Effects of privatizations on Argentine labor unions and workers have been manifold. At the institutional level, the General Confederation of Labor (Confederacion General del Trabajo, CGT) was fractured into groups of labor organizations that have taken separate and distinct approaches to privatizations, including diverse strategies of collective action and revenue generation. Privatizations also have generated an increase in stateness by breaking the organic ties between union leaders acting as the managers of SOEs and the government. Finally, a new union leader has emerged at the local level of representation with a broader horizon, stronger educational background, and more ambitious plans of both personal and organizational advancement.

The divisions within the union structure have coincided with the distinct attitudes adopted vis-à-vis privatizations. Some unions have taken on a more active and civic type of unionism, becoming involved in extensive social and economic research on privatizations and crafting less violent, more creative, and diverse types of social protest. Others have compensated for their loss of political prominence without breaking their ties with the Peronist ideology or government, hence keeping the patron-client type of arrangements that have long characterized the Argentine system of labor relations. Another group of Peronist unions with a historically more independent attitude toward Peronism has adopted a more professional and less ideological style of negotiation with the reforming government and the private sector. Many of
those unions have pushed for the democratization of the political system. Unions affiliated to the CGT have not been as vociferous about the democratization process. Nevertheless, they also have included demands of democratization in their discourse and projects much more so in the privatizations and post-privatizations periods than before.

While privatizations’ impacts have not reached the level of internal functioning of the labor unions, they have facilitated the rise of a new type of local union leader. The new leader understands that in a period where privatizations are either happening or have happened, union representatives need to be aware of the productivity of their plants, and the financial markets in general, in order to keep track of the value of workers’ shares in privatized enterprises. The new union leader of a pro-privatizations union at the local level tends to be more educated, younger, more pragmatic, and less ideological. In a similar way, the new union leader of an anti-privatizations union at both the local and the national levels is more open to dialogue with different ideological tenets, more active in social and political domains, and well-versed in current research on privatizations and development.

At the individual level, privatizations’ impact on democratic attitudes and perceptions has not been significant. The main determining criterion for what an Argentine worker should do in the post-privatizations period seems to be determined principally by the degree of his previous participation in union affairs, and less so by variables such as education, cultural outlook, or historical connections. This finding is important because 15 years ago, Peter Ranis (1991) had found that these innate variables were the most important determinants of workers’ views on democracy in Argentina. My research shows that today, they seem to matter less. Instead, being a member of a labor union and the degree of activity in it appear are critical. I call this characteristic “unionismo.”

If it was partisanship, including the left-right political ideologies, which determined how individual workers would react to and deal with privatizations in Turkey, in Argentina it was unionismo. The Argentine rank and file tends to be unionist, meaning that they have emotional and ideational attachments to labor unions and they are active in them. This is different from partisanship, where the emotional and ideational attachments are with political parties situated on the left-right political spectrum, not unions. If loyalty to political parties was the main determinant of the perception of and attitude toward privatizations in Turkey, loyalty to unions was in Argentina. Accordingly, unionist and nonunionist workers reacted differently to privatizations in Argentina. Most nonunionist workers, that is, those