ARE UNIONS DEMOCRATIC?
A Closer Look At The Internal Politics Of Labor Unions And Their Implications

NEW YORK, NY: Labor unions in the United States are supposed to be democratically governed. Unfortunately, much evidence suggests that unions are, in the vast majority of cases, only superficially democratic.

A review by Daniel DiSalvo (@DiSalvoCCNY) of the existing literature in his new Manhattan Institute report shows that turnout is extremely low, incumbent leaders often go unchallenged for long periods and “anoint” chosen successors, and unions often take political positions with which a substantial number of members disagree.

The report prescribes reforms that could, and should, bring the practice of union democracy in line with the values of American society and the spirit of the law. Specifically, it recommends that Federal, state, and local governments:

1. Require unions to **publicize electoral procedures and report election returns**. In particular, unions should report the names of the candidates for various offices; whether members voted in person, by phone, electronically, or postal mail; and the number of members who voted, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage.

2. Require unions to **adopt online voting systems**, thereby eliminating cumbersome barriers to voting (such as traveling to the union hall to cast a ballot); improving transparency; speeding the dissemination of election results; and reducing the costs of holding elections.

3. Stop requiring union members to pay for **advocacy that they do not support**. Specifically, public-sector unions need to formalize their political decision-making by holding referenda to gauge their members’ policy preferences more precisely. The results of these referenda should be made public.

Using these reforms to close the gap between union democracy as a theory and its actual practice would increase transparency—and accountability—for union members and the general public.

To read the full report click [here](#). To schedule an interview with the author, please contact Ray Niemiec at (646) 839-3335.