



## Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations, Committee on  
Foreign Affairs, House of  
Representatives

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For Release on Delivery  
Expected at 1:00 p.m ET  
Wednesday, June 17, 2020

# STATE DEPARTMENT

## Additional Steps Are Needed to Identify Barriers to Workforce Diversity

Statement of Jason Bair, Director,  
International Affairs and Trade

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-515T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

State has expressed a commitment to maintaining a diverse workforce and has undertaken efforts to increase diversity in its Civil and Foreign Services. EEOC directs federal agencies to regularly evaluate their employment practices to identify barriers to equal opportunity, take measures to eliminate any barriers, and report annually on these efforts.

This testimony examines (1) the demographic composition of State's workforce in fiscal years 2002 through 2018; (2) any differences in promotion outcomes for various demographic groups in State's workforce; and (3) the extent to which State has identified any barriers to diversity in its workforce. For the January 2020 report on which this testimony is based ([GAO-20-237](#)), GAO analyzed State's data for its full-time, permanent, career workforce in fiscal years 2002 through 2018. GAO also analyzed the number of years until promotion from early career ranks to the executive rank in both the Civil and Foreign Services. (GAO's analyses do not completely explain the reasons for differences in promotion outcomes, which may result from various unobservable factors. Thus, GAO's analyses do not establish a causal relationship between demographic characteristics and promotion outcomes.) In addition, GAO reviewed State documents and interviewed State officials and employee group representatives.

## What GAO Recommends

In its January 2020 report, GAO recommended that State take additional steps to identify diversity issues that could indicate potential barriers to equal opportunity in its workforce. State concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-20-515T](#). For more information, contact Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov).

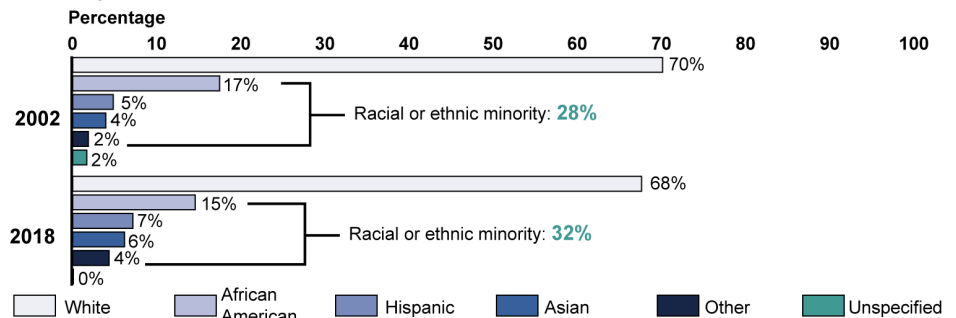
# STATE DEPARTMENT

## Additional Steps Are Needed to Identify Barriers to Workforce Diversity

### What GAO Found

The overall proportion of racial or ethnic minorities in the Department of State's (State) full-time, permanent, career workforce grew from 28 to 32 percent from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2018. The direction of change for specific groups varied. For instance, the proportion of African Americans fell from 17 to 15 percent, while the proportions of Hispanics, Asians, and other racial or ethnic minorities rose by varying percentages. The proportion of racial or ethnic minorities and women was lowest in the higher ranks of State's workforce.

**Diversity in State Department Workforce in Fiscal Years 2002 and 2018**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | [GAO-20-515T](#)

GAO's analyses of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found differences in promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities and whites and for men and women. GAO found these differences in both descriptive analyses (calculating simple averages) and adjusted analyses (controlling for certain individual and occupational factors that could influence promotion). For example, GAO's descriptive analysis of data for State's Civil Service found that rates of promotion for racial or ethnic minorities were 16 to 42 percent lower, depending on the rank, than for whites. Similarly, after controlling for certain additional factors, GAO's adjusted analysis of these data found that promotion for racial or ethnic minorities was 4 to 29 percent less likely than for whites. Also, both types of analysis generally found that promotion outcomes for women relative to men were lower in the Civil Service and higher in the Foreign Service. For example, women in the Foreign Service were more likely than men to be promoted in early to mid career.

State has identified some diversity issues, but it should consider other issues that could indicate potential barriers to diversity in its workforce. State's annual reports to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for fiscal years 2009 through 2018 identified issues such as underrepresentation of Hispanic employees and underrepresentation of minorities in the senior ranks. However, GAO's analysis and GAO's interviews with State employee groups highlighted additional issues that could indicate barriers to diversity. For example, State's reports have not identified lower promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities relative to whites, which GAO found in its analysis. Until State takes steps to explore such issues, it could be missing opportunities to investigate and remove barriers that impede members of some demographic groups from realizing their full potential.

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Chairman Castro, Ranking Member Zeldin, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our review of diversity in the Department of State's (State) workforce. While State has expressed a commitment to maintaining a diverse workforce, Congress' concerns about the racial and gender demographic composition of State's workforce are longstanding. As of the end of fiscal year 2018, State had nearly 23,000 full-time, permanent, career employees in its Civil Service and Foreign Service workforce.

This statement is based on our January 2020 report examining (1) the demographic composition of State's workforce in fiscal years 2002 through 2018, (2) any differences in promotion outcomes for various demographic groups in State's workforce, and (3) the extent to which State has identified any barriers to diversity in its workforce.<sup>1</sup>

For our January 2020 report, we analyzed data from State's Global Employment Management System for the department's full-time, permanent, career workforce in fiscal years 2002 through 2018. To examine promotion outcomes for various racial or ethnic minorities and for women and men in State's workforce, we conducted two types of analyses of State's workforce data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018.<sup>2</sup> First, we conducted descriptive analyses, calculating simple averages to compare promotion rates for racial or ethnic minorities and whites and for women and men. Second, we conducted a more sophisticated analysis using a duration analysis method that took into account certain individual factors other than racial or ethnic minority status and gender that could influence promotion, including the length of time it takes to be promoted.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, we examined the statistical relationship between promotion and racial or ethnic minority status and gender, incorporating various individual characteristics such as occupation, veteran status, and

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<sup>1</sup>See GAO, *State Department: Additional Steps Are Needed to Identify Potential Barriers to Diversity*, [GAO-20-237](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 27, 2020).

<sup>2</sup>For our January 2020 report, we considered racial or ethnic minorities to be employees whose race was not recorded as non-Hispanic white or unspecified. We counted multiracial individuals—those who self-identified two or more races—in the “other” group and did not include those individuals in the identified racial groups.

<sup>3</sup>For our January 2020 report, we defined gender as male or female.

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education.<sup>4</sup> Our analyses do not completely explain the reasons for differences in promotion outcomes, which may result from various unobservable factors. Thus, our analyses do not establish a causal relationship between demographic characteristics and promotion outcomes. In addition, to examine the extent to which State has identified any barriers to diversity in its workforce, we reviewed State documents and interviewed State officials and employee group representatives.

Detailed information on our objectives, scope, and methodology can be found in the issued report. We conducted the work on which this testimony is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

State had 22,806 full-time, permanent, career employees at the end of fiscal year 2018—an increase of more than 38 percent from fiscal year 2002.<sup>5</sup> Over this period, the number of full-time, permanent, career employees in State’s Civil Service rose by nearly 40 percent, from 6,831 in fiscal year 2002 to 9,546 in fiscal year 2018. Over the same period, the number of full-time, permanent, career employees in State’s Foreign Service increased by 36 percent, from 9,739 to 13,260.

To increase diversity in its workforce, State carries out a variety of efforts focused on recruiting and retention. For example, the Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship Program and Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Program recruit diverse candidates for the Foreign Service by providing graduate fellowships to college seniors and college graduates. Additionally, according to State officials, recruiters for the

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<sup>4</sup>These characteristics included the length of time in each grade (Civil Service) or class (Foreign Service) prior to promotion; racial or ethnic minority status; gender; years of federal service; age when hired at State; veteran’s status; graduation from a college or university considered Ivy League or located in the District of Columbia, Virginia, or Maryland; use of long-term leave in the prior year; change between service types; occupation; fiscal years; service in a hardship assignment in the prior year (Foreign Service only); overseas service in the prior year (Foreign Service only); and proficiency in a hard language (Foreign Service only).

<sup>5</sup>Permanent employees are hired under career appointments. Because we focused our analysis on full-time, permanent, career employees, our analysis excludes Foreign Service nationals—locally employed staff at embassies abroad—and contractors. State uses a different employee definition in some reports.

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department participate in career fairs and discussion panels and host information sessions at conferences with a focus on diversity and inclusion, such as those held by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. Some regional and functional bureaus also undertake efforts to increase diversity. According to State's Senior Advisor for Diversity, Inclusion, and Outreach, bureau leaders set the tone, and provide support for bureau-level initiatives.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Management Directive 715 (MD-715) provides policy guidance and standards for establishing and maintaining effective affirmative programs of equal employment opportunity. Through MD-715, EEOC directs federal agencies to regularly evaluate their employment practices to identify barriers to equal opportunity in the workplace, take measures to eliminate identified barriers, and report annually on these efforts to EEOC.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Equal Employment Opportunity: Management Directive 715, EEO MD-715* (Oct. 1, 2003).

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## Overall Proportion of Racial or Ethnic Minorities at State Has Grown, but Proportions of African Americans and Women Have Fallen

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### Proportion of Racial or Ethnic Minorities at State Increased, While Proportion of African Americans Decreased

Among State's full-time, permanent, career employees, the proportion of racial or ethnic minorities grew from 28 percent in fiscal year 2002 to 32 percent in fiscal year 2018.<sup>7</sup> During this period, as figure 1 shows,

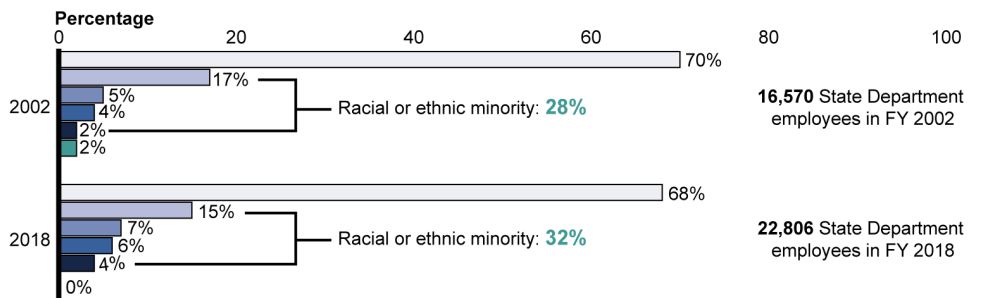
- the proportion of racial or ethnic minorities in the Civil Service decreased slightly, from 44 to 43 percent, and
- the proportion of racial or ethnic minorities in the Foreign Service increased from 17 to 24 percent.

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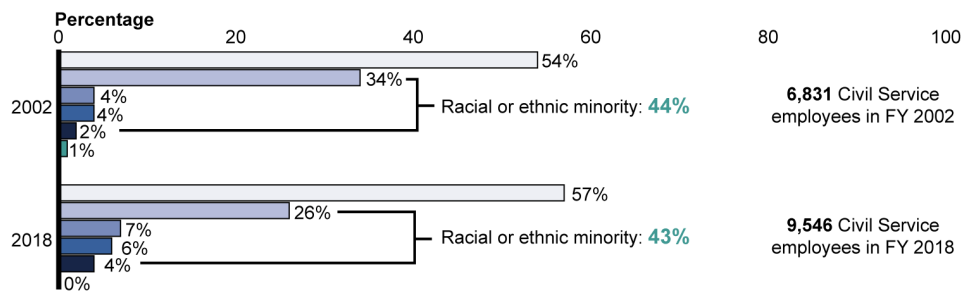
<sup>7</sup>Racial or ethnic minorities exclude non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic employees whose race was unspecified in State's employee records. We counted multiracial individuals—those who self-identified two or more races—in the "other" group and did not include those individuals in the identified racial groups.

**Figure 1: Proportions of White and Racial or Ethnic Minority Employees at Department of State Overall and in Civil Service and Foreign Services, Fiscal Years 2002 and 2018**

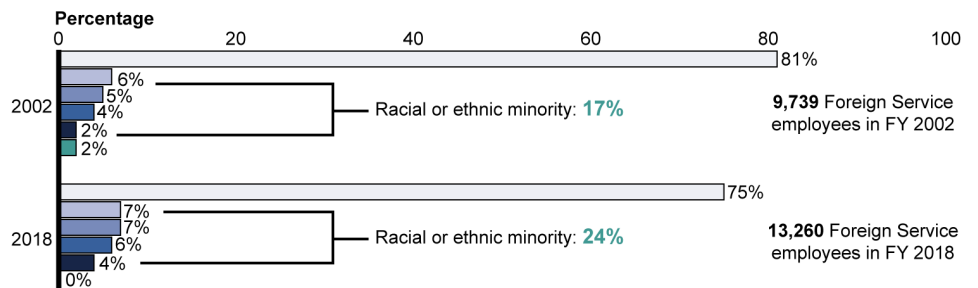
**State Overall**



**Civil Service**



**Foreign Service**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-20-515T

Notes: The data shown reflect numbers and proportions of white and racial or ethnic minority employees at the end of fiscal years 2002 and 2018. "Other" includes Native Hawaiian/Pacific

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Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and non-Hispanic multiracial. "Unspecified" includes individuals whose race or ethnicity is not identified. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. For instances where an employee record showed a change in an individual's racial or ethnic group, we assigned the most recently recorded value to all years.

Although the overall proportion of racial or ethnic minorities at State increased from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2018, the direction of change for specific racial or ethnic minority groups varied, as shown in figure 1.

- The proportion of African Americans at State overall declined from 17 percent in fiscal year 2002 to 15 percent in fiscal year 2018. The proportion of African Americans in State's Civil Service decreased from 34 to 26 percent, while the proportion of African Americans in State's Foreign Service increased from 6 to 7 percent.
- The proportions of Hispanics, Asians, and other racial or ethnic minorities at State overall and in both the Civil and Foreign Services increased by varying percentages from fiscal year 2002 to fiscal year 2018.<sup>8</sup>

As figure 2 shows, the proportions of racial or ethnic minorities in the Civil and Foreign Services were generally much smaller in higher ranks in fiscal year 2018.<sup>9</sup>

- The proportion of racial or ethnic minorities in fiscal year 2018 was lower than the proportion of whites at GS-11, GS-13, and higher ranks in the Civil Service and at all ranks in the Foreign Service.
- The proportion of racial or ethnic minorities in fiscal year 2018 was progressively lower in each rank above GS-12 in the Civil Service and above Class 5 in the Foreign Service.

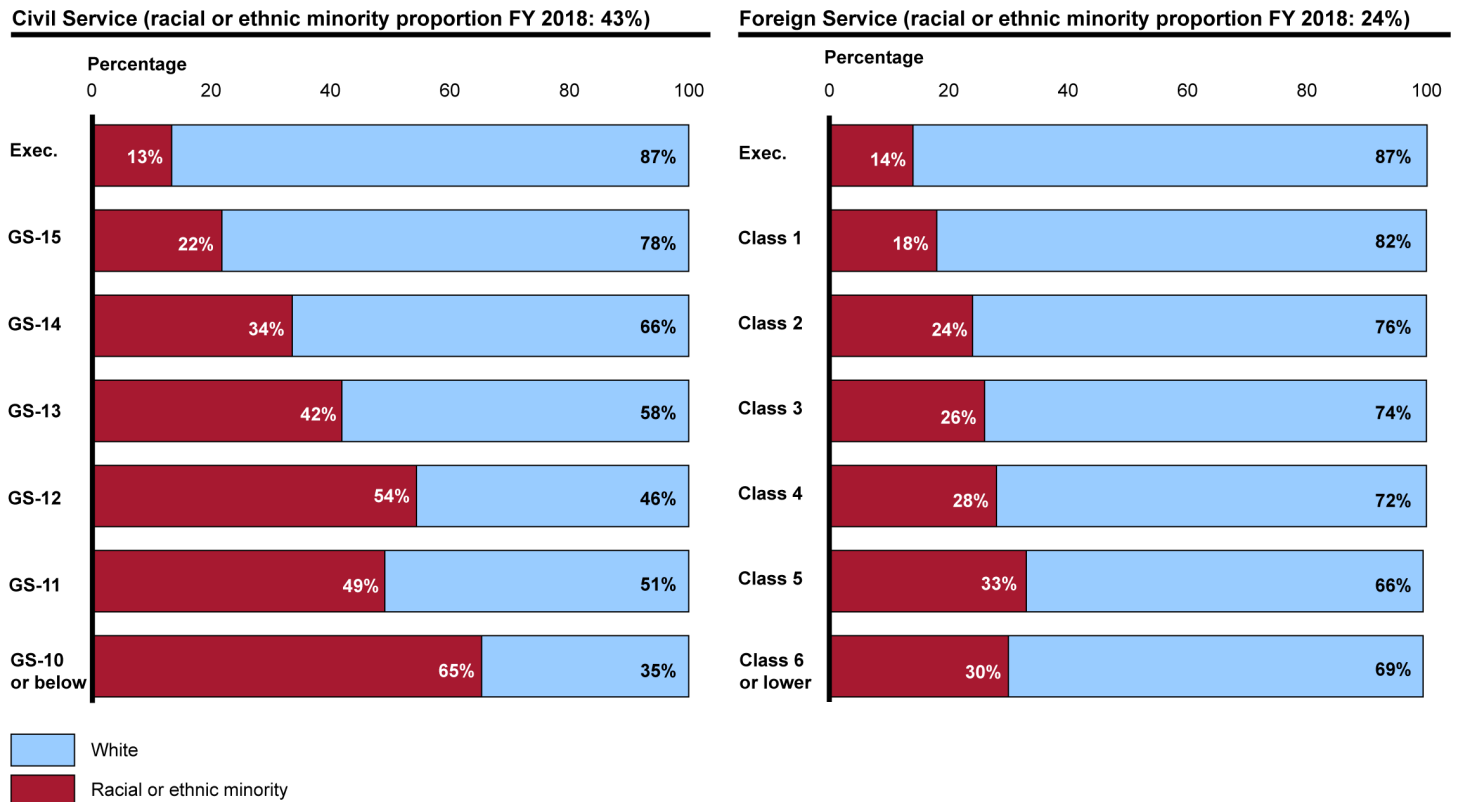
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<sup>8</sup>Other racial or ethnic minorities at State include Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and non-Hispanic multiracial.

<sup>9</sup>Civil Service employees are on the GS classification system, which has 15 ranks, ranging from GS-1 (lowest) to GS-15 (highest), followed by the executive rank. Foreign Service Officers enter at Class 4, 5, or 6, depending on education and experience. Officers can be promoted up to Class 1, after which they can apply for the executive rank.



**Figure 2: Proportions of White and Racial or Ethnic Minority Employees in the Department of State’s Civil and Foreign Services across Ranks, Fiscal Year 2018**



Notes: The data shown reflect proportions of white and racial or ethnic minority employees at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2018. Racial or ethnic minorities exclude non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic employees whose race was unspecified. “Unspecified” includes individuals whose race or ethnicity is not identified. For instances where an employee record showed a change in an individual’s racial or ethnic group, we assigned the most recently recorded value to all years.

### Proportion of Women at State Decreased

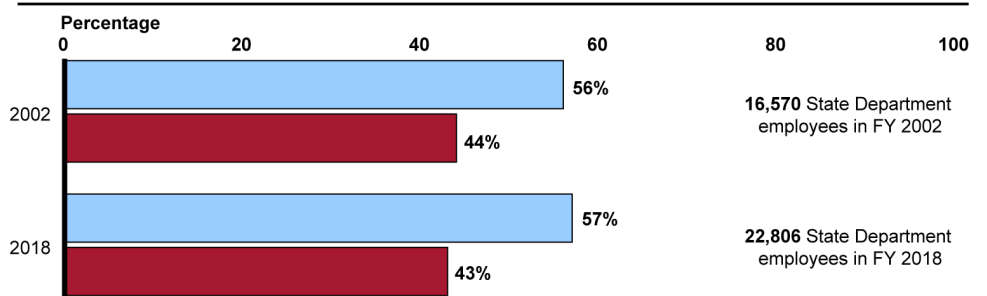
Among State’s full-time, permanent, career employees, the overall proportion of women at State decreased slightly, from 44 percent in fiscal year 2002 to 43 percent in fiscal year 2018.<sup>10</sup> During this period, as figure 3 shows,

<sup>10</sup>In addition, the proportion of African American women at State decreased from 13 percent in fiscal year 2002 to 9 percent in fiscal year 2018. See [GAO-20-237](#) for more information.

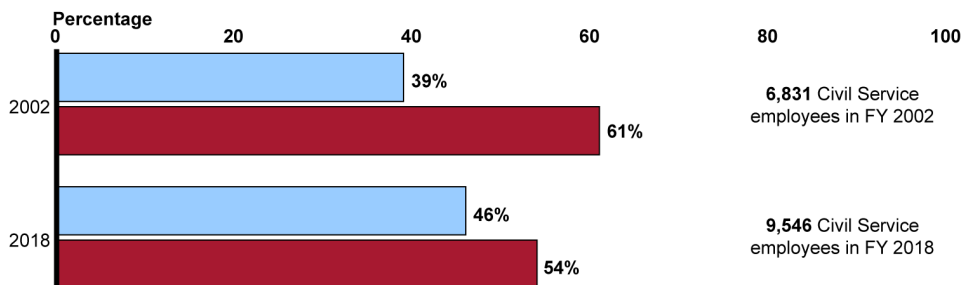
- the proportion of women in State’s Civil Service decreased from 61 to 54 percent and
- the proportion of women in State’s Foreign Service increased from 33 to 35 percent.

**Figure 3: Proportions of Men and Women in the Department of State Overall and in Its Civil and Foreign Services, Fiscal Years 2002 and 2018**

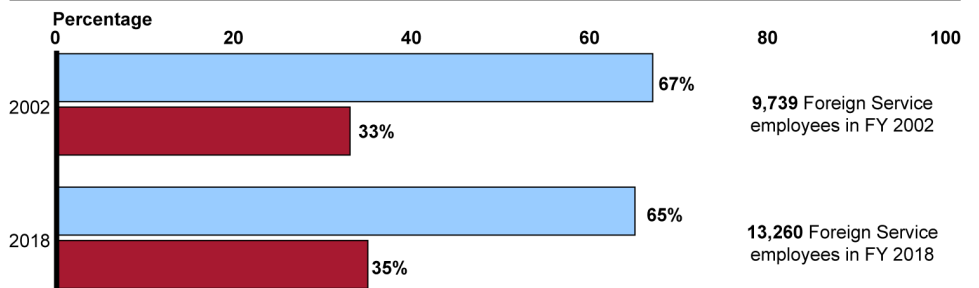
**State Overall**



**Civil Service**



**Foreign Service**



Men  
Women

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-20-515T

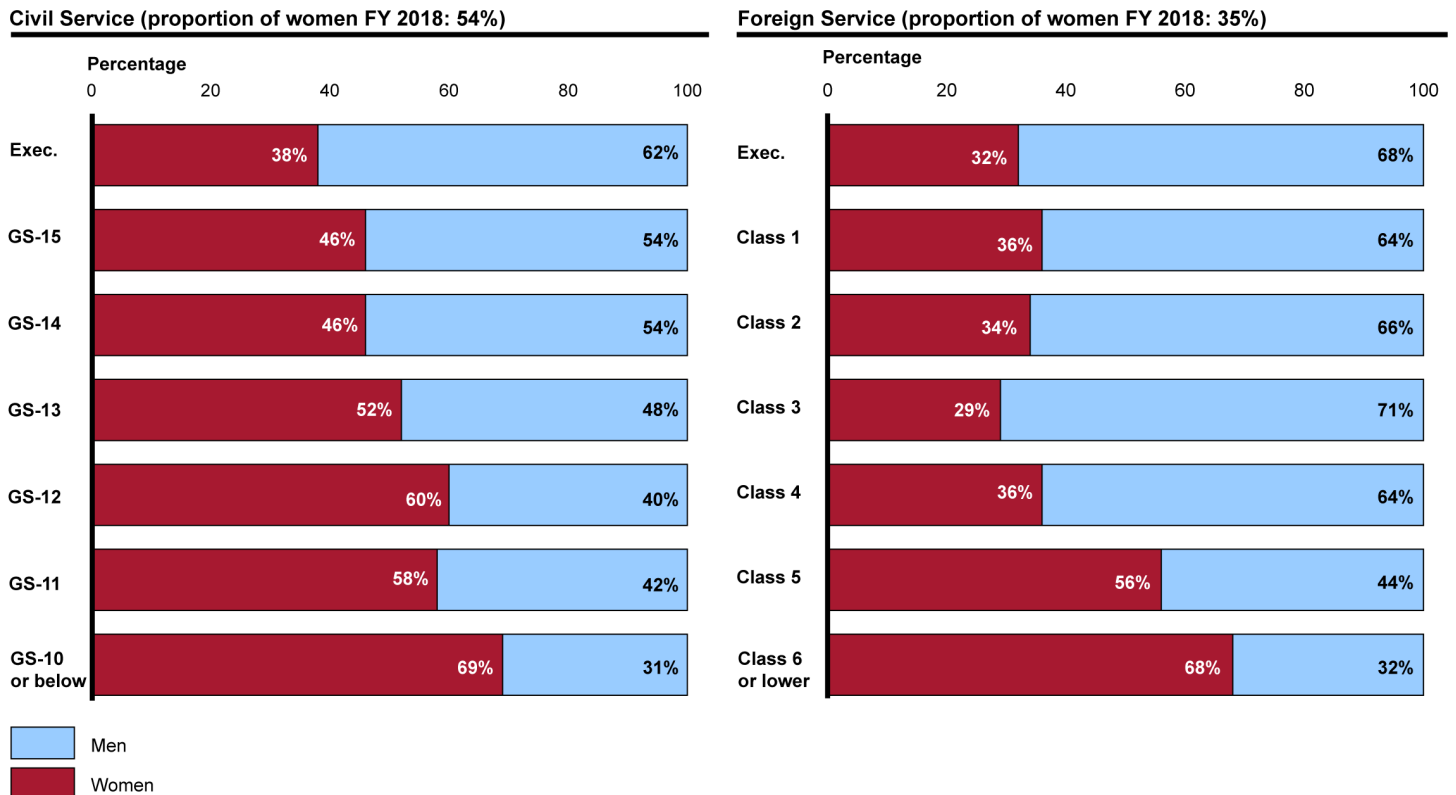
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Notes: The data shown reflect proportions of male and female employees at the end of fiscal years (FY) 2002 and 2018. For instances where an employee record showed a change in an individual's gender, we assigned the most recently recorded value to all years.

In addition, the proportion of women at State was generally lower than that of men in the higher ranks of both the Civil and Foreign Services in fiscal year 2018, as figure 4 shows.

- The proportion of women was lower than the proportion of men at GS-14 and higher ranks in the Civil Service and at Class 4 and higher ranks in the Foreign Service in fiscal year 2018. For example, the proportion of women at Class 4 was 36 percent, while the proportion of men was 64 percent.
- The proportion of women in the Civil and Foreign Services in fiscal year 2018 was generally progressively smaller from the lower to the higher ranks.

**Figure 4: Proportions of Women and Men in the Department of State’s Civil and Foreign Services across Ranks, Fiscal Year 2018**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-20-515T

Notes: The data shown reflect proportions of male and female employees at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2018. For instances where an employee record showed a change in an individual’s gender, we assigned the most recently recorded value to all years.

## Promotion Outcomes Were Generally Lower for Racial or Ethnic Minorities Than for Whites and Differed for Women Relative to Men

Our analyses of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found differences between promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities relative to whites and for women relative to men. We found these differences when conducting descriptive analyses, which calculated simple averages, as well as adjusted analyses, which controlled for certain individual and occupational factors other than racial or ethnic minority status and gender that could influence promotion. Our analyses do not completely explain the reasons for differences in promotion outcomes, which may result from various unobservable factors. Thus, our analyses do not establish a causal relationship between demographic

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characteristics and promotion outcomes. The following are some highlights of our analysis.

- **Promotion outcomes in State’s Civil Service were generally lower for racial or ethnic minorities than for whites.** Our descriptive analysis of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found that rates of promotion from GS-11 through the executive rank were 16.1 to 42.0 percent lower for racial or ethnic minorities in the Civil Service than for their white counterparts, depending on the GS level.<sup>11</sup> Our adjusted analysis, controlling for factors other than race or ethnicity that could influence promotion, found that racial or ethnic minorities in the Civil Service were 4.3 to 29.3 percent less likely to be promoted from GS-11 through the executive rank than their white counterparts.
- **Promotion rates in State’s Foreign Service were generally lower for racial or ethnic minorities than for whites, but the differences in promotion odds were generally not statistically significant.** Our descriptive analysis of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found that, relative to whites, the rate of promotion for racial or ethnic minorities in the Foreign Service was 5.0 to 15.8 percent lower for promotions from Class 4 through Class 1.<sup>12</sup> Controlling for factors other than race or ethnicity that could influence promotion, our adjusted analysis found that differences in the odds of promotion for racial or ethnic minorities and whites were generally not statistically significant. However, the odds of promotion from Class 4 to Class 3 were statistically significantly lower for racial or ethnic minorities than for their white counterparts.
- **Promotion rates were generally lower for women than men in State’s Civil Service, but differences in the odds of promotion were not statistically significant.** Our descriptive analysis of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found that the rate of promotion in the Civil Service was generally lower for women than for men. Specifically, for promotions from GS-11 through the executive

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<sup>11</sup>We calculated these rates as the number of newly elevated employees in the next-higher rank in the following fiscal year divided by the number of employees in the given rank in the current year. Thus, the rate of promotion from each rank is based on the total number of individuals in that rank in the current year and not on the number of applicants for promotion. Additionally, this calculation includes employees who may have reached the maximum rank for their particular occupation and may therefore have no remaining promotion potential in that occupation.

<sup>12</sup>From Class 1 to the executive rank, the promotion rate for racial or ethnic minorities was 2.7 percent higher than for whites.

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rank, promotion rates for women were generally 0.7 to 11.6 percent lower than the promotion rates for men, depending on the GS level.<sup>13</sup> However, our adjusted analysis, controlling for factors other than gender that could influence promotion, did not find any statistically significant differences in the odds of promotion for women and men in the Civil Service.

- **Our adjusted analysis found that the odds of promotion were generally higher for women than men in State’s Foreign Service.** Our descriptive analysis of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found that women in the Foreign Service experienced a higher rate of promotion than men from Class 3 to Class 2 and from Class 2 to Class 1. Our adjusted analysis, controlling for factors other than gender that could influence promotion, found that women in the Foreign Service had higher odds of promotion than men in early to mid career. For example, the odds of promotion from Class 4 to Class 3 were 9.4 percent higher for women than for men.

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## State Has Identified Some Diversity Issues but Should Consider Other Issues That Could Indicate Potential Barriers

State has identified some diversity issues in its reports to EEOC. As table 1 shows, in fiscal years 2009 through 2018, State’s annual MD-715 reports identified and analyzed a total of 11 diversity issues related to participation of racial or ethnic minorities and women. State identified most of these issues in multiple years.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Women had lower rates of promotion from every rank from GS-11 through the executive rank except from GS-14 to GS-15, where the promotion rate for women was 9.8 percent higher for women than for men.

<sup>14</sup>State officials noted that in some cases, EEOC instructs them to focus on a particular diversity issue. For example, they noted that EEOC required all federal agencies, including State, to conduct a barrier analysis on Hispanic employment from GS-12 through the executive rank to be submitted in the fiscal year 2016 MD-715.

**Table 1: Types, Frequency, and Number of Diversity Issues Identified by the Department of State, Fiscal Years 2009-2018**

Type of diversity issue	Fiscal year										Total times identified
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Underrepresentation of Asian Americans in the senior ranks	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Underrepresentation of Women in the senior ranks	✓ <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	2
Underrepresentation of African Americans in the senior ranks	—	✓	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	2
Underrepresentation of Native American/Pacific Islander/Alaskan Natives	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Underrepresentation of women in Foreign Service	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Underrepresentation of African Americans in the Foreign Service	✓	—	—	✓	—	✓	—	—	—	—	3
Underrepresentation of minorities in the senior ranks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	4
Underrepresentation of Hispanics	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	6
Underrepresentation of individuals with disabilities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	8
Higher attrition of women in a particular bureau	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	1
Higher attrition of minorities in a particular bureau	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	1
<b>Total issues identified</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>33</b>

Legend: ✓ = identified in Management Directive 715 (MD-715) report for the fiscal year, — = not identified in MD-715 report for the fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State MD-715 reports for fiscal years 2009 through 2019. | GAO-20-515T

<sup>a</sup>In 2009, State's MD-715 report cited underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic females in the senior ranks.

However, State employee groups and our analysis have identified additional diversity issues, such as differences in promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities relative to whites in early to mid career. For example, during our structured interviews with 11 employee groups, representatives of the groups discussed a variety of issues related to diversity at State. Examples include the following:

- Employee group representatives expressed concern about representation of minorities in the higher ranks of both the Civil and

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Foreign Services. For example, representatives told us that for some minority groups, it is difficult to be promoted above the GS-13 level.

- Employee group representatives voiced perceptions that it takes longer for women and racial or ethnic minorities to be promoted. For example, representatives of one group told us that it takes longer for employees with diverse backgrounds to reach GS-13 in the Civil Service and Class 2 in the Foreign Service and that very few of these employees are promoted beyond those levels.

We recommended that the Secretary of State take additional steps to identify diversity issues that could indicate potential barriers to equal opportunity in its workforce. For example, State could conduct additional analyses of workforce data and of employee groups' feedback. State concurred with the recommendation and noted that the agency will continue to work on initiatives to recruit, retain, develop, and empower a diverse, capable workforce.

In conclusion, although State has implemented several plans, activities, and initiatives to improve diversity and representation throughout the ranks of its workforce, longstanding diversity issues—for example, underrepresentation of racial or ethnic minorities and women in the senior ranks—persist at the agency. Until State takes steps to explore such issues, it could be missing opportunities to investigate, identify, and remove barriers that impede members of some demographic groups from realizing their full potential.

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Chairman Castro, Ranking Member Zeldin, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

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## GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony, please contact Jason Bair, Director, International Affairs and Trade, at (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this testimony are Emil Friberg (Assistant Director), Julia Jebo Grant (Analyst-in-Charge), Nisha Rai, Moon Parks, Justin Fisher, Melinda Cordero, Courtney Lafountain, Kathleen McQueeney, Dae Park, K. Nicole Willems, Reid Lowe, and Christopher Keblitis.



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