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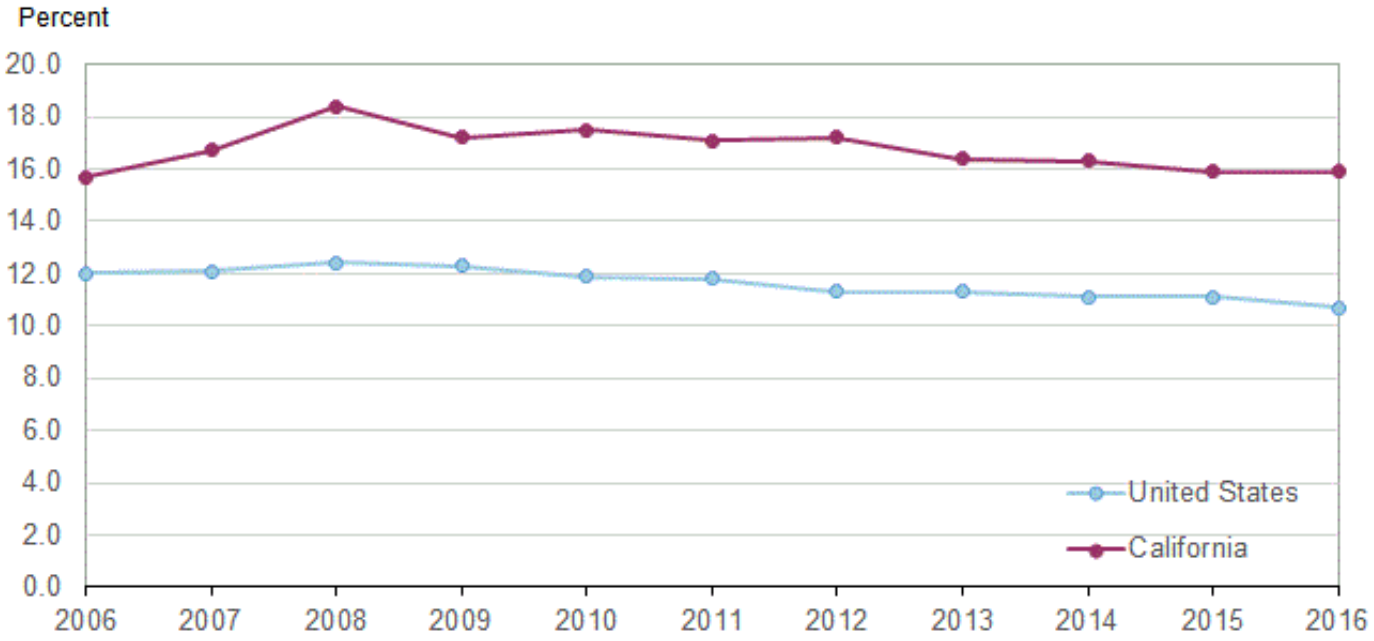
WESTERN INFORMATION OFFICE: San Francisco, Calif.
Technical information: (415) 625-2270 BLSinfoSF@bls.gov www.bls.gov/regions/west
Media contact: (415) 625-2270

Union Members in California — 2016

In 2016, union members accounted for 15.9 percent of wage and salary workers in California, unchanged from 2015, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Assistant Commissioner for Regional Operations Richard Holden noted that the union membership rate for the state was at its peak in 1989, when it averaged 18.9 percent, and at its low point in 2000 at 15.5 percent. (See chart 1 and table A.) Nationwide, union members accounted for 10.7 percent of employed wage and salary workers in 2016, down 0.4 percentage point from 2015. Since 1989, when comparable state data became available, union membership rates in California have been above the U.S. average.

Chart 1. Members of unions as a percent of employed in the United States and California, 2006–2016



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

California had 2,551,000 union members in 2016. In addition to these members, another 245,000 wage and salary workers in California were represented by a union on their main job or covered by an employee association or contract while not union members themselves. (See table A.) Nationwide, 14.6 million wage and salary workers were union members in 2016 and 1.7 million wage and salary workers were not affiliated with a union but had jobs covered by a union contract.

Table A . Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers in California, annual averages, 2006–2016 (numbers in thousands)

Year	Total employed	Members of unions (1)		Represented by unions (2)	
		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed
2006	14,501	2,273	15.7	2,444	16.9
2007	14,856	2,474	16.7	2,650	17.8
2008	14,889	2,740	18.4	2,909	19.5
2009	14,297	2,453	17.2	2,622	18.3
2010	13,892	2,431	17.5	2,578	18.6
2011	13,931	2,379	17.1	2,532	18.2
2012	14,483	2,489	17.2	2,666	18.4
2013	14,835	2,430	16.4	2,579	17.4
2014	15,135	2,472	16.3	2,652	17.5
2015	15,657	2,486	15.9	2,689	17.2
2016	16,001	2,551	15.9	2,796	17.5

Footnotes:
(1) Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.
(2) Data refer to both union members and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.
Note: Data refer to the sole or principal job of full- and part-time wage and salary workers. All self-employed workers are excluded, both those with incorporated businesses as well as those with unincorporated businesses. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

In 2016, 23 states had union membership rates above the U.S. average (10.7 percent), of which 8 had rates above 15.0 percent. (See table 1.) Of the eight states with the highest rates, four bordered the Pacific Ocean and four were located in the Northeast. (See chart 2.) NNew York had the highest rate at 23.6 percent, followed by Hawaii (19.9 percent) and Alaska (18.5 percent).

Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia had union membership rates below the national average in 2016, with nine states having union membership rates below 5.0 percent. Among these nine states, seven were located in the South, and two were in the West. South Carolina had the lowest rate at 1.6 percent. The next lowest rates were in North Carolina (3.0 percent), Arkansas (3.9 percent), and Georgia (3.9 percent). Nationwide, union membership rates decreased over the year in 31 states and the District of Columbia, increased in 16 states, and were unchanged in 3 states.

State union membership levels depend on both the employment level and the union membership rate. The largest numbers of union members lived in California (2.6 million) and New York (1.9 million). Over half of the 14.6 million union members in the U.S. lived in just seven states (California, 2.6 million; New York, 1.9 million; Illinois, 0.8 million; Pennsylvania, 0.7 million; and Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio, 0.6 million each), though these states accounted for only about one-third of wage and salary employment nationally.

Technical Note

The estimates in this release are obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS), which provides basic information on the labor force, employment, and unemployment. The survey is conducted monthly for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the U.S. Census Bureau from a scientifically selected national sample of about 60,000 eligible households. The union membership data are tabulated from one-quarter of the CPS monthly sample and are limited to wage and salary workers. All self-employed workers are excluded.

Beginning in January of each year, data reflect revised population controls used in the CPS. Additional information about population controls is available on the BLS website at https://www.bls.gov/cps/population-control-adjustments-2016.pdf.

Reliability of the estimates

Statistics based on the CPS are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. When a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed, there is a chance that the sample estimates may differ from the true population values they represent. The exact difference, or sampling error, varies depending upon the particular sample selected, and this variability is measured by the standard error of the estimate. There is about a 90-percent chance, or level of confidence, that an estimate based on a sample will differ by no more than 1.6 standard errors from the true population value because of sampling error. BLS analyses are generally conducted at the 90-percent level of confidence. The state discussion in this release preserves the longtime practice of highlighting the direction of the movements in state union membership rates and levels regardless of their statistical significance.

The CPS data also are affected by nonsampling error. Nonsampling error can occur for many reasons, including the failure to sample a segment of the population, inability to obtain information for all respondents in the sample, inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, and errors made in the collection or processing of the data.

Information about the reliability of data from the CPS and guidance on estimating standard errors is available at https://www.bls.gov/cps/documentation.htm#reliability.

Definitions

The principal definitions used in this release are described briefly below.

Union members. Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

Union membership rate. Data refer to the proportion of total wage and salary workers who are union members.

Represented by unions. Data refer to both union members and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

Wage and salary workers. Workers who receive wages, salaries, commissions, tips, payment in kind, or piece rates. The group includes employees in both the private and public sectors. Union membership and earnings data exclude all self-employed workers, both those with incorporated businesses as well as those with unincorporated businesses.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: 202-691-5200, Federal Relay Service: 800-877-8339.

Table 1. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by state, 2015-2016 annual averages (numbers in thousands)

State	2015					2016				
	Total employed	Members of unions(1)		Represented by unions(2)		Total employed	Members of unions(1)		Represented by unions(2)	
		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed
Alabama	1,863	190	10.2	204	11.0	1,895	153	8.1	170	9.0
Alaska	304	60	19.6	66	21.7	297	55	18.5	59	19.9
Arizona	2,661	138	5.2	163	6.1	2,727	122	4.5	151	5.5
Arkansas	1,155	58	5.1	74	6.4	1,186	47	3.9	59	5.0
California	15,657	2,486	15.9	2,689	17.2	16,001	2,551	15.9	2,796	17.5
Colorado	2,310	194	8.4	215	9.3	2,438	238	9.8	263	10.8
Connecticut	1,587	269	17.0	277	17.4	1,568	275	17.5	288	18.4
Delaware	412	38	9.2	43	10.4	419	48	11.4	56	13.3
District of Columbia	334	35	10.4	40	12.1	343	32	9.5	37	10.7
Florida	7,994	546	6.8	671	8.4	8,113	456	5.6	574	7.1
Georgia	4,016	162	4.0	206	5.1	4,249	165	3.9	210	4.9
Hawaii	583	119	20.4	126	21.7	597	119	19.9	125	20.9
Idaho	679	46	6.8	50	7.3	689	42	6.1	47	6.8
Illinois	5,566	847	15.2	892	16.0	5,587	812	14.5	856	15.3
Indiana	2,828	283	10.0	319	11.3	2,927	304	10.4	335	11.4
Iowa	1,435	138	9.6	174	12.2	1,454	129	8.9	153	10.5
Kansas	1,255	110	8.7	136	10.8	1,274	109	8.6	132	10.3
Kentucky	1,705	187	11.0	207	12.1	1,710	190	11.1	228	13.4
Louisiana	1,847	107	5.8	126	6.8	1,799	76	4.2	88	4.9
Maine	549	64	11.6	75	13.6	567	65	11.4	77	13.5
Maryland	2,757	287	10.4	337	12.2	2,815	310	11.0	347	12.3
Massachusetts	3,103	402	12.9	441	14.2	3,158	381	12.1	407	12.9
Michigan	4,083	621	15.2	672	16.5	4,196	606	14.4	651	15.5
Minnesota	2,565	363	14.2	385	15.0	2,563	365	14.2	388	15.2
Mississippi	1,103	60	5.4	75	6.8	1,108	73	6.6	90	8.1
Missouri	2,615	230	8.8	257	9.8	2,711	262	9.7	290	10.7
Montana	427	52	12.2	59	13.9	418	50	11.9	58	13.9
Nebraska	882	68	7.7	80	9.0	876	64	7.4	74	8.5
Nevada	1,232	177	14.3	203	16.5	1,211	146	12.1	182	15.0
New Hampshire	641	62	9.7	73	11.4	669	63	9.4	74	11.0
New Jersey	3,880	596	15.4	644	16.6	4,007	644	16.1	666	16.6
New Mexico	782	49	6.2	61	7.9	784	49	6.3	64	8.2
New York	8,249	2,038	24.7	2,141	26.0	8,227	1,942	23.6	2,075	25.2
North Carolina	4,089	123	3.0	167	4.1	4,225	129	3.0	174	4.1
North Dakota	352	19	5.4	24	6.8	363	20	5.5	25	7.0
Ohio	4,914	606	12.3	670	13.6	4,970	617	12.4	702	14.1
Oklahoma	1,567	88	5.6	116	7.4	1,482	80	5.4	97	6.6
Oregon	1,586	235	14.8	256	16.2	1,691	228	13.5	267	15.8
Pennsylvania	5,601	747	13.3	804	14.4	5,686	685	12.1	724	12.7
Rhode Island	483	68	14.2	72	14.9	481	74	15.5	81	16.9
South Carolina	1,960	41	2.1	57	2.9	1,981	32	1.6	52	2.6
South Dakota	382	22	5.9	26	6.9	379	20	5.2	26	7.0
Tennessee	2,693	146	5.4	175	6.5	2,746	158	5.7	174	6.4
Texas	11,177	503	4.5	626	5.6	11,457	462	4.0	606	5.3
Utah	1,274	50	3.9	67	5.2	1,318	62	4.7	79	6.0
Vermont	284	36	12.6	42	14.7	290	33	11.5	37	12.9
Virginia	3,736	202	5.4	258	6.9	3,748	160	4.3	226	6.0
Washington	2,977	500	16.8	536	18.0	3,090	539	17.4	577	18.7
West Virginia	665	83	12.4	91	13.7	669	79	11.8	88	13.2
Wisconsin	2,682	223	8.3	253	9.4	2,696	219	8.1	244	9.0
Wyoming	261	19	7.1	22	8.2	248	16	6.3	18	7.3

Note: See footnotes at end of table.

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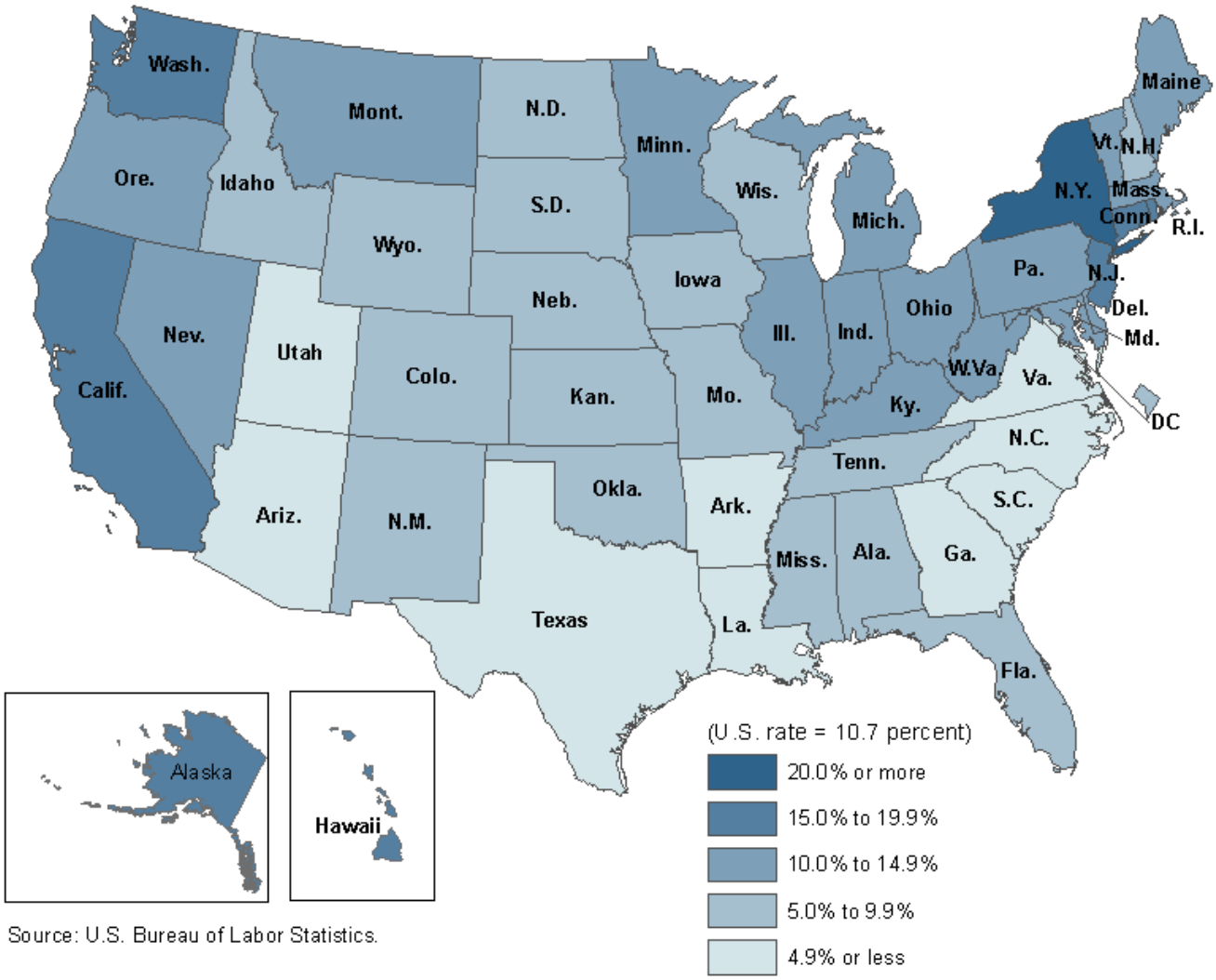
Chart 2. Union membership rates by state, 2016 annual averages



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.