Nebraska’s Labor Movement Survey

Morgan Vogel

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The Center for Public Affairs Research collaboratively produces and disseminates high-quality public scholarship about topics that impact the lives of Nebraskans.
Nationally and in Nebraska union membership is declining

National rates of union membership 2000 to 2021

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 5-year Estimates
Despite declining membership, Americans’ approval of labor unions remains high.

Source: Gallup, Work and Education Survey, 2023
Union membership in Nebraska is moderate at 6.8%

Rate of union membership by state for 2021

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 5-year Estimates
Methodology

To what extent is there support for the labor movement in Nebraska?

- Explore membership, perceptions, and efficacy
- Survey instrument created using Qualtrics
- Survey distributed by email and social media
- 600 responses

Specific outreach to:
- Nebraska State AFL-CIO
- Omaha Federation of Labor
- Midwest Nebraska Central Labor Council
- Lincoln Central Labor Union
- Nebraska State Education Association
- Nebraska State Democratic Party
- Nebraska State Republican Party
- Douglas County Democratic Party
- Douglas County Republican Party
- Nebraska Young Republicans
Survey Demographics

Gender

- **Male**: 427, 75%
- **Female**: 128, 23%
- **Non-Binary**: 4, 1%

Race

- **10, 2%**: American Indian or Alaska Native
- **9, 2%**: Asian
- **12, 2%**: Black or African American
- **36, 6%**: Latino/Latina/Latinx
- **3, 1%**: Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- **508, 86%**: White
- **10, 2%**: Other

Age

- **30 or less**: 142, 27%
- **31-40**: 110, 21%
- **41-50**: 97, 18%
- **51-60**: 67, 13%
- **61-70**: 61, 12%
- **71-80**: 45, 8%
- **81+**: 8, 2%
**Survey Demographics**

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- **High School Graduate**: 18%, 100 respondents
- **Some College**: 20%, 113 respondents
- **Trade or Vocational School**: 20%, 112 respondents
- **Associate Degree**: 8%, 48 respondents
- **Bachelor’s Degree**: 18%, 103 respondents
- **Advanced Degree (Master’s, J.D., Ph.D., etc.)**: 16%, 90 respondents
Union Membership

Is your workplace currently unionized?
- No: 124, 23%
- Yes: 418, 77%

Are you currently a member of a union?
- No: 145, 26%
- Yes: 409, 74%

How long have you belonged to a labor union?
- Over 20 years: 96, 25%
- Less than 5 years: 164, 43%
- Between 5 to 10 years: 75, 19%
- Between 10 to 20 years: 50, 13%
## Union Membership

### Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skilled trades</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Do you currently hold or have you previously held a leadership position within your local union chapter?

- Yes: 87 (23%)
- No: 258 (67%)
- Yes, in the past: 39 (10%)

### What type of union do you belong to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union Type</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Craft union</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial union</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service union</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uplift union</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity-exclusive union</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise union</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many respondents, both union and non-union, believe unions are a positive force in the country and in Nebraska.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents Who Belong to a Union</th>
<th>Respondents Who Do Not Belong to a Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82% believe unions are a positive force in this country</td>
<td>76% believe unions are a positive force in this country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72% believe unions are a positive force in this state</td>
<td>59% believe unions are a positive force in this state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many respondents, both union and non-union, believe the decline in union representation is very bad for working people.

**Respondents Who Belong to a Union**

- Very good for working people: 36, 10%
- Somewhat good for working people: 12, 3%
- Somewhat bad for working people: 103, 28%
- Very bad for working people: 219, 59%

**Respondents Who Do Not Belong to a Union**

- Very good for working people: 13, 8%
- Somewhat good for working people: 8, 5%
- Somewhat bad for working people: 46, 29%
- Very bad for working people: 91, 58%
Many respondents strongly agree with the goals of organized labor and identify a sense of belonging to their union.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers need strong trade unions to protect their interests.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in the goals of organized labor.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My union and I have just about the same basic values.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The decisions made by my union mostly reflect my opinions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My union’s problems are my problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am an important part of my union.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My union means a great deal to me personally.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a strong sense of belonging to my union.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sense of community one feels in the union is unique.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have strong bonds to my union, bonds that would be hard to cut off.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many respondents believe unions are effective in advocating for, protecting, and improving workers’ rights.
Support for labor unions does not necessarily translate into members’ participation in union activities

**Percent of survey respondents who participated in union activities in past year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read news from your union</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote in a union election</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak with your union representative</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a union meeting or event</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete a survey from your union</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a rally organized by your union</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take an online advocacy action organized by your union</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve as an elected or appointed union representative</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among those who work in education, there is strong support for teachers’ unions. 100% of respondents believe that, without a union, teachers would be vulnerable to school politics or administrators who abuse their power.
Among those who work in education, respondents believe unions are important in supporting and protecting teachers’ rights.

- Bargain for wages/salary: 95% extremely important, 5% not important at all.
- Bargain for health/retirement benefits: 95% extremely important, 5% not important at all.
- Protect teachers’ jobs: 84% extremely important, 16% not important at all.
- Provide information about political candidates and their issue positions: 63% extremely important, 26% very important, 11% moderately important.
- Support/endorse political candidates: 68% extremely important, 16% very important, 11% moderately important, 5% not important at all.
According to respondents, retirement security and access to healthcare and insurance are top benefits provided by unions.

- **Job security and stability**: 99, 15%
- **Financial benefits**: 120, 18%
- **Healthcare and insurance benefits**: 122, 19%
- **Retirement and future security**: 156, 24%
- **Representation and collective voice**: 99, 15%
- **Education and training opportunities**: 16, 2%
- **Community and support**: 20, 3%
- **Safety and work conditions**: 21, 3%
Respondents identify pay and benefits as the number one area of improvement for unions.
UNION TOOLS

1. Political Involvement
2. Collective Bargaining
3. Organizing the Unorganized
4. Working Together with Like-minded Groups and Organizations

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