

Psycho-social determinants of employee strike propensity among labor union members in an Indian context

Determinasi psiko-sosial terhadap kecenderungan mogok karyawan di kalangan anggota serikat pekerja dalam konteks India

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Abstract

Understanding the psychological and relational factors that influence strike propensity among unionized employees is crucial for effective labor management. This study examined whether personality traits, employee-employer relationships, and organizational trust influence strike propensity among labor union members affiliated with different political parties (INTUC, BMS, and CITU) in Kerala, India. This study uses a quantitative method, with a cross-sectional survey and was conducted with 505 unionized employees. Strike propensity was significantly positively correlated with extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and co-worker relationships. Significant negative correlations were observed with conscientiousness, neuroticism, employee-supervisor relationships, and employee-organization relationships. Younger adults demonstrated significantly higher strike propensity, compared to middle-aged adults. Multiple regression analysis revealed that openness to experience, extraversion, and supervisor relationships collectively explained 26% of the variance in employee strike propensity ($R^2 = 0.26$). Personality traits and workplace relationships significantly influence strike propensity among unionized employees. This study concluded that organizations can potentially reduce strike likelihood by focusing on supervisor-employee relationships and considering personality factors in labor management strategies.

Keywords: employee strike propensity; Kerala state; labor union members; organizational trust

Abstrak

Memahami faktor-faktor psikologis dan relasional yang memengaruhi kecenderungan mogok di antara karyawan yang tergabung dalam serikat pekerja sangat penting untuk manajemen tenaga kerja yang efektif. Studi ini meneliti apakah ciri-ciri kepribadian, hubungan karyawan-majikan, dan kepercayaan organisasi memengaruhi kecenderungan mogok di antara anggota serikat pekerja yang berafiliasi dengan berbagai partai politik (INTUC, BMS, dan CITU) di Kerala, India. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan survei cross-sectional yang dilakukan terhadap 505 karyawan yang tergabung dalam serikat pekerja. Kecenderungan mogok berkorelasi positif secara signifikan dengan ekstrovertasi, keterbukaan terhadap pengalaman, keramahan, dan hubungan rekan kerja. Korelasi negatif yang signifikan diamati dengan kehati-hatian, neurotisisme, hubungan karyawan-atasan, dan hubungan karyawan-organisasi. Orang dewasa yang lebih muda menunjukkan kecenderungan mogok jauh lebih tinggi, dibandingkan dengan orang dewasa paruh baya. Analisis regresi berganda menunjukkan bahwa keterbukaan terhadap pengalaman, ekstrovertasi, dan hubungan dengan atasan secara kolektif menjelaskan 26% varians kecenderungan mogok karyawan ($R^2 = 0,26$). Ciri-ciri kepribadian dan hubungan di tempat kerja secara signifikan memengaruhi kecenderungan mogok di antara karyawan yang tergabung dalam serikat pekerja. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa organisasi berpotensi mengurangi kemungkinan mogok dengan berfokus pada hubungan atasan-karyawan dan mempertimbangkan faktor kepribadian dalam strategi manajemen ketenagakerjaan.

Kata kunci: kecenderungan mogok karyawan; negara bagian Kerala; anggota serikat pekerja; kepercayaan organisasi

Introduction

Economic development serves as a key indicator in categorizing a country as a developed nation, developing nation or an underdeveloped nation. It refers to the overall economic prosperity of a country, commonly assessed through its gross domestic product (GDP). A nation's GDP is largely influenced by its industrial output and the production of goods and services. There is a line of research which shows that the industrial sector plays a significant role in determining GDP growth in India. For instance, in the 2023–24 financial year, the industry sector contributed roughly 27–28% of India's gross value added (GVA), with the manufacturing industry alone accounting for around 14–15% (India Briefing 2024, Statistics Times 2024). Growth in GDP arises from robust industrial activities that drive economic progress. For an industry to be effective and profitable, the most important element is the atmosphere of peace and harmony prevailing among the management and their employees. A conflict between these two entities can result in disharmony and may provoke employees to strike and a prolonged strike can bring down the economic development of the country in the long run.

India has one of the largest workforces in the world, and strikes negatively affects industrial productivity, foreign investment, and social and economic stability. Empirical studies indicate that prolonged strikes typically result in marginal short-term wage gains but lead to long-term employment instability as firms switch to automation or contract labor, leading to a decline of overall productivity over time (Mitra 2025). Investigating the psychological and relational factors influencing strike propensity yields a more comprehensive understanding beyond mere economic grievances. The findings can assist organizations, unions, and policymakers in developing proactive interventions (e.g., trust-building, relationship management, personality-informed HR practices) to mitigate disruptive strikes while protecting workers' rights.

The key challenges faced by labor unions involve ensuring employee welfare, improving workplace conditions, addressing extended working hours, promoting fair wages, and securing employee benefits. Among the fundamental tenets and roles of labor unions are the regulation of the relationship between workers and the organization, the resolution of complaints, the articulation of new demands on behalf of workers, and the participation in collective bargaining and negotiations. In this way, unions serve as a means of communication between workers and management and represent a group of workers.

The primary function of every trade union is to protect and promote the interest of its members (Hoxie 1923, Perlman 1949). In India, trade unions work in pursuit of protecting their rights. They negotiate with bosses to enhance the welfare of the employees which includes their pay, work hours, health, and safety (Prakash et al. 2024). A recent study conducted in India and the Philippines showed that unions negotiate for benefits like training, bonuses, health insurance plans and so on. They also help prevent workplace conflicts by agreeing not to engage in strike/lockout (Observer Research Foundation 2025).

Employee strike propensity is a motivational or psychological concept that represents the extent to which union employees are willing to engage in strike with the support of goals set by the union (Barling et al. 1992). Recent studies conceptualized employee strike propensity as a multi-component attitude, comprising affective, cognitive, and behavioral-intent dimensions and recommend measuring both general strike attitudes and specific behavioral reactions such as willingness to participate (Vesper & König 2022).

India has witnessed a significant rise in industrial strike activities in recent years. As strike increases, the associated loss escalates. Strikes involve all primary sectors such as banking, mining, transport, and manufacturing, often mobilized by trade unions in response to perceived anti-worker reforms, rising cost of living, and declining job security. The Labor Bureau, Government of India (2023) provided quantitative evidence of rising strike frequency and associated economic losses. For instance, according to the Labor Bureau's yearly reports in 2020-2021, millions of mandays were lost in each year, resulting in significant output and financial losses nationally. Such movements reflect collective worker dissatisfaction due to persistent wage issues, poor working conditions, privatization, and diminished bargaining power (Times of India 2025).

Post-strike, the management has to put in a diligent effort to redeem the organization from its loss. Sorting out their issues without causing much loss to both the parties is the most feasible way to come out of it. Raising grievances to the management with the support of the labor union gets better attention rather than approaching them individually. Management finds it hard to overlook the issues raised by the unions as it costs the management highly when a group of employees go on strike.

Objective circumstances/events along with people's cognitive, motivational, emotional, and behavioral dispositions have a significant role in an individual's decision to participate in a strike (Brandstätter & Opp 2014). Personality traits exert an influence on the cognitive and behavioral patterns of individuals in all spheres of their life and similarly they provide valuable insights into an individual's political attitudes and behavior (Gerber et al. 2011). Therefore, a thorough gain of knowledge in this realm with respect to employees' strike propensity would be beneficial to an understanding of it.

When potential employees maintain a positive relationship with their colleagues, employer and management, they perform the assigned tasks with efficiency. Being content with one's own work creates a peaceful work atmosphere and brings down workplace conflicts which in turn enhances productivity. Employer-employee relationships have been shown to have a statistically significant positive influence on job satisfaction; motivated and satisfied employees contributed to a harmonious work atmosphere and enhanced the productivity of the organization (Mohamed et al. 2024).

In such a work sphere, employees prefer not to engage in strikes. Rather, they try to resolve the differences before things turn into a crisis. Hence, it is presumed that employee relations influence their strike propensity. Employees' trust toward the organization is tied to its success. Organizational trust generates a feeling among the employees that the employer and top management do not engage in any sort of behaviors that are detrimental to them. Consequently, employees reciprocate it by detaching from protests and all counterproductive work behaviors. Acknowledging the relevance of organizational trust among employees, this study highlights organizational trust in relation to employee strike propensity.

The following hypotheses were formulated for the current study based on the review of literature:

- H₀₁:** Employee Strike Propensity does not significantly differ based on age among labor union members.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between employee strike propensity and personality among labor union members.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant relationship between employee strike propensity and worker relations among labor union members.
- H₀₄:** There is no significant relationship between employee strike propensity and organizational trust among labor union members.
- H₀₅:** Personality, worker relations, and organizational trust do not significantly influence employee strike propensity among labor union members.

The study has made meaningful contributions as it focuses on the psychological and relational determinants of strike propensity, thereby extending existing literature that predominantly emphasizes economic and structural factors. Understanding the psycho-social determinants of strike propensity can inform labor policies and organizational practices, potentially leading to strategies that address underlying issues and reduce the occurrence of strikes. The research can aid labor unions, human resource managers, and organizational leaders in developing interventions that foster positive workplace relationships and address psychological factors contributing to strike behaviors.

Research Method

Employees in and around the Ernakulam District of Kerala State, India, who are members of labor unions were the participants of this research. Ernakulam district is the industrial capital of Kerala state (Shyam 2013). A self-report questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data for the current study, which

used the survey research technique. Disproportionate stratified random sampling was used to collect the data. Members of the INTUC, BMS, and CITU trade unions, which are associated with various political parties, were included in the present research. In line with research ethics, the study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Periyar University, Salem. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire honestly. Primary level education was mandatory to be a part of the study. Apprentice workers were excluded from the study. The questionnaire received responses from 666 participants in total. After removing outliers and incomplete data, 505 data were taken into consideration for the final analysis. The administration of the tools took around 20 to 30 minutes. The final sample consisted of 505 participants out of which 461 were males and 44 were females with an average age of 39.42 years (SD=11.13).

The Strike Propensity Scale developed by Amal & Jayakumar (2020) was used to assess employees' tendency to engage in strike-related behavior. The instrument includes 24 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *Always* (5) to *Never* (1). Reliability indices were satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha reported at 0.74 and split-half reliability at 0.79. Concurrent validity was also established, showing a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.55$) with the Participatory Behavior Scale.

To measure personality traits, the Big Five Locator by Howard et al. (1996) was employed. This scale assesses the five major personality dimensions—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—using five items per trait on a five-point Likert format. Reported test-retest coefficients were above 0.72, indicating good stability. Internal consistency estimates were neuroticism ($\alpha = 0.63$), extraversion ($\alpha = 0.77$), openness ($\alpha = 0.69$), agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.74$), and conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.75$). Evidence of validity was further supported by its moderate correlation ($r = 0.40$) with the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI).

The Worker Relations Scale (WR), designed by Biggs et al. (2016), was used to capture workplace relationships across three domains: co-worker relations, employee-supervisor relations, and employee-organization relations. The scale consists of nine items rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Reliability coefficients were 0.74 for co-worker relations, 0.79 for supervisor relations, and 0.72 for organizational relations. Both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported the construct validity of the scale. The Organizational Trust (OT) Scale developed by Paliszkievicz and Koochang (2013) was also administered. This 13-item measure uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.88, reflecting strong internal consistency. Its validity was supported by a significant positive correlation with organizational performance ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$).

Normality of data distribution was assessed through skewness and kurtosis. The skewness values for strike propensity, Big Five Locator, worker relations, and organizational trust were -2.83, 0.39, 2.57, and 2.91, respectively, while their kurtosis values were -0.45, 2.58, -0.41, and -0.70. Based on Kline's (2011) guidelines, skewness values between -3 and +3 and kurtosis values between -8 and +8 are considered acceptable. As the present results fell within these thresholds, the data were judged to meet the assumption of normality, permitting the use of parametric statistical techniques.

All analyses were conducted using SPSS (Version 24.0). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were first computed, followed by Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) to examine associations among the study variables.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r):

$$r = \frac{\sum(X_i - \bar{X})(Y_i - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum(X_i - \bar{X})^2 \times \sum(Y_i - \bar{Y})^2}}$$

Multiple linear regression analysis and Pearson's correlation were used to investigate the relationship and predictive influence of organizational trust, personality, and worker relations on workers' inclination to strike. Moreover, age-based variations in the likelihood of employee strikes were found using independent sample t-tests.

Results and Discussion

In this session, the hypotheses are tested and the results are presented as well as interpreted. The analysis focuses on the psycho-social determinants of employee strike propensity among union members in India, with particular attention to personality traits, workplace relationships, and demographic variables such as age (see Table 1). Further, the results are discussed with respect to prior empirical research.

Table 1.
Distribution of sample on the basis of demographic variables

Demographic variables	Categorization/grouping	No. of sample	Percentage
Age group (Years)	Early Adulthood	266	52.7%
	(19 – 40 years)		
	Middle Adulthood (41-65 years)	239	47.3%
Gender	Male	461	91.3%
	Female	44	8.7%
Marital Status	Single	146	28.9%
	Married	359	71.1%
Family type	Nuclear Family	321	63.6%
	Joint Family	184	36.4%
Educational Qualification	Up to 10 th	132	26.1%
	Higher Secondary	91	18.0%
	Diploma	148	29.3%
	Degree	134	26.5%
Place of Work	Rural	267	52.9%
	Urban	182	36.0%
	Semi-urban	56	11.1%

Source: Authors' contribution

Table 2 shows that employee strike propensity of young adults and middle-aged adults significantly differ (t -value=1.98, $p<0.05$). Young adults scored higher for employee strike propensity than middle aged adults. Young adults are full of vigor and vitality. Young adulthood is the healthiest time of an individual (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman 2006, Wilson et al. 2019). Strength and physical performance reach their peak at this age (Tarpenning et al. 2004, Huebner & Perperoglou 2019). Their concern about health is very much lower than middle aged adults. They are packed with energy and willingly take up responsibilities. Their political ideology and beliefs encourage them to join a protest for their own and others' benefits.

Table 2.
Difference in ESP with regard to age

Variable	Young adults		Middle-aged adults		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Employee Strike Propensity	90.77	8.01	89.37	7.87	1.98*

*Significant at 0.05 level

Source: Authors' contribution

A survey of Orb Media across 128 countries revealed that young adults who are interested in politics prefer protest over formal political engagement (Tyree 2018). This can be interpreted through Conflict Theory (Coser 1956, Marx 2000), which views strikes as expressions of structural and generational tensions. Psycho-social factors related to their age is also a reason for the increased participation of youth in strike. Youth are searching for a sense of belonging and participation in strike is treated as a means to self-expression (Murer 2011). Rather than being passive, cynical and uninterested, youth are concerned about the state of the world and future. They possess strong ideals and very often willing to rebel against the status quo (Fominaya 2020).

Participating in strikes inherently involves risk-taking because it exposes employees to potential economic losses, strained relationships with management, and sometimes even legal or social repercussions. Studies showed that younger adults exhibit higher risk taking tendencies, which decline with age (Rolison et al. 2014, Duell et al. 2018). These heightened risk-taking tendencies can make younger workers more vulnerable to strikes. These could be reasons for the youth to devote their time and energy to strikes. In addition, Schutt (1982) provides compelling evidence that younger workers were more likely than their older counterparts to go on strike, particularly in response to pay increases and other perks.

Getting older is accompanied with decline in mental and physical health, enduring the burden of various physical ailments. Comparing youth and middle-aged, the middle-aged are more susceptible to diseases. Preoccupation of middle-aged people with their physical ailments progressively worsens their quality of work life, perhaps deflecting their attention from workplace-related issues. Barmby et al. (2004) also suggested that age and absenteeism are positively correlated due to general deterioration of health and greater proneness to long-term illnesses. There is a line of research which mentions that as the age and number of chronic diseases increase absenteeism and productivity loss also increase (Jinnett et al. 2017, Akhtar 2022).

Midlife is a stage which marks the beginning of chronic illnesses and diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and arthritis pain which trigger distress among the middle-aged employees (Lachman 2004). Employees in the age bracket of 41 to 65 years feel stressed due to financial reasons, work pressure and work worries (Guilford 2015) which adds to the deterioration of their health. Middle-aged adults who are stressed or overworked on their job tend to develop mental health issues in the future more than contented employees (Rapaport 2018). Along with their work, they have to focus on their physical and mental health as well. This keeps them away from protests and turns their attention toward their health and related issues. A harmonious and peaceful work environment would be their preference. They would try to ingest workplace conflicts as much as possible and engaging in strikes would be their last resort, unlike their younger counterparts.

Table 3.
Correlation of ESP and personality among labor union members

Variables	Employee strike propensity	Mean	SD
Employee Strike Propensity	—	90.11	7.97
Openness to Experience	0.09*	14.36	2.31
Conscientiousness	-0.10*	17.87	3.74
Extraversion	0.22*	14.09	3.26
Agreeableness	0.10*	15.40	2.28
Neuroticism	-0.09*	13.59	2.14

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Authors' contribution

From Table 3, it can be seen that the correlation coefficient of ESP is significantly related to the five dimensions of personality. The result reveals that there is a significant positive as well as negative relationship between employee strike propensity and the five dimensions of personality. There is a significant

and positive correlation between openness to experience ($r = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$), extraversion ($p < 0.05$), and agreeableness ($r = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, there is a significant and negative correlation between conscientiousness ($r = -0.10$, $p < 0.05$) and neuroticism ($r = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$) and ESP. These findings align with the Five-Factor Model of Personality (Costa & McCrae 1992), which demonstrates how individual traits shape political participation and collective behavior (Brandstätter & Opp 2014).

In the present study, it can be seen that openness to experience is positively related to willingness to cooperate in the protest (Table 3). Earlier studies revealed that individuals with high levels of openness to experience are open to different beliefs, viewpoints and also experiences (Goldberg 1990). They look out for new experiences. Such individuals seek out new knowledge and acquire information related to politics and this in turn affects their attitude toward getting involved in strikes. Past studies mentioned that high political engagement is associated with high openness to experience (Mondak & Halperin 2008, Vecchione & Caprara 2009, Curtin et al. 2010, Steinbrecher & Schön 2012). Individuals who participate in rallies showed high openness to experience compared to those who do not get involved (Mondak et al. 2010). The result of another study by Brandstätter & Opp (2014) suggested that more openness to experience shows high willingness to engage in protest. Individuals with high openness to experience engage in more social as well as political activities compared to the low scorers in openness to experience.

Table 3 also reveals that individuals with conscientiousness shared a negative relationship with the willingness to engage in strike. Since conscientious individuals are good at controlling, organizing and managing one's own instincts (Goldberg 1990), therefore external provocation do not draw them into any form of protest. From the reviews, it was found that less conscientious individuals engage in different forms of political activities (Mondak et al. 2010). Further, Brandstätter & Opp (2014) mentioned that less conscientious individuals showed a positive relationship with the engagement in protest. Studies also revealed that individuals who score less on self-efficacy and score high on conscientiousness showed less willingness to engage in strike (Mondak 2010). Recent studies have also demonstrated that openness to experience has also been positively related with willingness to participate in collective actions across various cultural contexts. Such individuals demonstrate greater receptivity to new ideas, social change, and unconventional strategies, which may enhance their propensity to endorse or engage in strikes (Chmara et al. 2020). Conscientious individuals follow rules and norms of the organization; therefore, they do not go against the organization.

Extroversion has a significant positive correlation toward willingness to engage in protest. Extroverts exhibit a proclivity toward social interaction (Mondak 2010, Gallego & Obsersky 2012). Active political life includes maintaining interpersonal contact which is accompanied by greater interest in public affairs. Higher affinity toward public life can increase the probability to get involved in protests (Ribeiro & Borba 2016). Individuals high in extroversion show active engagement with the world, which is the result of social interaction. The assimilation of information associated with the public sphere can enhance the tendency to engage in strike. Several authors (Mondak & Halperin 2008, Vecchione & Caprara 2009, Curtin et al. 2010, Steinbrecher & Schön 2012) have found that high political engagement is related to high extroversion. Extroverts are more likely to join the rallies (Mondak et al. 2010). Being in a group provides extroverts an opportunity to interact with others. Therefore, they become a part of political organizations (Gerber et al. 2011, Bakker et al. 2015, 2016). A recent work indicated that extraversion has been found to correlate positively with behaviors such as seeking information about strikes and engaging in strike-related social network activity (Vesper & König 2022). Ertan et al. (2021) found that strong social ties among workers significantly increased their involvement in strike events, with network position and peer ties predicting who joined the strike. Mostly, they engage in social and political activities because they are very sociable and people-oriented.

Agreeableness was found to be significantly and positively related to willingness to strike. Traits like being respectful, friendly, helpful and generosity are high for agreeable people. Due to their optimistic view of human nature, such individuals gel with others easily (Goldberg 1990). Studies suggested that agreeableness played an important role in shaping individuals' social and political behavior (Mondak

et al. 2010). When agreeable individuals become a member of a union, they exhibit their loyalty and commitment toward their union, especially when the union has stood with them during any crisis. When the union employees encounter any kind of issues with the management, the union acts as a support system for their employees. Agreeable people reciprocate it in the form of loyalty toward the union. Instead of management, when the union intervenes in their grievances, it creates an attachment toward the union and results in developing stronger relational ties with their union. Generally, individuals high on agreeableness are cooperative in nature. Gerber et al. (2011) mentioned that agreeable people identify themselves with the in-groups as they prefer 'cooperative component of group identification.' Therefore, such individuals conform to the union's decision without much objection. Dollbaum & Robertson (2023) showed that agreeable people who are sociable tend to exhibit high levels of activism.

It can be seen that neuroticism showed a negative relationship toward willingness to cooperate in strike. Studies revealed that neurotic individuals are anxious, depressed, inconsiderate, and thoughtless. They express anger and hatred toward others (Goldberg 1990). Due to their impulsivity, they act immediately and jump to conclusions, which is not an acceptable trait for group members of the labor union. Labor unions prefer collective and compatible decisions which are based on several discussions among the members. They are emotionally volatile. On the other hand, individuals high on emotional stability engage in several social and political activities held during the period of campaigns for the local and national elections like donating money to the political parties, writing letters and engaging in political discussions, casting votes, active participation in public meetings and taking part in rallies (Gerber et al. 2011).

Studies revealed that individuals who engaged in Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protests showed high on emotional stability (Panagopoulos & Lehrfeld 2015). Studies also found that high emotional stability has a high association with propensity to protest (Brandstätter & Opp 2014). Ireland et al. (2018) found that a stronger negative association exists between neuroticism and attitude favoring action. Emotional stability is vital for each individual as being a union member comes with a lot of responsibilities. An individual with a stable mind can only perform the tasks that are accompanied along with the union membership. Neurotic individuals fail to do so. Hence, the negative relationship between neuroticism and employee strike propensity.

Table 4.
Correlation of ESP and Worker Relations (WR) among labor union members

Variables	Employee strike propensity	Mean	SD
Employee Strike Propensity	—	90.11	7.97
Co-worker Relations	0.16*	13.07	2.42
Employee–Supervisor Relations	-0.45*	7.86	2.87
Employee–Organization Relations	-0.18*	10.58	3.17

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Authors' contribution

From Table 4, it is found that there is a strong positive as well as negative relationship between employee strike propensity and the three dimensions of worker relations. The result reveals that there is a significant positive correlation with employee strike propensity and co-worker relations in the dimensions of worker relations ($r = 0.16, p < 0.05$). There is a significant negative correlation with the employee strike propensity and the employee-supervisor relations ($r = -0.45, p < 0.05$) and a significant negative correlation between employee strike propensity and employee-organization relations ($r = -0.18, p < 0.05$). This resonates with social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) and psychological contract theory (Rousseau 1995), which explain how breaches in reciprocity or perceived obligations can trigger collective protest.

Table 4 indicates a significant positive correlation between co-worker relationships and workers' inclination to strike. This supports the collectivist cultural perspective (Sinha 1990), where group solidarity and harmony are prioritized over individual interests in industrial relations. The study suggests that employees

rely on co-workers for completing their work and work-related tasks and this reflects the existence of a support system. A positive support system in the organization enriches, supports and enhances sociability among the co-workers (Kenny & Kashy 1994). As a result, a strong 'we' feeling is developed among them. When a healthy relationship exists among them, they stand with each other in case a need arises. Even during vulnerable situations, they stand shoulder to shoulder with the co-workers. The emergence and longevity of protest depends on the sense of community and a mutual interpretive understanding among the protesters (Dixon et al. 2004). The success and failure of strikes is determined by the degree of interpersonal relationship and solidarity that prevails among the union members (Varoufakis 1989). Ertan et al. (2021) demonstrated that employees' relationships with colleagues are more likely to influence their commitment to and participation in a strike. Born et al. (2016) demonstrated that communication and trust networks among employees enhances the likelihood of strike participation because it helps in faster diffusion of information and stronger execution of solidarity norms.

Supervisors and employees are considered as different entities that possess different principles and roles. As supervisors are the representatives of the management, they execute the plans and policies of the management. They are being paid by the management. Due to the unfavorable organizational policies in the industrial setting, employee-supervisor relations are associated with many tensions, disagreements and conflicts. The workers understand that they have to count on concerted and collective action to fulfil their demands. On the other hand, supervisors refuse to succumb to the demands of employees. This refusal by the supervisor due to the management's unwillingness to give in to the demands of employees strain the employer-employee relationship and ultimately lead to strike (Pandey 2007). Better industrial-relation qualities, representation in work councils reduces strike incidences (Addison & Teixeira 2019, 2024). The major reason for the dissatisfaction among employees is inadequate pay, working conditions, heavy workload, lack of redressal of grievances and so on. When the supervisor fails to provide the much-needed facilities to the employees, employee-supervisor relations fizzle out and end up in a strike. When collective bargaining and negotiation between both the parties fail to fix the issue, strike is considered as the apt solution to settle the issues. Hence, the significant negative correlation between employee-employer relation and strike propensity.

ESP and employee-organization was found to have a significant negative relationship. Strike occurs when the employer falls short of ways to address the disputes with regard to the employment of the employees (McGregor 2018). Given the fact that employee-employers are indispensable to each other, they repeatedly get involved in conflicts (Asian Productivity Organization 2014). Union employees perceive strike as going against the will of their employer (Adell 1967) and employees are less likely to support strikes when they have a strong working connection with their employer (Martin & Sinclair 2001).

Several past studies mentioned that a positive attitude toward the employers implies that they are less likely to get involved in strike (Martin 1986, Ng 1991, Barling et al. 1992, McClendon & Klaas 1993, Martin & Sinclair 2001). When the demands of the union employees are denied by the management, the employees go out in the street to protest with the support of their respective union. Employees prefer a management that favors them the most. The management is endowed with the right to hire and fire employees. and the right to relocate, shut down, merge, takeover or sell their companies is within the discretion of the management. These actions have a negative impact on their employees (Saxena & Singh nd). When disputes arise or the management tries to execute new policies, the change is perceived as a win-lose situation by the labor organizations (Razi et al. 2012) which engenders strikes and is perceived as management's attempt to gain control over the labor force.

On the contrary, unions focus on the benefits that can be derived from the management (Dhal 2014). When the intentions of both the parties differ, conflicts erupt. Also, unions acquire the trust from employees' commitment and cooperation, which is essential for efficient work performance (Gill 2009). In the absence of unions, management has an upper hand over the employees and so can easily exploit them (Dhal 2014). To stop the totalitarian- like control by the management, strike is considered as the last resort of the union employees to protect their financial and social well-being (McGregor 2018).

The more loyalty union employees have toward the organization, the less likely they are to go for strike against the management. When an amicable relationship is maintained between the employees and management, the propensity to strike also drops drastically. Studies that show the link between employee–organization relationship and strike propensity remain scarce. However, there are several studies indicating that stronger organizational support is associated with lower levels of workplace conflict, lower turnover intentions, and higher job satisfaction (Bhattarai 2021).

Table 5.
Correlation of ESP and Organization Trust (OT) among labor union members

Variables	Employee strike propensity	Mean	SD
Employee Strike Propensity	—	90.11	7.97
Organization Trust (OT)	-0.19*	33.20	6.37

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Source: Authors' contribution

From Table 5, it can be seen that there is a negative correlation between employee strike propensity and organizational trust. The result revealed that there is a negative relationship with employee strike propensity and organizational trust ($r = -0.19, p < 0.05$). This is supported by organizational justice and trust theories (Greenberg 1990, Mayer et al. 1995), which emphasize fairness and trust as central to cooperative labor relations. Higher levels of organizational trust tend to establish a significant negative relationship with labor disputes (Kim & Kim 2012). Union employees know that their organization is subjected to many hardships during the time of strike. Also, they are aware of the loss which their organization has to undergo when a strike is declared. Being concerned about the repercussions of the strike, they solve it before it transforms into a major issue. For integrative bargaining, joint problem-solving and cooperative relationship, trust between the labor and management is considered as an antecedent.

Moreover, trust is considered as the most crucial element of attitudinal structuring in labor negotiations (Walton & McKersie 1991). During a crisis, union employees with organizational trust try to resolve the issue through negotiations and bargaining with the management rather than plunging into protest. Engaging in political protest is taxing as the costs levied and benefits obtained are uncertain. Even in precarious circumstances, when union employees engage in strike, it may be due to the lack of trust in the organizational policies. One of the major reasons for union employees' strike is due to the unfair policies or conditions that are prevalent in the organization. When the employees perceive a fair distribution of power and resources among the leaders and followers, it develops trust toward the organization which prevents them from engaging in strike. Trust is generally predicted in unsure and risky circumstances (Bhattacharya et al. 1998).

Trust mitigates the labor disputes due to the following reasons. First, with the increase in trust, the active communication dynamics also increases (Zand 1972, Smith & Barclay 1997). Second, the trust in negotiators results in integrative bargaining and not distributive bargaining as, when negotiators engage in integrative bargaining, it is less likely to end up in conflicts as compared to distributive bargaining. Addison & Teixeira (2024) revealed that industrial-relations quality and managerial trust are negatively associated with strike incidence. Therefore, it is evident that organizational trust significantly reduces the propensity to strike among union members.

According to Hair et al. (2014), tolerance values should not be below 0.10, and the acceptable threshold for VIF is five. In the present analysis, all values met these criteria, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Among the predictors, three independent variables—openness to experience, extraversion, and employee–supervisor relations—were found to significantly explain employee strike propensity. These variables collectively accounted for 26% of the variance in strike propensity.

Table 6.

Influence of openness to experience, extraversion and employee-supervisor relations on employee strike propensity among labor union members

Independent variables	Dependent variable	Unstandardized coefficient		Beta	t-value p<0.05	Model summary p <0.05	Tolerance	VIF
		B	SE					
Openness to Experience		0.38	0.09	0.15	3.85		0.89	1.12
Extraversion	Employee Strike Propensity	0.37	0.09	0.17	3.98	F = 20.23 R ² = 0.26	0.77	1.28
Employee Supervisor Relations		-1.02	0.12	-0.37	8.32		0.74	1.33

Source: Authors' contribution

The standardized beta coefficients provide insight into the relative importance of predictors. Openness to experience yielded a positive beta value ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that a one standard deviation increase in openness corresponds to a 0.15 standard deviation increase in strike propensity. Similarly, extraversion showed a positive association ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a comparable increase in strike propensity. In contrast, employee-supervisor relations demonstrated a negative relationship ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.05$), implying that stronger supervisor relations are associated with a 0.37 standard deviation reduction in strike propensity. Among the predictors, employee-supervisor relations emerged as the strongest factor in the model. In comparison to a null model, these variables improved the model fit, as shown by the statistical significance of the total regression model, $F(9, 495) = 20.23$, $p < 0.05$.

Table 6 shows that openness to experience, extraversion and employee-supervisor relations accounted for 26% of variability in employee strike propensity. Grounded in the Big Five personality theory (Costa & McCrae 1992), this study considers openness and extraversion as personality traits that predispose individuals toward social and political activism. Further, drawing from social exchange theory (Blau 2017), we posit that the quality of employee-supervisor relationships shapes employees' willingness to support or reject strike actions. Openness to experience has a positive influence on employee strike propensity. Since they are more involved in social and political activities, those who are open to new experiences are more likely to be employees who go on strike. Research has shown that demonstrators who had high degrees of openness to experience were more inclined to participate in Occupy Wall Street demonstrations (Panagopoulos & Lehrfeld 2015). Reviews suggested that individuals who joined for rallies exhibited high openness to experience when compared to the individuals who do not engage in rallies (Mondak et al. 2010). Studies found that individuals who obtained high on openness to experience exhibit more willingness to engage in strike (Mondak et al. 2010, Brandstätter & Opp 2014, Chmara et al. 2020). Openness to experience can directly predict political activism (Curtin et al. 2010), they prefer liberal political orientation. Those high in this trait relate closely with the social and political world and therefore it affects them personally, which could be the reason to strike.

Individuals with high extroversion show high involvement in social and political activities as they get along with others easily. Studies revealed that individuals with high extroversion showed larger numbers of communication networks (Mondak et al. 2010). Hibbing et al. (2011) mentioned that individuals high on extraversion more frequently discuss politics than others. Further, compared to any other personality traits, extroverts showed more propensity to engage in rallies as well as strikes (Mondak et al. 2010, Vesper & König 2022). Their strong need for affiliation makes them active members of the union who abide to the unions' decision.

Strike propensity is significantly predicted by the employee-supervisor relation. When the employees perceive the treatment from the supervisor as favorable, they try to reciprocate it by not supporting strike. Rather, they suggest their leaders and co-members of the union negotiate with the management during the union meeting. A strong sense of obligation is developed in the minds of employees when they are given more support by the supervisor (Kidd & Smewing 2001). If the demands of the union employees are not met by the supervisor with due attention, this prompts the union employees to go on strike. The major functions of the supervisors are planning and organizing the work schedule of the employees, better working conditions, motivating them to perform better, and handling the grievances of the employees (Juneja 2015). When they detract from their duties and responsibilities, employees call for strike. Therefore, a significant negative influence was found between employee-supervisor relation and employee strike propensity.

Conclusion

The current study is one of the first to evaluate the psycho-social factors that influence employees' inclination to strike within the Indian labor union context. By doing so, the research provides a more holistic and human-centered understanding of the reasons for engaging in strike actions. Furthermore, the focus on labor union members in the Indian context, where strikes are on the rise, adds cultural and contextual specificity that is underrepresented in the global literature. This study helps the union leaders, HR managers and policymakers to understand the significance of promoting trust-building practices, investing in healthy interpersonal relations at the workplace, and understanding the personality-driven tendencies that may influence employee behavior during conflict situations. It is possible to create a more constructive and dialogue-oriented approach to labor relations in the Indian context by addressing these psychosocial factors. Further, it advances the scope of industrial relations research in India by empirically demonstrating how psychosocial factors shape strike propensity beyond the traditional economic or structural determinants.

The study exclusively sampled employees affiliated with labor unions. Consequently, the generalizability of the study is contingent upon the characteristics of the sample. The current research is completely based on self-report measures. Participants tend to present themselves in a favorable way relative to the existing social norms and mores. The sample size in the present study is limited. Due to the busy work schedule of the labor union members, obtaining consent to participate in the survey from a large sample posed considerable difficulties. Based on the employee strike propensity findings, conducting interaction sessions with all levels of employees would let HR managers know their grievances and act on them. Taking a cue from the employee strike propensity outcome, establishing a grievance redressal cell for the employees to report their workplace related issues do help to resolve their prevailing problems. Understanding the Employee Strike Propensity of employees, conducting employee counselling and providing guidance in the right direction would enhance their mental health and so their performance. Taking initiative to organize training programs to upgrade their skills and knowledge might positively influence their employee's commitment to their organisation and a certain way to reduce the employee strike propensity scores of the employees.

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