

Pathway Staff Diversity in Senate Personal Offices

June 26, 2024

LaShonda Brenson, Ph.D. and Kimberly Victor



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As the new president of the Joint Center, I am proud to present our first “Pathway Staff Diversity in Senate Personal Offices” report. In this analysis, Dr. Lashonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor review the state of racial representation in positions that are the pathways to top staff positions in the Senate. We explore the differences in staff composition by political party, age of the Senator, and the race/ethnic identity of the Senator, among other considerations. We find that most Senate offices, and the institution as a whole, must work harder to ensure that Congress reflects the makeup of this country.

This report follows the March 2024 disbandment of the U.S. House of Representatives Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Closing this office amidst the challenges of congressional staffing, particularly for African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, is likely to make a bad situation worse. Barriers to entry for underrepresented groups could increase; there could be a decline in retention and advancement of diverse staff; a potential reversal of the few diversity gains achieved; and a decrease in public trust. This report is meant to help keep a spotlight on these important issues.

Black voices matter. The lack of representation in key political staffing positions has been a crucial focus of the Joint Center’s 54-year commitment to achieving genuine democratic representation in our nation. We are eager to collaborate with members of Congress, as well as our partners in the advocacy, corporate, and philanthropic sectors, to tackle this aspect of racial inequality in our federal legislature. It is a challenge that should no longer persist in 21st-century America.

Dedrick Asante-Muhammad

President

ABOUT THE JOINT CENTER

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, America’s Black think tank, provides compelling and actionable policy solutions to eradicate persistent and evolving barriers to the full freedom of Black people in America. We are the trusted forum for leading experts and scholars to participate in major public policy debates and promote ideas that advance Black communities. We use evidence-based research, analysis, convenings, and strategic communications to support Black communities and a network of allies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Joint Center is especially appreciative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for supporting this report. We also thank the Hewlett Foundation and the Democracy Fund for supporting the Joint Center’s program to increase diversity among congressional staff.

We thank the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus and Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association for providing input on this report’s methodology and assistance in identifying staff members. We also thank all offices that responded to our emails and phone calls for helping us get accurate data.

A special thanks to our colleagues Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, Jessica Fulton, Chandra Hayslett, Victoria Johnson, and Kennedy Fortner for their support throughout the project and for closely reviewing the report to ensure the highest level of accuracy. This report was designed by Vlad Archin.

Media Contact

press@jointcenter.org | 202.789.3500 EXT 105

© Copyright 2024

All rights reserved.

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

633 Pennsylvania Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20004

info@jointcenter.org | jointcenter.org

[@JointCenter](https://www.instagram.com/JointCenter)



JOINT CENTER
FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	Executive Summary
5-6	Introduction
7-9	Defining Pathway Staff
9-11	Pathway Position Diversity <i> Overall Statistics on Pathway Positions</i>
12-13	Pathway Staff Diversity by Political Party
14	Diversity by Size of Pathway Staff
15-17	Pathway Diversity by Senate Office
17-18	Pathway Diversity by Senator Age
18-20	Pipeline to the Chief of Staff Position
21-23	Pipeline to the Legislative Director Position
23-24	Pipeline to the Communications Director Position
25	Next Steps
26	About the Authors
27-28	References



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides evidence regarding the lack of racial diversity among U.S. Senate “pathway” staff. In this report, pathway staff refers to positions held on the pathway to top staff positions in the Senate. Pathway staff include deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels, and press secretaries/deputy communications directors in the personal offices of U.S. senators. The data reflects Senate employment as of Jan. 31, 2024. Key findings demonstrate that:

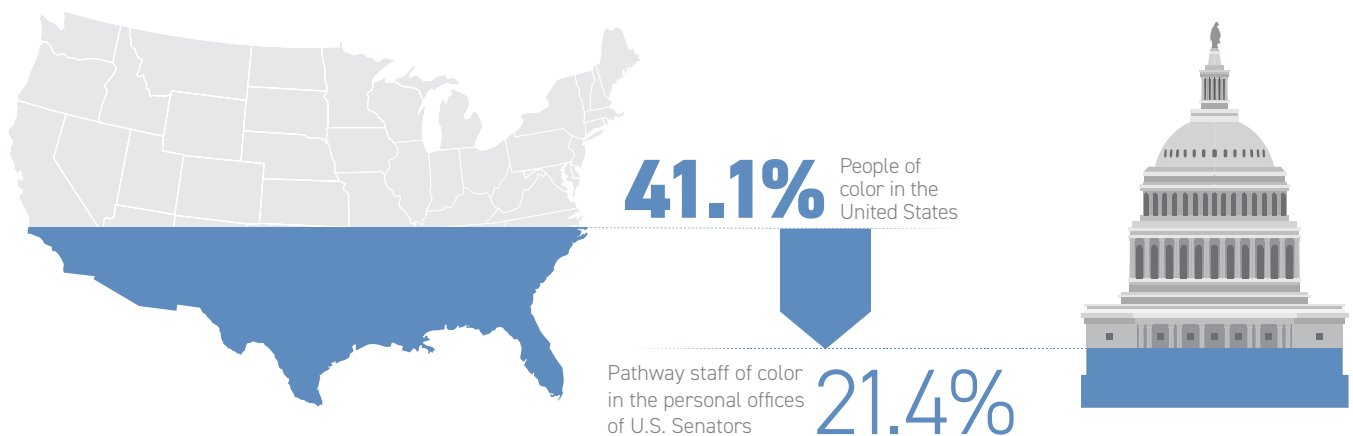
- ***People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but just 21.4 percent of pathway staff in the Senate are people of color.*** African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.4 percent of Senate pathway staff. Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 6.8 percent of Senate pathway staff. Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population but 5.4 percent of Senate pathway staff.
- ***The percentage of white top staff (i.e., chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors) in 2023 (84.2 percent) is higher than that of white pathway staff (78.6 percent).*** However, the percentage of pathway staff of color was higher than the percentage of top staff of color in 2023. Staffers of color made up 15.8 percent of Senate personal office top staff and make up 21.4 percent of pathway staff in the Senate.
- ***Black staff have the most significant difference among staff of color between the percentage of top staff and that of pathway staff in the Senate.*** In 2023, African Americans accounted for 2.1 percent of Senate top staff but 5.4 percent of Senate pathway staff. Latina/os accounted for 5.8 percent of Senate top staff but 6.8 percent of Senate pathway staff. Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders accounted for 4.5 percent of Senate top staff but 5.4 percent of Senate pathway staff.
- ***Pathway staff of color comprise a larger percentage of Senate Democrats staff than Senate Republicans, but both parties fall short of full representation.*** People of color comprise 14.0 percent of Republican voters in 2022 and 9.7 percent of Republican Senate pathway staff. People of color account for 36.0 percent of Democratic voters in 2022 and 30.4 percent of Democratic Senate pathway staff.
- ***African American voters were underrepresented among pathway staff in Senate Democratic offices.*** African Americans accounted for 17.0 percent of Democratic voters in 2022 but only 8.3 percent of Democratic Senate pathway staff. African Americans represented 1.0 percent of Republican voters and 1.6 percent of Republican Senate pathway staff.
- ***While Black senators only account for four percent of the U.S. Senate, they employ 21.1 percent of the Black pathway staff in the U.S. Senate.***
- ***Senators under 60 years old had the highest percentage of pathway staff of color at 29.6 percent compared to about 14.8 percent for senators 60 to 69 years old and 19.5 percent for senators 70 years old or older.***

INTRODUCTION

In this report, the authors define pathway staff in the Senate as deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels, and press secretaries/deputy communications directors.

Since 2015, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies has analyzed and disseminated information on the state of diversity among congressional staff. While our recent Senate¹ and House² reports demonstrate some improvements in the percentage of top staff positions over time, these figures still pale in comparison to the diversity of the U.S. population. Many experts and advocates purport that investing in the pipeline of mid-level staffers or “pathway” staff positions is a solution to increasing the diversity among top staffers. However, few studies have identified what positions lead to top staff roles. The studies that exist do not examine the state of diversity in these “pathway” roles. This report seeks to fill this gap by identifying which pathway positions Senate staff typically occupy before becoming top staff and providing data on the diversity within these positions.

In this report, the authors define pathway staff in the Senate as deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels,³ and press secretaries/deputy communications directors.⁴ These positions are the ones most often held by top staff who have been internally promoted.⁵ Though these staffers are less visible than senators and their top staff, these staffers play an essential role in the function of Senate offices, including filling in for the chief of staff when they are on travel with the senator, meeting with stakeholder groups, obtaining cosponsors on bills, and helping to manage the workload of Senate offices.⁶



The findings from this report suggest that the lack of diversity in pathway positions affects the ability of staff of color to be promoted to top staff positions.

We find that while people of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population, they account for only 21.4 percent of pathway staff of color in the personal offices of U.S. senators. In our *Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices* report, we found that people of color account for 15.8 percent of top staff (chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors) in the personal offices of U.S. senators.⁷

The findings from this report suggest that the lack of diversity in pathway positions affects the ability of staff of color to be promoted to top staff positions. When a top staff position becomes vacant, some offices promote pathway staffers within their office.⁸ Employing a pathway staff that lacks diversity could limit the opportunity to employ a diverse top staff. Many congressional top staff job advertisements also specify a preference for candidates with previous Capitol Hill experience.⁹ Diversity in the pipeline would ensure that more staff of color meet the preference for Capitol Hill experience.

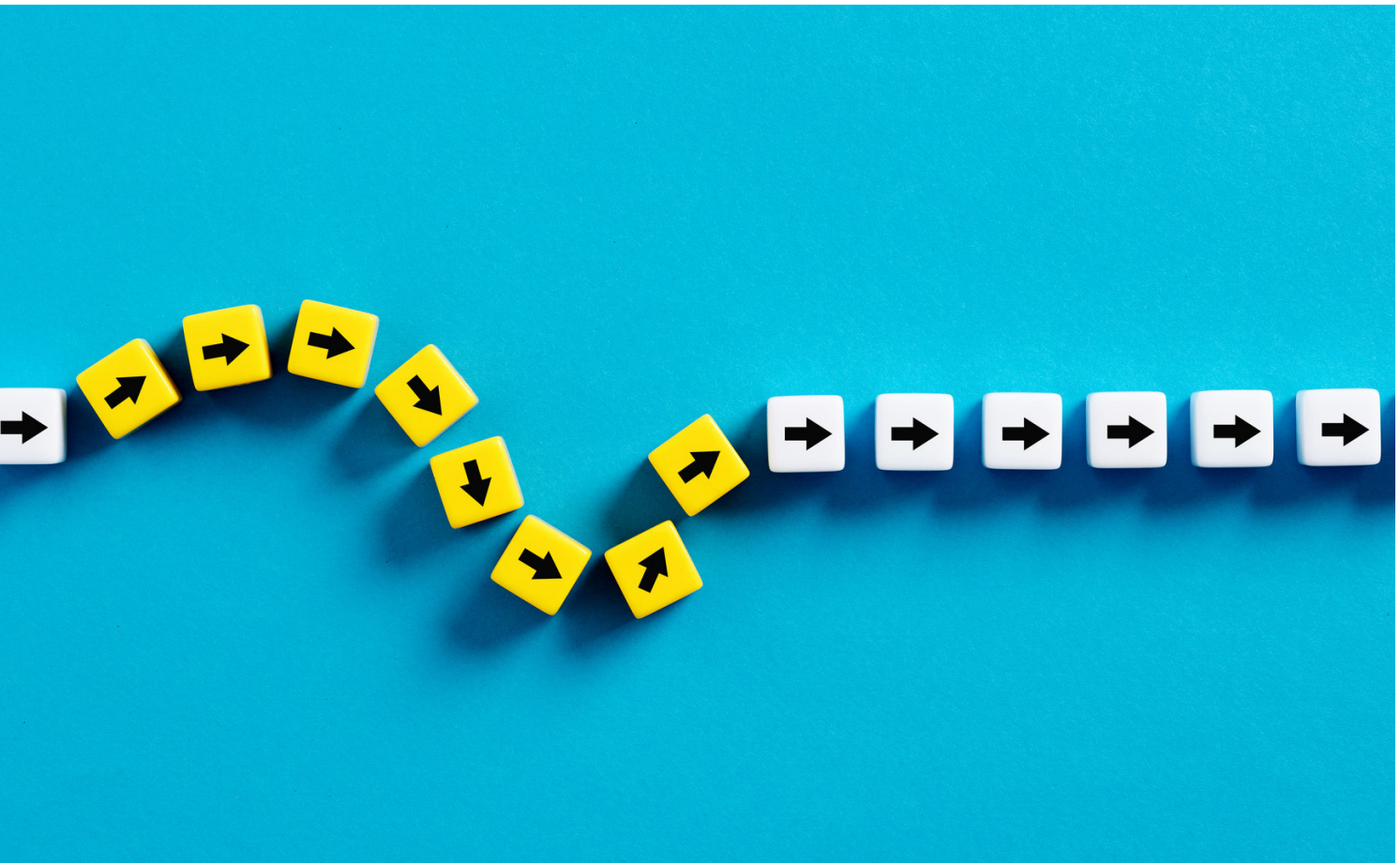
The need for greater diversity among pathway staff is a challenge that the Senate, as an institution, must address. Congressional decisions affect all Americans, and the lack of racial diversity among personal office pathway staff impairs senators' understanding of their constituencies' diverse perspectives. This report does not claim that white staff cannot represent communities of color, nor that proportional representation is a panacea. The considerable influence of congressional staff in shaping the U.S. Senate and the lack of racial diversity among pathway staff stifle adequate representation of all U.S. citizens. Increasing diversity among key staffers would enhance deliberation, innovation, legitimacy, and legislative outcomes, allowing the Senate to function more effectively and in a way that more accurately reflects America's diversity.

Currently, the U.S. Senate does not systematically collect data on the race and ethnicity of its members' staff. Though federal law requires that employers with more than 100 employees 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.¹⁰ For the past seven years, however, Senate Democrats have disclosed data from a voluntary survey on the aggregate racial and ethnic diversity of each Democratic U.S. senator's personal and committee offices.¹¹ To date, Senate Republicans have not released demographic data on their staffs. Beyond the surveys from the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which is now disbanded,¹² and the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative,¹³ there is no central repository of data to help guide efforts to make the congressional workforce more diverse. If Congress cannot tell what the demographic makeup of its workforce is, it cannot fully address the challenges and opportunities of diversity and inclusion. Hence, this study will add to the limited literature in this area and provide further data on the racial/ethnic diversity of staff in the Senate.

DEFINING PATHWAY STAFF

We completed an extensive process to decide which mid-level staff positions to include in our study. We reviewed the mid-level or “pathway” staff positions included in previous studies.¹⁴ We also reviewed the career trajectories of top staff in the Joint Center’s 2023 report on top staff diversity in the U.S. Senate.¹⁵ We used this literature to determine an initial list of staff position titles to examine more deeply. We studied the prevalence of these titles across Senate offices. Next, we met with and/or surveyed several senior staffers across race and political party to discuss how Senate offices are structured and the typical career trajectories for chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors. Based upon this process, we define pathway staff as deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels, and press secretaries/deputy communications directors. We further explain why we chose these positions in their respective sections below.

We considered but decided to exclude a few other positions in our definition of pathway staff. For instance, the “fellow” position was considered because it was counted as a mid-level staffer in previous reports.¹⁶ However, unlike the other positions included in this study, fellows are typically paid by outside organizations rather than from the senator’s office budget.



These positions are also temporary positions. Fellows are represented in almost two-thirds of Senate offices,¹⁷ and the most common type of fellow in the Senate is a defense fellow.

The “professional staff” position was considered because a handful of top staff served in these roles before becoming chiefs of staff in our *Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices* report.¹⁸ However, this position is only represented in a handful of Senate offices. This title is used most often in committee offices rather than in Senate personal offices.

The “adviser” position was considered because when examining the career trajectories of chiefs of staff in *Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices*, 19 percent of them previously served as an adviser.¹⁹ However, most of those adviser positions were “senior advisers.” Therefore, instead of including all advisers in our definition of pathway staff, we only included senior advisers in our study.

We completed a census of employment in pathway positions in each U.S. senator’s personal office as of Jan. 31, 2024. In the initial data collection stage, the authors performed an online search for Senate staff photographs with links to current and past employment. The authors obtained data from various sources, including LegiStorm, X (formally Twitter), LinkedIn, YouTube, Wikipedia, Roll Call, The Hill, National Journal, constituent photographs, wedding announcements, and press interviews.

The authors then emailed deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels, and press secretaries/deputy 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 staff who had yet to respond to our initial email were contacted again with another opportunity to correct our data. For the handful of staffers who left their position before our email could reach them, we reached out to their former chief of staff asking them to confirm our data. Nine percent of the staffers responded, and a few submitted corrections to the data (for example, “this person identifies as biracial”). One percent of pathway staffers responded that they were unwilling to participate in the study and did not confirm our data. Lastly, the authors then reviewed all the collected information identifying people of color with leadership from diverse staff associations (i.e., Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus (SBLSC) and Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association (CAPASA)) to confirm and ask for any corrections to our data.



The U.S. Census Bureau defines race as a person's self-identification with one or more social groups.²⁰ 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.

We contend that this analysis provides the most consistent snapshot of diversity across pathway staff in U.S. senators' personal offices. Any isolated instances of influential staff of color in pathway positions that were not included in this report do not explain why the U.S. Senate has a proportion of people of color in the deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels, and press secretaries/deputy communications director positions that is not representative of the diversity in the United States.

PATHWAY POSITION DIVERSITY

Overall Statistics on Pathway Positions

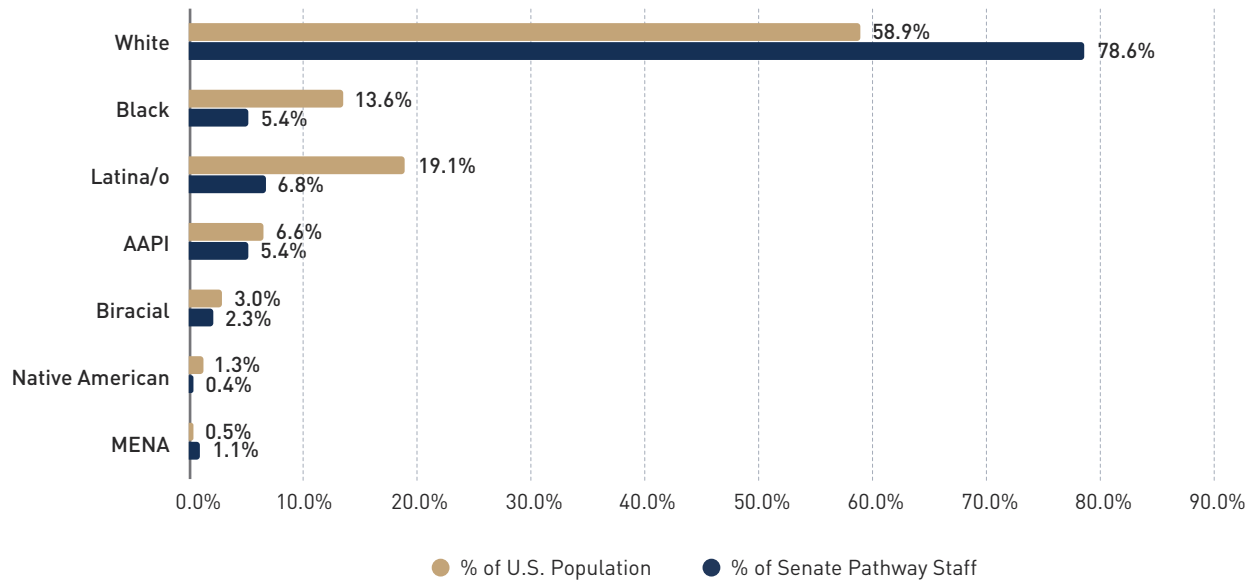
People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population, but just 21.4 percent of pathway staff in the Senate.²¹ White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population but 78.6 percent of Senate pathway staff.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate pathway staff:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.4 percent of Senate pathway staff;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 6.8 percent of Senate pathway staff;
- Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.4 percent of Senate pathway staff;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population but only 2.3 percent of Senate pathway staff;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but only 0.4 percent of Senate pathway staff; and
- Middle Eastern/North Africans (MENAs) are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population and 1.1 percent of Senate pathway staff.



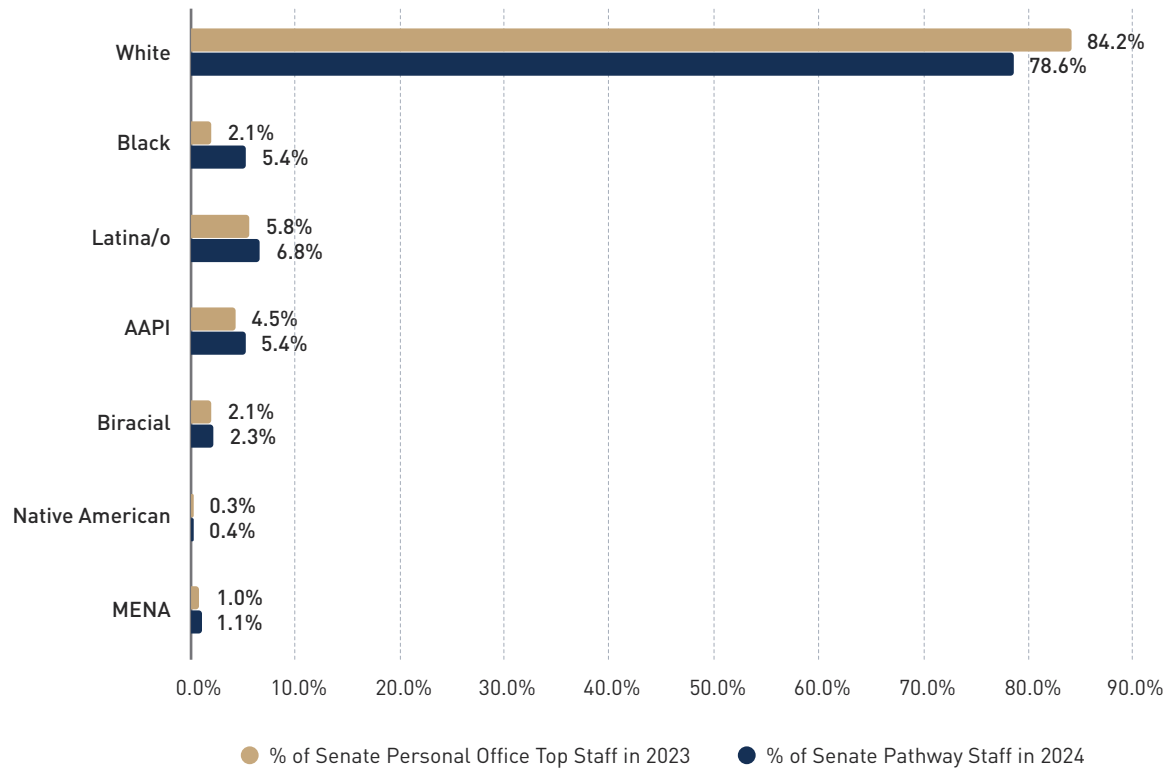
Racial Diversity of Senate Pathway Staffers vs. U.S. Population



Comparing the demographics of Senate pathway staff to that of Senate personal office top staff from our October 2023 report, we find that the percentage of white top staff is higher than that of white pathway staff (84.2 percent vs. 78.6 percent).²² However, all groups of color observe a higher percentage of pathway staff compared to their makeup of top staff diversity in 2023. Across race and ethnicity, Black staff saw the most significant difference between the percentage of top staff and the percentage of pathway staff. These findings indicate that for African Americans in particular, representation as pathway staff does not lead to similar levels of representation as Senate top staff.

Across race and ethnicity, Black staff saw the most significant difference between the percentage of top staff and the percentage of pathway staff.

Racial Demographics of Senate Pathway Staffers vs. Racial Demographics of Senate Personal Office Top Staff



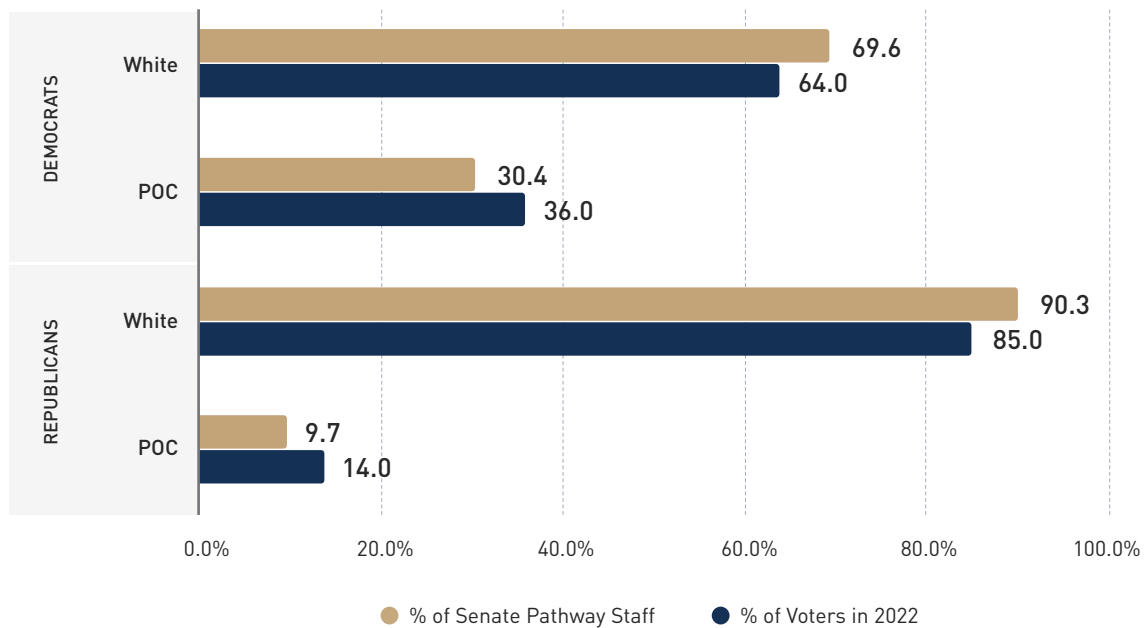
We recently observed a pattern that may explain the disparities in the recruitment and retention of pathway staff in our October 2023 report.²³ We also found that the African American top staff's retention and hiring patterns were unique. None of the African American top staff hired as of January 2020 were retained as of June 2023. In addition, all six African American top staffers included in our October 2023 report previously worked for other Senate offices, rather than obtaining top staff positions through promotion within the same office.²⁴ However, during that same period, white, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and Latina/o top staff observed at least a portion of their staffers being promoted to a top staff position from a pathway position within the same Senate personal office.



PATHWAY STAFF DIVERSITY BY POLITICAL PARTY

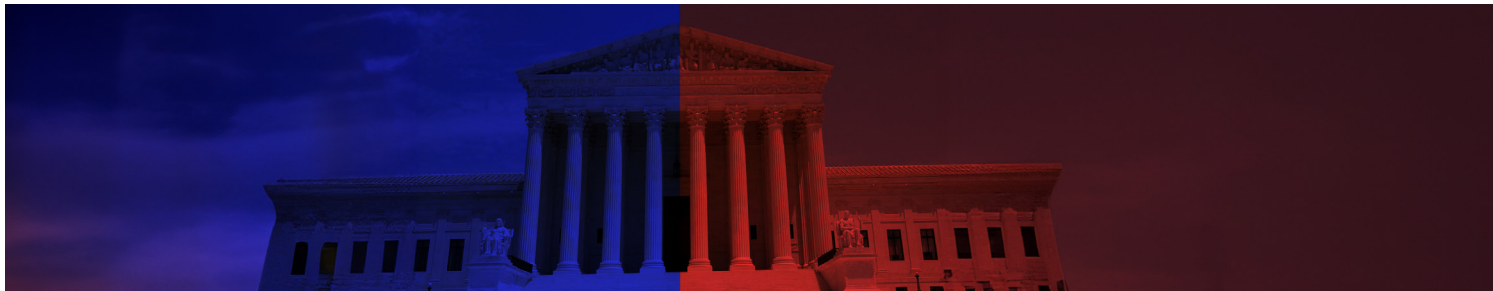
Disaggregating our pathway staff diversity data by political party position reveals some notable differences. A 2023 Pew Research Center survey found that 36.0 percent of 2022 voters who self-identified as Democrats were people of color,²⁵ which is higher than the percentage of Democratic Senate pathway staff who are people of color (30.4 percent).²⁶ In contrast, people of color made up 14.0 percent of 2022 voters who self-identified as Republicans and 9.7 percent of Republican Senate pathway staff.

Racial Representation by Party Base Voters*

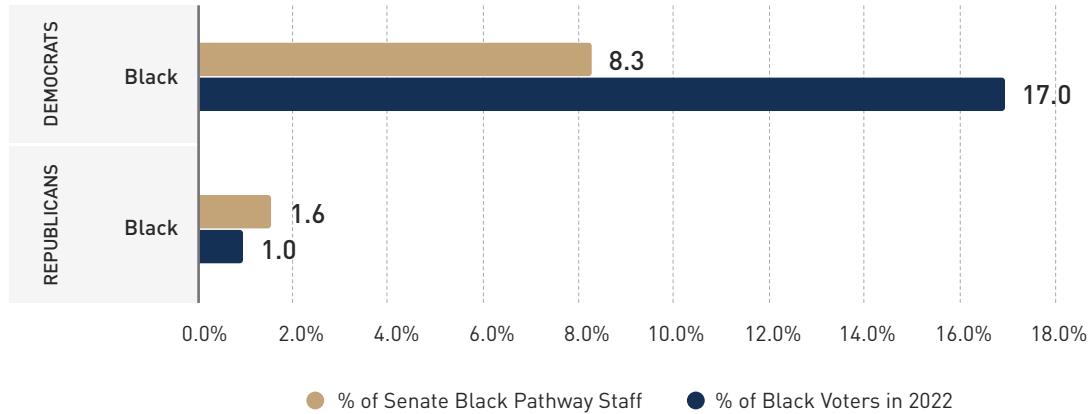


*Due to rounding, some percentages may add up to less than 100 percent.

African American voters were underrepresented among pathway staff in Senate Democratic offices and slightly overrepresented in Senate Republican offices. African Americans accounted for 17.0 percent of Democratic voters in 2022 but only 8.3 percent of Democratic Senate pathway staff. African Americans accounted for 1.0 percent of Republican voters and 1.6 percent of Republican Senate pathway staff.



Black Representation by Party Base Voters



Democratic Senate offices employed over 25 percent more staff in pathway positions than their Republican counterparts (398 Democratic pathway staffers vs. 309 Republican pathway staffers). While Senate Democrats employ slightly more pathway staffers than their Republican counterparts, they employ over four times as many staff of color in pathway positions than their Republican colleagues.

Pathway Staff in Senate Personal Offices by Political Party

	Democrat	Percentage	Republican	Percentage	Total
White	277	69.6%	279	90.3%	556
Black	33	8.3%	5	1.6%	38
Latina/o	39	9.8%	9	2.9%	48
Biracial	11	2.8%	5	1.6%	16
AAPI	31	7.8%	7	2.3%	38
MENA	4	1.0%	4	1.3%	8
Native	3	0.8%	0	0.0%	3
Total	398	100%	309	100%	707

DIVERSITY BY SIZE OF PATHWAY STAFF

The number of pathway staff positions available in each senator’s office varies. Most offices employ seven or eight pathway staffers; however, some employ as few as one pathway staffer, and some employ up to 14.

We grouped Senate offices into three categories to analyze diversity among similar-sized offices. Group 1 contains 36 senators who have between one to six pathway staffers. The average number of pathway staff in this group is 4.8. Group 2 contains 39 senators who have seven or eight pathway staffers. The average number of pathway staff in this group is 7.4. Group 3 contains 25 senators who have between nine to 14 pathway staffers. The average number of staff in this group is 9.8. We analyzed these groups to examine if pathway staff diversity varies based on the number of pathway staff a Senate office employs.

We found that the group of senators with the highest average number of pathway staff (Group 3) employs the most racially and ethnically diverse pathway staffers (26.0 percent). In contrast, the senators who have between one to six pathway staffers (Group 1) employ the lowest percentage of pathway staffers of color (12.8 percent). Group 2, the group of senators who have seven or eight pathway staffers, falls in the middle of both groups, having 22.5 percent of pathway staff of color.

Pathway Diversity by Senate Grouping (Based on Size of Pathway Staff) and Political Party

Groups	Average number of pathway staff	Number of senators in group	Percentage of pathway staff of color	Percentage of Democratic senators	Percentage of Republican senators
1	4.8	36	12.8%	30.6%	69.4%
2	7.4	39	22.5%	56.4%	43.6%
3	9.8	25	26.0%	72.0%	28.0%

PATHWAY DIVERSITY BY SENATE OFFICE

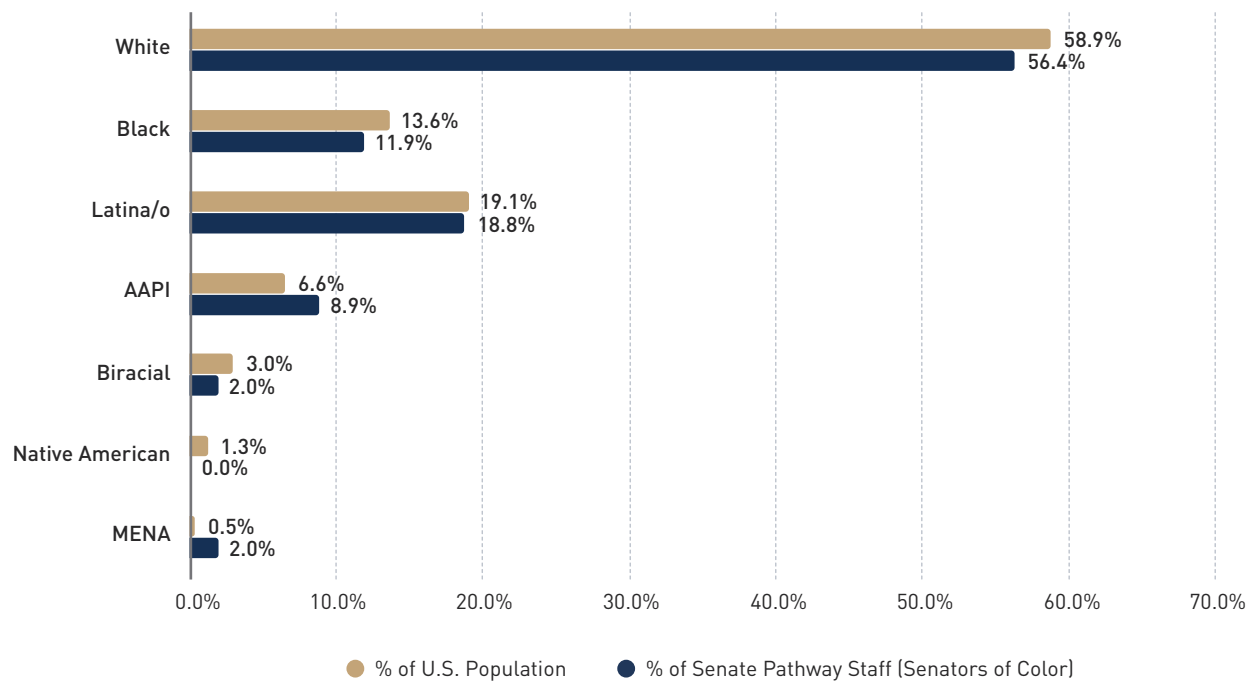
Senators of color tend to hire a disproportionate number of pathway staffers of color. People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population, but only 13.0 percent of the U.S. senators.²⁷ Senators of color employ 14.3 percent of all pathway staffers (or 101), while white senators employ 85.7 percent (or 606).²⁸ Despite the smaller number of available positions in their offices, senators of color employ 29.1 percent of the pathway staffers of color in Senate personal offices.

The racial and ethnic representation in pathway positions in personal offices of senators of color is much more reflective of the U.S. population than in the U.S. Senate as a whole (see the “Overall Statistics on Pathway Positions” section of this report). We found that people of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population and 43.6 percent of pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population and 56.4 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color.

This report finds that some groups of color are almost proportionately represented among Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but 11.9 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but 18.8 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color;
- Asian American/Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population and 8.9 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color, which is higher than the AAPI population;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population but 2.0 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but no Native American Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color; and
- Middle Eastern/North Africans (MENAs) are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population and 2.0 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of senators of color, which is higher than the MENA population.

Racial Diversity of Senate Pathway Staffers (Senators of Color) vs. U.S. Population



While Black senators only account for four percent of the U.S. Senate,²⁹ they employ 21.1 percent of the Black pathway staff in the U.S. Senate. We found that people of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but 52.8 percent of pathway staff in personal offices of Black senators.³⁰

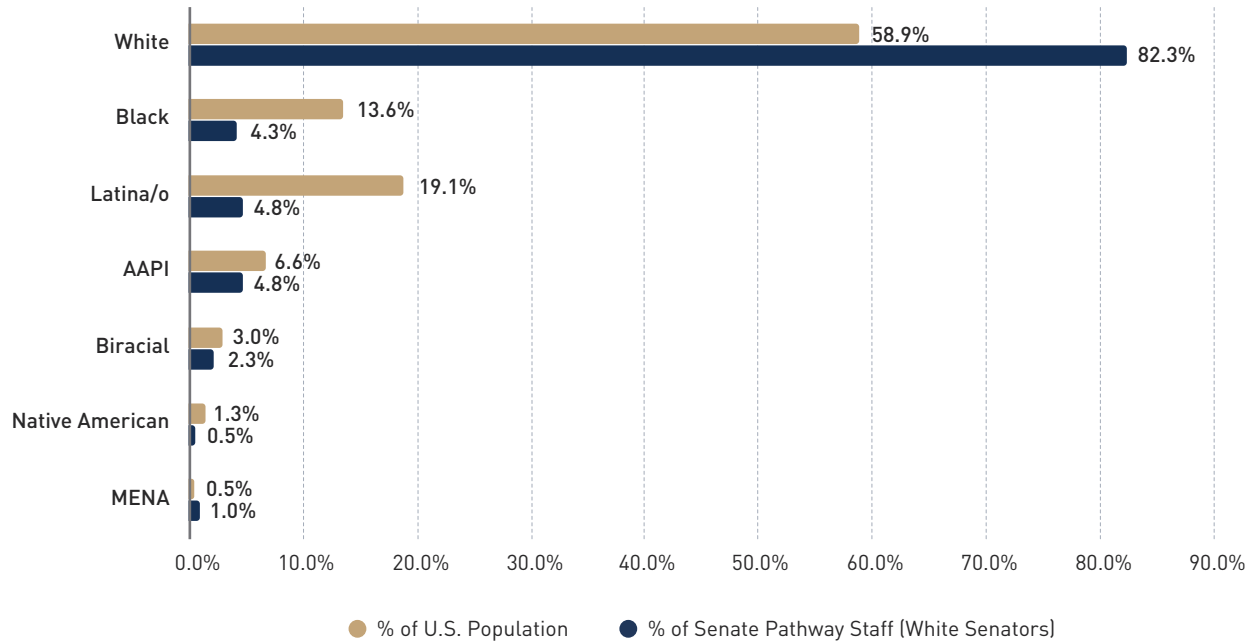
The overall statistics of pathway positions in personal offices of white senators are not as reflective of the U.S. population in comparison to the overall statistics we mentioned earlier (see the “Overall Statistics on Pathway Positions” section of this report). We found that people of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 17.7 percent of pathway staff in personal offices of white senators. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population and 82.3 percent of Senate pathway staff in the personal offices of white senators.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate pathway staff in the personal offices of white senators:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 4.3 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of white senators;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 4.8 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of white senators;
- AAPIs are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population but 4.8 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of white senators;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population but 2.3 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of white senators;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but 0.5 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of white senators; and
- MENAs are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population and 1.0 percent of Senate pathway staff in personal offices of white senators, which is higher than the MENA population.

We found that people of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but 52.8 percent of pathway staff in personal offices of Black senators.

Racial Diversity of Senate Pathway Staffers (White Senators) vs. U.S. Population



PATHWAY DIVERSITY BY SENATOR AGE

The senators were grouped into three categories based on their age distribution.³¹ Group 1 consisted of 32 senators below the age of 60 years old. The average age of the group is 51.3 years old. Group 2 consisted of 33 senators between the ages of 60 to 69. The average age of this group is 65.3 years old. Group 3 contained 35 senators aged 70 years old and above. The average age of this group was 74.9 years old.

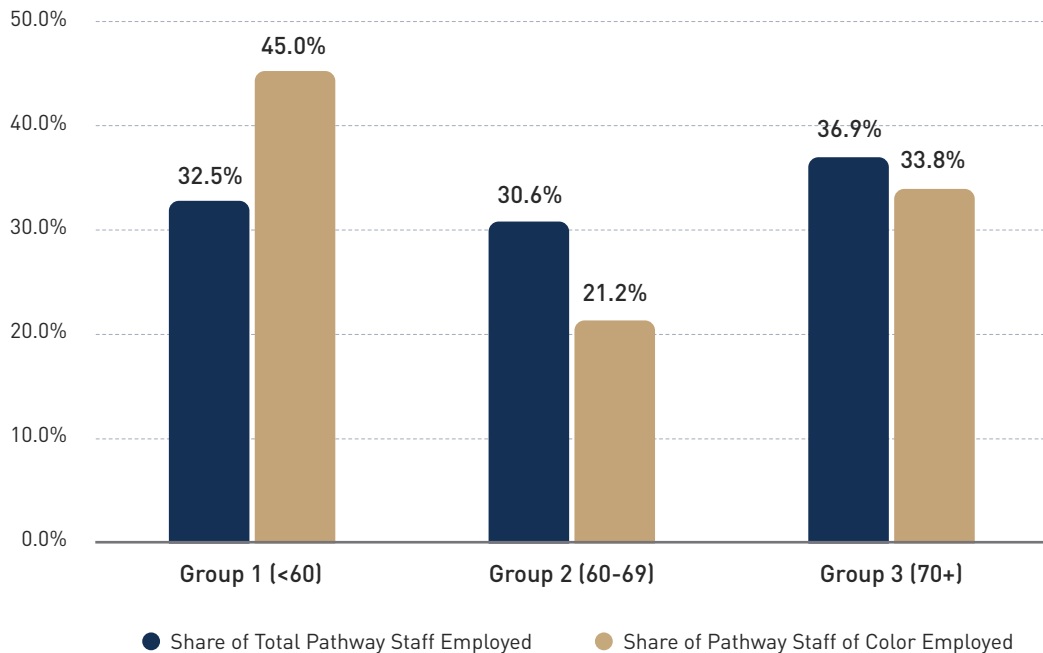
Senate Groupings by Age, Amount of Senators, Average Pathway Staff of Color, Share of Pathway Staff Employed, and Share of Pathway Staff of Color Employed

Groups	Average age	Number of senators in group	Average percentage of pathway staff of color employed	Share of total pathway staff employed	Share of pathway staff of color employed
1: Below 60	51.3	32	29.6%	32.5%	45.0%
2: 60-69	65.3	33	14.8%	30.6%	21.2%
3: 70+	74.9	35	19.5%	36.9%	33.8%

The youngest group of senators employ the highest average percentage of pathway staffers of color (29.6 percent). Group 2 employs the lowest average percentage of pathway staff of color (14.8 percent). The oldest group of senators falls in the middle of both groups, employing an average of 19.5 percent pathway staff of color.

A similar trend persists when analyzing the share of staffers who each group employs. Group 2 employs the smallest share of all pathway staff (30.6 percent). They also employ the smallest share of pathway staff of color to a disproportionate degree, at 21.2 percent. The oldest group of senators employs the largest total share of pathway staff (36.9 percent) and the second largest share of pathway staff of color (33.8 percent). The youngest group of senators employ the second largest share of total pathway staff (32.5 percent) and the largest share of pathway staff of color (45.0 percent). This finding mirrors a previous Joint Center report's finding that the youngest group of senators also hired the highest percentage of top staffers of color in comparison to the older groups of senators.³²

Share of Pathway Staff Employed vs. Pathway Staff of Color Employed (by Senator Age)



Next, we study the pathway staff diversity by position (i.e., deputy chiefs of staff, senior advisers, legislative assistants, counsels, and press secretaries/deputy communications directors) and its connections to the top staff positions (i.e., chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors).

PIPELINE TO THE CHIEF OF STAFF POSITION

Chief of staff is the highest-ranking staff position in each office, and almost all offices have a chief of staff. The chief of staff develops and implements all policy objectives, oversees the personal office budget and operating plans for the member’s office, and coordinates the member’s activities with leadership and committee office(s).³³

The most common pathway positions in the Senate for the chief of staff position are deputy chief of staff and senior adviser. In examining the career trajectories of chiefs of staff in our *Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices* report, 16.0 percent (16/100) of them most recently served as deputy chiefs of staff prior

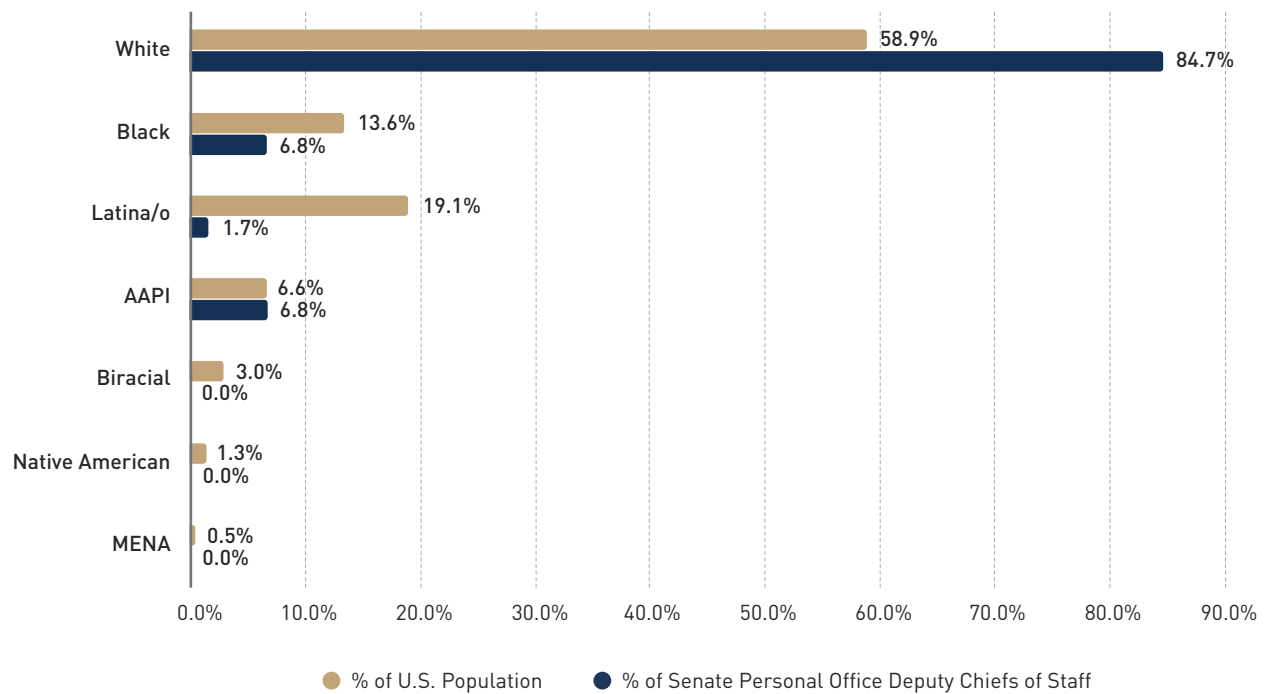
to being promoted to chief of staff. Deputy chiefs of staff were not consistently found in all personal offices, and the responsibilities associated with the roles varied. While some deputy chiefs of staff supervise legislative and communications directors, others focus on managing administrative tasks in the office. Deputy chiefs of staff often fill in for the chief of staff when they are on travel with their senator or out of office.

People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 15.3 percent of deputy chiefs of staff in the Senate. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population but 84.7 percent of Senate deputy chiefs of staff.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate deputy chiefs of staff:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 6.8 percent of Senate deputy chiefs of staff;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 1.7 percent of Senate deputy chiefs of staff;
- AAPIs are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population and 6.8 percent of Senate deputy chiefs of staff, which is slightly higher than the AAPI population;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population but no Senate deputy chief of staff;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but no Senate deputy chief of staff; and
- MENAs are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population but no Senate deputy chief of staff.

Racial Diversity of Senate Deputy Chiefs of Staff vs. U.S. Population



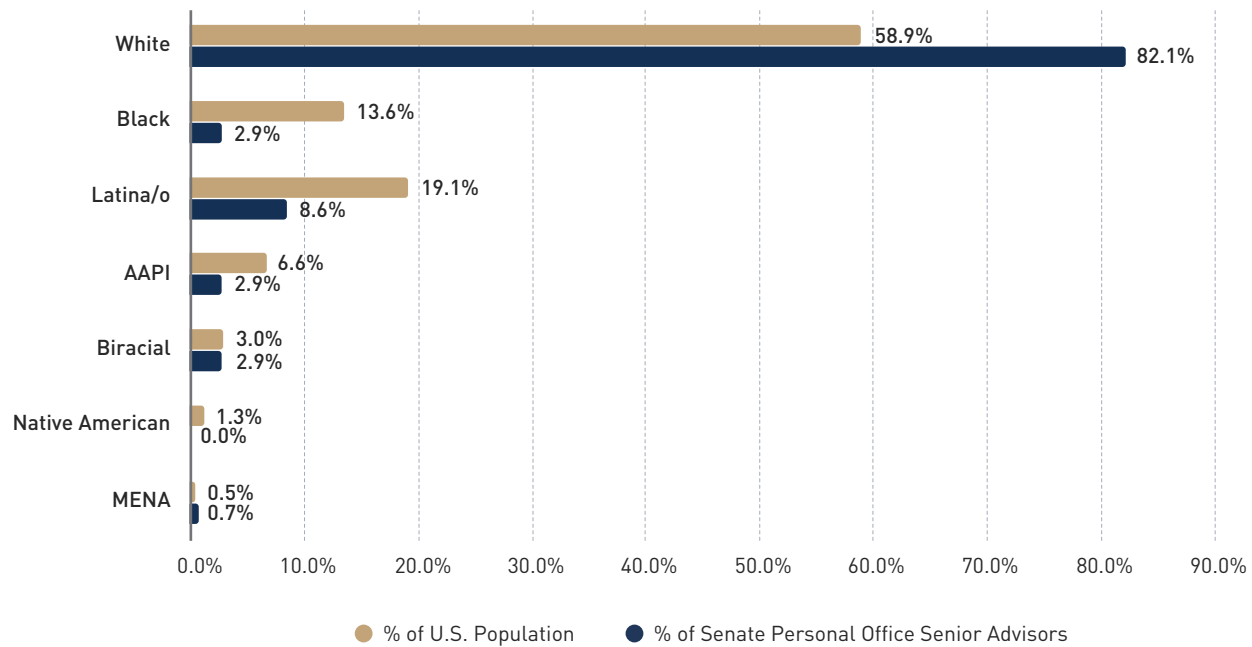
Senior advisers are responsible for monitoring legislation, drafting amendments and bills, identifying legislative priorities, developing legislative proposals, providing vote recommendations, engaging with key stakeholders, and providing written and oral briefings to the senator. Senior advisers are also responsible for managing more junior advisors.³⁴ This position is represented in 68.0 percent of Senate offices.

People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 17.9 percent of senior advisers in the Senate. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population but 82.1 percent of Senate senior advisers.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate senior advisers:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 2.9 percent of Senate senior advisers;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 8.6 percent of Senate senior advisers;
- AAPIs are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 2.9 percent of Senate senior advisers;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population but 2.9 percent of Senate senior advisers;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but no Senate senior advisers; and
- MENAs are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population and 0.7 percent of Senate senior advisers, which is higher than the MENA population.

Racial Diversity of Senate Senior Advisers vs. U.S. Population



PIPELINE TO THE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR POSITION

The legislative director establishes the senator's legislative agenda and manages all legislative staff. The legislative director also monitors legislative activity on the House floor and handles legislative planning for the senator.³⁵

The most common pathway positions in the Senate for the legislative director position are legislative assistant and counsel. In examining the career trajectories of legislative directors in our *Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices* report, 27.1 percent (26/96) of them most recently served as a legislative assistant prior to being promoted to legislative director. In studying the positions legislative directors from the October 2023 report had before being promoted, counsel was the second most common position (22/96 or 22.9 percent) held.

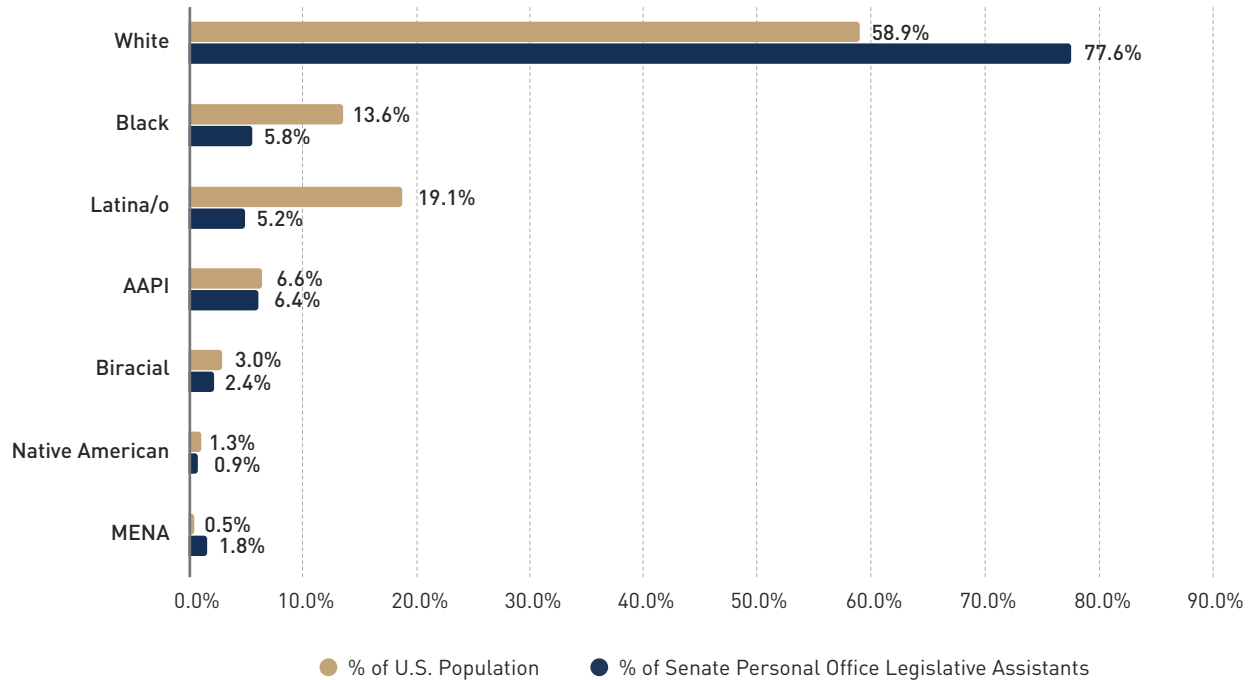
Legislative assistants are policy experts who advise the senior legislative staff in Senate offices on various policy issues. Legislative assistants develop and plan legislative initiatives and monitor legislative developments within Senate committees and on the Senate floor. Under the supervision of the legislative director, legislative assistants help with writing floor speeches for the senator, drafting constituent correspondence for the senator, and meeting with constituents and special interest groups on behalf of the senator. This position is also represented in over 90 percent of Senate offices.

People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population, but 22.4 percent of legislative assistants in the Senate. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population but 77.6 percent of Senate legislative assistants.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate legislative assistants:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.8 percent of Senate legislative assistants;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.2 percent of Senate legislative assistants;
- AAPIs are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population and 6.4 percent of Senate legislative assistants, which is almost proportional to the AAPI population;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population but 2.4 percent of Senate legislative assistants, which is almost proportional to the Biracial population;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but 0.9 percent of Senate legislative assistants, which is almost proportional to the Native American population; and
- MENAs are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population and 1.8 percent of Senate legislative assistants, which is higher than the MENA population.

Racial Diversity of Senate Legislative Assistants vs. U.S. Population



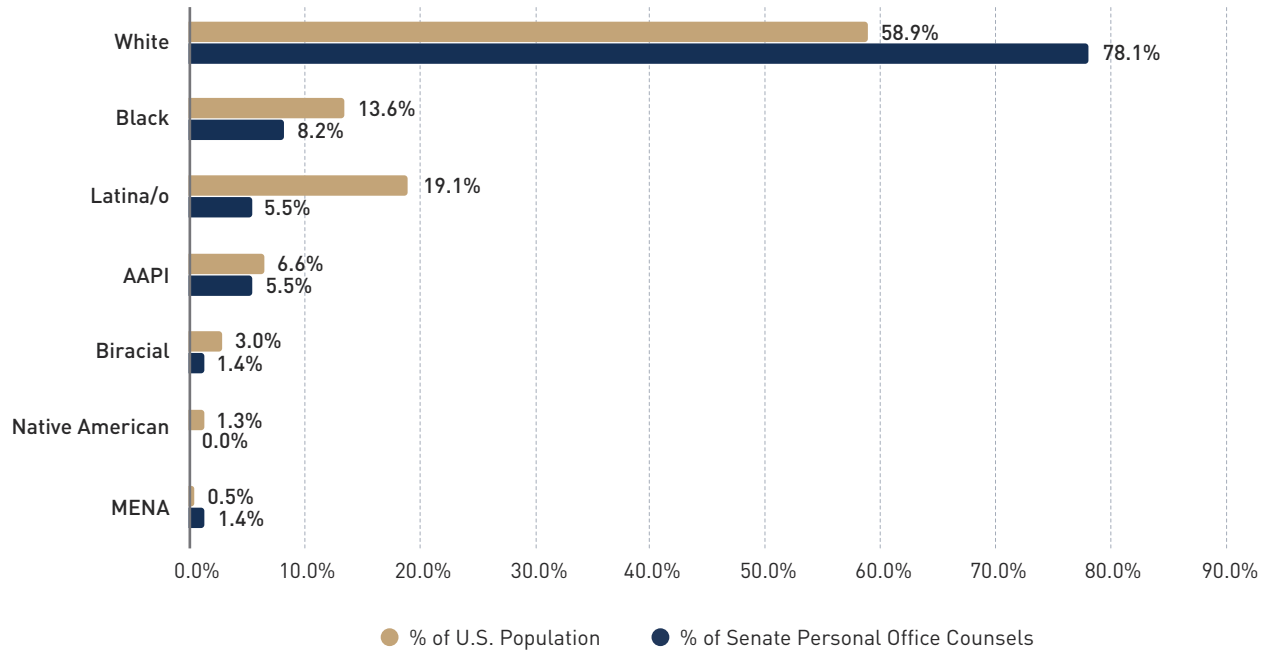
Counsels typically plan and execute legislative strategy act as support staff; write memos, speeches, and talking points; and monitor legislative activity.³⁶ Many counsels serve on committees and other Senate offices. However, this report only considers counsels employed in Senate personal offices. Counsel positions in Senate personal offices have a variety of titles.³⁷ We chose not to include senior or chief counsel positions in our count of counsels in this report, as this type of counsel position is a more senior role than other counsel positions in Senate personal offices. This position is also represented in almost 70 percent of Senate offices.

People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population but just 21.9 percent of counsels in the Senate. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population but 78.1 percent of Senate counsels.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate counsels:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 8.2 percent of Senate counsels;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 5.5 percent of Senate counsels;
- AAPIs are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population but 5.5 percent of Senate counsels;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population, but 1.4 percent of Senate counsels;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population, but no Senate counsels; and
- MENAs are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population and 1.4 percent of Senate counsels, which is higher than the MENA population.

Racial Diversity of Senate Counsels vs. U.S. Population



PIPELINE TO THE COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR POSITION

The communications director manages the stream of information between the senator, constituents, the media, and the public. The communications director also develops and implements media and communications strategies for the senator and acts as the formal spokesperson.³⁸

The most common pathway positions in the Senate for the communications director position are press secretary or deputy communications director. In examining the career trajectories of communications directors in our *Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices* report, 36.8 percent (35/95) of them most recently served as press secretaries before being promoted to communications director. Twenty percent (19/95) of communications directors in the October 2023 report previously served as deputy communications directors before being promoted to communications director.

The press secretary writes and edits press releases, op-eds, talking points, and newsletters.³⁹ Under the supervision of the communications director, they also develop and maintain effective relationships with district, state, and the media. This position is also represented in over 70 percent of Senate offices.

Some Senate offices have deputy communications directors in addition to the press secretary position, while others use the deputy communications director position to supplant the press secretary position. In examining whether the deputy communications director position is also a pathway to the communications director position, our analysis found that in the offices that do not have a press secretary, 34 percent employ someone with a deputy communications director title.

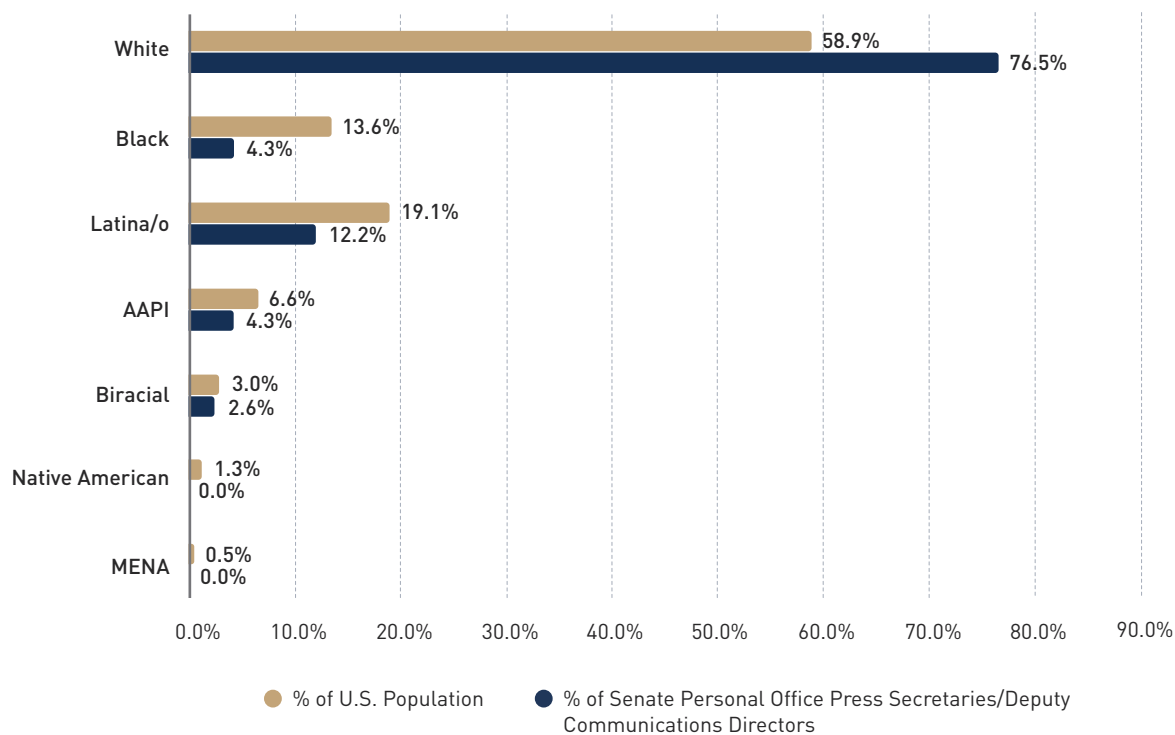
The roles of press secretaries and deputy communications directors are more similar than different, so instead of analyzing these positions separately, we combine them and report our findings below.

People of color account for 41.1 percent of the U.S. population, but just 23.5 percent of press secretaries/deputy communications directors in the Senate are people of color. White Americans account for 58.9 percent of the U.S. population but 76.5 percent of Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors.

This report finds that almost all groups of color are underrepresented among Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors:

- African Americans are 13.6 percent of the U.S. population but only 4.3 percent of Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors;
- Latina/os are 19.1 percent of the U.S. population but only 12.2 percent of Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors;
- AAPIs are 6.6 percent of the U.S. population but 4.3 percent of Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors;
- Biracial Americans are 3.0 percent of the U.S. population and 2.6 percent of Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors, which is almost proportional to the Biracial population;
- Native Americans are 1.3 percent of the U.S. population but no Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors; and
- MENAs are 0.5 percent of the U.S. population but no Senate press secretaries/deputy communications directors.

Racial Diversity of Senate Press Secretaries/Deputy Communications Directors vs. U.S. Population



NEXT STEPS

Since the Joint Center’s 2015 report, *Racial Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*, Congress has taken essential steps to improve transparency and staff diversity. For the past several 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’ staffs are diverse in critical positions that may serve as pipelines to top positions. This will help us better understand why Black staff in our report observed the most significant gap between the percentage of pathway staff and top staff in our 2023 report.

Unfortunately, Senate Republicans have yet to publicly release any data on the diversity of their staffs. Senate Republicans should immediately disclose this data and annually report it. Both Senate Republicans and Democrats should work together to develop a diversity plan that helps Senate offices in recruiting, hiring, training, promoting, and retaining a diverse Senate staff.

We should also note that many top staff are hired from external organizations and companies. These staff often have experience working in government relations or may have a previous working relationship with the senator. Future studies should explore what the pipeline of staff hired from external organizations, companies, and campaigns looks like.

On the House of Representatives side, on March 25, 2024, the U.S. House Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) office was disbanded. ODI previously led bipartisan efforts since 2020 in promoting diverse hiring within the U.S. House offices. By shuttering the ODI, we are not just losing an office; we are losing ground in our collective pursuit of a truly representative democracy. The Joint Center calls on the replacement office — the Office of Talent Management under the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer — to build on the great work of the ODI and create a central repository of data to help guide efforts to make the House of Representatives workforce more diverse. While the ODI is closed, the Joint Center will continue to play a pivotal role in advocating for a congressional workforce that mirrors the diversity of the American people within the U.S. House of Representatives.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. LaShonda Brenson is the senior researcher at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Prior to her current role, she led the Joint Center's Hill diversity research as the senior fellow of diversity and inclusion at the Joint Center. 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 and Congressional Hispanic Caucus, as institutions, matter. One way she demonstrates the added value of the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucus is by illustrating that when caucus members serve as caucus leaders, they introduce more bills because of their additional staff capacity.



Kimberly Victor is the research associate for the Hill diversity program at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. She previously served as the Joint Center's research analyst. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Human Development with minors in Inequality Studies and Crime, Prisons, Education, and Justice from Cornell University. At Cornell, she successfully defended her senior honors thesis on the intersection between race and purpose, arguing that the connection between one's sense of purpose and racial identity has important implications on one's well-being, particularly for communities of color. During her tenure at Cornell, she worked as the Poetry Program Coordinator for Prisoner Express, helping the organization provide opportunities for creative self-expression through art and poetry to hundreds of incarcerated individuals across the U.S.

REFERENCES

- ¹ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023. Between 2020 and 2023, the overall percentage of personal office top staff of color increased from 11.0 percent to 15.8 percent.
- ² LaShonda Brenson, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in the U.S. House of Representatives](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 6, 2022. Between 2018 and 2022, the percentage of people of color in House personal office top staff positions increased from 13.7 percent to 18 percent.
- ³ We should note that we did not include senior or chief counsel positions as this type of counsel position is often more senior in the Senate offices than other types of counsel positions.
- ⁴ The methodology section provides more information about how these positions were selected.
- ⁵ We understand that Senate offices also hired top staff from external positions. Future studies should examine the pathway positions and work experiences of top staff hired from external organizations.
- ⁶ James Jones, 2024, *The Last Plantation: Racism and Resistance in the Halls of Congress*, Princeton University Press.
- ⁷ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ⁸ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ⁹ See Senate Employment Office, “[Senate Employment Bulletin](#).”
- ¹⁰ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “[EEO Data Collection](#).”
- ¹¹ We should note that Senators King (I-ME), Sinema (I-AZ), and Sanders (I-VT) are registered Independents but are included in this study because these Senators caucus with the Senate Democrats.”
- ¹² See Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, “[Joint Center Responds to the U.S. House Office of Diversity and Inclusion Disbandment](#).”
- ¹³ See, “[Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative](#).”
- ¹⁴ Barbara Romzek and Jennifer Utter, “Congressional Legislative Staff: Political Professionals or Clerks?” *American Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 4 (1997): 1251–1279; Barbara Romzek, “Accountability of Congressional Staff,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* 10, no. 2 (2000): 413–446; Jacob Montgomery and Brendan Nyhan, “[The Effects of Congressional Staff Networks in the U.S. House of Representatives](#),” *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 3 (2017): 745–761.; Alexander Furnas and Timothy M. LaPira, “[Congressional Brain Drain: Legislative Capacity in the 21st Century](#),” *New America*, September 8, 2020; James Jones, 2024, *The Last Plantation: Racism and Resistance in the Halls of Congress*, Princeton University Press.
- ¹⁵ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ¹⁶ E.g., Alexander C. Furnas & Timothy M. LaPira, “[Congressional Brain Drain Legislative Capacity in the 21st Century](#),” *New America*, September 2020.
- ¹⁷ Fifteen offices have two fellows, 11 offices have three fellows, and four offices have one or more fellows.
- ¹⁸ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ¹⁹ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, “About the Topic of Race.”
- ²¹ Some pathway staff have multiple titles and roles in Senate offices. For our analysis in this section, we only counted these staffers once to identify pathway staffers as unique individuals.
- ²² LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ²³ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.

- ²⁴ LaShonda Brenson and Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October 18, 2023.
- ²⁵ “[Demographic profiles of Republican and Democratic Voters](#),” Pew Research Center, July 12, 2023.
- ²⁶ Senators Sanders, Sinema, and King are registered as Independents but are included with the Democratic Senators since they caucus with the Democratic party. If we were to exclude Senators Sanders, Sinema, and King from our count of Democrats, then the percentage of diverse pathway staff in Democratic Senate offices would change slightly to 30.7 percent.
- ²⁷ U.S. senators of color include Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Laphonza Butler (D-CA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Markwayne Mullin (R-OK), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Tim Scott (R-SC), and Raphael Warnock (D-GA). See U.S. Senate, “[Ethnic Diversity in the Senate](#).”
- ²⁸ Senators of color had an average of 7.8 pathway staffers per office, and white senators had an average of 7.0 pathway staffers per office.
- ²⁹ U.S. senators who identify as Black include Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Laphonza Butler (D-CA), Tim Scott (R-SC), and Raphael Warnock (D-GA). See U.S. Senate, “[African American Senators](#).”
- ³⁰ U.S. senators who identify as Black include Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Laphonza Butler (D-CA), Tim Scott (R-SC), and Raphael Warnock (D-GA). See U.S. Senate, “[African American Senators](#).”
- ³¹ The analysis considered the age of the Senators as of January 31, 2024.
- ³² Kimberly Victor, “[Racial Diversity of the 118th Congress by Age](#),” Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, July 24, 2023.
- ³³ R. Eric Peterson, “[Congressional Staff: Duties, Qualifications, and Skills Identified by Members of Congress for Selected Positions](#),” Congressional Research Service, April 23, 2021.
- ³⁴ See Senate Employment Office, “[Senate Employment Bulletin](#).”
- ³⁵ R. Eric Peterson, “[Congressional Staff: Duties, Qualifications, and Skills Identified by Members of Congress for Selected Positions](#),” Congressional Research Service, April 23, 2021.
- ³⁶ R. Eric Peterson, “[Congressional Staff: Duties, Qualifications, and Skills Identified by Members of Congress for Selected Positions](#), Congressional Research Service,” April 23, 2021.
- ³⁷ In our report, we encountered counsel titles including but not limited to legislative counsel, general counsel, tax counsel, associate counsel, floor counsel, legal counsel, policy counsel, national security counsel, and special counsel.
- ³⁸ R. Eric Peterson, “[Congressional Staff: Duties, Qualifications, and Skills Identified by Members of Congress for Selected Positions](#), Congressional Research Service,” April 23, 2021.
- ³⁹ R. Eric Peterson, “[Congressional Staff: Duties, Qualifications, and Skills Identified by Members of Congress for Selected Positions](#),” Congressional Research Service, April 23, 2021.



Opinions expressed in Joint Center publications are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers, or governors of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies or of the organizations that support the Joint Center and its research.

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

info@jointcenter.org | www.jointcenter.org | [@JointCenter](https://www.instagram.com/JointCenter)

©2024 Joint Center for Political and Economic Studie