



# THE STATE OF THE UNIONS 2025

*A Profile of Unionization in Chicago, in Illinois, and in the United States*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Support for labor unions remains high and bipartisan—with 70 percent of Americans approving unions, three-fifths saying they strengthen the economy, and record numbers reporting that they want unions to have more influence in the United States. Surveys show that at least 35 percent of nonunion employees are interested in joining unions and as many as 48 percent would unionize their workplaces if they could.

In 2024, Illinois added 27,000 union members and its unionization rate increased by 0.3 percentage points.

- There were 75 successful union petitions that newly organized 3,700 workers in Illinois.
- The union success rate for new organizing drives was 56 percent.
- Illinois organized more union members from 2022 through 2024 (18,300 members) than the previous seven years combined (16,500 members).

Illinois' union membership rate is now 13 percent, which is above the national average (10 percent) and is the 14<sup>th</sup>-highest union density among the 50 U.S. states.

- One-in-five military veterans (19 percent) is a union member.
- 20 percent of Black workers are unionized compared to 13 percent of white workers and 10 percent of Hispanic workers.
- Native-born and naturalized citizens (14 percent) are more likely to be union members than foreign-born workers (9 percent).
- Union membership rates in Illinois exceed the national average across the board, including by age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, geography, occupation, industry, and veteran status.

Labor unions promote job quality for workers and positive outcomes for taxpayers.

- Unions boost average worker earnings by 12 percent in Illinois, the 3<sup>rd</sup>-highest union wage effect in the nation.
- Unions raise average wages by 9 percent nationally and by at least 5 percent in 43 U.S. states.
- Union members in Illinois are 8 percentage points more likely to own their homes, 5 percentage points more likely to have health insurance coverage, and 1 to 4 percentage points less likely to rely on government assistance programs like Medicaid and food stamps.

Nationally, the United States lost 170,000 union members in 2024, but the decline was concentrated in states that have weakened collective bargaining rights by adopting so-called “right-to-work” laws.

- The 26 so-called “right-to-work” states shed 179,000 union members last year, while states that protect collective bargaining rights added 9,000 union members.
- Michigan repealed its “right-to-work” law in 2024 and gained 15,000 union members.
- “Right-to-work” states have experienced slower wage growth since 2019 and their workers now earn 7 percent less after accounting for cost-of-living differences.

Unions face significant challenges on Labor Day 2025 and beyond.

- The Trump administration has revoked collective bargaining rights for more than 1 million federal workers, affecting 45,000 union members in Illinois.
- The Trump administration has canceled union contracts for hundreds of thousands of workers at the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, the Treasury, and Agriculture as well as other agencies.
- The Trump administration has shuttered agencies, fired new employees, imposed hiring freezes, created deferred resignation programs, and fired the Bureau of Labor Statistics commissioner.
- The Trump administration fired the National Labor Relations Board Chair, leaving it without a quorum and effectively shutting down the body that rules on union organizing activities.
- Utah stripped collective bargaining rights from teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other state and local government employees.

To better reflect public opinion, lawmakers and voters could consider repealing “right-to-work” laws and take steps to enact Workers’ Rights Amendments, which ban “right-to-work” laws and prohibit legislation that restricts collective bargaining rights for state and local government workers. Data from both Michigan and Illinois reveal that these actions can facilitate growth in union membership and boost worker earnings.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Executive Summary	i
Table of Contents	ii
About the Authors	ii
Introduction	1
Union Petitions	2
Unionization Rates and Trends by Demographics, Geography, and Education	2
Unionization Rates by Sector, Industry, and Occupation	7
The Impact of Union Membership on Worker Wages	11
Union Membership, Benefits, and Government Assistance	12
States that Weakened Collective Bargaining Rights and Union Decline	12
Federal Challenges to Unions	16
Conclusion	17
Sources	19
Cover Photo Credits	22
Appendix	23

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Americans continue to strongly support labor unions. Fully 70 percent of American adults approve of unions, including more than nine-in-ten Democrats, nearly seven-in-ten independents, and half of all Republicans (Gallup, 2025; Brennan, 2024; GBAO, 2023). More than three-fifths of Americans say that unions strengthen the economy and four out of every five voters say that unions improve workplace safety, worker pay and hours, and healthcare access and affordability (GBAO, 2023; Saad, 2023). In addition, 43 percent of Americans want unions to have more influence in the United States than they have today, a record high for the question which was first asked in 1999, compared to only 26 percent who want them to have less influence, a record low (Gallup, 2025). Evidence suggests that substantially more workers would like to become union members. For example, in 2017, 48 percent of nonunion workers reported that they would vote to unionize their workplaces if they could (Shierholz et al., 2024). In 2022, 35 percent of nonunion employees surveyed by Gallup reported that they were somewhat, very, or extremely interested in joining unions (McCarthy, 2022). The data suggests that if labor law was facilitating the market demands of workers, between 45 to 62 million more workers would likely become union members.

Research has long established a connection between unionization and higher job quality (U.S. Treasury, 2024). Union households have earned an average of 10 to 20 percent more than nonunion households every year since the 1930s (U.S. Treasury, 2024; Farber et al., 2021; Schmitt, 2008). The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 95 percent of union workers have access to healthcare coverage and 95 percent have access to retirement plans. By contrast, just 71 percent of nonunion workers have healthcare access and 72 percent have retirement plan access (BLS, 2024). Research has also linked union representation with safer workplaces, lower worker turnover, and less reliance on government assistance programs (Banerjee et al., 2021; Ford & Freund, 2022; Bach & Kinder, 2021; Sojourner & Pacas, 2018).

However, union membership has gradually declined over the past decades. The share of U.S. workers who are union members has fallen from one-in-four (24 percent) in 1973 to one-in-ten today (10 percent) (Hirsch, Macpherson, & Even, 2025). A significant driver of the decline in union density has been the erosion of workers' organizing rights across the United States. So-called "right-to-work" laws allow workers to receive services, benefits, and representation from unions for free without paying either dues or fees. A 5-4 Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31, et al.* overturned 41 years of precedent and imposed "right-to-work" conditions on state and local government employment nationwide (Oyez, 2018). Permitting "free-riding" reduces the resources that unions have available to advocate for employees and organize new members, which weakens worker bargaining power and decreases union membership (Manzo & Bruno, 2023a; Fortin, Lemieux, & Lloyd, 2022; VanHeuvelen, 2020; Stansbury & Summers, 2020; Hogler, Shulman, & Weiler, 2004; Davis & Huston, 1993).

This report, conducted by researchers at the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) and the Project for Middle Class Renewal (PMCR) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, analyzes the course of unionization in Illinois, in the Chicago metropolitan statistical area (MSA), and in the United States from 2015 to 2024. It is the 11<sup>th</sup> annual report of its kind for union members in Illinois, with the previous release in September 2024 and the initial release dating back to April 2014 (Manzo & Bruno, 2024; Manzo, Bruno & Parks, 2014). The report first explores union petition data and the recent success rate of organizing campaigns in Illinois. The report then tracks unionization rates and investigates union membership across demographic, educational, sectoral, industry, and occupational classifications before evaluating the impact of union membership on worker wages and other socioeconomic outcomes. It also assesses how workers in states that support collective bargaining rights fare against their counterparts in states that have weakened workers' rights by adopting so-called "right-to-work" laws, with an emphasis on Michigan—which became the first state in six decades to repeal a "right-to-work" law in 2024 (Shumway, 2024; Cappelletti, 2024). The penultimate section discusses the federal challenges to unions that have occurred in 2025. Finally, the report concludes by recapping key findings.



## UNION PETITIONS

There have been signs of a resurgent labor movement in Illinois. In November 2022, voters approved the Workers’ Rights Amendment, adding Section 25 to the Illinois Constitution. The Amendment declares that “no law shall be passed that interferes with, negates, or diminishes the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively over their wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment and work place safety” (ILGA, 2025). The Amendment guarantees the fundamental right of workers to unionize and bargain collectively, effectively bans in perpetuity so-called “right-to-work” laws, and blocks any future legislation that would limit the items over which public sector employees can bargain in Illinois. The Amendment passed with bipartisan support, driven by union members—88 percent of whom voted in favor—as well as robust support from middle-class households and rural working-class voters (Manzo & Bruno, 2023b; Manzo & Bruno, 2023c).

There has been an uptick in union organizing activity that began in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic but was bolstered by the Workers Rights’ Amendment (Figure 1). Data on union petitions in Illinois assigned to the Region 13 Chicago office of the National Labor Relations Board show that there were 75 successful union petitions at Illinois workplaces that unionized about 3,700 workers in 2024. This represented a 56 percent union success rate at workplaces with closed petitions. These numbers are down slightly from 2023, when more than 4,700 employees at 90 workplaces were unionized at a 65 percent success rate, but nevertheless exceed pre-pandemic levels.

**FIGURE 1: UNION PETITION DATA, ILLINOIS PETITIONS AT NLRB REGION 13 (CHICAGO), 2015-2024**

Year	Successful Petitions	Union Petitions	Closed Petitions	Success Rate (of Closed)	New Employees Represented
2015	56	128	128	43.8%	2,284
2016	42	95	95	44.2%	1,257
2017	38	92	92	41.3%	4,331
2018	35	77	77	45.5%	2,317
2019	51	112	112	45.5%	2,409
2020	29	76	76	38.2%	1,069
2021	60	100	99	60.6%	2,824
2022	76	133	131	58.0%	9,847
2023	90	142	139	64.7%	4,739
2024	75	150	134	56.0%	3,697

Source: “Recent Charges and Petitions Filings” from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB, 2025).

The two largest workplaces to unionize in 2024 were The University of Chicago Medical Center, where 1,031 licensed physicians employed as interns, residents, and fellows became members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) after a 99 percent yes vote, and Flex-N-Gate Chicago, a manufacturer of automotive products and systems where 375 production and maintenance employees became members of the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) after a 61 percent yes vote (NLRB, 2024a; NLRB, 2024b). Additionally, six of ten organizing campaigns at Starbucks locations were successful, newly representing 119 workers at coffeeshops in Chicago, Des Plaines, Elgin, and Evanston (NLRB, 2025). Overall, Illinois organized more union members in the past three years (18,283 members) than the previous seven years combined (16,491 members), an outcome that could be attributed to passage of the Workers’ Rights Amendment (Figure 1).

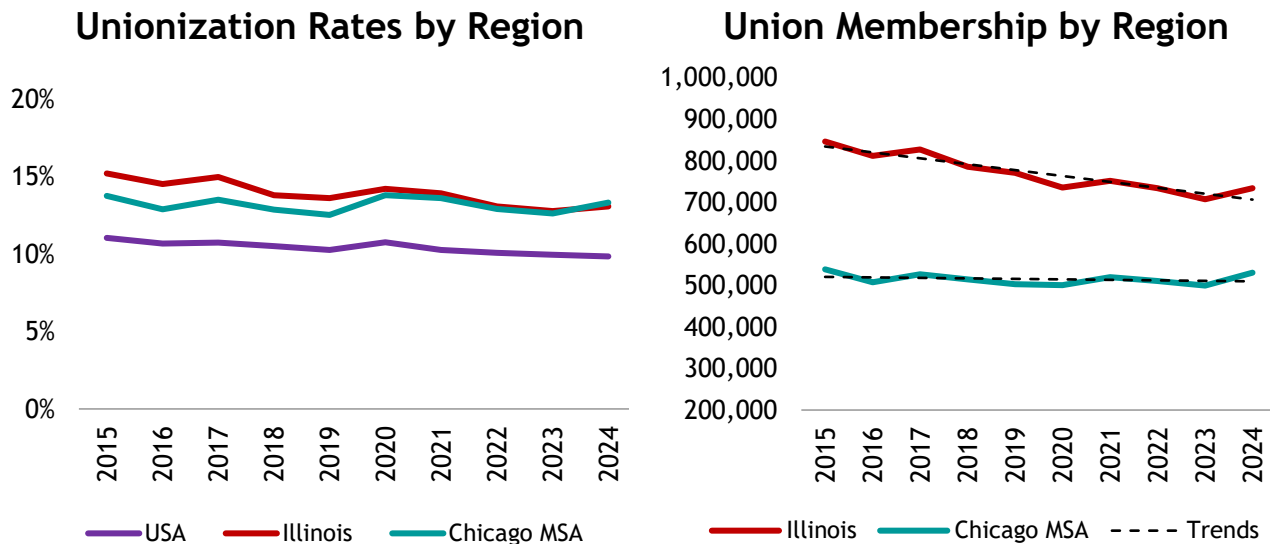
## UNIONIZATION RATES AND TRENDS BY DEMOGRAPHICS, GEOGRAPHY, AND EDUCATION

This report largely utilizes data from the *Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups* (CPS-ORG) (EPI, 2025). The CPS-ORG is collected, analyzed, and released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at

the U.S. Department of Labor. The ten-year dataset from 2015 through 2024 captures survey data on nearly 2.8 million individuals aged 16 to 80 years old in the United States. These observations include 77,073 Illinois residents, of whom 46,231 were employed. In 2024, employed respondents totaled 3,847 in Illinois and 2,669 in the Illinois portion of the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin metropolitan statistical area (“Chicago MSA” or “Chicago area”). No out-of-state residents who work in Illinois are included. Results are weighted to adjust the survey data to the overall population based on Census Bureau estimates.<sup>1</sup>

Nationally, there were 14.2 million union members in 2024 (Figure 2). This represents 170,000 fewer union members than in 2023 and 541,000 fewer dues-paying members than in 2015. That said, union density is still 242,000 members above the historic low of 14.0 million members recorded in 2021.

**FIGURE 2: GRAPHS OF UNIONIZATION RATES AND TOTAL UNION MEMBERSHIP BY REGION, 2015-2024**



	Illinois		Chicago MSA		USA	
Year	Members	Rate	Members	Rate	Members	Rate
2015	846,984	15.2%	539,036	13.8%	14,786,281	11.1%
2016	812,397	14.5%	508,058	12.9%	14,549,634	10.7%
2017	828,066	15.0%	526,875	13.5%	14,811,525	10.7%
2018	785,966	13.8%	514,629	12.9%	14,740,188	10.5%
2019	771,465	13.6%	503,086	12.5%	14,566,657	10.3%
2020	736,186	14.2%	501,209	13.8%	14,250,234	10.8%
2021	752,063	13.9%	520,254	13.6%	14,003,553	10.3%
2022	734,430	13.1%	510,982	12.9%	14,280,077	10.1%
2023	707,829	12.8%	499,878	12.6%	14,415,235	10.0%
2024*	734,842	13.1%	530,628	13.3%	14,245,481	9.9%
<b>Average</b>	<b>771,023</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>515,463</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>14,464,886</b>	<b>10.4%</b>

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2015-2024 (EPI, 2024). Values may not sum perfectly due to rounding. \*NOTE: Illinois' 13.1% unionization rate ranks 14<sup>th</sup> in the United States.

Illinois experienced gains in union membership last year (Figure 2). The unionization rate was 13.1 percent in 2024, the 14<sup>th</sup>-highest among the 50 U.S. states and a 0.3 percentage-point growth over 2023. Illinois added 27,000 union members, increasing from 708,000 members in 2023 to about 735,000 union members in 2024. The Chicago area powered this year-over-year growth, with 531,000 union members in 2024

<sup>1</sup> For more on the *Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups* (CPS-ORG) data, its limitations, and recent issues, see the Appendix.

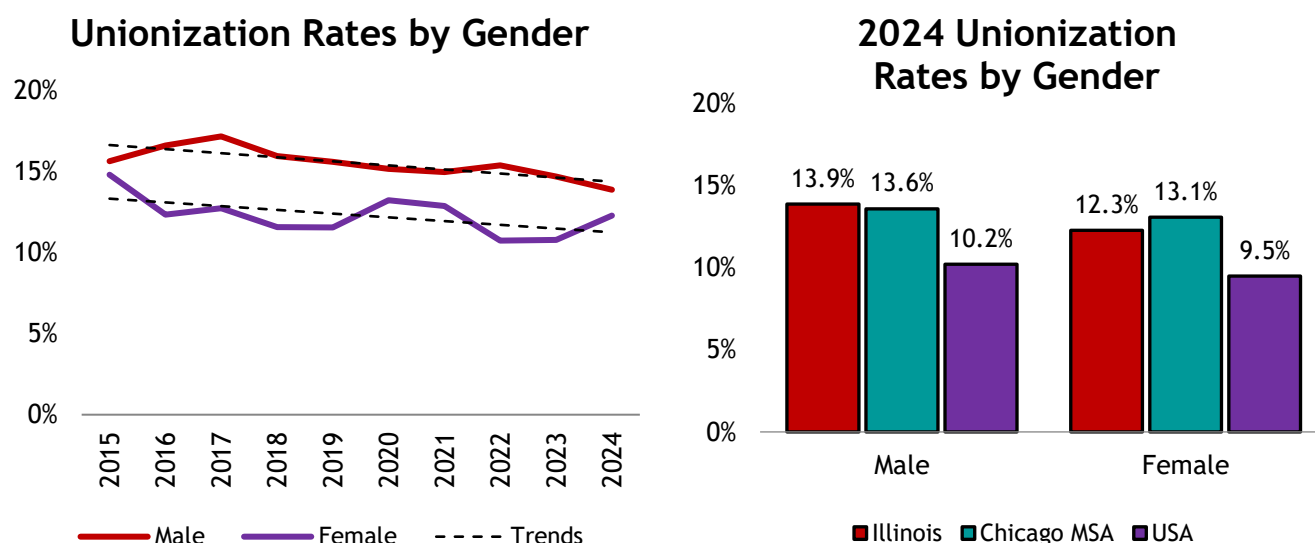
compared to 500,000 in 2023, a gain of 31,000 members. The Chicago area's unionization rate also ticked up from 12.6 percent to 13.3 percent.

Over the long run, however, unionization has declined in both Illinois and the Chicago area (Figure 2). The total union membership rate was 15.2 percent in 2015 but fell to 13.1 percent in 2024. The Chicago area's union membership rate has also fallen slightly, from 13.8 percent to 13.3 percent. As a result, there are about 112,000 fewer union members in the state than there were in 2015, including 8,000 fewer union members in the Chicago area and 104,000 fewer union members in Downstate communities. This decline, concentrated outside of the Chicago area, is attributable to several factors, including migration patterns and economic changes. Specifically, Illinois' population has become less rural and more urban as the state's economy has polarized over the last decade, adding jobs in managerial, business, and professional services occupations requiring highly educated workers but losing jobs in manufacturing, extraction, and other highly unionized sectors ([Illinois Future of Work Task Force, 2022](#)).

## Gender

Since 2015, the unionization rate for employed men in Illinois has fallen from 15.6 percent to 13.9 percent, a drop of 1.8 percentage points (Figure 3). The unionization rate of employed women has also decreased, from 14.8 percent to 12.3 percent, a drop of 2.5 percentage points. However, both men and women in Illinois continue to have higher unionization rates than their counterparts across the United States. Illinois' male unionization rate is 3.7 percentage points higher, and its female unionization rate is 2.8 percentage points higher than their comparable national averages (10.2 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 3: GRAPHS OF UNIONIZATION RATES BY GENDER, 2015-2024



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2015-2024 ([EPI, 2025](#)).

## Racial or Ethnic Background

Black workers are the most unionized racial or ethnic group (Figure 4). The unionization rate for Black workers is 19.6 percent in Illinois, 21.7 percent in the Chicago area, and 11.7 percent in the United States. In comparison, white union density is 13.2 percent in the state, 13.3 percent in the Chicago area, and 10.0 percent across the nation. Respective unionization rates for Hispanic workers are lower at 10.4 percent, 10.5 percent, and 8.5 percent. Between 2015 and 2024, white workers had the largest decline in union membership (-3.0 percentage points), while those belonging to all other racial and ethnic classifications experienced gains (3.7 percentage points).

FIGURE 4: GRAPHS OF UNIONIZATION RATES BY RACIAL OR ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION, 2015-2024

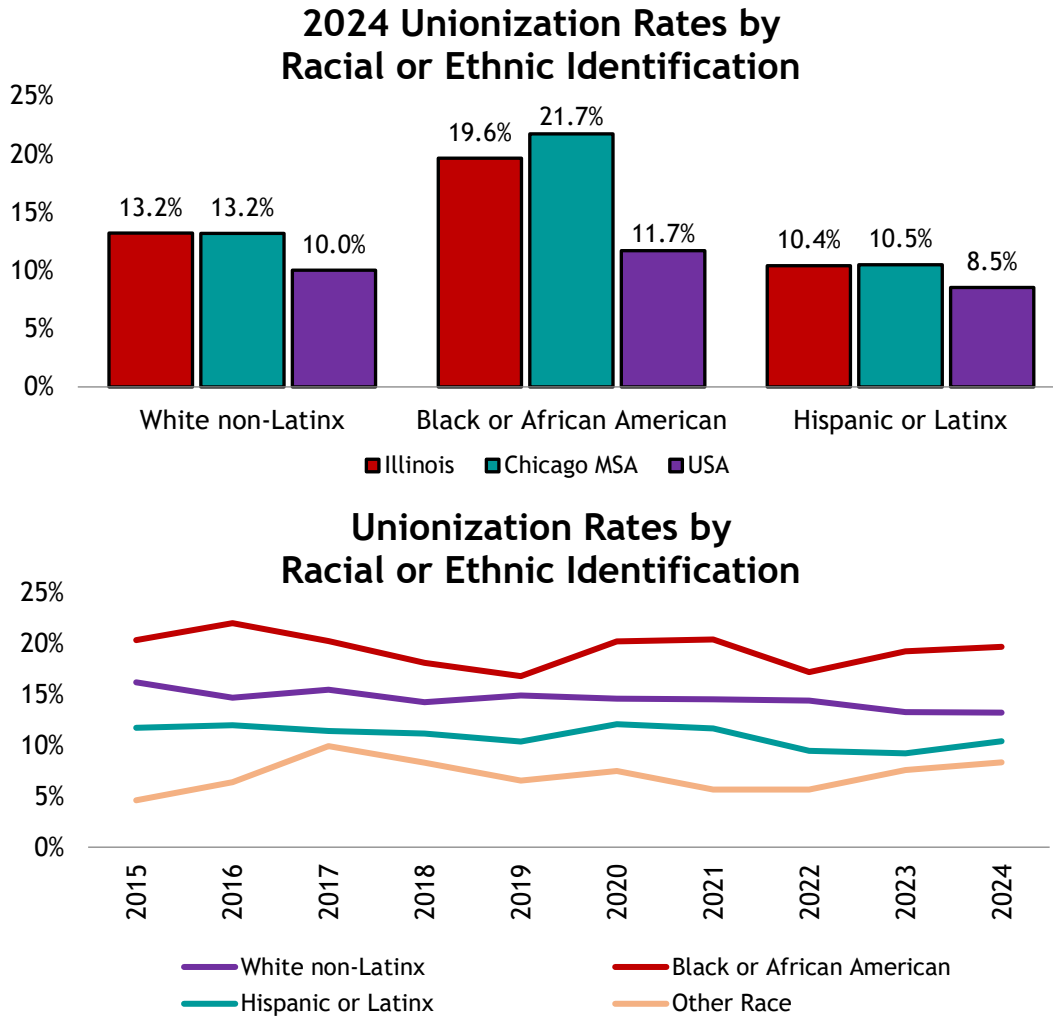
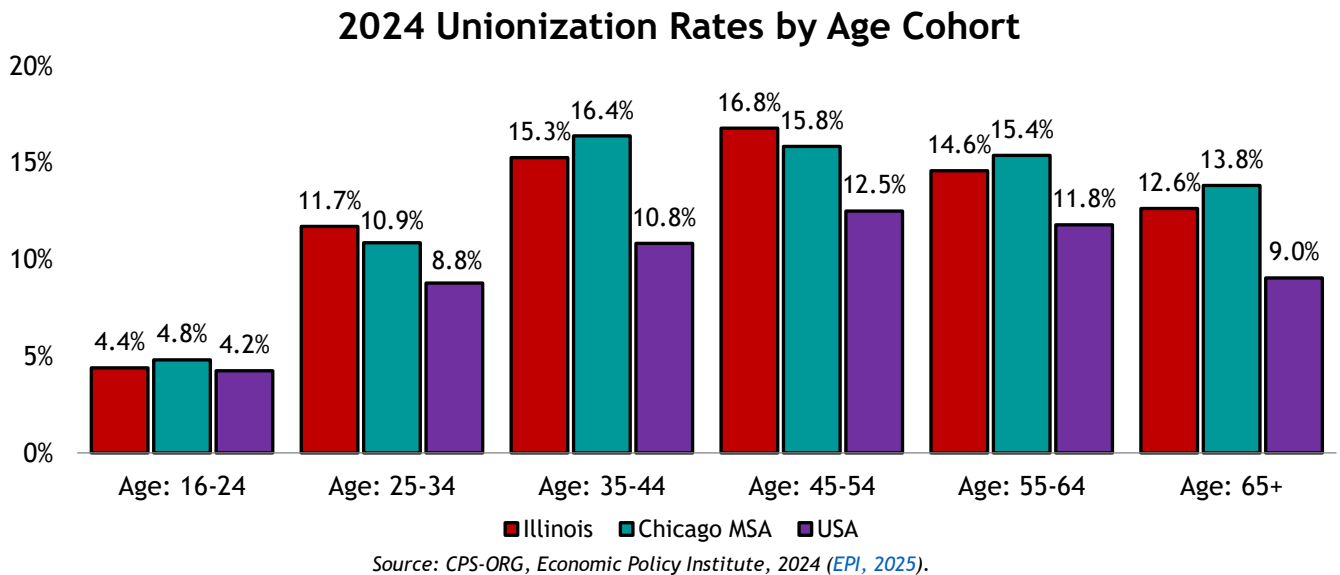


FIGURE 5: UNIONIZATION RATES BY AGE COHORT BY REGION, 2024





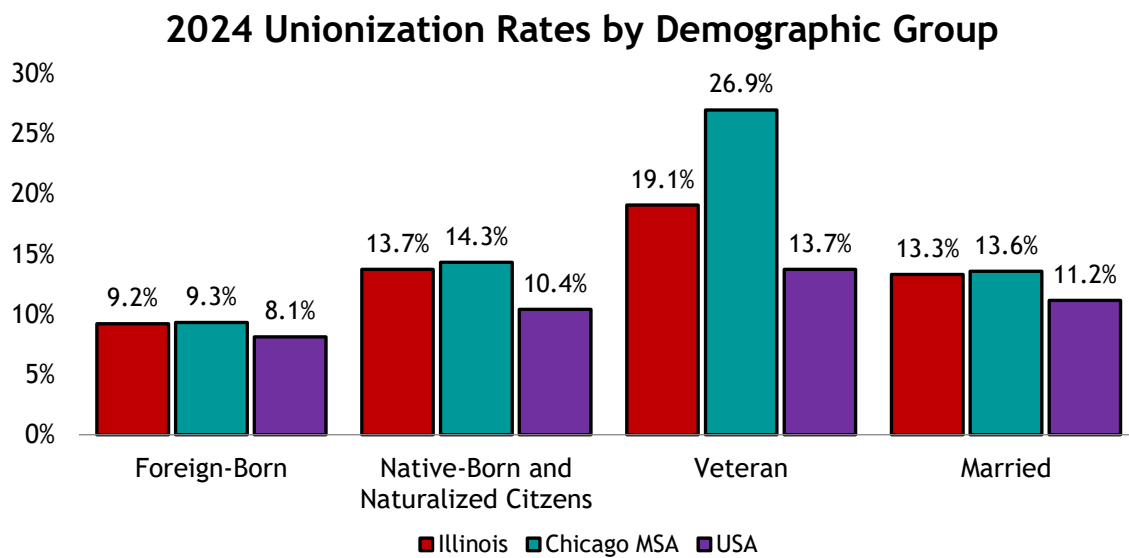
### Age Cohort

Unionization rates are higher for middle-aged workers than for young workers and older workers (Figure 5). For example, the unionization rate of workers between the ages of 45 and 54 years old is 16.8 percent in Illinois. Similarly, workers aged 35 to 44 years old and those aged 55 to 65 years have unionization rates of 15.3 percent and 14.6 percent in Illinois. By contrast, for young workers aged 16 to 24 years old and those aged 25 to 34 years old, unionization rates are just 4.4 percent and 11.7 percent in Illinois. For those 65 years or older, the unionization rate is 12.6 percent in the state. Across all age cohorts, workers in Illinois and in the Chicago area are more likely to be union members than the national average.

### Other Demographic Groups

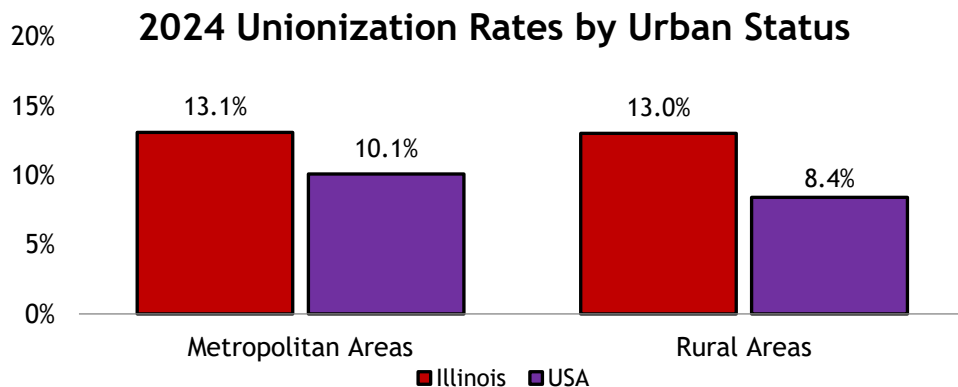
Union membership varies across other demographic classifications as well (Figure 6). Illinois' most unionized demographic group is military veterans. About one-in-five employed veterans is a union member in Illinois (19.1 percent) and one-in-four is in the Chicago area (26.9 percent). Across the United States, 13.7 percent of employed veterans are unionized. Unionization rates for married workers, foreign-born workers, and U.S. citizens are all above the national average in Illinois and in the Chicago area. Among workers who are married in the state, 13.3 percent are union members. In Illinois, U.S. citizens (13.7 percent) are more likely to be union members than foreign-born workers (9.2 percent).

FIGURE 6: UNIONIZATION RATES OF SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS BY REGION, 2024



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 (EPI, 2025).

FIGURE 7: UNIONIZATION RATES BY URBAN STATUS IN ILLINOIS AND THE UNITED STATES, 2024



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 (EPI, 2025).

## Geography

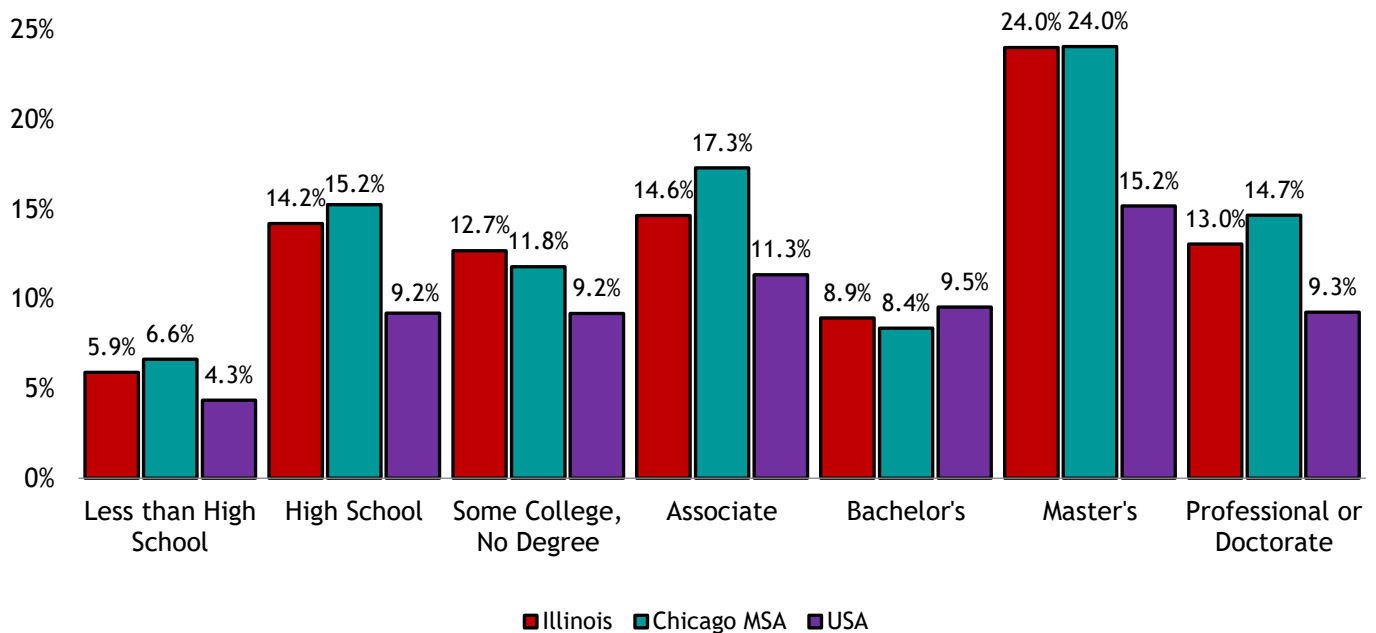
Unionization is not discernibly higher in the metropolitan areas of Illinois (Figure 7). The union membership rate is 13.1 percent in metropolitan areas like Chicago, Rockford, and Springfield, while it is 13.0 percent in rural portions as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Both are more unionized than their national counterparts. Illinois' urban and suburban areas are 3.0 percentage points more unionized than the comparable national average (10.1 percent) and its rural areas are 4.6 percentage points more unionized than the comparable national average (8.4 percent).

## Educational Attainment

Workers with master's degrees are the most unionized educational group (Figure 8). Nationally, more than one-in-seven master's degree holders is a union member (15.2 percent). In Illinois, nearly one-in-four workers with master's degrees is a union member (24.0 percent), including 24.0 percent in the Chicago area. Workers with associate degrees also have relatively higher unionization rates, at 14.6 percent in Illinois, 17.3 percent in the Chicago area, and 11.3 percent in the United States. Workers without high school degrees and workers with bachelor's degrees comprise the two least-unionized educational groups in Illinois. Except for workers with bachelor's degrees, unionization rates are higher in Illinois than the national average across all levels of educational attainment.

FIGURE 8: UNIONIZATION RATES BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OR STATUS BY REGION, 2024

### 2024 Unionization Rates by Educational Attainment



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 (EPI, 2025).

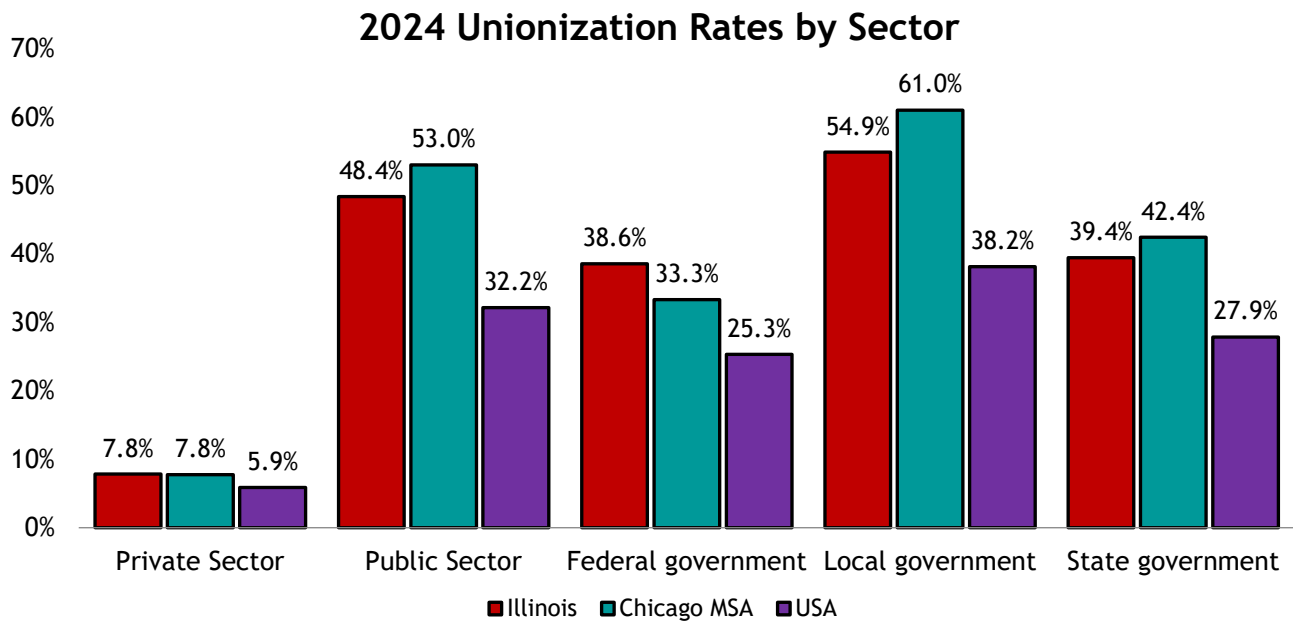
## UNIONIZATION RATES BY SECTOR, INDUSTRY, AND OCCUPATION

### Sector

While fewer than one-in-twelve private sector workers is now a union member in Illinois (7.8 percent), the Chicago MSA (7.8 percent), and the United States (5.9 percent), Illinois' private sector unionization

rate is 0.2 percentage point above its low point of 7.6 percent in 2022 ([Manzo & Bruno, 2023d](#)) (Figure 9). Unionization rates are considerably higher for public sector workers. Half of public sector workers are unionized in both Illinois (48.4 percent) and the Chicago area (53.0 percent), as are about one-third nationwide (32.2 percent). The most unionized public sector group is local government employees in Illinois (54.9 percent), the Chicago area (61.0 percent), and nationally (38.2 percent), which includes teachers, police officers, and firefighters. About four-in-ten state government employees, including workers at public universities, are unionized in Illinois (39.4 percent) as are nearly four-in-ten federal government employees (38.6 percent).

**FIGURE 9: UNIONIZATION RATES BY SECTOR OR LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT BY REGION, 2024**



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 ([EPI, 2025](#)).

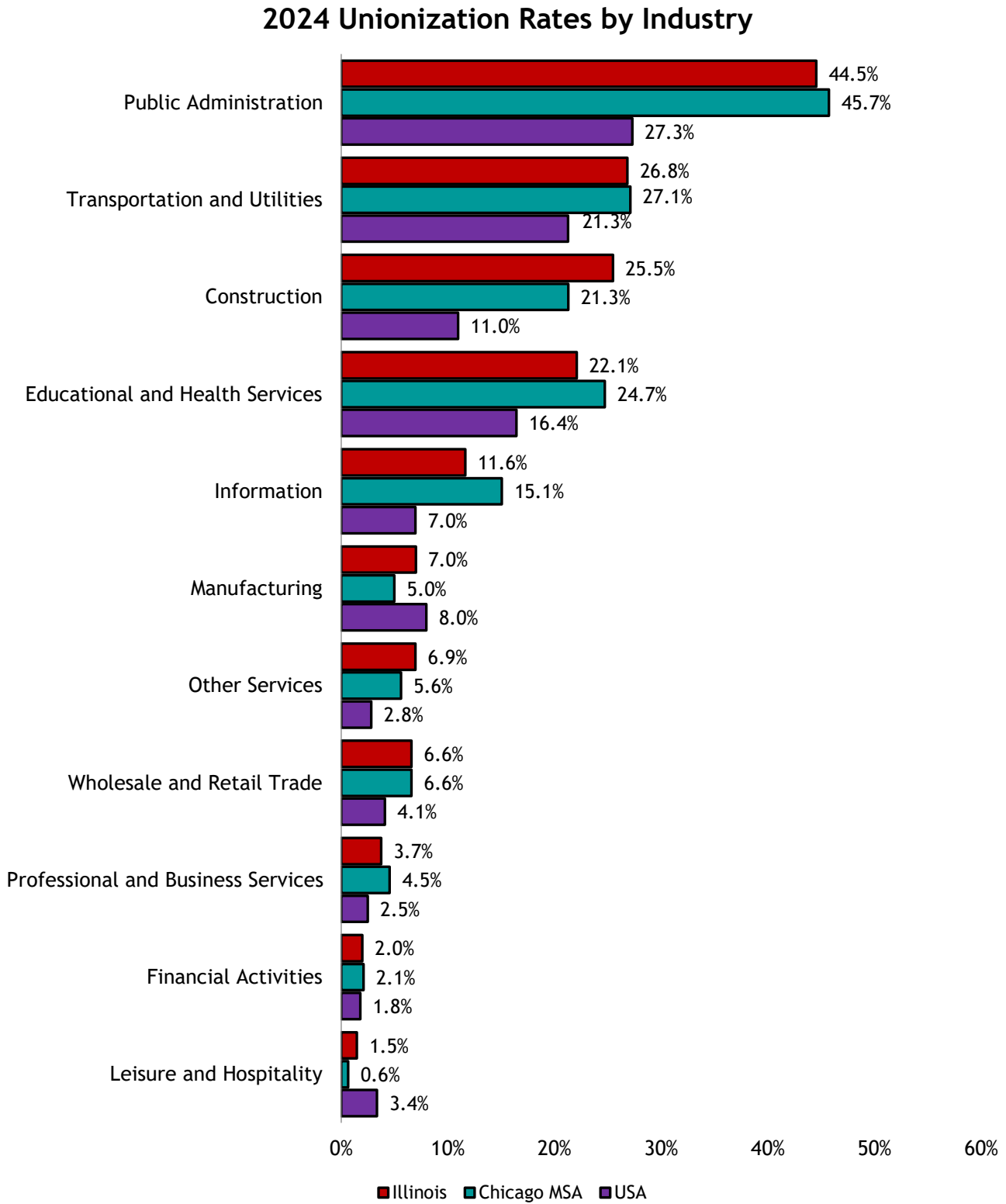
### Industry

Union membership varies widely by industry (Figure 10). The top four industries by unionization rates in Illinois are public administration (44.5 percent), transportation and utilities (26.8 percent), construction (25.5 percent), and the combined educational and health services industry (22.1 percent). The manufacturing workforce, associated historically as a leader in industrial unionization, is now only 7.0 percent organized in Illinois, just 5.0 percent in the Chicago area, and 8.0 percent nationally. The least-unionized industries generally are leisure and hospitality, financial activities, and professional and business services.

### Occupation

Figure 11 depicts the unionization rates of major occupations. The highest unionization rates in Illinois are among those in education, training, and library professions (46.2 percent); protective service careers (45.0 percent); construction and extraction occupations (27.4 percent); community and social service roles (25.8 percent); life, physical, and social science careers (20.4 percent); and installation, maintenance, and repair jobs (20.2 percent). These occupations have relatively high levels of unionization exceeding 20 percent. More specifically, essential workers like public pre-K through 12 teachers are 78.6 percent unionized and police officers and firefighters are 83.2 percent unionized in Illinois. On the other hand, the lowest unionization rates are for those in sales and related jobs (1.9 percent) and white-collar professionals in legal fields (2.6 percent) and management, business, and financial careers (3.3 percent) (Figure 11).

FIGURE 10: UNIONIZATION RATES BY MAJOR INDUSTRY BY REGION, 2024



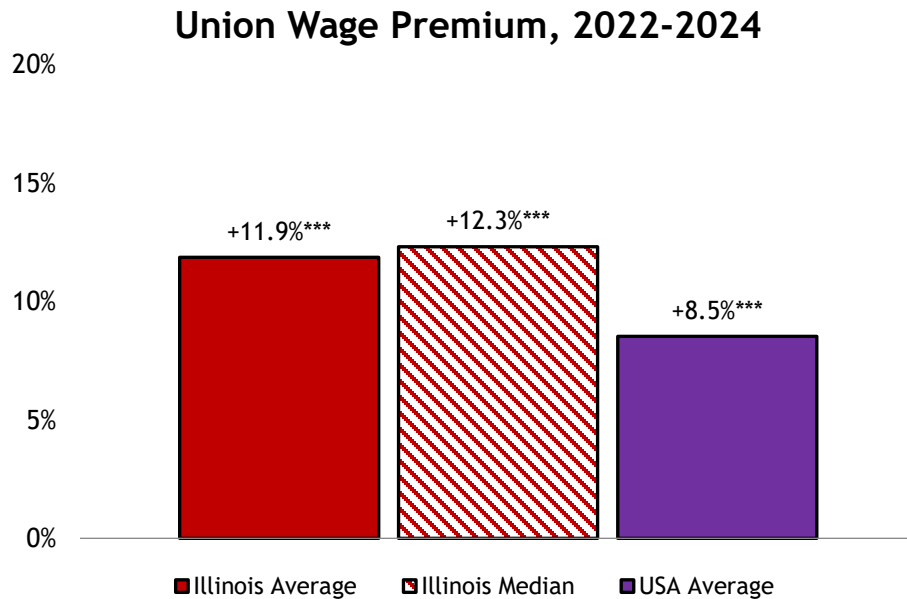
Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 ([EPI, 2025](#)).

FIGURE 11: UNIONIZATION RATES BY OCCUPATION BY REGION, 2024

Selected Occupations (2024)	Illinois	Chicago MSA	USA
Education, Training, and Library*	46.2%	50.2%	32.2%
Protective Service*	45.0%	51.7%	29.6%
Construction and Extraction	27.4%	20.1%	15.4%
Community and Social Service	25.8%	27.8%	13.6%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	20.4%	18.7%	10.6%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	20.2%	23.3%	12.6%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	18.0%	19.2%	8.7%
Transportation and Material Moving	17.1%	18.2%	13.2%
Production	16.4%	15.4%	11.6%
Healthcare Support	12.5%	12.1%	8.2%
Office and Administrative Support	10.4%	10.6%	8.5%
Personal Care and Service	9.5%	9.2%	4.3%
Healthcare Practitioner and Technical	6.6%	7.2%	12.0%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	5.3%	3.6%	3.9%
Computer and Mathematical Science	5.2%	5.7%	3.7%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	5.1%	6.0%	6.5%
Architecture and Engineering	5.0%	2.7%	5.7%
Management, Business, and Financial	3.3%	3.2%	4.1%
Legal	2.6%	3.1%	5.4%
Sales and Related	1.9%	1.3%	2.7%

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 (EPI, 2025). \*NOTE: Pre-K through secondary education teachers employed in the public sector had a unionization rate of 78.6% and police officers and firefighters had a unionization rate of 83.2 percent.

FIGURE 12: REGRESSIONS OF UNION WAGE PREMIUMS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND ILLINOIS, 2022-2024



Three asterisks (\*\*\*) indicate significance at the 1-percent level. Two asterisks (\*\*) indicate significance at the 5-percent level. Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2022-2024 (EPI, 2025). Statistics are adjusted by the outgoing rotation group earnings weight to match the total population ages 16 to 80 years old. Regression outputs are converted to percent changes using correct adjustments to interpret natural logarithms (Kennedy, 1981; IDRE, 2025). For more, see the Appendix.



## THE IMPACT OF UNION MEMBERSHIP ON WORKER WAGES

Union workers earn more than their nonunion counterparts (Figure 12). Many factors can influence a worker's earnings, including level of educational attainment, occupation, geographic location, and demographic characteristics. Statistical models called "regressions" are utilized to account for these and other important factors to isolate the independent effect of union membership on wages from 2022 through 2024. After accounting for these variables, union membership statistically increases a worker's hourly earnings by 8.5 percent in the United States.

The union wage premium is even higher in Illinois (Figure 12). Union membership boosts Illinois workers' hourly earnings by an average of 11.9 percent. Furthermore, a unique analytical tool called a "quantile regression," permits evaluation for the median worker. While union membership is statistically associated with a 11.9 percent increase in the average Illinois worker's wage, the wage premium is 12.3 percent for the median worker. All results are statistically significant at the 99-percent level of confidence. The data show that unionization boosts earnings for workers in Illinois.

FIGURE 13: UNION WAGE PREMIUMS BY STATE, OLS REGRESSIONS, 2022-2024

Rank	State	Union Premium	Rank	State	Union Premium
--	United States	+8.5%	26	Rhode Island	+7.2%
1	Nevada	+15.3%	27	South Dakota	+7.2%
2	Wisconsin	+13.8%	28	Texas	+7.1%
3	Illinois	+11.9%	29	Idaho	+6.9%
4	Indiana	+11.8%	30	Kentucky	+6.9%
5	Delaware	+11.5%	31	New Jersey	+6.8%
6	North Dakota	+10.5%	32	Tennessee	+6.8%
7	Maryland	+10.4%	33	New Mexico	+6.6%
8	California	+10.0%	34	Colorado	+6.4%
9	Georgia	+9.8%	35	Maine	+6.2%
10	Arizona	+9.7%	36	Ohio	+5.8%
11	Kansas	+9.4%	37	New York	+5.7%
12	Utah	+9.2%	38	Washington	+5.7%
13	Wyoming	+9.0%	39	Oregon	+5.7%
14	Connecticut	+8.5%	40	Alaska	+5.6%
15	Minnesota	+8.4%	41	Florida	+5.6%
16	South Carolina	+8.3%	42	Massachusetts	+5.5%
17	Montana	+8.3%	43	Mississippi	+4.7%
18	Missouri	+8.1%	44	Iowa	No effect
19	Alabama	+8.1%	45	West Virginia	No effect
20	New Hampshire	+7.9%	46	Virginia	No effect
21	Oklahoma	+7.8%	47	Louisiana	No effect
22	Pennsylvania	+7.6%	48	District of Columbia	No effect
23	Michigan	+7.5%	49	North Carolina	No effect
24	Nebraska	+7.4%	50	Vermont	No effect
25	Hawaii	+7.3%	51	Arkansas	No effect

All estimates are statistically significant unless noted. Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2022-2024 (EPI, 2025). Statistics are adjusted by the outgoing rotation group earnings weight to match the total population ages 16 to 80 years old. Regression outputs are converted to percent changes using correct adjustments to interpret natural logarithms (Kennedy, 1981; IDRE, 2025). For more, see the Appendix.

How does the average Illinois union earnings difference of 11.9 percent compare to the wage premium in other states? Similar regressions are run to assess each of the 49 other states plus the District of Columbia against Illinois. The results, reported in Figure 13, reveal that Illinois has the 3<sup>rd</sup>-highest union wage premium in the nation, behind only Nevada (15.4 percent) and Wisconsin (13.8 percent). In total, 13 states

have union wage effects that are higher than the national average of 8.5 percent. Importantly, the union wage gain exceeds 4.5 percent in 43 states and is statistically insignificant in just seven states (Figure 13).<sup>2</sup>

## **UNION MEMBERSHIP, BENEFITS, AND GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE**

This section uses data from a supplement of the *Current Population Survey* called the *Annual Social and Economic Supplement* (CPS-ASEC) (Flood et al., 2024). The CPS-ASEC is collected every March and includes more detailed information on household income, poverty, health insurance coverage, and tax and government assistance metrics than the core *Current Population Survey*. While the ten-year dataset from 2015 through 2024 captures survey data on 47,063 Illinois residents, only 3,117 of them were also in the CPS-ORG dataset, between the ages of 15 and 85 years old, and had information available on their union status. The data are weighted to adjust for the overall population based on Census Bureau estimates.

In Illinois, union members are significantly more likely to have health insurance coverage and be homeowners and much less likely to rely on government assistance programs (Figure 14). Fully 96.1 percent of union members report that they have health insurance coverage compared to just 90.9 percent of nonunion workers, a difference of 5.2 percentage points. Notably, only 4.9 percent of union members are covered by Medicaid or another public plan versus 8.4 percent of nonunion workers, a difference of 3.5 percentage points. Union members are also 1.4 percentage points less likely to rely on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food stamps and 2.3 percentage points less likely to receive Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits for low-income earners. Furthermore, 77.3 percent of union members own their homes, 8.3 percentage points more than nonunion workers (69.1 percent). Union workers in Illinois earn higher wages, contribute more in income taxes and property taxes, and are less dependent on government assistance programs—positively impacting public budgets for taxpayers.

**FIGURE 14: BENEFITS AND SOCIOECONOMIC OUTCOMES IN ILLINOIS BY UNION STATUS, 2015-2024**

<b>Illinois Workers (2015-2024)</b>	<b>Union Member</b>	<b>Nonunion Workers</b>	<b>Union Difference</b>
Health Insurance Coverage Rate	96.1%	90.9%	+5.2%
Public Health Insurance Coverage	4.9%	8.4%	-3.5%
Received SNAP Food Stamps	3.5%	4.9%	-1.4%
Received EITC Benefits	5.5%	7.8%	-2.3%
Homeownership Rate	77.3%	69.1%	+8.3%

Source: CPS-ASEC, IPUMS, 2015-2024 (Flood et al., 2024). N=3,117, including 461 union members and 2,656 nonunion workers.

## **STATES THAT WEAKENED COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS AND UNION DECLINE**

States that have weakened collective bargaining rights and undermined labor unions by adopting so-called “right-to-work” laws have been a significant contributor to the recent declines in union density across the United States. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, “right-to-work” states have seen their union membership rate drop from 6.0 percent to 5.1 percent, a 15.8 percent decrease as an overall share of the workforce (Figure 15). The union membership rate decline in so-called “right-to-work” states was more than seven times larger than the comparable decline among collective bargaining states, which fell from 14.5 percent to 14.2 percent over the same period (a 2.1 percent decrease relatively). As a result, the unionization rate in “right-to-work” states is now 9.1 percentage points below the unionization rate in collective bargaining states.

<sup>2</sup> Statistically insignificant effects—in which values are not significant at least at the 90-percent level of confidence—occur in seven mostly small states, six of which are so-called “right-to-work” states, as well as the District of Columbia. The lack of statistical significance is most likely due to small sample sizes, which have been decreasing in the CPS-ORG dataset over time.

Workers have fared better in collective bargaining states, where average hourly earnings have grown by 27.6 percent since 2019 (not adjusted for national inflation). In “right-to-work” states, average hourly earnings have only increased by 26.3 percent. Put differently, wages have grown 1.3 percent slower in “right-to-work” states since 2019 (Figure 15).

**FIGURE 15: “RIGHT-TO-WORK” (RTW) AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING (CB) STATE OUTCOMES, 2019-2024**

Labor Market Outcome	Unionization Rate			Average Hourly Earnings		
	RTW	CB	Difference	RTW	CB	RTW Difference
2019	6.0%	14.5%	-8.4%	\$25.64	\$29.60	-13.4%
2020	6.4%	15.2%	-8.8%	\$27.66	\$32.08	-13.8%
2021	5.7%	14.9%	-9.2%	\$28.30	\$33.50	-15.5%
2022	5.6%	14.6%	-8.9%	\$30.49	\$35.98	-15.3%
2023	5.8%	14.3%	-8.5%	\$32.03	\$37.86	-15.4%
2024	5.1%	14.2%	-9.1%	\$32.37	\$37.75	-14.3%
<b>Growth: 2019 to 2024</b>	<b>-1.0%</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>	<b>+26.3%</b>	<b>+27.6%</b>	<b>-1.3%</b>

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2019-2024 (EPI, 2025). Wages are in nominal dollars (i.e., they are not adjusted for inflation). Numbers may not sum perfectly due to rounding. RTW represents “right-to-work” states while CB represents collective bargaining states.

There are currently 26 states with “right-to-work” laws and 24 states plus the District of Columbia that protect workers’ rights to collective bargaining. In 2024, collective bargaining states added 9,000 union members while “right-to-work” states lost 179,000 union members (Figure 16). Additionally, 17 of the 25 collective bargaining jurisdictions added union members (68.0 percent) compared with only eight of the 26 “right-to-work” states (30.8 percent). The State of Michigan offers a natural experiment because it repealed its “right-to-work” law in 2024. In its first year protecting collective bargaining rights, Michigan added 15,000 union members and its unionization rate increased from 12.8 percent to 13.4 percent. On the other hand, Utah will serve as case study on the impacts of restricting workers’ rights after it banned collective bargaining for all public sector workers—including teachers, police officers, and firefighters—beginning July 1, 2025 (Schoenbaum, 2025).

Union membership may have grown more in collective bargaining states last year if not for the 2018 *Janus* Supreme Court decision. The decision only directly affected state and local government employees in collective bargaining states because those in “right-to-work” states could already “free-ride” and opt to receive union services and benefits without paying anything for them prior to the ruling. Accordingly, the *Janus* headwind specifically mutes union membership in collective bargaining states.

Workers earn significantly less in states that have weakened collective bargaining rights (Figure 17). As of 2024, worker earnings averaged \$32.37 per hour in “right-to-work” states, which was 14.3 percent less than the \$37.75 per hour earned by their counterparts in collective bargaining states. Even after accounting for differences in the cost of living through regional price parities by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) at the U.S. Department of Commerce, workers still earn less in “right-to-work” states. Although their cost-of-living is 7.8 percent lower on average, workers in “right-to-work” states earned 6.9 percent less than those in collective bargaining states in 2024 after adjusting for price differences. In a national ranking by cost-of-living-adjusted average hourly earnings, collective bargaining states comprise nine of the Top 10 (or highest-paid) states while “right-to-work” states account for eight of Bottom 10 (or lowest-paid) states (Figure 17).

Survey data disclose that the public strongly supports unions and millions of U.S. workers would join unions if they could. Taken together, Figures 15 through 17 show how lawmakers could respond and better represent voter preferences. Repealing so-called “right-to-work” laws could expand union membership, as it did in Michigan, or at least curb declines. It would also boost worker earnings. In collective bargaining states, lawmakers and voters could take steps to enact their own Workers’ Rights Amendments to prohibit “right-to-work” laws in perpetuity and ban future legislation to limit items over which teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other state and local government employees can bargain. Illinois shows that this additional level of constitutional protection can facilitate growth in union membership.

FIGURE 16: UNION MEMBERSHIP IN “RIGHT-TO-WORK” AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STATES, 2023-2024

State	RTW or CB	2023	2024	Change
<b>Michigan*</b>	<b>RTW→CB</b>	<b>565,872</b>	<b>580,657</b>	<b>+14,784</b>
Alaska	CB	45,263	52,867	+7,604
California	CB	2,513,660	2,374,726	-138,934
Colorado	CB	189,392	206,583	+17,191
Connecticut	CB	255,323	268,956	+13,633
Delaware	CB	38,728	36,908	-1,820
District of Columbia	CB	31,551	38,337	+6,786
Hawaii	CB	138,067	147,386	+9,320
Illinois	CB	707,829	734,842	+27,013
Maine	CB	51,766	76,406	+24,640
Maryland	CB	302,573	324,134	+21,561
Massachusetts	CB	410,713	494,868	+84,154
Minnesota	CB	354,206	377,256	+23,050
Missouri	CB	254,364	233,081	-21,284
Montana	CB	55,570	56,322	+752
New Hampshire	CB	62,042	62,263	+220
New Jersey	CB	677,587	680,141	+2,554
New Mexico	CB	60,214	62,747	+2,533
New York	CB	1,710,097	1,705,865	-4,233
Ohio	CB	640,230	621,419	-18,811
Oregon	CB	254,861	293,022	+38,161
Pennsylvania	CB	749,287	667,157	-82,129
Rhode Island	CB	62,618	72,247	+9,629
Vermont	CB	43,025	42,452	-573
Washington	CB	574,524	547,944	-26,580
Alabama	RTW	154,902	139,913	-14,988
Arizona	RTW	132,530	118,003	-14,527
Arkansas	RTW	62,017	45,012	-17,005
Florida	RTW	441,495	461,826	+20,331
Georgia	RTW	211,882	174,826	-37,056
Idaho	RTW	36,315	42,589	+6,275
Indiana	RTW	243,763	270,110	+26,347
Iowa	RTW	106,342	92,643	-13,699
Kansas	RTW	120,017	83,279	-36,738
Kentucky	RTW	151,761	155,911	+4,150
Louisiana	RTW	76,010	68,216	-7,794
Mississippi	RTW	75,888	58,903	-16,985
Nebraska	RTW	68,007	62,150	-5,858
Nevada	RTW	170,896	165,047	-5,849
North Carolina	RTW	124,206	107,594	-16,612
North Dakota	RTW	22,399	18,151	-4,248
Oklahoma	RTW	116,419	91,624	-24,796
South Carolina	RTW	48,999	60,948	+11,948
South Dakota	RTW	15,295	11,598	-3,697
Tennessee	RTW	178,159	135,565	-42,594
Texas	RTW	588,537	601,661	+13,124
Utah	RTW	65,066	57,715	-7,351
Virginia	RTW	175,330	208,129	+32,799
West Virginia	RTW	60,371	61,079	+708
Wisconsin	RTW	204,964	180,487	-24,477
Wyoming	RTW	14,300	13,916	-384
<b>25 Collective Bargaining States</b>		<b>10,749,362</b>	<b>10,758,584</b>	<b>+9,222</b>
<b>26 “Right-to-Work” States</b>		<b>3,665,873</b>	<b>3,486,897</b>	<b>-178,976</b>

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2023-2024 (EPI, 2025). RTW represents “right-to-work” states while CB represents collective bargaining states. Numbers may not sum perfectly due to rounding. \*NOTE: Michigan’s unionization rate increased from 12.8 percent in 2023 to 13.4 percent in 2024.

FIGURE 17: WORKER EARNINGS IN “RIGHT-TO-WORK” AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STATES, 2024

States Ranked by Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Hourly Earnings		RTW or CB (2024)	Average Hourly Earnings	Regional Price Parity*	Cost-of-Living-Adjusted Average Hourly Earnings
1	District of Columbia	CB	\$54.31	110.8	\$49.02
2	Colorado	CB	\$41.06	101.4	\$40.50
3	Massachusetts	CB	\$42.35	108.2	\$39.13
4	Virginia	RTW	\$39.33	100.7	\$39.04
5	Washington	CB	\$42.21	108.6	\$38.88
6	Maryland	CB	\$39.90	104.0	\$38.38
7	New Jersey	CB	\$41.63	108.9	\$38.23
8	Connecticut	CB	\$38.58	103.7	\$37.21
9	Ohio	CB	\$33.19	91.8	\$36.15
10	Alaska	CB	\$36.75	101.7	\$36.13
11	Montana	CB	\$32.58	90.2	\$36.11
12	California	CB	\$40.59	112.6	\$36.05
13	North Dakota	RTW	\$31.93	88.6	\$36.05
14	Pennsylvania	CB	\$35.12	97.5	\$36.02
15	Rhode Island	CB	\$36.52	101.4	\$36.01
16	Minnesota	CB	\$35.39	98.4	\$35.96
17	Tennessee	RTW	\$33.21	92.5	\$35.89
18	New Hampshire	CB	\$37.72	105.3	\$35.81
19	Vermont	CB	\$34.43	96.6	\$35.63
20	New York	CB	\$38.34	107.6	\$35.62
21	Illinois	CB	\$35.06	98.9	\$35.47
22	Wisconsin	RTW	\$32.83	93.1	\$35.27
23	Oklahoma	RTW	\$30.95	88.3	\$35.06
24	Michigan	CB	\$32.89	94.2	\$34.92
25	Utah	RTW	\$33.02	95.0	\$34.76
26	Nebraska	RTW	\$31.35	90.4	\$34.69
27	Kansas	RTW	\$31.10	90.0	\$34.57
28	North Carolina	RTW	\$32.43	94.1	\$34.45
29	Missouri	CB	\$31.59	91.8	\$34.43
30	Oregon	CB	\$36.01	104.7	\$34.39
31	Kentucky	RTW	\$31.10	90.5	\$34.37
32	Indiana	RTW	\$31.62	92.2	\$34.30
33	Arkansas	RTW	\$29.47	86.5	\$34.06
34	South Dakota	RTW	\$29.99	88.1	\$34.04
35	Idaho	RTW	\$30.96	91.4	\$33.86
36	Iowa	RTW	\$29.94	88.8	\$33.73
37	Texas	RTW	\$32.74	97.2	\$33.69
38	Georgia	RTW	\$32.57	96.7	\$33.69
39	Louisiana	RTW	\$29.59	88.3	\$33.49
40	Delaware	CB	\$33.24	99.3	\$33.49
41	Maine	CB	\$32.44	97.1	\$33.41
42	Arizona	RTW	\$33.71	101.1	\$33.34
43	Wyoming	RTW	\$30.16	90.8	\$33.19
44	New Mexico	CB	\$29.92	90.4	\$33.10
45	Alabama	RTW	\$29.77	90.0	\$33.09
46	South Carolina	RTW	\$30.71	93.2	\$32.96
47	Nevada	RTW	\$31.65	97.0	\$32.63
48	West Virginia	RTW	\$28.93	89.8	\$32.23
49	Florida	RTW	\$32.51	103.5	\$31.43
50	Mississippi	RTW	\$26.09	87.3	\$29.89
51	Hawaii	CB	\$32.44	108.6	\$29.86
25 Collective Bargaining States			\$37.75	103.6	\$36.40
26 “Right-to-Work” States			\$32.37	95.5	\$33.90
“Right-to-Work” Difference			-14.3%	-7.8%	-6.9%

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2024 (EPI, 2025); “Regional Data: GDP and Personal Income,” U.S. Department of Commerce (BEA, 2025). RTW represents “right-to-work” states while CB represents collective bargaining states. \*NOTE: Regional price parities (RPPs) measure cost-of-living differences across states for 2023, the latest year for which data were available, and are expressed as a percentage of the overall national price level, which is indexed to 100.0.



## FEDERAL CHALLENGES TO UNIONS

Many federal challenges to union rights have occurred in 2025. In March, President Trump issued an Executive Order on “Exclusions from Federal Labor-Management Relations Programs,” which revoked collective bargaining for more than 1 million federal workers, or four-in-five federal workers represented by unions (Glass, 2025). The Executive Order used “national security” concerns to justify eliminating collective bargaining rights at more than a dozen federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of the Treasury, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and National Science Foundation (NSF) (Glass, 2025). After a federal appeals court lifted a preliminary injunction and allowed agencies to proceed with enforcing the Executive Order, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced in August that it would terminate its union contracts, stripping labor protections for more than 400,000 workers, including nurses (Cameron, 2025). Also in August, the EPA canceled its union contracts, affecting approximately 12,000 workers, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) terminated collective bargaining for about 8,100 animal health and food safety inspection workers (Rozen & Volcovici, 2025; Douglas, 2025). Earlier in the year, in March 2025, the Department of Homeland Security moved to terminate its collective bargaining agreement with between 45,000 and 50,000 workers at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), but that action was temporarily blocked by a federal judge over the summer (Santana & Sisak, 2025; Bellisle, 2025). These actions will affect as many as 45,000 union members in Illinois who are employed by federal government agencies (Figure 18).<sup>3</sup>

FIGURE 18: FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE HEADCOUNT AND UNIONIZATION IN ILLINOIS, 2019-2024

Year	Federal Employees	Unionization Rate	Federal Government Union Members
2019	102,810	37.1%	38,105
2020	92,183	40.3%	37,144
2021	98,641	41.5%	40,977
2022	106,816	30.2%	32,258
2023	101,275	35.3%	35,705
2024	117,236	38.6%	45,216

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2019-2024 (EPI, 2025).

President Trump, working with Tesla, SpaceX, and X CEO Elon Musk when he was tasked with running the “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE), sought to reduce the number of workers employed by the federal government. Notably, the Trump administration directed federal agencies to fire probationary employees who have served for fewer than two years, instituted a hiring freeze for the federal government, cut the Department of Education workforce in half by firing 1,300 employees after the U.S. Supreme Court lifted a lower court injunction, shuttered the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), instituted new rules making Senior Executive Service (SES) employees easier to fire for any reason, and offered deferred resignation to federal employees (McNicholas et al., 2025). As a result, an estimated 149,000 employees have left the federal government since January 2025, with the Department of the Treasury, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Defense experiencing the largest reductions (Jamieson, 2025).

In addition to the elimination of hundreds of thousands of unionized federal workers, recent federal actions have also had effects on workplace protections and job quality across America. First, President Trump rescinded the “Investing in America and Investing in American Workers” Executive Order, which directed government agencies to award grants and federal contracts to applicants who commit to strong labor standards and workers’ rights, including by utilizing project labor agreements (PLAs), union neutrality agreements, prevailing wage standards, registered apprenticeships, and targeted local hiring

<sup>3</sup> The Protect America’s Workforce Act, a bipartisan bill in the U.S. House of Representatives cosponsored by 222 Members of Congress, including 14 Representatives from Illinois, would rescind President Trump’s Executive Order, restore federal workers’ right to collectively bargain, and reinstate their union contracts (Library of Congress, 2025).

practices ([McNicholas et al., 2025](#)). Then, the administration canceled U.S. Department of Labor grants that are awarded to nonprofit organizations to uphold labor rights by combatting forced labor, child labor, and human trafficking ([McNicholas et al., 2025](#)). Finally, the federal budget reconciliation bill passed by Congress in July 2025 phases out tax credits for wind and solar projects in 2027—five years earlier than originally planned under the Inflation Reduction Act—which will reduce the overall clean energy buildout nationally by a projected 53 percent through 2035, decrease the value of projects that are covered by prevailing wage and apprenticeship standards via the expanded credits, and reduce construction employment by approximately 400,000 jobs over the next decade ([King et al., 2025](#); [Energy Innovation, 2025](#)).

Importantly, the federal agency that enforces collective bargaining rights for private sector workers has also been effectively shut down in 2025. By law, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) must be an independent agency with five members in total and three for a quorum. In January, President Trump fired Board Chair Gwynne Wilcox, bringing its membership down to two, denying it the quorum it needs to legally operate, and leaving workers without a decision-making body to rule on their organizing activities. Additionally, the President dismissed the NLRB’s general counsel and his replacement has revoked a variety of NLRB actions intended to protect labor rights—including those that prevented corporations from using noncompete agreements, limited the use of artificial intelligence and monitoring technologies to spy on workers, and imposed more stringent penalties on companies who fired workers for engaging in union activities ([Glass, 2025](#)).

Most recently, the President fired the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the U.S. Department of Labor in August after the agency released a monthly employment report that showed a softening labor market ([Kopack, Alba, & Strickler, 2025](#)). While the President claimed without evidence that the updated statistics were falsified or even deliberately manipulated to make the economy appear weaker, federal agencies routinely revise their numbers due to response rate issues, lags in data collection, changes in economic conditions, and other factors. The Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee (FESAC) was a task force of unpaid statistical experts working to recommend ways to boost federal survey response rates to improve data accuracy, but the group was disbanded in February by Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick ([Pino, 2025](#)). President Trump’s nominee to take over as head of the BLS has been widely criticized by economists because he has called for suspending the monthly jobs report and moving to a quarterly release and has frequently misunderstood the BLS data for which he would be responsible ([Rugaber & Boak, 2025](#); [Lalljee, 2025](#)). If the BLS halts certain releases or the data becomes unreliable under a new commissioner, then businesses, governments, unions, and the public will be unable to make accurate and timely economic decisions in 2026 and beyond.

## **CONCLUSION**

In Illinois, 13 percent of workers are unionized following an increase of 27,000 members and a 56 percent success rate for union organizing drives in 2024. Military veterans, Black workers, U.S. citizens, workers with master’s degrees, and public sector employees have the highest unionization rates across the state.

The data reveal that unions continue to promote job quality and increase worker earnings. Illinois has the 3<sup>rd</sup>-highest union wage premium in the nation, with unions raising wages by 12 percent. Union members are also 8 percentage points more likely to own their homes, 5 percentage points more likely to have health insurance coverage, and between 1 and 4 percentage points less likely to rely on various government assistance programs than nonunion workers—positively impacting public budgets in Illinois.

Nationally, unions lost 170,000 members in 2024. The decline was concentrated in states that have weakened collective bargaining rights by adopting so-called “right-to-work” laws, which shed 179,000 union members last year. “Right-to-work” states have seen their wages grow 1 percent slower over the past five years, resulting in worker earnings that are now 14 percent below their counterparts in collective bargaining states—or 7 percent after accounting for cost-of-living differences. On the other hand, Michigan

became the first state in six decades to repeal its “right-to-work” law in 2024, and the result was an improvement in its unionization rate and a gain of 15,000 union members across the state.

However, unions suddenly face significant challenges this Labor Day and beyond. The Trump administration has revoked collective bargaining rights for more than 1 million workers and canceled union contracts at federal agencies. The administration has also shuttered entire agencies, dismissed new employees, imposed hiring freezes, created deferred resignations programs, rescinded grants that promoted job quality, rendered the National Labor Relations Board powerless, and fired the nonpartisan Bureau of Labor Statistics commissioner. Meanwhile, at the state-level, Utah stripped collective bargaining rights from teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other state and local government employees in 2025.

These actions are at odds with public opinion, which continues to show that seven-in-ten Americans support labor unions and that millions of nonunion workers are interested in joining unions. To better reflect voter preferences, lawmakers could consider repealing so-called “right-to-work” laws. In collective bargaining states, lawmakers and voters could take steps to enact their own Workers’ Rights Amendments to ban “right-to-work” laws and prohibit legislation that restricts collective bargaining rights for teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other public servants. The data from both Michigan and Illinois reveal that these actions and constitutional protections can facilitate the expansion in union membership and boost to worker earnings desired by voters and workers.

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## **APPENDIX**

This report largely utilizes data from the *Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups* (CPS-ORG). CPS-ORG data reports individual-level information on more than 20,000 respondents nationwide each month. The records include data on wages, unionization, hours worked, sector, industry, and occupation, as well as other demographic, geographic, and education variables. The data was extracted from Economic Policy Institute Microdata Extracts ([EPI, 2025](#)).

There are limitations to using CPS-ORG data which have worsened over time. The biggest limitation is that not every surveyed worker replies to the union membership question. For example, in 2024, union membership data was only available for 3,490 of the 3,847 surveyed workers (90.7 percent) in Illinois. While this does not impact unionization rates, estimates are likely *underreported* for both total union members and total nonunion workers.

Another major limitation is that U.S. resident response rates to BLS surveys such as the CPS-ORG have been declining over time. In April 2015, 88.3 percent of households responded to the *Current Population Survey*. By April 2025, only 68.1 percent did, a decrease of 20.2 percentage points ([BLS, 2025](#)). Declining response rates are occurring as a result of many factors, such as difficulty in reaching certain demographic groups, fewer individuals responding to surveys conducted over phone or by mail, and overall mistrust of surveys for political reasons ([BLS, 2023](#); [Feldman & Mendez, 2022](#)).

To correct for nonresponse bias, analytic weights are provided by the Department of Labor to match the sample to the estimated U.S. population between the ages of 16 and 80 years old. However, population estimates have *themselves* become problematic. Two groups that have historically been at the most risk of undercounts by the U.S. Census Bureau are foreign-born individuals and Hispanic individuals due to structural factors such as administrative barriers, language barriers, reduced access to broadband internet, and lack of trust in the government based on immigration status ([Lou & Martin, 2022](#)). In fact, in the 2020 Census, there was a record undercount of Hispanic residents, with the Census Bureau missing one-in-20 Hispanic people ([Cohn & Passel, 2022](#)). These projections have led to “wildly erroneous” claims about Illinois’ population, which was underestimated ([Miller, 2022](#); [Ramos & Armentrout, 2022](#)).

Between 2015 and 2024, the population between the ages of 16 and 80 years old in Illinois was estimated to have decreased by about 58,000 people (-0.6 percent), from just under 10.1 million to just over 10.0 million (Table A). However, this estimate is based on a rapidly declining number of respondents and an increasingly higher analytic weight applied per response. Over the ten-year period, the number of people from Illinois who responded to the survey decreased from about 9,200 to just over 6,400, a drop of 30 percent. Early in the decade, each respondent corresponded to approximately 1,100 estimated people in the state. By the end of the decade, each respondent was representing nearly 1,600 estimated people in Illinois, a 42 percent increase. Finally, Illinois residents have also decreased a share of survey respondents nationally—a notable shift that could contribute to lower population estimates and lower employment estimates in this household survey than the reality across the state (Table A).

With these caveats in mind, it is worth noting that the CPS-ORG estimates of Illinois’ population ages 16 to 80 have been below projections of Illinois’ population from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which samples 5 percent of credit reports from Equifax to understand household debt, including mortgage, credit card, auto loan, and student loan balances (Table B). The CPS-ORG data suggests that Illinois has had between 9.9 million and 10.1 million people ages 16 to 80 years old each year since 2015. In comparison, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York has reported that between 10.4 million and 10.8 million Illinois residents ages 18 years and older have had credit files since 2015. While these sources assess slightly different groups of people, the CPS-ORG estimates have gone from estimating 4 percent fewer adults in Illinois to 8 percent fewer as of 2024.

TABLE A: ILLINOIS' ADULT POPULATION ESTIMATES AND DECLINING CPS-ORG RESPONSES, 2015-2024

Population Estimates (Ages 16-80 Years Old) by Year	Estimated Illinois Population	Surveyed Individuals in Illinois	Analytic Weight Per Surveyed Person	Individuals Surveyed in United States	Illinois' Share of Responses
2015	10,086,427	9,203	1,096	313,383	2.9%
2016	10,074,065	9,148	1,101	313,591	2.9%
2017	10,040,700	8,744	1,148	308,664	2.8%
2018	10,048,848	8,346	1,204	301,053	2.8%
2019	10,009,776	7,715	1,297	290,217	2.7%
2020	9,975,234	7,329	1,361	270,123	2.7%
2021	9,924,430	7,117	1,394	264,623	2.7%
2022	10,003,941	6,606	1,514	251,377	2.6%
2023	10,000,608	6,421	1,557	242,582	2.6%
2024	10,028,307	6,444	1,556	243,236	2.6%
<b>2015-2024 Change</b>	<b>-58,120</b>	<b>-2,759</b>	<b>+460</b>	<b>-70,147</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>
<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>-0.6%</b>	<b>-30.0%</b>	<b>+42.0%</b>	<b>-22.4%</b>	<b>-9.8%</b>

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2015-2024 (EPI, 2025). Values may not sum perfectly due to rounding.

TABLE B: ILLINOIS' ADULT POPULATION ESTIMATES, CPS-ORG VS. NEW YORK FED EQUIFAX, 2015-2024

Estimated Illinois Population by Year	CPS-ORG Estimated Population (Ages 16-80)	New York Fed Consumer Credit Panel / Equifax (Ages 18+)	CPS-ORG Difference
2015	10,086,427	10,458,900	-3.6%
2016	10,074,065	10,517,100	-4.2%
2017	10,040,700	10,526,580	-4.6%
2018	10,048,848	10,503,020	-4.3%
2019	10,009,776	10,564,280	-5.2%
2020	9,975,234	10,567,240	-5.6%
2021	9,924,430	10,628,560	-6.6%
2022	10,003,941	10,699,920	-6.5%
2023	10,000,608	10,710,340	-6.6%
2024	10,028,307	10,838,060	-7.5%
<b>2015-2024 Change</b>	<b>-78,213</b>	<b>+379,160</b>	<b>-437,280</b>

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2015-2024 (EPI, 2025); Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit: Household Debt Statistics by State, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2014-2024 (New York Fed, 2025). New York Fed data sample 5 percent of Equifax credit reports in the fourth quarter of each year (i.e., October, November, and December). Values may not sum perfectly due to rounding.

**TABLE C: ROBUST OLS AND QUANTILE REGRESSIONS OF THE IMPACT OF UNION MEMBERSHIP ON THE NATURAL LOG OF HOURLY WAGES, 2022-2024**

Ln(Nominal Wage)	(1) USA Mean		(2) Illinois Mean		(3) Illinois Median	
	Coefficient	(St. Err.)	Coefficient	(St. Err.)	Coefficient	(St. Err.)
Union member	0.0818***	(0.0032)	0.1121***	(0.0164)	0.1162***	(0.0174)
Age	0.0308***	(0.0004)	0.0320***	(0.0024)	0.0245***	(0.0021)
Age <sup>2</sup>	-0.0003***	(0.0000)	-0.0003***	(0.0000)	-0.0002***	(0.0000)
Female	-0.1592***	(0.0021)	-0.1610***	(0.0118)	-0.1327***	(0.0106)
White	0.0291***	(0.0091)	0.0406	(0.0841)	0.0710	(0.1125)
Black/African American	-0.0595***	(0.0095)	-0.0317	(0.0857)	0.0036	(0.1131)
Hispanic/Latinx	-0.0439***	(0.0094)	-0.0354	(0.0847)	0.0035	(0.1131)
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.0494***	(0.0100)	0.0771	(0.0868)	0.1103	(0.1142)
Veteran	0.0203***	(0.0048)	-0.0131	(0.0326)	-0.0517*	(0.0281)
Married	0.0729***	(0.0021)	0.0955***	(0.0114)	0.0954***	(0.0113)
Citizen	0.0658***	(0.0047)	0.0641***	(0.0234)	0.0594***	(0.0207)
Foreign-born	-0.0335***	(0.0040)	-0.0674***	(0.0202)	-0.0784***	(0.0187)
Metro Area	0.0641***	(0.0027)	0.0641***	(0.0186)	0.0641***	(0.0187)
Federal government	0.0145**	(0.0063)	-0.0403	(0.0419)	0.0214	(0.0267)
State government	-0.1374***	(0.0047)	-0.2012***	(0.0311)	-0.2040***	(0.0205)
Local government	-0.1203***	(0.0041)	-0.1175***	(0.0225)	-0.1163***	(0.0226)
Usual hours worked	0.0037***	(0.0001)	0.0041***	(0.0006)	0.0051***	(0.0005)
Less than high school	-0.1192***	(0.0034)	-0.0805***	(0.0191)	-0.0369***	(0.0139)
Some college	0.0360***	(0.0027)	0.0474***	(0.0150)	0.0445***	(0.0149)
Associate's	0.0791***	(0.0031)	0.0741***	(0.0174)	0.0654***	(0.0182)
Bachelor's	0.2959***	(0.0029)	0.3309***	(0.0161)	0.3078***	(0.0162)
Master's	0.4199***	(0.0041)	0.4481***	(0.0220)	0.4497***	(0.0199)
Professional/Doctorate	0.5959***	(0.0069)	0.6555***	(0.0344)	0.6698***	(0.0343)
Year: 2023	0.0478***	(0.0023)	0.0564***	(0.0128)	0.0677***	(0.0113)
Year: 2024	0.0774***	(0.0022)	0.0538***	(0.0122)	0.0826***	(0.0121)
Industry Variables	Y		Y		Y	
Occupation Variables	Y		Y		Y	
State Fixed Effects	Y		N		N	
Constant	2.1575***	(0.0150)	2.0395***	(0.1016)	2.077***	(0.1223)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.4070		0.4028		0.2740	
Observations	354,287		10,098		10,098	
Weighted	Y		Y		Y	

Three asterisks (\*\*\*) indicate significance at the 1% level, two asterisks (\*\*) indicates significance at the 5% level, and one asterisk (\*) indicates significance at the 10% level. Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2022-2024 (EPI, 2025). The data are adjusted by the outgoing rotation group earnings weight to match the total population 16 to 80 years old.

Robust ordinary least squares (OLS) and quantile regression models account for other variables to parse out the actual and unique causal effect that union membership has on hourly wages on average. The analyses control for a host of demographic, work, sector, industry, occupation, and education variables that could also have an impact on a worker's hourly earnings. In the U.S. model, Regression (1), state indicator variables are included to factor in unmeasured state-specific characteristics. The sample, in all cases, is weighted to match population estimates. Regression (2) compares the impact of union membership on wages for Illinois compared to the nation from robust OLS analyses and Regression (3) provides the median regression from a quantile regression for Illinois.

NOTE: In this report, regression outputs are converted to percent changes using correct adjustments to interpret natural logarithms (Kennedy, 1981; IDRE, 2025). The correct interpretations of these results are  $e^{(\text{coefficient})} - 1$ .