LAW360 Employment Authority

Portfolio Media. Inc. | 230 Park Avenue, 7th Floor | New York, NY 10169 | www.law360.com
Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Union Rates See Continued Drop In 2024, BLS Says

By **Beverly Banks**

Law360 (January 28, 2025, 9:37 PM EST) -- The overall share of union-represented workers dipped in 2024, according to data released Tuesday by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, marking another year of decreasing unionization rates while labor advocates say the data doesn't reflect ongoing organizing efforts.



A report by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics found a slight decrease in the percentage of union-represented workers from 2023 to 2024, from 11.2% to 11.1%. (AP Photo/Jay Reeves)

In its annual unionization report, the BLS said the share of workers represented by unions fell slightly from **11.2% in 2023** to 11.1% in 2024. The unionization rate fell for both private-sector and government workers as compared to 2023, the agency said.

The BLS said the share of union-represented private-sector workers dropped from 6.9% in 2023 to 6.7% in 2024. In 2023, the rate of union-represented workers in the private sector had increased slightly from 6.8% in 2022 to 6.9%.

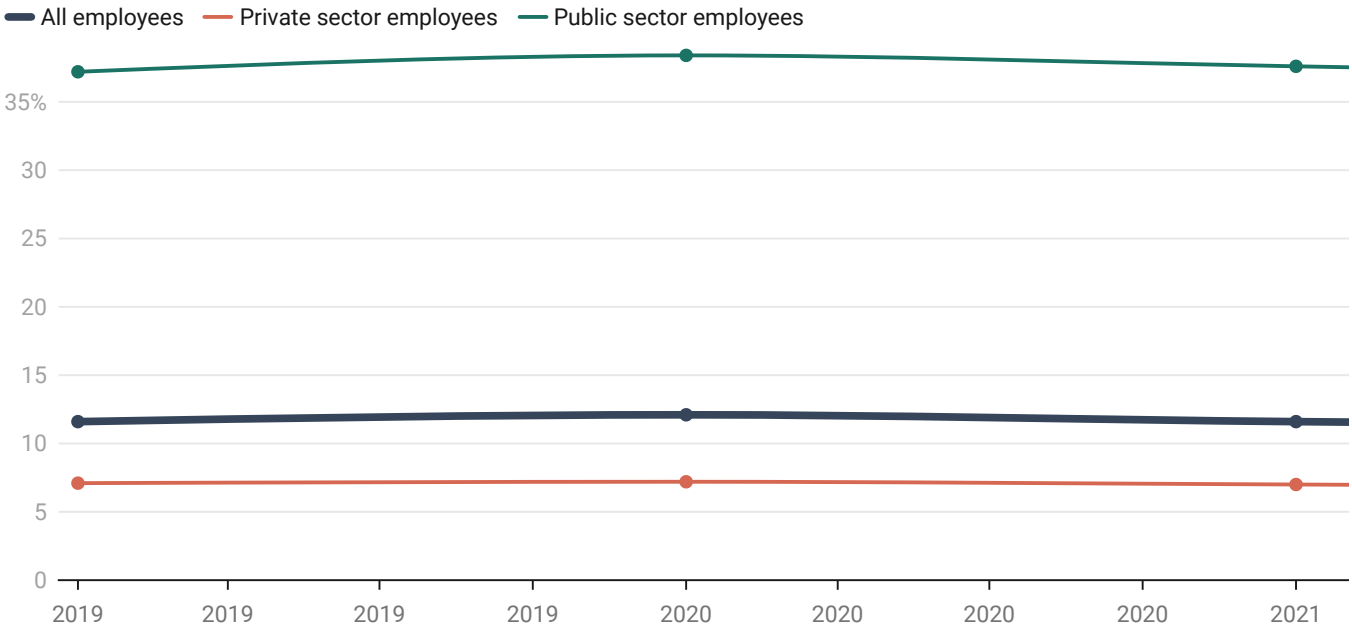
The percentage of workers represented by unions in the public sector fell from 36% in 2023 to 35.7% last year, the BLS said.

The union membership rate in the public sector is still "more than five times higher than the rate of private-sector workers," the BLS said.

The total union membership rate declined a little from 10% in 2023 to 9.9% in 2024, according to the BLS data. The agency said 20.1% of the workforce were union members in 1983, which was the first year that data was available.

Unionization Rate Falls Again in 2024

The percentage of workers represented by unions decreased in 2024, with unionization rates dropping in the public and private sectors compared to data from 2023.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

Labor advocates say the data isn't reflective of union organizing on the ground, but employment experts say the numbers show a continual decline of the labor movement.

In a statement Tuesday, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler said the BLS data doesn't "begin to tell the real story of the desire workers have to join a union."

Shuler mentioned an uptick in the number of union representation elections in recent years and votes in favor of unions. In October, the National Labor Relations Board said representation election **petitions rose** by about 27% between fiscal year 2023 and fiscal year 2024.

"Many of these victories are not reflected in the numbers released today because employers are exploiting a broken system to delay bargaining a first contract," Shuler said.

Margaret Poydock, a senior policy analyst at the Economic Policy Institute, said that some union organizing efforts aren't mirrored in the BLS data because those campaigns haven't notched an initial collective bargaining agreement yet.

In the past few years, organizing drives have sprung up at major companies like **Starbucks**, Amazon and Trader Joe's, although none of these unionization efforts have resulted in a first contract.

"Organizing takes time, and it might take a while before these organizing numbers are actually translated into union membership and union representation numbers," Poydock said.

Todd Vachon, director of the Labor Education Action Research Network at Rutgers University, attributed the decline in the number of union members in 2024 to unionized jobs being eliminated and hurdles with

organizing in growing industries like the service sector. According to the BLS report, the number of union members decreased by 169,000 between 2023 and 2024.

Aside from the drops in the unionization rate and membership numbers, Poydock said there was an uptick with union representation in the federal workforce and increases for private education and health services.

Poydock noted that "this is the first year in a couple years where we've seen both declines" in the number of union-represented workers and the share of the workforce.

The downward trend in data for unionization shows "labor can't break out of its decline," said Marick Masters, a professor of management at Wayne State University.

"There's an erosion in labor's position in society, and it makes unions much less relevant to the overall equation of economics and politics," Masters said.

With representation elections, Masters pointed out that the number of eligible voters is an "infinitesimal part of the overall workforce."

While the labor movement has received more attention in recent years, "you can't argue with math" when it comes to the unionization data, said Alex MacDonald, a shareholder at Littler Mendelson PC.

Even with blips in the numbers, MacDonald emphasized the overall trend of unionization rates declining for decades dating back to the 1950s.

Poydock and Vachon said changes to the National Labor Relations Act, which covers private-sector workers, are needed to bolster union organizing.

Rulings at the NLRB under former President Joe Biden's administration could help increase unionization, Vachon said, including the **board's finding** last year that so-called captive audience meetings are unlawful.

But the impact of President Donald Trump's administration on the NLRB "remains to be seen," Vachon said. Trump **recently removed** NLRB general counsel Jennifer Abruzzo and Democratic board member Gwynne Wilcox.

Both Masters and MacDonald said the decrease in unionization rates transcends who is in the White House and in charge at the NLRB.

"There was a lot of activity from the general counsel's office," MacDonald said. "There were favorable decisions from the NLRB. People thought, maybe this is how the labor movement turns around, and yet the numbers just don't seem to budge."

--Additional reporting by Tim Ryan and Braden Campbell. Graphics by Ben Jay. Editing by Nick Petruncio.

All Content © 2003-2025, Portfolio Media, Inc.