



## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CODE, 2020 AND INDUSTRIAL HARMONY IN NASHIK'S MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR LABOUR MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS

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### **Abstract:**

*Industrial Relations Code, 2020 is a major shift in the regulatory framework in India for industrial relations as it is consolidating three major pieces of labour law into a single law that will promote industrial harmony, organizational efficiency and improve relations between employers and employees. The paper is comprehensive and covers the implementation, impact and implications of the Code in Nashik's manufacturing industry, which is a key industrial hub in Maharashtra. The research method adopted in this study is the qualitative and policy-analytical approach which is based on the analysis of legal provisions, views of the stakeholders, observation of implementation and industrial evidences from secondary sources. The evaluation of the reforms is made regarding their ability to achieve industrial harmony and the balance of flexibility for the employers, protection of the workers and stability of the organizations in the manufacturing sector of Nashik. The results show that the Code enhances the improvement of the regulatory landscape, the structuring of industrial relations, but implementation issues, differential organizational capacity, lack of awareness among SMEs and concerns on workforce security remain a hurdle to the effective realization of the Code in the promotion of sustainable labour-management relations.*

**Keywords:** *Industrial Relations Code 2020, Labour Law Reforms, Industrial Harmony, Employment Relations, Labour Compliance*

## 1. Introduction

The features of the Indian labour law regime have been a complex labyrinth, characterised by institutional fragmentation, complexity of regulation, and compliance issues impacting labour-management relations, and industrial governance. The country received a colonial system of state-based labour administration on the eve of independence, which was geared mainly towards control and not welfare. In the following decades India had passed a series of labour laws, some over fifty in number at the central level alone, and hundreds more at the state level, making India's labour laws a labyrinthine regulatory framework with many problems for employers and workers (Bamber et al., 2021; Goldar & Aggarwal, 2023).

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, passed on 28th September 2020, is a result of over 40 years of efforts towards rationalisation and modernisation of Indian Labour laws. The Code is a merger of three important labour laws namely, the Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. The main purpose of this consolidation is to make the regulatory framework more compliant, litigant-friendly, harmonious, and flexible to meet the current economic challenges (Bhuta, 2022; Ganesh, 2026).

Nashik, in the northwest region of Maharashtra, has become a prominent industrial hub in India. It is not just the diversity of the district's manufacturing base but also the fact that the industry includes automotive components, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, food processing, electronics and the renowned wine industry. Satpur-Ambad industrial belt has many large-scale manufacturing industries and also thousands of small and medium industries (SMEs) (Nair, 2025; Singh et al., 2025).

Nashik is an appropriate place to conduct a study on the impact of the Industrial Relations Code for a number of reasons. Firstly, the district's industrial structure is in tune with the industrial diversity of India, hence the findings here are potentially generalisable. Secondly, with the city's proximity to Mumbai and Pune, it is in the midst of Maharashtra's industrial belt, with traditional strong labor relations that can still get contentious. Third, the fact that there are both organized and unorganized sectors, and degrees of unionization, gives a broad scope to be analysed (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Bamber et al., 2021).

Nashik's manufacturing industry directly provides jobs to around 250,000 people and many thousands in ancillary and support services. The industrial relations climate has been moderate and with frequent disputes, there is relative functional collective bargaining. But the industry has to contend with today's challenges of technological change; international competition; skills shortages; and flexible working arrangements. While the labour law reforms are already under discussion in academic and policy circles, there is little research that has focused on the organisational and industrial relations implications of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 on a region-specific manufacturing ecosystem. Practically, existing studies have mostly concentrated on the interpretation of the law and on the overall study of macro-level policies, and have paid relatively little attention to the implications of the Code in terms of enterprise-level labour-management relations, industrial harmony, workforce governance and adaptability of the organization. In the context of this, the manufacturing industries of Nashik offer a significant industrial setting to gauge the effect that the labour reforms have on employment relations, interaction between stakeholders and industrial management practices (Kumar & Hooda, 2024; Panagariya, 2025).

The study is also relevant for the debate on Human Resource Management and on Organizational Management as part of wider understandings that focus on the impact of the labour law reform on the governance of the workplace, grievances, collective negotiations, flexibility of the workforce and institutional structures of industrial relations. The paper aims to combine the analysis of legal reform with organizational and management aspects in order to add a link between labour policy and the practical field of industrial management (Collings et al., 2018; Klikauer, 2022).

The Code was a result of a wider initiative by the Ministry of Labour and Employment to bundle four existing omnibus codes (Wages; Industrial Relations; Social Security; Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions) together to create codes that would facilitate the application of the various laws, particularly the Wages Code. Introduced in 2019 and enacted in 2020, the IR Code. The Ministry of Labour and Employment has informed that all provisions of the All Labour Code will be effective from November 21, 2025. In this backdrop, the present study critically discusses the implementation environment, perceptions of stakeholders and Industrial Relations implications of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 in the manufacturing sector of Nashik. The study in particular takes a closer look at the effect of reforms on industrial harmony, organizational relations, labour flexibility and institutional governance mechanisms in the modern manufacturing context (Rani et al., 2021; Waas, 2022).

The results of this research apply only to the manufacturing sector in the Nashik district as a whole and not necessarily to other sectors or other geographic locations. The study covers the implementation of the Code between September 2020 and end of 2024, recognizing that full implementation is still not complete. Some of the state-specific provisions necessary to achieve complete operationalisation remained to be finalised during the time of research, thereby restricting the assessment of the potential practice of certain provision (Chatterji et al., 2025).

The three other labour codes passed alongside the Industrial Relations Code (2020) – the Code on Wages, 2019; the Code on Social Security, 2020; and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 – are not extensively discussed in the paper except where they relate to industrial relations issues. The study, however, offers valuable policy and organizational lessons regarding the dynamic between labour law transformation, industrial governance and labour law in the manufacturing sector, notwithstanding these constraints.

**Research Objectives**

- To analyze the major provisions of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 and evaluate their implications for industrial harmony, labour-management relations, and organizational governance within manufacturing industries
- To examine the implementation status, institutional challenges, and organizational preparedness associated with the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 in Nashik’s manufacturing sector
- To assess stakeholder perspectives—including employers, workers, trade unions, and regulatory authorities—regarding the Code’s influence on workforce governance, employment relations, and industrial coordination
- To evaluate the impact of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 on industrial disputes, collective bargaining mechanisms, labour-management relations, and organizational industrial harmony
- To identify best practices and propose policy and managerial recommendations for the effective implementation of labour reforms in manufacturing organizations.

**2. Labour Reforms**

Conceptual framework: The concept in the present study draws on Industrial Relations Systems Theory (IRST), which focuses on the dynamic between employers, workers, trade unions and regulatory institutions in the process of getting industrial harmony and workplace governance. The study also builds on the Organisational Governance and Human Resource Management theories to gain insights into the effects of labour reform on the structure of collective bargaining, grievance handling, flexibility of the workforce and organisational stability in manufacturing industries. The theoretical approaches offer a multi-disciplinary context to consider the implications of labour law changes for management and institutions. Table 1 summarizes major scholarly contributions related to labour reforms, industrial relations, workforce governance, and organizational implications associated with the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (Dukes & Kirk, 2024; Rakhimova, 2023).

**Table 1. Summary of Major Scholarly Contributions on Labour Reforms and Industrial Relations**

Authors	Focus Area	Key Findings	Relevance to Present Study
(Prakash et al., 2022)	Occupational safety, welfare, and industrial relations	Effective implementation of occupational safety and welfare laws improves workforce satisfaction and industrial harmony	Supports organizational governance and workplace harmony analysis
(Roy & Dubey, 2022)	Industrial Relations Code, 2020	Labour law consolidation simplifies industrial dispute mechanisms and enhances industrial relations efficiency	Supports labour reform and industrial governance discussion
(Chatterji et al., 2025)	Labour law reforms and labour flexibility	Labour reforms may improve industrial adaptability but raise concerns regarding worker protection and employment security	Supports flexibility versus workforce security debate

(Rakhimova, 2023)	Workplace conflict and labour modernization	Communication, conflict resolution, and modernization are essential for reducing workplace tensions	Supports grievance redressal and industrial harmony analysis
(Dukes & Kirk, 2024)	Industrial relations and labour law	Labour law and industrial justice must operate through integrated industrial relations systems	Supports theoretical and institutional governance framework
(Bhuta, 2022)	Industrial Relations Code analysis	The Code promotes labour flexibility and compliance simplification while creating implementation challenges	Supports stakeholder and implementation analysis
(Mani, 2024)	Role of trade unions	Trade unions remain important institutions for protecting worker interests and regulating industrial relations	Supports stakeholder and collective bargaining discussion
(Mahato, 2025)	Labour reforms and international standards	Indian labour reforms should align with international labour standards and worker welfare principles	Supports policy and governance implications

Document Analysis: Review of Government Notifications, Implementation Guidelines, Circulars and other Government-related policy documents from Central and Maharashtra Governments. The study uses mainly secondary qualitative data sources such as government policy documents, reports on labour law, literature, industrial publications, observations of stakeholders, and publicly available institutional records. These sources were analysed carefully to see if there are themes that recur that relate to the areas of industrial harmony, labour flexibility, organisational preparedness and implementation issues (George, 2025; Mahato, 2025).

The field observations were informal and consisted of observing workplace practices, employee-employer relations, grievance handling processes, and industrial relations mechanisms in selected manufacturing tasks in the industrial areas of Nashik (Prakash et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2019).

Stakeholder Perspectives: This study builds largely on secondary sources and legal interpretation, but does include publicly available statements, reports and documented perspectives from employer associations, trade unions, and labour departments. A thematic interpretation and comparative policy analysis are used as the analytic method of the study. The study explores the linkages between the labour law changes and the mechanisms of industrial relations, the reactions of the stakeholders and the consequences for the governance of organizations in order to assess the overall managerial and industrial governance effect of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (Forsyth & McCrystal, 2025; Haile, 2021).

### 3. Evolution of Industrial Relations Law in India

#### 3.1 Pre-Independence Era

The modern industrial relations system of India was introduced during colonial times, when the first Factory Act was passed in 1881, in response to pressure from the textile mill owners and the concern of the British government. The first major move towards the regulation of industrial conflicts was the Trade Disputes Act 1929, which contained a conciliation clause and also an anti-strike clause for public utility services (Chakravarty, 2023; Sinha et al., 2017).

Later, however, colonial labour law was essentially geared towards continuing the industrial production of goods for colonial purposes and not for the benefit of the worker. During this time, workers' activities were frequently met with harsh treatment, and the law was relatively weak in enforcing non-arbitrary dismissal, health and safety, or wages for workers (Laxman, 2022).

#### 3.2 Post-Independence Consolidation

The Constitution of India was adopted in 1950 for an independent India, and many rights about labour became fundamental rights and guiding policies for the State. Article 19(1)(c) provided that everyone had the right to form unions. Article 43 required state to ensure living wage and decent working conditions. The result of this constitutional framework was extensive labour law (Laxman, 2022).

The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 was the foundation of the industrial relations system in India. It introduced dispute settlement provisions such as conciliation, arbitration and adjudication. It also contained provisions to

cover layoffs, conditions of closures and retrenchment compensation as well as standing orders. Registration and operation of the unions remained under the control of the Trade Unions Act, 1926, and the Industrial Employment Act, 1946, provided for the introduction of written terms and conditions of employment.

### 3.3 Expansion and Fragmentation

The following decades saw the emergence of various labour laws on specific topics like minimum wages, bonus payments, provident funds, gratuity, maternity benefits, contract labour and many other laws. Each law dealt with a legitimate concern, but together the laws provided a complex, overlapping and sometimes contradictory framework of regulation (Business, 2020; Shyam Sundar & Sharma, 2018). By the 1990s, the number of labour laws in India, at the Central level, had crossed 50 and at the State level: more than several hundred. Ensuring compliance involved dealing with several definitions, keeping several registers and reporting to several authorities. For small and medium-sized enterprises, legal complexity was a significant burden and for large enterprises, it was a necessity to have a dedicated compliance team. Critics said this was a policy that demotivated formal employment, stunted business development and had a counterproductive effect on informal workers as it left them unprotected (Mani, 2024).

### 3.4 Reform Initiatives

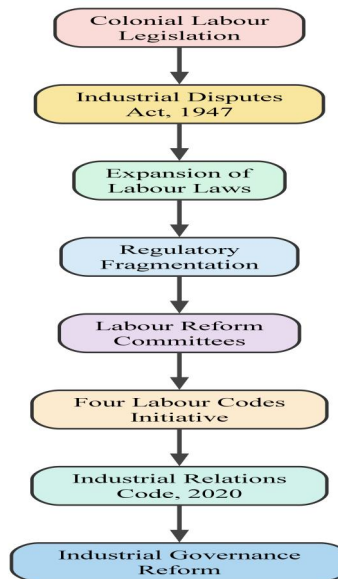
The awareness of these problems began the discussions around reform from the 1990s and in India's economic liberalization era. The Second National Commission on Labour (2002) suggested that the various labour laws be integrated into a single code of laws. Several professional committees suggested similar rationalisation and streamlining (Banerjee et al., 2024). But there was still a problem with labour law reform, which was politically touchy. Trade unions were concerned about the reduction of the worker protection gained in the past, while employers believed that the rigid rules hindered job creation and economic growth. As a consequence, for decades, substantive reforms were postponed or faced parliamentary hurdles, most of which were left in draft form (Mani, 2024).

### 3.5 The Four Labour Codes Initiative

The present government has started a process of comprehensive reform which includes the integration of central labour laws into four codes: Code on Wages, 2019; Code on Industrial Relations, 2020; Code on Social Security, 2020; and Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020. All four codes were passed in Parliament between 2019 and 2020, which are the most transformative labour law reforms in the history of independent India. The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, provides a comprehensive set of rules for the terms of employment, the functioning of the trade unions, industrial disputes and related issues, combining three significant laws in one code designed to streamline compliance, minimise conflict and enhance harmony in the industrial relations system (Bhuta, 2022; Jha, 2026). The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 is the result of a historical journey of India's Industrial Relations framework which is depicted through Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Evolution of Industrial Relations Law and Labour Reform Framework in India**

**Figure 1. Evolution of Industrial Relations Law and Labour Reform Framework in India**



## 4. Key Provisions of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020

### 4.1 Structural Overview

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, has 12 chapters and 102 sections arranged in a logical sequence, beginning with definitions, then moving on to union registration, negotiating, dispute resolution and penalties. The Code applies to all industrial establishments and aims to strike a balance between flexibility of employers and protection for workers, update definitions to better accommodate the current employment landscape, and simplify dispute resolution (George, 2025).

### 4.2 Recognition and Negotiation

One of the most important innovations of the Code is in relation to the recognition of trade unions and recognition and negotiation councils. Previous laws were ambiguous about how to decide on representation and resulted in lengthened disputes and multiple unions assuming representation rights.

The Code introduces a new concept, a "negotiating union" for establishments with fewer than 300 workers. For a trade union to be regarded as the negotiating union, it must either have 51% of workers on its rolls, or be supported by 51% of workers. This majority rule is intended to provide a proper representation of the workers' interests in the recognized union (Dukes & Kirk, 2024).

### 4.3 Negotiating Council

If there are 300 or more employees in the establishment, the Code requires a negotiating council to be established that consists of representatives of trade unions that have received at least 20% support from the employees in the establishment. The council conducts collective bargaining on behalf of all workers and must have unions representing 51% or more of workers sign off on any decisions. This mechanism allows several unions to exist but not to cause fragmentation which might lead to ineffectual bargaining (Dukes & Kirk, 2024).

### 4.4 Standing Orders

The mandatory standing order requirement is raised from 100 to 300 workers. Employers who employ 300 or more employees are required to issue standing orders which outline the terms of employment, working conditions, disciplinary procedures and other matters. This change decreases compliance cost for smaller establishments and ensures that workers in larger ones are protected. Together these represent a general policy trend towards institutional industrial governance and labour market flexibility. Although the Code aims to enhance the efficiency of the operation and minimize the regulatory burden for manufacturing companies, its operational impact on workforce security, collective bargaining success and the overall

harmony in the industry depends on the readiness of the companies and the cooperation of stakeholders. Table 2 sets out the key requirements of the Industrial Relations Code 2020 and the possible implications for labour-management relations and organisational governance (Bhuta, 2022).

**Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Major Provisions of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020**

Provision	Earlier Labour Framework	Industrial Relations Code, 2020	Organizational and Industrial Implication	Supporting Reference
Trade Union Recognition	No clear majority-based recognition mechanism	Requires 51% worker support for negotiating union	Reduces inter-union conflict and improves negotiation clarity	(Roy & Dubey, 2022)
Negotiating Council	Limited structured multi-union participation	Multi-union negotiating council framework introduced	Enhances collective bargaining coordination	(Dukes & Kirk, 2024)
Standing Orders Threshold	Mandatory for over 100 workers	The threshold increased to 300 workers	Reduces compliance burden on SMEs	(Bhuta, 2022)
Retrenchment Permission	Government approval required for more than 100 workers	The threshold increased to 300 workers	Improves operational flexibility for employers	(Chatterji et al., 2025)
Fixed-Term Employment	Limited recognition and regulatory clarity	Formalized with proportional worker benefits	Enhances workforce flexibility and employment adaptability	(Bhuta, 2022)
Grievance Redressal Committees	Less structured implementation	Mandatory for establishments with 20+ workers	Strengthens internal communication and dispute resolution	(Rakhimova, 2023)
Strike and Dispute Regulations	Existing procedural restrictions	Expanded notice and conciliation mechanisms	Encourages industrial dispute management and stability	(Roy & Dubey, 2022)
Trade Union Participation	Traditional representation model	Institutionalized participative governance approach	Supports industrial harmony and collaborative governance	(Mani, 2024)

## 5. Key Provisions of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020

### 5.1 Structural Overview

The Industrial Relations Code 2020 consists of 12 chapters and 102 sections that are structured to follow a logical sequence of definitions, mechanisms of union recognition, negotiation process, dispute resolution, and sanctions. It is applicable to all industrial establishments and aims to strike a balance between flexibility in the employer's actions and protection for the employees, update the definition of industry to address modern employment, and simplify dispute resolution (George, 2025).

### 5.2 Recognition and Negotiation

One of the key innovations of the Code of Practice is on the concept of accepting recognition and negotiation of trade unions. The previous legislation did not establish a clear way to define "representative unions" resulting in drawn-out negotiations and multiple unions claiming representation rights. The Code includes a new term, "negotiating union," for employers employing fewer than 300 employees. A trade union to be recognised as the negotiating union must either have at least 51% of the workers on its rolls, or be supported by 51% of the workers. The intent of the majority requirement is to ensure that the union that has been recognized truly represents workers' interests (Roy & Dubey, 2022).

**Negotiating Council:** If the establishment employs 300 or more employees, a negotiating council is required to be established, consisting of representatives of trade unions that have had the support of 20% or more of the employees. The council negotiates on behalf of all workers and the decision to take requires a majority of

workers (at least 51%) in the council to be represented by a union. This is a mechanism that can allow for several unions to be represented without creating a situation where it is split up and this harms effective bargaining. The number of workers in mandatory standing orders is raised from 100 to 300. Producers with 300 or more employees are required to make standing orders, which outline conditions of employment, working conditions, disciplinary action, and other areas. This will lessen compliance costs for smaller units and continue to protect workers in large units (Chatterji et al., 2025).

### **5.3 Industrial Disputes and Strikes**

The Code preserves the essential dispute resolution processes with some changes:

**Industrial Disputes Definition:** The Code has a very general definition of an industrial dispute as referring to any disagreement between an employer and workers concerning the terms, conditions, rights or duties of employment. But it makes clear that the grievance "must be brought by a 'significant number' of workers to avoid frivolous claims. The Code retains the two-tiered conciliation system, where conciliation officers try to resolve the dispute without going to adjudication. The conciliation period will be 45 days from reference date, with a further 45 day extension. This time line is intended to be a compromise between sufficient negotiation time and prompt solution.

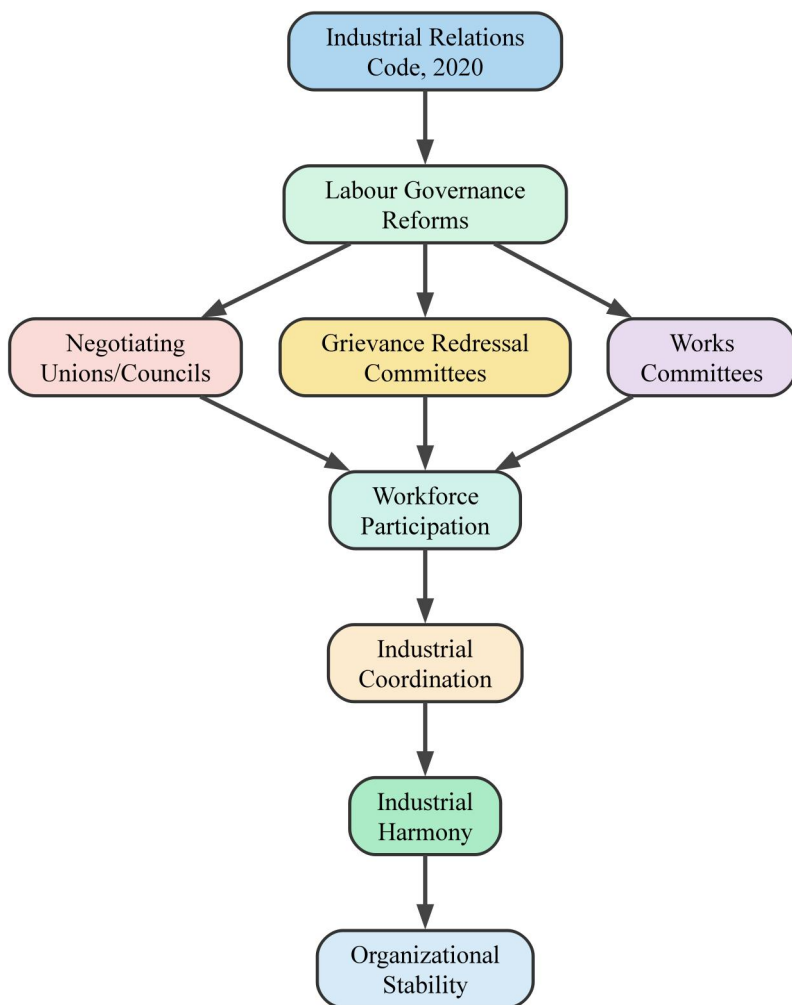
**Strike Restrictions:** The Code imposes certain restrictions on strikes in public utility services, including a 14-day notice period to strike and prohibitions on strikes during the conciliation process, and 60 days following such process. It also bars strikes during an arbitration process. Those restrictions are said to infringe on the basic right of workers to strike, but are thought to ensure that certain services are not compromised and to foster negotiated settlements (Forsyth & McCrystal, 2025).

**Employer Flexibility:** The Code eliminates prior government permission for layoffs, retrenchment, and closure in establishments with as many as 300 employees (up from the previous limit of 100). Prior approval is eliminated in order to give employers more flexibility to meet economic demands, but establishments will still be required to give notice and compensation. This rule has produced much controversy, as unions interpret it as breaching job security. In terms of organizational management, these changes can enhance the flexibility of decision-making and operational adaptability of manufacturing companies that compete. But the employment security and a stable workforce suggest, however, that efficiency improvements in the organization should not be achieved without a sustainable labour-management relationship and mechanisms to build trust among employees (Jha, 2026).

### **5.4 Grievance Redressal Mechanisms**

**Establishment of internal Committees:** This Code requires that organizations with 20 or more workers form grievance redressal committees with equal number of members from employer and workers. These committees are expected to resolve the worker's grievances within a period of 30 days, thus facilitating the quick enterprise-level resolution of grievances (Rakhimova, 2023).

**Workers' Participation:** Create works committees comprised of representatives from the employer and worker in establishments of 300 or more employees to harmonize relations, advance working conditions and settle workplace issues through dialogue. This is an incentive for cooperative industrial relations and worker participation in management. The institutional mechanisms also support the internal communication within and participative management of the institutions which is also crucial aspects of modern Human Resource Management and industrial governance systems (Collings et al., 2018). The Industrial governance and labour-management system under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 is shown in figure 2.



**Figure 2. Industrial Relations Governance Framework under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020**

## 6. Implementation Landscape in the Manufacturing Sector in Nashik

### 6.1 Industrial Profile of Nashik

Nashik's industry is very diversified. The automotive ancillary industry forms a major component, with numerous units manufacturing components for major automobile manufacturers. Huge presence of the pharmaceutical industry, several API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient) manufacturers and formulation units. Nashik is known worldwide for the food processing industry, especially grape processing and wine-making. Other industries include engineering goods, electronics manufacturing, and defense production (Mathur et al., 2022).

More than 5000 manufacturing units, from micro to large multinational corporations, are spread across the industrial areas, especially Satpur, Ambad, Sinnar and Igatpuri industrial estates. There are significant differences in employment across establishment size, with larger establishments providing more formal employment arrangements, and smaller establishments using more informal arrangements, which can provide poorer wages and benefits (Harney & Nolan, 2022).

### 6.2 Pre-Code Industrial Relations Climate

Prior to the implementation of the Code, the industrial relations situation in Nashik overall was fairly stable vis-à-vis some other industrial centres of Maharashtra. Labour relations were not often a source of conflict except occasionally on issues of wage adjustments, working conditions and retrenchment. Workers were involved in several well-established unions, organised within different central trade union federations (Ganesh, 2026).

Collective bargaining functioned reasonably in large organized sector units, and there were periodic wage settlements in these situations between management and recognized unions. But in smaller enterprises, there was not always a formal system of industrial relations, and workers' organisation was limited. As with all

industries, the manufacturing industry had its problems of conflicting demand for worker membership from competing unions, recognition problems and disputes being delayed in the conciliation and adjudication processes (Policy, 2011).

### 6.3 Current Implementation Status

Partial implementation and differing application of the Industrial Relations Code in the manufacturing sector of Nashik City as of late 2024. The Code was assented by the President in September 2020, however, the state governments must frame and notify the rules under the Code for it to come into effect. However, similar to several states, Maharashtra has been drafting rules but has been delayed for a number of reasons such as the political change, consultations with stakeholders and administrative delays for final notification (Mahato, 2025).

This implementation limbo leaves employers and workers unsure. Some forward-thinking companies have started to conform their practices with the Code provisions in preparation for full implementation, while others are operating on the basis of the existing practices. Some preliminary notifications have been issued and awareness programs have taken place under Maharashtra government, but the complete transition is yet to happen. The differential implementation means that institutional and managerial issues with transitions of labour law in manufacturing industries are not without complications. The conditions of organizational readiness, administrative coordination, technological adaptation, and awareness of stakeholders appear as some of the key factors affecting the success of industrial governance reforms (Panagariya, 2025).

### 6.4 Awareness Levels

There are significant differences in the awareness of the provisions of the Code among stakeholder groups. Most large manufacturing companies have a human resources and legal compliance department and have a good understanding of the key sections of the Code and what is likely to change in the code. These businesses have joined in consultations, attended seminars held by industry associations, and started to make preparations for implementation (Harney & Nolan, 2022).

But the small and medium businesses (SMBs) are far less aware, however, due to resources issues they are not getting engaged with regulatory developments. Few SME owners are familiar with the Code and are not sure about the compliance requirements. The lack of awareness creates implementation difficulties in that effective compliance requires not only knowing the provisions of the legislation – but also meeting the expectations for compliance by adapting the way the work is done (Kumar & Hooda, 2024).

The awareness of workers is also not uniform. In large establishments, unionized workers have been provided with information via their unions; these unions have arranged training sessions and made literature regarding the Code available. Non-unionized workers, especially in smaller workplaces and in unorganized workplaces, however, have limited knowledge of how the Code may impact their rights and working conditions. These differences in awareness, suggest a scale-dependent impact of labour optimizations with SMEs having comparatively lower levels of challenges with compliance adaptations, workforce communication and institutional implementations (Haile, 2021).

### 6.5 Stakeholder Preparations

**Employer Organizations:** The Nashik Industries and Manufacturers Association (NIMA) and other employer organizations have organised several awareness programs for their members with the help of legal experts to explain the provisions of the Code. These organisations have similarly made representations to the state authorities to suggest changes in the proposed rules in line with the industrial conditions in the state (Smith et al., 2025).

Preparatory internal work has started in larger manufacturing firms: reviews on existing standing orders; evaluation of procedures for recognition of unions; evaluation of fixed-term employment opportunities and training HR staffing. In addition, several companies have begun to discuss with the recognized unions the expected changes, hoping to reach a consensus and thus avoid conflicts during the transition process. **Trade Unions:** The major trade unions in the manufacturing industry in Nashik have responded in different ways to the Code. Some unions have expressed strong opposition to certain measures, such as the lifting of the standing orders' thresholds and the need to obtain prior permission for retrenchment. Others appraise the possible advantages as is more easily recognized and fixed term employment protections, while hoping for the reinforcement of implementation safeguards (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Unions have run their own awareness programs for the membership, focused frequently on aspects they see as harmful to workers. In the process of drafting rules, some unions have sent letters or memos to government officials requesting changes or greater safeguards. The coordination of the unions on Code related matters has been less harmonious, with some degree of unity in common interests and problems but with some rivalry for membership and influence. Government Machinery: The Maharashtra Labour Department has taken several preliminary measures such as training its labour officers and inspectors about the provisions of the Code. In addition, the department has initiated the process of creating a digital infrastructure to support the single compliance platform that is proposed in the Code. However, there are implementation challenges as human and technological resources are limited (Forsyth & McCrystal, 2025).

## 7. Stakeholder Perspectives and Concerns

### Employer Perspectives

The overall sentiment from the employers in Nashik's manufacturing industry is that they are generally supportive of the Code but have some concerns. The dominant employer point of view is that more flexibility is needed in the way people are employed to react to the volatility of the markets, technological developments and global competition (Panagariya, 2025).

### Positive Aspects Cited:

Large employers are especially welcomed by the Code's ability to consolidate three separate laws into one, as they expect to see less complexity and cost to comply. The consolidated digital registration and return platform is well received, as multi-location businesses today are operating in multiple states' registration systems. The fixed-term employment contract provisions without categorizing workers as contract labour is seen as a positive aspect, as it provides flexibility of employment without compromising worker benefits (Business, 2020).

Raising the threshold from 100 to 300 workers in mandatory standing orders is advantageous to medium-sized businesses that had previously been treated with a "big-business approach. The rise in the number of workers (from 100 to 300) in a standing order is beneficial to businesses of medium size that were previously required to implement "big business" compliance. Likewise, the elimination of the previous government rules that required approval for job cuts and retrenchment in firms employing up to 300 people is welcomed as being a step that will help cut down on bureaucratic delays, but employers recognise the sensitivity of the regulation. New approaches to union recognition, such as negotiating unions and councils, are considered to have the potential to reduce union recognition disputes and increase positive collective bargaining. Recognized unions are valued by employers because they are able to represent majorities of workers, which may limit fragmentation and competing claims (Chatterji et al., 2025). Key opinion leaders' views on the implementation and organisation of the IR Code 2020 in manufacturing industries are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3. Stakeholder Perspectives on the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 in Manufacturing Industries**

Stakeholder Group	Positive Perceptions	Major Concerns	Organizational Implications	Reference
Employers	Simplified compliance and operational flexibility	Increased implementation and adaptation costs	Improved workforce management flexibility	(Bhuta, 2022)
SMEs	Reduced standing order compliance burden	Limited awareness and technological preparedness	Weak implementation capacity	(Roy & Dubey, 2022)
Trade Unions	Clearer union recognition mechanisms	Reduced worker protection and retrenchment safeguards	Potential increase in industrial tensions	(Mani, 2024)
Workers	Improved grievance handling mechanisms	Employment insecurity under fixed-term employment	Workforce uncertainty and trust concerns	(Chatterji et al., 2025)
Government	Ease of doing	Administrative and	Governance	(Mahato,

Authorities	business and labour law simplification	enforcement limitations	implementation challenges	2025)
Industrial Relations Scholars	Modernization of labour governance framework	Weak institutional enforcement mechanisms	Need for balanced industrial governance	(Dukes & Kirk, 2024)
Labour Policy Experts	Streamlined dispute resolution mechanisms	Risk of excessive labour flexibility	Need for balanced labour-management governance	(Rakhimova, 2023)
Manufacturing Organizations	Greater adaptability to changing market conditions	Transition-related industrial uncertainty	Organizational restructuring and HR adaptation	(Prakash et al., 2022)

**Concerns Expressed:**

Employers have some concerns, however. Owners of SMEs are concerned about the costs of implementation, especially for those digital compliance systems that demand technological investments and capacity building. The need to set up grievance redressal committees for all enterprises having only 20 or more workers is considered burdensome by the smaller firms. Some employers worry that better recognition systems could empower unions to be more aggressive in negotiating salaries, which could result in more strike threats. While somewhat protective the ban on strikes during conciliation and during the following periods is regarded as possibly inadequate in long strikes (Rakhimova, 2023).

Employers also report confusion about the implementation of various provisions of the Code at the state level, resulting in some business planning challenges. The transition period between the two is complex because the law's implementation is delayed, which leads to some uncertainties about the rules of employment, especially on the question of fixed-term contracts. Characterizes the worldview of workers and Trade Unions. Trade unions, representing worker views, express strong reservations on various aspects of the Code that they see as compromising their interests, as well as doubts as to the realization of the perceived advantages (Waas, 2022).

**Major Concerns:**

The higher level of prior government consent for retrenchment (100 to 300 workers) raises the strongest opposition. This clause takes away important safeguards for workers against arbitrary retrenchment, especially for those in companies of 100-300 employees, who have lost these prior approval safeguards, according to unions. Employers are still required to give notice and pay, but unions argue that government oversight made it harder to get rid of workers when it wasn't warranted and gave them negotiating power. The raised position of compulsory standing orders, affecting unions, also has an impact on the workers in establishments with 100-300 employees, as they will now have no legally binding terms of employment. The Code allows for voluntary standing orders, but unions are concerned that employers will not make such an order without being mandated to do so by legislation, making workers subject to arbitrary management decisions (Rani et al., 2021).

The regulation of strikes – in particular the prohibition of strikes during conciliation and for 60 days after is considered as overly restrictive of the right to strike. Unions say employers can delay conciliation to be able to postpone a legitimate strike, an instrument of the worker that is most effective in their bargaining. Although there are equal benefits provisions in place, concerns of disguised permanent employment without security are raised by fixed-term employment. Fixed-term contracts are a concern for unions as they fear that employers might make extensive use of them, thereby reducing the workforce to a more precarious situation.

**Potential Benefits Acknowledged:**

Not everything related to unions is bad. Many unions agree that better recognition mechanisms would be good for the genuinely representative unions as they could help to diminish long recognition battles. The negotiating council is viewed as potentially being a factor to enhance collective bargaining when more than one union exists, though the need for a 51% majority could stymie negotiations. Though it only provides for the operational details of the re-skilling fund, it is well received as it addresses technological unemployment concerns. Unions say this is recognition that there's a "small part" of the gains from economic efficiency that should be used to support transitions for workers. More severe penalties for Code violations are welcome, if applied properly. Unions say it is the quality of the implementation of the laws rather than the quality of the

laws themselves that is important, and better penalties are not worth having unless there is effective inspection and prosecution (Smith et al., 2025).

## **8. Government and Administrative Perspectives**

Parliamentary debates, statements and administrative decisions highlight the reformist aims of the Code and recognise the challenges of implementation. Consolidation and simplification will minimize compliance burden, especially for small businesses, without compromising the protections for workers, government officials say. The Code is designed to strike a balance between the flexibility of employers' needs for job creation and economic development and the security and welfare concerns of the workers.

Many provisions do not remove protections, they are simply making sense of thresholds in light of current realities of industrial scale operations, officials stress. The change from 100 to 300 worker thresholds shows that a formal economy of 100 workers is no longer considered large, and that excessive regulation stifles growth of the formal economy. The government stresses the need to leverage technology with a single digital platform to shift compliance from hurdle to opportunity. Single window systems can help cut down on corruption, boost transparency and speed up approvals, which can benefit all stakeholders. Administration views, however, recognize implementation difficulties, especially effective state capacity. Major investments in digital infrastructure, staff training, and organizational restructuring are needed for effective implementation. The Code's lofty goals are hampered by resource limitations in state labour departments (Panagariya, 2025).

## **9. Academic and Expert Perspectives**

Labour law experts and scholars of industrial relations look at the Code with mixed feelings, with some positive comments about its consolidation and some doubts in regard to certain provisions and prospects for implementation. The Code has been seen by many experts as the first step towards rationalizing the Indian labour law framework, as the existing framework was complex and definitely affected business operations and good labour protection. But there is a concern that the Code is more about flexing than secure employment and thus may contribute to the informalisation of jobs (Dukes & Kirk, 2024).

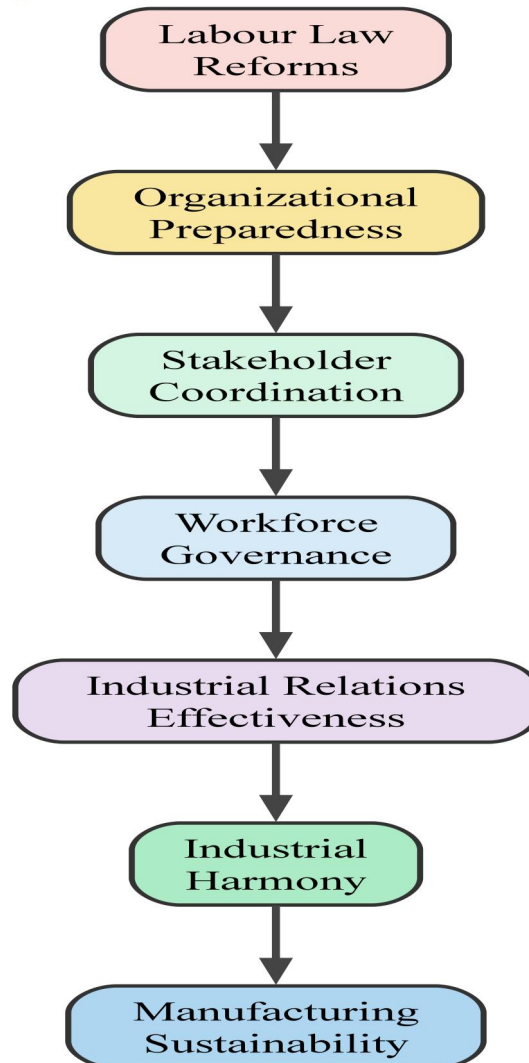
Of particular interest is the fixed-term employment system. Theoretically, it will offer flexibility whilst maintaining protection, but the experts remain skeptical as to how this will translate in terms of the benefits received and the fact that employers may seek to evade their permanent employment obligations through the use of fixed-term contracts. International experience shows that if they are not well implemented, they can aggravate precarity. There are mixed reviews on union recognition processes. Prolonged disputes may be lessened by the clear majority requirements but critics point out that the 51% rule may be hard to meet if the workers are split between several unions, leaving establishments with no recognised negotiating body.

Legal experts point out that the Code has an important margin of discretion for government authorities in handling disputes and enforcing compliance. Discretion allows for decision making in the context but it also adds uncertainty and a potential for inconsistent application. In general, stakeholders provided feedback indicating that implementing labour reforms is a long-term process that requires collaborative industrial relations arrangements to be established by organisations, trade unions and regulatory bodies to ensure good operational efficiency and workforce sustainability. The study suggests that the relationship between labour flexibility, organizational governance, institutional capacity to implement flexibility, and the mechanisms for stakeholder participation have a growing impact on industrial harmony in manufacturing industries. Labour law reforms need to be judged, therefore, not only on their legal impact but also on the other organizational and managerial dimensions (Chatterji et al., 2025).

## **10. Key Findings**

The study has a number of managerial implications to manufacturing organisations that are governed by a changing labour framework. To minimise conflicts in the implementation process and enhance the trust of the workforce, first, organizations should enhance internal labour-management communication systems. Second, manufacturing companies ought to strengthen grievance redressal systems, participatory management systems as well as industrial dialogue systems to sustain long term industrial harmony. Third, SMEs need increased institutional support, awareness-raising campaigns, and guidance on compliance to adapt well to the evolving labour regulations. Lastly, the leaders of organizations have to strike a balance between the flexibility of operations and the stability of the workforce to ensure sustainable industrial relations and organizational productivity. Figure 3 demonstrates a relation between the implementation of labour reform,

organizational governance, and the coordination of stakeholders and industrial harmony outcomes in the manufacturing industries (Collings et al., 2018).



**Figure 3. Relationship Between Labour Reform Implementation and Industrial Harmony in Manufacturing Industries**

**Achievement of Consolidation:** The Code has managed to merge various laws in a more sensible structure, which may make compliance easier. Nevertheless, the achievement of this potential hinges on the effective formulation of rules, building digital infrastructure, and capacity building of stakeholders.

**Flexibility vs. Protection Tensions:** The Code walks a fine line between flexibility and protection of the employer and the worker. Employer flexibility in provisions such as higher standing order and retrenchment thresholds give employers more flexibility in operations whereas worker protection provisions such as fixed-term employment and negotiating mechanisms focus on worker security. The question of whether this balance is correct or otherwise is still debated, although employers tend to agree with flexibility arrangements and unions worry about the loss of protection. **Implementation Issues:** Seventeen months after enactment, the implementation is not in full effect as states have delayed in rule-making and have capacity issues. Such a limbo leaves everyone in uncertainty and postpones any possible benefit realization.

**Stakeholder Divide:** There is a great deal of difference in terms of stakeholder views. The reforms of the Code are mostly welcome by the employers, especially by large businesses, though they have concerns regarding the implementation. Trade unions consider a number of these provisions a threat to the rights of workers but see possible advantages of more explicit recognition systems. The government underlines the need of reforms and struggles with the practical issues of implementation (Harney & Nolan, 2022).

**Capacity Constraints:** capacity constraints in both the private and the public sector are major implementation challenges. Most of the businesses and especially SMEs have no awareness and resources to do effective

compliance. Government labour departments have constraint in the number of personnel and resources to use which impacts enforcement and facilitation capacity (Alka et al., 2026).

Differential Effects: The Code has a wide variation of effects on the establishment sizes and sectors. The structure of large organized sector with advanced HR systems and formal industrial relations can easily sail the changes as compared to SMEs with limited resources. High-skill industries are more adaptive as compared to traditional manufacturing. The results of the research paper show that changes in labour laws are becoming more the tools of industrial regulation and not necessarily the legal regulatory tools. Industrial Relations Code, 2020 shows the impact of labour reforms on the adaptability of organisations, their management structures, institutional coordination, and stakeholder engagement processes in the manufacturing industries. Regarding Human Resource Management, the reforms underscore the increasing significance of participative governance, grievance management framework, flexibility of workforce, and the collaborative industrial relations models in ensuring sustainable organizational harmony (Goldar & Aggarwal, 2023).

### 11. Research Limitations and Future Directions

The research is confined by the fact that the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 has not been fully implemented yet, limiting the evaluation of its practical effects in the long term in the manufacturing industries. The study is mainly based on legal analysis, secondary sources and publicly available stakeholder views which restricts direct empirical validation. Subsequent research must embrace longitudinal and case study survey techniques, organisational level case studies, interviews with workers and measures of organisational performance to give more insights into the results of labour reforms. Cross-state, cross-sector, and cross-system comparative research on the governance of workforce, industrial harmony, and employment practices within the context of changing labour reforms can also enhance knowledge about workforce governance, industrial harmony, and employment practices.

### 12. Conclusion

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 has been a significant move towards reorganising and updating the system of industrial relations in India through the integration of several important labour laws into a single governance system. The current research paper analysed the implementation scenario, stakeholder attitudes and organizational consequences of the Code in the manufacturing industry in Nashik, which is a significant industrial ecosystem with different types of manufacturing processes, different organizational sizes and changing labour-management relations. The results suggest that the Code can enhance the simplification of regulation, coordination of industries, grievance management mechanisms, and workforce governance frameworks. Simultaneously, significant issues still exist in terms of the readiness to implement, awareness among the stakeholders, institutional capacity, issues of workforce security and disparate adaptability between SMEs and large manufacturing organizations. The analysis also illustrates that the role of labour reforms in organisational governance, Human Resource Management practices, collective bargaining systems and industrial harmony is becoming more and more significant than the conventional legal and regulation role that it plays. Although employers tend to enjoy the enhanced operational flexibility and the enhanced simplified compliance mechanisms, workers and trade unions still raise concerns about employment security and labour protection. Thus, the effectiveness of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 in the long term will be determined by the balance of implementation, the industrial regulation system, the efficient work of institutions, the involvement of workers, and the coordination of employers, workers, trade unions, and regulatory bodies to achieve sustainable industrial relations and organizational stability in the manufacturing industry.

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