



# ACHIEVING DIVERSITY

BY ERIC N. KOHLI, ESQ.

**“Diversity:” It may seem like a buzzword recently gaining momentum. However, it is a noble concept. It has been sweeping across the law landscape – from in-house counsel to big law, to the courts, to state bars, and more. Surely, you’ve heard about it. But why the push? And how much have we progressed?**

Diversity is a positive thing, not just in the legal field, but in every field. “Diversity widens viewpoints and takes different ideas and perspectives into account. This can translate into creating richer solutions, obtaining better results and maximizing productivity, innovation and creativity.”<sup>1</sup> The organization STEPS 4 CHANGE adds that “every culture, every nationality, every single person sees the world in a different way. Similarly, every culture, [every] nationality, and [every] person has different knowledge, perspectives, and points of view.”<sup>2</sup>

## How Far has Diversity Progressed in the Legal Field?

Let’s look at cold hard numbers for the sake of objectivity.<sup>3</sup> Only 37 percent

of counsel in U.S. law firms are women. But in the overall U.S. population, 51 percent are women. Only about 4 percent of counsel in U.S. law firms identify as LGBTQ. In the overall U.S. population, more than 7 percent do. These disparities defy the law of averages; we would expect counsel numbers to correspond to their numbers in the overall general population.

Latino women comprise only 3.25 percent of associates, and black women only 3.17 percent. This is in the associate group, where the diversity rates are far better than in the partner population (both non-equity and equity). (More on that later.) For perspective, women of color are projected to comprise the majority of the U.S. female population by 2060.<sup>4</sup> Currently, these attorneys

represent barely 3 percent of attorneys, for a group that is already well on its way to becoming the majority of the female population.

This ~3 percent statistic is actually an improvement from prior years. That number was a quarter of a percentage point lower than just the year prior.

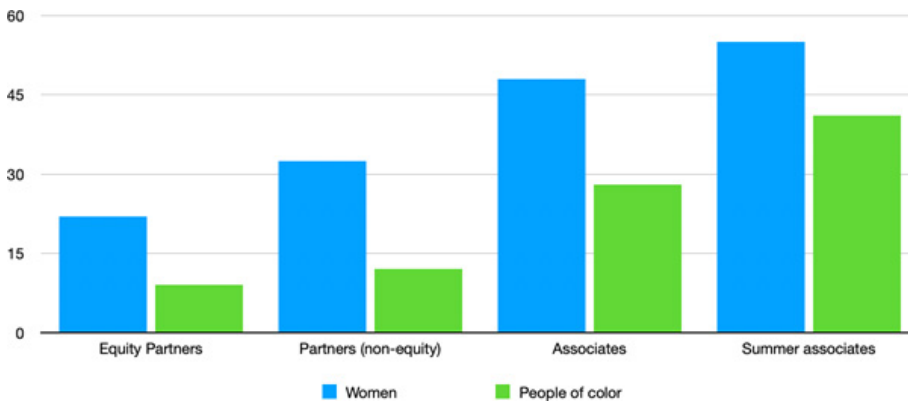
These statistics tell us that although we have been making progress toward achieving “diversity,” we still have quite a way to go.

## The Seniority Spectrum Tells the Story

Across the legal field’s seniority spectrum, with equity partners at one end of the spectrum and summer associates at the other, and partners (non-equity) and associates in the middle, a very informative picture emerges.

Amongst equity partners, 78 percent are men. Only 22 percent are women, and only 9 percent are people of color. Next step down the spectrum are partners (non-equity): 67.5 percent men, 32.5 percent women, and 12 percent people of color. Notice the difference? Next step down the spectrum are associates; women associates come in at 48 percent and people of color at 28 percent. Finally, at the end of the spectrum, summer associates: 55 percent are women and 41 percent are people of color.

A chart plotting this data helps visualize the spectrum:



A cursory glance at the chart makes the trend starkly evident – the younger the group of legal practitioners, the more diverse.

Well, what does that tell us? It tells us that, with time, the legal field is marching towards better and better levels of diversity. Every level has better diversity than the previous one, no exceptions. It also means that, over time, as our current young crop of summer associates graduates to associates, partners, and some day to equity partners, the field of law will possess improved diversity levels, eventually reaching the diversity levels that currently exist in that group.

Although the trend suggests that achieving a diverse population of lawyers is eventually inevitable, we still need to work to support that goal if we want it to happen.

Here’s a toast to achieving “diversity” – cheers!

## ENDNOTES:

1. Jess Mann, <https://diversitysocial/why-is-diversity-important>.
2. <https://www.steps4change.org/why-is-diversity-so-important>.
3. Statistics listed in the Nat’l Assoc. of Law Placement’s 2021 report on diversity in U.S. law firms.
4. <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-of-color-in-the-united-states/>



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