

## WORKING CLASS POWER



# Working Class Power

The Decline and Reconfiguration of  
Trade Union Power Resources  
in the 21st Century

Jesper Prytz



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

© Jesper Prytz

Department of Sociology and Work Science  
University of Gothenburg, Box 720  
SE 405 30, Gothenburg, Sweden  
jesper.prytz@gu.se

ISBN: 978-91-87876-72-8 (digital version)  
ISBN: 978-91-87876-72-1 (printed version)  
Online: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/83996>

Göteborg Studies in Sociology No 79  
Department of Sociology and Work Science,  
University of Gothenburg

Cover design: Karl Prytz  
Typesetting: Emil Agrell & Jesper Prytz  
English proofreading: James Morrison  
Printing: Stema Specialtryck, Borås, Sweden, 2024



*Till Jonas*



# ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises four studies investigating the formation, uses, and interactions of trade union power resources. By applying a longitudinal approach, the studies analyse a variety of outcomes associated with four sources of labour's power. The aim of this thesis is to explain how the power resources of labour, particularly those of trade unions, have been impacted by neoliberal reforms to institutions and the restructuring of labour markets for a broadly defined working class of wage earners. The main data sources used are original survey data, the Swedish Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the international EU KLEMS database.

STUDY I used data from Swedish surveys spanning 1997 to 2018 to investigate whether changing conditions for trade unions are associated with changing attitudes to trade union-related issues. While union density declined due to structural and institutional shifts, attitudes toward wage negotiation remained stable. Union members favoured collective bargaining. Vulnerable labour market segments showed stronger support for unions. Overall, individuals endorsing union engagement often benefit most from union involvement in employment matters.

STUDY II examined the impact of Ghent system reforms on Swedish union membership from 2007 to 2008. Amidst a notable decline in union density – which has been attributed to tax deduction removal and increased unemployment insurance fees – the study explored the interplay between these reforms and structural changes to the labour market. Analysing data from Swedish LFS identified two main factors that contribute to the decline: changes in labour force composition and

direct Ghent system effects, which especially affected exposed worker categories. The results reveal cyclical union density patterns, disrupted by Ghent system changes, with increased temporary and younger employees driving the decline, particularly in specific sectors.

STUDY III's point of departure is from previous research that found that individuals typically join unions before the age of 35. This trend is most notable among younger employees, often in sectors that have high atypical employment and lack union representation. Previous studies focused on fixed individual characteristics when analysing membership likelihood, overlooking how employment paths, like transitioning from temporary to permanent roles, affect union density and membership. This study examines how job sequences influence youth union membership using Swedish labour data. The findings reveal varied effects based on age and time, with stable permanent contracts promoting membership and younger workers showing lower commitment due to limited labour market exposure. In particular, full-time students and workers drifting between spells of unemployment, employment, and studies are less likely to choose union membership and commit over the long term, with institutional changes to the Ghent system mediating these effects.

STUDY IV departs from the fact that advanced economies have seen a decline in the wage share compared to profits. This decline is influenced by factors like decreasing union density and collective bargaining coverage. However, the impact varies based on institutional context and the main wage-setting mechanism. Analysing data from 22 OECD countries, the study explored how labour market institutions and wage-setting mechanisms affect income distribution across skill groups. Union density increases the wage share, especially where statutory minimum wages are absent, while the effect of collective bargaining is more nuanced. Statutory minimum wages benefit medium- and low-skilled workers but negatively interact with collective bargaining for medium-skilled groups. The findings highlight how wage-setting institutions influence outcomes for workers, offering key insights for balancing collective bargaining and statutory wage policies to promote equitable income distribution.

The main conclusions from these studies point to the complexity of interactions between the power resources of the working class of wage earners. Of importance is also an implied resistance to neoliberal reforms to institutions to maintain unions' power resources or to rely on other sources of power when institutional power diminishes, as well as a general shift in the class-based power dynamics in industrial relations. White-collar professionals and academics in Sweden have increased their bargaining power while the power of blue-collar workers has declined, suggesting an increasingly fragmented labour movement. At a broader level, the dynamic between capital and labour has shifted in capital's favour as the share of wages in relation to profits are in decline, suggesting labour is unlikely to improve the wage share unless collective bargaining or adequate statutory minimum wages are introduced, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to wage regulation.

## KEYWORDS

trade unions, institutional change, union membership, union density, social custom, rational choice, trade union attitudes, wage-setting, industrial relations, sequence analysis, wage share, Swedish Labour Force Survey (AKU), non-standard employment, youth employment, power resource theory



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	vii
List of Studies	xiii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables	xv
Abbreviations	xvi
Förord (acknowledgements in Swedish)	xvii
1. Introduction	i
Aim and Research Questions	5
Organisation of the Thesis	6
2. Setting the Scene	7
Labour market and Industrial Relations Deregulation	7
The Nordic Model and Sweden's Industrial Relations System	9
Policy Changes and Union Density Decline in Sweden	11
Regulation of Fixed-Term Employment	13
Redistribution and Income Inequality	15
3. Previous Research on Trade Unions	19
Union Membership and Union Density	19
Attitudes to Unions	21
Income Distribution	23
Summary of Previous Research	25
4. Theoretical Considerations	27
Power Resource Theory	27
Types of Power Resources	29
Feedback Loops and the Recursive Interplay of Power Resources	34
Individual-level Mechanisms for Union Membership	38
Summary and Theoretical Model of the Thesis	43

5.	Methods and Materials	47
	Research Design and Context	47
	The Survey on Attitudes to Trade Unions	50
	The Labour Force Survey	51
	The EU KLEMS, OECD, and ICTWSS databases	52
	Additional Data	53
	Operationalisation of Theoretical Concepts	55
	Statistical Analyses	58
	Ethical and Legal Considerations	60
6.	Summary of Results	63
	Study I: Attitudes to Trade Unions	64
	Study II: Institutional Change and Trade Union Membership	65
	Study III: Employment Trajectories and Trade Union Membership	66
	Study IV: Wage-setting Mechanisms and the Distribution of Wages and Profits	68
7.	Discussion and Conclusions	71
	Discussion of Results	71
	Conclusions	74
	Practical Implications	75
	Future Research	76
8.	Summary in Swedish	79
	REFERENCES	87
	APPENDIX	97

# LIST OF STUDIES

- I. Prytz, J. & Larsson, B. (2024). “Changes in Trade Union Membership and Attitudes to Unions in Sweden”, in T. Berglund & Y. Ulfsdotter Eriksson (eds). *Scrutinising Polarisation. Patterns and Consequences of Occupational Transformation in the Swedish Labour Market*. London: Routledge.
- II. Prytz, J. & Berglund, T. (2023). “Disruption of the Ghent effect: Disentangling structural and institutional determinants of union membership decline in Sweden, 2005–2010”, *Industrial Relations Journal*, 54 (6): 471–494.
- III. Prytz, J. (submitted). “Organizing at the Margins: Youth Employment Trajectories and Trade Union Membership in Sweden”. Unpublished manuscript.
- IV. Prytz, J. (submitted). “Bargaining Above the Bare Minimum: Power Resources, Wage-setting Practices, and the Wage Share”. Unpublished manuscript.

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Mean union density in 36 OECD countries and Sweden, 1960–2019	12
Figure 2. Employment protection legislation index of fixed-term/ temporary employment contracts in 32 OECD countries and Sweden, 1985–2019. Temporary employees as a percentage of the total number of employees in Sweden, 1987–2019	13
Figure 3. Mean adjusted wage share in 36 OECD countries and Sweden, 1960–2019	17
Figure 4. Direction in power resources formation	44
Figure 5. Recursive effects and feedback loops between types of power resources	45

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Relationship between power resources and expected effects	37
Table 2. Individual incentive formation for decisions on union membership	41
Table 3. Expected relationships between institutions, individual decisions for union membership, and aggregate level outcomes	42
Table 4. Overview of methods and materials used in the thesis	49
Table 5. Overview of operationalisations of main theoretical concepts in the thesis	56
Table A1. Time series availability for countries included in Figures 1–3	97

## ABBREVIATIONS

EPL	Employment protection legislation
FTE	Fixed-term employment
GTE	General Temporary Employment
LFS	Labour Force Survey
PRT	Power resource theory
SCB	Statistics Sweden ( <i>Statistiska centralbyrån</i> )
SMW	Statutory minimum wage
UD	Union density
UI	Unemployment insurance

# FÖRORD

## (ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN SWEDISH)

Eftersom det är viktigt för mig att alltid trycka på det ironiska inleder jag med en paradox: trots att det är bland det första man kanske läser i den här avhandlingen är det här förordet jag skriver allra sist. Och kanske det som känns svårast för nu får man ju inte missa något. Men nu är avhandlingen iallafall klar, och nu firar vi!

Först och främst, ett stort tack till mina handledare. Om jag har sett längre är det genom att stå på jättarnas axlar. Men i ärlighetens namn hade det helt säkert inte blivit någon avhandling utan er, särskilt inte med en individ som jag som har en tendens att försvinna in i mig själv när jag inte tycker att det jag gör går vägen. Bengt, du har en otrolig förmåga att skapa struktur, uppmuntra och övertyga en osäker doktorand om att det jag gör faktiskt är tillräckligt bra. Och hur du ansträngt dig för att få det att funka trots att jag känt att det tagit emot både i forsknings- och livsvärlden. Det är jag dig evigt tacksam för! Och Tomas, du har dragits med mig sedan masteruppsatsen. Din entusiasm inför forskning i allmänhet och sociologi i synnerhet har gjort att det känts värt att kämpa på när det känts som att jag varit i den trängsta återvändsgränden. Tack igen!

Tack till Kristin Jesnes och Patrik Vulkan för konstruktiva kommentarer på mitt PM-seminarium som fick mig att börja känna mig hemmastadd inom akademien. Tack till Johan Alfnsson och Nadine Kraamwinkel-Jha för era kommentarer på mittseminariet som fick mig att tro på att jag inte var helt ute och cyklade med texten. Tack också till Johan för insiktsfulla kommentarer i anslutning till mitt slutseminarium. För hjälpen att kunna knyta ihop säcken i slutskedet av skrivprocessen är jag också extra tacksam till Mattias Wahlström och Arvid Lindh för kommentarer som i någon mån vred avhandlingen i

180 graders riktning åt motsatt håll men som också resulterade i en många gånger bättre text.

Förutom att fundera över analytiska forskningsfrågor att svara på är det också viktigt att ha kul på jobbet och på afterwork när man doktorerar. Johanna, Lotte, Nathan och Sarah. Er vänskap har varit ovärderlig under den största delen av min doktorandtid. Tack för alla gånger jag har fått hänga med er och för samtal om hur livet inte tar slut när allting känns lönlöst med det akademiska. Ni är bäst!

Till doktorandkollektivet i stort: tack för gott häng på Tai Shanghai (och andra vattenhål), seminarier, fester och samtal om högt och lågt. Doktorander kommer och går men jag minns er alla (hoppas jag) som var och är det: tack Johan Alfonsson, Veronica Flyman, Tomas Gustavsson, My Hyltegren, Helena Håkansson, Hannes Lagerlöf, Jane Pettersson, Jon Sunnerfell, Christopher Thorén och Carl Wilén. Och sist men inte minst, tack till Megan Rådesjö och Josefin Persdotter för perfekt kontorskamratskap och tillhörande snack.

Till kvantgänget. Patrik, Erica, Caroline och Sofia. Att få planera och undervisa ihop med er gjorde mig mycket mer självsäker inför vad jag vågade mig på att testa metodmässigt under avhandlingen. För mig är det också alltid viktigt med en vinst (se nedanstående stycken om quiz), så det är extra roligt att få lägga till ännu en tillsammans med er!

Till Pia Jacobsen och Anna-Karin Wiberg i administrationen. Det ni inte kan lösa med er kunskap på jobbet kan ni lösa över en öl, en lunch eller ett oinbjudet samtal på era kontor. Till Ylva Ulfsson Eriksson och Johan Alfonsson som förgyllt konferenser på Brittiska öarna och i USA. Till alla i polariseringsprogrammet – tack för att ni tog med mig och lät mig hålla på med lite forskning på lika premisser!

Till alla er innan- och utanför akademien som läst, gett mig kommentarer på texter och – inte minst – stöttat mig både i formella och informella sammanhang. Tack till Axel, David, Emil, Freddan, Hanna, Henrik, Johan, Lowe, Mattias, Neil, Nika, Rickard, Sofia, Sofie och Tatjana. Det blev tillslut en bok även om jag var en ganska udda person att umgås med i perioder. Otroligt att ni höll fast vid mig! Anders Prytz – peppen inför min anställningsintervju ska inte under-

skattas, och tack för att du (motvilligt!) lät mig testa på det studentikosa.

Till alla er som sett till att jag hållit mig vid sunda vätskor utanför universitetets väggar, och påmint mig om att det ändå inte är så jävla annorlunda eller mer ansträngande att doktorera än att ägna sig åt något annat. Och alltså fått ner mig på jorden, tack för det! Vi måste alla ändå genomlida allting. Inte minst blev detta tydligt under den redan slitna klichén som hette COVID-19-pandemin. Inledningsvis betydde detta att vi ersatte pubquiz med hemmaquiz på helgerna: tack till KP, Emil, Axel och Rickard för gott snack och för att ni alltid lät mig vinna! Och tack till KP, Axel, Rickard och Nika för (periodvis) stora framgångar på quizet på Paddington. Tack också till hela Dynamo Kviberg<sup>1</sup> som trots generell avsaknad av framgångar i Korpen Division 4 lät mig bibehålla *mens sana in corpore sano* under samma period och efterföljande år. Släpp allt ni har, det e match!

Under hela studietiden finns det också ett antal personer som på ett eller annat sätt fått mig att vilja stanna kvar och fortsätta även om jag tröttnat på antingen studierna/akademien eller platsen jag befunnit mig på, eller både och. I Lund var det Frej och Casper, och i Göteborg var det Lowe, Anton och Alexander. Frej – snart ses och hörs vi! Casper – vad har du för adress? Lowe – hur fan hamnade vi här? Anton – att du peppade mig att söka doktorandtjänsten gjorde all skillnad! Nalle Knut – om det är någon jag litar på är det du. Tack till er!

Catrine, du kanske fick höra saker som gick händelserna i förväg något. ”Han kommer bli professor”. Det vet jag inte om jag blir, men du har alltid trott på mig och alltid uppmuntrat mig till att göra precis det jag vill och vad jag tror är rätt. Och att påminna mig om att behålla en förnuftig inställning till allting, det är nog viktigast av allt. Pilot-Anders, du håller dig också paradoxalt nog på marken i det avseendet. Nu vill jag börja komma på middag igen!

Det finns ett särskilt minne som följt mig från innan den stund då jag började studera sociologi fram till idag. Hans, efter studenten så sa du till mig att nu går man till Arbetsförmedlingen och så får man till

<sup>1</sup> i Lowe, KP, Axel, Svahn, Torres, Gelin, Pajmen, Emil, Freddan, Samuel, Adam, Einar, Josef med flera.

slut ett jobb. Du trodde väl inte heller på det gissar jag, men om det var någont som satte i gång någon form av tonårstrotsig indignation så var det att upptäcka att detta inte var sant, och att jag under några år där jag drev mellan tillfälliga anställningar, arbetslöshet och studier (se Studie III i den här avhandlingen för kontext). Den erfarenheten kombinerat med att läsa en kursbeskrivning för en grundkurs i sociologi var nog anledning till att jag flyttade till Lund för att ta mig an en kandidatexamen. Du sa någon gång att jag borde plugga till lärare, och det blev väl typ så i slutändan, men ändå lite annorlunda!

Karl, min lillebror. Du har sagt förut att av oss syskon är det jag som är "book-smart" och du som är "street-smart". Det kanske är sant men du kan borde nog ändå ge den här boken en chans om du vill. Om inte annat är du tusenfalt mer estetiskt sinnad, och det hade utan tvekan inte blivit en så snygg bok om inte du tagit tag i att designa omslaget. Tack också för din entusiasm om att leva livet och njuta fullt ut, och tack för att jag får vara med när du gör det!

Till Solveig och Lars, farmor och farfar. Ni har nämnt varsin sak som hängt med mig starkt under de senaste åren. Först om fackligt medlemskap: "Om man inte var med blev man utfrys", och sedan om vad det betyder att hålla på med forskning: "Att forska är att se vad alla andra har sett, och tänka vad ingen annan har tänkt". Jag vet inte riktigt om jag är där ännu men jag kämpar på! Den 17 januari 2025 firar vi doktorsexamen och 66-årig bröllopsdag, ses då!

Nu börjar livet igen! Ha det gott så ses vi snart allihop!

Jesper  
Göteborg, november 2024





# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explain how the power resources of labour, particularly those of trade unions, have been impacted by neoliberal reforms to institutions and the restructuring of labour markets. I also investigate how these resources interact, and are leveraged to achieve specific outcomes such as improving the wage share. Power resources in their original sense refer to the “properties of an actor that provide the ability to reward or punish another actor” (Korpi 1978: 35). Scholars have since expanded this framework to include various dimensions of power, such as structural, associational, institutional, and ideational power. Structural power refers to the control over production processes; associational power stems from collective organisation, particularly in trade unions; institutional power refers to labour laws and regulations; and ideational power refers to the narratives and discourses that influence societal norms and the hegemonic order (Alfonsson 2024; Refslund & Arnholtz 2022; Schmalz *et al.* 2018; Wright 2000). Within this framework, labour’s ability to influence outcomes for wage earners as a broadly defined working class is shaped by how these different power resources interact, particularly in the context of neoliberal reforms and market-driven changes.

Over the past few decades, labour relations in advanced democracies have undergone significant changes. Once characterised by having strong regulations and relatively stable, permanent employment relations, the labour market has become increasingly liberalised through neoliberal reforms. This has led to the erosion of the standard employment relationship – the traditional model of full-time, long-term employment – and the rise of precarious, non-standard forms of work. As a result, labour’s structural power has diminished, as workers now face

greater insecurity and risk of unemployment, which has reduced their capacity to influence production through strikes or other collective actions (Wright 2000). This weakening of structural power has also undermined the effectiveness of trade unions, which historically played a central role in negotiating better wages and working conditions (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Kjellberg 2021; Schnabel & Wagner 2008).

The liberalisation of industrial relations has not only weakened labour's structural power but has also contributed to declining union density (UD). UD refers to the percentage of workers who are members of a trade union, and its decline has been especially pronounced in countries with traditionally strong labour movements, such as Sweden. Despite having a highly institutionalised system that historically supported high levels of union membership, Sweden saw a marked decrease in UD following reforms to the Ghent system, which tied union membership to the unemployment insurance (UI) funds (Clasen & Viebrock 2008; Kjellberg & Lyhne Ibsen 2016; Prytz & Berglund 2023; Rothstein 1990; Scruggs 2002). This decline in UD highlights the vulnerability of even the most robust labour institutions under neoliberal capitalism, raising concerns about the future of labour's bargaining power and its ability to address rising income inequality and sluggish wage growth (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Kjellberg 2019; Meyer 2017).

Trade unions have long been recognised for their role in compressing wage disparities, protecting workers' rights, and exerting political influence (Albrecht *et al.* 2011; Bengtsson 2014; Korpi 1983). By focusing on trade unions and their members as central actors, the present thesis explores unions' and workers' agency in shaping labour market outcomes. Rather than relegating unions to a passive role in the face of neoliberalism, I investigate how unions and their members navigate changing labour market conditions and institutional frameworks, and how they continue to wield power in a rapidly evolving economic landscape (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022).

This thesis contributes to the existing literature by addressing gaps in our understanding of how institutional changes impact within-country UD, particularly in the context of structural changes such as the rise of non-standard employment. It also examines how the interaction of institutional and associational power resources affects income distribution, a topic that has been treated somewhat lightly in the liter-

ature. Much of the existing research adopts an economic approach that fails to account for the role of power and union agency or treats country differences without fully exploring the factors that condition this agency (cf. Parisi 2017; Stockhammer 2009).

Studying labour's power resources and how these resources interact is crucial for understanding how societies address social and economic problems. Albert O. Hirschman (1971) outlined two main mechanisms by which such issues are dealt with: the *exit* mechanism, where dissatisfied workers quit their jobs in search of better opportunities, and the *voice* mechanism, where workers seek to improve conditions through negotiations with employers. In labour markets, the exit mechanism represents a more individualistic approach that assumes market forces will correct inefficiencies. However, trade unions play a pivotal role by providing a collective voice, which enables workers to negotiate for better wages, job security, and working conditions *without* having to leave their jobs. This dynamic has been particularly important in industrial societies, where large firms concentrated significant numbers of workers under one roof, and trade unions emerged as their collective representative (Freeman & Medoff 1984).

The decline in union power due to neoliberal reforms, coupled with a shift towards a service-based economy where work is more fragmented, threatens to undermine this collective voice. As smaller firms and non-standard forms of employment become increasingly prevalent, the role of trade unions in representing workers may diminish, which could fundamentally alter labour market dynamics and weaken workers' ability to secure favourable outcomes (Prytz & Larsson 2024).

A notable factor that is expected to contribute to declining union membership is the individualisation of values, particularly among younger workers. It has been argued that younger cohorts entering the labour market may be less inclined to organise collectively and will instead rely more on individual power resources in negotiating with employers (Alfonsson 2022). This shift toward individualism could weaken labour's associational power, as younger workers may prioritise personal advancement over collective bargaining. Such value changes also affect labour's ideational power, as the narrative of collective struggle and solidarity gives way to a narrative focused on individual success and flexibility (Boltanski & Chiapello 2018; Vallas & Christin 2018).

While changes to the structural and associational power resources of labour are critical, the institutional mechanisms governing labour markets remain a key area of focus for the investigation of labour's power resources. Whereas institutions, such as collective bargaining frameworks and labour laws, often change at a slower pace than the labour market itself (Arnholtz & Refslund 2022; Schmalz *et al.* 2018), these institutions play a profound role in shaping labour's other power resources. In particular, unions face challenges in representing the growing number of workers in precarious, temporary, or part-time employment, as these workers often fall outside the traditional scope of union activities. This raises questions about whether unions can effectively represent these workers' interests in a changing labour market characterised by increased insecurity (Keune & Pedaci 2020; Rueda 2007; Visser 2019).

Furthermore, trade unions have historically played a crucial role in reducing income inequality by negotiating wage increases and securing benefits for workers across different sectors. However, with declining union membership and the weakening of collective bargaining institutions, the ability of unions to fulfil this redistributive function is increasingly under threat – with alternative forms for wage-setting such as statutory minimum wages (SMWs) taking their place or being introduced as a complement to collective bargaining as envisioned by the EU minimum wage directive (European Commission 2020; Schulten & Müller 2020). As neoliberal policies continue to reshape labour markets, the following question arises: Can individuals solve issues like wage-setting and job security on their own, without the support of collective institutions like trade unions?

Hirschman's (1971) exit mechanism suggests that without a collective voice, the only option left for workers is to leave unsatisfactory jobs in search of better ones. However, this individualistic approach overlooks the systemic inequalities and differences in outcome that exist in labour markets. Trade unions provide a crucial counterbalance to employer power, and their decline could lead to greater wage disparities and a weakened safety net for workers. Are trade unions under an increased threat and has their role been sidelined in the wake of neoliberal capitalism?

## AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overarching aim of this thesis is to explain how the power resources of labour, particularly those of trade unions, have been impacted by neoliberal reforms to institutions and the restructuring of labour markets. I also investigate how these resources interact, and are leveraged to achieve specific outcomes such as improving the wage share. A first subsidiary aim is to investigate the membership dimension of trade union power and how these have developed over time and in different categories of workers, and whether it is reasonable to envision a revitalisation of the trade union movement. The second subsidiary aim is to investigate how the class-based dynamics of trade unionism have shifted; for instance, how the institutional and membership dimensions of trade union power affect the redistribution of income from capital to labour.

*The specific research questions for the individual studies making up the thesis are as follows:*

1. How have individual attitudes towards trade unions and trade union engagement changed over time, and how are these changes distributed across different labour market categories? Can any of these changes be attributed to the mediating effect of institutions? (Study I)
2. How do structural and institutional changes affect associational power and union membership? (Studies II & III)
3. How do structural and institutional power resources interact with individual-level union membership decisions? (Studies II & III)
4. How do institutional regulations (such as wage-setting mechanisms) impact income distribution between labour and capital, and how can these regulations strengthen or weaken union power? (Study IV)

## ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of key institutional changes to industrial relations and labour market dynamics that have impacted unions and their power resources, as well as individual-level employment patterns and union membership. This sets the stage for the investigated context and argues for the importance of longitudinal analyses, given that the institutional landscape for trade unions have profoundly changed. In Chapter 3, I review previous research, which includes the state of research regarding both the formation of trade unions' power resources and the state of research regarding the conversion of power resources into influencing the distribution of wages and profits. I also address studies on attitudes to trade unions. In Chapter 4, I introduce and discuss the theoretical framework used in this thesis. I argue that this framework effectively accounts for analyses examining how individual motivations for union membership intersect with aggregate-level power resources. I also discuss the structural and institutional determinants that are expected to affect the distribution of wages and profits, and conclude that section by suggesting a main theoretical framework which guide the analyses. In Chapter 5, I present the empirical materials used for the individual studies, and outline the employed methods. This section also includes a discussion of the ethical and legal considerations addressed in the research process. In Chapter 6, I present a summary of the individual studies. In Chapter 7, I discuss the main results of the thesis and their implications for research on trade unions. Finally, I provide a Swedish summary of the aim, theoretical model, results of the compiled studies, and the main conclusions of the thesis in Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 2

# Setting the Scene

In this chapter, I briefly outline the key historical changes to institutions governing industrial relations and labour markets in advanced capitalist societies over recent decades. These include the deregulation of the employment relationship and the decline in UD. I also discuss these developments in more detail in the Swedish context, as Studies I–III of the thesis focus on Sweden. Study IV, adopting a comparative scope, examines the primary mechanisms for wage-setting as a key aspect of institutional design through which trade unions derive power. This chapter proceeds as follows. I first review the deregulation of industrial relations and labour markets on a comparative level, followed by the specific experience of Sweden. Next, I discuss the increasingly lax regulation of fixed-term employment in Sweden and the longitudinal development of the share of temporary employment on the labour market. Finally, I discuss the change in the distribution between wages of profits in the economy over the last six decades.

### LABOUR MARKET AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS DEREGULATION

Industrial relations in Europe have been moving towards neoliberalisation, which is understood as the expansion of employer discretion in terms of wage determination, hiring and firing practices, and the organisation of the workplace (Baccaro & Howell 2017). This stands in contrast to classical liberalism, where neoliberalism entails using state power to bring about a society in which individuals conceive of and relate to each other as providers of specialised services, and where their in-

teractions are coordinated based on a logic of competition (Boltanski & Chiapello 2018; Harvey 2007; Vallas & Christin 2018). The trend in the political economy context is therefore characterised by a shift from centralised coordination towards fragmented competition, and from collective to individual action, preferences and decisions (Streeck 2009: 149). This development is concurrent among countries with markedly different industrial relations regimes, which indicates a common trajectory. While labour's institutional, associational, and structural resources have diminished following this path, employers' strength has increased due to the institutionalisation of the market order. While labour laws and regulations follow a liberalised trajectory, employer density remains high, indicating growing employer discretion in relation to labour (Baccaro & Howell 2017).

In terms of the practice of recent state regulation towards a liberalised trajectory, the Nordic countries and Sweden in particular stand out. Not only is Sweden the birthplace of the power resource theory (PRT) (Korpi 1978, 1983), but Sweden has often also been described as a global model of labour strength and has come to epitomise the Nordic welfare model (Esping-Andersen 1990; Przeworski 1986). However, the social democratic welfare state has eroded in recent decades in terms of reduced government spending, increased inequality and a reduction of UI generosity (Alfonsson 2024; Kjellberg 2020). These developments provide a unique opportunity to explore how structural and institutional shifts impact labour power in a context traditionally characterised by strong unions, social dialogue, and a labour market highly regulated by collective agreements.

In contrast to other Nordic contexts, Sweden has retained strong protection of permanent workers while the protection of temporary employees has been hollowed out (Berglund *et al.* 2017; Vulkan 2016). This situation contrasts with that of Denmark, another example of the Nordic model, where the deregulation of permanent *and* temporary employment forms has been coupled with extensions to unemployment benefits and training (Emmenegger 2010). Therefore, Sweden occupies a peculiar place for liberalisation to take place, where some power resources have remained strong and others have diminished, facilitating a particular configuration of power which may be articulated and drawn upon. The following section outlines the salient changes to Swedish industrial relations relevant to this thesis.

## THE NORDIC MODEL AND SWEDEN'S INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEM

The Nordic model of industrial relations is characterised by low levels of state intervention and by the fact that rules governing the labour market are negotiated mainly between employers and trade unions. The labour market in Sweden has historically featured strong collective bargaining. In the pre-1983 Rehn-Meidner model, wages were centrally negotiated with reference to occupational skill level, and not by individual or workplace productivity (Tomaskovic-Devey *et al.* 2015). Wage negotiations in this model favoured the lowest paid at the expense of wage growth in high-skilled occupations, resulting in a compressed wage distribution (Alexopoulos & Cohen 2003). Sweden has also had a historically high UD, which has often been attributed to the Ghent system wherein union membership is coupled with access to the UI funds (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Clasen & Viebrock 2008; Kjellberg 2019). Also notable is the relative cooperation between employer and employee associations, which has led to few instances of labour market conflict since the introduction of the Industrial Agreement of 1997. This gave unions and employers in the export-oriented manufacturing sector the role to set the general wage increase rates for all sectors (Kjellberg 2019; Rosetti 2019).

The Ghent system, introduced in 1934 (Rasmussen & Pontusson 2018), is expected to incentivise union membership in several ways. The relationship between union membership and UI fund membership, being the core of the Ghent system, is not so obvious: since its introduction in Sweden, there has not been a requirement to become a member of both in order to qualify for unemployment benefits (Kjellberg 2006; Lind 2009; Lindellee & Berglund 2022). However, an often-cited explanation for membership is rooted in a rational-choice perspective on union membership (Rothstein 1990). In this view, individuals aim to maximise the benefits of unionisation, opting to join or remain in unions when the perceived advantages outweigh the associated costs (Olson 1965). Key factors influencing this decision include union fees, personal income and the perceived services or benefits unions provide (Schnabel 2003). While cost-benefit analyses like this function as one important heuristic, unemployment insurance linked to union mem-

bership can also act as a strong incentive, given the historical and organisational ties between unions and insurance funds, where unions often promote these benefits as part of membership (Clasen & Viebrock 2008).

However, Scruggs (2002) suggested that negative selective incentives might also explain the Ghent effect, as unemployment funds determine applicants' eligibility. Although unions and funds are officially separate, and non-union members have the right to join an unemployment fund (or the non-union Alfa fund since 1998), some individuals may still prefer union membership in order to avoid any perceived bias in the process (Scruggs 2002).

In addition to more salient institutional changes, there was also a notable shift in discourse around wage-setting and pay structures from the 1980s onwards, moving away from solidaristic ideals toward a focus on organisational productivity, flexibility, and performance-based pay (Thörnqvist 1998; Lapidus 2015). The traditional model of "equal pay for equal work", which relied on nationally coordinated wage scales and considered factors like job evaluations, qualifications, tenure and standardised wage increases, was largely abandoned. In its place, a more individualised system emerged that emphasised performance and personal contributions to the organisation. This period, particularly from the mid-1980s onward, saw increased decentralisation and a shift away from collective wage determination. Collective agreements began to favour more local and individualised wage-setting practices, while national agreements specifying wage levels and guarantees declined. Although these changes were less pronounced in the private sector, especially among blue-collar workers, they had a more significant impact in the public sector and on white-collar employees (Baccaro and Howell 2017; Kjellberg 2019). However, the actual effects on wage inequality should not be overstated. While these reforms may have contributed to wider wage dispersion, Sweden's wage structure remains relatively compressed, and there are institutional barriers that limit the influence of individualised wage determination (Anxo 2017). Nevertheless, more fragmented and local bargaining implies that this discursive shift may have had impacts on the individual level in terms of attitudes concerning individual or collective employer negotiations (Bengtsson & Ber-

glund 2011), which may impact the discursive or ideational power of labour even if UD levels are kept relatively high.

### *Policy Changes and Union Density Decline in Sweden*

In terms of UD, Sweden was at an all-time high in 1995, with close to 85 percent of all employees being union members. However, in 2007, Swedish unions experienced a steep decline in UD, following the newly elected centre-right government's changes to the system of industrial relations: membership fees to the union-administered unemployment insurance funds were increased and tax deductions for union membership were abolished (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Kjellberg 2019). Further differentiation was made in 2008, when these fees were based on the level of unemployment within the specific insurance funds,<sup>1</sup> forming two distinct periods with an earlier "strong" and latter "weak" Ghent system.<sup>2</sup> This emerges as an important particularity of Sweden as changes to the Ghent system have been made, leaving UD at 68 per cent in 2023 (Ljunglöf *et al.* 2024). The differentiation of fees led to steep increases for workers in low-wage service sectors such as the hospitality industry (Kjellberg & Lyhne Ibsen 2016). However, unions organising public sector workers and higher paid white-collar workers retain high UD compared to blue-collar workers, whereas before the reform these categories of workers were at the same percentage levels (Kjellberg 2023). To counter this development, several trade unions, in both blue- and white-collar sectors, subsequently introduced complementary income insurance schemes tied to union membership (Hamark & Lapidus 2024; Lindellee 2018). However, these schemes are still intimately connected to the generosity of unemployment benefits, which makes it unclear whether this provides a specific incentive providing any aggregate effects on UD than UI fund membership.

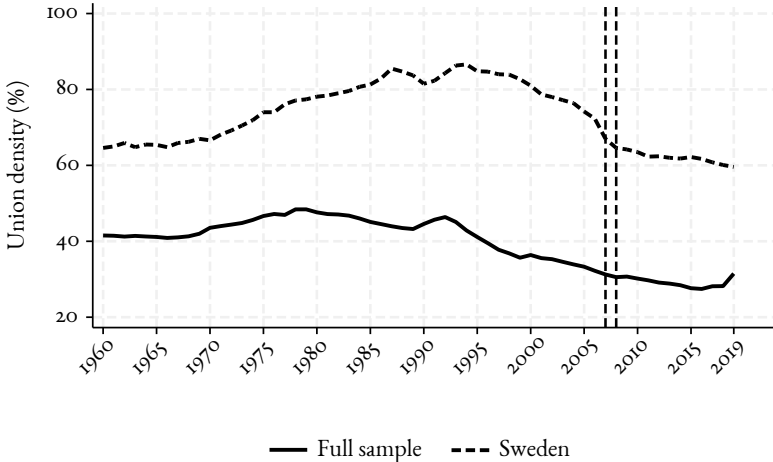
---

1 See Studies I and II for more detailed descriptions of the changes to the Ghent system and the introduction of new employment forms.

2 I use the terms "strong" and "weak" Ghent system throughout the thesis as analytical categories to differentiate between different mechanisms of the Ghent system as a source of institutional power and their results on UD. The strong Ghent system refers to the period before the changes in 2007 and 2008, with strong selective incentives for union membership with tax-reduced union membership and UI fund membership. The weak Ghent system refers to the period following the removal of tax deductions and, in turn, the social differentiation of the UI fund fees (Kjellberg 2011).

Figure 1 illustrates the developments in UD for Sweden in relation to 36 OECD countries over the period 1960–2019. Across this period, the expected positive effect of the Ghent system can be readily observed, as Sweden’s UD is markedly above the OECD average, although the decline in the mid-2000s stands out. If this sharp decline can be explained by changes to the Ghent system in 2007 and 2008 in Sweden, the earlier patterns of development both within Sweden and across the OECD broadly align with discussions of the deregulation of institutions towards employer discretion (Baccaro & Howell 2017), where hiring and firing practices and the organisation of the workplace is no longer in labour’s favour. As such, another possible explanation for falling UD is a general decline in labour’s structural power in the direction of labour market segmentation and increased levels of unemployment, which is discussed in the following section.

*Figure 1. Mean union density in 36 OECD countries and Sweden, 1960–2019.*



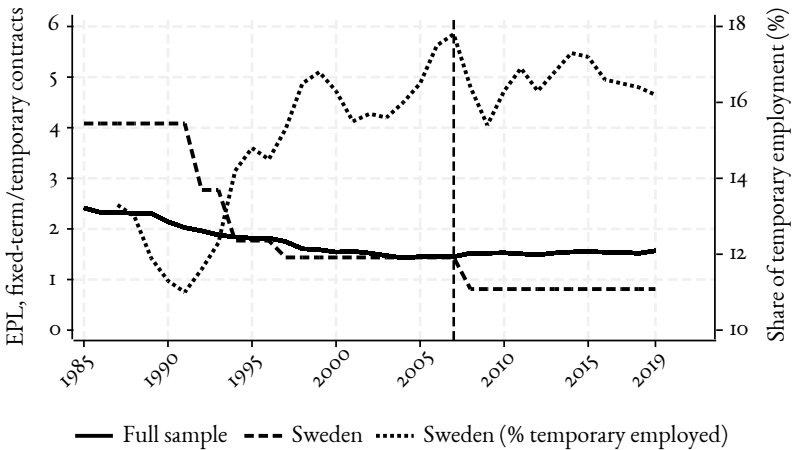
*Note:* Source is the Comparative Political Data Set 1960–2022 (Armingeon *et al.* 2024). The lines on the x-axis in 2007 and 2008 represent the years when the major changes to the Ghent system of unemployment insurance were enacted in Sweden.

## Regulation of Fixed-Term Employment

An important institutional deregulation that coincided with the aforementioned Ghent system changes was the introduction of new forms of fixed-term contracts as part of labour law in Sweden, which can be argued to be an institutional extension of neoliberalism and its processes toward flexibilisation (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Boltanski & Chiappello 2018). This relates to theories on *dualisation*, where the labour market is segmented into an insider group with stable employment and good working conditions, and an outsider group with atypical employment, which changes the structural dynamic of labour as the composition of the labour force is altered (Häusermann & Schwander 2012; Shin & Ylä-Anttila 2018).

Sweden's position as a critical case to study becomes even more salient when assessing the degree of regulation of fixed-term contracts; this is outlined in Figure 2, where Sweden is compared to 32 OECD countries.

Figure 2. Employment protection legislation index of fixed-term/temporary contracts in 32 OECD countries and Sweden, 1985–2019 (left y-axis). Temporary employees as a percentage of the total number of employees in Sweden, 1987–2019 (right y-axis).



Note: Source is the Comparative Political Data Set 1960–2022 (Armingeon *et al.* 2024) and the Swedish Labour Force Survey (SCB 2023). The line on the x-axis in 2007 represents the year in which EPL was relaxed in Sweden and General Temporary Employment was introduced as a new employment form.

The values reported in Figure 2 correspond to an employment protection legislation (EPL) index ranging from 0 (permissive) to 6 (strict) on the employment protection of temporary employees (Armingeon *et al.* 2024). As indicated here, the Swedish employment protection of temporary workers has decreased considerably during the last 35 years, moving from a strict to an increasingly liberal level in relation to the OECD average. This is also mirrored in the share of temporary employed as a percentage of all employees during the period (see the right-hand y-axis in Figure 2), from 13.3 per cent in 1987 to 16.2 per cent in 2019; this figure peaked in 2007 when 17.8 per cent were on temporary contracts.

On 1 July 2007, the Swedish government introduced General Temporary Employment (GTE) as a new employment form by amending the Employment Protection Act. This reform replaced earlier forms of temporary employment and permitted employers to issue an unlimited number of temporary contracts without needing to justify the reason for doing so. The reform also increased job security for temporary workers, as employees on a GTE contract with the same employer for more than two years (within a five-year period) would become eligible for a permanent employment contract (Berglund *et al.* 2017). While the use of temporary contracts increased before the introduction of the GTE, the negative impact in conjunction with the transition to the weak Ghent system was nevertheless exacerbated due to a “weak” as opposed to “strong” EPL, and the following economic crisis (Kjellberg 2011).

Despite temporary employees being a minority, this development nevertheless underscores the move towards an increasingly flexible labour market. Temporary employment is most prevalent in younger age groups and institutional changes towards increased precarity can isolate workers, reducing their opportunities for collective organisation (Alfonsson 2022; Schack 2023). Given that insecure positions on the labour market are expected to decrease the likelihood of union membership at the individual level, this raises the question of whether the decreasing unionisation rates in younger cohorts are due to increased labour market insecurity (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman 2013; Kjellberg 2020; Høgedahl & Juul Møberg 2022). This indicates an important interplay between the structural and institutional power resources on associ-

ational power (cf. Alfonsson 2024).<sup>3</sup> In this sense, any positive effects of institutions (such as the Ghent system) can be counteracted by others (such as a decrease of EPL), leading to broken career paths with increased spells of unemployment (Anxo *et al.* 2011; Kalleberg 2011; Oesch & Baumann 2015).

In addition to the decline in UD, these dynamics not only weaken the bargaining position of individual workers but also have broader implications for the distribution of economic gains between labour and capital. As the labour market becomes increasingly fragmented and precarious, the structural power of workers to negotiate higher wages diminishes. This erosion of bargaining power is reflected in a long-term decline in the share of wages relative to profits, signalling a shift in the balance of economic power that warrants closer examination.

### *Redistribution and Income Inequality*

The decline in power resources at the structural, associational and institutional levels has run in parallel with negative developments in the redistributive process, leading to increased income inequality and a declining share of wages relative to profits. These trends have been driven by several factors, including technological advancements and globalisation, which have significantly reshaped labour markets. Technological changes have automated many labour-intensive processes, displacing workers and reducing demand for certain types of labour, especially medium-skilled positions (Autor & Dorn 2013). At the same time, globalisation has enabled firms to substitute domestic labour with cheaper foreign labour, a shift that has been widely supported by research in economics (Elsby *et al.* 2013; Harrison 2002). The outsourcing of jobs,

---

<sup>3</sup> Drawing on PRT, Alfonsson (2024: 33) also discussed the developments in the unemployment level, concluding that Sweden entered a “high unemployment” era in the 1990s, which indicates that, at the structural level, the supply of labour has been greater than the demand. This discussion can also be extended to the structural composition of the labour force, where the bargaining power of labour is dependent on whether the workforce is segmented into workers with safe and vulnerable employment respectively, often leading to hierarchies between individuals and groups of workers (Schmalz *et al.* 2018).

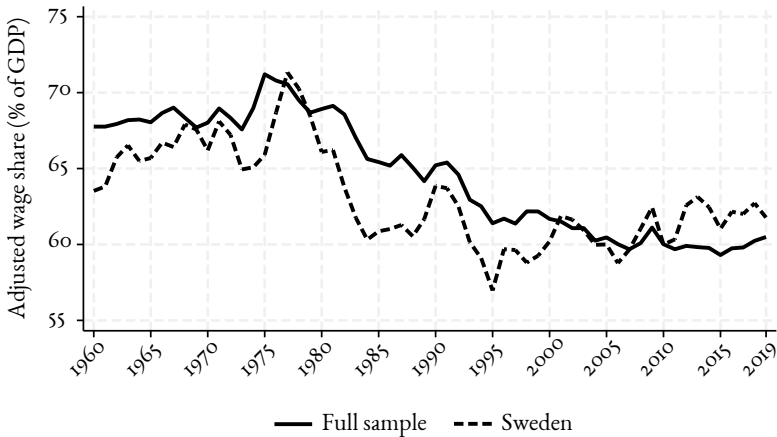
coupled with increased competition from low-wage countries, has exerted downward pressure on wages in many advanced economies.

As wages stagnate or even decline for certain sectors of the workforce, profits have surged, leading to a redistribution of income from labour to capital. This is reflected in the decreasing wage share – the proportion of national income allocated to workers in the form of wages and salaries – across many countries. Power has been described as occupying the centre of determining these effects, and the weakening of labour’s bargaining position is not just a consequence of economic forces like globalisation and technological change; it is also tied to the erosion of unions’ structural and associational power (Guschanski & Onaran 2022; Kristal 2010, 2013). With fewer workers able to organise collectively and exert pressure on employers, wage-setting practices have become increasingly skewed in favour of capital.

This redistribution away from wages and towards profits has profound implications for income inequality. As workers secure a smaller portion of the economic pie, income disparities widen, particularly between high-skilled, high-income workers and the rest of the labour force (Álvarez *et al.* 2021). At the same time, the growing concentration of wealth among capital owners further exacerbates inequality. In many countries, the share of income going to the top 1 per cent of earners has increased significantly since the 1980s (Jacobson & Occhino 2012; Piketty 2014), a period that coincides with the decline of unions and collective bargaining systems, often leading to the introduction of SMWs (Kozák & Picot 2024). This growing concentration of income at the top not only reflects the weakening of labour’s bargaining power but also signals a broader shift in the balance of power between labour and capital.

However, the role of ideational power in the redistributive process remains less clear. Ideational power refers to the ability of actors to shape the beliefs, perceptions, and norms that influence political and economic decision-making. In the context of wage-setting and redistribution, ideational power can shape the discourse around issues such as wage fairness, the role of unions, and the legitimacy of income inequality (Hauptmeier & Heery 2014). In recent years, discursive shifts towards more individualised and localised bargaining have undermined unions’ collective power, which has further reduced their ability to se-

Figure 3. Mean adjusted wage share in 36 OECD countries and Sweden, 1960–2019.



Note: Source is AMECO (2024). The adjusted wage share accounts for the share of wages as a percentage of GDP, with wages of the self-employed imputed. The adjusted wage share at factor cost was used instead of the wage share at market prices as the latter also includes taxes and subsidies, which are not relevant to the study of the distribution between labour and capital (Bengtsson 2014).

cure better wages and working conditions for their members. As these shifts take hold, unions' ideational role in wage-setting may diminish, allowing employers to dominate the discourse and set the terms of bargaining in their favour (Kindermans 2017).

Figure 3 illustrates the decline of the wage share in Sweden and 36 OECD countries between 1960 and 2019. As the figure shows, the wage share reached its peak in the mid- to late 1970s before beginning a long-term decline. Again, this trend underscores the broader shift in income distribution away from labour and towards capital over the past several decades.

This chapter has provided an overview of the key changes to industrial relations and labour's power resources in Sweden and in the OECD in addition to the decline of the share of wages in relation to profits in the economy. While these changes to labour market structure and institutions may, at first glance, seem to have coincided with a decrease in associational power resources and the wage share, any prospective mechanisms for how this has occurred must be accounted for.

The review also implies that these changes must be assessed longitudinally as the mechanisms may not work uniformly across time. The next chapter reviews the present state of research regarding the determinants of union membership, attitudes to unions, and the role of labour's power resources in income distribution.

## CHAPTER 3

# Previous Research on Trade Unions

In this chapter, I present previous research pertaining to attitudes to unions, union membership, and the application of power resources in relation to the distribution of wages and profits. I first account for research on union membership and UD, investigated in Studies I–III. Next, I present research on the conditions under which positive or negative attitudes towards trade unions arise, which are in focus in Study I. Lastly, I review the research on the impact of power resources in terms of achieving bargaining outcomes, which is examined in Study IV. Additionally, research on labour’s power resources often imply important interaction and recursive effects, which are discussed throughout this section.

### UNION MEMBERSHIP AND UNION DENSITY

Research on union membership has often sought to explain why workers join or leave unions, focusing on factors such as structural, institutional and individual-level characteristics. Structural factors include shifts in employment patterns, such as the transition from public to private sectors (Palm 2017; Schmitt & Mitukiewicz 2012), and the rise of atypical forms of employment, such as part-time or temporary work, which tends to weaken attachment to the workplace and, in turn, to unions (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Palm, 2017). Such trends result in fewer workers in traditionally unionised sectors, which partly explains declining union density in many countries.

Concerning the role of institutions on UD, this line of research emphasises the features of the industrial relations systems, such as collect-

ive bargaining coverage, the degree of bargaining centralisation as well as the workplace presence of unions (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Ebbinghaus & Visser 1999; Scheuer 2011). One of the central institutional factors that affects union density is the structure of UI systems (Western 1997). The Ghent system, where unions manage the UI funds, has been identified as being particularly conducive to higher union density. Countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Belgium, which employ the Ghent system, tend to have much higher union membership rates than those with state-run UI (Kjellberg & Lyhne Ibsen 2016). The reason for this is often termed the “Ghent effect”, that is, when unemployment benefits are tied to union membership, individuals are more likely to join unions for economic security (Rasmussen & Pontusson 2018).

In contrast to the role of institutions, cultural and individual-level explanations highlight demographic factors such as age, gender, and social class, as well as individual attitudes toward unions (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Schnabel 2003; Vestin & Vulkan 2021; Visser 2019). Younger workers, for instance, are often less likely to join unions due to perceived irrelevance or negative views on collective bargaining. However, in contexts where unions remain widespread, such as countries with the Ghent system, this trend is less pronounced (Kjellberg 2020). Some scholars have also argued that the lower unionisation rates among youth reflect their precarious labour market positions rather than a generational shift in attitudes toward individualism (Allvin & Sverke 2000; Kirmanoğlu & Başlevent 2012).

Structural power resources – the resources labour derives from its position within the broader economic structure – are closely linked to changes in employment and the composition of the labour market. For example, higher unemployment rates have been shown to negatively impact union density, as workers in precarious or insecure employment situations may perceive less value in union membership (Checchi & Nunziata 2011; Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Schnabel 2013). While unemployment at the aggregate level affects union density negatively, it has been studied less frequently at the individual level. However, studies have indicated that unemployment may affect union membership ideologically or practically, as long-term unemployment may reduce demand for union services (Bain & Price 1980; Walsh 1985).

Institutional power resources influence union density through the regulatory and organisational frameworks that govern labour markets. In Sweden, Anders Kjellberg's work has highlighted how changes to the Ghent system, particularly the differentiation of UI fund fees, resulted in substantial declines in union density. This decline has been unevenly distributed across age groups, employment contracts and country of origin, with younger and foreign-born workers being less likely to join unions (Kjellberg 2020). The interaction between institutional changes and structural factors, such as shifts in employment types, has also been critical in explaining the decline of union membership in Sweden and other European countries (Kjellberg 2011; Palm 2017). However, multivariate testing of this proposed conditional effect is lacking.

Lastly, the decline in union membership has been attributed to value changes, with some scholars suggesting that younger cohorts may be more individualistic, preferring personal career development over collective bargaining (Bengtsson & Berglund 2011; Booth *et al.* 2010; Bryson *et al.* 2005). However, this hypothesis has been contested in countries with strong labour institutions like Sweden, where structural explanations, such as labour market instability and prolonged periods of tertiary education, offer more convincing accounts of declining unionisation among young workers (Griffin & Brown 2011; Oliver 2010; Vandaele 2018; Vestin & Vulkan 2021). Rather than a change in attitudes, younger workers' reluctance to join unions may reflect their experience of insecure labour market trajectories, which make union membership seem less relevant or necessary.

## ATTITUDES TO UNIONS

Attitudes toward unions play a crucial role in shaping union membership and, by extension, union density. These attitudes are not merely a reflection of structural changes but also represent individual-level perceptions of unions' relevance and efficacy. Workers' attitudes toward unions often depend on their personal experiences in the labour market and their political or ideological orientations. For instance, union members are generally more likely than non-members to support progressive policies, particularly those that align with left-wing ideologies (Behrens

*et al.* 2004; Iversen & Soskice 2015; Mosimann & Pontusson 2017; Schnabel & Wagner 2008).

Unions are traditionally seen as defenders of workers' rights, and this role often aligns with broader support for social solidarity and welfare policies. Union members are more likely than non-members to perceive conflicts between workers and management, supporting a more adversarial view of labour-capital relations (Hyman 2001; Ringqvist 2021a). Union members are also more inclined to support policies aimed at environmental protection and sustainability (Ringqvist 2021b; Vachon & Brecher 2016), which reflects the broader ideological positions that unions often take on progressive social issues.

The literature also highlights the role of institutional power resources in shaping attitudes toward unions. In countries like Sweden, where union density traditionally has been high and unions have been integrated into the fabric of the welfare state, union membership is seen as a norm and positive attitudes toward unions are widespread (Rosetti 2019). This point is in contrast to any expectations that the Ghent effect gives rise to sustained union membership through purely instrumental effects,<sup>4</sup> and that a membership norm arises within unions as egalitarian attitudes are fostered through unions' close association with the welfare state and social democracy (Korpi 2006). Conversely, in countries with lower union density and weaker institutional support for unions, attitudes toward unions may be more negative. This involves workers viewing unions as less effective or even irrelevant to their personal or professional lives due to competing political or ideological differences among the workforce (Penninx & Roosblad 2000).

A key factor in explaining these differences is the extent to which unions can adapt to changing labour market conditions. The rise of precarious employment and the gig economy presents significant challenges for unions, which have historically been more successful in organising workers in stable, full-time positions. Research suggests that workers in precarious or non-standard employment are less likely to join unions, not only due to the instability of their jobs but also because they may perceive unions as less capable of addressing their specific needs (Behrens *et al.* 2004).

---

<sup>4</sup> While union membership may foster positive attitudes towards solidarity and a left-wing ideology, the Ghent system does not necessarily imply any active participation from union members (Müller-Jentsch 1985).

The ability of unions to recruit new members from these groups depends partly on the attitudes of existing members, which reflects the second-order collective action problem of being willing to recruit new members (Visser 2002). If unions are perceived as exclusive or resistant to change, it may be more difficult for them to attract workers in precarious positions (Keune & Pedaci 2020). Conversely, if unions are seen as inclusive and responsive to the needs of all workers, regardless of their employment status, they may be more successful at maintaining or even increasing membership. This highlights the importance of associational power resources – the ability of unions to mobilise workers and build solidarity across different groups – in shaping both union density and workers’ attitudes toward unions (Rosetti 2019).

## INCOME DISTRIBUTION

The decline in the wage share, which refers to the portion of national income going to labour as opposed to capital, has been a central focus of research on income distribution. This trend has been observed in many advanced economies and is often cited as a key factor driving rising income inequality. A declining wage share not only reflects a redistribution of income from labour to capital but also raises concerns about aggregate demand and economic stability, as workers with stagnant or declining wages have less purchasing power (IMF 2007; ILO 2013).

Several factors contribute to the decline in the wage share. Globalisation is often cited as one of the most significant of these, with increased capital mobility enabling firms to shift production to countries with lower labour costs, thereby exerting downward pressure on wages in higher-cost economies (Elsby *et al.* 2013; Harrison 2002). As firms relocate or threaten to relocate, workers in advanced economies face increased competition from lower-wage workers abroad, which weakens their bargaining power and leads to a redistribution of income away from labour.

Technological change is another key factor that affects income distribution. The concept of skill-biased technological change suggests that technology complements high-skilled workers while displacing

low-skilled workers, thereby exacerbating wage inequality. In this model, capital-augmenting technology increases the productivity of high-skilled workers, driving up their wages, while simultaneously reducing demand for low-skilled labour, which leads to wage stagnation or wage decline for these workers (Bassanini & Manfredi 2014; Bentolila & Saint-Paul 2003). A related theory – routine-biased technological change – focuses on the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on middle-skill jobs, which are more easily automated. This has led to an increased job polarisation, with high-skill and low-skill jobs growing at the expense of middle-skill employment (Autor & Dorn 2013).

The third important line of research relates to labour’s bargaining power and how its weakening has led to the decline in the wage share. Having strong trade unions and institutions for collective bargaining have been shown to impact the wage share positively (Bengtsson 2014; Keune 2021). Conversely, the decline in collective bargaining coverage and UD in recent decades has had a negative effect on the wage share (Álvarez *et al.* 2021; Moore *et al.* 2019).

Relatedly, declining UD and collective bargaining coverage have also resulted in somewhat paradoxical effects to wage-setting practices, as their decline often precedes the introduction of SMWs. This implies that different institutional power resources may substitute for one another in wage-setting practices. Pedersen and Picot (2023) have shown that institutional support for collective bargaining tends to be stronger in countries without SMWs, raising questions about potential substitution effects between collective bargaining and SMWs shaping the wage share (Aghion *et al.* 2011; Bonoli 2003). Considering the direct effects, previous research has reached mixed conclusions on the relationship between SMWs and their effect on the wage share: while some studies have suggested positive short-term effects (OECD 2012), others have implied negative effects if domestic labour is substituted for foreign labour (OECD 2018), or that SMWs only provide increased income security on the individual level, which only inhibits further wage share decline (Lansley & Reed 2013).

## SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This review has provided an overview of the present state of research in relation to unions' power resources and the studies comprising this thesis. Previous research on union membership provides important insights into the mechanisms underlying individual decision-making. However, it often treats institutions as isolated forms of power, rather than examining the implied interactions between institutions and other sources of power. For instance, different forms of institutional power may interact in forming the individual-level decision for union membership, thus shaping the degree of associational power, while institutions also shape structural power resources such as the level of unemployment and the extent of labour market dualisation. Therefore, the individual studies in this thesis focus on investigating the interactions of power resources in greater detail through multivariate testing.

Study I in the thesis investigates the interplay between changes to institutions and UD and whether these changes can explain any differences in attitudes towards trade unions over time. In the Nordic countries in particular, unions draw significant power from institutions, which leads to high UD. Previous research indicates that these factors impact attitudes positively, where union members are more inclined than non-members to support solidaristic values, and other trade union-related issues may be supported by members. If the effect of institutions and a falling UD is mediated by changes in values, as the theories on individualisation suggest, then attitudes towards trade unions may have been impacted negatively.

The interaction between structural and institutional power is the focus in Study II in the thesis. Both types of power have been demonstrated as having a negative effect on UD but their combined effect is less clear. While the composition of the labour force is affected by institutions, the individual-level effect in terms of, for instance, the employment contract can be thought of as being conditioned by the institutional system that provides incentives or disincentives for union membership. As such, this study investigates the interaction of labour force composition and Ghent system changes and their effects on UD.

The temporal aspect also applies to the individual level. If the explanation for union decline in younger cohorts is a result of their labour

market trajectories rather than of changes in values towards more individualised attitudes, this implies that we should also study the impact of career patterns on union membership. Furthermore, this relationship can also be expected to be mediated by institutions, where, for instance, a less strict EPL for FTE decreases structural power. This, because of an increase in insecure trajectories, in turn weakens associational power. Study III in the thesis focuses on this relationship.

Considering the international trend of declining UD and collective bargaining coverage, the question of what to counteract the expected shift in the power balance between labour and capital with has been discussed. One way to restore this power is through institutions; for instance, by introducing SMWs to set a wage floor in bargaining situations. However, the impact of SMWs on the wage share is relatively unexplored. On one hand, SMWs only set the lowest levels of wages, implying the effect might be biased towards low-skilled workers, whereas UD and collective bargaining are expected to positively impact the wage share for the entire workforce due to mobilisation and encompassing effects. Therefore, Study IV focuses on the interaction between associational and institutional power with the wage share as the outcome.

To arrive at the expected direction of labour's power resources effects on each other – in addition to their interactions and the relationship between aggregate-level power resources and individual-level decisions for, say, union membership – the following section outlines the theoretical framework of the thesis, which guided the individual studies.

## CHAPTER 4

# Theoretical Considerations

To understand the broader implications of unions' changing power resources, this chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. As previous sections have laid out, a central point of departure in the literature on trade unions is how their effectiveness is dependent on their strength relative to employers – where the formation and conversion of trade union resources is based on the distribution of power on the labour market, as well as the resultant strategies formulated. This power distribution is also relative to the formal and informal sanctions regulated by institutions. To this end, the power resource theory (PRT) and literature on institutional change are used as the theoretical tools to investigate and explain the aim of the thesis. By framing the studies using PRT, the role of workers and their organisation in trade unions in industrial relations can be understood as a class-based approach to workers' place in production and the distributional processes that result from this (Korpi 1978; Wright 2000). In parallel to this, a theory on institutional change helps understand the contexts in which institutions originate and evolve.

### POWER RESOURCE THEORY

PRT focuses on the relative distribution of power resources in different social classes within a capitalist system (Korpi 1978, 1983). A central component in this model is the asymmetrical distribution of power resources, particularly with regard to capital and labour, which stress that PRT takes a relational approach as employees and employers both can mobilise power resources to come to agreement (Schmalz *et al.* 2018).

Therefore, the starting point in this discussion is that employers hold significant power through their ownership of the means of production. Thus, the theoretical framework builds on Marxist insights on labour relations, yet expands on it by focusing on how organising and mobilising the working class can counterbalance the power of employers (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022: 1960; Wright 2000). Since the mobilisation of power resources is costly, these actors develop strategies to reduce costs. Here, the most efficient route is the channelling of power resources into collective action associations, such as trade unions (Korpi 1978). While Korpi's model is an attempt to explain how union organising and the strength of left-wing parties have been instrumental in the emergence of an encompassing welfare state characterised by full employment and an extensive social safety net, putting unions' power and resources at centre stage brings back an important actor shaping labour markets and industrial relations. This shifts the focus away from for instance employers as the decisive factor, as seen in the Varieties of Capitalism approach (Arnholtz & Refslund 2024; Hall & Soskice 2001).

Korpi's original theoretical model stressed that a social scientific approach needs to consider the "intentional explanations, in which the desires and beliefs of actors are taken into account" (Korpi 1985: 31), indicating that there needs to be analytical separation between power, interest and strategies. As such, the mere existence of power resources does not imply the existence of interests or strategy but rather a potentiality of these. Therefore, a central question in PRT is how to define *power* in itself. Levesque and Murray (2010: 335) ordered labour power along two analytical lines, building on the Weberian definition as the probability that an actor can carry out their will despite resistance from other actors (Weber 1968: 53). First, power includes the *power to* do something and also having *power over* something – that is, determining the rules of play. These forms of power then underlie the resources that can be mobilised (Levesque & Murray 2010). This argument has also been stated in Lukesian terms, where power can be understood as the capacity of social actors to create or resist changes in accordance with their interests, while resources are those properties of actors that can be mobilised in order to magnify the potential power (Arnholtz & Refslund 2024: 13; Lukes 2005).

As stated, the leverage of power resources by trade unions to mobilise for particular outcomes are also dependent on their interests and strategies (Arnholtz & Refslund 2024). This is illustrated in the different ways unions have positively impact the share of wages in relation to profits on the labour market at large, relevant to Study IV in this thesis. The literature here describes how trade unions can draw on multiple types of power resources to formulate strategies: for instance, institutional power can be sourced and the bargaining system can be leveraged depending on whether there is a right to collective bargaining or an SMW that sets the wage floor (Álvarez *et al.* 2021; Keune 2021; Parisi 2017). Collective bargaining coverage as a result of institutional power would then act as a strategy to increase wages for the entirety of the workforce, irrespective of associational power. In contrast, leveraging associational power through union member mobilisation in negotiations would be another way to impact the wage share, which can be effective depending on the institutional context (Bengtsson 2014; Parisi 2017). Stated more broadly, the interest of unions would be to affect the distribution of income in the economy, while the strategy for doing so would differ based on the available power resources.

PRT becomes useful for this thesis as it pays attention to specific power configurations and how these change over time. By studying the actors endowed with these resources (in this case, workers and trade unions), the agency and implied strategy of these actors is articulated and can complement structural factors (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022). In the following sections, I discuss some specific power resources of labour salient to this thesis.

## TYPES OF POWER RESOURCES

While Korpi (1978, 1985) did not differentiate between different kinds of sources of power, significant theoretical work has been undertaken to outline these. Despite the thesis focus on unions, delineating other resources helps formulate an understanding of union decline. In this section, I outline four main components of labour's power resources relevant to the individual studies of this thesis.

## *Structural Power*

*Structural power resources* are defined as the power derived from workers' position in the production system and can be understood as the foundation for other power resources, as it is available even without collective organisation (Schmalz *et al.* 2018; Wright 2000: 962). Structural power refers to the ability of the working class to interfere with production, for instance through industrial action and work stoppages. The level of structural power relates to employers' ability to replace workers, and therefore having regulations on strike activity is important to regulate this power resource (and relates to institutional power). Furthermore, two sub-types of structural power can be distinguished: workplace power and marketplace power (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022; Schmalz *et al.* 2018; Silver 2003; Wright 2000). Workplace power refers to the extent to which employers are dependent on workers, while marketplace power acknowledges that the structural power of employees depends on the labour market at large. For instance, the economic cycles influence worker structural power, where low unemployment and the ability to shift jobs infers a better bargaining position for workers (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022; Smith 2006). In the context of this thesis, Studies II and IV relate to the structural power resources. Study II models whether the cyclicity of UD is a result of changes in the labour force composition, while Study IV explicitly models the unemployment rate as a predictor of the decline in the wage share.

## *Associational Power*

*Associational power resources* are “the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organizations of workers” (Wright 2000: 962), and are where the primary power of workers are pooled (Brinkmann & Nachtwey 2010). In contrast to structural power, associational power requires an organisational process and collective actors capable of strategising (Silver 2003). The effectiveness of this process is often measured as the number of members or UD. While Karl Marx (2010) recognised that labour's power was in the force of numbers, unions also require an adequate infrastructure and organisational efficiency in order to exercise power (Schmalz *et al.* 2018). They must

also be willing to mobilise functions on different levels: the workplace, the sectoral, and the societal levels. The local levels provide the foundation for higher level associational power, which in turn can become institutionalised. Union organising is important for this type of power resource, indicating that both the number of union members and their willingness to act and mobilise is important (Korpi 1978). Additionally, the organisational structures of the union movement and the coordination and internal cohesion need to be efficient for the formation of this form of power (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022: 1963). As such, associational power is shaped by the interconnection between the local and societal levels and the degree to which these levels are coordinated (Wright 2000: 963). In relation to this framework, Studies II and III explicitly investigate the formation of union membership in relation to unions' membership levels and the individual preconditions for joining.<sup>5</sup>

### *Institutional Power*

*Institutional power resources* influence how actors interact and strategize (Korpi 1978), and is usually the result of struggles based on structural and associational power (Schmalz *et al.* 2018). Systems like collective bargaining, EPL, unemployment benefits, conciliation and arbitration frameworks, and vocational training can serve as critical sources of power in labour relations. While institutions often mirror the prevailing balance of power, shifts in other power resources can transform their role, enabling certain actions while restricting others, thus functioning as dynamic tools of influence in labour politics (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022).

Power from institutions may shift over time, either because the distribution of other power resources changes or because the functioning of the institution changes (Streeck & Thelen 2005). This means that even if institutional power can appear more steadfast than the other types of power resources, underlying changes may still be taking place

---

<sup>5</sup> Intimately tied to this are the individual-level mechanisms (that is, the *social custom* and *rational choice* explanations), which are commonly used to explain individual union membership. These are discussed in further detail in the following sections of this chapter and in Studies II and III.

(Thelen 2009). The institutional power resources are at the centre of this thesis and all studies relate to these to some extent. Study I investigates whether attitudes towards trade unions have changed over time alongside the institutional changes to Swedish industrial relations. Studies II and III deal with individual union membership in unstable institutional settings (the strong and weak Ghent system), expecting to impact associational power at the aggregate level. Study IV compares different institutional designs (SMW presence and levels) as conditions for the application of unions' power resources in the redistributive process.

While institutions provide worker power – and, as such, have the ability to enhance other power resources – they are rarely static and evolve with the political context. The literature traces the origins of institutional power to compromises between actors representing their class interests (Korpi 1983; Hyman 2001). One such compromise was the introduction of representative democracy itself, where labour movements used their structural and associational power to advance their interests (Korpi 1983).

Central to the literature are two main accounts of institutional change. The first is the notion of *erosion* of institutions, where regulations that support collective action are eroding, thus weakening the power of labour in favour of management discretion (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Thelen 2009). The second account is the notion of institutional *drift*, where institutions related to the labour market are modified to some extent but are generally seen as unchanged at the core (Streeck & Thelen 2005). In this case, the institutions themselves are unsuitable for the current socio-political context. Relevant to Studies I–III in this thesis is the notion of institutional erosion, in which changes to Swedish EPL and the Ghent system are taken into account. Relevant to Study IV, the introduction of SMWs often precedes periods of prolonged union and collective bargaining decline, changing the function of institutions and, as such, suggests institutional drift (Pedersen & Picot 2023).

## *Ideational Power*

*Ideational power resources* involve shaping individuals' normative and cognitive beliefs through ideas, norms, and discourse, often reflected in personal attitudes (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016; Hauptmeier & Heery 2014). This form of power influences how people perceive and respond to social and political issues, which can help explain why some workers join unions while others do not. Differences in beliefs, such as views on solidarity and fairness, affect decisions about union membership. Workers' cognitive perceptions, such as the perceived effectiveness and benefits of union membership, also play a crucial role, and thus, the willingness to mobilise is influenced by pro-union attitudes among potential members (Pontusson 2013).

Union members typically hold stronger normative beliefs about collective action, viewing union membership as a social or moral obligation, which positions ideational power as a sub-type of associational power (Alfonsson 2024; Rosetti 2019). Conversely, non-members may prioritise individualism or lack trust in the union's ability to provide perceived tangible benefits. These cognitive differences may affect decisions around union participation and shape the strategies unions use to mobilise workers (Nissen & Jarley 2005). Attitudes toward unions – especially regarding the norms, values, and perceptions of their role – are key components of ideational power. Importantly, individual attitudes are shaped by broader societal discourses that unions seek to influence. For instance, union campaigns often aim to invoke and establish a form of working class consciousness, and reshape how workers think about solidarity or challenge dominant ideologies of individualism (Rosetti 2019). Thus, ideational power involves altering personal beliefs and attitudes through a socialisation process, rather than merely reflecting workers' positions within the labour market (Korpi 1978; Offe & Wiesensthal 1980). Ultimately, ideational power resources enable unions to shape both normative and cognitive beliefs, where differences between union members and non-members in terms of how they perceive collective action and union efficacy illustrate how ideational power can manifest at an individual level.

## FEEDBACK LOOPS AND THE RECURSIVE INTERPLAY OF POWER RESOURCES

PRT is crucial for understanding how the interaction of power resources over time and across different contexts explains broader societal changes (Alfonsson 2024; Keizer *et al.* 2024; Refslund & Arnholtz 2022). This theory goes beyond a static view of power distribution, recognising that shifts in one type of power resource, such as those held by unions or employers, often have recursive effects on other resources. For instance, when power resources between labour and capital become increasingly different, conflict over issues like wage distribution tends to decrease, especially when the disparity in power resources is significant (Korpi 1985: 36). However, changes in one form of power – such as an increase in union strength or employer influence – do not occur in isolation (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Thelen 2014). These shifts often trigger wider changes across other resources, influenced by past conflicts or, conversely, through non-mobilisation when the balance of power discourages action (Korpi 1985). This process highlights how changes in labour power, driven by historical interactions, continuously reshape the dynamics of labour relations and bargaining outcomes.

Labour's power resources are also shaped through a dialectical relationship between ideas and the structural context, meaning that shifts in ideologies, such as those concerning employment policy, can transform the labour market's functioning (Alfonsson 2024; Keizer *et al.* 2024). This process can be understood as an “ideological dialectical spiral” (Alfonsson 2024: 43), where ideas and structural conditions mutually reinforce each other, affecting power relations over time. In this context, the associational power of unions – built on the collective decisions of individual workers to join – becomes a critical tool for negotiating with employers. However, the effectiveness of this associational power is not independent; it is also closely linked to broader structural and institutional power configurations that can either enhance or limit union mobilisation (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022). The nature of this interaction suggests that changes in structural conditions, such as the rise of precarious work or increasing unemployment, can weaken union membership, undermining support for the institutional conditions (Kjellberg 2011; Palm 2017), and in Korpian terms reduce the likelihood

of conflict due to increased employer dominance (Korpi 1985). However, workers are both shaped by and capable of reshaping their positions within the labour market through collective action, which reflects the fluid, ongoing nature of labour struggles in capitalist economies. Therefore, these recursive effects illustrate how each power resource can both influence and be influenced by changes in other forms of power (Schmalz *et al.* 2018). Table 1 briefly outlines the expected relationships between the different types of power resources and their interactions.

Structural power refers to the power that the working class acquire from their position within the labour market (Wright 2000). Labour markets with high levels of workers in permanent employment with high job security hold more structural power because their role in production makes them harder to replace. Conversely, workers in temporary or precarious employment have lower structural power due to their weaker bargaining position and higher replaceability (Keizer *et al.* 2024; Wright 2000).

At the individual level, structural power is expressed in this thesis through the employment contract variables, which shape a worker's decision to join or refrain from joining a union. At the aggregate level, if most workers are in permanent positions (that is, strong structural power), unions will benefit from higher associational power in terms of UD. Conversely, an economy dominated by temporary employees (that is, low structural power) would weaken union strength (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Visser 2002), reinforcing a cycle of declining associational power. Lower UD in itself means less bargaining power for unions in terms of reducing the perception that the balance of power is in favour of succeeding in reaching their goals. This reinforces employer dominance and potentially deepens precarious labour conditions due to changes to institutions, further weakening structural power. As such, this interaction illustrates how changes in structural power can recursively affect associational and institutional power.

Associational power stems from the collective strength of workers organised in unions. In the formal model, union membership at the individual level reflects associational power at the aggregate level. The higher the UD (that is, more workers opting for union membership), the stronger the bargaining position of the working class, influencing wages, working conditions and labour policies. However, associational power is not just an outcome of individual instrumental motives – it is

also shaped by institutional and structural power. In the strong version of the Ghent system, for instance, workers are incentivised to join unions, which increases associational power (Clasen & Viebrock 2008). As union membership rises, unions gain more leverage to bargain with employers and influence labour laws, which creates a feedback loop that strengthens union influence and labour conditions.

Associational power emerges out of the conflict between capital and labour, where capital seeks to minimise labour costs and labour seeks to achieve satisfactory wages and security. The struggle over working conditions leads to shifts in union strength, which then impacts the labour market structure (structural power). For example, stronger unions can reduce precarious employment through collective bargaining to gain better contracts and protections due to the semi-optional nature of Swedish EPL (Bylund & Viklund 2006; Olausson 2024), thereby increasing structural power. If associational power weakens due to declining union membership (caused by precarious work or weakened institutional frameworks), structural power decreases, as does the ability of unions to attract members.

Institutional power refers to the legal, regulatory, and welfare systems that influence the power of workers and unions. In the Ghent system where union membership is tied to unemployment insurance, institutional power plays a critical role in incentivising union membership (Scruggs 2002). The strong version of the Ghent system aligns individual workers' interests with union membership by offering selective incentives such as subsidised fees and unemployment protection, thus enhancing associational power. In contrast, through institutional erosion, a weak Ghent system with decoupled benefits or high fees provides disincentives for union membership for some worker categories, weakening institutional power and reducing UD (Kjellberg 2011; Palm 2017).

Institutional power is particularly significant because it shapes both structural and associational power. By altering the incentives for union membership, institutional power affects the degree to which workers can leverage their collective strength. Moreover, strong unions can influence institutional frameworks (for instance, by lobbying for favourable labour laws or derogating from terms set in a system of semi-optional EPL) (Olausson 2024), which enhances their own power over

*Table 1. Relationship between power resources and expected effects.*

TYPE	STRUCTURAL POWER			ASSOCIATIONAL POWER		INSTITUTIONAL POWER			BARGAINING SYSTEM			INTERACTION EFFECTS		
	UD	UD	UD	UD	UD	EPL	Ghent	Ghent	Bargaining system	LF comp. x Ghent/EPL	UD x EPL	UD x Barg. centralisation	UD x Barg. system	
MECHANISM	UD	UD	UD	UD	UD	EPL	Ghent	Ghent	Bargaining system	LF comp. x Ghent/EPL	UD x EPL	UD x Barg. centralisation	UD x Barg. system	
	Supports and stabilises IR system	UM's socialised collective attitudes	UM mobilisation in negotiations	Limiting FTE use	Selective incentives for UM	High SMW boosts bargaining	Dual incentives (SER & Ghent)	UD & barg. discourse foster collective attitudes	UD effect, boosts bargaining					
PROBABLE OUTCOME	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	
	Increase in AP	Reinforces IP	Increase in WS	Increase in SP	Increase in AP	Increase in WS	Increase in AP	Increase in WS	Increase in AP	Increase in SP	Increase in IDP	Increase in WS	Increase in WS	

*Note:* LF: labour force; UE: unemployment; SER: standard employment relationship; AP: associational power; UD: union density; IR: industrial relations; IP: institutional power; UM: union membership; IDP: ideational power; WS: wage share; EPL: employment protection legislation; FTE: fixed-term employment; SP: structural power; CB: collective bargaining; SMW: statutory minimum wage

time. The interaction between institutional power and structural/associational power is recursive. If unions are strong (high associational power), they are better positioned to shape institutional power (by influencing policies that protect workers' rights), enhance union participation, or strengthen social protections through the bargaining process. This increases associational and structural power, allowing workers to further negotiate for favourable labour conditions. Conversely, if unions are weak, employers can lobby for institutional changes that diminish union protections (such as weakening the Ghent system), which exacerbates the decline in union membership and leads to a downward spiral in working class power.

Lastly, ideational power results directly from associational power from a within-union socialisation process, which increases the likelihood that members will be willing to mobilise (Pontusson 2013), in addition to and in conjunction with a decentralisation of bargaining in a country such as Sweden, leading to a decrease in ideational power as individualisation takes hold (Baccaro & Howell 2017; Boltanski & Chiappello 2018).

## INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL MECHANISMS FOR UNION MEMBERSHIP

The configuration of the structural and institutional power resources also has consequences for the individual-level *instrumental* reasons for union membership. On a structural level, workers with more stable employment positions, such as secure contracts or steady career trajectories, are often more likely to join unions (Ebbinghaus 2006; Schnabel 2013). This link suggests that favourable labour market conditions can support union membership as a form of individual security. Institutions also play a crucial role. In Sweden, the Ghent system incentivises union membership by linking it to unemployment benefits, thereby providing a direct financial incentive. Conversely, weakening the Ghent system – such as by increasing membership fees or reducing benefits – can discourage membership (Clasen & Viebrock 2008; Rothstein 1990; Gordon 2019; Kjellberg 2011).

Studies of union membership often focus on the snapshot measurement points of individuals or use these to compute aggregate UD levels.

While individual-level structural positions at a fixed point in time can be a useful indicator when assessing the total level of UD or associational power, they imply somewhat reductive reasoning in terms of whether individuals remain members in unions or not. Whether departing from the social custom or rational choice frameworks, permanent contracts and employment in workplaces with strong union presences are expected to turn out in a positive membership decision in the Ghent system. Related to this, workers generally join unions in younger ages, making it critical that they choose collective organisation at early labour market stages (Vestin & Vulkan 2021; Visser 2019). Furthermore, the literature on the long-term commitment to unions results from initially favourable experiences (Klandermans 2003; Gomez & Gunderson 2004). As such, a single-point measurement of union membership status can just as likely be a result of a young worker sampling membership. Similarly, if union membership appears learned and habit-like, we can also extend the insights from social custom theory to investigate life-course effects (Anxo *et al.* 2010; Bernardi *et al.* 2019). In this sense, stable (permanent) employment would entail a greater probability of sustained membership, while unstable trajectories would hinder the development of a norm or habit of union membership.

At the individual level, the decision to join a trade union can be influenced by a variety of factors. These can be broadly categorised into two main frameworks: the *social custom* and the *rational choice* mechanisms. Within the social custom framework, the decision to join unions is often influenced by norms at the workplace or fostered by a collective identity (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011; Visser 2002). For instance, in sectors with a strong tradition of union representation at the workplace, the individual reason for joining a union is often a matter of tradition, irrespective of immediate personal benefits (Akerlof 1980). Therefore, UD is often higher in so-called *union strongholds* where employees are concentrated at larger workplaces, such as in the manufacturing industry. Conversely, industries with weaker social custom have greater difficulty upholding union membership as a norm (Visser 2002; Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011).

However, the social custom mechanism can be questioned in theoretical and empirical terms. Theoretically, it implies a *traditional* type of action where the motive for unionisation arises from one's parents hav-

ing been members or whether there is a tradition of unionisation at the workplace (Ebbinghaus *et al.* 2011: 109), while empirically, the evidence appears mixed and is rarely stringently operationalised in large-scale surveys (cf. Lyhne Ibsen *et al.* 2017; Visser 2002). This indicates that an instrumental heuristic might just as easily replace the social custom as an explanation.

In contrast, the rational choice framework emphasises the individual cost-benefit analysis and rational decision-making process as the main reasons for joining unions. As such, economic incentives and individual self-interest promote the decision, and individuals weigh the potential benefits of membership against the costs and risk of it (Olson 1965). This means the fee structure and other benefits and services provided by unions are the decisive factors when becoming a member (Schnabel 2003).

With regard to the competing perspectives of these two frameworks, recent research has emphasised that while ideological or normative components to the reasons for membership are important, the instrumental reasons are more useful for understanding the decline in UD in Western democracies. In his paper on collective instrumentalism among the membership base, Refslund (2024) noted that Korpi's initial study of the reasons for union membership in Swedish metal manufacturing only identified 8 per cent who did so because of outside pressure, and 41 per cent who did so for reasons of solidarity (Korpi 1978). While this one empirical example is rather indicative, it reinforces the view that the Ghent system mainly fosters instrumental reasons for union membership, even when referring to a high UD sector at the height of the Swedish welfare state in spite of options for free-riding (Rothstein 1990). Therefore, understanding the decision to join a trade union as a form of collective action organisation can be understood through the structural circumstances in which the individual worker finds themselves. In this sense, workplace size, shared interests, the likelihood of success of collective action, institutions, ideology and norms all impact the decision for joining unions (Refslund 2024). This incentive formation is outlined in Table 2.

*Table 2. Individual incentive formation for decisions on union membership.*

	COGNITIONS	VALUES	NORMS
TYPE	Rational choice	Ideology	Social custom
MECHANISM	Selective incentives	Solidarity	Outside pressure
	↓	↓	↓
PROBABLE OUTCOME	Member/ non-member	Member	Member

As shown in Table 2, solidaristic ideological values and the social custom influences membership positively. By contrast, the rational choice mechanism is contingent upon the incentives provided by institutions, and bounded rationality in the form of social heuristics can be used in order to arrive at the individual instrumental decision<sup>6</sup> (Elster 1990; Granovetter 2017).

In addition to union membership decisions, the formation of attitudes is relevant to Study I in this thesis and can be understood as the reflection of ideational power at the individual level, as discussed in previous sections. The main point of the direction of the effect here is thought to be a result of the direct effects of associational and institutional power, as well as how these interact. Union-friendly attitudes are borne out of the success of socialisation process within unions in order to foster collectivist and egalitarian values towards, for instance, income equality (Pontusson 2013; Rosetti 2019). In contrast, the institutional context also matters in fostering these attitudes in countries with strong welfare states (Korpi 2006). However, if discursive shifts in terms of, say, wage-setting occur due to decentralisation of bargaining and in conjunction with a decline in UD, we could expect a decrease in collectivist-oriented attitudes towards individualisation (Boltanski & Chiapello 2018; Vallas & Christin 2018).

6. For instance, temporary employees under the strong Ghent system could join unions due to favourable fees and eligibility for UI, while temporary employees under the weak Ghent system may make a decision based on a negative heuristic like “temporary workers don’t benefit from unions”. In contrast, whether the positive heuristic of “everyone joins unions so I will too” is reflective of a social custom or some form of instrumental motive is less certain. Nevertheless, this concept is used in the individual studies of the thesis, as any analytical separation of cognitive and normative motives is impossible due to data limitations (see Chapter 5 on the operationalisation of concepts).

Table 3. *Expected relationships between institutions, individual decisions for union membership, and aggregate-level outcomes.*

	<i>Ghent</i> STRONG	<i>EPL</i> STRONG	<i>Ghent</i> WEAK	<i>EPL</i> WEAK
SOCIAL CUSTOM	Increases incentive for union membership			
BOUNDED RATIONALITY	Strong incentives		Weak incentives	
EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT	Permanent employment increases incentive for union membership			
EMPLOYMENT TRAJECTORY	Regulation of FTE ⇒ stable trajectories		Lax regulation of FTE ⇒ increase in unstable trajectories	
	↓	↓	↓	↓
EXPECTED UM ACTION	Member	Member	Member if SC; non-member if RC	Non-member
INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL OUTCOME	Positive attitudes		Negative attitudes	
PROBABLE AGGREGATE-LEVEL OUTCOME	UD stable or increasing, AP and SC maintained <i>ceteris paribus</i>	Standard employment the norm, SP maintained <i>ceteris paribus</i>	UD decrease, AP and SC decline <i>ceteris paribus</i>	Non-standard employment increase, SP decline <i>ceteris paribus</i>

*Note:* FTE: fixed-term employment; SC: social custom; RC: rational choice; UD: union density; AP: associational power; SP: structural power; UM: union membership

Table 3 outlines the expected relationships between institutions, individual decisions for union membership, and aggregate outcomes. In the first instance, the social custom effect is expected to facilitate union membership due to the workplace norm. The instrumental reasons for collective organisation are based on the institutional incentives (in the Swedish case, the Ghent system, which facilitates membership or non-membership depending on whether these are strong or weak. In this sense, the strong Ghent system would provide positive and negative selective incentives to union membership, while under the weak Ghent system disincentives are provided for the total workforce and for workers in sectors with higher unemployment due to differentiation of UI fund fees. These incentives are mediated by bounded rationality as a heuristic for membership decisions. Coupled with deregulation of EPL this is also expected to provide a dual disincentive for membership in

the snapshot dimension for temporary workers, and also the longitudinal dimension as laxer regulation of FTE is expected to increase insecure employment trajectories. In terms of the employment trajectories, a more secure career path will also involve a greater possibility of encountering the union norm, and as such organise to uphold the social custom. On the aggregate level, the strong and weak Ghent systems also affect associational power positively or negatively, *ceteris paribus*, while the weak and strong EPL strengthens or weakens structural power.

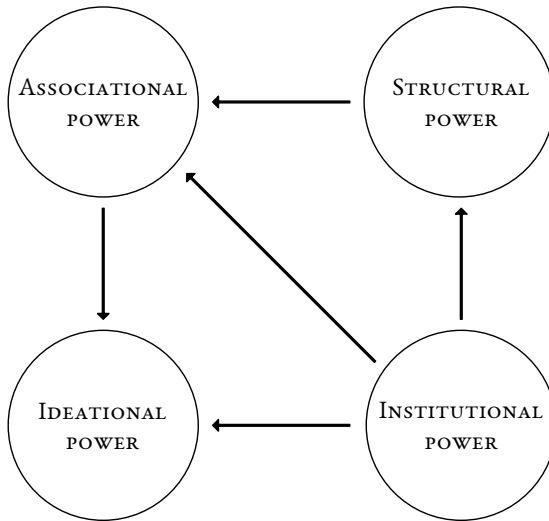
## SUMMARY AND THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE THESIS

The theoretical overview has resulted in several insights that guide the individual studies comprising this thesis. Firstly, PRT provides the general argument for studying trade unions: in this sense, the structural and associational types of power resources are most salient at first glance. Structural power resources such as the level of unemployment and the share of non-standard employment arrangements are expected to influence the associational power resource (UD in this case) on mainly the workplace and sectoral levels, *ceteris paribus*. However, including institutional power of different forms into this framework introduces an increasingly complex picture of expected relationships, which will be outlined in the following section. Based on the previously overarching theoretical framework, I outline the main directions in the formation of power resources in Figure 4.

As is shown in Figure 4, the importance of the institutional power resources can be noted as they are expected to have direct impacts on the three other sources of power. In this sense, EPL would directly influence the labour force composition, high bargaining centralisation would foster collectivist attitudes, and the Ghent system would structure the level of associational power. However, these directions preclude any conditional effects that may change direct impacts. These are outlined in Figure 5.

Figure 5 illustrates the arguments regarding the recursive effects and feedback loops between different types of power resources. Structural power is sourced in the first instance in the form of EPL as institutional

Figure 4. Direction in power resources formation.

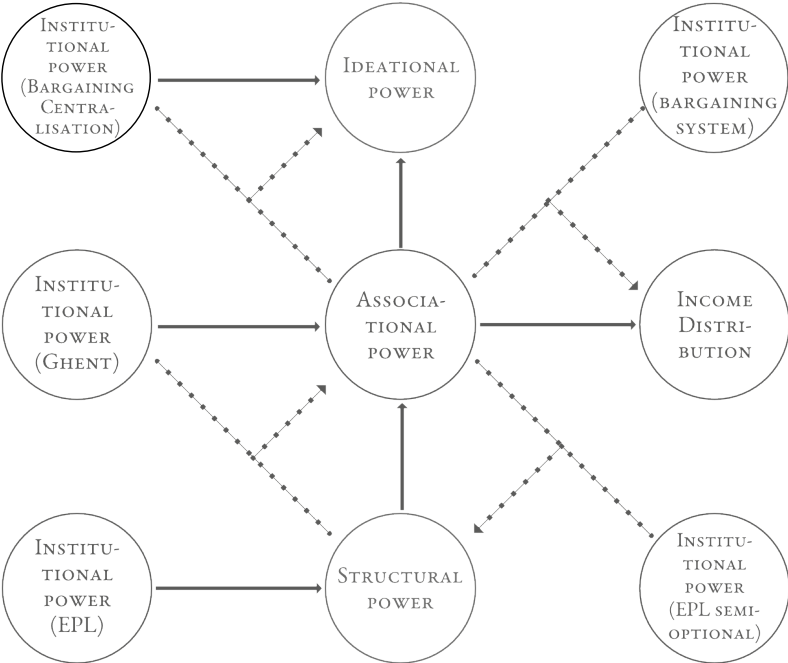


power. As such, negative changes in the direction of laxer protections of, for instance, FTE contracts are likely to result in a reduction of structural power as the share of workers with insecure employment increases. Structural power directly influences associational power as the composition of the labour force is an important predictor for UD. Similarly, institutional power through the unemployment insurance system influences associational power directly. These two direct channels are expected to impact UD and can also be expected to interact, which is relevant to Studies II and III where the individual-level decisions mediate the effects on the aggregate level. If the level of structural power conditions the effects of the incentives of the unemployment insurance system, we should also expect a decrease in UD if there is a decrease in structural power (Kjellberg 2011). Additionally, simultaneous negative changes to both structural and institutional power as a form of institutional *erosion* would create dual disincentives for union membership at the individual level, further exacerbating the direct negative effects on associational power. Moreover, the life-course paradigm indicates that deregulation should indicate a greater share of instable career trajectories, decreasing associational power. The level of structural power is also

conditioned by the system of bargaining. If unions are successful at derogating from the semi-optional EPL by bargaining for higher levels of permanent employment contracts, structural power may instead be strengthened, which again affects associational power, as in the first instance. This is, however, rather unlikely in the Swedish context seeing as the level of fixed-term employment seem rather cemented as discussed in Chapter 2.

The level of associational power is expected to directly influence ideational power. Here, norms and values would be a result of socialisation through union membership. This is relevant to Study I, which investigates whether any changes in attitudes towards trade union engagement can be attributed to the decline in union density. Based on the theoretical framework, this relationship is expected. Furthermore, a direct influence from the degree of bargaining centralisation is expected to

*Figure 5. Recursive effects and feedback loops between types of power resources. The solid arrows indicate direct relationships while dotted arrows indicate conditional effects.*



mediate any changes in values over time. However, if bargaining becomes local and fragmented as solidaristic wage policies become less important, the effect of associational power on ideational power can be conditioned by the bargaining model. This is intimately tied to the earlier discussion on the liberalisation of labour markets, where individual attitudes are expected to be fostered by deregulation. It is from these insights that Study I departs, investigating the effects of decentralisation and UD on the attitudes towards collective vis-à-vis individual employer negotiations and trade union engagement.

Extending the model to a broader level to facilitate the comparative analysis in Study IV, associational power reinforces institutional power through providing support for the prevailing bargaining model. Therefore, any negative changes to UD or collective bargaining coverage are expected to be addressed by states through changing conditions that seek to uphold the relative power resources of workers and employers. A large reduction in associational power would lead to institutional changes to the bargaining system. One such change is the introduction of SMWs to set the wage floor across the economy. UD and the bargaining system are expected to have separate direct impacts on the income distribution in the economy in terms of the share of wages and profits, but the effect of UD is conditioned by the bargaining system, where the non-existence of an SMW or an SMW at lower levels leads to more effective union strategies in bargaining, which is expected to impact the wage share positively.

To conclude, while this is not the end-to-all or an exhaustive model that describes all expected causal directions, there are important conditional and recursive effects pertaining to labour's power resources at the aggregate level, which also are related to structural and attitudinal positions on the individual level. Having outlined the overarching theoretical model of the thesis, the following chapter discusses the methods, materials, and operationalisation of the main concepts on the aggregate and individual levels as discussed in this chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

## Methods and Materials

In this chapter, I present the overarching methodology of the thesis and the specific studies' methods, selection, analytical tools, and ethical considerations. The thesis consists of four studies that all employ quantitative methods. Using both survey and register data, labour's power resources are studied in a number of different ways. The following sections present the data sources, operationalisation of concepts and modelling specifications in further detail, as well as a reflection on the ethical and legal considerations in relation to the analyses.

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONTEXT

The studies that comprise this thesis are approached in multiple different ways and conducted using several different data sources, while being united in the longitudinal aspect of the analyses. Table 4 presents an overview of the different data sources and analytical techniques used for the different studies. Study I uses a cross-sectional design and analyses three survey materials conducted in 1997, 2006, and 2018 in order to identify whether employee attitudes to unions have changed over time; this study also computes UD levels per year between 1997 and 2015. Studies II and III uses the Swedish Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the years 2005–2010 and 2005–2014, respectively, in conjunction with the LISA database for information on educational background. The LFS is a two-year long rotating panel where individuals are surveyed quarterly. This means that these individuals can be followed for a maximum of eight successive time periods with a detailed account of labour market variables for the adult population. The total population of the LFS in

these years are Swedish individuals aged 15–74. In Study II, I selected all individuals in employment aged 16–64, while in Study III the sample includes those aged 18–35 at the first measurement point who had finished secondary education. Study IV takes a comparative approach and uses country-level data from the EU KLEMS, OECD, and ICTWSS databases for the years 2008–2018.

While the choice of investigating the formation and uses of labour’s power resources in the quantitative paradigm can be seen as an attempt to establish claims of causality and generalisability, this understanding must be nuanced. The studies in this thesis follow the approach of “causal inference”, as described by Aneshensel (2012), where the relationship between variables is assessed through statistical association rather than direct causal claims. In Studies I and II, the effect on attitudes and trade union membership is evaluated through cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to make definitive causal claims. Although statistical associations are useful for understanding trends and relationships, the temporal ordering of cause and effect cannot be firmly established.

Study III addresses this limitation by incorporating a longitudinal component, where the independent variable (employment trajectory) precedes the outcome (union membership). This temporal aspect enhances the ability to infer causality, as it ensures that changes in union membership follow changes in labour market conditions. However, the short panel of the Swedish LFS restricts the strength of these inferences. Additionally, potential biases related to omitted variables, such as unmeasured cultural or attitudinal shifts, could also affect the interpretation of results (Johfre & Saperstein 2023).

Study IV adopts a comparative perspective, using country-level data to examine the relationship between labour’s power resources and income distribution across multiple countries. This approach made it possible to identify broader patterns across different national contexts and helped me explore how varying institutional structures impact labour’s bargaining power. By comparing data from multiple countries, this study adds an international dimension to the thesis, highlighting how labour’s power resources interact with different institutional

Table 4. Overview of methods and materials used in the thesis.

STUDY	RESEARCH PROBLEM	PURPOSE & POPULATION	DATA AND METHODS	RQ
I	With institutional changes coinciding with a decline in union density, how do these developments impact individual-level attitudes to trade unions as well as the collective vs individual attitudes towards employer negotiations?	Investigate developments in composition of union density and individual attitudes to unions in Sweden; individuals aged 16–64	Swedish LFS/survey PCA & OLS regression	1, 2
II	How do institutional changes to a system in which unions enjoy high institutional support affect the membership base of trade union power?	Investigate the dynamics of changes to the EPL and Ghent systems in Sweden and the resultant effects on union density; individuals aged 16–64	Swedish LFS/LISA; logistic regression	2, 3
III	With decreasing labour market attachment in younger cohorts, how do labour market careers affect the decision to join a union?	Investigate the influence of employment trajectories on union membership in Sweden; individuals aged 18–35	Swedish LFS/LISA; sequence analysis & logistic/negative binomial regressions	2, 3
IV	How does the erosion of labour market institutions and decline in labour's power resources affect the wage share? Specifically, how do the power resources interact with the presence of an SMW and SMW levels?	Investigate the influence of labour's power resources and mechanisms for wage-setting on the wage share in high-income countries; OECD countries 2008–2018	EU KLEMS/OECD/ICTWSS; OLS regression with panel-corrected standard errors	4

frameworks. Nevertheless, endogeneity and omitted variable bias issues arise here as well, limiting the possibility of inferring causality (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen 2017).

### *The Survey on Attitudes to Trade Unions*

The data used in Study I for the analysis of employee attitudes towards trade unions consisted of a survey on “Perceptions of occupational prestige and the union” conducted in Sweden in 2018 and administered by Statistics Sweden (SCB). The questionnaire was constructed in order to facilitate a better understanding of current Swedish employee attitudes in relation to current labour market conditions, as well as to conduct comparative analyses with other data sources (see p. 47). The data were collected as part of the research programme “The Challenges of Polarization on the Swedish Labour Market”<sup>7</sup> led by Professor Tomas Berglund at the Department of Sociology and Work Science at the University of Gothenburg. This project provided important primary data for the analysis of employee attitudes towards different issues of trade union engagement (such as defending jobs and distributing income in society), as well as attitudes towards employee attitudes towards collective or individual negotiations with employers.

The survey targeted a stratified random sample of the Swedish population aged 16–74<sup>8,9</sup> and had a response rate of 22 percent, consisting of a total of 1653 responses. Participants were sent the questionnaire between October 2018 and March 2019. The response rates in the survey were low among low-skilled and low-income individuals, as well as with those born outside of the Nordic countries in regard to selection bias. This is potentially significant to the results in Study I, as foreign-born and low-income individuals are more likely to be in precarious employment and to not be members of trade unions (Berglund *et al.* 2017; Gordon 2019; Elgenius *et al.* 2024). As the results from the survey have not been weighted, the results may underestimate the support for any of these groups’ views on trade union engagement.

---

7 Project identification number 2016–07204; registration number 090–17.

8 The analyses on collective vs. individual negotiations in Study I consisted of employees aged 16–64 (see the following section, “Additional Data”, p. 53–55), while the analyses on attitudes towards trade union engagement used the full dataset.

9 The sample was stratified, where individuals aged 16–24 were oversampled to increase response rates in this age group.

## *The Labour Force Survey*

The LFS is used as the main source for the analyses in Studies II and III, and for the descriptive analysis of UD in Study I. This survey is the official source for the calculation of the employment and unemployment rates in Sweden and is collected by Statistics Sweden (SCB) through monthly telephone interviews to obtain a representative sample of the Swedish population. The population in 1997–2004 was 16–64-year-olds, while during later years (2005 onwards) it was 15–74-year-olds. The sample consisted of around 21,500 individuals aged 15–74 in 2015. The LFS employs a rotating panel approach where one-eighth of the panel is replaced with a new rotational group each quarter, and each individual is surveyed on a quarterly basis for a maximum of eight quarters (that is, two years). The non-response rates for each year vary, but has hovered around 15 per cent up until 2008, whereafter non-responses have steadily increased up to 35 per cent in 2014, even reaching above 50 per cent in 2022 (SCB 2023).

In Study I, the LFS for the years 1997–2015 is used to compute yearly UD of individuals in employment, aged 16–64 and break the rates down in relation to the class-based peak-level confederations. The data for these years are also used in Study II to compute monthly UD on the aggregate level in addition to yearly levels, with UD broken down in relation to the independent variables of the study between 2005 and 2010. For these descriptive analyses, the weights supplied by Statistics Sweden serve to correct for any undersampling of any category (SCB 2019a). However, the regression analyses in Studies II and III, as well as the sequence and cluster analyses in Study III, are not weighted to account for any patterns in the missing data. Regression models were estimated to analyse these patterns, showing that younger individuals, women, those born outside of Sweden, and those not in the labour force have a higher likelihood of not completing all eight waves of the LFS with regard to Study III. In Study II, participants with temporary contracts, women, and those born outside of Sweden have a higher likelihood of not answering the question on union membership.

## *The EU KLEMS, OECD, and ICTWSS Databases*

To conduct the analyses in Study IV, I compiled a dataset of comparative indicators of the wage share, SMWs, and power resources on the macro-level from freely available databases. For data on the share of wages as a percentage of total GDP, I make use of the EU KLEMS 2023 dataset (Bontandini *et al.* 2023). Furthermore, it is possible in the material to break down the wage share into three groups of workers defined by skill level (high, medium and low) for the years 2008–2018 in 22 countries<sup>10</sup> where, for instance, the high-skilled workers' wage share corresponds to the share of wages as a percentage of GDP in this specific category, and so on. These skill levels are defined based on the share of employees in each country with a specific level of education, as indicated by the ISCED standard.<sup>11</sup> However, because the data include the years of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–2009, in which wages and profits often show an erratic behaviour (Bengtsson 2014), the results must be interpreted with caution.

The ICTWSS database (Visser 2019) was used for information on the country-level UD and collective bargaining coverage. These variables express the percentage (0–100) of employees that are union members, as well as the percentage of wage and salary earners covered by a collective agreement. Where data were missing in the country-level series, the series were linearly interpolated between available years, following previous research (Guschanski & Onaran 2022). I also include a variable on the coordination of wage-setting as a control from the ICTWSS.

Data on SMWs are from the OECD and expressed as the Kaitz index (Kaitz 1970); that is, the minimum wage level as a percentage of the median wage for each country and year. This is a common method for measuring the so-called “bite” of the minimum wage (Garnero *et al.* 2015; Grimshaw *et al.* 2015) as comparative data on the enforcement of minimum wages across firms is often unavailable. As such, the range of

---

10 Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

11 Low-skilled: up to lower secondary education (ISCED >2); medium-skilled: up to post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED >4); high-skilled: university graduates (ISCED 5>).

this variable can span 0–100, where countries *without* statutory minimum wages are coded as 0, and where 100 would indicate the minimum wage is equal to the median wage of each country-year.

However, analysing this compiled dataset is not straightforward and comes with some important caveats. For instance, linearly interpolating the series on UD implies an exogenous development in the series, while, in actual terms the UD may fluctuate due to factors such as changes to the unemployment level. However, alternatives are limited for assessing comparative data on the country-level, especially in regard to UD broken down by skill-level. Nevertheless, these are commonly used datasets that are held in high regard.

### *Additional Data*

In addition to the data from the 2018 survey on attitudes towards trade unions, the analysis of employee attitudes towards collective and individual wage negotiations in Study I also used a similar item from surveys conducted in 1997 (collected within the framework of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)) and 2006. These used different populations than the survey conducted in 2018, where the population targeted are aged 18–64 in 1997 (random sample of the Swedish population, response rate 68 per cent) and aged 16–64 in 2006 (random sample of the Swedish population, response rate 52 per cent). Therefore, the comparative analysis in Study I only used data for employees aged 18–64. As with the 2018 survey, the 1997 and 2006 surveys were not weighted, which may skew the results in the undersampled categories. In particular, women are overrepresented in the 2006 survey (Bengtsson & Berglund 2011).

For Studies II and III, the LFS was supplemented with data on educational background, year of birth, and country of origin from the LISA database, supplied by SCB. The LISA database integrates registers of data on employment, education and social insurance, where the population is the entirety of the Swedish population aged 15 and older (16 and older up until 2009) who were registered residents on 31 December for each year (SCB 2019b). Data collection was conducted in November of each year, and as such I matched the highest completed level of education based on the month and year in which an individual

was surveyed in the LFS. For instance, the selection criteria for inclusion in Study III were individuals aged 18–35 who had finished secondary education at the first measurement point. For instance, if an individual entered the LFS in January 2006, the data on educational level used would be that collected in LISA in November 2005. Conversely, if an individual entered the LFS in November 2006, the educational level in LISA for November 2006 was used.

In Study IV, the control variables used were compiled from three different sources. Data on the unemployment rate were collected from ILOSTAT (ILO 2013) and are defined as the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the total number of persons in the labour force. The collection of labour force statistics differs between countries, due to reasons such as differences in questionnaires when conducting household surveys or populations censuses, or even due to the frequency of observation, even when following ILO's conceptual guidelines. This implies that a straightforward comparison of unemployment rates between countries is not possible and may impact the generalisability of the results of the analyses.

Data on the percentage share of left-wing cabinet seats and globalisation used in Study IV were collected from the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS) and calculated from a number of sources (Armingeon *et al.* 2024). Here, left-wing parties denote social democratic parties as well as parties to the left of social democrats in each country, while globalisation is operationalised as trade openness (that is, the imports plus exports as a share of total GDP). This is a commonly used measure of globalisation as it indicates the relative importance of international transactions relative to domestic (Harrison 2002).

Lastly, Study IV also includes controls for technological change and human capital in the regression analyses. These are taken from the Penn World Table (PWT) 10.1 dataset (Feenstra *et al.* 2015). Technological change is proxied as the capital-labour ratio (defined as the capital stock at current PPPs divided by the number of persons engaged in the labour market). This is a commonly used measure of technological change as it measures the impact of capital relative to labour inputs to productivity (Álvarez *et al.* 2021). From the PWT I also include a control for education in the form of a human capital index, based on years of schooling and returns to education. While I could alternatively have

controlled for the share of high-skilled (that is, university-educated) employees for each country-year in the dataset, this measure is considered more accurate measure because it takes into account the differences in schooling between countries (Feenstra *et al.* 2015).<sup>12</sup>

### *Operationalisation of Theoretical Concepts*

This section accounts for the operationalisations of the main dependent and independent variables used in the individual studies of the thesis. Table 5 provides an overview of operationalisations, and in which study each theoretical concept is used. In terms of the power resources derived from PRT and discussed in Chapter 4, the operationalisations are rather straightforward and are derived directly from the theoretical propositions. To this end, *structural power* is operationalised as the labour market position or employment contract on the individual level in Studies I–III,<sup>13</sup> and also incorporates a dynamic aspect to the individual level by introducing employment trajectory as the main independent variable in Study III. Regarding structural power at the aggregate level, Study II also takes into account the effects of the composition of the labour force as an explanatory factor for UD changes, while Study IV operationalises the concept as the rate of unemployment (meaning lower levels of unemployment result in higher structural power of labour).

The main variable that seeks to measure *associational power* is operationalised in the studies as UD, where an increase to the share of union members as a percentage of wage and salary earners can be considered an increase to associational power. This variable is taken from the ICT-WSS database (Visser 2019) for use in Study IV and computed from the individual-level union membership data in the LFS between 1997 and 2015 in Studies I and II. On the individual level, the union membership

---

<sup>12</sup> For instance, two countries might have similar proportions of high-skilled workers, but if the returns to education are higher in one, the human capital contribution is greater, impacting productivity and economic outcomes differently.

<sup>13</sup> While there are multiple types of temporary employment (cf. Berglund *et al.* 2017), Study II does not differentiate between these in the regression analyses to maintain parsimony. As such, the study does not account for any differences in union membership behaviour between, for instance, those on GTE contrasts as opposed to, for instance, substitutes.

Table 5. Overview of operationalisations of the main theoretical concepts in the thesis.

CONCEPT	OPERATIONALISATION	STUDY	DATA SOURCE
Structural power	Labour market position/ employment contract	I, II, III	LFS/2018 survey
	Employment trajectory	III	LFS
	Unemployment rate	IV	ILOSTAT
	Labour force composition	II	LFS
Associational power	Union density	I, II, IV	LFS/ICTWSS
	Union membership	I, II, III	LFS/2018 survey
	Union commitment	III	LFS
Institutional power	Ghent system	I, II, III	LFS
	EPL deregulation	I, II, III	LFS
	SMW presence/levels	IV	OECD
	Collective bargaining coverage	IV	ICTWSS
Ideational power	Collective vs. individual negotiation	I	1997/2006/2018 survey
	Attitude towards trade union engagement	I	2018 survey
Institutional change	Strong/weak Ghent system	I, II, III	LFS
	Introduction of SMW*	IV	OECD
Social custom/ rational choice	Sector of employment	II	LFS
	Employment contract/ employment trajectory	III	LFS

Note: SMW introduction as an example of institutional change is not explicitly discussed or analysed in Study IV, but is a feature of the data in one of the countries (Germany introduced an SMW in 2015).

variable in the LFS is used for the regression analyses in Studies II and III, and is also used to operationalise union commitment (calculated as the cumulative quarters of union membership for each individual in the analysis, 0–8) in Study III.

*Institutional power* is inferred from performing dynamic analyses in Studies II and III. By including *year and phase in the union density cycle*<sup>14</sup> in Study II it was possible to investigate the effects of the Ghent system before and after the changes in 2007–2008, down to the monthly level. Therefore, as a special case of the decrease of an institu-

<sup>14</sup> See Study II for how this construct was arrived at.

tional power resource, *institutional change* was operationalised as the strong and weak versions of the Ghent system as well as the liberalisation of Swedish EPL in this study and assessed by comparing effects between relevant year and month. For Study III the impact of institutions and their changes are accounted for by controlling for year effects only due to the smaller sample, while in Study I institutions were assessed only for the descriptive analyses (that is, the 1997 and 2006 surveys were conducted under the strong Ghent system, and the 2018 survey under the weak). Lastly, the main institutional power resources analysed in Study IV was the presence of an SMW and SMW level in conjunction with collective bargaining coverage to assess the main institutional support for wage-setting.

Regarding the strictly individual-level concepts, the social custom and rational choice mechanisms expected to guide individuals in their decisions for union membership were not measured directly but are rather inferred from the analyses in Studies II and III. In Study II, the main variable used is *sector of employment*, where, for instance, effects in union strongholds such as the manufacturing sector are expected to be shielded from the negative effects of institutional changes due to a strong social custom, whereas sectors characterised by larger shares of temporary employees and smaller workplaces, such as the hotel and restaurants sector, are expected to be more exposed due to a lower social custom. In Study III, *employment contract* and *employment trajectory* is used, the idea here being that stable employment (trajectories) will foster the socialisation into union membership. For the analysis on attitudes towards collective or individual negotiation, and attitudes towards trade union engagement, see Study I.

In Study IV the wage share is operationalised as the *adjusted wage share*, meaning the wages of the self-employed are imputed. Including these wages ensures that the wage share is not affected by any changes to the share of self-employed individuals in the economy, and is the typical measure used in the literature (see, for example, Bengtsson 2014; Kristal 2010, 2013).

Lastly, in Studies I–III, an important selection also relates to *who* is defined as a potential union member. UD is most often defined as the proportion of wage and salary earners (employees) who are members of unions. In Studies I and II, the sample and analyses follow this defini-

tion rather slavishly, where only employees are included. For Study III, potential union membership is extended to the unemployed and full-time students, both as a means of assessing the impact of the fixed (employment) status and to include these positions in the sequence and cluster analyses to come up with typical employment trajectories. In the LFS, an individual is defined as being in employment (or unemployed or engaged in full-time studies) if, during a given interview wave, they have spent at least one hour as a paid worker or in self-employment. This can be further broken down into permanent or temporary employment. As this thesis focuses mainly on those in employment (including unemployed and student in Study III that can be part of the individual employment trajectory), the self-employed are not considered.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSES

The statistical analyses differ depending on the studies included in the thesis. In this section I briefly account for the analytical procedures and any shortcomings of these in the four studies.<sup>15</sup> The analyses were conducted in STATA (versions 17 and 18).

To investigate attitudes to unions, Study I used principal component analysis (PCA) and ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. To this end, attitudes towards trade union engagement are constructed as a single index based on eight items in the survey (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.85), while an index indicating if an individual prefers collective or individual negotiations was constructed from two items (Cronbach's Alpha 0.68). PCA is a form of exploratory factor analysis that enables the detection of underlying factors that explain the covariance among a larger set of measured variables (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen 2017), and through conducting analyses on singular items as well as the PCA analysis it became apparent that the items tended to co-vary, which motivated the index's construction. The indices were then used as dependent variables in OLS regression models, with standardised beta coefficients

---

15 For more in-depth discussions of the analytical strategies used, see the individual studies of the thesis.

used to assess the relative importance of the predictor variables (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen 2017).

Studies II and III investigate the association of structural and institutional explanations with trade union membership. As the dependent variable is binary (1 yes, 0 no), these studies use logistic regression with standard errors clustered on the individual level to account for any potential heteroskedasticity and correlation of error terms (Longhi & Nandi 2015). However, by pooling the panels in the LFS, these studies are exposed to omitted variable bias. An alternative to these estimations would be to model the relationships using conditional fixed effects logit models, but due to the reliance on the calculation of marginal effects to compare different regression models in these studies,<sup>16</sup> this was not considered feasible as marginal effects in fixed effects models rely on the assumption that the fixed effect is zero, which is generally not true in studies on union membership. For instance, stable characteristics such as gender and country of origin often have significant effects, which is also true for the results in Studies II and III.

In Study III I performed sequence and cluster analysis in order to arrive at a typology of the employment trajectories of young individuals at the start of their labour market careers. The sequence analysis was conducted using the dynamic Hamming distance, which compares sequences by accounting for the timing and order of events (Lesnard 2010). Regarding the choice of clustering, Ward's method and Partitioning Around Medoids (PAM) are two common clustering techniques that differ in their approach. Ward's method is a hierarchical clustering algorithm that minimises the variance within clusters by iteratively merging clusters based on the least increase in total variance. It is well-suited for identifying compact, spherical clusters. PAM, on the other hand, is a partitioning method that selects actual data points (medoids) as cluster centres and minimises the sum of dissimilarities between points and their nearest medoid. Unlike Ward's, PAM is more robust to noise and outliers (Studer 2013), but due its computational intensity the Ward's method was preferred in Study III.

In Study III I also conducted negative binomial regression models to analyse the cumulative number of quarters spent in union membership

---

<sup>16</sup> Marginal effects are presented rather than odds ratios as the latter are conditional on the model specification and therefore not comparable across models (Mood 2010).

during each individual's employment trajectory. Negative binomial and Poisson regressions are commonly used to model count data where the outcome variable represents the number of occurrences of an event within a fixed period or space, in this case union membership for each of the eight quarters of the LFS (Long & Freese 2014). These estimation strategies are often employed when the response variable takes non-negative integer values and when events are independent. Poisson regression assumes that the mean and variance of the outcome are equal, which is known as equidispersion. In cases where overdispersion occurs (meaning the variance exceeds the mean), negative binomial regression is a preferred alternative. The data were tested for overdispersion using the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test in Stata, indicating that negative binomial estimations were preferred (Long & Freese 2014).

Study IV analyses the relationship between labour's power resources and the wage share. Due to the panel data structure and the panels exhibiting heteroskedasticity, serial correlation, and cross-sectional dependence, which I assessed using the Breusch-Pagan (1979), Wooldridge (2002), and Pesaran (2015) tests, respectively, standard errors produced by OLS estimations become invalid. Therefore, I estimated OLS models with panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE) (Box-Steffensmeier *et al.* 2014).<sup>17</sup> The central explanatory variables in the estimations were lagged and standardised in order to account for potential reverse causality and to assess the relative importance of the predictors, respectively. To address omitted variable bias, I also included country and year fixed effects to control for time-varying and country-specific unobserved variables.

## ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics approval was granted in 2017 by the then existing Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg for the aforementioned research pro-

---

<sup>17</sup> I also experimented with feasible generalised least squares (FGLS) regression in the analyses in Study IV. Beck and Katz (1995) suggested that while FGLS is preferable in asymptotic samples, it is inefficient if  $N > T$ , and that OLS with PCSEs is a preferable method of estimation. In contrast, Reed and Webb (2010) stated that the FGLS estimator is more efficient than PCSE in the presence of serial correlation. However, the choice of estimation does not substantially affect the key findings of the study.

gramme, and for all the studies that make up the thesis.<sup>18</sup> Beyond ethical approval, research has been conducted in accordance with the fundamental principles of good research practice as formulated by the Swedish Research Council (2017), which are to ensure reliability, honesty, respect and responsibility. For instance, for the survey data collected for Study I, the information letter provided to individuals explained the purpose of the study and stressed that completing the attached questionnaire was voluntary, as well as the secrecy of individual answers as the data were made unidentifiable by SCB before being provided to the researchers. SCB also stresses the issue of secrecy in the documentation to the LFS and LISA databases (SCB 2019b, 2023).

Regarding the legal ramifications that surround the processing, analysis and presentation of the used data, the LFS and LISA databases contain sensitive personal data as defined under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), making knowledge of the laws and regulations relevant to the project important. This relates, for instance, to the processing of microdata to avoid identification of research subjects. Furthermore, as use of data from SCB is restricted to individuals who have received permission, and can only be accessed through the agency's online platform, data processing must be conducted in an ethical manner to ensure that the researcher comes to the right conclusions as other researchers are not generally able to access data during the peer review process.

The thesis subject matter relates to several instances of sensitive personal data. For instance, the main research question implies that data on trade union membership must be collected in order to draw any conclusions. Furthermore, the literature on Swedish trade union membership has stated that individuals with a foreign background are less likely to join trade unions (Gordon 2019); this is also stated as sensitive personal data in the GDPR. The collection of this personal data is explicitly stated in the GDPR to be forbidden in Article 9, unless it is to be used for, *inter alia*, scientific purposes. This generates additional issues for the researcher to consider, such as minimising the risk of identification of any research subject by pseudonymising any identifiable indicators, for example. In addition, Article 7 of the GDPR also states that individual data collection and processing is to be performed with the in-

<sup>18</sup> Project identification number 2016-07204; registration number 090-17.

formed consent of the research subject, as well as the subject having the right to withdraw from participation in research at any time.

However, individuals contributing to a study using secondary survey and register data do not necessarily need to know that they are part of research (Swedish Research Council 2017), which suggests that consent is implied in this case. As such, the requirements of informed consent as well as the right to withdraw from participating stated in the GDPR become somewhat blurry, putting increased pressure on the researcher to ensure that this type of data is processed in a way that does not compromise the integrity and anonymity of the research subjects. In the case of this thesis, several technical solutions limit the identification of any research subject. For instance, Statistics Sweden does not allow any individual with permission to process its microdata to access this outside of its own online password-protected platform, which makes storage of any microdata on unprotected computers impossible. Furthermore, Swedish personal identity numbers in the data are not accessible to the researcher and are replaced by unique identification numbers that are not in use anywhere else.

The results of my analyses may only be presented on an aggregated level to ensure that no individual data can be discerned. As such, I need to be aware of issues regarding personal data that may lead to identification even when noting the technical solutions that SCB provides. Relating the issues of handling sensitive personal data to today's procedure for ethical review, the Swedish Ethical Review Authority also requires researchers dealing with quantitative secondary data to provide a list of variables to be used in order that the correct handling of potential sensitive data can be assessed by those seeking ethical approval (Swedish Ethical Review Authority 2021). The research programme that this thesis is part of already had already been approved by the regional ethical review board in Gothenburg before the adoption of GDPR, but still adheres to these principles for ensuring sensitive personal data is protected.

## CHAPTER 6

# Summary of Results

This chapter summarises the four studies of the thesis and their results. All four studies depart from the question on the state of labour's power resources and their development over time. For instance, trade union membership has been declining in many European countries and the problem of membership recruitment and retainment may force trade unions to adopt new practices or – in being able to do so – source their power through different means. All four studies relate to institutional changes and trade union power. Study I analysed developments in trade union member composition as well as individual attitudes to trade unions in Sweden. Study II focused on explaining how the timing of institutional reforms in Sweden impacted union density in different categories of workers. Study III analysed how different employment trajectories impact the decision to join a trade union among younger individuals in Sweden. Lastly, Study IV analysed, in a comparative setting, how the institutional mechanisms for wage-setting on the national level, in addition to trade union and individual power resources on the country level affect the distribution of wages and profits in the labour market, with a focus on which share of wages are distributed to which category based on skill-level.

## STUDY I: ATTITUDES TO TRADE UNIONS

Prytz, J. & Larsson, B. (2024). "Changes in Trade Union Membership and Attitudes to Unions in Sweden"<sup>19</sup>, in T. Berglund & Y. Ulfsdotter Eriksson (eds). *Scrutinising Polarisation. Patterns and Consequences of Occupational Transformation in the Swedish Labour Market*. London: Routledge.

This book chapter investigates individual-level attitudes to trade unions and trade union engagement. The study starts with an overview of the developments of Swedish union density since the mid-1990s, as well as the membership composition of Swedish trade unions considering the increased dominance of the white-collar TCO and SACO peak-level confederations compared to the blue-collar LO confederation. This is related to institutional changes, particularly the decentralisation of wage formation, unemployment insurance reform, and the changes in the regulation of employment forms.

Previous studies have described the decline in union density because of these institutional changes and changes in values, while less is known about whether the decline can also be attributed to changes in attitudes to trade unions. The aim of this study was to investigate whether attitudes have changed regarding trade union engagement, and whether attitudinal changes from a solidaristic view of wage-setting to a more individualised one could be discerned. To study this, the book chapter used data from the Swedish Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the descriptive analyses, as well as three surveys conducted in 1997, 2006, and 2018 for the analysis of attitudes to trade unions.

The decline in union density was investigated using descriptive data from the LFS and discussed as being due to structural changes in addition to the institutional changes described earlier. These changes hit the blue-collar unions the hardest and shifted the balance of power between blue- and white-collar peak-level confederations. Furthermore, the

---

<sup>19</sup> Jesper Prytz performed the descriptive analyses on the development of union density in the peak-level organizations, while Bengt Larsson performed the descriptive and regression analyses of the original survey data. Both authors contributed to the manuscript and agreed on the final draft.

study found that attitudes towards individual compared to collective negotiation of wages are relatively stable during the investigated time period, with union members in particular being more inclined towards collective negotiations. Regarding trade union engagement in general, the study found that exposed labour market categories are more likely to emphasise that trade unions are needed. We conclude by discussing that individuals in favour of trade union engagement are also those who may benefit the most from unions engagement in employment-related issues.

## STUDY II: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP

Prytz, J. & Berglund, T. (2023). “Disruption of the Ghent effect: Disentangling structural and institutional determinants of union membership decline in Sweden, 2005–2010”<sup>20</sup>, *Industrial Relations Journal*, 54 (6): 471–494.

This study investigates the direct and indirect effects that changes to the Ghent system of unemployment insurance in Sweden during 2007 and 2008 had on individual trade union membership. The paper departs from the notable union density decline in Sweden during these years in which tax deductions for union membership were abolished and fees to the unemployment insurance funds were raised. Concurrently, changes to the employment relationship were enacted, which increased the share of temporary employed workers on the Swedish labour market. Considering the possible interaction between Ghent system and employment liberalisation as an influence on union membership, the article investigated the timing of different phases of the reforms in a multivariate setting.

---

<sup>20</sup> Jesper Prytz and Tomas Berglund both conceived of the study and the interpretation of results. Prytz performed all data management and descriptive and regression analyses in the paper. Both authors contributed to the manuscript and agreed on the final draft.

The article discusses two main explanations for the decline of union density. The first is the structural effect of the composition of the labour force as an expected effect of, for example, the increase of temporary employees. The second is the direct effects of the Ghent system changes, as well as the interaction of these in different categories of workers. To study this issue, the article used data from the Swedish LFS and the Longitudinal Integration Database for Health Insurance (LISA) ( $n=689,957$ ) between 2005 and 2010. This made it possible to follow monthly changes in unionisation before, during and after the Ghent system changes.

Based on the use of descriptive statistics and logistic regression, the results showed that union density is cyclical over the course of a year, with fluctuations resulting from labour force composition within a stable institutional order. This suggests a structural explanation for union density when institutions are stable. The introduction of changes to the Ghent system disrupted this density cycle. A rise in the number of temporary and younger employees, as well as more blue-collar employees in the construction, and hotel and restaurants sectors, accounted for most of the decline in union membership during these years.

### STUDY III: EMPLOYMENT TRAJECTORIES AND TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP

Prytz, J. (submitted). "Organizing at the Margins: Youth Employment Trajectories and Trade Union Membership in Sweden". Unpublished manuscript.

This study investigates the effects of labour market careers on individual union membership and builds on the insights gained in Study II regarding the rise of non-membership among temporary and young employees. It also builds on previous research that stress the importance of socialisation into union membership during the first stages of an individual's career in younger ages. While younger employees are found to a higher extent in sectors with atypical employment and lack of union

representation at the workplace, the article argues that in order to understand how the union membership norm arises it is important to operationalise labour market states as trajectories rather than as fixed positions. As such, the article investigated the influence of employment trajectories on union membership with a particular focus on the possibility of organising workers at the margins of the labour market.

The article discussed the institutional preconditions for young individuals in the period following institutional changes to Swedish industrial relations, which were expected to impact the decision of union membership. These included the deregulation of the employment relationship and the changes to the Ghent system which abolished the eligibility of unemployment benefits for those with a university degree but no work experience. To study the impact of employment trajectories on union membership, the article used data from the LFS and LISA databases, restricting the sample to individuals between 18 to 35 years of age ( $n=23,132$ ) in the years 2005–2014.

Based on the use of sequence and cluster analyses to construct individual employment trajectories, the results showed that, due to the effect of the Ghent system the union membership rates are generally high. However, newcomers on the labour market often have an unstable attachment to the labour market, where a sizeable section of young people drift between positions of higher education, employment and unemployment. However, stable permanent employment increases with age. The employment trajectories were then used as independent variables in logistic and negative binomial regression analyses.

The results showed that individuals with precarious trajectories, as well as those mainly engaged in full-time studies, are less likely to become union members, although this negative association decreases with age and work experience. Furthermore, changes to the Ghent system led to an increase in the probability of these categories not joining unions at all due to increased fees. Organising individuals at the margins of the labour market is concluded as improbable, and as the initial experience of unions is important to a continued membership commitment, many young workers with insecure trajectories might be lost to unions over the long term.

## STUDY IV: WAGE-SETTING MECHANISMS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF WAGES AND PROFITS

Prytz, J. (submitted). “Bargaining Above the Bare Minimum: Power Resources, Institutional Designs, and the Wage Share”. Unpublished manuscript.

The last study of the thesis addressed the role of institutional wage-setting mechanisms as well as labour’s power resources in the distribution of wages and profits on the labour market. The paper departs from research in sociology and heterodox economics, which have described a decline in the share of wages in relation to profits while also having noted the positive influence of labour’s bargaining power. On one hand, the balance of power between labour and capital is conceptualised as an important predictor of this redistributive process. On the other hand, regarding the institutional variations in wage-setting, legislation sets out the conditions for the economic security of workers. As such, both the relative strength of unions as well as the institutional support for collective bargaining or statutory minimum wages influence the distribution of wages and profits.

The article departs from previous research in which union density and collective bargaining coverage have been found to have a positive impact on the wage share. However, existing studies have overlooked the variations in union conditions and bargaining processes between different institutional contexts, and how the wage share is distributed among different categories of workers. This article addresses these gaps by examining how institutional designs for unions and main wage-setting mechanisms influence the wage share. To study this, I analysed country-level data in 22 OECD countries using the EU KLEMS, ICT-WSS, and OECD databases ( $n=233$ ) between 2008 and 2018. This made it possible to follow yearly changes in the wage share on the country level at different skill levels of the wage share distribution.

As the data had a panel structure, the study used OLS regression with panel-corrected standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity, serial correlation and cross-sectional dependence. The results show that the union density is positively associated with the wage share. Breaking down the wage shares into skill level only shows positive effects for the

high-skilled wage share. For the total and medium-skilled wage share, the effect of union density is conditional on the presence of a statutory minimum wage, as well as the minimum wage level, in which increasing union density predicts a negative effect on the wage share. With regard to the SMW level that is expected to condition the effects of collective bargaining on the wage share, the article shows how collective bargaining coverage has a positive effect on the wage share, where the high-skill level wage share is positively impacted even at higher levels of SMW. However, the effect is most pronounced in countries without an SMW. For the medium-skill wage share, collective bargaining gives rise to a negative effect at higher SMW levels, while for the low-skilled wage share the SMW levels work independently towards boosting the wage share. The article concludes that statutory minimum wages benefit low- and medium-skilled workers, who depend on wage floors for fair income. High-skilled workers are less affected, negotiating higher wages through collective bargaining. In high-union-density countries, strengthening bargaining mechanisms is key, while robust minimum wages are crucial in low-union-density contexts.



# CHAPTER 7

## Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter addresses the research questions in light of the results obtained in the individual studies, and these are connected to the overarching aim and research questions of the thesis. The findings are interpreted in dialogue with previous research and the theoretical framework, particularly the power resource theory (PRT). I then draw broader conclusions about the trajectory of trade unions and labour's power resources under neoliberal institutional reforms. Finally, practical implications are explored, followed by suggestions for future research.

The overall aim of this thesis has been to explain how the power resources of labour, especially trade unions, have been affected by neoliberal reforms and the restructuring of labour markets. This includes understanding how different power resources interact and are leveraged to achieve various outcomes, such as improvements in the wage share. Overall, the research demonstrates significant interaction effects between the various types of power resources. The studies offer a dynamic explanation of how trade unions navigate the contemporary labour market landscape. First, institutional deregulation, particularly the erosion of labour's institutional power, has had a detrimental impact on the associational power of Swedish unions, and led to a fragmentation of working class power. This has coincided with a noticeable decline in UD.

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Study I examined attitudes toward trade unions based on multiple cross-sectional surveys. The aim was to assess whether these attitudes

could be indirectly linked to institutional changes. Contrary to earlier findings, which suggested a shift toward more individualistic values (Bengtsson & Berglund 2011; Furåker & Berglund 2003), Study I found no substantial evidence that younger cohorts hold more individualistic attitudes. This aligns with more recent studies that have challenged the individualisation thesis (Vestin & Vulkan 2021). Study I highlights that attitudes toward collective versus individual negotiations with employers remain robust, even after institutional changes. Therefore, while institutional reforms might impact union membership rates, they do not necessarily lead to a shift in workers' values or attitudes toward collective bargaining.

This finding suggests that the interaction between UD and institutional deregulation towards decentralisation of bargaining does not impact ideational or discursive power resources, as predicted by the theoretical model in Chapter 4. Instead, values related to collective bargaining and general union engagement seem to be primarily shaped by the socialisation effects of being a union member. Therefore, this is a direct result of associational power, where high UD reinforces collective values even amid deregulation (Pontusson 2013; Rosetti 2019). Study I suggests that unions' socialising effect remains stable, regardless of external institutional pressures. In terms of RQ1, attitudes towards trade unions, particularly regarding collective negotiations, have remained consistent despite institutional changes. Institutional reforms have impacted union membership but have not significantly altered individuals' values or attitudes, indicating robust socialisation effects among union members.

Study II focused on the decline in UD in Sweden and the Nordics, particularly in relation to changes to the Ghent system of unemployment insurance. Consistent with previous findings (Kjellberg & Lyhne Ibsen 2016; Böckerman & Uusitalo 2006), Study II confirms that alterations to the Ghent system have had a direct negative effect on UD. However, this study offers new insights into the complex dynamics involved. Methodologically, it disentangles compositional from institutional effects and provides a detailed account of the cyclicity of UD. By examining different labour market categories, Study II reveals how institutional reforms disproportionately affected younger and temporary workers, disrupting the annual cycle of UD. The findings indicate

that the Ghent system can only maintain high UD levels if it remains heavily subsidised, corroborating prior studies (Rasmussen & Pontusson 2018). After the reforms, UD stabilised at a lower level, reflecting the weakened role of the Ghent system in promoting union membership.

Study III delves deeper into the findings in Study II by focusing on the labour market trajectories of precarious groups. It further investigates how these trajectories interact with institutional reforms to impact union membership. The study confirms the existence of so-called “structural individualism” (Kjellberg 2020: 49), a concept whereby individuals appear to make individualistic choices due to unfavourable structural positions. This is especially true for younger workers who drift between employment, unemployment and education. While white-collar unions have had some success in organising student groups, Study III shows that success in organising is age-dependent, with younger individuals remaining more challenging to recruit. The study also demonstrates the importance of considering both fixed labour market positions and trajectories when analysing union membership. Sequence analysis of labour market attachment offers a more nuanced understanding than previous studies, which relied on less detailed metrics (Leschke & Vandaele 2018). In terms of RQ<sub>2</sub> and RQ<sub>3</sub>, Studies II and III underscore that structural changes (particularly the rise in non-standard employment) and institutional reforms like those to the Ghent system, have led to a decline in union density. This has weakened associational power, but the strength of unions remains contingent on institutional designs that incentivise membership. Moreover, institutional reforms have disproportionately affected younger and precarious workers, leading to lower union membership in these groups. However, career trajectories also play a role in union membership decisions, with more stable employment patterns encouraging higher membership rates.

Study IV shifts the focus to wage regulation and the impact of declining associational power on labour’s ability to negotiate favourable wage outcomes. The study investigates how collective bargaining and statutory minimum wages (SMWs) affect the wage share. In line with earlier research (Bengtsson 2014; Guschanski & Onaran 2022; Stockhammer 2009), Study IV finds a positive relationship between UD and

the wage share. However, this effect is conditional on the institutional context. Interestingly, in countries with high SMWs, UD had a negative effect on the wage share. In terms of RQ<sub>4</sub>, this suggests that introducing SMWs as a means to counter institutional drift may not be the most effective strategy for improving the wage share unless SMWs are set at low levels that encourage collective bargaining. These findings challenge existing assumptions about the relationship between institutional frameworks and wage-setting practices and call for a more nuanced approach to wage regulation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis has been to explore how labour's power resources, especially those of trade unions, have been influenced by neo-liberal reforms and the restructuring of labour markets. One of the key insights is that while institutional changes have weakened some aspects of labour's power – particularly institutional and associational power – trade unions remain important actors in labour market negotiations. However, the ability of unions to organise precarious workers and maintain relevance in an increasingly fragmented labour market is a crucial question for the future.

In some areas of the labour market, working class power seems to be increasingly fragmented. Institutional reforms have shifted the balance of power within the Swedish trade union movement, with white-collar confederations now dominating union membership. The findings from Study III highlight the difficulties of organising younger and more precarious workers, who arguably stand to benefit the most from union representation. This is mirrored in Study I, where it is concluded that those with the most to lose from non-membership remains outside of the union. For unions to remain relevant, especially among these hard-to-reach groups, innovative recruitment strategies will be essential, especially when institutional power resources are diminishing (Frege & Kelly 2003; Schmalz & Thiel 2017).

An important aspect that is missing from the analyses is the role that ideology plays in shaping union membership decisions. While the the-

oretical model in this thesis focuses on several sources of power of a broadly defined working class, future iterations should incorporate an ideological dimension to better understand how political beliefs influence union membership. Additionally, the analysis could benefit from a deeper exploration of societal and political power, as power derived from institutions often stems from broader societal dynamics rather than direct negotiations alone (Refslund & Arnholtz 2022; Schmalz *et al.* 2018). For instance, the power derived from left-wing parties in constructing the social democratic welfare state is absent from the analyses in this thesis. Previous studies have confirmed the shift in voting patterns whereby younger generations are less likely to rally around a political party based on their class position (Vestin 2019). This finding suggests that the ideational power fostered by unions is not necessarily converted into societal power, which can assert hegemony and foster a political project reflective of the views of the labour movement (Levesque & Murray 2013; Schmalz *et al.* 2018).

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this thesis suggest several practical implications for trade unions in Sweden and beyond. First, although trade unions remain critical actors in the Swedish labour market, their power resources have been eroded. To sustain and potentially rebuild the various resources of power, unions must adopt proactive strategies to resist institutional reforms that are designed to weaken union density and UI fund membership. One such avenue could be so-called “greenfield organizing” in workplaces without a union presence and precarious work (Simms 2015); however, the negative association of insecure employment with future union membership status paints a bleaker picture about whether this is possible in practice.

Recruitment of young members and workers in precarious employment conditions is another critical area for union revitalisation. White-collar unions have been described as having had some success in adapting their strategies to recruit members in sectors that traditionally do not have high unionisation rates (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman

2013; Jansson & Uba 2019), but the challenge of organising temporary workers persists. Bargaining for, or encouraging EPL that favours permanent contracts may offer one avenue for increasing membership levels in these precarious groups.

Taking the comparative approach, unions should also remain vigilant against the push for statutory minimum wages, at least in countries where union support is high and the role of collective bargaining is broadly used. Study IV suggests that collective bargaining has a stronger effect on the wage share in countries without SMWs. This means that unions should resist efforts to introduce SMWs into the wage-setting framework unless these are set at levels that promote, rather than replace, collective bargaining. However, the results from Study IV need to be assessed carefully due to the short time series and low number of countries without SMWs in the sample. Considering that the terms aimed for in the EU's minimum wage directive are both high levels of SMWs in conjunction with high levels of collective bargaining coverage (Dingeldey *et al.* 2021), it is not clear whether positive effects result over the long term.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The research conducted in this thesis opens up numerous avenues for future study. First, future research should focus on understanding how precarious workers, particularly in non-standard employment forms, interact with trade unions. While some insights were gained from Study III, more research is needed to explore the broader implications of these employment patterns on union membership and associational power on a larger scale. Therefore, the life-course framework provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics, but further empirical work is required in order to make longitudinal assessments on membership dynamics.

Study II finds no theoretically expected interaction of changes to the Ghent system and country of origin, as described by Gordon (2019), or any sign of the possibility of derogating from EPL in collective agreements hindered the decline in Swedish union density in 2007 and 2008. Further research should address the labour market positions of the for-

eign-born in greater detail and investigate the association with union membership. Previous studies have described the negative association of precarious labour market positions in this group, especially in terms of non-European migrants (Elgenius *et al.* 2024; Philipson Isaac 2024).

The compositional effects found in Study II that explain the variations in UD also warrant further inspection. While previous research indicates that structural transformations or shifts have had minor impacts on UD in Sweden compared to other countries (Kjellberg & Nergaard 2022; Schmalz *et al.* 2018), there have nevertheless been important shifts from the public to the private sector in Sweden in recent years (Berglund & Ulfsson Eriksson 2024; Larsson *et al.* 2012), and the within-sector labour force composition might play an important role in explaining decreases based on institutional and sectoral contexts to further disentangle where and when unions are gaining or losing ground. A fruitful way of investigating this matter in a quantitative multivariate setting could be to perform so-called shift-share analyses to investigate, for instance, whether changes in UD at the sectoral level are a result of the within-sector labour force composition (Batut *et al.* 2024).

Study III also suggests that the membership patterns of those with the lowest levels of education must be investigated in greater detail, as previous research indicates that these are even more likely to be found in precarious labour market positions, and also at the margins of the labour market in terms of career patterns. Furthermore, younger individuals who have not yet finished secondary education are increasingly turning to work (Kallós 2024), meaning that the possibility of socialisation or non-socialisation into the union norm can start at even younger ages than those studied in Study III. Further research could also explore the organising strategies of white-collar unions, particularly in relation to students, and investigate the extent to which these are successful in organising and maintaining members in the transition from education to work (Jansson & Uba 2019). Understanding how student membership patterns evolve as they transition into the workforce could provide insights into the long-term sustainability of union membership.

In terms of wage regulation, future research should focus on the interaction between collective bargaining and statutory minimum wages. The results of Study IV suggest that while SMWs may improve wage outcomes in some contexts, they could also undermine collective bar-

gaining efforts in others. Investigating these dynamics further would provide a more nuanced understanding of wage-setting practices and their implications for the wage share.

In sum, this thesis provides valuable insights into the shifting dynamics of labour's power resources, but more work is needed to fully understand the complex interactions between the structural, associational, institutional, ideational, and other sources of power. The ongoing changes to the labour market and the political landscape make this an essential area of study for understanding the future of trade unions and collective bargaining.

## CHAPTER 8

### Summary in Swedish

#### KONTEXT

Syftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka hur arbetarrörelsens, och särskilt fackföreningarnas maktresurser, har påverkats av nyliberala reformer och omstruktureringar av arbetsmarknaden. Under de senaste decennierna har fackföreningarnas makt i relation till arbetsgivarna minskat, framför allt till följd av institutionella förändringar och en ökad flexibilisering av arbetskraften. Genom att använda maktresursteorin (Power resource theory, PRT) som teoretiskt ramverk, analyserar avhandlingen hur maktbalansen mellan arbete och kapital förändrats, och hur dessa förändringar påverkar löneandelen och facklig organisering.

Avhandlingen undersöker flera dimensioner av arbetares makt: den strukturella, den kollektiva, den institutionella och den idébaserade. Strukturella maktresurser avser arbetarnas position inom produktionen, medan kollektiva maktresurser växer fram genom kollektiv organisering i fackföreningar. Institutionella maktresurser såsom lagar och avtal spelar också en avgörande roll för att forma förutsättningarna för arbetares makt. Genom att analysera hur dessa maktresurser förändras och samverkar över tid kan vi bättre förstå villkoren för facklig organisering och fackföreningsrörelsens relevans i fråga om inkomstfördelningen mellan arbete och kapital.

Avhandlingen ställer fyra centrala forskningsfrågor som rör hur individuella attityder till fackligt medlemskap förändras över tid; hur institutionella förändringar påverkar facklig styrka; samt hur dessa förändringar påverkar inkomstfördelningen mellan arbete och kapital. Genom att analysera dessa frågor i en svensk tillika komparativ kontext

syftar avhandlingen till att belysa de utmaningar som arbetare och fackföreningar står inför i en tid av nyliberal omstrukturering, samtidigt som den utforskar möjligheter för en framtida revitalisering av fackföreningsrörelsen.

## SYFTE OCH FRÅGESTÄLLNINGAR

Avhandlingens övergripande syfte är att förklara hur arbetares maktresurser i allmänhet – och fackföreningarnas maktresurser i synnerhet – har påverkats av nyliberala reformer av institutioner och en flexibilisering av arbetsmarknaden. Ett första delsyfte är att undersöka utvecklingen av fackligt medlemskap över tid och mellan olika kategorier av arbetare, samt om det är rimligt att föreställa sig en revitalisering av fackföreningsrörelsen. Det andra delsyftet är att undersöka hur dynamiken inom fackföreningsrörelsen har förändrats, till exempel hur de institutionella och medlemsbaserade dimensionerna av facklig makt påverkar inkomstfördelningen i form av andelen lön i förhållande till vinster. Av detta följer fyra forskningsfrågor som ligger till grund för de empiriska analyserna i avhandlingens delstudier:

1. Hur förändras individers attityder till fackföreningar och individuellt engagemang över tid, och hur fördelas dessa attityder mellan olika kategorier på arbetsmarknaden? Kan några av dessa förändringar tillskrivas institutioners medlande effekter? (Studie I)
2. Hur påverkar strukturella och institutionella förändringar av arbetsmarknaden och a-kassesystemet fackföreningarnas kollektiva maktresurser? (Studie I, II och III)
3. Hur samverkar strukturella och institutionella förändringar i beslutet att gå med i facket på individnivå? (Studie II och III)
4. Hur påverkar olika lönesättningsmodeller inkomstfördelningen mellan arbete och kapital, och hur kan lönesättningsmodellen stärka eller försvaga fackföreningarnas maktresurser? (Studie IV)

## STUDIE I

Denna studie undersöker individers attityder till fackföreningar och fackligt engagemang. Först ges en översikt över utvecklingen av den fackliga anslutningsgraden i Sverige sedan 1990-talets mitt, samt en diskussion om medlemskompositionen i fackföreningarna med hänsyn till den ökade dominansen av tjänstemannaorganisationerna TCO och SACO i förhållande till arbetarorganisationen LO. Denna utveckling relateras till institutionella förändringar – specifikt decentraliseringen av lönebildningen, reformeringen av arbetslöshetsförsäkringen och förändringarna i regleringen av anställningsformer.

Tidigare studier har beskrivit minskningen av den fackliga anslutningsgraden som en följd av dessa institutionella förändringar och förändrade värderingar, men vi vet mindre om huruvida minskningen även kan tillskrivas förändringar i attityder till fackföreningar. Syftet med denna studie är därför att undersöka om attityderna till fackligt engagemang har förändrats över tid, och om det går att urskilja en förskjutning från en solidarisk syn på lönebildning till en mer individualiserad sådan. För att undersöka detta har studien använt data från SCB:s arbetskraftsundersökning (AKU) för deskriptiva analyser av utvecklingen i facklig anslutningsgrad samt tre enkätundersökningar från 1997, 2006 och 2018 för att analysera attityder till fackföreningar.

Utvecklingen av den fackliga anslutningsgraden analyseras med hjälp av deskriptiva data från AKU och diskuteras som ett resultat av strukturella förändringar utöver de tidigare nämnda institutionella förändringarna. Dessa förändringar drabbade arbetarfacken hårdast och skiftade maktbalansen mellan LO och tjänstemannafacken. Vidare finner studien att attityderna till individuella kontra kollektiva löneförhandlingar är relativt stabila under den undersökta tidsperioden, där medlemmar i facket är mer benägna att förespråka kollektiv kontra individuell förhandling än vad icke-medlemmar är. Vad gäller fackligt engagemang i allmänhet visar studien att utsatta kategorier på arbetsmarknaden är mer benägna att betona att fackföreningar behövs. Avslutningsvis diskuteras att de som är positiva till fackligt engagemang också är de som sannolikt gynnas mest av fackföreningarnas engagemang i sysselsättningsrelaterade frågor.

## STUDIE II

Denna studie undersöker de direkta och indirekta effekterna av förändringarna i Gent-systemet i Sverige under 2007 och 2008. I Gent-systemet ansvarar fackföreningarna för administrationen av a-kassan. Artikeln tar sin utgångspunkt i den betydande nedgången i facklig anslutningsgrad i Sverige under dessa år, då skatteavdragen för fackligt medlemskap avskaffades och avgifterna till a-kassorna höjdes. Samtidigt infördes förändringar i regleringen av anställningsformer som ökade andelen visstidsanställda på den svenska arbetsmarknaden. Artikeln undersöker hur förändringarna i Gent-systemet och flexibiliseringen av arbetsmarknaden samverkade och påverkade fackförbundens anslutningsgrad genom en multivariat analys av reformernas tidsförlopp.

Artikeln diskuterar två huvudsakliga förklaringar till nedgången i facklig anslutningsgrad. För det första diskuteras den strukturella effekten av arbetskraftens sammansättning, exempelvis som en konsekvens av ökningen av tillfälligt anställda. För det andra diskuteras de direkta effekterna av förändringarna i Gent-systemet samt interaktionen av dessa inom olika kategorier av arbetstagare. För att studera detta använder studien data från SCB:s AKU- och LISA-databaser ( $n=689,957$ ) mellan 2005 och 2010. Detta gör det möjligt att följa månatliga förändringar i anslutningsgrad före, under och efter förändringarna av Gent-systemet.

Med hjälp av deskriptiv statistik och logistiska regressionsanalyser visar resultaten att den fackliga anslutningsgraden är cyklisk på årsbasis och att anslutningsgraden fluktuerar beroende på arbetskraftens sammansättning inom en stabil institutionell ordning. Detta tyder på en strukturell förklaring för facklig anslutningsgrad när institutionerna är stabila. När förändringarna i Gent-systemet infördes stördes denna cykel. En ökning av antalet tillfälligt och yngre anställda, samt en ökning arbetare inom bygg-, hotell- och restaurangsektorerna förklarade en stor del av nedgången i fackligt medlemskap under dessa år.

## STUDIE III

Denna studie undersöker effekten av individers sysselsättningsbanor på fackligt medlemskap och bygger på slutsatserna från Studie II som visade på ökningen av icke-medlemskap bland tillfälligt anställda och unga. Studien bygger också på tidigare forskning som betonar vikten av en tidig insocialisering i fackligt medlemskap i en individs karriär. Samtidigt som yngre individer i högre grad återfinns i sektorer med stor andel visstidsanställningar, där facklig representation dessutom ofta saknas på arbetsplatsen, argumenterar studien för att det blir viktigt att operationalisera arbetsmarknadspositioner som sysselsättningsbanor snarare än som fasta positioner för att förstå hur normen för fackligt medlemskap uppstår. Artikeln undersökte således individuella sysselsättningsbanors påverkan på fackligt medlemskap med särskilt fokus på möjligheten att organisera individer med låg anknytning till arbetsmarknaden.

Artikeln diskuterar de institutionella förutsättningarna för unga individer under perioden efter institutionella förändringar i den svenska partsmodellen, vilka förväntades påverka beslutet om att gå med i facket. Dessa inkluderade införandet av allmän visstidstjänst som anställningsform men också förändringarna i Gent-systemet som avskaffade rätten till a-kasseersättning för dem med universitetsexamen men utan arbetslivserfarenhet. För att studera sysselsättningsbanornas påverkan på fackligt medlemskap använder artikeln data från AKU- och LISA-databaserna, och begränsar urvalet till individer mellan 18 och 35 år ( $n=23,132$ ) under åren 2005–2014.

Genom sekvens- och klusteranalyser för att konstruera individuella sysselsättningsbanor visar resultaten att den fackliga anslutningsgraden generellt sett är hög, oavsett anknytning till arbetsmarknaden, på grund av Gent-systemets påverkan. Däremot har nykomlingar på arbetsmarknaden ofta en instabil anknytning till arbetsmarknaden där en betydande andel unga växlar mellan högre utbildning, arbete och arbetslöshet. Andelen tillsvidareanställningar ökar dock med åldern. Sysselsättningsbanorna används sedan som oberoende variabler i logistiska och negativa binomialregressions-analyser. Resultaten visar att individer med osäkra sysselsättningsbanor samt de som främst ägnar sig åt

heltidsstudier är mindre benägna att välja medlemskap i facket än dem med tillsvidareanställningar, även om denna negativa korrelation minskar med ålder och arbetslivserfarenhet. Förändringarna i Gent-systemet ledde även till en ökad sannolikhet för att dessa kategorier väljer fackligt medlemskap på grund av höjda avgifter. Avslutningsvis bedöms det som osannolikt att kunna organisera de med låg anknytning till arbetsmarknaden, då den initiala erfarenheten av facket är viktig för ett fortsatt medlemskap över tid. Många unga arbetare med osäkra sysselsättningsbanor riskerar därmed att gå förlorade för facket.

## STUDIE IV

Den sista studien i avhandlingen undersöker hur institutionella lönebildningsmekanismer och arbetares maktresurser påverkar fördelningen av löner och vinster på arbetsmarknaden. Artikeln utgår från forskning inom sociologi och heterodox nationalekonomi som har beskrivit en nedgång i löneandelen i förhållande till vinster, där nedgången i arbetares förhandlingsstyrka har visat sig ha en negativ inverkan. Maktbalansen mellan arbete och kapital är en viktig faktor i denna omfördelningsprocess, samtidigt som den institutionella variationen i lönebildningsprocessen – där lagstiftningen anger villkoren för arbetare och fackföreningarnas möjlighet till förhandling – också spelar en avgörande roll. Både fackföreningarnas relativa styrka och det institutionella stödet för att teckna kollektivavtal och om det finns lagstadgade minimilöner förväntas därför påverka löneandelen.

Artikeln tar sin utgångspunkt i tidigare forskning som visat att högre facklig anslutningsgrad och kollektivavtalsäckning påverkar löneandelen positivt. Tidigare studier har dock förbiset variationen i fackliga förhållanden och förutsättningarna för kollektivavtalsförhandlingar i olika institutionella kontexter samt hur löneandelen är fördelad mellan olika kategorier av arbetare. Denna studie adresserade dessa kunskapsluckor genom att undersöka hur fackföreningar och de huvudsakliga lönebildningsmekanismerna påverkar löneandelen. För att studera detta analyserade artikeln paneldata på landnivå i 22 OECD-länder med hjälp av EU KLEMS-, ICTWSS- och OECD-databaserna (n=233) mellan åren 2008 och 2018. Detta gjorde det möjligt att följa

årliga förändringar i löneandelen på landnivå för olika arbetare inom olika kvalifikationsnivåer.

I studien används OLS-regression med standardfel korrigerade för panelstrukturen för att ta hänsyn till heteroskedasticitet och autokorrelation. Resultaten visar att en hög facklig anslutningsgrad har en positiv effekt på löneandelen. När löneandelen bröts ned efter kvalifikationsnivå visade sig positiva effekter endast för högkvalificerade arbetare. För den totala löneandelen och medelkvalificerade arbetares löneandel är effekten av facklig anslutning däremot beroende av förekomsten av en lagstadgad minimilön samt nivån på denna minimilön, där en ökning av facklig anslutning får en negativ effekt på löneandelen. Vidare undersöks nivån på minimilöner som förväntas villkora effekterna av kollektivavtal på löneandelen, och studien visar att en högre kollektivavtalsäckning har en positiv effekt på de högkvalificerades löneandel. Den högkvalificerade löneandelen påverkas positivt även vid högre minimilönenivåer, men effekten är mest uttalad i länder utan minimilön. För den medelkvalificerade löneandelen har kollektivavtal snarare en negativ effekt vid högre minimilönenivåer, medan minimilönenivåerna oberoende bidrar till att öka löneandelen för lågkvalificerade arbetare. Artikeln drar slutsatsen att lagstadgade minimilöner gynnar låg- och medelkvalificerade arbetstagare som är beroende av minimilöner för en rättvis inkomst. Högkvalificerade arbetstagare påverkas mindre då de snarare förhandlar högre löner genom kollektivavtal oavsett om en lagstadgad minimilön finns på plats. I länder med hög facklig anslutning blir det därför viktigt att stärka rätten att teckna kollektivavtal, medan minimilöner på en adekvat nivå är avgörande i länder med låg facklig anslutning för att upprätthålla löneandelen.

## SLUTSATSER

De övergripande slutsatserna som dras i avhandlingen visar att fackföreningars maktresurser har påverkats negativt av nyliberala reformer och en omstrukturering av arbetsmarknaden. Detta har lett till en minskning i facklig anslutningsgrad, särskilt bland unga och tillfälligt anställda. Institutionella förändringar, såsom försvagningen av Gentsystemet, har haft en direkt negativ inverkan på anslutningsgraden, vilket även bekräftar tidigare forskning.

Studierna i avhandlingen bidrar med viktiga nyanser genom att visa hur fackföreningarnas maktresurser samverkar och påverkar varandra. Särskilt intressant är interaktionen mellan institutionella förändringar och individuella faktorer som anställningsförhållanden och utbildning. I synnerhet har osäkra sysselsättningsbanor såsom att exempelvis driva mellan arbete, studier och arbetslöshet gjort det svårare för facken att organisera unga arbetare. Vidare visar avhandlingen att arbetares förmåga att påverka löneandelens utveckling är beroende av deras kollektiva maktresurser. Facklig anslutning har en positiv effekt på löneandelen, men denna effekt är villkorad av institutionella faktorer som närvaron av lagstadgade minimilöner. Studien finner att minimilöner, om de sätts för högt, kan försvaga fackföreningarnas förmåga att förhandla fram högre löner för arbetare med lägre kvalifikationsnivåer.

Slutligen understryker avhandlingen komplexiteten i hur arbetares maktresurser formas, interagerar och kan användas. Av vikt är också av att organisera och rekrytera yngre arbetstagare och de med osäkra anställningar för att stärka fackföreningsrörelsen och återuppbygga de kollektiva maktresurserna, särskilt när de institutionella maktresurserna försvagats. Fackföreningsrörelsen är fortsatt relevant men har fragmenterats, och dess framtida styrka beror på förmågan att anpassa sig till förändrade arbetsmarknadsförhållanden och det politiska landskapet.

## REFERENCES

- Aghion, P., Algan, Y. & Cahuc, P. (2011). "Civil Society and the State: The Interplay between Cooperation and Minimum Wage Regulation", *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 9 (1): 3–42.
- Akerlof, G. A. (1980). "A theory of social custom, of which unemployment may be one consequence", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 94(4): 749–775.
- Albrecht, J., Björklund, A. & Vroman, S. (2011). "Unionization and the Evolution of the Wage Distribution in Sweden: 1968 to 2000", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 64 (5): 1039–1057.
- Alexopoulos, M. & Cohen, J. (2003). "Centralised Wage Bargaining and Structural Change in Sweden", *European Review of Economic History*, 7: 331–363.
- Alfonsson, J. (2022). *Det otrygga arbetslivet i Sverige: Dess framväxt och konsekvenser*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Alfonsson, J. (2024). "Dismantling Employees' Power Resources in the Swedish Labour Market. An Ideological Theoretical Approach", *Nordic Welfare Research*, 9 (1): 28–47.
- Álvarez, I., Keune, M., Cruces, J. & Uxó, J. (2021). "Missing Links in the Inclusive Growth Debate: Functional Income Distribution and Labour Market Institutions", *International Labour Review*, 160 (3): 337–362.
- Allvin, M. & Sverke, M. (2000). "Do New Generations Imply the End of Solidarity? Swedish Unionism in the Era of Individualization", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 59 (2): 532–567.
- AMECO (2024). "Annual macro-economic database". Retrieved 28 September 2024 from [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-research-and-databases/economic-databases/ameco-database\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-research-and-databases/economic-databases/ameco-database_en).
- Aneshensel, C. (2012). *Theory-based Data Analysis for the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Anxo, D., Bosch, G. & Rubery, J. (2010). "Shaping the Life Course: A European Perspective", in D. Anxo, G. Bosch & J. Rubery (eds). *The Welfare State and Life Transitions*, pp. 1–77. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Anxo, D. (2017). *Industrial Relations and Crisis: The Swedish Experience*. Geneva: ILO.
- Armington, K., Engler, S., Leemann, L. & Weisstanner, D. (2024). *Comparative Political Data Set 1960–2022*. Zurich/Lüneburg/Lucerne: University of Zurich, Leuphana University Lüneburg, University of Lucerne.

- Arnholtz, J. & Refslund, B. (2024). "A power resource theory for contemporary capitalism: Why power and workers still matter", *Stato e mercato*, 130: 7–32.
- Autor, D. & Dorn, D. (2013). "The Growth of Low-Skill Service Jobs and the Polarization of the US Labor Market", *American Economic Review*, 103: 1553–1597.
- Baccaro, L. & Howell, C. (2017). *Trajectories of Neoliberal Transformation: European Industrial Relations Since the 1970s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bain, G. S. & Price, R. (1980). *Profiles of Union Growth. A Comparative Statistical Portrait of Eight Countries*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bassanini, A. & Manfredi, T. (2014). "Capital's Grabbing Hand? A Cross-industry Analysis of the Decline of the Labor Share in OECD Countries", *Eurasian Business Review*, 4: 3–30.
- Batut, C., Lojkine, U. & Santini, P. (2024). "Which side are you on? A historical study of union membership composition in seven Western countries", *Industrial Relations: A Journey of Economy and Society*, 63 (2): 205–287.
- Beck, N. & Katz, J. N. (1995). "What to do (and not do) with time-series cross-section data", *American Political Science Review*, 89 (3): 634–647.
- Behrens, M., Hamann, K. & Hurd, R. (2004). "Conceptualizing Labour Union Revitalization", in C. Frege & J. Kelly (eds). *Varieties of Unionism: Strategies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bengtsson, M. & Berglund, T. (2011). "Negotiating Alone or Through the Union? Swedish Employees' Attitudes in 1997 and 2006." *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 32 (2): 223–241.
- Bengtsson, E. (2014). "Do unions redistribute income from capital to labor? Union density and wage shares since 1960", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 45 (5): 389–408.
- Bentolila, S. & Saint-Paul, G. (2003). "Explaining Movements in the Labor Share", *The B.E. Journal of Macroeconomics*, 3: 1–33.
- Berglund, T., Håkansson, K., Isidorsson, T. & Alfonsson, J. (2017). "Temporary Employment and Future Labor Market Status", *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 7 (2): 27–48.
- Berglund, T. & Ulfsdotter Eriksson, Y. (2024). "Scrutinising Polarisation: An Introduction", in T. Berglund & Y. Ulfsdotter Eriksson (eds). *Scrutinising Polarisation. Patterns and Consequences of Occupational Transformation in the Swedish Labour Market*, pp. 1–18. London: Routledge.
- Bernardi, L., Huinink, J. & Settersten, R. A. (2019). "The Life Course Cube: A Tool for Studying Lives", *Advances in Life Course Research*, 41: Article 100258.
- Boltanski, L. & Chiapello, E. (2018). *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Verso.
- Bontadini, F., Corrado, C., Haskel, J., Iommi, M. & Jona-Lasinio, C. (2023). *EUKLEMS and INTANProd: Industry Productivity Accounts with Intangibles*. Rome: Luiss Lab of European Economics.
- Bonoli, G. (2003). "Social Policy through Labor Markets", *Comparative Political Studies*, 36: 1007–1030.
- Booth, J., Budd, J. W. & Munday, K. M. (2010). "First-Timers and Late-Bloomers: Youth-Adult Unionization Differences in a Cohort of the U.S. Labor Force", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 64 (1): 53–73.
- Box-Steffensmeier, J. M., Freeman, J. R., Hitt, M. P. & Pevehouse, J. C. W. (2014). *Time Series Analysis for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Breusch, T. S. & Pagan, A. R. (1979). "A Simple Test for Heteroscedasticity and Random Coefficient Variation", *Econometrica*, 47: 1287–1294.

- Brinkmann, U. & Nachtwey, O. (2010). "Krise und strategische Neuorientierung der Gewerkschaften", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 13–14: 21–29.
- Bryson, A., Forth, J. & Kirby, S. (2005). "High-involvement management practices, trade union representation and workplace performance in Britain", *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 52 (3): 451–491.
- Bylund, B. & Viklund, L. (2006). *Arbetsrätt i praktiken*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Böckerman, P., & Uusitalo, R. (2006). "Erosion of the Ghent system and union membership decline", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44 (2): 283–303.
- Carstensen, M. B. & Schmidt, V. A. (2016). "Power through, over and in ideas: Conceptualizing ideational power in discursive institutionalism", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23 (3): 318–337.
- Cecchi, D. & Nunziata, L. (2011). "Models of Unionism and Unemployment", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 17 (2): 141–152.
- Clasen, J. & Viebrock, E. (2008). "Voluntary Unemployment Insurance and Trade Union Membership: Investigating the Connections in Denmark and Sweden", *Journal of Social Policy*, 37 (3): 433–451.
- Dingeldey, I., Schulten, T. & Grimshaw, D. (2021). "Introduction: Minimum wage regimes in Europe and selected developing countries", in I. Dingeldey, D. Grimshaw & T. Schulten (eds). *Minimum Wage Regimes. Statutory Regulation, Collective Bargaining and Adequate Levels*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–16.
- Ebbinghaus, B. (2006). "Trade union movements in post-industrial welfare states. Opening up to new social interests?", in G. Bonoli & K. Armingeon (eds). *The politics of post-industrial welfare states. Adapting post-war social policies to new social risks*, pp. 123–143. London: Routledge.
- Ebbinghaus, B., Göbel, C. & Koos, S. (2011). "Social capital, 'Ghent' and workplace contexts matter: Comparing union membership in Europe", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 17 (2): 107–124.
- Ebbinghaus, B. & Visser, J. (1999). "When Institutions Matter: Union Growth and Decline in Western Europe, 1950–1995", *European Sociological Review*, 15 (2): 135–158.
- Elsby, M. W. L., Hobijn, B., Sahin, A. (2013). "Unemployment dynamics in the OECD", *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 95 (2): 530–548.
- Emmenegger, P. (2010). "The long road to flexicurity: the development of job security regulations in Denmark and Sweden", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 33 (3): 271–294.
- Elgenius, G., Frank, D., Omanović, V. & Berglund, T. (2024). "Transmitted inequalities? The second generation and migration history penalties on the Swedish labour market", in T. Berglund & Y. Ulfsdotter Eriksson (eds). *Scrutinising Polarisation. Patterns and Consequences of Occupational Transformation in the Swedish Labour Market*, pp. 87–105. London: Routledge.
- Elster, J. (1990). "Norms of Revenge", *Ethics*, 100 (4): 862–865.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- European Commission (2020). *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Feenstra, R. C., Inklaar, R. & Timmer, M. P. (2015). "The Next Generation of the Penn World Table", *American Economic Review*, 105 (10): 3150–3182.
- Fichtenbaum, R. (2009). "The impact of unions on labor's share of income: A time series analysis", *Review of Political Economy*, 567–588.
- Freeman, R. B. & Medoff, J. L. (1984). *What Do Unions Do?* New York: Basic Books.

- Frege, C. M. & Kelly, J. (2003). "Union Revitalization Strategies in Comparative Perspective", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 9 (1): 7–24.
- Furåker, B. & Berglund, T. (2003) "Are the unions still needed? On Employees' Views of Their Relations to Unions and Employers." *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 24 (4): 573–594.
- Garnero, A., Kampelmann, S. & Rycx, F. (2015). "Sharp Teeth or Empty Mouths? European Institutional Diversity and the Sector-Level Minimum Wage Bite", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 53 (4): 760–788.
- Gomez, R. & Gunderson, M. (2004). "The Experience Good Model of Union Membership" in P. V. Wunnava (ed). *The Changing Role of Unions: New Forms of Representation*. New York: Sharp.
- Gordon, J. C. (2019). "The Perils of Vanguardism", *Socio-Economic Review*, 17 (4): 947–968.
- Granovetter, M. (2017). *Society and Economy*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.
- Griffin, L. & Brown, M. (2011). "Second Hand Views? Young People, Social Networks and Positive Union Attitudes", *Labour & Industry*, 22 (1–2): 83–101.
- Grimshaw, D., Bosch, G. & Rubery, J. (2014). "Minimum Wages and Collective Bargaining: What Types of Pay Bargaining Can Foster Positive Pay Equity Outcomes?", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 52 (3): 470–498.
- Gumbrell-McCormick, R. & Hyman, R. (2013). *Trade unions in Western Europe: hard times, hard choices*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guschanski, A. & Onaran, Ö. (2022). "The Decline in the Wage Share: Falling Bargaining Power of Labour or Technological Progress? Industry-level Evidence from the OECD", *Socio-Economic Review*, 20 (3): 1091–1124.
- Hall, P. & Soskice, D. (2001). *Varieties of Capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hamark, J. & Lapidus, J. (2024). "Swedish unions and obligatory complementary income insurance: Securing unemployment benefits in a changing welfare state", *Social Policy & Administration*, 58: 61–77.
- Harrison, A. (2002). *Has Globalization Eroded Labor's Share? Some Cross-Country Evidence*. MPRA Paper, UC Berkeley and NBER.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hauptmeier, M. & Heery, E. (2014). "Ideas at Work", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25 (18): 2473–2488.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1971). *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hyman, R. (2001). *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class & Society*. London: Sage.
- Häusermann, S. & Schwander, H. (2012). "Varieties of Dualization? Labor Market Segmentation and Insider-Outsider Divides Across Regimes", in P. Emmenegger, S. Häusermann, B. Palier & M. Seeleib-Kaiser (eds). *The Age of Dualization: The Changing Face of Inequality in Deindustrializing Societies*, pp. 27–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Høgedahl, L. & Juul Møberg, R. (2022). "Young Workers in Transition: Explaining the Density Gap by a Life-course Perspective", *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 12 (S8): 29–49.
- ILO (2013). *Global Wage Reports 2012/13, Wages and Equitable Growth*, Geneva.
- IMF (2007). "The Globalization of Labor", *The World Economic Outlook*, chapter 5.
- Iversen, T. & Soskice, D. (2015). "Information, Inequality, and Mass Polarization: Ideology in Advanced Democracies", *Comparative Political Studies*, 48 (13): 1781–1813.

- Jacobson, M. & Occhino, F. (2012). "Labor's Declining Share of Income and Rising Income Inequality", Economic Commentary No. 2012-12. Cleveland, OH: Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.
- Jansson, J. & Uba, K. (2019). *Trade Unions on YouTube: online revitalization in Sweden*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Johfre, S. & Saperstein, A. (2023). "The Social Construction of Age: Concepts and Measurement", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49: 339-358.
- Kaitz, H. B. (1970). "Analyzing the length of spells of unemployment", *Monthly Labor Review*, 93 (11): 11-20.
- Kalleberg, A. L. (2011). *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s-2000s*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kallos, A. (2024). "The Studentification of Low-Wage Service Work in Sweden: Who Participates?" *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* (published online ahead of print).
- Keizer, A., Johnson, M., Larsen, T. P., Refslund, B. & Grimshaw, D. (2024). "Unions and precarious work: How power resources shape diverse strategies and outcomes", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 30 (4): 383-402.
- Keune, M. (2021). "Inequality Between Capital and Labour and Among Wage-Earners: The Role of Collective Bargaining and Unions", *Transfer*, 27 (1): 29-46.
- Keune, M. & Pedaci, M. (2020). "Trade Union Strategies against Precarious Work: Common Trends and Sectoral Divergence in the EU", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 26 (2): 139-155.
- Kindermans, D. (2017). "Challenging varieties of capitalism's account of business interests: Neoliberal think-tanks, discourse as a power resource and employers' quest for liberalization in Germany and Sweden", *Socio-Economic Review*, 15 (3): 587-613.
- Kirmanoglu, H., & Baslevant, C. (2012). "Using basic personal values to test theories of union membership", *Socio-Economic Review*, 10 (4): 683-703.
- Kjellberg, A. (2006). "The Swedish Unemployment Insurance - will the Ghent system survive?", *Transfer*, 12 (1): 87-98.
- Kjellberg, A. (2011). "The Decline in Swedish Union Density Since 2007", *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 1 (1): 67-93.
- Kjellberg, A. (2019). "Chapter 28 Sweden: collective bargaining under the industry norm", in T. Müller, K. Vandaele & J. Waddington (eds). *Collective bargaining in Europe: towards an endgame*, pp. 583-683. Brussels: ETUI.
- Kjellberg, A. (2020). *Den svenska modellen i en ovisst tid. Fack, arbetsgivare och kollektivavtal på en föränderlig arbetsmarknad. Statistik och analyser: facklig medlemsutveckling, organisationsgrad och kollektivavtalstäckning*. Stockholm: Arena Idé.
- Kjellberg, A. (2021). *Den svenska modellen 2020: pandemi och nytt huvudavtal*. Stockholm: Arena Idé.
- Kjellberg, A. (2022). *Kollektivavtalens täckningsgrad samt organisationsgraden hos arbetsgivarförbund och fackförbund*. Lund University: Studies in Social Policy.
- Kjellberg, A. (2023). *Den svenska modellen ur ett nordiskt perspektiv: facklig anslutning och nytt huvudavtal*. Stockholm: Arena Idé.
- Kjellberg, A. & Lyhne Ibsen, C. (2016). "Attacks on union organizing: Reversible and irreversible changes to the Ghent systems in Sweden and Denmark", In T. P. Larsen & A. Ilsoe (eds.) *Den Danske Model set udefra—Komparative perspektiver på dansk arbejdsmarkedsregulering: Et festskrift til professor emeritus Jesper Due og professor emeritus Jørgen Steen Madsen*, pp. 279-302. Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

- Kjellberg, A. & Nergaard, K. (2022). "Union Density in Norway and Sweden: Stability versus Decline", *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 12 (58): 51–72.
- Klandermands, B. (2003). "Disengaging from Movements", in J. Goodwin & J. Jasper (eds). *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Korpi, W. (1978). *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism. Work, Unions and Politics in Sweden*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Korpi, W. (1983). *The Democratic Class Struggle*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Korpi, W. (1985). "Power resources approach vs. action and conflict: On causal and intentional explanations in the study of power", *Sociological Theory*, 3: 31–45.
- Korpi, W. (2002). "The Great Trough in Unemployment: A Long-Term View of Unemployment, Inflation, Strikes, and the Profit/Wage Ratio", *Politics and Society*, 30 (3): 365–426.
- Korpi, W. (2006). "Power Resources and Employer-centered Approaches in Explanations of Welfare States and Varieties of Capitalism: Protagonists, Consenters, and Antagonists", *World Politics*, 58 (2): 167–206.
- Kozák, M. & Picot, G. (2024). "The Politics of Minimum Wage Levels: Explaining Introduction and Levels", *British Journal of Industrial Relations* (published online ahead of print).
- Kristal, T. (2010). "Good Times, Bad Times: Postwar Labor's Share of National Income in Capitalist Democracies", *American Sociological Review*, 75 (5): 729–763.
- Kristal, T. (2013). "The Capitalist Machine: Computerization, Workers' Power, and the Decline in Labor's Share within U.S. Industries", *American Sociological Review*, 78 (3): 361–389.
- Lansley, S. & Reed, H. (2013). *How to Boost the Wage Share*. London: Touchstone Publications, TUC, 13.
- Lapidus, J. (2015). "An odd couple: Individual wage setting and the largest Swedish trade union", *Labor History*, 56 (1): 1–21.
- Larsson, B., Letell, M. & Thörn, H. (2012). *Transformations of the Swedish Welfare State: From Social Engineering to Governance?* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leschke, J. & Vandaele, K. (2018). "Explaining leaving union membership by the degree of labour market attachment: Exploring the case of Germany", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 39 (1): 64–86.
- Lesnard, L. (2010). "Setting Cost in Optimal Matching to Uncover Contemporaneous Socio-Temporal Patterns", *Sociological Methods & Research*, 38 (3): 389–419.
- Levesque, C. & Murray, G. (2010). "Understanding Union Power: Resources and Capabilities for Renewing Union Capacity", *Transfer*, 16 (3): 333–350.
- Lind, J. (2009). "The end of the Ghent system as trade union recruitment machinery?", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 40 (6): 510–523.
- Lindellee, J. (2018). *Beyond Retrenchment: Multi-Pillarization of Unemployment Benefit Provision in Sweden*. Lund: Lund University.
- Lindellee, J. & Berglund, T. (2022). "The Ghent System in Transition: Unions' Evolving Role in Sweden's Multi-Pillar Unemployment Benefit System", *Transfer*, 28 (2): 211–227.
- Ljunglöf, T., Fransson, A. & Kjellberg, A. (2024). *Kollektivaavtalsstäckning och arbetsmarknadens organisationer*. Medlingsinstitutet.
- Long, J. S. & Freese, J. (2014). *Regression Models for Categorical Dependent Variables Using Stata*. College Station, TX: Stata Press.
- Longhi, S. & Nandi, A. (2015). *A Practical Guide to Using Panel Data*. Sage.

- Lukes, S. (2005). *Power – A Radical View*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lyhne Ibsen, C. (2017). “Trade union revitalisation: Where are we now? Where to next?”, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 59 (2): 170–191.
- Marx, K. (2010). *The First International and After: Political Writings*. London: Verso.
- Meardi, G. (2018). “Economic integration and state responses: Change in European industrial relations since Maastricht”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 56 (3): 631–655.
- Mehmetoglu, M. & Jakobsen, T. G. (2017). *Applied Statistics Using Stata: A Guide for the Social Sciences*. London: Sage.
- Meyer, B. (2017). “Financialization, Technological Change, and Trade Union Decline”, *Socio-Economic Review*, 17 (3): 477–502.
- Mood, C. (2010). “Logistic regression: Why we cannot do what we think we can do, and what we can do about it”, *European Sociological Review*, 26 (1): 67–82.
- Moore, S., Onaran, Ö., Guschanski, A., Antunes, B. & Symon, G. (2019). “The Resilience of Collective Bargaining – A Renewed Logic for Joint Regulation”, *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 41 (2): 279–295.
- Mosimann, N. & Pontusson, J. (2017). “Solidaristic unionism and support for redistribution in contemporary Europe”, *World Politics*, 69 (3): 448–492.
- Müller-Jentsch, W. (1985). “Trade Unions as Intermediary Organizations”, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 6 (1): 3–33.
- Nissen, B. & Jarley, P. (2005). “Unions as Social Capital: Renewal through a Return to the Logic of Mutual Aid?”, *Labor Studies Journal*, 29 (4): 1–26.
- OECD (2012). *Labour Losing to Capital: What Explains the Declining Labour Share?* OECD Employment Outlook 2012. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2018). *Decoupling of Wages from Productivity: What Implications for Public Policies?* OECD Economic Outlook 2018. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Oesch, D. & Baumann, I. (2015). “Smooth Transition or Permanent Exit? Evidence on Job Prospects of Displaced Industrial Workers”, *Socio-Economic Review*, 13 (1): 101–123.
- Offe, C. & Wiesenthal, H. (1980). “Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form”, *Political Power and Social Theory*, 1 (1): 67–115.
- Olausson, E. (2024). *Kollektivavtalsförhandlingar i den svenska modellen*. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik.
- Oliver, D. (2010). “Union Membership Among Young Graduate Workers in Australia: Using the Experience Good Model to Explain the Role of Student Employment”, *Industrial Relations Journal*, 41 (5): 505–519.
- Olson, M. (1965). *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Palm, J. (2017). *There is Power in a Union: Trade Union Organization, Union Membership and Union Activity in Sweden*. PhD thesis. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Parisi, M. L. (2017). “Labor Market Rigidity, Social Policies and the Labor Share: Empirical Evidence Before and After the Big Crisis”, *Economic Systems*, 41 (4): 492–512.
- Pedersen, S. H. & Picot, G. (2023). “Regulating low wages: cross-national policy variation and outcomes”, *Socio-Economic Review*, 21 (4): 2093–2116.
- Penninx, R. & Roosblad, J. (2000). *Trade Unions, Immigration, and Immigrants in Europe, 1960–1993: A Comparative Study of the Attitudes and Actions of Trade Unions*. New York: Berghahn Books.

- Pesaran, M. H. (2015). "Testing Weak Cross-Sectional Dependence in Large Panels", *Econometric Reviews*, 34: 6–10.
- Philipsen Isaac, S. (2024). "Unpacking State Production of Temporal Dispossession: The Intersections of Labour, Asylum and Informalization in Sweden", *Critical Sociology* (published online ahead of print).
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pontusson, J. (2013). "Unionization, Inequality and Redistribution", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 51 (4): 797–825.
- Prytz, J. & Berglund, T. (2023). "Disruption of the Ghent effect: Disentangling structural and institutional determinants of union membership decline in Sweden, 2005–2010", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 54 (6): 471–494.
- Prytz, J. & Larsson, B. (2024). "Changes in Trade Union Membership and Attitudes to Unions in Sweden", in T. Berglund & Y. Ulfsdotter Eriksson (eds). *Scrutinising Polarisation. Patterns and Consequences of Occupational Transformation in the Swedish Labour Market*, pp. 165–180. London: Routledge.
- Przeworski, A. (1986). *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rasmussen, M. B. & Pontusson, J. (2018). "Working-Class Strength by Institutional Design? Unionization, Partisan Politics, and Unemployment Insurance Systems, 1870 to 2010", *Comparative Political Studies*, 51 (6): 793–828.
- Refslund, B. (2024). "Theorizing collective action – Instrumental collectivism as a key concept for explaining workplace collective action", *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society* (published online ahead of print).
- Refslund, B. & Arnholtz, J. (2022). "Power Resource Theory Revisited: The Perils and Promises for Understanding Contemporary Labour Politics", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 43 (4): 1958–1979.
- Reed, W. R., & Webb, R. (2010). "The PCSE estimator is good – just not as good as you think", *Journal of Time Series Econometrics*, 2 (1).
- Ringqvist, J. (2021a). "How do union membership, union density and institutionalization affect perceptions of conflict between management and workers?" *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27 (2): 131–148.
- Ringqvist, J. (2021b). "Union membership and the willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs: A multi-level analysis covering 22 European countries", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 60 (3): 662–682.
- Rosetti, N. (2019). "Do European trade unions foster social solidarity? Evidence from multilevel data in 18 countries", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 50 (1): 84–101.
- Rothstein, B. (1990). "Marxism, Institutional Analysis, and Working-Class Power: The Swedish Case", *Politics & Society*, 18 (3): 318–345.
- Rueda, D. (2007). *Social Democracy Inside Out: Government Partisanship, Insiders and Outsiders in Industrialized Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SCB (2019a). *Kvalitetsdeklaration Arbetskraftsundersökningarna (AKU)*. Retrieved 15 November 2024 from [https://www.scb.se/contentassets/aob66217ccac4552b-68ee-acb21a7758a/amo401\\_kd\\_2019\\_lj\\_190214.pdf](https://www.scb.se/contentassets/aob66217ccac4552b-68ee-acb21a7758a/amo401_kd_2019_lj_190214.pdf)
- SCB (2019b). *LISA, Longitudinell integrationsdatabas för Sjukförsäkrings- och Arbetsmarknadsstudier*. Retrieved 18 November 2024 from <https://www.scb.se/contentassets/fobc88c852364b6ea5c1654a0cc90234/lisa-bakgrundsfakta-1990-2017.pdf>

- SCB (2023). *Kvalitetsdeklaration Arbetskraftsundersökningarna (AKU)*. Retrieved 18 November 2024 from [https://www.scb.se/contentassets/c12fd0d28d604529b2b4ffc2eb742fbc/amo401\\_kd\\_2023\\_230210.pdf](https://www.scb.se/contentassets/c12fd0d28d604529b2b4ffc2eb742fbc/amo401_kd_2023_230210.pdf)
- Schack, L. (2023). "Resisting state-sanctioned precarity: social reproduction and anti-austerity organizing in Berlin", *Social Movement Studies* (published online ahead of print).
- Scheuer, S. (2011). "Union Membership Variation in Europe: A Ten-Country Comparative Analysis", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 17 (1): 57–73.
- Schmalz, S., Ludwig, C. & Webster, E. (2018). "The Power Resources Approach: Developments and Challenges", *Global Labour Journal*, 9: 113–134.
- Schmalz, S. & Thiel, M. (2017). "IG Metall's Comeback: Trade Union Renewal in Times of Crisis", *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 39 (4): 465–486.
- Schnabel, C. (2003). "Determinants of Trade Union Membership", in J. T. Addison & C. Schnabel (Eds.) *International Handbook of Trade Unions*, pp. 12–43. Edward Elgar.
- Schnabel, C. (2013). "Union membership and density: Some (not so) stylized facts and challenges", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 19(3): 255–272.
- Schnabel, C., & Wagner, J. (2008). "Union density and determinants of union membership in 18 EU countries: Evidence from micro data, 2002/03", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 38 (1): 5–32.
- Schmitt, J. & Mitukiewicz, A. (2012). "Politics matter: changes in unionisation rates in rich countries, 1960–2010", *Industrial Relations Journal*, 43 (3): 260–280.
- Schulten, T. & Müller, T. (2020). *Between Poverty Wages and Living Wages. Minimum Wage Regimes in the European Union*. European Studies for Social and Labour Market Policy No. 1.
- Scruggs, L. (2002). "The Ghent System and Union Membership in Europe, 1970–1996", *Political Research Quarterly*, 55 (2): 275–297.
- Shin, Y-K. & Ylä-Anttila, T. (2018). "New Social Risk Groups, Industrial Relations Regimes and Union Membership", *Journal of European Social Policy*, 28 (3): 242–254.
- Stockhammer, E. (2009). *Determinants of Functional Income Distribution in OECD Countries*. IMK Studies, Düsseldorf, Macroeconomic Policy Institute.
- Silver, B. J. (2003). *Forces of Labor. Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Simms, M. (2015). "Accounting for Greenfield Union Organizing Outcomes", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 53 (3): 397–422.
- Smith, C. (2006). "The double indeterminacy of labour power: Labour effort and labour mobility", *Work, Employment and Society*, 20 (2): 389–402.
- Streeck, W. (2009). *Re-forming Capitalism: Institutional Change in the German Political Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Streeck, W. & Thelen, K. (2005). "Introduction: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies", in Streeck, W. and Thelen, K. (eds). *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies*, pp. 1–39. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Studer, M. (2013). "WeightedCluster Library Manual". *Pract. Guide Creat. Typol. Trajectories Soc. Sci.*, 2296–1658.
- Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2021). Application form for ethical approval – Main application, General information and signatures. Swedish Ethical Review Authority.

- Swedish Research Council (2017). *Good Research Practice*. Stockholm: Swedish Research Council.
- Thelen, K. (2009). "Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47 (3): 471–498.
- Thelen, K. (2014). *Varieties of liberalization and the new politics of social solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thörnqvist, C. (1998). "The Swedish discourse on decentralisation of labour relations", in D. Fleming & C. Thörnqvist (eds). *Global redefining of working life – A new Nordic agenda for competence and participation*, pp. 267–292. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Tomaskovic-Devey, D., Hällsten, M. & Avent-Holt, D. (2015). "Where Do Immigrants Fare Worse? Modeling Workplace Wage Gap Variation with Longitudinal Employer-Employee Data", *American Journal of Sociology*, 120 (4): 1095–1143.
- Vachon, T. E. & Brecher, J. (2016). "Are union members more or less likely to be environmentalists? Some evidence from two national surveys" *Labour Studies Journal*, 41 (2): 185–203.
- Vallas, S. P. & Christin, A. (2018). "Work and Identity in an Era of Precarious Employment: How Workers Respond to 'Personal Branding' Discourse", *Work and Occupations*, 45 (1): 3–37.
- Vandaele, K. (2018). "How Can Trade Unions in Europe Connect with Young Workers"? in J. O'Reilly et al. (eds). *Youth Labor in Transition: Inequalities, Mobility, and Policies in Europe*, pp. 660–688. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vestin, E. (2019). *The Decline of Class Voting in Sweden 1968–2014: Reconsiderations, Explanations and the Role of the New Middle Class*. PhD thesis. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
- Vestin, E. & Vulkan, P. (2021). "Cohort differences in Swedish union membership 1956–2019 and the role of individualization", *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 12 (S8): 7–28.
- Visser, J. (2002). "Why Fewer Workers Join Unions in Europe: A Social Custom Explanation of Membership Trends", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 40 (3): 403–430.
- Visser, J. (2019). *ICTWSS Database. Version 6.1*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS), University of Amsterdam.
- Visser, J. & Checchi, D. (2011). "Inequality and the Labor Market: Unions" in W. Salverda, B. Nolan & T. Smeedling (eds). *Oxford Handbook on Economic Inequality*, pp. 230–256. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vulkan, P. (2016). *The Microfoundations of Flexicurity. Employees' Well-being and Attitudes to Labour Market Policy in a Swedish and Nordic Welfare State Setting*. PhD thesis. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
- Walsh, K. (1985). *Trade Union Membership: Methods and Measurement in the European Community*. Brussels: Eurostat.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Western, B. (1997). *Between Class and Market: Postwar Unionization in the Capitalist Democracies*. Princeton University Press.
- Wooldridge, J. M. (2002). *Econometric Analysis of Cross Section and Panel Data*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wright, E. O. (2000). "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise", *American Journal of Sociology*, 105 (4): 957–1002.

## APPENDIX

*Table A1. Time series availability for countries included in Figures 1–3.*

COUNTRY	UNION DENSITY	EPL OF FTE	ADJ. WAGE SHARE
Australia	1960–2015	1985–2019	1960–2019
Austria	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Belgium	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Bulgaria	2000–2016	N/A	1995–2019
Canada	1960–2015	1985–2019	1960–1980, 1991–2019
Croatia	2004–2018	2015	1995–2019
Cyprus	2000–2016	N/A	1995–2019
Czech Republic	1993–2018	1993–2019	1993–2019
Denmark	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Estonia	1992–2019	2008–2019	1993–2019
Finland	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
France	1960–2018	1985–2019	1960–2019
Germany	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Greece	1977–2016	1985–2019	1960–2019
Hungary	1990–2018	1990–2019	1995–2019
Iceland	1979–2018	2008–2019	1970–2019
Ireland	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Italy	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Japan	1960–2019	1985–2019	1980–2019
Latvia	1995–2018	2012–2019	1992–2019
Lithuania	1995–2019	2014–2019	1993–2019
Luxembourg	1970–2019	2008–2019	1960–2019
Malta	2000–2019	N/A	1995–2019
Netherlands	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
New Zealand	1970–2018	1990–2019	1986–2019
Norway	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Poland	1991–2017	1991–2019	1992–2019
Portugal	1977–2016	1985–2019	1960–2019
Romania	1998–2018	N/A	1990–2019
Slovakia	1995–2018	1993–2019	1995–2019

*Table A1, continued.*

COUNTRY	UNION DENSITY	EPL OF FTE	ADJ. WAGE SHARE
Slovenia	1991–2015	2008–2019	1995–2019
Spain	1977–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Sweden	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
Switzerland	1960–2018	1985–2019	1991–2019
United Kingdom	1960–2019	1985–2019	1960–2019
USA	1960–2016	1985–2019	1960–2019