

Why Courts Matter: Diversity

A diverse federal bench improves the quality of justice and instills confidence that judges understand the real-world implications of their decisions. Under the Obama administration, the federal judiciary has become significantly more diverse than in prior years. President Obama has nominated more women and minorities for federal judgeships than any previous president.

Despite these significant gains, minority groups – including women, LGBT individuals, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and Native Americans – continue to be under represented overall in the federal judiciary as of March 2013.

Out of a total of 874 active judgeships:

- Women: 239 (30 percent)
- African American: 95 (12 percent)
- Asian American: 18 (2 percent)
- Latino: 70 (9 percent)
- Native American: None
- Openly gay: 4 (less than 1 percent)

President Obama's Diverse Judicial Nominees

- **Women:** Nearly 42 percent of President Obama's confirmed nominees have been women. President Obama has increased the number of women on the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 9th, 11th and Federal Circuits, as well as the U.S. District Courts.
- **African American:** 17 percent of President Obama's confirmed nominees have been African American.
- **Asian American:** President Obama has more than doubled the number of Asian Americans on the federal bench, including nominating the first women judges of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian and Vietnamese descent.
- **Latino:** 12 percent of President Obama's confirmed nominees have been Latinos
- **Native American:** In 2012, Senate Republicans blocked Obama's nomination of Arvo Mikkanen, a Native American nominated to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma. He would have been the only active Native American federal judge.
- **LGBT:** Obama has nominated nine openly gay candidates to the federal bench, four of which have been confirmed.

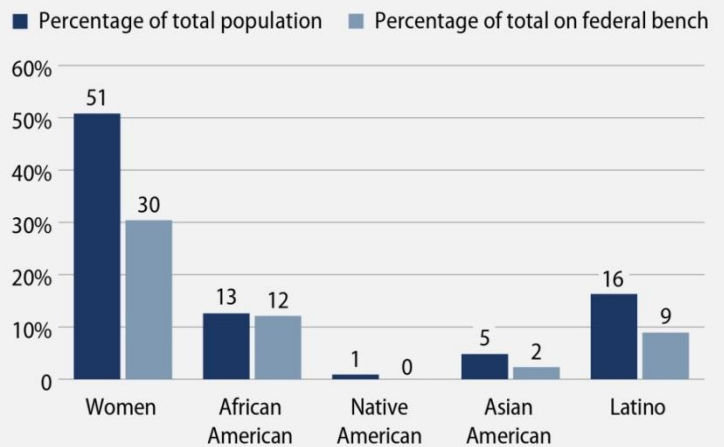
President Obama's Diversity Firsts

- First Latina to serve on the United States Supreme Court (Justice Sonia Sotomayor)
- First female Asian American Circuit Court judge (Jacqueline Nguyen on the 9th Circuit)
- First Latino Circuit Court judges in three circuits (Albert Diaz on the 4th Circuit, Adalberto Jose Jordan on the 11th Circuit and Jimmie V. Reyna on the Federal Circuit)
- First openly gay man on a federal court (J. Paul Oetken)
- First openly gay Asian American on the federal bench (Pamela Chen)

Legal Progress is the legal policy and communications program at the Center for American Progress. A key mission of Legal Progress is to educate the public about the impact of the courts on issues they care most about.

FIGURE 1

Underrepresentation of minorities on the bench

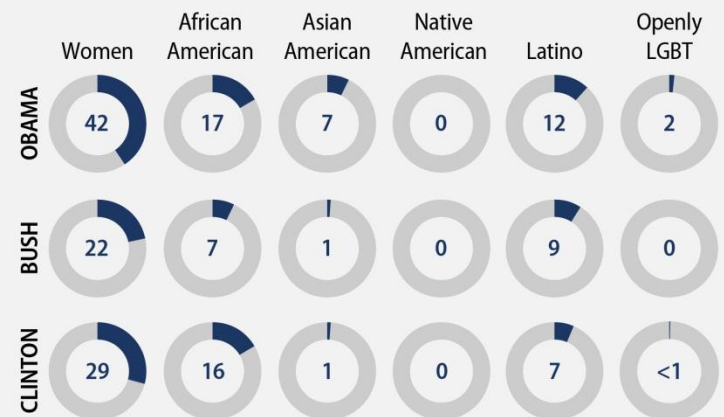


Sources: "Diversity on the Bench," available at http://www.fjc.gov/history/home.nsf/page/judges_diversity.html; U.S. Census.

FIGURE 2

Diversity: A presidential comparison

Percentage of judicial confirmations



Source: "Judicial Selection Snapshot," available at <http://www.afj.org/judicial-selection/judicial-selection-snapshot.pdf>.