

**THE STATE OF THE UNIONS IN 2008:**  
**A PROFILE OF UNION MEMBERSHIP IN**  
**LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA AND THE NATION<sup>1</sup>**

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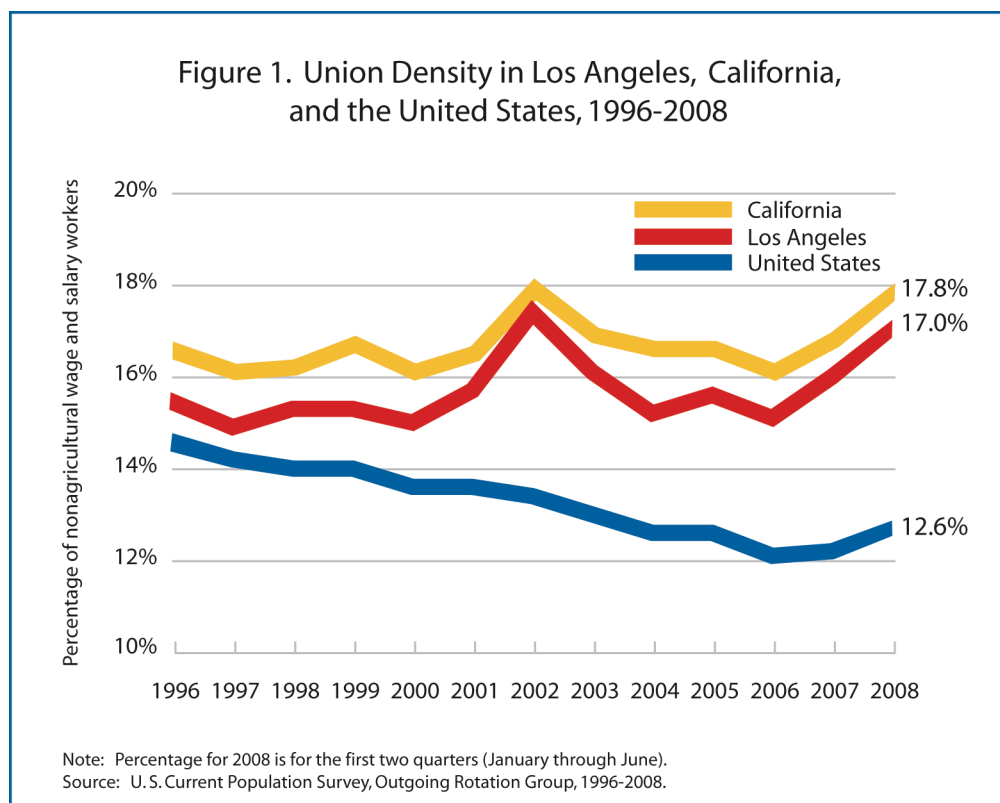
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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on analysis of the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group data for the first six months of 2008. We created a merged data set including the six monthly surveys conducted from January to June, inclusive, of 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, 2008): 1-8. Special thanks to Rebecca Frazier for designing the graphics and for editorial assistance.

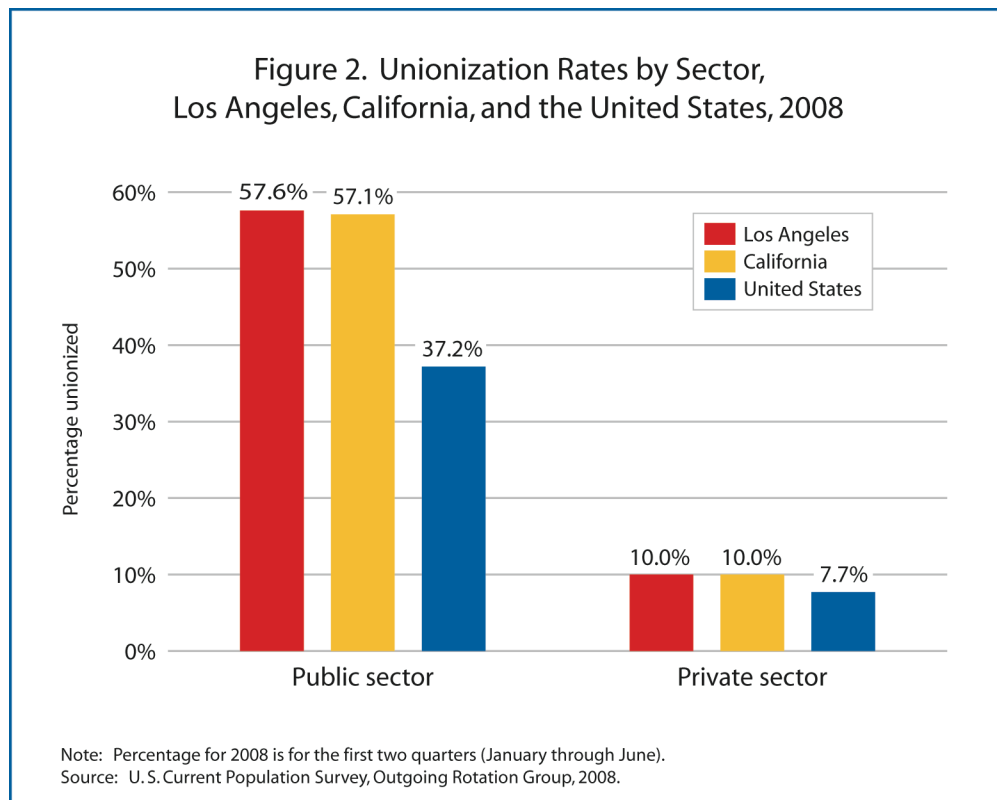
Over the past several years, the nation's unionization rate – the percentage of all employed wage and salary workers who are union members – has suffered serious decline. There was a slight uptick in the past year, however, countering the long-term downward trend. In the first half of 2008, unionization rose half a percentage point over the 2007 level, to 12.6 percent of all U.S. employed civilian wage and salary workers.

In California, as well as in its largest metropolis (Los Angeles), the recent upward trend in unionization is more pronounced, and has been sustained over a longer period. As Figure 1 shows, both in the state as a whole and in the L.A. metropolitan area, the rate of unionization has held steady for more than a decade now, and has edged significantly upward in the past few years. The 2008 unionization rate is 17.0 percent in the L.A. metropolitan area (up from 15.9 percent in 2007) and 17.8 percent in California (up from 16.7 percent in 2007) – in both cases well above the national average. Indeed, Los Angeles currently has an estimated 1,227,600 union members, or nearly half of the 2,633,600 union members in the state of California. California in turn accounts for about 16 percent of all the nation's union members, more than any other state.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> California also has a greater population than any other state, so this is not so surprising. Six other states - Alaska, Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania - have a higher unionization rate than California. See Hirsch and Macpherson 2008: 28-29.

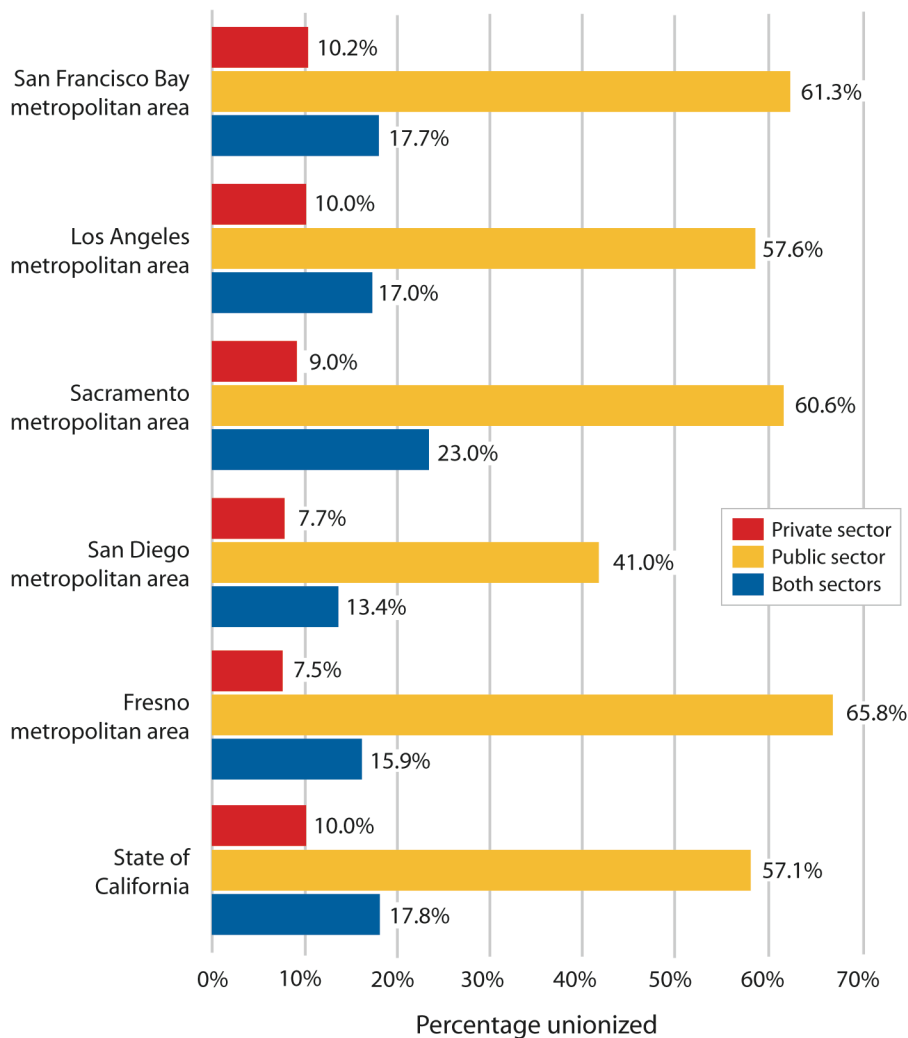
Unionization rates are consistently higher in the public sector than in the private sector. As Figure 2 shows, public-sector unionism is especially strong in Los Angeles as well as in California: in 2008, well over half of all workers in the public sector are union members, in both the L.A. area and in the state. In the nation as a whole, the unionization rate for public-sector workers is 37.2 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 is much lower, but it is substantially greater in both California and Los Angeles than nationwide. In the L.A. metropolitan area, the private sector unionization rate rose significantly in the past year, from an average of 8.8% in 2007 to 10.0% in the first half of 2008.



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 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The L.A. 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, 2008

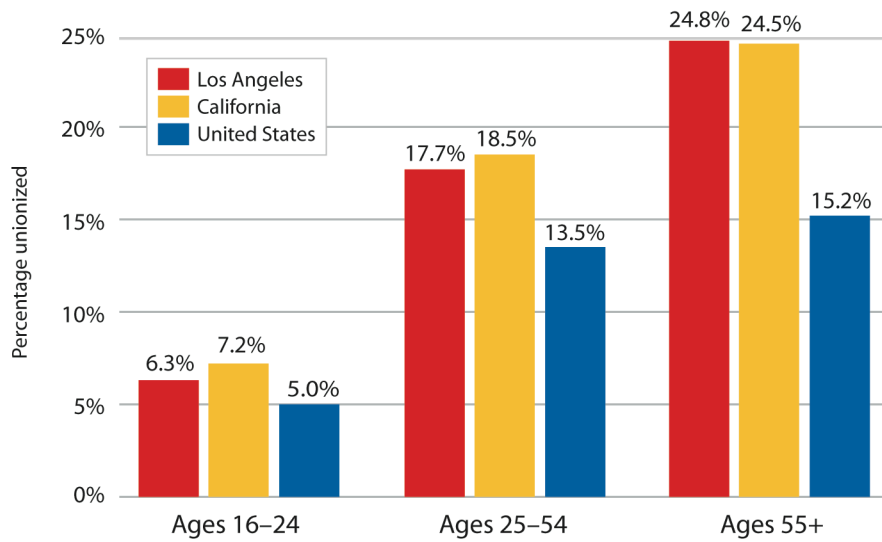


Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

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.<sup>4</sup> 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 nonunion jobs, which further reduces turnover and similarly contributes to an increase in the average age of unionized workers.

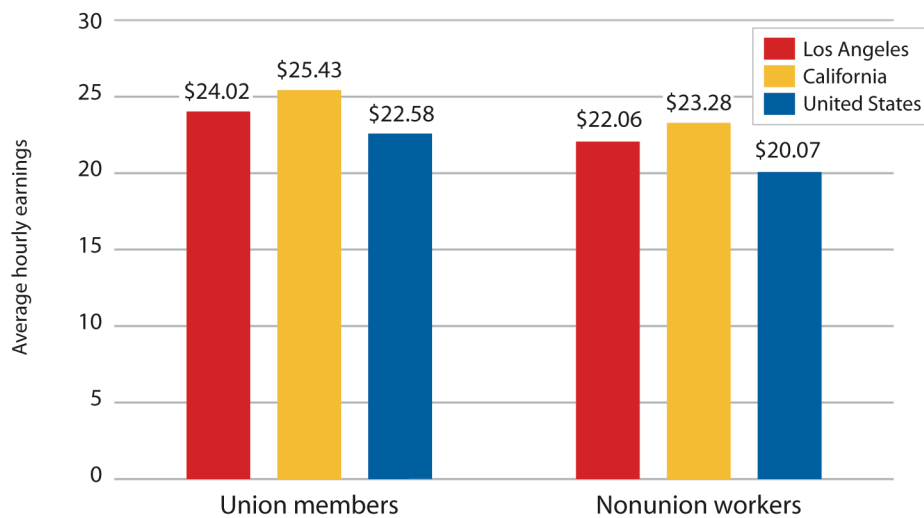
<sup>4</sup> The earnings figures shown in Figure 5 are preliminary estimates, computed in 2008 dollars.

Figure 4. Unionization Rates by Age,  
Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2008



Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

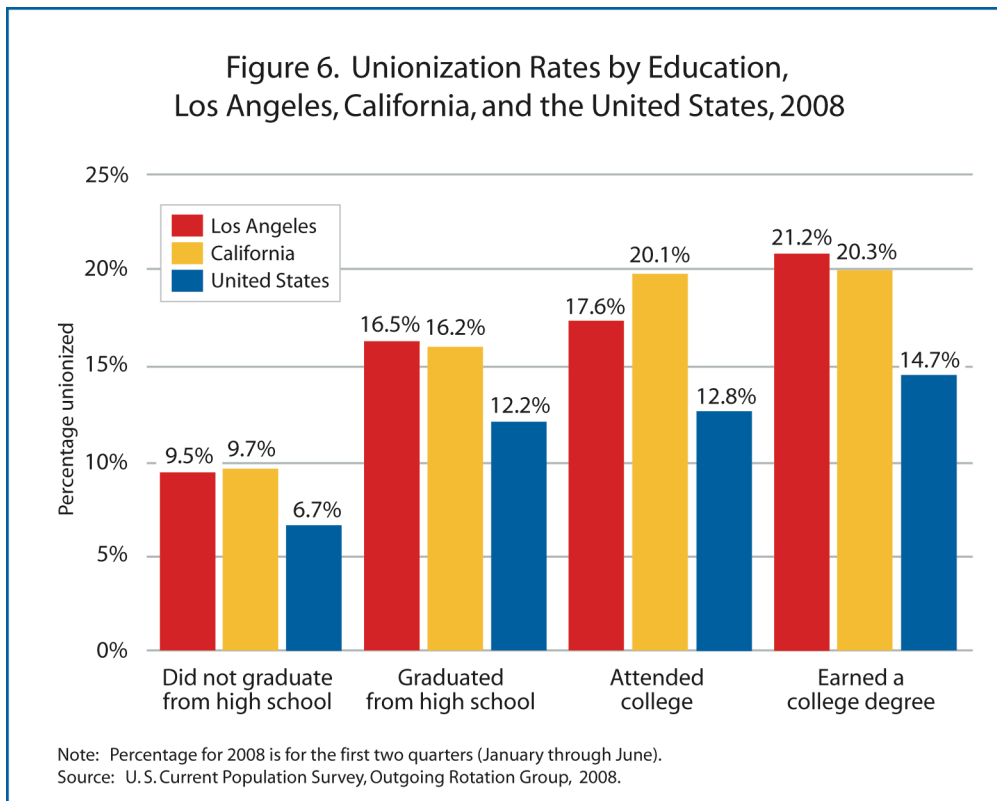
Figure 5. Earnings Differentials for Union Members and Nonunion  
Workers, Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2008



Note: The figures shown are mean earnings and are for the first two quarters of 2008 (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

Although as figure 5 shows, average earnings are substantially higher for union members than for nonunion workers, the differential has narrowed somewhat over time. However, union members also are far more likely to have access to benefits like retirement plans, medical insurance coverage, and paid leave than their nonunion counterparts. Although state and metropolitan area data are not available on benefits, in the United States as a whole in 2008, 90 percent of union members had access to retirement benefits, compared to only 61 percent of nonunion workers; 91 percent of union members had access to medical coverage, compared to 70 percent of nonunion workers; and 57 percent of union members had employer-provided paid leave benefits, compared to only 38 percent of nonunion workers.<sup>5</sup>

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 anyone 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-



<sup>5</sup> These data are from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' March 2008 *National Compensation Survey*, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ecs2.pdf>

educated workers, and as Figure 7 shows, they have the highest unionization rates of all industry groups.

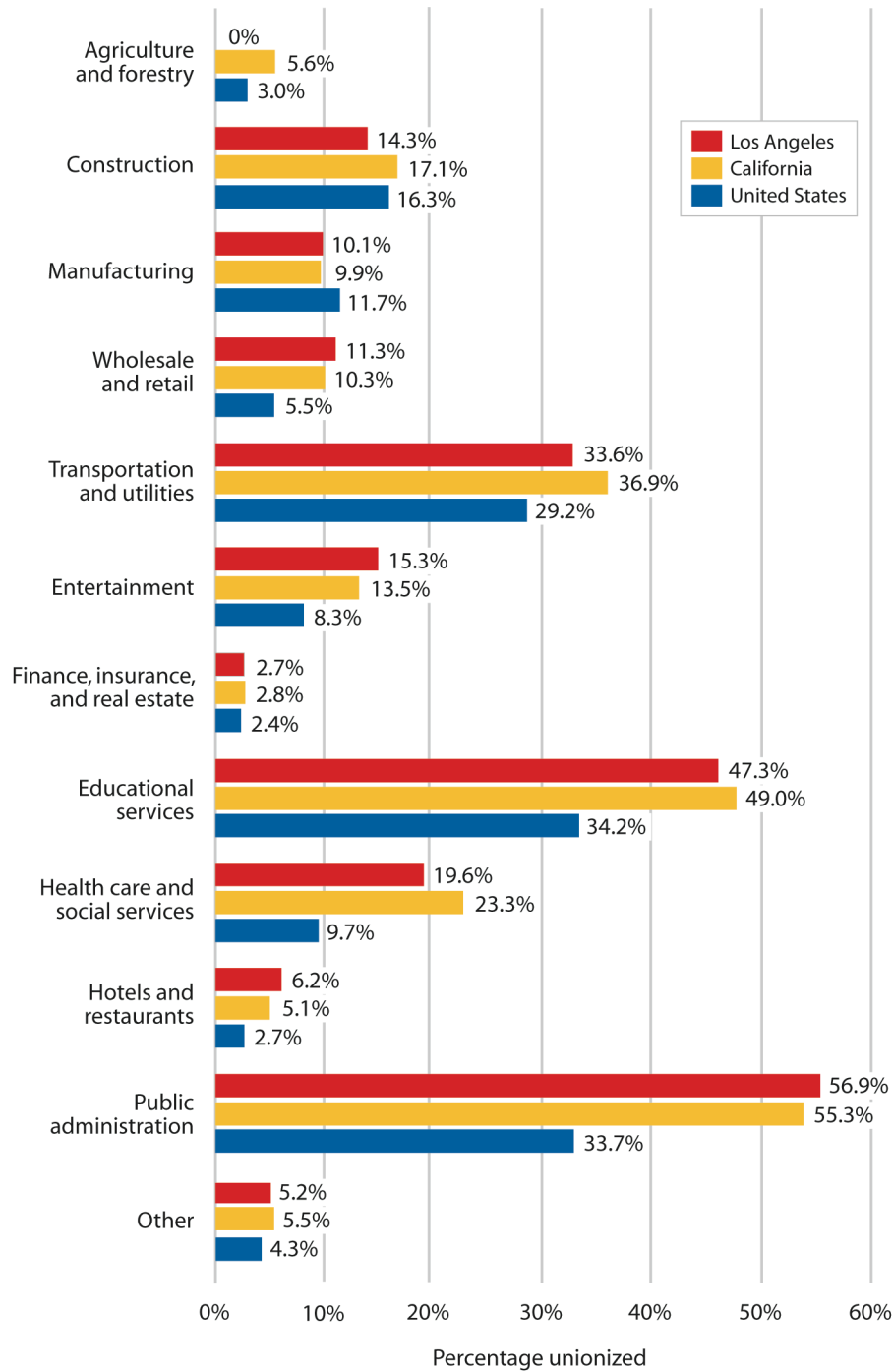
As Table 1 shows, the composition of union membership in the L.A. metropolitan area is somewhat different from that in the state and the nation. The entertainment industry accounts for 4.1 percent of union members in the metropolitan area, nearly one-and-a-half times its share of California union membership, and more than double its national share. By contrast, manufacturing accounts for a much smaller share of union membership, both in Los Angeles 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, 2008

|                                     | 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            | ---                           | ---           | 14,566                  | 0.6%          | 31,446                  | 0.2%          |
| Construction                        | 67,944                        | 5.5%          | 160,031                 | 6.1%          | 1,310,029               | 8.1%          |
| Manufacturing                       | 97,309                        | 7.9%          | 174,221                 | 6.6%          | 1,782,111               | 11.0%         |
| Wholesale and retail                | 120,811                       | 9.8%          | 213,316                 | 8.1%          | 1,038,060               | 6.4%          |
| Transportation and utilities        | 128,927                       | 10.5%         | 263,542                 | 10.0%         | 2,082,181               | 12.8%         |
| Entertainment                       | 50,585                        | 4.1%          | 71,655                  | 2.7%          | 273,979                 | 1.7%          |
| Finance, insurance, and real estate | 13,648                        | 1.1%          | 28,958                  | 1.1%          | 215,156                 | 1.3%          |
| Educational services                | 342,067                       | 27.9%         | 699,583                 | 26.6%         | 4,429,702               | 27.3%         |
| Health care and social services     | 158,900                       | 12.9%         | 391,396                 | 14.9%         | 1,617,745               | 10.0%         |
| Hotels and restaurants              | 27,464                        | 2.2%          | 51,263                  | 1.9%          | 245,552                 | 1.5%          |
| Public administration               | 155,570                       | 12.7%         | 420,740                 | 16.0%         | 2,317,863               | 14.3%         |
| Other                               | 64,119                        | 5.2%          | 144,374                 | 5.5%          | 909,811                 | 5.6%          |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>1,227,617</b>              | <b>100.0%</b> | <b>2,633,645</b>        | <b>100.0%</b> | <b>16,253,634</b>       | <b>100.0%</b> |

Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U. S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

Figure 7. Unionization Rates by Industry Group,  
Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2008



Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.



The high level of unionization in educational services and public administration (shown in Figure 7) also affects the gender-specific unionization rates shown in Figure 8, since both industries rely heavily on female workers. As Figure 8 shows, contrary to the still-conventional wisdom, women's unionization rate is significantly *higher* than that of men in both Los Angeles and in California, whereas for the United States as a whole, the male unionization rate is almost two percentage points higher than the female rate. This reflects the fact that the public sector is much more highly unionized in California and in Los Angeles than it is in the nation as a whole (see Figure 2 above).

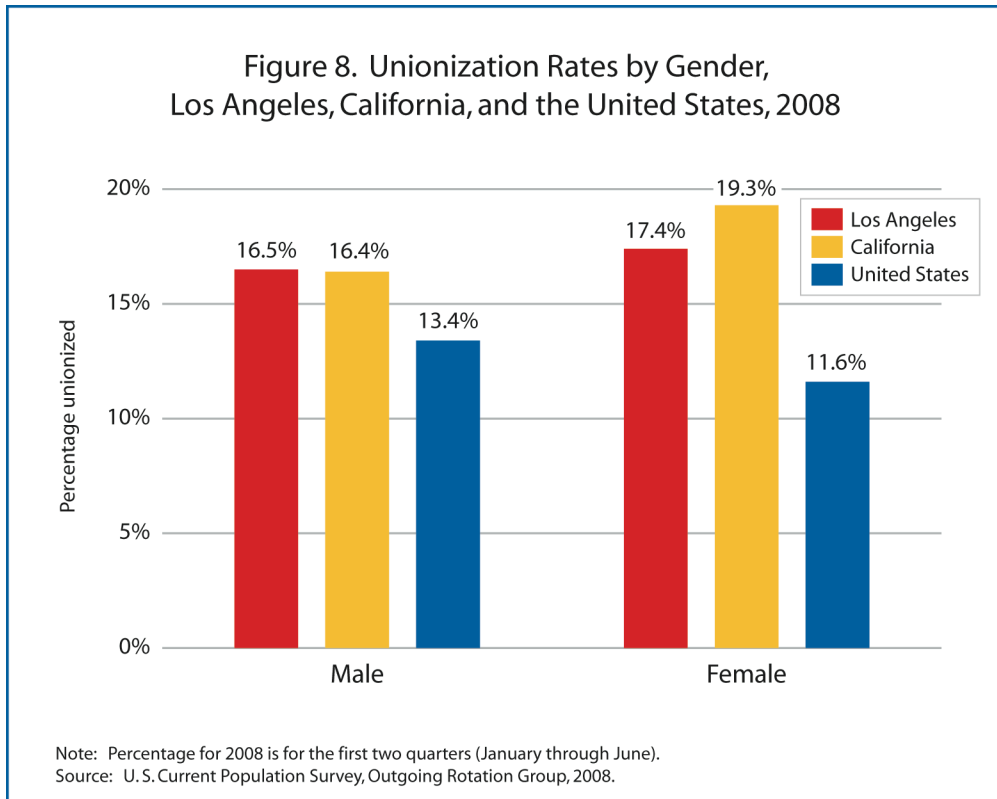
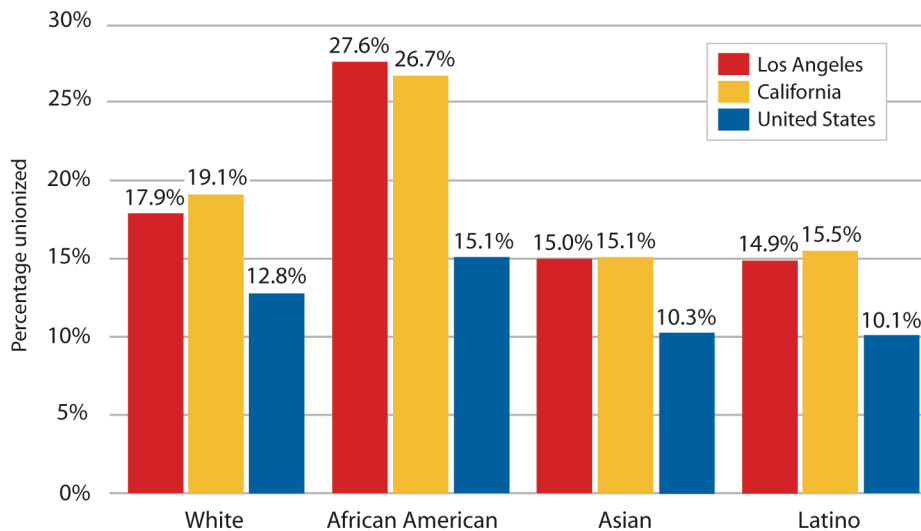


Figure 9 shows that unionization rates also vary by race and ethnicity. Indeed, African Americans have the highest unionization rate of any group shown, largely because of their relatively high concentration in public-sector employment. Whites have the second-highest unionization rate of the categories shown. Both African-Americans and whites are far more likely to be U.S.-born than Asians and Latinos; and the unionization rates for the latter two groups are affected by the fact that U.S.-born workers are more likely to be union members than are immigrants, as discussed below and shown in Figure 10.

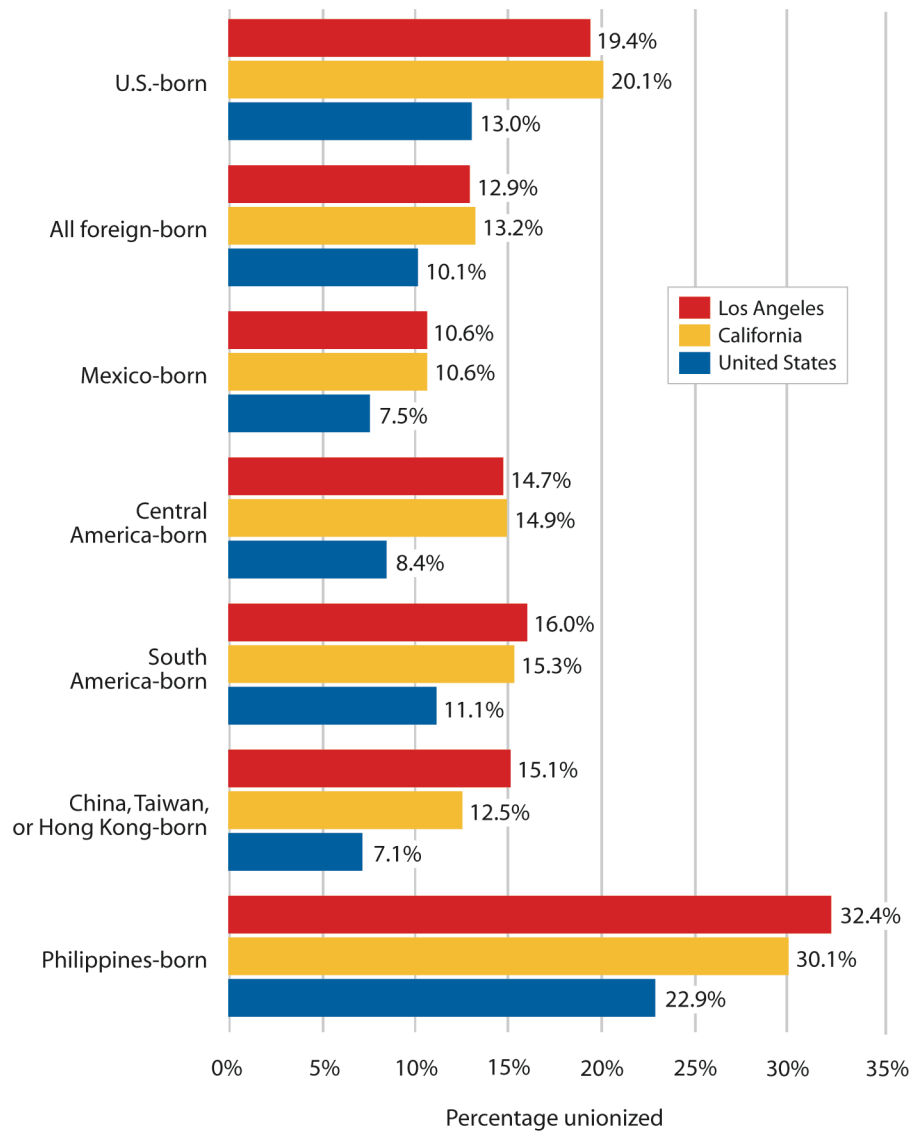
Figure 9. Unionization Rates by Race/Ethnicity, Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2008



Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

Unionization rates vary not only between U.S.-born and foreign-born workers, but also by nativity, or place of birth, as Figure 10 shows. U.S.-born workers are more highly unionized than foreign-born workers as a whole, largely because relatively few foreign-born workers are employed in the highly unionized public sector. The only exception here is workers born in the Philippines, fully 20.3 percent of whom were employed in 2008 in the public sector in California, as were 15.2 percent of those in Los Angeles, and 15.9 percent of those in the United States as a whole. By contrast, only 4.7 percent of Mexican-born workers in California were employed in the public sector, only 4.0 percent of those in Los Angeles, and only 4.5 percent of Mexican-born workers nationwide. Again it is the high public sector unionization rates that underlie and explain what at first appears as a difference in nationality or nativity.

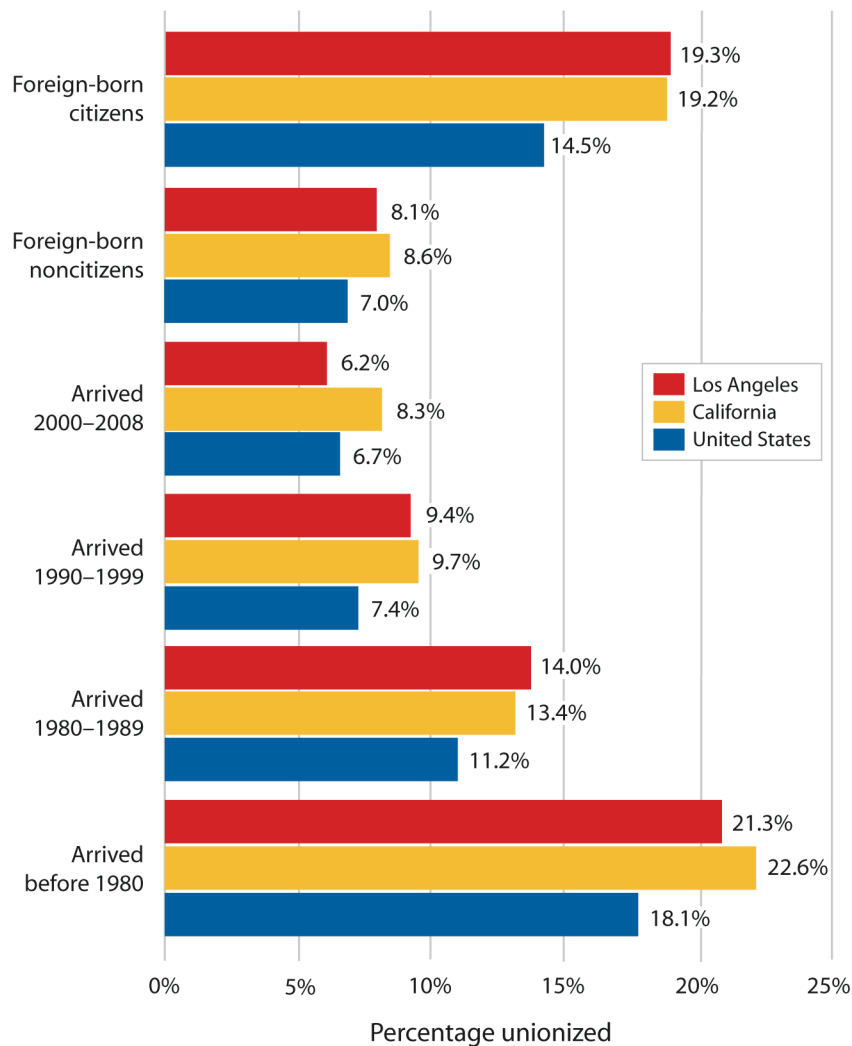
Figure 10. Unionization Rates by Selected Places of Birth, Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2008



Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008

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 far lower rates of unionization.

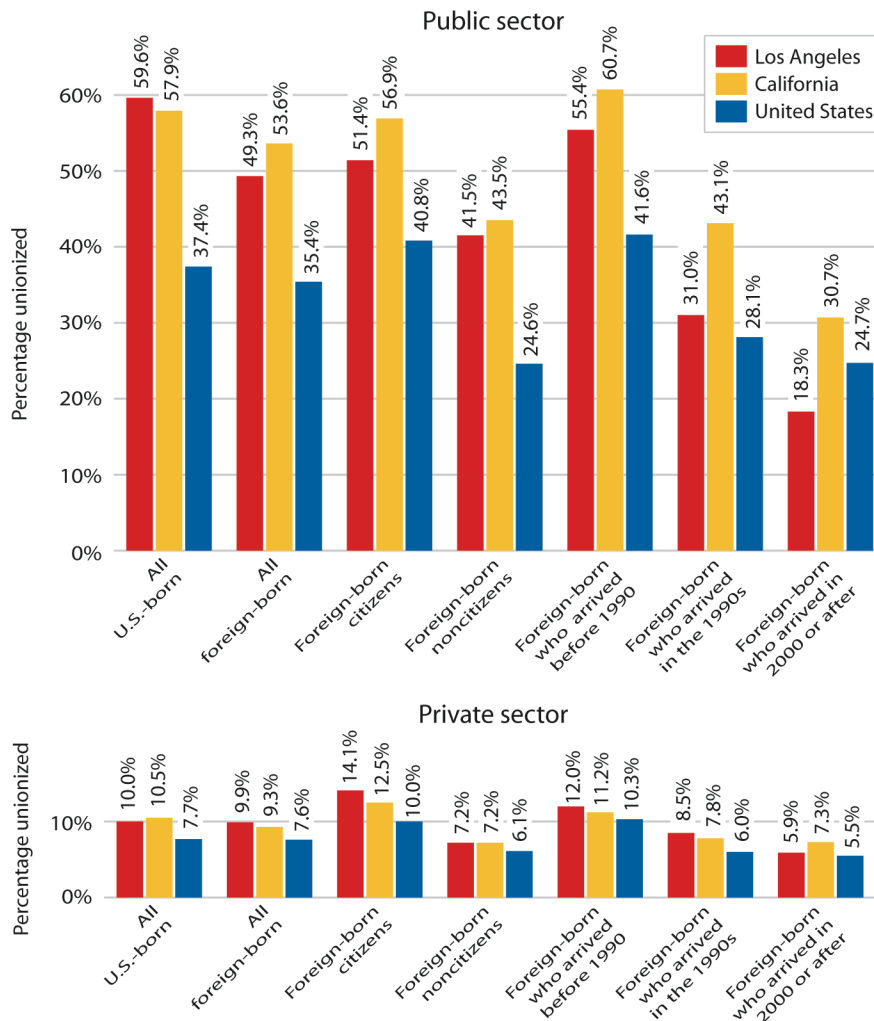
Figure 11. Unionization Rates by Citizenship and Date of Arrival, Los Angeles, California, and the United States, 2008



Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

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 noncitizens and recently arrived immigrants, whose overall unionization rates are very low (see Figure 11), have relatively high public-sector unionization rates, 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, 2008



Note: Percentage for 2008 is for the first two quarters (January through June).  
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2008.

Relatively few noncitizens and recently arrived immigrants work in the public sector, however; only 4.9 percent of all foreign-born noncitizens in the United States, and only 6.3 percent of all foreign-born workers who arrived in or after 1990, are employed in this sector, compared to 17.9 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, barely reaching into the double digits. Indeed, the main reason for the relatively low unionization rates among recently arrived immigrants and noncitizens 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 L.A. 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 generally continued its long-term decline nationally, it has been relatively stable and recently even increased in Los Angeles and in California over recent years. This reflects the region's unusual labor history and its relatively high public-sector unionization rate, as well as the fact that manufacturing (the sector in which unionization has declined most sharply nationally) has historically been less important in the region's economy than was the case in other parts of the nation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed analysis of the distinctive features of L.A. 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 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).