NEWS RELEASE
BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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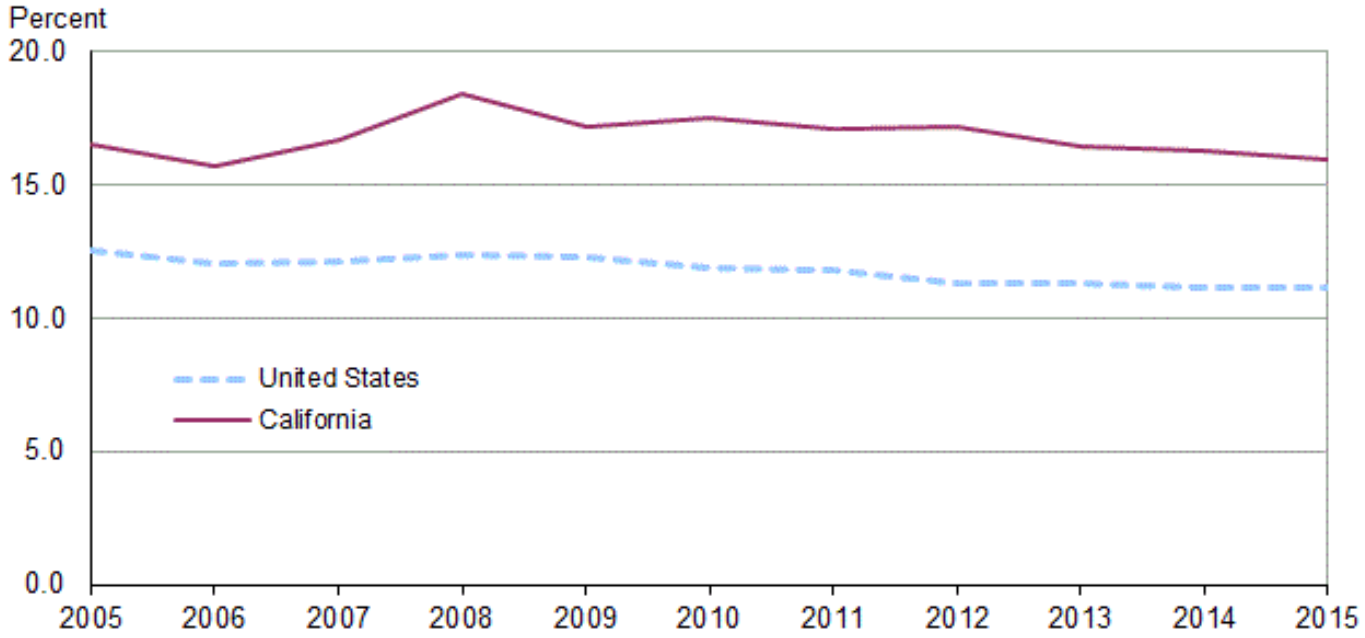
Union Members in California — 2015

In 2015, union members accounted for 15.9 percent of wage and salary workers in California, compared with 16.3 percent in 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Regional Commissioner Richard J. Holden noted that the union membership rate for the state was at its peak in 1989, when it averaged 18.9 percent, and reached a low of 15.5 percent in 2000. (See chart 1 and table A.) Nationwide, union members accounted for 11.1 percent of employed wage and salary workers in 2015, unchanged from 2014. Since 1989, when comparable state data became available, California union membership rates have been above the U.S. average.

Chart 1. Members of unions as a percent of employed in the United States and California, 2005-2015



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

California had 2,486,000 union members in 2015. In addition to these members, another 203,000 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 2015 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, 2005-2015 (numbers in thousands)

Year	Total employed	Members of unions [1]		Represented by unions [2]	
		Total	Percent of employed	Total	Percent of employed
2005	14,687	2,424	16.5	2,610	17.8
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

Footnotes:
(1) Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.
(2) Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union, as well as 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 2015, 20 states had union membership rates above the U.S. average, of which 9 had rates above 15.0 percent. (See table 1.) Of the nine states with the highest rates, four bordered the Pacific Ocean, three were located in the Northeast, and the remaining two states were in the Midwest. (See chart 2.) New York had the highest rate at 24.7 percent, followed by Hawaii (20.4 percent) and Alaska (19.6 percent). New York has had the highest union membership rate in the nation for 19 of the past 20 years.

Thirty states and the District of Columbia had union membership rates below the national average in 2015, with five of these states having union membership rates below 5.0 percent. Among these five states, four were located in the South and one in the West. South Carolina had the lowest rate at 2.1 percent, followed by North Carolina (3.0 percent), Utah (3.9 percent), Georgia (4.0 percent), and Texas (4.5 percent). Nationwide, union membership rates increased over the year in 24 states and the District of Columbia, declined in 23 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 (2.5 million) and New York (2.0 million). Roughly 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; Pennsylvania, 0.7 million; and Michigan, Ohio, and New Jersey, 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 www.bls.gov/cps/cps15adj.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, 2014-2015 annual averages (numbers in thousands)

State	2014					2015				
	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	1,887	204	10.8	228	12.1	1,863	190	10.2	204	11.0
Alaska	307	70	22.8	75	24.4	304	60	19.6	66	21.7
Arizona	2,593	138	5.3	173	6.7	2,661	138	5.2	163	6.1
Arkansas	1,108	52	4.7	60	5.4	1,155	58	5.1	74	6.4
California	15,135	2,472	16.3	2,652	17.5	15,657	2,486	15.9	2,689	17.2
Colorado	2,328	221	9.5	250	10.7	2,310	194	8.4	215	9.3
Connecticut	1,564	231	14.8	245	15.7	1,587	269	17.0	277	17.4
Delaware	384	38	9.9	43	11.3	412	38	9.2	43	10.4
District of Columbia	325	28	8.6	35	10.7	334	35	10.4	40	12.1
Florida	8,042	455	5.7	561	7.0	7,994	546	6.8	671	8.4
Georgia	3,926	170	4.3	193	4.9	4,016	162	4.0	206	5.1
Hawaii	572	124	21.8	131	22.9	583	119	20.4	126	21.7
Idaho	641	34	5.3	43	6.7	679	46	6.8	50	7.3
Illinois	5,500	831	15.1	880	16.0	5,566	847	15.2	892	16.0
Indiana	2,802	299	10.7	335	12.0	2,828	283	10.0	319	11.3
Iowa	1,459	156	10.7	184	12.6	1,435	138	9.6	174	12.2
Kansas	1,287	95	7.4	116	9.0	1,255	110	8.7	136	10.8
Kentucky	1,714	189	11.0	219	12.8	1,705	187	11.0	207	12.1
Louisiana	1,834	96	5.2	118	6.4	1,847	107	5.8	126	6.8
Maine	566	62	11.0	71	12.5	549	64	11.6	75	13.6
Maryland	2,612	310	11.9	347	13.3	2,757	287	10.4	337	12.2
Massachusetts	3,036	415	13.7	445	14.7	3,103	402	12.9	441	14.2
Michigan	4,028	585	14.5	631	15.7	4,083	621	15.2	672	16.5
Minnesota	2,538	360	14.2	380	15.0	2,565	363	14.2	385	15.0
Mississippi	1,028	38	3.7	46	4.5	1,103	60	5.4	75	6.8
Missouri	2,559	214	8.4	249	9.7	2,615	230	8.8	257	9.8
Montana	414	52	12.7	57	13.8	427	52	12.2	59	13.9
Nebraska	877	64	7.3	79	9.0	882	68	7.7	80	9.0
Nevada	1,173	169	14.4	192	16.4	1,232	177	14.3	203	16.5
New Hampshire	626	62	9.9	72	11.5	641	62	9.7	73	11.4
New Jersey	3,860	635	16.5	664	17.2	3,880	596	15.4	644	16.6
New Mexico	763	43	5.7	56	7.4	782	49	6.2	61	7.9
New York	8,060	1,980	24.6	2,081	25.8	8,249	2,038	24.7	2,141	26.0
North Carolina	3,936	76	1.9	126	3.2	4,089	123	3.0	167	4.1
North Dakota	353	18	5.0	24	6.9	352	19	5.4	24	6.8
Ohio	4,958	615	12.4	688	13.9	4,914	606	12.3	670	13.6
Oklahoma	1,465	89	6.0	106	7.2	1,567	88	5.6	116	7.4
Oregon	1,554	243	15.6	264	17.0	1,586	235	14.8	256	16.2
Pennsylvania	5,525	703	12.7	754	13.7	5,601	747	13.3	804	14.4
Rhode Island	453	68	15.1	72	15.8	483	68	14.2	72	14.9
South Carolina	1,884	41	2.2	61	3.2	1,960	41	2.1	57	2.9
South Dakota	363	18	4.9	22	6.0	382	22	5.9	26	6.9
Tennessee	2,514	127	5.0	141	5.6	2,693	146	5.4	175	6.5
Texas	11,205	543	4.8	700	6.2	11,177	503	4.5	626	5.6
Utah	1,236	46	3.7	57	4.6	1,274	50	3.9	67	5.2
Vermont	286	32	11.1	37	13.1	284	36	12.6	42	14.7
Virginia	3,665	179	4.9	228	6.2	3,736	202	5.4	258	6.9
Washington	2,914	491	16.8	536	18.4	2,977	500	16.8	536	18.0
West Virginia	687	73	10.6	80	11.6	665	83	12.4	91	13.7
Wisconsin	2,626	306	11.7	327	12.5	2,682	223	8.3	253	9.4
Wyoming	255	17	6.7	19	7.5	261	19	7.1	22	8.2

Note: See footnotes at end of table.

Footnotes
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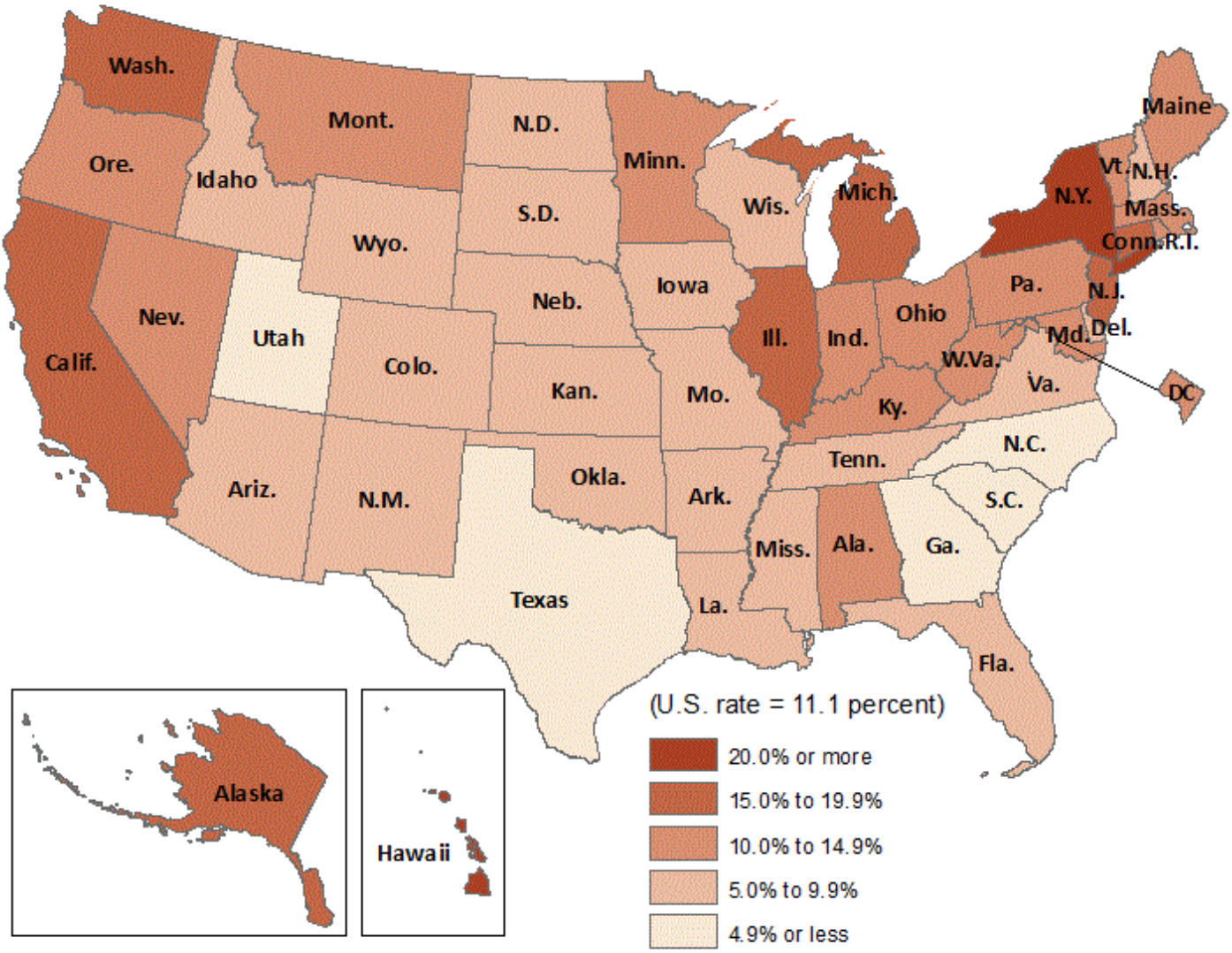
Chart 2. Union membership rates by state, 2015 annual averages



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.