



Labor Day 2022: State Of The U.S. Labor Unions

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The end of summer officially is upon us with the impending Labor Day weekend. That also means it's time for our annual review of the state of the labor relations landscape. Compared to prior years, unions may have reason to be optimistic but it's still a mixed bag for organized labor.

Let's with the numbers. According to [the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#):

"In 2021, the number of wage and salary workers belonging to unions continued to decline (-241,000) to 14.0 million, and the percent who were members of unions – the union membership rate – was 10.3 percent, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. The rate is down from 10.8 percent in 2020 – when the rate increased due to a disproportionately large decline in the total number of nonunion workers compared with the decline in the number of union members. The 2021 unionization rate is the same as the 2019 rate of 10.3 percent. In 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent and there were 17.7 million union workers."

While union membership numbers are at historical lows – per that data – there are indications unions' fortunes may be turning around. Indeed, [union petitions are up](#) over 57% so far this year as compared to 2021. A big factor in this has been [the nationwide Starbucks campaign](#), which has seen over 200 cafes vote in unions since December last year.

It's not just Starbucks, though, as [companies like Apple](#) and [Trader Joe's](#) and

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many other employers have seen [union organizing activity this year](#). Given all these efforts, we may see union ranks start to swell.

Another reason for optimism among unions may be the friendly faces at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo has pushed for what are widely perceived as pro-union changes to labor law, such as increased back pay for terminated workers, broader definitions for “protected concerted activity,” and stricter requirements on employers when it comes to settling unfair labor practice charges. In addition, President Biden has appointed a three-member majority to the NLRB who come from pro-union backgrounds, and the “Biden Board” [has just issued its first significant decision](#) – a decision that makes it harder for employers to prohibit union insignia in the workplace.

2022 has been an interesting year on the labor relations front. We'll see if the union organizing boom continues – and, if it does, what impact that will have on organized labor in years to come. Happy Labor Day.