

# The Nexus Between Trade Unions and Industrial Democracy: A Survey-Perspective

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**Abstract:** - Insights are limited on connections between trade unions and industrial democracy in developing countries. It is on this basis; this study examines the link between trade unions and industrial democracy in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study was anchored on evolutionary theory. The study was survey research design with 400 as sample size selected from eight union organizations. Data collection was through questionnaire, and analysed with Pearson Chi-Square.  $H_{01}$  revealed that unions' size has no significant relationship with employees' representation participation.  $H_{02}$  indicated that unions 'power has no significant relationship with involvement in decision making.  $H_{03}$  showed that benefits derived by the union members has no significant relationship with participation in decision making. The study recommended embracement of collective bargaining as one of the manifestations of industrial democracy. Also, there should be balance of power between unions and management. Joint consultation and co-determination should be incorporated into the policy of work organizations to facilitate sense of oneness between management and labour unions in the workplace.

**Key-Words:** - trade, unions, industrial, democracy, survey, perspective

Received: March 23, 2025. Revised: May 9, 2025. Accepted: June 4, 2025. Published: August 4, 2025.

## 1 Introduction

Work organizations growth and high productivity attainment require mutual co-operation, unity of purpose and regular smooth interaction between workers and the management. It is when sense of oneness between the two parties takes place that peaceful atmosphere that can pave way for effective communication, harmony, joint decision making and accelerated profit will come into fruition. Giving opportunity to workers to participate in decision making otherwise called industrial democracy is a tool to foster peaceful co-existence, co-operation and commitment of management and employees to the

objectives of work organization. Industrial democracy at work creates a space where management and the employees represented by their union representatives may collaborate and make decisions together. Through this platform, workers have the assured right to legitimately participate and contribute to the decisions and modalities for running and managing the industrial enterprise for the overall benefit of all the interested parties with minimum friction. It is a form generally used to argue that, by analogy with political democracy, workers are entitled to significant voice in the decisions affecting the companies in which they work, [39], [25], and [15]. In both private and public work

organisations, labour unions engage in regular demands for improved working conditions from the employers. However, going by the historical development of trade unions in Nigeria, employers of labour hitherto this moment still show negative attitude towards trade unionism because they consider it as platform not only to challenge their authority but also checking their arbitrariness, [2], [3]. It is understandable why the lack of industrial democracy led to failures to bargain or uphold collective agreements, such as the one between the government and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities, as well as deliberate attempts to engage in unfair labor practices that frequently result in low productivity and job dissatisfaction. Previous research on industrial democracy concentrated on topics like the economy and industrial democracy, [43] [29], [14] employee job satisfaction and industrial democracy, [42], [28], and [9] employment relations and industrial democracy, [8], [6] and social transformation and industrial democracy [15], but there hasn't been much work in the intellectual discourse on industrial democracy in relation to trade unions.

The current difficulties labour unions face, including casualization, outsourcing, high employee turnover, downsizing, irregular employer payment of wages and salaries, high inflation leading to a rise in the cost of living and a decline in the purchasing power of money, etc., are some of the main reasons there are conflict between employers and labor unions, [10]. However, it is anticipated that as industrial democracy is incorporated into labor-management relations, the intensity of labor disputes will decrease as a forum for discussion of fundamental issues pertaining to pay and working conditions as well as other crucial issues to promote peace and harmony at the workplace is established. Lack of respect for the dignity of labour, management's unilateral decision-making strategy, organizational culture that views labour as a tool to be used and then discarded, excessive display of management prerogatives, autocratic management style, poor workplace, poor communication network, poor pay, indiscriminate firing of employees, management's negative attitude toward labor unions, and excessive application of management prerogatives low productivity and ongoing labor

management conflicts are results of the trend. Based on this, the study looks at how trade unions influence industrial democracy among a selected unions organisations in Lagos State.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Trade Unions

Trade union laws in Nigeria and United Kingdom gave the definition of trade union as “any combination, whether temporary or permanent, the principal objective of which is the regulation of the relations between workmen and masters, or imposing of restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business and also the provision of benefits to members”. A trade union can also be defined as an organization of workers formed by workers for the sole purpose of improving the socio-economic and political interest of their members. Membership of a trade union is in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention No. 87 of 1948 regarding freedom of association of workers and convention No. 98 of 1949 in respect of right to organize and bargain collectively. Consequently, workers are free to associate, organize and bargain collectively in order to protect their jobs and enhance good working conditions. It is this that can foster job commitment and job security among employees and prevent management arbitrariness in the workplace, [3]. The size of any labour union is a function of many factors namely: level of workers' consciousness or education, attitude of the employers, legal provisions of the work organization, strategic nature of the industry, terms and conditions of employment, level of occupational health and safety in the workplace, management style and union leadership.

[1] and [4] emphasised that a trade union has economic, political, socio-psychological and managerial functions to perform as summarised in the following ways: they provide welfare measures for its members. That is, in a bid to enhance the well-being of their members, trade unions provide welfare packages for members such as loans, endowment funds and financial support in the time of need. They boost the ego and morale of its members and ensure good relationship between workers and management. They obtain better conditions of service for its member. They give financial support to its members. Craft unions, industrial unions, general unions, enterprise/company unions, occupational unions, federations, and amalgamated unions are the six main

categories of trade unions that scholars have recognized, [14], [18], [23], [24].

According to [33], [11], [12], and [13], the following factors are crucial for effective trade unionism: One union in one industry must be permitted, no group should face discrimination. Genuine leadership must be developed among trade union members for political and economic association, professional trade unionists must be employed and paid on a full-time basis, and the government must always support genuine trade union efforts, [32], [31], [34].

## 2.2 Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is a system of work organization that enables management, who represents the employer, and labor representatives to meet at a round table to debate and resolve their underlying fundamental structural issue relating to terms and conditions of employment. For collective bargaining to be effective, bargaining should be in good faith. Each party must have open minds by listening to each other's views with flexibility in making adjustment to their demands, there must be spirit of give and take between workers and employers, industrial relations must be between workers represented by their union and employer represented by the management, the purpose of collective bargaining is to reach collective agreement not mere talking and there must be favourable political and economic climate, [17].

According to [26], [36], [37], [40] and [16], the benefits of collective bargaining in labor-management relations can be seen in the following areas: proper handling of grievances between employees and management; promotes peace, stability, and progress in work organization; fair wages and economic growth; it eliminates strikes, lockouts, and go-slow in work organization; it addresses problems with age, pension benefits, bonuses, health and safety issues.

## 2.3 Industrial Democracy

The term "industrial democracy" has been defined in a variety of ways by academics and professionals in the field of industrial and labor relations. Industrial democracy was defined by [27], [41] and [43] as a collection of social or institutional mechanisms whereby subordinate employees participate in one or more organizational decision-making processes within the workplace, either individually or collectively. Industrial democracy, according to [32], is a concept that addresses the status and role of employees in industrial society based on their

participation in setting the terms of their working lives. Industrial democracy was described by [15] as a formal, typically legal framework for workers' representation and satisfaction at various levels of management decision-making. [19], used the term in different dimensions in a work captioned "Sidney and Beatrice Webb's institutional theory of labor markets and wage determination" where the author asserted that "trade unions are democracies, that is to say, their internal constitutions are based on the principle of government of the people, by the people and for the people" and thereby attempt solving the fundamental problems of administrative efficiency and popular control." More so, the author likened 'Trade Union Functions' to industrial democracy involving method of collective bargaining.

From the foregoing, industrial democracy can be seen as a process whereby workers through their representatives and employer represented by management participate and contribute to decision making process that affects their respective working lives without any disaffection. It entails the use of democratic principles in managing industrial units whereby equilibrium is established between employees' rights and employer's rights. It is a mechanism contrived to prevent autocratic management style in the workplace, where workers are treated as partners in progress through their representatives by taking part in work committees, joint management councils, suggestion schemes, and shop councils, [1]. In industrial democracy, workers are treated as responsible partners of the organization by allowing them to participate in the decision-making process through democratic means.

## 2.4 Employees' Representation Participation

In this method, management and labor representatives collaborate to make choices in a true democratic manner free from hostility and coercion from either side. By allowing each person the chance to contribute significantly to decision-making, a sense of camaraderie is created. Participation structure of employees can be in form of Co-determination: In West Germany, the phrase "co-determination" became well-known following World War II, [21], and [35]. According to the Co-determination Act of 1951 and the Works Constitution Acts of 1952 and 1972, respectively, workers were given the right to take part in decision-making. In light of this, management and staff worked together to find solutions to a range of issues that were within the administrative discretion. After the war, widespread collaboration between businesses and unions defined German labor

relations. This caused employer to stop opposing trade unions and accept them as employees' voice.

## 2.5 Co-ownership/Co-participation

It is a strategy designed to give employees the ability to obtain compensation as well as a cut of the company's total profit, [20]. Employees become devoted, committed, and like to belong to company if they can see themselves as co-owners or co-partners, [7]. Consensus by scholars offers awareness on issues that could aid the organization's development and growth, paving way for embracing the concept of syndicalism. Insight on syndicalism indicates that by the end of the 19th century, syndicalism had become more prevalent in France, [22]. Syndicalism proponent held the opinion that a social revolution might be achieved through picketing, protests, sabotage, strikes, or other violent or peaceful means of subduing foes, [22]. Later, the idea was adopted in Britain, where it was believed that, in accordance with free societies, industries should be managed by the people who worked in them, [22].

## 2.6 Joint Consultation

According to [32], joint consultation is a type of meeting between management and employees in which the discussion of issues encompasses those that can improve employee welfare and organizational development. [14], [9], and [6], identified the following requirements for the success of industrial democracy: existence of strong trade unions; willingness of workers to treat one another as partners; full realization of the significance of industrial democracy in national life by all concerned workers, employers, and governments. It entails management and unions' genuine desire to deal with industrial problems peacefully and through democratic means, [14].

## 2.7 Evolutionary Theory

This theory also known as "theory of industrial democracy" as advocated by [38]. To Webbs, trade unionism is an extension of the principle of democracy in the industrial sphere where individuals are allowed to collectively participate in decision making. That is to say, trade unionism is a strategy for balancing the bargaining strength of labor and capital rather than a tool for overthrowing capitalism. The theory held that workers are primarily bound together for the purpose of trade unions with the basic aim of improving their economic position, hours of work, health, benefits, safety of working environment, and their general comfort. Trade unionism provides a means by which workers overcome managerial dictatorship, on the one hand,

and express their voice in the determination of the conditions under which they have to work, on the other. Webbs also maintained that workers form trade unions because they are individually powerless relative to their employers and that individual bargaining yields no result, so they rely on collective bargaining. They examined the power relationship between employers and employees and noted that because employers have vast financial resources they can use to their advantage, workers form trade unions so as to form co-operatives, self-help, social security to assist poor members and to enable government make legislation in their favour.

## 2.8 Empirical Exposition

In a study carried out by [30] on productive pragmatism: industrial democracy under neoliberal capitalist conditions, the study involved two instances of industrial democracy's setting and procedures. The reports demonstrated that it is crucial to maintain the viability of democratic institutions.

In a study titled "A working-class road to radical industrial democracy: workplace industrial relations and workers mobilisation in the ex-GKN factory in Florence" conducted by [5]. The research question that cropped up was that, is workplace industrial democracy a means of empowering the working class in the modern era of liberalized labour relations? Even under unfavorable labour-capital balance of power conditions, it was contended that radical forms of workplace industrial democracy could strengthen workers' structural, associational, societal, and ideational power resources when certain historical legacies and organizational circumstances are present. GKN plant's radical industrial democracy practices were reported as crucial in bolstering workers' power reserves, facilitating their sustained mobilization and convergence with other social movements were demonstrated. The results highlighted how radical industrial democracy may be a valuable tool for developing independent working-class power.

[38], surveyed the power relationship between employers and employees and reported that though employers possess financial resources being used to their gain, workers utilise trade unions to achieve co-operatives, self-help, and social security to support members, and canvas for beneficial government legislation. Relatedly, [29], and [43] reported that diversity in an organization constitute avenue to be explored toward the mutual benefits of all stakeholders. Similarly, [25], and [39] argued that industrial democracy should be legalised and adopted as template for relationship management in

organizations. Likewise, [14] posited that recognition of stakeholders, particularly, trade union paves ways for industrial harmony. Also, [28], and [42] reported that fairness to internal stakeholders is required for achieving capitalist inclusive objectives. More so, [9] advocated collective bargaining as a relevant condition for addressing fragmentation at work setting. Furthermore, [6] argued that concerns could be checked through industrial democracy. Moreover, [15] argued that social transformation among employees aligns with industrial democracy. In addition, [32] buttressed that industrial democracy has yielded different degrees of success with the European continent.

### 3 Method

The cross-sectional survey is limited to commercial nerve-centre of Nigeria (Lagos State), where headquarters of most union organisations are located. Multi stage sampling technique was employed. First, public work organisations are many in Lagos State, however, for the purpose of this study, eight were purposively selected for the study in view of their active involvement in unions activities. Thereafter, there was stratification of union leaders into: ex-officio members, current executive members, current active members, long serving members. The population of study consisted of present and past union leaders, executive union members and experienced employees making a total population of 1200 union leaders in the selected eight union organizations in Lagos State. A total of 400 union leaders, executives, representatives were selected as sample size with the use of Taro Yamane sample size determination approach. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used involving questionnaire and in-depth interview. Qualitative data involved the use of content analysis while quantitative data was analysed by using percentages, and hypotheses were tested by using Pearson Chi-Square. See Tables in Appendix.

#### Interpretation of Acronyms in Table 1

1. Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN)
2. Council of Maritime Transport and Association (CMTA)
3. Seaport Terminal Operators Association of Nigeria (STOAN)
4. Nigerian Ports Authority Craftsmen and Allied Workers Union (NPACAWU)
5. National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANN&M)
6. Joint Health Sector Union (JOHESU)
7. Medical and Health Workers Union (M&HWU)

8. National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD)

## 4 Results

### Chi-Square Tests

#### Hypothesis One

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between trade union size and employees' representation participation.

In Table 2, Pearson chi square test shows a p-value of 0.124, which is greater than the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating that the relationship between trade union size and employees' representation participation is not statistically significant. Also, the contingency coefficient of 0.296 suggest a weak association between the two variables. Hence, this weak association combined with the lack of statistical significance, supports the decision to accept the null hypothesis.

#### Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant association between trade union power and involvement in decision making.

In Table 4, result shows that there is no association between trade union power and involvement in decision-making because the chi-square p-value is 0.057 is greater than 0.05. Analysing the contingency coefficient of 0.271 reflects a weak association between the two variables. This further supports the null hypothesis, indicating that the variation in trade union is not meaningfully associated with levels of employee involvement in decision-making.

#### Hypothesis Three

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the benefits derived by trade unions and their participation in management decision making.

In Table 6, results shows that the benefits derived by trade unions and their participation in management decision making is not statistically significant as evidenced by the Pearson Chi-square value of 0.61 above the pre-set threshold of 0.05, evidence for the acceptance of the null hypothesis. The same is true for the likelihood ratios (0.079) and linear-by-linear association ( $p = 0.193$ ), all pointing to a lack of significant association. The result further shows a weak association between the variables due to the contingency coefficient of 0.264. This further

supports the conclusion that trade union benefits do not influence their involvement in decision making.

## 5 Discussion

Hypothesis one indicated that the relationship between trade union size and employees' representation participation is not statistically significant. This implies that the relationship observed between the two variables was not significant, hence, null hypothesis was accepted, while alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis two revealed that there is no association between trade union power and involvement in decision-making because the chi-square p-value is 0.057, greater than 0.05. More so, the relationship observed between the two variables was not significant, hence, trade unions functions and co-determination have no significant strong association. To this effect, null hypothesis was accepted, while alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis three indicated that the benefits derived by trade unions and their participation in management decision making is not statistically significant as evidenced by the Pearson Chi-square value of 0.61 above the pre-set threshold of 0.05, evidence for the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Findings of this study revealed that the labour leaders in the selected eight union organisations were low in their level of participation in collective bargaining with the management. This is tandem with the claims of some scholars. For instance, [30], suggested balancing and rebalancing political and socio-technical participation. Similarly, [5], highlighted usefulness of radical industrial democracy. Likewise, [38], advocated relationship between employers and employees. Besides, [29], encouraged mutual benefits among stakeholders. Also, [25], and [39] advocated adoption of industrial democracy. More so, [14], favored recognition of stakeholders. Moreover, [28], and [42] advocated fairness to trade union leaders. Furthermore, [9], advocated collective bargaining as a relevant condition for addressing disunity. Additionally, [6], argued that industrial slavery is undesirable. In addition, [15], associated social transformation among employees with industrial democracy. As well, [32], buttressed that industrial democracy has yielded different degrees of success with the European continent.

## 6 Conclusion

On note of conclusion, the importance of a positive working relationship between labour and management in the industrial relations system cannot

be overstated. This assumes that functions like collective bargaining, joint consultation, co-determination, and trade unions must receive the kind of priority focus that the study lacked. In public work organizations, the lack of these platforms for industrial democracy to thrive could exacerbate unfair labour practices and conflicts of interest between labour and management, which can result in low productivity and a decline in profit-making. In order for harmony, peace, and firm cooperation to rule supremely between labour and management, it is the responsibility of the management of every work organization to establish the platform where every component of industrial democracy may be properly put into reality.

Recommendations arising from this study the following: Management of most work organisations must embrace seriously the principle of collective bargaining as tool for conflict institutionalization and effective management of terms and conditions of employment that can foster workplace peace and harmony. The scope of the collective bargaining must be widened to accommodate many issues that can facilitate industrial peace and workplace harmony.

One of the ways to guarantee involvement of labour unions in decision making is through joint consultation which prevents arbitrary action and unilateral decision on the part of management, hence, co-operative attitude and harmonious relationship between management and workers must be established thorough joint consultation on regular basis. This will allow unions' powers and functions to be recognized in the management decision making, Co-determination is a potent tool that the management must establish with the labour unions that can reinforce the significance of the latter and guarantee peaceful co-existence between the two parties. This will certainly foster job satisfaction and commitment on the part of workers for maximum productivity.

Effective policy of union s participation in management should be formulated and implemented as a matter of necessity among various work organisations. It is a way recognizing labour dignity and contribution towards the success of their work organisations. By so doing, workplace conflict and labour grievances will be minimal there promoting harmonious labour management relations that can pave way for high productivity. In addition, union leaders will have the confidence to say that they are benefiting from workers' participation in management.

## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

This is not an AI assisted work. Authors on this paper take full responsibility for this work in terms of writing, editing and revision.

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### **Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)**

The authors equally contributed in the present research, at all stages from the formulation of the problem to the final findings and solution.

### **Sources of Funding for Research Presented in a Scientific Article or Scientific Article Itself**

No funding was received for conducting this study.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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## APPENDIX

Table 1. Framework

S/N	NAME	NUMBER
1	MWUN	40
2	CMTA	45
3	STOAN	55
4	NPACAWU	55
5	NANN&M	60
6	JOHESU	50
7	M&HWU	50
8	NARD	45
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1200</b>

Table 2. Correlation between Trade Union Size and Employees' Representation Participation

	Value	DF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	175.208 <sup>a</sup>	154	.124
Likelihood Ratio	168.351	154	.083
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.874	1	.171
N of Valid Cases	380		

a. 28 cells (15.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.75

**Source:** Authors' Calculation in Statistics Software, 2025

Table 3. Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by nominal contingency coefficient	.296	.123
N of Valid Cases	380	

**Source:** Authors' Calculation in Statistics Software, 2025

Table 4. Correlation between Trade Union Power and Involvement in Decision Making

	Value	DF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	148.362 <sup>a</sup>	154	.057
Likelihood Ratio	143.281	154	.069
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.731	1	.098
N of Valid Cases	380		

a. 22 cells (16.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.41.

Table 5. Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by nominal contingency coefficient	.271	.065
N of Valid Cases	380	

**Source:** Authors' Calculation in Statistics Software, 2025

Table 6. Correlation between Benefits Derived by Trade Unions and their Participation in Management Decision Making.

	Value	DF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	142.487 <sup>a</sup>	120	.061
Likelihood Ratio	139.210	120	.079
Linear-by-Linear Association	.6911	1	.193
N of Valid Cases	380		

a. 22 cells (16.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.41.

**Source:** Authors' Calculation in Statistics Software, 2025

Table 7. Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by nominal contingency coefficient	.264	.071
N of Valid Cases	380	

**Source:** Authors' Calculation in Statistics Software, 2025