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California Union Membership

A TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY PORTRAIT

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THE CHANGING LEVEL AND COMPOSITION OF UNION MEMBERSHIP IS a long-standing focus of research on the organized labor movement. In the United States union density began falling in the late 1950s; the decline accelerated in the mid-1970s and has continued since.¹ With the election of John Sweeney to the AFL-CIO presidency in 1995, and the renewed commitment to organizing that he promoted, many hoped for a reversal of this trend. Initially, such optimism seemed

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1. "Density" refers to the percentage of union members (or workers covered by union contracts) among wage and salary employees in a given labor market or region. Density is a key index of labor union strength. Its meaning is complex, however, given the winner-take-all industrial relations system that exists in the United States, under which unions either represent all the workers in a given workplace or none of them. One reason that density figures fail to fully capture the extent of union influence is that, in addition to representing their members directly in collective bargaining, unions indirectly generate improvements in the pay, benefits, and working conditions of nonunion workers in a variety of ways. For example, many employers seek to avoid unionization by preemptively offering wages and benefits similar to those of their unionized competitors. The workers they employ thus receive many of the same economic advantages as union members, despite their nonunion status. Similarly, and on a far larger scale, the efforts of organized labor in the political and legislative arenas often result in improvements for nonunion workers in the form of minimum wage laws, unemployment benefits, health and safety legislation, workers' compensation, and the like. Moreover, the standard convention of calculating density using the number of wage and salary workers as the denominator can be misleading, since managers, supervisors, "confidential" employees, and others are ineligible for

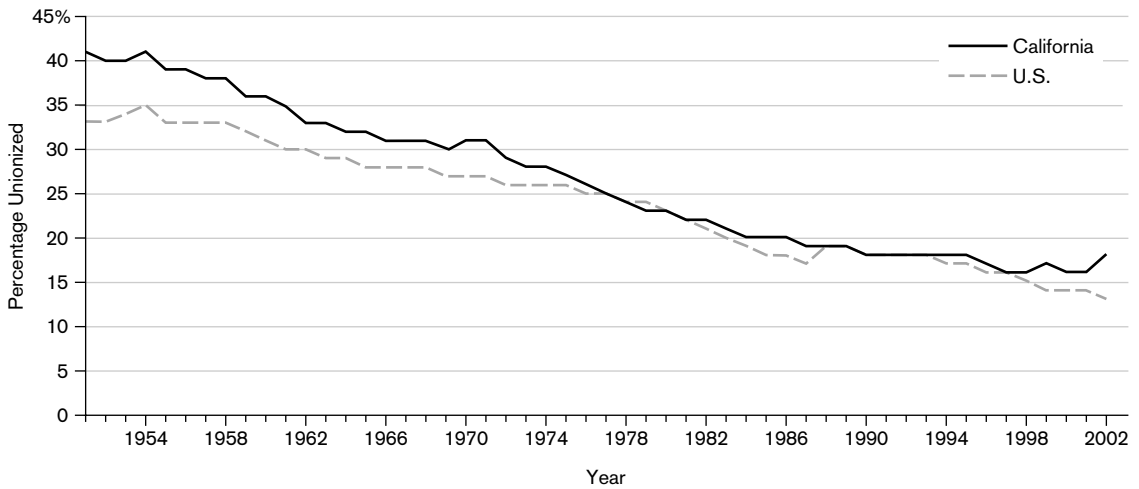


FIGURE I.1. Union Density, U.S. and California, 1951–2002

SOURCE: Hirsch and MacPherson, various years.

warranted: several large unions poured resources into recruiting new members in the late 1990s, and the downward trend was briefly arrested (although not reversed). After the century’s end, however, the decline resumed, and by 2002 the unionized percentage of the wage and salary workforce had fallen to 13.3%, lower than any time since the early 1930s (Figure I.1).

California stands out as an exception to the general pattern over the past few years. Against all odds, union density has inched upward in the nation’s most populous state, from 16.1% of all wage and salary workers in 1998 to 17.8% in 2002. Although several states have higher absolute levels of density, the recent upturn in California is highly unusual.² This chapter presents an analysis of union membership patterns in the state and explores the reasons for its recent divergence from the nation as a whole. Our analysis centers on a new source of data: the 2001–02 California Union Census (CUC), a survey of all local unions in the state sponsored by the Institute for Labor and Employment of the University of California.³ We also draw on national

union membership under U.S. labor law (see Cobble 1994). Still, union density is the most widely used, and arguably the single best, measure of organized labor’s strength and influence over time, across sectors of the economy, and geographically.

2. In 2002 seven states (New York, Alaska, Hawaii, Michigan, New Jersey, Illinois, and Washington) had higher levels of density than California; however, density increased in only three of these states between 1998 and 2002. In New York, density rose marginally from 25.4% in 1998 to 25.6% in 2002; in Illinois, the gain was more substantial, from 18.9% to 19.7%. Only Alaska, where density rose from 20.4% to 24.4% over the period, had a greater increase than California (Hirsch and MacPherson, various years).
3. Most U.S. unions have “locals” representing workers in a particular sector or geographic

data from the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS). On this basis we present a more detailed portrait of unionism in California than has been available for many years.⁴

Actively recruiting new members into the ranks of the labor movement, as the current leadership of the AFL-CIO has urged its affiliates to do, is the main way in which unions themselves can help to increase density. But many other factors influence the density level. If employment declines in a unionized industry or occupation, or if employment expands in a non-union (or weakly unionized) industry or occupation, union density will fall. Conversely, if employment expands in a unionized industry or occupation, or if it declines in a non-unionized one, density will increase. As is often pointed out, given the impact of shifting employment trends and normal labor market growth and turnover, simply to maintain U.S. union density at current levels would require unions to organize about 500,000 new members annually. To increase density by one percentage point nationally requires organizing nearly a million new members (Freeman 2003). This makes the recent increase in density in California all the more impressive.

In 2001–02 the CUC found a total of 2,583,349 union members and a total of 2,980,360 workers who were covered by collective bargaining agreements (not all of whom were dues-paying union members) in the state of California.⁵ The CPS reports slightly lower figures for the state: 2,578,700 union members, or 17.8% of all wage and salary workers, and 2,760,389 covered workers, or 19.1%, for 2002.⁶ These density levels are substantially higher than those in the nation as a whole, where only 13.3% of wage and salary workers were union members in 2002, and 13.6% were covered by collective bargaining agreements.⁷ As Figure 1.1 shows, however, this is a recent development: from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, California density levels

area. In most cases local unions are affiliated with national unions, often called “Internationals” because they include (or formerly included) some locals in Canada. Following standard usage inside the labor movement, in the text we refer to all national unions as Internationals.

4. For more details on our data and methodology, see the Appendix to this chapter.
5. Although unions are legally required to represent everyone in the bargaining unit for which they negotiate a collective agreement, in some cases the workers in the unit are required neither to become union members nor to pay union dues. This can be the case if the union is unable to win a “union shop” agreement, which requires all workers hired by the employer to become union members after a fixed period of time. The alternative to a union shop is typically an “open shop,” where formal membership in the union is voluntary. In other cases, mostly in the public sector, unions may have an “agency shop” agreement, which stipulates that all represented workers pay an agency fee whether or not they are union members.
6. It is not surprising that the CUC, which collected data directly from unions, found a higher figure for covered workers than the CPS, which is based on a household survey, since non-members covered by union contracts are often unaware of their status.
7. The CPS figures in 2001 were 16.4% for union membership in California, with 18.0% covered by agreements; nationally the figures were 13.5% and 14.8%, respectively. In later sections of this chapter, we merge the 2001 and 2002 CPS data, since the CUC data overlap 2001 and 2002.

were closer to the U.S. average (although in the 1950s and 1960s California density was consistently above the national average).

In many respects, trends in California closely resemble those in the United States as a whole. In both cases union membership growth has been concentrated in the public sector, while the private sector has presented far more difficult challenges to the labor movement. The overall distribution of union membership by industry and occupation is generally similar in the state and the nation as well. Union membership patterns are highly gender-differentiated, with women disproportionately concentrated in some unions (especially those based in the public sector) and men in others (most notably in the building trades), both in California and nationwide.

The recent divergence between density levels in the state and the nation is linked to several factors that distinguish California from the rest of the United States. Historically, the industrial unions (and the manufacturing sector in which they are based) have been weaker in California than elsewhere in the nation, and in recent years membership losses in the state also have been smaller in this sector than in the nation as a whole. At the same time, union growth in the public sector, as well as in health care, has been much more rapid in California than in the nation over the past few decades.

Another factor distinguishing California from the United States as a whole is that union organizing efforts have been more effective in the state than in the nation (see Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, this volume). The leading force is the nation's most rapidly growing union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).⁸ The SEIU has historically accounted for a greater share of total union membership in California than in the nation, and this has contributed greatly to the divergence in density trends. California is also distinguished by the presence of a few large unions whose membership is either limited to the state or overwhelmingly concentrated there, and some of these unions are unusually active in the organizing arena as well.

California's demographic composition is also unusual in that it includes a disproportionate share of the nation's growing population of immigrant workers and has (largely as a result of immigration) a workforce that is more racially and ethnically diverse than that of the nation as a whole. Economic inequality is also more extreme in California (especially Southern California) than in the nation (Milkman and Dwyer 2002). The state's large low-wage workforce, many of whose members are foreign born, has been a key target in recent organizing efforts. When those efforts have succeeded, they have contributed to the growth in California's union density; nevertheless, recent immigrants remain underrepresented in union ranks, as we discuss below.

Finally, organized labor has more political influence in California than in most other states. This has not only helped to maintain existing union membership but also facilitated the recruitment of new, previously non-union workers into the labor movement. For example, in 1999 the SEIU added 74,000 home health care workers to its ranks after a lengthy labor-led campaign for a change in state law (Greenhouse

8. See the list of union abbreviations at the beginning of this volume.

1999). At the local level the labor movement also has found ways to successfully parlay its political clout into legislative and other efforts that indirectly or directly support organizing (see Meyerson 2001; Logan, this volume).

THE DISTRIBUTION OF UNION MEMBERSHIP BY INDUSTRY, SECTOR, AND AFFILIATION

The contemporary composition of union membership in California has several characteristics that distinguish it from that in the United States as a whole, reflecting the state's rather unusual labor history. The industrial unionism that emerged nationally in the 1930s and 1940s never achieved the strength in California (nor in the West generally) that it enjoyed elsewhere in the nation. In the mid-1950s, employment in manufacturing comprised a smaller proportion of total employment in California than was the case nationally, and union density in the state's manufacturing sector lagged behind the national level as well. Two-thirds of California's union members were employed outside the manufacturing sector, compared to about two-fifths in the nation as a whole, so that what one careful mid-twentieth-century observer called "nonfactory unionism" dominated the region (Kennedy 1955, 5–7).

In this early period, the unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), especially the Teamsters and the building trades unions, were numerically dominant in the state. In 1955, on the eve of the AFL's merger with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the California Department of Industrial Relations (1956, 9) reported that only 12% of the state's union members were affiliated with the CIO, which primarily organized within basic manufacturing, compared to 29% of those in the United States. Fully 81% of the state's union members were AFL-affiliated at this time (with another 7% in independent unions), compared to 61% nationally. By 1987 (the most recent year for which such data are available, other than the 2001–02 CUC data discussed below) only one of the twelve largest International unions in the state was a former CIO affiliate (California Department of Industrial Relations, 1987).⁹

Although the distinction between AFL and CIO unions is far less meaningful today, the weight of this history is still palpable: the unions formerly affiliated with the CIO now account for a relatively small share of California's union members, compared to the nation as a whole. Moreover, in 2001–02, manufacturing was the only major sector of the economy in which California's union density (9.3%) was lower than the nation's (14.6%) (Figure 1.2).¹⁰

9. In 1987 the state's top twelve unions, ranked by membership size, were IBT, SEIU, UFCW, IAM, UBC, CWA, IBEW, Actors and Artistes, IUOE, LIUNA, HERE, and NALC (California Department of Industrial Relations 1989, 13). CWA is the only former CIO affiliate in this group. See Figure 1.4a for the 2001–02 ranking.

10. Workers in aerospace, the state's largest manufacturing industry from the 1950s until its dra-

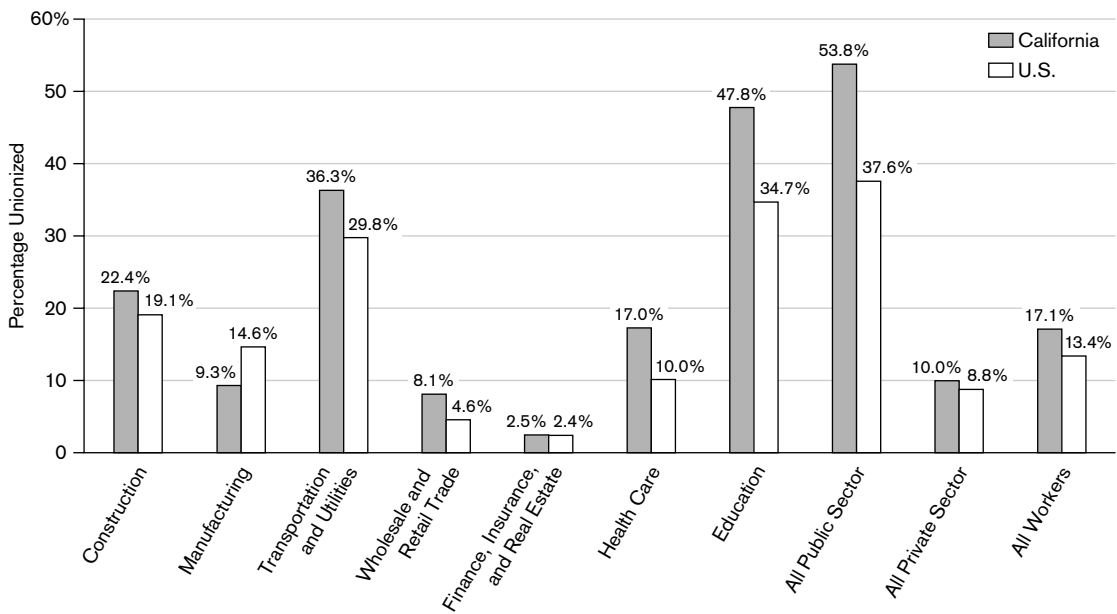


FIGURE 1.2. Union Density, by Selected Industry Group and Sector, U.S. and California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.

N = 25,052 for California; N = 355,670 for the United States.

The unevenness of unionization in California is illustrated in Figure 1.3, which compares the 2001–02 distribution across major industry groups of California’s union members (Figure 1.3a) with the distribution of the state’s employed wage and salary workers (Figure 1.3b).¹¹ For example, over a fourth (26.2%) of all California

matic decline in the early 1990s, were largely represented by the International Association of Machinists (IAM), an AFL affiliate. By the late 1960s the UAW also had a significant presence in California, representing workers in aircraft and defense plants as well as in some half-dozen auto assembly plants that were then operating in the state. At its peak in 1968 the UAW was ranked sixth in membership among all International unions in California. Even then the state’s nonmanufacturing union membership was more than double the level in manufacturing (California Department of Industrial Relations 1969, 8–9). In the 1970s and 1980s a wave of plant closings decimated the state’s basic manufacturing sector, followed in the 1990s by the collapse of the aerospace and defense industries. Union density in manufacturing in California has lagged behind the nationwide level for many years. In 1988, for example, the state’s union density in manufacturing was 15.6%, compared to 22.1% in the United States; at that time California ranked thirty-fourth among the fifty states in manufacturing density, but seventeenth in overall union density (Hirsch and MacPherson 1999, 108).

11. We collapsed some of the industry groups that the CPS presents separately. Our “transportation and utilities” group includes “transportation,” “communications,” and “utilities and san-

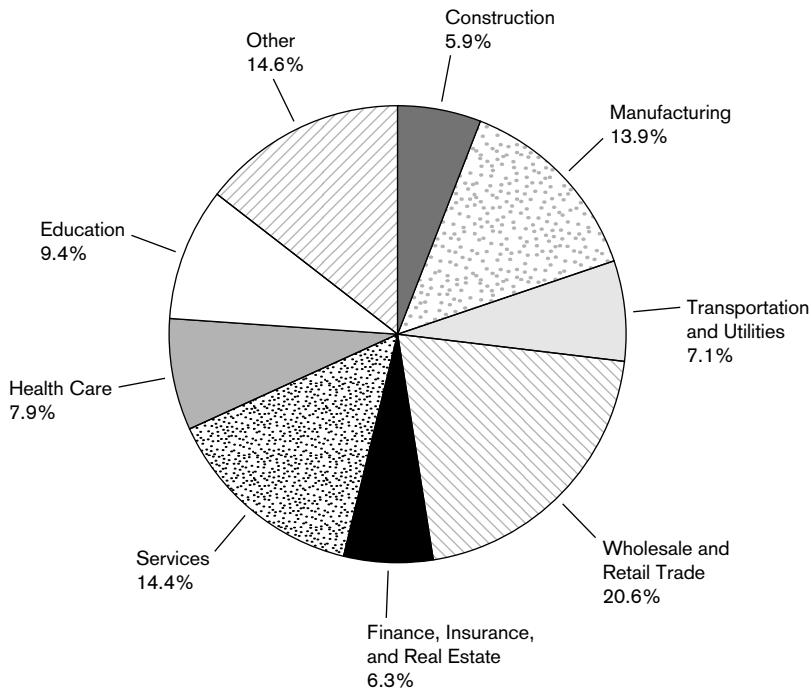


FIGURE 1.3a. Employed Workers, by Selected Industry Group, California, 2001–2002
 SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.
 N = 25,052 for California.

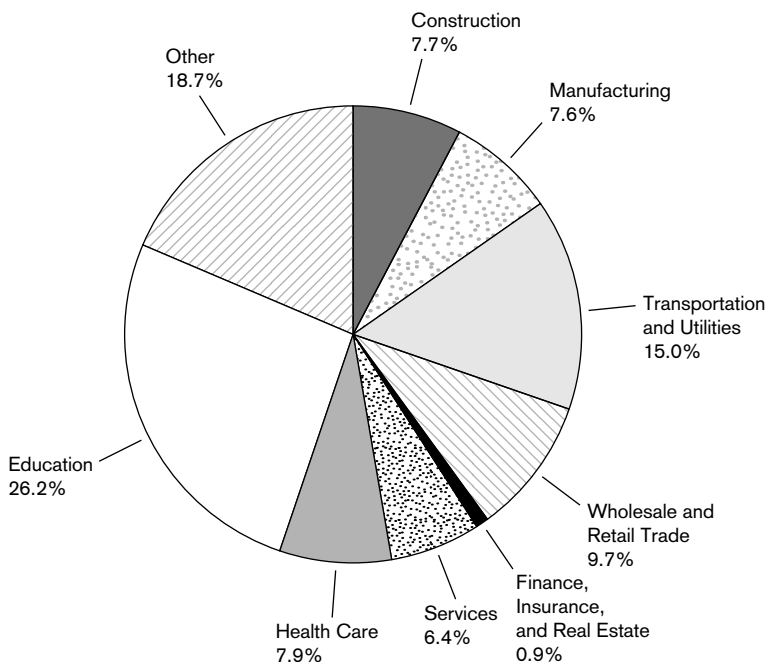


FIGURE 1.3b. Union Members, by Selected Industry Group, California, 2001–2002
 SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.
 N = 25,052 for California.

union members, but under a tenth (9.4%) of the state's wage and salary workers, were in the education sector. Similarly, transportation and utilities accounted for 15.0% of unionized workers but only 7.1% of wage and salary workers. By contrast, wholesale and retail trade, combined with finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) and other services, accounted for 41.3% of all wage and salary workers, but only 17.0% of union members in the state.¹²

Public-sector and health care unionism have been the main source of organized labor's growth throughout the nation in recent decades. In both these arenas, however, California has moved far ahead of the United States as a whole, with much higher density rates in the state than in the nation (see Figure 1.2). Whereas union density in 2001–02 was 37.6% for public-sector workers nationally, in California it was a far higher 53.8%. (The gap in private-sector density rates between the nation and the state was much smaller, with rates of 8.8% and 10.0%, respectively.) Similarly, union density in health care was 10.0% nationally, but 17.0% in California.¹³ Yet, because public-sector and health care industry workers comprised only about 16% and 8%, respectively, of all employed wage and salary workers (both statewide and nationally), the relatively high density rates in these sectors have limited impact on the overall picture.

The SEIU is the state's powerhouse in both these sectors, whereas nationally it has been less dominant, sharing the field more evenly with other players, most importantly the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). The CUC found that in 2001–02 the SEIU represented 16.5% of all California union members and 20.3% of all workers covered by collective bargaining agreements in the state (Figure 1.4a). In the public sector the SEIU's share was even greater, accounting for nearly one-fourth (24.2%) of all union members in the state (Figure 1.5a). And in health care (which includes both public- and private-sector employers), SEIU represented over half (53.5%) of all union members and nearly two-thirds (64.3%) of all covered workers. Nationally, SEIU's membership is larger than that of any other union except for the National Education Association (NEA) (Figure 1.4b). Nevertheless, it accounted for only 7.8% of all union members nationwide in 2001, less than half its share in California.

itary services: our "services" group includes "private household services," "business and repair services," "personal services," and "entertainment and recreation"; and our "health care" group includes "hospitals" and "medical services, other than hospitals." Occupational group breakdowns are also included in the CPS data; we analyzed these but do not report any results here.

12. Unionization is also uneven *within* many industries. Construction is a good example: although precise data are not available on the state level, residential construction is virtually nonunion today, whereas density remains substantial in commercial and highway construction.

13. The health care industry includes a substantial public-sector segment, in which density is much higher than it is in private-sector health care. In California, 43.1% of public-sector health care workers are unionized, compared to 13.4% of private-sector health care workers; in the United States the figures are 27.5% and 8.1%, respectively.

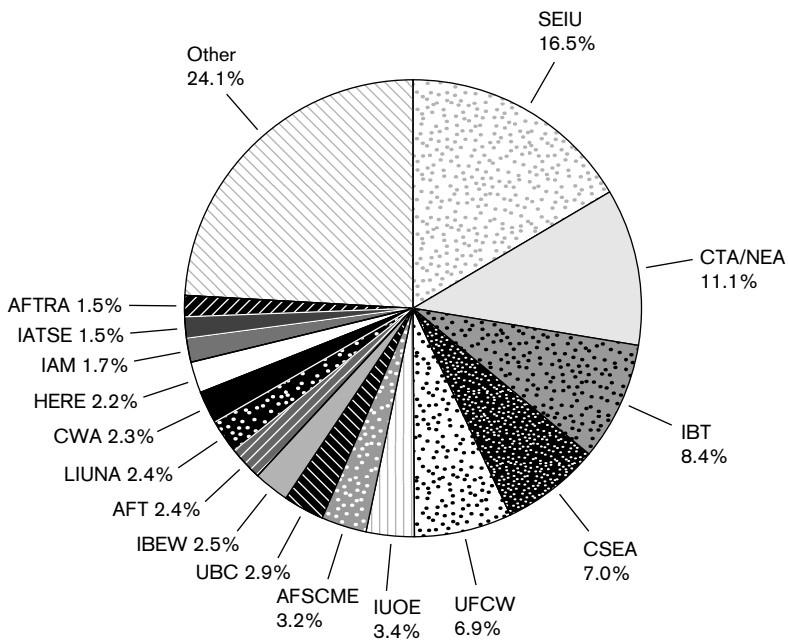


FIGURE 1.4a. Distribution of Union Members, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 1,352 local unions.

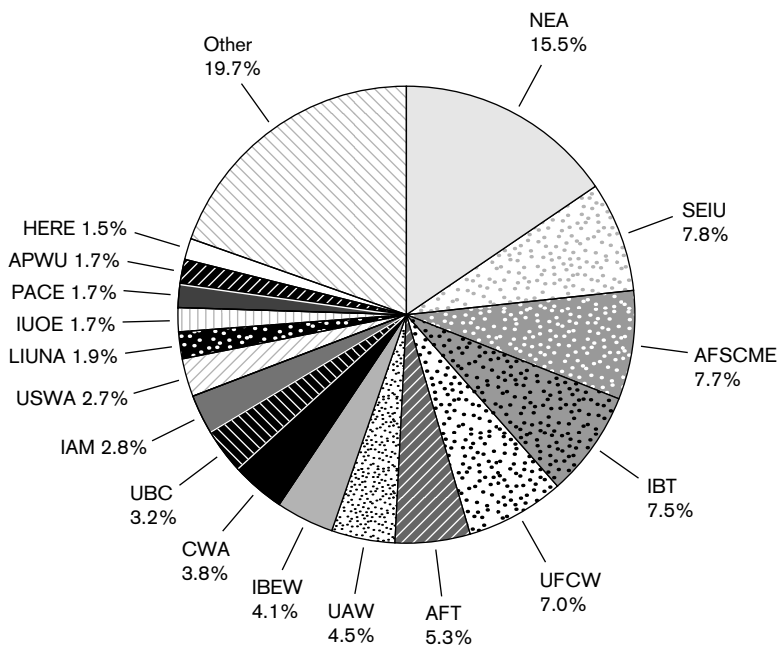


FIGURE 1.4b. Distribution of Union Members, by International Union, U.S., 2001

SOURCES: Gifford 2002, 2, 238–239; <http://www.carpenters.org>.

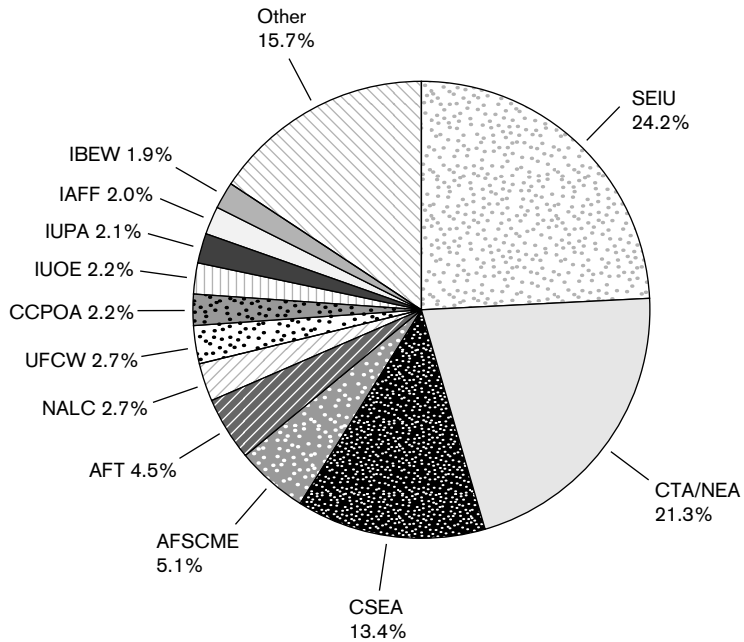


FIGURE 1.5a. Distribution of Public-Sector Union Members, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 1,352 local unions.

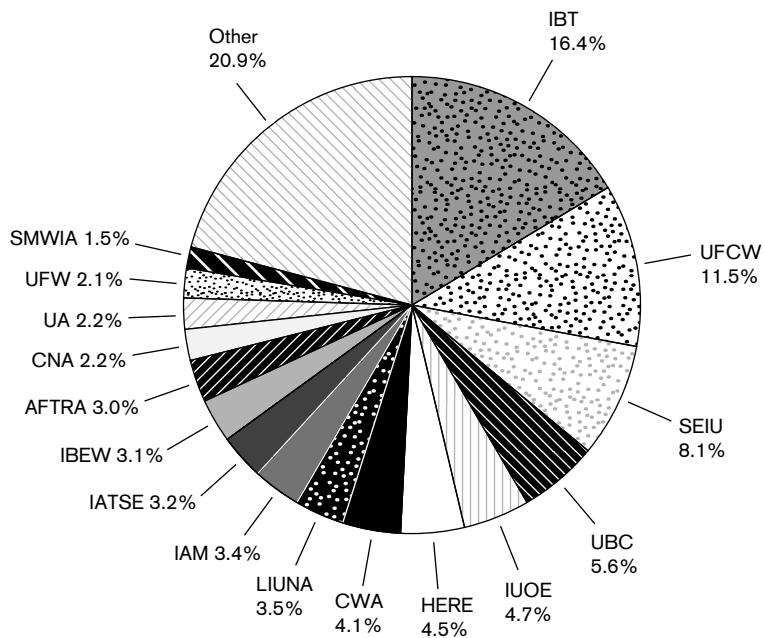


FIGURE 1.5b. Distribution of Private-Sector Union Members, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 1,352 local unions.

Another public-sector heavyweight, and the second largest union in the state, is the California Teachers Association (CTA), which is affiliated with the NEA (but not with the AFL-CIO). Together with the California School Employees Association, another large union that represents a variety of workers (other than teachers) employed in public schools, the CTA dominates the heavily unionized education sector. The two together represent almost three-quarters (71.6%) of all California union members employed in education.

The SEIU's overarching role is one unusual feature of the California labor movement. Another is the presence of a few large unions that are not directly affiliated with any larger national or International union and in which membership is either exclusive to the state or overwhelmingly concentrated there. Examples include the California Nurses Association (CNA), the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA), and the United Farm Workers (UFW).¹⁴ Numerically, the most important of these unaffiliated unions is the abovementioned California School Employees Association (CSEA).¹⁵ The CSEA represents 7.0% of the state's union members (see Figure 1.4a), and its share of public-sector dues-payers is an even greater 13.4%—a larger share than that of any organization other than the SEIU and the CTA (Figure 1.5a).

Both CSEA and several of the largest SEIU locals represent many public-sector workers who in other states are often represented by AFSCME. Indeed, in 2001–02 AFSCME accounted for only 3.2% of California union members, compared to 7.7% nationally in 2001 (Figure 1.4b). Only 5.1% of union members in California's public sector were in AFSCME in 2001–02 (Figure 1.5a).

Thus, union membership in California is highly concentrated in a small number of unions that represent the bulk of the organized workforce (Figure 1.4a). This is the case nationally as well (Figure 1.4b). The general patterns are similar in California and the United States, with two notable exceptions: the SEIU's and CSEA's especially large share of the state's union membership; and the relatively minor presence in California of the United Auto Workers (UAW), once the nation's largest union and the flagship of the CIO, and the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), another former CIO affiliate. In 2001–02 the UAW accounted for only 0.6% of the state's union members (many of whom are not industrial workers at all but recently

14. The UFW is a national union, but the vast bulk of its membership is in California. For purposes of our analysis here, we treat the other large statewide units as "Internationals" if they have 15,000 members or more, even though their membership is limited to California.

15. There are two unions that use the acronym CSEA. The first and largest is the California School Employees Association, which is the organization we refer to here (and throughout the text when we use this abbreviation). The CSEA was an independent union until 2001, when it affiliated with the AFL-CIO. This organization represents teachers' aides and school bus drivers, as well as clerical workers, food service workers, custodians, groundskeepers, and maintenance workers (see <http://www.scsea.com>). The other union that uses this acronym is the California State Employees Association, which became Local 1000 of the SEIU in 1988 (previously it was an independent employee association) (see <http://www.calcsea.org>).

organized teaching assistants in the University of California). Nationally, by contrast, the UAW is the seventh largest union, with 4.5% of all union members in the United States in 2001. Similarly, the USWA accounted for only 0.6% of California union members but 2.7% of those in the nation.

California public-sector union membership was especially highly concentrated in 2001–02, with only five unions accounting for more than two-thirds of the members (Figure 1.5a).¹⁶ In the private sector the picture is rather different (Figure 1.5b). In 2001–02 the Teamsters had the largest share of members in the state, followed by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and SEIU. Those top three Internationals accounted for over a third (36.0%) of all private-sector union members in the state. Another 16.9% were in the four largest construction unions: the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC), the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Other Internationals were significant players in the private sector as well: the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE), the Communication Workers of America (CWA), and two entertainment industry unions, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and the International Alliance of Theatrical State Employees (IATSE).¹⁷

The distribution of union membership across Internationals in 2001–02 was not dramatically different from that in previous years. The CUC found that the same unions that had the largest share of the state's union membership in 2001–02 had the largest share in both 1991 and 1996.¹⁸ The most important change over this period is the steady growth of the SEIU, whose share of California union membership grew by nearly six percentage points between 1991 and 2001–02 (Figure 1.6). The only other unions that increased their share of the state's union membership by more than one percentage point over the period were the CTA, CSEA, and AFSCME. As the SEIU and these three public-sector unions expanded their role in California's labor movement over this period, the share of union membership held by most other large unions in the state declined somewhat.

Unionism in the United States has always been highly decentralized, especially at the local level, where individual union organizations tend to be quite small. Although

16. CUC respondents were nearly equally divided between public- and private-sector locals, with each category comprising 46% of the total. The remaining 8% of respondent locals include both public- and private-sector members; we do not present data here on their composition by International.

17. Another major entertainment industry union, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), declined to participate in the CUC, so is not included in Figure 1.5b.

18. The CUC data for these years are incomplete: 26.7% of respondents did not provide membership figures for 1991, and 18.8% did not provide figures for 1996. On average, however, there was no significant difference between the size (in 2001–02) of the locals that did and those that did not provide such figures ($p = 0.160$ for 1991 and $p = 0.155$ for 1996).

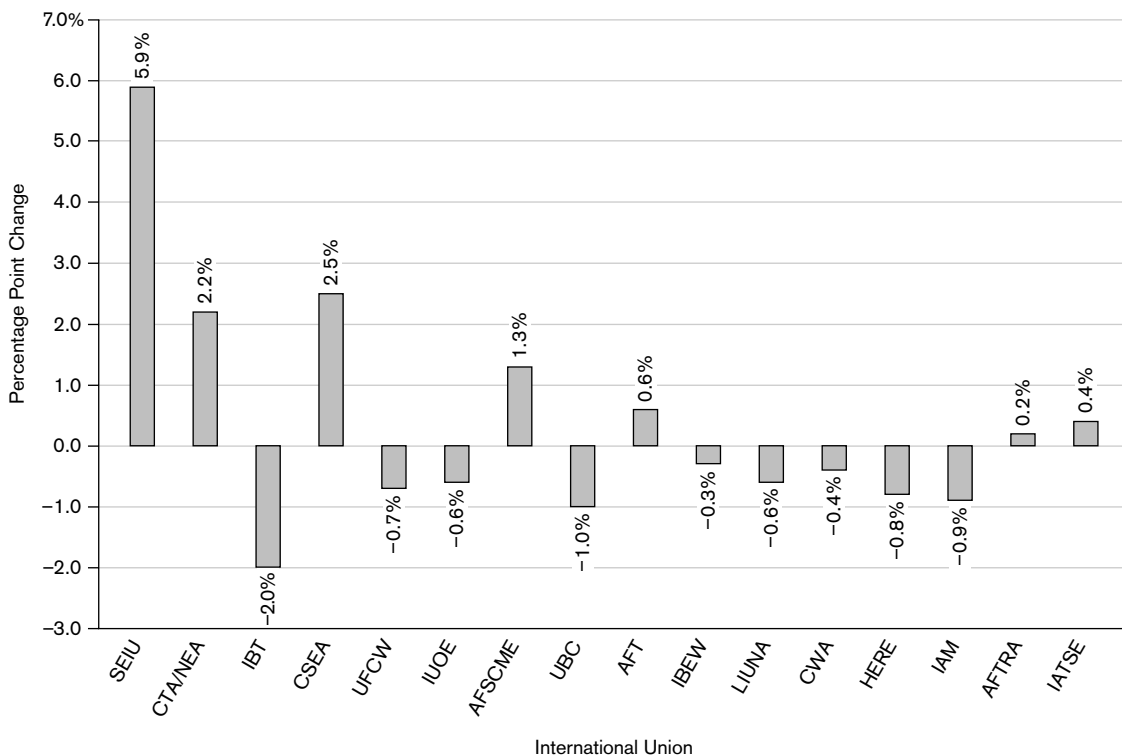


FIGURE 1.6. Change in Membership Share of Selected International Unions, California, 1991 to 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 990 local unions.

comparable national data are not available, the CUC found that in 2001–02 the majority of California’s local unions (52.1%) had 300 members or fewer. Only 5.5% of the CUC respondent locals had more than 5,000 members, while nearly three-fourths of them (74.6%) had 1,000 members or fewer.¹⁹

Average local union size varied widely among International unions in California (Table 1.1).²⁰ Small locals are especially characteristic of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), with a median local size of 60 members among CUC

19. Local unions in the state were even smaller in 1987, the last year prior to the CUC for which any such data are available. At that time only 2.9% of California local unions had 5,000 or more members, and 63.2% had fewer than 300 members (California Department of Industrial Relations 1989, 11). In the years since 1987, many local unions have merged, which would account for the increase in average size.

20. The table includes only those Internationals (as well as the category of independent unions) for which the CUC had at least 25 local union respondents. The means were generally higher than the medians because most Internationals had at least one very large local; hence medians are the better measure here.

TABLE I.1. Median and Mean Local Union Size
(Number of Dues-Paying Members) for Selected
International Unions, California, 2001–2002

<i>Union</i>	<i>Median Size of Locals</i>	<i>Mean Size of Locals</i>
SEIU	5,676	13,301
IBT	3,000	4,029
UBC	1,058	1,363
LIUNA	1,034	1,575
CCPOA	756	627
IBEW	696	1,762
CWA	609	1,248
IAM	427	757
PAT	424	656
AFSCME	274	1,165
CTA/NEA	234	234
IATSE	160	832
AFT	128	464
Independent Unions	94	604
UTU	84	149
NALC	69	437
IAFF	60	180

SOURCE: California Union Census.

NOTE: These results are unweighted.

N = 1,352 local unions.

respondents, and the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), with a median local size of 69. Independent unions (those with no AFL-CIO affiliation) also tend to be quite small; among CUC respondents the median size for this group of unions was 94. In sharp contrast, some Internationals typically have very large locals. The outstanding examples in the CUC are the SEIU, with a median local size of 5,676 members, and the Teamsters, with a median size of 3,000.

UNION MEMBERSHIP BY GENDER, AGE, NATIVITY, RACE AND ETHNICITY

California's union members include a higher proportion of women and older workers than does the nation as a whole. In addition, the fact that California is home to such a disproportionate share of the nation's immigrants means that they

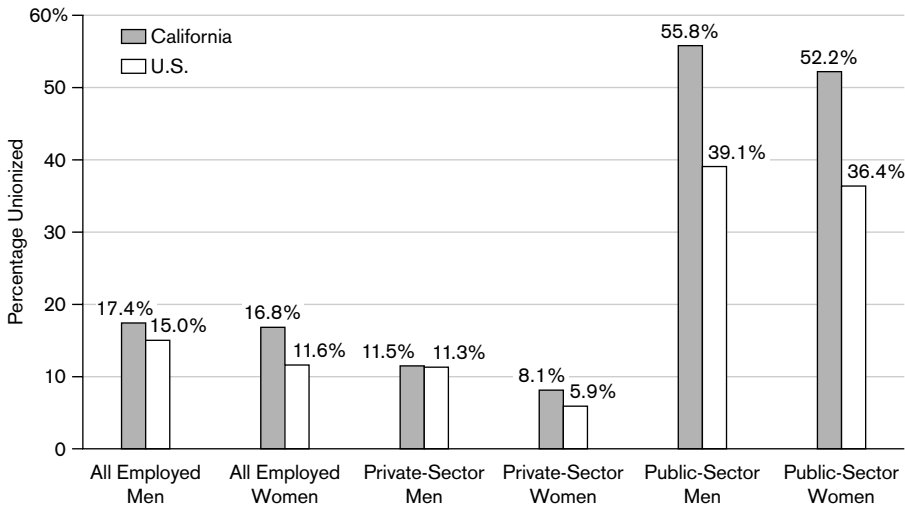


FIGURE 1.7. Unionization Rates, by Gender and Sector, California and U.S., 2001–2002
 SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.
 N = 25,052 for California; N = 355,670 for the United States.

have a considerable presence among unionized workers even though their rate of membership is lower than that of their native-born counterparts. In regard to race and ethnicity, the state’s union membership is more diverse than that of the nation, with an especially large representation of African Americans.

Gender

Historically, women have been less extensively unionized than men throughout the United States, but in California the gender gap in union density is extremely small: in 2001–02, according to the CPS, 16.8% of the state’s employed female wage and salary workers were union members, compared to 17.4% of their male counterparts. In the United States as a whole, the gap is considerably wider: 11.6% of employed women were unionized in 2001–02, compared to 15.0% of employed men. The contrast is largely an artifact of the fact that the public sector, in which female employment is relatively extensive, is more highly unionized in California than nationwide (Figure 1.7). The extremely low level of unionization among women employed in the private sector—only 5.9% nationally and 8.1% in California—reflects the fact that the more highly unionized private-sector industries tend to employ a disproportionate share of male workers. For example, in California in 2001–02, 92.0% of all wage and salary workers employed in construction, and 68.7% of those in transportation and utilities, were male. These are relatively highly unionized

industries (see Figure 1.2); in contrast, in the overwhelmingly nonunion finance, insurance, and real estate industry, only 38.7% of the workers were male.

The CUC data, similarly, reveal a high degree of gender differentiation among California union members.²¹ Whereas female union members are overwhelmingly concentrated in the public and service sector unions, their male counterparts are disproportionately found in the building trades. (The same is most likely true of the United States as a whole, although national data on gender by International union are not available.) To a large extent this reflects gender segregation in the workforce, which has historically been reproduced in the jurisdictional divisions internal to the organized labor movement. In recent decades, however, traditional lines of union jurisdiction have become increasingly blurred.

In 2001–02, women made up 46.4% of all union members in the state (compared to 41.8% nationwide), but their distribution across unions contrasted sharply with that of their male counterparts (Figure 1.8a). Although the CTA/NEA, SEIU, the Teamsters, and UFCW accounted for large shares of both female and male union members, there the similarities end. The other unions with large shares of California's female union members were the CSEA, AFSCME, AFT, UFCW, and CNA, with 19.8%, 4.8%, 4.7%, 4.6%, and 4.3%, respectively. None of these unions was among the top five unions for men (Figure 1.8b). (CSEA was the seventh most important union for men, but it accounted for only 3.6% of male union members.)

Among the six labor organizations that accounted for the largest share of the state's male union members in the 2001–02 CUC, three are building trades unions (the Operating Engineers, with 8.0% of all male union members in the state, the Carpenters, with 7.0%, and the Laborers, with 4.4%). A tiny proportion of the state's female union members were found in these unions (1.1%, 0.6%, and 1.1%, respectively). Almost a third (30.1%) of all male union members in California were in the building trades, compared to a very small percentage (2.9%) of female union members. If public-sector unions are excluded, the building trades' share rises to a figure approaching half (46.7%) of the state's male union members.

Women are far more concentrated than men in the public-sector unions. The CUC found that 61.9% of the state's female union members were in public-sector unions (and another 13.8% in "mixed" union locals that include both public- and private-sector workers), compared to 36.5% of the state's male union members (with another 20.9% in mixed locals).

Age

The age distribution of union members is heavily weighted toward older workers (Figure 1.9). Density rates for workers under twenty-five years of age were dramatically lower than for older workers, and workers over fifty-five had the highest density

21. Of local unions responding to the CUC, 79.2% supplied data on their gender composition.

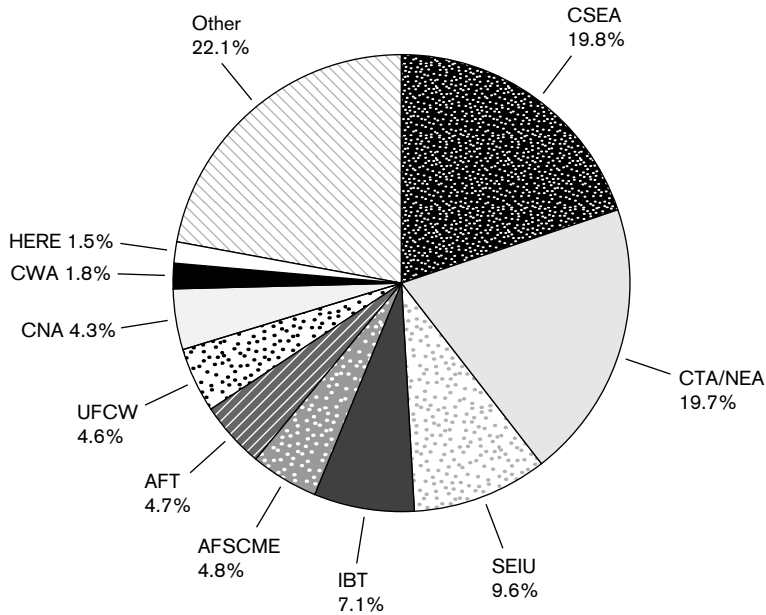


FIGURE 1.8a. Female Union Members, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 1,112 local unions.

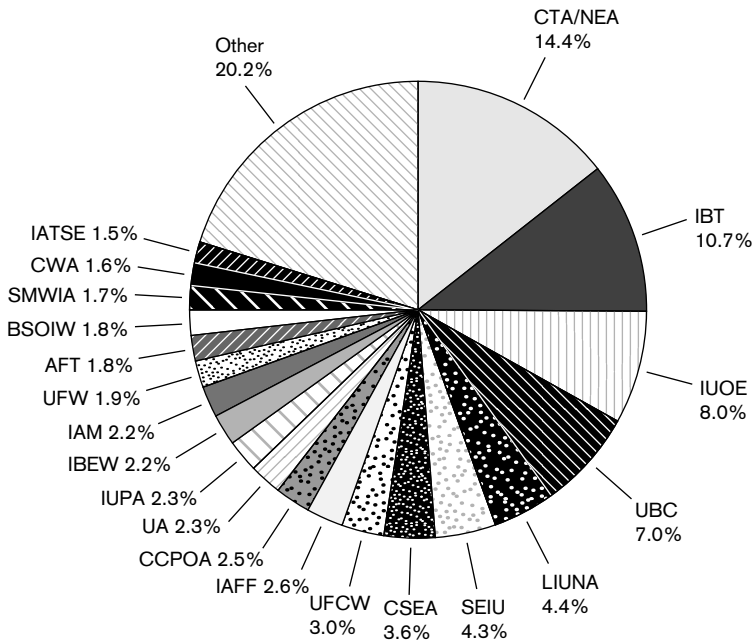


FIGURE 1.8b. Male Union Members, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 1,112 local unions.

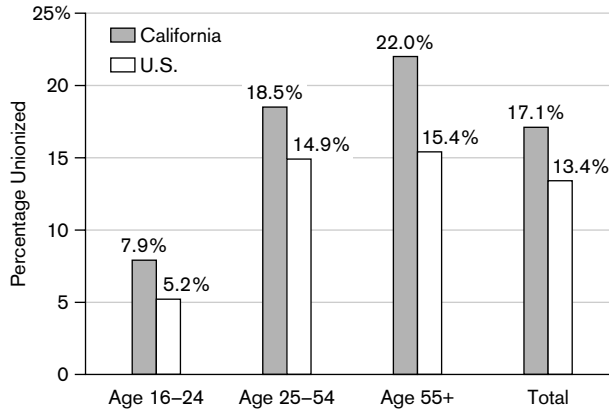


FIGURE 1.9. Unionization Rates, by Age, California and U.S., 2001-2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights. N = 25,052 for California; N = 355,670 for the United States.

rates. This is the case nationally, but to an even greater degree in California. The skewed age pattern reflects the fact that young workers tend to be clustered in occupations and industries with low unionization rates, as well as the tendency of unionized workplaces to reward seniority and provide greater job security than non-unionized ones.

Nativity and Race and Ethnicity

California's large immigrant population has been an important target of union organizing in recent years, and there is some evidence that this population has an unusually favorable attitude toward unionism (Weir 2002, 121). Yet, the overall unionization rate for these workers remains well below that for the native born. Only 11.7% of the state's foreign-born workers were union members in 2001-02, compared to 19.7% of their native-born counterparts. The differential between immigrants and natives was smaller on the national level, with unionization rates of 11.0% and 13.8%, respectively.²² Despite this, immigrants comprised 22.1% of all union members in California in 2001-02, compared to only 11.9% of union members nationwide. This reflects the fact that immigrants make up a far greater portion of the state's workforce (32.4%) than of the nation's (22.1%), rendering the recent increases in union density in California—and the contrast between that trend and the national decline in density—all the more remarkable.

22. This is partly because the most recent immigrants, for whom unionization rates are especially low, are disproportionately concentrated in California (for more details see the next paragraph of the text).

As other commentators have noted (Waldinger and Der-Martirosian 2000, 69–70), recent immigrants are less likely to be union members than those who have been U.S. residents for many years. In California, 19.8% of immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1980 were unionized in 2001–02, compared to 10.8% of those who arrived between 1980 and 1989; only 6.0% of those who arrived in 1990 or later were unionized. The majority of immigrants, however, are among the more recent arrivals (70.9% arrived in 1980 or later), and their low unionization rates depress the overall immigrant unionization rate.

Figure 1.10 compares the composition of the state’s workforce with that of its union membership, disaggregated by nativity as well as race and ethnicity. Here the continuing underrepresentation of the state’s massive immigrant workforce in organized labor is apparent. The figure also shows that native-born African Americans comprise a much larger proportion of union members than of employed workers. The same is true (although with a much smaller differential) for native-born Anglos.

Unionization rates vary considerably by race and ethnicity among both foreign- and native-born workers (Figure 1.11). Statewide, 28.7% of employed African American wage and salary workers were unionized in 2001–02, a higher unionization rate than that for any other racial or ethnic group, or for African American workers nationwide, which was considerably lower at 17.1%. This large differential between state and nation reflects the fact that California’s union density is much higher than the nation’s in the public sector, a major employment niche for African Americans. Nearly a third (30.1%) of all employed African Americans in California were in public-sector jobs in 2001–02, far more than any other group.

There was a smaller but still substantial differential between state and national unionization rates for native-born Latinos: 20.3% in California, but only 13.2% in the United States. Although the unionization rate for native-born Latinos was well below the level for African Americans, it reflects a similar ethnically specific pattern of extensive public-sector employment in a state with unusually strong public-sector unionization. In 2001–02, 20.2% of California’s native-born Latinos were employed in the public sector—more than native-born Anglos (18.2%) or native-born Asians (17.9%).

The variation among racial and ethnic groups, when analyzed by nativity, is relatively small *within* the public and private sectors alike (Figure 1.12). Even foreign-born workers, whose overall unionization rates were far below those of their native-born counterparts, had very high unionization rates within the public sector. The fact that relatively few of them are employed in that sector (only 6.4% of foreign-born Latinos and 13.2% of foreign-born Asians) means that this does little to boost the overall unionization rate for these subgroups, however. Indeed, that so many foreign-born Latinos are employed in industries and occupations that rely on casual forms of employment—either marginal to or entirely outside of the formal economy—helps explain their relatively low rates of unionization.

The CUC included questions about the composition of local union membership

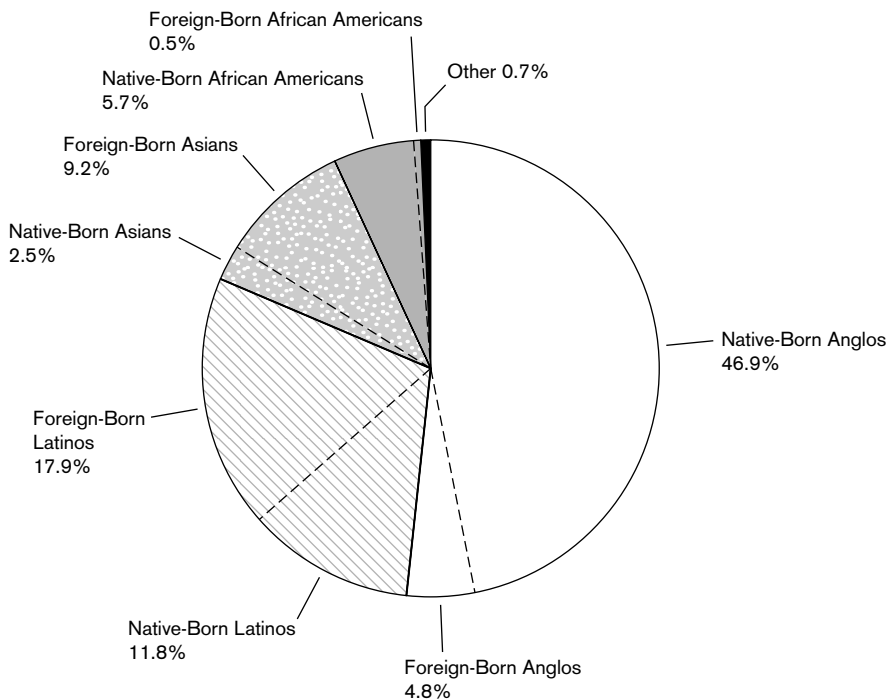


FIGURE 1.10a. Employed Wage and Salary Workers, by Race and Ethnicity and Nativity, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights. N = 25,052.

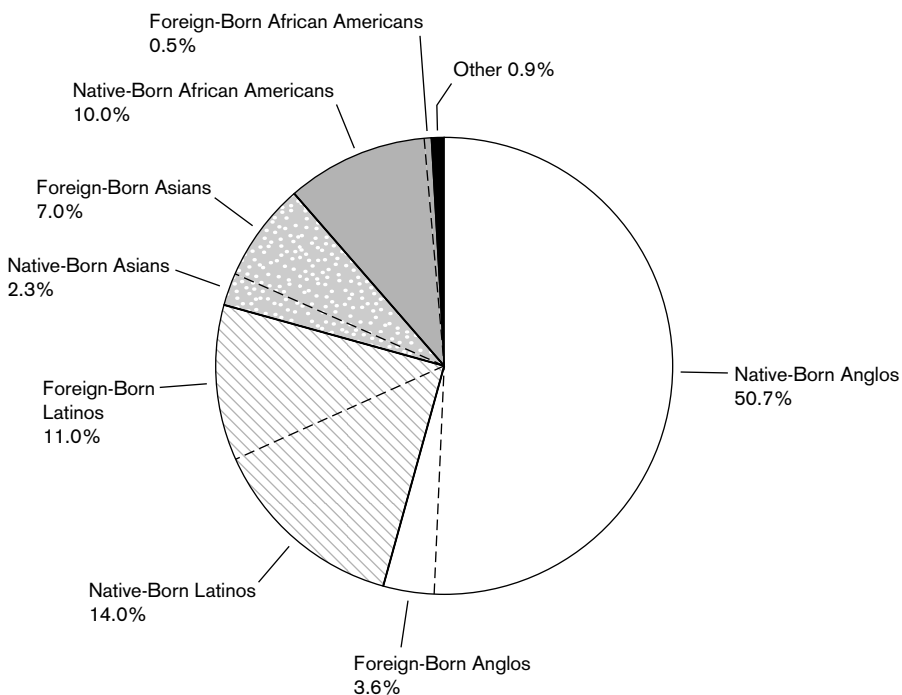


FIGURE 1.10b. Union Members, by Race and Ethnicity and Nativity, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights. N = 25,052.

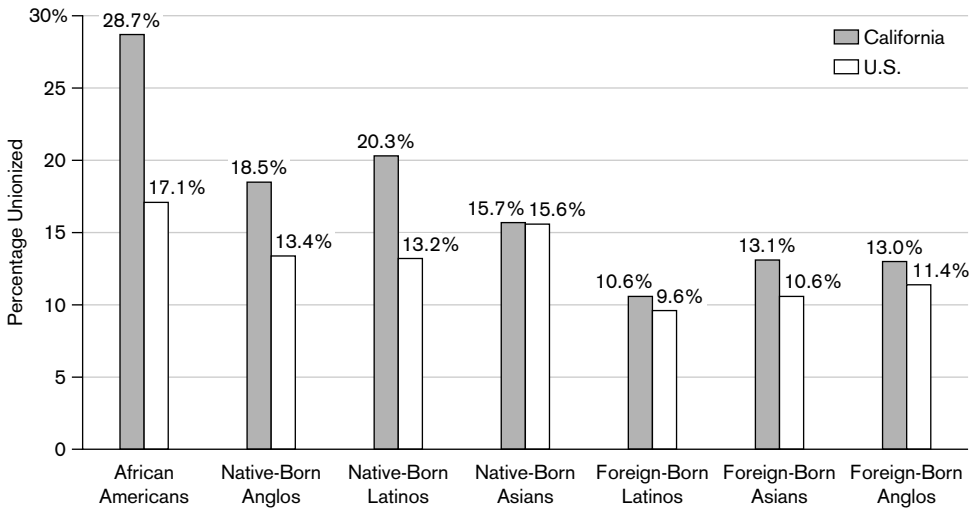


FIGURE 1.II. Unionization Rates, by Race and Ethnicity and Nativity, California and U.S., 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.

N = 25,052 for California; N = 355,670 for the United States.

by race and ethnicity. Only 59.6% of respondents provided such data, however, so the results must be interpreted with great caution.²³ What these data do suggest is a considerable degree of racial and ethnic concentration by local union. For example, among the local unions that provided data on their racial and ethnic composition, 20.0% had no African American members, and 48.7% had a very low percentage of African Americans—less than 5%. Similarly, 30.3% of the locals had no Asian members, and 68.0% had less than 5%. This pattern was much less common for Latinos and Anglos, the two largest racial/ethnic groups in the state’s workforce. Only 4.8% of the locals providing data on this topic had no Latino members, and only 12.2% had less than 5%. Similarly, only 3.2% of locals reported no Anglo members, and in only 4.8% did Anglos make up less than 5% of all members.

REGIONAL PATTERNS OF UNION MEMBERSHIP IN CALIFORNIA

For most of the twentieth century the San Francisco Bay Area had by far the highest level of union density in the state of California. By contrast, the Los Angeles area

23. In most cases the CUC respondents indicated that they did not keep records on this subject, and even those who did supply such data often did so on the basis of rough estimates. The data on nativity were reported even less frequently by CUC respondents than that for race, and thus none are reported here.

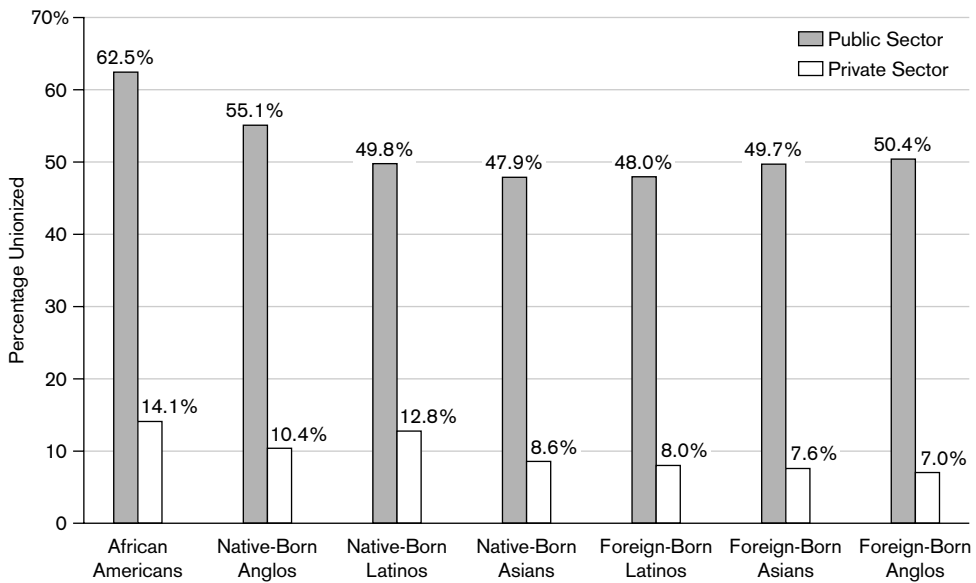


FIGURE 1.12. Unionization Rates, by Sector, Race and Ethnicity, and Nativity, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.
N = 25,052.

had a reputation as a “company town,” which dated from the open shop movement that dominated the city in the early decades of the twentieth century. Although by the early postwar period Los Angeles had achieved density approaching the state-wide level, the Bay Area long remained the center of organized labor’s strength in the state. In 1955, for example, the California Department of Industrial Relations (1956, 11) found that union density was 51% in the Bay Area, compared to only 37% in the Los Angeles metropolitan area and 40% statewide. By 2001–02, however, the difference in density levels between the state’s two largest metropolitan areas had narrowed to only half a percentage point: 16.9% in the Bay Area and 16.5% in the Los Angeles metropolitan area (Table 1.2). Los Angeles has also emerged as the most important stronghold of labor’s political influence in recent years (Meyerson 2001).

Some of the state’s smaller metropolitan areas show considerably higher density rates than either Los Angeles or the San Francisco Bay Area. The most important example is Sacramento, with a density rate of 25.7%, reflecting the large concentration of public-sector employment in the state capital: 27.1% of all wage and salary employees in the Sacramento area worked in the public sector, compared to 16.4% statewide.²⁴

24. The situation is similar in the Fresno area, which also has relatively high overall density (19.9%) and where 23.8% of wage and salary employment is in the public sector.

TABLE 1.2. Employment, Union Membership, and Union Density in California's Major Metropolitan Areas and Regions, 2001–2002

<i>Metropolitan Area/Region</i>	<i>Employed Wage and Salary Workers, Percentage Distribution</i>	<i>Union Members, Percentage Distribution</i>	<i>Density (Union Members as Percentage of Employed Wage and Salary Workers)</i>
San Francisco Bay Area ^a	22.5%	22.1%	16.9%
Los Angeles metro area ^b	46.8	45.0	16.5
Sacramento metro area ^c	5.8	8.7	25.7
San Diego metro area ^d	8.2	7.2	15.0
Fresno metro area ^e	2.8	3.2	19.9
Central Valley ^f	9.3	9.8	18.1
Rest of state	4.7	4.0	14.8
California total	100.0	100.0	17.1
N	25,052	4,284	—

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.

^a Includes San Francisco, Alameda, Santa Clara, Marin, San Mateo, Sonoma, Napa, Contra Costa, Solano and Santa Cruz Counties.

^b Includes Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Ventura and San Bernardino Counties.

^c Includes Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer and Yolo Counties.

^d Includes San Diego County only.

^e Includes Fresno and Maera Counties.

^f Includes Kings, Tulare, Kern, Monterey, Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, San Benito and San Luis Obispo Counties.

The CPS sample sizes are too small to permit detailed analysis of the composition of union membership on a regional basis, even using the pooled 2001–02 data, with the partial exception of the state's two largest metropolitan areas, the Los Angeles region and the San Francisco Bay Area (which includes San Jose and Oakland).²⁵ These two regions account for over two-thirds of the state's union members. Even so, we can extract reliable results from the CPS for only a few variables.

In the San Francisco Bay Area union density was considerably higher in the construction, transportation/utilities, and health care industries than it was in the Los Angeles metropolitan area or in the state as a whole in 2001–02 (Figure 1.13). In the

25. More specifically, the CPS data are for the Los Angeles–Anaheim–Riverside Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), which includes Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Ventura, and San Bernardino Counties; and the San Francisco–Oakland–San Jose CMSA, which includes San Francisco, Alameda, Santa Clara, Marin, San Mateo, Sonoma, Napa, Contra Costa, Solano, and Santa Cruz counties.

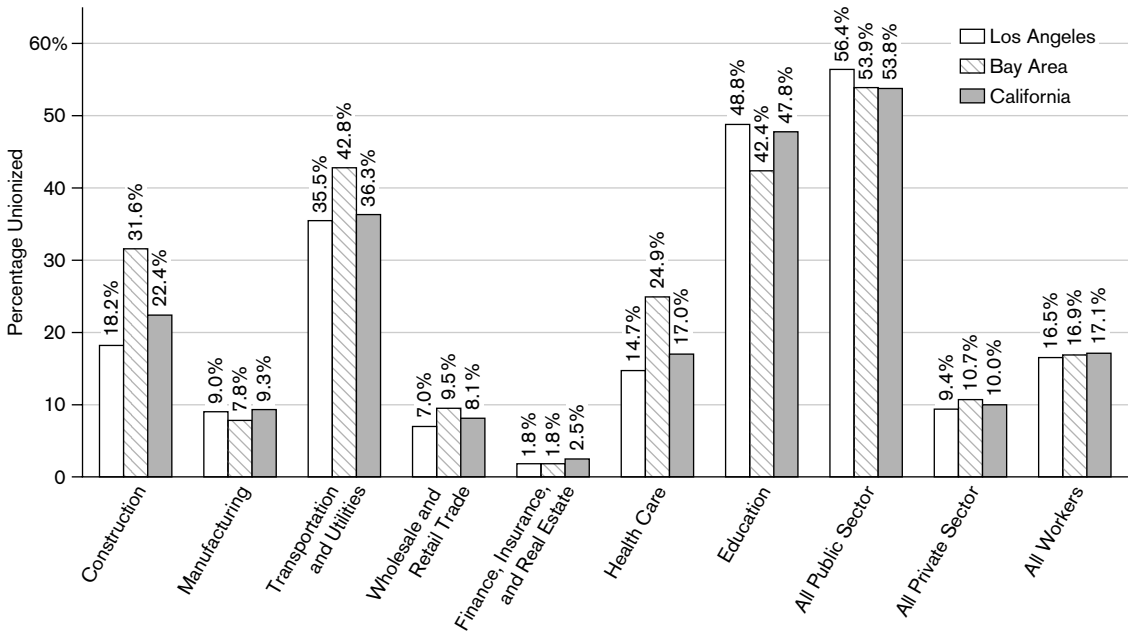


FIGURE 1.13. Union Density, by Selected Industry Group and Sector, California, Los Angeles, and San Francisco Bay Area, 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.

N = 13,819 for Los Angeles, N = 4,760 for San Francisco, N = 25,052 for California.

Los Angeles area, in contrast, union density was higher in the education sector and the public sector generally.

The gender and age distribution of union membership in the state’s major regions was not significantly different from the statewide pattern. Some notable contrasts between the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas in regard to nativity and race and ethnicity are evident, however (Figure 1.14). For example, in 2001–02 African Americans were more extensively unionized in the Los Angeles area than in the Bay Area (reflecting the overrepresentation of African Americans in public-sector employment in combination with Los Angeles’s relatively high public-sector union density).

More striking, however, is the fact that a lower proportion of Latino wage and salary workers, and especially foreign-born Latinos, were unionized in Los Angeles than in the Bay Area. The widespread perception of Los Angeles as the main center of Latino immigrant unionization notwithstanding, only 9.5% of immigrant Latino workers in Los Angeles were union members in 2001–02, compared to 14.1% in the Bay Area.²⁶

26. This is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that a higher proportion of foreign-born workers in 2001–02 was made up of recent arrivals in the San Francisco Bay Area (79.2%

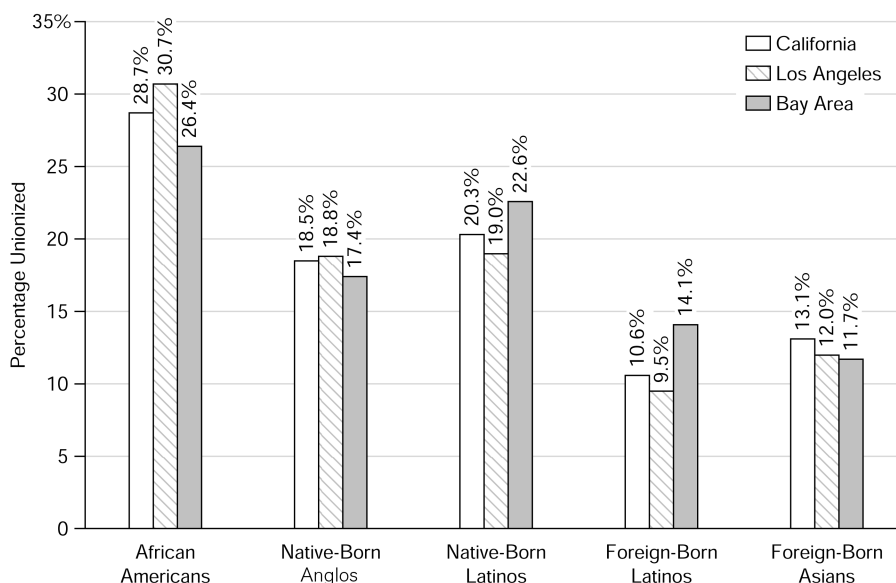


FIGURE 1.14. Unionization Rates, by Race and Ethnicity and Nativity, for Selected Groups, California, Los Angeles, and San Francisco Bay Area, 2001–2002

SOURCE: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group Earnings Files, merged for 2001 and 2002 (see Appendix).

NOTE: Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights.

N = 13,819 for Los Angeles, N = 4,760 for San Francisco, N = 25,052 for California.

The gap between perception and reality is linked to the huge proportion—37.5% in 2001–02—of the Los Angeles metropolitan area workforce that is Latino (almost two-thirds of whom were foreign-born in 2001–02). By contrast, only 17.8% of the Bay Area workforce was Latino in 2001–02 (slightly less than two-thirds were foreign-born). Despite their relatively low unionization rates, then, immigrant Latinos figure prominently among Los Angeles union members, thanks largely to their massive presence in the metropolitan area’s workforce. In 2001–02, 29.7% of all Los Angeles union members were Latino (15.9% native-born and 13.8% foreign-born), compared to only 18.4% of those in the Bay Area (9.1% native-born and 9.3% foreign-born).

The CUC also collected geographical data on union membership in the state’s major metropolitan areas and regions.²⁷ As is the case statewide (see Figure 1.4a),

arrived in 1980 or later, and 46.8% in or after 1990) than in the Los Angeles area (68.9% arrived in 1980 or later, and 31.6% in or after 1990), since, as noted above, recent immigrants are generally less likely to be unionized than those who have been in the United States for a longer period of time.

27. The CPS geographical data refer to the region in which workers reside, whereas the CUC data refer to the region in which union members’ workplaces are located. The CUC asked each

union membership in the San Francisco and the Los Angeles regions alike is concentrated in a relatively small number of unions (Figure 1.15). Although the major players in these two metropolitan areas are similar to those in the state, the SEIU's 2001–02 share of union membership was particularly massive in the Bay Area, where it accounted for more than a fifth (21.4%) of all union members. The SEIU was the largest single union in the Los Angeles area too, but accounted for a considerably smaller share of the 2001–02 total (15.4%). The major building trades unions (UBC, IUOE, LIUNA, and IBEW) also accounted for a larger share of Bay Area union membership (12.1%, compared to 10.6% for Los Angeles). The CNA is a significant player in the Bay Area, with 2.7% of all union members in the region; in the L.A. area it accounted only for 0.4%. In Los Angeles the two largest entertainment unions, IATSE and AFTRA, jointly accounted for 5.4% of union members; their share of Bay Area union membership was relatively small (1.1% jointly), and UFCW's share of union membership in Los Angeles was more than double that in the Bay Area (8.5% versus 3.3%).

UNION STAFFING PATTERNS

The CUC also collected data on union staffing patterns in California, including a detailed breakdown as to which unions in the state employ organizers and to what extent.²⁸ In light of the recent push for renewed organizing from the national AFL-CIO, these data are particularly revealing. When John Sweeney became the labor federation's president in 1995, he called on all the affiliates to participate in a massive "Change to Organize" program and urged them to help reverse the tide of declining union density by devoting 30% of their budgets to organizing unorganized workers. Many unions embraced Sweeney's rhetoric, but relatively few actually dedicated the extensive resources to organizing that his program called for, in part because they were reluctant to shift staffing priorities away from servicing existing members (Voss and Sherman 2000).

No national data are publicly available on the extent to which unions have redirected staff resources toward organizing, but the CUC found that California local unions employ very few organizers and that those organizers who are on union staffs

local union to identify the location of each employer for which they represented members. In cases of employers who operated on a statewide basis, we assumed that the distribution of the members across regions was proportional to that of the union membership in the state for which regional data were reported. Because of various problems involving the data for other regions, here we discuss only the state's two largest regions, the San Francisco Bay Area and the Los Angeles metropolitan area. (The CUC definitions of each region are identical to those of the two CMSAs described in note 25.)

28. The response rate for the CUC staffing questions was 96.5%.

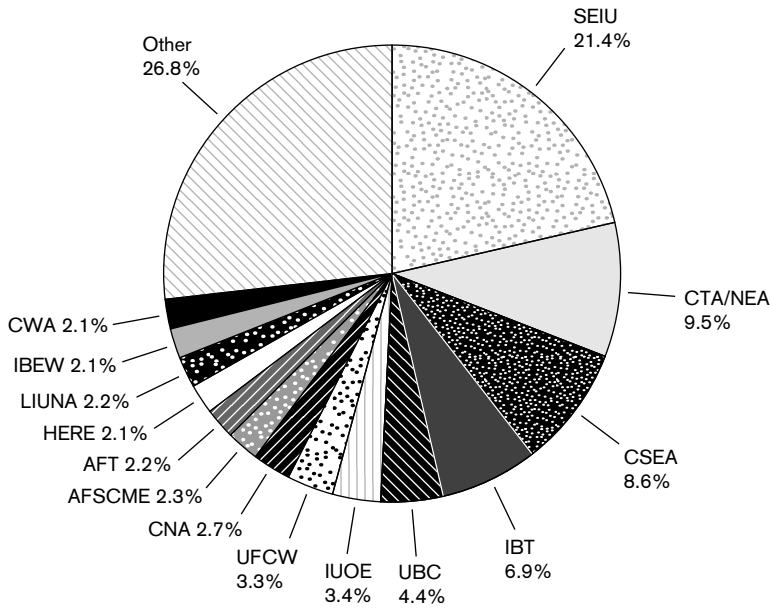


FIGURE 1.15a. Distribution of Union Members, by International Union, San Francisco Bay Area, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 521 local unions.

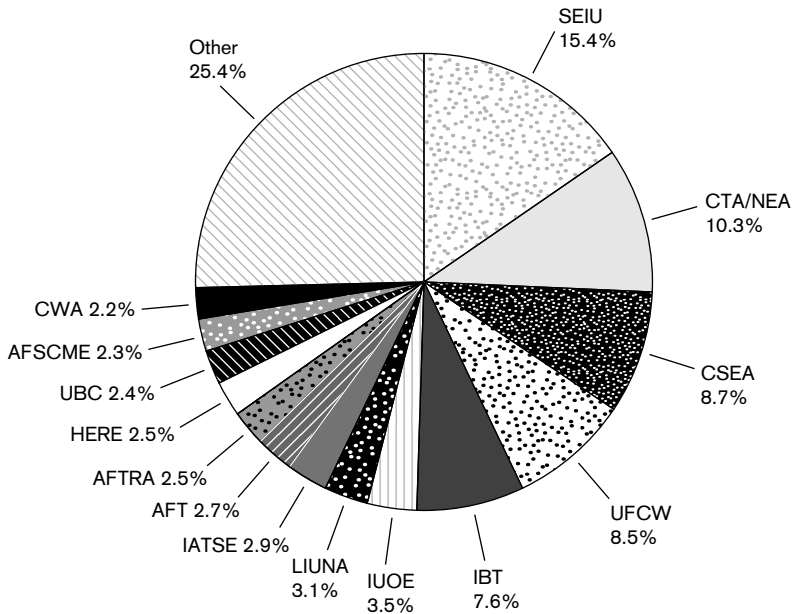


FIGURE 1.15b. Distribution of Union Members, by International Union, Los Angeles, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

N = 661 local unions.

TABLE 1.3. Union Staffing Levels by Size of Local Union, California, 2001–2002

<i>Number of Staff Employed by Local Union (full-time equivalent)</i>	<i>Percentage of All Local Unions in California</i>	<i>Average Number of Dues-Paying Members in Local Union</i>
0	50.9%	218
More than 0 but less than or equal to 1	13.3	479
More than 1 but less than or equal to 3	12.6	880
More than 3 but less than or equal to 5	6.6	1,509
More than 5 but less than or equal to 10	7.7	2,348
More than 10 but less than or equal to 25	5.8	5,279
More than 25	3.3	26,475
Total	100.0	—

SOURCE: California Union Census.

NOTE: N = 1,306 local unions. Percentages are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix); averages are unweighted.

are concentrated in very few Internationals. Indeed, a mere five Internationals employ nearly half (48.9%) of all organizers in the state.²⁹ The extent to which unions employ organizers is important not only in relation to the AFL-CIO’s organizing program but also because it is both a cause and a consequence of increased union density.

About half (50.9%) of California’s local unions in 2001–02 had no paid staff at all, 64.2% had one full-time staff member or less, and fully 83.4% had five or less (Table 1.3). Not surprisingly, staffing levels were closely correlated with local union size, and as we have already noted, most unions in the state are quite small.³⁰ Larger unions tend to employ more staff than smaller unions, both because they have more resources and because they have a greater need for staff support.

29. The CUC defined “paid staff” as individuals employed by local unions for a minimum of 20 hours per week. All staffing data in this section are presented as FTEs (full-time equivalents, where full-time is defined as 40 hours per week). Elected union leaders (such as president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, etc.) were included only if they also were employed by the union as clerical workers, business agents, organizers, or researchers—the four job titles on which data are presented here. We asked each responding local for a full report on staff members serving their local union, including individuals whose salaries were paid by other union entities (Internationals, or regional or district units of Internationals). We did not collect data on staff employed by regional union organizations (such as the California Labor Federation or the State Building and Construction Trades Council) or on the staff of Central Labor Councils and the like.

30. The correlation between local union size and staff FTE is $r = 0.932$ ($p < .01$). $N = 1304$.

TABLE 1.4. Number of Staff Employed by Local Unions, with Percentage Distribution among all Local Unions, for Selected Staff Titles, California, 2001–2002

<i>Number of Staff (full-time equivalent)</i>	<i>All Union Staff</i>	<i>Clerical Workers</i>	<i>Business Agents</i>	<i>Organizers</i>	<i>Researchers</i>
0	50.9%	60.0%	64.2%	84.8%	96.9%
More than 0 but less than or equal to 1	13.2	16.8	14.4	8.8	0.8
More than 1 but less than or equal to 3	12.6	13.6	9.1	4.3	1.8
More than 3 but less than or equal to 5	6.6	4.0	5.1	0.8	0.5
More than 5 but less than or equal to 10	7.7	3.0	4.3	0.8	0
More than 10 but less than or equal to 25	5.8	1.8	2.0	0.3	0
More than 25	3.3	0.8	0.9	0.2	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE: California Union Census.

NOTE: N = 1,306 local unions. Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

Unions that did have staff primarily employed clerical workers and business agents (Table 1.4). Clerical workers were the largest single group, with 40.0% of local unions employing at least some part-time clerical staff. Only 23.2% of locals, however, had more than one clerical staff member.

The next most common job title was that of union business agent, whose duties primarily involve the enforcement of union contracts. The CUC found that 35.8% of locals had at least a part-time business agent in 2001–02, with 21.4% of locals employing one or more business agents. There is a strong correlation between the number of business agents a local employed and the number of dues-paying members it had.³¹

Business agents in public-sector unions served more than twice as many members (1,950 members, on average) than their private-sector counterparts (856 members).³² This is probably because public-sector unions, given the greater prevalence of agency and open shop contract provisions, often have fewer dues-payers than private-sector unions do, so that their resources are more limited.³³ Public-sector unions are also more likely to have unpaid shop stewards who carry out some of the tasks business agents perform elsewhere. Business agents in the building trades served fewer members (471, on average) than did business agents employed by unions in other sectors (1,396, on average). Building trades locals tend to employ more staff because of their role in the labor-intensive work of maintaining hiring

31. The correlation between local union size and business agent FTE is $r = 0.891$ ($p < .01$). $N = 1304$.

32. The number of members per business agent was even lower in mixed locals (837 members).

33. See note 5 regarding agency and open shop provisions.

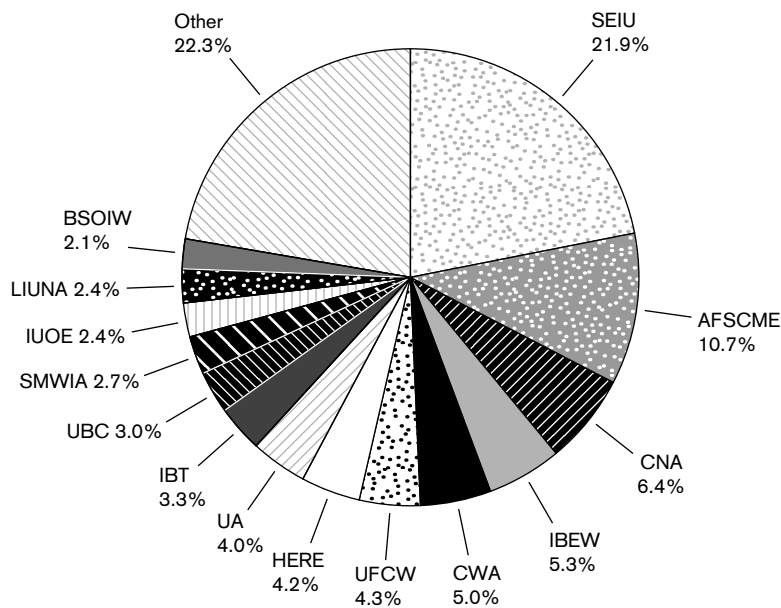


FIGURE 1.16. Distribution of Organizers, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

SOURCE: California Union Census 2001–02.

NOTE: Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).
N = 1,306 local unions.

halls and administering apprenticeship programs. Shop stewards are a rarity in the trades as well.

Local unions were far less likely to employ organizers than clerical workers or business agents. Only 15.0% of CUC respondents had even one part-time organizer on staff in 2001–02, and only 6.2% of locals employed one or more organizers.³⁴ A mere 1.9% of locals employed three or more organizers.

Internationals varied greatly in the extent to which they employed organizers (Figure 1.16 and Table 1.5). SEIU, which has the largest number of union members in California, also employed the largest number of organizers: 136, or 21.9% of all organizers in the state. Other unions that employed 15 or more organizers included AFSCME, CNA, CWA, UFCW, HERE, the Teamsters, and several of the building trades unions (IBEW, UA, UBC, SMWIA, LIUNA and IUOE).

One would expect the unions with the largest numbers of dues-paying members to employ the largest number of organizers, but this was not always the case.³⁵ The

34. Most of the part-time organizers in our data are business agents who are expected to spend half of their time organizing nonunion workers.

35. There is a positive and statistically significant correlation between organizer FTE and local union size, but it is much weaker than the correlations reported in notes 30 and 31: $r = 0.394$ ($p < .01$). $N = 1304$.

TABLE 1.5. Number of Organizers and Member-to-Organizer Ratio, by International Union, California, 2001–2002

<i>International Union</i>	<i>Number of Organizers (FTE)</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>	<i>Member-to-Organizer Ratio</i>
SEIU	136.0	21.9%	4,452
AFSCME	66.6	10.7	1,707
CNA	40.0	6.4	950
IBEW	33.4	5.3	1,957
CWA	30.9	5.0	2,321
UFCW	26.4	4.3	6,819
HERE	26.2	4.2	2,218
UA	24.7	4.0	1,134
IBT	20.6	3.3	10,646
UBC	18.3	3.0	4,113
SMWIA	16.5	2.7	1,105
LIUNA	15.1	2.4	4,277
IUOE	15.0	2.4	6,056
BSOIW	13.1	2.1	1,342
CSEA	12.0	1.9	17,917
NEA	11.5	1.9	26,358
PAT	10.2	1.6	2,051
AFTRA	8.5	1.4	4,427
AFA	7.0	1.1	1,028
NALC	7.0	1.1	5,666
IUPA	6.0	1.0	5,122
IATSE	5.5	0.9	7,695
All Others	67.6	10.8	—
Total	620.1	100.0	—

SOURCE: California Union Census.

NOTE: $N = 1,306$ local unions. Results are weighted to correct for survey non-response (see Appendix).

last column of Table 1.5 shows the ratio of union members to organizers for all Internationals with five or more organizers. A few unions stand out as having an exceptionally large number of organizers relative to their memberships: these include the CNA, the UA, and AFA. Like the ratio of members to business agents, the member-to-organizer ratio was much higher in public-sector unions (7,493 members per organizer, on average) than those in the private sector (4,234).³⁶ The average ratio for

36. The ratio for mixed locals is an even lower 3,044 members per organizer.

building trades locals was 2,631 members per organizer, half the average ratio (5,028 workers per organizer) in non-trades locals.

Of all the staff titles reported here, unions were least likely to hire researchers: 96.9% had none, and only 2.3% employed one or more full-time staff members in this capacity (see Table 1.4). Moreover, researchers were even more concentrated than organizers were among very few unions: of the 40 locals that did employ researchers, 11 were SEIU affiliates and 7 were HERE affiliates. Researchers on local union staffs are primarily engaged in providing support for organizing campaigns, so it is not surprising that their distribution among unions is similar to that for organizers.

The CUC data also suggest a relationship between union growth and staffing patterns, particularly in regard to organizers. One might expect unions that employ sizable numbers of organizers to be the unions that grow most rapidly, all else being equal (of course, a variety of other factors may also affect union growth or stagnation), since organizers increase a union's capacity to organize new workers. The presence of organizers can also result from past growth, since an expanded membership base increases union resources, making it possible to hire more organizers. There is indeed a correlation between the number of organizers employed by California local unions in 2001–02 and the extent to which the membership of those locals grew over the preceding five years. No such correlation was found between the employment of staff for other job titles and union growth.³⁷ It is likely that the unions with extensive organizing staff will be better able than their counterparts who lack such staff to respond to the challenge of increasing union density in future years.

CONCLUSION

Although union membership patterns in California are similar in many respects to those in the nation, the state's labor movement also has several distinctive features. It is to these that we must turn to explain California's recent divergence from the United States as a whole in regard to union density.

California's unusual labor history is critical in this regard. The relatively early growth of public-sector and health care unionism in the state helped give it an edge and fueled continued expansion of the unionization in the state. The SEIU's unusually large presence in California had a major impact in the 1990s, when this union became exceptionally active in organizing new members. The existence of several other vibrant unions that operate entirely or largely in the state further contributed

37. The correlation between the number of organizer FTEs and the percentage change in the number of dues-paying members in each union between 1996 and 2001–02 is $r = 0.280$ ($p < .01$). $N = 1051$.

to California's divergence from the nation. Finally, because the industrial unions of the CIO were always relatively weak in the state, the precipitous decline of these unions over the past few decades, which has been devastating for the labor movement in the rustbelt, had only a limited impact on California.

Another crucial factor that sets California apart from the nation as a whole is organized labor's extensive political influence in the state, particularly in the past decade. Through involvement in electoral politics and the legislative process, California unions increasingly have been able to use their political muscle to make organizing gains—a source of influence that is conspicuously absent on the national level. The California Labor Federation (the statewide AFL-CIO body) and many of the Central Labor Councils (local AFL-CIO bodies) are especially active and effective. On the local level, and especially in Southern California, labor has constructed a virtuous circle, translating organizing successes into political power by mobilizing at the grassroots, and then using the resulting political leverage as a resource to help foster further organizing. Thanks to this dynamic, along with the strength of public-sector unionism in Los Angeles, the once substantial gap in union density between the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles has virtually disappeared.

Another gap that has all but closed in California is the longstanding gender disparity in union membership. Today union density among women is far higher in the state than it is in the United States as a whole, although women and men remain concentrated in very different parts of California's organized labor movement (as is also the case nationally). African Americans are also more extensively unionized in California than in the nation. Immigrant workers, too, have a higher unionization rate in California than in the United States, although in this case the gap is minimal. That the state's workforce includes a disproportionately large share of recent immigrants, who comprise one of the least unionized population groups (both nationally and in the state), makes California's recent gains in union density all the more impressive.

Whether the state's labor movement can maintain its recent momentum and continue to increase union density depends on a variety of complex factors, most of which are difficult to predict. But, assuming that the SEIU continues to expand and that labor remains politically influential in the state, we can conclude that the outlook for continued union growth is far more favorable in California than in the United States as a whole, where prospects of reversing the long-term density decline appear relatively bleak.

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APPENDIX. Data and Methods

Since 1987 the only regularly collected data on union density in California have been those included once a year in the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS). For purposes of analyzing broad national or state-level trends, these data are extremely valuable. Because they are based on a relatively small household sample, however, they are of limited utility for analysis of smaller geographic units or specific industries within the state.

In the past, the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) collected data on union density in the state. For four decades, from 1947 to 1987, the DIR conducted a survey of all union locals, which it published in the serial *Union Labor in California*, at first annually and then, after 1971, biannually. After 1987 this practice was discontinued, and for the years since the only publicly available data on union density in the state have been those in the CPS, with the exception of the survey we report on here.

In early 2001 the University of California's newly established Institute for Labor and Employment (ILE) approached the DIR to explore the possibility of reviving the practice of collecting union membership and union coverage data directly from union locals. The authors of this chapter led this effort. With the assistance of the DIR and the California Labor Federation, we developed a survey instrument and sent it to all the local unions in the state.

We obtained a list of all AFL-CIO affiliated union locals from the California Labor Federation and developed our own list of independent (i.e., not AFL-CIO affiliated) unions from a variety of public sources. Our approach was more inclusive than that used by DIR in the

past: whereas they excluded all private-sector independent unions with less than two employers or less than 1,000 members, we included all independent unions that had written collective bargaining agreements, regardless of size. We did exclude independent unions that lacked any such agreements.

The 2001–02 California Union Census (CUC) was modeled after the DIR’s 1947–1987 surveys in some respects, but we updated some of the old questions and added some new ones. Using a mail questionnaire combined with extensive telephone follow-up, we were able to obtain an 83% response rate (1,348 of 1,620 locals) in the 2001–02 survey (although for some questions, the response rates were far lower). In some cases we obtained data from public sources to supplement and verify the data collected through the survey, and in a few instances we used this method to obtain data for nonrespondents.

Because the response rate varied among the International unions we surveyed, and between independent unions and AFL-CIO affiliates, we used a data weighting technique in the analysis reported in the text. We created a weight variable, defined as the total number of locals in each International divided by the total number of locals from whom we received responses to the survey. Thus the weights are the inverse of the probability that a local is included in our sample (probability weights). In addition, we corrected for some inconsistencies in the data, using other information provided by respondents. This involved less than 5% of the cases for the variables on which findings are reported here.

The CPS data cited in this report are from a dataset that we constructed by merging the 2001 and 2002 Outgoing Rotation Group data. Results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights. The sample includes employed civilian wage and salary workers, age sixteen and over. We followed the sample definition and weighting procedures described in Hirsch and Macpherson (2003, 1–8).

Merging the 2001 and 2002 CPS data files increases the reliability of our analysis (by doubling the number of observations), and it is the closest approximation to the timing of the CUC data collection process, which began in the fall of 2001 and continued through the summer of 2002. (We requested that CUC respondents supply data for 2001, but in some cases they gave us 2002 figures, and in other cases they provided the most recent data they had access to, which sometimes predated 2001).

The CUC data differ from those collected by the CPS in several ways, but the single most important is that the CUC’s source is data obtained from the population of union locals in the state, whereas the CPS is a household sample that reaches about 1.5% of all employed wage and salary workers (see Hirsch and MacPherson 2003, 11). In both cases there are significant limitations to the data, as well as distinct advantages. For example, many individuals surveyed by the CPS may not be aware of their union or nonunion status. On the other hand, the demographic information we collected from union locals on their members was poor in quality; here the CPS data are far superior. In compiling the text, we compared the data from both sources. Where one was definitively more reliable, we used it; in cases where both are of comparable reliability, we report both.

Further details on the data and methods are available from the authors.

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