

ISSUE BRIEF

The Union Advantage

Union membership helps raise workers' pay and narrow the income gap that disadvantages minorities and women. Union pay is higher in nearly every occupational group, and union workers have better benefits and greater job stability. This translates into greater prosperity for working families and communities across America. It also benefits employers. Studies indicate that unions increase productivity.

The Union Advantage by the Numbers

Union workers' median weekly earnings	\$718
Nonunion workers' median weekly earnings	\$575
Union wage advantage	25%
Union workers with guaranteed (defined-benefit) pensions	70%
Nonunion workers with guaranteed (defined-benefit) pensions	16%
Union pension advantage	54 percentage points
Union workers who get health benefits	73%
Nonunion workers who get health benefits	51%
Union health benefits advantage	22 percentage points
Union workers who get short-term disability coverage	66%
Nonunion workers who get short-term disability coverage	33%
Union disability coverage advantage	33 percentage points
Union workers who get life insurance coverage	78%
Nonunion workers who get life insurance coverage	53%
Union life insurance coverage advantage	25 percentage points

Sources: Dale Belman, "Unions, the Quality of Labor Relations, and Firm Performance," in *Unions and Economic Competitiveness*, Lawrence Mishel and Paula V. Voos, eds. (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1992), pp.41-107; U.S. Department of Labor, *Employment and Earnings*, Jan. 2002; Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employee Benefits in Private Industry*, 1999.

Communities do better when unions are stronger. Studies show that states in which more people are union members are states with higher wages, better benefits and better schools. While unions are just one of the factors that affect the quality of living, the pattern indicates that when workers have a voice, the community benefits over time.

Ten Strongest Union States Compared With the Ten Weakest

	10 States Where Unions Are Strongest	10 States Where Unions Are Weakest
Average hourly earnings, 2000 ₁	\$15.61	\$12.49
Average household income, 2000 ₂	\$46,378	\$38,854

Percent of population with no

medical insurance, 1999–2000 ₃	11.8%	15.1%
Public education spending per pupil, 2000–2001 ₁	\$8,265	\$5,774
Percent of eligible voters who voted in presidential election, 2000 ₄	55.2%	49.2%
Crimes per 100,000 people ₁	4,114	4,694
Percent of population in poverty, 1999 ₁	10.6%	13.3%

1. O’Leary, Kathleen and Scott Morgan, *State Rankings*, 2001. Morgan Quinto Press, 2001.

2. U.S. Census Bureau, *Income of Households by State in 2000*.

3. Kaiser Family Foundation *State Health Facts Online*, www.statehealthfacts.kff.org.

4. Voter turnout in 2000 from www.fairvote.org/tournout/preturnstate.htm.

The 10 states where unions are the strongest (based on percentage of the workforce with a union) are New York, Hawaii, Alaska, Michigan, New Jersey, Washington, Illinois, Rhode Island, Ohio and Minnesota.

The 10 states where unions are the weakest (based on percentage of the workforce with a union) are North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, Arizona, South Dakota, Arkansas, Florida and Utah.