



Senate Staff Diversity Among Democratic Presidential Candidates

BY LaSHONDA BRENSON | JULY 11, 2019

Introduction

On July 11, 2019, the U.S. Senate Democratic Caucus released [diversity data](#) on the U.S. Senate personal and committee office staff of each of their Members. This analysis examines the data of the staff in the personal offices of the seven U.S. Senators running for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination: Bennet (CO), Booker (NJ), Gillibrand (NY), Harris (CA), Klobuchar (MN), Sanders (VT), and Warren (MA).

This analysis finds:

- People of color account for 41 percent of registered Democratic voters, but a lower percentage of the staff in the U.S. Senate personal offices of Senators Klobuchar and Sanders.
- African Americans account for 21 percent of registered Democratic voters, but a lower percentage of the staff in the U.S. Senate personal offices of Senators Klobuchar, Gillibrand, Bennet, and Sanders.
- Latinos account for 12 percent of registered Democratic voters, but a lower percentage of the staff in the U.S. Senate personal offices of Senators Warren, Sanders, and Klobuchar.

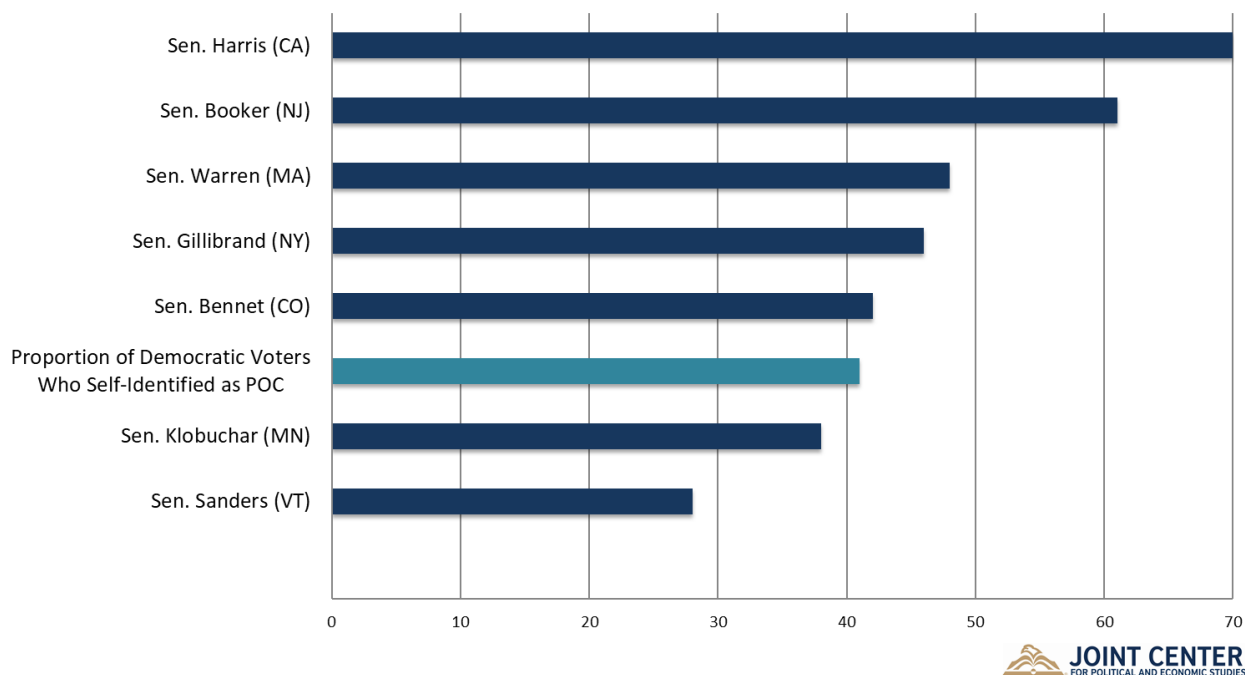
Staff of Color

All seven Senators have a higher proportion of staff of color in their U.S. Senate personal offices than the population of people of color in their respective states. However, 41 percent of

registered Democratic voters identified as people of color,¹ but 2 Senators (Klobuchar and Sanders) have fewer than 41 percent of people of color on their U.S. Senate personal staffs (see Figure 1).

The chart below compares the demographics of staff within the 7 Senate personal offices with the demographics of people of color who identify as Democratic voters.

Figure 1: Percentage of POC Senate Staffers vs Percentage of POC Democratic Voters Among Seven Presidential Candidates, 2019



Sources: Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative and Pew Research Center

Since 2017, Senator Sanders’s staff of color increased by 12 percent. However, his current personal office staff is comprised of 28 percent people of color, which is 13 percent lower than the percentage of Democratic voters who are people of color. Of all 18 Democratic U.S. Senate Ranking Members of full committees, Senator Sanders’s Budget Committee staff has seen the [second biggest increase](#) in diverse staff since 2018 (+20 percentage points).

Over the same time period, Senator Klobuchar’s staff of color increased by 9 percent. But her personal office staff is 38 percent people of color, which is slightly lower than the proportion of Democratic voters who are people of color. Of all 18 Democratic U.S. Senate Ranking Members of full committees, however, Senator Klobuchar’s Rules Committee staff has seen the biggest

¹ Pew Research Center, September 13, 2016. [“The Parties on the Eve of the 2016 Election: Two Coalitions, Moving Further Apart.”](#)

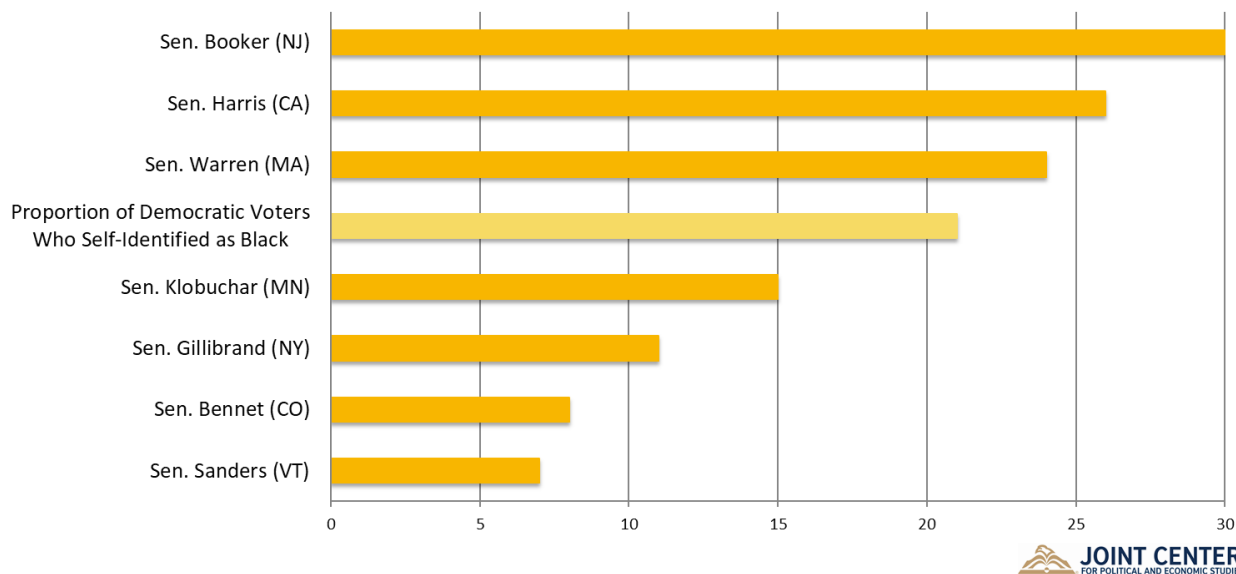
increase in diverse staff since 2018 (+27 percentage points) and is now the [second most racially diverse](#).

In contrast, the percent of staff of color in the personal offices of Senators Harris (+29), Booker (+20), Warren (+7), Gillibrand (+5), and Bennet (+1) outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters who self-identified as people of color. Of all 47 Democratic U.S. Senate personal offices, Senator Harris’s office is the [most diverse](#), and Senator Booker’s is the [third most diverse](#).

Black Staff

With regard to Black staffers, the chart below compares the demographics of the 7 Senate personal offices with the demographics of Black people who identify as Democratic voters.

Figure 2: Percentage of Black Senate Staffers vs Percentage of Black Democratic Voters Among Seven Presidential Candidates, 2019



Sources: Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative and Pew Research Center

With the exception of Senator Gillibrand, all senators running for the Democratic presidential nomination have a higher proportion of Black staffers than the Black population in their respective states. However, as the chart shows, four senators (Klobuchar, Gillibrand, Bennet, and Sanders) have a lower percentage of Black staffers than the percentage of Democratic voters who identify as Black (21 percent).

The starkest difference in changes of staff in the past two years lies in Senator Gillibrand’s office. Since 2017, Senator Gillibrand’s staff of color only decreased by 2 percent but Black

staffers in her office had a significant decrease (-50 percent). Although her office is comprised of 11 percent of Black staffers, including a Black chief of staff, it is 10 percentage points below the proportion of Democratic voters who identify as Black.

Senator Klobuchar's percentage of Black staffers increased by 5 points. However, her personal office staff is comprised of 15 percent of Black staffers, which is 6 percentage points lower than the percentage of Democratic voters who identify as Black. Of all 18 Democratic U.S. Senate Ranking Members of full committees, however, Senator Klobuchar's Rules Committee staff is the third highest with regard to the percentage of African Americans staff – it is 20 percent Black.

Senator Bennet's percentage of Black staffers increased by 3 points. But, since 2017, 8 percent his personal office staff has been Black, which is 13 percentage points lower than percent of Democratic voters who identify as Black.

The number of Black staff (7 percent) in Senator Sanders's office remained unchanged from 2017 to 2019.

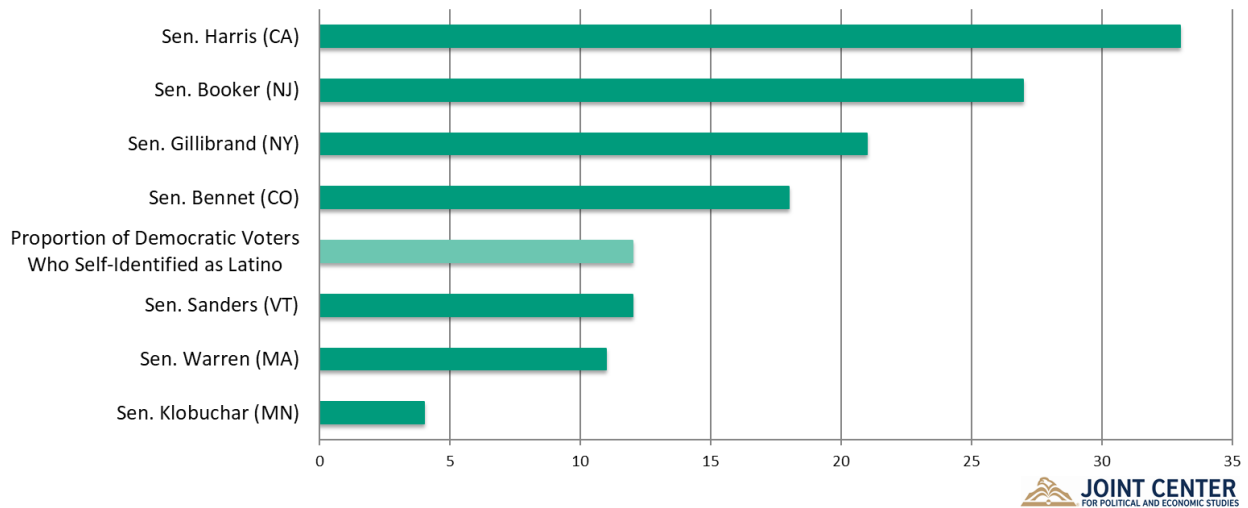
In contrast, the percent of Black staffers in the personal offices of Senators Booker (+9), Harris (+5), and Warren (+3) outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters who identify as Black.

With regard to chiefs of staff and legislative directors, Senators Warren and Gillibrand have Black chiefs of staff, and Senator Harris has a Black legislative director.

Latino/a Staff

The chart below compares the demographics of the 7 Senate personal offices with the demographics of Latino/as who identify as Democratic voters.

Figure 3: Percentage of Latino/a Senate Staffers vs Percentage of Latino/a Democratic Voters Among Seven Presidential Candidates, 2019



Sources: Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative and Pew Research Center

While 12 percent of Democratic voters identified as Latino/a, two Senators (Warren and Klobuchar) have staffs that are less than 12 percent of Latino/as.

Since 2017, Senators Klobuchar's (-50 percent) and Bennet's (-40 percent) Latino/a staff decreased significantly. However, Senator Bennet's personal office still outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters who identify as Latino/a (18 percent). This is 6 percentage points above the proportion of Democratic voters who identify as Latino/a. Senator Klobuchar's personal office staff is comprised of 4 percent of Latino/a staffers. This is 8 percentage points lower than Democratic voters who identify as Latino/a. Of all 18 Democratic U.S. Senate Ranking Members of full committees, Senator Klobuchar's Rules Committee staff is one of the five Democratic Committee staffs with no Latino/a staff.

In contrast, 5 of the 7 personal offices of senators running for the Democratic presidential nomination increased their percentage points of Latino/a staffers over the past three years: Senators Sanders (+10), Gillibrand (+7), Harris (+6), Booker (+4), and Warren (+3). In addition, the percentage of Latino/a staffers in the personal offices of Senators Harris (+21), Booker (+15), Gillibrand (+9), and Bennet (+6) outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters who self-identified as Latino/a.

In summary:

- Senators Harris's and Booker's personal offices staff demographics outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters for the three racial/ethnic categories listed above.
- Senator Warren's personal office staff demographics outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters who are people of color and Black, but had less than the average proportion for Latino/a staffers.
- Senators Gillibrand's and Bennet's personal offices staff demographics outpaced the proportion of national Democratic voters for people of color and Latino/as but fell below the average proportion for Black staffers.
- Senators Klobuchar's and Sanders's personal offices staff demographics both fell below or was the same as the proportion for all racial/ethnic categories listed above.
- Black voters account for over a fifth of Democratic voters (21 percent).² However, 4 of the 7 Senators running for the Democratic presidential nomination have less than 21 percent of Black staffers in their U.S. Senate personal offices.

² Ibid.