

Private Sector Union Membership Rate Held Steady in 2023

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The union membership rate among private sector workers remained steady at 6% in 2023, according to a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) [news release](#). As the 2022 rate indicated, private sector union membership continues to decline since the peak in the 1950s.

Organizing activity continued to increase in 2023, with unfair labor practice charges and representation petitions reaching the highest levels in years, according to a fiscal year (FY) 2023 National Labor Relations Board [press release](#). Unions also won 76% of representation [elections](#), an increase from 72% from FY 2022.

However, while the number of private sector union workers increased by 191,000 in 2023, the size of the national workforce also grew, and unions did not grow membership enough to increase the national membership percentage rate.

Union membership increased in many states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and South Carolina.

Industries with some of the highest membership rates include transportation and utilities (16.5%), construction (10.7%), motion pictures and sound recording (12.1%), and education and health services (8.1%).

Moreover, industries with traditionally low union membership have seen an uptick in organizing as well. For example, in recent years the accommodation and food services industry has seen a significant increase in organizing activity, particularly at quick-serve restaurants and other national chains across the country.

The year 2023 also saw workers in the financial services industry vote on union representation, despite the industry's low membership and representation rate of 1.7%. Although only 34 petitions for election in the financial services industry have been filed in the last five years, 35% of those were filed in 2023 alone. This data indicates that organizing efforts in the financial services industry will likely continue to increase.

The BLS data emphasizes that, although the overall membership rate remained steady, organizing

momentum should not be discounted. Indeed, more than 300 strikes occurred across the country in 2023 and unions reached several high-profile landmark agreements, which will likely spur organizing efforts among the workforce in the year ahead.

Organizing momentum, combined with the pro-labor Biden Administration, means it is critical for employers to be prepared, even those in industries with lower union membership. Employers must engage in positive employee relations, address employee issues and concerns head on, and prepare to communicate with employees about union organizing.

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