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Demographics

Fast Facts:

- 8.4% – Increase in the number of lawyers from 2011 to 2021
- 1970s – Decade when the number of lawyers grew fastest, by 76%

Growth of the Legal Profession

There are more than 1.3 million lawyers in the United States. To be more precise, there were 1,327,910 active lawyers as of Jan. 1, 2021, according to the ABA National Lawyer Population Survey, a tally of lawyers in every U.S. state and territory.

Over the past year, from 2020 to 2021, the number of active lawyers counted by the survey fell slightly, by one-tenth of one percent. The drop was almost entirely because of a change in how Vermont counts its lawyers. Previously, Vermont did not distinguish between resident and non-resident lawyers. For 2021, Vermont only tracked resident lawyers. As a result, the Vermont count dropped by 1,414 lawyers – a huge drop of 39% for such a small state. That accounted for more than the total decline in the number of lawyers nationally of 826.

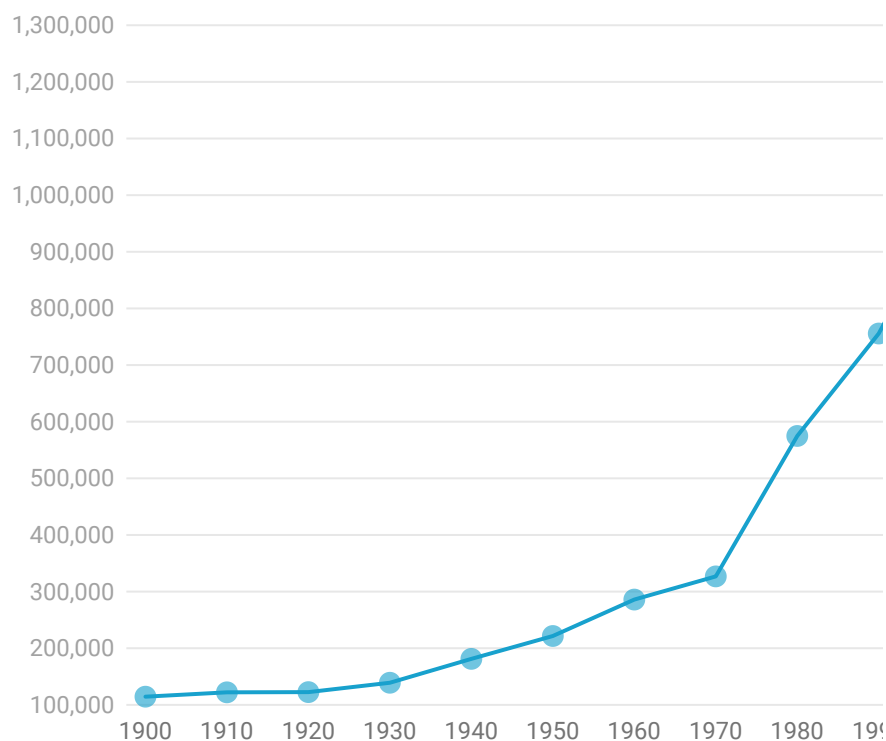
Over the past decade, the number of lawyers nationwide has grown by more than 100,000 – an increase of 8.4% from 2011 to 2021.

In the 21st century, the growth of the legal profession has slowed. In the previous century, from 1900 to 2000, the number of lawyers rose 793% – from 114,460 to just over 1 million, an average growth of nearly 8% a year. By contrast, the number of lawyers nationwide has grown roughly 1.5% a year since 2000 – from 1,022,462 in 2001 to 1,327,866 in 2021, an increase of nearly 30%.

The largest increase in lawyers occurred in the 1970s, a decade when the number of lawyers jumped 76% – from 326,000 in 1970 to 574,000 in 1980.

For much of the 20th century, the industry's growth was much slower: It took 50 years for the number of lawyers to nearly double – from 114,000 in 1900 to 221,000 in 1950. It took less than 30 years for that number to double again – from 221,000 in 1950 to 464,000 in 1978.

Lawyer Growth: 1900 - 2021



Source: ABA National Lawyer Population Survey • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Fast Fact:

- Where will you find the most lawyers per capita? The District of Columbia has just under 700,000 residents – less than Alaska – but it ranks 13th for number of resident lawyers (28,011). There is one resident lawyer in the district for every 25 residents.

Lawyers by State

The states with the fastest-growing lawyer populations over the last decade were not necessarily the largest states.

The number of lawyers in Utah grew 31% since 2011. That's the fastest growth in the nation, even though Utah is only the 30th-largest state by population. North Dakota is also one of the smallest states by population, but it, too, had one of the largest rates of growth in lawyers since 2011: 17%.

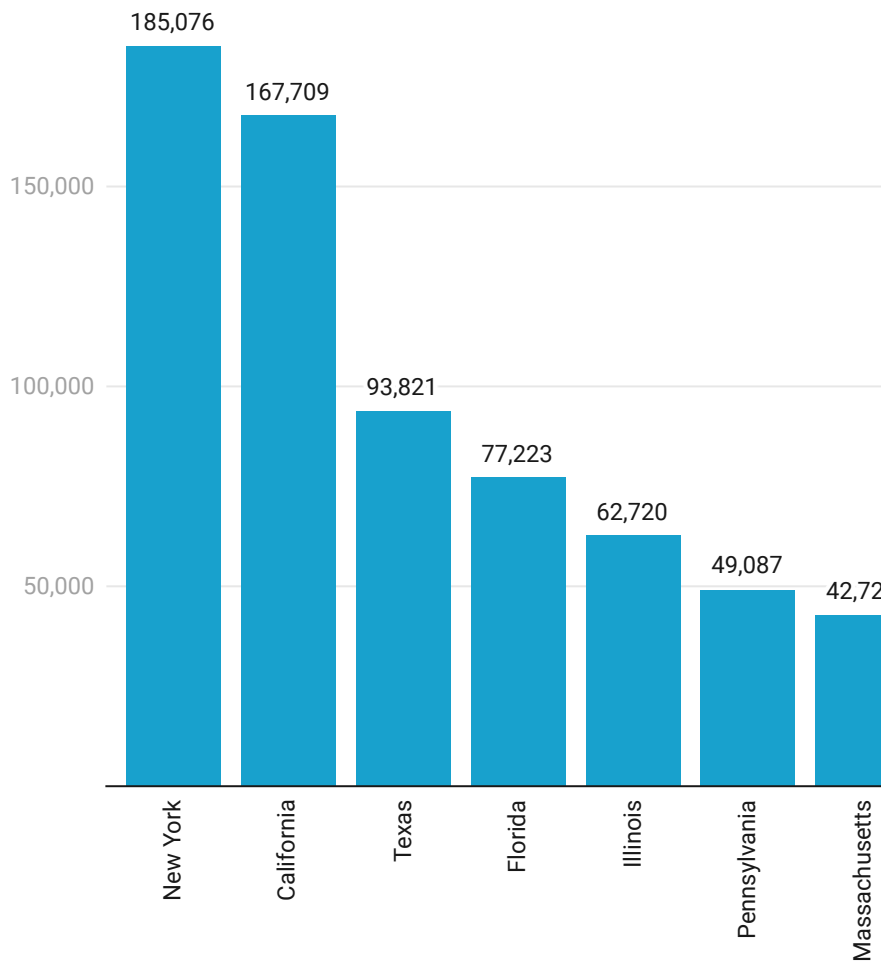
However, some large states did record large increases in the number of lawyers. Florida (19%) was the third fastest-growing state in the nation for lawyers since 2011. Texas (19%) and North Carolina (17%) were also among the 10 largest states by population and among the top 10 states for lawyer growth in the past decade.

Two states – Maryland and Louisiana – reported unusually large lawyer growth in the past decade because they changed how they reported lawyer residents, not necessarily because they experienced large growth.

California, which has the largest population in the nation, ranked second in the number of lawyers (167,709) behind New York State (185,076), even though New York has half the population of California.

Six states lost lawyers over the past decade: Alaska (down 4.5%), Vermont (down 2.9%), Kansas (down 2.4%), New Jersey (down 1.5%), Rhode Island (down 1.0%) and Mississippi (down 0.6%).

States with Most Lawyers: 2021



Source: ABA National Lawyer Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau • [Get the data](#) •

[View all U.S. States...](#)

Fast Fact:

- Most state bars and state licensing agencies track gender in the profession, but not all do. In 2021, 44 states reported the number of male and female lawyers – up from 42 states in 2011.

Lawyers by Gender

Over the past decade, the percentage of female lawyers has increased slowly. It stood at 33% in 2011 and grew to 37% in 2021. In other words, male attorneys still greatly outnumber female attorneys – though that is gradually changing as more women, and fewer men, are enrolling in law school every year.

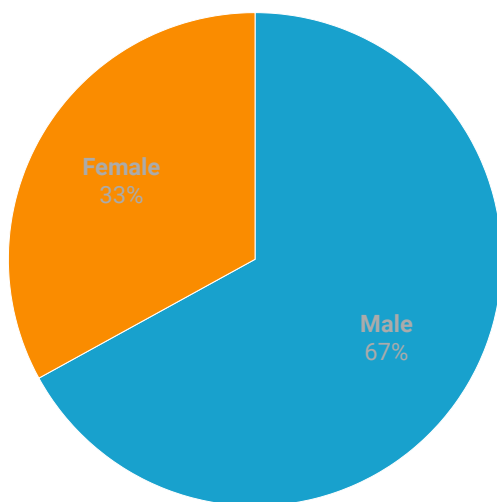
The gender numbers have changed drastically over the past half-century. From 1950 to 1970, only 3% of all lawyers were women. The percentage has edged up gradually since then – 8% in 1980, 20% in 1991, 27% in 2000, 37% in 2021.

The first female lawyer in the United States was Margaret Brent, in 1648 in Maryland. The ABA created the Margaret Brent Award in 1991 to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of female lawyers.

The American Bar Association admitted the first two women as members in 1918 – Mary Florence Lathrop of Denver and Mary Grossman of Cleveland. The first female president of the American Bar Association was Roberta Cooper Ramo of New Mexico in 1995. There have been 10 female ABA presidents, including five of the last six, as of 2021.

Lawyer Gender: 2011

Male Female

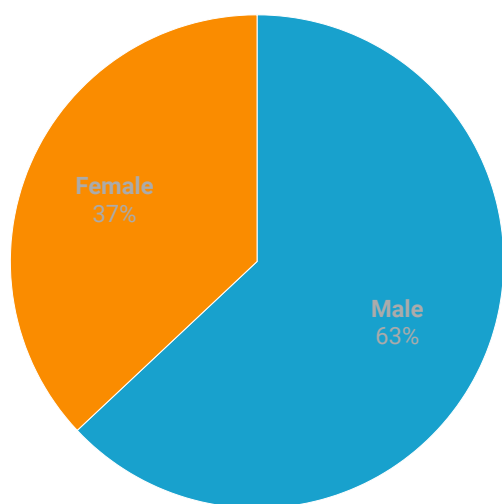


Source: ABA National Lawyer Population Survey • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Lawyer Gender: 2021

Male

Female



Source: ABA National Lawyer Population Survey • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Fast Fact:

- Only half of all state bars and state licensing agencies track race and ethnicity in the profession. In 2021, 25 states reported the race and ethnicity of lawyers – up from 17 states in 2011.

Lawyers by Race and Ethnicity

The legal profession has been very slow to diversify by race and ethnicity over the past decade, according to the ABA National Lawyer Population Survey. Ten years ago, in 2011, lawyers of color were 11.7% of the profession. A decade later, in 2021, they represented 14.6% of the profession – an increase of almost three percentage points.

White men and women are still overrepresented in the legal profession compared with their presence in the overall U.S. population. In 2021, 85% of all lawyers were non-Hispanic whites, a decline from 88% a decade ago. By comparison, 60% of all U.S. residents were non-Hispanic whites in 2019.

Nearly all people of color are underrepresented in the legal profession compared with their presence in the U.S. population. For example, 4.7% of all lawyers were Black in 2021 – nearly unchanged from 4.8% in 2011. The U.S. population is 13.4% Black.

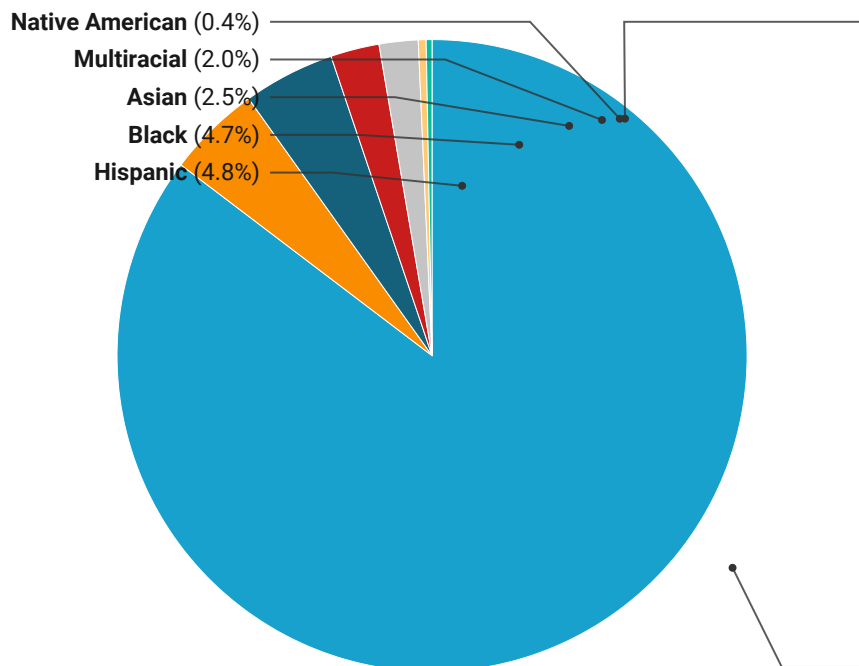
Similarly, 4.8% of all lawyers were Hispanic in 2021– up nearly one percentage point from 3.9% a decade earlier. The U.S. population is 18.5% Hispanic.

Just 2.5% of all lawyers were Asian in 2021 – up slightly from 1.7% 10 years earlier. The U.S. population is 5.9% Asian.

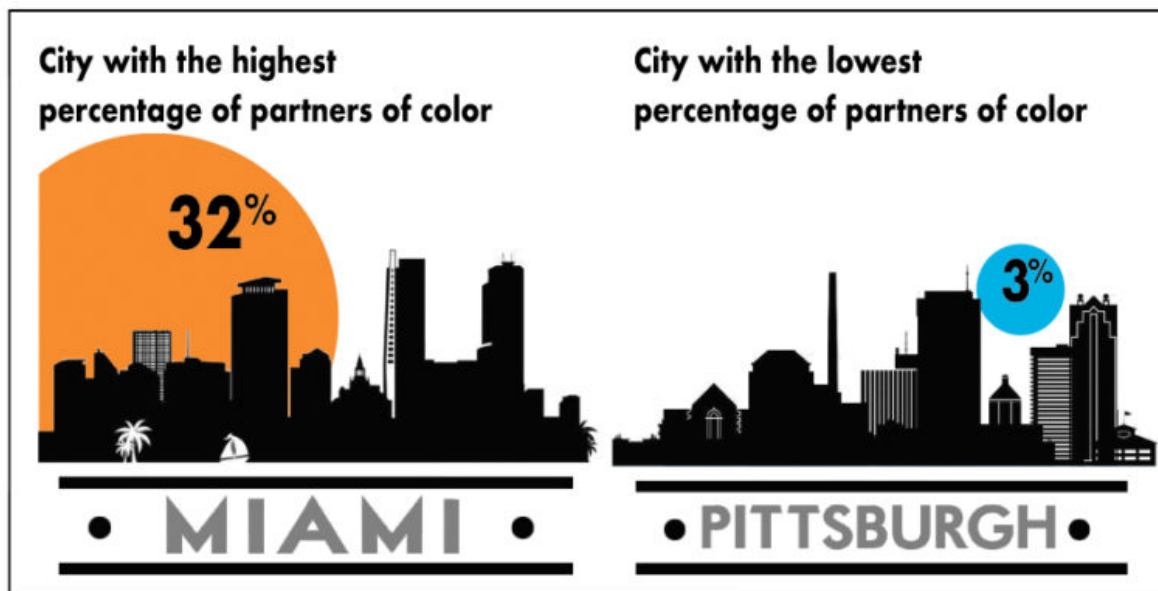
Native Americans are the smallest racial or ethnic group among U.S. lawyers. Roughly one-half of 1% of all lawyers (0.4%) are Native American – down from 1.0% a decade ago. The U.S. population is 1.3% Native American.

The number of mixed-race lawyers is slowly rising. The National Lawyer Population Survey began tracking the number in 2014, when it was close to zero. In 2021, it stood at 2.0% of the profession.

Lawyers by Race and Ethnicity: 2021



Diversity in U.S. Law Firms



For the first time ever, more than 10% of all law firm partners are lawyers of color, according to the 2020 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms from the National Association for Law Placement.

Progress in law firm diversity is still proceeding slowly. Viewed year by year, the change is almost imperceptible. But viewed over the span of a decade, the change is easier to see.

More than a decade ago, in 2009, 6% of law firm partners were Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American or mixed race. In 2020, 10.2% of all partners were lawyers of color.

The numbers are much higher for law firm associates. In 2009, nearly 20% of all associates were lawyers of color. In 2020, the number was 26%.

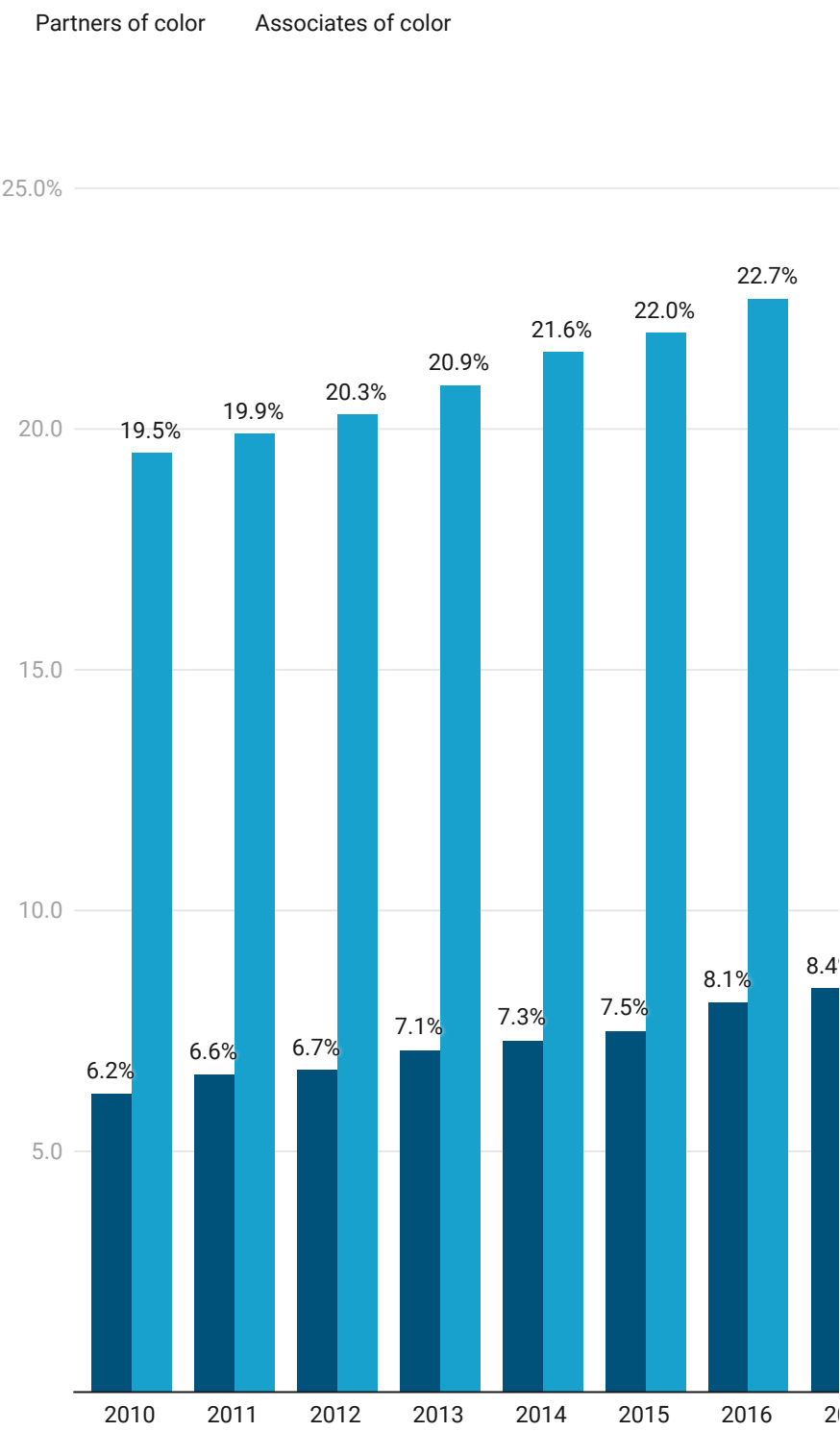
But law firm diversity varies dramatically across the country. At one extreme, 32% of all law firm partners in Miami are lawyers of color – the largest percentage in the country. At the other extreme, less than 3% of partners in Pittsburgh (2.88%) are lawyers of color – the lowest percentage in the country.

Law firm diversity is particularly strong in California. Among the top 10 cities and metro areas in the country for law firm diversity, half are in California: San Diego, Silicon Valley, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Orange County. Two more are in Texas: Houston and Austin.

On the flip side, seven of the bottom 10 areas for law firm diversity are in the Midwest: Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Cincinnati, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis and Cleveland.

City size appears to have no correlation to law firm diversity. For example, while New York City, Los Angeles, Houston and San Diego are among the 10 largest U.S. cities by population and by diversity of law firms, Philadelphia – the nation's sixth-largest city – fares poorly for law firm diversity. Only 5% of all law firm partners in Philadelphia are lawyers of color.

Partners and Associates of Color: 2010 - 2020



Source: Source: National Association for Law Placement 2020 Report on Diversity in U.S.

Fast Fact:

- Law students are more likely to be openly LGBT than law firm lawyers: 7.7% of law firm summer associates describe themselves as LGBT – more than double the percentage of all law firm lawyers who describe themselves as LGBT (3.3%).

LGBT Lawyers

The number of openly lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) lawyers at American law firms continues to grow slowly, according to an annual survey by the National Association for Law Placement.

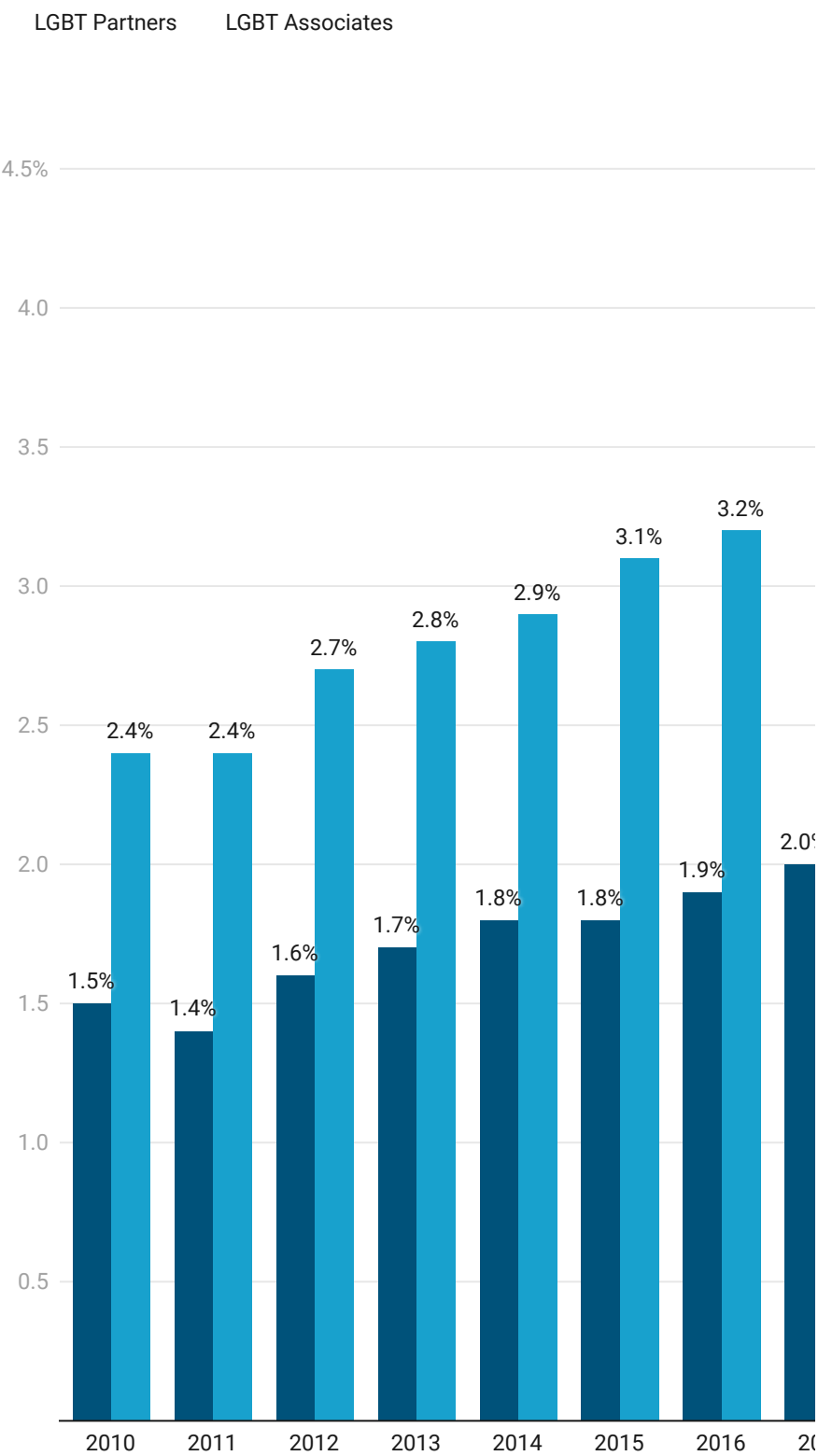
The 2020 survey found 3,187 LGBT lawyers at 837 law offices across the country. That represents 3.3% of the 96,202 lawyers at those firms. Ten years earlier, in 2010, the same survey found 2,137 LGBT lawyers at American law firms, or 1.9% of all lawyers.

The same trend is evident among law firm associates. In 2010, 2.4% of all associates reported they were LGBT. In 2020, the figure was 4.7%.

The percentage of law firm summer associates who report they are LGBT is substantially higher. In 2020, 7.7% of all summer associates said they were LGBT, according to the survey.

No reliable statistics are available on the total number of LGBT lawyers in all parts of the legal profession.

LGBT Partners and Associates: 2010 - 2020



Source: [Source: National Association for Law Placement 2020 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Lawyers with Disabilities

The number of lawyers at American law firms who report having disabilities remains small – slightly less than 1% of all lawyers. Because the number is so small, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about trends, according to a 2020 survey by the National Association for Law Placement.

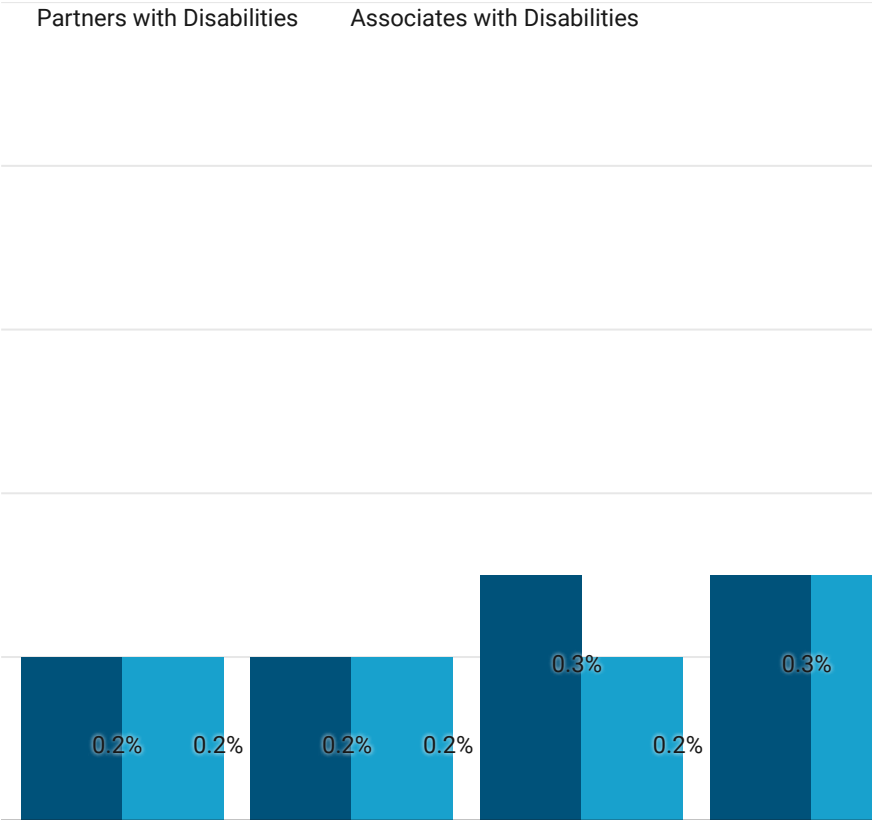
The survey found 602 lawyers who say they have disabilities at 658 law offices across the country. That represents 0.88% of the 68,136 lawyers in those offices.

The percentage of law firm partners who say they have disabilities is slightly lower – 0.69% – according to the 2020 survey. That is more than double the percentage for most of the past decade, when it fluctuated between 0.2% and 0.3%.

The same trend of more lawyers reporting that they have disabilities is true at the associate level. In 2020, just under 1% of all law firm associates reported having a disability. This is nearly double the percentage of associates who reported having a disability one year earlier (0.59%).

No reliable statistics exist on the total number of lawyers with disabilities in all parts of the legal profession.

Partners and Associates with Disabilities: 2010 - 2020



2020

Age

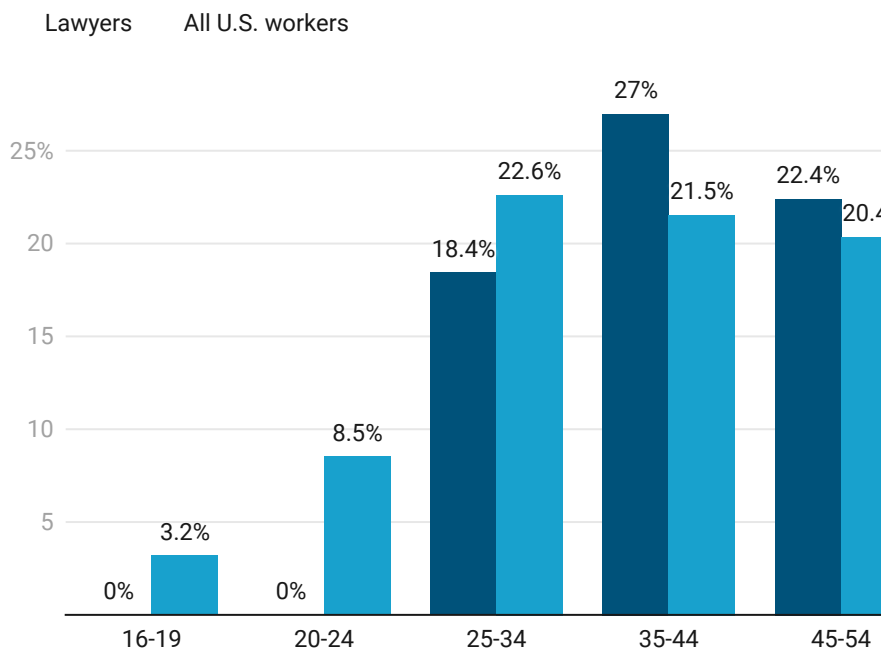
Lawyers are older than most American workers, on average, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median age for lawyers in 2020 was 47.1 years old, which means half are younger and half are older. By comparison, the median age of all U.S. workers was 42.5 – roughly 4½ years younger.

There are two reasons. First, very few lawyers are younger than 25, but roughly 12% of all American workers are younger than 25. Second, many lawyers work past age 65. Roughly 14% of all lawyers – that’s 1 in 7 – are 65 or older. Only 7% of all U.S. workers – about 1 in 14 – are 65 or older.

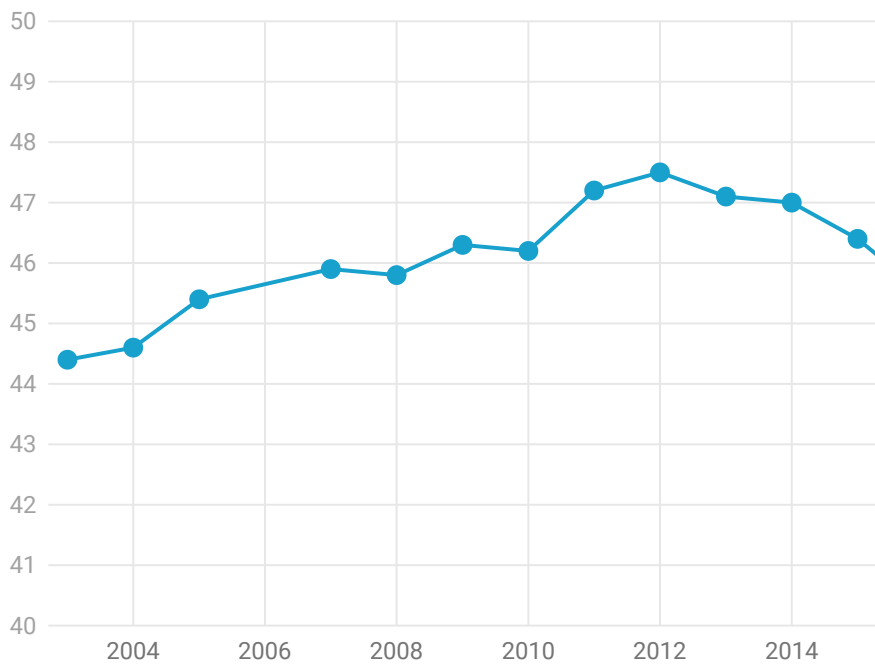
The age of a typical lawyer rose steadily from 2003 to 2012, then dropped for a few years, bottoming out in 2016, then rose again. Now it has plateaued around 47. That roughly coincides with the rise and fall and rise again of law school enrollment. As more young lawyers graduated from law school, the median age of all lawyers fell. When law school enrollment and graduations declined, the median age of all lawyers rose.

Going back in time even further, the typical lawyer was younger than today. In 1980, the median age of all U.S. lawyers was 39. That's nearly a decade younger the median age of 47 in 2020.

Age 2020: Lawyers Compared with All U.S. Workers



Median Age of Lawyers: 2003 - 2020



Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics • [Get the data](#) •
Created with Datawrapper

Fast Fact:

- The four metro areas with the lowest location quotients for lawyers? They are Johnson City, Tennessee (0.14); Dover, New Hampshire (0.17); Morristown, Tennessee and Cleveland, Tennessee (both 0.19).

Legal Demand in Metro Areas

The demand for lawyers is high in Washington, D.C., and New York City. But did you know legal demand is also high in Tallahassee, Florida.; Charleston, West Virginia.; and Santa Fe, New Mexico? Those are the five metropolitan areas with the highest demand for legal services in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The bureau measures employment and wages for more than 800 occupations in more than 380 metropolitan areas. One thing the bureau measures is demand for each occupation in each metro area. It's called the "location quotient" – a single number that shows demand for an occupation in one area compared to the nation as a whole.

For 2020 – as in all previous years – the Washington, D.C., area had the highest demand for lawyers of all metro areas. In fact, the location quotient for lawyers in the D.C. area was 3.08 – more than triple the national average. The demand for lawyers in the New York City area was 1.95 – nearly double the national average.

Surprisingly, most of the other top 10 metro areas for lawyer demand in 2019 were not huge cities, but many were state capitals. They were, in order: Tallahassee (2.68), Charleston (2.19), Santa Fe (2.03), Trenton, New Jersey (1.70); New Orleans, Louisiana (1.69); Montgomery, Alabama (1.65); Albany, New York (1.61) and Denver, Colorado (1.60).

Many other state capitals have high demand for lawyers. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Topeka, Kansas; Hartford, Connecticut, and Boston, Massachusetts, are all in the top 20 metro areas nationally for lawyer demand.

But not all state capitals have high location quotients for lawyers. Sixteen state capitals are actually below the national average for lawyer demand, including such large cities as Phoenix, Arizona; Nashville, Tennessee; Honolulu, Hawaii; and Indianapolis, Indiana.

Metropolitan Areas with HIGHEST Demand for Lawyers (Location Quotient)*

1. Washington, DC ... 3.08
2. Tallahassee, FL ... 2.68
3. Charleston, WV ... 2.19
4. Santa Fe, NM ... 2.03
5. New York, NY ... 1.95
6. Trenton, NJ ... 1.70
7. New Orleans, LA ... 1.69
8. Montgomery, AL ... 1.65
9. Albany, NY ... 1.61
10. Denver, CO ... 1.60

Metropolitan Areas with LOWEST Demand for Lawyers (Location Quotient)*

10. Visalia, CA ... 0.23
9. Ashburn, AL ... 0.21
8. Chambersburg, PA ... 0.21
7. Vallejo, CA ... 0.21
6. Elkhart, IN ... 0.20
5. Lebanon, PA ... 0.20
4. Cleveland, TN ... 0.19
3. Morristown, TN ... 0.19
2. Dove, NH ... 0.17
1. Johnson City, TN ... 0.14

** For example, if an occupation is 10% of all employment in one metro area compared with 2% in the nation, it has a location quotient of 5.0 for that metro area – demand is five times higher than the national average.*

Law Firm Leadership and Promotion

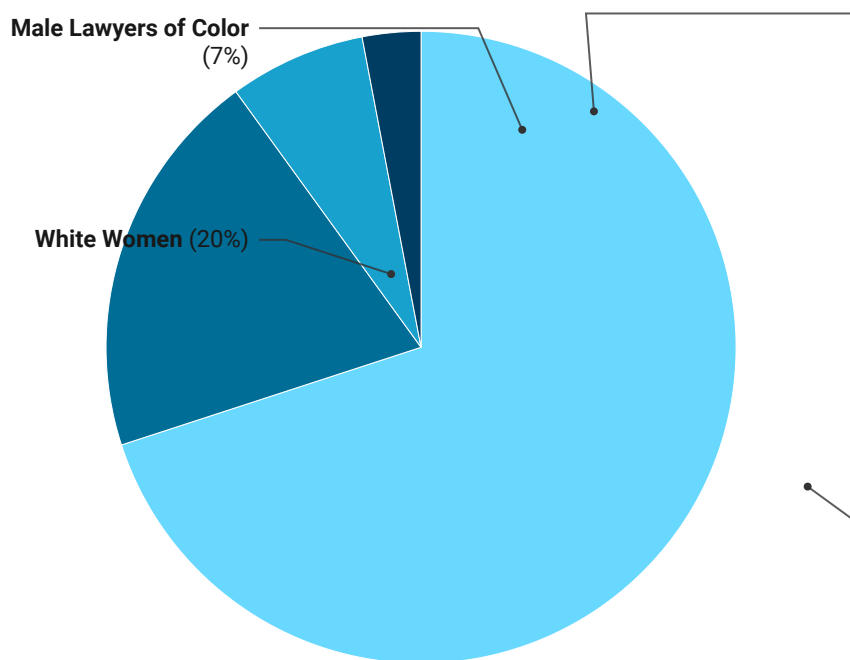
The leadership of most U.S. law firms is overwhelmingly white and male, according to the 2020 ABA Model Diversity Survey.

Approximately 70% of law firm leaders were white men in 2020, according to the report. In addition, 20% were white women, 7% were male lawyers of color and 3% were female lawyers of color. Small firms of 20 lawyers or fewer were more likely to have leaders who were men of color or women.

The survey defines law firm leadership as hiring partners, lead officers or members of firmwide compensation committees, partner review committees, highest governance committees, lead firmwide committees or groups, or lead local groups.

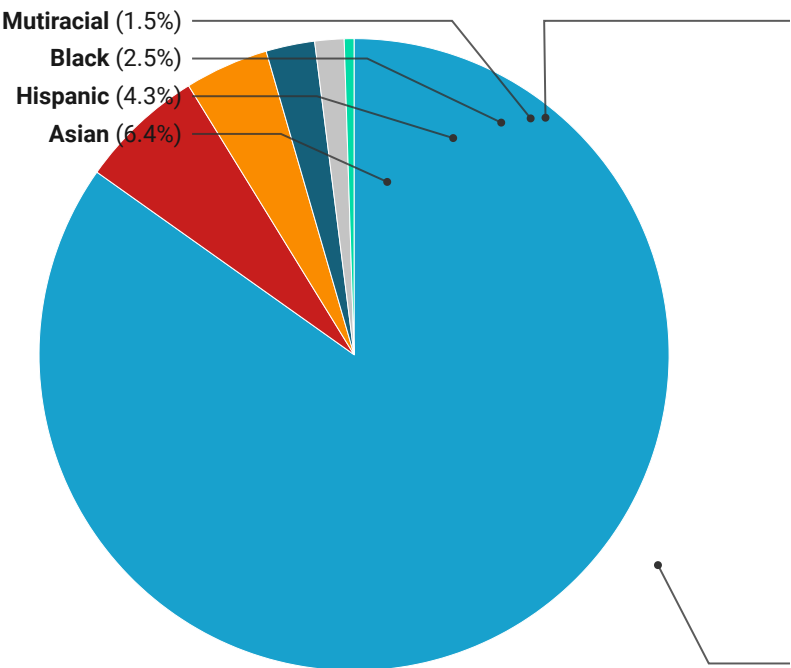
The survey also found that white associates are more likely to be promoted to equity partnerships than non-equity partnerships, whereas the opposite is true of associates of color. Similarly, male associates were more likely to be promoted to equity partnerships than non-equity partnerships, but the reverse is true of female associates.

Law Firm Leadership Positions

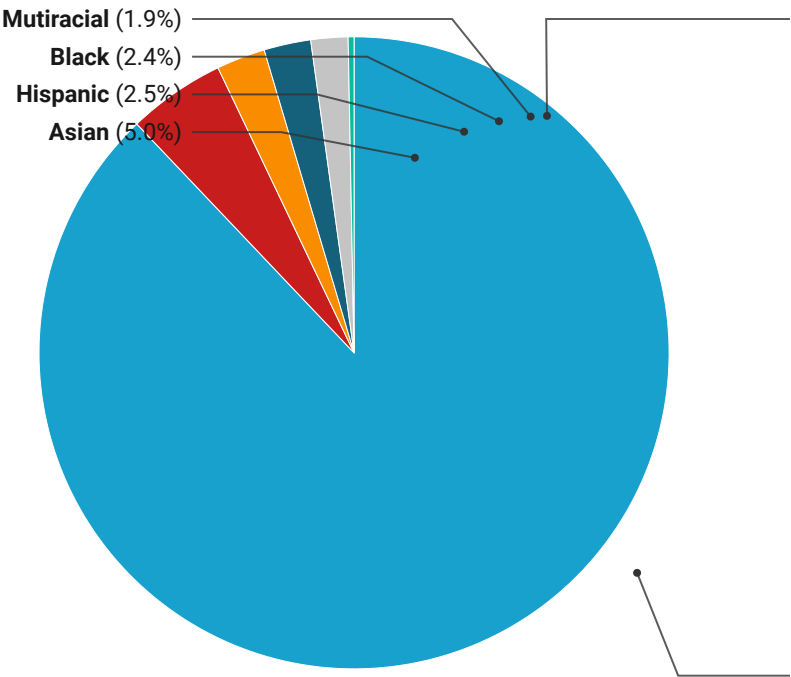


Source: 2020 ABA Model Diversity Survey Report • [Get the data](#) •

Promotions from Associate to Non-Equity Partner



Promotions from Associate to Equity Partner



Law Firm Attrition

Lawyers of color are twice as likely to leave U.S. law firms during a typical year as white lawyers, according to the 2020 ABA Model Diversity Survey. Also, female lawyers are slightly more likely to leave law firms than male lawyers.

The survey of 276 law firms in 2019 showed that achieving diversity in U.S. law firms is not simply a matter of attracting women and lawyers of color. Keeping them in the law firm is also important.

According to the survey, approximately 11% of white lawyers – roughly 1 in 9 – left law firms in 2019. That is much lower than the attrition of Black lawyers (21%), Hispanic lawyers (21%) and Asian lawyers (18%). At the same time, approximately 10% of male lawyers left their law firms, compared with 13% of female lawyers.

The difference in attrition rates is biggest among law firms that have 101 to 400 lawyers, according to the survey. Among those firms, the average attrition for white lawyers is 13%, but it is 33% for Hispanic lawyers, 31% for Black lawyers and 19% for Asian lawyers. The gender difference in attrition rates is not as great. For law firms of 101 to 400 lawyers, male lawyer attrition is 13% while female lawyer attrition is 17%.

The attrition rates in firms with more than 400 lawyers is not quite as significant, but the attrition rate for lawyers of color still exceeds the attrition rates of white males.

Overall Attrition Rate: 2019

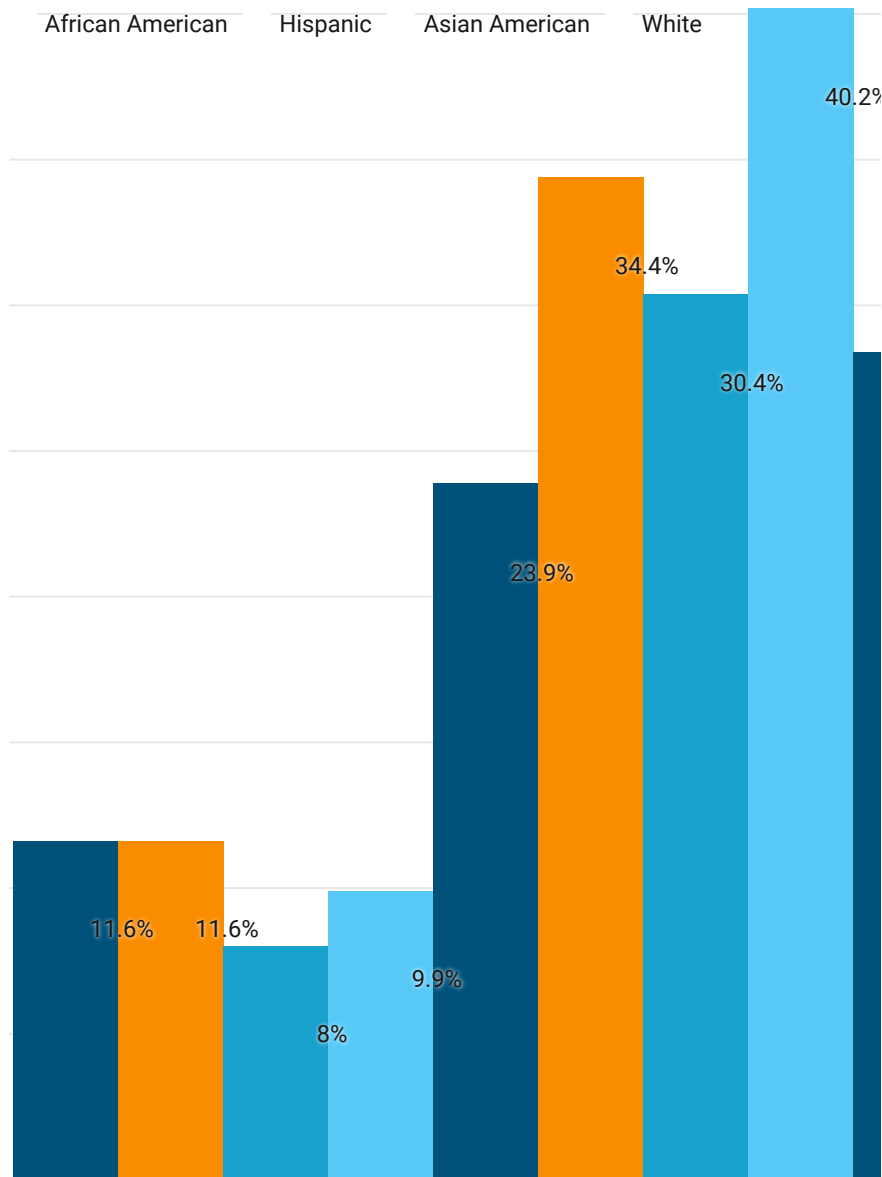
Where Lawyers Work by Race and Ethnicity

Lawyers of color are less likely to work at law firms and more likely to work for governments than lawyers who are white. That's one conclusion of a longitudinal study of lawyers admitted to the bar in 2000, conducted by the American Bar Foundation and the NALP Foundation for Law Career Research and Education.

The study, called "After the JD," followed lawyers from the Class of 2000 as they began their legal careers and then entered mid-career status. The study reported results in 2004, 2009 and 2014. It categorized results for lawyers who are white, Black, Asian American and Hispanic. A separate 2015 study conducted by the National Native American Bar Association did the same for Native American lawyers.

Where Lawyers Work by Race and Ethnicity

Among 2,862 surveyed lawyers admitted to the bar in 2000



Other professionals in the legal sector

Source: American Bar Foundation and NALP Foundation for Law Career Research

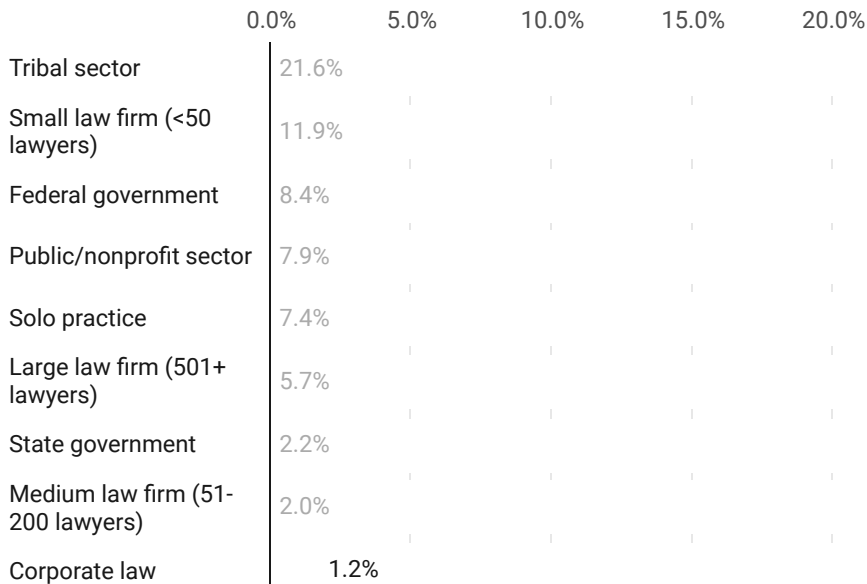
Some conclusions from the studies:*

- White lawyers are more likely to be found in law firms (40%) than lawyers who are Hispanic (34%), Asian American (30%), Black (24%) or Native American (20%).
- Black and Hispanic lawyers are more likely to work for government (28% and 25%, respectively) than lawyers who are Asian American (18%), white (17%) or Native American (11%).
- Asian American lawyers are more likely to be found as house counsels in businesses (21%) than lawyers who are Black (15%), Hispanic (11%), White (12%) or Native American (1%).

- A plurality of Native American lawyers (22%) work in the tribal sector, followed by law firms (20%), government (11%) and the nonprofit sector (8%).
- Black and Hispanic lawyers are most likely to be solo practitioners (12% of each), followed by lawyers who are white (10%), Asian American (8%) and Native American (7%).

* Statistics are for mid-career lawyers for White, Black, Hispanic and Asian American lawyers, and for all Native American lawyers.

Where Native American Lawyers Work



Source: National Native American Bar Association • [Get the data](#) • Created with

[Next Chapter: Legal Deserts](#)

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