

The State of Labor in New Jersey, 2023-2025

A Profile of Organized Labor in the Garden State

A Report from the Labor Education Action Research Network

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Executive Summary

Key Findings

- With 675,000 union members, New Jersey's unionization rate currently stands at 15.47%, based on the 2023-25 average, making it the sixth most highly unionized state in the U.S. Our findings show that overall unionization among all workers in the state declined slightly from 15.83% in the previous three-year period. The decline in density is due to the expansion of the non-union labor market, not the decline in union membership which actually increased by 22,000 since the last report.
- Union members are roughly evenly split between the private and public sectors, in line with the previous report's findings.
- Public and private sector density both dropped *slightly* by approximately .36%.
- Public sector total density is 57.38% vs. 57.73% in 2021–23; while a slight decline, it is still a highly organized sector. Private sector density is 8.91%, a slight decline from 9.30%.
- Public federal and state workers saw an increase in density to 39.45% and 60.44% respectively (up from 36.26% and 58.84%). Local public sector workers, however, saw a slight drop in density from 62.2% to 59.17%.
- There appears to be a **blue collar-white collar divide** when looking at unionization trends in the public vs. private sector. Most private sector union members are located in production occupations, while most public sector union members are found in professional occupations.
- Protective service saw a large increase from 44.4% to 56.9%, likely due to large hiring campaigns and organizational wins by 32BJ SEIU (InsiderNJ, 2025). **This has become the most highly organized occupation in NJ.**
- Education instruction and library services saw a drop from 56.1% to 51.72%, it is now the second most organized occupation in NJ. Libraries and school districts have seen large cuts this cycle as enrollment drops and federal grants have been frozen or withdrawn.
- Office and administrative support as well as transportation and material moving saw modest increases to 14.78% and 21.31% respectively.
- New Jersey's union members are more racially diverse and somewhat more gender-balanced than the national unionized workforce, with especially strong representation of Black workers, women in public sector education/health, and women in several service industries.
- Similar to previous trends, **Black workers remain more likely to be union members than white and other non-white workers.** Black men have the highest union density among all workers in the state. Private sector union membership remains slightly more diverse than in the public sector.
- **Women and men remain similarly likely to be unionized in NJ** with men being slightly more likely to be organized in the private sector, but women more likely to be organized in the public sector.
- Unionized workers across sectors and demographics enjoyed union wage premiums, earning on average 15.9% more than their non-union counterparts.

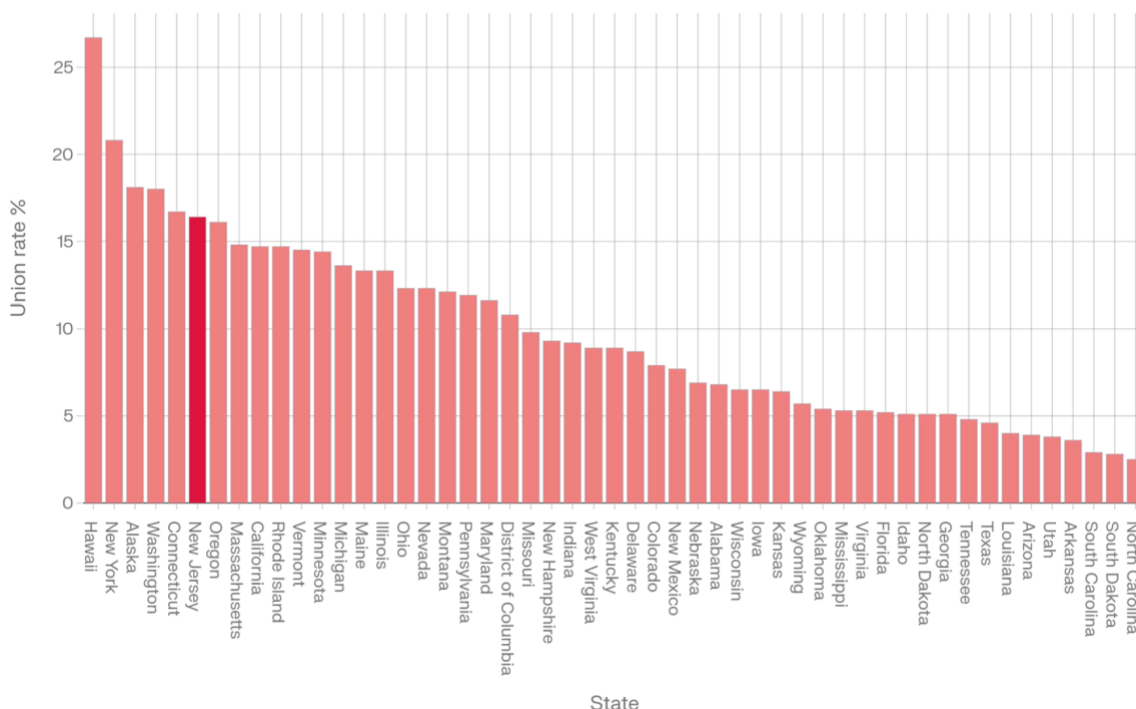
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Union density in the United States in 2025 stayed consistent at 10%, with a public unionization rate of 32.9% (up by .7% from 2024) and a private rate of 5.9 across all industries. Looking at Figure 1, we can see that New Jersey workers have maintained higher unionization rates than most other states, rising from 15.8% to 16.4%—keeping it as the sixth most unionized state in the U.S.ⁱ

While the previous two labor reports have been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and the state's recovery, this report centers on finding the new norms in an ever-changing labor landscape. With labor being more under attack than it has been in decades, even small wins and any form of stability are imperative.

Figure 1: Union membership rate (%) by U.S. state (2025)



To create a snapshot of the current state of labor in the Garden State, this report uses a series of data comprised of the 36 months starting in January 2023 and ending in December 2025.ⁱⁱ This is in exception to October 2025 when there was a federal government shut down and no data was collected or reported during this time. Our approach provides an overall look at trends in unionization across

the entire period as well as comparisons within sub-categories, including race and gender composition of union members. Survey response numbers were down across the board and some sample sizes were smaller on average thus should be interpreted with caution. As with previous State of Labor reports, data is drawn from the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group data. The report will outline unionization rates, including by sector, industry, occupation, and key demographic characteristics.ⁱⁱⁱ

Table 1 presents the unionization rates of New Jersey workers across all sectors as well as by each individual sector. As we can see, the overall “total” union density for the state of New Jersey in the years 2023-2025 is 15.47%, about 5.5% higher than the U.S. average. Union density within the private sector is also higher in New Jersey than the national average, at 8.91% -- a .39% decrease since the previous report. While the public sector total percentage stayed almost the same, each individual level saw significant change. The Federal and State levels saw an increase of 3.19% and 1.6% respectively, while the local sector saw a 3% drop, likely from federal cuts and downsizing (Chen, 2025).

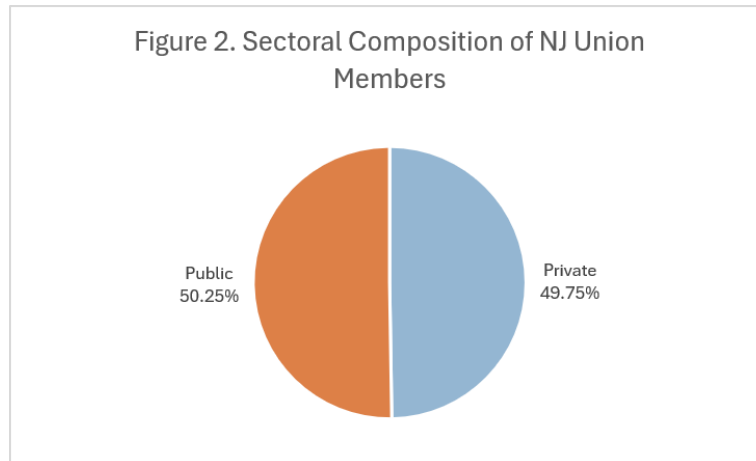
Similar to trends in the U.S. as a whole, unionization rates in New Jersey are considerably higher in the public sector than in the private sector, although this distinction is more pronounced in New Jersey than at the national level. Nationally, union density in the public sector is more than five times the density of private sector workers; in New Jersey public sector density is more than seven times the rate of private sector density.

UNIONIZATION BY SECTOR

Table 1. NJ Union Density by Sector, 2023-2025

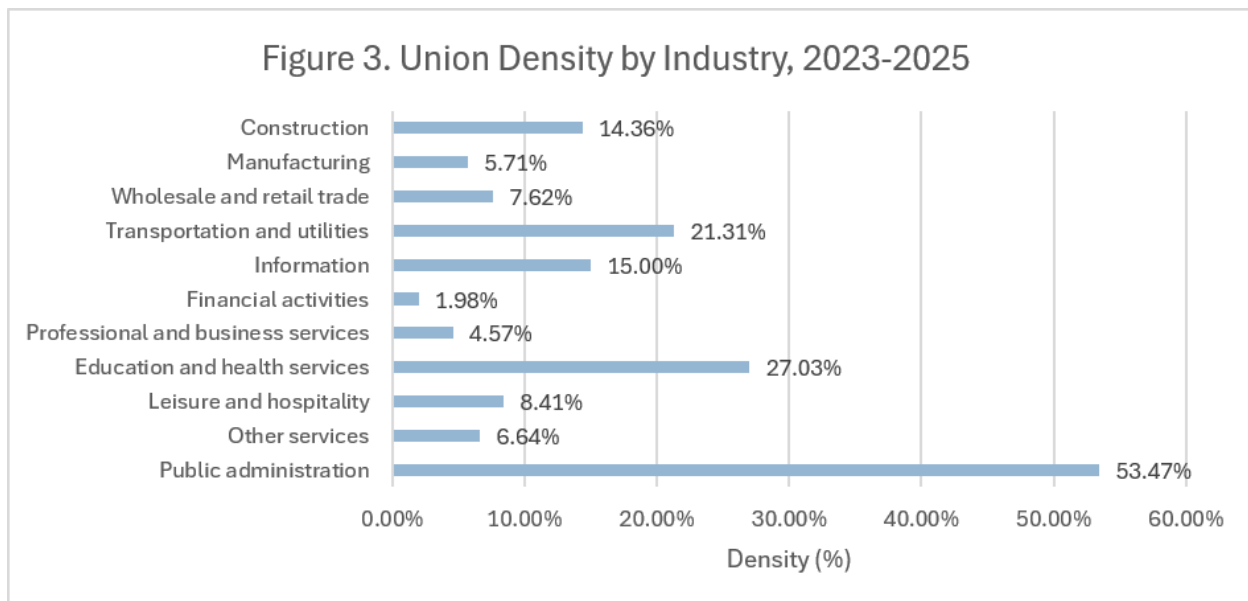
	2021-23	2023-25	Change
Total	15.83	15.47	-0.36
Private Sector	9.30	8.91	-0.39
Public Sector: Total	57.73	57.38	-0.35
Public Sector: Federal	36.26	39.45	+3.19
Public Sector: State	58.84	60.44	+1.60
Public Sector: Local	62.20	59.17	-3.03

Despite the higher union density in the public sector, the private sector labor force remains significantly larger, accounting for nearly 85% of all employed workers in the state. Reflective of this, Figure 2 reveals union members are fairly evenly split between private and public sectors.



UNIONIZATION BY INDUSTRY & OCCUPATION

Understanding industry dynamics and organizational breakdowns by occupation is critical to understanding where there is still work to be done in the labor movement. Figure 3 shows that public administration, education and health services and transportation and utilities, are New Jersey's most highly unionized industries; similar to national trends. This leaves multiple sectors, however, underrepresented in the New Jersey labor movement. Some of the least union-dense industries include manufacturing, professional and business services, as well as financial activities.

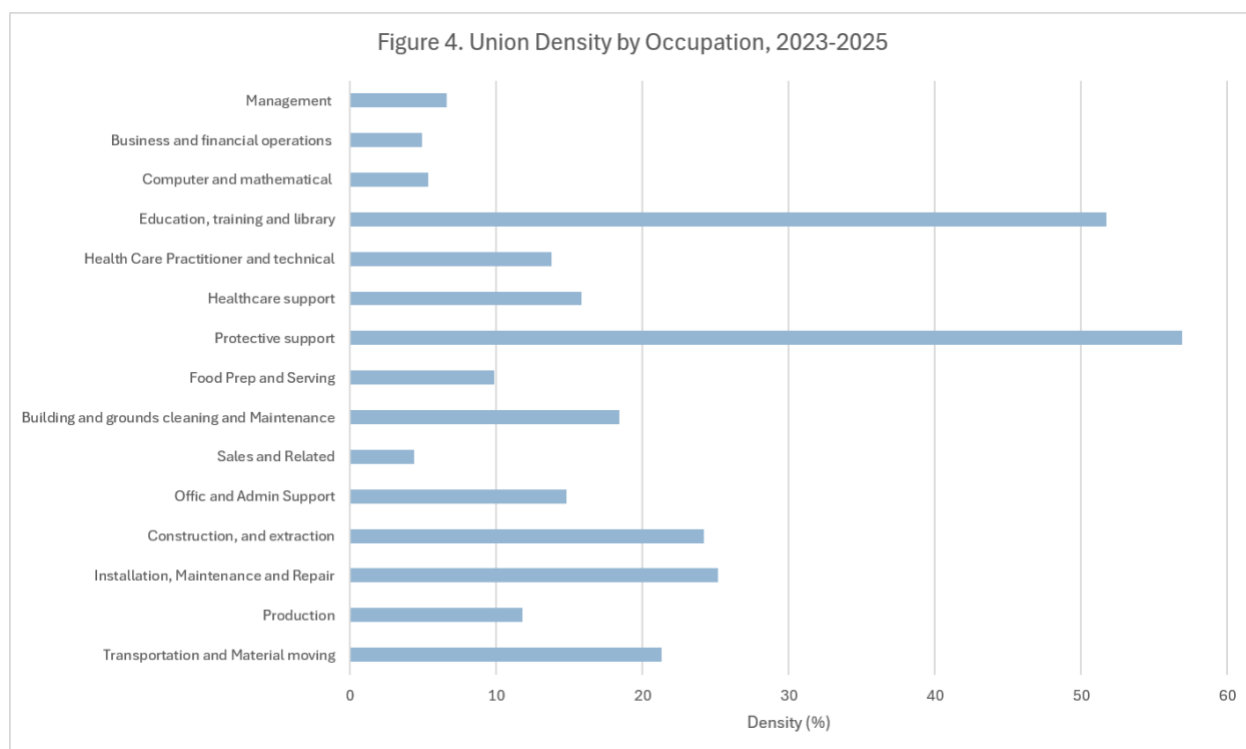


*Manufacturing, information, financial activities, leisure and hospitality as well as other services should be interpreted with caution as their sample size was below <50.

Figure 3 shows that New Jersey's unionization by industry is much higher than national averages in the same sectors, and it especially highlights the extraordinary role of unions in public administration and education/health services. The highest-density industries in NJ are public administration: 53.5%, education and health services: 27.0% and transportation and utilities: 21.3%. The lowest density industries are manufacturing: 5.7%, professional and business services: 4.6% and financial activities: 2.0%.

Public administration and education/health are much more unionized in NJ than national statistics. In state, public administration density of 53.5% is dramatically above the overall U.S. union rate (~10%) and consistent with, but likely higher than, national public-administration figures, reflecting NJ's status as a strong public-sector union state. NJ's 27% density in education and health services is close to or slightly below the national occupational unionization in education (about 32.5%) but still nearly three times the national overall rate, underscoring how strongly unionized this sector is in the state.

Construction, transportation, and utilities are also union-dense relative to national norms. Nationally, construction and transportation-related jobs have union membership rates above the overall union rate, but generally still under one-third of workers. In NJ, construction (14.4%) and transportation and utilities (21.3%) both sit well above the national overall rate and in the top tier of NJ private-sector industries.



* Occupation densities should be interpreted with some caution as sample sizes for some occupations were <50

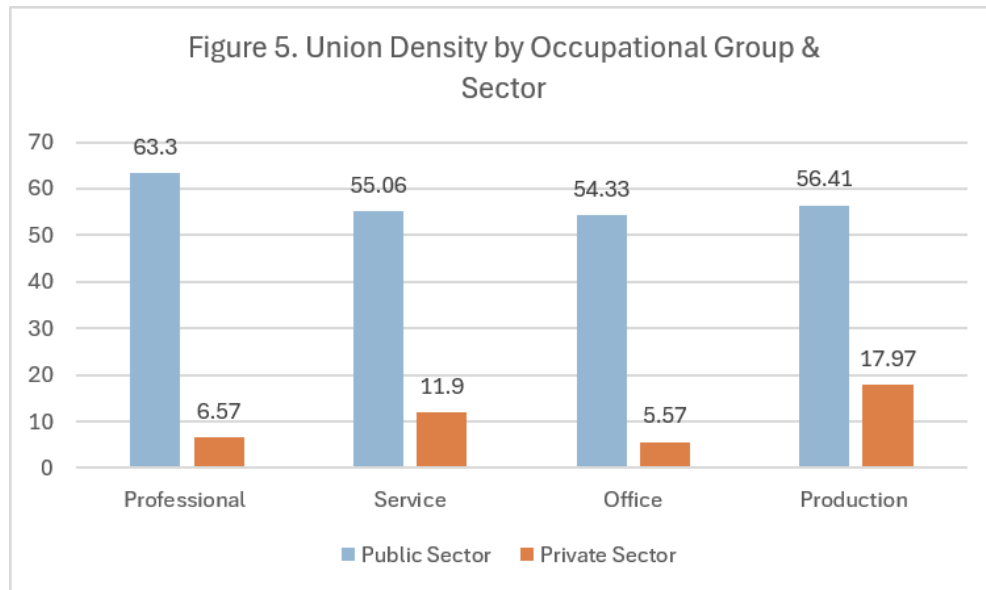
Low-density private service and professional industries mirror but are often still above national levels. In the U.S., unionization in professional and business services, financial activities, information, and leisure and hospitality is generally low (single digits). NJ follows that pattern: financial activities (2.0%) and professional and business services (4.6%) are weakly unionized, though still around or modestly

above national benchmarks, while leisure and hospitality (8.4%) and wholesale and retail trade (7.6%) slightly exceed typical U.S. rates in these sectors

Looking at union density by occupation in Figure 4, we see that Protective Services and education are the most highly unionized occupations. Grouping together occupations based on broader characteristics, we can gain better insights on what types of occupations union members are located in, as well as trends in these distributions. Table 2 displays how we combined similar types of occupations into broader groups.

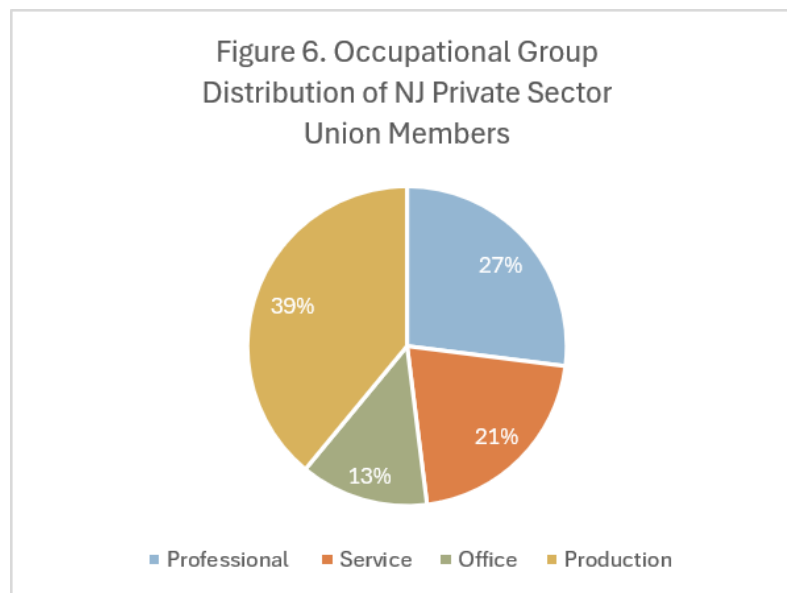
Table 2. Occupational Groups

Occupational Group	Constituent Occupations
Production	Construction and extraction Installation, maintenance, and repair Production Transportation and material moving
Service	Healthcare support Protective service Food preparation and serving related Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance Personal care and service
Office	Sales and related Office and administrative support
Professional	Business and financial operations Computer and mathematical Architecture and engineering Life, physical, and social science Community and social service Legal Education instruction and library Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media Healthcare practitioner and technical
Management (public sector only)	Management



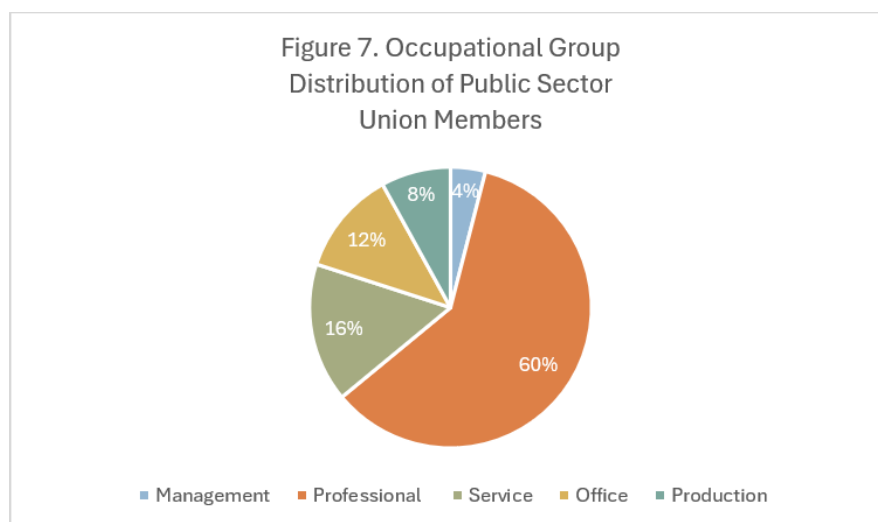
*Management and production groups estimate in the public sector should be interpreted with caution as n was <50.

Figure 5 displays density among these occupational groups. As we can see, production occupations have the highest density (20.4%) in the private sector, while professional occupations have the highest density in the public sector (63.6%). Management occupations have a lower density in the public sector than other occupations.



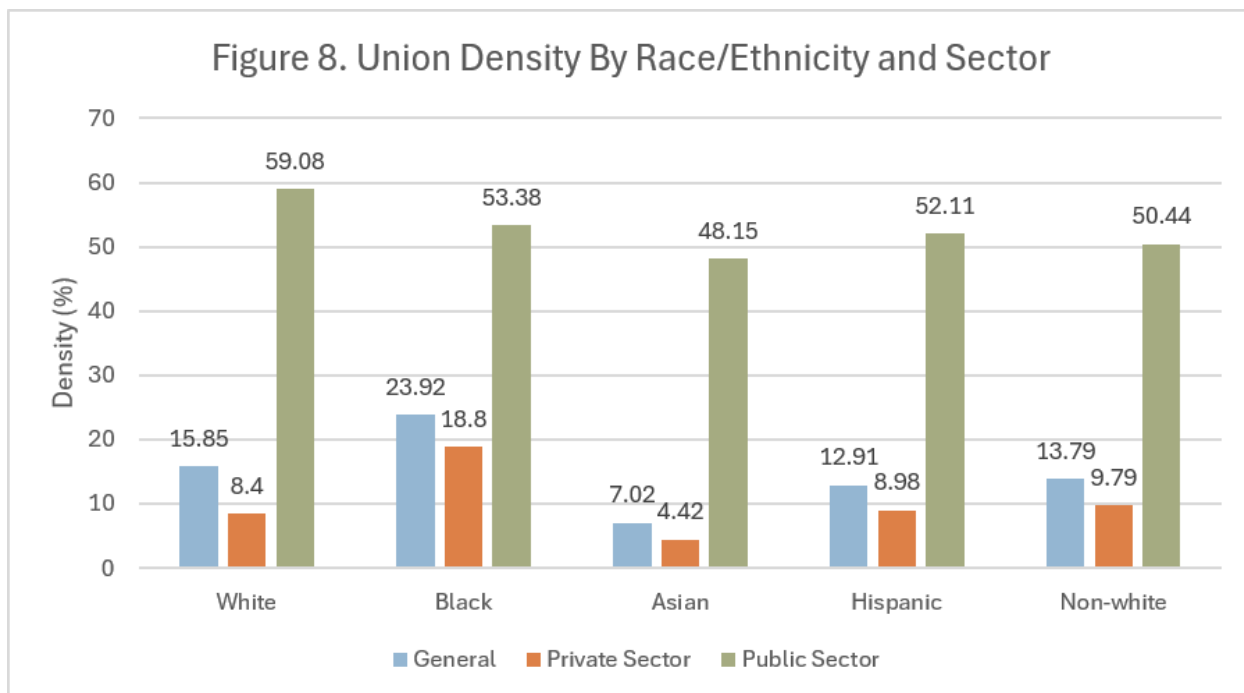
In terms of the distribution of union members within these occupational groups, the “blue/white collar divide” seems to align with the public and private sector division among union members. Figure 6 shows that most private sector union members are found in production (39%) and professional occupations (27%), while Figure 7 shows that a vast majority of public sector union members are found in professional (60%) and service (16%) occupations. It should also be noted that the Big Beautiful Bill attempted to strip professional status from a number of occupations, predominantly women and BIPOC positions (Union Label and Service Trades Department, 2026). While it was set

to take effect July 1st, as of late June 2026 this has been blocked (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2026). While this change was never “formally” enacted, acknowledgement of this should be noted.



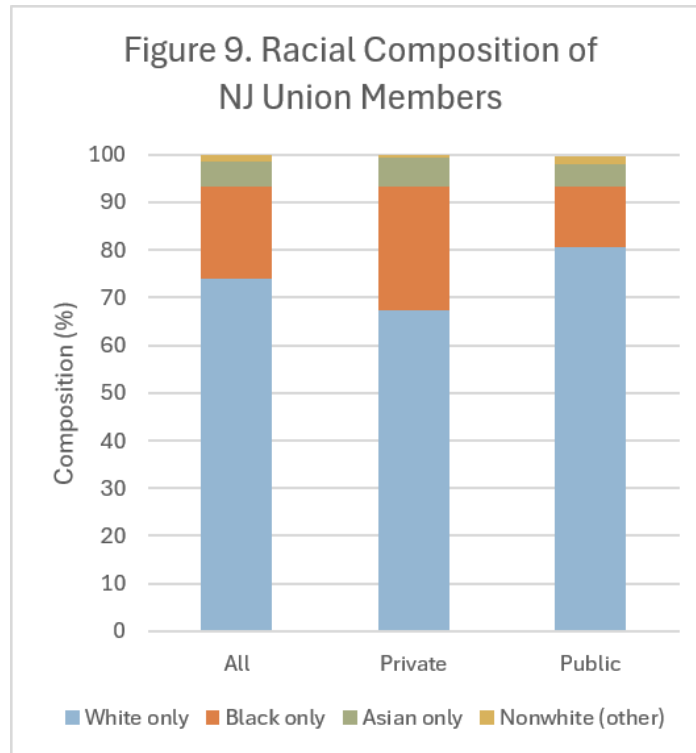
UNIONIZATION BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Among major race/ethnicity groups, Figure 8 shows that Black workers in NJ continue to have the highest union density compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, Black union density in the state is more than *double* the 2023 national average of 11.8% (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026). Hispanic workers in the Garden State also outperform their national average of 10%. In the private sector, both Black and Hispanic workers have higher union density than white workers, and non-white workers from other racial and ethnic categories trail closely behind white workers. However, in the public sector, white workers have the highest union density among any racial/demographic group.

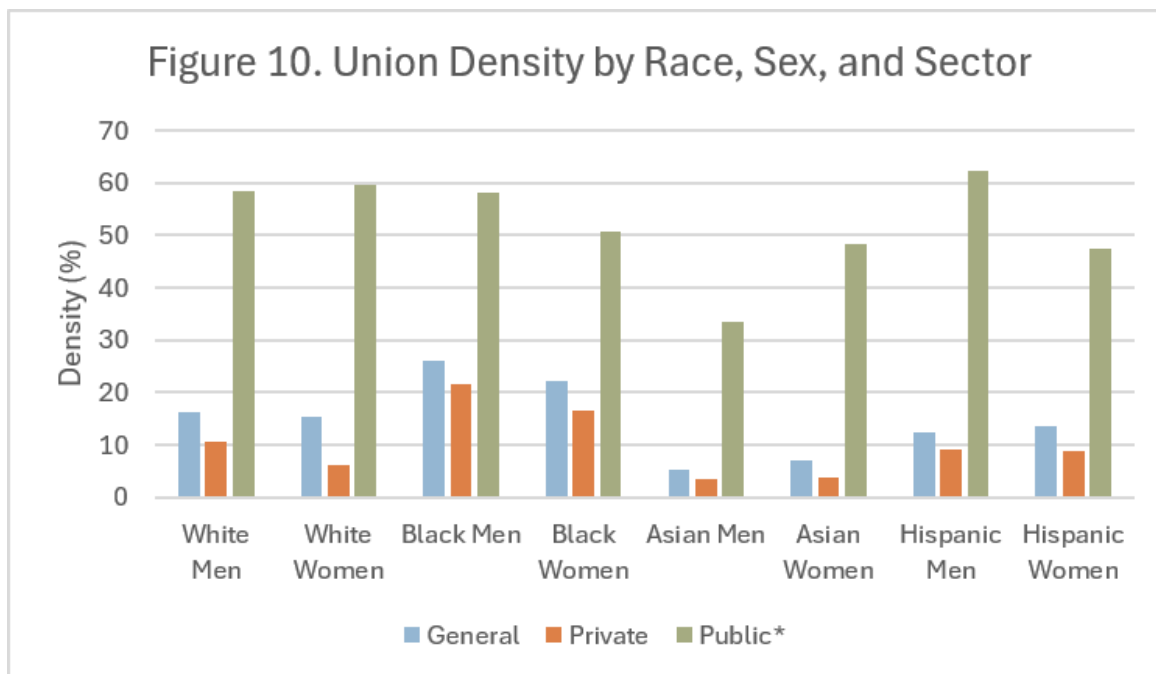


Overall private sector union density in NJ is highest for Black workers with 18.8%, followed by other Non-white (9.9%), Hispanic (9.0%) and White (8.4%). These exceed national trends across all groups. In the public sector, unionization rates are extremely high across all groups (roughly 48–59%), with White workers at 59.1%, Black at 53.4%, Asian at 48.2%, Hispanic at 52.1%, and Non-white other at 50.4%. The gap between Black and White unionization in NJ (roughly 8 percentage points overall) is larger than the national Black–White gap (by about 1.5 points), suggesting NJ unions are especially important for Black workers’ representation. NJ’s public sector densities above 50% for every racial/ethnic group far exceed the national overall union rate of 10%, underscoring how central public employment is to union coverage for workers of color in the state.

Figure 9 shows the general racial composition of NJ union members. The NJ unionized population is approximately 74% White, 19% Black, 5% Asian and 1-2% Non-white-other. Workers are generally more diverse in the private sector with 67% White, 26% Black, 6% Asian. These trends exceed national trends with the national average being 12.4%. With these numbers showing that the NJ private-sector union workforce is only two-thirds White (vs over 70% nationally), this underscores that NJ private-sector unions play a comparatively large role for workers of color, Black workers in particular. In summary, NJ has higher racial diversity numbers than national averages with Black workers making up approximately 24% of the unionized workforce.

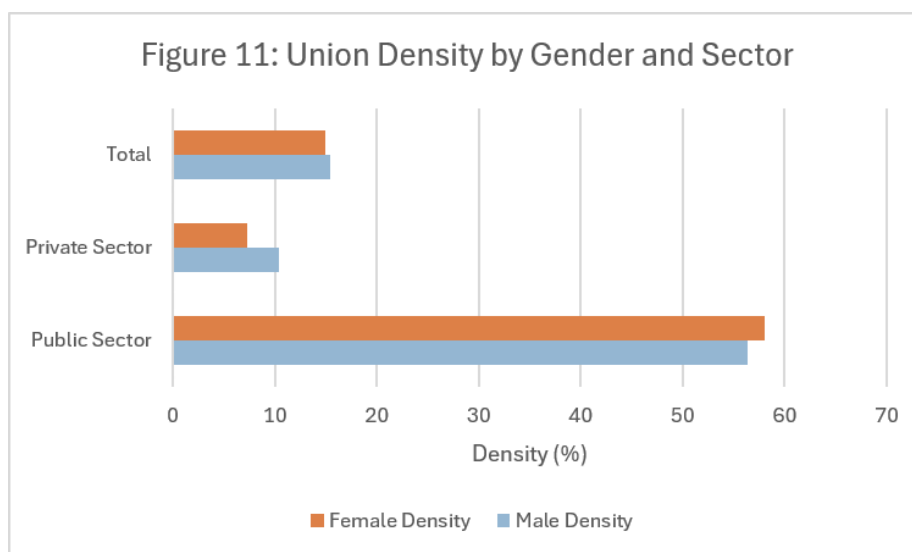


Addressing Figure 10, general union density is highest for Black men (26.1%), followed by Black women (22.2%), White men (16.2%), White women (15.5%), Hispanic women (13.5%), Hispanic men (12.3%), and then Asian women (7.0%) and Asian men (5.2%). In the private sector, the ranking is similar, with Black men and women having the highest densities (21–22%), clearly above White and Hispanic men and women and far above Asian workers. In the public sector, densities are very high for nearly all groups (roughly 33–62%), with notably high rates for Hispanic men (62.2%), White women (~59.6%), and White men (~58.3%). Nationally, Black men and Black women also have higher union membership rates than White, Asian, or Hispanic workers of the same gender, but at much lower levels than in NJ. When you disaggregate by race and gender, NJ mirrors the national pattern—Black workers, especially Black men, are the most unionized group—but at much higher absolute levels, pointing to unions as a particularly significant institution for racial equity in the New Jersey labor market.



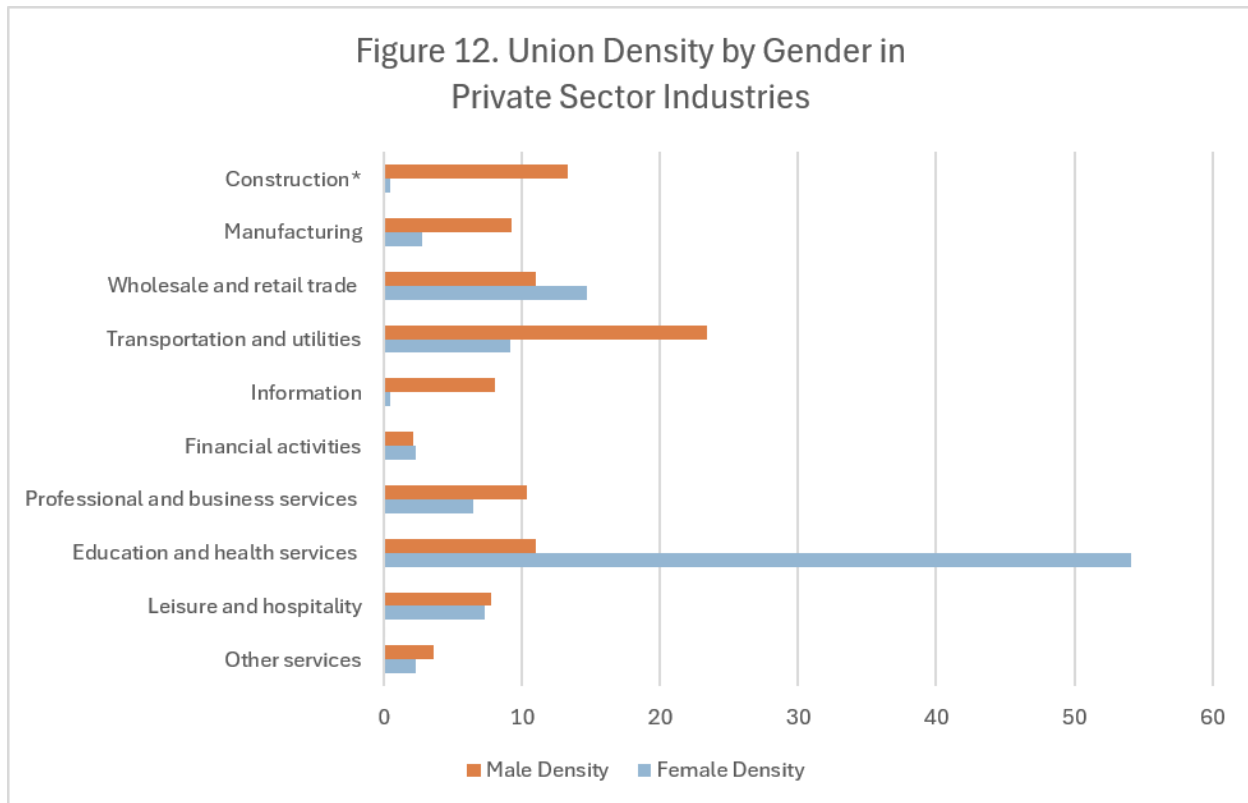
*Please note that sex and gender are not clearly delineated in the larger data, this coupled with male and female only choices, non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals are currently not represented.

Union density by gender, displayed below in Figure 11, shows that men and women are roughly even in terms of their overall union density. In the private sector, men's unionization (10.4%) exceeds women's (7.3%), indicating a gender gap where men are more likely to be union members. In the public sector, the pattern flips: women's density (58.0%) slightly exceeds men's (56.4%), suggesting women are somewhat more concentrated in highly unionized public jobs. NJ's near-parity overall suggests that women's strong presence in public sector unions is enough to offset their weaker position in private-sector organizing, arguably showing something close to gendered unionization parity in NJ.



*Federal public sector estimates should be interpreted with caution as the sample size was <50.

Looking at private sector industries specifically, there are much stronger gender disparities. Education and health services show a very large gender gap with the female density of 54.1% vs male density of 11.0%; indicating women’s heavy concentration in unionized education/health jobs relative to men in the same industries.



*Please note that figures 12-14 include categories with small n’s. Please interpret with caution.

In terms of the distribution of union members in private sector industries, we can see trends that reflect the long history of gender segregation of employment in particular industries. In figure 13 we can see over half of unionized women in the private sector are located in education and health services. Wholesale and retail trade also remains a prominent industry for female union members. In contrast, figure 14 shows that male union members are located primarily in construction and transportation and utilities industries. NJ’s private-sector pattern is consistent with national gender occupational segregation: men dominate unionized blue-collar and transportation trades, while women’s union strength in the private sector is concentrated in education and health services and some parts of retail and services. This suggests that any strategy to expand women’s union coverage in the private sector must tackle access to better-unionized “male” industries or deepen organizing in female-dominated service work.

Figure 13. Distribution of Female Union Members in NJ Private Sector Industries

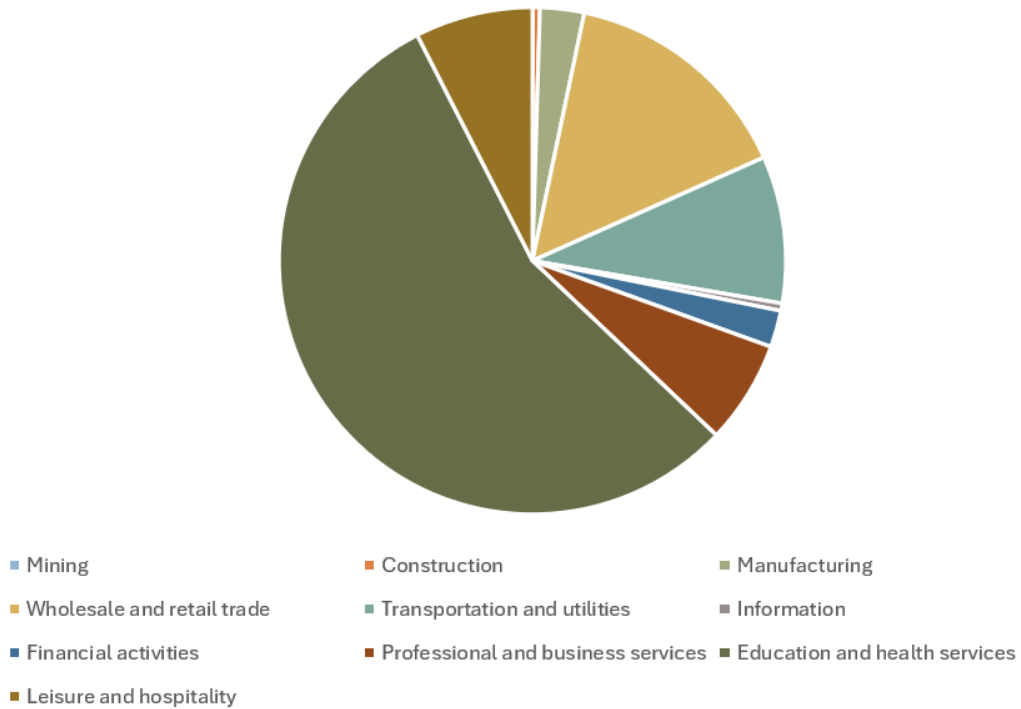
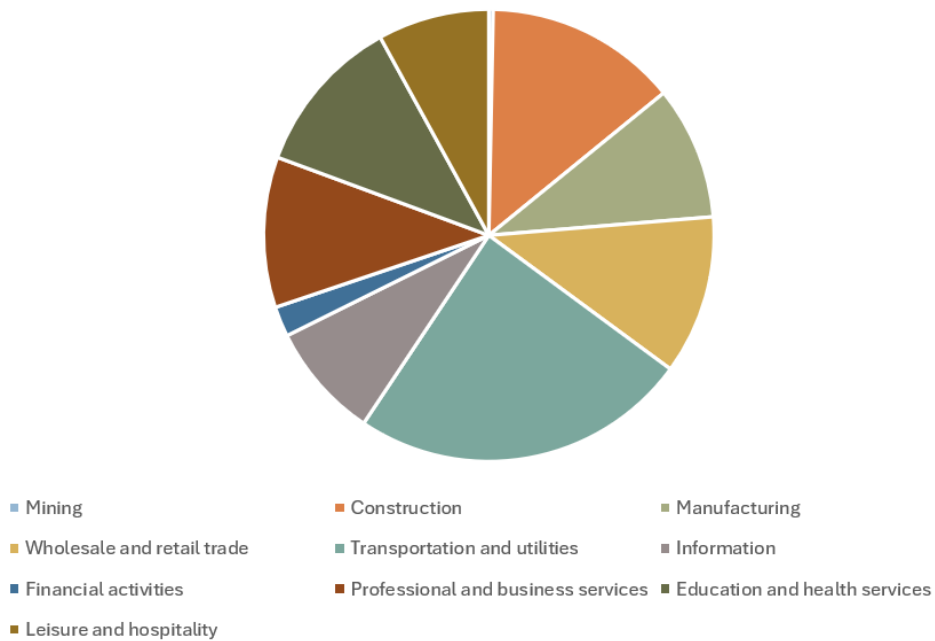


Figure. 14. Distribution of Male Union Members in NJ Private Sector Industries



UNION WAGE PREMIUM

We look next at the difference in pay rates for union vs. non-union workers across a variety of job and personal characteristics. We caution readers that these numbers are just for the sake of comparison as they do not simultaneously take into consideration the full range of factors that may shape differences in wages across various occupations and demographic characteristics. Limited sample sizes prevent us from digging into more granular analyses.

Table 3. NJ Union Wage Premium Rates, 2023-2025

Category	Non-Union Weekly	Union Weekly	Union Wage Premium	Pct. Diff
All Workers	\$ 1,416.46	\$ 1,661.56	\$245.10	15.9%
All Full-time Workers	\$ 1,631.53	\$ 1,817.99	\$186.46	10.79%
All Part-time Workers	\$ 530.21	\$ 898.09	\$367.88	51.51%
Full-time Only, Detailed				
Private Sector+	\$ 1,402.68	\$ 1582.92	\$180.24	12.07%
Public Sector	\$ 1,671.50	\$ 1,866.60	\$195.1	11.03%
Public Sector (State)	\$ 1,586.82	\$ 1,952.86	\$366.04	20.68%
Public Sector (Local)	\$ 1,489.24	\$ 1,880.45	\$391.21	23.20%
Men	\$ 1,668.59	\$ 1,835.34	\$166.75	9.52%
Women	\$ 1,165.07	\$ 1,483.10	\$318.03	24.02%
White	\$ 1,889.39	\$ 2,000.19	\$110.80	5.86%
Black	\$ 1,101.54	\$ 1,230.59	\$129.05	11.71%
Hispanic	\$ 1,077.94	\$ 1,395.83	\$317.89	29.49%
Young (16-34yrs in age)	\$ 1,098.99	\$ 1,265.14	\$166.15	15.12%
Prime (35-65yrs in age)	\$ 1,583.62	\$ 1,771.33	\$187.71	10.6%
Construction Occupations	\$ 1,228.44	\$ 1,809.70	\$581.26	32.12%
Edu. and Health Occupations	\$ 1,684.83	\$ 1,888.49	\$203.66	12.09%
Service Sector Occupations	\$ 925.39	\$ 1,275.44	\$350.05	27.45%
Protective Service Occ.	\$ 1,608.57	\$ 1,929.23	\$320.66	19.93%
Production Occupations	\$ 1,049.03	\$ 1,521.25	\$472.12	45.01%
Transportation Occupations	\$ 1,008.52	\$ 1,342.09	\$333.57	33.08%

+Private sector weekly wages are derived only from occupations with sufficient sample size to avoid any potential skewing as a result of outliers – non-eligible managerial occupations excluded.

* Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to low sample size (N <50).

Here we see that unionization created a wage premium in all categories, with the average being over 15% or \$245 per week. For full-time workers, this premium was only 10.8% but for part-time unionized workers the premium was over 50% of their weekly wage. However, this is a decrease in the unionized premium from the last report, possibly due to increased minimum wage laws coming into effect.

Public and private sectors have similar wage premiums being 11% and 12% respectively. Of the public sector, local unionized workers have the highest wage premium at 23.2%, just a head of state workers with 20.7%. However, this could be because of the increased likelihood of local and state public sector workers to be unionized, so readers are cautioned in their interpretation. Men and women both see a benefit from unionization with women receiving a 24% premium compared to men's 9.5%. This is likely due to the gendered wage gap so commonly present in non-unionized work environments.

Hispanic and Black workers saw larger wage premiums than White workers. Hispanic workers saw the largest premium of nearly 30% over non-unionized Hispanic workers. Black unionized workers enjoyed an 11.7% wage premium, and White workers had a wage premium of 5.9%. Young workers (16-34 yrs) also saw a large premium when compared to prime age workers (35-65 yrs). Young worker's premiums were $\frac{1}{3}$ larger than prime workers with premiums of 15.1% and 10.6% respectively.

When looking more closely into the private sector, unionized production-based organizations have the largest wage premium at 45%. This is followed by transportation occupations (33.1%), construction occupations (32.2%) and service sector occupations (27.4%). The smallest premium is held by education and health occupations holding a wage premium of only 12.1%.

In summary, unionization contributes to higher wages. The benefits are greatest among the least well-off, most vulnerable, and historically marginalized groups of workers, including racial minorities, women, young workers and part-time workers. This is all despite falling overall unionization rates.

WORK STOPPAGES

According to the Cornell IRL Labor Action Tracker (Kallas et al., 2026), between January 1st 2023 and December 31st, 2025 there were 1,121 strikes and 12 lockouts nationwide. The strikes involved over 1.1 million workers and resulted in over 34 million total strike days. The vast majority of these actions came in 2023 with high profile strikes such as SAG-AFTRA strike, the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions strike, the Los Angeles Unified School District strike, and the UAW Stand-Up Strike. Over this three-year period, strikes and actions slowed progressively each year with 2025 resulting in 298 strikes as opposed to the 467 in 2023.

In New Jersey, there were 20 strikes over the same period. Most consisted of either short, 1-4 day local strikes or longer national strikes referenced above. All were "authorized" with the exception of a 2-day strike in October of 24 in East Orange, NJ where the East Orange Education Association - NJEA struck against the school district demanding greater job security.

CONCLUSION

Using CPS Outgoing Rotation Group data from 2023–2025 alongside state and federal statistics, this report concludes that New Jersey remains a highly organized and comparatively union-dense state, even as unionization has edged downward and the broader labor market has become more fragile. Overall union density stands at 15.47 percent for 2023–2025, roughly 5.5 percentage points above the national average and sufficient to keep New Jersey among the most unionized states, despite modest declines in both public and private sector density since 2021–2023. Public sector workers continue to anchor this strength, with total public density at 57.38 percent—more than seven times the private-sector rate of 8.91—while recent gains at the federal and state levels are offset by notable erosion in local government unionization. Industry and occupational patterns show union power concentrated in public administration, education and health services, and transportation and utilities, contrasted with persistently low unionization in manufacturing, professional and business services, and financial activities, highlighting substantial organizing potential in under-represented segments of the economy. At the same time, unions in New Jersey play an outsized role in advancing racial and gender equity, especially for Black and Hispanic workers and for women in public-sector education and health, producing a unionized workforce that is more racially diverse and closer to gender parity than the U.S. as a whole.

These gains are situated within a labor market characterized by slower employment growth and elevated unemployment. The report’s contextual evidence shows that New Jersey’s unemployment rate in the mid-2020s has remained above national levels, and broader measures of labor underutilization point to a labor market that is balanced rather than tight, reinforcing concerns about precarity and the need for caution in interpreting estimates based on small samples. In this environment, legislative and administrative attacks on labor rights and professional status—such as the “Big Beautiful Bill,” targeting occupations disproportionately held by women and BIPOC workers—underscore both the vulnerability of key groups and the continuing importance of collective organization. Overall, the evidence indicates that New Jersey’s “union advantage” is real but not assured: sustaining and extending it will require continued organizing in low-density industries, deliberate strategies to confront race and gender segregation in employment, and proactive engagement by unions and allied institutions to stabilize job quality and shape the next phase of the state’s labor landscape.

NOTES

- i. “Union density” denotes the proportion of all full-time, nonagricultural, wage and salary workers who are union members in a region, occupation, or industry. Data for the state rankings displayed in Figure 1 are from Hirsch and Macpherson, 2022.
- ii. The “2023-25” data discussed here and shown in the figures and tables throughout with the averages for the 36 months merged into one data set. All results are calculated for 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, 2018).
- iii. To ensure reliability, given the limitations of the CPS dataset, we have attempted to restrict unionization rates only for subgroups that have a minimum of 50 observations. Subgroups such as individual occupations and racial categories that fall below this threshold are combined into larger groups to provide projections. In some cases, for subgroups that fall slightly below our reliability threshold, we have still reported these tabulations but indicated that they should be interpreted with caution as they may be derived from non-representative samples.

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