

# Voice on the Job for Younger Workers

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## Executive Summary

In 2023, young workers are reaping the benefits of a tight labor market. At the same time, many are expressing profound dissatisfaction with their jobs, even taking to social media to “live quit” in response to unaddressed grievances. Younger workers want “decent jobs”. How do younger workers understand and experience “voice” on the job? Will this help us understand the “Great Resignation” and the challenges in recruiting younger workers? We recently fielded a survey that can shed light on these questions. As part of the Worker Empowerment Research Network (WERN), we recruited 2,561 frontline workers in the health care, hospitality, retail, telecommunications, and warehousing industries. In our sample, we find that:

- younger workers, defined as those 30 and under, are less attached to their employer; they are more willing to leave their current position and more likely to have quit a job in the past compared to workers over 30;
- younger workers report more problems at work;
- younger workers are less likely to turn to formal channels (managers, human resources) to address workplace problems;
- nevertheless, younger workers are *more* satisfied with their level of voice at work, although this likely reflects lowered expectations;
- younger workers are more “union-curious” but less sure of unions’ ability to improve worker voice;
- younger workers are more concerned about targeted employer retaliation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that, compared to older workers, younger workers are less attached to their jobs, less confident about their employer’s commitment to them, and more unsure about what to do when they face problems at work. Once the problems facing young workers get back to management or HR, it is likely too late.

These findings have important implications for strategies to hire, retain, and develop younger workers. Clear, early, and frequent communication with workers at the early stages of their careers will be critical, especially about how they can make their voices heard at work, what to do when there is a problem, and what they can expect from problem-solving procedures. Most of all, our findings suggest that workers are uncertain about employers’ commitments to *them*. Credibly signaling a willingness to invest in workers’ careers and react constructively to their concerns will bring out the best in workers and firms.

Executives and managers can choose how to respond to younger workers who seek union representation—with defensive opposition, or with collaboration. All-out opposition might appear to be the easy choice, but combative opposition risks fraying relationships with younger workers and hindering retention of dedicated employees. A union organizing drive is a meaningful *signal* about workers’ experiences that may not have been transmitted through other channels.

## Introduction

Public support for labor unions is near an all-time high, with young Americans as the most supportive age group. Young workers are at the forefront of labor activism in the 2020s. From Starbucks to Amazon to the gig economy, workers under 30 are trying to make their voices heard at the workplace and beyond. For their part, management and human resources professionals routinely pay lip service to the importance of “open door” policies, “worker engagement,” and “worker voice.” They can be caught off-guard by worker activism, sometimes responding in combative and counterproductive ways.

But beyond the headlines, we know little about the state of worker voice and empowerment among younger Americans. How do young workers feel about the quality of their jobs and their influence over conditions at work? Do young people feel connected to their coworkers and workplace communities, or do they feel alienated? And finally, do young people see labor unions as a mechanism for empowerment or as a potential liability—or do they not know much about unions at all?

In this report, we investigate these questions systematically with data from a new survey of frontline workers across five industries: healthcare, hospitality, retail, telecommunications, and warehousing. This survey provides a unique look into workers in industries that make up a large proportion of the US workforce and tend to pay lower wages.

Our analysis uncovers a nuanced picture of the working life for young Americans. We find that, compared to older workers, workers aged 30 and under tend to be just as positive in their perceptions of voice and satisfaction on the job. However, younger workers are more likely to report problems at work, especially unstable work schedules and wage theft. Not surprisingly, younger workers are more likely to have quit a job over problems at work in the past, and they are more likely to be planning to leave their current job. In addition, younger workers are highly interested in labor unions, but they worry about retaliation from management for union activity. There is also a significant minority of young workers who are unsure about what unions do and whether unionization can help improve their lives.

Taken together, the results suggest that we are in a moment of possibility for young workers. Young workers are more educated, racially diverse, and potentially more “union curious” than at any time in recent US history. Key questions include whether executives and managers can adapt and engage collaboratively and whether the labor movement can connect workplace experience and worker voice. Successful answers to these questions could unlock new potential for shared prosperity in 21st century America.

## About the Survey

Recent survey evidence has shown a marked uptick in Americans’ frustration with their jobs as well as support for labor unions (Hertel-Fernandez 2020a, 2020b; Macdonald 2023; McCarthy

2022). But nearly all recent survey research exploring working conditions, worker voice, and worker mobilization use broad national samples. In contrast, our survey sample allows us to drill down into five specific industries that employ large numbers of younger workers and experience the challenges with worker recruitment, retention, and union organizing drives. Our survey is unique in concentrating on these frontline workers in the post-COVID period.

Under the auspices of the Worker Empowerment Research Network (WERN), we fielded an original survey of American workers, focusing on five select industries known for low wages, scheduling instability, and intense recent unionization drives: healthcare, hospitality, retail, telecommunications, and warehousing. Survey respondents were recruited from the Qualtrics online panel with quotas for each of the targeted industries, as well as age, race, and gender, ensuring broad representation for workers of color as well as younger workers across these industries. We then weight the sample to match the national demographics of workers in each of the five industries based on gender, age, and race. The survey was in the field from June 21 to August 22, 2022, and received 2,561 completed responses.

In our sample, 24% ( $n = 626$ ) of respondents were 30 years old or younger, the group we refer to as “younger workers” throughout. Compared to the over-30 workers in our sample, the younger group was less white (50% vs. 70%), more likely to identify as female (56% against 44%), and more likely to speak languages other than English at home (28% vs. 19%). Younger workers in these industries were more likely to live in urban areas (32% vs. 27%) and somewhat more likely to have a college degree (34% vs. 30%) but substantially less likely to have employer-provided health insurance (69% vs. 80%). A detailed comparison of younger and older workers in our sample appears in the appendix.

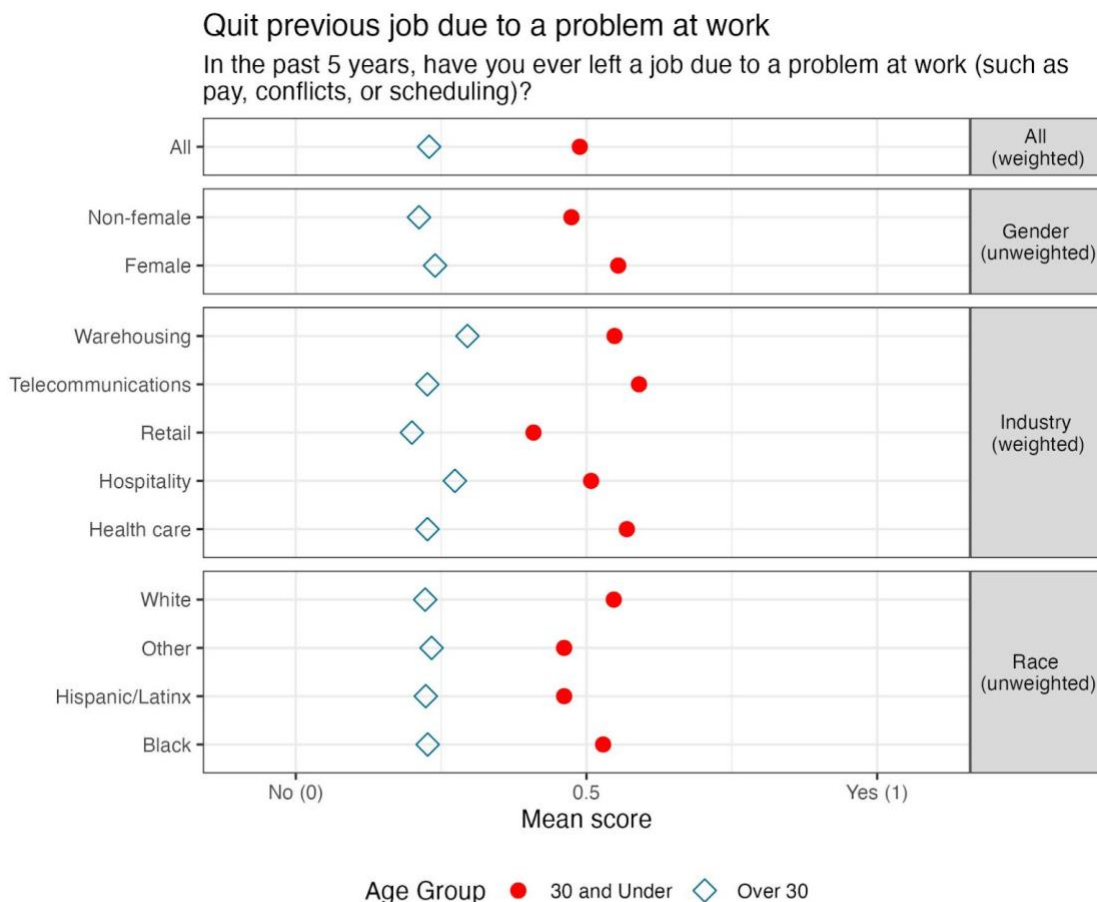
## Job Attachment

*Younger workers are less attached to employers. Younger workers—especially women and those in healthcare, telecommunications, and warehousing—are far more likely to have quit a job recently due to a problem at work. Younger workers and workers of color are more likely to be planning to quit in the near future, especially in the hospitality industry.*

The uptick in job-switching since the COVID-19 pandemic has been dubbed the “Great Resignation.” Younger, frontline workers in industries disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic have seen the highest churn. Our survey data confirms this among workers in our five targeted industries.

We asked respondents about whether they have quit a job in the last few years as well as their intentions to look for a new job in the near future. Figure 1 displays reported quitting behavior by age group, broken out by gender, industry, and race. Compared to colleagues over 30, younger workers are much more likely to state that they left a job due to a problem at work. The age gap is visible across all gender, race, and industry groups, but it is biggest among female workers, workers in healthcare and telecom, and among white and Black respondents.

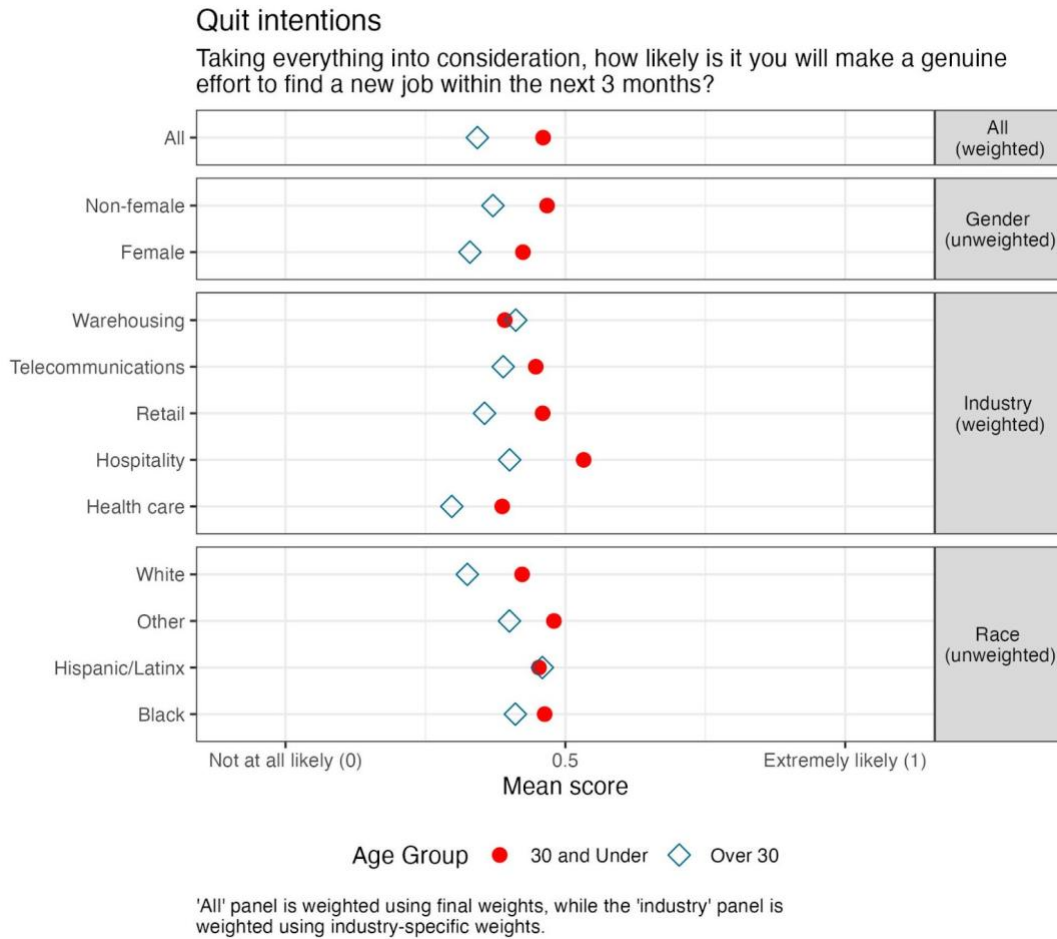
Figure 1: Younger workers are more likely to have quit a previous job due to a problem at work.



'All' panel is weighted using final weights, while the 'industry' panel is weighted using industry-specific weights.

Looking at future quit plans, we again see that younger workers are more likely to be looking for a new job, although the age gaps are generally smaller. Figure 2 shows average quit intentions across age groups broken out by the same demographic groups. Younger workers, especially in hospitality, are more likely to quit than their older colleagues. Older white workers are the least likely to report an intention to quit, whereas there is no age gap in quit intention among Hispanic/Latinx workers.

Figure 2: Younger workers are more likely to be planning to quit, especially in the hospitality industry.



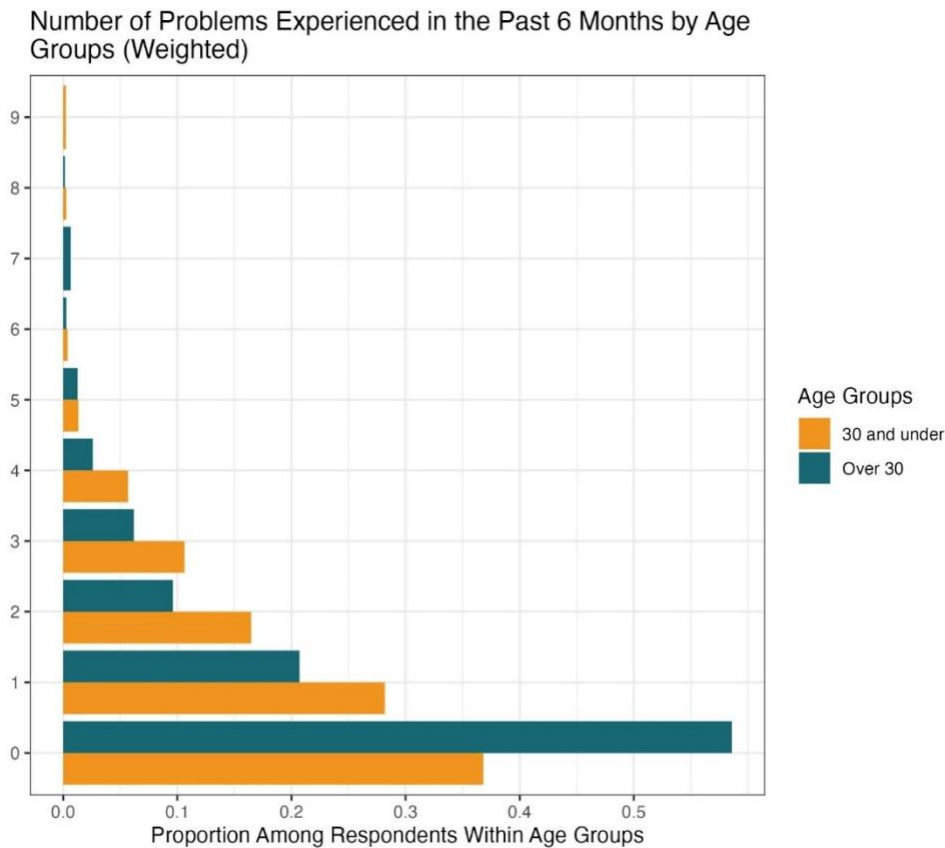
## Problems on the Job

*Younger workers experience more problems at work, especially scheduling instability and wage theft. And some problems occur more frequently together, suggesting there are better and worse jobs and employers. More problems at work connect with reduced job satisfaction, increased chances of quitting, and increased support for unionization.*

Workers of all ages are quitting or looking for new jobs at higher rates, but younger workers are especially implicated in the Great Resignation, something we call the “age gap” in job attachment. Many explanations for the age gap put the blame squarely on “Gen Z” workers themselves: they are alleged to be more demanding and entitled, more thin-skinned, or just less willing to work hard. Nevertheless, existing survey work from Woods et al. (2023) indicates that worsening job quality for younger workers is a more likely culprit. Our survey expands on this: younger frontline workers report more problems on the job than older workers.

We asked our survey respondents to report whether they had recently experienced a variety of different workplace problems in the past six months. Problems ranged from late or incorrect pay to harassment. Figure 3 displays the number of problems reported among the younger and older respondents. Younger workers report considerably more problems: 63% of younger workers report experiencing at least one problem against 41% of those over 30.

Figure 3: Younger workers report more problems on the job.

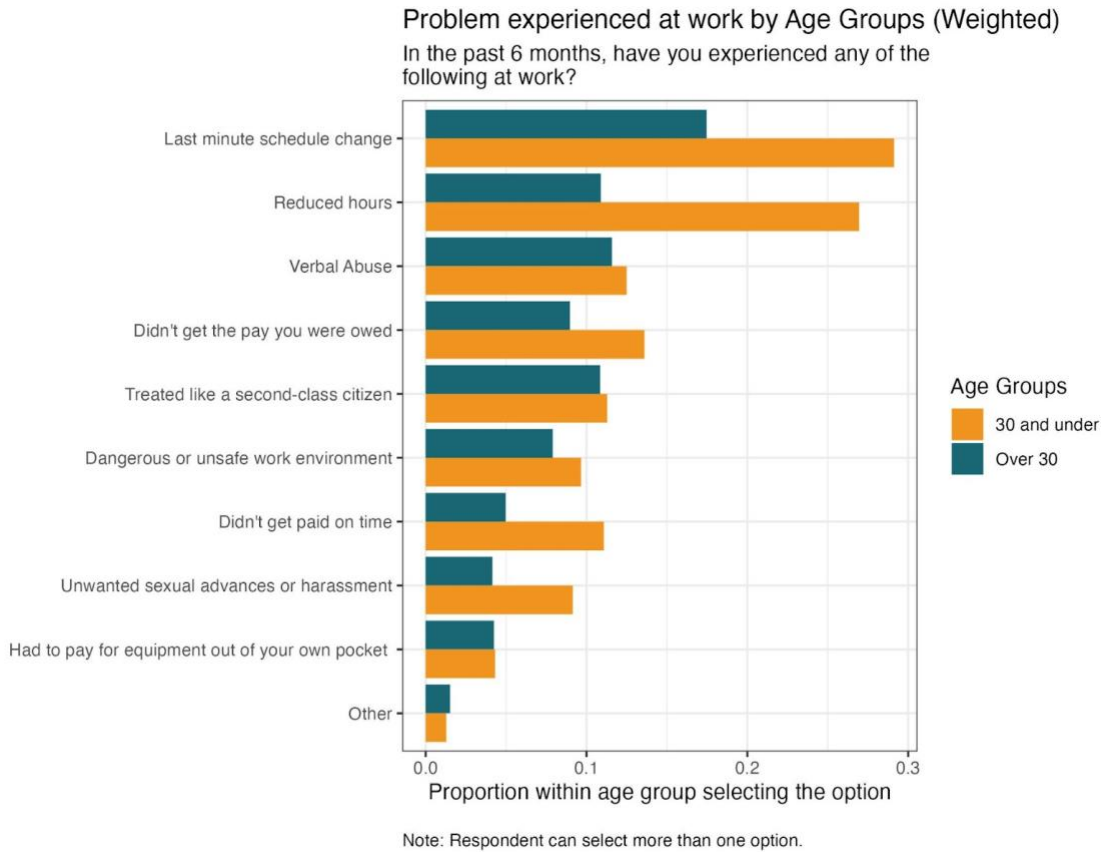


What are some problems workers experienced? Figure 4 displays reporting frequencies for ten different classes of problems. Younger workers report experiencing more last-minute schedule changes, reduced hours, verbal abuse, wage theft (both underpayment and late payment), unsafe work environment, sexual harassment, and out-of-pocket expenses for work equipment. Young workers are nearly twice as likely as older workers to report schedule instability in the form of last-minute schedule changes and reduced work hours. They are over one and one-half times more likely to report wage theft.

In our survey, it also appears that problems on the job seem to occur together. For example, in the overall sample, 18% of respondents reported an incident of scheduling instability, and 14% reported either late or under-payment of wages in the last six months. But among those reporting scheduling instability, 23% reported problems with wage theft. And among those reporting wage theft, 29% also reported scheduling instability, more than double the rate in the

overall sample. Similarly, workers reporting unsafe working conditions are four times more likely to report verbal abuse than the general sample. For frontline workers, there are better and worse jobs. But, echoing the famous Tolstoy line, the bad jobs are bad in different ways.

Figure 4: Younger workers experience more types of problems at work at higher rates.



Each of these negative experiences can have consequences. Younger families are more financially precarious (Pew Charitable Trusts 2015; PYMNTS and LendingClub 2022). Even one late paycheck can compound financial stress in the form of late and overdraft fees, high-interest borrowing, and worse (Klein 2017; Paquette 2018). Last-minute schedule changes play havoc with childcare and upend efforts to balance work, school, and our communities. All of these problems jointly contribute to a sense of uncertainty, instability, and lack of support, part of the “scarcity tax” for low-income families (Mullainathan and Shafir 2013).

Job satisfaction reduces turnover (Carsten and Spector 1987; Muchinsky and Tuttle 1979; Wright and Bonett 2007). Experiencing problems at work connects to job satisfaction and quit intentions in predictable ways. Figure 5 shows that people reporting more problems at work are also less satisfied with their jobs, as measured using a battery of questions about subjective job quality. The negative relationship is nearly identical for younger and older workers. In Figure 6, we connect quit intentions with problems at work, comparing younger and older workers. For both groups, more problems imply a greater willingness to quit their job. Problems on the job are also



predictive of union support among non-union workers, a relationship we document in the appendix.

Figure 5: Workers with more problems at work are less satisfied, regardless of age cohort. Curved lines represent summary relationships, and the shaded regions depict the level of statistical uncertainty around these relationships (95% confidence bands)

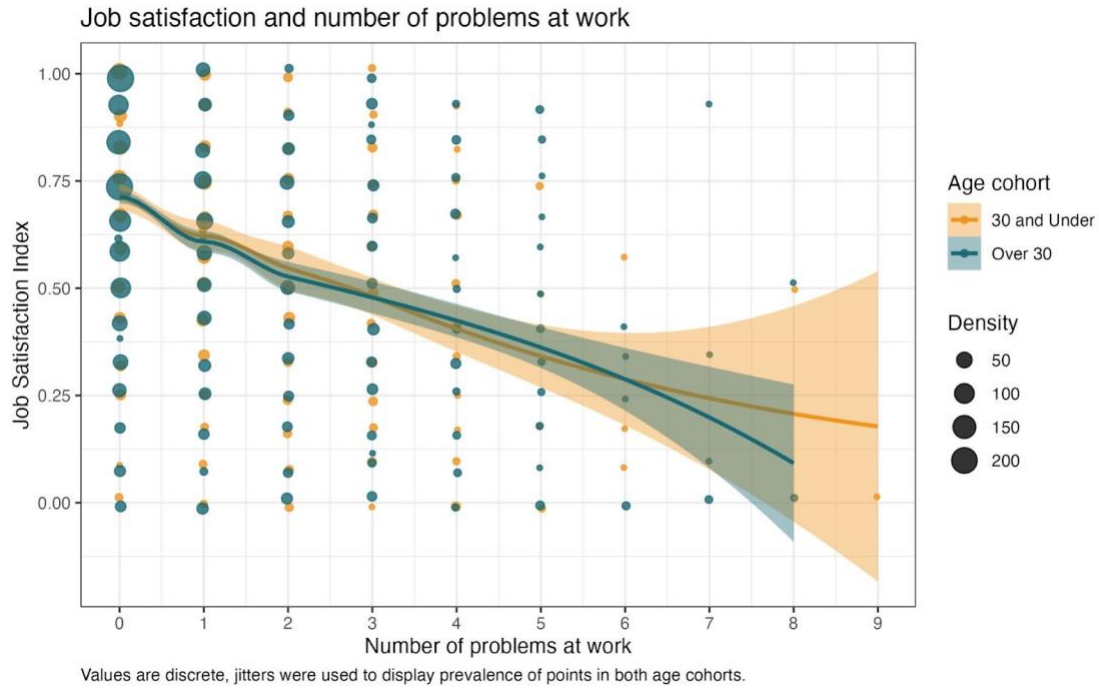
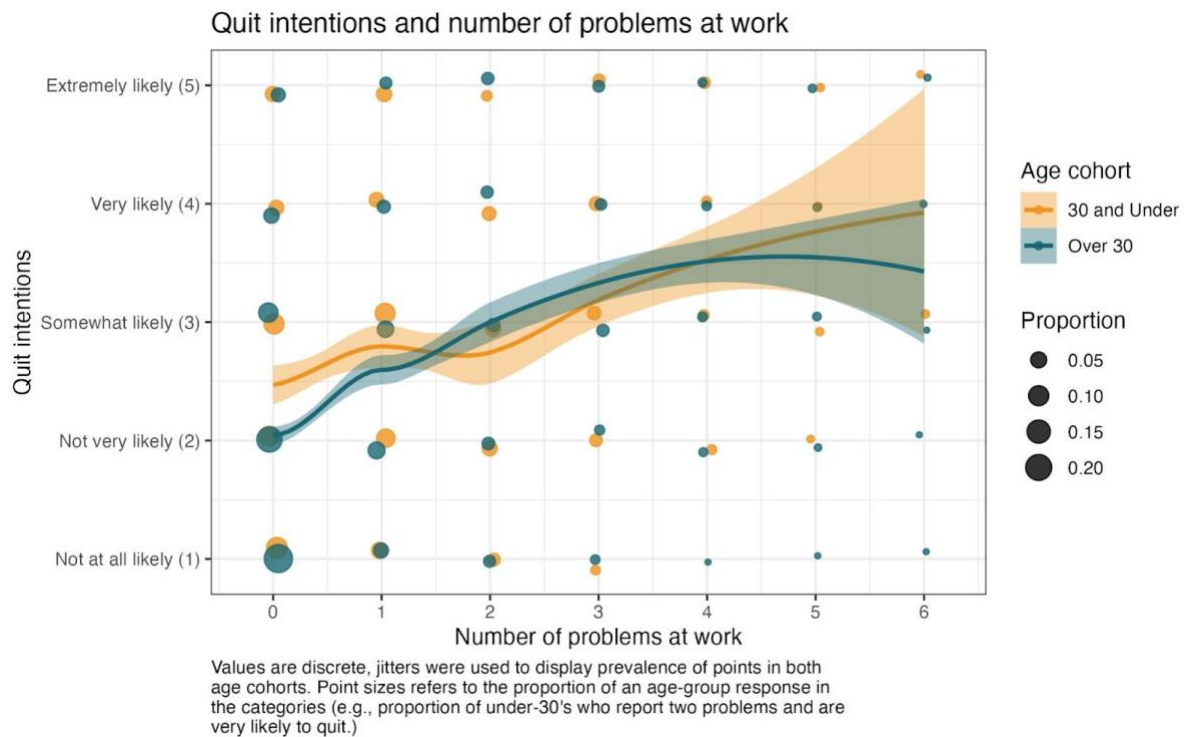


Figure 6: Workers with more problems at work are more likely to want to quit, regardless of age cohort. Curved lines are summary relationships, and the shaded regions are statistical uncertainty around these relationships (95% confidence bands)



## Support Networks and Interpersonal Relationships

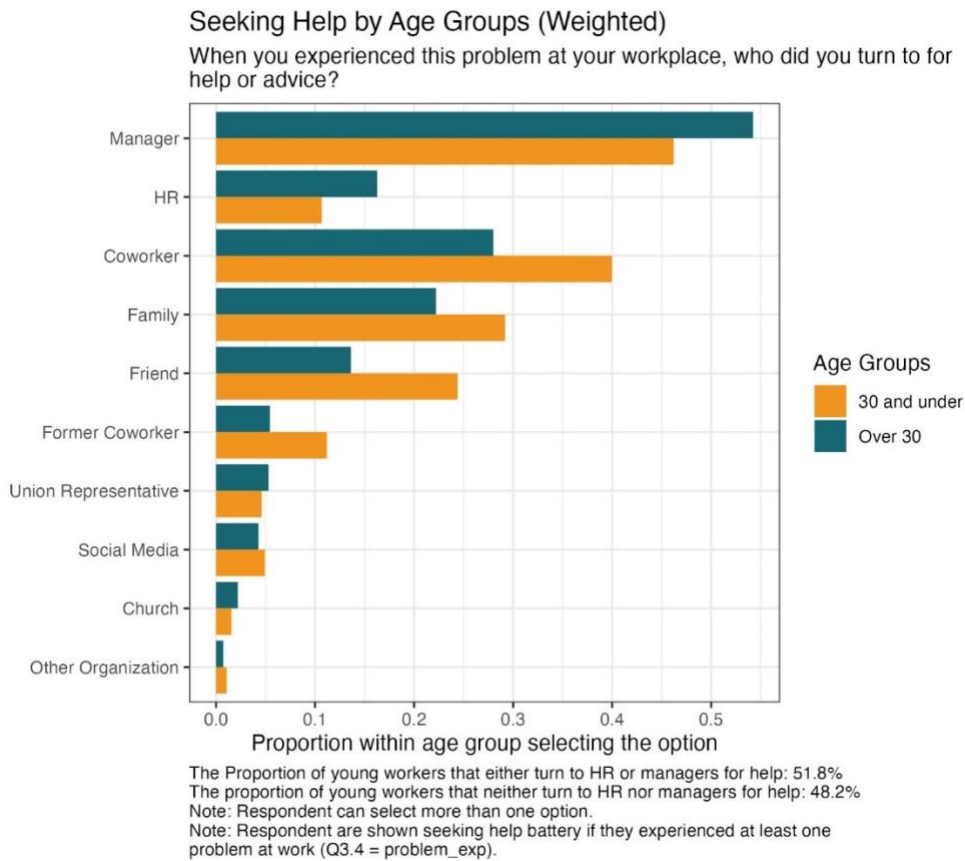
*Interpersonal relationships at work are equally important for younger and older workers. But younger workers are more likely to turn to friends and co-workers and less likely to use formal channels (such as HR) when experiencing problems at work. By the time managers or HR hear about problems, it may already be too late.*

Managers and human resources professionals have invested millions in fielding worker engagement surveys, creating feedback channels, maintaining intranet and social media accounts aimed at staff, and advertising their “open door” policies for worker concerns. Do workers avail themselves of these resources when confronting problems at work? Or do they use more “informal” channels?

We presented our respondents with a variety of resources they might use when confronting the workplace problems just described. Figure 7 summarizes the survey responses by age group. Younger workers are *less* likely to use formal channels (HR, managers, union representatives) to address problems at work. Just over half of younger workers will reach out to managers or HR representatives, compared to 61% of workers over 30. Younger workers are more likely to turn to informal networks, such as co-workers, friends, and family members to help with workplace

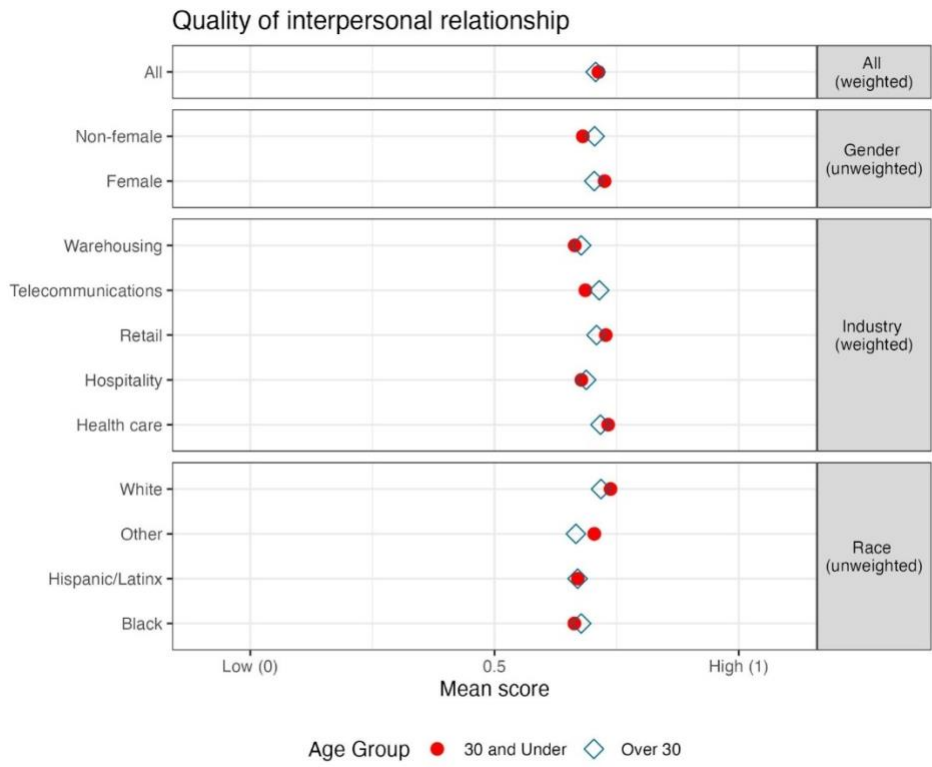
problems. For example, younger workers are about twice as likely to consult their friends compared to workers over 30.

**Figure 7: Workers are most likely to turn to managers when experiencing problems at work, but younger workers are shifting to more informal support networks.**



Younger workers’ reliance on informal support is reflected in the importance of interpersonal (“horizontal”) relationships on the job. We constructed a “quality of interpersonal relationships” (QIR) index by averaging responses across four survey questions asking about co-worker dependability; support; similarity in social activities; and the absence of racial conflict at their worksite. Figure 8 plots the average score for younger workers and workers over 30 across demographic and industry variables. It suggests that both age groups report similar quality of interpersonal relationships at work.

Figure 8: Younger and older workers report similar levels of relationship quality at the workplace.



'All' panel is weighted using final weights, while the 'industry' panel is weighted using industry-specific weights.

We link QIR with the likelihood of quitting in Figure 9. The downward-sloping lines show that workers—both older and younger—with higher QIR scores are less likely to have plans to quit.

Figure 9: Workers with better relationships at work are less likely to quit. Younger workers are, on average, more likely to be planning to quit at every level of QIR. Curved lines are summary relationships, and the shaded regions are 95% confidence bands.

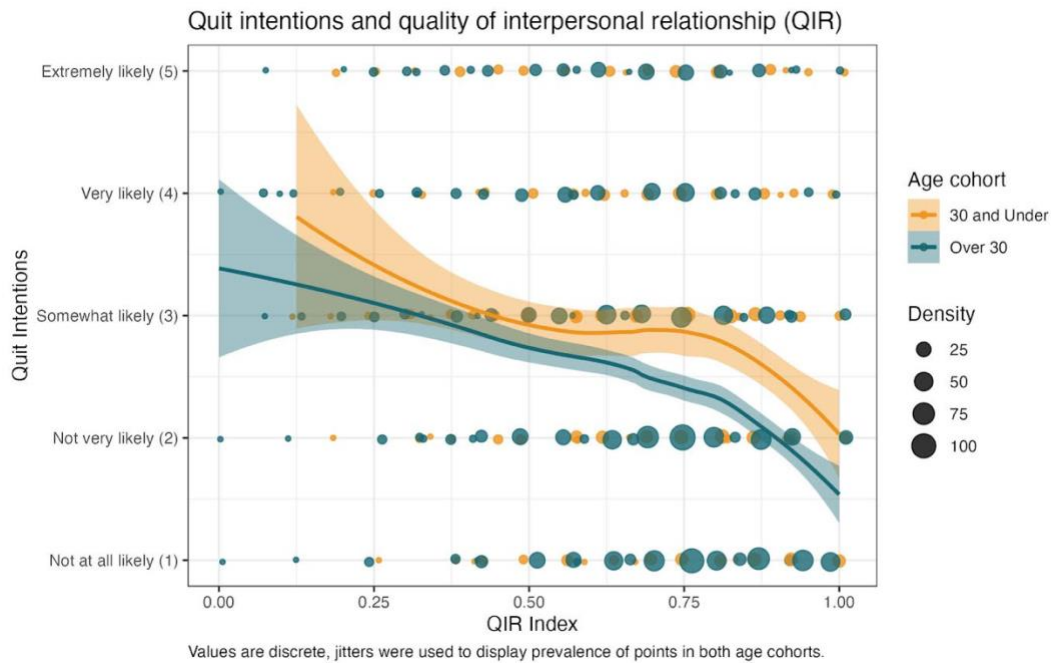


Figure 9 also shows that interpersonal relationships at work are not enough. Across the entire range of QIR scores, younger workers are, on average, more likely than older workers to be planning to quit. Taken together with our analysis of problems at work, retaining young workers requires attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships *and also* preempting problems at work, such as late or incorrect pay or conflict with management. Problems at work appear to signal a lack of respect and commitment to workers. Relative to older workers, younger workers are responding by avoiding formal channels, turning to informal networks and reducing their commitment to their current employer. By the time managers or HR hear about problems from younger workers, it may already be too late.

### Voice at Work

*Despite experiencing more workplace problems, younger workers are also reporting a smaller “voice gap” at work. Majorities of younger workers report a voice gap around wages, benefits, and promotion opportunities.*

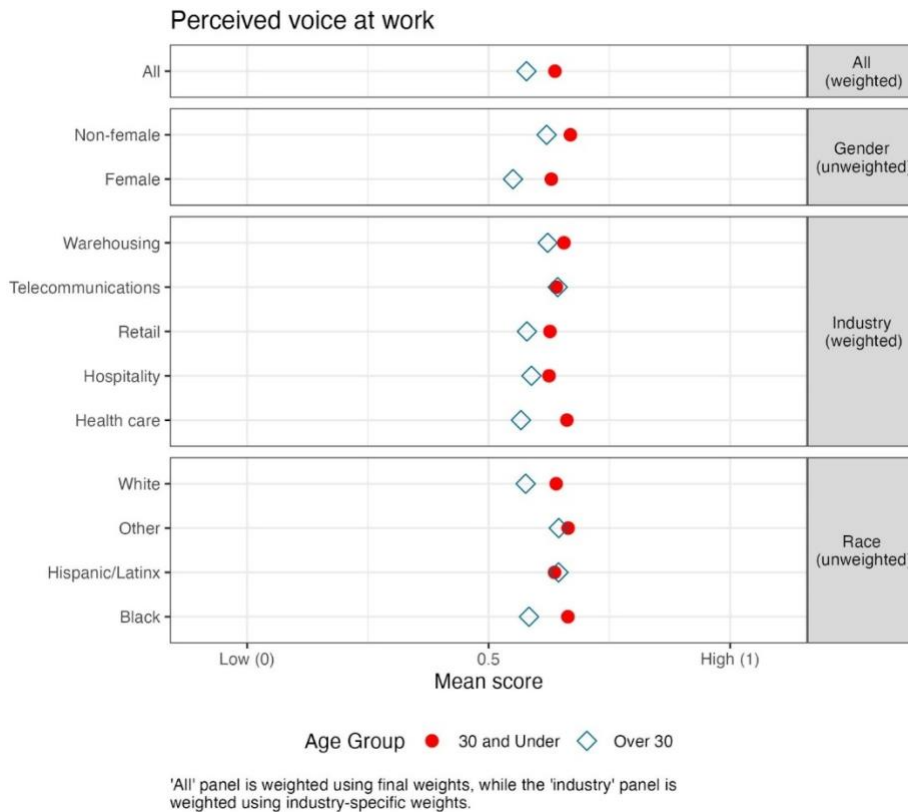
Albert Hirschman (1970) famously described the two main ways people respond to problems within organizations. They can simply withdraw and go elsewhere (“exit”) or stick around and try to make things better by expressing their opinions and increasing their engagement (“voice”). Exit might be simple, but it can produce a negative feedback loop, as the people with the best options leave first, causing additional performance declines and more exits. “Voice” can prevent or break the vicious cycle.

Members of the business, labor, and scholarly communities have all called for more “worker voice” as a way to improve worker satisfaction and retention as well as business performance (Adhvaryu, Molina, and Nyshadham 2019; Bahat, Kochan, and Rubenstein 2023; Detert and Burris 2016; Harvard Business Review 2019; Kochan et al. 2019, 2022). Meaningful influence over working conditions is core to creating “decent jobs” (Ahlquist 2023). But it is not always clear what we mean by “voice,” and the opportunities and desire to exercise voice may vary across different aspects of the job as well as across industries and types of workers.

We build on the survey work in Kochan et al. (2019), which asked respondents how much say they had on a variety of issues: wages, benefits, and safety, but also training, how to do the job, promotion opportunities, and scheduling. In our survey, we asked respondents “how much of a say or influence” they felt they had over the same issues. Those in the survey could respond with “about the right amount,” “less than I should, or “none.” To paint a picture of perceived voice, we averaged across these different areas to construct a summary index of perceived worker voice.

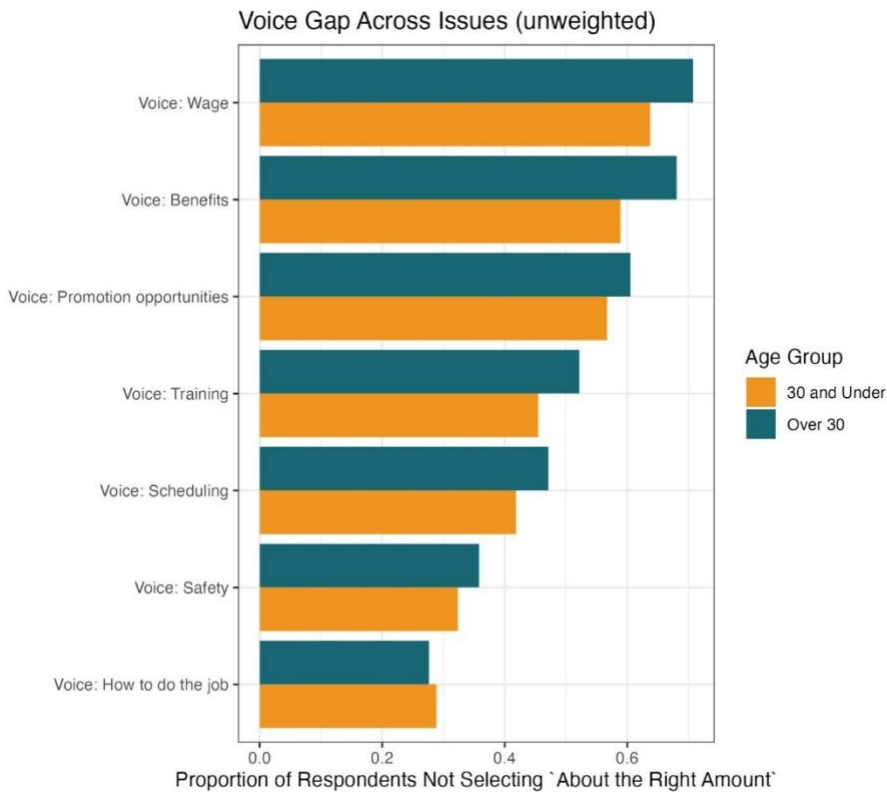
Figure 10 displays the average perceived voice, broken out by demographic categories and comparing younger to older workers. Surprisingly (considering our findings about problems on the job), we find that younger workers report slightly *higher* perceived voice scores. The largest age differences in perceived voice appear in healthcare and among female and Black workers. Perceived voice on the job helps predict quit intentions among younger workers. Young workers at the highest level of the voice index are about 27% lower on our measure of quit intentions compared to the younger workers at the lowest voice index level; among older workers, there is a negligible relationship. In the appendix, we also show that higher levels of perceived voice connect with lower support for unionization.

Figure 10: Younger workers report marginally higher levels of voice at work.



When we examine the individual components of the voice index, we see a somewhat more complex set of relationships. We follow Kochan et al. (2019) and highlight the “voice gap,” that is, the difference between the say a worker has on the job and the amount she believes she should have. In the WERN survey, we measure the voice gap as the percentage of respondents who state that they have *less than* “about the right amount” of say over various aspects of the job. In Figure 11, we display the voice gap by age group. The voice gap itself is greatest for wages, benefits, and promotion opportunities, mirroring the findings in Kochan et al. (2019). Also consistent with the earlier findings, younger workers report a *smaller* voice gap.

Figure 11: The proportion of workers stating that they had less than the “right amount” of say on various aspects of the job. Majorities of younger workers report a voice gap on wages, benefits, and promotions.



How does this more positive attitude toward voice relate to younger workers’ reduced attachment to their employers? One clear explanation is that younger workers experience more problems, and the problems at work outweigh (or invalidate) any initial perceptions of voice. Another possibility is the expectations workers have around voice, which we turn to next.

### Disconnect Between Perceived Voice and Experienced Problems

*Younger workers report more voice and more problems at the workplace. This disconnect suggests that younger workers have different expectations for how much say they should have on the job or different interpretations of what “voice” means.*

Does perceived voice reflect workers’ reported experiences on the job? Do workers who report more voice experience fewer problems on the job? In our sample, the answer is no. The clearest way to see this in our data is by considering workers’ reported scheduling instability (a composite of how often workers report the cancellation or last-minute change to a scheduled shift) and workers’ reported voice over scheduling issues. Figure 12 presents this comparison, showing that younger workers experience higher levels of schedule instability, yet they also report having *more* voice on scheduling compared to older workers. In the industries where there is no appreciable



difference in scheduling instability across age groups (warehousing and telecommunications), younger workers report marginally *less* voice in scheduling.

Figure 12: Younger workers report more scheduling instability problems but also more voice on scheduling.



When looking at the overall voice index, we find that it has virtually no correlation with the number of problems people reported at work. This disconnect between perceived voice and problems at work, particularly between younger and older workers, suggests that workers might have different *expectations* for how much say they should have on the job or different interpretations of “voice”. Existing research indicates that, regardless of stated corporate policy managers’ intent, most workers do not speak up due to both fear and a sense of futility (Detert and Burris 2016). This is consistent with our survey data: 30% say that they are afraid to raise questions for fear of manager retaliation. But reported fear of retaliation is effectively uncorrelated with respondents’ perceptions of voice on the job. So, when asked, workers may report having “some” or “about the right amount” of say, *given* their lower expectations. This problem seems particularly acute when we look at younger workers. In the next section, we uncover further evidence of a voice (and expectations) gap as we explore younger workers’ interest in labor unions.

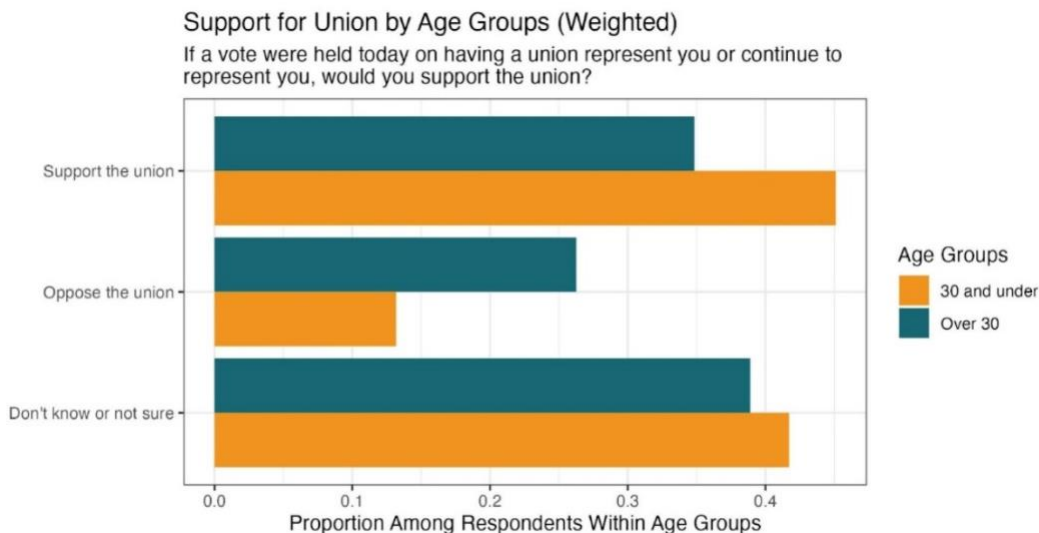
## Younger Workers Are “Union Curious”

*A large plurality of younger workers would vote for a union. Outright majorities of younger workers in healthcare, telecommunications, and warehousing would vote for unionization. But there is a substantial minority who are uncertain, especially in retail and hospitality. Younger workers are more positive than older workers about unions as a vehicle for voice at work and in government, but there is a substantial group of younger workers who are unsure.*

Different people mean different things when talking about “worker voice.” Executives and human resources professionals might imagine new ways for workers to voice opinions through surveys or even specialized apps. But labor unions are the legal and organizational vehicle through which workers independently express workers’ collective desires to management. And we have seen an increase in both union organizing and support for unionization (Kochan et al. 2019, 2022), with executives sometimes reacting counterproductively to worker demands (Bahat and Kochan 2023). We asked our respondents whether they would support unionization and whether they would expect unions to improve worker voice around various issues. In general, we find that support for unions far outweighs outright opposition, consistent with other recent survey work. Importantly, however, there is a substantial group of workers who are undecided or uncertain about unions and what they might offer.

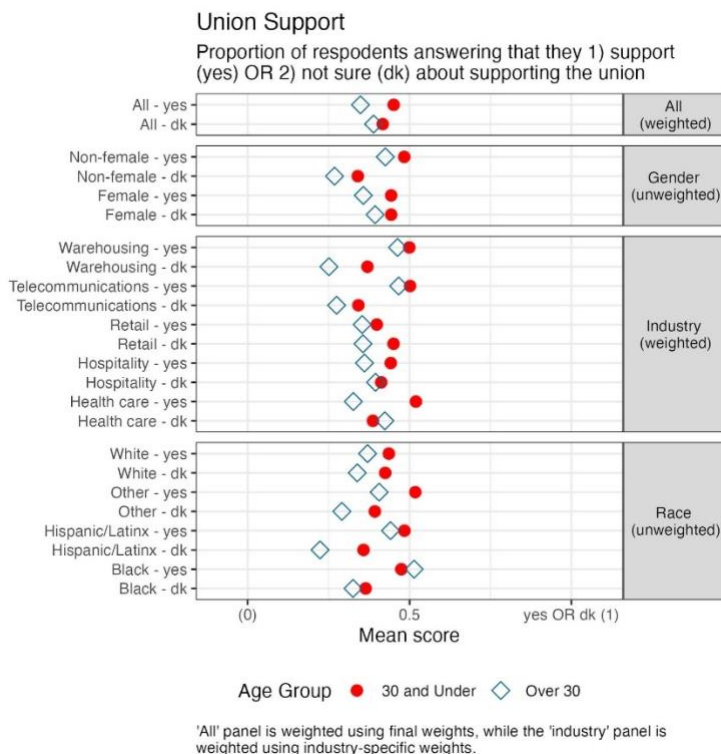
The standard survey question for union support asks whether a respondent would vote for union representation. Figure 13 displays the responses from our sample. Consistent with other recent findings, we see strong support for unionization, especially among younger workers. Younger workers are also about half as likely to oppose union representation as older workers. But the larger conversation around unionization tends to overlook the significant minority of workers who are *unsure* about their view of union representation. In fact, over one-third of younger workers are unsure and “don’t know” is the modal response among older workers.

Figure 13: Younger workers strongly support unions.



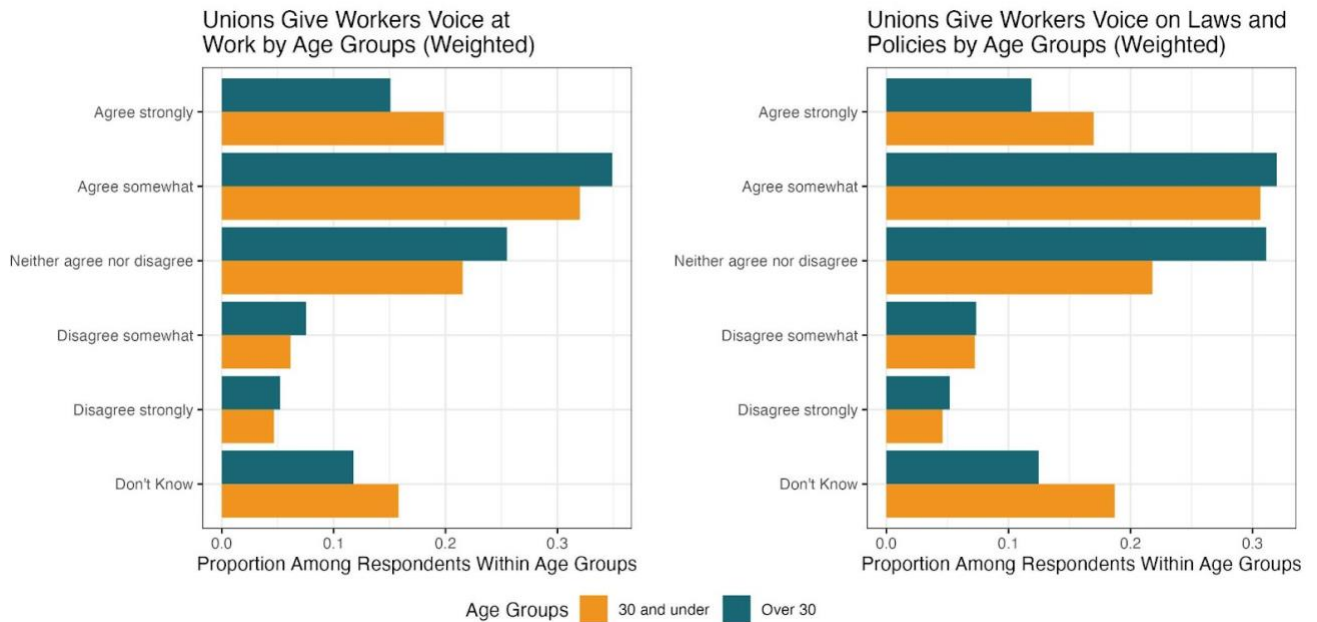
When we break out union support by demographics and industry (Figure 14), we uncover additional variation. Union support generally exceeds opposition, especially in warehousing. Young workers are consistently more supportive of unions, but there is a large proportion of respondents unsure of union representation. Uncertainty is highest among women and healthcare workers. The age gap in union uncertainty is largest among warehousing workers and Latino workers. Healthcare workers have the largest age gap in support for union representation.

Figure 14: Union Support Across Demographic and Industry Variables, including those who responded “don’t know.”



While younger workers are more supportive of unions, what are their attitudes towards unions' supposed ability to deliver worker “voice”? Figure 15 shows that younger workers are more confident in unions' ability to improve both voice at work and voice on policies and laws. At the same time, however, younger workers also display a larger proportion of respondents stating that they are unsure about unions' connection to worker voice. Taken together, our sample reinforces the idea that workers today are quite open to unions and view them as one possible vehicle for improved influence on the job. But there remains substantial pockets of uncertainty, especially among younger workers. This state of affairs represents a window of opportunity for both unions and management to improve their communication with younger workers and, ideally, lay out a vision for productive collaboration and improving working conditions (Bahat, Kochan, and Rubenstein 2023).

Figure 15: Younger workers see unions as effective vehicles for a voice at work, but there are a larger proportion of younger workers who are undecided.



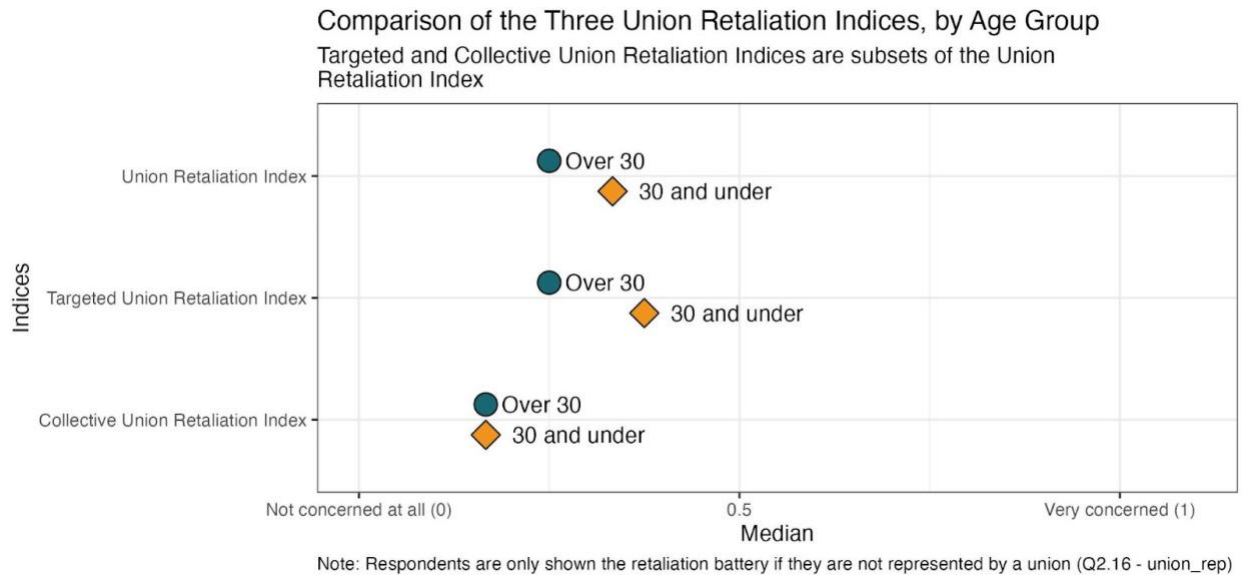
### Younger Workers Are More Concerned About Management Retaliation for Supporting Unions

*Younger workers are more likely to be worried that management will target them personally in retaliation for supporting a union. They are less concerned with collective forms of retaliation, such as plant closures and strategic automation. Fears of targeted retaliation imply that management has a potentially serious trust problem with younger frontline workers.*

Exploiting this opportunity will be challenging. Workers, in general, are understandably fearful of employer retaliation for supporting a unionization drive. Younger workers are especially concerned about targeted retaliation.

We asked respondents about a variety of ways that employers might respond to unionization efforts, including reduced promotion opportunities, reduced work hours, changed shifts or transfers, employment termination, job outsourcing, job automation, and closing the establishment entirely. From these questions, we construct a union retaliation index. We also constructed two sub-indices. The “targeted retaliation” index averages across the first four items that indicate employer retaliation targeted at specific individuals. The collective retaliation index includes only those final three items that involve retaliation against whole groups of workers. Figure 16 displays the differences in the retaliation indices by age group. Younger workers are more concerned about retaliation than older workers. The difference in concern comes entirely from differences in fears about retaliation targeted at individual workers.

Figure 16: Younger Workers Are More Concerned About Union Retaliation.



All told, younger workers are more likely to view unions as a vehicle for voice on the job and more supportive of unionization, but they are also more concerned about management retaliation for supporting a union. This is consistent with the idea that younger workers have lower expectations for what kind of say they should expect to have on the job and a reduced willingness to use existing formal channels to address workplace problems. These lowered expectations reflect a potentially serious level of distrust in management and a lack of credibility in management’s professed commitments. Ultimately this manifests as weaker worker attachment to any particular job or employer among younger frontline workers.

## Conclusion

2023 is a year of both promise and uncertainty for young workers. Young workers are reaping the benefits of a tight labor market (Bahn and Zickuhr 2022). Despite having fewer opportunities to own homes, this labor market is helping younger workers catch up to their parents in terms of building wealth (Cook 2022). At the same time, these gains in income and wealth among young Americans are more unequal (Kent and Ricketts 2021b), with prosperity less broadly shared than in older generations (Kent and Ricketts 2021a). Young workers in low-wage industries are often unsatisfied with their pay and working conditions, with some even taking to social media to engage in “live quitting” of their jobs (Tatum 2023). Young workers are culturally distinct (Dua et al. 2022; Francis 2022; Kislik 2022), digitally literate, and on the frontlines with respect to the implementation of new workplace technologies—including surveillance and monitoring technologies (Parkes 2023). Young workers in low-wage industries also continue to be at greater risk of the tragic consequences of unsafe working conditions (Mayorquin 2023).

These and other trends have led to increased media attention on workers' experiences. While anecdotes abound, there has been less systematic analysis of young workers' experiences and attitudes. This report steps in to fill this gap.

This report investigated the attitudes and experiences of young, front-line workers in five low-wage industries in the U.S. The survey is extensive, providing a broad view of workers' beliefs about their satisfaction, voice, and autonomy on the job—and their feelings about who they can turn to for help when they experience problems.

Our findings are nuanced but paint a picture of both promise and uncertainty. Young workers report having *more* voice on the job than older workers, but also more problems at work and less stability in employment. As with older workers, the young workers who report more problems at work are less satisfied with their job and are more likely to consider quitting.

Young workers see promise in organized labor, with supermajorities of those having an opinion saying that they would vote for union representation. However, many are unsure about unionization, and younger workers are more concerned about retaliation from their employers for unionizing.

Taken together, these findings suggest that younger workers may have lower expectations about what they can reasonably expect of employers and how much influence they can have by speaking up on the job. As a result, younger workers are less likely to use formal channels for grievances, less attached to their jobs, and substantially more supportive of labor unions. Younger workers are telling us that, by the time management hears about problems, it is probably too late.

Firms have a choice about how to respond to young workers who seek union representation in their workplaces—with defensive opposition, or with collaboration. All-out opposition has been the default strategy for many firms in recent decades, but combative opposition risks fraying workplace relationships, hindering recruitment of dedicated employees, and tarnishing brand reputations.

This study also suggests that there are opportunities for unions and employers to engage young workers in decision-making and problem-solving around questions of technology, scheduling, conflict management, and other workplace issues. This should entail communicating with young workers clearly, early, and often about how they can make their voices heard at work—and what they can expect in response. It also means developing policies, partnerships, and management practices that credibly signal a willingness to invest in younger workers for the long term. A collaboration with labor organizing is one potential and underappreciated way to send these credible signals in ways that can benefit both workers and employers.

## About the Authors

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## Appendix

### *Sample Demographics*

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and employment breakdown of the survey respondents. 24% ( $n = 626$ ) of respondents were 30 years old or younger.

56% of young workers identify as female, compared to 44% of workers over 30. Workers were asked to select which racial or ethnic identity best described them: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino/Latina, or Other. 50% of younger workers identify as non-white compared to 29% of workers over 30. Those who selected the “Other” category were then provided open-ended space to describe their racial/ethnic background; most of these workers identified as racially mixed.

Young workers are 9 percentage points more likely to speak a language other than English at home (28% vs. 19%). Geographically, younger workers are more likely to live in large cities (32%) compared to workers over 30 (27%). 22% of young workers have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 34% for workers over 30. Young workers in the sample also report having more precarious benefits and employment classification. Young workers are 8.1 percentage-points more likely to be temporary employees or independent contractors (16% versus 8%). Young workers are nearly 12 percentage points less likely to have employer-provided healthcare (69% versus 80%).

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

	Under 30	Over 30
Female	56%	44%
PoC/non-white	50%	29%
Language other than English	28%	19%
Large city resident	32%	27%
BA/BS or higher	34%	30%
Temp/independent contractor	16%	8%
Employer health insurance	69%	80%

Note: unweighted percentages for respondent demographics and worker characteristics.

Figure 17: Predicting quit intentions.

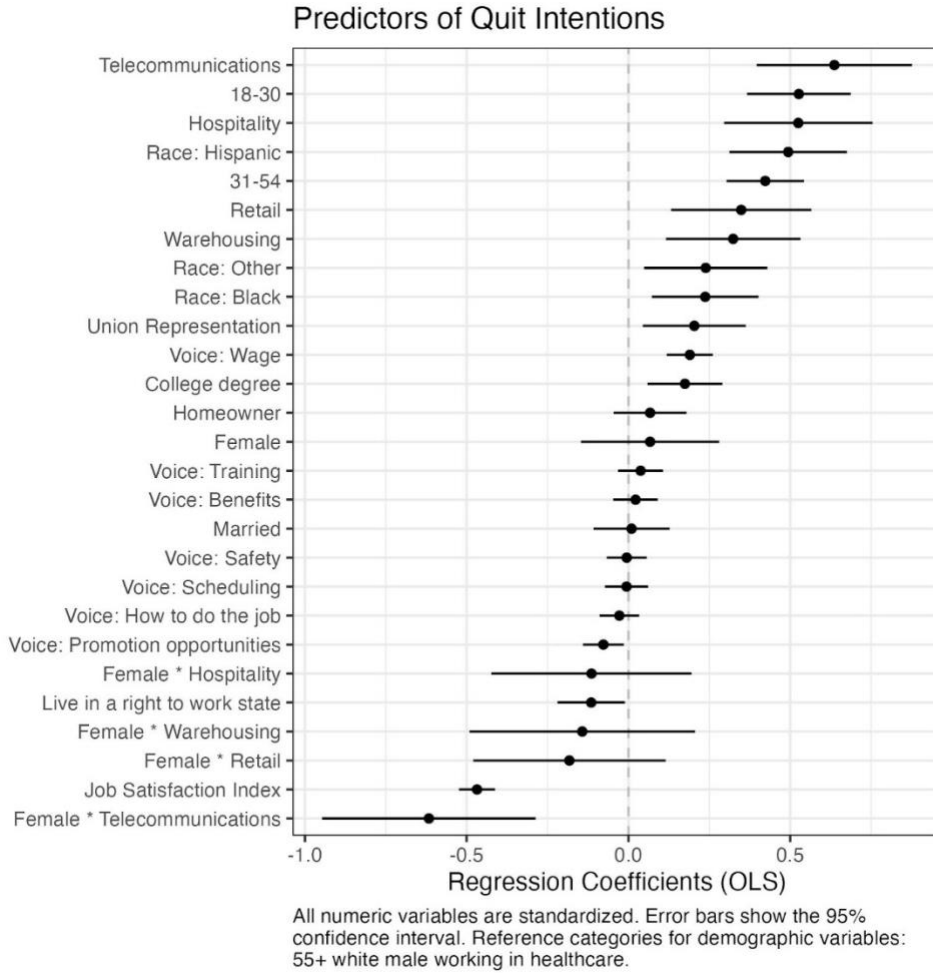
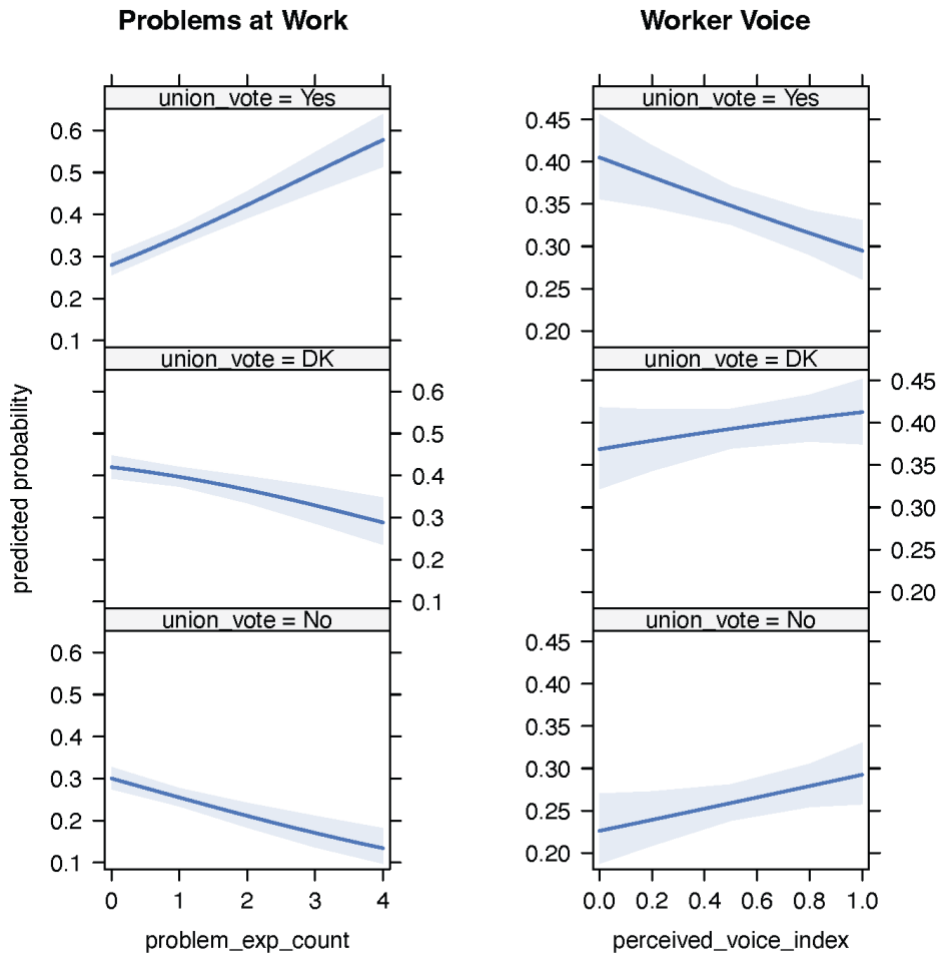


Figure 18: Predicted vote for unionization from multinomial logistic regression. More problems make workers more likely to support unionization and less uncertain. Greater sati with voice at work reduces support for unionization.



Note: Sample is non-union workers . Models control for age, race, gender, industry, and education. Shaded regions are 95% confidence intervals.

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