

# Union jobs disappearing at local, state and national levels, study finds

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The recession is finally taking its toll on national, state and local unionization rates, according to UCLA's annual report on organized labor.

Following an uptick last year, unionization rates fell between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010, by just more than half a percentage point in California and by a full percentage point in the five-county Los Angeles metropolitan area, researchers at UCLA's Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE) found.

"Given the duration and depth of the recession, it was inevitable that union jobs would be hit," said Lauren Appelbaum, the report's lead author and director of research at the IRLE. "Jobs are continuing to disappear, and unionized jobs continue to disappear along with them."

"The State of the Unions in 2010: A Profile of Union Membership in Los Angeles, California and the Nation" publishes on Labor Day, Sept. 6.

Even with the losses, the Los Angeles metro area accounts for nearly half of the union members in California, which is the most heavily unionized state in the nation.

"In recent years, unions in Los Angeles have been at the head of the pack, and they've been having successes that unions are not having elsewhere," said IRLE director Christopher C. Tilly, a professor of

[urban planning](#) at the UCLA School of Public Affairs. "That makes Los Angeles an important laboratory for unions and for labor-watchers."

The findings in the report are based on labor figures in the U.S. Current Population Survey, conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. [Census Bureau](#). The UCLA report tracks year-to-year changes in unionization for the nation, California and the Los Angeles metropolitan area, which includes the counties of Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Ventura and San Bernardino.

The report found that unionization rates also dipped nationally, but by a smaller margin than in the Los Angeles metro area and the state. The overall unionization rate in the U.S. was 12.1 percent, down from 12.4 percent the previous year.

The proportion of the workforce that is unionized now stands at 16.5 percent in Los Angeles and 17.6 percent in California. With gains made by unions in 2008 and 2009 now wiped out, Los Angeles and California unionization rates have returned to their 2007 levels. Unionization rates had been climbing steadily since 2007, after having been relatively flat for a decade.

Especially heavily hit this year was the nation's private sector, which for the first time ever employed fewer union members than the public sector. The public sector has long boasted a larger concentration of union members, but because the private sector is so much larger, the absolute number of union members in the private sector had always exceeded that in the public sector.

The number of union workers employed in the private sector fell from approximately 7.91 million in 2008 to 7.19 million in 2009, while the number of public-sector union workers dropped from 7.86 million to 7.76 million.

"These figures are less a reflection on how well the public sector is doing than a testament to how many jobs have been lost in the private sector," Appelbaum said.

From 2008 to 2009, unionization rates were down across a range of industry groupings, with the most significant losses in:

- Transportation and utilities, which fell in Los Angeles from 41.5 percent to 34.3 percent and in California from 41.7 percent to 36.4 percent.
- Manufacturing, which fell in Los Angeles from 9.7 percent to 7.0 percent.
- Health care and social assistance, which fell in Los Angeles from 19.4 percent to 15.7 percent.
- Public administration, which fell in California from 58.1 percent to 52.1 percent and across the nation from 33.3 percent to 31.9 percent.

Wholesale and retail trade posted the only significant increase in unionization rates over the prior year. Statewide, the industry's unionization rate went from 8.7 percent to 10.6 percent, a development that left researchers scratching their heads.

"This is probably due to the fact that there are fewer workers in this industry, and often, the first jobs to go are non-union, which would increase the proportion of union workers overall," Appelbaum said.

In keeping with a recession that has hit male workers harder than female workers, evidence continued to mount of a "mancession." Both locally

and statewide, male unionization rates lost ground to female unionization rates. Male rates in Los Angeles dropped from 17.4 percent in 2008 to 16.0 percent in 2009 and in California from 17.9 percent to 17.1 percent.

The proportion of Latino workers who are unionized also dropped, falling in Los Angeles from 16.2 percent last year to 12.9 percent this year. In fact, Latino workers traded places with workers of Asian ancestry in 2009, becoming the least unionized ethnic group in Los Angeles, the state and the nation.

"In the long term, Latino unionization has increased greatly," Tilly said. "It's one of the great success stories of the Los Angeles labor movement. But short-term changes are driven very much by what's happening in the industries that attract workers of specific ethnicities. Latinos are concentrated in construction, which is getting hammered in Los Angeles, and I suspect that industry's woes are taking a toll on overall unionization rates among Latinos. If and when we see a recovery in California, I would expect the long-term trend to resume."

Unionization rates remained higher for workers with more education. Workers with a college degree have the highest unionization rate in the nation, at 14.1 percent. In California and Los Angeles, workers with some college education, as well as those with a college degree, have higher unionization rates than those with less education.

"The stereotypical union member is a blue-collar worker, but increasingly, that's not as true," Appelbaum said. "Public sector workers tend to be more highly educated, and there's a higher unionization rate in the public sector."

Union membership carries significant benefits, the report found. Unionized workers earned more per hour, on average, than their non-

union counterparts in Los Angeles (\$5 more), California (\$4.50) and the nation (\$4.30).

As in the past, Sacramento boasted the state's highest unionization rate, followed by the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Fresno and San Diego.

Moving forward, union jobs will remain vulnerable as state and local governments across the nation continue to grapple with dramatic budget shortfalls, the report predicts.

"States are currently short \$121 billion, and the gap in state budgets is expected to rise to \$140 billion by the end of the 2010 fiscal year," Appelbaum said. "Unless the federal government provides the states with money to balance budgets, services will continue to be cut, and workers are going to continue to be laid off from jobs that are highly unionized."

**More information:** To read the complete report, go to [www.irle.ucla.edu](http://www.irle.ucla.edu)

Provided by University of California - Los Angeles

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