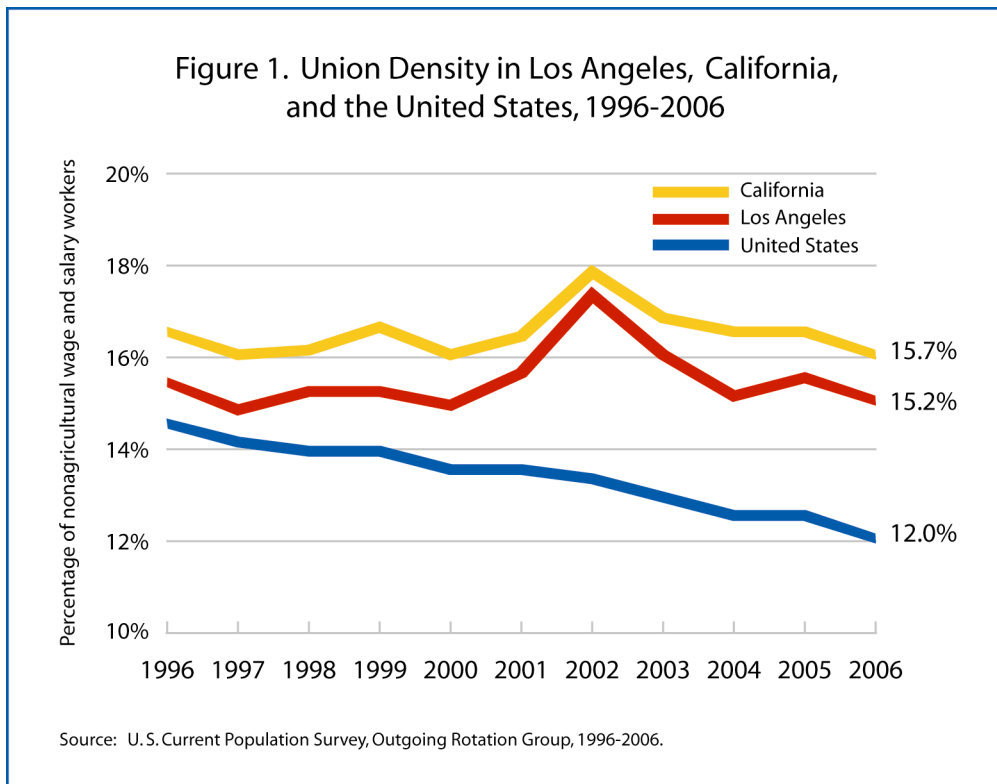


UNION MEMBERSHIP IN 2006: A PROFILE OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA AND THE U.S.¹

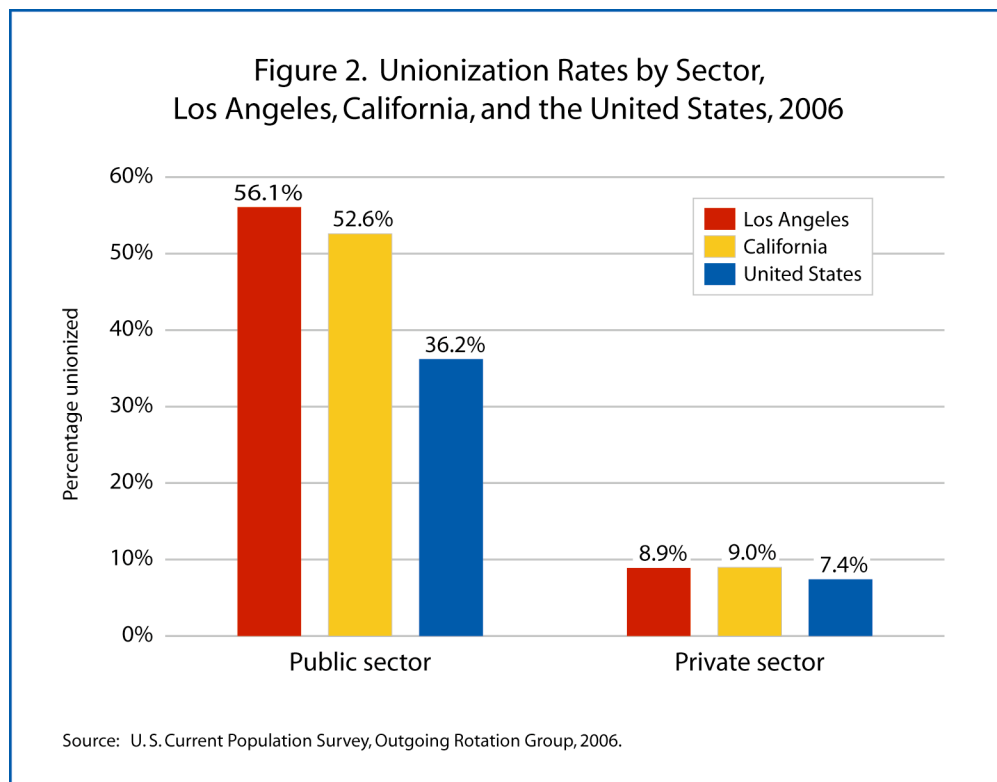
Ruth Milkman and Bongoh Kye

Over the past decade, the nation's unionization rate – the percentage of all employed wage and salary workers who are union members – has continued its relentless decline. However, in both the Los Angeles metropolitan area and in California, unionization has held steady over this ten-year period, and even edged upward in some years, as Figure 1 shows. The unionization rate in 2006 was 15.2 percent in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, and 15.7 percent in California – in both cases well above the national average of 12.0 percent.



¹ This report is based on analysis of the U.S. Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data for 2006. We created a merged data set including all twelve monthly surveys conducted in that year. All results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights. The sample includes employed civilian wage and salary workers, aged 16 and over. 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.: Bureau of National Affairs, 2007: 1-8). Special thanks to Rebecca Frazier for designing the graphics and for editorial assistance. An abridged version of this report is published in the *California Labor and Employment Law Review* 21 (Sept. 2007), pp. 9, 33-35.

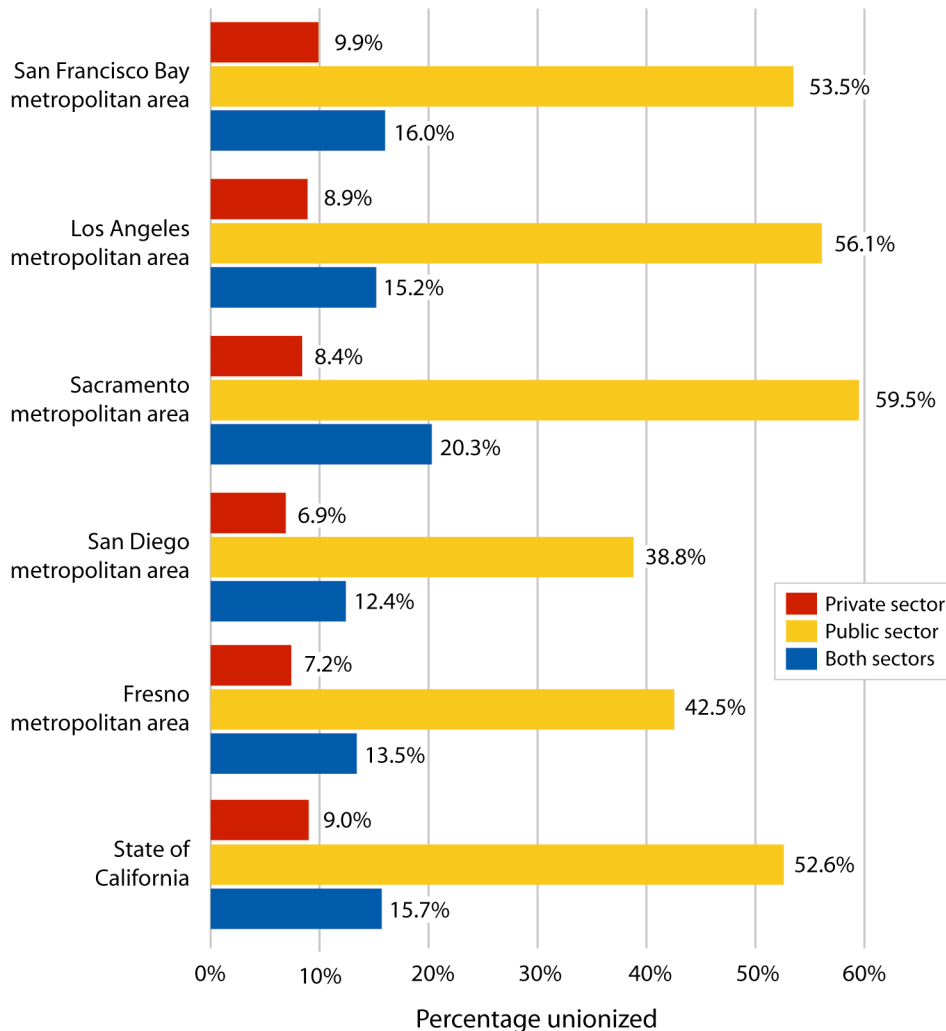
Unionization rates are consistently higher in the public sector than in the private sector. As Figure 2 shows, public-sector unionism is especially strong in Los Angeles as well as in California: in 2006, well over half of all workers in the public sector were union members, in both the Los Angeles area and in the state. In the nation as a whole, the unionization rate for public-sector workers was 36.2 percent; much higher than in the private sector, but well below the rates for public-sector workers in California or Los Angeles. Private-sector unionization in all three geographical units was much lower – indeed, in the single digits – but it was substantially greater in both California and Los Angeles than nationwide.



As Figure 3 shows, unionization rates in both the public and private sectors vary among California's major metropolitan areas. Sacramento has a relatively high rate of unionization in both sectors; while in San Diego and Fresno the opposite is true. Although historically the San Francisco Bay Area was the most highly unionized part of the state, while Los Angeles lagged far behind, in recent years the gap has nearly closed: today Los Angeles has nearly the same overall unionization rate as the Bay Area, and in the public sector the rate is slightly higher in the Southland.²

² The Los Angeles metropolitan area as shown in Figure 3 includes Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Ventura, and San Bernardino counties; the San Francisco Bay Area includes San Francisco, Alameda, Santa Clara, Marin, San Mateo, Sonoma, Napa, Contra Costa, Solano and Santa Cruz counties; the San Diego metropolitan area includes San Diego county only; the Sacramento metropolitan area includes El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento and Yolo counties; and the Fresno metropolitan area includes Fresno and Madera counties.

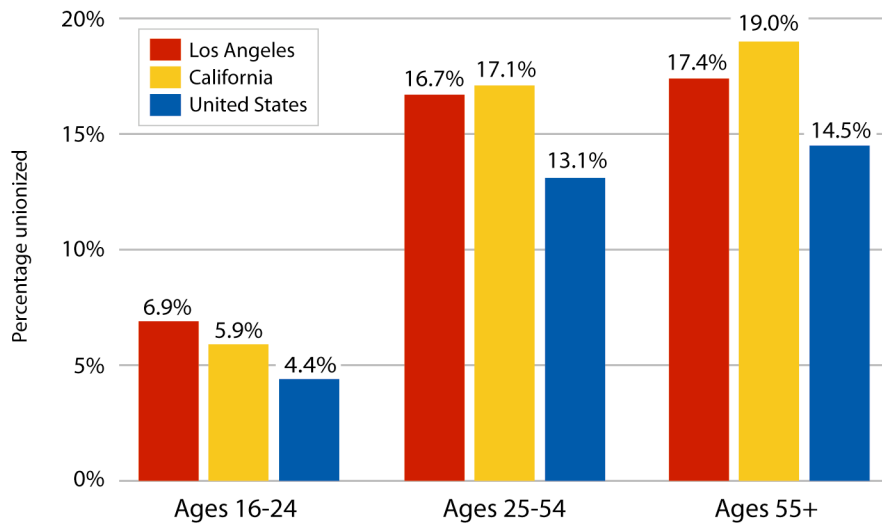
Figure 3. Unionization Rates in
Selected Metropolitan Areas, California, 2006



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

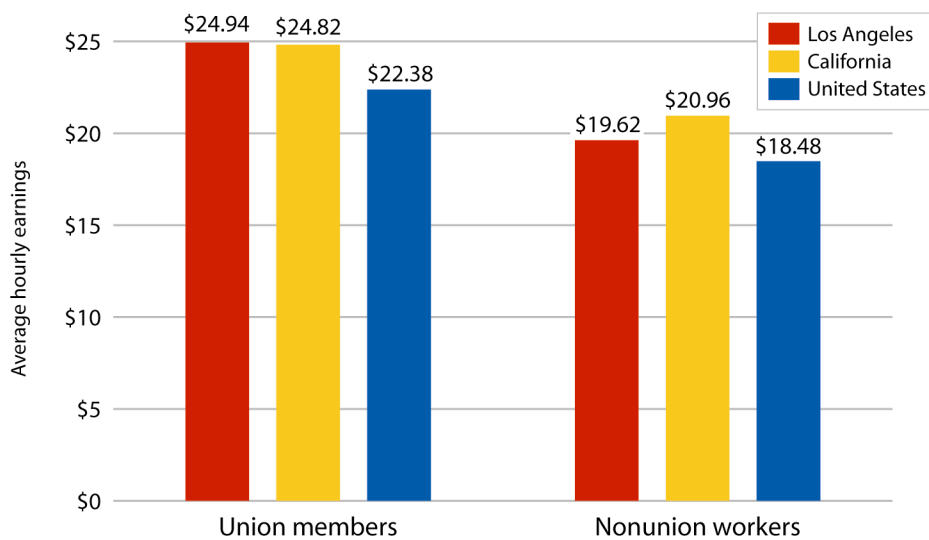
Unionization rates are highest for workers over 55 years old, as Figure 4 shows. They are extremely low among the youngest workers, those aged 16-24, a pattern that is consistent across the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the state of California, and the nation. This age variation reflects the fact that unionized jobs, on the average, provide workers with substantially higher wages than do nonunion jobs, as Figure 5 shows. Higher wages are typically associated with lower employee turnover, which generates an older workforce over time. In addition, unionized jobs generally offer more job security than non-union jobs, which further reduces turnover and similarly contributes to an increase in the average age of unionized workers.

Figure 4. Unionization Rates by Age,
Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2006



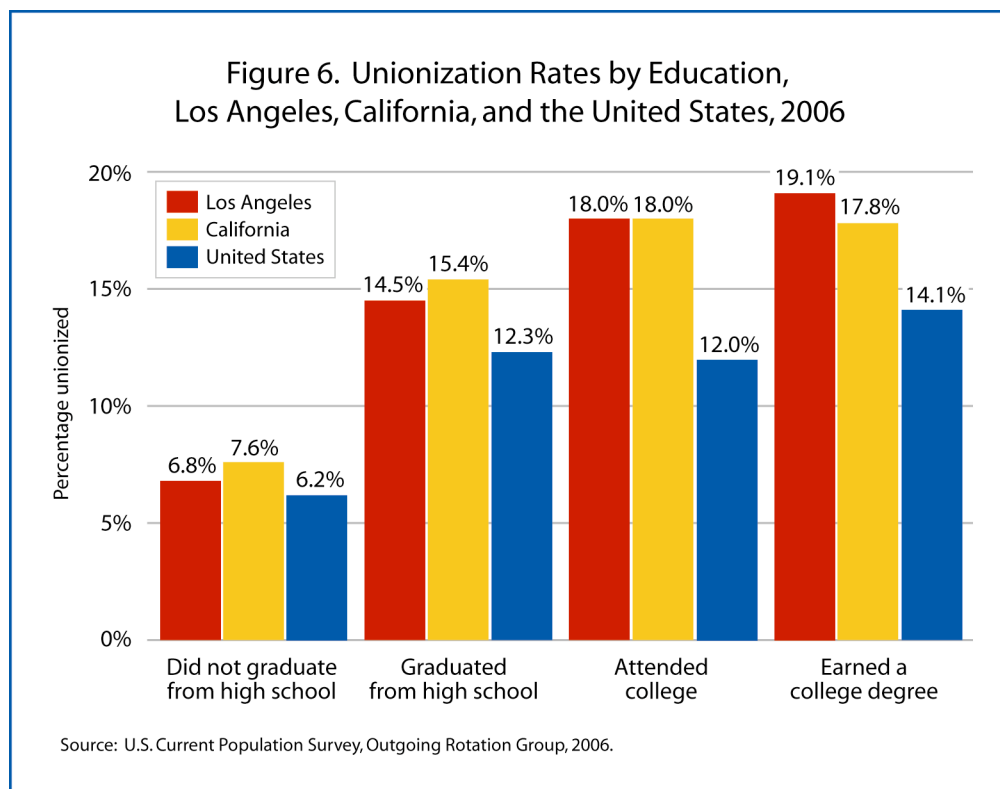
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

Figure 5. Earnings Differentials for Union Members and Nonunion
Workers, Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2006



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

Figure 6 shows that in Los Angeles, California and the United States alike, the more education workers have, the higher their unionization rate tends to be. Whereas decades ago, the archetypal union member was a blue collar worker with limited education, today mid-level professionals are much more likely to be unionized than any one else, especially in sectors like educational services and public administration. As Table 1 shows, workers in the educational services industry group alone make up over one-fourth of all unionized workers in the L.A. metropolitan area, the state of California, and the nation; similarly, public administration accounts for over one-eighth of union members in all three jurisdictions. Both these industry groups include relatively large numbers of college-educated workers, and as Figure 7 shows, they have the highest unionization rates of all industry groups.



As Table 1 shows, the composition of union membership in the Los Angeles metropolitan area is somewhat different from that in the state and the nation. The highly unionized entertainment industry accounts for 5.2 percent of union members in the metropolitan area, more than one-and-a-half times its share of California union membership, and more than triple its national share. By contrast, manufacturing accounts for a much smaller share of union membership, both in the Los Angeles metropolitan area and in the state, than is the case nationally.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Union Members by Selected Industry Groups, for the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, California, and the United States, 2006

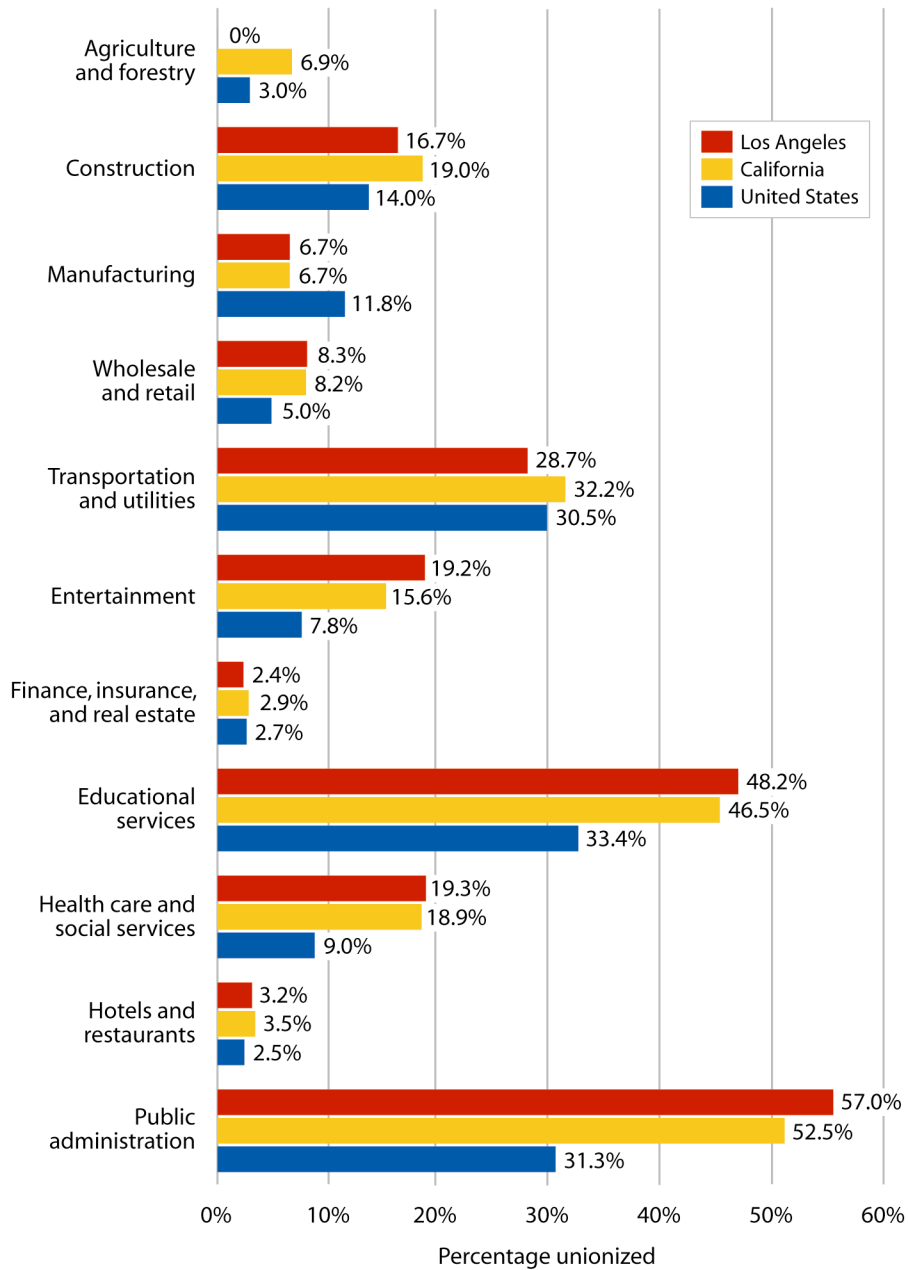
	Los Angeles metropolitan area		State of California		United States	
Industry group	Number of union members	% of total	Number of union members	% of total	Number of union members	% of total
Agriculture and forestry	944	--	17,121	0.8%	32,773	0.2%
Construction	84,517	7.8%	198,128	8.7%	1,246,521	8.1%
Manufacturing	61,659	5.7%	109,293	4.8%	1,850,438	12.1%
Wholesale and retail	91,327	8.4%	181,586	8.0%	967,545	6.3%
Transportation and utilities	102,811	9.5%	212,982	9.4%	2,080,836	13.6%
Entertainment	55,896	5.2%	70,977	3.1%	232,040	1.5%
Finance, insurance, and real estate	11,898	1.1%	30,025	1.3%	245,873	1.6%
Educational services	302,121	27.8%	593,348	26.1%	4,072,317	26.5%
Health care and social services	143,736	13.2%	300,644	13.2%	1,440,903	9.4%
Hotels and restaurants	17,033	1.6%	36,279	1.6%	222,698	1.5%
Public administration	155,392	14.3%	370,781	16.3%	2,039,790	13.3%
Total	1,085,788	100.0%	2,273,437	100.0%	15,359,103	100.0%

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

Note: Totals do not add to 100% because not all industry groups are shown.

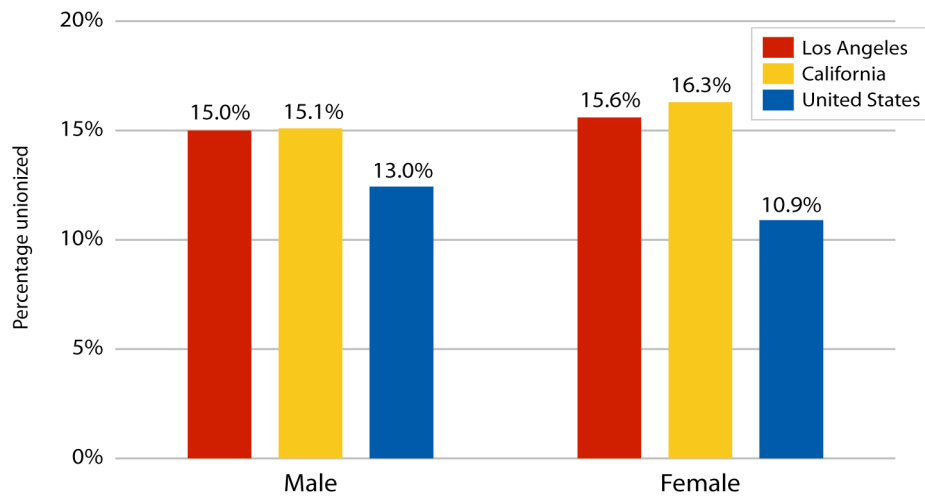
The high level of unionization rate of educational services and public administration also affects the gender-specific unionization rates shown in Figure 8, since both industry groups rely heavily on female workers. As Figure 8 shows, the unionization rates of employed women are actually slightly higher than those of employed men in Los Angeles and in California, whereas for the United States as a whole, the male unionization rate is about two percentage points higher than the female rate. This reflects the fact that the public sector is so much more highly unionized in California and Los Angeles than in the nation as a whole (see Figure 2 above).

Figure 7. Unionization Rates by Industry Group,
Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2006



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

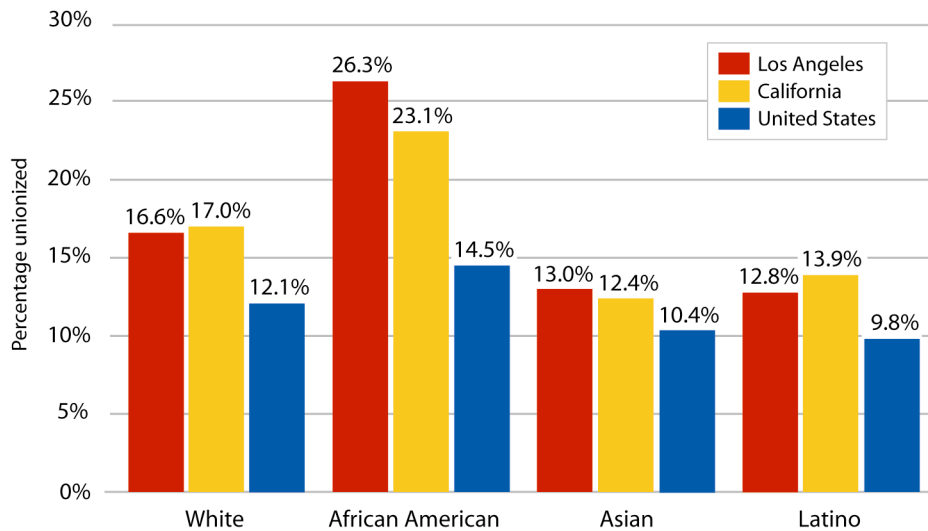
Figure 8. Unionization Rates by Gender,
Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2006



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

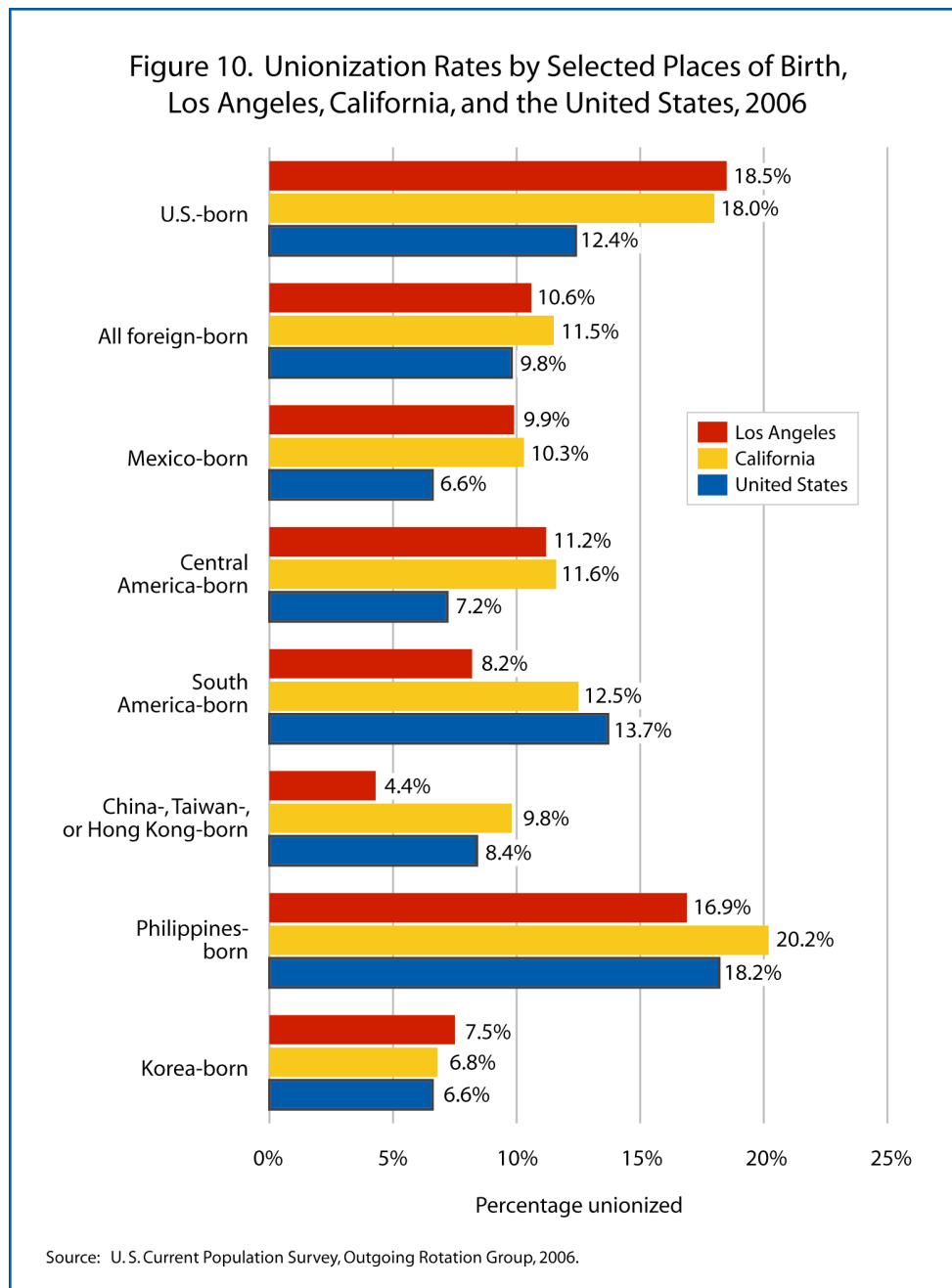
Figure 9 shows that unionization rates also vary by race and ethnicity. Indeed, African Americans have the highest unionization rate of any group shown, largely because of their relatively high concentration in public-sector employment.

Figure 9. Unionization Rates by Race/Ethnicity,
Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2006



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

Unionization rates vary by nativity, or place of birth, as well. As Figure 10 shows, U.S.-born workers are more highly unionized than foreign-born workers as a whole. This is partly due to the fact that relatively few foreign-born workers are employed in the highly unionized public sector, with the exception of workers born in the Philippines. Fully 20.2 percent of workers born in the Philippines were employed in 2006 in the public sector in California, as were 16.4 percent of those in Los Angeles, and 16.9 percent of those in the United States as a whole. By contrast, only 5.5 percent of Mexican-born workers in California were employed in the public sector, only 5.7 percent of those in Los Angeles, and only 4.4 percent of Mexican-born workers nationwide. Again the high public sector unionization rates underlie what at first appears as a difference in nationality or nativity.



However, as Figure 11 shows, foreign-born workers who have become U.S. citizens, and those who arrived in the United States before 1990, have unionization rates higher than or comparable to those of U.S.-born workers. More recent arrivals, by contrast, have extremely low rates of unionization.

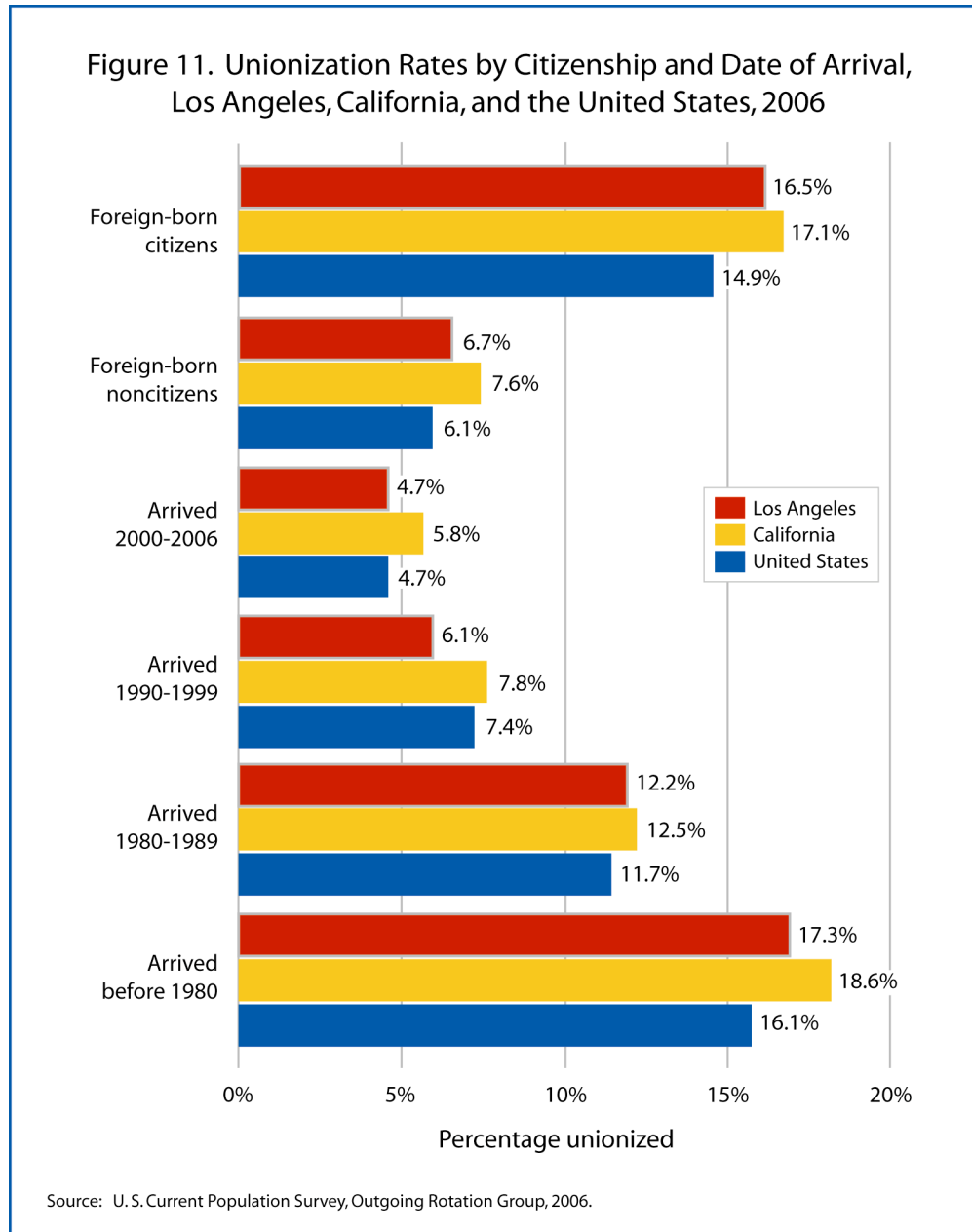
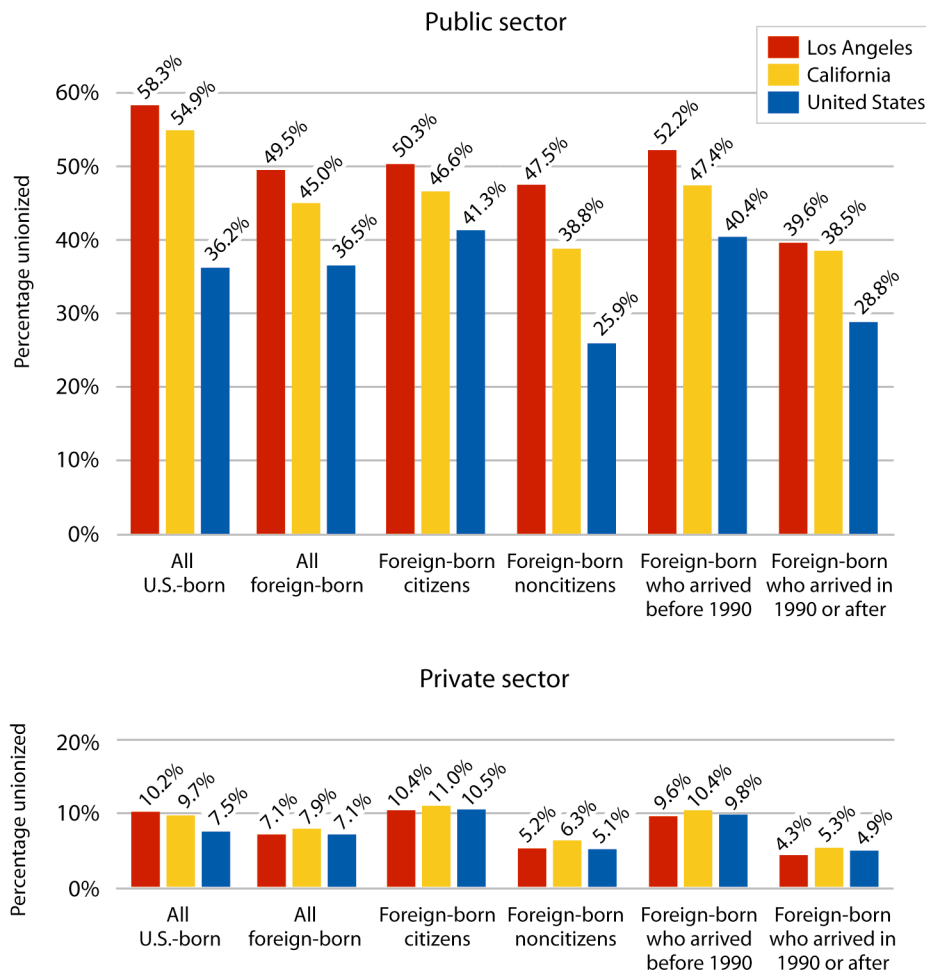


Figure 12 disaggregates the data for foreign-born workers between the public and private sectors. It reveals that unionization rates vary much less *within* each of these sectors than between them. Even foreign-born non-citizens and recently arrived immigrants, whose overall unionization rates are generally low (see Figure 11), have public-sector unionization rates well above 25 percent, for all three geographical entities shown.

Figure 12. Unionization Rates in Public and Private Sectors for Selected Demographic Groups, Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2006



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2006.

Relatively few non-citizens and recently arrived immigrants work in the public sector, however; only 4.9 percent of all foreign-born non-citizens in the United States, and only 5.8 percent of all foreign-born workers who arrived in or after 1990, are employed in this sector, compared to 17.3 percent of all U.S.-born workers. As a result, the high level of public-sector unionization for these immigrant groups does little to boost their overall unionization rate. By contrast, in the private sector, unionization rates are consistently low for all groups, seldom reaching into the double digits. Indeed, the main reason for the relatively low unionization rates among recently arrived immigrants and non-citizens is the fact that they are frequently employed in industries and occupations that rely on highly casualized and precarious forms of employment, either marginal to or entirely outside of the formal economy.

Unionization patterns in the Los Angeles metropolitan area and in California are similar in many respects to those in the United States as whole. At the same time, however, the labor movement in the nation's most populous state and in that state's largest metropolis has some distinctive features. Most important, although the overall level of unionization has continued its long-term decline nationally, it has been relatively stable and sometimes even increased in Los Angeles and in California over recent years. This reflects the region's unusual labor history and its relatively high level of public-sector unionization, as well as the fact that manufacturing (the sector in which unionization has declined most sharply nationally) has historically been less important in the state's economy than is the case in other parts of the nation.³

³ For more detailed analysis of the distinctive features of Los Angeles and California labor, see Ruth Milkman and Daisy Rooks, "California Union Membership: A Turn-of-the-Century Portrait," *The State of California Labor 2003*, available on line at <http://www.irle.ucla.edu/research/scl/pdf03/scl2003ch1.pdf> and Ruth Milkman, *L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).