



# U.S. Circuit and District Court Judges: Profile of Select Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of U.S. circuit and district court judges are of ongoing interest to Congress. Such interest is demonstrated especially at the time circuit and district court nominations are considered by the Senate. For example, floor statements by Senators in support of circuit or district court nominees frequently emphasize the particular demographic characteristics of nominees that would enhance the diversity of the federal judiciary.

The statistics provided below are based upon selected demographic characteristics of individuals serving, as of March 1, 2015, as active circuit or district court judges. Consequently, the statistics reported do not include judges who took senior status, retired, or resigned prior to that date. Additionally, the statistics presented below do not include those individuals whose nominations were unsuccessful or whose nominations are currently pending in the Senate.

U.S. circuit courts take appeals from federal district court decisions and are also empowered to review the decisions of many administrative agencies. Altogether, 179 circuit court judgeships are currently authorized by law. U.S. district courts are the federal trial courts of general jurisdiction. Altogether, 673 U.S. district court judgeships are currently authorized.

For any U.S. circuit court identified in the text below, states falling within that court’s jurisdiction are identified in parentheses. Similarly, for any U.S. district court identified below, the most populous city in the district with a federal courthouse is identified in parentheses.

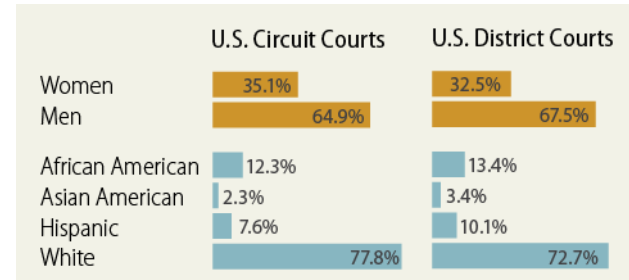
## Sex

As shown by **Figure 1**, women comprise 35.1% of active U.S. circuit court judges and 32.5% of district court judges (while men comprise 64.9% and 67.5% of circuit and district court judges, respectively).

The percentage of circuit court judges who are women varies across judicial circuits. For example, 7 (46.7%) of 15 judges for the Sixth Circuit (Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee) are women, while 2 (18.2%) of 11 judges for the Eighth Circuit (Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota) are women.

Similarly, the percentage of active U.S. district court judges who are women varies across judicial districts. As of March 1, 2015, for example, four (57.1%) of seven judges currently serving on the court for the Northern District of Alabama (Birmingham) are women, while one (12.5%) of eight judges for the Eastern District of Texas (Plano) is a woman.

**Figure 1. Percentage of U.S. Circuit and District Court Judges by Select Demographic Characteristics**  
(As of March 1, 2015)



**Source:** Congressional Research Service

**Notes:** While the Hispanic category is treated as a non-white category, individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. The Asian American category includes any judges of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ancestry. This figure does not include a category for judges of American Indian or Alaska Native ancestry. As of this writing, there is one district court judge of American Indian ancestry.

## Race

**Figure 1** also reports the percentage of active U.S. circuit and district court judges who are African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and white.

At present, whites account for 77.8% of all circuit court judges and 72.7% of district court judges. African American judges comprise 12.3% of circuit court judges and 13.4% of district court judges. For Hispanic judges, the corresponding percentages are 7.6% (circuit) and 10.1% (district), while for Asian Americans the corresponding percentages are 2.3% (circuit) and 3.4% (district).

For each racial minority group, there is a greater percentage of individuals belonging to that group serving as district court judges than as circuit court judges.

The percentage of active circuit court judges who are racial minorities varies across judicial circuits. At present, 4 (36.4%) of 11 judges for the D.C. Circuit are racial minorities, while 1 (11.1%) of 9 judges for the Seventh Circuit (Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin) belongs to a racial minority group.

Similarly, the percentage of active U.S. district court judges who are racial minorities varies across judicial districts. For example, 6 (46.2%) of 13 judges for the Eastern District of New York (Brooklyn) are racial minorities. Some districts, including the Middle and Southern Districts of Alabama (Montgomery and Mobile, respectively), currently have no

active district court judges who are racial minorities appointed to them.

### Sex and Race, Combined

**Table 1** provides the percentage of U.S. circuit and district court judges broken down by sex and race.

Of circuit court judges, 49.1% are white men, followed by white women (28.7%), African American men (8.2%), Hispanic men (5.8%), African American women (4.1%), Asian American men and Hispanic women (both at 1.8%), and Asian American women (0.6%).

**Table 1. Percentage of U.S. Circuit and District Court Judges by Sex and Race**  
(As of March 1, 2015)

Demographic Group	U.S. Circuit Court Judges	U.S. District Court Judges
African American Men	8.2%	7.8%
African American Women	4.1%	5.6%
Asian American Men	1.8%	2.0%
Asian American Women	0.6%	1.6%
Hispanic Men	5.8%	6.6%
Hispanic Women	1.8%	3.6%
White Men	49.1%	50.9%
White Women	28.7%	21.8%

**Source:** Congressional Research Service

**Note:** This table does not include a category for judges of American Indian or Alaska Native ancestry. As of this writing, there is one female district court judge of American Indian ancestry.

Of U.S. district court judges, 50.9% are white men, followed by white women (21.8%), African American men (7.8%), Hispanic men (6.6%), African American women (5.6%), Hispanic women (3.6%), Asian American men (2.0%), and Asian American women (1.6%).

**Table 1** also shows that, within each racial group, there are a greater percentage of male judges than female judges currently serving as either circuit or district court judges.

### Sexual Orientation

At present, there is one openly gay U.S. circuit court judge. He serves on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit (a court with national jurisdiction over certain types of cases that is located in Washington, D.C.).

There are also 10 openly gay men and lesbians currently serving as district court judges. These judges are currently

serving on courts for the Central District of California (Los Angeles), Southern District of Florida (Miami), Southern District of Illinois (East St. Louis), Eastern District of Michigan (Detroit), Eastern District of New York (Brooklyn), Southern District of New York (Manhattan), District of Oregon (Portland), Eastern District of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), and Western District of Texas (San Antonio).

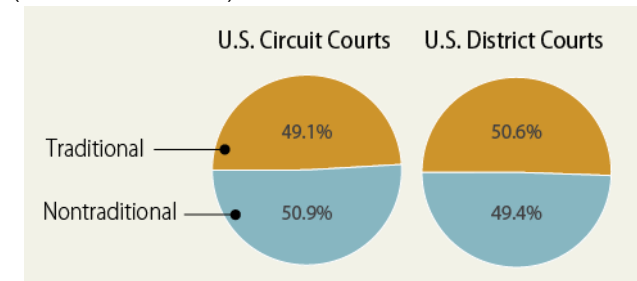
### Nontraditional Judges

As defined by CRS, “nontraditional” judges are those judges belonging to certain demographic groups from which, historically, individuals were not often, if at all, appointed to federal judgeships. For example, of all women who have ever served as a U.S. circuit court judge, 97.7% were appointed after 1976.

For the purposes of this analysis, nontraditional judges include (1) women, of any race; (2) non-white men; and (3) openly gay or lesbian judges, of any race. **Figure 2** shows, after combining these three groups of judges, the overall percentages of nontraditional U.S. circuit and district court judges actively serving as of March 1, 2015.

At present, nontraditional judges now comprise a majority of active U.S. circuit court judges (50.9%). Of U.S. district court judges, nontraditional judges comprise 49.4% of all judges currently serving.

**Figure 2. Percentage of Nontraditional U.S. Circuit and District Court Judges**  
(As of March 1, 2015)



**Source:** Congressional Research Service

**Note:** See text for list of demographic groups included in “nontraditional” category. “Traditional” judges are any white men not belonging to other demographic groups included in the nontraditional category.

The relatively recent increase in the percentage of nontraditional judges likely reflects a number of factors, including underlying changes in the demographic characteristics of those admitted to practice law, as well as efforts by recent Presidents and the Senate to diversify the federal judiciary.

**Barry J. McMillion**, Analyst in American National Government

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.