



U.S. District Court Nominees Confirmed During the First Year of the Biden Presidency: Overview and Comparative Analysis

January 5, 2022

This Insight provides information related to the number of U.S. district court nominees confirmed during the first calendar year of the Biden presidency (2021), as well as information about the number of such nominees confirmed during the first years of presidencies from 1953 to 2017. Additionally, this Insight provides demographic information about President Biden’s confirmed nominees, as well as the nominees confirmed during the first years of the presidencies of his three immediate predecessors—Presidents Trump (2017), Obama (2009), and George W. Bush (2001). Another Insight, [available here](#), provides similar information about U.S. circuit court nominees.

U.S. District Courts

[U.S. district courts](#) are the federal trial courts of general jurisdiction. These courts resolve [civil disputes](#) and handle [criminal matters](#) by [determining facts and applying legal principles](#). There are [91 U.S. district courts](#) established under [Article III](#) of the U.S. Constitution. Each state has at least one U.S. district court (as do the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico), while some states have as many as four district courts. [Three territories of the United States](#)—Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands—[also have district courts](#) established under Article IV of the U.S. Constitution (nominees to territorial courts serve fixed terms and are not included in the data below).

Number of Confirmed Nominees

President Biden had 29 U.S. district court nominees confirmed during his first calendar year in office. As shown by [Figure 1](#), this is the third-highest number of district court nominees confirmed during the first year of a presidency since 1953. Of the 11 presidencies included in [Figure 1](#), the greatest number of district court nominees confirmed during the first year of a presidency is 47 (in 1961 during the first year of the Kennedy presidency).

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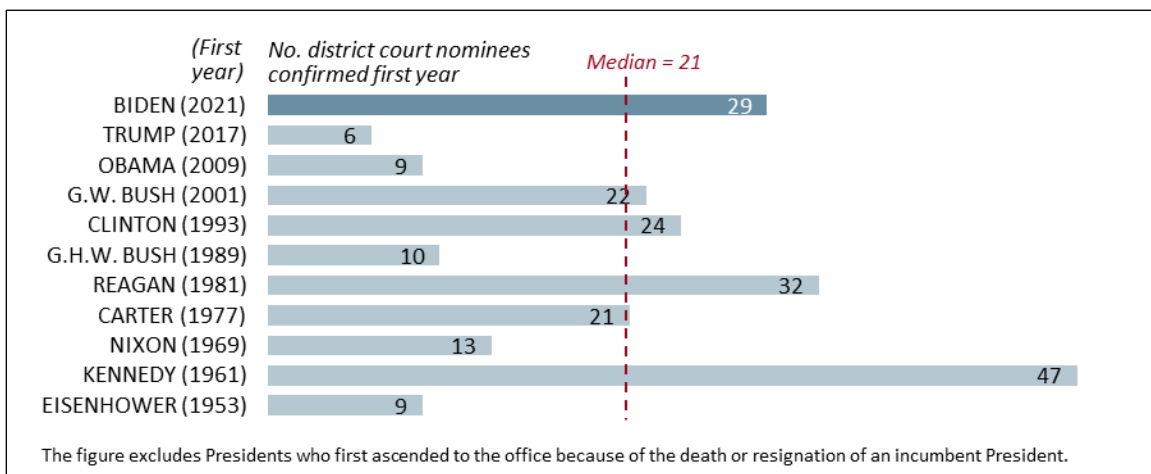
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The 29 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Biden presidency is above the median number of such nominees confirmed during the first year of the 11 presidencies included in the figure (with a median of 21 confirmed nominees).

The number of U.S. district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Biden presidency is also the greatest number confirmed during the first year of a presidency since 1981 (when 32 district court nominees were confirmed during the first year of the Reagan presidency).

Additionally, when combined with the [number of U.S. circuit court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Biden presidency](#) (11 nominees), the number of district and circuit court nominees confirmed in 2021 is the greatest total number of such nominees confirmed during the first year of any presidency since 1981 (when a total of 40 nominees were also confirmed during the first year of the Reagan presidency).

Figure 1. Number of U.S. District Court Nominees Confirmed During the First Year of a Presidency (1953-2021)



Source: Congressional Research Service.

Demographic Characteristics of Confirmed Nominees

Gender

Of the 29 U.S. district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Biden presidency, 23 (79%) were women. This represents the second instance during the first year of any presidency that a majority of confirmed district court nominees were women (with the first being in 2009).

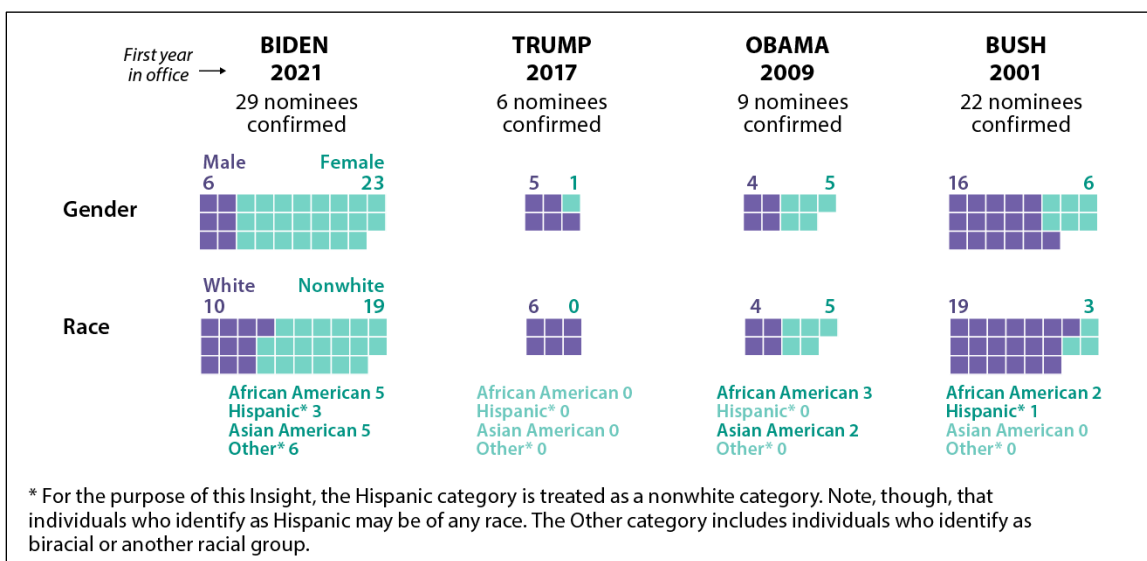
For comparative purposes, **Figure 2** provides data for the first years of the presidencies of President Biden’s three immediate predecessors—Presidents Trump (2017), Obama (2009), and George W. Bush (2001). Specifically, of the 6 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Trump presidency, 1 (17%) was a woman; of the 9 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Obama presidency, 5 (56%) were women; and of the 22 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Bush presidency, 6 (27%) were women.

The percentage of district court nominees confirmed during the first year of a presidency who were women is not always reflective of the overall percentage of such nominees who were confirmed during an

entire presidency. For example, of the 268 district court nominees confirmed during the entire Obama presidency, 110 (41%) were women.

Overall, of the 611 active U.S. district court judges serving as of January 1, 2022, 214 (35%) were women and 397 (65%) were men.

Figure 2. Demographic Background of U.S. District Court Nominees Confirmed During the First Year of a Presidency (2001-2021)



Source: Congressional Research Service.

Race

Of the 29 U.S. district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Biden presidency, 19 (66%) were nonwhite (including 5 African American nominees, 5 Asian American nominees, 3 Hispanic nominees, 1 American Indian nominee, and 5 biracial nominees). This represents the second instance during the first year of any presidency that a majority of confirmed district court nominees were nonwhite (with the first being in 2009).

For comparative purposes, **Figure 2** provides data for each of the first years of the presidencies of President Biden’s three immediate predecessors—Presidents Trump (2017), Obama (2009), and George W. Bush (2001). Specifically, of the 6 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Trump presidency, none were nonwhite; of the 9 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Obama presidency, 5 (56%) were nonwhite; and of the 22 district court nominees confirmed during the first year of the Bush presidency, 3 (14%) were nonwhite.

The percentage of district court nominees confirmed during the first year of a presidency who were nonwhite is not always reflective of the overall percentage of such nominees who were confirmed during an entire presidency. For example, of the 268 district court nominees confirmed during the entire Obama presidency, 98 (37%) were nonwhite.

Overall, of the 611 active U.S. district court judges serving as of January 1, 2022, 177 (29%) were nonwhite and 434 (71%) were white.

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