



JOINT CENTER
FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES



RACIAL DIVERSITY AMONG TOP STAFF IN SENATE PERSONAL OFFICES

LaShonda Brenson, Ph.D.
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Executive Summary

This report provides evidence regarding the lack of racial diversity among U.S. Senate personal office top staff positions. This report defines personal office top staff as all chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors in the Washington, DC personal offices of U.S. Senators. The data reflect Senate employment as of January 2020. Key findings show:

- **People of color make up 40% of the U.S. population, but only 11% of all Senate personal office top staff.** Latina/os make up 18.5% of the U.S. population, but only 3.8% of Senate personal office top staffers. African Americans account for 13.4% of the U.S. population, but only 3.1% of Senate personal office top staffers. Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders are 6.1% of the U.S. population, but only 2.7% of Senate personal office top staffers.
- **Senate personal offices representing states with large shares of Black or Latina/o residents hire relatively few Black or Latina/o top staffers.** African Americans account for an average of 27.1% of the population in ten states (AL, DE, GA, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, NY, and VA), yet hold only 3.5% of the total top staff positions in these states' U.S. Senate personal offices. Latina/os account for an average of 29.4% of the population in ten states (AZ, CA, CO, FL, IL, NV, NJ, NM, NY, and TX), yet hold 13.6% of the top staff positions in these states' Senate personal offices.
- **While Democrats employ more personal office top staff of color than Republicans, both parties have low numbers, and the Republicans' percentage is closer to their party's share of voters who are people of color.** People of color make up 14% of registered voters who identify as Republicans and 4% of Republican Senate personal office top staff. People of color account for 39% of self-identified Democratic registered voters, but only 19% of Democratic Senate personal office top staff. African Americans are 19% of Democratic registered voters, but only 5% of Democratic Senate personal office top staff.
- **The three states with the highest share of Black residents that are represented by two Democratic U.S. Senators have no Black personal office top staff.** On average, African Americans account for 24.7% of the residents and 39.3% of the 2016 Democratic Party turnout in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, but none (0%) of the 17 top staff positions in the Senate personal offices of these states. The three states with the highest share of African American residents represented by two Republican U.S. Senators (Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi) also have no Black personal office top staff.
- **Between 2015 and 2020, the overall percentage of personal office top staff of color increased from 7.1% up to 11%, but Asian American/Pacific Islander and Native American numbers declined.** Racial diversity increased among Senate personal office top staff who are Latina/o (2.4% to 3.8%) and African American (0.7% to 3.1%) and declined among those who are Asian American/Pacific Islander (3.7% to 2.7%) and Native American (0.3% to 0%).

Introduction

This report examines racial diversity among top staff in the Washington, DC personal offices of U.S. Senators—chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors—in January 2020.¹

Unelected top staff in personal offices play an essential role in the U.S. Senate. These staffers often provide political and policy expertise, develop legislation, meet with constituents, act as surrogates for Senators, manage Senate offices, and hire, supervise, and terminate employees. Personal office top staffers also assist their bosses in carrying out several special powers reserved to the U.S. Senate, including agreeing to treaties and confirming federal judges, cabinet secretaries, and many other executive branch and independent agency officials. While Senators make the final decisions, senior personal office staff wield substantial influence.

The U.S. Senate already lacks racial diversity among its membership—in part due to its structure—and developing more racially diverse personal office top staff could help offset this lack of diversity. While people of color account for 40 percent of the U.S. population,² they account for only 9 percent of U.S. Senators and 11 percent of top staff in the personal offices of U.S. Senators.³

The lack of racial diversity among personal office top staff impairs the ability of Senators to understand the diverse perspectives of their constituencies. People of color are underrepresented in various occupations, but a lack of diversity among top Senate staff warrants special attention because Senate decisions affect everyone in the nation. The lack of racial diversity among top staff is not a partisan issue but a challenge that the Senate—as an institution—must address.

This is a critical moment for the U.S. Senate to be equipped to understand and address structural inequality. COVID-19 has disproportionately claimed the lives of African Americans and Latina/os, and it has resulted in disproportionately high business closures and unemployment among African Americans and Latina/os. Police killings of African Americans have prompted mass protests. Meanwhile, the Senate passed legislation like the Paycheck Protection Program that inadequately responded to the needs of small Black-owned businesses, and the Senate has failed to enact meaningful reform that holds accountable in court police who commit unwarranted violence.

This report does not assert that White staffers are incapable of representing diverse communities, or that proportional representation or symbolic appointments alone will solve all of our nation's problems. Instead, we submit that the significant influence of top staff in shaping the U.S. Senate combined with the lack of racial diversity among top staff allow for systemic biases that reproduce privilege and inequality and affect all Americans. Increasing diversity among key staffers would enhance deliberation, innovation, legitimacy, and legislative outcomes, which would allow the Senate to function more effectively and in a way that more accurately reflects America's diversity.

Methodology

The U.S. Senate does not systematically and reliably study the race or ethnicity of the top staff of all of its Members.⁴ While federal law requires that many federal agencies, government contractors, and private and nonprofit organizations collect and disclose employees' race, gender, and other demographic information to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, this law does not apply to the U.S. Senate. Unfortunately, Senate Republicans have yet to release publicly any data on the diversity of their staffs. We commend Senate Democrats for disclosing data for the past four years on the total racial diversity of each Democratic U.S. Senator's staff, although we urge them to disaggregate data by position and office to reveal whether staff of color are largely relegated to lower-level positions or to positions in state offices that are more visible to their constituents of color.

We have completed a census of the top positions in each U.S. Senator's Washington, DC personal office. Data reflect employment in Senate personal offices as of January 2020. Data are presented in the aggregate to demonstrate that the lack of racial and ethnic representation is not the problem of any particular office or party, but the Senate as an institution.

In the initial stage of data collection, the author performed an online search for Senate staff photographs with links to current and past employment. The author obtained data from a variety of sources, including LegiStorm, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Wikipedia, Roll Call, The Hill, National Journal, constituent photographs, wedding announcements, and press interviews. During this initial stage, the author conditionally identified the race or ethnicity of approximately 94 percent of top staff.

The author then reviewed all of the collected information identifying people of color with leadership from the Congressional Black Associates, Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association, Congressional Hispanic Staff Association, Congressional Native Staff Association, Middle Eastern and North African Staff Association, and the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus to confirm these data and to identify the remaining 6 percent of staffers whose race could not be determined during the initial stage of data collection. To assist with the confirmation process, researchers on occasion utilized a tool that uses Census data to predict the probability of an individual's race/ethnicity based upon their surname.⁵

Further, the author emailed the chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors in each Senate personal office, provided each person with the data collected about their race/ethnicity and position, and asked the staffers to correct any errors. Those staffers who did not respond were contacted via email a second time with another opportunity to correct our data.

About 39 percent of the offices responded, and a few submitted corrections to the data (for example, “this person identifies as biracial”). A few offices that responded expressed unwillingness to participate in the study and did not provide information. The researcher hand-delivered personalized letters individually addressed to the chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors in offices where staffers did not respond to our two confirmation emails. This gave those offices a final opportunity to respond to and correct the data.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines race as a person’s self-identification with one or more social groups. This report contains seven racial categories: White, African American, Latina/o, Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), Biracial or Multiracial, Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), and Native American.⁶

To maintain consistency, we limited our definition of “top” staff to three positions: chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director. Some congressional staff have multiple titles and roles in the Senate personal offices. For our analysis, we counted only the most senior role to identify top staffers as unique individuals.

Unlike the Joint Center’s 2015 report *Racial Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*, this 2020 personal office top staff report does not focus on full committee staff directors. While staff directors are top staff positions in the Senate that have significant influence, hiring practices in personal offices and committee offices are distinct. Hiring practices in Senate personal offices are often tied to policy, politics, relationships with Senators, and a potential employee’s connection to the state. Senate committees, on the other hand, are ideally the domain of policy experts with specialized knowledge. A future Joint Center study will focus specifically on committee top staff diversity.

This report only focuses on top staff positions in Senate personal offices located in Washington, DC. Some Senators have hired state directors who identify as people of color, including Senators Booker (D-NJ), Cardin (D-MD), Carper (D-DE), Kaine (D-VA), Menendez (D-NJ), and Rosen (D-NV). The vast majority of staffers in these roles are located in state offices and are often more visible to constituents than staff in Washington, DC. A future Joint Center study will focus specifically on state director diversity.

This report focuses on the three Washington, DC personal office top staff positions that are deemed so essential that almost every Senate office has them. Other staff may have significant roles in the personal offices of some Senators, but those positions are not included in this report because they are not consistent across offices.

Deputy chiefs of staff, for example, are often not hired by U.S. Senate personal offices, and the responsibilities of deputy chiefs of staff vary significantly among the offices that do hire them. For example, some deputy chiefs appear to supervise legislative directors and communications directors, while others seem to focus on managing administrative tasks in the office. As of January 2020, about 60 percent of personal offices had a deputy chief of staff position. One-third of these

offices had more than one deputy chief of staff, and some offices had as many as four deputy chiefs of staff.⁷

Of the personal offices that did have a deputy chief of staff not already included in this study, 17.9 percent of these staffers are people of color. Of the deputy chiefs, four are African American, two are Latina/o, three are Asian American/Pacific Islander, and one is Biracial. If we included the deputy chief of staff position as “top staff” in our analysis, we would increase the percentage of top staff of color in the Senate from 11 percent to 12.1 percent. The Senators who have hired deputy chiefs who identify as people of color are Senators Booker (D-NJ), Coons (D-DE), Durbin (D-IL), Gillibrand (D-NY), Hirono (D-HI) (two deputy chiefs of color), Leahy (D-VT), McSally (R-AZ), Schatz (D-HI), and Warren (D-MA).

In some offices, staff in the role of chief counsel, legal counsel, legislative counsel, general counsel, or senior counsel have significant influence. Senators Booker, Durbin, Harris, Manchin, McConnell, Schatz, and Van Hollen—among other Senators—have people of color in at least one of these positions. For some offices, a senior advisor may carry significant influence. These positions, however, are not the same across all offices.

Further, many staffers of color in personal offices work as press secretaries, legislative assistants, policy advisors, and other mid- and junior-level positions. These staff add significantly to legislative deliberations and enrich the congressional workplace with diverse perspectives. Future Joint Center research will study the state of diversity among staff in these roles and determine which of these positions serve as “feeder” positions for top staff roles.

Some personal offices had vacancies in the positions we identify as top staff. Senator Markey's office did not have a chief of staff. Senator Tillis's office did not have a legislative director. The offices of Senators Blackburn, Cassidy, Manchin, McSally, Stabenow, and Van Hollen did not have communications directors in January 2020 when these data were collected.

We believe this report's analysis provides the most consistent snapshot of diversity across top staff in the Washington, DC personal offices of U.S. Senators. While there may be isolated instances of significantly influential staff of color in positions not reflected by this report, the presence of these individuals does not explain why the U.S. Senate, as a whole, has few people of color in the chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director positions.

Personal Office Diversity

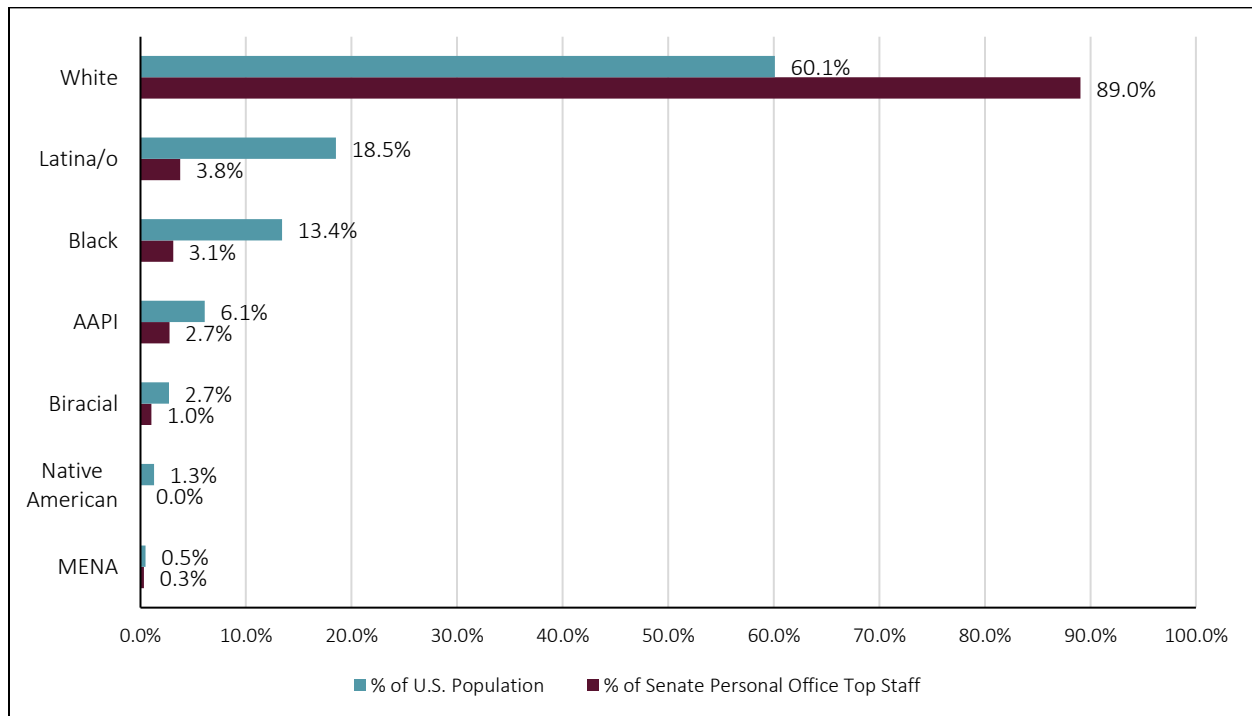
Compared with their respective shares of the U.S. population, White Americans account for a much higher percentage of the 292 U.S. Senate personal office top staff examined, and people of color account for a much lower percentage.

People of color account for 40 percent of the U.S. population, but 11 percent of Senate personal office top staff. White Americans account for 60 percent of the U.S. population, but 89 percent of personal office top staff.

All groups of color are underrepresented among Senate personal office top staff. This report finds that:

- Latina/os are 18.5 percent of the U.S. population, but only 3.8 percent of Senate personal office top staff;
- African Americans are 13.4 percent of the U.S. population, but only 3.1 percent of Senate personal office top staff;
- Asian American/Pacific Islanders are 6.1 percent of the U.S. population, but only 2.7 percent of Senate personal office top staff;
- Biracial Americans are 2.7 percent of the U.S. population, but only 1 percent of Senate personal office top staff;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population, but there are currently no Native American Senate personal office top staff; and
- Middle Eastern/North Africans are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population, but 0.3 percent of Senate personal office top staff.

Racial Demographics of Senate Personal Office Top Staff vs. U.S. Population⁸



Disaggregating these data by position reveals some notable differences.

Chief of staff is the highest-ranking staff position in each Senator’s personal office. Usually, chiefs of staff are responsible for hiring and firing employees and making other management decisions in a Member’s personal office. More than other employees, chiefs of staff are likely to act as surrogate Senators. Chiefs of staff are endowed with tremendous decision-making power, and their perspectives shape legislative action. Of the 99 Senate chiefs of staff in Washington, DC personal offices, only eight (or 8.1 percent) are people of color. They include four African Americans, three Latina/os, and one Asian American/Pacific Islander.

A legislative director often manages an office’s legislative activities and may supervise a Member’s legislative staff. Of 99 legislative directors, 14 (or 14.1 percent) are people of color. They include four African Americans, four Latina/os, three Asian American/Pacific Islanders, one Middle Eastern/North African, and two biracial staffers.

A communications director plays a central role in planning and executing a Senator’s communications strategy, including managing relationships with media outlets and journalists, arranging press interviews and preparing Senators for interviews, and drafting news releases, statements, and opinion pieces. Of 94 Senate communications directors, ten (or 10.6 percent) are people of color. They include one African American, four Latina/os, four Asian American/Pacific Islanders, and one biracial staffer.

Racial Demographics Among Senate Personal Office Top Staff

	Chief of Staff	Percentage	Legislative Director	Percentage	Communications Director	Percentage
White	91	91.9%	85	85.9%	84	89.4%
Black	4	4.0%	4	4.0%	1	1.1%
Latina/o	3	3.0%	4	4.0%	4	4.3%
AAPI	1	1.0%	3	3.0%	4	4.3%
Native American	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
MENA	0	0.0%	1	1.0%	0	0.0%
Biracial	0	0.0%	2	2.0%	1	1.1%
Total	99	100%	99	100%	94	100%

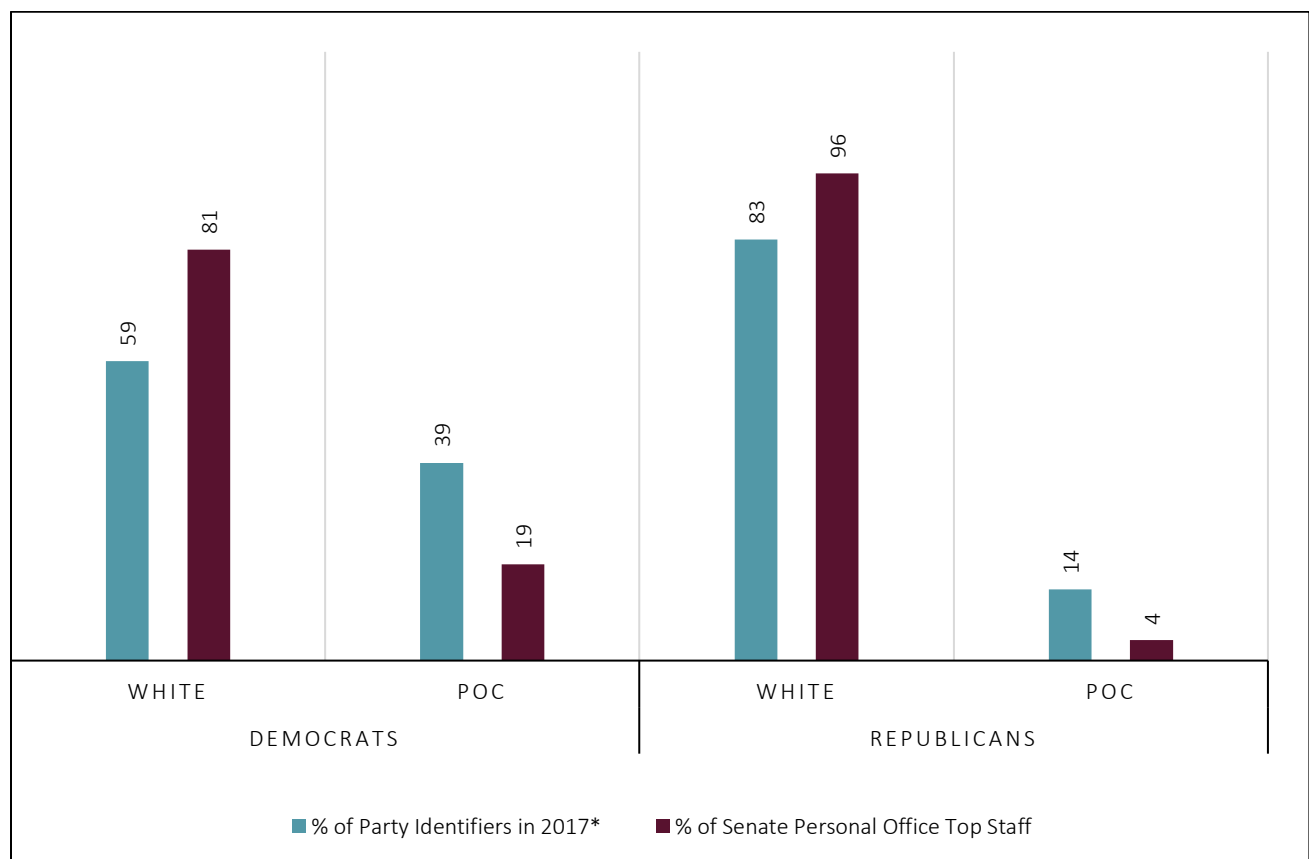
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. Also, the number of chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors do not add up to 100 due to vacancies at the time of data collection. See methodology section for more detail.

Staff Diversity by Political Party

Despite conventional wisdom, both Democratic and Republican Senate personal offices employ relatively few top staff of color. Indeed, the Republicans’ percentage of top staffers of color is actually closer to the share of their party’s voters who are people of color.⁹ A 2017 Pew survey showed that 39 percent of registered voters who self-identify as Democrats were nonwhite,¹⁰ but our research showed that only 19 percent of Democratic Senate personal office top staff are people of color. In comparison, people of color make up 14 percent of registered voters who identify as Republicans and 4 percent of Republican Senate personal office top staff.

African Americans accounted for 19 percent of Democratic registered voters,¹¹ but only 5 percent of Democratic Senate personal office top staff.

Racial Representation by Party Base Voters (in percentages)



*Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100 percent.

While Senate Democratic personal offices have less available top positions available, they employ more staff of color in top positions than their Republican colleagues.

Top Staff of Color in Senate Personal Offices by Political Party (by raw numbers)

	Democratic Party	Republican Party	Total
Black	7	2	9
Latina/o	10	1	11
AAPI	7	1	8
Native American	0	0	0
MENA	1	0	1
Biracial	1	2	3
Total	26	6	32

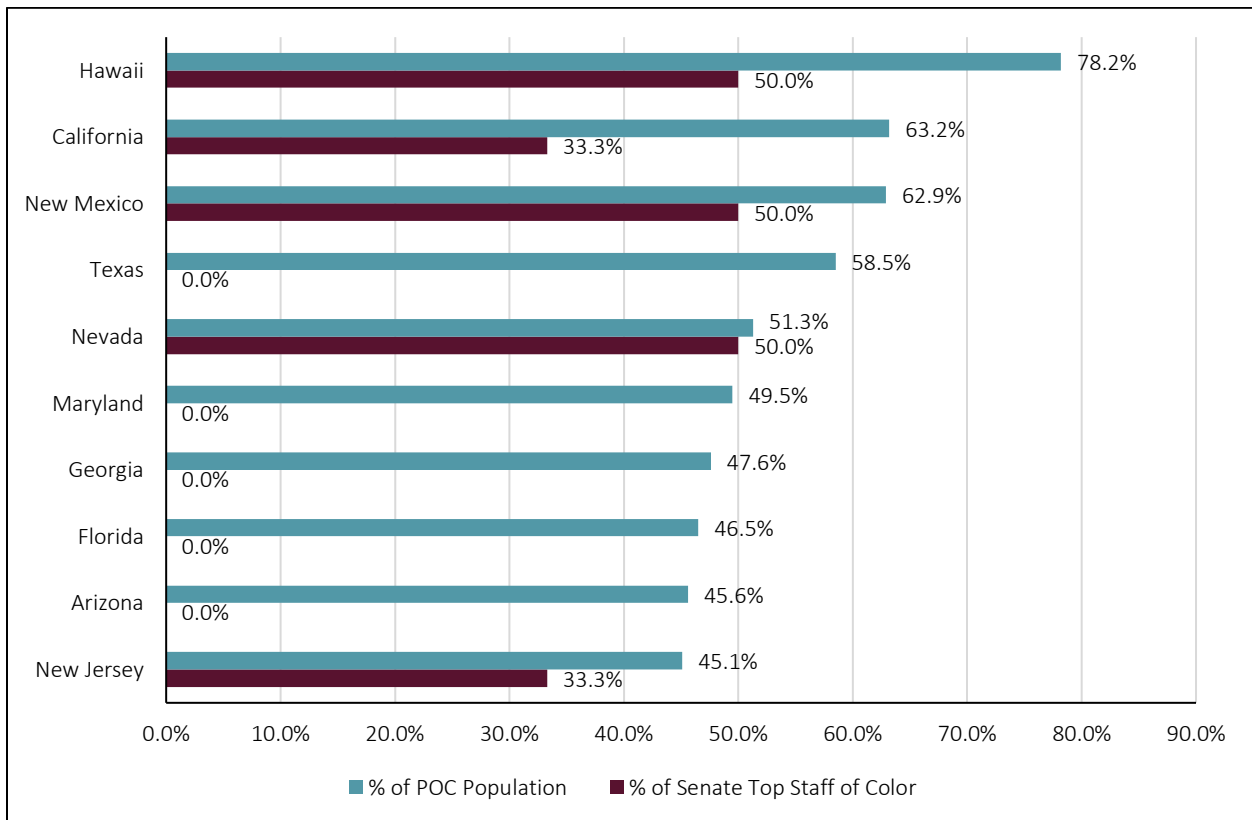
States with Large Populations of Color

People of color are underrepresented among top staff even in Senate personal offices that represent large populations of color.

Over 65 percent of people of color in the United States live in just ten states (Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia).¹² On average, people of color make up 46.6 percent of the population of these states (ranging from North Carolina at 37.2 percent up to California at 63.2 percent). By comparison, people of color account for 12.1 percent (7 of 58) of the top staff positions in Senate personal offices representing these ten states.

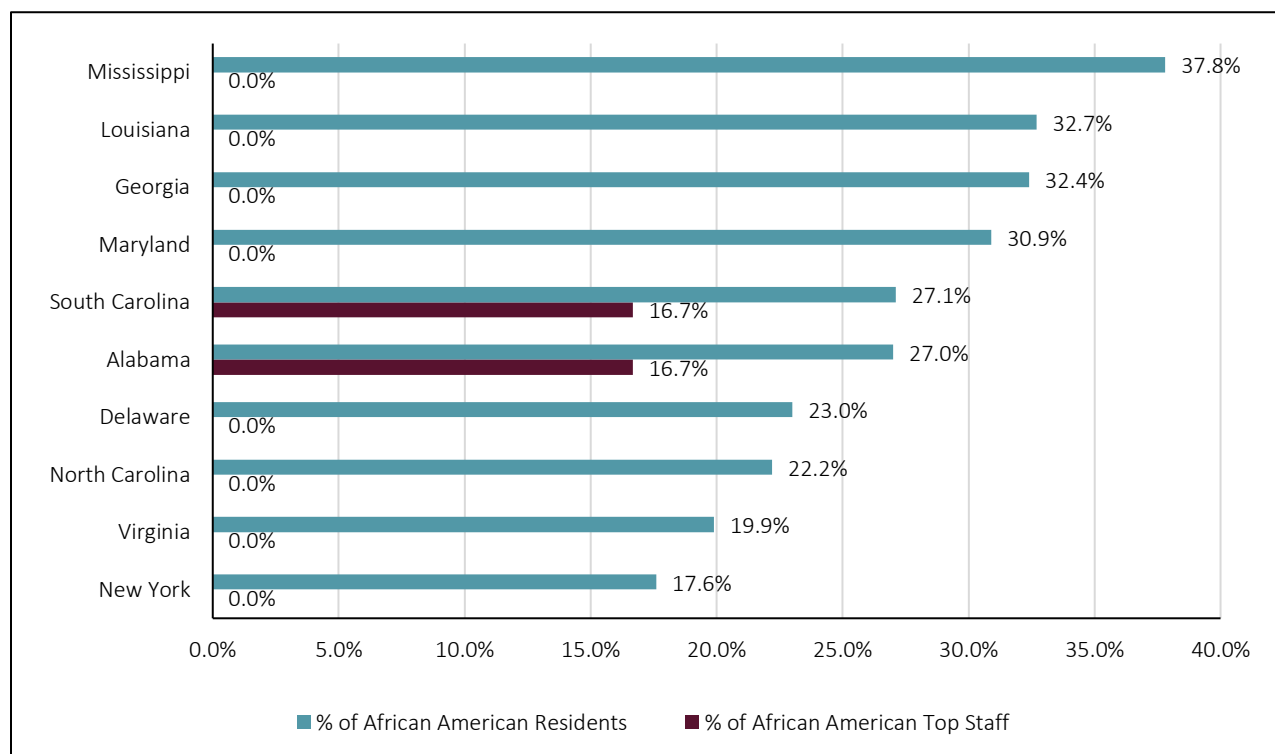
Top staff of color remain underrepresented—but to a lesser extent—in personal offices of the Senators who represent the ten states with the largest populations of color relative to the entire state population. On average, people of color in these ten states (Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, and Texas) make up 54.8 percent of the population yet hold only 22.4 percent of the states’ total Senate personal office top staff positions. Half of these ten states (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, and Texas) have no staff of color in personal office top positions. Another four of these states (California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and New Jersey) have a population of color that is significantly higher than the state’s percentage of Senate personal office top staff of color.

Senate Personal Office Top Staff of Color in States with Highest Percentage of Residents Who Are People of Color



This same trend persists in states with large Black populations. On average, African Americans account for 27.1 percent of the population in the ten states that have the highest shares of residents who are African American. By comparison, African Americans account for only 3.5 percent (2 of 57) of the top staff spots in Senate personal offices representing these states.

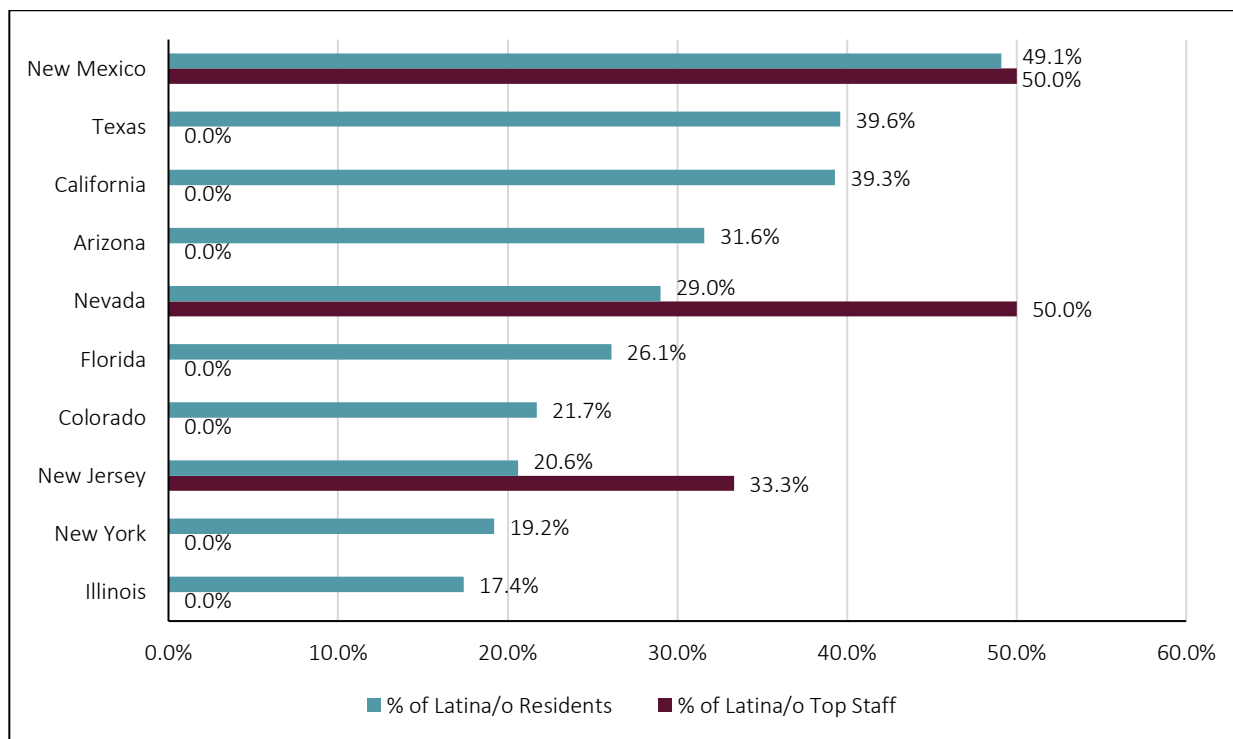
Black Senate Personal Office Top Staffers in States with Highest Percentage of Residents Who Are African American



The three states (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) with the highest share of Black residents that are represented by two Democratic U.S. Senators have no Black personal office top staff. On average, African Americans account for 25 percent of the residents and 39.3 percent of the 2016 Democratic Party turnout in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia,¹³ but none (0 percent) of the 17 top staff positions in the Senate personal offices of these states. The three states with the highest share of African American residents represented by two Republican U.S. Senators (Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi) also have no Black personal office top staff.

Latina/os are also underrepresented among top staff in the personal offices of Senators representing the ten states with the largest percentage of residents who are Latina/o. On average, Latina/os account for 29.4 percent of the population of these states,¹⁴ but only 13.6 percent (8 of 59) of the top staff positions in the Senate personal offices representing these states.

Latina/o Senate Personal Office Top Staffers in States with Highest Percentage of Residents Who Are Latina/o

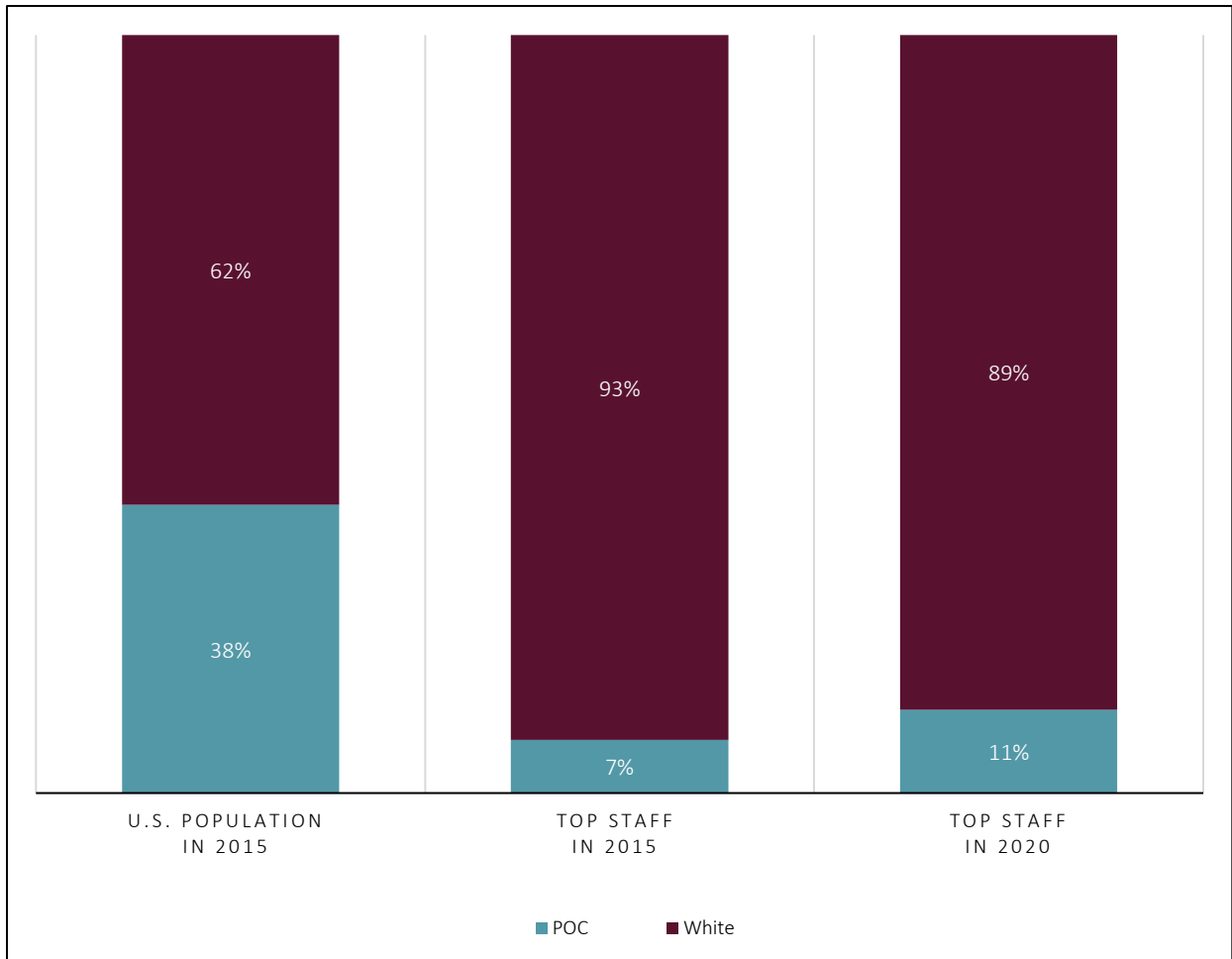


While Senate job advertisements often suggest that personal offices try to hire staffers from their states who have affiliations with their constituents, many Senators from states with large populations of color do not appear to value similar representation with regard to racial diversity among personal office top staff.

Changes in Diversity Since 2015

Between 2015 and 2020, the percentage of people of color in Senate personal office top staff positions increased from 7.1 percent (21 positions) to 11 percent (32 positions).

Racial Diversity Among Top Staff, 2015 – 2020



Note: Between 2015 and 2020, the U.S. population increased from 38 percent to 40 percent people of color. Also, in 2015, there were 297 positions available and in 2020, there were 292 available positions. These figures are less than 300 due to vacancies at the time the data was collected.

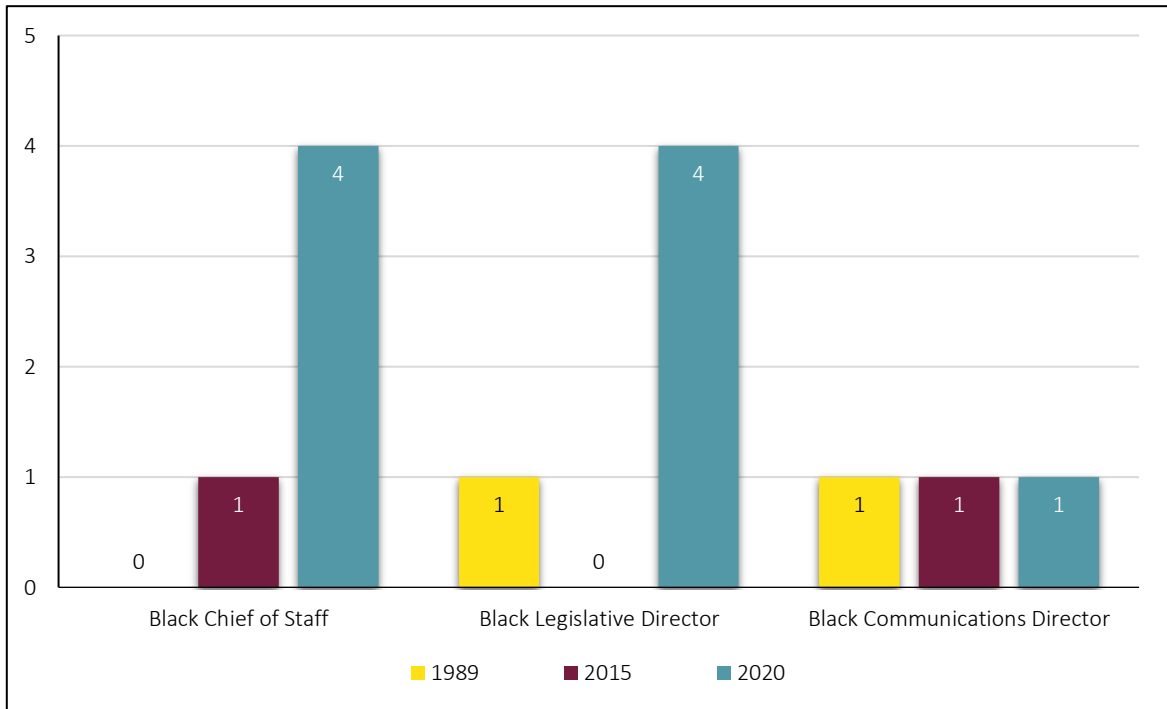
In examining the 26 states that had at least one Senate personal office top staffer of color in either 2015 or 2020, 53.8 percent experienced an increase in the number of top staff of color, 26.9 percent experienced a decrease, and 19.2 percent experienced no change. The numbers changed for several reasons—some Senators were newly elected and hired new staff, some top of staff of color left their positions and were replaced by White top staff, and vice versa.

Senate Personal Office Top Staff of Color, 2015 – 2020 (by State)

State	% of Personal Office Top Staff of Color - 2015	% of Personal Office Top Staff of Color - 2020	Difference
California	0.00%	33.30%	+ 33.30
Illinois	0.00%	33.30%	+ 33.30
New Jersey	0.00%	33.30%	+ 33.30
Ohio	0.00%	33.30%	+ 33.30
Nevada	16.70%	50.00%	+ 33.30
New Mexico	16.70%	50.00%	+ 33.30
Massachusetts	16.70%	40.00%	+ 23.30
Michigan	0.00%	20.00%	+ 20.00
Alabama	0.00%	16.70%	+ 16.70
Kansas	0.00%	16.70%	+ 16.70
Minnesota	0.00%	16.70%	+ 16.70
Mississippi	0.00%	16.70%	+ 16.70
Hawaii	33.30%	50.00%	+ 16.70
Indiana	16.70%	33.30%	+ 16.60
New Hampshire	16.70%	16.70%	0.00
New York	16.70%	16.70%	0.00
Oregon	16.70%	16.70%	0.00
South Carolina	16.70%	16.70%	0.00
Washington	16.70%	16.70%	0.00
Arizona	16.70%	0.00%	- 16.70
Montana	16.70%	0.00%	- 16.70
Oklahoma	16.70%	0.00%	- 16.70
Pennsylvania	16.70%	0.00%	- 16.70
West Virginia	16.70%	0.00%	- 16.70
Utah	33.30%	0.00%	- 33.30
Florida	50.00%	0.00%	- 50.00

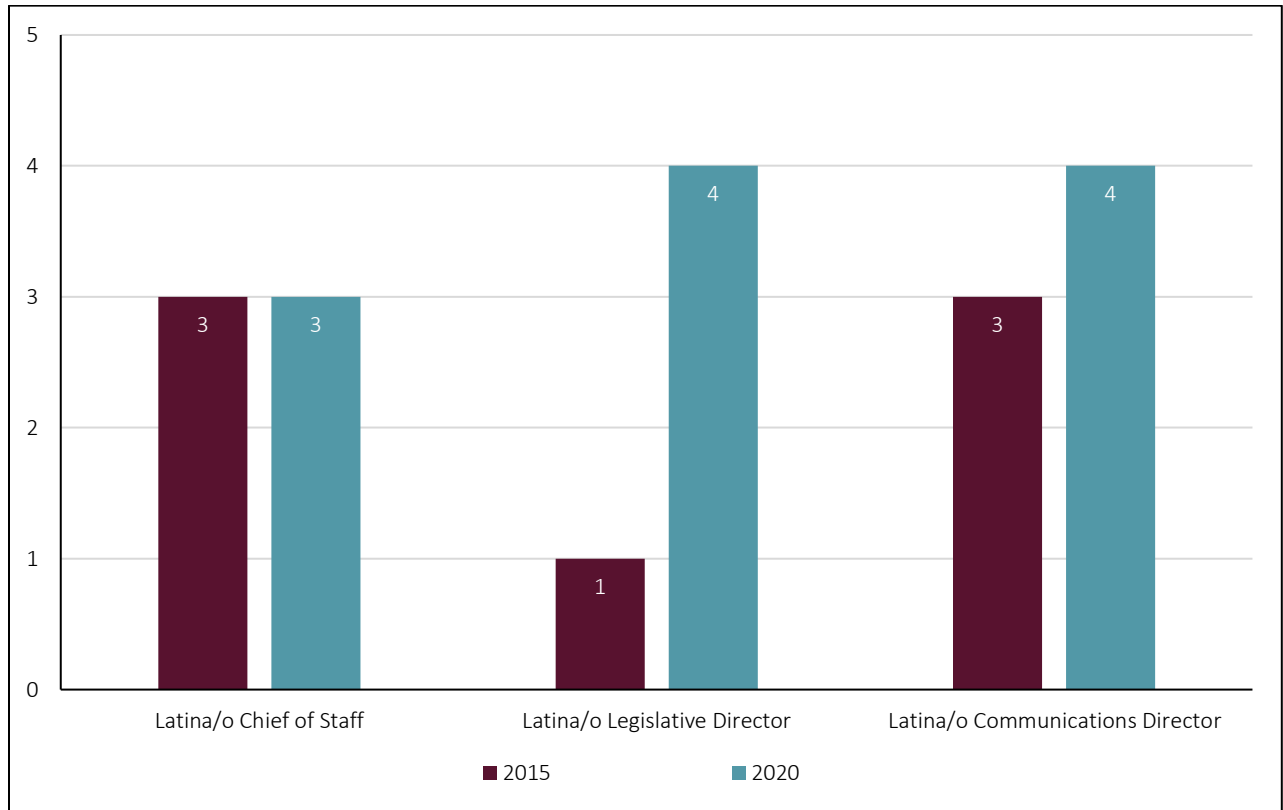
From 1989 to 2015, there was little change in the number of Black Senate personal office top staff. From 2015 to 2020, the percentage of Black Senate personal office top staff increased from 0.7 percent to 3.1 percent (from 2 to 9).

Black Senate Personal Office Top Staff, 1989 – 2020



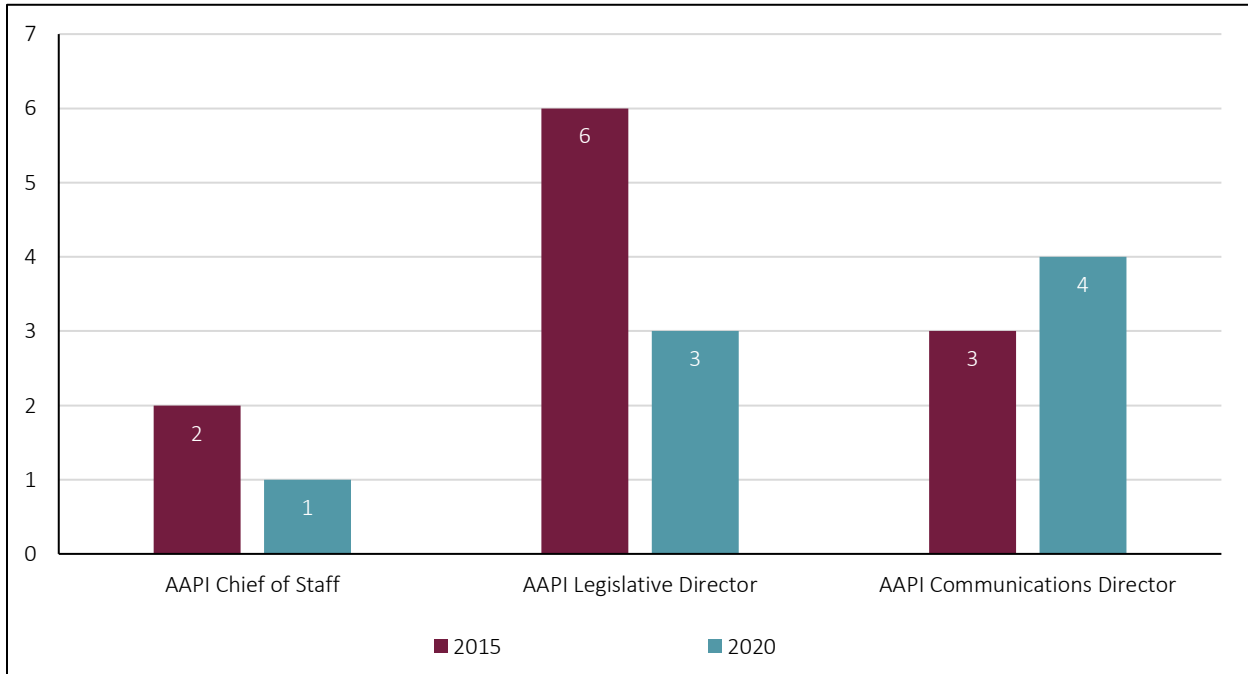
From 2015 to 2020, Latina/o Senate personal office top staff increased from 2.4 percent to 3.8 percent. While the number of Latina/o chiefs of staff remained the same from 2015 to 2020, the number of Latina/o legislative directors and communications directors increased.

Latina/o Senate Personal Office Top Staff, 2015 – 2020



From 2015 to 2020, the number of Asian American/Pacific Islander personal office top staffers in the Senate dropped 27.3 percent (from 11 to 8 positions—or from 3.7 percent of Senate personal office top staff down to 2.7 percent). While the number of Asian American/Pacific Islander communications directors increased by one, this was offset by a loss of a chief of staff and three legislative directors.

Asian American/Pacific Islander Senate Personal Office Top Staff, 2015 – 2020



While there was one Native American communications director who accounted for 0.3 percent of Senate personal office top staff in 2015, there were no Native American Senate personal office top staff in 2020.¹⁵

Next Steps

Since the Joint Center's 2015 *Racial Diversity Among Top Senate Staff* Report, Congress has taken essential steps to improve transparency and staff diversity. For the past four years, for example, Senate Democrats led both chambers by releasing racial/ethnic data about the staff in Democratic Senators' personal and committee offices. In future reports, Senate Democrats should disclose data on diversity by position, as this would reveal which Senators have diversity in critical mid-level positions that serve as pipelines to top positions.

Unfortunately, Senate Republicans have yet to release publicly any data on the diversity of their staffs, despite representing states with large populations of color, such as Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas. Senate Republicans should disclose this data immediately and report it annually.

Both Senate Republicans and Democrats should work together and follow the lead of the U.S. House of Representatives by establishing an Office of Diversity and Inclusion that develops a diversity plan that helps Senate offices in recruiting, hiring, training, promoting, and retaining a diverse Senate staff.

In forthcoming reports, the Joint Center will analyze data on the racial diversity of Senate committee top staff, mid-level staff, and state directors; examine data on staff diversity in the U.S. House; and propose and analyze recommendations for Members to continue to make progress.

Recognition of Personal Offices with Diverse Top Staff

We applaud the Washington, DC personal offices of the following U.S. Senators who had at least one person of color in a top staff position in January 2020.

Personal Offices with Top Staff of Color	
Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ)*	Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS)
Senator Mike Braun (R-IN)	Senator Gary Peters (D-MI)
Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH)	Senator Robert Portman (R-OH)
Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA)	Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV)
Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV)*	Senator Bernard Sanders (I-VT)
Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)	Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI)*
Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL)	Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY)
Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)	Senator Tim Scott (R-SC)
Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA)	Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)
Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM)*	Senator Tina Smith (D-MN)
Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI)	Senator Tom Udall (D-NM)
Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS)	Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
Senator Doug Jones (D-AL)	Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR)
Senator Edward Markey (D-MA)	Senator Todd Young (R-IN)

*Senate personal offices with more than one top staff of color.

About the Author



Dr. LaShonda Brenson is the Senior Fellow of Diversity and Inclusion at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, where she leads the organization’s congressional staff diversity efforts. Prior to her current role, she served as a Civil Rights Analyst at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. At the Commission, Dr. Brenson organized national briefings and wrote reports on municipal fines and fees and their impact on minority communities, minority voting rights, and women in prison. Previously, she was the Research Director at Project Vote, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded on the belief that an organized, diverse electorate is the key to a better America.

Dr. Brenson earned her Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Political Science from the University of Rochester, and her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Using qualitative interviews with congressional staffers and quantitative methods, her dissertation research provides evidence that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), as institutions, matter. One way she demonstrates the added value of the CBC and CHC is by illustrating that when caucus members serve as caucus leaders, they introduce more bills because of their additional staff capacity.

Acknowledgments

I am especially appreciative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for its support of this report and Democracy Fund’s support in providing funding for SKDKnickerbocker, which provided invaluable communications guidance. I also thank the Hewlett Foundation and the Democracy Fund for their support of the Joint Center’s entire program to increase diversity among congressional staff.

I am grateful to the Congressional Black Associates, Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association, Congressional Hispanic Staff Association, Congressional Native Staff Association, Middle Eastern and North African Staff Association, and the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus, and several Senate staffers for providing input and for their assistance in identifying staff members. I also thank all offices that responded to our emails and phone calls to help us get accurate data.

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¹ We also use the terms “top staff,” “key staff,” or “senior staff” interchangeably.

² [United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts.”](#)

³ U.S. Senators of color include Cory Booker (D-NJ), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Marco Rubio (R-FL), and Tim Scott (R-SC). See U.S. Senate, [“Ethnic Diversity in the Senate.”](#)

⁴ One notable exception is the [Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative](#), which has published an annual survey of staff diversity among U.S. Senate Democratic offices since 2017. To date, Senate Republicans office have not released demographic data on their staffs.

⁵ Michael Cisneros, [“Surnames and Race in the U.S.”](#) Tableau Public, October 6, 2017.

⁶ Our previous Senate report published in 2015 did not include Middle Eastern/North African and Biracial/Multiracial as racial and ethnic categories.

⁷ Sixteen of the 72 deputy chiefs of staff are already included in our top staff calculations because the relevant staffers also serve as the legislative director or communications director in their respective offices.

⁸ This figure is calculated by the author using U.S. Census data and original data collection. See [United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts” and Maryam Asi and Daniel Beaulieu, “Arab Households in the United States: 2006-2010,” United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey Briefs, May 2013.](#)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, [“Wide Gender Gap, Growing Educational Divide in Voters’ Party Identification,”](#) Survey Report, March 20, 2018. Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100 percent.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² This figure was calculated by the author using U.S. Census data. See [United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts.”](#)

¹³ African Americans accounted for 23.2 percent of Delaware’s population and 34 percent of its Democratic turnout, 31.1 percent of Maryland’s population and 47 percent of its Democratic turnout, and 19.9 percent of Virginia’s population and 37 percent of its Democratic turnout. State population data was calculated by the author using U.S. Census data from July 1, 2019. See [United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts.”](#) Percentage of Democratic party turnout data in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia in 2016 was provided by [BlueLabs](#), an analytics and technology company.

¹⁴ There were only five senior staff positions available in Arizona because of a position vacancy.

¹⁵ Currently, there are no Native Americans in top staff positions in Senate personal offices. Since our previous report did not include information on Biracial or Middle Eastern/North African staffers, we cannot draw any definitive conclusions about how the number of these staffers has changed since 2015.