

What Types of Factors Can Influence the Strength of Labor Unions in Companies and State Enterprises in Thailand?

Chaturong Napathorn (Corresponding author)

Department of Human Resource and Organization Management, Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy
Thammasat University, Rangsit campus, Klongluang, Pathumthani 12121, Thailand
Tel: 662-696-5905 E-mail: chaturon@tu.ac.th and napathorn_c@windowslive.com

Suchada Chanprateep

Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science
Chulalongkorn University, Phayathai Road, Patumwan, Bangkok 10330, Thailand
Tel: 662-218-5070 E-mail: suchada.cha@chula.ac.th

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Abstract

This research provides an empirical analysis of the factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand in order to provide long-term implications for labor unions and labor-management relations in Thailand and other countries. The union's presidents, board committees, and members of labor unions in nine private companies and two state enterprises were participated in this survey. Based on 1761 valid responses from a total population of 44573 persons, our findings demonstrated that 13 factors tend to affect the strength of labor unions in companies and state enterprises in Thailand. Represented in descending order of influence, the macro-level (or national-level) factors include labor union association; mass media; cultural factors; labor relations law; economic, political, and population changes; and the role of government. The micro-level (or firm-level) factors in descending order of importance success in collective bargaining; labor union policies; union member unity; employer policies; financial status of labor union; union president and board committees; and the relationship between labor union and employer.

Keywords: Labor Union, Industrial relations, Labor relations, Labor-Management relations

1. Introduction

Labor unions are entities established by workers and democratically operated in order to represent workers in any company or state enterprise in order to protect worker interests and promote mutually beneficial relationships between employers and workers. In addition, they also play an important role in the development of society and the nation as a whole (Webb, 1896; Pongpangan, 1979; Somprasong, 1979; Tosuwanjinda, 2002; Wilawan, 2007).

According to Piriyaangsan (1999), the philosophy of positive labor relations, the labor union is considered one of the most important institutes in the industrial world (Piriyaangsan, 1999). According to Dunlop (1958), the labor relations system is a sub-system of an overall social system. It consists of three main parties, namely, employers, workers, and the government (Dunlop, 1958); the representative of workers within any enterprise or industry is the labor union. If a labor union is strengthened and operated according to the philosophy of positive labor relations, members of such labor union will rely on labor union itself as the agent able to protect their interests. The labor union also plays an important role in promoting fairness within an organization and protecting members from being exploited by employers. At the same time, if employers strictly follow the philosophy of positive labor relations, such employers must recognize the significance of labor unions and not weaken the labor union in any way so that the union can manage compensation, benefits and welfare, and conditions of employment fairly. When both parties pay attention to each other, a win-win situation becomes the ultimate goal (Tengyai, 1996). However, if the labor union is weakened and cannot truly protect the interests of workers, or if the labor union does not follow the philosophy of positive labor relations, employers may take

advantage of or exploit workers. At the same time, workers will no longer trust the labor union as the representative of workers.

Hence, the strength of labor unions strongly influence whether such labor unions are able to protect the welfare and interests of workers and promote fairness and impartiality among them. In addition, it also encourages employers to realize the existence and significance of labor unions as the representative of workers in any state enterprise or company. Employers will be less likely to take advantage of or exploit workers, and any unfair labor practices will be less likely to take place within the enterprise or company. The workplace atmosphere will move toward a win-win outcome.

2. Overview of Factors Influencing the Strength of Labor Unions

A question remains in the study of labor unions, namely, what types of factors can influence the strength of labor unions? Several scholars have offered opinions about this issue. For instance, John Keane (1992) suggested that the strength of labor union depends on three factors, namely, members regularly paying the annual fee to the labor union, members willing to participate in the activities arranged by the labor union, and the size of the labor union itself (Keane, 1992). However, based on the scholarly debate on union strength, the number of labor union members or the growth of labor unions does not appear to affect the broader qualitative aspect of union strength (MacKenzie, 2010). It may be possible that unions that have a large number of members are weak because members may be passive with respect to the labor union's activities or may not participate in the union's activities (Gall, 2005). Kneitshel (1986) also proposed five factors influencing the strength of labor unions, including solidarity, independence of the labor union, democracy, unity, and responsibility (Kneitshel, 1986). In addition, Miller and Form (1951; 1964; 1980) also classified factors strengthening the labor union into two types, namely, external and internal factors. The external factors consist of a legal system that protects the labor union and the acceptance by workers that "labor union is considered the legitimate entity" (Wilawan, 2007). In terms of internal factors, this may include the property or resources owned by the labor union (Miller and Form 1951; 1964; 1980).

The characteristics of labor union leaders are also associated with loyalty among members and the willingness of members to join and work for labor unions (Gordon *et al.*, 1980; Kelloway and Barling, 1993; Kurovillia and Fiorito, 1984; Metochi, 2002; Thacker *et al.*, 1990). That is, these characteristics are prone to influence the strength of labor unions themselves. In addition, national culture also play an important role in labor union membership and strength; people living in a country with a strong cultural emphasis on collectivism tend to trust labor unions to help protect their rights and interests and thus are more likely to join a labor union (Posthuma, 2009). Another important issue that may affect union strength is the relationship between workers and employers. That is to say, when workers perceive that employers are unfair in the distribution of rewards or that workers are treated unfairly, workers are prone to decide to join a labor union or are willing to take actions on behalf of it (Buttigieg *et al.*, 2008).

Social, economic, and industrial changes also affect the strength of unions in various ways. For instance, the shift from manufacturing to service industry has led to the employment of a larger number of women, youth, and part-time, contract, and temporary workers who tend not to join labor unions. This results in the decline of union density, power, and strength (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Automation, one of the major effects of social, economic, and industrial changes, is also a substantial challenge that may influence the strength of labor unions in many countries around the world such as in Japan and the US because it may lead to a surplus number of workers and a lower number of union members (Klay, 1987; U.S. Department of State, 2010). Globalization is another concern that may influence the strength of labor unions because privatization, deregulation, job insecurity, and lower wages resulting from globalization might weaken the labor union itself (Abbas, 2007; Scruggs and Lange, 2002). Moreover, fluctuations in business cycles, inflation, and unemployment rates also play a role in the strength of labor unions in several countries around the world (Joelle and Williamson, 2008).

Thai scholars in particular have also proposed some ideas about the factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand. For instance, Jandaravitoon (2001) has stated that several changes are required in order to strengthen labor unions in Thailand, such as an increase in the financial freedom of labor unions, adequate office equipment, a sufficient number of labor union officers, and conviction among union leaders to pay more attention to public interest than individual interests. (Jandaravitoon, 2001). In addition, the number of labor union members, the internal structure of the labor union (*i.e.*, unity among members, the unity between union board members and members, qualifications of labor union leaders, and the democratic structure of the union), the acceptance of labor union from employers, freedom of labor union in its own operations, attitudes of the community toward workers, and the attitudes of executives and legislators also strongly affect the strength of

labor unions in Thailand (Pitayanon, 1987).

3. Research Methods

3.1 Development of the Measuring Instrument

This research commenced with in-depth interviews with union presidents, union board committees, and members of 13 leading labor unions in 6 well-known industries in Thailand (Table 1). Open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews were used to address the diversity of responses that arise during the interviews. Subsequently, the researcher summarized the data obtained from interviewees together with a literature review; the researcher then designed questionnaires on factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand. The researcher classified these factors into two levels. The macro-level factors consisted of labor relations law; the association of labor unions; the role of the government; economics, political, and population changes; cultural factors; and mass media. Micro-level factors include the union's president and board committees; unity among union members; the financial status of labor union; employer policies; the relationship between labor union and employers; success in collective bargaining; and labor union policies.

In order to increase reliability and validity in order to ensure the appropriateness of the data collection instrument, the researcher requested two of the most experienced labor union leaders in Thailand to verify the questionnaires and conducted a pilot test with 50 people, including academics, labor union leaders, members of labor unions, and the students who were studying labor relations at one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand. Then, the researcher tested the instrument's reliability again by applying Cronbach's coefficient alpha as a measure of consistency. Measures of the coefficient alpha of 0.8 or above are considered reliable.

3.2 Data Collection

Union presidents, union board committees, and members of labor unions in private companies and state enterprises were contacted through a formal invitation to participate in the survey. All of the union's presidents, board committees, and former presidents allowed the researcher to visit their organizations. The presidents and board committee members distributed the questionnaires to their members on behalf of the researcher. From the total number of union members of 44573 persons in 11 leading labor unions in Thailand, the sample size was 1490 persons, which allowed figures to be calculated at a confidence level of 95% and an error at 5%.

3.3 Limitation of the research methods

Several limitations of this study should be considered. First, the results may only be applied to the current situation in Thailand since cultures and attitudes of people are different from one country to another. Second, the results may not represent the whole population of union presidents, board committees, and members in Thailand. However, the researcher attempted to select the leading labor unions in each well-known industrial sector together with state enterprises in Thailand in order to obtain appropriate and valid data regarding factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand. Third, respondent bias may also affect the results.

4. Findings

4.1 Profile of the respondents

One thousand, seven hundred and sixty-one valid responses (resulting in a response rate of 60%) were received in January 2010. Respondents included union presidents, board committees, and members in Thailand who were at least 18 years of age. A summary of the demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table 2.

Mean ratings of issues regarding factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand

The six macro-level factors (*macro*) and seven micro-level factors (*micro*) were analyzed using item mean ratings, as presented in Table 3. In descending order of factor means, the macro-level factors derived are as follows.

Factor 1_{macro} Labor union associations (mean = 4.164)

Factor 2_{macro} Mass media (mean = 3.951)

Factor 3_{macro} Cultural factors (mean = 3.942)

Factor 4_{macro} Labor relations law (mean = 3.910)

Factor 5_{macro} Changes in economics, politics, and population (mean 3.876)

Factor 6_{macro} The role of the government (mean = 3.697)

The 59 items regarding macro-level factors were extracted; the ten items rated with the highest scores are shown in Table 4. The item "*The unity among labor unions will help promote the union's negotiation power and get*

reputation from government” under *Factor 1_{macro}* (labor union associations), scored the highest with a mean score of 4.42. Next, in descending order of factor mean, the micro-level factors are as follows.

Factor 1_{micro} Success in collective bargaining (mean = 4.167)

Factor 2_{micro} Labor union policies (mean = 4.167)

Factor 3_{micro} Unity among union members (mean = 4.148)

Factor 4_{micro} Employer policies (mean = 3.895)

Factor 5_{micro} Financial status of the labor union (mean 3.883)

Factor 6_{micro} Union president and board committees (mean = 3.842)

Factor 7_{micro} Relationship between the labor union and employer (mean = 3.750)

With respect to 65 items regarding micro-level factors, ten items with the highest score were extracted and are shown in Table 5. The item, “*the labor unions protect member’s interests by receiving reasonable salary and welfare*” under *Factor 1_{mic}* scored the highest with a mean of 4.49.

5. Data analysis and discussion

5.1 Macro-level (national-level) factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand

The researcher analyzed the ten macro-level items extracted from 59 items and found that the respondents that participated in this survey agreed that all six macro-level factors represented in this study influence the strength of labor unions in Thailand. The analysis and discussion of these factors are described in detail below.

5.1.1 *Factor 1_{macro}*: Labor union associations

There are three items under this factor. The first item, “*Unity among labor unions in Thailand will help promote the union’s negotiation power and achieve a better reputation from the government,*” was rated a mean score of 4.42. The second item, “*Leaders of labor union should pay attention to the labor union associations in order to set up labor organizations at higher level in order to strengthen the labor unions and labor movement in Thailand,*” was rated a mean score of 4.26. The third item, “*The association of labor unions into federation or confederation within the same industry plays an important role in empowering the collective bargaining of such labor unions,*” was rated a mean score of 4.23. This implies that labor union associations, especially within the same industry, into higher-level labor organizations would help strengthen the labor movement in Thailand since it can promote the negotiation power of labor union. However, the unity among labor organizations in Thailand is a substantial concern. Based on interviews with several labor union leaders in Thailand, they agreed that one of the biggest problems regarding the labor movement in Thailand is the lack of unity among labor unions and labor organizations in Thailand. Put simply, labor organizations in Thailand are fragmented. They have been established in order to serve the personal interests of labor union leaders, not the general interests of workers. This is why there are so many labor councils in Thailand (that is, 12 labor councils), while the rate of unionization in Thailand is very low at less than 5% (Khinkaew, 1999; Thanachaisettavut, 1996). The fragmentation of labor organizations ultimately weakens the power of labor unions themselves in terms of collective bargaining power with employers and the government. Recently, a labor organization named Thai Labor Solidarity Committee was established in order to solve problems regarding the weakness, fragmentation, and lack of unity among labor organizations and the labor movement in Thailand. However, whether this committee can fulfill its goals or not is an issue for further study.

5.1.2 *Factor 2_{macro}*: Mass media

The item, “*Attending national-level activities such as National Labor Day’s activities, in order to express power and unity among labor organizations in Thailand will help strengthen the labor unions in Thailand,*” was rated a mean score of 4.24. The item, “*The innovative technology of mass media could either promote or deteriorate the image as well as the unity of labor unions. Thus, utilizing mass media to strengthen labor unions must be done with much caution,*” was rated a mean score of 4.16. That is to say, due to advanced technology and borderless communication networks in today’s age of globalization, the spread of information from Thai labor unions through several kinds of mass media may help enhance the status of labor unions to internationally competitive levels. People across the globe and international organizations will be more likely to recognize the labor activities, and unfair labor practices in Thailand, which should put some pressure on employers to pay more attention to and treat the labor unions within their enterprises more fairly. Labor leaders hope that labor unions in Thailand will be strengthened in this way. For instance, the Centaco Co., Ltd., which produces fresh and processed chicken, is located near Bangkok. During the past years, the company has attempted to threaten the

existence of the labor union in several ways and has dismissed hundreds of workers, including a former labor union leader. The unfair labor practices of this company have been broadcasted through several types of mass media. The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF) together with several labor unions across many countries such as Hong Kong and Taiwan have provided assistance for Centaco's labor union to address this situation (IUF, 2007).

5.1.3 Factor 3_{macro}: Cultural factors

The first item, *"The habits of Thai people are often concerned with short-term benefits and daily wages, resulting in a lack of concern for long-term benefits for security after retirement. This type of attitude reduces the power of collective bargaining,"* was rated a mean score of 4.09. The second item, *"Thai people often compromise, pay respect to one another, and avoid being offensive to one another, which positively affects collective bargaining,"* was rated a mean score of 4.06. This means that Thai cultures play an important role in the strength of labor unions. According to studies from Hofstede (1984) and Suthakavatin (2005), Thailand is a country with high power distance and collectivism. Thai people tend to compromise and behave according to the majority's opinions (Hofstede, 1984; Suthakavatin, 2005). In addition, Thai workers normally do not pay attention to long-term interests. Instead, they focus on short-term benefits and daily wages. They almost never think about their life security after retirement. Hence, they do not recognize the benefits of membership in labor unions in the long run. In contrast, they think that being a member of a labor union is useless or may affect their job status in the short-run. In addition, the interviewees further mentioned that Thai workers tend to easily accept job proposals from employers despite the lower pay since, such workers believe that *"it's better than no pay or losing my job"*. That is, Thai workers perceive that being exploited by employers is no problem. Of course, this perception will erode the bargaining power of labor unions and lead to weaknesses of labor unions in the country.

5.1.4 Factor 4_{macro}: Labor relations law

The item, *"Labor unions in Thailand will be strengthened if only one labor relations law is applied for both private companies and state enterprises in Thailand,"* was rated a mean score of 4.18. In the past, Thailand had only one labor relations law for both private companies and state enterprises, namely, Labor Relations Act B.E. 2518. State enterprises's businesses strongly influenced many Thai people, the general economic situation, and overall society; they include organizations like the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) and the State Railway of Thailand. Their labor unions and leaders were also powerful during collective bargaining with their employers and the government. It was found that the government accepted proposals from state enterprise labor unions regarding issues such as requests for higher wages and salary increases, request to not privatize, and so on. In addition to enhancing their power in claiming and protecting the rights and interests of their own members, under Labor Relations Act B.E. 2518, leaders of state enterprise labor unions also played an important role in assisting, supporting, and associating with private-company labor unions in claiming and protecting the rights and interests of their members as well. However, when labor relations laws have been separated into two categories, that is, one for private companies (Labor Relations Act B.E. 2518) and the other for state enterprises (State Enterprise Labor Relations Act B.E. 2543), the power of state enterprise labor unions has become limited, and due to this separation of law, leaders of state enterprise labor unions can no longer assist and support private company labor unions with respect to the labor movement. As a result, some private company labor unions have been isolated and weakened. They cannot protect the rights and interests of their members as they could in the past when state enterprise labor unions supported them. This is the reason why respondents believe that if only one labor relations law is applied, the strength of labor unions in Thailand will be fostered.

5.1.5 Factor 5_{macro}: Economic, political and population changes

The item, *"Currently, the employment of a larger number of part-time or contract workers, the automation, the fluctuations of unemployment rate, and so on, tend to affect job work security of workers. They tend to join the union to claim and protect their rights and interests. However, the strengths of unions is based on whether such unions are able to truly protect the rights and interests of their members or not,"* was rated a mean score of 4.09. From interviews with leaders of several leading labor unions in Thailand, it was found that due to economic and industrial changes and automation, an increasing number of part-time and contract workers are employed in companies and their subsidiaries due to their flexibility in terms of employment and dismissal. These workers tend not to be members of labor unions. Some part-time workers who would like to join a labor union may be threatened by employers (Prakarabhoti, 2007). Indeed, some employers attempt to separate full-time workers from part-time workers in order to avoid association between the two groups (International Labor Standard, [online] available: <http://www.muslimthai.com/main/1428/content.php?page=sub&category=110&id=10952>,

July 2, 2010). This tends to weaken labor unions in Thailand. In addition, interviewees also agreed that during the time of economic crisis, a higher number of workers tend to join unions because they believe that unions can help them protect their rights, interests, and status as full-time workers. However, when the economic situation recovers or is prosperous, workers tend not to pay attention to unions since they believe that unions are useless. In terms of the demographic dimension, interviewees stated that men tend to be labor union members more so than women. Another important issue is that the authors found that most labor union members had earned only a primary school certificate. The workers who earn at least a Bachelor's degree tend not to join unions in Thailand because they believe that unions cannot help them enhance their status within their company.

5.1.6 Factor 6_{macro}: Role of government

The item, *"The government should foster understanding and provide knowledge among company executives or employers regarding the significance of labor relations system in order for such employers to feel more confident about worker intentions and recognize that labor unions are not their enemies but their partners,"* was rated a mean score of 4.27. This implies that if the government pays attention to and recognizes the significance of labor unions, it should attempt to promote better understanding among employers regarding the existence and significance of labor unions. In addition, the government should also provide knowledge about labor relations laws and labor relations systems for employers and workers as well as members of labor unions in order to help foster mutual understanding between both parties and strengthen the labor union as an entity that plays an important role in a positive labor relations system. According to the interviews, most workers in Thailand still lack a basic understanding about labor rights, labor laws, labor unions, and labor relations systems. However, if employers believe that labor union is the "cancer", they may attempt to weaken or simply provide no support for labor unions (Jandaravitoon, 2001). Hence, the role of government as mentioned is key insofar as the government can influence the existence and strength of labor unions in Thailand in the future.

5.2 Micro-level (that is, firm-level) factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand

The researcher analyzed the twelve items (of 65) that were rated with the highest score and found that respondents agreed that all seven micro-level factors represented in this study influence the strength of labor unions in Thailand. An analysis and discussion of these factors are described in detail as follows.

5.2.1 Factor 1_{micro}: Success in collective bargaining

The item, *"The existence of labor union allows a union member to ensure that he/she will receive reasonable benefits and wages,"* was rated a mean score of 4.49. The item, *"The existence of labor union allows a union member to ensure that they will receive the appropriate welfare that they desire,"* was rated a mean score of 4.46. This implies that success in collective bargaining between labor unions and employers in terms of wages, benefits, and welfare are considered significant in terms of assessing the strengths of labor unions in Thailand. Because Thai workers who are members of labor unions are mostly white-collar workers (Piriyarangsarn, 1999), they normally concentrate their attention and efforts on wage increases and bonuses (Levine, 1997), and they strongly believe that being members of labor unions will help them successfully make requests for annual wage increases and bonuses from employers. Hence, workers decide to join or leave unions for this reason. Most labor unions in Thailand try their best to succeed in annual collective bargaining with their employers regarding wage and salary increases as well as bonuses. They implement many strategies to ensure that the annual collective bargaining process will be successful, particularly with regard to discussing problems or issues of wages and salary increases with employers, the appointment of a joint consultation committee (JCC), collaborating with other labor unions to form labor union federations, congresses or councils in order to strengthen the power of the labor unions themselves, and so on.

5.2.2 Factor 2_{micro}: Union policies

The item, *"Building up unity among a union's board committees will positively strengthen the labor union,"* was rated a mean score of 4.39. The item, *"The development of union's board committees and members by educating them to understand labor relations law positively promotes the strength of labor union,"* was rated a mean score of 4.37. This implies that labor unions in Thailand should implement policies aimed at enhancing unity among a labor union's board committees and members and educating them to understand labor relations laws in order to strengthen the status and power of the union. Some scholars have suggested that fragmentation among labor unions, labor union leaders, and members is one of the most important problems in Thai labor movement over time (Brown, 2007; Jandaravitoon, 2001; Brown and Frenkel, 1993). Thus, it is important for labor unions and labor organizations to recognize and solve this problem rapidly. Labor unions should start with implementing a policy to build trust and unity among board committees and members within their own labor unions. If board committees and members unite and work for the same ultimate goal, labor unions will be more likely to be able

to truly protect the rights and interests of workers, and they will not be unnerved or fragmented by employer actions. In contrast, if fragmentation and rivalries among labor unions in Thailand continue, labor unions can be easily weakened. Employers may intervene in a labor union's actions, and labor unions may no longer be able to truly protect the rights and interests of workers. Another important union policy involves educating board committees and members in order to understand labor relations law more clearly. Employers in Thailand often use the loopholes in Thai labor relations law to take advantage of workers. Without working knowledge of labor relations law, workers usually accept being exploited by employers. Hence, we can say that the lack of formal education and actual knowledge, especially on labor law and labor relations law, among Thai workers is considered by some scholars to be one of the major obstacles in the development of positive labor-management relations in Thailand (Thanachaisettavut, 1996).

5.2.3 Factor 3_{micro}: Unity among union members

The item, *"The ratio of the number of members of labor unions to the number of workers who are eligible to be members of labor unions indicates the strength of labor unions,"* was rated a mean score of 4.46. The items, *"The continuous increase in the number of labor union members demonstrates the strength of labor unions"* and *"Confidence among members toward labor unions tends to positively affect the strength of labor unions"* were rated a mean score of 4.44. This implies that unity among labor unions members affect the strength of labor unions in Thailand. Of course, if members trust or confide in the ability of labor unions to claim or protect their interests, they must be an important factor that can strengthen labor unions themselves, since they will try their best to support a labor union's status and activities in various ways. For instance, they must be willing to pay the union's monthly fee, and they must be willing to take part in the labor union's activities. They must attend the labor union's annual meeting, and they must participate in electing the union board members in order to show employers and society at large that the labor union is harmonious and cannot be easily threatened. They will not be inactive members in name only, not doing anything for their union. However, based on the interviews, there are a large number of members who are inactive or do not pay attention to labor union activities. They join the unions just because they think that unions can help protect their rights and interests in the workplace. However, they do not recognize the roles and responsibilities of labor unions clearly. They do not participate in any labor union activities, since they think that such activities are useless, or they do not have enough time to do so.

5.2.4 Factor 4_{micro}: Employer policies

The item, *"The company's policy or the parent company's policy related to the Bipartite Labor Relations System tends to positively affect the strengths of labor unions,"* was rated a mean score of 4.01. This implies that the respondents agreed that the employer's policy affects the strength of labor unions in Thailand. That is to say, if a company or parent company in a foreign country focuses on promoting a positive bipartite labor relations system, it will implement strategies, regulations, rules, and procedures that play an important role in fostering relationships between employers and workers. According to the interviews, there are many policies, strategies, regulations, and rules that employers implement in order to promote positive bipartite labor relations system, such as allowing the union president or union board committees to work full-time for the labor unions, approving the construction of a labor union's office building within a company's compounds, holding activities for the employers and union members to promote good relationships between the two parties, preparing worker manuals regarding labor laws, labor relations systems, and other topics of importance to workers, allowing the union president or union board committees to attend the company's annual ceremonies and meetings, and providing financial assistance for labor union development fund.

5.2.5 Factor 5_{micro}: Financial status of union

The item, *"The overall financial stability of the labor unions tends to positively affect the strength of labor unions,"* was rated a mean score of 4.26. Not surprisingly, if the financial status of labor unions in companies and state enterprises in Thailand is stable, such labor unions should be able to achieve many goals and objectives, such as holding several activities in order to promote their roles and responsibilities, helping members overcome the labor-management relations problems, having enough funds to cover worker livelihood during a strike or lockout in order to ensure successful negotiations with workers, having enough money to pay for legal fees in case that workers are unfairly dismissed and lawsuits become necessary, and providing certain benefits for workers in several occasions (e.g. wedding ceremonies, ordination, funeral ceremonies etc.). This stable financial status will ultimately strengthen labor unions.

5.2.6 Factor 6_{micro}: Union president and board committees

The item, *"The leadership, honesty, integrity, and transparency of the union president and board committees tend to positively affect the strength of labor unions,"* was rated a mean score of 4.47. The item, *"Union*

presidents and board committees who have had long-time experiences working for labor unions positively promote the strength of labor unions,” was rated a mean score of 4.19. Not surprisingly, several leading and powerful labor unions in this study such as the Thai rayon labor union, Bangkok bank workers union, Thai carbon black labor union, have presidents who have held that position in the labor unions for over 10 years. These leaders have accumulated knowledge, skills, and experiences in the labor movement in Thailand for a long time; as such members of these labor unions trust their capabilities and potential to strengthen the labor unions and to act as representatives of the workers in the workplace. In some case, the authors found that when an experienced leader stepped down from the position due to retirement and the union appointed a new president, the new leader faced problems resulting from a lack of trust among members and a lack of knowledge and experiences to tackle sophisticated labor-management situations. As a result, the labor union’s status was weakened.

5.2.7 Factor 7_{micro}: Relationships with employers

The item, “*The management of the company should accept the existence and purpose of the labor union,*” was rated a mean score of 4.38. This implies that most respondents agreed that a good relationship between employers and labor unions plays an important role in strengthening labor unions in Thailand. A company policy that pays attention to the positive bipartite labor relations system will foster a good relationship between employers and labor unions as the representative of workers within the company. Each party understands its own roles and those of the other party. An employer should not view that labor union as a troublemaker but rather as an entity that plays an important role in promoting good labor-management relations; indeed, without workers, the company cannot exist. In addition, labor union will respectfully contact and coordinate with employers. Labor unions should understand that without employers, labor unions cannot exist. When both parties respect each other, strengthened labor unions are the ultimate outcome.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a better understanding of factors that influence the strength of labor unions in companies and state enterprises in Thailand. After conducting the literature review and in-depth interviews with leaders of 13 labor unions in Thailand, a set of factors that tend to critically affect the strength of labor unions in Thailand was identified. In addition, this study also found support for the theoretical argument regarding the factors that influence the strength of labor unions, as proposed by several scholars mentioned above. This research has some practical implications for labor unions and employers. Based on these results, there is evidence to suggest that if labor unions want to be strong, they should emphasize the factors the authors propose because such factors play an important role in strengthening labor unions in companies and state enterprises in Thailand. With respect to employers, if the status of labor unions is strong, employers might recognize the significance and existence of labor unions as the representative of workers within the respective enterprise or industry. Workers who believe that they have been treated badly by their employers will claim their rights and protect their interests through labor unions. Unfair labor practices are less likely to occur in such situations, and good labor-management relations tend to be the ultimate outcome if both parties respect each other. However, there are limitations of this study that must be considered. That is to say, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of union presidents, board committees, and members in Thailand. Nevertheless, the researcher tried to balance the limitations mentioned above by drawing data from 13 leading labor unions in 6 well-known industry sectors in Thailand in order to obtain the most valid dataset despite the study’s limitations.

7. Future Research Direction

Future research on the factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand should employ advanced statistical tests such as factor analysis, multiple regression test, and so on in order to recognize the most important factors that influence the strength of labor unions in Thailand as well as the relationships among factors. In addition, further research should be conducted to compare factors influencing the strength of labor unions in each company or each sector in Thailand; comparisons of factors between private companies and state enterprises should also be made in order to provide implications for labor unions and labor-management relations in Thailand and other countries in the long term.

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Table 1. The name list of thirteen leading labor unions in six well-known industries in Thailand participated in this study

Industry	Name of labor union
	Toyota Thailand Workers' Union
Automobile Industry	Honda Workers' Union of Thailand
	Isuzu Engine and Parts Worker's Union
Petroleum and Chemical Industry	Thai Bridgestone Labour Union
	Thai Carbon Black Labour Union
Food and Beverages Industry	Siam Foods Labour Union
	Foremost Thailand Workers Union
Garment and Textile Industry	Thai Rayon Labour Union
	Teijin Polyesters Workers Union
Finance and Banking Industry	Bangkok Bank Workers Union
	Thai Farmers Bank Labour Union
State Enterprises	The Labour Union of Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
	TOT Workers' Union

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N =1,761)

Characteristics	Respondents	(%)
Sex	1,306	74.2
Male	455	25.8
Female		
Age (Average \pm S.D)	41.35 \pm 8.93 year	
< 30 years	206	11.7
30-39 years	484	27.5
40-50 years	752	42.7
> 50 years	319	18.1
Education Level		
Primary School	91	5.1
Lower Secondary	223	12.7
Upper Secondary/ Vocational Certificate	546	31.0
Diploma	315	17.9
Bachelor Degree	493	28.0
Higher than Bachelor Degree	93	5.3
Duration of employment within organization (Average \pm S.D)	17.31 \pm 9.279 years	
< 10 years	379	21.5
10-19 years	708	40.2
20-30 years	459	31.2
> 30 years	125	7.1
Duration of membership within labor union (Average \pm S.D)	14.59 \pm 8.714 years	
< 10 years	499	38.3
10-19 years	798	45.4
20-30 years	428	24.3
> 30 years	36	2.0
Personal Monthly Income (Thai Baht)		
< 5,000 Baht	56	3.2
5,000-9,999Baht	232	13.1
10,000-29,999 Baht	715	40.6
30,000-49,999 Baht	455	25.9
> 50,000 Baht	303	17.2
Position held in organization		
Permanent Worker	1,748	99.3
Part-time Worker	13	0.7
Marital Status		
Single	348	19.8
Married	1,330	75.5
Divorced	83	4.7

Table 3. Mean ratings and Cronbach's alpha of factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand

Factors	Mean ^a	Cronbach's alpha
Macro level factors (National level factors)		
<i>Factor 1_{macro}</i> Labor union associations	4.164	0.934
<i>Factor 2_{macro}</i> Mass media	3.951	0.897
<i>Factor 3_{macro}</i> Cultural factors	3.942	0.937
<i>Factor 4_{macro}</i> Labor relations law	3.910	0.886
<i>Factor 5_{macro}</i> Changes in economics, politics, and population	3.876	0.862
<i>Factor 6_{macro}</i> The role of the government	3.697	0.855
Micro level factors (Firm level factors)		
<i>Factor 1_{micro}</i> Success in collective bargaining	4.167	0.805
<i>Factor 2_{micro}</i> Labor union policies	4.167	0.958
<i>Factor 3_{micro}</i> Unity among union members	4.148	0.883
<i>Factor 4_{micro}</i> Employer policies	3.895	0.907
<i>Factor 5_{micro}</i> Financial status of the labor union	3.883	0.843
<i>Factor 6_{micro}</i> Union president and board committees	3.842	0.832
<i>Factor 7_{micro}</i> Relationship between the labor union and employer	3.750	0.826

^a Five-point Likert scale was used for rating the issues ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree".

Table 4. Mean ratings of items regarding macro-level factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand

Macro-level factors	Mean ^a	S.D.
Factor 1_{macro} Labor union associations		
• "Unity among labor unions in Thailand will help promote the union's negotiation power and achieve a better reputation from the government,"	4.42 ^b	0.839
• "Leaders of labor union should pay attention to the labor union associations in order to set up labor organizations at higher level in order to strengthen the labor unions and labor movement in Thailand,"	4.26	0.848
• "The association of labor unions into federation or confederation within the same industry plays an important role in empowering the collective bargaining of such labor unions,"	4.23	0.871
Factor 2_{macro} Mass media		
• "Attending national-level activities such as National Labor Day's activities, in order to express power and unity among labor organizations in Thailand will help strengthen the labor unions in Thailand,"	4.24	0.941
• "The innovative technology of mass media could either promote or deteriorate the image as well as the unity of labor unions. Thus, utilizing mass media to strengthen labor unions must be done with much caution,"	4.16	0.984
Factor 3_{macro} Cultural factors		
• "The habits of Thai people are often concerned with short-term benefits and daily wages, resulting in a lack of concern for long-term benefits for security after retirement. This type of attitude reduces the power of collective bargaining,"	4.09	1.024
• "Thai people often compromise, pay respect to one another, and avoid being offensive to one another, which positively affects collective bargaining,"	4.06 ^c	0.907
Factor 4_{macro} Labor relations law		
• "Labor unions in Thailand will be strengthened if only one labor relations law is applied for both private companies and state enterprises in Thailand,"	4.18	0.940
Factor 5_{macro} Changes in economics, politics, and population		
• "Currently, the employment of a larger number of part-time or contract workers, the automation, the fluctuations of unemployment rate, and so on, tend to affect job work security of workers. They tend to join the union to claim and protect their rights and interests. However, the strengths of unions is based on whether such unions are able to truly protect the rights and interests of their members or not,"	4.25	0.944
Factor 6_{macro} The role of the government		
• "The government should foster understanding and provide knowledge among company executives or employers regarding the significance of labor relations system in order for such employers to feel more confident about worker intentions and recognize that labor unions are not their enemies but their partners,"	4.27	0.959

^a Five-point Likert scale was used for rating the issues ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”.

^b The highest mean among nine issues.

^c The lowest mean among nine issues.

Table 5. Mean ratings of items regarding micro-level factors influencing the strength of labor unions in Thailand

Micro-level factors	Mean ^a	S.D.
Factor 1_{micro} Success in collective bargaining		
•“The existence of labor union allows a union member to ensure that he/she will receive reasonable benefits and wages,”	4.49 ^b	0.817
• “The existence of labor union allows a union member to ensure that they will receive the appropriate welfare that they desire,”	4.46	0.841
Factor 2_{micro} Union policies		
•“Building up unity among a union’s board committees will positively strengthen the labor union,”	4.39	0.784
•“The development of union’s board committees and members by educating them to understand labor relations law positively promotes the strength of labor union,”	4.47	0.839
Factor 3_{micro} Unity among union members		
•“The ratio of the number of members of labor unions to the number of workers who are eligible to be members of labor unions indicates the strength of labor unions,”	4.46	0.771
•“The continuous increase in the number of labor union members demonstrates the strength of labor unions”	4.44	0.851
•“Confidence among members toward labor unions tends to positively affect the strength of labor unions”	4.44	0.812
Factor 4_{micro} Employer policies		
•“The company’s policy or the parent company’s policy related to the Bipartite Labor Relations System tends to positively affect the strengths of labor unions,”	4.01 ^c	0.969
Factor 5_{micro} Financial status of union		
•“The overall financial stability of the labor unions tends to positively affect the strength of labor unions,”	4.26	0.918
Factor 6_{micro} Union president and board committees		
•“The leadership, honesty, integrity, and transparency of the union president and board committees tend to positively affect the strength of labor unions,”	4.47	0.890
•“Union presidents and board committees who have had long-time experiences working for labor unions positively promote the strength of labor unions,”	4.19	0.808
Factor 7_{micro} Relationships with employers		
•“The management of the company should accept the existence and purpose of the labor union,”	4.38	1.017

^a Five-point Likert scale was used for rating the issues ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”.

^b The highest mean among nine issues.

^c The lowest mean among nine issues.