

Union Membership Byte 2017

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Contents

Introduction.....2

Public and Private Sector.....4

Gender.....5

Age6

Race and Ethnicity.....7

Education.....8

Nativity9

States.....10

References.....12

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Introduction

Today, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released data on union membership for 2016.¹ Using that report, and additional analysis of the raw data, this paper presents trends in union membership from 1983 to 2016.

In 2016, the share of workers who were members of a union decreased 0.4 percentage point to 10.7 percent (see **Table 1**), continuing a downward trend that has occurred since at least the early 1980s, when directly comparable data became available (see **Figure 1**).

TABLE 1

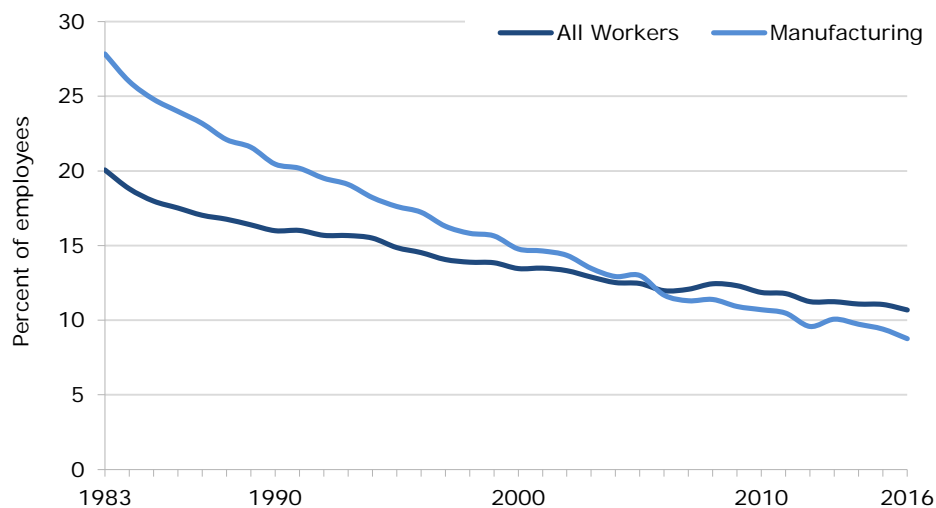
Union Membership and Coverage Rates, 2015–2016 (percent of employees)						
	Membership			Coverage		
	2015	2016	Change	2015	2016	Change
<i>All</i>	11.1	10.7	-0.4	12.3	12.0	-0.3
<i>Public sector</i>	35.2	34.4	-0.8	39.0	37.9	-1.1
<i>Private sector</i>	6.7	6.4	-0.3	7.4	7.3	-0.1
Manufacturing	9.4	8.8	-0.6	10.0	9.6	-0.4
<i>Gender</i>						
Women	10.6	10.2	-0.4	11.9	11.6	-0.3
Men	11.5	11.2	-0.3	12.6	12.3	-0.3
<i>Race or ethnicity</i>						
White	10.8	10.5	-0.3	12.0	11.7	-0.3
Black	13.6	13.0	-0.6	14.7	14.5	-0.2
Hispanic	9.4	8.8	-0.6	10.6	10.0	-0.6
Asian	9.8	9.0	-0.8	10.9	10.1	-0.8
<i>Age</i>						
16–24	4.4	4.4	0.0	5.3	5.3	0.0
25–34	9.7	9.2	-0.5	10.9	10.4	-0.5
35–44	12.3	12.0	-0.3	13.5	13.3	-0.2
45–54	13.6	13.3	-0.3	15.0	14.8	-0.2
55–64	14.3	13.3	-1.0	15.6	14.7	-0.9
65 or over	9.5	9.6	0.1	10.8	10.8	0.0
<i>Education</i>						
Less than high school	5.4	5.4	0.0	6.2	6.2	0.0
High school	10.2	9.9	-0.3	11.2	10.8	-0.4
Some college	10.9	10.6	-0.3	12.0	11.8	-0.2
College	10.9	10.4	-0.5	12.2	11.8	-0.4
Advanced Degree	16.9	16.0	-0.9	19.1	18.0	-1.1
<i>U.S.-born</i>	11.5	11.2	-0.3	12.8	12.5	-0.3
<i>Foreign-born</i>	8.9	8.2	-0.7	9.9	9.3	-0.6

Source and notes: Data for all, public, private, gender, race/ethnicity and age, from BLS, Union Members 2016; data for education and nativity from CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group. Some differences in columns three and six reflect rounding.

¹ See: <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf> (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017).

FIGURE 1

Union Membership Rate, 1983–2016



Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

In addition to a 0.4 percentage-point drop in membership rate, there were also 240,000 less union workers in 2016 than in 2015 (see **Table 2**).

TABLE 2

Union Members and Workers Covered by a Union Contract, 2015–2016

(thousands of workers)

	Membership			Coverage		
	2015	2016	Change	2015	2016	Change
<i>All</i>	14,795	14,555	-240	16,441	16,271	-170
<i>Public sector</i>	7,241	7,120	-121	8,031	7,834	-197
<i>Private sector</i>	7,554	7,435	-119	8,411	8,437	26
Manufacturing	1,369	1,295	-74	1,462	1,422	-40
<i>Gender</i>						
Women	6,833	6,667	-166	7,681	7,567	-114
Men	7,963	7,888	-75	8,760	8,704	-56
<i>Race or ethnicity</i>						
White	11,301	11,120	-181	12,627	12,436	-191
Black	2,246	2,209	-37	2,427	2,475	48
Hispanic	2,104	2,032	-72	2,365	2,308	-57
Asian	770	752	-18	860	839	-21
<i>Age</i>						
16–24	800	816	16	967	988	21
25–34	2,985	2,924	-61	3,363	3,296	-67
35–44	3,457	3,423	-34	3,785	3,782	-3
45–54	3,909	3,846	-63	4,306	4,269	-37
55–64	3,035	2,903	-132	3,329	3,209	-120
65 or over	610	643	33	691	726	35
<i>Education</i>						
Less than high school	544	538	-6	622	621	-1
High school	3,792	3,686	-106	4,139	4,051	-88
Some college	4,254	4,220	-34	4,697	4,700	3
College	3,344	3,266	-78	3,747	3,689	-58
Advanced Degree	2,853	2,840	-13	3,228	3,204	-24
<i>U.S.-born</i>	12,826	12,680	-146	14,244	14,131	-113
<i>Foreign-born</i>	1,961	1,870	-91	2,189	2,133	-56

Source and notes: Data for all, public, private, gender, race/ethnicity and age, from BLS, Union Members 2016; data for education and nativity from CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

Public and Private Sector

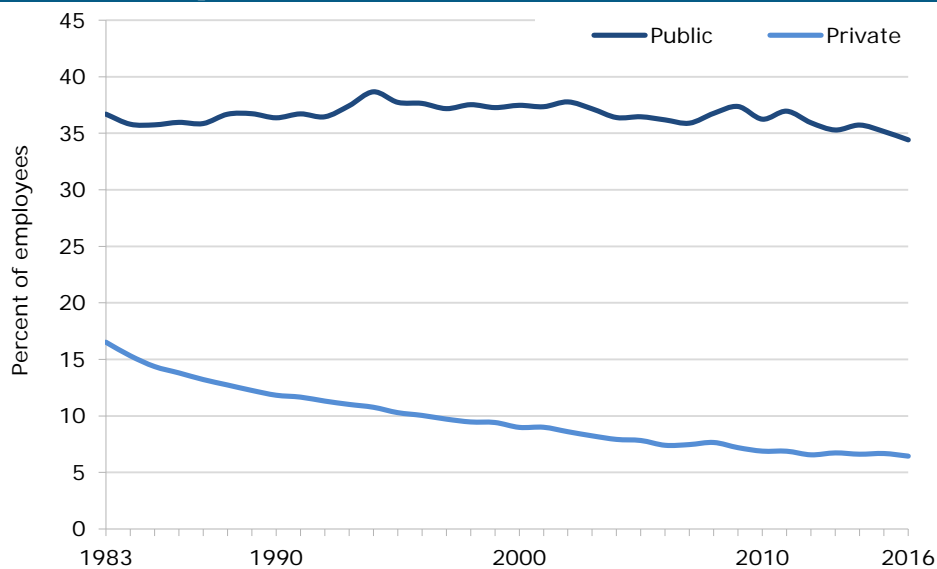
Union membership in the private sector fell by 119,000 and the membership rate fell 0.3 percentage point to 6.4 percent. There was a slightly larger decrease in union membership in the public sector (down 121,000), corresponding to a 0.8 percentage-point drop in the public sector membership rate to 34.4 percent.

Although public sector workers are more likely than their private sector counterparts to be union members, there remain more private-sector union members (7.4 million) than public-sector union members (7.1 million).

Since the early 1980s, the union membership rate in the private sector has declined steadily, while the membership rate in the public sector has been much more stable (see **Figure 2**).

FIGURE 2

Union Membership Rate, Public and Private Sectors, 1983–2016

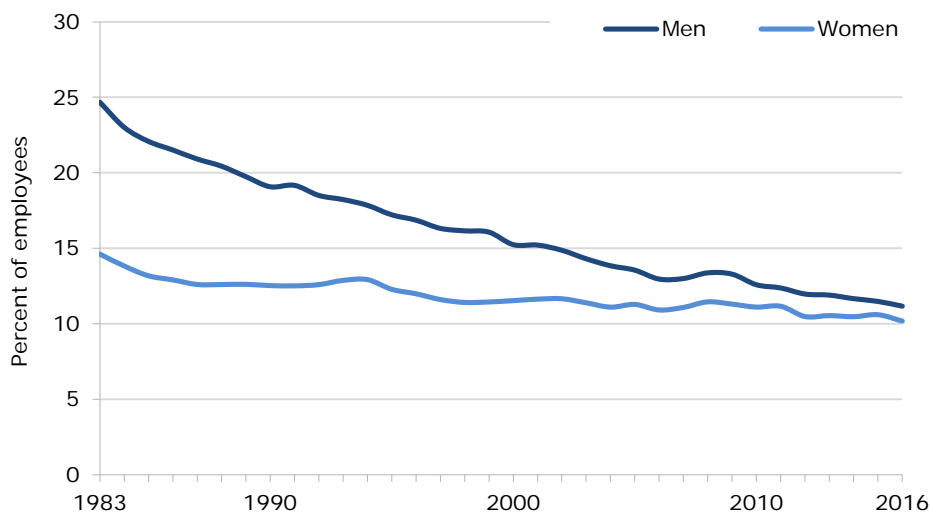


Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

Gender

In 2016, the gender gap in union membership continued to narrow (see **Figure 3**). The union membership rate for women fell 0.4 percentage point to 10.2 percent and the rate for men fell 0.3 percentage point to 11.2 percent. The number of female union members fell by 166,000 and the number of male union members fell by 75,000. Women also accounted for 45.8 percent of the union workforce in 2016, down from 46.2 percent in 2015.

FIGURE 3
Union Membership Rate, By Gender, 1983–2016



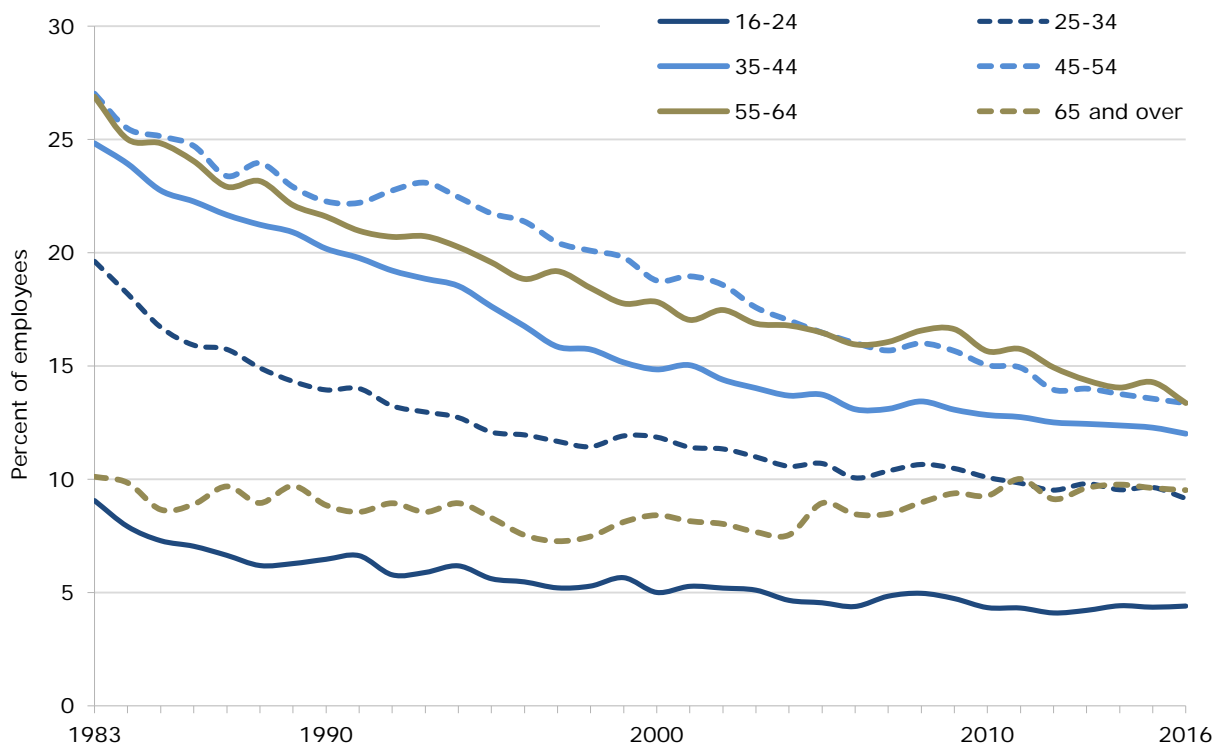
Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

Age

Union membership rates continue to decline for most age groups (see **Figure 4**). Generally, union membership rates are higher for each successive age group, with the lone exception being the 65 and older age group. In 2016, the membership rate of workers ages 16 to 24 remained flat at 4.4 percent. Workers ages 25 to 34 had a membership rate of 9.2 percent, 0.5 percentage point less than in 2015. Workers ages 35 to 44 also experienced a drop in membership rate from 12.3 percent in 2015 to 12.0 percent in 2016. Workers in both the 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 age groups had a union membership rate of 13.3 percent. For workers ages 45 to 54, this represented a 0.3 percentage-point drop from 2015, and for workers ages 55 to 64, this represented a 1.0 percentage-point decline. The membership rate of workers ages 65 and older rose 0.1 percentage point to 9.6 percent in 2016.

FIGURE 4

Union Membership Rate, By Age, 1983–2016



Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

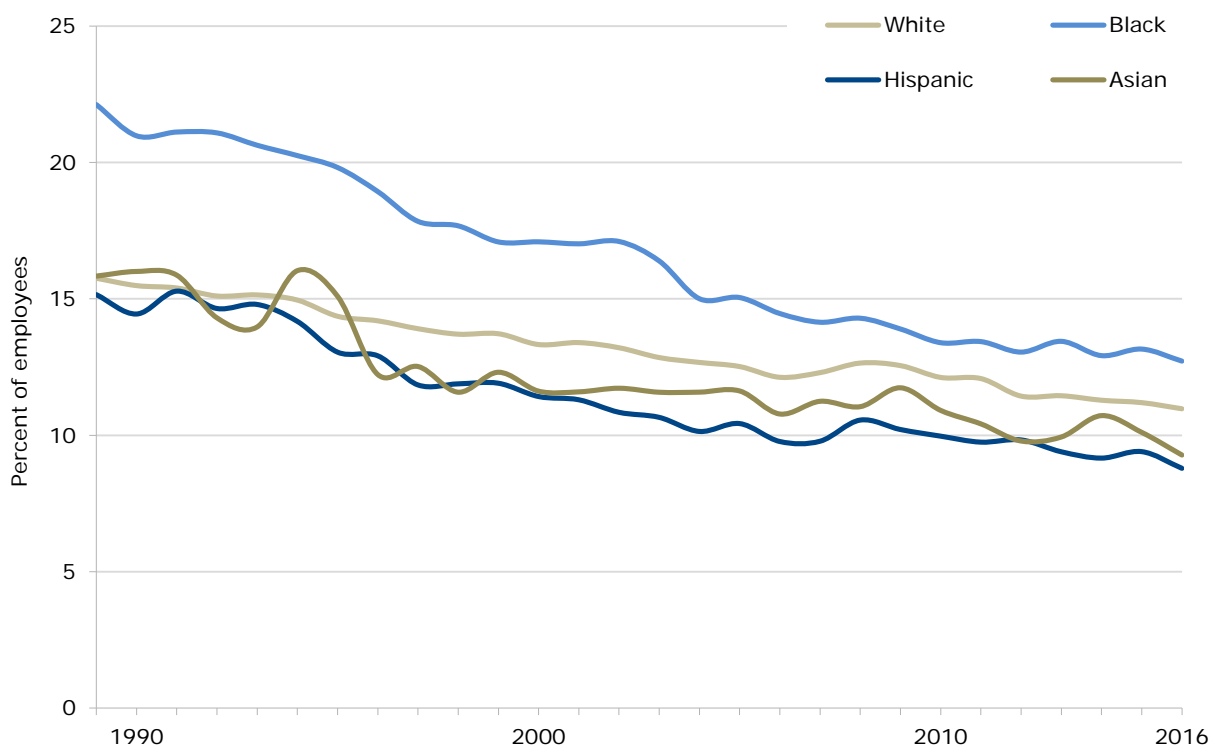
Race and Ethnicity

In 2016, union membership rates decreased in every racial/ethnic group. Asian workers saw the greatest decrease in membership rate (down 0.8 percentage point to 9.0 percent), followed by Hispanics (down 0.6 percentage point to 8.8 percent), Blacks (down 0.6 percentage point to 13.0 percent), and whites (down 0.3 percentage point to 10.5 percent).

Using a different, but consistent measure of race and ethnicity, **Figure 5** displays union membership rates from 1989 to 2016.²

FIGURE 5

Union Membership Rate, By Race/Ethnicity, 1989–2016



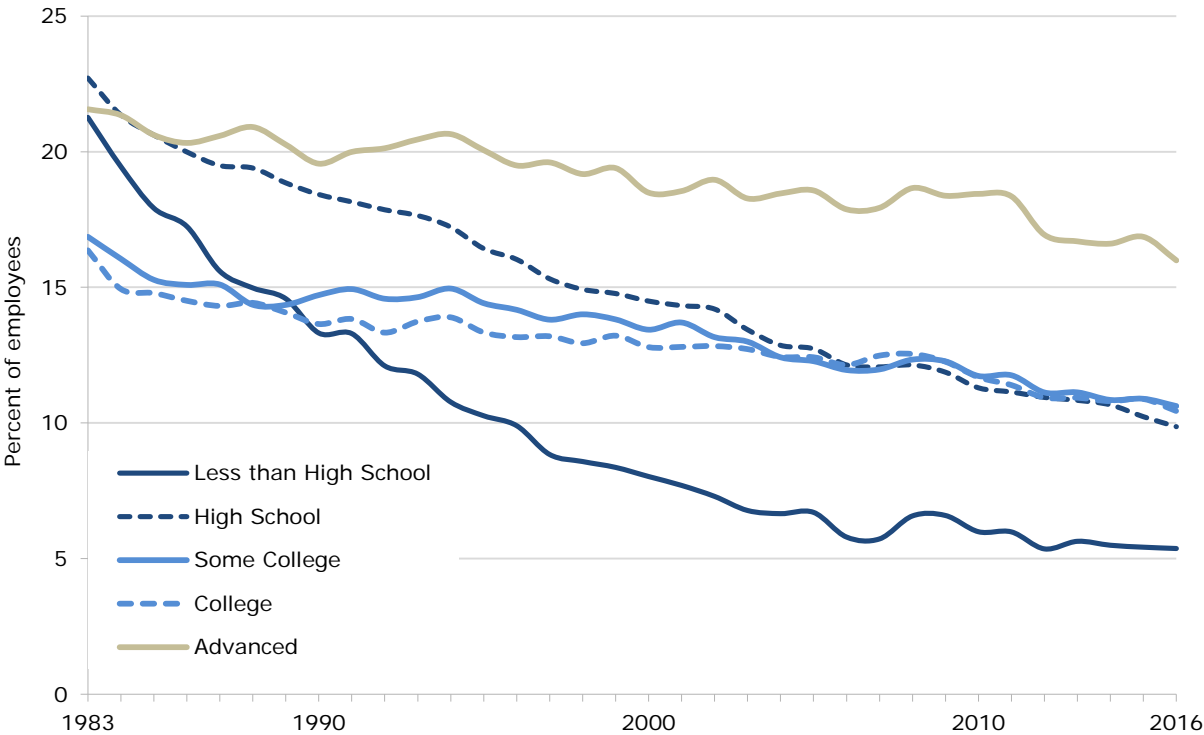
Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

² The race/ethnicity categories in Figure 5 differ from the categories that appear in the BLS Union Members report and those from Table 1 of this report. The categories in Figure 5 are mutually exclusive. Hispanics are not included in the white, Black, or Asian categories and are counted only in the Hispanic category. The BLS includes Hispanics in the data for white, Black, and Asian categories as well as in the separate Hispanic category.

Education

The BLS Union Members report does not publish union data by education level. Using the raw Current Population Survey (CPS) data, **Figure 6** shows trends in union membership by education level from 1983 to 2016. Union membership rates rise as education level increases, therefore workers with an advanced degree are the most likely to be union members. In 2016, their membership rate decreased 0.9 percentage point to 16.0 percent. The membership rate for workers with a bachelor’s degree fell 0.5 percentage point to 10.4 percent. Workers with some college but no degree and those with a high school degree all saw their membership rates decrease 0.3 percentage point to 10.6 percent and 9.9 percent, respectively. Workers with less than a high school degree had a union membership rate of 5.4 percent in 2016, the same as in 2015.

FIGURE 6
Union Membership Rate, By Education, 1983–2016



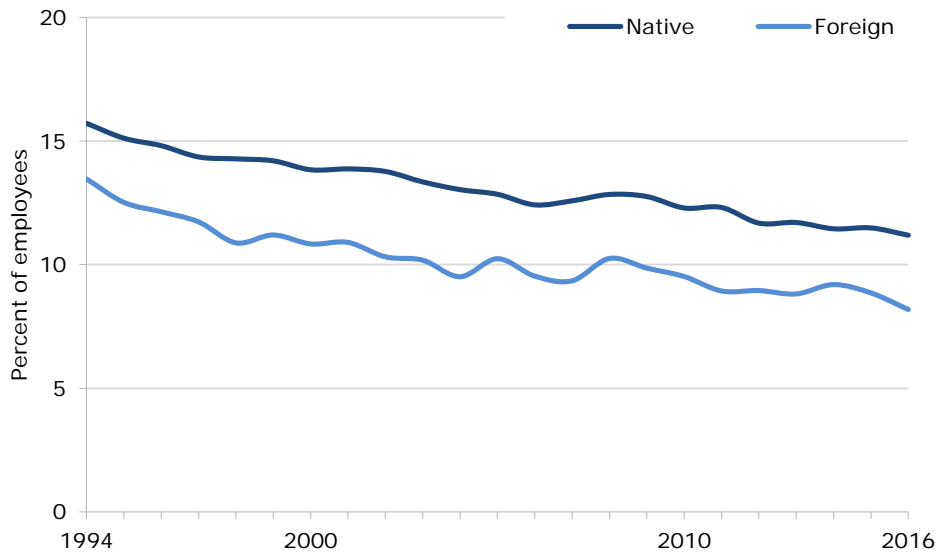
Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

Nativity

Figure 7 uses the raw CPS data to show the trends in unionization for native- and foreign-born workers since 1994. In 2016, native workers (11.2 percent) remained more likely than their foreign-born peers (8.2 percent) to be union members.

FIGURE 7

Union Membership Rate, By Nativity, 1994–2016



Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

States

The states with the five highest union membership rates were: New York (23.6 percent), Hawaii (19.9 percent), Alaska (18.5 percent), Connecticut (17.5 percent), and Washington (17.4 percent). The states with the five lowest rates were: South Carolina (1.6 percent), North Carolina (3.0 percent), Georgia and Arkansas (tied at 3.9 percent), and Texas (4.0 percent) (see **Table 3**).

TABLE 3
Union Membership Rate and Union Members, By State, 2015–2016

State	Union Membership Rate (%)			Union Members (thousands)		
	2015	2016	Change	2015	2016	Change
Alabama	10.2	8.1	-2.1	190	153	-37
Alaska	19.6	18.5	-1.1	60	55	-5
Arizona	5.2	4.5	-0.7	138	122	-16
Arkansas	5.1	3.9	-1.2	58	47	-11
California	15.9	15.9	0.1	2,486	2,551	65
Colorado	8.4	9.8	1.4	194	238	44
Connecticut	17.0	17.5	0.5	269	275	6
Delaware	9.2	11.4	2.2	38	48	10
D.C.	10.4	9.5	-0.9	35	32	-3
Florida	6.8	5.6	-1.2	546	456	-90
Georgia	4.0	3.9	-0.1	162	165	3
Hawaii	20.4	19.9	-0.5	119	119	0
Idaho	6.8	6.1	-0.7	46	42	-4
Illinois	15.2	14.5	-0.7	847	812	-35
Indiana	10.0	10.4	0.4	283	304	21
Iowa	9.6	8.9	-0.7	138	129	-9
Kansas	8.7	8.6	-0.1	110	109	-1
Kentucky	11.0	11.1	0.1	187	190	3
Louisiana	5.8	4.2	-1.6	107	76	-31
Maine	11.6	11.4	-0.2	64	65	1
Maryland	10.4	11.0	0.6	287	310	23
Massachusetts	12.9	12.1	-0.8	402	381	-21
Michigan	15.2	14.4	-0.8	621	606	-15
Minnesota	14.2	14.2	0.0	363	365	2
Mississippi	5.4	6.6	1.2	60	73	13
Missouri	8.8	9.7	0.9	230	262	32
Montana	12.2	11.9	-0.3	52	50	-2
Nebraska	7.7	7.4	-0.4	68	64	-4
Nevada	14.3	12.1	-2.3	177	146	-31
New Hampshire	9.7	9.4	-0.3	62	63	1
New Jersey	15.4	16.1	0.7	596	644	48
New Mexico	6.2	6.3	0.1	49	49	0
New York	24.7	23.6	-1.1	2,038	1,942	-96
North Carolina	3.0	3.0	0.0	123	129	6
North Dakota	5.4	5.5	0.1	19	20	1
Ohio	12.3	12.4	0.1	606	617	11
Oklahoma	5.6	5.4	-0.3	88	80	-8
Oregon	14.8	13.5	-1.3	235	228	-7
Pennsylvania	13.3	12.1	-1.3	747	685	-62
Rhode Island	14.2	15.5	1.3	68	74	6
South Carolina	2.1	1.6	-0.4	41	32	-9
South Dakota	5.9	5.2	-0.7	22	20	-2
Tennessee	5.4	5.7	0.3	146	158	12
Texas	4.5	4.0	-0.5	503	462	-41
Utah	3.9	4.7	0.8	50	62	12
Vermont	12.6	11.5	-1.2	36	33	-3
Virginia	5.4	4.3	-1.1	202	160	-42
Washington	16.8	17.4	0.7	500	539	39
West Virginia	12.4	11.8	-0.6	83	79	-4
Wisconsin	8.3	8.1	-0.2	223	219	-4
Wyoming	7.1	6.3	-0.8	19	16	-3

Source and notes: BLS, Union Membership 2016.

The five states with the most union members were: California (2.6 million), New York (1.9 million), Illinois (812,000), Pennsylvania (685,000), and New Jersey (644,000). The states with the five fewest union members were: Wyoming (16,000), South Dakota and North Dakota (tied at 20,000), South Carolina (32,000), and the District of Columbia and Vermont (tied at 32,000).

References

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. "Union Members 2016." Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>.