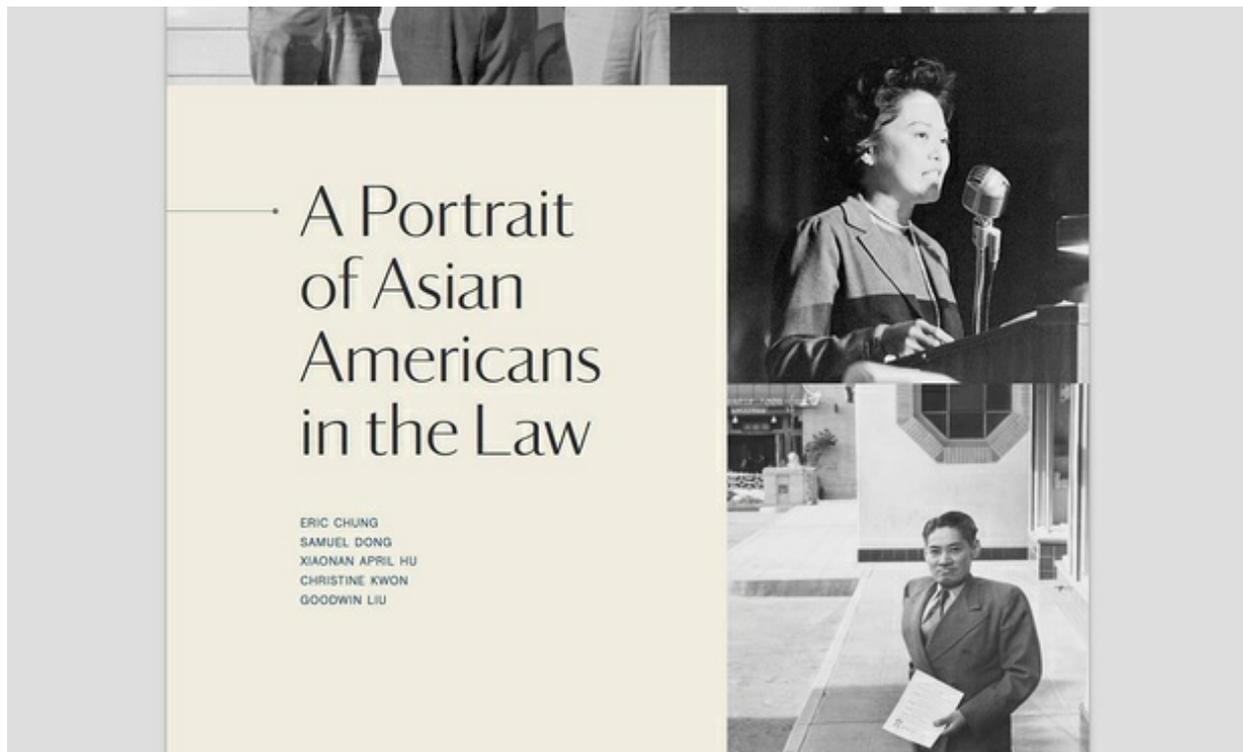


Study: Asian-Americans Face Glass Ceiling in the Law

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Courtesy of NAPABA

SAN FRANCISCO — Asian-Americans have been the fastest-growing minority group in the legal profession for the past three decades, but they've made only limited progress in reaching the upper echelons of the law, according to a [study released Tuesday](#).

"[A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law](#)," published by the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association and Yale Law School, reports there are over 50,000 Asian-American lawyers in the United States today compared to 20,000 in 2000. The study, billed as the first comprehensive look at the career paths of Asian-American law students and lawyers in the United States, found that Asian-Americans account for nearly 5 percent of lawyers and about 7 percent of law school students nationwide—as compared to 6 percent of the entire population.

But, at the peak of the legal profession, the study found that only 3 percent of federal judges and 2 percent of state judges are Asian-American. In 2016, only three of the nation's 94 U.S. attorneys were Asian-Americans. And as of 2014 only four Asian-Americans served as elected district attorneys.

Goodwin Liu.

Photo: Jason Doiy/ALM

"Asian-Americans have a firm foot in the door of the legal profession; the question now is how wide the door will swing open," wrote the study's co-authors, including California Supreme Court [Justice Goodwin Liu](#). "Greater penetration into these public leadership roles is critical if the increasing number of Asian-American attorneys is to translate into increasing influence of Asian-Americans in the legal profession and throughout society."



The study found that the experience of Asian-American lawyers in private practice mirrored that of the lawyers in government service. For nearly two decades, according to the report, Asian-Americans have been the largest minority

group in large law firms. But, the study found, they have had highest attrition rates and the lowest ratio of partners-to-associates among all groups. It said the problems stem, in part, from inadequate access to mentors.

"To the extent that mentoring and networking are conditioned by perceptions of sociability and conformity with cultural norms, Asian-Americans may face particular obstacles rooted in stereotyped perceptions of being foreign, socially awkward, or unassimilable," the report's authors wrote. "Whereas Asian-Americans are regarded as having the 'hard skills' required for lawyerly competence, they are regarded as lacking many important 'soft skills.'"

Bijal Vakil, the office executive partner at White & Case in Silicon Valley and a former member of NAPABA's executive committee, said that the study's finding will provide a baseline for Asian-American lawyers moving forward. "We are fortunate to have the data so that in-house counsel and leaders in private practice can continue the dialogue and take steps to move our inclusion goals forward," Vakil said.

Liu co-authored the study along with three recent Yale Law School graduates—Eric Chung, Xiaonan April Hu and Christine Kwon—as well as Yale Law postgraduate associate Samuel Dong.