

Bloomberg Law Analysis

# ANALYSIS: How Long Does It Take Unions to Reach First Contracts?

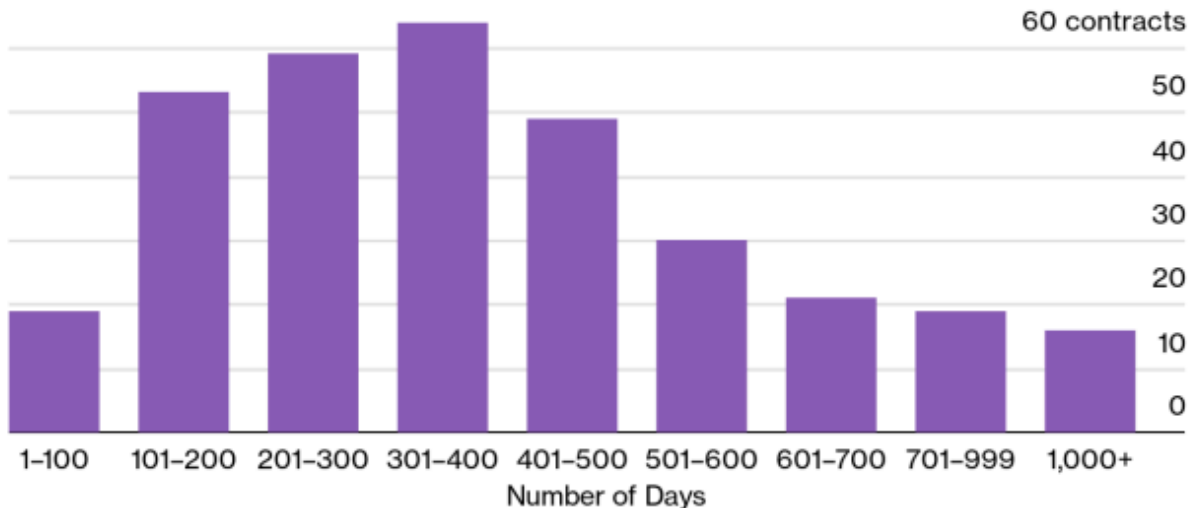
June 1, 2021, 5:16 PM EDT

Every once in a while, a Bloomberg Law subscriber in the labor relations practice area presents us with a poser: Do we know how long it takes newly unionized employers and their newly organized workers to reach a first contract?

It's a hard statistic to pin down. Parties to private-sector collective bargaining agreements aren't required to notify the government when they ratify a contract at all, let alone identify whether such a deal was a first contract and report how long it took to negotiate it.

But the answer is: Yes, we do know. By cross-referencing two of the databases in Bloomberg Law's Labor PLUS resource and calculating an average, we can pinpoint the average number of days it takes new union locals and their employers to sign that initial CBA. It's well over a year: 409 days, to be exact.

## Negotiating First Contracts Is a Drawn-Out Process Time Elapsed From NLRB Certification to CBA Ratification



Source: Bloomberg Law Labor Data

Notes: Analysis covers 330 union wins in NLRB representation elections for which Bloomberg Law has obtained contract ratification information, 2004–2021.

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Here’s where that figure comes from. The National Labor Relations Board, which oversees the representation election process in most private-sector workplaces, tracks the date that elections are certified by the board. That information is stored in our NLRB Elections database.

Meanwhile, in our Settlement Summaries database, we monitor coverage of signed union contracts, focusing on the changes in wages and benefits negotiated in each one. We add about 800 records each year to that database, noting the ratification date whenever possible.

From the cross-reference of these two data sets, we have identified 330 contracts, dating as far back as 2004, for which we have both an NLRB election certification date and a first contract ratification date on file. It’s our analysis of these dates that gives us the mean negotiation length of 409 days. (The median is 356 days.)

### Health Care Workers Wait the Longest to Obtain First Contracts Time Elapsed From NLRB Certification to CBA Ratification



Bloomberg Law Labor Data  
Analysis covers 330 union wins in NLRB representation elections for which Bloomberg Law has obtained contract ratification information, 2004–2021.

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There’s a lot that we can do with this metric. For example, we can see that employers in the health care industry have taken the longest to settle a first contract, while those in manufacturing have been pushed to the table much sooner.

In a future analysis, I'll look into whether there is a connection between the length of a first contract's bargaining time and the size of its wage increase.

*Bloomberg Law subscribers can access, search, and run reports from both the NLRB Elections and Settlement Summaries databases by using our Labor Plus: Organizing and Bargaining Data resource.*

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