

Legal Education

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Law school applications and enrollment

U.S. law school enrollment remained essentially flat in 2023 after a small dip in 2022.

The number of students pursuing juris doctor degrees at ABA-accredited law schools in 2023 stood at 116,851 — a tiny increase of 124 students, or 0.1%, from the previous year.

The total number of JD students peaked in 2010 at 147,525, then dropped for several straight years before starting to rise again in 2018.

An additional 23,032 students in 2023 were in non-JD programs in U.S. law schools, pursuing masters of law and other degrees, as well as certificates. Participation in these non-JD programs has boomed in recent years, nearly doubling since 2014, when there were 11,973 non-JD students.

The number of law school applicants dropped 2% in 2023 to 61,371, according to the Law School Admission Council. This was roughly the same level as in 2018.

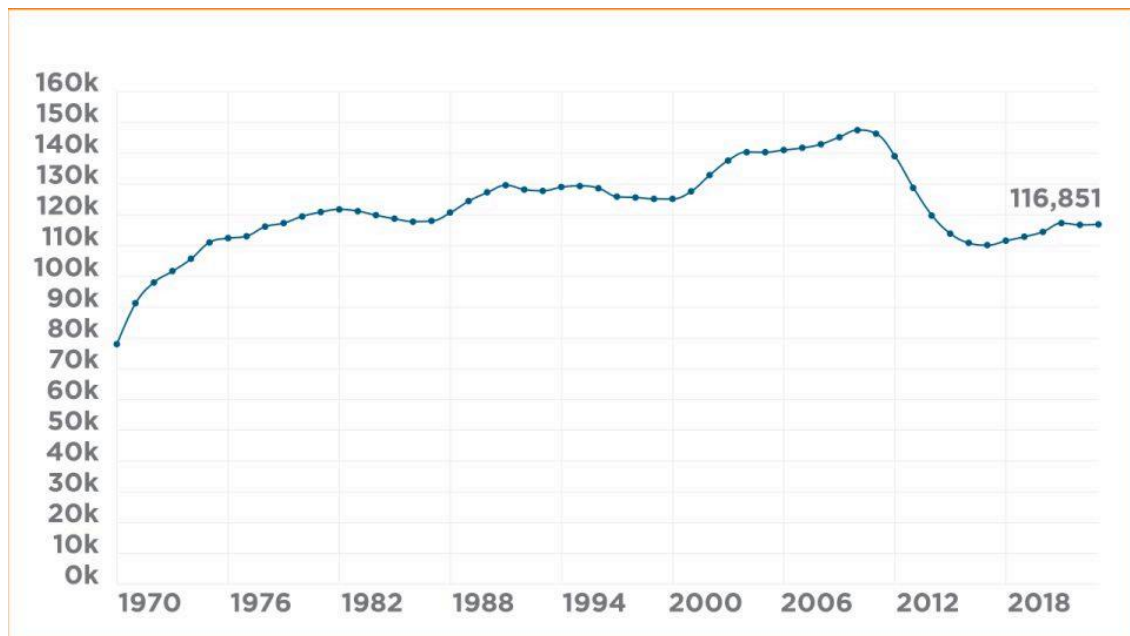
The peak year for law school applicants was 2004, when more than 100,000 people applied to ABA-accredited law schools.

Roughly two-thirds of all applicants (69.9%) were accepted to at least one law school. The acceptance rate was essentially the same as the year before: 69.7% in 2022.

Fast fact:

- The average law school applicant applies to nearly seven law schools — 6.8 per student, to be exact.

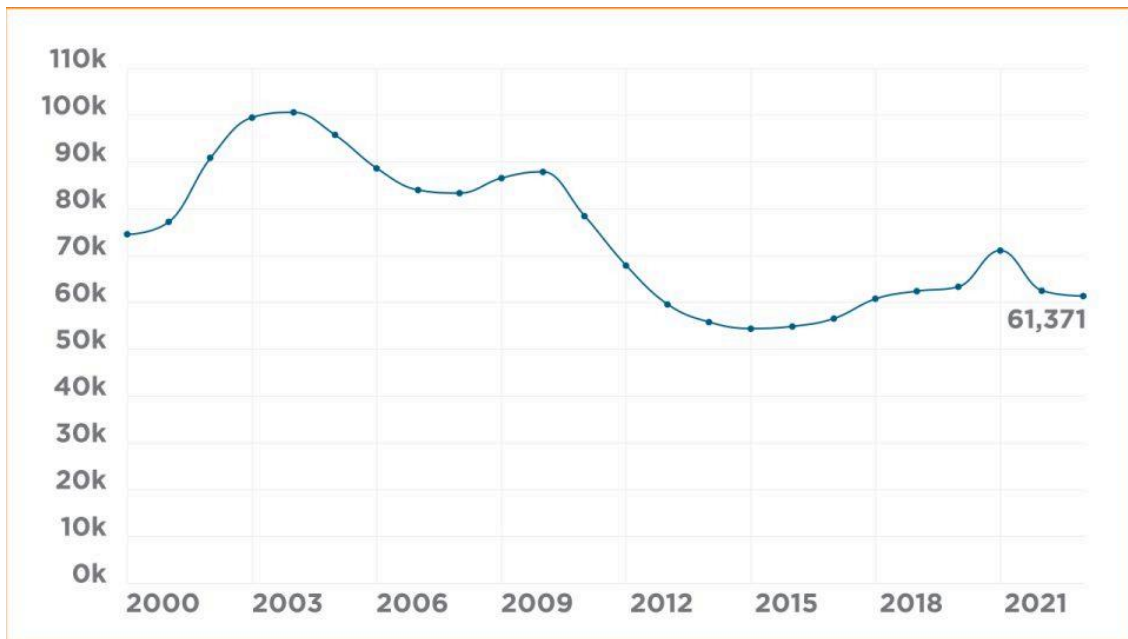
Sources: [Law School Admission Council](#), [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)



Law school enrollment 1970-2023

Enrollment for 1970-2013 includes all students, but for 2014 to present only JD students

Sources: [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)



Law school applicants 2000-2023

Source: [Law School Admission Council](#)

Why law school?

More students pursue law degrees because of their interest in public service than for high salaries, according to a 2018 national survey, “Before the JD,” conducted by the Association of American Law Schools and co-sponsored by the ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar.

The survey evaluated responses from 22,189 undergraduates at 25 four-year institutions and from 2,727 first-year law students at 44 law schools.

The most commonly cited reasons for attending law school were as a path to careers in politics, government or public service (44%); a passion for that type of work (42%); an opportunity to be helpful (35%) and to advocate for social change (32%). About 1 in 3 students (31%) said they were motivated by access to high-paying jobs.

Most students did not enter law school immediately after college. Two-thirds (65%) delayed law school for a year or more, compared to 1 in 3 (35%) who

enrolled directly after college. Of those who postponed law school, just over half (53%) waited three years or more after getting their undergraduate degree.

More than half (55%) of the law students reported that they first considered going to law school before their first year of college. Roughly one-third (35%) first considered pursuing law school before high school

Fast facts:

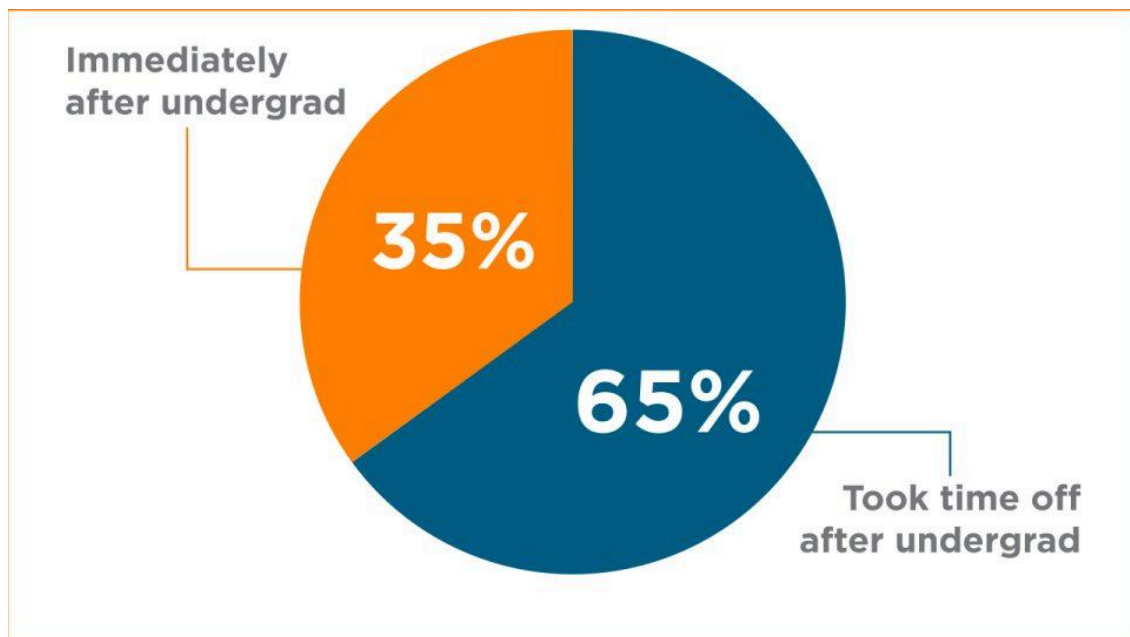
- Students with higher LSAT scores were more likely to delay law school (74%) than students with lower scores (58%).
- Asian and African American students were more likely to delay law school (73% and 71%) than Hispanic and white students (69% and 64%).

Source: Association of American Law Schools "[Before the JD](#)" report

WHY DO UNDERGRADUATES ASPIRE TO GO TO LAW SCHOOL?

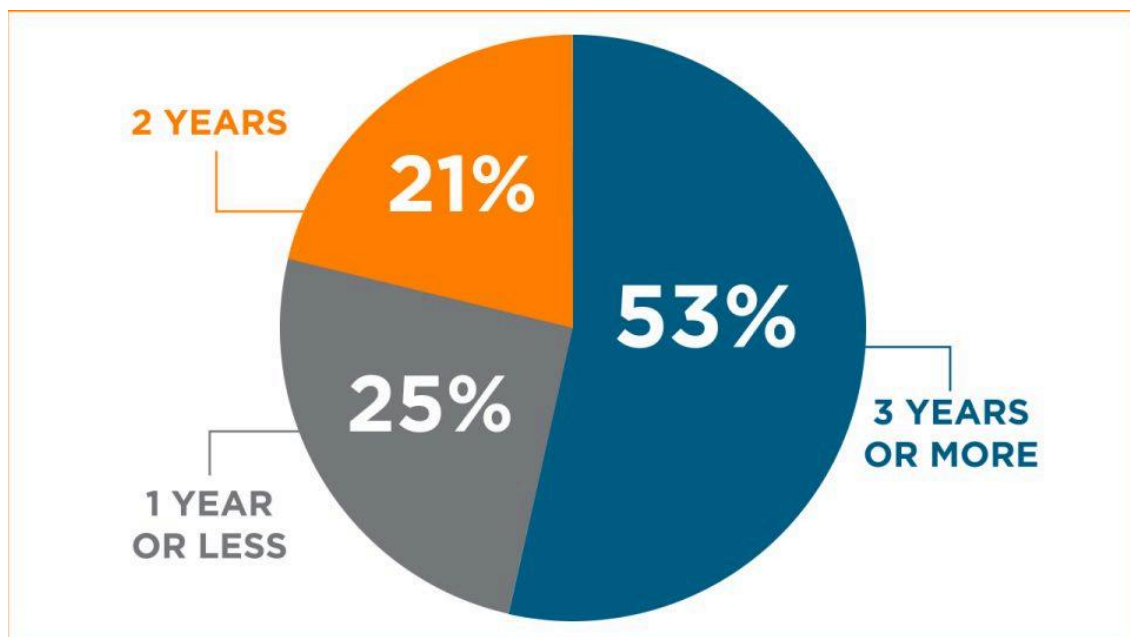
Pathway for career in politics, government or public service	44%
Passionate/high interest in type of work	42%
Opportunities to be helpful to others or useful to society/giving back	35%
Advocate for social change	32%
Access to high-paying jobs	31%

Source: *Before the JD: Undergraduate Views on Law School*, American Association of Law Schools and Gallup



When students enrolled in law school

Source: *Before the JD: Undergraduate Views on Law School*, American Association of Law Schools and Gallup



For students who delayed law school, how many years?

Source: [*Before the JD: Undergraduate Views on Law School, American Association of Law Schools and Gallup*](#)

Law school demographics — Gender

The gender gap at ABA-accredited law schools continued to widen in 2023. For the sixth straight year, most students pursuing a juris doctor degree were women — 56.2%.

The number of male students at the 196 ABA-accredited law schools has dropped every year for the past 13 years — from 78,516 in 2010 to 50,096 in 2023. Meanwhile, the number of female students has increased each of the past seven years — from 55,766 in 2016 to 65,754 in 2023.

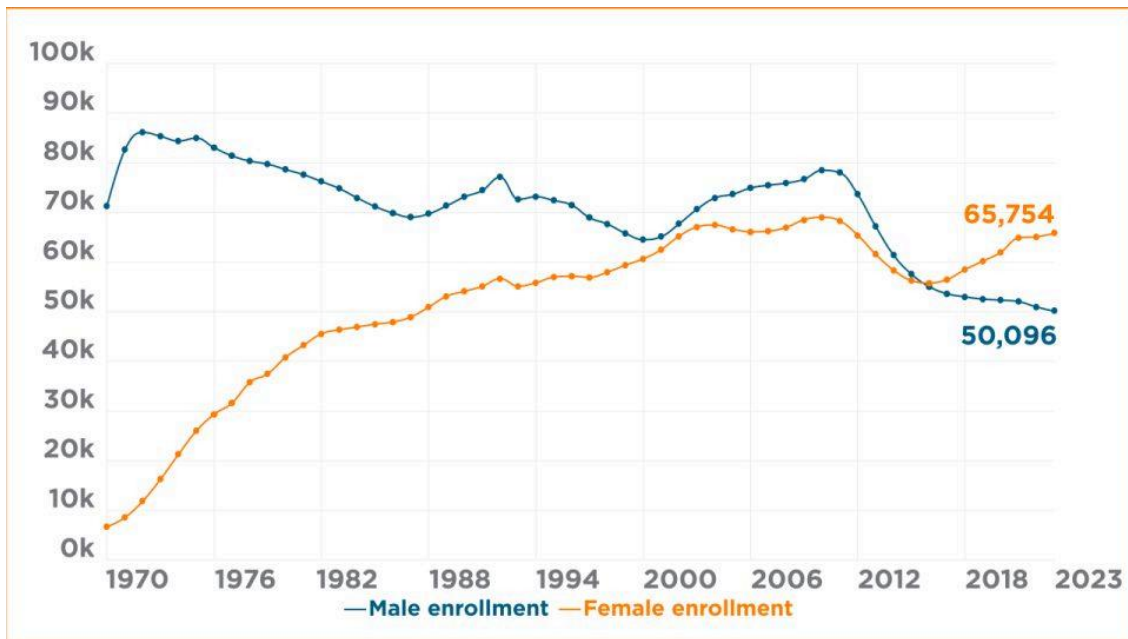
That means there were nearly 16,000 more women than men in accredited law schools in 2023.

For decades, law school students were overwhelmingly white and male, but the gender gap began to narrow markedly after 1970. That year, 91% of all law students were men. The gap came close to vanishing in 2001 and 2002, when 49% of all students were women, but then broadened again.

In 2016, for the first time, women made up a majority of all law students at ABA-accredited schools. That year, 50.3% of all students pursuing JD degrees were female. Since then, the gap between male enrollment and female enrollment has grown wider with each passing year.

Not every law student identifies as male or female. In 2023, 115,850 JD students identified as one or the other, but another 416 said they were neither gender, and 632 preferred not to identify their gender.

Source: [*ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar*](#)



Law school enrollment by gender 1970-2023

Source: [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)



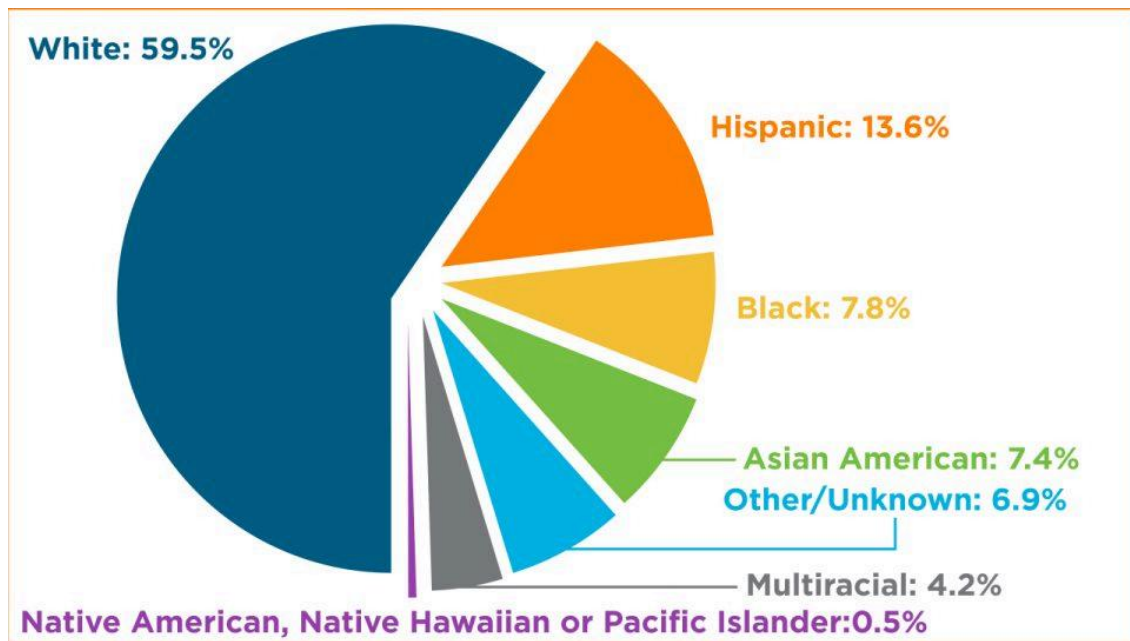
Law school demographics — Race and ethnicity

Law school classes have gradually become more diverse by race and ethnicity. A decade ago, in 2013, 29% of all law students classified themselves as students of color. Ten years later, in 2023, one-third of all students pursuing a juris doctor degree (34%) were students of color.

The demographic change is more dramatic when considering first-year law students over the past several decades. In 1978, students of color occupied just 9% of all first-year law school seats. In 2023, that number was nearly four times larger: 34%.

Among all law students in 2023, 13.6% were Hispanic, 7.8% Black, 7.4% Asian American, 4.2% mixed race and 0.5% Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. An additional 6.9% were classified as race unknown.

Source: [*ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar*](#)



Law students by race & ethnicity 2023

Source: [*ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar*](#)

Fast facts

- Number of law schools where women outnumber men: 171
- Number of law schools where men outnumber women: 24
- Number of law schools exactly 50-50 male-female: 1 (Wisconsin — 349 men, 349 women)
- Highest ratio of men: Liberty — 57% male
- Highest ratio of women: Northeastern — 70% female
- Number of law schools where women outnumber men 2-to-1: 4 (Northeastern, Florida A&M, Charleston, North Carolina Central)
- Law schools outside Puerto Rico with the highest percentage of students of color: Howard (99%), Texas Southern (86%), St. Thomas of Florida (78%)

- Law schools with the smallest percentage of students of color: Drake, West Virginia, Northern Kentucky, Detroit Mercy (all 12%)
- 1,048 law students in 2023 identified as neither male nor female or preferred not to answer. The largest number (64) were at the University of Denver.

Source: [*ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar*](#)

Employment after graduation

Unemployment among new law school graduates dropped to the lowest level in at least a decade in 2023, according to data compiled by the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar.

For the law school Class of 2023, unemployment 10 months after graduation dropped to 5%. Since peaking at 11.2% in 2013, unemployment among new law school graduates has declined steadily, except for a one-year blip when unemployment rose to 8.3% for the Class of 2020. That was the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the number of new graduates joining law firms after graduation is higher than ever: 53% for the Class of 2023. That number has been climbing steadily over the past decade. For the Class of 2012, it was just 39%.

On the other hand, the number of new law graduates getting jobs in the business sector has been falling. For the Class of 2014, more than 15% worked in businesses soon after graduation. For the Class of 2023, it was just 8% — the lowest in at least a decade.

In almost every other sector, the numbers held roughly steady. For example, 1 in 9 graduates from the Class of 2023 (11%) took government jobs. It was roughly the same a decade earlier.

For several years, judicial clerkships grew more popular as first jobs out of law school, peaking at 10% in 2019, and that number has held steady. It was 10%

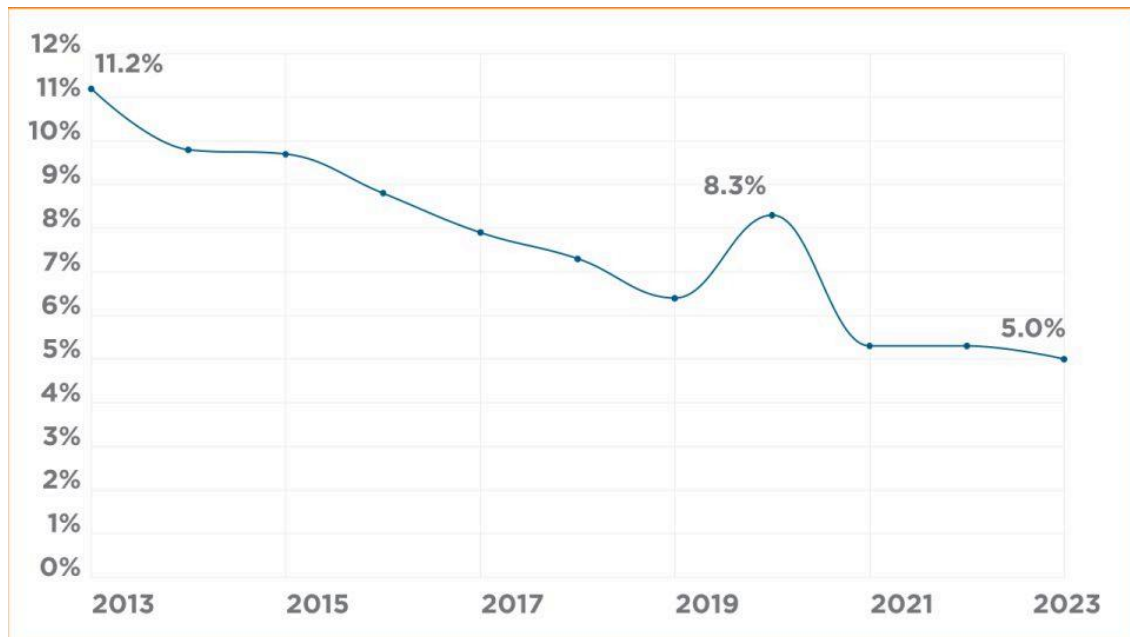
again for the Class of 2023 graduates.

Meanwhile, the number of graduates who go into solo practice straight out of law school continues to be tiny. Roughly one-half of 1% of all 2023 grads (0.6%) took the solo route. A decade ago, 2.3% of the Class of 2013 practiced solo — a small number but nearly four times the current rate.

Fast Fact:

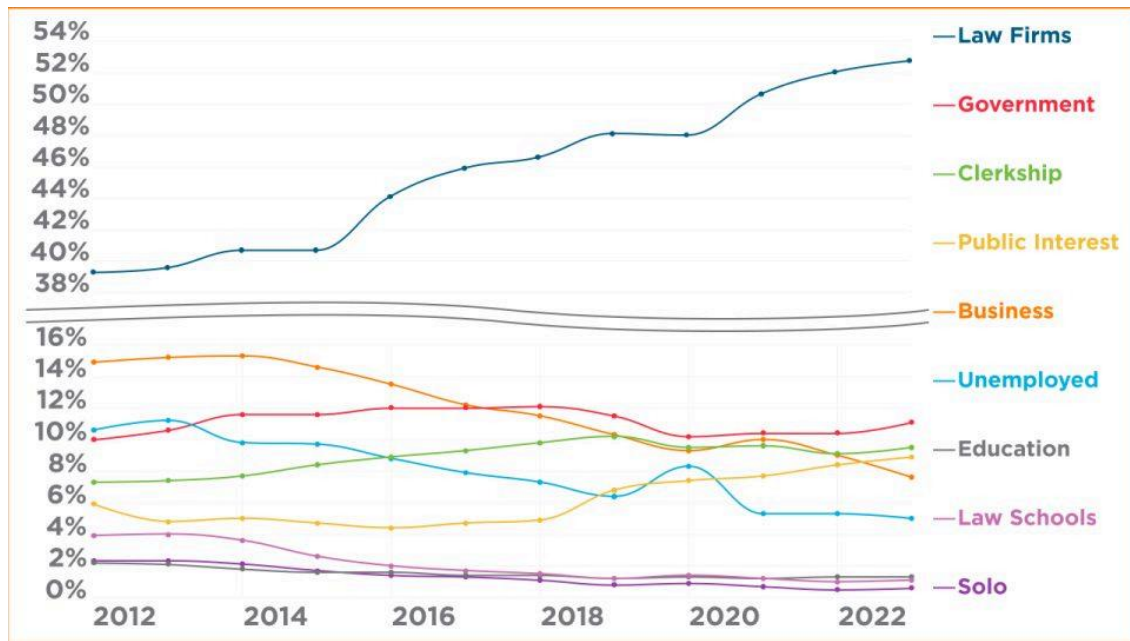
- 8 out of 10 law school graduates in 2023 got jobs requiring bar passage: 80.2%.

Source: [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)



Percent unemployed 10 months after graduating

Source: [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)



Where law school graduates work 10 months after graduating

Source: [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)

Bar passage rates

The national bar exam passage rate for first-time test-takers held steady in 2023 at 72%, after two years of slight declines, according to the National Conference of Bar Examiners, which develops the test and collects data from the states.

The passage rate for first-time test-takers has been somewhat steady since 2014, fluctuating between a low of 69% in 2016 and 2018, and a high of 76% in 2020. The highest passage rate in recent years was 82% in 2008.

The number of people taking the exam for the first time remained relatively stable in 2023, dipping just 1.3% from the year before. In all, 44,180 took the exam for the first time in 2023. It was significantly higher — 50,016 — just a few years ago, in 2016.

As usual, there was a large difference in passage rates between first-time test-takers and repeat test-takers in 2023. Among first-timers, 72% passed the bar exam. Among those repeating the exam, only 30% passed. In 2023, more than

twice as many people took the test for the first time as those repeating the exam (44,180 versus 21,994).

Passage rates also varied widely based on where test-takers learned the law. The passage rate for all test-takers from ABA-accredited schools — including those taking the test for the first time and those repeating it — was 64% in 2023. Just 20% of students who attended non-accredited law schools passed the bar.

There was also a significant difference in passage rates across the 50 states. In 2023, Utah had the highest passage rate among first-time test-takers at 90%. California had the lowest passage rate at 61%.

State size doesn't seem to have any relation to passage rates. New York, with more than 9,000 first-time bar exam takers, the most in the country, had a passage rate of 73% — nearly equal to the national rate of 72%. But California, second in the nation with more than 6,000 first-time test-takers, had the lowest passage rate at 61%.

Fast facts:

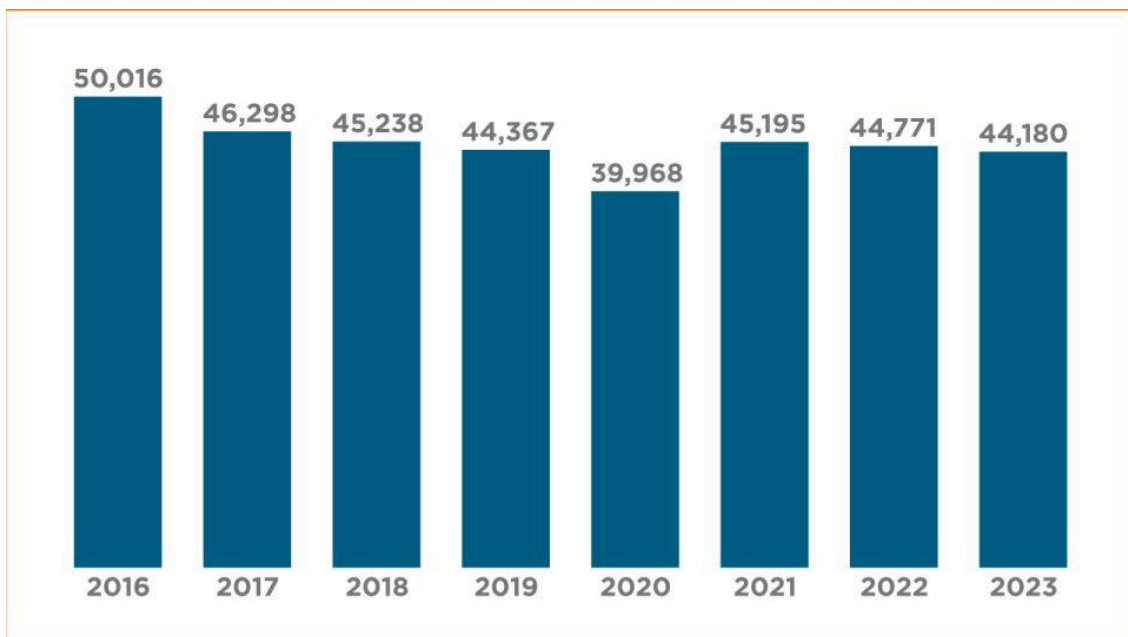
- The vast majority of all test-takers in 2023 (83%) went to ABA-accredited law schools.
- 82 people who took the bar exam in 2023 skipped law school and studied at law offices, which is allowed in some states. The largest number of them (35) were from Washington state. Nationwide, just 37% of those who studied in law offices passed the exam.

Source: [*National Conference of Bar Examiners*](#)



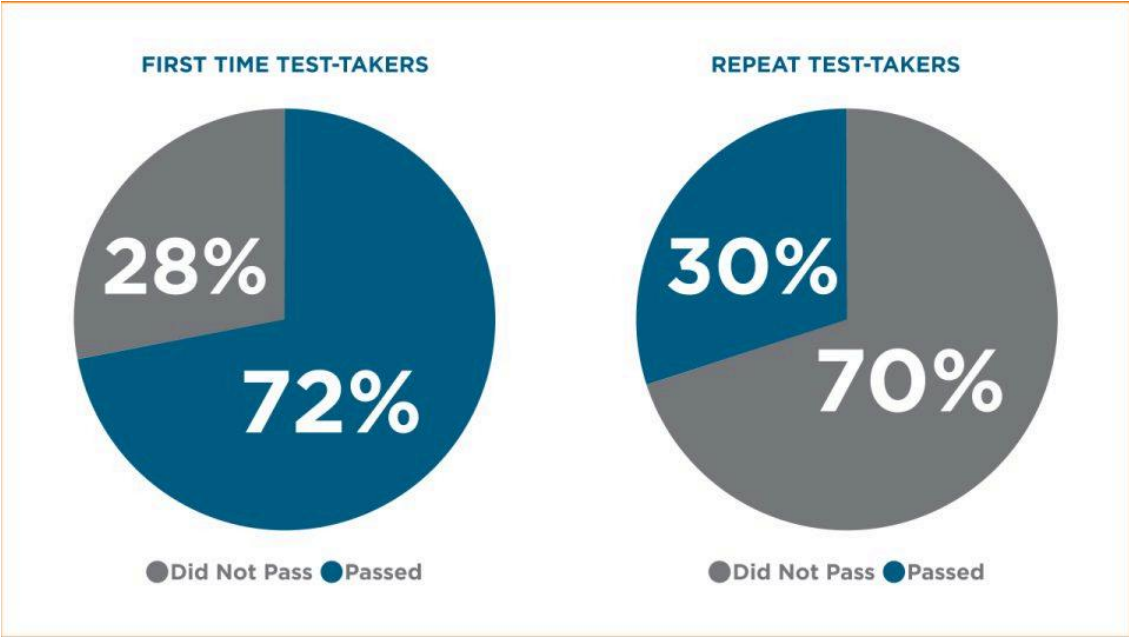
First timer bar passage rates

Source: National Conference of Bar Examiners



Number of people taking bar for first time

Source: National Conference of Bar Examiners



Bar passage rates first timers vs repeaters

Source: [National Conference of Bar Examiners](#)

BAR PASSAGE RATE 2023	
ABA-Approved Law School	64%
Law Office Study	37%
Law School Outside the USA	34%
Non-ABA-Approved Law School	20%

Source: [ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#)

States with highest and lowest passing rates among first-time test-takers: 2023

Highest

- Utah 90%
- Iowa 86%
- Montana 85%
- Missouri 84%
- Minnesota 82%
- New Mexico 82%

Lowest

- California 61%
- Michigan 62%
- New Hampshire 63%
- New Jersey 66%
- Connecticut 66%

Bar passage rates — Race, ethnicity and gender

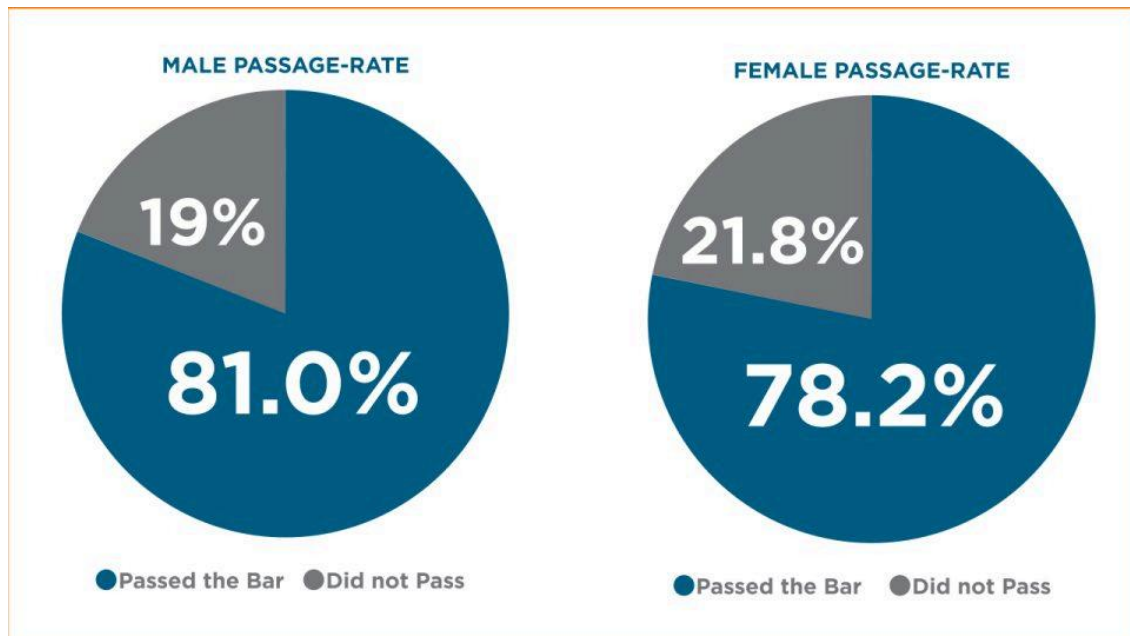
To comply with ABA standards, a law school must show that three-quarters of its graduating class passes the bar exam within two years after graduation. In the most recent study, white test-takers in 2023 were more likely to pass than test-takers of other races and ethnicities, according to the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar.

Among white graduates taking the exam for the first time, 84% passed in 2023. By comparison, 74% of Asian first-time test-takers passed, 71% of Hispanics, 68% of Native Americans and 58% of Blacks. Among all first-time test-takers of color, the passage rate was 69%.

The gap narrows over time. For the Class of 2021, 93% of white test-takers ultimately passed the exam within two years of graduation, as did 90% of Asian Americans, 86% of Hispanics, 82% of Native Americans and 78% of Blacks.

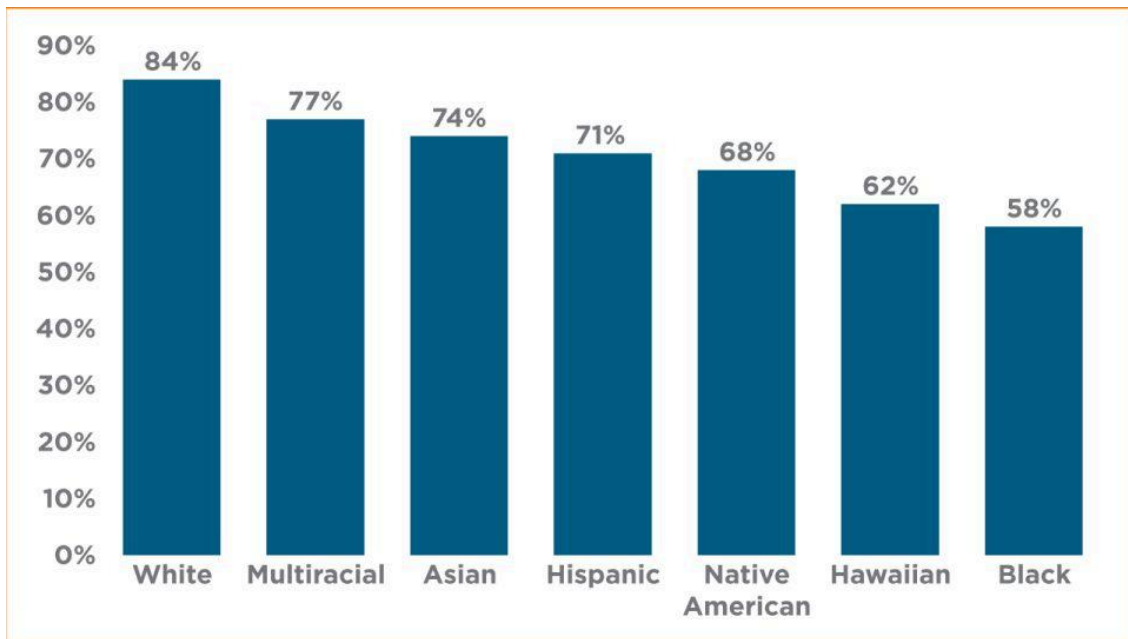
There was a small difference in bar passage rates between men and women in 2023: 81% of men passed the exam on the first try, as did 78% of women.

Source: [*ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar*](#)



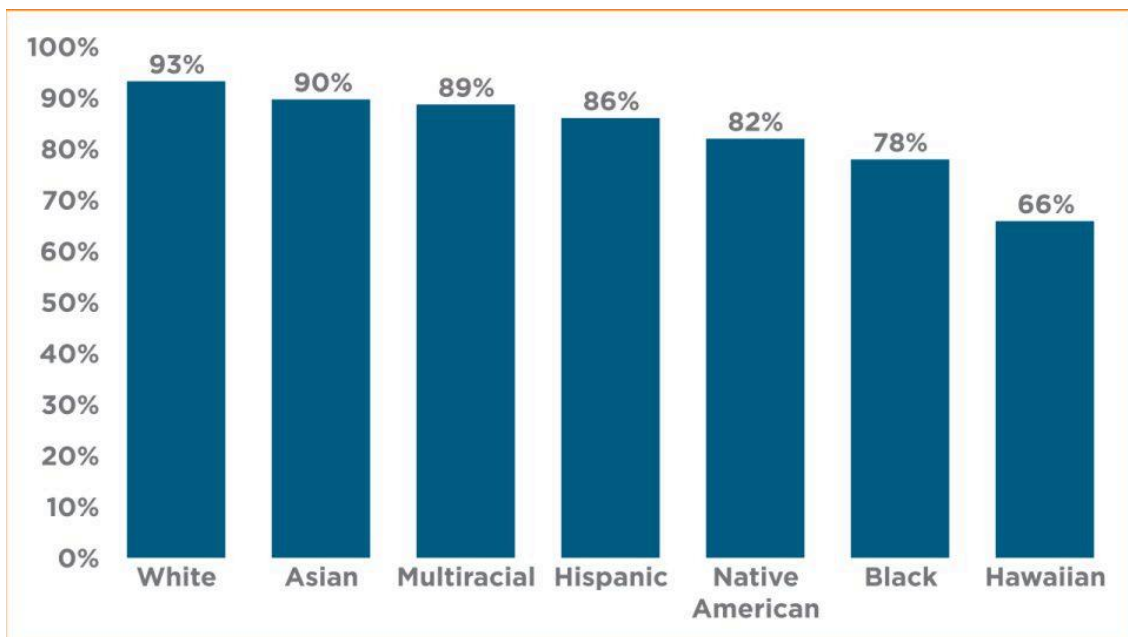
Bar passage rates by gender: 2023 first-time test-takers

Source: [*National Conference of Bar Examiners*](#)



First timer Bar passage by Race and Ethnicity

Source: [National Conference of Bar Examiners](#)



Ultimate Bar passage rates by race and ethnicity

Source: [National Conference of Bar Examiners](#)

