



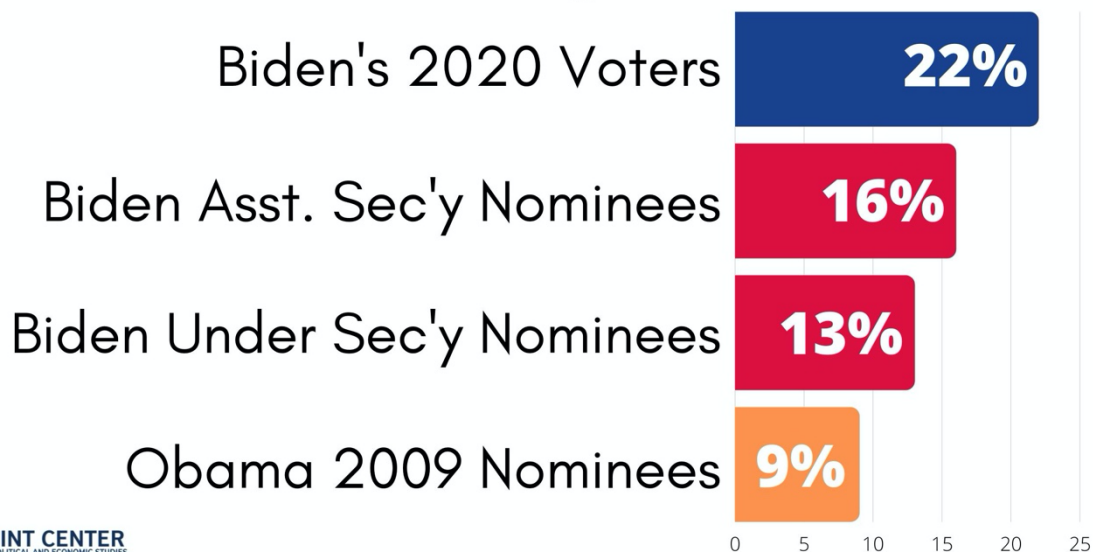
# Report Card on Biden Administration Black Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary Nominations

June 29, 2021

As of June 18, 2021, President Biden had announced nominees for about half the Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary positions that require Senate confirmation at the 15 executive branch agencies in his administration. Of announced nominees, African Americans make up 16% of Assistant Secretary nominations and 13% of Under Secretary nominations.

Biden's Black nominations for these positions fall short of the percentage of his 2020 general election voters who are African American (22%). The nominations did, however, exceed the share of President Obama's Senate-confirmed Black appointees in 2009 (9.4%).

## Black Americans account for the following share of...

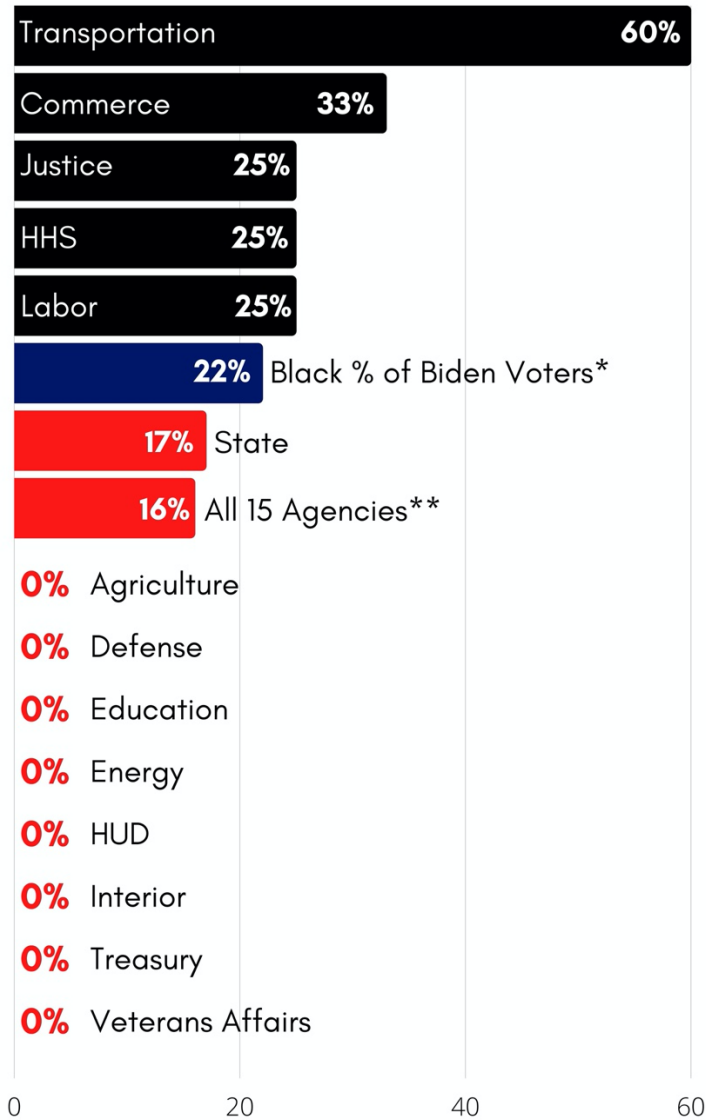


Black representation is important because Assistant Secretaries and Under Secretaries are critical in driving agency priorities and are often the leading subject matter experts for an administration on given issues in their portfolios. These officials are generally nominated by the President, confirmed by the Senate, and lead major divisions or offices. On an agency organizational chart, Assistant Secretaries and Under Secretaries are often just a step or two below an agency's Secretary and Deputy Secretary, and the positions can serve as stepping stones to the top positions. While this analysis focuses on Assistant Secretaries and Under Secretaries (which are often relatively overlooked compared to more the more visible Cabinet Secretaries), we also examine Assistant Secretaries and Under Secretaries in relation to Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries (see below).

To ensure fair representation in leadership positions, African Americans should account for at least 22% of all Biden appointments in Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary positions. While African Americans make up 13.4% of the U.S. population, they represent a tiny fraction of appointees in Republican administrations—too many of which have not counted Black voters as a significant component of the Republican voting base. For example, although the Joint Center is waiting on data from a Freedom of Information Act request regarding the percentage of President Trump's nominees for all Senate-confirmed positions, we do know that African Americans accounted for none of President Trump's three U.S. Supreme Court picks or 54 U.S. Court of Appeals appointments, and only 6.9% of his 174 U.S. District Court appointments. Democratic administrations that aspire to just over 13% of Black Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary appointments are complicit in ensuring that African Americans remain underrepresented in political appointments.

**The Biden administration still has an opportunity to shape Black representation among its Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary nominations.** For example, 70 open Assistant Secretary positions remained as of June 18, and Biden's Black Assistant Secretary nominations will fall to 8% if no additional Black Americans are nominated. However, the number could be 22% if Black Americans are nominated for 20 (29%) of these remaining Assistant Secretary positions. For Under Secretary, 22 positions remained open as of June 18, and Black Under Secretary nominations will fall to 7% if no additional Black Americans are nominated. Again, the number could be 22% if Black Americans are nominated for seven (32%) of these remaining Under Secretary positions.

## Black Share of Biden Assistant Secretary Nominees



\*African American Share of President Biden’s 2020 General Election Voters.

\*\*The Department of Homeland Security has no Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary positions. The 2020 Plum Book lists a Senate-confirmed Immigration and Customs Enforcement Assistant Secretary, but that position has since been converted to a Senate-confirmed Director. For the purposes of this analysis, we categorized all of the Department of Justice’s Assistant Attorney General positions as Assistant Secretaries. This dataset reflects nominees as of June 18, 2021.

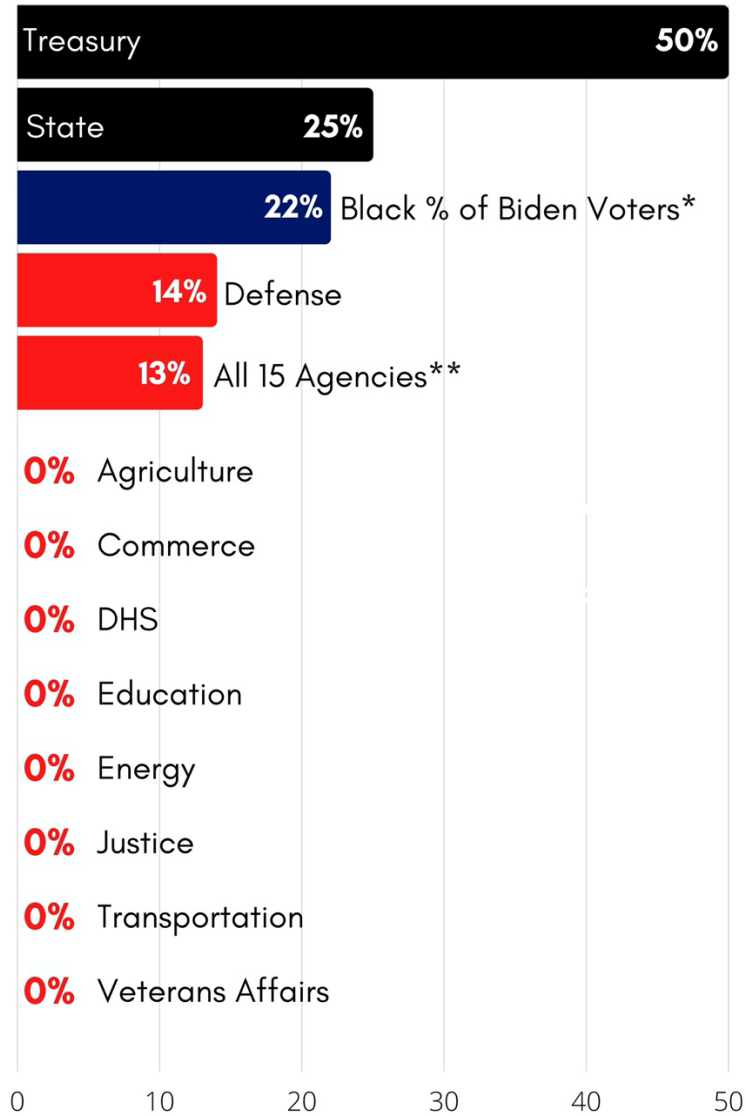
## Biden Assistant Secretary Nominees (as of June 18, 2021)

	Ranking	% of Noms who are Black	Total # of Noms	Total # Black Noms	Remaining Open Positions
Transportation	1	60	5	3	0
Commerce	2	33	3	1	9
Justice	3	25	8	2	2
HHS	3	25	4	1	4
Labor	3	25	4	1	5
State	6	17	18	3	4
All 15 Agencies	7	16	69	11	70
Agriculture	8	0	0	0	2
Defense	8	0	11	0	15
Education	8	0	3	0	5
Energy	8	0	2	0	6
HUD	8	0	2	0	5
Interior	8	0	5	0	1
Treasury	8	0	4	0	7
Veterans Affairs	8	0	3	0	1

*\*The Department of Homeland Security has no Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary positions. The 2020 Plum Book lists a Senate-confirmed Immigration and Customs Enforcement Assistant Secretary, but that position has since been converted to a Senate-confirmed Director.*

Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies • Created with Datawrapper

## Black Share of Biden Under Secretary Nominees



*\*African American Share of President Biden’s 2020 General Election Voters.*

*\*\*HHS, HUD, Interior, and Labor have no Senate-confirmed Under Secretary positions. For the purposes of this analysis, we categorized the Department of Justice’s Associate Attorney General as an Under Secretary. This dataset reflects nominees as of June 18, 2021.*

## Biden Under Secretary Nominees (as of June 18, 2021)

	▲ Ranking	% of Noms who are Black	Total # Noms	Total # Black Noms	Remaining Open Positions
Treasury	1	50	2	1	1
State	2	25	4	1	2
Defense	3	14	7	1	2
All 15 Agencies	4	13	24	3	22
Agriculture	5	0	3	0	5
Commerce	5	0	1	0	5
Education	5	0	1	0	0
Energy	5	0	2	0	2
DHS	5	0	1	0	3
Justice	5	0	1	0	0
Transportation	5	0	1	0	0
Veterans Affairs	5	0	1	0	2

*\*HHS, HUD, Interior, and Labor have no Senate-confirmed Under Secretary positions.*

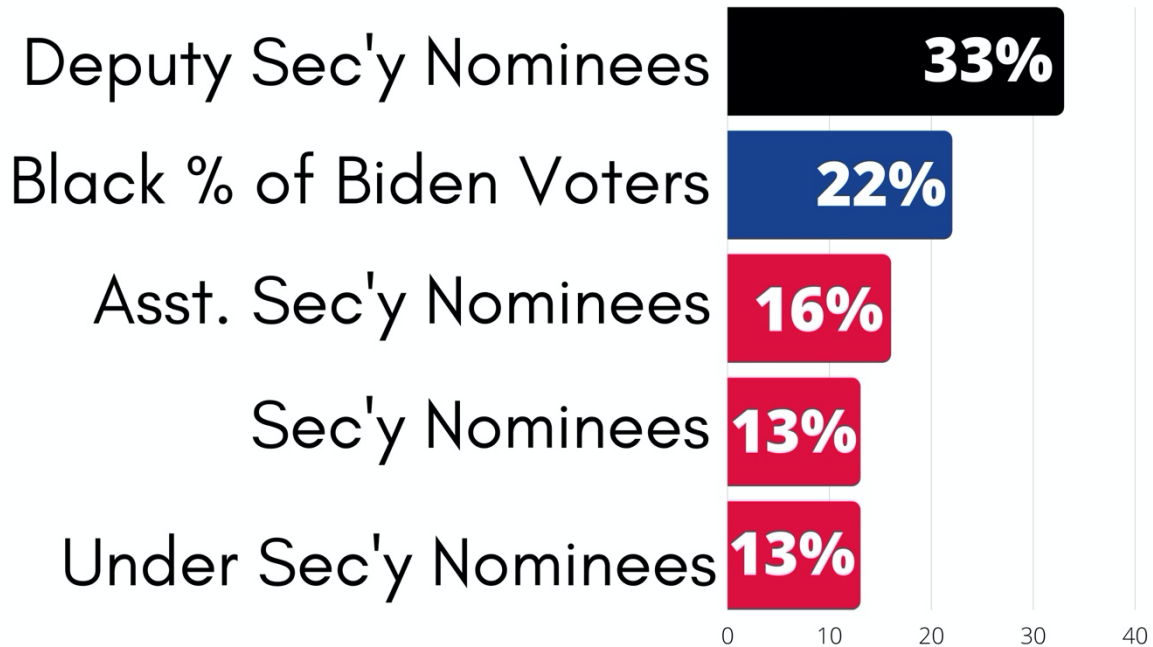
Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies • Created with Datawrapper

## **Black Biden Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary Nominees Compared to Secretary and Deputy Secretary Nominees**

The Joint Center has analyzed the share of President Biden's Secretary and Deputy Secretary nominations who are Black in its [100-Day Report on the Biden Administration](#). This section compares those numbers to Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary nominations.

As shown below, the share of President Biden's Under Secretary nominations who are Black (13%) is comparable to the Black share of both his Secretary Nominations and the U.S. population (both at 13%). Biden's Black Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary (16%) nominees, however, fall short of the percentage of President Biden's voters nationwide who are Black in the 2020 general election (22%). (The February 2020 South Carolina Democratic primary resurrected Biden's presidential campaign, and in that contest African Americans accounted for [70%](#) of Biden's voters). The share of Biden's Deputy Secretary appointments who are Black (33%, 5 of 15 positions) significantly exceeds the Black share of his 2020 voters.

## By Position—Total Black Share of Biden Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretary & Assistant Secretary Nominees



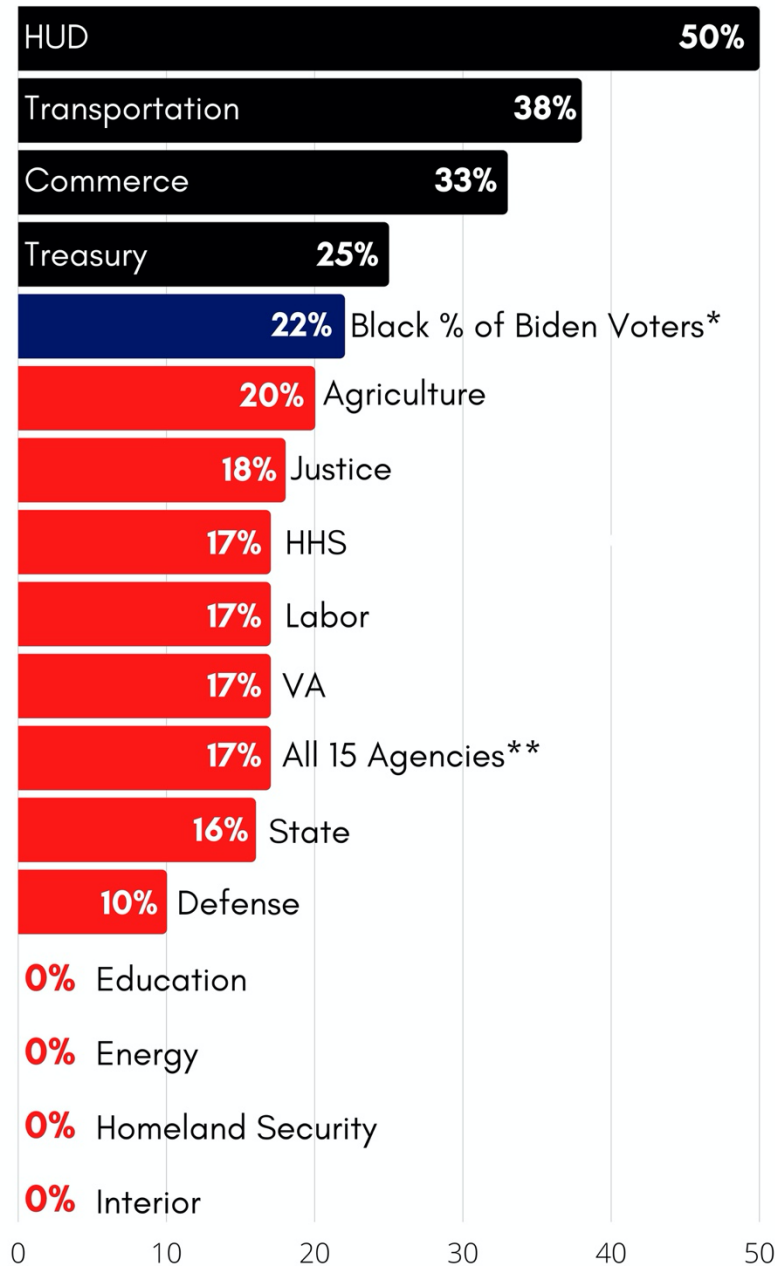
*\*African American Share of President Biden's 2020 General Election Voters. This dataset reflects nominees as of June 18, 2021.*

Looking at the four positions cumulatively at each agency, Biden's track record so far is 0% at Education, Energy, and Interior. It is between 10% and 20% at Agriculture, Justice, Health and Human Services, Labor, State, Veterans Affairs, and Defense.

The Black share of President Biden's nominations in the four positions is well above 22% at Transportation, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Treasury, but absent continued efforts, these accomplishments are tenuous—particularly at Commerce and Treasury, which both currently have a significant number of open spots. For example, if President Biden fills the remaining open spots at Commerce, Treasury, and HUD with no Black nominees, the share in these four top positions who are Black would fall from 33% to 10% at Commerce, from 25% to 13% at Treasury, and from 50% to 22% at HUD. The significant African American representation at Transportation seems more stable, as nominees for all Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretary, and Assistant Secretary positions have been announced.



## By Agency—Total Black Share of Biden Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Under Secretary & Assistant Secretary Nominees



*\*African American Share of President Biden’s 2020 General Election Voters.  
This dataset reflects nominees as of June 18, 2021.*

## Methodology

This report focuses on African American nominations to Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary positions that require Senate confirmation in the Biden-Harris administration. We used the [2020 U.S. Government Policy and Supporting Positions](#) (commonly known as the Plum book) and the [Partnership for Public Service political appointee tracker of the \*Washington Post\*](#) to identify both agency positions and nominees. Based on these sources, we identified 139 Assistant Secretary positions and 46 Under Secretary positions. For the purposes of this analysis, we categorized all of the Department of Justice's Assistant Attorney General positions as Assistant Secretaries, and the Associate Attorney General as an Under Secretary.

The Partnership for Public Service includes three positions that are not included in the Plum Book: the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Energy, Installations, and Environment); the Assistant Secretary for Financial Stability at Treasury; and the Labor Department's Under Secretary for Management and Performance. The Plum Book includes two positions that the Partnership for Public Service does not track: Under Secretary of Energy and the Labor Department's Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management. We included all of these positions in our analysis.

Further, 22 Assistant Secretary positions are not designated by the Plum Book as requiring Senate confirmation (13 are listed as presidential appointments, four are noncareer appointments, and five do not indicate the type of appointment listed and are not included in the Partnership for Public Service political appointee tracker). We have not included those positions in our analysis.

We determined whether a nominee is Black with the following steps: 1) examining images of the nominee from his or her social media account, news reports, or bio from a government or institutional website; 2) looking for racially identifiable information in reports or news coverage of the nominee (e.g., the nominee is the first African American nominated for the position); and 3) reviewing whether the nominee is affiliated with an African American organization or institution, which can include but is not limited to HBCUs, fraternities or sororities, the NAACP, etc. For those nominees who had publicly available contact information (e.g., email address, LinkedIn account), we contacted the nominees to double-check our assumption and asked them to correct the information with how they self-identify. We also shared this report and our underlying dataset with the White House Presidential Personnel Office and invited the office to correct any errors in our data.

In addition to Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary positions, there are many other presidential appointments that require Senate confirmation and that are not included in this analysis (e.g., directors, administrators, chairs of independent agencies). The Joint Center will analyze Black nominations for many of these positions in the future. Further, the Biden administration has appointed many people of color who are not Black to Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary positions, and this analysis does not purport to reflect those numbers or diminish their significance in advancing racial equity.

## List of Black Biden Assistant Secretary and Under Secretary Nominees

Below is a list of all African Americans nominated by President Biden to serve as Assistant Secretary or Under Secretary in one of the 15 executive branch agencies as of June 18, 2021. To provide corrections to the data below, send an email with “CORRECTION” in the subject line to [research@jointcenter.org](mailto:research@jointcenter.org).

Agency	Position	Title	Name
Department of Commerce	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development	Alejandra Castillo
Department of Defense	Under Secretary	Under Secretary of Defense (Intelligence)	Ronald S. Moultrie
Department of Health and Human Services	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use	Miriam Delphin-Rittmon
Department of Justice	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Attorney General (Civil Rights Division)	Kristen Clarke
Department of Justice	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Attorney General (Criminal Division)	Kenneth Polite
Department of Labor	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy	Taryn Williams
Department of State	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary of State (Diplomatic Security)	Gentry O. Smith
Department of State	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary of State (International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs)	Todd Robinson
Department of State	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary of State (Western Hemisphere Affairs)	Brian A. Nichols
Department of State	Under Secretary	Under Secretary of State (Arms Control and International Security Affairs)	Bonnie Jenkins
Department of the Treasury	Under Secretary	Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence	Brian Nelson
Department of Transportation	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology	Robert Hampshire
Department of Transportation	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy	Christopher Coes
Department of Transportation	Assistant Secretary	Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Budget and Programs	Victoria Wassmer

## **Acknowledgments**

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