Article

Comparative Political Studies
1–33

DOI: 10.1177/0010414019879715
journals.sagepub.com/home/cps
SAGE

The Dynamics of Labor Militancy in the Extractive Sector: Kazakhstan's Oilfields and South Africa's Platinum Mines in Comparative Perspective

Allison D. Evans[1] **and Rudra Sil**[2]

Abstract

This article investigates why, in two very different regimes, similarly high levels of labor militancy are evident in Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt. It also explores the common dynamics leading up to the massacres at Zhanaozen (2011) and Marikana (2012). The hypothesis-generating most different systems comparison highlights the challenges of labor relations where extraction at fixed sites combines with volatile prices and shareholder pressures in a globalized economy to raise the stakes for business, labor, and state. Also significant are blockages in existing channels for bargaining linked to quiescent unions. These jointly necessary conditions account for increased militancy in extractive industries in Kazakhstan and South Africa. To account for the Zhanaozen and Marikana massacres, timing and sequence are considered. Both standoffs came later in the strike wave, prompting impatient state and business elites to criticize the protests as "criminal" acts, and priming security personnel to employ violent repression.

[1]University of Nevada, Reno, USA
[2]University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

Corresponding Author:
Rudra Sil, Political Science Department, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6215, USA.
Email: rudysil@sas.upenn.edu

Keywords
extractive industries, labor protest, Kazakhstan, South Africa, trade unions, wildcat strikes

From 1992 to 2019, Kazakhstan had just one president and was coded by Freedom House (2018) as "not free" for most of that period. Post-apartheid South Africa, by contrast, has held regular elections, the most recent in 2019, and is scored among the most "free" countries in the developing world. This difference is mirrored in industrial relations, with South Africa's Constitution and Labor Relations Act manifesting a more robust commitment to core labor standards, including greater protection for the right to strike and freedom of association. Economic conditions, too, vary greatly. Although natural resources are important to both economies, Kazakhstan's reliance on oil rents rose sharply after the extraction of oil in the Caspian Basin began in 1998. Although Kazakhstan and South Africa had nearly identical levels of per capita gross domestic product (GDP) (PPP [purchasing power parity]) in 1999, by 2018, the figure for the former was twice the size of the latter. Kazakhstan also has far lower levels of inequality as indicated by Gini coefficients, along with an unemployment rate that is one sixth that of South Africa. Given these differences, it is not surprising that labor unrest has been more widespread in South Africa over the past two decades: economic concerns, socioeconomic inequality, and more opportunities for collective action led to more labor actions.

Yet, at the sectoral level, both Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt stand out for recurrent episodes of labor unrest marked by significantly greater militancy than in other sectors in these countries. It is also in these two sectors that a remarkably similar chain of events unfolded within a span of 8 months, ending in the tragic killing or wounding of dozens of striking workers. On December 16, 2011, in the oil town of Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan, at least 16 workers were shot dead and another 100 injured when police opened fire on protesters. On August 16, 2012, outside of a platinum mine in Marikana, South Africa, local security forces shot and killed 34 striking mineworkers while injuring several dozen others. This article offers a most different systems comparative study guided by two questions: First, in two regimes with different political and economic conditions, what accounts for a similar tendency toward more militant forms of labor unrest in Kazakhstan's oil sector and South Africa's platinum sector? Second, is there something about the dynamics of the strike waves in 2011-2012 in these two relatively lucrative sectors that might account for the escalating confrontations culminating in the bloody massacres at Zhanaozen and Marikana? Our goal is neither to test existing theories of strikes or protest waves, nor to offer a comprehensive account of either of the massacres. It is to generate middle-range hypotheses concerning the particular conditions and mechanisms that complicate labor relations in extractive industries in developing countries.

In this context, militancy refers to labor actions, often initiated as wildcat strikes, that are not protected by labor law, that are viewed by workers as a battle for fundamental rights, and that persist even in the face of threats (or notices) of dismissal. We argue that certain distinctive features of labor relations in export-oriented extractive industries within developing countries, which are marked by production at a fixed location combined with exposure to volatile prices in an increasingly globalized economy, greatly raise the stakes for state, business, and a workforce with heightened expectations of improved living standards. The extent to which these conditions contribute to labor militancy, however, depends on a second factor: whether there exist adequately institutionalized channels for mediation and bargaining, which is unlikely where the dominant trade union bodies are quiescent and prioritize cooperation with state and business. Although neither of these factors independently accounts for labor unrest anywhere, we regard them as jointly forming necessary conditions for explaining heightened militancy among striking workers in Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum mines during the period leading up to the massacres. However, to account specifically for the massacres, we delve into the timing and sequence of key episodes in each of the cases. It is significant that later in the strike wave, as state and business became more anxious about further declines in output and revenue, they began to threaten or initiate mass dismissals of striking workers, many of whom were migrants, while characterizing the dispute as a "criminal" act organized by external forces. This, in turn, made workers at both sites even more intransigent and primed local security forces to more vigorously respond to protest actions in the name of restoring order. The first section below considers the limitations of common structural arguments often invoked to explain labor unrest and introduces our own three-step "middle-range" argument. The next three sections link our comparative study to each of these three components, respectively. The conclusion provides an overview of the portable elements of the argument that affect the likelihood and dynamics of labor unrest within export-oriented extractive industries.

The Limits of "Macro" Explanations: Toward a Mid-Range Perspective

Comparative studies of labor unrest and protest movements frequently rely on "macro" explanations, citing such factors as differences in regime type or levels of social inequality. Arguments relating labor movements to regime type have their roots in the growth of industrial capitalism in Europe, where an expanding working class played a key role in democratizing movements and paved the way for labor incorporation in new democracies (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, & Stephens, 1992). In more recent episodes of transition, a similar pathway is evident in some new democracies, whereas in others labor incorporation has been hampered by authoritarian legacies and declining social protection in the face of neoliberal reforms (Caraway, Cook, & Crowley, 2015; Hartshorn & Sil, 2019). Where authoritarianism persists alongside privatization, as in China, labor unrest is still in evidence, but workers are cautious to stress the lawful character of their protests so as not to be seen as directly challenging the regime (Lee, 2007; Solinger, 2009; Wright, 2019).

In the cases compared here, the differences between the political systems of South Africa (since the end of apartheid) and Kazakhstan (after the breakup of the USSR) are manifested in the quite different levels of political competition and in the space for civil society actors, including independent trade unions and labor movements. In South Africa, although the African National Congress (ANC) has led the national government since 1994, elections have seen the ANC's vote share steadily drop while opposition parties have taken control of several major cities. In Kazakhstan, although regular elections are held and opposition parties exist, President Nazarbayev consistently received more than 90% of the vote in every presidential election, and his party, Nur-Otan (Radiant Fatherland), captured more than 85% of the seats in parliament in the last three parliamentary elections. In labor relations, South Africa is seen as one of the leaders in the developing world in upholding workers' rights through its Constitution, the Labor Relations Act, and various institutions for mediation and social dialogue (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2002). Although the dominant labor federation—the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)—is allied with the ruling ANC, unions once affiliated with COSATU have freely defected, and competing trade union organizations have come to account for nearly half of the unionized workforce (Bischoff, 2015). Kazakhstan's main labor federation—the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTUK)—is descended from the Soviet-era trade union apparatus and is seen as essentially co-opted by the state (Beissenova, Dzurenich, & Olenchuk, 2016; Croucher, 2015). Labor laws are extremely restrictive, making it nearly impossible to register new unions. The few alternative unions that do manage to get registered can be easily shut down by courts, as was the case with the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Kazakhstan in 2017 (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

These differences point to a much wider "political opportunity structure" (Tarrow, 1994) in South Africa for more regular and widespread labor mobilization than is possible in Kazakhstan, where labor quiescence is the rule. They cannot, however, account for either inter-industry differences in labor unrest within each country or the remarkably similar dynamics associated with labor militancy in extractive industries in Kazakhstan and South Africa. Moreover, these differences do not explain how similarly tragic massacres could occur at both Zhanozen and Marikana. Massive human rights abuses, such as the violent repression of protesters, are typically not associated with democracies like post-apartheid South Africa.

Another common "macro" explanation for labor unrest emphasizes the frustrations of the working class over rising socioeconomic inequalities and the loss of social protection. Thomas Piketty (2014, p. 39), for example, views the massacre at Marikana as one of many instances of labor unrest following from the extreme inequalities and intense distributional conflicts generated by 21st-century capitalism. This view tends to downplay local and sectoral features tied to variations in the character of labor protest (Sil & Wright, 2018). It also works much better for South Africa than for Kazakhstan. In South Africa, the ANC-led government's embrace of business-led growth is seen as responsible for the persistence of disproportionately high poverty and unemployment among Blacks (Bond, 2014), along with a level of inequality that is higher than under apartheid, as marked by its Gini coefficient of 63 (World Bank, 2019). Kazakhstan's Gini coefficient is below 30, and its per capita GDP has grown rapidly since 1998 while its unemployment rate is one fifth that of South Africa for most of the past decade (World Bank, 2019). Thus, although labor unrest in South Africa may be partly related to persistent poverty, inequality, and joblessness, these factors neither explain the recurrent conflicts in Kazakhstan's oilfields, nor account for the relatively high militancy in the extractive industries of both countries, especially considering that it is the prospect of higher earnings in these lucrative sectors that account for high rates of labor in-migration to Kazakhstan's western oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt.

Arguments predicated on the "resource curse" home in on some distinctive features of the resource extraction sector. Dependence on revenues from resource exports is seen as detracting from sustained growth in other sectors while enabling regimes to reduce tax rates, buy popular support, and preempt democratizing rebellions (Ross, 2012, p. 69). Whether or not all resource exporters manifest these negative effects of resource dependence remains an open question (e.g., Smith, 2007). But, even if we grant that the "resource curse" thesis applies to the case of Kazakhstan, where oil and gas rents represent 15% to 20% of GDP and coincide with enduring authoritarianism, the thesis does not work as well for South Africa, where the *combined* rents from several of its key natural resources (i.e., gold, diamonds, platinum) have only once exceeded 10% of South Africa's annual GDP over the past two decades. Despite South Africa's position as the world's top producer of platinum, the actual and potential economic benefits from platinum mining are far less significant for the national economy than for the individuals and companies in the mining sector.

Our point of departure is the presumption that no single general theory can adequately explain the relatively high level of labor militancy in the resource extraction sectors of two countries that vary considerably in their baselines for industrial conflict. For Kazakhstan, labor unrest is more the exception than the rule, in part because of severe constraints on the right to strike and on the formation of new unions (Human Rights Watch, 2016). When strikes have occurred, as in the months preceding the Zhanaozen massacre, they have been heavily concentrated in the western oilfields, which is where labor unrest continues to cause the greatest concern for the government (Williamson, 2017). In South Africa, labor unrest is ubiquitous. In a survey of the level of "cooperation in labor-employer relations," South Africa ranked dead last out of 140 countries (World Economic Forum, 2016). Even so, the platinum belt stands out in terms of the incidence of wildcat strikes and the level of strike violence (Chinguno, 2015; von Holdt, 2012). In 2012, the year of the Marikana massacre, 16 million of the 17 million working hours lost due to strikes were in the mining sector, with nearly half of those strikes not protected by labor law (Odendaal, 2014). In this article, we develop a middle-range account of why, in two regimes with markedly different political and economic characteristics, we see heightened labor militancy in the extractive sector, with one episode in each case ending in a tragic massacre. Our argument proceeds in three steps.

First, we emphasize how certain distinctive aspects of labor relations at resource extraction sites tend to raise the stakes for state, business, and labor. In focusing on extractive industries, we do not seek to revive or test past arguments about the inter-industry propensity to strike and, in particular, about the role of solidarity among miners constituting an "isolated mass" (Church & Outram, 1998; Kerr & Siegel, 1954). Nor are we concerned with differentiating motivations and patterns of strike activity among miners working in different national settings or operating with different types of extraction processes at different stages of industrialization (Mitchell, 2011; Shorter & Tilly, 1974). Such arguments were predicated on a much earlier vision of a workforce embedded in tight-knit communities periodically rising up against business elites whose worries over labor costs and productivity were not yet intertwined with concerns over export earnings or share prices on global stock markets. The oil workers at Zhanaozen and the platinum miners at Marikana are a much more heterogeneous group that includes local workers as well as migrants from different regions in search of higher earnings. Their work is more regimented and structured around complex processes of mechanized extraction, preparation, and long-distance transportation (Mitchell, 2011). And their demands are influenced by an awareness of the living standards and working conditions of their counterparts in other countries and of the revenue generated by the resources they must extract daily under difficult conditions. Employers, for their part, strive to control output at fixed production sites while contending with volatile commodity and share prices in a competitive global economy. Ruling elites are concerned whenever falling exports of natural resources curtail revenue streams or, worse, hinder prospects for economic growth. These conditions raise the stakes for state, labor, and business whenever labor disputes break out, at least more so than in sectors such as manufacturing or agriculture. It is these high stakes that increase the potential for prolonged labor conflict.

This does not imply that heightened labor militancy is inevitable in extractive industries. Thus, the second step of our argument focuses on whether the system of labor relations contains reliable mechanisms for mediation and bargaining that might preempt militant labor actions. Despite having more progressive labor laws and institutions, South Africa has not fared much better than Kazakhstan on this score. In both countries, the formal machinery for social dialogue, while seemingly adequate on paper, was rendered ineffectual due to the ties between the state and the dominant national labor federation. This effectively left workers with no independent representation, particularly when it came to tripartite deliberations over industry-wide disputes (Cherry, 2006; Croucher, 2015). In these cases, this shifted the burden to company-level efforts at mediation, which also went nowhere because the established union bosses prioritized cooperation with management over pressing forward with workers' grievances.

Recent research has shown how blockages in existing channels for mediation and negotiation generally increase the likelihood of wildcat strikes across the developing world (Anner, 2018; Anner & Liu, 2016). Such blockages, we argue, have an even more pronounced effect in extractive industries given the special constraints accompanying production at fixed sites. In manufacturing and agriculture, even absent regular channels for bargaining, wildcat strikes sometimes spur employers to offer modest concessions (Anner & Liu, 2016; Pye, 2017). At the same time, large global companies (e.g., in the automobile industry) have production facilities at different locales and can respond to recurrent work stoppages by threatening to halt or cut production at a given plant unless workers moderate their demands. In other industries, to the extent that employers rely on migrant labor, the latter may have the option of returning to their families or seeking new work through informal networks rather than participate in prolonged labor actions (Lee, 2007; Pye, 2017). In the extractive sector, in the absence of regularized bargaining, negotiating strategies for all actors are more constrained. Management is not in a position to either relocate or make repeated concessions to striking workers; but it does have the option of replacing them with newly arriving migrants in an expanding pool of labor. Workers who live in, or have migrated to, distant towns specifically to obtain jobs in a lucrative industry are more likely to persist with their demands than to relocate in search of new work. In these conditions, if docile company unions prioritize cooperation with management over negotiating on behalf of workers' grievances, the blockages in the institutionalized mechanisms for bargaining and mediation can increase the likelihood of a prolonged standoff.

Although these two conditions jointly form necessary conditions in explaining the relatively high levels of militancy seen in Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt, they still do not explain the strikingly similar spirals of confrontation leading up to the massacre of strikers at Zhanaozen and Marikana. Thus, the third step of our argument focuses on the timing and sequence of particular events. We note that the standoffs at Zhanaozen and Marikana occurred later in a strike wave in their respective sectors, at a time when state and business were growing more impatient and anxious over further disruptions of production. Under these conditions, the urgency for ending the industrial disputes grew, with key members of the ruling elite and senior management officials converging upon a narrative treating strike organizers as engaged in "criminal" acts by outsiders or external actors. These signals also primed local security personnel to respond more rapidly and aggressively to the slightest provocation on the part of restive strikers in the name of restoring "order." This third component of the argument is heavily shaped by specific contexts and so does not lend itself to causal generalizations, especially as the objects of the explanation—the two massacres—are by their very nature rare, anomalous events. Nevertheless, there are portable lessons to be gleaned from the fact that later stages in a strike wave appear to raise the stakes and for all actors, making certain tactics more likely to backfire and trigger spirals of violence. The next three sections elaborate upon these three steps in our argument within the context of the cross-case comparison.

The Sectoral Context: Export-Oriented Resource Extraction in a Globalized Economy

South Africa has long been the world's largest platinum producer, accounting for nearly 70% of global output. When platinum prices peaked in early 2008,

Figure 1. Oil prices, from 2000 to 2018 (WTI crude, US$ per barrel).
Source. See www.macrotrends.net/1369/ (accessed May 20, 2019).
WTI = West Texas Intermediate.

natural resource rents accounted for nearly 13% of South Africa's GDP (World Bank, 2019). Kazakhstan began oil extraction at the Tengiz oilfields in the western region of Mangystau in 1998. Since that time, Kazakhstan's level of resource dependence has been substantially higher than that of South Africa, with the percentage of GDP being accounted for by natural resource rents peaking at 32% in 2008 (World Bank, 2019). In the year of the Zhanaozen massacre (2011), more than 27% of Kazakhstan's GDP came from natural resource rents; in the year of the Marikana massacre (2012), just 7% of South Africa's GDP came from natural resource rents (World Bank, 2019). Nevertheless, as Figures 1 and 2 suggest, both economies were hit hard by the steep decline in global commodity prices in 2008-2009 following a steady rise in prices over the preceding 6 years. The decline coincided with Kazakhstan's GDP growth rate falling from more than 9% in 2000-2006 to just 1.2% in 2009 and with South Africa's GDP contracting by 1.5% in 2009.

These conditions did not immediately trigger labor unrest in either sector, in part because wage demands made little sense during a period of falling profits and economic crisis. But, by 2010-2011, with commodity prices rising once again, both Kazakhstan's oil workers and South Africa's platinum miners began to demand higher wages, triggering a succession of labor actions. Although it may not be possible to explain why these actions began to unfold around the same period in two locales separated by more than 7,000 miles, it

Figure 2. Platinum prices, from 2000 to 2018 (US$ per troy ounce).
Source. See www.macrotrends.net/2540/ (accessed May 20, 2019).

makes sense that the timing is related to the boom–bust cycle reflected in Figures 1 and 2. In the period immediately following the "bust," workers were already eager to jettison wage restraint, whereas their employers remained uncertain about the recovery and were still in the process of trying to stabilize revenue. It is precisely within this window that the strike waves in Kazakhstan's western oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt unfolded. Yet, demands for higher pay are nothing new, nor is resistance to wage increases on the part of employers. This section focuses on certain distinctive features of the extractive sector that complicated efforts to maintain industrial peace.

As noted above, resource extraction takes place at fixed sites. Kazakhstan's oil is predominantly extracted along the Caspian Basin in the western part of the country where Zhanaozen is located. South Africa's platinum deposits are mostly concentrated in the Bushfeld complex to the northwest and northeast of Johannesburg; Marikana is about 70 miles to the northwest of Johannesburg. In both locales, output depends entirely on extracting resources at specific sites, with few options available to overcome loss of output caused by work stoppages. Yet, revenue streams generated by the export of natural resources are greatly affected by global fluctuations in commodity prices tied to boom–bust cycles. States, too, put a premium on steady output in extractive industries because resource rents are major contributors to their budgets, whether through direct control of production or through taxation of private companies. Thus, although recurrent work stoppages and/or steep rises in labor costs are problematic for industrial relations in any sector, in extractive industries, prolonged labor disputes serve to magnify pressures and uncertainties tied to fluctuations in global commodity prices.

Moreover, export-oriented resource extraction comes with special challenges for private companies with foreign shareholders and/or listed in global stock exchanges where share prices can fluctuate even more wildly than the price of a commodity. In South Africa, platinum extraction has been dominated by three huge private companies—Amplats, Implats, and Lonmin, which owned the mine at Marikana until it was taken over by Sibanye-Stillwater in 2019. All three were listed in both the Johannesburg and London stock exchanges at the time of the Marikana massacre. For these companies, a fall in commodity prices or drop in output has been accompanied by an even steeper fall in share prices. For example, although platinum prices in June 2015 stood at half what they were in June 2008 (Macrotrends, 2018), Lonmin's shares in 2015 were valued at just 1% of what they had been in 2008 (Smith, 2007). In Kazakhstan's oil sector, several enterprises and subsidiaries are marked by significant foreign ownership, including the partly Chinese-owned KMG-EP (KazMunaiGas-Exploration Production), which is a subsidiary of KMG (KazMunaiGas). None of these companies fared nearly as poorly as Lonmin, but KMG reported a 7% drop in production and a corresponding loss of US$270 million attributable to the strikes at their facilities (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015, p. 126), which meant not only lower profits but also lower share prices and reduced opportunities to attract new foreign investment. In short, for private companies involved in resource extraction, shareholder pressures vastly magnify the consequences of production stoppages and volatile prices. This generates a particularly troublesome dilemma for business: Prolonged strikes disrupt production and reduce profits (driving down share prices); yet acceding to repeated demands for wage hikes means continually rising labor costs (again, negatively impacting share prices).

For labor, jobs in extractive industries come with aspirations of increased earnings that, if not met, devolve into a strong sense of frustration and relative deprivation. One of the clearest indications of the initial attraction of jobs in extractive industries is the presence of a large contingent of migrant workers in both South Africa's platinum belt and Kazakhstan's oilfields. These workers have relocated from distant locales, drawn by the promise of higher incomes in a sector they perceive to be lucrative, while rapidly increasing the density of the population in the communities surrounding resource extraction sites (Jäger, 2014; Stoddard, 2013; Xulu, 2012). In South Africa's platinum belt, a majority of the workforce consists of (mostly male) migrants from distant locales, most notably from the Transkei region as well as from Lesotho and Swaziland. These workers leave their families behind to live in dismal conditions in the hopes of quickly increasing their earnings, but instead end up living in cramped hostels with very limited infrastructure in the surrounding community (Cairncross & Kisting, 2016; Chinguno, 2015). In the Mangystau region of western Kazakhstan, too, a significant number of the oil workers are migrants. Although some are from rural areas and towns in other regions, the majority of migrant workers are repatriates, so-called oralmen—ethnic Kazakhs about 85% of whom were previously residing in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Jäger, 2014; Schenkkan, 2012; Yessenova, 2005). More than 100,000 oralmen have settled in the Mangystau region, accounting for roughly half of the region's population growth since 1999 (Schenkkan, 2012) and about a quarter of those striking at Zhanaozen (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015).

The fact that many workers in South Africa's mines and Kazakhstan's oilfields are migrants is not itself a reason for greater militancy in these sectors; in fact, the migrants come from different regions and join local workers to form a heterogeneous workforce that is different from the tight-knit communities associated with coalminers' strikes in the early 20th century. For our purposes, the main significance of the steady migration is that it constitutes evidence of the appeal of jobs in a sector widely regarded as lucrative. But, for migrant and local workers alike, the initial expectations go largely unmet and fuel a growing sense of frustration and relative deprivation among all workers (whether migrants or locals) as they see their wages stagnate in the midst of all the wealth being visibly amassed by corporate executives, management, and even union bosses. In the wake of the Marikana massacre, South Africa's Deputy President Kgaleme Motlanthe (2009-2014) openly acknowledged the "super-exploitation of unskilled workers" in the mining sector (cf. Stoddard, 2013). Workers are also more conscious of the higher earnings and better working conditions of their counterparts in wealthier countries and, in Kazakhstan's oil sector, of foreign specialists and staff as well (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015). In one of the 2011 oil strikes, at Ersai Caspian Contractor, workers in the Karakiya union put forth demands that specifically included "equal wages with foreign staff" (Rittmann, Darby, & Misol, 2012, p. 61). At Marikana, workers proclaimed that their average wages were less than one tenth of their counterparts in Britain and Australia even though they worked longer shifts and had to engage in the more physically exhausting system of traditional rock drilling (Alexander, Lekgowa, Mmope, Sinwell, & Xezwi, 2013; Sinwell & Mbatha, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, when management in both countries noted that these workers' wages were higher than average wages in other regions or sectors across the country, both Kazakhstan's oil workers (Jäger, 2014) and South Africa's platinum miners (Chinguno, 2015) pointed to the difficult and even dangerous working conditions they faced as justification for compensatory pay hikes.

Importantly, although workers do have some leverage through their ability to halt production, this can be offset by management's ability to threaten or enact mass dismissals with the intention of ending strikes and discouraging future demands. This has been a recurrent feature of the dynamics of labor disputes in both Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum mines, even in the early disputes that ended in new agreements and the rehiring of dismissed workers. The threat of mass dismissals is an effective one, particularly in light of the steadily increasing pool of labor and the lack of alternative employment options for migrant workers employed in the region's main industry. This does not, however, assure management of an easy or quick victory, as evident at the protests at Zhanaozen and Marikana, where the threat of dismissals served to stiffen the resistance of workers (even those dismissed) in the hopes of garnering support from the government and/or international audiences. Thus, labor disputes in both Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt reveal a similar dynamic: unmet wage demands, wildcat strikes, mass dismissals, and growing labor intransigence.

In short, the context for our paired comparison, which also denote the boundary conditions for identifying other comparable cases, concerns the specific dynamics that can complicate and exacerbate labor disputes in volatile resource extraction sectors. The fact that production must occur at fixed sites, the magnified impact of fluctuating global commodity prices on state revenue and company profits, and the frustrated expectations of workers who initially seek jobs in these lucrative sectors as a path to higher living standards all combine to dramatically raise the stakes for state, business, and labor. As the next two sections suggest, however, these characteristics alone do not constitute a sufficient condition in accounting for heightened labor militancy in these sectors.

The Limits of Cooperative Unionism: The Withering Away of Social Dialogue

The high stakes described above do not automatically predict labor unrest for the simple reason that labor institutions, including trade unions and fora for social dialogue, can facilitate collective bargaining and produce general agreements before labor disputes escalate. In both Kazakhstan and South Africa, tripartite institutions existed for this purpose. At the company level, there were also rules in place for dues-paying workers to be represented by the majority trade union in negotiations with management when disputes arose. Yet, at both the national and company levels, these institutions failed to function as intended—largely because the dominant trade unions prioritized industrial harmony over advocating on behalf of aggrieved workers.

Labor Relations in Kazakhstan's Western Oilfields

Although Kazakhstan is party to numerous ILO Conventions, the leading national labor federation, FTUK, is a typical "legacy union" (Caraway, 2012), derived from the Kazakh branch of the Soviet-era All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions. FTUK is viewed as being more concerned with labor peace and productivity than with workers' grievances, essentially continuing its predecessor's reliance on "top-down bureaucratic structures reliant on management patronage" (Croucher, 2015, p. 951). Due to the close ties between FTUK and the government, the efforts to set up alternative trade unions predictably run into cumbersome procedures that make it virtually impossible to get officially registered. Independent labor activists have attempted to establish a new national-level inter-industry union, Zhanartu, but their paperwork has been repeatedly rejected on technicalities by the Ministry of Justice (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 27-28). In rare cases where a new union might be recognized, it is usually at the company level, thereby excluding it from participation in tripartite fora. This has effectively left FTUK with a monopoly in national-level bargaining, often producing collective agreements that the state and large industrial lobbies favor (Rotmann & Williamson, 2012). Thus, when it comes to deliberations over inter-industry issues, there has been no vehicle for channeling workers' interests into meaningful positions from which to negotiate ever since labor laws were revised in 2000 to make sectoral collective agreements entirely voluntary. Subsequently, the Labor Code of Kazakhstan (first adopted in 2007, then overhauled in 2015) further minimized the role of FTUK in collective bargaining by giving employers even more flexibility in unilaterally altering individual labor contracts as required by shifts in economic and technological conditions (Khassenov, 2016). Under these conditions, the burden for preempting or diffusing industry-wide labor disputes fell entirely on enterprise management and company unions.

At the local level, the mechanisms for mediation and negotiation were similarly rendered ineffective given that the unions authorized to engage in bargaining were affiliated with the dominant national federations and were rewarded for preserving industrial peace (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015). Established union bosses showed little interest in presenting workers' grievances to management or preparing industrial actions that might have forced negotiations or compromises (Beissenova et al., 2016; Rittmann et al., 2012). Company executives also refused to recognize alternative unions that were prepared to negotiate on behalf of striking workers. Unable to count on their unions as a vehicle for bargaining, aggrieved workers were left to either accept the status quo, or, as in the case of the oilfields, mobilize independently.

In the oilfields, the main company-level union, the FTUK-affiliated Kazneftgaz Profsoyuz, claims to represent the vast majority of oil workers but has been reluctant to initiate labor disputes. In the years leading up to the 2011 disputes, independent unions in the sector were ignored or thwarted by both the official unions and management (Croucher, 2015, p. 950). The latter insisted that only the FTUK-affiliated union was authorized to negotiate on behalf of workers, refusing to recognize alternative unions. Given that the union was known to toe "the government line," however, it became progressively less trusted by workers as a means for pursuing grievances (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015, p. 126). These conditions effectively precluded regularized wage bargaining and set the stage for recurrent wildcat strikes in the sector. Indeed, labor disputes had been sporadically erupting into protests and riots since at least 2005 (Yessenova, 2007), though not on a scale that caused either unions or management to worry at the time.

Immediately preceding the 2011 strike wave, the first indication of critical blockages in company-level channels for negotiations came at Ersai Caspian Contractor, where an alternative union, Karakiya, had been formed in 2009. In early 2011, Karakiya attempted to initiate a labor dispute for higher wages and "non-interference in the union's activities," after the company had restricted the union leader's access to company grounds. Ersai management refused to open negotiations, claiming that the union "had not adhered to regulations" in Kazakhstan's Labor Code (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 11, 58). According to members, management did not allow the elected leader of Karakiya to work and permitted only one meeting per month. In response, 217 workers signed their names to a set of four demands presented by Karakiya: "(1) higher wages, (2) revision of the collective agreement, (3) equal wages with foreign staff, and (4) non-interference with union activities" (Rittmann et al., 2012, p. 61). Ersai management not only rejected the demands as groundless but interrogated "and, in some cases, harassed and threatened" the workers whose names were attached to the demands (Rittmann et al., 2012, p. 61). Workers refusing to respond to management's summons were made to report to the police station. When this process was repeated a month later with the same result, Karakiya members decided to call a strike, following the procedures outlined for legal strikes per the Labor Code (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 64-65). The strike drew an estimated 700 participants and lasted about 6 weeks before local authorities broke it.

Another episode, at Karazhanbas Oil (KBM), reveals a different kind of blockage. Here, although members of the company union were ready to pursue a labor dispute, the cozy relationship between management and the chairman of the company union, Erbosyn Kosarkhanov, effectively scuttled meaningful bargaining. In January 2011, the union put forward three experts to represent it on a mediation commission for higher pay, but Kosharkhanov and KBM executives agreed to bar union lawyer Natalia Sokolova from the process (Rittmann et al., 2012, p. 37). The following month, the union terminated the labor dispute, but rank-and-file members alleged that Kozharkhanov acted unilaterally and proceeded to elect a new leader of the KBM union. But management refused to recognize him and later kept union members and their lawyers from accessing the union office and documents required to transfer authority to the new chairman to reinitiate the labor dispute (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 37-40). The company's vice president proceeded to file a complaint with the prosecutor's office, whereas workers lodged their own complaints and initiated a 7-month labor strike starting in May 2011. The strike at KBM, although it did not involve an alternative union, suggests that workers were prepared to reject a union boss seen as beholden to management.

The wildcat strike that broke out at OzenMunaiGaz (OMG) is the dispute that culminated in the Zhanaozen massacre. In late-May 2011, two dozen workers launched a hunger strike to protest a reduction in wages after their individual complaints were rejected by management as unfounded. In solidarity, several thousands of workers downed their tools and walked off the job. Although nearly 8,000 of the 9,000 employees of OMG were members of the company union, the strike bypassed the union structures and was largely undertaken "by personal initiative of individual workers" (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 48-49). Workers reportedly saw no point in relying union leaders who appeared to agree with OMG management that there was no basis for a wage dispute. However, as the strike had not been authorized by the majority union, management proceeded to simply dismiss some 2,000 workers. This move set the stage for the intensification of protest around an encampment set up at Zhanaozen (discussed below).

At all three companies, formal mechanisms for wage bargaining and dispute resolution simply did not come into play. In all cases, company unions affiliated with FTUK and headed by union bosses sought to block the formal initiation of wage disputes. In cases where alternative unions or new leaders were put forward, management simply refused to recognize them. And, when wildcat strikes were subsequently initiated by workers, company executives relied on their close connections to local authorities to have the actions declared illegal, thereby securing a pretext for fining or dismissing striking workers.

Labor Relations in South Africa's Platinum Belt

The dominant labor federation in South Africa, COSATU, is not a legacy union as FTUK is. In fact, COSATU emerged as part of the struggle against the apartheid regime, with many of its members also belonging to the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). After the end of apartheid, an explicit "triple alliance" was established between COSATU, ANC, and SACP. ANC officials counted on COSATU to mobilize electoral support, whereas COSATU leaders expected to be able to advance workers' interests by influencing government policies through the tripartite body NEDLAC (the National Economic Development and Labor Council).

Under Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki (1998-2008), a concerted push toward business-led growth and deeper integration into the global economy left some in COSATU concerned. But Jacob Zuma's rise as ANC president initially offered hope because Zuma was reputed to be a labor sympathizer and had worked closely with many of COSATU's leaders. In reality, Zuma's government continued to move forward with neoliberal reforms, whereas COSATU saw its own cohesion and relevance get further diminished (Buhlungu, 2010). COSATU's internal surveys revealed that, although 83% of the membership had seen the triple alliance as beneficial in 1994, that figure dropped to 61% by 2008 (Maree, 2012, pp. 68-69). During the 2014 elections, many affiliates refused to mobilize support for the ANC, and several later defected. As a result, the number of constituent federations in COSATU fell from 22 to 14.

The decline in COSATU's stature and unity also meant that it had difficulty leveraging its seats in NEDLAC, the main tripartite body, to negotiate inter-industry collective agreements (Webster, Joynt, & Metcalfe, 2013, p. 54). The main business association actually declared NEDLAC to be a "purely advisory structure" that at best yielded nonbinding agreements (Cherry, 2006, p. 148). The chief executive officer (CEO) of the Chamber of Mines even called for shutting it down saying that "NEDLAC belongs to a previous era" (cf. Webster et al., 2013, p. 11). Under these conditions, NEDLAC had an increasingly difficult time functioning as a forum for tripartite discussions that could preempt industrial conflict (Bischoff, 2015, p. 245). A report prepared for the ILO pointed to the decline in social dialogue and erosion of trust as major obstacles to retaining NEDLAC as a functional mechanism for peak-level tripartism (Webster et al., 2013). As in Kazakhstan, the burden for industrial peace shifted to the enterprise level.

Initially, the majority union at each of South Africa's three largest platinum mining companies—Amplats, Implats, and Lonmin—belonged to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), a founding member of COSATU (Allen, 2005). In the post-apartheid era, NUM continued to play a significant role in recruiting and organizing newly arrived migrant workers at the mines (Xulu, 2012). Yet, as part of COSATU and the triple alliance, NUM also saw itself as "a leadership grooming institution [that] has always been willing to avail its graduates to assume important roles within the alliance structures" (National Union of Mineworkers, 2016). It is precisely this latter role that made NUM less reliable as a defender of miners' interests, especially after 2008, when platinum prices first experienced a steep decline and the mines began to speak of retrenchment.

Although NUM claimed to represent more than two thirds of the workforce at the mines, union bosses were rewarded for cooperating with management and maintaining productivity. In comparison to their counterparts in other sectors, NUM shop stewards were more likely to push for accommodation (Masondo, Orkin, & Webster, 2015, p. 211). Among the rank-and-file, the perception was that NUM's chiefs were well-to-do individuals whose continued prosperity depended on the success of the company. One striking example of this dynamic is South Africa's current president, Cyril Ramaphosa, who had been a founding leader of NUM and a general secretary of the ANC. As the Mbeki government adopted a program of business-led growth, Ramaphosa shifted his attention from union activities to business ventures, set up an investment firm with major stakes in South Africa's mines, and later joined the board of Lonmin.

At all three companies, however, mounting grievances over wages led to a series of massive wildcat strikes, each marked by a level of militancy not seen since the apartheid era (Chinguno, 2015). In January 2012, workers at Implats issued demands for a wage increase that would triple their earnings, basing their claims on the fact that their real wages had long stagnated, whereas the mean salaries of company executives were 150 times as much as miners' average earnings (Alexander et al., 2013). Thousands of workers walked off the job without the backing of NUM, whereas Implats executives declared the strike illegal. Implats proceeded to fire 17,000 workers and then met with NUM leaders to arrange for the re-employment of 15,000 of those dismissed. This was effectively a method to break the strike without offering substantial concessions. Even so, the strike continued for 6 weeks, in part because an alternative union had entered the fray: the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). AMCU, which was not affiliated with COSATU, began to recruit Implats workers and claimed to become the majority union in the course of the strike. NUM representatives disputed the claim, and intra-labor violence flared up with each union blaming the other (Chinguno, 2015, p. 263). In the end, AMCU managed to negotiate a substantial increase in wages, albeit spurring wage demands and strike actions at other mines.

In July 2012, a month before the strike at Marikana, another strike at Lonmin's Karee mines revealed how NUM blocked negotiations over workers' demands for wage increases. Again, the result was a massive wildcat strike called by independent workers' committees, followed by the company's dismissal of 9,000 workers as a means to break the strike. And, again, AMCU stepped in to recruit members, claimed to become the majority union, and negotiated the rehiring of workers along with a pay increase (Alexander et al., 2013, pp. 27-28). At Lonmin's mines in Marikana, however, NUM held on to its position as the majority union and discouraged talk of strikes. Shots were even fired from NUM's offices at approaching workers (Alexander et al., 2013). When workers walked off the job at Lonmin to press their grievances, it appeared as though the cycle seen before at Implats and Lonmin's Karee mines would be repeated. This time, however, before AMCU could recruit enough members to take over as the majority union, the confrontation between workers and management quickly escalated into a tense standoff that would end in the deaths of dozens of workers.

The case studies are not identical. In fact, they reveal consequential differences in regime type, at least insofar as a new union AMCU, unlike alternative unions in Kazakhstan, became the majority union at the big three platinum mines. Later, in 2014, AMCU organized the largest strike ever in South Africa. Although lasting 5 months, it was not a wildcat strike; the trade union itself initiated the strike and was able to eventually bargain with management (Shabalala, 2014). This could mark a point of divergence going forward, in the sense that AMCU demonstrated that a union acting independently on behalf of aggrieved workers could bypass the blockages in social dialogue and force open channels of mediation in ways that the more quiescent unions could not (Sil & Samuelson, 2018). Yet, prior to the Zhanaozen and Marikana massacres, in neither country did the professed support for tripartism produce institutionalized negotiations to produce collective agreements or resolve labor disputes. A big part of the reason was that affiliates of the main labor federations in both countries, despite their different inheritances, prioritized cooperation with management over initiating industrial action on behalf of their rank-and-file. The result in both cases was recurrent labor unrest, often manifested in wildcat strikes marked by high levels of militancy. The next section investigates what separated the bloody endings at Zhanaozen and Marikana from the other strikes that broke out earlier in Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt.

Later in the Game: Rising Anxiety, Criminalized Protest, and Escalating Violence

Recently, Mahoney and Falleti (2015, p. 216) have argued that "the order and pace of events can be causally consequential for the outcome of interest," which may lead to "self-amplifying" processes. Along these lines, it is significant that the confrontations at Zhanaozen and Marikana were part of a longer strike wave and began relatively late in the game—when state, business, and local authorities were reaching a critical threshold as a result of mounting costs generated by preceding labor disputes. These conditions made it more likely that the state would be inclined to regard strikers as "criminal," businesses would threaten or enact mass dismissals, desperate strikers would become more intransigent, and local security forces would be more prone to react forcefully to threats (real or imagined) in the name of preserving order and restoring production in a critical sector.

The Pathway to the Zhanaozen Massacre

The decentralization of managerial control over Kazakhstan's petroleum sector effectively gave subnational leaders in oil-rich regions "a continued stake in the regionally based distribution of benefits" (Jones Luong, & Weinthal, 2010, p. 206). However, this also meant that labor disputes were predictably spurred by local distributive conflicts. Although wages in the oil-producing Mangystau region were higher than elsewhere, migrant workers who had relocated in search of high-paying jobs in a lucrative sector continually sought to narrow the gap between their take-home pay and their initial expectations against the backdrop of the wealth being amassed by elites. Long-running wage disputes had been unfolding at all three major oil companies—Ersai, KBM, and OMG—for more than a year by the time the massacre occurred at Zhanaozen. At OMG, workers' grievances over pay date back to 2010, when the company introduced changes to the remuneration system to resolve an initial dispute. Although the changes appeared to signal a victory for labor, workers' representatives claimed that their actual take-home pay later began to drop (Rittmann et al., 2012, p. 49).

The frustrations related to the 2010 dispute formed part of the backdrop for both workers and management when tensions over wage levels escalated again in 2011 at all three companies. Workers at KBM were the first to move, supposedly over technical aspects of "wage coefficients and the remuneration system" (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 49-51). They launched a partial hunger strike on May 8, before calling a broader strike 9 days later. On May 11, workers at Ersai initiated their own strike, this one backed by the alternative union that had supplanted the FTUK-affiliated company union. Two weeks later, OMG launched its own strike over higher wages, with thousands of workers walking off the job without the backing of their company union. It was during this last strike that management took a tougher stance, instantly dismissing workers' claims as illegitimate, which was supported by regional courts that declared the strikes "unlawful" on the basis of Article 303 of the Labor Code, which prohibits strikes at "hazardous production facilities."

The strike at Ersai, while lasting several weeks and using militant tactics, eventually drew to an end when management agreed to sit down with the alternative union before tensions spiraled out of a control. The strike at KBM was marked by a standoff that persisted for several months. In both cases, management mostly relied on applying pressure through legal measures and interference with union administration to gradually force a negotiated end to the conflict with minimal concessions. However, the scale of labor unrest had reached new heights when OMG workers began their strike, with thousands of oil workers striking and greatly extending the losses already incurred by companies due to the preceding stoppages. By then, state officials were paying more attention in light of fears over shrinking tax revenues. In fact, then-President Nazarbayev's son-in-law, Timur Kulibaev, who headed a state holding company at the time, declared that the strike had "caused great damage to state coffers" and estimated the loss to the state in 2011 at US$365 million (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015, p. 126). At the company level, OMG's subsidiary, KMG, reported a 7% drop in production and a corresponding loss of US$270 million that was attributed entirely to the strike (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015, p. 126).

Under these conditions, both ruling elites and company executives relied on their ties to local authorities to try to force a quick and decisive end to the OMG strike, but in the process triggered greater militancy and intransigence on the part of workers. After the regional courts declared the strikes in the oilfields illegal, in June 2011, some 300 to 500 striking OMG workers marched to set up a hunger strike outside the regional Mayor's Office, but found their path blocked by about 50 law enforcement officers who proceeded to detain dozens of participants (Rittmann et al., 2012, p. 45). The company subsequently dismissed hundreds of workers in the hope that others would then return to work to avoid the same fate. But the strikers (including most of the dismissed workers) responded in July by setting up an encampment at the central square of the nearby town, Zhanaozen. In August 2011, another 1,000 OMG workers were dismissed and key protest leaders were arrested (Rittmann, 2015). This set the stage for a more tense standoff than what had been seen in the earlier protests at Ersai and KBM.

One element of the subsequent escalation featured a narrative, promulgated largely by government officials and business executives, that "criminal" and "external" elements were exacerbating an unnecessary conflict, disrupting production and harming the country. By the time of the OMG strike, anxieties over mounting losses had reached a critical threshold, prompting ruling elites and company officials to make a concerted effort to criminalize the protests and justify dismissals and coercive tactics. Strikers were portrayed as unreasonable and greedy, and confrontations were blamed on the actions of opposition groups and "external" forces such as Kazakh repatriates (Satpayev & Umbetaliyeva, 2015). Rather than bring an end to the dispute, however, this tactic only intensified labor intransigence.

Importantly, the narrative about "criminal" elements and "external" forces resonated with local police, who were already dealing with a rapid influx of migrant workers and Kazakh repatriates. According to Human Rights Watch's comprehensive report, throughout the Fall of 2011, local police, with the backing of the courts, began to harass, detain, and charge strikers with various infractions well before the massacre occurred (Rittmann et al., 2012). Although harassment and detentions had been evident at Ersai and KBM, things escalated more steeply at OMG, the latest and most prolonged dispute. As that strike went into its second month, riot police went in to arrest OMG workers on hunger strike, with reports of excessive police violence against the striking workers and detention of family members (Rittmann et al., 2012, pp. 53-54). By the Fall of 2011, the frequency of violent incidents intensified, though it is not clear who instigated them, and no perpetrators were brought to account. In October, several striking workers were struck by rubber bullets, with police accusing the workers of shooting at each other (Rittmann et al., 2012, p. 55). In short, well before the time of the Zhanaozen massacre on December 16, 2011, a spiral of coercion and violence had already been steadily intensifying, with local police getting increasingly primed to react to any act that appeared to be "unlawful" or "criminal" in their eyes.

In the months following the massacre, President Nazarbayev called for oil workers to be reinstated in their jobs (Salmon, 2012). But Nazarbayev also absolved the police force and company officials from blame for the massacre, attributing the escalation of violence to "the actions of bandit elements which wanted to use the situation for their criminal designs" (Lillis, 2011). Along similar lines, and for the benefit of international audiences, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Yerzhan Kazykhanov (2012), penned an article in *Foreign Policy* blaming the violence at Zhanaozen on rioters who "chose destruction rather than negotiation." Interestingly, this official narrative on Zhanaozen was even accepted and reproduced by independent journalists and bloggers in the months following the massacre (Lewis, 2016). It is true that five police officers received short prison sentences for "abuse of power" after they were found to have fired bullets directly leading to three civilian deaths (Rittmann, 2015, p. 9). But these convictions essentially ended any further inquiries into what roles may have been played by others in positions of authority. Meanwhile, some 34 oil workers would be convicted in 2012 for inciting mass riots at Zhanaozen, with 13 of them imprisoned despite having claimed to have confessed while being tortured and subjected to ill-treatment (Rittmann, 2015, p. 9). This ending to the drama at Zhanaozen has not prevented workers from launching fresh strikes in the oil sector. In recent years, strikes and protests have also been launched by workers in other extractive industries, notably copper and coal, which have also had a history of periodic labor unrest dating back to the late-Soviet period. But, perhaps as a sign that the massacre at Zhanaozen left its own mark, companies have been more inclined to initiate negotiations than risk prolonged standoffs, as evident in management's response to a 2016 protest at Burgylau oil service company in Zhanaozen over projected cuts in working hours (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2016).

The Pathway to the Marikana Massacre

In South Africa, labor militancy had been steadily rising across locales and sectors during the decade preceding the Marikana massacre (Chinguno, 2015; von Holdt, 2012). But the rise was most noticeable and violence prone in the platinum sector, especially in the years following the steep drop in platinum prices during the second half of 2008. Then, the waves of labor disputes during the months before the Lonmin strike at Marikana set the stage for an intensifying spiral of confrontation between intransigent mineworkers and increasingly impatient company officials and local police forces.

One reason why the Lonmin mineworkers' strike at Marikana escalated toward a violent standoff was that it came relatively late in the strike wave of 2012. Previous labor disputes and wage hikes at other platinum mines, particularly at Implats, had created rising expectations among the striking workers at Marikana. Meanwhile, Lonmin management worried about the effects of continual wage hikes at a time when volatile platinum prices and share prices required them to retrench and contain labor costs. NUM remained in place as the majority union with the authority to negotiate on behalf of the miners at Lonmin. However, rather than opening negotiations with management, NUM sought to deflect workers' grievances as part of an effort to prevent AMCU organizers from making inroads into Lonmin's mines at Marikana after their success in negotiating pay hikes at Implats and at Lonmin's other mines at Karee. NUM had been the majority union at both of these other locations and was now under more pressure to avoid any labor dispute that might give AMCU a chance to expand their recruitment activities. Under these conditions, by the time Lonmin workers first put forth their demands for wage hikes in August 2012, both the company and the leaders of its dominant union were eager to prevent any further deterioration of their positions vis-à-vis workers.

As in the case of OMG in Kazakhstan, however, the efforts to thwart the initiation of labor disputes only led to heightened militancy and intransigence on the part of workers, particularly as they were aware of the wage increases won by their counterparts at other mines. Rather than waiting for NUM officials to become responsive, they took matters into their own hands and downed their tools to set up a massive encampment for striking workers on a "koppie" (small hill) just outside the mines at Marikana. This time, the actions of the strikers did not result in negotiations with Lonmin management. Although workers set up a committee to negotiate on behalf of striking mineworkers, company officials refused to negotiate with the workers on the grounds that the dispute had not been formally authorized by the majority union (NUM). Instead, tense confrontations erupted between striking mineworkers, on the one hand, and company security forces and local police, on the other. This was accompanied by instances of intra-labor violence (Chinguno, 2015, p. 263), starting with the two workers shot outside of NUM's office at the start of the conflict and extending into lethal confrontations between backers of NUM and AMCU during the course of the wildcat strike at Marikana. Thus, even before the massacre at Marikana, 10 people had died, with the victims including not only workers but also security personnel and union activists from both NUM and AMCU.

As in the case of the OMG dispute in the weeks preceding the Zhanaozen massacre, the labor dispute at Marikana came to be increasingly characterized by company board members and some government officials as "criminal" acts. During the hearings over the Marikana massacre, it was discovered that Cyril Ramaphosa sent e-mail messages in his capacity as a Lonmin board member to company executives and the Minister of Mineral Resources just 24 hours before the massacre stating, "The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labor dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterised as such . . . There needs to be concomitant action to address this situation" (Davies, 2015). That Ramaphosa, a former founding leader of NUM, was the largest shareholder in Lonmin and had close ties to top ANC leaders only served to reinforce the views held by company executives that the strikers camped outside the Lonmin mines were engaged in an unlawful act, disregarding the legal framework for initiating and resolving labor disputes. For the locally recruited security forces, whose leaders had close ties to Lonmin management, the signal was to act more decisively to put an end to "criminal" acts being carried out in their own communities. As in the case of the migrant oil workers in western Kazakhstan, the fact that so many of the workers at platinum mines are migrants from distant places made it easier for local security forces to blame the dispute on outside agitators greedily seeking to increase their wealth rather than dispossessed members of their own community.

Under these conditions, it becomes easier to see how local police forces and company security personnel might begin to view the spear-wielding protesters at the koppie at Marikana as an imminent threat to law and order, and possibly to their own lives. At the same time, the actions of the local security forces immediately preceding the massacre make it difficult to characterize the situation as one of self-defense. In fact, a wide range of accounts of the massacre describe security personnel (Alexander et al., 2013; Cairncross & Kisting, 2016; Sinwell & Mbatha, 2016), acting under the direction of company executives, who began to hem in the workers at the koppie encampment with razor wire while setting up a second perimeter with armored vehicles. It is these actions that led the workers to descend en masse, causing the security forces to shoot off multiple rounds of live fire that would leave 34 more people killed, many found to have been shot in the back.

At the sites of both the Zhanaozen and Marikana massacres, the lack of institutionalized channels of bargaining and quiescent trade union bodies set the stage for wildcat strikes. In both cases, the fact that the particular disputes at OMG and Lonmin emerged and persisted late into the strike wave increased the determination with which ruling elites and business officials sought to avoid further concessions and to decisively halt further drops in output. This, in turn, led to a similar tendency to characterize the strikes at OMG and Lonmin as “unlawful” actions spurred on by “criminal” elements, thereby setting off a spiral of anger, distrust, and anxiety in what was already a tense, protracted standoff. These conditions greatly increased the likelihood of the kind of horrific tragedies seen at Zhanaozen and Marikana.

Conclusion

The sequences outlined in the previous section are not likely to be repeated in either country given the financial and reputational costs that ensued for the relevant companies (most vividly illustrated by Lonmin’s extended struggles until its recent takeover). At the same time, the paired comparison points to some broader inferences and lessons in relation to the challenges of labor relations in export-oriented resource extraction industries. Thus, the argument laid out above may be regarded as, in part, a stylized narrative that explains the outcomes examined here and, in part, a set of middle-range hypotheses that apply to a universe of cases that satisfy the relevant boundary conditions: export-oriented extractive industries within developing or emerging economies (see Figure 3).

First, although labor unrest is not inevitable in the extractive sector, Kazakhstan’s oil fields and South Africa’s platinum belt illuminate the distinctive challenges of preempting or containing industrial conflict in the

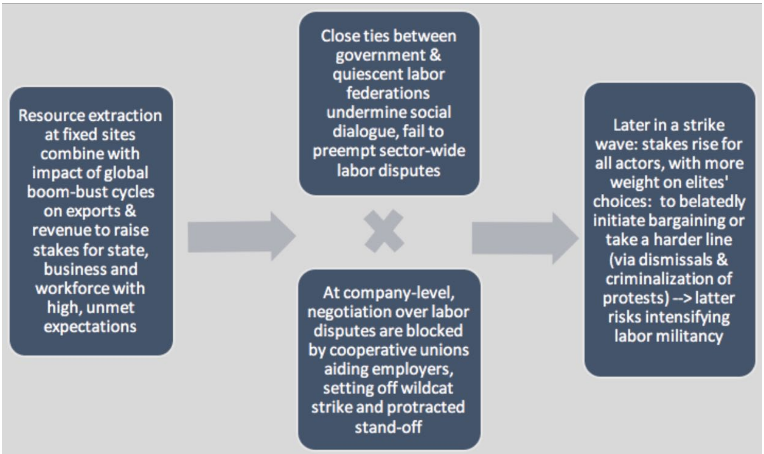

Figure 3. Building blocks of middle-range hypotheses.

context of export-oriented resource extraction in a globalized economy. The wildcat strikes in Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum mines were orchestrated by workers from diverse backgrounds (some local, some migrants from different locales) who had sought out jobs in the extractive sector in the hopes of securing higher earnings. Their protests did not depend on the preexisting solidarity of isolated tight-knit communities frequently associated with an earlier era of miners' strikes (e.g., Kerr & Siegel, 1954). Nor did they reflect the "resource radicalism" that galvanized more recent anti-extractive social movements in Latin America (Riofrancos, 2019). They did, however, reflect unmet expectations that intensified the sense of relative deprivation vis-à-vis corporate executives, managerial elites, and foreign staff. Also significant were the anxieties that the state and business displayed with respect to an industry where production takes place at a fixed site but revenue streams are impacted greatly by fluctuating global commodity prices tied to unpredictable boom–bust cycles. Our argument is focused on the higher likelihood of labor militancy and a prolonged standoff when state, business, and labor all attach great material significance to the potential gains connected to export-oriented resource extraction, but with fewer exit options than are usually found in other sectors. The state fears loss of tax revenues, businesses see loss of profits magnified by falling share prices, and workers are angered by the discrepancies between what they expect, what they earn, and the wealth they see amassed around them.

The resulting challenges can be, and often are, managed through negotiations if there are effective channels for tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining. In Kazakhstan's oilfields and South Africa's platinum belt, however, close ties between the leading national labor federation and the ruling elite and between local union bosses and management prevented organized labor from exerting the pressure needed to conduct purposeful negotiations between employers and workers. The dangers of close ties between trade unions and ruling elites pursuing market reforms have been noted in other cases, including Poland and Tunisia (e.g., Hartshorn & Sil, 2019; Ost, 2005). In advanced industrial economies marked by high growth and generous redistributive policies, cooperative unions may very well serve their rank-and-file by striking deals to preserve employment levels in exchange for wage restraint. For much of the developing world, however, such deals are not likely to be accepted by disaffected workers who have sometimes relocated over long distances in search of higher wages. Under these conditions, if unions are unwilling to enter into wage disputes on behalf of workers, there is a higher likelihood of wildcat strikes and other militant forms of labor action. Together, the complex challenges of labor relations in export-oriented extractive industries and blockages in institutionalized channels for mediation and bargaining may be viewed as jointly necessary conditions for heightened labor militancy in the extractive sector in developing economies.

Militancy, however, need not escalate into massacres. In fact, the horrific end to the strikes at Zhanaozen and Marikana represent rare events, each resulting from a host of antecedent conditions. For each, a comprehensive causal account would incorporate idiosyncratic factors that do not have comparable analogs in other cases. In the case of Marikana, for example, one could plausibly trace the outcome to a long history of violent repression in South Africa's mines dating back to the colonial and apartheid periods (Allen, 2005). In Zhanaozen, one could go back to the legacy of the communist system of industrial relations and its impact on trade union behavior (Beissenova et al., 2016). Such connections between rare outcomes and context-specific factors do not lend themselves to broad testable hypotheses. Nevertheless, there are temporal aspects to both causal stories that suggest portable insights about how the timing and sequence of disputes within a strike wave impact the prospects for a peaceful settlement. These include the fact that strikes coming on the heels of previous disruptions of production and/or prior settlements are likely to have raised the expectations of labor while reducing the patience of state and business, making a prolonged standoff more likely. These conditions also make it more likely that certain tactics, such as carrying out mass dismissals and characterizing strikes as "criminal" acts orchestrated by "outsiders," can have unintended consequences, as evident in the rising tensions at Zhanaozen and Marikana, the actions of local security forces, and the resulting reputational costs for both state and business in the aftermath.

Finally, it is worth noting that there are instances where alternative unions can emerge and play a key role in preempting or diffusing labor unrest. In South Africa, AMCU's success in supplanting NUM and conducting fruitful negotiations at other platinum mines demonstrates that labor unrest in export-oriented extractive sectors can be contained by unions prepared to act more independently and vigorously on behalf of aggrieved workers. But, so long as the channels for negotiation in resolving labor disputes are blocked, labor militancy is more likely, and protracted standoffs heighten the possibility of events like the tragic massacres seen at Zhanaozen and Marikana.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments and suggestions offered by Teri Caraway, Adam Fishwick, Mary Gallagher, Ian M. Hartshorn, Chris Howell, Brian Mello, Thea Riofrancos, Kate Samuelson, Tobias Schule-Cleven, Jennifer Shi, Regine Spector, as well as three anonymous reviewers. An earlier version of this paper was awarded the 2019 Dorothy Day Award for the best paper on labor politics presented at the previous year's APSA Annual Meeting.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Rudra Sil https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9502-3122

References

Alexander, P., Lekgowa, T., Mmope, B., Sinwell, L., & Xezwi, B. (2013). *Marikana: Voices from South Africa's mining massacre*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Allen, V. L. (2005). *The history of Black mineworkers in South Africa*. London, England: Merlin Press.

Anner, M. (2018). CSR participation committees, wildcat strikes and the sourcing squeeze in global supply chains. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *56*, 75-98.

Anner, M., & Liu, X. (2016). Harmonious unions and rebellious workers: A study of wildcat strikes in Vietnam. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *69*, 3-28.

Beissenova, A. A., Dzurenich, E. N., & Olenchuk, O. N. (2016). Problems in the development of trade union movement in Kazakhstan. *Education and Science Without Borders*, *7*, 87-89.

Bischoff, C. (2015). COSATU's organisational decline and the erosion of the industrial order. In V. Satgar & R. Southall (Eds.), *COSATU in crisis: The fragmentation of an African trade union federation* (pp. 217-246). Johannesburg, South Africa: KMM Review.

Bond, P. (2014). *Elite transition: From apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa*. London, England: Pluto Press.

Buhlungu, S. (2010). *A paradox of victory: COSATU and the democratic transformation in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Cairncross, E., & Kisting, S. (2016). Platinum and gold mining in South Africa: The context of the Marikana massacre. *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*, *25*, 513-534.

Caraway, T. (2012). Pathways of dominance and displacement: The varying fates of legacy unions in new democracies. *World Politics*, *64*, 278-305.

Caraway, T., Cook, M., & Crowley, S. (2015). *Working through the past: Labor and authoritarian legacies in comparative perspective*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Cherry, J. (2006). Workers and policymaking. In S. Buhlungu (Ed.), *Trade unions and democracy: COSATU workers' political attitudes in South Africa* (pp. 143-166). Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council Press.

Chinguno, C. (2015). Strike violence after South Africa's democratic transition. In V. Satgar & R. Southall (Eds.), *COSATU in crisis: The fragmentation of an African trade union federation* (pp. 246-267). Johannesburg, South Africa: KMM Review.

Church, R., & Outram, Q. (1998). *Strikes and solidarity: Coalfield conflict in Britain, 1889-1966*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Croucher, R. (2015). National and international labour relations in oil and gas Trans National Corporations in Kazakhstan. *International Business Review*, *24*, 948-954.

Davies, N. (2015, May 19). Marikana massacre: The untold story of the strike leader who died for workers' rights. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/19/marikana-massacre-untold-story-strike-leader-died-workers-rights

Freedom House. (2018). *Table of country scores*. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2018-table-country-scores

Hartshorn, I., & Sil, R. (2019). The fate of labor after regime change: Lessons from post-communist Poland and post-apartheid South Africa for Tunisia's Nobel Prize-winning unions. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *40*, 20-41.

Human Rights Watch. (2016). *"We are not the enemy": Violations of workers' rights in Kazakhstan*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/11/23/we-are-not-enemy/violations-workers-rights-kazakhstan

Human Rights Watch. (2019). *World report 2019*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/kazakhstan

International Labour Organization. (2002). *National labour law profile: South Africa*. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/information-resources/national-labour-law-profiles/WCMS_158919/lang–en/index.htm

Jäger, P. F. (2014). Flows of oil, flows of people: Resource-extraction industry, labour market and migration in western Kazakhstan. *Central Asian Survey*, *33*, 500-516.

Jones Luong, P., & Weinthal, E. (2010). *Oil is not a curse: Ownership structure and institutions in Soviet successor states*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Kazykhanov, Y. (2012, January 26). Steady strides. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/26/steady-strides/.

Kerr, C., & Siegel, A. (1954). The inter-industry propensity to strike—An international comparison. In A. Kornhauser, R. Dubin, & A. M. Ross. (Eds.), *Industrial conflict* (pp. 189-212). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Khassenov, M. (2016). Flexibilization of labour in Kazakhstan: New legal framework and institutional decisions. *E-Journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies*, *5*, 1-12.

Lee, C. K. (2007). *Against the law: Labor protests in China's rustbelt and sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lewis, D. (2016). Blogging Zhanaozen: Hegemonic discourse and authoritarian resilience in Kazakhstan. *Central Asian Survey*, *35*, 421-438.

Lillis, J. (2011, December 21). Kazakhstan: Violence in Zhanaozen threatens Nazarbayev legacy. *Eurasianet*. Retrieved from https://eurasianet.org/node/64745

Macrotrends. (2018). *Crude oil prices and platinum prices: Historical charts*. Retrieved from http://www.macrotrends.net/1369/

Mahoney, J., & Falleti, T. (2015). The comparative sequential method. In J. Mahoney & K. Thelen (Eds.), *Advances in comparative-historical analysis* (pp. 211-239). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Maree, J. (2012). COSATU, oligarchy, and the consolidation of democracy in an African context. In S. Buhlungu & M. Tshoaedi (Eds.), *COSATU's contested legacy* (pp. 56-89). Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council.

Masondo, T., Orkin, M., & Webster, E. (2015). Militants or managers? COSATU and democracy in the workplace. In V. Satgar & R. Southall (Eds.), *COSATU in crisis: The fragmentation of an African trade union federation* (pp. 192-216). Johannesburg, South Africa: KMM Review.

Mitchell, T. (2011). *Carbon democracy: Political power in the age of oil*. London, England: Verso.

National Union of Mineworkers. (2016). *NUM history*. Retrieved from http://num.org.za/About-Us/History

Odendaal, N. (2014, August 6). SA one of the world's most violent, strike-prone countries. *Mining Weekly*. Retrieved at http://www.miningweekly.com/article/sa-one-of-the-worlds-most-violent-strike-prone-countries-2014-08-06

Ost, D. (2005). *The defeat of solidarity: Anger and politics in postcommunist Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Pye, O. (2017). A plantation precariat: Fragmentation and organizing potential in the palm oil global production network. *Development and Change*, *48*, 942-964.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (2016). *Kazakhstan oil industry workers go on strike over pay cuts*. Retrieved https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-zhanaozen-oil-workers-strike/27885821.html

Riofrancos, T. (2019). *Resource radicals: From petro-nationalism to post-extractivism in Ecuador*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Rittmann, M. (2015). Fatal end to oil strike. *International Union Rights*, *22*(3), 8-9. Retrieved from http://www.ictur.org/pdf/IUR223.pdf

Rittmann, M., Darby, S., & Misol, L. (2012). *Striking oil, striking workers: Violations of labor rights in Kazakhstan's oil sector*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch.

Ross, M. (2012). *The oil curse: How petroleum wealth shapes the development of nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rotmann, M., & Williamson, H. (2012, September 14). Kazakhstan's labor rights debacle. *GlobalPost*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/14/kazakhstans-labor-rights-debacle

Rueschemeyer, D., Stephens, E., & Stephens, J. (1992). *Capitalist development and democracy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Salmon, P. (2012). Police massacre has opened a dark chapter for Kazakh workers' movement. *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, *20*, 73-77.

Satpayev, D., & Umbetaliyeva, T. (2015). The protests in Zhanaozen and the Kazakh oil sector: Conflicting interests in a rentier state. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, *6*, 122-129.

Schenkkan, N. (2012, February 29). Kazakhstan: Concern rising over ethnic Kazakh returnees. *Eurasianet*. Retrieved from https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-concern-rising-over-ethnic-kazakh-returnees

Shabalala, Z. (2014, June 23). Platinum union declares end to South Africa's longest strike. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-strike-resolution/platinum-union-declares-end-to-south-africas-longest-strike-idUSKBN0EY1RP20140623

Shorter, E., & Tilly, C. (1974). *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sil, R., & Samuelson, K. (2018). Anatomy of a massacre: The roots of heightened labour militancy in South Africa's platinum belt. *Economy and Society*, *47*, 403-427.

Sil, R., & Wright, T. (2018). The dynamics of labour protest in an era of declining social protection. *Economy and Society*, *47*, 335-342.

Sinwell, L., & Mbatha, S. (2016). *The spirit of Marikana: The rise of insurgent trade unionism in South Africa*. London, England: Pluto Press.

Smith, B. (2007). *Hard times in the lands of plenty: Oil politics in Iran and Indonesia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Solinger, D. (2009). *States' gains, labor's losses: China, France, and Mexico choose global liaisons, 1980-2000*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Stoddard, E. (2013, October 17). South Africa's migrant mine labour conundrum. *Reuters*. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/africa-investment/africa-investment-south-africas-migrant-mine-labour-conundrum-idUSL6N0I02II20131017

Tarrow, S. (1994). *Power in movement: Collective action, social movements and politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

von Holdt, K. (2012). COSATU members and strike violence: What we learn from quantitative and qualitative data. In S. Buhlungu & M. Tshoaedi (Eds.), *COSATU's contested legacy* (pp. 186-211). Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council.

Webster, E., Joynt, K., & Metcalfe, A. (2013). *Repositioning peak-level social dialogue in South Africa: NEDLAC into the future* (Research report of the ILO, Southern Africa Office). Johannesburg, South Africa: National Economic Development and Labour Council.

Williamson, H. (2017, February 2). Kazakhstan: The labor crackdown and possible unintended consequences. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/02/kazakhstan-labor-crackdown-and-possible-unintended-consequences

World Bank. (2019). *World Bank open data*. Retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.TOTL.RT.ZS

World Economic Forum. (2016). *Global competitiveness Report, 2015-16*. Retrieved from http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/competitiveness-rankings/#indicatorId=EOSQ135

Wright, T. (2019). Labour protest in China's private sector: Responses to Chinese communism with capitalist characteristics. *Economy and Society*, *47*, 360-381.

Xulu, N. (2012). COSATU and internal migrant workers: Old fault lines, new dilemmas. In S. Buhlungu & M. Tshoaedi (Eds.), *COSATU's contested legacy* (pp. 212-227). Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council.

Yessenova, S. (2005). "Routes and roots" of Kazakh identity: Urban migration in postsocialist Kazakhstan. *The Russian Review*, *64*, 661-679.

Yessenova, S. (2007). Worker riot at the Tengiz oilfield: Who is to blame? *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*. Retrieved from https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/11356-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2007-2-21-art-11356.html

Author Biographies

Allison D. Evans is assistant professor of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her research focuses on contentious politics, labor, urban politics, and comparative postcommunism. Her refereed articles have appeared in such journals as *Post-Soviet Affairs, Studies in Comparative International Development*, and *Economy*

and Society, and and she is currently working on a book tentatively titled *Protest in the Provinces: Coming to Terms with Capitalism in Russia's Company Towns*.

Rudra Sil is professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania where he is also SAS director of the Huntsman Program in International Studies and Business. Sil is the author, coauthor, or coeditor of seven books, most recently *Comparative Area Studies: Methodological Rationales and Cross-Regional Applications* (Oxford University Press, 2018), coedited with Ariel Ahram and Patrick Köllner. He has also published more than three dozen articles and book chapters, covering topics from labor politics and international development to Soviet/post-Soviet studies, Asian studies, and qualitative methodology.