

Celebrating Success: How Latinos Helped Fight Economic Inequality through Labor Movements

Hispanics and Latinos have always been a part of the American story, and their leadership in important labor [movements](#) has helped ensure that workers of all backgrounds can demand better wages and on-the-job protections. While Democrats continue to fight for these principles, this Hispanic Heritage Month we highlight some of the many Latino leaders and movements that have built worker power and helped shape our economy.

Latinos played a key role in labor movements throughout the 20th century

- In the 1930s, Guatemalan American activist [Luisa Moreno](#) organized factory workers across multiple states and industries and was one of the founders of the National Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples—a labor rights organization committed to the empowerment of Latino workers.
- In the 1960s, [Cesar Chavez](#) and [Dolores Huerta](#) founded the United Farm Workers (UFW) and fought for higher wages and protections of farmworkers against harmful working conditions.
 - Huerta has been a [leader](#) in workers' rights throughout her life and continues to engage in activism for social justice as founder and [president](#) of the Dolores Huerta Foundation.
 - Chavez, who passed away in 1993, [fought](#) for farmworkers up until his passing and left a [legacy](#) of leadership through the UFW and the [National Farm Workers Service Center](#), now known as the Cesar Chavez Foundation.
- From the 1990s through the early 2000s, [Linda Chavez-Thompson](#) served as the inaugural executive vice president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), after a long career in advancing workers' rights. Chavez-Thompson was also the first person of color to hold one of the three highest offices in the AFL-CIO.

Through their leadership and engagement in unions, Latinos continue to make history today

- [Teresa Romero](#), current head of the UFW, led workers in securing a [seminal](#) state law that protects farmworkers' right to organize in California.
- As the former national & legislative political director at the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, [Camille Rivera-Westin](#) led multiple initiatives [focused](#) on guaranteeing good wages and stable hours for workers like retail employees, airport catering workers, and car wash workers.
- Data shows that Latinas and Black women helped [drive](#) the momentum in union [membership](#) in 2023.

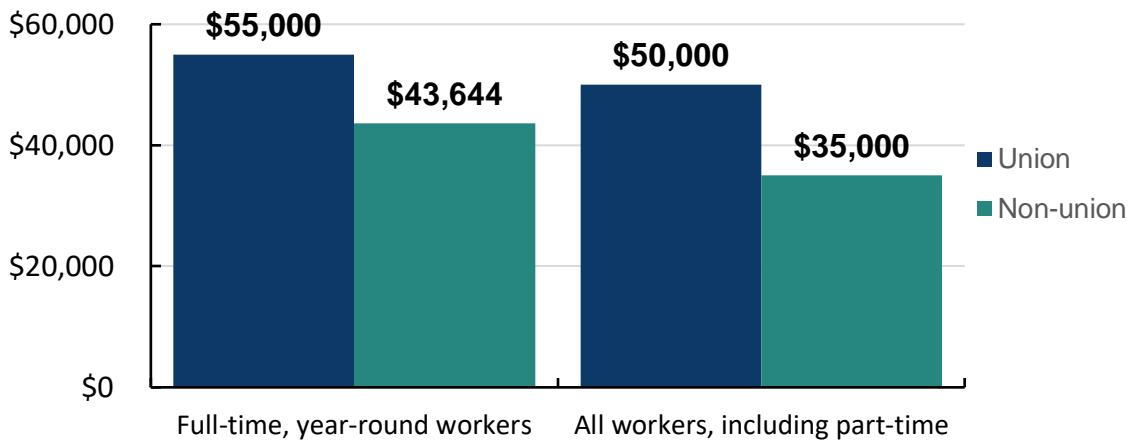
Unions help combat economic inequality and promote a stronger middle class

- Unions create economic conditions that can [strengthen](#) the middle class by raising wages for middle income workers, ensuring stable working hours, and improving other working conditions that lead to better worker health and performance on the job.
- Among other approaches, unions work to reduce income inequality by advocating that a larger share of company earnings go to [workers](#), instead of increasing [CEO](#) pay.
- One report [found](#) that states with the highest rate of union membership have higher state minimum wages, and workers earn \$6,000 more than the national average in annual median income.

- Analysis by the JEC Democrats finds that the typical unionized Latino worker working full-time earns roughly \$55,000 per year, compared to the \$43,644 earned by their non-unionized counterparts. This earnings gap grows to \$15,000 if part-time workers are included.

Unionized Latino Workers See Higher Median Earnings

Median annual earnings among full-time, year-round and all Latino workers ages 16 and older by union status, 2022



Source: JEC calculations, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Note: Full-time, year-round workers are those working at least 35 hours for 50-52 weeks per year. Workers not in a union but who are covered by one are not included.



More can be done to support workers' rights, well-being, and ability to join a union

- A report by UCLA found that immediately prior to the pandemic, 2.5 million Latino workers were [unionized](#), but over 23 million Latino employees were not part of a union.
- Union membership has [declined](#) since the 1950s, coinciding with increasing income inequality. As the economy has grown, many middle-class [families'](#) incomes have not grown with it.
- Changes to federal and state laws have made it harder for workers to organize. Research has shown these changes [lowered](#) both unionization rates and overall wages.

New laws and regulations can support unions in enhancing wages, training and working conditions

- Chairman Martin Heinrich's [Pre-Apprenticeships To Hardhats \(PATH\) Act](#) would grant unions and other organizations additional funding for training workers.
- Senator Padilla and Representative Grijalva's [Fairness for Farm Workers Act](#) would codify overtime pay for farmworkers and build on Latino organizers' efforts to ensure all Americans have access to well-paying jobs and strong worker protections.
- Key legislation like the Protecting the Right to Organize ([PRO](#)) Act would enhance workers' ability to organize without fear of punishment or risk of losing their job.