

Unraveling the Ideological Tapestry of Big Law: A Fresh Perspective on Legal Leanings



As the curtain rises on the 2024 presidential election, one question looms: Does Big Law exhibit a liberal tilt? Beyond the realm of speculation, empirical research offers insights. A 2015 study by scholars from Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Chicago suggested that lawyers, especially those in the 100 largest firms (Big Law), lean more liberal than their peers in smaller firms.

Probing Ideological Orientations through Pro Bono Cases

In a paper recently published in the Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, University of Notre Dame law professor Derek Muller unveils a distinctive approach to unraveling the ideological leanings of major law firms. Muller delves into the universe of [pro bono](#) cases, specifically scrutinizing US Supreme Court amicus briefs filed by Am Law 100 firms on behalf of "likely pro bono" clients over four years.

Pro Bono as a Gateway to Ideological Insight

Muller's emphasis on pro bono cases arises from the belief that these cases serve as a unique window into a firm's ideology. In contrast to individual [lawyers' campaign contributions](#), pro bono cases reflect a firm's institutional commitment, involving multiple layers of approval. Muller contends that these cases offer valuable insights into a firm's priorities and organizational obligations.

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Liberal Inclinations in Big Law

Muller's analysis of 851 pro bono amicus briefs exposes a significant leftward inclination in [Big Law](#). Among these briefs, 64% championed liberal positions, 31% supported conservative stances, and 5% opted for neutrality. This two-to-one ratio underscores a prevailing liberal tendency in [large law firms](#).

Illuminating Trends through Salient Cases

Further categorizing cases based on significance, Muller pinpointed five highest-salience cases. In pivotal issues such as abortion, LGBTQ rights, and the Second Amendment, a staggering 95% of [Big Law](#) briefs rallied behind liberal positions, underscoring an overwhelming liberal bias in these contentious matters.

Firm-Specific Revelations

Muller's paper offers intriguing insights into specific firms. Despite Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher leading in liberal and conservative briefs, the firm's 64% support for the liberal side aligns with the broader trend in Big Law. Surprisingly, [Jones Day](#), often perceived as a conservative firm, exhibited a 52% liberal stance, positioning it as one of the more traditional firms in Muller's sample.

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Implications for Aspiring Lawyers and Law Firms

Muller's data holds [practical implications](#) for law students and attorneys navigating the selection of law firms. A deeper understanding of a [firm's ideological orientation](#) can guide individuals in finding an environment aligned with their values. Moreover, this data allows firms to engage in introspection, evaluating their ideological stance compared to peer firms and its [potential impact](#) on workplace culture and business development.

Big Law's True Colors: Shades of Green

While Muller's paper offers valuable insights into the political leanings of Big Law, it's crucial to recognize that pro

bono work, while enlightening, pales compared to firms' work for paid clients. The latter often involves safeguarding the interests of affluent corporations and individuals, reflecting a more "conservative" approach to preserving the status quo.

In conclusion, the ideological landscape of [Big Law is nuanced—most large firms](#) lean blue, some more red, but ultimately, Big Law's favorite color is green.

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