

The Association Between Union Membership and Views of Worker-Management Conflict



Asher Moss, Applied Data Analysis, Wesleyan University

Introduction

- Employers sometimes discourage workers from unionizing by presenting unions as a source of conflict and an impediment to positive communication (Kleiner 2001).
- Unionized workplaces are more likely to see visible conflict between workers and management, including strikes, walk-offs, and lockouts (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).
- However, unions may promote communication and cooperation between labor and management.
- The union voice hypothesis suggests that unions provide workers an outlet to voice their concerns, resolve issues in the workplace, and increase cooperation between workers and management (Deery, Buttigieg, & Zatzick, 2014) (Gordon & Ladd 1990).

Research Questions

- Is there an association between union membership and workers’ views on whether there is conflict between workers and management?
- Does this association differ based on the income, education level, and political party membership of respondents?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=2,652) were drawn from the 2021 General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative sample of English-speaking, non-institutionalized adults in the U.S.

Measures

- Belief about union membership was coded dichotomously based on the question, “Do you (or your spouse or partner) belong to a labor union? (Who?).”
- Whether a respondent believes there is conflict between workers and management was measured with the question, “(In all countries, there are differences or even conflicts between different social groups. In your opinion, in America how much conflict is there between . . .) Management and workers?” Possible responses ranged from 1 (“there are no conflicts”) to 4 (“very strong conflicts”).

Results

Univariate

- 9.5% of respondents were members of a union.
- 2.7% of respondents said there is no conflict between workers and management. 46.2% said there is some conflict. 42.7% said there is strong conflict. 8.3% said there is very strong conflict.

Bivariate

- Based on a logistic regression, belief about conflict between workers and management (O.R. 2.0, CI .91-4.34) is not significantly associated with union membership. People who are union members are not significantly more likely to believe there is conflict between workers and management than people who are not union members.

Multivariate

- Based on a logistic regression, belief that there is no conflict between workers and management (O.R. 2.5, CI 1.1, 6.0) is significantly associated with union membership after controlling for income.
- Belief that there is no conflict between workers and management (O.R. 2.4, CI 1.0, 5.8) is also significantly associated with union membership after controlling for education level, political party membership, and income.

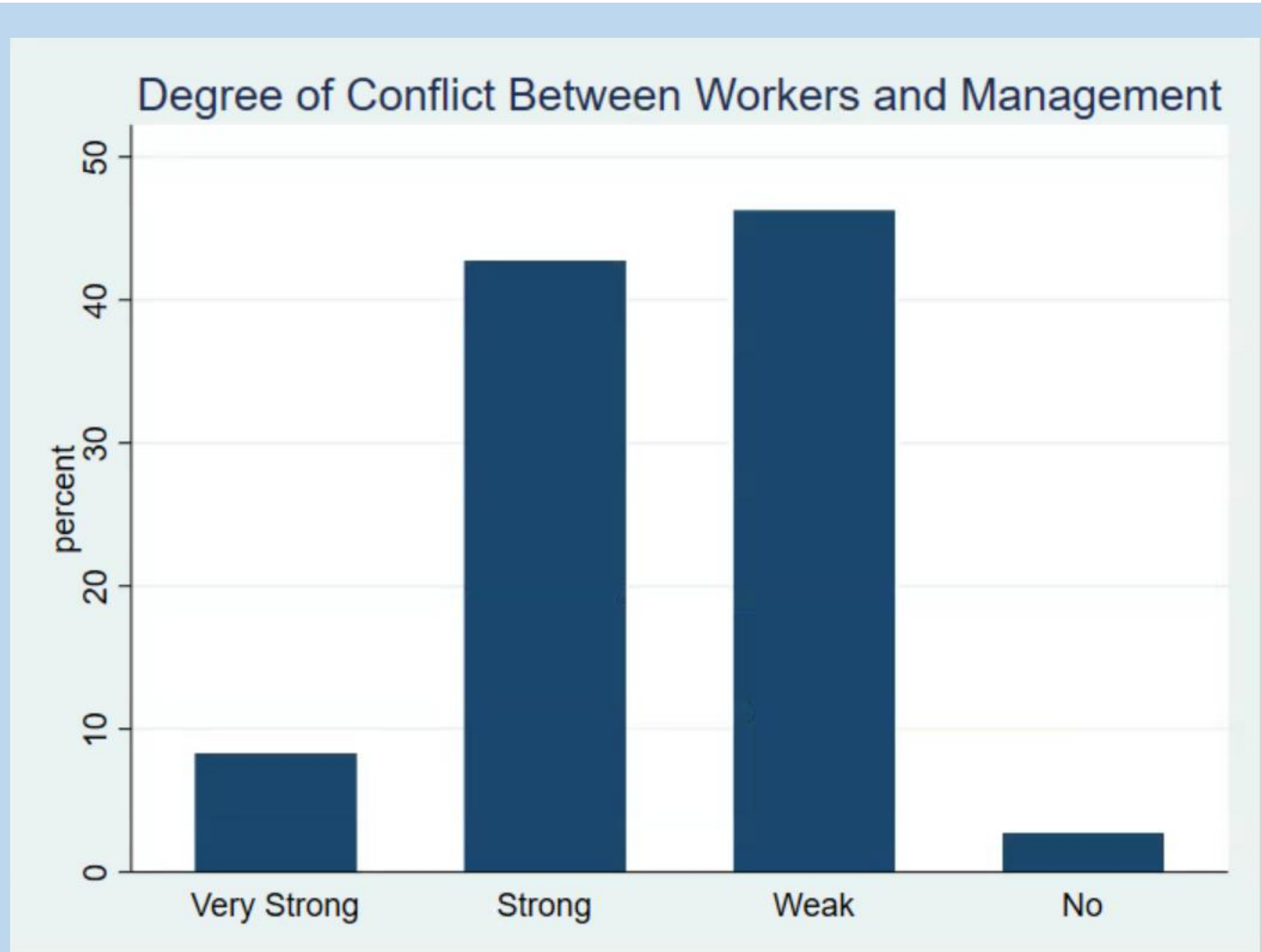


Figure 1: Univariate Graph: Views on the Degree of Conflict Between Workers and Management

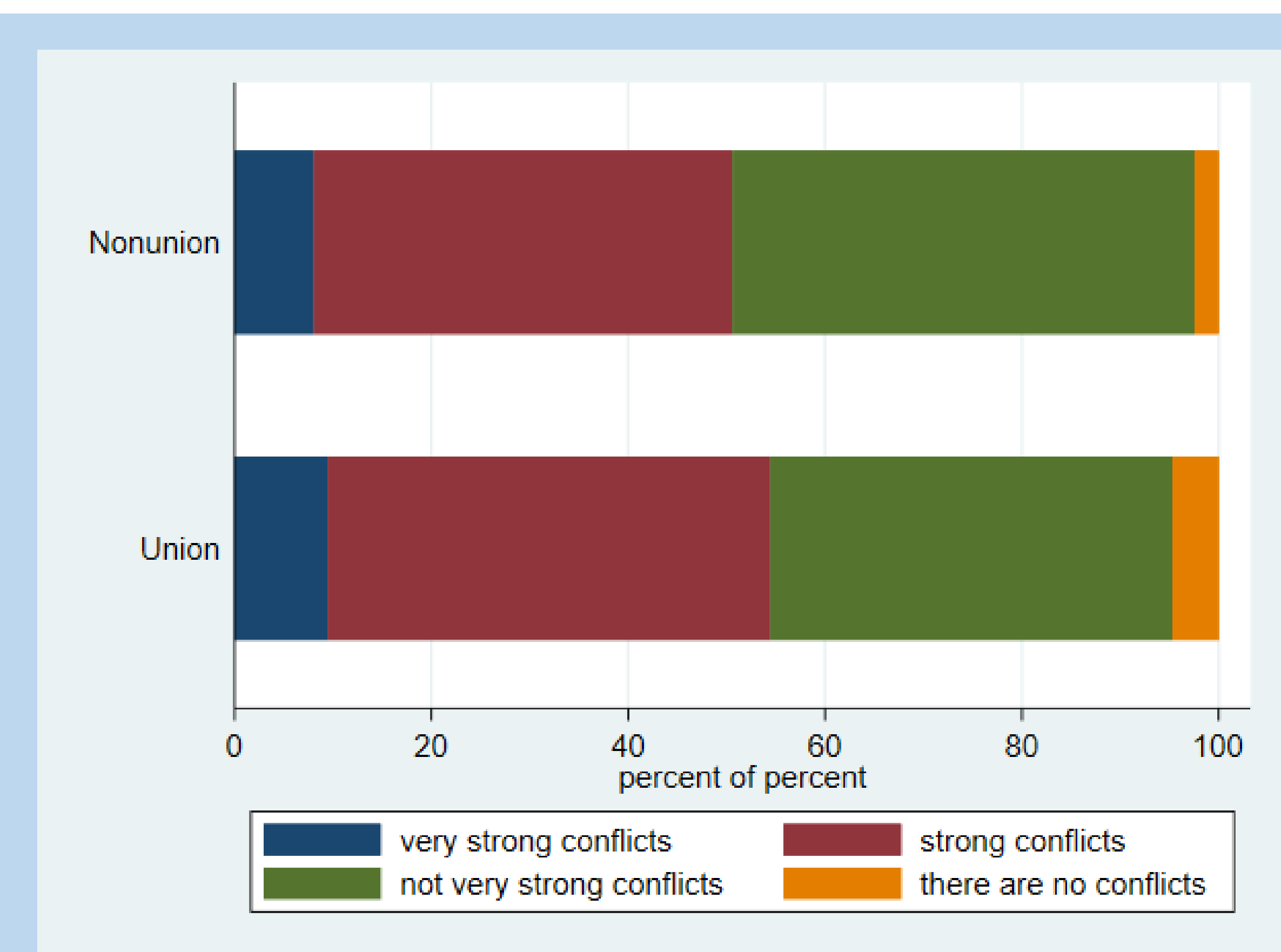


Figure 2: Bivariate Graph: Association Between Unionization and Belief About Worker-Management Conflict

Discussion

- This study shows that unionized workers are significantly more likely to say there is no conflict between labor and management, when accounting for income.
- This result suggests that unions may not a source of conflict in the workplace and could instead just a vehicle for expressing discontent.
- This result could help clarify the nature of labor relations and encourage unionization.