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Unions By The Numbers: 2023 Edition

January 19, 2023 | [Labor And Employment, Unions And Union Membership](#)



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It's that time of year again when the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) [releases its annual report](#) detailing, at least numerically, where unions currently stand in America. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly given all the union headlines last year, the 2022 data overall wasn't good news for unions. Indeed, their numbers on a percentage basis of the American workforce have dropped to historic lows.

According to BLS: "The union membership rate – the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions – was 10.1 percent in 2022, down from 10.3 percent [in 2021](#), the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. The number of wage and salary workers belonging to unions, at 14.3 million in 2022, increased by 273,000, or 1.9 percent, from 2021. However, the total number of wage and salary workers grew by 5.3 million (mostly among nonunion workers), or 3.9 percent. This disproportionately large increase in the number of total wage and salary employment compared with the increase in the number of union members led to a decrease in the union membership rate."

The report went on to say, "The 2022 unionization rate (10.1 percent) is the lowest on record. In 1983, the first year where comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent and there were 17.7 million union workers."

There are several other notable highlights from the report, including:

- Union membership among public-sector workers (33.1 percent) remains more than five times higher than the rate of private-sector workers (6.0 percent)
- Women have continued to close the “gender gap” in terms of union membership. In 1983 – when this data was first compiled, men had a 24.7 percent participation rate versus women at 14.6 percent. Based on the latest report, men are now at 10.5 percent to women at 9.6 percent.
- Hawaii and New York remain the states with the highest union density, with union membership rates landing at 21.9 and 20.7 percent respectively. The Carolinas have the lowest rates with South Carolina at 1.7 percent and North Carolina coming in at 2.8 percent.
- Union workers on average have higher earnings than their non-union counterparts, with union employees averaging \$1,216 per week as compared to \$1,029 for non-union workers.

These numbers, however, don’t tell the whole story on the American labor relations front. There are indicators unions are seeing somewhat of a resurgence. For instance, we have seen a [dramatic increase in the number of union election](#) petitions being filed at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in the last year. The [nationwide Starbucks union drive](#) accounted for a fair amount of this activity, with hundreds of cafés [voting in unions](#) throughout 2022. Starbucks wasn’t the only household name to see unions seeking to represent its workers last year, as [Trader Joe’s Apple](#), and many others also got hit with election petitions.

Unions are also seeing heightened publicity as of late. Aside from the Starbucks union drive dominating headlines and highlighting many baristas’ motivations for wanting a union, 2022 also saw a [significant uptick in strikes](#) that garnered much media attention. This newfound attention towards unions no doubt has piqued the interest of workers in various industries.

Aside from seeing their ranks swell, organized labor has other reasons to celebrate. The NLRB ended last year with a flurry of [significant “pro-union decisions”](#) that tilt the legal landscape in their favor. Among these rulings were favorable changes to rules on union insignia, union dues payments, and “micro-units.”

Bottom line: Union numbers are down, but they remain active and labor unrest remains palpable as we enter 2023.