

Why GAO Did This Study

State has expressed a commitment to maintaining a workforce that reflects the diverse composition of the United States and has undertaken efforts to increase representation of diverse groups in its Civil and Foreign Services. EEOC requires some federal agencies, including State, to systematically identify, examine, and remove barriers to equal participation at all levels of their workforce and to report on such barriers annually.

GAO was asked to review issues related to the diversity of State's workforce. This report 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 barriers to diversity in its workforce. GAO analyzed State's personnel data for its full-time, permanent, career workforce for fiscal years 2002 through 2018. GAO 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. GAO also reviewed State documents and interviewed State officials and members of 11 employee groups.

What GAO Recommends

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-20-237](#). For more information, contact Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or bairj@gao.gov

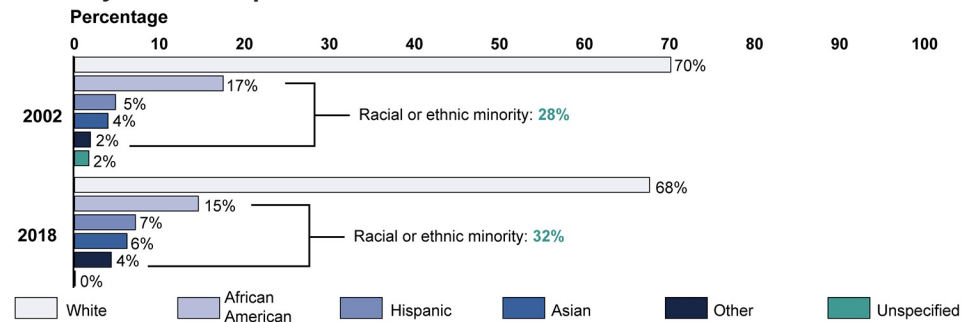
State Department

Additional Steps Are Needed to Identify Potential Barriers to Diversity

What GAO Found

The overall proportion of racial or ethnic minorities in the Department of State's (State) full-time, permanent, career workforce increased 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 Hispanics increased from 5 percent to 7 percent, while the proportion of African Americans decreased from 17 to 15 percent. Also, the proportion of racial or ethnic minorities and women was lowest at management and executive levels.

Diversity in State Department Workforce in Fiscal Years 2002 and 2018



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State data. | GAO-20-237

GAO's analyses of State data for fiscal years 2002 through 2018 found differences in promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities and whites. These differences existed in both descriptive analyses, which calculated simple averages, and in adjusted analyses, which controlled for certain individual and occupational factors that could influence promotion. Compared with the descriptive analyses, the adjusted analyses found smaller percentage differences between promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities and whites in State's Civil Service and some evidence of smaller percentage differences in State's Foreign Service. GAO found generally lower promotion rates for racial or ethnic minorities than for whites. For example, controlling for factors such as education, years of service, and occupation, racial or ethnic minorities in the Civil Service had lower rates and odds of promotion than whites at each rank from early career through senior management. Also, both types of analysis found promotion outcomes for women compared with men were lower in the Civil Service and generally 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 barriers to equal opportunity but should consider other issues that could indicate potential barriers to diversity. In its annual reports to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), State has identified issues such as underrepresentation of Hispanic employees. However, other State analysis, GAO's analysis, and GAO's interviews with State employee groups highlighted additional issues that could indicate barriers. For example, State's reports have not identified discrepancies in midcareer promotion of racial or ethnic minorities relative to whites, which GAO found in its analysis. Taking additional steps to identify diversity issues could enhance State's ability to detect and remove barriers to equal participation in its workforce.