

UNION AND NONUNION HOUSEHOLDS: General Social Survey, 2000-2012



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INTRODUCTION

The United States population has always been typified by significant diversity. Particularly since the Industrial Revolution, the residents of modern America have come from a mix of racial, ethnic, gender, educational, religious, and political backgrounds. The industrialization of the economy also induced an expansion in another significant socioeconomic group in America: the union household. Union households may differ in many ways compared to homes where there are no union members. This joint Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) and University of Illinois Labor Education Program (LEP) Economic Commentary compares and contrasts the characteristics of individuals in union households to those of individuals in nonunion households.

The commentary first discusses the General Social Survey, the data source used for our analyses. The commentary then explores the demographics of union and nonunion households. Labor market outcomes such as work factors and income levels are subsequently analyzed. In the following section, the religious affiliations and behaviors of individuals in union households are compared to those in nonunion households. Reported political identification and views are then presented before responses on personal satisfaction and social confidence are examined. The final two sections discuss national trends, their potential implications for the labor movement, and conclusions derived from the study.

DATA SOURCE

All data utilized in this ILEPI Economic Commentary are derived from the General Social Survey (GSS) Cumulative Datafile 1972-2012 from the Survey Documentation and Analysis program from the Survey Methods Program (CSM) at the University of California, Berkeley. Except for the U.S. Census, the General Social Survey is regarded as the best source of data on societal trends. Conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, the GSS takes the pulse of the nation, tracking American demographics, behaviors, and attitudes. Since 1994, the GSS has been conducted every two years. Weights are applied to all responses to match the sample to the actual U.S. population.

From 2000 to 2012, the GSS surveyed 18,878 American residents (Figure 1). Respondents were not required to reveal whether they live in a union or nonunion household. Nevertheless, 13,088 (69.3 percent) did answer the question: “Do you or your spouse belong to a labor union? Who?” The following analysis is limited to those 13,088 respondents. Of those who did provide a response, 1,840 individuals (14.1 percent) identified as members of a union household and 11,248 people (85.9 percent) said that neither they nor their spouses were union members. Figure 1 details the breakdown by survey year.

Figure 1: General Social Survey Respondents by Survey Year, Nationwide, 2000-2012

Year	Total Sample	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household
2000	2,809	309	1,572
2002	2,751	286	1,532
2004	2,803	239	1,612
2006	4,492	501	2,985
2008	2,013	199	1,151
2010	2,041	149	1,220
2012	1,969	157	1,176
Total	18,878	1,840	11,248

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). N=18,878.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF UNION AND NONUNION HOUSEHOLDS

Individuals from union households are older, more male, and more likely to be married than those in nonunion households (Figure 2). At 47.1 years old, union household respondents are an average of 1.8 years older than their counterparts. Additionally, men comprise 49.0 percent of union household respondents but only 45.4 percent of those in nonunion households. While these figures indicate that females may have been slightly overrepresented in the General Social Survey from 2000 to 2012, they do mirror the general finding that men have a higher union membership rate than women.¹ Roughly 71.1 percent of those in union households are also married compared to just 52.8 percent of people in the nonunion comparison group.

Union households are also less likely to identify as Latino or Latina than the rest of the population (Figure 2). While the white non-Latino share of household members is effectively the same for both the union (71.3 percent) and nonunion categories (71.0 percent), African-Americans are more likely to live in a union household (14.3 percent to 12.7 percent). By contrast, Latinos and Latinas comprise 10.4 percent of union household members but 12.0 percent of those living in homes without a union member.²

Figure 2: Core Demographics of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012

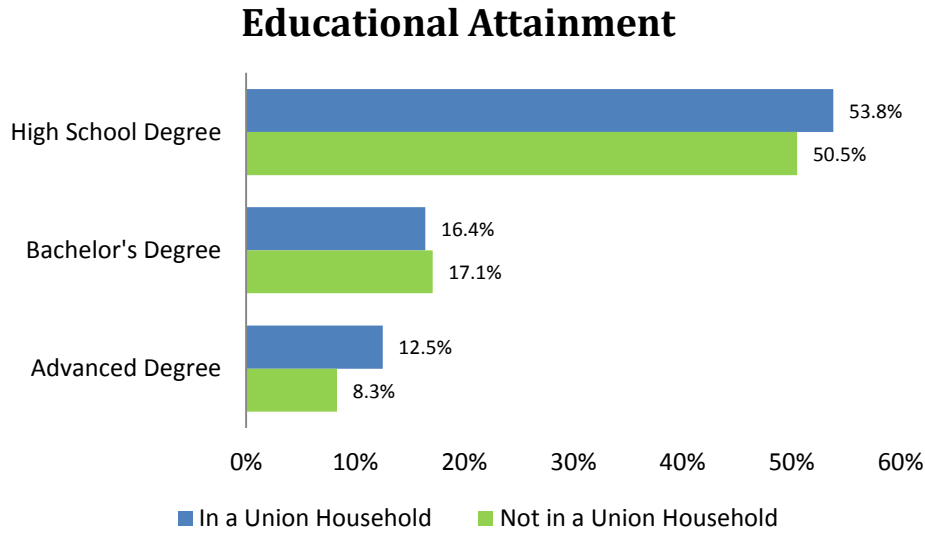
Core Demographic	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household	Difference
Age	47.10	45.32	1.78
Male	49.01%	45.43%	3.58%
Female	50.99%	54.57%	-3.58%
White non-Latino	71.28%	70.96%	0.31%
African-American	14.31%	12.70%	1.61%
Latino or Latina	10.39%	12.03%	-1.64%
Married	71.06%	52.83%	18.23%

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

Union households tend to have slightly higher levels of educational attainment than nonunion households (Figure 3). While the percentage of union households with only a high school degree or equivalent, at 53.8 percent, is greater than the nonunion counterpart (50.5 percent), the share with a bachelor's degree or beyond is also larger. Fully 28.9 percent of individuals in union households have at least a bachelor's degree, including 12.5 percent with a master's, professional (J.D., M.D., etc.), or doctorate (Ph.D.) degree. In comparison, the comparable numbers for individuals in nonunion households are 25.4 percent and 8.3 percent.

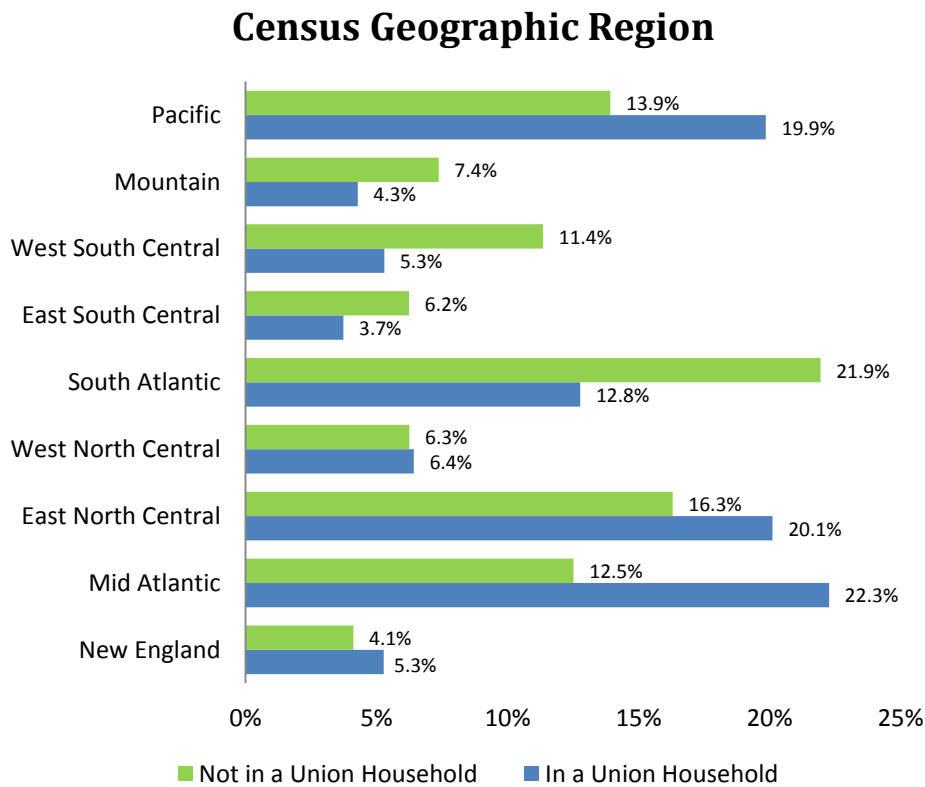
Union households are also more concentrated in certain geographic regions in the United States than others (Figure 4). As expected, union households are more prevalent on the coasts and around the Great Lakes. While almost three-quarters (73.9 percent) of all union households are located in the Northeastern (New England and Mid-Atlantic), Midwestern (East North Central and West North Central), and Pacific states, those regions account for about half (53.1 percent) of all nonunion households. The region with the highest concentration of union households is the Mid-Atlantic (22.3 percent), which includes New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. On the other hand, the South (South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central) and Mountain regions comprise just 26.1 percent of union households but 46.9 percent of nonunion households.

Figure 3: Educational Attainment of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

Figure 4: Census Geographic Region of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

WORK AND INCOME

Across labor market outcomes, American residents in union households differ significantly from those in homes without a union member (Figure 5). A member of a union household is 9.8 percentage points more likely to have a job than his or her counterpart in a nonunion household. Among only employed persons,

those in union households work 1.5 weeks more on average per year than those who are not in union households. They are also 5.4 percentage points more likely to have full-time work status and -3.9 percentage points less likely to be working part-time, with other arrangements such as casual employment and internships making up the difference. Finally, at \$46,721 per year, the personal incomes of employed workers in union households were \$4,153 (9.8 percent) higher than the personal incomes of employed workers in nonunion households, in constant 2012 dollars. When extending the analysis out to the household-level instead of the individual-level, union households earn an average of \$80,571 annually, \$20,689 (34.5 percent) more than those in nonunion households. Thus, union households are more likely to be employed, union households work longer weeks and hours, and union households earn more money than nonunion households.

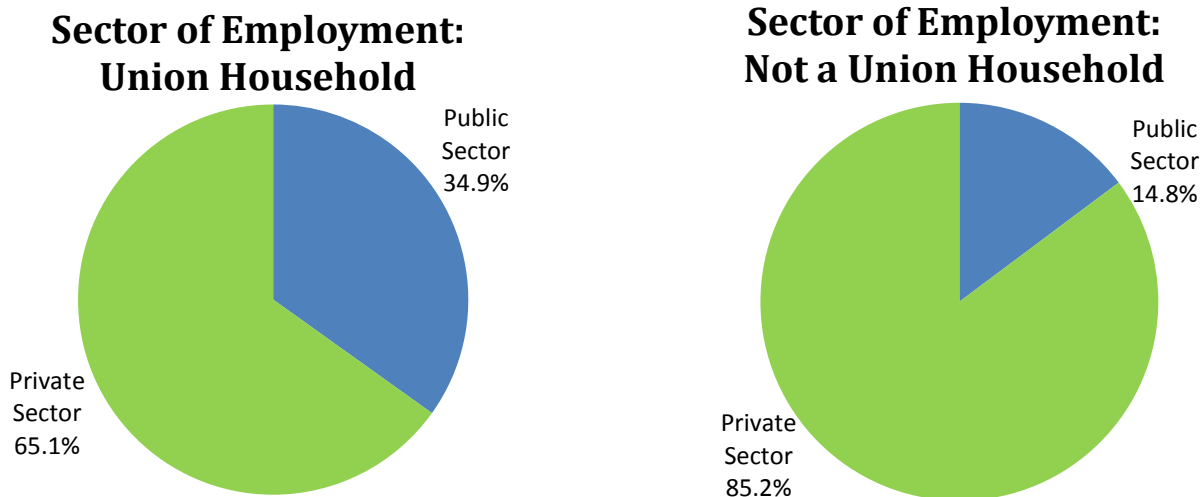
Figure 5: Work and Income Characteristics of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012

Work or Income Characteristic	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household	Difference
Employment rate	71.38%	61.55%	9.84%
Weeks worked last year	47.61	46.13	1.49
Full-time	84.49%	79.06%	5.43%
Part-time	14.48%	18.41%	-3.94%
Employed personal income (2012 \$)	\$46,721	\$42,569	\$4,153
Household income (2012 \$)	\$80,571	\$59,882	\$20,689

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248. Employed union household N= 1,311; Employed nonunion household N= 6,728. Income estimates are converted to 2012 dollars using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) inflation adjustment, available at: <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.

Federal, state, and local government bodies also employ a significant share of people in union households (Figure 6). Over one-third of individuals from union households who have a job (34.9 percent) work in the public sector compared to less than one-sixth of employed persons in nonunion households (14.8 percent). Conversely, private sector workers (including those who are self-employed or work in the nonprofit arena) are more prevalent in nonunion households. These findings mirror national union membership rates: In 2013, for instance, the unionization rate for private sector workers was 6.7 percent and 35.3 percent for public sector workers.³

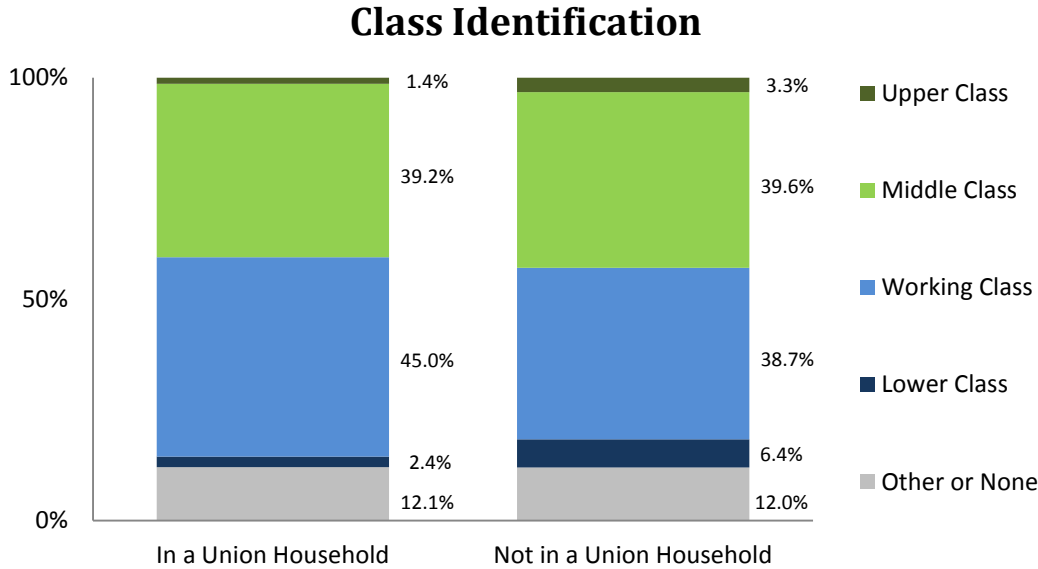
Figure 6: Sector of Employment of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248. Employed union household N= 1,311; Employed nonunion household N= 6,728.

These labor market outcomes translate into different degrees of socioeconomic class association (Figure 7). Of all American residents in union households, 39.2 percent identify as “middle class,” almost half (45.0 percent) consider themselves “working class,” 2.4 percent call themselves “lower class,” and a small 1.4 percent say that they are “upper class.” At 39.6 percent, middle-class identification for members of nonunion households is roughly the same as those in union households. But fewer workers categorize their socioeconomic status as “working class” (38.7 percent); instead, more choose the “lower class” designation (6.4 percent). A higher share of nonunion household members are also willing to call themselves “upper class” (3.3 percent). In both union and nonunion households, about one-in-ten respondents either do not identify with a social class, report another class identity, or chose not to respond. The results indicate that falling union membership may be correlated with declines in “working class consciousness.”

Figure 7: Class Identification of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors’ analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

RELIGION

Individuals in union households are slightly more religious than those in nonunion households (Figure 8). While 16.0 percent of nonunion household members are nonreligious, just 13.8 percent of those in union households do not follow any religion. Among those identifying with a religion, however, union household members also differ from respondents who are not in a union household. Members of union households are more likely to follow the Catholic faith (32.8 percent) or be “Moderate Protestants” (12.4 percent) than those in the comparison group (24.2 percent and 10.9 percent, respectively). By contrast, union households are underrepresented among adherents to Fundamentalist Protestantism, Liberal Protestantism, Judaism, and other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The higher propensity for Catholics to be and/or reside with union members could stem from Catholic social teachings which express a preferential option for the poor, the dignity of work, the rights of workers to organize and join labor unions, and solidarity.⁴ On the other hand, the correlation could simply be because Catholics are disproportionately located in the Northeast and Midwest.

In addition to expressing a higher degree of religious affiliation than their nonunion equivalents, a higher share of the population in union households attends religious services as well (Figure 9). Only 17.5 percent of persons in union households respond that they never attend church compared to 21.1 percent of those in nonunion households. However, a slightly higher fraction of nonunion household members (25.5 percent) than union household members (24.6 percent) attend religious services at least once a week.

Figure 8: Religious Identification of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012

Religious Identification	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household	Difference
Protestant	46.53%	50.44%	-3.91 %
• Fundamentalist Protestant	• 23.28%	• 27.72%	• -4.44%
• Moderate Protestant	• 12.43%	• 10.87%	• 1.56%
• Liberal Protestant	• 10.19%	• 11.02%	• -0.83%
Catholic	32.83%	24.15%	8.68%
Jewish	1.65%	1.99%	-0.34%
Other religions	5.21%	7.39%	-2.18%
No religion	13.79%	16.03%	-2.24%

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

Figure 9: Religious Attendance of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012

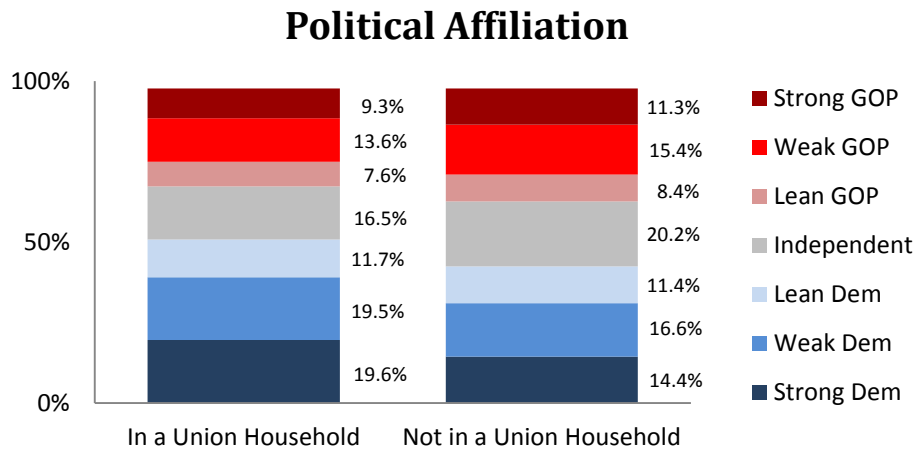
Religious Attendance	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household	Difference
Never attends church	17.46%	21.11%	-3.65%
Does attend church	82.54%	78.89%	3.65%
• Attends church at least once a week	• 24.63%	• 25.52%	• -0.89%

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

POLITICS

An individual's political preferences and party identification may be influenced by an array of factors—including union membership, demographics, geography, work and income status, and religious beliefs. Whatever the prevailing factors, union households tend to affiliate more with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party (Figure 10). Compared to nonunion household members, higher shares of those in union households consider themselves “strong” Democrats (19.6 percent to 14.4 percent), “weak” Democrats (19.5 percent to 16.6 percent), and Democratic Party “leaners” (11.7 percent to 11.4 percent). Conversely, they are less likely to consider themselves “strong” Republicans (9.3 percent to 11.3 percent), “weak” Republicans (13.6 percent to 15.4 percent), and “leaners” of the Grand Old Party (7.6 percent to 8.4 percent). The share of independents is also 3.7 percentage points greater in nonunion households than union households. In sum, half (50.8 percent) of all people in union households at least lean Democratic, 8.4 percentage points higher than their nonunion counterparts, while 30.5 percent at least lean Republican, 4.7 percentage points below the level of respondents from nonunion households (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Political Identification of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

Figure 11: Political Party Lean of Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012

Political Party Lean	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household	Difference
Democratic Party	50.80%	42.42%	8.37%
Republican Party	30.50%	35.15%	-4.65%

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 1,840; Nonunion household N= 11,248.

Beyond “Bread and Butter” economic and labor issues, union households are more traditionally-liberal on some issues and more traditionally-conservative on others (Figure 12). Union household members are more likely to believe that abortion should be allowed in all cases (by 6.8 percentage points) and if a mother’s life is threatened (by 0.6 percentage points). They are also less likely to believe that premarital sex is “wrong” (by 2.2 percentage points). On the other hand, 44.4 percent of union households have a firearm in their home, 10.9 percentage points above the analogous nonunion level. And 68.5 percent of individuals in union households are in favor of capital punishment for persons convicted of murder, a value 1.7 percentage points higher than the comparable nonunion estimate.

Figure 12: Views on Sociopolitical Issues, Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012

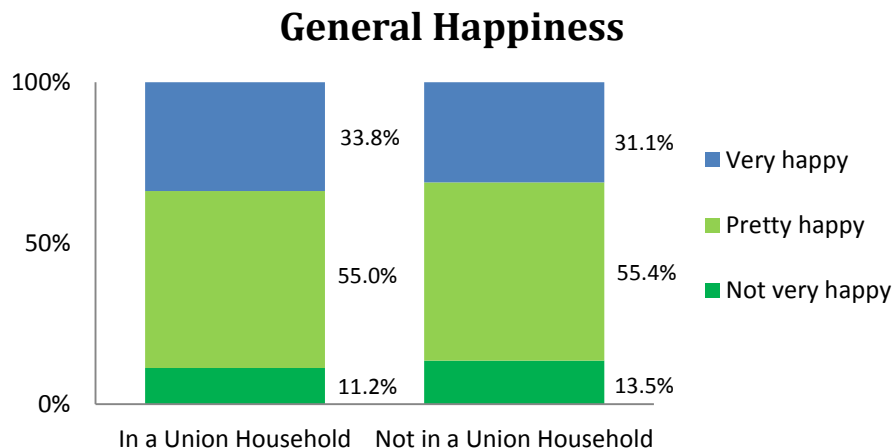
Sociopolitical Issue	In a Union Household	Not In a Union Household	Difference
Abortion allowed in all cases	48.23%	41.47%	6.76%
Abortion allowed if mother’s life threatened	89.16%	88.57%	0.59%
Premarital sex is not wrong	49.49%	47.34%	2.15%
Has gun in home	44.39%	33.47%	10.92%
In favor of capital punishment	68.50%	66.79%	1.71%

Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 909; Nonunion household N= 4,646.

PERSONAL SATISFACTION AND SOCIAL CONFIDENCE

Finally, individuals in union households diverge somewhat from nonunion household members on personal satisfaction, the view on how people get ahead, and institutional confidence. First, people in union households report that they are slightly happier: 88.8 percent say that they are happy, with 33.8 percent claiming that they are “very happy,” compared to respective figures of 86.5 percent and 31.1 percent for those in households without a union member (Figure 13). Although a plethora of causes could be behind this finding, one possible explanation is that unions raise worker incomes and reduce income inequality.⁵ Greater income inequality has been found to reduce national happiness; by compressing wages, unions may contribute positively to aggregate wellbeing.⁶

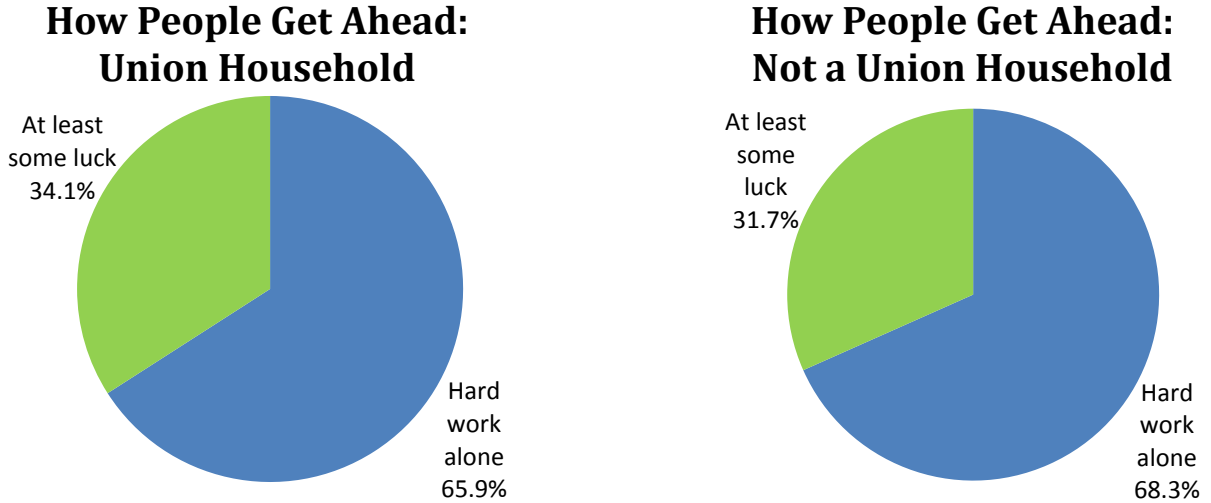
Figure 13: Reported General Happiness, Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors' analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 964; Nonunion household N= 4,915.

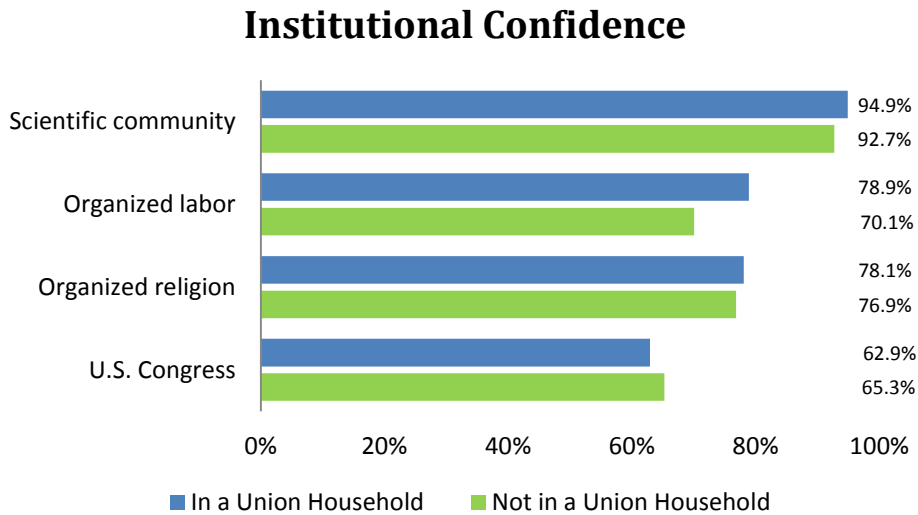
Individuals in union households are less likely to believe that a person’s own “hard work” is the main reason that he or she gets ahead (Figure 14). While over six-in-ten respondents of both groups believe that individual hard work is the predominant factor to individual success, 34.1 percent of those in union households believe either that “luck or help from others” is how people get ahead or that “hard work and luck or help from others are equally important.” By contrast, just 31.7 percent of nonunion household residents believe that luck plays any role. A viewpoint that people are not always rewarded for their hard work and dedication or that it takes help from others to succeed may contribute to an individual’s decision to seek or fight for union membership.

Figure 14: Views on How People Get Ahead, Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors’ analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 518; Nonunion household N= 2,838.

Figure 15: Confidence in Institutional Leaders, Individuals in Union and Nonunion Households, 2000-2012



Source: Authors’ analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Union household N= 958; Nonunion household N= 4,834.

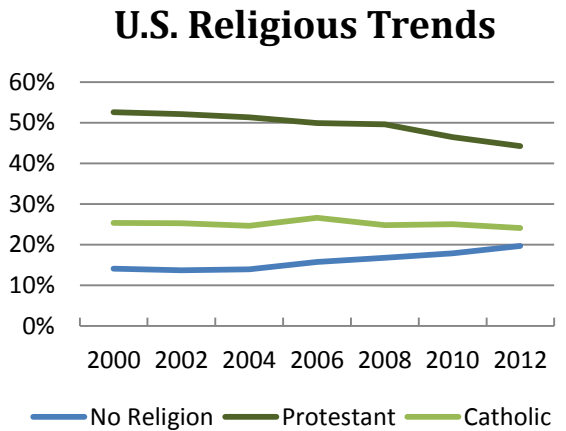
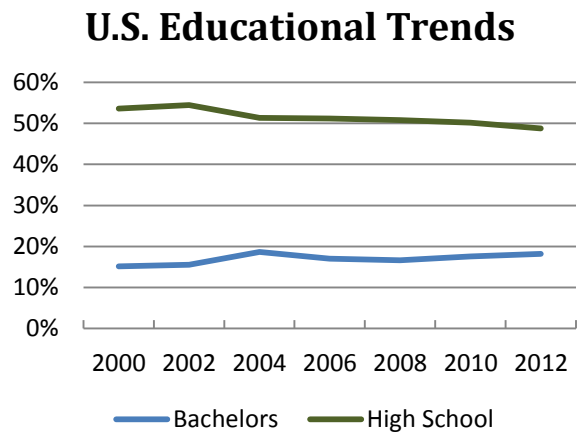
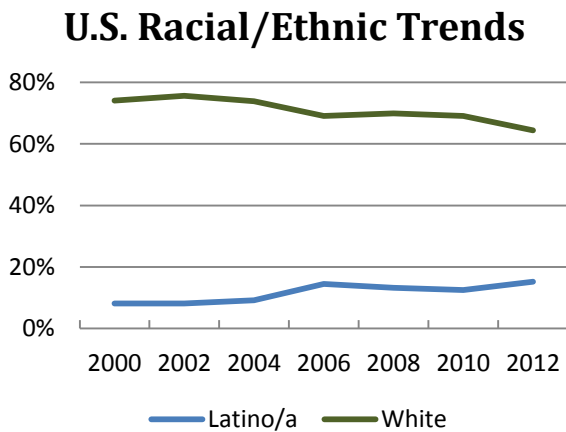
Residents who live in union households generally express more confidence in the people running some of America’s largest institutions than those who reside in homes without a union member (Figure 15). In comparing those in union households to those who are not in union households, 94.9 percent and 92.7 percent respectively have “some” or “a great deal” of confidence in the scientific community while 78.1 percent and 76.9 percent respectively have confidence in the leaders of organized religion. Additionally, at 78.1 percent, union households also unsurprisingly have more confidence in organized labor. Interestingly,

among *nonunion* households, confidence in organized labor is quite high: 70.1 percent have “some” or “a great deal” of confidence in labor’s leaders, indicating that the labor movement may still have room to grow total membership. People in union households, however, have less confidence in the United States Congress to do the right thing. While 62.9 percent of respondents from union households had at least some confidence in the nation’s legislative leaders, 65.3 percent of persons from nonunion households had confidence in Congress.

U.S. TRENDS AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Broadening out the analysis to the complete sample of 18,878 respondents, the data reveal that the U.S. population is changing (Figure 16). First, Latinos and Latinas are increasing as a share of the national population. While Latinos and Latinas comprised 8.1 percent of the population in 2000-2002, their share has risen to 13.8 percent in recent years. Meanwhile, the percentage of those who identify as non-Hispanic whites has fallen from 74.8 percent to 66.8 percent over that time. Second, the share of the population that has only a high school degree has also dropped from 54.0 percent to 49.5 percent. Instead, more American residents are earning bachelor’s degrees: not counting advanced degree-holders, 17.9 percent of the population had a bachelor’s degree in 2010-2012, up from 15.3 percent just ten years earlier. Lastly, the American population is becoming more nonreligious and less Christian. While the fraction of the U.S. population that is Catholic has remained constant at about one-fourth, the Protestant share of religious identification has fallen from 52.4 percent to 45.4 percent. Those who report that they adhere to no religion, on the other hand, have increased from 13.9 percent to 18.8 percent of the population.

Figure 16: National Demographic Trends, 2000-2012



Characteristic	2000-02	2010-12	Trend
White non-Latino	74.82%	66.78%	-8.04%
Latino or Latina	8.13%	13.79%	5.66%
High School	54.04%	49.50%	-4.54%
Bachelors	15.32%	17.87%	2.55%
No Religion	13.93%	18.78%	4.85%
Protestant	52.38%	45.37%	-7.01%
Catholic	25.31%	24.58%	-0.73%

Source: Authors’ analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). Total N= 18,878. 2000-2002 N= 5,560; 2010-2012 N= 4,010.

While driven by the nation’s youth, the growing number of nonreligious American residents reflects decreased religiosity across the age distribution (Figure 17). Figure 17 displays changes in the nonreligious share by age group. The changes are presented first by “same-age” group, such as those aged 35 to 44 in 2000-2002 compared to those also aged 35 to 44 in 2010-2012. They are then reported as relative “cohort” changes, such as those aged 35 to 44 in 2000-2002 compared to the same group ten years later in 2010-2012 when they were aged 45 to 54. Except for those aged 35 to 44, whose reported affiliation of “no religion” was 1.2 percentage points lower in 2010-2012 than when they were 25 to 34 in 2000-2002, all age groups experienced increases in the share of Americans who were nonreligious over the decade.

Figure 17: Reported Religious Affiliation: No Religion, 2000-2002 compared to 2010-2012

Nonreligious by Age Group	2000-02	2010-12	Same-Age Change	Cohort Change
24 or younger	20.44%	31.67%	11.23%	–
25 to 34	20.17%	28.13%	7.96%	7.69%
35 to 44	13.46%	19.02%	5.56%	-1.16%
45 to 54	14.25%	17.02%	2.77%	3.56%
55 to 64	8.44%	15.96%	7.52%	1.71%
65 or older	7.48%	12.27%	4.80%	3.83%

Source: Authors’ analysis of General Social Survey (GSS). 2000-2002 N= 5,560; 2010-2012 N= 4,010.

These trends could be problematic for the labor movement. Latinos and Latinas, the largest growing demographic group, comprise 12.0 percent of those in nonunion households compared to just 10.4 of those in union households. Bachelor’s degree earners are slightly more likely to live in nonunion households while those with a high school degree alone are slightly more likely to live in union households. Finally, while Protestants as a whole are underrepresented in union households, so too are people who do not follow a particular religion. While the exact effect that these trends may have on the labor movement is unclear, labor unions *may* need to do a better job of connecting with and organizing Latino/a families, bachelor’s degree holders, and workers who are not religious. Alternatively, encouraging policies which increase the number of advanced degree holders instead of just bachelor’s degrees may benefit labor unions, since those with master’s, professional, and doctorate degrees make up 12.5 percent of people in union households compared to 8.3 percent of those in nonunion homes. Organized labor may also need to reach out to and ally with organizations that support immigrants’ rights to increase its appeal among Latinos and Latinas. Lastly, it is possible that the growing number of nonreligious Americans (across all ages) feels ostracized by a labor movement which often partners with faith-based groups in communities. Organized labor thus may need to collaborate with groups that promote freethinking or secular causes in order to increase or maintain membership levels.

CONCLUSIONS

Union households are different from nonunion households. Compared to individuals in nonunion households, American residents in union households are:

- Older, more African-American, less Latino or Latina, and more likely to be married;
- More likely to have an advanced (master’s, professional, or doctorate) degree;
- Disproportionately located in states in the Northeast, Midwest, and Pacific;
- More likely to have a job, work more weeks and hours, earn more money per year, work in the public sector, and identify as “working class;”
- More Catholic, less nonreligious, and more likely to attend church;
- More likely to affiliate with the Democratic Party and be “stronger” Democrats; and
- Happier, more likely to think some luck or help from others contributes to individual success, and have more confidence in science, organized religion, and organized labor but less confidence in Congress.

The good news for unions is that eight-in-ten union households and seven-in-ten *nonunion* households have confidence in organized labor. On the other hand, in addition to the continuing decline in the union membership rate, trends in U.S. demographics may be problematic for organized labor. As the country is becoming more Latino/a, more educated, and less religious, demographic groups that have been key members of the labor movement are gradually declining. If organized labor is to reverse the historic drop in union membership, it will likely have to do a better job of reaching out to, connecting with, and organizing residents who belong to these groups.

ENDNOTES

¹ According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, men had a higher union membership rate (11.9 percent) than women (10.5 percent) in 2013. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (January 2014). “Union Members – 2013,” Department of Labor, available at: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>.

² This also aligns with the union membership rates: In 2013, white workers had an 11.1 percent unionization rate, African-American workers had a 13.4 percent unionization rate, and Latino/a workers had a 9.8 union membership rate. *Ibid.* 1, BLS, Table 1.

³ *Ibid.* 1, BLS.

⁴ “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching.” (2005). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, available at <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>.

⁵ See: Frank Manzo IV and Robert Bruno. (January 2014). “Which Labor Market Institutions Reduce Income Inequality? Labor Unions, Prevailing Wage Laws, and Right-to-Work Laws in the Construction Industry,” available at http://illinoisepi.org/countrysidenonprofit/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ILEPI-LEP-Research-Report_Institutions-Income-Inequality_ManzoBruno1.pdf; Robert Gordon and Ian Dew-Becker. (April 2008). “Controversies about the Rise of American Inequality: A Survey.” National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper 13982; and Richard Freeman. (July 1996). “Unionism and the Dispersion of Wages.” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 34.

⁶ Daniel Sacks, Betsey Stevenson, and Justin Wolfers. (December 2012). “The New Stylized Facts about Income and Subjective Well-Being.” The authors find that increased income inequality is associated with decreased aggregate wellbeing.