

# COWS: The state of Working Wisconsin 2017: Facts and figures

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**View full report at: <http://www.cows.org/soww>.**

*Unemployment is Low, but Inequality & Racial Disparity Remain Daunting*

In time for Labor Day weekend, COWS has released [The State of Working Wisconsin 2017: Facts & Figures](#), an overview of the critical issues facing working people in the state.

How are Wisconsinites faring? Unemployment is low, and given the brutal aftermath of the Great Recession, this is good news indeed. And while the numbers fall short of the national pace, Wisconsin is seeing a steady increase in job growth.

But the unemployment rate is just one indicator; other data helps draw a picture that is less worthy of celebration. Even the rate of unemployment, low overall, is unevenly distributed. As we've long documented, the generational context of slow wage growth and increasing inequality are real and pressing issues in the state.

Further highlights from the report:

## **National Context: 34<sup>th</sup> in US for Job Growth**

Wisconsin private sector job growth over that period ranks 34th. This means two-thirds of the states in the nation posted stronger growth over the same period.

## **Shrinking Middle Class**

According to analyses by the Pew Charitable Trust over 2000-2013, the share of families in the middle class in Wisconsin fell by 5.7 percent. That is the largest decline posted by any state in the nation.\*

## **Racial Disparity**

Wisconsin's African American unemployment rate, 11%, is 2.9 times the rate for whites. Nationally, the black unemployment rate is 2.1 times the white rate. Furthermore, Wisconsin has the regrettable distinction of ranking among the worst states in the nation in terms of racial equality, from education to jobs and income to incarceration.

## **Long Term Wage Stagnation**

Taking inflation into account, the wage of Wisconsin's median worker is 92¢/hour more today than it was in 1979. That's very slow wage growth – an annual raise of less than 3¢ per hour.

## **Union Coverage Falls Below National Average**

Over 2011-16, Wisconsin union coverage fell by more than one-third, from 14.1 to 9 percent, a decline of 5.1 percentage points. Over the same period, national union coverage fell 1 percentage point.

*COWS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “think-and-do tank” dedicated to improving economic performance and living standards in the state of Wisconsin and nationally. Based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, COWS works to promote “high road” strategies that support living wages, environmental sustainability, strong communities, and public accountability. For more information, visit [www.cows.org](http://www.cows.org).*

\*<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2015/3/19/the-shrinking-middle-class-mapped-state-by-state>