

The recent historic union victories at Amazon, Apple, and Starbucks have raised the prospect of a possible resurgence of U.S. labor organizing. Filings for new union elections

the latter year, then drifted down to 8.26 million by 2019. With it fell the number of employed union members in that last pre-pandemic year (a drop of over 14%).

The COVID-19 crisis that began in spring 2020 shrank the number employed across the state by 760,000 (-8.6%) in a single year's time. But the number of union workers employed only fell by half that rate. So, the fraction of New York workers with union representation actually rose in 2020, up a percentage point to 22%.

In the latest available 2021 government surveys, 1.73 million of the state's 7.8 million wage and salary employees, or 22.2%, said that they were union members. That means that New Yorkers now have a union membership rate that is over twice the current national average of 10.3 per cent (though still below its earlier levels). In fact, only one other state – Hawaii, at 22.4% – now has a density rate above 20 per cent. But, with a small workforce of barely one-half million, that represents just 121,000 unionized Hawaiians.²

The influence of unions is greater than suggested by their membership figures, not least because unions represent some employees who report in surveys that they are covered by union contracts but are not formally union members. For example, 140,706 workers said their job had union coverage, in addition to the 1.73 million New Yorkers who identify as union members. Hence, the state's broader union coverage rate (or "coverage density") was 24 per cent. Nationwide, it was just 11.6 per cent (15.8 million people) including both 14 million members and 1.8 million nonmembers who were covered by union contracts last year. But using coverage

rather than membership rates alters neither New York's state ranking, nor the trends plotted in Figure 1.

How does union density in downstate New York compare to that in other large metro areas? Did the union share of all metro area employment rise in the depths of the pandemic, as in the New York State trend? Was this common in other states and in the major metropolitan areas within each one?

In Table 1 and Figure 2, we present estimates of union membership

per cent in 2016 to 31 per cent in 2017. Its declining job base year after year did not stop employees at a number of new media outlets like HuffPost, Gothamist and DNA Info from winning union representation that year. Though Long Island's union membership rate dipped to 25.7 per cent on the eve of the 2020 crisis year, it has averaged 27–28 per cent since then – over 6 percentage points higher than NYC density. For the pp2r

What can explain the divergent union trends among these cohorts? Does the relatively low rate of current union membership among young workers reflect weaker pro-union and/or stronger anti-union sentiments among youth?. Young workers have been the hardest hit by the general wage declines of the past two decades. In fact, while the wage gap between youth and adult workers has widened in many advanced countries, it has grown far more in the U.S. than in others.⁹ And the declining affordability of higher education, health insurance and housing over this same period has left more and more college-bound students little choice but to hold down jobs, both before and during college.

In fact, a number of public opinion surveys have found youth more likely than any age go

contracted by 40,569 (-7.7 percent). Over 8 in 10 of these were local government positions – some 90 per cent of which were held by union members.

This turned around under Mayor Bill deBlasio, whose 2014-21 administration expanded City Hall positions to record-breaking levels.¹³ Every major facet of city government increased its headcount, some by double-digits like information technology (+50 per cent) and sanitation (+33 per cent). By May 2019, the full government job count (federal, state and local) had reached 588,900. Over the following 12 months

Compared to downtown, Long Island has had a similar set of five industries with the highest union coverage as of 2019–21: Public Administration (62.8 per cent), Education Services (57.9), Transportation, Warehousing & (46.4), Construction (35.2) and Information (25.0). But very much unlike the city, Nassau-Suffolk unions won membership gains in 7 of the 11 industry categories. Just two industries – Construction and Education – accounted for over half of the region’s new union members. But, given more rapid employment increases, the fraction of their workers in unions fell to 35.2 and 57.9 per cent, respectively. Health Care and Leisure/Hospitality each gained over 4,000 new union members – growth sufficient to raise their union membership rates as well.

Long Island’s more pandemic-vulnerable sectors mostly achieved employment rebounds ahead of the city. Of the three private sector industries that lost membership, Information experienced the largest decline (-2,806) in residents represented by unions, followed by the lightly unionized Professional & Business Services (-1,433) and Transportation & Warehousing (-1,349). Information’s decline was driven by the loss of 2,806 jobs in the software and IT services sector, followed by a loss of 1,433 jobs in the publishing and printing sector. Transportation & Warehousing’s decline was driven by the loss of 1,349 jobs in the warehousing and transportation sector, followed by a loss of 1,349 jobs in the transportation sector. Education Services’ decline was driven by the loss of 1,349 jobs in the education services sector, followed by a loss of 1,349 jobs in the education services sector.

by -73,606 in 2020 – union members’ share of the city work force rose from 20.2 per cent in 2019 to 21.3 in 2020.

New York City’s deep employment plunge and slow recovery have left its unions with far fewer members and wiped out nearly all the pandemic bump in the union density rate. By 2021, the 689,000 city residents who were union members (20.5 per cent of the work force) still numbered 7.3 per cent less than in pre-pandemic 2019.

In sharp contrast, on Long Island both the number of union members and their share of the population have risen -- from 25.7 per cent in unions in 2019 to 27 per cent the following year. With 26.5 per cent of its employed residents union members by 2021, this marks the fifth consecutive year that Long Island unions have represented a larger fraction of the work force than their NYC counterparts. The Island experienced a shallower 2020 employment drop and faster rebound than downtown. Though it ended 2021 with an employment count still slightly below the pre-COVID level, the unemployment rate has fallen below three per cent.

Underlying these trends in union membership are often dramatic variations in unions’ fortunes among workers differentiated by age, gender, race and ethnicity, immigrant status, hours of work, public-private sector, and industry. We found that New York City’s Millennials – by far the largest single age group – are more than twice as likely as their cohort nationwide to be union members (19.6 per cent vs. 9.2 percent) and now account for nearly one in four of all the city’s union members. And New Yorkers in their late teens/early twenties are over three times as likely as youth elsewhere to have union protections today.

New female union workers accounted for two-thirds of the post-recession rise in union membership in New York City, and women are now a majority of the city’s union members. While the city’s membership rate has fallen among men to 23.9 per cent today, the female rate has moved from 24 up to 25.7 per cent over the same period. On Long Island, new female union workers accounted for 61 per cent of the net increase in membership since the recession. Union contracts now cover 25.9 per cent of men and 24.2 per cent of women workers – and the gap between them has been cut in half since the late 1990s.

African American women in New York City are more likely than any other demographic group, male or female, to hold jobs with union representation. The black female union density rate of nearly 42 per cent is followed by that of African American men (37.2 per cent), Latina women (26.8 per cent), and Latino men (25 per cent). In fact, white non-Hispanic men today account for only 15 per cent of New York City’s unionized work force. On Long Island, the white male union share is nearly three times as large (42 per cent), but a growing majority of its union workers are now women and minority men.

Over two-fifths of all union members in the city are immigrants. Moreover, the foreign-born accounted for one-third of all new



Earnings Gaps: Union & NonUnion FT Workers, by Age, Sex, Race/Ethnicity and Educational Attainment

	2019-21 Hourly pay, full-time workers (\$median)		
	NonUnion	Union	Union Pay Premium (%)
	\$16.76	\$22.00	31.26
	18.50	20.00	8.11
Sex			
Male	18.24	24.00	31.58
Female	16.50	18.19	10.24
Age:			
20-29	16.00	18.50	15.63
30-44	17.50	22.75	30.00
45-64	18.20	22.00	20.88
Race/Ethnicity			
White	20.00	22.50	12.50
Black	16.00	18.00	12.50

Local Labor Market

September, Fall 2022

by Margo McCormack

Job growth and falling unemployment have been widespread across the country and in the local labor market so far this autumn. At summer's end, the national unemployment rate fell from 3.7% in August to 3.5% in September, according to preliminary, seasonally adjusted estimates by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Black and Hispanic jobless rates (5.8% and 3.8%, respectively) in September still exceed those of whites (3.1%) and Asians (2.5%), but all have fallen by over two percentage points since the same time last year. That's been driven by 21 straight months of job growth, averaging a very healthy +420,000 new jobs/month in 2022. And fears that the tightening labor market might stoke labor shortages and price inflation have eased as the worker quit rate has kept falling since May. But, faced with stubbornly high price inflation, average hourly earnings have dropped 3.8%.

New York City's unemployment has also plunged since the pandemic peak of 21% (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Though still well above the national average, it reached 6.6% this August (seasonally adjusted), down from 9.3% a year earlier. And preliminary September numbers show it dropping a full percentage point, to 5.6%. Month-to-month local estimates can be volatile, but the fairly steady downward direction suggests a clear pattern.

Moreover, the city's job growth rate (now 6.1% over the past 12 months) is nearly double the national average. According to the monthly establishment payroll survey, it still falls 102,900 below (-2.2%) the pre-pandemic level in August 2019. But if the growth rate continues to outpace the national average, local job counts and unemployment levels could finally close the gap with pre-pandemic levels in the new year.

Within the city, the jobless rate has fallen in every borough since the same time last year, as have the numbers unemployed (Table 12). Citywide, 205,000 are still unemployed, down by 124,500 over the last 12 months. (Note that this and most other local area published

statistics from the household survey are not seasonally adjusted.) Over this same period, the number of NYC residents who were employed rose to 3.75 million, an increase of 73,500. So, about 51,000 of the unemployed dropped out of the labor force.

Where have the city's rapidly growing new jobs been coming from? Just three industries accounted for nearly three-fourths of total job growth over the past 12 months. These three sectors recorded both the most rapid growth rates and the largest numbers of jobs created: leisure and hospitality (+75,000 jobs, or +17.8%); educational and health services (+72,200 jobs, or +6.1%); and professional and business services (+64,400, or +8.3%).

Professional and Business Services grew across all sectors, with employment services growing 22%. Education and Health Services