



Messages: Political Action—Agenda-Setting, Elections and Protests

Abstract This chapter describes the predominant issues in the YouTube videos uploaded by Swedish trade unions and examines how these messages vary across the three union confederations. We particularly focus on three different forms of political activism: agenda-setting, electoral campaigns and protests. The results demonstrate that political activism does not form a significant part of the Swedish unions' YouTube videos, except during election time, which includes national elections and elections to the EU parliament. It is also shown that working-class unions with historical links to the Social Democratic Party are more politically active than other unions.

Keywords Political messages · Agenda-setting · Electoral campaign · Protest

By releasing the video 'How to get a raise in 47 seconds' only three days before International Women's Day, the Municipal Workers' Union made a clear political statement (Kommunal 2014, March 5). It has been claimed by scholars of trade union revitalization that this is the route forward: unions must increase their engagement in politics (Baccaro et al. 2003; Hamann and Kelly 2004). It is important not only for unions to engage in narrowly defined employment issues, but also for them to attempt to impact politics in general, since the interests of trade union members are broader than employment-related issues alone; the

structure of the welfare state, taxation and other redistribution issues are of interest to all employees (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2010). Moreover—and perhaps more importantly—engaging in politics can demonstrate a union’s broader societal relevance to its members and potential members and can create a more active membership.

Political activism among trade unions is not new; however, critics have argued that over time, unions have come to focus on narrow employment-related issues and that much of union work has gone through juridification, with professional trade union officials ‘serving’ the members (so-called business trade unionism) as a result (Lopez 2004; Voss and Sherman 2000). Deepening a union’s political activism implies a return to ‘the roots’: engaging in politics can make trade unions into a strong political force once again; it can improve the relationship between the members and the organizations and thus bring social movement unionism back into the movement (Fairbrother 2008; Milkman and Voss 2004, pp. 9–11).

Unions can pursue political influence in different ways, including engagement with election campaigns, institutionalized cooperation with political parties and classical corporatist arrangements, such as involvement in legislation processes and the implementation of legislation (Hamann and Kelly 2004, p. 94). Social media cannot be used for all of these different strategies for pursuing political activism; however, communicating via YouTube could be very important in unions’ agenda-setting, engagement in electoral campaigns and protest mobilization.

Influencing the *political agenda* is a strategy that is part of ordinary interest-group activities. Like any interest-based organization, trade unions try to impact the issues that are discussed in the political debate. The second type of political activism that is of interest here, namely *election campaigns*, has become increasingly important over time, as voters have become unfaithful to a single party (Norris 2000, p. 177). This trend is relevant not only for political parties, but also for anyone wishing to affect electoral campaigns. Trade unions cooperating with political parties have often been very active during election campaigns; for example, they may provide financial support to a political party or provide volunteers to assist with practical duties during the campaign (Allern and Bale 2017; Jacobson 1999; Sinyai 2006). Such ties have been thoroughly examined by interest-group scholars. According to the cost-benefit exchange model, when trade unions assist in elections, political parties (if they win) implement certain policies in exchange (Streeck and Hassel

2003; Öberg et al. 2011). Thus, there is nothing new about unions participating in election campaigns. However, recent studies suggest that since the link between political parties and unions has weakened over time, there has been a shift in union participation in election campaigns (Allern and Bale 2017). Finally, to these institutional forms of political actions, more contentious actions can be added: that is, the *mobilization of political protest* in the form of political strikes (i.e. strikes with political aims, rather than strikes that occur during collective bargaining rounds), demonstrations or boycotts.

All these activities—involvement in election campaigns, placing issues on the political agenda and mobilizing protest campaigns—can be performed through strategic communication on social media in general and, without a doubt, through uploaded videos on YouTube. In fact, the Municipal Workers’ Union’s video in which the chairperson is transformed into a man is a good example of several different forms of political activism. First, it points to the central political issue of women’s smaller life earnings. Second, although the video was posted during an ongoing election campaign for the 2014 Swedish general elections and the EU parliament, the video is in English, which gives its message a far wider reach than Sweden. This can be seen as an attempt to impact the agenda of a more general political debate. Third, the end of the video exhorts the viewer to protest gender inequality. The fact that the video was uploaded only a few days before International Women’s Day, when protests against gender inequality often take place, emphasizes this effect even more. Thus, all three types of activism are present in the same video. Whether this is typical for the videos of all Swedish unions, or whether there are differences across the three confederations, is the major question addressed in this chapter.

3.1 UNIONS’ POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND EXPECTED VARIATIONS IN SWEDEN

It has been widely noted that organizations’ communication via social media tends to follow a similar pattern as their communication through regular media, even though the former method carries certain benefits. Regular media outlets (e.g. newspapers) have a ‘gate-keeper’ role that can work both in favour of and against the unions’ agenda. Early on in its development, the labour movement was aware of the necessity for communication strategies through the media (Wring 2005); this

often led to the establishment of specific communication departments in union organizations. In the Swedish case, the LO had already hired its first press commissioner by 1931 (Enbom 2009, p. 56). Above all, the labour movement invested in newspapers in order to ensure that their perspectives would be published, since conservative and liberal newspapers would not expound the unions' views. Over time, unions' investments and ownership in newspapers have decreased, causing other channels of communication to grow in importance. Social media offers unions new opportunities to spread their messages; more importantly, it allows unions to control their messages and bypass the newspapers' gate-keeping role.

It is known that trade unions' choice to exercise political activism—whether offline or online—is related to a range of different factors, such as the dominant structure of industrial relations in a country, or the unions' leadership, available resources and historical experiences. Since we focus on Sweden in this work, it is important to note that the strong corporatist institutions that were established in the early twentieth century gave Swedish trade unions good opportunities for political engagement (Hermansson et al. 1999; Rothstein 1992). The preconditions allowing unions to impact politics changed drastically in 1992, when the Employers' Organization, SAF, withdrew all of its representatives from state agencies' boards and caused a shift into pluralistic relations between the state and interest organizations (Johansson 2000; Rothstein and Bergström 1999). Nevertheless, the strong historical tradition of trade unions' political activism in Sweden remains present today.

In most countries, unions have experienced institutionalized cooperation with social democratic and left parties (Allern and Bale 2017). This holds true for the Swedish working-class unions affiliated with the LO. In fact, the LO was founded by the Social Democratic Party. Initially, the union movement mainly organized workers, and the working class usually voted for social democratic and left parties. Thus, pursuing this direction in political activism was expected. In Sweden today, most of the LO-affiliated unions still actively support and financially contribute to the Social Democratic Party, even though the collective affiliation to the party was abolished in 1991. Cooperation between unions and the political party is still highly institutionalized; for example, many of the LO-affiliated unions' chairmen also hold a position in the Social Democratic Party, such as being a member of the party board (Jansson 2017).

The TCO and Saco and their affiliated unions, on the other hand, have always stressed political neutrality, even though some connections exist between the TCO and the Social Democratic Party. For example, the party has separate clubs for party members that are active in the TCO unions. There have also been several personal overlaps, as a few of the TCO's chairmen have held positions in social democratic governments. However, such overlaps also existed during the centre-right government from 2010 to 2014. Thus, the 'neutrality' of these union confederations and their affiliated unions means that the white-collar and upper-middle-class unions do not explicitly support specific political parties. This neutrality is motivated by the argument that cooperation with specific political parties is inconvenient for the union members (and potential members). It is known, for example, that during the 2014 elections, a larger share of LO members voted for the Social Democratic Party (52%) than TCO members (33%) or Saco members (22%) (Oscarsson 2018). Furthermore, 23% of TCO and Saco members voted for the centre-right Moderate Party, suggesting that there is no clear interest among the white-collar and upper-middle-class unions to support a specific party. The fact that 17% of LO members voted for the radical right Sweden Democrats in 2014 (Oscarsson 2018) shows that over time, the cooperation between the LO and the Social Democratic Party may be challenged further. Thus, given that the different unions have approached political engagement differently in the past, and due to their different member compositions, we expect the LO-affiliated unions to carry out more electoral activities via YouTube than the TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions.

In addition to electoral engagement and agenda-setting, the third form of political action for unions is the mobilization of protests. Even though the main protest activity of trade unions has always been the strike (Vandaele 2016), there are plenty of examples of mass demonstrations mobilized by unions in cooperation with other social groups, especially since the 1990s. This trend is related to the role of unions in the democratization processes in Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Africa, as well as to the increasing mobilization that is occurring against globalization and neoliberal political reforms (Della Porta 2006; Fantasia and Stepan-Norris 2004). Although social movement scholars often neglect the analysis of protests mobilized by trade unions due to the interest in 'new' social movements, the contemporary shift towards materialistic protests, especially since the Great Recession of 2008,

has increased scholarly interest in trade unions' contentious actions (Andretta et al. 2016; Peterson et al. 2015). Swedish unions are not as radical in their political activism as unions in France, Italy or Spain; however, there are plenty of instances of such political engagement. For example, Swedish unions combined strikes with calls for broader consumer boycotts in their Toys 'R' Us dispute in 1994 (Vandenberg 2006), and the Swedish Protest Database 1980–2011 reports on more than 270 demonstrations that were mobilized by the unions, excluding the regular May Day demonstrations (Uba 2016). There are no studies comparing the protest activism of different Swedish unions; however, Peterson et al. (2012) have used survey data to show that LO members have more experience with joining strikes than the members of the TCO and Saco, while Saco and TCO members have boycotted various products more often than the members of the LO (Peterson et al. 2012, p. 640). These findings suggest that there should not be much difference in terms of protest mobilization via YouTube across the examined unions. In order to detect the political engagement in unions' YouTube videos—including agenda-setting, electoral engagement and protest mobilization—we examined the messages in 4535 videos uploaded by the unions by means of a simple word cloud analysis of the large N dataset and then performed a more detailed examination using the small N dataset of coded videos.

3.2 POLITICAL MESSAGES IN THE LARGE N SAMPLE: METHOD AND FINDINGS

By combining the rough word cloud analysis with the other available metadata (i.e. the upload date, duration, etc.), we were able to obtain a general description of the ways in which unions have used YouTube and the messages they have transmitted in their political communication.

Our analysis was performed in several steps. As it is unlikely that all union videos contain political activism, the first step of the analysis was purely inductive: we counted the most frequently used words in the titles and descriptions provided by the unions when they uploaded the 4535 videos. In order to minimize unnecessary noise, we excluded commonly used verbs, pronouns, adverbs, and conjunctions such as 'and', 'we' and 'here'; the names of the unions; the names of cities such as Stockholm or Gothenburg; and first names such as Per, Annelie and Thor. For simplification purposes, we also substituted all words related

to collective agreement, such as demands in collective bargaining (*avtalskrav*) or negotiations of collective agreement (*avtalsrörelse*), with the word ‘collective agreement’ (i.e. *avtal*). This was important because all of these words refer to the same issue; thus, counting them as separate words could lead to an underestimation of the importance of this particular theme in the unions’ videos. All of the details of this process are provided in the Appendix to this book. The resulting table of the most frequently used words was visualized in the form of a word cloud, with a larger font size indicating words that were used more often by the unions (Fig. 3.1 shows the word cloud; the table itself is in the Appendix).

As indicated in Fig. 3.1, the most frequently used words in the video titles and descriptions relate to the unions themselves and to ‘ordinary union work’. Examples include ‘chairperson’ (*ordförande*) and ‘congress’ (*kongress*), followed by words such as ‘job’ (*jobb*), ‘collective agreement’ (*avtal*), ‘member’ (*medlem*) and ‘seminar’ (*seminarium*). Other frequently used words are ‘agenda item’ (*dagordningspunkt*) and ‘trade



Fig. 3.1 The most commonly used words in titles and descriptions

union board' (*förbundsstyrelse*). In other words, the trade unions seem to use YouTube to communicate with their members and to disperse information about their regular work. This is a reasonable finding, considering that our analyses of the videos' audiences in Chapter 2 clearly demonstrated that union members are the most common audience.

A few of the words in the word cloud are clearly related to politics. First, the words 'byta' (change) and 'regering' (government) form the phrase 'byta regering', which was used in 242 videos entitled 'Therefore, I want to change the government' that were uploaded by the LO-affiliated Municipal Workers' Union in 2010. These videos depict union members speaking into the camera for only a few seconds each, explaining why they want to change the government. (Sweden had a centre-right government from 2006 to 2014, and this video campaign was an attempt to get voters to vote for the Social Democratic Party.) Thus, these videos are strong and clear examples of election campaigns driven by trade unions on YouTube. The word 'elections' (*val*) is another frequently used word, albeit less so than 'change' and 'government'.

Second, another word that is clearly related to politics is 'Almedalen'. This word refers to a park in Visby on Gotland Island, which hosts the so-called politicians' week every summer in July. This event is the biggest trade fair for politicians and lobby organizations in Sweden and involves all party leaders and interest organizations in the country. It is a place where politicians, bureaucrats and various interest groups meet and have numerous seminars, lectures and debates. All of the union confederations and most of the trade unions are present. Most of the videos containing the word *Almedalen* report on the major questions for the unions during this week. Thus, these videos are good examples of attempts to impact the political agenda.

Third, other examples reveal attempts to influence the political agenda that are mainly related to education and healthcare. The former includes words such as 'school' (*skolan*), 'teachers' (*lärare*) and 'education' (*utbildning*), which occur frequently in the word cloud. This finding is not surprising, for two reasons: (1) Sweden had poor results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); this issue has been frequently discussed in the Swedish public debate over the past ten years, and the unions have actively participated in such debates. (2) There are two very active teachers' unions in Sweden (one affiliated with the TCO and another with Saco), and these unions' posts naturally focus

As shown in Fig. 3.2, clear differences emerge between the unions affiliated with the LO, the TCO and Saco. First, the proportion of videos containing political messages differs between the unions: 32% of the LO videos refer to some political content, in comparison with 24% of the TCO videos and 15% of the Saco videos. Second, the visual appearance of the three word clouds reveals that the LO's word cloud is 'thinner' than those of the TCO and Saco: the LO cloud contains only a few words in large font. This is due to the distribution of the words; the LO-affiliated unions have a skewed word distribution. For these unions, the most common words are mentioned about 300 times, whereas the rest of the words are mentioned about 30 times or less; thus, there are a few political themes that the LO-affiliated unions talk about a great deal. There is no such skewed distribution of the word frequency in the TCO or Saco videos, indicating that the political themes or issues discussed among TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions are more diverse.

Third, the most common words in the videos uploaded by the LO-affiliated unions relate to election campaigns, which is not the case for the TCO and Saco videos. 'Elections' are mentioned more frequently by Saco than by the TCO-affiliated unions (40 times versus 29 times, in comparison with 69 times for the LO); however, the TCO and Saco give no clear calls to change the government or to perform other electoral engagements. This finding suggests that the TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions are not engaging with elections campaigns. In general, these results support our expectations regarding the political neutrality of the white-collar and upper-middle-class unions and the more intensive electoral activism of the working-class unions.

Fourth, the most frequent words in the TCO and Saco clouds can be interpreted as referring to agenda-setting. As displayed in Fig. 3.2, the word '*Almedalen*' is very common in the TCO and Saco videos, indicating that these unions seem to value (or at least discuss) the yearly Almedalen event more than the LO. This phenomenon may be a result of the political neutrality of the TCO and Saco unions: without pre-defined cooperation with a political party, it is necessary to use lobby opportunities to impact agenda-setting, and Almedalen is an excellent forum to do so. Another notable trend among the videos of the white-collar and upper-middle-class unions is the frequent mention of the welfare state. Common words in the videos uploaded by the TCO-affiliated unions are 'teachers' (*lärare*), 'school' (*skola*), 'healthcare' (*vård*) and 'tax reform' (*skattereform*); these words refer to issues that

are important to the middle class. Hence, it makes sense that the trade unions organizing the middle class are engaging in such issues and the mentioning of these issues, such as ‘tax reform’, indicate attempts to impact the political agenda. A similar pattern can be seen in the Saco videos, which use many education-related words (‘university’ [*universitet*], ‘teacher’ [*lärare*] and ‘education’ [*utbildning*]). Here, it is necessary to account for a methodological caveat: the unions affiliated to both of these union confederations might mention these words because they organize employees working in these sectors (e.g. teachers). Later, in the small N analysis, we will combine the education-related words with the audiences in order to try to distinguish which videos present political campaigns and which do not.

We found little evidence of contentious politics in our frequency analysis of the words used in the video titles and descriptions. The closest to protest action was the term ‘fight’ (*kamp*), which was found 28 times in the LO videos, whereas the other confederations used this term less than ten times in their video titles or descriptions. Other protest-related or collective action-related words such as ‘demonstration’ or ‘manifestation’ (in Swedish, the word ‘manifestation’ is often used for denoting a demonstration) were more or less absent in the material. One example of demonstration is a video posted by the LO that contains joint action among the LO, TCO and Saco; the video shows the chairpersons of the three confederations collectively demanding improvement in unemployment insurance in Almedalen (LO 2015b, February 5). The lack of protest in the unions’ YouTube videos does not mean that the unions did not mobilize protests during this time period, however. For example, the Municipal Workers’ Union organized demonstrations against the centre-right government’s cutbacks to the social insurance system; these demonstrations took place close to the Swedish parliament and to the building in which the Moderate Party (Moderaterna) has had its headquarters on Thursdays for several years (Antonsson 2009, September 24; Beckström 2011). These protests were shown in a few videos (Kommunal 2010a, June 17); however, in relation to the total number of videos uploaded to YouTube by Swedish unions, the lack of words referring to contentious action shows that such political engagement is rare. One reason may be that videos risk exposing the activists’ identities; in fact, our interviews with trade union activists confirmed that they view such exposure as a major concern (interview, 2015, May 21).

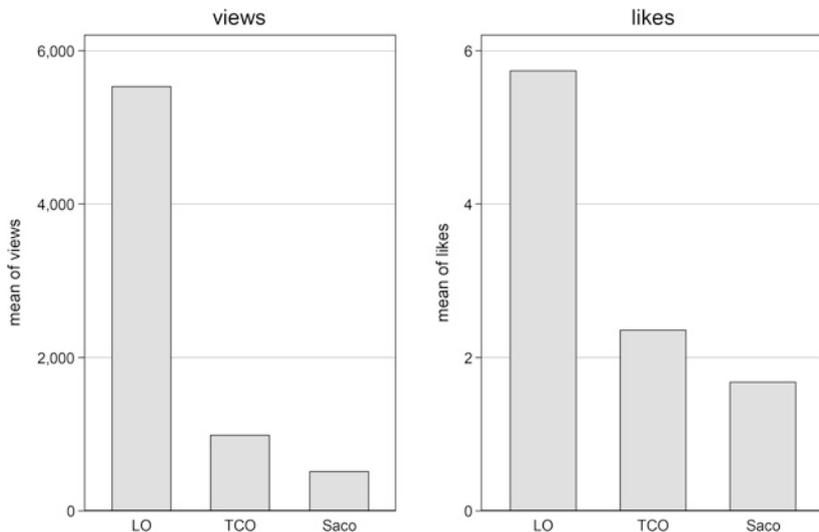


Fig. 3.3 The average number of views and likes of political videos across confederations

Finally, even though the overall number of videos containing political activism was modest, such videos could still be important in terms of dissemination. Since our metadata contained measurements of popularity—that is views and likes—we could determine the spread of the videos to some extent. As Fig. 3.3¹ demonstrates, not only do the LO-affiliated unions post the most videos on electoral campaigns, but their videos also receive far more views and likes than those of the other two confederations. The most liked video containing a political message that was uploaded by the working-class unions was a video produced by the LO that was part of the 2014 election campaign. This video, titled ‘Reinfeldt’s Sweden’ (LO 2014, February 23), listed a number of problems (mainly related to increased income and wealth inequalities) caused by the centre-right government led by Fredrik Reinfeldt. The video contains graphics that are easy to follow and has English subtitles. It has received 1148 likes and over 270,000 views from 2014 to 2017. The general popularity of the TCO and Saco videos is very low in comparison with that of the LO videos.

3.3.1 *Election Campaigns: All About Timing?*

The third step in our analysis of the videos' metadata focused on when the video was uploaded. The word clouds demonstrated that electoral activism among the TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions was rare. However, it is also possible to take part in an election campaign more generally, by being active in social media during election years. Such activities would not be captured by our word clouds. Therefore, we used another way to examine which trade unions took an active part in electoral campaigning, by focusing on timing. Two general elections (2010 and 2014) and two elections to the European Parliament (2009 and 2014) were covered by our observation period of 2007–2017. Figure 3.4 displays the number of videos uploaded over time.

A comparison of the videos uploaded by the three confederations reveals different patterns. While the unions affiliated with LO and TCO were the first to upload videos in 2007 and clearly used YouTube more during the 2010 election year, the unions affiliated with Saco had a slower start but gradually became energetic users of YouTube. Figure 3.4 contains one clear peak in 2010, which suggests that YouTube was used

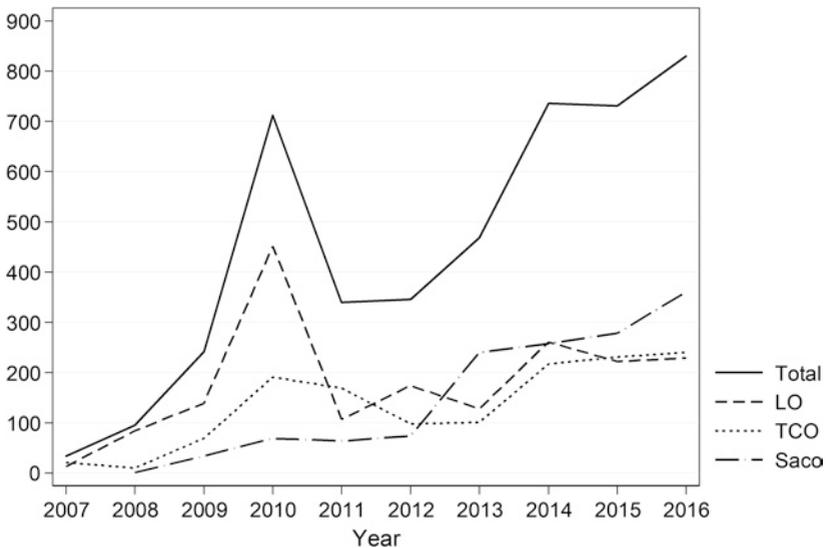


Fig. 3.4 Number of videos per year by confederation and their affiliated unions

for political campaigning. In 2014, however, there is no clear peak for the TCO and Saco unions; rather, they continued to upload videos at roughly the same rate over the two following years. On the other hand, the LO uploaded fewer videos after the 2014 election, but this decrease was not as great as the decrease in uploads after the 2010 election.

It is important to note that elections in Sweden always take place on the second Sunday in September, while the EU elections take place in May or June. Figure 3.5 illustrates the unions' activities on YouTube during the 2009, 2010 and 2014 election years. It is clear that LO-affiliated unions were very active in uploading videos during the 2010 election campaign; the number of videos increases in September. Many of the videos uploaded by the Saco-affiliated unions in June 2010 were not related to the Swedish elections, and they contain reports from the congress of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) in Chile. The LO-, TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions were also very active in May 2014, which suggests that they were engaged in the election campaigns for the EU elections. In fact, they were more active before the EU elections than before the general elections. Although this information is not visible in the graph, a few videos were uploaded by the LO-affiliated unions before the 2009 EU parliamentary elections, exhorting everyone to vote in the EU elections (IF Metall 2009b, June 2;

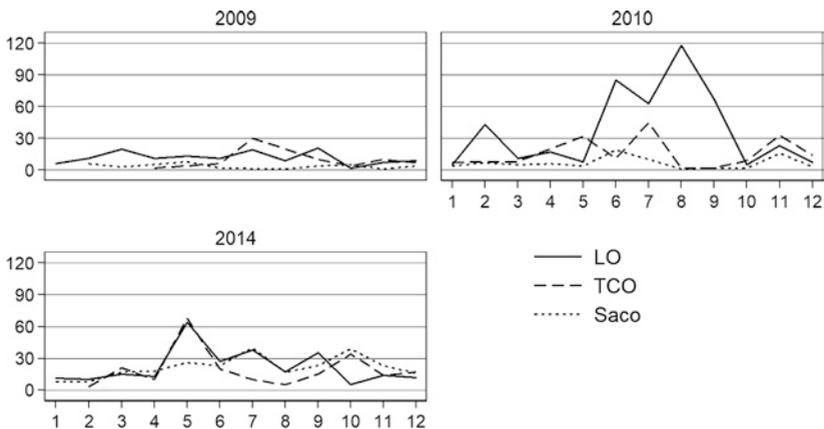


Fig. 3.5 Monthly distribution of videos on election years by confederation and their affiliated unions

Kommunal 2009, May 18). All graphs in Fig. 3.5 indicate that the TCO also uploaded many videos at the beginning of July (as did Saco in 2014), which mirrors the unions' activities in Almedalen.

3.4 POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE SMALL N SAMPLE: METHOD AND FINDINGS

Analysing the metadata provided us with a rough picture of the trade unions' messages on YouTube. In order to obtain a more detailed picture of the unions' political activism, we used our dataset of 624 randomly selected and carefully coded videos. The manually coded data also allowed us to evaluate whether our simple content analysis of the metadata was accurate. For each video, we asked: *What is the main content of this video and who is the audience?* Since our interest here was in the political messages, we classified the content according to the three types of political activism examined in the large N analysis: agenda-setting, participation in election campaigns and protest-related videos (i.e. reports of events and calls for action). The category 'agenda-setting' contained videos that focused on policy issues such as welfare, education, health care, equality, justice or economy and that targeted the general public or politicians. Since it can be difficult to distinguish agenda-setting from ordinary trade union work, we identified these videos through the *issue* being discussed in the video and through the *addressee* of the video: if the video discussed general political issues or specific policies, and if the addressees were politicians or the general public, then we assumed that the union was trying to impact the political agenda. The category 'election campaigns' held videos related to elections, including mobilization to vote for specific parties and participation in elections in general. The category 'protest' contained videos that either reported on protest events (e.g. demonstrations) or mobilized viewers for a protest event (e.g. calling viewers to sign a petition).

In addition to these three political activism categories, we included two other categories in the small N analysis. The category 'ordinary trade union work' contained various types of videos that discussed union-related issues or were part of the regular work of the unions. These videos covered topics such as employment issues, questions related to collective agreement, wages, reports on internal events (e.g. congresses, seminars and meetings) and more. They addressed a variety of audiences including members of the union, employers, other trade unions and the

Table 3.1 Messages in the small N sample (percentage and number of cases)

	<i>LO %</i>	<i>TCO %</i>	<i>Saco %</i>	<i>Total % (N)</i>
Ordinary trade union work	52.8	64.8	82.7	61.4 (383)
Agenda-setting	11.6	26.5	10.6	15.9 (99)
Election campaigns	32.5	8.7	0	20 (125)
Protest	2.7	0	3.9	2 (13)
Other	0.3	0	2.9	1 (4)
Total	100% (335)	100% (185)	100% (104)	100% (624)

general public. Finally, the category ‘other’ contained videos that did not fit into any of the other categories.

Table 3.1 shows how the videos in our sample were distributed across these categories. In comparison with the large N analysis, the small N sample contained a larger proportion of political activism—about 38% (in comparison with 25% for the large N sample); however, the differences between the confederations were very similar in the two analyses. Whereas almost 47% of the videos uploaded by the LO-affiliated unions carried a political message, the respective figures were 36% for the TCO-affiliated unions and 16% for Saco-affiliated unions. Although the difference between the large N and the small N analyses may relate to the sampling process, watching the videos provided greater validity of the coding process than the rough counting of words in the large N analysis allowed.

As displayed in Table 3.1, the TCO-affiliated unions uploaded videos containing ‘agenda-setting’ messages twice as often as the LO- and Saco-affiliated unions. This is not surprising, since the word cloud indicated that policy issues related to the welfare state frequently appeared in the videos of the TCO unions. Education was the most prevalent issue addressed in the TCO’s videos, with 53% of the TCO’s agenda-setting videos discussing some aspect of education. This prevalence is probably due to one of the two teachers’ unions in Sweden, the Swedish Teachers’ Union (Lärarförbundet), being part of the TCO. A closer look at the videos that discuss ‘education’, however, revealed that half of these videos address politicians and/or the public. Thus, these videos are not ‘ordinary union work’; rather, they must be considered as attempts to impact the political agenda. Some of these videos are very political. For example, a few of the videos were produced by a local section of the Teachers’ Union and showed members posing questions to politicians

regarding the number of children per teacher in preschool and primary school (Läraryförbundet 2015a, September 17; 2015b, September 24). Since all education in Sweden is financed by the state, these videos undoubtedly address the question of relocating tax money to schools; therefore, they are attempts to impact the political agenda. The rest of the TCO's agenda-setting videos referred to the politicians' week—Almedalen—during which the Teachers' Union has been very active.

The agenda-setting videos by the LO-affiliated unions also addressed specific policy issues, with a particular focus on unemployment insurance (IF Metall 2013, October 25) and on cutbacks made in sickness insurance (LO 2015a, January 16). Some of them raised bigger issues regarding inequalities and insecure employment (Byggnads 2013, March 6). In the case of Saco, the agenda-setting videos were very diverse and focused on health and education.

Turning to 'election campaigns', the findings were similar to the results of the large N analysis and showed that the videos uploaded by working-class unions in the small N sample focused on electoral campaigns three times more frequently than those uploaded by the other confederations. In fact, our small N sample contained no election-related videos from any Saco-affiliated union.

About 80% of the videos categorized under 'election campaigns' were uploaded by one union—the Municipal Workers' Union—and were related to the 'Therefore, I want to change the government' campaign. Some of the videos uploaded by LO-affiliated unions clearly called viewers to vote for the Social Democratic Party (Kommunal 2010b, August 17; 2010c, September 13), while other election-related videos mobilized the viewers to improve the conditions of the working class (IF Metall 2010b, August 22).

Of the videos uploaded by the TCO-affiliated unions in this category, the majority were uploaded by the Teachers' Union. This union posted a number of videos in 2010 and again in 2014, which stressed the importance of a well-functioning school system. These videos were active attempts to make primary education into a major issue in the election campaign (Läraryförbundet 2014, May 7). The political neutrality of the TCO-affiliated unions could again be seen in these videos: in 2014, the Teachers' Union published videos showing the union chairperson talking to each of the political parties in parliament (except for the populist radical right party) and asking questions on education politics. This type of engagement in the election campaign, which displays different

voting alternatives for viewers without recommending a particular party, demonstrates political neutrality while simultaneously encouraging the audience to vote.

Finally, in terms of videos about ‘protests’, as in the large N study, very few references were made to contentious politics in the small N study. Only 12 videos could be placed in this category: four videos from Saco-affiliated unions and eight from LO-affiliated unions. It should be emphasized that very few of these videos were in themselves protest actions. Surprisingly, there was only one such video: a video from the Saco-affiliated National Union of Teachers exhorting the viewers to sign a petition on the union’s homepage to increase the time teachers get per pupil (Lärarnas Riksförbund 2011, February 18).

It has been argued that when social movements use YouTube, they often *present* their major goals in their videos rather than using YouTube as the means to *achieve* their goals (Vraga et al. 2014). Our results confirm this. The other videos in the ‘protest’ category simply reported on contentious politics by displaying different protest events that had taken place. For example, one video reported on a demonstration for higher salaries for teachers (Lärarnas Riksförbund 2013, October 2); another video showed a flashmob organized by the union Akademikerförbundet SSR (Akademikerförbundet SSR 2013, October 17); and a third video uploaded by the Swedish Engineers showed the symbolic action of distributing soup (in a reference to a student’s low income) in front of the students’ loan office (Sveriges ingenjörer 2010, June 17). Finally, two videos referred to the crisis in the Swedish automobile industry: one reports on a demonstration against the closing of the production of the Swedish car SAAB and calls out General Motors (IF Metall 2010a, August 16) and the other targeted the government and called for financial support to the car industry during the recession (IF Metall 2009a, March 17). The crisis of the Swedish automobile industry was one of the few clear signs of the Great Recession of 2008 in Sweden. In these videos, the unions’ political actions primarily oppose the government policies that allowed the closures. Both videos were produced and uploaded by the Metal Workers’ Union, although the second video was created in cooperation with the Saco-affiliated union Sweden’s Engineers. These videos use protest events to draw attention to important issues for the trade union movement. Nevertheless, the number of protest-related videos and videos referring to unions’ protest actions in Sweden was so small that we are unable to discuss patterns in these videos.

3.5 TRADE UNIONS' POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ON YOUTUBE

It has been suggested that clearly and openly engaging in politics could help to revitalize the trade union movement. As social media is now a natural part of engagement with political campaigns, YouTube could be a means for political activism. Our analysis of the YouTube videos uploaded by Swedish trade unions showed that some of the Swedish unions have taken this suggestion seriously. For example, the Municipal Workers' Union, which is affiliated with the LO, carried out comprehensive electoral engagement in 2010. Many of the other trade unions, especially those affiliated with Saco, neglected the electoral campaign altogether and opted for agenda-setting activism.

As expected, working-class unions are still more politically active than white-collar and upper-middle-class unions, as they have been in the past. Moreover, the working-class unions clearly support one specific party—namely the Social Democratic Party. The other two union confederations emphasize their political neutrality both offline and online. However, they do not refrain from engaging in politics. The findings show that the TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions try to have an influence on which specific issues are politically debated. Our study demonstrates that the unions affiliated with these confederations are active in uploading videos about politics during election years, making them an indirect part of election campaigns in Sweden. Thus, the strategy of TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions seems to be one of trying to impact the political agenda without siding with a specific political party.

Finally, our analysis showed that the Swedish unions have not used YouTube to engage in 'contentious politics'. The working-class unions uploaded most of the few protest videos we detected; however, the TCO- and Saco-affiliated unions did not seem to have spread a message of contention through their YouTube videos.

NOTE

1. In all tables and figures in this chapter, 'the LO' refers to the LO and its affiliated unions, 'the TCO' refers to the TCO and its affiliated unions, and 'Saco' refers to Saco and its affiliated unions.

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