

## The State of New York Unions 2022

by Gregory DeFreitas

The recent historic union victories at Amazon, Apple, and Starbucks have raised the prospect of a possible resurgence of U.S. labor organizing. Filings for new union elections have jumped 50 per cent over the same period last year. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than in the New York Metropolitan area, site of some of the first-ever union election wins at Amazon, REI, Starbucks and new media firms. Among the most important causes and consequences of these important trends are changes in the membership and bargaining strength of worker organizations.

Fifteen years ago, we wrote the first detailed description of the major characteristics of and trends in recent unionization in the New York Metropolitan Area, the nation's largest metro labor market.<sup>1</sup> Every five years since then we have updated these findings with empirical analysis conducted on large microdata samples from the US Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys. In this our fourth report, I trace changes in union membership just before, during and since the 2020 COVID crisis, with separate analyses by sex, age, race, ethnicity, immigration status and industry.

### Among the key highlights of the findings are:

- The New York Metropolitan Area today has the highest union membership rate of the country's large metro regions. Of its wage and salary employees, 18.9 per cent are now in unions – nearly twice the national average.
- The fraction of employees in unions increased in both New York City and its suburbs in 2020, when our region was the national epicenter of the pandemic. A broadly similar pattern was common among the other largest metro areas we considered. But it appears to have been largely due to higher lockdown layoff rates of nonunion workers. So, even though the union membership rate rose in 2019-20, the number of New York City residents in labor unions fell.
- New York City's deep employment plunge and slow recovery have left its unions today with far fewer members and wiped out nearly all the pandemic bump in the union density rate. By 2021, the 689,000 city residents who were union members (20.5 per cent of the work force) still numbered 7.3 per cent less than in pre-pandemic 2019.
- With 336,246 (26.5 per cent) of its employed residents in unions by 2021, this marks the fifth consecutive year that Long Island unions have represented a larger fraction of the work force than their NYC counterparts. The Island experienced a shallower 2020 employment drop and faster rebound than downtown. Though it ended 2021 with an employment count still slightly below the pre-COVID level, the unemployment rate has fallen

below three per cent and both the number of union members and their share of the population have risen.

- The trend toward higher union membership rates on Long Island than downtown appears to be echoed in most, though certainly not all metro areas today. Nationwide in 2021, union density in center cities averaged 10.25 per cent, compared with 11.1 per cent in metro suburbs
- Underlying local time series in union membership are often dramatic variations in unions' fortunes among workers differentiated by age, gender, race and ethnicity, immigrant status, hours of work, public-private sector, and industry. Working women now have higher union membership rates than men in New York City. 21.8 per cent vs. 18.8.
- Long Island women are more likely than men or women in the city to be union members – and both the female and male union density rates on the Island are now higher than at any time since the Great Recession.
- Gen Z, Millennials and all other age groups average rates of union membership in New York City and Long Island far above the national average. Today, Millennials – by far the largest single age group – are nearly twice as likely as their cohort nationwide to be union members. Moreover, Millennials now account for nearly 40 per cent of all the city's union members. Gen X employees – Gen Z's parents – are more likely to be union members than any others.
- African American women in New York City have the highest rate of union representation of any demographic group, male or female. The black female union density rate of nearly 36 per cent is followed by that of African American men (31 per cent), Latina women (20.7 per cent), and Latino men (19 per cent). In fact, white men today account for only 15 per cent of New York City's unionized work force. On Long Island, the white male union share is over twice as large (34 per cent), but a growing majority of its union workers are now women and minority men. In fact, since the Great Recession, Hispanics have accounted for over 60 per cent of new union members.
- Two-fifths of all union members in the city are immigrants. Naturalized immigrant citizens have a higher union membership rate (27 per cent) than either US-born citizens (20.7 per cent) or non-citizen migrants (11.2 per cent). Long Island immigrants are a far smaller fraction of the work force (17 per cent) than in the city, with lower union density than the native-born. But the number of immigrants in unions rose by over 17,000 (+43 per cent) since the pre-pandemic period. Newly organized immigrants accounted for 43.7 per cent of the Island's most recent growth in union membership.

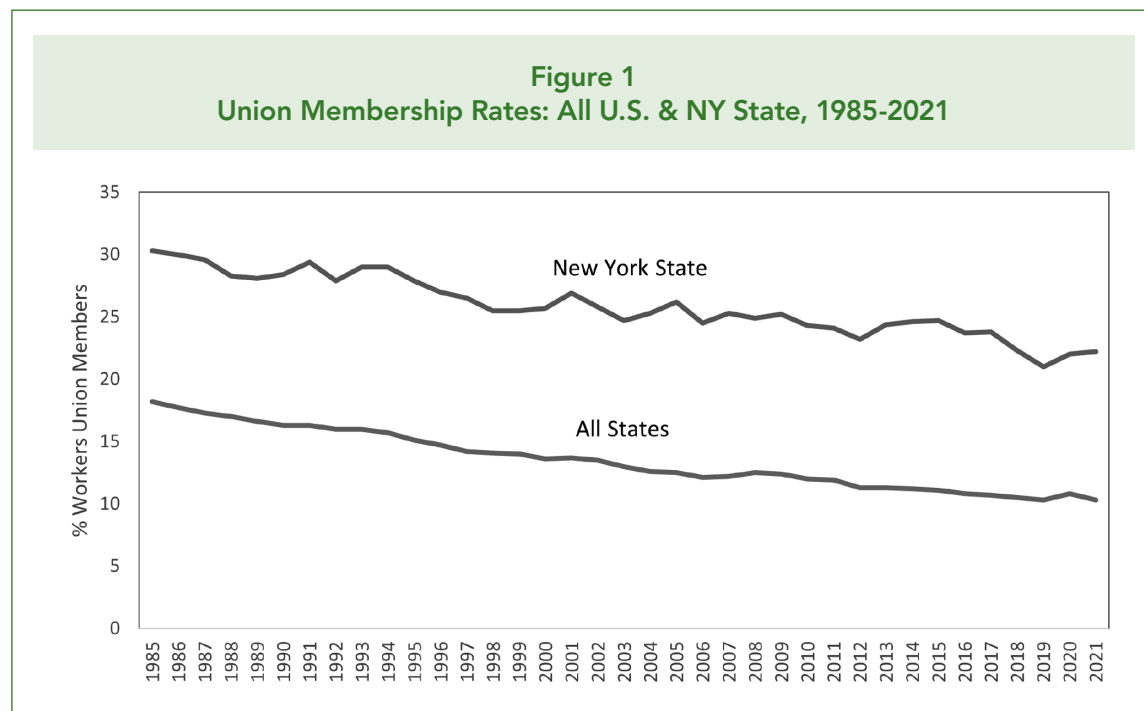
- The public sector now accounts for 45 per cent of New York City union members and has a density twice the national average. The need for public sector “essential workers” to cope with the pandemic, coupled with union job securities, limited the sector’s 2019-21 job shrinkage. But, my findings show that, in the city, the public sector’s union membership still declined by 23,191 over this period. With it, that sector’s union density rate declined by 1.5 percentage points.
- On Long Island, 68 per cent of its more than 237,400 public sector workers are now in unions, a membership rate that has held fairly steady over the past decade. The Long Island public sector represents a larger proportion of the resident population’s jobs than in the city. And it accounts for half of all Long Island residents in a union job.
- Which specific industries have accounted for recent union membership growth and decline? In New York City, all but three of 11 broad industry categories had declines in union membership. The two hardest hit industries, Health Care and Financial Services, together lost nearly 100,000 union positions – accounting for over half of the city’s total membership decline. Together with losses in Wholesale & Retail Trade and in Leisure & Hospitality Services, these four industries account for four out of five union membership losses. The latter three also experienced marked employment shrinkage in 2020-21, as stores and tourism venues closed and much of Wall Street and the real estate industry scaled back operations. Three industries saw modest gains of from about 3,000 to 9,000 new members since 2014-16: Education Services, Information and Public Administration.
- Compared to downtown, Nassau-Suffolk unions won membership gains in 7 of the 11 industry categories. Just two industries – Construction and Education – accounted for over half of the region’s new union members. Although Long Island’s more pandemic-vulnerable sectors mostly achieved employment rebounds ahead of the city, three private sector industries lost membership: Information; Professional & Business Services; and Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities
- Do unions win higher pay? Yes, earnings at unionized employers in the NYC/Long Island metro area are typically far higher than the nonunion standard. Among NYC/Long Island adult residents in full-time jobs, union members earn 12-13 per cent higher hourly wages – even after controlling for age, education, job experience, gender, race, immigration

status, employment sector and other relevant characteristics. The union advantage in full compensation is even greater, once we add health insurance, pensions, disability and vacation pay, job safety and security provisions in typical union contracts. Such benefits have increasingly been major items in collective bargaining, and sometimes take precedence for members over bigger wage hikes.

### NY State & NYC Metro

New York State today has the highest unionized share of the workforce of anyplace in the continental U.S. As recently as 1980, one in three New York workers (33.5%) was represented by a union – 10 percentage points above the national average that year. Although New York, like nearly all other states, has experienced marked declines in union density, the pace of that erosion has generally been slower than elsewhere. While the national union membership rate dropped over 10 percentage points to 19.1 per cent, New York’s rate fell less than one-third as much, to 32.3 per cent.

As Figure 1 shows, the state’s membership density fell more rapidly from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s. But, since 1983, New York has had a higher rate of union membership than any state in all but 9 of the 39 years through 2021. Over the last two decades, as national union density continued to shrink, the state’s density held relatively steady at 25 to 26 per cent until the Great Recession. In the last pre-recession year (2007), 2.06 million New Yorkers were union members. By the trough year 2012, the state’s wage/salary job count had plunged by 217,000 and union membership was down to 1.84 million (23.2 percent). Then rapid recovery began that more than replaced the total number of lost jobs by 2015 and raised union membership and density to 24.7 percent, very close to pre-recession levels. However, as the expansion matured in 2016-2017, the state’s job growth turned anemic. The job count peaked at 8.48 million in

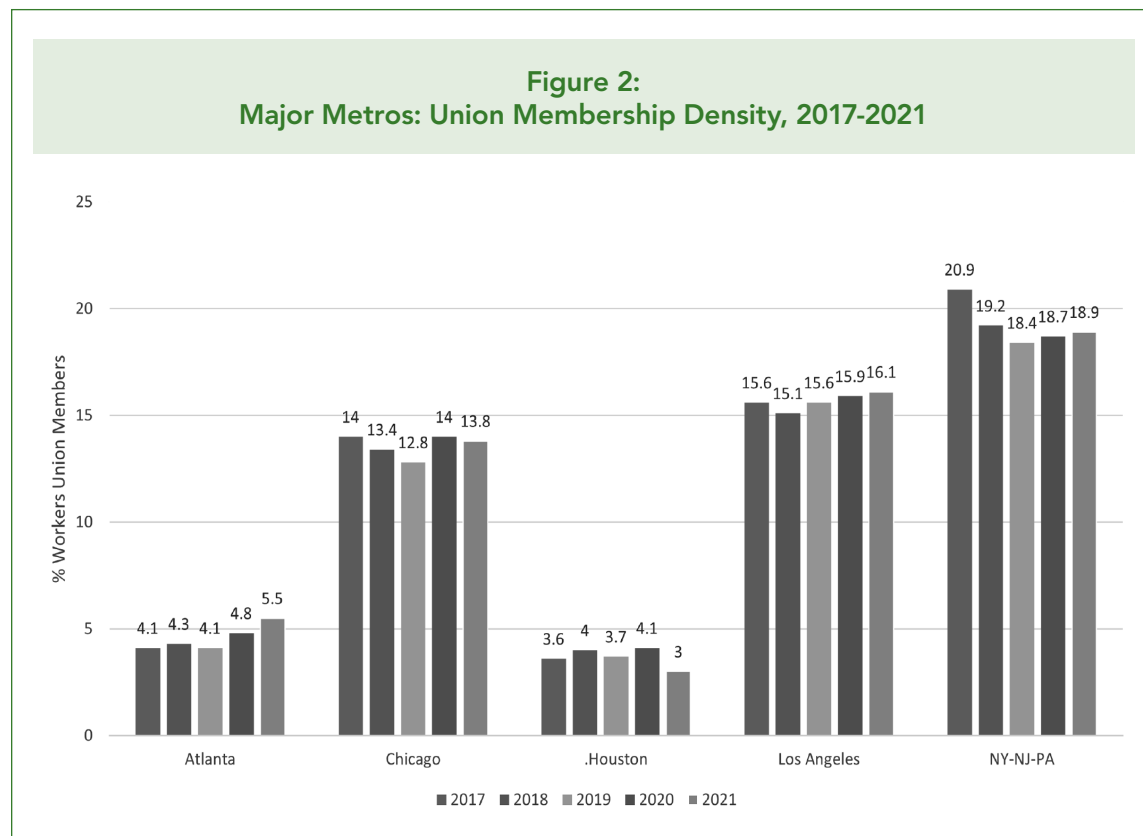


the latter year, then drifted down to 8.26 million by 2019. With it fell the number of employed union members in that last pre-pandemic year (a drop of over 14%).

The COVID-19 crisis that began in spring 2020 shrank the number employed across the state by 760,000 (-8.6%) in a single year’s time. But the number of union workers employed only fell by half that rate. So, the fraction of New York workers with union representation actually rose in 2020, up a percentage point to 22%.

In the latest available 2021 government surveys, 1.73 million of the state’s 7.8 million wage and salary employees, or 22.2%, said that they were union members. That means that New Yorkers now have a union membership rate that is over twice the current national average of 10.3 per cent (though still below its earlier levels). In fact, only one other state – Hawaii, at 22.4% – now has a density rate above 20 per cent. But, with a small workforce of barely one-half million, that represents just 121,000 unionized Hawaiians.<sup>2</sup>

The influence of unions is greater than suggested by their membership figures, not least because unions represent some employees who report in surveys that they are covered by union contracts but are not formally union members. For example, 140,706 workers said their job had union coverage, in addition to the 1.73 million New Yorkers who identify as union members. Hence, the state’s broader union coverage rate (or “coverage density”) was 24 per cent. Nationwide, it was just 11.6 per cent (15.8 million people) including both 14 million members and 1.8 million nonmembers who were covered by union contracts last year. But using coverage



rather than membership rates alters neither New York’s state ranking, nor the trends plotted in Figure 1.

How does union density in downstate New York compare to that in other large metro areas? Did the union share of all metro area employment rise in the depths of the pandemic, as in the New York State trend? Was this common in other states and in the major metropolitan areas within each one?

In Table 1 and Figure 2, we present estimates of union membership figures in the country’s 5 most populous metropolitan regions. In the NY-NJ-CT-PA Metro Area (including the city, Long Island, northern and western commuter counties), 18.9 per cent of the area’s wage and salary workers were union members in 2021. New York continued to rank first in union density among the largest metro areas, even though the number of union members had declined slightly from the pre-recession comparison year (-4.4 percent). Moreover, as in the state pattern, the union membership rate rose from 2019 into the 2020-21 recession period: in NY Metro it was up from the pre-recession 18.4 per cent in 2019 to 18.7 per cent the following year, then to 18.9 per cent by 2021. The same 2019-2020 upward pattern in union density held for the other major metros shown here, despite different employment growth patterns over these same years.

### City and Suburbs

To better understand these and related trends, we need more detailed knowledge about unionization in New York’s component regions. This report focuses on the state’s economic engine and population center: New York City and Long Island, home to the majority of the state’s workers and of its union members.

The statistical analysis here is based on large microdata sets from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Surveys (CPS). This is a national survey conducted monthly on random samples of 60,000 households nationwide. The survey questionnaire asks about a rich variety of demographic, geographic and employment-related matters. Sampled households are interviewed once each month for four consecutive months. One year later, each of these “rotation groups” is again interviewed for a final four consecutive months. We utilized the CPS Outgoing



Rotation Group files (CPS-ORG) provided by IPUMS for all the years 1986 through 2021.<sup>3</sup> The data set is not, of course, without limitations; in particular, it identifies only county of residence, which may differ from the county where the respondent works. The now-standard methodology employed here follows that of state- and metro-level research papers by Barry Hirsch and David Macpherson.<sup>4</sup>

Within the metro area, we found that an estimated 710,865 of New York City’s 3.4 million employed residents were union members in 2021: a membership density of 21.15 percent. Another 54,647 non-members told interviewers that their job was covered by a collective bargaining contract, so a total of 25.5 per cent were represented by a union.

Among working Long Islanders, 340,052 had union membership (26.8 per cent of employed residents). Insofar as some of the latter may well be commuters whose New York City jobs offer union coverage, these estimates may understate union density among the city’s employers. But the same may be true to some extent for suburban areas, as reverse commuting of the city’s residents to jobs on Long Island and elsewhere continues to grow.

These findings reveal that New York City and Long Island residents account for nearly 59 per cent of the entire state’s 1.8 million union members. Has this numeric importance been reflected in similar union density trends over time? For each year from 1986 through 2021, we plotted estimates of annual union membership rates for New York City and Long Island residents in Figure 3.

It appears that the overall state trends in unionization in Figure 1 have been markedly influenced by the roughly similar trend followed in the city. From a 1986 density of 35.5 per cent, the city’s union membership rate fell to a low of 25 per cent by 2000. As the local job market slowly revived after the 2001 recession, union membership rose to an average of 27 per cent in 2004-06. But in only the first year of the Great Recession (2008), union density dropped sharply to 24.1 percent, a decline that only hit bottom at 21.5 per cent in 2012. With the city’s strong job recovery and population growth in the following few years, the fraction in unions

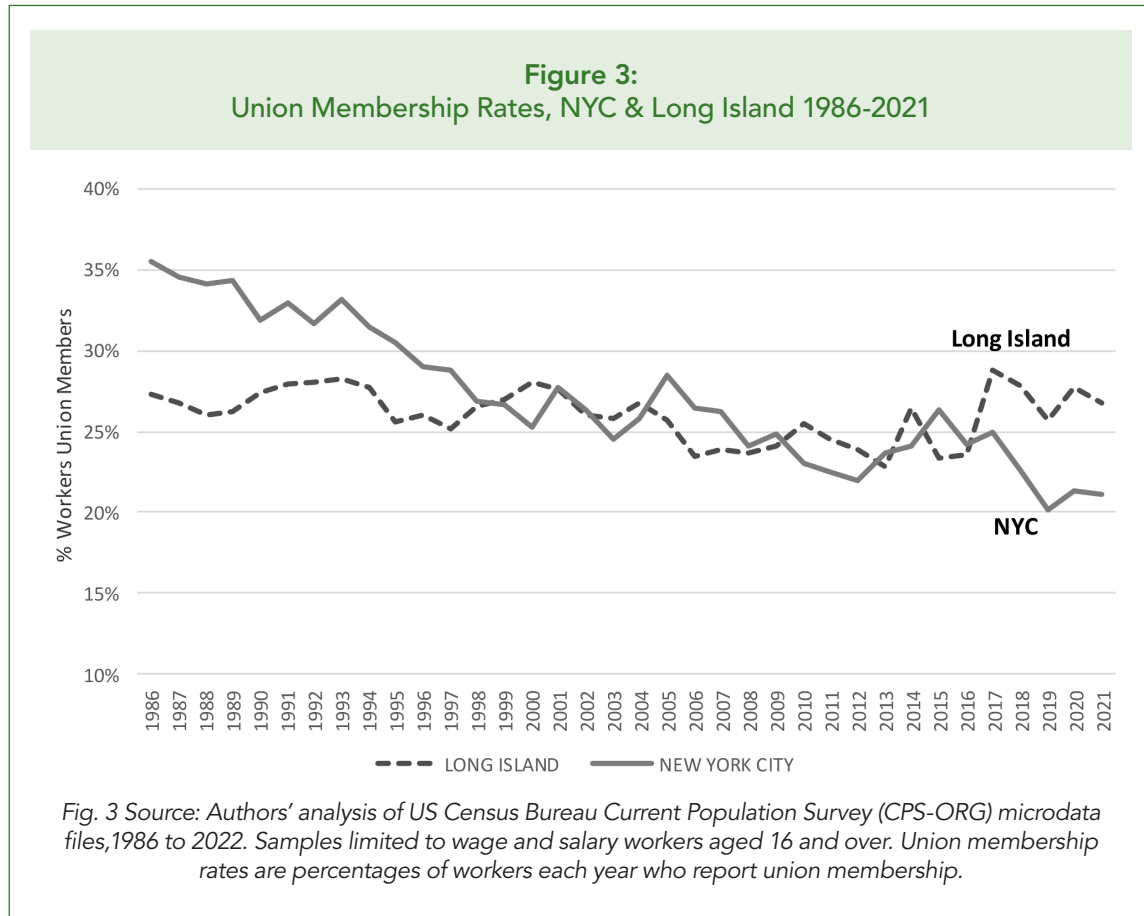


Fig. 3 Source: Authors’ analysis of US Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS-ORG) microdata files, 1986 to 2022. Samples limited to wage and salary workers aged 16 and over. Union membership rates are percentages of workers each year who report union membership.

peaked at 26.3 per cent in 2015. However, the next four years saw that figure slide to a new low in 2019 – 20.2 per cent – before it turned around to recover 1 percentage point in density by 2021. But that very partial recovery during the pandemic still leaves the NYC rate today a full 5 percentage points below where it was in 2015.

In contrast, Long Island’s union membership density has over the same period followed a generally more stable pattern than the state or the city. In the mid-1980s, when over 1 in 3 working people in the city were union members, that was true of barely 1 in 4 Long Islanders. From then on, their union density actually rose slightly from about 26 to 27 per cent in the mid-1980s to 28 per cent in the early 1990s. After dipping in the mid-nineties, the Long Island rate rose to 27 per cent in 1999 – the first year in the series that Long Islanders had a higher unionization rate than the city (26.6 per cent). During the core recession years 2008-10, the density fell, bottoming out at 22.9 per cent in 2013.

But, unlike the city’s post-2015 pattern, union density on Long Island then rose to a 2017 peak of nearly 29 per cent. That spike was concentrated in two of the largest industries: Health Care and Educational Services. Stepped up unionization in the former may have been aided by far above-average health care job growth in 2016-17. Educational Services also experienced job growth, but milder and largely concentrated in 2015-16. The far smaller Information Services industry had a union density jump from 27

per cent in 2016 to 31 per cent in 2017. Its declining job base year after year did not stop employees at a number of new media outlets like HuffPost, Gothamist and DNA Info from winning union representation that year. Though Long Island’s union membership rate dipped to 25.7 per cent on the eve of the 2020 crisis year, it has averaged 27–28 per cent since then – over 6 percentage points higher than NYC density. For the past five consecutive years, Long Island unions have represented a larger fraction of the work force than their counterparts downtown.

### Accounting for Recent Trends

What accounts for the patterns in local union density traced above? A large body of social science research on union membership patterns has for years been exploring a variety of possible explanatory factors, mostly at the national level.<sup>5</sup> Economists tend to broadly categorize them as either “labor supply” factors (including age groupings, gender, race/ethnicity, immigration; skill composition, union organizing) or “demand” factors (like job availability, wage/benefits growth, legal and employer obstacles to organizing). A systematic study of the full set of such possible explanatory factors is well beyond the scope of this report. But we can take some exploratory steps by investigating in more detail recent changes in the main component parts of the New York area’s unionized work force. To make this possible at the metro-level requires more data than is available in single-year survey samples.

Even with the large national sample size of our Current Population Survey data source, the CPS metro-level subsamples are generally not large enough for a single year to yield statistically significant estimates on many narrowly defined demographic or economic subgroups. Recognizing this, I only used single-year data so far for city-wide or metro-wide estimates of union membership. In order to have large enough data samples for reliable estimates of more detailed analysis of specific age, racial, or job groupings in the New York metro area, I pooled the CPS data into three-year groupings: a) 2008, 2009, 2010; b) 2014, 2015, 2016 and c) 2019, 2020, 2021. The first and last of these three time-periods have the advantage that they correspond to recessionary business cycle troughs, while the second covers recovery years post-Great Recession. We are thereby able to make trough-to-trough comparisons that minimize possible confounding influences from cyclical variations. In most of this analysis, we focus on the proportion of workers who report union membership, rather than the slightly higher union coverage measure (which follows its patterns closely).

### Pandemic and Recession

The 2020 pandemic-driven lockdown recession was historically sharp, if relatively brief.<sup>6</sup> At its original epicenter in the NY Metro Area, the unemployment rate at first soared to 20.2 per cent in May 2020, but was cut in half to 10.2 per cent 12 months later, then dropped further to 5.7 per cent by May 2022.<sup>7</sup> On Long Island the change was from 13.4 per cent in 2020 to 4.5 per cent the following May, and then a drop all the way to 2.7 per cent by May 2022. But the city’s jobless rate today is still higher than the national average (3.6 per cent). If we only compare 2019-2021 statistics to non-

	Union Members as Share of all Wage/Salary Workers: 2019-2021 (%)		
	All U.S.	NYC	Long Island
Gen Z	3.1	5.7	8.1
Millennials	9.4	15.4	24.7
Gen X	12.8	26	31.2
Boomers	11.6	28.5	24.8
ALL	10.4	20.3	26

recession years 2014-16, some portion of the union membership trends may be solely attributable to short-run job loss in the pandemic years. One way to adjust for this is via “trough-to-trough” comparisons of different recessions.

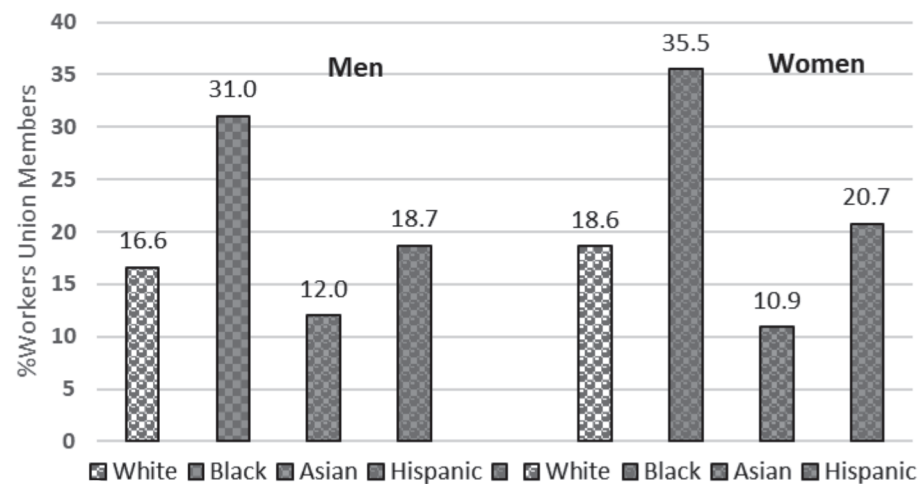
The broad time trends found in these larger data sets appear to be quite comparable with the annual estimates described above. Table 2 reports our estimates for each of the three-year periods of the total number of residents employed, as well as the numbers of these who are union members. Between 2004-06 and the Great Recession years 2008-10, the number of New York City residents in labor unions fell from 856,334 to 800,884 – a decline of 55,450 (-6.5 percent). Since the city’s workforce still managed to expand over this period (by +152,900 jobs, +4.8 percent), the fraction in unions fell from 26.9 per cent to 24 per cent in 2008-10. In the subsequent recovery, more rapid job growth (+5.8 percent) helped turn around NYC union density, though only to 24.8 per cent in 2014-16 – more than twice the national average, but over two percentage points less than the city’s pre-recession density. Then the downward drift (noted in our single-year data above) lowered the city’s membership rate through 2019, before it registered a small rebound once the pandemic began. On average, 20.9 per cent of wage and salary workers were union members in 2019-21 – 101,578 fewer (-13 per cent) than in the Great Recession.

Long Island has experienced both a stronger economic recovery and a very different union membership trend. Unemployment by 2022 is back to pre-COVID levels, as are labor force participation rates. In fact, despite media speculation on a “great resignation,” the overall participation rate is now even higher than in 2019: 64.6 per cent now, versus 62.1 per cent then. Since the Great Recession, both the number of working people in unions and their share of the overall work force have grown. In 2008-10, the Island’s 300,924 union members accounted for 24.4 per cent of all workers. Today, that number has increased by 31,328 new members, pushing the density rate up to 26.8 per cent of all employees.

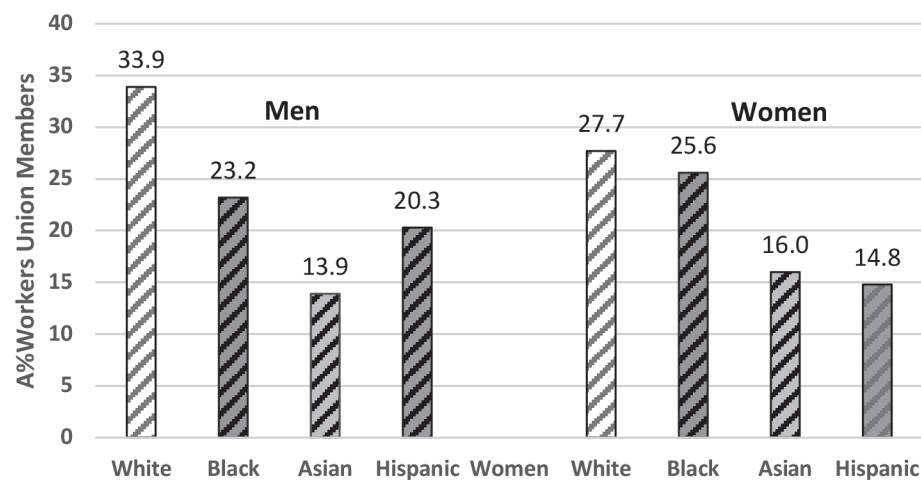
### Age and Gender Differences

Working women are the majority of the union work force in New York City today. Union women account for 22 per cent of all female wage and salary employees, compared to male unionists’ 18.8 per cent share of working men. But the opposite is true on Long Island,

**Figure 4:**  
NYC Union Membership Rates by  
Gender & Race/Ethnicity 2019-2021



**Figure 5:**  
Long Island Union Membership Rates by  
Gender & Race/Ethnicity 2019-2021



where men still hold over a 4 percentage point advantage with their 28.1 per cent membership rate. The city experienced large losses in union membership among both men and women. But by 2021, Long Island union membership grew by another 21,932 men (+13.5 per cent) and 9,396 working women (+6.8 per cent).

Young workers' involvement in recent retail and university organizing efforts have sparked new hopes for unions' future growth prospects. At the moment, low youth unionization rates are still the norm across the country. Nationwide, the latest 2022 government report shows that a mere 4.2 per cent of young workers ages 16 to 24 were union members, the lowest rate of any age

group.<sup>8</sup> The youth rate has dropped by over half from 9.1 per cent in 1983, the first year in which the BLS began collecting annual membership rates by age group. Today, the 763,000 young union members under 25 (over 1 million fewer than in 1983) account for just under 6 per cent of all 14 million union members.

Among major age groups in New York City, the newest working people – Generation Z – have the lowest rate of union membership: among those ages 16-24, it was just 6.9 per cent in 2019-21 – less than half the rate of Millennials 25-34 (Table 2). Twenty-five years earlier, one in five of the city's youngest workers had union coverage. By the late 1990s, that rate had slipped to 13 per cent and it fell more (to 11.3 per cent) during the Great Recession. Although it had recovered somewhat (to 13.4 per cent) by 2014-15, the pandemic cut it nearly in half. The number of the youngest union members was down by 25,363 in 2019-2021

In sharp contrast, on Long Island that same youth cohort recorded more than double the city's youth membership rate: 14.3 per cent – a 4.5 percentage point increase over the rate during the recovery years 2014-16, and a still larger improvement over the level in the Great Recession. Since that time, not only the membership rate but also the number of young union workers rose, by 7,302.

Gen Z's mostly Gen X parents (now in their 40s and 50s) average the highest union membership rates: in the city, one-fourth of workers ages 45-54 and 31.7 per cent of those ages 55-64 are in unions. That raises the question of how much pro-union sentiments may flow from parents to their children and influence their own decisions

on seeking union representation at work.

Note that there are multiple definitions of these generations used by demographers and popular media. Census reports typically use the following birth cohorts and age ranges: Boomers (born 1946-64; current ages: 58-76); Gen X (born 1965-81; current ages: 41-57); Millennials (born 1982-2000; current ages: 22-40) and Gen Z (born 2001-2019; current ages: 3-21). If we apply these broad generational categories to the data, the most recent union density figures confirm again how much the NY Metro Area outpaces the national average in union coverage today, in all age groups.

What can explain the divergent union trends among these cohorts? Does the relatively low rate of current union membership among young workers reflect weaker pro-union and/or stronger anti-union sentiments among youth? Young workers have been the hardest hit by the general wage declines of the past two decades. In fact, while the wage gap between youth and adult workers has widened in many advanced countries, it has grown far more in the U.S. than in others.<sup>9</sup> And the declining affordability of higher education, health insurance and housing over this same period has left more and more college-bound students little choice but to hold down jobs, both before and during college.

In fact, a number of public opinion surveys have found youth more likely than any age group to express positive attitudes toward unions. Of the respondents of all ages to a national Gallup poll in August 2021, 68 per cent of US adults said that they had a favorable view of unions – the highest pro-union sentiment in over 60 years of polling. In a Pew Research survey that same summer, 69 per cent of 18-to-29 year olds said they view unions' impacts positively – over 10 percentage points higher than those surveyed ages 30 to 64.<sup>10</sup>

What then explains the disconnect between the fact that youth generally express stronger pro-union attitudes than adults and the seemingly contradictory low unionization rates of young people? The nature of the jobs that most youth find and of the firms that hire them appear to account for a large share of the explanation. First, their jobs are more likely to be entry-level, low-skill and often part-time or temporary positions in small businesses – all characteristics long associated with low union density. Secondly, as Richard Freeman and James Medoff have argued, job creation in growing new firms tends to disproportionately favor youthful hires. Since job growth has increasingly been dominated by firms in the traditionally nonunion service sector, youth have more and more only found entry jobs in such nonunion industries.<sup>11</sup> Also, large numbers of youth jobs today have little choice but to work for wealthy and notoriously anti-union employers like Wal-Mart and McDonalds, with long histories of spending freely on legal talent and management consultants to punish or fend off any union organizing. And, the 2020 pandemic had especially harsh impacts on youth-intensive job sectors like retail and leisure/hospitality. Those industries are more significant in the tourist-driven downtown job market than on Long Island. We will explore the inter-industry differences in a later section.

Finally, many unions have long neglected organizing young workers, failed to give them leadership roles, and sacrificed their interests in favor of protecting senior employees' pay, benefits and job security. In the past few years, some unions have tried to address this problem. A growing number in New York and elsewhere have intensified their organizing efforts among young immigrants and among graduate teaching assistants at a number of major universities.

## Race & Ethnicity

Today, over 61 per cent of workers in New York City and 40 per cent on Long Island are African American (Non-Hispanic), Asian or Spanish Origin. In the city, the work force's Non-Hispanic white and Asian components are the youngest: 57 per cent are either Gen Z or Millennials.

How has the racial and ethnic mix of employment and union coverage been changing? Compared with the Great Recession years 2008-2010, the only major racial/ethnic group in the city whose employment was still notably reduced by 2019-2021 was also the most vulnerable to pandemic job losses – African Americans. The number of employed African American men fell 4 per cent and the female job count plunged 9.3 per cent, for a total decline of over 70,000. This accounts for some of the union membership drop (-19,000) among Black men and their density decline (from 35.7 per cent in 2008-10, to 31 per cent now). But NYC's Black working women, despite over double the rate of job loss of men, had a smaller loss in union members (-16,700) and a slight increase in their membership rate (up from 34.6 per cent in the Great Recession years to 35.5 per cent today).

Of those race/ethnic groups in the city whose employment numbers had surpassed the pre-pandemic level by 2019-21, both Hispanics and Non-Hispanic whites recorded declines in the number of union members as well as in their fraction of the workforce. Only the fast-growing Asian male workforce increased its union membership (by another 6,597), up from 10.9 per cent in 2008-10 to 12 per cent today.

Among male New Yorkers, African Americans still have the highest union density, followed by Latinos (18.7), Non-Hispanic whites (16.6), and Asian men (12.0). The African American union density rate nationwide also tends to exceed that of any major racial or ethnic group. But, unlike the national pattern, the city's Latino rate has surpassed that of Non-Hispanic white New Yorkers

Among working women, African Americans continue to have the highest proportion of all New York workers covered by a union contract, followed by Latinas (20.7), Non-Hispanic whites (18.6), and Asian women (10.9). The 366,671 women currently employed in union jobs are nearly three times as numerous as their 131,382 Non-Hispanic white male counterparts – long the stereotypical union worker. In fact, the female share of the city's unionized work force has risen such that it has now more than reached parity with the male share. Although the number of working women with union coverage is down (by -25,672) since the Great Recession years, the much steeper decline in union men (-75,906) meant their share of covered jobs declined.

On Long Island, Non-Hispanic white workers skew older: twice as many are Boomers as in any other race/ethnic group. Their union membership rate is over twice as large (33.9 per cent) as in the city, and it has increased markedly over the pre-pandemic level (29.1 per cent). But the Island's Non-Hispanic white majority has for



decades been shrinking, with Boomers' aging and retirement. Just since the Great Recession, their employment count is down by nearly 14 per cent. In sharp contrast, the Island's African American, Asian and Hispanic working populations increased at double-digit rates, pushing up all their union membership numbers.

Among working men in Nassau-Suffolk, Latinos accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the growth in male union members. Among women, Latinas were two-thirds of all new members. And this translated into higher Hispanic density rates: 20.3 per cent of Latino workers are now in a union, up from 17.2 per cent in 2008-10. And the Latina unionization measure has risen from 8.7 per cent then to 14.8 per cent now.

### Immigration

Two-fifths of all union members in New York City are immigrants. Moreover, the foreign-born accounted for one-third of new unionization since the last recession. Naturalized immigrant citizens have a higher union membership rate (27 per cent) than either US-born citizens (20.7 per cent) or non-citizen migrants (11.2 per cent). In our 2007 study we found that, by 2004-2006, 26.2 per cent of the city's immigrant workers held union jobs, accounting for 43.5 per cent of the entire union work force. Moreover, foreign-born U.S. citizens were the main source of union growth from the late 1990s through the mid-2000s, accounting for 88 per cent of the increase in total union coverage in those pre-recession years citywide.

That has not been the case since then. Regardless of whether compared to the Great Recession or to 2014-16, both citizen and non-citizen immigrants have gained fewer jobs since, and the number with union coverage has declined (Table 3). Their union density has shrunk as well: 31 per cent of naturalized immigrant workers had union coverage in 2014-16, but the membership rate is only 27 per cent today. Non-citizen immigrants, mostly recent arrivals, have union density (11.2 per cent, down 4 percentage points) less than half that of foreign-born US citizens. In contrast, native-born New Yorkers, have recaptured more jobs post-pandemic, but far fewer are in unions. Their employment has risen by 16,965 since pre-pandemic days, but the number with union representation is down by over 90,000. In fact, the decline in US-born union members accounts for 51 per cent of the city's total membership decline and has driven down the union density rate as well.

On Long Island, a very different process is underway. Long Island immigrants are a far smaller fraction of the work force (17 per cent) than in the city, with lower union density than the native-born. But the number of immigrants in unions rose by over 17,000 (+43 per cent) since the pre-pandemic period. Foreign-born men and women continue to fill an expanding role in the work force. Though far less numerous than in the city (from which some have relocated), they now account for over 25 per cent of local jobholders. Employment of more recent, non-citizen workers has increased since the pre-COVID years by nearly 53,000 (+51 per cent growth), and the number with union jobs has almost tripled. This has raised their

union density from just 6.4 up to 12 per cent. Among settled immigrants with US citizenship, the density rate has been relatively stable as employment has risen (though by less). And union representation, with additional 5,000 immigrant union members. Overall, since the Great Recession, foreign-born workers in Nassau-Suffolk have accounted for nearly half (+46%) of new union members. So immigrants, though less than one-fifth of the work force, account disproportionately for over two-fifths of Long Island's new union members.

The size of the aging native-born work force has kept contracting (by over 11,500), but the number with union coverage has gone in the opposite direction: up by over 12,000. Together with the increased number of union jobs among foreign born Long Islanders, the higher coverage among the native born caused the number of Long Island union workers to grow by 3.4 per cent, raising the union density rate from 25 per cent in 2014-16 to an average 26 per cent in 2019-21.

### Public and Private Industry Sectors

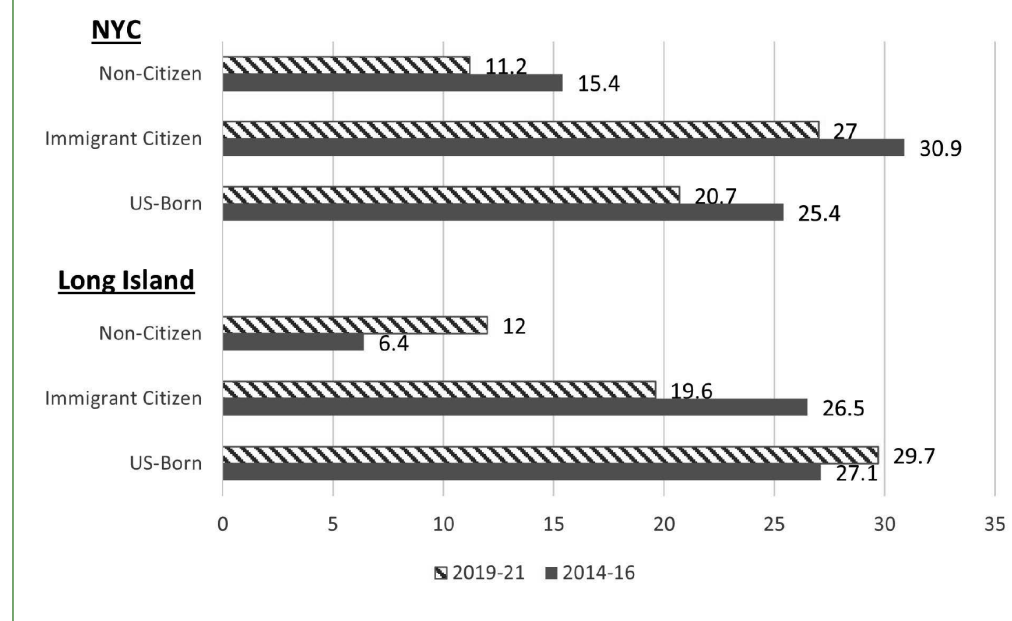
There has long been a wide gap between union membership levels in the private and the public sectors. Over the last half-century nationwide, private sector coverage has dropped to from one-fourth to just 6.1 per cent in 2021. But in the public sector today, over five times as large a share of the work force (33.9 per cent) has union coverage, a density rate that eroded little until the last five years. Though the public sector today accounts for just 15 per cent of all employment, it is home to half the entire union work force.

The unionization gap between public and private sector jobs is even wider in New York. In the 2020 pandemic lockdown, employment in New York State plunged by over 704,000 compared to the year before. Of these, only 2.5 per cent were in the public sector. The private sector's job loss rate was nearly ten times that of the far smaller public sector.

One important reason for the public sector's strength here was the fact that two out of three workers in the state in that sector have union representation – the highest rate of any state. The number of public employees with union membership actually rose by 25,000 in 2020, to a total of 874,000.

How does the New York Metropolitan Area compare with these statewide patterns? Our findings in Table 4 reveal a similarly enormous public-private density gap, but substantially higher union coverage locally in both sectors. Comparing the broader 2019-21 period to our pre-pandemic base years, Table 4 shows how much New York City's private sector shrinkage (by -60,448 employees) was accompanied by big declines in both the number of union members (down by -152,530) and the union share of all private employment (down to 13 per cent – a 4.7 percentage point drop). The city's local government jobs are the most highly unionized in the country. Nearly three of every four employees in that subsector today is a union member. But in the years between the Great Recession and 2014-16, public sector employment of New Yorkers

**Figure 6:**  
Immigrant/Native Differences in Union Membership Rates (%),  
2014-16 & 2019-21



contracted by 40,569 (-7.7 percent). Over 8 in 10 of these were local government positions – some 90 per cent of which were held by union members.

This turned around under Mayor Bill deBlasio, whose 2014-21 administration expanded City Hall positions to record-breaking levels.<sup>13</sup> Every major facet of city government increased its headcount, some by double-digits like information technology (+50 per cent) and sanitation (+33 per cent). By May 2019, the full government job count (federal, state and local) had reached 588,900. Over the following 12 months, driven by the pandemic, it shrank by about 5,000, then by another 15,000 through spring 2021.

The need for “essential workers” to cope with the pandemic, coupled with union job securities, limited the 2019-21 job shrinkage. But, we found that the union work force still declined by 23,191 over this period. With it, the public sector's union density rate declined by 1.5 percentage points.

Only the less unionized state government subsector in the city had employment gains most recently (by over 22,000, helping to raise the union job count, as well as the membership density rate. The number of NYC-based state government staff in unions increased by over 15,000, as did the union density rate. It rose to 60 per cent, up from 58.5 per cent in mid-decade.

The 2020 pandemic and its immediate aftermath continue to destabilize the city's public sector. Unlike many private sector employers, the city government has been far less willing to offer

more flexible workweeks with work-from-home options. That, coupled with typically lower salaries and more sluggish hiring procedures, has been cited as driving more workers into the private sector and raising the public sector vacancy rate of unfilled jobs.<sup>14</sup>

On Long Island by 2021, private sector employment had rebounded from the pandemic far faster than downtown. In the same period that the city was losing over 60,000 jobs and over twice that many union members, Nassau-Suffolk's private sector gained in both employment and unionization. Of the more than 40,000 new workers added to private firms' employment rolls by 2019-21, 81 per cent held union coverage.

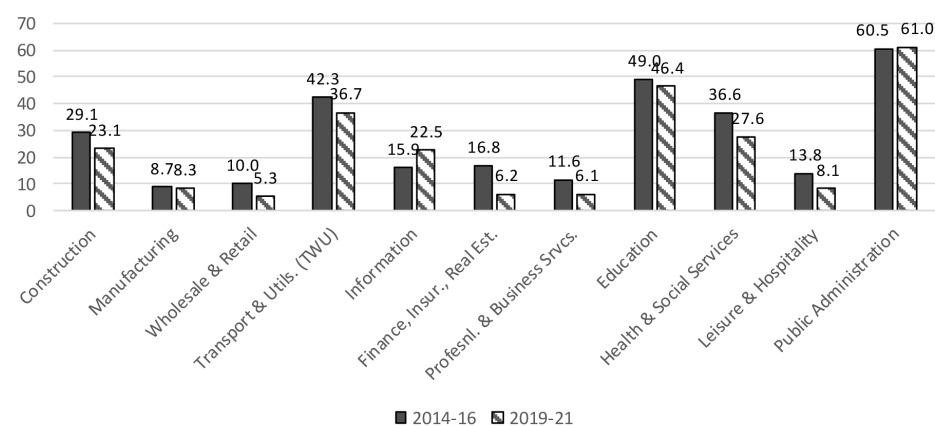
These private sector employment and unionization gains partially counterbalanced reductions in the public sector. Long Islanders' employment with federal and local government agencies (nearly all union

jobs) shrank by a total of 28,436. As in the city, state government positions went the other way, nearly doubling to 63,300. That added over 18,000 new union members to union rolls. As a result, public sector unions suffered a net loss of 6,557 fewer members – a nearly 4 per cent decline. Though modest, that was enough to lower the sector's membership density rate from 71 per cent pre-pandemic to 68.1 per cent today.

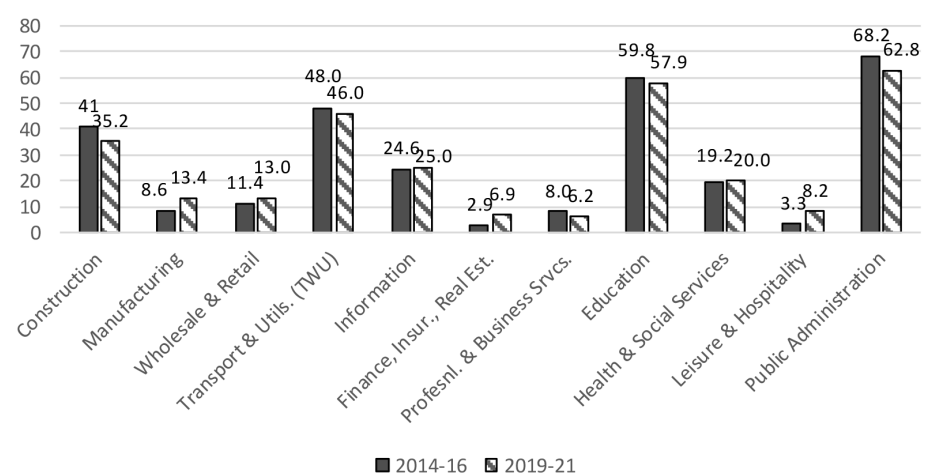
Yet the public sector clearly remains of enormous importance to both local employment and unionization trends. It now accounts for 13.4 per cent of New York City's employment and 44 per cent of its union members. On Long Island, the public sector represents a larger proportion of the resident population's jobs than in the city, and a larger share of total union membership. That sector accounts for nearly one-fifth of local employment and holds half of all Long Island residents in a union job.

This is, on at least one score, rather surprising. The US Supreme Court's 2018 *Janus* decision overturned 41 years of precedent and stripped all public sector unions of the right to collect service fees (“fair share fees”) from all workers receiving their collective bargaining and grievance handling services. The ruling sparked widespread fears that it would lead free-riding workers to drain unions of their main funding source and cut membership as well. In doing so, the current Court overruled the 1977 Court's *Abood* decision, which allowed unions to collect compulsory fees for nonpolitical services, but not for any political lobbying or support of political candidates.

**Figure 7:**  
NYC Industry Rates of Union Membership (%),  
2014-16 & 2019-2021



**Figure 8:**  
Long Island Industry Rates of Union Membership (%),  
2014-16 & 2019-2021



New York’s legislature, anticipating the *Janus* decision, amended the state’s Taylor Law in 2017 to limit unions’ obligations to cover grievance processing for free rider employees who refuse to pay any union service fees. And many unions have stepped up their education and member engagement activities. The risk of *Janus* eroding union finances remains, but its long-term impacts will depend on how much it energizes them to mobilize members new and old to committed support of their unions.<sup>15</sup>

### Industry-Specific Union Differentials

How has unionization varied by industry of employment? Across the country, the top five industries with the highest union membership rates today are: the Public Sector (33.9 per cent), Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities (15.4), Education Services

(12.9), Construction (12.6) and Information (10.0). The least unionized segments of the private sector, all with less than three per cent of their employees in unions, are: Finance, Insurance & Real Estate (FIRE), Professional & Business Services and Leisure & Hospitality Services.

The New York Metro Area has a broadly similar mix of organized industries, but each with membership rates two or more times above the national figures (Table 5). In New York City, the most unionized industries as of 2019-21 are: Public Administration (60.5 per cent), Education (46.4 per cent), Transportation, Warehousing & Utilities (36.7), Health & Social Services (27.6) and Construction (23.1). Union membership is at its lowest, single-digit rates in: Wholesale & Retail Trade, FIRE, Professional & Business Services, Leisure & Hospitality Services and Manufacturing. The latter, once New York’s largest, heavily unionized private sector employer, now accounts for just 2.5 per cent of the city’s employees and barely 1.0 per cent of its union members. Health care alone now has nearly 25 times as many unionized employees as manufacturing and over three times as high a union density.

How did the city’s union rolls change industry-by-industry between the pre-pandemic period and 2019-2021? All but three of the 11 broad industry categories in Table 5 had declines in union membership. The two hardest hit industries, Health Care and FIRE, together lost over 98,000 union positions – accounting for over half of the city’s total membership decline (-176,679). Adding the losses in Wholesale & Retail Trade

and in Leisure & Hospitality Services, these four industries account for four out of five union membership losses. The latter three also experienced marked employment shrinkage in 2020-21, as stores and tourism venues closed and much of Wall Street and the real estate industry scaled back operations. Health Care and Social Services employment expanded, but only by 2.1 per cent.

Three industries saw modest gains of from about 3,000 to 9,000 new members since 2014-16: Education Services, Information and Public Administration. Only in the case of the latter two were these gains strong enough to also raise their membership rates, to 22.5 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively.

Compared to downtown, Long Island has had a similar set of five industries with the highest union coverage as of 2019–21: Public Administration (62.8 per cent), Education Services (57.9), Transportation, Warehousing & (46.4), Construction (35.2) and Information (25.0). But very much unlike the city, Nassau-Suffolk unions won membership gains in 7 of the 11 industry categories. Just two industries – Construction and Education – accounted for over half of the region’s new union members. But, given more rapid employment increases, the fraction of their workers in unions fell to 35.2 and 57.9 per cent, respectively. Health Care and Leisure/Hospitality each gained over 4,000 new union members – growth sufficient to raise their union membership rates as well.

Long Island’s more pandemic-vulnerable sectors mostly achieved employment rebounds ahead of the city. Of the three private sector industries that lost membership, Information experienced the largest decline (-2,806) in residents represented by unions, followed by the lightly unionized Professional & Business Services (-2,082) and Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities (-1,155). Job cuts in the highly organized local government subsector cost unions 4,000 fewer member jobs over this period, pushing the public sector’s overall union density rate down nearly six percentage points by 2019-21. So Long Island’s employment and union membership growth was mainly a private sector phenomenon.

### Union-Nonunion Wage Differentials

Over the past three years, how have new and surviving union members fared in their earnings relative to nonunion workers? The best available information to find out comes from the US Labor Dept.’s Current Population Survey. Each month it questions many thousands of working people sampled nationwide about their labor earnings and earnings-relevant characteristics. I follow a long tradition of researchers examining usual hourly wage and salary data in its Earners Study database from outgoing rotation groups.<sup>16</sup>

The BLS each year publishes national tables of gross median weekly earnings figures for full-time union and nonunion wage and salary workers subdivided by sex, age, race/ethnicity, industry, occupation and other characteristics. In its latest 2021 estimates, overall median weekly earnings were: \$1,169 for union members and \$975 for nonunion employees nationwide. That is, the median union employee has a 20 per cent pay premium over nonunion workers. Among women, both union and nonunion workers earn less than the median male employee, but the gender gap is much narrower among female union members. The union/nonunion earnings differential among women is 24.9 per cent, well above the 14.8 per cent male union premium.<sup>17</sup>

In light of the national evidence of a large union pay premium, how do union and nonunion pay compare today in the region with still-high union density: New York? In Tables 7 and 8, we present our earnings findings on all wage and salary workers in New York City and Long Island separately. Like the standard BLS analysis, these statistics are drawn from CPS samples of full-time wage and salary workers, excluding all incorporated or unincorporated self-

employed. Among full-time New York City workers in the most recent years, the median hourly wage was \$22 for union members, compared to \$16.76 for those lacking union coverage. That is, the gross union-nonunion hourly wage differential appears to be over 31 percent. On Long Island, in contrast, the overall differential is 8.5 per cent in favor of union workers. Median union hourly pay is \$20, compared to the \$18.50 nonunion median.

In order to draw comparisons by age, education and other characteristics, with samples large enough for reliable estimates, I pooled all New York City and Long Island employees into a NY Metro data set. Looking first at gender inequalities, the estimates in Table 7 show that both male and female union members earn double-digit pay premiums over their non-union counterparts. In fact, regardless of age group, race/ethnicity or educational level, local employees covered by union contracts tend to earn significantly higher wages and salaries than workers lacking union representation.

Table 8 presents median wages by broad sectors as well as individual industries. In both the private and public sectors, workers with union representation earn, at the median, over 20 per cent higher pay than nonunion workers. The gross hourly pay differential is especially high and positive in Construction, Information, and Leisure & Hospitality Services. (It is highest in Other Services, but that group’s subsample is relatively small and the estimate must be viewed with caution). But the estimated pay differentials in Finance, insurance, real estate (the FIRE sector) and Professional & Business Services are quite large, negative values, seeming to show far higher nonunion pay. In only two of the 13 industries did median nonunion pay exceed that of union members: Manufacturing and Educational Services.

Of course, skill, experience, occupation, firm size and many other factors besides union coverage could be behind such wage differences. If, for example, union members are more likely to be older, more skilled and living in generally higher wage labor markets, then those factors may explain more of their pay advantage than does their union membership. Without controls for such factors, the explanatory power of unions could be overstated. On the other hand, one could underestimate unions’ independent pay effects if they influence nonunion employers to pay higher wages too.<sup>18</sup>

A standard approach to this question among labor economists is to use multivariate regression analysis to estimate the earnings impact of union coverage, independent of a variety of other pay-related control variables. I ran standard earnings functions on the pooled 2019-2021 NYC-Long Island metro data set, with the natural log of hourly wages and salaries as the dependent variable. The sample was limited to employed adults ages 25 and over, who are neither currently enrolled in school nor self-employed. The control variables include educational attainment, length of work experience, employment sector, sex, number of children, immigrant status and controls for race and Spanish Origin. Education, experience and sector are also known to capture occupational and industry effects.



Multivariate Wage Regressions  
2019-2021 (Dependent Var: log(Wage/hr))

	Union Coverage	Education (years)	Work Exper (years)	Public Sector	Black	Hispanic	Immigrant Citizen	Immigrant NonCitizen	Married Mom	Unmarried Mom	Single Woman No Children
1/	0.1299 <sup>s</sup>	0.0417 <sup>s</sup>	0.0112 <sup>s</sup>								
2/	0.1366 <sup>s</sup>	0.0417 <sup>s</sup>	0.0115 <sup>s</sup>	-0.0114							
3/	0.1233 <sup>s</sup>	0.0380 <sup>s</sup>	0.0154 <sup>s</sup>	-0.0017	-0.1527 <sup>s</sup>	-0.0580 <sup>s</sup>	-0.0887 <sup>s</sup>	-0.0732 <sup>s</sup>	-0.1470 <sup>s</sup>	-0.170 <sup>s</sup>	-0.088 <sup>s</sup>

Notes: S=statistically significant coefficient estimate. Regression controls include (years experience) 2 and year dummy variables. Full coefficient estimates & diagnostics available by request. Source: Author's analysis of 2019-21 CPS-ORG monthly microdata.

The results indicate that, regardless of the model specification, workers with union coverage in the NY Metro Area earn 12-13 per cent more than otherwise comparable non-union employees. The estimated union impact is highly statistically significant (1 per cent level), as are all the control variables except one: employment in the public sector. That result is consistent with my recent research findings that, where NY Metro public sector earnings average above those in the private sector, the gap is largely attributable to greater experience, education and union representation of public sector employees.<sup>19</sup>

The findings suggest, as expected, that more years of schooling and work experience tend to raise earnings, but that women, both mothers and those single and childless, are at a significant disadvantage to men of similar education, experience, job sector, union coverage and other characteristics.<sup>20</sup> Overall, New York women earn 16.3 per cent less than the male control group. When disaggregated by marital status and parenthood, the results confirm that mothers without a spouse present face the biggest pay disadvantage, followed by married mothers. The child care crisis sparked by the 2020 pandemic lockdown and its aftermath magnified their difficulties in juggling parenting and job needs. While childless working women faced fewer such obstacles, the findings here show that they still earned significantly less than comparable men. African American, Hispanic and immigrant workers are also at a substantial pay disadvantage (ranging from -5 to -15 per cent), even after controlling for major earnings-relevant characteristics. These metro-area results are largely consistent with a rich empirical literature of mostly national data samples has long shown that, even after adjusting for all such factors, union members tend to earn higher wages than otherwise-similar nonunion employees.

However, focusing solely on hourly pay comparisons is likely to understate the socioeconomic advantages available to most workers with union representation. Health insurance, pensions, disability and vacation pay have increasingly been major items in collective bargaining, and sometimes take precedence for members over bigger wage hikes. Unions also typically provide a variety of valuable services to their members in addition to higher wages and benefits. These include: grievance handling, communicating workers' concerns to management, training opportunities, job

placement assistance, and social and political activities. Research has found that union members also tend to have more information about and resources to claim overtime pay, workers' compensation, family and medical leaves, and O.S.H.A. safety protections.<sup>21</sup> The latter took on unprecedented importance with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other common union benefits include member discounts for legal services, consumer goods, home heating recreation and travel.

#### Summary and Concluding Remarks

This study investigates the latest trends in unionization in New York through original empirical analysis of large U.S. Census Bureau microdata sets. The principal direction and characteristics of union coverage nationwide are compared with the case of the New York Metropolitan Area, the nation's largest metro labor market. To make statistically reliable estimates of detailed components of these trends, we relied on multiyear samples with adequate numbers of observations for reliable statistical estimates of specific worker groups, industries, etc. The analysis tracks changes in union membership since the Great Recession to 2021, with separate analyses by sex, age, race, ethnicity, immigration status and industry.

Among the key highlights of our findings are that, first, New York State has the highest unionization rate in the continental U.S. Only New York and Hawaii can boast of having over one-fifth of their workforce in unions. And the downstate New York Metropolitan Area today has the highest union membership rate of all the country's large metro regions. Of its wage and salary employees, 21.4 per cent are in unions – over twice the national average outside New York.

Within the metro area, I found that the fraction of employees in unions increased in both New York City and its suburbs in 2020, when our region was the national epicenter of the pandemic. A broadly similar pattern was common among the other largest metro areas we considered. But it appears to have been largely due to temporary compositional effects of the crisis on the labor force. Since lower-wage, largely nonunion workers were the most vulnerable to massive lockdown layoffs that year, higher-paid workers with union protections mostly held onto their job. So, even though the number of New York City residents in labor unions fell

by -73,606 in 2020 – union members' share of the city work force rose from 20.2 per cent in 2019 to 21.3 in 2020.

New York City's deep employment plunge and slow recovery have left its unions with far fewer members and wiped out nearly all the pandemic bump in the union density rate. By 2021, the 689,000 city residents who were union members (20.5 per cent of the work force) still numbered 7.3 per cent less than in pre-pandemic 2019.

In sharp contrast, on Long Island both the number of union members and their share of the population have risen -- from 25.7 per cent in unions in 2019 to 27 per cent the following year. With 26.5 per cent of its employed residents union members by 2021, this marks the fifth consecutive year that Long Island unions have represented a larger fraction of the work force than their NYC counterparts. The Island experienced a shallower 2020 employment drop and faster rebound than downtown. Though it ended 2021 with an employment count still slightly below the pre-COVID level, the unemployment rate has fallen below three per cent.

Underlying these trends in union membership are often dramatic variations in unions' fortunes among workers differentiated by age, gender, race and ethnicity, immigrant status, hours of work, public-private sector, and industry. We found that New York City's Millennials – by far the largest single age group – are more than twice as likely as their cohort nationwide to be union members (19.6 per cent vs. 9.2 percent) and now account for nearly one in four of all the city's union members. And New Yorkers in their late teens/early twenties are over three times as likely as youth elsewhere to have union protections today.

New female union workers accounted for two-thirds of the post-recession rise in union membership in New York City, and women are now a majority of the city's union members. While the city's membership rate has fallen among men to 23.9 per cent today, the female rate has moved from 24 up to 25.7 per cent over the same period. On Long Island, new female union workers accounted for 61 per cent of the net increase in membership since the recession. Union contracts now cover 25.9 per cent of men and 24.2 per cent of women workers – and the gap between them has been cut in half since the late 1990s.

African American women in New York City are more likely than any other demographic group, male or female, to hold jobs with union representation. The black female union density rate of nearly 42 per cent is followed by that of African American men (37.2 per cent), Latina women (26.8 per cent), and Latino men (25 per cent). In fact, white non-Hispanic men today account for only 15 per cent of New York City's unionized work force. On Long Island, the white male union share is nearly three times as large (42 per cent), but a growing majority of its union workers are now women and minority men.

Over two-fifths of all union members in the city are immigrants. Moreover, the foreign-born accounted for one-third of all new unionization since the last recession. Naturalized immigrant citizens have a higher union membership rate (31 percent) than either

US-born citizens (25 percent) or non-citizen migrants (6 percent). Long Island immigrants are a far smaller fraction of the work force, with lower union density than the native-born. But the number of immigrant citizens in unions rose nine per cent since the Great Recession.

The public sector now accounts for 37 per cent of New York City union members and has a density twice the national average. On Long Island, 71 per cent of its more than 237,000 public sector workers are in unions, a membership rate that has held fairly steady over the past decade. The Long Island public sector represents a larger proportion of the resident population's jobs than in the city. And it accounts for the majority of all Long Island residents in a union job. The relative stability of the highly unionized public sector in New York continues to serve as an important counteracting force against dramatic declines in total union density of the sort so common nationwide.

Which specific industries have accounted for union membership growth and decline of late? In New York City, all but three of 11 broad industry categories had declines in union membership. The two hardest-hit industries, Health Care and Financial Services, together lost nearly 100,000 union positions – accounting for over half of the city's total membership decline. Adding the losses in Wholesale & Retail Trade and in Leisure & Hospitality Services, these four industries account for four out of five union membership losses. The latter three also experienced marked employment shrinkage in 2020-21, as stores and tourism venues closed and much of Wall Street and the real estate industry scaled back operations. Three industries saw modest gains of from about 3,000 to 9,000 new members since 2014-16: Education Services, Information and Public Administration. Only in the case of the latter two were these gains strong enough to also raise their membership rates, to 22.5 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively.

Compared to downtown, Nassau-Suffolk unions won membership gains in 7 of the 11 industry categories. Just two industries – Construction and Education – accounted for over half of the region's new union members. Although Long Island's more pandemic-vulnerable sectors mostly achieved employment rebounds ahead of the city, three private sector industries lost membership: Information; Professional & Business Services; and Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities.

Finally, we found a substantial wage advantage for the typical New Yorker working for a unionized employer compared to comparable nonunion employees. Among NYC/Long Island adult residents in full-time jobs, union members earn 12-13 per cent higher hourly wages – even after controlling for age, education, job experience, gender, race, immigration status, employment sector and other relevant characteristics. The union advantage in full compensation is even greater, once we add health insurance, pensions, disability and vacation pay, job safety and security provisions in typical union contracts. Such benefits have increasingly been major items in collective bargaining, and sometimes take precedence for members over bigger wage hikes.

The union movement in New York and nationwide has weathered the pandemic years with notable advantages: record-high public approval, a highly pro-union president in the White House and historic organizing breakthroughs at Amazon, Apple, Starbucks and other fiercely anti-union employers. In July, at the national convention of the AFL-CIO in Philadelphia, Liz Schuler, the federation's first female president won enthusiastic support from its member unions for a new commitment to organize at least 1 million new workers. But that goal stretched over the next 10 years – a very modest aim for just an extra 100,000 new union members per year, or less than a 1 per cent increase. And it confronts a hostile anti-worker bloc in the US Senate that continues to veto the union-friendly PRO Act and to freeze funding for the National Labor Relations Board at 2014 levels. Whether labor unions can make serious headway in reversing their decades-long decline will depend on how well the younger generation can leverage current organizing and political strength to achieve far more ambitious goals.

*Gregory DeFreitas is the Augustus Weller Professor of Economics and Director, Center for Study of Labor & Democracy at Hofstra University.*

*REGIONAL LABOR REVIEW, vol. 25, no. 1 (Fall 2022).*

© 2022 Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy, Hofstra University.

**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> DeFreitas, G. and B. Sengupta, “The State of New York Unions 2007,” Regional Labor Review (Fall 2007); DeFreitas, G. and B. Sengupta, “The State of New York Unions 2012,” Regional Labor Review (Fall 2012); & DeFreitas, G. and Sengupta, “The State of New York Unions 2017,” Regional Labor Review (Fall 2017).
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022. “Union Members – 2021,” BLS Press Release (1/20/22), www.bls.gov. Over half of all the country’s union members are concentrated in just seven states: New York, California, Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington. Starting in 2018, Hawaii has had the highest density rate of any state.
- <sup>3</sup> For technical details on IPUMS CPS data files, see: Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, J. Robert Warren and Michael Westberry. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 9.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V9.0>
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Hirsch, Barry T and David A. Macpherson. 2002. “Union Membership and Coverage Database from the Current Population Survey: Note,” Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 56 (2), January: 349–54; Hirsch, Barry T and David A. Macpherson. 2003. “Union Membership and Coverage Database from the Current Population Survey: Note,” Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 56 (2), January: 349–54. See our technical appendix in the full report for more details.
- <sup>5</sup> Among many studies, see for example: Bennett, James and Bruce Kaufman. 2001. The Future of Private Sector Unionism in the US, Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe; Bronfenbrenner, Kate, et al. (ed). 1998. Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; and the studies cited therein.

- <sup>6</sup> On COVID’s local job impacts and recovery efforts, see: DeFreitas, Gregory, “New York’s Plague Year Economy: Reopening into Recession or Recovery?” Regional Labor Review (Spring/Summer 2020) and “New York’s Post-Pandemic Economy: Will Recovery Reshape Labor Prospects?” Regional Labor Review (Spring/Summer 2021).
- <sup>7</sup> These local unemployment statistics are not seasonally adjusted.
- <sup>8</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2022. “Union Members -- 2021,” BLS Press Release (1/20/22), www.bls.gov.
- <sup>9</sup> See the international comparisons in DeFreitas, Gregory (ed). 2008. Young Workers in the Global Economy: Job Challenges in North America, Europe and Japan, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- <sup>10</sup> Brenan, Megan, “Approval of Labor Unions at Highest Point Since 1965,” Gallup Poll (9/02/2021). Gramlich, John, “Majorities of Americans say unions have a positive effect on U.S. and that decline in union membership is bad,” Pew Research Report (9/03/2021).
- <sup>11</sup> Freeman, Richard B. and James Medoff. 1984. What Do Unions Do? New York: Basic Books.
- <sup>12</sup> See the case studies of youth in unionized low-wage jobs in Tannock, Stuart. 2001. Youth At Work: The Unionized Fast-food and Grocery Workplace. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- <sup>13</sup> Goodman, David, “Now Hiring: Under de Blasio, New York’s Government Grows to Record Level,” NY Times (10/11/2016)
- <sup>14</sup> Rubinstein, Dana and Emma G. Fitzsimmons, “Why City Workers in New York Are Quitting in Droves,” NYTimes (7/13/2022).
- <sup>15</sup> Fernbach, Karen, “Will Public Sector Unions Survive the Supreme Court’s Janus Decision?” Regional Labor Review (Fall 2018).
- <sup>16</sup> One common difficulty of pay estimation with the CPS is that reported earnings are “topcoded” with a maximal value that has not been raised annually. This earnings cap was last lifted in 1998 (from \$1,923/week); the current topcode (\$2,884.61) has been unchanged for 24 years. As a result of this artificial cap on high earners, trends in pay inequality may be consistently underestimated. For a recent discussion of research issues with topcoding, see Gould, Elise, et al., “Stagnant topcode thresholds threaten data reliability for the highest earners and make inequality difficult to accurately measure,” EPI Working Economics Blog (April 2022): www.epi.org. BLS recently announced plans to start regular topcode updates in: “Changes to 2022 CPS Public Use Microdata Files,” BLS Press Release (1/14/2022): www.bls.gov.
- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022. “Union Members in 2021,” BLS Press Release: www.bls.gov
- <sup>18</sup> See evidence of this in Rosenfeld, J., et al., “Unions, Norms and the Rise of US Wage Inequality,” American Sociological Review (8/2011).
- <sup>19</sup> DeFreitas, G., “Is New York’s Public Sector Workforce Overpaid?” Regional Labor Review (Spring/Summer 2018): 3-10.
- <sup>20</sup> For an accessible selection from the vast research work on gender discrimination, see: Benard, S. & S. Correll, “Normative Discrimination and the Motherhood Penalty,” Gender & Society (2010); Goldin, Claudia, Career and Family, Princeton U. Press, 2022.
- <sup>21</sup> Bivens, Josh, et al. 2017. “How Today’s Unions Help Working People,” EPI Report (8/24/17): www.epi.org. Freeman, Richard and Joel Rogers. 1999. What Workers Want. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

**Table 1.**  
Employment & Unionization Changes in Major Metros, 2017-2021

Metro Area	Employment	Union Members	Employment	Union Members	Changes, 2017-21 (%)	
	2017	2021	2017	2021	Employment	Union Members
Atlanta	2,666,580	2,939,402	113,453	160,791	10.2	41.7
Chicago	4,276,694	4,203,132	599,251	580,215	-1.7	-3.2
Houston	2,934,172	3,095,967	106,648	93,095	5.5	-12.7
Los Angeles	5,680,448	7,351,953	814,954	652,727	29.4	-19.9
New York	8,783,907	9,711,899	1,919,039	1,835,521	10.6	-4.4

**Table 2.**  
Age/Sex Differences in Union Membership Rates, 2008-21

NYC	2008-10		2014-16		2019-21		2008-21 Member Change	2014-21 Member Change
	Union Membership	Membership Rate (%)	Union Membership	Membership Rate (%)	Union Membership	Membership Rate (%)		
All Ages	800,884	24.0	875,985	24.8	699,306	20.9	-101,578	-176,679
Men	408,541	24.0	434,023	23.9	332,635	18.8	-75,906	-101,388
Women	392,343	24.0	441,962	25.7	366,671	21.8	-25,672	-75,291
16-24	39,294	11.3	47,284	13.4	21,921	6.9	-17,373	-25,363
25-34	177,407	18.9	204,959	19.6	160,104	15.3	-17,303	-44,855
35-44	168,022	22.8	185,486	24.3	154,512	20.6	-13,510	-30,974
45-54	223,540	30.2	220,037	31.1	149,502	25.0	-74,038	-70,535
55-64	164,345	35.9	161,996	32.9	165,186	31.7	841	3,190
65 & up	28,276	23.7	56,224	33.1	49,796	23.8	21,520	-6,428
<b>Long Island</b>								
All Ages	300,924	24.4	302,869	24.5	332,252	26.8	31,328	29,383
Men	162,469	26.0	163,225	25.9	184,401	28.1	21,932	21,176
Women	138,455	23.0	139,644	23.0	147,851	23.8	9,396	8,207
16-24	13,401	8.4	13,997	9.8	21,299	14.33	7,898	7,302
25-34	58,276	25.6	48,314	24.3	58,384	24.62	108	10,070
35-44	78,374	25.4	81,195	29.6	81,987	27.54	3,613	792
45-54	93,701	31	90,881	30.3	87,447	32.55	-6,254	-3,434
55-64	48,187	25.9	53,867	21.9	64,900	27.45	16,713	11,033
65 & up	8,985	18.6	14,614	19.2	15,044	19.0	6,059	430

Table 2: Note: Rates above show percent of all non-managerial wage/salary employees who reported union membership. Source: author’s calculations from monthly Consumer Population Survey-Outgoing Rotation Groups (CPS-ORG): U.S. BLS, 2014-2022.



**Table 3.**  
Immigrant & US-Born Differences in Union Membership Rates, 2014-21

NYC	2014-16			2019-21			2014-21 Member Change
	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	
Foreign-Born Citizen	852,727	263,109	30.9	755,458	203,974	27.0	-59,135
Foreign-Born Non-Citizen	683,675	105,521	15.4	682,925	76,488	11.2	-29,033
US-Born Citizen	1,996,379	507,355	25.4	2,013,344	416,762	20.7	-90,593
<b>Long Island</b>							
Foreign-Born Citizen	161,785	33,118	20.5	194,286	38,080	19.6	4,962
Foreign-Born Non-Citizen	103,703	6,590	6.4	157,157	18,859	12.0	12,269
US-Born Citizen	972,019	263,161	27.1	926,853	275,275	29.7	12,114

**Table 4.**  
Public/Private Sector Union Membership Rates, 2014-2021

NYC	2014-16			2019-21			2014-21 Member Change
	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	
Private	3,046,213	540,679	17.7	2,985,765	388,149	13.0	-152,530
Public	486,587	335,306	68.9	462,736	312,115	67.5	-23,191
Federal	67,812	31,915	47.1	63,551	26,692	42.0	-5,223
State	83,346	48,773	58.5	105,637	63,910	60.5	15,137
Local	335,409	254,618	75.9	293,772	220,329	75.0	-34,289
<b>Long Island</b>							
Private	1,000,354	134,594	13.5	1,040,826	167,573	16.1	32,979
Public	237,152	168,274	71.0	237,470	161,717	68.1	-6,557
Federal	29,081	19,128	65.8	26,421	17,861	67.6	-1,267
State	34,687	23,814	68.7	63,622	41,863	65.8	18,049
Local	173,385	125,331	72.3	147,609	102,146	69.2	-23,185

**Table 5.**  
NYC Union Membership Rates & Changes, by Industry of Employment

NYC	2014-16			2019-21			2014-21 Member Change
	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	
Construction	199,602	58,084	29.1	183,319	42,347	23.1	-15,738
Manufacturing	120,115	10,450	8.7	87,260	7,243	8.3	-3,207
Wholesale & Retail	406,270	40,627	10.0	343,857	18,224	5.3	-22,403
Transport & Utils. (TWU)	208,434	88,168	42.3	215,701	79,162	36.7	-9,005
Information	109,516	17,413	15.9	117,266	26,385	22.5	8,972
Finance, Insur., Real Est.	400,971	67,363	16.8	327,280	28,801	8.8	-38,562
Prof. & Business Services	482,931	56,020	11.6	520,240	30,434	5.9	-25,586
Education	327,135	160,296	49.0	356,666	165,493	46.4	5,197
Health & Social Services	604,459	221,232	36.6	617,414	170,406	27.6	-50,826
Leisure & Hospitality	342,680	47,290	13.8	293,950	23,810	8.1	-23,480
Public Administration	148,377	89,768	60.5	151,881	92,648	61.0	2,880
Other Services	182,291	19,742	10.8	234,168	14,729	6.3	-5,013

Note: TWU=transportation, utilities and warehousing services. FIRE=finance, insurance and real estate services.  
Data Source: see table 1.

**Table 6.**  
Long Island Union Membership Rates & Changes, by Industry of Employment

NYC	2014-16			2019-21			2014-21 Member Change
	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	Employed	Union Members	Membership Rate (%)	
Construction	63,113	25,876	41	95,171	33,500	35.2	7,624
Manufacturing	78,582	6,758	8.6	64,019	8,579	13.4	1,820
Wholesale & Retail	163,351	18,622	11.4	153,871	20,003	13.0	1,381
Transport & Utils. (TWU)	88,482	42,471	48.0	89,817	41,316	46.0	-1,155
Information	40,838	10,046	24.6	28,959	7,240	25.0	-2,806
Finance, Insur., Real Est.	117,192	3,399	2.9	83,444	5,758	7.06	2,359
Prof. & Business Services	139,219	11,138	8.0	146,061	9,056	6.2	-2,082
Education	157,040	93,910	59.8	175,993	101,900	57.9	7,991
Health & Social Services	193,051	37,066	19.2	206,642	41,328	20.9	4,263
Leisure & Hospitality	71,775	2,369	3.3	84,186	6,903	8.2	4,535
Public Administration	70,538	48,107	68.2	70,227	44,103	62.8	-4,004
Other Services	54,327	3,015	5.6	79,905	5,953	7.5	2,938

Note: TWU=transportation, utilities and warehousing services. FIRE=finance, insurance and real estate services.  
Data Source: see table 1.

**Table 7**  
Earnings Gaps: Union & NonUnion FT Workers, by Age, Sex, Race/Ethnicity and Educational Attainment

	2019-21 Hourly pay, full-time workers (\$median)		
	NonUnion	Union	Union Pay Premium (%)
<b>NYC</b>	\$16.76	\$22.00	31.26
<b>Long Island</b>	18.50	20.00	8.11
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	18.24	24.00	31.58
Female	16.50	18.19	10.24
<b>Age:</b>			
20-29	16.00	18.50	15.63
30-44	17.50	22.75	30.00
45-64	18.20	22.00	20.88
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White	20.00	22.50	12.50
Black	16.00	18.00	12.50
Asian	17.23	26.00	50.90
Hispanic	16.00	20.00	25.00
<b>Education [ages 25+]</b>			
Less than HS	15.00	20.50	36.67
HS Grad	17.00	18.50	8.82
Some College	18.05	22.00	21.88
College Grad	23.00	25.00	8.70

Note: the wage sample includes all NYC and Long Island full-time workers ages 25+, neither self-employed nor enrolled in school.

**Table 8**  
NY Metro Earnings Gaps: Union & NonUnion FT Workers, by Industry of Employment

Industry	2019-21 Hourly pay, full-time workers (\$median)		
	NonUnion	Union	Union Pay Premium (%)
<b>NYC + Long Island:</b>			
Construction	\$20.00	\$28.00	40.00
Manufacturing	19.00	15.00	-21.05
Wholesale & Retail	15.60	20.00	28.21
Transport & Utils. (TWU)	18.68	22.50	20.45
Information	21.00	35.00	66.67
Finance, Insur., Real Estate	20.00	24.00	20.00
Prof. & Business Services	18.45	20.00	8.40
Education	17.49	16.00	-8.52
Health & Social Services	17.00	20.00	17.65
Leisure & Hospitality	15.00	23.75	58.33
Public Administration	18.00	20.00	11.11
Other Services	17.00	25.00	47.06
<b>All Private Sector</b>	<b>16.43</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>21.73</b>
<b>All Public Sector</b>	<b>17.40</b>	<b>22.00</b>	<b>26.44</b>

Note: the wage sample includes all NYC and Long Island full-time workers who are neither self-employed nor enrolled in school.

## Job Market Strengthens in NY Metro Area, Fall 2022

by Margo McCormack

Job growth and falling unemployment have been widespread across the country and in the local labor market so far this autumn. At summer's end, the national unemployment rate fell from 3.7% in August to 3.5% in September, according to preliminary, seasonally adjusted estimates by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Black and Hispanic jobless rates (5.8% and 3.8%, respectively) in September still exceed those of whites (3.1%) and Asians (2.5%), but all have fallen by over two percentage points since the same time last year. That's been driven by 21 straight months of job growth, averaging a very healthy +420,000 new jobs/month in 2022. And fears that the tightening labor market might stoke labor shortages and price inflation have eased as the worker quit rate has kept falling since May. But, faced with stubbornly high price inflation, average hourly earnings have dropped 3.8%.

Within the city, the jobless rate has fallen in every borough since the same time last year, as have the numbers unemployed (Table 12). Citywide, 205,000 are still unemployed, down by 124,500 over the last 12 months. (Note that this and most other local area published

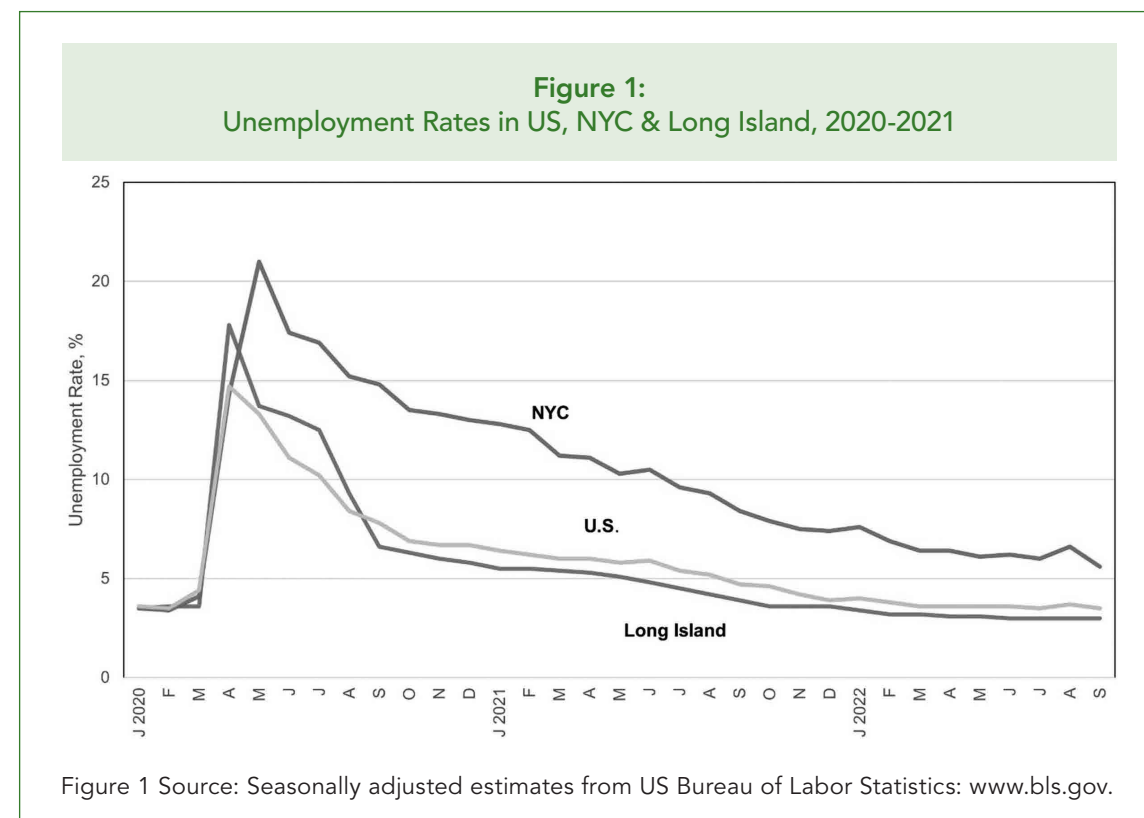


Figure 1 Source: Seasonally adjusted estimates from US Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov.

New York City's unemployment has also plunged since the pandemic peak of 21% (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Though still well above the national average, it reached 6.6% this August (seasonally adjusted), down from 9.3% a year earlier. And preliminary September numbers show it dropping a full percentage point, to 5.6%. Month-to-month local estimates can be volatile, but the fairly steady downward direction suggests a clear pattern.

Moreover, the city's job growth rate (now 6.1% over the past 12 months) is nearly double the national average. According to the monthly establishment payroll survey, it still falls 102,900 below (-2.2%) the pre-pandemic level in August 2019. But if the growth rate continues to outpace the national average, local job counts and unemployment levels could finally close the gap with pre-pandemic levels in the new year.

statistics from the household survey are not seasonally adjusted.) Over this same period, the number of NYC residents who were employed rose to 3.75 million, an increase of 73,500. So, about 51,000 of the unemployed dropped out of the labor force.

Where have the city's rapidly growing new jobs been coming from? Just three industries accounted for nearly three-fourths of total job growth over the past 12 months. These three sectors recorded both the most rapid growth rates and the largest numbers of jobs created: leisure and hospitality (+75,000 jobs, or +17.8%); educational and health services (+72,200 jobs, or +6.1%); and professional and business services (+64,400, or +8.3%).

Professional and Business Services grew across all sectors, with employment services growing 22%. Education and Health Services