

# DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK



## The Real Statistics Behind 'The U.S. Labor Boom'

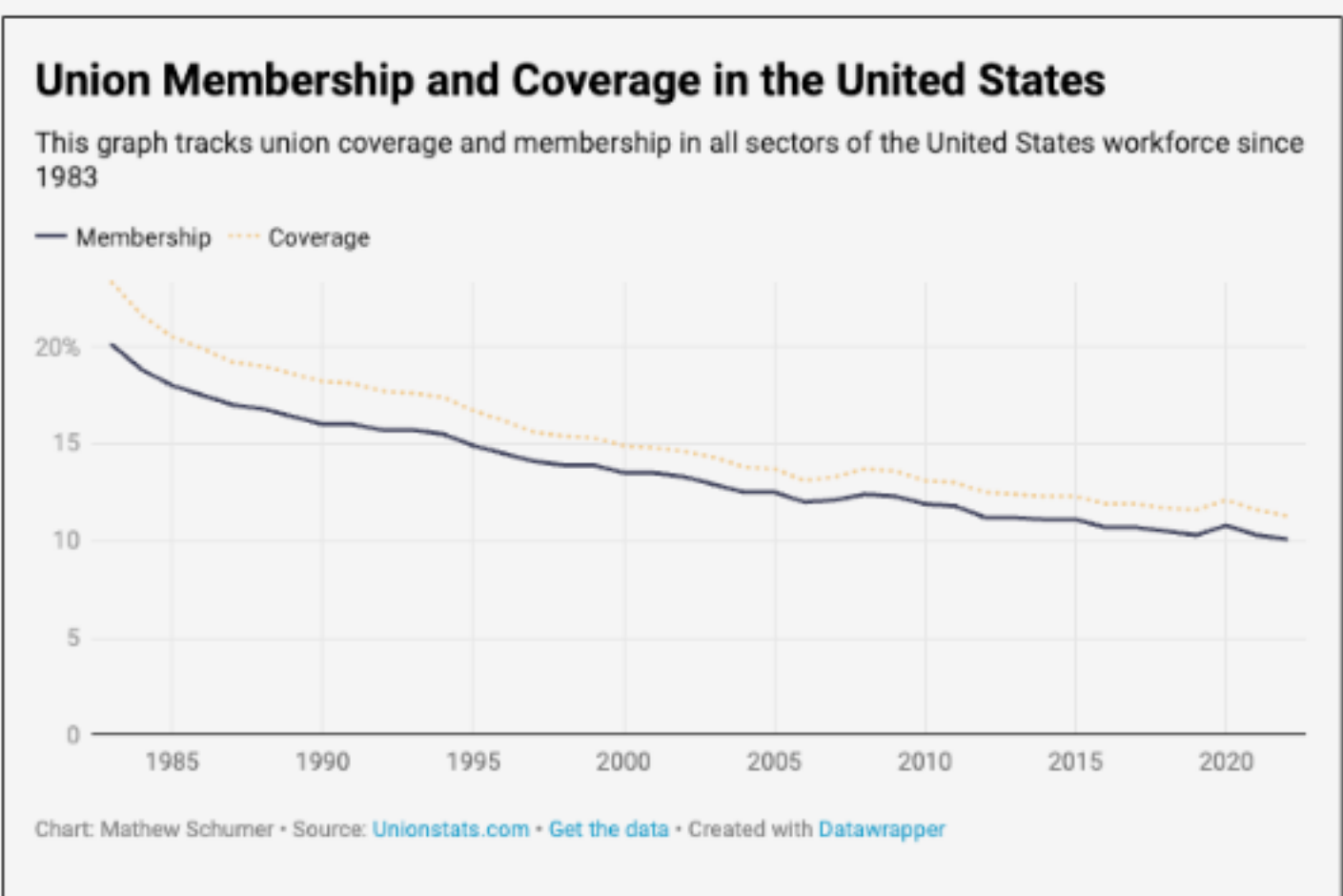
by Mathew Schumer

Unionization is in the midst of a comeback in the American lexicon. High-profile labor movements among workers at companies like Starbucks and Amazon are becoming the subjects of popular news segments. An oft-cited Gallup poll suggests that public approval of labor unions in the U.S. is on its way to an all-time high.

Within the past month, a strike of workers affiliated with the Writers Guild of America has made front-page news, due to its potential implications. The last strike of this nature occurred over a decade ago and lasted over 100 days with significant economic effects.



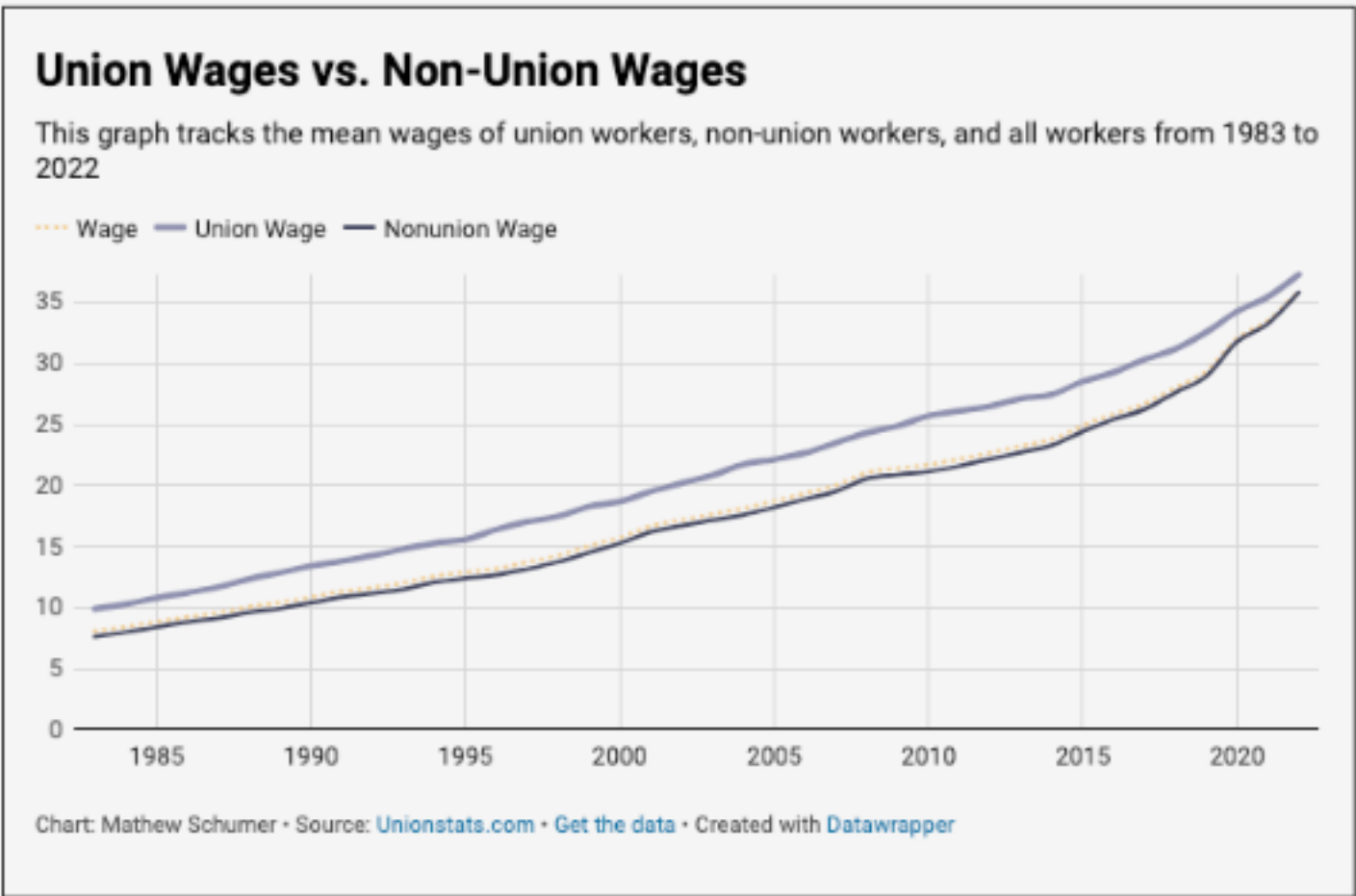
“What’s gonna have to happen in this country is a general strike... Hopefully one day- hopefully soon- all the unions in the country can come together on the same accord,” said Amazon Labor Union president and founder Chris Smalls during a livestream in 2022. Despite the optimism of organizers like Smalls, labor unions still face an uphill battle when it comes to successfully covering the American workforce.



Union popularity has yet to translate into any meaningful change for unionization numbers at-large. Since the early 1980s, unionization and union coverage have seen a significant decrease in the United States- a trend that shows no sign of slowing down.

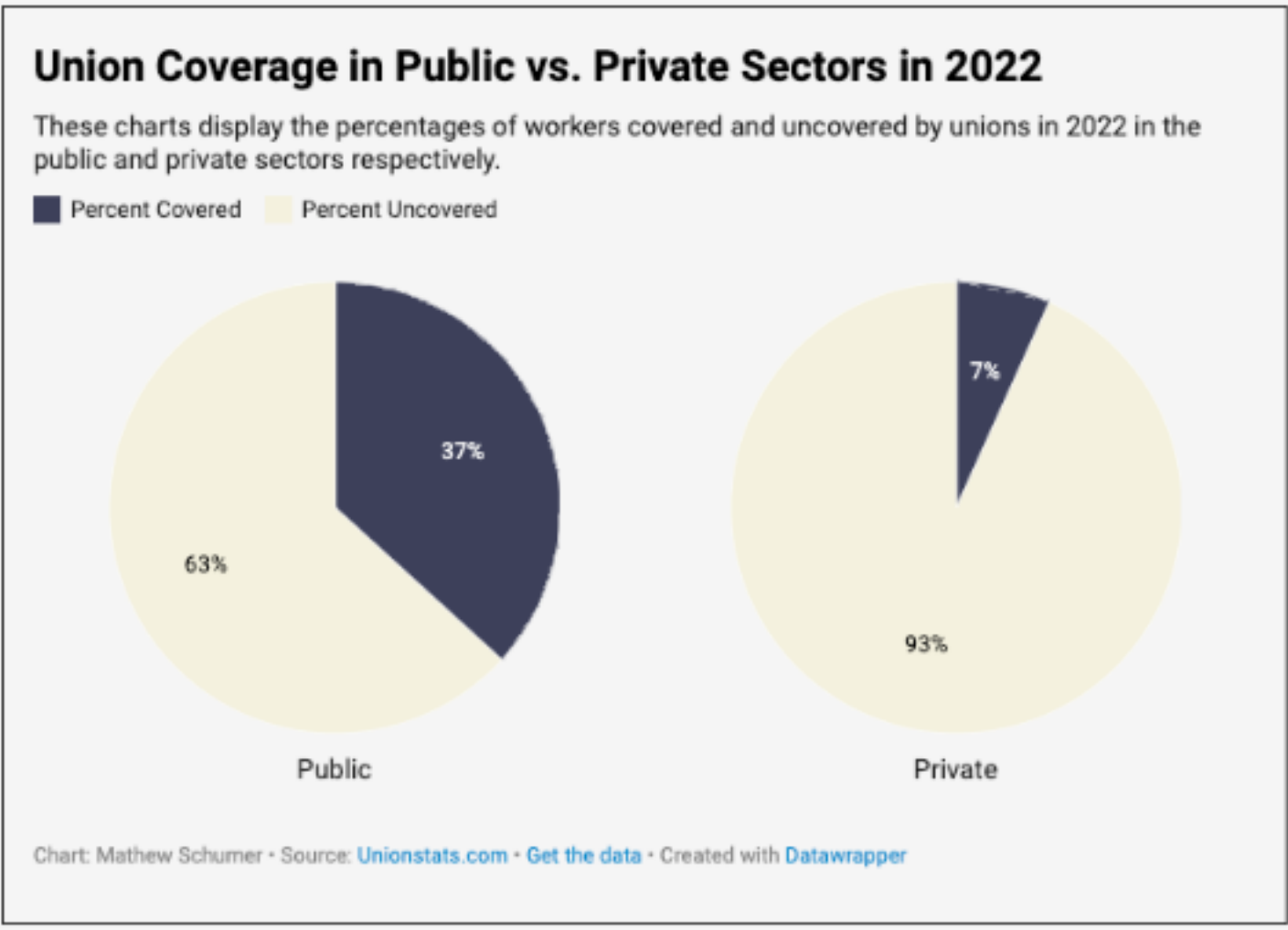
According to [Unionstats.com](#), a website that aggregates data from the Current Population Surveys (CPS), Unionization in the U.S. is currently seeing its lowest rates in recorded history. Union coverage among workers was at 11.3%, while membership was only at 10.1%.

Even the gap between union membership and coverage has been thinning slowly, given the introduction of right-to-work laws at the state level. These laws, enacted primarily in midwestern Republican-led states, ban unions from covering workers who aren’t explicitly affiliated with them and obfuscate the process of collective bargaining.



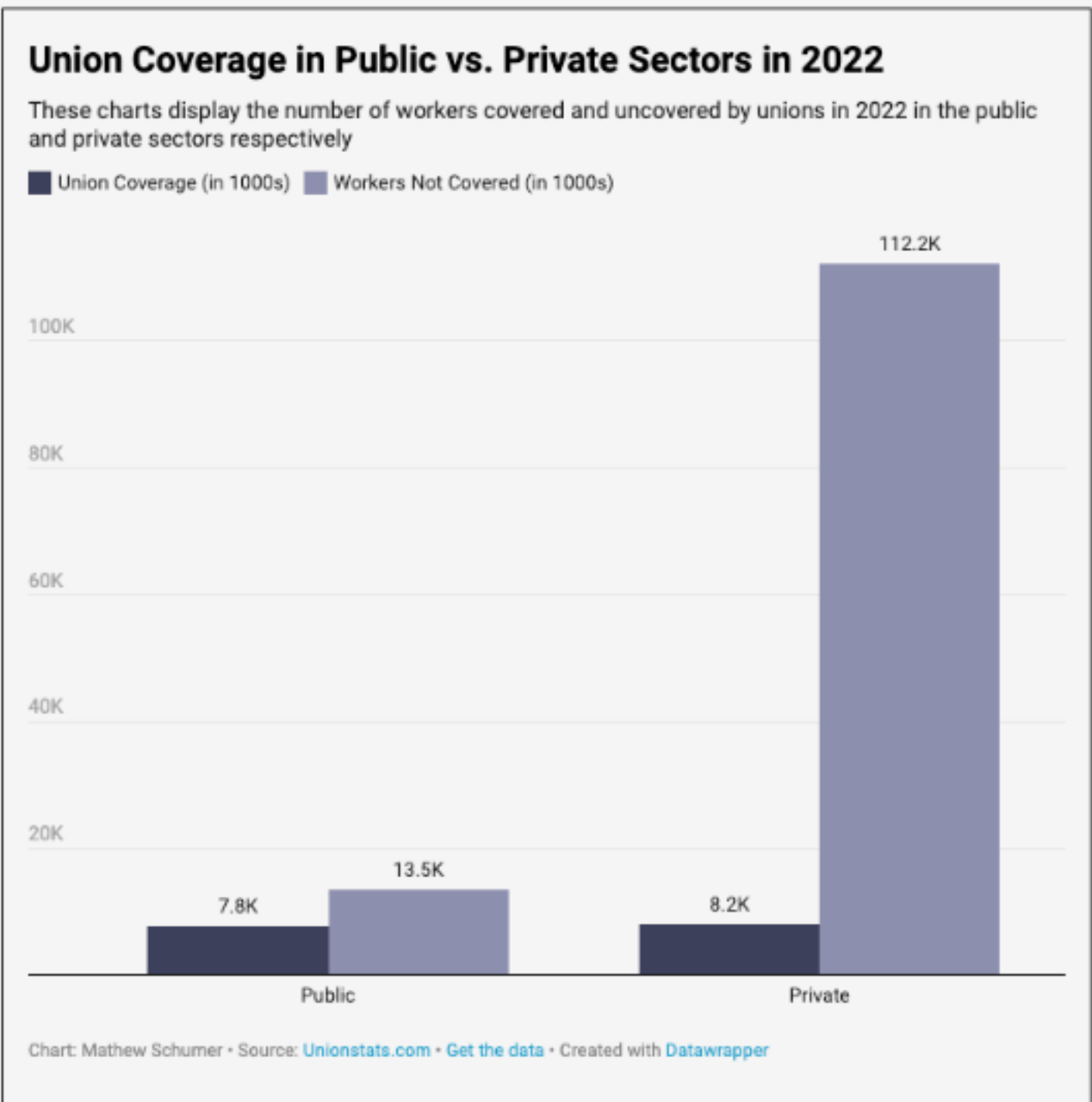
In line with the downward trend in unionization, the overall wage of American workers has begun to trend closer to that of the nonunion wage. Historically, the (albeit slight) influence of higher union wages has skewed the average wage of all American workers higher than nonunion workers; but the numbers suggest that as unionization numbers decrease, so does this influence.

That has also resulted in the closing gyre between the union and nonunion average wages. In 2012, the average union wage was \$26.48, whereas the nonunion average was only \$22.15- a difference of \$4.33. The difference in 2022 was only \$1.46, which is even less when adjusted for inflation.



To understand these trends, it’s important to look at the breakdown of union coverage by sector. In the public sector, 37% of workers were covered by unions in 2022, compared to only 7% of workers in the private sector. A report published in 2020 by the Economic Policy Institute attempted to determine the causes of this disparity.

The report found that there are “structural weaknesses in the law, exacerbated by anti-union amendments to the NLRA in 1947 and aided by a series of rulings by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and courts, have allowed employers to interfere in and defeat efforts by their workers to organize unions and to face no real consequences for doing so.”



Putting these statistics in the scope of the American workforce at large only serves to emphasize their severity. As exhibited by this graph, the number of nonunionized workers in the private sector far exceeds any other category- accounting for almost 75% of the entire American workforce.

Rep. Robert C Scott (D-VA) introduced the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act in 2019 to address those numbers and aid the efforts of workers attempting to unionize, as well as making it harder for employers to retaliate against unionization. The bill initially passed in the House but stagnated in the Senate, prompting Rep. Scott to introduce a second PRO Act in 2023.



While Democrat-backed bills like this aren’t likely to pass in a Republican-majority House, they do indicate that efforts are still being made to change the tide. Public opinion remains in favor of labor organizers, and if that trend continues for a few more years it could hit a critical mass and lead to tangible change. That, however, remains to be seen.