

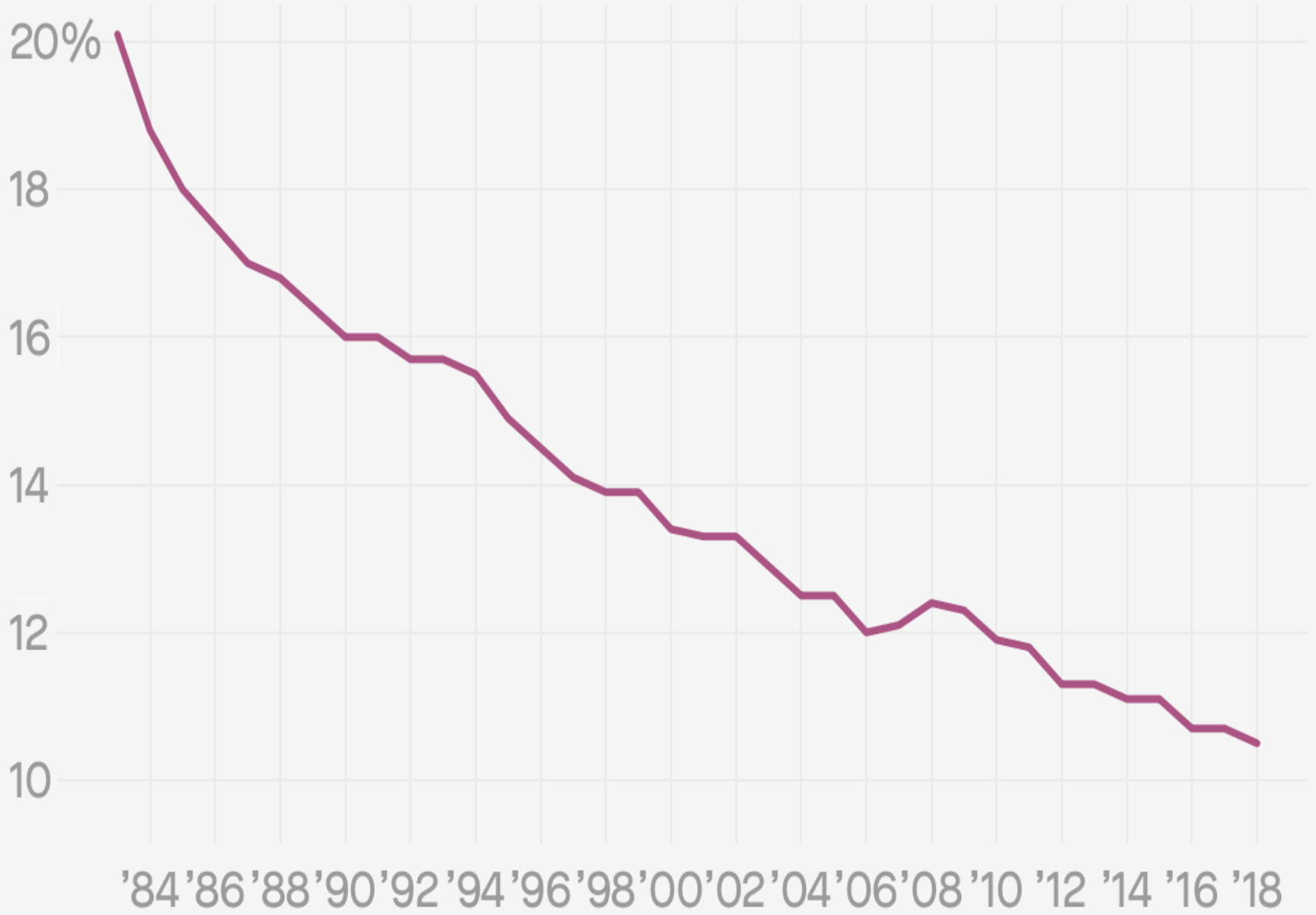
INEQUALITY AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT

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Rate of union membership among US workers

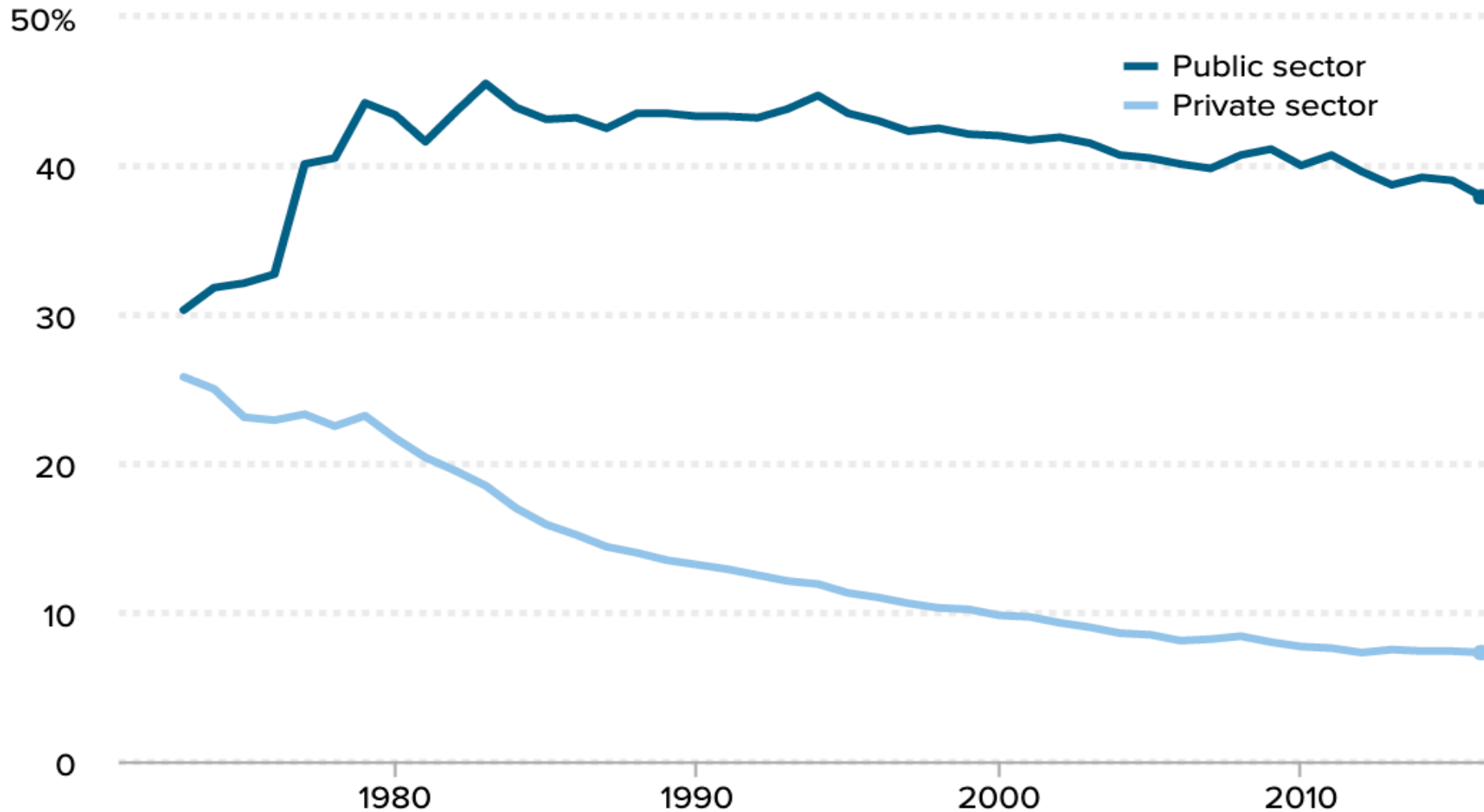


De-unionization in Historical Perspective

- In 2019, private-sector union density in the U.S. was 6.2%. That is roughly similar to the level in 1900, when overall density (all private sector) was 6.8%.
- In 1930, overall union density (nearly all private sector) was about 13% - slightly higher than overall density today: 10.3% in 2019 (including public sector).
- Unionization peaked in the mid-1950s when both overall density and private sector were about 35%.
- Erosion began in the late 1950s; accelerated in 1970s.

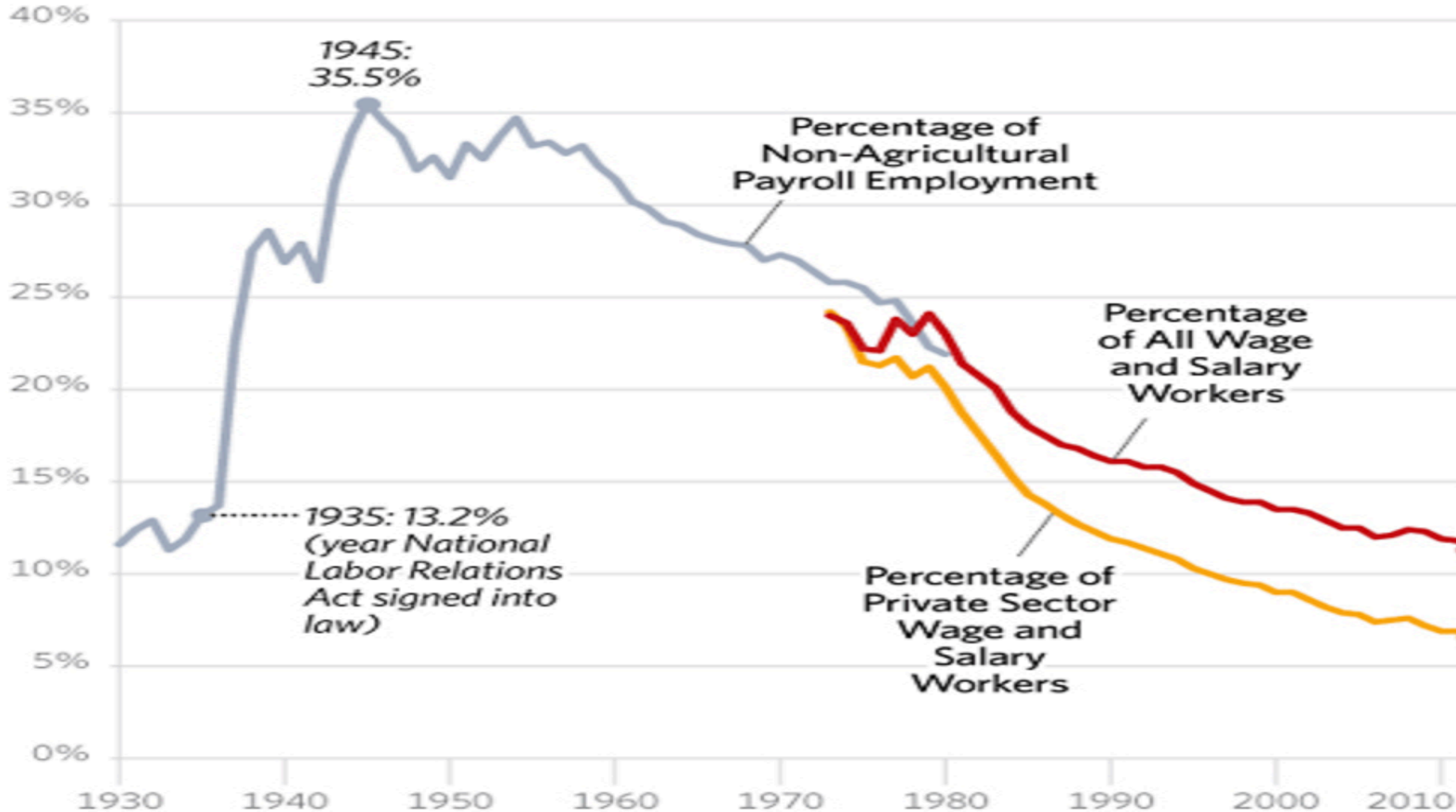
Private-Sector Union Decline

Union coverage rates by sector, 1973–2016



The Longer View

UNION MEMBERSHIP PERCENTAGES



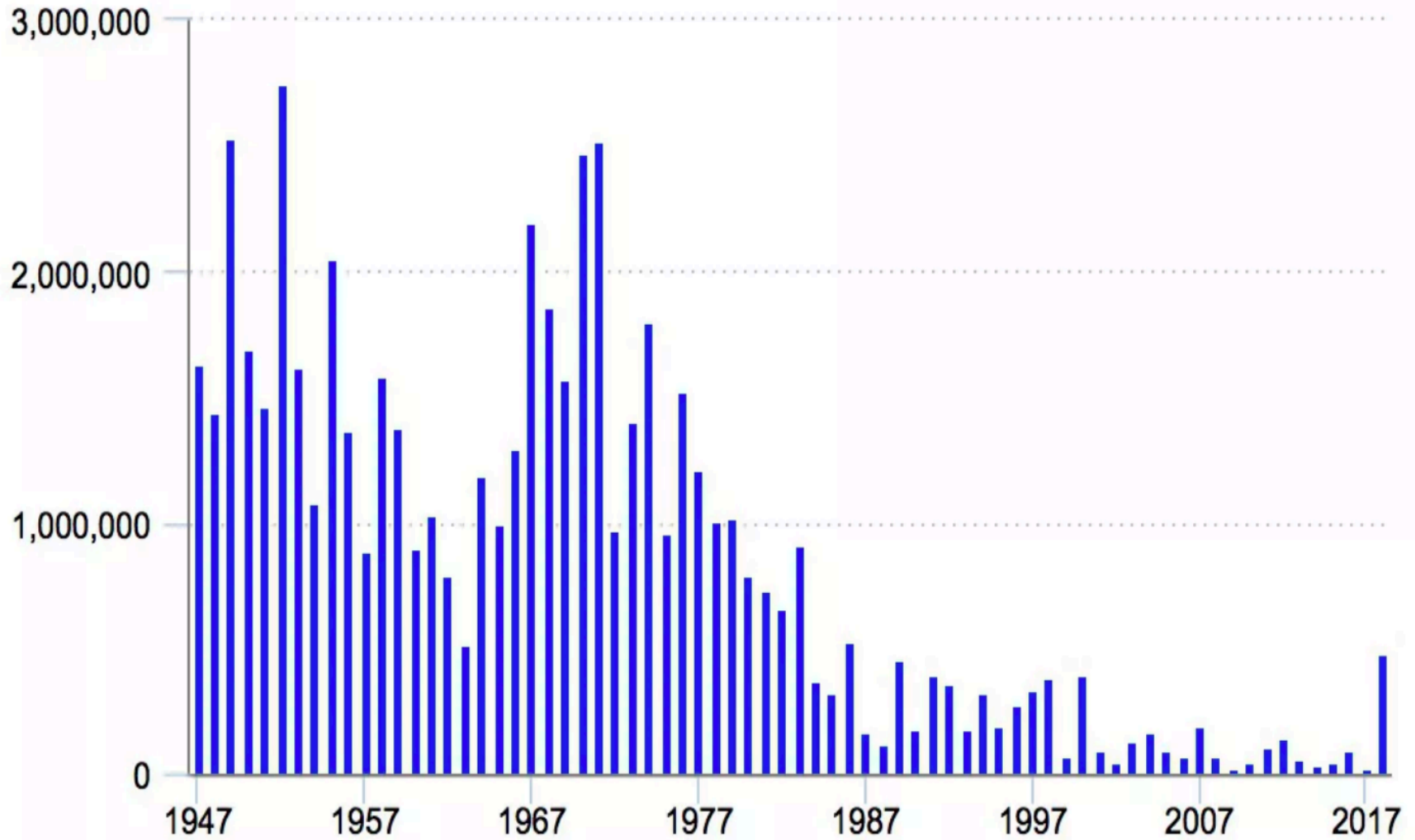
Unions Not Only Have Fewer Members, But Also Reduced Leverage

- Strikes have declined dramatically in frequency, from an average of 289 per year in the 1970s, 35 per year in the 1990s, and 15 per year in the 2000s.
- Strikes in recent decades are often employer-provoked, defensive struggles, not union-led offensive actions.
- More strikes in 2018 than anytime since 1986 – mostly (but not all) in the public sector.
- As in pre-New Deal era, short “demonstration” strikes are becoming more common.

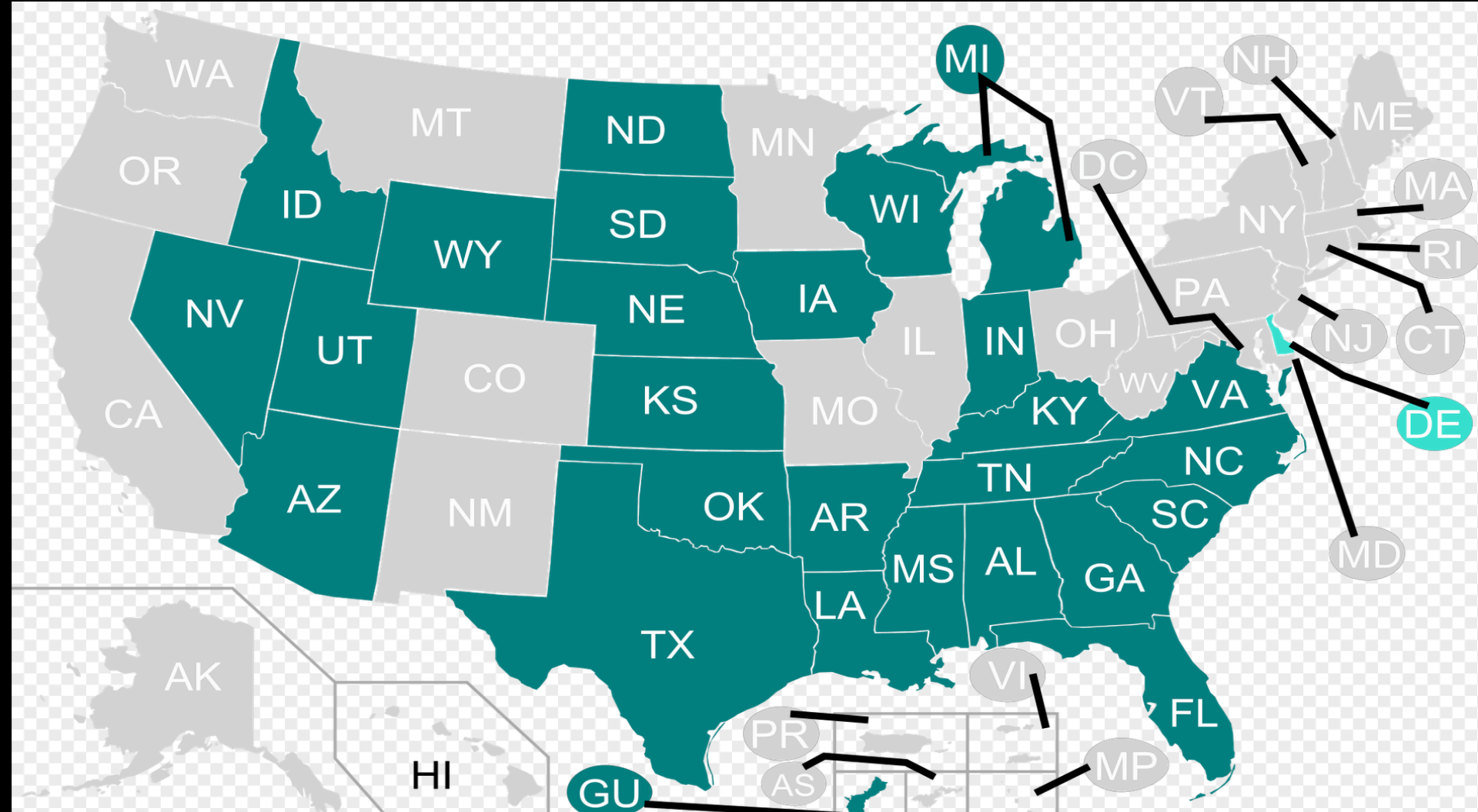
Annual work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers, 1947–2018

■ Number of work stoppages
■ Number of days idle

■ Number of workers involved



"Right to Work" states



Decline Broader than in Manufacturing

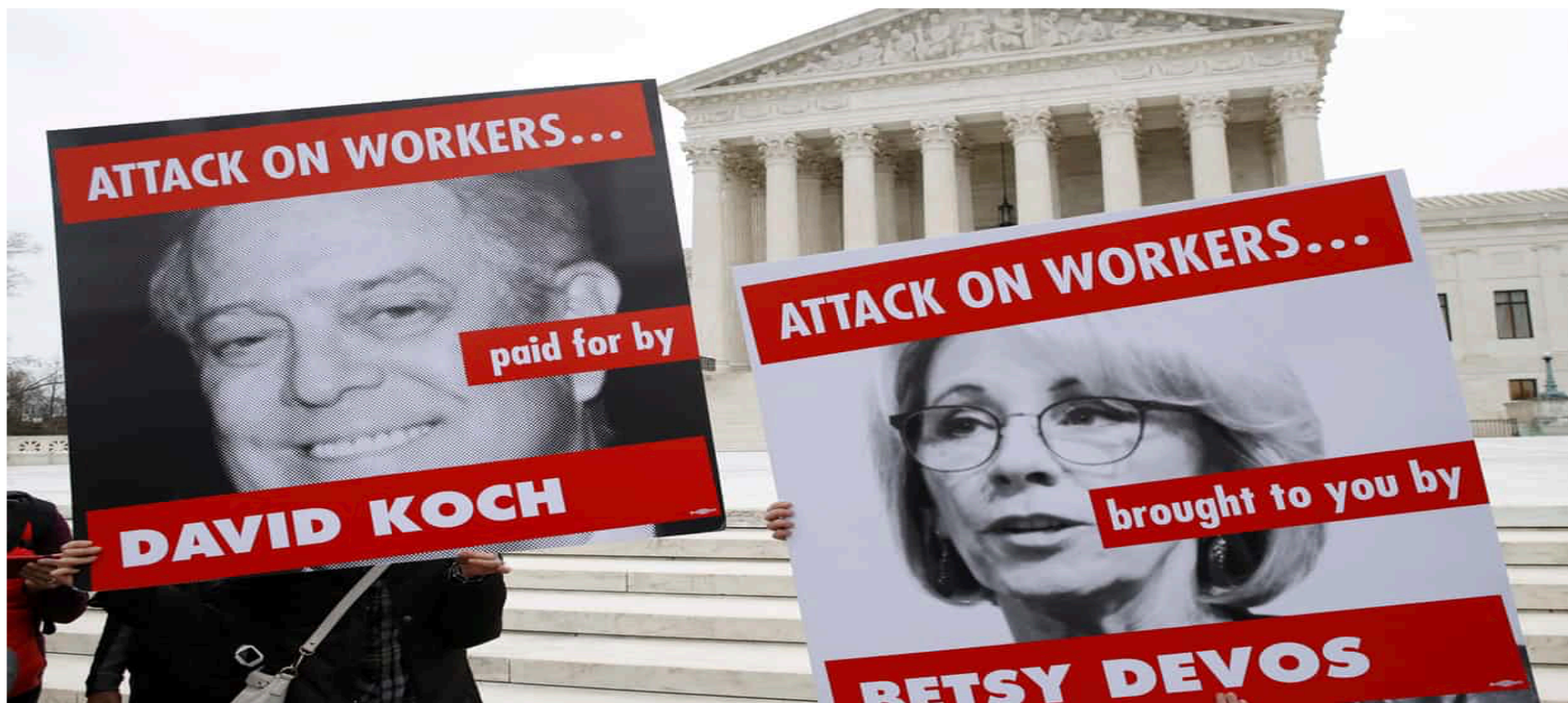
- **Between 1973 and 2018, density fell from 38.9% to 9.0% in manufacturing**
- **In construction, there was a similarly dramatic decline: from 39.5% in 1973 to 12.8% in 2018.**
- **In private sector as a whole, density fell from 24.2% to 6.4% in this period (mostly in place-bound industries like hospitality, services, and retail).**

Key Causes of U.S. Private-Sector Union Decline since the 1970s

- **Employer attacks on private sector unions**
 - Union “avoidance” in nonunion settings
 - Efforts to weaken/eliminate unions already present
 - Routine use of “permanent replacements” in strikes
- **Outsourcing and subcontracting**
- **Deregulation**
- **Limited new union organizing**
- **Recent right-wing attacks on collective bargaining in the public sector.**

Exclusive: how rightwing groups wield secret 'toolkit' to plot against US unions

Internal documents obtained by the Guardian reveal a nationwide drive to persuade union members to quit and stop paying dues



▲ Members of the American Federation of Teachers hold up signs depicting Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and David Koch, while protesting in support of unions outside of the supreme court on 26 February. Photograph: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

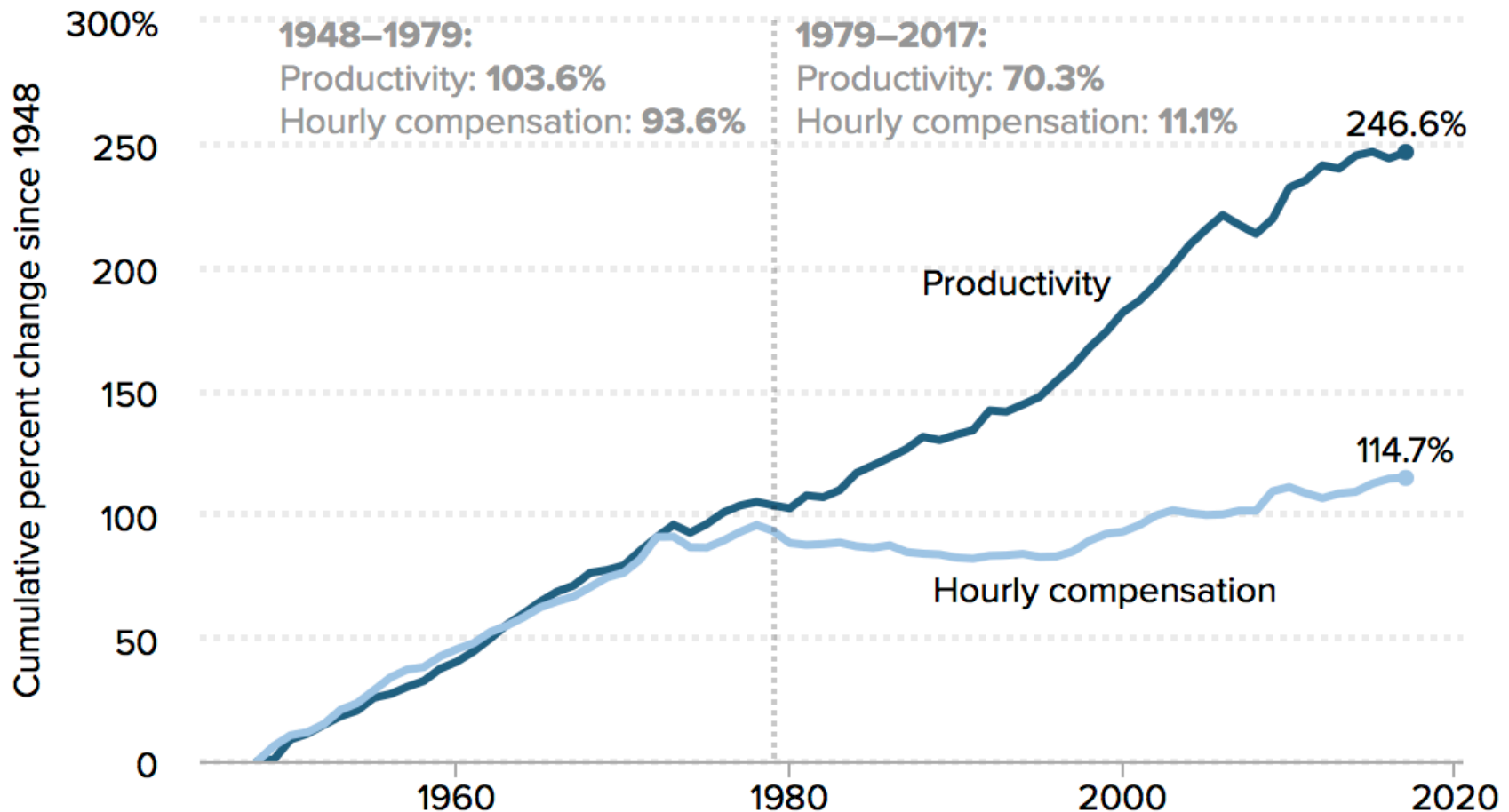
Rightwing activists are launching a nationwide drive to persuade public-sector trade union members to tear up their membership cards and stop paying dues, posing a direct threat to the progressive movement in America.

Why De-unionization Matters

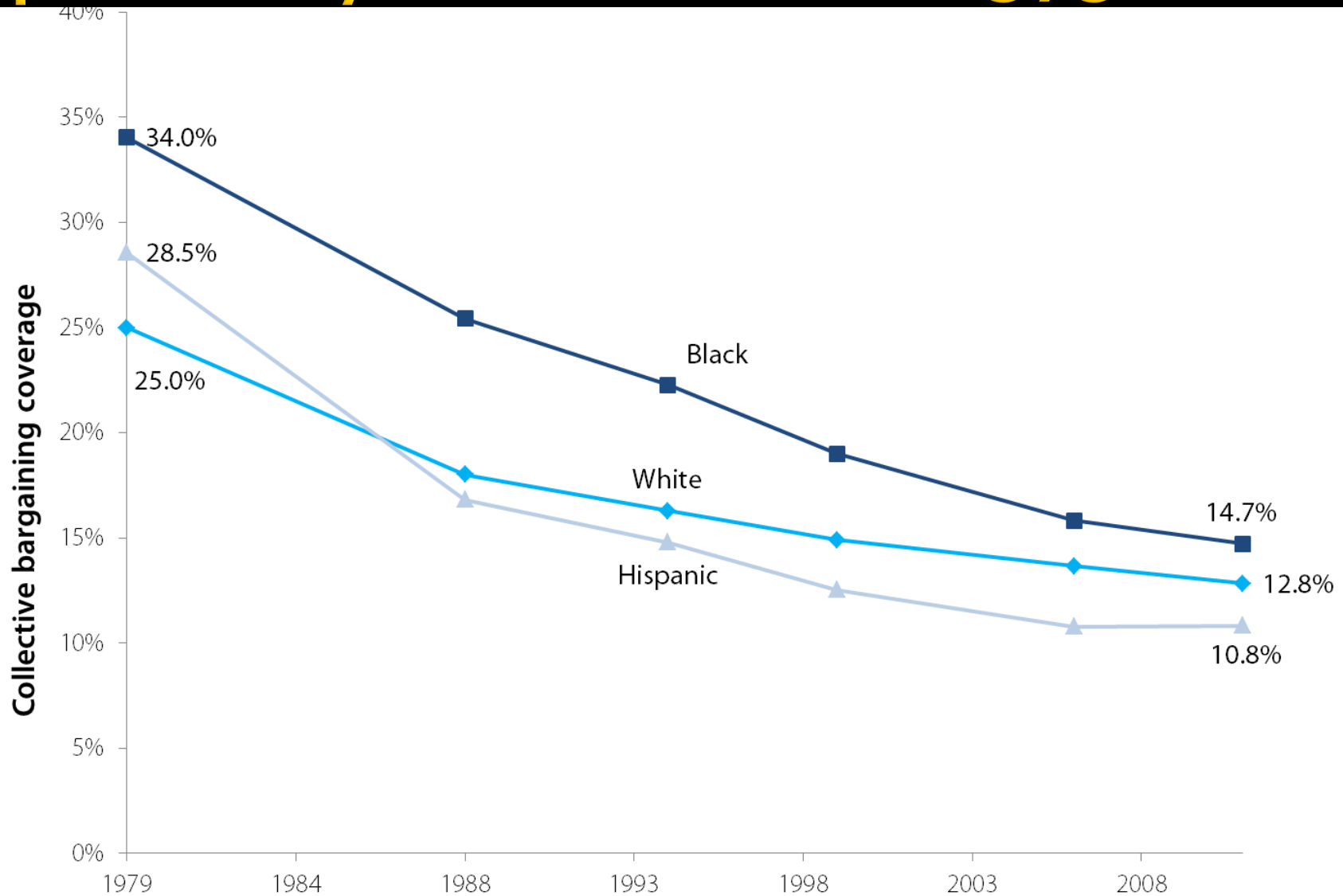
- It directly contributes to growth in inequality. Western & Rosenfeld: 20% of growth in hourly wage inequality for women and 33% for men (from 1973 to 2007) was due to de-unionization.
- Unionization effect on reducing working poverty exceeds that of economic performance and social policies — for both union and nonunion households (see Brady et. al., "When Unionization Disappears" ASR 2013)

Labor Compensation Flat Despite Vast Productivity Growth Since the 1970s

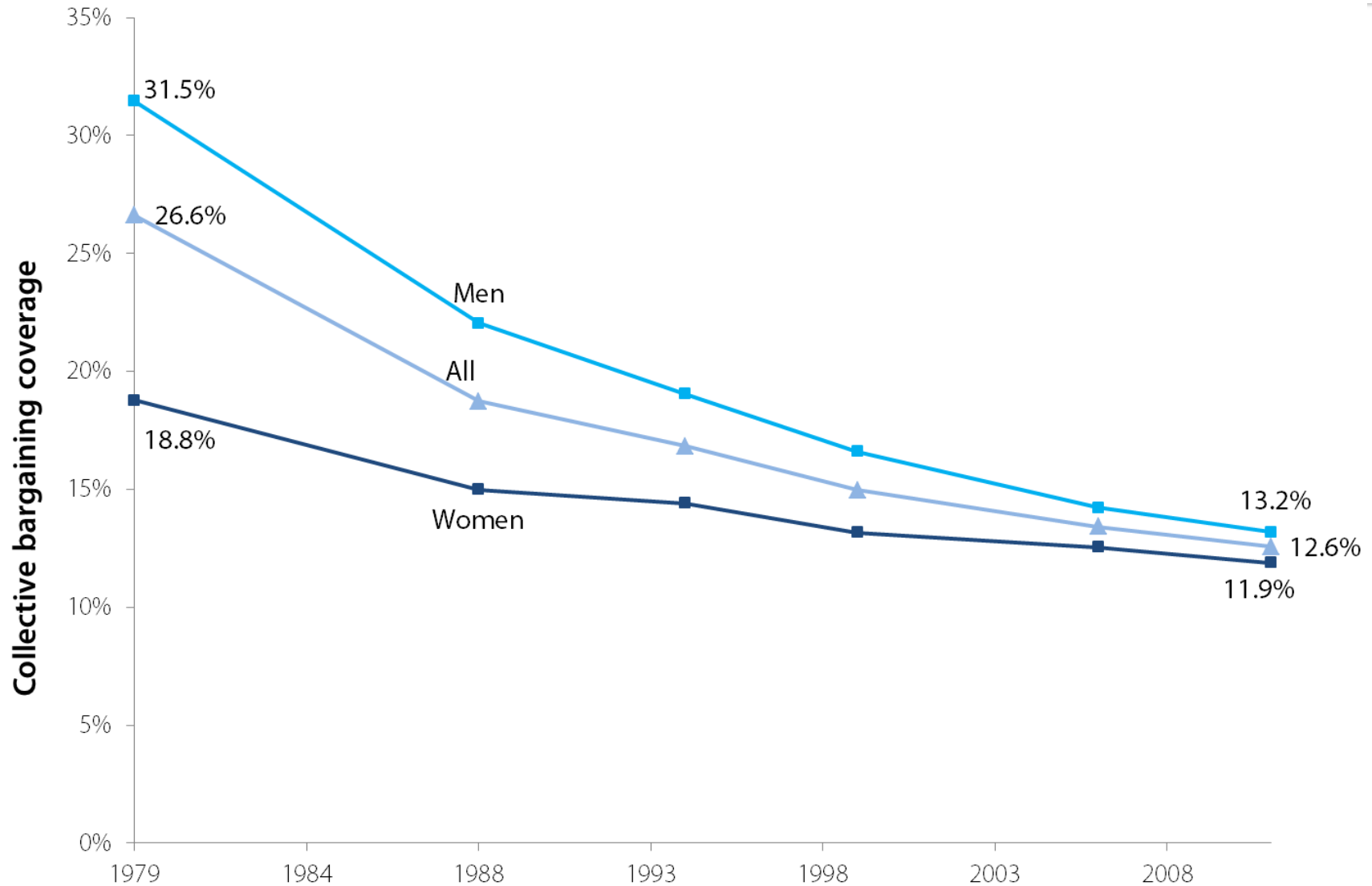
Productivity growth and hourly compensation growth, 1948–2017



Workers of color disproportionately impacted by union decline (1979-2012)



Feminization of union membership accompanies decline



Other union demographics (2017)

- **Younger workers are the least unionized:**
 - 4.4% of those aged 16-24 are union members
 - 9.5% of those aged 25-34
 - 13.3% of those aged 55-64
- **Immigrant unionization rates (8.5% in 2018) are slightly lower than those of the U.S.-born: 10.9% (the gap was wider - 9.5% vs. 13.0% - in 2004). Immigrants who arrived decades ago are as likely to be unionized as U.S.-born workers, and surveys show immigrants generally view unions more positively than the U.S.-born.**

Growth in “Alt-Labor” Organizing

Worker centers – now 200+ in the U.S. – organize and advocate in:

- **precarious, casualized occupations like day labor and domestic work, where traditional unionism is impractical**
- **sectors that unions have abandoned or neglected, like restaurants, retail, garment-making**
- **sectors where workers are nominally self-employed (and thus not covered by NLRA) like taxi driving and street vending**
- **some organize along ethnic lines (e.g. Min Kwon, Chinese Staff & Workers in NYC)**
- **typically focus on wage theft and other legal violations, many also engage in immigrant rights advocacy.**

The "Fight for \$15"

- Began as an offshoot of Occupy Wall Street in (with an NYC fast food workers strike in 2012).
- Funded by the SEIU, demanding \$15 per hour and a union for fast food workers.
- No success on the union front, but campaign led to minimum wage hikes in many parts of the U.S.
- Some large employers have also increased wages "voluntarily" in response to the campaign.
- Tactics are similar to those of "alt-labor."

Raises from \$15 Minimum Wage Laws, 2012-18

Jurisdiction	Affected Workers	Total Raises (2018\$)
California ⁸	5,604,000	\$21,990,096,000
Massachusetts ⁹	840,000	\$2,527,560,000
New York ¹⁰	3,162,345	\$16,434,706,965
Flagstaff, AZ ¹¹	22,000	\$119,135,022
Los Angeles, CA ¹²	609,000	\$3,104,073,000
San Jose, CA ¹³	115,000	\$366,275,000
San Francisco, CA ¹⁴	142,000	\$422,166,000
Washington, DC ¹⁵	114,000	\$348,156,000
Montgomery County, MD ¹⁶	127,000	\$794,368,059
Minneapolis, MN ¹⁷	78,000	\$317,460,000
St. Paul, MN ¹⁸	56,000	\$181,656,773
SeaTac, WA ¹⁹	6,300	\$43,161,300
Seattle, WA ²⁰	102,000	\$558,552,000
Total	10,977,645	\$47,207,366,119

State and Local Protective Legislation (another strategy from early 20th century)

- Minimum wage laws are only one example.
- Paid family leave laws - now in 6 states and D.C., starting with CA in 2002, most recent MA 2018.
- Earned sick days (10 states, 19 cities, 3 counties).
- Domestic Workers Bills of Rights (8 states, starting with NY in 2010).
- Wage theft laws in IL, CA and NY and various local jurisdictions.

College-Educated Millennials and Union Organizing

- Recent union activity and growth among:
 - Adjunct faculty; graduate teaching assistants.
 - Journalists, both on-line and in traditional newsrooms.
- 2018 teachers' strikes were also led by Millennials
- Young workers are also organizing at Google and other tech companies (but not forming unions).
- The latest: Bernie supporters are now organizing labor protests among essential workers

Rising Public Approval and Worker Desire for Unionism

- **64% of Americans approved of unions in a 2019 Gallup poll – only 1999 and 2003 had higher rates in the past half century.**
- **75% of those aged 18-29, compared to 60% of all adults, view unions favorably (Pew 2017 data).**
- **49% of non-union non-managerial workers surveyed in 2017 said they would vote for a union (up from 1/3 in 1977 and 1995 surveys); strongest interest among nonwhite & young workers.**
- **83% of already-unionized workers said they would vote for a union (in the same 2017 survey).**