

# **The Impact of DEIA Policies on Federal Workforce Diversity: A Case Study of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management**

Structural discrimination occurs when dominant groups benefit their members while disadvantaging non-dominant groups. These dynamic impacts resource allocation, employment, and income. During the Jim Crow era, government institutions publicly supported structural racial inequality, providing advantages to whites over non-whites (Bobo, 2011). Unfortunately, this type of discrimination persists today, presenting an ongoing challenge for the United States.

In June 2021, President Biden signed an Executive Order to advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in the Federal workforce, aiming for greater diversity and inclusion. The order reflects Biden's commitment to addressing the long-standing issues of employment discrimination, institutional racism, and gender inequality in American society. Following this, the Biden administration led to the recent OPM diversity report, which provides demographic information on the federal workforce, categorized by race, gender, and disability. From 2017 to 2021, there were only marginal changes in federal workforce diversity, with slight increases in Black, Latinx, Asian, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander employees,<sup>1</sup> a slight decrease in Native American and Alaskan Native employees,<sup>2</sup> and a rise in the proportion of women in the workforce.<sup>3</sup>

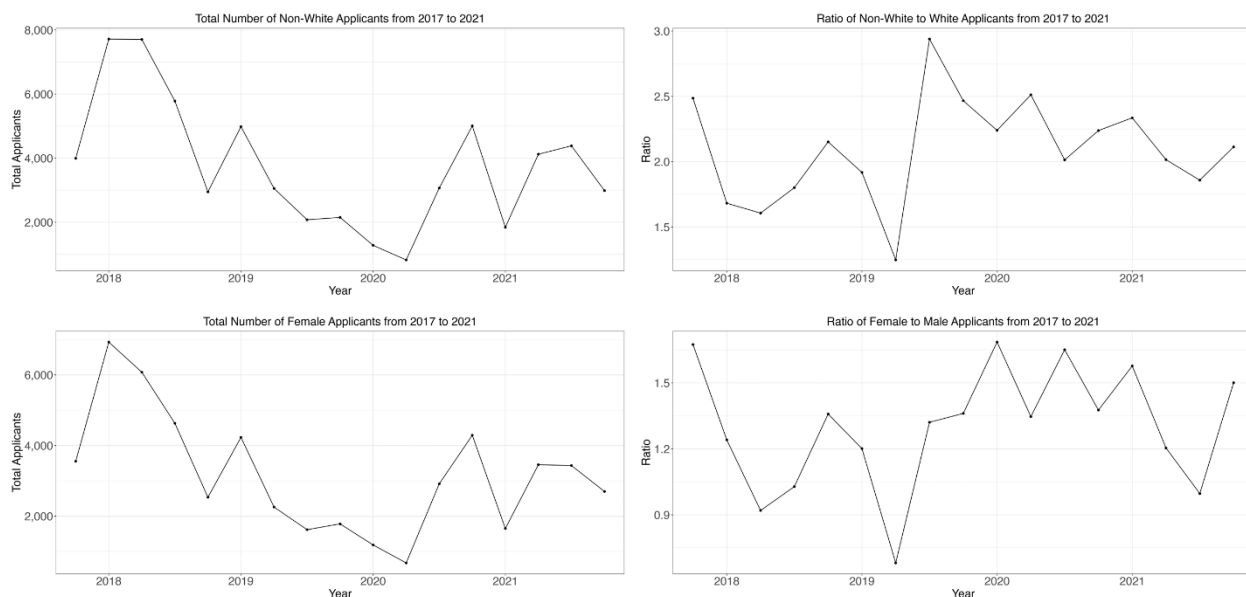
In this context, our team conducted a case study to examine trends among non-white and female applicants at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the chief human resources agency and personnel policy manager for the Federal Government. The data, sourced from the USA Staffing and Monster hiring systems, shows patterns from individuals from non-white backgrounds and females between 2017 and 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> Black employees increased from 18.15% to 18.19%, Latinx employees from 8.75% to 9.95%, Asian workers from 5.99% to 6.49%, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders grew from 0.51% to 0.59%.

<sup>2</sup> Native American and Alaskan Native workers decreased from 1.69% to 1.62%.

<sup>3</sup> Women went from 43.38% to 44.44% of the workforce.



The data shows that, following the issuance of the Biden administration’s Executive Order in June 2021, there was only a minimal increase in non-white applicants, and no increase in female applicants during the second quarter of 2021, as opposed to a larger increase observed from the first quarter of 2020 to the third quarter of 2020. This observation suggests that Biden’s Executive Order did not significantly impact the number of non-white and female applicants. Furthermore, the number of non-white and female applicants has continued to decrease even after June 2021. While the proportion of non-white and female applicants has risen since the second quarter of 2021, the overall number of applicants has decreased, and data coverage is limited, making it difficult to assess the full impact of the Executive Order. This study focuses on the number of applicants rather than hiring results, but the low number of applicants may point to the OPM’s inadequate proactive measures in achieving DEIA goals. Consequently, this observation suggests that structural inequalities still exist within OPM. In our follow-up study, we plan to collect more data to determine whether the increase in the proportion of non-white and female applicants starting in the second quarter of 2021 is due to the Executive Order effects. We will also investigate whether the lack of significant reflection of Biden’s Executive Order within agencies is

an issue exclusive to OPM or more widespread across various agencies. These findings highlight the importance of addressing these issues on a government-wide scale.

## **References**

Bobo, Lawrence D. 2011. Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today. *Daedalus* 140(2): 11-36. [https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED\\_a\\_00091](https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00091)