

# Study: Unions Make Even Nonmembers Happier

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(Sept. 22) -- The American worker has [never been more dissatisfied with his job](#). Meanwhile, union membership [continues its 50-year decline](#). Coincidence? Benjamin Radcliff thinks not.

He's a professor of political science at Notre Dame and the co-author of a [new study](#) about unions in 14 nations. His research shows that people who live in countries thick with union membership are a happier lot -- regardless of whether they're in a union or not. "There's a direct effect of being a member and sort of an indirect effect," Radcliff tells AOL News.



Damian Dovarganes, AP

Thousands of union workers from across the U.S. joined community and labor leaders Aug. 13 for a labor rally for good jobs in California and nationwide.

The study crunched life-satisfaction data from several European countries, as well as Japan, Australia and the U.S. As its write-up notes, happiness with one's life increasingly means happiness at work, and so Radcliff and his colleagues looked to see what brings nine-to-fivers joy.

In a (oversimplified) word: unions. For those who are members, there are all the obvious gains, such as job security, decent salaries, decent hours, decent benefits. But for workers who aren't, there is Radcliff's indirect effect: "People who have union jobs like their jobs better," Radcliff tells AOL News. "And that puts pressure on other employers to extend the same benefits and wages to compete with the union shops."

As if to pre-empt the complaints of the good people at the Cato Institute, the study also says that the subset of union members making the highest salaries don't attribute their happiness to unions. It's the lower-paid people who find contentment through organized labor.

Also, happiness itself is only somewhat quantifiable, even viewed through the prism of work, Radcliff says. To take the best measure of it, one needs to consider the unemployment rate, the level of trust among countrymen, even church attendance.

But, on the whole, there is "a causal relationship" between happiness and the density of unions, Radcliff says. Denmark ranks near the top in both categories. The United States, by contrast, ranks in the bottom third for happiness among the 14 countries studied. "There's a reason for that," Radcliff says.