

March 4, 2019

Union Membership Continues to Drop Nationwide

The Janus decision is having an effect on membership

By Jarrett Skorup

Union membership has continued its long-term downward trend, declining again in 2018. At the same time, the number of jobs across the nation increased, as did household income.

This information comes from the U.S. Department of Labor in one of its annual reports. Union members declined by 0.2 percentage points — from 10.7 percent of the workforce to 10.5 percent. Other data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the U.S. has continued to gain jobs, adding 2.4 million in 2018, with average weekly earnings up 3.0 percent — well above the rate of inflation.

Union membership in states now subject to the Janus decision — states that previously were not right-to-work — has seen the largest drop in union membership.

Unions and their allies have attempted to spin the decline in union membership into a positive development. In a report for The Guardian newspaper, reporter Mike Elk contrasts the numbers with the U.S. Supreme Court decision last year in *Janus v. AFSCME*, which held that public sector workers could not be forced to contribute to or be members of a union.

Elk notes that union membership declined overall, but shows that in some states, membership increased. He also quotes union officials who argue that the decision has fired up much of their membership, and he points to states with teacher union strikes as examples.

Many states that saw teachers' strikes have added members. Arizona added 24,000 new members in the public sector. Oklahoma added 16,000, Colorado 19,000, and Washington state added 35,000 members.

However, some unions did lose members. California lost 100,000 [public sector] union members, New Jersey lost 30,000 members, and Michigan lost 30,000 — states that didn't have political mobilizations as large as those in Oklahoma and Arizona.

While some states with teacher strikes added members, others, like North Carolina and West Virginia, did not. And while the Janus decision has only been in place for less than a year, it may be having a larger effect than

Summary

Though union membership has increased in some states, it's down nationally, especially in states that were previously not right-to-work.

Main text word count: 738



Union membership is down after the Supreme Court's decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*.

some believe. Union membership in states now subject to the Janus decision — states that previously were not right-to-work — has seen the largest drop in union membership. In the 22 states that had mandatory bargaining and agency fees, union membership went down from 4,654,3000 to 4,603,600, a 1.1 percent decline. And that was during a period that saw state and local governments adding jobs.

As noted by The Guardian report, this decline was particularly pronounced in three states the Mackinac Center has been working in to educate public employees about their newly affirmed rights: Michigan, California and New Jersey.

California, which lost 97,600 state and local government union members, saw total union membership drop from 15.5 percent to 14.7 percent of the workforce. New Jersey lost 38,100 state and local government union members, and the total workforce rate dropped from 16.2 to 14.9 percent. Michigan lost 30,400 state and local government union members, and its total workforce unionization rate declined from 15.6 to 14.5 percent.

Unionization in Michigan's public and private sectors has changed a lot in the past 15 years. From 2003 to 2018, Michigan has gone from the 4th-most unionized state to the 10th.

It's unclear how much of the decline in unions is the result of Janus instead of long-term trends with a variety of sources. The important thing is that union members have a choice in membership, one public sector workers can exercise at www.MyPayMySay.com.

A version of this piece first appeared on the Mackinac Center blog.

#####

Jarrett Skorup is the director of marketing and communications at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Michigan. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the Mackinac Center are properly cited.

Union membership in states now subject to the Janus decision — states that previously were not right-to-work — has seen the largest drop in union membership.

Attention Editors and Producers

Viewpoint commentaries are provided for reprint in newspapers and other publications. Authors are available for print or broadcast interviews. Electronic text is available for this Viewpoint at mackinac.org/pubs/viewpoints.

Please contact:

Holly Wetzel
Communications Coordinator
989-631-0900
wetzel@mackinac.org

140 West Main Street
P.O. Box 568
Midland, Mich. 48640

Mackinac.org
Facebook.com/MackinacCenter
Twitter.com/MackinacCenter