



A PORTRAIT OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE LAW 2.0

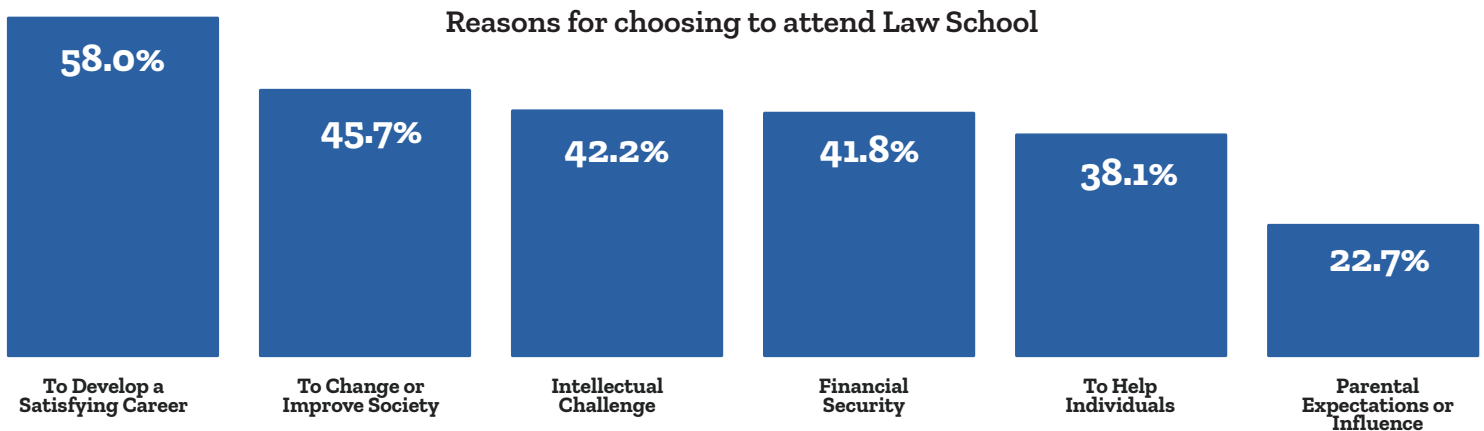
Identity and Action in Challenging Times

By Tyler Dang, Katherine Fang, Benji Lu, Michael Tayag, and Goodwin Liu

Five years ago, “A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law” offered a systematic account of Asian Americans in the legal profession. The report showed that, within the span of a generation, Asian Americans have become a visible presence across all sectors of the legal profession but are significantly underrepresented in the leadership of law firms, government, and academia.

Since then, the American Bar Foundation (ABF) has collaborated with the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, and Yale Law School to present “[A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law 2.0](#).” This five-year update offers fresh insights into career advancement and political participation against the backdrop of a rise in anti-Asian hate. Key findings:

Asian American attorneys indicated greater engagement with social and political issues, along with a desire to change and improve society.



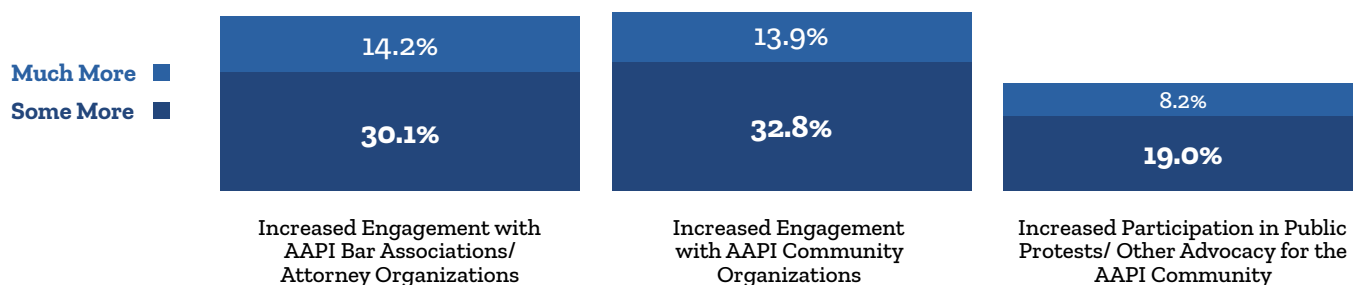
Among 2022 survey respondents, the second most common motivation for attending law school was the **desire to change or improve society**, up from the fourth most common motivation in 2017.



2022 survey respondents seeking to change practice settings ranked a desire to advance issues or values important to them among their most significant reasons for doing so. This was ranked among the least significant reasons in 2016.



Change in activities from March 2020:



Although there has been progress in the appointment of federal judges and in the ranks of general counsel, underrepresentation of Asian Americans in the top ranks of the legal profession persists.

The number of Asian American federal judges has increased over the past five years, comprising 6.0% of active federal judges compared to 3.4% in 2016.

In 2020, there were 45 AAPI general counsel of Fortune 1000 companies, up from 19 in 2009.

Only one of 93 Senate-confirmed U.S. Attorneys is Asian American, and in 2019, there were only 8 Asian Americans among the nearly 2,400 elected prosecutors—numbers that are disturbingly small given the rise in reported incidents of anti-Asian harassment and violence.

Asian Americans continue to be the largest minority group at major law firms, but they continue to have the highest attrition and the lowest ratio of partners to associates. Just 4.3% of equity partners at major firms in 2020 were Asian American; almost 90% were White.

	Asian American	White
Associates	12.6%	72.2%
Equity Partners	4.3%	89.6%
All Attorneys	8.6%	79.8%



Asian American attorneys would likely benefit from greater institutional supports that counteract stereotypes and facilitate relationship-building, development of soft skills, and leadership opportunities.

One-third of 2022 survey respondents indicated that they had no mentors in law school. Those who were the first in their family to attend law school were especially likely to report being unaware of the importance of mentorship to their careers.

"I had to actively seek out mentors and felt like some (particularly White mentors) had preconceived notions of Asian Americans as hard workers and intense but not particularly savvy in navigating the law."

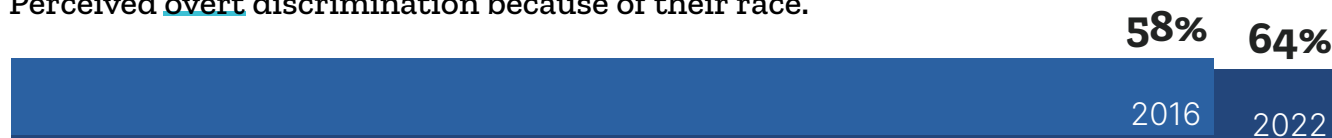
"I did not find many mentors I could identify with during law school. I would have loved to have a woman of color mentor who looked like me and had the same background as me, but they were all so busy that I didn't want to add more to their plate, so I didn't seek their help. There are so few women of color in the legal field, and so much labor is demanded of them."

The three most significant obstacles to advancement cited by 2022 survey respondents were the same as those cited by 2016 respondents: **lack of formal leadership training programs, inadequate access to mentors, and lack of recognition for one's work.**

More 2022 survey respondents, compared to 2016 survey respondents, reported perceiving overt or implicit discrimination in the workplace because of their race. Survey respondents in 2022 and 2016 consistently reported being stereotyped—as hard-working, responsible, and logical but also as lacking in interpersonal skills and leadership potential.



Perceived overt discrimination because of their race.



Perceived implicit discrimination because of their race.