

Tulane University

Tulane study finds slow progress for women and minorities in Louisiana judiciary

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The number of judges in Louisiana district courts has doubled in the past 25 years, yet minority representation on the bench in those courts has increased only 1 percent, according to a new Tulane University study tracking gender and racial diversity in the state's judiciary.

Professor of Political Science Sally J. Kenney and Research Professor Heather L. Johnson of Tulane's [Newcomb College Institute](#) examined Louisiana Secretary of State figures tracking gender and race for judges in federal, state and parish courts since 1992 and compared them to U.S. census data.

The report will be released at 6 p.m., Thursday, Jan. 25, in room 110 of John Giffen Weinmann Hall

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at Tulane. A [panel discussion](#) will follow featuring Chief Justice Bernette Johnson of the Louisiana Supreme Court, Chief Judge Carl E. Stewart of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, and Caroline Fredrickson, president of The American Constitution Society.

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Sally Kenney

Highlights of the report include:

- Women constitute 51 percent of Louisiana's population, yet women judges comprised less than 32 percent of all state and federal judges based in Louisiana in 2017.
- Racial minorities are 36 percent of Louisiana's population; non-white judges were 22 percent of all state and federal judges in the state.
- Louisiana Courts of Appeal has the highest percentage of elected women with almost 40 percent of women judges (21 out of 53 positions) in 2017.
- In 1992, all seven Supreme Court Justices in Louisiana were white men, all Democrats. In 2017, six Supreme Court Justices in Louisiana are white men, five are Republican, and one has no party affiliation. The remaining member is a black woman who is a Democrat.
- Of the 42 district courts in Louisiana, black women judges serve or have served on only six district courts and black men serve or have served on 13 district courts. Women serve or have served on 28 district courts.
- In 1992, non-white judges held 22.6 percent of the district court positions, but that number has hardly budged, increasing a little more than one percent to 23.9 percent in 2017.

"A gradual increase in both the number of women and minority men judges should not lull us into complacency. Progress is not natural, inevitable, or irreversible," said Kenney, Newcomb College Institute executive director. "Women's representation on the Louisiana Supreme Court and Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals has gone down. Given President Trump's nomination of almost exclusively white men, the federal courts in Louisiana will likely become less diverse. It is up to citizens committed to a diverse and representative bench and equal justice under law to keep vigilant to ensure that we do not reverse the progress Louisiana has made."