

ANALYSIS: Now It Takes 465 Days to Sign a Union's First Contract

By Robert Combs 2022-08-02T05:00:44000-04:00

While viewing the Senate Budget Committee's recent [hearing on labor relations issues](#), I heard two facts that made me sit up and take notice.

"After a union wins an election, the average number of days to get to a contract is 409 days," Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) said. "And about a third of victorious unions can't get a contract in the first three years."

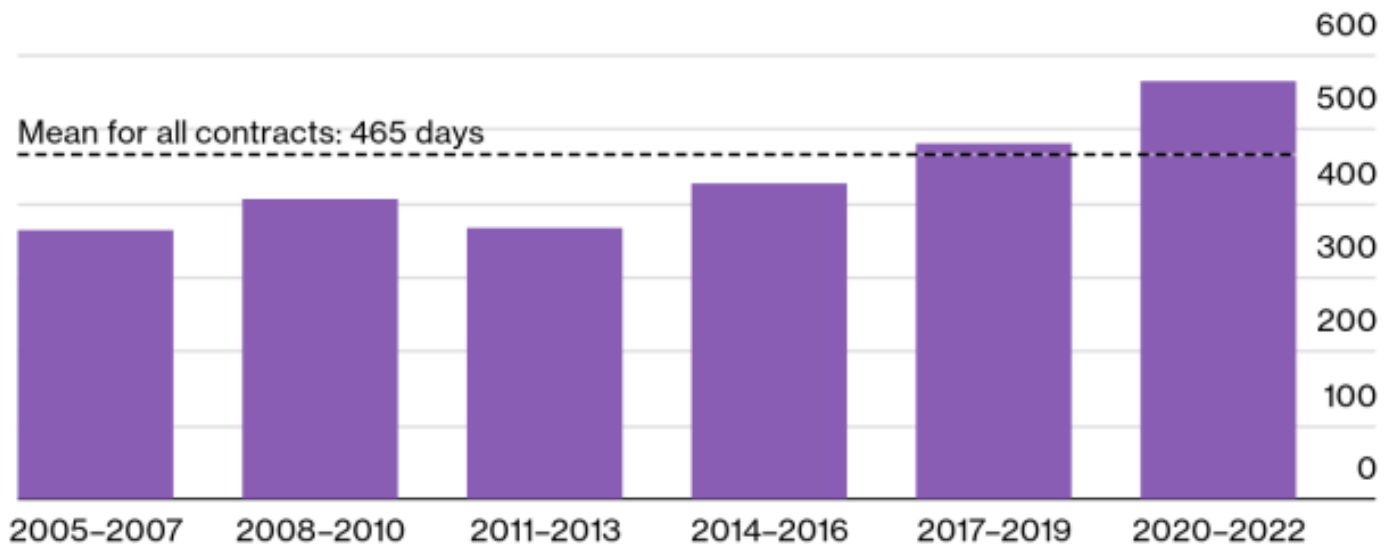
The reason the first statistic struck me is because it's from me. Or, I should say, it's from [Bloomberg Law's labor data](#), which led to an [article](#) I posted last summer.

Kaine's mention spurred me to return to our databases and update that figure. The result: Based on our analysis of 391 records of first contracts signed since 2005, the mean number of days it takes newly unionized employers and their newly organized workers to ratify a first contract has grown to 465 days. (The median showed a more moderate increase, from 356 to 374 days.)

Means are subject to outliers from time to time, which helps explain such a dramatic jump. But still, it's hard to ignore that there's been a trend toward longer delays in first-contract signings. Here's a look at the averages over time.

Signing Delays for Unions' First Contracts Are Getting Longer

Mean number of days from NLRB election to contract ratification



Source: Bloomberg Law Labor Data

Analysis covers 391 first contracts for which Bloomberg Law has obtained dates for NLRB election and contract ratification, 2005-2022. Years depicted here are for contract ratification dates.

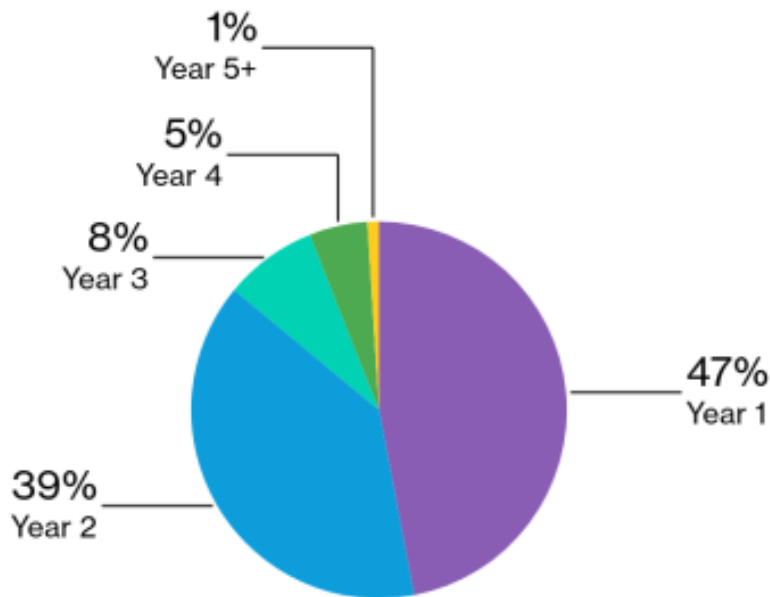
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The second statistic Kaine cited didn't come from Bloomberg Law. In fact, I'm not sure where it originated. I've traced it back to a mention in a [2009 Economic Policy Institute paper](#), but it might be even older.

I don't dispute the figure itself; whatever the methodology was, it was almost certainly different from how we crunch our data. But I thought I'd go ahead and provide a 2022 version anyway.

Most Unions Have No Contract Signed Within a Year of Organizing

Timing of contract ratification following an NLRB election win



Source: Bloomberg Law Labor Data

Analysis covers 391 first contracts for which Bloomberg Law has obtained dates for NLRB election and contract ratification, 2005–2022. "Year 1" means the contract was ratified less than 365 days after the election date.

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The result from our databases: 53% of the 391 first contracts took a full year or more to sign—virtually matching the 52% figure mentioned in the 2009 paper, incidentally. But only 6% of contracts took three full years or more, not one-third as Kaine and others have said.

Last summer, I posted [another finding](#) that longer delays in first contracts correlated to lower wage hikes for workers. I'll be updating that statistic soon.

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