

THE STATE OF THE UNIONS 2022

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

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Frank Manzo IV, M.P.P.

Robert Bruno, Ph.D.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Labor unions have historically delivered pathways into good, middle-class careers. Through collective bargaining, union workers earn higher wages, are more likely to have health insurance coverage, and have greater access to paid leave.

A recent surge in union activity is taking place following years of worsening inequality, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a national labor shortage.

- Workers at Amazon facilities, Starbucks stores, cannabis cultivation centers and dispensaries, and other workplaces have recently voted to join or form unions.
- Public approval of labor unions is at 71 percent, its highest level in six decades.
- In Illinois, there were 58 successful union petitions in 2021, the most since 2014—a 60 percent success rate that was higher than at any other time over the past decade.

Today, Illinois' union membership rate is about 14 percent, which is the 11th-highest union density among the 50 U.S. states.

- Even as the number of union members declined nationally, Illinois added union members between 2020 and 2021—the state's first increase since 2017.
- Between 2012 and 2021, unionization rates declined by 0.7 percentage points in Illinois and 0.9 percentage points in the United States.
- In the last decade, union membership in Illinois decreased by about 48,000 members, but the Chicago area added about 30,000 members while “Downstate” Illinois lost 78,000 members.
- Since 2017, the year before the *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* Supreme Court decision, there are now about 76,000 fewer union members in Illinois.

Certain groups of workers are significantly more likely to be unionized than their peers in Illinois.

- One-in-five Black workers (20 percent) is unionized compared to 15 percent of white workers.
- One-in-four military veterans (26 percent) is a union member.
- Between 2012 and 2021, the unionization rate of men fell by 1.5 percentage points while the unionization rate of women increased by 0.4 percentage point.
- Since 2018, workers under 35 years old have experienced the largest increases in unionization.

Essential workers and public sector workers are more likely to be union members in Illinois.

- About half of all public sector workers are unionized (49 percent) compared to fewer than one-in-ten private sector workers (9 percent).
- A brief spike in public sector unionization rates in 2020 shows that union members were less likely to be laid off or leave the labor force than their nonunion peers during the pandemic.
- Unionization rates are 70 percent for pre-K through 12 teachers, 69 percent for police officers and firefighters, and 45 percent for blue-collar construction and extraction workers.
- Research suggests that face-to-face workers who earn low wages and had the greatest risk of COVID-19 exposure may have the greatest potential for growth in union density.

Labor unions promote strong outcomes for workers, businesses, and taxpayers.

- In Illinois, unions lift worker wages by an average of 15 percent, the 4th-highest in the nation.
- Research has linked union representation with better job quality—higher incomes, improved health care access, safer workplaces, lower turnover, and less reliance on public assistance.

As Illinois and the nation face high inflation and continue to deal with a global pandemic, unions offer workers vital tools for combatting rising costs and promoting workplace safety. While a tightening labor market and a recent wave of unionization drives demonstrate that many workers want to organize and join unions, legal and political opposition are significant challenges for the labor movement. However, in November 2022, Illinois will vote on the Workers' Rights Amendment, which would protect the right to unionize and could improve the state of the unions in Illinois.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Frank Manzo IV, M.P.P. is the Executive Director of the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI). He earned his Master of Public Policy from the University of Chicago and his Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Political Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He can be contacted at fmanzo@illinoisepi.org.

Robert Bruno, Ph.D. is a Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Labor and Employment Relations and is the Director of the School's Labor Education Program. He also serves as Director of the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy in Political Theory from New York University and his Master of Arts in Political Science from Bowling Green State University. He can be contacted at bbruno@illinois.edu.

INTRODUCTION

Gallup, which has conducted public opinion polls around the world since 1935, has concluded that one of its most important findings is that “what the whole world wants is a good job” (Blanchflower, 2019; Clifton, 2015). Good jobs deliver family-supporting incomes, quality health care coverage, retirement security, schedules with predictable but flexible hours, and opportunities for professional development and career advancement. Good jobs rely on public policies and strong institutions that enable employment to lift people into the middle class.

In the United States, the labor movement has historically provided reliable pathways into good jobs. On average, union households have earned between 10 percent and 20 percent more than nonunion households every year since the 1930s (Farber et al., 2021). The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 95 percent of union workers have access to health care coverage, 95 percent have access to retirement plans, and 92 percent have access to paid sick leave. By contrast, just 69 percent of nonunion workers have health care access, 68 percent have retirement plan access, and 77 percent have paid leave (BLS, 2021).

Union membership, however, has gradually declined. Almost one-in-four U.S. workers (23 percent) was a member of a labor union in 1980. Over four decades later, just one-in-ten workers (10 percent) is unionized (Hirsch & Macpherson, 2022). A significant driver of the decline in union density has been the erosion of worker organizing rights across the United States. In the last decade, five states passed legislation allowing workers to “free ride” and receive all the services, benefits, and representation from unions without paying either dues or fair-share fees. A 5-4 Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31, et al.* overturned four decades of precedent and also permitted free-riding amongst all public sector employees nationwide. Allowing some workers to benefit from collective bargaining without requiring them to help support the union’s representational services has been found to reduce union density by more than 8 percentage points because it financially strains union organizing budgets (Hogler, Shulman, & Weiler, 2004).

As union membership has declined, economic inequality has worsened. The long-term drop in unionization explains as much as one-third of the growth in inequality (Western & Rosenfeld, 2011). In fact, declining worker power more broadly—which includes waning unionization, decreasing real minimum wages, and reduced worker protections—“explain[s] the entirety of the change in the distribution of income between labor and capital in the United States in recent decades and could also explain the rise in corporate valuations, profitability, and measured markups” (Stansbury & Summers, 2020).

The lack of good jobs and the rise in inequality was revealed and deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers performing essential and face-to-face work—including police officers, firefighters, teachers, nurses, construction workers, manufacturing workers, warehouse workers, restaurant workers, and retail cashiers—had seen their collective bargaining rights eroded prior to the pandemic. These workers were less likely to earn middle-class wages, have health care benefits, and be able to take paid days off to care for themselves or their families. These workers—who are also more likely to be women, Black, and Hispanic—were hit hardest by the pandemic, having the highest risks of workplace exposure and suffering from more job volatility (Manzo & Bruno, 2020). Other workers in higher-paying occupations that could be performed remotely were far less likely to lose their jobs or suffer income losses.

Worsening inequality and a once-in-a-century pandemic have driven up support for labor unions in the United States (Elias & Lucas, 2022). Public approval of unions has surged to 71 percent support, its highest level in six decades (McCarthy, 2022). Insufficient workplace protections for vulnerable workers, the changing nature of the employer-employee relationship, record profits at large corporations, and a national labor shortage due to a “Great Resignation” of workers, early retirements, COVID-19-related illnesses and deaths, and other factors have may have all been major catalysts of growing support for unions (Elias & Lucas, 2022; Fowers & Van Dam, 2021).

In the wake of surging public opinion, labor unions have secured a number of high-profile victories in recent months. Workers at Amazon’s Staten Island warehouse in New York City voted to form a union, the first win at the nation’s largest online retailer (Weise & Scheiber, 2022). Microsoft announced a neutrality agreement with the Communications Workers of America, remaining neutral if eligible employees wanted to unionize and allowing fast-tracked elections without petitioning the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) (Scheiber & Weise, 2022). As of mid-2022, workers at 200 Starbucks stores had voted to unionize, expanding membership to more than 5,000 employees (Combs, 2022). This includes Starbucks stores in Peoria, Cary, and multiple locations in the City of Chicago (Byrnes, 2022; Roeder, 2022).

There has been a recent surge in successful union petitions (Figure 1). The rise in union petitions has included “workers in industries that have been traditionally thought of as difficult to organize,” including coffee shop workers, museum workers, adjunct professors and lecturers, and workers at cultivation centers and dispensaries in the cannabis industry (Soglin & Mijares Torres, 2022; Schuba, 2021; UFCW, 2022). Data on union petitions in Illinois assigned to the Region 13 Chicago office of the National Labor Relations Board are presented in Figure 1.

In 2021, there were 58 successful union petitions at Illinois workplaces that newly unionized about 2,800 workers (Figure 1). This represents a 60 percent union success rate at the 97 workplaces with closed petitions last year. The 58 union workplaces—almost entirely at private companies and nonprofits—are the highest amount of newly unionized workplaces in Illinois since 2014, when 62 units were organized. The 2,800 newly represented workers mark the highest total since 2017. And the 60 percent success rate is significantly higher than at any time over the past decade, when success rates ranged between 33 percent and 47 percent. There is strong evidence that the rise in new organizing campaigns has continued in 2022, with 639 union wins organizing more than 43,000 new members across the country—including 200 union wins at Starbucks locations covering more than 5,000 new members (Combs, 2022). The rise in the success rate demonstrates that more and more workers from diverse workplaces are interested in unionizing.

FIGURE 1: UNION PETITION DATA, ILLINOIS PETITIONS AT NLRB REGION 13 (CHICAGO), 2012-2021

Year	Successful Petitions	Union Petitions	Closed Petitions	Success Rate (of Closed)	New Employees Represented
2012	62	131	131	47.3%	2,648
2013	52	116	116	44.8%	2,900
2014	62	155	155	40.0%	3,787
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	111	45.9%	2,409
2020	25	76	76	32.9%	983
2021	58	100	97	59.8%	2,766

Source: “Recent Charges and Petitions Filings” from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB, 2022).

In November 2022, voters in Illinois will vote on the Workers’ Rights Amendment, which would prevent Illinois from passing a state law or local ordinance “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 workplace safety” (ILGA, 2021). If approved by voters, the Constitutional Amendment could strengthen workers’ ability to collectively bargain over wages, benefits, and working conditions.

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 2012 to 2021. It is the eighth annual report of its kind for union members in the Chicago area and in Illinois

but is the first since September 2020 (Manzo et al., 2020). The report tracks unionization rates and investigates union membership across demographic, educational, sectoral, industry, and occupational classifications. The study subsequently evaluates the impact that labor union membership has on worker wages in Illinois and across the United States. The report concludes by recapping key findings.

DATA

This report utilizes data from the *Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Groups* (CPS-ORG). The CPS-ORG is collected, analyzed, and released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the U.S. Department of Labor. 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, 2022). Analytic weights are provided by the Department of Labor to match the sample to the actual U.S. population 16 years of age or older.

The 10-year dataset from 2012 through 2021 captures information on more than 3 million individuals aged 16 to 85 years old in the United States. These observations include information on 86,504 Illinois residents, of whom 51,854 were employed. In 2021, respondents with at least one job totaled 4,167 in Illinois and 2,837 in the Illinois portion of the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin metropolitan statistical area (“Chicago MSA”). No out-of-state residents who work in Illinois are included. For example, Indiana and Wisconsin residents are excluded from the Chicago area estimates.

In this analysis, the biggest limitation is that not every surveyed worker replies to the union membership question. For example, in 2021, union membership data was only available for 3,773 of the 4,167 surveyed workers (90.5 percent) in Illinois. While this does not impact unionization *rates*, estimates are likely underreported for both total union members and total nonunion workers.

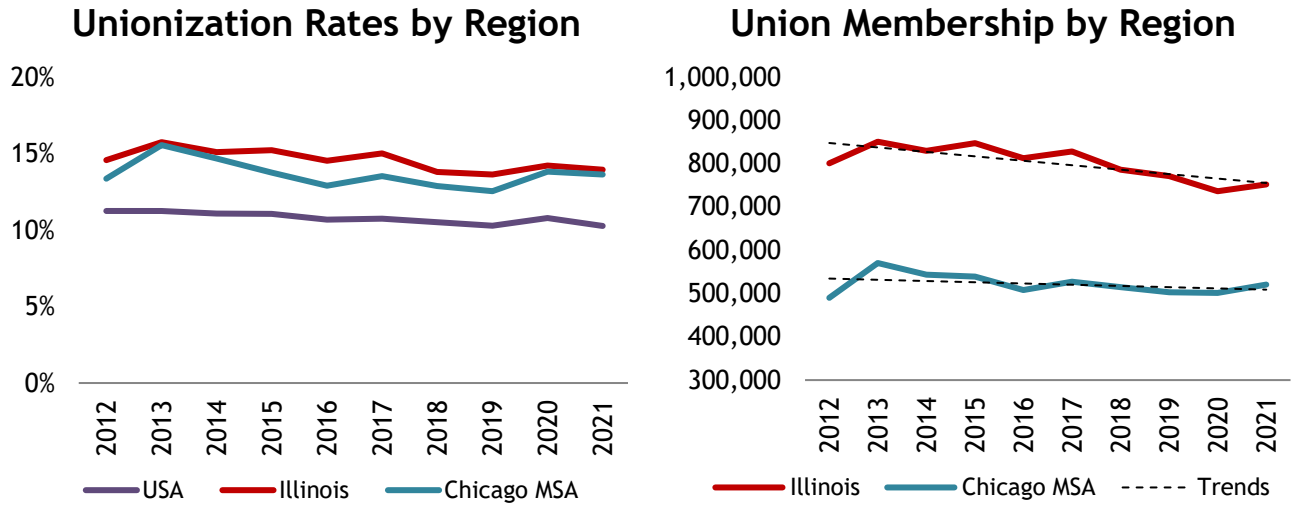
UNIONIZATION RATES AND TRENDS BY DEMOGRAPHICS, GEOGRAPHY, AND EDUCATION

Since 2012, unionization has declined in both Illinois and the United States (Figure 2). The total union membership rate was 14.6 percent in Illinois and 11.2 percent nationwide in 2012. By 2021, the unionization rate had fallen to 13.9 percent in Illinois and 10.3 percent in the United States. However, Chicago area’s unionization rate increased slightly between 2012 and 2021, from 13.6 percent to 13.8 percent. While there are now about 48,000 fewer dues-paying union members in Illinois than there were in 2012, this drop was entirely outside of the Chicago area. The Chicago area added about 30,000 union members, indicating that “Downstate” Illinois lost about 78,000 union members (Figure 2).

Gender Identification

The unionization rate for employed men in Illinois has fallen from 16.5 percent in 2012 to 15.0 percent in 2021, a drop of 1.5 percentage points (Figure 3). By contrast, the unionization rate of employed women has marginally increased, from 12.5 percent to 12.9 percent, a gain of 0.4 percentage point (or 3.2 percent). Both men and women in Illinois continue to have higher unionization rates than their counterparts across the United States. Illinois’ male unionization rate is 4.4 percentage points higher and its female unionization rate is 3.0 percentage points higher than their comparable national averages (10.6 percent and 9.9 percent, respectively).

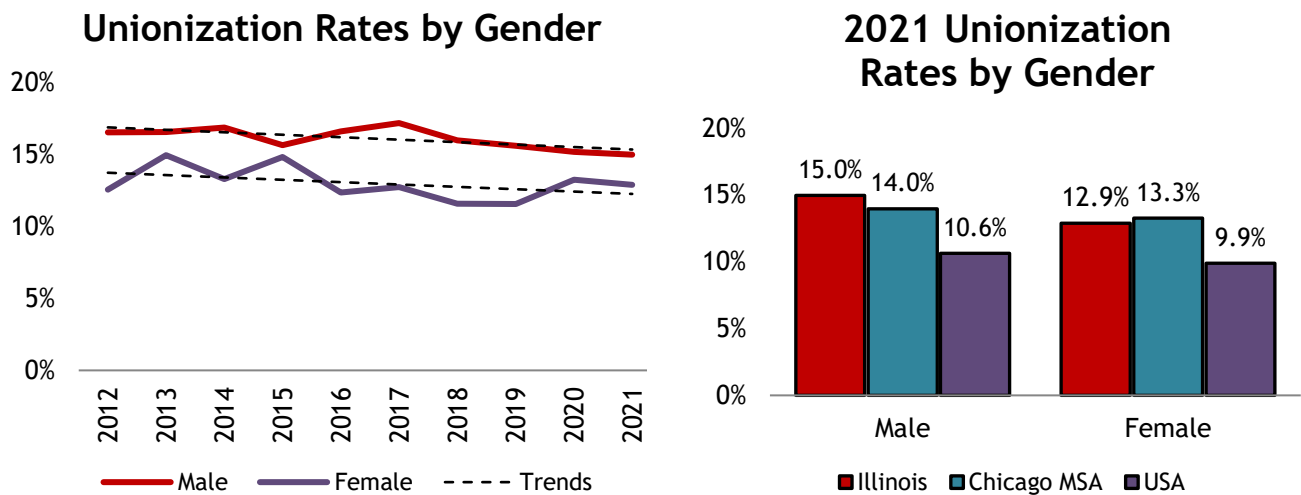
FIGURE 2: GRAPHS OF UNIONIZATION RATES AND TOTAL UNION MEMBERSHIP BY REGION, 2012-2021



Year	Illinois		Chicago MSA		USA	
	Members	Rate	Members	Rate	Members	Rate
2012	800,434	14.6%	490,023	13.4%	14,349,358	11.2%
2013	850,557	15.7%	570,390	15.5%	14,515,755	11.2%
2014	829,757	15.1%	543,428	14.7%	14,569,936	11.1%
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%
Average	801,388	14.6%	521,699	13.6%	14,514,312	10.8%

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2012-2021 (EPI, 2022).

FIGURE 3: GRAPHS OF UNIONIZATION RATES BY GENDER IDENTIFICATION, 2012-2021

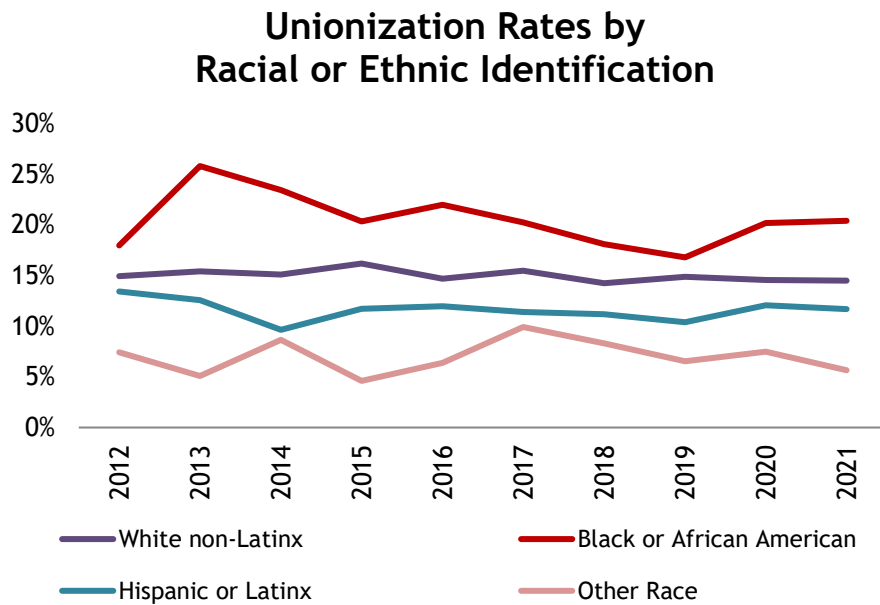
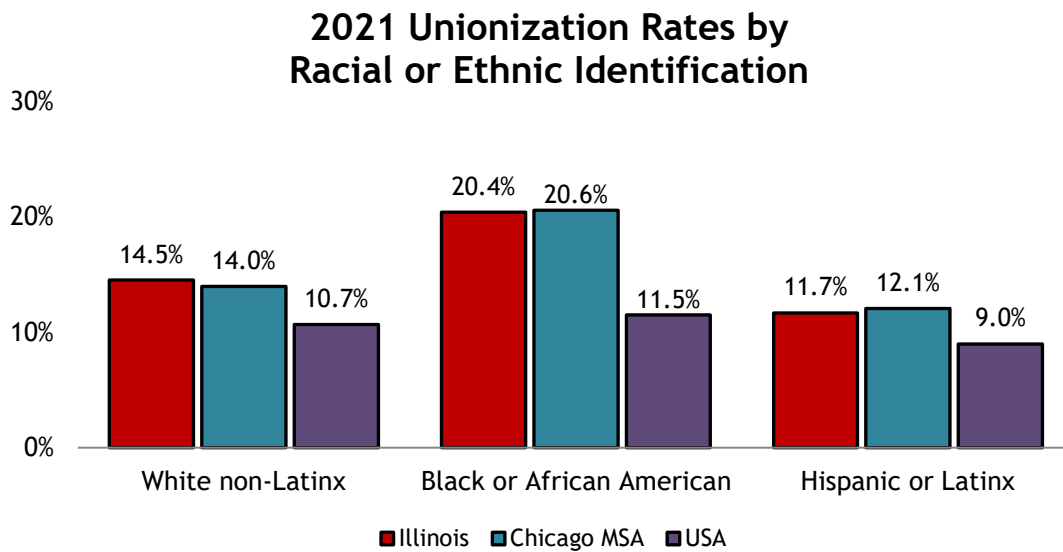


Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2012-2021 (EPI, 2022).

Racial or Ethnic Background

Black and African American workers are the most unionized racial or ethnic group (Figure 4). The unionization rate for Black and African American workers is 20.4 percent in Illinois, 20.6 percent in the Chicago area, and 11.5 percent in the United States. In comparison, white union density is 14.5 percent in the state, 14.0 percent in Illinois’ largest metropolitan area, and 10.7 percent across the nation. Respective unionization rates for Hispanic and Latinx workers are also lower, at 11.7 percent, 12.1 percent, and 9.0 percent. Additionally, while Black workers in Illinois experienced a 2.4 percentage point increase in union membership between 2012 and 2021, all other racial and ethnic groups experienced declines (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: GRAPHS OF UNIONIZATION RATES BY RACIAL OR ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION, 2012-2021

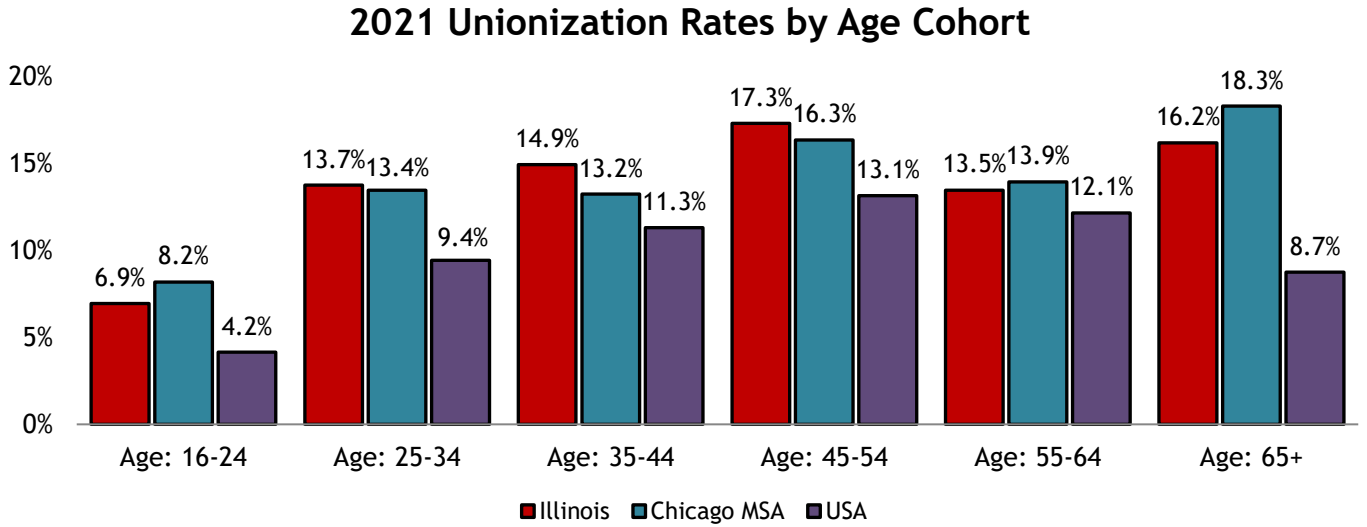


Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2012-2021 (EPI, 2022).

Age Cohort

Unionization rates are much higher for middle-aged workers and older workers than for young workers (Figure 5). For example, the unionization rates of workers between the ages of 45 and 54 years old are 17.3 percent in Illinois and 16.3 percent in the Chicago area. Similarly, workers ages 65 years or older have unionization rates of 16.2 percent in Illinois and 18.3 percent in the Chicago area. By contrast, for young workers aged 16 to 24 years old, unionization rates are just 6.9 percent in Illinois and 8.2 percent in the Chicago area. Workers in Illinois and in the Chicago area are more likely to be union members than the national average across all age cohorts.

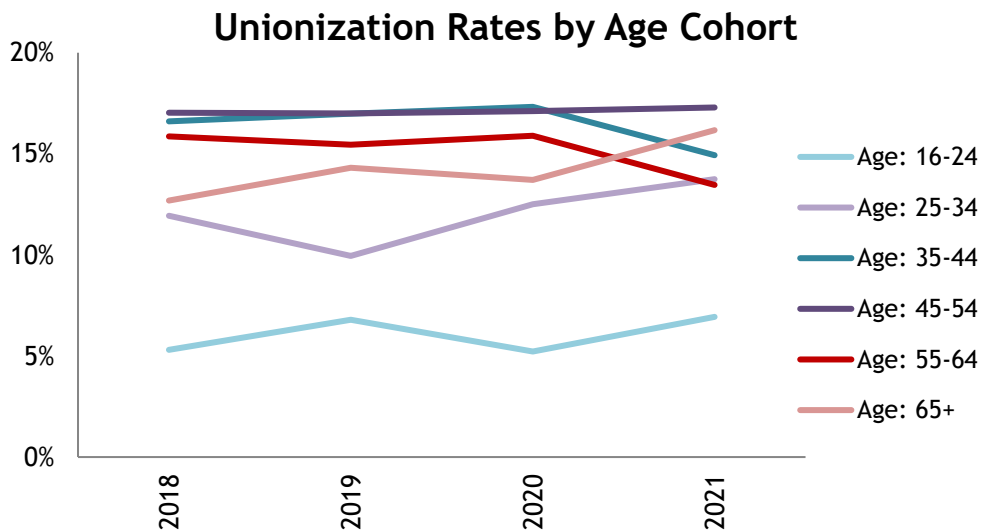
FIGURE 5: UNIONIZATION RATES BY AGE COHORT BY REGION, 2021



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

It is worth noting that unionization rates have recently increased for younger workers in Illinois (Figure 6). Since 2018, those 16 to 24 years old saw a 1.6 percentage point increase in unionization and those between the ages of 25 and 34 years old saw a 1.8 percentage point increase. The unionization rate for workers ages 65 years and older has also increased by 3.5 percentage points. The union membership rate for workers ages 45 to 54 years old was steady, but unionization declined for all other middle-aged cohorts.

FIGURE 6: ILLINOIS UNIONIZATION RATES BY AGE COHORT, 2018-2021



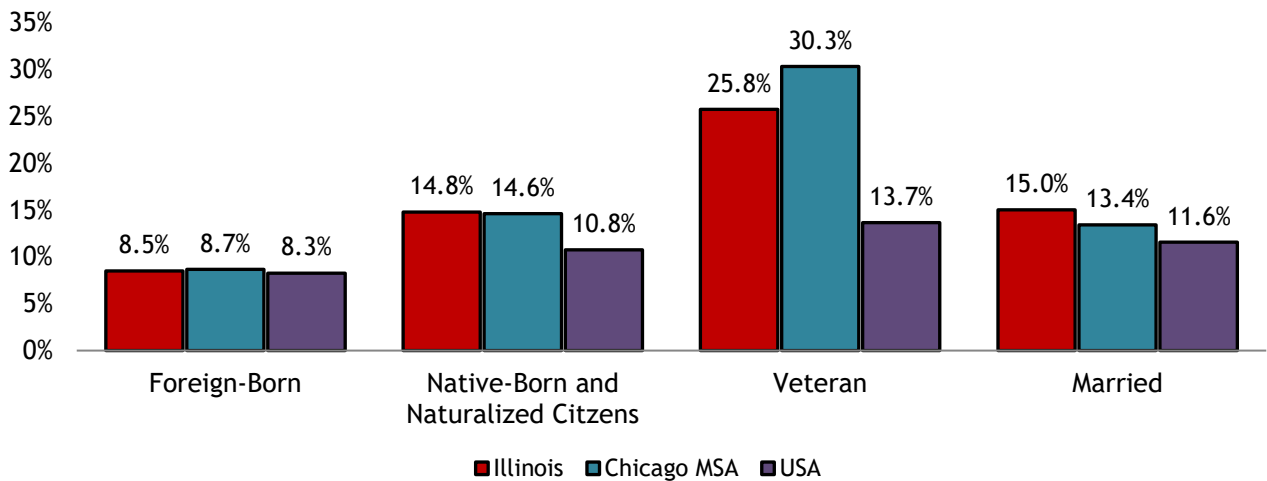
Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2018-2021 (EPI, 2022).

Other Demographics Groups

Union membership varies across other demographic classifications as well (Figure 7). Among the most unionized groups are military veterans. About one-in-four employed veterans is a union member in Illinois (25.8 percent) and three-in-ten are in the Chicago area (30.3 percent). For the United States, 13.7 percent of employed veterans are unionized. The unionization rate for married workers, foreign-born workers, and native-born and naturalized citizens are all above the national average in Illinois and in the Chicago area. Native-born and naturalized citizens are more likely to be union members than foreign-born workers in Illinois, the Chicago area, and the nation.

FIGURE 7: UNIONIZATION RATES OF SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS BY REGION, 2021

2021 Unionization Rates by Demographic Group



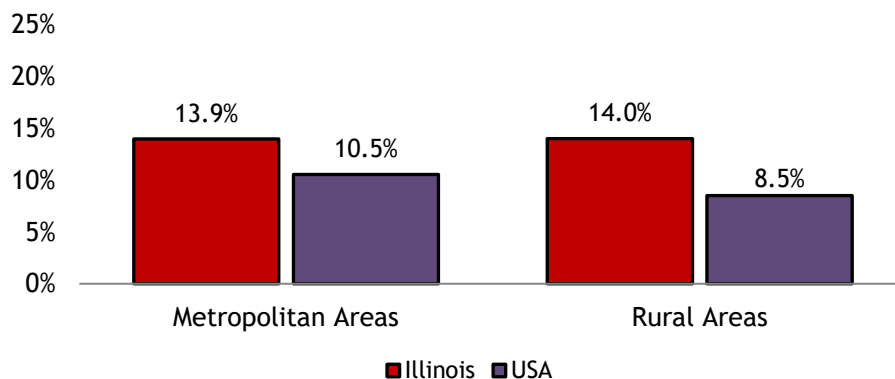
Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

Geography

Figure 8 reveals that unionization is comparable regardless of urban status in Illinois. The union membership rate is 13.9 percent in metropolitan areas like Chicago, Rockford, and Springfield, which is statistically indistinguishable from the 14.0 percent rate in rural Illinois. Nationally, however, metropolitan areas are more unionized (10.5 percent) than rural areas (8.5 percent).

FIGURE 8: UNIONIZATION RATES BY URBAN STATUS IN ILLINOIS AND THE UNITED STATES, 2021

2021 Unionization Rates by Urban Status

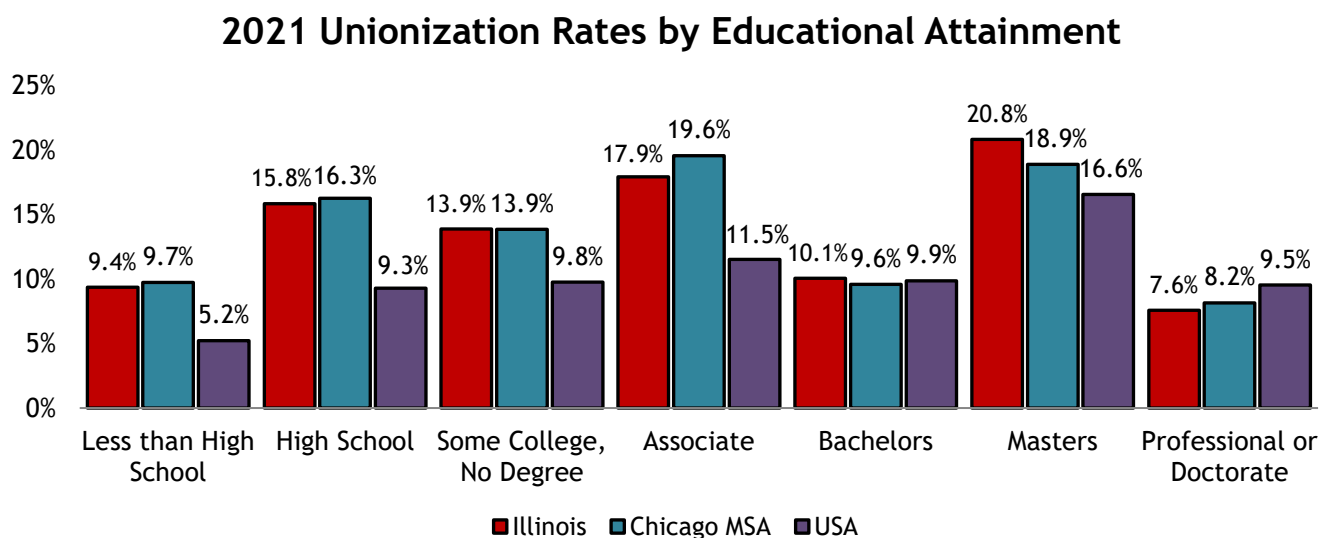


Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

Educational Attainment

Workers with master's degrees are the most unionized educational group (Figure 9). Nationally, one-in-six master's degree holders is a union member (16.6 percent). In Illinois, more than one-in-five workers with master's degrees is a union member (20.8 percent), including 18.9 percent in the Chicago area. Workers with associate degrees also have relatively higher unionization rates, at 17.9 percent in Illinois, 19.6 percent in the Chicago area, and 11.5 percent in the United States. Workers without high school degrees and workers with professional or doctorate degrees comprise the two least-unionized educational groups in Illinois. Except for workers with professional and doctorate degrees, unionization rates are higher in Illinois than the national average across all levels of educational attainment.

FIGURE 9: UNIONIZATION RATES BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OR STATUS BY REGION, 2021



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

UNIONIZATION RATES BY SECTOR, INDUSTRY, AND OCCUPATION

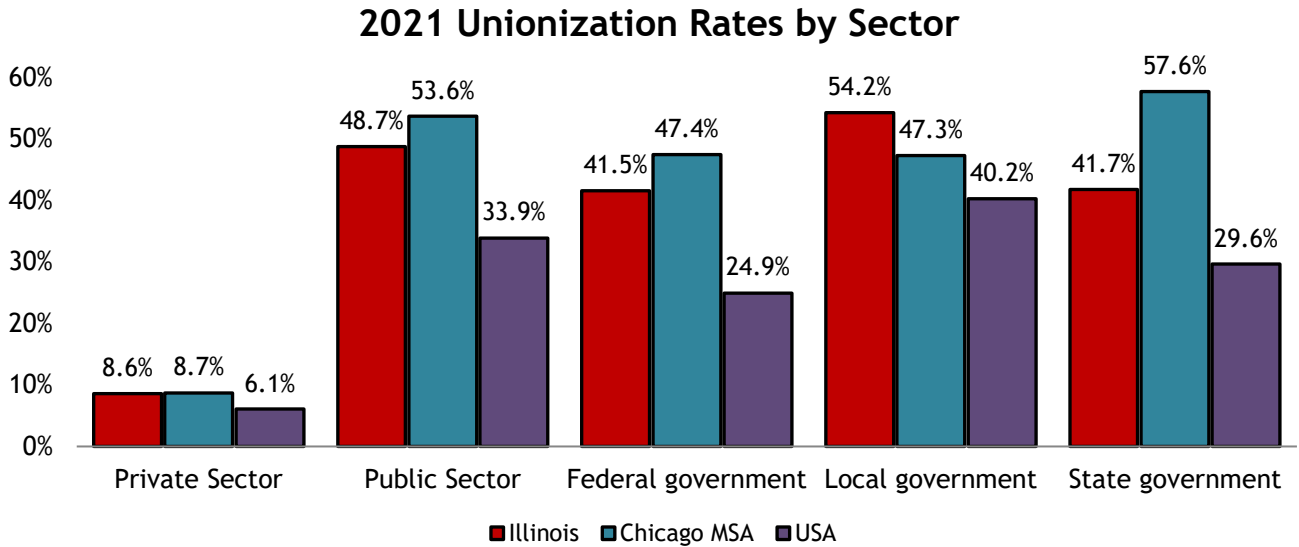
Sector

While fewer than one-in-ten private sector workers is now a union member in Illinois (8.6 percent), the Chicago MSA (8.7 percent), and the United States (6.1 percent), unionization rates are significantly higher for public sector workers (Figure 10). About half of all public sector workers are unionized in both Illinois (48.7 percent) and the Chicago area (53.6 percent), as are about one-third nationwide (33.9 percent). The most unionized public sector group is local government employees in Illinois (54.2 percent) and nationally (40.2 percent), but state government employees are the most unionized in the Chicago area (57.6 percent).

The data suggests that the 5-4 *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31, et al.* Supreme Court decision in June 2018 may have affected union membership in Illinois (Figure 11). In 2017, the last full year before the decision, the unionization rate of state and local government employees was 52.1 percent. Immediately following the decision, just 47.3 percent of state and local government employees were union members. The state and local government employee unionization rate did increase in 2020, but the change is because unions protected jobs for their members during the COVID-19 pandemic while nonunion workers were more likely to leave the labor force or be laid off. In state and local government, nonunion employment fell from an estimated 318,000 workers in 2019 to 216,000 workers in 2020 before rebounding somewhat to 291,000 workers in 2021, according to the CPS-ORG data. By 2021, as total employment mostly recovered in both the private and public sectors,

state and local government employees had a unionization rate of 49.9 percent, which is 2.2 percentage points below its pre-*Janus* level. By contrast, the unionization rate of private sector workers fell by 1.1 percentage points between 2017 and 2021.

FIGURE 10: UNIONIZATION RATES BY SECTOR OR LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT BY REGION, 2021



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

FIGURE 11: UNIONIZATION RATES BY SELECTED SECTORS, 2017-2021

Year	All Illinois	Private Sector	State and Local Government
2017	15.0%	9.8%	52.1%
2018	13.8%	8.7%	47.3%
2019	13.6%	8.9%	47.3%
2020	14.2%	8.5%	57.5%
2021	13.9%	8.6%	49.9%
Change Since 2017	-1.1%	-1.2%	-2.2%

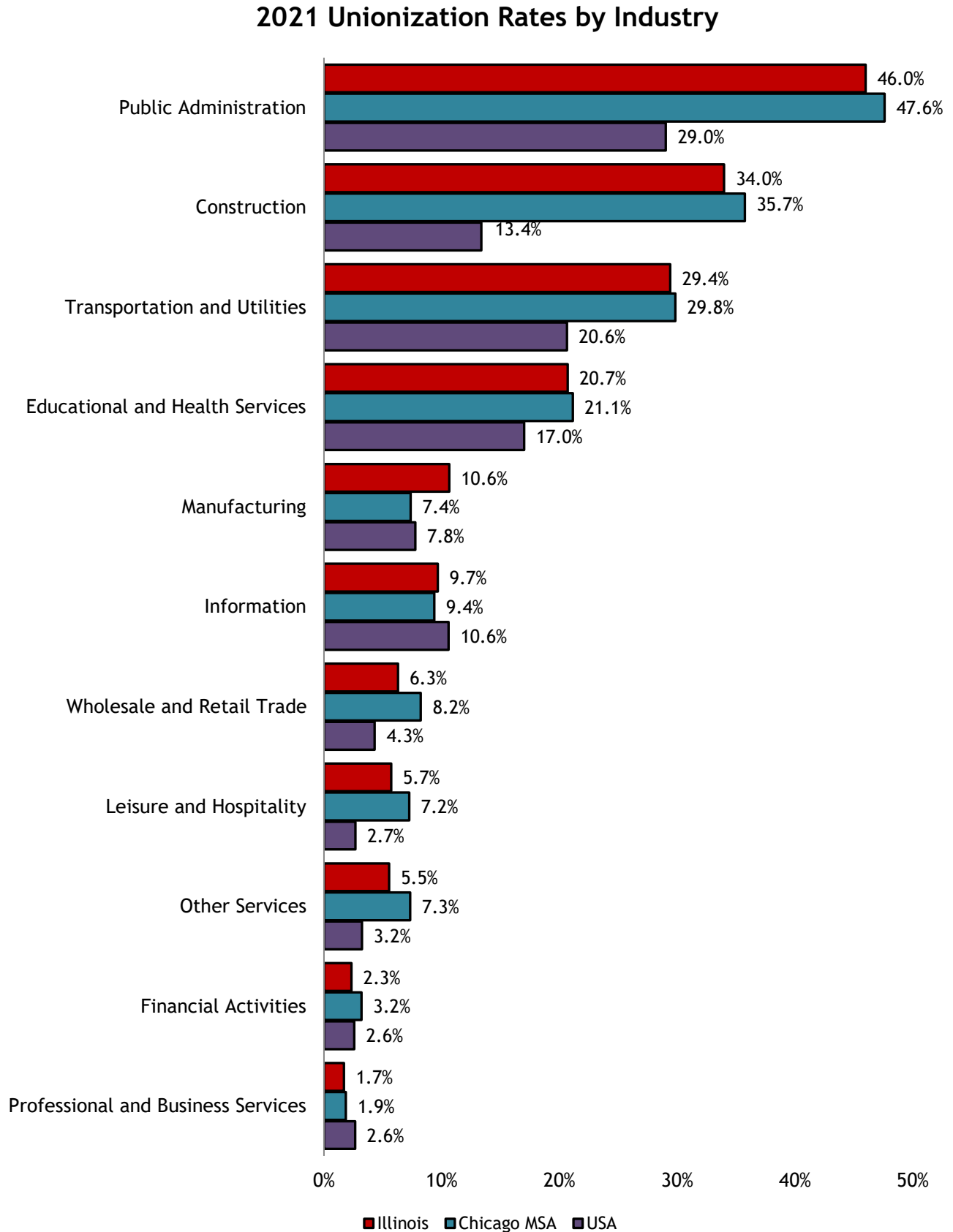
Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2017-2021 (EPI, 2022).

Industry

Union membership varies significantly by industry (Figure 12). The top four industries by unionization rates in Illinois are public administration (46.0 percent), construction (34.0 percent), transportation and utilities (29.4 percent), and the combined educational and health services industry (20.7 percent). The manufacturing workforce, associated historically as a leader in industrial unionization, is now only 7.8 percent organized nationally, 7.4 percent in the Chicago area, and 10.6 percent across Illinois. The least-unionized industries generally are professional and business services and financial activities.

Figure 13 presents breakdowns of total union membership in Illinois compared to total employment in the state for selected industries. Industries are organized in descending order by unionization rate. Note that the estimates include all occupations within an industry. The construction industry, for example, includes white-collar workers who typically are not union members, such as engineers and architects. The top five industries with the most union members in Illinois are educational and health services (271,000 members), transportation and warehousing (115,000 members), public administration (109,000 members), construction (80,000 members), and manufacturing (67,000 members) (Figure 13).

FIGURE 12: UNIONIZATION RATES BY INDUSTRY BY REGION, 2021



Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

FIGURE 13: ILLINOIS INDUSTRY UNIONIZATION RATES, EMPLOYMENT, AND UNION MEMBERS, 2021

Selected Industries (2021)	Unionization Rate	Total Employment	Total Union Members	Total Sample
Public Administration	46.0%	237,000	109,000	171
Construction	34.0%	236,000	80,000	169
Transportation and Utilities	29.4%	391,000	115,000	274
Educational and Health Services	20.7%	1,310,000	271,000	926
Manufacturing	10.6%	633,000	67,000	448
Information	9.7%	81,000	8,000	57
Wholesale and Retail Trade	6.3%	715,000	45,000	499
Leisure and Hospitality	5.7%	406,000	23,000	265
Other Services	5.5%	200,000	11,000	140
Financial Activities	2.3%	436,000	10,000	306
Professional and Business Services	1.7%	730,000	12,000	502

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022). All estimates rounded to the nearest thousand.

Occupation

Figure 14 similarly depicts the unionization rates of occupations in Illinois. Protective service occupations (51.4 percent); education, training, and library careers (46.2 percent); construction and extraction workers (45.3 percent); installation, maintenance, and repair workers (32.7 percent); and community and social service workers (24.7 percent) all have relatively high levels of unionization exceeding 20 percent. Compared to the nation, unionization rates in these five occupations are significantly elevated in Illinois. Union membership in construction and extraction occupations, as an example, is 28.2 percentage points higher in Illinois than the comparable U.S. average.

FIGURE 14: UNIONIZATION RATES BY SELECTED OCCUPATION BY REGION, 2021

Selected Occupations (2021)	Illinois	Chicago MSA	USA
Protective Service	51.4%	47.4%	33.3%
Education, Training, and Library	46.2%	47.4%	34.7%
Construction and Extraction	45.3%	46.5%	17.1%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	32.7%	30.4%	13.9%
Community and Social Service	24.7%	29.1%	14.6%
Transportation and Material Moving	19.5%	22.0%	12.9%
Production	15.0%	13.2%	10.8%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	14.2%	17.6%	9.4%
Office and Administrative Support	10.8%	10.5%	8.5%
Architecture and Engineering	10.0%	8.5%	5.9%
Healthcare Support	9.8%	6.4%	8.3%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	9.5%	8.6%	7.1%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	9.4%	7.2%	10.0%
Healthcare Practitioner and Technical	8.4%	10.9%	11.7%
Legal	6.0%	5.0%	5.8%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	4.9%	6.3%	3.1%
Sales and Related	4.6%	6.3%	3.3%
Computer and Mathematical Science	3.9%	4.2%	3.7%

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

Workers who were deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic are also more likely to be union members (Figure 15). The unionization rate of pre-K through 12 teachers, including those at public schools and private schools, is 70.4 percent in Illinois. Police officers and firefighters are 69.3 percent unionized. As noted in Figure 14, fully 45.3 percent of blue-collar construction and extraction workers—such as operating engineers, carpenters, and laborers—are union members. Manufacturing production workers like machinists are 15.8 percent unionized and registered nurses are 8.7 percent unionized.

FIGURE 15: UNIONIZATION RATES OF ESSENTIAL WORKERS IN ILLINOIS, SELECTED EXAMPLES, 2021

Essential Workers in Illinois vs. Illinois Average (2021)	Unionization Rate
Pre-K through 12 Teachers	70.4%
Police Officers and Firefighters	69.3%
Construction and Extraction Workers	45.3%
Production	15.0%
Registered Nurses	8.7%
Illinois Average	13.9%

Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2021 (EPI, 2022).

Compared to essential workers and remote workers, those in face-to-face occupations earn relatively low wages, are less likely to have health insurance coverage, and were most at risk of exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also less likely to be union members than essential workers (Manzo & Bruno, 2020). As the economic effects of the pandemic waned, these workers have sought job quality. Many have left their face-to-face occupations, such as food service and hospitality jobs, for higher-quality positions. Others, like those at Starbucks, have formed unions to bargain for better working conditions. At a time with historic union approval and when the unionization rates of young workers are on the ascent, research suggests that the occupations with the greatest potential for growth in union density are those in face-to-face (or frontline) jobs that may have the most to gain from collective bargaining.

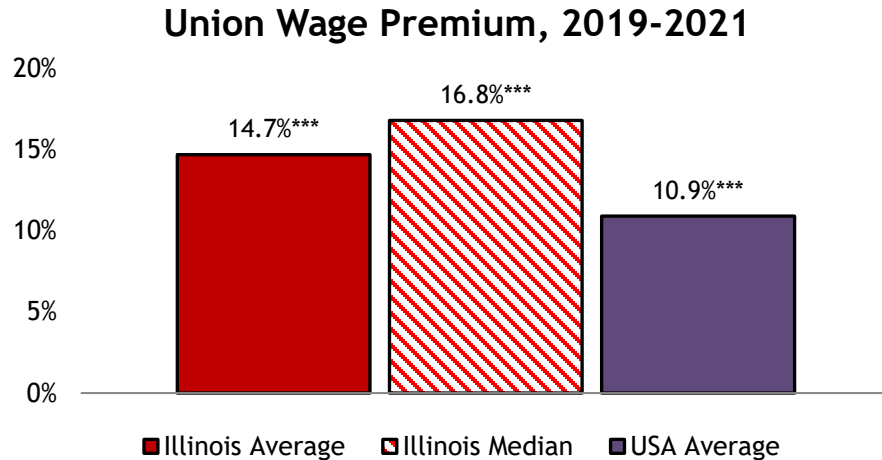
THE IMPACT OF UNION MEMBERSHIP ON WORKER WAGES

Union workers earn more than their nonunion counterparts (Figure 16). Many factors can influence a workers' earnings, including age, level of educational attainment, occupation of employment, geographic location, and demographics. Statistical models called "regressions" are utilized to account for these and similar factors to isolate the independent effect of union membership on wages. After accounting for these variables, union membership statistically increases a workers' hourly wage by 10.9 percent in the United States.

The union wage premium is even higher in Illinois (Figure 16). Union membership boosts Illinois workers' hourly earnings by an average of 14.7 percent. Furthermore, a unique analytical tool called a "quantile regression," permits evaluation for the median worker. While union membership is statistically associated with a 14.7 percent increase in the *average* Illinois worker's wage, the wage premium is 16.8 percent for the median worker. All results are statistically significant at the 99-percent level of confidence. The data show that unionization boosts wages for Illinois' middle class.

How does the average Illinois union difference of 14.7 percent compare to the wage premium in other states? Similar 2019 through 2021 regressions are run to assess each of the 49 other states plus the District of Columbia against Illinois. The results, reported in Figure 17, reveal that Illinois has the 4th-highest union wage premium in the nation, behind only Connecticut (17.3 percent), Delaware (16.0 percent), and New Hampshire (15.9 percent). A total of 20 states have union wage premiums that are higher than the national average of 10.9 percent. Importantly, a positive union wage premium exists in every state.

FIGURE 16: REGRESSIONS OF UNION WAGE PREMIUMS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND ILLINOIS, 2019-2021



Three asterisks (***) indicate significance at the 1-percent level. Two asterisks (**) indicates significance at the 5-percent level. Source: CPS-ORG, Center for Economic and Policy Research Uniform Data Extracts, 2019-2021. Statistics are adjusted by the outgoing rotation group earnings weight to match the total population 16 years of age or older. Regression outputs are converted to percent changes using correct adjustments to interpret natural logarithms (Kennedy, 1981; IDRE, 2021). For more, see the Appendix.

FIGURE 17: UNION WAGE PREMIUMS BY STATE, OLS REGRESSIONS, 2019-2021

Rank	State	Union Premium	Rank	State	Union Premium
--	United States	10.9%	26	Wisconsin	10.2%
1	Connecticut	17.3%	27	Minnesota	10.1%
2	Delaware	16.0%	28	Tennessee	10.1%
3	New Hampshire	15.9%	29	Oregon	10.0%
4	Illinois	14.7%	30	Washington	9.6%
5	Nevada	14.5%	31	Montana	9.5%
6	Oklahoma	13.8%	32	Ohio	9.5%
7	Pennsylvania	13.7%	33	Arizona	9.4%
8	New Jersey	13.4%	34	West Virginia	9.2%
9	North Dakota	13.3%	35	Rhode Island	8.8%
10	Kentucky	12.6%	36	New York	8.6%
11	Wyoming	12.4%	37	New Mexico	8.3%
12	Texas	12.4%	38	Iowa	8.2%
13	Alaska	12.4%	39	Florida	8.0%
14	Louisiana	12.1%	40	Utah	7.4%
15	Indiana	12.1%	41	South Carolina	7.3%
16	Idaho	11.8%	42	Nebraska	6.8%
17	Missouri	11.5%	43	Massachusetts	6.6%
18	Georgia	11.5%	44	Alabama	6.6%
19	California	11.4%	45	Maryland	6.3%
20	Michigan	11.0%	46	Virginia	5.9%
21	Kansas	10.6%	47	North Carolina	5.4%
22	Vermont	10.6%	48	Mississippi	5.1%
23	Hawaii	10.6%	49	District of Columbia	4.6%
24	Maine	10.4%	50	South Dakota	4.4%
25	Arkansas	10.3%	51	Colorado	4.3%

All estimates are significant at the 1-percent level except for the following: Oklahoma, Maine, Utah, and the District of Columbia (which are all significant at the 5-percent level); Virginia and Mississippi (which are significant at the 10-percent level); and South Carolina, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Colorado. Source: CPS-ORG, Economic Policy Institute, 2019-2021 (EPI, 2022). Statistics are adjusted by the outgoing rotation group earnings weight to match the total population 16 years of age or older. Regression outputs are converted to percent changes using correct adjustments to interpret natural logarithms (Kennedy, 1981; IDRE, 2021). For more, see the Appendix.

CONCLUSION

Since 2012, unionization has declined in Illinois and in the United States. There are approximately 48,000 fewer union members in Illinois today than there were in 2012. This drop, however, has been entirely outside of the Chicago metro area because the Chicago area added about 30,000 union members. There have also been significant declines in union membership since the June 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* Supreme Court decision. Still, about 14 percent of all workers in Illinois are unionized, with the highest rates among Black workers and military veterans. Essential workers like teachers, police officers, firefighters, construction workers, production workers, and registered nurses are also more likely to be union members. In addition, young workers and women have experienced recent gains in unionization.

Labor unions continue to promote job quality and increase hourly wages. Illinois has the 4th-highest union wage premium in the nation, with unions raising wages for the average worker by 15 percent. Unions particularly boost earnings for Illinois' middle-class residents: The median Illinois worker earns 17 percent higher wages due to union membership.

As Illinois and the nation face high inflation and continue to deal with a global pandemic, there are both tailwinds and headwinds for the labor movement. On the positive side, labor unions are enjoying historic levels of public support, with nearly seven-in-ten Americans approving. The tight labor market and workers reconsidering their priorities have increased bargaining power and empowered workers to quit and accept good jobs. The recent wave of unionization drives at places like Amazon, Starbucks, and cannabis dispensaries has demonstrated that many workers from new workplaces want to join and form unions. On the negative side are significant challenges. Employers can currently interfere in worker organizing campaigns and stall union elections without significant penalty. Long-term trends in outsourcing and automation threaten good union jobs. For example, the rise in remote work provides workers with flexibility, but also allows corporations to hire people to work from anywhere—and not just in Illinois, California, and Florida, but also in China, India, and Mexico. Finally, recent changes on the United States Supreme Court and the Court's willingness to overturn established precedents could further undermine labor standards and collective bargaining nationally. However, in November 2022, Illinois voters may choose to protect workers' ability to unionize and collectively bargain through the Workers' Rights Amendment.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A: ROBUST OLS AND QUANTILE REGRESSIONS OF THE IMPACT OF UNION MEMBERSHIP ON THE NATURAL LOG OF HOURLY WAGES, 2019-2021

Ln(Nominal Wage)	(1) USA Mean		(1) Illinois Mean		(2) Illinois Median, Q(.5)		(3) Indiana Mean	
	Coefficient	(St. Err.)	Coefficient	(St. Err.)	Coefficient	(St. Err.)	Coefficient	(St. Err.)
Union member	0.1037***	(0.0031)	0.1373***	(0.0153)	0.1553***	(0.0164)	0.1138***	(0.0206)
Age	0.0378***	(0.0004)	0.0346***	(0.0021)	0.0317***	(0.0017)	0.0334***	(0.0024)
Age ²	-0.0004***	(0.0000)	-0.0003***	(0.0000)	-0.0003***	(0.0000)	-0.0003***	(0.0000)
Female identity	-0.1620***	(0.0021)	-0.1703***	(0.0111)	-0.1446***	(0.0097)	-0.1828***	(0.0139)
Veteran	0.0080*	(0.0043)	0.0347	(0.0275)	0.0517	(0.0343)	-0.0797***	(0.0236)
Citizen	0.0484***	(0.0047)	0.0315	(0.0221)	0.0458**	(0.0195)	0.0087	(0.0439)
Foreign-born	-0.0292***	(0.0038)	-0.0086	(0.0187)	-0.0187	(0.0185)	-0.0758**	(0.0351)
White	0.0010	(0.0040)	0.0098	(0.0221)	0.0216	(0.0233)	0.0146	(0.0418)
Black/African American	-0.1135***	(0.0046)	-0.1178***	(0.0253)	-0.0752***	(0.0255)	-0.0448	(0.0443)
Hispanic/Latinx	-0.0706***	(0.0041)	-0.0621***	(0.0224)	-0.0398*	(0.0234)	-0.0453	(0.0422)
Metro Area	0.0697***	(0.0026)	0.1317***	(0.0170)	0.1270***	(0.0145)	0.0538***	(0.0145)
Federal government	0.0598***	(0.0061)	0.0362	(0.0341)	-0.0338	(0.0429)	-0.0137	(0.0448)
State government	-0.0571***	(0.0045)	-0.0684***	(0.0261)	-0.0916***	(0.0238)	-0.0424	(0.0311)
Local government	-0.0394***	(0.0041)	-0.0373*	(0.0223)	-0.0701***	(0.0215)	-0.0476*	(0.0282)
Usual hours worked	0.0040***	(0.0001)	0.0048***	(0.0006)	0.0058***	(0.0005)	0.0044***	(0.0007)
Less than high school	-0.1267***	(0.0034)	-0.1042***	(0.0181)	-0.1104***	(0.0146)	-0.1093***	(0.0228)
Some college	0.0366***	(0.0025)	0.0438**	(0.0141)	0.0338**	(0.0136)	0.0107	(0.0154)
Associate's	0.0669***	(0.0030)	0.0704***	(0.0172)	0.0537***	(0.0189)	0.0846***	(0.0199)
Bachelor's	0.2998***	(0.0029)	0.3134***	(0.0159)	0.2991***	(0.0151)	0.2566***	(0.0180)
Master's	0.4519***	(0.0040)	0.4701***	(0.0205)	0.4916***	(0.0190)	0.3691***	(0.0267)
Professional/Doctorate	0.5847***	(0.0068)	0.5476***	(0.0355)	0.5726***	(0.0311)	0.5728***	(0.0480)
Industry Dummies	Y		Y		Y		Y	
Occupation Dummies	Y		Y		Y		Y	
State Dummies	Y		N		N		N	
Constant	1.7254***	(0.0178)	1.5688***	(0.1079)	1.4787***	(0.0920)	1.9243***	(0.1136)
R ²	0.4263		0.4310		0.2956		0.4164	
Observations	392,026		11,166		11,166		6,650	
Weighted	Y		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, 2019-2021. The data are adjusted by the outgoing rotation group earnings weight to match the total population 16 years of age or older.

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 a worker's wages. In the U.S. model, state indicator variables are included to factor in unmeasured state-specific characteristics. The sample, in all cases, is weighted to match the actual population. Regression (1) compares the impact of union membership on wages for Illinois compared to the nation from robust OLS analyses, regression (2) provides the median regression from a quartile regression for Illinois, and regression (3) uses Indiana as an example of robust OLS results from other states.

NOTE: In this report, regression outputs are converted to percent changes using correct adjustments to interpret natural logarithms (Kennedy, 1981; IDRE, 2021). The correct interpretations of these results are $e^{(\text{coefficient})} - 1$.

