



THE STATE OF THE UNIONS 2012:

A PROFILE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK STATE,
AND THE UNITED STATES

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These are difficult times for organized labor in the United States. In addition to the challenges of an anemic economic recovery and persistently high unemployment, unions are confronting continuing attacks on public-sector collective bargaining rights and aggressive demands for concessions from both public- and private-sector employers.

Against this background, the long-term decline of unionism has continued unabated. Although relative to the nation as a whole, organized labor remains strong in New York City and State, significant erosion has occurred there in recent years, as Figure 1a shows. Nearly one-fourth (22.3 percent) of all wage and salary workers residing in New York City were union members in 2011-12, compared to 22.9 percent a year earlier, and 24.6 percent two years earlier.¹ This proportion was slightly higher in New York State (23.7 percent), which ranks first in union density among the nation's fifty states, and whose unionization rate is more than double the U.S. average of 11.7 percent.² In absolute terms, New York State had more union members — almost 1.9 million — than any state except California, which has a far larger population.

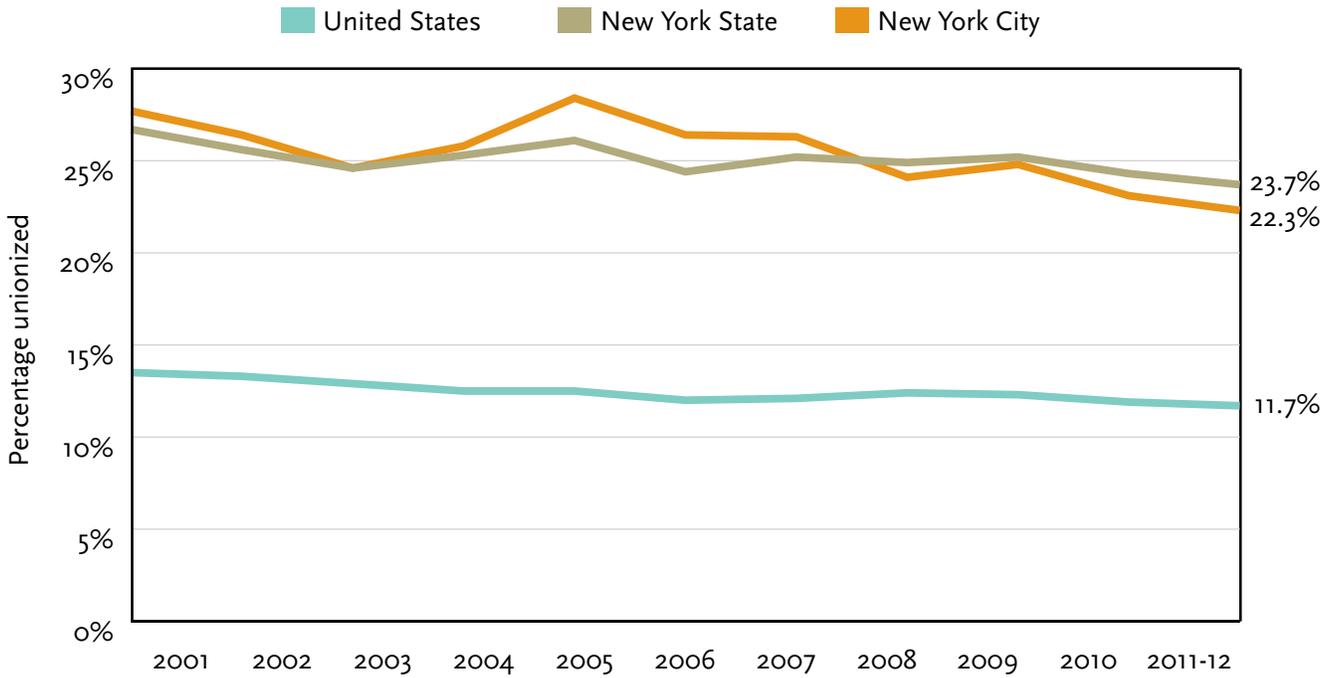
In 2011-12, there were about 735,000 union members in the five boroughs of New York City, representing almost two out of every five union members in the state.³

At the national and state level, and to an even greater extent in New York City, losses in union membership have been disproportionately concentrated in the private sector over the past decade, as Figure 1b shows. The Great Recession that began in late 2007 accelerated the long-term decline in private-sector unionization in the City (see page 5). In the public sector, by contrast, union density has been relatively stable, and has actually increased slightly in New York City recently (see Figure 1c), although ongoing budget cuts and, in other parts of the country, direct attacks on collective bargaining rights for public-sector workers may change that in the future.⁴

Geographical Variation in Union Density

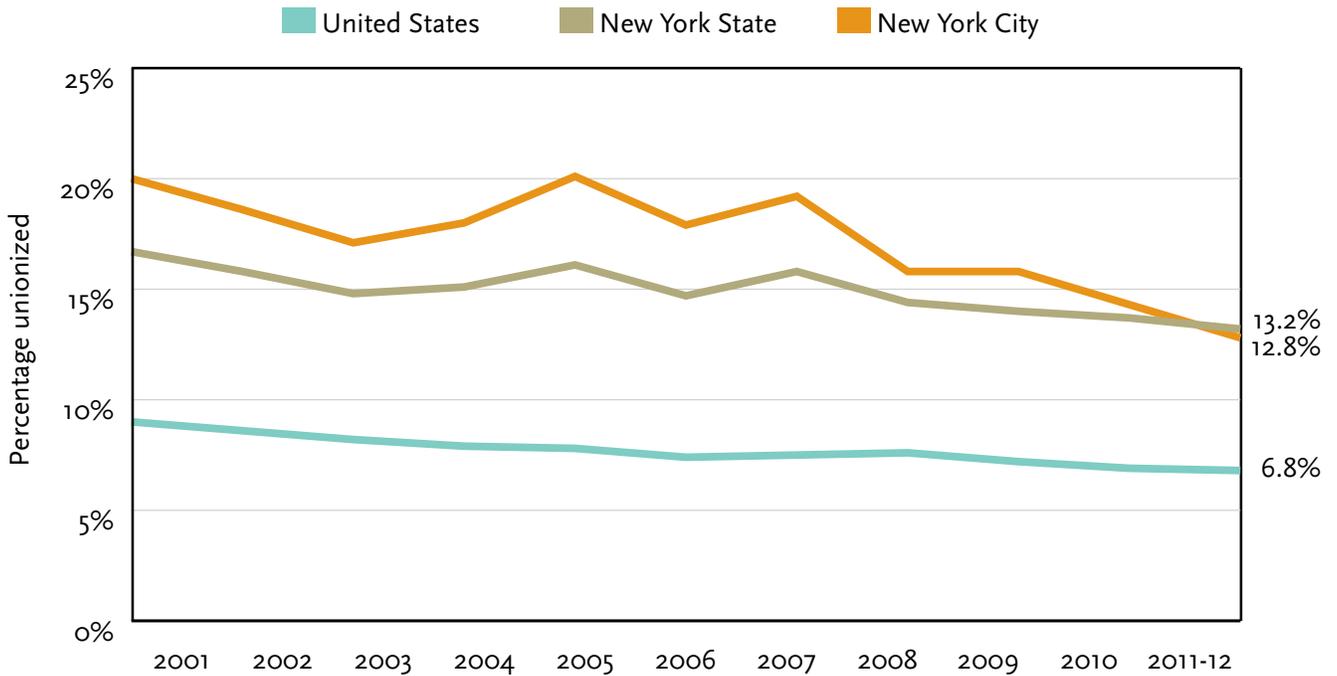
Figure 2 shows the 2011-12 private- and public-sector union density levels for the United States overall, New York State, New York City, upstate New York (excluding the five boroughs of New York City), and the larger New York City metropolitan area.⁵ These are

Figure 1a. Union Density in New York City, New York State and the United States, 2001 - 2012



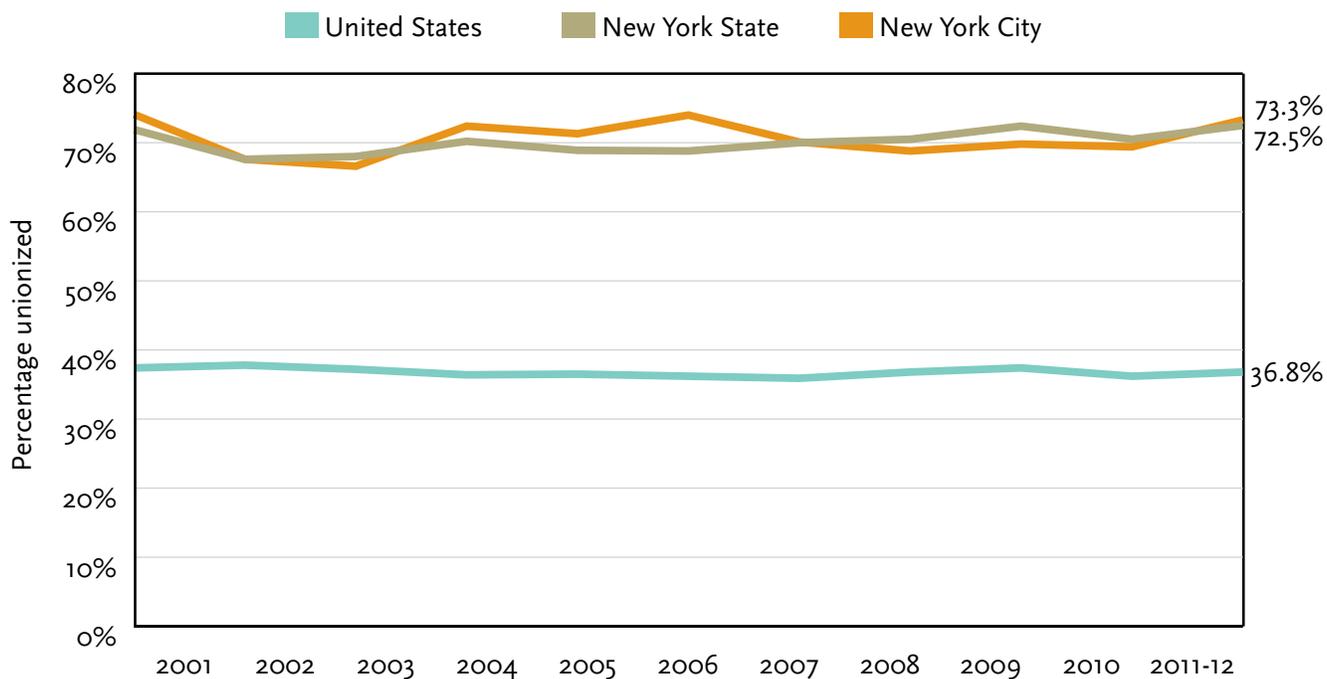
Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2001 - June 2012

Figure 1b. Private-Sector Union Density in New York City, New York State and the United States, 2001 - 2012



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2001 - June 2012

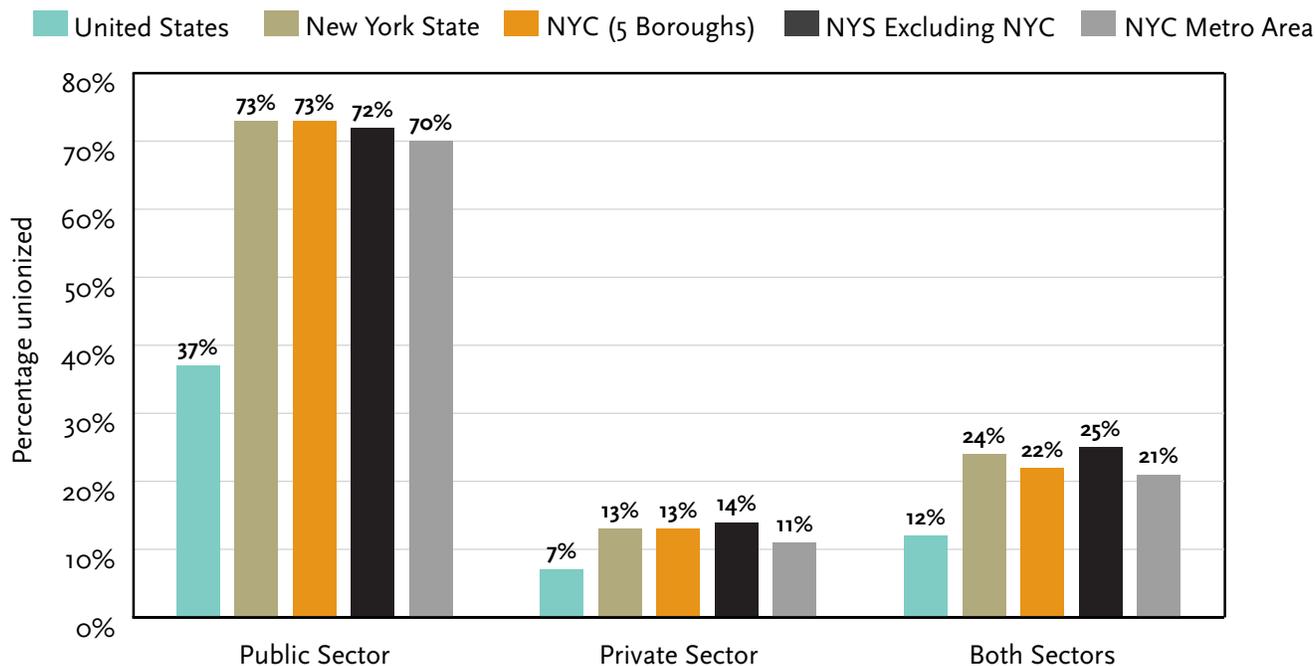
Figure 1c. Public-Sector Union Density in New York City, New York State and the United States, 2001 - 2012



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2001 - June 2012

Figure 2. Union Density, By Sector, New York City, New York State and the United States, 2011-12



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

the five entities for which we present detailed data in the bulk of this report.

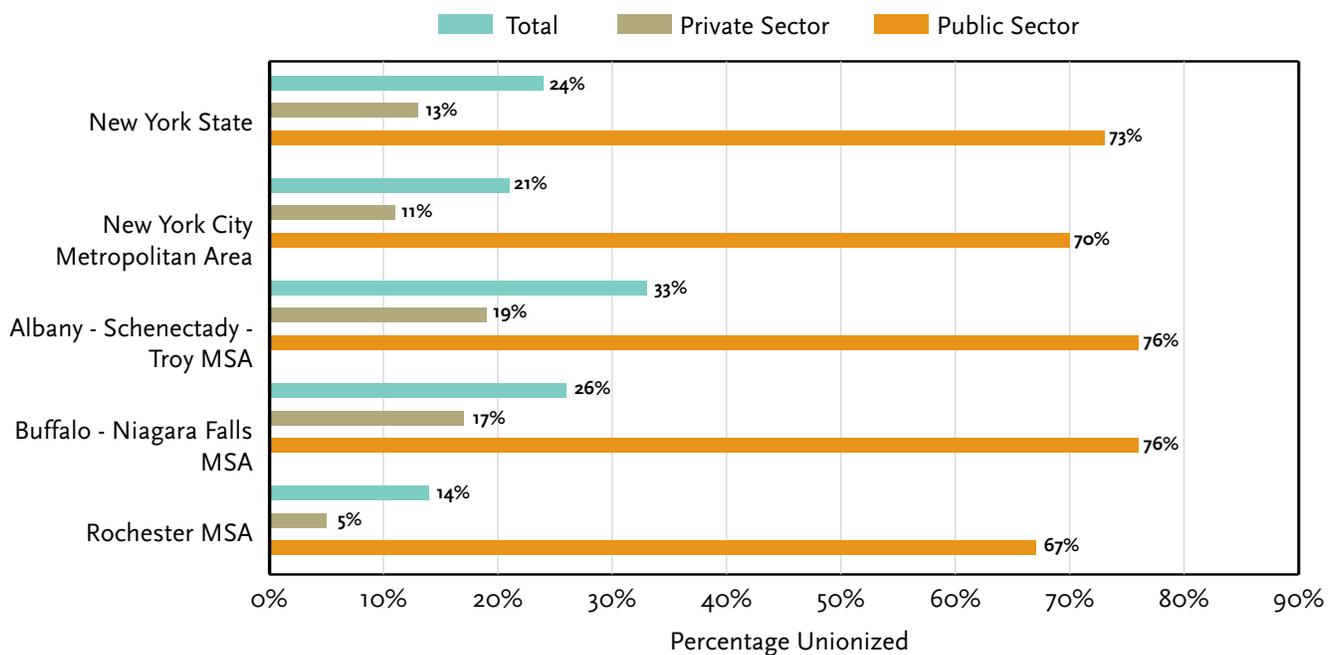
By way of background, however, we begin with some summary figures for additional geographical areas. Figure 3 shows the 2011-12 private- and public-sector density figures for the state, the New York City metropolitan area, and the next three largest metropolitan areas in the state.⁶ In each of these regions, unionization levels were consistently higher in the public than in the private sector, and consistently higher than the national public-sector average, with well over two-thirds of public-sector workers unionized in each region, nearly double the national public-sector rate (36.8 percent). Private-sector union density was lower across the board, but in this sector too, New York State generally exceeded the national average of 6.8 percent for 2011-12. As Figure 3 shows, that was not only the case in the State as a whole — where private-sector density was double the national level — but also in three of its four largest metropolitan areas. The one exception is the Rochester metropolitan area, where private-sector density was

slightly below the national average in 2011-12 (and where public-sector density was also lower than in the other metropolitan areas shown).

The large public-private sector differential, combined with the fact that the Capital District has a disproportionate share of public-sector employment, helps to explain why union density is higher in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area than in the other areas shown in Figure 3. As is typical of metropolitan areas that surround state capitals in highly unionized states, private-sector union density is also higher in Albany-Schenectady-Troy than in any other metropolitan area shown in Figure 3.⁷

Within New York City, as Figure 4 shows, union density varies across the five boroughs, with substantially higher levels of unionization among residents of the outer boroughs than among those living in Manhattan in 2011-12. The population of Staten Island has the highest union density levels in the city. Unfortunately, given CPS sample size limitations, we cannot analyze these inter-borough variations in more detail.⁸

Figure 3. Union Density By Sector, New York State and Selected Metropolitan Areas, 2011-12



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

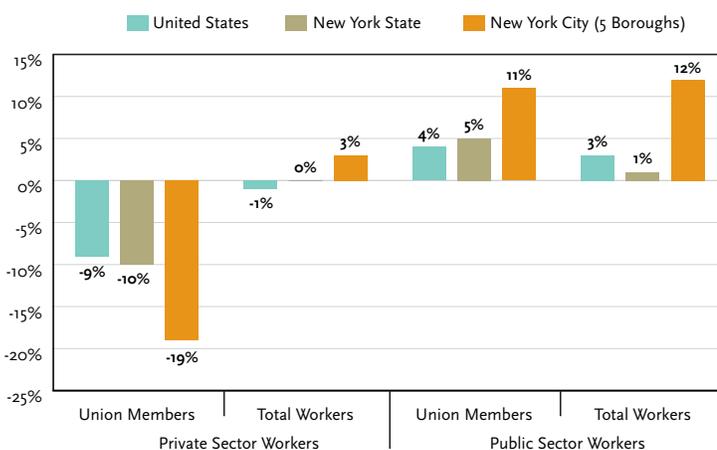
THE RECESSION'S IMPACT ON PRIVATE-SECTOR UNION DENSITY IN NEW YORK CITY

A comparison of union membership in 2003-07 and 2008-12 offers a window into the impact of the Great Recession on the labor movement. Most striking here is the sharp decline in New York City's private-sector unionism over this time span. The recession accelerated the long-term process of de-unionization in the City's private sector, to a far greater extent than in New York State or in the nation as a whole. Between 2003-07 and 2008-12, the average number of private-sector union members in the City fell by nearly one-fifth (19%), double the decline over that time span in New York State (10%) and in the nation (9%).

As Figure R1 reveals, the sharp decline in private-sector union membership in New York City was *not* due to a disproportionate decline in employment; on the contrary, employment in the City actually grew modestly (by 3%) over this time span. Total employment was flat in New York State and declined slightly nationally over this period, yet union membership fell less in the State and nation than in the City. Meanwhile in the public sector, both union membership and employment rose in the City, to a much greater degree than was the case in New York State or in the nation.

Figure R2 decomposes the decline in New York City's private-sector union membership by industry group, and also shows the change in employment in each industry group over the 2004-07 and 2008-12 periods. Union membership fell by 30% or more in manufacturing; wholesale and retail trade; information services; finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE); professional services; and in leisure and hospitality. In most of these industry groups, as Figure R2 shows, employment increased even as union membership fell. The only exception here was manufacturing, which continued its long-term employment decline. That employment grew in all the other industry groups mentioned suggests that the union membership decline was not a result of employment losses, but other causes).

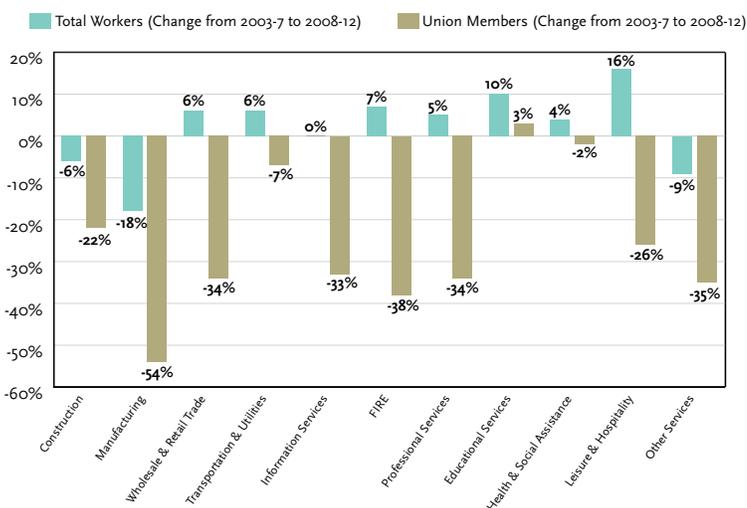
Figure R1. Changes in Union Membership and Total Employment, New York City, New York State, and the United States, 2003-2012.



Percentages shown are for the average of the 60 months from Jan. 2003-to Dec. 2007 and the 56 months from Jan. 2008 - June 2012.

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2003 - June 2012

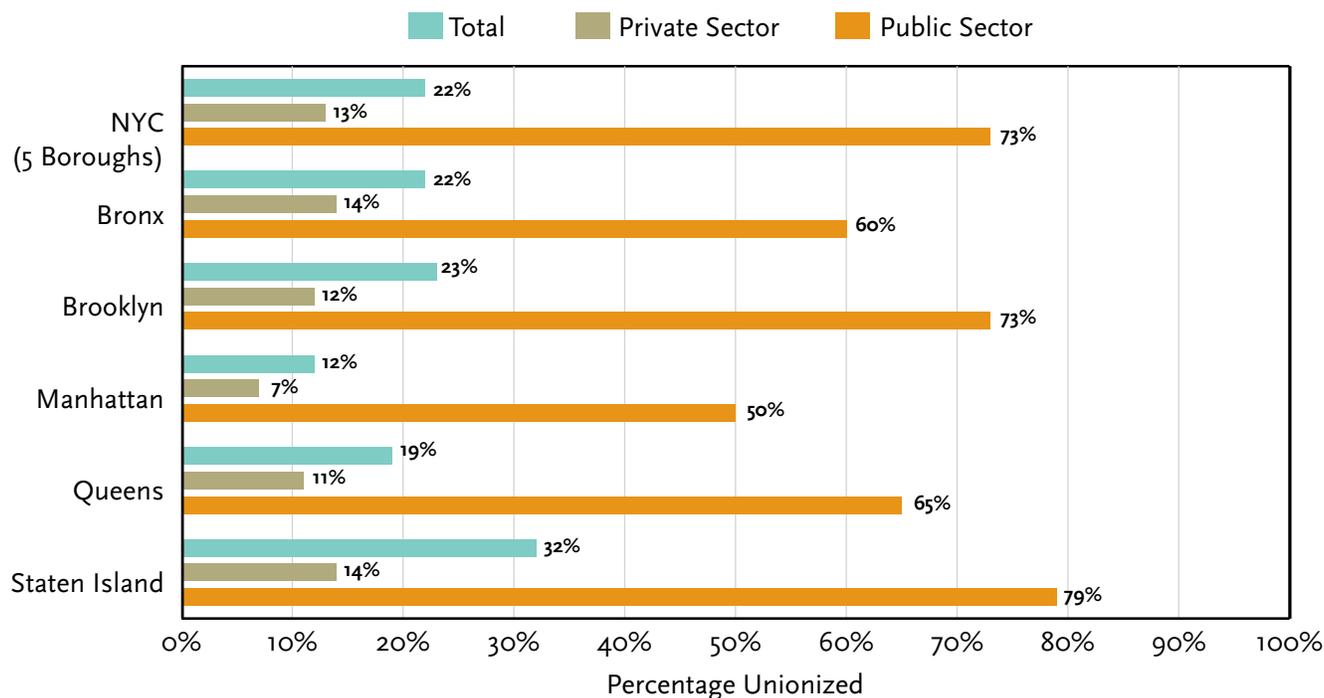
Figure R2. Changes in Union Membership and Total Employment between 2003-07 and 2008-2012, Private Sector Only, Selected Industry Groups, New York City.



Percentages shown are for the average of the 60 months from Jan. 2003-to Dec. 2007 and the 54 months from Jan. 2008 - June 2012.

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2003 - June 2012

Figure 4. Union Density By Sector, New York City and Its Boroughs, 2011-12



NOTE: Several values reflect subgroups with fewer than 100 observations. See endnote 8 for details. Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012. Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

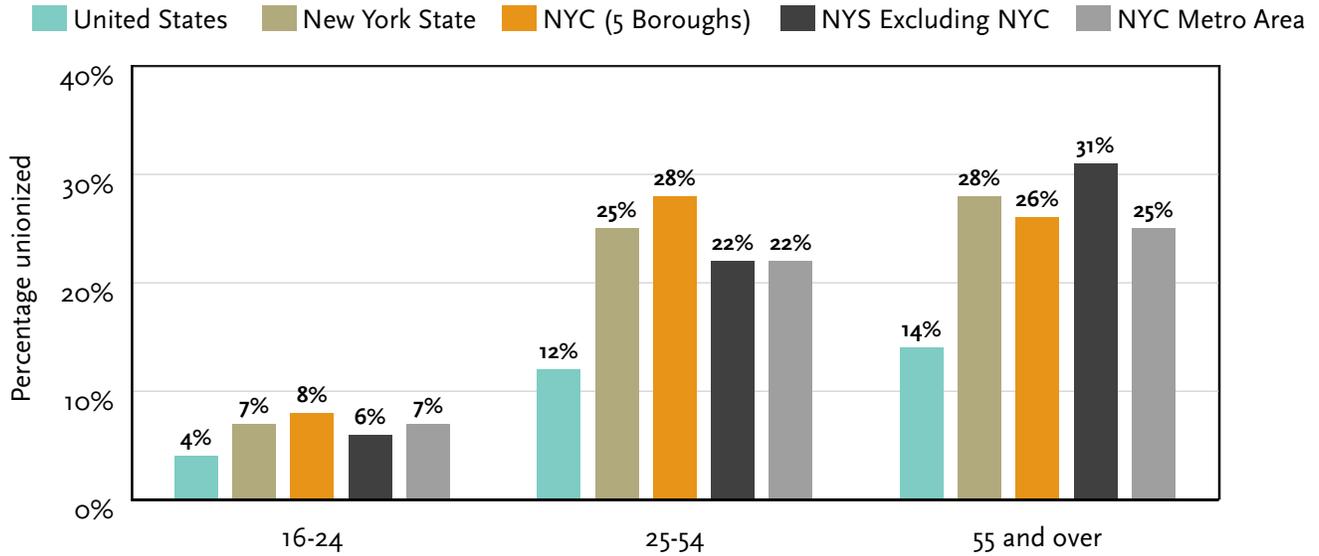
Union Membership By Age, Earnings, and Education

Unionization rates are much higher for older than younger workers. As Figure 5 shows, they are highest for workers aged 55 years or more, somewhat lower for those aged 25-54, and far lower — by a factor of about three relative to the 55+ group — for those aged 16-24. This pattern is consistent across all the geographical entities shown, reflecting the limited extent of union organizing among new labor market entrants. In addition, as Figure 6 shows, unionized jobs typically provide workers with higher wages than nonunion jobs do. Because higher wages are strongly associated with lower turnover, this tends to generate an older workforce. In addition, unionized jobs typically offer more job security than nonunion jobs, further reducing turnover and thus further

contributing to the relatively higher average age of unionized workers.

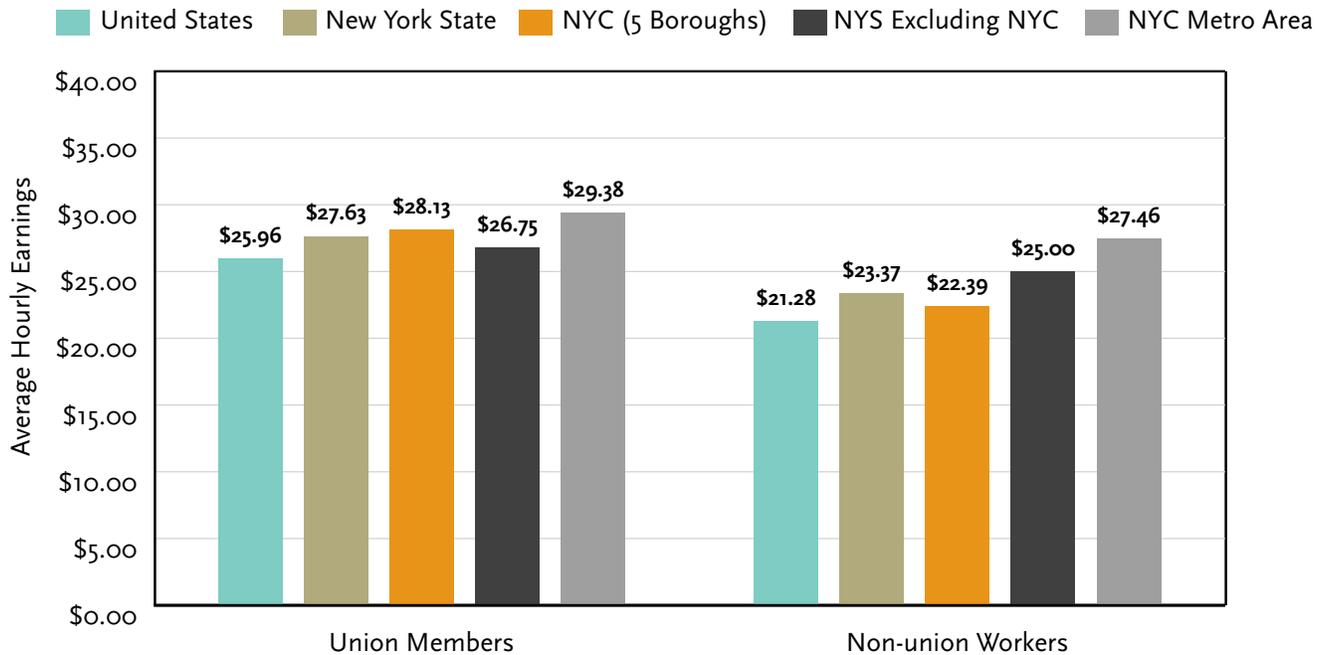
Figure 7 shows that — contrary to popular belief — in both New York State and the United States, the more education workers have, the higher their unionization rate tends to be. Whereas decades ago the archetypal union member was a blue collar worker with limited formal education, today mid-level professionals in fields like education and public administration are more likely to be unionized than virtually any other group of workers (as documented in detail below). The traditional pattern is still in evidence in the five boroughs of New York City, and to a lesser degree in the New York City metropolitan area, where high school graduates have unionization rates only slightly lower than those of college graduates, and those with some college (but not

Figure 5. Unionization Rates by Age, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



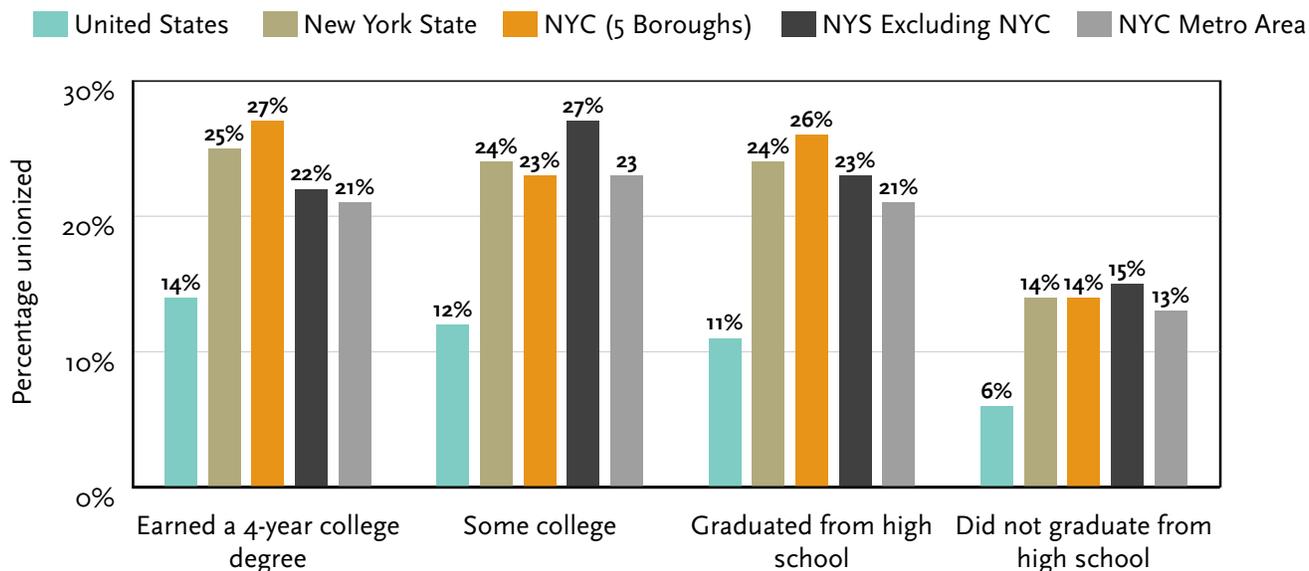
Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

Figure 6. Mean Weekly Earnings, Union Members and Non-Union Workers, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



Figures reflect preliminary estimates, in 2012 dollars.
 Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

Figure 7. Unionization Rates by Education, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

a four-year college degree) have the highest rates of all. This reflects the high union density of New York City’s transportation and health care industries (discussed below), both of which employ large numbers of workers with high school and two-year college degrees.

Industry Variation in Unionization Rates

As Table 1 shows, more than half (54.8 percent) of all unionized workers in the United States are in three basic industry groups: educational services, health care and social assistance, and public administration. In New York City and State, those three industry groups account for an even greater proportion of all unionized workers (63.4 percent and 63.6 percent, respectively). All three of these industry groups are comprised predominantly of public sector jobs (although the health care component of “health care and social assistance” is largely in the private sector) and all three include relatively large numbers of college-educated workers.

As Table 1 shows, the composition of union membership in New York City (both in the five boroughs and in the larger metropolitan area), and to a lesser degree in the state as well, differs in some other respects from the national pattern. This reflects New York City’s highly deindustrialized local economy and its status as a key node of the global financial sector. Manufacturing accounts for a far smaller share of union membership in New York than nationally, especially in the City, while finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) and professional and business services account for a larger share of the total than is the case elsewhere in the nation.

Table 2 shows the composition of wage and salary employment by industry group for the same five geographical entities for which the composition of union membership is presented in Table 1. Comparing the two tables reveals that, for most industry groups, the share of union membership deviates greatly from the share of employment. Industry groups with high union density, such as

Table 1. Composition of Union Membership by Industry Group, for Selected Geographical Areas in New York and the United States, 2011-12

Industry Group	USA	New York State	NYS Excl. NYC	NYC (5 Boroughs)	NYC Metro Area
Construction	6.7%	5.5%	6.3%	4.2%	5.4%
Manufacturing	9.7%	4.0%	6.0%	0.9%	2.4%
Wholesale and retail trade	6.0%	4.6%	5.7%	2.7%	6.0%
Transportation and utilities	12.8%	11.0%	10.2%	12.3%	12.9%
Information services	2.1%	1.7%	2.0%	1.2%	1.8%
Finance, insurance and real estate	1.4%	2.7%	1.5%	4.6%	2.8%
Professional and business services	2.4%	3.3%	2.1%	5.1%	4.0%
Educational Services	28.5%	28.7%	31.8%	24.0%	27.9%
Health Care and Social Assistance	11.3%	19.7%	15.8%	25.8%	18.9%
Leisure and Hospitality	2.5%	2.3%	1.0%	4.2%	2.6%
Other Services	1.3%	1.2%	1.2%	1.4%	1.3%
Public administration	15.0%	15.2%	16.3%	13.6%	14.2%
Other	0.6%	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Table 2. Composition of Wage and Salary Employment by Industry Group, for Selected Geographical Areas in New York and the United States, 2011-12

Industry Group	USA	New York State	NYS Excl. NYC	NYC (5 Boroughs)	NYC Metro Area
Construction	5.3%	4.8%	4.7%	4.9%	4.8%
Manufacturing	11.0%	7.1%	9.4%	3.9%	6.6%
Wholesale and retail trade	14.4%	13.2%	14.7%	11.1%	13.1%
Transportation and utilities	5.3%	5.4%	4.6%	6.6%	6.4%
Information services	2.3%	3.1%	2.8%	3.5%	3.4%
Finance, insurance and real estate	6.7%	8.5%	6.8%	10.7%	9.7%
Professional and business services	10.1%	10.7%	9.3%	12.7%	12.6%
Educational Services	10.1%	11.8%	13.3%	9.9%	10.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	14.1%	16.3%	16.3%	16.4%	15.2%
Leisure and Hospitality	9.4%	9.2%	7.8%	11.1%	8.6%
Other Services	4.4%	4.3%	4.0%	4.6%	4.4%
Public administration	5.4%	5.4%	5.9%	4.7%	4.7%
Other	1.6%	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

educational services, or transportation and utilities, make up a much larger share of union membership than of employment. By contrast, wholesale and retail trade, and the leisure and hospitality industry group, account for a far more substantial share of employment than of union membership.

Figure 8 depicts the industry group data in a different format, showing unionization rates by industry (as opposed to the share of the unionized workforce employed in each industry group, shown in Table 1) for the City, the metropolitan area, the State, and the nation. Unionization rates vary widely across the twelve industry groups shown. Education and public administration are the most highly unionized, as noted above, followed by the transportation and utilities industry group. Next come construction, along with health care and social assistance, two other industry groups in which unionization is extensive in New York City, the surrounding metropolitan area, and New York State. By contrast, in the United States as a whole, unionization rates for these industry groups are only slightly above average. At the other extreme, union density is consistently low — in the single digits — for wholesale and retail trade, leisure and hospitality, and “other services,” regardless of geography.

Because these industry group data are highly aggregated, they obscure the complexity of the City, State and nation’s extremely uneven patterns of unionization by industry. The limited sample size of the CPS limits our ability to capture that complexity for 2011-12. For this reason, we created a different dataset that consolidates CPS data over a much longer period, the nine and a half years from January 2003 to June 2012, inclusive.⁹ This 114-month blend provides a much larger sample size, permitting a far more disaggregated analysis of industry variations. Because of the longer time span represented in the data, the unionization rates derived from this dataset will differ somewhat from those shown in Figure 8 for 2011-12.¹⁰

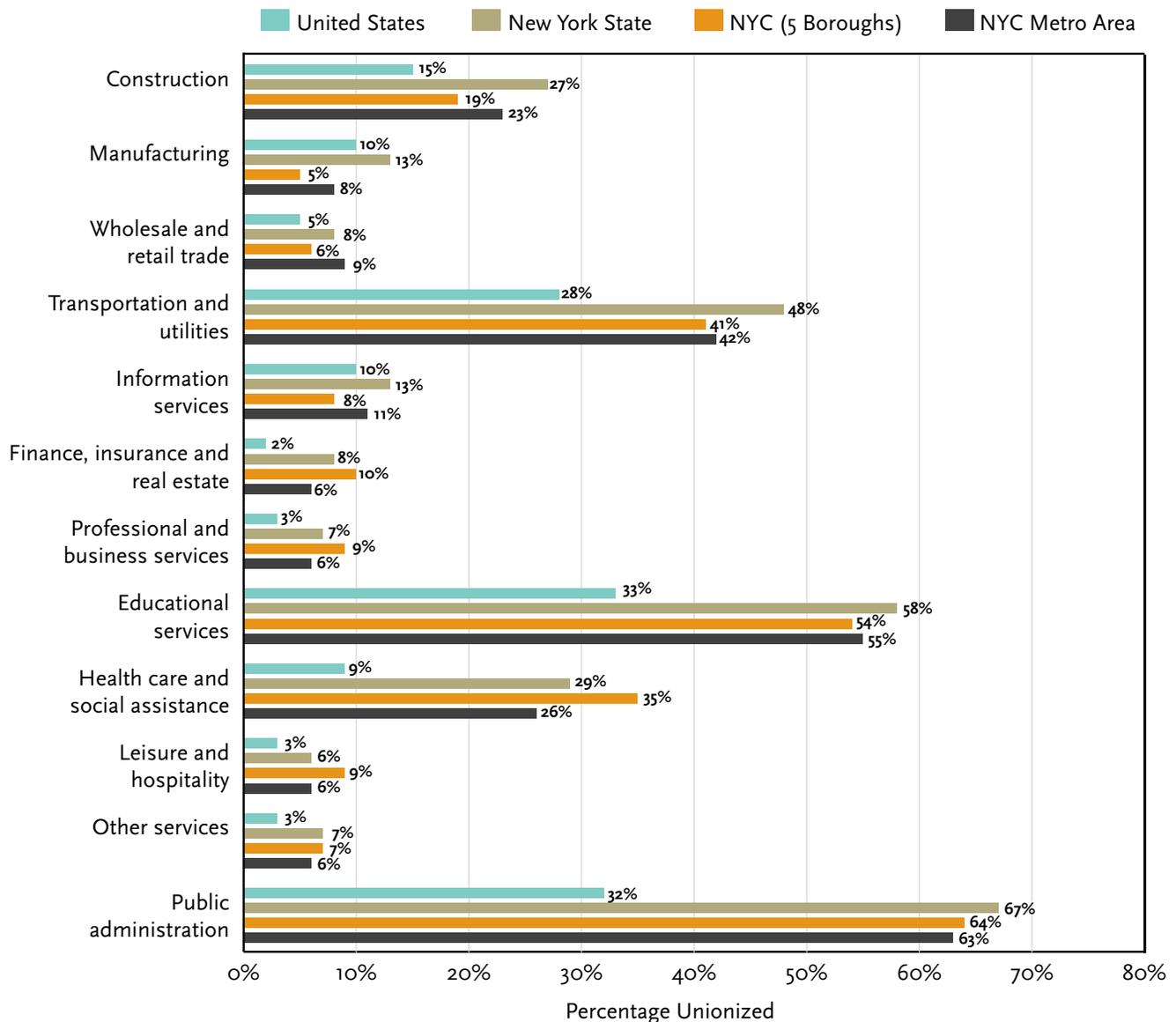
Table 3 summarizes the 2003-2012 data for 41 industry groups, showing unionization rates in the five boroughs of New York City, New York State, and the United States as a whole. For almost all of these industries, both New York City and New York State had far higher union density than in the United States as a whole in this period. The few exceptions include food manufacturing and couriers and messengers, both of which had higher density in the State than in the nation as a whole, but more limited unionization in New York City; and retail grocery stores, in which the City lags both the State and the nation, reflecting the fact that unlike the rest of the country, New York City proper has vast numbers of small specialty retail food stores, very few of which are unionized.

In 11 of the 41 industries shown, 2003-12 unionization rates were above 35 percent in New York City: utilities, air transportation, bus service and urban transit, postal service transportation, wired and other telecommunications, elementary and secondary schools, hospitals, nursing care facilities, home health care services, hotels, and public administration. With the exception of hotels, these industries also had rates at or above 30 percent in the State. In the case of air transportation and postal service transportation, the high unionization rates are the product of national-level collective bargaining, but for the other nine industries they reflect union strength in local and regional labor markets.

Union contracts may no longer set the wage standard for the City’s workforce as a whole, but they often do so in such key sectors of the urban economy as hotels, hospitals, nursing care, and telecommunications, as well as in public sector industries like transit, education, home health care (the unionized portion of which is publicly funded) and public administration.

That said, the detailed portrait of industry-specific unionization rates in Table 3 fails to capture some important points of differentiation. For example,

Figure 8. Unionization Rates by Industry Group, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

although union density in New York City retail grocery stores overall was 15.2 percent in the 2003-12 period, nearly all traditional supermarkets in the city are unionized. Similarly, while overall density for department and discount stores in New York City as a whole was less than 15 percent, some major Manhattan

department stores are unionized “wall to wall.” These data also fail to capture the differences among industry segments within construction, in which commercial construction is far more unionized than its residential counterpart in the City, the State and the nation alike.

Table 3. Unionization Rates by Industry, New York City, New York State, and the United States, 2003-2012.

Industry	New York City (5 boroughs)	New York State	United States
TOTAL (All Industries)	24.8%	24.8%	12.2%
Agriculture and mining	NA	3.7	4.7
Utilities	58.6	56.9	29.1
Construction	26.9	29.5	15.4
Food manufacturing	12.0	19.9	16.2
Textile and apparel manufacturing	11.8	12.7	4.7
Paper products and printing	20.1	15.2	13.6
Other manufacturing	12.8	15.7	11.4
Wholesale grocery and beverages	14.6	18.1	10.8
Other wholesale trade	8.1	6.9	3.2
Retail grocery stores	14.7	23.9	19.4
Pharmacy and drug stores	8.3	6.8	4.9
Department and discount stores	14.7	6.3	2.6
Other retail trade	5.4	4.6	2.1
Air transportation	46.0	48.0	44.7
Truck transportation	14.5	18.8	10.6
Bus service and urban transit	73.7	65.2	41.4
Postal service (transportation)	78.1	80.9	64.8
Couriers and messengers	29.2	34.9	29.5
Other transportation	23.7	30.3	23.7
Newspaper, periodical and book publishing	8.8	12.9	7.2
Motion pictures and video	17.0	14.6	13.1
Radio, television and cable broadcasting	19.6	16.5	7.5
Wired and other telecommunications	40.1	37.4	19.1
Other information services	17.7	17.4	8.4
Finance, insurance and real estate	13.2	9.7	2.5
Building and security services	26.5	17.4	4.9
Other management and professional services	6.5	5.9	2.5
Elementary and secondary schools	67.4	69.6	42.7
Other educational services	25.0	28.8	13.6
Offices of physicians and other health providers	8.8	4.6	2.1
Hospitals	48.8	40.2	14.3
Nursing care facilities	46.7	31.9	8.4
Home health care services	37.1	31.6	9.0
Child day care services	18.6	10.3	7.3
Other health care and social assistance	26.3	21.8	3.4
Performing arts, museums, and sports	25.2	25.0	11.6
Amusement, gambling and recreation	5.6	5.9	5.0
Hotels	35.9	22.1	8.0
Restaurants, food service & drinking places	3.5	2.6	1.3
Other services	9.0	7.3	3.2
Public administration	62.9	66.9	32.1

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2003-June 2012.

Union Membership Demographics

The patterns of unionization by industry have a powerful effect on the demographics of unionism, because males and females, as well as workers of various racial and ethnic origins, are unevenly distributed across industries.¹¹ For example, educational services, as well as health care and social assistance, which have very high unionization rates, rely disproportionately on female workers. So do retail industries like drug stores and department stores, hotels, child day care services, and finance, insurance and real estate. These patterns help explain why the 2011-12 unionization rate for women in New York City and in the metropolitan area, as well as New York State was higher than that of men. As Figure 9 shows, in the portion of New York State other than the City, the gender gap is modest, but the male unionization rate was slightly greater than that of females in 2011-12. The gender gap was wider in the nation as a whole, again favoring males, largely because the public sector is less extensively unionized nationally than in New York City and State.

Unionization rates also vary by race and ethnicity, as Figure 10 shows. Like the gender dynamic, this too reflects differential racial and ethnic patterns of employment across industries. African Americans are the most highly unionized group shown in Figure 10, regardless of geography, largely because of their disproportionately high representation in public-sector employment. This effect is amplified in New York City because of the highly unionized bus service and urban transit sector, in which African Americans are also overrepresented.

Immigrants and Unionization

Unionization rates vary with nativity as well. As Figure 11 shows, in 2011-12 U.S.-born workers were more highly unionized than foreign-born workers, regardless of geography, once again reflecting the fact that relatively few foreign-born workers are employed

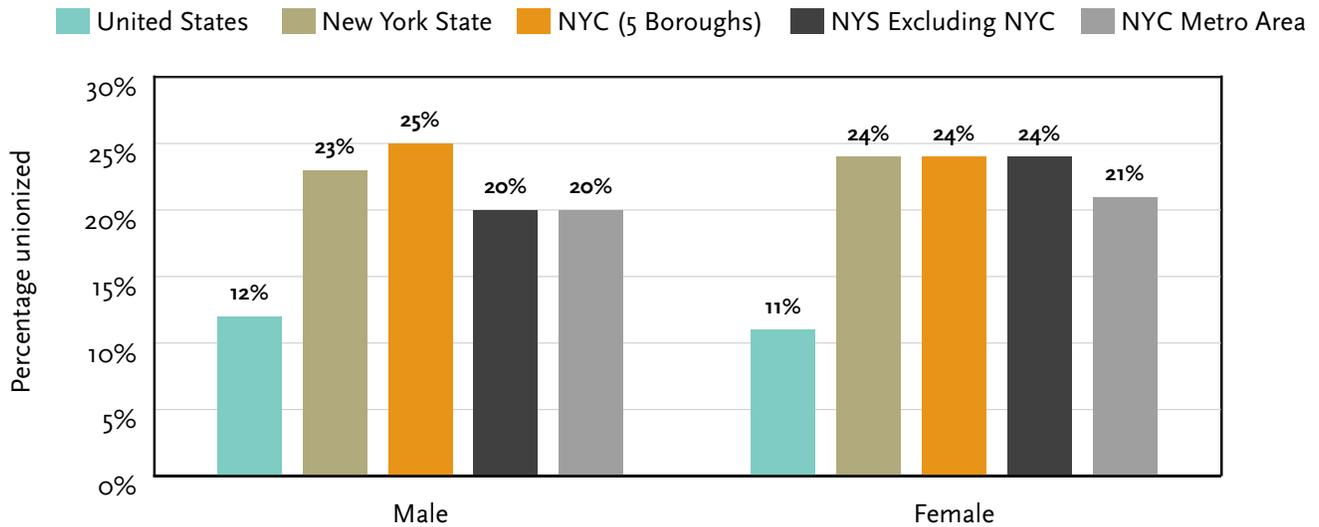
in the highly unionized public sector. In contrast, workers born in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico — a substantial population group in both New York City and the rest of the state — are highly unionized. Indeed, their unionization rate is even higher than that of African Americans. Puerto Rican-born workers (all of whom are U.S. citizens) are highly overrepresented in public sector employment. In contrast, the foreign-born are vastly underrepresented in that segment of the workforce.¹²

As Figure 12 shows, however, foreign-born workers are by no means a homogenous group. The 2011-12 unionization rate of naturalized U.S. citizens, and that of immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1990, are comparable to or higher than those of U.S.-born workers. More recent arrivals, by contrast, have extremely low rates of unionization. These newcomers are relatively young, and as noted above, few younger workers are union members, regardless of nativity. Moreover, the most recent immigrants are disproportionately employed in informal-sector jobs that have relatively low unionization rates. Over time, however, these data suggest that many immigrant workers manage to move up in the labor market, into sectors where unions are present.

Figure 13 shows that unionization rates for foreign-born workers vary much less *within* the public and private sectors than between them. Even foreign-born workers who arrived in the U.S. after 1990, whose overall unionization rates are generally low (as Figure 12 shows), had 2011-12 public-sector unionization rates of about 60 percent in New York State and in the New York City metropolitan area, and over 30 percent in the nation as a whole.

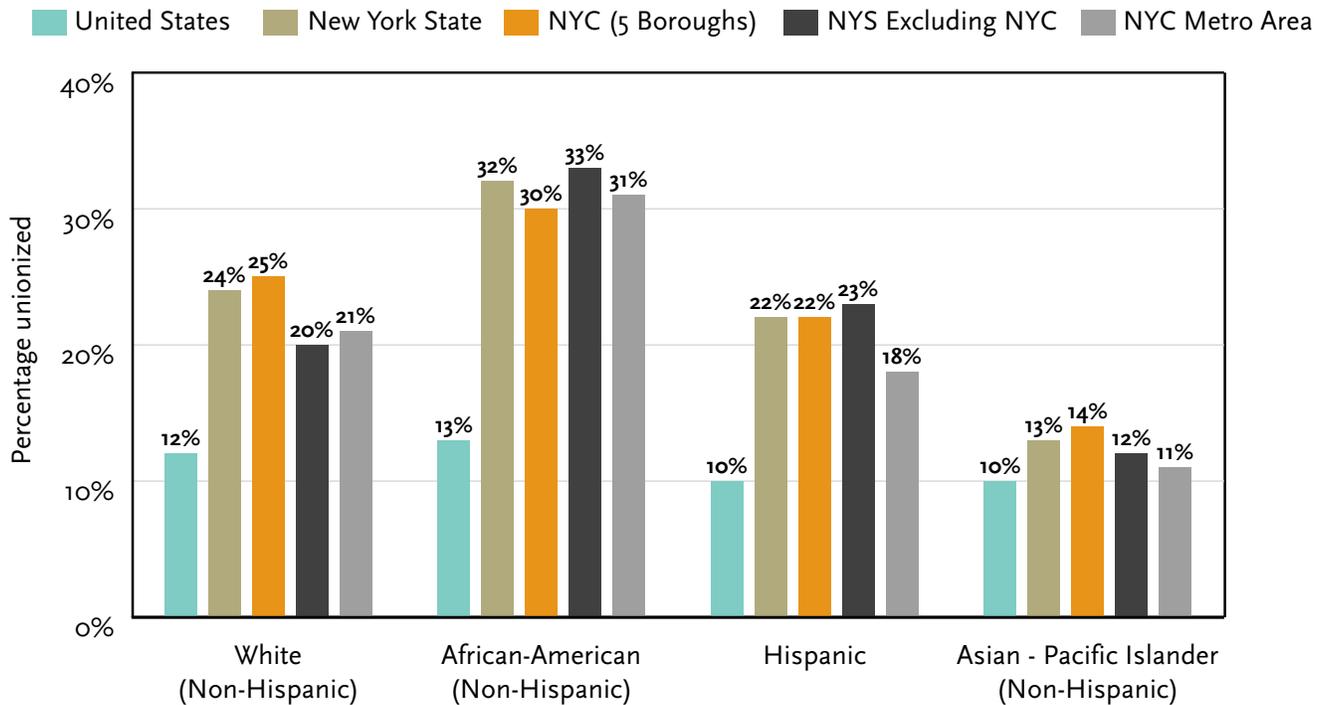
Relatively few noncitizens and recently arrived immigrants work in the public sector, however. Only 5.7 percent of all foreign-born noncitizens in the United States, and only 7.1 percent of all foreign-born workers who arrived in or after 1990, were employed in the public sector in 2011-12. By contrast, 16.3 percent of the overall U.S. workforce was in the public

Figure 9. Unionization Rates by Gender, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



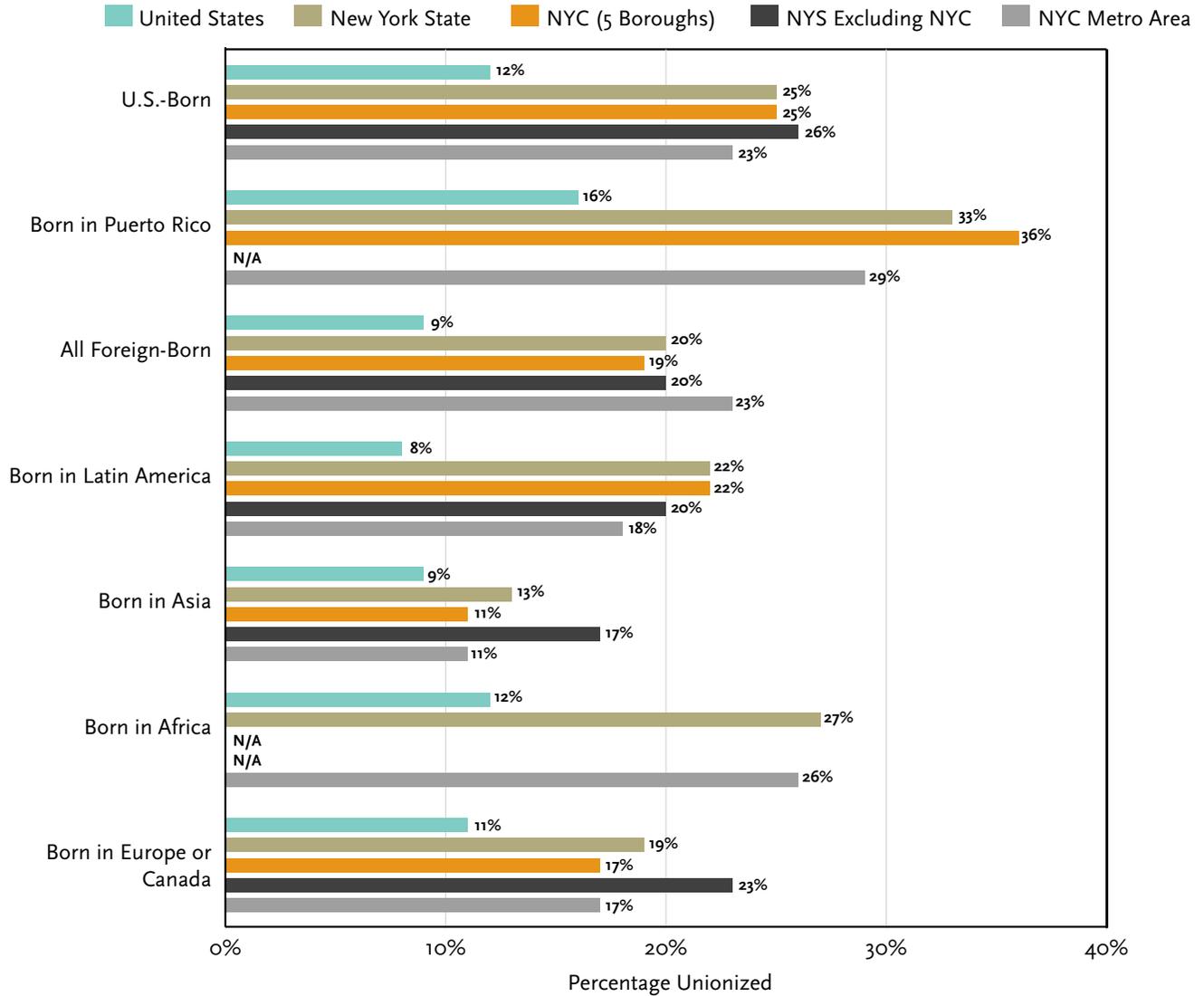
Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

Figure 10. Unionization Rates by Race and Ethnicity, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



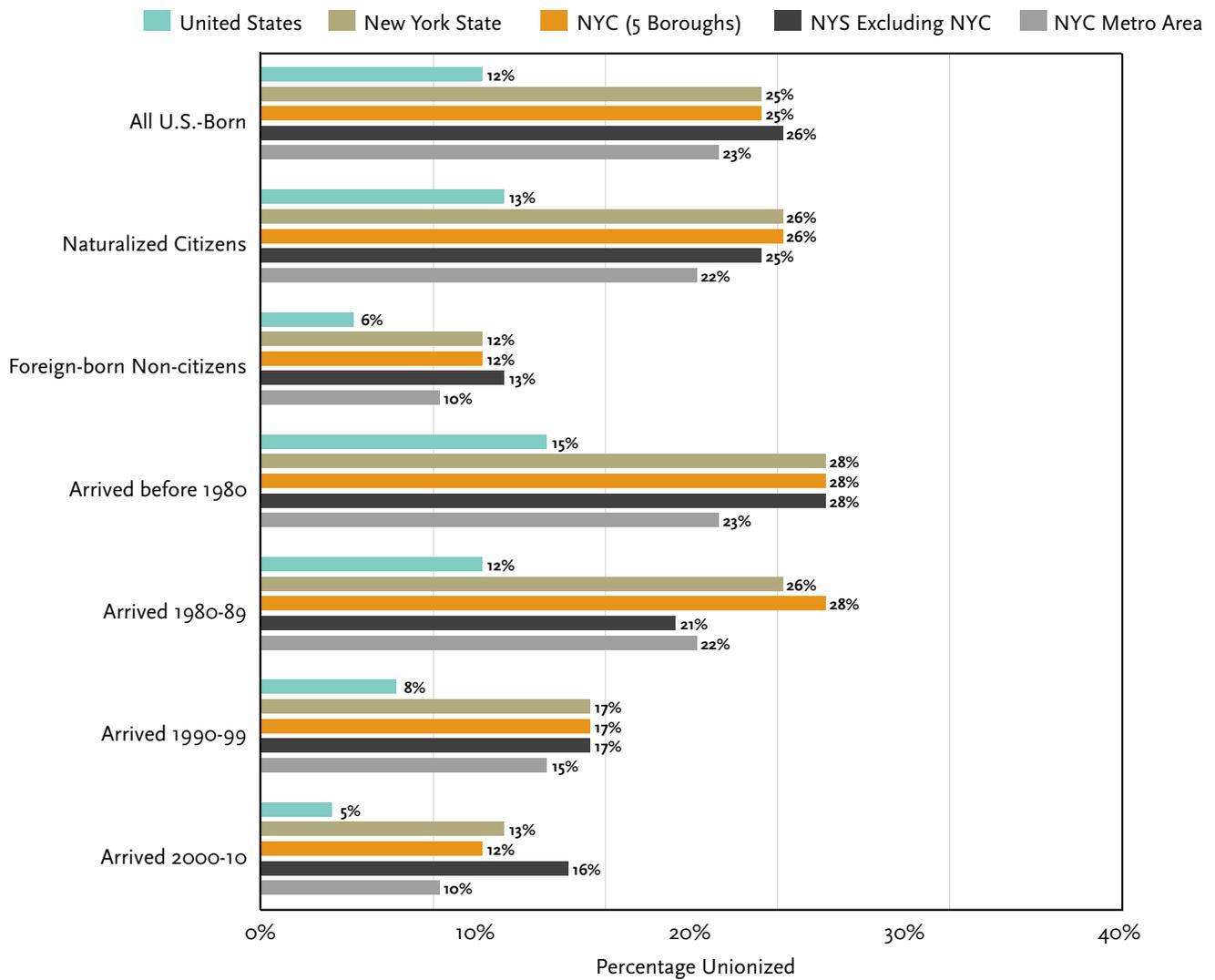
Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

Figure 11. Unionization Rates by Selected Places of Birth, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See endnote 1 in the text.
 Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

Figure 12. Unionization Rates by Nativity, Citizenship Status, and Date of Arrival in the United States, Selected Geographical Areas, 2011-12



Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

Figure 13. Public and Private Sector Unionization by Nativity, Citizenship Status and Date of Arrival, United States, New York State, and New York Metropolitan Area, 2011-12



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See endnote 1 in the text.
 Note: Percentages shown for 2011-12 include the 18 months from January 2011 to June 2012
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2011 - June 2012

sector. As a result, the high level of public-sector unionization for these particular immigrant groups does little to boost their overall unionization rate. By contrast, in the private sector, unionization rates are consistently lower for all groups, regardless of citizenship status or date of arrival.

Table 4 offers a closer look at patterns of immigrant unionization by national origin. Due to the limited sample size of the CPS, for this purpose we used the dataset (described above) that includes CPS data from January 2003 to June 2012. Table 4 presents unionization rates for immigrants from various countries and regions for that period, for foreign-born wage and salary workers living in New York City, New York State, and the nation.¹³ (Because they are based on multiple years, the data in Table 4 differ from those shown in Figures 11, 12 and 13; since unionization declined between 2003 and 2012 the rates shown in Table 4 are consistently higher than the comparable rates in 2011-12.)

Table 4 reveals that unionization rates vary widely among immigrants by place of birth. There are a number of reasons for this. One involves date of arrival; as Figure 12 shows, immigrants who have been in the United States for an extended period are more likely to be unionized than recent arrivals. Similarly, naturalized citizens are more likely to be unionized than non-citizen immigrants (as Figure 12 also shows). The case of Mexican immigrants in New York City is an extreme one in this respect; as recent arrivals to the city, few of whom are citizens and many of whom are unauthorized, they have the lowest unionization rate of any group shown in Table 4.¹⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, Italian-born workers, as well as those born in the Caribbean, are more likely to have arrived decades ago and to have become citizens.

It is striking that several of the immigrant nationalities shown in Table 4 have unionization rates that exceed those of U.S.-born workers. In the case of New York City, that is the case for those born

in Italy, the Philippines, Honduras, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Ghana. Typically workers from these nationality groups are overrepresented in highly unionized industries. Thus for example, 43 percent of all Italian-born workers in the city are employed in education, health care and social assistance and construction (compared to 30 percent of all U.S. born workers in the city). For several other nationality groups, overrepresentation in the health care and social assistance sector largely accounts for their high unionization rates: 49 percent of Filipino immigrants, 24 percent of Dominican-born, 38 percent of the Haitian-born, 39 percent of the Jamaican-born, 29 percent of the Guyana-born and 32 percent of the African-born workers in New York City are employed in the highly unionized health care and social assistance industry group; by contrast that industry group employs only 14 percent of the city's U.S. born workers. Similarly, Haitians, immigrants from Guyana, and South Asians are overrepresented in the highly unionized transportation industry, which helps to account for their relatively high unionization rates. The specifics are a bit different for immigrants in New York State and in the United States as a whole, but in general the varying unionization rates among the groups shown in Table 4 are closely correlated with their varied distribution across industries, which vary in union density levels (see Figure 8), as well as their dates of arrival and citizenship status.

Conclusion

Actively recruiting new members into the ranks of the labor movement, as many dedicated organizers have sought to do in recent years, is the primary means by which unions themselves can act to increase the unionization level. This is one key counterweight to the downward trend in organized labor's influence. Yet many factors that the labor movement cannot control also critically influence the level of union

Table 4. Unionization Rates for Foreign-born Workers by Place of Birth, New York City, New York State, and the United States, 2003-2012.

	Place of Birth	New York City (5 boroughs)	New York State	United States
EUROPE	Italy	31.3%	30.7%	20.2%
	Great Britain and Ireland	23.0	25.3	10.8
	Other Western Europe	14.4	18.3	11.6
	Russia	20.6	19.2	10.4
	Poland	18.5	21.0	13.7
	Ukraine	18.9	18.5	11.6
	Other Eastern Europe	16.9	18.5	10.0
ASIA	Middle East	14.0	14.5	8.7
	China (including Hong Kong)	10.6	11.1	8.3
	Bangladesh	12.8	11.8	7.9
	India	17.0	20.3	6.2
	Pakistan	22.7	22.1	9.3
	Philippines	33.0	31.9	18.6
	Korea	5.7	7.1	7.2
	Other Southeast Asia	14.8	15.2	9.3
Other Asia	19.4	16.5	8.9	
LATIN AMERICA	Mexico	5.0	6.9	6.8
	El Salvador	16.5	12.8	8.0
	Honduras	29.5	20.4	6.0
	Other Central America	33.3	24.9	8.3
	Barbados	33.5	31.3	27.7
	Dominican Republic	27.9	26.6	17.7
	Haiti	41.5	39.6	16.7
	Jamaica	37.5	35.9	20.8
	Trinidad and Tobago	27.0	28.0	18.3
	Other Caribbean	35.0	33.1	9.5
	Columbia	25.9	23.8	9.8
	Ecuador	18.4	17.2	12.0
	Guyana	30.4	29.3	21.8
Other South America	18.4	18.0	7.6	
AFRICA	Ghana	43.6	43.4	16.2
	Other Africa	26.4	24.6	10.8
	Other foreign-born	20.6	21.7	11.1
	U.S. (except Puerto Rico)	26.3	25.6	12.7
	Puerto Rico	37.8	33.9	17.2

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2003-June 2012.

density. All else equal, if employment declines in a highly unionized sector of the economy, or expands in a non-union (or weakly unionized) sector, union density will fall. The best-known example of this is the steady decline of manufacturing — a former union stronghold — over the past few decades, along with the expansion of private-sector service industries where unions have historically been weak. Indeed, these combined trends have been a major driver of the general erosion of union density. Conversely, if employment expands in a highly unionized sector or declines in a non-union or weakly unionized one, the overall level of density will increase. Privatization and subcontracting, both of which often involve a shift from union to non-union status for affected workers, further complicate the picture in some settings. Over the long term, given the “churning” effects of employment shifts and (in non-recessionary periods) normal labor market growth and turnover, simply to maintain union density at a given level requires a great deal of new organizing; and to increase density requires far more extensive effort.

In New York City and State, unionization levels are far higher than in other parts of the nation — about double the national average. This was not the case in the mid-20th century, when unionization was at its peak: In 1953, 34.4 percent of New York State’s workers were unionized, only slightly above the 32.6 percent national level.¹⁵ Although since then organized labor has more than held its own in New York relative to the nation, in absolute terms unions have lost considerable ground in both the City and State over the past few decades, especially in the

private sector. As recently as 1986, New York City’s private-sector union density was 25.3 percent, nearly double the 2011-12 level (12.8 percent) level, and statewide the figure was 24.0 percent as recently as 1983 (compared to 13.2 percent in 2011-12).¹⁶

As union strength in the private sector has declined, the ratio of public- to private-sector unionization in New York City and State has reached a record high. In the City in particular, where the Great Recession accelerated the decline in private-sector density, that ratio is of serious concern. In labor’s glory days, a strongly unionized private sector helped foster a social-democratic political culture in New York City.¹⁷ The precipitous drop in private-sector density is among the factors that have threatened to undermine that tradition in recent years. Although so far public-sector density in the City has been preserved intact, in the wake of the fiscal crises generated by the recent economic downturn, public-sector unions have been increasingly on the political defensive. Thus despite New York City and State’s unusually high density levels — the highest of any major U.S. city and the highest of any state — this is a period of profound challenges for organized labor. For the time being, however, New York’s unions continue to offer significant protection to a diverse population of workers in both the City and State, including middle-class teachers and other professionals as well as a substantial segment of minorities and immigrants — in both professional and nonprofessional jobs.

Notes

1. This report is based on analysis of the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group data for 2011 and the first six months of 2012. We created a merged data set from the 18 monthly surveys conducted from January 2011 to June 2012, inclusive; the 2011-12 data discussed here and shown in the figures and tables below are the averages for those 18 months. All results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights, for employed civilian wage and salary workers aged 16 and over. We followed the sample definition and weighting procedures described in Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson, *Union Membership and Earnings Data Book* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, 2012), pp. 2-6. To ensure reliability, given the limitations of the CPS dataset, we report unionization rates only for subgroups that have a minimum of 100 observations, unless otherwise noted. Rates for subgroups that fall below this threshold are labeled NA (not available). The New York City figures for the earlier years are from our September 2010 and 2011 reports, based on CPS data for January 2009-June 2010 and January 2010-June 2011, respectively, available at http://www.ruthmilkman.info/rm/Policy_Reports.html

2. “Union density” denotes the proportion of all wage and salary workers who are union members in a region, occupation, or industry. For the state rankings, see Hirsch and Macpherson 2012.

3. An estimated 734,766 union members resided in New York City’s five boroughs in 2011-12, while the statewide total is estimated at 1,873,194. The CPS data on which these estimates are based rely on respondents’ self-reports as to whether or not they are union members. (Respondents who indicate that they are not union members are also asked whether they are covered by a union contract, but the analysis in this report does not include those who replied affirmatively to that question.) The geographical data in the CPS (and in this report) refer to respondents’ place of residence — not the location of their workplaces. Since many workers commute from other areas to their jobs in the city, this makes the data for the five boroughs of New York City a rather imperfect approximation of the extent of unionization in the city. Some sections of this report present data on union members residing in the wider New York metropolitan area, but that group includes many individuals who are employed outside New York City.

4. In January 2003, methodological changes were made in the CPS (for details, see <http://www.bls.gov/cps/rvcps03.pdf>.) As a result, the data shown in Figures 1a, 1b and 1c for 2003-2012 are not strictly comparable to those for 2001 and 2002.

5. Throughout this report we use the term “New York metropolitan area” to denote the New York-Newark-Bridgeport NY-NJ-CT-PA Combined Statistical Area (CSA), based on the CSA definitions introduced in 2003. The New York-Newark-Bridgeport CSA includes the following counties (in addition to the five boroughs of New York City proper): Dutchess, Nassau, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, Ulster and Westchester Counties, New York; Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex and Union Counties, New Jersey; Litchfield, New Haven and Fairfield Counties, Connecticut. The CSA also includes Pike County, Pennsylvania, but that is not included in our dataset. For details, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/omb/bulletins/fy2009/09-01.pdf>

6. These are “Metropolitan Statistical Areas” based on the 2003 U.S. Census (OMB) area definitions.

7. The only metropolitan areas (based on 2003 Census area definitions) outside of New York State for which Hirsch and MacPherson report greater 2011 union density than the New York-Newark-Bridgeport CSA were the Harrisburg-Carlisle, PA MSA, the Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Roseville MSA, both of which include the state capitals of highly unionized states, and the Springfield, MA-CT MSA] See Hirsch and MacPherson 2012, pp. 38-49. Note that smaller MSAs are not included due to small sample sizes.

8. For the Manhattan and Staten Island, the values shown for the public sector are based on fewer than 100 observations (for Manhattan, N=83 and for Staten Island, N=71) so these data points should be interpreted with caution.

9. The CPS methodology changed in January 2003, making it impractical to include data from before that date.

10. Since unionization has declined somewhat since 2003 (see Figure 1a-c), the results of this analysis slightly overestimate the actual levels of density for each industry shown in Table 3. [all of the categories are over 100 observations in the 2003-12 dataset, including those that were marginally under 100 last year. Could delete this note entirely if you want.]

11. Given the nation's winner-take-all union representation system, and the fact that a relatively small proportion of present-day union membership is the product of recent organizing, the demographic makeup of union membership mainly reflects the demographic makeup of employment in highly unionized industries and sectors. Although unionized workers are more likely than their nonunion counterparts to express pro-union attitudes, this is typically a consequence rather than a cause of union affiliation. See Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 68-77. Moreover, individual workers seldom have the opportunity to make independent decisions about union affiliation. Instead, unionization occurs when entire workplaces (or occasionally, entire industries) are organized, and once established, unionization in those workplaces tends to persist over time. Later, as a result of workforce turnover and de-unionization, strongly pro-union workers may be employed in non-union settings, and workers with little enthusiasm for organized labor may find themselves employed in union shops.

12. Puerto Ricans born on the U.S. mainland cannot be separately identified in these data. Those born in Puerto Rican are likely to be older, all else equal, which further contributes to their higher unionization rate.

13. Table 4 only includes nationalities for which there are 100 or more observations in the 2003-12 dataset.

14. The CPS data do not include information on immigration status. Note that Mexicans have much higher unionization rates in the United States as a whole, reflecting the fact that in many other parts of the country the Mexican-born population includes many individuals who arrived decades ago and many who have become naturalized citizens.

15. See Leo Troy, *Distribution of Union Membership among the States, 1939 and 1953* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 1957), available at <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c2688.pdf> In 1939 the figures were 23.0 percent for New York State and 21.5 for the nation. Figures for New York City union membership levels during these years, unfortunately, are not available.

16. The 1986 private-sector figure is 25.3% for the New York PMSA (NYC's five boroughs as well as Putnam, Westchester and Rockland Counties). This and the 1983 statewide figure can be found at <http://unionstats.gsu.edu/> See also Gregory DeFreitas and Bhaswati Sengupta, "The State of New York Unions 2007," (Hofstra University Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy, 2007), which includes 1980s data, available at https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/cld_stateofnyunions2007.pdf

17. See Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

About the Murphy Institute

The Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies was established over twenty years ago with the support of the late CUNY Chancellor Joseph S. Murphy. The Institute, part of CUNY's School of Professional Studies, conducts strategic research, organizes public forums and conferences, and publishes the journal *New Labor Forum*. The Institute's worker education program offers a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate courses and degree programs designed to meet the academic and career advancement needs of working adults and union members in the New York City area.

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About the New York City Labor Market Information Service

From Data to Information to Intelligence

New York City's policy makers and practitioners engaged in workforce development, education, and economic development operate within a dynamic and complex labor market. The New York City Labor Market Information Service (NYCLMIS) develops research and tools that help them make sense of the labor market and make informed decisions that benefit their constituents as well as New York City's economy as a whole. The NYCLMIS also serves to raise public awareness of critical employment-related issues facing New York City. The NYCLMIS began in 2008 as a joint initiative of the New York City Workforce Investment Board and the City University of New York (CUNY) and is housed at the Center for Urban Research at the CUNY Graduate Center.



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