BRINGING THE STRIKE BACK IN: UNDERSTANDING STRIKE STRATEGIES AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE UNITED STATES

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BRINGING THE STRIKE BACK IN: UNDERSTANDING STRIKE STRATEGIES AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE UNITED STATES

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This dissertation explores how workers and their organizations in the United States utilize the strike, labor's most potent tool for asserting power. Drawing on 108 interviews and an original, comprehensive database of strike activity, this dissertation problematizes conventional perspectives on strikes and strike effectiveness that narrowly analyze work stoppages during the course of institutionalized bargaining relationships. Rather than occurring solely as the product of failed contract negotiations between unionized workers and firms, strikes emerge in a variety of institutional contexts and assume multiple forms. Based on qualitative interviews and fieldwork, I develop a typology of strikes that reflect their multidimensionality and unpackage the multiple ways that workers conceptualize strike outcomes and effectiveness. Unlike much of the existing literature on labor revitalization and power resource theory that focuses almost exclusively on labor's strategy and agency, this research emphasizes the importance of examining power relationally by also studying employer behavior. I elaborate a theoretical framework that incorporates employer power resources and strategic capabilities into an analysis of strike outcomes, finding that employers fundamentally shape the deployment and effectiveness of labor's strategies and resources.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Stephan Kallas was born in New York, New York. He received his BA in Politics (High Honors) and History from Oberlin College in 2014. He then worked for three years as a labor organizer in Cleveland, Ohio, Memphis, Tennessee, and Oakland, California. He entered the MS/PhD program at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations in August 2018. He will be starting as an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois' School of Labor and Employment Relations in January 2024.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Since 2021, the labor movement in the United States (US) has appeared to gain more momentum than in prior years. Following decades of stagnant wages, worsening income inequality, and declining unionization rates, workers have increasingly acted in response to dangerous working conditions brought about by the covid-19 pandemic and persistent income inequality. Record breaking quit rates, successful union campaigns at previously impervious employers like Amazon and Starbucks, and activism related to social movement struggles against systemic racism and police brutality all demonstrate that the workplace is increasingly viewed as a site of contestation (Casselman, 2022; Frymer and Grumbach, 2020; Greenhouse, 2022; Gurley, 2022; Kochan et al, 2023). Relatedly, workers appear to be reclaiming the strike as an important tool to resist concessions proposed by employers and secure improved pay and working conditions.

Virtually all scholars agree that a labor strike consists of a stoppage of work by a group of workers in response to some sort of grievance and/or to achieve a demand. Various definitions of a strike exist, and I include a discussion of several in Chapter Four. In this dissertation, I adopt and slightly alter Peterson's (1937) definition: "a temporary stoppage of work by a group of *~~employees~~ (workers)* in order to express a grievance or to enforce a demand" (parentheses and italics added by me). This definition is useful because it acknowledges that strikes occur in a variety of institutional contexts and makes no normative judgements about what a strike should entail, such as whether strikes should have a particular size or certain goals. I substitute "workers" for "employees" because the former is a more inclusive term that accounts for structural changes in the US economy over time, like the rise of independent contractors (Katz and Krueger, 2019).

Strikes are complex phenomenon that serve as labor's most potent source of leverage and collective power. In his study on a wildcat strike in the US, Gouldner (1954: 65) cautions that "[a] 'strike' is a social phenomenon of enormous complexity which, in its totality, is never susceptible to complete description, let alone complete explanation." Strikes require collective organization, involve various actors internal and external to the employment relationship, have the capacity to inflict considerable disruption on firms and broader communities, and are heavily regulated by states around the world. The disruptive capacity of strikes gave rise to the establishment of industrial relations systems and laws that institutionalize collective bargaining, often with the explicit goal of reducing industrial conflict (Korpi and Shalev, 1979; Eidlin, 2015). In the US, the disruption caused by workers on strikes in the early-twentieth century helped lead to sustained, widescale gains for millions of workers through the legal recognition of collective bargaining, though these very same institutions likely depressed further militancy by channeling industrial conflict into formalized grievance procedures (Piven and Cloward, 1977; Fantasia, 1988). Strikes have decreased considerably in the US and many European countries since the 1970s (Baccaro and Howell, 2017; BLS, 2023a).

The declining utility of strikes in the late-twentieth century led labor organizations to adopt alternative strategies to (re)build worker power. Various factors explain the decline in strike rates, including employment shifts to less unionized workplaces in the service sector, the rise in the power of global capital relative to labor due to the deregulation of banking and other industries, and changes in managerial ideology and tactics towards unions (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1986; Godard, 2011; Appelbaum and Batt, 2014). These structural and ideological changes reduced the power of unions and placed organized labor on the defensive, leading to internal divisions within the labor movement (Getman, 1998). The decline in strikes as an

effective tool in contract disputes (Rosenfeld, 2006) and the brutal defeats suffered by strikers in the 1980s (Hoerr, 1988) led labor leaders to develop other strategies, like comprehensive campaigns and community coalitions, and academic research began to capture this shift (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, and Seeber, 1998; Voss and Sherman, 2000; Clawson, 2003; Milkman and Voss, 2004). These union revitalization scholars reconceptualized labor activism as the adoption of strategic comprehensive campaigns and organizing tactics, rather than industrial action at the point of production.

Despite the focus on more innovative strategies and tactics, labor organizations never entirely abandoned strikes as an important weapon in their arsenal. 2012 marked an important year in efforts by labor organizations to reclaim the strike, as Chicago Teacher Union (CTU) members undertook a seven-day work stoppage that resisted austerity and introduced a 'bargaining for the common good' approach to labor negotiations, and fast-food workers launched the Fight for 15 (FF15) campaign with a one-day strike in New York City (Ashby and Bruno, 2016; Rhomberg, 2018; Sneiderman and McCartin, 2018). The 2018 statewide educator strikes involving hundreds of thousands of workers further demonstrated a shift in the locus of labor militancy from the globally vulnerable manufacturing industry to the place-based service sector (BLS, 2019b). US labor scholars, following these real-world trends, are beginning to recenter the strike in academic analysis to understand the role of labor militancy in (re)building worker power (McAlevey, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Givan and Lang, 2020; Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; Kallas, 2023). This renewed focus on strikes draws attention not only to the creative strategies devised by union leaders and staff, but to direct action undertaken by workers.

While evidence suggests an uptick in strike activity since 2018 (BLS, 2019b; Kallas, Ritchie, and Friedman, 2023), researchers still lack a comprehensive understanding about strikes

in the contemporary period and whether they can achieve positive and sustainable outcomes for the labor movement. My dissertation research contributes to the literature in three ways. First, I provide a more comprehensive understanding of strikes through the creation of a dataset that includes strikes of all sizes by both union and nonunion workers, overcoming limitations in official data sources that capture only a fraction of total activity. Second, I develop a typology of strikes that moves our understanding of labor resistance away from a narrow understanding of strikes as indefinite work stoppages at the end of failed contract negotiations between unions and firms to multidimensional phenomenon that emerge in a variety of institutional contexts. Third, I analyze strikes and strike outcomes relationally, finding that an analysis of employer resources and strategies is essential to understanding strike outcomes for workers and their organizations. Many of these insights on strikes and strike outcomes apply to labor contestation more broadly.

The importance of strikes

Workers develop their greatest source of collective leverage through strikes. Under capitalism, an unequal employment relationship exists in which workers need to sell their labor to capitalists, who own the means of production. Because capitalism depends on wage labor, the primary way for workers to exercise leverage is by collectively withholding labor, which halts production and imposes considerable costs on those who own capital (Hyman, 1989). This dynamic makes the strike an enduring component of the capitalist employment relationship (Silver, 2003).

In the US, early strikes over wage increases, the regulation of work hours, and the right to unionize were regulated by the courts and often violently suppressed by employers and the state. Workers and their families suffered injuries and even death during these long, drawn-out struggles that more closely resembled battlefields than basic disputes between two parties

(Montgomery, 1987). Strikes eventually became institutionalized as a legal right, albeit under certain conditions. The codification of labor law through the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1935 formalized strikes as part of the collective bargaining process, generally to encourage negotiations or resolve impasse between unions and firms, and initially provided robust protection for work stoppages before the courts and Congress began to intervene (Klare, 1978; Colvin and Darbishire, 2013). Subsequent amendments to the NLRA further restricted the right to strike by outlawing sympathy and general strikes under most conditions (McCammon, 1990). In settings not regulated by the NLRA, such as the public sector, strikes remained heavily regulated or banned. These laws and institutions shape strike incidence and patterns, but do not eliminate industrial conflict (Katz, 2013).

Limitations in official data sources prevent a complete understanding of strikes in the contemporary period. Researchers who study strikes often analyze data collected by governments, but these data sources exclude strikes based on a variety of reasons, such as size, duration, and legality (Silver, 2003; van der Velden, Dribbusch, Lyddon, and Vandaele, 2007; Vandaele, 2016; Kallas et al, 2023a). For example, since funding cuts by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in the US has only documented work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers that last at least an entire shift and occur on a workday, defined as any day excluding weekends or federal holidays (BLS, 2019a). These narrow inclusion criteria omit most strikes.

Many data sources, and by extension scholars, conceptualize the strike as a homogeneous phenomenon that emerges in a specific institutionalized setting, which obscures the diverse ways that workers organize strikes. Much of the quantitative research on strikes in the US is modeled on the ‘contract strike’ - an indefinite work stoppage at the conclusion of failed negotiations

between unions and firms (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021). But both union and nonunion workers organize strikes in a variety of institutional contexts. Hyman (1989: 55) claims that "[strikes] are in fact part of a continuum of behavior," arguing against a rigid understanding of work stoppages. With the decline of unionization rates and collective bargaining coverage, other types of strike have increased in salience. New research is needed because how and why labor organizations use strikes have changed (Rosenfeld, 2019; Givan and Lang, 2020). These developments reflect a widening scope of the form and expression of labor conflict, even in its most traditional sense (Riordan and Kowalski, 2021).

The way that labor organizations utilize strikes also help explain how workers resist employers and build collective power. Researchers have previously examined the relationship between strikes and other indicators of worker power, such as their role in increasing union membership (Hodder, Williams, Kelly, and McCarthy, 2017). Others have relied primarily on case study analysis to understand whether and how unions organize strikes to achieve worker demands. This approach generally emphasizes the role of union strategy in determining outcomes, arguing that effectiveness depends on the adoption of certain strategies and tactics in preparation for and during a strike (Milkman, 2006; McAlevey, 2016; Blanc, 2022). However, this focus on labor's strategy and agency often inadequately accounts for the extent to which employers shape outcomes for workers and their organizations, reflecting a tendency of industrial relations (IR) scholars to analyze union *or* employer strategies in isolation of the other (Doellgast, Bidwell, and Colvin, 2021).

Research strategy and methodology

Studying how workers strike and whether strikes lead to positive outcomes for labor are crucial to understanding labor relations, collective action, and economic and social inequality. A

more thorough understanding of strikes helps to reveal how workers collectively confront power imbalances at work and rising economic inequality (Bivens, McNicholas, Poydock, Sherer, and Leon, 2023). In this dissertation, I answer three main research questions:

1) *What is the extent and distribution of strike activity in the US?*

2) *What types of strikes do workers organize in the US today*?

3) *Under what conditions are strikes most effective for workers and their organizations?*

Motivated by these questions, I investigate both strike strategy and outcomes. To answer these questions, I collect data using three main sources: The Cornell ILR Labor Action Tracker (ILR LAT), qualitative fieldwork, and secondary materials.

I led the team that created the ILR LAT in late-2020 to create a comprehensive database of strike activity across the US that overcomes the limitations of existing data sources. Since January 2021 and as of August 2023, the ILR LAT research team has collected data on over 930 strikes and over 1,280 labor protests, totaling more than 2,000 labor actions. I have collected data on hundreds of strikes, reviewed over 1,000 secondary news sources, and oversee the team that documents all strike activity. To add an event to the tracker, we need to verify that the action took place by citing at least two sources. News articles and social media posts comprise the vast majority of sources cited. We also collect data on several other variables, including the employer, labor organization, industry, size, unionization status, and demands of striking workers. This project overcomes limitations in official data sources by capturing strikes of all sizes that involve both union and nonunion workers.

I also undertook qualitative case study analysis to help answer research questions on strike types and outcomes. Between December 2021 and March 2023, I conducted 108

interviews, examined over 200 internal union documents and secondary source materials, and engaged in 10 hours of direct participant observation to analyze three main case studies. I conducted 61 interviews as part of the first two case studies, comparing strikes organized by healthcare workers in Worcester, Massachusetts and Buffalo, New York in 2021 to explain variation in strike outcomes. Healthcare workers organized both strikes in the 12-18 months following the onset of the covid-19 pandemic in the US, and these cases help illuminate how workers on the front lines of the pandemic undertook economic action to advance primarily nonwage demands. I conducted 47 interviews as part of the third case study, in which I analyzed strikes organized by Starbucks workers as part of their unionization and contract campaigns. Most of my interviews focus on four regions in which Starbucks workers have engaged in relatively high levels of strike activity as of late-2022: Upstate New York (Buffalo and Ithaca), the Seattle-area, the Kansas City-area, and the Boston-area. I also spent 10 hours on the picket line during strikes by Starbucks workers.

I relied on data collected from case studies to develop my broader theoretical categories and framework. I broadly adopted a grounded theory approach, analyzing already collected data to inform subsequent data collection and create emerging theoretical categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Case study research is a particularly useful way to generate novel theoretical contributions, especially when such insights are drawn directly from the data. I analyzed data iteratively, meaning that I refined research questions through data collection, using information gained in interviews to identify new areas of inquiry and adapt questionnaires (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). I primarily identified interviewees through snowball sampling, which helped me connect with informants outside of initial organizational contacts. I analyzed interviews according to a general inductive approach, in which I initially review the raw data, code

numerous segments of text, and finally identify categories that comprise my main findings (Thomas, 2006).

In terms of research design for the qualitative case studies, I drew inspiration from past research in IR that implement matched case comparisons to understand divergent outcomes for workers and their organizations (Turner, 1991; Frost, 2000). Frost's (2000) work is especially important here, as she drew on two matched pairs – controlling for potential explanatory variables like union district, membership, geography, and various employer characteristics – and identified four key components of local union capabilities to explain variation in local union success towards workplace restructuring. While I did not identify multiple sets of matched pairs in my qualitative research designs, I selected cases that controlled for potential confounders and other explanatory variables. I also analyzed 'extreme cases' that reveal unique and surprising findings, which are particularly useful for theory building (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

Argument

I advance two main arguments about strikes and strike outcomes in this dissertation. First, strikes in the US are best understood as multidimensional phenomena that take an array of forms and emerge in a variety of institutional contexts. I create a typology of strikes that challenges much of the quantitative literature in the US, which narrowly analyzes the contract strike. I identify five main types of strikes that emerge in various institutional contexts, like union and nonunion workplaces, and find that workers and their organizations often strategically organize alternative types of strikes to overcome the limitations of conventional work stoppages and intensified employer opposition. While a variety of types exist, strikes in the US are still largely confined to the workplace as disputes between workers and individual firms. This stands in stark contrast to the experience of other countries, such as the United Kingdom and France, in

which workers have long organized large strikes that occur at the industry or national level (Yanatma, 2023; Ziady, 2023).

Second, I find that understanding strike outcomes requires an analysis of *both* labor and employer strategies and resources. Through my case study analysis, I find that employers largely shape outcomes for workers and their organizations. My three main cases demonstrate that unions that advance an effective strategy and mobilize a range of power resources – defined as "the properties of an actor that provide the ability to reward or punish another actor" (Korpi, 1978: 35) – sometimes fail, and those that lack elements of an effective strategy can still win, because of the relative strength of the employer they oppose. I identify three types of employer power resources and strategies – *structural power, degree of vulnerability to societal actors, and strategic capabilities* – that firms leverage in response to strikes and labor campaigns. These findings help return the power resources approach (PRA) to how scholars originally conceived it, as a relational power struggle between labor and capital (Brookes, 2018).

I challenge perspectives emphasizing labor's strategy as the most important determinant in achieving successful outcomes. While a distinction exists between revitalization scholars that argue for the implementation of top-down strategic organizing campaigns (Voss and Sherman, 2000; Voss, 2010) and those that call for a renewed focus on rank-and-file workers and 'deep organizing' (McAlevey, 2016; Blanc, 2019), both perspectives emphasize the role of labor's strategy in successful outcomes. I find that the outcomes for labor are structured and sometimes determined by factors outside of its control, such as the strength of employers (Ellem, Goods, and Todd, 2020; Batt, Kallas, and Appelbaum, 2020). I also emphasize the importance of analyzing both labor and employer characteristics when studying strikes and campaigns, instead of following the tendency of IR scholars to focus on just one group (Doellgast et al, 2021).

Outline

The dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter Two, I situate my research questions in past literature and develop a theoretical framework. I examine three main perspectives on strikes, literature from the late-1990s and 2000s on labor revitalization, and research utilizing the power resources approach (PRA) before discussing my theoretical contributions. In Chapter Three, I develop a typology of strikes based primarily on data from the ILR LAT. I provide a detailed description of the ILR LAT and briefly discuss broader data on strikes in the US since 2021, comparing the level and distribution of strike activity to earlier eras in US history and with other countries today. While data collection procedures vary considerably in the present from earlier eras, data from the ILR LAT enables a basic understanding of whether activity observed today compares in size and scope to that of the mid-late twentieth century. My main contributions in Chapter Three are to build a typology of strikes in the US and present a distribution of the types of strikes across industry, unionization status, geography, and size of the dispute.

The remainder of the dissertation is based on qualitative research and interview data. In Chapter Four, I compare strikes and strike outcomes by two healthcare unions that organized indefinite work stoppages in 2021 at the conclusion of failed contract negotiations during the covid-19 pandemic. I find that employer power, rather than union strategy, best explains the divergent outcomes observed in the two cases. I also create a framework to understand different types of employer power resources that, similar to labor's power resources, can be mobilized during campaigns and strikes. In Chapter Five, I analyze the unionization campaign at Starbucks and find that Starbucks workers have organized various types of strikes and adopted an identity-based organizing approach in campaigns to win union elections and achieve first contracts, though the employer has continued to mount an aggressive anti-union effort that has shaped the

effectiveness of workers' campaign and strike strategies. In Chapter Six, I conclude by summarizing the contributions of the dissertation and discuss future areas of research.

Chapter Two: Theory and framework

In this chapter, I provide an overview of prior research on my main research questions about strike strategies and outcomes. I begin with a review of three dominant perspectives on strike incidence, discussing the strengths and limitations of each approach. I argue that the *worker militancy* perspective – which emphasizes that workers organize strikes in response to the power imbalances created by the capitalist employment relationship – is the most useful of these approaches to understanding strikes in the US in the current period, though it requires a deeper analysis of the ways that employers shape labor militancy. I then discuss the decline of worker power and, relatedly, unions' use of strikes in the late-twentieth century and the ensuing literature on labor revitalization strategies that largely excluded workplace militancy from its analysis.

I continue by analyzing the literature on strike effectiveness and the PRA, arguing that strikes and strike outcomes are best understood as relational struggles between workers and employers. Like literature on labor revitalization, the PRA is concerned with how workers strategically (re)build collective power, emphasizing labor's agency to act collectively and win campaigns. I respond by bringing back the PRA as it was originally conceived and stressing that power is relational, as employers leverage structural power and strategic capabilities to shape strike strategies and outcomes for labor. This relational perspective to analyzing strikes and campaigns is largely muted in recent studies of labor revitalization. I conclude by discussing my theoretical framework on the types of power resources and strategies used by employers in response to strikes and, by extension, labor campaigns. This framework is supported and further developed through case study analysis in subsequent chapters.

Perspectives on strikes

Prior research on strikes can be grouped into three broad categories: the *neoclassical* perspective, the *political-organizational* perspective, and the *worker militancy* perspective. The first two perspectives are distinguished by Franzosi (1989), who categorized prior quantitative literature on strikes into similar approaches. A third approach to strikes, the *worker militancy* perspective, is grounded in an understanding of strikes as the product of the capitalist employment relationship and discontent by workers (Hyman, 1989; Godard, 1992). This perspective focuses on the social processes that facilitate solidarity, rather than solely analyzing the impact of factors like information sharing or bargaining institutions on strike rates (Kelly, 1998). While research in the *neoclassical* and *political-organizational* perspectives mostly analyze 'contract strikes' – indefinite work stoppages by unionized workers at the conclusion of failed collective bargaining negotiations (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021), which reflected the dominant type of strike across the US in the mid-late twentieth century, the *worker-militancy* approach allows for a more nuanced approach to understanding labor contestation as workers increasingly organize diverse types of strikes.

Neoclassical perspective

The *neoclassical* perspective refers to traditional economic approaches on strike research, specifically the relationship between misinformation and labor market factors on strike incidence. Hicks (1963) elaborated on the misinformation hypothesis, in which he argues that strikes occur because unions lack the same available information regarding firm performance as does management. This asymmetry leads to faulty negotiations and increases the likelihood of a strike. More specifically, researchers in this perspective isolate union members as the instigators of strikes. Union members push union leaders to strike for higher wage gains without knowledge of the company's financial status (Ashenfelter and Johnson, 1969).

This perspective also links labor market factors to strike rates. Tight labor markets shift the balance of power somewhat towards labor and provide union members more confidence that a work stoppage will allow them to achieve their demands. Recent increases in strike activity observed in 2018-2019 transpired during a period of low unemployment, suggesting that workers were empowered by the availability of other jobs or felt secured that employers could not easily find replacement workers (Shierholz and Poydock, 2020). Historical evidence demonstrates that labor market factors alone cannot explain strike rates. For example, strikes have declined considerably from the 1980s into the 2010s despite vast fluctuation in unemployment and inflation rates over this period (Rosenfeld, 2014). Misinformation and labor market conditions sometimes matter, but in isolation they fail to account for the various other factors that determine strike frequency over time (Godard, 1992).

Political-organizational perspective

The *political-organizational* perspective emphasizes the impact of worker organizations and national institutions, rather than economic conditions or misinformation, on strike incidence. Shorter's and Tilly's (1974) account of strikes in France between 1830 and 1968 serves as an important case. French workers consistently struck at high levels despite variation in labor market conditions and consistently achieving very poor outcomes, a phenomenon largely unexplainable by the *neoclassical* perspective on strikes. The rise of unions in France increased strike size and reduced strike duration, demonstrating the importance of labor organizations on strike rates over time.

This perspective also links unionization rates and the political power of organized labor on strike rates. In Europe, unions in several countries translated early militancy into political power, which allowed them to create encompassing institutions that reduced the level of

industrial conflict (Korpi, 1983). The strongest examples are in Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway, where labor and capital organized into highly centralized corporatist institutions to coordinate bargaining and construct social partnerships. In contrast, high strike rates sometimes signify labor's institutional weakness. Strikes may not reduce union decline, and the relatively high strike rates observed in countries like the US, Canada, and Ireland for much of the twentieth century reflected labor's lack of political power (Korpi and Shalev, 1979; Western, 1995).

Critiques of the neoclassical and political-organizational perspectives

The *neoclassical* and *political-organizational* perspectives help explain strikes in the mid-late twentieth century when unionization rates and conventional bargaining relationships were more prominent, but these approaches are limited in explaining more diverse types of labor action in the twenty-first century. Scholarship in these perspectives is often based on recorded strikes found in official data sources. While this research may appear more comprehensive, it generally only examines strikes within the narrow confines of institutionalized collective bargaining or workplace-based disputes. As previously stated, official data sources on work stoppages across the world exclude large numbers of strikes based on various factors, including size, duration, or legal status (Silver, 2003; van der Velden et al, 2007; Kallas et al, 2023a). In the US, the BLS has only documented work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers that last at least an entire shift *and* occur at some point during a 'workday' - excluding weekends and federal holidays – since 1981 (BLS, 2019a). These data limitations produce a distorted and narrow view of strike activity. For example, of the 424 work stoppages documented by the ILR LAT in 2022, only 37 (8.7%) involved 1,000 or more workers (Kallas et al, 2023a).

Partially because of these data limitations, much of the prior quantitative research on

strikes in the US is modeled on the indefinite work stoppage at the end of failed collective bargaining negotiations between unions and firms, also referred to as the 'contract strike' (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021). This type of strike became most common after the institutionalization of labor law in the US, especially in the wake of the Taft-Hartley amendments that eliminated or curtailed recognition, sympathy, and general strikes (McCammon, 1990). The Wagner Act model largely decentralized private sector labor disputes into conflicts between unions and firms at individual workplaces, with strikes functioning to resolve bargaining impasse (Colvin and Darbishire, 2013). Empirical research on strikes in the late twentieth century, drawing on data from the BLS or the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), almost exclusively analyzes contract strikes (McConnell, 1989; Cramton and Tracy, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2006; Martin and Dixon, 2010; Kochan and Riordan, 2016). The identification of different types of strikes outside of institutionalized collective bargaining relationships in the twenty-first century, like one-day strikes by nonunion fast-food workers and fixed duration strikes by unionized nurses (Rhomberg, 2018; Kallas, 2023) emphasize the importance of a worker-centered approach to understanding labor unrest in the current period (Cornfield, 2023).

These more conventional perspectives to understanding labor militancy also exclude the linkages between class and non-class oppression. Workers' social identities impact the scope of labor contestation, and a purely class-based approach to understanding worker militancy cannot account for hierarchy within the working-class or, conversely, transformative intersectional organizing (Sapre and Tapia, 2022). While IR scholars have generally ignored the linkages between social identity and labor militancy (Lee and Tapia, 2021), it is certainly not a new phenomenon. For example, women framed strike demands in the late-nineteenth century around

their roles in the community and their family, although these demands were often subordinated to those of male workers in cross-gender strikes (DeVault, 2006).

Worker militancy perspective

Drawing on aspects of the *political-organizational* perspective and more critical research from industrial relations and social movement studies, I identify the *worker militancy* perspective as a third approach to understanding strikes. This perspective is grounded in the understanding that an inherently antagonistic relationship exists between labor and capital, which inevitably leads to labor unrest initiated by workers (Hyman, 1989). Workers and their organizations organize strikes not only to secure wage increases, but to achieve various nonwage demands like greater job control and improved health and safety (Montgomery, 1979; McCammon, 1990; Givan and Lang, 2020; Kallas et al, 2023a). Workers also sometimes organize strikes to achieve more radical political demands as part of broader social movements and/or against authoritarian regimes (Kimeldorf, 1988; Seidman, 1994; Nowak, 2019).

The *worker militancy* perspective is rooted in more qualitative approaches to understanding strikes and how labor activism has changed over time. The *neoclassical* and *political-organizational* approaches to understanding labor conflict are largely outdated because of changes in the ways that workers and their organizations utilize strikes. Recent qualitative evidence demonstrates that workers organize various types of strikes in a range of institutional contexts, suggesting that 'no one size fits all' when it comes to understanding labor activism. Strikes are increasingly public, emerge in a variety of institutional (union and non-union) contexts, and reflect a widening scope of demands (Rosenfeld, 2019; Kallas et al, 2023a). For example, following the example set by striking Chicago teachers in 2012, educator unions have increasingly centered the demands of community members in strikes as part of 'bargaining for

the common good' campaigns (McCartin, Sniederman, & BP-Weeks, 2020; Givan and Lang, 2020). Other labor organizations have constructed alternative strike models. Examples include nationwide one-day strikes by fast food workers on the FF15 campaign that involve a small number of activists but generate media coverage and political support (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021), and fixed duration strikes by nurse unions that impact hospital management financially while advancing members' working conditions and patient care advocacy (Kallas, 2023).

According to the *worker militancy* perspective, workers organize strikes despite vastly different political contexts or the presence of institutions designed to prevent industrial conflict. Labor conflict has persisted in the automobile industry across various countries, linking strike emergence to the capitalist production process (Silver, 2003). Workers also organize strikes spontaneously, often in defiance of the institutions meant to regulate and prevent labor unrest. Fantasia (1988) demonstrates how workers form "cultures of solidarity" by engaging in conflict in direct opposition to institutions designed to regulate labor unrest, such as unions, collective bargaining agreements, and formalized grievance procedures.

The *worker militancy* perspective also draws on insights from social movement theory. Scholars have increasingly called for an integration of industrial relations and social movements literature to achieve a better understanding of how and why workers mobilize (Kelly, 1998; Tapia, Elfstrom, & Roca-Servat, 2018). Social movement theory seeks to understand how groups of people protest, emphasizing the importance of various factors on movement emergence and development, such as broader political opportunity structures (McAdam, 1983; Tarrow, 2011), the availability of resources (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), and framing work that enables activists to construct meaning around social justice issues (Benford and Snow, 2000). Kelly (1998) integrates social movement theory into an understanding of labor militancy by drawing on Tilly

(1978) to demonstrate how activists transform individual grievances into a broader sense of collective injustice. Rather than emphasizing the role of institutions and bargaining structures on militancy, he argues that concepts like leadership and attribution are essential to understanding how workers translate injustice and individual grievances into collective interest.

Following this approach, *worker militancy* scholars emphasize the critical role of leaders in organizing other workers to participate in strikes. Union organizers may encourage workers to act more militantly by engaging in a series of 'structure tests' - gradually escalating the riskiness of the tasks that workers are asked to do or their level of public exposure to assess whether they are ready to strike (McAlevey, 2018). Examples of structure tests include tactics like signing petitions and delivering them to management through 'marches on the boss,' in which workers collectively confront a manager to discuss grievances (McAlevey, 2016; Kallas, 2023).

While the *worker militancy* perspective provides a better framework for understanding strikes in the US during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, it requires a deeper understanding of the ways that changes to the employment relationship since the late-twentieth century shape strike incidence, strategies, and outcomes in the present. Workers never stopped organizing strikes in the US, but the considerable decline in strike activity from the 1980s through the 2010s suggests the important role of structural changes and employer opposition on labor militancy. These changes fundamentally impact both strike rates and the diverse types of strikes that workers organize in the current period, as labor organizations strategically adapt the strike in response to declining bargaining power and increased employer resistance.

Union decline and labor revitalization strategies

Union power has declined considerably across the US since the 1970s. Union density of all wage and salary workers peaked at about 33 percent in 1955 before declining to

approximately 18 percent in 1985 and 10 percent in 2020. The decline in the private sector is even more pronounced, as only 6 percent of workers belong to unions as of 2022 (Hirsch and Macpherson, 2003). Because of low profit margins in the 1970s, corporations faced shareholder discontent. They tried to increase profit margins and compete with global competitors by decreasing labor costs, especially those incurred by union contracts (Appelbaum and Batt, 2014). Employers developed more leverage because they could threaten the offshoring of jobs, which enabled them to more aggressively fight unions and demand concessions in core manufacturing industries like steel (Hoerr, 1988).

These structural changes brought about by the threat of offshoring and globalization, combined with management's changing attitudes and tactics towards unions, considerably weakened strike effectiveness and depressed strike rates. Reagan's firing of the air traffic controllers on strike in 1981 sent a signal to employers to confront unions more aggressively. According to the BLS, the number of 'major' (1,000 workers or more) strikes declined from 289/year in the 1970s, to 35/year in the 1990s, and to 15/year in the 2010s (BLS, 2023a). Deunionization, lack of labor law enforcement, and globalization increased employers' leverage in labor disputes and allowed them to resist strikes more effectively. Employers' strategic choices also mattered (Kochan et al, 1986), as managers increasingly exploited openings in US labor law to advance concessions and decertify local unions. For example, employers increasingly hired permanent replacements in response to strikes in the 1980s, which sometimes resulted in the decertification of local unions (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998).

Unions stopped relying on strikes because they lacked the workplace bargaining power that made conventional work stoppages so effective in the first case. The high-profile defeat of many strikes, such as the air traffic controllers in 1981, also demonstrated the decline in labor's

power. A key case that exemplified the degree to which employers and the government radically altered their approach to collective bargaining in the private sector occurred between the United Steelworkers and Phelps Dodge in 1983. The Steelworkers organized a defensive strike to protect against proposed concessions by the company. The ensuing conflict resulted in management hiring permanent replacements and violence between strikers and replacement workers. The governor of Arizona also sent in the national guard to ensure that production could resume during the strike. These permanent replacements then voted to decertify the union in 1984 (Rosenblum, 1995).

Labor revitalization

In response to reduced power and concessionary bargaining in the 1970s and 1980s, unions experimented with a range of strategies and innovations. These included labor management partnerships (Rubinstein and Kochan, 2001; Kochan, Eaton, McKersie, and Adler, 2011), increased political action (Katz, Batt, and Keefe, 2003), and comprehensive campaigns to organize new workers into the labor movement (Bronfenbrenner et al, 1998; Milkman, 2006). Union leaders sometimes oscillated between collaborative and militant approaches depending on the perceived costs of cooperating with management (Hammer and Stern, 1986). While some unions won temporary improvements via labor management partnership, like wage gains and increased training achieved by United Auto Worker (UAW) members at Saturn in the early-mid 1990s (Rubinstein and Kochan, 2001), few were sustained as outsourcing and offshoring accelerated (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, 2000).

As labor management cooperation initiatives largely failed to reverse broader union density decline, some labor organizations began to prioritize new organizing strategies to rebuild power. An emerging literature on union revitalization developed to document and analyze these

new strategies and efforts, emphasizing the *agency* that unions and other labor organizations possessed to reverse organized labor's decline (Bronfenbrenner et al, 1998; Turner, Katz, and Hurd, 2001; Milkman and Voss, 2004; Fantasia and Voss, 2004). Due to the decreasing utility of strikes, these researchers primarily focused on how unions developed external sources of leverage to overcome declining bargaining power and/or organized through alternative models that bypassed the NLRB election process (Waldinger, Erickson, Milkman, Mitchell, Valenzuela, Wong, & Zeitlin, 1998; Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Eaton and Kriesky, 2001).

The adoption of a more strategic organizing approach often required unions to endure years-long processes of internal organizational transformation by more activist union staff and leaders. This approach generally recognized progressive union leaders and staff as the agents of change. Voss and Sherman (2000) identified three factors that help transform previously bureaucratic unions into organizations acting more like a social movement: new local leadership, prior activist experience with new social movements of staff members and leadership, and increased centralized leadership and resource allocation to new organizing by the international union. Unions overcame legacies of 'business unionism' and low popularity among workers by articulating a social justice approach that framed grievances as community and political issues (Lopez, 2004; Avgar, Boris, Bruno, and Chung, 2018). European unions with much greater legal support for labor nonetheless also began to experience union decline and some tried to mimic the social movement organizing strategies that the US unions had found necessary to develop (Greer, 2008; Givan and Eaton, 2021).

In the context of weakened unions and the collapse of the New Deal framework for workplace and firm-based collective bargaining, SEIU organizers in Los Angeles developed one of the most innovative approaches to establishing union power. The Justice for Janitors (JfJ)

campaign is the leading example demonstrating the shift from a workplace-based to a place-based organizing strategy. SEIU campaigners analyzed the changing ownership structures in the commercial real estate buildings and realized that because owners were contracting out their janitorial services, the union could not effectively bargain for workers at the level of each contractor. They realized they had to launch a city-wide campaign that included a wide range of tactics, including street demonstrations, strikes, and corporate campaigning, to bring the building owners to the table as a group (Waldinger et al, 1998). Campaigners also identified the changing demographic composition of the workforce – the importance of immigrant workers – as a fundamental change that required more inclusive organizing strategies. In Los Angeles and other cities, SEIU developed strong coalitions with faith based and other organizations in Central American and Mexican communities. By building a city-wide campaign against employers coupled with mobilization of workers based on their identities, SEIU organized and achieved large wage increases for janitors across Los Angeles in the 1990s, which laid the groundwork for campaigns in cities across the US (Milkman, 2006).

Other efforts to build worker power have increasingly eschewed the notion of achieving collective bargaining through existing institutions, arguing that 'no one size fits all' with regard to establishing collective voice for workers (Fine, Burnham, Griffith, Ji, Narro, & Pitts, 2018). Part of this is due to longstanding exclusions of large groups of workers, including farmworkers, domestic workers, independent contractors, and public sector workers, from coverage under the NLRA. Racism motivated many of these exclusions, as Southern Democrats would only vote for the NLRA if it excluded occupations dominated by Black workers, like farm labor and domestic workers (Perea, 2011). These longstanding exclusions have become more consequential for a larger group of workers because of demographic changes and employers' greater use of

misclassification and outsourcing to avoid employment responsibilities (Weil, 2014). For example, the rise in employer use and misclassification of independent contracts pose immense challenges for labor organizations because they divide workers and prevent organization under the NLRA.

Workers have increasingly formed alternative labor organizations in response to these challenges and the inadequacies of the NLRA. Worker centers – defined as community-based and community-led organizations that engage in a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing to provide support to low-wage workers (Fine, 2006) – grew considerably between 1990 and 2019. These organizations have been able to represent workers by *not* defining themselves as unions that are subject to restrictions under the NLRA, and instead provide legal and organizing resources for workers across employers within certain occupational or geographic boundaries (Fine, Narro, and Barnes, 2018; Garrick, 2021). Workers have also organized independently in settings in which they lack collective bargaining rights. For example, ridehail drivers have organized online communities to voice grievances and coordinate collective action. Past research shows that participation in these online groups leads to a greater interest in joining a labor organization (Maffie, 2020).

Some unions have also developed innovative campaigns to organize workers and raise employment standards in lieu of establishing collective bargaining at individual workplaces. The FF15 represents an exemplary case here. The campaign's main targets are local and state governments, rather than individual employers (Rolf, 2016; Franco, 2019). Unlike traditional union campaigns, the FF15 campaign builds political power despite lacking a large dues-paying membership base. Funded by SEIU, campaign leaders organized fast food and other low wage workers through citywide organizing committees that mobilized several national days of actions

each year, involving a small number of workers but generating a large amount of press coverage (Rhomberg, 2018). The campaign also utilized digital tools like social media to better advocate for workers and build broader community support (Frangi, Zhang, and Hebdon, 2020). More than 25 million workers achieved minimum wage gains between 2012, the year the FF15 began, and 2021, with the majority of these gains made by workers of color (Lathrop, Lester, and Wilson, 2021).

Finally, researchers have increasingly called for a heightened emphasis on identity-based and intersectional organizing strategies in research on labor revitalization. These scholars argue that applying critical race theory and an intersectional lens to understanding labor revitalization is fundamental to overcoming purely class-based analyses of labor campaigns, centering the perspectives of marginalized voices in the research process, and understanding racialized and gendered forms of domination within the labor movement (McBridge, Hebson, and Holgate, 2015; Lee and Tapia, 2021; Smiley and Gupta, 2022). This perspective emphasizes the importance of intersectional organizing and problematizes the distinction between labor campaigns and social movements. For example, the FF15 has united with Black Lives Matter and other racial justice organizations to center the intersectionality of low-wage worker identities and build broader community and political power (Tapia, Lee, and Filipovitch, 2017). The case of the 2017 Women's March demonstrates that building solidarity requires more than just collective economic interest. Organizers applied an intersectional approach that frequently confronted questions of hierarchy and privilege, helping to transform the campaign into a broader movement (Lee and Tapia, 2023).

Labor revitalization literature emerged to document the creative and innovative strategies by labor organizations in response to declining union power. Rather than emphasizing the

strategic choices of employers in transforming industrial relations (Kochan et al, 1986), it focused on the various ways that labor strategically builds economic and political power in an era of declining workplace bargaining power (Frege and Kelly, 2003). Researchers in this perspective remained closely connected with labor leaders and activists to document successful strategies from case studies of new organizing drives, contract campaigns, and unconventional ways to build worker representation.

Where is the strike?

Much of the literature on labor revitalization written in the 1990s and 2000s does not conceptualize the strike as playing a major, or any, role in the renewal of worker power. The concept of workplace activism shifted from shop floor militancy to strategic campaigns. Important research outlining revitalization efforts, like Voss and Sherman's (2000) study on how internal organizational transformation leads to the allocation of more resources to new organizing and Frege and Kelly's (2003) revitalization strategies, ignore strikes entirely. The focus of labor organizations, and scholars documenting these strategies, shifted to overcoming workers' declining workplace bargaining power that was historically expressed through strikes, or strike threats. Evidence suggested that strikes no longer achieved wage gains and the defeats suffered by workers on indefinite strikes in the late-twentieth century proved that workers and their organizations needed to adopt alternative strategies to build power beyond the workplace (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998; Bronfenbrenner et al, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2006).

While strike rates continued to decline considerably into the 21st century, some labor organizations began to experiment with alternative strike models that overcame the limitations of conventional contract strikes. Scholars began to document some of these efforts in the late-2010s, indicating renewed attention to strikes as a tool for labor resistance. The most studied

example are strikes led by educator unions as part of 'bargaining for the common good' campaigns (Sneiderman and McCartin, 2018). Starting with the 2012 strike by the Chicago Teachers Union, some educator unions began to organize strikes around contract demands that linked the concerns of teachers with those of parents and community members – addressing issues like teacher-student ratios, mental health services, and student homelessness (Ashby and Bruno, 2016; Givan and Lang, 2020). This labor-consumer coalitional approach to bargaining transforms strikes from a product of private negotiations between unions and employers into public actions, sometimes outside of institutionalized bargaining relationships as in the case of the 'red for ed' strikes in 2018, that include and center the demands of various community stakeholders (Blanc, 2019).

Renewed scholarly attention on strikes also underscores questions regarding the ideological underpinnings of revitalization strategies. Missing in much of the literature on labor revitalization are debates over the 'politics of organizing' (Simms and Holgate, 2010). Ibsen and Tapia (2017) explain that ideological debates on union renewal are often divided into pluralist versus militant approaches. The debate in the US goes a step further by distinguishing between organizing and militancy. Unions implement social movement tactics to achieve a diverse range of goals (Trongone, 2022). Some scholars reject a return to old models of labor contestation through workplace-based campaigns and strikes, and instead argue for an organizing approach grounded in more innovative and strategic campaigns, like the FF15, to win over policymakers (Rolf, 2016). This perspective argues that labor leaders should leverage political relationships to spur new organizing and reform labor law, which could help shift the broader balance of class power.

Others have interpreted the development of alternative labor organizations and strategic,

union staff-dominated campaigns as impediments to building worker power, favoring instead a return to a CIO model of organizing that builds towards shop floor militancy and majority strikes (Burns, 2011; McAlevey, 2016; Uetricht and Eidlin, 2019; Blanc, 2019). Scholars from this perspective argue that shifting the balance of class power requires massive upheaval and disruption by workers, similar to the strike wave in the 1930s that helped create the conditions for the passage of the NLRA. McAlevey claimed that "a critical factor in the failure of the union revitalization effort after 1995 has been the strategic choice made by key leaders of New Labor to move away from workers and the workplace" (2016: 18). She distinguished between 'mobilizing' and 'deep organizing', arguing that many of the unions allocating resources to new organizing rely too heavily on union staff and media campaigns and only mobilize a small subgroup of workers, as opposed to advancing majority strikes. Despite this different perspective, McAlevey shares the belief, fundamental to the labor revitalization approach, that the adoption of specific strategies and approaches are key to reversing organized labor's decline.

Understanding strike effectiveness

While scholars are beginning to recenter the strike in debates about labor revitalization, questions remain concerning the conditions under which strikes are most effective for workers and their organizations. Strike effectiveness is measured primarily in two ways: the material outcomes for workers on strike (Card and Olson, 1995; Rosenfeld, 2006; Massenkoff and Wilmers, 2022) and the impact of strikes on unions as institutions (Rosenblum, 1995; McAlevey, 2016; Molina and Barranco, 2016; Hodder et al, 2017). Most scholars in the former tradition focus specifically on the strike-wage relationship to determine effectiveness. Card and Olson (1995) analyzed strikes in the late-nineteenth century to evaluate effectiveness, arguing that strikes in the 1880s had a 'winner-take-all' dynamic, as successful strikes resulted in a wage

increase and unsuccessful strikes meant that workers returned to work at pre-strike wages. In the late-twentieth century, strikes no longer led to wage gains for workers during a period of union decline and increased employer opposition (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Kimball, 2019; Massenkoff and Wilmers, 2022). Massenkoff and Wilmers (2022) also find that strikes in the US failed to increase hours, improve job stability, or enhance healthcare benefits after 1982.

Scholars have also conceptualized effectiveness as the extent to which strikes build the broader mobilization power of workers against capital and achieve other long-term sociopolitical outcomes (Molina and Barranco, 2016; Reddy, 2021). Rather than a tactic to achieve immediate material outcomes for workers, strikes also impact union power, measured by factors like membership gain (Cregan, 2013). For example, membership in the British Public and Commercial Services Union increased during months with higher strike activity between 2007 and 2013, providing evidence that organizing strikes can lead to membership gain (Hodder et al, 2017). Strikes also have broader political effects beyond economic consequences for unions. Exposure to the red state teacher walkouts in 2018 strengthened the support of parents towards teachers, the labor movement, and general interest in undertaking labor activism (Hertel-Fernandez, Naidu, and Reich, 2020).

Finally, unsuccessful strikes may have negative outcomes for workers. In the US, the permanent replacement of striking workers during failed strikes has led to job loss and union decertification, in addition to the considerable financial costs already imposed to workers on strike (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998). For example, Rosenblum (1995) demonstrated how workers at Phelps Dodge in Arizona endured a nearly three-year strike, initially organized against severe concessionary proposals by management in contract negotiations, that eventually led to the permanent replacement of strikers and the decertification of the union by those very

replacement workers. Striking workers may also face criminal penalties or extra-legal violence. For example, workers in South Africa have experienced brutality by both the police and private security forces during strikes in the twenty-first century. On August 16th, 2012, state police killed 34 workers during a wildcat strike at the Lonmin platinum mine as part of the Marikana massacre (Chinguno, 2013).

The Power Resources Approach

A major limitation of much of the literature on labor revitalization and strike effectiveness is that it isolates specific labor tactics or broader strategies as part of successful campaigns without developing a more comprehensive analytical framework. The PRA attempts to overcome this limitation by creating a framework to understand how workers (re)build collective power through the identification of different types of power resources that workers possess and strategically operationalize during campaigns and strikes. Similar to research on labor revitalization, the PRA is rooted in an emphasis on the strategy of organized labor. Schmalz et al explain that "the PRA is founded on the basic premise the organised labor can successfully defend its interests by collective mobilisation of power resources" (2018: 113). A major distinction between the PRA and much of the literature on labor revitalization is that the former is explicitly grounded in a relational understanding of power, meaning that one cannot fully understand labor's power without examining the power and resources of employers (Schmalz et al, 2018; Brookes, 2018). Despite acknowledging that power is best understood as a relational concept, most research utilizing this perspective focuses almost entirely on labor's power resources.

The contemporary PRA makes distinctions between different types of resources available to workers and labor organizations to strategically deploy and further their collective interests.

Wright (2000) distinguishes between structural power, which workers inherently develop based on their position in the economic system, and associational power, which results from workers' acting together in collective organizations like trade unions. Silver (2003) further conceptualized structural power as a combination of marketplace bargaining power and workplace bargaining power. Marketplace power results from labor market conditions, like the ability of employers to hire replacement workers in the event of a strike. Workplace power refers to the disruptive capacity that workers develop due to their unique position in a supply chain or broader economic system. For example, many transportation and logistics workers cultivate high levels of workplace bargaining power.

Additional research has identified other kinds of power resources that workers and their organizations draw on during campaigns. Two other major sources of power include societal and institutional. Societal power consists of both discursive, or symbolic, power and coalitional power (Schmalz et al, 2018). Symbolic power refers to public contestations over values, providing workers with an important source of moral leverage (Chun, 2009). For example, unions that organize healthcare workers achieve greater success when framing workplace struggles as patient care issues, emphasizing how union campaigns can advance occupational norms and interests (Reich, 2012; Gastón, 2022). Coalitional power refers to networks and alliances with external groups that can be drawn on during campaigns (Tattersall, 2010). Institutional power refers to the sources of leverage available to workers through existing institutions, which can serve to support labor campaigns or constrain them (Schmalz et al, 2018; O'Brady, 2021).

Certain power resources may activate other types of power resources or union strategies. Rhomberg and Lopez (2021) "view associational power as the central fulcrum of worker power,

the key to activating various power resources spanning the economy, state, and civil society" (39). According to this perspective, associational power is the determining factor in the utilization of other types of power resources. Strong institutional power resources can also support unions' adoption of inclusive organizing strategies, helping lead to a 'virtuous cycle' to prevent precarious employment (Doellgast, Lillie, and Pulignano, 2018). Fischer-Daly (2021) argues through case studies of farmworker campaigns that power resources are developed sequentially through the acknowledgement and achievement of human dignity, rather than the result of a previously defined power resource. The overarching emphasis from this perspective is on how labor strategically builds different sources of power.

Employer power resources

Despite scholars asserting that the PRA "needs to be understood as a relational concept" (Schmalz et al, 2018: 115) between workers and capital, research utilizing this framework often focuses exclusively on labor's power resources. Brookes (2018) emphasizes this point when discussing paths forward for the PRA, explaining that most scholars in this tradition "rarely go on to systematically theorise the power resources of those with whom workers are in conflict" (2018: 254). Similarly, in a recent literature review on union responses to precarious work in Europe, Carver and Doellgast (2021) find that "the strategies and motivation of employers…are more often assumed than systematically studied" (381).

Economists frequently analyze employer power, though their conceptualization is generally rooted in broader labor market conditions and remains more detached from labor contestation. Many economists equate employer power with labor market or monopsony power, which occurs in uncompetitive labor markets when a firm has disproportionate purchasing power of labor and can therefore depress wages (Robinson, 1933). Evidence suggests that employers'

labor market power is growing and has resulted in increased wage suppression (Naidu, Posner, and Weyl, 2018; Manning, 2021). Other economists make a sharp distinction between employer power and worker power, arguing that declining worker power is more responsible for increased firm profitability and depressed wage growth than increased labor market concentration by employers (Stansbury and Summers, 2020). Important factors that economists cite as contributing to the decline of worker power include policy changes that have systematically weakened collective bargaining and helped reduce unionization rates since the 1970s (Bivens and Shierholz, 2018). While this approach may help understand broader changes in labor market conditions and indicators of both employer and worker power, it remains primarily concerned with outcomes related to wage growth and does not necessarily provide a useful framework for understanding power *relationally* during specific campaigns.

Research in industrial relations is more directly concerned with the actors shaping the employment relationship, including how their strategies have evolved over time. IR scholars developed the concept of 'strategic choice' to explain the breakdown of the previously established Wagner Act model of collective bargaining in the US (Kochan, McKersie, and Cappelli, 1984). Their argument about strategic choice was rooted in management's agency. Beginning as early as the 1950s, employers began to use their power more aggressively to pitting manufacturing plants against one another – or 'whipsawing' – to force concessions. Union busting activities accelerated in the 1970s and thereafter due to heightened pressure from shareholders to reduce labor costs and the increased global mobility of capital (Appelbaum and Batt, 2014). The response of many employers to strikes in the 1980s illustrated the shifting approach of management towards unions in the late-twentieth century. Despite the Supreme Court's decision in *NLRB v, Mackay Radio & Telegraph* Co., 304 U.S. 333 (1938) that allowed

management to permanently replace economic strikers, employers had rarely hired permanent replacements in response to strikes until the 1980s. Management representatives then began to proactively hire permanent replacements during strikes to intentionally weaken and decertify local unions (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998; Cramton and Tracy, 1998; Hatton, 2014).

Much of the labor revitalization literature outlined above emerged to document the responses of unions and labor organizations to this more aggressively anti-union approach from managers. But much of that research assumes the presence of management opposition as a given, without recognizing variation in employer's power, and instead focuses on labor's strategies and resources alone. This reflects a trend in industrial relations to research labor's strategies to rebuild power or management's impact on worker voice exclusively, rather than studying both relationally (Doellgast et al, 2021). From the perspective of studying labor campaigns, this approach has led to an overwhelming emphasis on the agency of labor organizations without a similarly in-depth analysis of how employers use their managerial prerogative and set the conditions under which labor executes its strategies and resources.

Others have started to challenge the trend of labor scholars to focus exclusively on labor's power resources. Batt et al (2020) attribute variation in union outcomes on divergent institutional legacies of local employer power. Despite implementing similar organizing strategies, healthcare unions in Rochester have not expanded to the same degree as those in nearby Buffalo since the 1980s. In Rochester, healthcare unions failed to expand beyond a single hospital because powerful, locally headquartered firms adopted paternalistic employment practices and organized against unionization. In contrast, healthcare unions in Buffalo leveraged decades of labor-management collaboration across multiple industries and a working-class identity. They successfully unionized 'wall-to-wall' memberships at the two major health

systems in the city (Batt et al, 2020). Kassem (2022) undertakes a cross-national comparative analysis and examines how Amazon workers in Germany and the US attempted to leverage newfound structural, associational, and institutional power during the covid-19 pandemic, but have largely failed to achieve a sustained bargaining relationship due to the company's structural position and vast resources to combat unionization.

(Re)building associational power does not always succeed due to weakened or declining structural power and the role of the state. The recent history of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union illustrates this point, as efforts to rebuild membership activism have largely failed. Ellem et al (2020) conclude that "the undermining of structural power over many years has made members less willing to imagine, let alone embrace, other sources of power and new strategies…the union remains in crisis" (443). The state also shapes the deployment and effectiveness of labor's power resources. For example, the type of response by the Chinese state to the mobilization of rural migrant workers largely depends on workers' demands. In an analysis of rural migrant workers' mobilizations between 2011 and 2018 in Guangdong Province, Hui (2022) finds that local governments sometimes met demands for economic concessions, but violently repressed workers who sought to gain workplace institutional power through independent unionization.

Understanding strike strategies and outcomes

In this dissertation, I make two main theoretical contributions. First, strikes are best understood as multidimensional phenomena, as workers and labor leaders organize various types of strikes to overcome structural changes at work, increased employer opposition, and the limitations of conventional work stoppages. Much of the literature on strikes in the US is modeled after the contract strike at the conclusion of failed collective bargaining negotiations

between unions and firms, which confines our understanding of labor activism to a particular institutional context involving unionized workers in collective bargaining negotiations. My research reveals that union leaders and activists strategically organize different types of strikes across a variety of institutional contexts, union and nonunion, to overcome the challenges posed by sustaining indefinite work stoppages.

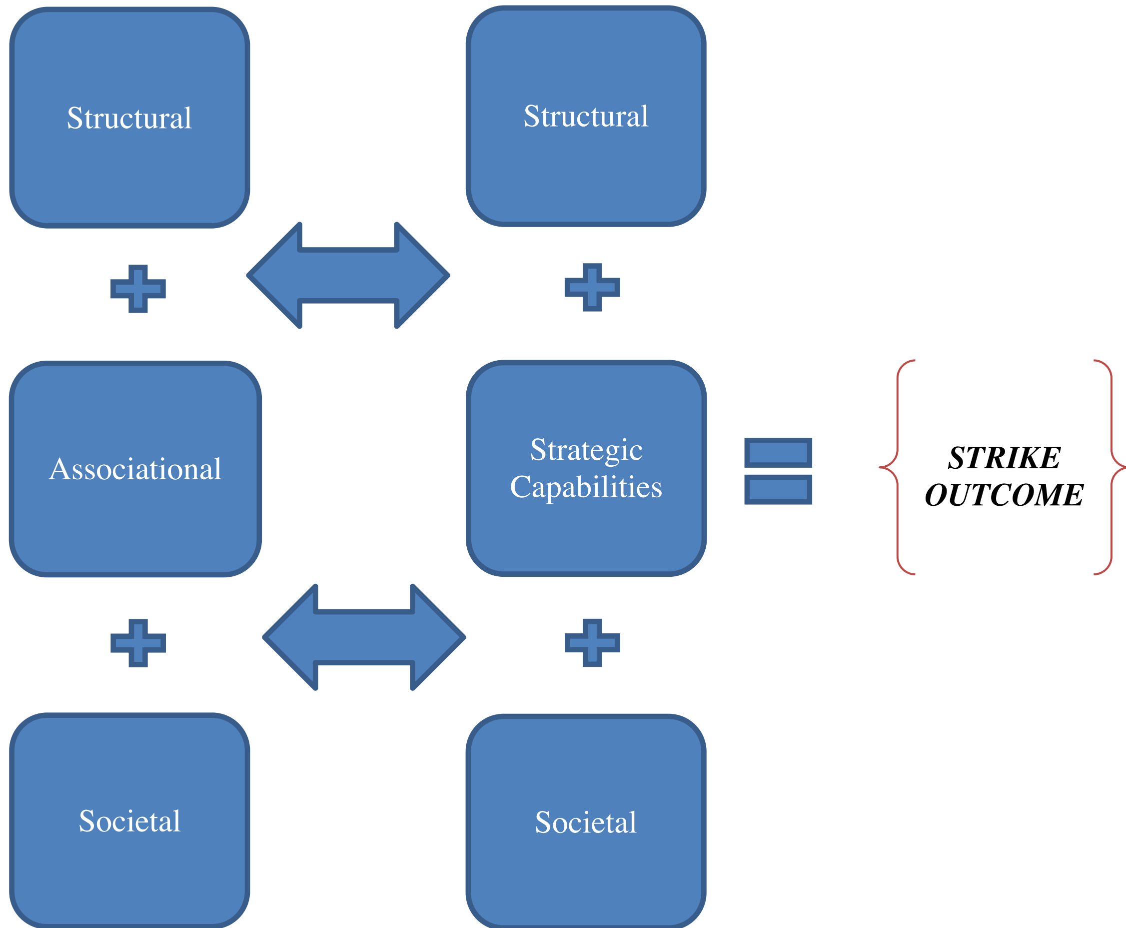
The types of strikes developed by labor organizations include *indefinite work stoppages*, *fixed duration strikes*, *walkouts*, *sickouts*, *wildcats*, and *demonstration strikes*. Indefinite work stoppages are the most conventional type in the US, reflecting more drawn-out struggles between workers and employers until a settlement is reached. Some strikes, such as fixed duration and demonstration strikes, are primarily motivated by strategic decisions of union leaders to overcome the limitations of indefinite work stoppages (Kallas, 2023). Others, such as walkouts, describe spontaneous actions that occur more frequently in non-union settings in which workers lack collective voice at work, generally have worse jobs, and are exposed to more immediate health and safety dangers, especially during the covid-19 pandemic. The typology of strikes is listed in Table I and receives more attention in Chapter Three.

Table I: Typology of strikes

Type of strike	Definition
Indefinite	A planned strike in which workers intend to stay out until reaching a settlement.
Fixed duration	A planned strike with a pre-determined time length in which workers unconditionally return to work at the conclusion of the strike.
Walkout	A spontaneous work stoppage by a group of workers while at work, generally in response to an immediate workplace issue.
Sickout	A work stoppage in which workers collectively call out sick to express a grievance or enforce a demand.
Wildcat	A work stoppage by union members without authorization from, and in defiance of, union leadership.
Demonstration	A planned strike generally involving a small minority of workers from a given workplace, firm, or industry to make claims of the state, rather than cause immediate economic disruption.

Second, I emphasize the need to study strikes and labor campaigns *relationally* through a focus on *both* union and employer strategies and power resources, and how these strategies and resources interact with each other. Much of the literature in labor and employment relations in the aftermath of the strategic choice framework (Kochan et al, 1986) focused either on the impact of new employer strategies on worker voice or on strategies by the labor movement to rebuild worker power (Doellgast et al, 2021). Few studies have simultaneously analyzed union and employer strategies. Understanding the strike outcomes of workers requires not only an examination of union tactics and resources, but an analysis of how employers shape labor's power resources through their own resources and strategic capabilities. As demonstrated in Figure II, findings from this dissertation identify sources of both labor's and employer's power resources, emphasizing how they interact with each other to shape strike outcomes.

Figure I: Strike outcomes and the PRA revisited



Following Silver (2003), labor's structural power is conceptualized as a combination of marketplace and workplace bargaining power. The transferable, occupation-based skills that some workers possess represents an additional element of structural power emphasized in this dissertation. For example, nurses possess high levels of occupation-based skills that are not firm specific and enable them to find other sources of employment relatively easily, especially during a protracted labor dispute (McAlevey, 2018). Instead of loosely defined as power resulting from the collective organization of workers, associational power encompasses infrastructural

resources, organizational efficiency, member participation, and internal cohesion (Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Schmalz et al, 2018). Special emphasis is placed on the components of associational power that specifically relate to strikes, like strike preparation and funds. Strike preparation consists of prior strike experience and tactics, such as the use of 'structure tests' (McAlevey, 2018; Kallas, 2023), that help build towards more successful strikes. Strike funds include financial support raised by unions to support members and help sustain particularly long strikes (Las Heras and Rodríguez, 2021). Finally, societal power is conceptualized as the extent to which labor organizations can leverage external alliances with community organizations, political leaders, and society's general support for organized labor (Schmalz et al, 2018). Building meaningful community coalitions and mobilizing them during strikes serves as one example of leveraging societal power (Tattersall, 2010).

I identify specific types of employer power resources and capabilities from my case study research. Structural power refers to an employer's financial strength and size, including its ability to move or rely on production elsewhere (Katz, Kochan, and Colvin, 2017). Societal power refers to the vulnerability of firms to community pressure and their ability to wield or withstand political influence. Labor organizations and management representatives struggle over societal power, though employers may be able to draw on high levels of structural power – such as by moving or relying on production in another region or country – and strategic capabilities to resist strikes in the absence of community or political support. Strategic capabilities refer to employers' ability to exploit institutional openings in labor law to defeat strikes, such as through the hiring of permanent replacements. It also refers to a general strategic savviness in response to strikes, which can be developed through prior experience with work stoppages. I exclude associational power because employers' associations appear relatively rare in the US today,

though employers have organized in the past at a regional or industry-wide level to resist unionization efforts (Batt et al, 2020). Employers' organizations remain very relevant in other institutional contexts, especially in Europe, making it important to examine how management actors rely on associational power in response to strikes in those countries (Gooberman and Hauptmeier, 2022).

The key insight is that each side's power resources relationally shape one another, leading to profound consequences on the outcome of a strike or dispute. This relationship is not unidirectional, but I place emphasis on the impact of employer power resources and capabilities on labor's power resources because much of the prior literature analyzes the latter in isolation. For example, workers with high levels of structural power are thought to have a greater disruptive capacity and win more concessions from employers during strikes (McAlevey, 2018). But employers' structural power, societal power, and strategic capabilities shape labor's disruptive capacity. If an employer faces a strike by a group of workers with high levels of structural and associational power in one location but possesses the financial resources to withstand the costs of the strike and/or the ability to move production to other worksites, this impacts the patterning and outcomes of workers who decide to strike. Labor's power resources during strikes and, by extension, labor campaigns, cannot be analyzed independently of employer's power resources and capabilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined various perspectives on strikes, labor revitalization, and power resources that help situate my research questions and theoretical contributions. Much of the prior research on strikes in the US analyzed contract strikes at the conclusion of failed negotiations between unions and firms. This approach is not as useful in the twenty-first century because

workers organize various types of strikes in response to the challenges posed by structural changes at work and intensified employer opposition. Existing literature also largely focuses on the role of labor's power resources and agency in building successful strikes. I advance a relational analytical approach to analyzing strike strategies and outcomes by accounting for the role of employer resources and capabilities. In the next four chapters, I present research findings on strike activity across the US, develop a typology of strikes, and discuss both union and employer strategies and power resources developed during strikes and labor campaigns through case study analysis.

Chapter Three: Towards a typology of strikes in the United States

In this chapter, I develop a typology of strikes by leveraging qualitative fieldwork and data from the ILR LAT. I also introduce the ILR LAT and present data to situate the current level of strike activity in the US. I create a typology of strikes to overcome the prevailing unidimensional understanding of work stoppages in the US and to analyze the conditions under which certain types of strikes emerge. I contextualize these findings by explaining the rationale behind the development of the ILR LAT and by providing a broader understanding of strikes in the US.

Introduction

On March 30th, 2020, approximately 100 nonunion workers went on strike at Amazon's JFK8 fulfillment center – the same location where workers would form the first ever union at Amazon in the US two years later – to protest unsafe working conditions during the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic (Evelyn, 2020; Weise and Scheiber, 2022). In November 2021, nearly 200 bus drivers in two North Carolina public school districts organized separate sickouts to protest low wages, with both groups winning bonus pay in the following weeks (Owens and Arthur, 2021; The Fayetteville Observer, 2021). And from September 12th until September 15th, 2022, approximately 15,000 unionized nurses across Minnesota participated in a three-day strike to protest inadequate contract negotiations on pay and staffing improvements. Nurses returned to work unconditionally after the strike without a contract before securing an agreement in December 2022 after authorizing a second work stoppage (Wiley and Sepic, 2022; Gooch, 2022).

These examples demonstrate that strikes encompass a broad range of collective activity and assume a variety of forms. Until recently, scholars largely understood how US workers

organize strikes in purely economic terms, as drawn-out conflicts that resulted from failed contract negotiations and bargaining impasse between unions and firms (McConnell, 1989; Rosenblum, 1995; Cramton and Tracy, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2006; Martin and Dixon, 2010; Kochan and Riordan, 2016). Rather than the product of private negotiations, recent strikes are often shorter in duration, develop more of a public and political face, and emerge in a variety of institutional contexts (Rosenfeld, 2019; Reddy, 2021). Based on the ILR LAT, which I developed and discuss below, nonunion workers organized approximately one-third of all strikes in 2021 and 2022, illustrating shifting patterns of labor action during the covid-19 pandemic (Kallas et al, 2023a). While researchers have identified new types of strikes by workers and their organizations (Rhomberg, 2018; Kallas, 2023), no scholarly typology of strikes in the US exists that reflect these unaccounted-for types of work stoppages. This study answers the following research questions: what are the different types of strikes that US workers organize *and* what is the distribution of the types of strikes by industry, unionization status, geography, and size?

In this chapter, I develop a typology of strikes by identifying six types of work stoppages in the US – *indefinite*, *fixed duration*, *walkouts*, *sickouts, wildcats*, and *demonstration*. I draw on a comprehensive dataset of 627 strikes across the US from 2021-2022 and qualitative interviews of striking workers and campaign representatives to identify these unique types. In addition to demonstrating the diverse range of forms that strikes take, I present descriptive evidence that certain variables – such as industry, unionization status, geography, and size – influence the frequency of each type. This study reveals a diversification of labor action, as workers and labor organizations adopt different forms of strikes across various institutional contexts. It also demonstrates that while strikes assume a variety of forms in the US, they remain largely confined to disputes between workers and specific firms, as opposed to industry-wide or political strikes.

What is a strike?

The term "labor strike" encompasses a broad range of collective behavior in which a group of workers stop working. No universally agreed upon definition exists, though all share some important characteristics. Peterson (1937) defines a strike as a "temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or to enforce a demand." Numerous scholars and public officials have adopted this definition, at times with slight revisions (see Hyman, 1989; van Der Velden, Dribbusch, Lyddon, & Vandaele, 2007; Hamann, Johnston, and Kelly, 2013; BLS, 2019a). Others define strikes more narrowly. In an in-depth study of industrial action in the United Kingdom, Knowles (1952:1) defined a strike as "collective stoppages of work undertaken in order to bring pressure to bear on those who depend on the sale or use of the products of that work." This definition emphasizes workers bringing pressure against a specific group that depends on their labor. Similarly, CIO staff organizer Steuben (1950: 13-14) defined a strike as "an organized cessation from work. It is the collective halting of production or services in a plant, industry, or area for the purpose of obtaining concessions from employers," arguing that not only are strikes targeted against a specific group – employers – but they involve some degree of organization.

All definitions of a strike include workers collectively stopping work in response to a grievance or to advance some type of demand. This does not mean that strikes require prior organization or target a specific group, like employers. While workers often strike to win concessions from employers, they can also strike in response to governmental (in)action or societal injustice. The longstanding tradition of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) members refusing to unload goods from authoritarian regimes, such as Germany and Japan in the 1930s and South Africa in the 1980s, provides an important example of a strike in

response to extra-workplace injustice (Kimeldorf, 1988).

I adopt and slightly revise Peterson's (1937) definition of a strike because it emphasizes the collective, temporary stoppage of work to express a grievance or advance a demand, a common theme across all definitions. An important edit I make is to use the term "workers" instead of "employees" to account for legal distinctions across countries and the rise in alternative forms of employment, like independent contractors (Katz and Krueger, 2019). The revised definition reads as "a temporary stoppage of work by a group of *workers* in order to express a grievance or to enforce a demand." This inclusive definition encompasses a wide variety of labor action, meaning that the ILR LAT captures strikes otherwise excluded from other definitions and databases. Updating "employees" to "workers" is necessary to account for structural changes in the US economy since the definition's origin in 1937.

Types of Strikes

While a strike may assume different forms, much of the prior research on work stoppages in the US is modeled on the indefinite strike by unionized workers at the end of failed collective negotiations, also referred to as the 'contract strike' (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; See McConnell, 1989; Rosenblum, 1995; Cramton and Tracy, 1998; Getman, 1998; Rosenfeld, 2006; Martin and Dixon, 2010; Kochan and Riordan, 2016). US labor law channels unsuccessful contract negotiations between unions and firms towards strikes as the ultimate tool that unions have as leverage to resolve bargaining impasse, with workers holding out until reaching a settlement (Katz et al, 2017). But recent qualitative studies find that strikes in the US now take on a variety of forms and have developed more of a public face, in contrast with work stoppages at the conclusion of failed, private negotiations between unions and firms. Examples include strikes by teacher unions that engage community support through 'bargaining for the common

good' campaigns (Ashby and Bruno, 2016; McCartin et al, 2020; Givan and Lang, 2020), fixed duration strikes by nurse unions that impact hospital management financially while advancing members' working conditions and patient care advocacy (Kallas, 2023), and one-day strikes by fast food workers to generate public sympathy and increase political pressure on large corporations (Rhomberg, 2018).

Despite these new forms of work stoppages, no comprehensive typology of strikes in the US has been developed. Prior research has analyzed the emergence of specific types of strikes in both the US and Europe, such as general strikes (Hamann et al, 2013) and wildcat strikes (Gouldner, 1954; Fantasia, 1988; Brenner, Winslow, and Brenner, 2020). Scholars in Europe have attempted to create typologies of labor disputes and strikes. Nowak and Gallas (2014) built a typology of 'mass strikes' in Europe by drawing on the work of revolutionary socialist Rosa Luxemburg (1906/2008), analyzing these strikes along four dimensions: aims (types of demands), extent (geographic and sectoral distribution), direction (offensive versus defensive demands), and form (short versus indefinite). In a second typology, researchers from Eurofound (2022) studied both strike and non-strike labor actions from 2018-2019 across all European Union (EU) member states plus Norway and the United Kingdom. They categorized disputes into main clusters based on the scale (national or localized), type of demands (interest and rights, pay, employment problems, company policies, and public policies), duration (extended or short), and the extent of third-party intervention.

Building on these two typologies of labor disputes in Europe and other research on specific types of strikes, I identified four analytical categories from prior literature to help analyze existing strikes: the *scale* of a strike, determined by its scope (workplace, industry, or society) and relative size; the *duration* of a strike, relating primarily to whether the strike is

called indefinitely until reaching a settlement or is of a predetermined duration; the *issues* of a strike, relating to the types of grievances or demands by workers involved in a dispute; and the *organization, authorization, and legality* of a strike, relating to whether workers are formally unionized, have authorization for the strike from union leadership, and the legality of the strike.

Scale

One way to distinguish between different types of strikes is based on scale, determined in part by whether a strike is confined to an individual firm, industry, or an entire region. The industrial relations framework of specific countries influences the scale of many strikes. For example, because collective bargaining in the US occurs primarily at the workplace level and labor law restricts certain types of labor activity, like general strikes, most work stoppages emerge in individual workplaces and/or at specific firms (Katz et al, 2017). In other countries, strikes often occur at the industry or regional level. While strike incidence is relatively low in Germany, work stoppages often occur at the industry level because sectoral bargaining is commonplace (Dribbusch, 2007). Workers across the EU have also increasingly engaged in mass general strikes since the 1980s (Hamann et al, 2013), especially to protest austerity measures taken by governments in the aftermath of the 2008 recession (Nowak and Gallas, 2014; Vandaele, 2016).

A second component of scale concerns the size and relative participation in a strike. Some strikes involve an especially large number of workers because they occur at a sizeable employer or in response to a political decision that impacts a broad range of people. In terms of relative participation, strikes that involve nearly complete involvement by impacted workers in a dispute develop greater disruptive capacity and can be referred to as majority, or mass participation, strikes (McAlevey, 2018). However, not all strikes involve a large majority of a

given workplace or industry. Many labor organizations in the United States have attempted to exert public pressure on employers by organizing short strikes involving a small percentage, or a minority, of workers. Rather than relying on economic leverage, scholars have referred to these actions as 'symbolic strikes' because they mobilize power resources through civil society and external alliances (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021). The national one-day strikes organized by the SEIU's FF15 campaign since 2012 is the archetypal example, as a very small percentage of fast-food workers engage in pre-planned days of action that generate public visibility but exert minimal direct economic pressure on employers (Rhomberg, 2018; Juravich, 2018; Pasquier, Daudigeos, and Barros, 2021).

Duration

A second way to distinguish between strike types is based on duration, specifically whether workers predetermine the length of a strike before initiating a work stoppage. Workers, sometimes in consultation with union leaders, may elect to engage in a limited or indefinite strike (Lyddon, 1998). Hyman's (1989) distinction between 'token demonstration' and 'trials of strength' strikes is useful here. 'Token demonstration' strikes signal a warning to employers and are more common in countries with high union density and strong labor laws. These conflicts are often of a shorter duration and used to build leverage in contract negotiations. For example, many strikes in Germany take the form of short, sector-wide warning strikes to signal dissatisfaction with ongoing contract negotiations (Dribbusch, 2007). 'Trial of strength' strikes represent a long-term struggle in which workers hold out until reaching a settlement. These kinds of strikes remained common in countries with national collective bargaining legislation, but in which unions lacked political incorporation or institutions facilitating social partnership (Hyman, 1989). For example, strikes in the US were among the longest in the world long after passage of

the Wagner Act in 1935 because work stoppages functioned as the primary way to resolve bargaining impasse (Edwards, 1981; Colvin and Darbishire, 2013).

Workers and their organizations also strategically manipulate strike duration, often in response to the challenges of sustaining indefinite strikes. Strikes with predetermined time lengths – also called fixed duration strikes (Kallas, 2023) – have become more prevalent in the US because of the financial and job security costs imposed by indefinite work stoppages on workers and legal challenges constructed by the state, such as laws that allow firms to permanently replace striking workers (Martin and Dixon, 2010; Hennebert and Faulkner, 2020; Oswalt, 2020). Some unions exclusively organize fixed duration strikes. For example, leaders in the California Nurses Association began utilizing fixed duration strikes in the late-1990s because they more effectively protect nurses' finances, job security, and role as patient advocates while still inflicting a large amount of economic disruption by forcing employers to staff hospitals with costly temporary replacements (Kallas, 2023). Strikes against governmental (in)action – ranging from mass, general strikes against austerity to symbolic strikes involving a small number of workers – are also commonly of a fixed duration (Nowak and Gallas, 2014; Rhomberg, 2018). The limitation of these strikes is that workers often unconditionally return to work at the conclusion of the strike, meaning that they may not force enough economic or public pressure to compel an immediate settlement (Kallas, 2023).

Issues

The type and nature of the issues workers strike over is a third way to distinguish forms of work stoppages. The main distinctions here are between economic and political strikes, and offensive versus defensive strikes.[1] Political and general strikes are sometimes viewed as

[1] In the US, an important legal distinction also exists between economic and unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes based on the type of demands involved in a dispute. An economic strike is a strike over better working conditions,

synonymous (Hamann et al, 2013), though the former can be conceived more broadly as work stoppages that address extra-economic issues (Nowak and Gallas, 2014). The aforementioned strikes by ILWU members in protest of authoritarian regimes provides one example of a political strike that does not occur at the national, or even regional level. In contrast, economic strikes are organized around working conditions like pay and safety, generally targeting workers' immediate employers (Gall, 2012). Workers can make both economic and political demands during strikes, such as in 'bargaining for the common good' campaigns by educators in the US. Rather than exclusively striking over issues like pay, many teacher unions have articulated demands, like addressing student homelessness, to engage community stakeholders (McCartin et al, 2020; Givan and Lang, 2020).

Scholars also distinguish between offensive and defensive strikes based on whether workers are trying to win or protect something during the dispute. In offensive strikes, workers demand something that they currently lack. Offensive strikes can occur over issues of control, such as winning union recognition, or over terms of employment, like securing wage increases (Montgomery, 1979; Wallace, Rubin, and Smith, 1988; McCammon, 1990). In defensive strikes, workers resist concessions, legal violations, austerity measures, or demands by employers or the state to return to prior conditions (Stearns, 1974; Elfstrom and Kuruvilla, 2014). Silver's (2003) distinction between Marxian and Polanyian labor unrest is partially based on the nature of demands by workers on strike. She conceptualizes Marxian-type labor unrest as offensive strikes by an emerging working class against exploitation, using labor militancy in the global automobile industry to illustrate her argument. Polanyian-type strikes, on the other hand, resist

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such as improved pay or benefits. A ULP strike is a strike in response to employers committing ULPs, such as illegally terminating a union activist. Employers are permitted to permanently replace strikers in an economic strike, but not in a ULP strike (Leroy, 2001).

commodification and working-class unmaking, as with deindustrialization. While Silver pays less attention to this form of unrest, work stoppages in the US manufacturing sector during the late-twentieth century exemplify defensive strikes as workers faced concessions, job loss, and increasingly recalcitrant employers (Rosenblum, 1995; Rosenfeld, 2006).

Organization, authorization, and legality

A final way to distinguish strikes is based on organization and legality, determined by whether the strike was planned or spontaneous, authorized or unauthorized, and legal or illegal. Despite recent evidence that nonunion workers organized one-third of all strikes in 2021 and 2022 (Kallas et al, 2023a), most research on strikes in the US involves planned work stoppages by union members (Rosenfeld, 2006; McAlevey, 2018; Kallas, 2023). Strikes by nonunion workers that have received scholarly attention are either recognition strikes – in which workers strike to achieve union recognition – that were most common before 1945 (Snyder, 1977), or strikes coordinated by unions as part of a broader campaign, such as in the case of the FF15 (Rhomberg, 2018). Almost no research exists on spontaneous strikes by nonunion workers in the US. A lone exception is an ethnographic account of a spontaneous work stoppage by Latino "gellers" at a medical electronics factory in 1983 in response to discriminatory layoffs by firm management (Devinatz, 2003). Considering that approximately 90% of the US workforce does not belong to a union and that nonunion workers have organized one-third of all strikes in 2021 and 2022, more research needs to examine cases of both planned and spontaneous strikes by nonunion workers in the US.

In a unionized setting, a distinction exists between authorized and unauthorized - also referred to as wildcat - strikes. Authorized strikes generally occur through a formalized process regulated by internal union procedures and existing labor law. Wildcat strikes occur when rank-

and-file members undertake strike action without the authorization, or expressly in defiance, of union leadership (Gouldner, 1954; Fantasia, 1988; Blanc, 2019).[2] While no historical data exist on strikes by authorization status in the US, prior research has used strikes during the term of a contract as a proxy because most collective bargaining agreements in the US contain a 'no strike' clause, which prohibits work stoppages during the life of a contract (Byrne and King, 1986; McCammon, 1990). Wildcat strikes, which historically occurred most frequently in the mining industry in the US, comprised approximately one-third of all strikes from 1960-1976, but declined to just about 13% of all strikes in 1980 (McCammon, 1990). Data on wildcat strikes remain limited from 1980 until 2021 (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kallas et al, 2023a). In the public sector, wildcat strikes sometimes take the form of sickouts, in which workers coordinate and collectively use sick time to protest a grievance (Katz et al, 2017). Unauthorized strikes likely decreased as unionization and strike rates declined, though educators organized statewide work stoppages in 2018-2019 across states like West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona largely in defiance of union leadership (Blanc, 2019).

The existence of laws that regulate or restrict strikes by certain workers creates a final classification: legal versus illegal strikes. Unlike unauthorized strikes organized in violation of a contractual no strike clause, the legality of strikes is generally determined by statutory provisions that may punish illegal conduct more forcefully. In the US, some workers are permitted to strike only under certain conditions. Examples include requirements for healthcare workers to provide a ten-day notice of any work stoppage and educators in certain states, like Pennsylvania, only allowed to strike for a certain number of days (Olson, 1986; Kallas, 2023). More common in the

[2] In other contexts, definitions of wildcat strikes are not necessarily limited to those by unionized workers. For example, in many regions of the Global South, wildcat strikes more broadly referred to as unauthorized work stoppages regardless of unionization status (see Anner and Liu, 2016; Huang, Huang, & Mai, 2022).

public sector are complete restrictions on the right to strike. For example, as of 2014, 35 states plus the District of Columbia banned teacher strikes and some states, like New York, ban all public sector strikes (Sanes and Schmitt, 2014). However, legislation outlawing strikes does not necessarily prevent strikes from occurring. The aforementioned educator strikes in 2018 and 2019 involved hundreds of thousands of workers from various states that outlaw strikes by teachers (Blanc, 2020). Public sector workers and union leaders can face severe penalties for engaging in illegal work stoppages, but they do not necessarily preclude such strikes from occurring (Katz, 2013).

The Cornell ILR Labor Action Tracker

Investigating the diverse ways that workers organize strikes requires a comprehensive understanding of strike activity. Similar to many other countries, official data sources in the US only document a fraction of total strikes (Silver, 2003; van der Velden, Dribbusch, Lyddon, and Vandaele, 2007; Vandaele, 2016; Kallas et al, 2023a). To overcome these data limitations, I developed, and have since led, the ILR LAT. Launched in late-2020, this project seeks to create a comprehensive database of strike activity, regardless of the size of a strike or the unionization status of workers on strike, displayed on a publicly accessible interactive map.[3] The ILR LAT helps to overcome the limitations of several existing databases of strike activity in the US, including the BLS work stoppages program, the FMCS dataset, Bloomberg Law's work stoppage database, and PayDay Report's strike map. The ILR LAT, BLS, FMCS, and Bloomberg Law also keep track of lockouts – often grouped together with strikes under the term 'work stoppages' – but since lockouts are relatively rare today, I use the terms 'strike' and 'work stoppage' interchangeably.

[3] The project's complete methodology is available at https://striketracker.ilr.cornell.edu/methodology.html.

The BLS' work stoppages program historically served as the dominant source of strike statistics. Before funding cuts by the Regan administration, BLS statisticians kept comprehensive and thorough data on work stoppages (see BLS, 1981 for the most recent example). However, since funding cuts by the Reagan Administration in the early-1980s, BLS statisticians only collect data for work stoppages that involve 1,000 or more employees, last a full shift, and occur on a 'workday' – defined as Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays (BLS, 2019a). These narrow inclusion criteria prevent researchers from developing a comprehensive understanding of strike activity. In 2022, only 37 of the 424 work stoppages documented by the ILR LAT involved 1,000 or more workers, or 8.7% (Kallas et al, 2023a).

The FMCS supplies another database of strike activity, though it only documents strikes that occur at the conclusion of failed contract negotiations between unionized workers and firms that are reported by mediators. The advantage of this dataset compared to the BLS is that it captures strikes occurring in contract negotiations regardless of firm size (Martin and Dixon, 2010). However, the FMCS excludes most strikes outside of conventional private sector bargaining relationships, like union recognition strikes, wildcats, strikes by nonunion workers, and many work stoppages in the public sector (Rosenfeld, 2006).

The considerable shortcomings of official datasets in capturing strikes helped inspire new efforts to track strike activity, though limitations still remain. Since 1990, Bloomberg Law has operated a work stoppage database that requires a subscription to access (Combs, 2021). Bloomberg Law's database documents work stoppages involving unionized workers and capture data on the employer, union, duration, geographic location, industry, size, and issues involved in a dispute (Bloomberg Law, 2023). While Bloomberg Law provides a more complete accounting of strikes than the BLS or FMCS, it does not systematically document strikes by nonunion

workers, who comprise over 90% of the labor force. The dataset also requires a subscription to view, making it cost prohibitive for many to access.

Finally, the news organization PayDay Report developed a strike map in 2020 to document strikes more comprehensively during the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic. PayDay Report claims that nearly 1,200 strikes occurred in 2020, arguing that this represents “the largest strike wave in the U.S. since 1946” (Elk, 2020). Unlike the other data sources, PayDay Report only tracks whether a strike occurs, rather than collecting data systematically on the size, demands, or other variables of an action. Whereas official datasets like the BLS and FMCS capture strikes too narrowly and underestimate levels of strike activity, PayDay Report may overestimate the number of strikes across the US for two main reasons. First, PayDay Report does not make a clear distinction between strikes and protests, making it difficult to determine whether certain actions are correctly labeled as strikes. Second, PayDay Report does not develop verification protocols, which means that some actions are added from a single source, like a tweet.

The ILR LAT overcomes the limitations in existing data sources by providing a comprehensive and rigorous approach to collecting data on strikes. ILR LAT researchers employ a slightly revised definition of a strike developed by Peterson (1937), also used in this dissertation, to document strikes of all sizes (two or more workers) regardless of unionization status. These inclusion criteria make the ILR LAT a more comprehensive database than the BLS, FMCS, or Bloomberg Law. Unlike PayDay Report, ILR LAT researchers also collect data on numerous variables relating to a strike, including the employer, labor organization, industry, number of locations, geography, size, duration, authorization/unionization status, and demands. The project also links to all sources used to find these data. ILR LAT researchers also apply

rigorous search and verification protocols to find a strike, ensure that a strike occurred, and collect data on other relevant variables. The research team relies on systematic google news and social media searches, labor movement contacts, and other existing databases to find strikes. Two sources are required to add a strike to the database. Regular, biweekly team meetings are used to resolve questions about specific events – such as whether an action should be counted as a strike. Finally, ILR LAT researchers also keep track of non-strike labor protests, like rallies and informational pickets. While the count of protests is not comprehensive, none of the other work stoppage databases elaborated on above attempt to document these non-strike actions.

Methodology

To investigate the types and distribution of strikes recently organized by workers across the US, I undertook a multistep analytical approach drawing on both data from the ILR LAT and qualitative fieldwork. I began by identifying and building a typology of strikes, which emerged from both qualitative fieldwork and larger scale data collection as part of the ILR LAT. I then attempted to code every strike beginning in 2021 or 2022 from the ILR LAT database based on the type of strike. I coded a type for 627 of 672 total strikes (~93%), with each strike falling under a single category. I then analyzed the distribution of strike types along four potential indicators – industry, unionization status, geography, and size – to demonstrate that specific types emerge more frequently under certain conditions.

Data collection

To identify the types, I relied on four major sources: data collection while leading the ILR LAT research team, media and news accounts of various strikes, 47 interviews with respondents affiliated with the Starbucks Workers United campaign, and prior research I conducted on fixed duration strikes by nurse unions (Kallas, 2023). As of July 2023, I have

collected data on approximately 350 strikes and reviewed data collection for an additional 450 strikes while serving as project director of the ILR LAT. Through this data collection, I reviewed over 1,000 news and media sources relating to strikes. This experience provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of the different ways that workers organized strikes, helping me to begin identifying different types of strikes. I also relied on 47 interviews with Starbucks workers and union staff affiliated with the Starbucks Workers United unionization campaign. Starbucks Workers United, a campaign organized by the labor union Workers United, emerged in late-2021 and, as of July 2023, have won union elections at over 325 stores (Union Elections Data, 2023). As of July 2023, Starbucks workers also organized over 140 strikes, including four nationally coordinated strikes involving over 1,000 workers each (Kallas et al, 2023a). Finally, I relied on prior qualitative research on strikes, specifically an analysis of fixed duration strikes (Kallas, 2023), to help distinguish between different strikes forms.

Analytic strategy

The types of strikes include indefinite work stoppages, fixed duration strikes, walkouts, wildcat/sickouts, and demonstration strikes. To briefly summarize before explaining in more detail in the findings section, an indefinite work stoppage is a strike in which workers plan to stay out until reaching an acceptable settlement. In contrast, a fixed duration strike is a work stoppage in which workers predetermine a strike end date in advance, returning to work unconditionally on that date (Kallas, 2023). Unlike indefinite or fixed duration strikes, a walkout refers to a spontaneous strike without any prior planning, generally in response to an immediate workplace issue or demand. Demonstration strikes share similarities with political strikes, but are organized on a much smaller scale. They involve work stoppages specifically for or against political legislation or governmental decisions, and often involve only a small minority of

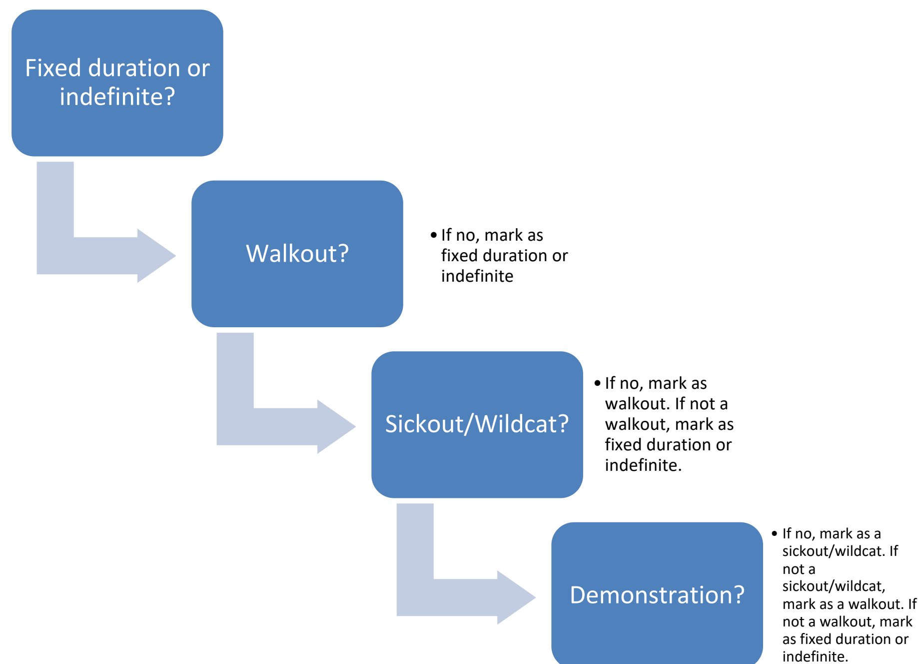
workers from a given workplace or industry (Rhomberg, 2018).

Wildcat strikes refer to work stoppages by unionized workers without authorization from and in defiance of union leadership (McCammon, 1990). Wildcats may be planned or spontaneous, but, unlike walkouts, they only emerge in unionized settings. Sickouts refer to groups of workers coordinating the use of sick leave to protest a grievance (Katz et al, 2017). They can occur in both unionized and nonunion settings. While wildcats can take the form of a more conventional strike or a walkout, a sickout can also be considered a wildcat if workers collectively call out sick without the authorization from and in defiance of union leadership. The wildcat and sickout categories are combined in the analysis because of considerable overlap between the two. Thirty-five out of 41 wildcat strikes were sickouts (~85%) and 35 out of 65 sickouts (~54%) were wildcats. Additionally, nonunion workers organized 14 out of 65 total sickouts (~22%). These data demonstrate the relative disappearance of wildcat strikes in the time period studied, as the vast majority of unauthorized work stoppages took the form of sickouts by K-12 teachers or public sector bus drivers.

After developing the typology, I assigned codes to each strike in the ILR LAT's database from 2021-2022. While these types are not necessarily mutually exclusive, I assign just one code to each strike to better distinguish between these different forms of work stoppages. I argue that the definitions of each strike are specific enough to capture unique forms of activity. I coded the type of strike for each event based on the following criteria, also displayed as a decision tree in Figure II. Each successive type takes priority over a prior type, so a strike that is both a fixed duration and a sickout is labeled as a sickout. First, I established whether the strike was indefinite or of a fixed duration. Second, I identified whether the strike occurred spontaneously or involved some degree of pre-planning. Third, I determined whether the strike involved a sickout and/or

wildcat strike. As previously stated, the sickout and wildcat types are combined because of considerable overlap between the two. Fourth, I determined whether the strike involved demands at a specific firm or claims on the state. I labeled the action a demonstration strike if a strike involved claims of the state, regardless of what type of form – indefinite, fixed duration, walkout, wildcat/sickout – the strike took.

Figure II: Decision Tree



I assigned a specific category to each strike starting in 2021 or 2022 from the ILR LAT's database. To determine the strike category, I evaluated the sources – news articles, press releases, or social media posts – listed for each strike provided by the ILR LAT and followed the coding process outlined above. I had familiarity with identifying information from these types of sources through my prior experience collecting data on strikes on the ILR LAT. I searched for key terms in each source to determine the strike category. Examples include a source describing the beginning of a strike and stating that "workers will return to work" on a specific date, indicating a fixed duration strike. Alternatively, language in the source to the effect of "workers will keep

striking until a contract is reached" signaled an indefinite strike. To determine the other kinds of strikes – walkouts, wildcat/sickout, and demonstration – I identified other key terms and language. For example, walkouts involve no prior planning, so quotes or text from sources reading that "the strike wasn't pre-planned" helped distinguish walkouts from other types of strikes.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed iteratively as I redefined types through the coding process. After coding the first 250 strikes, I realized that too much overlap existed between fixed duration, walkouts, and demonstration strikes – making it somewhat difficult to distinguish between them during analysis. I identified important differences through this process, such as differentiating between walkouts that were spontaneous and those that were planned. The latter ultimately fell under the fixed duration strike label. I also noticed an important distinction between strikes that targeted direct employers and those that made claims of the state, helping me distinguish demonstration strikes from other types. After establishing these tighter definitions, I recoded the first 250 events and coded the remaining strikes. I then reviewed all strikes to confirm codes were assigned correctly, which allowed me to evaluate all strikes in the entire database at least twice. There were several strikes in which I lacked adequate information to confidently code. In these cases, I searched for additional sources that might provide more context. I ultimately excluded 45 strikes from the analysis due to lack of information.

After coding each strike, I compiled descriptive data according to the type of strike and along the following indicators – industry, unionization status, geography, and size. Data for all four indicators are collected by the ILR LAT research team and used in this study. Industry is defined by the NAICS 2017 classification system. A single strike can occur in multiple

industries, though no more than two industries are listed in each strike. Unionization status is determined by whether workers on strike have previously achieved union recognition. Geography is measured in this study as whether a strike occurred in a Right to Work (RTW) state. Twenty-seven states had active RTW legislation during the study period, and these laws generally reduce labor's power (VanHeuvelen, 2020). Finally, size is determined by the approximate number of participants in a strike. Data on strike size were available for 586 out of 627 strikes coded (~93%). As the results demonstrate, the incidence of strike type varied considerably by these indicators.

Findings I: Contextualizing strikes historically and comparatively

Before explaining the emergence of distinct types of strikes, I present broader data on strikes in the US relying on annual reports compiled by the ILR LAT. I then compare the level of strike activity historically and with recent trends in the United Kingdom (UK). In 2021, US workers participated in 279 work stoppages (274 strikes and five lockouts) involving ~140,000 workers. In 2022, workers participated in 424 work stoppages (417 strikes and seven lockouts) involving ~224,000 workers (Kallas et al, 2023a). The number of work stoppages increased ~52% and the number of workers involved in stoppages increased ~60% from 2021 to 2022.

Other important findings include the distribution of stoppages by industry, duration, size, demands, and unionization status. In 2022, over one-third of all stoppages occurred in the accommodation and food services industry[4], yet a majority of all workers on strike, over 60%, were employed in the educational services industry. Strikes were of a relatively short duration over this time period, in contrast with the conventional understanding of strikes in the US as longer, drawn out struggles (Hyman, 1989). In 2021, approximately 37% of stoppages lasted one

[4] A work stoppage may occur in multiple industries.

day or less and 57% lasted less than five days. In 2022, those figures increased to 46% and 67%, respectively. Strikes are also relatively small, perhaps reflecting increased activity in industries with smaller workplaces, like accommodation and food services. In 2022, 49% of strikes involved fewer than 50 workers and 61% involved fewer than 100 workers.

In terms of the types of demands associated with strike activity[5], workers organized more strikes around pay than any other issue, but nonwage demands also motivated labor action. In 2022, workers advanced pay as a demand in 55% of stoppages. Health and safety improvements and staffing increases represented the two other most frequent demands of strikes, at 25% and 20% respectively. Finally, nonunion workers organized a surprisingly high number of strikes, perhaps due to the dangerous working conditions many experienced during the covid-19 pandemic. Nonunion workers organized ~36% of all stoppages in 2021 and ~31% in 2022. However, these strikes are considerably smaller than stoppages by unionized workers, as nonunion workers accounted for just under 4% of all workers on strike in 2021 and 3% in 2022 (Kallas et al, 2023a).

Historical comparison

Work stoppages and the number of workers involved in stoppages have decreased dramatically from the 1970s to 2022. While changes to inclusion criteria by the BLS in the early-1980s prevents a continuous comparison of strikes since 1950, Charts I and II display the average number of major work stoppages/year and average number of workers involved in a major stoppage/year in the time period listed. 'Major' work stoppages include those of 1,000 or more workers that last at least an entire shift.

[5] A work stoppage may have multiple demands.

Chart I

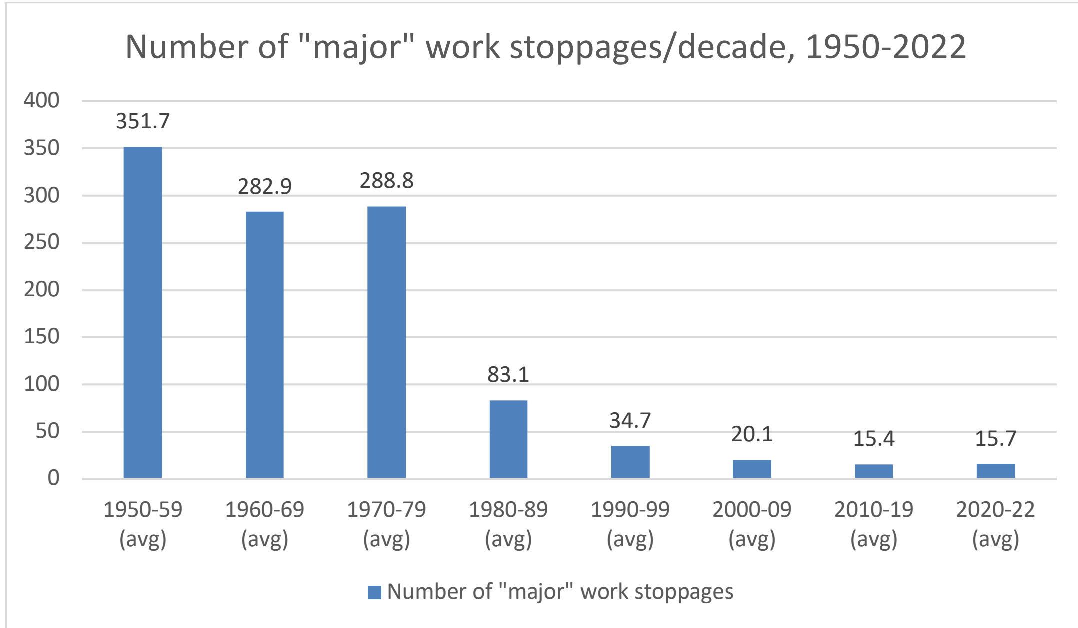
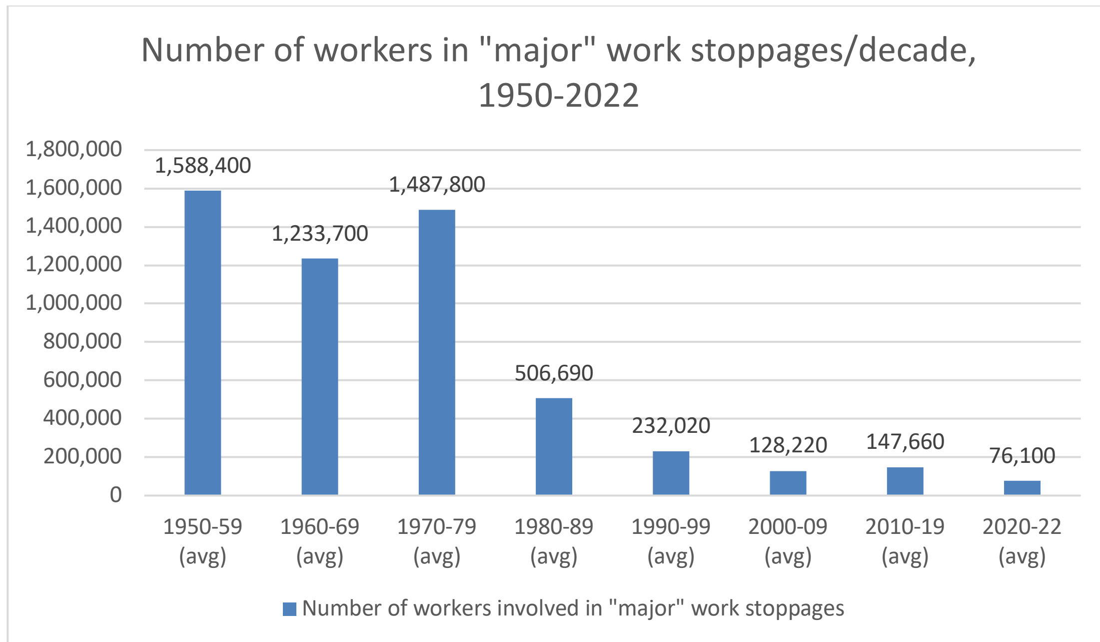


Chart II

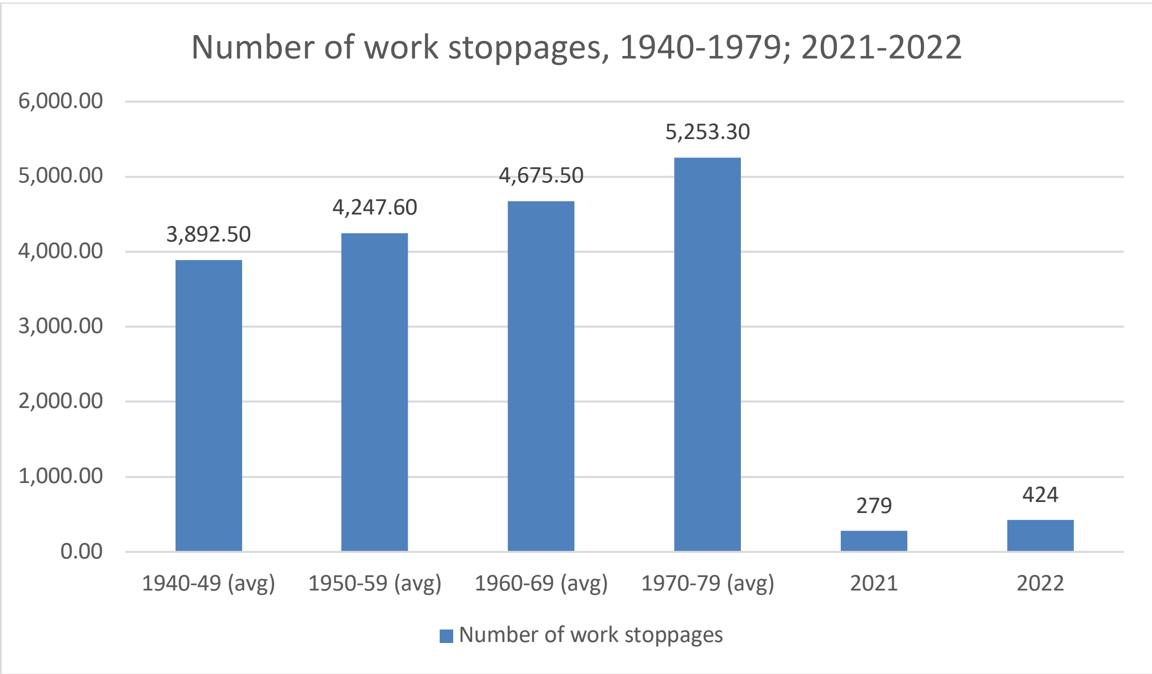


*Charts I and II are derived from BLS data (BLS, 2023a).

More comprehensive data available through the ILR LAT allows for a more thorough comparison of strike activity. The BLS kept data on all work stoppages involving six or more

workers lasting at least a full shift through 1979 (BLS, 1981). While the ILR LAT project captures all strikes of two or more workers, including those lasting less than a full shift, and contemporary researchers have the advantage of certain research tools and media sources unavailable over forty years ago, these comprehensive figures still provide an indication of the level of strike activity today compared to the mid-twentieth century. Charts III and IV demonstrate that all work stoppages, regardless of size, have similarly declined since the mid-twentieth century.

Chart III



*Source: BLS (BLS, 1981) for 1940-1979 and ILR LAT (Kallas et al, 2023a) for 2021-2022.

Chart IV

*Source: BLS (BLS, 1981) for 1940-1979 and ILR LAT (Kallas et al, 2023a) for 2021-2022.

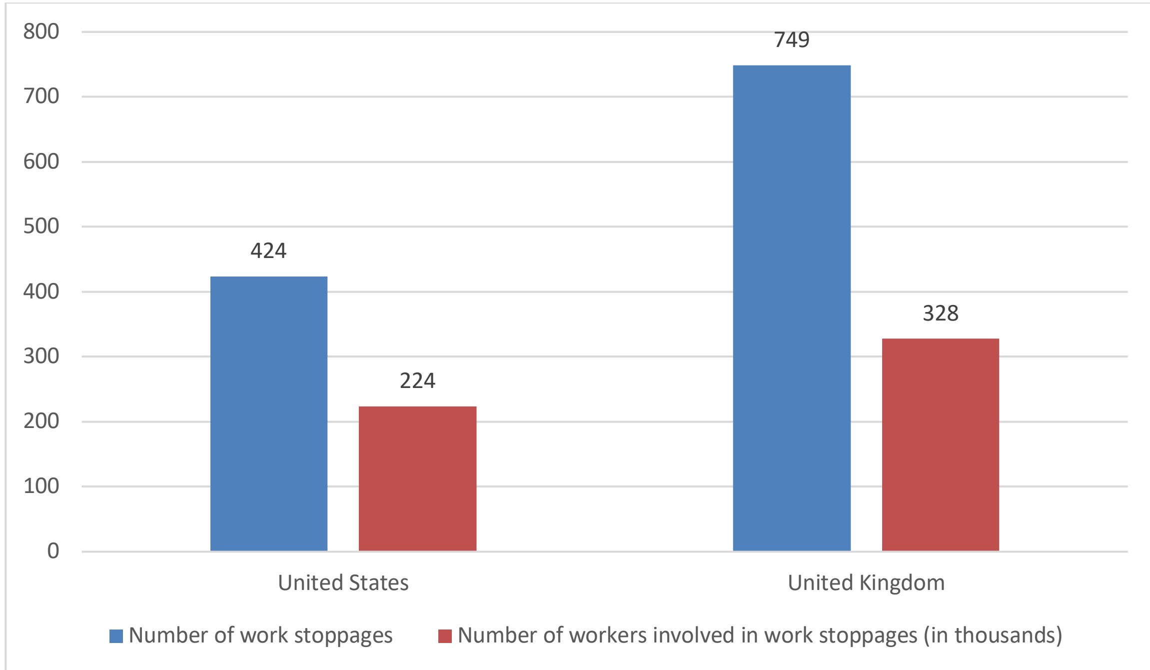
The number of work stoppages and workers involved in stoppages in 2021 and 2022 compared to 1940-1979 reflects a dramatic decline in labor militancy, but an examination of how workers organize recent strikes demonstrates innovation and strategic adaptability. In 1950, 1952, 1953, and 1974, as many or more work stoppages occurred involving 1,000+ workers than the number of total stoppages in 2021 or 2022. Between 1943 and 1979, only one year – 1963 – featured less than one million workers going on strike (BLS, 1981). While the scope of this decline is considerable, historical comparisons require contextualization. Factors like de-unionization, intensified employer opposition to organizing and strikes, the rise of a 'shareholder ideology' that led firms to demand concessions in contract negotiations, and the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy all help explain the considerable decline in strike rates (Rosenblum, 1995; Hirsch and Macpherson, 2003; Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Appelbaum and Batt, 2014). Despite the considerable decline, cases like the 2018-2019 statewide educator work

stoppages and health and safety walkouts during the covid-19 pandemic suggest that workers and their organizations are reclaiming the strike in this more hostile context. While total numbers remain far below strike rates in the mid-twentieth century, workers and their organizations have increasingly experimented with innovative strike models (Blanc, 2019; Givan and Lang, 2020; Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; Kallas, 2023).

Comparison with the United Kingdom in 2022

While strikes rates remain far lower than previous historical eras, evidence of a recent, relative increase in strikes is not just confined to the US. The UK provides a useful comparison for strike activity with the US due to both countries maintaining relatively high strike rates throughout much of the twentieth century and possessing somewhat similar industrial relations institutions (Hyman, 1989; Colvin and Darbishire, 2013). As Chart V displays, albeit with the use of different data sets, more work stoppages and workers involved in stoppages occurred in the UK than the US in 2022. A major reason for this discrepancy is that strikes in the UK increased considerably in November 2022. Compared to an average of 31 strikes involving 20,180 workers/month from January 2022-October 2022, UK workers organized 272 stoppages involving 78,800 participants in November 2022. This increased strike rate continued for several months, as an average of 250 stoppages involving 92,020 workers/month occurred from November 2022-March 2023 in the UK (ONS, 2023).

Chart V: Comparing work stoppages in the US and the UK, 2022



*Sources: US data generated from the ILR LAT (Kallas et al, 2023a); UK data generated from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2023)

The relative increase in strikes over the past couple of years in the US, UK, and other countries like France (Yanatma, 2023) suggests that during this period, workers have started to reclaim labor's most conventional source of leverage. These strikes center various demands, including wage increases, safer workplace conditions, and defending previously won gains threatened by employer or state action. However, workers do not organize all strikes in the same way or with the same goal. An analysis of the types of strikes that workers organize across various contexts and whether the form that strikes assume have changed from prior eras would generate a more nuanced understanding of contemporary labor action. In the remainder of this chapter, I build a typology of strikes in the US and present initial evidence of the conditions under which certain types of strikes emerge.

Findings II: Identifying and defining the types

Table I: Typology of strikes

Type of strike	Definition
Indefinite	A planned strike in which workers intend to stay out until reaching a settlement.
Fixed duration	A planned strike with a pre-determined time length in which workers unconditionally return to work at the conclusion of the strike.
Walkout	A spontaneous strike by a group of workers while at work, generally in response to an immediate workplace issue.
*Sickout**	A planned strike in which workers collectively call out sick to express a grievance or enforce a demand.
*Wildcat**	A planned or spontaneous strike by union members without authorization from, and in defiance of, union leadership.
Demonstration	A planned strike generally involving a small minority of workers from a given workplace, firm, or industry to make claims of the state, rather than cause immediate economic disruption.

*Sickouts and wildcat strikes are combined in the presentation of results.

The types of strikes identified in this study are based largely on differences in strike *form*, which depends on three factors: whether the strike had a predetermined end date, whether the strike was planned or spontaneous, and whether the strike occurred as a group of workers coordinating the use of sick leave and/or striking in defiance of union leadership. As previously stated, the sickout and wildcat types are combined because of considerable overlap between the two.

I identified the first factor – the intended duration of a strike – through prior, published research on nurse unions and fieldwork on the Starbucks union campaign. Starbucks workers sometimes debated the utility of indefinite versus fixed duration strikes. For example, when discussing an indefinite strike that they helped organized, a Starbucks worker explained that "we don't feel like it's right to end the strike until the demands are met" (Interview 97, union

activist). In contrast, workers on the campaign have more frequently organized fixed duration strikes, in which workers write a strike letter that includes both demands and a date in which they offer to unconditionally return to work, regardless of whether the demands were met (Interview 72, campaign representative).

Workers and their organizations are often strategic in their planning of fixed duration strikes. For example, one striking worker explained how they approached choosing the timing of a one-day, fixed duration strike:

> "We started figuring out when all our schedules lined up where everyone comfortable with [going on strike] worked on the same day" (Interview 70, union activist).

A small but increasing number of strikes by Starbucks workers have involved week-to-week authorizations, in which workers state in a strike letter presented to management that they will strike indefinitely, but check-in at the end of each week to determine whether they want to keep striking (Interview 72, campaign representative). I coded these strikes as indefinite work stoppages because they do not initially include a planned end date.

The second factor – whether the strike was planned or spontaneous – distinguishes indefinite or fixed duration strikes from walkouts. Starbucks workers consistently made a distinction between strikes and walkouts. For example, when discussing a walkout, one striking worker explained that "everyone on the floor agreed to walkout…not a strike because we didn't vote the whole store. [The working conditions] were unsafe, we're not doing it" (Interview 71, union activist). A walkout does not involve the planning or procedures, like a vote, common in the leadup to a strike. Walkouts are also in response to an immediate issue, in this case a safety concern brought about by the covid-19 pandemic. Another worker who participated in multiple strikes at their store distinguished between walkouts and strikes based on whether the action occurred spontaneously, explaining that:

> "The [health and safety one] and the one over [unnamed worker's] firing were walkouts - spontaneous reactions to things going on in the store. This one earlier was planned, and others are basically planned, and we vote on ahead of time" (Interview 77, union activist).

Some coordination may occur as part of a walkout. This is to make sure that all workers on shift will participate and to confirm with union staff that a spontaneous strike would be protected under labor law. For example, one striking worker discussed the tasks they need to complete after workers decided it was not safe to keep working that shift:

> "It was definitely spontaneous. When we had that meeting with [management] we weren't thinking about walking out the next day…throughout the morning [of the walkout] it was me talking to every person when they came in [and asking them]: are you okay with [walking out]? This is the plan, the time, and the signal. Then I need to contact people coming in later to make sure they don't come in for the shift and make sure they are okay with it…by 8am everyone was on board and knew what we were doing. There was one person who didn't want to be part of it later…we were going to walk out at 8:45am and instead we changed it to 8:30am so they wouldn't have to be part of the group when we walked out" (Interview 64, union activist).

Walkouts do *not* include groups of workers walking out of a work as part of a pre-planned strike. For example, one striking worker explained a pre-planned strike in which workers decided to leave work together and coordinated onsite community support ahead of time:

> "I am an opener, so I get in at 4:30am. We did our morning routines like any other day…the plan was to walk out at 7am and everyone, workers and community, to show up at 7am" (Interview 85, union activist).

The remaining types – sickout/wildcat and demonstration strikes – largely emerged through data collection on the ILR LAT and from reviewing prior literature. Both sickouts and wildcat strikes were utilized most frequently by teachers, bus drivers, and other school staff in K-12 public education. These strikes are relatively easy to identify because of their unique form – occurring as groups of workers collectively using sick leave, generally with no physical picket line, and/or workers striking in defiance of union leadership. For example, a news article covering a strike at a local school district in 2021 explained that "staff at [the school district]

called out sick Friday in protest of the administrator the school district selected to serve as interim superintendent" (Cervenka, 2021; italics added by author). This article specifies a sickout strike as workers collectively called out sick to protest a grievance.

The one type of strike identified based on a particular type of demand is the demonstration strike, which involves work stoppages demanding policy change or government action. These strikes are noticeably different from other types because they make claims on the state, rather than specific employers, and usually involve a small minority of employees. For example, a news article described a day of action by daycare workers across the country to address grievances to policymakers, with the author stating that "the purpose of the strike is for daycare workers to *stress to policymakers* how essential they are to not only families but also to the U.S. economy" (Wallace, 2022; italics added by author). This quote indicates a strike targeted against politicians and legislators, rather than a specific employer.

Descriptive results

Table II: Distribution of strikes by type (2021-2022)

	Fixed duration N (%)	Indefinite	Wildcat/sickout	Walkout	Demonstration
N (627)	241 (38%)	229 (37%)	71 (11%)	55 (9%)	31 (5%)

Table II displays the distribution of strikes that began in 2021 and 2022 by type. More strikes were of a fixed duration than any other type, followed closely by indefinite work stoppages. These two types made up a large proportion of total strikes, accounting for ~75% of all work stoppages. Wildcat and sickout strikes were combined due to overlap between the two, making up 11% of total strikes. Workers conducted walkouts in about 9% of strikes, while demonstration actions represented 5% of total strikes. The small number of demonstration strikes indicates that strikes in the US during the time period studied were largely confined to disputes

between workers and individual employers.

Two other strike types omitted from Table II include recognition strikes and sympathy strikes. These were omitted because of their relatively small size. I identified just 11 recognition strikes (~2% of total) that began in 2021 or 2022. Because these strikes are defined as indefinite work stoppages to achieve union recognition, I listed these under the indefinite category. I identified just 10 sympathy strikes (~2% of total). Most of these sympathy strikes were not considered distinct strikes by the ILR LAT research team, instead being grouped together with the original strike that workers struck in solidarity with. Exceptions include two sympathy strikes involving ~40,000 and ~22,000 workers in 2021 that were of a predetermined one-day duration, leading me to group them under the fixed duration type.

Table III: Type of strike by industry* (2021-2022)

	Fixed duration	**Indefinite**	**Wildcat/ sickout**	**Walkout**	**Demonstration**	**Total****
N	241	229	71	55	31	627
Accommodation/ Food Services	97 (40%)	13 (6%)	0	31 (56%)	16 (52%)	157 (25%)
Educational Services	19 (8%)	42 (18%)	50 (69%)	4 (7%)	0	115 (18%)
Transportation, Warehousing	24 (10%)	27 (12%)	9 (13%)	7 (13%)	5 (16%)	72 (11%)
Manufacturing	3 (1%)	61 (27%)	3 (4%)	0	4 (13%)	71 (11%)
Health Care, Social Assistance	49 (20%)	17 (7%)	0	1 (2%)	1 (3%)	68 (11%)
Information	35 (15%)	11 (5%)	2 (3%)	6 (11%)	1 (3%)	55 (9%)

*A strike can occur in multiple industries. The top six industries by strike incidence are listed.
**Totals do not add up because some industries are missing, and some strikes occur in multiple

industries.

Table IV: Industry by type of strike* (2021-2022)

	Accommodation/ food services	Educational services	Transportation, warehousing	Manufacturing	Health care, social assistance	Information	Total**
N	157 (25%)	115 (18%)	72 (11%)	71 (11%)	68 (11%)	55 (9%)	627
Fixed duration	97 (62%)	19 (17%)	24 (33%)	3 (4%)	49 (72%)	35 (64%)	241 (38%)
Indefinite	13 (8%)	42 (37%)	27 (38%)	61 (86%)	17 (25%)	11 (20%)	229 (37%)
Wildcat/ sickout	0	50 (43%)	9 (13%)	3 (4%)	0	2 (4%)	71 (11%)
Walkout	31 (20%)	4 (3%)	7 (10%)	0	1 (1%)	6 (11%)	55 (9%)
Demonstration	16 (10%)	0	5 (7%)	4 (6%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	31 (5%)

*A strike can occur in multiple industries. The top six industries by strike incidence are listed.
**Totals do not add up because some industries are missing and some strikes occur in multiple industries.

Table III demonstrates the considerable variation in the type of strike by industry. For example, approximately 25% of strikes that began in 2021 and 2022 took place in accommodation and food services, but an outsized proportion of total fixed duration strikes (40%), walkouts (56%), and demonstration strikes (52%) occurred in this industry. Only 6% of indefinite work stoppages and zero wildcat/sickout strikes took place in accommodation and food services. Other important findings include the very high proportion of total wildcat/sickout strikes in educational services (69%) and the relatively high number of total indefinite work stoppages in manufacturing (27%). Table IV demonstrates industry by type of strike, enabling an analysis of the prominence of strike types within specific industries. For example, indefinite work stoppages were much more frequent in manufacturing than any other type of strike, accounting for 86% of strikes in that sector. Conversely, in healthcare and information, fixed

duration strikes occurred at a much higher rate, accounting for 72% and 64% of strikes, respectively.

Table V: Type of strike by unionization status (2021-2022)

	Fixed duration	**Indefinite**	**Wildcat/sickout**	**Walkout**	**Demonstration**	**Total**
N	241	229	71	55	31	627
Union	165 (68%)	184 (80%)	57 (80%)	18 (33%)	2 (6%)	426 (68%)
Nonunion	76 (32%)	45 (20%)	14 (20%)	37 (67%)	29 (94%)	201 (32%)

Table VI: Unionization status by type of strike

	Union	**Nonunion**	**Total**
N	426 (68%)	201 (32%)	627
Fixed duration	165 (39%)	76 (38%)	241 (38%)
Indefinite	184 (43%)	45 (22%)	229 (37%)
Wildcat/sickout	57 (13%)	14 (7%)	71 (11%)
Walkout	18 (4%)	37 (18%)	55 (9%)
Demonstration	2 (<1%)	29 (14%)	31 (5%)

Table V displays type of strike by unionization status. Unionized workers organized more strikes than nonunion workers, at 68% and 32% respectively. This same proportion was observed in the distribution of fixed duration strikes, suggesting that both union and nonunion workers are utilizing shorter strikes with predetermined time lengths. Unionized workers organized a greater proportion of both indefinite and wildcat/sickout strikes (80% each). These kinds of strikes may be more likely in unionized workplaces because unions have more resources, such as strike funds, to help sustain indefinite strikes and, by the definition used in this study, wildcat strikes only involve unionized workers. All 14 wildcat/sickout strikes by nonunion workers were

sickouts. Nonunion workers participated in a considerably larger percentage of walkouts and demonstration strikes, organizing approximately two-thirds of all walkouts and 94% of all demonstration strikes.

The high frequency of walkouts and demonstration strikes by nonunion workers illustrates different types of activity. Walkouts reflect spontaneous action, which may be more likely to occur among nonunion workers because they are often employed in worse jobs and lack representation to help resolve immediate workplace issues. Demonstration strikes, on the other hand, involve some degree of planning in response to governmental (in)action. Some of these strikes were organized as part of broader campaigns like the FF15, while others emerged as a backlash to governmental action, such as the five total strikes against state or federal covid-19 vaccine mandates.

Table VII: Type of strike by location in a RTW state (2021-2022)

	Fixed duration	Indefinite	Wildcat/sick out	Walkout	Demonstration	Total
N	241	229	71	55	31	627
Non-RTW	192 (80%)	158 (69%)	40 (56%)	34 (62%)	22 (71%)	446 (71%)
RTW	44 (18%)	66 (29%)	31 (44%)	21 (38%)	6 (19%)	168 (27%)
Both	5 (2%)	5 (2%)	0	0	3 (10%)	13 (2%)

Table VIII: Location in a RTW state by type of strike (2021-2022)

	Non-RTW	RTW	Both	Total
N	446 (71%)	168 (27%)	13 (2%)	627
Fixed duration	192 (43%)	44 (26%)	5 (38%)	241 (38%)
Indefinite	158 (35%)	66 (39%)	5 (38%)	229 (37%)
Wildcat/sickout	40 (9%)	31 (18%)	0	71 (11%)
Walkout	34 (8%)	21 (13%)	0	55 (9%)
Demonstration	22 (5%)	6 (4%)	3 (23%)	31 (5%)

Table VII demonstrates type of strike by location in a RTW state. As of 2022, RTW legislation existed in 27 states (54%), covering ~82,482,000 workers, or ~50% of all employed and unemployed workers in the US (BLS, 2023b).[6] Seventy-one percent of strikes occurred in a non-RTW state, compared to 27% in a RTW state. Two percent of strikes occurred across multiple states in which at least one of the states is RTW and at least one of the states is non-RTW (e.g. a strike that occurs in both Iowa and Illinois). Compared to those total distributions, fixed duration strikes were somewhat more common in non-RTW states, while wildcat/sickouts and walkouts appeared more frequently in RTW states. Table VIII enables a clearer comparison of the relationship between location in a RTW state and the type of strike. Fixed duration strikes accounted for 43% of total strikes in non-RTW states and 26% in RTW states, whereas indefinite strikes accounted for 35% of strikes in non-RTW states and 39% in RTW states. Wildcat/sickouts and walkouts occurred in higher relative proportions in RTW than non-RTW

[6] Data on the number of all employed and unemployed workers in the US gathered from the July 2022 report by the BLS, which compiles data on the civilian labor force by state.

states. The findings on fixed duration versus indefinite strikes here are somewhat surprising because one might have expected that unions have fewer resources and less support of politicians in RTW states, making it more difficult to sustain indefinite strikes. However, perhaps workers in non-RTW states organized a higher proportion of fixed duration strikes because they cultivate greater political and community support, making indefinite strikes less necessary to achieve their demands.

Table IX: Type of strike by size* (2021-2022)

	Fixed duration	**Indefinite**	**Wildcat/sickout**	**Walkout**	**Demonstration**	**Total**
N	241	229	71	55	31	627
<50 workers	115 (48%)	63 (28%)	25 (35%)	42 (76%)	15 (48%)	260 (41%)
50-99	28 (12%)	34 (15%)	20 (28%)	3 (5%)	0	85 (14%)
100-249	40 (17%)	44 (19%)	12 (17%)	4 (7%)	6 (19%)	106 (17%)
250-999	29 (12%)	43 (19%)	7 (10%)	2 (4%)	0	81 (13%)
1,000+	18 (7%)	32 (14%)	2 (3%)	0	2 (6%)	54 (9%)
Unknown	11 (5%)	13 (6%)	5 (7%)	4 (7%)	8 (26%)	41 (7%)

*Determined size for ~93% (586 out of 627) strikes

Table X: Size by type of strike* (2021-2022)

	<50 workers	50-99	100-249	250-999	1,000+	Unknown	Total
N	260 (41%)	85 (14%)	106 (17%)	81 (13%)	54 (9%)	41 (7%)	627
Fixed duration	115 (44%)	28 (33%)	40 (38%)	29 (36%)	18 (33%)	11 (27%)	241 (38%)
Indefinite	63 (24%)	34 (40%)	44 (42%)	43 (53%)	32 (59%)	13 (32%)	229 (37%)
Wildcat/sickout	25 (10%)	20 (24%)	12 (11%)	7 (9%)	2 (4%)	5 (12%)	71 (11%)
Walkout	42 (16%)	3 (4%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)	0	4 (10%)	55 (9%)
Demonstration	15 (6%)	0	6 (6%)	0	2 (4%)	8 (20%)	31 (5%)

*Determined size for ~93% (586 out of 627) strikes

Table IX displays type of strike by size, reflecting the approximate number of workers participating in a strike. Over 40% of all strikes involved less than 50 workers, and approximately 55% of all strikes involved fewer than 100 workers. Less than 10 percent of all strikes involved 1,000 or more workers. Unsurprisingly, walkouts and demonstration strikes occur much more frequently in very small workplaces (<50 workers) than medium or large workplaces. Since walkouts involve spontaneous activity, it makes sense that these occur more frequently in either smaller workplaces or among smaller groups within larger workplaces. Demonstration strikes often involve a small minority of workers at a given workplace or firm, which would explain their smaller size. Table X displays size by type of strike, allowing for a clearer examination of the incidence of types in different-sized workplaces. A disproportionately high number of large strikes (250 or more workers) took the form of indefinite work stoppages.

However, many large work stoppages also took the form of fixed duration strikes, suggesting that these kinds of strikes are used by both small and large groups of workers.

Discussion

The findings presented in this study provide a novel typology of labor unrest and strikes in the US. Rather than the product of institutionalized collective bargaining relationships, strikes emerge in a variety of contexts and take on several different forms. These forms vary considerably due to characteristics such as industry, but also the strategic decisions by workers and their organizations. Unions in industries with deeper legacies of unionization, like manufacturing, primarily organize indefinite work stoppages, reflecting conventional strike models. Workers and their organizations in industries that previously lacked high unionization rates or collective bargaining coverage, like accommodation and food services, utilize a variety of strike models like fixed duration, walkouts, and demonstration, and rarely engage in indefinite work stoppages.

Wildcat and sickout strikes were more frequently found in the public sector, with more of these strikes occurring in the educational services industry than all other industries combined. This is likely due to public sector workers lacking the right to strike in most states. Public sector unions often face financial and, occasionally, criminal punishment for organizing a strike, such as in the case of New York State's Taylor Law (Katz et al, 2017). Sickouts emerge as a more viable tactic in this context because they are more easily organized without formal union authorization and are difficult for administrators to punish. Despite accounting for one-third of all strikes in the US from 1960 until 1976 (McCammon, 1990) and making a resurgence during the 2018-2019 statewide educator strikes (Blanc, 2019), wildcats were almost nonexistent in 2021-2022 and overwhelmingly take the form of sickouts by K-12 public sector school workers.

Prior literature suggests that variation in workers' power resources may explain the adoption of specific types of strikes. Workers with vast structural and associational power are more likely to sustain an indefinite work stoppage because employers struggle to find replacement workers and workers can rely on a combination of organizational resources, like strike funds, or the availability of other jobs to overcome financial costs incurred while on strike (Silver, 2003). Most workers in the accommodation and food services sector lack these disruptive capacities and resources. For example, leaders of the FF15 campaign understand that fast food workers lack the disruptive capacity or financial resources to sustain indefinite strikes, which is why many work stoppages on this campaign took the form of fixed duration or demonstration-type actions (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021).

A particularly important finding of this study is the prominence of fixed duration strikes, which comprise a larger percentage of strikes than any other type. As previously stated, the adoption of fixed duration strikes differs by the institutional legacies and strategies adopted by unions in particular industries, with workers in the accommodation and food services, healthcare, and information industries adopting this type much more frequently than in manufacturing or educational services. Fixed duration strikes also occur disproportionately frequently in non-RTW states, which suggests that labor organizations may use these strikes in areas where they can mobilize more political support and public pressure. Because fixed duration strikes lack the potential disruptive capacity of indefinite work stoppages, leveraging political pressure and community support serve as a primary goal of these strikes (Kallas, 2023).

While this study has focused on developing a strike typology and explaining the distribution of distinct types, variation within individual types also exists. This variation can be partially explained by the relative bargaining power that workers possess in specific cases. For

example, fixed duration strikes sometimes involve a small proportion of nonunion workers in a given workplace striking for a few hours to protest low pay and health and safety issues, like when fewer than 200 Amazon workers stopped work for a day or less at warehouses in Georgia, Illinois, and California around Prime Day - the company's largest sale event of the year - in 2022 (Feliz Leon, 2022). These strikes may also feature an entire bargaining unit walking out after the expiration of a collective bargaining agreement, such as the case of 15,000 nurses in Minnesota striking for three days in September 2022 (Wiley and Sepic, 2022).

In the former, workers likely engaged in fixed duration strikes on an important sales day for the company to try and maximize their limited bargaining power, as most Amazon workers lack union representation or the capacity to engage in strikes with majority participation. In the latter, unionized workers leverage high bargaining power to inflict economic pressure on hospitals while protecting nurses' economic interests and role as patient care advocates (Kallas, 2023). Prior research suggests that professional workers, like nurses, prefer collaborative labor relations instead of confrontation and strikes (Aleks, 2019). However, professional workers may embrace certain types of strikes, like fixed duration, because they can protect professional norms like patient care advocacy (Kallas, 2023). Most strikes in the health care (72%) and information (64%) sectors – two industries with large amounts of professional workers – were of a fixed duration.

The covid-19 pandemic also impacted the strike types observed here, especially regarding strikes organized by nonunion workers. Walkouts reflect spontaneous activity, which are often related to immediate health and safety concerns. While the data presented here do not cover the height of the pandemic in 2020, the health and safety issues resulting from the covid-19 pandemic likely impacted the number of walkouts and wildcat sickouts in 2021 and 2022. For

example, 16 of the 35 (46%) wildcat sickouts that occurred across 2021 and 2022 were organized between December 20th, 2021, and February 28th, 2022, at the height of the omicron variant. Walkouts also occur more frequently in nonunion workplaces than most other strike types, perhaps due to the employment of nonunion workers in more dangerous industries with relatively low levels of union representation. Additional data collection from before and during 2020 is needed to more effectively compare and account for the impact of covid-19 on different strike types.

The types of strikes identified here demonstrate a stark contrast between the US and other geographic regions, like Europe, regarding the scale and forms of labor militancy. Approximately 95% of strikes in this study occur at the workplace, or at most the firm, level. Political and general strikes, which have increased considerably across Europe since the 2008 recession (Hamann et al, 2013; Nowak and Gallas, 2014), were entirely absent in the US during 2021 and 2022. The closest category to political strikes – demonstration strikes – are of a much smaller scale and generally include mobilization to influence public narrative over a single issue or legislation, rather than causing mass disruption over broader government policies (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021). Even solidaristic strike types more common in the US during earlier historical eras have largely disappeared. Very few recognition and sympathy strikes occurred across the US during the period studied here. This may result from longstanding legal challenges, as the 1947 Taft-Hartley amendments to the National Labor Relations Act largely restricted the use of both types of strikes (McCammon, 1990).

This study suggests that despite the breakdown of the Wagner Act model (Piore and Safford, 2006) and the rise of community and intersectional organizing (Fine, 2006; Tapia et al, 2017), labor strikes in the US are largely confined to the workplace with demands made of

individual employers. The indefinite, fixed duration, wildcat/sickout, and walkout strikes examined here all involve grievances leveled against specific firms. Important exceptions to this rule exist, such as the strike by NBA and WNBA players in response to the police shooting of Jacob Blake and other work stoppages in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives in 2020 (Frymer and Grumbach, 2020). I find that such strikes in support of broader social movements largely dissipated by 2021, perhaps due to the challenges of sustaining social movement activity, the legal obstacles in the US to engaging in strikes for reasons beyond economic issues, and/or the failure of unions to engage in intersectional organizing (Lee and Tapia, 2023).

Finally, strikes in the US today are relatively small and infrequent when contextualized historically and in comparison with other countries. Despite the potentially transformative moment facing the US labor movement in 2023, as workers have won pathbreaking union organizing campaigns at large corporations like Amazon and Starbucks (Kochan et al, 2023), the level of strike activity is far lower than earlier eras. For example, the BLS documented ~5,000 work stoppages/year involving around two million workers during the 1970s, in comparison with findings from the ILR LAT documenting 279 work stoppages involving ~140,000 workers in 2021 and 424 work stoppages involving ~224,000 workers in 2022 (BLS, 1981; Kallas et al, 2023a). While the types of strike vary considerably in the current period, the total amount of strike activity remains quite low, especially when considering that the US workforce is much larger in 2022 than the 1970s.

Strikes declined across most European and North American states in the late-twentieth and early-twenty first centuries (Godard, 2011), though recent developments in France and the UK demonstrate a resurgence of strikes in certain countries. In France, which has consistently high levels of strike activity at the industry and national level, workers mobilized no fewer than

six national strikes in the first four months of 2023 against pension reforms by the Macron government (Yanatma, 2023). In the UK, which had relatively low levels of labor unrest until recently, more working days were lost to strikes in 2022 than any year since 1989, and widespread industry-wide strikes in rail and other services continued occurring in early-2023 (Ziady, 2023). Unlike in the US, these major strikes have taken the form of industry-wide or general strikes that are not confined to specific workplaces or firms and cause considerable economic disruption on a national scale.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I find that strikes encompass a broad range of collective activity. Rather than solely the product of institutionalized collective negotiations, workers and their organizations utilize strikes in a variety of contexts. The emergence of different types of strikes depends on a variety of factors, such as the industry and unionization status of workers involved. In the US, strikes, and the various forms they take, generally occur at individual workplaces or firms. This is in stark contrast to the experience of strikes in other countries, in which strikes sometimes occur at the industry or national level. This study demonstrates that the strike should not be understood or modeled as a single construct, but a diverse type of action that assumes a variety of forms.

Subsequent research can build on this study in several ways. First, the typology of strikes was based primarily on strike form. There are several other ways to classify distinct types of strikes. This study did not comprehensively investigate strikes by demand type (offensive versus defensive), legal status, or extent of participation (majority versus minority). Second, we still lack comprehensive research on the outcomes or effectiveness of strikes, especially those that advance nonwage demands. This study does not demonstrate whether certain types of strikes are

more effective for workers and their organizations. Finally, this study identifies various types of strikes but does not provide a detailed account of the challenges associated with organizing these innovative actions. For example, nonunion workers organize a variety of different types of strikes, including demonstration strikes associated with existing campaigns like the FF15 and spontaneous walkouts by workers facing immediate workplace issues. Considering the limited research on nonrecognition strikes by nonunion workers, more research should investigate strikes across a variety of institutional contexts.

Chapter Four: What if you mobilize effectively and still don't win? Examining the role of employer power in shaping strike outcomes

In this chapter, I undertake a qualitative case comparison of two indefinite strikes by healthcare workers at the conclusion of failed contract negotiations in 2021. I attempt to explain observed variation in strike outcomes, specifically why the group of workers who developed much higher levels of strike preparation achieved worse outcomes than the group of workers less prepared to strike. I argue that variation in bargaining power, particularly employer power resources, rather than union strategy, explains different outcomes in the two cases. I develop a framework for understanding employer power resources and strategic capabilities, challenging perspectives on labor revitalization and the power resources approach that focus primarily on labor's agency.

Introduction

After decades of declining unionization rates and low levels of labor militancy, the period of 2021 to 2023 showed a surprising resurgence of activism. Workers achieved groundbreaking unionization victories at companies like Amazon and Starbucks, and an uptick in strike activity in late-2021 that continued into 2022 suggests the possibility, though not certainty, of more widespread union renewal (Kallas et al, 2023a; Kochan et al, 2023). Researchers have started to recenter the strike as an important tool of working-class resistance (McAlevey, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Givan and Lang, 2020; Las Heras and Rodríguez, 2021; Orellana, Pérez, and Link, 2022; Kallas, 2023). While strikes have received more serious attention from scholars of late, a complete understanding of strikes requires an analysis of their outcomes and under what condition they are effective or not in improving employment terms for workers.

Researchers interested in how workers (re)build collective power have largely focused on labor's agency, specifically the strategies that labor organizations develop through innovative

campaigns. Adopting certain strategies and facilitating internal organizational changes to prioritize 'new organizing' are viewed as essential to achieving labor revitalization outcomes like membership gain (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Voss and Sherman, 2000). Studies of strike outcomes similarly emphasize the determinative role of union strategy in successful versus unsuccessful cases (Johnston, 1994; Milkman, 2006). Scholars utilizing the PRA also share this emphasis on labor's agency and capacity to act strategically. Despite the conception of the PRA as a relational power struggle between labor and capital (Gallas, 2018), researchers using this framework primarily emphasize the different types of power that workers and unions strategically deploy in labor campaigns (Schmalz et al, 2018). These approaches lack a similarly detailed analysis of employer power and strategies. Unions and labor organizations sometimes fail in efforts to (re)build power, even when adopting strategic and inclusive organizing strategies, due to employer characteristics and/or weakening institutions (Batt et al, 2020; Ellem et al, 2020). The PRA needs to be reclaimed as a *relational* concept, meaning that employers shape the deployment and effectiveness of labor's strategies and resources (Brookes, 2017).

In this study, I analyze both union and employer strategies and resources to assess whether the deployment and effectiveness of union power resources also depends on employer characteristics. I examine the extent to which power resources theory - as originally conceived as a relational power struggle between labor and capital - helps explain variation in strike outcomes through a comparison of two recent strikes by healthcare workers at acute care hospitals in the US. While both hospitals are local, Catholic institutions, one is owned and operated by a national, for-profit healthcare corporation and the other by a local, five-hospital health system. In the first case, 700 nurses represented by the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) endured a nearly ten-month long strike at Saint Vincent Hospital – owned and operated by a national for-

profit health system – in Worcester, Massachusetts. Nurses achieved a compromise on staffing demands after five months, before spending an additional five months on strike to ensure that all workers returned to their pre-strike positions after the hospital hired permanent replacements. In the second case, nearly 2,000 healthcare workers represented by the Communications Workers of America Local 1133 (CWA 1133) struck for just over one month at Mercy Hospital – owned and operated by a local health system – in Buffalo, New York, winning comprehensive staffing ratios and large wage increases for the lowest paid workers.

This chapter takes a critical case study approach by choosing workers with greater structural power and strong unions. I make the following contributions to our understanding of strikes and strike outcomes. First, drawing on strikes organized by unions representing workers with high levels of structural power, I demonstrate that employers critically shape union power resources. This finding builds on recent work demonstrating how employers and the state constrain collective worker action, emphasizing the need to study labor campaigns relationally (Batt et al, 2020; Ellem et al, 2020; Fischer-Daly, 2022; Hui, 2022). A unique contribution of this study is a comparison of strike effectiveness, rather than other campaign or organizational outcomes. Second, I develop a framework to understand how employers respond to strikes, and by extension, labor campaigns. I find that the ability of employers to respond to strikes depend on three main factors: *structural power resources*, based on employers' financial strength; *degree of vulnerability to societal actors*, determined by the employers' size, location of corporate headquarters; and vulnerability to reputational effects and susceptibility to community and political pressure; and *strategic capabilities*, or the extent to which employers can effectively draw on their resources, prior experience, and exploit institutional openings in response to strikes.

Strike Effectiveness

Explaining variation in strike outcomes requires an understanding of the two main ways that scholars conceptualize strike effectiveness. Effectiveness is measured as the extent to which strikes achieve workers' immediate material demands or the impact of strikes on broader revitalization indicators, like unions' membership or institutional strength (Rosenfeld, 2006; McAlevey, 2016; Molina and Barranco, 2016; Hodder et al, 2017; Kallas, 2023). Researchers from the first perspective on strike effectiveness largely focus on the impact of strikes on wages. Between 1945 and 1980, strikes largely led to wage gains, leading scholars to conceptualize strikes as effective for advancing workers' material interests. However, since 1980, the strike-wage relationship has largely decoupled, meaning that strikes no longer lead to wage gains (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Kimball, 2019; Massenkoff and Wilmers, 2022). But strikes are not only organized to achieve wage, or broader material, gains. Strikes may help preserve or strengthen union membership and institutional security (Cregan, 2013; Hodder et al, 2017). Qualitative case studies of militant unions in the US and UK have examined how union leaders facilitate strike action to enhance member solidarity, suggesting that strikes build more effective unions over time (Darlington, 2009; Kallas, 2023). Recent evidence suggests that more militant unions achieve better outcomes for members in both healthcare and nonhealthcare settings (Krachler, Auffenberg, and Wolf, 2021; Litwin and Shay, 2022; Park, 2023).

To build effective strikes, most researchers argue that union strategy, in the form of strike preparation and tactics deployed during the strike, largely determines effectiveness (McAlevey, 2016; Orellana et al, 2022). In terms of strike preparation, union leaders can deploy structure tests – gradually escalating organizing asks of workers to gauge membership strength – to determine whether workers are ready to strike (McAlevey, 2018). Examples of structure tests

include tactics like ‘marches on the boss,’ where workers will collectively address a manager on workplace concerns, that mobilize workers to confront the employer directly (Kallas, 2023). The commitment of union resources towards strike funds is also important. For example, unions in the Basque Country have invested heavily into strike funds to support larger and longer strikes, serving as an important source of union renewal (Las Heras and Rodríguez, 2021).

Matched case comparisons of strike outcomes often identify union strategy as the key explanatory variable in determining success versus failure. For example, Johnston (1994) argued that the way unions framed labor disputes both internally and externally explained variation in the outcomes of two comparable worth strikes organized by city workers and registered nurses in California during the early-1980s. Despite lacking strong organizational support, the city workers succeeded because they framed their strike as a conflict over comparable worth, winning support as public sector workers from external allies. The registered nurse strike failed because they pursued a traditional bargaining approach rooted in private sector contract negotiations without effectively leveraging external sources of power. Similarly, Milkman (2006) argues that strategic decisions determine strike effectiveness. She argues that the 1992 drywallers’ strike succeeded because the union supported strikers with legal aid and a media campaign, whereas the 1996 port truckers’ strike failed because it lacked a comprehensive campaign to bring the employer to the table. Other studies have also implemented matched case comparisons to argue that union strategy or innovative tactics lead to more successful strike outcomes (Stillerman, 2017; Blanc, 2022).

The Power Resources Approach

The PRA has emerged as another framework to explain how workers strategically (re)build collective power. Schmalz et al (2018: 113) explain that “[t]he PRA is founded on the

basic premise that organised labour can successfully defend its interests by collective mobilisation of power resources," emphasizing that effective union strategy can help workers win labor campaigns and strikes. The modern PRA identifies different sources of power that workers and labor organizations can draw on during campaigns. An important distinction is made between associational and structural power. Wright (2000) defines associational power as "the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organizations of workers" (962), whereas structural power is "power that results simply from the location of workers within the economic system" (962), which is largely outside of workers' control. Silver (2003) adds nuance to the definition of structural power by distinguishing between marketplace bargaining power and workplace bargaining power. Marketplace bargaining power refers to the tightness of the labor market, or the availability of replacement workers; whereas workplace bargaining power refers to workers' location in strategic sectors, like transportation, that have the capacity to disrupt large segments of the economy.

Additional research has identified other types of power resources that workers and their organizations draw on during campaigns, such as symbolic (Chun, 2005), coalitional (Tattersall, 2010), societal (Schmalz et al, 2018), and institutional (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; O'Brady, 2021). The PRA provides a particularly good model for explaining how precarious workers with low structural power build power and win campaigns. For example, janitors in the US and South Korea developed moral leverage by engaging in public dramas that broadened the scope of protest activity. These "public dramas redefined employers and what their moral responsibilities are" (Chun, 2005: 497), leading to new sources of symbolic and associational power for workers. The overarching emphasis remains on how labor strategically builds different sources of power.

Most research in the PRA conceptualize strikes one of many resources to develop as part of a broader campaign, though some recent studies center strikes and discuss how labor organizations can mobilize power resources to support work stoppages. Strikes serve as the fundamental expression of workers' structural, or workplace bargaining, power (Silver, 2003). However, the organization of strikes requires high levels of associational power to develop effective strike strategy and strike funds (Schmalz et al, 2018; Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021). Rather than just a tactic to be mobilized, strikes can serve as the centerpiece of labor revitalization efforts to rebuild collective power. In an analysis of a successful nurses' strike against austerity in Ireland, Naughton (2022) demonstrates that while the nurses' union developed high levels of structural and associational power, effective framing strategies proved necessary to win over public support and sustain the strike. Nurses and the government struggled with each other to cultivate societal power during the strike, which ended up serving as an important power resource for the unions' success.

Employer power resources

Many studies utilizing the PRA overlook the role of employer strategies and resources in labor campaigns. Brookes (2018) makes a call for PRA scholars to better theorize and account for employer power resources, emphasizing the importance of understanding power relationally. A broader review on union strategies vis-à-vis precarious workers in Europe finds that researchers generally lack a systematic analysis of employer behavior during campaigns to improve conditions for vulnerable workers (Carver and Doellgast, 2021). Important concepts like 'strategic capabilities' are largely applied to unions but can also illuminate employer response to worker organization. Lévesque and Murray (2010: 341) define "capability" as "sets of aptitudes, competencies, abilities, social skills and know-how that can be developed, transmitted and

learned." Rather than just cultivating resources, unions need to strategically develop and activate them (Ganz, 2000). This concept can also help explain how employers learn from and strategically respond to labor campaigns.

Notable exceptions to the tendency of labor scholars to focus exclusively on union power resources and capabilities exist, which can serve as a starting point to understand employer power resources. Industrial relations literature emphasizes the role of 'strategic choice' and managerial tactics, arguing that management actively shapes the employment relationship and union responses (Kochan, McKersie, and Cappelli, 1984). Tactics that employers adopted included the hiring of union avoidance firms, holding of captive audience meetings, and illegal termination of union activists to chill new organizing (Logan, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). Employers also resorted to strikebreaking tactics, such as the hiring of permanent replacements and subsequent decertification campaigns, when workers resisted concessions (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998). Resources matter too. The relative bargaining power of employers is shaped by a firm's financial strength and ability to move or profit from production elsewhere in the event of a strike (Katz et al, 2017).

Efforts by labor organizations to (re)build collective power sometimes fail due to legacies of employer power and/or declining structural power. A prior matched case comparison of healthcare organizing in Rochester and Buffalo, NY demonstrates the crucial role of employer power in shaping outcomes for unions in the contemporary era. Unions in both cities implemented similar 'social movement' organizing strategies in major hospitals, yet efforts in Rochester largely failed to expand beyond the non-registered nurse staff at a single hospital because employers built on local legacies of anti-unionism and actively organized against further union expansion. In Buffalo, unions successfully leveraged decades of labor-management

collaboration and a working-class identity persistent throughout the city to help organize both major health systems (Batt et al, 2020). Sometimes factors like workers' declining structural power can lead members to resist union-led efforts at rebuilding associational power (Ellem et al, 2020). Fischer-Daly (2022) argues that structural power needs to be understood relationally, finding that market concentration and the organization of international commodity markets that insulate retailers helped limit the disruptive potential of a mass strike in 2015 by Mexican strawberry workers.

Despite the important role of employers in shaping the deployment and effectiveness of labor's power resources, little effort has been made to conceptualize types of employer power resources in response to strikes and labor campaigns. Most research that analyzes employer response to campaigns focuses on specific tactics, like disciplining workers involved in an organizing campaign or hiring permanent replacements to help defeat strikes and decertify local unions (Rosenblum, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 2009). From my qualitative, case comparison approach, I develop a framework to understand the different sources of power and strategic capabilities that employers draw on in response to strikes, which fundamentally shape strike outcomes for workers and their organizations.

Methods

Case Selection

To examine variation in strike outcomes and effectiveness, I analyze two recent strikes involving hospital-based registered nurses in the US. I focus on strikes involving nurses because they are difficult to replace and acquire occupational-based skills that are not firm-specific (McAlevey, 2018). These characteristics make strikes involving nurses ideal cases in which to examine variation in strike effectiveness because they develop high levels of structural power. I

identified cases through the ILR LAT (Kallas et al, 2023a). According to this database, 12 strikes involving hospital-based nurses occurred in 2021, when case selection occurred. All these strikes involved unionized nurses. Nine of the strikes were of a fixed duration, meaning that unions predetermined strike length before initiating a work stoppage. Because a contract settlement is rarely reached immediately following a fixed duration strike (Kallas, 2023), I select cases from the three indefinite strikes that ended with an agreement to better analyze outcomes and effectiveness.

Table XI: Case background, chapter four

	Case One	**Case Two**
Union	Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA)	Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1133
# Members at hospital at beginning of strike	800	1,950
Location of hospital	Worcester, MA	Buffalo, NY
First unionized	1998	1992
Employer	Saint Vincent Hospital (Tenet Healthcare)	Mercy Hospital (Catholic Health)
# Beds at hospital	348	473
Employer headquarters	Dallas, TX	Buffalo, NY
Employer's # total hospitals during strike	60	5
(Outcomes)		
Duration	10 months	One-plus month (40 days)
Contract gains	Mix of 1:4 and 1:5 RN staffing ratios on med-surge floors; secured healthcare benefit for part-time workers	Mix of 1:4 and 1:5 RN staffing ratios on med-surge floors; mix of 1:1 and 1:2 RN ratios on critical care floors; 1:3 RN and 1:6 ancillary staff ratios on step down units; achieved $15 minimum wage across the hospital; successfully fought back proposed healthcare and pension concessions
Bargaining unit attrition	The bargaining unit lost ~325 nurses (~41%) in the *two* months following the strike	The bargaining unit lost ~ 250 members (~13%) in the *five* months following the strike

The two cases selected for this study include a strike by 700 Massachusetts Nurses

Association (MNA) members at Saint Vincent Hospital – owned and operated by Tenet Health – in Worcester, MA, and a strike by nearly 2,000 healthcare workers (both nurses and non-nurse staff) represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1133 at Mercy Hospital – owned and operated by Catholic Health – in Buffalo, NY. The strike by MNA nurses represents the only indefinite work stoppage by a bargaining unit composed exclusively of registered nurses across the US in 2021. These strikes occurred after the expiration of contracts and failed negotiations. Workers organized both strikes primarily for better staffing, an issue that was exacerbated by the pandemic. These strikes for staffing improvements stand in contrast to defensive work stoppages in response to concessionary bargaining strategies by employers common in the late-twentieth century (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998). I did not attempt to study the third indefinite strike because it involved a safety strike, initially unauthorized by the union, by a group of healthcare workers at a non-acute care, behavioral health hospital outside the course of traditional collective bargaining negotiations (Takahama, 2021).

Data Collection and Analysis

Table XII: Interviewee breakdown, chapter four

	Case One	**Case Two**	**Miscellaneous**
Striking workers	10	20	0
Union staff	6	6	0
Community and political leaders	7	6	0
Management representatives	2	2	0
Healthcare labor relations experts	0	0	2
TOTAL	**25**	**34**	**2**

I relied on both purposive and snowball sampling to gain access to different groups of interviewees. I began with outreach to academics and labor movement connections to initiate contact with union representatives involved in each strike. After negotiating access with a staff member from each union, I relied on snowball sampling to reach striking workers and other union staff that helped organize the strike. Striking workers and union staff comprised the majority of interviewees in each case. I also spoke with local community leaders, politicians, and employer representatives to understand their perspective on the strikes. I gained access to these participants through union representatives, other labor movement connections, or cold emails. It was especially important to interview management representatives due to my developing argument about employer power shaping strike outcomes. Because of the omicron variant of covid-19, I began interviewing MNA staff and nurses over zoom in December 2021. I then completed the remaining interviews for this case during in-person fieldwork in March 2022. I completed most interviews on the CWA 1133 strike during two weeks of fieldwork in Buffalo in April 2022. All interviews lasted from 40 minutes to one-and-a-half hours in length. I implemented a semi-structured interview approach, adapting my questionnaire based on what I learned from prior informants. In addition to taking detailed notes, all interviews were taped and transcribed.

Argument

Through fieldwork that included 61 interviews as well as the examination of secondary sources and union documents, I argue that variation in employer power explains the divergent strike outcomes observed in the two cases. Drawing on recent literature, I measure strike outcomes based on contract gains and strike duration, with better gains and shorter duration representing the ideal outcome for workers and their organizations (Blanc, 2022; Orellana et al,

2022). In the first case, MNA members endured nearly ten months on strike to obtain a compromise on staffing demands. While the two sides reached agreement on staffing language five months into the strike, the work stoppage continued for an additional four-and-a-half months to ensure that all nurses retained their pre-strike positions. The employer in this case is a for-profit health system that operates 60 hospitals across the US, hired permanent replacements during the strike, and experienced very large profits in 2021. In the second case, CWA 1133 members struck for just over one month, winning landmark staffing ratios and an increased minimum wage floor. The employer is a local not-for-profit health system operating five hospitals and suffered large financial losses because of the strike. Because long, indefinite work stoppages by healthcare workers are relatively rare, these strikes serve as 'exceptional cases' that generate unique and revelatory findings (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

Findings

MNA – Tenet Healthcare: "Two Separate Strikes"

Background

On March 8, 2021, approximately 700 nurses initiated a strike organized primarily around improved staffing demands at Saint Vincent Hospital (SVH-Tenet) in Worcester. Originally a Catholic community hospital that provided healthcare for those most in need, Tenet Health owned and operated the hospital when nurses first successfully organized and waged a 49-day first contract strike in 2000 against mandatory overtime. Tenet sold the hospital to Vanguard Health System in 2004 before repurchasing it, through the acquisition of Vanguard, in 2013 (Micucci, 2015). The union did not strike at the hospital between 2000 and 2021. The two sides opened negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement in October 2019, with the contract expiring at the end of that year. Major demands included staffing and improved health

care benefits for part time employees.

Nurses voiced staffing improvements as a central demand in negotiations prior to the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic in early-2020. The pandemic exacerbated the staffing issues faced by nurses and led to a deterioration of working conditions across SVH-Tenet. The shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) impacted nurses considerably, with one explaining that at the height of the pandemic "we had to wear one N95 mask for three days in a row…we would store it in tupperware…I don't know how I survived" (Interview 16, striking worker). PPE shortages were compounded by the furloughing of nurses and staff at SVH-Tenet in April 2020 (Hanson, 2020; Interview 1, union staffer). These working conditions only made staffing an even greater priority in collective bargaining negotiations, which had temporarily paused in March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. One nurse stated that "the trauma of going through covid was unreal. I saw more people die in a one-month period than in my entire nursing career…we probably would have settled for less before the pandemic. The torture of the pandemic, we weren't settling" (Interview 8, striking worker).

Nurses demanded improved nurse to patient staffing ratios, specifically that all floors be staffed at no more than four patients for each nurse to improve working conditions and enhance patient care. They also demanded that the employer pay 80% of health insurance premium costs for part-time nurses, which full-time nurses had already obtained (Interview 6, striking worker). Management accused the nurses of trying to win staffing ratios through collective bargaining after a failed 2018 ballot initiative that would have mandated ratios in hospitals across Massachusetts (Interview 19, management representative). MNA members endured nearly 10 months on strike to achieve a compromise on staffing improvements – nurses on med surge units would receive a mix of four or five patients depending on assignment. They also had to resist the

employer hiring over 100 permanent replacements and supporting a post-strike decertification effort. This led nurses to characterize the work stoppage as two strikes – an offensive strike for staffing improvements from March to mid-August, and a defensive strike to ensure that all nurses would retain their pre-strike positions from mid-August to December.

Union power resources

MNA nurses at SVH-Tenet had waged a successful strike before, which enhanced nurses' strike preparation in 2021. In 2000, nurses struck for 49 days to defeat mandatory overtime and win a first contract at the hospital after over two years of negotiations (Interview 18, striking worker). Many of the members and staff involved in the 2000 strike held union leadership positions in the buildup and during the 2021 strike (Interview 2, union staffer). The first contract strike made this bargaining unit one of MNA's strongest: "The bargaining unit stayed really well organized its whole existence…[they're] not afraid to strike because a first contract strike is the toughest…the bigger takeaway was staying organized after the first contract" (Interview 4, union staffer). Even managers acknowledged the nurses' organizational strength at the hospital, with one claiming that "There have been several new leadership teams [in the past] 20 years ago…MNA would run this hospital. Nobody would say no to them" (Interview 25, management representative).

Because of nurses' prior experience with striking, the union organized numerous non-strike actions and structure tests to try and bring SVH-Tenet to the table without initiating a work stoppage. Nurses began with simple organizing asks such as a button campaign, MNA black and blue scrub Fridays, and tabling to discuss bargaining priorities in early-2020. They began escalating through more confrontational actions, such as a community car caravan in response to furloughs in April 2020 and a no confidence vote petition delivered through a march on the boss

in May 2020 as negotiations remained on pause because of the pandemic (Thompson, 2020; Interview 5, striking worker).

Both sides resumed bargaining in July 2020 and nurses began to prepare for a strike as negotiations made little progress in the fall. The union organized its first informational picket on December 1, 2020, held community standouts in December and early-January, and started daily picketing for over an hour each day beginning on January 6, 2021 (Interview 2, union staffer). While both sides made progress on some economic issues, such as wages, nurses felt that the hospital remained unwilling to engage on staffing concerns (Interview 1, union staffer). Union leaders organized an open-ended strike because nurses had already waged a successful 49-day strike in 2000 and they did not believe a shorter, fixed duration strike would cause enough economic disruption to force SVH-Tenet negotiators to concede on staffing demands (Interview 4, union staffer; Interview 13, union staffer). As one representative stated:

> "[Our] read of Tenet is that [a short strike] wasn't going to work. We did daily pickets for one hour for months and it didn't do anything…we're in a war with these people. The nurses had been through it before. We weren't anticipating a 301-day strike…never know how long it's going to be" (Interview 13, union staffer).

SVH-Tenet management encouraged nurses to cross the line both at the beginning and throughout the strike to weaken the union's structural and associational power. While some nurses crossed the line during the strike, most of those who crossed did so from the beginning. Union representatives estimated that 120 out of just over 800 members crossed the line immediately, while an employer representative claimed that about 185 nurses out of 870 MNA employees had crossed within the first couple of weeks (Interview 1, union staffer; Interview 7, striking worker; Interview 19, management representative). Either way, even management representatives acknowledged the enormous economic cost of the strike to the employer (Interview 19, management representative; Interview 25, management representative). One

estimate claimed that total staffing costs ranged from $40-65 million, though this figure most certainly undercounts the total cost of the strike because it does not account for the impact of bed closures (Bartlett, 2021b).

The picket line served as the most visible manifestation of the strike, making it essential for union leaders to coordinate shifts and demonstrate high participation. Maintaining a strong picket line, especially for such a long strike, created several challenges. One nurse stated that:

> "It was difficult to maintain that strike line. We had five entrances that we had to cover. [If] we had 12-15 people on that strike line there were only three at each door, it didn't look strong. We backed off to four entrances. Everybody had their own entrance they liked the best. The more aggressive ones were Bridge Street where loading docks brought replacement nurses in and domestic scabs. The nice ones that waved stayed up front…we were there every morning and evening to welcome and say goodbye to [the CEO]" (Interview 7, striking worker).

Union leaders created a group of 18 picket captains, representing every unit, to coordinate picket schedules, make sure members participated on the line, and provide updates on contract negotiations. These captains also organized important services at the strike office, such as offering free childcare (Interview 6, striking worker). The picket line helped improve internal organization in several ways, from boosting morale to networking for jobs in search of alternative sources of income (Interview 18, striking worker). Community and political support were especially important in supporting the picket line. Within the first week, Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, Congressman Jim McGovern and former Congressman Joe Kennedy III all visited the strike line (Interview 1, union staffer). The AFL-CIO covered the picket line every Wednesday afternoon from 4-6pm (Interview 9, union staffer). The Carpenters union created a volunteer organizing committee that sent members and staff to walk the line every Tuesday afternoon for the first 15 weeks of the strike (Interview 10, community leader). It became more difficult to mobilize members out to the line as the strike continued and nurses found other jobs

to supplement lost income, which was key in maintaining the economic pressure on SVH-Tenet (Interview 7; 8, striking worker).

The different sources of financial support provided to nurses proved critical in maintaining the strike line and preventing most nurses from crossing. Three major sources of financial support emerged for nurses: organizational support from the union in the form of a hardship fund, governmental support in the form of unemployment aid and COBRA subsidies, and alternative sources of employment. The latter ended up being especially important, both in the decision to organize an open-ended strike and in keeping workers from crossing the line as the strike continued beyond the summer and government funding began to expire. One union leader commented on the increased structural power of nurses during this time period due to broader economic conditions:

“Economically, while most people thought [the strike] would be done before [getting] another job, they all recognized they could get another job…it’s harder to [strike] in a bad economic situation” (Interview 13, union staffer).

Union support and governmental programs provided important support for striking workers to sustain the strike, especially through August. Nurses who urgently needed financial support applied for the union’s hardship fund, which required nurses to participate on the picket line. Of those nurses who used the fund, some made decisions on a weekly basis while others required more consistent support until unemployment insurance issues got resolved (Interview 5; 6, striking worker). The union and community organizations also provided daily support on the picket line, with one nurse explaining that “we also did a lot of practical things, food pantry, gift cards/cash, offered a lot of meals” (Interview 18, striking worker). Unemployment insurance and COBRA subsidies were essential. The CARES Act supplemented $800/week unemployment insurance with an additional $300/week benefit until September, which provided striking nurses

with additional financial support during the strike (Interview 2; Interview 13, union staffer). Striking nurses also obtained COBRA subsidies in April when the Department of Labor expanding healthcare benefits to striking workers under the American Rescue Plan (Massachusetts Nurses Association, 2021). Nurses' unemployment ran out in September, when federal benefits expired, and the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance agreed to hear a request by SVH-Tenet to cancel state insurance due to the hospital closing additional beds in August (Cohan, 2021).

The turning point of the strike in August – or the separation of the first, offensive strike for staffing and second, defensive strike over the return-to-work agreement –marked a change in how nurses supported themselves to prevent crossing the picket line. With SVH-Tenet management unwilling to guarantee that over 100 striking nurses would return to their pre-strike position and the government subsidies expected to expire in September, nearly six months after the beginning of the strike, MNA leaders made it clear that nurses would need to find additional jobs to supplement their income. That conversation was not easy, as one nurse recalled at the meeting announcing that SVH-Tenet would not guarantee all nurses could return to their positions:

"[A union leader] was like, 'we need to get jobs,' and the room got so angry, it was palpable. That was the reality, you need to hear the truth. If you want to sustain [the strike], we need to be able to support ourselves" (Interview 18, striking worker).

Some nurses had already taken on additional work either in the healthcare field or other industries, such as delivering for Uber Eats (Interview 6, striking worker; Interview 22, striking worker). Many others began to find new jobs in late-August or September. Because of the demand for healthcare professionals, especially due to the abundance of covid-19 vaccination clinics at the time, many nurses found employment at clinics or at UMass Memorial, the other

major medical center in Worcester, which needed more staff because SVH-Tenet closed additional beds during the strike (Interview 5, striking worker; Interview 22, striking worker). Others, especially older nurses, struggled to find jobs. One nurse mentioned that they had not interviewed for a new job in 35 years (Interview 18, striking worker). MNA staff provided resources to support nurses who struggled to find work. The strike office became a location where nurses could develop computer skills or help with writing a resume. Some nurses would even debrief recent job interviews to learn from each other's experiences (Interview 18, striking worker).

Finally, nurses generated high levels of community and political support during the strike. In terms of community support, local unions and political organizations helped aid nurses financially and on the picket line. In addition to local union participation on the line, members of Worcester's Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) chapter helped fundraise nearly $13,000, consistently participated on the line, and joined workers during a trip to protest at Tenet's headquarters in Dallas. The strike served as a rallying call for many DSA members and helped revitalize the local chapter (Interview 21, community leader). Local faith groups, independent of the diocese, also generated narrative power through counselling sessions, prayer vigils and peaceful protests, demonstrating that the nurses' cause was just and in line with pro-worker Catholic values. On June 22, 2021, members of the Catholic Worker Movement held an exorcism in the atrium of SVH to rid the hospital of corporate greed, taking aim at the hospital's for-profit owners (Cartolano, 2021; Interview 23). While management accused the local organization of conducting a publicity stunt and banned participants from the property for two years, the action served to boost the morale of striking workers and emphasized that the longtime Catholic hospital had abandoned its roots. Members of the Catholic Worker Movement also

delivered a petition supporting the strikers that generated over 250 signatures, including approximately 20 priests, to the bishop and hospital executives. The Catholic Workers maintained independent decision-making from the union, which further strengthened community support for the strike (Interview 23, community leader).

Local, state, and national politicians also provided sources of leverage for workers, with US Labor Secretary Marty Walsh eventually brokering a strike settlement in December. Politicians supported striking nurses by carving out access to COBRA subsidies, joining the picket line, providing resources to nurses filing for unemployment insurance, and placing political and public pressure on SVH-Tenet management. Congressional representatives ensured that striking workers had access to COBRA benefits. Two state representatives called for a department of health investigation into the closing of 100 beds by the hospital in early-August, leading to negative publicity for the hospital (Gooch, 2021; Interview 15, community leader). This call for an investigation, coupled with an increase in strikes across the US in October 2021, served to generate more local and national press coverage as the strike moved past six months (Interview 9, union staffer). The strike ultimately concluded when Labor Secretary Walsh, who served as the mayor of Boston and developed longstanding ties to the labor movement and MNA, brought both sides together to reach an agreement in mid-December. As part of the settlement, nurses retained their pre-strike positions.

Employer Power Resources

Despite generating high levels of structural, associational, and societal power, almost 700 nurses remained on strike for nearly ten months to reach a compromise on staffing improvements and retain their pre-strike positions. What accounts for the contract outcomes and particularly long duration of this strike, especially considering that nurses leveraged multiple sources of

economic and societal power? The employer shaped the trajectory of the strike due to abundant financial resources, limited vulnerability to local political and community pressure, and effective strategy that placed additional pressure on striking workers. These tactics continued after the strike ended, as the union faced a decertification campaign and the employer unilaterally requiring all nurses to work 12-hour shifts. And while those sympathetic to the nurses' strike blamed local SVH-Tenet leadership for prolonging the strike, corporate leaders based at headquarters in Dallas, Texas, clearly played an important role in negotiations for management (Interview 19, management representative; Interview 25, management representative).

Tenet experienced very large profits in 2021 that enabled them to withstand tens of millions of dollars in costs imposed by the strike. Because nurses occupy high-skilled positions and operate in a tight labor market, they are difficult and costly to replace. Tenet contracted with a staffing company to find temporary replacement workers. Management announced that they spent over $5 million to staff the hospital over the first five days of the strike, with replacement workers costing between $95-$110/hour, double the pay rate of MNA nurses (Bartlett, 2021a). While Tenet did not publicly disclose staffing or other costs for the remainder of the strike, one outlet concluded that the hospital spent between $40-$65 million in staffing costs alone, which includes temporary replacement nurse contracts and over $4 million for police detail (Bartlett, 2021b; Interview 25, management representative). These figures underestimate staffing costs because they do not include lodging and transportation, and do not account for the considerable rise in temporary nurse labor costs towards the end of 2021 (Bartlett, 2021b). They most certainly underestimate the total costs of the strike due to the hospital losing revenue from closing over 100 beds during the work stoppage.

Yet Tenet, which owns and operates 60 hospitals across the US, achieved substantial

profits in 2021. The for-profit healthcare corporation amassed nearly $450 million in profits during the third quarter of 2021 alone, in the middle of the nurses' strike (Gliadkovskaya, 2021). For the year, it achieved a net income of $915 million (Paavola, 2022). Tens of millions in losses imposed by nurses on strike at one out of 60 hospitals had a relatively small impact on the company's financial performance. As one management representative explained: "If we were a standalone [hospital], we wouldn't have survived" (Interview 19, management representative).

Nurses also mobilized local community and political pressure to bring SVH-Tenet to the table, but these power resources proved largely ineffective against the national health corporation. MNA representatives and local leaders explained that these political relationships would generally have made a more immediate impact. One union representative explained that "we had to reconcile that nothing is working…[we were] punching them in the face…every politician from top to bottom…and they are impervious to any of this" (Interview 9, union staffer). The lack of a local connection between Tenet and the City of Worcester made community and political pressure less impactful (Interview 1; 4; 9, union staffer; Interview 10, community leader). Comparing Tenet with other Massachusetts-based health systems, one union representative stated that:

> "If we look at other systems like Mass General Brigham, it's a local industry. Leaders live in the community and participate in the community. With Tenet, the power base of the entity is out of state…little contact with the community and influence with the community, but then the community has little influence on them…we led a strike at Tufts in downtown Boston a few years ago. That leadership lived locally and it's a local institution" (Interview 4, union staffer).

Even local leaders felt baffled at the lack of impact that community and political pressure had on SVH-Tenet during the strike. One leader remarked that:

> "Me making a call would have a big influence usually, but it didn't matter this time…there was no middle ground. Typically, when we have meetings with labor and management, they'll at least compromise. It was just flat-out no. It was very different than any other

> meeting I had with a labor dispute. Typically, management is at least somewhat neutral when talking to public officials…usually more sensitive and diplomatic" (Interview 15, community leader).

Another union representative emphasized that Tenet decision-makers do not seem to prioritize growth on the east coast, noting that the company recently sold five hospitals in Florida and only owns three acute care hospitals in the northeast. From the union's perspective, Tenet "can afford to scorch the earth when they are not going to be here anyways" (Interview 13, union staffer), pointing to another reason why the company mounted such strong opposition to the strike.

The limited effectiveness of local community and political pressure led the union to exert pressure on Tenet outside of Massachusetts. A delegation of MNA leaders and striking nurses organized a rally outside of Tenet headquarters in Dallas, Texas in July 2021 with other healthcare and labor activists, including unions representing workers at Tenet-owned hospitals. They demanded a resolution of the strike and called for a Congressional investigation into how Tenet handled covid-19 funding (Gonzales, 2021). While both sides reached a settlement on economic issues less than a month after the protest, the strike continued for an additional five months over the return-to-work agreement.

Throughout the strike, SVH-Tenet management demonstrated strategic savviness by exploiting institutional opportunities in US labor law to weaken the union's position. Striking nurses and union representatives interpreted the employer's decision to hire permanent replacement and refuse to guarantee striking nurses a return to their pre-strike positions as "union busting" (Interview 7, striking nurse) and that management's "goal was not to settle a contract, the goal was to break the union" (Interview 18, striking nurse). Both management and union representatives stated that hiring permanent replacement nurses rarely happened during nursing labor disputes, at least in Massachusetts (Interview 4, union staffer; Interview 19, management

representative). MNA representatives claimed that management hired permanent replacements "partially, but strategically" (Interview 4, union staffer). One nurse explained:

> In August we were in negotiations and had the contract settled. We gave in on some of staffing…when it came to the return-to-work agreement, they said striking nurses would not come back to positions…basically every nurse in a specialty area. All these specialties where they need seniority…[it's] union busting all the way" (Interview 7, striking worker).

The hospital hired permanent replacements with the apparent goal of encouraging striking nurses to cross. The hospital's return to work proposal included that 109 nurses, most of whom worked in coveted specialty areas, would not be guaranteed a return to their prior position. Many of the nurses in specialty areas went out on strike in solidarity with floor nurses who experienced the worst staffing issues. Now, the strike shifted to protect those specialty nurses. Union representatives estimate that around 25 nurses crossed back in after the two sides could not agree on a return-to-work agreement in late-August, which represents a relatively small proportion of the workers still on strike (Interview 14, union staffer).

Even after both sides reached an agreement on a strike settlement in mid-December, SVH-Tenet leadership continued to oppose the union by allegedly supporting a decertification campaign and making unilateral changes to nurses' schedules. A nurse hired as a permanent replacement collected signatures for a decertification election to remove MNA as the nurses' bargaining representative, reminiscent of similar efforts following the employment of permanent replacements during strikes in the late-twentieth century. Local management held numerous captive audience meetings and, on at least one occasion, encouraged nurses to vote against MNA representation (Interview 14, union staffer; Interview 19, management representative). Nurses voted 302-133 in favor of keeping the union (Bonner, 2022). Less than three months after the decertification election, local management unilaterally imposed 12-hour shifts on all nurses.

Most nurses at the hospital worked eight-hour shifts, and the implementation of 12-hour shifts highlights the continued tensions between both sides at the hospital (McCluskey, 2022).

The total vote count in the decertification election also demonstrates the bargaining unit attrition due to nurses taking other jobs during the strike and electing not to return to work at SVH-Tenet. One management representative claimed that the hospital lost nearly 300 nurses in January 2022 alone, suggesting that many striking nurses either decided to stay at new jobs or retired (Interview 19, management representative). These 300 or so nurses, who comprise more than one-third of the total pre-strike bargaining unit, include several union activists. One former SVH nurse discussed their decision to not return to the hospital:

> "I ultimately decided not to come back…I started a new job at the end of September. People are nice to me and it's 9 to 5 Monday through Friday. I am appreciated…not a number, but a person. My happiness and my mental health are important. It was time to move on. I had been burnt twice…not going to let it happen a third time" (Interview 16, striking worker).

CWA 1133 – Catholic Health

Background

On October 1st, 2021, approximately 2,000 members of CWA 1133 began a strike at Mercy Hospital in Buffalo, NY to demand better staffing across the hospital and a higher base wage for the lowest paid workers. Contentious relations existed between Mercy Hospital-CHS management and CWA 1133 long before the strike in 2021, though a strike had never occurred at the hospital. Mercy Hospital, originally opened by the Sisters of Mercy in 1904, became part of the Catholic Health System during its founding in 1998. CWA originally organized the Registered Nurse (RN) unit at Mercy Hospital in early-1991 and the Service, Technical, and Clerical (STC) unit in late-1991, achieving first contracts for both in 1992. The union reportedly filed around 700 grievances in a one-year period from 1993-1994, highlighting the adversarial relationship between labor and management at the time (Fleron, Stanger, and Patton, 2000;

Interview 45, union staffer). Tense relations were further exacerbated after the union agreed to a concessionary contract in 2012 in response to threats of job cuts (Interview 31, striking worker; Weisansal and Converso, 2016). One union negotiator explained the history of bargaining with Mercy representatives:

> "At Mercy there was never a change in their anti-union sentiment…there may have been years where they attempted to work with us or pretended to go through the motions, but they never changed their mantra. Bargaining was always incredibly difficult" (Interview 45, union staffer).

During the buildup to contract negotiations in 2016, the union invested nearly one million dollars in a comprehensive contract campaign that emphasized membership mobilization and community coalitions (Interview 42, union staffer). Ninety-six percent of workers authorized a strike, and the union organized a public-facing campaign that engaged the faith community and local political leaders. Instead of agreeing to concessions, members won large wage increases and better staffing language. The union also achieved a common expiration date across contracts with three different Catholic Health hospitals in return for a no-strike clause, even after contract expiration, for all but one hospital, chosen at the union's discretion. Because Mercy is by far the largest unionized hospital in the Catholic Health system, CWA 1133 built towards a potential strike there in the leadup to contract negotiations in 2020 (Interview 39, striking worker).

While workers achieved a stronger contract after negotiations in 2016, staffing issues became even more pronounced leading into negotiations in 2020, which were exacerbated by the covid-19 pandemic. Healthcare workers across the hospital felt demoralized due to the pandemic, with one union staffer explaining that "these [workers] were confronted with more death in a one- or two-year period than they dealt with over their entire careers in nursing" (Interview 45, union staffer). The union agreed to a one-year extension of the collective bargaining agreement in 2020 with just a 0.5% wage increase, which further frustrated members and set the stage for a

strike (Interview 28, striking worker). While members felt dissatisfied and wanted to strike, union staffers had a difficult time engaging members in basic participation, like coming to meetings or signing a petition. As one staffer recalled, "the only thing that motivated people was to talk about going on strike" (Interview 42, union staffer). One member discussed how some workers felt as if they should have gone on strike in 2016 but union leadership did not allow them to, stating that:

> "This time if we didn't strike there would be hell to pay…didn't do it the last time when we were supposed to…it wasn't an option not to [strike] for many members" (Interview 36, striking worker).

Union leaders also discussed how some workers "never forgave us for not letting them strike in 2016" (Interview 45, union staffer). Members were adamant about going on strike as the necessary response to exacerbated staffing issues and poor working conditions. One respondent stated that "people were so angry and begging us to go on strike" (Interview 42, union staffer).

Union power resources

Nearly 2,000 healthcare workers at Mercy Hospital walked off the job on October 1, 2021, until reaching agreement on a new contract on November 9, 2021. The union won its major contract demands as part of the strike despite having relatively low levels of strike preparation. Rather than organizing daily informational pickets for months leading up to the strike, CWA 1133 only organized one major public facing action – an informational picket in August 2021 – before the strike. Union staffers lamented the lack of structure tests prior to the beginning of the strike (Interview 27, union staffer). Union members were agitated, and many felt that a strike was inevitable, but this did not mean that members understood the kind of preparation that a strike entails. While CWA is often regarded as a militant union, much of this militancy stems from strikes in the telecommunications industry. A union leader stated that

"CWA knows how to strike, but this bargaining unit had never been through it…they didn't understand the implications of walking out" (Interview 45, union staffer). Other union staffers had similar analysis, with one exclaiming that "it was clear that the local had no idea what a strike was at all" (Interview 27, union staffer) and another stating that the "leadership was completely unprepared and didn't know what to do" (Interview 58, union staffer).

This lack of preparation became apparent on day one of the strike. While the union built a strike organization structure that assigned certain workers and staff to different committees, including picket line scheduling, some workers did not understand that they needed to actively picket during the strike. After a 6am rally on day one of the strike, many workers did not show up to the picket line. One union representative stated that:

> "What we learned immediately…[workers] thought this was a vacation…they didn't view this as an obligation and didn't realize that in order to win the strike they had to be on the picket line" (Interview 42, union staffer).

In response to this lack of picket line participation, union staffers began holding daily meetings with picket line captains to ensure that striking workers understood their picket line duties, which required each worker to participate a required number of hours each week to receive their strike fund pay. One union staffer explained the difference between this strike and the numerous ones organized by members in the telecommunications industry:

> "We had to explain how to walk picket lines on the first day…in years of working telephone strikes I never once had a conversation with a local on how to put up a picket line" (Interview 58, union staffer).

Local leadership turnover also contributed to internal organizing problems that CWA 1133 members had to endure during and beyond the strike. CWA maintains a relatively decentralized organizational structure, with locals electing their own leadership and larger districts – seven in total – providing organizing and bargaining support to locals when necessary

(Interview 58, union staffer). Local leadership at CWA 1133 underwent considerable change just prior to the strike, as a new president and vice president unseated incumbents who had experience in prior negotiations. Many members remained frustrated by not going on strike in 2016 and the perception that union leaders became too close with management (Interview 36, striking worker; Interview 59, management representative). Two different local presidents were removed from office for not complying with covid-19 vaccine mandates and the local was eventually placed into a temporary trusteeship one year after the strike in October 2022 by the CWA executive board (Communications Workers of America, 2022).

While CWA 1133 members lacked adequate strike preparation and experienced internal leadership tensions, they still developed high levels of disruptive capacity due to virtually the entire hospital going on strike. The workers' associational and structural power were somewhat limited because of a no strike clause agreement negotiated in 2016 that only allowed members from one of three hospitals – Mercy, Kenmore Mercy, and St. Joseph's - to strike. The union strategically, and unsurprisingly, organized a strike at Mercy considering they represent approximately 2,000 workers there, compared to a few hundred each at Kenmore and St. Joseph's. CWA 1133 represents a 'wall-to-wall' bargaining unit at Mercy Hospital, meaning that nearly all workers at the hospital are members of the local. While the RN and STC workers have separate contracts, they have common expiration dates and bargained together. One union staffer explained the importance of representing all members in the hospital:

> "We had a real advantage taking everyone out. All these tiny specialties in technical units…they can't just easily bring someone in…not just nurses, techs were key too" (Interview 42, union staffer).

Union representatives had to overcome longstanding tensions between RN and STC staff during the strike. Messaging during the strike emphasized the importance of STCs, who

sometimes felt forgotten in negotiations. One striking worker explained:

> "There was tension between RNs and STCs. A lot of the time the latter thinks the former forgets about them…through negotiations and our communications we let them know that we're not forgetting about them. We were a united front and we weren't going to leave anyone else behind" (Interview 34, striking worker).

The picket line helped break down these barriers. Rather than being divided by occupation, picket line schedulers ensured that different groups of workers would picket with each other (Interview 44, striking worker). While workers overcame occupational silos on the picket line, the tensions between nurses and non-nurses still persisted at the time. One nurse responded to a comment by another member about nurses being paid too much: "So as politely as I could, I did say the RN can do the aide's job. The RN can [also] do the respiratory job" (Interview 40, striking worker). Despite these tensions, union negotiators bargained a contract that achieved considerable staffing improvements for both RNs and STCs and large wage increases for the lowest paid workers in the STC unit.

Striking workers also benefitted from CWA's strike fund and new legislation that reduced the waiting period for unemployment benefits to take effect. CWA maintains a $430 million strike fund, one of the largest of any union in the country (Interview 58, union staffer). Striking workers started receiving $300/week after the second week on strike, with that number increasing to $400/week after the fourth week. CWA members were also eligible to collect unemployment benefits after just two weeks on strike as a result of legislation pioneered by Buffalo-area state senators Tim Kennedy and Sean Ryan. While many members had a difficult time navigating the online unemployment system, the combined strike fund and unemployment benefits helped sustain the 40-day strike (Interview 37, striking worker).

CWA 1133 members cultivated high levels of societal power during the strike due to Buffalo's legacy as a "big union town" (Interview 28, striking worker) and support from both

local politicians and the faith community. One of the reasons union leaders thought they could overcome low levels of strike preparation was Buffalo's standing as a pro-union area:

> "The other thing about our own calculation is this is Buffalo…we knew we had everybody in the community. We had a great issue which was staffing, made us seem unselfish. We were worried about the optics of striking during a crisis…confident in terms of communications and political and community establishment" (Interview 58, union staffer).

The strike coincided with an important mayoral race, which is part of the reason why many politicians showed up to the picket line regularly. Striking workers also gathered support from members of the faith community, which helped organize multiple prayer vigils. These vigils boosted morale among striking workers and emphasized that Mercy-CHS, a Catholic hospital and health system, failed to live up to Catholic teachings in negotiations (Interview 40, striking worker). One union staffer commented that they "never had so many prayer vigils during a strike" and discussed the dual role of these vigils as a source to increase public pressure and boost internal morale:

> "[Prayer vigils] were influential as a tactic, but it was a really difficult thing for our members to go on strike…healthcare strikes are very different than strikes at Verizon…they felt they were ditching patients…clergy support had a healing effect" (Interview 27, union staffer).

Employer Power Resources

CWA 1133 members achieved their contract demands largely because Mercy-CHS was in a relatively weak position during the strike because of limited financial resources, vulnerability to societal actors, and questionable strategic decision making leading up to and during the strike. Management's priority during the strike was operational flexibility, achieving a sustainable contract, and retaining staff. They were open to pay increases for certain job classifications, but also wanted to achieve changes to existing healthcare and retirement benefits and resisted the introduction of staffing ratios for much of negotiations. In terms of outcomes,

one management representative admitted that “we were pretty unsuccessful at anything we were trying to do. Labor has a lot of leverage right now, and [they] took advantage” (Interview 59, management representative).

The strike exacerbated the hospital’s, and by extension the health system’s, already poor financial situation. CHS suffered a deficit of $74 million in 2020 because of challenges from the pandemic, even after accounting for nearly $90 million in covid-19 relief (Harris, 2022). In 2021, CHS suffered $160 million more in operating losses, of which $89 million was due to strike replacements and the impact of bed closures during the 40-day work stoppage at Mercy (Interview 56, management representative). Moody’s also downgraded CHS’ credit rating after the second week of the strike, which placed additional pressure on the company to reach an agreement (Harris, 2022).

Because of industry-wide labor market conditions, CHS-Mercy representatives had to pay disproportionately high costs for temporary replacement workers. The health system’s financial situation did not enable them to overcome these large costs. As is common during strikes in healthcare, the hospital found traveling workers through a third-party staffing agency. Replacement nurses cost five to six times as much as regular staff, with pay rates surpassing $150/hour (Interview 27, union staffer). Nursing assistants made over $35/hour, more than double pay rate for regular staff (Interview 44, striking worker). Respiratory therapists were the costliest to replace compared to their regular pay rate, further demonstrating that both RNs and non-RNs were difficult to replace (Interview 59, management representative).

The hospital also incurred additional costs beyond the workers’ base pay rate. They had to orient traveling workers and oversee day-to-day management. Many traveling workers did not consistently show up to shifts or decided not to stay on the job. It took about two weeks into the

strike for the hospital to stabilize with reliable staff (Interview 59, management representative). The hospital paid the contingency firm to oversee travel for nurses outside of Buffalo, lodging, transportation between lodging and the hospital, and security. The hospital incurred all these logistics and operations costs to service around 100 patients, down from 300-330 patients on a typical day, which meant more lost revenue due to bed reductions (Interview 59, management representative). Mercy-CHS paid as much as six-times for temporary staff while losing money as a result of service reductions.

Rather than devising creative ways to make the hospital incur more economic disruption, union leaders were worried about the long-term impact of the strike on the hospital's finances. The persistent, nationwide labor shortage in healthcare meant that hospitals would have to spend large amounts of money to staff hospitals during a labor dispute. One union staffer explained:

> "[They] were in bad shape and lost a gargantuan amount of money during the pandemic…we were worried we could put them out of business…when the strike was over we pivoted to get them more money" (Interview 58, union staffer).

Moreover, Mercy is the largest unionized facility in CHS, which caused the strike to have a disproportionate impact on the company's finances. CHS did not have the organizational resources or capacity to survive a very long, drawn out strike. One respondent compared CHS' resources with Tenet's when discussing both labor disputes:

> "In Worcester they took on Tenet. Tenet had the time and money to beat them down…we were hopeful that at Mercy it would not be a long strike…[it's] really a flagship of Western New York. We did not anticipate that it could be a long strike there (Interview 45, union staffer).

The size and location of CHS' facilities also made the health system more vulnerable to local community and political pressure. CHS is headquartered in Buffalo and operates five hospitals, all located in the greater Buffalo area. The company relied heavily on state support throughout the covid-19 pandemic and its growth plan includes expansion across Western New

York, led by the construction of a new hospital in Lockport by September 2023 (Minkewicz, 2023). Management representatives claimed that public pressure did not play a major factor in the outcome of the strike, but recognized that virtually all community leaders and local politicians supported the strikers throughout the labor dispute. One representative stated:

> "It was really interesting to see how much sympathy people on strike received…lack of understanding of company's point of view and people didn't really care…community leaders and politicians were far more labor focused than company focused. Just about every person up for election next year or so came out to the picket line" (Interview 59, management representative).

Union leaders recognized that support for organized labor remains high in Buffalo. The ongoing mayoral race at the time also made the strike, as one respondent explained, an important issue that drove politicians out to the line:

> "With it being an election year helped a lot. [Politicians] were just walking the picket lines…insanely beneficial. The political backing was very supportive" (Interview 28, striking worker).

In addition to the severe financial impact and pressure from local community and political leaders, Mercy-CHS representatives suffered from a lack of prior strike history and questionable strategic decisions that weakened their bargaining position in negotiations during the strike. In its nearly 25-year history, CHS had only experienced just one prior strike – a 21-day strike involving 170 nurses in 2001 at St. Joseph's - prior to the work stoppage at Mercy (Communications Workers of America, 2001). The lack of experience with strikes impacted hospital management's response, with one representative admitting that "once you have been through this once, you're much more equipped to handle it" (Interview 59, management representative). While union members at Mercy had issued multiple strike authorizations during negotiations in the past, hospital management did not expect that workers would actually go on strike. One manager commented that "I was pretty surprised they actually went out" (Interview

59, management representative) and a union staffer privy to negotiations in the hours before the strike explained that management "miscalculated" and "started throwing everything at us" at the last minute (Interview 58, union staffer), not realizing that it was too little too late.

In terms of strategic response to the strike, CHS-Mercy management decided to effectively lockout all workers after the strike began, preventing anyone from crossing the picket line and returning to work during the strike. This allowed the union to continue and exert its maximum economic leverage regardless of if some workers wanted to cross the line. Local management representatives defended this decision, even in hindsight, because of the irreparable damage that allowing workers to cross the line may have caused to the workplace environment after the strike ended (Interview 56; management representative). As one representative stated:

> "The reason we [made that decision] was because we didn't want them to deal with the aftermath when things settled down of being the person who crossed the line…didn't want to subject them to scorn of peers" (Interview 59, management representative).

Union representatives also believed that management's decision to not allow workers to cross the line was a response to the potential for workplace conflict after the strike ended. One union staffer stated that "the hospital felt that if they let people cross the picket line it would be really bad when striking workers came back in…in terms of people fighting and conflict in the hospital" (Interview 42, union staffer).

While management representatives prioritized longer term workplace culture, there is little doubt that the decision to not allow workers to cross strengthened the union's bargaining position. One union respondent explained that "we knew there were people who absolutely wanted to work [during the strike at Mercy] but were told no" (Interview 45, union staffer). Another union leader described management's decision to not allow workers to cross as "another miscalculation," further explaining that:

> "I think they thought that they were punishing the workers…it betrays how inexperienced they are. They didn't split the ranks" (Interview 58, union staffer).

The union did not need to worry about workers crossing the picket line and 'splitting the ranks,' a common challenge facing most unions on strike. While losing workers from the picket line and, potentially, the bargaining unit are important concerns, management did not try and divide workers over the issue of crossing the line and reducing some of the immediate financial impact on the hospital. Moreover, CHS-Mercy management also did not seriously consider hiring permanent replacements during the 40-day work stoppage, mainly because the strike did not go on long enough to consider that as an option (Interview 59, management representative).

Case Comparison and Discussion

Table XIII: Union power resources

	Case One: MNA-Tenet	Case Two: CWA-Mercy
Strike preparation	**HIGH**	**LOW**
Structural/Associational	**MEDIUM-HIGH**	**HIGH**
Societal	**HIGH**	**HIGH**

Understanding the divergent strike outcomes observed in these two cases requires an analysis of both union and employer power resources. As Table XIII demonstrates, only evaluating union strategy and resources would lead to a different calculation about the prospect for union success in each case. The MNA nurses were much more prepared to strike than CWA 1133 healthcare workers for two primary reasons. They had waged a successful strike before that

included many leaders of the current bargaining unit, and they engaged in numerous structure tests – including daily picketing for months – to gauge support for the strike. CWA 1133 members lacked prior strike history, only engaged in one major public facing action before the strike, and many did not even understand that once the strike began, they would have to regularly report to the picket line.

MNA nurses achieved higher levels of strike preparation than CWA 1133 members, but they did not develop as much associational or structural power due to the occupational boundaries in their bargaining unit. CWA 1133 benefitted from representing a wall-to-wall bargaining unit, which allowed them to strike the entire hospital. This inflicted more immediate economic damage and forced the employer to hire temporary replacements for both nurses and several groups of non-nurse staff. While MNA lacked the same extent of disruptive capacity due to only representing one group of workers, it is important to note that nurses cultivate high levels of structural power, suggesting that this difference in union bargaining power does not entirely explain divergent strike outcomes observed here. Nurses are very difficult to replace and acquire occupational-based skills that allow them to find other jobs somewhat easily. This allowed striking MNA nurses to find other employment during the protracted work stoppage. To understand why CWA 1133 healthcare workers achieved better strike outcomes than MNA nurses, we need to account for variation in the power resources and strategic capabilities of employers in each case as highlighted in Table XIV.

Table XIV: Employer power resources and strategic capabilities

	Case One: MNA-Tenet	Case Two: CWA-Mercy
Structural	**HIGH**	**LOW**
Vulnerability to societal actors	**LOW**	**HIGH**
Strategic capabilities	**HIGH**	**LOW**

The first employer power resource identified as part of this study is structural power, reflecting an employer's financial strength and size. Employers' financial status and ability to shift production to other sites impacts their relative bargaining power in labor negotiations and disputes (Katz et al, 2017). MNA nurses faced a larger and better resourced employer that implemented a more effective strategy in response to the strike. In 2021, Tenet operated 60 hospitals across the United States and experienced close to one billion dollars in profits, despite facing considerable losses at SVH during the strike. In contrast, CHS struggled financially during the pandemic and faced a strike at its largest unionized facility. Operating only five hospitals, all in Western New York, CHS experienced $160 million in operating losses in 2021. The strike caused over half of these losses, and Moody's downgraded CHS' credit status two weeks into the work stoppage (Harris, 2022). Rather than trying to devise creative ways to financially burden the company during the strike, union leaders at CWA feared that the work stoppage could put the hospital out of business. When asked about the comparison between the MNA strike at Tenet and the CWA 1133 strike at Buffalo, a CWA union leader commented that "I explicitly said to colleagues that I am so glad that we are not striking against a for-profit,

corporate hospital chain" (Interview 58, union staffer).

The second employer power resource identified here regards an employer's vulnerability to societal actors, conditioned by factors including the location of corporate headquarters and the firm's growth plans. Unions have long recognized the need to identify and pressure key decision-makers within firms through strategic corporate campaigns (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, 2000), though my findings suggest that these tactics are not always successful. Tenet, headquartered in Dallas, Texas, only operates three of its 60 hospitals in Massachusetts. Multiple union staffers and local political leaders commented how impervious Tenet appeared to local and state-level community and political pressure. Tenet management did not agree to a strike settlement until December 2021, when Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, a cabinet member in President Joe Biden's administration, became involved in negotiations. In contrast, CHS is headquartered in Buffalo and operates all five hospitals in the greater Buffalo area, making them much more susceptible to local community and political pressure than Tenet management.

Finally, employers may vary in strategic capabilities, or the extent to which they use their resources and learn from prior experience to implement effective strategy (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). Tenet exhibited much greater strategic capabilities than CHS due to prior experience with strikes and implementing more aggressive tactics in response to the work stoppage. Tenet management had experience with multiple indefinite work stoppages, including one by MNA at SVH in 2000. Management encouraged striking nurses to cross from day one and began hiring permanent replacements two months into the strike, eventually hiring more than 200 replacements (Saint Vincent Hospital, 2021; Bonner, 2021). After both sides reached agreement on economics and staffing language, the strike by MNA nurses continued for an additional five months because management refused to guarantee that all striking nurses would

return to their pre-strike position. Encouraging union members to cross the line, engaging in hardline bargaining, and hiring permanent replacements who facilitated a decertification effort are all hallmarks of employer responses to strikes beginning in the late-twentieth century (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998).

In contrast to Tenet management, CHS management lacked the same degree of experience with strikes and implemented questionable tactics in response to the work stoppage. In its 25-year history, CHS had only experienced one other strike back in 2001 at St. Joseph's. CHS representatives discussed how they were surprised when the workers went on strike and feel much more prepared for a future work stoppage after learning from this experience (Interview 59, management representative). Instead of encouraging workers to cross the picket line and threatening to hire permanent replacements, management made the surprising decision to not allow any member of the bargaining unit to return to work at the beginning or during the strike. This decision forced management to rely entirely on temporary replacement workers at disproportionately high costs and meant that the union did not face concerns of workers crossing the picket line and dividing the membership. Management representatives continued to defend that decision, emphasizing the importance of maintaining harmonious workplace relations, especially beyond the strike (Interview 56; 59, management representative). But this decision weakened management's bargaining position, thereby strengthening the union's power.

Table XV: Union power resources revisited

	Case One: MNA-Tenet	Case Two: CWA-Mercy
Strike preparation	HIGH	LOW
Structural/Associational	LOW	HIGH
Societal	LOW-MEDIUM	HIGH

Table XV outlines the union's power resources in each case after accounting for employer power resources, demonstrating the importance of conceptualizing power resources as relational and interdependent. The associational and structural power of MNA nurses decreases considerably when accounting for Tenet's financial strength and size, as the strike by nurses at SVH had minimal impact on Tenet's national operations. Workers with low levels of structural power overcome their limited capacity at direct economic disruption by mobilizing power resources beyond the workplace (Chun, 2005; Schmalz et al, 2018), but even these proved largely unsuccessful against Tenet. MNA nurses organized high levels of community support and local political pressure with little effect because Tenet is headquartered in Dallas and the vast majority of the firm's production occurs outside of Massachusetts. The only way that MNA nurses exerted meaningful pressure on Tenet is when Marty Walsh, the former Mayor of Boston and, at the time of the strike, the U.S. Secretary of Labor, facilitated negotiations to end the strike.

Unlike the experience of MNA nurses at Tenet, the structural and associational power of CWA 1133 healthcare workers at CHS-Mercy increased when accounting for the employer's

financial strength and size. CHS struggled financially because of the pandemic, which was exacerbated by the healthcare workers' strike at its largest unionized facility. CWA 1133 also mobilized substantial local community and political pressure. CHS management was much more vulnerable to financial and community pressure due to the health system's relatively small size and location of all operations in the greater Buffalo area.

Findings from this case comparison also emphasize the importance of strategy, though not necessarily union strategy. The employers varied deeply in their strategic capabilities. Tenet management drew on its experience with multiple drawn-out strikes and followed the playbook of an aggressive employer response to union-led work stoppages. They encouraged workers to cross the line, hired permanent replacements, and refused for months to guarantee that all nurses would return to their pre-strike positions. Hiring permanent replacements became a common tactic used by employers during the 1980s to defeat strikes and decertify local unions (Cramton and Tracy, 1998). While it proved much more difficult to permanently replace nurses in 2021 than manufacturing workers in the late-twentieth century, the hiring of some permanent replacements and hard bargaining adopted by Tenet management lengthened the strike considerably. CHS management in Buffalo lacked this same kind of experience with strikes. Rather than encouraging workers to cross and hiring permanent replacements, CHS management refused to let any workers cross the picket line. These diverging employer strategies considerably impacted unions' bargaining power in each case.

My findings indicate that union strategy and strike preparation are less important indicators of strike outcomes than prior literature would suggest. The strike preparation and internal organization of MNA nurses were considerably greater than CWA 1133 healthcare workers, yet the latter achieved much better strike outcomes. These findings conflict with work

on labor mobilization that focuses specifically on the strategies and agency of labor organizations, such as through developing a relational organizing culture or deep organizing that wins support from previously indifferent workers (McAlevey, 2016; Tapia, 2019). This perspective links strike preparation to successful outcomes based on whether labor organizations utilize multiple structure tests to gauge worker commitment (McAlevey, 2018) or use digital tools to enhance organization (Blanc, 2022). Other case comparisons of successful and unsuccessful strikes have similarly concluded that union strategy determines outcomes (Johnston, 1994; Milkman, 2006).

Rather than concluding that effective strategy leads to successful outcomes, my findings emphasize the importance of relative bargaining power. While CWA 1133 lacked the same degree of strike preparation as MNA, they had much greater bargaining power due to representing a ‘wall-to-wall’ unit and, most importantly in my study, opposing a much weaker employer. Bargaining power and power resources are relational concepts, meaning that we cannot understand union power with analyzing employer power, and vice-versa (Katz et al, 2017; Schmalz et al, 2018). While prior work has measured the impact of employer opposition in resisting both strikes and union campaigns (Cramton and Tracy, 1998; Logan, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Kallas, Park, and Aleks, 2023), much less research utilizing the PRA fully analyzes specific employer power resources. Instead of assuming that all employers have high degrees of power, I provide a framework to analyze employer power resources by focusing on three main types: employers’ structural power, employers’ degree of vulnerability to community and political pressure, and employers’ strategic capabilities. Because employers vary in their capacity to resist collective action by workers, it is important for labor scholars to incorporate an analysis of distinct employer power resources to fully understand worker power,

especially when analyzing specific campaigns or strikes.

Conclusion

Union organizing victories at prominent, private sector employers and a relative uptick in strike activity suggest the potential for a revitalized labor movement in the US (Kallas et al, 2023a; Kochan et al, 2023). These very campaigns also demonstrate the extreme employer opposition facing unions and labor organizations. Building on a case comparison of two recent strikes by unionized healthcare workers, this study illustrates the importance of studying both union and employer power resources during labor campaigns. Employers may largely oppose labor activism, especially in the US, but this does not mean that all employers have the same capacity to resist strikes and other campaigns. The three main factors that determine employers' capacity to resist strikes include structural power, or their financial strength, vulnerability to societal actors, or the extent to which their decision-making is impacted by political and community pressure, and strategic capabilities, or their ability to exploit prior history and institutional openings in labor law.

Chapter Five: Examining strikes, social identity, and outcomes on the Starbucks union campaign

In this chapter, I undertake an in-depth case study of strikes organized by Starbucks union activists across multiple regions as part of their organizing and bargaining campaigns. I find that Starbucks workers' approach to strike strategy and interpretation of strike outcomes contrast with more conventional understandings of strike preparation and effectiveness in three main ways. First, Starbucks workers distinguish between and utilize different types of strikes – indefinite, fixed duration, and walkouts – that require varying degrees of preparation and coordination. Second, Starbucks workers organize around social identities, particularly LGBTQ+, to advance workplace activism. This finding emphasizes the linkages between social identity and economic action, rather than distinguishing between mobilization around economic and noneconomic identities. Finally, Starbucks workers analyze strike effectiveness not according to whether strikes achieve immediate material outcomes, but by whether they strengthen membership activism or community support. Despite these innovative organizing and strike strategies, union activists have, as of August 2023, failed to secure a first contract due to the company's structural power and strategic capabilities. The fact that Starbucks workers across regions have struggled to win a contract against a single employer further demonstrates the importance of studying strike and campaign outcomes relationally.

Introduction

On December 9th, 2021, baristas in Buffalo, NY accomplished something that many practitioners and scholars thought was unachievable. They formed a union at Starbucks, a firm with 9,000 company-owned stores across the US known for its progressive reputation on social issues and industry-leading employee benefits package. Journalists and activists heralded the election wins at Starbucks as a 'watershed' moment for the labor movement (Slater and Jaffe,

2021), as a labor union established representation at an enormous employer with considerable brand recognition in the low-wage service sector. The success in Buffalo helped lead to organizing campaigns at numerous Starbucks locations across the country, and workers at over 325 stores had voted to unionize as of mid-July 2023 (Union Election Data, 2023). These victories at Starbucks and, subsequently, other private sector employers previously considered impervious like Amazon, Apple, and Trader Joe's, have led scholars to argue that the labor movement confronts a potentially transformative moment (Kochan et al, 2023).

Whether this moment truly becomes a watershed for the labor movement at least partially depends on whether Starbucks workers establish a collective bargaining relationship with their employer by negotiating a first contract. Employers in the US have aggressively opposed union organizing and first contract negotiations over the past four decades. Scholars have found that the adoption of certain tactics by employers – like holding captive audience meetings or engaging in illegal behavior like terminating union activists – negatively impacts union organizing and bargaining outcomes (Cooke, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Logan, 2006; Ferguson, 2008; Kallas et al, 2023b). Starbucks management has utilized these legal and illegal tactics frequently in response to the Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) union campaign. As of late-June 2023, the company faced nearly 100 complaints issued by NLRB officials for engaging in illegal ULPs across the country, indicating a coordinated response to oppose unionization nationally (Wise and lafolla, 2023).

The company's anti-union tactics have led Starbucks workers to respond through strikes and other creative strategies. Starbucks workers organized at least 141 strikes from the beginning of the campaign through July 1, 2023, comprising nearly a quarter of all strikes in the US over that period (ILR Labor Action Tracker, 2023). Unlike conventional strikes in the US that feature

unions walking out indefinitely at the conclusion of failed negotiations with firms (Rosenfeld, 2006; Martin and Dixon, 2010), strikes by Starbucks workers have taken a variety of forms and have emerged at different phases of the pre-recognition organizing and post-recognition bargaining process. Consistent with recent evidence on strikes in the US, Starbucks workers have strategically retooled the strike in response to a recalcitrant employer, immediate workplace safety concerns, and the costs of sustaining indefinite work stoppages (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; Kallas, 2023). The Starbucks union campaign has also centered workers' social identity in organizing campaigns and strikes, moving away from a purely class-based understanding of labor contestation. Many scholars argue that intersectional organizing – defined as "a continual process for building solidarity that centers the voices and participation of marginalized identities and their amplified oppression in the pursuit of social justice" (Lee and Tapia, 2023: 84) – is crucial to incorporate the voices of marginalized workers and revitalize the labor movement (McBride, Hebson, and Holgate, 2015; Lee and Tapia, 2021).

In this study, I address the following research questions concerning labor mobilization and strikes in the US. First, *how have the strikes organized by Starbucks workers changed and problematize what we know about strikes and strike outcomes more generally?* Starbucks workers organized ~24% of all strikes in the US between January 1, 2022 and July 1, 2023, making an analysis of strikes on the Starbucks campaign essential to understanding labor militancy in the US. The variation in the type of strike and the context in which certain strikes have emerged during the campaign allow me to test and challenge the conventional understanding of strikes and strike outcomes in existing literature. Second, *what explains the Starbucks workers' union campaign's organizing, bargaining, and strike outcomes, so far?* While Starbucks workers have won elections at over 300 stores, the vast majority of Starbucks

9,000 corporate-owned locations in the US remain nonunion and the union has failed to secure a first agreement at any store. Related to question number two, I investigate how *workers' social identities impact their participation and activism in the campaign*. Many Starbucks union leaders identify as LGBTQIA+ and are empowered by their identity and lived experiences.

I make the following contributions to the field. First, I find that a considerable amount of variation occurs with regards to the preparation and organization of strikes on the Starbucks campaign. The types of strikes organized by Starbucks workers challenge dominant perspectives on work stoppages in the US, and these strikes demonstrate how workers utilize conventional tactics, like building expansive strike funds, in innovative ways. Second, I find that workers' social identities fundamentally shape activism on the Starbucks union campaign, with some identities becoming more salient than others. This finding supports recent work emphasizing the importance of non-economic identities and intersectional organizing in fostering labor solidarity. Finally, by analyzing multiple regions of strike activity within a single corporation, I find that despite the adoption of different strike types, generous strike support, and identity-based organizing, management has leveraged immense structural power and exploited weak labor law to universally oppose the unionization campaign and, as of August 2023, the signing of a first contract. This demonstrates the importance of understanding labor campaigns and strikes relationally, as an analysis of the form and effectiveness of union power resources and strategies requires an understanding of employer sources of power.

Theoretical Background

Labor's strategy and power

Both labor and employer resources and strategies impact campaign outcomes for workers, but most recent work in industrial relations focuses on one side, rather than analyzing

them relationally (Doellgast et al, 2021). Research in both labor revitalization and the power resources approach emphasize labor's agency, specifically the capacity of labor organizations to act strategically to (re)build worker power (Schmalz et al, 2018). Labor organizations can improve their chances at winning campaigns by allocating resources to new organizing and adopting comprehensive campaign tactics (Voss and Sherman, 2000; Milkman, 2006). For example, Bronfenbrenner (1997) found that implementing certain tactics during organizing campaigns, like house calls and building representative organizing committees, led to a greater likelihood of winning an NLRB election. More recently, Kallas et al (2023b) demonstrate that unions that engage external stakeholders during contract campaigns by holding public rallies and building community coalitions are more likely to secure a first contract than those that do not adopt these public-facing tactics.

The collective withdrawal of labor represents workers' traditional, and most potent, type of resistance. While scholars often overlooked the strike in earlier research on labor revitalization (see Voss and Sherman, 2000; Frege and Kelly, 2003), recent evidence suggests that workers and their organizations have started to recenter the strike as a key source of resistance (McAlevey, 2016; Blanc, 2019; Givan and Lang, 2020). Previously, scholars conceptualized strikes in the US as a product of a specific institutional context, namely failed private contract negotiations between unions and firms. Most quantitative research on strikes in the US is largely modeled on this type of work stoppage, also referred to as the 'contract strike' (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; see Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Riordan, 2016; Massenkoff and Wilmers, 2022). Recent qualitative evidence finds that strikes take on a much more public-facing form and are generally shorter in duration, in contrast to the indefinite work stoppage at the end of institutionalized bargaining negotiations. Educator unions that advance 'bargaining for the common good

strategies' during strikes that actively center community interests in negotiations and fixed duration strikes by both fast-food workers and nurses provide important examples of new types of strikes that problematize the conventional understanding of work stoppages in the US (Sneiderman and McCartin, 2018; Givan and Lang, 2020; Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; Kallas, 2023).

These new types of strikes also challenge the way scholars conceptualize strike outcomes and success. Because most conventional strikes in the US featured unions and firms engaging in indefinite 'trial of strength' (Hyman, 1989) conflicts until reaching some sort of settlement, strike outcomes were best understood as the material gains achieved directly from striking. For example, quantitative research on strike outcomes in the US generally measures the impact of strikes on wages, finding that the positive strike-wage relationship that existed from the 1950s through the 1970s largely disappeared beginning in the 1980s (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Kimball, 2019). While this understanding of strike outcomes remains important as indefinite work stoppages in institutionalized bargaining relationships still occur, it's imperative to consider other ways of measuring effectiveness. Some scholars emphasize the impact of strikes on broader revitalization goals, like membership gain and building stronger labor organizations (Dribbusch, 2016; McAlevey, 2016; Hodder et al, 2017; Kallas, 2023). Workers also strike to air grievances and generate public support, knowing that employers may not immediately concede to their demands.

Intersectional organizing

A key component of labor contestation often ignored in existing IR literature is the role of workers' social identities – such as race, gender, and sexuality – on organizing strategy and outcomes. Scholars have increasingly challenged primarily class-based understandings of

workers' collective identity and interests, calling for critical race and intersectional (CRT/I) approaches that prioritize the intersection of workers' social identities (McBride et al, 2015; Lee and Tapia, 2021). Despite receiving somewhat minimal attention in IR research (Lee and Tapia, 2021), the concept of 'intersectionality' originated from an analysis of US employment law, specifically unsuccessful claims by Black women alleging discrimination while employed at General Motors. Crenshaw (1989) argued that by separating and distinguishing the sex and racial discrimination claims in this case, the courts failed to acknowledge the intersections of these identities, which are fundamental to the experience of Black women. Scholars utilizing a CRT/I perspective argue that leaders in the labor movement have largely failed to prioritize the complex and intersectional nature of workers' identities, instead advancing an organizing agenda that emphasizes perceived shared economic interests (Holgate, 2005; Lee and Tapia, 2023).

Rather than uniting workers solely around shared economic interests, an intersectional organizing approach centers the extra-workplace social identities of workers in the mobilization process. Prioritizing identity-based issues at work and in communities is crucial to empowering marginalized workers. For example, Pearson, Anitha and McDowell (2010) demonstrate how labor process changes imposed by management cannot fully explain why mostly female South Asian migrant workers organized strikes in two different time periods and institutional contexts, instead pointing to how workers shared ethnic and gender identities served as the basis for resistance in defiance of both the employer and, eventually, union representatives in both cases. The FF15 campaign provides another important example of intersectional organizing. While framing demands in economic terms, campaign organizers constructed alliances with organizations such as the Movement for Black Lives to prioritize low-wage workers' social identities, rather than strictly organizing around a class-based, identity-neutral frame (Tapia et al,

2017). This intersectional organizing approach helps us understand not only a shifting axis of mobilization from economic to noneconomic identities within industrial relations (Piore and Safford, 2006), but also how workers organize around social identities at the site of production through strikes and other militant activity (Sapre and Tapia, 2022).

Employer strategy and power

An analytical approach grounded in a concept of relational power means that research on labor contestation cannot examine labor's strategy in isolation, but also needs to account for how employer power and tactics shapes union strategies and outcomes. Much of the research on employer behavior during labor campaigns in the US focuses on management's attitudes and tactics towards unionization. Kochan et al (1986) developed the concept of 'strategic choice' to explain fundamental changes in private sector industrial relations beginning in the 1970s, arguing that employers no longer viewed unions as a legitimate component of workplace regulation. In line with this shifting ideology, employers began to demand concessions from unionized workers in contract negotiations and intensify opposition to new organizing efforts. The greater willingness of employers to hire permanent replacements in response to strikes during the 1980s helps illustrate these changing norms (Rosenblum, 1995; Getman, 1998; Cramton and Tracy, 1998; Hatton, 2014).

A large amount of research has documented management's opposition to new organizing campaigns over the past four decades. Employers respond to organizing drives with both legal and illegal tactics. Legal tactics include holding captive audience and hiring union avoidance consultants to prevent unionization and first contract negotiation (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Logan, 2006). Illegal tactics include ULPs like firing union activists during organizing drives or closing plants in response to unionization. Employers often engage in these illegal tactics because they

face minimal financial punishment when breaking the law and legal proceedings take months, if not years, to process, leading to considerable delay. This delay often chills organizing campaigns, as ULPs by employers reduce the likelihood of unions winning an NLRB campaign and achieving a first contract (Ferguson, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Kallas et al, 2023b).

Methodology

To answer my research questions on strikes and labor mobilization, I conducted an in-depth qualitative case study of the SBWU campaign. I studied this campaign for two main reasons. First, SBWU has achieved considerably greater scale than other recent campaigns at large, private sector employers in the US. As of early-July 2023, Starbucks workers unionized nearly 325 stores across the US and won ~84% of elections held (Union Elections Data, 2023). In comparison, the Amazon Labor Union won one of two elections and Trader Joe's United won four of six elections in that period (Sainato, 2023a; Freeman, 2023). Second, Starbucks workers organized 141 strikes between January 2022 and July 1, 2023 – far more than any other group of workers – accounting for ~24% of total strikes in the US (ILR Labor Action Tracker, 2023). The case of the Starbucks union is key to understanding both the form that contemporary strikes take and how workers organize strikes to support organizing and bargaining campaigns.

Data collection and analysis

I pursued an inductive, fieldwork-based approach to data collection. Because my research focus centered on strikes, I engaged in purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) to select four main field site locations based on strike frequency. This allowed me to analyze organizing and strike strategy across multiple regions under the same employer. The regions chosen include upstate New York (Buffalo and Ithaca), Seattle, Kansas City, and Boston. I determined strike frequency through the ILR LAT, which has maintained a comprehensive database of strike activity since

the beginning of the Starbucks union campaign. When initial case selection began in July 2022, 10 strikes at eight locations had occurred in upstate New York and 15 strikes at 17 locations had occurred in the greater Seattle area, leading me to select these as two of my cases. By mid-September 2022, six strikes at two locations had occurred in the greater Kansas City area, and five strikes at eight locations, including the first and, as of July 2023, longest indefinite strike, had occurred in the greater Boston area, leading me to select these two regions as additional cases to examine strike activity. By the conclusion of fieldwork in mid-April 2023, Starbucks workers had organized 81 strikes across these four regions.

My primary source of data are interviews with workers involved in the organizing campaign and strikes at their stores. I conducted 47 semi-structured interviews between April 2022 and April 2023. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours in length, with most interviews lasting approximately one hour. Table XVI displays additional information about the interviews. I relied on a mix of sampling techniques to access interviewees. Unlike organizing drives led primarily by union staff, many of the newer campaigns at large, private employers are noted for their independence from established unions (Moore, 2023). While Starbucks workers have organized through an existing union, Workers United, the campaign has demonstrated a degree of independence and grassroots activism uncommon in many conventional unionization drives (Logan, 2023).

Because of this context, I recruited most interviewees outside of formal union contacts. I accessed informants through cold emails and connections made through my university. I then relied primarily on snowball sampling to reach additional contacts in the regions that I studied (Parker, Scott, and Geddes, 2019). I also undertook ten hours of participant observation, attending three separate picket lines during strikes by Starbucks workers in Buffalo, NY and

New York, NY. I reviewed secondary sources, including news articles and social media posts, to triangulate findings from the qualitative data. Finally, the ILR LAT provided comprehensive data on the number of strikes, approximate workers on strike, demands of strikes, and unionization status of workers involved in strikes associated with the Starbucks union campaign.

Table XVI: Interviewee breakdown, chapter five

Region	Primary fieldwork dates	# Workers interviewed	# Other campaign representatives interviewed	Total interviewed
Upstate NY	Nov 15-Nov 23, 2022	16	2	18
Seattle, WA	July 31-Aug 4, 2022	8	N/A	8
Kansas City, MO	Sept 18-Sept 23, 2022	8	1	9
Boston, MA	Feb 19-Feb 24, 2023	7	N/A	7
Other areas	(zoom)	5	N/A	5
		44	3	**47**

I analyzed all interviews according to an inductive and iterative approach. I updated my research questions and interview questionnaire based on data collected during prior interviews (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). For example, my original questionnaire focused almost entirely on questions pertaining to strikes organized by Starbucks workers. When it became clear through initial interviews that many union activists identified as LGBTQIA+ and workers drew on this identity as a source of empowerment during the campaign and specific strikes, I created a new line of inquiry on the role that social identity played in workers' activism. All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. After reading through all interviews at least once and taking detailed notes on emerging themes, I analyzed interviews through a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). I identified key categories across interviews that comprise the main sections of my findings.

Findings

Case Background

The union campaign at Starbucks officially began in August 2021, when a group of workers – referred to as "partners" – filed election petitions to organize three stores in the Buffalo, NY area. The campaign originated as a product of the Rochester Regional Joint Board of Workers United, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union. Most Workers United members work in manufacturing or industrial laundry, but the Rochester joint board had previously supported barista organizing in upstate New York, which played a pivotal role in the decision to organize Starbucks locations in Buffalo. Workers United successfully organized four Gimme! Coffee locations across Ithaca and Trumansburg, NY in 2017 and five SPoT Coffee locations in Rochester and Buffalo, NY in 2019 (The Ithaca Voice, 2017; Interview 71, union activist). Starbucks workers in Buffalo won elections at two of three stores on December 9, 2021 (Scheiber, 2021). The campaign quickly spread to other stores across the country in the following weeks.

The original decision to unionize Starbucks resulted from a regional, industry-wide organizing approach, rather than a strategy to organize the company nationally. The Starbucks organizing campaign organically spread beyond Buffalo. The local Workers United joint board in upstate New York had organized SPoT Coffee locations in 2019 but failed to achieve healthcare benefits in first contract negotiations. This led campaigners to believe that establishing nonwage benefits in collective agreements covering baristas necessitated organizing SPoT competitors and setting industry-wide standards. One campaign leader explained that:

> "We didn't get healthcare. And the idea was, if we're going to get healthcare and all of these things for SPoT, we're going to have to organize the competition for SPoT…So Starbucks was obviously the biggest player" (Interview 71, union activist).

This regional industry-wide strategy motivated initial organizing at Starbucks in the Buffalo area. Campaign organizers did not expect the unionization effort to spread nationally as rapidly as it did. The same campaign organizer expressed surprise when discussing how the campaign turned national so quickly:

> And I didn't think anybody would even want to organize in other parts of the country until we had a contract in Buffalo and…won the right to organize because there wasn't this kind of geographic project elsewhere, especially at that time. So I was like, 'we either can do it here or we can't do it.' That wasn't true" (Interview 71, union activist).

Rather than remaining confined to the Buffalo area, the Starbucks campaign quickly spread to locations across the US. Workers decided to organize for a range of reasons, including low pay, understaffing, racist confrontations with customers and managers, hours cuts, and health and safety concerns (Interview 62; 80; 82; 85; 88; 89; 101; 102, union activist). The pandemic also "radicalized" workers as many union activists discussed how the poor treatment they received from Starbucks as the pandemic stretched beyond the initial couple of months influenced their decision to organize (Interview 85, union activist). Starbucks workers also tend to be younger and more progressive, with many activists identifying themselves as leftists due to their ideology and/or prior activism (Interview 71; 87; 97; 98; 101; 103; 105; 106; 107; 108; union activist). This prior activism led some workers to support the unionization effort immediately, even without much knowledge about the campaign (Interview 87; 97, union activist).

Despite the numerous issues that unionized Starbucks workers confront at work and eventually organized around, the rapid expansion of the campaign suggests a considerable amount of diffusion from initial organizing success in Buffalo. Numerous respondents cited the Buffalo unionization efforts as a major instigator of campaigns in their store and region (Interview 80; 81; 83; 85; 86; 89; 98; 99; 100; 106, union activist). One activist explained how

the Buffalo campaign directly impacted the decision to organize at their store, echoing similar stories from workers across the country:

> "The big push to start, putting out paperwork and everything happened in January of 2022, right after New Year's. That was when my coworker started planting the seeds like, "Hey, I keep seeing all this stuff that's happening in Buffalo…What would you think about maybe starting something like that here?" (Interview 89, union activist).

Because the union organized through a store-by-store approach, which was initially and unsuccessfully challenged multiple times by Starbucks, workers organized relatively quickly in many locations. Legal challenges by Starbucks to the NLRB certainly delayed many elections, but the relatively small size of many stores and progressive ideology of many baristas allowed campaign organizers to achieve majority support in many stores. As of March 2023, the average bargaining unit size of a store was 26 workers (Logan, 2023). One worker commented on the rapid progression from an initial meeting to achieving storewide support and petitioning for a union election:

> "I get back and within 24 hours, one of those partners that went had already made a spreadsheet. And at that point, our OC [organizing committee] was the three of us. She had already gone in and assigned out of the three of us, this is the person who should approach this [other] person to confirm [their support]. And our store is pretty small…so it was just really fast…Again, my two coworkers were really hyping up how on board our store was. The lore goes that one of the Workers United organizers was like, 'Oh, you could do it in a week then,' and they were like, 'Yeah, bet. We'll get this done'" (Interview 98, union activist).

Despite initial organizing success, persistent employer opposition largely explains why new organizing victories have largely stalled and the union has, as of August 2023, failed to negotiate a first contract. Starbucks management has aggressively opposed the union campaign through both legal and illegal means. Testifying before the United States' Congress, former CEO Howard Schultz denied any illegal union busting by Starbucks management, but defended the company's right to legally oppose unionization and state its preference for workers to remain

nonunion (Selyukh and Hsu, 2023). Investigators have found that Starbucks management violated labor law numerous times in response to the growing union campaign. As of July 2023, the NLRB had issued almost 100 complaints against Starbucks for engaging in ULPs, including terminating union activists and excluding workers in unionized stores from company-wide pay and benefit improvements (lafolla and Purifoy, 2023). While Starbucks workers have achieved unionization in nearly 325 stores and won ~84% of elections held as of early-July 2023, organizing victories began to stagnate in the summer of 2022 and the union has failed to negotiate a first contract at any store. Figures III and IV (Naidu, 2023) demonstrate how Starbucks workers organized approximately 200 stores involving over 5,000 workers between December 2021 and May 1st, 2022, but only organized around 100 stores involving approximately 2,500 workers between May 1st, 2022 and May 1st, 2023.

Figure III: Starbucks union election wins, 09/21-05/23 (copied from Naidu, 2023)

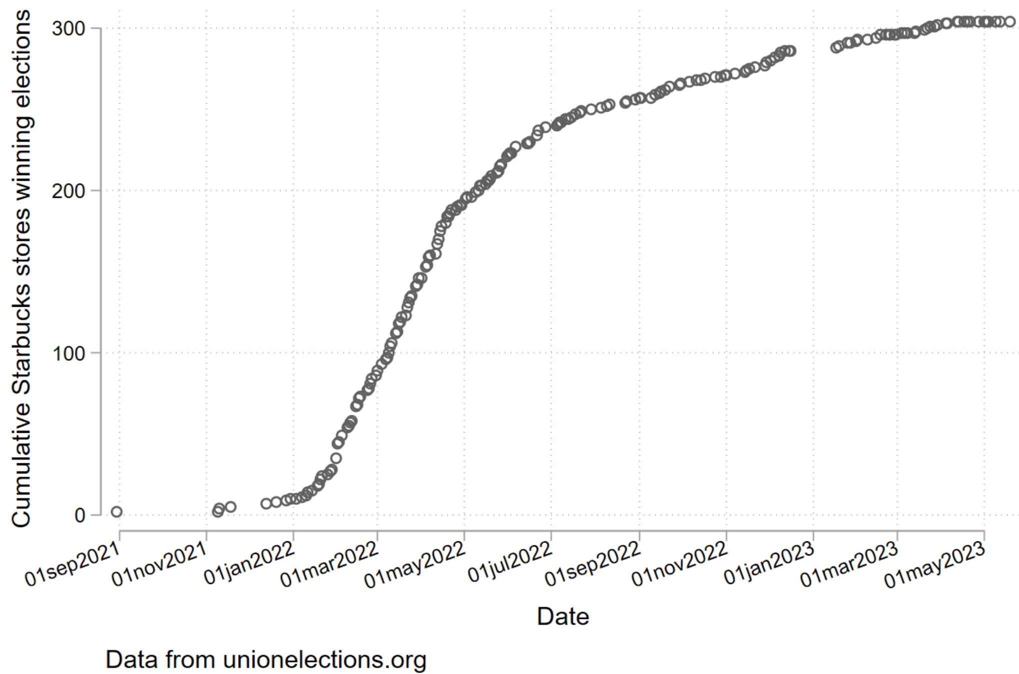
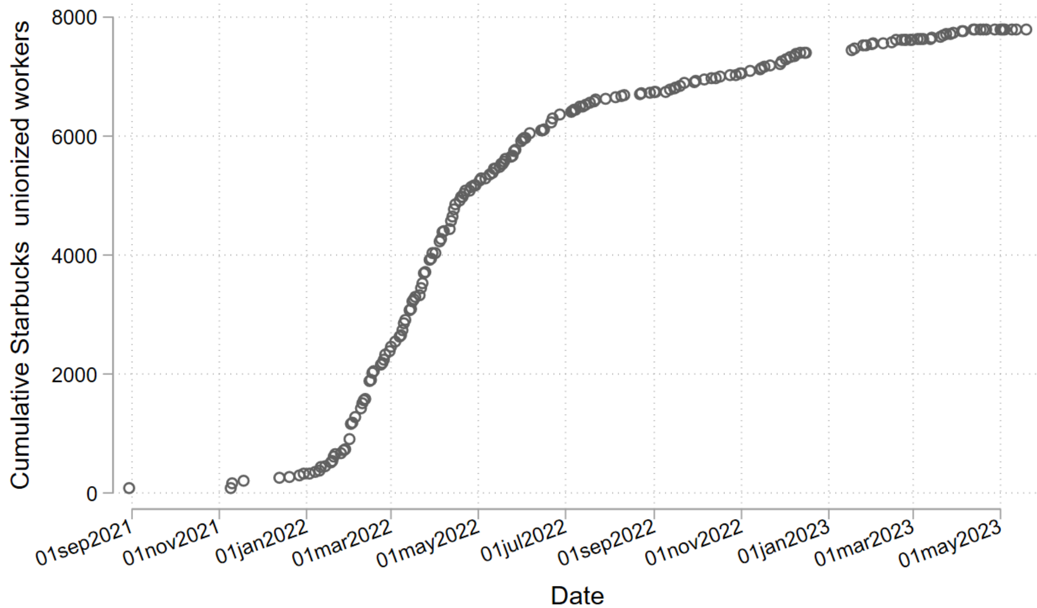


Figure IV: Starbucks number of unionized workers (copied from Naidu, 2023)



Strike organization and support

Starbucks workers have responded to poor working conditions and employer retaliation by organizing strikes. As of June 2023, Starbucks workers had organized over 140 strikes in response to unsafe working conditions and unfair labor practices. Most strikes are reactive, occurring in response to poor working conditions or employer retaliation, like the termination of union activists (Interview 80; 81; 88, union activist). These strikes have also occurred at different phases of the campaign. For example, of the 141 strikes organized by Starbucks workers between January 1, 2022 and July 1, 2023, 19 were organized by workers before achieving union recognition at their stores.

Most strikes in 2022 occurred at the store or regional level, but national campaign leaders have increasingly coordinated strike activity in response to inadequate first contract negotiations. The first nationally coordinated strike occurred in November 2022 during 'red cup day' –

Starbucks' largest sales day of the year – and involved approximately 2,000 workers from over 100 stores protesting unfair labor practices (Isidore, 2022). Starbucks workers participated in an additional three nationally coordinated strikes between December 2022 and June 2023. These included a week-long strike in late-June 2023 by nearly 150 stores involving approximately 3,000 workers in response to the firm's refusal to allow in-store Pride Month decorations and inadequate first contract negotiations (Moreno and Scheiber, 2023).

Strike organization

Due to a variety of factors, including the lack of a prior bargaining relationship and the autonomy that activists obtain from formal union leadership, a considerable amount of variation exists with regards to strike preparation and organization by Starbucks workers. Most strikes on the campaign have occurred at the store-level and occur for a variety of reasons beyond failed contract negotiations. Because of this, preparation for store-level strikes sometimes occurred impromptu. While all strikes have included a formal strike notice to protect workers from retaliation and ensure that they will return to work, other procedures, such as strike votes, did not always follow a standard script. For example, one worker explained the process of gauging support for a strike at their store:

> "I'm learning, I'm a newbie, so I might not have done it this way if I were to do it again. Because I think that I might want to instill some anonymity in the future. But I asked directly, I was like, "Hey, you're scheduled this day. I'm thinking of doing a strike. We have a store meeting planned the next day, and I think it would be dope if we showed our solidarity and showed what this is about. And that we understand that whatever they're going to try and tell us at this meeting, it's bullshit…
>
> And so, I compiled my list of yeses, or yes, if other people do it. And then I didn't get any nos. I got some people... because some people I wasn't able to see in person, so I had to text them and they just wouldn't respond. But of those who did respond, it was majority, yes. And so, then I communicated with everybody being like, "Hey, you all, majority of us have voted that on this day there's going to be a strike." As far as letting the folks know that was essentially it" (Interview 83, union activist).

Another activist echoed this relatively informal and impromptu approach to organizing strikes:

> "I don't really use it [strike vote] for my store. *My store is very not by the book. We don't really do anything. Everything is kind of thrown together, which is probably sad to say, but it works.* And so I usually, it'll be a worker that comes to me about an issue, a problem, and then I'll [tell them], well you know, can go on strike for that if you want to. You can see how your other partners feel about it and if it's strongly felt it'll happen and if not, it'll just like fizzle out a little" (Interview 100, union activist; italics added by author).

This more spontaneous organization of strikes can have negative consequences. For example, one activist described a situation in which many workers did not know that they would appear on a strike letter, which led to divisiveness within the store and reduced the willingness of many workers to participate in subsequent protests and strikes (Interview 86, union activist).

Other activists followed more formal procedures for organizing strikes, and the campaign has certainly advanced a more coordinated approach to strike preparation since mid-2022. Workers from many stores took formal strike votes online through Survey Monkey (Interview 88, union activist). Other stores elected strike captains to help generate community support, coordinated with union staff to ensure that workers receive their strike pay, and handled interactions with disruptive customers or police on the picket line (Interview 84; 98, union activist). Workers from some stores gradually escalated towards a strike, similar to how unions approach strike preparation in more conventional bargaining relationships. For example, workers from one store initiated a week of action leading into a strike by organizing several non-strike actions, like wearing union shirts and organizing a march on the boss, to strategically gauge support for a work stoppage and to escalate pressure on local management (Interview 88, union activist).

Strikes coordinated at the regional or national level required more advanced planning. For example, one union activist discussed how coordinating regional strikes turned into a

“science”:

> "Yeah, the process has been partners congregating regionally over a Zoom call. Some of us would call… and say, ‘Hey, this is what's coming up. We're thinking about going on strike on this day for these reasons. What are our concerns? How do we all feel about this?’ Then usually, we have the stores go back and have their own meeting where they run through it a little more in detail and call a vote.
>
> Then I think we usually do a super majority, but my store's been unanimous both times…if the super majority or more of the store votes in favor of striking, then it's all good. We get the letter pumped out that we have to send for notice and fill out the strike fund portal that we have for the national and regional strike funds…Then we coordinate the strike lines and get all of the signs made and the goodies and put the call out to our supporters and all that. *It's down to a science*” (Interview 103, union activist; italics added by author).

By November 2022, campaign leaders increasingly organized nationwide strikes involving numerous stores to cause greater economic disruption and more external pressure on Starbucks. These nationwide strikes required months of advanced coordination. Starbucks workers have formed a national contract action team, comprised of union activists from across the country, which plans actions, including strikes, to help secure a first contract. Workers from many unionized stores appoint representatives on national union committees like the contract action team, and those activists bring back information from the committees to other members (Interview 99, union activist). Individual stores often have discretion on participation in national strikes. For example, many stores in the Boston area participated in the first nationwide strike on red cup day in November 2022, but most decided against striking during the second nationwide strike in December 2022 because of concerns regarding membership burnout (Interview 104; 108, union activist).

Strike functioning

A considerable amount of variation also exists with regards to the functioning of picket lines and the success of striking workers in shutting down stores. While exceptions exist, striking

workers aim to picket outside of a store for around three or four hours during busier parts of the day, rather than picketing during all business hours or 24-7 (Interview 84, union activist). Other factors, like weather, also impact picket line planning, as extreme temperatures can reduce participation or lead activists to reschedule picket hours (Participant observation; Interview 108, union activist). Strikes often force individual stores to close for the day, but management is sometimes able to staff stores using a combination of workers not originally scheduled to work, employees from other stores, or employing store managers on floor responsibilities. Respondents often commented that managers who tried to staff the floor with themselves or other managers generally failed to keep a store open during a strike, but sometimes management finds temporary replacements. For example, one activist commented how half of their strikes had successfully shut down the store for the entire duration of the work stoppage, but in the other instances management found replacement workers from other locations to keep the store open (Interview 99, union activist).

In contrast with more conventional strikes, Starbucks workers do not always demonstrate a large degree of animosity towards workers who cross the picket line (Interview 62; 63; 71; 102, union activist). Some activists hesitate to antagonize workers who cross because they could still participate in future union activity (Interview 102, union activist), and some workers who have crossed lines eventually helped lead future strikes (Interview 71, union activist). One activist illustrated this relatively passive attitude towards temporary strike replacements:

> “So, all the partners who cross the picket line cross through the back door. So, I mean, I didn't care. They had kids working in there who had just been hired two months ago and who wanted to keep their job and there are people who went into work who I'm still fine with and will be fine with when I go back… I did not hear any kind of comments being made by our Starbucks partners about, "Oh, why would they go in?" I think there was a consensus that we knew they were able to staff the store because of all of these brand-new employees…” (Interview 63, union activist).

Striking workers on the picket line also interact frequently with customers who plan to buy coffee. Some customers are very supportive of strikes and even join workers on the picket lines, but others have expressed frustration if stores are closed or cross picket lines to enter stores and purchase coffee when stores remain open. Striking workers often try to convince customers not to cross the line to purchase coffee, but many customers do so, even in regions like Buffalo with relatively high union density and more public support for unions (Participant observation).

Strike funds

Because Starbucks workers earn low wages, a generous strike fund has proven essential to fostering strike activity. Numerous activists commented that the cost of losing pay serves as the main obstacle to convincing workers to strike (Interview 63; 73; 77; 81; 85; 97; 105; 106, union activist). One activist commented that "it's generally the number one question people ask at our store or other stores when we talk about striking is how and if you get paid" (Interview 106, union activist). Another described the mentality of workers in their store regarding strikes: "as long as we're getting paid, we'll be on strike" (Interview 73, union activist). Workers United leadership quickly realized the importance of robust strike pay, using union resources to establish a national fund of one million dollars in July 2022 to continue compensating striking workers at 70% their normal pay rate, despite Starbucks workers not paying dues until negotiating a first contract (Workers United, 2022; Interview 105, union activist). Workers feel empowered by this financial security and the national strike fund helps explain the relatively high level of strike activity by Starbucks workers since 2022. One activist explained:

> "The majority of my coworkers are paycheck to paycheck, so the idea of missing a single shift is very frustrating for them. And so, to be able to tell them like, 'No, you will be fine and you'll probably be in a better spot in the future if you do this.' It really made the job of convincing them a lot easier" (Interview 81, union activist).

Because the national strike fund compensates workers at 70% of their normal pay rate,

union activists have created local and regional community-based funds to reimburse workers the extra 30% of their missed shifts. There is considerable regional variation in these local funds, which may help explain why Starbucks workers in certain parts of the country went on strike in higher rates earlier in the campaign. For example, workers in the Pacific Northwest (Washington and Oregon) started a GoFundMe community fund after the first strike in the region occurred in late-March 2022. The fund raised $15,000 within a few days and surpassed $75,000 as of July 2023 (Interview 80, union activist; GoFundMe, 2022). This fund ensured that all Starbucks workers on strike in the region, regardless of whether they had unionized or not, received strike pay. Other regions have taken a more localized, store-by-store approach to compensating workers the additional 30% not provided by the national fund. For example, Starbucks workers in the Boston area have worked with the Greater Boston Labor Council to help crowdsource funds for local strikes, sometimes even raising funds through QR codes while on the picket line (Interview 105, union activist).

Some challenges have existed with regards to strike pay, specifically if workers cannot raise the additional 30% to cover lost wages and the impact that strike pay may have on picket line participation. One activist discussed how late strike pay and the lack of local funds to make up the remaining 30% of lost wages helped lead some striking workers to pick up shifts at other stores to supplement lost income (Interview 67, union activist). According to interviews, union representatives quickly resolved the few early strike pay distribution issues in subsequent strikes. Another challenge related to strike pay involves workers who join a strike by not showing up to work, but do not participate in picket lines (Interview 100, union activist). Striking workers have generally received strike pay regardless of participation in picket lines. Occasionally, striking workers have not formed picket lines at all during strikes (Interview 67, union activist). Union

activists have discussed linking strike pay with picket line participation requirements, as low turnout on the line can reduce morale for workers physically present (Interview 102, union activist).

Types of strikes

A defining characteristic of labor militancy at Starbucks is that strikes have occurred at different phases of the organizing and/or bargaining campaigns and take on a range of forms. Some workers have organized pre-recognition strikes, or strikes before formally unionizing. Rather than striking until achieving union recognition, workers organize strikes of a shorter duration and in response to perceived employer misconduct or frustration with the slow process of board recognition (Interview 80; 83; 85, union activist). For example, workers at one store organized a pre-recognition strike to protest a union leader receiving disciplinary action during an active union campaign. A union activist discussed how quickly the store decided to undertake a strike, rather than organize non-strike actions like tabling or rallies more common in traditional strike preparation:

> "I think that was the first thing we had ever done. I don't even think we had tabled at that point… We just dove right in and said, 'zero to a hundred, we want to go on strike'" (Interview 85, union activist).

Pre-recognition strikes sometimes predate formal organizing and help motivate workers to unionize. For example, workers from one store initiated a strike in response to severe understaffing. Between day one and two of the strike, they contacted a Workers United representative to learn about the process of filing for a union election. The workers then collected signed petition cards on the picket line, gaining over 70% support of the potential bargaining unit over the following two days (Interview 82; union activist). This case emphasizes both the various contexts under which strikes occur on the Starbucks campaign and the quickness with which

union activists can organize relatively small workplaces.

Starbucks strikes are also distinguished by the form that they take, rather than the phase in which they occur during the organizing or bargaining campaign. Findings suggests that three types of strikes have emerged on the Starbucks campaign: fixed duration, indefinite, and walkouts. Fixed duration strikes – a planned strike with a pre-determined time length in which workers unconditionally return to work at the conclusion of the strike – are the most common and involve workers stating that they will return to work unconditionally at the conclusion of the strike. Indefinite strikes – a planned strike in which workers intend to stay out until reaching a settlement – are the least common, though have increased somewhat in frequency since the beginning of the Starbucks campaign. Walkouts – a spontaneous work stoppage by a group of workers while at work, generally in response to an immediate workplace issue – are distinguished from fixed duration and indefinite strikes by their spontaneity. Walkouts do not involve any pre-planning or procedures, like strike votes, that occur in fixed duration or indefinite strikes, and are generally organized in response to an immediate workplace safety concern and/or an employer unfair labor practice.

Fixed duration strikes

Most strikes organized by Starbucks workers between January 2022 and July 2023, including all four nationally coordinated strikes, have been of a fixed duration of seven days or less. Fixed duration strikes provide several important advantages in comparison to indefinite work stoppages. First, they protect workers' financial interests. Because Starbucks workers make relatively low pay and many live paycheck to paycheck, the primary hesitation to striking for many workers is lost wages (Interview 82; 84; 86, union activist). Fixed duration strikes do not require workers to sacrifice pay or hours for an extended time period. Second, and relatedly,

these types of strikes help protect organizational resources. Workers United maintains a generous strike fund for Starbucks workers, which is imperative to engaging in both store-level and nationwide strikes. Strike pay is normally guaranteed to striking workers for no more than two weeks because indefinite or long duration strikes threaten to drain these resources (Interview 80; 81; 82, union activist).

Third, fixed duration strikes allow union activists to organize strikes strategically. These kinds of strikes can build solidarity within a bargaining unit without leading to burnout. One activist explained the advantage of a one-day strike: “so it sends the message that we’re aware of what’s going on, but it doesn’t exhaust people” (Interview 83; union activist). These strikes also allow the union to organize strikes on days that maximize disruption to the company. For example, the union has coordinated many nationwide strikes during particularly busy days for Starbucks, like red cup day, to inflict as much financial cost on the company as possible and generate heightened public visibility and press coverage (Interview 101; 108; union activist). Workers also organize fixed duration strikes when as many strike-ready partners are scheduled to work as possible, making it more likely the store will shut down for the day. One union activist explained that the daily shift schedule was the primary factor in deciding what day to organize a particular strike:

> “And we picked a date based on who was scheduled that…and on the [date], we were like, ‘Oh yeah, definitely some badass people are working this day.’ And more than likely if we ask them, "Hey, do you want to go on strike?" They're going to be like, "Fuck yeah." And so we went to each of those people and just asked them ‘Do you want to go on strike this day for these reasons?’ And everybody said yeah” (Interview 85, union activist).

Other union activists echoed the importance of organizing strikes depending on who was scheduled to work, explaining the key role of the shift supervisor during strikes. Shift supervisors help run the day-to-day operations of the floor, coordinating baristas on what station to work at

and dealing with issues like difficult customers when a store or assistant store manager are not present. Shift supervisors are generally included in the bargaining unit because they lack basic responsibilities of most supervisors, like hiring and firing. Because they often possess keys to open the store, they are particularly important to get on board during strikes (Interview 102; 106, union activist). One activist explained:

> "Let's say your opening shift supervisor wants to cross the picket line, that's going to be a much worse day to strike than a shift where your opening shift supervisor is pro-union and we'll go on strike with you" (Interview 71, union activist).

Indefinite strikes

Starbucks workers have also organized indefinite strikes that feature workers striking until achieving their demands or securing a settlement. These strikes are much more infrequent than fixed duration strikes or walkouts because of concerns regarding missed wages and strike pay. One union leader explained that "an indefinite strike…would just serve to deplete our fund before we really have a reason to indefinitely strike" (Interview 81, union activist). Another discussed the relationship between already thin work hours and striking indefinitely:

> "And that means that [we're] going to have to be really tactical with what [we] can and cannot do with strikes, just because that's hours taken away. And so it's hard for us to necessarily do indefinite strikes, just because we get so few hours as it is that we rely really hard on those hours" (Interview 84, union activist).

But some workers justified organizing indefinite strikes due to the seriousness of issues they confronted at work and an acknowledgement that Starbucks would not respond to these concerns without more forceful action. One worker involved in an indefinite strike explained:

> "Initially, we had only planned to be on strike for one or two days. But we don't feel like it's right to end the strike until our demands are met. And because our demands are very simple, and they are for the health and safety of everyone" (Interview 97, union activist).

Starbucks workers who organized indefinite work stoppages have noted that these strikes entail certain challenges. In one case, workers initiated an indefinite strike in response to a

reportedly abusive store manager who disrespected and misgendered workers, removed Pride decorations, and simultaneously cut hours while requiring workers to provide additional scheduling availability. Striking workers quickly realized that to sustain a successful strike they would need to maintain a 24-7 picket line to prevent supplies from reaching the store, as the local Teamsters union who made deliveries for Starbucks has a clause in its contract preventing drivers from crossing an active picket line.

The strike's continued organization became dependent on two main factors: active participation from community members on the picket line and a strike fund that continued to compensate workers for 100% of missed pay. Because Starbucks stores only employ so many workers, staffing the 24-7 picket line required deep levels of community participation. Striking workers built a group chat consisting of hundreds of union allies and community supporters who signed up for picketing at two-hour increments. In terms of financial support, striking workers received 70% of their regularly scheduled pay guaranteed by Workers United strike fund and the remaining 30% crowdsourced through local community donations.

Striking workers successfully prevented their store from opening for the duration of the work stoppage and eventually, months after the strike ended, won their main demands, but this single-location indefinite strike did not emerge as a model to reproduce across the country. Local management did not hold any formal negotiations with strikers throughout the dispute, though they did hire security guards that respondents perceived as a threat, especially towards the end of the strike. Workers ended their strike without immediately achieving their demands, as despite alleged promises of the store manager's dismissal, the manager continued working at the store for a few additional months before being ultimately being replaced. The strike demonstrated a high level of solidarity and community support, but also illustrated the challenges, like strike

funding and maintaining internal solidarity, of single-location indefinite strikes.

Walkouts

In contrast to fixed duration and indefinite strikes, walkouts occur spontaneously to protest an immediate workplace issue. Union activists consistently distinguished between strikes and walkouts (Interview 62; 63; 70; 75; 77; 83; 88; 97; 99; 104). When describing the buildup to a walkout, one activist explained "but the walkout wasn't decided on or anything until that morning. No one walked into the store that morning going, 'Oh, we're going to walk out today'" (Interview 97; union activist). Another activist distinguished between strikes and walkouts based on whether formal procedures occurred in the lead up to the action:

> "Everybody who is on the floor agreed to walk out...it was a walkout and not a strike because we didn't vote the whole store. It was just 'this is unsafe, we're not doing it'" (Interview 71, union activist).

Union staff also distinguished between strikes and walkouts, with one activist explaining that "the way that I've been taught through my Workers United reps and other folks in the union is a walkout is when everyone in the middle of working collectively says that they are going to stop working and leave" (Interview 104; union activist).

Walkouts primarily occur in response to immediate unsafe working conditions or frustrations stemming from perceived illegal conduct by management, like the termination of a union activist. For example, workers organized one walkout to protest unsafe working conditions in response to health and safety threats posed by covid-19. Workers discussed ideas on how to deal with the increased spread of covid-19, ranging from closing the store for five days to allow sick partners time to recover to enforcing a mask mandate for customers who entered the store. They claimed that management refused to implement any proposals. Workers did not make the decision to strike at that time, but once a group of employees reported for their normal shift in

the following days and encountered a sick co-worker, they decided to organize a walkout. Other walkouts have occurred in response to employer unfair labor practices. For example, a video on TikTok viewed over 20 million times showed a group of workers walking out and shutting down a store immediately after the termination of a union activist who had worked at Starbucks for over 13 years.

While walkouts lack the advanced planning and procedures, like a strike vote, typical of fixed duration and indefinite strikes, they require immediate coordination. This coordination generally involves communicating with co-workers present in the store and, often, those scheduled to work later in the day. This communication increases in difficulty if a manager is present in the store. One union activist described how they communicated with and assessed the support of other partners, while in the presence of a manager, for an impending walkout:

> "When our other coworker went home, our support manager came in. Originally, she was scheduled later in the day. We were going to walk out before she came in so that she wasn't there. But because she came in early, we had to kind of finagle this around her. And I was put on a support position, which means that I was given more flexibility. I was walking around and able to talk to people, and [other worker] was put on a planted position on bar. So, she couldn't move. She couldn't talk to people; she couldn't contact anyone. So, throughout the morning it was me talking to every single person when they came in, are you okay with this? This is the plan. This is the time, and this is the signal.
>
> So, then it became, well, I need to contact the people that are coming in later and make sure that they don't come in for their shift and then make sure that they're okay with it. I was constantly running to the back, sending a text, coming back out, talking to [same other worker]. This person said this. Okay, tell this person that, run to the back, text them again…
>
> But everyone, by the time, by 8:00am, I would say everyone was on board and we all knew what we were doing. And there was one person that didn't want to be part of it, that came in later in the day and they were the one person, we changed our plans. So, we were going to walk out, I think at 8:45am, and instead we changed it to 8:30 or 8:27am. I think we walked out so that they wouldn't have to be part of the group when we walked out" (Interview 64; union activist).

This story reveals important insights about organizing a walkout. First, job assignments matter, especially when a manager is present on the floor. One of the workers was assigned to work on a

“planted” position at the bar, meaning that she could not easily communicate with co-workers on or offsite. This essential task fell to a worker who was assigned to a “support position” meaning they had more “flexibility” to engage with other co-workers. Second, workers may not want to participate in a walkout. The timing changed due to a partner coming in to work who did not want to participate in the walkout. While workers made the decision to walkout early that morning, it required a considerable amount of immediate planning to orchestrate.

In addition to communication challenges, walkouts face additional obstacles pertaining to properly closing the store or, in the presence of a manager, engaging with management. Respondents commented that walkouts can be “tricky” (Interview 77; 78, union activist), as workers need to close the store properly or else face discipline or potential retaliation from management. One activist described some of the steps they needed to take to close the store during a walkout, contrasting it with more planned out strikes:

> “Before we actually left…[the shift] put away the money, we cut off the lines, notified the people in the lobby what was going down, asked them all to move out to the patio. We locked the doors and we left. Most strikes are not that crazy. Most strikes are not that sudden. We have planned out intensely what we are doing, not just when we're doing, but what we're doing” (Interview 88, union activist).

Walkouts also often involve direct confrontation with managers. One group of activists described a walkout in which they collectively passed their store manager on the way out the door. The manager had asked them to clock out, but they just kept moving past her (Interview 62; 63; 64, union activist). Other activists see value in this type of confrontation with management because it can build solidarity and class consciousness. One union leader described this potentially transformative impact of a walkout:

> “And then you just see this wave of partners coming from the back, chanting with our signs. It was a really powerful moment as partners. We really were able to make our voices heard and we actually were able to shut down the store. We shut down all-day

> Saturday and all-day Sunday. They let us be, they didn't really bother us at all, but it was a really cool moment to show that the power that we had as partners. *And I think a lot of partners were worried about it, really did see this is the ability to really change the course of the store and put it back in our hands. It's no longer in management's hands or Starbucks' corporate hands. It's now in our hands.* And we had the ability to change course…It really brought us together" (Interview 99, union activist; italics added by author).

Strike power and outcomes

While Starbucks workers have organized a high volume of various types of strikes, these strikes have not, as of July 2023, meaningfully moved Starbucks management in first contract negotiations or to resolve unfair labor practices. Despite unionizing over 325 stores as of late-June 2023, Workers United only represent Starbucks workers at approximately 3.5% of the firm's nearly 9,000 company-owned stores in the United States. This means that Starbucks workers have relatively low structural power vis-à-vis the company, as even a nationwide strike involving hundreds of stores may not meaningfully impact Starbucks financially (Interview 101, union activist). Union activists acknowledge that strikes may not force Starbucks management to immediately concede to workers' demands. One activist explained:

> "A lot of our strikes have been very reactive**.** Starbucks does something, and we have a, okay, emergency meeting. We are not going to let them get away with it, or at least get away with it quietly. *We can't really stop it. We're not at the strength of a campaign to say we're going to keep them from getting away with it permanently, at all, but we can't do it quietly*" (Interview 80, union activist; italics added by author).

Starbucks management draws on considerable financial power, its large size, and both legal and illegal tactics in response to the union campaign and strikes. Starbucks achieved gross profits of approximately $23 billion from March 2022-March 2023 (Macrotrends, 2023). These profits, and the corporation's sheer size in both the United States (~9,000 corporate owned stores) and globally (~35,000 total stores) limits the financial impact of strikes, even those organized with the participation of workers from hundreds of stores. Starbucks management has

also relied heavily on lawyers from Littler Mendelson, a law firm that specializes in management-side labor law, in its response to the union campaign. Bloomberg Law found that at least 50 partners and over 100 total lawyers from Littler Mendelson have represented Starbucks in legal cases regarding the union campaign since its inception (Wise and lafolla, 2023). Workers United has alleged that Starbucks violated federal labor law on more than 550 cases as of late-June 2023. NLRB officials have issued over 100 complaints and administrative law judges have found that Starbucks committed unfair labor practices in at least 17 occasions (Wise and lafolla, 2023). Many of these rulings concern illegal retaliation, such as terminating a union activist or closing unionized stores, though others involve ULPs committed during first contract negotiations. Starbucks' economic standing makes strikes by Starbucks workers less financially impactful, and the company's willingness to engage in illegal conduct suggests that it will continue taking a hardline approach to contract negotiations.

As of July 2023, unionized workers continue to face difficulties compelling Starbucks management to negotiate a first contract. Most bargaining sessions in 2022 and early-2023 between the union and management ended after a few minutes because of disagreements about hybrid bargaining. Union members and staff insisted on making bargaining sessions zoom-accessible to allow workers out sick or from other parts of the country to sit on local bargaining sessions, whereas management representatives demanded only to negotiate in-person without zoom accessibility. One of the union's primary motivations for hybrid bargaining is to ensure that no bad precedent is set in single stores, as Starbucks workers hope to reach a single, national contract with addendums for certain stores or regions (Interview 98; 103, union activist). While each side has filed board charges against the other for refusal to bargain, the NLRB has found that Starbucks management has bargained in bad faith. For example, a late-April 2023 complaint

by NLRB officials found illegal conduct committed by Starbucks management for refusing to bargain at 144 unionized stores, delaying contract negotiations in the process (Sainato, 2023b).

The one area where meaningful negotiations have occurred concerns effects bargaining. Management has engaged in effects bargaining, mostly over the impacts to unionized workers during store closures, in multiple locations (Interview 80; 102; 104, union activist). In one case regarding a store closure, management agreed to provide most workers with their first choice of store transfer (Interview 102, union activist). However, the union has alleged that Starbucks has engaged in unfair labor practices by disproportionately closing unionized stores. Administrative law judges have ordered Starbucks to reopen stores illegally closed in retaliation, though the company plans to appeal those rulings (Dougherty, 2023).

Conceptualizing strike effectiveness

While store, regional, and national-level strikes have so far failed to compel Starbucks management into negotiating a first contract, union activists conceptualize multiple components of strike effectiveness beyond whether work stoppages achieve immediate material gains or a contract. A clear distinction between success and failure does not necessarily exist when analyzing strikes by Starbucks workers. One union activist explained how they came to this understanding over time after participating in multiple strikes:

> "I think in terms of what I would normally deem success in the context of a strike, I think my initial reaction would be to say, 'Oh, success is when you set demands and those demands are met through a strike.' Now I think less black and white than that. Now I think it's more about what you're able to build from a strike, whether it's community support, internal support, and strength. I think that that is what I've learned to define as success. I would love it if we had, like when we did the red cup day stuff, we had 111 stores striking. Did we end up getting what we wanted, which was the ULPs to stop and the benefits to finally get transitioned to us? No. No, we didn't, but we had 111 stores that were striking together. That's freaking huge. I think that I measure success differently now based on [those] criteria and that experience, but it would be nice to get strong enough to where we could shut everything down and get exactly what we want. I think that's what we're building towards" (Interview 103, union activist).

Some respondents distinguished between the economic and public relations impact of strikes (Interview 72; 76, campaign representative). Because Starbucks' financial strength and size makes it relatively impervious to the financial costs incurred during strikes, workers emphasize the negative public relations generated during strikes for the company. Several union activists cited the importance that Starbucks management places on its brand, and they view strikes as a means to convey publicly that the company no longer adheres to the progressive values it supposedly fosters (Interview 81, union activist).

Strikes can also positively impact the union's internal organization and outreach to local community members. Several activists emphasized that strikes are fun and convey this message when speaking with more hesitant co-workers (Interview 88; 104, union activist). One activist explained:

> "It's also about having fun because that's what keeps the workers together. We made sure we were playing music. We would interact with customers in a fun way, invite them to different actions that they could do. Of course, we had the bubbles that we played with. We had bubble guns, chalk art, just anything and everything that we could do to have fun while we were here (Interview 88, union activist)."

Another union leader spoke about how going on strike fosters a sense of confidence even without creating immediate change at the company:

> "Well, I guess that depends on what you consider a success to be. Success in terms of getting word out there and sharing information about what's going on. Yeah, I think that was a success. Success in terms of demonstrating to ourselves that we are capable of doing it and motivating ourselves and feeling more confident in what we can do, I think that was a success as well. In terms of creating change within the company that's undecided, it's unsure" (Interview 83, union activist).

While strikes have served as an important tool to express discontent and build internal organization, some union activists have participated in strikes that reduce morale and/or trust between co-workers. Strikes that are rushed without adequate coordination have sometimes

resulted in these negative outcomes. For example, workers from one store lost trust in union activists when their names appeared on a strike notice without proper consultation, leading to reduced activism at the store (Interview 83; 86, union activist). Another union activist discussed how rushed planning for a strike helped lead to low levels of community support and allowed management to staff the store with other workers:

> "This last strike…they tried to pull off really quick, I want to say even within 24 hours. And so there just wasn't a lot of time to coordinate the picket and the community support and even the partners themselves it sounds like. So Starbucks was pretty quickly able to just get other people in the store and open it up. I think that was a little disheartening for the organizing committee after the successful strikes. And so I think they're kind of in a period of just resting and rebuilding" (Interview 98, union activist).

Starbucks management has also retaliated against workers on strike, though not through the conventional tactics used by US employers in response to work stoppages. As of June 2023, Starbucks management had not attempted to permanently replace workers on strike. The fixed duration nature of many strikes partially explains why Starbucks has not attempted to permanently replace striking workers, but one respondent also cited the administrative difficulty that management would likely encounter:

> "I don't know what it even looks like to permanently replace a Starbucks worker….People are constantly leaving the store and being hired into the store or transferring between stores; or picking up a shift at another store, having kind of a home store, but then working at a few other places throughout a week or a month…Honestly, I think it would be such an administrative headache to pay attention to that issue that it's not even worth Starbucks' time to attempt to do that. I think they're much more likely to just permanently close a unionized store, which they have been doing" (Interview 72; campaign representative).

This respondent mentions a different way that Starbucks management has responded to strikes: closing stores. The most obvious case occurred in Ithaca, New York, where workers walked out in response to faulty equipment and unsafe conditions in April 2022. Starbucks management then decided to close the store permanently in June 2022. In July 2023, an NLRB judge ruled that

Starbucks management illegally closed the store in violation of the National Labor Relations Act, ordering that the company reopen the store and reinstate all employees with backpay (Eidelson, 2023). Starbucks workers have also faced discipline and retaliation for improperly closing a store down during a walkout, which lacks the advanced planning of strikes that do not involve workers spontaneously leaving work in the middle of a shift (Peck, 2023).

Social identity and intersectional organizing

Many Starbucks union activists identify as LGBTQIA+, and these identities deeply shape workers' activism on the union campaign. The fact that so many workers are young and identify as LGBTQIA+ results largely from Starbucks' hiring practices and the safe culture that the company, at least superficially, creates for queer and gender non-conforming partners. Some trans workers decided to work at Starbucks for its unique benefits, like gender affirming healthcare, excluded from most benefits packages at other similar employers (Interview 107, union activist). Others discussed how Starbucks cultivates a safe space for queer workers. One activist stated that "I think one of the main things is that Starbucks has been a safe place for queer people, especially in historically conservative or oppressive areas" (Interview 103, union activist). Some union activists work at stores where almost everyone identifies as LGBTQIA+. One activist explained:

> "And I know at my store… it's rare to find someone that's just heterosexual. We are all gay, but a lot of people go by they/them and are either gender-nonconforming, trans, pan, bi, anything and everything" (Interview 108, union activist).

These hiring demographics helped catalyze the unionization campaign because so many LGBTQIA+ workers have experienced injustice inside and outside of work and tend to be more progressive. One union activist emphasized how the safe culture created among LGBTQIA+ partners at Starbucks spilled over into the organizing campaign:

> "I think it's kind of just a safe haven for us because we all know that we'll be respected by one another and we can be ourselves around each other. We don't have to hide who we are. I think that's just the kind of culture that Starbucks has built in the stores, that this is a welcoming place for everyone, no matter who you identify with or how you identify. And I think that's just transformed into our movement as well" (Interview 99, union activist).

Starbucks' hiring practices helped foster the labor campaign by hiring so many radical queer workers. A union activist explained:

> "I think that ironically, Starbucks has virtue-signaled to the extent of getting radical queer organizers in their stores and now it's like the gay chickens coming home to roost in a sense, because now you've united a bunch of pissed off, passionate queers who want to take action in terms of labor organizing" (Interview 103, union activist).

Others discussed how a union organizing drive or strike at a store emerged in response to Starbucks management violating this safe culture fostered at many stores. For example, the longest indefinite strike organized by Starbucks workers as of July 2023 started in response to a particularly abusive store manager who frequently misgendered partners and removed Pride decorations. Company-wide policies in which Starbucks management failed to live up to their own purported values, such as by refusing to extend abortion care benefits to workers in unionized stores in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in 2022 to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, also agitated many activists (Interview 100, union activist).

The LGBTQIA+ identity of many union activists clearly serves as a source of empowerment on the union campaign. Some workers emphasized the intersections of their identities. Some workers discussed how the presence of so many other LGBTQIA+ co-workers fostered solidarity that would *not* have been possible with large amounts of heterosexual co-workers. One union activist discussed:

> "So everyone around me is queer, so I feel very comfortable. I feel very at home at [my store]. We can talk about pretty much anything…Whereas if it were straight colleagues, I'd be a little bit more, I wouldn't say I would be isolated, but I definitely feel like a

> degree of self-preparation" (Interview 108, union activist).

This quote problematizes an understanding of solidarity rooted solely in class position or shared economic interests. Other respondents further demonstrate how a shared non-class identity can foster solidarity:

> "I'm talking to a lot of Starbucks workers and a lot them are queer. And it's just the very act of being like, 'Oh hey, what are your pronouns?' It's silly, but it shows them that they're in a space where that sort of thing matters, where that sort of thing is taken seriously, and where that sort of thing can be something that is addressed positively rather than something to get out of the way" (Interview 107, union activist).

LGBTQIA+ union activists frequently made the connection between facing injustice in their everyday life with activism on the union campaign. One worker described in detail how their identity shapes the way others perceive them, which in turn impacts their positionality and activism:

> "I'd say, of *having the confidence of walking through the world, knowing that I'm being stared at*. Knowing that I am different and I am going to stand out no matter what I do. I think that helped with me being like, 'Well, fuck it. I'm going to be seen no matter what, anyway. *I might as well do something*.' *Oh God, it's terrifying though*. *But yeah, I think that helps me be confident in myself, and I think it also helped me be more aware of the injustices that happen in our society*. Coming from a group that has historically been kept down, *I think helps me have that predisposition to awareness* that not everything is perfect, not everything is right, not everything is as it should be" (Interview 83, union activist; italics added by author).

This worker stated that it's "terrifying" to be constantly seen by everyone, but how this experience fundamentally shapes their understanding of the world and desire to organize for social justice. Another union activist echoed this point, stating that queer workers are more "equipped" to "fight back" because of these extra-workplace experiences:

> "Being visibly queer, being openly queer in America is like, well, in most of the world, is you have to be ready for some sort of adversarial confrontation whenever you leave your house. So, you aren't quite as afraid to push back, I think. You show up looking like I do and you're going to get people who just don't like you from the outset. So, you learn to

> fight back and you learn to stand up for your own for the things that you deserve" (Interview 107, union activist).

These experiences by many union activists have made queerness a particularly salient identity on the union campaign. The week-long 'strike with pride' involving nearly 150 stores and 3,000 workers across the country in late-June 2023 demonstrates this salience. Union activists and staff coordinated a nationwide strike in response to Starbucks management from multiple regions preventing workers from decorating their stores for Pride month, a common practice in Starbucks locations across the country (Moreno and Scheiber, 2023; Starbucks Workers United, 2023). In addition to outstanding ULPs, this provides another example of Starbucks management allegedly not upholding the progressive values it espouses. As of July 2023, it is unclear whether Starbucks management may move or negotiate more willingly in response to identity-based claims, like alleged LGBTQIA+ discrimination, than they have on unionization efforts.

Racial identity also shapes the way Starbucks workers experience their work and union activism, though, as of July 2023, the campaign has not centered race as a salient identity in the same way as queerness. According to company data from 2022, 49% of retail workers identify as white, 31% as Latinx, 8% of Black, and 6% as Asian (Starbucks Demographics, 2022). Workers of color are particularly vulnerable to racism and discrimination from both customers and management. One union activist of color discussed how a group of customers used racial epithets to make them and another co-worker feel threatened, and store management refused to do anything about it (Interview 101, union activist). Others discussed how anti-union retaliation is often racialized. A union leader explained:

> "Myself and the person that I was in the dispute with, we are both people of color. I think that in another situation where I've previously experienced other partners that identify as white getting into disputes and it not being exaggerated to the extent that my situation

> was. Mine was a regular dispute amongst two people who were not just coworkers but friends, and it was blown out into I am violent, and the other person is violent and therefore we needed to be removed. So, I think that that plays a huge role. And not just the retaliation against me for being a union leader, but also just because there is that stereotype that when people of color, specifically African-American people get mad, we are seen as loud, angry, violent, aggressive" (Interview 78, union activist).

Several respondents of color believe that SBWU could more effectively center marginalized voices in the campaign. A large portion of Starbucks union leaders identify as white, which does not entirely reflect the racial demographics of the workforce. In response to a question about centering the voices of marginalized workers on the campaign, one activist of color commented:

> "I think a lot of people can agree that Starbucks is quite white in our organizing efforts, and there's a lot of white partners that are being highlighted in stories and stores that are talked about. But we do know that there's a demographic, a large demographic, of stores with people of color in it, and we're not reaching them because they're not seeing proper representation" (Interview 101, union activist).

Several union activists of color have responded to these challenges by creating a grassroots committee called POCKET – People of Color Keeping Everyone Together. The goal of POCKET is to "grow leaders who can in turn put themselves out there and be leaders of the movement and, in turn, change the face of our movement because it is very white-faced" (Interview 100, union activist) and to create a "safe space for partners of color that are also organizing" (Interview 101, union activist). A requirement of committee membership is to join at least one other national union committee to ensure that POCKET does not become siloed and that other committees have representation and meaningful participation from activists of color (Interview 100, union activist). Major challenges to empowering union activists of color on the campaign include overcoming tokenism and scaling up POCKET. Multiple activists of color described feelings of tokenism when discussing their involvement on the campaign (Interview 100; 101, union activist). One activist discussed constantly being asked to give speeches and

participate in union events:

> "But I know I'm asked because I am a woman of color. I know, which is a good thing and also kind of, I guess can be a good and a bad thing because it almost seems like I'm the token Black person for the union. They want to show that they're more diversified, so they will lean towards me for half of the really, I guess, big showy things" (Interview 100, union activist).

Union activists created POCKET in part to overcome this very problem and to create more leaders from marginalized identities outside of the LGBTQIA+ community. While the emergence of POCKET has helped center the voices of marginalized workers, some activists discussed the challenges in getting others more regularly involved in the committee:

> "Scaling is one of the biggest problems that we're having, getting more people to be involved and actively involved. Like I said, people are burnt out. They're working multiple jobs, they're in school and then they're in other committees of the campaign, and some aren't even in committees of the campaign. They have other stuff going on, and so they don't have the capacity to be leaders right now" (Interview 101, union activist).

Discussion

The preparation and organization of strikes by Starbucks workers challenges our understanding of labor contestation in a variety of ways. In terms of strike preparation, a considerable amount of variation exists when analyzing strikes associated with the Starbucks campaign. Some store-level and national strikes involve weeks of advanced planning, but many strikes are organized somewhat impromptu. Strike votes, when taken, often occur through online platforms like SurveyMonkey instead of in-person or more formal strike authorization processes. Rather than employing a series of structure tests in preparation for a strike (McAlevey, 2016), some workers organized and participated in strikes before engaging in any other sort of protest or concerted activity. The relatively informal and unsystematic approach to organizing strikes at Starbucks stores differs considerably from conventional work stoppages at the end of failed contract negotiations.

Strikes organized by Starbucks workers demonstrate the importance of generating financial support for striking workers. Similar to more conventional strikes, high levels of participation depended largely on financial support through strike funds (Las Heras and Rodríguez, 2021). While the union placed duration limits on many strikes to prevent the exhaustion of resources, many activists commented that strike funds were essential to the functioning of even short duration strikes, as workers could not afford to lose any wages. Rather than just relying on formal strike funds through their union, workers also set up store-level or regional funds financed through community donations to supplement additional lost wages. This approach to generating strike funds bridges much of what scholars know from conventional industrial relations research emphasizing the importance of expansive funds raised by unions (Katz et al, 2017) with more community-centric approaches to labor revitalization that focus on coalition-building and leveraging external sources of power (Bronfenbrenner et al, 1998; Fantasia and Voss, 2004).

Picket line dynamics, especially those between striking workers and strikebreaking replacements, differed from many conventional strikes. While Starbucks workers have not faced the threat of permanent replacement, many strikers refused to speak negatively about workers who crossed the line. Union activists often continued engaging with replacement workers in efforts to make them more pro-union in the future. This approach to replacement workers differs considerably from the adversarial and sometimes violent interactions between strikers and 'scabs' throughout US history (Brecher, 2020). The relatively short duration of many Starbucks strikes partially explains these different attitudes towards replacements, as workers often unconditionally return to work before securing an agreement.

Starbucks workers also organize various types of strikes that reflect the increasingly

diverse forms of labor action in the US. Compared to conventional work stoppages in the US that involve unionized workers striking indefinitely at the end of failed contract negotiations until securing some sort of agreement – also called 'contract strikes' (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021) – strikes by Starbucks workers are generally shorter and protest grievances, rather than achieving immediate material outcomes. Some strikes are spontaneous in response to unsafe working conditions or perceived illegal actions taken by employers. These walkouts resemble both spontaneous wildcat strikes (Fantasia, 1988) and spontaneous strikes by nonunion workers (Devinatz, 2003). The major difference is that walkouts by Starbucks workers are supported financially by union leaders, with the understanding that workers engaging in walkouts are more prone to retaliation and, therefore, need to take additional steps to ensure that the store is closed properly.

Most strikes organized by Starbucks workers are of a fixed duration, meaning workers return to work unconditionally at the conclusion of a pre-determined strike length. Union activists strategically organize these fixed duration strikes, in part, to overcome some of the limitations of indefinite work stoppages, like burdensome financial costs (Hennebert and Faulkner, 2020). Because Starbucks workers have low structural power vis-à-vis their employer, these fixed duration strikes often fail to compel a settlement from management. They instead serve to enhance the internal mobilization capacity of the union and generate public pressure on the employer. Unlike Starbucks workers, unionized nurses in the US often leverage high levels of structural power during fixed duration strikes because they are very costly and difficult to replace (Kallas, 2023). This enables nurse-led fixed duration strikes to impose both economic and noneconomic costs on hospitals that can eventually compel a settlement.

Assessing the effectiveness of strikes organized by Starbucks workers depends on the

measurement of success employed. Scholars have generally measured strike effectiveness in two ways: the immediate material outcomes that strikes achieve for workers (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Riordan, 2016; Massenkoff and Wilmers, 2022) and/or the impact of strikes on labor's longer term mobilization capacity (Darlington, 2009; McAlevey, 2016; Hodder et al, 2017; Kallas, 2023). An analysis of Starbucks strike outcomes also needs to account for how workers subjectively interpret effectiveness (Blanc, 2023). By the material outcomes measure, strikes by Starbucks workers have largely failed. Workers have not yet secured a first contract and strikes related to store-specific concerns or unfair labor practices generally fail to achieve an immediate resolution. However, most union activists do not expect that their strike demands will result in immediate tangible gains. Activists generally gauge effectiveness of strikes based on other outcomes more in line with the mobilization capacity measure, like whether a strike generates community support or instills confidence and enthusiasm in other workers. Based on this measure, strikes are certainly more successful, though some ambiguity remains. Union activists frequently discussed how strikes lead to positive mobilization outcomes, like generating community and political pressure on Starbucks management and strengthening internal support for the union. Others commented how a few poorly organized strikes have lowered morale and weakened future participation in union activities. Strikes also allow Starbucks workers to express their grievances, though striking for the sake of striking is unlikely to result in sustained organization or high mobilization capacity.

The low structural power of Starbucks workers largely explains the limited effectiveness, measured conventionally, of strikes on the campaign. Workers United represents Starbucks workers at less than four percent of all corporate-owned stores in the US, and even nationwide strikes that involve over 100 stores have a limited impact on the company financially. Union

leaders need to strategize other ways to overcome this low structural power. Consumers represent one potential source of leverage. Starbucks workers find themselves in a service triangle in which customers wield a large amount of power (Lopez, 2010). Building labor-consumer alliances is a key component to labor revitalization in the service sector. Many successful labor campaigns in the service sector, like SEIU's Justice for Janitors movement, leveraged consumer power by building alliances with customers (Waldinger et al, 1998; Lopez, 2004). Other research demonstrates that the adoption of public-facing external tactics like community coalitions significantly increases the likelihood of achieving a first contract (Kallas et al, 2023b).

Evidence suggests that Starbucks union leaders are increasingly mobilizing consumers and other community allies in its first contract campaign. For example, student activists at Cornell University organized an occupation of a prominent administration building in protest of Starbuck's decision to close all locations – all of which were unionized – in Ithaca, NY, asking university administration to terminate its contract with Starbucks (Senzon and Mong, 2023). Cornell administration announced in August 2023 that the university would end its contracts with Starbucks by June 2025 (Mong, 2023). Student activists at other universities, like the University of Washington, have started to organize similar efforts to remove Starbucks coffee from campus and Workers United has posted staff positions for 'campus organizers' to support the union campaign (Fowler, 2023; Union Jobs, 2023). If union activists can form coalitions with student groups to pressure universities to terminate contracts with Starbucks, that could potentially impact both the company's bottom line and generate negative press coverage.

Finally, the union campaign and associated strikes by Starbucks workers demonstrate how workers' social identities fundamentally impact their collective organization at work. Union

activists consistently discussed how their social identity – particularly race, gender, and sexuality – shaped their experience at work and involvement on the union campaign. This demonstrates how workers confront and mobilize around issues at work not just as workers with a shared economic interest, but as people whose experience of work and labor campaigns is rooted in their social identities (Lee and Tapia, 2021). Acknowledging and organizing around these social identities often broadens the scope of labor conflict beyond the boundaries of conventional labor-management relations (Riordan and Kowalski, 2021). However, the Starbucks union case reveals that workers can organize around these social identities not necessarily as part of a 'shifting axes of mobilization' away from unions and conventional workplace regulation (Piore and Safford, 2006), but rather to advance their economic interests. Starbucks workers have organized strikes around identity-based issues – particularly threats to LGBTQIA+ workers who comprise a large portion of the union's grassroots leadership – demonstrating the linkage between social identity and workplace action (Sapre and Tapia, 2022).

Conclusion

This study finds that strikes organized by Starbucks workers as part of their organizing and bargaining campaign problematizes our understanding of labor action in several ways. First, Starbucks workers either modify or eschew conventional approaches to strike preparation and organization. For example, expansive strike funds allow workers to participate in strikes, but local community fundraising, instead of just union resources, are an important source of strike pay. Second, Starbucks workers organize and distinguish between different types of strikes, challenging the typical conceptualization of strikes in the US as phenomenon tied to institutionalized bargaining relationships. Third, Starbucks workers understand that strikes will not achieve immediate material gains, but they frequently organize strikes regardless. While

strike effectiveness can be measured multiple ways, the overwhelming financial power, size, and strategic capabilities of Starbucks management have, as of August 2023, prevented the union from securing a first contract or claiming victory in specific strikes. Finally, Starbucks workers engage in identity-based and intersectional organizing to further workplace activism and strikes, demonstrating the linkage between social identity and economic action. Future research may build on these findings in several ways, such as by comparing the approach to organizing and strikes by Starbucks workers with other campaigns that utilize different strategies in similar contexts, like the FF15.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The relative increase in strikes since 2021 poses important questions for labor practitioners and scholars, such as whether this momentary uptick in activity will result in more sustained gains over time (Kochan et al, 2023). Reflecting a past era of higher unionization rates and more conventional bargaining relationships, much of the prior quantitative literature on strikes is modeled on the 'contract strike' at the conclusion of failed collective bargaining negotiations between unionized employees and firms (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; See Rosenfeld, 2006; Martin and Dixon, 2010; Kochan and Riordan, 2016). Researchers also largely measured strike effectiveness based on the strike-wage relationship, or the extent to which strikes achieved immediate material outcomes for workers (Rosenfeld, 2006). Qualitative case studies often concluded that labor's strategy and strike preparation largely determined strike effectiveness, emphasizing labor's agency in disputes with employers (Johnston, 1994; Milkman, 2006; McAlevey, 2016; Blanc, 2022).

In this dissertation, I reveal several important dynamics about contemporary strikes in the US that build on and challenge these perspectives. First, workers and their organizations organize numerous types of strikes in a variety of institutional contexts. While indefinite work stoppages by unionized employees at the end of failed contract negotiations remain important, a comprehensive analysis of strikes needs to incorporate unconventional types. Second, I challenge more conventional understandings of strike outcomes and effectiveness. Rather than just examining the strike-wage relationship, I study how strikes impact nonwage outcomes like workplace staffing and building more militant organizations over time. Finally, understanding strike outcomes and effectiveness requires an analysis of employer power resources and strategic capabilities. Employers shape strike outcomes through their structural power, degree of

vulnerability to societal pressure, and strategic capabilities. This perspective emphasizing employer power resources and capabilities reclaims the power resources approach as a *relational* framework to understand struggle between labor and capital.

These findings problematize existing perspectives on strikes and strike outcomes in several ways. Unlike past research that largely analyzed contract strikes, I build a typology of strikes that challenges this unidimensional perspective on strikes in the US and reflects the increasing diversification of labor action, demonstrating that most strikes in the US today take a different form than indefinite work stoppages by unionized employees. I was able to elaborate on a broader range of strike actions by developing a unique database through the ILR LAT. Rather than relying on official sources like the BLS or the FMCS that only capture a small percentage of work stoppages, the ILR LAT documents strikes of all sizes regardless of unionization status. Without this tool, most unconventional strikes would remain hidden and excluded from analysis because they do not meet certain size or other inclusion criteria.

These findings also build on and broaden prior qualitative work identifying unconventional types of strikes. Many labor organizations adopt alternative strike models to overcome the limitations of indefinite work stoppages (Rhomberg and Lopez, 2021; Kallas, 2023). In this dissertation, I provide further evidence that workers and their organizations utilize unconventional types of strikes to overcome costs associated with indefinite work stoppages. For example, many Starbucks workers acknowledge that indefinite strikes risk draining the union's strike fund and burning out workers, leading them to organize both fixed duration strikes and walkouts to strategically protest grievances and generate community support.

I also problematize more conventional conceptualizations of strike outcomes and the factors that determine strike effectiveness. In terms of strike outcomes, much of the prior

literature measured the impact of strikes on either immediate material gains, specifically wages (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Riordan, 2016), or broader organizational and revitalization indicators like union status, membership gain, and strengthening internal organization (Rosenblum, 1995; Darlington, 2009; McAlevey, 2016; Hodder et al, 2017; Kallas, 2023). These perspectives on measuring strike outcomes remain important in many contexts. In Chapter Four, I examined strike outcomes conventionally by determining the extent to which indefinite strikes at the conclusion of failed contract negotiations achieved worker demands, with the ideal outcome being a strike that achieved all demands in the shortest possible duration (Blanc, 2022; Orellana et al, 2022). In Chapter Five, I studied unconventional strikes by Starbucks union activists in which workers often unconditionally returned to work before securing an agreement. These strikes largely failed when studied from a perspective of securing material demands. However, they achieved more positive results when analyzed from the standpoint of broader revitalization indicators. Many Starbucks union activists stated that they do not expect to realize immediate tangible improvements in their working conditions by going on strike, but measure effectiveness based on whether picket lines adequately engaged the community and strengthened internal support for the union.

While the subjective experience of workers on strike is an important component of understanding strike effectiveness (Blanc, 2023), the question of analyzing material and campaign-related outcomes of strikes remains. Findings from both Chapters Four and Five demonstrate that employers critically shape strike outcomes and effectiveness. In the comparison of healthcare worker strikes, the union that developed high levels strike preparation achieved worse outcomes than the union with relatively low preparation. Instead, variation in bargaining power, specifically employer power and capabilities, explains divergent strike outcomes in these

two cases. Employer power is also a determinative factor of strike outcomes in the Starbucks case. A major reason that Starbucks workers do not expect to achieve any immediate material outcomes from strikes is because Starbucks management can easily withstand work stoppages at single stores, or even hundreds of stores, due to the company's vast size and financial strength. The company's response, or lack thereof, to many strikes shapes the way that workers subjectively experience and interpret strike effectiveness.

I challenge the unidimensional focus of many scholars on labor's agency and strategy in determining strike outcomes. Labor revitalization literature and studies grounded in the PRA tend to focus exclusively on labor's resources and strategies, rather than analyzing employer characteristics (Brookes, 2018; Carver and Doellgast, 2021). Prior research suggests that the adoption of specific union strategies during strikes and labor campaigns explains successful versus unsuccessful outcomes (Johnston, 1994; Milkman, 2006). Success depends on labor organizations implementing rank-and-file organizing tactics or committing to principles of 'deep organizing' (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; McAlevey, 2016). This dissertation finds otherwise. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, labor organizations can still fail despite engaging in thorough strike preparation. And labor organizations sometimes win without extensive strike preparation. A main contribution of this dissertation is reclaiming the PRA, and other frameworks for understanding labor's campaigns and outcomes, as a relational power struggle. The effectiveness of union strategies and resources in strikes or campaigns requires an analysis of employer power resources, as they fundamentally shape each other.

These findings do not mean that union strategies lack importance. They indicate that union leaders need to make strategic choices about where and how to engage in labor action, perhaps by adopting a particular type of strike, due to the extent of employer resources. Union

leaders may also need to engage in political action to regulate or reduce employer power more broadly. Many labor organizations understand this and have developed sophisticated research departments to analyze employers' strengths and weaknesses in preparation for a campaign or strike. Scholars should follow their lead and systematically account for employer power resources and strategies to understand how these sources of power shape the development and effectiveness of union tactics (Batt et al, 2020).

Many scholars in the US have studied employer strategies and tactics in response to unionization efforts, finding that unfair labor practices by employers result in negative outcomes for organizing and bargaining campaigns (Logan, 2006; Ferguson, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Kallas et al, 2023b). While tactics are an important component of employer behavior, management representatives leverage multiple sources of power to contest labor campaigns. In this dissertation, I develop a framework to better understand employer power resources and strategies by examining employers' *structural power*, or size and financial strength, *degree of vulnerability to societal actors*, and *strategic capabilities*, or the extent to which they leverage their resources and prior experience to implement effective strategy.

Limitations and future research

Several areas of future research can help build on and advance the findings presented in this dissertation. First, the identification of different types of strikes by the nature of demands can help link questions of strike type with strike effectiveness. Categorizing strike demands into offensive versus defensive based on whether workers attempt to secure new gains or defend existing conditions may illuminate the prospect of broader scale labor revitalization through strikes. Second, new quantitative studies on strike effectiveness could help ascertain the conditions under which strikes are most effective. For example, a study could investigate

whether a certain type of strike leads to better immediate outcomes for workers. Challenges exist to measuring strike outcomes and effectiveness. Most quantitative analyses of strike effectiveness only examine the impact of strikes on wages (Rosenfeld, 2006; Kochan and Riordan, 2016), but workers organize strikes for a plethora of nonwage demands, especially in the wake of the workplace safety issues generated by the covid-19 pandemic (Kallas et al, 2023a). Many strikes also end before workers secure an agreement with employers, making it somewhat difficult to link a strike with eventual changes in working conditions, if those changes are even achieved. This dynamic may necessitate different measurements of effectiveness for indefinite work stoppages versus fixed duration, walkouts, and demonstration strikes, as the latter group often end without a settlement.

Finally, the completion of this dissertation is occurring during a time of numerous, considerably large strikes and strike threats in the summer of 2023. While strikes and the number of workers on strike increased gradually in 2021 and 2022, they never approached the size of large strikes in 2018 and 2019, never mind most years in the twentieth century. However, strikes by ~175,000 workers in Hollywood, ~15,000 hotel workers in Southern California, and strike threats by ~150,000 Big Three autoworkers, and possibly ~85,000 Kaiser workers, could lead to nearly a half million workers on the picket line by the fall, 2023. Unlike large strikes in 2018 and 2019 organized mostly by public sector educators, those in 2023 have occurred in various industries predominantly in the private sector. These strikes, combined with the level of strike activity already surpassing 2021 and 2022 through the first half of the year, could result in more workers on strike in 2023 than any other year in several decades. Whether these strikes overcome entrenched employer resistance to (re)build worker power more broadly remains to be seen.

Appendix A: Interview table

Interview # (case study)	Position	Date (month/year)
1 (CS1)	Union staff	December 2021
2 (CS1)	Union staff	December 2021
3 (CS1)	Striking worker	January 2022
4 (CS1)	Union staff	January 2022
5 (CS1)	Striking worker	January 2022
6 (CS1)	Striking worker	January 2022
7 (CS1)	Striking worker	February 2022
8 (CS1)	Striking worker	February 2022
9 (CS1)	Union staff	February 2022
10 (CS1)	Community/political leader	February 2022
11 (CS1)	Community/political leader	February 2022
12 (CS1)	Community/political leader	February 2022
13 (CS1)	Union staff	March 2022
14 (CS1)	Union staff	March 2022
15 (CS1)	Community/political leader	March 2022
16 (CS1)	Striking worker	March 2022
17 (CS1)	Community/political leader	March 2022
18 (CS1)	Striking worker	March 2022
19 (CS1)	Management representative	March 2022
20 (CS1)	Striking worker	March 2022
21 (CS1)	Community/political leader	March 2022
22 (CS1)	Striking worker	March 2022
23 (CS1)	Community/political leader	March 2022
24 (CS1)	Striking worker	March 2022
25 (CS1)	Management representative	March 2022
26 (CS2)	Union staff	April 2022
27 (CS2)	Union staff	April 2022
28 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
29 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
30 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
31 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
32 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
33 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
34 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
35 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
36 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
37 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
38 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
39 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
40 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
41 (CS2)	Community/political leader	April 2022
42 (CS2)	Union staff	April 2022
43 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
44 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
45 (CS2)	Union staff	April 2022
46 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022

47 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
48 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
49 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
50 (CS2)	Union staff	April 2022
51 (CS2)	Striking worker	April 2022
52 (CS2)	Community/political leader	April 2022
53 (CS2)	Community/political leader	April 2022
54 (CS2)	Community/political leader	April 2022
55 (CS2)	Community/political leader	May 2022
56 (CS2)	Management representative	May 2022
57 (CS2)	Community/political leader	May 2022
58 (CS2)	Union staff	May 2022
59 (CS2)	Management representative	November 2022
60 (CS 1+2)	HC labor relations expert	February 2022
61 (CS 1+2)	HC labor relations expert	March 2022
62 (CS3)	Union activist	May 2022
63 (CS3)	Union activist	May 2022
64 (CS3)	Union activist	May 2022
65 (CS3)	Union activist	May 2022
66 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
67 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
68 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
69 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
70 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
71 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
72 (CS3)	Campaign representative	November 2022
73 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
74 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
75 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
76 (CS3)	Campaign representative	November 2022
77 (CS3)	Union activist	December 2022
78 (CS3)	Union activist	December 2022
79 (CS3)	Union activist	January 2023
80 (CS3)	Union activist	August 2022
81 (CS3)	Union activist	August 2022
82 (CS3)	Union activist	August 2022
83 (CS3)	Union activist	August 2022
84 (CS3)	Union activist	August 2022
85 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
86 (CS3)	Union activist	October 2022
87 (CS3)	Union activist	October 2022
88 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
89 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
90 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
91 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
92 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
93 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
94 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022
95 (CS3)	Union activist	September 2022

96 (CS3)	Campaign representative	September 2022
97 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
98 (CS3)	Union activist	November 2022
99 (CS3)	Union activist	January 2023
100 (CS3)	Union activist	January 2023
101 (CS3)	Union activist	January 2023
102 (CS3)	Union activist	January 2023
103 (CS3)	Union activist	February 2023
104 (CS3)	Union activist	February 2023
105 (CS3)	Union activist	February 2023
106 (CS3)	Union activist	February 2023
107 (CS3)	Union activist	February 2023
108 (CS3)	Union activist	February 2023

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