

Six Ways Unions Build a Strong Middle Class

Middle-class Americans are **more prosperous when more workers in our communities are unionized**. But today **only 12 percent of Americans are union members** — a record low. Here are six ways unions build a strong middle class:

More power in the economy

Unions raise wages and benefits

Workers who join unions **earn 15 percent more** — or \$2.50 more per hour — than nonunion counterparts. Union membership is also associated with a 19 percent increase in the likelihood of having employer-provided **health insurance**, and a 25 percent increase in having employer-sponsored **retirement plans**.



Unions build career ladders to the middle class

Fifty-six percent of unionized workers have access to work-related **education assistance**, compared to 48 percent of nonunion workers. Also, when unions are involved, training is of higher quality, enhances job stability, and is more likely to help advance workers' careers across multiple employers.



Unions ensure middle-class workers are represented in corporate decision making

Unions help create internal balance in corporate decision making. If unions



More power in government

Unions promote political participation

For every 1 percent increase in union density, **voter turnout for all Americans increases by 0.2 to 0.25 percent** — and even more for minorities and the nonwealthy. If unionization rates were 10 percentage points higher in 2008, 2.6 million to 3.2 million more citizens would have turned out to vote.

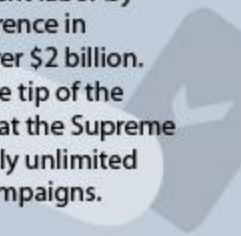


Unions help balance the disproportionate influence of corporations and trade associations on Congress

But as unions have weakened, corporations — rather than the middle class — dominate American elections. In 2010, corporate and trade association Political Action Committees outspent labor by \$218 million and the difference in lobbying expenses was over \$2 billion. And these gaps are just the tip of the iceberg, especially now that the Supreme Court has legalized virtually unlimited corporate spending on campaigns.



Unions help ensure policies that benefit the middle class



Sources:

Unions raise wages and benefits

"Workers who join unions earn 15 percent more-or \$2.50 more per hour-than nonunion counterparts and are more likely to have health and retirement benefits."

John Schmitt, "The Union of the States" (Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2010).

Unions build career ladders to the middle class

"Fifty-six percent of unionized workers have access to work related education assistance compared to 48 percent of nonunion workers."

Bureau of Labor Statistics, "National Compensation Survey: Employment Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, March 2007" (2007), available at <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/sp/ebsm0006.pdf>. (The BLS has not updated this statistic since 2007.)

Also, when unions are involved, training is of higher quality...

C. Jeffery Waddoups, "Union-Management Training Partnerships in the Hotel Industry: The Case of Las Vegas and San Francisco." Working Paper (The New Economic Information Service and the Foundation for Democratic Education, 2002).

Daniel Marschall, "The institutionalization of workplace learning in American unions: Innovations for new work systems and labor movement renewal." In David Finegold and others, eds., *Transforming the U.S. Workforce Development System: Lessons from Research and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

Unions ensure middle-class workers are represented in corporate decision making

"Unions help create internal balance in corporate decision making. If unions were stronger today, more corporations would consider how middle class workers were affected when making major decisions."

Sanford Jacoby, *The Embedded Corporation: Corporate Governance and Human Resources Management in the United States and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Unions promote political participation

"For every 1 percent increase in union density, voter turnout for all Americans increases by 0.2 to 0.25 percent-..."

Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis, "Labor Organization and Electoral Participation in Industrial Democracies," *American Journal of Political Science*, 44 (1) (2000): 132-141.

Unions help balance the disproportionate influence of corporations and trade associations on Congress

"In 2010, corporate and trade associations Political Action Committees outspent labor by \$218 million And the difference in lobbying expenses was over \$2 billion."

Center for Responsive Politics, "Lobbying, Top Spenders," and "Ranked Sectors," available at:
<http://www.opensecrets.org>.

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Winner Takes All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States," *Politics and Society* 38 (152) (2010).

Unions help ensure policies that benefit the middle class

"It would be hard to exaggerate the influence that the labor movement has had on creating and maintaining the social safety net that undergirds the American middle class."

Paul Krugman, "The Great Wealth Transfer," *Rolling Stone*, December 14, 2006.

Thomas Byrne Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984).

See also:

- [As Unions Weaken So Does the Middle Class](#) by David Madland and Nick Bunker

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