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EXTENT AND JUSTIFICATIONS FOR STRIKE PRONENESS IN THE NIGERIA PUBLIC SECTOR INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Strike has become one of the most effective tools used by workers to drive home their demands and the intensity of this varies from one sector to another. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate strike proneness and why public sector industries are more strike prone in Nigeria. The study takes an exploratory approach by reviewing extant literatures as a focal point of analysis to determine the extent of strike intensity among industries in the public sectors with a view towards drawing up relevant justifications. The findings of the study shows that in comparison with other sectors, education as sub sector of public sector are more strike prone and the reason generally for public sector strike proneness is because government is the highest employer of labour as well as the umpire ensuing the behaviour of an employer and at the same time involve in the regulatory framework that guides the employment relations between the employer and employees in the private and public sector which often leads to unilateral decisions in the face of collective bargaining ; unfair treatment of employees and anti-union activities appears to be factors responsible for more industrial strike in the public sector among others. Therefore, the study recommend that government should practice unbiased democracy that is just, fair and deal equitably with the respective organized union so as to prevent conflict and not control conflict because of the after math consequences.

Keywords: *Strike proneness, public sector, Nigeria.*

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INTRODUCTION

As there are divergent opinions and orientations among workers and management in the workplace, Industrial conflict becomes endemic and as a result, industrial conflict could exist in the form of strike, sabotage, absenteeism, presenteeism, offensive and defensive lock-out, ban on overtime, personnel quits or exit among others. It is important to know that the literatures on industrial conflict in industry identifies two broad types of interests (a) disputes of interest (disputes over interests) and (b) disputes of rights (disputes over rights) and in Nigeria, the following factors appear to be important in explaining the nature and types of disputes which are: Sector of the economy i.e. whether public or private sector; the subsector of each sector i.e. for the public sector, whether industrial, service or commercial subsectors; Presence or absence of unions and the type of workers involved (white collar, junior workers, essential service, etc) (Otobo,2016).

However, it is becoming an undisputed fact that the obvious and spectacular manifestation of industrial conflict in the Nigeria private and public sector is strike. However, this is also noted by Chidi(2010) that strike action is really the most common and costly apparent indication of conflict of interests between the workers and the employers, he further stated that it is because strike is seen as a last resort for protecting the employees' interest and welfare against the policies and actions of the employer. This is perhaps an indication that both employer and employee either in the private sector or public sector has exhausted all the internal mechanism of settling dispute regarding their terms and condition of employment.

In view of this, Clark (2012) claimed that strike action is as a result of unfair treatment that workers receive from their employers' that is, when employees perceived that they are not being treated fairly with respect to pay and condition of service, there is bound to be disagreement between the employees and the employers. This is why Fashoyin (1992) viewed strikes as enduring power struggle between workers and employers. In the context of an organized trade union, strike actions are seen as a tool used by union leaders in registering their grievances concerning pay and conditions of employment (Adavbiele,2015).

However, the intensity of strike actions often varies from one sector to another; and from one country to another (Adavbiele, 2015). This implies that some sectors or industries are more strike prone.

Objectives of the study

It is within the purview of the above that the study aim:

- I. To investigate strike proneness and
- II. why public sector industries are more strike prone

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strike Proneness

Strike proneness is a situation where an industry or a group of workers display a high propensity to engage in industrial actions. Strike propensities refer to the extent to which union members are willing to engage in strikes(James, Martin & Robert ,2001). Strike proneness can be measured in a number of different ways, including the number of strikes, the number of working

days lost through strike action, the number of workers involved and number of working days lost per thousand workers employed. In Nigeria public and private sectors, the following industrials are prone to strikes; agriculture, automobile, shipyards, transportation, chemical and non-metallic, construction industry, food, beverage and tobacco, hotels and personal services, metal products, iron and steel, paperboard and paper products, petroleum and natural gas, solid minerals, textile, civil service, parastatals etc(Otobo,2016).

Ran (1982) argue that in a highly strike-prone organizations, negotiations are usually handled by representatives equipped with limited authority who are less prepared for a strike situation, and their ideology is less critical of promoting union leaders to managerial positions and less favourable of opening recruitment to out-of-plant competition. Similarly, Michele, Robert and Douglas(2005), study shows that(i)experience with strikes made bargaining units less likely to strike in the future and (ii) the longer a strike lasted, the greater was the probability of settling and that small bargaining units were less likely to strike than were larger units, but had longer strikes when they did strike.

Although, Jimmy (2002) argued that it is not the practise of organising union or unionism that causes strikes but unionising just makes disputes easier to manage. On the basis of individual experience to strike propensity, Ignace Ng(1993) study shows that faculty members who have attended the study session, and those who have been active in past union meetings were more likely to get involved in picketing and in picket organizing during the course of the strike actions. This indicates those organisations that practice ‘employee voice mechanism’ are prone to other forms of industrial conflict such as employee turnover, absenteeism, etc. This why Gill , John and Keith (2008) stated that the more opportunities employees have to air their grievances, especially through employee ‘voice’ mechanisms, the more they are likely to ensue their grievances and in the absence of these opportunities and structures, conflict is likely to become overt in much higher levels of employee turnover or absenteeism.

In terms of the motives for strike propensity, Ifeanyi and femi (2001) argues that the critical issues that gave the strike its essential characters originated from the social and economic spheres vis-a-vis critical governance issues that cannot be explained simply by ‘political motivates’. Also, James, Martin and Robert (2001) study identifies four motivational explanations for individual propensity to strike, these are: social exchange relationships between member and union, and member and company, economic circumstances, and social status. Chidi (2010) note that the consequence of strike prone country is that such country is not likely to attract foreign investment from foreign industrialists or the transnational corporations because such an economy would be seen as unstable and venerable to industrial crisis and he argued that strike propensity has become a very important input in the calculation of international credit rating among other political factors such as stability of government in all countries.

The extent of strike propensity will not be known without adequate and accurate data, unfortunately, the paucity of strike data has also been a challenge to determined strike propensity, and Robert (2018) has argued that employers and unions should be required to report exact strike threats, lockouts, and other strike-related activities. Also, variables to be used should be well suited for calculating strike propensity , that is why Ed (1973) stated that the variables used is an assumption that time spent in striking would otherwise have been spent working and this may not always have been the situation. He argued that some of the workers involved may have been retrenched, become ill, or engaged in work slowdowns. Another assumption is that time lost in strikes cannot or will not be made up after the strike actions. He said this is apparently incorrect, since production losses in many strikes are soon regained by working overtime couple with the use of excess productive capacity.

Synthesizing the above views, strike propensity could be shaped as a result of bargaining units, experiences of those involved in strike and motives behind the strike actions, thus this can be expressed as bargaining units + experiences of the ‘strikers’+ motive(s) could be equal to(=) strike proneness

Theoretical Perspectives On Strike Pronness

Robbins (2003) cited by Chidi (2010) stated three theories of conflict which are: The classical or traditional theory, the human relations theory and the interactionist theory. **The classical or traditional theory** views conflict as dysfunctional, violent, destructive, irrational, bad or evil and must be discouraged or avoided. **The human relations theory** advocates that conflict is a inevitable, functional and cannot be eliminated. **The interactionist theory** is similar to the human relations perspective, but goes a step further to encourage conflict on the bases that harmonious, peaceful and cooperative group is prone to becoming static and non-responsive to the needs for change and innovation.

In view of the assumptions of the above theories, industries who shared the ideology of the human relations especially the interactionist perspective have the tendency to be more strike prone than industries that tend towards the classical ideology or believes. In other words, Industries or sectors that adopt the human relations and the interactionism ideology are more prone to industrial actions or strikes.

Variables Of Measuring Strike Incidence

Fajana (1995) argued that there are considerable overt variations in the incidence of strikes among industries and among nations, and also in distinctive profiles or shapes of strikes. Citing Poole (1986), he identified the following strike profiles: duration, breadth, frequency, and impact.

- I. Frequency: This implies the number of work stoppages in a given unit of analysis over a specified time period. This is measured as number of stoppages per 100,000 wage/salary earners.
- II. Breadth: Refers to the number of workers who participate in work stoppages. This is measured as involvement per 1000 wage/salary earners.
- III. Duration: Is measured as the length of the stoppages usually in man-days of work lost. This is measured as average length of stoppages in working days.
- IV. Impact: Refers to the number of working days lost through stoppages. This is measured as the number of working days lost per 1000 wage/salary earners.

Data on General Overview of Strike Proneness and Sector and Subsector Involvement Disputes in Nigeria

Data on General Overview of Strike Proneness

The data column on work stoppages provides us an overview of the strike frequency, breadth and duration so as to give a statistical evidence that generally strike are frequent in terms of years and dispute involved,

It is within this purview that the table below shows the frequency of disputes and work stoppages from 1946-2007 and the table 2 and chart below displays the extent of strike incidence of each industry in terms of their sector and sub sector.

Table 1
Strike incidence

Year	Disputes	Work stoppages	Workers involved	Man-days lost
1946	16	10	6485	132000
1947	59	28	17721	132000
1948	-	21	6830	-
1949	86	46	50043	577000

1950	46	19	35573	286351
1951	59	38	6930	20243
1952	59	26	12455	59847
1953	54	33	9990	26874
1954	54	34	6473	12200
1955	76	43	89522	901000
1956	98	30	23623	61297
1957	137	49	21797	63410
1958	129	53	19046	73095
1959	115	54	23250	70862
1960	140	69	36667	157373
1961	127	58	18673	57303
1962	153	45	-	53039
1963	-	62	45409	96621
1964	968	195	21710	1300000
1965	308	125	36201	238679
1966	234	89	41344	100300
1967	150	59	14878	59761
1968	133	31	11767	35356
1969	170	53	28524	56074
1970	165	44	14784	27072
1971	296	165	77104	208114
1972	196	64	52748	145125
1973	173	60	33963	115371
1974	338	129	62565	144881
1975	775	346	107489	435493
1976	230	125	52242	148141
1977	172	93	59270	136349
1978	142	78	105525	875137
1979	155	755	204742	2038855
1980	355	265	221088	2350998
1981	258	234	323700	2218223
1982	341	253	2874721	9652400
1983	184	131	629177	404822
1984	100	49	42046	301809
1985	77	40	19907	118693
1986	87	53	157165	461345
1987	65	38	57097	142506
1988	156	124	55620	230613
1989	144	80	157342	579968
1990	174	102	254540	1339105
1991	204	117	460471	2257382
1992	221	124	238324	966 611
1993	160	90	880224	6192167
1994	199	110	1541146	234307748
1995	46	26	193944	2269037
1996	29	24	19826	94664
1997	31	31	59897	539801
1998	16	11	9494	47631
1999	52	27	173858	3158087
2000	49	47	344722	6287733
2001	19	18	57188	1727123
2002	24	11	24737	370 318

2003	77	28	249697	5690952
2004	36	26	127377	2737399
2005	20	11	29152	760553
2006	30	9	5642	74077
2007	2	2	875	12950

Source: CBN, Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity, Chidi(2010) and Fajana (2002)

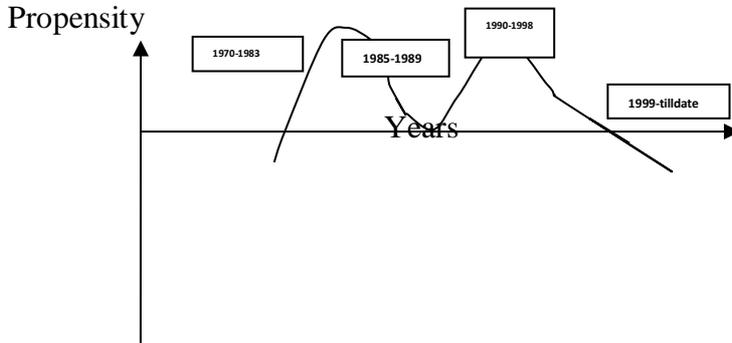


Chart above is further illustrating the pattern of work stoppages

Source: Author

The table below shows the summary of explanation of Table 1 and the chart:

Date	Frequency	Reason
1970-1983	High	Inflationary trend engendered by the civil war of 1967-1970
1985-1989	Low	The use of coercive strategies and policies at putting industrial actions in safer channels within the purview of revamping the ailing economy
1990-1998	High	Structural adjustment programme of 1986 as well as the annulment of the 1993 presidential election by the then military regime of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida
1999-till date	Low	Transition to civil rule i.e democratic dispensation were organised unions are allowed to air their views

Source: Author

In the light of the summary of explanation of the table above, it is important to note that despite this democratic dispensation till date, the public sector is still prone to strike. For instance strike actions during this period is usually occasioned by incessant hikes in the prices of petroleum products by the federal government likewise the education sector, specifically Academic Staff Union of Universities(ASUU) have been going on strike over earned academic allowances,

conditions of work and funding of the University system. At the moment of writing this paper, ASUU is in a serious negotiation with the federal government over the Integrate Personnel and Payroll system (IPPIS) . From the perspective of ASUU, it is being considered as violating the University autonomy and the Integrated Personnel and Payroll System (IPPIS) is not taken into consideration the peculiarity of the University system while the federal government is said to introduce this automated to curb corruptions(such as ghost workers among others) in the federal government higher institutions. It is on this basis that federal government has threaten to stop salary if ASUU did not join the IPPIS platform and ASUU threaten with ‘no pay no work’ policy making them strike prone in the event that both parties failed to come into agreeable terms.

Data on Strike Incidence in Industrial Sector and Subsector

A sectorial and sub sectorial presentation of data to show the extent of strike prones in Nigeria is being considered below.

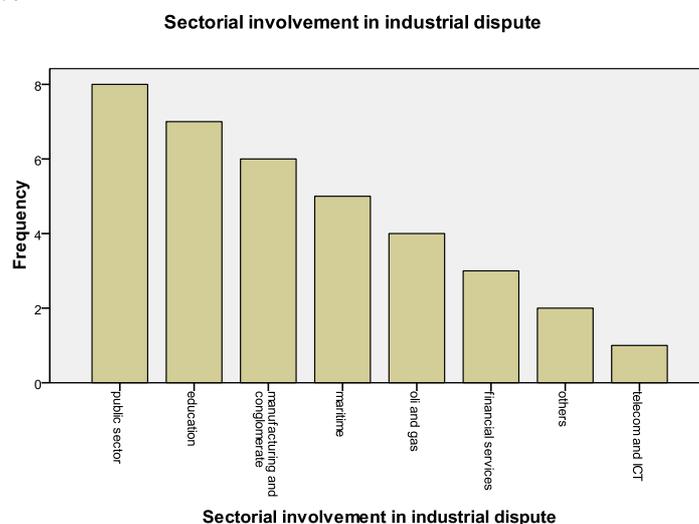
Fajana(2006) stated the Inter-Industry comparison of strike profiles between the years of 1976-1988. This is stated below:

Table 2
Inter-industry differences in strike profiles: Nigeria 1976-1988

Industry	Frequency	Duration	Breadth	Impact
Manufacturing	35.33	2.39	20.08	88.16
Construction	27.32	3.98	72.28	56.03
Community & Social Services	27.22	15.25	172.41	317.00
Other Activities	16.33	1.59	11.97	83.25
Financial Institution	10.55	4.2	10.34	49.62
Transport	10.11	8.12	18.92	100.33
Mining and Quarrying	7.55	1.14	1.64	8.04
Agriculture and Forestry	7.33	12.07	4.25	44.33
Distribution, Restaurant and Hotels	6.77	0.83	2.48	5.88
Electricity & Water	2.88	3.98	1.49	9.24

Source: Fajana (1995).

Also, a survey carried out by CIPMN gave a sectorial involvement in industrial dispute. This is display below:



Source: Chartered Institute of Personnel Management, Nigeria (2012)

From the table and chart above, it can be seen that the manufacturing sector had the highest frequency of strike (35.33 per 100,000 workers) as at 1995 from table 2 while the survey by CIPMN (2012) which shows that manufacturing industry took a third position in dispute involvement as the public sector and its subsector (education) are more strike prone than the manufacturing industry.

Justifications For Public Sector Strike Proneness

There is no gay saying that the public sector and its subsector are more prone to strike than any other sector as stated by Otobo (2016), that the most strike prone groups of workers are found in the public services and include school teachers, civil servants, and local authority administrators.

The reasons for public sector in Nigeria being more prone to strike include:

- I. Government is the highest employer of labour as well as the umpire ensuing the behaviour of an employer and at the same time involve in the regulatory framework that guides the employment relations between the employer and employees in both the private and public sector which often leads to unilateral decisions in the face of collective bargaining couple with unfair treatment of employees and anti-union activities.
- II. Historically, Nigeria strike action started in the industries in the public sector. Example in 1847, the artisan workmen in the public works department in Lagos embarked on a 93 days strike to protest against their hours of work. Also, the organized form of strike started at a time when the first union in Nigeria was formed in the public sector known as the Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union in 1912. (Fashoyin,1992)
- III. There is absolute managerial prerogative in the industries in the private sector than industries in the public sector because the company is being financed by the capital contributed by the owner(s) of the business while the industries in the public sector are financed by the tax payer money which made it more easy for the workers to question the managerial prerogatives of the management of the industries in the public sector, as a result, the unions in the industries in the private sector are not formidable like the union in the industries in the public sector. This is because, in the public sector, unionism is tends to be encouraged but in many private organizations, management may stifle the formation of workers' union in order to maintain its control over work related issues affecting workers
- IV. There are more contract staff in the industries in the private sector than industries in the public sector as a result of the fact that temporary contract staff are not eligible to form a union according to trade union act and this does not give room for more organised strike actions
- V. The loop hole in the trade union act that allow 50 persons to form a union has given the industries in the private sector the opportunity to reduce the number of workers to 49 so as to avoid organised unionism that can make the industries to be strike prone.

RESEARCH METHOD

For the purpose of this research work, a qualitative research design with exploratory research approach was adopted which involve the review of extant literatures because the secondary data was from empirical journals, articles, publications, texts written by various authors relating to the study. This method is being adopted because it will give interpretation of existing phenomenon or construct within the purview of its various patterns and dimensions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings also reveal that the global outlook of a country that are strike prone will be affected because factors influencing strike propensity might be beyond political motives and other factors such as socio-economic variables, social status and critical governance issues play a very critical role for strike propensity (James, Martin & Robert,2001; Ifeanyi &femi,2001)). Also, strike propensity is dependent on the bargaining units and the experiences of the 'strikers' (Michele, Robert & Douglas,2005) but strike is not the only variables that determines propensity for industrial conflict.

Likewise in measuring strike proneness or propensity as indentified, findings shows that there are paucity of data on strike actions and other related activities, and that assumptions on variables of calculation are sometimes based on unrealistic assumptions (Ed,1973). The justifications for strike proneness shows that the origin, ideology(human relations/interactionist), state as the highest employer of labour, and the labour acts /trade union act culminated into the reasons for strike proneness in the public sector.

CONCLUSION

In realizing the fact at hand, It is obvious that the only language that employer of labour really understand for employees to drive home their demands is strike, invariably industries that ensue this philosophy are prone to going for strike actions at the slighted provocation with their respective employer. In view of this, it became apparent that public sector and its subsector are more strike prone due to its antecedent and the current happenings in the industry. The study recommend that actors especially government in employment relations should work towards preventing strike tendencies or actions by practicing unbiased democracy that is just, fair and deal equitably in its actions and policies with the respective organized union so as to prevent conflict and not control conflict because of the after math consequences.

Limitation of the study

The limitation is that failure of strike recorders to pay attention to those members of the workforce who do not participate in strike actions (Fajana, 1995) and the variables for computing the strike stoppages or disputes involved are sometimes based on false assumptions couple with the fact that there are no up-to-date statistics showing the extent of strike stoppages in the private and public sector.

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