

Labour disputes in contexts of trade union fragmentation and pluralism: An empirical analysis of the case of Chile

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Abstract. *The number of strikes in Chile has increased substantially since the late 2000s. This article analyses this development from the point of view of a key aspect of the Chilean model of industrial relations: trade union pluralism. Drawing on a representative survey of private sector companies, the authors estimate logistic regression models indicating that trade union pluralism significantly increases the probability of strike action. The analysis does not, however, indicate that the positive effect of trade union pluralism can be explained by inter-union competition, as is suggested in some of the international literature.*

Keywords: *trade unions, dispute, strike, trade union pluralism, collective bargaining, labour relations, Chile.*

1. Introduction

Disputes are an integral part of employment relationships (Hyman 1989). Analysis of their dynamics is therefore essential in order to understand the more general aspects of such relations, from the possibility for cooperation between the various parties involved in the labour process to the effectiveness of legislation aimed at regulating disputes. Such an analysis is particularly relevant in the case of Chile. Since the second half of the 2000s, Chile has experienced a substantial increase in the number of labour disputes, in the form of more frequent strikes or industrial action (OHL 2017; Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017; Velásquez Orellana, Pérez and Link 2022).

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Original title: "Conflictividad laboral en contextos de fragmentación y pluralismo sindical. Análisis empírico del caso de Chile", *Revista Internacional del Trabajo* 142 (3). Translation by Susan Mutti, revised by the ILR editorial team. This article is also available in French, in *Revue internationale du Travail* 162 (3).

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According to various analysts, one of the main causes of that increase is the legislation governing the Chilean model of industrial relations (OHL 2017; Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017), which is predicated on the 1979 Labour Plan thrust on the country by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Among other things, the legislation promotes decentralized collective bargaining at the company level, which it restricts to a series of highly bureaucratized stages that exclude a significant part of the workforce (particularly subcontracted or temporary workers) (Feres Nazarala 2009). The legislation also restricts the right to strike, limiting it exclusively to the statutory collective bargaining process and facilitating a series of mechanisms that, in practice, make strikes ineffective as a means of exerting trade union pressure (Gutiérrez Crocco 2020; Pérez Ahumada 2021). In addition, the legislation fosters a fragmented union structure that weakens unions. This process is a consequence of regulations that promote union pluralism, that is, the presence of two or more unions within a company, all of them empowered to represent workers and engage in collective bargaining (Rojas Miño 2009; Narbona 2014).

Several recent studies that have analysed the nature of strike action in Chile help to understand the sectoral variations in the strikes, the strikers' demands (economic and political) and the way in which strikes are complemented by other, non-disruptive forms of mobilization (Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017; Velásquez Orellana, Pérez and Link 2022; Gutiérrez Crocco 2020; Medel, Velásquez and Pérez 2023). However, few studies have systematically analysed the influence of certain aspects of the Chilean model of industrial relations on strikes or industrial action at the company level.

In this article, we contribute to the discussion by empirically analysing a key aspect of the Chilean model of industrial relations, namely trade union pluralism. Drawing on data obtained from the 2019 Labour Survey (ENCLA in its Spanish acronym) and on the international literature on trade unions, trade union pluralism and labour disputes, we analyse whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the presence of trade unions and the rapid increase in the number of strikes at the enterprise level. Next, in the central part of the article, we study whether the propensity for strikes is also affected by the existence of multiple trade unions in an enterprise and by the type of relationship (antagonistic or cooperative) between them. In line with recent research, our findings lead us to conclude that the presence of a trade union significantly increases the probability of a strike occurring at a company. Furthermore, the findings support the hypothesis that trade union pluralism – measured by the existence of two or more unions in the same company – significantly contributes to the proliferation of strikes. The data do not, however, clearly confirm the hypothesis, put forward by some writers, that the positive relationship between union pluralism and strike action is attributable to competition between unions endeavouring to sign up a larger number of members or obtain better collective agreements. At the end of the article, we explain these findings, showing how they contribute to the international debate on trade union pluralism and labour disputes.

This remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the second section, we describe the central aspects of the Chilean model of industrial relations and

their impact on trade union organization and labour disputes, before reviewing the relevant recent international literature in the third section. We present the data and methods used in the fourth section, the results in the fifth and the consequent analysis in the sixth. The study's conclusions are presented in the final section.

2. Industrial relations and strikes in Chile

2.1. The Labour Plan

The Chilean model of industrial relations is predicated on the 1979 Labour Plan introduced by the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–90). According to its architect, the Minister of Labour at the time, José Piñera, the Labour Plan was a “trade union plan” that tried to dismantle the “corporatist” regulations of the 1931 Labour Code in order to “depoliticize” and liberalize labour relations (Piñera 1992). To that end, after deregulating individual employment contracts under Decree Law No. 2,200 (1978), in 1979 the military regime promulgated Decree Laws Nos. 2,756, on trade union organization, and 2,758, on collective bargaining and strikes.

The two decrees laid the groundwork for the Labour Plan, which limited collective bargaining to exclusively economic issues and prohibited sector-wide bargaining. The Plan also prohibited union control of jobs and representation by one single union in a company or economic sector, while promoting the principle of *union pluralism* – known in Chile as *paralelismo sindical* (union parallelism) – through regulations that not only facilitated the formation of multiple unions in individual enterprises but also recognized the right of each such union to engage in collective bargaining with the employer (Feres Nazarala 2009; Rojas Miño 2009). The Labour Plan decrees also rejected the single attribution of organizational rights, establishing that a company's collective agreements could be signed not only by an employer and a union (or multiple unions) but also by an employer and a “group of workers” (“bargaining group”) constituted for the sole purpose of collective bargaining (Decree Law No. 2,758, article 2) (Rojas Miño 2007).¹ Lastly, the Labour Plan decrees restricted the right to strike, making it lawful to replace striking workers and limiting strike action outside statutory collective bargaining processes (Feres Nazarala 2009). Any other form of collective action (for example, solidarity strikes) was explicitly prohibited.

Despite its strongly repressive and anti-union bias, the central aspects of the Labour Plan have not changed since democracy was restored in 1990. The labour reforms of the early 1990s and 2000s took the form of legislation that, among other things, facilitated the formation of company trade unions and

¹ The legislation established the possibility of signing unregulated “collective conventions” as an alternative to conventional (statutory) “collective agreements”. In later modifications of the regulations (Law No. 16,620 of 1987), the dictatorship refined the difference between collective agreements and conventions, establishing that, unlike the collective agreements typically signed by an employer and a union, collective conventions would not recognize the right to strike or protections for the members of the signing negotiating group (Rojas Miño 2007).

federations/confederations. They also legalized the existence of national trade union confederations and reinforced the powers of the Labour Inspectorate to deal with complaints of anti-union practices (Cook 2007; Feres Nazarala 2009). However, they did not substantially strengthen the right to strike or establish a sectoral bargaining system (although not prohibited, bargaining by branch of economic activity remained subject to employer approval). Furthermore, the reforms did not alter the principle of union pluralism that remains in force to this day (Rojas Miño 2009; Narbona 2014). Similarly, the last major labour reform measure proposed by President Michelle Bachelet in 2014 entailed no major transformation of Chilean trade unionism. The resulting statute (Law No. 20,940) did not eliminate the principle of trade union pluralism and maintained the primacy of collective bargaining at the enterprise level. Likewise, while it formally did away with the replacement of strikers, it also obliged the unions to provide “emergency teams” to ensure the continuity of basic company operations during strikes.

2.2. Effects of the Chilean system of industrial relations: Trade union fragmentation and high levels of labour unrest

The institutional framework has had major consequences for industrial relations in Chile. As shown in table 1, the country has a modest unionization rate and the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining is extremely low. Trade union organization is characterized by the existence of many different unions with few members. Table 1 also shows that there were some 11,000 active unions between 2010 and 2019 and that they had on average just over 90 members each. Due to the decentralized nature of collective bargaining, three out of four unionized workers were affiliated with a union that operated only at the enterprise level (Chile, Department of Labour 2019b, 45).

Despite the unchanged nature of the industrial relations system, since the late 2000s, Chile has witnessed a rebirth of union mobilization (Aravena and Núñez 2009; OHL 2017; Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017). Since 2006, trade unions from economic sectors with a strong tradition of mobilization (for example, mining and port logistics) and from traditionally “unorganized” sectors (such as wholesale

Table 1. Trade unions and collective bargaining in Chile (averages 1990–2019)

	Rate of unionization	Coverage by collective bargaining (%)	Number of trade unions	Unionized workers	Number of workers per union
1990–99	15.4	7.7	7 668 ^a	652 326 ^b	85 ^a
2000–09	13.4	5.6	8 865	690 688	78
2010–19	15.3	6.9 ^c	11 054	1 017 723	92

Notes: (i) ^a No data available for 1990 and 1996; ^b No data available for 1996; ^c No data available for 2017, 2018 and 2019. (ii) Number of workers per union calculated as the number of unionized workers divided by the number of trade unions. (iii) The number of trade unions includes only active unions.

Sources: Chile, Department of Labour (2019a, 62; 2019b, 20–22).

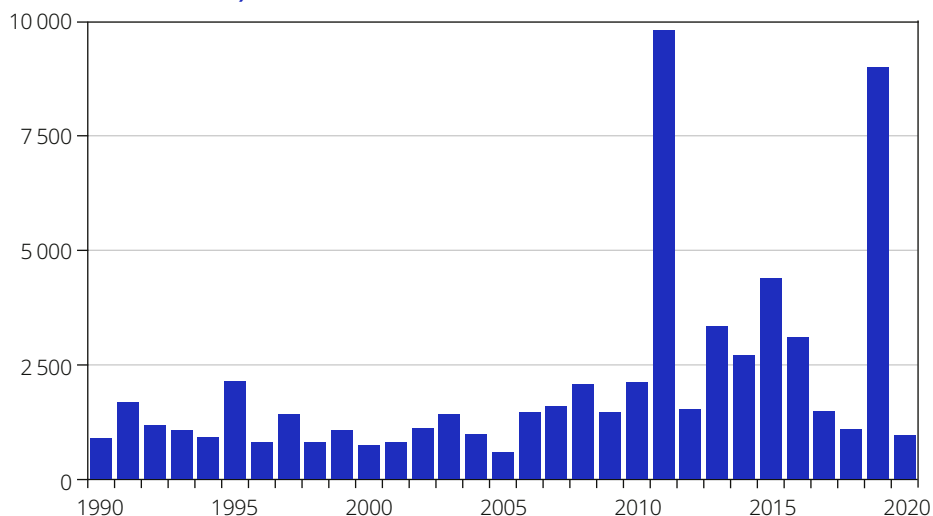
and retail trade) have launched large-scale mobilizations at both the sectoral and enterprise level (Bank Muñoz 2017; Santibáñez and Gaudichaud 2017). A particularly well-known aspect of this phenomenon has been the increase in “extra-legal” strikes, that is, actions that disrupt the work process and occur outside the statutory collective bargaining process (OHL 2020). Despite not being protected by labour law, many of the strikes brought economic victories for workers (Aravena and Núñez 2009; Santibáñez and Gaudichaud 2017).

This coincided with a series of anti-neoliberal protests in Chile, which gained strength in 2011 and continued intermittently until the so-called “social outburst” of 18 October 2019 (Somma et al. 2021). The events that began then had a significant impact on trade union mobilization, which in turn was one of the main components of the social outburst (Osorio and Velásquez 2022). As verified in a recent report by the Observatory of Labour Strikes (OHL in its Spanish acronym), in 2019 alone there were five general strikes, the highest number recorded in one year since the return to democracy (OHL 2020, 25–26).

Figure 1 illustrates this rebirth of labour mobilization in Chile. It provides information on the average person-days of work lost in private sector strikes between 1990 and 2020. As can be seen, strike activity increased considerably after the 2000s, peaking in 2011 and 2019, when the number of person-days of work lost quadrupled compared to the levels observed in the early 1990s. Consistent with recent research (Medel, Velásquez and Pérez 2023; Velásquez Orellana, Pérez and Link 2022), the greater disruptive capacity of unions shows that Chilean workers have been able to organize and act collectively, despite the limitations established by the labour legislation

Various analysts have suggested that the fragmentary nature of the Chilean model of industrial relations and the low protection it affords are key

Figure 1. Average annual person-days of work lost in strikes (private sector, 1990–2020)



to understanding the rise in the incidence of labour disputes. Some argue, for example, that the restrictions on collective bargaining by temporary or sub-contracted workers have prompted such workers to form trade union organizations dedicated to negotiating pay increases and improved working conditions outside the channels established in the law (Aravena and Núñez 2009; Santibáñez and Gaudichaud 2017). Others affirm that the increase in labour mobilization can also be explained by the inefficiency of the legislation on collective bargaining and strikes. According to this view, the legislation is inefficient because it excessively bureaucratizes the negotiation process and leaves very little room for the parties to participate autonomously (López Fernández 2009).

The revival of strike activity has sparked renewed interest in empirical studies of labour disputes in Chile. Some researchers have focused on describing the “legal” or “extra-legal” nature of strikes (Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017), while others have emphasized the effectiveness of the tactics used by workers (Velásquez Orellana, Pérez and Link 2022). Studies have also been conducted of how strikes are complemented by other forms of non-disruptive mobilization (Gutiérrez Crocco 2020) and of the extent to which the increase in strike action is an expression of the greater politicization of the Chilean trade union movement (Medel, Velásquez and Pérez 2023).

These studies are an important step forward in the study of strikes in Chile. However, they have not systematically analysed how certain aspects of the legislation currently in force affect patterns of labour disputes. We carry out this type of analysis in this article, focusing on an aspect that determines how trade unions function in Chile: union pluralism. To do this, we study whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the presence of unions and the occurrence of strikes at the enterprise level. Then, based on international studies on union pluralism (see section 3), in the central part of the article we analyse whether the existence of multiple unions in a company significantly increases the number of strikes. Lastly, in order to understand how union pluralism can lead to more labour disputes, we analyse whether the type of relationship that exists between unions (antagonistic or cooperative) significantly affects the level of contentious action observed in companies.

3. Literature review

3.1. Trade unions and industrial action

In their classic study of trade unions in the United States, Freeman and Medoff (1984) argue that unions are organizations that help channel the collective “voice” of workers, facilitating communication between workers and management and thus reducing the number of labour disputes (see also Lewin 2005; Bennett and Kaufman 2007). However, recent research has presented ample evidence casting doubt on this hypothesis. It shows that unions are able to mobilize the collective power and class solidarity of workers (Dixon, Roscigno and Hodson 2004; Bank Muñoz 2017) and therefore foster opposition between workers and management (Lewin 2005). Thus, unionized workers tend to be not only more dissatisfied with their jobs (Laroche 2016; Bessa, Charlwood and Valizade 2021)

but also to view the relationship between workers and employers as conflictive (Ringqvist 2021). They are also more often involved than non-unionized workers in disruptive actions such as strikes and demonstrations (Jansen 2014; Kerrissey and Schofer 2018).

Based on the above observations, our first hypothesis is as follows:

- (H_1) *In enterprises that have trade unions, the probability of a strike occurring is higher than in enterprises in which there are no trade unions.*

3.2. Models of industrial relations and trade union structure: The case of union pluralism

The institutions that regulate the functioning of trade unions and collective bargaining significantly affect the probability of strikes or contentious actions in the workplace (Brandl and Traxler 2010). In this regard, international research has shown that there is substantially less strike activity in countries with corporatist (that is, centralized or “coordinated”) models of industrial relations than in countries with “pluralistic” or liberal regulations – in other words, decentralized models in which union pluralism predominates (Korpi and Shalev 1979; Paloheimo 1984; Humphries 1990; Brandl and Traxler 2010).

In corporatist countries, particularly the Nordic and continental European countries, industrial relations are coordinated through centralized sectoral or national collective bargaining involving highly institutionalized trade union and employer organizations that often enjoy monopoly or quasi-monopoly representation in an economic sector. This translates into more moderate unions and companies and, consequently, fewer labour disputes (Paloheimo 1984; Brandl and Traxler 2010). According to the research carried out to date, this process involves two main mechanisms. On the one hand, by acting as centralized organizations, corporatist unions tend to moderate their wage demands and reduce the “economic militancy” of their members in exchange for greater economic benefits and greater participation in tripartite dialogue (Calmfors and Driffill 1988; Brandl and Traxler 2010). On the other hand, the greater degree of centralization of company unions increases their ability to “force” companies to respect the collective agreements adopted at the central (sectoral or national) level. Indeed, negotiations tend to bring greater economic benefits to workers under the corporatist model than in decentralized regimes. Centralized bargaining processes have the support of business associations not only because they limit labour unrest through the signing of “peace clauses” but also because, by establishing sector-wide wage and work conditions, they limit competition between companies for human resources (Wallerstein, Golden and Lange 1997; Martin 2014; Bulfone and Afonso 2020).

In Latin America, the characteristic elements of the corporatist model exist in, for example, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, albeit to varying degrees (Bensusán 2016; Etchemendy 2019). In Argentina and Uruguay, as in European corporatist countries, collective bargaining on wages is conducted at the sectoral level (Etchemendy 2019). In the case of Brazil, the unions enjoy monopoly representation of categories of occupations within a municipal territory (the

principle of *unicidade sindical*, or trade union unicity), while in Argentina the legal principle of *personería gremial* (the legal recognition of a trade union) implies that workers in an economic sector must be represented by a *single* union (Bensusán 2016; Cook 2007). As in Chile, the Argentine and Brazilian trade union movements are divided for political or ideological reasons; however, unlike the Chilean model, the existence of corporatist regulations in Argentina and Brazil severely limits inter-union competition during collective bargaining.

The corporatist model stands in contrast to the pluralistic or liberal Anglo-American regimes. In Latin America, Chile is a paradigmatic case of a pluralistic regime. In such regimes, decentralized collective bargaining prevails at the enterprise level and involves fragmented trade union and company organizations. Thus, the corporatist institutional mechanisms that allow disputes to be channelled “top down” are fragile (Paloheimo 1984; Humphries 1990). In particular, unlike corporatist regulations that promote monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic union representation, pluralistic models tend to be dominated by schemes of union “pluralism” (also called “multi-unionism”), which encourage the coexistence of two or more unions within a single company (or economic sector). All these unions have the same rights of representation and compete to attract the largest possible number of members from among the same group of workers. This type of union pluralism, which is predominant in Chile, stands in contrast to a second form of union pluralism, which also exists in the country, in which unions represent different occupational groups within the same company (Dobson 1997, 549; Jansen 2014, 68–69).

Empirical research does not usually distinguish between the two forms of union pluralism. However, the available evidence (mainly in respect of European countries) clearly indicates that union pluralism significantly increases the probability of strike action. There is no question that the existence of multiple unions weakens the collective power of workers, leaving them vulnerable to employer divide-and-conquer tactics (Dobson 1997, 550). This may in some cases result in fewer strikes. However, union pluralism also hinders the collective bargaining process and the likelihood of reaching agreements with employers; this in turn affects the economic efficiency of companies and makes them more prone to suffer from open conflicts with their employees (Dobson 1997; Jansen 2014). In addition, at the company or economic sector level, the existence of multiple unions encourages competition between unions for members, prompting the unions to adopt less conciliatory attitudes towards the company in order to achieve economic concessions and thereby increase their membership (Paloheimo 1984; Humphries 1990; Dobson 1997). In line with this idea, various studies carried out in recent decades have found significantly more strike action in companies, economic sectors and countries where union pluralism exists (Akkerman 2008; Brandl and Traxler 2010; Jansen 2014).

Based on this type of evidence, we put forward the following hypotheses:

- (H_2) *There is a positive relationship between the existence of multiple trade unions in one company and the incidence of strike action.*
- (H_3) *The probability of a strike occurring increases when there are antagonistic or competitive relationships between trade unions.*

4. Data and methods

4.1. Data

In this article, we analyse data taken from the ninth ENCLA, which was carried out between March and September 2019. The ENCLA is a probability survey, representative of all private sector enterprises with five or more workers (Chile, Department of Labour 2020, 30). It collects information using four different types of questionnaire: “Self-administered”, “Employers”, “Unions” and “Workers”. The first two apply to all enterprises in the sample. The “Unions” questionnaire is limited to companies that have trade unions; the respondent is the person occupying the office of president or the highest managerial position of the company’s most representative union. The “Workers” questionnaire is addressed to enterprises that have no unions and is completed by a person representing the workers on the company’s health and safety or training committee or, if there is no such body, a person chosen at random from among the workers.

In keeping with our objectives, we used these last two questionnaires to build a representative case-based database of all private enterprises, with and without unions, in the country. After cleansing the records and removing cases with missing data, the final database consisted of 3,465 cases. In some of the analyses we also used only the data for companies with unions ($N = 1,099$) or a representative subsample of companies with more than one union ($N = 448$).

4.1.1. Dependent variable

To measure the existence of strikes and labour disputes, we used the responses to the following question: “During 2018, did the company’s workers engage in any of the following forms of industrial action?” Owing to minor variations between the “Unions” and “Workers” questionnaires, our analysis focused on the following response options:

- worker march or rally to put pressure on the company
- concerted work slow-down
- collective work stoppage for part of the day
- strike (collective work stoppage for one day or more, without following collective bargaining protocols)

All the responses were binary (1 = yes, 0 = no). Exploratory analyses showed that the number of enterprises that experienced such action was low, meaning that we could not analyse each of the variables separately. We therefore decided, in line with earlier research (Jansen 2014, 68), to create a single binary variable defined as “strike”, where 1 represents the existence of at least one disruptive action and 0 is the absence of such action.

One possible limitation of this dependent variable is that it does not allow us to measure the existence of “legal” strikes occurring as part of statutory collective bargaining processes. Because of the legal restrictions on the right to strike in Chile (see section 2), the option “legal strike” only appeared in the “Unions” questionnaire. However, for reasons unknown to us, this variable was

Table 2. Descriptive sample statistics

	<i>N</i>	Average	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Dependent variable</i>					
Strike (1 = yes)	3 465	0.05	0.23	0	1
<i>Independent variables</i>					
Presence of a trade union (1 = yes)	3 465	0.32	0.47	0	1
Trade union pluralism (1 = yes) ^a	1 099	0.41	0.49	0	1
Number of union members ^{a, b}	1 099	277.14	862.04	1	20 000
Type of relationship between unions ^b					
Rivalry and competition	448	0.08	0.27	0	1
Indeterminate (none or context-dependent)	448	0.53	0.50	0	1
Cooperation and solidarity	448	0.39	0.49	0	1
Controls					
<i>Economic sector</i>					
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3 465	0.05	0.22	0	1
Mining and quarrying	3 465	0.02	0.14	0	1
Manufacturing	3 465	0.10	0.30	0	1
Utilities (electricity, water, etc.)	3 465	0.03	0.16	0	1
Construction	3 465	0.11	0.32	0	1
Trade	3 465	0.18	0.38	0	1
Transportation, storage and communication	3 465	0.08	0.27	0	1
Accommodation and food service activities	3 465	0.06	0.25	0	1
Financial and real estate activities	3 465	0.05	0.21	0	1
Professional and administrative services	3 465	0.12	0.32	0	1
Education	3 465	0.12	0.32	0	1
Health care	3 465	0.06	0.23	0	1
Arts, entertainment and recreation	3 465	0.02	0.16	0	1
<i>Company size</i>					
Micro and small enterprises (5–49 workers)	3 465	0.47	0.48	0	1
Medium-sized enterprises (50–199 workers)	3 465	0.17	0.38	0	1
Large enterprises (200 or more workers)	3 465	0.36	0.48	0	1
Temporary workers (1 = yes)	3 465	0.46	0.50	0	1
Subcontracted workers (1 = yes)	3 465	0.34	0.47	0	1

Note: ^a Variable applied to enterprises with no union; ^b Variable applied to enterprises with more than one union.

Source: ENCLA 2019 data based on ISIC Rev.4 classification of economic activities.

not recorded in the public version of the ENCLA database, so we were unable to analyse it. In any case, for methodological reasons we deemed it preferable not to include it in our measurement of strikes. Otherwise, it would have been difficult to compare the databases with the presence and absence of unions. Our study therefore focused exclusively on strike activity defined as “extra-legal” (OHL 2020, 5).

While it is true that this approach may limit the scope of our findings, previous research suggests that extra-legal strikes are a central aspect of labour unrest in Chile. According to data from the OHL (2020), when conflicts in the public and private sectors are taken into account, there were twice as many extra-legal strikes between 2010 and 2019 as legal strikes. Moreover, in the private sector, extra-legal strikes tended to be less frequent than legal ones, but they involved many more workers. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of strikers involved in extra-legal strikes doubled – they even tripled in 2014 and 2016 (OHL 2020, 12). The same report indicates that, during the ENCLA reference year (2018), some 30,000 workers participated in strikes in the private sector. Of these, about 19,000 took part in extra-legal strikes (OHL 2020, 12).

In sum, the data indicate that, despite its limitations, our analysis is useful for understanding labour unrest in Chile. The dependent variable represents a set of disruptive actions carried out collectively by workers to interrupt the work process. This operational definition of strike is consistent with that used in similar research both in Chile (for example, Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017; OHL 2020) and in other parts of the world (for example, Jansen 2014).

Descriptive statistics on this and the other variables analysed may be found in table 2.

4.1.2. Independent variables

We considered three main independent variables:

- *Presence of a trade union.* Binary variable in which 1 indicates that the enterprise has one or more trade unions and 0 indicates that it has none.
- *Trade union pluralism.* Binary variable in which 1 indicates that the enterprise has more than one trade union and 0 indicates that it has only one. We used this binary variable because the information set out in the public version of the ENCLA did not allow us to use a more refined measure of the number of unions in each enterprise.
- *Type of relationship between trade unions.* A categorical variable broken down into three categories:
 1. relations of cooperation and solidarity between trade unions in the same enterprise;
 2. ambiguous or unclear relationships (ranging from unions that said that they had no relationship with each other to unions whose relationship varied depending on the circumstances);

3. relationships of rivalry and competition between unions (for example, competition for members and to obtain better collective agreements).

The reference category is the relationship of rivalry and competition.²

4.1.3. Controls

Recent empirical research has shown that the number of strikes varies greatly by economic sector and company size (Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017; OHL 2020). Our multivariate analysis therefore includes controls for *economic sector*, measured in terms of 13 categories regrouping 17 of the categories set out in the fourth revision of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC Rev.4),³ and *company size*, measured in terms of three large categories depending on the number of company workers (table 2). Owing to problems related to the sample size, in some analyses applied only to enterprises with unions we used versions of these variables with fewer categories (table 4). In these analyses, the economic sector was subdivided into three large groups: agriculture, fishing and mining; manufacturing, construction and utilities; and services. The size of the company was measured using a binary variable whereby 1 was the value corresponding to large companies and 0 represented all the others.

Recent literature suggests that the probability of a strike occurring is also affected by other factors, such as union size or the existence of flexible and less protected work arrangements. Union size positively impacts strikes, while hiring workers on flexible or less protected contracts makes it more difficult to recruit them as union members and reduces the likelihood of strikes (Campolieti, Hebdon and Hyatt 2005; Kelly 2015; Jansen, Akkerman and Vandaele 2017). Our statistical models therefore incorporate three other controls available in the ENCLA database. The first is union size, measured as the number of members (if there is more than one union in the company, the largest union is used). The second indicates whether during the previous year the company hired temporary personnel to carry out work similar to that of the permanent workers (1 = yes,

² Owing to the sample size, it was not possible to use the original version of this variable, which distinguished unions that stated that they had no relationships with each other from those that said that the relationships varied depending on the circumstances. More specifically, the ENCLA questionnaire asked: "In general, how would you define the relations of your union with the other unions in the company in 2018?" The response options were as follows: (1) The relations between unions are based on cooperation and solidarity; (2) The relations between unions are based on rivalry and competition (for new members and better collective agreements, among others); (3) The relations between unions are based on both cooperation and rivalry, depending on the context and the union; (4) There is no relationship between the unions. In the variable used in this article, the last two response options were grouped into category 2.

³ Those categories are: agriculture, forestry and fishing (section A of the ISIC Rev.4); mining and quarrying (section B); manufacturing (section C); electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (section D) and water supply (section E); construction (section F); wholesale and retail trade (section G); transportation, storage and communication (sections H and J); accommodation and food service activities (section I); financial real estate activities (sections K and L); professional and administrative services (sections M and N); education (section P); human health and social work activities (section Q); and arts, entertainment and recreation (section R).

0 = no), while the third indicates whether the company employed subcontracted workers during the same period (1 = yes, 0 = no).⁴

4.2. Statistical method

The hypotheses set out above were tested using a series of logistic regression models. The dependent variable for all the models was strike. To facilitate the presentation of findings, we put the regression models into three groups, one for each independent variable. In each case, the underlying logic was the same. Model 1 included only the independent variable of interest. Model 2 included the controls for economic sector, company size and, in table 4, union size. Lastly, model 3 included the controls for temporary and subcontracted workers.

Because of the way in which the ENCLA sample was designed, we had to weight the data in order to obtain valid population estimates according to the size of the enterprise and the branch of economic activity (Chile, Department of Labour 2020, 30). The regression models were thus estimated using the weighted sample data.

As with any conventional regression model, logistic regressions do not allow the existence of causality to be established *statistically*. The coefficients described in section 5 should therefore be interpreted only as correlations. Our independent variables represent institutional characteristics that are exogenous to the strike action measured in the dependent variable. This leads us to posit, in line with other similar research (Jansen 2014), that the causal chain operates in the manner proposed by us (for example, union pluralism “causes” more strike action) and not the other way around.

5. Findings

Table 3 shows the results for three logistic regression models whose independent variable was the *presence of a union* in the company. As observed in the coefficient of model 1, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the presence of one or more union organizations and the occurrence of strikes. In other words, the presence of unions significantly increases the logarithm of the odds ratio (log odds) that strikes will occur. The relationship remains robust even when controls are introduced in models 2 and 3, indicating that our first hypothesis (H_1) holds true.

Table 4 shows the results for six logistic regression models. In the first group of models (1 to 3) the independent variable is *union pluralism*, while in the second group (models 4 to 6) the independent variable indicates the type of relationship between the unions.

⁴ Unfortunately, these variables did not allow us to ascertain why and to what extent the companies had hired temporary/subcontracted workers. It is therefore quite likely that they capture different approaches to such hires, from their extensive use to reduce labour costs to their limited use in time and for specific reasons (for example, to replace licensed workers). The lack of detail may limit the scope of the data, since only in the first case (extensive use of temporary/subcontracted workers) would it make sense to posit a negative relationship between these variables and strike action.

Table 3. Strike determinants in Chilean private sector enterprises, 2018
(logistic regression coefficients represented in log odds)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Union presence	2.291**** (0.054)	2.368**** (0.069)	2.372**** (0.072)
<i>Economic sector (reference category: transportation, storage and communication)</i>			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing		-2.608**** (0.236)	2.723**** (0.236)
Mining and quarrying		-0.085 (0.210)	-0.120 (0.211)
Manufacturing		-0.994**** (0.093)	-1.042**** (0.094)
Utilities (electricity, water, etc.)		-0.441* (0.230)	-0.588** (0.233)
Construction		-0.791**** (0.098)	-0.903**** (0.099)
Trade		-0.419**** (0.083)	-0.472**** (0.084)
Accommodation and food services		-1.412**** (0.166)	-1.557**** (0.167)
Financial and real estate activities		-2.319**** (0.299)	-2.341**** (0.299)
Professional and administrative services		-0.917**** (0.106)	-0.978**** (0.107)
Education		-0.250**** (0.096)	-0.404**** (0.098)
Health care		-0.700**** (0.154)	-0.828**** (0.155)
Arts, entertainment and recreation		-2.471**** (0.362)	-2.593**** (0.362)
<i>Company size (reference category: micro and small enterprises)</i>			
Medium-sized enterprises		1.034**** (0.073)	1.036**** (0.074)
Large enterprises		0.171** (0.086)	0.076 (0.087)
Temporary workers (yes)			0.507**** (0.056)
Subcontracted workers (yes)			-0.248**** (0.064)
Constant	-4.231**** (0.032)	-3.679**** (0.067)	-3.728**** (0.070)
Observations	3 465	3 465	3 465
Log likelihood	-7 087.221	-6 761.499	-6 719.922
Akaike information criterion	14 178.440	13 555.000	13 475.840

*, **, *** and **** indicate statistical significance at the 10, 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent levels, respectively.

Note: Standard errors appear in parentheses.

Source: Authors' calculations based on 2019 ENCLA data.

Table 4. Strike determinants in Chilean private sector enterprises with unions, 2018 (logistic regression coefficients represented in log odds)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Union pluralism	0.361**** (0.097)	0.468**** (0.108)	0.475**** (0.108)			
<i>Type of relationship between unions (reference category: rivalry and competition)</i>						
Indeterminate (none or context-dependent)				0.052 (0.339)	0.092 (0.345)	0.176 (0.353)
Cooperation and solidarity				-0.335 (0.355)	-0.320 (0.360)	-0.224 (0.367)
<i>Economic sector (reference category: services)</i>						
Agriculture, fishing and mining		-0.489*** (0.246)	-0.457* (0.247)		0.300 (0.303)	0.174 (0.308)
Manufacturing, construction and utilities		0.234**** (0.091)	0.227** (0.091)		0.212 (0.179)	0.313* (0.183)
<i>Company size (reference category: micro/small and medium-sized enterprise)</i>						
Large		-0.206*** (0.103)	-0.193* (0.105)		-0.095 (0.187)	-0.286 (0.194)
Number of unionized workers		0.0001* (0.0001)	0.0001* (0.0001)		0.00005 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)
Temporary workers (Yes)			0.025 (0.094)			1.033**** (0.210)
Subcontracted workers (Yes)			-0.160* (0.092)			0.417** (0.185)
Constant	-2.036**** (0.052)	-2.082**** (0.074)	-2.024**** (0.090)	-1.603**** (0.323)	-1.678**** (0.371)	-2.645**** (0.419)
Observations	1 099	1 099	1 099	448	448	448
Log likelihood	-1 764.806	-1 754.962	-1 753.740	-484.676	-483.631	-465.168
Akaike information criterion	3 533.613	3 521.924	3 523.480	975.353	981.261	948.336

*, **, *** and **** indicate statistical significance at the 10, 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent levels, respectively.

Notes: (i) Standard errors are indicated in parentheses. (ii) Models 4 to 6 include only enterprises with more than one trade union.

Source: Authors' calculations based on 2019 ENCLA data.

Regarding those models, the coefficients indicate that, in companies where there is more than one union, the log odds of worker-driven disruptive action taking place is greater. As in the previous case, the effect of the independent variable is statistically significant and remains robust even when controls are introduced. This suggests that our second hypothesis (H_2) is true.

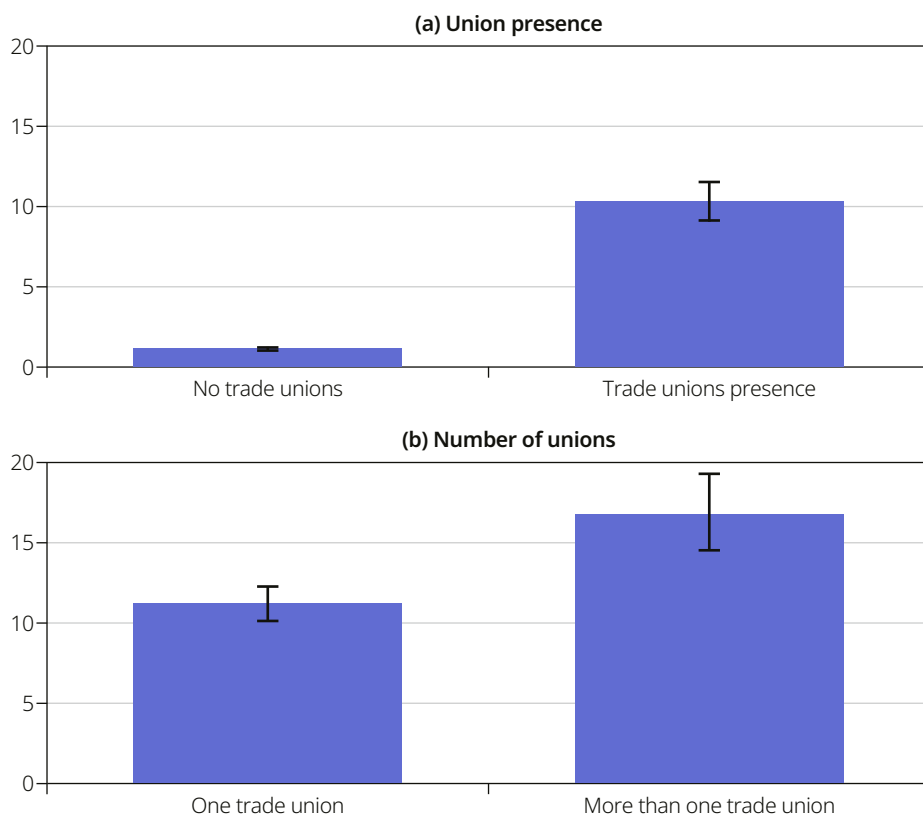
On the other hand, the models devised to analyse the impact of the relationship between unions (models 4 to 6) suggest that the probability of strikes occurring is lower when the relations between unions are grounded in solidarity and cooperation rather than in rivalry. This is consistent with our hypothesis. However, the relationship is not statistically significant in any of the models, not even in model 4, where no controls were introduced. Therefore, our third hypothesis (H_3) is not true.

In closing this section, we briefly examine what happens to the coefficients of the controls included in the regression models. The controls in table 3 suggest that, compared to our reference category (transportation, storage and communications), strikes tend to be less frequent in branches of activity such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, and financial and real estate activities. Table 3 also shows that strikes tend to occur more often in medium-sized and large enterprises, although in the latter case the coefficient is statistically significant only in model 2 (that is, when there is no control for the hiring of temporary and subcontracted workers). These results are in line with the evidence presented in earlier research (OHL 2017 and 2020; Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017). In addition, the coefficients of model 3 in table 3 suggest that the propensity to strike may be lower in companies that subcontract workers and higher in companies that hire temporary workers. This only partially coincides with the results described in other studies (Campolieti, Hebdon and Hyatt 2005; Jansen, Akkerman and Vandaele 2017), perhaps because the variables do not allow us to distinguish clearly between the causes and extent of the use of temporary and subcontracted workers (see note 4). Lastly, in line with earlier evidence (Campolieti, Hebdon and Hyatt 2005), the controls for models 2 and 3 in table 4 suggest that there tend to be more strikes in companies with more unionized workers.

6. Analysis

Our study points to a positive relationship between the presence of unions and union pluralism (that is, the existence of multiple unions in an enterprise) and the probability of strike action – an observation that is largely consistent with international evidence.

Regarding the presence of unions, the results reaffirm the idea that trade unions may be weak but they nevertheless remain key to mobilizing the “associative power” of workers (Bank Muñoz 2017; Wright 2000). This can be clearly seen in figure 2(a). Based on the coefficients of model 3 in table 3, the figure shows the probability of strikes in unionized and non-unionized enterprises, with all other variables in the model remaining constant in their reference category. As indicated in the figure, the probability of strikes occurring is approximately 1

Figure 2. Probability of strike action in enterprises (percentage)

Source: Generated by the authors using OHL data.

per cent in enterprises without a union presence, rising to more than 10 per cent in unionized enterprises. As well as confirming the conclusions of previous studies on unions and associative power, these results underscore the need to qualify the recent theory according to which the trade union “fetish” should be abandoned and priority shifted to the study of other “non-union” forms of collective organization (Atzeni 2021). While there is no denying the importance of other types of organization that go beyond the actions of “traditional” unions (particularly collective bargaining), our data indicate that unions continue to occupy, at least in the case of Chile, a central place in labour disputes and collective mobilization in the workplace.

As regards union pluralism, the results of the regression models corroborate the thesis that the existence of multiple union organizations contributes to the increase in the number of strikes (Akkerman 2008; Jansen 2014). This is observed in figure 2(b), which shows the probability of strikes occurring in enterprises where only one union is present and in enterprises with more than one union. These probabilities were calculated from the coefficients of model 3 in table 4, keeping the size of the unions controlled at their average value and controlling for the rest of the variables in their reference category. As reflected

in figure 2(b), the probability of strikes occurring in enterprises with only one union is close to 12 per cent. That figure rises to about 16 per cent in enterprises that have more than one union.

As indicated in section 5, the results do not allow us to conclude that the higher number of disputes resulting from union pluralism is due to competition between unions. The models indicate that strikes are less likely in enterprises characterized by inter-union cooperation than in companies where unions compete with each other, but the difference is not statistically significant. While the data do not allow us to offer a robust explanation of these results, one possible, purely statistical, explanation has to do with the sample size of models 4 to 6. Estimating models with few cases affects the statistical strength of the coefficients, reducing their statistical significance. Another possible explanation can be drawn from recent empirical research. International studies suggest that union pluralism increases the number of strikes because it tends to produce more “chaotic” collective bargaining and greater degrees of uncertainty (Dobson 1997; Brandl and Traxler 2010). This might indicate that union pluralism leads to more labour disputes because it makes negotiations with employers more difficult, regardless of the type of relationship that exists between the unions concerned. In future research, ideally based on statistical analyses of larger sample sizes, problems of this kind should be studied in greater depth. This would help to clarify whether the theory that inter-union competition increases labour unrest by fostering “confrontational” attitudes in the unions is valid in the case of Chile (Dobson 1997; Jansen 2014).

Lastly, the results of the analysis prompt us to reconsider the effects of union pluralism in Chile. As various analysts have rightly observed, legislation that promotes union pluralism limits the formation in enterprises of union organizations with disruptive power (Feres Nazarala 2009; Durán and Kremerman 2015). Without denying this finding, our evidence indicates that it cannot be inferred that the weakness resulting from union fragmentation leads to a linear reduction in the level of strike activity in enterprises.

7. Conclusion

In the past decade, Chile has witnessed the rebirth of strike action. This article has studied this phenomenon, focusing on a key but rarely analysed aspect of the Chilean model of industrial relations: union pluralism. In line with the international literature, our empirical evidence has shown a statistically significant relationship between the presence of unions and the probability that strikes will occur in enterprises. Another, perhaps more important, conclusion is that union pluralism heightens the probability of strike action in a statistically significant way. The regression models do not support the hypothesis that the positive effect of union pluralism is explained by inter-union competition. Even so, our results have fundamental consequences for the study of labour unrest in countries that, like Chile, have fragmented, decentralized and “uncoordinated” industrial relations.

As we have seen in section 2 of the article, the Chilean labour model is decentralized, fragmented and provides little protection for the right to strike. The results of this study have shown that the trade union fragmentation resulting from this regulatory framework explains, at least in part, the increase in the number of strikes in the country. Recent studies show that the increase has been especially notable when it comes to extra-legal strikes involving “political” demands (that is, demands that are not necessarily wage-related or strictly economic) (Pérez, Medel and Velásquez 2017; Medel, Velásquez and Pérez 2023). Future research will have to analyse these phenomena in greater depth. Studies could be conducted, for example, of the extent to which union pluralism has (or has not) facilitated the rise of extra-legal strikes at the behest of increasingly politicized unions (Osorio and Campusano 2020; Medel, Velásquez and Pérez 2023).

The results also prompt us to reconsider how unions and businesses conceive the Chilean model of industrial relations and how, then, the existing legislative framework could be modified. Recent research shows that labour legislation remains unchanged largely because of employer opposition to the centralization of collective bargaining and unions (Pérez Ahumada 2021). The results of our study have highlighted that the reluctance of employers to change this model can be counterproductive even for the companies themselves. The business position has perpetuated a regulatory framework that fragments trade unions and, for that very reason, encourages strike action.

In response to the long-standing demands of the trade union movement, the current President of Chile and leader of the Left, Gabriel Boric, has pointed to the need for legislative changes aimed at centralizing collective bargaining and strengthening unions (Apruebo Dignidad 2021). The social mobilizations that began in October 2019 and the election of a leftist government in December 2021 were indications that the conditions for definitively repealing the 1979 Labour Plan were better than in previous decades. However, in view of the defeat of the national plebiscite on 4 September 2022, the consequent weakening of the Boric Government and the steadfast business opposition to pro-union reforms, it hardly seems feasible to promote a substantial modification of the Chilean labour model, at least for now. In this context, the results of this study have indicated that reform aimed at strengthening unions and centralizing collective bargaining may promote less conflictual industrial relations. This could help persuade employers to discuss the advantages of implementing a new regulatory framework that, in addition to strengthening unions, regulates the relations between capital and labour more efficiently.

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