

ASIAN AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATION IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

A CULTURAL DIVERSITY SNAPSHOT

NOVEMBER 2025

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ON BEHALF OF THE ASIAN AUSTRALIAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION INC



ASIAN AUSTRALIAN
LAWYERS ASSOCIATION INC
ADVANCING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE LAW



VICTORIAN BAR

GilchristConnell

Message from the National President

Matt Floro

ASIAN AUSTRALIAN LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION, NATIONAL PRESIDENT

The Asian Australian Lawyers Association acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present, and to emerging leaders. We recognise the continuing connection of First Nations peoples to land, waters, and culture, and acknowledge their enduring custodianship of law and justice on this continent.

With the release of our 2025 Cultural Diversity Snapshot, we are once again reminded that while the legal profession has made meaningful progress towards greater inclusion, there remains a bamboo ceiling that too many in our community still press against. Asian Australian lawyers are strongly represented among our most junior ranks, but that diversity remains starkly absent in the most senior roles — at the Bar, in partnerships, and on the judiciary.

This report serves as both a mirror and a map. It holds up a mirror to our profession, reflecting both the triumphs and ongoing challenges faced by Asian Australians seeking to contribute at the highest levels. It is also a map: a resource to help institutions create pathways for advancement, encourage robust inclusion, and ensure that the legal system genuinely reflects the vibrant diversity of the Australia it serves.



Justice, as Judge Burchell so eloquently put it, is not only what we decide—it is who we allow to decide. The legitimacy of our institutions relies on all Australians being able to see themselves reflected in positions of legal authority and leadership. A surname should never be a verdict. Diversity does not soften the law—it sharpens its sight, deepens our deliberations, and ensures that our profession is equipped to meet the needs of all Australians.

The findings in this report are an invitation to act—with transparency, resolve, and unity. We encourage decision makers in government, the judiciary, law firms, at the Bar, and in the broader profession to read and use this report, and to join us in forging a path towards a legal system that is truly representative, equitable, and just.

Let us continue to work together to create an Australia where the diversity, strength and ingenuity of our multicultural backgrounds are respected, reflected and celebrated in our legal profession, institutions and national dialogue.

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"As a judge, the question I am most often asked to determine is what a reasonable person would say, do, or think. At Federation, that 'reasonable person' was imagined as a young, Christian man. Today, they are more likely a woman in her mid-thirties. Tomorrow, they will look and sound different again as Australia becomes ever more diverse. If the composition of the judiciary drifts too far from this evolving touchstone, however, our decisions risk drifting too - away from the perspectives and attitudes of modern Australia.

From construing implied terms in commercial arrangements, to understanding the dynamics of the employment relationship, to weighing sentencing factors, cultural perspective is not an add-on - it is ingrained in judgment. I say this as someone raised at the meeting point of two cultures. I have learned that meaning can tilt with a gesture and that duty can sound different depending on who is heard. Diversity does not soften the law - it sharpens its sight. It deepens deliberation, steadies legitimacy, and helps us hear the whole story before we write its ending. The diversity of opinion and perspective is also what has allowed the common law to grow and thrive across generations and jurisdictions.

The Asian Australian Lawyers Association's 2025 Diversity Report shows progress since 2015, but it also reveals a bamboo ceiling that too many heads still press against. A surname should never be a verdict, and as leaders of the profession, we must open pathways that might otherwise narrow - through briefing, mentoring, and appointing.

Read this report and use it as a map to move us. Because justice is not only what we decide - it is who we allow to decide. And the Australia my court serves deserves to see itself on the bench."

Her Honour Judge Sharon Burchell
County Court of Victoria

Why this study and why now?

A well-functioning legal system is a fundamental part of a democratic state. Every citizen will at some point in their life need to rely on the legal system to either seek protection from wrongdoing, access their rights under the law or be held accountable. The Australian legal system reflects social norms by informing what is considered acceptable and reasonable within society. Concepts around fairness, equity, justice, reasonableness, proportionality, and rights are set through the process of creating legislation and interpreting it through the court system. It is therefore important that the institutions that make up this framework include perspectives that reflect our broader community supporting its legitimacy and social licence to operate impartially. Critically, those in a position to influence how the law is shaped and applied should align to the communities that make up broader Australia as a matter of fairness.

Australia is hailed as being one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world. At the last Census (August 2021), 28% of the Australian population were born overseas and almost half of all Australians (48%) had a parent born overseas. Further, 17% or 4.3 million Australians reported Asian ancestry in the last Census, up from 11% in 2011 and 14% in 2016^[ii] with Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cantonese and Punjabi amongst the most common languages other than English in Australian homes. Australia's multiculturalism has been a key strength in its economic growth and has been traditionally valued by mainstream Australians. This was supported by the Scanlon 2024 Mapping Social Cohesion Report, which found that 82% of surveyed adults agree or strongly agree that immigrants are generally good for the economy and improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures.^[iii]

According to the URBIS 2022 National Profile of Solicitors Report released by the Law Society of New South Wales, as at October 2022 there were 90,329 practicing solicitors in Australia, in the decade between 2011 and 2022 the legal profession grew by more than 57%.^[iv]

The continuing growth of the legal profession presents opportunities for improving representation across the board. Indeed, over the last ten years many Asian Australian legal professionals broke through professional barriers for the first time, with Asian Australian lawyers appointed to partner positions, senior counsel and judiciary in several firms and jurisdictions. While it is heartening to see some progress made, overall Asian Australians are still disproportionately underrepresented in the most senior ranks within legal institutions.

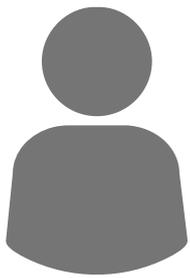
This report builds on the work done in the 2015 AALA Cultural Diversity Snapshot and aims to provide further insights regarding the current state of Asian Australian representation within the legal system. We encourage institutions and organisations to continue to take action to improve representation at the most senior ranks within the legal system.

Finally, we acknowledge that names are only one indicator of ethnicity and will not be a perfect identifier. While other data sources may exist that could potentially help to improve accuracy, there are significant practical limitations to incorporating additional data sources into the analysis (including data quality, consistency and comparability) and any improvement is likely to be modest.

Beyond using methods around compulsory self-identification, it is unlikely there ever will be a perfect data set to measure cultural diversity. Further, there are still barriers around people feeling comfortable in self-identifying for a variety of complex reasons including continued fear of discrimination. We therefore recognise that there will be Asian Australians who are not identified in our dataset due to the methodology used. It is of interest that these results reflect the greater tendency for migrants to Anglicise their names rather than Anglo-Celtic or European people to adopt Asian names. This reflects continued name discrimination faced by Asian Australians and other migrant communities in professional settings.

Despite its limitations, we believe this analysis provides a unique insight on the visibility of Asian Australian representation within the Australian legal profession that has not previously been available. The ultimate goal of the report is to initiate important conversations about the structural barriers to broader inclusion within the legal ecosystem. The report's findings align with the lived experience of many Asian Australian legal professionals and the professional barriers they face regarding representation and promotion amongst their peers. The report provides a starting point to these conversations and should be considered in the context of other information and evidence available.

A Snapshot of Asian Australian Diversity in 2025

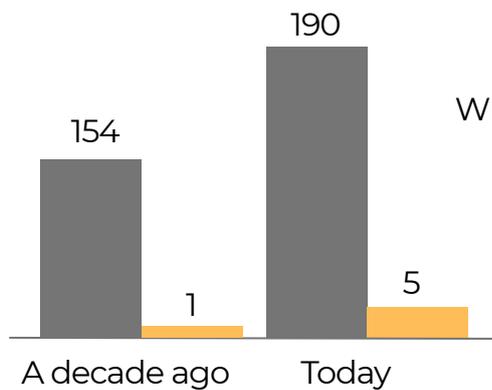


VS.



While there is strong representation of **Asian Australian Lawyers** at **junior levels** within law firms, this is **not reflected** in **senior ranks** of the profession.

There are **62 judges** named **Michael** compared to just **40 Asian Australian judges**



While the number of **judicial officers in Federal courts** increased from **154 to 190** in the last decade, the number of **Asian Australian judicial officers** only increased by **four**.

Improvements in gender equality at the Bar have **not translated** to proportionate increases in **Asian Australian female representation** at the Bar



At the current rate it will take at least **70 years** before **Asian Australian judicial officers** make up **17%** of the judiciary and reflect the Australian population as captured at the last Census in 2021.

Figure 1 Asian Australian share of legal cohorts, 2025

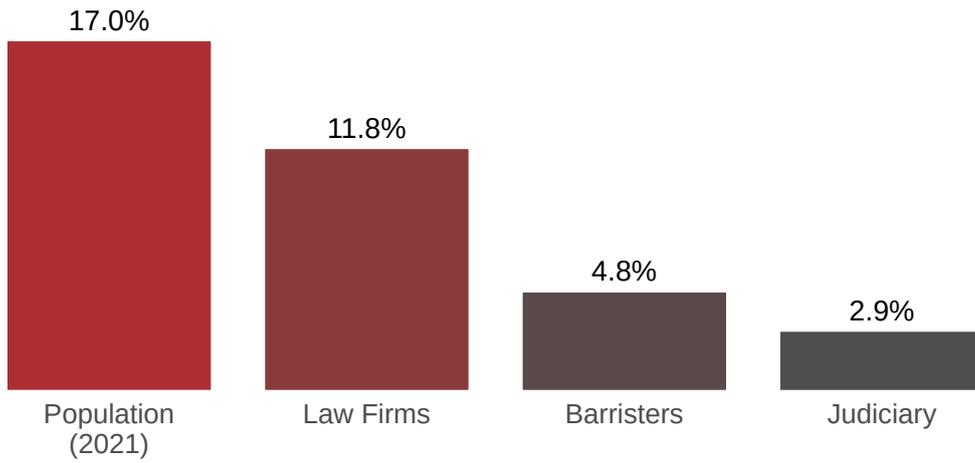


Figure 2 Asian Australian share of legal cohorts, 2015 & 2025

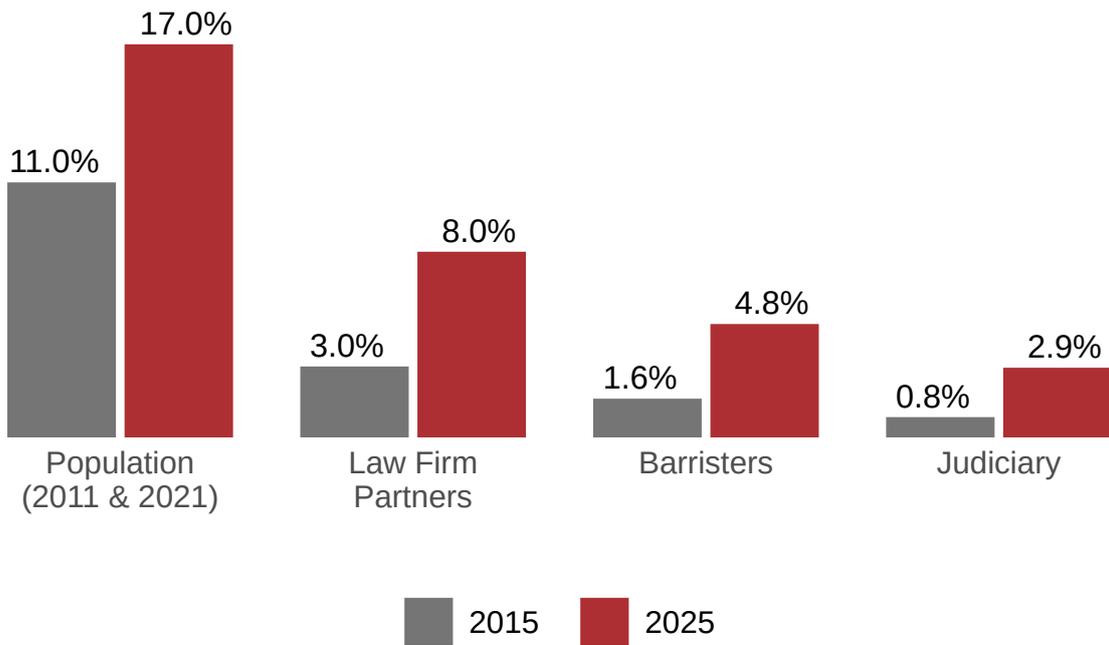


Figure 3 Asian Australian share of granular legal cohorts, 2025

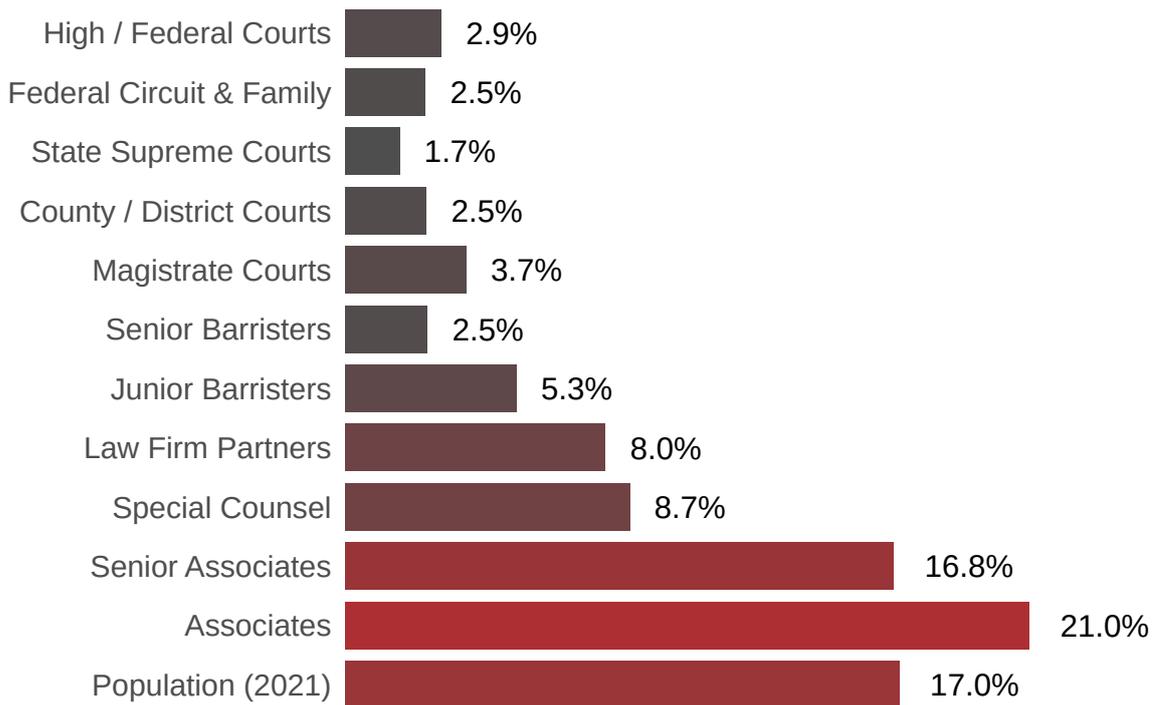
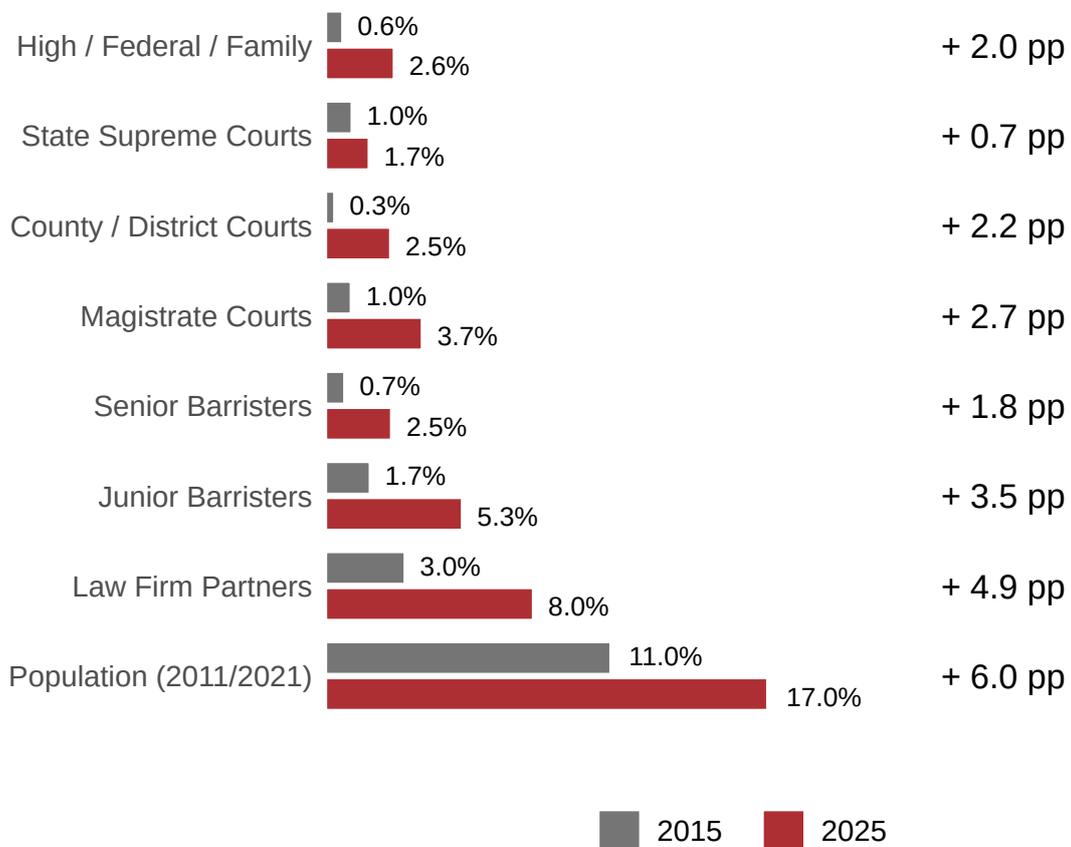


Figure 4 Asian Australian share of granular legal cohorts, 2015 & 2025



Note: a percentage point (pp) is the difference between two percentage values



Comparing the 2015 and 2025 results

“When I launched the 2015 report, a collective breath was drawn at my observation that the data (and accompanying infographic) demonstrated that the Australian legal profession, and particularly its upper echelons, remained predominantly ‘pale, stale and male’.

It is pleasing to see that, over the last 10 years, Asian Australian representation has improved at nearly all levels of the legal profession, with State and Territory Supreme courts an obvious exception.

Nevertheless, that in 2025, there are still more judges named Michael than Asian Australian judges highlights the need for further action and intervention if our judiciary is to come anywhere near reflecting the community it serves.”

Reynah Tang, AM
Former AALA National President, 2013-2016

Asian Representation	2015	2025	Change
	%	%	pp
Judiciary	0.80%	2.90%	+2.1 pp
Barristers	1.60%	4.80%	+3.2 pp
Law Firm Partners	3.00%	8.00%	+5.0 pp
Total	2.00%	5.50%	+3.5 pp
Population	11.00%	17.00%	+6.0 pp

Notes:

- Population based on 2011 & 2021 Census results for a comparable 10-year change.
- The Asian Ancestry share in the ABS Census results was 11.0% in 2011, 14.4% in 2016 and 17.0% in 2021.
- A percentage point (pp) is the difference between two percentage values.

The 2015 cultural diversity report released by the Asian Australian Lawyers Association had the following headline findings:

- Nationally only 1.6% of all barristers were identified as Asian Australian, including 87 Junior Counsel and 7 Senior Counsel
- Across the 97 firms surveyed, only 3.0% of partners were identified as Asian Australian
- Across Federal and State jurisdictions there were 8 Asian Australian judicial officers making up only 0.8% of all judicial officers in Australia
- No members of the judiciary were identified as Asian Australian in Western Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory

The 2015 report was the first data survey of its kind to look at Asian Australian representation within the legal profession. It provided important insights regarding the under representation of the Asian Australian community in senior leadership positions and highlighted the need for further action. Ten years on, our report takes the work further and attempts to measure the progress that has been made since 2015.

This report demonstrates that Asian Australian representation has increased across all measured categories over the last decade, however more work needs to be done.

The share of Asian Australians remains well below that of the overall Australian population particularly among barristers and the judiciary. Asian Australians in senior leadership roles within the legal system are still significantly underrepresented compared to the proportion of Asian Australians within broader Australian society.

Methodology and limitations

This report was compiled by collecting first and last name data of people within the Australian legal profession from publicly available information online, including:

- the websites of 25 of Australia's largest law firms
- all eight state and territory Bar association websites
- federal, state and territory court websites which list sitting judiciary listed in Annexure G

Data collection was undertaken in July 2025 with the analysis completed in September 2025. The final dataset includes approximately 15,000 names.

Consistent with the 2015 AALA report, the data does not include in-house counsel, government and academic lawyers due to the limited public information available.

An individual's ethnicity has been inferred from their name using NamSor's online name detection software (<https://namsor.app/>), which uses a proprietary algorithm to estimate the country and region origin of an individual's first and last name. NamSor has been widely used in academic studies to infer gender and/or ethnicity from names.

Asian ethnicity is based on an individual's name originating in 'East Asia', 'South-East Asia' or 'South Asia'. Predictions of a name originating in 'Western Asia' or 'Central Asia' have been excluded. These regions, as defined by NamSor, primarily cover countries in the Middle East such as Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus, Türkiye and other ethnicities unlikely to identify themselves as Asian.

Care was taken to control for ethnically ambiguous names like Lee that might have an Asian origin but are also common elsewhere. Examples include Spanish names in the Philippines, Portuguese names in Sri Lanka and Arabic names in Indonesia.

For many people, their ethnicity can be reliably inferred from the biographic information contained within their name. However, ethnicity is a complex concept that is highly individual in nature. For example, this methodology may misclassify people if their name does not align with their ethnicity for a variety of reasons including mixed heritage, adoption or name changes due to marriage. In addition, it is also possible that non-Asian lawyers have been misclassified as Asian.

We have made a small number of manual corrections, primarily made to the judiciary where more detailed public profiles are available, but not to the barrister and law firm cohorts.

Any remaining misclassification that we have been unable to identify will naturally affect the results of our analysis. However, we consider it highly unlikely that the effect is significant enough to materially impact the overall findings, conclusions and call to action.

Law Firms

“As a first-generation migrant who grew up in very modest circumstances, I could never have imagined a future in a top-tier law firm — let alone becoming a partner in one. It was difficult to see myself reflected at that level, when so few who looked like me, spoke like me, or shared my story occupied those spaces. Like so many others, it was sheer grit and determination over many years — coupled with the belief and sponsorship of generous mentors — that made all the difference. They encouraged me to believe in a future I could not yet see and showed me that talent flourishes when leaders choose to recognise it.

Now that I am a partner, I have come to appreciate just how profoundly culture shapes our professional journeys — influencing how we think, how we make decisions, how we connect with others, and how we sponsor and promote our talent. Diversity in leadership matters because it broadens the lens through which decisions are made, challenges long-held assumptions, and allows our institutions to serve with greater empathy, understanding, and representation.

While it is heartening to see growing diversity across the legal profession, particularly at its most senior levels, there remains a long road ahead if we are truly to reflect the community we serve. Those of us who have been able to navigate the bamboo ceiling carry a responsibility — to mentor, sponsor, and champion the next generation of diverse talent. Real progress will come when inclusion becomes self-sustaining: when those who once sought representation become the ones who create it for others. I look forward to that future — and to playing my part in helping make it a reality.”

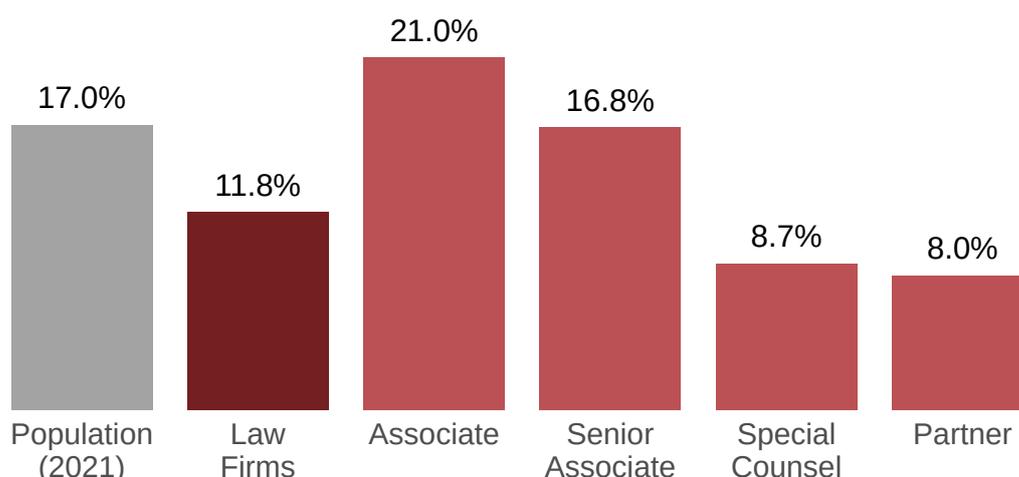
Jerome Martin
Partner, Clayton Utz

Law Firms	Asian Australian			Anglo-Celtic		European		Total
	n	%	from 2015	n	%	n	%	n
Partner	249	8.00%	+5.0 pp	2,068	66.30%	613	19.70%	3,118
Special Counsel	142	8.70%	-	1,043	64.10%	320	19.70%	1,627
Senior Associate	270	16.80%	-	903	56.30%	318	19.80%	1,604
Associate	199	21.00%	-	460	48.50%	189	19.90%	948
Total	860	11.80%	-	4,474		1,440	19.70%	7,297

Notes:

- Figures harmonise the different terminology used by different law firms.
- The 2015 report only looked at Partner numbers. Not possible to calculate the change for other cohorts.
- A percentage point (pp) is the difference between two percentage values.

Figure 5 Asian Australian Representation across law firms



We surveyed 25 national law firms and found that Asian Australian representation was greatest at the Associate and Senior Associate levels making up 21% and 16.8% respectively. These figures nearly equal or exceed the Asian Australian share of the broader population. Around 17% of Australians reported having Asian ancestry in the 2021 ABS Census. These figures also represent that there is a healthy pipeline of Asian Australian talent within law firms and that barriers to entering the legal profession for Asian Australians at entry levels may not be overly onerous.

However, promotional opportunities across the board may not be equivalent to Anglo-Celtic Australian or European Australian peers with representation dropping off at more senior ranks for Asian Australian solicitors, such as special counsel (8.7%) and partners (8%). Whereas for European counterparts the proportion at more senior ranks are roughly the same across all levels at approximately 19.7% and for Anglo-Celtic lawyers there is a noticeable increase from 48.5% of Associates having an Anglo-Celtic surname, the proportion increasing to 66.3% of Partners.

Bamboo Ceiling

The term bamboo ceiling^[1] is a metaphor used to describe the specific barriers that prevent professionals with Asian heritage from career ascension within white-dominant workplaces due to intersecting factors involving culture, class, organisational biases and stereotypes.

While there has been an increase in all measured categories since 2015 reflecting the important advocacy work of professional groups such as the Asian Australian Lawyers Association and other diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, it is still the case that within law firms, at the Bar and in judiciary, Asian Australian representation becomes increasingly rarer at senior levels.

For example while 16.8% of solicitors publicly listed as Senior Associates (or equivalent) have names predicted to be of Asian origin, only 5 of the 190 appointed judicial officers (2.6%) across the High Court, the Federal Court and the Federal Circuit and Family Court have names predicted to be of Asian origin.

[1] The term bamboo ceiling was first used in 2005 by Jane Hyun in *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: Career Strategies for Asians*.

The data supports that while barriers to entering the legal profession at junior ranks may be improving over time, there may be other structural and systemic barriers for many Asian Australians in advancing to more senior levels within the profession.

“The importance of diversity in the legal profession, in particular at the higher levels of the profession, is an issue that has gained prominence in recent years. Importantly, the prominence of the issue has come about, not simply through calls for diversity by members of minority groups, but through its promotion by members of the profession at the highest level. That, to a large extent, has come from the realisation that the legitimacy of our courts as public institutions and the profession generally are undermined when they fail to reflect the society they represent. While some groups are, no doubt, still seriously underrepresented, the profile of lawyers entering the profession suggests significantly greater diversity amongst new lawyers than has previously been the case. The profile of those at the upper levels of the profession, while moving, remains skewed to a predictable demographic. Significantly, the change at the upper levels appears to be well behind where it should be based on the changes at entry level and the effluxion of time. The task therefore remains to both expand diversity at entry level and to promote the flow of diverse talent to the top of the profession. These are not straightforward endeavours and are, no doubt, affected by a multiplicity of factors. What can be said is that organisations such as the Asian Australian Lawyers Association (AALA) perform an important role in countering the biases that frustrate the necessary progress.”

**The Honourable Justice Hament Dhanji
Supreme Court of New South Wales**

At a crossroads for change?

In 2015, AALA estimated that 3% of Partners were Asian Australian. In our analysis we've seen improvements with approximately 8% of Partners now having an Asian Australian name. The more than doubling of the proportion of Asian Australian Partners is applauded. However, we are still a long way away from unlocking untapped potential of Asian Australian talent in the legal profession and it is important to not be complacent.

Law practices are increasingly becoming more global in nature. There are significant business growth opportunities in the Asian-Pacific region which is creating increasing demand for Asian Australian lawyers who have Asian language skills and cultural competency which are highly valuable in competing for business in the region.

Increasing demand for Asian Australian talent will create competition for recruitment. Law firms that invest in improving visible representation of Asian Australian leaders at senior ranks are more likely to attract further Asian Australian solicitors to their firms needed to create a talent pipeline for future senior appointments. Firms that have increased visibility at more senior ranks are also more likely to reap the benefits that diversity brings to the business as well as signal to prospective employees that their workplace is more likely to be culturally safe. Savvy firms seeking to take advantage of these opportunities for growth should consider making these changes and investments now.

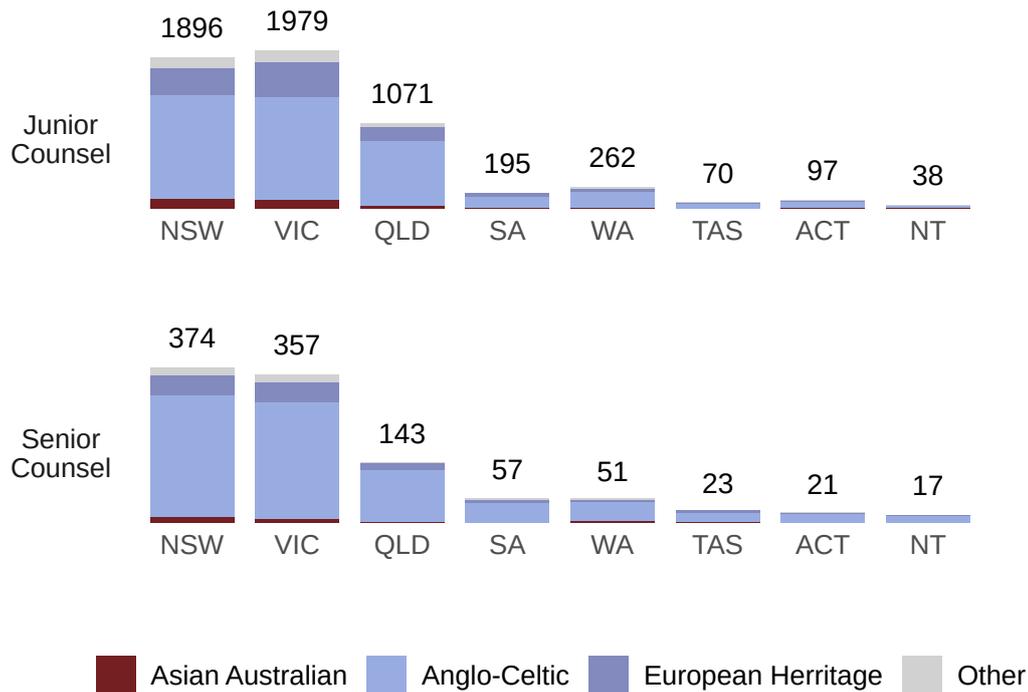
Barristers

"I was admitted to legal practice in 2010, signed the Victorian Bar Roll in 2020 and was appointed as a legal member of the Mental Health Tribunal in 2021. As a law student I distinctly remember carefully reading the profiles of lawyers and barristers of Asian descent in the context of what my own career might be able to look like. The decisions I made about my career and my progression through the profession were inspired by people who I didn't know - the profiles of lawyers and barristers of Asian descent which I read. I reflect on why I focused on the profiles of those lawyers and barristers of Asian descent, and, I believe it's because those profiles suggested to me that if you can do the job, you will be treated fairly, and that you can find your own version of success in the profession. Diversity is critically important to ensure that those with the ability to contribute to the profession don't self-select themselves out of the process."

Jayr Teng
Barrister, Victoria

Barristers	Asian Australian			Anglo-Celtic		European		Total
	n	%	from 2015	n	%	n	%	n
Senior Counsel	24	2.50%	+1.8 pp	758	79.80%	124	13.10%	950
Junior Counsel	284	5.30%	+3.5 pp	3,736	69.10%	1,011	18.70%	5,407
Total	308	4.80%	+3.2 pp	4,494	70.70%	1,135	17.90%	6,357

Figure 6 Number of Barristers by jurisdiction and level



Senior Counsel

Since 2015 when AALA’s diversity report counted 7 Asian Australian barristers appointed to Senior Counsel rank, the number has since more than tripled over the last ten years to 24 across Australia with New South Wales leading the way with 13 Asian Australian Senior Counsel followed by Victoria’s 9 Senior Counsel, Western Australia (3), Queensland (1) and the Northern Territory (1). However, there are still three jurisdictions, South Australia, Tasmania & Australian Capital Territory with no Asian Australians appointed or practising as Senior Counsel.

The improvements in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland are welcomed, however there is still significant work to be done, with Asian Australian Senior Counsel only representing approximately 2.5% of all Senior Counsel nationally, an increase from 0.7% (or 1.8 percentage points) since the 2015 AALA report. At this rate (+0.18 pp per year) we will reach 17.0% representation reflective of the broader population in the 2021 ABS Census in approximately 85 years.

A career at the Bar, particularly as Senior Counsel, has been the traditional pathway for judicial appointments. Improving diversity at this level of the legal profession is therefore critical to the talent pipeline for future judicial appointments.

Junior Counsel

Similarly for Junior Counsel, numbers of Asian Australian barristers have significantly increased since 2015 with New South Wales experiencing the most growth from 26 barristers in 2015 to 126 in 2025 and Victoria increasing from 40 to 110. There were more modest increases in Queensland from 20 to 34 and Western Australia from 5 to 13. The Australian Capital Territory was recorded as having no Asian Australian barristers in 2015 but now has 7 and Tasmania also improved from zero to 3 Asian Australian barristers. Meanwhile, South Australia (2) and Northern Territory (1) are unchanged from 2015.

“Since commencing practice in the law, I have only come across a few barristers of Asian heritage. Through AALA, I have met lawyers, barristers and members of the judiciary from many backgrounds. The open conversations with and encouragement by them has benefited me immensely. AALA has assisted me in establishing my practice at the Bar, and I am grateful for the network and sense of connection it provides.”

Kirsty Ha
Barrister, Victoria

The significant improvements in New South Wales and Victoria demonstrate that there is a growing pipeline of talent and increasing interest from Asian Australian lawyers to join the Bar. Other than Northern Territory and South Australia, all jurisdictions have improved on results from 2015 with Tasmania and Australian Capital Territory welcoming Asian Australian barristers in their jurisdiction, when there were previously none recorded. We should be cautious however of becoming complacent as progress will not be sustained if Asian Australian barristers do not consider the Bar a safe workplace.

Improvements on gender diversity has not translated to broader intersectional diversity

The Law Council of Australia’s Equitable Briefing Policy encourages clients that brief barristers to brief women barristers in at least 30% of all briefs and ensure that they receive at least 30% of the value of all brief fees. Some briefing entities have taken these targets further, such as Victorian Legal Aid which has committed by 2025 to reach at least 50% of all VLA-funded briefs and briefing fees going to women.^[iv] The broad adoption of such policies has encouraged greater participation of women at the Bar with significant increases in recent years. However, despite the increase of representation of women overall, Asian Australian women are still significantly underrepresented in all jurisdictions.

Figure 7 Gender and Ethnic Diversity at the Bar

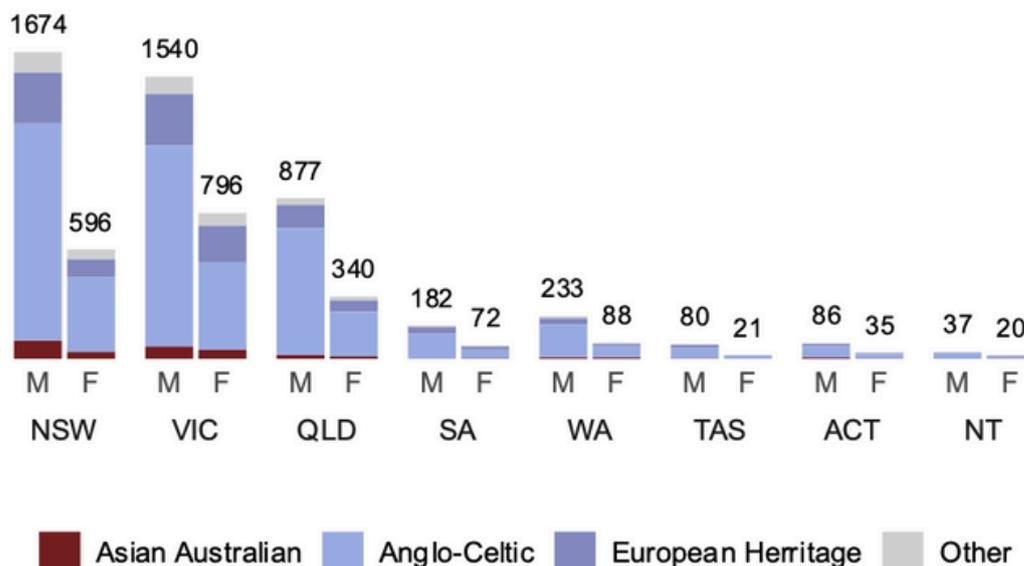
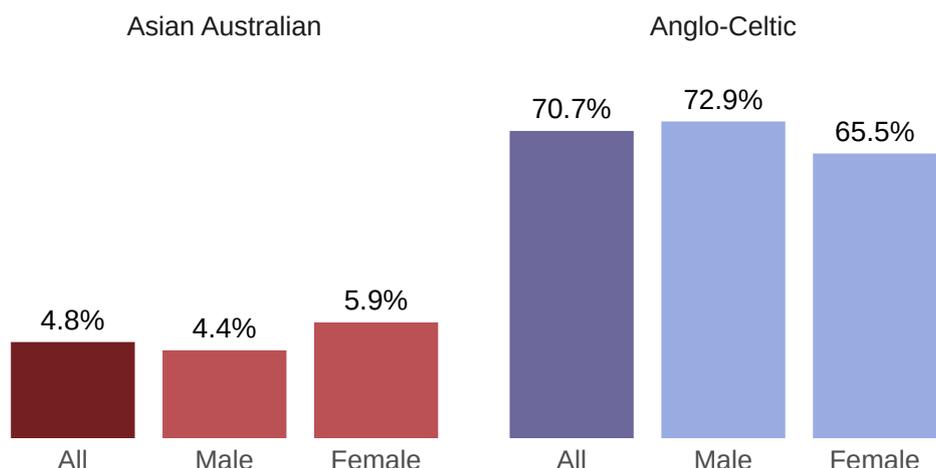


Figure 8 Intersectional Representation at the Bar



While women make up approximately 29.8% of the Bar across all jurisdictions, Asian Australian women represent only 5.9% of all women at the Bar and only 1.7% of all people at the Bar. This compares with women with Anglo Celtic surnames who make up 65.5% of all women at the Bar. The results are even starker at the Senior Counsel level, with only four jurisdictions featuring Asian Australian female Senior Counsel, all in the single digits: Victoria (3), New South Wales (2), Queensland (1) and Western Australia (1) compared to their Anglo Celtic female counterparts in the same jurisdictions: Victoria (45), New South Wales (51), Queensland (10) and Western Australia (7).

In the September 2025 Jobs and Skills Australia, Gender Economic Equality Study, titled: *Education and Training Divides: Gendered skills, pathways and outcomes*, the report found that while female graduates are more likely to become solicitors, CALD^[2] females who become solicitors have a lower median income than males. The report identified a 13.9% gender pay gap in this occupation, with CALD females having the lowest median incomes across cohorts.^[M]

We encourage further consideration about how gender equitable initiatives could take a more proactive intersectional approach to ensure that opportunities for advancement are evenly distributed as much as possible. Actions could include offering increased support and removing promotional barriers for marginalised women from diverse backgrounds.

“As the data shows, we are beginning to see smatterings of Asian Australians lawyers across levels of seniority, but given the sizeable Asian Australian diaspora and highly educated legal professionals, Australian Asians are disproportionately underrepresented in positions of leadership within Australia’s legal institutions. Australia’s legal fraternity should reflect the nation’s diversity, so that diverse communities view law-making and legal practice as more inclusive, fairer, and legitimate. If you’re reading this report, I ask you to consider what you can do today to promote diversity in our justice system so that it better serves the community.”

**Sheeana Dhanji,
Barrister, Victoria**

[2] Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

Judiciary

"I was appointed as a judicial officer ten years ago. I vividly remember walking into my first judges' conference and feeling like there was a sea of white faces looking back at me. As demonstrated by this report, things have changed over the last ten years, but there is still much room for improvement. Having a judiciary which reflects the diversity of the community matters. It matters for all the judges (and aspiring judges) from diverse backgrounds who see others like them and don't feel so alone. It matters for the parties and practitioners who see a judiciary which fairly reflects the community. And, most importantly, it matters to the quality of justice - because the insight, understanding and impartiality of the judiciary is enhanced when judges work and connect with others from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences."

Her Honour Judge My Anh Tran
County Court of Victoria

Judiciary	Asian Australian			Anglo-Celtic		European		Total
	n	%	from 2015	n	%	n	%	n
High / Federal	2	2.90%	+2.3 pp	56	82.40%	5	7.40%	68
Federal Circuit	3	2.50%	+2.5 pp	93	76.20%	25	20.50%	122
Supreme Courts	4	1.70%	+0.7 pp	191	79.60%	33	13.80%	240
County / District	7	2.50%	+2.2 pp	215	76.50%	45	16.00%	281
Magistrates	24	3.70%	+2.7 pp	501	77.40%	95	14.70%	647
Total	40	2.90%	+2.1 pp	1,056	77.80%	203	14.90%	1,358

Notes: A percentage point (pp) is the difference between two percentage values.

Since 2015 the number of Asian Australian judicial officers has increased from 8 to 40. The biggest increases coming from the lower courts with 24 Asian Australian judicial officers now sitting in state Magistrates courts. The number of judicial officers sitting in County or District Courts has increased from 1 to 7.

In the Supreme Court of New South Wales there are 2 Asian Australian judicial officers as well as in the Supreme Court of Western Australia. The Federal Court of Australia has two sitting Asian Australian judicial officers and the Federal Circuit and Family Court has three Asian Australian judicial officers (from none in 2015).

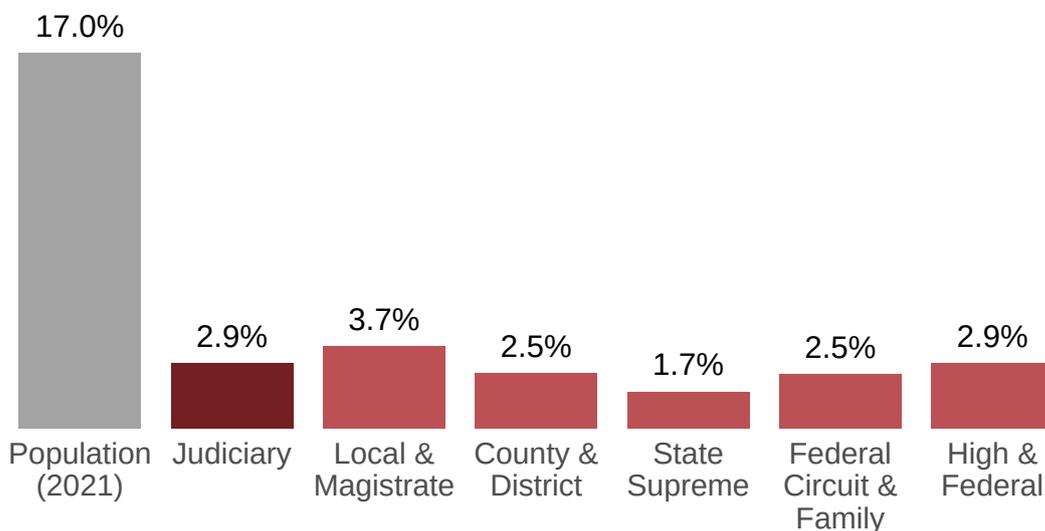
This is a notable increase from 1 to 5, however across the same period, the total sitting judicial officers across Federal courts (including the High Court) increased from 154 to 190.

Again, these are mixed results with uneven progress across jurisdictions. While it is encouraging to see that there are five times more Asian Australian judicial officers now than in 2015, they still only represent a meagre 2.9% in our dataset. The starkness is revealed by the fact that there are less Asian Australian judicial officers (40) in our dataset than there are judicial officers named Michael (62). There remain several superior courts which are still to appoint their first Asian Australian judicial officer. For example, there have been no Asian Australian judicial officers appointed to the High Court of Australia and in several Supreme Courts.

Our analysis suggests that there are currently no Asian Australian sitting judicial officers in the Supreme Courts in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, or the Northern Territory. Similarly, there are no Asian Australian sitting judicial officers in County or District Courts in New South Wales or South Australia.

We understand that judicial promotions are rare between jurisdictions, therefore based on current practices, it is unlikely that the increased appointments in the Magistrates Courts will necessarily translate into greater representation across the Supreme Court, Federal Court or High Court of Australia in future years without proactive interventions.

Figure 9 Asian Representation in the Judiciary



Since the 2015 AALA report, the Asian Australian share of the Judiciary increased from 0.8% to 2.9%, or an increase of 2.1 percentage points. At this rate (+0.21 pp per year) it will take at least 70 years before Asian Australian judges make up 17% of the judiciary and reflect the Australian population as captured at the last Census in 2021.

Recommendations for further work

Work which fell out of scope for this report but could be explored and expanded upon in future work include the following:

- data from law society registers in each jurisdiction
- student graduating data from universities offering law programs
- broader set of judiciary data in specialty courts and tribunals
- cultural diversity data of court users

One of the challenges in compiling a comprehensive report is that data is published inconsistently across different jurisdictions. As such, it may be the case that some jurisdictions are able to undertake more comprehensive analysis compared to others. To assist completion of this work on a national basis in future, we recommend that law societies and the various Bars consider adopting agreed data categories and conventions to allow for streamlining of analysis.

Where to from here?

This report makes the case for more interventions to improve Asian Australian representation within the legal profession, particularly at senior levels.

We are calling on Australian organisations and institutions to move beyond broad statements about valuing diversity, inclusion and equity in corporate documents alone and instead take proactive steps to improve the status quo.

Without strengthening commitments to change, it is unlikely that significant advancements will be made at the pace required to reflect the broader diversity across Australian communities.

This includes:

- taking active steps to improve data collection to track progress
- amending the Uniform Law and other regulatory frameworks to include a statutory commitment to promoting greater diversity and inclusion in the legal profession
- investing in the talent pipeline for Asian Australian lawyers, barristers and judicial officers, including tailored L&D opportunities, active sponsorship and use of quotas in leadership courses for underrepresented employee cohorts within senior ranks
- increasing cultural diversity on decision making panels, boards and bodies which decide appointments and promotions
- explicitly recognising benefits that are brought by candidates with diverse lived experience in selection criteria for promotion
- applying intersectional approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives including acknowledging how intersecting identities can compound the effect of discrimination
- Government and businesses who frequently brief law firms and barristers as repeat users of the court system should consider equitable briefing policies that extend beyond gender equality and adopt intersectional approaches to promote diverse talent
- considering changes to the process of judicial appointments to proactively widen the pool of available candidates and acknowledge the importance of judicial diversity in ensuring broader access to justice outcomes

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Individual Contributors

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About the Authors



Sharon Deano is a proud Filipina Australian lawyer and a career public servant. Sharon has worked for both Commonwealth and State regulators for nearly two decades and is currently a senior executive in the Victorian public service. She has strongly advocated for greater representation of culturally and racially marginalised Australians in senior roles both in the public service and the legal profession. She is currently a senior executive champion for the Victorian Public Service Women of Colour Network and was also the former Secretary of the Filipino Australian Lawyers Association. Sharon is also a long-standing member for the Asian Australian Lawyers Association.



Peter Gray has worked for the Commonwealth Government since 2015. He has an economics background and is currently a Principal Data Analyst at the ACCC. He is at his happiest when using data to challenge conventional wisdom. His work on the ACCC's Gender Pay Gap received an Honourable Mention for Outstanding Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy at the L.E.A.D (Leadership Excellence & Distinction) Awards in August 2024.

General Disclaimer: The views and opinions in this report are of the authors and are endorsed by the Asian Australian Lawyers Association. They do not reflect the views of the authors' respective employers.

Annexure A – 2025 Asian Australian Representation

Table A1: 2025 breakdown by ethnicity and professional cohort – count

Group	Asian Australian	Anglo-Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
	n	n	n	n	n
High / Federal	2	56	5	5	68
Federal Circuit	3	93	25	1	122
Supreme Courts	4	191	33	12	240
County / District	7	215	45	14	281
Magistrates	24	501	95	27	647
Judiciary	40	1,056	203	59	1,358
Senior Counsel	24	758	124	44	950
Junior Counsel	284	3,736	1,011	376	5,407
Barristers	308	4,494	1,135	420	6,357
Partner	249	2,068	613	188	3,118
Special Counsel	142	1,043	320	122	1,627
Senior Associate	270	903	318	113	1,604
Associate	199	460	189	100	948
Law Firms	860	4,474	1,440	523	7,297
Total	1,208	10,024	1,002	1,002	15,012

Table A2: 2025 breakdown by ethnicity and professional cohort – share of total

Group	Asian Australian	Anglo-Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
	%	%	%	%	n
High / Federal	2.90%	82.40%	7.40%	7.40%	68
Federal Circuit	2.50%	76.20%	20.50%	0.80%	122
Supreme Courts	1.70%	79.60%	13.80%	5.00%	240
County / District	2.50%	76.50%	16.00%	5.00%	281
Magistrates	3.70%	77.40%	14.70%	4.20%	647
Judiciary	2.90%	77.80%	14.90%	4.30%	1,358
Senior Counsel	2.50%	79.80%	13.10%	4.60%	950
Junior Counsel	5.30%	69.10%	18.70%	7.00%	5,407
Barristers	4.80%	70.70%	17.90%	6.60%	6,357
Partner	8.00%	66.30%	19.70%	6.00%	3,118
Special Counsel	8.70%	64.10%	19.70%	7.50%	1,627
Senior Associate	16.80%	56.30%	19.80%	7.00%	1,604
Associate	21.00%	48.50%	19.90%	10.50%	948
Law Firms	11.80%	61.30%	19.70%	7.20%	7,297
Total	8.00%	66.80%	6.70%	6.70%	15,012

Annexure B – Changes from 2015 AALA Report

Table B: Asian-Australian share of total, 2015 & 2025

Group	2015			2025			Change pp
	Asian Australian		Total	Asian Australian		Total	
	n	%	n	n	%	N	
High/Federal/Family	1	0.60%	154	5	2.60%	190	+4.1 pp
Supreme	2	1.00%	198	4	1.70%	240	+0.7 pp
County/District	1	0.30%	295	7	2.50%	281	+2.2 pp
Magistrate	4	1.00%	410	24	3.70%	647	+2.7 pp
Judicial	8	0.80%	1,057	40	2.90%	1,358	+2.2 pp
Senior	7	0.70%	964	24	2.50%	950	+1.8 pp
Junior	87	1.70%	5,097	284	5.30%	5,407	+3.5 pp
Barristers	94	1.60%	6,061	308	4.80%	6,357	+3.3 pp
Partners	125	3.00%	4,100	249	8.00%	3,118	+4.9 pp
Overall	329	2.90%	11,218	950	8.80%	10,833	+5.9 pp

Notes: A percentage point (pp) is the difference between two percentage values.

Annexure C – 2025 Barristers by State/Territory

Table C1: 2025 breakdown of barristers by ethnicity & state/territory – count

Level	State/ Territory	Asian Australian	Anglo- Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
		n	n	n	n	n
Junior	NSW	126	1,299	326	145	1,896
Junior	VIC	110	1,290	432	147	1,979
Junior	QLD	34	809	172	56	1,071
Junior	WA	13	191	40	18	262
Junior	SA	2	137	47	11	197
Junior	TAS	3	52	12	3	70
Junior	ACT	7	64	18	8	97
Junior	NT	1	26	8	4	39
Junior	Total	284	3,736	1,011	376	5,407
Senior	NSW	13	295	46	20	374
Senior	VIC	9	281	49	18	357
Senior	QLD	1	124	19	2	146
Senior	WA	3	48	5	3	59
Senior	SA	-	47	7	3	57
Senior	TAS	1	23	5	2	31
Senior	ACT	-	21	2	1	24
Senior	NT	-	17	1	-	18
Senior	Total	24	758	124	44	950
Total	Total	308	4,494	1,135	420	6,357

Table C2: 2025 breakdown of barristers by ethnicity & state/territory – share of total

Level	State/ Territory	Asian	Anglo- Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
		Australian				
		n	n	n	n	n
Junior	NSW	6.60%	68.50%	17.20%	7.60%	1,896
Junior	VIC	5.60%	65.20%	21.80%	7.40%	1,979
Junior	QLD	3.20%	75.50%	16.10%	5.20%	1,071
Junior	WA	5.00%	72.90%	15.30%	6.90%	262
Junior	SA	1.00%	69.50%	23.90%	5.60%	197
Junior	TAS	4.30%	74.30%	17.10%	4.30%	70
Junior	ACT	7.20%	66.00%	18.60%	8.20%	97
Junior	NT	2.60%	66.70%	20.50%	10.30%	39
Junior	Total	5.30%	69.10%	18.70%	7.00%	5,407
Senior	NSW	3.50%	78.90%	12.30%	5.30%	374
Senior	VIC	2.50%	78.70%	13.70%	5.00%	357
Senior	QLD	0.70%	84.90%	13.00%	1.40%	146
Senior	SA	5.10%	81.40%	8.50%	5.10%	59
Senior	WA	-	82.50%	12.30%	5.30%	57
Senior	TAS	3.20%	74.20%	16.10%	6.50%	31
Senior	ACT	-	87.50%	8.30%	4.20%	24
Senior	NT	-	94.40%	5.60%	-	18
Senior	Total	2.50%	79.80%	13.10%	4.60%	950
Total	Total	4.80%	70.70%	17.90%	6.60%	6,357

Annexure D – 2025 Intersectionality at the Bar

Table D1: 2025 breakdown of barristers by ethnicity and gender– count

Level	Gender	Asian Australian	Anglo-Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
		n	n	n	n	n
Junior	Male	180	2,616	650	227	3,673
Junior	Female	104	1,120	361	149	1,734
Junior	All	284	3,736	1,011	376	5,407
Senior	Male	17	639	99	37	792
Senior	Female	7	119	25	7	158
Senior	All	24	758	124	44	950
All	Male	197	3,255	749	264	4,465
All	Female	111	1,239	386	156	1,892
All	All	308	4,494	1,135	420	6,357

Table D2: 2025 breakdown of barristers by ethnicity and gender – share of total

Level	Gender	Asian Australian	Anglo-Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
		%	%	%	%	n
Junior	Male	4.90%	71.20%	17.70%	6.20%	3,673
Junior	Female	6.00%	64.60%	20.80%	8.60%	1,734
Junior	All	5.30%	69.10%	18.70%	7.00%	5,407
Senior	Male	2.10%	80.70%	12.50%	4.70%	792
Senior	Female	4.40%	75.30%	15.80%	4.40%	158
Senior	All	2.50%	79.80%	13.10%	4.60%	950
All	Male	4.40%	72.90%	16.80%	5.90%	4,465
All	Female	5.90%	65.50%	20.40%	8.20%	1,892
All	All	4.80%	70.70%	17.90%	6.60%	6,357

Annexure E – 2025 Gender split of Bar by State/Territory

Table E: 2025 breakdown of barristers by gender and state/territory

Level	State/ Territory	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
		n	n	n	%	%
Junior	NSW	1359	537	1896	72%	28%
Junior	VIC	1253	726	1979	63%	37%
Junior	QLD	745	326	1071	70%	30%
Junior	WA	182	80	262	69%	31%
Junior	SA	137	60	197	70%	30%
Junior	TAS	52	18	70	74%	26%
Junior	ACT	67	30	97	69%	31%
Junior	NT	23	16	39	59%	41%
Junior	Total	3673	1,734	5,407	68%	32%
Senior	NSW	315	59	374	84%	16%
Senior	VIC	287	70	357	80%	20%
Senior	QLD	132	14	146	90%	10%
Senior	WA	51	8	59	86%	14%
Senior	SA	45	12	57	79%	21%
Senior	TAS	28	3	31	90%	10%
Senior	ACT	19	5	24	79%	21%
Senior	NT	14	4	18	78%	22%
Senior	Total	792	158	950	83%	17%
All	NSW	1674	596	2270	74%	26%
All	VIC	1540	796	2336	66%	34%
All	QLD	877	340	1217	72%	28%
All	WA	233	88	321	73%	27%
All	SA	182	72	254	72%	28%
All	TAS	80	21	101	79%	21%
All	ACT	86	35	121	71%	29%
All	NT	37	20	57	65%	35%
All	Total	4465	1,892	6,357	70%	30%

Annexure F – 2025 Judiciary by Jurisdiction

Table F1: 2025 breakdown of judiciary by ethnicity and jurisdiction - count

Court	Jurisdiction	Asian Australian	Anglo-Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
		n	n	n	n	n
High/Federal	Federal	2	56	5	5	68
Federal Circuit	Federal	3	93	25	1	122
Total	Federal	5	149	30	6	190
Supreme	NSW	2	44	8	2	56
Supreme	VIC	-	63	9	4	76
Supreme	QLD	-	28	1	1	30
Supreme	WA	2	16	5	3	26
Supreme	TAS	-	7	1	-	8
Supreme	ACT	-	9	3	1	13
Supreme	NT	-	12	2	1	15
Supreme	All	4	191	33	12	240
District	NSW	-	77	10	4	91
County	VIC	4	63	13	4	84
District	QLD	1	35	7	2	45
District	WA	2	26	8	2	38
District/County	All	7	215	45	14	281
Local	NSW	8	121	18	14	161
Magistrates	VIC	7	133	37	8	185
Magistrates	QLD	3	103	11	1	118
Magistrates	WA	2	78	6	1	87
Magistrates	TAS	-	14	2	1	17
Magistrates	ACT	-	11	3	-	14
Local	NT	1	14	4	-	19
Magistrate	All	24	501	95	27	647
Overall	All	40	1,056	203	59	1,358

Table F2: 2025 breakdown of judiciary by ethnicity and jurisdiction – share of total

Court	Jurisdiction	Asian Australian	Anglo-Celtic	European Heritage	Other Ancestry	Total
		n	n	n	n	n
High/Federal	Federal	2.90%	82.40%	7.40%	7.40%	68
Federal Circuit	Federal	2.50%	76.20%	20.50%	0.80%	122
Total	Federal	2.60%	78.40%	15.80%	3.20%	190
Supreme	NSW	3.60%	78.60%	14.30%	3.60%	56
Supreme	VIC	-	82.90%	11.80%	5.30%	76
Supreme	QLD	-	93.30%	3.30%	3.30%	30
Supreme	WA	7.70%	61.50%	19.20%	11.50%	26
Supreme	TAS	-	87.50%	12.50%	-	8
Supreme	ACT	-	69.20%	23.10%	7.70%	13
Supreme	NT	-	80.00%	13.30%	6.70%	15
Supreme	All	1.70%	79.60%	13.80%	5.00%	240
District	NSW	-	84.60%	11.00%	4.40%	91
County	VIC	4.80%	75.00%	15.50%	4.80%	84
District	QLD	2.20%	77.80%	15.60%	4.40%	45
District	WA	5.30%	68.40%	21.10%	5.30%	38
District/County	All	2.50%	76.50%	16.00%	5.00%	281
Local	NSW	5.00%	75.20%	11.20%	8.70%	161
Magistrates	VIC	3.80%	71.90%	20.00%	4.30%	185
Magistrates	QLD	2.50%	87.30%	9.30%	0.80%	118
Magistrates	WA	2.30%	89.70%	6.90%	1.10%	87
Magistrates	TAS	-	82.40%	11.80%	5.90%	17
Magistrates	ACT	-	78.60%	21.40%	-	14
Local	NT	5.30%	73.70%	21.10%	-	19
Magistrate	All	3.70%	77.40%	14.70%	4.20%	647
Overall	All	2.90%	77.80%	14.90%	4.30%	1,358

Annexure G – Courts Included in Analysis

High Court	Federal
Federal Court	Federal
Federal Circuit & Family Court	Federal
Supreme Court	NSW
Supreme Court	VIC
Supreme Court	QLD
Supreme Court	WA
Supreme Court	SA
Supreme Court	TAS
Supreme Court	ACT
Supreme Court	NT
District Court	NSW
District Court	QLD
District Court	WA
District Court	SA
County Court	VIC
Local Court	NSW
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Magistrates Court	QLD
Magistrates Court	WA
Magistrates Court	SA
Magistrates Court	TAS
Magistrates Court	ACT



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