



Bureau of Justice Statistics

Civil Justice Data Brief

Federal Justice Statistics Program

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Civil Rights Complaints in U.S. District Courts, 2000

In 2000 plaintiffs filed over 259,000 civil complaints in U.S. district courts. About 41,000 of these complaints involved a civil rights-related issue such as discrimination in employment, housing, welfare benefits, or voting rights. The number of civil rights-related cases declined to 40,908 after reaching a high of 43,278 in 1997.

The decline in the number of civil rights complaints was due largely to employment civil rights complaints that dropped 12% from 23,796 in 1997 to 21,032 in 2000. By contrast, the number of other types of civil rights complaints increased from 1998 to 2000: housing from 838 to 1,284, voting from 108 to 167, and welfare from 66 to 80 filings.

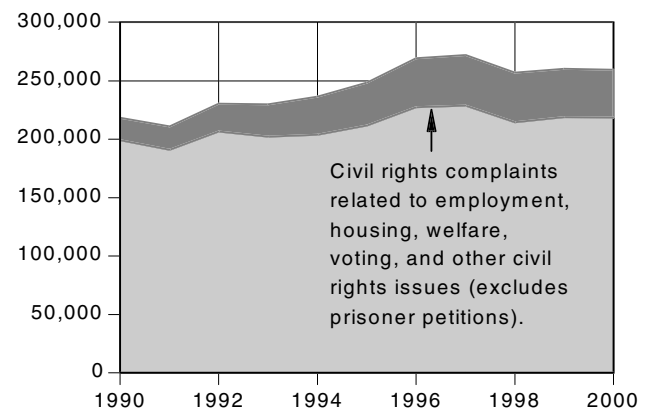
In 2000 a jury disposed of 80% of the 1,652 civil rights complaints terminated by trial verdict; a judge, 17%; and a directed verdict, about 4%. This continues the upward trend in the use of jury trials over the decade. On average, civil rights related complaints went from filing to disposition by trial verdict in about 14 months during 2000. Half the complaints were disposed of in 11 months or less.

The number of civil rights related complaints filed in U.S. courts of appeal fell to 7,952 in 2000 from a high of 8,466 in 1998. Civil rights related appeals accounted for about 22% of all civil cases filed in U.S. courts of appeal.

Jurisdiction of civil rights complaints

Most (90%) civil rights complaints filed in U.S. district court continued to involve only private parties rather than the Federal Government. Private suits, however, declined 6% from a high of 40,361 in 1997 to 37,888 in 2000, while employment complaints in which the U.S. Government was the defendant rose 8% from 1,241 in 1997 to 1,362 in 2000.

Number of civil rights complaints as a portion of all civil cases filed in U.S. district courts, 1990-2000



Types of civil rights complaints filed in U.S. district courts, 1990-2000

Year	Total	Type of civil rights complaints ^a				
		Employment	Voting	Housing	Welfare	Other ^b
1990	18,914	8,272	140	367	135	10,000
1991	19,892	8,370	247	452	130	10,693
1992	24,233	10,771	494	527	125	12,316
1993	27,655	12,962	213	590	114	13,776
1994	32,622	15,965	224	730	122	15,581
1995	36,600	19,059	208	735	116	16,482
1996	42,007	23,152	229	932	83	17,611
1997	43,278	23,796	141	854	91	18,396
1998	42,354	23,735	108	838	66	17,510
1999	41,304	22,490	102	1,136	63	17,513
2000	40,908	21,032	167	1,284	80	18,345

^aExcludes prisoner petitions.

^bSpecific types of civil rights cases within the "other" category cannot be distinguished.

Source: *Annual Report of the Director*. Washington, D.C.: Administrative Office of the United States Courts (table C-2).

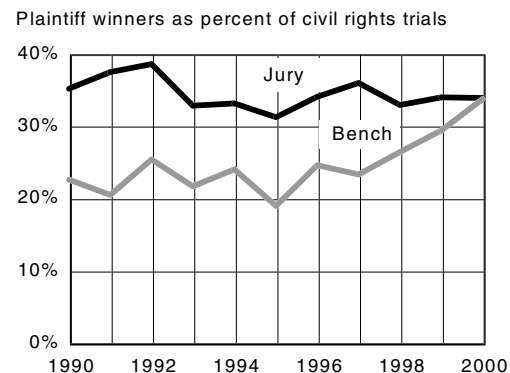
These statistics, prepared by Marika F.X. Litras, Ph.D., update those in previous reports. Visit <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs> for the most recent and complete statistics.

Plaintiff winners and awards in civil rights complaints terminated by trial in U.S. district courts, 1990-2000

Year	Number of cases terminated by trial verdict	Plaintiff winners						
		Total number	Percent	Number with monetary awards	Award amount			
				Median	Less than \$500,000	\$1 million or more	\$10 million or more	
1990	1,384	384	27.7%	317	\$184,000	56.9%	38.4%	1.3%
1991	1,351	380	28.1	323	173,000	61.6	36.2	1.5
1992	1,838	568	30.9	451	100,000	67.3	27.4	4.4
1993	1,549	418	27.0	349	62,000	81.1	14.0	4.0
1994	1,793	513	28.6	424	75,000	84.7	9.9	5.4
1995	1,799	470	26.1	383	100,000	80.7	13.3	8.6
1996	1,979	602	30.4	488	100,000	77.9	15.5	9.8
1997	1,974	624	31.6	495	110,000	77.6	15.6	9.7
1998	1,954	585	29.9	447	125,000	76.3	14.3	8.9
1999	1,801	574	31.9	464	130,000	80.4	14.2	8.4
2000	1,652	545	33.0	416	155,500	77.9	13.7	7.7

*Number of trial cases disposed for which a judgment was known. Includes jury trials, bench trials, and directed verdicts.
Source: Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, Civil Master File, annual.

In 2000 the percentage of plaintiff winners from jury and bench trials converged at 34%: the percentage of plaintiff winners in bench trials rose from a low of 19% in 1995 and the percentage in jury trials fell from a high of 39% in 1992



Continued increase in out-of-court settlements

While out-of-court settlements rose from 35% of civil rights complaints disposed of in 1998 to 38% in 2000, trial verdicts continued a decline from 5% to 4%.

Plaintiff winners and awards

Plaintiffs won 34% of civil rights complaints in 2000 regardless of the type of trial. Of the 545 plaintiffs who won their trials, 416 or 76% were awarded monetary damages. Half of these awards were in amounts of \$155,500 or less.