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## Beyond Strikes? Regime and Repertoire of Workers' Protests in Poland 2004–2016

*Abstract:* There is an ongoing debate on the changes in the activity of the labour movement in Europe: whether strikes are still the dominant form of action or were they supplanted by demonstrations and civil activism. The question is urgent in countries such as Poland where the number of registered strikes is very low. We verify the hypothesis that the labour movement in Poland shifts from the labour rights to civil rights model of contention in five dimensions: the scale of protest, mobilizing structures, repertoire, claims, and addressees. To avoid pitfalls of relying on official strike data, we use protest event analysis to gather data on workers' protest from the national press. The conclusion is that the official data on strikes does not reveal the full scope of protest but work stoppages remain the dominant form of action. Results question the reliance on the official strike data to measure labour movement activity.

*Keywords:* labour repertoire, protest event analysis, strike, workers' protest

### Introduction

The number of strikes is decreasing across Europe, yet trade unions still organize resistance against anti-employee policies, and work stoppages are still their default tool of action (Vandaele 2016). In this context, the low contentious activity of trade unions in Poland is surprising. In most years during the studied period, the number of officially registered strikes did not exceed 50. Is the Polish case a taste of things to come for European trade unions, an extreme case of labour movement quiescence (Crowley 2002), or is there another explanation? What happened to workers' militancy in the country of "Solidarity"?

We do not believe that the conflict between capital and labour has ceased to exist, but rather that it takes other forms than that of legal strikes (Kelly 2015: 722–723). The institutional framework that regulates and registers industrial conflict requires careful examination. Are Polish workers protesting in the streets rather than in their workplaces? What organizations mobilize them? What are their demands? The official data on strikes cannot help us answer those questions. We need a methodology that measures the dynamics of industrial action but does not rely on official data. Only then we can assess the true extent of changes in labour militancy and repertoire. The aim of the article is to study the

activity of the labour movement in Poland in years 2004–2016 beyond the official data. This knowledge can improve our understanding of the process happening across Europe.

We develop upon the Gentile and Tarrow (2009) thesis that in neoliberal regimes workers use civil rights rather than labour rights to voice their discontent. What is the difference? In the civil rights model, demonstrations and non-governmental organizations replace or supplement strikes and trade unions. Our hypothesis is that the workers' contention changes towards that model in five dimensions: scale of protests, mobilizing structures, repertoire, demands and their addresses. The low number of strikes is an indicator of this process because contention takes different, unregistered forms. To verify this, we use protest event analysis (PEA), a key method for social movement studies.

In the next section of the article, we describe theoretical questions related to changes in the labour contention: why it happens and how. Then, we operationalize our hypothesis and describe the methodology of protest event analysis. The analysis of results is the main section of the article. The conclusion follows.

### **Changing Regimes and Repertoires of the Labour Movement**

There is an ongoing debate on the transformation of the repertoire of the labour movement: what are contemporary forms of interaction between workers and political and economic elites? Decreased labour militancy in the workplace is considered to be an essential feature of a neoliberal economy (Van Der Velden 2007) and street demonstrations seem to be a more common form of action (Andretta et al. 2016).

According to Gentile and Tarrow (2009), the change in the repertoire is derivative of changes within political and economic regimes. They propose two ideal types of regimes and their corresponding forms of labour contention. Corporatist regimes, where there are strong institutional channels of communication between elites and contenders, allow workers to use their historical, labour rights-related repertoire: strikes and other forms of workplace contention. Trade unions remain essential forms for workers' organizing and influencing the political system. In neo-liberal regimes, however, institutions that channelled industrial conflict are weak or disbanded altogether. The labour movement, stripped of its power in the workplace, has to rely on civil rights and street contention. Shared tools of action bring trade unions and other social movement organizations closer together and increase the probability of mutual cooperation.

Research supports the validity of the Gentile and Tarrow model. The economic regime of the European Union (Erne 2015), deindustrialization and small company size (Bordogna and Cella 2002), countries' openness to trade (Piazza 2005), layoff deregulation (Belloc 2021) and job flexibility (Jensen et al. 2017) all reduce workers' willingness to participate in a strike and the number of strikes. In consequence, the number of strikes in European countries has reached an all-time low (Kelly 2015). Union representatives are aware of the difficulties posed by neoliberal policy and tend to act cautiously (Hennebert and Faulkner 2017). Some unions consciously pursue a strategy called 'social movement unionism,' which involves innovative forms of contention and broad coalitions with civil society actors (Fairbrother 2008; Ross 2007). There are no exact analyses of the scale of this shift in the

labour repertoire, and it represents an enormous challenge for scholars, who draw their conclusions from official data sets (Campos Lima and Artiles 2018; Vandaele 2016).

How does this model explain the Polish reality? Some consider Polish case unique due to recent history of neoliberal structural adjustments that were accompanied by limited means of social protection (Bohle and Greskovits 2007). According to critics, Polish neocorporatist institutions restrict and weaken the position of the labour movement vis-à-vis capital and the state. In other words, it is illusionary and obscures strong class conflicts (Ost 2000). Consequent governments ignore and marginalize social dialogue (Szkłarczyk 2019). This could make trade unions an ineffective tool for pursuing workers' interests.

Still, only trade unions can organize strikes in Poland (Świątkowski 2011: 166). With the union membership as high as 12.9%, only 1/8 of a total of 16 million workers can exercise their right to strike. 75% of union members work in the public sector, while only 18% work in private companies (CBOS 2019). While atypical employment is one of the characteristics of the Polish economy (Trappmann 2011), precarious workers rarely unionize and protest about their working conditions (Mrozowicki and Czarzasty 2020). The procedure of collective dispute favours employers and requires enormous organizational effort on the side of the unions (Czarzasty 2019). This is because organizers can be held liable for criminal and financial losses caused by work stoppage (Kurzynoga 2018). Backsliding in the development of institutions of collective bargaining (Greskovits 2015: 272) and consequent liberalization of the labour law (Karolak 2020) deepen this unequal access to the right to strike in Poland. This is why we expect trade unions to employ civil rights-related contention instead of relying on weak labour rights-related institutions.

The official data on strikes suggests that the change might already be happening. The average yearly number of strikes (2004–2016) is 1142.3. However, this metric is skewed by two nationwide strike campaigns that involved thousands of public institutions: there were 1736 strikes in 2007 and 12765 in 2018. In fact, those were only years when the number of registered strikes was higher than 100. When they are excluded from calculation, the average falls to 31.8. On the other end of the spectrum, there were only 2 strikes with 200 participants in 2004. In 2014—3 strikes with 848 participants, in 2016—5 with 709 (ILOSTAT).

We do not know whether workers employ other forms of contention, or whether they do not protest at all. We have insufficient data on other forms of workers' militancy. In fact, this applies to data on strikes in all countries of Europe (and beyond) (Kelly 2015).

To conclude, there is a need for studies of labour movement beyond official data: from wildcat strikes through demonstrations to absenteeism (Greskovits 2015: 271). Varga (2013) suggests that the labour movement is best studied during episodes of contention and those should be the focus. Still, the question remains: what are those episodes of contention if not strikes?

## **Research Plan**

### *Operationalization*

Our hypothesis is that the workers' contention in Poland is shifting from the labour rights model towards the civil rights model, as proposed by Gentile and Tarrow (2009).

Table 1

**Two models of labour contention developed from Gentile and Tarrow (2009)**

	Labour rights model	Civil rights model
Scale of protest	Officially registered	Unregistered
Mobilizing structures	Trade unions	Social movement organizations
Repertoire	Work stoppages, picket lines	Street demonstrations, social campaigning
Demands	Economic and labour rights-related	Political
Addressees	Owners and managers	Political elites and the public

We operationalize those two models in five dimensions: scale of contention, mobilizing structures, repertoires of contention, claims and their addressees.

In the first model, protests are confined to institutionalized forms typical for industrial relations: industrial debates and strikes. In the civil rights model, protests ‘overflow’ institutions and the actual scale of contention is higher than registered. If the hypothesis is true, the majority of protests will not be registered by official statistics.

Mobilizing structures describe formal and informal structures that bring people together during protest events (Tarrow 1998: 124). In the labour rights model, trade unions are the primary organization for mobilizing workers, while in the civil rights model, different social movement organizations (non-governmental organizations, community groups, etc.) represent workers’ interests. A growing share of events organized by the latter would positively verify the hypothesis.

Repertoires are typical forms of contentious interactions (Tilly 2006: 35). Picket lines and strikes are elements of a labour rights repertoire, while demonstrations and social campaigning represent a civil rights repertoire. An increase in collective actions typical for social movements would represent a positive verification of our hypothesis.

Finally, our hypothesis concerns demands and their addressees. The labour rights model implies that the unions target their claims towards company owners and managers and those claims are within their responsibility, such as wages or work conditions. In the civil rights model, political elites and the public are the addressees of demands. Those demands are broader than immediate material concerns and relate to political rights and policies. Thus, if the hypothesis is correct, the majority of protests will target the government rather than management, and their demands will relate to general political or economic issues, rather than work and employment-related issues. This is simplification, as strikes are often accompanied by picket lines, and protests targeting company owners involved messages directed at authorities. Those two variables—demands and addressees—should be examined carefully with attention to relations between them.

### *Methodology*

The study employs a methodology of PEA, a method that quantifies properties of protest events recorded from the daily press (Koopmans and Rucht 2002). PEA has hitherto been used in the study of workers’ collective actions worldwide (Silver 2003), long-term industrial conflicts (Franzosi 1995; Shorter and Tilly 1971) and particular strike waves (Ekiert and Kubik 1999).

PEA comes in useful when the official data on contention is unreliable. Polish statistics collect only a handful of annual data points on work stoppages: number of strikes per sector of the economy and per region, number of participants and days not worked. Official data does not report wildcat strikes (Hyman 1989: 45). Our analysis shows that official Polish data miss dozens of strikes every year. The law does not require the reporting of preliminary, warning strikes. We also assume that employers are less likely to report a spontaneous strike when conflict was not a part of the industrial dispute and it was resolved quickly.

The weakness of the official data is evident in international comparisons because of different legal definitions of strike and differences in the procedures for recording them (Dribbusch and Vandaele 2016; Vandaele 2016). Strikes and other forms of contention have different legal basis origins (constitutional, case law, collective agreement) and different prerequisites and restrictions (Warneck 2007). For example, in countries like Denmark the employer has to be notified of a planned strike 14 days beforehand, whereas no notice is required in Germany and Switzerland (IOE 2017). Moreover, the same term does not always describe the same type of collective action, as some are legal in one country but banned in the other (Warneck 2007). The position on the labour market also influences access to the right to strike, as certain occupations, such as public administration workers (Oates 2019) and precarious employees (Costa and Soeiro 2015; Wagner and Lillie 2015), often cannot strike. Official statistics are founded upon particular legal frameworks and conceal the aforementioned nuances. This applies to Polish national context too, when the official strike register form omits important informations such as organizations involved or claims.

Thus, instead of following official statistics, we have decided to use a tool typical for social movements studies: protests event analysis. The unit of analysis in PEA is an event of protest, a contentious collective action: a discontinuous, collective claim-making interaction between contenders and those who have resources (Tilly 1987: 227). The event has to contain claims addressed towards institutions holding power: a state, a company, etc. (see: McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow 2001: 10–12). The labour movement manifests itself through protest events that are either organized by workers themselves or on behalf of workers by different groups, such as: advocate organizations, social movements, political parties, community groups, anonymous protesters, etc. Thus, we coded protest events that were organized by actors representing workers or protesting on their behalf, whatever their organizational forms and claims were. Strikes are only one form of action in the labour movement's repertoire, alongside demonstrations, picket lines, blockades, etc. This broad definition accounts for the changing nature of the labour movement itself (Fantasia and Stepan-Norris 2007: 557). Lobbying, non-confrontational collective action (Bagguley 2010) or non-public resistance (Scott 2000), such as absenteeism, disobedience, work-to-rule or sabotage, are outside of the scope of our study.

We coded protests found in the daily press with a standardized questionnaire. We searched the electronic archives of two daily newspapers and the Polish Press Agency using the keywords: "trade union," "union members," "workers," "strike," "protest." The start date (2004) is the year of Poland's accession to the European Union, a profound change in the institutional context of labour movement activity (Greskovits 2015), and the cut-off date (2016) is the beginning of our research project.

Initially, our project involved the use of the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Polish Press Agency (PAP) (considered neutral) and right-wing *Rzeczpospolita* to counter the description bias. There are no other nationwide daily newspapers that cover the whole period. However, preliminary tests showed that PAP and *Rzeczpospolita* reported only 20% of events covered by *Gazeta Wyborcza* and a negligible number of events not reported there. As every source was equally time- and labour-intensive, we have decided to use *Gazeta Wyborcza* as the primary source. Then, we have used the two other sources to supplement missing data and check for alternative estimates. Local newspapers and Internet portals were used as additional sources in uncertain cases. In most cases, however, *Gazeta Wyborcza* provided enough and adequate information. The influence of biases is minimized, since our research concentrates on macro-dynamics. Our database is the closest possible estimation of the volume of workers' protest in Poland in years 2004–2016.

## **Results: Workers' Protests in Poland**

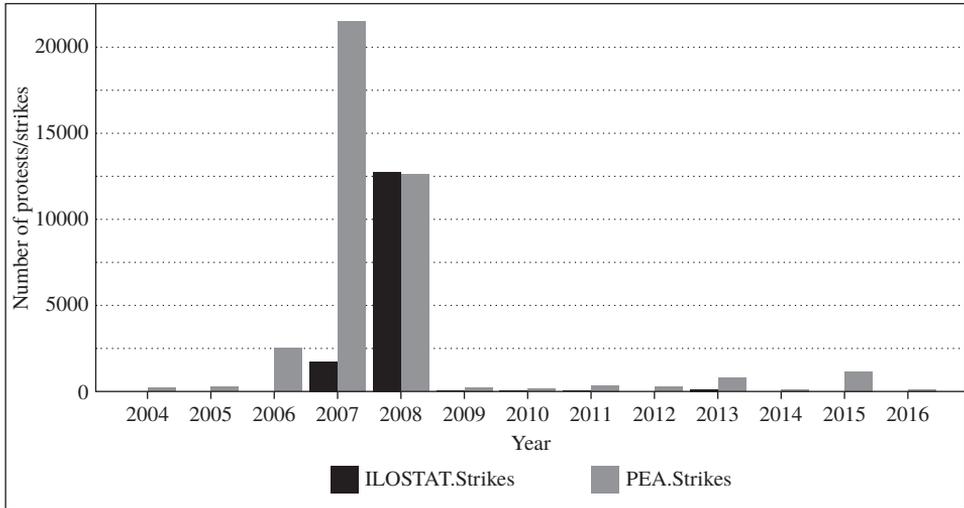
### *The Scale of Mobilization*

There were 14,853 strikes in Poland in 2004–2016 according to ILOSTAT, which aggregates data provided by GUS, the Polish statistical office. Using PEA, we coded 40,296 protest events in the same period. In each studied year (except for 2008, when numbers are almost equal) the number of protests counted by PEA exceeds the number of officially reported strikes. The total number of participants reported by the press is over three times the number of participants in registered strikes. This means that there is a significant number of protests beyond registered channels of industrial conflict.

The yearly average of registered strikes in the studied period is 1142.3, while the yearly average number of protests is 3099.7. However, large-scale strike campaigns in education (2007) and healthcare (2008) distort those measurements. Excluding 2007 and 2008, the yearly average of strikes decreases to just 31.8, while the yearly average for all protests remains at the relatively high level of 556.5. The same happens with the number of participants. The yearly average for PEA is 120.2 thousand participants and just 32.2 thousand for ILOSTAT. With outlier years excluded, those numbers decrease to 98.8 thousand for PEA and 13.6 thousand for ILOSTAT. The tenfold difference in the number of protests and participants reveals the scale of mobilization not reported by official statistics.

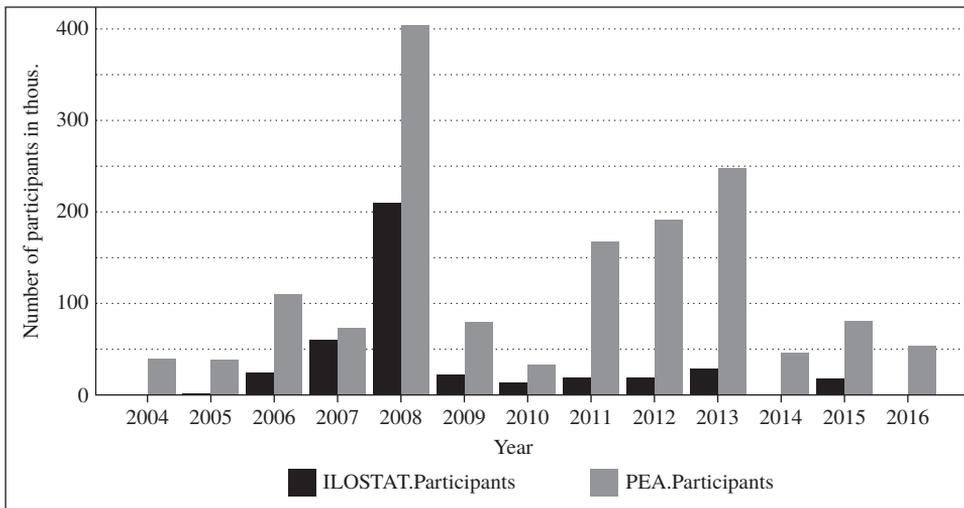
The difference between the number of protests reported in ILOSTAT and PEA data is most prominent in 2006, 2007, 2013 and 2015. In 2006, postal workers organized an unrecognized, nationwide wildcat strike, while 40,000 miners took part in protest (yet the press did not report on the number of workplaces involved). Over 20,000 schools took part in a two-hour warning strike and staff of over 1300 state-owned companies took to the streets to protest against government policy in 2007. In 2013, there was a general strike in the Silesia region, which does not appear in official statistics at all. It was an important result for the anti-government coalition of the major trade unions: Solidarity, OPZZ, FZZ and Sierpień '80. According to the trade unions, 85,000 people took part in various collective

Figure 1a  
**Comparison of official data and PEA: number of events**



Source: ILOSTAT and our own research.

Figure 1b  
**Comparison of official data and PEA: participants**



Source: ILOSTAT and our own research.

actions. The press estimated the number of workplaces protesting at 800 and unions at 1300, while official statistics registered only 52 strikes in Silesia with 26,223 participants in that year. A few months later, 120,000-strong demonstrations took place in Warsaw. The protests targeted austerity measures imposed by the Civic Platform government and were connected

with the overall crisis of social dialogue observable since 2011 (Szklarczyk 2019). Finally, in 2015 medical doctors associated within the Porozumienie Zielonogórskie (Zielona Góra Alliance) protested against low-wage contracts with the National Health Fund. Again, official statistics did not register those events.

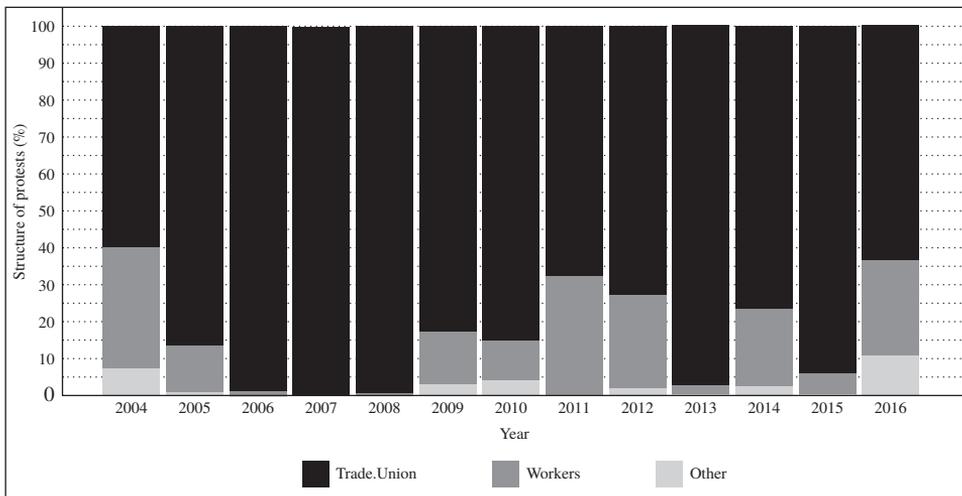
Despite PEA showing the number of events and participants as several times larger, their dynamics are closely related to the dynamics of the official data. Nevertheless, this finding confirms the hypothesis that the scale of protests was much larger than that reported in official statistics.

### *Mobilizing Structures*

Our hypothesis states that mobilizing structures of the labour movement change. However, this has not happened. Trade unions were responsible for 98.3% of all protests: NSZZ “Solidarność” (*Solidarity*) organized or participated in 89.4% of all protest events; the second largest federation, OPZZ, in 55.4%; the third federation, FZZ, took part in only 3.2% of protests.

Figure 2

**Mobilizing structures of workers' protest in Poland, 2004–2016**



Source: own research.

Civil society organizations or communities organized only 0.2% of all protests by themselves, but supported unions during 295 events (0.7% of the total). In most cases, those were left-wing organizations: small political parties or anarchist groups. Other non-union organizations were prominent in sectors where strikes are legally forbidden (such as courts or the police) or difficult to unionize (such as the retail and creative sector). Protests in education and childcare sometimes involved community groups and NGOs. Organizers framed those protests as being not only against budget cuts and closures, but rather about the well-being of children. Similar reframing of a mine closure in Bytom as a defence of

the local community created a broad alliance of actors participating in the protest in 2015 (Kubisa 2016).

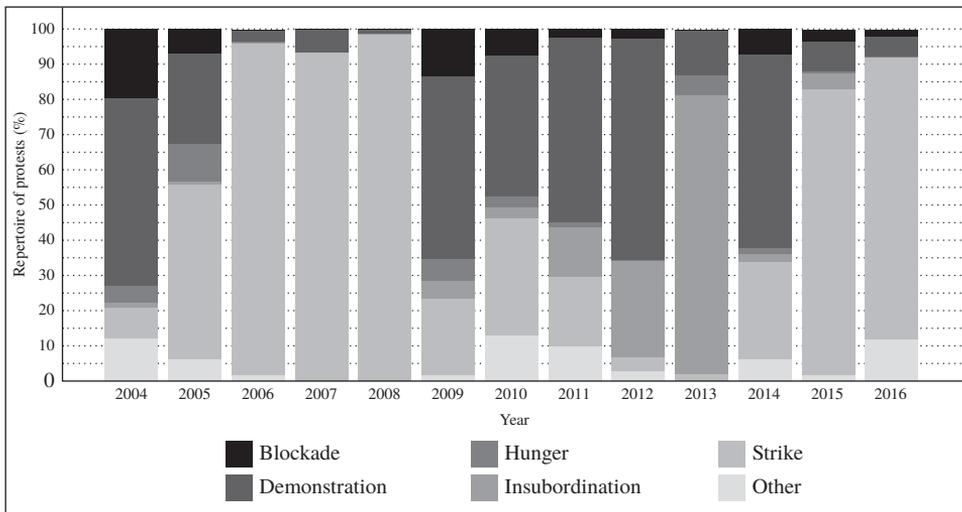
The fundamental role of trade unions in mobilizing Polish workers is indisputable, even if the majority of their protests were not registered in the official strike data. Polish workers still voice their grievances through trade unions. The share of protests that involved other types of organizations is relatively low and stable. This finding falsifies this particular dimension of the hypothesis.

### *Repertoire of Contention*

Are work stoppages still the dominant form of contention? In fact, the press uses the term “strike” in an imprecise way, to describe registered strikes, wildcat strikes, warning strikes and any other form of work stoppage, usually without distinction, which is why the number of strikes in our database is double that in official statistics (36,825 compared to 14,851). The other reason is that employers did not fulfil their obligation to report strikes to the office of statistics; however, we consider this as a minor influence on the final number. Nevertheless, different work stoppages constitute 91.2% of all protests in the database and are unquestionably the key weapon of Polish workers. 8.2% of protests employed combined forms of action. The most popular case of combined protest was work stoppage in the workplace with an accompanying picket line in the streets.

Figure 3

Repertoire of contention of workers' protests in Poland, 2004–2016



When strikes were not possible or difficult to organize, workers employed a different repertoire: street demonstrations, marches, and picket lines. Those forms of action are much easier to use and available to non-union organizations, as they do not require invoking industrial disputes. The only requirement is to inform local authorities about proposed

public gatherings. Demonstrations constitute 6.4% of all protests, but if we exclude the 2006 and 2007 strike campaigns from the database, they constitute one fifth of records in the database. Other forms of contention are used only occasionally.

Rail unions blocked the tracks in 2004 and 2007, while mining unions blocked roads in 2009 and 2015. In sectors where the law forbids strikes or slowdowns which have the same effect as a full strike, an insubordination-type protest might achieve this goal. Court workers undertook work-to-rule actions in 2011, 2013 and 2015, while border guards did the same in 2012, bringing their workplaces to a virtual standstill.

Rail workers organized hunger protests in 2005 and 2006 against cuts in the national railroad budget, and again in 2009 against mass lay-offs without social protection. Medical emergency workers (2005) and bus drivers (2011) also employed this repertoire. The number of such drastic protests in recent years is low.

Violence during protests is a very rare occurrence: only 0.1% of all events involved any incident of this type. In the period under study, there were 20 events that involved violent clashes between protesters and the police and 30 that involved vandalism or damage to property. One driver committed suicide during a strike in the Białystok public bus company in 2011. This is the only protest-related death in the database.

The strike (either legal and registered or not) is still the preferred repertoire of Polish workers, and this finding falsifies our hypothesis. Still, it is worth noting that demonstrations (typical for the civil rights model) are the second most popular form of protest.

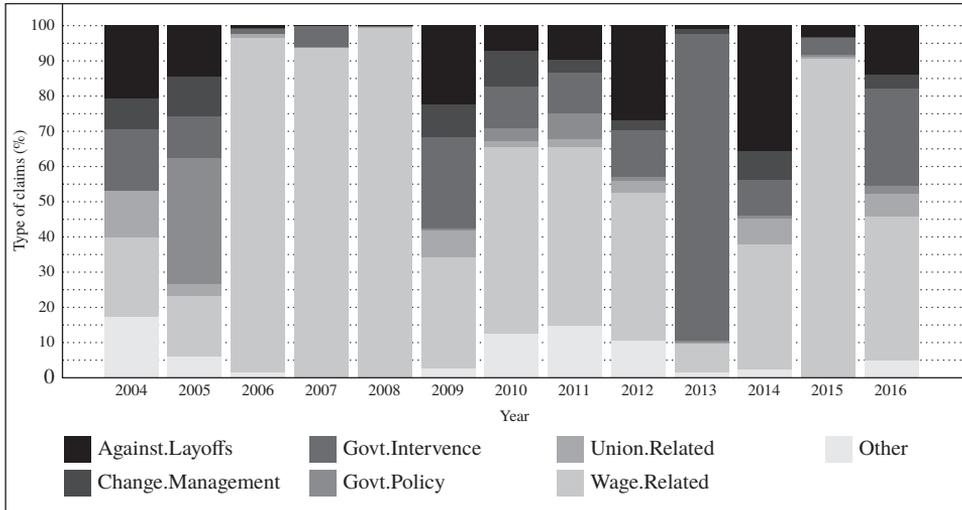
### *Demands*

According to Polish law, unions can address their demands only to the direct employer and within their legal responsibilities. This means that political strikes are forbidden and actions targeting government policies have to take different forms. Political demands can be voiced through social dialogue, but the Social Dialogue Council has limited influence on government policy (Szklarczyk 2019). In reality, strikers often carry messages that reach beyond the workplace conflict. The press have provided information on claims voiced during collective actions that were absent from official statistics.

The analysis does not reveal any trends in the motivations of workers' protests. Wage-related claims make up 91.3% (36,786) of the total. Again, this is a consequence of the 2007 and 2008 strike campaigns. The second most popular are demands for government intervention (pleas for investment, tax relief or some other help), which constitutes 5.8% (2,327) of all events. The third major group consists of claims against lay-offs, closures or bankruptcies, which constitute exactly 1% (407) of events. There were 173 (0.4% of the total) calls for a change in management (both managerial policy and personnel changes to the board of managers). Protests related to union rights, collective bargaining and social dialogue make up 0.4% (161) of all collective actions. In 2013–2015 there was no official body for social dialogue, as trade unions ceased their participation in the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs. Nevertheless, there was no increase in related protests in those years. Finally, there are 155 protests (0.4% of the total) that called for changes in government policy.

Wage-related demands dominate workers' contention in Poland, while more general issues related to policy are of marginal importance. During contention, workers pursue

Figure 4

**Claims voiced during workers' protests in Poland (relative)**

Source: own research.

their immediate interests rather than more general, civil rights issues. This finding falsifies our hypothesis that the workers' contention moves beyond the labour rights model in this aspect.

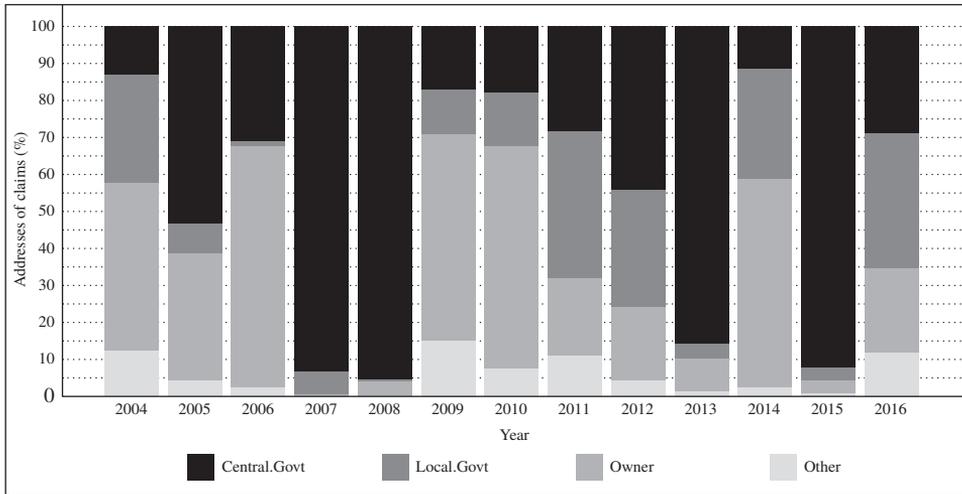
### *Addressees*

In Polish law, strikes have to be addressed to company owners or managers. Together with legal restriction on issues, this forces trade unions to act only upon their close environment. Nevertheless, they often address their postulates to the government as the ultimate employer in the public sector and as the highest instance in industrial relations. The state is the third party in industrial conflict, and workers often try to obtain the support of politicians for their cause. Through their representatives, they try to influence peak-level social dialogue and to make their problems a subject of exchange between social partners and the government (Gardawski 2009: 172). Targeting authorities is a way to gain additional leverage in negotiations by having politicians on their side.

We tracked reported instances of workers contacting or attempting to contact authorities during collective actions or organizing their demonstrations in front of or near local or central government buildings. If there were several addressees, we coded only the highest point of reference mentioned: from the owner or management, through local authorities to the central government. The other option was the public, coded when protesters voiced demands without directly invoking any institutions that should respond to them.

The chart of addressees of collective action does not show any secular trends. Protests targeting central authorities make up 87% of all events. With the increase in scale of protest,

Figure 5  
**Highest addressees of demands of workers' protests in Poland (relative)**



Source: own research.

the prominence of its addressees also rises. Actions aimed at the public (i.e., without a clear addressee) are marginal in the database, yet in a few years (2004, 2009, 2011 and 2016) they constitute 10% of events. Asking the government for protection reveals the relative weakness of trade unions as opposed to capital: they cannot defend workers on their own. On the other hand, most unions are active in the public sector, so the government is the ultimate employer for them.

Social movements tend to mobilize when their actions can gain the attention of the political elites, for example, close to elections (McAdam and Tarrow 2010: 533–534). This is not the case in Poland: elections did not increase the number of workers' protests nor the share of protests addressed to the state. Presidential elections were held in 2005, 2010 and 2015, while parliamentary elections took place in 2005, 2007, 2011 and 2015. In 2005 and 2015 there were two elections; however, only in 2015 was the share of protests targeting the central government significantly higher than the average. This was an effect of the campaign by the Zielona Góra Alliance, which protested against the low funding of healthcare. Political alliances between parties and unions formed before parliamentary elections partially explain this phenomenon (Sroka 2005).

The importance of the government as an addressee of workers' claims suggests that the labour movement is shifting towards a civil rights model. However, the situation is more complicated. While most large-scale campaigns target the central or local authorities, it is also because those campaigns erupt in sectors with dominant public ownership, such as education or healthcare. They are the most unionized and most contentious campaigns. Lack of visible correlation between election years and labour movement mobilization suggests that labour issues are not transformed into political issues.

### Beyond strikes? Conclusion

We have negatively verified the hypothesis regarding the shift within the Polish labour movement. Is Polish workers' contention shifting towards the civil rights model? The answer is no. The labour movement clings to the labour rights model, yet our data shows its limitations.

With the scale of contention being triple that of official statistics, trade unions can mobilize tens of thousands of workers, and do so. Legal constraints and financial responsibility for illegal strikes divert unions and their leaders from pursuing strike action. However, work stoppages remain the dominant and preferred form of action. While the degree of success of union protests is debatable and beyond the scope of our research, their existence proves that trade unions still have viable mobilizing power (Varga 2015: 320). The major issue is low wages. In other cases, trade unions in Poland mobilize in response to the actions of other actors: owners, managers or authorities. Those actions are primarily Polanyi-type protests, defence against lay-offs, or deregulation of the remaining public companies (Silver 2003: 20). While public sector employees are unionized and mount collective resistance, workers in the private sector are left defenceless due to the increased costs and risks of organizing. Civil rights and labour rights models might be equally valid but present in different sectors of the economy. In fact, however, workers in the private sector rarely protest. The labour rights model of contention within the public sector is the last bastion of defence against neo-liberalism (Gardawski 1999).

Gentile and Tarrow claim that "those union movements that survive the transition from a corporatist to a neo-liberal regime will do so by adapting their strategies to the citizen rights domain; those that fail to shift to a citizen repertoire will fail and weaken" (2009: 489). Our research shows that, at least in the quantitative dimension, the Polish labour movement adheres to the labour rights repertoire. In the light of Gentile and Tarrow's findings, it might seem that Polish unions are doomed to fail if they do not employ other forms of contention beyond strikes or make new alliances beyond workers organizations. Research shows that smaller left-wing unions like Workers' Initiative are prone to change; they use a varied repertoire of strategies and cooperate with civil society groups and organizations (Mrozowicki, Maciejewska 2013; Mrozowicki, Maciejewska 2017). However, their share of actions in the database is minor (1731 collective actions, 4.3% of all) and the majority of unions is conservative in the range of tools used in the struggle. Massive feminist protests against the right-wing government in recent years (2018, 2020) were held without involvement of trade unions (Kubisa, Rakowska 2018; Majewska, Korolczuk et al. 2019). Still, is Polish civil society strong enough to replace trade unions? We doubt it.

At the same time, however, the situation of unions changed due to new government. Law and Justice introduced regulations (i.e. on the minimal wage or civil contracts) that realized some of their postulates and created new forum of industrial dialogue (Social Dialogue Council). More recent data is required to assess whether those developments increased unions' bargaining and mobilizing capacity. Ultimately, we believe that the Gentile and Tarrow's theory has limited explaining and predicting power in the Polish context. More attention should be paid to structural characteristics of different economies, especially

employment and union density in the public sector, education and healthcare. Unions in those are most active and influence the general picture of the movement.

We have discovered that the level of labour mobilization in Poland is ten times higher than reported by official statistics. The alleged quiescence of the labour movement is partially a methodological artefact rather than an empirical phenomenon. As neo-liberal regimes weaken labour, they also weaken institutions that register the activity of the labour movement. Examination of this idea would require in-depth national studies of official strike data and other sources of knowledge on protest events (Gall 2013). It would be valuable to go beyond national-level data and study regimes and repertoires in different sectors. Finally, profound political changes question whether models of social reality have real predicting value.

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