

# Political Contest for State Power in Florida

Olivia Lang, Tanay Warriar  
Jordan Scott Department of Sociology

## Background and Introduction

In 2023, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill 256, a bill which increased membership requirements for public sector unions. This contributes to a recent trend of states imposing greater requirements for public sector labor unions. For example, Wisconsin's Act 10, a bill which limits collective bargaining rights.

Throughout the years, Florida’s citizens can see the more stringent rules unions must follow, but not what contributed to these rules. Senate Bill 256 is studied to demonstrate how state political power has shifted from unions to big businesses.

Different perspectives on Florida’s legislation are analyzed in the research; the roles of corporate business interests that lobbied in favor of the bill and the union members that fought against it. The research seeks to better understand how state power is contested in Florida, with respect to union efforts.

Table 1: Committee Participation for SB 256 and HB 1445

Body	Committee	Speak For	Speak Against	Waive For	Waive Against
House 03/16/23	Constitutional Rights, Rule of Law, & Government Operations Subcommittee	2	33	8	69
House 04/11/23	State Affairs	4	62	4	74
Senate 03/07/23	Government Oversight & Accountability	3	37	5	55
Senate 03/16/23	Fiscal Policy	3	60	3	38

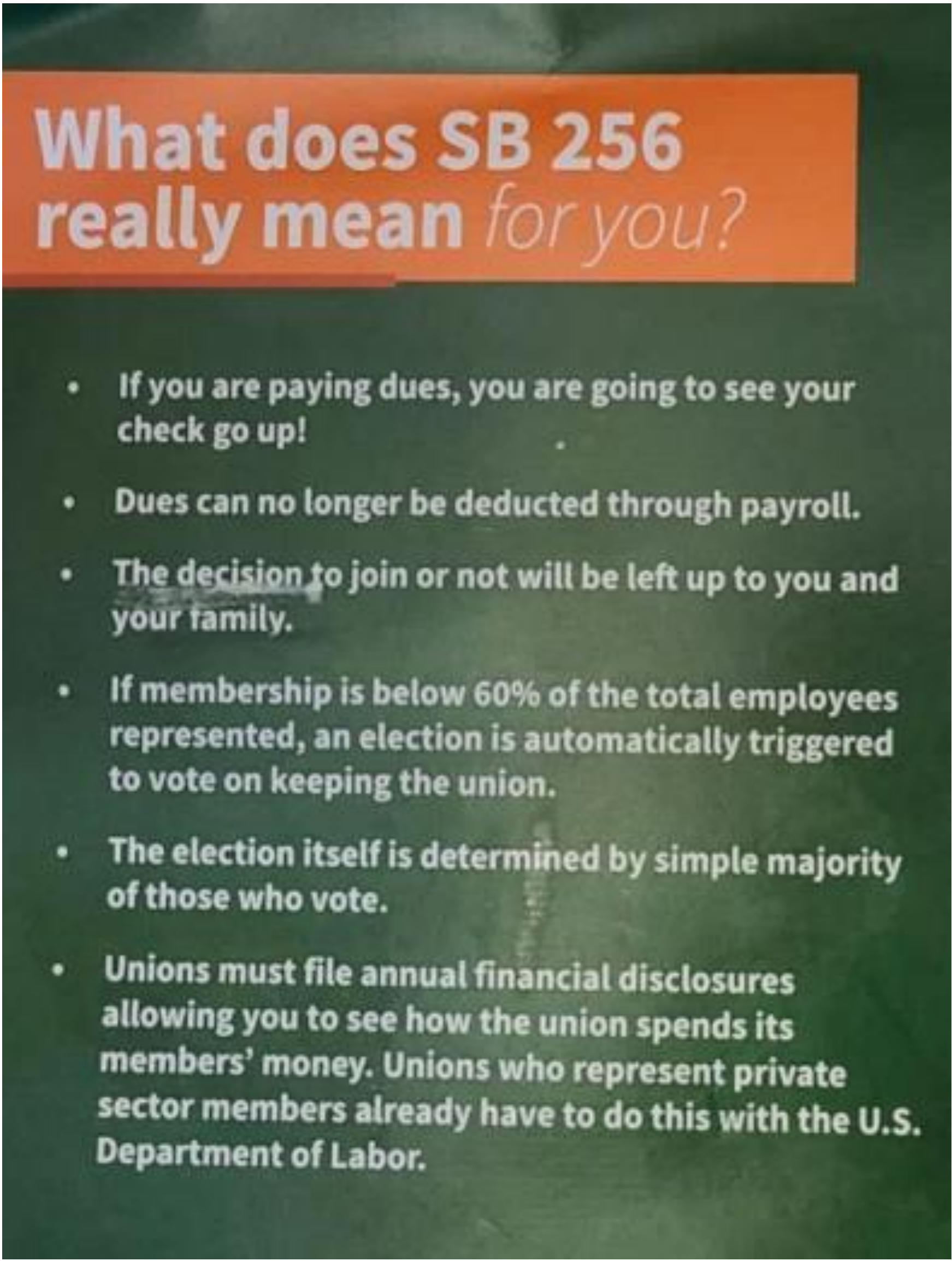
Above the committee participation (public comment) of the number of supporters and opponents of HB 1445 and SB 256 is documented

## Results

Collective bargaining rights have weakened over the years and power has shifted from labor unions to corporate funded neoliberal organizations. Although labor union members and leaders attempt to compete for power through public comment and lobbying, corporate think tanks wield more lobbying power.

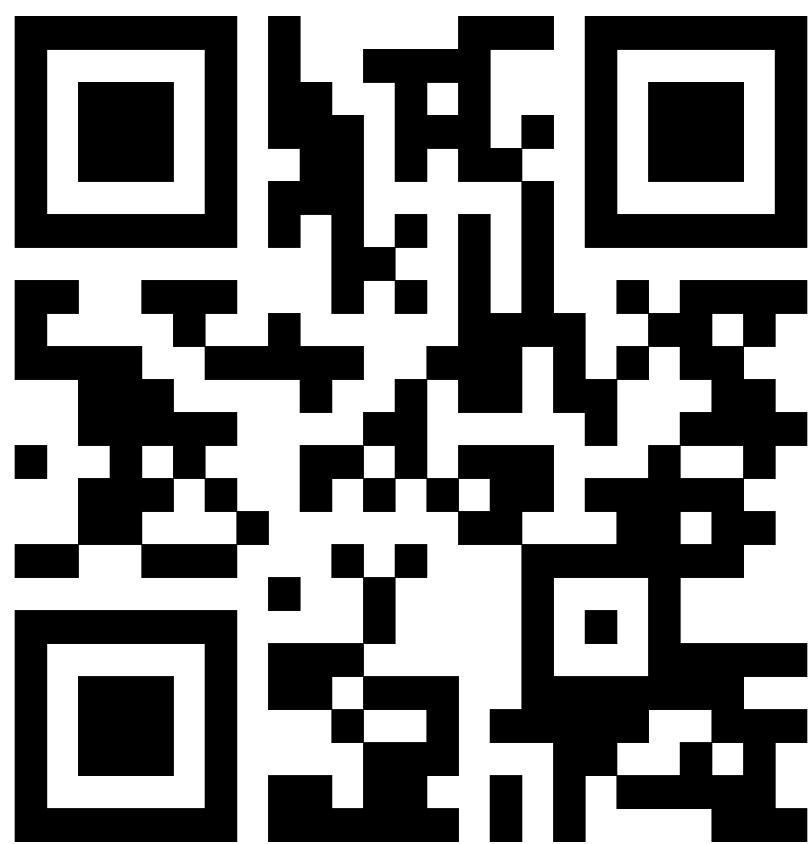
As seen in table 1, an overwhelming majority of individuals waived or spoke against the legislation, yet the legislation passed. Unions no longer hold the historical state level power they used to.

Results are ongoing as legislation evolves in Florida and other states. The results thus far show the overall weakening of collective bargaining in the public sector and a strengthening of corporate lobbying power.



A think tank's approach and framing of SB 256

## References:



## Methods

Research consisted of transcribing and analyzing the content of:

- Senate committee meetings
- Interviews with senators
- Relevant documents
- Legislation

The study specifically examines the passage of S.B. 256. This was conducted through a review of committee meetings of S.B. 256 and H.B. 1445 (the House companion to S.B. 256). The votes of different Senate members were analyzed as well as people who came to meetings to speak for or against legislation.

Those in favor of the legislation often came from:

- Corporate organizations
- Think tanks

Those opposed to the legislation were often:

- Union members
- Union officials
- Public sector workers

Arguments for or against the bill were compared to the eventual passage of S.B. 256. Overall, the comprehensive analysis will aid in understanding the contest between neoliberal organizations and unions for state power.

## Discussion of Findings

As stated before, the study found that corporate lobbying is more effective in exerting political influence. Instead of the historical power unions and public sector workers had, it has shifted to think-tanks and businesses.

This study was mainly focused on:

- Senate meetings
- Committee meetings
- Arguments for and against the legislation

Moving forward, the research could center more around:

- Interviews with legislators
- Interviews with union leaders
- Interviews with think-tank leaders

To reach further conclusions, it is important to continue research in the field and investigate the power dynamics between the public and private sector.