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## 1AC

### Monopsony ADV---1AC

#### The United States Federal Government should substantially strengthen collective bargaining rights for workers in the United States by mandating sectoral bargaining.

#### The sole contention is MONOPSONY:

#### Lack of sectoral bargaining allows individual employers to hold disproportionate power over wages and conditions. This concentration of power, also known as a monopsony, erodes workers’ bargaining rights and increases inequality.

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There is growing evidence of workers being in an increasingly vulnerable position relative to their employers. This is evident in different ways such as a decline in the share of income going to labour (Berlingieri et al. 2017; Paternesi Meloni and Stirati 2022; Lombardi et al. 2023) but also in greater inequality between workers. Across many countries, rising wage inequality increasingly reflects differences in pay setting between firms for otherwise similar workers (see e.g. Criscuolo et al. 2020; Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2020; Zwysen 2022). Workers also face rising uncertainty in the labour market, for different reasons, heightening workers’ dependence and reducing their power to affect or negotiate their working conditions (Flecker 2010; Weil 2014; Rubery 2015). These trends all indicate an increase in employers’ power over workers. While there are several important factors contributing, such as the weakening of labour market institutions protecting workers (see e.g. Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2020; Zwysen 2024a), and macro-trends such as globalisation and digitalisation, increasing attention is also given to the issue of labour market monopsony power.

More people may be familiar with monopolies, where there is only one seller of a product who can consequently mark-up the product power without losing customers. In a monopsony there is one buyer who can pay less for their factors – for workers in the case of labour market monopsony – and like in a monopoly this is generally economically inefficient (Council of Economic Advisers 2016). In the context of the labour market it is generally no longer the case that there is only one employer, as in the traditional company town, but there are circumstances under which employers can exert monopsony power even when they are not the only one, because there are fewer other options available to workers. Monopsony power can be defined as ‘the situation that arises where firms have the power to set wages unilaterally, leading to inefficiently low levels of employment and wages’ (Araki et al. 2022: 133).

There are different sources of such wage setting or monopsony power for employers. This report focuses on two sources which are most often discussed as well as the main targets of policy interventions: that is, labour market concentration, where few employers hire most workers in a local labour market and thereby have greater pay setting power as workers have fewer outside options (see e.g. Azar et al. 2020; Benmelech et al. 2022; Bassanini et al. 2024; Jarosch et al. 2024); and the use of specific instruments aimed at limiting competition for labour, such as agreements between employers not to poach staff, or non-compete clauses (see e.g. Boeri et al. 2024; Young 2024). These factors contribute to workers being more dependent on one company setting wages either because there are few alternative employers or because they cannot easily move to them.

This higher relative power of employers over their workers results in negative outcomes for the workers themselves – lower wages particularly, but also less job security (Bassanini et al. 2024; Lehner et al. 2024). It also means poorer outcomes for the economy more widely in terms of lower mobility and innovation, resulting in lower growth and lower employment than there would otherwise have been (Manning 2021; Sokolova and Sorensen 2021; Berger et al. 2022).

#### The plan is necessary to reverse those trends by eliminating unilateral employer control over wage setting.

Alí Bustamante 23, deputy director of the worker power and economic security program at the Roosevelt Institute, PhD from the University of Miami, “Balancing Power between Workers and Employers Requires Sectoral Bargaining”, July 13th, 2023, <https://rooseveltinstitute.org/publications/balancing-power-between-workers-and-employers/>, DOA: 7/22/25, Rslish

Sectoral bargaining provides a useful framework for collaboration between workers, employers, and policymakers in which equal bargaining power between workers and employers is achieved (Elrod 2023). Collective bargaining across all firms in a sector directly addresses the problems associated with employer monopsony power by eliminating employers’ unilateral control over wage setting for both current and future workers. According to Elrod (2023), fostering tripartite policy-setting through the creation of sectoral wage boards and sector-level collective bargaining creates the ideal conditions to sustain economic growth and improve labor conditions.

Existing American labor law largely limits collective bargaining to individual worksites or firms, with few exceptions. This disjointed approach to collective bargaining in the United States curtails the ability of workers to improve working conditions and allows economic inequalities to persist (Andrias and Brishen 2018). With the addition of sectoral bargaining to worksite-level bargaining, workers could organize a plurality of both union and nonunion workers to bargain for industry-wide wage levels and standardized working conditions. Additionally, sectoral bargaining could strengthen the American labor movement by complementing the credible threat of switching jobs with the institutionalized threat of sector-wide strikes. Workers’ ability to leverage the threat of quitting is limited by their need to be employed. As a result, an individual’s credible threat of switching jobs is nullified during periods of low growth. Conversely, collective bargaining reduces employment during periods of economic recession, thereby sustaining the power of the bargaining unit to demand higher wages or improved working conditions irrespective of the state of the economy and labor market (Bustamante 2022).

Sectoral bargaining also provides workers in other non–collectively bargained sectors with higher wages. According to Bassier (2022), positive wage spillovers result when firms involved in sectors with sectoral wage setting are present in a local labor market. Furthermore, sectoral bargaining can have a positive impact on the entire wage structure of a local labor market when firms whose wages are determined by sectoral bargaining experience a large labor share. The provision of a credible employment option in local labor markets constrains the ability of employers to unilaterally set wages, triggering the positive wage spillover.

#### Unchecked inequality exacerbates every existential crisis. It magnifies political instability, warming, societal divisions, and slows growth.

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(ii) Institutional quality and conflict

It is often argued that a country’s long-term performance depends to a significant extent on the quality of its institutions, including its political and legal institutions (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2005). Economic research mostly focuses on explaining long-term differences in growth rates. As seen above, some researchers argue that high inequality will reduce growth rates, among other things, because it can worsen institutional quality. However, besides facilitating economic growth, public institutions have other functions that matter from a long-term perspective. For example, disaster preparedness, education, public health, foreign policy, science policy, and many other areas could influence long-term trajectories. If such things go badly, they could increase existential risk. Conversely, good institutions will help reduce existential risk. For many existential risk reduction strategies likely require public goods and collective action, which in turn require good public institutions (among other reasons, because some such public goods are unlikely to be provided by markets). So, it seems reasonable to assume that, with most other societal goals, good institutions can help deliver existential risk reduction. Here is a cheesy analogy: targeted actions like washing your hands regularly or getting a flu shot can reduce your risk of dying from an infection. But you will also do well investing in a strong immune system, as that is an ‘all-purpose goods’ in lowering your risk of dying from any bacterium or virus. Investing in good institutions might similarly be an all-purpose-good: rather than tackling individual sources of existential risk directly, we improve conditions for tackling whatever existential risks may come our way.

There are at least two reasons why higher inequality could decrease institutional capacities for longtermist public goods.

First, there is some direct evidence that, whatever the causal pathway, inequality reduces institutional quality (which in turn typically leads to more inequality) (Chong and Gradstein 2007; Savoia, Easaw, and McKay 2010).

Second, high inequality can lead to elite capture. Empirical work on studying political and de facto legal power is difficult, yet there is a growing consensus that high levels of inequality can lead to elite capture and thereby reduce the long-term quality of legal and political institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008; 2013; Bartels 2018; Bavel 2016; Chong and Gradstein 2007; Cummins and Rodriguez 2010; Savoia, Easaw, and McKay 2010). Further, if institutions are disproportionately geared towards elite interests, then they might be less likely to be geared towards positive long- term trajectories. We might see more rent-seeking and less investment in public goods. Moreover, if elite capture is strong enough, such capture, and the potential inequality that comes with it, can intensify going forward (Chong and Gradstein 2007).

Now, one might object and wonder whether elite interests and longtermist interests will necessarily be misaligned. Could an enlightened elite not even be more longtermist than a more democratic system? Here are two potential arguments. First, wealthy donors fund a significant part of research and direct action on existential risk and longtermism (the Open Philanthropy Project, for example). Indirectly, inequality might thus reduce existential risk through such funding. Second, rich people might have a lower rate of pure time preference than less well-off people, which would make them more naturally aligned with investing in long-term causes.

In response to the first argument, remember we here focus on income inequality reductions. Private funding only requires ‘enough’ wealth inequality going forward, it need not require elite capture. And reducing income inequality is unlikely to eradicate the required wealth inequality and the existence of big donors. In response to the second argument, we are somewhat sceptical that elite capture would translate a lower impatience rate into longtermist strategies in policy. A successful transmission would require influence to be systematic and well-coordinated across time and, probably, across different elite actors. Yet lobbying and elite influence must often capitalise on shorter windows of opportunities, which makes well-coordinated intertemporal, and positive longtermist, policy capture less likely.

Of course, such considerations are speculative. But, in any case, we think that, on balance, there are stronger reasons to believe elite capture would increase – rather than decrease – existential risk. First, elite capture often comes with rent seeking, which lowers institutional quality (Chong and Gradstein 2007). Second, industries like oil, gas, weapons and others are often concentrated and well organised in exerting influence in law and legislation. Their interests and influence overall are likely to be more short-term than longtermist. Third, recent decades have seen a shift towards a stronger shareholder value orientation in corporate governance. A common criticism of this shift is that it incentivises more short-term decisions. Accordingly, corporate influence into public institutions will likely display short-termist bias too. Finally, we can of course imagine that ‘pro- longtermist elite capture’ could happen and gamble on that possibility. However, if strong democratic and legal oversight and the power to check elite influence is lost, we might struggle to reverse our gamble.

Second, high inequality is likely to reduce social capital and trust (Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Knack and Keefer 1997; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). Social capital and trust in public institutions in turn are important for effective public goods provision (Knack and Keefer 1997; Beugelsdijk, Groot, and Schaik 2004). Effective public goods provision, in turn, is important for (some) effective measures to reduce existential risk (and, more generally, to coordinate towards more valuable long-term trajectories). Therefore, high inequality could reduce societies’ capacities to effectively respond to large-scale challenges like existential risk.

Finally, some limited direct evidence suggests societies with higher social capital and lower inequality exhibit better preventive and adaptive outcomes for environmental risks and can show greater resilience to external shocks (Bavel and Curtis 2019; Kahn 2005). For example, Matthew Kahn provides some evidence that more equal countries, when controlled for GDP, have significantly lower death rates in natural catastrophes (Kahn 2005). While smaller natural catastrophes are different from global catastrophic risk scenarios, resilience in such events might be somewhat indicative of societies’ resilience to catastrophic risks.

So, good social and institutional conditions could help reduce existential risk. Consider next how, conversely, bad conditions might increase existential risk. A key driver of existential risk is conflict, both between and within nation-states (or what (Ord 2020, 175–79) calls a ‘risk factor’). Conflicts and arms races raise human-induced existential risks such as nuclear war, the outbreak of a bio- engineered virus or the launch of misaligned artificial intelligence. Note that an existential catastrophe could be set in motion either purposefully or accidentally. Both are more likely during conflict. Nuclear warheads, cyberweapons, and bioweapons could all be used purposefully to attack enemy states, leading to potential global escalation. But as past nuclear incidents and close calls during the Cold War show, arms races also increase the probability of accidental catastrophes (Schlosser 2013).

Esteban and Schneider find that formal and empirical evidence suggests that political and social polarization increases the risk of violent conflict, both intra-nationally and internationally (Esteban and Schneider 2008). If income inequality increases polarization, inequality may indirectly drive existential risk. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that income inequality can increase the degree of polarization between groups of citizens. Bonica et al. find that the degree of polarization within the US House of Representatives, for example, is accurately tracked by domestic income inequality, with correlation coefficients rising up to 0.95 depending on the chosen time-period (Bonica et al. 2013, 105–8). Of course, correlation does not imply causation and the correlation is likely at least partially the result of reverse causation or a confounding variable. That said, we should assign a non-negligible credence to inequality partially causing polarization. Moreover, inequality and polarisation might also play some role in getting polarising and populist candidates elected (Piketty 2018). In a preliminary analysis of US election data, Darvas and Efstathiou find that more unequal states were more likely to vote for Donald Trump, after controlling for variables such as income, race and education (Darvas and Efstathiou 2016). Populist politicians – like Trump, Bolsonaro and others – are likely bad news for existential risk reduction. They are less cooperative in delivering regional and global public goods and typically prefer riskier, and more conflictual and nationalistic policy styles.

#### There are no alt causes---monopsonies are the only explaining factor for rising inequality.

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The US Department of the Treasury recently issued a report on competition in the labor market that found that employer concentration and anticompetitive labor practices lower worker wages while also driving income inequality and slowing economic growth. The Treasury report supports what the Roosevelt Institute and other researchers have found over the past several years: Employer monopsony is undermining the well-being of Americans. However, there are several tools our government can use to rein in corporations and increase the bargaining power of workers.

Monopsony—the disproportionate labor market power exerted by employers over workers—takes many different forms. But it always results in decreased bargaining power for workers, allowing corporations to pay lower wages, provide fewer benefits, and worsen working conditions.

Roosevelt’s research shows that monopsony is pervasive across industries and locations, as corporate concentration has crowded out competitors and suppressed worker power. With sufficient concentration, or through collusion with other firms, employers actively use their market power to impose barriers to job mobility and transfer costs to workers.

Monopsony power has a discriminatory impact on workers of color, and particularly on Black and brown women; it increases the likelihood of discrimination in hiring, funnels people of color into low-wage jobs, and reduces the ability of marginalized workers to move between jobs. Employers can then obscure their anti-worker practices by pointing to changes in technology and credentials as the main culprits behind wage stagnation, rising inequality, and the erosion of working conditions. Yet the record is clear: Our research shows that inequality in the labor market and the decline of worker power are not adequately explained by a “skills gap,” but rather by increasing monopsony in the labor market.

#### Warming causes extinction---it overwhelms adaptation, causes power vacuums, and risks escalating conflicts.

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On the other side of the Atlantic, and more or less at the same time as Wallace-Wells was getting attention too, David Bendell (2018) generated controversy with a paper and subsequent edited book on what he called deep adaptation (Bendell and Read 2021). When the paper was rejected by a journal he self-published it online, arguing that contemporary trajectories, especially melting permafrost and methane releases in the Arctic, were happening much faster than conventional analyses were suggesting. The acceleration of climate change suggested to Bendell that conventional assumptions about climate adaptation were underestimating what was coming and that civilization was unlikely to cope without dramatic social and economic change. These he saw as unlikely to transpire in a timely manner, hence societal collapse looms in the near term future. Some of these arguments were influential with parts of the Extinction Rebellion movement in Britain in particular.

One notable point in Bendell’s argument is that his paper was rejected on the grounds that it didn’t engage the contemporary social science literature. But, he argued, that was his point; conventional social science assumes that the future will be more or less the same as the present, hence it doesn’t generate the kind of material that Bendell is concerned about, a rapid climate transition that is outside what conventional projections, and economic analyses in particular, are assuming. Not surprisingly there wasn’t much of a social science literature for him to engage! While Bendell doesn’t use Michael Albert’s (2020) formulation of social science as committed to “continuationism”, the argument is loosely consistent with the use of this term. Projections into the future assume that social patterns change gradually, not abruptly.

The case of international relations as a discipline failing to anticipate the demise of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s suggests linearity and persistence as key assumptions in security studies. What both Wallace-Wells and Bendell suggest is that current trajectories are likely to lead to non-linear responses, both in terms of natural change and in terms of social change. Gradual linear changes are what one assumes if market mechanisms and technical innovation form the policy framework for tackling climate change. But, and this is a key point, it’s mostly rapid severe and unexpected shocks, and tipping points in natural and social systems, that worry people thinking about climate as a security problem.

Failure to respond appropriately and in time to indications of likely future risks may indeed lead to catastrophe. In security studies at least, histories of war suggest that militaries are usually preparing to fight previous wars, or at least frequently find themselves ill equipped for novel circumstances. This was the case most recently when the United States fought the war on terror in the aftermath of 9/11 mostly with an organization and armaments which had been designed to fight the Soviet Union decades earlier (Dalby 2009a). Likewise it seems that the military now are ill equipped to deal with the challenges that climate change and biodiversity decline present. As noted earlier, Daniel Deudney (1990) pointed out at the beginning of the environmental security discussion that given its training, missions and equipment, the military is hardly the appropriate institution to tackle ecological matters. Its equipment is frequently useful in responding to disasters, but the huge use of fossil fuels involved in military transport, frequently not counted in greenhouse gas emission calculations, is part of the problem (Belcher, Bigger, Neimark and Kennelly 2020). Prevention is key; drastic reactions after the fact are an indication of failure. To paraphrase the key argument from classical Chinese strategist Sun Tsu, if you have to fight your strategy has failed. In the case of climate change this adage is directly applicable; avoiding catastrophic climate change is the only security strategy that is feasible, and a functional civilization of many billion people in a radically destabilized climate system is simply not possible.

There is a very considerable social science literature engaging with the dangers of environmental collapse and the lessons that might be learned from historical cases of empires and societies disappearing as a result of calamities, some of which they brought upon themselves. Jared Diamond’s (2005) volume Collapse is an especially high profile example. What is new in the case of Wallace-Wells and Bendell is the projections that climate change and radical disruptions caused by humanity will be the likely cause of civilizational collapse in coming decades. While much of the discussion about historical cases of societal collapse has focused on naturally occurring climate change, or in many cases on the exhaustion of agricultural resources by either ill-considered farming and irrigation practices or natural limitations in particular ecosystems, the current apocalyptic framing doesn’t focus on resource shortages or direct poisoning by pollution. The 1970s discussion of the Limits to Growth too focused on resource shortages as a cause of the collapse of industrial civilization (Herrington 2021). The formulation of environmental security derived from Our Common Future likewise suggests that resource shortages are a key problem. But now, with both the extinction crisis and climate change, the discussion is focused on the opposite argument: the consequences of too much economic growth based on the dramatic expansion of firepower in the period of the great acceleration.

In contrast climate disasters are projected as the indirect result of disruptions caused by greenhouse gas emissions, and the response of such things as melting permafrost and the slowing of the Gulf Stream, and, in Bendell’s case, alarm about collapsing marine methane clathrates which might cause a huge spike in methane in the atmosphere with disastrous rapid global heating as the outcome. At the worst these disruptions and the failure to deal with them might, so these narratives of doom suggest, lead to the elimination of humanity in toto. Science fiction writers have explored these scenarios too. John Barnes in Mother of Storms offers a cautionary tale of rapid heating caused by military action; Frank Schatzing’s nightmare scenario in his novel The Swarm focuses on other dangers from clathrates but cautions against military attempts to destroy environmental threats. While both are excellent entertainment, there is little in the scientific literature to suggest that disintegrating ocean bed clathrates offer immediate threats of destabilizing the earth system.

A failure to anticipate such concerns with possible dramatic destabilizations of the earth system in time, or instigate actions to slow climate change and make societies much more adaptable, might lead to elites struggling to maintain control, in the process leading to major wars. If they went nuclear, which given the number of nuclear arsenals currently in existence is quite possible, then once again nuclear winter raises its head as civilization’s fate. Glikson (2017) makes the argument that we might better term present circumstances the Plutocene, because of the future persistence of plutonium and the long lasting isotopes that it generates. In this context the concerns raised by the delegates at the 1972 conference in Stockholm about the need to eliminate nuclear weapons as part of any serious attempt to grapple with global environmental issues seem prescient, even if they were dropped from the sustainable development discourse once the cold war ended.

Human extinction looms over this discussion and has led to more recent systematic discussions of this possibility, and a larger scholarly engagement with the question of long term human survival (Bostrom 2013). This now provides the largest scale contextualization for security studies, and in terms of how environmental security might be rethought, is an essential part of the discussion for a discipline that has survival as its core concern. But this isn’t just a matter of human extinction: earth system trajectories in motion suggest that fossil fueled civilization is already causing the sixth overall extinction event in the planet’s history (Ceballos, Ehrlich and Dirzo 2017). The potential for major biosphere disruption because of ocean acidification looms over much of this discussion too. This is now the key context for engaging with environmental security, rather than the narrow focus on resource shortages as putative causes of conflict in the Global South.

EXTINCTIONS, AND MERE CATASTROPHES

While there are some technical arguments about what counts as a global extinction event and whether we are living in the sixth one at the moment, conventional wisdom counts five major extinction events in the geological record. As noted in Chapter 3, the most famous is the episode ending the age of the dinosaurs, with a massive asteroid collision with earth being a key part of this story. Reconstructing such episodes is key to stratigraphy, the study of the layers of rocks that tell the story of the planet in the history of sediments and volcanic episodes, and paleontology, the study of fossil life that charts the rise and demise of forms of life in the biosphere, the living part of the planetary system. The major periods of earth history are designated in terms of the dominant forms of life that lived in those times. Now the dominant form is human, the Anthropos is us; hence we now live in the Anthropocene.

The discussion of the Anthropocene highlights the simple but profound fact that humanity is now causing geological scale transformations of the earth, something that is not intuitively obvious to most people, and something that is clearly well beyond the scope of many politicians to grasp, and also beyond most efforts, at least so far, at global governance. While climate change is mostly discussed in terms of more extreme weather, potential violence and the costs of storms and floods, that larger context is more fundamental once one considers the long term fate of humanity. Hence the growing use of terms such as existential crisis, even if it is frequently far from clear precisely whose existence is threatened and hence what kind of security policy is needed for whom where. The David Wallace-Wells (2017) article posed the question of whether all of humanity might be eliminated by climate change and the disruptions likely to follow from failures to anticipate what might be coming and act in time to prevent calamity. His subsequent book (Wallace-Wells 2019) may have been less apocalyptic in tone, but the question hangs over the discussion of climate change, and work in the field of environmental security simply has to confront it even if conventional international relations analyses have been slow to engage these larger questions.

Because one thing is clear: the prior climate history of the planet demonstrates that popular journalistic and policy maker assumptions of gradual climate changes, of slowly rising temperatures and weather patterns shifting in predicable trajectories towards the poles, are unlikely to be correct (Barnosky, Hadly, Bascompte et al. 2012). While clearly climate systems will move, and where soils can accommodate plants from distant places, agricultural opportunities may open up (Xu, Kohler amd Lenton 2020), the newly ice free parts of Greenland being a case in point, assuming that these transitions will be either smooth progressions or predictable sequences has long been recognized as assuming too much (Alley 2004; Schneider 2004). These possibilities are key to thinking about global security, a very different set of assumptions than those that have long populated economic risk analyses relating to climate, with linear projections far into the future (Keen 2021), and implicit assumptions of the inevitability of economic growth.

One particularly worrisome scenario that has engaged popular culture is the matter of the dangers of the Gulf Stream stopping, or at least slowing noticeably (Caesar, McCarthy, Thornally et al. 2021). If substantial meltwater from Arctic ice changes the density of water in the North Atlantic then it will not sink as it has been doing since the end of the last glaciation. If this occurs, in technical terms the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Current (AMOC) stops, then the global circulation of ocean currents would stop, and this would have numerous ecological effects. Should that happen, then European climates are likely to be very substantially cooler in the short run (farmers in Greenland will have their hopes disappointed) and agriculture there will be disrupted. (This too has been presented in hugely exaggerated form in the 2004 Hollywood disaster movie The Day After Tomorrow.) If the AMOC slows or stops it might temporarily slow melting in Greenland, but presumably heating would intensify further south as the warm waters no longer move heat to higher latitudes. More than this, the various crucial parts of the earth system that may be destabilized as the earth heats are not independent, and if one crosses a tipping point and begins to operate differently, others may follow (Wunderling, Donges, Kurths and Winkelmann 2021). Cascade disruptions make predicting these interactions difficult, and because there is lack of clarity in terms of what amount of heating is required for tipping points to be crossed, predictions are difficult. But that doesn’t mean these dangers aren’t foreseeable, and if rapid decarbonization of the global economy is set in motion, they might be avoided.

The crucial point in all this is that regional consequences are likely from global climate change, and average temperature changes over the whole system aren’t helpful as indications of how conditions in particular places are likely to be affected. All of which means that risks to specific places, as with specific economic systems, need to be evaluated in much more detail, and in the case of supply chains in the global economy, points of vulnerability identified. Policies over the next few decades need to grapple with the disruptions, extreme weather and heat waves that are likely, rather than assume a smooth transition to a future stable state (Albert 2020). The key question for consideration specifically of security is whether states, societies and economies with production systems, and crucially infrastructure designed for one set of circumstances, will be flexible enough to handle disruptive transitions.

#### Slow growth fuels revisionist conflict initiation.

Sung Chul Jung 24, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Diplomacy @ Myongji University, “Economic slowdowns and international conflict,” 2024, *Journal of Peace Research*, 61(2), 180-196, https://ideas.repec.org/a/sae/joupea/v61y2024i2p180-196.html

In sum, this statistical analysis shows that an economic slowdown increases the likelihood of initiating military conflict. Specifically, economically troubled autocracies act more aggressively toward democracies whose economies depend on them. Political unrest also increases conflict initiation, as many studies of diversionary conflict have argued. However, autocracies suffering from political troubles do not seem to target economically dependent democracies. Democracies with smaller economies seem to be attractive targets for economically troubled autocracies whose leaders may blame the politically different partner’s ‘unfair’ trade and currency practices and domestic policies for the deteriorating economy. The autocracies will present their military decisions as inevitable to correct international wrongs and reboot the national economy. Meanwhile, leaders facing political unrest may seek diversionary targets, initiating a conflict through which they can mobilize their support base (and marginalize opposition groups) by exploiting ideological, religious, and/or ethnic identities of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Future studies should seek to unravel the complex relationship between types and levels of domestic unrest and types and combinations of political regimes, in either the presence or absence of diversionary conflict. The findings of this study suggest that an attractive target is not predetermined but is closely related to the domestic and international situation confronted by leaders who are battling for their political survival. Summary and implications Since the 2000s, many pundits and scholars have attributed two rising powers’ instances of aggression to their domestic problems. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea and its deployment of troops to Syria, along with China’s assertive actions in the South China Sea, have been seen as aggressions arising out of domestic weakness (Kaplan, 2016). Some have attributed China’s recent provocative actions against India, Japan, and Taiwan to its struggling economy in the wake of the pandemic (Myers, 2020). In the post-Cold War period, these two great powers, often regarded as revisionist powers, have regained their national capabilities to some extent and have sought higher status in international politics (Larson & Shevchenko, 2010). What made them more aggressive in the 2010s? One promising explanation is their decreasing economic growth rates. Due to their abundance of natural and human resources, the two former communist countries had maintained their increased status relative to their neighboring states since the 2000s or even earlier. However, falling energy prices and the reform-incapable structures of their economies retarded their further growth and increased the burden on their authoritarian leaders, who also had to manage domestic calls for political freedom and maintain the legitimacy of their rule. According to this article’s causal explanation, Russia and China became more revisionist actors in the 2010s at least partly because their economies went downhill, and their aggressions were directed at smaller and more vulnerable economies. A slowing economy and economic dependence have both individual and interactive effects on military conflict in international politics. Slow growth rates contribute positively to conflict initiation, especially when an autocracy suffering from a slowing economy targets a democracy whose economy is dependent on the autocracy. Whereas economic interdependence has been regarded by many liberal scholars as a reason for international cooperation, this study shows why and how asymmetric interdependence contributes to interstate conflict by articulating its interaction with an economic slowdown in a dyadic relationship. Both political unrest and economic problems have destabilizing effects on international politics, but their effects differ when economically dependent democracies are the target. Future research should compare different types of domestic unrest and their effects on international relations with sophisticated logic and strong evidence. This analysis shows that economic growth has two distinct effects. Slower growth makes one state weaker than others and its leaders more vulnerable to domestic challenges. A state’s economic slowdown not only causes a change in the balance of economic power so as to favor its competitor but also increases the troubled state’s foreign aggression, which can harm its adversary. Therefore, it is uncertain whether one state’s economic slowdown benefits its rival’s security. An autocracy’s slowing economy can be a warning, rather than good news, to its democratic opponents if the latter maintain economic relationships with the former. In this regard, economic sanctions may provoke the target leader’s diversionary tactic of blaming its poor economy on the sanctioner. We can see this pattern in Tokyo’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor at a time of US sanctions against Japan, which had continued since the late 1930s. The current global economic outlook is uncertain in the wake of COVID-19. Although we do not yet know the pandemic’s long-term economic consequences, all states will likely struggle with slower growth and the erosion of democracy and will engage in more protectionist policies to reboot their economies and save major industries. In this context, we should be especially concerned about the risk that troubled economies pose to international security. As this study’s findings suggest, slower growth causes domestic problems, which often lead to the diversionary use of force against foreign states. If we cannot prevent struggling leaders from using diversionary tactics, worsening economies in authoritarian states will likely drive such states into a more confrontational or aggressive stance toward their economic partners, if not toward political and ideological partners. We can all hope world leaders will realize that this is a time to beat a global pandemic and an economic recession, not to beat up on a foreign state.

#### The plan revitalization of unions serves as a necessary counterweight to corporate power, while increasing societal safety nets.

McNicholas et al. 25, Celine McNicholas, director of policy and government affairs/general counsel at the Economic Policy Institute, JD from Villanova University School of Law and BA from Mount Holyoke College; Margaret Poydock, senior policy analyst from EPI, BS in Political Communication from Emerson College; Heidi Shierholz, president of the Economic Policy Institute, PhD in Economics from University of Michigan, MA in Economics from University of Michigan, MS in Statistics from Iowa State University, BA in Mathematics from Grinnell College; Hilary Wething, Economist at the Economic Policy Institute, PhD in public policy and management from the University of Washington, “Unions aren’t just good for workers—they also benefit communities and democracy”, August 20th, 2025, <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-arent-just-good-for-workers-they-also-benefit-communities-and-democracy/>, DOA: 8/28/25, Rslish

We know that unions promote economic equality and build worker power, helping workers to win increases in pay, better benefits, and safer working conditions. But that’s not all unions do. Unions also have powerful effects on people’s lives outside of work. They help foster solidarity, promote civic and political engagement, provide reliable information to working-class communities about how economic policies impact their lives, and serve as a counterweight to corporate power in our democracy. Throughout history, unions have been engines of resistance to entrenched and undemocratic power—mobilizing working people to challenge inequality, defend civil rights, and push back against authoritarianism in all its forms.

In this report, we document the strong correlation between higher levels of unionization and a range of economic, personal, and democratic well-being measures. In the same way unions give workers a voice at work, with a direct impact on wages and working conditions, the data suggest that unions also give workers a voice in shaping their communities. Where workers have this power, states have more equitable economic, social, and democratic structures.

Background

When workers join together in a union and engage in collective bargaining, their wages, benefits, and working conditions improve. There is a wealth of research documenting the positive effects unions have for workers, both those who are unionized and those who are not.

Higher wages and decreased income inequality

On average, a worker covered by a union contract earns 12.8% more in wages than a peer in a nonunionized workplace in the same industry with a similar education, occupation, and level of experience (EPI 2025a). This wage advantage is known as the “union wage premium.” But unions don’t just help union workers—they help all workers (Bivens et al. 2017). When union density is high, nonunion workers benefit too because unions effectively set broader standards—including higher wages—which nonunion employers must meet to attract and retain the workers they need (Rosenfeld, Denice, and Laird 2016; Mishel 2021). The combination of the direct wage effect for union members and this spillover effect for nonunion workers means unions are crucial to raising wages for working people and reducing income inequality (Card 1996, 2001; Card, Lemieux, and Riddell 2018).

Smaller racial wage gaps

Unions have historically reduced wage gaps between Black and white workers (Farber et al. 2021). For much of the post-WWII period, Black workers were more likely to be in unions and received a larger wage premium for union membership. Today, Black workers represented by a union are paid 12.6% more than their nonunionized Black peers, and Hispanic workers represented by a union are paid 16.4% more than their nonunionized Hispanic peers (EPI 2025b).

Higher wages for women

On average, the wages of women represented by a union are 9.8% higher than those of nonunionized women with comparable characteristics (EPI 2025c). Further, there is suggestive evidence that within workplaces, union bargaining reduces gender wage gaps. For example, Biasi and Sarsons (2020) show that the expiration of teacher collective bargaining agreements led to an increase in the wage gap between men and women with similar credentials, implying that the terms of the collective bargaining agreement had previously helped to minimize such wage gaps.

Increased government revenue and less need for safety net programs

Unionization has a range of positive economic impacts in addition to decreasing wage inequality and raising wages for historically disadvantaged groups. Sojourner and Pacas (2018) find that union membership yields a positive “net fiscal impact”—or, to put it simply, unionized workers have more income and therefore pay more taxes. Unions pave the way for more income and wealth-building for workers and therefore more revenue for the government.

Sojourner and Pacas (2018) also find that unionized workers need fewer public benefits. Higher incomes allow workers and their families to be less dependent on government benefits and unions also help workers win benefits such as health insurance from their employers.

Greater access to employer-sponsored benefits including health insurance, retirement, and paid leave

Union workers are far more likely than nonunion workers to be covered by employer-provided health insurance. More than nine in 10 unionized workers have access to employer-sponsored health benefits (compared with just 71% of nonunion workers) and union employers contribute more to their employees’ health care benefits (BLS 2024a). Furthermore, union employers are more likely to offer and contribute more toward retirement plans than comparable nonunion employers. Union workers are also more likely to have paid sick days, vacation and holidays, more input into the number of hours they work, and more predictable schedules (EPI 2021; Shierholz et al. 2024).

Strengthened health and safety

Unions also improve the health and safety of workplaces by providing health insurance and paid sick time, requiring safety equipment, and empowering workers to report unsafe conditions without fear of retaliation (Zoorob 2018; Amick et al. 2015). So-called right-to-work (RTW) legislation that weakens unions has been associated with a roughly 14% increase in the rate of occupational fatalities (Zoorob 2018). Higher unionization rates and collective bargaining coverage are also associated with better health outcomes (Muller and Raphael 2023).

Increased civic engagement and broader community benefits

Beyond wages, benefits, and safety, recent scholarship shows the indirect effect unions have on people’s political and personal attitudes and on the broader community and economy as a whole. Frymer and Grumbach (2021) find that union membership reduces white racial resentment. Feigenbaum, Hertel-Fernandez, and Williamson (2019) analyze the relationship between unions and political advocacy, specifically on policies related to worker empowerment and economic justice. They find that weakening unions (through the enactment of RTW laws) has significant long-term political and economic effects, such as lower voter turnout, lower organized labor contributions, less voter mobilization, fewer working-class candidates serving in state legislatures and Congress, and less pro-worker state policy. These political consequences undoubtedly affect not only the communities in which they take place, but also the broader economy, as the chosen candidates enact economic policies. Unions are also shown to increase civic engagement. Dean, McCallum, and Grumbach (2023) found that county-level union density was associated with greater access to ballot drop boxes—a highly secure way to increase access to voting—during the 2022 midterm elections.

Our analysis in this report supports this existing scholarship on unions. The strong relationship between union density and a range of economic, personal well-being, and democratic outcomes is consistent with the idea that unions amplify the political power of workers—advancing and defending policies that benefit the broad interests of workers, their families, and their communities.

The data we analyze across a wide range of indicators support the notion that unions play a critical role in improving outcomes for working people and their communities. They do this by advocating for higher wages and better benefits for members, mobilizing and building grassroots coalitions, and acting as a key countervailing forces against rising corporate power. Through this work, unions help produce and sustain positive economic, health, educational, and democratic outcomes in the communities in which they are active, including by strengthening democratic engagement and, as a result, helping to safeguard against anti-democratic forces.

#### Promoting bargaining is key to reducing inequality and increase unionization.

Wells King 20, former research director at American Compass, “Workers of the World”, September 18th, 2020, https://americancompass.org/workers-of-the-world/, DOA: 6/19/25, Rslish

Given the obvious limitations of the American enterprise-based system, some reformers and labor leaders are considering the potential for collective bargaining at the sectoral, regional, and even national level – so-called “broad-based bargaining.” Labor market centralization is strongly correlated with higher union organization, and sectoral bargaining is the most conducive to union growth. The OECD reports that coverage by collective bargaining is only stable and high where some form of broad-based, multi-employer bargaining exists.

Broad-based bargaining improves the performance of unionized industries and firms along a number of different dimensions. It has been shown to reduce employee turnover and to establish better, and also more flexible, safety standards for particular industries. By including all employers within a given industry, it creates new incentives and collaborative forums for worker training; industries covered by sector-level agreements are more likely to invest in workforce development and devote greater resources to firm-sponsored training.

Broad-based bargaining’s benefits also spill over into the broader economy, improving both labor-market and social outcomes. It increases national employment by both reducing unemployment and increasing labor force participation, and also boosts productivity rates for covered industries. Meanwhile, it compresses wage distributions across entire industries, much as enterprise-based bargaining does within unionized firms, reducing economic inequality.

In countries with broad-based bargaining – particularly those were agreements are national in scope – unions are responsive to macroeconomic issues like wage-driven inflation and international competitiveness. They tend to strike a balance that accepts relatively lower wages but promotes healthier firms and rising productivity, which supports higher wage growth in the long run. In Germany, for instance, trade unions have agreed to set wages below marginal productivity in order to increase the competitiveness of export sectors.

#### Unionization and bargaining rights are critical to combat corporate power by forcing competition.

David Kaplan 25, Senior Specialist in the Social Protection and Labor Markets Division of the Inter-American Development Bank, Ph.D. in Economics from Cornell, “What Is Monopsony and How Does It Affect the Labor Market?”, July 18th, 2025, <https://blogs.iadb.org/trabajo/en/what-is-monopsony-and-how-does-it-affect-the-labor-market/>, DOA: 7/22/25, Rslish

The second implication for public policy has to do with the importance of labor unions. According to the U.S. Council of Economic Advisers, unions can serve as a counterweight to employers’ bargaining power and their unilateral use of “monopsonistic power,” promoting higher wages, better working conditions, and even more efficient employment levels. In other words, the presence of monopsony in countries may justify efforts to reverse a long-term trend of declining unionization. In fact, a recent study found that the negative impact of monopsony on wages is smaller where a larger share of workers are represented by unions. This study also found that the link between productivity and wages is stronger when unions have more representation.

The presence of monopsony in countries may justify efforts to reverse a long-term trend of declining unionization.

The third implication is perhaps the most obvious. Just as there are efforts to combat and regulate monopolies, experts are beginning to look at how to regulate monopsony. For example, Alan Krueger and Eric Posner propose strengthening the monitoring and scrutiny of mergers between companies to detect adverse effects on the labor market. Likewise, Krueger and Posner suggest strengthening and increasing the power of workers by prohibiting agreements that prevent low-wage workers from seeking employment in companies that compete with their current employer. They also propose banning agreements between branches of a single company from competing for the same workers.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the best way to combat monopsony is to promote an environment where more high-productivity companies compete for available labor. One study, for example, finds that an economic environment with both high- and low-productivity firms exacerbates the monopsony problem because the few high-productivity companies face no competition in the labor market. In this sense, fighting monopsony involves not only measures traditionally associated with “worker protection,” but also policies typically linked to promoting productivity.

Combating monopsony involves not only measures traditionally associated with “protecting the working class”, but also measures associated with promoting productivity.

Monopsony Versus Perfect Competition

My impression is that the debate on the best public policies in the face of monopsony is beginning. Policies aimed at strengthening the bargaining power of workers or limiting the power of employers are justified by the evidence of the monopsony problem, but we should not forget the warnings of the “classic” model altogether of perfect competition over excessive state intervention. In my opinion, the mistakes of “praising too much the virtues of the free labor market” and “ignoring the unforeseen consequences of intervening too much in a market” are equally common and dangerous.

Given the growing interest in the topic of monopsony we arrive at two conclusions that go hand in hand with the growing empirical evidence of its existence:

First, worker protections designed to give employees a larger share of the pie can also serve as an incentive to create a more productive labor market—that is, they can help grow the pie—provided they are implemented in a measured way. 

Second, a productivity agenda aimed at increasing the size of the pie can also end up giving workers a larger slice. This is how we see opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean to improve working conditions: by giving workers a bigger share of a larger pie for all.

#### Increasing bargaining power through labor law reforms is key. That causes reductions in inequality and promotes growth.

Austin Clemens 25, Former senior fellow at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth and former assistant research scientist at the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University, Equitable Growth, “Slow wage growth is the key to understanding U.S. inequality in the 21st century”, 07/08/25, https://equitablegrowth.org/slow-wage-growth-is-the-key-to-understanding-u-s-inequality-in-the-21st-century/#:~:text=As%20others%20have%20pointed%20out,to%20significant%20drops%20in%20consumption., Accessed: 07/14/25, mcc

This issue brief is primarily focused on the income data, where inequality has been stable over the past two decades, as opposed to wealth inequality, which has increased over the same period. Specifically, this brief looks at the past 23 years of income growth in the United States through the lens of the five streams of income mentioned above. **Understanding how** these **streams of income add up to total income can yield new insight about the U.S. economy.** In particular, analyzing the data shows the following:

* Income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, has changed little and is currently almost exactly at its average level for the 2000–2023 period.
* This single-number summary, however, obscures important dynamics. Income growth has been highest for households in the bottom 50 percent of the distribution and households in the top 10 percent of the distribution. Those in the 50th percentile to the 90th percentile, representing the middle and upper-middle class in the United States, have seen weaker income growth.
* In the 21st century, **wages have grown slower than any other income source**, making these two decades an outlier in recent U.S. economic history. This slowdown in wage growth largely explains why households in the 50th percentile to the 90th percentile have lagged other groups in income growth because this group is the most dependent on wage gains.
* Although the bottom 50 percent of households have kept pace, more and more of their income comes in the form of in-kind transfers, such as from Medicaid and Medicare, which means their economic welfare is advancing slower than their incomes.
* **There is no substitute for a strong U.S. labor market. To reduce income inequality in the United States and increase the share of income that households earn from wages, workers need greater bargaining power.**
* Income inequality will likely increase because of policies pursued by President Donald Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress that erode the power of workers and cut benefits in major government programs, such as nutrition assistance, health care, and housing energy assistance.

Taken together, these findings are disconcerting. Although inequality has largely stopped expanding, the current level of inequality in the United States is high, and an analysis of the components of income suggest that there is significant weakness along the entire income distribution, outside of the top decile. **The primary culprit is a labor market that no longer generates strong wage growth for U.S. households.**

As others have pointed out, **the macroeconomic impact of rising inequality is likely to be slowing growth.** Lower-income households have high propensities to consume. Even modest erosion of their incomes could lead to significant drops in consumption. The likely result is a double whammy of weak and unevenly distributed economic growth.

#### Sectoral level bargaining is key---only that addresses historical oppression embedded in US labor laws and checks inequality.

Christine Blumauer 19, manages the Clean Slate Labor Law Project at Harvard Law School’s Labor and Worklife Program, Master’s in Peace and Security Studies from the University of Hamburg, “Addressing Racial Exclusion Through Sectoral Bargaining”, July 23rd, 2019, <https://onlabor.org/addressing-racial-exclusion-through-sectoral-bargaining/>, DOA: 6/22/25, Rslish

In the recent conversation between Veena Dubal and Benjamin Sachs and Sharon Block, there is solid agreement around the need to grant collective bargaining rights to platform workers. Yet the right way to get there is subject of intense debate.

However, underneath this debate, lies a more fundamental question: what do collective bargaining rights, set forth by the NLRA, achieve for workers currently covered by the Act and notwithstanding those excluded from it? Far from enough, and this is why Block and Sachs are calling for major labor law reform. To get this ambitious reform process started, they have mobilized experts and activists through the Clean Slate for the Future of Labor Law Project here at Harvard’s Labor and Worklife Program.

As a political scientist by training, one question that the project addresses, particularly stands out to me: What is the level of bargaining most conducive to building worker power? It stands out to me, because it likely is the question around which to build the next generation of labor law, such that it will be a keystone to a just and inclusive democracy. To get to a just and inclusive society, we first need to confront systemic patterns of oppression. Historical and present racism are inscribed in and reinforced through current labor law. In his foreword to Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings that Formed the Movement, Cornel West provocatively says: “[Critical race theory] compels us to confront critically the most explosive issue in American civilization: the historical centrality and complicity of law in upholding white supremacy (and concomitant hierarchies of gender, class, and sexual orientation).”

U.S. labor law is inherently guilty of perpetrating racism, as evidenced by the racially motivated exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers from the NLRA. But the Act is racist in many other pernicious ways, starting with how it sets collective bargaining at the enterprise-level. Enterprise-level bargaining reinforces racial segregation by structurally impeding the formation of inter-firm solidarity: it constrains the number of workers who can join forces and creates divides among workers who would otherwise share an economic class struggle. By doing so, it also exacerbates economic and political inequality. Upscaling collective bargaining then becomes an important step to overcoming racism and thus building a just and inclusive democracy.

Upscaling bargaining to combat inequality for all and people of color in particular.

In his research on inequality and democratic accountability, Martin Gilens showsthat government is over-responsive to the rich: government usually proceeds with policies that serve the interests of the affluent over those of the poor. In other words, the rich – the firm-owners and capital investors if you will – determine the economic and political course of this country (and others) at the expense of workers. Historically oppressed workers are disproportionately affected, even when the economy is supposedly doing well: while unemployment rates reached the historic low of 3.6% last April, the unemployment rate for black Americans was of 6.7% or 86% above the national average.

In this context, enterprise-level bargaining further supports corporations’ parochial mindset in which they are entitled to grab most of the profits for themselves. David Madland, over at Center for American Progress argues that, “in large part because it leads to greater coverage, sectoral bargaining also reduces economic inequality to a greater degree than does enterprise bargaining.” It reduces economic inequality because greater levels of coverage mean more powerful checks on corporations through higher wages, more money invested in workers’ safety, less hours worked per worker etc. Concurrently, recent OECD studies show that, in sectoral bargaining systems, unemployment rates go down for women and low-skilled workers and thus for people of color, who overwhelmingly occupy the most precarious jobs.

But sectoral bargaining does more than just bring back balance to economic and political power by ensuring a fairer redistribution of profits between capital investors and workers. Here, the positive impact on historically oppressed workers is only secondary and not fully intended. We cannot satisfy ourselves with that –  driving systemic change ought to be intentional.

Building bridges across race at the sectoral level.

Absent inter-firm solidarity, workers tend to be fragmented along racial, ethnic and gender divides – and even pitted against each other along those divides. In sociology, this phenomenon is typically referred to as social closure: processes of drawing boundaries, constructing identities, and building communities in order to monopolize scarce resources for one’s own group, thereby excluding others from using them. This means that we need to develop a mechanism that institutionalizes workers’ mobilization across race and other historical divides instead of feeding into them. As Erica Smiley puts it in Time to Tackle the Whole Squid: Confronting White Supremacy to Build Shared Bargaining Power: “Clarifying workers’ shared self-interests against common corporate enemies is the only way to motivate white workers who have legitimate worries and fears to act in their shared interests with workers of color […].”

It is at the sectoral-level that bargaining over working conditions can bring workers together across historical divides. By elevating the level of bargaining, we can avoid workers competing “downwards” against each other – over less safety, smaller paychecks etc. Not only does sectoral bargaining prevent such race to the bottom, it perennializes positive and mutually beneficial interactions between workers across their racial and other divides. This then sets the stage for an inclusive market economy in which firms are encouraged to be efficient and innovative, all the while relying on a broadly mobilized, and thus empowered, workforce.

#### While restoring the balance of bargaining power necessary to combat warming.

Sharon Block 19, Professor of Practice and the Executive Director of the Center for Labor and a Just Economy at Harvard Law School, “How Labor Law Could Help – Not Hinder – Tackling Big Problems”, December 6th, 2019, <https://onlabor.org/how-labor-law-could-help-not-hinder-tackling-big-problems/>, DOA: 7/3/25, Rslish

Lately we are seeing workers trying to enforce demands that their employers address the climate crisis.  Leaders of the “Bargaining for the Common Good” movement have made addressing the climate crisis a focus of their innovative bargaining campaigns.  In September, Amazon workers at the Seattle headquarters walked off the job to protest the company’s failure to take bolder action on climate.  OnLabor’s own Jared Odessky recently provided an overviewin “In These Times” of provisions in collective bargaining agreements that address climate protection goals.

I fear, however, that these efforts to deal with climate change at the bargaining table are destined to have limited success because of the fundamental structural problems with our labor law.  Enterprise bargaining severely limits the scope of what workers can accomplish through bargaining, including what they can accomplish on climate, because collective bargaining agreements apply only to one firm (at best).  No single employer can make a meaningful difference in climate change, no matter how much the company reduces its carbon footprint or advocates for clean energy policies.  A single employer at best can influence the after-the-fact effects of climate change, like giving workers more water breaks during periods of high temperatures.  In this way, the NLRA’s enterprise-based bargaining system precludes workers from demanding a say in any issue that is bigger than what their own employer can tackle.

Moreover, the law’s definition of mandatory subjects of bargaining raises questions about whether unions in our enterprise-based bargaining system can even get the climate issue to the bargaining table.

I’ve written previously about how the NLRA’s narrow definition of mandatory subjects of bargaining is an impediment to workers being able to weigh in on the full range of issues in which they are interested, including the response to the climate crisis.  To be a mandatory subject of bargaining, a proposal must not only be related to a term or condition of employment, it must also be within an employer’s influence or control.  See Eastex, Inc. v. NLRB, 437 U.S.  556, 568 n. 18 (1978).  If workers’ frame their objective in putting climate-related proposals on the enterprise-based bargaining table as impacting the climate crisis and reversing the trend of increasing temperatures, their proposals are going to fail the mandatory-subject test.  No single employer can be understood to influence or control climate change.

Moving to sectoral bargaining, however, would expand the scope of collective bargaining agreements in a way that would enable unions to better address climate change. Imagine if workers could create a coordinated movement to demand in bargaining that lots of employers reduce their carbon footprints – maybe together employers could actually impact climate change.  The climate crisis is so massive and all-encompassing there are legitimate questions as to whether even a coordinated approach among employers could have a meaningful impact.  Legislation that mandates radical change in the U.S. climate policy, along the lines of the Green New Deal, is necessary to save the planet.  I suggest, however, that a worker-driven coordinated sectoral policy on climate change could be a positive step in making big needed changes.

Although such a worker-driven industry-wide approach is not possible under the NLRA, labor law reform could move the U.S. to a sectoral bargaining system. Take, for example, how a sectoral approach could work in the auto industry.  Many environmentalists believe that a big move in the U.S. to electric cars is a necessary step in reaching the U.S. obligations under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.  What if all of the auto manufacturers in the U.S. were at a sectoral bargaining table where the unions made a demand for a transition to electric vehicles?  The size of the U.S. market could influence the global market for electric cars.  Even if that is not true, sectoral bargaining in the U.S. also could facilitate a global sectoral push for more electric cars.  Let’s now imagine if unions engaged in a transnational strategy to pressure automakers around the world to increase production of electric vehicles.  Because most of the rest of the world engages in sectoral bargaining such coordination is not beyond the realm of possibility.  If successful, we could be on our way to tackling one of the most significant contributors to carbon pollution.

Electricity generation is another sector that must be reformed to arrest the climate crisis.  Unions that represent workers in the energy sector could bring clean energy generation proposals to a sectoral bargaining table and negotiate the terms of a just transition – one that leads to cleaner energy and support for workers whose jobs change as a result of such a transformation.  Germany recently engaged in such an exercise.  In January 2019, the German Coal Commission brought together industry players, unions and other stakeholders to negotiate an agreement to phase out coal by 2038.  This form of sectoral bargaining also negotiated financial support for coal miners and their communities.  While the Coal Commission was not formally a part of Germany’s sectoral bargaining system, it demonstrates the potential of an industry-wide approach to tackling big climate goals.

Facilitating sectoral bargaining over climate crisis strategies would be beneficial for two reasons.  First, it would create a new tool to put pressure on corporations to change their behavior.  So far, relying on voluntary corporate commitments or our gridlocked political system has not yielded the results we need.  Second, it would ensure that workers have a direct voice in influencing how corporations address the climate crisis.  Workers are already on the front line of suffering from our inaction on climate – it makes sense to reform labor law so they can have a chance to spur much needed action.

#### Reject claims of exclusivity---collective commitment is only sustainable when aligning over cross-sector partnerships.

Tabitha Bentley 19,   strategy director of Washtenaw County My Brother’s Keeper, a BMe Skillman Vanguard fellow, and consultant, “The Challenge of Negotiating Race in Cross-Sector Spaces”, June 11th, 2019, [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the\_challenge\_of\_negotiating\_race\_in\_cross\_sector\_spaces#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_challenge_of_negotiating_race_in_cross_sector_spaces), DOA: 8/28/25, Rslish

In 2016, when I started researching the successes and failures of cross-sector partnerships like My Brother’s Keeper (MBK), I chose not to foreground race.

That was a mistake.

I quickly learned that race and what I call racial negotiation—the leveraging of the power of race to achieve a goal—are at the crux of collective-action efforts aiming to address deep societal inequities.

We must account for this dynamic in our change-making endeavors or risk failing to achieve the ultimate transformation needed to undo systemic inequities: the acknowledgment and eradication of racism.

Fortunately, my investigation into cross-sector initiatives also uncovered patterns that can help guide us toward this goal. The insight traces back to John Kania and Mark Kramer’s theory of collective impact, and Peter J. Robertson and Shui-Yan Tang’s conceptualization of how commitment can motivate individuals to cooperatively pursue shared ends. Inspired by their work, I theorized that the quality and success of a collective action is significantly interconnected with collective commitment, though neither always requires the other. And to really understand the concepts of action and commitment, I wanted to develop a deeply contextualized understanding of the relationships among a collaboration's partners and the circumstances in which they work.

I studied Padres y Jóvenes Unidos (PJU), PUSH Excel, Promise Neighborhoods, Project QUEST, and an MBK community in a large midwestern county (to be referred to in this article as “Highland County MBK”). They all are examples of collective efforts taking on large social problems involving communities of color, such as inequity in education.

In every case, stakeholders negotiated race and power to garner individual and organizational commitments, and these negotiations played a critical role in how participants and leaders engaged in change-making work and the outcomes they experienced. Two patterns emerged, the second of which provided tactics that promoted more success when trying to address systemic social inequities.

1. Emphasizing White Interest-Convergence

White interest-convergence describes a process of change in communities of color that aligns with the economic and sociopolitical interests of white elites. It can be used two ways: strategically to shape change-making efforts and analytically to evaluate those undertakings. Derrick Bell coined the term in a 1980 Harvard Law Review article, posing it as an analytical tool. Other scholars such as Enrique Alemán, Jr., and Sonya Alemán suggest that white interest-convergence can also be used strategically, and note that Civil Rights and Chicano/a activists documented deliberate attempts to bring about social change by allying with white elites long before Bell’s conceptualization of interest-convergence.

In all of the cases I studied, people attempted to bring about commitment, action, and social change by aligning the social-justice interests of communities of color with those of white people. This indicates that they saw white interest-convergence as an important means to achieve the goals of the collective group, a notion made even more compelling given that four of the five efforts were organized by people of color. It seems diverse leaders firmly believed white interest-convergence was essential for achieving their missions. But the tactic played out differently for some of the organizations. Here's a look at three of them that emphasized white-interest convergence:

PUSH Excel initiative: Jesse Jackson founded Push Excel in 1975 to help black students achieve academic excellence while facing personal, family, and community challenges. White interest-convergence became apparent in his acceptance of large financial support from predominately white-power-holding organizations: the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, which was abolished in 1979, and the National Institute for Education, which was abolished in 1985. The funding came with a compulsory program evaluation that didn't work well, eventually damaging the organization's mission.

Promise Neighborhoods: The program, proposed by President Obama in 2007, had policies that excluded language about race, racism, and the systematic and institutional devices that have contributed to the continued marginalization of poor communities of color. The language instead focused on schools, poverty, and business-driven values, such as competition and rigorous evaluation. The scholar Alecia S. Person even suggested that the program wouldn’t have received committed federal funds had it not supported an education reform agenda that was tied to the economic self-interests of white political and capitalist elites.

Highland County MBK (HCMBK): I was a participatory researcher and facilitator during HMBK's first two years. I observed the organization's predominately black leaders overlook the insight of local men of color and instead deferentially seek the thoughts, opinions, and validation of white legislators, institutional leaders, and power holders.

PUSH Excel and Promise Neighborhoods did not experience the long-term success and sustainability they anticipated, and the outcomes for HCMBK are not yet known. However, the other two efforts I studied—PJU and Project Quest—experienced more sustainability while also employing white interest-convergence. Why?

2. Emphasizing Racism, Race, and Communities of Color

The more successful organizations embraced conversations and actions that centered racism and race. Their strategies privileged the voice, needs, desires, and values of communities of color. They made it impossible to divorce structural and institutional inequities from the minds, goals, and commitment of their partners and participants.

This appeared to be critically important for building collective commitment, undertaking collective action, and ensuring the sustainability of their collective action. Here is how they did it:

PJU: In the early 2000s, parents and students organized with education partners to make improvements to a deteriorating high school in Denver. It used political education, which authors Mark Warren and Karen Mapp define as “the mechanism by which [PJU] members and staff examined the impact structural inequities and power structure have on…day-to-day lives.” Political education explicitly allowed the Latinx-based group to discuss matters such as the root causes of racism, and connected knowledge of historic struggle to the everyday lives of youths and adults, aiming to inspire them to act.

Project QUEST: In the early 1990s, two community-based organizations helped provide technical education to people in San Antonio, Texas, who were struggling to obtain employment in a dramatically changing job market. They used relational organizing, which is deliberate relationship-building for the purpose of finding commonality for political action. It allowed leaders rooted in their communities to conduct house meetings to reconnect and build relationships with neighbors. With these gatherings, communities of color could discuss "common difficulties," including layoffs and low wages, and find the space to "process their private pain" and realize they weren't alone in going through it, Brett Campbell writes. Their experiences then rose in prominence and shaped the principles of the project's education-based job training program.

Allies Around the Globe, Listen Up

Considering race is a crucial approach to getting commitment to collective action and sustaining change-making efforts. It requires privileging marginalized voices in a consistent, respectful, and deliberate way.

#### Understanding unions and labor laws is prerequisite to building effective coalitions.

Andrew Moss 25, emeritus professor from the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, “Union Members Hold the Keys to a Restored Democracy”, June 2nd, 2025, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2025/06/02/union-members-hold-the-keys-to-a-restored-democracy/>, DOA: 8/4/25, Rslish

When ICE and other agencies began arresting, detaining, and deporting immigrants this past January under orders from Donald Trump, unions stepped up to support immigrant workers. They called for the release of workers detained and imprisoned without due process, offered know-your-rights workshops and legal assistance, accompanied workers to their ICE check-ins, and gave public displays of solidarity, such as the May Day marches this year.

In doing all this, unionists clearly rejected the scapegoating that’s been a hallmark of authoritarians for years. They didn’t buy the claims that immigrants were driving up housing prices or threatening the physical safety of Americans.

Yes, there were unionists who voted for Donald Trump in 2024, but a clear majority did not. Their rejection then, and their resistance now, show why unions are playing a key role in resisting authoritarianism today – and why they’ll play an equally critical role in rebuilding democracy once the Trump era is over.

When Trump is gone, unions and other American institutions will have to confront the inequality that weakens democracy no matter who’s in power. Over 800 American billionaires collectively possess $6.22 trillion in wealth, and they wield immensely disproportionate political power. At the same time, millions of their fellow citizens struggle to get by, juggling payments for rent, groceries, healthcare, childcare, elder care, and transportation. In taking in this picture, one must also consider the record 771,480 people who were reported as unhoused on a single night last year – and the 47.4 million people living in food insecure households.

It’s not surprising, then, that more than 85 million people who were eligible to vote in last year’s presidential election chose not to do so, many of them feeling that their vote would make little difference in their own lives or in the lives of their communities.

There was a time – in the mid-1950’s – when one in three American workers belonged to a union. It was a time of much greater economic equality, in no small measure due to the greater union density of that era. The reason was, and is, clear: unions are the only institutions that directly represent the economic interests of working people, and over the decades they’ve demonstrated their power by raising wages, improving working conditions, and yielding greater job security through collective bargaining.

In addition, unions foster participation in everyday democracy, keeping members informed of political issues, and promoting engagement and leadership within the union and the community at large. It’s quite possible that Donald Trump might never have reached the White House if union membership was as strong today as it was in the 1950’s.

But union strength declined precipitously in the last few decades. Corporate heads engaged in aggressive forms of union busting, and legislators at both the state and national levels have worked methodically to weaken existing labor laws and to pass hostile legislation, such as the so-called “right-to-work” laws. When Donald Trump was inaugurated this year, he joined the attack by terminating collective bargaining for federal employees and by firing thousands of federal workers.

As Trump’s anti-democratic agenda has come into sharper focus, scholars and activists have called for a broad coalition to resist the assaults on democracy and the rule of law. They’ve called on a wide range of institutions – the courts and legal profession, media organizations, colleges and universities, businesses and non-profits, advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, and unions – to work together in resisting these attacks.

But a broad-based coalition will succeed only insofar as its members understand the economic underpinnings of a democratic society – and the unique role that unions play in advancing the economic interests of working people. Union members may constitute 9.9 percent of working people today, but that percentage hasn’t stopped them from recently securing major victories on behalf of auto workers, UPS drivers, health workers, teachers, actors, screenwriters, and hotel workers, among many others.

An effective coalition will recognize the foundational role that unions and union members play in protecting and rebuilding community, and coalition members will provide support to restore union strength. This means, among other things, becoming informed about labor history and current labor struggles, and supporting critical legislation, like the PRO Act, that will protect the right to organize.

If coalition members are serious about protecting democracy as a whole – not just their own institutional turf – they’ll be willing to leave their familiar silos. If, for example, an M.L. King or a U.S. President can walk a picket line, so can the president of your alma mater, or the head of that prominent law firm in your town. Or, for that matter, so can the rest of us.

And if we’re willing to leave our comfort zones and face with clarity and discernment the uncertainty that lies before us, we might – just might – cross a threshold into a new, more expansive and creative notion of what American democracy can be.

#### This is historically proven labor unions have expanded internationally to protect all workers’ rights.

Levi Perrin 25, Contributor to Word in Black, national media brand innovating on the legacy of the Black Press; “From Wash Tubs to Union Halls: Black Women’s Legacy in the Labor Movement,” 2/11/25, https://wordinblack.com/2025/02/black-women-labor-movement

In the aftermath of the Civil War, as the United States grappled with Reconstruction, Black women — both formerly enslaved and free — emerged as a force in the labor movement. From laundresses in the 19th century to today’s domestic workers, their collective actions have been pivotal in demanding labor rights and dignity for Black women and all workers.

In the sweltering summer of 1881, 20 Black laundresses in Atlanta formed the Washing Society, a trade organization dedicated to securing better wages, respect, and autonomy over their work. They established a uniform rate of $1 per dozen pounds of laundry and, with the support of Black clergy, called for a citywide strike on July 19. Their numbers swelled rapidly, growing to 3,000 members within three weeks. These women employed door-to-door canvassing to rally support, even reaching out to white laundresses—an extraordinary act of interracial solidarity for the era.

Despite facing arrests, fines, and intimidation from city officials, the strikers remained resolute. Their unwavering determination not only led to increased wages but also inspired other domestic workers, including cooks and maids, to demand better working conditions.

The strike underscored the indispensable role of Black women in the New South’s economy and challenged societal norms that sought to render them invisible.

The spirit of resistance demonstrated by the Atlanta washerwomen set a precedent for future labor movements. In 1866, just a year after the Civil War, Black laundry workers in Jackson, Mississippi, went on strike to secure fair wages, recognizing the dependence of white households on their services.

Fast forward to the 20th century, and figures like Dorothy Bolden emerged as pivotal leaders. In 1968, Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers Union of America, organizing over 10,000 members to advocate for better wages and working conditions. She emphasized the importance of communication and negotiation, teaching domestic workers how to assert their rights and demand respect for their labor

Many Black women throughout history were unsung heroines of worker’s rights.

Rosina Corrothers Tucker, born the same year of the Atlanta labor action of 1881, helped form the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black labor union recognized by the AFL-CIO. She also organized laundry and domestic workers. She lived to 105 and was an active labor force until her passing. At 100, she narrated a documentary of the Sleeping Car Porters, “Miles of Smiles. Years of Struggle.”

Nannie Helen Burroughs, another freedom stalwart who contributed to labor, education, and migrant rights, founded the National Association of Wage Earners in 1921, fighting for the rights of Black domestic workers and working-class women through education and policy advocacy. She also established the National Training School for Women and Girls and was a mentor to legions of activists in the emerging civil rights movement.

These women were part of a broader movement that extended beyond domestic labor. Clara Day, a leader in the Teamsters Union, fought for the rights of warehouse workers and addressed issues of workplace discrimination. Maida Springer Kemp, a labor organizer in the garment industry, went on to advocate for workers’ rights internationally, becoming a crucial link between U.S. labor movements and African workers’ struggles.

Today, the legacy of these early labor movements is evident in organizations like the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). In 2015, the NDWA launched We Dream in Black, an initiative aimed at building the collective power and visibility of Black caregivers, nannies, and professional cleaners. This collective invests in Black worker organizing infrastructure, particularly in the South, where anti-labor policies have historically posed challenges.

The impact of such initiatives is profound. Black women are increasingly taking leadership roles in labor unions, transforming priorities to focus on issues like family-friendly benefits, healthcare, and protections against sexual harassment. Their presence has led to significant strides in workplace equity, reshaping union policies and representation

The journey from the Atlanta washerwomen’s strike to today’s labor movements is a testament to resilience, solidarity, and an unwavering demand for justice. These pioneers have not only fought for their rights but have also laid the groundwork for future generations to continue the struggle for equitable labor practices. Their stories serve as powerful reminders of the enduring strength and agency of Black women in labor and life — refusing to be erased and demanding that their contributions be recognized and respected.

#### Revitalizing the labor movement is vital---only that can check back against corrupt powers.

Eric Blanc 25, assistant professor of labor studies at Rutgers University, “Why Labor Can Defeat Trumpism”, April 1st, 2025, <https://lpeproject.org/blog/why-labor-can-defeat-trumpism/>, DOA: 9/11/25, Rslish

Our best bet for beating back and defeating Trumpism lies in a revitalized labor movement. Thanks in part to an inspiring surge in workplace organizing in recent years, organized labor is one of the few social forces with the legitimacy, resources, and leverage to expose and fight back against Trump’s sham populism. But can workers and unions continue their forward momentum under the new administration?

Trump has attacked organized labor on multiple fronts, from attempting to terminate unionized federal employees to illegally firing a National Labor Relations Board member. Such fierce opposition to unions has given a green light to corporate America to reassert its dominance. But as the growth of worker-to-worker resistance among federal workers is showing, vicious boss attacks can in certain circumstances be a major spur to labor mobilization and organization. As the union saying goes, sometimes “the boss is the best organizer.”

On the whole, unions are still well-positioned to continue their organizing momentum. Doing so will be critical for beating back Trump’s worst attacks and isolating MAGA by demonstrating the emptiness of its economic populist rhetoric. In this brief post, I lay out five factors that should encourage unions to invest more, not less, into organizing.

1. The economic forces fueling Trumpism also favor labor’s continued resurgence. After the pandemic laid bare the fundamental unfairness of our economic system, workers responded with a burst of union organizing and the most significant strike activity in decades. The same underlying economic forces — chronic economic insecurity and inequality — helped propel Trumpism to a narrow victory in the 2024 elections. But Trump’s actual policies will inevitably exacerbate economic inequality, undermining the Republican Party’s hollow pro-worker rhetoric.

Unlike the party, unions were able to build power and win real security for working people, setting off a record-breaking wave of strikes, organizing against right-to-work laws, and winning minimum wage increases across the country.

With a tight labor market projected for the coming years, employers will have less power to threaten employees who dare to unionize their workplaces and workers will have more bargaining leverage against employers, increasing the chances of successful and headline-grabbing strikes.

2. Young worker activism is not going away. As I show in my new book We Are the Union, most of the labor upsurge since 2020 has been driven forward by Gen Z and Millennial workers radicalized by economic inequality, Bernie Sanders, and racial justice struggles. Contrary to what some have suggested, the 2024 election did not register a major shift to the right among young people, but rather a sharp drop in young Democratic turnout.

The recent proliferation of union campaigns across Amazon drivers and at Whole Foods is just the latest instance of a generational uptick that continues to spread across Starbucks, higher education, journalism, and beyond. These “labor-pilled” young activists are unlikely to throw in the towel just because Trump is again in office — if anything, the dramatic failure of establishment Democratic politics (combined with the power deficits of ephemeral street protests) will likely grow the ranks of young people convinced that workplace organizing is the central axis for winning progressive change, not just on issues of economic inequality but also on the wide range of issues animating young activists today, including combatting racism, environmental devastation, and militarism.