

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/smaller-share-of-u-s-workers-were-union-members-last-year-11674154828>

[ECONOMY](#)[U.S. ECONOMY](#)

# Union Membership Rate Hits Record Low Despite Votes at Apple, Amazon, Starbucks

Decline comes even as unions added more members than in any year since 2008

By *David Harrison* [Follow](#)

Updated Jan. 19, 2023 3:07 pm ET

The share of U.S. workers who are members of unions fell to a record low last year even though unions added more members than in any year since 2008 following union elections at workplaces including Starbucks Corp., Amazon.com Inc. and Apple Inc.

About 10.1% of wage and salary workers were union members last year, down from 10.3% in 2021, the Labor Department said Thursday. The membership rate has been falling for decades as the economy has become more reliant on services industries, where workers haven't traditionally been unionized.

Union membership grew by 273,000 last year to 14.3 million, a rise of 1.9%. But the overall labor force grew by 5.3 million, or 3.9%, the department said.

Unions remain the exception in most private-sector workplaces. About 7.2 million private-sector workers, or about 6% of the 120.36 million private-sector workforce, were represented by unions last year, the Labor Department said. That compared with about 7.1 million public-sector union members, or 33.1% of the 21.32 million public-

sector workforce.

Union representation of leisure and hospitality workers rose to 2.8% last year from 2.2% a year earlier, still well below overall private-sector representation.

The economic rebound from the pandemic has resulted in a persistent labor shortage with job openings vastly outnumbering the number of unemployed workers. There were about 10.5 million job openings in November, according to the latest available data, compared with six million unemployed people looking for work during the same month.

Wages have risen sharply as a result and the unemployment rate has fallen to half-century lows.

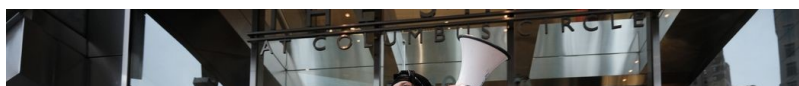
That tight labor market has also given workers more leverage over their employers and led to renewed interest in labor unions.

A total of 1,363 union elections were held in fiscal year 2022, the most since 2015, according to the National Labor Relations Board. Unions won the ability to represent workers in 1,041 of those elections, also the most since 2015. Workers who wish to join a union frequently have to petition the NLRB to hold an election to determine whether the workplace will become unionized.



Starbucks workers on strike outside a Brooklyn coffee shop in November.

PHOTO: ANGELA WEISS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES





Labor activists and Amazon workers protesting in New York City in November.

PHOTO: SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

Baristas at hundreds of Starbucks stores across the country have voted to join a union. Retail workers at Apple stores also have voted to join unions.

Amazon workers last spring voted to join a union at a warehouse in Staten Island, N.Y., while Amazon workers last fall voted against unionizing at an upstate New York warehouse. Earlier this month, workers at Microsoft Corp. voted to form that company's first union.

Workers seeking union representation say they want to improve pay, benefits and working conditions.

In many cases, employers have challenged the results of those elections. Workers aren't officially union members until those challenges are resolved either by the NLRB or in court, said Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of labor education research at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

Workers have also been engaging in more strikes and work stoppages. Workers launched 22 strikes last year involving more than 1,000 workers, according to the Labor Department, the most since 2019. A total of 125,000 workers took part in the strikes, also the most since 2019.

"It's going to take a lot more to shift union density," Ms. Bronfenbrenner said. A possible recession this year could pose new challenges for unions, she added. "If the economy constricts then there are going to be fewer new jobs for unions to organize."



Faculty and their supporters marched during a strike at the University of Illinois Chicago on Tuesday.  
PHOTO: PAT NABONG/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Write to David Harrison at [david.harrison@wsj.com](mailto:david.harrison@wsj.com)

*Appeared in the January 20, 2023, print edition as 'Percentage of Workforce in Unions Falls to a Low Despite New Members'.*