

# Measuring Internal Labour Union Contention

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with Dr. Barry Eidlin

## 1. Introduction

My ARIA project contributed to Dr. Barry Eidlin and Dr. Nathan Wilmers' broader research project entitled "Does Democracy Pay? Determinants of Organizational Effectiveness in Unions."

This research asks **how internal union contention impacts wages** negotiated by the union on behalf of its members. This is an important question in the conversation around how to revive the power of labour.



I worked on the **qualitative coding** of **newsletters** published by a reform group within the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) labour union. The results of my coding are used to measure and characterize rank-and-file contention occurring in the IBT over time.

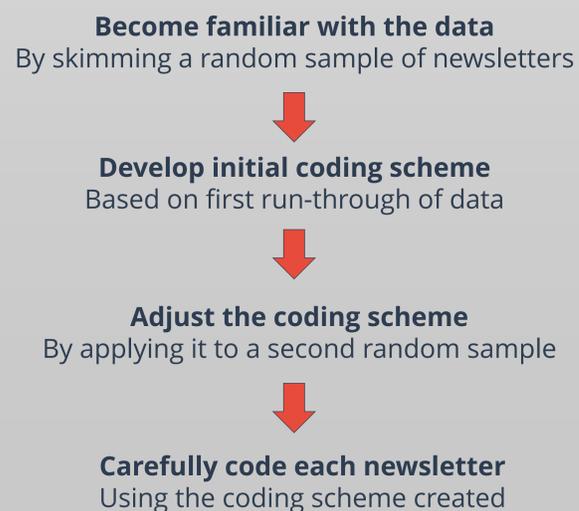
## 2. Data

The **International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)** is North America's largest labour union. **Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU)** is a group of rank-and-file teamsters advocating for reform within IBT.

I coded newsletters published several times per year by the TDU, first called **Convoy Dispatch** and later **Teamster Voice**. The set of newsletters runs from 1988-2018 and includes over 250 editions, each 12 to 16 pages long.

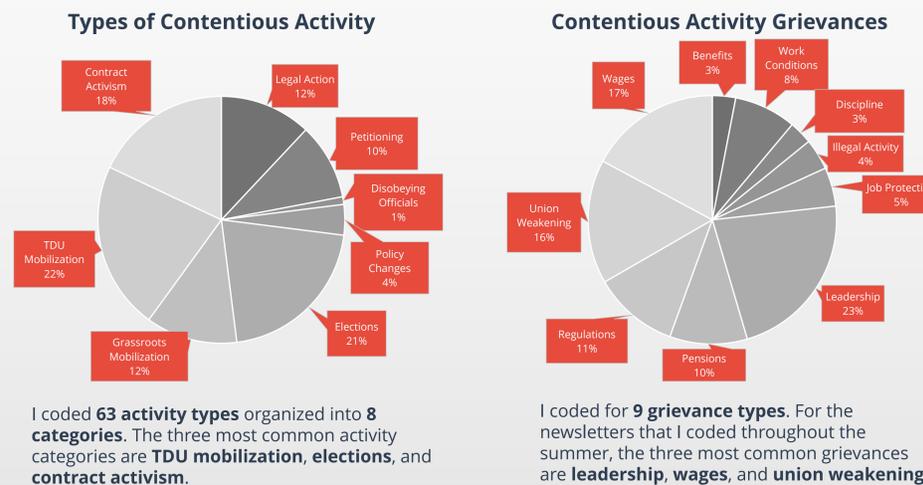


## 3. Methods



## 4. Findings

The coding scheme I developed included codes describing **action type**, **target**, **grievance**, and **outcome**. The distribution of codes for action type and grievance are shown below:



## Contentious Activity on the Ground

Below are examples of what different types of activity look like when found in the newsletter, and partial snapshots of how they were coded:

Action	Grievance
Policy Change: Bylaw Amendment	Rules and Procedures

Local 470 members will be able to vote on a change in their bylaws so that members may elect their own stewards. Electing stewards may seem like a basic democratic right, but President Joe Sullivan and the rest of the incumbent leadership of Local 470 have refused to support the change.  
Convoy Dispatch No. 141, May 1995

Action	Grievance
Petitioning: Picketing	Pensions

The retirees have left no stone unturned in their efforts to correct this injustice. They have appealed to the local, to Pennsylvania Conference of Teamsters head Johnny Morris, and to the International. They have picketed at the county courthouse and at the Local 401 union hall.  
Convoy Dispatch No. 106, June/July 1991

Action	Grievance
Elections: Electing Reformer	Leadership

New York Local 805 members elected the Sandy Pope Leadership Action Team in balloting on Dec. 7. Pope, a long-time leader in the Teamster reform movement and a member of the TDU International Steering Committee, defeated the incumbent president by a wide margin.  
Convoy Dispatch No. 223, Jan 2005

Action	Grievance
Contracts: Voting No	Wages

Local 100 members voted the contract down, both road and local. It's important to note that the officers of our local supported the contract even though they campaigned against Hoffa. They voted with him and against the wishes of the majority of our membership. The members in Cincinnati were the best judge of this contract—not our leadership!  
Convoy Dispatch No. 249, Feb/March 2008

## 5. Challenges

- ⇒ Creating codes that could be useful in both the qualitative and quantitative analysis
- ⇒ Balancing the breadth and specificity of codes
- ⇒ Determining whether to adjust the coding scheme or apply an imperfect code when ill-fitting cases arise

## 6. Big Picture

The qualitative coding of the TDU newsletters is just one way that Dr. Barry Eidlin and Dr. Nathan Wilmers' research examines contention.

Another side of the project is **quantitative**, examining the relationship between **union elections results and negotiated wages**. When a local union votes for a reform candidate at the international union level, does this impact the quality of the contracts that the local union negotiates for its members?

While the data produced from my coding of the TDU newsletters may be incorporated into the quantitative portion of the project, the main purpose of this exercise is to qualitatively colour in the picture of what internal union democracy looks like on the ground.



Throughout the summer, I also contributed to the quantitative side of the project by helping to clean data and get it ready for analysis.

## 7. Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my supervising professor, **Dr. Barry Eidlin**, whose mentorship throughout this summer and beyond has substantially shaped my understanding of the world of sociology and fueled my desire to be part of it. I am grateful to **Dr. Nathan Wilmers**, whose guidance has been formative to the development of my quantitative research skills. Thank you to **Dr. Joan Eakin** and **Mr. Christopher Hoffman** for their generous funding of this research project. I am also appreciative of the **Arts Internship Office** for the ARIA program and their support.