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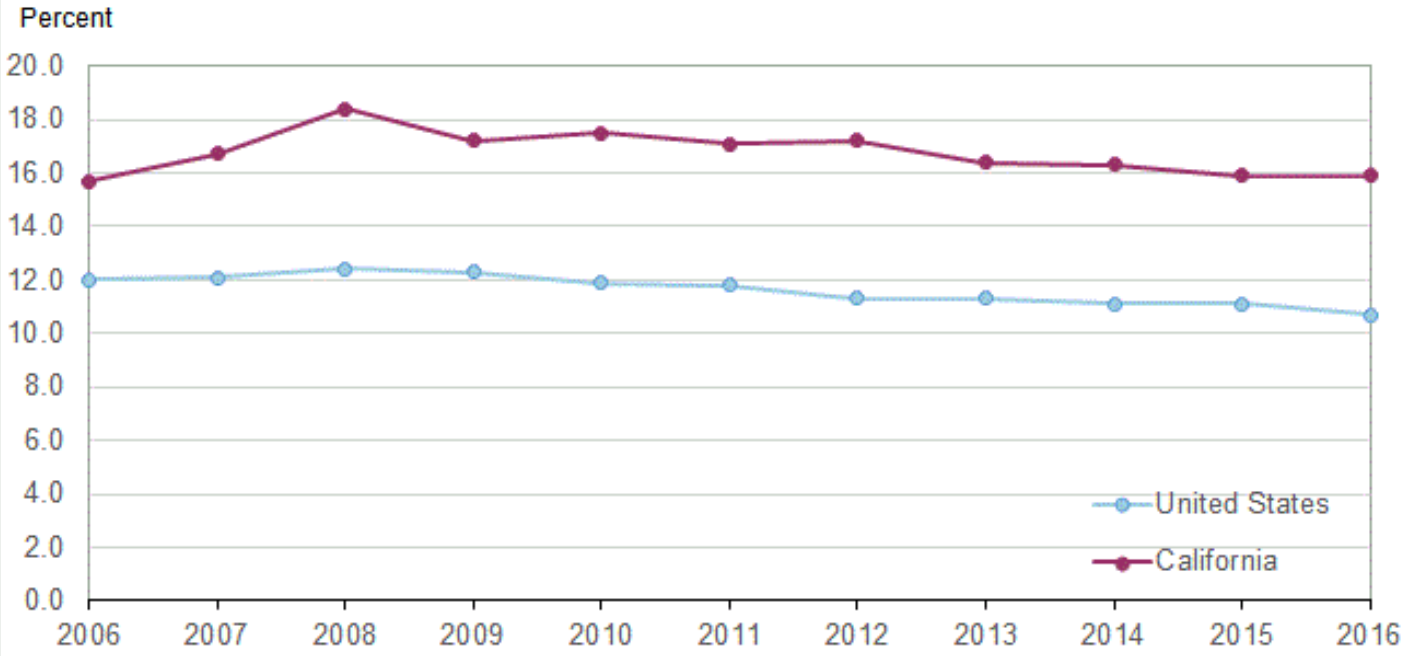
# Union Members in California — 2016

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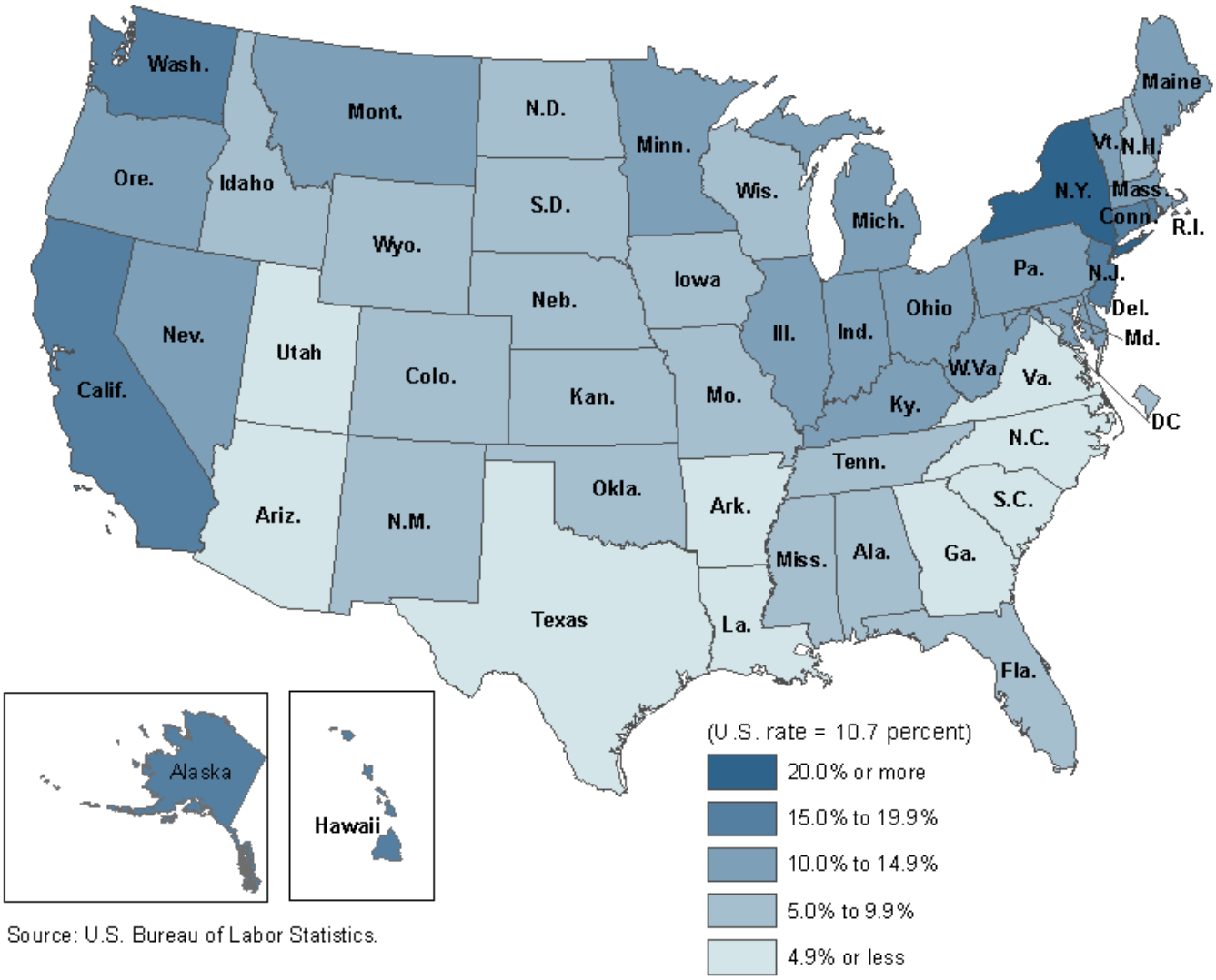
(2) Data refer to both union members and workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.
Note: Data refer to the sole or principal job of full- and part-time wage and salary workers. All self-employed workers are excluded, both those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

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




Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.