

How Are Minority Staffers Utilized? Evidence from the California State Assembly

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Abstract

Legislative staffers are among legislators' most valuable assets and their appointment by legislators is strategic. Past research has focused on how legislative staffer appointments help legislators meet policy or constituency service goals. In this article I advance the literature by theorizing how minority staffers are utilized. I hypothesize, and show using novel data from the California State Assembly, that state legislators disproportionately place Hispanic and Asian American Pacific Islander staffers in constituency service positions. This may be done as an effort to provide a form of surrogate descriptive representation. Concerningly, because minority staffers are more likely to be placed in constituency service positions, minority staffers are less likely to be placed in policy orientated positions where they might have the most influence over substantive policymaking. This leads to a situation where minority staffers are placed in visible constituency service appointments but continue to be underrepresented in key policy appointments.

Introduction

Legislative personal staffers¹ are among legislators' most valuable resources (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981b). Staffers can be found in every aspect of the legislative process. Staffers conduct public policy research (Hagedorn 2015; Pertschuk 2017; Weissert and Weissert 2000; Wilson 2013), respond to constituency service requests (Landgrave and Weller 2020; Frantzich 1985), control access to legislators (Kalla and Broockman 2016), and much more. Given the key roles legislative staffers play, it is not surprising that a growing literature is focused on better understanding staffer utilization (Burgat 2020; Dittmar 2021; Grose, Mangum, and Martin 2007; Moens 2023; Ommundsen 2023; Ritchie and You 2020; Salisbury and Shepsle 1981a; Wilson and Carlos 2014; Ziniel 2020). Studying appointments—how staffers are utilized—gives us a glimpse into a legislator's workstyle in the legislature and in their home district.

Legislators can elect to place legislative staff in either policy or constituency service appointments. Policy staffers research policies, draft legislation, and generally help with the passage of legislation (Pertschuk 2017). Constituency service staffers meanwhile respond to constituency correspondence, meet with local constituency groups, and generally help with district affairs. Importantly for this manuscript, the latter group of staffers are more visible to constituents than the former. Constituents interact with constituency service staffers whenever they seek help from a legislator's office or attend a public outreach event. In contrast, few constituents directly interact with policy staffers. Conversely, although they may not regularly interact with the public directly, it is policy staffers that have the most influence over the policymaking process.

Staffer appointment patterns are strategic. Burgat (2020) finds that legislators appoint staffers with stronger networks to more prestigious policy assignments because staffers with stronger networks are more effective in acquiring the cooperation of other legislative actors to get legislation passed (McCrain 2018; Montgomery and Nyhan 2017). Of direct relevance to the present paper, Grose, Mangum, and Martin (2007) and Ziniel (2020) find that minority staffers are more likely to be assigned to constituency service appointments.

In this manuscript I hypothesize, and show using original data from the California State Assembly, that minority staffers are more likely to be appointed to constituency positions. I speculate this occurs because legislators are seeking to provide a form of surrogate descriptive representation to their constituents. By placing minority staffers in highly visible constituency positions, legislators can signal to constituents their commitment to descriptive representation. Consistent with this hypothesis I find that more Hispanic and Asian American Pacific Islander staffers are appointed to constituency service staffer positions in districts with a large Hispanic and AAPI constituency. While a larger Hispanic and AAPI constituency is also positively associated with a larger share of Hispanic and AAPI staffers appointed to policy positions, the association is substantially *less* than for those appointed to constituency service positions.

¹ Committee, campaign, and other staffers deserve study but are outside the scope of this manuscript.

This discrepancy is concerning. It means that, although Hispanic and AAPI staffers may be appointed to highly visible public facing constituency service positions by legislators to provide descriptive representation, minority staffers are less likely to be placed in policy positions that would best enable them to provide *substantive* representation by influencing the policymaking process. This latter statement should not be interpreted as meaning that constituency service orientated staffers don't influence the policy process at all. Constituency service staffers can influence the policy process by alerting their seniors about constituents' policy demands. Nonetheless, by their nature policy staffers have a greater degree of influence over the policy process than their constituent service counterparts, all else held equal (Montgomery and Nyhan 2017).

This manuscript makes several advances to the literature. First, I show that minority staffers are more likely to be appointed to constituency service positions compared to policy positions. Second, I increase the generalizability of prior studies of minority staffer appointments by analyzing AAPI staffers. Past research has focused on the appointment of Black and Hispanic staffers almost exclusively due to data limitations. There have historically been too few AAPI staffers employed by Congress for statistical analysis. In contrast, AAPI staffers are the 3rd largest pan-ethnic group in the California State Assembly which enables statistical analysis. The inclusion of AAPI staffers in these analyses is especially important because their appointment patterns could plausibly differ due to the model minority stereotype or other factors. My results show that AAPI staffers face the same appointment patterns as other minority staffer groups. Third, I show that past findings on staffer appointments generalize to the contemporary California State Assembly. Prior empirical evidence focused on the United States House of Representatives during the early 2000s (Grose, Mangum, and Martin 2007; Ziniel 2020).

Legislative Staffers

Legislative staffers are political professionals who've been conditionally delegated power to aid legislators (Romzek and Utter 1997). Staffers work over 40 hours weekly and are expected to work nights, weekends, and holidays (Ritchie and You 2020). Staffers are fervently loyal to their legislators. This is evidence by the fact that most retire alongside their legislators and move with them across chambers (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981a). Even when staffers change legislative office, they tend to move to allied offices (Montgomery and Nyhan 2017).

Staffers' workstyle can be explained in part by looking at their past employment. Many staffers are drawn from legislators' personal constituencies and helped legislators win their early elections (Brooks and Chatfield 2020). Some have followed legislators across multiple offices. It is because the legislator-staffer relationship is so intimate that the study of staffer appointments reveals much about a legislator's priorities.

The critical question is how legislators decide where to appoint minority staffers. Between 2010-2019, most legislative staffers in the California State Assembly were white (an estimated 61.75%). Hispanic and AAPI staffers made up an estimated 27.58% and 8.72% respectively. Given the relatively few minority staffers available, legislators must be strategic when deciding where to place them. Should they be appointed primarily in policy or constituency service positions? I hypothesize that legislators are more likely to place minority staffers in constituency

service positions because they face pressure to place minority staffers in outward facing and highly visible to constituents to provide a form of surrogate descriptive representation to their constituents.

While legislators ultimately have the power to decide who they hire and what position they are given, there are two caveats of note. Caveat one—the distinction between ‘policy’ and ‘constituency service’ staffers can become blurred even in Congress, and even more so in state legislatures where the number of staffers available is limited. The average member of the House of Representatives has about twenty staffers, which allows for a high degree of staffer specialization. In some of the least unprofessionalized state legislatures, a single staffer can be shared by two or more legislators and may need to be a ‘jack of all trades master of none’ (Landgrave 2024). California is the most professionalized state legislature in the country, so its staffers have the luxury of specialization to a degree,² but it is acknowledged that a policy staffer may be called upon to do constituency service work (and vice versa) as needed. Caveat two—while legislators have a broad range of discretion in hiring and appointment of staffers, they are ultimately beholden to the available *supply* of applicants. The question of *who* applies for staffer positions, and the general influence of supply-side factors, is one that merits study (Brant 2024; Brooks and Chatfield 2020) but is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Policy staffers have the potential to serve as substantive representatives insofar that they have input in what type of legislation is passed (Dittmar 2021; Rosenthal and Bell 2003; Wilson 2013), but they make for poor descriptive representatives because they seldom interact with constituents. In comparison a constituency staffer has limited influence over what legislation is passed but is a highly visible public facing descriptive representative. When allocating minority staffers between policy and constituency service appointments, I theorize that legislators prefer to assign minority staffers to constituency service appointments because they are more visible to constituents. Minority constituents may desire for more minority staffers to be appointed to policy *and* constituency service roles, but they can more easily observe the latter than the former. Visibility is key. Furthermore, whether a minority policy staffer can influence legislation is dependent on the legislature as a whole. Even if a legislator places more minority staffers in policy positions, it’s possible that other actors will prevent the passage of desired legislation. The appointment of minority staffers to policy staffers is risky and could lead to neither legislation being passed, nor visible descriptive representation being provided. In comparison, constituency service is produced at the legislative office level. Regardless of the legislature, at-large constituency service staffers perform their work and serve as visible descriptive representatives.

² This distinction is reflected in the titles of the staffers. Whereas in less professionalized legislatures staffers may be simply titled ‘staffer’, staffers in the California State Assembly have titles denoting what their primary responsibilities are. Constituency service staffers have titles like “District Coordinator”, “(Principal/Senior) Field Representative”, etc. Policy staffers meanwhile have titles like “Legislative Director” or “Legislative Assistant”.

The California State Assembly

This paper differs empirically from past staffer appointment studies (Grose, Mangum, and Martin 2007; Ziniel 2020) by using administrative data from the California State Assembly, the lower chamber of the California state legislature, from 2010 to 2019. By contrast, Grose, Mangum, and Martin (2007) use data from 41 Congressional districts that had a Black population of at least 15% in the 107th Congress (2001–2002), and Ziniel (2020) relies on data from 211 representative Congressional districts in the 108th Congress (2003-2005).

The present paper's use of the California State Assembly has three primary advantages. The first advantage is that the California State Assembly is most similar to the United States House of Representatives in terms of institutional professionalism (Squire 2024). The California State Assembly meets year-round, its legislators are well compensated, and staffer support is readily available. The California State Assembly's similarity to the United States House of Representatives extends beyond traditional measures of professionalism (Bowen and Greene 2014). California's management of legislative staffers is similar to Congress' in that legislative staffers serve at the pleasure of their legislators (DeGregorio 1995; Salisbury and Shepsle 1981b). Notably, California's legislative terms limits have increased the relative power of staffers (Kousser 2005; Robinson 2011). To the extent that professionalized legislatures act similarly regarding appointment decisions about staffers, what is learned from the California State Assembly is likely to apply to other highly professionalized legislatures.

The second advantage is that the California State Assembly is an intrinsically important legislature to study because it governs California, a state with a large and diverse economy (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2002). If independent, California's economy would be the 5th largest in the world. California's economy is only smaller than the remainder of the United States, China, Japan, and Germany. California is not only wealthy, but also diverse. Silicon Valley houses the world's premier technology firms. The Central Valley is a major agricultural producer. Southern California is the center of the entertainment industry. Given the state's size and diversity, the California State Assembly regularly deals with complex legislation ordinarily reserved for national legislatures. In the past decade it has dealt with everything from climate change to immigration policy (Lee, Landgrave, and Bansak 2023).

Third, the richness of the data exceeds alternatives. Prior papers have focused on a single legislative session during the early 2000s. The present paper covers ten years of data (2010 to 2019). Prior papers have relied on a subsample of legislative districts, but this paper includes all legislative staffers employed in the California State Assembly at the end of the calendar year. Prior papers have omitted analyzing AAPI staffer appointments because Congress employs few AAPI staffers. California's large Asian American Pacific Islander population makes it ideal for studying AAPI staffers.

Data and Research Methods

This study relies primarily on administrative personnel data from the California State Assembly (2010 to 2019). This administrative data was acquired through a California Legislative Open Records Act request. The data records every personal staffer employed in the California State

Assembly at the end of the calendar year. The data includes the name of legislative staffers, their annual salaries, and their positions. The data includes all staffers, but I exclude committee staff from analysis because the appointment of committee staffers is a joint decision whereas personal staffers are hired and appointed largely on the discretion of individual legislators.

A staffer’s likely race/ethnicity is *imputed*, i.e., estimated, based on their surnames using the R “wru” program (Imai and Khanna 2016; Wais 2016) which allows researchers to impute the likely race, gender, and other demographic characteristics of an individual based on their location and surname. This is a common technique in political science for imputing race/ethnicity (Barth, Mittag, and Park 2019). As a robustness check I also impute race/ethnicity by matching staffer’s surnames with the 2010 Census surname data, which provides information on the national racial/ethnic composition of a surname. Both imputation methods yield near identical results, see Appendix Table 1 and Appendix Figure 1. Regardless of the imputation method, a degree of incorrect imputations can be expected.

In Table 1 I present the number of staff employed by the California State Assembly each year by purported race and ethnicity. A total of 4,735 staffers are observed across ten years (2010-2019). The largest group is white staffers (n=2,924), followed by Hispanic staffers (n=1,306), and AAPI staffers (n=413). Note that the likely race/ethnicity of four staffers cannot be estimated using their name. These staffers are treated as white staffers (the reference category) unless stated otherwise, but results are not sensitive to their exclusion. Fifteen staffers are omitted from the analyses because of incomplete data.

Table 1 – Estimated Number of Minority Staffers Employed in the California State Assembly by Year³

| Race/Ethnicity | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | Total |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| AAPI | 32 | 43 | 28 | 46 | 27 | 40 | 27 | 52 | 54 | 64 | 413 |
| Black | 9 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 88 |
| Hispanic | 98 | 124 | 98 | 122 | 108 | 162 | 93 | 167 | 157 | 177 | 1,306 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| White | 258 | 333 | 246 | 313 | 245 | 338 | 195 | 339 | 320 | 337 | 2,924 |
| Total | 397 | 507 | 374 | 485 | 388 | 553 | 327 | 570 | 544 | 590 | 4,735 |

Note: As discussed below, this table undercounts Black staffers due to the imputation method used.

Few purported Black staffers are estimated in the dataset. This is driven by the imputation method (both the version presented in the main manuscript and appendices) relying on distinctively black surnames which are, compared to Hispanic and AAPI surnames, less frequent in the data. If I had additional systematic data, such as staffer photographs, I could address this underestimation of Black people, but I am limited by the data available.

³ The number of personal staffers employed in the California State Assembly increased by 48.61% during the observed time (2010-2019). The bulk of this growth occurred in the number of personal staffers employed in policy assignments. This trend is consistent with Crosson et al. (2019)’s finding that inter-partisan competition discourages legislators from assigning staffers to policy assignments.

Staffer type, policy or constituency service, is imputed based on staffer classification titles. As part of my Legislative Open Records Act request, I requested and received information on staffer classifications, including description and salary range. As noted above, constituency service titles included “District Coordinator” and “(Principal/Senior) Field Representative”. Policy titles included “Legislative Director” and “Legislative Assistant”. The titles are standardized within the assembly. I cross-checked the descriptions given through the Legislative Open Records Act with assembly job opening listings to verify the classification scheme.

A typical job posting for “Legislative Assistant”, an entry-level policy staffer position describes the position as such: “...the Legislative Assistant will perform a variety of duties including, but not limited to, staffing bills and policy committees, conducting policy related research, drafting talking points, fact sheets, and letters, meeting with stakeholders, advising the Assemblymember on specific issue areas, and general office duties as needed.”

A typical job posting for “Field Representative”, an entry-level constituency service position, describes the position’s duties as such: “Key responsibilities include but are not limited to responding to a variety of constituent casework, event planning, staffing the Assemblywoman at community events, making presentations at events, and cultivating and maintaining professional relationships with the community, local elected officials, businesses and community organizations.”

The two types of staff are not entirely distinct from one another. A legislative assistant has some public facing duties, such as meeting with stakeholders. Similarly, a field representative has some influence on policy in the form of alerting their superiors about constituents’ policy demands. Nonetheless the two positions are clearly specialized in one or the other direction.

Legislative district demographics comes from the United States Census’ American Community Survey (1-year estimates).

Analysis

If my hypothesis is correct - if legislators strategically appoint minority staffers to provide visible descriptive representation to their constituents - then there are two empirical implications:

H1a. A larger Hispanic constituency should be positively associated with a larger share of Hispanic staffers appointed to constituency service and policy positions.

H1b. A larger AAPI constituency should be positively associated with a larger share of AAPI staffers appointed to constituency service and policy positions.

H2. The association between constituency composition and staffer appointments should be larger for the appointment of constituency service than policy positions.

I estimate the appointment of Hispanic constituency service and policy staffers using ordinary least squares (OLS) in Table 2. The two respective outcome variables (continuous variable, 0-1) indicate the percent of a legislative office’s sub-unit that is Hispanic. The unit of analysis is the

legislative office's sub-unit, i.e. the constituency service office and policy office respectively. The independent variable of interest is the percent of the legislative district that is Hispanic (continuous variable, 0-100; mean: 38.30, SD: 19.28, range: 9.90-83.90). In Table 2 Column 1, I find that a one percentage point increase in Hispanic constituents is associated with a 0.921 percentage point increase in Hispanic constituency service staffers (p-value < 0.001). In Table 2 Column 2 I add legislators' demographic characteristics and the legislative districts' population size (in units of 10,000s) as controls. The association between the share of Hispanic constituents and the share of Hispanic constituency staffers decreases to 0.520 but is still statistically significant (p-value < 0.001). A larger Hispanic constituency is associated with a larger share of Hispanic staffers working in constituency service.

In Table 2 Columns 3-4, the outcome variable is the Hispanic share of policy staffers. Like constituency service appointments, I find that a larger share of Hispanics in the district is positively associated with an increase of Hispanics serving as policy staffers. This relationship is consistently significant across specifications (p-value < 0.001). The elasticity for constituency service and policy staffers are similar, but not identical, to one another. This indicates that, after controlling for legislators' demographic characteristics, a larger Hispanic constituency is associated with a larger share of Hispanics in constituency service and policy staff positions.

The relationship between a district's Hispanic population and the number of policy staffers is important because many policy positions are based on a legislators' capital office in Sacramento. If the hiring and appointment of personal legislative staffers were driven primarily by supply-side concerns, then a legislators' district demographics should have little bearing on the makeup of their capital office.

The visible descriptive representation hypothesis is well supported by Table 2. I find that Hispanic legislators employ more Hispanics in both constituency service and policy positions, but that the association for constituency service is higher. I use seemingly unrelated regression analysis to formally test that the positive association between Hispanic constituency share, and constituency service staffers is larger than and statistically different from the association between Hispanic constituency share and policy staffers (p-value = 0.0015).⁴ What this means is that—although more minority staffers are appointed overall in legislative districts with more minority constituents—minority staffers are disproportionately appointed in constituency service versus policy positions.

⁴ To be specific, I first estimate a seemingly unrelated regression with the two different outcome variables being the (1) share of Hispanic constituency service staffers and the (2) share of Hispanic policy staffers. I then conduct a test of cross-equation constraints to formally test if the Percent Hispanic coefficient is different across model (1) and (2).

Table 2 – Determinants of Hispanic staffer appointments, OLS

| VARIABLES | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | DV: % Hispanic CS Staffers | | DV: % Hispanic Policy Staffers | |
| Percent Hispanic | 0.921*** (0.054) | 0.520*** (0.062) | 0.542*** (0.057) | 0.286*** (0.069) |
| Percent AAPI | 0.300*** (0.096) | 0.381*** (0.104) | 0.305*** (0.102) | 0.146 (0.115) |
| Percent Black | -0.543*** (0.182) | -0.085 (0.176) | -0.196 (0.192) | 0.216 (0.194) |
| Hispanic Legislator | | 29.981*** (2.745) | | 19.505*** (3.060) |
| AAPI Legislator | | -4.785 (3.814) | | 14.236*** (4.243) |
| Black Legislator | | 4.036 (7.342) | | 22.534*** (8.023) |
| District Population (10,000) | | -0.174 (0.376) | | -0.459 (0.412) |
| Constant | -7.214** (3.033) | 6.071 (18.374) | -1.476 (3.218) | 23.827 (20.149) |
| Observations | 758 | 758 | 734 | 734 |
| R-squared | 0.283 | 0.388 | 0.111 | 0.174 |

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

I next analyze AAPI staffer appointments. For those interested in the study of Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and their impact on politics, California is a key case study. About a third of the total national AAPI population resides in the state of California and California has the largest total AAPI population of any U.S. state (Budiman and Ruiz 2021). Only Hawaii has a larger share of AAPI residents. The analysis of AAPI staffer appointments is particularly valuable because of the model minority stereotype. One could plausibly believe that AAPI staffer appointments more closely mirror the appointment patterns of the dominant white group than minority staffers. As I show below though, AAPI staffer appointment patterns closely mirror that of other minority staffer populations.

I model the determinants of AAPI staffer appointments in Table 3. This model is identical to Table 2 except the outcome variable is the share of AAPI staffers in constituency service and policy assignments, respectively, instead of Hispanic staffers. The primary independent variable of interest is the percent of the legislative district that is AAPI (continuous variable, 0-100; mean: 13.45, SD: 10.70, range: 1.40-55.00). Across models I find that state legislative districts with larger AAPI populations are associated with having more AAPI staffers in both constituency service and policy positions. In Table 3 Column 1, I find that a 1 percentage point

increase in a state legislative district's Asian population is associated with a 1.011 percentage point increase in AAPI constituency service staffers (p-value < 0.001). Once additional controls are included, the coefficient goes down to 0.831 (p-value < 0.001); see Table 3 Column 2.

In Table 3 Columns 3 - 4 I estimate the determinants of AAPI appointments to policy positions. With control variables, I find in Table 3 Column 4 that a 1 percentage point increase in a legislative district's AAPI constituency is associated with a 0.223 percentage point increase in AAPI policy staffers (p-value = 0.002).

Legislators appoint more AAPI staffers to both constituency service and policy positions in districts with larger AAPI populations. The difference in magnitude size when examining constituency service and policy staffers is notable. Like the Hispanic analysis, I formally test using a seemingly unrelated regression. I find that the association between AAPI constituency share, and constituency staffers is larger than and statistically different from the association between AAPI constituency share and policy staffers (p-value < 0.001).

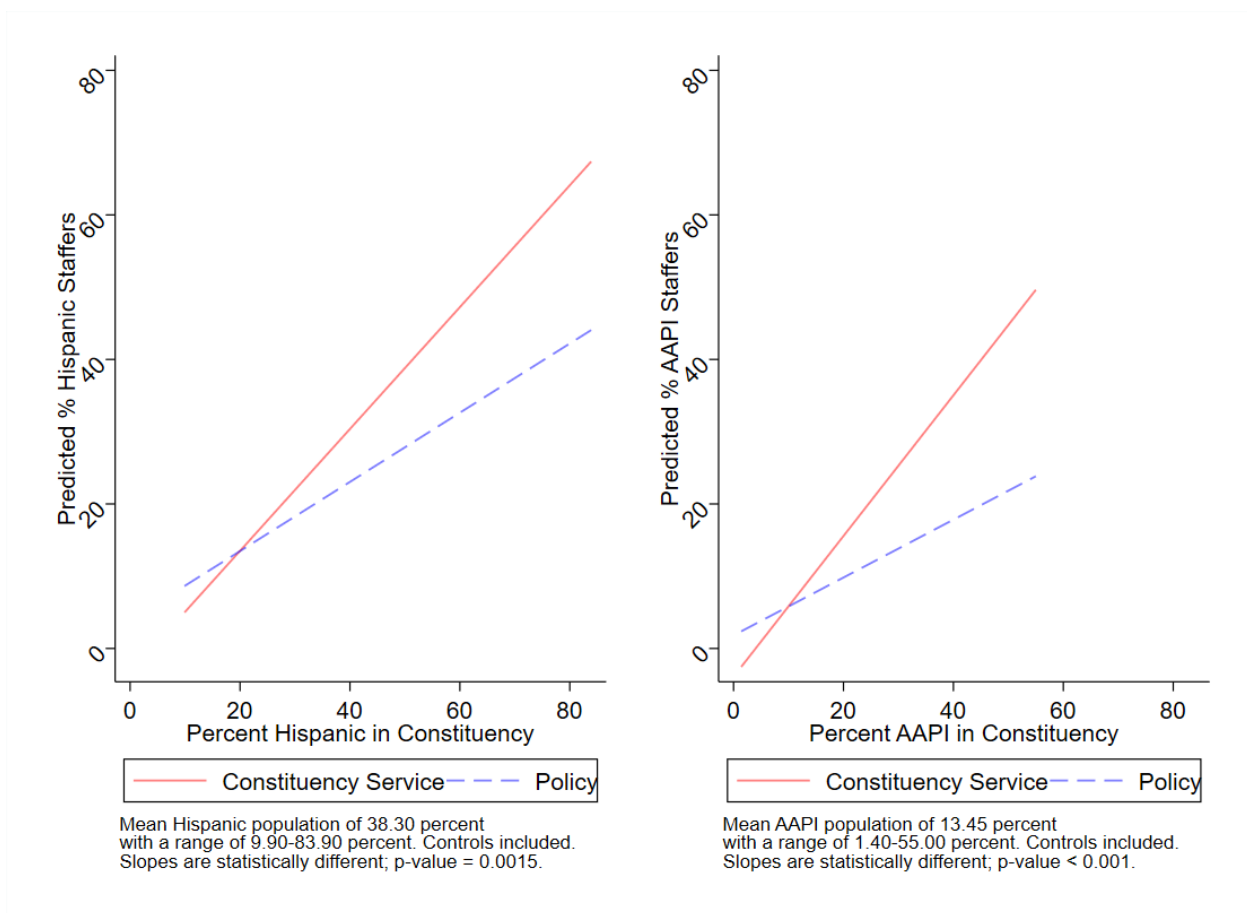
Table 3 – Determinants of AAPI staffer appointments, OLS

| VARIABLES | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| | DV: % AAPI CS Staffers | | DV: % AAPI Policy Staffers | |
| Percent Hispanic | 0.079*** (0.031) | 0.120*** (0.037) | 0.122*** (0.035) | 0.118*** (0.043) |
| Percent AAPI | 1.011*** (0.055) | 0.831*** (0.063) | 0.461*** (0.064) | 0.223*** (0.072) |
| Percent Black | -0.169 (0.104) | -0.174 (0.106) | -0.120 (0.120) | -0.054 (0.121) |
| Hispanic Legislator | | -3.460** (1.649) | | 0.196 (1.917) |
| AAPI Legislator | | 12.699*** (2.291) | | 17.440*** (2.658) |
| Black Legislator | | -2.041 (4.410) | | -2.814 (5.026) |
| District Population (10,000) | | -0.008 (0.226) | | 0.363 (0.258) |
| Constant | -6.458*** (1.728) | -5.445 (11.038) | -2.985 (2.005) | -18.833 (12.621) |
| Observations | 758 | 758 | 734 | 734 |
| R-squared | 0.324 | 0.358 | 0.070 | 0.127 |

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The analysis of the determinants of Hispanic and AAPI staffer appointment are surprisingly near identical. Figure 1 below provides a summary of the analyses presented in Tables 2-3, with controls included. Visually I find an upward slope for both predicted minority constituency service and policy staffers, albeit the slope is steeper for constituency service staffers. As noted above, the slopes are statistically distinct from one another. Although more overall Hispanic and AAPI staffers are appointed in districts with larger numbers of Hispanic and AAPI constituents – minority staffers are disproportionately being placed in constituency service positions compared to policy positions. These results are overall consistent with the visible descriptive representation hypothesis.

Figure 1 – Predicted percent minority staffers by legislative district demographics



Conclusion

This paper has extended our understanding about the strategic appointment of minority staffers by legislators. I find that more Hispanics and AAPI staffers are appointed to both constituency service and policy staffers in legislative districts that are respectively populated by more Hispanic and Asian constituencies. Consistent with my visible descriptive representation hypothesis, I find that the magnitude of this association is higher in the appointment of constituency service staffers compared to policy staffers. This is concerning because, although the data shows that minority staffers are being appointed in highly visible roles that allow them

to provide descriptive representation, they are less likely to be employed in policy positions that would best enable them to provide substantive representation.

Two notes of caution are in order. First, the findings presented here should not be interpreted as conclusive proof of legislators' underlying motivation. The observed behavior provides strong suggestive evidence that legislators are appointing minority staffers to provide constituents with a form of surrogate descriptive representation, but alternative explanations exist that cannot be ruled out with the existing data. Legislators in highly professionalized legislatures, like the California State Assembly, may hire and appoint staffers at their discretion. However, it is possible (and not inconsistent with the descriptive representation hypothesis) that minority staffer appointment patterns are driven, at least in part, by staffer career preferences, the availability of qualified applicants, and other supply-side factors. Additionally, legislators may strategically employ the few minority staffers available in constituency roles because of the uncertainty that minority policy staffers will yield substantive representation in each legislative session. This manuscript makes an important contribution by showing the uneven nature of minority staffer appointments, but future research is necessary to fully understand legislators' motivations and how institutional design influences their decision-making.

Second, the findings here are limited insofar that I lack more data on staffers. I observe staffers' racial minority status, but I don't observe differences in their academic qualifications and experience prior to entering service. An alternative explanation for the observed appointment patterns is that minority staffers have different qualifications that causes them to be appointed in constituency service, but I lack the necessary data to formally test this possibility.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this manuscript advances the existing literature. Empirically, I do so by analyzing original data from the California State Assembly (2010-2019). The extant staffer appointment literature has relied almost exclusively on the United States House of Representatives. By using the California State Assembly, I show that the appointment pattern of minority staffers extends to other American legislatures. Additionally, focusing on the California State Assembly allows me to extend analysis to include Asian American Pacific Islanders, one of the fastest growing minority populations in the United States.

It is my hope that this manuscript encourages further research on the role of legislative staffers' race and ethnicity in legislative behavior. For example, it is unclear what institutional factors like term limits or legislative professionalization may have on the diversity of legislative staff. State legislatures are useful for this type of research given their variation across several aspects of institutional design. There have been a few notable manuscripts on this topic in recent years (Jones 2024; Ziniel 2020), but the area is still ripe for future work .

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Appendix

The main manuscript estimates staffers' race and ethnicity by using the 'wru' program (Imai and Khanna 2016; Wais 2016), which imputes likely race, gender, and other demographic characteristics by using an individual's surname and location. As a robustness check I also estimate purported race and ethnicity by using a simpler method where I ascribe a staffer's likely race/ethnicity by their surname alone. To do this I use the 2010 US Census' data on surnames. A given surname is assigned as either a(n) 'Asian', 'Black', 'Hispanic', or 'White' if the plurality of its name holders *nationwide* self-identifies as such. For example, 84.06% of people with the surname 'Gonzales' identified as Hispanic in 2010, so I impute the likely race/ethnicity of anyone with that surname as 'Hispanic'.

Appendix Table 4 – Comparison of Race/Ethnicity Imputation between Old vs. New Method

| (Old) Est. Staffer Race | (New) Est. Staffer Race | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| | Asian | Black | Hispanic | White | Total |
| Asian | 350 | 7 | 3 | 39 | 399 |
| Black | 0 | 81 | 6 | 0 | 87 |
| Hispanic | 3 | 2 | 1,019 | 132 | 1,156 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| White | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2,435 | 2,441 |
| Total | 355 | 91 | 1,031 | 2,608 | 4,085 |

As shown in Appendix Table 1, the imputation using this more simplified method yields some differences compared to the imputation method used in the main manuscript. 12.28% of Asians using the main manuscript imputation method are classified a different race using the simplified imputation method. Similarly, 11.85% of Hispanics identified using the main manuscript method are classified as a different race using the simplified imputation method. Nonetheless in most cases the two approaches agree. Note that the above table lists staffers who

could be assigned a likely race/ethnicity using both imputation methods, which leads to fewer total staffers compared to Table 1 in the main manuscript.

As a further robustness check, I reestimated the analysis presented in the main manuscript’s Figure 1 below. Substantively the results remain unchanged. A larger share of Hispanics (AAPI) staffers are employed by legislators whose constituency has a larger share of Hispanics (AAPI) staffers. Minority staffers are more likely to be placed in constituency service positions than policy positions.

Appendix Figure 2 – Predicted percent minority staffers by legislative district demographics, comparison between old and new imputation method

