

Number of Hispanic U.S. Circuit and District Court Judges: Overview and Analysis

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This CRS Insight provides historical and statistical information on the appointment of Hispanic U.S. circuit and district court judges. Such information addresses ongoing congressional interest in the demographic characteristics of lower federal court judges. [Note that individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.](#) [Previous CRS analysis](#) examines other racial groups and additional demographic characteristics, such as gender.

The first Hispanic American appointed as a lower federal court judge was [Reynaldo G. Garza](#), appointed by President Kennedy in 1961 to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas (Houston). Judge Garza was later appointed by President Carter in 1979 to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit (comprised at the time of Texas, Florida, and four other southern states), also becoming the nation's first Hispanic circuit court judge.

U.S. District Courts

Following the appointment of Judge Garza in 1961, the number of Hispanic district court judges has steadily increased—reaching 66 judges in 2015 (representing 9.7% of the 677 district court judgeships currently authorized by Congress). [Figure 1](#) shows the number of active Hispanic U.S. district court judges at five-year intervals from 1960 (when there were no Hispanic district court judges) to 2015.

As the overall number of Hispanic district court judges has increased, so too has the number of Hispanic women serving as judges—increasing by 283% (a net change from 6 to 23) in the last 15 years, from 2000 to 2015. The number of Hispanic men serving as judges increased by 65% (from 26 to 43) during this same period.

Overall, 87% of all the Hispanic women ever appointed to district court judgeships are still serving as district court judges or, after being elevated, are now serving as circuit court judges—underscoring how relatively recently most Hispanic women judges have been appointed. In contrast, 57% of Hispanic men ever appointed to district court judgeships are still serving as district or circuit court judges.

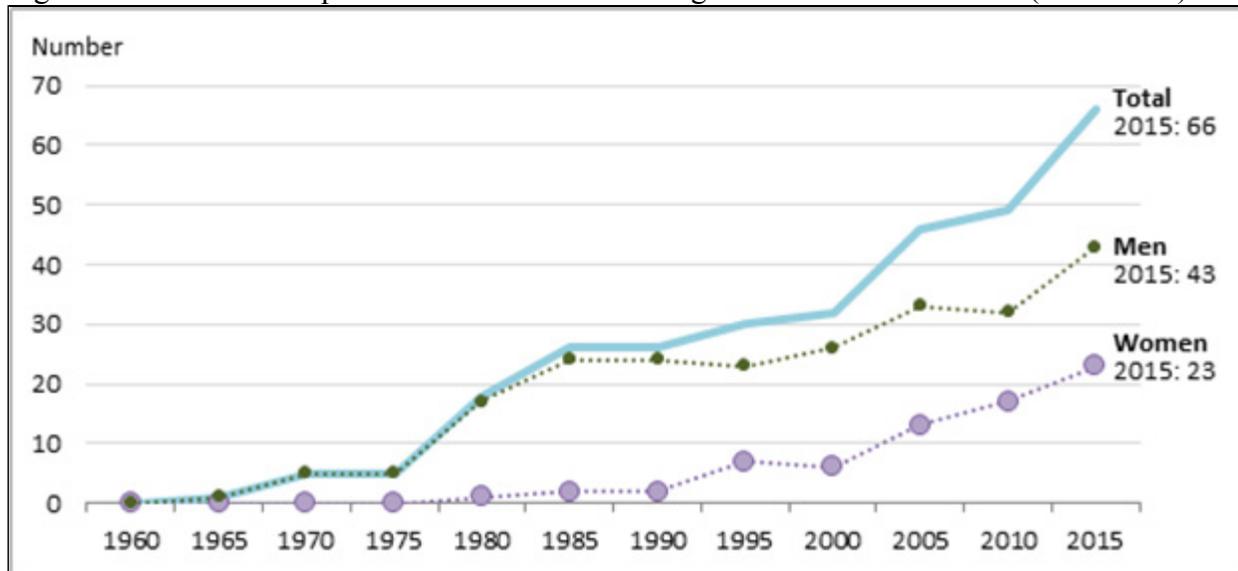
A number of "firsts" have occurred in recent years in the appointment of Hispanic district court judges to particular judicial districts. For example, from 2000 to the present, the first ever Hispanic female judges were appointed to the District of Arizona, Northern District of California (San Francisco), District of Colorado, Middle District of Florida (Tampa), District of New Jersey, District of Nevada, Eastern District of New York (Brooklyn), Eastern District of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), Western District of Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh), and the Western District of Texas (San

Antonio).

Additionally, since 2000, the first male Hispanic district court judges were appointed to the Southern District of California (San Diego), District of Colorado, Middle District of Florida (Tampa), Southern District of Mississippi (Jackson), District of Nevada, District of Oregon, Eastern District of Washington (Spokane), and the Western District of Washington (Seattle).

Overall, the appointment of Hispanic district court judges has largely occurred in judicial districts located in [states in which a relatively high percentage of the population identifies as Hispanic](#) (compared to the nation as a whole). Specifically, 89, or 78%, of the 114 Hispanic district court judges ever appointed to the bench have served in Texas (23), California (19), Puerto Rico (19), Florida (9), New York (7), Arizona (6), or New Mexico (6).

Figure 1. Number of Hispanic U.S. District Court Judges at Five-Year Intervals (1960-2015)



Source: Congressional Research Service

U.S. Circuit Courts

As with the number of Hispanic U.S. district court judges, the number of Hispanic U.S. circuit court judges has steadily increased over time, reaching 14 judges in 2015 (representing 7.8% of the 179 circuit court judgeships currently authorized by Congress). [Figure 2](#) shows the number of active Hispanic U.S. circuit court judges at five-year intervals from 1975 (when there were no Hispanic circuit court judges) to 2015.

As the overall number of Hispanic circuit court judges has increased, so too has the number of Hispanic women serving as judges—increasing by 100% (a net change from 2 to 4) in the last 15 years (from 2000 to 2015). During the same period, the number of Hispanic men serving as circuit court judges has increased by 25% (from 8 to 10).

Each of the five Hispanic women ever appointed to circuit court judgeships are still serving as circuit court judges (or, in the case of [Sonia Sotomayor](#), on the Supreme Court), while 67% of Hispanic men ever appointed to circuit court judgeships are still serving as circuit court judges.

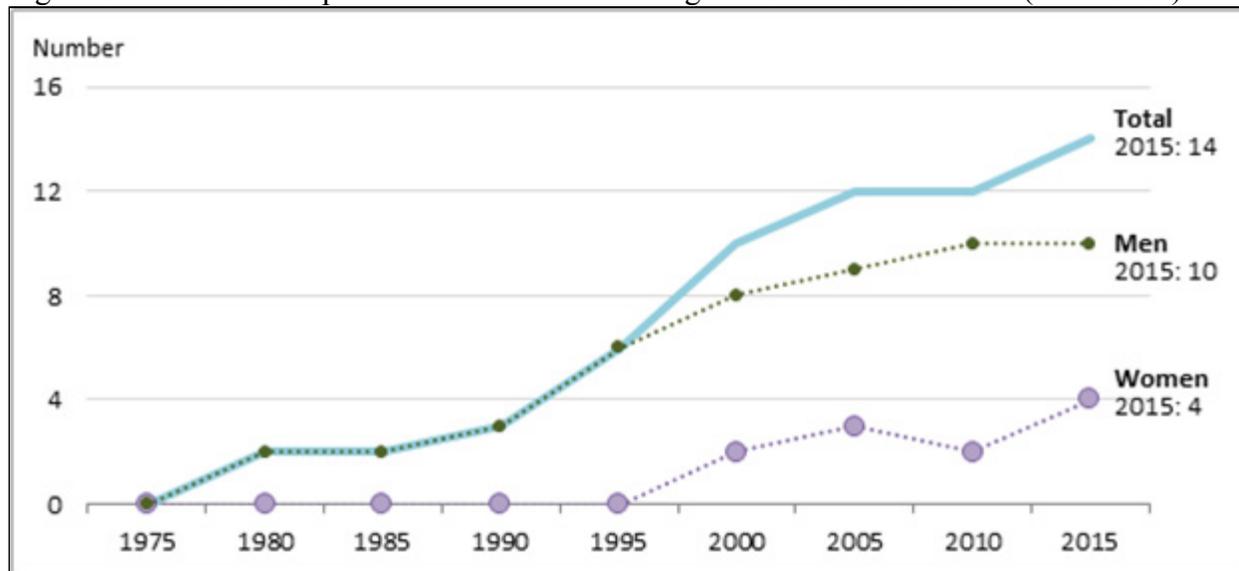
A number of "firsts" have occurred in recent years in the appointment of Hispanic circuit court judges. Since 2000, the first Hispanic female judge was appointed to the [Federal Circuit](#) (a court with nationwide jurisdiction in certain subject areas). Additionally, since 2000, the first male Hispanic circuit court judges were appointed to four circuits (the Third, Fourth, Eleventh, and Federal circuits).

Overall, a majority of Hispanic circuit court judges have been appointed to [circuits](#) with states in which a relatively high percentage of the population identifies as Hispanic. Specifically, 11, or 55%, of the 20 Hispanic circuit court judges ever appointed have served in either the Ninth Circuit (7)—comprised of Arizona, California, seven other western states, and two U.S. territories—or the Fifth Circuit (4)—comprised of Texas and two other southern states. There has

been one Hispanic American appointed to the Eleventh Circuit (Alabama, Florida, Georgia), and one to the Tenth Circuit (Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, Wyoming).

As of this writing, no Hispanic circuit court judges have ever been appointed to the Sixth, Seventh, or Eighth circuits (the three circuits are comprised of a total of 14 states).

Figure 2. Number of Hispanic U.S. Circuit Court Judges at Five-Year Intervals (1975-2015)



Source: Congressional Research Service

While the recent increase in the number of Hispanic Americans serving as U.S. circuit and district court judges is notable, there might remain, for some advocates of greater demographic judicial diversity, continuing issues to address in the appointment of Hispanic judges. For example, the percentage of either circuit or district court judges identifying as Hispanic is lower than the percentage of Hispanics and Latinos that comprise the total U.S. population. There might also be judicial circuits and districts in which a relatively high percentage of the population identifies as Hispanic but in which few or no Hispanic judges are currently serving. [Other CRS research](#) provides discussion on why some advocates of judicial diversity consider these important issues (and alternative views held by others).