

# Union Membership Byte 2016

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## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

According to data released [today](#)<sup>1</sup> by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the share of the U.S. workforce that is a member of a union remained unchanged at 11.1 percent in 2015 (**Table 1**). The union membership rate has been declining steadily since at least the early 1980s, when directly comparable data became available (**Figure 1**).

**TABLE 1**  
**Union Membership and Coverage Rates, 2014–2015**  
(percent of employees)

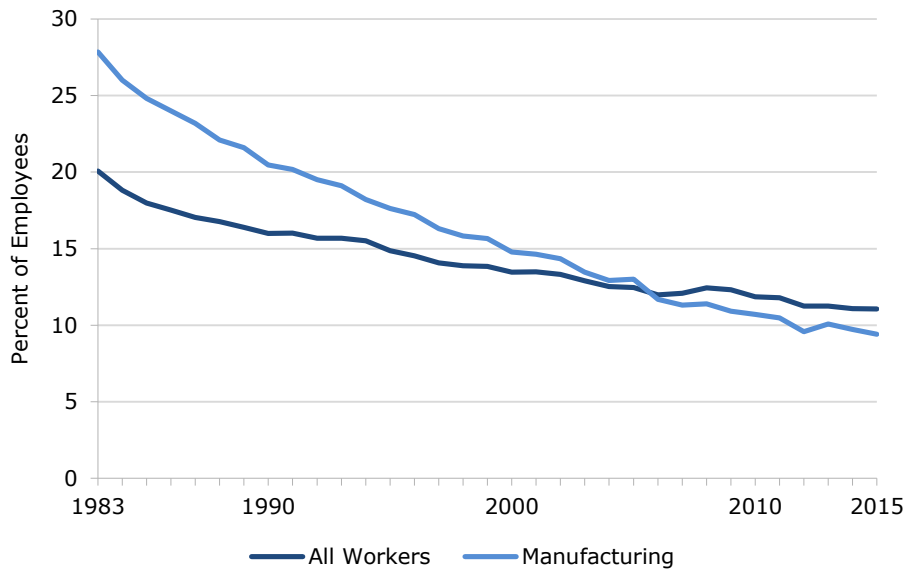
	Membership			Coverage		
	2014	2015	Change	2014	2015	Change
<i>All</i>	11.1	11.1	0.0	12.3	12.3	0.0
<i>Public sector</i>	35.7	35.2	-0.5	39.2	39.0	-0.2
<i>Private sector</i>	6.6	6.7	0.1	7.4	7.4	0.0
Manufacturing	9.7	9.4	-0.3	10.5	10.0	-0.5
<i>Gender</i>						
Women	10.5	10.6	0.1	11.7	11.9	0.2
Men	11.7	11.5	-0.2	12.8	12.6	-0.2
<i>Race or ethnicity</i>						
White	10.8	10.8	0.0	12.0	12.0	0.0
Black	13.2	13.6	0.4	14.6	14.7	0.1
Latino	9.2	9.4	0.2	10.3	10.6	0.3
Asian	10.4	9.8	-0.6	11.6	10.9	-0.7
<i>Age</i>						
16-24	4.5	4.4	-0.1	5.3	5.3	0.0
25-34	9.5	9.7	0.2	10.6	10.9	0.3
35-44	12.4	12.3	-0.1	13.7	13.5	-0.2
45-54	13.8	13.6	-0.2	15.0	15.0	0.0
55-64	14.1	14.3	0.2	15.5	15.6	0.1
65 or over	9.7	9.5	-0.2	10.9	10.8	-0.1
<i>Education</i>						
Less than high school	5.5	5.4	-0.1	6.3	6.2	-0.1
High school	10.7	10.2	-0.4	11.6	11.2	-0.4
Some college	10.9	10.9	0.0	11.9	12.0	0.1
College	10.8	10.9	0.1	12.1	12.2	0.1
Advanced Degree	16.6	16.9	0.3	18.8	19.1	0.3
<i>U.S.-born</i>	11.5	11.5	0.0	12.7	12.8	0.1
<i>Foreign-born</i>	9.2	8.9	-0.3	10.2	9.9	-0.4

**Source and notes:** Data for all, public, private, gender, race/ethnicity and age, from BLS, Union Membership 2015; 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 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

**FIGURE 1**

**Union Membership Rate, 1983–2015**



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

The total number of union members increased by about 219,000 members in 2015, but this increase did not keep pace with overall job growth of 2.3 million, so the union membership rate remained flat (see **Table 2**).

**TABLE 2****Union Members and Workers Covered by a Union Contract, 2014–2015**

(thousands of workers)

	Membership			Coverage		
	2014	2015	Change	2014	2015	Change
<i>All</i>	14,576	14,795	219	16,152	16,441	289
<i>Public sector</i>	7,218	7,241	23	7,927	8,031	104
<i>Private sector</i>	7,359	7,554	195	8,224	8,411	187
Manufacturing	1,409	1,369	-40	1,517	1,462	-55
<i>Gender</i>						
Women	6,638	6,833	195	7,434	7,681	247
Men	7,939	7,963	24	8,717	8,760	43
<i>Race or ethnicity</i>						
White	11,274	11,301	27	12,503	12,627	124
Black	2,097	2,246	149	2,303	2,427	124
Latino	1,978	2,104	126	2,220	2,365	145
Asian	779	770	-9	866	860	-6
<i>Age</i>						
16-24	804	800	-4	956	967	11
25-34	2,879	2,985	106	3,205	3,363	158
35-44	3,460	3,457	-3	3,823	3,785	-38
45-54	3,927	3,909	-18	4,286	4,306	20
55-64	2,924	3,035	111	3,229	3,329	100
65 or over	582	610	28	653	691	38
<i>Education</i>						
Less than high school	543	544	1	619	622	3
High school	3,958	3,792	-166	4,306	4,139	-167
Some college	4,223	4,254	31	4,639	4,697	58
College	3,202	3,344	142	3,587	3,747	160
Advanced Degree	2,644	2,853	209	2,992	3,228	236
<i>U.S.-born</i>	12,596	12,826	230	13,945	14,244	299
<i>Foreign-born</i>	1,974	1,961	-13	2,198	2,189	-9

**Source and notes:** Data for all, public, private, gender, race/ethnicity and age, from BLS, Union Membership 2015; data for education and nativity from CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

## Public and Private Sector

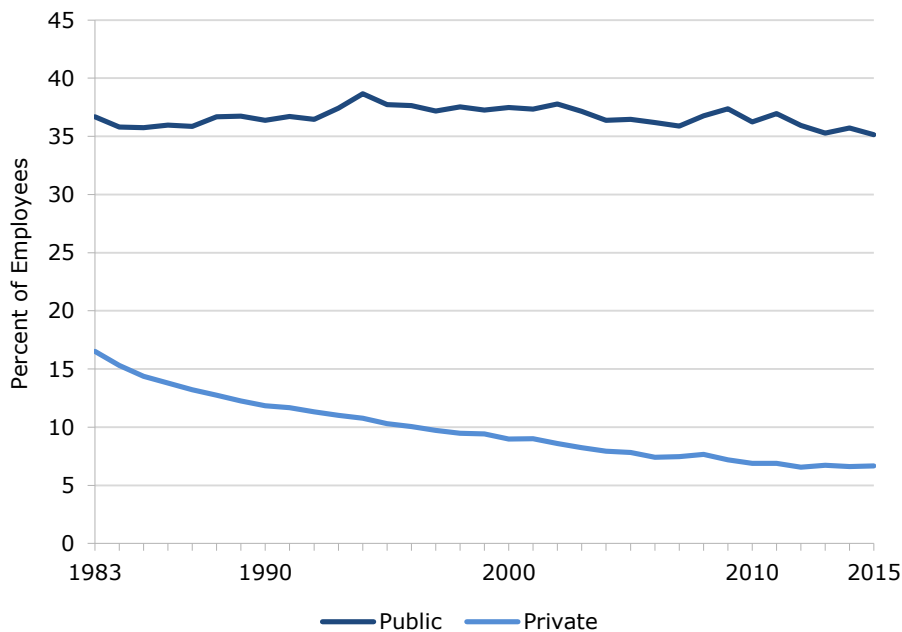
After one year of rising public-sector union membership, the public-sector membership rate fell by 0.5 percentage point to 35.2 percent in 2015. The number of public-sector union members rose by 23,000 and total public-sector employment increased by 388,000 workers. Meanwhile, in the private sector, the union membership rate rose 0.1 percentage point to 6.7 percent, even though the number

of private-sector union members increased by 195,000 members. This was due to the fact that overall job growth in the private sector (up about 1.9 million) outpaced union growth in the private sector.

Union membership remains higher in the private sector than the public sector, with 7.6 million private-sector union members and 7.2 million public-sector union members.

**Figure 2** shows that the union membership rate in the public sector has remained relatively stable since the early 1980s, and the union membership rate in the private sector has declined steadily over the same period.

**FIGURE 2**  
Union Membership Rate, Public and Private Sectors, 1983–2015



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

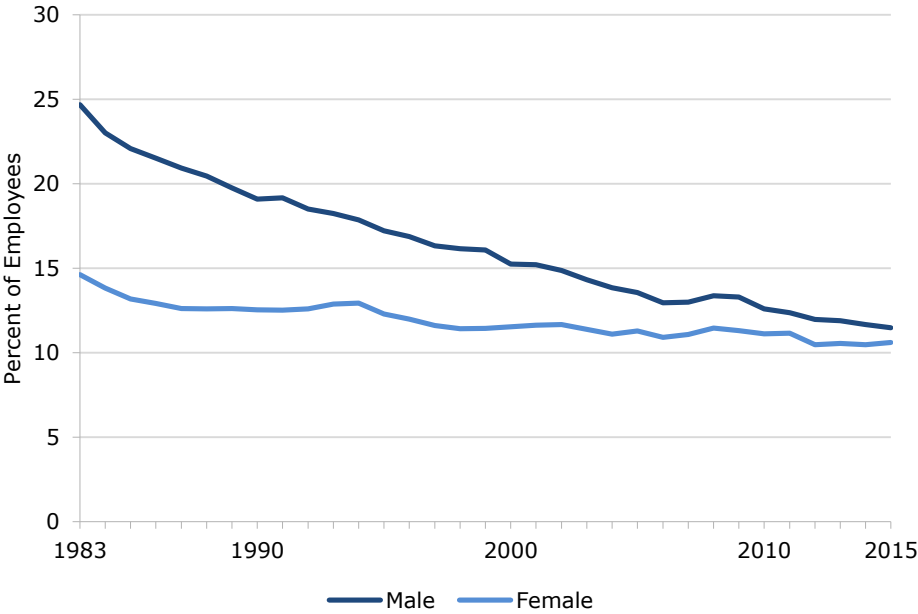
## Manufacturing

Historically, workers in manufacturing have been more likely than the average worker to be a union member (see Figure 1). However, since the mid-2000s, this has no longer been the case. In 2015, workers in manufacturing were less likely (9.4 percent) than the average worker (11.1 percent) to be a union member. This represents a decline of 0.3 percentage point from 2014.

# Gender

The union membership rate for women increased 0.1 percentage point to 10.6 percent, while the rate for men declined 0.2 percentage point to 11.5 percent. The total number of union members increased 195,000 for women and increased 24,000 for men. These net changes have slightly narrowed the gender gap in union membership rates. This convergence has occurred because the membership rate has fallen more slowly for women than it has for men (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3**  
Union Membership Rate, By Gender, 1983–2015



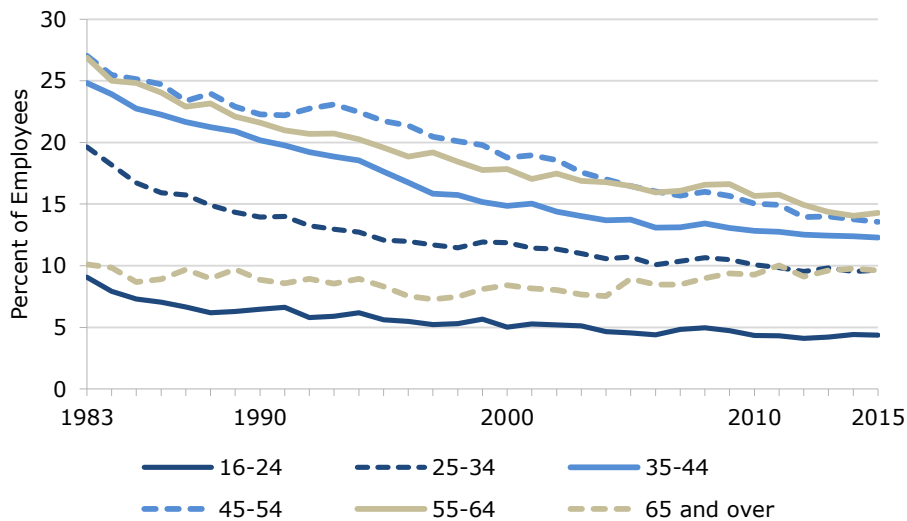
Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

# Age

Union membership also varies by age. With the exception of the 65 and older group, unionization rates increase with age. In 2015, the union membership rate of workers ages 16 to 24 was 4.4 percent (down 0.1 percentage point). Union membership rates are higher for 25-to-34 year-olds at 9.7 percent, and continue to rise along the age distribution for 35-to-44 year-olds (12.3 percent), 45-to-54 year olds (13.6 percent), and 55-to-64 year-olds (14.3 percent). Union membership rates then fall to 9.5 percent for workers ages 65 and older.

Union membership rates have been in decline for almost all age groups since the early 1980s. The one exception is the unionization rate of workers 65 and older, which has increased gradually in the 2000s (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4**  
**Union Membership Rate, By Age, 1983–2015**



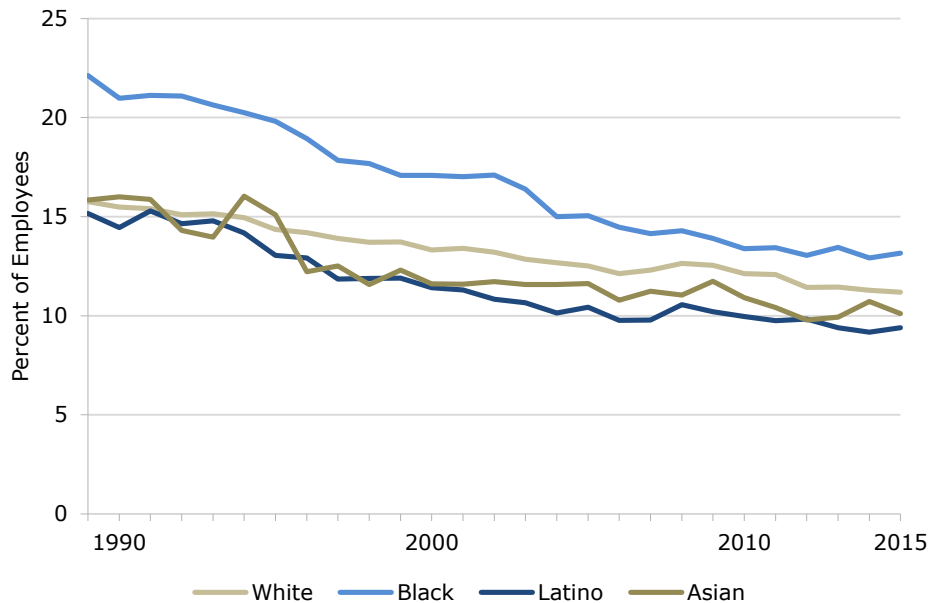
Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

## Race and Ethnicity

As has been the case for decades, black workers remain the racial group most likely to be union members (13.6 percent, up 0.4 percentage point from 2014). About 10.8 percent of white workers were members of unions (unchanged), and 9.8 percent of Asian workers (excluding Pacific Islanders) were union members. Latinos were the group with the lowest unionization rate (9.4 percent, up 0.2 percentage point).

Figure 5 shows union membership rates from 1989 to 2015 using a different, but consistent measure of race and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> Unionization rates for all races have declined, and the gap between blacks and the other groups has narrowed considerably over this time.

<sup>2</sup> The BLS racial and ethnic categories are overlapping, with Latinos appearing in the white, black, and Asian categories as well as in the separate Latino category. The categories in Figure 5, however, are mutually exclusive. Latinos are not included in the white, black, or Asian categories and are counted only in the Latino category; the Asian category in Figure 5 (but not in the BLS data) also includes Pacific Islanders.

**FIGURE 5****Union Membership Rate, By Race/Ethnicity, 1989-2015**

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

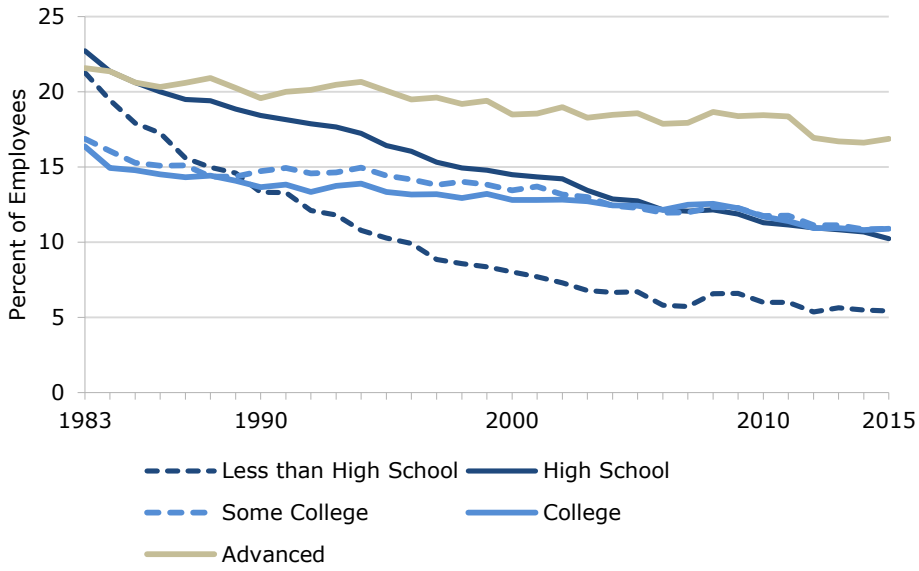
## Education

Although the BLS Union Membership report does not publish union membership rates by education level, we have calculated these rates using the underlying CPS data. The data show that union membership rates increase as education level increases. In 2015, workers with less than a high school degree had a union membership rate of 5.4 percent (down 0.1 percentage point). Workers with a high school degree (10.2 percent), some college but no degree (10.9 percent), and a bachelor's degree (10.9 percent) had unionization rates that were roughly twice that of workers with less than a high school degree. Workers with advanced degrees were the most likely to be union members (16.9 percent).

Since the early 1980s, union membership rates have declined sharply for those workers with less than a high school degree (**Figure 6**). This group of workers went from being one of the most unionized in 1983 to the least unionized in 2015. Workers with advanced degrees have seen their unionization rate decline much more slowly, significantly widening the gap between them and their less educated peers.

**FIGURE 6**

**Union Membership Rate, By Education, 1983–2015**



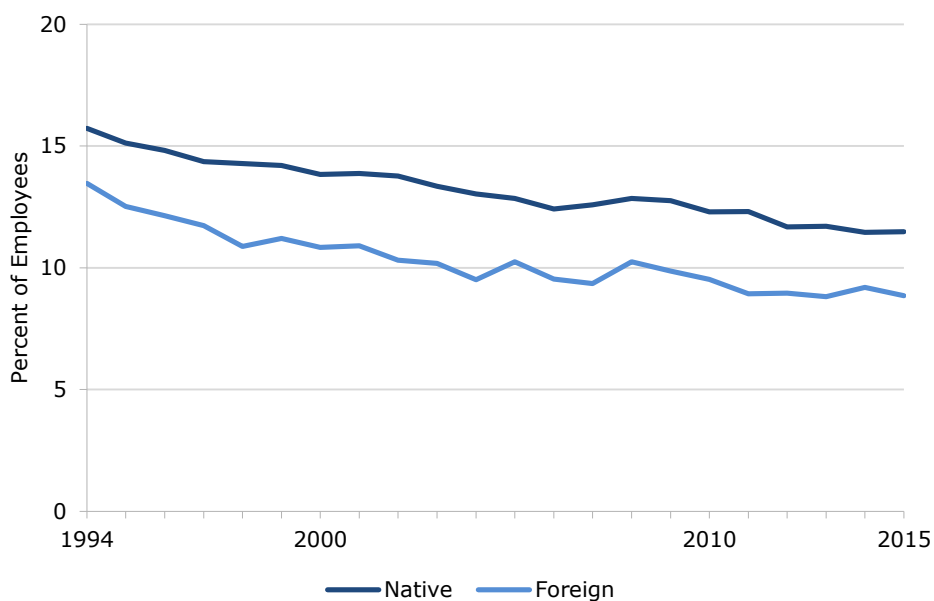
Source: CEPR analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group.

## Nativity

Using the underlying CPS data, we have calculated the unionization rates of native- and foreign-born workers going back to 1994. Following a long-term trend, U.S.-born workers (11.5 percent) were more likely than foreign-born workers (8.9 percent) to be union members in 2015 (**Figure 7**).

**FIGURE 7**

Union Membership Rate, By Nativity, 1994–2015



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

## States

In 2015, the five states with the highest union membership rates were: New York (24.7 percent), Hawaii (20.4 percent), Alaska (19.6 percent), Connecticut (17.0 percent), and Washington (16.8 percent). The five states with the lowest union membership rates were: South Carolina (2.1 percent), North Carolina (3.0 percent), Utah (3.9 percent), Georgia (4.0 percent), and Texas (4.5 percent) (**Table 3**).

TABLE 3

## Union Membership Rate and Union Members, By State, 2014–2015

	Union Membership Rate (%)			Union Members (thousands)		
	2014	2015	Change	2014	2015	Change
Alabama	10.8	10.2	-0.6	204	190	-14
Alaska	22.8	19.6	-3.2	70	60	-10
Arizona	5.3	5.2	-0.1	138	137	-1
Arkansas	4.7	5.1	0.4	52	58	6
California	16.3	15.9	-0.4	2,472	2,486	14
Colorado	9.5	8.4	-1.1	221	194	-27
Connecticut	14.8	17.0	2.2	231	269	38
Delaware	9.9	9.2	-0.7	38	38	0
D.C.	8.6	10.4	1.8	28	35	7
Florida	5.7	6.8	1.1	455	546	91
Georgia	4.3	4.0	-0.3	170	162	-8
Hawaii	21.8	20.4	-1.4	124	119	-5
Idaho	5.3	6.8	1.5	34	46	12
Illinois	15.1	15.2	0.1	831	847	16
Indiana	10.7	10.0	-0.7	299	283	-16
Iowa	10.7	9.6	-1.1	156	138	-18
Kansas	7.4	8.7	1.3	95	110	15
Kentucky	11.0	11.0	0.0	189	187	-2
Louisiana	5.2	5.8	0.6	96	107	11
Maine	11.0	11.6	0.6	62	64	2
Maryland	11.9	10.4	-1.5	310	287	-23
Massachusetts	13.7	12.9	-0.8	415	402	-13
Michigan	14.5	15.2	0.7	585	621	36
Minnesota	14.2	14.2	0.0	360	363	3
Mississippi	3.7	5.4	1.7	38	60	22
Missouri	8.4	8.8	0.4	214	231	17
Montana	12.7	12.2	-0.5	52	52	0
Nebraska	7.3	7.7	0.4	64	68	4
Nevada	14.4	14.3	-0.1	169	177	8
New Hampshire	9.9	9.7	-0.2	62	62	0
New Jersey	16.5	15.4	-1.2	635	596	-39
New Mexico	5.7	6.2	0.5	43	49	6
New York	24.6	24.7	0.1	1,980	2,038	58
North Carolina	1.9	3.0	1.1	76	123	47
North Dakota	5.0	5.4	0.4	18	19	1
Ohio	12.4	12.3	-0.1	615	606	-9
Oklahoma	6.0	5.6	-0.4	89	88	-1
Oregon	15.6	14.8	-0.8	243	235	-8
Pennsylvania	12.7	13.3	0.6	703	747	44
Rhode Island	15.1	14.2	-0.9	68	68	0
South Carolina	2.2	2.1	-0.1	41	41	0
South Dakota	4.9	5.9	1.0	18	22	4
Tennessee	5.0	5.4	0.4	127	146	19
Texas	4.8	4.5	-0.3	543	503	-40
Utah	3.7	3.9	0.2	46	50	4
Vermont	11.1	12.6	1.5	32	36	4
Virginia	4.9	5.4	0.5	179	202	23
Washington	16.8	16.8	0.0	491	500	9
West Virginia	10.6	12.4	1.8	73	83	10
Wisconsin	11.7	8.3	-3.4	306	223	-83
Wyoming	6.7	7.1	0.4	17	19	2

Source and notes: BLS, Union Membership 2015.

The five states with the most union members were: California (2.5 million), New York (2.0 million), Illinois (847,000), Pennsylvania (747,000), and Michigan (621,000). The five states with the fewest union members were: Wyoming and North Dakota (tied at 19,000), South Dakota (22,000), the District of Columbia (35,000), and Vermont (36,000).

## References

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2016. "Union Members 2015." Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>.