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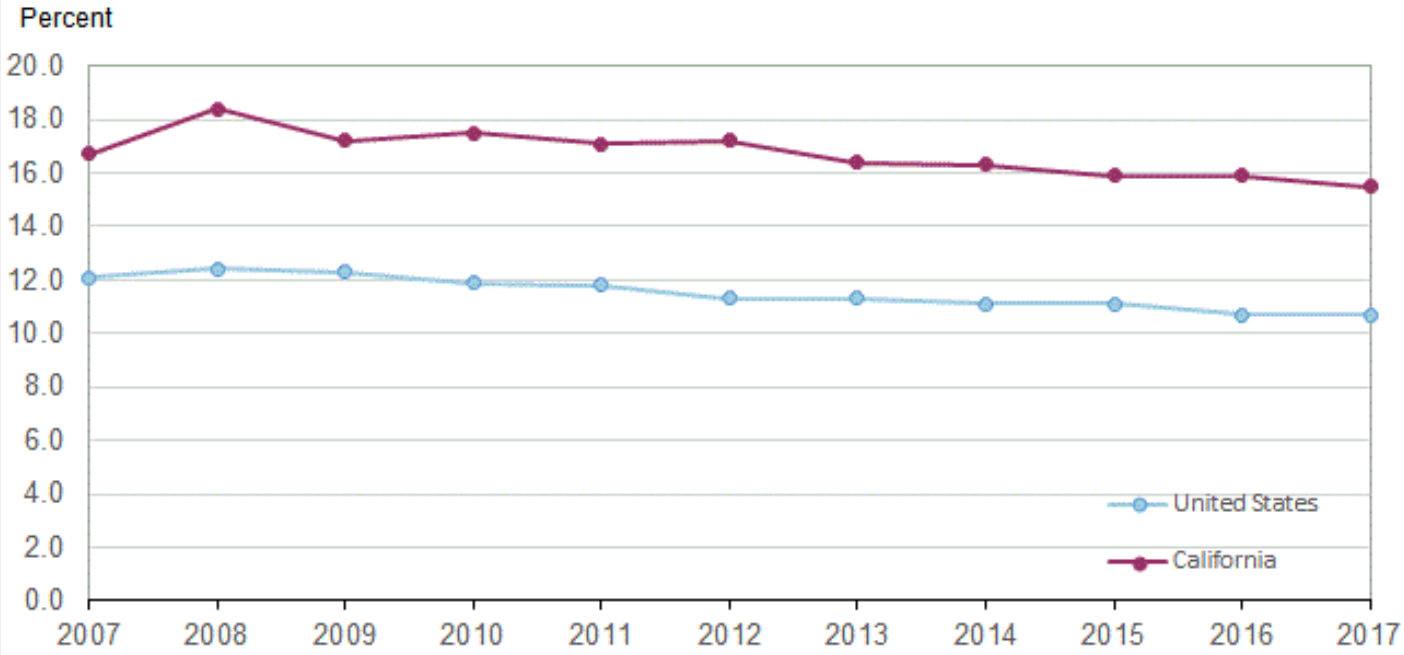
Union Members in California — 2017

In 2017, union members accounted for 15.5 percent of wage and salary workers in California, compared with 15.9 percent in 2016, 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 series peak in 1989, when it averaged 18.9 percent, and at its lowest in 2000 and 2017 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 2017, unchanged from 2016. 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, 2007–2017



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

California had 2,491,000 union members in 2017. In addition to these members, another 217,000 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, 14.8 million wage and salary workers were union members in 2017 and 1.6 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, 2007–2017 (numbers in thousands)

Year	Total employed	Members of unions [1]		Represented by unions [2]	
		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed
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
2017	16,064	2,491	15.5	2,708	16.9

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 2017, 27 states and the District of Columbia had union membership rates below that of the U.S. average, 10.7 percent, while 22 states had rates above it and 1 state had the same rate. See table 1.) Nine states had union membership rates below 5.0 percent in 2017, with South Carolina having the lowest rate (2.6 percent). The next lowest rates were in North Carolina (3.4 percent) and Utah (3.9 percent). Two states had union membership rates over 20.0 percent in 2017: New York (23.8 percent) and Hawaii (21.3 percent). (See chart 2.)

Nationwide, union membership rates increased over the year in 25 states and the District of Columbia, decreased in 21 states, and were unchanged in 4 states. The largest numbers of union members lived in California (2.5 million) and New York (2.0 million). Over half of the 14.8 million union members in the U.S. lived in just seven states (California, 2.5 million; New York, 2.0 million; Illinois, 0.8 million; Michigan and Pennsylvania, 0.7 million each; and 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/documentation.htm.

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, 2016-2017 annual averages (numbers in thousands)

State	2016					2017				
	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	1,895	153	8.1	170	9.0	1,869	138	7.4	152	8.1
Alaska	297	55	18.5	59	19.9	304	55	18.1	59	19.4
Arizona	2,727	122	4.5	151	5.5	2,805	111	4.0	145	5.2
Arkansas	1,186	47	3.9	59	5.0	1,209	62	5.1	74	6.1
California	16,001	2,551	15.9	2,796	17.5	16,064	2,491	15.5	2,708	16.9
Colorado	2,438	238	9.8	263	10.8	2,494	238	9.6	273	11.0
Connecticut	1,568	275	17.5	288	18.4	1,645	278	16.9	295	17.9
Delaware	419	48	11.4	56	13.3	425	45	10.7	48	11.2
District of Columbia	343	32	9.5	37	10.7	347	34	9.8	40	11.5
Florida	8,113	456	5.6	574	7.1	8,573	480	5.6	570	6.6
Georgia	4,249	165	3.9	210	4.9	4,342	173	4.0	217	5.0
Hawaii	597	119	19.9	125	20.9	605	129	21.3	139	22.9
Idaho	689	42	6.1	47	6.8	723	35	4.8	42	5.8
Illinois	5,587	812	14.5	856	15.3	5,516	827	15.0	872	15.8
Indiana	2,927	304	10.4	335	11.4	2,987	266	8.9	289	9.7
Iowa	1,454	129	8.9	153	10.5	1,475	104	7.0	127	8.6
Kansas	1,274	109	8.6	132	10.3	1,296	101	7.8	131	10.1
Kentucky	1,710	190	11.1	228	13.4	1,810	174	9.6	232	12.8
Louisiana	1,799	76	4.2	88	4.9	1,780	78	4.4	96	5.4
Maine	567	65	11.4	77	13.5	576	66	11.4	81	14.0
Maryland	2,815	310	11.0	347	12.3	2,772	299	10.8	326	11.8
Massachusetts	3,158	381	12.1	407	12.9	3,231	401	12.4	431	13.3
Michigan	4,196	606	14.4	651	15.5	4,230	658	15.6	711	16.8
Minnesota	2,563	365	14.2	388	15.2	2,693	411	15.2	428	15.9
Mississippi	1,108	73	6.6	90	8.1	1,106	59	5.3	77	7.0
Missouri	2,711	262	9.7	290	10.7	2,613	226	8.7	265	10.1
Montana	418	50	11.9	58	13.9	419	50	11.9	57	13.6
Nebraska	876	64	7.4	74	8.5	858	70	8.2	78	9.1
Nevada	1,211	146	12.1	182	15.0	1,290	164	12.7	189	14.6
New Hampshire	669	63	9.4	74	11.0	642	72	11.3	83	13.0
New Jersey	4,007	644	16.1	666	16.6	3,898	630	16.2	665	17.1
New Mexico	784	49	6.3	64	8.2	769	52	6.7	63	8.3
New York	8,227	1,942	23.6	2,075	25.2	8,472	2,017	23.8	2,148	25.3
North Carolina	4,225	129	3.0	174	4.1	4,305	145	3.4	171	4.0
North Dakota	363	20	5.5	25	7.0	356	18	5.1	24	6.8
Ohio	4,970	617	12.4	702	14.1	5,062	635	12.5	688	13.6
Oklahoma	1,482	80	5.4	97	6.6	1,536	84	5.5	108	7.1
Oregon	1,691	228	13.5	267	15.8	1,763	262	14.9	277	15.7
Pennsylvania	5,686	685	12.1	724	12.7	5,543	665	12.0	723	13.0
Rhode Island	481	74	15.5	81	16.9	486	78	16.1	84	17.2
South Carolina	1,981	32	1.6	52	2.6	1,986	52	2.6	78	3.9
South Dakota	379	20	5.2	26	7.0	380	20	5.4	25	6.7
Tennessee	2,746	158	5.7	174	6.4	2,728	155	5.7	176	6.4
Texas	11,457	462	4.0	606	5.3	11,626	543	4.7	669	5.8
Utah	1,318	62	4.7	79	6.0	1,375	54	3.9	74	5.4
Vermont	290	33	11.5	37	12.9	288	32	11.0	35	12.1
Virginia	3,748	160	4.3	226	6.0	3,801	176	4.6	222	5.8
Washington	3,090	539	17.4	577	18.7	3,112	584	18.8	630	20.2
West Virginia	669	79	11.8	88	13.2	683	75	11.0	82	11.9
Wisconsin	2,696	219	8.1	244	9.0	2,778	230	8.3	250	9.0
Wyoming	248	16	6.3	18	7.3	243	15	6.0	16	6.7

Note: See footnotes at end of table.

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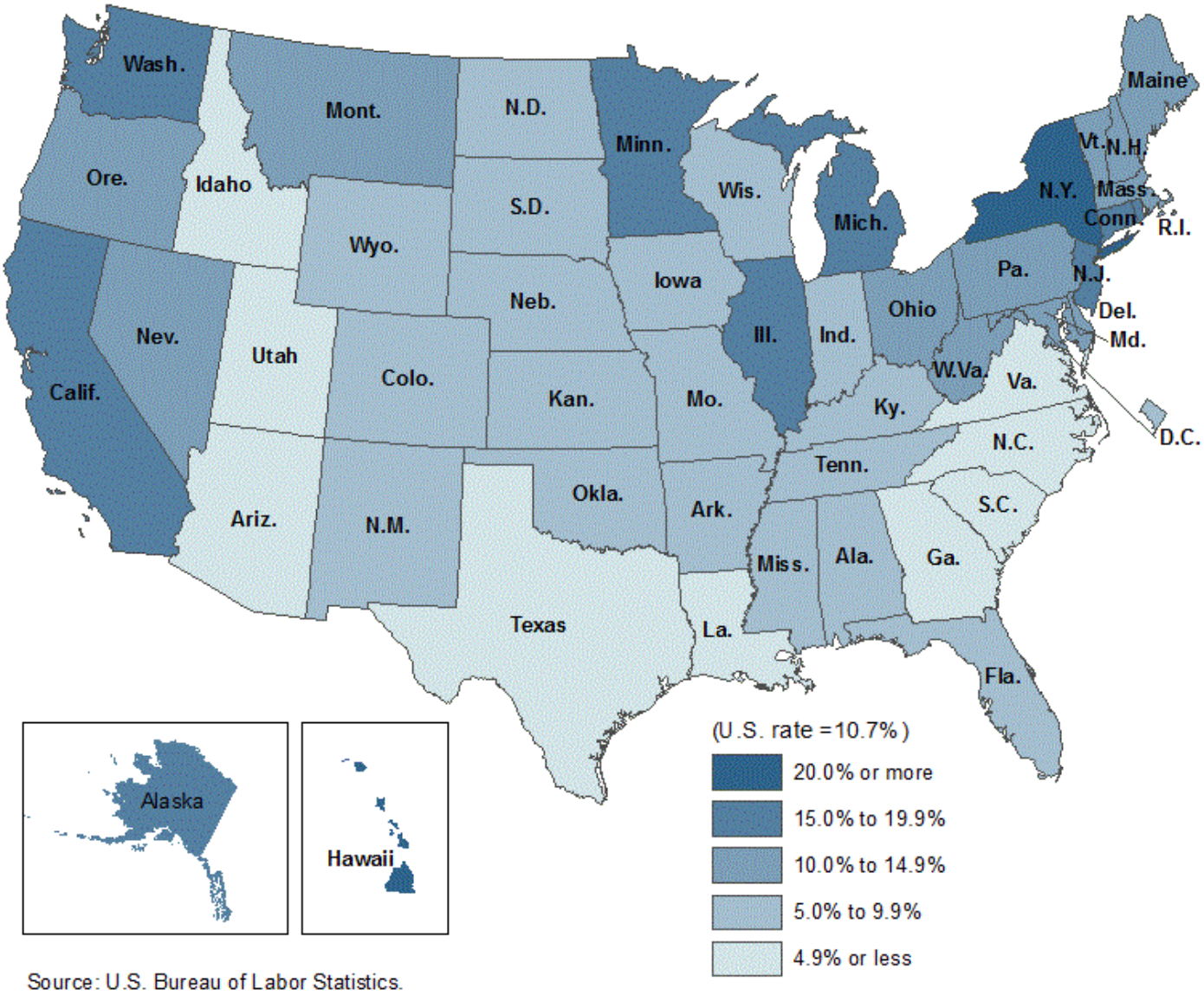
Chart 2. Union membership rates by state, 2017 annual averages



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.