

Enhanced and Continued Focus on Racial Justice

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, ACS put the struggle against racial injustice at the center of our work. In June, we held a briefing call, "A History of Violence: Institutional Racism in Our Criminal Legal System," co-sponsored with the National Bar Association, that explored in detail the institutional and systemic racism within our criminal legal system that leads to disproportionate police violence against black and brown people and against the protesters who take to the streets demanding change and the ways we can address it.

We as ACS and our chapters understand the importance of inclusion and the value of diversity in pushing for a progressive vision of the law. We equip our leaders with resources to enable them to work towards equity. This year, we organized roundtable discussions on using a race conscious lens in all that we do. We also developed a program guide on "Combatting Anti-Racism through Law" for our law student leaders to use to develop discussions. Several ACS chapters (student and lawyer chapters) organized programming on racial justice and equity, including a Los Angeles series on race and the law and implicit bias and debiasing programs throughout the country. Moreover, we collaborated with partner organizations who have been fighting this fight long before ACS was founded nearly 20 years ago. We worked with Michele Goodwin and the National Black Law Students Association for a series on elevating and engaging Black lives in law school. We helped to staff volunteer projects with racial justice organizations. And, our chapters throughout the country established strong partnerships with local affinity groups.

Our virtual regional convenings featured discussions on subjects such as racial justice and the right to protest, and qualified immunity and the horribly unjust killing of Tamir Rice. ACS committed to calling out the Trump Administration's renewal of the federal death penalty and death penalty in general, highlighting the inherent racial inequities. ACS is one of the few national membership organizations taking on this issue and we will continue to engage our network in challenging its legality.



COVID-19 and Its Effects on the Legal System

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACS has worked to educate the nation about the public health threats as well as the legal and constitutional issues our country is facing as a result of the crisis. Recordings of our highly successful webinar series as well as other commentary, analysis, and other resources from ACS and our network can be found on our [COVID-19 Resources page](#).



Virtual National Convention

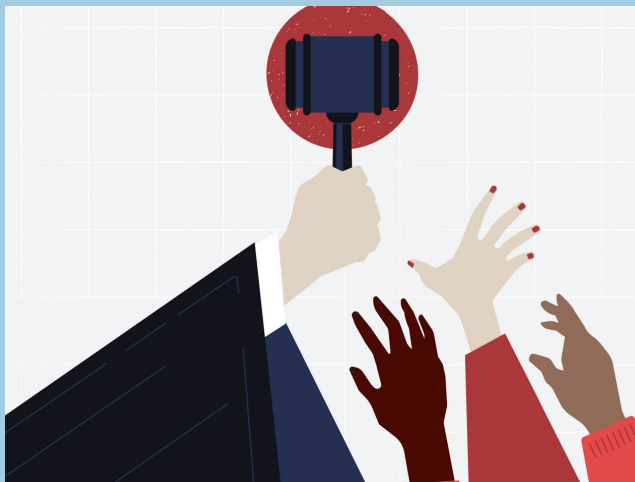
In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to quickly transition our National Convention to a virtual format and made all tickets free of charge. Despite not being able to convene in person, we were still able to bring together nearly 1,000 lawyers, law students, judges, and policymakers. Panels considered issues such as the pandemic and the law, a 21st Century Constitution, and remarks from Stacey Abrams on how to protect our democracy.

ACS NATIONAL CONVENTION



A Changing Judiciary

In nearly four years, President Trump has confirmed 227 Article III judges, including 3 Supreme Court Justices. On the circuit courts, just over one in four judges were appointed by President Trump. This is nearly 70% of the total that President Obama was able to confirm in eight years.



President Trump 's judicial nominees fit a very clear mold. They are:

- 85% white
- 76% male
- 65% white male
- Young - His youngest confirmed nominee is 33.

These judges are already transforming the judiciary and will continue to do so for decades to come. An overwhelming majority represent a narrow and regressive vision of the Constitution – and, as we all know, these are lifetime appointments.

ACS firmly believes that an independent and diverse judiciary is essential to our democracy and the rule of law. We are committed to continuing our work to educate lawmakers and the general public on the importance of the courts and of building a progressive and diverse pipeline to ensure a future federal bench that better reflects America.

Defending the Fairness of the Courts

ACS tracks vacancies, nominations, and other processes affecting the judiciary— essential information to keep advocates informed about the pace and impact of the current nominations process. We recently launched “Diversity of the Federal Bench,” a new data tracker that monitors the gender, racial, and ethnic diversity of the federal courts. We update the tracker continuously, and it has already proven to be a helpful resource to our network members, partners, and the media. In addition, ACS’s Path to the Bench initiative is developing a highly qualified pool of legal professionals dedicated to long-term, positive change and a fair judiciary. Our chapters, working closely with their local legal communities, are identifying talented progressive lawyers at every stage in their careers and giving them the support necessary to obtain influential legal positions at the state and federal level. Through this project, ACS is building the bench of progressive lawyers and judges and providing the networks to create the next generation of leaders in the law.

Path to the Bench

The ACS Path to the Bench Initiative is developing a highly qualified pool of lawyers dedicated to long-term, positive change and a fair judiciary. Our chapters, working closely with their local legal communities, are identifying talented progressive lawyers at every stage in their careers and giving them the support necessary to obtain influential legal positions at the state and federal level. Central to our work is ensuring that local legal communities come together to engage in the process and racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and practice area diversity is prioritized. Through this project, we are building the bench of progressive lawyers and judges and providing the networks to create the next generation of leaders in the law.

We create working groups in each state consisting of local ACS chapter members who work with their state’s local legal community to identify progressive legal talent, identify opportunities to help place lawyers in influential legal positions, and develop programming and networking events to support this work. We currently have 45 working groups across 36 states, and those numbers continue to grow as we increase our outreach. When vacancies occur, ACS’s networks provide decision-makers with the most representative and competitive candidates who are ready to step into these roles, backed by a strong group of peers to support them.

Read [Progressive Groups Urge Biden to Move Quickly on Diverse Slate of Judges](#)

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ACS has provided me an outlet to engage with other students and professionals in our industry and strive to. do good things. Additionally, ACS has guaranteed that when I leave law school, I will have a network of individuals who I can reach out to if needed. I will forever be thankful for ACS, the work they do, and the staff who make everything they do possible.

- ACS network member on [GreatNonprofits.org](#)

States Attorneys General Project



Since 2017, the State Attorneys General (AG) Project has cultivated much-needed collaboration between state attorneys general offices (AGOs) and connected AGO staff with advocacy organizations to create better policies and strengthen local responses to issues. Following the pivotal Presidential election results in November, the work of state attorneys general will be more important than ever, and the State AG Project will continue to serve an instrumental role disseminating legal resources and hosting programming that examines and analyzes the legal and policy issues state attorneys general face.

Through our working groups, we coordinate meetings to allow AGOs to privately develop policy responses and exchange ideas and bring in partner organizations to inform their work and coordinate efforts. We facilitate informal relationships for better multistate collaboration, for example, making connections among AGOs that seek to replicate litigation strategies, set up new enforcement units, or create listservs to track amicus activity in civil rights cases. This year, all our gatherings were virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic but were still successful and widely attended.

Protecting Voting Rights and Democratic Participation

ACS is committed to protecting voting rights and democratic participation by responding to critical needs at the national, state, and local level. Our work provides key resources for advocates and individual voters to prepare for and address these anticipated election administration challenges. In this election year, ACS has been deeply engaged in both leading and in connecting our network with partner organizations and activities in these areas: volunteer poll workers, voting advocacy, election protection, and the Election Day Class Cancellation program, which our student network is mobilizing on campuses throughout the nation.

Since 2018, we have been working with leading voting organizations through All Voting is Local to monitor election activity at the local level and supply critical resources to local leaders to identify problems early. We are also expanding our local partnerships and campaigns to fill the increased need for trained poll workers and election protection volunteers, including Power the Polls, the Alliance of Students at the Polls (ASAP) and We Can Vote. Earlier this year, we held a briefing call on election “norm setting” during COVID-19 to address confusion around ballot counting in November, considering an increased number of absentee and mail-in ballots may result in delayed election results.



ACS Chapters staff participating in nonpartisan voting rights activities.

Presidential Transition



Following the recent election, ACS is identifying reforms that will be needed to restore the rule of law, particularly in the executive branch. To that end, ACS has started an executive branch recruitment project which will identify diverse, experienced lawyers with an interest in serving in federal positions and provide them with educational information about the presidential appointments process. We will also provide training on how to be effective leaders, managers, and line attorneys, especially in light of the multitude of crises they will be facing. In addition to the Department of Justice, we are working to identify suitable talent for roles across agencies, such as general counsel offices, chiefs of staff, and other roles traditionally held by lawyers. We will continue to focus on opportunities for positive change that can be achieved at the state and local levels as well, as we to recognize the importance of working for change at all levels.

