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Depictions of Strikes on Social Media

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Abstract

Social media provides a rich source for the study of social movements. Not only do movement organizations use social media as a platform to spread their message and organize, but users can also share their thoughts about a particular movement with ease. This project seeks to understand how the socioeconomic status and gender of a social movement's participants affect the public's reaction to their activities. This is done by studying how these movements are described on Twitter, and if these descriptions differ among different striking professions. The types of social movement I intend to study are all strikes which were active in the United States recently.

My first case will be of *New York Times* journalists who went on a one-day strike in 2022 and who will serve as my sample of a labor movement which represents white-collar workers perceived as having high socioeconomic status. My second case, which will involve labor movements perceived as representing primarily women who also have a lower socioeconomic status, I will study reactions to nurse strikes that happened in New York City hospitals in January 2023. I hypothesize that public sentiment will be less sympathetic to social movements that are perceived as representing primarily workers with high socioeconomic status, the journalists, and more sympathetic to a profession that is seen as necessary in society, nurses. Being able to fully study these public sentiments will be able to provide formal answers for how class and gender impact the perceptions of a social movement.

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I. Introduction

Social media serves as a useful tool for understanding social movements. Not only can movement organizations use social media platforms to spread their message, mobilize members, and garner support, but members of the public can use social media to share their unfiltered reactions to the movement. Organized labor is one type of social movement; one that is currently more popular than it has been in decades. Polling conducted in 2022, for instance, placed unions' approval rating at its highest percentage, 71%, since the 1960s (McCarthy, 2022). In light of American organized labor's growing popularity and the opportunities social media provides for social movements, I sought to understand how members of the public react to strikes on social media. Specifically, this study will investigate the following research question: does the profession of workers on strike influence the public reaction to that movement on social media?

To answer this question, I compared reactions to two strikes on Twitter; a strike of *New York Times* journalists and a strike of nurses at hospitals in New York City. My results indicate support for the following hypothesis: that when professions which the public perceives as being working-class or having greater utility for society receive greater public support on social media. Explanations for these findings and its implications for the study of organized labor are discussed later.

II. Literature Review

a. Public Support for Organized Labor

Extensive attention has been given to understanding the factors which predict the levels of public support for organized labor. Jarley and Kuruvilla (1994) utilized an analysis of opinion polls about the public's union attitudes to identify the factors that drive changes in public opinion over time. The authors found the union wage differential, the additional pay a unionized worker

receives compared to a non-union worker, as a positive influence on public opinion of unions because it serves as an indicator that a union is effective for workers. A union wage differential which exceeds 20 percent, though, tends to create negative public opinion towards unions due to views that these higher wages are excessive or greedy. The authors also found that public attitudes towards unions is shaped by macroeconomic conditions, and that higher rates of unemployment tend to foster negative union views because of unions' perceived responsibility in creating poor economic conditions. Performing a similar analysis, Edwards and Bain (1988) found a decline in inflation rates as a source of increased union approval ratings. Newman and Kane (2017) also identified an individual's first-hand experience with inequality as part of the economic conditions that influence views on unions. According to them, if someone lives in an area with higher levels of income inequality, that person is more likely to hold favorable views of unions when compared to those that live in more egalitarian communities.

The way that the media portrays organized labor also has a marked impact on the public's attitudes towards unions. Schmidt (1993) identifies the changes in how unions are portrayed in the media and their connection with public opinion. The author found that over time stories about strikes became an increasing proportion of organized labor coverage even though the actual number of strikes decreased. These changes influenced members of the public to develop more negative views towards labor, particularly for people with little personal attachment or experience with unions. Jarley and Kuruvilla (1994) and Edwards and Bain (1988) both compared public opinion polls to the number of days lost to strikes and found that fewer days lost to strike leads to an improvement in the public's views towards unions. These trends are coupled with the fact that newspapers under-cover illegal firings of pro-union workers (Carreiro, 2005) and tend to employ a negative tone when describing union stories (Bruno, 2009). In

addition, Kane and Newman (2019) demonstrate that exposure to particular types of negative rhetoric against unions, what they term “class-based anti-union rhetoric” (p. 997) which portrays union workers as “overpaid, greedy, and undeserving of their wealth” (Kane & Newman, 2019, p. 997) creates less public support for unions. The authors specifically assert that exposure to this type of rhetoric decreases the perception that an individual is similar to a union member, that unions are less deserving of public support, and that support for pro-union public policy will decrease. This demonstrates that members of the public are routinely exposed to media portrayals of unions that might be described as biased. If negative attitudes towards unions are developed in response to the number of days lost to strikes, and the media’s portrayals of unions overemphasize strikes and neglect illegal firings while using a negative tenor, then these factors combine to create negative sentiment towards organized labor, decrease feelings of solidarity with union members, and influence policy preferences for union-related legislation.

Beyond the media and macroeconomic conditions, there are numerous other factors which have been identified as influences on public opinion about unions. Different demographics among the public have varying views towards unions. For instance, attitudes towards unions vary across different generations. In national youth surveys, young people increasingly tend to report having no opinion on labor unions, and their lack of opinion is much lower than prior generations (Aleks et al., 2021). Latinos who are not American citizens tend to have a highly positive view of unions, even when compared to non-Latinos who are not citizens and both Latino and non-Latino citizens (Lyon, 2022). McAleese and Day (2022) utilized survey responses to identify certain psychological explanations for union attitudes. The authors found respondents whose political orientation is conservative, feel prejudiced against union members, and who do not fully understand a union’s activities tended to report having less pro-union

sympathies than their cohorts. In short, there are various other elements that have been identified as significant predictors of public union attitudes.

b. Public Support for Strikes

However, it is necessary to differentiate between how the public views organized labor generally compared to how it views strikes. Because strikes can have a direct impact on members of the public, there can be changes in how the public views these two things. And, as discussed previously by Jarley and Kuruvilla (1994) and Edwards and Bain (1988), strikes have been demonstrated to produce negative public attitudes towards organized labor more broadly. Third-party members of the public who are negatively affected by a strike tend to develop more negative views about the workers on strike, as demonstrated by Day et al.'s (2006) survey of students affected by the threat of a university faculty strike. The authors also linked disruption to students resulting from the strike to increased strain reactions, whereas students who felt they had control over their own tasks reported feeling less strain. Kelloway et al. (2008), however, found that pre-existing union beliefs and feelings about whether strikers are being treated fairly by their employer predicts third-party support for strikes. In particular, members of the public who already supported unions or felt that workers were not getting a fair deal were more likely to speak with picketing workers, write letters to the editor in support of strikers, and to not cross a picket line.

If members of the public have positive experiences or opinions about the workers on strike, they are also more likely to support their cause. Naughton (2022) performed a content analysis of supportive messages for Irish nurses in Ireland who went on strike in 2019 in major newspapers and on Twitter. In these statements, the author found the high levels of public support for the nurses on strike was bolstered by people who reported their experiences with

“nurses’ kindness and compassion” (Naughton, 2022, p. 103) as reasons for their support of the nurses’ demands. Parents of children whose teachers went on walkouts or strike in 2018 and 2019 had high levels of support despite being directly impacted and inconvenienced by these events (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2021). In this instance, Hertel-Fernandez et al. (2021) argue that teachers were able to influence the public’s support for their strike by connecting their working conditions with children’s education and making efforts to aid parents in providing childcare and meals while schools were closed.

While not every strike has had its details expounded in the realm of peer-reviewed literature, pollsters have regularly asked the public their opinion on specific strikes. Strictly looking at public opinion polls, variations can be seen in how the public views different strikes. For instance, professional athletes that go on strike tend to receive very poor public support. When Major League Baseball players went on strike in 1995 and when National Football League players did the same, polls asking the public whom they supported in the dispute showed only 24% of the public supported the baseball players and 35% supported the football players (Roper Center, 2014). When those on strike are seen as critical to public safety such as air traffic controllers, whose strike received only 29% support in polls in 1981 (Roper Center, 2014).

c. Significance and Limitations

Understanding how the public views organized labor is a necessary component of studying unions because their capacity to engage as actors in political and economic systems is often reliant on public opinion. At a base level, the level of public approval for unions has an impact in the level of union membership. Stepina and Fiorito (1986) demonstrated the connection between declines in public approval for unions and falling rates of membership. Schickler and Caughey (2011) utilized a historical study of Congress during the 1930s and 1940s

to illustrate the effect anti-union sentiment has in the political arena. While in the early-1930s, New Deal legislation was passed through Congress rather easily, waves of anti-union backlash in the mid-1930s and 1940s curtailed this trend. Instead, with fewer staunch union supporters elected to Congress various New Deal proposals faced tougher opposition on Capitol Hill. Even today, union views among the public have an influence on what types of labor legislation is passed. Bucci and Jansa (2021) argue that strong pro-union support within the public constrains Republican state legislatures from adopting anti-labor policies. Even when conservative state governments are elected, which typically would lead to more anti-labor legislation being passed, the state having higher levels of union support among the public reduces the state government's ability to pass such laws.

However, prior studies of what influences public views towards organized labor have certain limitations. For one, studies typically analyze public responses to unions for public-sector employees. These include teachers (Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2021; Bracic et al., 2020), professors (Day et al., 2006; Kelloway et al., 2008), or nurses at government-operated healthcare facilities (Naughton, 2022). While these studies provide valuable insight, they cannot account for how the public views all organized labor and its activities. The focus only on public-sector unions sheds only partial light on the how the public perceives organized labor, and expanding to specifically study unions in the private sector will provide a better understanding of this topic.

A second limitation in this area of study is that the influences on the public's views of unions tend to be studied at the level of broad economic trends, or regarding the demographics of the public. This incomplete understanding of what affects how the public views unions does not take into account whether the perceived demographics of the union's members impact public opinion. When the membership of a union's characteristics has been considered, such studies

often rely on the gender of workers in their analysis. Bracic et al. (2020) utilized this type of analysis to study reactions to teacher strikes, a profession that is perceived as a women-dominated field. The authors demonstrated that voters who were coded as being sexist based on their views that men are better suited for politics than women and that wives should be controlled by their husbands had less support for teacher's strikes than voters who were not coded as sexist, and voted for candidates who did not support the strike. In response to a women's strike in Switzerland, which was not organized by labor unions, Reveilhac and Eisner (2022) argue that these women's actions created polarized reactions on social media. Politicians on the left tended to voice their support for striking women on Twitter, while politicians on the right were more likely to state their opposition or support counter-protestors. However, there have not been comparisons across professions to see if these demographic differences impact how the public views different unions. Whether the perceived composition of the workers on strike has an impact on public opinion is an understudied area, but whether these factors truly influence public opinion is worthy of greater consideration.

Finally, while traditional media's portrayals of organized labor have been well documented, the same attention has not been given to how organized labor is treated on social media. Naughton (2022) and Reveilhac and Eisner (2022) both utilize text data from Twitter posts to support their arguments regarding the strikes they respectively studied. For modern social movements, an online presence is a critical aspect for building public support for their cause. In addition, utilizing social media data provides greater access to a wider range of opinions and views beyond those who work within traditional media. Studying the words online users employ for themselves to describe their views on a particular issue, rather than filtered

through a poll or a journalist, can provide a more robust picture for what the public truly believes about organized labor.

III. Methods

To understand how the profession of workers influences how the public reacts to their strikes on social media, I compared Tweets posted in reaction to two different strikes. I hypothesize that professions that are perceived as working-class or being useful in society would receive more favorable public support than white-collar workers. This is because unions are associated with the working class, and as such strikes among white-collar workers would be likely to be seen as greedy and working towards improving what are seen as good working conditions.

I began by identifying the strikes I would include in my sample. To test how the profession of workers influences public reactions to strikes, I considered a number of recent strikes of white-collar and working-class employees. For a white-collar case, I chose a one-day strike of journalists at *The New York Times* that occurred on December 8, 2022. For a working-class, pink-collar case I chose a three-day strike of nurses employed at Mount Sinai and Montefiore Medical Centers in New York that occurred from January 9, 2023 to January 11, 2023.

To collect Twitter data in response to these strikes, I utilized the Twitter Advanced Search function available on the platform. This function allows for the searching of tweets which conform to various parameters. I collected Tweets from between the day before the strike began and the day after the strike ended, and then searched for Tweets mentioning the employees' unions or employers' Twitter accounts. The specific parameters I input are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Twitter Advanced Search Parameters

Parameter	Nurses	Journalists
All of these words	Blank	Blank
This exact phrase	Blank	Blank
Any of these words	“Strike,” “Walkout,” or “Walk out”	“Strike,” “Walkout,” or “Walk out”
None of these words	Blank	Blank
These hashtags	Blank	Blank
Language	English	English
From these accounts	Blank	Blank
To these accounts	Blank	Blank
Mentioning these accounts	@MontefioreNYC, @MountSinaiNYC, @nurses	@nytimes, @nytimesguild
Replies	Includes replies and original Tweets	Includes replies and original Tweets
Links	Include Tweets with links	Include Tweets with links
Minimum replies	Blank	Blank
Minimum likes	Blank	Blank
Minimum retweets	Blank	Blank
Dates	From January 8, 2023, to January 13, 2023	From December 7, 2022 to December 10, 2022

Note. When searching for Tweets, dates had to be extended by one day to include Tweets from the day after a strike ended

These searches resulted in a dataset containing N = 1825 Tweets; N = 1001 in response to *The New York Times* strike and N = 824 in response to the nurses’ strike. The dataset included the text of the Tweets, as well as descriptions of any images or GIFs included in the post. I automatically excluded any Tweets which were plainly irrelevant to my study. For example, my search generated a Tweet in reply to *The New York Times*’ Twitter account referring to a missile strike in Russia, but because this was not about the journalists’ strike it was excluded.

I then coded the text of the Tweets based on their position on the strike, whether it supported, opposed, or was neutral about the strike, as well as the sentiment expressed by the Tweet. The position of the Tweets was determined based on whether the author was in favor of,

opposed to, or neutral about the strike in question. The sentiment categories were developed throughout the coding process and were generated when multiple Tweets with similar messages arose in my dataset.

IV. Results

a. Differences in Support

The analysis of my dataset indicated stark differences in public reactions to strikes based on the profession of the employees on strike. While only 32.9% (N = 329) of Tweets supported *The New York Times* journalists on strike, 72.9% (N = 601) of Tweets supported the nurses on strike, shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Figure 1

Percentage of Tweets by Position for Both Strikes

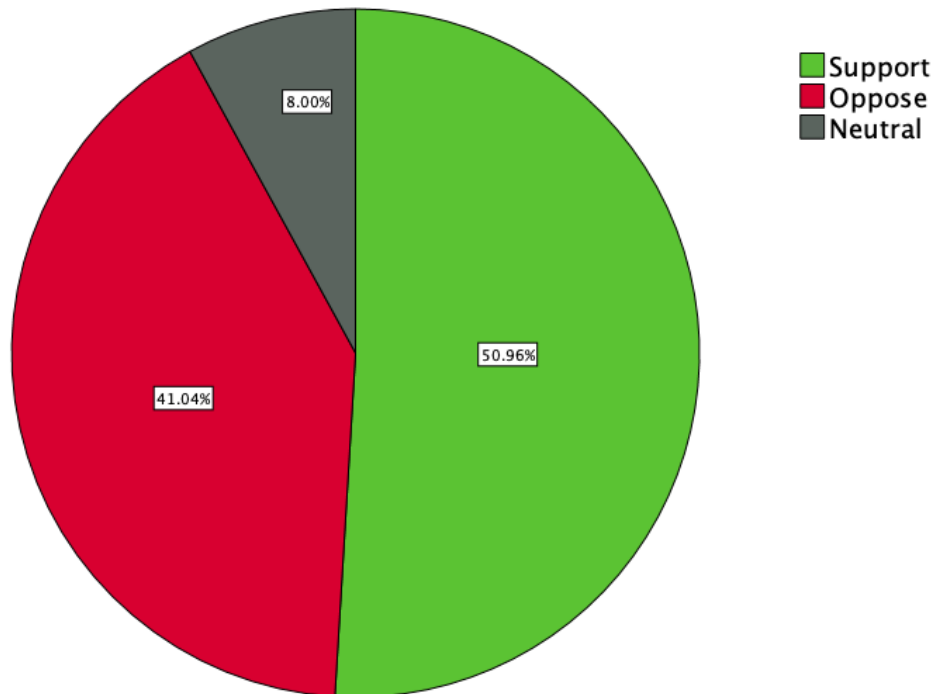


Figure 2

Percentage of Tweets by Position for The New York Times Strike

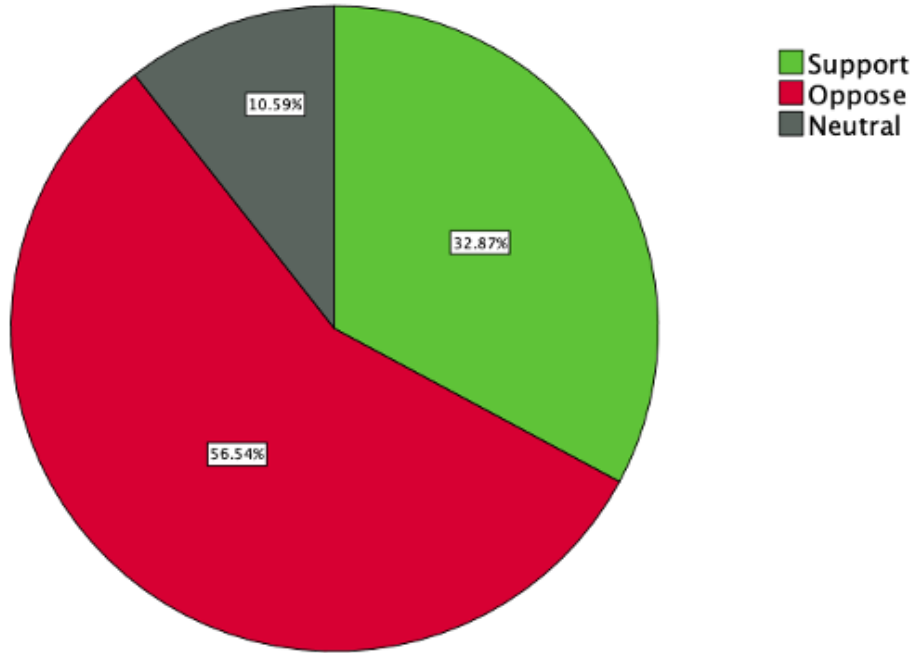
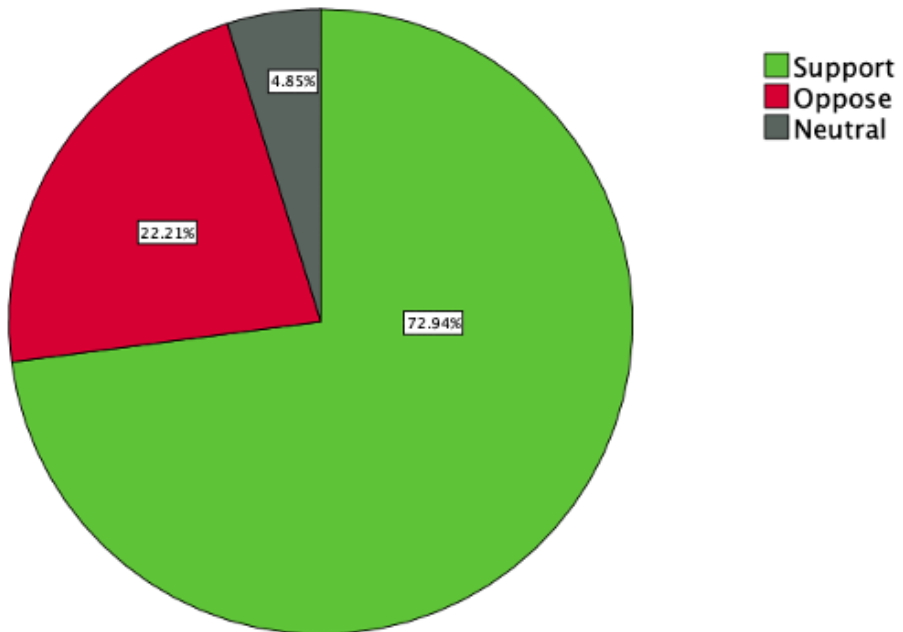


Figure 3

Percentage of Tweets by Position for the New York State Nurses' Association Strike



To test this difference for statistical significance, I used a chi-square test. By comparing the proportion between the actual number of Tweets I counted and the proportion that is expected if there was not variation between the position categories, this test allows me to reject a null hypothesis that there is no variation between public sentiment about strikes based on the profession. Instead, my analysis provides strong evidence the public views working-class employees more sympathetically than white-collar workers when they go on strike.

Table 2

Crosstabulation of Dataset

			Position						
			Support		Oppose		Neutral		Total
			<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Strike	NY Times	Count	329.0	32.9	566.0	56.5	106.0	10.6	1001.0
		Expected Count	510.1	51.0	410.8	41.0	80.1	8.0	1001.0
	NY State Nurses	Count	601.0	72.9	183.0	22.2	40.0	4.9	824.0
		Expected Count	419.9	51.0	338.2	41.0	65.9	8.0	824.0
Total		Count	930.0	51.0	749.0	41.0	146.0	8.0	1825.0

Table 3

Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Value	290.804
<i>df</i>	2
Asymp. Sig.	<.001 ^a

Note. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 65.92.

a Result is significant at the 99.9 percent confidence interval.

b. Differences in Sentiment

The sentiments expressed within the Tweets also varied widely between strikes.¹ Supporters of *The New York Times* journalists most commonly expressed sentiments of solidarity. These types of messages included people saying, “solidarity my puzzling comrades.” Other common sentiments of support included broad messages of general support, such as “Good luck!” or requests for additional information on how to support the strike, which included Tweets saying “What can readers do to support you guys?”

Those opposed to the journalists’ strike, though, most commonly voiced anti media sentiment, either to the *New York Times* itself or to media as a whole. An example of this type of sentiment includes “You lie to us daily and now we’re supported to support you?..good luck with that..” The journalists’ opponents also regularly shared messages of general opposition by saying “In other news no one cares” and anti-solidarity messages to spite the aims of the strikers, such as “Will read the NYT cover to cover today.” The percentages in which these Tweets occurred are detailed in Figures 4 and 5, while Table 4 describes each sentiment category for the Tweets.

¹ When specific Tweets are used as examples of a sentiment, their text is not altered for spelling, grammar, or punctuation purposes.

Figure 4

Categories of Tweets in Support of The New York Times Strike

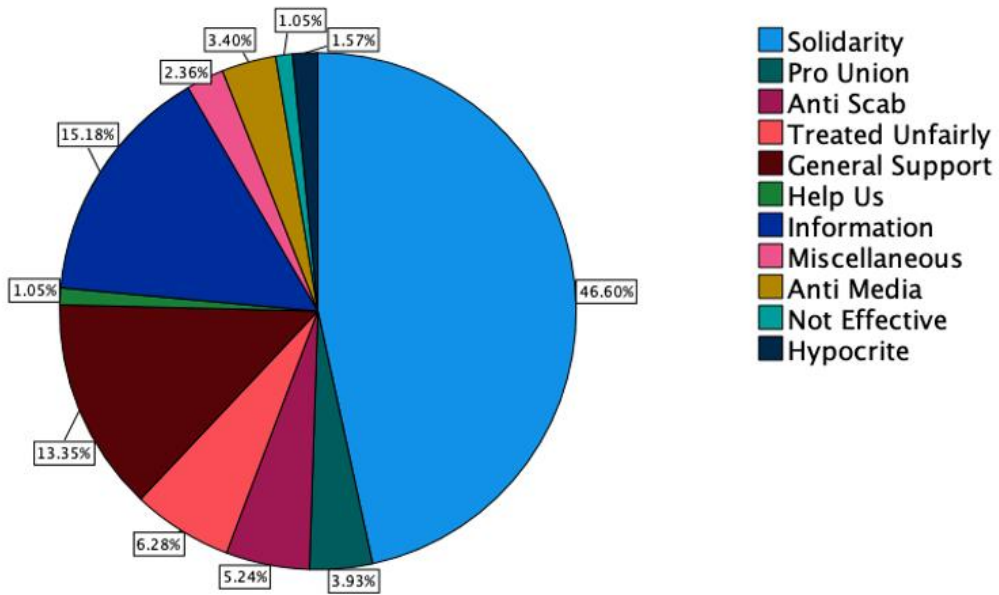


Figure 5

Categories of Tweets in Opposition to The New York Times Strike

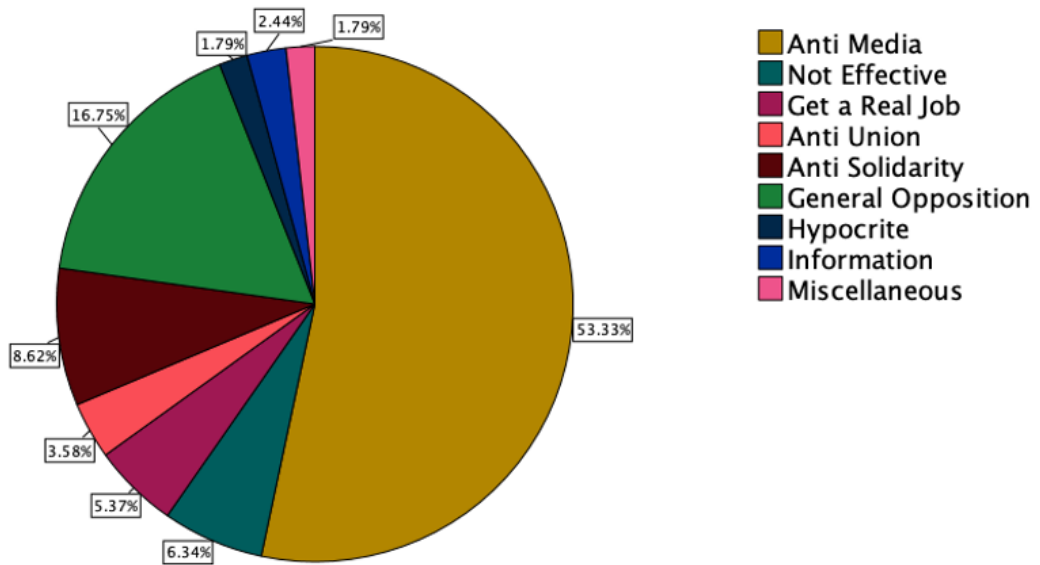


Table 4The New York Times *Sentiment Categories*

Category	Definition	Tweet Example
Solidarity	Support for the union's request not to interact with the <i>Times</i> ' website or games	"NO links NO clicks NO games #SolidarityWithStrikes"
Pro Union	Support for unions	"I'm with you all, but damn, this [not playing Wordle] is not easy. But I can hang in if you can. Union now, union foreverus"
Anti Scab	Opposition to <i>Times</i> employees who crossed the picket line	"So any reporting we see today is from a scab?"
Treated Unfairly	Feelings that journalists were not being treated fairly by their employer	"Solidarity with all journalists and media workers on strike for fair pay"
General Support	Broad message of support, without another specific sentiment	"I support NYTimesGuild"
Help Us	Requesting assistance or advice for another workplace	"I wish my fellow dealers at our casino could do this! This new management has taken everything away from us even our bonuses. I wish everyone the best of luck tomorrow!!"
Information	Asking for more information about the strike or the union's demands	"hi, does this include The Athletic? Support your cause and don't want to be crossing any picket lines" or "Shouldn't you be on strike? Why did you cross the picket line for this nonsense."
Miscellaneous	Sentiment did not fit in another category	"Please mask to protect people from multiple respiratory viruses"
Anti Media, Pro Strike	Opposition to the media system or <i>The New York Times</i> itself	"Good luck- you will need it going up against the uni-party billionaire donor class that YOU write for. I hope you win some concessions and get a raise but maybe rethink some of the nonsense and propaganda- Good Look on the strike, may the force be with you"
Not Effective, Pro Strike	The strike would not work	"One day did nothing, you really need to strike/walk out."

Table 4 (continued)

Hypocrite, Pro Strike	Journalists are hypocritical because of how their newspaper treats other issues	“not crossing the picket line AND ALSO begging your staffers to treat Trans* people better in your future work”
Anti Media, Anti Strike	Opposition to the media system or <i>The New York Times</i> itself	“Please come back to work What would we do without the ny times who would give us in writing all the lies and fake news”
Not Effective, Anti Strike	The strike would not work	“That’s it? What a bunch of losers”
Get a Real Job	The journalists should find a new profession	“No one cares. No one. Learn to weld.”
Anti Union	Opposition to unions	“We need a word in English for a fight where you hope both sides lose”
Anti Solidarity	Ignoring the union’s request not to interact with the <i>Times</i> ’ website and games, and doing so to spite the union	“Let’s all get over to the failing @nytimes websites to make sure their viewership stays up during the strike. This the same company that bales on and on about the benefits of belonging to a union, except when that union represents employees of the New York Times. 😁😁😁”
General Opposition	Broad message of opposition, without another specific sentiment	“so sorry, don’t care”
Hypocrite, Anti Strike	Journalists are hypocritical because of how their newspaper treats other issues	“did I miss you supporting the railroad strike? Walk out as long as you want. The majority of Americans don’t read your drivel.”

While the sentiments expressed in reaction to the nurses’ strike were more evenly spread out across several categories, certain types of messages still cropped up more often than others. While messages of general support for nurses was most common, with statements such as “I totally support the Nurses!#StandWithNurses #SafeStaffingSavesLives,” the next most common messages expressed by supporters were concerns over the safety and pay of nurses in their

current working conditions. Tweets that stated nurses were not working in safe conditions included those saying “Nurses continuing to work in substandard conditions so that Administration can reap grotesque salaries and bonuses is reckless. #SupportNurses” and members of the public who felt nurses were not being paid enough stated “I stand with NYSNA. Pay ‘em for god’s sake!!! 😊.”

Those opposed to the strike, though, typically either voiced general messages of their opposition, such as calling the nurses “losers,” anti-vaccine rhetoric, as exemplified by a Tweet reading, “Did you strike when hundreds of you co workers were let go for not wanting to take the #covid19 vaccine? I can’t recall that you did,” or concerns about the safety of patients while nurses were on strike by stating “Way to leave the patients for your own benefit.” The percentages for how often these sentiments were Tweeted are in Figures 6 and 7, and Table 5 defines each sentiment category.

Figure 6

Categories of Tweets in Support of the Nurses’ Strike

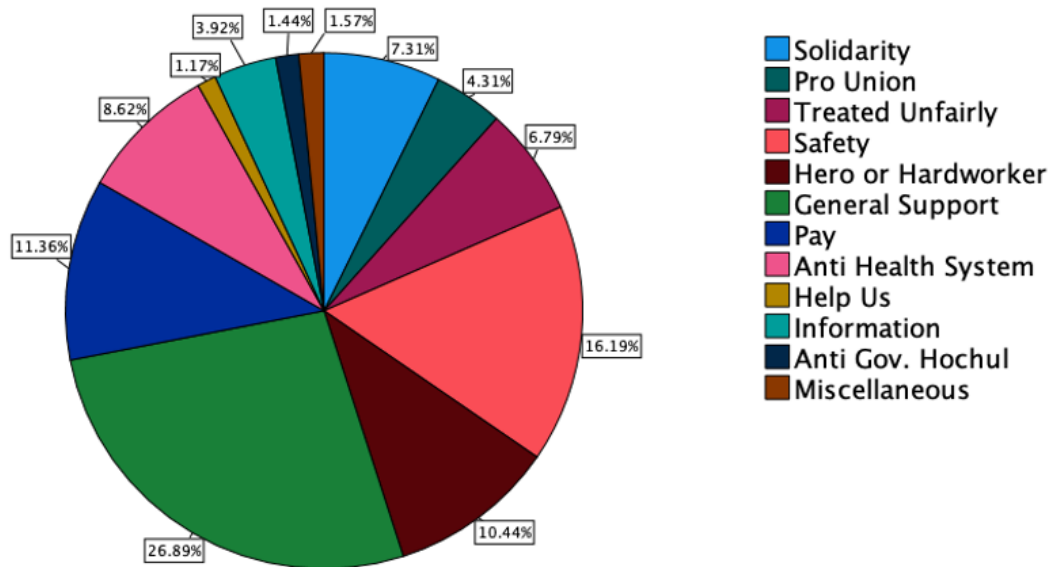


Figure 7
Categories of Tweets in Opposition to the Nurses’ Strike

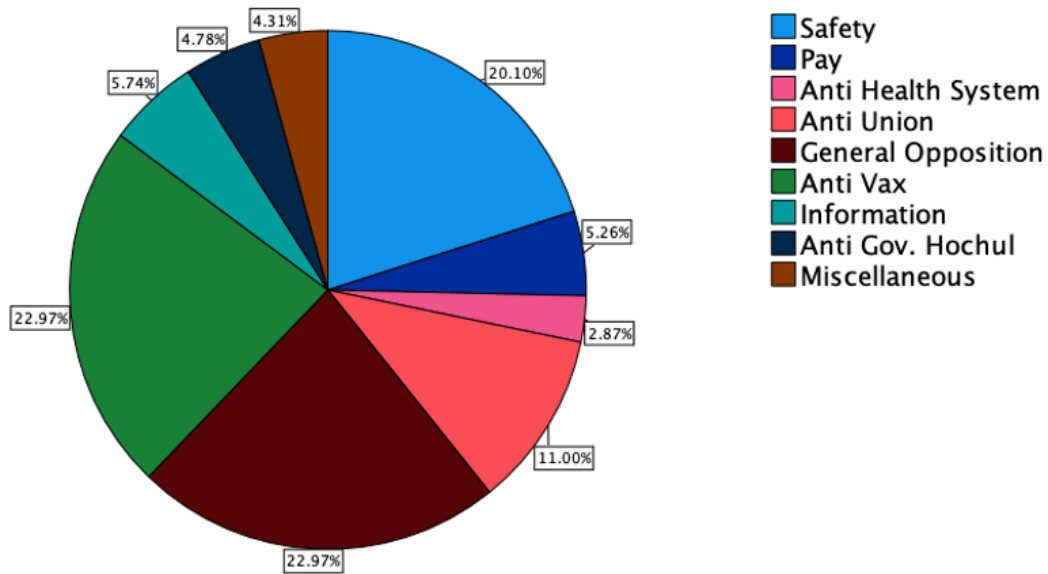


Table 5

Nurse Sentiment Categories

Category	Definition	Tweet Example
Solidarity	Messages of support that include references to solidarity	“#Solidarity ☺”
Pro Union	Support for unions	“#UnionStrong”
Treated Unfairly	Feelings that nurses were not being treated fairly by their employer	“Most strikes get authorized by members over working conditions. There may be other issues, but unnecessarily burdensome working conditions is the straw which most often breaks the camel’s back.”
Safety, Pro Strike	Nurses are working in unsafe conditions	“Nurses are the backbone of patient safety and quality!! Our number one ally.”

Table 5 (Continued)

Hero or Hard worker	Feeling that nurses are heroes or particularly hard workers	“We owe our essential workers for getting us through one of the toughest times. I have nurses who at the height of pandemic cried or vented to me about what they were witnessing. We will always stand on the side our nurses. Thank you for your service. 🙏”
General Support	Broad message of support, without another specific sentiment	“You have my support.”
Pay, Pro Strike	Nurses are not paid enough, or hospital executives are paid too much	“Hospital CEO’s pay in the NY Metro area run between \$2-5M/yr. and they’ve never taken care of a single patient. Pay the nurses and staff appropriately 😊”
Anti Health System, Pro Strike	The broader healthcare system does not adequately support nurses	“The fact this had to be FOUGHT FOR instead of a mutually desired way of operating is an indictment of our system generally. Congrats! I wish it wasn't a fight in the first place”
Help Us	Requesting assistance or advice for another workplace	“Come to AZ the backwards state home of the whimper nurses, and the most corrupt board of nursing in the nation !”
Information	Asking for more information about the strike or the union’s demands	“Is it [the staff to patient ratio] 1:5 on med/surg like they have in California?”
Anti Gov. Hochul, Pro Strike	Opposed to Governor of New York Kathy Hochul’s intervention in the strike, but in favor of nurses	“As if Hochul was for union or unionized workers”
Miscellaneous	Sentiment did not fit in another category	“I would have been part of that strike had I not been injured by a drunk driver while performing my duties as a DON.”
Safety, Anti Strike	Nurses going on strike harmed their patients’ safety	“So how many patients died due to lack of nurses care.”
Pay, Anti Strike	Nurses are paid too much	“Most of these nurses make more than NY Governor.”

Table 5 (continued)

Anti Health System, Anti Strike	The nurses' demands are the cause of problems in the healthcare system	"Why is healthcare so expensive? Greedy nurses and medical residents"
General Opposition	Broad message of opposition, without another specific sentiment	"That's exactly how they behave with patients. They have time to dance and they do dance. Check TikTok. Now they have a spur of energy to dance. They are nurses, they know it doesn't work that way."
Anti Vax	Nurses' demands should not be supported because of vaccine mandates and policies	"I fully support our hero nurses on strike. Too many were forced to choose between taking the Covid 19 vaccine and their jobs. It was a big mistake to mandate vaccination."
Anti Gov. Hochul, Anti Strike	Opposed to Governor of New York Kathy Hochul's intervention in the strike, but opposed to nurses' cause	"Where was the Union when they mandated that worthless vaccine upon us and fired the rest? Kissing @GovKathyHochul back side."

V. Discussion

a. Why Was Response to the Nurses' Strike More Positive?

My analysis suggests that members of the public had a much more positive response to the nurses on strike than they did for the journalists. This is likely because of factors previously identified as generating support for strikes by Naughton (2022) and Hertel-Fernandez (2021). Both authors argue that prior positive experience with or conceptions of a profession leads to public support for a strike. Supportive Tweets indicated that Twitter users had a positive conception of nurses, specifically that they are heroes and hard workers, they are not paid enough, or they are being made to work in unsafe conditions. In contrast, many Tweets in response to the journalists' strike indicated that members of the public held a negative perception

of that profession. Tweets which express anti media sentiment or told journalists that they should find another line of work indicate that the social media users in my dataset likely did not hold journalists in as high a regard as nurse, creating less support for the journalists' strike.

However, prior perceptions of the profession is not the only factor that influenced public support for a strike. Employer behavior may have also contributed towards high levels of support for nurses. Mount Sinai Health System (2023) released a statement which claimed:

NYSNA walked out of negotiations and rejected Governor Hochul's proposed solution.

The union is forcing Mount Sinai nurses to leave their patients during a COVID-19, flu, and RSV surge. This strike is reckless. New Yorkers deserve better.

This statement received high levels of backlash from the Twitter users in this sample, with Twitter users taking particular issue with the assertion that the nurses were being reckless. Users replied by saying "Mount Sinai is the reckless one here, not nurses," or "Treating your nurses so poorly that they are forced to go on strike is reckless. It is a failure of management not nursing. Anti-union anti-worker sentiment is not a good look for a hospital. Do better." These Tweets show how an employer's reaction to a strike can also influences public support.

b. Other Findings

The analysis of my dataset also indicates that supporters of the strikes often included the union's demands in their messages of support. The New York Times Guild (2022) informed their followers that:

If @NYTimesGuild members don't have a deal soon, we're asking readers to not engage in any @nytimes platforms tomorrow and stand with us on the digital picket line! Read local news. Listen to public radio. Pull out a cookbook. Break your Wordle streak.

In response, supporters shared messages of solidarity and confirmed that they would follow the union's requests. Similarly, the primary demands of the nurses' union was for their employers to reduce the ratio of patients to staff in order to improve safety. In response, supporters on Twitter posted messages voicing their support for this demand and calling on the nurses' employers to create safe staffing ratios. This indicates that unions can effectively garner public support for their demands using social media.

A surprising finding was the lack of explicitly gendered language in response to the nurses' strike. Only four Tweets utilized explicitly gendered language to describe the strike, either by only using "she" when talking about nurses, or calling nurses slurs that are typically applied to women. Because nursing is a women-dominated profession (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), at the outset of my analysis I was expecting the opposite result. Although, as Naughton (2022) notes, the perception of nurses being skilled at caregiving is rooted in the gendered origins of the nursing profession (p. 96).

c. Next Steps

The results of my findings could be expanded in several ways. Because both of my cases were strikes in New York, a broader geographic representation of strikes could improve my findings by exploring whether support for strikes varies by region. Including strikes from a wider variety of professions would also improve my results. Numerous professions that span the spectrum from white- to blue-collar have gone on strike in the United States recently, and comparing public reactions to these movements could provide further evidence for how the profession on strike impacts public sentiment. Studying other professions perceived as gendered in addition to nursing could indicate how gender influences public views on strikes as well.

Finally, I was limited in how I could search Twitter because of policy changes the company made involving access to its data. While I was undertaking this project Twitter placed its API, the interface prior researchers have used to access its data, behind a paywall. This prevented me from replicating the research methods of prior studies, and as a result better access to Twitter's data retrieval methods might improve my findings.

VI. Conclusion

My comparison of public reactions to strikes on social media indicates that the profession of workers on strike influences how the public perceives their strikes. Members of the public expressed greater sympathy for the concerns of striking nurses than journalists, lauding nurses as heroes that were being placed in unsafe conditions and were being underpaid. This is in contrast to how members of the public posted in response to the journalists' strike. It was more common for members of the public to express sentiments opposed to the journalism profession, creating a more negative social media response to their strike.

Not only does this study expand the scope of the study of organized labor by showing how support for their cause can vary based on which workers they are representing, but also has implications for unions' strategy. If a union representing a profession that is unpopular or unsympathetic that goes on strike, then the union would do well to improve its standing in the court of public opinion before the strike begins. How the public views a profession influences whether they support the workers while on strike, so working towards improving public perceptions of a profession would generate more public support for their cause.

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