



WORKPLACE JUSTICE

UNION MEMBERSHIP IS CRITICAL FOR EQUAL PAY

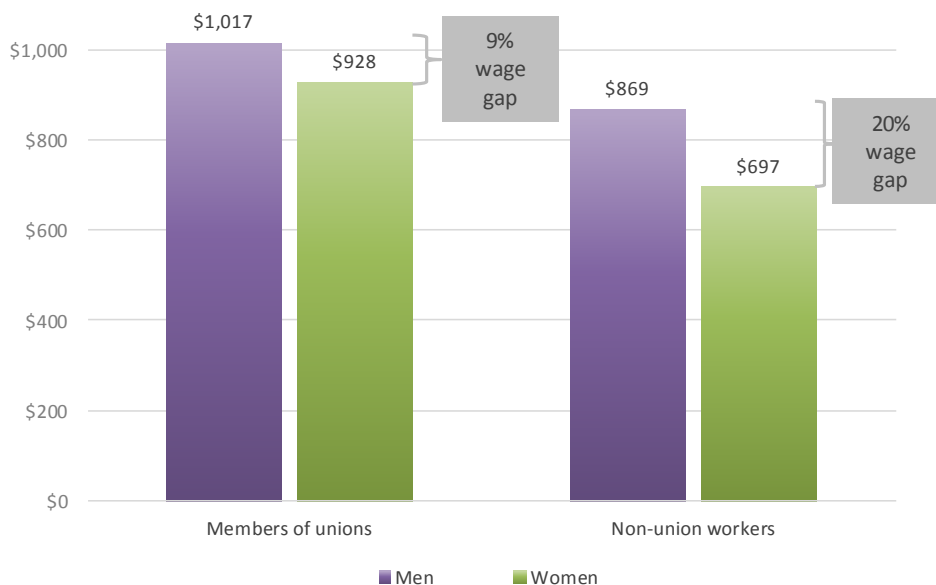
Katherine Gallagher Robbins and Andrea Johnson

Union membership boosts wages for all workers—but women see especially large advantages from being in a union. The wage gap among union members is less than half the size of the wage gap among non-union workers, and female union members typically earn over \$230 per week more than women who are not represented by unions—a larger wage premium than men receive. Protecting and strengthening workers' rights to come together to form a union is a key strategy for achieving equal pay for women.

The overall gender wage gap for union members is less than half the size of the wage gap for non-union workers.

- Among non-union workers, women working full time typically make 80 percent of what their male counterparts make weekly—a wage gap of 20 cents.
- Among union members, that gap shrinks dramatically: women working full time typically make 91 percent of what their male counterparts make weekly—a wage gap of 9 cents.
- The gender wage gap is also smaller for African American and Latina union workers. Among full-time workers:
 - o The wage gap between African American women and white men is 34 cents among non-union workers, compared to 27 cents for union workers.
 - o The wage gap between Latinas and white men is 40 cents among non-union workers, compared to 26 cents for union workers.

Wage Gap for Median Weekly Earnings by Union Membership, 2015



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Union Members Summary (Jan. 2016), Table 2, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>. Figures are for full-time workers.

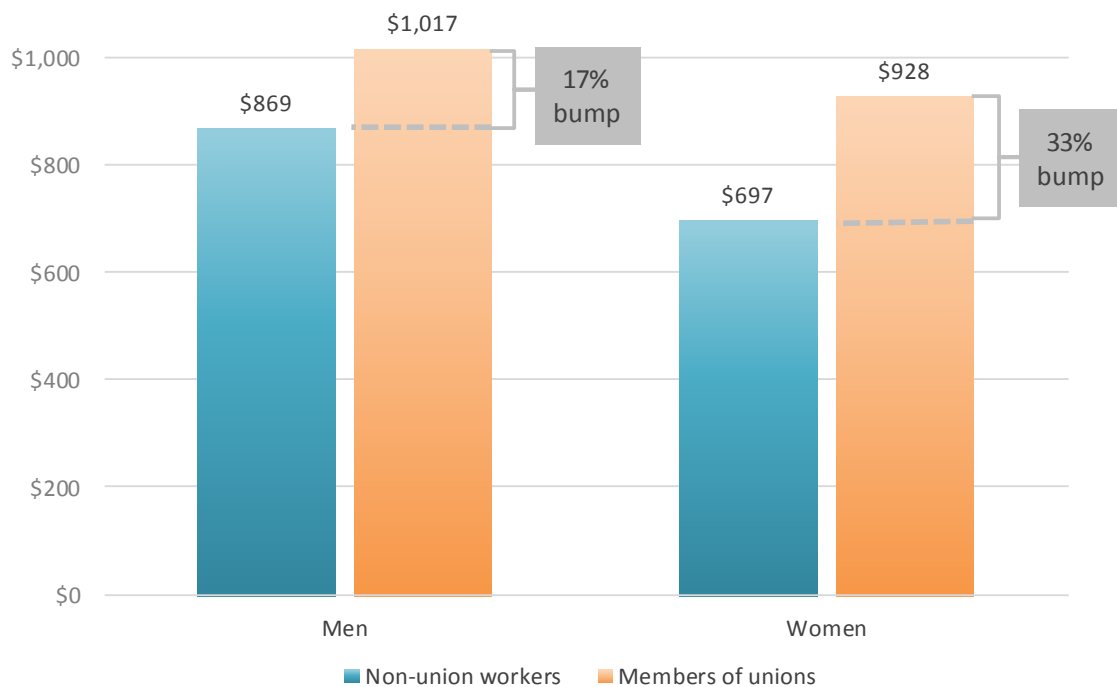


- The wage gap for Asian American women disappears among union workers.
 - Among full-time union workers, Asian American women typically make slightly more than white men (an extra 4 cents on the dollar), while among full-time, non-union workers, Asian American women make less than white men, resulting in a 7-cent wage gap.
- Greater wage transparency and standardization in collectively bargained wages, as well as the availability of formal grievance processes and union representation to address complaints regarding wages, likely contribute to the smaller gender wage gap among union members.

Women’s union wage premium is 1.6 times as large as men’s.

- Union members typically make more per week than non-union workers—but the bonus is larger for women, and is especially large for some women of color.
 - Women union members who work full time typically make \$928 per week—33 percent (\$231) more than women non-union workers who typically make \$697 per week. In contrast, men union members who work full time typically make \$1,017 per week—17 percent (\$148) more than men non-union workers who typically make \$869 per week.

Median Weekly Earnings and the Union Premium, 2015



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Union Members Summary (Jan. 2016), Table 2, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t02.htm>. Figures are for full-time workers.

www.nwlc.org 

- Among women, Latina workers experience particularly large financial benefits from union membership. Among full-time workers, Latina union members typically make 44 percent more (\$237 per week) than Latina non-union workers.
- Among full-time workers, African American women union members typically make 29 percent more (\$173 per week) than African American women non-union workers.

- Among full-time workers, Asian American women union members typically make 31 percent more (\$256 per week) than Asian American women non-union workers.
- Among full-time workers white women union members typically make 33 percent more (\$237 per week) than white women non-union workers.



The rate of union membership ticked up slightly for women between 2014 and 2015.

- The rate of union membership—the percentage of employees who were members of unions—remained flat in 2015 at 11.1 percent.
- The percentage of employed women who were union members ticked up slightly between 2014 and 2015 to 10.6 percent from 10.5 percent, while the rate for men declined to 11.5 percent from 11.7 percent.

To promote equal pay for women, workers' rights to organize must be strengthened—but these rights are under attack.

- Half the states have enacted so-called right-to-work laws, which hinder workers' efforts to organize and bargain collectively and result in lower wages for working people.¹ Defending against such laws is critical to ensure the economic security of all workers and equal pay for women.
- The ability of public sector unions to promote equality and economic security for women, who make up a majority of the public sector workforce, is presently being challenged in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. The plaintiffs in that case are seeking to overturn nearly 40 years of precedent and establish new barriers to workers coming together to advocate for improved wages and working conditions in the public sector.

- Other lawmakers are working to strengthen the right of workers to band together. The Workplace Action for a Growing Economy (WAGE) Act,² introduced in this Congress, would discourage employer retaliation against workers who exercise their right to organize and would assure that if the right to organize is denied, remedies will be prompt and fair.

Technical note: Unless otherwise noted, all data come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Union Members 2015 release (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>). BLS data on union membership include all employed wage and salary workers 16 and older. Figures are annual averages. Data are not available broken down by gender and sector. Data on union representation (workers represented by unions include both workers who are union members as well as those who are not members but whose jobs are covered by a union contract) are not reported here but are similar to those for union membership. Wage gaps in this analysis are calculated based on median weekly earnings. These data differ slightly from the often-used measure of median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Using that measure, the typical woman makes 79 percent of what the typical man makes (see National Women's Law Center, *The Wage Gap is Stagnant for Nearly a Decade* (September 2015) available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/wage-gap-stagnant-nearly-decade>).

1 Right-to-work laws make it illegal for unions to negotiate a contract that allows them to collect fair share dues from all of the employees who benefit from the union contract. Regarding lower wages, see ELISE GOULD & WILL KIMBALL, ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE, "RIGHT-TO-WORK" STATES STILL HAVE LOWER WAGES (Apr. 2015), available at <http://www.epi.org/publication/right-to-work-states-have-lower-wages/>.

2 S. 2042, 114th Cong. (2015).

