



The State of the Unions 2011

A Profile of Organized Labor in New York City, New York State, and the United States

Ruth Milkman and Laura Braslow

September 2011

The Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies,
Center for Urban Research, and NYC Labor Market Information Service, CUNY



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These are unusually difficult times for organized labor in the United States. In addition to the challenges of an anemic economic recovery and persistently high unemployment, unions are confronting unprecedented attacks on public-sector collective bargaining rights and widespread demands for concessions from both public- and private-sector employers.

Against this background, the long-term decline of U.S. unionization rates has continued unabated. Although relative to the nation as a whole, organized labor remains strong in New York City and State, substantial erosion has occurred there in recent years, as Figure 1a shows. Nearly one-fourth (22.9 percent) of all wage and salary workers residing in New York City were union members in 2010-11, compared to 24.6 percent a year earlier.¹ This proportion was slightly higher in New York State (24.1 percent), which ranks first in union density among the nation's fifty states, and whose unionization rate is more than double the U.S. average of 11.9 percent.² In absolute terms, New

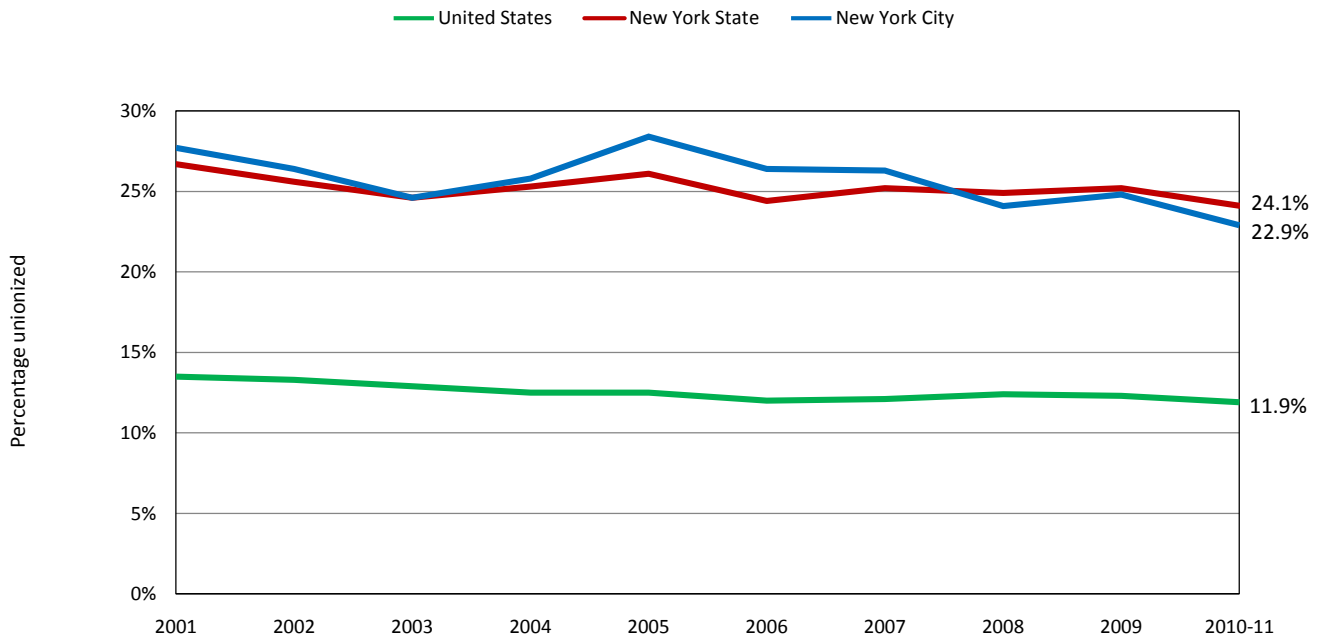
York State had more union members – over 1.9 million – than any state except California, which has a far larger population. In 2010-11, there were over 750,000 union members in the five boroughs of New York City, comprising about 40 percent of all union members in the State.³

At the national, state, and city levels alike, losses in union membership have been disproportionately concentrated in the private sector over the past decade, as Figure 1b shows. In the public sector, union density has been relatively stable (see Figure 1c), although government budget cuts and recent attacks on collective bargaining rights for public-sector workers may change that in the future.⁴

Geographical Variation in Union Density

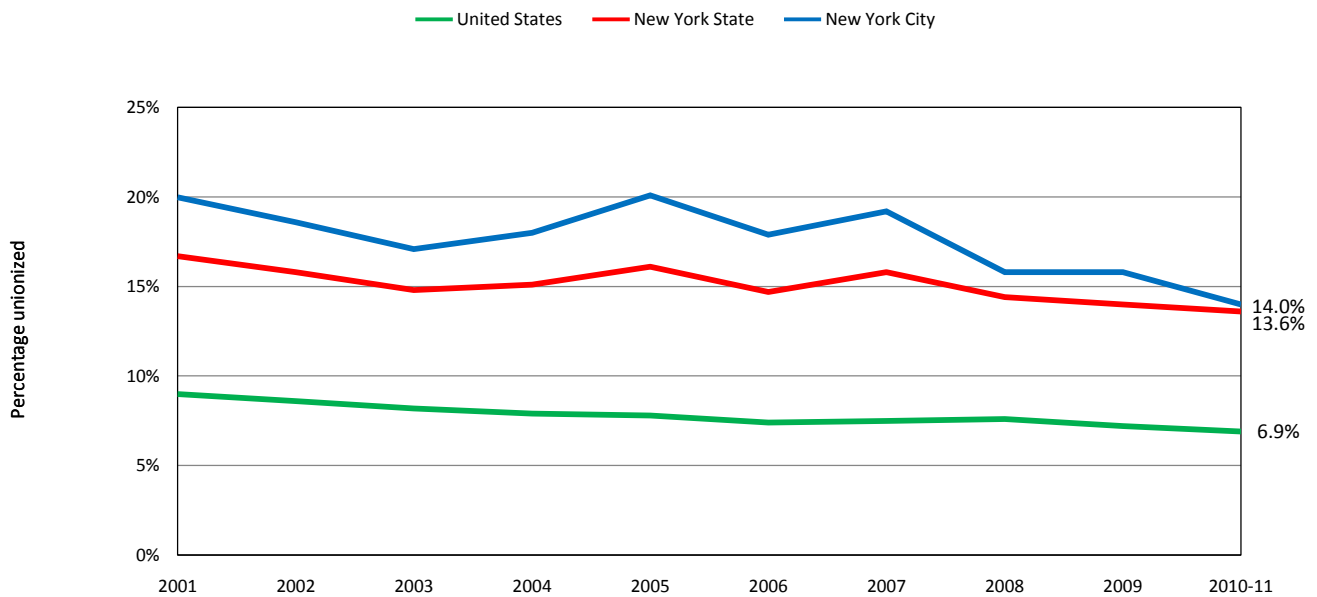
Figure 2 shows the 2010-11 private- and public-sector union density levels for the United States, New York State, New York City, upstate New York (excluding the five boroughs of New York City), and the larger New York City metropolitan area.⁵ These are the five entities for which we present detailed

Figure 1a. Union Density in New York City, New York State and the United States, 2001 - 11



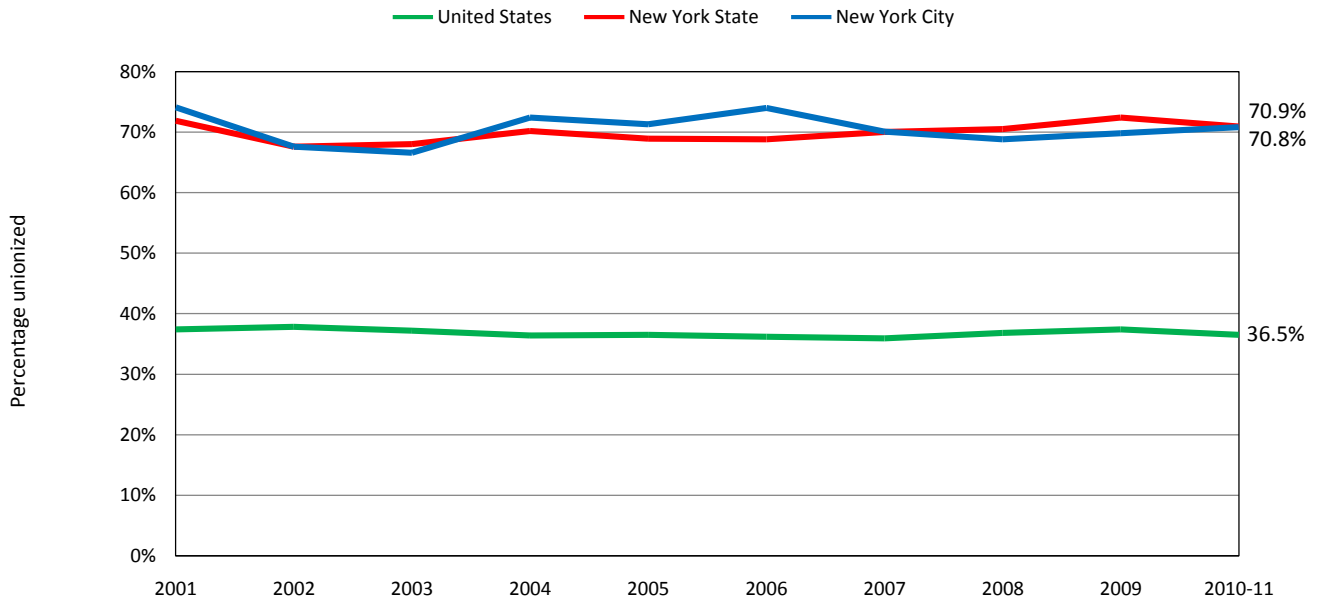
Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2001 - June 2011

Figure 1b. Private-Sector Union Density in New York City, New York State and the United States, 2001 - 11



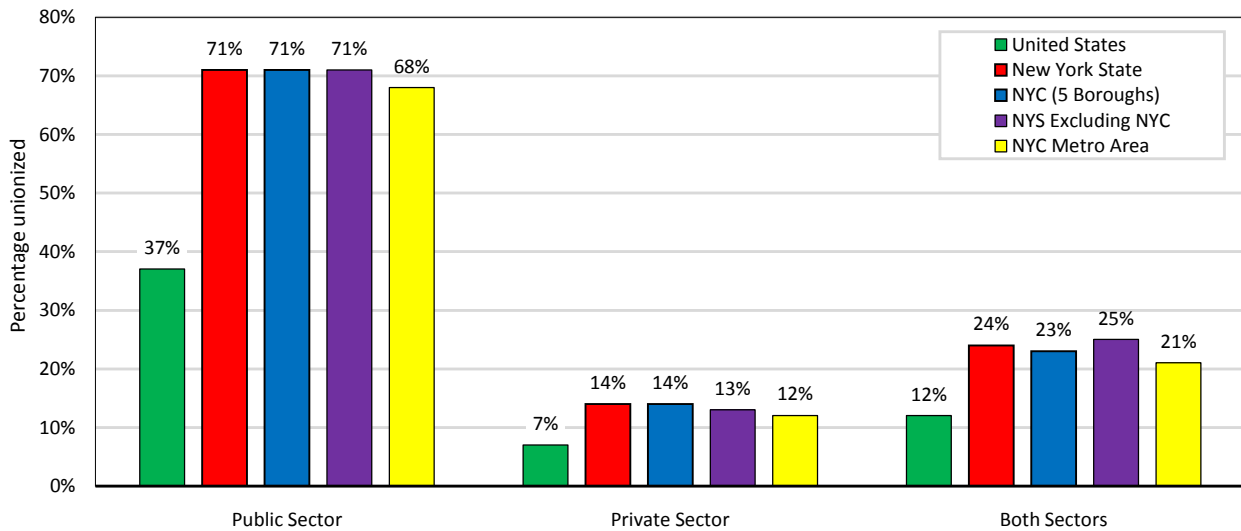
Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2001 - June 2011

Figure 1c. Public-Sector Union Density in New York City, New York State and the United States, 2001 - 11



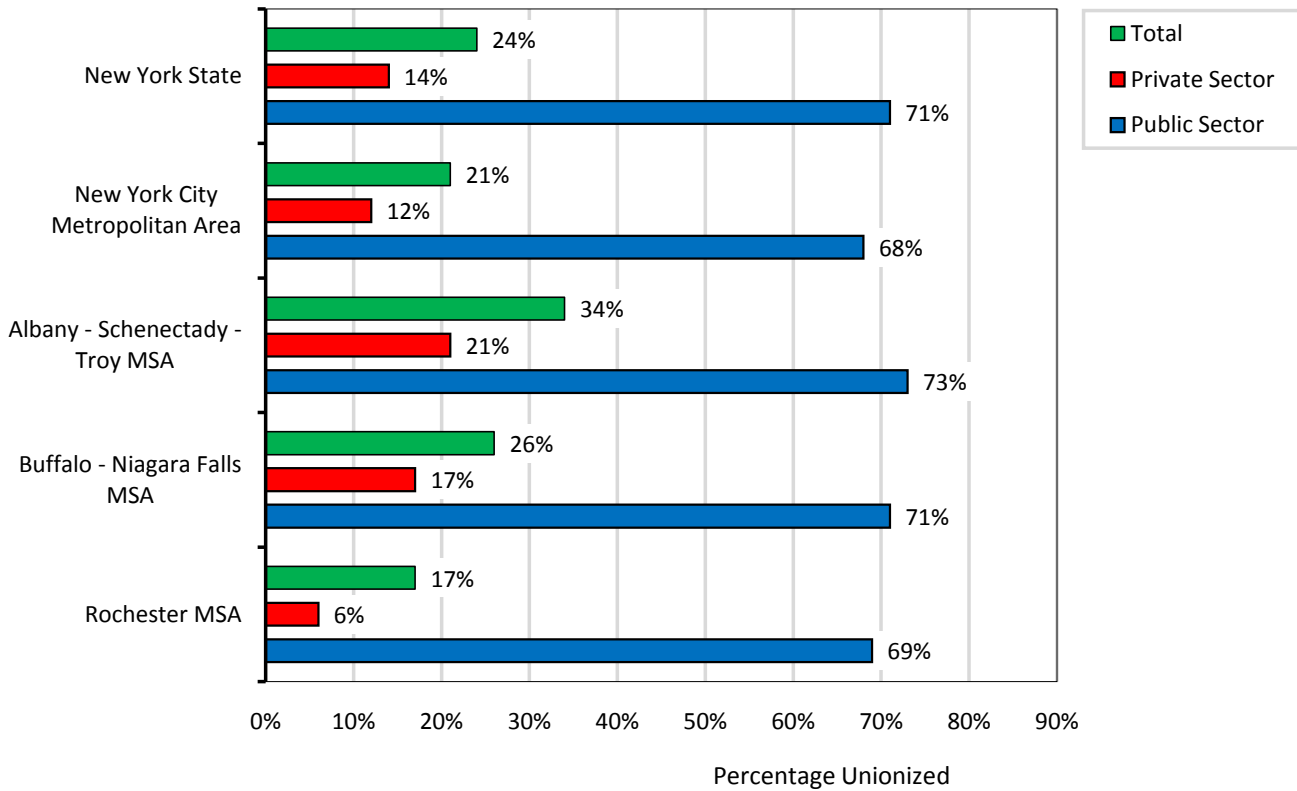
Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2001 - June 2011

Figure 2. Union Density, By Sector, New York City, New York State and the United States, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

Figure 3. Union Density By Sector, New York State and Selected Metropolitan Areas, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010- June 2011

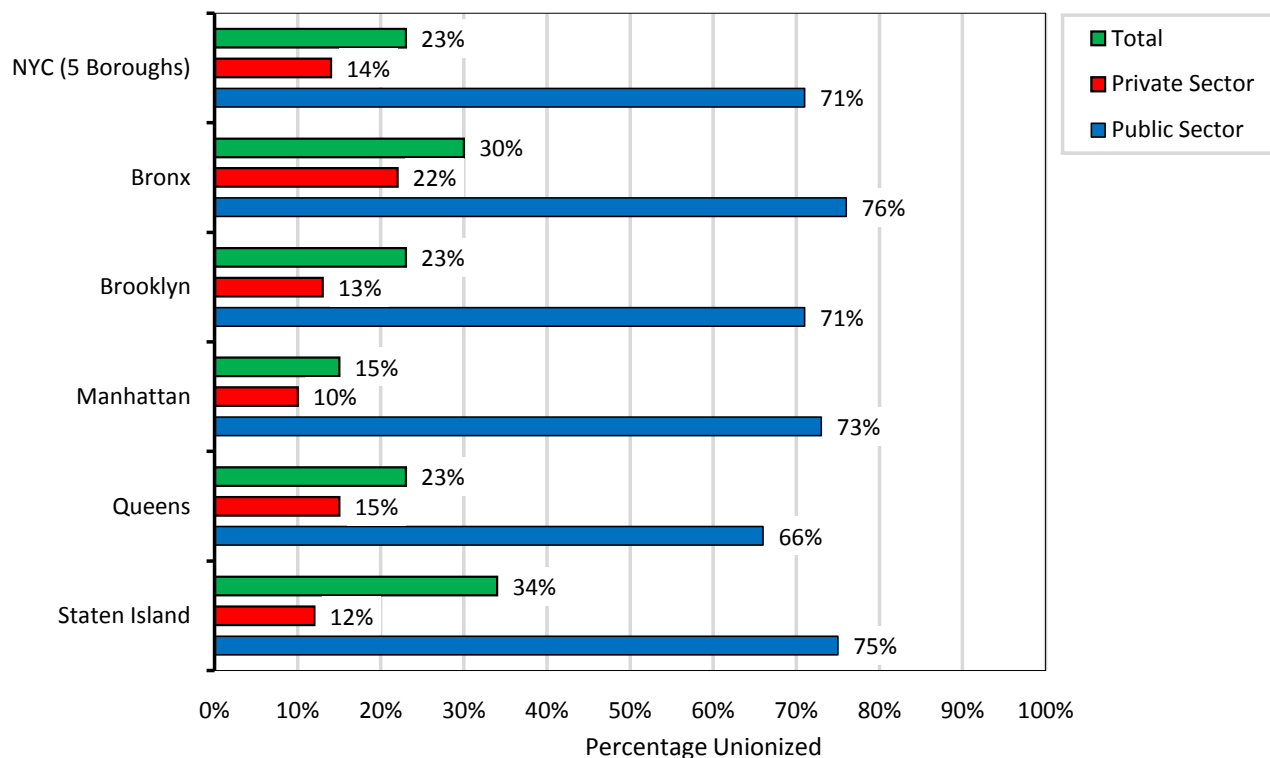
data in the bulk of this report.

By way of background, however, we begin with some summary figures for additional geographical areas. Figure 3 shows the 2010-11 private- and public-sector density figures for the State, the New York City metropolitan area, and the next three largest metropolitan areas in the State.⁶ In each of these regions, unionization rates were consistently higher in the public than in the private sector, with well over two-thirds of public-sector workers unionized – nearly double the national public-sector rate (36.5 percent). Private-sector union density was lower across the board, but even here, New York levels generally exceeded the national average of 6.9 percent for 2010-11. As Figure 3

shows, that was not only the case in the State as a whole – where private-sector density was double the national level – but also in three of its four largest metropolitan areas. The one exception is the Rochester metropolitan area, where private-sector density was slightly below the national average in 2010-11.

The large public-private sector differential, combined with the fact that the State’s Capital District has a disproportionate share of public-sector employment, helps to explain why union density is higher in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy metropolitan area than in the other areas shown in Figure 3. As is typical of metropolitan areas that surround state capitals in highly unionized

Figure 4. Union Density By Sector, New York City and Its Boroughs, 2010-11



NOTE: Several values reflect subgroups with fewer than 100 observations. See footnote 8 for details.
 Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010- June 2011

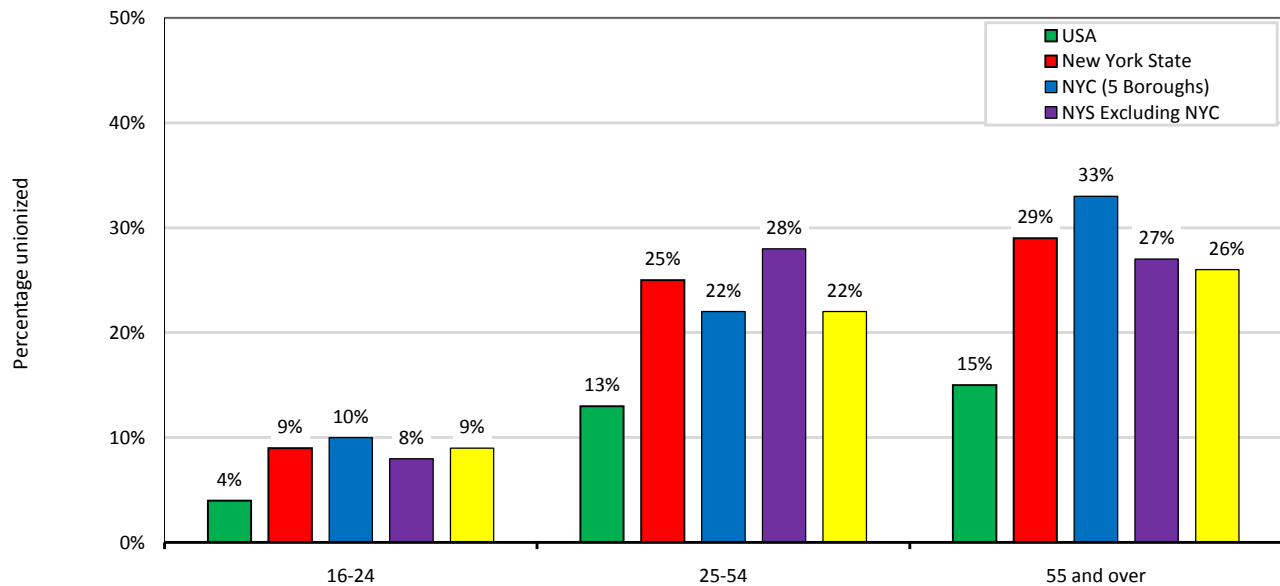
states, private-sector union density is also higher in Albany-Schenectady-Troy than in any other metropolitan area shown in Figure 3.⁷

Within New York City, as Figure 4 shows, union density varies across the five boroughs, with substantially higher levels of unionization among residents of the outer boroughs than among those living in Manhattan in 2010-11. The populations of the Bronx and Staten Island have the highest union density levels in the City. Unfortunately, given Current Population Survey (CPS) sample size limitations, we cannot analyze these inter-borough variations in more detail.⁸

Union Membership By Age, Earnings, and Education

Unionization rates are much higher for older than younger workers. As Figure 5 shows, they are highest for workers aged 55 years or more, somewhat lower for those aged 25-54, and far lower – by a factor of about three relative to the 55+ group – for those aged 16-24. This pattern is consistent across all the geographical entities shown, reflecting the limited extent of union organizing among new labor market entrants. In addition, as Figure 6 shows, unionized jobs typically provide workers with higher wages than do nonunion jobs. Because higher wages are strongly

Figure 5. Unionization Rates by Age, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010- June 2011

associated with lower turnover, this tends to generate an older workforce. In addition, unionized jobs typically offer more job security than nonunion jobs, further reducing turnover and thus further contributing to the relatively high average age of unionized workers.

Figure 6 also shows that the union wage premium is substantially greater in New York City and State than in the nation as a whole, an effect of New York’s relatively high union density.

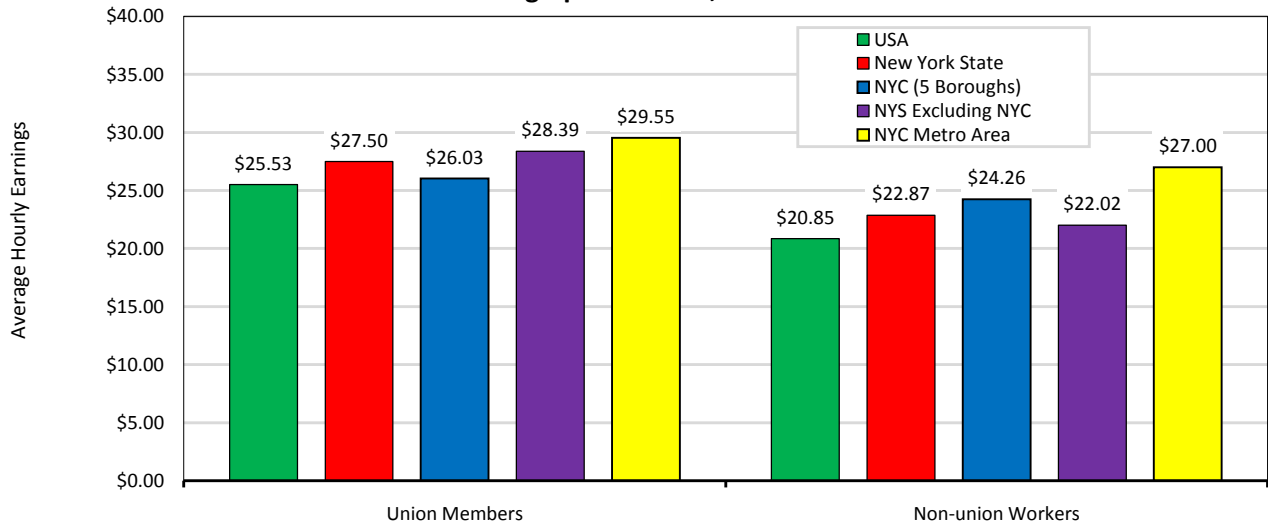
Figure 7 shows that – contrary to popular belief – in both New York State and the United States, the more education workers have, the higher their unionization rate tends to be. Whereas decades ago the archetypal union member was a blue collar worker with limited formal education, today mid-level professionals in fields like education and public administration are more likely to be unionized than virtually any other group of workers (as documented in detail below). The traditional pattern is still in evidence in the five boroughs

of New York City, and to a lesser degree in the New York City metropolitan area, where high school graduates have unionization rates only slightly lower than those of college graduates, and those with some college (but not a four-year college degree) have the highest rates of all. This reflects the high union density of New York City’s transportation and health care industries (discussed below), both of which employ large numbers of workers with high school and two-year college degrees.

Industry Variation in Unionization Rates

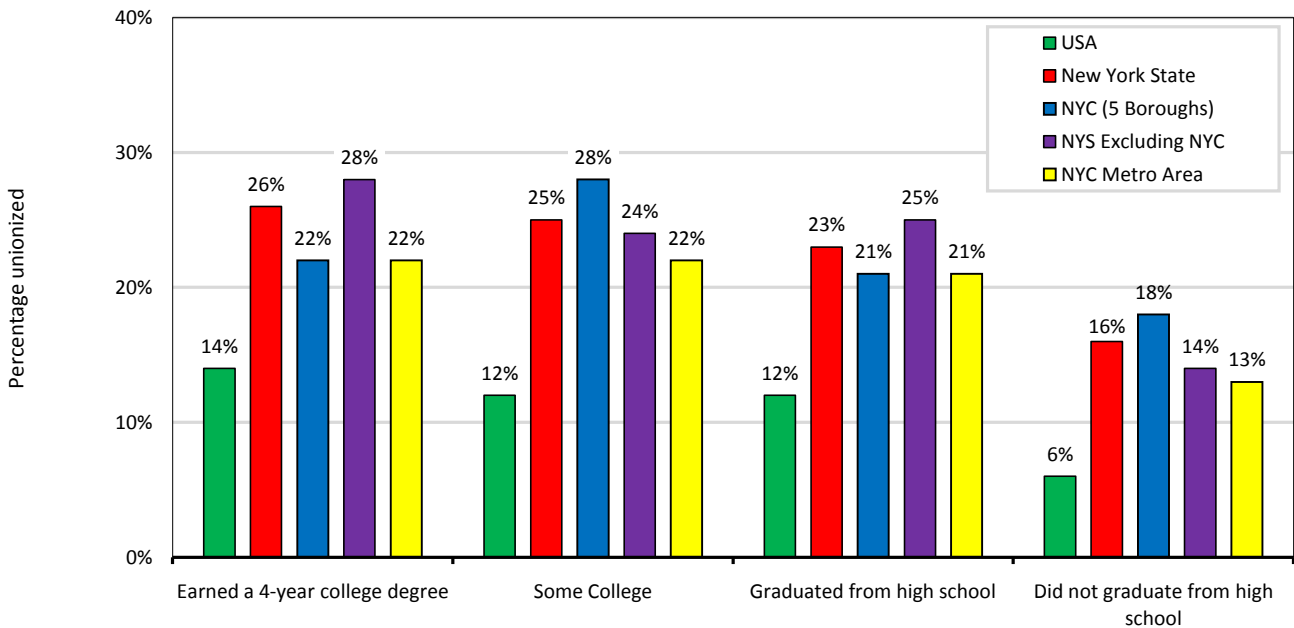
As Table 1 shows, more than half (54.7 percent) of all unionized workers in the United States are in three basic industry groups: educational services, health care and social assistance, and public administration. In New York City and State, those three industry groups account for an even greater proportion of all unionized workers (63.2 percent

Figure 6. Average Hourly Earnings, Union Members and Non-Union Workers, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



Figures reflect preliminary estimates, in 2010 dollars.
 Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2010

Figure 7. Unionization Rates by Education, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

**Table 1 : Composition of Union Membership by Industry Group,
Selected Geographical Areas in New York and the United States, 2010-11.**

Industry Group	USA	New York State	NY State excluding NYC	NYC (5 boroughs)	NYC Metro Area
Construction	6.5%	6.1%	7.4%	4.1%	5.8%
Manufacturing	9.9	4.3	6.0	1.7	2.6
Wholesale and retail trade	5.8	4.4	4.9	3.6	5.7
Transportation and utilities	12.8	10.3	9.1	12.0	12.4
Information services	2.0	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.6
Finance, insurance and real estate	1.4	2.8	1.2	5.2	3.2
Professional and business services	2.6	3.5	2.6	4.8	3.9
Educational Services	28.9	28.9	32.3	23.7	29.4
Health Care and Social Assistance	11.0	19.3	15.2	25.3	18.4
Leisure and Hospitality	2.4	1.8	1.4	2.5	2.2
Other Services	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.0	1.4
Public administration	14.8	15.7	16.7	14.2	13.5
Other	0.5	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

SOURCE: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010-June 2011.

and 63.9 percent, respectively). All three of these industry groups are comprised predominantly of public-sector jobs (although the health care component of "health care and social assistance" is largely in the private sector), and all three include relatively large numbers of college-educated workers.

As Table 1 shows, the composition of union membership in New York City (both in the five boroughs and in the larger metropolitan area), and to a lesser degree in the State as well, differs in some other respects from the national pattern.

Manufacturing accounts for a far smaller share of union membership in New York than nationally, especially in the City, while finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) and professional and business services account for a larger share of the total than is the case elsewhere in the nation.

Table 2 shows the composition of wage and salary employment by industry group for the same five geographical entities for which the composition of union membership is presented in Table 1. Comparing the two tables reveals that, for most industry groups, the share of

Table 2: Composition of All Wage and Salary Employment by Industry Group, Selected Geographical Areas in New York and the United States, 2010-11.

Industry Group	USA	New York State	NY State excluding NYC	NYC (5 boroughs)	NYC Metro Area
Construction	5.3%	4.9%	5.2%	4.5%	5.0%
Manufacturing	10.8	6.7	8.6	4.1	6.5
Wholesale and retail trade	14.5	13.4	14.8	11.6	13.2
Transportation and utilities	5.3	5.5	4.6	6.8	6.6
Information services	2.4	3.0	2.8	3.3	3.4
Finance, insurance and real estate	6.7	8.5	6.8	10.9	9.8
Professional and business services	9.9	9.7	8.6	11.2	11.5
Educational Services	10.4	11.9	13.5	9.6	11.0
Health Care and Social Assistance	14.1	16.9	16.7	17.1	15.3
Leisure and Hospitality	9.3	9.2	8.1	10.7	8.4
Other Services	4.4	4.3	3.9	4.9	4.6
Public administration	5.6	5.8	6.2	5.2	4.8
Other	1.5	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

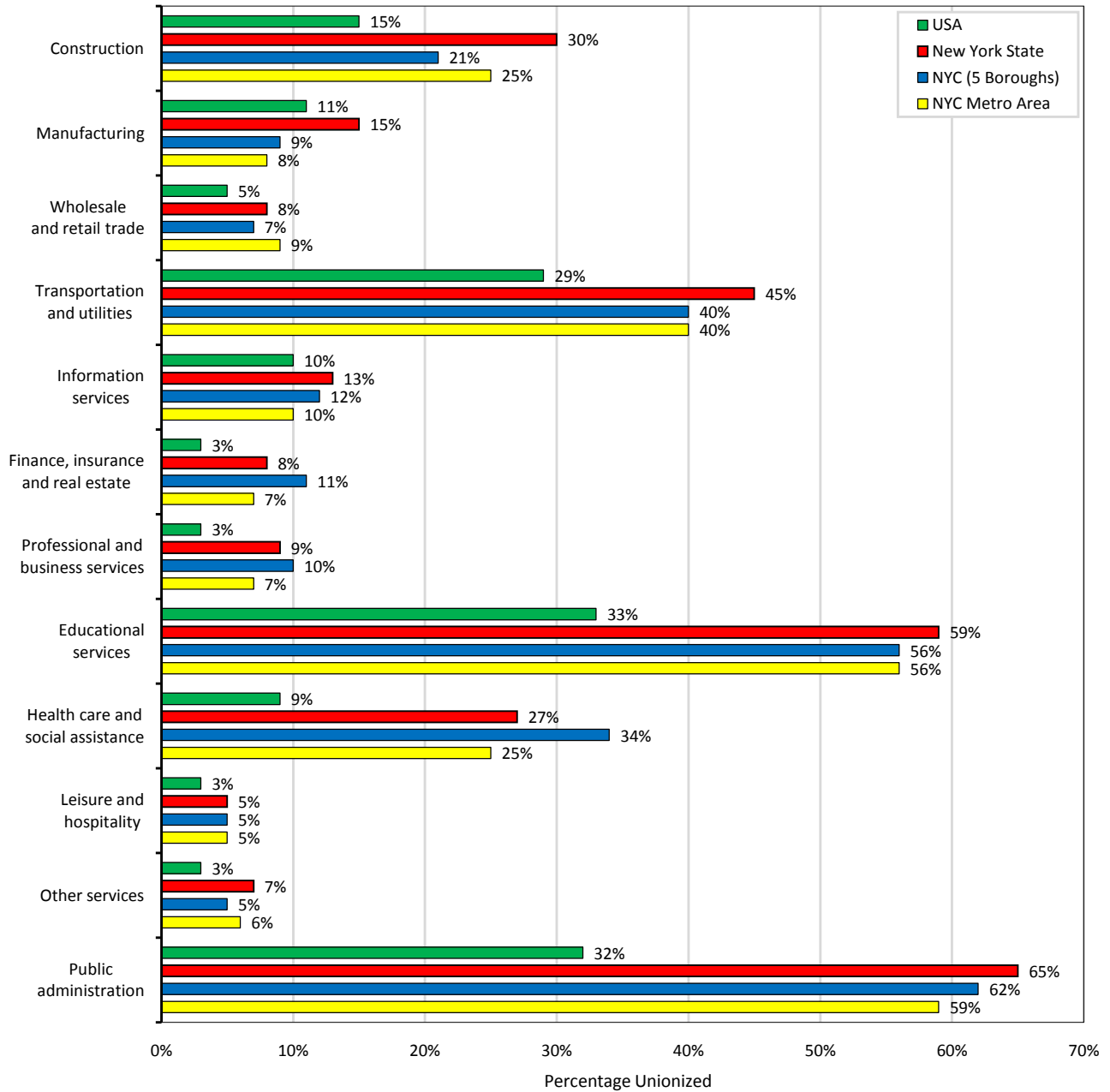
SOURCE: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010-June 2011.

union membership deviates greatly from the share of employment. Industry groups with high union density, such as educational services, or transportation and utilities, make up a much larger share of union membership than of employment. By contrast, wholesale and retail trade, and the leisure and hospitality industry group, account for a far more substantial share of employment than of union membership.

Figure 8 depicts the industry group data in a different format, showing unionization rates by industry (as opposed to the share of the unionized

workforce employed in each industry group, shown in Table 1) for the City, the metropolitan area, the State, and the nation. Unionization rates vary widely across the twelve industry groups shown. Education and public administration are the most highly unionized, as noted above, followed by the transportation and utilities industry group. Next come construction, along with health care and social assistance, two other industry groups in which unionization is extensive in New York City, the surrounding metropolitan area, and New York State. By contrast, in the United States as a whole,

Figure 8. Unionization Rates by Industry Group, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

unionization rates for these industry groups are only slightly above average. At the other extreme, union density is consistently low -- in the single digits -- for wholesale and retail trade; leisure and hospitality; and "other services," regardless of geography.

Because these industry group data are highly aggregated, they obscure the complexity of the City, State and nation's extremely uneven patterns of unionization by industry. The limited sample size of the CPS limits our ability to capture that complexity for 2010-11. For this reason, we created a different dataset that consolidates CPS data over a much longer period, the eight-and-a-half years from January 2003 to June 2011, inclusive.⁹ With this far larger sample, we are able to provide a more fine-grained analysis of industry variations. Because of the longer time span, however, the unionization rates derived from this dataset differ somewhat from those shown in Figure 8 for 2010-11.¹⁰

Table 3 summarizes the 2003-2011 data for 41 industries, showing unionization rates in the five boroughs of New York City, New York State, and the United States as a whole. For almost all of these industries, both New York City and New York State had far higher union density than in the United States as a whole in this period. The few exceptions include food manufacturing and couriers and messengers, which had higher density in the State than in the nation as a whole, but lower unionization rates in New York City; and retail grocery stores, in which the City lags both the State and the nation, reflecting the fact that unlike the rest of the country, New York City proper has vast numbers of small specialty retail food stores, few of which are unionized.

In 11 of the 41 industries shown, 2003-11 unionization rates were above 33 percent in New York City: utilities, air transportation, bus service

and urban transit, postal service transportation, wired and other telecommunications, elementary and secondary schools, hospitals, nursing care facilities, home health care services, hotels, and public administration. With the exception of hotels, these industries also had rates above 30 percent in the State. In the case of air transportation and postal service transportation, the high unionization rates are the product of national-level collective bargaining, but for the other nine industries they reflect union strength in local and regional labor markets. Although it does not meet the 33 percent threshold, building and security services is another industry in which unionization is disproportionately strong in New York City, and also much stronger in the State relative to the nation as a whole. Union contracts may no longer set the wage standard for the City's workforce as a whole, but they often do so in such key sectors of the urban economy as hotels, hospitals, nursing care, and telecommunications, as well as in public-sector industries like transit, education, home health care (the unionized portion of which is publicly funded) and public administration.

That said, the detailed portrait of industry-specific unionization rates in Table 3 fails to capture some important points of differentiation. For example, although union density in New York City retail grocery stores overall was 15.5 percent in the 2003-11 period, nearly all traditional supermarkets in the City are unionized. Similarly, while overall density for department and discount stores in New York City as a whole was less than 15 percent, some major Manhattan department stores are unionized "wall to wall." These data also fail to capture the differences among industry segments within construction, in which commercial construction is far more unionized than its residential counterpart in the City, the State and the nation alike.

Table 3. Unionization Rates by Industry, New York City, New York State, and the United States, 2003-2011.

Industry Group	NYC (5 boroughs)	New York State	United States
TOTAL (All Industries)	25.1%	24.9%	12.3%
Agriculture and mining	NA	3.5	4.7
Utilities	58.9 (N=99)	56.5	29.4
Construction	27.0	29.5	15.4
Food manufacturing	15.2	20.2	16.5
Textile and apparel manufacturing	10.6	13.7	5.0
Paper products and printing	24.0 (N=94)	15.1	13.7
Other manufacturing	14.3	16.1	11.6
Wholesale grocery and beverages	15.5	17.9	10.9
Other wholesale trade	8.2	6.8	3.2
Retail grocery stores	15.5	23.5	19.8
Pharmacy and drug stores	9.9	7.2	5.1
Department and discount stores	14.7	6.2	2.6
Other retail trade	5.9	4.8	2.1
Air transportation	44.8	48.6	45.2
Truck transportation	16.1	18.6	10.7
Bus service and urban transit	75.0	65.5	41.4
Postal service (transportation)	74.9	80.0	64.6
Couriers and messengers	27.9	34.2	29.8
Other transportation	23.9	29.8	23.9
Newspaper, periodical and book publishing	9.0	13.5	7.4

NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text.

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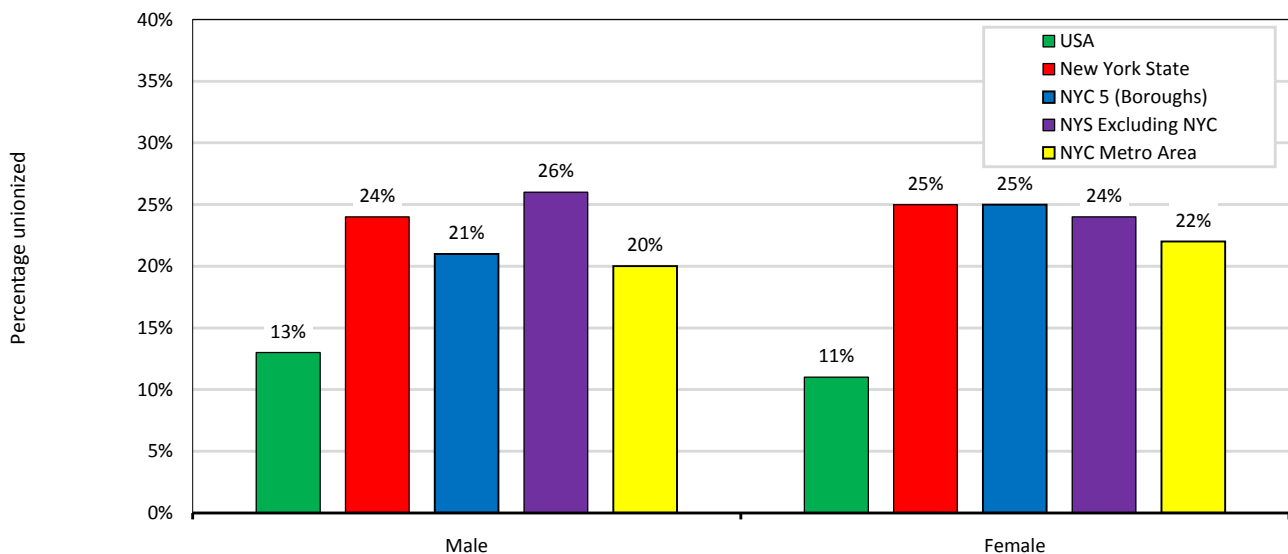
Table 3 (continued). Unionization Rates by Industry, New York City, New York State, and the United States, 2003-2011.

Industry Group	NYC (5 boroughs)	New York State	United States
Motion pictures and video	20.5	16.3	12.9
Radio, television and cable broadcasting	20.5	15.9	7.6
Wired and other telecommunications	44.1	39.3	19.5
Other information services	19.1	17.6	8.4
Finance, insurance and real estate	13.4	9.9	2.5
Building and security services	27.5	18.0	4.9
Other management and professional services	6.0	5.9	2.5
Elementary and secondary schools	66.5	69.6	42.7
Other educational services	26.2	28.7	13.5
Offices of physicians and other health providers	9.3	4.4	2.1
Hospitals	48.0	39.9	14.3
Nursing care facilities	47.0	32.3	8.5
Home health care services	38.1	32.9	9.1
Child day care services	18.0	10.6	3.3
Other health care and social assistance	26.0	21.7	7.3
Performing arts, museums, and sports	24.3	25.3	11.7
Amusement, gambling and recreation	6.4	6.5	5.0
Hotels	35.1	22.1	8.1
Restaurants, food service & drinking places	3.3	2.6	1.3
Other private-sector service industries	9.1	7.4	3.2
Public administration	62.4	66.6	32.0

NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text.

SOURCE: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2003-June 2011

Figure 9. Unionization Rates by Gender, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

Union Membership Demographics

The patterns of unionization by industry have a powerful effect on the demographics of unionism, because males and females, as well as workers of various racial and ethnic origins, are unevenly distributed across industries.¹¹ For example, educational services, as well as health care and social assistance, which have very high unionization rates, rely disproportionately on female workers. So do retail industries like drug stores and department stores, hotels, child day care services, and finance, insurance and real estate. These patterns help explain why the 2010-11 unionization rate for women in New York City and in the metropolitan area was higher than that of men. As Figure 9 shows, in the rest of New York State the gender gap is modest, but the male unionization rate was slightly greater than that of females in 2010-11. The gender gap was wider in the nation as a whole, again favoring males,

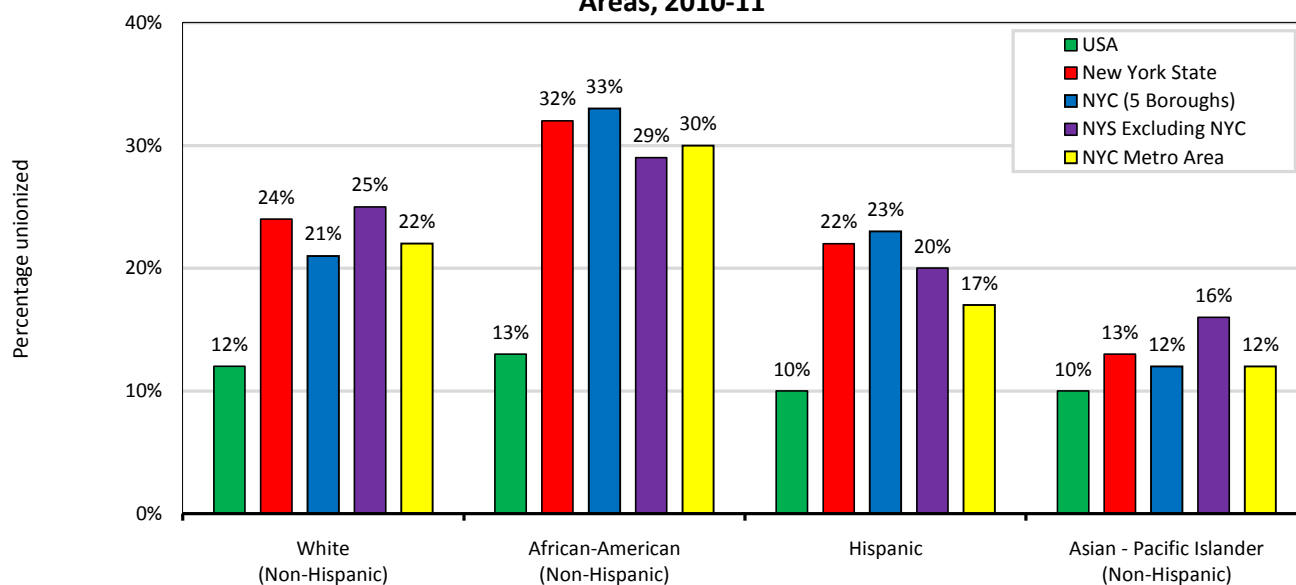
largely because the public sector is less extensively unionized nationally than in New York City and State.

Unionization rates also vary by race and ethnicity, as Figure 10 shows. Like the gender dynamic, this too reflects differential racial and ethnic patterns of employment across industries. African Americans are the most highly unionized group shown in Figure 10, regardless of geography, largely because of their disproportionately high representation in public-sector employment. This effect is amplified in New York City because of the highly unionized bus and urban transit sector, in which African Americans are also overrepresented.

Immigrants and Unionization

Unionization rates vary with nativity as well. As Figure 11 shows, in 2010-11 U.S.-born workers were more highly unionized than foreign-born workers, regardless of geography, once again

Figure 10. Unionization Rates by Race and Ethnicity, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



Percentages shown for 2009-10 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

reflecting the fact that relatively few foreign-born workers are employed in the highly unionized public sector. In contrast, workers born in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico – a substantial population group in both New York City and the rest of the State – are highly unionized. Indeed, their unionization rate is higher than that of African Americans. Puerto Rican-born workers (all of whom are U.S. citizens) are highly overrepresented in public-sector employment. In contrast, the foreign-born are vastly underrepresented in that segment of the workforce.¹²

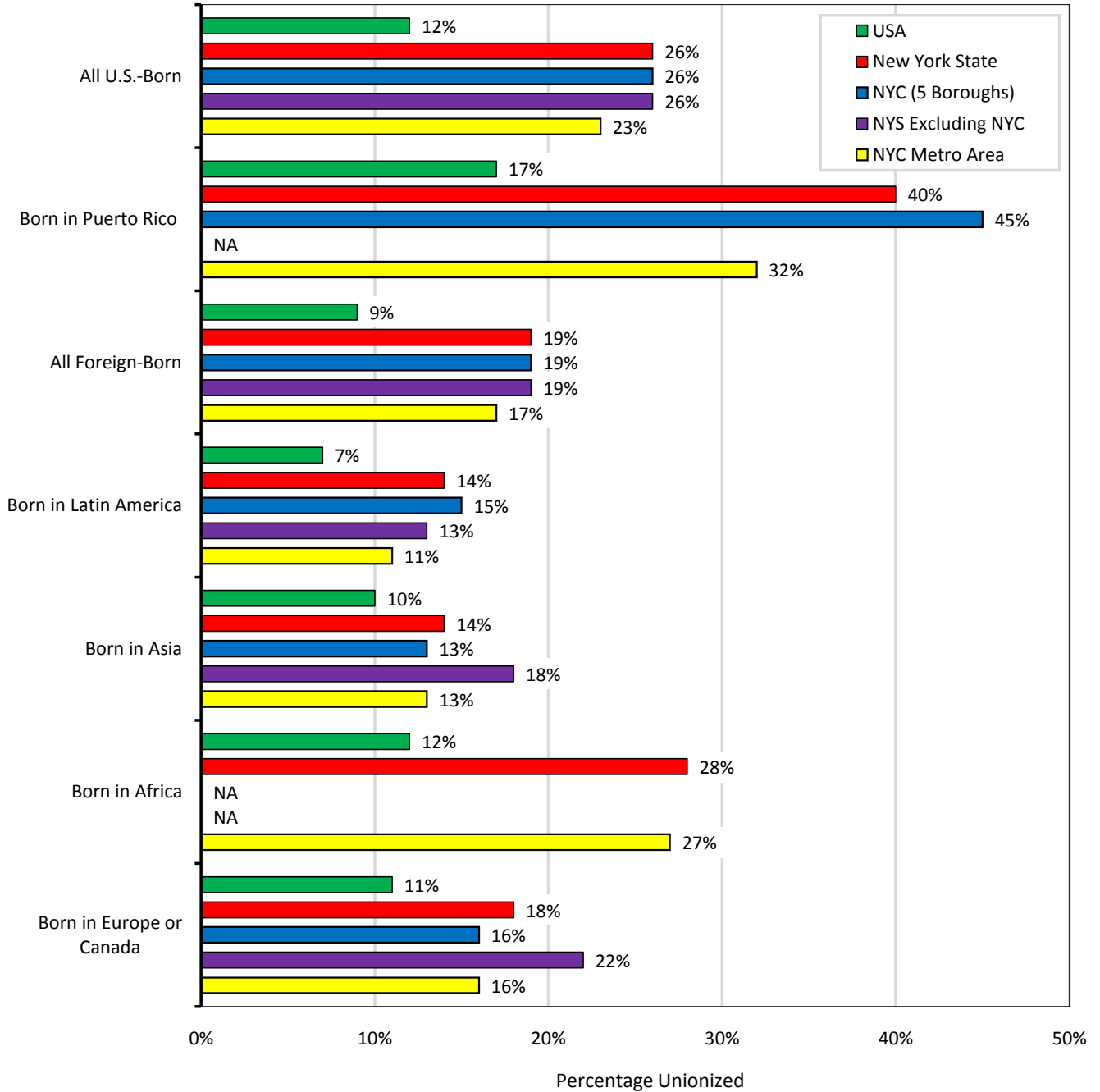
As Figure 12 shows, however, foreign-born workers are by no means a homogenous group. The 2010-11 unionization rate of naturalized U.S. citizens, and that of immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1990, are comparable to or higher than those of U.S.-born workers. More recent arrivals, by contrast, have extremely low rates of unionization. These newcomers are relatively young, and as noted above, few

younger workers are union members, regardless of nativity. Moreover, the most recent immigrants are disproportionately employed in informal-sector jobs that have relatively low unionization rates. Over time, however, these data suggest that many immigrant workers manage to move up in the labor market, into sectors where unions are present.

Figure 13 shows that unionization rates for foreign-born workers vary much less within the public and private sectors than between them. Even foreign-born workers who arrived in the U.S. after 1990, whose overall unionization rates are generally low (as Figure 12 shows), had 2010-11 public-sector unionization rates well over 50 percent in New York State and in the New York City metropolitan area, and over 25 percent in the nation as a whole.

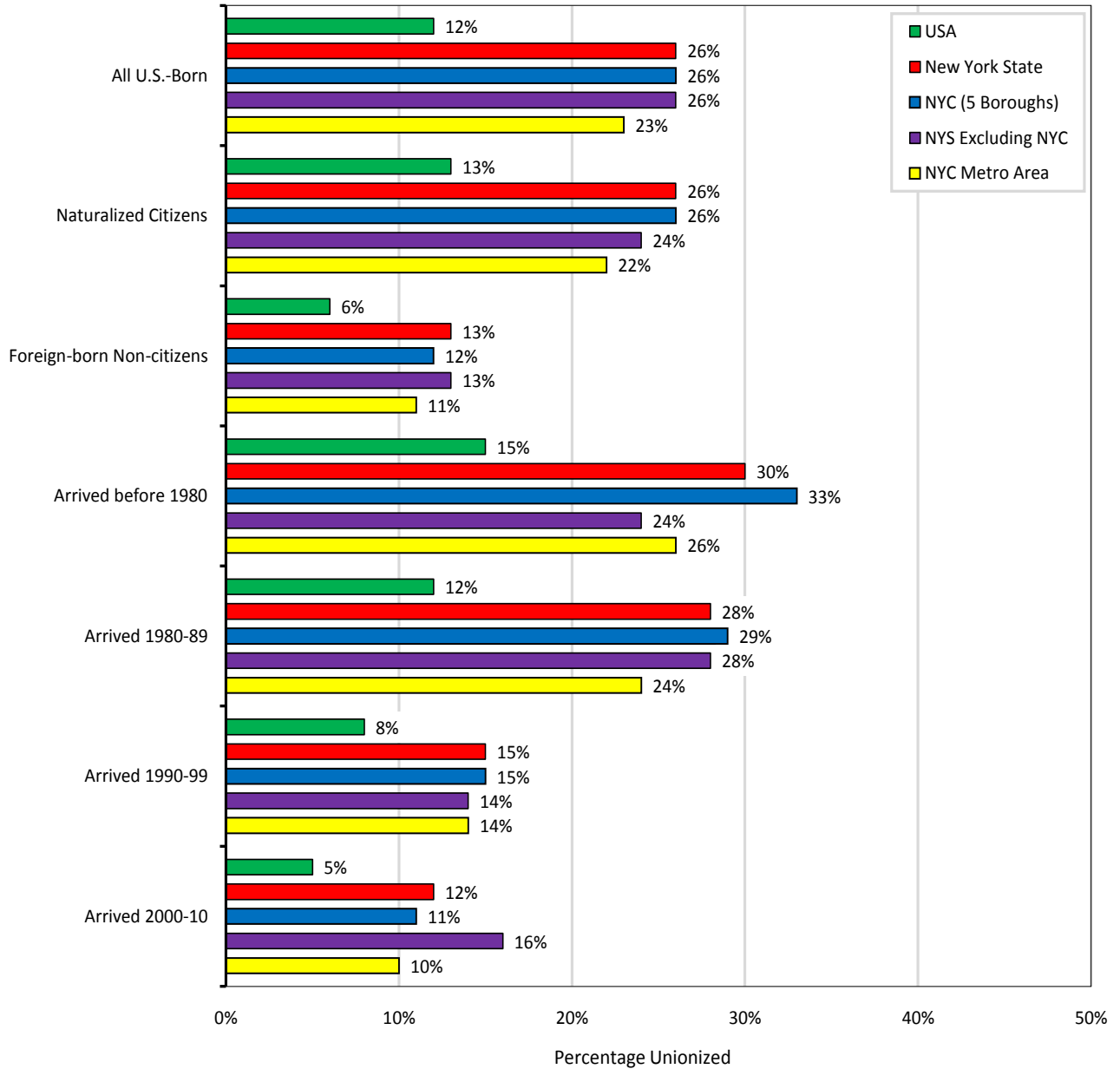
Relatively few noncitizens and recently arrived immigrants work in the public sector, however. Only 5.3 percent of all foreign-born noncitizens

Figure 11. Unionization Rates by Selected Places of Birth, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11



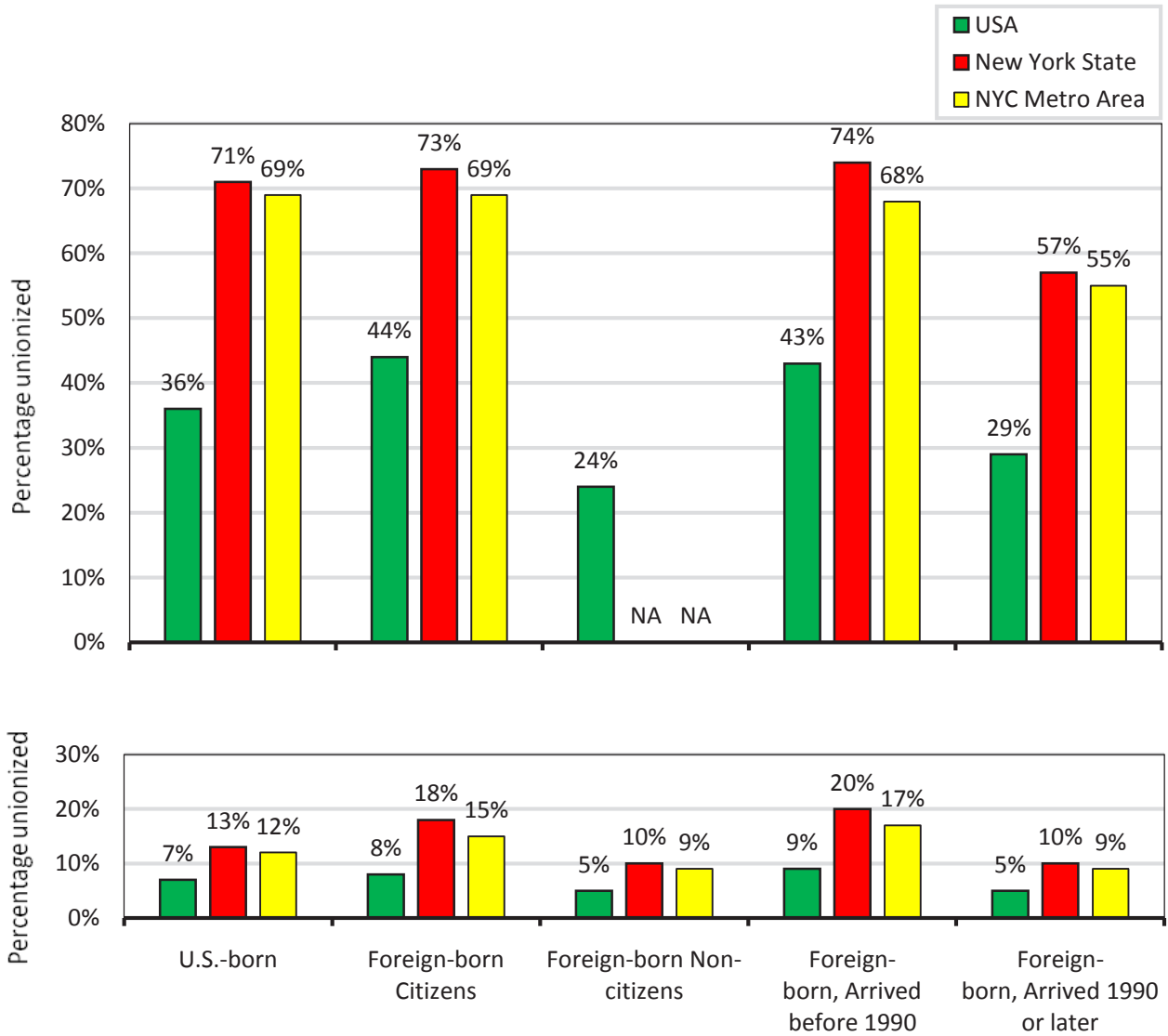
NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text.
 Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

Figure 12. Unionization Rates by Nativity, Citizenship Status, and Date of Arrival in the United States, Selected Geographical Areas, 2010-11.



Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011
 Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

Figure 13. Public and Private Sector Unionization for Selected Demographic Groups, United States, New York State, and New York Metropolitan Area, 2010-11.



NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text.

Note: Percentages shown for 2010-11 include the 18 months from January 2010 to June 2011

Source: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2010 - June 2011

in the United States, and only 6.6 percent of all foreign-born workers who arrived in or after 1990, were employed in the public sector in 2010-11. By contrast, 16.8 percent of the overall U.S. workforce was in the public sector. As a result, the high level of public-sector unionization for these particular immigrant groups does little to boost their overall unionization rate. By contrast, in the private sector, unionization rates are consistently lower for all groups, regardless of citizenship status or date of arrival.

Table 4 offers a closer look at patterns of immigrant unionization by national origin. Due to the limited sample size of the CPS, for this purpose we used the dataset (described above) that includes CPS data from January 2003 to June 2011. Table 4 presents unionization rates for immigrants from various countries and regions for that period, for foreign-born wage and salary workers living in New York City, New York State, and the nation.¹³ (Because they are based on multiple years, the data in Table 4 differ from those shown in Figures 11, 12 and 13; since unionization declined between 2003-2011 the rates shown in Table 4 are generally higher than the comparable rates in 2010-11.)

Table 4 reveals that unionization rates vary widely among immigrants by place of birth. There are a number of reasons for this. One involves date of arrival; as Figure 12 shows, immigrants who have been in the United States for an extended period are more likely to be unionized than recent arrivals. Similarly, naturalized citizens are more likely to be unionized than non-citizen immigrants (as Figure 12 also shows). The case of Mexican immigrants in New York City is an extreme one in this respect; as recent arrivals to the City, few of whom are citizens and many of whom are unauthorized, they have the lowest unionization rate of any group shown in Table 4.¹⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, Italian-born workers, as well as those born in the

Caribbean, are more likely to have arrived decades ago and to have become citizens.

It is striking that several of the groups shown in Table 4 have unionization rates that exceed those of U.S.-born workers. In the case of New York City, that is the case for those born in Italy, the Philippines, Central America, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana and Africa. Typically these groups are overrepresented in highly unionized industries. Thus for example, 45 percent of all Italian-born workers in the City are employed in education, health care and social assistance and construction (compared to 30 percent of all U.S. born workers in the City). For several other groups, overrepresentation in the health care and social assistance sector largely accounts for their high unionization rates: 50 percent of Filipino immigrants, 24 percent of Dominican-born, 38 percent of the Haitian-born, 38 percent of the Jamaican-born, 30 percent of the Guyana-born and 33 percent of the African-born workers in New York City are employed in the highly unionized health care and social assistance sector; by contrast that industry group employs only 14 percent of the City's U.S. born workers. Similarly, Haitians, immigrants from Guyana, and South Asians are overrepresented in the highly unionized transportation industry, which helps to account for their relatively high unionization rates. The specifics are a bit different for immigrants in New York State and in the United States as a whole, but in general the varying unionization rates among the immigrant groups shown in Table 4 are closely correlated with their varied distribution across industries, which vary in union density levels (see Figure 8), as well as their dates of arrival and citizenship status.

Table 4. Unionization Rates for Foreign-born Workers by Place of Birth, New York City, New York State, and the United States, 2003-2011.

Place of Birth	NYC (5 boroughs)	New York State	United States	
EUROPE	Italy	32.5%	31.0%	20.2%
	Great Britain and Ireland	23.5	26.0	10.9
	Other Western Europe	15.2	19.8	11.8
	Russia	21.1	19.2	10.5
	Poland	17.9	20.8	13.5
	Ukraine	17.9	19.3	11.8
	Other Eastern Europe	16.6	17.4	9.9
ASIA	Middle East	14.2	14.2	8.4
	China (including Hong Kong)	10.5	11.2	8.3
	India, Pakistan and Bangladesh	17.0	18.4	6.8
	Philippines	34.5	32.5	18.8
	Korea	5.7	7.1	7.0
	Other Southeast Asia	12.5	15.0	9.5
	Other Asia	20.5	17.8	8.9
LATIN AMERICA	Mexico	4.5	7.0	6.8
	Central America	28.7	18.9	7.8
	Dominican Republic	28.4	26.4	17.8
	Haiti	42.5	40.6	16.6
	Jamaica	37.6	36.3	20.8
	Trinidad and Tobago	26.2	27.6	18.0
	Other Caribbean	36.8	33.9	10.4
	Columbia	28.3	25.0	9.9
	Ecuador	18.1	16.7	12.0
	Guyana	31.1	29.8	21.9
	Other South America	18.7	18.5	7.7
Africa	32.6	31.1	11.4	
Other foreign-born	21.8	21.8	11.2	
U.S. (except Puerto Rico)	26.4	25.7	12.8	
Puerto Rico	38.0	34.2	17.4	

NA = Sample size is insufficient to generate reliable estimates. See footnote 1 in the text.
 SOURCE: U.S. Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group, 2003-June 2011.

Conclusion

Actively recruiting new members into the ranks of the labor movement, as many dedicated organizers have sought to do in recent years, is the primary means by which unions themselves can act to increase the unionization level. This is one key counterweight to the downward trend in organized labor's influence. Yet many factors that the labor movement cannot control also critically influence the level of union density. All else equal, if employment declines in a highly unionized sector of the economy, or expands in a non-union (or weakly unionized) sector, union density will fall. The best-known example of this is the steady decline of manufacturing, a former union stronghold, over the past few decades, along with the expansion of private-sector service industries where unions have historically been weak; indeed these combined trends have been a major driver of the general erosion of union density. Conversely, if employment expands in a highly unionized sector or declines in a non-union or weakly unionized one, the overall level of density will increase. Privatization and subcontracting, both of which often involve a shift from union to non-union status for affected workers, further complicate the picture in some settings. Over the long term, given the "churning" effects of employment shifts and (in non-recessionary periods) normal labor market growth and turnover, simply to maintain U.S. union density at a given level requires a great deal of new organizing; and to increase density requires far more extensive effort.

In New York City and State, unionization levels are far higher than in other parts of the nation – about double the national average. This was not the case in the mid-20th century, when unionization was at its peak: In 1953, 34.4 percent of New York State's workers were unionized, only slightly above the 32.6 percent national level.¹⁵

Although since then organized labor has more than held its own in New York relative to the nation, in absolute terms unions have lost considerable ground in both the City and State over the past few decades, especially in the private sector. As recently as 1986, New York City's private-sector union density was 25.3 percent, well above the 2010-11 level (14.0 percent) level, and statewide the figure was 24.0 percent as recently as 1983 (compared to 13.6 percent in 2010-11).¹⁶

As union strength in the private sector has declined, the ratio of public- to private-sector unionization in New York City and State has reached a record high. In labor's glory days, a strongly unionized private sector helped foster a strongly social-democratic political culture in New York City.¹⁷ The precipitous drop in private-sector density is among the factors that have threatened to undermine that tradition in recent years. Although so far public-sector density in the City has been preserved intact, in the wake of the fiscal crises generated by the current economic downturn, public-sector unions have been increasingly on the political defensive. Thus despite New York City and State's unusually high density levels – the highest of any major U.S. city and the highest of any state – this is a period of profound challenges for organized labor. For the present, however, New York's unions continue to offer significant protection to a diverse population of workers in both the City and State, including middle-class teachers and other professionals as well as a substantial segment of minorities and immigrants – in both professional and nonprofessional jobs.

Thanks to Joshua B. Freeman, Lesley Hirsch, Stephanie Luce, and Ed Ott for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this report; and to Peter Frase for graphic design and production assistance.

Endnotes

1. This report is based on analysis of the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group data for 2010 and the first six months of 2011. We created a merged data set from the 18 monthly surveys conducted from January 2010 to June 2011, inclusive; the 2010-11 data discussed here and shown in the figures and tables below are the averages for those 18 months. All results are calculated using the CPS unrevised sampling weights, for employed civilian wage and salary workers aged 16 and over. We followed the sample definition and weighting procedures described in Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson, *Union Membership and Earnings Data Book* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, 2011), pp. 1-8. To ensure reliability, given the limitations of the CPS dataset, we report unionization rates only for subgroups that have a minimum of 100 observations, unless otherwise noted. Rates for subgroups that fall below this threshold are labeled NA (not available). The New York City figure for the previous year is from our September 2010 report, based on CPS data for 2009 and the first six months of 2010, available at: <http://www.urbanresearch.org/news/new-cuny-study-on-nyc-and-states-high-unionization-and-unique-patterns-of-union-membership>

2. "Union density" denotes the proportion of all wage and salary workers who are union members in a region, occupation, or industry. For the state rankings, see Hirsch and Macpherson, pp. 30-31.

3. An estimated 771,500 union members resided in New York City's five boroughs in 2010-11, while the statewide total is estimated at 1,930,000. The CPS data on which these estimates are based relies on respondents' self-reports as to whether or not they are union members. (Respondents who indicate that they are not union members are also

asked whether they are covered by a union contract, but this report does not analyze that group.) The geographical data in the CPS (and in this report) refer to respondent's place of residence – not the location of their workplaces. Since many workers commute from other areas to their jobs in the City, this makes the data for the five boroughs of New York City an imperfect approximation of the extent of unionization in the City. Some sections of this report present data on union members residing in the wider New York metropolitan area, but that group includes many individuals who are employed outside New York City.

4. In January 2003, methodological changes were made in the CPS (for details, see <http://www.bls.gov/cps/rvcps03.pdf>.) As a result, the data shown in Figures 1a, 1b and 1c for 2003-2010 are not strictly comparable to those for 2001 and 2002.

5. Throughout this report we use the term "New York metropolitan area" to denote the New York-Newark-Bridgeport NY-NJ-CT-PA Combined Statistical Area (CSA), based on the CSA definitions introduced in 2003. The New York-Newark-Bridgeport CSA includes the following counties (in addition to the five boroughs of New York City proper): Dutchess, Nassau, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, Ulster and Westchester Counties, New York; Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex and Union Counties, New Jersey; Litchfield, New Haven and Fairfield Counties, Connecticut. The CSA also includes Pike County, Pennsylvania, but that is not included in our dataset. For details, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/omb/bulletins/fy2009/09-01.pdf>

6. These are "Metropolitan Statistical Areas" based on the 2003 U.S. Census area definitions.

7. The only MSAs outside New York State with greater 2010 union density than the New York-Newark-Bridgeport CSA were Lansing-East Lansing, Michigan and Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Roseville, California – both of which include the capitals of highly unionized states. See Hirsch and MacPherson, pp. 38-49.

8. For the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the values shown for the public sector are based on fewer than 100

observations (for the Bronx, N=93, for Manhattan, N=77 and for Staten Island, N=88) so these three data points should be interpreted with caution.

9. The CPS methodology changed in January 2003, making it impractical to include data before that date.

10. Except as noted, there are at least 100 observations in the merged 2003-11 data set for each industry shown in Table 3. Since unionization has declined somewhat since 2003 (see Figure 1a-c), the results of this analysis slightly overestimate the actual levels of density for each industry shown in Table 3.

11. Given the nation's winner-take-all union representation system, and the fact that a relatively small proportion of present-day union membership is the product of recent organizing, the demographic makeup of union membership mainly reflects the demographic makeup of employment in highly unionized industries and sectors. Although unionized workers are more likely than their nonunion counterparts to express pro-union attitudes, this is typically a consequence rather than a cause of union affiliation. See Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 68-77. Moreover, individual workers seldom have the opportunity to make independent decisions about union affiliation. Instead, unionization occurs when entire workplaces (or occasionally, entire industries) are organized, and once established, unionization in those workplaces tends to persist over time. Later, as a result of workforce turnover and de-unionization, strongly pro-union workers may be employed in non-union settings, and workers with little enthusiasm for organized labor may find themselves employed in union shops.

12. Puerto Ricans born on the U.S. mainland cannot be separately identified in these data. Those born in Puerto Rico tend to be older, all else equal, which further contributes to their higher unionization rate. The number of observations for Puerto Ricans in New York City is 98, just below the threshold of 100 mentioned in endnote 1

13. Table 4 only shows nationalities for which there are 100 or more observations in the 2003-11 dataset.

14. The CPS data do not include information on

immigration status. Note that Mexicans have much higher unionization rates in the United States as a whole, reflecting the fact that in many other parts of the country the Mexican-born population includes many individuals who arrived decades ago and many who have become naturalized citizens.

15. See Leo Troy, *Distribution of Union Membership among the States, 1939 and 1953* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 1957), available at <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c2688.pdf> In 1939 the figures were 23.0 percent for New York State and 21.5 for the nation. Figures for New York City union membership levels during these years, unfortunately, are not available.

16. The 1986 private-sector figure is 25.3% for the New York PMSA (NYC's five boroughs as well as Putnam, Westchester and Rockland Counties). This and the 1983 statewide figure can be found at <http://unionstats.gsu.edu/> See also Gregory DeFreitas and Bhaswati Sengupta, "The State of New York Unions 2007," (Hofstra University Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy, 2007), which includes 1980s data, available at http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Academics/Colleges/HCLAS/CLD/cld_stateofnyunions2007.pdf

17. See Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

About the Murphy Institute

The Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies was established over twenty years ago with the support of the late CUNY Chancellor Joseph S. Murphy. The Institute, part of CUNY's School of Professional Studies, conducts strategic research, organizes public forums and conferences, and publishes the journal *New Labor Forum*. The Institute's worker education program offers a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate courses and degree programs designed to meet the academic and career advancement needs of working adults and union members in the New York City area.

About the Center for Urban Research

Working with the City University of New York Graduate Center's faculty and students, the Center for Urban Research organizes basic research on the critical issues that face New York and other large cities in the U.S. and abroad; collaborates on applied research with public agencies, non-profit organizations, and other partners; and holds forums for the media, foundations, community organizations and others about urban research at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

About the NYCLMIS

The New York City Labor Market Information Service (NYCLMIS) provides labor market analysis for the public workforce system. The service is a joint endeavor of the New York City Workforce Investment Board (WIB), the Center for Economic Transformation at the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and the Center for Urban Research at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The NYCLMIS' objectives are to:

- Develop action-oriented research and information tools that will be used by workforce development service providers and policy makers to improve their practice.
- Be the portal for cutting-edge and timely labor market data about New York City.

The NYCLMIS primarily serves the program and policy needs of the public workforce system. The NYCLMIS creates research and associated products that are of service to the broader practitioner and policy communities in their day-to-day and strategic decision-making. These products help distill, frame, and synthesize the volumes of data available for the practical use of the public workforce system's partners and stakeholders, with the overall goal of raising public awareness of the importance of work-force development in New York City.

