

# Union construction workers diversify, still outearn nonunion counterparts

## New study will put nonunion contractors on the defensive

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The city's union construction workers are increasingly diverse with strong representation of African-Americans, while nonunion workers are mostly Hispanic and earn far less than their unionized counterparts.

The new data on the makeup of the industry comes from [a comprehensive analysis](#) by the Economic Policy Institute and will present a new hurdle for nonunion contractors, who are already on the defensive politically as Gov. Andrew Cuomo has allied himself with construction unions.

### Construction Industry Demographics

	Union	Nonunion
Whites	44.7%	22.7%
Black	23.7%	16.1%
Hispanic	29.1%	50.3%
Others	2.5%	10.9%

Source: Economic Policy Institute

The importance of the study is clear because it has already been attacked by groups aligned with the nonunion sector, who emphasize that the Economic Policy Institute is a progressive think tank with strong ties to unions and that the study was paid for by the building trades.

But no one has yet disputed the substance of the study or showed that the data were manipulated. Moreover, studies from EPI are no different from reports produced by the Real Estate Board of New York or the Partnership for New York City. (In general I find EPI's work substantive, something I would also say about the conservative Manhattan Institute or Empire Center for New York State Policy, whose work I also frequently cite.)

For the record, EPI examined household data from the monthly U.S. Labor Department survey and Census Bureau data from quarterly [employer unemployment-insurance reports](#). It averages

data from 2006 to 2015 to make sure its analysis is representative. It excluded workers with a college degree, assuming they occupied management-level positions.

The key points:

**Unions are no longer lily white** and have made major strides in adding African-Americans to their ranks, which the EPI attributes to the outreach efforts of unionized apprentice programs.

**Nonunion workers are primarily Hispanic** and paid much less than unionized workers. Hispanic workers average only \$32,000 compared with \$40,000 for Hispanics who belong to unions.

In fact, **nonunion construction workers are not well paid at all**. If EPI is correct that the average wage of nonunion workers is \$16.84, their annual income is only \$35,000. All these figures assume workers get paid for 40 hours a week for 52 weeks of work, which means annual pay is likely to be lower than that.

The pay issue is important because until now there were no reliable statistics on nonunion construction wages. If the study focuses attention on wages, nonunion contractors will have a hard time defending their practices.

### Construction Industry Hourly Pay

	Union	Nonunion
Whites	\$25.85	\$19.82
Black	21.36	15.70
Hispanic	24.18	15.84
Others	NA	16.24

Source: Economic Policy Institute