



Perceived manager opposition to unions

In order to better understand factors that may influence an employee's decision to join a trade union, employees in the *Australia at Work* study¹ were asked to respond via a five point agree-disagree scale to the following statement:

'As far as I can tell, managers at my workplace oppose unions'

In 2010, more than one-fifth (21.3%) of the 4,830 employees interviewed either strongly agreed or agreed with the above statement.

- Those in permanent jobs (22.8%) are more likely than those in casual jobs (17.7%) to perceive manager opposition to unions. As were those in full-time work (24.2%) compared to those in part-time work (14.0%).
- Perceived manager opposition to unions was also considerably higher among employees in the private sector (26.4%) than amongst those employed in the public sector (13.0%) and not for profit sector (15.9%).
- Male employees are considerably more likely (26.1%) than female employees (16.2%) to perceive manager opposition to unions. This is most likely to be due to gender differences in industry of employment.
- Taken as a group, these workers (i.e. permanent, full-time, private sector) occupy the core workforce and are located where unions are most likely to find private sector footholds, and in turn, most likely to encounter manager resistance.
- Unsurprisingly, employees who are insecure (27.3%), untrusting of managers (39.3%) or who see them as unfair (42.3%) are all more likely to view their superiors as anti-union.
- Union members are slightly more likely to see their managers as opposed to unions (at 22.4% compared to 20.9% respectively). In contrast, those in workplaces with a union presence are less likely (17.5%) than those where there is no union presence in the workplace (26.8%) to perceive their managers as

¹ The *Australia at Work* study is being conducted by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grant scheme and the industry partner is Unions NSW. Further financial support is provided by CFMEU Energy & Mining Division, CFMEU ACT Branch, NSW Nurses' Association, the Police Federation of Australia, the SDA, the CEPU, the QLD Nurses Federation and the Nurses Federation (Victorian Branch). *The study* is a five-year longitudinal telephone survey of people who were aged 16 to 58 years and in the Australian labour force in March 2006 (i.e. prior to the implementation of the *Work Choices* legislation on 27 March 2006). New entrants and re-entrants to the labour force after March 2006 were not 'in-scope' for the study.

anti-union. Further, workers in high skill jobs (18.1%) are less likely than those in lower skilled jobs (24.8%) to view their managers as hostile to unions.

- One of the most important indicators is industry of employment. Where agreement with the statement ranges from 46.4% of employees in the Mining industry to 9.9% of employees in the Public Administration & Safety industry.

Perceived manager opposition to unions by industry, 2010, per cent

<i>'As far as I can tell, managers at my workplace oppose unions'</i>	Agree or strongly agree	Union density 2010	Change in Union density 2006 to 2010
Mining	46.4%	21.3%	-1.2%
Wholesale trade	45.6%	5.7%	-2.6%
Transport, postal and warehousing	36.4%	28.8%	-3.7%
Rental, hiring and real estate services	32.9%	4.0%	-1.1%
Manufacturing	31.2%	17.8%	-5.3%
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	29.6%	37.3%	-1.9%
Construction	28.7%	16.8%	-5.1%
Information, media and telecomm.	24.6%	12.1%	-5.0%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	23.3%	1.9%	-4.2%
Finance and insurance services	22.6%	10.1%	-3.3%
Retail trade	20.7%	15.4%	-3.4%
Professional, scientific & technical services	20.4%	3.2%	-0.5%
Health care and social assistance	18.2%	26.5%	-1.0%
Administrative and support services	17.6%	8.2%	+1.2%
Accommodation and food services	14.4%	4.4%	-2.8%
Arts and recreation services	13.9%	15.5%	-4.3%
Education and training	11.8%	39.2%	+0.3%
Public administration and safety	9.9%	33.0%	-4.6%
Total	21.3%	18.3%	-2.1%

Population: Employees in 2010

Weight: Weights10

Source: Australia at Work W4, ABS Catalogue 6310.0, Trade Union membership, August 2010, released 6May 2011

What do our findings suggest?

To date, much of the decline in union density has been attributed to rising individualism or indifference to collectivism amongst today's workers and the structural changes in the labour market.

Our findings point to a variable rarely considered: strong union resistance or aggression among managers. Union membership losses in some industries may be (in part) driven by stronger union resistance among managers, resistance strong enough for employees to register widely. This need not amount to specific, direct efforts at de-unionisation: it could simply be that workers in these industries now attach greater risk to union membership, deterring new joiners and weakening union commitment among members.