

Union Representation During a Pandemic

**The Case of K-12 School
COVID Protocols, Public
Health and
Individual Autonomy**

January 25, 2024

I ILLINOIS

School of Labor &
Employment Relations
Project for Middle Class Renewal

Kwon Hee Han
Tingting Zhang, PhD
Robert Bruno, PhD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the Illinois educational workforce, creating a complex interplay between public health measures, individual autonomy, and union dynamics. This report, based on a survey of Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) members, highlights these multifaceted responses to vaccine mandates and the intricate position of teachers' unions during these unprecedented times.

Key Findings:

Vaccine Attitudes: Most respondents were vaccinated (76%) and held positive views on vaccines (>60%). Opinions on *vaccine mandates* were divided, with 47% fully supporting mandatory workplace vaccination and around 40% firmly against it.

Regional Variations in Responses: Support for vaccine mandates was higher in Chicago (61%) compared to non-Chicago urban (49%) and nonurban (31%) areas. In contrast, nonurban respondents were more likely to oppose financial penalties for non-compliance (57.8%) than those in other regions. This polarization underscores the challenge for unions in navigating safety concerns and personal choice.

Workplace Responses to Vaccine Mandates: Despite Governor J.B. Pritzker's executive order, a third of respondents indicated that their jobs were exempt from the vaccine mandate. Additionally, 17% felt their school districts did not provide adequate virus protection measures other than vaccine mandate, possibly indicating non-enforcement of state directives.

Union Communication and Member Perceptions: A significant portion of respondents (43%) were unaware of their union's position on vaccine mandates, pointing to a communication gap. There was a regional disparity in perceptions of union communication and effective representation of membership interests, with Chicago members generally more satisfied than those in nonurban areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the work experience of educators in Illinois, testing the resilience and adaptability of IFT local unions. Despite the contentious nature of vaccine mandates and varied member opinions, most members acknowledged the effectiveness of their unions in representing diverse perspectives while ensuring safety. The report highlights the need for improved union-member communication and offers insights into union strategies for future crises.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction-----	4
Illinois Workers’ Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic -----	5
Unions and Union Members’ Response to the Mandate-----	6
Survey Findings -----	8
Impact of COVID-19 on Illinois Educators-----	8
IFT Member Vaccination Status and Opinions about Vaccination Mandates -----	9
Did the Controversy Weaken the Support for the Union? -----	18
Conclusion-----	21
References -----	22
Appendix -----	25

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kwon Hee Han is a Ph.D. student in the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He earned a Master of Science in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Business Administration from Yonsei University.

Tingting Zhang, PhD is an Assistant Professor at the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research primarily explores unions as organizations and the role of digital voice within the evolving landscape of the future of work. She has published in journals such as the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *International Migration Review*, *Industrial Relations Journal*, and *Education Finance and Policy*.

Robert Bruno, PhD is Professor and Director at the Labor Education Program at the University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign’s School of Labor and Employment Relations. His research focuses broadly on working-class and union studies issues. He is the author of five books: *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown*, *Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Local 705 Story*, *Justified by Work: Identity and the Meaning of Faith in Chicago’s Working-Class Churches*, *A Fight for the Soul of Public Education: The Chicago Teachers Strike* and *What Work Is*. He has also published articles in such journals as *Workplace Democracy*, *Labor Studies Journal*, *Labor History*, *Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations*, *Working USA* and the *Journal of Labor Research*.

ABOUT THE PROJECT FOR MIDDLE CLASS RENEWAL

The Project for Middle Class Renewal’s mission is to investigate the working conditions of workers in today’s economy and elevate public discourse on issues affecting workers with research, analysis and education in order to develop and propose public policies that will reduce poverty, provide forms of representation to all workers, prevent gender, race, and LGBTQ+ discrimination, create more stable forms of employment, and promote middle-class paying jobs. Each year, the Project publishes critical research studies and holds education forums on contemporary public policies and practices impacting labor and workplace issues. If you would like to partner with the Labor Education Program in supporting the work of the Project or have questions about the Project please contact Robert Bruno, Director of the Labor Education Program, at (312) 996-2491.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the Illinois educational workforce. Among the various workplace protection measures instituted to counteract the COVID-19 virus, the implementation of mandatory vaccination emerged as the most contentious, primarily due to its perceived infringement upon the individual's autonomy in making health-related decisions. This issue placed teachers' unions in a complex predicament, necessitating a delicate equilibrium between advocating for public health on a collective basis and acknowledging the diverse beliefs and stances within their membership. A critical question arose: Would this turmoil potentially undermine support for the unions?

To gain insights into the experiences of Illinois educators during the pandemic, particularly as it was drawing to a close, and to gather data on other work-related issues, the Project for Middle Class Renewal administered a 63-item online Qualtrics survey to local members of the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) between April and May 2022. Participation in the survey was voluntary and available to all union members. Out of 1,386 respondents, 963 furnished complete information on the two principal areas of interest (vaccine & mandate attitude and opinion on union performance). Among them, 777 individuals reported their location of work, which enabled regional comparison. In this report, school districts are categorized as Chicago, non-Chicago urban, or nonurban based on counties and postal codes of work locations provided by survey respondents. Nonurban counties are defined either as not within a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) per the U.S. Census Bureau or as part of an MSA but with a population under 60,000, following definitions by the Illinois Primary Health Care Association (IPHCA, 2020) and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (2003). The sample was representative of the IFT membership. The demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in the Appendix Figures 1 and 2.

The report begins by examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor force in Illinois. It proceeds with a summary of the diverse positions that unions have adopted regarding COVID-19 vaccination mandates. Subsequently, it provides a comprehensive analysis of survey findings on union members' reactions to the vaccine mandate, along with their awareness of workplace policies and their unions' positions on the mandate. Following this, the report assesses union members' views on the communication and efficacy of their unions. The report culminates with a brief overview of the findings.

ILLINOIS WORKERS' EXPERIENCE

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Workers in Illinois experienced significant adverse effects. One month into the pandemic, several reports projected that Illinois economy would be profoundly impacted by the pandemic, including unprecedented levels of unemployment, economic disruption concentrated in key industries, plummeting tax revenue, and skyrocketing state expenditure to protect vulnerable populations (e.g., University of Illinois System, 2020a; 2020b). As the pandemic continued, severe impacts on Illinois workers unfolded. The unemployment rate in Illinois reached 16.5 percent in April 2020 (Illinois Future of Work Task Force, 2022). Small businesses reported on average a 40% decline in revenue due to the initial stay-at-home order and the sizable negative effects lasted for months (University of Illinois System, 2020c). Approximately a quarter of workers were reported to be directly impacted at the beginning of the pandemic (Hill, 2020). This significant proportion can be partly attributed to the fact that more than half of the state's workforce were designated "essential" workers (Manzo & Bruno, 2020). By 2022, total state employment was down by four percent, compared to 2019, with significant gender, racial, regional, and sectoral discrepancy (Dunn et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had effects on the post-pandemic workforce in Illinois. As of April 2022, while the unemployment rate showed a notable decrease, it remained elevated in comparison to the levels observed in the pre-pandemic period (Illinois Future of Work Task Force, 2022). Additionally, the recovery process exhibited persistent disparities, indicating an uneven return to employment stability across various sectors and demographics within the state (Illinois Future of Work Task Force, 2022). This situation underscores the long-term implications of the pandemic on the labor market and highlights the need for targeted interventions to address these ongoing disparities in the workforce recovery process (Dickson et al., 2021; Manzo & Bruno, 2020).

The pandemic appears to have significantly affected the educational workforce in Illinois. A survey conducted in 2020 revealed that the pre-existing issue of teacher shortages was exacerbated by the pandemic. Additionally, school districts anticipated that this situation would deteriorate further in the future (The Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, 2020). This finding underscores the profound impact of the pandemic on the educational sector in Illinois, highlighting not only the immediate challenges but also the potential for long-term implications in terms of staffing and educational delivery. According to an October 2020 survey, the overwhelming majority of educational workforce found that teaching and learning became more difficult, and one in three teachers considered leaving the profession (Illinois Education Association, 2021). In addition, teachers attendance fell by 22.9 percent in fall 2021 when the in-person instruction resumed (Hancock & Adams, 2023). Despite those findings, there remains a limited understanding of how educators navigated the pandemic-related specific workplace issues (Advance Illinois, 2022; Bruno & Christen, 2021).

UNIONS AND UNION MEMBERS' RESPONSE TO THE MANDATE

The vaccination mandate has emerged as a critical issue in workplace health and safety. As workers navigate the risks of exposure in their workplaces, the decisions of unions and employers can have significant implications for worker safety and labor relations. Labor unions have played an active role in the debates and dialogues surrounding this topic. Following the announcement of a vaccination mandate Executive Order by the White House, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) published a succinct memorandum on November 10, 2021. This memo provided a legal framework for the implementation of the mandate within unionized workplaces: employers were not required to negotiate changes in employment terms and conditions that are statutorily mandated (NLRB, 2021:2). However, employers had to engage in bargaining with the union representatives regarding discretionary actions permitted by the emergency temporary standards (ETS) issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA, 2021).

For instance, the ETS stipulates that employees who fail to comply with the vaccine mandate should not be present at the workplace, but it does not compel employers to dismiss these employees. In such situations, employers are obligated to negotiate with unions on how to manage non-compliant employees, unless the unions relinquish their right to bargain. As a result, some corporations, including Disney, have enacted distinct vaccine policies for their unionized and non-unionized employees (Gibson, 2022).

Labor unions across the country have adopted dramatically different official positions on the vaccination mandate, with some actively opposing it. Although COVID-19 was the leading cause of death among police officers in 2020 and 2021, police unions in multiple states have pursued legal actions, threatened resignations, and even openly encouraged members to disregard the mandates (Griffith, 2021; Jeong, 2021). The clash between the mayor of Chicago and police union chief over vaccine mandate caught national attention (Bosman, 2021). Similarly, firefighters' unions have expressed disapproval, arguing that vaccine requirements violate their members' right to personal choice (Vernuccio, 2021). The Southwest Airline Pilots Association has maintained that receiving a vaccine should be an individual pilot's decision (SWAPA, 2021; Vernuccio, 2021). The United Steelworkers (USW) declared their opposition to mandatory vaccinations as a condition of employment or as a mandate at the state or federal level (United Steelworkers, 2020; 2021). In California, a public-sector union challenged the state's vaccine or testing mandates on the grounds that such a mandate represents a change in employment terms and conditions, necessitating negotiations with the union before implementation (Adams, 2021). The dispute eventually resulted in a settlement with the state. In the hospitality sector and at companies like Boeing and GE, some unions have adopted a more active stance. Union members have organized demonstrations and walkouts to uphold their "freedom of choice" and protest employer-imposed mandates (Singleton, 2021).

Some unions have expressed support for vaccinations while concurrently opposing the mandates. Transportation unions like the Teamsters and the American Trucking Association have advocated for voluntary vaccination, yet they have strongly contested the mandate through legal channels, citing potential severe repercussions for the supply chain and the economy (American Trucking Associations, 2022; Teamsters Local, 2010; 2021). The American Postal Workers Union has also stood against the mandate, although it has encouraged members to get vaccinated on a voluntary basis (American Postal Workers Union, 2021). The Allied Pilots Association is not against vaccines or mandates per se, but the Association stresses the importance of considering the pilots' concerns and needs while ensuring a safe work environment (DeMarche, 2021).

UNIONS AND UNION MEMBERS' RESPONSE TO THE MANDATE

In contrast, the AFL-CIO, which is the largest federation of unions in the United States, supported the Executive Order on vaccine mandates from the outset (AFL-CIO, 2021). Likewise, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, representing a significant number of workers in the building trades, and UNITE HERE, a union for hospitality and service industry workers, were in favor of mandatory vaccinations (Cohen, 2021; UNITE HERE, 2021). The National Nurses Union was also a proponent of the mandates, advocating for the safety of healthcare workers (National Nurses United, 2021).

The stance of the national teachers' unions on the vaccine mandate was fluid. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers initially deemed vaccination mandates unnecessary (Perez Jr., 2021; Will, 2021). Over time, their positions evolved from reluctance to an endorsement of workplace vaccine mandates (American Federation of Teachers, 2021a; 2021b; Heavey, 2021; Ujifusa, 2021), leaving the specific bargaining up to local chapters (Heavey, 2021; Smylie, 2022).

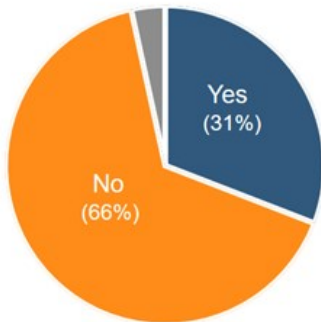
SURVEY FINDINGS

Impact of COVID-19 on Illinois Educators

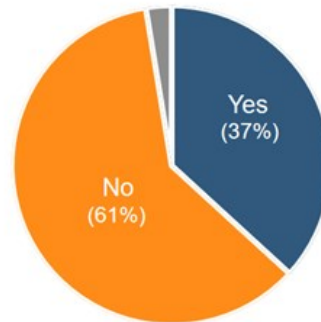
Educators in Illinois were profoundly impacted by the pandemic. As shown in Figure 1, approximately one third (31%) of our respondents reported experiencing isolation due to infection, with a slightly higher percentage (37%) having been quarantined due to exposure or close contact. Moreover, an overwhelming majority (94%) were aware of a colleague at work who had contracted COVID-19, and nearly half (49%) knew someone who passed away due to the virus. The data showed no significant statistical differences in the impact of COVID-19 on individuals from Chicago, urban areas outside Chicago, and nonurban school districts of Illinois (Table 1).

Figure 1: The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

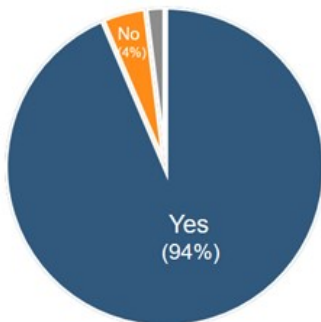
(a) Isolation Experience due to Covid-19 Infection



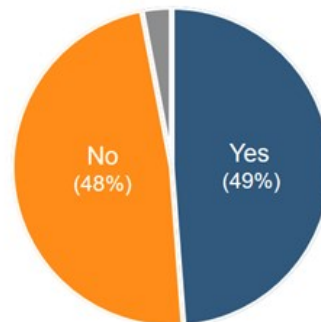
(b) Quarantine Experience due to Exposure/Close Contact



(c) Know Someone from Work who had Covid-19



(d) Know Someone who Passed Away due to Covid-19



SURVEY FINDINGS

Table 1: Regional Variations in Covid-19 Impact

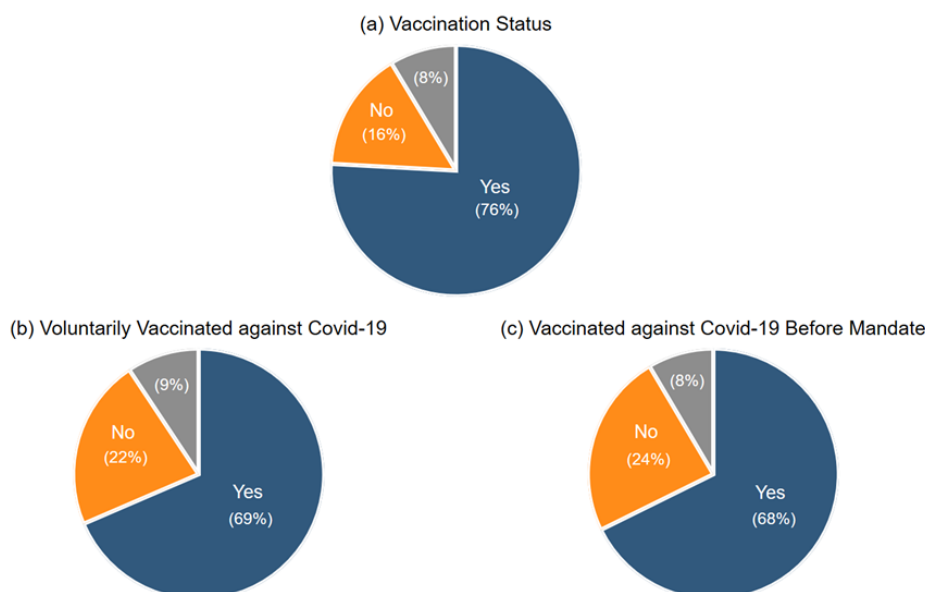
	Chicago (N=200)			Urban Non-Chicago (N=532)			Nonurban (N=45)		
	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer
Isolation Experience	28%	69%	3%	31%	66%	3%	40%	60%	0%
Quarantine Experience	35%	64%	1%	38%	60%	2%	40%	60%	0%
Know Someone had Covid-19	94%	5%	1%	95%	4%	1%	98%	2%	0%
Know Someone who Passed Away	48%	49%	3%	49%	49%	2%	47%	47%	6%

IFT Member Vaccination Status and Opinions about Vaccination Mandates

IFT local unions had broad autonomy to tailor their policies to member needs. To better understand the degree of differences among IFT members and the main concerns driving their opinions on vaccines and mandates in schools, survey respondents were asked about their vaccination status and their attitudes towards the vaccine, as well as their school district’s vaccine policy.

As seen in Figure 2, a large majority (76%) of respondents were vaccinated; 69% were voluntarily vaccinated, and 68% were vaccinated prior to the announcement of a vaccine mandate. The data showed no significant statistical differences between educators working in Chicago, urban areas outside Chicago, and nonurban regions of Illinois (Table 2).

Figure 2: Vaccination Status



SURVEY FINDINGS

Table 2: Regional Variations in Vaccination Status

	Chicago (N=200)			Urban Non-Chicago (N=532)			Nonurban (N=45)		
	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer
Vaccination Status	82%	12%	6%	78%	15%	7%	76%	15%	9%
Voluntary Vaccination	72%	21%	7%	72%	21%	7%	71%	16%	13%
Proactive Vaccination	69%	24%	7%	72%	21%	7%	69%	20%	11%

Attitudes towards the COVID-19 vaccine and mandate policy were measured by six questions in our survey (Table 3). Respondents were given a range of options from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” to express their level of agreement.

Table 3: Survey Items of Vaccine and Mandate Attitude

Survey Items	
Question 1	The COVID-19 vaccine is important for protecting the overall public health of our communities.
Question 2	The COVID-19 vaccine is an important tool to decrease the spread of the disease.
Question 3	The COVID-19 vaccine should be mandatory for frontline essential workers like myself.
Question 4	The vaccine mandate made me feel safer on my job.
Question 5	Non-compliance with vaccine mandates at work should be financially penalized (e.g., fine, suspension, and termination).
Question 6	The vaccine mandate is necessary for workers like me because we need to set a good example for the public.
All items are measured by 5-point Likert scale. (1: Strongly disagree; 2: Somewhat disagree; 3: Neither agree nor disagree; 4: Somewhat Agree; Strongly agree)	

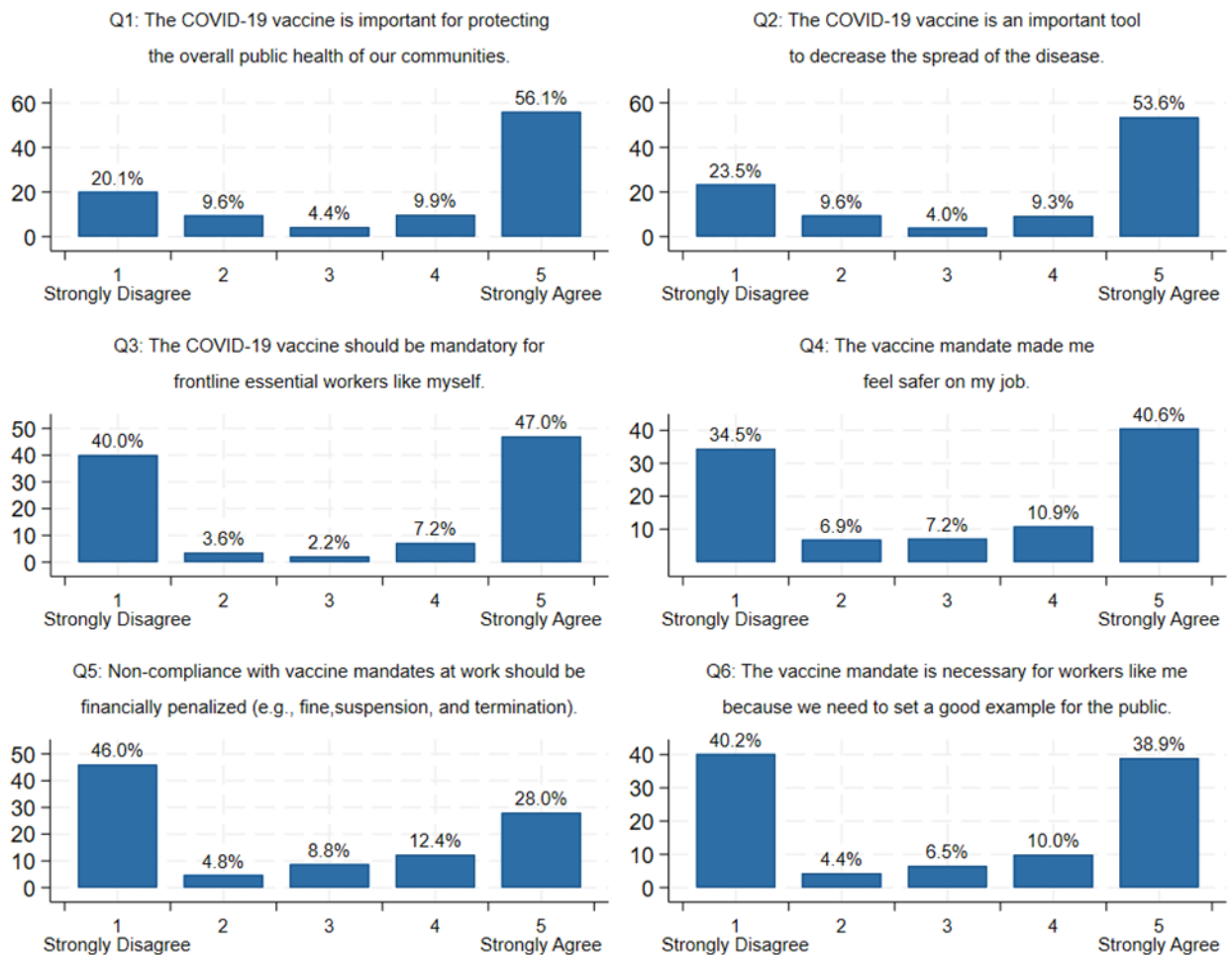
SURVEY FINDINGS

Figure 3 shows the distribution of answers to these questions. A notably larger proportion of survey respondents expressed a positive attitude on the vaccine: 56% and 54% strongly agreed with the statements “The COVID-19 vaccine is important for protecting the overall public health of our communities” and “The COVID-19 vaccine is an important tool to decrease the spread of the disease,” respectively. However, approximately one in five respondents strongly disagreed with these statements.

The views on vaccine mandates were more polarized. Over one third of the respondents, strongly concurred with the statements, “The COVID-19 vaccine should be mandatory for frontline essential workers like myself,” “The vaccine mandate made me feel safer on my job,” and “The vaccine mandate is necessary for workers like me because we need to set a good example for the public.” Contrarily, a similar proportion of respondents strongly disagreed with these statements.

The statement “Non-compliance with vaccine mandates at work should be financially penalized (e.g., fine, suspension, and termination)” encountered the greatest resistance; 46% of survey respondents strongly disagreed with imposing financial penalties for non-compliance. Nevertheless, a similar proportion either agreed (13%) or strongly agreed (28%) with such financial penalties.

Figure 3: Vaccine and Mandate Attitude



SURVEY FINDINGS

To gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind opposition to vaccine mandates, our survey included an open-ended question, attracting responses from 269 individuals. This higher-than-average response rate (28%) indicates a significant level of member interest in the topic. From these open-ended responses, seven main oppositional themes were identified. The most common reason for opposition, cited by slightly more than half of the respondents to the question, was the principle of medical choice autonomy. These individuals expressed concerns about the mandate infringing on their freedom to make personal medical decisions. Additionally, 16% of respondents raised doubts about the vaccine’s safety, and a similar proportion questioned its effectiveness against COVID-19, thus opposing its mandatory nature. Other notable reasons included personal medical conditions and religious or moral objections, accounting for 9% and 8% of the responses, respectively. The detailed categorization of these themes is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Content Analysis on Why Respondents Oppose to Vaccine Mandate

Topics	Frequency
Freedom of medical choice	127 (47%)
Vaccine is not safe, unproven and has side effects	44 (16%)
Vaccine is not effective against Covid-19	40 (15%)
Health and medical reason	24 (9%)
Religious or moral belief	21 (8%)
Vaccine mandate and union are politicized	10 (4%)
Covid-19 is not a serious disease	3 (1%)
Total	269 (100%)

The data revealed some notable regional variations, particularly in attitudes towards the vaccine mandate. As shown in Table 5, unionized educators in Chicago and urban areas outside Chicago displayed a statistically significantly higher level of agreement with the statement “The COVID-19 vaccine should be mandatory for frontline essential workers like myself” than those in nonurban area. Moreover, regarding the question “Non-compliance with vaccine mandates at work should be financially penalized,” unionized educators in Chicago reported statistically significantly higher level of agreement than those in nonurban area. However, no statistical differences were observed between respondents from Chicago, non-Chicago urban areas, and nonurban school districts on other aspects of attitudes towards the vaccine and vaccine mandate.

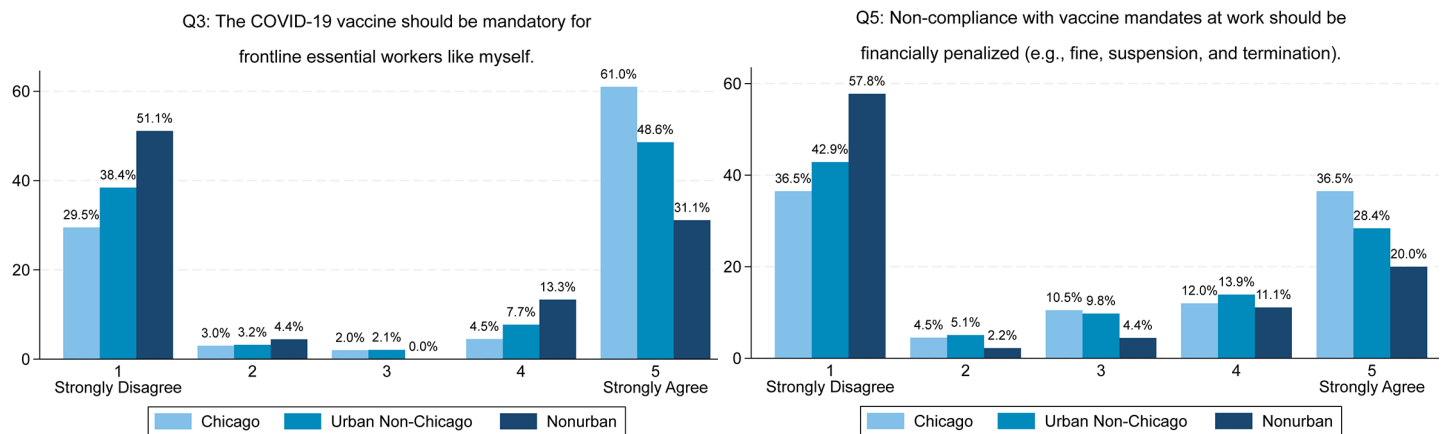
SURVEY FINDINGS

Table 5: Regional Variations in Vaccine and Mandate Attitude

	Average Value			ANOVA F-value	Bonferroni Post-hoc Test (p-value)		
	Chicago (N=200)	Urban Non-Chicago (N=532)	Nonurban (N=45)		Chicago vs. Urban Non-Chicago	Chicago vs. Nonurban	Nonurban vs. Urban Non-Chicago
Question 1	4.03	3.81	3.38	3.25	0.23	0.05	0.28
Question 2	3.93	3.69	3.33	2.92	0.43	0.10	0.19
Question 3	3.65	3.25	2.69	6.02	0.15	0.01	0.04
Question 4	3.49	3.26	2.84	2.79	0.32	0.09	0.29
Question 5	3.08	2.80	2.33	3.89	0.23	0.04	0.16
Question 6	3.41	3.12	2.73	3.31	0.39	0.08	0.15

Figure 4 displays the distribution of responses to questions 3 and 5, revealing marked regional differences. For question 3, 61.0% of Chicago respondents strongly support a vaccine mandate, versus 48.6% from non-Chicago urban and 31% from nonurban regions. Conversely, for question 5, a significant 57.8% of nonurban respondents strongly oppose financial penalties for non-compliance, compared to 36.5% in Chicago. In both cases, the prevalence of respondents favoring strong positions, either for or against the mandate and its associated penalties for violations, has led to extremely polarized views, highlighting the contentious nature of the issue.

Figure 4: Regional Variations in Vaccine and Mandate Attitude

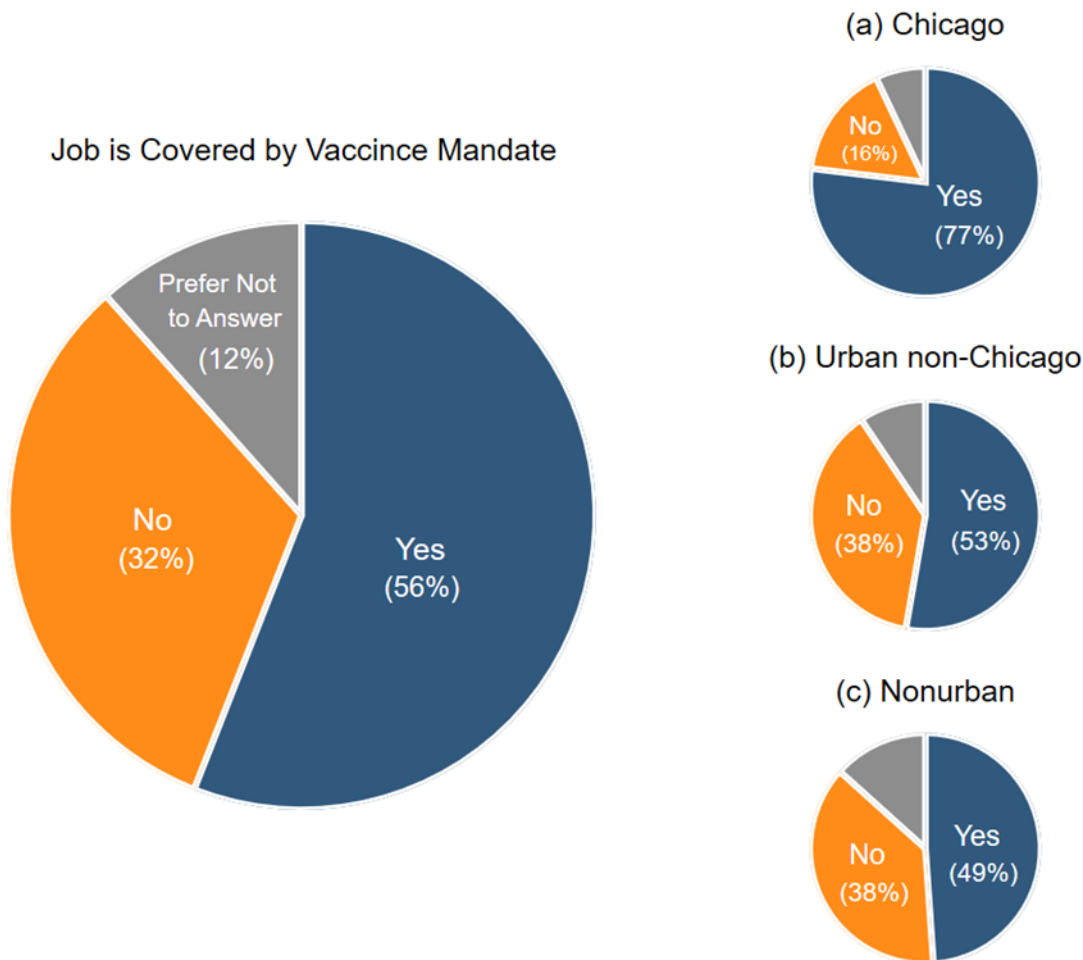


SURVEY FINDINGS

As shown in Figure 5, the survey indicated that a majority of the respondents, 56%, were employed at jobs where a vaccine mandate was in effect, while 32% indicated their jobs were not affected by a mandate. In truth, all K-12 school districts were under a vaccination mandate. An Executive Order issued by Governor J.B. Pritzker required school districts to either require vaccination or subject educators who refused vaccination to regular testing (Illinois.Gov Press Release, 2021). But here we are assessing both how aware union members were of the mandate and the application of it in their school districts.

The sizeable proportion that said there was no mandate may be revealing not a mistaken understanding, but the reality that their school district was not enforcing the governor’s health emergency order. Either way, it raises a question about the efficiency of the local and state unions’ communications on virus mitigation efforts. Notably, a sizable proportion, 12%, opted not to provide an answer to this question. This non-response rate was much higher than for the individual vaccination status questions within the survey, suggesting a potential sensitivity or controversy surrounding this issue.

Figure 5: Vaccine Mandate Job Coverage

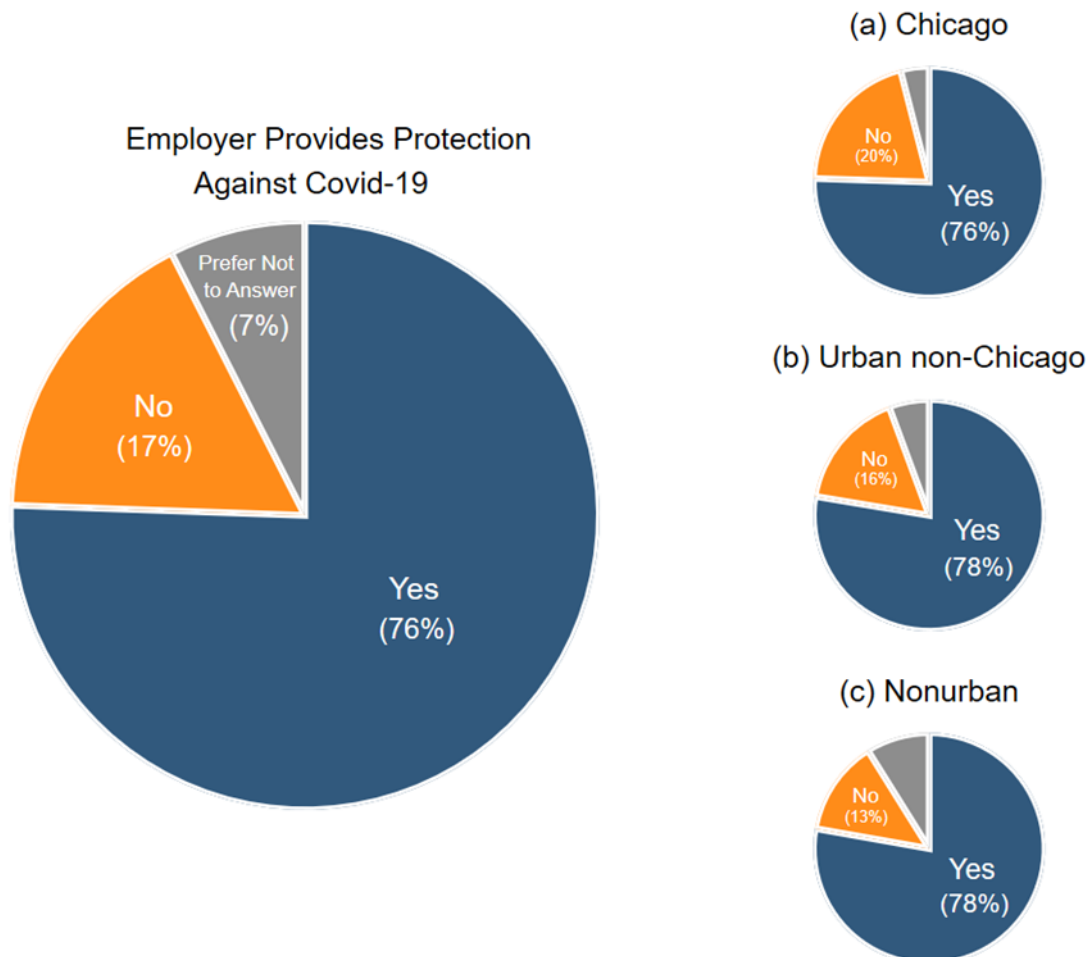


SURVEY FINDINGS

Furthermore, vaccine mandates were significantly more common among respondents working in Chicago, with 77% reporting a vaccine mandate, as opposed to only 53% of those in non-Chicago urban districts. This indicates a clear regional discrepancy in the enforcement of vaccine-related workplace policies, with Chicago showing a much greater propensity towards such mandates. This disparity aligns with the earlier finding of higher support for vaccine mandates among unionized educators in Chicago and likely reflected broader regional policy differences, community attitudes, and variations in the spread and impact of COVID-19.

According to Figure 6, in addition to implementing vaccine mandates and allowing exemptions, a significant majority of survey respondents, 76%, reported that their school districts had instituted additional protective measures against COVID-19. Conversely, 17% said their employers had not implemented any further protections. The absence of statistical differences in the adoption of other workplace protective measures across Chicago, non-Chicago urban, and nonurban school districts highlights the contentious nature of vaccine mandate policies. This lack of variance suggests the debate around vaccine mandates does not necessarily correlate with the implementation of other forms of health and safety measures within K-12 school districts.

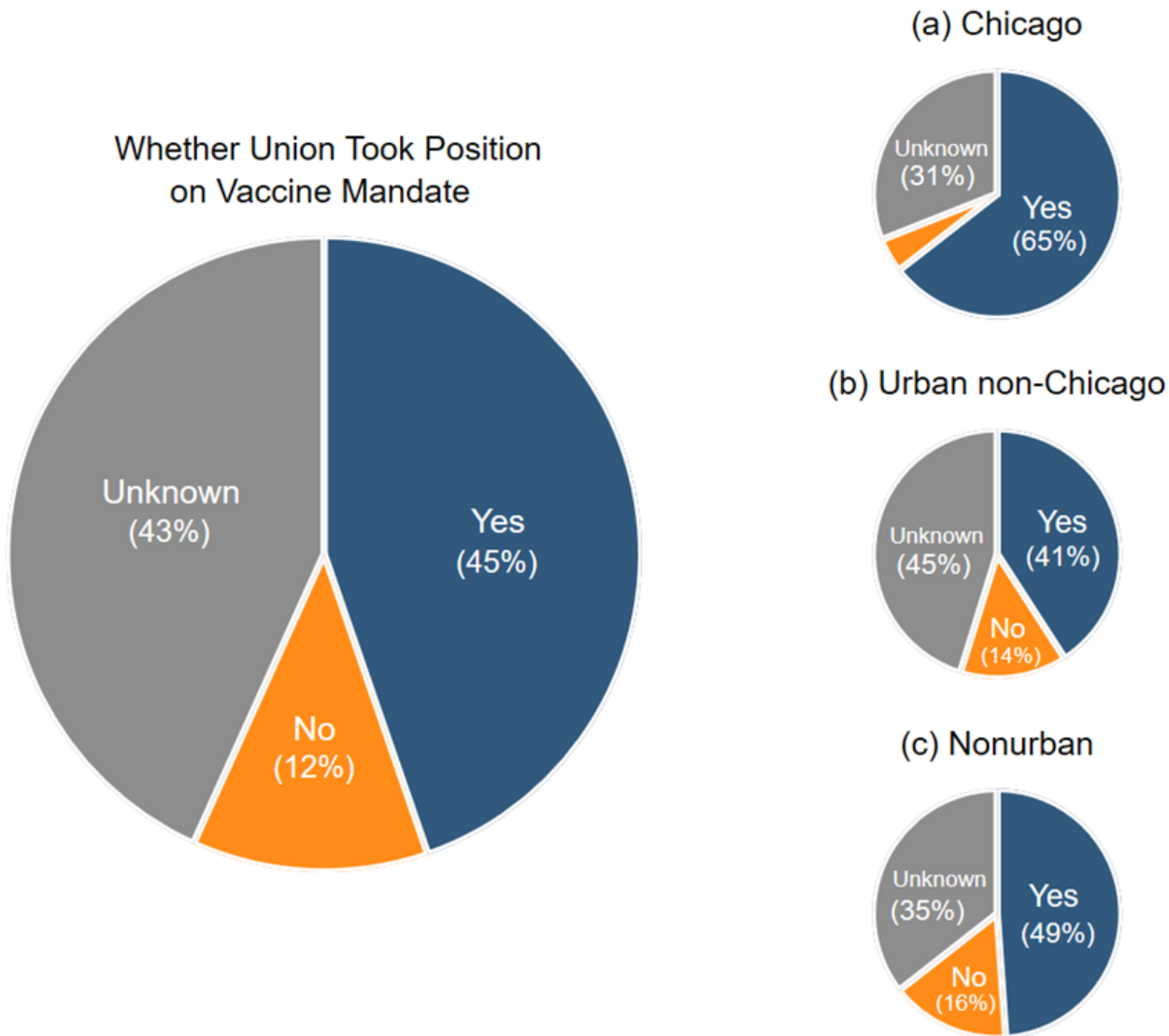
Figure 6: Provision of Additional Protection Other Than Vaccine Mandate



SURVEY FINDINGS

Figure 7 shows that close to half of the respondents, 45%, reported their union had taken a *formal* position on vaccine mandates, while a smaller segment, 12%, stated their unions had refrained from doing so. A significant number, 43%, admitted to being unaware of their union’s policy on the matter.

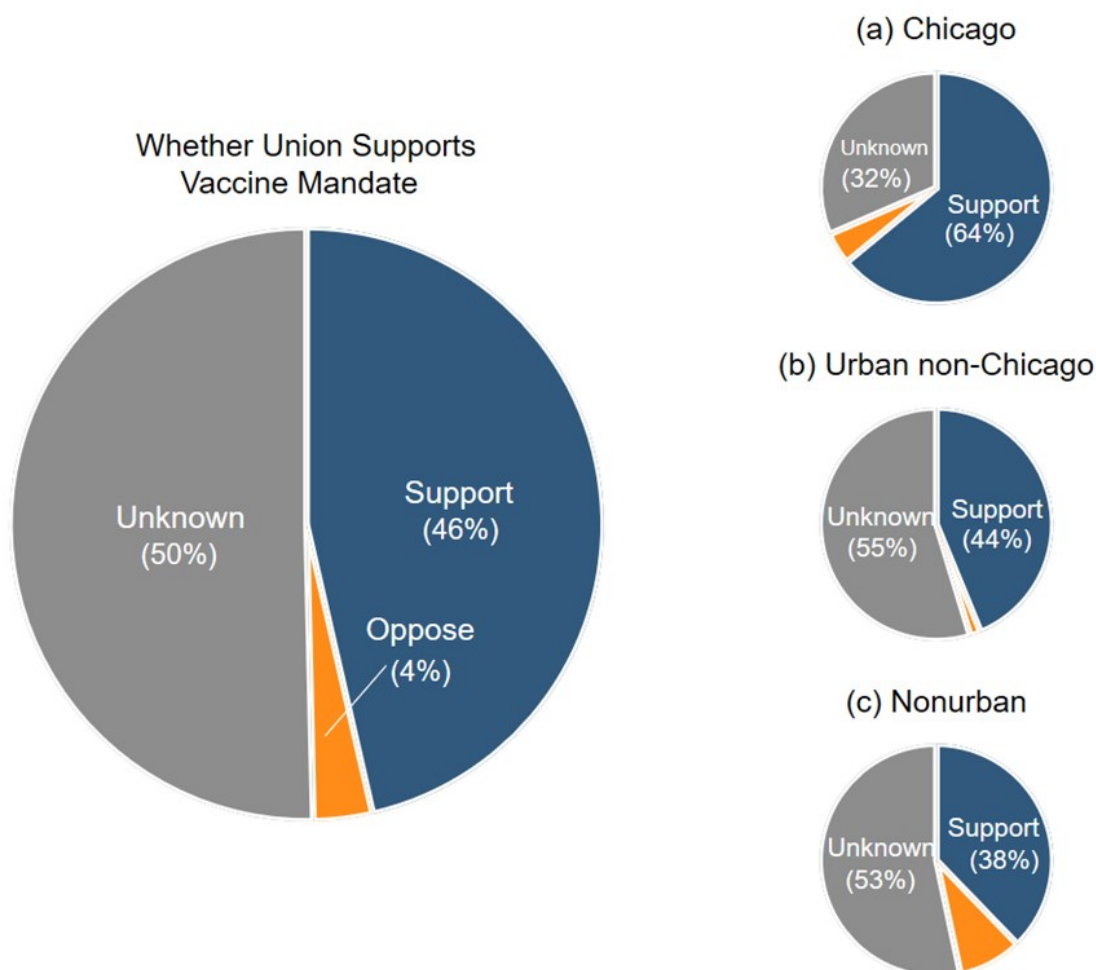
Figure 7: Awareness of Union Position



SURVEY FINDINGS

Furthermore, Figure 8 shows that 46% of respondents noted that their unions were *in favor* of the mandate, in contrast to a mere 4% who acknowledged their union’s opposition. Surprisingly, a full 50% of those surveyed were uncertain about their union’s position on vaccine mandate policies.

Figure 8: Union Position on Vaccine Mandate



Educators’ perceptions of their union’s position on vaccine mandate policies varied significantly with the location of the respondents’ workplaces. In Chicago, 65% of respondents indicated that their union had a definitive position on vaccine mandates. This figure contrasts with the 41% in non-Chicago urban districts and 49% in nonurban districts who reported the same. Additionally, 64% of Chicago respondents noted their union’s support for the mandate, while 32% were uncertain about their union’s position. In non-Chicago urban districts, only 44% reported their union’s support for the mandate, and 55% did not know their union’s position.

This regional variation highlights the influence that location may have on a union’s involvement with vaccine mandate policies. It suggests the context of the local environment, including community attitudes and regional health policies, could have a role in shaping union policy decisions and member awareness. Notably, the significant share of respondents who were unaware of their union’s stance in this case is very concerning, given the contentious workplace debates and extensive public exposure of the issue.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Did the Controversy Weaken the Support for the Union?

Membership solidarity is the cornerstone of labor union strength and success. Although internal disagreements are a natural aspect of any democratic process, unions have consistently advocated on behalf of their members and other workers to enhance working conditions. Unions strive to reflect member interests, advocating for higher wages, more benefits, increased health and safety measures, equitable treatment, enhanced training opportunities, and greater employee voice in the workplace through collective bargaining, grievance arbitration, and public policy advocacy (e.g., Bennett & Kaufman, 2005; Givan & Hipp, 2012).

The vaccine mandate presented a significant challenge for unions because of members' sharply divided opinions. Labor unions have rarely encountered such a dilemma, caught between emphasizing collective interests and individual bodily autonomy. This division requires unions to navigate the complex landscape of advocating for workplace safety while also respecting individual choices and freedom. In scenarios where member consensus is unattainable, it naturally raises the question: Did differences in membership attitudes undermined support for their unions? The strength of a union lies in the solidarity of its members; thus, differing stances on such critical issues could potentially impact its unity and perceived effectiveness.

Our survey gauged respondents' opinions on three key statements: "My union is clear in communicating what objectives and issues are being worked on to members," "My union is bargaining with the employer to adjust the COVID-19 vaccine policies," and "I have real confidence in my union's ability to achieve its goals." Respondents were given a range of options from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to express their level of agreement. We also asked respondents to evaluate the overall performance of their union in representing members like themselves on a five-item scale from "poor" to "excellent" (Table 6).

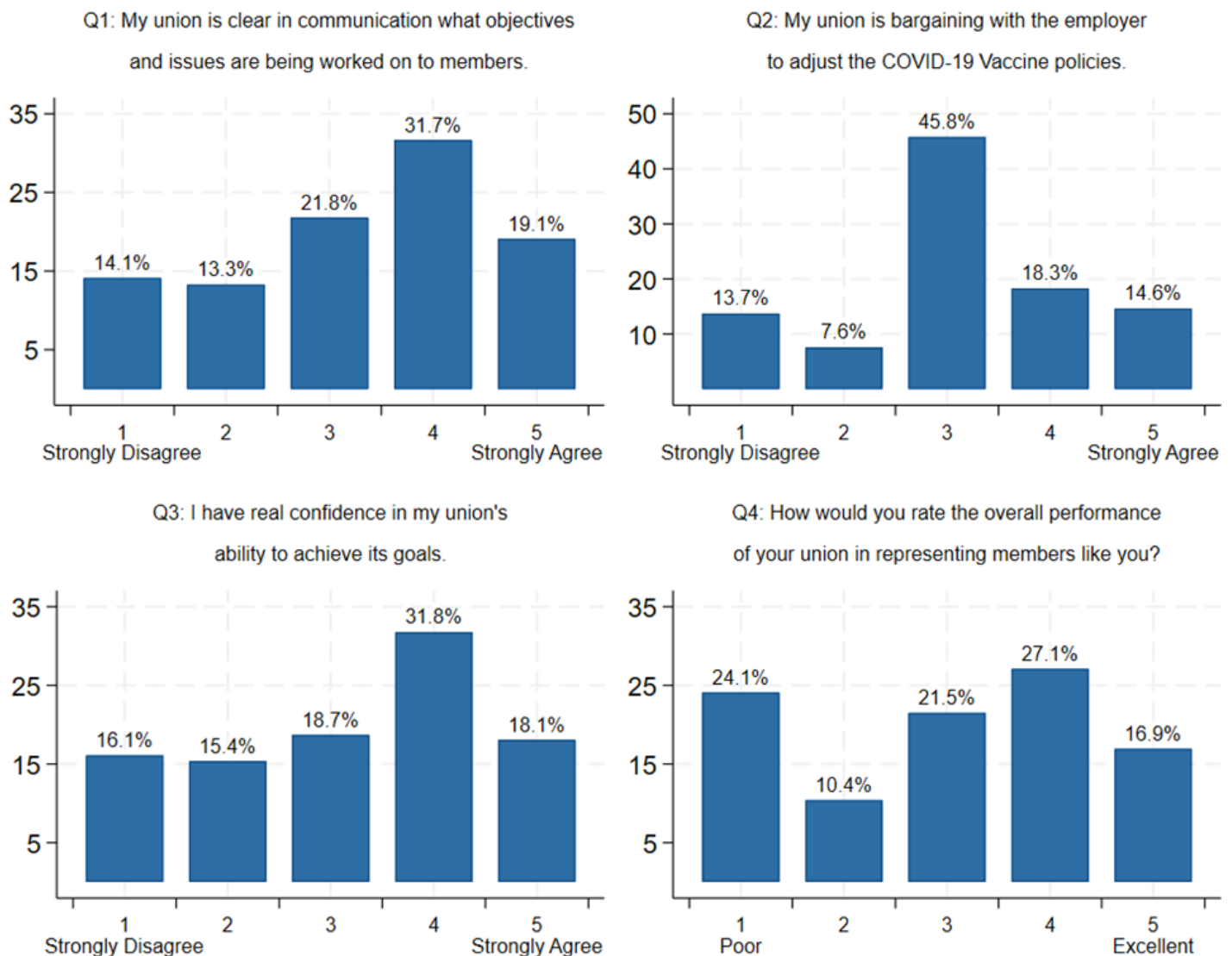
Table 6: Survey Items of Respondent's Opinion on Union and its Performance

Survey Items	
Question 1	My union is clear in communication what objectives and issues are being worked on to members.
Question 2	My union is bargaining with the employer to adjust the COVID-19 Vaccine policies.
Question 3	I have real confidence in my union's ability to achieve its goals.
Question 4	How would you rate the overall performance of your union in representing members like you?
All items are measured by 5-point Likert scale. (1: Strongly disagree; 2: Somewhat disagree; 3: Neither agree nor disagree; 4: Somewhat Agree; Strongly agree)	

SURVEY FINDINGS

The responses to the union performance are depicted in Figure 9. Slightly more than half of respondents (51%) concurred that their union maintained clear communication. Approximately 33% somewhat or strongly agreed that their union was effectively bargaining to adjust vaccine policies, while about 21% disagreed with this statement. Half felt confident in their union’s ability to achieve its goals, whereas about 32% lacked this confidence. Similarly, nearly half of the respondents rated their union’s performance as “good” or “excellent,” but 34% judged their union’s performance as “poor” or “less than fair.”

Figure 9: Opinion on Union Performance



SURVEY FINDINGS

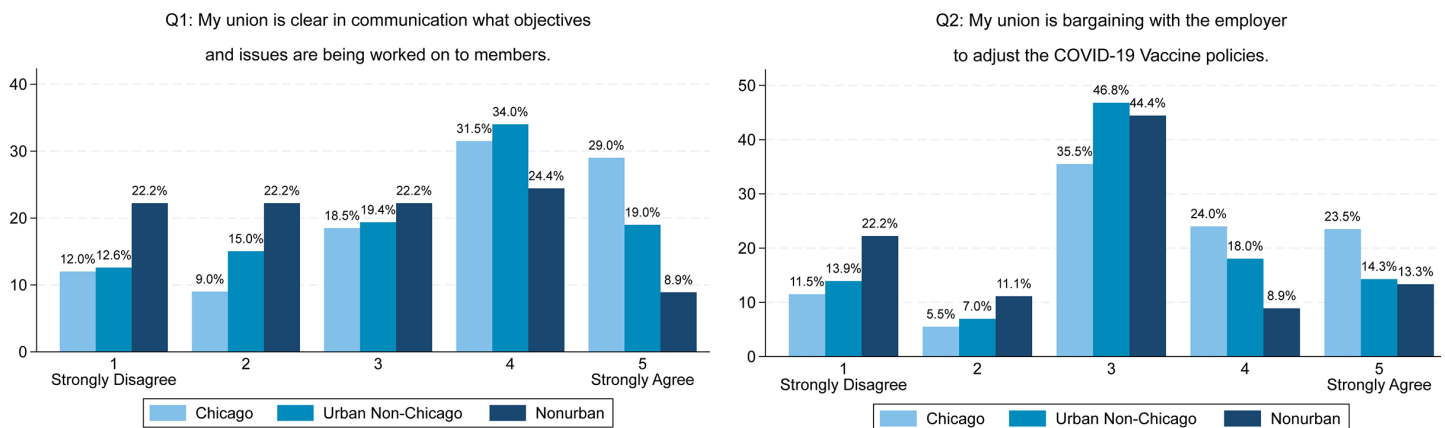
Table 7 shows that significant geographical variations were apparent in members’ perceptions of union effectiveness. Respondents from Chicago held markedly more positive views on their union’s communication regarding current objectives than their counterparts working in non-Chicago urban and nonurban areas. They were also more likely to report active union engagement in bargaining with employers to adjust vaccine policies. Notably, no statistically significant differences were found between Chicago, non-Chicago urban, and nonurban school districts in respondents’ confidence in their union’s ability to achieve its goals, or in their evaluations of union performance.

Table 7: Regional Variations in Respondent’s Opinion on Union

	Average Value			ANOVA F-value	Bonferroni Post-hoc Test (p-value)		
	Chicago (N=200)	Urban Non-Chicago (N=532)	Nonurban (N=45)		Chicago vs. Urban Non-Chicago	Chicago vs. Nonurban	Nonurban vs. Urban Non-Chicago
Question 1	3.57	3.32	2.76	7.66	0.02	0.00	0.07
Question 2	3.43	3.12	2.80	7.22	0.23	0.01	0.01
Question 3	3.26	3.28	2.84	2.19	0.11	0.17	0.98
Question 4	3.14	3.18	2.64	2.94	0.05	0.11	0.94

Figure 10 presents the distribution of responses to questions 1 and 2, highlighting that Chicago respondents were more likely to agree that their union communicates effectively compared to respondents from other regions. Regarding the evaluation of active bargaining by unions, most respondents remained neutral. Nevertheless, those in Chicago indicated a higher level of approval of union engagement compared to other areas.

Figure 10: Regional Variations in Respondent’s Opinion on Union



CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the work experience of educators in Illinois, revealing a complex interplay between public health measures, individual autonomy, and union dynamics. This report, based on a survey of Illinois Federation of Teachers members, highlights the multifaceted responses to vaccine mandates and the intricate position of teachers' unions amidst these unprecedented times.

Central to our findings is the resilience of IFT unions in navigating the pandemic-induced crisis. Despite the contentious nature of vaccine mandates and the evident polarization of opinions within their membership, the union managed to maintain its credibility with its members. The relatively strong union efficacy, as suggested by our data, underscores the IFT's adaptability and strength in the face of challenging circumstances.

Our analysis also reveals the nuanced and region-specific responses within the educational workforce. Notably, there was a marked disparity in attitudes and policies regarding vaccine mandates between Chicago and non-Chicago regions. This regional variation is significant in understanding the broader implications of the pandemic on the labor-management relations and strategies.

Furthermore, the survey results indicate a substantial variation in union members' opinions regarding vaccine mandates, reflecting a broader societal debate on individual rights versus collective welfare. Despite contrasting member opinions about their union's approach to vaccination policies, most members acknowledged the union was effective in representing their diverse perspectives while upholding public health guidelines and ensuring the safety of educators and students.

Importantly, this research underscores the vital importance of communication between unions and their members. The evident gap in communication, as revealed by large fractions of IFT members who did not know what local union position was on vaccination protocols, underscores the necessity for clear and effective dialogue to manage such complexities.

In conclusion, this report not only documents a specific aspect of impacts of the pandemic on the educational workforce in Illinois but also provides insights into the implications for labor relations, union effectiveness, and policymaking in the face of emerging global crises. The lessons learned from the IFT experience will be invaluable in shaping future strategies for unions and educational institutions alike, as they respond to future crises.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J. (2021, November 5). *An update on public-sector union vaccine mandate responses* [Ballotpedia News]. <https://news.ballotpedia.org/2021/11/05/an-update-on-public-sector-union-vaccine-mandate-responses/>
- Advance Illinois. (2022). *The State We're In*. Advance Illinois. <https://www.advanceillinois.org/research-hub/the-state-were-in>
- AFL-CIO. (2021, November 4). *AFL-CIO on Vaccination, Testing Rules: Employers Must Step Up*. <https://aflcio.org/press/releases/afl-cio-vaccination-testing-rules-employers-must-step>
- AGC & Autodesk. (2020). *2020 Workforce Survey Results*. AGC & Autodesk. [https://www.agc.org/sites/default/files/2020 Workforce Survey IL.pdf](https://www.agc.org/sites/default/files/2020%20Workforce%20Survey%20IL.pdf)
- American Federation of Teachers. (2021a, July 26). *AFT President Randi Weingarten Says Healthcare Worker Vaccines Are Critical, Must Be Negotiated*. American Federation of Teachers. <https://www.aft.org/press-release/aft-president-randi-weingarten-says-healthcare-worker-vaccines-are-critical>
- American Federation of Teachers. (2021b, August 12). *Leading Teachers Union Passes Resolution on Workplace Vaccine Policies*. American Federation of Teachers. <https://www.aft.org/press-release/leading-teachers-union-passes-resolution-workplace-vaccine-policies>
- American Postal Workers Union. (2021, September 10). *Vaccination Mandates by President Biden*. American Postal Workers Union. <https://apwu.org/news/vaccination-mandates-president-biden>
- American Trucking Associations. (2022, January 7). *Vaccine Mandate*. American Trucking Associations. <https://www.trucking.org/vaccinemandate>
- Bennett, J. T., & Kaufman, B. E. (2004). What do unions do? A twenty-year perspective. *Journal of Labor Research*, 25(3), 339.
- Bosman, J. (2021, October 15). Chicago's mayor and the city's largest police union clash over vaccinations. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/15/us/lori-lightfoot-police-union-vaccinations.html>
- Bruno, R., & Christen, N. (2021). Educating During a Pandemic: The Role of Collective Bargaining in Going Back to School. *The Illinois Public Employee Relations Report*, 38(1). <https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/iperr/118>
- Cohen, R. M. (2021, August 25). *Building Trades Union Imposes Vaccine Mandate on Itself*. The American Prospect. <https://prospect.org/labor/building-trades-union-imposes-vaccine-mandate-on-itself/>
- DeMarche, E. (2021, July 28). Postal workers union bristles at Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate. *Fox News*. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/postal-workers-union-bristles-at-bidens-covid-19-vaccine-mandate.print>
- Dickson, A., Manzo, F., Bruno, R., Gigstad, J., & Twarog, E. (2021). *Women and Child Care in Illinois: A Survey of Working Mothers During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Illinois Economic Policy Institute. <https://illinoisepi.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/pmcr-ilepi-women-and-child-care-in-illinois-covid-19-impacts-final.pdf>

REFERENCES

- Dunn, G., Manzo, F., & Bruno, R. (2022). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Illinois Workers: Data from the Current Population Survey, 2019-2021*. Illinois Economic Policy Institute. <https://illinoisepi.files.wordpress.com/2022/10/ilepi-pmcr-the-impact-of-covid-on-illinois-workers-final.pdf>
- Gibson, K. (2022, February 17). More big companies are dropping vaccine requirement for workers. *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-vaccine-requirement-workers-adidas-intel-starbucks/>
- Givan, R. K., & Hipp, A. L. (2012). Public perceptions of union efficacy: A twenty-four country study. *Labor Studies Journal*, 37(1), 7-32.
- Griffith, J. (2021, August 27). 'Hell no': Some police officers and their unions oppose vaccination mandates. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/hell-no-some-police-officers-their-unions-oppose-vaccination-mandates-n1277608>
- Hancock, P., & Adams, A. (2023, October 14). Illinois' Educator Workforce Weathered Pandemic, But Persistent Issues Remain: Report. *WTTW News*. <https://news.wttw.com/2023/10/14/illinois-educator-workforce-weathered-pandemic-persistent-issues-remain-report>
- Heavey, S. (2021, August 9). U.S. teachers' union shifts stance to back vaccine mandate as COVID surges. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-teachers-union-shifts-stance-back-vaccine-mandate-covid-surges-2021-08-08/>
- Hill, B. (2020, April 7). *COVID-19 potentially impacting one-fourth of Illinois workers*. Illinois Policy. <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/covid-19-potentially-impacting-one-fourth-of-illinois-workers/>
- Illinois Future of Work Task Force. (2022). *Future of Work in Illinois*. Illinois Future of Work Task Force. <https://www.ilga.gov/reports/ReportsSubmitted/3439RSGAEmail6850RSGAAttachFutureOfWorkTaskForceReport Revised FINAL.pdf>
- Illinois Government. (2021). Governor Pritzker announces COVID-19 vaccine requirement for healthcare workers, pre-K-12 teachers and staff, higher education personnel and students to slow spread of Delta variant. <https://www.illinois.gov/news/press-release.23808.html#:~:text=Teachers%20and%20staff%20at%20pre,vaccination%20by%20September%205%2C%202021>
- IPHCA. (2020). *Illinois Counties by Rural/Urban Classification*. Illinois Primary Health Care Association. http://www.idph.state.il.us/RuralHealth/Rur_Urb_2021.pdf
- Jeong, A. (2021, October 28). Judge denies New York City police union's request to halt vaccine mandate. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/10/28/new-york-city-vaccine-mandate-judge/>
- Manzo, F., & Bruno, R. A. (2020). *The Effects of the Global Pandemic on Illinois Workers: An Analysis of Essential, Face-to-Face, and Remote Workers During COVID-19*. Illinois Economic Policy Institute. <https://illinoisepi.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/ilepi-pmcr-effects-of-global-pandemic-on-illinois-workers-final-6.4.20.pdf>
- National Nurses United. (2021, September 9). *National Nurses United statement on Biden's comprehensive Covid strategy*. National Nurses United. <https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/press/statement-on-bidens-comprehensive-covid-strategy>

REFERENCES

- Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission. (2003). *Chicago Community Areas and ZIP Codes*. Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission. <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/sites/covid/reports/2020-04-24/ChicagoCommunityAreaandZipcodeMap.pdf>
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2021, November 5). *COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing; Emergency Temporary Standard*. Federal Register: The Daily Journal of the United States Government. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/11/05/2021-23643/covid-19-vaccination-and-testing-emergency-temporary-standard>
- Perez Jr., J. (2021, August 5). AFT president says union is now ‘looking at vaccine mandates.’ *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/08/05/aft-union-vaccine-mandates-502657>
- Singleton, M. (2021, October 22). 200+ GE employees, union members stage walk-out in Schenectady Friday protesting vaccine mandate. *NEWS10 ABC*. <https://www.news10.com/top-stories/200-ge-employees-union-members-stage-walk-out-in-schenectady-friday-protesting-vaccine-mandate/>
- Smylie, S. (2022, January 20). *Illinois teacher vaccine mandate back in spotlight after SCOTUS decision*. Chalkbeat. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/chicago/2022/1/20/22893454/illinois-covid-teacher-vaccine-mandates-scotus/>
- SWAPA. (2021, October 5). *Leadership Update: Vaccine Mandate*. <https://www.swapa.org/news/2021/leadership-update-vaccine-mandate/>
- Teamsters Local 210. (2021, October 4). *Teamsters negotiate new COVID vaccine agreement with CSU*. Teamsters Local 210. <https://teamsters210.org/2021/10/04/teamsters-negotiate-new-covid-vaccine-agreement-with-csu/>
- The Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools. (2020). *2020 Illinois Educator Shortage Survey*. <https://iarss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IARSS-2020-Educator-Shortage-FINAL.pdf>
- Ujifusa, A. (2021, August 8). AFT President Randi Weingarten Backs COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates for Teachers. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/aft-president-randi-weingarten-backs-covid-19-vaccine-mandates-for-teachers/2021/08>
- UNITE HERE. (2021, September 10). *Statement from President D. Taylor on UNITE HERE Vaccination Campaign*. UNITE HERE! <https://unitehere.org/press-releases/statement-from-president-d-taylor-on-unite-here-vaccination-campaign-2/>
- United Steelworkers. (2020). *COVID-19 Vaccination Policy*. <https://m.usw.org/members/coronavirus/resources/COVID-19-Vaccine-Policy-12.17.20-1.pdf>
- United Steelworkers. (2021, June 7). *Review USW’s COVID-19 vaccine recommendations*. United Steelworkers. <https://m.usw.org/news/media-center/articles/2021/review-usws-covid-19-vaccine-recommendations>
- Vernuccio, F. V. (2021, November 27). *Vaccine mandates put unions in a bind*. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/583109-vaccine-mandates-put-unions-in-a-bind/>
- Will, M. (2021, August 5). *Teachers’ Unions Have Opposed Vaccine Mandates. But That May Change*. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teachers-unions-have-opposed-vaccine-mandates-but-that-may-change/2021/08>

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

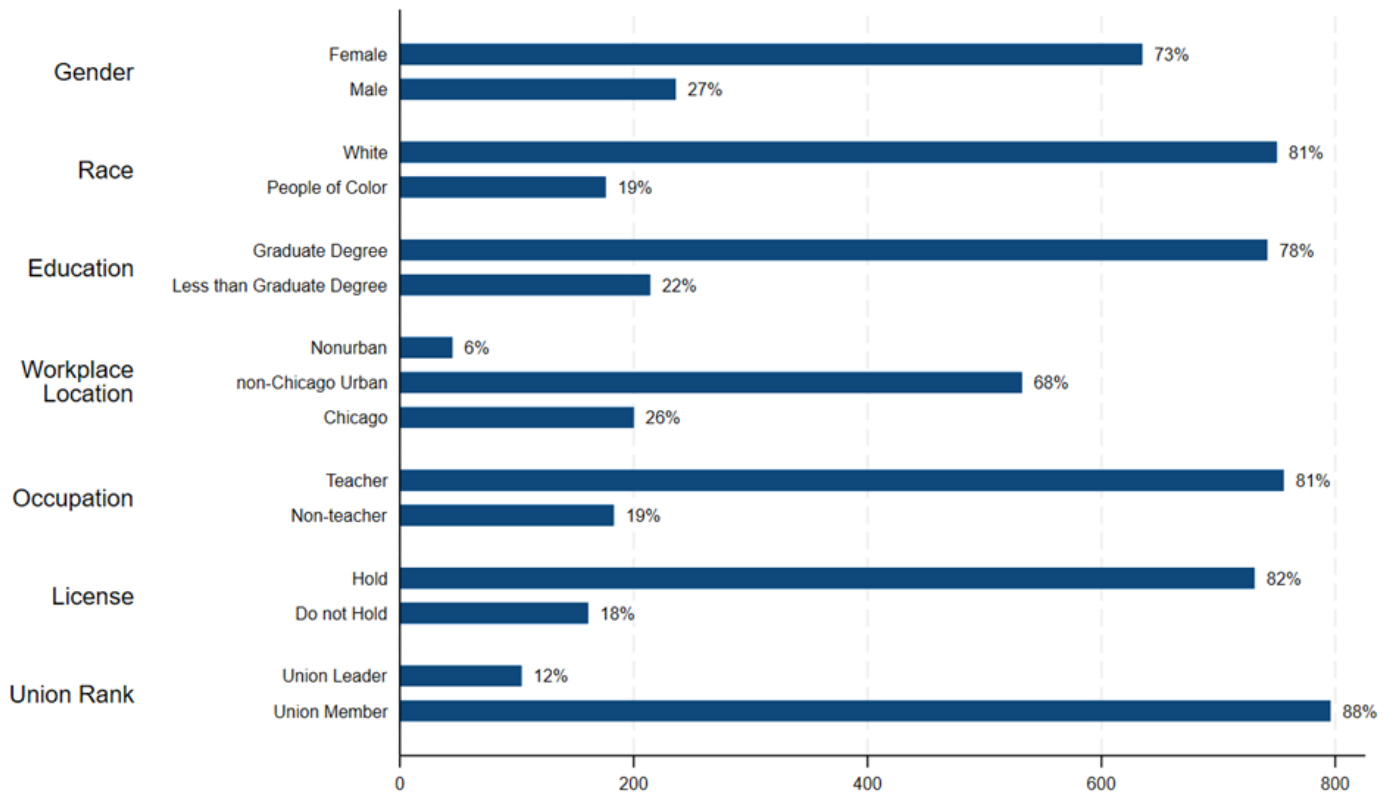


Figure 2: Age Distribution of the Sample

