

The Gender Pay Gap in Congressional Offices

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ABSTRACT

A growing literature examines the behavioral differences between men and women as candidates and elected officials, especially in Congress. However, little existing work has systematically analyzed how gender differences translate to the staffers members of Congress hire once in office. This is a notable gap given the importance extant research has assigned to congressional staff and their ability to influence the political process. In this paper, we analyze the gender dynamics of congressional staffing in the House and Senate. Using a comprehensive dataset of congressional staff employment histories from 2000-2014 which includes salary information, we find significant differences in the ways in which members pay their staff of different genders. We also find that large fluctuations in these trends over time conditional on the party and gender of the member of Congress. Overall, we find evidence of a large gender pay gap in certain offices, but there is substantial heterogeneity in the size of this gap depending on party and the seniority of the congressional staffer.

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Introduction

A substantial and growing body of work analyzes gender dynamics in Congress, finding differences between men and women as candidates and legislators with important implications for policymaking and representation (Swers, 2002; Lawless and Fox, 2005; Lazarus and Steigerwalt, 2018). A separate literature finds that congressional staff are influential actors behind the scenes on Capitol Hill, responsible for many of the roles typically associated with the members themselves (Price, 1971; Malbin, 1980; Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981; Romzek and Utter, 1997). To date, however, scant research examines the gender dynamics of congressional staff, despite the importance of staff in influencing legislative effectiveness (Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017; McCrain, 2019), shaping agendas (Hall, 1996; Wilson, 2013), and framing constituent opinions (Hertel-Fernandez, Mildemberger and Stokes, 2018).

This paper is a step towards unifying these research agendas through an analysis of gender pay dynamics among congressional staff. Using a comprehensive administrative dataset of congressional staff employment information from 2000-2014, which includes salary, job title, and office of employment, we find a substantial pay gap between men and women congressional staff. The average gap in pay between male and female staffers is over \$5,500 in the House and over \$7,500 in the Senate. The size of this pay differential depends on the party and gender of the member of Congress for which the staffer works. The largest differentials are found in Republican offices in the House and Senate and persist among junior and senior staff.

This paper builds on a large body of economic scholarship on gender pay differentials (for a review, see Bertrand, 2011; Blau and Kahn, 2017) by linking it to political institutions that have meaningful impacts on policy outcomes and representation. Though no pay gap exists between male and female elected officials because their salaries are set by legislation, the opportunity presented by studying congressional staff represents an important contribution to the economic literature on the gender pay gap. As each office in Congress is given full

flexibility in its allocation of staffing funds, one can think of individual offices as firms or enterprises (e.g., Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981). Congress, then, represents a unique setting for uncovering the illusive determinants of gender pay differentials by analyzing 435 distinct firms in the House and 100 firms in the Senate that all fall under similar constraints with observable, time-varying differences. With the ability to hold constant features of the firm, such as levels of funding, areas of responsibility, and the dynamics of the labor market, congressional offices represent a fertile ground for testing existing explanations for the gender pay gap.

Moreover, the focus of this research is timely due to the recent salience of congressional staff salaries and concerns about legislative capacity. As Washington D.C. has seen its cost of living rise, resources allocated for staff salaries have stagnated, resulting in lower average salaries and an increase in the asymmetry between public and private wages for those with staff experience (e.g., Cain and Drutman, 2014). This has led to active debate within Congress on paying interns, increasing staff salaries, and providing additional benefits for staffers.(Montoya-Galvez, 2018; Davis, 2019). These trends have led scholars to worry about a diminished congressional capacity that results in expertise-constrained offices relying heavily on subsidies from outside interests and lobbyists which may exacerbate the revolving door (e.g., LaPira and Thomas, 2017; McCrain, 2018; Crosson et al., 2019).

To proceed, we first discuss the literature on gender dynamics within congress and tie it into research on congressional staff and their impacts on the policy process. We then briefly outline the economics research on gender pay differentials and relate it to the congressional office as an enterprise, which leads to specific empirical expectations. We then turn to detailing the data used in our analysis and our empirical strategy before finally discussing the results and their implications for future work.

Gender Dynamics in Congress and Congressional Staff

Scholars have amassed a substantial body of evidence that women and men differ both as candidates and as elected officials. One of the more well-established facts in this literature is that men and women candidates who choose to run for Congress look different across a number of observable traits (Lawless and Fox, 2005). This observation derives from a psychological literature that finds women are more likely to shy away from competition and under-appreciate their own likelihood of success (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007; Correll, 2001).¹ There are additional factors that limit women from running for office, including gatekeeping by male-dominated party elites responsible for recruiting (Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Fox and Lawless, 2010) and a gender gap in political ambition (Fox and Lawless, 2014).

However, conditional on running, women are just as successful as male candidates in terms of fundraising (Burrell, 2010) and votes received (Seltzer, Newman and Leighton, 1997), and *more* successful at securing federal funds for their constituents (Anzia and Berry, 2011). Generally, a large body of evidence finds women behave differently once in Congress. Lazarus and Steigerwalt (2018) argue that the factors that drive fewer women to run for office also contribute to their behavior once in office by inducing female members of Congress to work harder for their constituents (because they are more likely to feel vulnerable) and, as a result, women also deliver more constituency service and respond better to constituent demands on policy. Other mechanisms that drive observed differences in behavior as legislators include that women have a greater tendency towards collaboration (Holman and Mahoney, 2018; Lawless, Theriault and Guthrie, 2018), a focus on different substantive policy issues (Mansbridge, 1999; Swers, 2002), and respond to marginalization due to minority status (Reingold, 2003; Fiske, 2010).²

¹Scholars also argue that these psychological differences interact with social and cultural norms about gender roles and further decrease women political involvement (e.g., Fowlkes, Perkins and Rinehart, 1979; Fox and Lawless, 2010).

²For an excellent review of this literature, see Lawless (2015).

While much, if not all, of the existing research on gender differences in Congress focuses on members, it is reasonable to believe female staffers are subject to many of the same dynamics as female members. For instance, Representative Loretta Sanchez wrote about her time on Capitol Hill: “Sexist, patronizing, and dismissive attitudes are a sad fact of life for women on the Hill. Without a doubt, there are certain members of Congress who still believe women don’t belong there” (Sánchez and Sánchez, 2008). There is little question that many female staffers are subject to the same treatment given the recent wave of sexual harassment allegations by female staffers against male members of Congress (Tully-McManus, 2019).

Moreover, there is good reason to focus on gender dynamics among congressional staff given the extant scholarship on staff in Congress. A large literature using extensive interviews with members and their staff finds that staff possess a great deal of autonomy within Congress and often enable the entrepreneurial efforts of their elected bosses (Price, 1971; Fox and Hammond, 1977; Malbin, 1980; DeGregorio, 1988). Staff also pre-configure the information that is acquired and passed onto members of Congress which likely shapes the policy activity in which members choose to engage and their voting decisions (Whiteman, 1995; Hall, 1996; Curry, 2015). Recent empirical evidence finds that members that share staff vote more similarly than we would otherwise expect (Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017) and that members with more experienced policy staff are more productive legislators (McCrain, 2019). Taken as a whole, this research provides substantial qualitative and quantitative evidence that staff influence all aspects of the policymaking process and directly affect members’ representational efforts.

There are further reasons to focus on staff in a gender and politics context. If structural features of Congress such as systematic pay differentials or discrimination results in fewer female staffers – or fewer female staffers in positions of authority – then this may have impacts on policy outcomes and representation more broadly. Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014), for instance, finds that the smaller the minority of women in a group, the less likely the female members of the group are to influence discussion and decision making (see also Kanthak and

Krause, 2010; Fiske, 2010; Oliphant, Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2014). In congressional settings, Kathlene (1994) finds that women are more likely to behave as facilitators during hearings while Ban et al. (2018) find that women are less likely to interrupt others at hearings and when proportionally more women attend, other women are more likely to participate.

Finally, evidence from other institutional settings suggests that involving women results in changes in outcomes of interest. The mechanism, which is relevant to this paper, is that men change their views by learning more about issues facing women when they are incidentally exposed to more women (as opposed to, for instance, homophily driven explanations). For example, in the courts literature Boyd, Epstein and Martin (2010) find that when women are (randomly) assigned to a panel of judges the male judges on the panel are more likely to rule in favor of the party alleging sex-based discrimination (relative to all male panels). If female staffers are marginalized on the Hill, then their ability to affect the deliberative and policy process may be limited.

The Benefits of Studying the Gender Wage Gap in Congress

A robust literature in economics seeks to uncover the determinants of the gender wage gap (for reviews, see Bertrand, 2011; Blau and Kahn, 2017). There are many challenges in determining what drives empirical differences in the wages between men and women including job preference selection effects, unobserved discrimination, variation in firm types, willingness to negotiate for higher salaries (and the substitutability of other benefits for salary raises), and differences in human capital. As Goldin (2014, 1093) notes, these studies produce “estimates of an ‘explained’ and a ‘residual’ portion. The ‘residual’ is often termed ‘wage discrimination’ since it is the difference in earnings between observationally identical males and females.” To date, no study has examined wage gaps in Congress. As we now briefly detail, the congressional setting (and the available data) presents many benefits towards the task of learning about the causes of the gender wage gap.

First, it is necessary to detail some of the structural features of staffing within Congress.

Members of Congress are given a fixed sum of money they can use towards staffing and other representation tasks, such as district office leasing and district communication efforts (this is called the Member Representation Allowance or MRA). In the House, the amount of money representatives can use towards personnel is fixed across members (in 2017 it was \$944,671). In the Senate, the amount varies based on the population of the state they represent. Members of the House are also limited to 18 full-time equivalent employees. Within these limits, though, members are completely autonomous in their staffing choices, including how many to hire, how much to pay them, how many to allocate in the DC versus the district, and even whether they choose to use their entire staffing budget (See the data discussion below for descriptives on numbers of staff and salary). However, there is relative homogeneity across offices in terms of job title and hierarchy within an office, especially in the House (see Petersen, 2011).³ A product of the budget constraints, especially in the House, is that most staff are low paid relative to other jobs with similar levels of responsibility and that offices have little ability to offer pay increases or bonuses unless another staffer leaves the office (e.g., Congressional Management Foundation, 2012; Cain and Drutman, 2014; McCrain, 2018).

What opportunities does studying congressional staff offer in understanding the determinants of the gender wage gap? First, by comparing offices within the House and then the Senate to each other, we are able to hold constant a large set of features that confound other cross-firm analyses of gender pay differentials (Webber, 2016). This is especially valuable when looking at House offices, as every member faces identical constraints on their budget and number of staffers. Further, the differences across these firms (offices) are largely observable, such as partisanship, seniority, electoral security, member gender, and institutional position (e.g., committee chair). In general, then, the staffing labor market is largely uniform

³For example, nearly every office within our sample employs a chief of staff, a legislative director and at least one legislative assistant. There are also typically caseworkers and lower-level staffers such as staff assistants and legislative correspondents. In the Senate, it is typical to see more staffers dedicated to policy-specific tasks and communication specific-tasks.

across firms. This is a challenge in other studies that seek to examine a set labor market, such as cohorts of MBA graduates (Bertrand, Goldin and Katz, 2010), because male and female employees can still select into firms based on traits that may confound the relationship of interest.⁴

Additionally, the longitudinal nature of the data (discussed in detail below) allow us to disentangle potentially confounding effects of gender pay differentials such as experience of the employee, which is observable. This also allows us to analyze whether women are promoted at different rates than men (Blau and DeVaro, 2007) and the effects of promotion of females to more senior roles on the gender gap within a firm (Kurtulus and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). In the conclusion we discuss additional potential benefits of studying the gender wage gap among congressional staff in the context of the economics literature that are beyond the scope of this study.

In short, the congressional staff setting provides a number of benefits in studying the gender wage gap. We are able to hold fixed key features about the labor market and examine wage dynamics within 435 firms in the House and 100 firms in the Senate. Differences between firms are often observable and also provide variation directly related to quantity of interest (e.g., whether the member is a male or female and their partisanship.) The richness of the data, which we discuss next, permits a detailed analysis examining divergence of salary growth among cohorts, promotion differences between genders, and features of the firm that may cause selection effect differences between men and women that bias other studies of this nature (e.g. the “flexibility” offered by a given job; Goldin, 2014).

⁴For instance, in a population survey-based study of gender pay (e.g. Mulligan and Rubinstein, 2008), observed gender pay gaps may be endogenous to men and women selecting into different industries or firms based on their personal utility of gaining firm-specific skills or the benefits of non-pecuniary benefits such as flexibility (see also Goldin, 2014). In congressional staffing, we can largely hold these features constant due to the uniformity of the staffing market and the observability of differences between offices.

Data and Empirical Strategy

We employ a comprehensive administrative dataset of congressional staff employment histories within the House and Senate from 2000-2014. These data are released publicly by both chambers at the semester (pre-2008) and quarterly level. The data list the staffer's name, position title, office and salary. In this study, we use a version of the data acquired from the private firm Legistorm. Legistorm takes the publicly released data and performs a variety of cleaning tasks before manually checking discrepancies.

Among the benefits of using the Legistorm data is that they digitize the earlier PDF-only versions of the public disbursement and manually fix complications from the process. They then clean and consolidate staffer names and job titles before matching them to offices which are given unique identifiers.⁵ As mentioned previously, job titles on Capitol Hill are largely homogenous, though in the raw data some differences remain in how they are reported in the disbursements. For instance, one office might label their legislative assistants Legis. Assist. while another might label them Legislative Assistant. Legistorm unifies these differences into one distinct title. Legistorm also collects a limited amount of personal information about each staffer, including their gender.

To create a staffer-year (and for some models, staffer-congress) panel, we aggregate the semesterly- and quarterly-level data to the year level. We take the office and job information from the last observation of a staffer within a year (so for four quarterly-level observations per staffer, we only keep the fourth quarter information). However, we aggregate the salary information up to the year level. For most staffers this is straightforward, but to reduce measurement error for staffers that leave the Hill mid-year we estimate the staffer's salary

⁵In the raw data it is common to find staffers with subtle differences in names. One might find James M. Smith in one quarter and then Jim Smith in the next. Legistorm assigns this staffer the same unique ID after verifying that it is indeed the same person.

for the full year.⁶ Finally we we adjust salaries for inflation to 2016 dollars.⁷

To tractably assess the gender wage gap within different levels of hierarchy within an office, we bin job titles into categories of responsibility. This process is motivated by Petersen (2011) and follows the convention in the literature (Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017; Madonna and Ostrander, N.d.; McCrain, 2018) and is possible because of the homogeneity of job titles in Congress. For example, chiefs of staff and legislative directors are binned into a ‘senior staff’ category, while legislative assistants and individuals with “policy” in their title fall into a ‘policy staff’ category. Finally, we merge in member-level information from Volden and Wiseman (2014), including the member’s seniority (tenure in Congress), their institutional status, such as committee chair, their party, gender, and vote share from the most recent election.

Overall, our dataset contains 158,906 observations from 2000 to 2014, encompassing 45,931 unique staffers and 1,040 congressional offices. Sixty-two percent of the staffers serve in the House, and 38% serve in the Senate.⁸ Overall, women make up 55% of congressional staffers. However, women hold only 34% of the senior staff positions. The average staffer earned an annual salary of \$54,220 (in 2016 dollars) across this time period; the average male staffer earned \$57,547 and the average woman earned \$51,457. Figure 1 plots the percentage of female staff (overall and senior) and the average salary by gender for each Congress in our sample. Across the entire time period women make up a small majority of staff overall but a significant minority of senior staff, and consistently earn less than male staff. Figure 2 presents the share of female staff in each chamber by party. Democrats and Republicans in both chambers employ roughly the same share of female staff overall, but Democrats employ a higher share of female staff in senior positions than Republicans.

⁶For example, if a staffer’s salary was \$37,500 for a year but was only in the data for 75% of the year, this staffer’s salary is adjusted to \$50,000. Results are robust to unadjusted versions of the salary.

⁷Inflation adjustment data comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁸While the House accounts for 82% of the unique offices in Congress, Senators have larger staffs than Representatives.

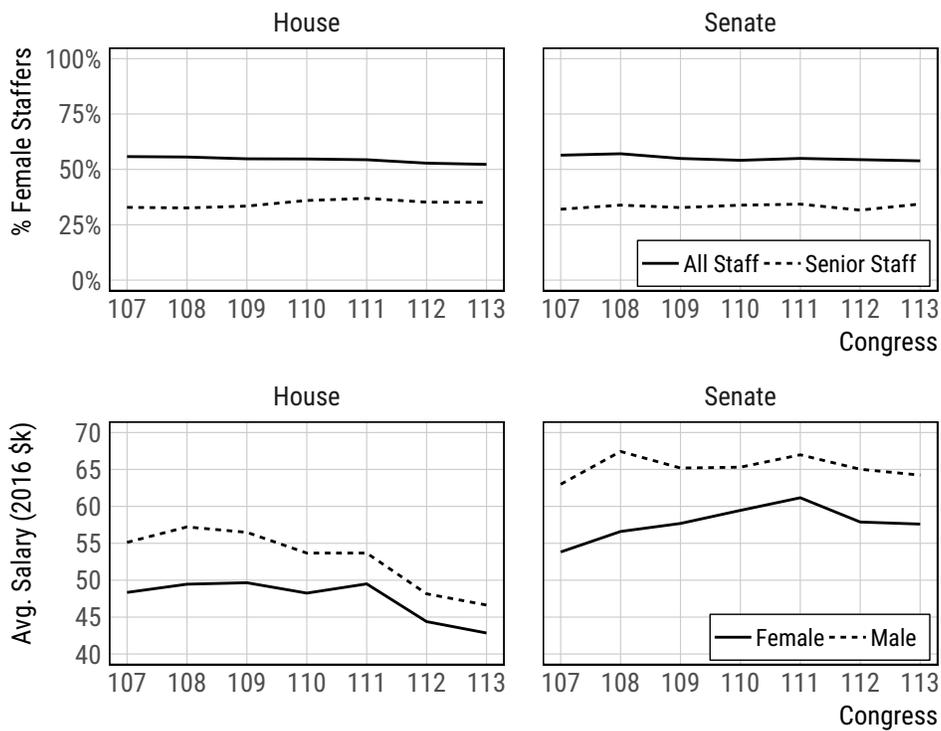


Figure 1: Staffing and Salaries by Gender

This figure plots patterns in staffing by gender over time. The top two figures display the percent of female staff broken down by all staff and senior staff. The bottom two figures display the average salary by gender across the same time period.

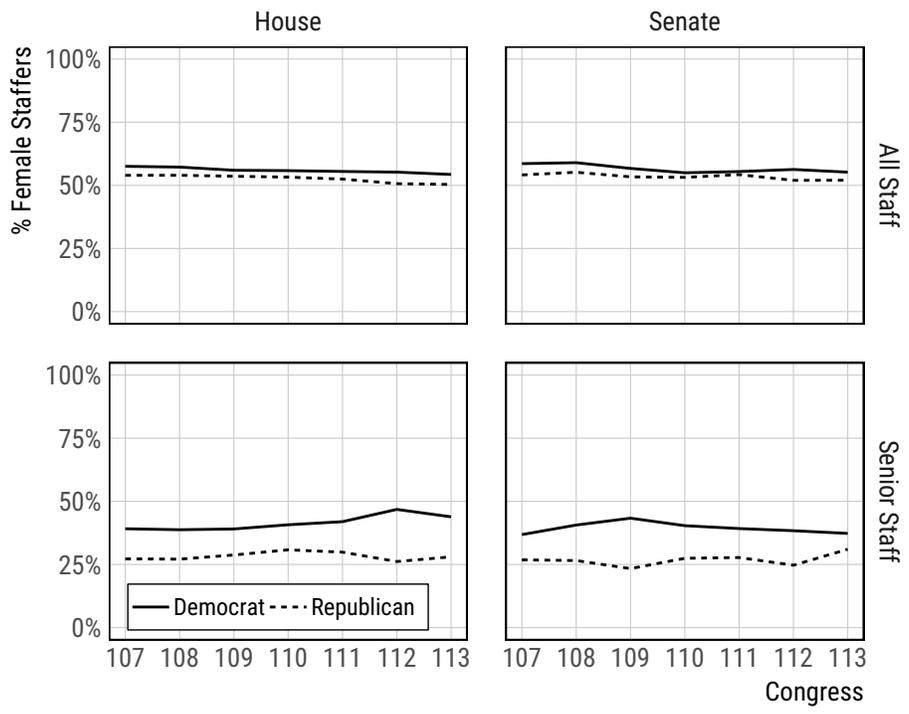


Figure 2: Staffing and Salaries by Gender

This figure plots patterns in staffing by gender over time. The top two figures display the percent of female staff broken down by party in the House, and bottom two figures show the breakdown by party in the Senate.

Regression Models

Figure 1 illustrates a clear gender gap between male and female staffers in congressional offices. Here, we use regression models to (i) estimate the average gender gap, (ii) identify heterogeneity in the gender gap across congressional offices and staff positions, and (iii) examine changes in the gender gap over time.

We begin with simple pooled regressions of all staffers, by chamber, with year fixed effects to account for Congress-wide changes to congressional office budgets and other common shocks to the staffing labor market. We estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} Salary_{iy} = & \beta_1 Gender_i + \beta_2 MC_Party_{iy} + \beta_3 Gender_i * MC_Party_{iy} \\ & + \beta_4 MC_Gender_{iy} + \beta_5 Gender_i * MC_Gender_{iy} + \gamma_y \end{aligned}$$

where i indicates the individual staffer and y the year and γ_y is a year fixed effect. The first model includes only β_1 , the staffer's gender, and year fixed effects. To identify differences based on the party of the staffer's employer, the second model includes the party of the member of Congress and an interaction term of the staffer's gender and the MC's party. Similarly, the third model includes the gender of the member of Congress and an interaction term of the staffer's gender and the MC's gender. The fourth model includes terms for both MC party and MC gender.

Figure 3 presents the results of the four different models. Each plots presents the estimated gender gap between male and female staffers.⁹ Overall, we find a gender gap of about \$5,500 in the House and \$7,500 in the Senate, which represents gaps of about 11–12% in each chamber. When we add terms for the MC's party, we find that the gender gap in both chambers is significantly larger in favor of men in the offices of Republicans. The third model shows that the gender gap is also larger in the offices of male MCs. However, much of this difference appears due to differences in the gender balance of MCs in each party. In

⁹See Tables A1 and A2 for the full results.

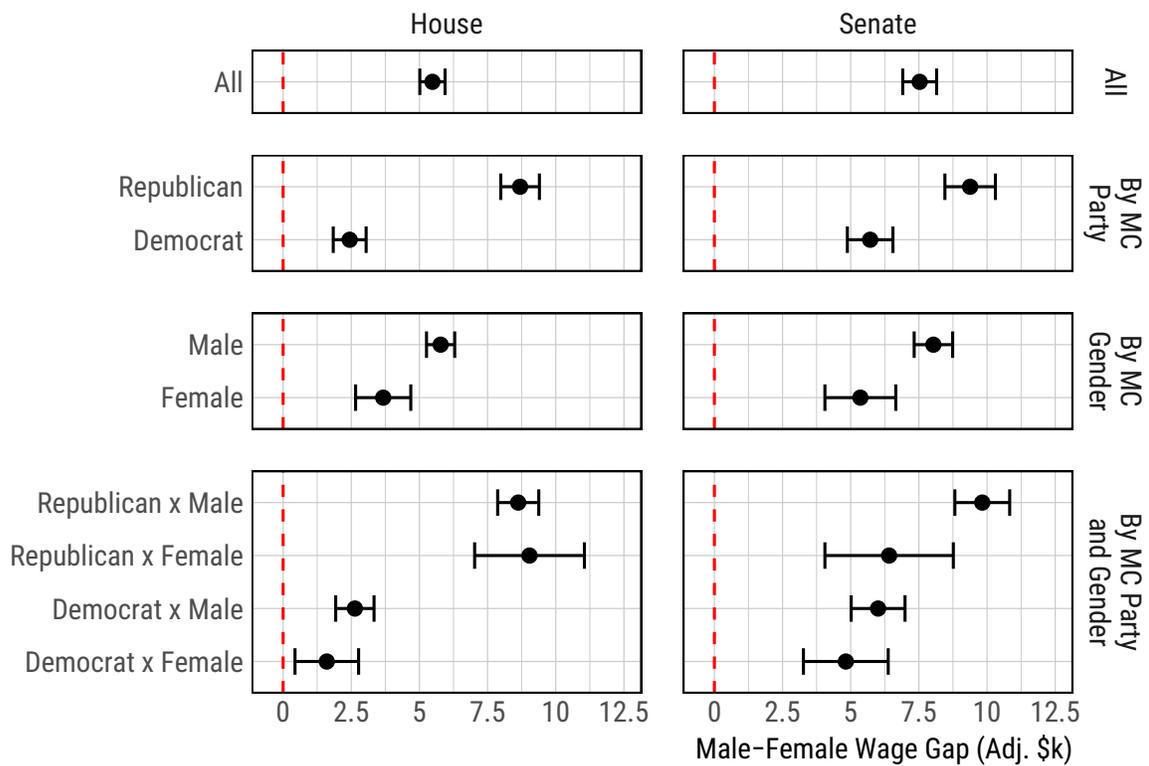


Figure 3: Gender Wage Gap Estimates, Pooled OLS by Chamber

This figure depicts coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals from four sets of regression per chamber (for eight total models). The outcome variable for each model is the staffer's salary in a given year.

the fourth model, where we include effects for both MC party and MC gender, we find no difference on gender in the House, and smaller differences in the Senate. Overall, we find a consistent gender gap across both House and Senate offices, but the gap is substantially larger in the offices of Republican MCs than Democratic MCs.

These results are robust to alternate specifications that address potential concerns about bias in the pooled regression models. First, congressional staffs are split between Washington, D.C. and local district offices, such that MCs may face different labor markets when hiring staff for district offices. If in-district staff are more likely to be women (60% of constituent service staff are female), and Republican MCs are elected from districts with lower average pay, then the estimated gender gap may be due to different labor markets, rather than pay discrimination. To address this, we replicate the above analysis with district fixed effects for the House and state fixed effects for the Senate.¹⁰ Appendix Tables A3 and A4 present the results. The results are consistent with the pooled models; we find a large gender gap in favor of male staffers, and the gap is larger when the member of Congress is a Republican. When controlling for party, we do not find a significant interaction between staffer gender and MC gender in either chamber.

A second potential issue with the pooled regression is the level of analysis. In the pooled models, each observation is a staffer-year. However, as staffing decisions and salaries are made at the office level, analyzing pay gaps by office-year may be appropriate. In Appendix Tables A5 and A6 we examine the relationship between the average pay gap in each office and the party and gender of its member of Congress (Model 1).¹¹ The results of this analysis are consistent with the prior models; there is a larger pay gap in the offices of Republican MCs than in Democratic MCs, but no difference in pay gap in either chamber from MC gender.

¹⁰The Senate models include all years. The House models only include the 2003–2012 period where we have five elections under the same set of districts in most states.

¹¹We define the office-level pay gap as the average salary of male staffers minus the average salary of female staffers.

Seniority and Experience

While the above results show strong evidence of a pay gap in congressional offices, this is not necessarily evidence of pay discrimination. If male and female staffers are seeking out different jobs, or have different levels of experience, then the wage gaps we observe may be attributable to these factors rather than gender. To address these issues, we first analyze pay gaps among senior staff and by specific types of jobs, and second we examine the effect of previous experience on salary.

We begin our analysis of pay gaps by staffing position by examining the salaries of the most highly paid staffers in each office. While the most highly-paid staffer in most offices is the chief of staff, there is some variation in job titles among other senior staff positions, including legislative director, deputy chief of staff, district chief of staff, or communications director. Accordingly, we subset our data to the three staffers in each office-year with the highest salaries. Regardless of title, we should expect these three staffers to be the most senior in the office based on their compensation. Figure 4 presents the results of this analysis, using the same four models as in Figure 3.¹²

We find a large gender gap of about \$10,900 in the House and \$9,900 in the Senate. In the House, we find that the gender gap is substantially larger in the offices of Republican MCs, but no differences on MC gender. In the Senate, however, we find that MC gender, not MC party, is strongly correlated with the gender wage gap; male senators pay male staff significantly more than female staff, but there is no statistically significant pay gap in the offices of female senators. The office-level models provide similar results; we find that the gender is about \$15,500 larger for male staffers working for Republicans in the House (but no effect on MC gender), and is about \$7,500 larger for male staffers working for male senators (but no effect on senator party). We also find that both Republicans and men in the House and in the Senate employ a significantly larger number of men in top staff roles

¹²See Tables A7 and A8 for the full results.

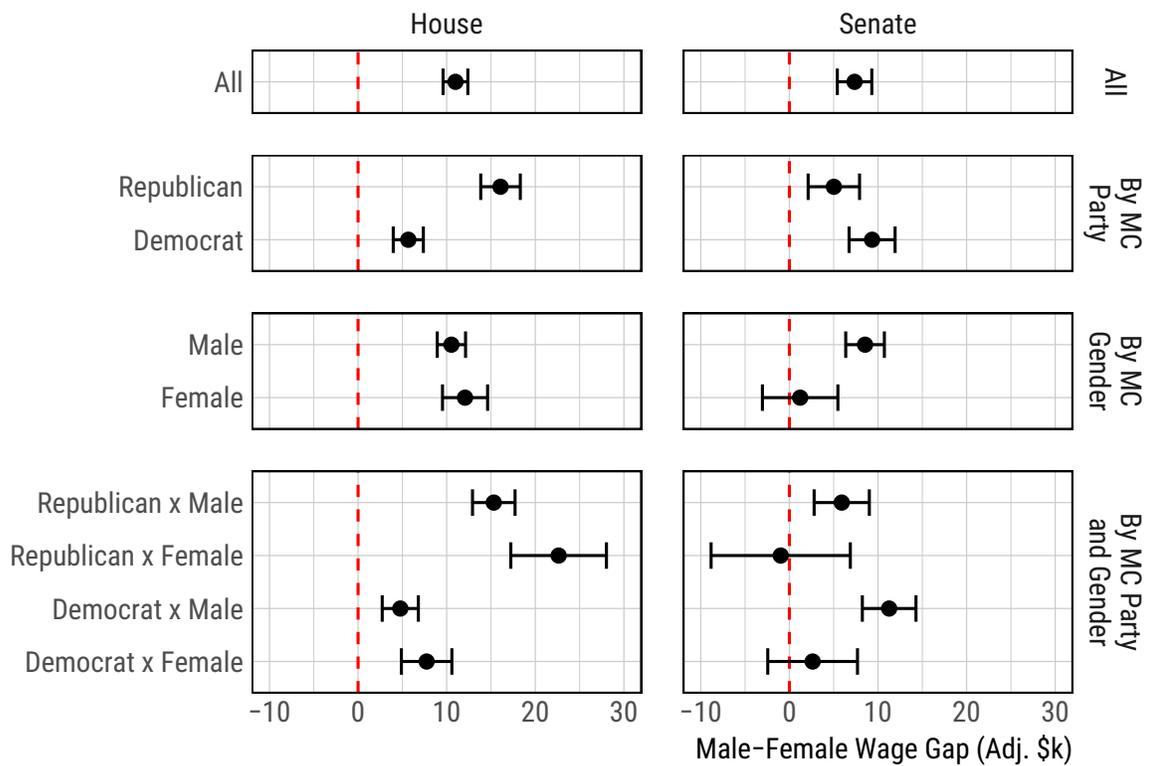


Figure 4: Gender Wage Gap Estimates, Top 3 Paid Staff, Pooled OLS by Chamber

This figure plots the outcome from eight separate regressions, four per chamber. The data for these regressions is subset to only the top three paid staff per office, and the outcome variable is a staffer's salary in a given year.

than women.¹³

Next, we turn to the effect of experience on wages. Experience (measured as years working in Congress) is positively correlated with wages. If men, on average, have more experience working in Congress than women, then the gender pay gap could be explained as compensation for experience, rather than discrimination. To estimate the effects of experience on salary, we estimate a model with a measure of experience, and interactions between experience, staffer gender, and the party of the member of Congress.¹⁴ Tables 1 and 2 present the results.

In Model 1, we include variables only for the gender of the staffer and their years of experience. Each additional year of experience is associated with a pay increase of \$3,300 in the House and \$4,500 in the Senate. Despite including experience in the model, the large gender gap persists. In Model 2, we add an interaction between staffer gender and years of experience. In both chambers, we now find no effect of staffer gender alone on their salary. Instead, we find that both the experience term and the staffer gender-experience interaction term are positive and statistically significant. Both men and women earn higher salaries with additional experience, but men earn more for each year of experience than women do. In Model 3, we add in variables for the party of the MC, and interact this with staffer gender, staffer years of experience, and a three-way interaction of staffer gender, experience, and MC party. In the House, we find no baseline gender gap, but that men earn a larger premium on experience than women. In the offices of Republican MCs, the value of experience for men is significantly larger than in the offices of Democratic MCs. In the Senate, we find a significant negative gender gap in Democratic offices and a large positive gender gap in Republican offices. Men earn a significantly larger premium on experience than women. Unlike the House, where this premium is larger for men in Republican offices, in the Senate

¹³See Tables A5 and A6, models 2 and 3.

¹⁴We measure experience as the number of prior years since 2001 where the staffer is employed by in Congress in any position (not necessarily the same member of congress, or a congressional office. Since this measure is necessarily truncated by the beginning of our dataset, we use only 2012–2014 data for this analysis, such that the experience variable runs from 0 to 11.

Table 1: Effect of Experience: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, 2012–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Male	6,183.67** (420.09)	324.88 (712.78)	−975.83 (1,035.95)
MC Republican			−2,832.54** (990.60)
Years Experience	3,353.85** (50.02)	2,917.10** (65.86)	2,876.67** (90.99)
Male x MC Republican			2,121.85 (1,426.53)
Male x Years Exp.		1,024.92** (100.86)	662.73** (142.31)
MC Rep. x Years Exp.			48.33 (131.85)
Male x MC Rep. x Years Exp.			766.61** (201.69)
Year FEs	X	X	X
Observations	20,619	20,619	20,619
<i>Note:</i>		* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table 2: Effect of Experience: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, 2012–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Male	9,575.20** (599.43)	445.06 (1,031.27)	−3,240.40* (1,368.73)
MC Republican			2,453.16 (1,436.54)
Years Experience	4,503.26** (73.25)	3,829.39** (95.77)	3,869.67** (128.65)
Male x MC Republican			8,014.16** (2,086.20)
Male x Years Exp.		1,603.14** (147.68)	1,948.83** (205.66)
MC Rep. x Years Exp.			−125.60 (192.82)
Male x MC Rep. x Years Exp.			−732.98* (296.27)
Year FEs	X	X	X
Observations	13,001	13,001	13,001
<i>Note:</i>		* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table 3: Examples of the Effects of Experience and Gender on Salaries

Years Exp.	Gender	House		Senate	
		Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans
0	Female	27.2 (25.6, 28.7)	24.3 (22.8, 25.8)	33.8 (31.9, 35.8)	36.3 (34.0, 38.6)
0	Male	26.2 (24.6, 27.8)	25.5 (24.0, 27.0)	30.6 (28.4, 32.8)	41.1 (38.7, 43.4)
5	Female	41.5 (40.5, 42.6)	38.9 (37.9, 40.0)	53.2 (51.9, 54.5)	55.0 (53.5, 56.6)
5	Male	43.9 (42.8, 44.9)	47.2 (46.2, 48.2)	59.7 (58.3, 61.1)	65.9 (64.3, 67.4)

This table shows the breakdown of the gender wage gap (in thousands of dollars) by gender, chamber and party by years of staff experience. Standard errors are in parentheses.

the premium is larger for men in Democratic offices.

To illustrate the different values of experience for men and women, consider the examples in Table 3, which shows predicted salaries for staff with no experience and five years of experience. In the House, new staffers of both genders earn roughly the same salary, regardless of the party of their employer. After five years of experience, however, men make more than women, and the gender gap for staffers in the offices of Republican MCs is significantly larger than in Democratic offices. Additionally, male staffers in Republican offices earn significantly more than male staffers in Democratic offices, while female staffers in Republican offices earn significantly less than female staffers in Democratic offices.

In the Senate, we find that staffers with no experience earn roughly the same salary in Democratic offices, but that there is a significant gender gap in favor of men in Republican offices. After five years of experience, there are gender gaps in both Democratic and Republican offices, and the gap is more than 50% larger in Republican offices. Female staffers with five years of experience earn roughly the same amount regardless of their employers party, while male staffers earn more in Republican offices than in Democratic offices. Figure 5 plots changes in predicted salary for different levels of staffer experience. While a gender gap emerges among House Democrats as experience increases, it is much smaller than the gender gap for House Republican offices or senators of either party.

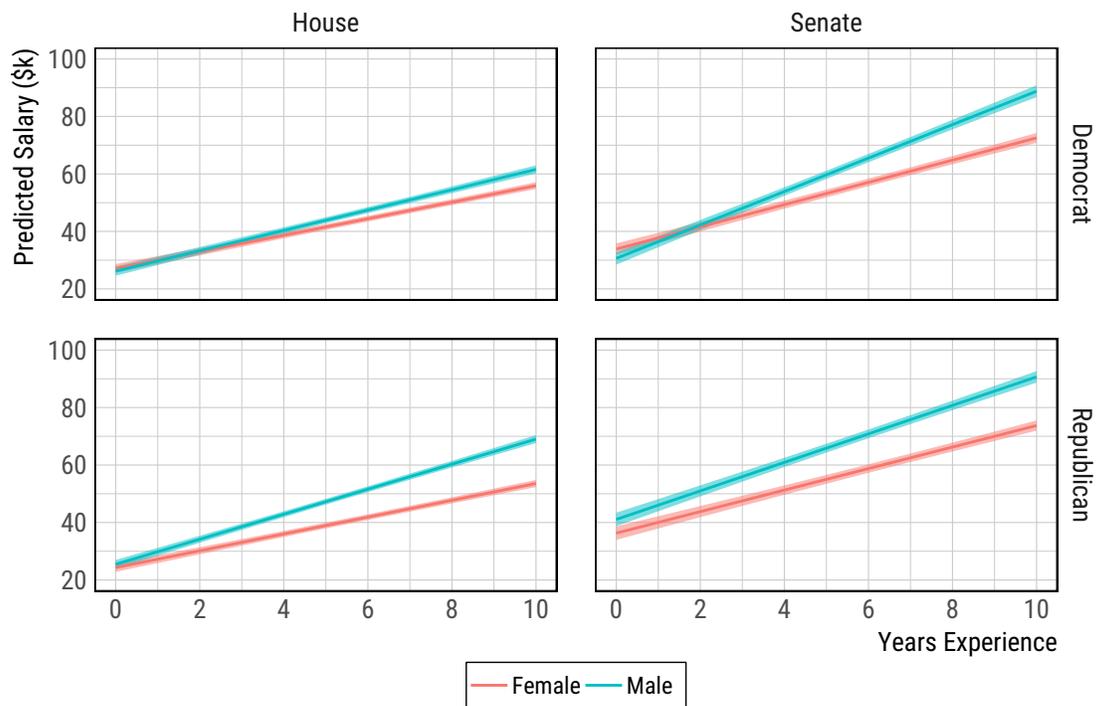


Figure 5: Predicted Salary by Years of Experience

This figure plots the predicted salary of male and female staffers as a function of their years of Hill experience. The predictions come from a regression (presented in full in the appendix) with staff salary as a dependent variable and staff gender, chamber, and party as the independent variable. 95% confidence intervals are included in the plot.

The Wage Gap Over Time

Finally, we turn to evaluating changes to the wage gap over time. Is the gender wage gap consistent over time? As the gender wage gap has increased in salience in popular discourse, it is possible that what we observe on average has disappeared in recent years. Examining this possibility, Figure 6 plots the estimated wage gap in each Congress. Salary gaps appear to decline slightly in each chamber over time. This effect appears to be driven by changes in the offices of Democrats. In the House, there is no gender gap in Democratic offices in recent years. In the Senate, while the gender gap persists, it has slightly decreased for Democratic senators, but not for Republicans.

In Tables A9 and A10, we estimate the gender gap using pooled models for the years 2012–2014. In the House, there is only a significant gender gap among Republican MCs, and there is no effect of MC gender. In the Senate, we find a persistent gender gap among both parties, but it is roughly twice as big for Republican senators as it is for Democratic senators. Additionally, while the gender gap was larger in the offices of male senators when looking at the full 2001–2014 period, there is not a significant difference by senator gender in recent years.¹⁵ While there is some evidence that the wage gap, on average, has become mitigated in recent congresses, it still persists especially conditional on the MC’s party.

Discussion and Conclusion

Building on the broad literature that details differences between men and women in a variety of political institutions, we find evidence that these differences persist within congressional staff. We uncover a substantial gender wage gap that is similar in magnitude to that found in the large economics literature on this topic. Little existing research has focused on gender wage differentials in political institutions which our research suggests is a topic worth further

¹⁵In Tables Tables A11 and A12 we also find that the gender gap maintains in 2012–2014 when only examining senior staff.

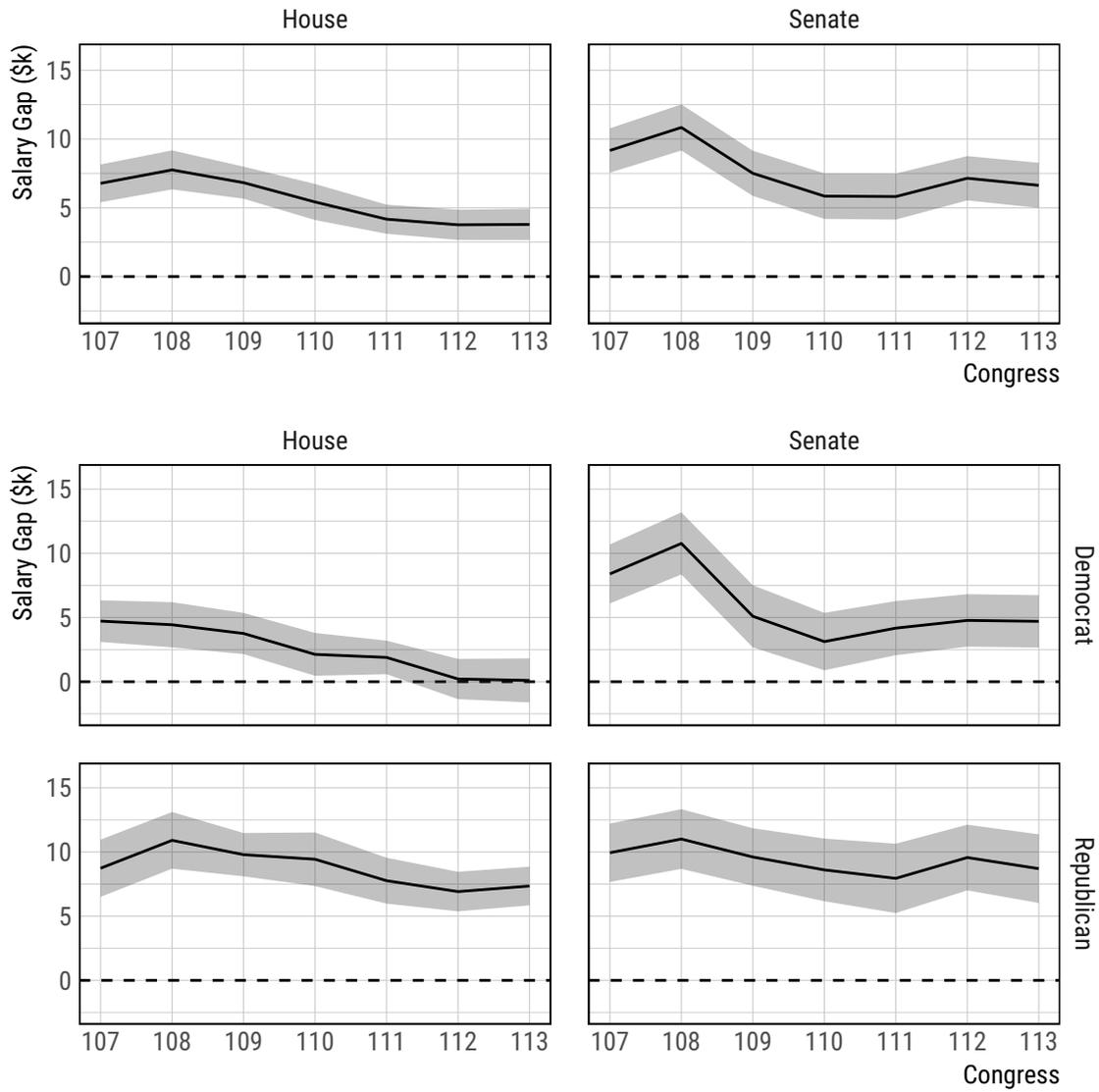


Figure 6: Salary Gaps by Congress and Party

The top two panels plot the average salary gap with empirical 95% confidence intervals by chamber. The bottom four plots further break down this relationship by party.

attention. But what do we make of these findings vis-a-vis both the political science literature on gender dynamics within congress and the economics literature on the mechanisms that produce observed salary differences?

A common thread in the political science literature is that men and women face different challenges which produces important variation in outcomes of interest. For instance, though men and women may see the same success in elections, this is likely brought on by selection effects that produce female candidates who are on average more qualified than male candidates in order to overcome biases in an electorate (Anzia and Berry, 2011). Thus, once in Congress, women also must work harder to prove they belong there, resulting in differences in representation and policy activity (Lazarus and Steigerwalt, 2018). The gender makeup of Congress is linked to more or less focus on certain issues (Swers, 2002) and a tendency towards or away from collaboration (Holman and Mahoney, 2018).

We find strong evidence in this paper for an inequality in gender roles among congressional staff, as observed by salary and staffer seniority, that likely has implications for many of the results highlighted in these studies. If female staffers are valued less or potentially discriminated against then their voices in decision making are more likely to be limited and their presence within more senior roles (which we observe) occurs at a lower rate. As a broad literature on congressional staff finds that staff have substantial influence within policymaking and information processing in Congress, this is a concerning finding. A next step for this project is to examine whether members of Congress who employ more female staff, and those with smaller pay differences, are also more effective lawmakers. Outcomes of interest here include overall legislative effectiveness, the ability to secure federal funds for their constituents, the types of legislation they introduce, and their propensity to behave in a bipartisan manner.

The results we present show that there is a gender wage gap, on average, in each chamber independent of party and the gender of the member of Congress. However, we show that the largest wage gaps exist in the Republican party and that this is especially pronounced in the

House. This partisan difference, along with descriptive patterns of how many female staffers are employed by each party and similar pay for entry level positions (see Figure 5), suggests a potential selection mechanism driving some of the variation in partisan salary differences.¹⁶ One plausible explanation, supported by the economics literature (e.g., Goldin, 2014), is that gender wage gaps are endogenous to males and females selecting the firms for which they work on different firm traits. In Congress, it is reasonable that one of the features on which they select is the party of the member.

Another trend in our results is the difference between chambers. As discussed above, the institutional features of congressional staffing present a unique opportunity to analyze gender pay dynamics. One of these features is the difference between chambers: in the House, each member has a hard limit on staffing funds that is uniform across offices (with the exception of party leadership). In the Senate, the amount of funds available for staffing is quite a bit larger and is determined by, among other traits, the Senator's home state population. This gives most Senators substantially more flexibility in how to allocate their staffing resource. A possible explanation for the persistently high wage gap in Senate offices, largely independent of party, is that they have more funds available for salary negotiations and bonuses (whereas in the House this is quite rare since most offices spend up to their budget each year). As a result, trends identified by the economics literature that show women are less likely to negotiate for salary or select themselves for promotion may be exacerbated in the Senate (Bertrand, 2011). The unique institutional setting of Congress makes it fertile ground for further examination of these important questions.

Future research, beyond the scope of this study, could also delve deeper into the selection effects that produce salary differences in other sectors. For instance, men and women have different preferences over non-pecuniary benefits that may cause some of the gender gap, leading women to select into firms that offer more flexibility (Goldin, 2014). Because much

¹⁶This finding aligns with a common result in the economics literature, that at early career stages there is very little pay gap, but as individuals advance in their career the gap increases (Bertrand, Goldin and Katz, 2010).

of Congress' work is observable, future work could take advantage of variation within and across offices in terms of their productivity, electoral security, and other features of these firms that might produce selection effects.

Additionally, more research is needed on the effect of congressional staff gender dynamics on legislator behavior and policy outcomes. A large literature argues that staff enable entrepreneurial efforts within an office and seek out information that members of Congress need (Malbin, 1980; Hall, 1996). If this information comes from staff that asymmetrically represent one demographic – perhaps a product of the wage differences we describe – then it is reasonable to expect the policy agendas and representational efforts of members to not be truly representative (Lowande, Ritchie and Lauterbach, 2018).

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Table A1: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, 2001–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	5,476.39** (236.16)	2,455.65** (328.03)	3,657.22** (580.68)	1,919.42** (595.57)
MC Republican		-2,010.08** (320.49)		-2,302.32** (326.12)
MC Male			1,470.78** (416.58)	2,030.46** (423.65)
Male x MC Republican		6,207.46** (472.33)		6,161.17** (480.12)
Male x MC Male			2,110.68** (635.64)	614.95 (645.70)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	98,982	98,982	98,982	98,982
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A2: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, 2001–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	7,529.08** (317.17)	5,644.38** (436.98)	5,382.80** (705.16)	4,211.94** (734.25)
MC Republican		1,235.38** (426.95)		992.22* (431.33)
MC Male			2,251.18** (524.35)	2,079.29** (529.58)
Male x MC Republican		3,781.79** (634.77)		3,521.75** (642.07)
Male x MC Male			2,646.27** (789.35)	1,926.60* (798.21)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	59,924	59,924	59,924	59,924
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A3: OLS Fixed Effects Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, 2003–2012

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	5,884.00** (278.20)	2,721.62** (382.12)	4,476.18** (680.69)	2,553.12** (699.12)
MC Republican		-2,185.52** (717.33)		-2,167.44** (718.64)
MC Male			2,063.18* (883.05)	2,715.72** (883.89)
Male x MC Republican		6,700.11** (556.21)		6,673.24** (563.86)
Male x MC Male			1,678.25* (745.53)	206.23 (755.09)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
District FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	72,337	72,337	72,337	72,337
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A4: OLS Fixed Effects Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, 2001–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	7,558.08** (315.79)	5,629.55** (435.53)	5,891.89** (703.47)	4,654.33** (732.87)
MC Republican		67.51 (552.62)		58.24 (557.31)
MC Male			178.64 (670.09)	168.51 (675.50)
Male x MC Republican		4,000.72** (632.11)		3,831.27** (639.64)
Male x MC Male			2,066.38** (787.07)	1,309.86 (796.11)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
State FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	59,924	59,924	59,924	59,924
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A5: Office-Level OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, 2001–2014

	Salary Gap (1)	Salary Gap - Top Staff (2)	Num. Top Staff Gap (3)
MC Republican	6,654.84** (551.04)	13,912.24** (1,593.34)	0.52** (0.04)
MC Male	1,419.29 (739.27)	-1,988.35 (2,115.66)	0.32** (0.06)
Year FEs	X	X	X
Observations	6,148	4,535	5,978
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table A6: Office-Level OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, 2001–2014

	Salary Gap (1)	Salary Gap - Top Staff (2)	Num. Top Staff Gap (3)
MC Republican	4,167.80** (699.66)	-4,189.31* (2,041.05)	0.30** (0.09)
MC Male	2,019.73* (914.51)	7,484.83** (2,667.35)	0.42** (0.11)
Year FEs	X	X	X
Observations	1,384	985	1,372
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Table A7: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, Senior Staff, 2001–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	10,991.06** (712.09)	5,594.39** (1,001.44)	12,019.09** (1,744.63)	8,657.88** (1,790.79)
MC Republican		-3,037.81** (1,063.62)		-4,099.94** (1,084.17)
MC Male			5,823.76** (1,355.44)	6,851.73** (1,380.13)
Male x MC Republican		10,453.58** (1,428.11)		11,188.56** (1,452.98)
Male x MC Male			-1,485.50 (1,911.32)	-4,270.35* (1,942.09)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	18,048	18,048	18,048	18,048
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A8: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, Senior Staff, 2001–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	7,356.39** (991.67)	9,484.45** (1,377.79)	730.30 (2,292.79)	2,327.33 (2,390.91)
MC Republican		5,139.00** (1,588.36)		5,116.25** (1,604.72)
MC Male			1,204.77 (1,949.04)	169.98 (1,973.95)
Male x MC Republican		-4,692.02* (1,984.87)		-5,282.13** (1,998.90)
Male x MC Male			7,799.03** (2,541.69)	8,855.74** (2,564.56)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	4,127	4,127	4,127	4,127
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A9: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, 2012–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	3,808.59** (461.98)	337.68 (668.83)	1,066.07 (1,076.33)	−567.93 (1,102.75)
MC Republican		−4,065.24** (636.67)		−4,389.68** (659.97)
MC Male			85.39 (793.02)	1,528.65 (821.20)
Male x MC Republican		6,701.50** (924.51)		6,527.63** (955.81)
Male x MC Male			3,301.38** (1,191.82)	1,161.44 (1,230.72)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	20,619	20,619	20,619	20,619
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A10: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, 2012–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	6,990.99** (679.33)	4,820.14** (902.47)	5,411.49** (1,419.83)	4,297.75** (1,458.71)
MC Republican		4,221.55** (931.14)		4,123.01** (947.24)
MC Male			1,516.26 (1,096.04)	630.36 (1,111.38)
Male x MC Republican		4,445.21** (1,365.75)		4,287.84** (1,394.51)
Male x MC Male			2,045.17 (1,616.75)	773.44 (1,645.51)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	13,001	13,001	13,001	13,001
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A11: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in House Offices, Senior Staff, 2012–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	6,931.98** (1,283.42)	919.85 (1,876.90)	8,242.10** (2,991.41)	5,025.48 (3,069.08)
MC Republican		-7,775.51** (1,906.14)		-9,599.45** (1,982.97)
MC Male			4,676.32* (2,328.61)	7,950.91** (2,417.40)
Male x MC Republican		11,673.50** (2,581.04)		13,215.16** (2,667.08)
Male x MC Male			-1,866.19 (3,313.30)	-6,235.49 (3,413.94)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	3,867	3,867	3,867	3,867
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	

Table A12: OLS Models of Gender Salary Gap in Senate Offices, Senior Staff, 2012–2014

	Annual Salary (\$)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Male	7,752.16** (2,321.50)	7,253.12* (3,147.37)	1,319.57 (4,990.33)	838.62 (5,157.08)
MC Republican		7,496.47* (3,701.54)		7,652.74* (3,777.32)
MC Male			966.34 (4,365.82)	-891.58 (4,441.85)
Male x MC Republican		141.37 (4,637.52)		-847.54 (4,711.71)
Male x MC Male			7,918.29 (5,640.35)	8,585.41 (5,710.84)
Year FEs	X	X	X	X
Observations	882	882	882	882
<i>Note:</i>			* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	