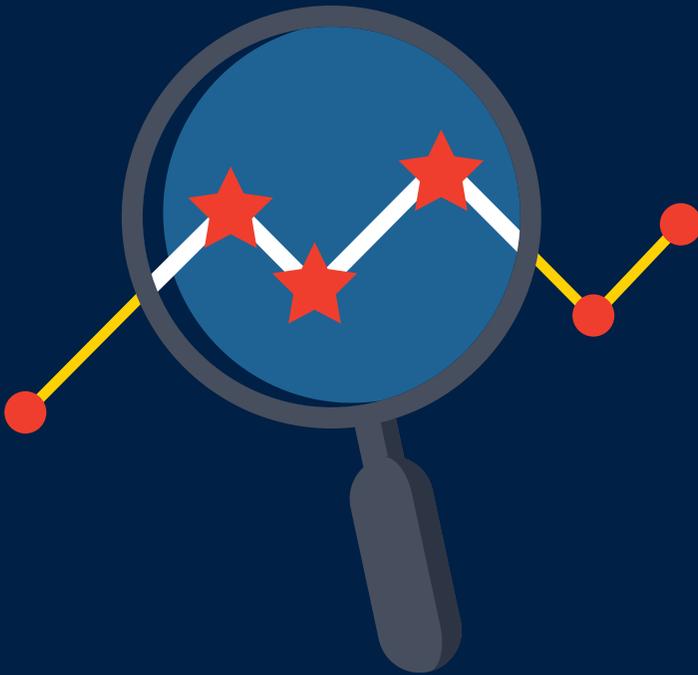




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# TAKING THE PULSE OF AMERICA'S UNION WORKERS



**Survey Highlights**

Written by

**The  
Economist**

Intelligence  
Unit

In September 2016 The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) conducted a survey, sponsored by Prudential, exploring the key concerns and aspirations of union members.

WE SURVEYED

1,573  ACTIVE UNION MEMBERS

AGED 18 AND OVER



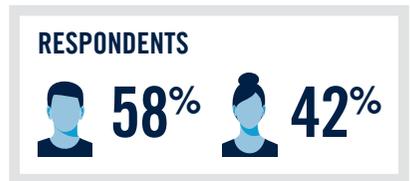
BABY BOOMER GENERATION OR EARLIER



GENERATION X



MILLENNIAL GENERATION



The survey sample includes members of the millennial cohort, Generation X and baby boomer generations. About 58% of respondents are male; nearly half have completed or are in the process of securing a four-year college degree or higher qualification; and nearly 90% work full-time. Slightly more than half live in suburban areas, and nearly two-thirds have been union members for ten years or longer.

## THERE IS A GENERATIONAL DISCONNECT AMONG UNION MEMBERS

The survey finds that millennials are not as personally invested in their jobs as their older counterparts: they report less job satisfaction than baby boomers and take less pride in their work. This stems in part from the comparatively junior posts that younger people tend to occupy, as well as the higher turnover among millennial workers.<sup>1</sup>

Q

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

% of respondents who strongly agree

● Millennials ● Gen X ● Baby boomers

**“Overall, I am satisfied with my job”**

24% Millennials  
27% Gen X  
31% Baby boomers

24%

31%

**“I have a strong sense of pride in my work”**

27% Millennials  
43% Gen X  
53% Baby boomers

27%

53%

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016

<sup>1</sup> Gallup, Business Journal, “Millennials: The Job-Hopping Generation,” May 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/191459/millennials-job-hopping-generation.aspx>.

It is therefore not surprising that millennial respondents have different work/life priorities than baby boomers. For example, the former are more personally concerned about their ability to make a living, less about longer-term benefits like medical or dental coverage. Being younger, they are comparatively less troubled by work demands that affect their health or well-being, and are much more interested in the availability of flexible hours and parental leave.



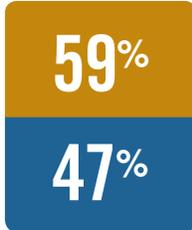
**Which of the following aspects of your work life are you personally most concerned about today?**

% of respondents

● Millennials ● Gen X ● Baby boomers

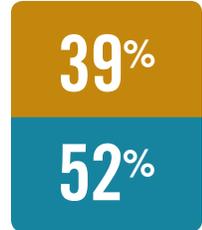
**Earnings/Ability to make a living**

59% Millennials  
47% Gen X  
47% Baby boomers



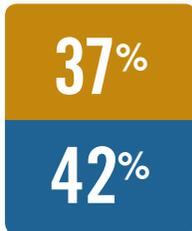
**Access to and/or cost of benefits (medical, dental, etc.)**

39% Millennials  
45% Gen X  
52% Baby boomers



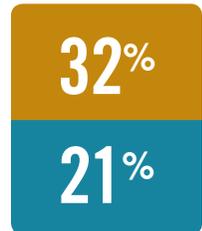
**Job security**

37% Millennials  
42% Gen X  
40% Baby boomers



**Work hours requirements**

32% Millennials  
26% Gen X  
21% Baby boomers



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016

Notwithstanding these generational differences, union members of all ages agree on the most important factors that are negatively affecting opportunities for U.S. workers today. Their top concerns are the cost of healthcare and low/stagnant wages. The cost of retirement ranks third overall among younger workers; for older workers, the movement of jobs out of the U.S. is a bigger issue. Beyond the top-ranked concerns, millennials are more worried than baby boomers about workplace inequality and discrimination (21% vs 14%) as well as a lack of available, affordable training programs (15% vs 7%).



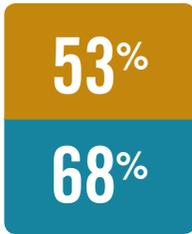
**Which of the following factors do you believe are negatively affecting the opportunities of American workers today?**

% of respondents

● Millennials ● Gen X ● Baby boomers

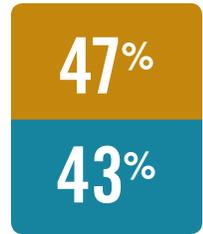
**Cost of healthcare**

53% Millennials  
61% Gen X  
68% Baby boomers



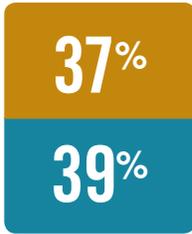
**Low/Stagnant wages**

47% Millennials  
44% Gen X  
43% Baby boomers



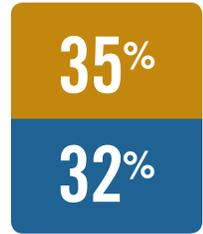
**Cost of retirement**

37% Millennials  
38% Gen X  
39% Baby boomers



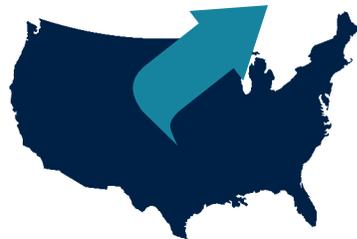
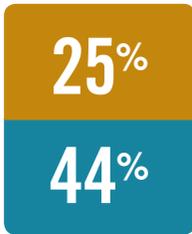
**Uncertainty about U.S. economy**

35% Millennials  
32% Gen X  
33% Baby boomers



**Movement of business, manufacturing and jobs outside the U.S.**

25% Millennials  
35% Gen X  
44% Baby boomers



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016

## MILLENNIALS HAVE HIGHER EXPECTATIONS OF UNIONS AND THE OVERALL WORKPLACE

As the workforce ages, labor groups will need to address a broader range of sometimes conflicting needs. The challenge is biggest for younger workers, especially millennials, because their expectations tend to differ from those of older members, who have been critical in building existing union structures and methods.

Q

**In which of the following areas do you believe that unions have been at the forefront of driving progress?**

% of respondents

34%

### Fair wages

34% Millennials  
46% Gen X  
47% Baby boomers

28%

### Access to benefits

28% Millennials  
35% Gen X  
44% Baby boomers

25%

### Equal pay for equal work

25% Millennials  
23% Gen X  
20% Baby boomers

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016

Millennials tend to be less satisfied with union accomplishments, which suggests that their expectations are not being met. For example, while millennials and boomers agree that there has been solid progress in access to benefits (32% vs 34%) and fair wages (24% vs 25%) in their lifetimes, millennials are significantly less likely to say that unions have been in the forefront of this progress. For fair wages, only 34% of millennials say so compared with 47% of boomers. And for access to benefits the gap is even bigger: 28% vs 44%. Millennials are also less likely to rank labor unions among the top institutions that can improve the welfare of U.S. workers either today or in the future.

In terms of workplace ideals, millennials are more hopeful that workplace equality (31% vs 26%) and a better work/life balance (24% vs 19%) can be achieved in the next ten years. However, they are less optimistic than baby boomers of achieving a livable, minimum wage (33% vs 42%) and pay equality between men and women (32% vs 39%). This is consistent with findings indicating millennials place more emphasis on workplace inclusion and working conditions, but have greater wage-related concerns than baby boomers.



## UNIONS CAN IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT BY OFFERING TRAINING AND TAKING NEW APPROACHES TO MEET MEMBER NEEDS

In the case of training, union members are actively engaged in building their own futures, but they also think unions should become more involved. Strong majorities agree with sentiments like “I actively seek to develop new skills” and “unions should offer more training or opportunities to enhance skills.” These results suggest opportunities for more unions to become engaged in providing training and apprenticeship programs.

Q

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

% of respondents

**“Advocacy for workers will remain important to future generations”**



**“Unions should offer more training or opportunities to enhance skills”**



**“I actively seek to develop new skills”**



● Strongly agree  
● Somewhat agree

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016

This approach would also align with the finding that millennials are more likely than older counterparts to see new jobs from a technologically advanced economy as opportunities for unions to gain members (56% vs 45%). They are also more likely to express interest in future work trends (61% vs 48%), such as telecommuting and the rise of the sharing economy through companies like Uber.

Although the survey findings point to the need for new approaches to meet shifting member expectations, traditional collective bargaining will remain at the core of union activity. Most members say that unions should focus on negotiating wages and benefits (58%) and protecting the security of pensions and other employee benefits (51%), as well as job security (41%). Moreover, nearly three-quarters of respondents agree at least somewhat with the proposition that “advocacy for workers will remain important to future generations,” while nearly one-third agree strongly.

Most respondents understand that there are few other institutions they can rely on for workplace advocacy. When asked which groups will play a critical role in protecting the welfare of U.S. workers in the future, respondents say that labor unions (55%) will continue as the top institution. But union members rank workers themselves closely behind (51%), suggesting opportunities for coalitions or partnerships with other advocacy groups. Fewer respondents mention corporations, government officials or public entities.

**Q** Which of the following groups or institutions has the greatest ability to improve the welfare of American workers?  
 % of respondents

Labor unions



Workers themselves



Corporations



● Today  
 ● In the future

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016

Union members across generations believe healthcare costs negatively affect opportunities for future generations of workers. And millennials are more likely than boomers to cite cost of retirement (43% vs 36%) and low/stagnant wages (43% vs 38%).

When asked which aspects of work life unions should focus on for future generations, millennials are more likely than older workers to emphasize retirement benefits, working hours and future work trends.

**Q** Which of the following aspects of work life should unions most focus on protecting for future generations of American workers?

% of respondents

● Millennials ● Gen X ● Baby boomers

**Earnings/Ability to make a living**

48% Millennials  
50% Gen X  
51% Baby boomers



**Access to and/or cost of benefits**

41% Millennials  
44% Gen X  
46% Baby boomers



**Access to and/or cost of retirement tools/planning**

32% Millennials  
27% Gen X  
22% Baby boomers



**Work hours requirements**

32% Millennials  
24% Gen X  
17% Baby boomers



**Job security**

32% Millennials  
39% Gen X  
47% Baby boomers



**Future work trends**

24% Millennials  
17% Gen X  
16% Baby boomers



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit survey, 2016



Significant differences between generations, especially between boomers and millennials, are changing the environment in which unions operate today. These shifts will be underscored as millennials age and boomers retire.

Some of these trends reflect generational differences in thinking or outlook, such as millennials having weaker attachments to the position they currently occupy and higher expectations of social progress in the future.

Union members overall believe the most important threats facing workers are the cost of healthcare and low/stagnant wages, with younger workers more concerned about the latter. However, opportunities for unions lie in the belief of union members of all ages that advocacy for workers will remain important for future generations.



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