

Article

Labour disputes in the UK: 2015

Analysis of UK labour disputes in 2015, including working days lost, stoppages and workers involved.

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1. Main points

The number of working days lost due to labour disputes in 2015 was 170,000 compared with 788,000 in 2014. The 2015 figure was the second lowest annual total since records began in 1891.

The decrease of working days lost in 2015 was mainly attributable to a number of large scale public sector strikes in 2014.

In a change to recent years, Transport and Storage saw the largest number of working days lost, while the majority of individual strikes occurred in Education.

The region with the highest working days lost per 1000 employees in 2015 was Northern Ireland.

Pay was once again the principal cause of labour disputes in 2015. This has been the main cause of labour disputes for the last ten years, with the exception of 2009 and 2010, when the main cause was redundancy.

The public and private sector saw the same amount of disputes in 2015 in a change to recent history. However, the public sector had more working days lost than the private sector.

There were 81,000 workers involved in labour disputes in 2015, the lowest figure since records began in 1893.

2. Introduction

This article presents analysis of the three main measures of labour disputes (working days lost, stoppages and workers involved) by industry, region, cause, size and duration. The statistics are put into context by considering estimates of working days lost per 1,000 employees. Data are taken directly from the employer or trade union involved after ONS has identified disputes from press reports.

This article gives information on labour disputes in 2015 as well as giving comparisons with earlier years. It presents year total figures on labour disputes in 2015 and provides a more in-depth analysis of figures than that published as part of the monthly [Labour Market Statistical Bulletin](#).

3. Annual changes

A comparison of labour disputes in 2014 and 2015 is shown in Table 1. There are 3 core components to the figures: the number of working days lost through stoppages, the number of workers involved in those stoppages and the number of stoppages themselves. (See technical note for more details on these definitions). Information on earlier years is available in the table [Labour Disputes Annual Estimates 1891 to 2015](#), which can be found in the datasets associated with this article.

Table 1 : Number of working days lost (WDL), workers involved and stoppages, UK, 2014 and 2015 in progress in year

	2014	2015
Working days lost through stoppages:	788,300	169,600
Workers involved in stoppages:	733,300	81,000
Stoppages:	155	106
Mean number of WDL per stoppage	5,086	1,600
Median number of WDL per stoppage	171	195

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Workers in progress figures also include workers who did not strike initially, but who joined at a later date.

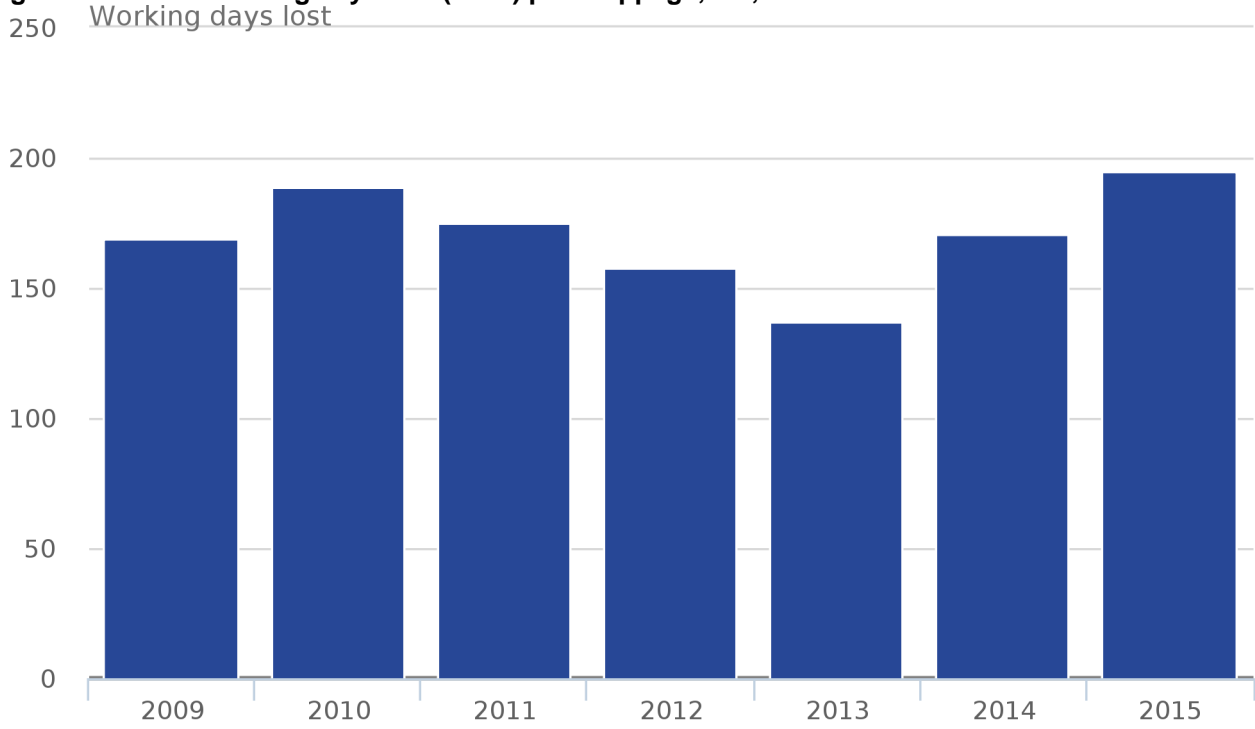
The 2015 working days lost total (170,000) is not only lower than the total last year, but is the second lowest annual total since records began in 1891 (the lowest was 157,000 in 2015).

There were 81,000 workers involved in labour disputes during 2015, the lowest since records began in 1893.

As shown at Table 1, the mean number of working days lost per stoppage was lower in 2015 than in 2014. However the median number was higher in 2015 than in 2014. The mean value is generally much higher than the median, since working days lost can be greatly affected by large one off strikes. For this reason, the median tends to give a more typical measure of the average number of working days lost per stoppage.

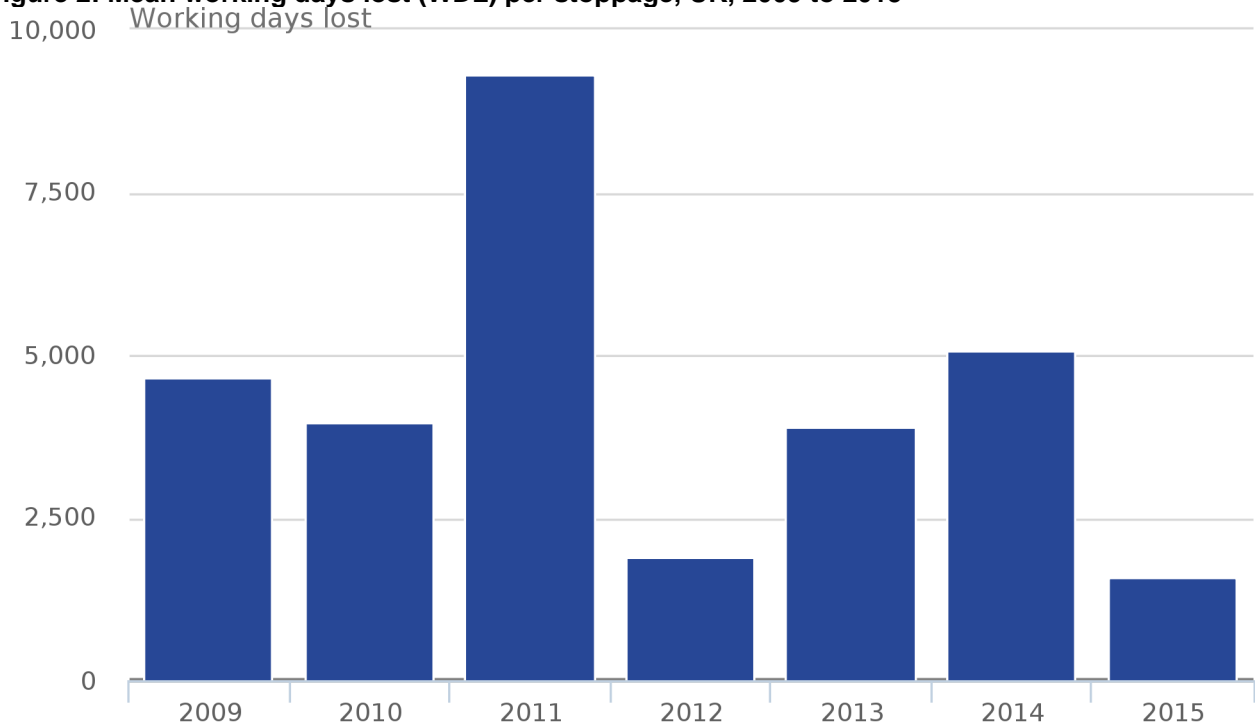
This can be seen at Figures 1 and 2, where the median number of working days lost per stoppage in a year is more consistent over time than the mean.

Figure 1: Median working days lost (WDL) per stoppage, UK, 2009 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 2: Mean working days lost (WDL) per stoppage, UK, 2009 to 2015

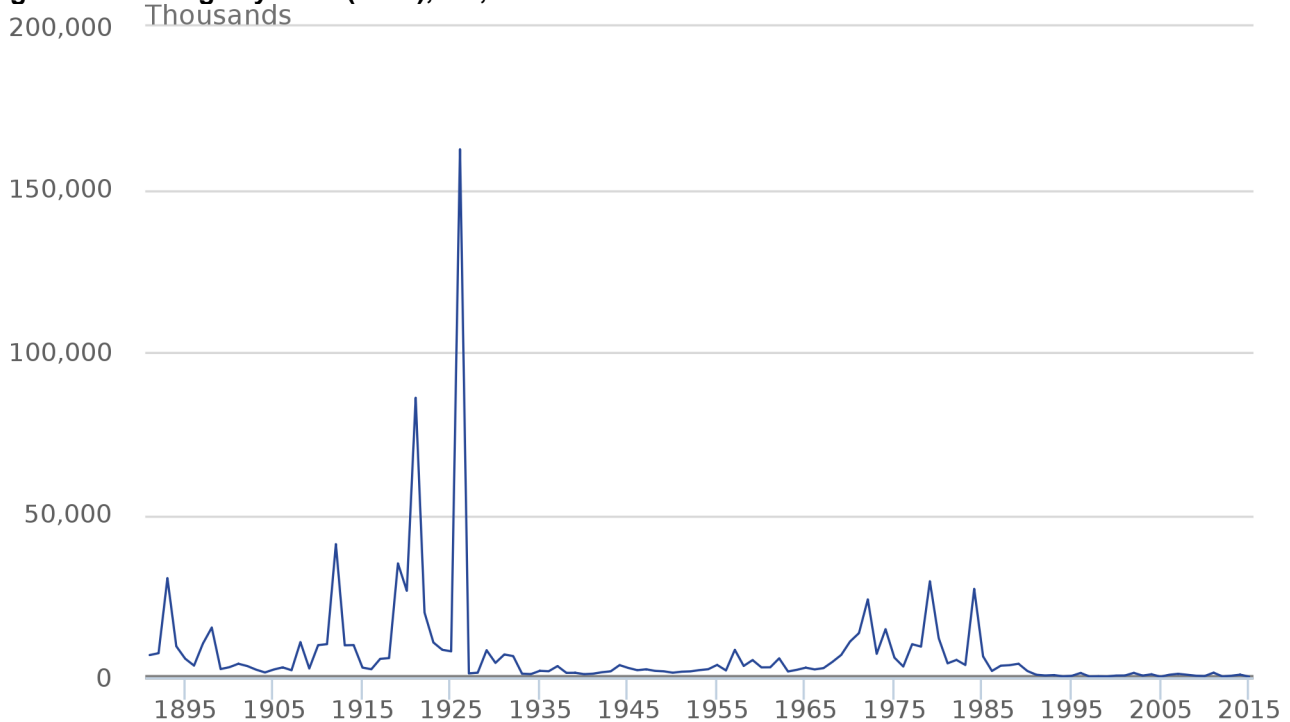


Source: Office for National Statistics

4. Review of 1996 to 2015

Figure 3 shows a time series of working days lost between 1891 and 2015. It shows that the amount of industrial action has significantly reduced in the last 30 years. This is a stark contrast to the level of action seen when the miners went on strike in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1910s and 1920s saw even greater levels of industrial action culminating in the general strike of 1926.

Figure 3: Working days lost (WDL), UK, 1891 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. 1898 - Welsh coal strike
2. 1912 - National coal strike
3. 1919 - Battle of George Square. Dispute over hours in a working week involving the shipbuilding and engineering trades
4. 1921 - Black Friday
5. 1926 - General Strike. Lasted 9 days. Over 1.5 million coal miners, dockworkers, iron workers, printers, railwaymen, steelworkers and other transport workers joined the strike
6. 1972 - UK Miners' strike
7. 1979 - Winter of discontent
8. 1984 - UK miners' strike, Battle of Orgreave

Table 2 presents labour disputes figures for the period 1996 to 2015, while Figures 4 and 5 illustrate working days lost and the number of stoppages respectively. Figures 4 and 5 show that there are a number of spikes in the time series in years when a particularly large strike took place, showing the impact individual strikes can have on the statistics. The high number of days lost in 2011, for example, was due to two large public sector strikes, while the 2002 figure was due to one very large stoppage in the transport and storage industry. A longer time series can be found within the [dataset](#) in this article.

Table 2 : Number of working days lost and stoppages, UK, 1996 to 2015

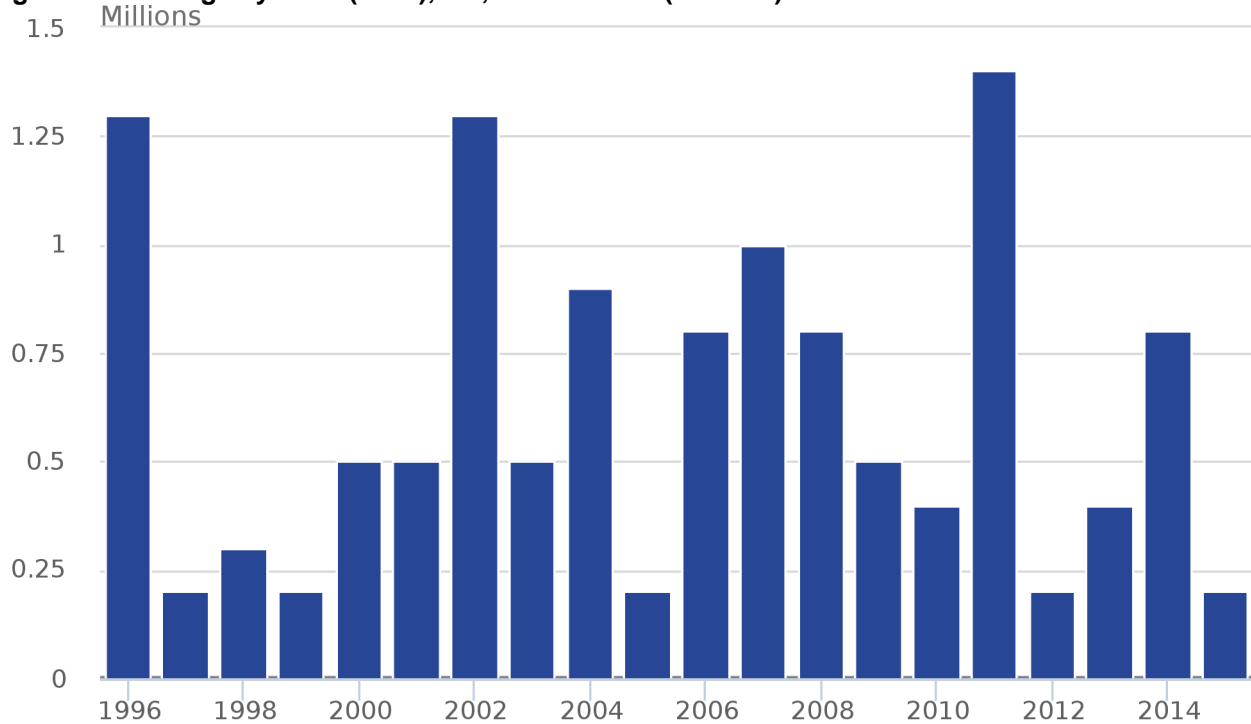
Year	Working days lost (thousands)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees ²	Workers involved (thousands)	Stoppages ³	Stoppages involving the loss of 100,000 working days or more
1996	1,302	53	364	230	2
1997	235	9	130	216	-
1998	282	11	93	166	-
1999	242	9	141	205	-
2000	499	19	183	212	1
2001	525	20	180	194	1
2002	1,323	49	943	146	2
2003	499	18	151	133	-
2004	905	33	293	130	3
2005	157	6	93	116	-
2006	755	27	713	158	1
2007	1,039	37	745	142	4
2008	759	27	511	144	2
2009	455	16	209	98	1
2010	365	13	133	92	1
2011	1,390	50	1,530	149	3
2012	249	9	237	131	1
2013	444	16	395	114	2
2014	788	27	733	155	2
2015	170	6	81	106	-

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

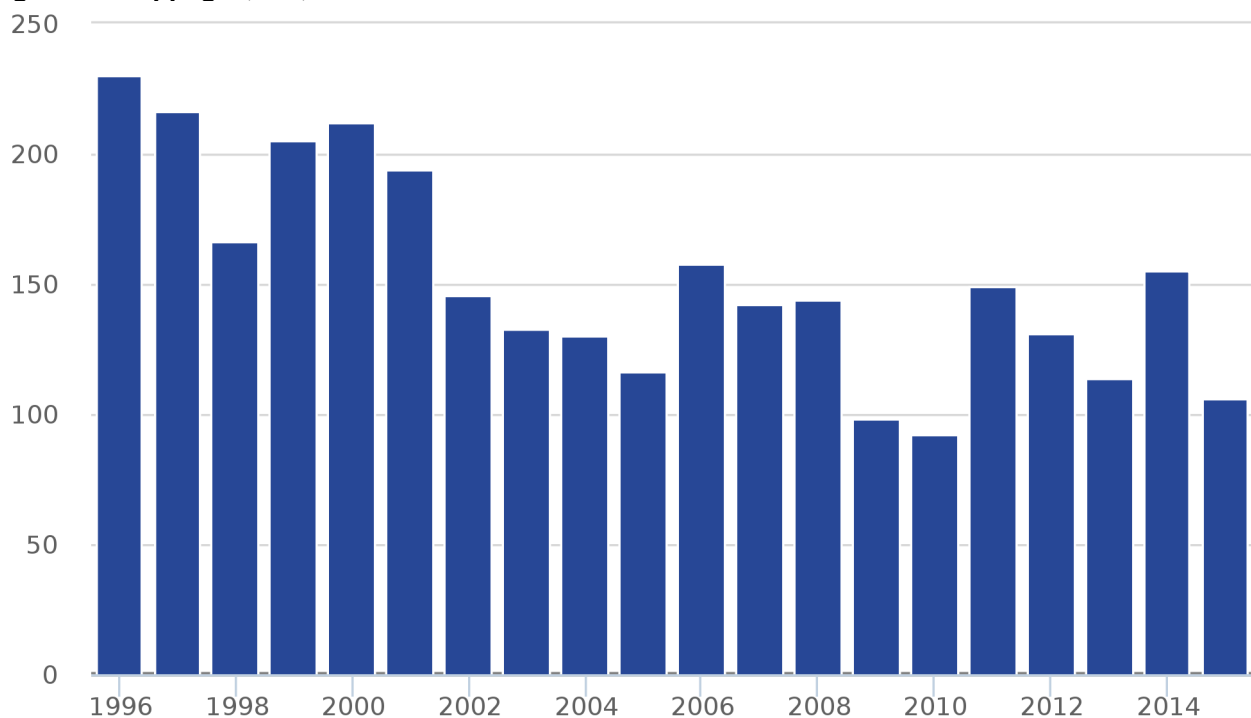
1. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent zero.
2. Based on the estimates of employee jobs from Workforce Jobs (ONS).
3. Stoppages in progress during year. Prior to 2015 a dispute was counted as a new stoppage if there was a gap of more than one month between instances of industrial action. From 2015 disputes with a gap of more than one month between instances of industrial action are counted as a single stoppage.

Figure 4: Working days lost (WDL), UK, 1996 to 2015 (millions)



Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 5: Stoppages, UK, 1996 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 5 shows that there has been a significant decline in the number of strikes since 1996. Though volatile, the number of working days lost has remained broadly the same over this period. This shows that although the number of stoppages has fallen, large scale stoppages have become more common.

The second column of Table 2 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees for each year from 1996 to 2015. This converts working days lost into a strike rate, taking into account the size of the labour force. This also enables comparisons to be made across industries and regions that differ in size, as well as adjusting for employment changes in industries and regions over time. The level of employee jobs has generally risen over time. The strike rate in the last 10 years is generally lower than in previous decades. This rise in employment explains strike rates that differ between years when there are no discernible changes in working days lost. The 170,000 working days lost in 2015 is equivalent to 6 working days lost per 1,000 employees, which is lower than the average over the last 20 years (23).

5. Industrial analyses

Historically, certain industries have been more prone to strike action than others, and breaking the labour disputes statistics down into separate industries can reveal some interesting patterns and shifts over time. However, it should be noted that comparisons between industries can also be affected by the methodology that is used for compiling the figures. For example, because very small stoppages are excluded from the figures (see technical note for more details), it is more likely that industry groups with large firms will have disputes included in the statistics. In addition to this, caution must be exercised while carrying out time series analysis due to changes in industrial classifications over time.

Table 3 shows labour disputes statistics for 2015 broken down into 14 industry groups (classified according to the Standard Industrial Classification 2007). Public Administration is the second largest sector in terms of number of working days lost, while the Transport and storage sector has risen to the largest, accounting for just over one third of the working days lost in 2015. However, this industrial group only accounted for 18% of all strikes (19), indicating that the number of workers taking part in these strikes is, on average, greater than other industrial groups. The Education sector showed 21,500 working days lost in 2015, accounting for a further 13% of the working days lost. The industry group with the largest number of stoppages is Education (29).

Table 3: Number of working days lost (WDL) and stoppages by industry, UK, 2015

Industry group (SIC 2007)	SIC class	Working days lost (thousands)	Working days lost per 1,000 employees	Workers involved (thousands)	Stoppages
All industries and services		169.6	6	81	106
Agriculture forestry and fishing	01,02,03	-	-	-	-
Mining, quarrying and Electricity, gas, air conditioning	5 to 9, 35	0.5	3	0.5	1
Manufacturing	10 to 33	11.3	5	2.7	9
Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities and Water Supply	36 to 39	3.1	16	0.2	2
Construction	41 to 43	2.1	2	0.4	3
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, personal and household goods and Accommodation and Food Services	45 to 48, 55 to 56	1.3	-	0.3	2
Transport and storage	49 to 53	60.2	47	28.4	19
Information and Communication	58 to 63	1.5	1	0.5	4
Financial and Insurance, Real estate, Professional, Scientific, Technical and Admin Activities	64 to 82	3.3	1	1.8	9
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	84	25.4	20	23.1	13
Education	85	21.5	8	14.9	29
Human Health and social work	86 to 88	20.0	5	7.4	10
Other	90 to 99	19.5	27	0.8	6

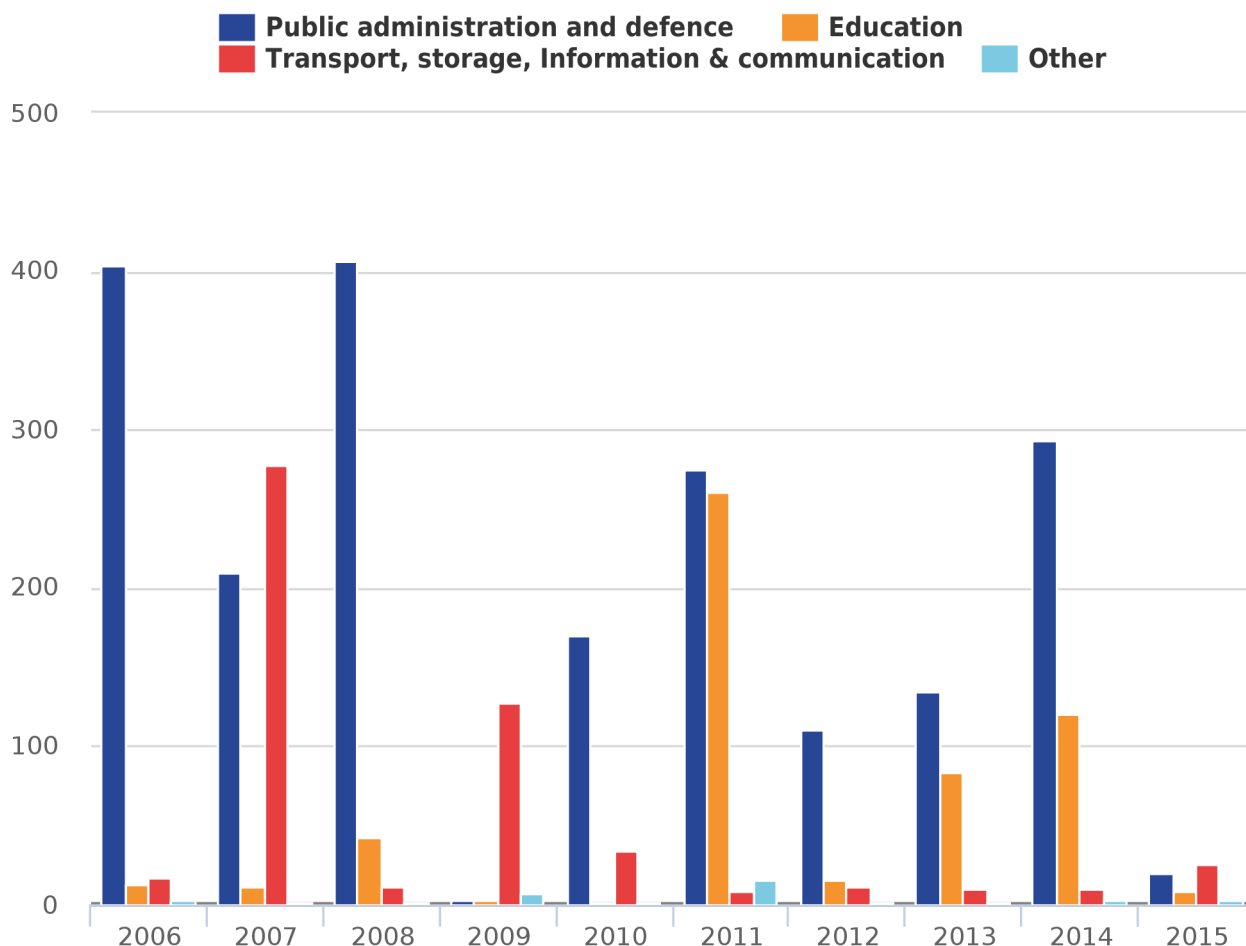
Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The figures for working days lost and workers have been rounded and consequently the sums of constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
2. Some stoppages involved workers in more than one of the above industry groups, but have each been counted as only one stoppage in the totals for all industries and services.
3. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent a zero or less than 50.

Figure 6 shows working days lost per 1,000 employees for four industrial groupings over a 10-year period. The industry group with the largest strike rate is public administration and defence. This is mainly because disputes in this group tend to be large. Education has also seen a large strike rate. This industry group has a large number of labour disputes, but disputes are usually small.

Figure 6: Working days lost (WDL) per 1,000 employees by sector, UK, 2006 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Industrial classifications follows Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 1992 up to 2004, SIC 2005 from 2005 to 2007 and SIC 2007 from 2007 onwards.

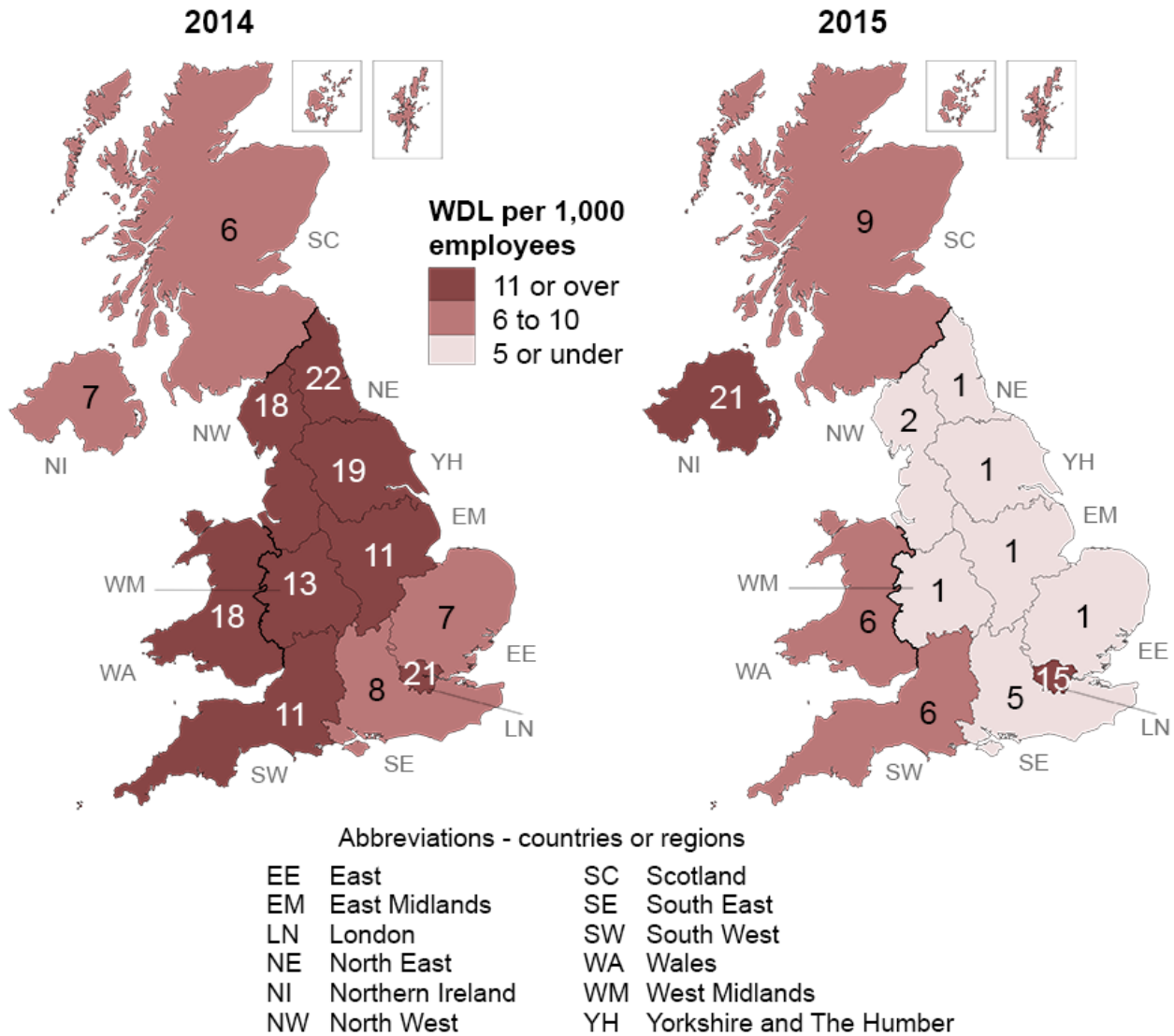
6. Regional analyses

Table 4 shows regional strike rates between 2007 and 2015, with a further breakdown of the figures for 2015 by industrial grouping. When interpreting these figures, it is important to bear in mind that the industrial composition of employment in a region is a major influencing factor on the scale of labour disputes it experiences. The regions with the highest strike rate in 2015 were Northern Ireland (21) and London (15). All of the regions except Northern Ireland and Scotland showed a decrease compared with 2014. Since 2007, the North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, London and Wales have shown the highest levels of industrial action. The East of England, South East and Northern Ireland have previously shown some of the lowest.

[Table 4: working days lost, workers involved and stoppages in progress by region and industry group, United Kingdom, 2015.](#)

Figure 7 compares working days lost per 1,000 employees between 2014 and 2015. Most regions showed a decrease in strike action over this period. Northern Ireland and London had the largest strike rate in 2015.

Figure 7 - Working days lost (WDL) per 1,000 employees, UK, 2014 to 2015



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7. Cause of disputes

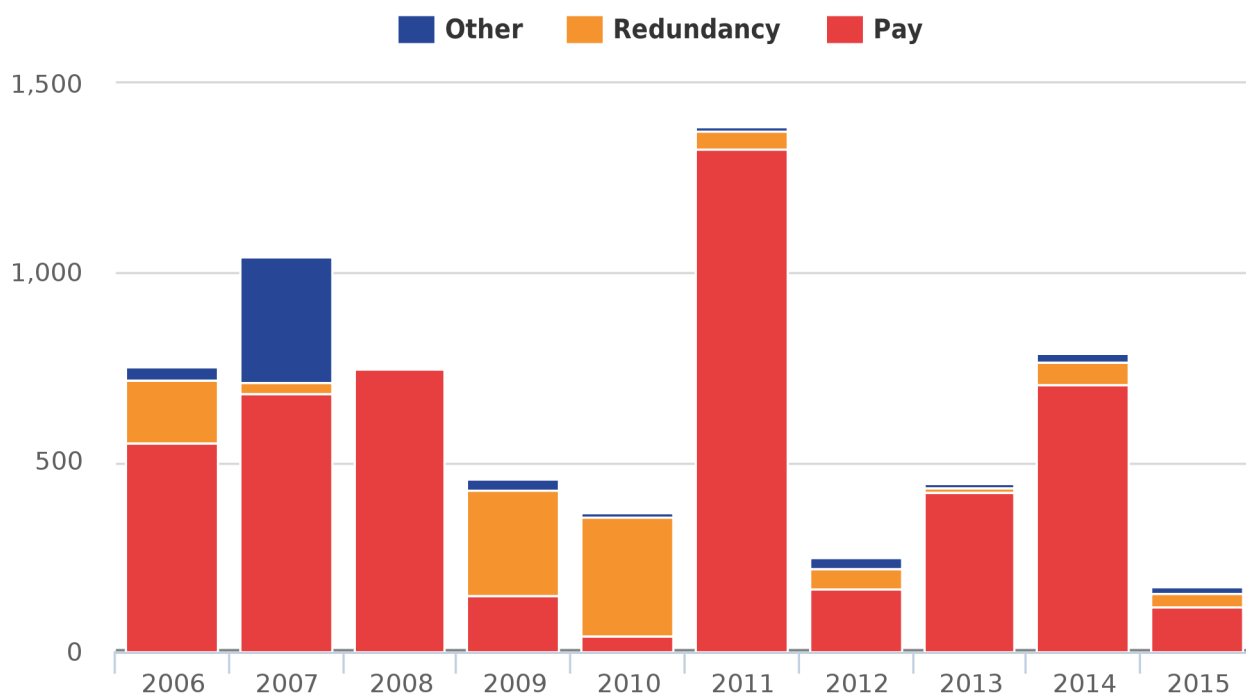
Table 5 shows stoppages in 2015 by principal cause and industry grouping. In 2015, 71% of working days lost were due to disputes over pay, accounting for 85% of all stoppages. The biggest contributors to this were public administration and defence and education.

Disputes over pay also include stoppages over feared or alleged reductions in earnings as well as disputes over the size of pay increases. Disputes over pension provisions are also classified as disputes over pay.

[Table 5: Working days lost, workers involved and stoppages in progress by main cause and industry group, United Kingdom, 2015.](#)

Figure 8 and Table 6 give information on working days lost by cause of dispute in each year. The figures are often dominated by 1 or 2 very large strikes, which can make comparisons over time difficult. Looking back over a 10 year period it is clear to see that pay usually dominates the days lost within the UK, with only 2 years not having pay as the major cause of working days lost. For 2009 and 2010, redundancy resulted in the highest number of working days lost.

Figure 8: Working days lost (WDL) by principal cause of dispute, UK, 2006 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

[Table 6: Working days lost \(WDL\) by principal cause in all industries and services, United Kingdom, 1996 to 2015](#)

8. Disputes by duration

Labour disputes statistics cover the number of days that strike action took place, not the number of days the parties involved in the dispute were actually in disagreement.

Table 7 and Figure 9 show the duration of the stoppages in progress in 2015. These show that just under a third of the number of stoppages (30%) lasted for only one day. These accounted for 25% of workers involved and 17,500 working days lost (10%). In a change to recent years, the percentage of disputes lasting longer than one day is noticeably higher (70%). In 2013 and 2014, disputes lasting longer than one day accounted for 37% and 54% respectively.

Table 7: Working days lost (WDL), workers involved and stoppages in progress by duration, UK, 2015

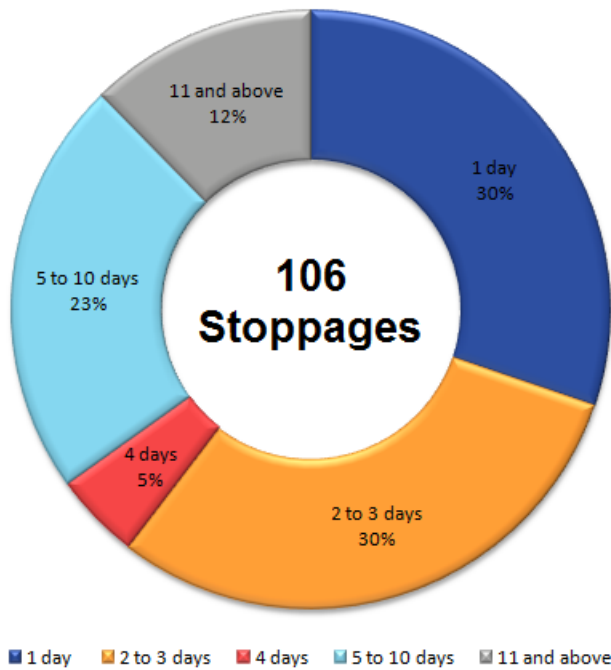
Days	Working days lost (thousands)	Proportion of all working days lost (%)	Workers involved (thousands)	Proportion of all workers (%)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (%)
1	17.5	10.3	20.0	24.7	32	30.2
2	29.1	17.2	21.6	26.7	19	17.9
3	30.9	18.2	16.8	20.7	13	12.3
4	1.9	1.1	0.6	0.7	5	4.7
5	7.3	4.3	1.6	2.0	9	8.5
6 to 10	24.3	14.3	8.9	11.0	15	14.2
11 to 15	16.6	9.8	10.0	12.3	3	2.8
16 to 20	5.8	3.4	0.6	0.7	2	1.9
21 to 30	5.3	3.1	0.4	0.5	3	2.8
31 to 50	3.0	1.8	0.2	0.2	2	1.9
Over 50	27.8	16.4	0.4	0.5	3	2.8
All stoppages	169.6		81.0		106	

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The statistics cover the number of days that strike action took place, not the number of days the parties involved in the dispute were actually in disagreement.
2. Classification by size is based on the full duration of stoppages, but the figure for days lost include only those days lost in 2015.
3. The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree precisely with the totals.
4. The working days lost figures are in general less than the product of the duration of each stoppage and the number of workers involved because some workers would not have been involved throughout the dispute - see technical note.
5. Cells containing a hyphen (-) represent a zero.

Figure 9: Stoppages in progress by duration of dispute, UK, 2015



9. Disputes by size

Table 8 shows disputes in 2015 by size and Figure 10 illustrates that a large proportion of days lost result from larger stoppages, with very few stoppages actually being large. The data also shows that 90% of working days lost in 2015 resulted from stoppages where more than 1,000 days were lost in total but only 26% of stoppages were that large. The highest proportion of stoppages was within the 'under 250 days' category, accounting for 53% of all stoppages, although this category accounted for just over 3% of working days lost. Table 8 shows the impact that large strikes can have on the figures.

Table 8: Stoppages in progress by size of dispute, UK, 2015

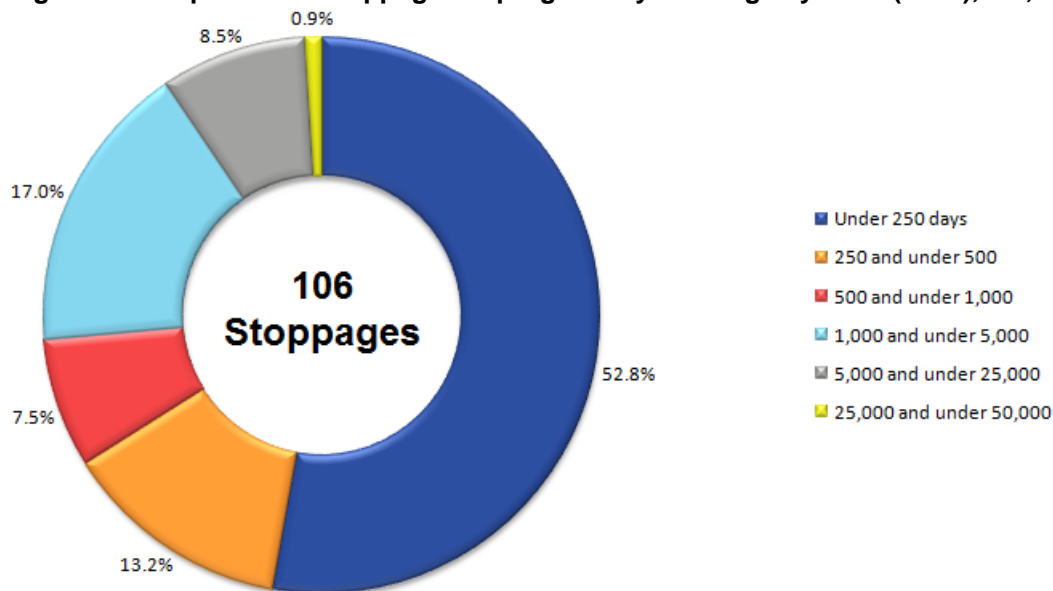
Working days lost in each dispute	Working days lost (thousands)	Proportion of all working days lost (%)	Workers involved (thousands)	Proportion of all workers (%)	Stoppages in progress	Proportion of all stoppages (%)
Under 250 days	5.6	3.3	4.1	5.1	56	52.8
250 and under 500	4.9	2.9	2.7	3.3	14	13.2
500 and under 1,000	5.9	3.5	1.8	2.2	8	7.5
1,000 and under 5,000	36.4	21.5	17.4	21.5	18	17.0
5,000 and under 25,000	90.9	53.6	40.4	49.9	9	8.5
25,000 and under 50,000	26.1	15.4	14.7	18.1	1	0.9
All stoppages	169.6		81		106	

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The figures for working days lost and workers involved have been rounded and consequently the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the totals.

Figure 10: Proportion of stoppages in progress by working days lost (WDL), UK, 2015

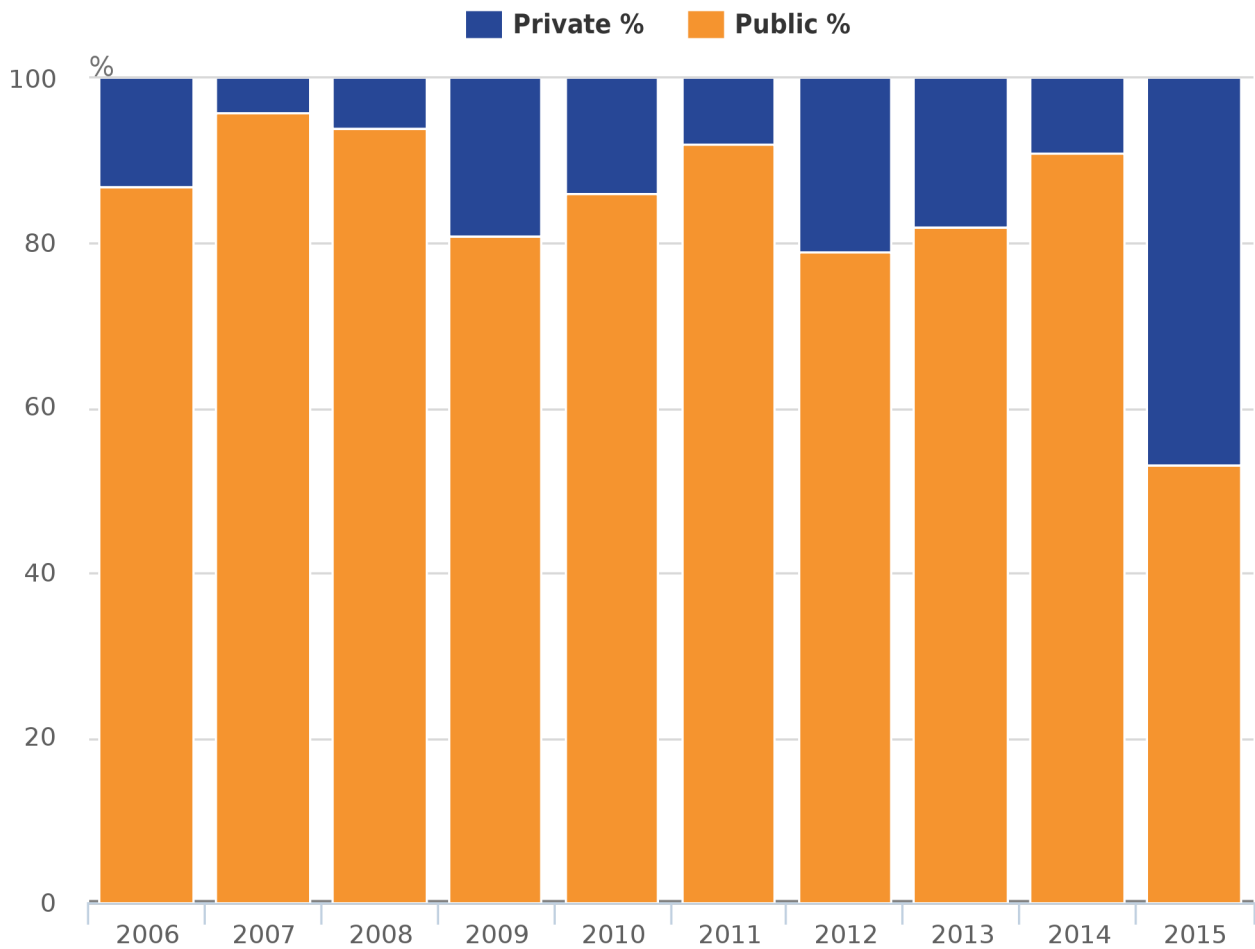


10. Disputes by public and private Sector

Figures 11a and 11b illustrate the breakdown of working days lost and the number of stoppages between the public and private sectors. The figures are also shown in Table 9. The number of working days lost in the public sector decreased from 716,000 in 2014 to 90,000 in 2015. This decrease in strike activity is also shown by the fall in the strike rate in the public sector from 132 working days lost per 1000 employees in 2014 to 17 in 2015.

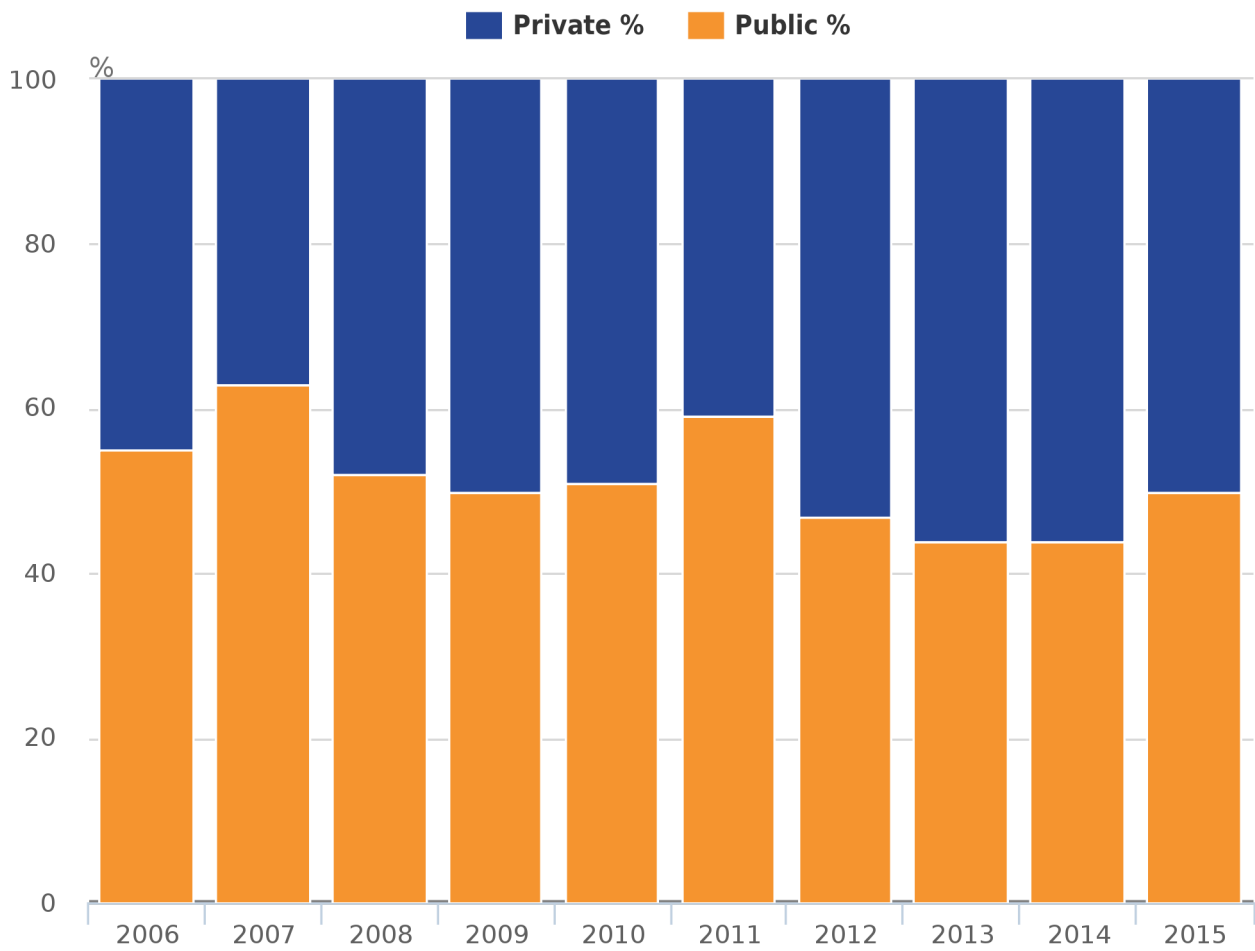
In the private sector 79,000 days were lost over 53 stoppages, which accounts for 47% of all days lost in 2015. Figure 11a shows that, for 2015 the private sector accounted for 47% of working days lost, the highest proportion since 1999. As shown at Figure 11b, there was an equal split of stoppages between the public and private sectors in 2015.

Figure 11a: Working days lost (WDL) by public and private split, UK, 2006 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Figure 11b: Stoppages by public and private split, UK, 2006 to 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

Table 9: Number of working days lost (WDL) and stoppages, public and private split, UK, 2006 to 2015

Year	Working days lost (thousands)		Stoppages ¹		Working days lost per 1000 employees ²	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
2006	656	98	87	71	108	4
2007	1,002	37	90	52	166	2
2008	711	48	75	69	117	2
2009	368	88	49	49	58	4
2010	313	52	47	45	50	2
2011	1,276	113	87	62	210	5
2012	198	51	62	69	34	2
2013	363	81	50	64	63	3
2014	716	72	68	87	132	3
2015	90	79	53	53	17	3

Source: Office for National Statistics

1. Stoppages in progress during year.

2. Based on the latest estimates of employee jobs from Workforce Jobs (ONS).

11. Trade union ballots

Annual trade union ballot data from 2002 to 2015 are presented in Tables 10 and 11. The number of ballots ¹ has fallen to 568 this year, this compares with 650 in 2014.

Table 10: Trade union ballots (strike action), UK, 2002 to 2015

Year	Total ballots	Ballots calling for 'strike action'	Ballots voting FOR strike action	Ballots voting AGAINST strike action	Split result
2002	806	738	613	113	12
2003	899	825	684	125	16
2004	952	901	746	142	13
2005	815	775	663	103	9
2006	1341	1290	1094	140	57
2007	767	713	637	64	12
2008	834	786	658	123	13
2009	579	561	458	93	10
2010	579	555	487	61	7
2011	994	964	903	51	9
2012	601	585	487	89	8
2013	494	469	417	48	4
2014	650	628	550	68	10
2015	568	558	503	50	5

Source: Electoral Reform Services

Notes:

1. As the majority of ballots include options for both 'strike action' and 'action short of strike action,' the total number of ballots does not equal the total of these options added together.
2. The number of ballots voting for and against strike action may not sum to the total number of ballots calling for strike action due to some votes being split.

Table 11: Trade union ballots (action short of a strike), UK, 2002 to 2015

Year	Total ballots	Ballots calling for 'action short of a strike'	Ballots voting FOR action short of a strike	Ballots voting AGAINST action short of strike	Split result
2002	806	537	519	16	2
2003	899	638	601	31	6
2004	952	759	709	41	9
2005	815	604	562	35	7
2006	1341	577	541	27	9
2007	767	583	555	19	9
2008	834	598	559	30	9
2009	579	435	407	21	7
2010	579	411	399	5	7
2011	994	388	375	8	5
2012	601	366	349	15	2
2013	494	318	279	33	6
2014	650	368	329	36	3
2015	568	417	404	12	1

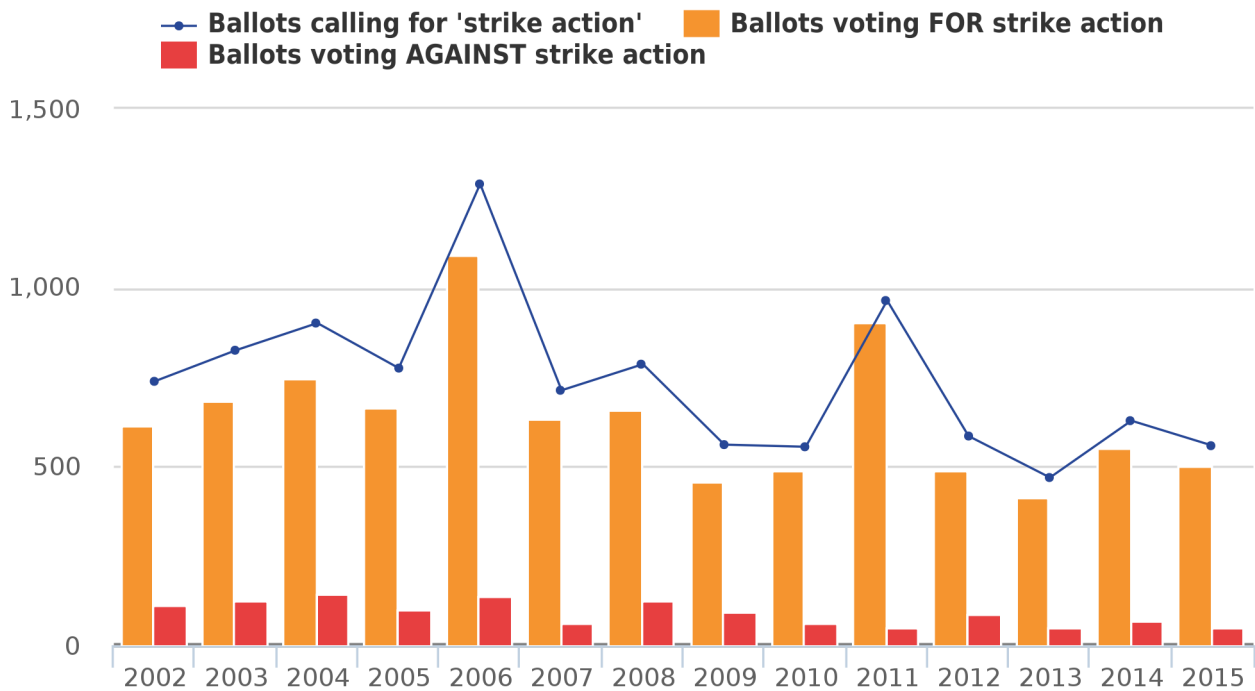
Source: Electoral Reform Services

Notes:

1. As the majority of ballots include options for both 'strike action' and 'action short of strike action,' the total number of ballots does not equal the total of these options added together.
2. The number of ballots voting for and against action short of a strike may not sum to the total number of ballots calling for action short of a strike due to some votes being split.

The number of ballots resulting in a vote for strike action in 2015 shows a decrease on the previous year from 550 to 503. The time series for trade union ballots is illustrated in Figure 12. This chart shows that a high percentage of ballots calling for strike action result in 'yes' votes, with 90% in 2015 and an average of 87% over the past ten years.

Figure 12: Ballots resulting in strike action, UK, 2002 to 2015



Source: Electoral Reform Services

12. Quality and methodology

The [Labour Disputes](#) Quality and Methodology Information document contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data
- the quality of the output: including the accuracy of the data, how it compares with related data
- uses and users
- how the output was created

13. Background notes

1. [National Statistics](#) are produced to high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice](#) for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet your needs. They are produced free from any political interference.
2. Note that data produced in this article may differ to articles from previous years due to revised figures.

14. Technical note

Coverage

Information regarding labour disputes within the UK is collected by ONS from a variety of sources. The information is collected directly from the employer or trade union involved after ONS have identified disputes from press reports. ONS publishes figures on labour disputes each month. They appear in the Labour Market Statistical Bulletin.

Definition of stoppages

The statistics cover stoppages of work in progress in the UK during a year caused by labour disputes between employers and workers, or between workers and other workers, connected with terms and conditions of employment. A distinction can be drawn between stoppages that started in the current year and those that started in earlier years.

A stoppage in progress is defined as a dispute that has continued from a previously recorded dispute by the same organisation and for the same cause. Prior to 2015 a dispute was counted as a new stoppage if there was a gap of more than one month between instances of industrial action. From 2015 disputes with a gap of more than one month between instances of industrial action are counted as a single stoppage.

The statistics exclude disputes that do not result in a stoppage of work, for example work-to-rules and go-slows; this is because their effects are not quantifiable to any degree of certainty. Stoppages involving fewer than 10 workers or lasting less than one day are also excluded unless the total number of working days lost in the dispute is 100 or more.

Stoppages over issues not directly linked to terms and conditions between workers and employers are omitted, although in most years this is not significant. For example, in 1986 one stoppage was considered to be political (a protest in the coal industry against the visit of an MP) and it was excluded from the figures. The total working days lost amounted to less than 1,000. The next known dispute to be excluded was in 1991. This involved a boycott by self-employed market traders who, after increased rent and changes to the market rules, kept their stalls closed for about 20 weeks.

The statistics include 'lock-outs', i.e. where an employer prevents their employees from working by refusing entry to the place of work, and 'unlawful', i.e. unlawfully organised strikes. However, no distinction is made between a 'strike' and a 'lock-out' or between 'lawful' and 'unlawful' stoppages. This is principally because of the practical difficulty in deciding in which category a particular stoppage falls. It was for similar reasons that a distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' disputes was no longer made after 1981.

Working days lost

Working days lost are defined as the number of days not worked by people as a result of their involvement in a dispute at their place of work. In measuring the number of working days lost, account is taken only of the time lost in the basic working week. Overtime work is excluded, as is weekend working where it is not a regular practice. Where an establishment is open every day, and runs two or more shifts, the statistics will record the number of working days lost for each shift. In recording the number of days lost, allowance is made for public and known annual holidays, such as factory fortnights, occurring within the strike's duration. No allowance is made for absence from work for such reasons as sickness and unauthorised leave.

Where strikes last less than the basic working day, the hours lost are converted to full-day equivalents. Similarly, days lost by part-time workers are converted to full-day equivalents. The number of working days lost in a stoppage reflects the actual number of workers involved at each point in the stoppage. This is generally less than the total derived by multiplying the duration of the stoppage by the total number of workers involved at any time during the stoppage, because some workers would not have been involved throughout.

In disputes where employers dismiss their employees and subsequently reinstate them, the working days lost figure includes those days lost by workers during the period of dismissal.

For disputes where employers dismiss their employees and replace them with another workforce the statistics cannot assume that working days lost by the sacked workers continue indefinitely. In such cases the statistics measure the number of days lost in terms of the size of the replacement workforce. For example, where an employer initially recruits 100 workers and wishes to build up to 300, the number of working days lost on day one will be 200 and will then progressively reduce on subsequent days, eventually to zero when the new workforce reaches the target of 300.

Figures given for working days lost per 1,000 employees use employee jobs for each year taken from ONS's most recent estimate of Workforce Jobs.

Number of stoppages

There are difficulties in ensuring complete recording of stoppages, in particular for short disputes lasting only a day or so, or involving only a few workers. Because of this recording difficulty and the cut-off applied, the number of working days lost is considered to be a better indicator of the impact of labour disputes than the number of recorded stoppages.

Workers involved

We aim to record the number of workers that are involved at any time in the stoppage. For example, consider a 3 day strike where there were 200 workers involved on the first day; 300 on the second day, of whom 100 were involved for the first time; and 200 on the third day, of whom 50 were involved for the first time. The total number of workers involved in the dispute is 350 - the sum of all those involved on the first day, and those joining for the first time on subsequent days. However, the number of workers taking strike action for the first time during a dispute cannot always be easily ascertained. In such cases the statistics record the highest number involved at any one time (300 in the above example). Take another example, where there are 200 workers involved in a stoppage on each of days one, two and three. It may be necessary to assume that there were a total of 200 workers involved, although it is possible, but unlikely, that as many as 600 workers could have been involved. For this reason, the statistics may under-estimate the number of workers involved in a dispute. However, the estimate of the number of working days lost is unaffected by this consideration.

Ballot data

Although the Electoral Reform Service (ERS) conduct the majority of industrial action ballots for Trade Unions in the UK, other organisations also conduct ballots. In addition to this, ballots with less than 50 union members do not have to appoint a scrutineer.