

# A Missouri ‘right-to-work’ law is more likely to harm black workers, who are more likely to be covered by a union contract than other workers

**Fact Sheet** • By [Valerie Wilson](#) and [Julia Wolfe](#) • May 15, 2018

The phrase “right-to-work” (RTW) refers to laws that prohibit unions from collecting any fees from nonunion members in a bargaining unit despite the fact that these nonmembers are covered by—and thus would still receive the benefits of—the union contract. These benefits include the right to have the union provide costly legal representation should a worker in the bargaining unit find it necessary to file a grievance against his or her employer. Contrary to how the phrase sounds, RTW laws actually restrict the rights of workers by cutting the financial support going to unions, thus limiting the ability of unions to help workers bargain for better wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Currently, 28 states, predominantly in the Midwest, South, and Southwest, have right-to-work laws in place.<sup>1</sup> Later this year, voters in Missouri will decide whether to adopt a new RTW law approved by the state’s general assembly last year.

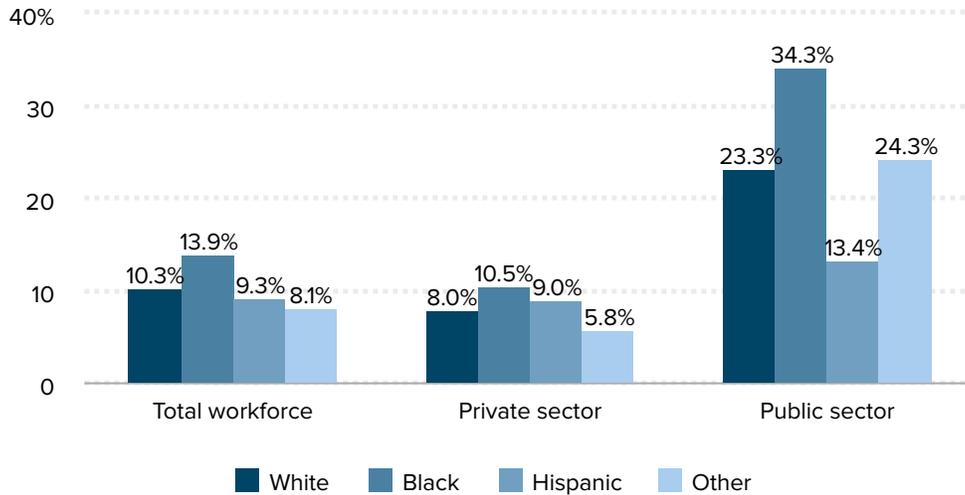
This fact sheet illustrates the disproportionate impact that a Missouri RTW law could have on African American workers, by highlighting the group’s strong representation among unionized workers in Missouri. This analysis is based on union membership data available from the Current Population Survey (conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) for 2010–2017, the period since the end of the Great Recession.<sup>2</sup>

In national studies that control for other factors than can influence wages statewide, including the cost of living, wages are still at least 3 percent lower in RTW states than in non-RTW states.<sup>3</sup> While Missouri workers of every race will likely see the negative impacts of an RTW law, black Missourians would be disproportionately harmed by this right-to-work law. That is because black workers are more likely to be

Figure A

## Black Missourians are more likely to be represented by a union than other workers

Union representation rates in Missouri, by sector and race/ethnicity



**Notes:** Calculated using 2010–2017 data. Representation rates are for workers covered by a collective bargaining contract.

**Source:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau

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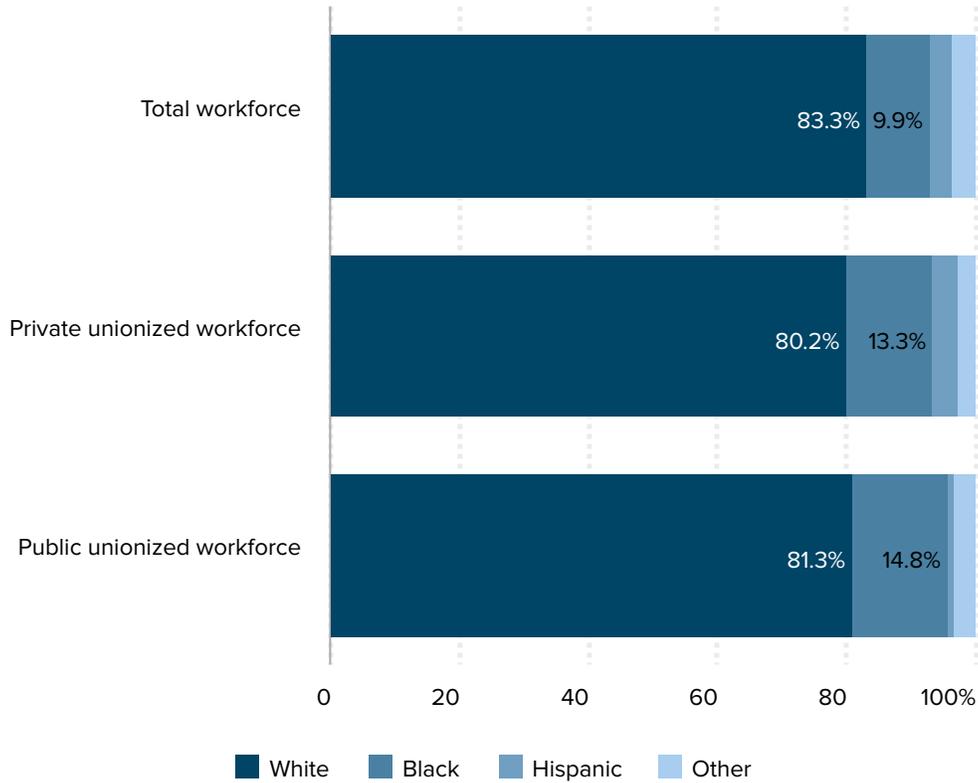
covered by a union contract (“unionized”) than other workers. As shown in **Figure A**, in Missouri, 13.9 percent of all black workers are unionized, compared with 10.3 percent of all white workers, and 9.3 percent of all Hispanic workers. Within the private sector alone, 10.5 percent of black workers, 8.0 percent of white workers, and 9.0 percent of Hispanic workers are covered by a union contract. Black Missourians’ participation in private-sector unions is slightly higher than participation by black workers in the private sector nationwide (9.4 percent).<sup>4</sup> (For union representation by gender and race/ethnicity, see **Appendix Table 1**.)

Due to this greater likelihood of being in a union, black workers have greater representation among the unionized workforce in Missouri than among the overall Missouri workforce. As shown in **Figure B**, black workers make up 13.3 percent of private-sector workers represented by a union, but just 9.9 percent of the total workforce. (For union shares by gender, see **Appendix Table 2**. For union shares by gender and race/ethnicity, see **Appendix Table 3**.)

Figure B

## Black workers make up a disproportionate share of the union workforce

Shares of the union workforce in Missouri, by sector and race/ethnicity



**Notes:** Calculated using 2010–2017 data. The “unionized workforce” includes all workers covered by a collective bargaining contract.

**Source:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau

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The negative effects of RTW laws extend beyond union members. As national evidence has shown, when RTW laws weaken the ability of workers to come together and bargain for higher wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions, this depleted worker power effectively lowers the bar for nonunion employers that once had to compete with the higher standards in unionized workplaces in order to attract and retain workers, and ultimately hurts the broad middle class—both union and nonunion workers.<sup>5</sup>

*Updated June 19, 2018, to include appendix tables.*

# Endnotes

1. The National Conference of State Legislatures maintains a “[Right-to-Work Resources](#)” web page that lists states with RTW laws.
2. Data from the years 2010–2017 are combined in order to get a larger sample size and more reliable estimates. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata (U.S. Census Bureau CPS ORG), survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics [machine-readable microdata file]. Accessed at [https://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](https://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).
3. Wages in RTW states are 3.1 percent lower than wages in non-RTW states, after controlling for a full complement of individual demographic and socioeconomic factors as well as state macroeconomic indicators. In dollar terms, being in an RTW state is associated with \$1,558 lower annual wages for a typical full-time, full-year worker. Source: Elise Gould and Will Kimball, “[Right-to-Work](#)” States Still Have Lower Wages, Economic Policy Institute, April 2015.
4. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata (U.S. Census Bureau CPS ORG), survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics [machine-readable microdata file]. Accessed at [https://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](https://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).
5. See Gordon Lafer and Alyssa Davis, “[Right to Work](#)” Is the Wrong Answer for New Mexico’s Economy, Economic Policy Institute, February 2015; and Jake Rosenfeld, Patrick Denice, and Jennifer Laird, [Union Decline Lowers Wages of Nonunion Workers: The Overlooked Reason Why Wages Are Stuck and Inequality Is Growing](#), Economic Policy Institute, August 2016.

Appendix  
Table 1

## Union representation rates in Missouri, by sector and by gender and race/ethnicity

Gender and race/ethnicity	Total workforce	Private sector	Public sector
<b>Men</b>	13.9%	12.5%	23.9%
<b>White</b>	13.4%	12.2%	22.7%
<b>Black</b>	19.6%	16.8%	37.4%
<b>Hispanic</b>	13.8%	14.3%	5.2%
<b>Other</b>	9.4%	7.3%	23.0%
<b>Women</b>	7.2%	3.7%	24.6%
<b>White</b>	7.1%	3.5%	23.8%
<b>Black</b>	9.4%	5.4%	32.1%
<b>Hispanic</b>	3.1%	1.4%	20.9%
<b>Other</b>	6.8%	4.4%	25.7%

**Notes:** Calculated using 2010–2017 data. Representation rates are for workers covered by a collective bargaining contract.

**Source:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau

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Appendix  
Table 2

## Shares of the union workforce in Missouri, by sector and gender

Gender	Total workforce	Private unionized workforce	Public unionized workforce
<b>Men</b>	51.7%	78.4%	39.9%
<b>Women</b>	48.3%	21.6%	60.1%
<b>Total</b>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Notes:** Calculated using 2010–2017 data. The “unionized workforce” includes all workers covered by a collective bargaining contract.

**Source:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau

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Appendix  
Table 3

## Shares of the union workforce in Missouri, by sector and by gender and race/ethnicity

Gender and race/ ethnicity	Total workforce	Private unionized workforce	Public unionized workforce
<b>Men</b>			
White	43.6%	63.7%	31.6%
Black	4.5%	9.5%	6.6%
Hispanic	1.9%	3.7%	0.2%
Other	1.8%	1.6%	1.6%
<b>Women</b>			
White	39.7%	16.4%	49.6%
Black	5.5%	3.9%	8.2%
Hispanic	1.3%	0.3%	0.7%
Other	1.7%	1.0%	1.5%
<b>Total</b>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Notes:** Calculated using 2010–2017 data. The “unionized workforce” includes all workers covered by a collective bargaining contract.

**Source:** EPI analysis of Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotation Group microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau

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