

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Cheyenne Blount
Email: cblount@abfn.org
Phone: 312.988.6515
Fax: 312.988.6579
Online: americanbarfoundation.org
Twitter: [@ABFResearch](https://twitter.com/ABFResearch)

A PORTRAIT OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE LAW

Groundbreaking new study from NAPABA and Yale Law School builds on American Bar Foundation research

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2, 2017 — Asian Americans have been the fastest-growing minority group in the legal profession for the past three decades, but they have made only limited progress in reaching the top ranks of the profession, according to a new report released today by the [National Asian Pacific American Bar Association](http://www.napaba.org) (NAPABA) and [Yale Law School](http://www.yale.edu).

The report, titled [A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law](#), is the first-ever comprehensive study of Asian Americans in the legal profession. It draws from the research of the [American Bar Foundation's](#) (ABF) [After the JD](#) project, a longitudinal study that examined the career paths of a national cohort of nearly 5,000 lawyers, including more than 200 Asian American lawyers.

“...There has not yet been a comprehensive study of the career paths of Asian-American law students and lawyers. Perhaps the closest effort is the wide-ranging longitudinal study, [After the JD](#)...” the report states. “Building on that study and others, this project — [A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law](#) — is an initial effort toward a systematic understanding of how Asian Americans are situated in the legal profession.”

According to the study, there are more than 50,000 Asian-American lawyers today, compared to 10,000 in 1990. Asian Americans comprise almost 5 percent of lawyers in America and roughly 7 percent of law school enrollment. Asian Americans are the largest minority group in big law firms, but they have the highest attrition rates and the lowest ratio of partners to associates.

Asian Americans comprise 3 percent of federal judges and 2 percent of state judges, compared to nearly 6 percent of the U.S. population. Only three out of 94 U.S. Attorneys in 2016 were Asian American, and only four out of 2,437 elected district attorneys nationwide in 2014 were Asian American.

The two-year study — authored by California Supreme Court Justice [Goodwin H. Liu](#), recent Yale Law graduates Eric Chung, Xiaonan April Hu and Christine Kwon, and Yale Law postgraduate associate Samuel Dong — included a dozen focus groups and a national survey of over 600 Asian-American lawyers.

The survey revealed that Asian Americans identify lack of access to mentors and contacts as a primary barrier to career advancement. They also report being perceived as careful and hard-working, but not assertive or creative. “Whereas Asian Americans are regarded as having the

‘hard skills’ required for lawyerly competence, they are regarded as lacking many important ‘soft skills,’” the study found. More than half of the Asian-American lawyers surveyed said they “sometimes” or “often” experience implicit discrimination in the workplace.

“Our study shows that Asian Americans have a foot in the door in every sector of the legal profession,” said Justice Liu. “The question now is how wide the door will swing open. Despite much progress, Asian Americans still face significant obstacles to reaching the leadership ranks.”

“This new empirical study is a significant contribution to our understanding of the challenges faced by Asian Americans in the legal profession,” said [Ajay K. Mehrotra](#), director of the ABF and professor of law at Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law. “It is only by first identifying the factors that have impeded the long-term leadership success of Asian Americans that we can find potential solutions to this vexing problem.”

For more information on [A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law](#), please contact portraitprojectresearch@gmail.com.

About the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association

The National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) is the national association of Asian Pacific American attorneys, judges, law professors and law students. NAPABA represents the interests of almost 50,000 attorneys and more than 80 national, state and local Asian Pacific American bar associations. Its members include solo practitioners, large firm lawyers, corporate counsel, legal services and non-profit attorneys, and lawyers serving at all levels of government. To learn more about NAPABA, visit www.napaba.org, like us on [Facebook](#), and follow us on Twitter ([@NAPABA](#)).

About the American Bar Foundation

The [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) is among the world’s leading research institutes for the empirical and interdisciplinary study of law. An independent, nonprofit organization for more than 60 years, The ABF seeks to expand knowledge and advance justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes and legal institutions. To further this mission, the ABF will produce timely, cutting-edge research of the highest quality to inform and guide the legal profession, the academy, and society in the United States and internationally. The ABF’s primary funding is provided by the [American Bar Endowment](#) and [The Fellows of The American Bar Foundation](#).

###

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in ABF publications are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the American Bar Foundation or the American Bar Association.

The AMERICAN BAR FOUNDATION, ABF and related seal trademarks as used by the American Bar Foundation are owned by the American Bar Association and used under license.