

# Reasons Why Thai Employees Want to Join Labor Unions: Evidence in Private Companies and State Enterprises

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## Abstract

This study provides an empirical analysis of reasons why Thai employees want to join labor unions in order to deepen our understanding of unionization-related issues in Thailand. The presidents, leaders and members of labor unions for nine private companies and two state enterprises participated in this survey. Based on 1841 valid responses from a total population of 44573 persons, our findings demonstrated that there are three main reasons why Thai employees want to join labor unions: compensation, safeguard against dismissal, and legal consultation (in descending order).

**Keywords:** Labor union, Thai employees, Labor relations, Labor market

## 1. Introduction

Labor unions have been viewed as organizations established to help protect the interests of employees and foster pleasant relationships between employees and employers (Webb, 1896; Pongpangan, 1979; Somprasong, 1979; Tosuwanjinda, 2002; Wilawan, 2007; Napathorn and Chanprateep, 2011 (a); Napathorn and Chanprateep, 2011 (b)). Much research has examined the reasons why employees want to join labor unions, especially in the United States and Europe (Wheeler and McClendon, 1991; Waddington and Whiston, 1997; Visser, 2002; Friedman, Abraham, and Thomas, 2006). For example, employees in the United States joined labor unions to improve work environments, career prospects, and job satisfaction (Friedman, Abraham, and Thomas, 2006). Employees in Poland joined labor unions to improve their career prospects (Zientara and Kuczynski, 2009). However, little attention has been paid to this issue in South East Asia, especially in Thailand. This lack of research attention may be because the labor relations climate in Thailand has been considered autocratic (Deyo, 1995). The labor relations system seems to be under the control of the management. Thai employees are not eager to organize labor unions because of cultural factors (Siengthai, 1993; Levine, 1997; Suthakavatin, 2005; Siengthai and Bechter, 2005). Most Thai employees view themselves to have a low rank in the organizational hierarchy; thus, they pay respect to managers whom they believe to have a higher rank within the organization. Therefore, they prefer not to create adversarial relationships with managers establishing labor unions to protect their own rights. Moreover, most managers have a negative perception of labor unions and thus do not welcome the establishment of labor unions within their workplace. Some managers also view labor unions as self-interested since some labor unions are established for personal rather than public purposes (Brown, 2004).

In this study, we conducted a study using well-designed questionnaires and in-depth interviews with labor union members from thirteen leading Thai labor unions for private companies and state enterprises. The questionnaires