

Unions & Management

Labor unions are associations of workers formed to protect workers' rights and advance their interests. Unions negotiate with employers through a process known as collective bargaining. The resulting union contract specifies workers' pay, hours, benefits, and job health and safety policies.

Thanks to the efforts of labor unions, workers have achieved higher wages, more reasonable hours, safer working conditions, health benefits, and aid when retired or injured. Labor unions were also instrumental in ending the practice of child labor. They have exerted a broad influence on American life, reshaping the political, economic, and cultural fabric of the country.

Backing for unions has been rising in the U.S. A Gallup poll, released Aug. 30, 2022, found that 71% of Americans now support unions--up from 65% before the pandemic, and the highest support level since 1965.

- A labor union is an association of workers formed to negotiate collectively with an employer to protect and further workers' rights and interests.²
- Sustained trade union organizing among American workers began in 1794 with the establishment of the first trade union.
- Discrimination in unions was common until after WWII and kept Black workers, women, and immigrants out of higher-skilled and higher-paid jobs.⁴ Today, labor union members are very diverse, including more women and Black workers than ever before.
- National organized labor groups have influenced federal legislation, such as the creation of the U.S. Department of Labor and civil rights legislation.
- Union power and membership reached a high point in the U.S. during the 1940s and 1950s.

Union membership reached a peak in the 1940s and 1950s. After declining in recent decades, younger generations, the impact of the pandemic on workers, and a tight labor market are helping to boost union membership.

Today, the highest rates of union membership are in the public sector and specifically in local government, which covers the heavily unionized occupations of police officers, firefighters, and teachers. Private-sector industries with high unionization rates include utilities, motion pictures, and sound recording, and transportation and warehousing.³⁰

In 2021, non-union workers had median weekly earnings of \$975, which is \$194 less than the \$1,169 recorded for union members.

Management consistently has actively or passively resisted unions due to higher costs, more safety rules and laws and strikes.

President Biden has actively and by executive order pushed for many federal contracts and construction be performed only by union labor or be paid with prevailing union wages in the geographical area.

The peak unionization rate was **35%** during the mid-1950s, after a surge in unionization during the Great Depression and after World War II.

The union membership rate—the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions—was **10.1 %** in 2022, down from 10.3% in 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

2022 data: The union membership rate of public-sector workers (**33.1%**) continued to be more than five times higher than the rate of private-sector workers (6.0 percent).

Do unions have too much/too little power today?

Are government unions helpful or hurtful for our country?

Should the government dictate using union labor of federal contracts?

Should “right to work” laws be in all states?

Is it okay for the government to push for more unions and increased membership?

Does management have too much power?

Are workers getting a reasonable slice of the economic pie?