

## **Perceived Internal Union Democracy And Union Cynicism: Evidence From Union-Member Public Officials in Türkiye**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between perceived internal union democracy and union cynicism among union-member public officials in Muğla (Türkiye). Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected online from members affiliated with different unions (N = 236). Perceived internal union democracy and union cynicism were measured using established scales, and hypotheses were tested via Pearson correlation and simple linear regression. The results indicate a strong, negative association between internal union democracy and overall union cynicism ( $r = -0.787$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Regression analyses further show that internal union democracy explains a substantial proportion of variance in cynicism ( $R^2 = 0.619$ ), with a stronger association for the cognitive-affective component ( $R^2 = 0.670$ ) than for the behavioural component ( $R^2 = 0.077$ ). These findings suggest that the effective functioning of internal union democracy-reflected in transparency, participation, and accountability-may play a critical role in limiting members' distrust and negative orientations towards unions. The study contributes to debates on union legitimacy and highlights the importance of democratic mechanisms for sustaining union-member relations.

**Key words:** Internal Union Democracy, Union Cynicism, Union Representation, Public Officials.

**JEL Code:** J51, J53, D23

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## **1. Introduction**

Employees come together under the umbrella of trade unions to overcome the individual difficulties they encounter in working life and to enhance their collective strength when facing workplace problems. Collective organization enables employees to negotiate with employers from a more balanced position than they could as isolated individuals (Kelly, 1998: 9; Hyman, 2001: 131). Beyond their role in economic collective bargaining, trade unions also contribute to the institutionalization of workers' collective will and to broader social change. The extent to which unions can effectively perform these functions is closely tied to their adherence to democratic principles-particularly the sound operation of representative mechanisms.

In evaluating union strength, indicators such as strike frequency, union density, bargaining power, collective bargaining coverage, and social and political power are commonly used. Yet union satisfaction is also critical. Union satisfaction primarily reflects the quality of the union-member relationship, including perceptions of union trust, union support, and internal union democracy. It also concerns members' assessments of how effectively the union protects their interests. From both perspectives, union satisfaction is not only an abstract attitude but also a perception shaped by the tangible benefits that unions deliver to members (Chacko, 1985: 364; Himarios, 1988: 68). Accordingly, understanding how members perceive democracy within the union-and how this perception relates to representation-remains essential.

The contemporary crisis of trade unionism cannot be explained solely by falling unionization rates; it is also widely interpreted as a decline in unions' power and effectiveness. Pitkin's (1967) conceptualization emphasizes that representation is not merely the act of election. It requires the ongoing defence of represented interests, the amplification of members' voices, and meaningful participation in decision-making. From this standpoint, union representation and internal union democracy are best understood as mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, whether unions operate in line with democratic principles has long been contested. Although unions are expected to be transparent, open to scrutiny and criticism, and attentive to members' demands, their representative structures are frequently criticized for failing to function democratically (Öztürk, 2013: 283).

Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy" suggests that as organizations grow, they become bureaucratized and decision-making increasingly concentrates in the hands of a small leadership group (Michels, 1915: 377-378; Dereli, 1971: 108-109). This perspective remains useful for understanding structural sources of democratic deficits and representation crises in union leadership. In a similar vein, Hyman (2001: 33-36) argues that unions have become "bureaucratic professional

organizations”, a transformation that may weaken the bond between members and union leaders over time.

The notion of a representation crisis has gained renewed prominence, particularly as democratic institutions worldwide have experienced declining trust (Hyman, 2001; Akkaya, 2004; Çelik, 2006; Mair, 2013; Millioğulları Kaya, 2017). In the union context, a representation crisis is reflected in members’ perceptions that they are not adequately represented, that their interests are insufficiently protected, and that decision-making lacks transparency. Such perceptions are associated with weaker union-member ties and reduced commitment (Hammer et al., 2009; Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013; Keser et al., 2014; Uçkan Hekimler, 2017; Millioğulları Kaya, 2017; Karcıoğlu & Balkaya, 2018; Karcıoğlu & Balkaya, 2021; Güven, 2021; Kazar & Tosun, 2022; Şafak et al., 2023; Kayır & Göksu, 2025). When a growing misalignment emerges between leaders’ strategic priorities and rank-and-file members’ expectations, members may increasingly interpret union action as unresponsive, thereby intensifying tensions within the organization. In such circumstances, a representation crisis becomes more likely.

Representation crises are associated with declining loyalty, weakened union effectiveness and trust, and reduced union density (de Guzmán et al., 2016: 465). One particularly salient consequence is cynicism. Cynicism can be understood as a cognitive and emotional distancing process that emerges as the individual’s psychological bond with the organization weakens (Andersson, 1996: 1397). Dean et al. (1998: 45) define organizational cynicism as an attitude comprising negative beliefs, emotions, and behavioral tendencies towards the organization. Abraham (2000: 269) similarly conceptualizes cynicism as a negative attitude rooted in the belief that the organization lacks integrity. In the present study, union cynicism is conceptualized as organizational cynicism directed at the union as the focal organization. In unions, cynicism may intensify when members perceive the organization as closed, unaccountable, or indifferent to their interests, thereby undermining democratic legitimacy.

Despite a growing interest in union democracy and member attitudes, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how perceived internal union democracy translates into cynical orientations towards the union, particularly in public-sector contexts where unions often operate under distinct institutional constraints and membership dynamics. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the following research question: How does deterioration in union members’ perceptions of internal union democracy affect their levels of union cynicism?

Accordingly, this study aims to empirically examine the relationship between perceived internal union democracy and union cynicism. In this study, internal union democracy is understood as a member-evaluated democratic functioning reflected in practices such as participation and voice, transparency, procedural justice, equality, and accountability. The research is based on

quantitative data collected from public officials in Muğla province (Türkiye) and draws on responses from members affiliated with different unions, thereby reducing single-union bias and enabling a broader assessment of how perceptions of internal union democracy relate to cynicism across union settings. By focusing on members' evaluations of democratic practices, the study contributes to debates on union legitimacy, representation, and the sustainability of union-member relations.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Representation and The Crisis of Representation in Unions**

In political theory and industrial relations, representation is conceptualized not merely as an act of authorization, but as a multidimensional relationship that also requires responsiveness to the preferences and interests of those represented and mechanisms of accountability. In Pitkin's (1967) framework, representation extends beyond formal delegation and includes descriptive and substantive dimensions. The central implication is that representation is not a static status but an ongoing process whose legitimacy depends on the quality of the relationship and the representative's performance. Building on this view, a crisis of representation refers to a weakening of the link between representatives and represented actors, alongside the perception that members' voices and demands are not adequately incorporated into decision-making and that leaders fail to respond effectively (Pitkin, 1967; Mair, 2013). Mair (2013) similarly draws attention to a broader "disconnection" dynamic, whereby representative institutions become distanced from the constituencies they claim to represent.

In the union context, a representation crisis is not simply dissatisfaction; it signals the erosion of the union's representational legitimacy among members (Hyman, 2001). A key organizational driver is bureaucratization and the concentration of decision-making within a narrow leadership group. Michels' (1915) "Iron Law of Oligarchy" argues that organizational growth tends to produce oligarchic tendencies, enabling leadership domination through hierarchy and a bureaucratic apparatus. In a related argument, Hyman (2001) suggests that unions increasingly resemble "bureaucratic professional organizations", a transformation that may weaken union-member ties over time.

Evidence from Türkiye also indicates that when members' perceptions of effectiveness and trust decline, the legitimacy of union representation can be questioned rapidly (Urhan & Selamoğlu, 2008; Uçkan & Kağnıcıoğlu, 2009). Contemporary research further notes that representation crises are shaped by both internal and external pressures. Neoliberal restructuring, labor-market flexibilization and fragmentation, declining unionization, and changing member profiles can strain unions' representational capacity and complicate what unions represent and how they do so (Akkaya, 2004; Hyman, 2001). These dynamics make the internal functioning of unions-particularly internal union democracy and member voice-more central to the question of legitimacy.

## **Internal Union Democracy as a Legitimacy Mechanism**

Unions' representational capacity cannot be attributed solely to formal legal authority. For members, legitimacy is closely related to whether decision-making is accessible, contestable, and subject to accountability. Accordingly, representation crises are frequently linked to the quality of internal union democracy, including participation channels, transparency, and leadership accountability (Demirdizen & Lordoğlu, 2013). In Türkiye, centrally organized and bureaucratic union structures and weak consultation mechanisms have been argued to undermine internal democratic functioning, reinforced by members' uncertainty regarding their influence over union policies and the adequacy of information shared by leadership (Urhan & Selamoğlu, 2008).

The union democracy literature treats democratic functioning as more than periodic elections. It includes institutional arrangements that enable members to influence union decision-making, free and fair competitive processes, and the legitimate presence of internal opposition. Lipset et al. (1956) show that internal competition can provide a monitoring and sanctioning basis through which members can effectively change leadership and policy direction, thereby sustaining democracy. Subsequent work similarly argues that assessing internal union democracy requires attention to participation in decision-making, oversight capacity, the operation of membership rights, and the extent to which union practices meet standards of transparency and accountability (Sipahi, 2016; Öztürk, 2013).

Empirical studies support the relevance of these mechanisms for member attitudes. Perceived union instrumentality predicts perceived union support, which in turn relates to loyalty and participation behaviors (Tetrick et al., 2007). At the local level, leader behaviors that facilitate contact, problem-solving, and "voice" opportunities are systematically associated with members' perceptions of procedural fairness and responsiveness (Hammer et al., 2009). Findings from Türkiye also indicate that perceived justice, instrumentality, and democratic functioning are positively associated with commitment and satisfaction, and that weakened democracy perceptions may contribute to trust erosion (Güven, 2021).

The relationship between internal union democracy and representation is often framed through legitimacy. Legitimacy concerns whether an institution's practices are perceived as appropriate and proper; decision procedures, experienced fairness, and accountability are central foundations (Tyler, 2006). The ILO (2005) similarly emphasizes that sound internal governance arrangements-consistent with internal union democracy (e.g., transparency and accountability)-are a prerequisite for sustaining member trust and, by extension, representational capacity. Conversely, specialization and bureaucratic routines may increase distance between

leaders and members, constraining participation and challenging internal democratic functioning (Aydın, 2017; Öztürk, 2013).

### **From Democratic Deficits to Union Cynicism: Theoretical Linkage**

When internal democratic functioning becomes contested, members' evaluations may shift from moderate dissatisfaction to broader attitudinal patterns concerning union integrity, fairness, and trustworthiness. The organizational cynicism literature conceptualizes cynicism as a multidimensional attitude that includes (i) cognitive beliefs that the organization lacks integrity, (ii) negative affect, and (iii) behavioral tendencies such as disparagement and criticism (Dean et al., 1998). Andersson (1996) similarly links cynicism to distrust and disappointment shaped by organizational experiences, while Abraham (2000) emphasizes the integrity-based core belief and associated emotional and behavioral reactions.

A prominent explanation for cynicism is the psychological contract breach/violation perspective. When implicit expectations and obligations are perceived to be unmet, individuals may interpret organizational conduct as a breach, leading to distrust and disappointment that foster cynical attitudes (Andersson, 1996). Adapted to the union context, members may hold implicit expectations that the union will provide effective representation, meaningful voice, and fair procedures. When leadership decisions appear unresponsive, non-transparent, or unaccountable, members may interpret this as a failure to honor those expectations. This perceived "responsiveness deficit" can erode representational legitimacy and facilitate beliefs that the union lacks integrity, thereby strengthening cynicism. Consistent with this logic, Hammer et al. (2009) argue that union-member relations can operate according to a psychological contract dynamic: members supply commitment and participation in exchange for bargaining outcomes and the union's capacity to deliver inclusion and fair treatment.

These theoretical strands imply a coherent pathway: internal union democracy → perceived legitimacy and responsiveness → trust/psychological contract fulfillment → lower cynicism. Conversely, perceived democratic deficits are expected to reduce legitimacy and responsiveness perceptions and to increase integrity-related doubts and negative affect, which may then manifest as cynical behaviors. In this study, union cynicism is conceptualized as organizational cynicism directed at the union as the focal organization (Dean et al., 1998; Andersson, 1996; Abraham, 2000).

In line with this multidimensional perspective, union cynicism is operationalized in the present study using two components—a cognitive-affective component and a behavioral component—to ensure alignment between the theoretical discussion and the hypothesis tests.

## **Hypothesis Development**

Taken together, the literature suggests that stronger internal union democracy—through participation opportunities, transparency, procedural justice, equality, and accountability—should reduce members’ cynical orientations by reinforcing legitimacy, responsiveness, and trust. Accordingly, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Internal union democracy has a significant and negative effect on union cynicism.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Internal union democracy has a significant and negative effect on cognitive-affective union cynicism.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Internal union democracy has a significant and negative effect on behavioral union cynicism.

## **3. Methodology**

### **Research Design and Data Collection**

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational survey design to examine whether union members’ perceptions of internal union democracy are associated with union cynicism (Karasar, 2002; Neuman, 2014). The research was conducted in Muğla province (Türkiye) with public officials who were union members. No occupational/professional stratification was applied, and participants affiliated with different unions were included to avoid a single-union focus. Data were collected online via a structured questionnaire link distributed through voluntary participation channels. As dissemination relied on open/voluntary access, the response rate could not be calculated. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed about confidentiality. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee. A total of 312 questionnaires were initially collected. Following screening procedures (see below), the final analytic sample comprised 236 respondents. Given the voluntary, non-probability online recruitment, findings should be interpreted as indicative for the sampled union-member public officials rather than fully generalisable to all public officials in Türkiye.

### **Measures**

Perceptions of internal union democracy were measured using the Organizational Democracy Scale developed by Geçkil and Tikici (2015) (28 items; participation-critique, transparency, justice, equality, and accountability). Union cynicism was measured using the Organizational Cynicism Scale adapted into Turkish by Kalağan (2009) (13 items; cognitive, affective, and behavioral content).

In both instruments, items were contextualized to the union setting by referring to the union as the focal organization, without altering the substantive meaning of the statements. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). No additional expert-panel review or pilot study was conducted because both instruments had been previously validated in Turkish samples and only minimal contextual wording was introduced; nevertheless, this remains a limitation.

### **Data Screening and Analysis Strategy**

Prior to hypothesis testing, data were screened for multivariate outliers and response-pattern issues. Mahalanobis distance values were computed separately for the internal union democracy and union cynicism item sets. Using  $p < .001$ , 29 cases were flagged as multivariate outliers for the democracy items and 39 for the cynicism items. In addition, cases exhibiting straight-lining (invariant responding across items) were excluded. After joint screening, 76 questionnaires were removed, leaving 236 cases for analysis.

All analyses were conducted using SPSS 24.0 and jamovi. Analyses proceeded as follows: (i) descriptive statistics; (ii) measurement validity assessment (EFA/CFA); (iii) Pearson correlations among the main variables; and (iv) simple linear regression models testing the effects of internal union democracy on overall union cynicism and its components. Given the cross-sectional, single-source design, findings are interpreted as associations consistent with the proposed theoretical direction rather than definitive causal effects.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Sampling adequacy and factorability were assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Kaiser, 1974; Field, 2009). In line with common guidelines, factor analysis was considered appropriate when KMO exceeded .50 and Bartlett's test was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted with Direct Oblimin rotation, given the theoretical expectation that latent factors may be correlated. In determining the factor structure, factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were retained and explained variance was examined. Item retention was evaluated based on factor loadings and item quality indicators. Items with factor loadings below .40 were considered inadequate (Coşkun et al., 2015: 283). Items were also flagged as problematic when they displayed cross-loadings, operationalised as loading on two factors with a loading difference smaller than .10 (Etcı, 2020). In addition, items with low communalities ( $< .40$ ) were considered for removal to improve the stability and interpretability of the factor solution.

Applying these criteria to the internal union democracy scale, EFA results indicated that Item 21 did not load meaningfully on the dominant factor (loading = .030), even though it had been reverse-coded. Because it effectively behaved as a

single-item factor and weakened the structural clarity of the solution, Item 21 was removed and the EFA was repeated.

Applying the same criteria to the union cynicism scale, Item 38 (“I complain to my non-union friends about what is going on in the union”) was removed because it exhibited cross-loadings with a loading difference below .10. In addition, Item 32 (“In my union, those who behave differently while expecting members to do something are appreciated”) was excluded due to a very low communality ( $h^2 = .034 < .40$ ) and because it generated a weak single-item factor. Subsequently, during CFA, Item 40 was removed as part of a parsimonious model refinement process to improve overall model fit and measurement clarity.

After removing Item 21, the internal union democracy scale yielded a single-factor structure with 27 items, explaining 73.701% of total variance. Factor loadings ranged from .676 to .952 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Exploratory factor analysis of internal union democracy

Item No	Item	
13	In the union I belong to, all evaluations are carried out in accordance with the principle of transparency.	,952
12	In the union I belong to, there is open and two-way communication.	,935
7	Union management takes union members' criticisms into account.	,933
15	In the union I belong to, there is a fair recognition/appraisal system.	,930
10	In the union I belong to, activities are conducted in line with the principle of transparency.	,922
6	Union management encourages union members to express criticism.	,910
8	It is considered normal for union members to criticize union management's practices.	,910
2	In union decision-making, the views of the majority are taken into account.	,908
11	Union leaders organize briefing meetings during periods of important developments.	,903
9	In union meetings, everyone is given an opportunity to express their views.	,899
17	Feedback is provided by taking into account members' contributions to the union.	,896
16	The allocation of internal union duties takes place through a democratic election.	,894
4	Union leaders respect majority decisions even if they do not like them.	,888
1	Union leaders encourage me to participate in union decisions.	,876
22	In union meetings, attention is paid to the quality of a suggestion rather than who makes it.	,873
25	I think the union I belong to is a democratic organization.	,872
14	The union I belong to supports members' development in union matters through training.	,869
3	When decisions are taken in the union, everyone who will be affected has the right to speak.	,850
19	Union members' views are influential in determining union leaders.	,836
28	In the union I belong to, a culture of accountability has developed.	,821
26	In the union I belong to, policies and procedures can always be questioned by union members.	,795
5	I can comfortably criticize union decisions and policies that I consider wrong.	,794

18	In the union I belong to, evaluation criteria are standardized.	,782
27	At any level in the union, I belong to, members can always be held accountable.	,751
23	In the union I belong to, discrimination is practiced among union members. (Reverse-coded)	,717
20	In the union I belong to, there is no gender discrimination.	,701
24	In the union I belong to, no discrimination is made based on language, religion, race, etc.	,676
<b>Eigenvalue</b>		<b>19,899</b>
<b>Total variance explained (%)</b>		<b>73,701</b>

Source: Authors' calculations

A CFA was then conducted to evaluate the plausibility of this one-factor model. Model fit indices are reported in Table 2, and detailed factor loadings are provided in Table 3. All factor loadings were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices ( $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, TLI, RMSEA) and interpreted holistically rather than relying on a single index (Kline, 2011).

**Table 2.** Model fit indices for the internal union democracy scale (CFA)

$X^2$	$df$	$X^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Decision
967	324	2.98	0.925	0.919	0.0917	Acceptable fit

Source: Authors' calculations

**Table 3.** Confirmatory factor analysis results for internal union democracy (CFA)

Item	Estimate ( $\lambda$ )	SE	$z$	$p$	Std. Estimate
1	1.147	0.0678	16.9	<.001	0.870
2	1.209	0.0662	18.3	<.001	0.911
3	1.131	0.0687	16.5	<.001	0.860
4	1.055	0.0612	17.2	<.001	0.649
5	0.908	0.0632	14.4	<.001	0.856
6	1.093	0.0596	18.3	<.001	0.859
7	1.185	0.0620	19.1	<.001	0.880
8	1.035	0.0577	17.9	<.001	0.782
9	1.034	0.0590	17.5	<.001	0.913
10	1.127	0.0605	18.6	<.001	0.935
11	1.172	0.0651	18.0	<.001	0.902
12	1.153	0.0597	19.3	<.001	0.889
13	1.195	0.0597	20.0	<.001	0.921
14	1.057	0.0628	16.8	<.001	0.904
15	1.148	0.0601	19.1	<.001	0.940
16	1.043	0.0594	17.5	<.001	0.959
17	1.060	0.0600	17.7	<.001	0.868
18	0.843	0.0593	14.2	<.001	0.935
19	0.963	0.0615	15.7	<.001	0.890
20	0.591	0.0500	11.8	<.001	0.893
22	0.959	0.0579	16.6	<.001	0.776
23 (R)	0.879	0.0704	12.5	<.001	0.828
24	0.570	0.0510	11.2	<.001	0.678
25	0.939	0.0565	16.6	<.001	0.771
26	0.847	0.0601	14.1	<.001	0.729
27	0.827	0.0636	13.0	<.001	0.803

28	0.846	0.0566	15.0	<.001	0.707
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**Source:** Authors' calculations

For union cynicism, the EFA screening and item elimination process is summarized in Table 4. The final EFA supported a two-factor structure consisting of a cognitive-affective component and a behavioral component, explaining 73.509% of total variance (Table 5).

**Table 4.** Union cynicism scale: EFA screening and item elimination summary

Stage	Procedure	Item	Decision rationale
1	Item removal	"I complain to my non-union friends about what is going on in the union."	Cross-loading on two factors with difference < .10
2	Item removal	"In my union, those who behave differently while expecting members to do something are appreciated."	Very low communality ( $h^2 = .034 < .40$ ) and a weak single-item factor
3	<b>Final Structure</b>	<b>The remaining 11 items</b>	<b>Most stable and highest-variance structure obtained</b>

**Source:** Authors' calculations

**Table 5.** Exploratory factor analysis results for union cynicism (final EFA solution)

Item No	Item	Cognitive-affective	Behavioral
35	Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel angry.	,917	
36	Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel furious.	,905	
34	Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel tense.	,895	
31	If it is said that a practice will be implemented in my union, I doubt whether it will actually happen.	,874	
37	Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel anxious.	,870	
29	I believe that what is said and what is done in my union are different.	,858	
33	I see very little similarity between what is promised and what is actually done in my union.	,844	
30	There is very little in common between my union's policies, aims, and practices.	,747	
40	I talk to others about how things are run in the union I belong to.		,825
41	I criticize the practices and policies of the union I belong to when talking to others.		,775
39	When my union and its members are mentioned, we exchange meaningful glances with other union members.		,663
<b>Eigenvalue</b>		<b>6,409</b>	<b>1,677</b>
<b>Variance explained (%)</b>		<b>58,261</b>	<b>15,248</b>
<b>Total variance explained (%)</b>		<b>58,261</b>	<b>73,509</b>

**Source:** Authors' calculations

CFA was used to assess this two-factor structure. The model improvement steps and corresponding fit indices are reported in Table 6, and the final CFA

loadings are presented in Table 7. Where CFA improvement steps required correlated residuals, error covariances were specified only within the same factor and only between items with overlapping wording/content, to capture shared method variance rather than substantive cross-loadings. Following EFA/CFA refinements, the final union cynicism measure comprised 10 items, loading on two components (8 cognitive-affective and 2 behavioral).

**Table 6.** CFA model improvement steps and fit indices (union cynicism)

Model stage	Modification	$X^2$	$df$	$X^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Decision
<b>Model 1</b>	Initial model (all items)	397	43	9.23	0.865	0.828	0.189	Rejected
<b>Model 2</b>	Item 40 removed	343	34	10.08	0.879	0.840	0.198	Revised
<b>Final Model</b>	Within-factor residual covariances specified	<b>109</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>0.968</b>	<b>0.949</b>	<b>0.112</b>	<b>Acceptable fit</b>

**Source:** Authors' calculations

**Table 7.** Final CFA results for union cynicism

Factor / Item	Estimate ( $\lambda$ )	SE	$z$	$p$	Std. estimate
<b>Cognitive-affective</b>					
29	0.934	0.0718	13.01	<.001	0.735
30	0.606	0.0671	9.02	<.001	0.551
31	0.820	0.0624	13.15	<.001	0.741
33	0.789	0.0663	11.90	<.001	0.687
34	1.154	0.0550	20.98	<.001	0.991
35	1.087	0.0552	19.71	<.001	0.958
36	1.070	0.0561	19.08	<.001	0.941
37	1.072	0.0569	18.85	<.001	0.939
<b>Behavioral</b>					
39	0.914	0.0912	10.02	<.001	0.810
41	0.769	0.0880	8.74	<.001	0.667

Note: Factor variances fixed to 1.000.

**Source:** Authors' calculations

### Reliability, Transparency, and Model specification

Internal consistency was assessed via Cronbach's alpha (Tavşancıl, 2014). Reliability coefficients for all constructs and sub-components are reported in Table 8. Internal union democracy demonstrated very high reliability ( $\alpha = .98$ ), and overall union cynicism showed high reliability ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Subscale reliability was high for cognitive-affective cynicism ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and acceptable for behavioral cynicism ( $\alpha = .68$ ), noting the sensitivity of alpha to short scales.

**Table 8.** Reliability analysis

Construct	No. of items	$\alpha$
<b>Internal union democracy</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>,98</b>
<b>Union cynicism (total)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>,93</b>
Cognitive-affective cynicism	5	,95
Behavioral cynicism	2	,68

**Source:** Authors' calculations

For transparency, EFA and CFA were conducted on the same dataset due to sample-size constraints; thus, CFA is presented as an internal assessment of model plausibility. Future studies are encouraged to cross-validate the measurement structure using independent or split samples. Based on the final measurement structure, internal union democracy was treated as a single construct, and union cynicism was operationalized with two components (cognitive-affective and behavioral). Accordingly, the hypotheses tested were:

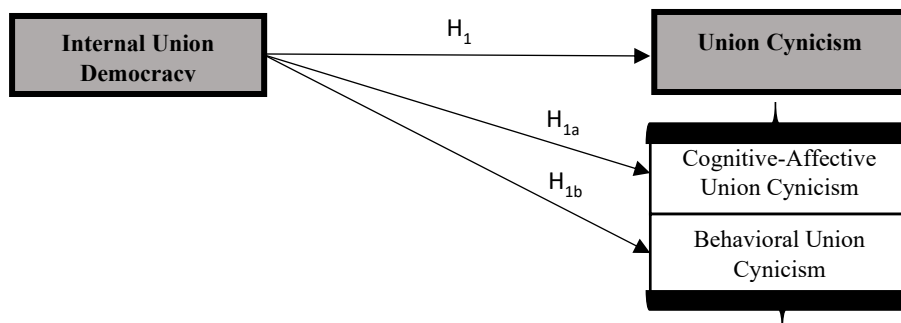
H<sub>1</sub>: Internal union democracy negatively predicts overall union cynicism.

H<sub>1a</sub>: Internal union democracy negatively predicts cognitive-affective union cynicism.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Internal union democracy negatively predicts behavioral union cynicism.

As shown in Figure 1, H<sub>1</sub> represents a direct effect. Accordingly, higher perceptions of internal union democracy are expected to be associated with lower levels of union cynicism (e.g., distrust, criticism, and disappointment), consistent with the negative relationship reported in the literature. In addition to overall cynicism, the present study examines union cynicism in two components-cognitive-affective and behavioral-captured by H<sub>1a</sub> and H<sub>1b</sub>.

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model



## 4. Findings

### Participant Characteristics and Union Membership

Descriptive statistics regarding the demographic characteristics of union-member public officials provide an overview of the sample and support interpretation of the study results. In addition, information on whether there are unionized family members, as well as the route and duration of union membership, helps contextualize members' perceptions.

**Table 9.** Participants' demographic characteristics (N = 236)

	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Marital status</b>		
Female	69	29,2	Married	198	83,9
Male	167	70,8	Single	38	16,1
Total	236	100	Total	236	100
<b>Year of Birth</b>			<b>Education level</b>		
1960-1979	140	59,3	High school or associate degree	26	11,0
1980-1999	96	40,7	Bachelor's degree	168	71,2
Total	236	100	Postgraduate	42	17,8
			Total	236	100

**Source:** Authors' calculations

As shown in Table 9, most participants were male (70.8%), married (83.9%), born between 1960-1979 (59.3%), and held a Bachelor's degree (71.2%).

**Table 10.** Union membership information (N = 236)

	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
<b>Unionized family member</b>			<b>Route to membership</b>		
Yes	111	47,0	Through a union representative	65	27,5
No	125	53,0	Workplace management recommendation	29	12,3
Total	236	100	Union branch manager	25	10,6
<b>Membership duration</b>			Friend	48	20,3
Less than 3 years	24	10,2	Own contact/initiative	69	29,2
3 years or more	212	89,8	Total	236	100
Total	236	100			

**Source:** Authors' calculations

According to Table 10, the proportions of participants with and without a unionised family member were relatively close (47.0% vs 53.0%). Most respondents had been union members for three years or more (89.8%). Regarding how membership was initiated, the largest share reported joining through their own contact/initiative (29.2%), followed by joining via a union representative (27.5%) and via a friend (20.3%). The notable share of members recruited through union representatives underscores the role of workplace representation in membership acquisition.

### **Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables**

Descriptive statistics for the 27 items representing internal union democracy (percent distributions, item means, and standard deviations) are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11.** Internal union democracy items: percentage distribution, mean, and SD

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
Union leaders encourage me to participate in union decisions.	14,0	14,4	13,1	39,4	19,1	<b>3,35</b>	<b>1,321</b>
In union decision-making, the views of the majority are taken into account.	16,1	11,9	12,7	42,4	16,9	<b>3,32</b>	<b>1,330</b>
When decisions are taken in the union, everyone who will be affected has the right to speak.	13,1	17,4	11,9	38,1	19,5	<b>3,33</b>	<b>1,325</b>
Union leaders respect majority decisions even if they do not like them.	11,0	10,6	20,3	41,9	16,1	<b>3,42</b>	<b>1,202</b>
I can comfortably criticise union decisions and policies that I consider wrong.	8,9	8,1	9,7	51,3	22,0	<b>3,69</b>	<b>1,163</b>
Union management encourages union members to express criticism.	10,6	17,8	18,2	41,1	12,3	<b>3,27</b>	<b>1,200</b>
Union management takes union members' criticisms into account.	12,3	13,1	13,6	42,8	18,2	<b>3,42</b>	<b>1,270</b>
It is considered normal for union members to criticize union management's practices.	9,7	8,1	22,5	43,6	16,1	<b>3,48</b>	<b>1,150</b>
In union meetings, everyone is given an opportunity to express their views.	8,5	7,2	14,4	45,3	24,6	<b>3,70</b>	<b>1,166</b>
In the union I belong to, activities are conducted in line with the principle of transparency.	10,6	10,2	15,7	43,2	20,3	<b>3,53</b>	<b>1,225</b>
Union leaders organize briefing meetings during periods of important developments.	11,9	16,5	9,7	41,9	19,9	<b>3,42</b>	<b>1,300</b>
In the union I belong to, there is open and two-way communication.	10,2	15,7	14,4	42,8	16,9	<b>3,41</b>	<b>1,229</b>
In the union I belong to, all evaluations are carried out in accordance with the principle of transparency.	11,4	12,3	19,5	37,7	19,1	<b>3,41</b>	<b>1,250</b>
The union I belong to supports members' development in union matters through training.	9,3	16,5	17,4	39,0	17,8	<b>3,39</b>	<b>1,221</b>
In the union I belong to, there is a fair recognition/appraisal system.	12,7	12,3	23,7	36,4	14,8	<b>3,28</b>	<b>1,231</b>
The allocation of internal union duties takes place through a democratic election.	8,5	9,7	16,1	44,1	21,6	<b>3,61</b>	<b>1,175</b>
Feedback is provided by taking into account members' contributions to the union.	9,7	12,7	16,1	45,3	16,1	<b>3,45</b>	<b>1,189</b>
In the union I belong to, evaluation criteria are standardized.	6,8	14,8	28,8	36,9	12,7	<b>3,34</b>	<b>1,089</b>
Union members' views are influential in determining union leaders.	8,5	12,7	16,5	45,3	16,9	<b>3,50</b>	<b>1,165</b>
In the union I belong to, there is no gender discrimination.	1,3	4,2	13,6	46,2	34,7	<b>4,09</b>	<b>,873</b>
In union meetings, attention is paid to the quality of a suggestion rather than who makes it.	7,2	9,7	17,8	46,2	19,1	<b>3,60</b>	<b>1,120</b>
There is no discrimination among union members in the union I belong to.	8,9	15,7	14,8	38,1	22,5	<b>3,50</b>	<b>1,246</b>
In the union I belong to, no discrimination is made based on language, religion, race, etc.	2,1	4,2	12,3	52,5	28,8	<b>4,02</b>	<b>,880</b>

I think the union I belong to is a democratic organization.	5,9	9,7	15,7	47,5	21,2	<b>3,68</b>	<b>1,094</b>
In the union I belong to, policies and procedures can always be questioned by union members.	5,1	16,1	21,2	41,1	16,5	<b>3,48</b>	<b>1,101</b>
At any level in the union, I belong to, members can always be held accountable.	10,2	8,1	28,0	39,8	14,0	<b>3,39</b>	<b>1,138</b>
In the union I belong to, a culture of accountability has developed.	8,9	18,2	24,6	44,5	3,8	<b>3,16</b>	<b>1,056</b>
<b>Internal union democracy (overall)</b>						<b>3,49</b>	<b>1,010</b>

Source: Authors' calculations

Overall, participants' perceptions of internal union democracy were above the midpoint ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), indicating that members generally viewed union functioning as relatively democratic. The highest-rated items were: "There is no gender discrimination in the union I belong to" ( $M = 4.09$ ) and "No discrimination is made based on language, religion, race, etc." ( $M = 4.02$ ), suggesting that members perceived the union as particularly inclusive. The item "There is no discrimination among union members in the union I belong to" ( $M = 3.50$ ) similarly reflects perceived fairness towards members. In addition, relatively high scores on "I can comfortably criticise union decisions and policies that I consider wrong" ( $M = 3.69$ ) and "In union meetings, everyone is given an opportunity to express their views" ( $M = 3.70$ ) provide concrete indications that freedom of expression and participation are supported within the union.

Descriptive statistics for union cynicism and its sub-components (cognitive-affective and behavioral) are reported in Table 12.

**Table 12.** Union cynicism items: percentage distribution, mean, and SD

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	M	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
I believe that what is said and what is done in my union are different.	19,9	40,3	10,6	19,5	9,7	<b>2,59</b>	<b>1,274</b>
There is very little in common between my union's policies, aims, and practices.	14,0	35,6	28,0	16,1	6,4	<b>2,65</b>	<b>1,102</b>
If it is said that a practice will be implemented in my union, I doubt whether it will actually happen.	19,1	42,4	18,6	14,8	5,1	<b>2,44</b>	<b>1,111</b>
I see very little similarity between what is promised and what is actually done in my union.	14,4	41,5	18,6	18,2	7,2	<b>2,62</b>	<b>1,151</b>
Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel tense.	42,4	32,6	13,1	6,8	5,1	<b>2,00</b>	<b>1,135</b>
Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel angry.	37,7	33,1	14,8	9,3	5,1	<b>2,11</b>	<b>1,162</b>
Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel furious.	41,9	32,2	13,6	7,6	4,7	<b>2,01</b>	<b>1,134</b>
Thinking about the union I belong to makes me feel anxious.	41,1	33,5	12,3	8,5	4,7	<b>2,02</b>	<b>1,139</b>
<b>Cognitive-affective (overall)</b>						<b>2,30</b>	<b>,999</b>

<b>Behavioral</b>	When my union and its members are mentioned, we exchange meaningful glances with other union members.	26,7	36,4	19,1	13,6	4,2	2,32	1,139
	I criticize the practices and policies of the union I belong to when talking to others.	18,6	37,7	15,3	24,6	3,8	2,57	1,159
<b>Behavioral (overall)</b>							<b>2,44</b>	<b>,999</b>
<b>Union cynicism (overall)</b>							<b>2,33</b>	<b>,902</b>

**Source:** Authors' calculations

As shown in Table 12, the overall level of union cynicism was low ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), close to the “disagree” response category. The behavioural cynicism mean was  $M = 2.44$ , whereas cognitive-affective cynicism averaged  $M = 2.30$ . Within the cognitive-affective dimension, the highest mean score was observed for the item indicating limited alignment between the union’s policies, aims, and practices ( $M = 2.65$ ). Within the behavioural dimension, the highest mean score was observed for items capturing members’ tendency to express criticism about union practices when talking to others ( $M = 2.57$ ). In contrast, the lowest mean scores were observed for emotional items such as feeling tense ( $M = 2.00$ ) and feeling furious ( $M = 2.01$ ). Overall, these patterns suggest that members may hold some critical views, but they do not report intense anger towards their unions.

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strength of associations among the study variables. Results are presented in Table 13.

**Table 13.** Pearson correlations among variables ( $N = 236$ )

	<b>Internal union democracy</b>	<b>Union cynicism (total)</b>	<b>Cognitive- affective</b>	<b>Behavioral</b>
<b>Internal union democracy</b>	-			
<b>Union cynicism (total)</b>	-,787**	-		
<b>Cognitive- affective</b>	-,818**	,980**	-	
<b>Behavioral</b>	-,278**	,594**	,420**	-

Note.  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed).

**Source:** Authors' calculations

As shown in Table 13:

- In line with  $H_1$ , internal union democracy and overall union cynicism were strongly and negatively associated ( $r = -0.787$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, higher perceptions of internal union democracy were associated with lower overall cynicism towards the union.
- In line with  $H_{1a}$ , internal union democracy and cognitive-affective cynicism were very strongly and negatively associated ( $r = -0.818$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that

democratic perceptions are particularly relevant for reducing negative beliefs and emotional reactions towards the union.

- In line with H<sub>1b</sub>, internal union democracy and behavioral cynicism were negatively associated, though at a low magnitude ( $r = -0.278$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Although statistically significant, this weaker association suggests that reduced democratic perceptions may translate more strongly into negative beliefs/feelings than into outward behavioral expressions.

### Regression Analyses (Hypothesis Tests)

To test the proposed hypotheses, simple linear regression analyses were conducted. Results are presented in Table 14.

**Table 14.** Regression results: effect of internal union democracy on union cynicism and its components (N = 236)

	Hypothesis	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	$\beta$	t	p	Decision
Union cynicism (total)	H <sub>1</sub>	,787	,619	380,824	-,787	-19,515	,000	Supported
Cognitive-affective cynicism	H <sub>1a</sub>	,818	,670	474,302	-,818	-21,778	,000	Supported
Behavioural cynicism	H <sub>1b</sub>	,278	,077	19,624	-,278	-4,430	,000	Supported

**Source:** Authors' calculations

As shown in Table 14, the model predicting overall union cynicism from internal union democracy was statistically significant ( $F = 380.824$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Internal union democracy negatively predicted overall union cynicism ( $\beta = -0.787$ ,  $t = -19.515$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the model explained 61.9% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.619$ ). Accordingly, H<sub>1</sub> was supported.

Second, internal union democracy significantly negatively predicted cognitive-affective cynicism ( $F = 474.302$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta = -0.818$ ,  $t = -21.778$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 67.0% of its variance ( $R^2 = 0.670$ ). Thus, H<sub>1a</sub> was supported.

Finally, internal union democracy significantly negatively predicted behavioral cynicism ( $F = 19.624$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta = -0.278$ ,  $t = -4.430$ ,  $p < .001$ ), although the explained variance was comparatively low ( $R^2 = 0.077$ ). Thus, H<sub>1b</sub> was supported.

Overall, the findings indicate that as perceptions of internal union democracy increase, cynicism decreases across dimensions. Notably, internal union democracy appears substantially more influential for members' cognitive and affective orientations than for their behavioral expressions.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to provide empirical evidence on how union members' perceptions of internal union democracy relate to the cynical attitudes they develop towards their unions. The measurement results indicated that internal union democracy was perceived as a unidimensional construct in the present sample. This suggests that members tend to evaluate democracy not by separating technical sub-dimensions, but rather as a holistic climate of democratic functioning (e.g., participation opportunities, transparency, and accountability). By contrast, union cynicism was operationalized with two components: a cognitive-affective component reflecting integrity-related doubts and negative emotional reactions, and a behavioral component reflecting outward expressions such as criticism and other behavioral manifestations.

The main findings show that perceived internal union democracy is a strong correlate of union cynicism. Specifically, internal union democracy negatively predicted overall cynicism and explained a substantial proportion of variance. This pattern supports the argument that democratic functioning within unions is not merely a formal requirement; it is a key mechanism shaping members' trust-based evaluations and affective orientations towards the organization. When unions are perceived to operate transparently, to allow voice, and to maintain accountability, members are less likely to develop integrity-related doubts and disappointment that can fuel cynicism. In this sense, the results are consistent with representation- and legitimacy-oriented accounts in the literature, which emphasize that the quality of internal democratic functioning (i.e., internal union democracy) affects members' perceptions of responsiveness and, ultimately, the union's representational legitimacy (Pitkin, 1967; Tyler, 2006; Hyman, 2001). Empirically, internal union democracy accounted for a substantial share of variance in overall union cynicism ( $\beta = -0.787$ ,  $R^2 = 0.619$ ) and especially in cognitive-affective cynicism ( $\beta = -0.818$ ,  $R^2 = 0.670$ ), whereas its explanatory power was more limited for behavioral cynicism ( $\beta = -0.278$ ,  $R^2 = 0.077$ ).

A dimension-level interpretation further refines the implications. The effect of internal union democracy was considerably stronger for cognitive-affective cynicism than for behavioral cynicism. This indicates that democratic deficits may be experienced primarily in members' cognitive and emotional worlds—through distrust, skepticism, and disappointment—while translating less directly into overt behavior. One plausible interpretation is that members may internalize dissatisfaction but remain behaviorally restrained due to organizational loyalty, social pressures, strategic considerations, or a perceived lack of efficacy. This pattern aligns with the logic of union support and loyalty models, including the “silent” phases of disengagement in which members withdraw psychologically before expressing discontent behaviorally (Tetrick et al., 2007; Hammer et al., 2009). It is also consistent with the organizational silence literature: when members believe that speaking up will not make a difference or that their views will not be

taken seriously, they may avoid voicing concerns (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Similarly, the notion of acquiescent silence highlights withdrawal stemming from the belief that change is unlikely (Van Dyne et al., 2003). From this perspective, relatively low behavioral cynicism should not automatically be interpreted as high satisfaction; it may also reflect a form of muted disengagement (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). This interpretation should be treated cautiously, as silence-related mechanisms were not measured directly in the present study.

The descriptive results also provide important context. Internal union democracy perceptions were above the midpoint, and the highest item means were observed on indicators of inclusiveness (e.g., absence of gender- and identity-based discrimination). At the same time, items related to accountability culture and active encouragement of criticism tended to be comparatively weaker. This combination suggests that while unions may be perceived as inclusive at the level of general norms, members may still experience uncertainty regarding day-to-day accountability and responsiveness mechanisms. Such a configuration is compatible with theoretical arguments that even limited erosion of democratic functioning can amplify integrity-related doubts and disappointment, thereby contributing to cynical orientations (Andersson, 1996; Abraham, 2000).

### **Practical Implications**

The findings imply that unions seeking to sustain member commitment should treat internal union democracy mechanisms as core organizational capacities rather than symbolic features. Measures that enhance transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation are likely to reduce cynicism by reinforcing perceptions of legitimacy and responsiveness. In practical terms, unions may consider strengthening regular information-sharing practices (including financial reporting and decision rationales), widening channels for member voice in policy formation, and ensuring that feedback and criticism can be raised without informal sanctions. In addition, participation mechanisms in collective bargaining—such as structured consultations on draft agreements and systematic member feedback—may help reduce perceived gaps between leadership priorities and members' expectations.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is cross-sectional and relies on self-reported survey data; therefore, findings should be interpreted as associations rather than definitive causal effects. Second, the sample was based on voluntary online participation among union-member public officials in Muğla, which limits generalisability to other populations and settings. Third, EFA and CFA were performed on the same dataset, and future research should cross-validate the measurement structure using independent or split samples. Finally, the behavioural cynicism component was measured with a very short subscale, which may constrain reliability and content coverage. Future research may employ multivariate models including relevant controls (e.g., gender, education, and union tenure) and longitudinal designs to strengthen causal inference. Future studies could also

incorporate qualitative approaches to capture the dynamics of member voice and silence, and test potential mediators (e.g., perceived legitimacy, psychological contract fulfilment, or perceived union support) and moderators (e.g., workplace context, tenure, or prior participation experience).

The study contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it provides evidence from union-member public officials in Muğla, drawing on respondents affiliated with different unions, thereby reducing single-union bias. Second, it shows that members' perceptions of internal union democracy may operate as a holistic construct in this context. Third, it demonstrates that the democracy-cynicism link is considerably stronger for cognitive-affective orientations than for behavioural expressions, highlighting an important asymmetry with implications for union legitimacy and member relations.

Overall, the study underscores that internal union democracy is closely tied to members' cynical orientations. Strengthening democratic mechanisms-particularly those that foster perceived responsiveness, transparency, and accountability-appears crucial for mitigating cynicism and sustaining the quality of the union-member relationship.

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