

# THE STATE OF THE UNIONS 2023:

## A PROFILE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK STATE, AND THE UNITED STATES

RUTH MILKMAN AND JOSEPH VAN DER NAALD





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Over the past few years, workers and organized labor have attracted widespread public and media attention, on a scale not seen for decades. The focus on “essential workers” at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with an unexpectedly long-lasting labor shortage and widespread discontent among workers, have led many of them to turn to unions to advance their interests. October 2021, dubbed “Strike-tober” by some commentators, inaugurated a series of large and successful strikes by long-unionized workers — most recently the writers’ and actors’ unions. With a formidable strike threat as leverage, UPS workers won a new union contract this summer with historic gains in pay and working conditions. Meanwhile, public support for labor has swelled, with 71 percent of respondents to a 2021 Gallup poll

indicating that they approved of labor unions, the highest level since 1959.<sup>1</sup>

Both buoyed by and helping to fuel such public support, thousands of workers at iconic companies like Amazon, Starbucks and Apple have won union representation elections since 2021, thanks to energetic organizing efforts led primarily by young, college-educated workers. In recent years, that same demographic group has been actively unionizing journalists, museum workers, nonprofit staff, medical interns and residents, and especially graduate student workers and adjuncts in colleges and universities. Although attracting far less attention than the organizing campaigns at companies like Starbucks and Amazon, these efforts have been underway for a longer period and have often been more successful.

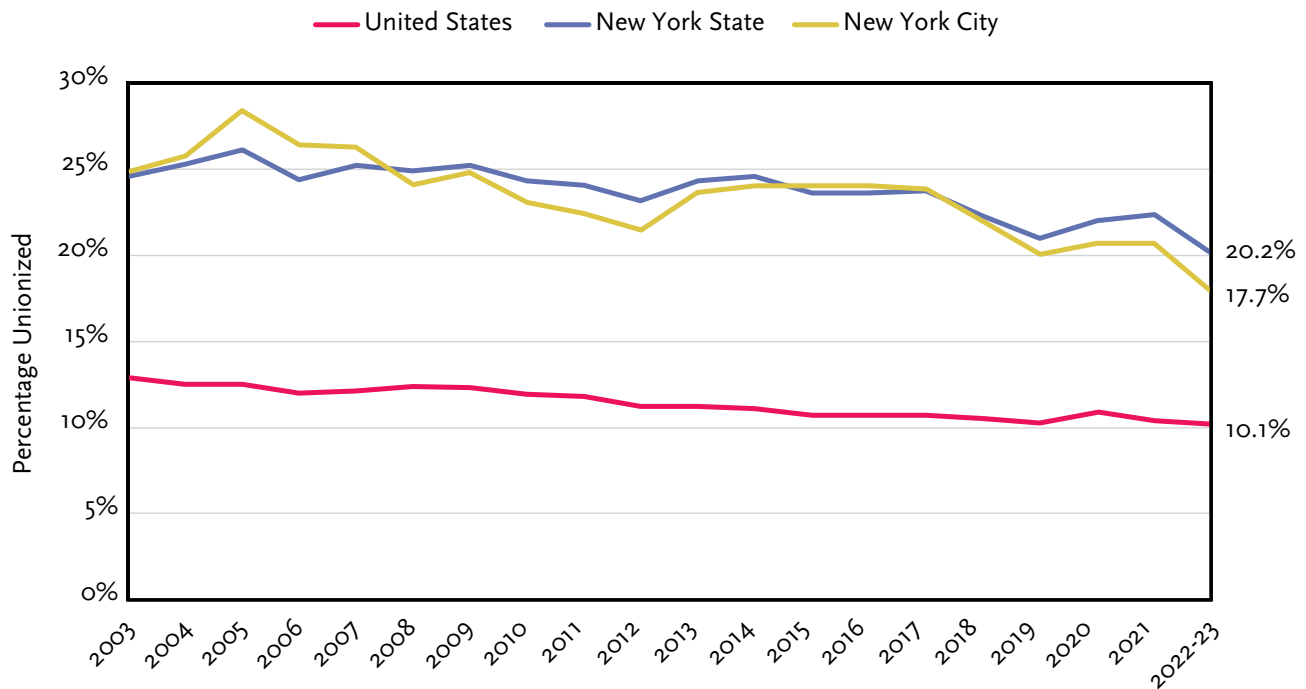
The data we analyze in this report are from the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS), which is a *household* survey. That means the union density figures reported below for “New York City” are based on data collected from workers who *reside* in the City’s five boroughs — as opposed to workers who are *employed* in the City (many of whom live in the surrounding suburbs). Similarly, the unionization rates reported for New York State are for *residents* of the State, regardless of where they are employed. An alternative perspective is offered in the Appendix to this report, which relies on data from a different source — unions themselves — indicating the number of unionized *jobs* located in New York City. However, only the CPS data are detailed enough to permit analysis of variations in unionization rates across demographic groups, industries and occupations, and thus are the basis for most of what follows.<sup>2</sup>

Highly educated workers—frustrated by poorly paid and precarious employment options—have increasingly turned to unionization to improve their situation since the Great Recession, and in some sectors even earlier. Graduate student workers and adjuncts employed in higher education are an extreme case of this phenomenon: they are not merely college-educated but typically have (or are pursuing) advanced graduate degrees, yet their job prospects have deteriorated dramatically as contingent employment has increasingly replaced the tenure-track jobs that were once the norm in institutions of higher education. Our special feature on pages 6-10, coauthored by William A. Herbert, Jacob Apkarian, and Joseph van der Naald, focuses on organizing trends in this sector, where union activity has been extensive for decades but has accelerated in the 2020s; indeed in the past year alone graduate student workers and adjuncts have mounted high-profile strikes from coast to coast, including several in the New York area.

Despite all these developments—multiple organizing wins, successful strikes, and rising public support for unions—the long-term decline in union density (the share of the labor force made up of union members) has continued unabated. As Figure 1a shows, unionization rates have fallen relentlessly over the past two decades, and the past year and a half has been no exception. Both nationally and among residents of New York City and State, overall density in 2022–23 was slightly *lower* than it was in 2021.

Organized labor has long been much stronger in New York City and State than in the nation. New York ranks first in union density among the nation’s largest states, with a unionization rate double the U.S. average, and it ranks second among all states (Hawaii’s union density is the nation’s highest, at 21.7 percent in 2022).<sup>3</sup> In absolute terms, New York State had more union members—1.64 million—than any state except California, which has a far larger

**FIGURE 1A. UNION DENSITY IN NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK STATE AND THE UNITED STATES, 2022–23**



Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

population. In 2022–23, there were about 604,000 union members residing in the five boroughs of New York City, accounting for 36.8 percent of all union members in the State.<sup>4</sup>

As Figure 1a shows, the overall level of unionization in both the City and State has been roughly double the national rate over the past two decades. But in the past few years, union density has fallen more in New York City and New York State than in the United States as a whole. In the mid-2010s, both the City and State rates steadily hovered around 24 percent, but then began to fall after 2017. By 2022–23, only 17.7 percent of all wage and salary workers residing in the five boroughs of New York City, and 20.2 percent of those in the state, were union members. Whether that is a temporary setback or the harbinger of a longer-term trend remains to be seen.

For most of the 21st century, as Figures 1b and 1c show, losses in union membership have been disproportionately concentrated in the private sector in the City, State, and nation alike. This reflects the fact that

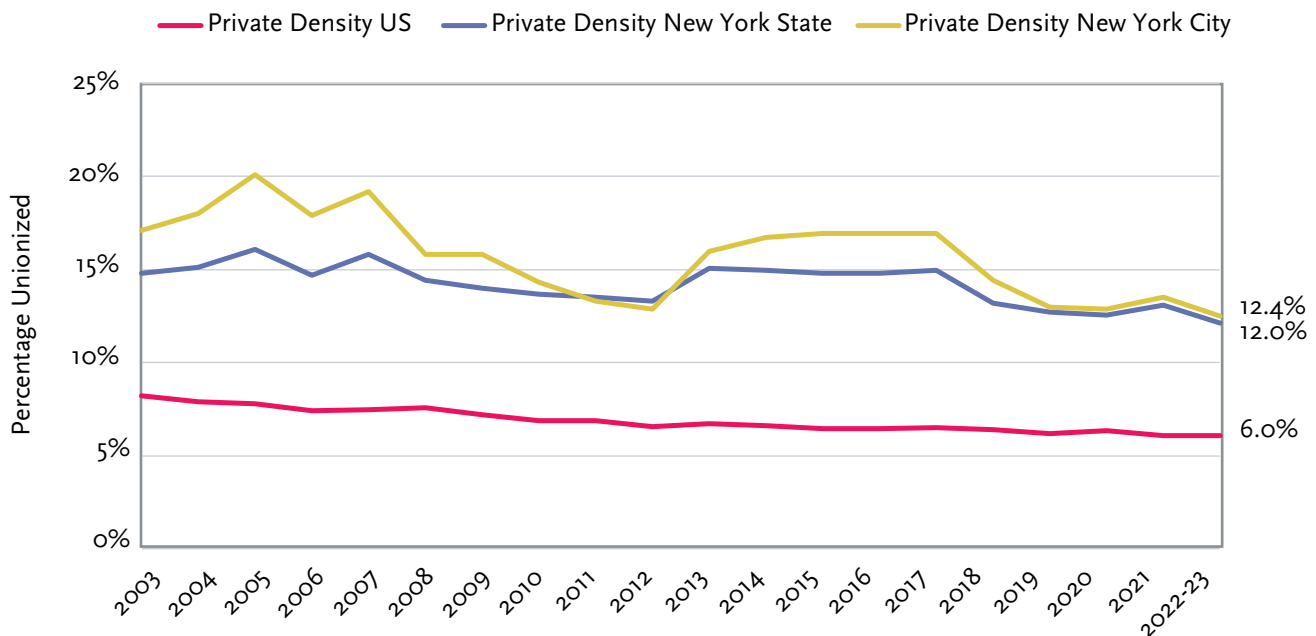
the overwhelming majority of private-sector employers (including Amazon and Starbucks, as recent events have demonstrated) have long been intransigently opposed to unionization.

Since the 2010s, anti-union attacks have increasingly penetrated the public sector as well, culminating in the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Janus vs. AFSCME*, which prohibits public-sector unions from collecting “fair share” or “agency” fees from non-members. In the immediate aftermath of that decision, public-sector union density remained relatively stable. However, since 2020 it has fallen in both New York City and State, with an especially steep drop in New York City (see Figure 1c).

### Geographical Variation in Union Density

Figure 2 shows 2022–23 private- and public-sector union density levels for the United States, New York State, New York City, upstate New York (excluding the five boroughs of New York City), and the New York City metropolitan “Combined Statistical Area.”<sup>5</sup> These

**FIGURE 1B. PRIVATE-SECTOR UNION DENSITY IN NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK STATE AND THE UNITED STATES, 2022–23**



Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

## UNION ORGANIZING AND STRIKES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE 2022-2023 UPSURGE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

BY WILLIAM A. HERBERT, JACOB APKARIAN AND JOSEPH VAN DER NAALD\*

As this report documents, the recent uptick in union organizing has not been large enough to reverse the long-term decline in union density, yet the labor movement revitalization of the post-pandemic period is nevertheless an important development. Media attention has focused especially on the organizing drives at Amazon, Starbucks, Apple and other iconic brands. Yet while workers have voted to unionize in those companies, management intransigence has thus far meant that no collective bargaining agreements have been reached at any of them. By contrast, in other sectors of the economy, such as higher education and among medical interns and residents, the recent spate of organizing has led to significant gains.

Higher education is the industry in which such gains have occurred on the largest scale to date. Organizing among college and university faculty, graduate assistants and other student workers is not new, but it has accelerated in recent years, especially since the Great Recession. Equally significant, in 2022-2023, strikes have increased in higher education—in some cases among long-unionized workers and in others for union recognition. This special feature analyzes these developments in historical context.

U.S. labor unions have represented academic employees for more than half a century, primarily at public four-year higher education institutions and community colleges.<sup>1</sup> Over the past decade, however, successful unionization in higher education has accelerated sharply, especially among contingent faculty and graduate student-workers at private colleges and universities. Since January 2022, an even more dramatic upsurge took shape, primarily among student workers (both graduate assistants and undergraduates). This recent growth in student unionization has far exceeded that among faculty—whether contingent or tenure-track.

In the same period (January 2022 through mid-2023), faculty and student workers alike (as well as postdoctoral scholars and other academic researchers), have engaged in an unprecedented level of strike activity across the country, alongside the national strike wave taking place in other sectors. Although the largest stoppages in this period were at the University of California, notable strikes also took place in the New York area, at Rutgers University, the New School, and Fordham University.

\* This special feature is guest-authored by CUNY's National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions at Hunter College, which has collected data and analyzed trends in higher education union organizing, collective bargaining, and strikes since 1972. See William A. Herbert, "In the Beginning, Long Time Ago: A Brief History of the National Center's Origin and Evolution," *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*, Vol. 14 (2023) <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/jcba/vol14/iss1/3/>. The analysis is based on the Center's collection of primary data, including certifications and decisions by the NLRB and public sector agencies, information posted on federal and state agency websites, responses from government agencies to freedom of information requests, news reports and decisions found on LexisNexis and Westlaw. The Center also thanks Bloomberg Law and the ILR Labor Action Tracker for enabling us to compare our strike data with their own as a means of verification.

## Higher Education Union Growth, 2022–2023

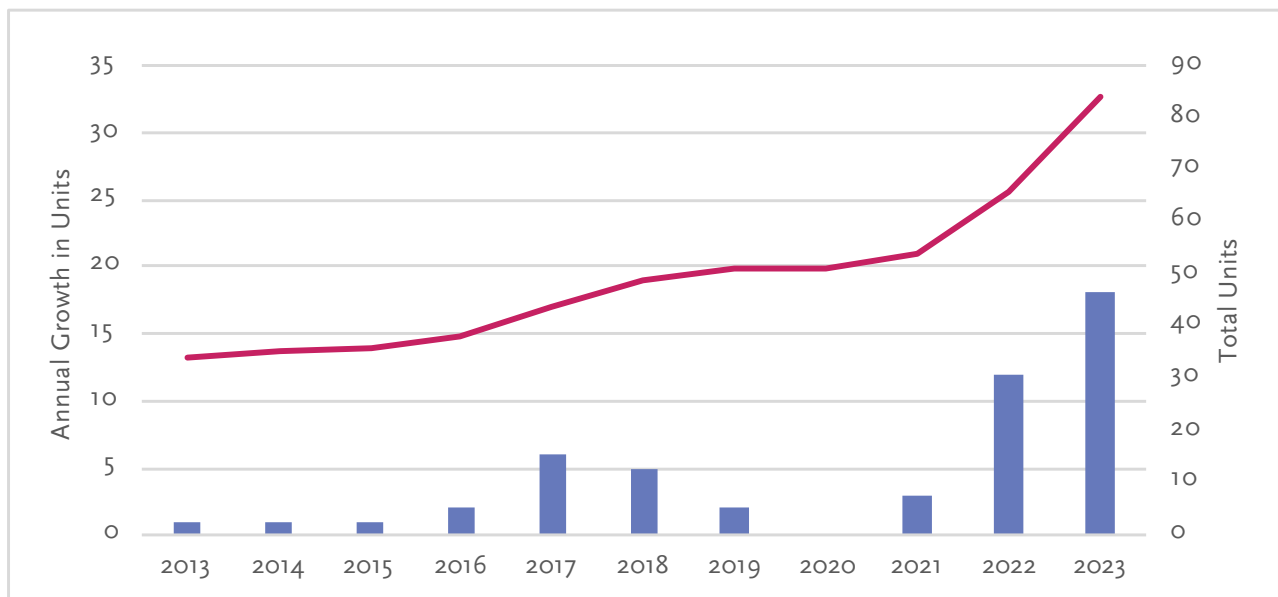
The labor organizing upsurge among student workers has included teaching and research assistants in both the humanities and the previously quiescent STEM fields, as well as undergraduate resident advisors, student dining hall workers, and library staff. This new wave of campus labor activism, although larger in scale than before, builds on more than five decades of growth in higher education unionism.<sup>2</sup>

While graduate and undergraduate student unions are of long standing,<sup>3</sup> the increased scope and success of recent campaigns reflect several new elements. Those include: the recent rise in public support for organized labor with 77 percent of young adults approving of unions;<sup>4</sup> the increased centrality of social justice issues in student-worker organizing; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on campus working conditions and its broader effect on public awareness of labor issues;<sup>5</sup> growing

support for workers in higher education from industrial unions like the United Automobile Workers (UAW), the United Electrical Workers (UE), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU); and the resourcefulness of undergraduate student-workers at Columbia University, Grinnell College, and Bennington College, all of whom successfully organized independent unions.

Alongside recent organizing at Starbucks, REI, Apple, and Trader Joe’s, the upsurge in student worker unionization reflects a wider labor awakening among younger workers. Union organizing has been trending upward among college-educated young workers, and especially those who are difficult to replace, like academic workers. For them, voting to unionize is far more likely to lead to recognition and a contract than among high-turnover and low-wage workers at companies like Starbucks, which has not yet signed a single contract despite hundreds of elections in which workers voted to unionize and repeated rulings by the National Labor Relations Board against the company’s anti-union

**FIGURE B1. GROWTH IN STUDENT-WORKER COLLECTIVE BARGAINING UNITS, 2013–23**



conduct. The growing presence of higher education workers in established unions is far from trivial: indeed, academic workers now make up approximately one-quarter of the UAW’s membership.<sup>6</sup>

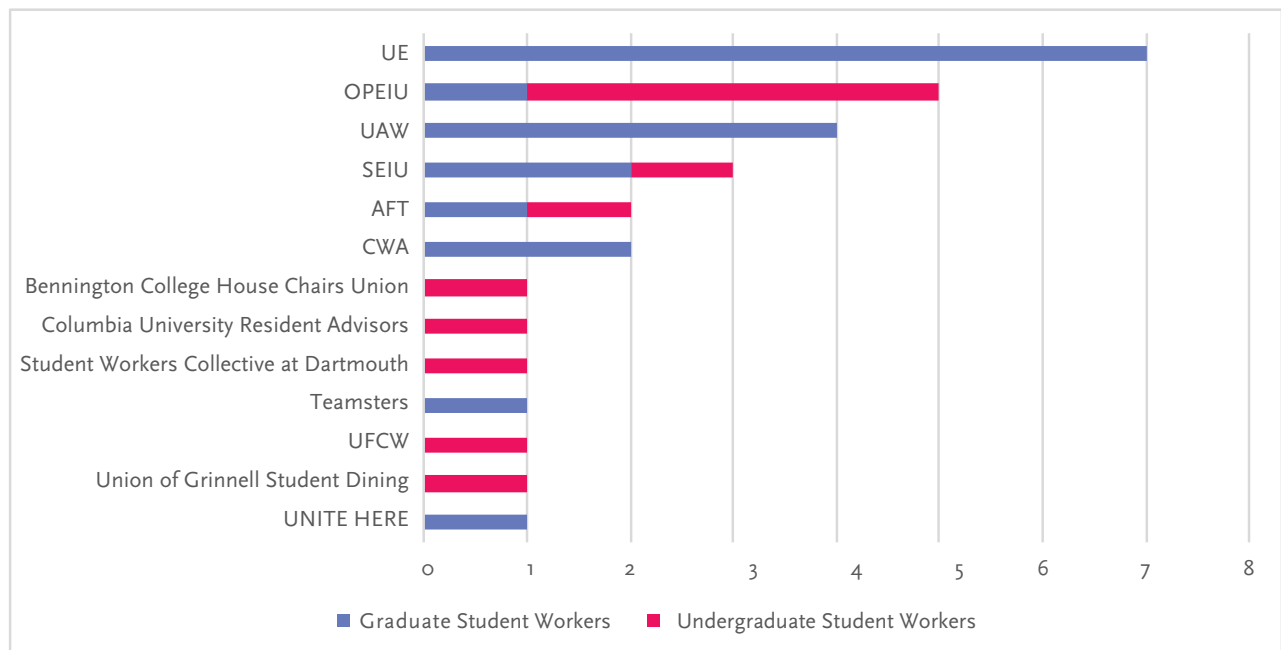
Figure B1 shows the rapid growth in unionization among graduate and undergraduate student workers for the period from January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2023. The line graph in this Figure shows the cumulative number of bargaining units, while the bar graph shows the number of new bargaining units added in each year—displaying the dramatic uptick that began in 2022. Indeed, during 2022 and 2023 alone unions won 30 new student-worker collective bargaining units, representing a total of 35,655 workers. Most of these involved graduate student workers, who comprise 62 percent (19) of the new units—including two that also include undergraduate workers. Graduate students make up 93 percent (33,314) of the total number of student-workers newly organized in this period.

The election margins in favor of unionization among student workers in 2022-2023 reflect broad

support for labor. On average, 91 percent of eligible student-workers voted in favor of unionization in representation elections in 2022-2023 (four additional units were recognized following card checks). These voting margins considerably surpass the 75 percent average of pro-union votes by graduate assistants in elections during the 2013-2019 period.<sup>7</sup> The 2022-2023 successes include union drives at Yale University, the University of Chicago, the University of Minnesota, and Johns Hopkins University, all of which had attempted but failed at organizing in the past.

Support from established unions for student-worker organizing has been instrumental in most of these victories, as Figure B2 shows. Since January 2022, the UE supported 37 percent (7) of the new graduate assistant units, representing around 19,000 workers, whereas before 2022 the UE had represented only two graduate assistant units (at the University of Iowa and the University of New Mexico). The UAW, which has been a dominant player in student-worker organizing for

**FIGURE B2: NEW STUDENT-WORKER UNITS BY UNION AFFILIATE, 2022–23**





decades, was certified to represent 21 percent (4) of the new graduate student bargaining units in 2022-2023—involving over 5,600 workers. These two unions were followed by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Communications Workers of America (CWA) representing two new graduate student units, and the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Teamsters' union, and UNITE HERE each representing one unit.

The growth in the number of undergraduate bargaining units is a notable new development. Prior to 2022, there was one long-existing unit of resident advisors and tutors at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, along with an undergraduate dining staff unit at Grinnell College. But in 2022-2023, new undergraduate student-worker unions were established at Columbia University, Barnard College, and Wesleyan University, among other campuses. Although these undergraduate units are noticeably smaller than their graduate assistant counterparts, this could change if the current SEIU campaign to organize 10,000 undergraduates at California State University is successful.<sup>8</sup> These campaigns also involve different unions than those leading graduate student organizing. The OPEIU won recognition in 36 percent (4) of the 11 new undergraduate units, alongside an equal number of recognized independent student-worker unions, as Figure B2 shows.

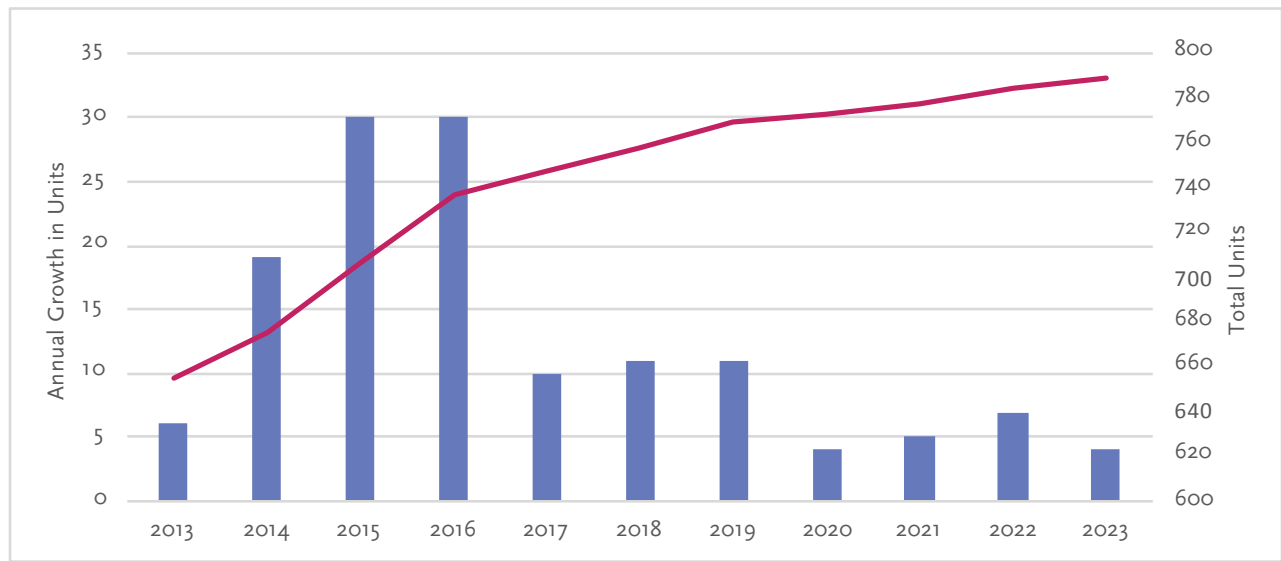
A comparison of 2022-2023 with the nine-year period prior to 2022 reveals the extraordinary and historic character of the recent phase of student labor organizing. The 30 new student bargaining units established since January 2022 represent a nearly 50 percent increase over the total number of graduate and undergraduate student-worker units (21) organized over the entire 2013-2021 period.<sup>9</sup> Only three units were recognized during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

In another departure from longer-term trends, nearly three-quarters of the new graduate assistant units and all the undergraduate bargaining units organized during 2022-2023 were at private colleges and universities. By contrast, prior to 2016, nearly all units were composed of graduate student employees at public institutions. Geographically, 70 percent (21) of the new graduate and undergraduate student-worker bargaining units established since January 2022 were located in the Northeast, including 27 percent (8) in Massachusetts and 23 percent (7) in New York.

The sharp 2022-2023 uptick in student-worker union organizing overshadows activity among faculty, for whom unionization growth was slower than in the pre-pandemic period, as Figure B3 shows. (Like Figure B1, Figure B3 shows cumulative growth of bargaining units in its line graph, and units added each year in its bar graph.) Between 2013 and 2021, 126 faculty collective bargaining units won recognition, involving a total of 42,466 faculty. SEIU organized the largest share of faculty units over the period, 59 percent (74), with a total of 25,963 (predominately non-tenure-track) faculty. In the 2013-2021 period, most of the new faculty bargaining units were at private (including both for- and non-profit) institutions, which accounted for 55 percent (70) of the total. The bulk of newly organized faculty bargaining units in the 2013-2021 period were at institutions in Florida (16), New York (17) and California (18).

By contrast, only 11 new faculty units have been recognized since January 2022, involving less than 4,000 faculty members. Although growth was slower, it is notable that 10 of these new units (91 percent) included non-tenure-track faculty. SEIU was the bargaining agent for 45 percent (5) of these new units, which is consistent with its leading role in organizing non-tenure-track faculty over the past decade.<sup>10</sup> Although most new faculty units were at private colleges and universities, the two

**FIGURE B3: GROWTH IN FACULTY BARGAINING UNITS, 2022–23**



largest ones organized in 2022-2023 were at public institutions: Harrisburg Area Community College and Miami University, represented by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) respectively. Six new faculty bargaining unions have won recognition in New York and California since 2022, two of them based at Skidmore College in upstate New York.

Whether the slower faculty unionization growth since January 2022 is a post-pandemic anomaly or symptomatic of a longer-term trend is unclear. Several new faculty organizing campaigns are currently underway, and they may well result in future growth, particularly among contingent faculty at private institutions. In addition, future growth at public institutions may occur as new legislation expands public-sector collective bargaining rights. The most recent example of this involves Maryland, where community college faculty were granted the right to unionize starting in September 2022.

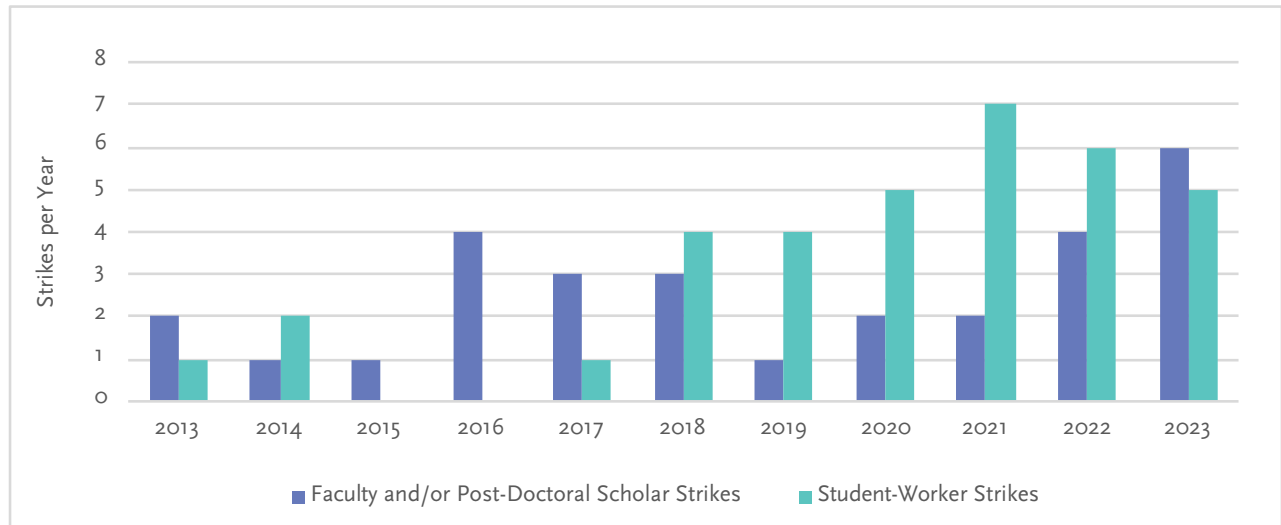
Bargaining unit growth among post-doctoral scholars and academic researchers has been modest over the past the past year and a half. Prior

to 2022, there were six post-doctoral bargaining units nationwide, and one unit of academic researchers, representing over 14,000 members in total.<sup>11</sup> Since January 2022, two new post-doctoral units and one academic researcher unit have won recognition, representing a total of over 2,000 employees.

### Higher Education Strike Activity, 2022-2023

In addition to new organizing, in the period since January 2022 there were 20 strikes by workers in higher education, as Figure B4 shows. These strikes involved a mix of student workers, faculty, and post-doctoral workers. Almost a third (32 percent) of all the strikes that occurred since 2013 took place in 2022 and the first half of 2023. Moreover, the frequency of strikes accelerated rapidly during that period, with fully half of the 2022-2023 stoppages taking place in the first six months of 2023. Six of the 10 strikes in 2023 involved faculty and post-doctoral units, and five involved student workers. (The strike at Rutgers University involved faculty, post-doctoral scholars, and graduate assistants and

**FIGURE B4: FACULTY, POST-DOCTORAL SCHOLAR AND STUDENT-WORKER STRIKES, 2013–23**



therefore appears twice in Figure B4, as does the strike at the University of California, which involved different bargaining units and ended on different dates.) Eight of the 22 strikes in 2022-2023 involved already-unionized graduate student workers, while three were undergraduate strikes seeking union recognition.

This explosive growth in strike activity in higher education is unprecedented within recent memory. In 2013-2017, there were only four student-worker strikes. The number began to rise in 2018, and growth continued thereafter, with at least five strikes in each year starting in 2019. While among graduate student-workers and faculty, national unions were the dominant force in these strikes, the pattern was different for strikes conducted solely by undergraduate student-workers, with seven of their 10 strikes since 2013 led by an independent union or conducted without a union.

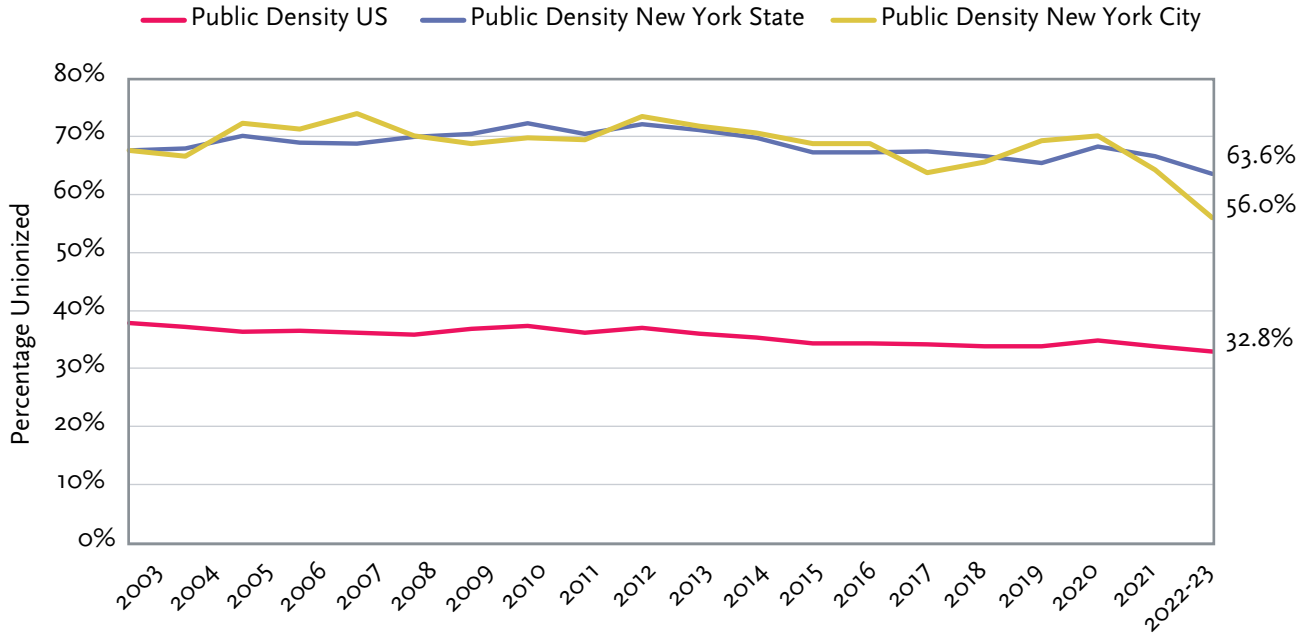
College and university faculty strikes are not new. For example, there were 14 faculty strikes in 1977.<sup>12</sup> But such activity (and indeed, strikes in other sectors as well) had largely dissipated by the mid-1980s.<sup>13</sup> Faculty strikes increased slightly in 2016, with four strikes, followed by a slight decline

until after the pandemic. There were four strikes by faculty and postdoctoral scholars in 2022 and another six in the first half of 2023, a substantial increase over previous years, as Figure B4 shows. Of the eight faculty strikes in 2022-2023, five involved combined units of tenured, tenure-track, and contingent faculty; two were limited to contingent faculty; and one involved only tenured and tenure-track faculty.

The strikes at the University of California in 2022 and at Rutgers University in 2023 exemplify a deliberate strategy of organizing simultaneous and coordinated work stoppages across separate bargaining units. The University of California strikes were the largest in the history of U.S. higher education, involving multiple bargaining units representing a total of over 45,000 graduate assistants, researchers, and post-doctoral scholars. The strike at Rutgers University was a wall-to-wall strike that involved over 9,000 tenured and tenure-track faculty, contingent faculty, post-doctoral scholars, and graduate assistants. The successful outcomes of those strikes may lay the groundwork for more multi-unit strikes in higher education in the years to come.

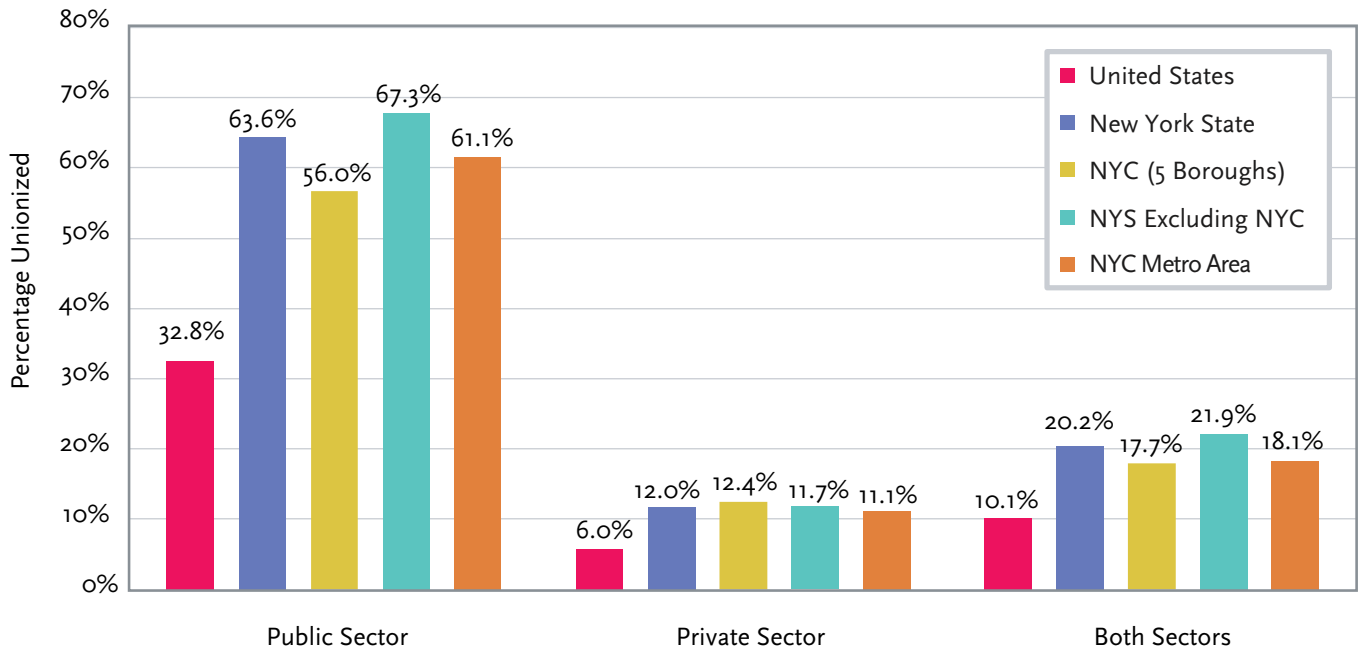
*See page 28 for notes.*

**FIGURE 1C. PUBLIC-SECTOR UNION DENSITY IN NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK STATE AND THE UNITED STATES, 2022–23**



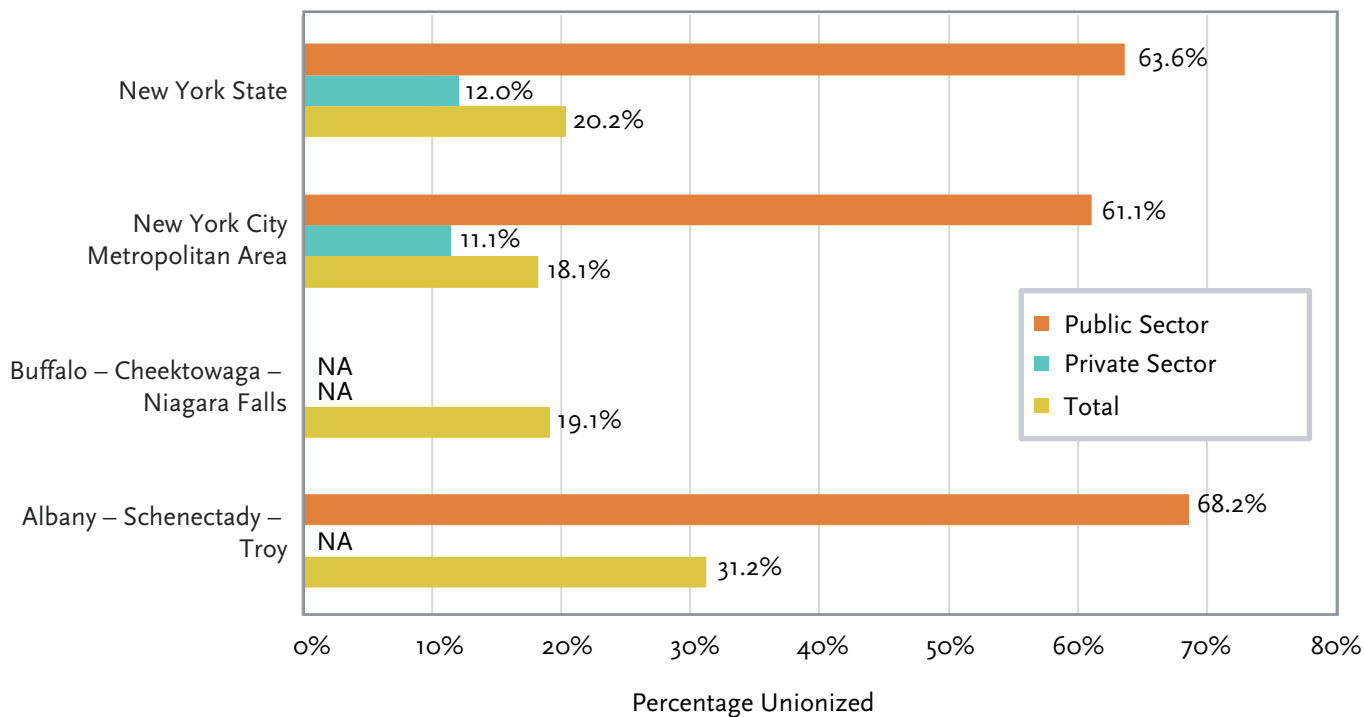
Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

**FIGURE 2. UNION DENSITY, BY SECTOR, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK STATE AND THE UNITED STATES, 2022–23**



Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

**FIGURE 3. UNION DENSITY BY SECTOR, NEW YORK STATE AND SELECTED METROPOLITAN AREAS, 2022–23**



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text. Percentages shown for 2022–23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023. Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

are the five geographical entities for which we present detailed data in this report.

By way of background, however, we begin with a brief look at a selection of smaller geographical areas. Figure 3 shows the 2022–23 density figures for the State, the New York City metropolitan area, as well as the second and third largest metropolitan areas in the State: Albany-Schenectady-Troy and Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Niagara Falls.<sup>6</sup>

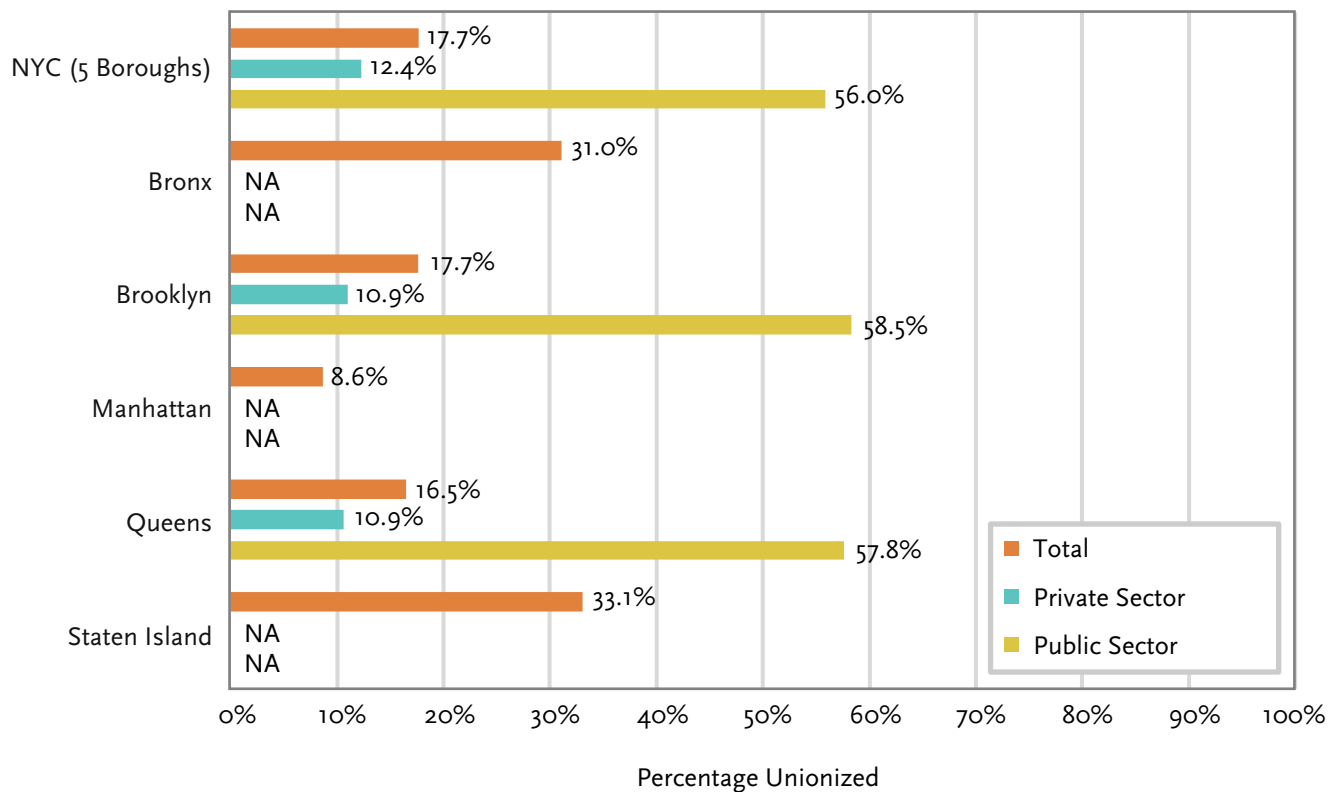
In New York State as a whole, public-sector density was 63.6 percent, nearly double the national average of 32.8 percent. The New York City metropolitan area had a slightly lower level of public-sector density (61.1 percent). The rate was substantially higher in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area, where public-sector density was 68.2 percent. That reflects the fact that the Capital District has a disproportionate share of public-sector employment—which also helps to explain why overall union density is far higher in the

Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area than in any of the other areas shown in Figure 3.

As expected, private-sector union density is consistently lower than in the public sector. In New York State the 2022–23 private-sector unionization rate was 12 percent, double the national average of 6 percent but less than a fifth of the State’s public-sector rate (63.6 percent), as Figure 3 shows. In the New York City metropolitan area, private-sector density was 11.1 percent in 2022–23, almost a full percentage point below the statewide private-sector rate. (Unfortunately, the CPS sample size is too small to reliably estimate private-sector density for the other two metropolitan areas shown.)

As Figure 4 shows, union density also varies among New York City’s five boroughs, with substantially higher 2022–23 unionization levels among residents of the “outer boroughs” than among those living in Manhattan. Staten Island and the Bronx have the

**FIGURE 4. UNION DENSITY BY SECTOR, NEW YORK CITY AND ITS BOROUGHS, 2022–23**



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text. Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023. Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

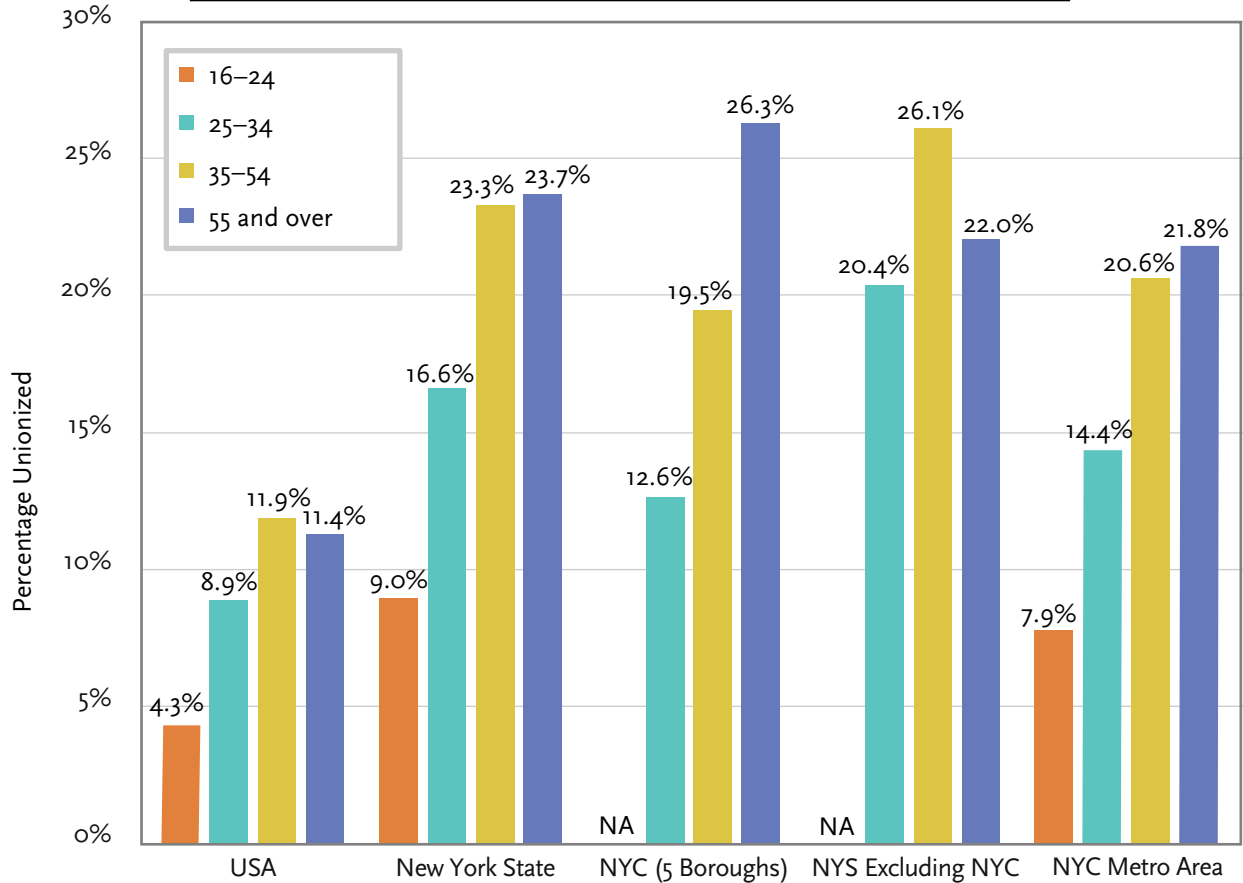
highest rates, with Brooklyn and Queens lagging behind them; however, even the latter have roughly twice Manhattan’s 8.6 percent rate. Unfortunately, the CPS sample size is too small to estimate the private- and public-sector rates in the Bronx, Manhattan or Staten Island.

### Union Membership by Age, Earnings, and Education

Although younger workers have been the main protagonists of many recent organizing successes, overall unionization rates remain much higher for workers aged 35 or more than for their younger counterparts. As Figure 5 shows, the 16-24 age group lags far behind in all five geographical jurisdictions. Across New

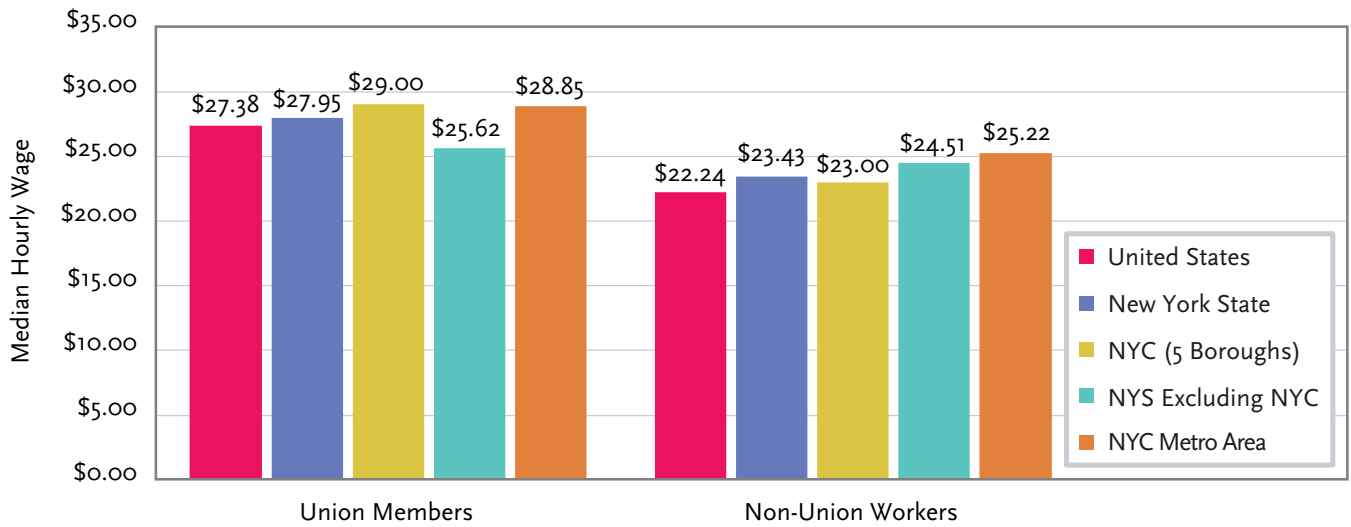
York State, as well as in New York City and the New York City metropolitan area, the rates are highest for workers aged 55 years or more, slightly lower for those aged 35-54, and far lower for the younger groups. The national pattern, like that in upstate New York, is slightly different, with a higher unionization rate for 35- to 54-year-olds than for those 55 and over. The age gradient manifest in Figure 5 reflects the fact that, as Figure 6 shows, unionized jobs provide workers with higher wages, on average, than non-union jobs do. Higher wages are strongly associated with lower turnover, which in turn tends to skew the unionized workforce toward older, more senior workers. In addition, unionized jobs generally offer more job security than nonunion jobs, further reducing turnover

**FIGURE 5. UNIONIZATION RATES BY AGE, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



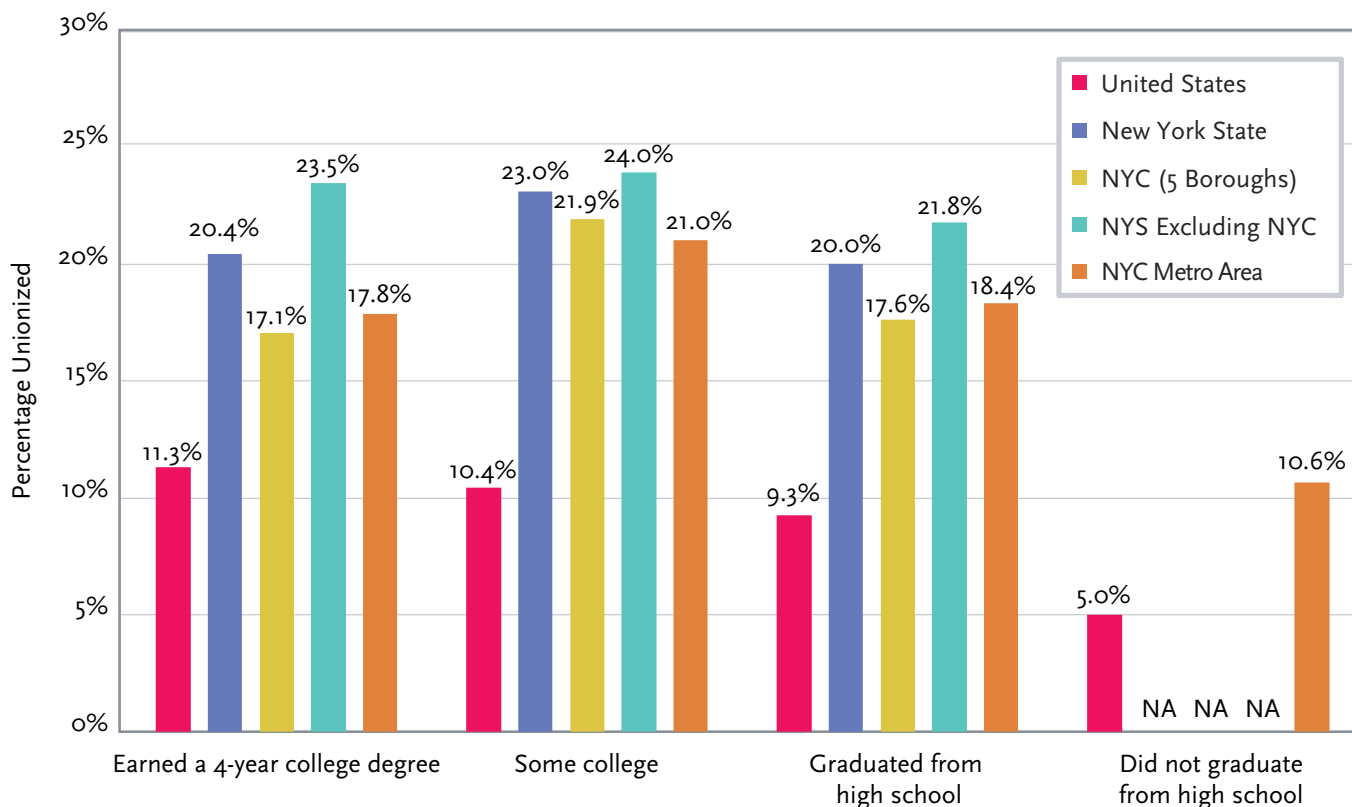
NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text  
 Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

**FIGURE 6. MEDIAN HOURLY WAGE, UNION MEMBERS AND NON-UNION WORKERS, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



Figures reflect preliminary estimates, in 2022 dollars.  
 Wages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022–June 2023  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023

**FIGURE 7. UNIONIZATION RATES BY EDUCATION, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text  
 Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

and similarly contributing to the age gradient among unionized workers.

Figure 7 shows that—contrary to enduring stereotypes—in all five geographical entities shown, college-educated workers have higher unionization rates than those with less education in 2022–23. Nationally, the rate is an even higher 12.8 percent for college-educated workers aged 35-54 (not shown in Figure 7). The rate is the same for those with some college as for those with four-year degrees in this age group.

In all four New York geographical entities shown in Figure 7, the group with “some college”—education beyond high school but short of attaining a four-year degree—consistently has the highest rates; nationally the rates for those with four-year degrees are the highest. At the other end of the spectrum, workers

who lack high-school degrees now have the nation’s lowest unionization rates, as is also the case in the New York City metropolitan area.

Decades ago, the typical union member was a blue-collar worker with limited formal education. But the data in Figure 7 reflect the fact that college attendance rates have increased steadily over time, and that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century mid-level professionals in fields like education and public administration—most of whom have attended college—are more likely to be unionized than any other group of workers. Recent union organizing in the private sector has also disproportionately involved college-educated workers in sectors like journalism, museums, non-profits, and higher education (on the latter, see our special feature for details), although the scale of that organizing is still too modest to impact the data shown in Figure 7.



## Industry Variation in Unionization Rates

In 2022–23 more than half (54.8 percent) of all unionized workers in the United States were in three basic industry groups: educational services, healthcare and social assistance, and public administration, as Table 1 shows. In New York City and State, those three industry groups account for an even larger share of unionized workers (60.3 percent and 62.1 percent, respectively). All three of these industry groups include large numbers of public-sector workers (although in healthcare a majority are in the private sector, as are about one-third of those employed in education). It is also noteworthy that, in contrast to many traditional union strongholds, all three of these industries include relatively large numbers of college-educated workers.

Table 1 also reveals that the composition of union membership in New York City, and to a lesser degree in the State, deviates in other respects from the national pattern. Most notably, manufacturing

accounts for a miniscule proportion of union membership in the five boroughs and in the New York City metropolitan area (so small that the CPS sample size makes it impossible to specify precise figures, which unfortunately is also the case for several of the other industries shown). By contrast, in New York City, the share of union membership accounted for by the healthcare and social assistance industry group is more than double its national share.

Table 2 shows the composition of wage and salary employment by industry group for the same five geographical entities for which the composition of union membership is presented in Table 1. Comparing the two tables reveals that, for most industry groups, the share of union membership deviates greatly from the share of employment. Industry groups with high union density, such as educational services, or transportation and utilities, make up a much larger share of union membership than of employment.

**TABLE 1: COMPOSITION OF UNION MEMBERSHIP BY INDUSTRY GROUP, FOR SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS IN NEW YORK AND THE UNITED STATES, 2022–23**

Industry Group	USA	New York State	NYS Excl. NYC	NYC (5 Boroughs)	NYC Metro Area
Construction	8.0%	6.4%	6.9%	NA	6.6%
Manufacturing	8.2%	4.0%	5.7%	NA	NA
Wholesale and retail trade	5.0%	3.8%	NA	NA	4.2%
Transportation and utilities	12.9%	10.5%	10.6%	10.2%	12.6%
Information services	1.6%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Finance, insurance and real estate	1.5%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Professional and business services	3.3%	4.2%	NA	NA	5.0%
Educational services	28.1%	27.7%	31.4%	21.3%	27.1%
Healthcare and social assistance	11.4%	19.3%	14.2%	28.0%	19.0%
Leisure and hospitality	2.9%	NA	NA	NA	3.7%
Other services	1.3%	NA	NA	NA	NA
Public administration	15.2%	15.2%	17.6%	10.9%	12.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99.4%</b>	<b>91.1%</b>	<b>86.4%</b>	<b>70.5%</b>	<b>91.0%</b>
<b>TOTAL of education, health and public admin</b>	<b>54.8%</b>	<b>62.1%</b>	<b>63.2%</b>	<b>60.3%</b>	<b>59.0%</b>

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding and missing data.

NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text

Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

**TABLE 2: COMPOSITION OF WAGE AND SALARY EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY GROUP, FOR SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS IN NEW YORK AND THE UNITED STATES, 2022–23**

Industry Group	USA	New York State	NYS Excl. NYC	NYC (5 Boroughs)	NYC Metro Area
Construction	6.4%	5.9%	6.2%	5.4%	5.9%
Manufacturing	10.4%	6.1%	8.7%	2.6%	6.0%
Wholesale and retail trade	12.6%	10.7%	11.7%	9.3%	10.4%
Transportation and utilities	6.3%	5.7%	5.7%	5.7%	6.8%
Information services	1.9%	2.5%	1.6%	3.7%	2.9%
Finance, insurance and real estate	6.7%	7.9%	6.9%	9.3%	9.2%
Professional and business services	12.0%	14.0%	11.8%	17.0%	15.3%
Educational services	9.7%	11.3%	12.4%	9.8%	10.4%
Healthcare and social assistance	14.4%	17.6%	16.1%	19.8%	16.7%
Leisure and hospitality	8.9%	9.0%	8.3%	9.8%	8.3%
Other services	4.2%	4.1%	4.2%	4.1%	4.0%
Public administration	5.5%	5.1%	6.1%	3.7%	4.2%
TOTAL	98.7%	99.8%	99.7%	100.0%	99.9%

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text

Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

By contrast, wholesale and retail trade, and the leisure and hospitality industry group, account for a far more substantial share of employment than of union membership.

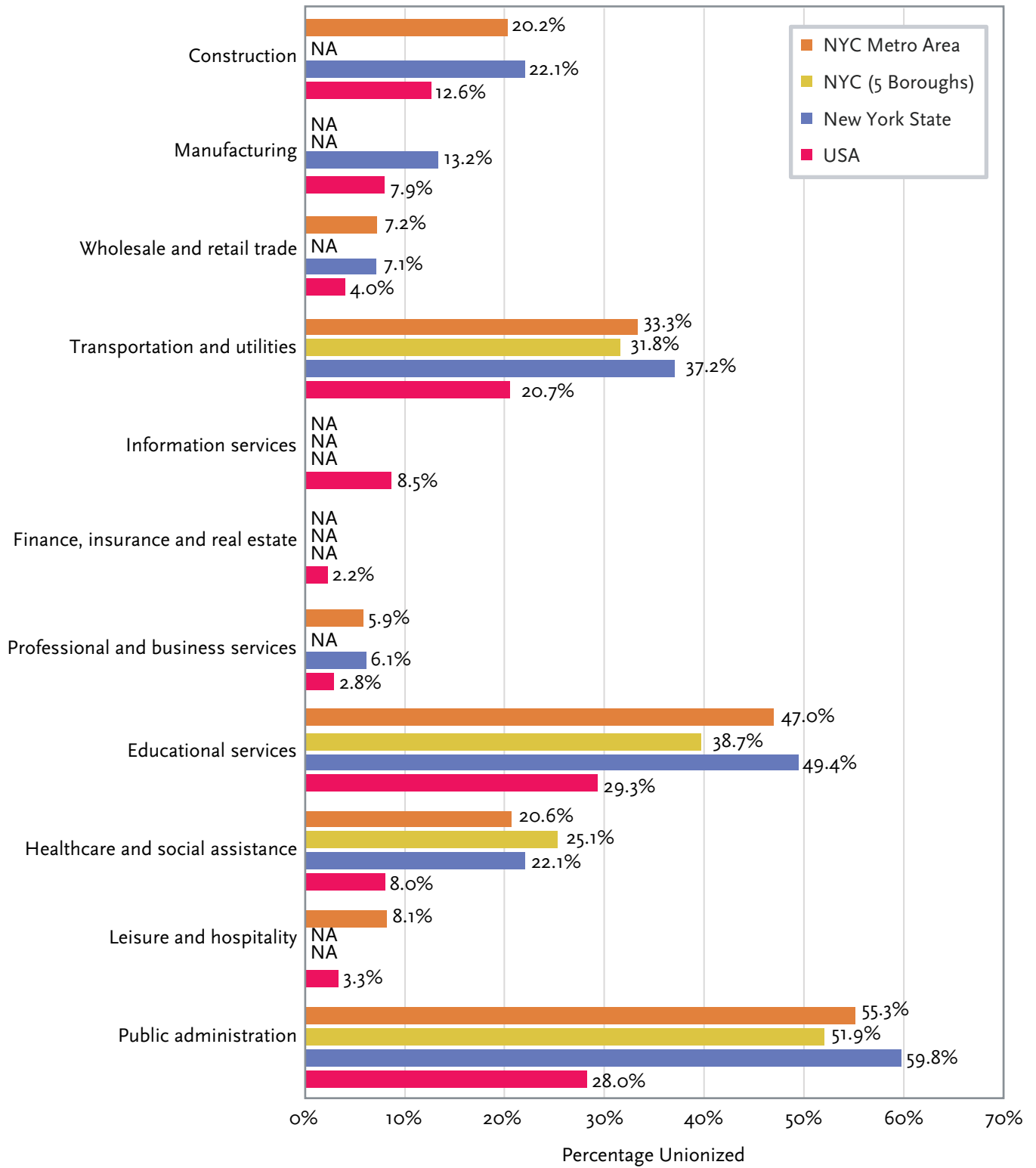
Figure 8 depicts the industry group data in a different format, showing unionization rates by industry (as opposed to the share of the unionized workforce in each industry group, as shown in Table 1) for the City, the metropolitan area, the State and the nation. Unionization rates vary widely across the eleven industry groups shown. Regardless of geographic jurisdiction, education, public administration, and transportation and utilities are the most highly unionized industry groups. In New York City, the next most unionized industry group is healthcare and social assistance, which is also relatively highly unionized in the New York City metropolitan area and in New York State. By contrast, in the United States as a whole, the unionization rate for healthcare and social assistance is only slightly above the private-sector average. The other outstanding high-density industry is construction, which has a unionization rate comparable to that in healthcare and social assistance

in the three geographical entities shown in Figure 8 (in New York City the sample size for construction is too small to permit a reliable estimate). At the other extreme, regardless of geography, union density is consistently low — in the single digits — in wholesale and retail trade; leisure and hospitality; information services; and in finance, insurance, and real estate.

Because these industry group data are highly aggregated, they obscure the complexity of the City, State and nation’s extremely uneven industry patterns of unionization. The limited sample size of the CPS restricts our ability to capture that complexity for 2022–23. For this reason, we created a different dataset that consolidates CPS data over a much longer period, the twelve-and-a-half years from January 2011 to June 2023, inclusive. This 150-month blend provides a much larger sample size, permitting a far more disaggregated analysis of industry variations. Because of the longer time span represented in the data, however, the unionization rates derived from this dataset differ somewhat from those shown in Figure 8 for 2022–23.<sup>7</sup>

Table 3 summarizes the 2011–23 data for 41 industry groups, showing unionization rates in the

**FIGURE 8. UNIONIZATION RATES BY INDUSTRY GROUP, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text  
 Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

**TABLE 3. UNIONIZATION RATES BY INDUSTRY, NEW YORK CITY,  
NEW YORK STATE, AND THE UNITED STATES, 2011–23**

Industry	New York Metro	New York State	United States
TOTAL (All Industries)	19.9%	22.9%	10.8%
Agriculture and mining	NA	NA	3.5
Utilities	44.3	45.8	24.2
Construction	25.5	27.9	14.0
Food manufacturing	8.2	12.8	12.1
Textile and apparel manufacturing	NA	NA	3.3
Paper products and printing	NA	25.5	11.8
Other manufacturing	6.9	12.3	8.6
Wholesale grocery and beverages	12.9	13.8	8.4
Other wholesale trade	5.2	6.9	2.5
Retail grocery stores	23.9	20.5	15.4
Pharmacy and drug stores	NA	9.1	4.4
Department and discount stores	NA	NA	2.6
Other retail trade	4.1	4.5	1.9
Air transportation	43.1	40.2	39.1
Truck transportation	14.6	20.0	8.5
Bus service and urban transit	58.6	62.2	40.1
Postal service (transportation)	74.6	79.0	63.4
Couriers and messengers	28.2	30.7	22.2
Other transportation	25.7	27.8	27.8
Newspaper, periodical and book publishing	NA	NA	4.8
Motion pictures and video	17.4	17.9	13.2
Radio, television and cable	17.0	20.7	7.8
Wired and other telecommunication	21.9	31.4	13.8
Other information services	23.3	NA	15.3
Finance, insurance and real estate	7.2	9.0	2.4
Building and security services	12.7	15.0	5.1
Other management and professional services	3.3	5.1	1.9
Elementary and secondary schools	62.9	66.5	39.5
Other educational services	23.8	26.5	12.7
Offices of physicians and other health providers	5.2	6.8	2.7
Hospitals	34.1	38.0	13.6
Nursing care facilities	25.2	29.3	6.7
Home healthcare services	24.8	26.4	7.4
Child day care services	10.3	13.4	3.6
Other healthcare and social assistance	19.7	22.2	8.8
Performing arts, museums and sports	23.1	24.1	11.6
Amusement, gambling and recreation	6.1	6.0	5.0
Hotels and accommodation	21.0	19.9	7.1
Restaurants, food service & drinking places	3.1	3.2	1.5
Other services	6.0	7.1	3.0
Public administration	58.8	63.2	30.4

NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011—June 2023.

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New York City metropolitan area, New York State, and the United States as a whole. For almost all the industry groups shown for which data are available, in this period the State had far higher union density than in the nation. The only exception is the residual category “other transportation”; in which the rates in the State and in the nation are equal. In the New York City metropolitan area, the unionization rate for this industry was even lower than in the State. Two other industries in the metropolitan area had a unionization rate below the national average: food manufacturing and “other manufacturing,” another residual category.

In 11 of the 36 industries shown for which sample sizes are sufficiently large to permit reliable estimates, 2011–23 unionization rates were at least 25 percent in the New York City metropolitan area: utilities; construction; air transportation; bus service and urban transit; postal service transportation; couriers and messengers; “other transportation,” elementary and secondary schools; hospitals; nursing care facilities; and public administration. These same 11 industries also had rates at or above 25 percent in New York State. Union density in paper products and printing, wired and other telecommunication, home healthcare services, and “other educational services” were also above the 25 percent threshold in the State (but not in the metropolitan area). In the case of air transportation and postal service transportation, these high unionization rates are the product of national-level collective bargaining, while for the other industries they reflect union strength in local and/or regional labor markets.

Union contracts may no longer set the wage standard for the New York workforce as a whole, but they still do so in key industries like hospitals, nursing care facilities and telecommunications, as well as in public-sector industries like transit, education, home healthcare (the unionized portion of which is publicly funded) and public administration.

That said, the portrait of industry-specific unionization rates shown in Table 3 fails to capture some important points of differentiation. A notable

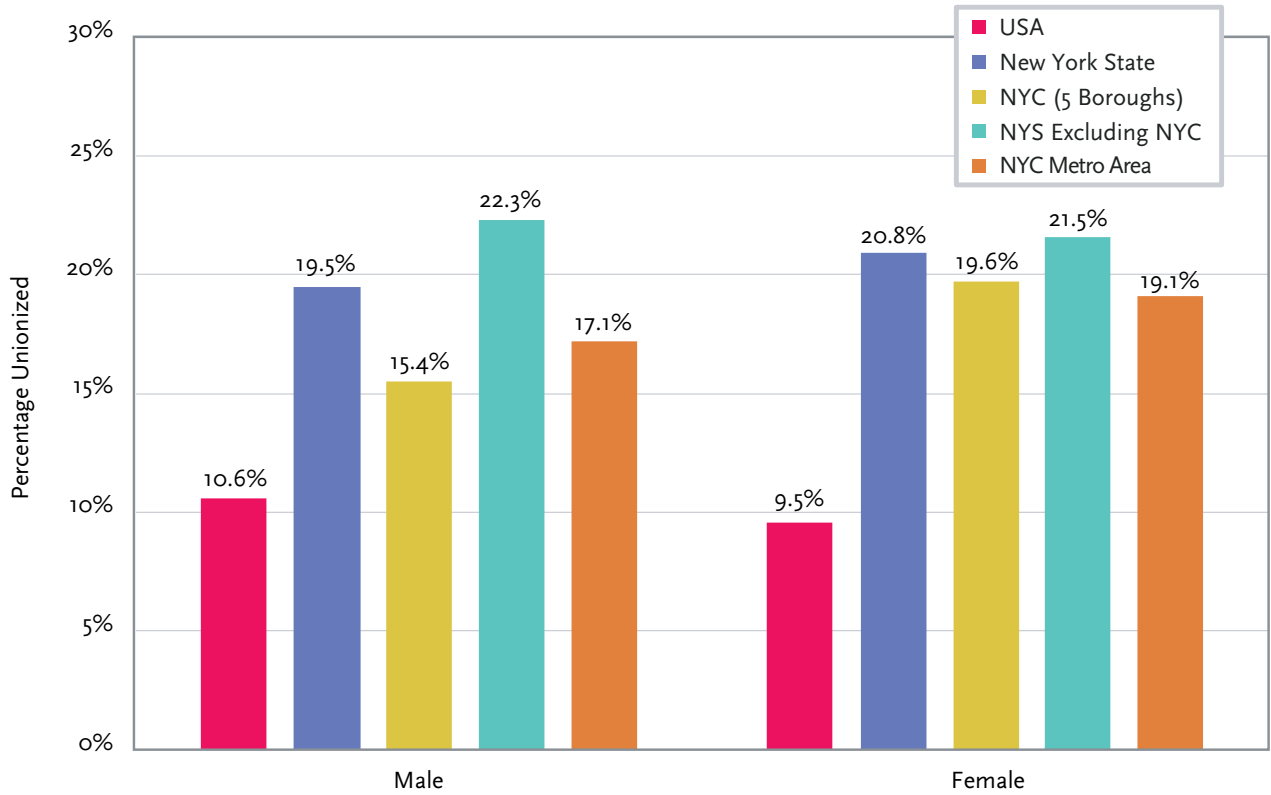
example is the variation among construction industry segments: commercial construction is far more unionized than its residential counterpart in the metropolitan area, the State and the nation alike. Similarly, while traditional supermarkets are still highly unionized, most other types of retail grocery stores are not.

## Union Membership Demographics

The patterns of unionization by industry have a powerful effect on the demographics of unionism because males and females, as well as workers of various racial and ethnic origins, are unevenly distributed across industries.<sup>8</sup> For example, educational services, as well as healthcare and social assistance, both of which have very high unionization rates, disproportionately employ female workers. This helps to explain why the 2022–23 unionization rates for women in New York City, the New York metropolitan area, and New York State were higher than those of men, as Figure 9 shows. The male unionization rate was slightly above that of females in 2022–23 in upstate New York and in the nation, but even in those jurisdictions the gender gap is relatively small by historical standards.

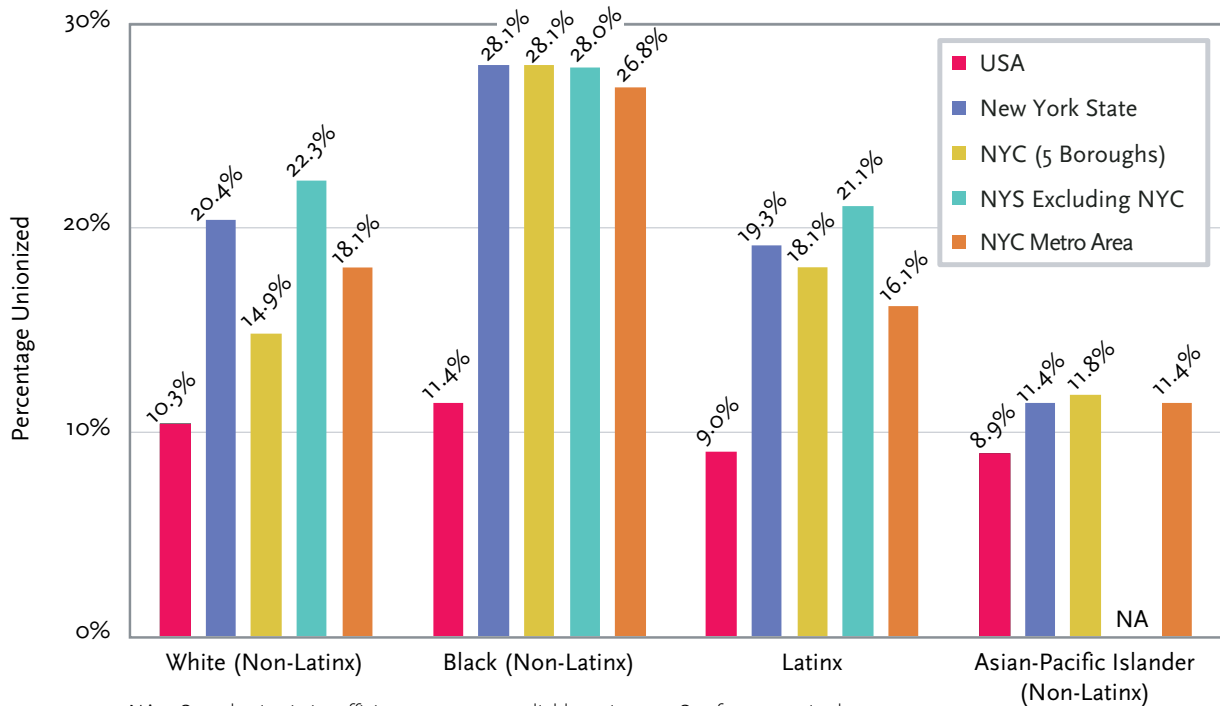
Unionization rates also vary by race and ethnicity, as Figure 10 shows. Like the gender dynamic, this reflects differential racial and ethnic patterns of employment across industries. Blacks are the most highly unionized group in all of the five geographical entities shown, in large part reflecting their disproportionate concentration in public-sector employment, in which (as shown above) unionization rates are far higher than in the private sector. This effect is further amplified in New York City—where the Black unionization rate is almost double that of whites—largely because of the large and highly unionized public transit sector, in which Blacks are overrepresented. Similarly, in New York City, Latinx workers’ unionization rate was higher than that of non-Latinx whites in 2022–23; but in the other four jurisdictions shown,

**FIGURE 9. UNIONIZATION RATES BY GENDER, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

**FIGURE 10. UNIONIZATION RATES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text.  
 Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

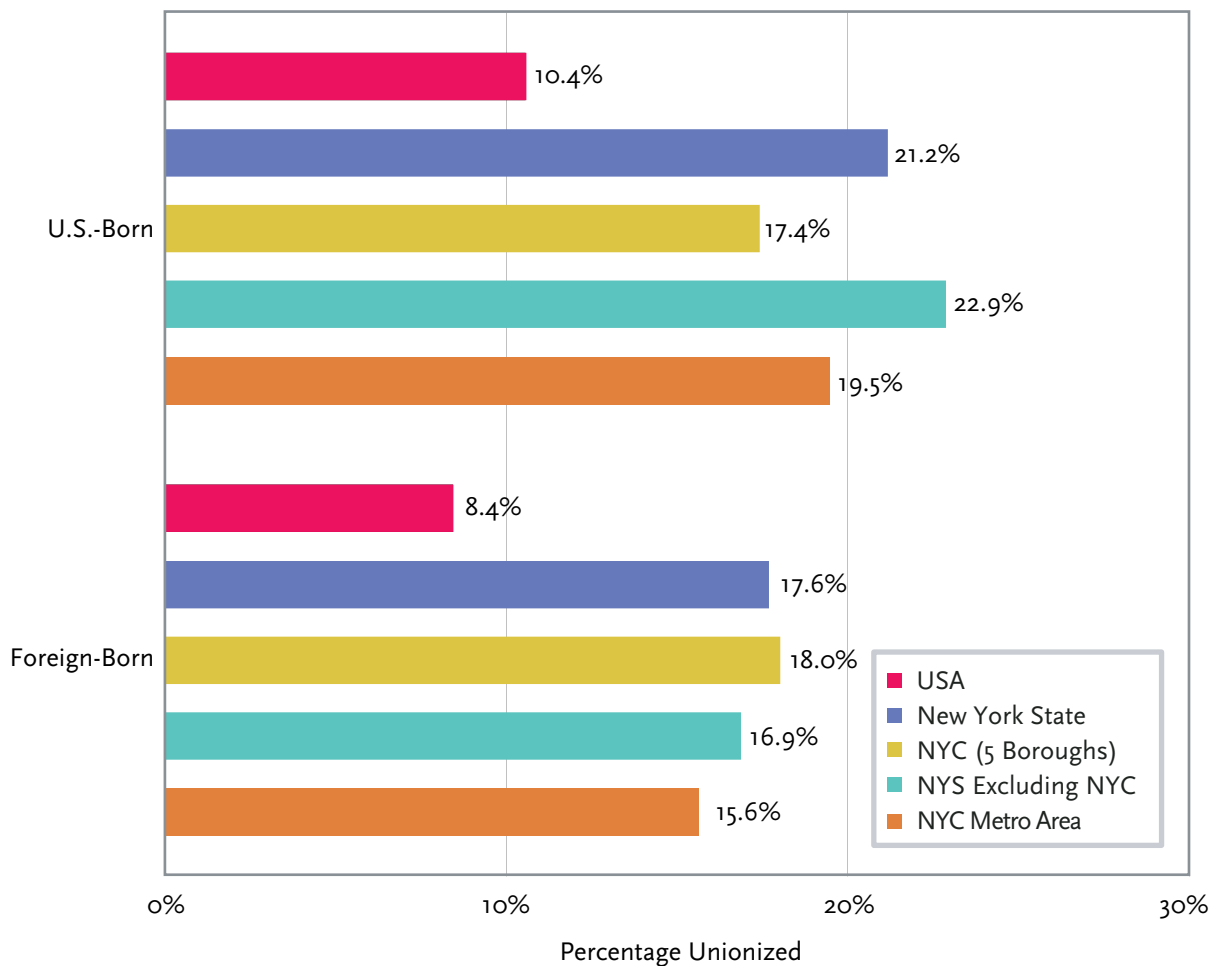
whites had a slightly higher unionization rate than their Latinx counterparts did.

Unionization rates vary with nativity as well, as shown in Figure 11. In 2022–23, foreign-born workers’ unionization rate was slightly higher than that of U.S.-born workers in New York City. U.S.-born workers had a higher unionization rate than their foreign-born counterparts in the other four geographical areas shown, however, reflecting the fact that relatively few foreign-born workers are employed in the highly unionized public sector. New York City is different from the other geographical entities shown because it has a large concentration of immigrants who arrived

in the United States decades ago, many of whom are naturalized U.S. citizens; immigrants in this group are often employed in the public sector and far more likely to be union members than recent arrivals.

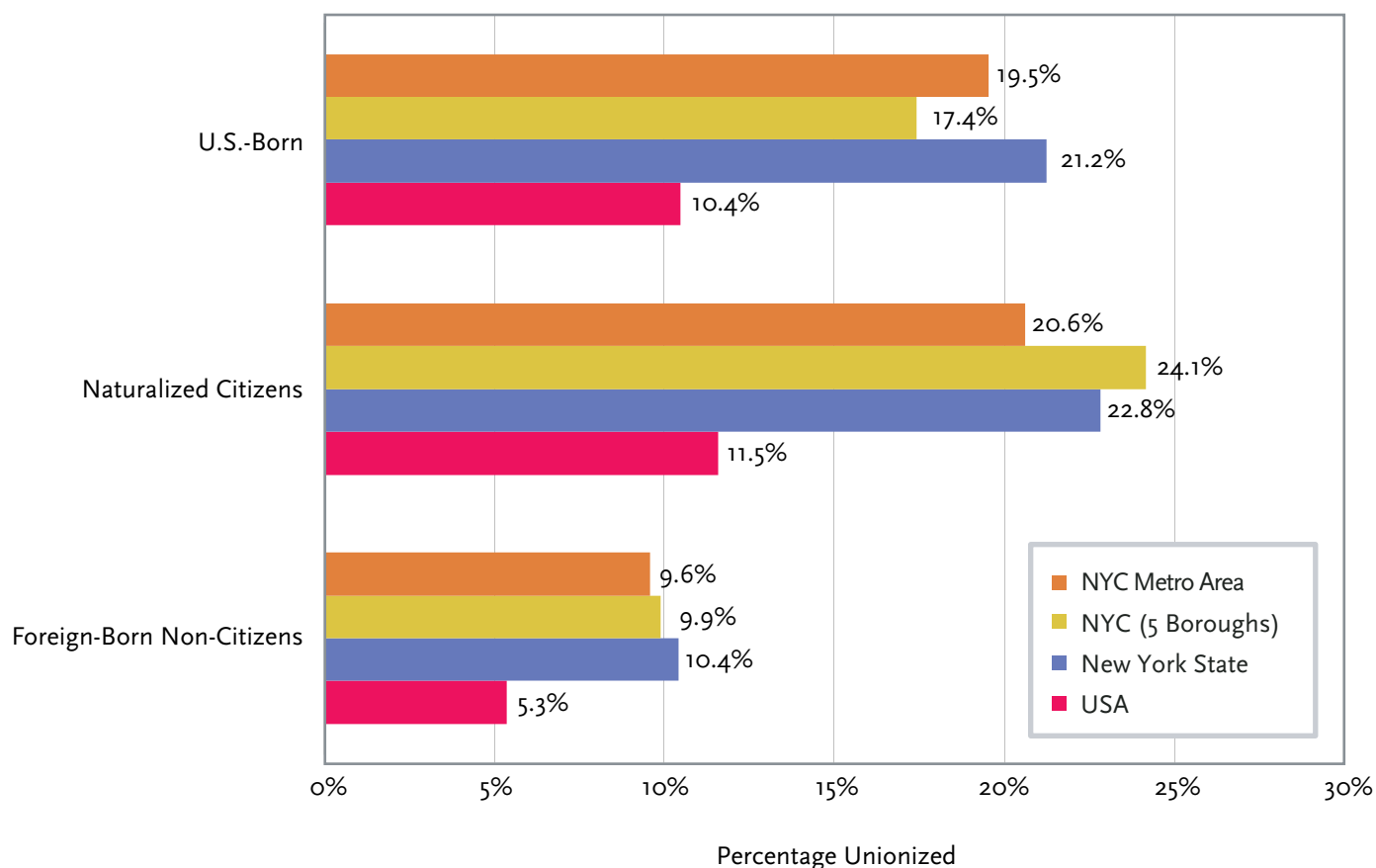
More generally, as Figure 12 shows, foreign-born workers are not a homogenous group. Across all geographical areas, the unionization rate of naturalized U.S. citizens is higher than that of U.S.-born workers. Foreign-born non-citizens, by contrast, consistently have very low rates of unionization. They typically are recent arrivals, and most are also relatively young (as noted above, younger workers are less likely to be union members than older ones, regardless of

**FIGURE 11. UNIONIZATION RATES BY NATIVITY, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022-23**



Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022—June 2023.

**FIGURE 12. UNIONIZATION RATES BY NATIVITY AND CITIZENSHIP STATUS, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

nativity). Moreover, noncitizen immigrants are disproportionately employed in informal-sector jobs, which have very low unionization rates. Over time, however, many immigrants are able to move into sectors of the labor market where unions are present, especially those who are naturalized citizens.

Figure 13 shows that unionization rates for foreign-born workers vary much less *within* the public and private sectors than between them, regardless of citizenship status. Relatively few noncitizens are employed in the public sector. However, in 2022–23, only 4.9 percent of all foreign-born noncitizens in the United States were employed in the public sector, compared to 14.5 percent of U.S. born workers and

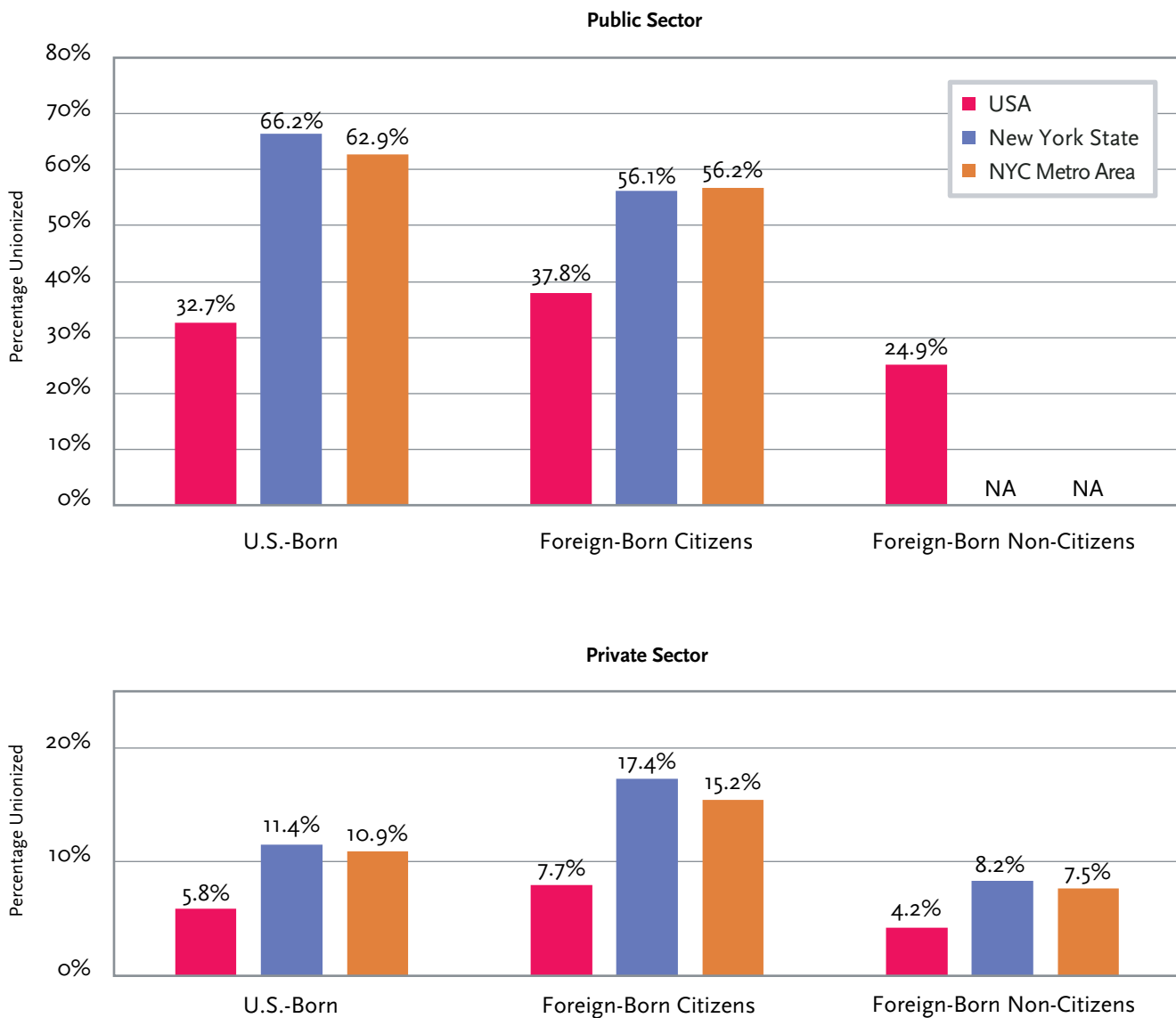
11.0 percent of naturalized citizens. Thus, the high level of public-sector unionization among noncitizens does little to boost their overall unionization rate. And as the bottom half of Figure 13 shows, private-sector unionization rates are consistently lower for all groups, regardless of citizenship status.

### Conclusion

Actively recruiting new members into the ranks of the labor movement, as many dedicated labor organizers have sought to do in recent years, is the primary means by which unions themselves can act to increase the unionization level. Indeed, this is one potential counterweight to the downward trend in organized



**FIGURE 13. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR UNIONIZATION BY NATIVITY AND CITIZENSHIP STATUS, SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS, 2022–23**



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text  
 Percentages shown for 2022-23 include the 18 months from January 2022 to June 2023.  
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2022–June 2023.

labor’s influence, although only if it can be scaled up to a higher level. As noted in the introduction to this report, the new organizing of the past few years has been of insufficient scale to make a difference in the overall picture, despite the intensive media and public attention it has attracted.

Moreover, many other factors that the labor movement cannot control also critically influence the

level of union density. All else equal, if employment declines in a highly unionized sector of the economy or expands in a non-union (or weakly unionized) sector, union density will fall. The best-known example of this is the steady decline of manufacturing, a former union stronghold, over the past few decades, along with the expansion of private-sector service industries where unions have historically been weak; indeed,

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these combined trends have been a major driver of the general erosion of union density. Conversely, if employment expands in a highly unionized sector or declines in a non-union or weakly unionized one, the overall level of density will increase. Privatization and subcontracting, both of which often involve a shift from union to non-union status for affected workers, further complicate the picture in some settings. Over the long term, given the “churning” effects of employment shifts and (in non-recessionary periods) normal labor market growth and turnover, simply to maintain union density at a given level requires a great deal of new organizing; and to increase density requires even far more extensive effort. This is why the recent uptick in union organizing has not impacted the overall density rates.

As we have seen, New York City and State’s unionization levels have been far higher than those in other parts of the nation—roughly double the national average—in recent years. However, this was not the case in the mid-20th century, when U.S. unionization was at a record high. In 1953, 34.4 percent of New York State’s workers were unionized, only slightly above the 32.6 percent national level.<sup>9</sup> Although since then organized labor has more than held its own in New York relative to the nation, in absolute terms unions have lost considerable ground in both the City and State over the past few decades—especially in the private sector. As recently as 1986, New York City’s private-sector union density was 25.3 percent, nearly twelve percentage points above the 2022–23 level (12.4 percent) level, and statewide the figure

was 24.0 percent as recently as 1983 (compared to 12.0 percent in 2022–23).<sup>10</sup>

As union strength in the private sector has ebbed, the ratio of public- to private-sector unionization in New York City and State has soared to record highs. That ratio has potentially serious implications. In labor’s glory days, a strongly unionized private sector helped foster a social-democratic political culture in New York City.<sup>11</sup> The decline in private-sector density is among the factors that have threatened to undermine that tradition in recent years. Even in the public sector (albeit to a far lesser extent than in the rest of the nation) unions in New York have lost some ground and have been increasingly on the political defensive. They were unable to negotiate new contracts for several years after the Great Recession; for years that impasse deprived most City workers of significant increases in compensation, with longer-term consequences.

More generally, even taking into account New York City’s and State’s unusually high union density levels—the highest of any major U.S. city and the second-highest of any state—organized labor continues to face daunting challenges. Yet unions continue to offer substantial protection to a diverse population of workers in the City and State, including teachers and other professionals, as well as large numbers of women, racial-ethnic minorities, and immigrants in both professional and nonprofessional jobs. And the recent surge of interest in organizing and the growth in public support for organized labor may also augur well for the coming years.

## Notes

1 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/12751/labor-unions.aspx>

2 This report (apart from the Appendix) is based on analysis of the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group data for calendar year 2022 and the first six months of 2023. We created a merged data set from the 18 monthly surveys conducted from January 2022 to June 2023, inclusive; the 2022-23 data discussed here and shown in the figures and tables below are the averages for those 18 months. All results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights, for employed civilian wage and salary workers aged 16 and over. CPS data used in this report come from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>, and Economic Policy Institute Current Population Survey Extracts, available at <https://microdata.epi.org/>. We followed the sample definition and weighting procedures described in Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson, *Union Membership and Earnings Data Book* (Washington D.C., 2019). See also [unionstats.com](http://unionstats.com) where Hirsch and Macpherson post annual updates (in contrast to the Data Book, which was discontinued after 2019). To ensure reliability, given the limitations of the CPS dataset, we report unionization rates only for subgroups that have a minimum of 50 union members, unless otherwise noted. Rates for subgroups that fall below this threshold are labeled NA (not available). The New York City figures for earlier years are from our September 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 reports, based on CPS data for January 2009-June 2010, January 2010-June 2011, January 2011-June 2012, January 2012-June 2013, January 2013-June 2014, January 2014-June 2015, January 2015-June 2016, January 2016-June 2017, January 2017-June 2018, January 2018-June 2019, January 2019-June 2020, January 2020-June 2021, and January 2021-June 2022 respectively. These earlier reports are available at <http://www.ruthmilkman.info/reports>.

3 For the state rankings, see [unionstats.com](http://unionstats.com).

4 An estimated 604,066 union members resided in New York City's five boroughs in 2022-23, while the statewide total is estimated at 1,641,238. The CPS data on which these estimates are based rely on respondents' self-reports as to whether or not they are union members. (Respondents who indicate that they are not union members are also asked whether they are covered by a union contract, but the analysis in this report does not include those who replied affirmatively to that question.) As noted in the text, all geographical data in

the CPS (and in this report) refer to respondents' place of residence—which often differs from the location of their workplaces. Since many workers commute from other areas to their jobs in the city, this makes the data for the five boroughs of New York City an imperfect approximation of the extent of unionization in the city. Some sections of this report present data on union members residing in the wider New York metropolitan area; a group that captures some commuters but also includes many individuals who are employed outside New York City.

5 Throughout this report, unless otherwise indicated, we use the term “New York metropolitan area” to denote the New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT-PA Combined Statistical Area (CSA), based on the CSA definitions introduced in 2020. The New York-Newark CSA includes the following counties (in addition to the five boroughs of New York City proper): Dutchess, Nassau, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, Ulster and Westchester Counties, New York; Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex and Union Counties, New Jersey; Litchfield, New Haven and Fairfield Counties, Connecticut; Monroe and Pike Counties, Pennsylvania. For details, see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Bulletin-20-01.pdf>.

6 These “Metropolitan Statistical Areas” are based on the 2013 U.S. Census (OMB) guidelines because the CPS currently uses the 2013 OMB definitions of these areas. For more details on the 2013 definitions, see [https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/legacy\\_drupal\\_files/omb/bulletins/2013/b13-01.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/legacy_drupal_files/omb/bulletins/2013/b13-01.pdf).

7 Since unionization has declined somewhat since 2011 (see Figures 1a-1c), the results of this analysis overestimate the actual levels of density for each industry shown in Table 3.

8 Given the nation's winner-take-all union representation system, and the fact that a relatively small proportion of present-day union membership is the product of recent organizing, the demographic makeup of union membership primarily reflects the demographic makeup of employment in highly unionized industries and sectors. Although unionized workers are more likely than their nonunion counterparts to express pro-union attitudes, this is typically a consequence—rather than a cause—of union affiliation. See Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 68-77. Moreover, individual workers seldom have the opportunity to make independent decisions about union affiliation. Instead, unionization occurs when entire workplaces (or occasionally, entire industries) are organized, and once

established, unionization in those workplaces tends to persist over time. Later, as a result of workforce turnover and de-unionization, strongly pro-union workers may be employed in non-union settings, and workers with little enthusiasm for organized labor may find themselves employed in union shops.

9 See Leo Troy, *Distribution of Union Membership among the States, 1939 and 1953* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 1957), available at <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c2688.pdf>. In 1939 the figures were 23.0 percent for New York State and 21.5 for the nation. Figures for New York City union membership levels during these years, unfortunately, are not available.

10 The 1986 private-sector figure is 25.3% for the New York PMSA (NYC's five boroughs as well as Putnam, Westchester and Rockland Counties). This and the 1983 statewide figure can be found at [unionstats.com](http://unionstats.com). See also Gregory DeFreitas and Bhaswati Sengupta, "The State of New York Unions 2007," (Hofstra University Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy, 2007), which includes 1980s data, available at [https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/cld\\_stateofnyunions2007.pdf](https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/cld_stateofnyunions2007.pdf).

11 See Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

## Notes for Special Feature

1 William A. Herbert and Jacob Apkarian, "Everything Passes, Everything Changes: Unionization and Collective Bargaining in Higher Education," *Perspectives on Work*, 21 (2017): 30-35. [https://www.lawcha.org/wp-content/uploads/HerbertApkarian\\_POW\\_HigherEd\\_2017.pdf](https://www.lawcha.org/wp-content/uploads/HerbertApkarian_POW_HigherEd_2017.pdf)

2 William A. Herbert, Jacob Apkarian, and Joseph van der Naald, "Supplementary Directory of New Bargaining Agents and Contracts in Institutions of Higher Education, 2013-2019" (New York, NY: Hunter College, 2020). <https://www.hunter.cuny.edu/ncscbhep/assets/files/SupplementalDirectory-2020-FINAL.pdf>.

3 William A. Herbert and Joseph van der Naald. "Graduate Student Employee Unionization in the Second Gilded Age." in *Revaluing Work(ers): Toward a Democratic and Sustainable Future*, ed. T. Schulze-Cleven and T. Vachon (Champaign, IL: Labor and Employment Relations Association, 2021), 221-46. [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1739&context=hc\\_pubs](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1739&context=hc_pubs)

4 Meg Brenan, "Approval of Labor Unions at Highest Point Since 1965," *Gallup*, September 2, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/354455/approval-labor-unions-highest-point-1965.aspx>

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12 William A. Herbert and Jacob Apkarian. "You've Been with the Professors: An Examination of Higher Education Work Stoppage Data, Past and Present," *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, 23 (2019): 249-77. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345387079-You%27ve-Been-with-the-Professors-An-Examination-of-Higher-Education-Work-Stoppage-Data-Past-and-Present>

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## Appendix\*

The table below is compiled from a variety of sources and indicates the number of members claimed by individual labor unions with jurisdictions in New York City-based workplaces. Unlike the Current Population Survey (CPS) data that serve as the basis for the rest of this report, which estimate the number of New York City *residents* who are union members, the data in this Appendix show the number of unionized *jobs* in New York City.

For a variety of reasons, the total number of union members in New York City shown in the table below is far higher than the CPS-based estimate of 604,000 cited on page 4 of this report. Perhaps the most important factor causing this discrepancy is that many union members who are employed in the City are commuters who live in the surrounding suburbs. In addition, some unions may inflate their membership numbers, and unions with broader geographical jurisdictions do not always know precisely how many of their members are employed in the City. Moreover,

many of the unions listed, especially those in sectors like construction and entertainment, have large numbers of members whose employment is irregular and for whom unemployment is common. Even when they are employed, workers in these sectors may oscillate between jobs in the City and jobs in other locations. All these factors help account for the fact that the total shown in the table below is greater than the CPS estimate cited above. Another factor operates in the opposite direction: since the CPS is a household survey that relies on responses from individuals, it is likely to include numerous cases of unionized workers who are unaware of the fact that they are members of labor organizations, potentially leading to an undercount. (It is also possible that some individual respondents to the CPS believe they are union members when in fact they are not, but the error is likely to be greater in the opposite direction.)

\*The data in this table were compiled from the most recent available LM-2/3/4 forms (typically from 2022) and other sources by Joseph van der Naald. Thanks to Ed Ott for assistance with this effort.

UNION NAME	Reported Membership
Amalgamated Transit Union <sup>c</sup>	14,406
American Association of University Professors <sup>c</sup>	552
American Federation of Government Employees <sup>c</sup>	7,902
American Federation of Musicians <sup>b</sup>	6,114
American Federation of School Administrators—Council of Supervisory Associations	6,737
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees <sup>c</sup>	130,338
American Federation of Teachers <sup>a, c</sup> (includes 20,774 members of PSC-CUNY and 119,955 in the NYC UFT)	152,772
American Postal Workers Union	8,083
American Train Dispatchers Association <sup>a</sup>	203
Anti-Defamation League Staff Association	156
Associated Actors and Artistes of America <sup>b, c</sup> (includes 16,934 members of Actors Equity Association; 896 members of the American Guild of Musical Artists; and 39,391 members of SAG-AFTRA)	57,432
Association of Commuter Rail Employees <sup>a</sup>	469
Association of Legislative Employees <sup>a</sup>	132
Association of Surrogates and Supreme Court Reporters Within the City of New York <sup>a</sup>	253
Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union <sup>c</sup>	1,320
Benefit Fund Staff Association	431
Brotherhood of Security Personnel	19
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen	60

UNION NAME	Reported Membership
Building and Construction Trades Department <sup>b</sup>	136
Campaign Workers Guild <sup>a</sup>	29
Citywide Association of Law Assistants of the Civil, Criminal and Family Courts <sup>a</sup>	300
Civilian Technicians Association	9
Communication Workers of America <sup>a, c</sup> (includes 2,750 members of the NewsGuild of New York)	25,776
Co-Op City Police Benevolent Association	78
Court Attorneys Association of the City of New York <sup>a</sup>	214
EMS Superior Officers Association <sup>a</sup>	33
Faculty Interest Committee of Ethical Culture Fieldston School	286
Fordham Law School Bargaining Committee	80
Furniture Liquidators of New York	8
Harper Collins Sales Association	33
Independent Association of Legal Workers	4
Independent Guard Union	7
Industrial Workers of the World	414
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees <sup>b, c</sup>	22,627
International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers <sup>b</sup>	7,078
International Association of Fire Fighters <sup>a</sup>	7,978
International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers <sup>b</sup>	963
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers <sup>a</sup>	11,868
International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers <sup>a, b</sup>	8,371
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers <sup>b</sup>	489
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers <sup>b</sup>	24,441
International Brotherhood of Teamsters <sup>c</sup>	60,000
International Brotherhood of Trade Unions	87
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers	134
International Longshoremen's Association	1,982
International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots — Atlantic Maritime Group <sup>c</sup>	1,400
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers <sup>b</sup>	8,030
International Union of Allied Novelty and Production Workers <sup>c</sup>	1,030
International Union of Elevator Constructors <sup>b</sup>	3,099
International Union of Journeymen and Allied Trades <sup>b</sup>	29,057
International Union of Operating Engineers <sup>a, b</sup>	21,930
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades <sup>a, b</sup>	6,754
International Union of Police Associations <sup>a</sup>	103
International Union, Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America	74
Laborers' International Union of North America <sup>b</sup>	18,932
League of International Federated Employees	928
Local One Security Officers	879
Major League Baseball Players Association <sup>c</sup>	90
Marine Engineers Beneficial Association <sup>a</sup>	145
Maritime Trades Department Port Council	22
Metal Trades Department <sup>b</sup>	17
MTA Commanding Officers Association <sup>a</sup>	26

UNION NAME	Reported Membership
Mount Sinai Pharmacy Association	125
National Air Traffic Controllers Association	146
National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees	508
National Association of Letter Carriers	11,112
National Association of Transportation Supervisors <sup>a</sup>	4,850
National Basketball Players Association <sup>c</sup>	38
National Labor Relations Board Union	43
National Postal Mail Handlers Union <sup>c</sup>	1,992
National Treasury Employees Union	3,480
National Writers Union <sup>c, e</sup>	166
New York City Deputy Sheriffs' Association <sup>a</sup>	145
New York Professional Nurses Association	1,223
New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association <sup>a</sup>	755
New York State Court Clerks Association <sup>a</sup>	1,225
New York State Court Officers Association <sup>a</sup>	1,422
New York State Federation of Physicians and Dentists	35
New York State Law Enforcement Officers Union <sup>a</sup>	35
New York State Nurses Association	25,358
New York State United Teachers Legal Staff Association	29
Newspaper and Mail Deliverers Union	357
Office and Professional Employees International Union <sup>c</sup>	5,043
Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association <sup>b</sup>	1,182
Organization of Staff Analysts <sup>a</sup>	3,411
Organization of Union Representatives	8
Patrolmen's Benevolent Association <sup>a</sup>	21,515
Police Benevolent Association of New York State <sup>a</sup>	63
Police Benevolent Association of the New York State Troopers <sup>a</sup>	209
Postal and Federal Employees Alliance	344
Professional Association of Holy Cross High School	45
Professional Dieticians of New York City Presbyterian	47
Restaurant Workers Union 318	21
Safety Professionals of America	8
Security Alliance Federation of Employees	323
Service Employees International Union <sup>a, c</sup> (includes 160,946 NYC members in 1199SEIU <sup>c</sup> ; 86,619 members in SEIU Local 32B-J <sup>c</sup> ; and 4,096 members in Workers United)	267,895
Special Patrolman Benevolent Association	80
Stage Directors and Choreographers <sup>b, c</sup>	741
St. John's Preparatory Teachers Association	33
Taxi Workers Alliance <sup>e</sup>	27,000
Transport Workers Union <sup>a</sup>	49,139
Uniformed Sanitation Chiefs Association <sup>a</sup>	73
Union of Automotive Technicians <sup>a</sup>	55
UNITE HERE <sup>d</sup>	33,933
United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters <sup>b</sup>	15,144

UNION NAME	Reported Membership
United Auto Workers <sup>c</sup>	13,214
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners <sup>b, c</sup>	18,481
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union <sup>d</sup> (includes 12,884 members in the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union)	33,539
United Nations International School Staff Association	222
United Probation Officers Association <sup>a</sup>	760
United States Park Police Sergeants Association	31
United Steelworkers <sup>d</sup>	2,493
United Uniformed Workers of New York <sup>a, f</sup>	33,820
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers <sup>b</sup>	1,464
United University Professions <sup>a</sup>	2,370
Utility Workers Union of America	7,193
Women's National Basketball Players Association <sup>c</sup>	11
Writers Guild of America <sup>b</sup>	2,649
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,248,607</b>

a Under the Landrum-Griffin Act (1959) and Civil Service Reform Act (1978) private-sector, postal and federal employee unions are required to file annually LM-2/3/4 forms with the U.S. Department of Labor, which report on their current membership (as well as other data). Public sector unions not covered by these acts are not required to file such forms, and thus some of the membership data were obtained directly from the unions, from the New York City Independent Budget Office (2023), from Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests to the Office of the State Comptroller's Office (2023) and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (2023), from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (2023), or from Combined Continuing Disclosure Filings relating to the Metropolitan Transit and Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authorities (2023).

b Data for these unions include some members working outside New York City. It is impossible to obtain precise data for those employed in the City, because the occupations they represent are not tied to stable workplaces; rather workers are hired for specific projects which are typically, but not always, located in the five boroughs. As a result New York City data for these unions may be overstated.

c The membership figures for this union are available in LM2/3/4 forms. However because the union's geographical jurisdiction extends beyond the five boroughs of New York City, some or all of the number shown was obtained directly from the union.

d Precise membership estimates for one or more of the locals in this union are not available. The figures shown are likely to be inflated because they include some members employed outside New York City.

e This union has dues-paying members but does not currently have collective bargaining rights.

f This includes the following unions, some of which may have members working outside New York City: 5,315 members in the Detectives Endowment Association; 4,252 members in the Sergeants Benevolent Association; 1,700 members in the Lieutenants Benevolent Association; 5,566 members in the Correction Officers Benevolent Association; 6,664 members in the Sanitation Workers Local 831; 2,431 members in the Uniformed Fire Officers Association; 1,192 members in the Sanitation Officers Local 444; 108 members in the Assistant Deputy Wardens - Deputy Wardens Association; 738 members in the Captains Endowment Association; 585 members in the Correction Captains Association; 294 members in the NYC Detective Investigators Association; 995 members in the NYS Supreme Court Officers Association; 97 members in the Port Authority Detectives Endowment Association; 111 members in the Port Authority Lieutenants Benevolent Association; 1,755 members in the Port Authority Police Benevolent Association; 249 members in the Port Authority Sergeants Benevolent Association; 186 members in the Uniformed Fire Alarm Dispatchers Benevolent Association; 338 members in the Bridge and Tunnel Officers Benevolent Association; 1,125 members in the Police Benevolent Association MTA; and 119 members in the Superior Officers Benevolent Association - Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority. The numbers for individual unions in the coalition were obtained directly from the unions, from the New York City Independent Budget Office, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Employee Payroll Information Directory, and from Combined Continuing Disclosure Filings relating to the Metropolitan Transit and Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authorities; all are for 2023.

Source: Unless otherwise indicated, the above data are extracted from the most recent LM-2, LM-3 and LM-4 forms that private-sector unions are required to submit annually to the U.S. Department of Labor, available at <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/olpdr/>





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## ABOUT THE CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES (SLU)

SLU was established in 2018, as an outgrowth of CUNY's Murphy Institute. The School offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in Labor Studies and Urban Studies designed to meet the needs of working adults as well as traditional-age college students who seek to learn more about the challenges confronting poor and working class populations in the workplace and in the community. It also collaborates with other units of CUNY to offer a range of college-credit programs designed to give workers the academic and technical skills they need for professional advancement. Its faculty includes distinguished scholars in the social sciences as well as expert practitioners in government, labor, and public service. In addition to its academic programs, SLU sponsors research, organizes forums and conferences, and publishes the journal *New Labor Forum*.

This year's report features a special feature guest-authored by William A. Herbert, Jacob Apkarian and Joseph van der Naald of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining at Hunter College-CUNY.

