

Women make little progress at law firms



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Getty Images (Robert Daly)

The number of women of color pursuing law degrees is on the rise, equaling nearly one-fifth of first-year law students in 2017.

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Law firms with women in top leadership roles tend to have slightly higher levels of female representation at their firms, but overall representation of women in the profession remains at far less than 50 percent.

Average representation of women attorneys at firms with a woman in a leadership role is 3 percentage points higher than among all firms surveyed for Law360's 2018

Glass Ceiling Report, and representation of women equity partners at those firms is 5 percentage points higher.

The report, which analyzed the demographic makeup of more than 300 U.S. law firms, showed that in general, women continue to make only slight progress toward equal representation in the legal profession. Growth in representation year-to-year was less than 1 percent at all attorney levels.

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“While this year's Glass Ceiling Report shows very modest gains for women, the numbers reflect what we've seen over the past five years,” Law360 editor-in-chief Anne Urda said.

More than 36 percent of lawyers are women, the study found, and 8 percent of private practice attorneys are women of color. About one-fourth of law firm partners, just more than 23 percent, are women, with just 3 percent being women of color. Forty-five percent of non-partners are women.

The American Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession report found that in 2017, women made up nearly 25 percent of general counsel at Fortune 500 companies and close to 20 percent in Fortune 501 to 1,000 companies.

The ABA report also showed that as of 2015, women lawyers earned weekly salaries at 89.7 percent of what their male counterparts earned.

Women have comprised 40 percent of law school classes for the past 30 years, per the Law360 study, and the number of women of color pursuing law degrees is on the rise, equaling nearly one-fifth of first-year law students in 2017.

Urda said the #MeToo movement has sparked fresh discussions inside law firms about gender discrimination and gender equality, which may spur changes down the road.

Nearly one-third of female respondents to Law360's Attorney Satisfaction Survey, to be released this summer, report having experienced sexual harassment, and more than one-half said they had faced gender discrimination on the job.

The Yale Law Women organization at Yale Law School designated the following companies, listed in alphabetical order, as the 2018 Top Ten Female-Friendly Firms, based on family accommodations, part-time work and paid leave, and indicators of gender equity such as partnership promotions and the composition of leadership committees:

- Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP
- Bryan Cave LLP
- Hogan Lovells LLP
- Holland & Knight LLP
- Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP

- Littler
- McDermott Will & Emery
- Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP
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