

Union Byte 2015

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Introduction

The share of the U.S. workforce that is a member of a union dipped 0.2 percentage points to 11.1 percent in 2014 (see **Table 1**). The drop was on par with the average pace of decline in the union membership rate since the early 1980s, when directly comparable data became available (**Figure 1**).

TABLE 1

Union membership and coverage rates, 2013-2014

(percent of employees)

	Membership			Coverage		
	2013	2014	Change	2013	2014	Change
All	11.3	11.1	-0.2	12.4	12.3	-0.1
Public sector	35.3	35.7	0.4	38.7	39.2	0.5
Private sector	6.7	6.6	-0.1	7.5	7.4	-0.1
Manufacturing	10.1	9.7	-0.4	11.0	10.5	-0.5
Gender						
Women	10.5	10.5	0.0	11.8	11.7	-0.1
Men	11.9	11.7	-0.2	13.0	12.8	-0.2
Race or ethnicity						
White	11.0	10.8	-0.2	12.2	12.0	-0.2
Black	13.6	13.2	-0.4	15.0	14.6	-0.4
Latino	9.4	9.2	-0.2	10.3	10.3	0.0
Asian	9.4	10.4	1.0	10.4	11.6	1.2
Age						
16-24	4.2	4.5	0.3	4.8	5.3	0.5
25-34	9.8	9.5	-0.3	11.0	10.6	-0.4
35-44	12.5	12.4	-0.1	13.7	13.7	0.0
45-54	14.0	13.8	-0.2	15.4	15.0	-0.4
55-64	14.3	14.1	-0.3	15.7	15.5	-0.2
65 or over	9.6	9.7	0.1	10.5	10.9	0.4
Education						
Less than high school	5.6	5.5	-0.1	6.3	6.3	-0.1
High school	10.8	10.7	-0.2	11.7	11.6	-0.2
Some college	11.1	10.9	-0.3	12.2	11.9	-0.3
College	10.9	10.8	-0.1	12.3	12.1	-0.1
Advanced Degree	16.7	16.6	-0.1	18.7	18.8	-0.1
U.S.-born	11.7	11.5	-0.3	12.9	12.7	-0.3
Foreign-born	8.8	9.2	0.4	9.7	10.2	0.4

Notes: Data for all, public, private, gender, race/ethnicity and age, from BLS, Union Membership 2014; data for education and nativity from CEPR analysis of CEPR extract of CPS. Some differences in columns three and six reflect rounding.

According to data released today by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the total number of union members increased in 2014 (up about 48,000 members or 0.3 percent) but the workforce grew more rapidly (up about 2.3 million or 1.8 percent), driving down the share of union members in the total workforce (see **Table 2**).

TABLE 2

Union members and workers covered by a union contract, 2013-2014

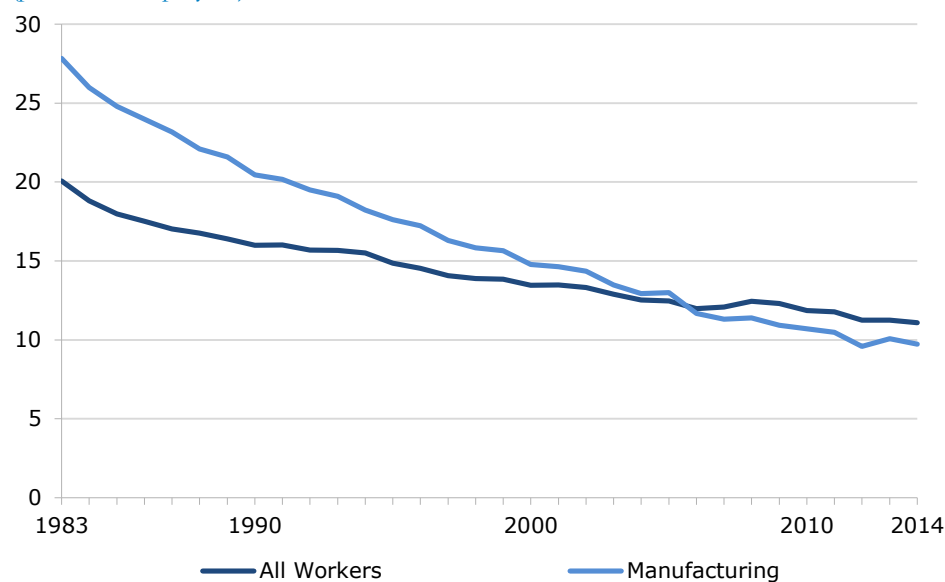
(thousands of workers)

	Membership			Coverage		
	2013	2014	Change	2013	2014	Change
All	14,528	14,576	48	16,028	16,152	124
Public sector	7,210	7,218	8	7,900	7,927	27
Private sector	7,318	7,359	41	8,128	8,224	96
Manufacturing	1,431	1,409	-22	1,558	1,517	-41
Gender						
Women	6,573	6,638	65	7,340	7,434	94
Men	7,955	7,939	-16	8,688	8,717	29
Race or ethnicity						
White	11,324	11,274	-50	12,507	12,503	-4
Black	2,081	2,097	16	2,294	2,303	9
Latino	1,952	1,978	26	2,141	2,220	79
Asian	683	779	96	758	866	108
Age						
16-24	745	804	59	854	956	102
25-34	2,886	2,879	-7	3,228	3,205	-23
35-44	3,458	3,460	2	3,790	3,823	33
45-54	3,990	3,927	-63	4,377	4,286	-91
55-64	2,899	2,924	25	3,176	3,229	53
65 or over	549	582	33	603	653	50
Education						
Less than high school	558	543	-15	621	619	-2
High school	3,929	3,958	29	4,255	4,306	51
Some college	4,309	4,223	-86	4,705	4,639	-66
College	3,170	3,202	32	3,575	3,587	12
Advanced Degree	2,550	2,644	93	2,861	2,992	131
U.S.-born	12,677	12,596	-81	13,986	13,945	-42
Foreign-born	1,839	1,974	135	2,030	2,198	168
Notes: Data for all, public, private, gender, race/ethnicity and age, from BLS, Union Membership 2014; data for education and nativity from CEPR analysis of CEPR extract of CPS.						

FIGURE 1

Union Membership Rate, 1983-2014

(percent of employees)



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

Public and Private Sector

The decline in the share of union members reflected very different trends in the public and private sector. The union membership rate fell 0.1 percentage points in the private sector, even though the number of private-sector union members increased by about 41,000 (or 0.6 percent). As with the overall numbers, however, the rise in total employment in the private sector (up almost 2.6 million workers or 2.3 percent) outpaced union growth, leading to a decline in the union share. Meanwhile, in the public sector, union membership increased 0.4 percentage points on what was essentially no change in public-sector union members (up 8,000 workers or 0.1 percent); total public-sector employment fell about 226,000 workers or 1.1 percent.

The net changes in the private and public sectors leave union membership almost evenly divided between the two sectors with about 7.4 million union members in the private sector and about 7.2 million in the public sector.

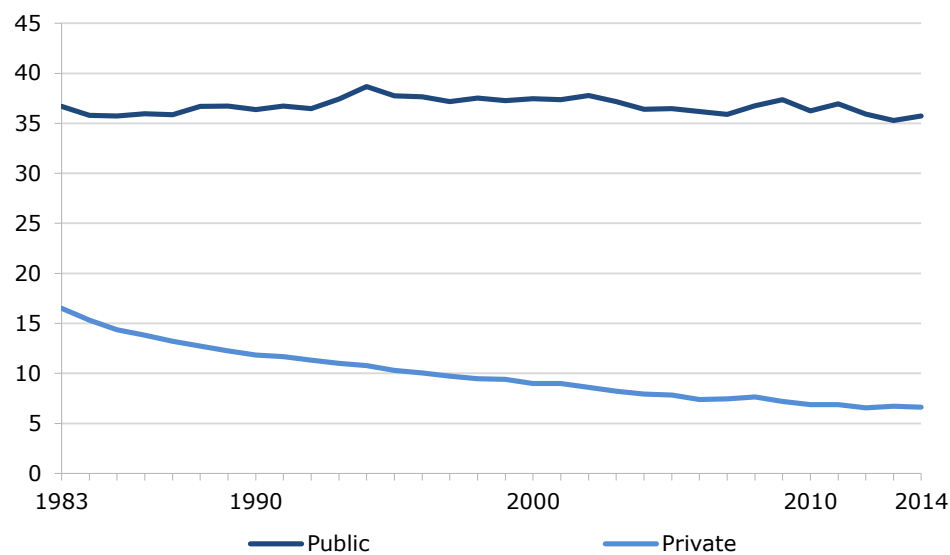
The union membership rate, however, remains much higher in the public sector (35.7 percent) than in the private sector (6.6 percent). Using the same Current Population Survey (CPS) data that are the source of the data released today, the union membership rate in the public sector has held relatively

constant since the early 1980s (**Figure 2**); roughly comparable data from other sources suggests that the unionization rate in the public sector has changed little since the mid-1970s.¹

FIGURE 2

Union Membership Rate, Public and Private Sectors, 1983-2014

(percent of employees)



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

Manufacturing

In 2014, workers in manufacturing were *less likely* (9.7 percent) than the average worker (11.1 percent) to be a member of a union. As Figure 1 shows, the lower union membership rate in manufacturing has been a feature of the labor market since the mid-2000s, reversing a long-standing historical pattern where workers in manufacturing were considerably more likely to be unionized than the average worker.

Gender

The union membership rate fell for men (down 0.2 percentage points) and was unchanged for women. The total number of union members decreased slightly for men (down 16,000 or 0.2 percent), but increased for women (up 65,000 or 1.0 percent).

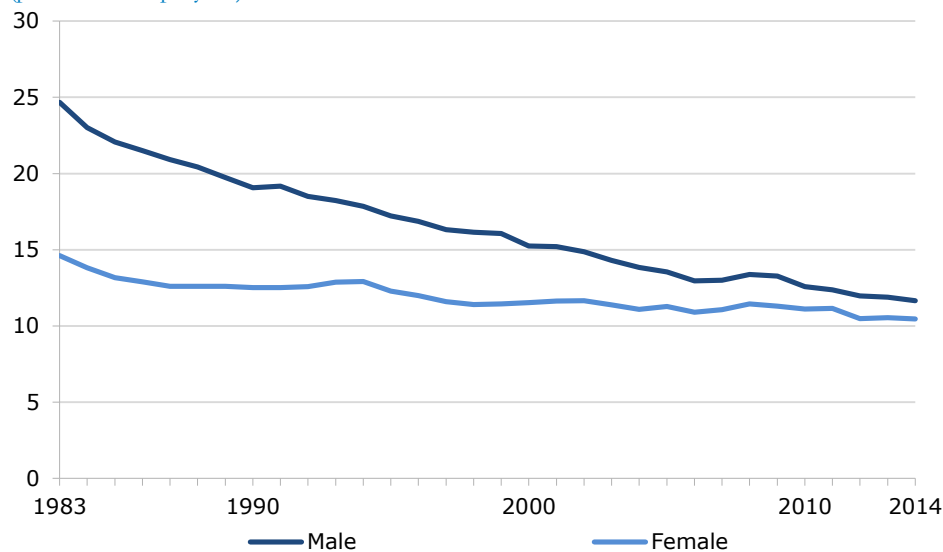
¹ See, for example, [Schmitt and Zipperer \(2009\)](#), Figure 1.

These net changes increased the share of women in total union membership from 45.2 percent in 2013 to 45.5 percent in 2014. If recent trends continue, women are on target to be a majority of the union workforce sometime in the mid-2020s.² But, women continue to be less likely to be a member of a union (10.5 percent) than men (11.7 percent). All of the long-term gender convergence in union membership rates 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, 1983-2014

(percent of employees)



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

Age

Union membership varies considerably by age. In 2014, only 4.5 percent of workers ages 16 to 24 were members of a union (up 0.3 percentage points from 2013). At 9.5 percent, the union membership rate was more than twice as high for 25-to-34 year-olds (down 0.3 percentage points from 2013). Unionization rates continue to rise with age for 35-to-44 year-olds (12.4 percent, down 0.1 percentage points from 2014), 45-to-54 year-olds (13.8 percent, down 0.2 percentage points), and 55-to-64 year-olds (14.1 percent, down 0.2 percentage points). Union membership rates fall off sharply – to 9.7 percent – for workers 65 and older (up 0.1 percentage points relative to 2013).

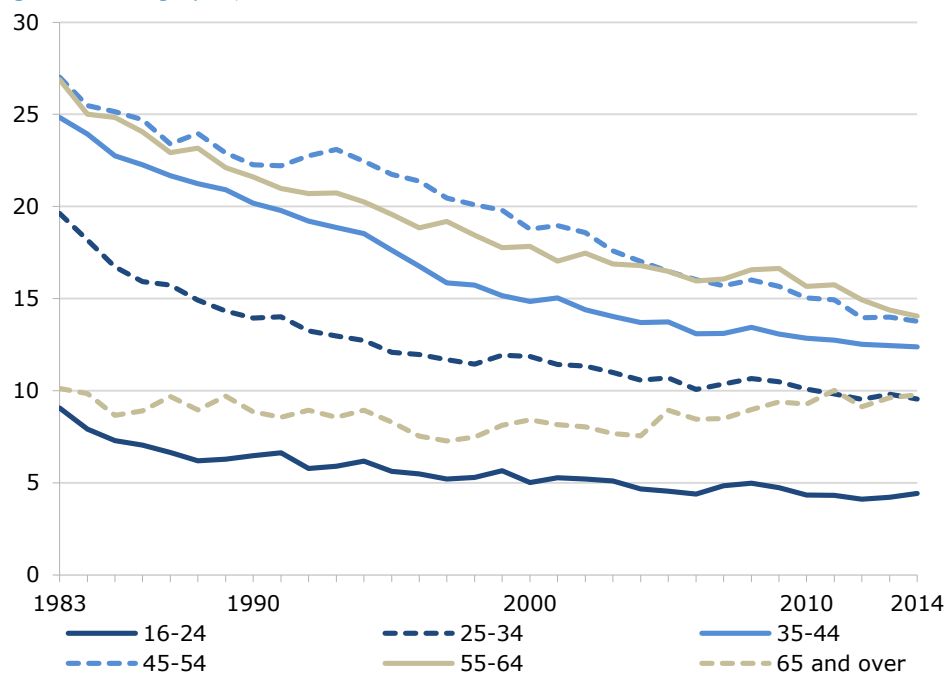
2 See Jones, Schmitt, and Woo (2014), Figure 2.

As **Figure 4** shows, for the entire period covered by the CPS data, unionization rates have been falling almost continuously for workers at every age range, except those 65 and older, which have increased slowly in the 2000s.

FIGURE 4

Union Membership Rate, By Age, 1983-2014

(percent of employees)



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

Race and ethnicity

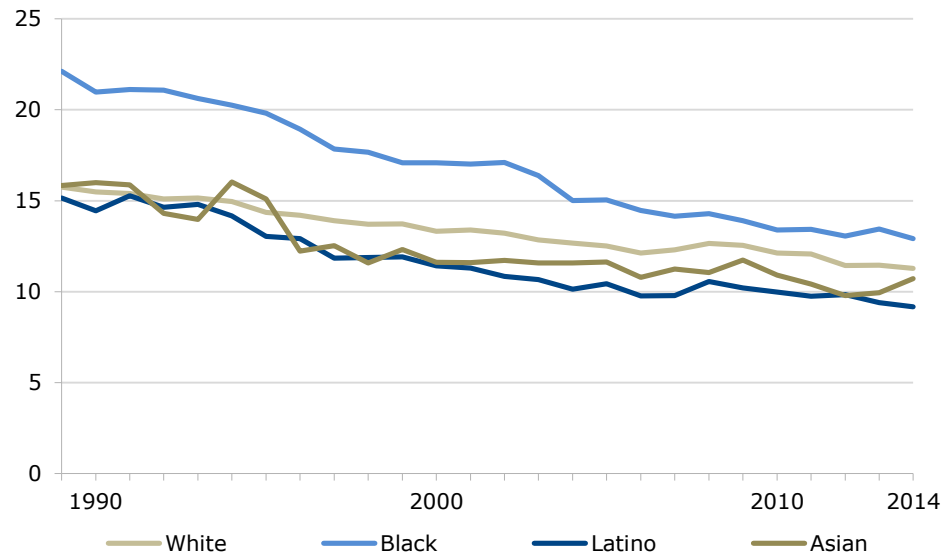
In 2014, blacks were the racial or ethnic group that was most likely to be a union member (13.2 percent), but the share of black workers who were union members fell in 2014 (down 0.4 percentage points). Whites were the group with the next highest share of union members (10.8 percent, down 0.2 percentage points from 2013). About 10.4 percent of Asians (excluding Pacific Islanders) were union members, making them only somewhat less likely than whites to be union members, though the uptick in the 2014 membership rate for Asians --up 1.0 percentage points last year-- may simply be a function of sampling variability for a group that is, at about six percent of the workforce, the smallest of the four race and ethnic categories (Tables 1 and 2). Latinos had the lowest share of union members (9.2 percent, down 0.2 percentage points).

Figure 5 displays longer-term trends for unionization rates using a different, but consistent measure of race that goes back to 1989.³ Two features of the chart stand out. First, the long-term downward trend in unionization cuts across all four major racial and ethnic categories. Second, while blacks remain more likely than other groups to be unionized, the gap between blacks and the others has narrowed considerably since at least the late 1980s.

FIGURE 5

Union Membership Rate, By Race/Ethnicity, 1989-2014

(percent of employees)



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

Education

The BLS Union Membership report does not publish union data by education categories, but the underlying CPS data do allow us to examine trends in unionization by education level. The probability of being in a union rises strongly with educational attainment. In 2014, the educational category with the highest rate of union membership was workers with an advanced degree or more (16.6 percent). Workers with a college degree (10.8 percent), some college but no degree (10.9 percent), and only a high school degree (10.7 percent) were much less likely to be union members than those with an advanced degree. The educational group that was least likely to be a union member were those workers with less than a high school degree (5.5 percent).

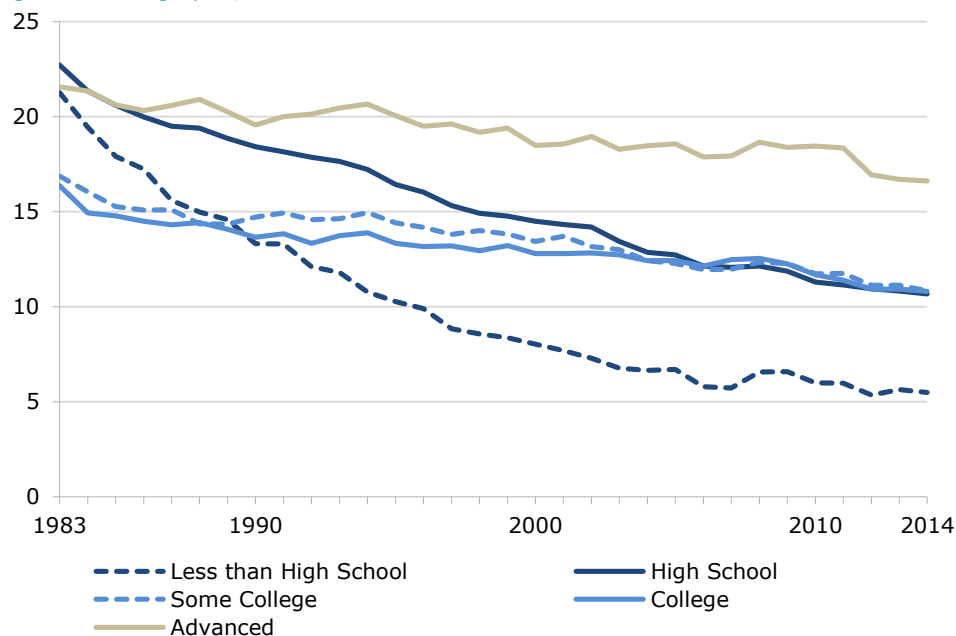
³ The BLS racial and ethnic categories are overlapping, with Latinos appearing in the white, black, and Asian categories as well as in the separate Latino category. The categories in Figure 5, however, are mutually exclusive. Latinos are not included in the white, black, or Asian categories and counted only in the Latino category; the Asian category in Figure 5 (but not in the BLS data) also includes Pacific Islanders.

Since 1983, union membership rates have declined most for workers with less than a high school degree (**Figure 6**). In 1983, less than high school educated workers were among the most unionized of all workers; by 2014, they were far and away the least likely to be union members. Workers with a high school degree (and no further education) were the group that experienced the next largest decline in unionization over the period. Declines in membership rates were significant, but smaller for workers with some college, a four-year college degree, or an advanced degree.

FIGURE 6

Union Membership Rate, By Education, 1983-2014

(percent of employees)



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

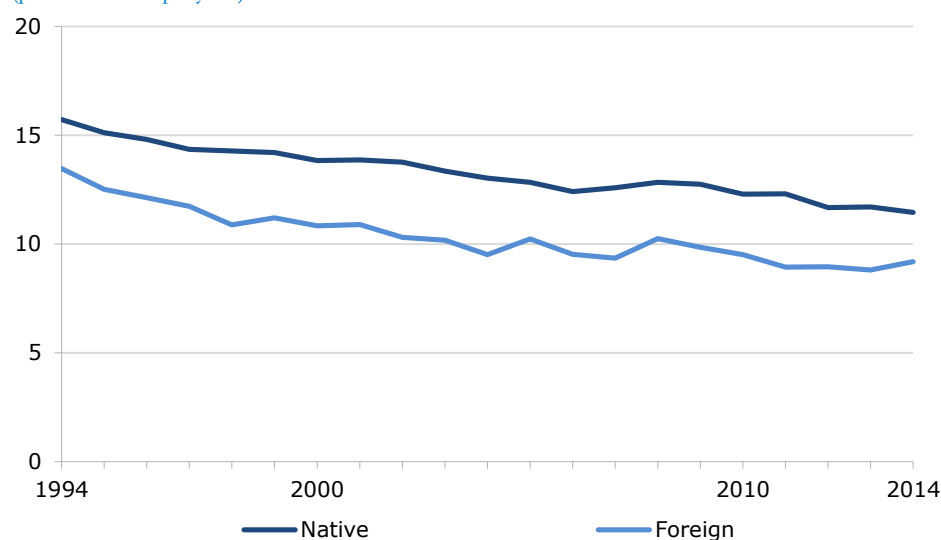
Nativity

The BLS does not report unionization rates by nativity, but, again, it is possible to use the CPS data to calculate unionization rates by country of birth back to 1994 (when the CPS began to ask respondents about where they were born). In 2014, U.S.-born workers (11.5 percent) were more likely than foreign-born workers (9.2 percent) to be union members, consistent with a long-term trend (**Figure 7**). But, last year, membership rates for foreign-born workers rose 0.4 percentage points, while they fell 0.2 percentage points for U.S.-born workers.

FIGURE 7

Union Membership Rate, By Nativity, 1994-2014

(percent of employees)



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

States

In 2014, the five states with the highest union membership rates were: New York (24.6 percent), Alaska (22.8 percent), Hawaii (21.8 percent), Washington (16.8 percent), and New Jersey (16.5 percent). The five states with the lowest union membership rates were: North Carolina (1.9 percent), South Carolina (2.2 percent), Mississippi and Utah (tied at 3.7 percent) and Georgia (4.3 percent). (See **Table 3**.)

The five states with the most union members were: California (2.5 million), New York (2.0 million), Illinois (831,000), Pennsylvania (703,000), and New Jersey (635,000). The five states with the fewest union members were: Wyoming (17,000), South Dakota and North Dakota (18,000), District of Columbia (28,000), and Vermont (32,000). (See **Table 3**.)

TABLE 3**Union Membership Rate and Union Members, By State, 2013-2014**

	Union Membership Rate (%)			Union Members (thousands)		
	2013	2014	Change	2013	2014	Change
Alabama	10.7	10.8	0.1	203	204	1
Alaska	23.1	22.8	-0.3	71	70	-1
Arizona	5.0	5.3	0.3	122	138	16
Arkansas	3.5	4.7	1.2	38	52	14
California	16.4	16.3	-0.1	2,430	2,472	42
Colorado	7.6	9.5	1.9	171	221	50
Connecticut	13.5	14.8	1.3	207	231	24
Delaware	10.3	9.9	-0.4	38	38	0
D.C.	9.3	8.6	-0.7	29	28	-1
Florida	5.4	5.7	0.3	414	455	41
Georgia	5.3	4.3	-1.0	209	170	-39
Hawaii	22.1	21.8	-0.3	121	124	3
Idaho	4.7	5.3	0.6	29	34	5
Illinois	15.8	15.1	-0.7	851	831	-20
Indiana	9.3	10.7	1.4	249	299	50
Iowa	10.1	10.7	0.6	143	156	13
Kansas	7.5	7.4	-0.1	94	95	1
Kentucky	11.2	11	-0.2	194	189	-5
Louisiana	4.3	5.2	0.9	75	96	21
Maine	11.1	11	-0.1	64	62	-2
Maryland	11.6	11.9	0.3	308	310	2
Massachusetts	13.7	13.7	0.0	401	415	14
Michigan	16.3	14.5	-1.8	633	585	-48
Minnesota	14.3	14.2	-0.1	362	360	-2
Mississippi	3.7	3.7	0.0	38	38	0
Missouri	8.6	8.4	-0.2	219	214	-5
Montana	13.0	12.7	-0.3	52	52	0
Nebraska	7.3	7.3	0.0	63	64	1
Nevada	14.6	14.4	-0.2	169	169	0
New Hampshire	9.6	9.9	0.3	60	62	2
New Jersey	16.0	16.5	0.5	611	635	24
New Mexico	6.2	5.7	-0.5	46	43	-3
New York	24.4	24.6	0.2	1,986	1,980	-6
North Carolina	3.0	1.9	-1.1	117	76	-41
North Dakota	6.4	5	-1.4	22	18	-4
Ohio	12.6	12.4	-0.2	605	615	10
Oklahoma	7.5	6	-1.5	114	89	-25
Oregon	13.9	15.6	1.7	208	243	35
Pennsylvania	12.7	12.7	0.0	701	703	2
Rhode Island	16.9	15.1	-1.8	77	68	-9
South Carolina	3.7	2.2	-1.5	69	41	-28
South Dakota	4.8	4.9	0.1	17	18	1
Tennessee	6.1	5	-1.1	155	127	-28
Texas	4.8	4.8	0.0	518	543	25
Utah	3.9	3.7	-0.2	49	46	-3
Vermont	10.9	11.1	0.2	31	32	1
Virginia	5.0	4.9	-0.1	180	179	-1
Washington	18.9	16.8	-2.1	546	491	-55
West Virginia	12.7	10.6	-2.1	87	73	-14
Wisconsin	12.3	11.7	-0.6	317	306	-11
Wyoming	5.7	6.7	1.0	15	17	2

Notes: BLS, Union Membership 2014.

References

Jones, Janelle, John Schmitt, and Nicole Woo. 2014. "Women, Working Families, and Unions." Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research, June. <http://www.cepr.net/documents/women-union-2014-06.pdf>

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