

Union members in 2007: a visual essay

James A. Walker

Union membership data are eagerly anticipated each year by labor unions, economic researchers, business managers, and reporters. These annual average data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) have been available since 1983. The CPS is a survey of about 60,000 households that provides data on employment and unemployment among the Nation's civilian noninstitutional population age 16 and older. Additional data on union membership are available on the Internet at www.bls.gov/cps/lfcharacteristics.htm#union.

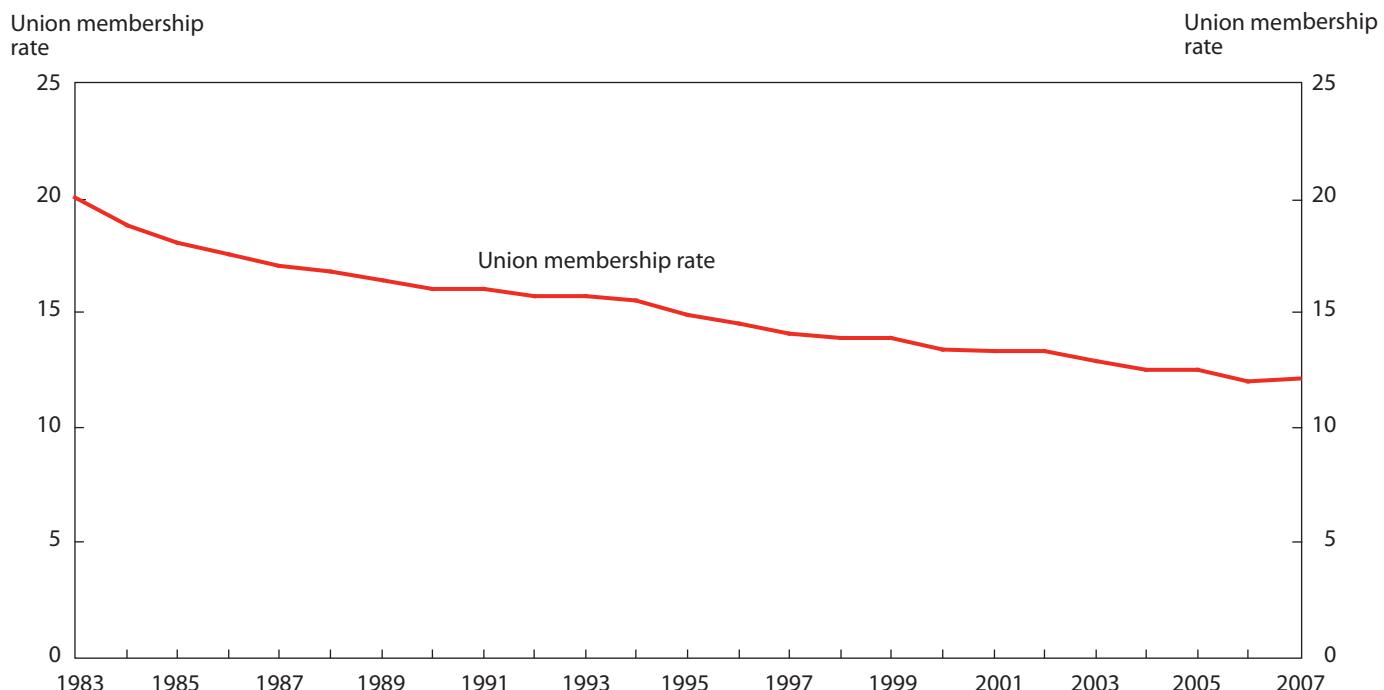
The term "union members" refers to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union. Nonunion employees are not members of a union, nor are they represented by a union on their job.

Data in this essay are limited to employed wage and salary workers. Union members who are temporarily absent from work because of strikes are included in the data. However, dues-paying union members who are unemployed or out of the labor force (such as those who are retired) are excluded.

Median usual weekly earnings data are for full-time wage and salary workers. The data represent earnings before taxes and other deductions and include any overtime pay, commissions, or tips usually received.

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1. The union membership rate of employed wage and salary workers has declined since 1983

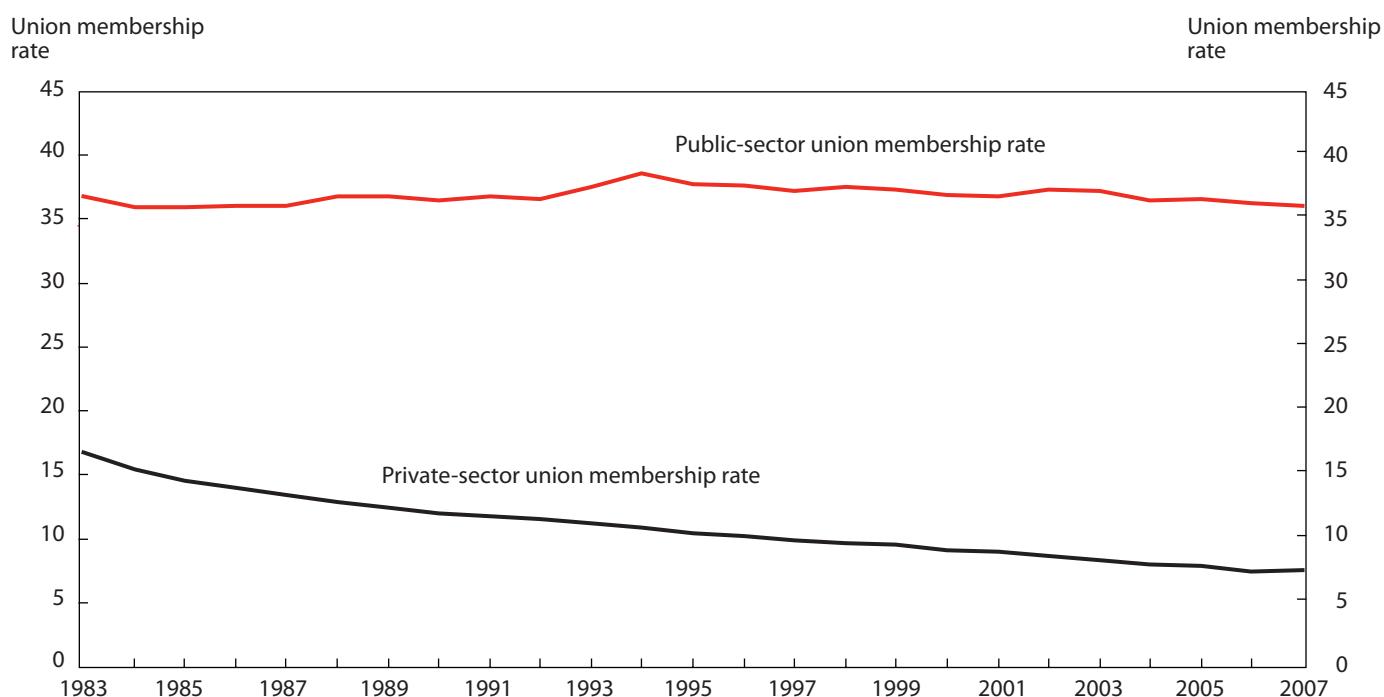


NOTE: The union membership rate is the proportion of wage and salary workers who are members of a union or an employee association similar to a union. Unpaid family workers and the self-employed are not included.

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- The percentage of all wage and salary workers who are members of a union or similar organization has declined by 8.0 percentage points since 1983, the first year for which consistent union membership data are available. In 1983, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent; it fell to 12.1 percent by 2007.
- The overall number of union members declined from 17.7 million in 1983 to 15.7 million in 2007. This 2.0 million decrease in the number of union members occurred despite an increase of 41.5 million in the number of employed wage and salary workers in the United States over the same period.

2. The private sector had a lower union membership rate than the public sector, 1983–2007

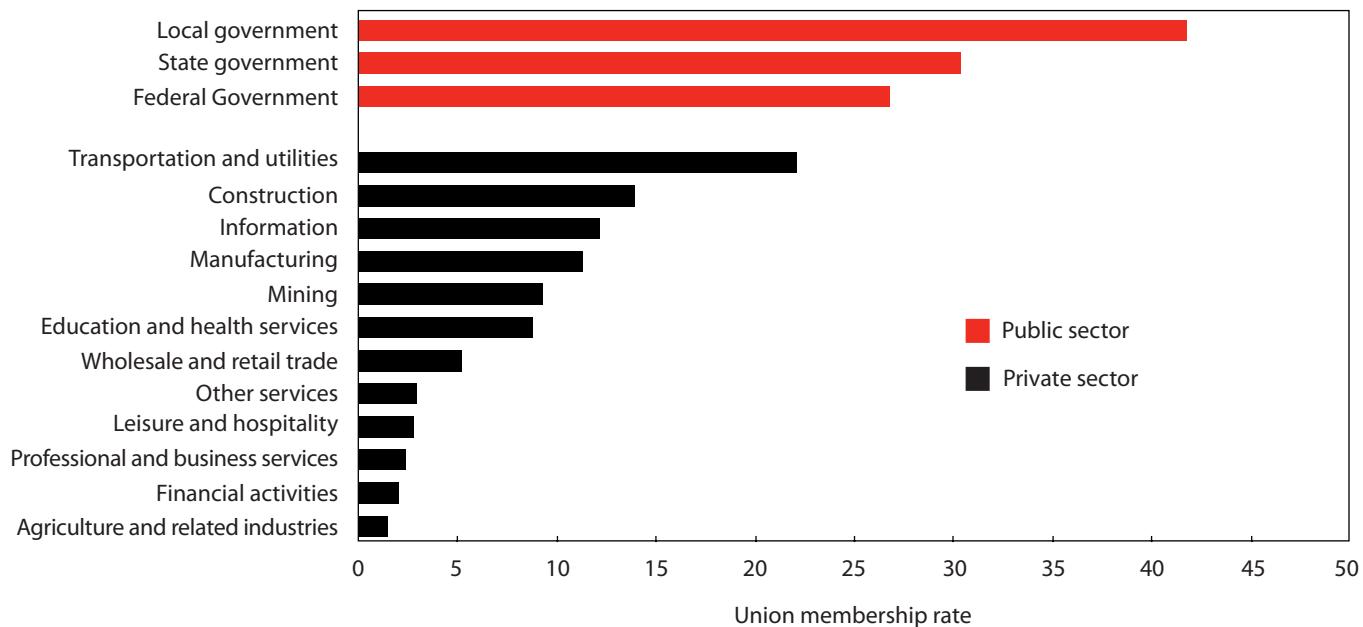


NOTE: Prior to 2000, private-sector data refer to the nonagricultural private sector.

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- Private-sector employees have a lower union membership rate than public-sector (government) employees. In 2007, there was a 28.4-percentage-point difference between the unionization rates of these two groups.
- The private-sector union membership rate declined by 9.3 percentage points, from 16.8 percent in 1983 to 7.5 percent in 2007.
- In contrast, the union membership rate of the public sector changed little over the same period. In 1983, the union membership rate of the public sector was 36.7 percent; it was 35.9 percent in 2007.

3. Union membership rates varied by industry in 2007

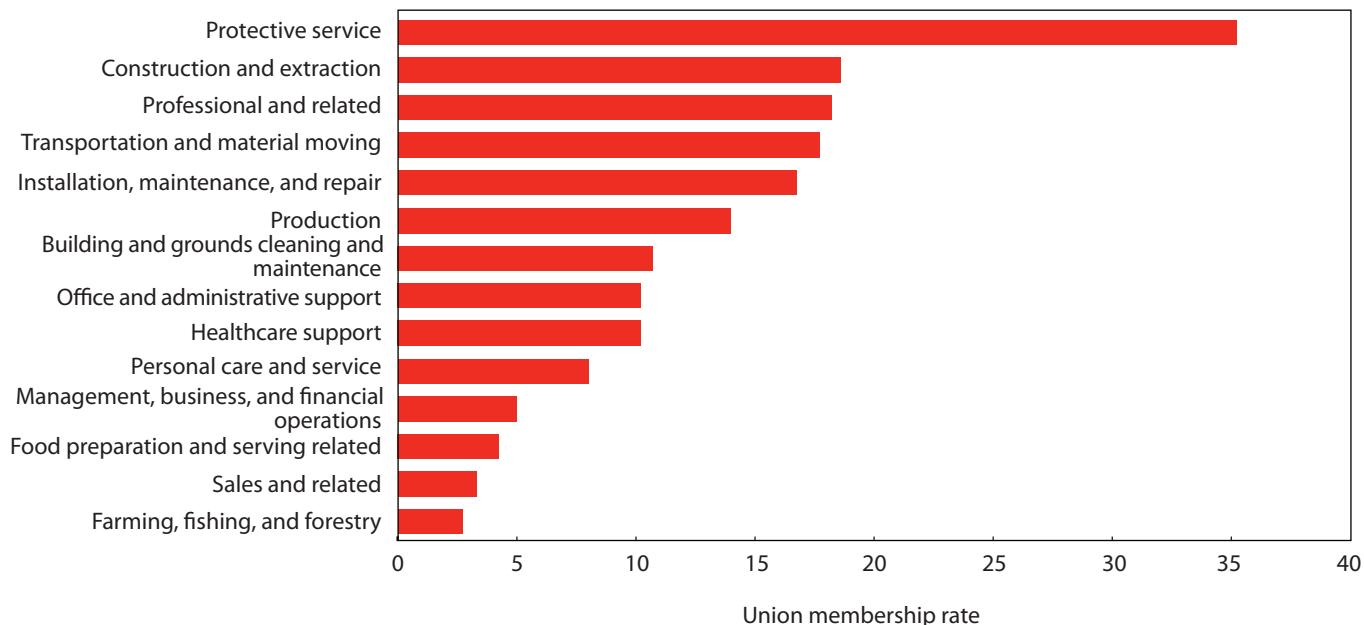


NOTE: Education and health services includes private education. Public education is included in the public sector.

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- Within the public sector, local government had the highest union membership rate (41.8 percent), followed by State government (30.4 percent) and Federal Government (26.8 percent).
- Among private-sector industries, transportation and utilities had the highest union membership rate in 2007, at 22.1 percent. Agriculture and related industries had the lowest union membership rate (1.5 percent).

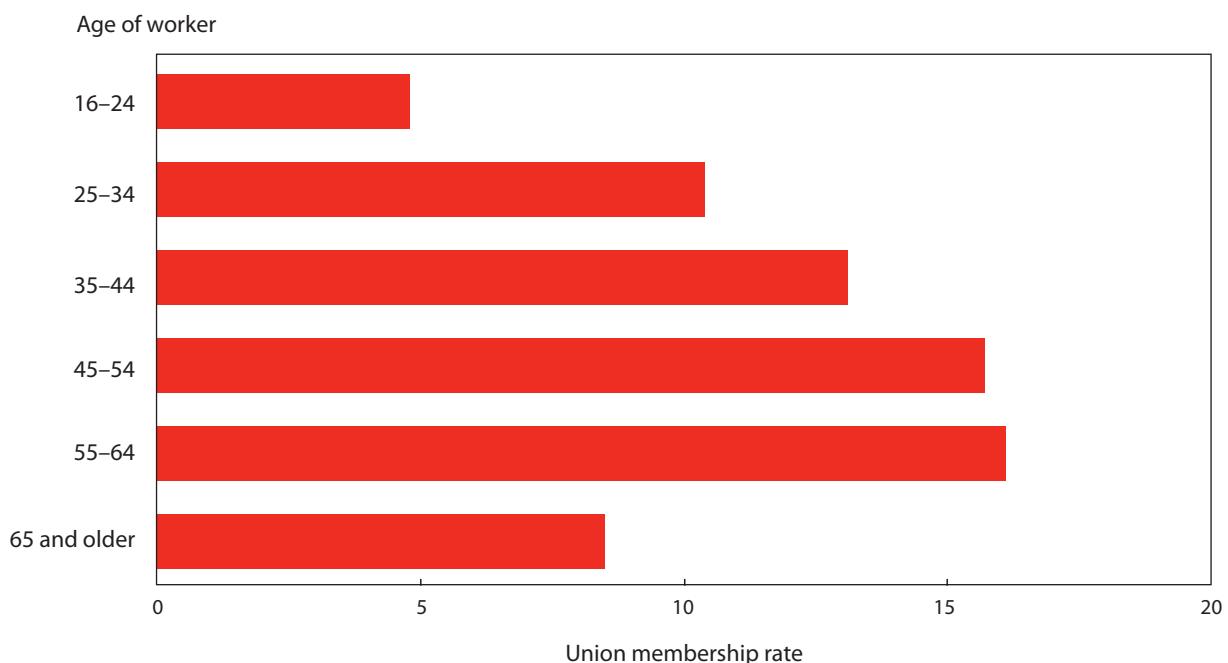
4. Union membership rates differed by occupation in 2007



SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- In 2007, protective service occupations had the highest union membership rate among broad occupational groups, at 35.2 percent. This category includes police officers and firefighters in the public sector.
- Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations had the lowest union membership rate, at 2.7 percent in 2007.
- When the broad occupational groups shown in the chart were divided into more detailed occupational groups, education, training, and library occupations had the highest union membership rate in 2007, at 37.2 percent. Education, training, and library occupations (which include public school teachers) also accounted for the largest number of union members (3.1 million) in 2007. These occupations are included within the broad category of professional and related occupations shown in the chart.

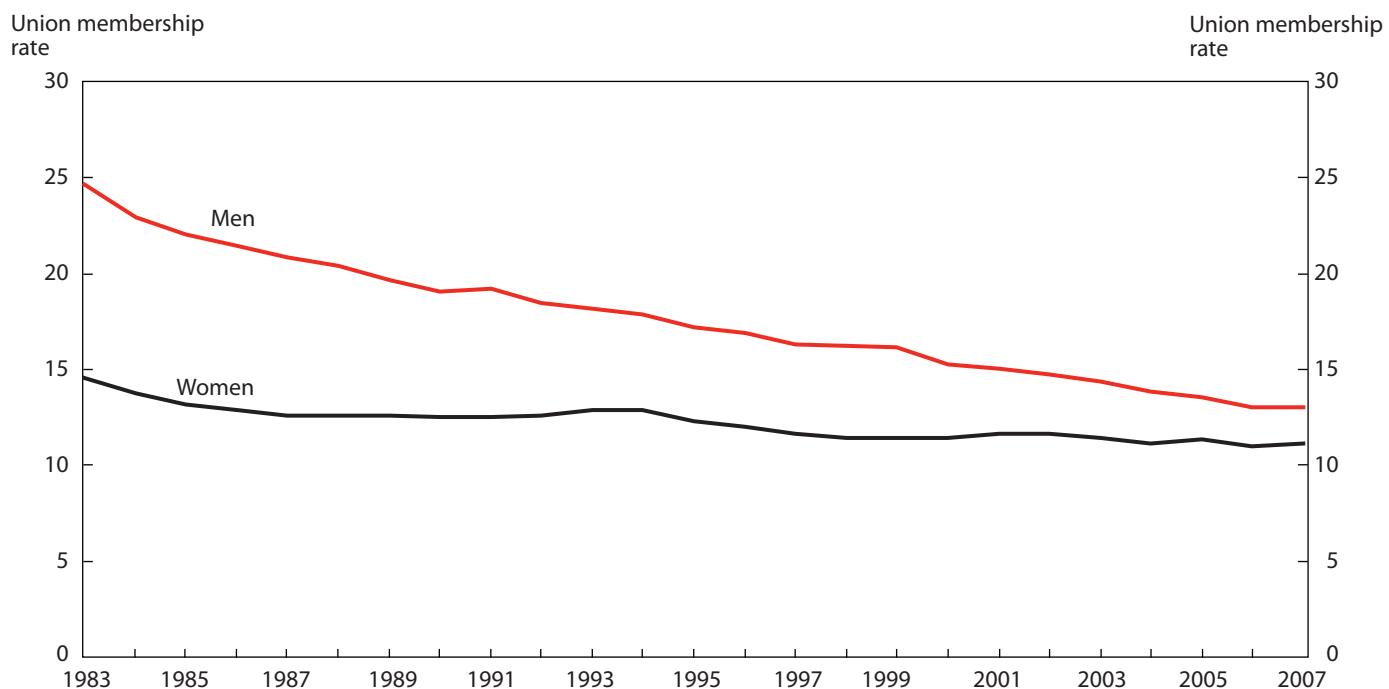
5. Wage and salary workers aged 45 to 64 years had the highest union membership rates in 2007



SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- In 2007, wage and salary workers aged 45 to 54 years and aged 55 to 64 years had union membership rates of 15.7 percent and 16.1 percent, respectively. Workers aged 16 to 24 years had the lowest rate (4.8 percent).
- At 8.5 percent in 2007, the union membership rate of wage and salary workers aged 65 years and older was about half that of workers aged 55 to 64 years (16.1 percent). The difference may be caused by larger proportions of union members retiring by age 65 than nonunion workers. Within education, training, and library occupations—a highly unionized field—42.3 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds in 2007 belonged to a union; by contrast, 20.2 percent of those aged 65 years and older were union members. Education, training, and library occupations had the highest union membership rate of both age groups in 2007.

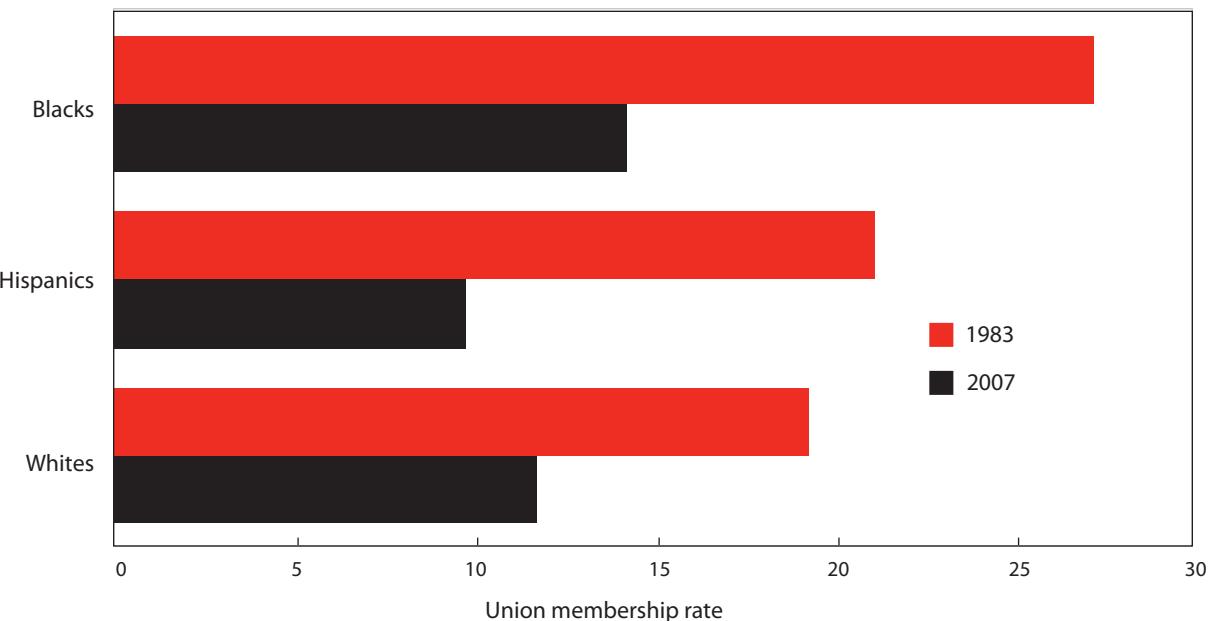
6. The union membership rate for men was higher than the rate for women from 1983 to 2007, but the gap narrowed during this period



SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- The gap between the union membership rates of men and women has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was 10.1 percentage points higher than the rate for women. In 2007, the gap between men and women was 1.9 percentage points.
- In 1983, 24.7 percent of men were members of a union; by 2007, this rate had dropped by 11.7 percentage points to 13.0 percent. The decline in the union membership rate of women has been less pronounced than the decline in the men's rate. The unionization rate for women fell by 3.5 percentage points between 1983 and 2007, from 14.6 percent to 11.1 percent.

7. The decline in the union membership rate from 1983 to 2007 varied by race and ethnicity

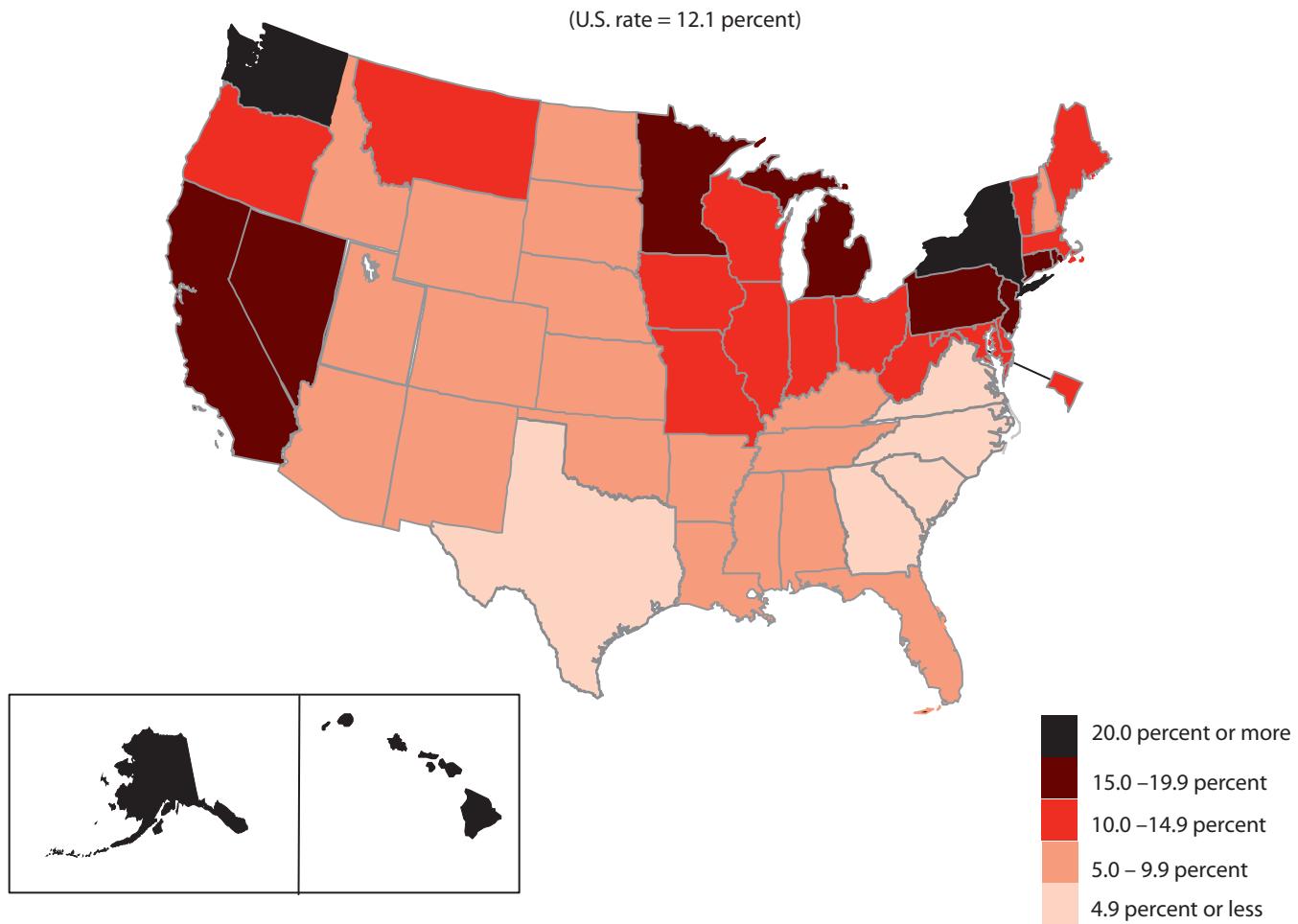


NOTE: The union membership rate of Asians is only available from 2003 onward; the rate was 10.9 percent in 2007. People of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race.

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

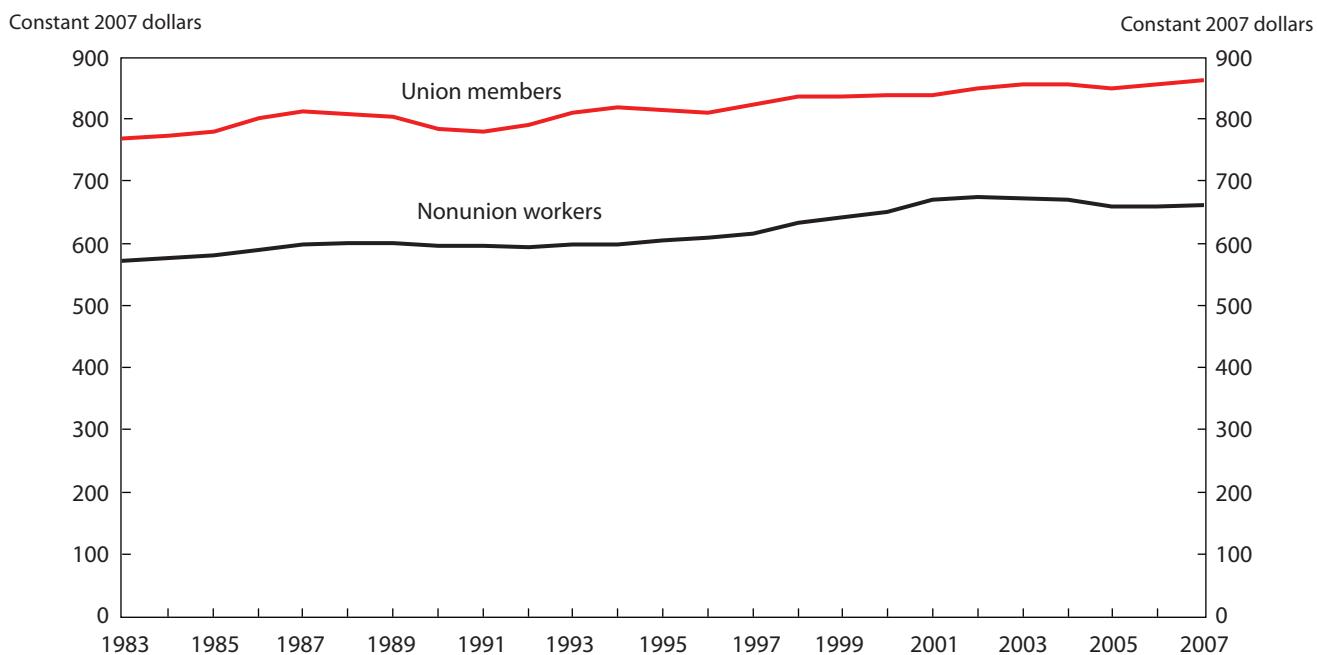
- From 1983 to 2007, the decline in the union membership rate of Blacks (12.9 percentage points) and Hispanics (11.3 percentage points) was larger than the decline for Whites (7.5 percentage points).
- In 1983, Blacks had the highest union membership rate at 27.2 percent, followed by Hispanics (21.1 percent) and Whites (19.3 percent).
- In 2007, Blacks continued to have a higher unionization rate (14.3 percent) than Whites (11.8 percent), Asians (10.9 percent), and Hispanics (9.8 percent).

8. Only four States had union membership rates above 20 percent in 2007



- New York had the highest union membership rate in 2007 (25.2 percent), followed by Alaska (23.8 percent), Hawaii (23.4 percent), and Washington (20.2 percent). By comparison, in 1989, the first year for which union membership data by State are available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 12 States with union membership rates above 20 percent.
- Five States had union membership rates below 5.0 percent in 2007—Texas (4.7 percent), Georgia (4.4 percent), South Carolina (4.1 percent), Virginia (3.7 percent), and North Carolina (3.0 percent).

9. Among full-time workers, union members had higher weekly earnings than nonunion workers, 1983–2007

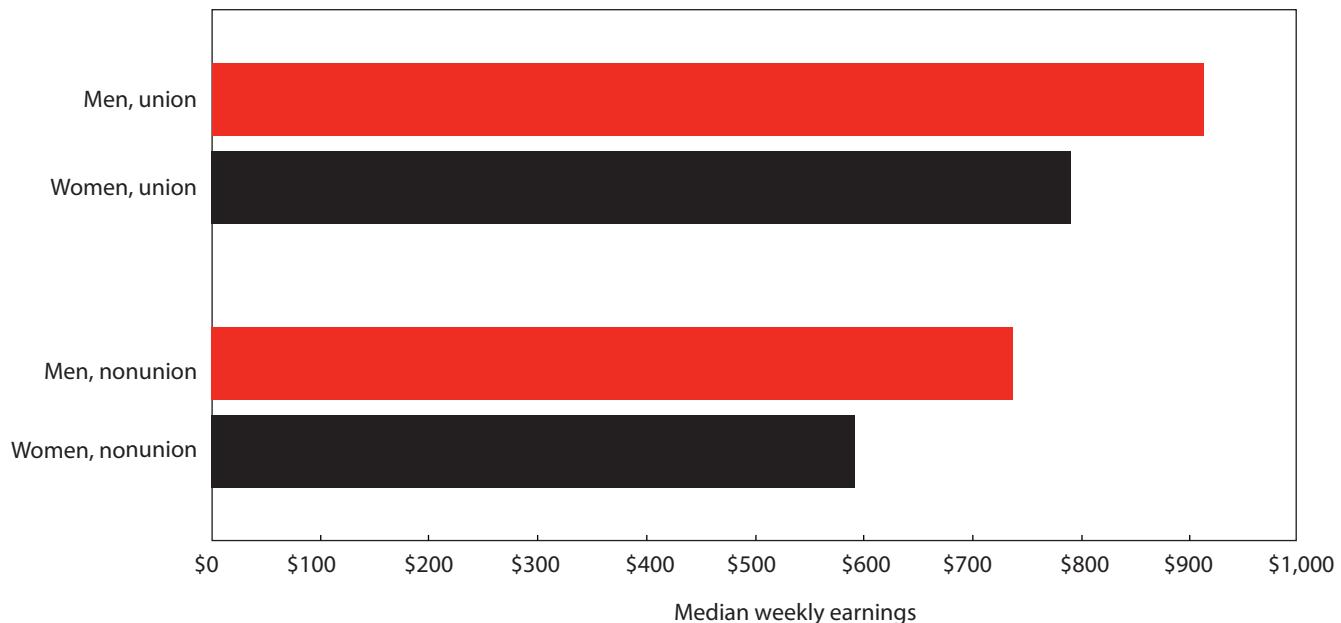


NOTE: The term "nonunion" refers to workers who are neither members of a union nor represented by a union on their job. Earnings are median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers and have been converted to constant dollars using the Consumer Price Index research series (CPI-U-RS).

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- In 2007, union members earned \$863 per week, compared with \$663 for nonunion workers.
- Median usual earnings of both union and nonunion workers have risen moderately since 1983. Adjusted for inflation, union members earned \$96 more per week in 2007 than in 1983, while nonunion workers saw an increase of \$94. These changes represent a 12.5-percent increase for union members and a 16.5-percent increase for nonunion workers between 1983 and 2007.
- The difference in earnings between the two groups was influenced by the distributions of union and nonunion workers by occupation, industry, firm size, and geographic region, as well as by coverage of a collective bargaining agreement.

10. Among full-time union and nonunion workers, women had lower weekly earnings than men in 2007

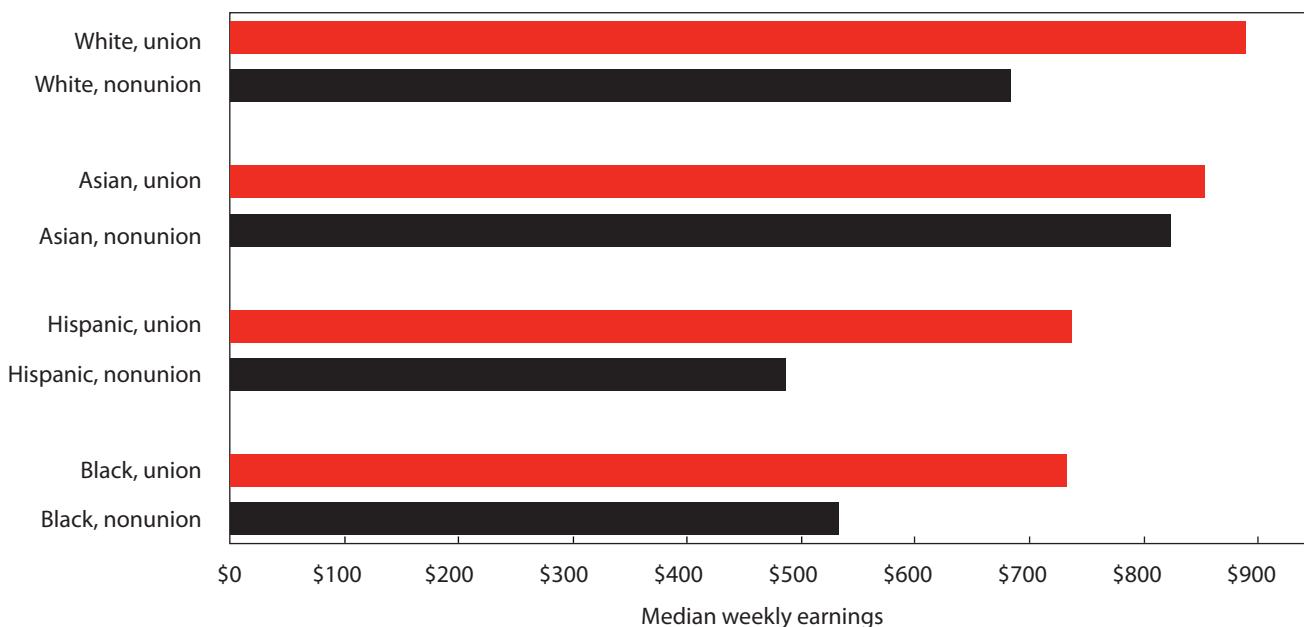


NOTE: The term "nonunion" refers to workers who are neither members of a union nor represented by a union on their job. Earnings are median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers.

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- In 2007, median usual weekly earnings of full-time workers were lower for women than for men, regardless of union membership status. In 2007, women union members earned \$790 per week, which was 87 percent of what union men earned (\$913). Among nonunion workers, women earned \$592, or 80 percent of what men were paid (\$738).
- The difference in earnings between men and women was smaller among union members (\$123) than among nonunion workers (\$146).
- Among both men and women, weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers were higher for union members than for nonunion workers. In 2007, union women earned 33 percent more than nonunion women, and union men earned 24 percent more than nonunion men.
- The difference in earnings between the groups shown in the chart was influenced by the distributions of union and nonunion workers by occupation, industry, firm size, and geographic region, as well as by coverage of a collective bargaining agreement.

11. Among full-time employees of the same race or ethnicity, most union members earned more per week than their nonunion counterparts in 2007



NOTE: The term "nonunion" refers to workers who are neither members of a union nor represented by a union on their job. Hispanics can be of any race. Earnings are median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers.

SOURCE: Current Population Survey (CPS), annual averages.

- White, black, and Hispanic union members who worked full time had substantially higher median usual weekly earnings than their nonunion counterparts in 2007. Among Asians, there was little difference between the earnings of union and nonunion members.
- White and Asian union members had higher median usual weekly earnings than Blacks or Hispanics. Non-union Whites and Asians also had higher earnings than Blacks or Hispanics who were not union members.
- Among Hispanics who worked full time, union members earned \$249 more per week than nonunion workers. This was the largest difference between union and nonunion median usual weekly earnings for any race or ethnic group.
- The differences in earnings among the groups shown in the chart were influenced by the distributions of union and nonunion workers by occupation, industry, firm size, and geographic region, as well as by coverage of a collective bargaining agreement.