



The Changing Face of Labor, 1983-2008

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Unionized Workers Today | 4 |
| Gender | 4 |
| Race/Ethnicity | 5 |
| Race/Ethnicity and Gender | 8 |
| Age | 11 |
| Education | 13 |
| Immigrant Status | 15 |
| Manufacturing | 17 |
| Public Sector | 18 |
| Region | 19 |
| Conclusion | 22 |

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Executive Summary

Over the last quarter century, the unionized workforce has changed dramatically. In 1983, over half of all union workers were white men, few union workers had a college degree, and almost one-third were in manufacturing.

In 2008:

- Over 45 percent of unionized workers were women, up from 35 percent in 1983. At current growth rates, women will be the majority of unionized workers before 2020.
- Over one-third (37.5 percent) of union workers had a four-year college degree or more, up from only one-in-five (20.3 percent) in 1983. Almost half (49.4 percent) of union women had at least a four-year college degree.
- Only about one-in-ten unionized workers was in manufacturing, down from almost 30 percent in 1983.
- Just under half (48.9 percent) of unionized workers were in the public sector, up from about one-third (34.4 percent) in 1983. About 61 percent of unionized women are in the public sector, compared to about 38 percent for men.
- Latinos were 12.2 percent of the unionized workforce, up from 5.8 percent in 1983. Asian Pacific Americans were 4.6 percent of union workers, up from 2.5 percent in 1989.
- About one-in-eight (12.6 percent) of union workers was an immigrant, up from one in twelve (8.4 percent) in 1994, the earliest year for which consistent data are available.
- Black workers were about 13 percent of the total unionized workforce, a share that has held fairly steady since 1983, despite a large decline in the representation of whites over the same period.
- Unionized workers were most likely to live in the Northeast (27.4 percent), the Midwest (25.7 percent), and the Pacific states (22.7 percent). A smaller share of the unionized workforce lives in the South (18.7 percent) and the West (5.6 percent). Since 2006, unionization rates have been increasing in the Pacific states (up from 17.6 percent in 2006 to 19.9 percent in 2008), the Northeast (up from 19.5 percent to 20.3 percent), and the West (up from 10.1 percent to 10.7 percent). Over the same period, unionization rates have been basically flat in the Midwest (at about 15.5 percent) and in the South (at 7.0-7.2 percent).
- The typical union worker was 45 years old, or about 7 years older than in 1983. (The typical employee, regardless of union status, was 41 years old, also about 7 years older than in 1983.)

- The most heavily unionized age group was 55-64 year olds (18.4 percent of 55-64 year-old workers are in a union). The least unionized age group was 16-24 year olds (5.7 percent).
- More-educated workers were more likely to be unionized than less-educated workers, a reversal from 25 years ago.
- In rough terms, five of every ten union workers were in the public sector; one of every ten was in manufacturing; and the remaining four of ten were in the private sector outside of manufacturing.

These trends in the composition of the unionized workforce, in part, reflect similar shifts in the workforce as a whole toward a greater share of women, Latinos, Asian Pacific Americans, and older, more-educated workers and a shift out of manufacturing toward services.

Introduction

In 1983 – the earliest year for which comparable data are available – over half (51.7 percent) of the unionized workforce were white men.¹ Today, white men account for only about 38 percent of union workers. In the intervening years, the shares of women, Latinos, and Asian Pacific Americans in the total union workforce have surged, while African Americans have held a roughly steady share of the union workforce. Over the same period, union workers have also grown older and better educated, and shifted out of manufacturing and into services, particularly into the public sector. Some of these developments reflect changes in the broader U.S. workforce, which today has more women, more Latinos, more Asian Pacific Americans, and is also older and more educated than in the past. Some of these trends, however, respond to particular issues affecting unions and the industries and occupations where they were historically concentrated.

In this report, we review consistent, nationally representative data for the last quarter century on the composition of the unionized work force.² For key demographic groups, we first provide a detailed picture of current union composition and document how these patterns have changed since 1983, when the government first began collecting systematic annual data on workers' union status. We then compare these trends for union workers with those in the U.S. workforce as a whole. Finally, for each group, we present trends in the unionization rate (the share of workers in each group who are a member of, or represented by, a union) over the period 1983-2008.³

1 We focus on the union workforce – workers who are either members of, or represented by, a union at their workplace.

2 We analyze annual data from the CEPR extract of the Outgoing Rotation Group of the Current Population Survey. See <http://www.ceprdata.org/>.

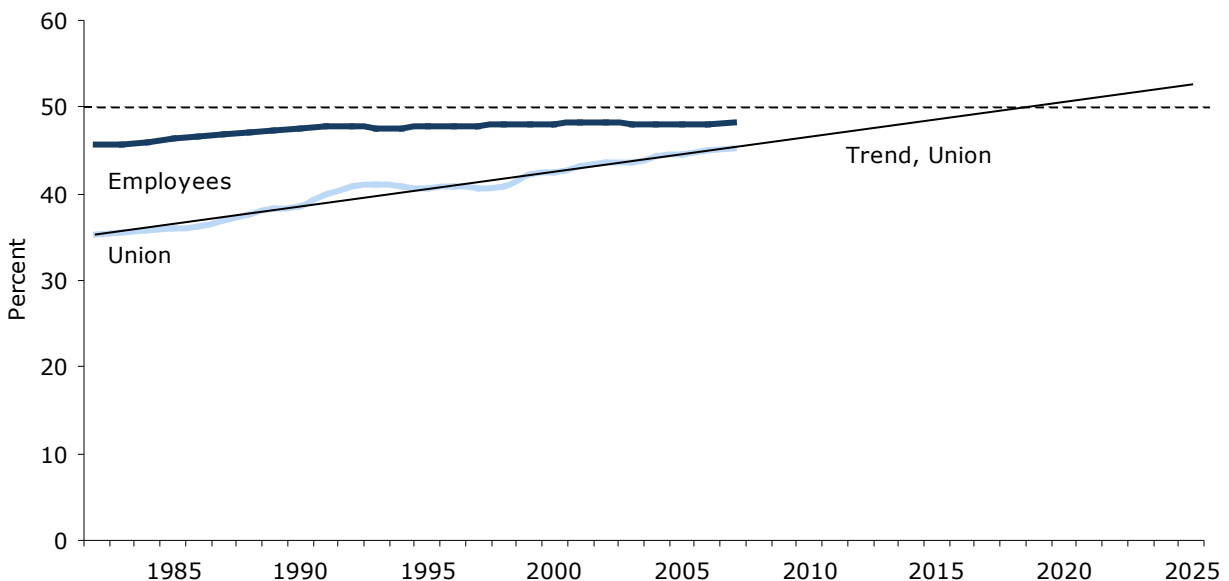
3 To view all of the underlying data used in this paper, please see <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/changing-face-labor-data-2009-11.xls>

Unionized Workers Today

Gender

Women are a large and growing segment of the union workforce. In 2008, they accounted for 45.2 percent of all union workers, compared to 35.4 percent in 1983. If current trends continue, women will be a majority of the union workforce before 2020. (See **Figure 1**.)

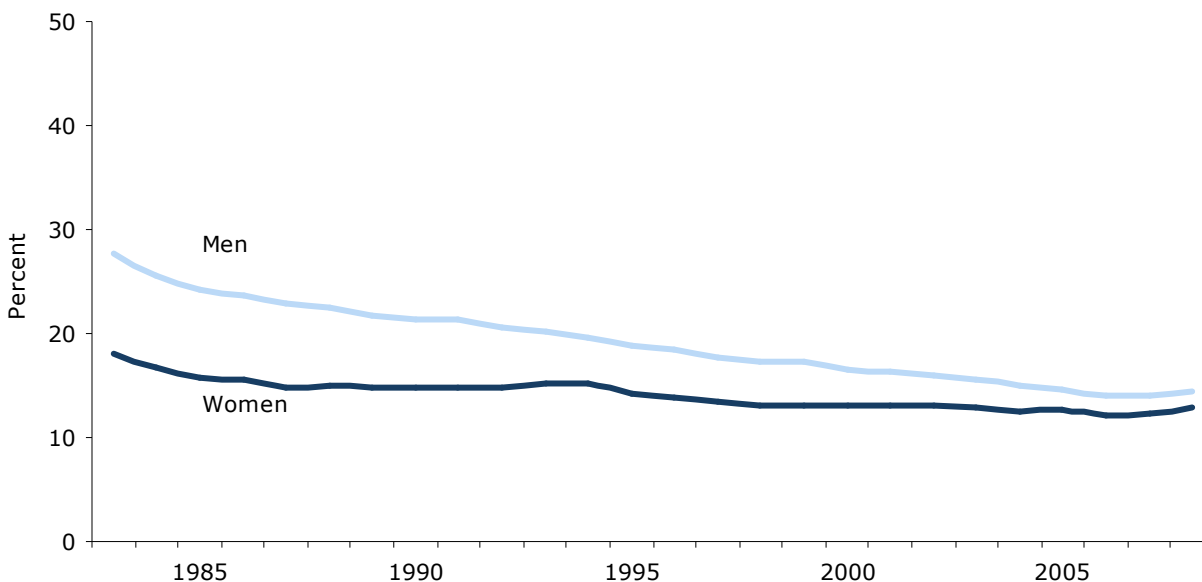
FIGURE 1: Women, Share of All Employees and All Union Members, 1983-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

The rise in the female share in the unionized workforce is substantially more than would have been expected if the unionized workforce simply followed the trends in the broader workforce. Between 1983 and 2008, the share of women in the total workforce rose from 45.8 percent to 48.3 percent, an increase of 2.6 percentage points. Over the same period, women's share in the union workforce increased by 9.8 percentage points, more than three times the increase in their share in the total workforce.

Despite the rise over the last quarter century in women's share of unionized workers, the unionization rate for women – the share of all women employees who are a member of a union or represented by a union at work – fell sharply. In 1983, 18.0 percent of women were unionized; by 2008, only 12.9 percent were unionized. Over the same period, however, the decline in the unionization rate was much steeper for men: from 27.7 percent in 1983 to 14.5 percent in 2008. (See **Figure 2**.)

FIGURE 2: Unionization Rate by Gender, 1983-2008

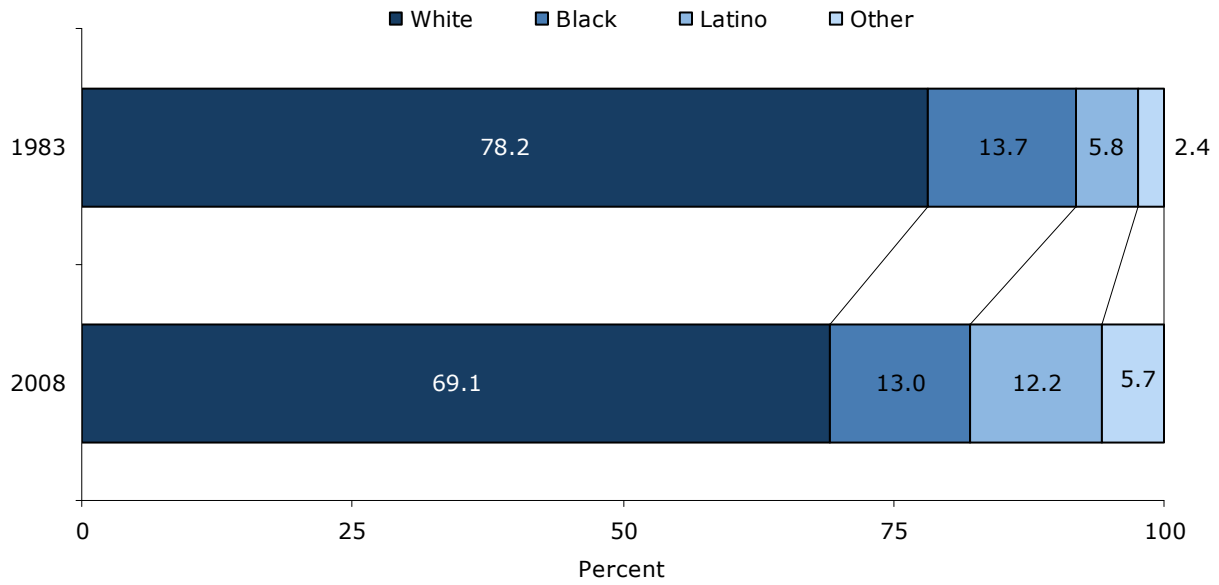
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Race/Ethnicity

Over the last quarter century, the share of whites in the union workforce has fallen sharply; meanwhile, the representation of Latino and Asian Pacific Americans (APA) has increased substantially, and the share of African Americans among all union workers has been roughly unchanged.

In 2008, 69.1 percent of union workers were white, 13.0 percent were black, 12.2 percent were Latino, and 4.6 percent were Asian Pacific Americans, with the remainder from other racial or ethnic groups. (See **Figure 3**.) Between 1983 and 2008, the representation of whites among all union workers fell 9.1 percentage points (from 78.2 percent in 1983). Over the same period, the increase in the Latino share (up 6.4 percentage points) accounted for about two-thirds of the drop in the representation of whites in the total union workforce, while the increase in the APA share (up 2.1 percentage points), accounted for about one-fourth of this drop. Over the last 26 years, the share of African Americans among union workers has fluctuated in a narrow range between 13 percent and 15 percent.

FIGURE 3: Union Members, Share by Race/Ethnicity, 1983 and 2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

The large increase in the share of Latino workers in the union workforce mirrors (though trails behind) the increase in Latinos in the overall workforce. (See **Table 1**.) In 1983, Latinos were about equally represented in the union and the overall workforces, accounting for 5.8 percent of unionized workers and 5.6 percent of all workers. By 2008, Latinos had grown to about 14.4 percent of the overall workforce, but only 12.2 percent of unionized workers.

TABLE 1: Composition of All Employees and of All Union Workers, 1983-2008 (percent)

| | 1983 | | 1989 | | 1994 | | 2008 | | Change (p.p.) (longest period) | |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| | All Emps. | All Union | All Emps. | All Union | All Emps. | All Union | All Emps. | All Union | Emps. | Union |
| Women | 45.8 | 35.4 | 47.1 | 37.7 | 47.6 | 41.1 | 48.3 | 45.2 | 2.6 | 9.8 |
| Men | 54.2 | 64.6 | 53.0 | 62.3 | 52.4 | 58.9 | 51.7 | 54.8 | -2.6 | -9.8 |
| White | 81.9 | 78.2 | 78.4 | 75.3 | 76.3 | 73.6 | 67.9 | 69.1 | -14.0 | -9.1 |
| Black | 10.1 | 13.7 | 10.9 | 14.9 | 11.2 | 14.7 | 11.5 | 13.0 | 1.5 | -0.7 |
| Latino | 5.6 | 5.8 | 7.6 | 6.9 | 9.3 | 8.4 | 14.4 | 12.2 | 8.8 | 6.4 |
| Other | 2.5 | 2.4 | 3.1 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 6.3 | 5.7 | 3.7 | 3.3 |
| Asian Pacific Americans | -- | -- | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 5.2 | 4.6 | 2.7 | 2.1 |
| Age | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16-24 | 21.9 | 10.4 | 18.5 | 7.4 | 16.9 | 6.9 | 14.5 | 6.0 | -7.4 | -4.5 |
| 25-34 | 29.4 | 29.2 | 30.2 | 26.8 | 27.4 | 22.9 | 22.6 | 19.4 | -6.8 | -9.8 |
| 35-44 | 21.2 | 26.1 | 24.5 | 31.1 | 27.0 | 32.2 | 23.0 | 24.6 | 1.8 | -1.5 |
| 45-54 | 14.9 | 19.5 | 15.7 | 21.5 | 18.2 | 25.9 | 23.0 | 29.4 | 8.1 | 9.9 |
| 55-64 | 10.4 | 13.6 | 9.0 | 11.8 | 8.3 | 10.8 | 13.5 | 18.1 | 3.1 | 4.5 |
| 65+ | 2.2 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 3.5 | 2.6 | 1.3 | 1.4 |
| Less than HS | 18.3 | 18.3 | 15.9 | 13.4 | 11.9 | 8.0 | 9.4 | 4.9 | -8.9 | -13.4 |
| High School | 37.2 | 41.1 | 36.1 | 40.3 | 34.5 | 37.4 | 29.9 | 28.7 | -7.3 | -12.4 |
| Some college | 23.6 | 20.2 | 25.2 | 22.3 | 29.2 | 28.2 | 29.4 | 28.9 | 5.8 | 8.7 |
| College + | 20.9 | 20.4 | 22.8 | 24.0 | 24.5 | 26.4 | 31.3 | 37.5 | 10.4 | 17.1 |
| Immigrant | -- | -- | -- | -- | 9.7 | 8.4 | 15.5 | 12.6 | 5.8 | 4.2 |
| Manufacturing | 22.8 | 29.7 | 20.8 | 25.8 | 18.6 | 20.9 | 12.4 | 11.0 | -10.4 | -18.7 |
| Public sector | 17.6 | 34.4 | 16.9 | 39.6 | 17.0 | 43.5 | 16.5 | 48.9 | -1.1 | 14.4 |
| Northeast | 22.0 | 29.0 | 21.1 | 27.8 | 19.5 | 26.9 | 18.6 | 27.4 | -3.4 | -1.6 |
| Midwest | 25.2 | 28.8 | 24.9 | 29.7 | 24.6 | 28.6 | 22.8 | 25.7 | -2.4 | -3.1 |
| South | 33.2 | 21.7 | 33.8 | 20.5 | 34.8 | 21.4 | 35.9 | 18.7 | 2.7 | -2.9 |
| West | 5.2 | 3.8 | 5.2 | 3.4 | 5.8 | 4.4 | 7.1 | 5.6 | 2.0 | 1.7 |
| Pacific | 14.4 | 16.7 | 15.0 | 18.6 | 15.2 | 18.7 | 15.6 | 22.7 | 1.2 | 5.9 |

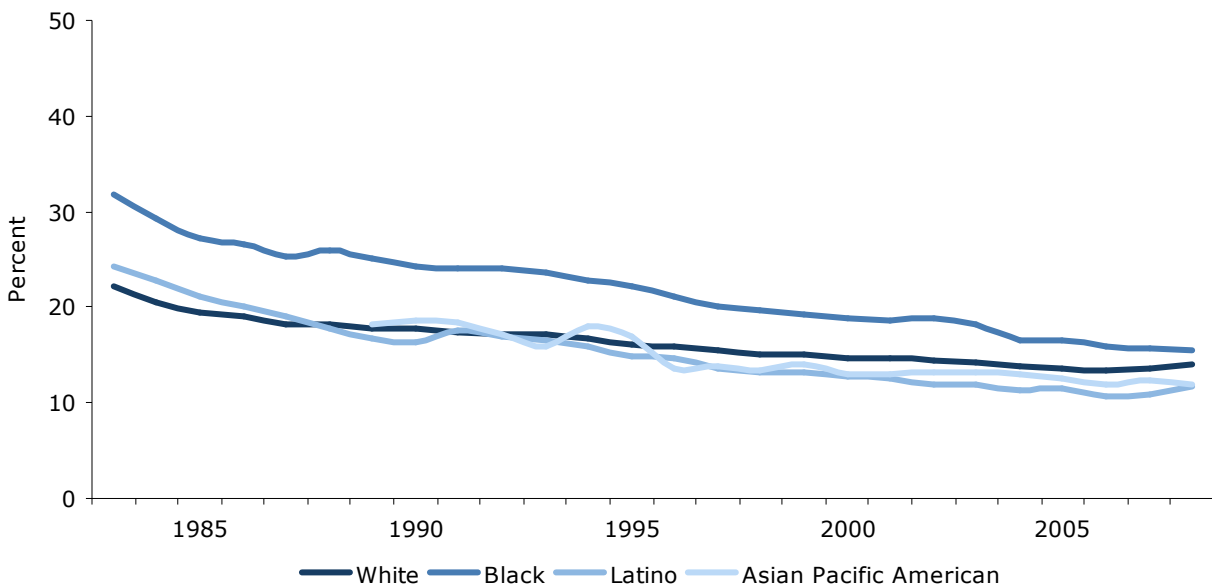
Notes: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data, 1983-2008. 1983 is the earliest year for which consistent data are available; 1989 is the earliest year with consistent data on Asian Pacific American race/ethnicity; 1994 is the first year with data on immigrant status; 2008 is the most recent complete year of data. The last two columns show the percentage-point change between 2008 and the earliest period for which data are available.

The rising share of Asian Pacific American workers in unions also lagged somewhat behind their increase in the overall workforce. In 1989, APAs had identical shares in the unionized workforce and the overall workforce (both 2.5 percent). In 2008, APA workers were 5.2 percent of the overall workforce, but only 4.6 percent of the unionized workforce.

Throughout the entire period, African American workers were a larger share of union workers than they were of all workers. The higher relative unionization rate for African Americans, however, has fallen steadily since at least the early 1980s. In 1983, African Americans were only 10.1 percent of the workforce, but 13.7 percent of all union workers; by 2008, African Americans were a slightly higher share of the overall workforce (11.5 percent) and a slightly lower share of union workers (13.0 percent).

Since 1983, the unionization rate has dropped dramatically for all racial and ethnic groups. (See **Figure 4**.) Despite the rising share of Latinos and Asian Pacific American workers, and the steady share of African Americans in the union workforce, the declines in unionization rates have been steeper for these groups than for whites. Between 1983 and 2008, the unionization rate for whites fell 8.2 percentage points (from 22.2 percent to 14.0 percent). Over the same period, the unionization rate declined 16.2 percentage points for African Americans (from 31.7 percent to 15.5 percent), 12.5 percentage points for Latinos (from 24.2 percent to 11.7 percent), and 9.4 percentage points for other workers (from 21.8 percent to 12.4 percent). For Asian Pacific American workers, unionization rates declined from 18.1 percent in 1989 (the earliest consistent data available) to 12.0 percent in 2008.

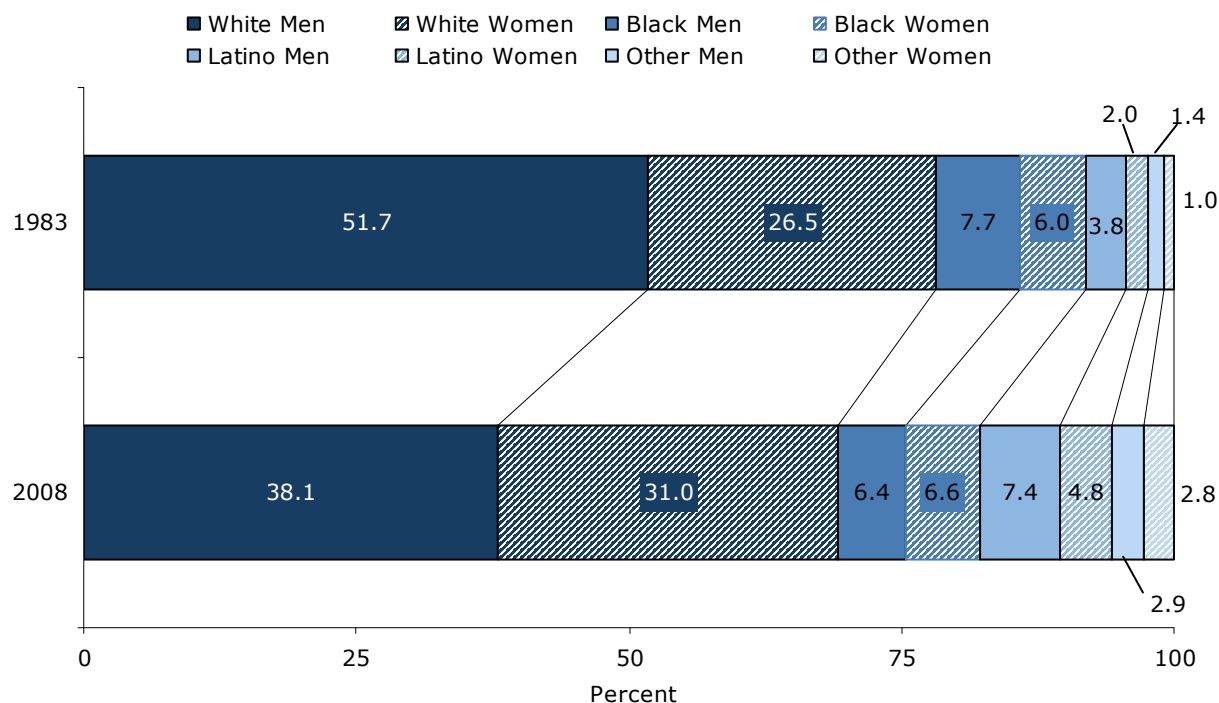
FIGURE 4: Unionization Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 1983-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Race/Ethnicity and Gender

In 1983, the majority (51.7 percent) of all union workers was white men; by 2008, white men were only 38.1 percent of the unionized workforce. In the most recent data, white women were the second largest group (31.0 percent) of union workers, followed by Latino men (7.4 percent), black women (6.6 percent), black men (6.4 percent), Latino women (4.8 percent), Asian Pacific American men (2.2 percent), and Asian Pacific American women (2.3 percent). (See **Figure 5**.)

FIGURE 5: Union Members, Share by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 1983 and 2008

Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

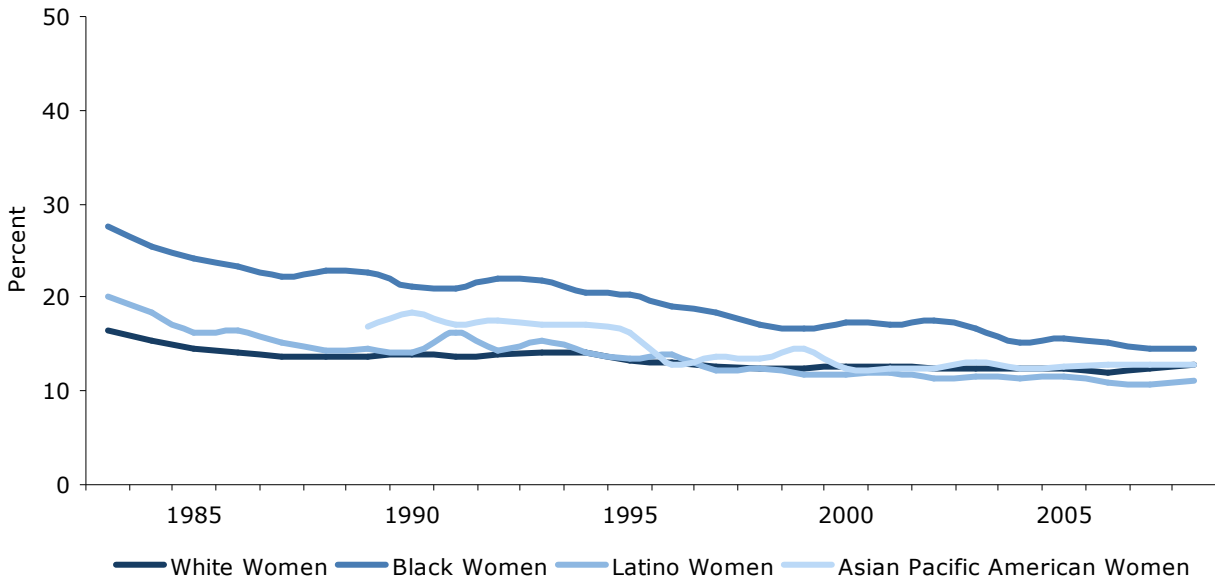
The groups whose share in the unionized workforce increased most over the last quarter century were white women (up 4.6 percentage points), Latino men (up 3.6 percentage points), and Latino women (up 2.8 percentage points). From 1989, when consistent data on Asian Pacific American workers became available, to 2008, the share of APA women increased 1.2 percentage points and APA men's share rose 0.9 percentage points. The change from 1983 to 2008 for African American women was smaller (up 0.7 percentage points) and for African American men was negative (down 1.4 percentage points). The only group that experienced a large drop in their share in the labor movement was white men (down 13.6 percentage points).

Among whites and Latinos, men outnumber women in the unionized workforce. In 2008, white men were 38.1 percent of all union workers, compared to 31.0 percent for white women; Latino men were 7.4 percent of union workers, compared to 4.8 percent for Latino women. Among black and Asian Pacific American workers, however, there are slightly more women than men. APA men were 2.2 percent of union workers, compared to 2.3 percent for APA women. Black men were 6.4 percent of union workers, compared to 6.6 percent for black women.

Between 1983 and 2008, the unionization rate for all eight gender and race groups declined. (See **Figure 6A** and **Figure 6B**.) The group that experienced the largest drop was African American men, who saw their unionization rate fall 19.1 percentage points, from 35.9 percent in 1983 to 16.8 percent in 2008. The decline for Latino men was the next largest (down 15.0 percentage points, from 27.0 percent in 1983 to 12.0 percent in 2008), followed by African American women (down 13.0 percentage points, from 27.5 percent to 14.5 percent), white men (down 11.9 percentage points, from 27.0 to 15.1 percent), and Asian Pacific American men (down 7.9 percentage points, from 19.2 percent to 11.3 percent between 1989 and 2008). Rates also fell for Latino women (down

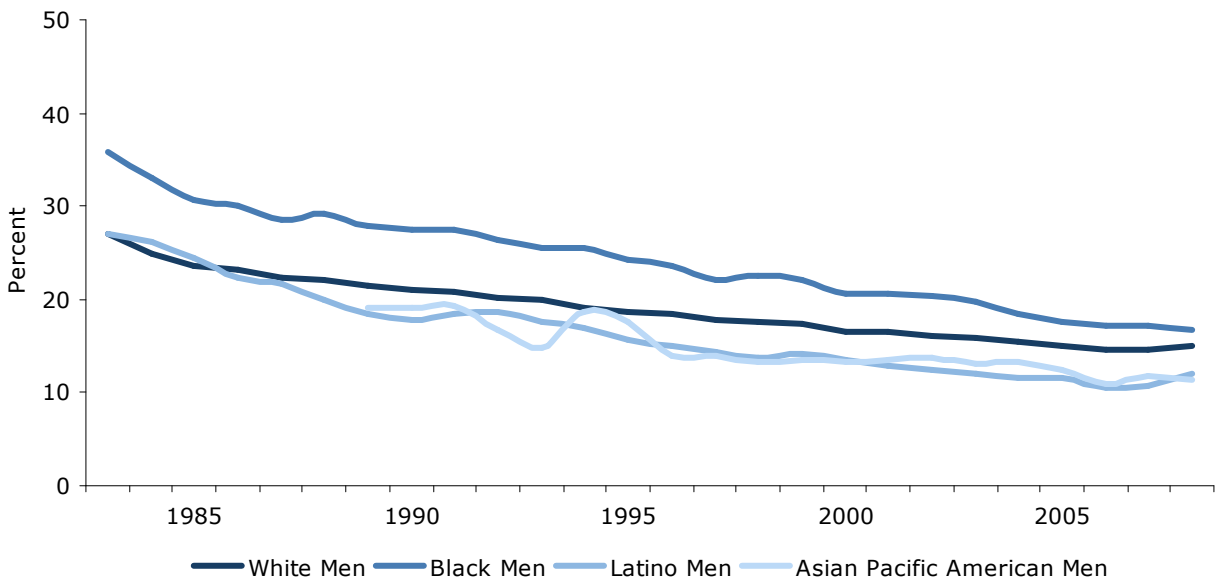
8.9 percentage points, from 20.1 percent to 11.2 percent) and APA women (down 4.1 percentage points, from 16.9 percent to 12.8 percent between 1989 and 2008). The group with the smallest decrease in unionization was white women, whose unionization rate fell only 3.7 percentage points (from 16.5 percent in 1983 to 12.8 percent in 2008). For all race and ethnic groups, the decline in unionization rates between 1983 and 2008 was consistently larger in percentage-point terms for men than it was for women.

FIGURE 6A: Female Unionization Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 1983-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

FIGURE 6B: Male Unionization Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 1983-2008

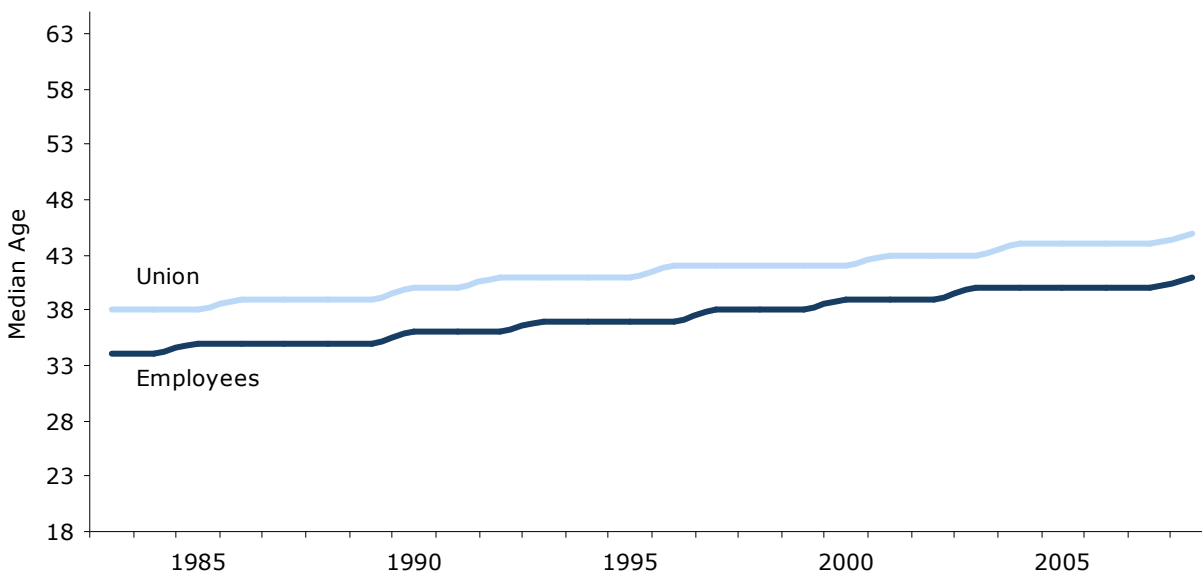


Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Age

The unionized workforce is significantly older now than it was in the early 1980s (though so is the overall workforce – see below). In 2008, the typical⁴ union worker was 45 years old – seven years older than the typical union worker in 1983, who was 38. (See **Figure 7**.)

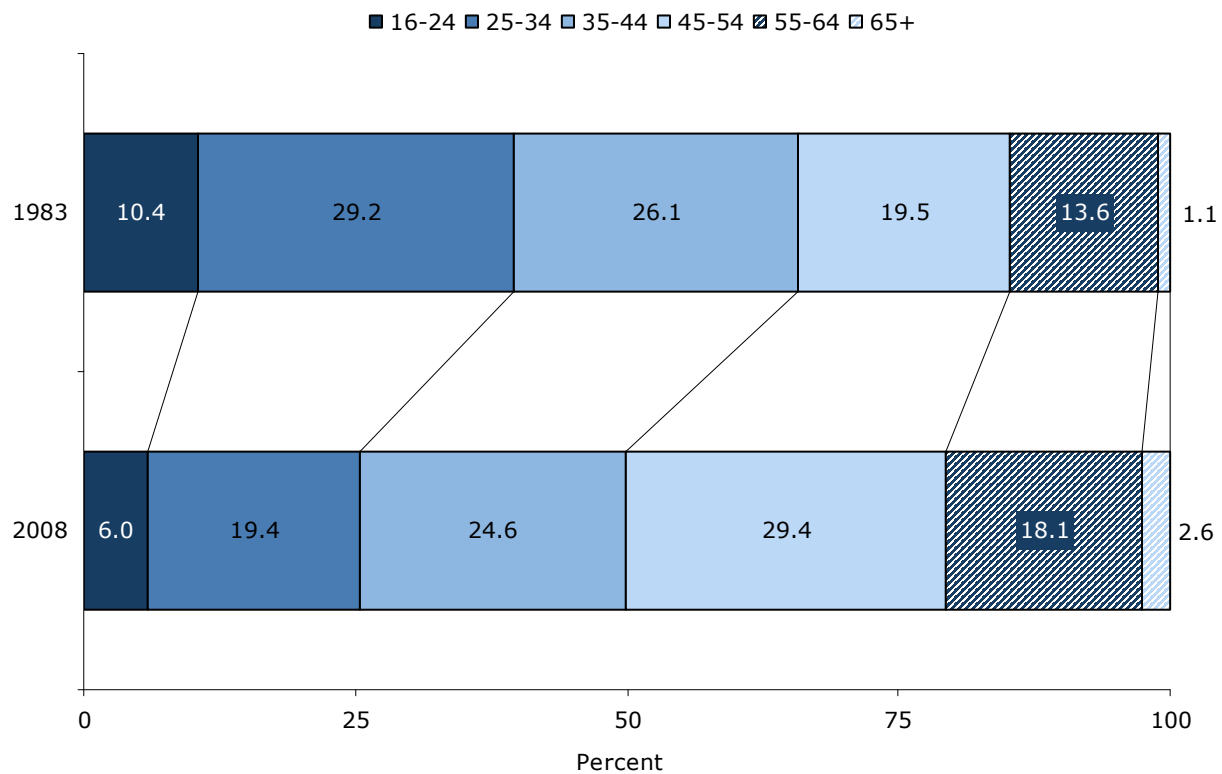
FIGURE 7: Median Age of All Employees and All Union Members, 1983-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Since 1983, the representation of younger workers in the unionized workforce has dropped sharply. The share of 16-24 year olds in the total union workforce has fallen 4.5 percentage points (from 10.4 percent in 1983 to 6.0 percent in 2008) and the share of 25-34 year olds is down 9.8 percentage points (from 29.2 percent to 19.4 percent). The age group that experienced the biggest increase was 45-54 year olds (up 9.9 percentage points, to 29.4 percent in 2008). The share of older union workers also increased: up 4.5 percentage points to 18.1 percent for 55-64 year olds and up 1.4 percentage points to 2.6 percent for workers 65 and older. (See **Figure 8**.)

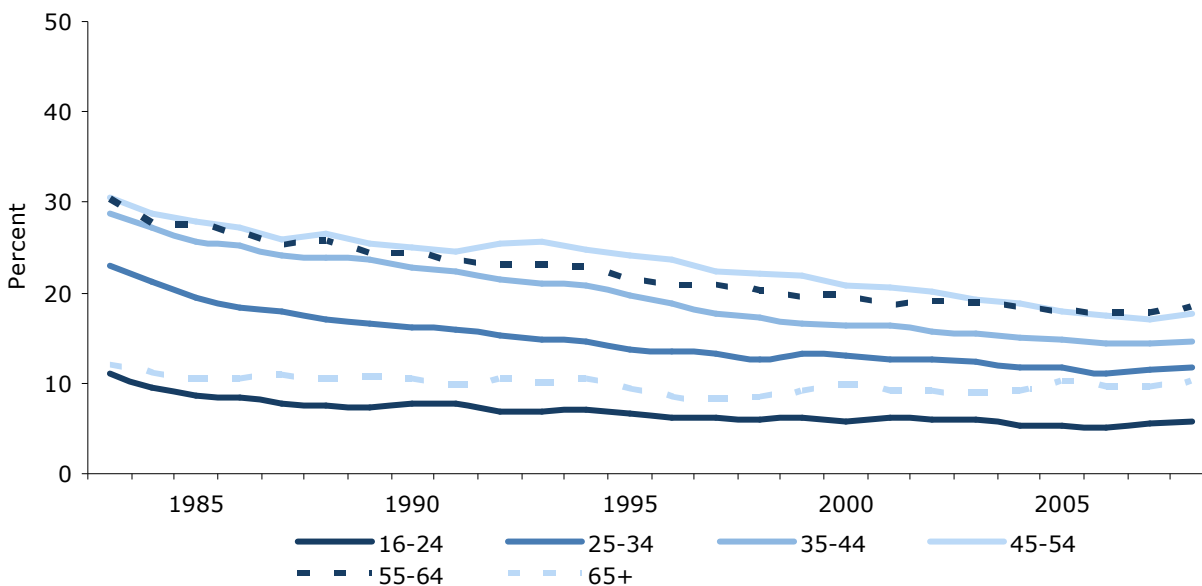
4 By typical, we mean the median worker, that is, the worker exactly in the middle of the age distribution, with half of all workers older and half of all workers younger.

FIGURE 8: Union Members, Share by Age Group, 1983 and 2008

Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Over the same period, the overall workforce has also grown substantially older. In 1983, the typical worker, regardless of union status, was 34 years old; in 2008, the typical worker was 41 years old. Younger workers were a much smaller share of the overall workforce in 2008 than they were in 1983. The 16-24 year-old group declined from 21.9 percent of all workers in 1983 to 14.5 percent in 2008; over the same period, 25-34 year olds fell from 29.4 percent of workers to 22.6 percent of workers. The 45-54 year-old group saw the biggest increase in representation in the overall workforce, rising from 14.9 percent of all workers in 1983 to 23.0 percent in 2008. The share of 55-64 year olds (up 3.1 percentage points to 13.5 percent in 2008) and workers 65 and older (up 1.3 percentage points to 3.5 percent) also increased.

Unionization rates increase steadily with age before dropping off sharply for workers 65 and older. (See **Figure 9**.) In 2008, only 5.7 percent of 16-24 year olds were unionized (down from 11.1 percent in 1983). For 25-34 year old workers, the unionization rate was 11.8 percent in 2008 (down from 23.1 percent in 1983); for 35-44 year olds, unionization was 14.7 percent in 2008 (down from 28.7 percent in 1983); for 45-54 year olds, 17.6 percent (down from 30.5 percent in 1983). The most heavily unionized age group in 2008 was 55-64 year olds – 18.4 percent (down from 30.4 percent in 1983). Workers 65 and older are less likely than workers of other ages (except those 16-24) to be unionized – 10.2 percent (down from 12.0 percent).

FIGURE 9: Unionization Rate by Age Group, 1983-2008

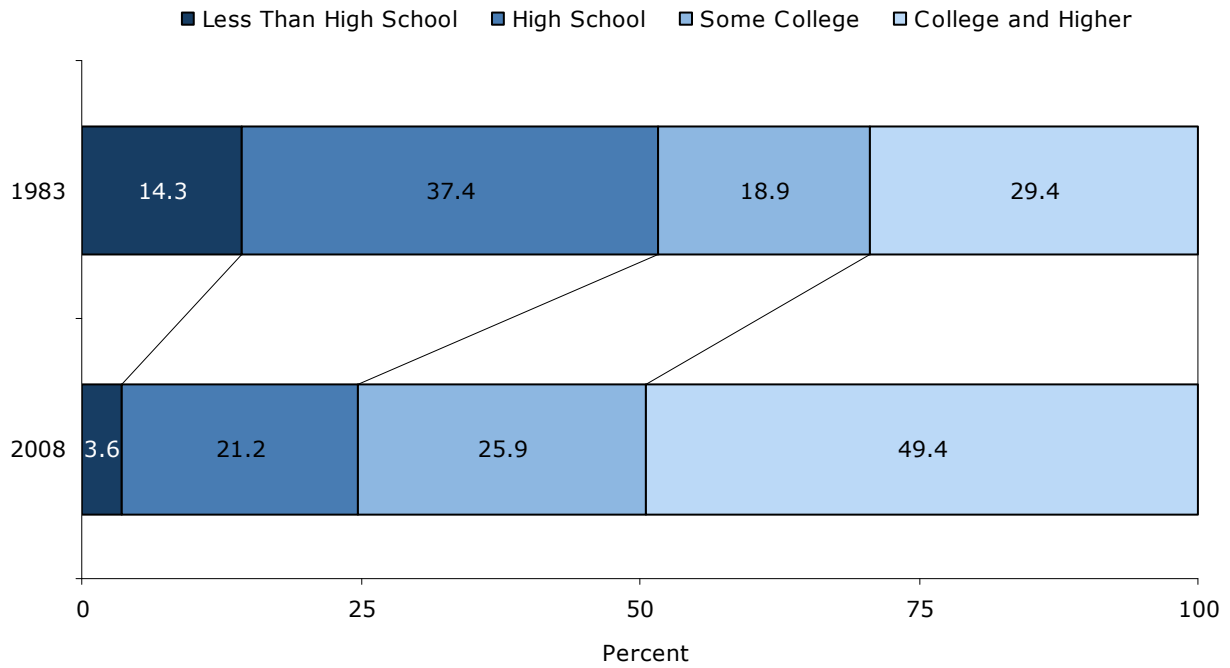
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Education

Unionized workers have much more formal education today than they did in the early 1980s. In 1983, union workers were slightly less educated than the overall workforce. By 2008, union workers were slightly more educated than the overall workforce.

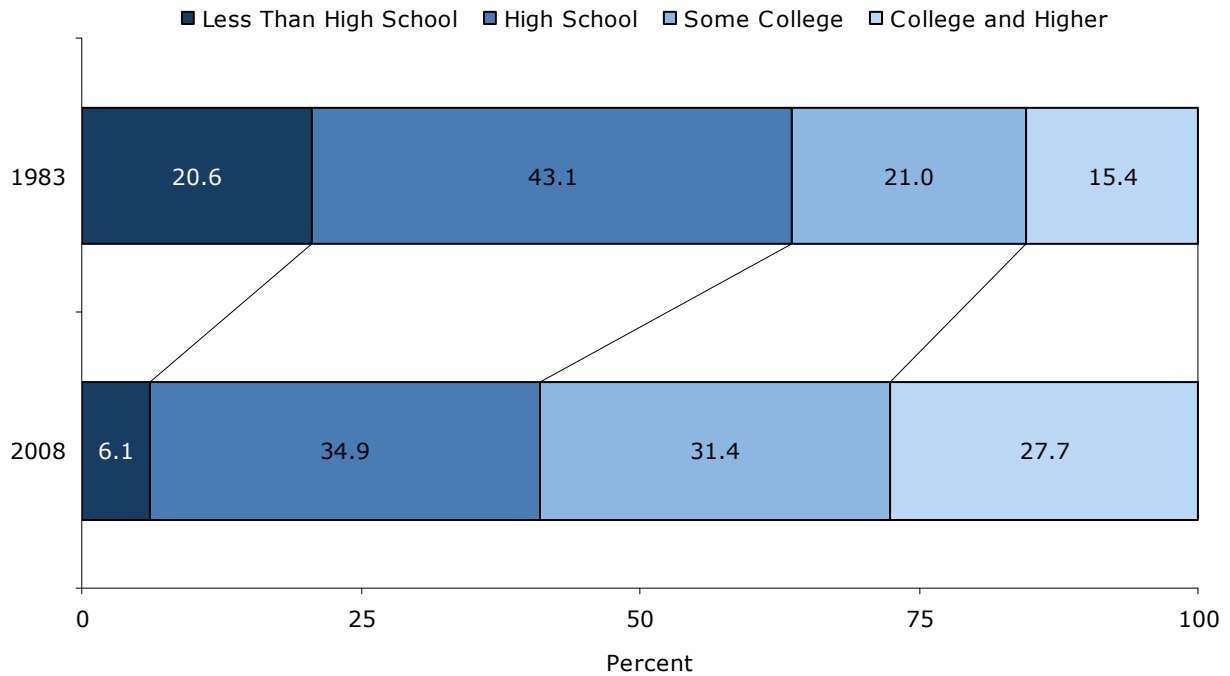
In 2008, 37.5 percent of union workers had a four-year college degree or more. Unionized women, a group that includes an important share of teachers and nurses, were even more likely (49.4 percent) to have a four-year college degree or more. (See **Figure 10A**.) Union men were substantially less likely (27.7 percent) to have a four-year college degree or more. (See **Figure 10B**.) The largest groups of union workers are those with some college but no four-year degree (28.9 percent in 2008) or a high school diploma (28.7 percent). In 2008, only 4.9 percent of union workers had less than a high school education, compared to 9.4 percent of all workers in 2008 and to 18.3 percent of union workers with less than a high school diploma in 1983.

FIGURE 10A: Female Union Members, Share by Education Level, 1983 and 2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

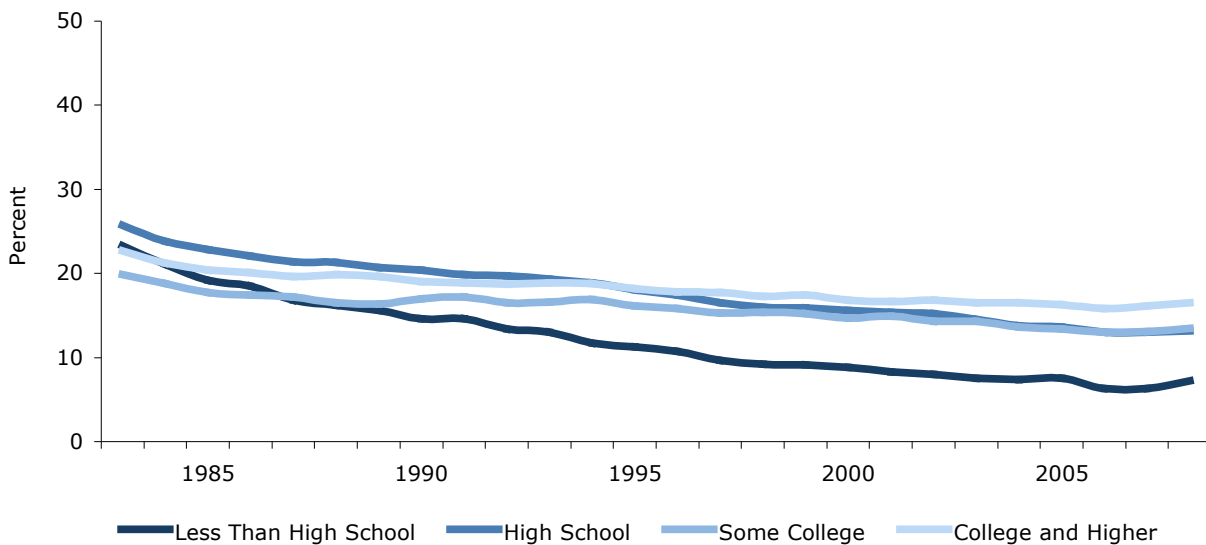
FIGURE 10B: Male Union Members, Share by Education Level, 1983 and 2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Between 1983 and 2008, the unionization rate has fallen across all education levels. (See **Figure 11**.) The pattern of unionization by education level, however, has almost inverted since the early 1980s. In 1983, less-educated workers were more likely to be unionized – 23.3 percent of workers with less than a high school degree and 25.7 percent of workers with a high school degree, compared to 19.9 percent of workers with some college and 22.7 percent of workers with a college degree or more. By 2008, the unionization rate for workers with less than a high school degree had collapsed to 7.2 percent, and the rate for high school educated workers (13.2 percent) was lower than the rate for those with some college (13.5 percent) and a college degree or more (16.5 percent).

FIGURE 11: Unionization Rate by Education Level, 1983-2008

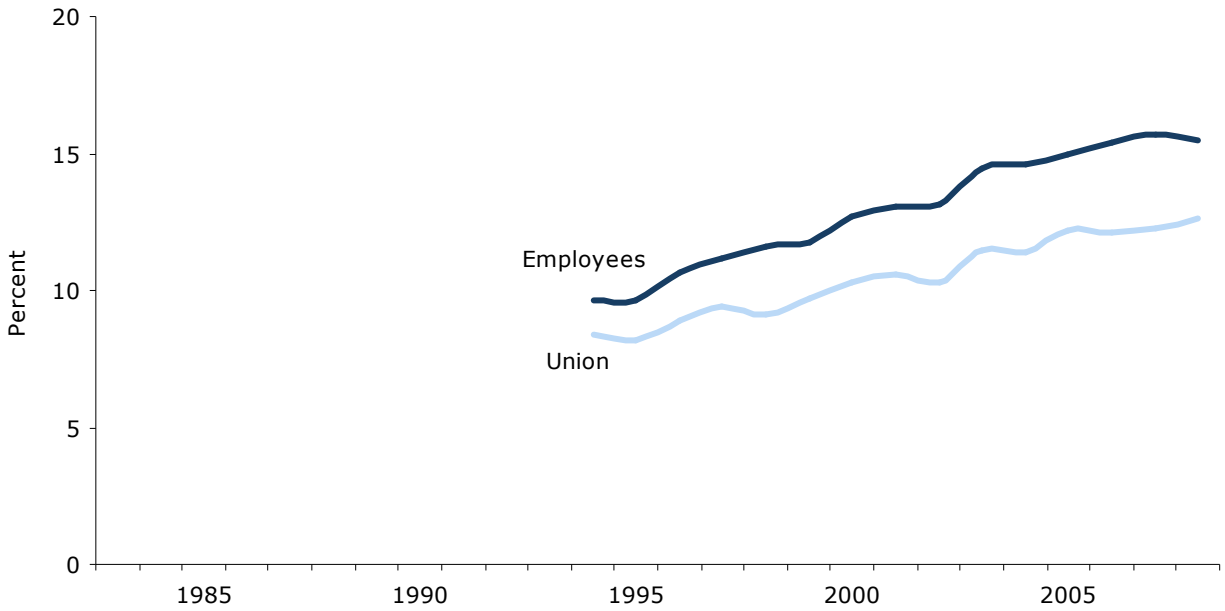


Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Immigrant Status

In 2008, 12.6 percent of union workers were immigrants, up from 8.4 percent in 1994, the earliest year for which the Current Population Survey collected information on workers' immigrant status. (See **Figure 12**.) Immigrants were 15.5 percent of the total workforce in 2008, up from 9.7 percent in 1994. These data suggest that the rise in immigrant representation in the unionized workforce has been substantial, but has trailed behind the growth of immigrants in the overall workforce (see Table 1 above).

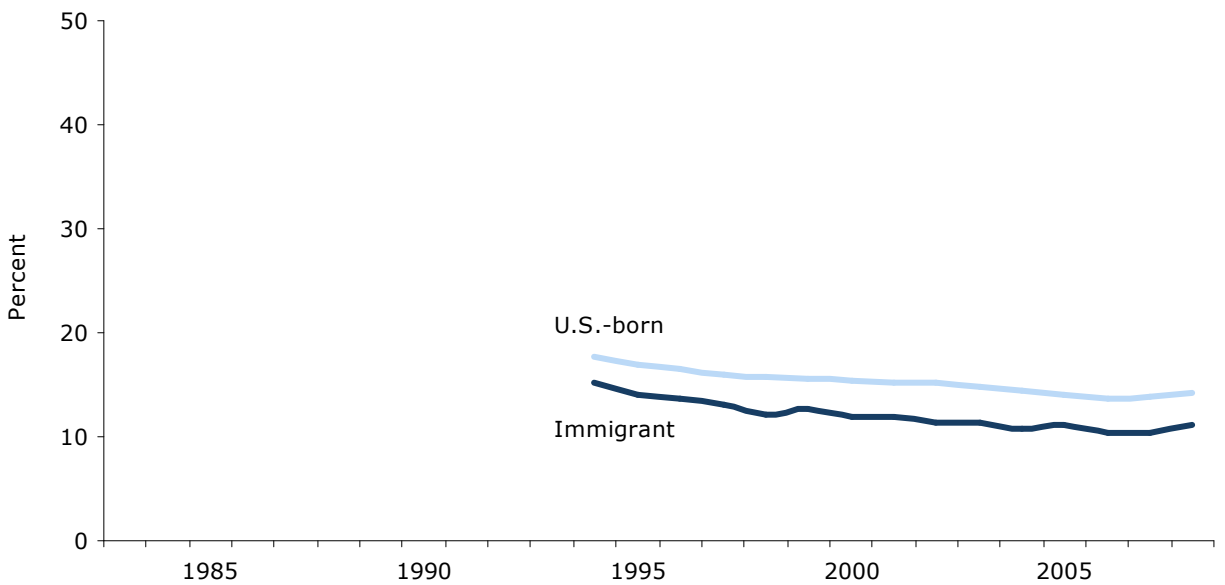
FIGURE 12: Immigrants, Share of All Employees and All Union Members, 1994-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Immigrant workers are less likely to be unionized than US-born workers. In 2008, about 11.2 percent of immigrant workers were in a union or represented by a union, compared to 14.2 percent of US-born workers. (See **Figure 13**.)

FIGURE 13: Unionization Rate by Immigrant Status, 1994-2008

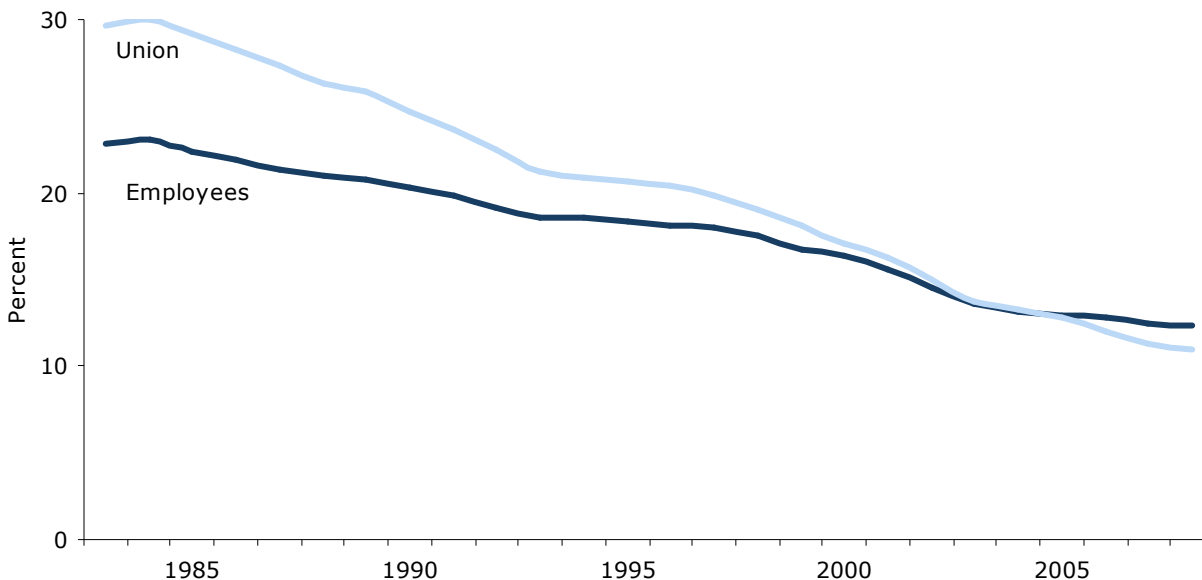


Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Manufacturing

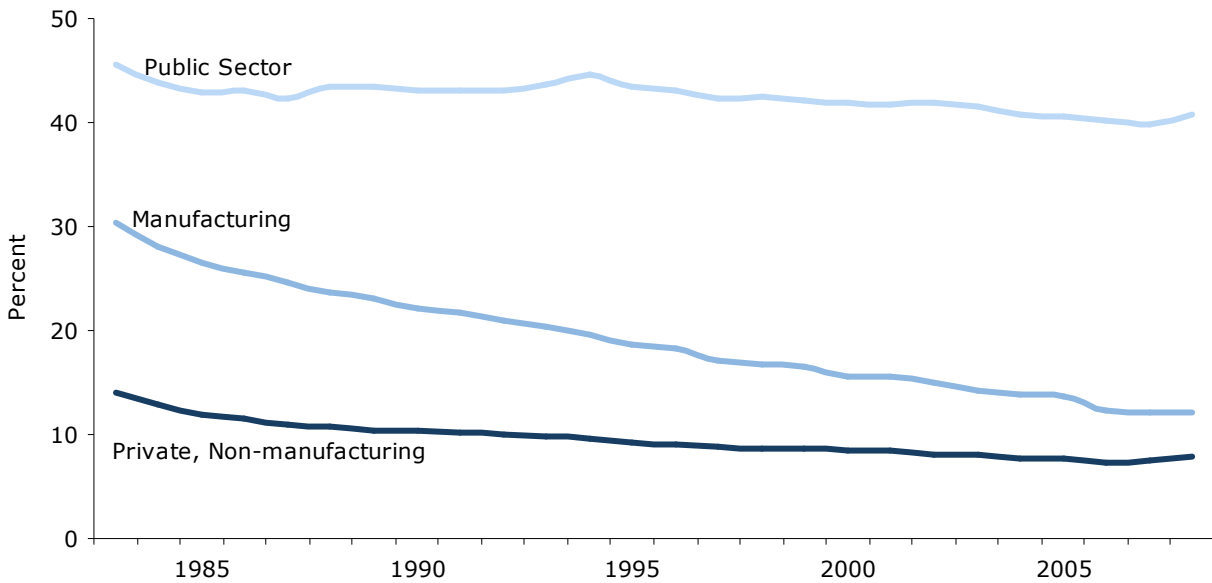
In 2008, just over one-in-ten union workers (11.0 percent) was in manufacturing, down from almost three-in-ten (29.7 percent) in 1983. (See **Figure 14**.) The decline in the share of manufacturing workers in the unionized workforce has been more rapid than the decline in manufacturing in the overall economy. In 1983, about 22.8 percent of the total workforce was in manufacturing, falling to 12.4 percent in 2008.

FIGURE 14: Manufacturing Workers, Share of All Employees and All Union Members, 1983-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

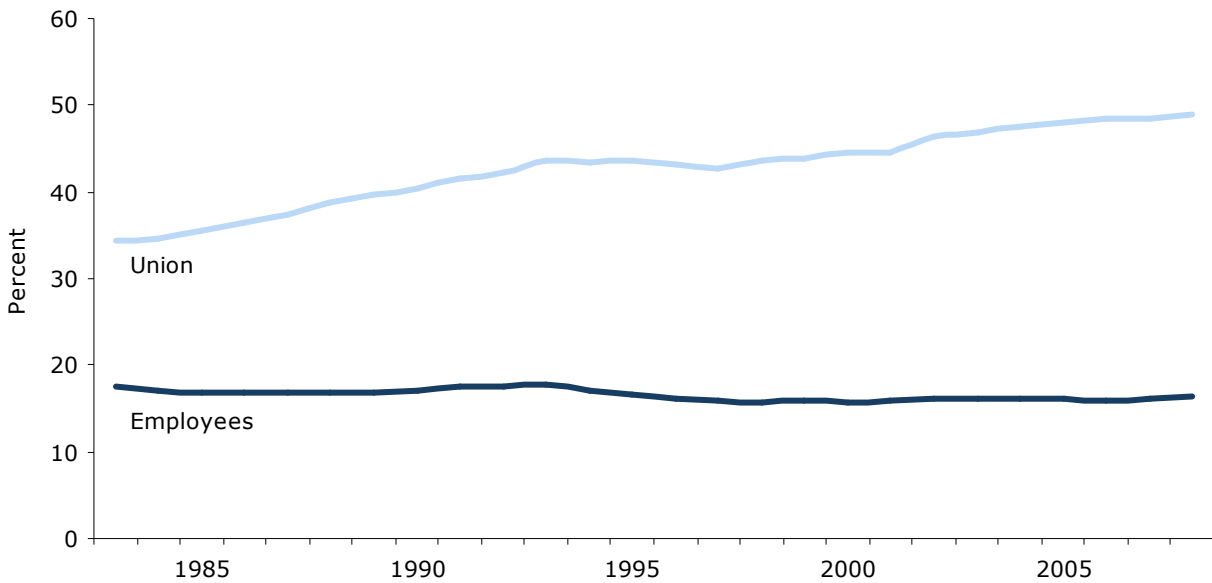
Traditionally, the manufacturing sector has been more heavily unionized than the rest of the country, but from the mid-2000s, manufacturing has been less unionized than the overall economy. (See **Figure 15**.) In 2008, 12.2 percent of manufacturing workers were unionized, compared to a 13.9 percent unionization rate for workers in the rest of the economy. By comparison, in 1983, 30.3 percent of manufacturing workers were unionized, compared to 21.2 percent of workers outside of manufacturing. The higher unionization rate outside manufacturing, however, is strictly a function of relatively higher rates of unionization in the public sector. In 2008, the unionization rate for private sector workers outside of manufacturing was only 7.8 percent.

FIGURE 15: Unionization Rate by Sector, 1983-2008

Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Public Sector

In 2008, public sector employees were about half (48.9 percent) of the unionized workforce, up from just over one-third (34.4 percent) in 1983. (See **Figure 16**.) Among women, public employees were 61.5 percent of union workers in 2008 (up from 47.2 percent in 1983), compared to 38.4 percent for men (up from 27.5 percent in 1983). Over the same period, public sector employees have remained about the same share of all employees, falling only slightly from 17.6 percent in 1983 to 16.5 percent in 2008.

FIGURE 16: Public Sector Workers, Share of All Employees and All Union Members, 1983-2008

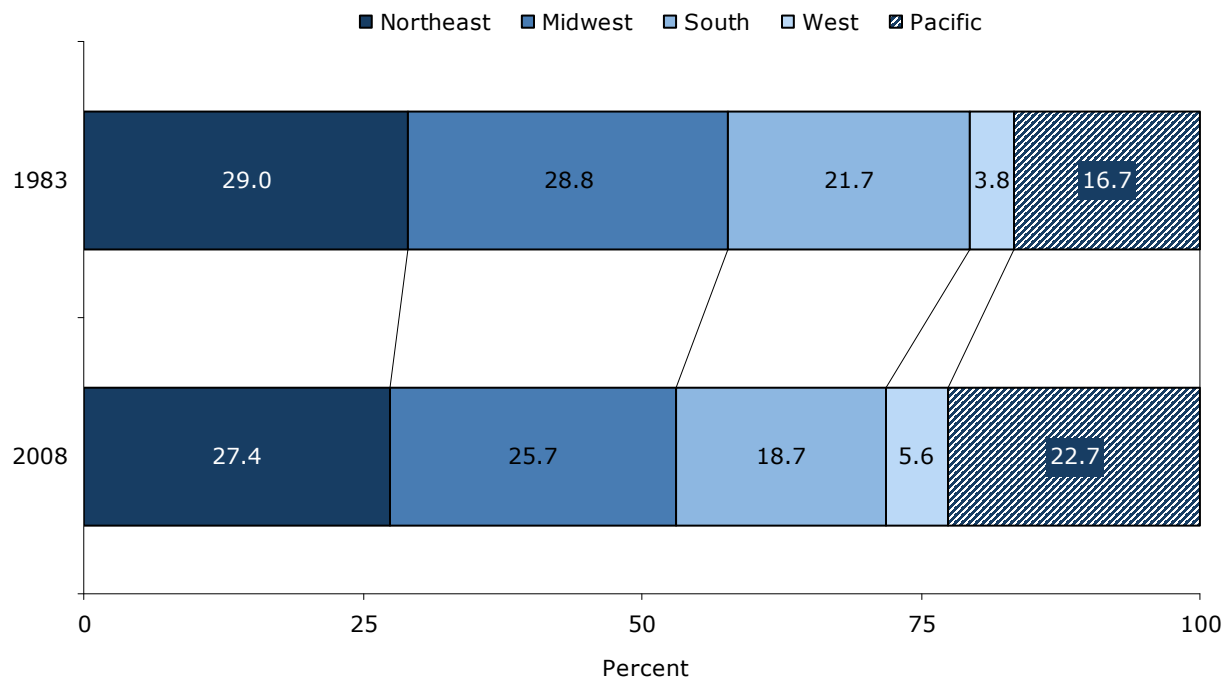
Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

The unionization rate has fallen much less in the public sector than it has in the private sector. In 1983, about 45.5 percent of public-sector workers were in a union or covered by a union contract at their place of work. (See Figure 15 above.) By 2008, the public-sector unionization rate had slipped to 40.7 percent. By contrast, in the private sector, unionization fell by more than half, from 18.5 percent of all private-sector workers in 1983 to 8.4 percent in 2008.

Region

Union workers are not distributed across the country in the same proportion as the overall workforce. Union workers are more heavily concentrated in the Northeast, Pacific, and Midwest, and underrepresented in the West and, especially, the South.⁵ In 2008, over one-fourth of all union workers were in both the Northeast (27.4 percent) and the Midwest (25.7 percent) (see **Figure 17**), compared to 18.6 percent of the total workforce in the Northeast and 22.8 percent of the total workforce in the Midwest (see Table 1 above). The Pacific states accounted for almost one fourth (22.7 percent) of union workers, but a substantially smaller share of the workforce (15.6 percent). Almost one-in-five union workers (18.7 percent) were in the South, but this was far smaller than the region's share in total employment (35.9 percent). States in the West were a much smaller share of both the unionized workforce (5.6 percent) and total employment (7.1 percent).

5 The Northeast is Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont; the Midwest is Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; the South is Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia; the West is Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; and the Pacific is Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

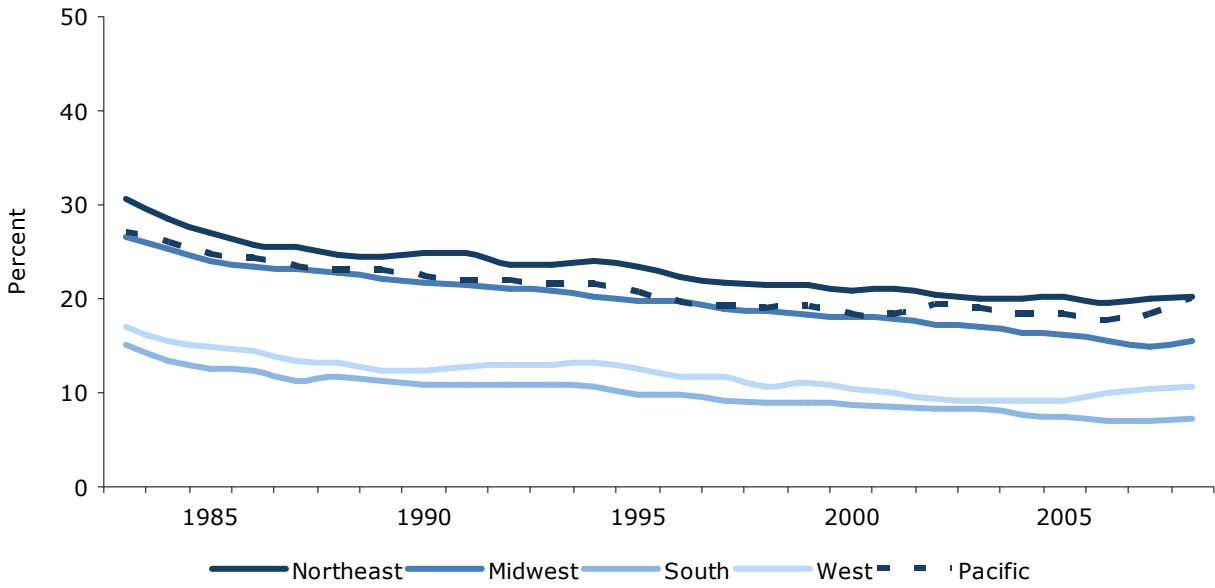
FIGURE 17: Union Members, Share by Region, 1983 and 2008

Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Over the last quarter century, unionization rates have fallen across every part of the country. (See **Figure 18**.) In 2008, unionization rates were highest in the Northeast (20.3 percent) and the Pacific states (19.9 percent). The Midwest, after experiencing the largest regional drop in unionization in percentage-point terms since 1983, had a 15.5 percent unionization rate in 2008. The unionization rate was substantially lower in the West (10.7 percent) and the South (7.2 percent).

Since 2006, unionization rates have been increasing in the Pacific states (up from 17.6 percent in 2006 to 19.9 percent in 2008), the Northeast (up from 19.5 percent to 20.3 percent), and the West (up from 10.1 to 10.7 percent). Over the same period, unionization rates have been basically flat in the Midwest (at 15.5 percent) and in the South (at 7.0-7.2 percent rate).

FIGURE 18: Unionization Rate by Region, 1983-2008



Source: Authors' analysis of CEPR extract of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group data.

Conclusion

The unionized workforce has changed dramatically over the last quarter century. Union workers, like the rest of the workforce, are now almost half women, older, more educated, and more racially and ethnically diverse.

These changes generally follow the contours of the larger workforce, but union workers have moved out of manufacturing and into higher education and the public sector faster than the overall workforce. Unions have incorporated large shares of Latinos, Asian Pacific Americans, and recent immigrants, but have not matched the pace of these groups' growth in the economy.

In the next decade, the rise of women to majority status in the labor movement and the likely continued influx of racial and ethnic minorities into unions are likely to be among the most important developments for organized labor.