



The mission of the California Labor Lab is to extend the pursuit of health and safety for workers in traditional employment to those in a wide range of alternative arrangements in partnership with affected communities.

Data Brief #6: Quality of Union vs. Non-Union Work in California

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The California Work and Health Survey (CWHs) asked adults 18-70 about their employment status, working conditions, and health outcomes. Respondents also reported whether they were in unions. Compensation and working conditions are core components of union protections, and the focus of continued worker organizing. We can use data about compensation, working conditions, and union status from the CWHs to generate insight into the impacts of unionization on workplace experiences and outcomes for workers.

I. Overview

- 3,077 out of 4,014 respondents worked in the past month, and of those who worked, 23% were in a union, 74% were not in a union, and 3% refused to state or did not know.
- The top three industries with the highest rates of unionization were Education/Healthcare (37%, or 1.7 million people), Public Administration/Other (35%, or 713,000 people) and Trade/Transit/Utilities (17%, or 563,000 people).
- 55% of unionized workers (2 million people) are employed at a company with over 1,000 employees, in comparison to 35% of all employed Californians (3.9 million people, out of a total employed population of 18.7 million people).

II. Economic Outcomes

- After controlling for race, gender, age, occupation, industry, job tenure, and firm size, non-union workers and their unionized counterparts are equivalently likely to have low earnings, defined as an annual individual income less than \$40,000.
- Under the same controls, unionized workers are 13% more likely to have access to a pension or retirement plan than non-union workers.
- When asked if their employer offers health insurance, unionized workers are 12% more likely to respond "yes."

III. Scheduling¹

- Under the above controls, union and non-union workers face very similar probabilities of irregular shift scheduling. Irregular shifts include night shifts, rotating shifts, split shifts, and variable shifts.
- Union and non-union workers also have similar probabilities of reporting that they work from home some or all of the time.
- However, non-unionized workers are 17% more likely to have flexible work hours than unionized workers. Flexible hours means that the respondent responded yes to the question, “do you have flexible hours that allow you to vary when you begin and work?”

IV. Psychosocial Working Conditions¹

- Our survey collected data regarding experiences of bullying in the workplace by the worker’s boss, coworkers, and customers.
 - There is no statistically significant difference between union and non-union probabilities of experiencing bullying at work.

Discussion of Results

Though the proportion with low personal earnings does not seem to differ by union status, access to pension and health insurance are more likely for unionized employees. Healthcare and retirement benefits represent important non- wage income that are frequently addressed by collective bargaining agreements.

Union workers are less likely to have flexible starting and ending hours, but the same difference does not exist for access to work from home. Because scheduling is also commonly covered by collective bargaining agreements, we may want to explore the relationship between scheduling and union status more closely in the future.

On an unadjusted basis, we initially found large union effects. However, after adjustment for race, gender, age, occupation, industry, job tenure, and firm size, union status was no longer associated with many of the outcomes analyzed because unionized workers are disproportionately employed by very large firms (1,000+ employees). Thus, the apparent effect of union status is instead the result of the higher union penetration in large firms.

¹ Note: All statistics cited in Sections II-IV are controlled for race, gender, age, occupation, industry, job tenure, and firm size.

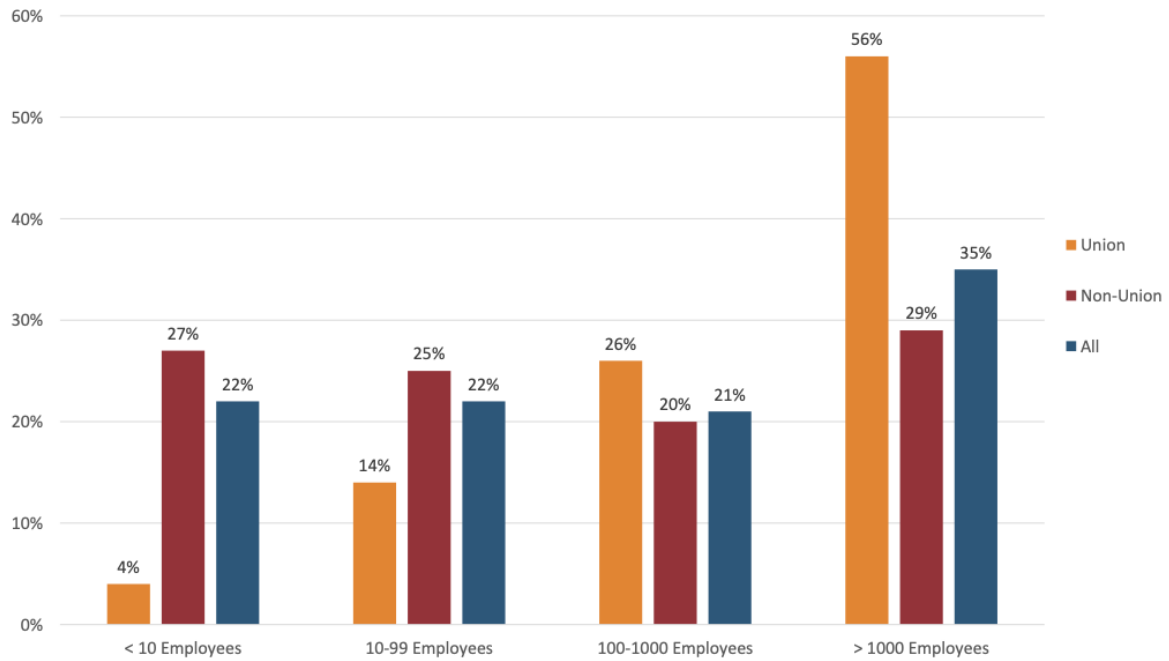
About the Survey

The California Work and Health Survey (CWHHS) used a random sample of cell phones to develop its study cohort of 4,014 working age Californians. The CWHHS was administered between November 2022 and May 2023 by telephone interviewers or completed on-line at the respondents' choice. Both the telephone-administered and on-line surveys could be completed in English or Spanish. The survey covered current employment status, working conditions among the employed, health status, and economic well-being. The results were weighted to reflect known characteristics of the working age population of California.

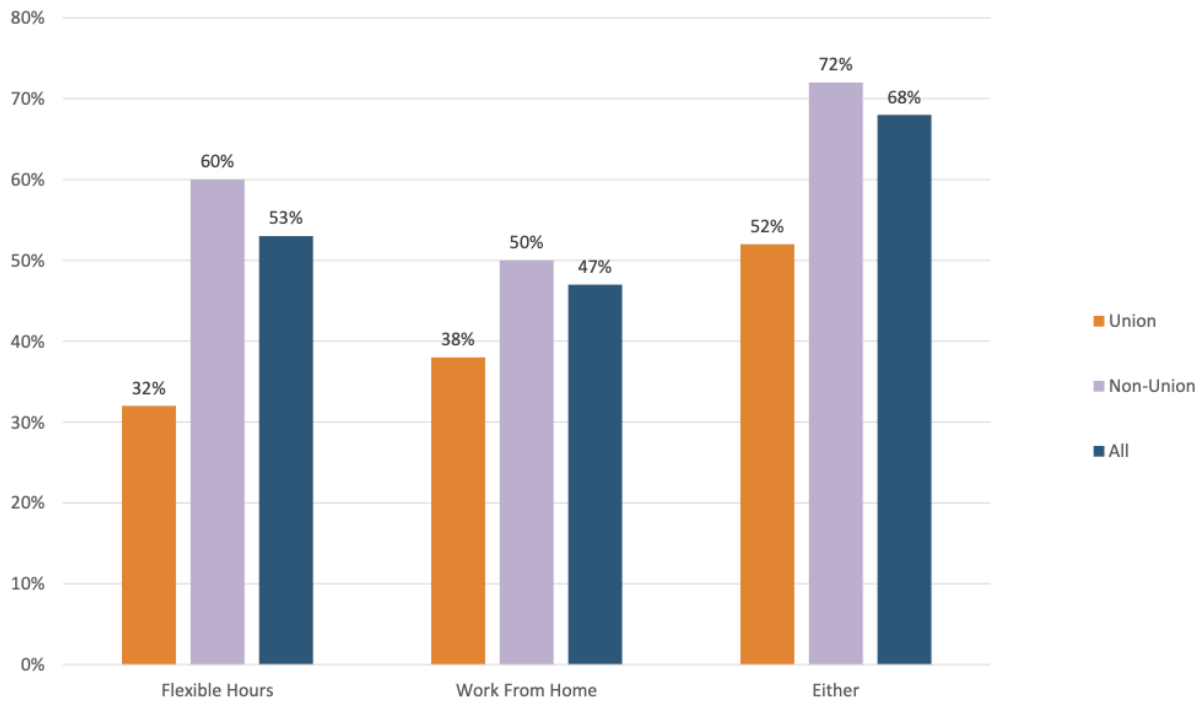
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Firm Size by Union Status among California Workers



Flexible Hours and Work From Home by Union Status



Proportion in Unions by Industry among California Workers

