Partisan Competition and the Decline in Legislative Capacity among Congressional Offices[1]
Short Title: Partisan Competition and Legislative Capacity

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Abstract. Since the 1990s, members of the U.S. House have shifted resources away from legislative functions to representational activities. We reveal this decline using an original dataset constructed from 236,000 quarterly payroll disbursements by 1,090 member-offices for 120,000 unique staff between the 103rd and 113th Congresses, as well as interviews with former members and staff in Congress. These data allow us to test two plausible alternative explanations, one rooted in the centralization of legislative power over time and the other in conservatives' desires to contract government power. We show that the decline in legislative capacity is symmetrical between and consistent within both parties, contrary to expectations rooted in asymmetrical, ideological sabotage. Additionally, this divestment occurs within incumbent member-offices over time, accelerates when new members replace incumbents, and persists when majority control changes. We conclude that competition over institutional control and centralization of legislative functions motivates declining legislative capacity among individual members.

Keywords: Congress; political parties; legislative staff; legislative capacity; Contract with America.

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In their classic article, "US Congressman as Enterprise," Salisbury and Shepsle (1981*b*) provide a rationale for congressional observers to rethink congressional behavior. The legislature is not a monolithic body with 535 participants, but rather an industry consisting of 535 "loosely coupled" firms, with the members acting as CEOs. To better understand the congressional economy, the authors argue, legislative scholarship ought "to incorporate the phenomena of congressional staff systematically with the analysis of Congress rather than awkwardly appending it to a discussion of congressmen [sic] as discrete individuals" (562-3). This logic was a straightforward application of institutional theory to the U.S. House: members of Congress have many competing goals which may best be understood by simply observing how they strategically deploy their scarce human resources. This observation was consistent with other foundational treatments of Congress, including how Congress became institutionalized and professionalized by expanding the role of staff (Polsby, 1968), how its institutions employ staff to serve members' political objectives (Fenno, 1973; Mayhew, 1974), and how members allocate Washington and home-based staff to match their career stage (Fenno, 1978).

Although Salisbury and Shepsle (1981*b*), Mayhew (1974) and Fenno (1973) suggest that members allocate their staff to meet their particular goals, they provide little practical guidance regarding *how* to map members' goals onto their human resource needs. Nevertheless, a series of recent studies revisit the central importance of congressional staff to the observed behaviors of members of Congress. These studies underscore the ability of staff to influence a variety of important legislative behaviors and outcomes, including voting and collaboration networks Montgomery and Nyhan (2017), responsiveness to constituents (Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenberger and Stokes, 2019), connections with interest groups and revolving door activity (LaPira and Thomas, 2017; McCrain, 2018), and even members' effectiveness as lawmakers (Crosson et al., 2020). Staff serve such a central role, in fact, that congressional scholars have recently led reform efforts aimed at improving the experience and expertise of staff in Congress (e.g., LaPira, Drutman and Kosar 2020). Yet while this scholarship has underscored the general value of congressional staff to members of Congress, the temporal limitations of current data on congressional staff prevent this work from exploring how over-time changes in political context have themselves altered value of various types of staff to member enterprises. More specifically, current work is unable to assess how phenomena such as the ascendance of congressional Republicans as a dominant majority, the rise in competition over majority control (Lee, 2016), growing polarization (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2016; Poole and Rosenthal, 2000), and other political trends have systematically altered market conditions in which members make their investment decisions.

In this article, we investigate how these well-documented changes in congressional politics have influenced members' resource allocation calculus. To do so, we introduce a large new dataset of all House member-office staff, their responsibilities, and their salaries between the 103rd and 113th Congresses. Using these data, we first document a general decline in members' investment in legislative operations. We then investigate how changes in congressional politics drove this decline. We provide evidence that the rise of insecure majority control of Congress (Lee, 2016) and the simultaneous centralization of lawmaking power within the party apparatus (Curry, 2015) has compelled members of Congress to systematically shift their enterprises' resources away from legislative endeavors. In fact, we show that members of both parties have purchased less legislative labor as a percentage of their overall spending during periods of both budget increases *and* declines, opting instead to invest a larger share in representational labor, such as constituent service and (especially) public relations.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we detail the decline in legislative resource allocations in members' personal offices between the 103rd and 113th Congresses, using our original, detailed categorizations of individual staffer responsibilities over the time period. We note that these investments have declined in both real terms and as the share of Members Representational Allowances (MRAs) have themselves shrunk. Second, based on insights from selected interviews with senior staff and former members of Congress conducted as part of the 2017 Congressional Capacity Survey, we lay out two alternative explanations for these declines based on well-documented historical developments in Congress: symmetrical party competition versus asymmetrical ideological sabotage. Third, we explain how our extensive new data set of individual staffers' primary responsibilities is uniquely able to adjudicate between the two alternatives. Fourth, we use a series of tests to confirm that member divestment in legislative staff persists under Republican and Democratic majorities, within Republican and Democratic offices, among newly elected members of Congress, and even among long-standing members of Congress. We argue that these trends are consistent with shifts in member staffing priorities as a response to centralized legislative power in an era of insecure majorities—and not conservative sabotage alone. We then discuss the implications of our findings for legislative studies and congressional reform efforts.

The Decline in Members' Legislative Operations

Although members may differ in their policy and representational priorities, representatives face similar demands on their time, represent similarly sized constituent populations, and discharge similar official duties as members of Congress. All representatives operate under institutionally dictated personal office budget constraints, set by the Member's Representational Allowance (MRA) formula, which differ with respect to travel distance and local cost of living (Brudnick, 2019). Nevertheless, given members' differences in their goals and priorities, representatives enjoy near full discretion on how to allocate their MRA spending towards office expenses such as personnel, franked mail, district office rental, and other overhead costs. In fact, there are effectively just two constraints on their spending. First, House rules forbid members from employing more than the maximum 18 full time equivalents, plus up to 4 part time equivalents. Second, members are personally liable for any allowable expenditures exceeding their formula-dictated MRA budget authorizations to prevent members from overdrawing their allowances.[1] In practice, then, members are constrained only by the amount of funding they are allocated.

Given the fixed nature of MRAs, a representative's staffing and spending decisions reflect trade-offs faced by the legislator, since MRA expenditures devoted to one function reduces resources available for others. Thus, because of the freedom with which members may spend their funds, representatives' observed spending patterns provide insight into how members confront these trade-offs, in pursuit of their individual goals. Indeed, as Salisbury and Shepsle (1981*b*) state, "the choice of organizational style may often reflect the member's own conception of his or her role and the functional priorities associated with it" (560). More specifically, in operating their individual legislative "enterprises," members purchase differentiated labor to meet their goals of reelection, policy influence, and institutional advancement (Fenno, 1973). In their pursuit, members hire some staff to focus on the actual process of legislating, others to work on casework in the district, and still others on communications with national and local journalists and through social media. Existing literature has confirmed the importance of these decisions. For example, members with more experienced policy staff appear better able to advance their own legislative agenda (Crosson et al., 2020), while senior staff connectedness may enable members to pursue new collaborations (Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017). Thus, traditionally, members have made use of professional staff as a means for pursue their goals. According to Salisbury and Shepsle's (1981*b*) logic, then, the relative amounts spent on these types of staff reflect members' cross-sectional and over-time differences in their priorities as representatives.

In spite of the demonstrated importance of congressional staff and potential for providing insight into member priorities, political scientists have remained unable to observe members' investments sys-

[1] For this reason, very few members spend 100% of their MRA allocation. According to recent personal communications with House Committee on Administration staff on this issue (*Personal communication with House House Committee on Administration staff*, 2019), it is not uncommon for some to publicize this fact as a symbol of their commitment to frugality with taxpayer dollars. The vast majority of members fail to spend some portion of their MRA, which are retained by the Chief Administrative Officer as cash reserves; they are not returned to the treasury. Nevertheless, these amounts are typically extremely small, amounting to just $40,000 on average.

tematically over time and in response to changes political context. In this paper, we introduce a unique new dataset of legislative staff, their responsibilities, and their compensation in the U.S. House, which enables us to observe these sorts of over-time changes. Using these data, we find that members have shifted resources away from congressional staff in general — and from staff responsible for policy portfolios in particular — over the past two decades. This has occurred even as members' budgets have been slashed considerably in recent years.

We reveal these trends by analyzing payroll disbursements for 120,000 unique personal staff in the U.S. House, from the 103rd through 113th Congresses. The full longitudinal data set categorizes 236,000 quarterly staffer-member observations. These data include information on compensation, employer, and job titles. Our main empirical contribution, however, is to systematically categorize all staffers into five "primary responsibility" categories—legislative, political management, office management, communications, and constituency service—which capture the major responsibilities of congressional staff in the U.S. House. We then collapse these data into three main staffer categories: legislative, representational, and administrative staff.

We systematically identify staff responsibilities using the quarterly *Congressional Yellow Book* volumes that coincide with the quarterly payroll statements. Our protocol permits some staff to have partial roles in multiple categories, so our process offers a higher degree of precision than simply relying on job titles. Moreover, relying on job titles alone may hide or inflate domain-specific roles (Petersen, 2011), especially as they relate to legislators' dual representational and lawmaking responsibilities, which frequently conflict with each other (Fenno, 1973). To the best of our knowledge, our 236,000 detailed coding decisions represent the largest, most systematic account of member of Congress's resource allocation decisions ever reported.[2]

[2] *Vital Statistics on Congress* aggregates staffer counts, but do not associate them with employing offices. The LegiStorm commercial directory includes payroll disbursements, but is truncated at calendar year 2001 and does not categorize individuals by their primary responsibilities. A legacy commercial directory published by Congressional Quarterly between 1993

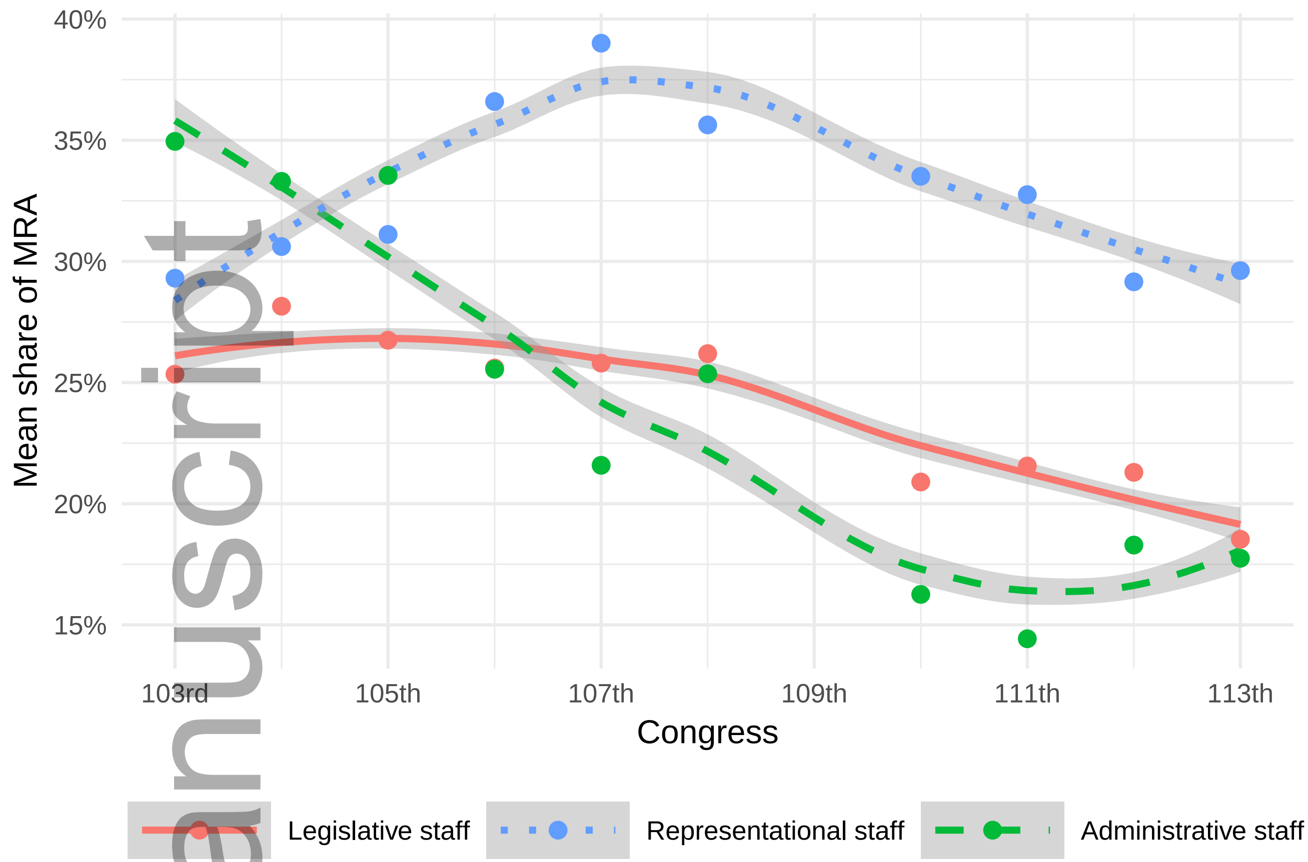


Fig 1: Mean share of member representational allowances allocated to different staff types. Dots show the mean percentage, while the loess smoother is estimated based on the full distributions. "Representational staff" is a collapsed category of constituent service and communications staffers, "Administrative staff" is a collapsed category including political and office management, and "Legislative staff" is any staffer with policy responsibilities in the Congressional Yellowbook.

Figure 1 depicts over-time trends in the three broad responsibility categories discussed above. The first category is *legislative staff*. Staffers were placed into this category based on several factors, summarized in Appendix B. Most notably, however, staffers were placed in the legislative category if their *Yellow Book* entry specifically includes a legislative policy portfolio. With this information, we were able to classify not only "traditional" legislative staff positions (such as Legislative Director and Legislative Assistant), but occasionally Chiefs of Staffs, Counsel, and Press Secretaries that have clear, substantive legislative responsibilities in the office. The second category, *representational staff* consists of constituency service and communications staff. Finally, *administrative staff* consists of both

through 2009 does not include payroll disbursements or responsibilities (Montgomery and Nyhan, 2017).

"political management" staff—typically the most senior non-legislative staffers, often a Chief of Staff who lacks a legislative portfolio—and office management, such as schedulers, information technology personnel, and other support staff.[3]

At this most general level of analysis, we observe an overall decline in spending on personnel over time. However, this decline is not equally steep across each of our three categories. In particular, both administrative staff and, more interestingly, legislative staff have experienced a systematic decline since the 103rd Congress. As Figure 1 depicts, the share of staffing resources allocated to legislative staffers peaked in the 104th Congress, with the median office allocating 27.1 percent, or $\$230,869$ for the median MRA. By the 113th Congress this share had decreased to 18.3 percent, or $\$225,768$ for the median MRA.[4] By contrast, spending on representational staff expands considerably with the growth in MRAs, peaking in the 107th Congress. While representational spending declines thereafter, members continued to spend more on representational staff as a percentage of their budget allotment in the 113th Congress than in the 103rd—while legislative staff experienced a clear, continuous decline throughout the entire period of observation.[5]

While legislative staff expenditures as a share of MRA authorized budgets has decreases consistently over time, the value in absolute terms fluctuates as the MRA authorizations expand and partially contract in the 112th Congress. Figure 2 plots inflation-adjusted MRA authorizations to all 440 voting and non-voting member offices. The median spending on legislative staffers peaked in the 111th Congress at $\$316,245$. Legislative staff expenditures plummet by nearly $\$90,000$ over subsequent Congresses in response to budget cuts. Thus, in recent Congresses, members have faced even starker trade-off pressure

[3]The original scheme may categorize political managers as also having partial constituency service or communications responsibilities, so portions of their compensation may already be allocated to the *Legislative staff* and *Representational staff* categories in Figure 1.

[4]All salaries are in 2017 inflation adjusted dollars.

[5]These results corroborate a more general shift from staff resources shifting from Washington to district offices beginning in the the 1970s. See Appendix D for the percentage of staff located in Washington and district offices. See Appendix F for models of several different types of staff beyond legislative staff, including communications and constituency service staff (which comprise the representational staff category).

between legislative and non-legislative investments. In spite of this fact, as Figure 1 depicts, legislative staff expenditures have continued to drop. Indeed, in response to MRA budget cuts, members have opted to cut legislative staff rather than representational staff.

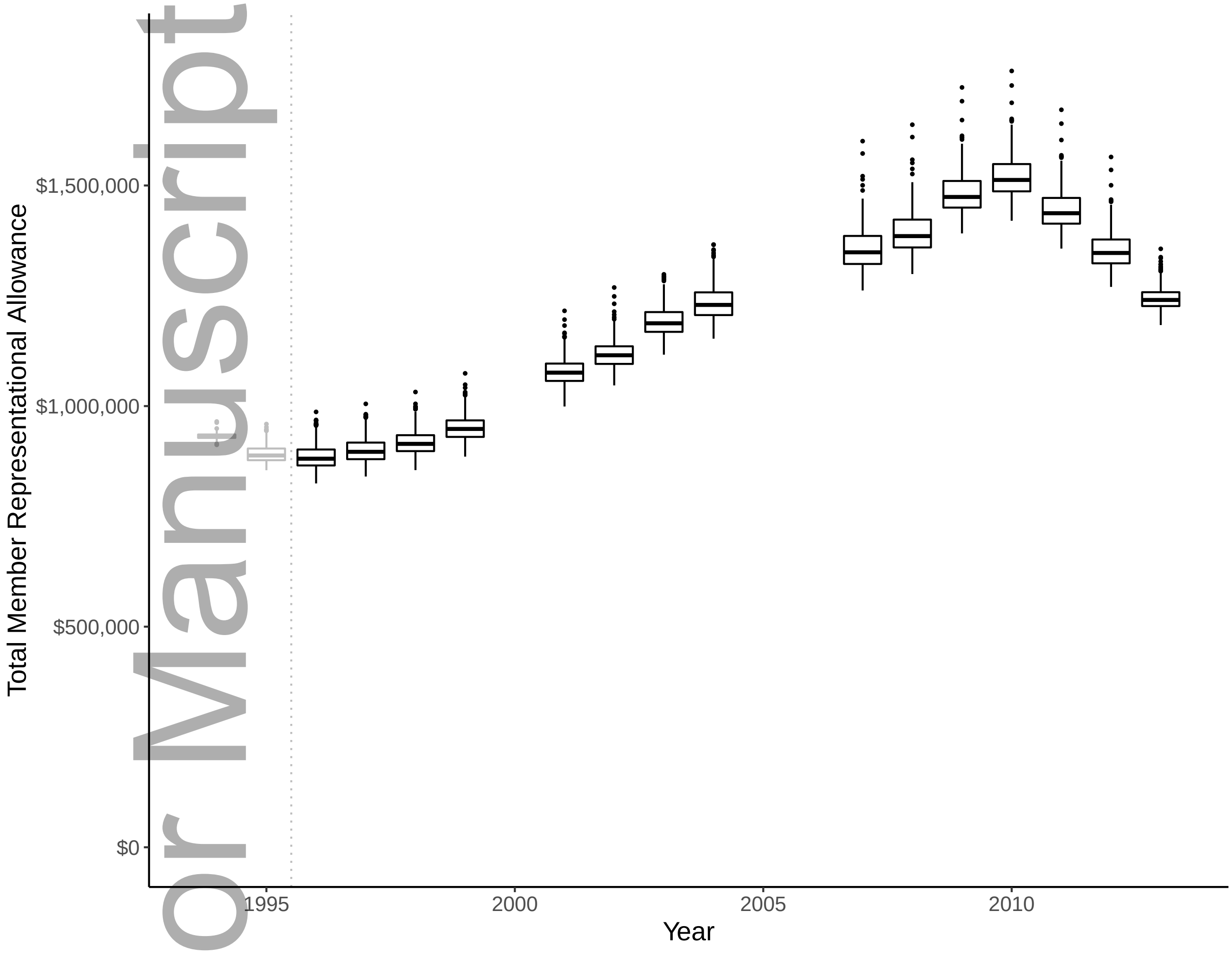


Fig 2: The rise and fall of Member Representational Allowances. Distributions for 1994 and 1995 in gray are imputed MRA estimates.

One may reasonably object that other contextual factors besides the ones we discuss below could explain the downward trends we observe. That is, it is plausible that, over the same time period, legislative committees emerged as a primary engine behind legislative work—rendering legislative investments by individual members less valuable. However, we underscore here that, over the time period of interest, the new Republican majority under Speaker Newt Gingrich followed through on promises to cut 1/3rd of committee staff, reduce civil service personnel in the Library of Congress, and eliminate the Office of Technology Assessment (*Vital Statistics on Congress* 2018). These cuts persist through present day. In fact, the only type of committee staff to see an overall increase in spending has been communication staff, which are primarily oriented toward public relations and not legislative operations.[6] [7] Thus, we do not believe that changes in committee staffing explain the observed downward trends. Nevertheless, as we illustrate below, we do examine how a different set of changes in political context—the rise in insecure legislative majorities—may have generated divestment incentives for the average member of Congress.

Why the Decline: Symmetrical Party Competition or Asymmetric Ideological Sabotage?

Why have members of Congress spent less on legislative staff in recent years? We argue that changes in political context—namely, the rise in insecure majorities (Lee, 2016) and concomitant centralization of legislating power in Congress (Curry, 2015)—have made investment of resources in legislative staffing less attractive to Members of Congress. Given that the rise of insecure majorities coincided with the Republican ascendance of the 1990s, however, it is also possible that conservatives' concerted efforts at divesting in the institution of Congress as a whole redounded to individual members' investment priorities. Thus, in the following section, we better detail the logic underlying these explanations, drawing upon a series of interviews with both current and former House staff and Representatives. In doing so, we develop empirical implications that delineate between the two accounts, which we ultimately examine with our dataset.

[6] See Online Appendix D, Figure A3, page 9.

[7] It is unlikely that declining legislative capacity is being augmented by the use of staff whose salaries are shared by committee offices. For one, few committees' rules authorize shared staff for all but committee leaders, and for those the House Committee on Administration limits shared cost amounts between offices. Our data reveal that percentage of salaries paid to shared employees represents only 1.3% of all payments. It is, therefore, extremely unlikely for such a small subpopulation of shared staffers to make up for the declines in personal offices legislative staff, because the absolute magnitude of spending on all shared staff is *smaller than* the magnitude of the decrease in resources devoted legislative staff.

As Lee (2016) argues, today's era of alternating majorities and partisan anxiety—especially in the House—has increased Congress's collective focus on reelection. Indeed, given the privileges associated with majority status, members realize the value of their co-partisans winning across the country. As a consequence, individual members delegate more policy development responsibilities to party leaders, who make use of asymmetric informational advantages (Aldrich, 2011; Curry, 2015; Koger and Lebo, 2017; Lee, 2016) and parliamentary agenda powers (Cox and McCubbins, 1993, 2005; Sinclair, 1998, 2011). Party leaders in turn manage party-differentiated policy agendas and reallocate representational and reelection resources, such as committee assignments, credit-claiming opportunities, and campaign funds. The result is a legislature with minimal independent legislative and policy contributions from rank-and-file members. Most major policy changes are dictated by party leaders (Curry, 2015).

We argue that these changes motivate members to spend less of their MRAs on policy aides, such as legislative directors and legislative assistants who are responsible for tracking, developing, and advancing the policy priorities of their member-boss. Indeed, with the centralization of the legislative process, members face receive fewer returns on their investments in high-salaried, long-term, and specialized legislative staffers.[8] By the same logic, though, the value of individual members retaining seats in Congress has increased, as majority control in Congress has grown more insecure, thereby increasing the importance of reelection-oriented activities.

These dynamics were adeptly summarized in a recent series of interviews with former and current high-ranking congressional staff conducted in 2017 Congressional Capacity Project Drutman et al. (2017). The interviews, conducted between February and June 2017, were administered in-person with 52 current senior staff in House and Senate personal, committee, party leadership, and chamber admin-

[8]This is not to say that such staff impart no legislative value to members of Congress, as Crosson et al. (2020) and others suggest. Rather, the argument rests only on the relative value of such staff declining over time.

istrative offices in Washington, DC. Additional interviews were conducted with four former members of Congress and seven former senior staff from the House and Senate committee offices. Interviewers elicited questions about their personal experiences working in Congress, as well as perspectives on how offices operate. [9]

According to one former Republican member of Congress—a senior appropriator closely aligned with Newt Gingrich—the decline in member capacity coincided with a concerted effort by party leaders to centralize legislative control and maximize members' reelection chances:

> [Before the 1994 Republican victory] the schedule was that the average member probably had his family here, Republican or Democrat...
>
> At Newt Gingrich's insistence when he was Speaker, you leave your families at home because you're more likely to get reelected. Politically, it was probably a wise move. Legislatively—for the good of Congress—it was a disaster, an absolute frigging [sic] disaster, because now their families, the spouses, the kids are back home. They go home to politick, presumably do that [Friday through Monday]. They're politicking at home, but their spouses don't want them to come to Washington so...they come back on Tuesday.

This individual took their assessment a step further, arguing that "[t]he work product, I think, has shown that it's not nearly what it used to be."

Further still, as a long-standing member who held office both before and after the Contract with America described, the decline in legislative focus was true for both "Republican or Democrat." In fact, this position was a common one among the nearly 60 senior staffers and former members interviewed. For example, this observation is corroborated by a senior Democratic leadership staffer, who had previously been Chief of Staff to a member in the mid-2000s:

> For years, my old boss had one of the highest retention rates of staff in Congress. Then, all of a sudden, we lost a bunch of staffers [...] We had that tension where we lost two people, one in DC, one in the district. I could only replace one because I wanted to move some money around and actually help shore some other people up. It became a tension of do I hire in the district, where they needed a staffer, or do I hire here?

[9] Semi-structured interview protocols and additional sampling information may be found in Appendix G. Anonymized transcripts are available upon request.

Ultimately, the office hired only a *district* staff replacement, despite the fact that this member—a New England Democrat whose first dimension DW-NOMINATE score falls well left of the party median, and who still holds a safe blue seat in the House—was comfortably ensconced in the latter stages of his career. A generation ago, Fenno (1973) suggested a such a member ought to focus on legislative work. Yet the member and his Chief of Staff concluded that there was little reason to pay a Washington-based legislative staffer.

These accounts underscore not only how members' valuation of legislative staff has declined as competition over majority control heightened, but also how party leaders have encouraged members to focus on constituent relations and reelection efforts. As previous literature has suggested, party leaders reward those who obtain valuable resources for reelection (Heberlig, Hetherington and Larson, 2006; Heberlig and Larson, 2007; Kanthak, 2007; Powell, 2015). Thus, in addition to the decreased value of legislative staff, these interviews suggest that partisan competition has increased the value of representational staff. Rather than simply connecting the member with media appearances or performing routine casework, representational staff today face greater pressure to strengthen the member's ties with key interests, fundraisers, and constituencies within their districts (Bawn et al., 2012; Fenno, 1978; Miler, 2010). As Congress has grown more insecure, the concomitant increased demand for constituent service and communications forces members to shift resources away from legislative operations toward representational staff.

In response to these forces, we believe that both parties have improved their ability to build the personal vote through constituent service (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987), developed sophisticated public relations efforts Grimmer (2013), and prioritized messaging bills written largely by party leaders (Curry, 2015; Lee, 2016). Partisan warriors in both parties have increasingly and universally deprioritized their legislative responsibilities as competition over majority control in both chambers of

Congress has increased (Bernhard and Sulkin, 2018; Theriault, 2013). Given that competition for the majority has remained tight, members of both parties have refocused attention to representational goals to the detriment of legislative goals.

"Ideological Sabotage" as an Alternative Explanation

As we detail, staffing incentives created by heightened partisan competition offer a compelling explanation for the coincidental downward and upward trends in share of resources devoted to legislative and representational staff, respectively, observed in Figure 1. Nevertheless, given that partisan competition is frequently associated with the rise of the Gingrich speakership and Contract With America, a reasonable alternative explanation for the observed changes in staffing may derive from simple ideological calculations. That is, perhaps members allocate staff *symbolically* to signal their commitment to larger or smaller government, and *instrumentally* to grow (or shrink) legislative capacity in line with their expansionary (or contractionary) ideal preferences.

As a consequence of gaining majority status in 1995, it is therefore possible that Republican members of Congress unilaterally divested in legislative operations as a matter of ideological commitment. Under this interpretation, GOP partisans' divestment in policy-oriented legislative enterprises is driven exclusively by the "that which governs least" ethos of the conservative coalition. That these institutional changes were achieved by the *de jure* adoption of the Contract with America when Newt Gingrich became Speaker is the key piece of evidence to support this claim.

In a recent interview, a senior Democratic leadership staffer—a veteran House aide who has worked in member, committee, and party leadership offices since the 1990s—characterizes the rhetoric of conservative members elected in both the 1994 Contract with America class and the 2010 Tea Party members as the primary cause:

> I think [Republicans'] internal and external posture on [reducing legislative operations] was probably the same. "We need to cut ourselves if we're going to make sure we're cutting other things too." I really do think it was Tea Party-driven. I think it was the mood of, "We're spending too much. If we don't cut ourselves, we're no better than the Democrats." I think it was that simple. [...]
>
> It was very similar to '94, too...it was the same idea. "We're going to cut the Office of Technology Assessment, we're going to get rid of all these member service organizations," and so on. Instead, "You can do them on your own, but we're not going to pay for them."
>
> There were a lot of staffers that went through this, that were in the room when the decisions were being made. One person told me that they knew it was a bad idea, but they're doing it because of the [Tea Party] members...I don't know if you'll ever get any of them on the record, or even off the record, to say that. I mean, I think a lot of the long term, dedicated Republican staff look at the cuts that were made in '94 and '95 and then again in 2011 and say, "We're not doing ourselves any favors. We know that."

Similar rhetoric is unheard of among Democrats, and certainly cannot be attributed to them, since the Contract was a Republican initiative. According to this explanation, the sharp decline in legislative resources inexorably stems from conservative partisan dogma. Despite understanding the ramifications of cuts to legislative operations staff—or perhaps because of it—members of the Republican Party viewed the costs in legislate matters to be far below the electoral advantage gained from cultivating an image of fiscal frugality.

Hypotheses and Tests

While the popular narratives we document in our interviews support both the "partisan competition" and "ideological sabotage" explanations for the decline in legislative staff investments, we can use our detailed data on members' allocation of scarce human resources to more systematically adjudicate between the two explanations. On balance, we believe that partisan competition—and the changes in the relative values of staffers in different roles it induces—best explain why members of Congress have appeared to divest in legislative staff. Here, we articulate three sets of tests to adjudicate between these two theories for staff allocation and change, ultimately finding the most support for the partisan competition explanation.

Perhaps most importantly to the ideological sabotage theory, we should observe asymmetric divestment from legislative staffing between Republican and Democratic personal offices, as a consequence of ideological differences between the parties. All else equal, divestment should occur in the post-Contract era and chiefly among Republicans. Conversely, partisan competition suggests symmetric divestment, as members of both parties respond equally to the concentration of legislative power in leadership offices and the increasing representational demands of electoral competition.

This fundamental difference leads to several testable hypotheses about the timing and partisan differences in legislative staffing trends. Our first set of such hypotheses concern the *decline* in legislative staff resources over time, and potential partisan differences in this decline.

H1: All legislators entering Congress in the post-Contract with America period devote a smaller share of their MRAs to legislative staff than legislators that first entered Congress before the Contract.

H1$_A$: Among legislators entering Congress in the post-Contract with America period, Republicans devote a smaller share of their MRAs to legislative staff than Democrats.

We test H1 by interacting legislator party with 1) a dummy variable for whether the legislator was *first* elected pre/post Contract with America, and 2) a linear time trend for the year the legislator was *first* elected. We focus on when legislators first entered Congress to capture the era in which they were socialized into norms of legislating. Freshman members are offered training by party leadership, House Administration Committee staff, and the Congressional Research Service, including manuals with model budgets and staffing allocations. Consequently, we expect staff allocations to remain sticky and constrained by members' pre-existing conceptions about their legislative roles and responsibilities. As such, we expect divestment — either due to increased partisan competition or ideological sabotage — to be particularly pronounced among legislators that are first elected under the new institutional conditions arising after the Contract with America. In both cases, a significant *interaction* with legislator party would support H1 and the "ideological sabotage" theory—indicating that divestment patterns differ significantly between the two parties.

Next, we investigate whether the incentive to divest from legislative staff is driven by whether or not a member belongs to the majority party. Given power asymmetries between majority and minority members in the House, investing heavily in legislative endeavors may make little sense for members of the minority party. However, if the ideological sabotage hypothesis is correct, the 2006 Democratic wave election should reverse the divestment trend among Democrats. That is, now in a position to legislate a broad, progressive policy agenda—including what would become the Affordable Care Act—the asymmetric hypothesis implies post-2006 Democrats should re-invest in legislative staff. Conversely, the influence of partisan competition should not be sensitive to which party actually holds the majority at any given point in time.

H2: Minority party members should divest more extensively from legislative staff than do majority party members under both Republican and Democratic control.

If the ideological sabotage theory is correct, but clear partisan differences are obscured by majority control of the chamber, we should instead expect the following:

$H2_A$: When Democrats are the party of the majority, Democratic members should re-invest more in legislative staff than minority Republicans.

We test H2 and H2A by subsetting the panel according to the party of the majority and again estimating models to interact legislator party and year of first election. If divestment were in fact ideologically motivated — meaning that Democrats were only divesting while Republicans were in control because of low expected utility of legislative work when in the minority — we should expect to see Democrats reinvest in legislative staff once they are in control. In this case, the absence of a partisan difference in divestment trends when Democrats are in power would lend support to the partisan competition theory.

Our first several tests focus on legislative divestment based on when they are first elected to Congress. This operationalization captures how members are socialized into the Congress under particular institutional circumstances. However, we also expect that long-serving members will be somewhat responsive to the same contextual factors faced by newly elected members. We therefore use a within-member panel design to investigate how legislative investment patterns fluctuate over time and between the two parties. Here again, persistent legislative divestment over time would be consistent with the partisan competition theory, while partisan differences in divestment would be consistent with ideological sabotage:

H3: Members of Congress invest a smaller share of their MRAs in legislative staffing in later Congresses, regardless of party.

We test this hypothesis by leveraging within-member variation in staff investments, modeling the share of MRAs directed towards legislative staff with member-level fixed effects. The primary independent variable of interest is a linear time trend for the 103rd-113th Congresses in our panel. A significant negative coefficient on this parameter indicates that individual members have shifted their MRA away from legislative staff during our period of observation, supporting the partisan competition theory. In other words, legislative divestment over time is not simply a "replacement effect" brought about by large influxes of new members to Congress. Rather, even long-serving members would adapt over time the changing political context, just as in the New England Democrat example above.

By contrast, ideological sabotage implies that we should observe within-member declines primarily among Republican members of Congress. Thus:

$H3_A$: Republican members of Congress invest a smaller share of their MRAs in legislative staffing in later Congresses than Democratic members do.

In order to asses $H3_A$, we interact the Congress time from H3 with legislator party.

Finally, we examine the extent to which newly elected members affect overall institutional divestment. Here, we subset our panel to include only the first terms in office for each member first elected between 1992 and 2012. We use these cross-sectional data to assess whether *freshman* members elected before the Contract with America allocated more of their MRAs to legislative staff than did those elected afterward. Given the changes associated with the rise in partisan competition, we expect:

H4: Freshman members in later Congresses devote a smaller share of their MRAs to legislative staff than freshman members in earlier Congresses.

Conversely, according to the ideological sabotage logic, we should observe this effect primarily among Republican members of Congress:

H4$_A$: Among Freshman members Congress in the post-Contract with America period, Republicans devote a smaller share of their MRAs to legislative staff than Democrats.

We test H4 using both a linear trend for the year in which the freshman member was first elected, and using a binary variable for whether the freshman member was first elected before or after the Contract with America. We then test H4$_A$ by interacting both of these measures with a dummy variable for legislator party.

Data

As briefly introduced above, our Congressional staff allocation panel covers the 103rd-113th Congresses. The data exclude the 109th Congress for reasons beyond our control.[10] Data for the 103rd-106th Congresses were drawn directly from archived *Statements of Disbursement of the U.S. House*, while data from the 107th-113th Congresses is provided by disbursement records digitized by the DC-based firm LegiStorm.

[10]Due to well-established data quality issues in House disbursement records, there are no informative staff titles included in 2005 or 2006 House records. This made categorizing staffers in the 109th Congress impossible.

To categorize individual staffers' responsibilities, a large team of research assistants used individual staffer entries in quarterly *Congressional Yellow Book* directories to investigate staffers' primary work functions. The *Congressional Yellow Book* is a longstanding and trusted commercial directory used by Washington elites, such as lobbyists and congressional staff, since at least the 1970s. These volumes provide a wealth of information that are useful for rendering accurate labor responsibility classifications, particularly as they pertain to legislative responsibility. First, for each member, the books detail which staff serve as "key aides" in both Washington and district offices. Not only is the staffer's physical location highly useful (though not dispositive) for inferring staffer responsibilities, but staffers' presence in the volume itself provides context for the their responsibilities. In addition, the volumes detail the legislative issue portfolios for relevant staff. The accuracy of this information is crucial for the creators of the volume, because lobbyists and other major consumers use the books to strategically target staff within congressional offices. Finally, the volumes occasionally list more informative job titles compared to what is reported in disbursement records. This information is especially useful for classifying staff whose payroll titles are uninformative in payroll records alone.[11]

It is important to underscore here that these data seek to capture a staffer's *primary* responsibilities, and not her *exclusive* responsibilities, as staff undoubtedly take on multiple roles within their offices. However, we seek to classify staff according to the office function that best describes their role. In cases where no such function appears to predominate, we take steps to split a staffer's salary between competing responsibility categories. However, we do so only when original archive sources provide clear evidence of multiple office functions, or of job title changes or promotions within the office.[12]

The detailed responsibility information in these directories is incorporated systematically into our

[11]For example, some members like Rep. Dave Camp list all staff as "Staff Assistants."

[12]We argue that interns do not present a problem for our ultimate analysis. First, interns are rarely assigned to policy responsibilities. Second, on the rare occasions they might be assigned to legislative duties, they should be captured in the Yellow Book. Finally, during our period of observation most interns earn no compensation; the total intern compensation is just 0.4% of all staff compensation.

coding protocol, found in Appendix B.[13] The protocol ensures that our data provide not only precise information about office responsibilities, but also consistent information across offices and throughout the period of observation. Combining this material with staffers' job titles is markedly more accurate than relying solely on job titles for classification, as such titles are not consistently operationalized across offices, personnel, and historical time period. As we highlight in greater length in Appendix B pages 3 to 5, projects relying on fully automated coding procedures are likely to yield inaccurate and biased staff allocation measures for congressional offices. First, as Petersen (2011) notes in the largest survey of staff titles and responsibilities conducted to date, job titles are quite variable across member offices. Staff assistants in one office may serve as low-level office administrators, for example, while similarly titled staffers in other offices serve as the lead policy analysts.[14] In fact, even *within* an office, similar titles do not always indicate similar responsibilities. Our coding process captures this kind of nuance, particularly as it pertains to legislative staff, as the *Yellow Books* record legislative responsibilities for staffers *regardless of staffer title or time period.*

This kind of consistency is especially important when attempting to explain allocation patterns over time. We therefore believe that our coding scheme is both more externally valid since job titles may be inflated for idiosyncratic reasons and internally reliable over time. Were such errors randomly distributed across offices and Congresses, they may simply introduce measurement noise, rather than systematic bias. However, this is unlikely to be the case. In informal interviews conducted for this data collection effort, staff have insisted that titling conventions have changed appreciably over our period of observation. For example, the military-inspired title "Chief of Staff" did not grow in popularity until the 1970s, and did not reach its present usage level until well into the 2000s. Instead, members titled

[13]Supplemental Information, pages 6 and 7.

[14]This ambiguity is particularly crucial in coding Chief of Staff. In some offices, the Chief of Staff serves as lead legislative counsel, effectively assuming the role of Legislative Director. In others, the Chief of Staff focuses primary on maintaining good relationships in the district or serving as the primary gatekeeper for access to the member. Ensuring accurate coding of chiefs of staff is of first-order importance, as the salaries of these individuals commonly occupy a large portion of a member's total spending on staff.

top staffers as "Administrative Assistants." Under modern-day naming patterns in the House, such a title is far more commonly associated with low-pay administrative work than the political management responsibilities of a Chief of Staff. Idiosyncrasies like this example introduce at least two different kinds of systematic bias. First, when high-seniority members choose not to adopt new naming conventions, these differences in title conventions will introduce systematic cross-sectional bias between senior and junior members of Congress. Second, members who *do* adopt evolving job titling conventions introduce systematic temporal bias between earlier and more recent congressional offices. These biases are not the only potential biases introduced by automated procedures; but, given that we purport to uncover an over-time decline in member-level legislative investment, they underscore the importance of our careful, granular operationalization of staffer responsibilities. Here again, the *Yellow Books* are invaluable to the accuracy of our coding procedure, as they record staffers' legislative responsibilities over the period of observation. We maintain a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the information provided by the volumes, as this information is marketed commercially to well-connected policy advocates and other government relations personnel who rely upon its veracity.

Using these resources, staffers were initially sorted into one of five functional categories: *legislative staff*, *political management staff*, *office management staff*, *communications staff*, and *constituency service staff*. *Legislative Staff* are staff whose primary responsibilities are to advise the member of Congress on matters pertaining to policymaking and the legislative process. Responsibilities may include drafting new bills, deciphering legislative language, offering voting or co-sponsorship advice, providing parliamentary procedure and legislative negotiation expertise, or interacting with stakeholders on behalf of the member. *Political Management Staff* are staff whose primary responsibilities are to manage the member's relationships with other elites in Washington, such as leaders of political parties and issue caucuses, lobbyists, and major donors. *Political Management Staff* deal in clerical responsibilities, such as coordinating office space, materials, and information technology, bookkeeping, arranging member travel, and reserving meeting space for constituent visitors.

Communications Staff interact with the media on the member's behalf, including managing social media, writing press releases, scheduling television appearances, drafting speeches, and submitting op-eds to newspapers. Finally, *Constituency Service Staff* deal primarily in relations with the member's constituents. Most often located in district offices, their responsibilities include handling bureaucratic casework, answering constituents' phone calls and mail, and alerting the member to public events in the district.

While some conceptual overlap between these categories undoubtedly exists, they are designed to capture Mayhew's (1974) primary member activities for reelection (advertising, credit-claiming, and position-taking) and Fenno's (1973) member goals (reelection, influence in the chamber, and good public policy). Note that on occasion a staffer may have more than one title associated with their names. In those cases, after consultation with the *Congressional Yellowbooks*, these staffers' responsibilities are split evenly between two (or more) categories. Consequently, these data represent the most complete, detailed, and accurate account of individual staffer functions ever compiled.

We connect individually categorized staff with their salary disbursements to create aggregate, office-level measures of staff allocation over time. For each Representatives' office, we calculate the share of their MRA spent on each of the five staffing categories in each year.[15,16] The result of this aggregation is an unbalanced panel dataset of 1,090 members over nine Congresses, for a total of 4,256 observations, based on 236,000 quarterly individual staffer responsibility coding decisions. We treat salary allocations across work responsibilities as members' revealed preferences for organizational priorities. In the

[15]Because of missing data, spending for some years are estimated with projections based on quarterly disbursements for one, two, or three quarters.

[16]Additional information about the collection, cleaning and backwards projection of MRA totals is available in Appendix A, pages 1 and 2.

analyses to come, we use the percentage of a representative's MRA spent on salaries for staffers coded as having primarily legislative responsibilities as our main dependent variable.

Other Variables

To account for well-known institutional features and personal characteristics that may impact members' behavior, we include a variety of independent variables from the Volden and Wiseman (2014) Legislative Effectiveness Project. First, research on the "political life cycles" of members of Congress suggests that members' may emphasize the pursuit of policy goals later in their career as they feel safe in their seats and seek a legislative legacy (Fenno, 1978; Hibbing, 1991). To account for this we include *Seniority*—number of Congresses served at a given point in time—as an independent variable in our models. We also include the square of seniority to capture the decreasing marginal effect of seniority. Second, we include binary variables for serving as a *Committee Chair*, a *Subcommittee Chair*, or as a member of *Power Committee*, as these members may be especially well-situated to substitute their personal office legislative staff with committee resources (Fenno, 1973; Patterson, 1970; Salisbury and Shepsle, 1981*a*).

Third, we include the folded 1st-dimension of DW-NOMINATE to account for member *Extremism*, as Volden and Wiseman (2014) suggest that members farther from the chamber median are less legislatively effective, implying they may invest less in legislative staff. Fourth, because Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer (2013) suggest that female legislators engage in legislative activity differently than their male counterparts, we include a binary variable for a member's gender. This term allows for the possibility that these differences extend to members' investment patterns.[17] Finally, because members in more competitive districts may face differential electoral incentives that induce them to invest more in communications or constituent service over legislative staff, we include variables for *Vote Share* and its

[17]Due to the potential for collinearity between race and party in the House, we have excluded race variables in these models. However the results presented here are robust to the inclusion of indicator variables for Latinx and African-American ethnicities.

square. [18]

Results

We develop four relevant tests to discriminate between the ideological sabotage and partisan competition hypotheses. First, we examine whether pre- and post-Contract members from both parties, or only the Republican party, exhibit a reduction in legislative staff investment following the 1994 Republican takeover. Second, we investigate whether members elected more recently invest less in legislative staff, and whether this trend is unique to Republicans. Third, we examine whether Democrats reinvest in legislative capacity once they regain control of the House—or whether they continue the trend of divestment. After demonstrating that the partisan competition hypothesis appears to best explain the observed trends in the data, we show that freshmen elected more recently invest far less in legislative staff than freshmen in earlier Congresses, suggesting that Congress's perpetual campaign has attracted members who are more inclined to cede legislative endeavors to other actors in Congress. This is consistent with the theory that contemporary congressional context of insecure majorities and the centralization of legislating within leadership requires legislative staffers fewer high-value skills, which has induced members to divest from legislative staff. Finally, in a supplementary analysis in Appendix F, we investigate whether representational staffers (communications and constituent service staff) exhibit similar divestment patterns to legislative staff. We find that instead, members of both parties have increased their investments in representational staffers over time, which is again consistent with the symmetric partisan divestment story.[19]

[18] Electorally safe and ideologically extreme members may represent the same basic group of individuals, though standard tests for collinearity indicate that the variables are not unduly inflating variance. In fact, the coefficients point in the same directions in the Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer (2013) analysis of gender and legislative effectiveness.

[19] We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this additional test.

Legislative Investment and the Contract with America

In our first series of tests, we examine whether members elected after the Republican Contract with America takeover systematically invest less in legislative staff than members initially elected and professionally socialized to legislative productivity norms in earlier Congresses. According to the ideological sabotage hypothesis, members elected under Gingrich's Contract with America agenda were committed to cuts in legislative capacity. However, because these ideological commitments were held only by Republicans, election during the Newt Gingrich era should decrease legislative investment only among Republicans. Conversely, the partisan competition hypothesis suggests that both parties should exhibit declines legislative investment over time.

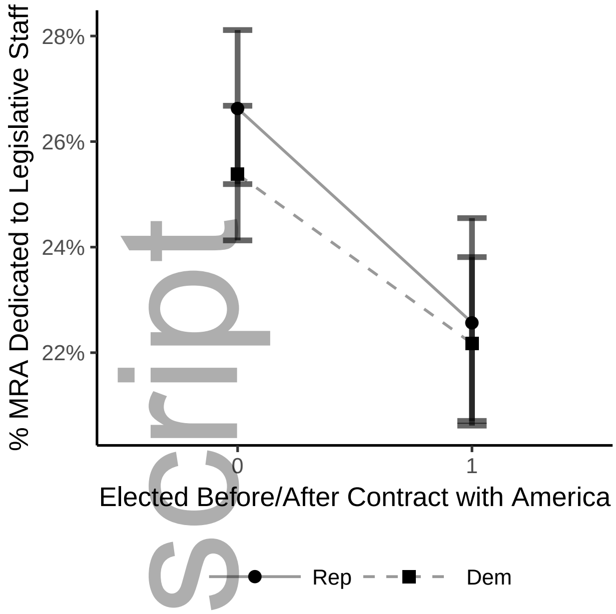
We test these competing predictions directly in Models 1 and 2 of Table 1. In these models, we regress a member's share of MRA allocated to legislative staff on a binary variable, indicating whether a member entered Congress before or after the Contract with America. To examine whether or not election post-Contract was particularly consequential for Republicans, we interact a partisan indicator (with Democrat = 1) with the post-Contract variable. If the asymmetric hypothesis is correct, we should observe a significant, positive coefficient on this variable (large enough to overcome negative main effects)—indicating that election post-Contract matters differentially for Republicans and Democrats. In both Models 1 and 2, as well as all remaining models presented hereafter, we employ beta regression estimated via MLE, as our outcome variable is a proportion that cannot take a negative value or a value greater than 1.

As Table 1 illustrates, election during the post-Contract era is negatively associated with member-level investment in legislative staff. Holding all other variables at their means or optimal values, estimates from Model 1 predict that the typical pre-Contract members spent 26 percent of their MRA on legislative staff, compared to the predicted 22.4 percent for post-Contract members. The difference of

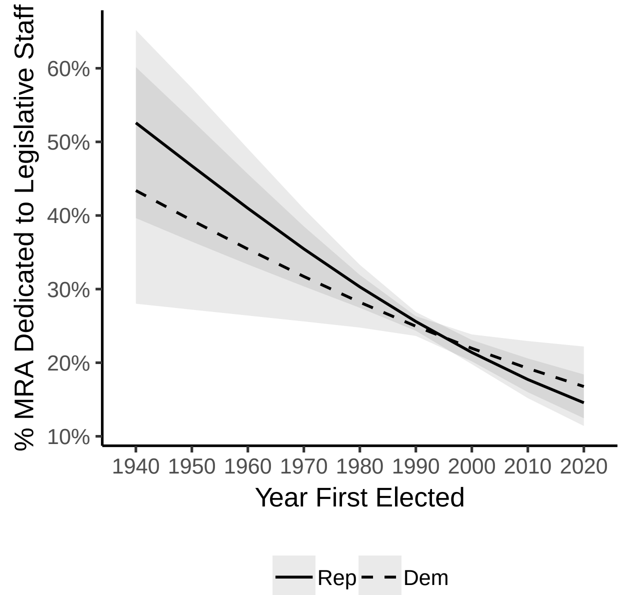
Table 1: ***Legislative Investment Before and After Contract with America***

	Percentage of MRA Spent on Legislative Staff			
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Elected Post-Contract	-0.197^{**}	-0.221^{**}		
	(0.048)	(0.042)		
Year of Election			-0.019^{**}	-0.023^{**}
			(0.005)	(0.004)
Democrat	-0.048	-0.068^{*}	-0.028	-13.848^{**}
	(0.033)	(0.030)	(0.037)	(5.669)
Post Contract ∗ Democrat		0.044		
		(0.055)		
Year of Election ∗ Democrat				0.007^{**}
				(0.003)
Seniority	0.025^{*}	0.025^{*}	0.012	0.009
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Seniority^2	-0.002^{*}	-0.002^{*}	-0.003^{**}	-0.002^{**}
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Committee Chair	-0.192^{**}	-0.196^{**}	-0.218^{**}	-0.229^{**}
	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.068)	(0.066)
Subcommittee Chair	-0.044^{+}	-0.046	-0.038	-0.035
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.037)	(0.031)
Power Committee	-0.037	-0.036	-0.047	-0.043
	(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.031)
Extremism	-0.273^{**}	-0.255^{**}	-0.133^{*}	-0.057
	(0.068)	(0.072)	(0.055)	(0.062)
Female	-0.047^{*}	-0.048^{*}	-0.026	-0.036^{*}
	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.018)
Vote Share	0.028^{**}	0.028^{**}	0.029^{**}	0.028^{**}
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Vote Share^2	-0.0002^{**}	-0.0002^{**}	-0.0002^{**}	-0.0002^{**}
	(0.00004)	(0.00004)	(0.00004)	(0.00004)
Constant	-1.930^{**}	-1.914^{**}	36.504^{**}	44.753^{**}
	(0.300)	(0.292)	(10.103)	(9.503)
Observations	4,256	4,256	4,256	4,256
R^2	0.066	0.066	0.094	0.098
Log Likelihood	4,312.121	4,313.111	4,389.562	4,399.188

$^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{+}p < .1$



(a) Binary Independent Variable: Model 2



(b) Continuous Independent Variable: Model 4

Fig 3: Interactions between Member Party and Recent Election

3.6 percent amounts to a reduction in spending of $41,669[20]—roughly equivalent to the salary of a one additional full-time legislative assistant.

These differences notwithstanding, Republicans do not appear to be noteworthy in their divestment in legislative staff. Figure 3 depicts the interaction between post-Contract status and partisanship. As the figure clearly illustrates, there are no significant differences between Republicans and Democrats with respect to the relationship between post-Contract status and legislative investment.

None of these findings are fully consistent with the asymmetric sabotage narrative, though relying on an interaction between two binary variables is a difficult test to interpret. Thus, we introduce an alternative test in Models 3 and 4 that replace the post-Contract indicator with a nominal variable representing a member's first year of election to Congress. Unlike the binary indicator, this variable allows for the possibility that members elected just before the 1994 wave may not have been substantially different from those elected immediately after it. Moreover, it allows us to interrogate whether the

[20]Using the average MRA ($1,157,460) in the dataset

over-time relationship between the election of new members and legislative investment differs between Republicans and Democrats.

As with Models 1 and 2, Models 3 and 4 exhibit a strong, negative relationship between recent election and legislative investment: each two-year election cycle is associated with a 0.7 percent decrease ($8,102, predicted at average MRA) in legislative staff spending compared to the previous year.[21] Unlike in Models 1 and 2, however, Models 3 and 4 initially appear to provide some modest support for the ideological sabotage hypothesis: while *Year of Election* is negatively and significantly associated with legislative investment, this association is less strongly negative among Democrats. Nevertheless, this difference is substantively small. In fact, as predicted values in Figure 3 indicate, *Year of Election* remains negative for both and differences between Republicans and Democrats are substantively small. In these models, Democrats may be slightly less committed to divestment than Republicans, but hardly enough to substantiate claims of asymmetric sabotage.

In Appendix F in the supplemental material we re-estimate models 1-4 on the share of their MRAs that Members of Congress allocate to to communications staff and constituent service staff, respectively. Where we see bipartisan secular declines in legislative staff during the post-Contract era, we see *growth* in these two staffing categories. The more recently members are elected, the higher a share of their MRAs they allocate to staffers with direct representational duties. These results, detailed in the supplemental materials, are consistent with the party competition theory.

Legislative Investment and Majority Control

Next, we leverage Democrats' return to power in 2006 as a means for discriminating between the asymmetric sabotage and party competition hypotheses. One possible objection to the above analysis is that Democratic members between 1995 and 2006 may simply have divested due to their minority status.

[21]Note that, while the coefficient on *Democrat* appears inordinately large in Model 4 (and in Models 8 and 10, below) this is only due to the fact that *Democrat* is interacted with a year (e.g. 2002), which is much larger than the 0,1 dummy variable.

Given power asymmetries between majority and minority members in the House, investing heavily in legislative endeavors may make little sense for members of the minority party. However, if the ideological sabotage hypothesis is correct, the 2006 Democratic wave election should reverse the divestment trend among Democrats. Now in a position to legislate a broad policy agenda, the asymmetric hypothesis implies post-2006 Democrats should re-invest in legislative staff.

In Table 2, Models 5 and 6 fit similar specifications on data drawn only from Congresses for which Republicans controlled the House majority, while Models 7 and 8 focus on those with Democratic majority. Sub-setting the data in this fashion allows us to assess whether members differentially invest in legislative staff based on their party, holding majority control constant. Alternatively, if Democrats did in fact reinvest in legislative staff after regaining the majority, then Republican members should now remain the only members who continue to divest in legislative staff.

When Republicans control Congress, *Year of Election* shows similar relationships as it does in the full regressions. As shown in Figure 4, when Democrats control Congress, *Year of Election* still negatively and significantly predicts legislative investment. More importantly, the association between *Year of Election* and legislative investment is not significantly different between Democrats and Republicans. Again, the evidence points toward the partisan competition hypothesis, as each new cohort from both parties continue the divestment trends initiated by their post-Contract colleagues.

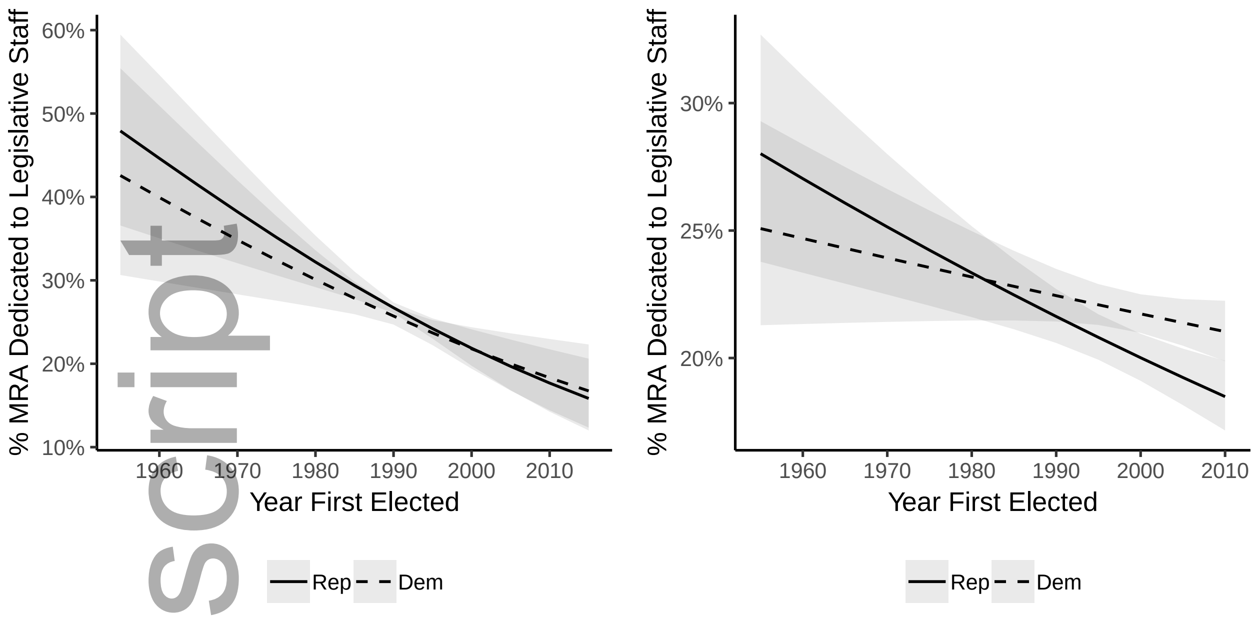
We introduce member-level fixed effects in Models 9 and 10 to illustrate this point, leveraging only within-member variance. In place of *Year of Election*, we include a simple *Congress* time trend. Doing so tests whether majority-party Democrats invested in legislative endeavors more than majority-party Republicans and allows the model to hold constant district-level factors that may influence a member's decision to invest in legislative staff. Previous research has suggested that different types of constituencies generate demand for different types of representation (Butler, 2014; Foster-Molina,

Table 2: Majority Control and Legislative Investment

	Percentage of MRA Spent on Legislative Staff					
	Model 5	**Model 6**	**Model 7**	**Model 8**	**Model 9**	**Model 10**
Year of Election	-0.024^{***}	-0.026^{***}	-0.007^{***}	-0.010^{***}		
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.001)	(0.002)		
Democrat	-0.036	-9.412	0.091^{***}	-11.232^{***}	-0.003	-0.140
	(0.049)	(5.887)	(0.028)	(3.528)	(0.004)	(0.091)
*Year of Election*Democrat*		0.005		0.006^{***}		
		(0.003)		(0.002)		
Congress Trend					-0.007^{***}	-0.008^{***}
					(0.0004)	(0.001)
*Congress*Democrat*						0.001
						(0.001)
Seniority	0.002	0.002			0.007^{***}	0.007^{***}
	(0.009)	(0.013)			(0.001)	(0.001)
Seniority^2	-0.002^{***}	-0.002^{***}			-0.0003^{***}	-0.0003^{***}
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)			(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Committee Chair	-0.169^{***}	-0.205^{***}	-0.160^{***}	-0.116^{***}	-0.027^{***}	-0.026^{***}
	(0.029)	(0.046)	(0.010)	(0.002)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Subcommittee Chair	-0.010	-0.024	-0.026	-0.008	-0.004	-0.004
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.020)	(0.025)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Power Committee	-0.007	-0.007	-0.025^{*}	-0.023	-0.003	-0.003
	(0.009)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Extremity	-0.152^{**}	-0.105^{*}	0.026	0.057^{***}	-0.024^{**}	-0.017
	(0.067)	(0.059)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Female	-0.048^{**}	-0.055^{***}	0.024	0.022	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Vote Share	0.018^{***}	0.017^{***}	0.034^{***}	0.033^{***}	0.004^{***}	0.004^{***}
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Vote Share^2	-0.0001^{***}	-0.0001^{***}	-0.0002^{***}	-0.0002^{***}	-0.00003^{***}	-0.00003^{***}
	(0.00003)	(0.00002)	(0.00001)	(0.00001)	(0.00001)	(0.00001)
Constant	46.089^{***}	51.169^{***}	10.810^{***}	17.017^{***}	0.863^{***}	0.944^{***}
	(11.039)	(13.362)	(2.007)	(4.259)	(0.057)	(0.078)
Member-Level FE?	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
Majority Restriction	R	R	D	D	All	All
Observations	2,974	2,974	861	861	4,256	4,256
R^2	0.128	0.129	0.049	0.052	0.554	0.554
Log Likelihood	3,046.756	3,049.511	1,134.396	1,135.698		

$^{+}p<0.1$; $^{*}p<0.05$; $^{**}p<0.01$

Note: Models 7 and 8 drop *Seniority* and *Seniority*^{2}, due to collinearity problems with *Year of Election*; these models also do not feature clustered standard errors, due to estimation issues



(a) Republican Controlled Congresses

(b) Democratic Controlled Congresses

Fig 4: Legislative Investment by Congress for Republicans and Democrats

2018; Harden, 2013), and inclusion of member-level fixed effects allows the model to hold such factors relatively constant (with the exception of redistricting years).

Figure 5 shows that the time trend is strongly negative, and is not statistically distinguishable between Republicans and Democrats, even when such effects are included. That is, even if we hold the individual member—and, to some extent, district—constant, investment in legislative staff decreased over time, regardless of party. This finding is consistent with the symmetrical partisan competition view. Additionally, this finding is consistent with H_3, which states that even long-serving members should adapt their investment patterns to the changing political context. Indeed, as the negative coefficient on the time trend indicates, members are significantly divesting in legislative staff over time—even when we leverage only within member variance.

These analyses reveal that divestment in legislative operations are not unique to Republicans. The implication is that Speaker Gingrich was most likely not as instrumental for broader divestment trends in Congress as some assume. Instead, we infer that Gingrich coincidentally came to power at a time

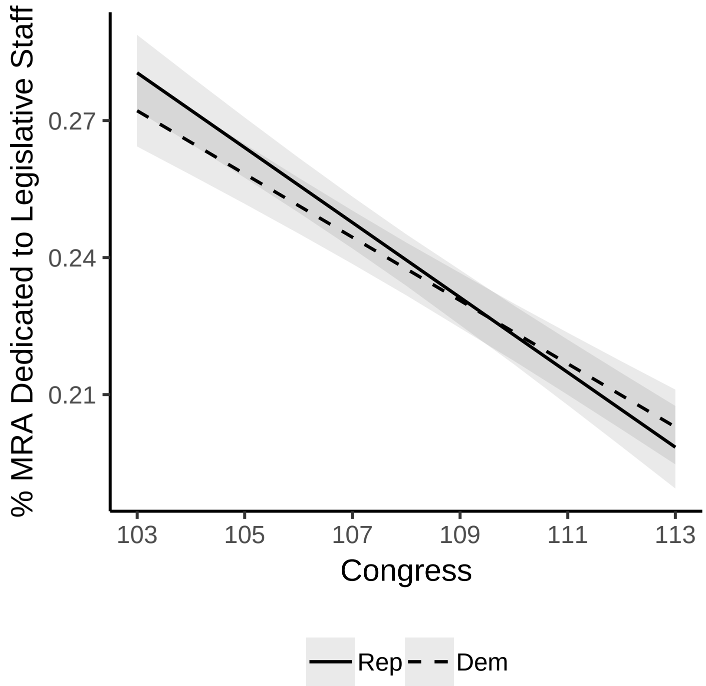


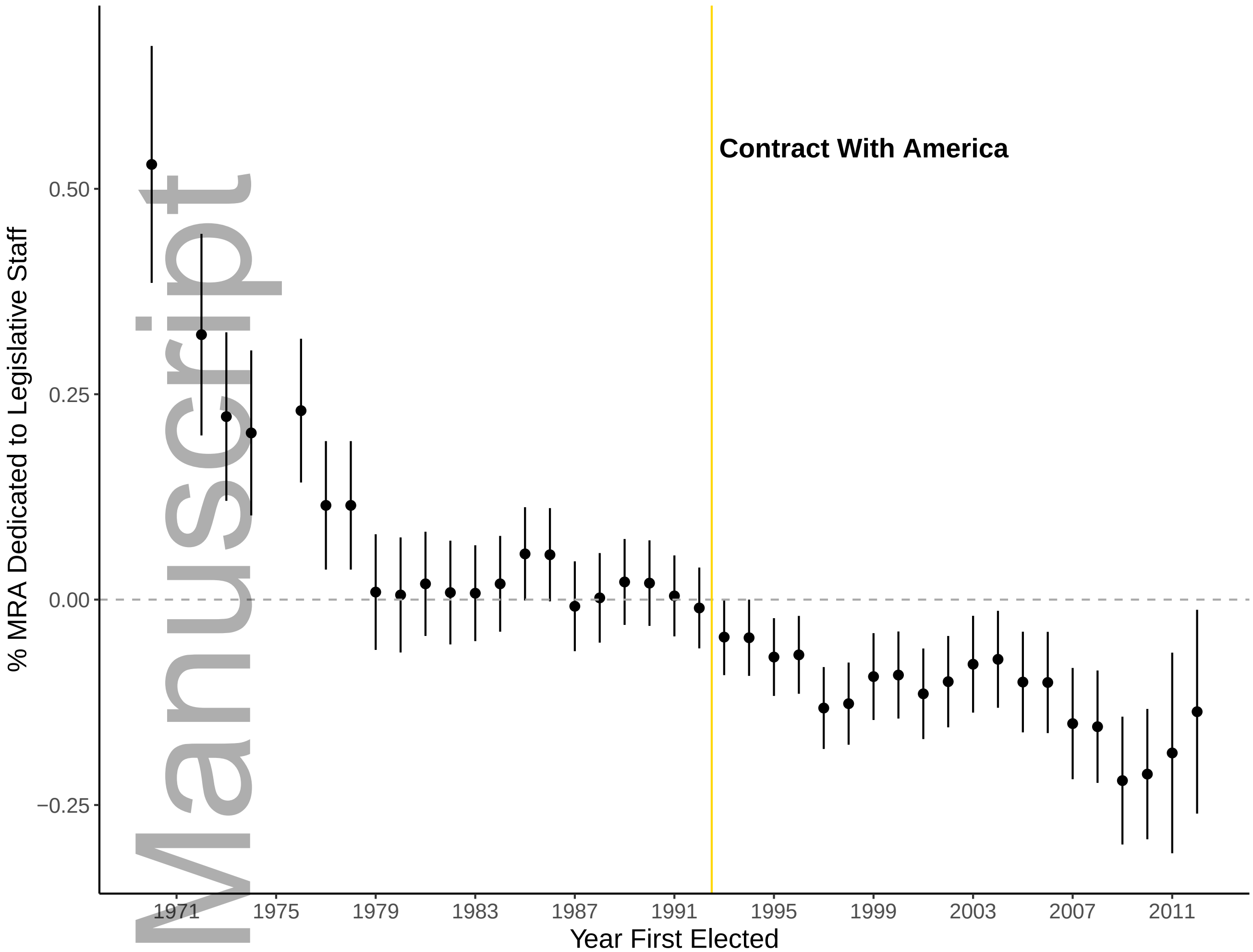
Fig 5: Member-level fixed effects

when broader electoral conditions empowered party leaders, making individual legislative enterprises less important.

Even still, it remains possible that the Republican takeover in 1995 accelerated the divestment process. Moreover, we recognize these results may imply that Gingrich indeed aggressively encouraged divestment in legislative enterprises, as suggested by his long-time ally that we interviewed. In Figure 6, we report the results of a series of regressions that use the basic specification found in Model 1, as well as Congress-level fixed effects, to more accurately observe replacement effects as new members are elected to the House over time. Across the models, we replace the binary pre-/post-Contract variable with a pre-/post-binary variable for each year of the first election listed in the x-axis. The coefficient and its corresponding 95% confidence interval are reported in the figure, with a reference line for 1994.

As the figure demonstrates, not all cutoff variables take on a negative value. In fact, it is not until coefficients reported for members elected in 1992 that the cutoff variable takes on a negative, albeit

Fig 6: Estimated Coefficients for Electoral Cutoff Variables



insignificant, sign. The following two years, 1993[22] and 1994, however, are not only negatively associated with legislative investment but approach statistical significance ($p \approx 0.0503$ and 0.0501). That is, legislators elected during and after Gingrich's speakership do appear to have differed from members first elected to earlier Congresses in terms of legislative investment. Coincidence is not causation, of course. The 1995 Republican takeover merely coincides with the beginning of a long-term, bipartisan divestment trend.

[22]There were five special elections in 1993.

Legislative Investment Among Freshman Legislators

Despite the consistency of our findings, the mechanics of this divestment remain unclear: do these findings primarily represent changes in resource allocation preferences among incumbent members of Congress, or are do they result from the election of a new kind of lawmaker who has never experienced a Congress primarily oriented toward making laws? In other words, have a new crop of electoral "showhorses" replaced dyed-in-the-wool legislative "workhorses" (Hall, 1996)? We test a series of models on freshman members of Congress alone to explore whether institution-wide divestment in legislative staffing is driven by newly elected members, shown in Table 3.

Models 11 and 13 mirror Models 1 and 3, testing the direct association between the year in which members were first elected and their investment in legislative staff. Model 11 tests this association using a dichotomous variable for whether freshmen were first elected after the Contract with America, while Model 13 uses a nominal variable to account for a linear trend in the year of first election. Estimates from Model 11 indicate that freshman members entering Congress after the Contract with America spent, on average, 5.92 percentage points less of their MRAs on legislative staff than freshman from the 103rd Congress.[23] At the mean MRA value during our period of observation ($1,157,460.00), the substantive difference in allocation of $68,603.35 is enough money for one senior legislative staffer or two junior staffers. Model 13 indicates that for each additional 2-year election cycle after that freshman is elected is associated with 1.07 percentage points less of their MRAs on legislative staff spending, which is $12,426 at the average MRA level.

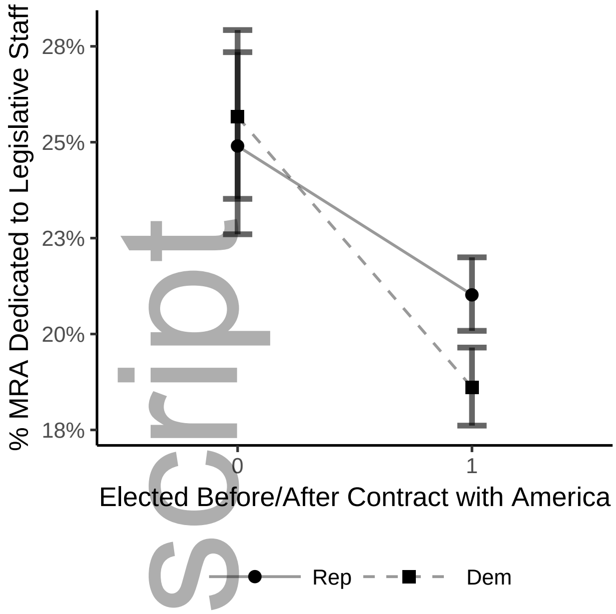
Models 12 and 14 examine whether the main effects of post-Contract entrance and year of first election differ, depending on the party of the freshman member. Results from both models are consistent with the results from Models 11 and 13. However, the interactions with party are not significant, as

[23] The model produces estimates of 27.1 percent vs. 21.2 percent spent on legislative staffers with all other variables held at the medians.

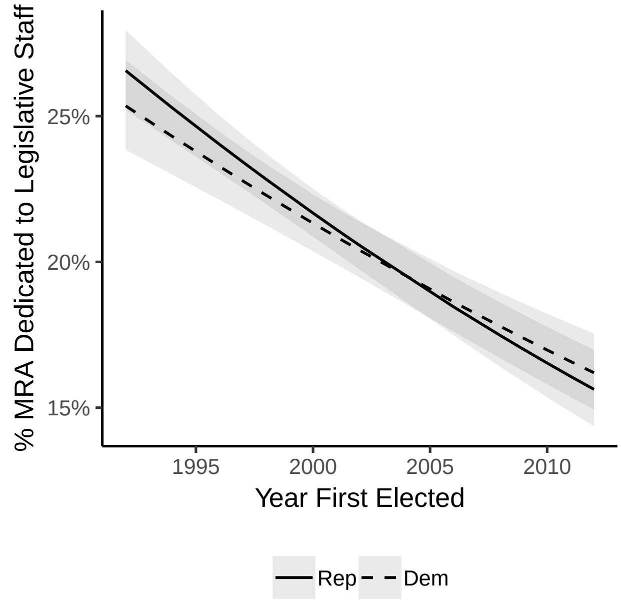
Table 3: ***Legislative Investment Among Freshmen, Before and After Contract with America***

	Percentage of MRA Spent on Legislative Staff				
	Model 11	**Model 12**	**Model 13**	**Model 14**	**Model 15**
Elected Post-Contract	-0.325^{**}	-0.220^{**}			
	(0.048)	(0.072)			
Year of Election			-0.031^{**}	-0.033^{**}	
			(0.002)	(0.004)	
Democrat	-0.106^{*}	0.041	-0.027	-10.607	0.007
	(0.045)	(0.087)	(0.042)	(10.028)	(0.043)
Post Contract ∗ Democrat		-0.193^{*}			
		(0.098)			
Year of Election ∗ Democrat				0.005	
				(0.005)	
Committee Chair	-0.184	-0.205	-0.369	-0.375	-0.387
	(0.489)	(0.488)	(0.458)	(0.458)	(0.443)
Subcommittee Chair	-0.108	-0.113	0.021	0.028	0.053
	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.077)
Power Committee	-0.057	-0.064	-0.081	-0.082	-0.076
	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.072)
Extremism	-0.426^{**}	-0.484^{**}	-0.160	-0.110	-0.135
	(0.108)	(0.111)	(0.104)	(0.115)	(0.102)
Female	-0.083^{+}	-0.088^{+}	-0.062	-0.064	-0.051
	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.043)
Vote Share	-0.003	-0.004	-0.00005	-0.001	0.001
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Vote Share^2	0.00004	0.0001	0.00002	0.00002	0.00001
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
104th Congress					0.049
					(0.058)
105th Congress					-0.088
					(0.061)
106th Congress					-0.651^{**}
					(0.079)
107th Congress					-0.149^{*}
					(0.074)
108th Congress					-0.201^{**}
					(0.068)
110th Congress					-0.423^{**}
					(0.072)
111th Congress					-0.466^{**}
					(0.065)
112th Congress					-0.593^{**}
					(0.065)
113th Congress					-0.597^{**}
					(0.063)
Constant	-0.775	-0.783	60.340^{**}	65.745^{**}	-1.080^{*}
	(0.498)	(0.497)	(4.798)	(7.044)	(0.453)
N	721	721	721	721	721
R-squared	0.085	0.089	0.196	0.197	0.251
Log Likelihood	834.834	836.777	888.716	889.270	920.058

$^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{+}p < .1$



(a) Binary Independent Variable: Model 12



(b) Continuous Independent Variable: Model 14

Fig 7: Interactions between Member Party and Recent Election among freshman members

Figure 7 shows. The significant and substantively large negative relationship between when freshman members are elected and the share of MRAs spent on legislative staff, coupled with the insignificant interaction with party, again lend support for the symmetrical party competition hypothesis. The robustness of these relationships is particularly notable given that freshmen legislators generally have not fully settled on a specific ”home style” or approach to lawmaking. For example, given that most freshmen worry about electoral vulnerability following their first term in office, vote share is not associated with legislative investment as it was in Tables 1 and 2. In spite of this behavioral ”noise,” recently elected freshmen clearly have invested less in legislative endeavors than have previous freshmen.

We estimate one final model on freshman members using the Congress fixed effects in Model 15. If the ideological sabotage hypothesis is correct, we should observe the Democratic Party reversing the trend when they regain the House majority in the 2006 wave election. If true, then incoming freshman members in the 110th Congress should have invested significantly more in legislative staff than incoming members in previous Congresses. This is evidently not the case. The Congress effects shown in

Table 3 show negative and significant differences between the 103rd Congress and all Congresses after the 105th. Freshman entering the 110th and 111th Congresses led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi are not meaningfully different from those that came before or after.

Discussion

Our assessment of legislative enterprises in the era of the perpetual campaign has yielded new insights for both political scientists and political reformers. The evidence of a post-Contract with America decline in members' legislative capacity sheds light on a troubling and unappreciated institutional redesign in Congress in the last quarter century, wherein members have individually divested in legislative capacity in response to a centralized battle for majority control of Congress. We suggest that the centralization of legislative work within leadership offices has reduced members' incentives to invest in their own legislative operations. Instead, they hire legislative staffers with more generalizable skills. Doing so avoids paying premiums to retain more expert and domain-specialized staff. What has followed is widespread member level re-allocation of resources away from legislative staff, and towards staff that serve representation goals.[24] This decline implies that the legislators' effectiveness also suffers, as corroborated by Crosson et al. (2020).

Nevertheless, the results suggest that simply increasing member budgets and adding more bodies to congressional offices will not address the broader trend of legislative divestment. Instead, it is likely to exacerbate it, since members may shift resources towards communications and constituent service staff. Members continued to divest in legislative staff during both periods of MRA increases and Tea Party-driven budget cuts. Moreover, members more recently elected to Congress exhibit far less commitment to legislative operations than their predecessors, suggesting that such members face broad institutional incentives that are significantly different from previous eras. It may also be that

[24] See supplemental analysis in Appendix F.

such legislators themselves are simply less committed to legislating, which generates a feedback loop of legislative divestment. Individual members are unlikely to employ and pay to retain highly skilled, policy-oriented staffers that may be in greater demand in the Senate or on K Street unless the institution provides opportunities for legislative entrepreneurship (Wawro, 2001). As long as actual legislating remains so centralized, there seems little reason to pay for seasoned legislative experts when an ambitious, and inexpensive, recent college graduate will suffice.

The general patterns we uncover here are substantiated in an interview with a Legislative Director for a Democrat, who serves as a senior staffer responsible for the office's legislative matters and manages three junior colleagues. The staffer observed that the decline in legislative resources we document here is associated with increased turnover and decreased policy experience in the House:

> The other piece is no one really knows how to legislate anymore. As someone who's been around a little while...there's not really the expertise, even among committee staff that there was a couple years ago because we're not doing it [legislating]...I was talking to a [committee legislative staff friend] last year. She was telling me that she had to bring all of [the legislative assistants working for members on] the subcommittee in to teach them how to do a markup because not one of the [legislative assistants] of this subcommittee had ever staffed their boss in a markup before. Ever.
>
> [...]
>
> We've got a great, smart team ... but two of my legislative assistants are 23 and 24...You need a little bit more experience in a place like this. [Congress] is always gonna be a young place, it's always gonna attract young people that are ambitious. But it's gone to an extreme...You can tell that people haven't gone through this before sometimes. Sometimes you can use that to your advantage, sometimes it's frustrating. But that's a real issue...It's hard when there aren't people that have been through quite a few markups, or been through a couple reauthorizations of a major bill.

These observations about the House are further substantiated in direct examinations of MRA expenditures on legislative staff and an office staff's experience. As summarized in Appendix E, member investments in legislative staff do help a member to retain a more experienced staff overall. However, as such investments have gone down, so too has experience among staffers.

For most observers of Congress, the most recognizable, systematic change in Congress over the past two to three decades has been the rise of ideological polarization between the parties. Polarization is undoubtedly crucial to our understanding of modern American politics: the hyper-partisanship and legislative gridlock associated with ideological polarization impedes Congress's ability to make laws and oversee the Executive, especially when key democratic principles and institutional norms may be threatened. But our evidence suggests that ideology and polarization are not the only forces systematically deteriorating members' productivity and legislative effectiveness. In their prosecution of the perpetual campaign to control Congress, members have incrementally abdicated their capacity to legislate. Indeed, congressional leadership of both parties have disincentivised their members from investing in the requisite staff to actively participate in the legislative process.

If democratic theory suggests partisan differentiation and competition improves citizens' ability to hold political elites accountable, then the bipartisan decline in members' capacity to legislate is worrisome. A legislature supported by young, inexperienced aides—however enthusiastic and capable—is likely to fail. The consequence is true, regardless if one's objective is to move policy in a conservative or a liberal direction. If both parties are to be blamed equally, and both are less able today to carry out the agendas that define their brands, citizens have little more than carefully tailored campaign messages to retroactively assess the parties on Election Day.

There is room for optimism, though. If the decline in members' capacity was created by both parties, and impacts their policy goals equally, then it is conceivable to convince backbenchers in both parties that improving their own legislative operations will benefit them. Moreover, doing so may counteract members in both parties feeling frustrated by party leaders who appear to dictate the legislative process. The MRA, as it currently functions, gives members a great deal of leeway to allocate resources as they see fit. Rather than waiting for the rare window of opportunity to reform party and chamber institutional rules to counteract party leaders' and committee chairs' extraordinary agenda setting powers, members—especially those in relatively safe electoral positions—can rebuild their legislative enterprises to enhance their own legislative effectiveness and institutional influence. They need not wait for permission from the Speaker or Minority Leader of either party to do so. Of course, doing so may run counter to the political context that caused the decline to begin with, so we are not under the false illusion that incrementally expanding personal office legislative enterprises in the House will solve Congress's ills. But perhaps members who have strong legislative enterprises will make leaders more responsive to the policy interests among the rank-and-file.

We believe that political reformers from across the ideological spectrum should welcome our discovery that the House's failure to fully resource its legislative operations is a bipartisan dilemma. The common assumption that the Contract with America ushered in the "absolute frigging [sic] disaster" of a legislative capacity crisis seemingly absolves Democrats of blame. Likewise, Republicans assume they can be credited with some good government accomplishment. Neither of these assumptions are true. Since Democrats and Republicans are equally to blame—and equally harmed—for the decline in member-level legislative capacity, then they ought to be equally responsible for resolving it.

Additionally, we recognize that our observation is limited to the House, and concentrated exclusively on member's personal offices. We have offered limited evidence here that the legislative slack has most likely not been picked up by committees. Further, there seems to be little evidence to suggest that members have outsourced these responsibilities to legislative support agencies or legislative service organizations, which have also witnessed declining budgets. Admittedly, our evidence cannot speak at all to whether Senators or Senate committees have made the same kinds of budget allocation decisions as their House counterparts. Future work ought to expand the scope of the analysis to include these additional institutions alongside House member offices. Additionally, future work that adopts a more granular assessment of legislative resources—as we do here—across a sufficiently long time to observe more than a handful of recent Congresses will offer valuable insight into legislative enterprises.

Conclusion

For scholars seeking to understand how Congress changes over time, this study offers an innovative way to comprehend the causes and consequences of legislators' revealed preferences over their behavioral priorities. Scholarly debates over how ideology and party affect legislative deliberation and political representation have tended to focus on roll call votes, which, although highly important, are necessarily constrained by negative and positive agenda powers. We show here that legislative scholars can use MRAs expenditures to observe strategic investments that are common among all members, and are therefore not so constrained by party leaders' agendas. Just as the increasing ideological homogeneity within parties and growing gap between the parties has deeply influenced Congress's policymaking activities and outputs, we believe that the sometimes subtle and incremental changes to Congress's institutional make-up uncovered here have generated a legislature with important differences in power dynamics and capacity for policymaking, compared to Congresses of previous decades.

In sum, although the House may never have taken a vote to reduce its legislative operations—and has for the most part routinely appropriated *more* funding to the Legislative Branch during our period of observation—the reductions nevertheless occurred, particularly among incoming members of both parties. Our findings indicate that, despite the rhetoric from conservatives, the Contract did not unilaterally sabotage Congress's ability to function as a lean, efficient lawmaking institution. Rather, intense party competition has encouraged members themselves to invest less in their own legislative endeavors. In response to a new political environment consisting of nationalized elections, highly centralized policymaking processes, and increased competition for majority status, lawmakers have incrementally dispensed with legislative staff. At the same time, members have delegated more power to House party leaders, who responded by increasing their own staffing resources over 200 percent (Lee, 2016, Figure 5-2, 114).[25]

These related developments—centralized party leader management of the legislative process and reduced legislative operations by members of Congress in both parties—have stunted the ability of individual policy entrepreneurs to affect policy outputs within the chamber. As a result, we posit that highly skilled, long-serving legislative staffers are largely over-qualified for the more routine policy-monitoring work that occurs in members' personal offices. Members have chosen instead to maintain smaller policy shops with higher turnover, and to allocate more resources towards representational staff or even non-staff expenditures. These changes equip members to operate within the legislature to which they have been socialized—a legislature that values enterprises that engage in partisan warfare more than those that engage in effective lawmaking and meaningful oversight. Without some critical institutional intervention to disrupt this borader trend, future generations of legislators and their staff will continue to preside over a Congress designed to win tomorrow's election, and not necessarily one designed to govern today.

[25]Reproduced with the author's permission in Appendix D, page 10 of the Supplemental Information.

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