



AAPIs on the Hill

Direct Representation

Occurs when the elected body mirrors the social or demographic characteristics of the represented group or community.

What is AAPI representation like on Capitol Hill?

VS

Substantive Representation

The degree to which representatives achieve the policy goals and preferences of the represented constituency.

Research on Asian American political participation often finds that despite traditional predictors for political participation (e.g. having higher socioeconomic status), AAPI communities tend to participate at lower rates than non-Hispanic whites, Latinos, and blacks. In addition, Asian Americans constitute a smaller percentage of the entire population and do not have the numbers to create more majority-minority districts, so descriptive representation is difficult to attain (Chaturvedi).

The breadth of social science research also shows that descriptive representation, though it might not be a necessary precursor to substantive representation, does have an effect on it.

AAPIs in the House of Representatives

3%



AAPIs in the Senate

1%



AAPIs in the United States

6%



Even if strong descriptive representation were to exist, there would still be few descriptive representatives. This is evident when looking at both the diversity of Congressional representatives and the diversity of their staffers.

There are even disparities in the Hill staff vs. the private sector. **17%** of House staff assistants (entry-level position) identify as a minority. Compared to the corporate world, where **34%** of entry-level professionals in the private sector in 2010 were minorities, this is a significant lag.

What causes disparities in representation?

A divided AAPI community, affected by factors such as:

- > Heterogeneity born from differences in language, religion, history, and culture
- > Common forms of exclusion in US (e.g. forever foreigner, model minority, yellow peril) that generate a panethnic identity

Disincentives to interact with other AAPIs on the Hill:

Minorities who are already on the Hill are told to broaden their networks and look outside the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus if they want to rise through the ranks.

Congressmembers don't have the same incentives as CEOs to focus on staff diversity:

Constituents are more likely to visit local offices rather than those on the Hill, so there is little incentive for Congresspeople to focus on staff diversity in the Capitol.

The idea that action occurs from the inside. This promotes the belief that when there is representation on the Hill, this will spill over into policy and the community.

And if there is a lack of diversity among staffers and congressmen, important minority groups are left out of conversations and their concerns are less likely make it into bills or legislation.

Progress as
an Inward
Function

What
action
can
be
taken?

The idea that action occurs from the outside. This is a growing trend where the community promotes its own agenda through platforms such as social media or protests to make their concerns heard.

This method is much more interactive, requiring community engagement, and "progress" can potentially be made faster

Progress as
an Outward
Function

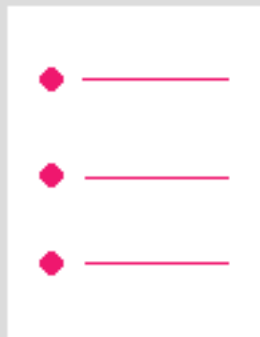
Create

Offices of Diversity



Consider

Requiring qualified, interested minority candidates to be interviewed when top-level job vacancies are available



Commit

To publishing demographic data on Congressional hiring practices



Contact

Congresspeople and inform them of descriptive and substantive representation issues



Studies find that hostile state or local-level policies and diminished feelings of American-ness can portend a future where most first and second generation AAPIs press for more descriptive representation.

Why is this important? What can happen with greater AAPI representation?

A social media campaign prompted a meeting on Capitol Hill to discuss Asian American representation in the media in summer 2016.

The DNC launched ProgressAAPI to build on the work of AAPI democrats and raise awareness of AAPI issues, and the RNC is heading its own initiative to engage with AAPI voters.

President Barack Obama signed a bill to replace the term "oriental" with "Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander" during Asian Pacific American Heritage Month 2016.



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