


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Do State Legislative Staffer Networks Influence Roll-call Voting? Evidence from Shared Personal Staffers in Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico

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## Abstract

Legislative staffers are an invisible force in legislative bodies that provide every imaginable service. It is doubtful that modern legislatures could operate without them. Prior studies of Congressional staffers have found evidence that staffers not only aid but also exert an independent influence on the policy-making process through network effects. In this article, I test if this extends to state legislative staffers using novel data from shared staffer networks in Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico. I argue that, compared to their Congressional counterparts, state legislative staffers are more akin to ‘clerks’ than ‘political professionals’ and this limits their ability to independently influence policymaking at the state level.

**Keywords:** legislative staffers; state politics; political networks; legislative professionalism; state legislatures

## Introduction

Legislative staffers—the invisible force that run legislatures (Fox and Hammond 1977)—have traditionally been modeled as having minimal agency loss (DeGregorio 1995), but recent work finds that staffers may independently influence legislative behavior like roll-call voting through their networks (Burgat 2020; Hertel-Fernandez, Mildenerger, and Stokes 2018; McCrain 2018; Montgomery and Nyhan 2017). It is important to test the effect of staffer networks on legislative roll-call voting because it is problematic for representative government if unelected staffers have an independent influence on lawmaking.

In this article, I test the effect of personal staffer networks on state legislators’ roll-call behavior. I identify staffer networks by leveraging the fact that personal staffers in Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico are shared between multiple legislators. I posit that shared personal staffer networks may coordinate action between state legislators. Personal staff may influence legislative behavior by serving as network bridges, links between nodes (i.e., legislators) that would otherwise have minimal or no connection

(Burt 2002). Staffers benefit from being, and have an incentive to be, network bridges in the short term because it increases their chances of being assigned more important policy portfolios (Burgat 2020) and in the long term because it increases their potential salary as future lobbyists (McCrain 2018; Shepherd and You 2020).

I test for the effect of shared personal staffer networks on state legislators' roll-call voting congruency by using original data from the Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico House of Representatives. I do not find consistent evidence that legislators with shared staff are more likely to vote congruently than legislators who do not share staff. To the contrary, in some specifications I find evidence that shared personal staffers are associated with less congruence in roll-call voting than would be expected if legislators did not share staff. This is an important finding because prior work has found evidence that staffer networks coordinate behavior in the United States House of Representatives (Montgomery and Nyhan 2017) and European Parliament (Ringe, Victor, and Gross 2013), but I failed to find similar evidence in state legislatures. My results suggest that the effect of staffer networks on legislative behavior is conditional on institutional design. I argue the key difference is staffer professionalism and utilization, but future work should seek to further explore what institutional design elements limit the influence of state legislative staffers.

This article contributes to a growing literature on the role of staffers on legislative behavior at the national (Burgat 2020; Dittmar 2021; Brandsma and Otjes 2024; Jones 2017; Hertel-Fernandez *et al.* 2018; McCrain 2018; Montgomery and Nyhan 2017; Moens 2022, 2024; Ritchie and You 2021) and subnational levels (Gray and Lowery 2000; Landgrave and Weller 2020; Weissert and Weissert 2000).

### Staffers as network bridges

Staffers can coordinate legislative action by serving as network bridges, connections between otherwise disconnected nodes in a network, and between legislators (Burgat 2020; Montgomery and Nyhan 2017; Ringe *et al.* 2013). To serve as network bridges, I hypothesize staffers must (a) have specialized knowledge gained through intensive work, (b) have a large network by working extensively in different roles, and (c) be trusted by their principals.

Staffers have a myriad of different roles because legislators delegate responsibilities to staffers due to time constraints (DeGregorio 1995). Legislatures could not operate without the 'invisible' labor of staffers (Fox and Hammond 1977). Staffers control access to the legislator by interest groups (Furnas *et al.* 2023; Jenkins, Landgrave, and Martinez 2020; Kalla and Broockman 2016) and by constituents (Hertel-Fernandez *et al.* 2018). Staffers give advice on policymaking (Gray and Lowery 2000; Pertschuk 2017; Weissert and Weissert 2000) and play a major role in constituency service (Frantzich 1985; Landgrave and Weller 2020). These extensive roles allow staffers to build large networks with other legislative actors. Additionally, in the process of carrying out intensive work duties staffers develop specialized knowledge about legislative activity that increases their value to legislators. Specialized knowledge can come in the form of public policy expertise and/or knowledge about how the legislature operates. Working extensively (working in many areas) and intensively (developing specialized knowledge) enables staffers to build an extensive network across the legislature and develop specialized knowledge.

Moreover, staffers must be trusted by legislators to be effective network bridges. Untrustworthy staffers with specialized knowledge would be an issue for legislators

because they could influence legislators to act against their own best interests. Rational legislators would not allow staffers to develop specialized knowledge if they could not trust them. A rational legislator will only trust a staffer and delegate duties to them if they can minimize agency loss. One way to minimize agency loss is through monitoring and screening (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). Legislators are in regular contact with staffers (Fenno 1978) and this gives legislators the opportunity to identify staffers who can be trusted with delegated power (DeGregorio 1995; Hagedorn 2015).

At the national level, there is strong evidence of the influence of staffer networks on legislative behavior. Montgomery and Nyhan (2017) find that Members of Congress (MCs) who have exchanged senior and policy staffers are more similar in their voting patterns than would otherwise be predicted. Montgomery and Nyhan (2017) hypothesize that Congressional staffers can influence legislative behavior because their specialized knowledge affords them autonomy which can lead to agency loss. MCs attempt to minimize agency loss by monitoring, retaining, and promoting trustworthy staffers. MCs would prefer to only delegate duties to highly trustworthy staffers but resource restraints force MCs to delegate autonomy to less trustworthy staffers who may use their autonomy to pursue their own goals.

Burgat (2020) finds that better-connected legislative staffers are more likely to be assigned to important policy assignments because legislators believe they will be better able to leverage their networks to achieve success. McCrain (2018) tests staffers' influence in networks by looking at their success as lobbyists and finds that former staffers with more congressional ties are more successful as lobbyists. The findings of Burgat (2020) and McCrain (2018) are important because they help us understand why staffers are motivated to serve as network bridges. By increasing their connectiveness in the legislative network, staffers not only improve the efficiency of their MCs (Fowler 2006; Battaglini, Sciabolazza, and Patacchini 2019) but also improve their own future wages as lobbyists.

Much of the extant work on staffer networks has relied on data from the United States House of Representatives (Fox and Hammond 1977) and Senate (Pertschuk 2017), but there is evidence that staffers serve as network bridges in the comparative context as well. Ringe *et al.* (2013) have noted the influence of staffers in the European Parliament. While staffer networks influence legislative behavior in the US and abroad, it is unclear if the influence of personal staffers extends to state legislatures where institutional design may limit the influence of staffer networks.

### Staffer utilization in state legislatures

State legislative staffers do not have the same roles, and are less professionalized, than their Congressional peers, and this may hinder their potential as network bridges. It cannot be taken for granted that staffers in all legislatures are used intensively and extensively. Nor can it be taken for granted that state legislative staffers are trusted by state legislators to the same extent Congressional staffers are trusted by MCs. American legislatures differ on many institutional design elements (Squire and Hamm 2005; Squire 2024), such as whether their legislators are term-limited (Kousser 2005) and or whether their members are elected from single or multimember districts (Kirkland 2012). I argue that the influence of legislative staffers is conditional on the variation in human resource management and staffer utilization across American legislatures.

Staffers have historically been treated in the literature as agents with minimal agency loss, that is, staffers are assumed to be acting on behalf of their MCs (DeGregorio 1988). This assumption is so pervasive that many legislative studies purported to be studying legislators use data on staffers as proxies for legislators. However, the principal–agent model cannot be taken for granted as accurately representing the relationship between staffers and legislators in state legislatures. State legislative staffers are employed by a centralized human resource department which severely constrains the relationship between them and legislators.

This constraint is perhaps most blatant when looking at how staffers are assigned in state legislatures. In Congress, MCs have a high degree of power to select and retain their staffers. In comparison, in some state legislatures, staffers are given assignments by centralized HR departments. In Arizona and New Mexico, staffer assignments change every two-year session. The new assignment rate, the percentage of staffers that are assigned new legislators each session, is about 100 and 85 percent, respectively, in Arizona and New Mexico; see Table 1. In Indiana, staffer assignments are changed every year with a new assignment rate of 74 percent. The high new assignment rate means that staffers have divided loyalties between their current legislator(s) and the human resource department that controls their long-term assignment. State legislative staffers serve at the pleasure of their current legislators, but they also serve at the pleasure of the human resources department. If staffers desire long-term employment, they must carefully balance their loyalty between their two principals.

Further complicating the principal–agent model is that personal staffers in state legislatures like Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico have multiple legislator principals. Their position as legislators’ trusted confidants creates a problem as it means that they are privy to multiple legislators’ confidential information. Access to this information could manifest itself as an opportunity for them to serve as network bridges but it could also lead to them betraying the trust of one legislator to aid another legislator. It is vital for legislators to uphold strong norms of conduct for staffers lest order break down. In possible recognition of the problem presented with dual loyalties for shared staffers, legislators have a norm against asking staffers about other legislators. The National Conference of State Legislatures’ (NCSL) suggested code of conduct (NCSL 2019) is evidence of the prevalence of this norm:

**Table 1.** Institutional features of the US, Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico house of representatives

	United States House	Arizona House	Indiana House	New Mexico House
Professionalism (Squire Index, 2015)	1	0.264	0.156	0.14
Professionalism Rank	N/A	14	40	43
Average Staffers Per Legislators	20.00	0.50	0.33	0.50
Staffer Turnover	20.00%	38.04%	39.02%	75.86%
New Assignment Rate	N/A	100.00%	74.00%	85.71%
Number of Legislators	435	60	100	70
Shared Staff	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Legislative Term Limits	No	No	No	No
Multimember Districts	No	Yes	No	No

*Note:* Staff Turnover for the US House is the average for 2001–2018. Arizona and Indiana Houses are for 2015–2020. New Mexico is for 2017–2020.

...many legislative staff members work for more than one legislator, including working on a single project or piece of legislation for legislators with opposing objectives, it is imperative the staff member maintain a wall of confidentiality between work for individual legislators. The expectations of leaders that they be kept informed can place staff members in difficult situations. Legislatures must clarify the staff obligation to maintain confidentiality and to whom the staff member owes a duty in order to minimize conflict between duties.

Survey evidence also supports the existence of a confidentiality norm. In an original survey of state legislators fielded in Spring 2020 ( $n = 81$ ), I asked state legislators if they ever asked shared staffers about other legislators' activities. Among those with shared staff, only 5.40 percent said that they had inquired about other legislators' actions.

A consequence of the principal-agent model breaking down in state legislatures with shared personal staff is that staffer professionalism is significantly lowered. A rational legislator will not delegate duties to a staffer who is untrustworthy. In turn, a staffer without delegated duties will neither have the ability nor incentive to develop specialized knowledge.

### Clerks or political professionals?

One of the core questions in the legislative staffer literature is whether to theorize staffers as "clerks" or "political professionals" (Romzek and Utter 1997). If staffers are clerks, then they are workers present to extend the capacity of legislators by conducting simple routine tasks and only matter in the sense that other capital inputs matter in determining a legislators' effectiveness. If staffers are political professionals - individuals with specialized knowledge (Wilensky 1956) - then staffers matter not only in determining a legislators' effectiveness but also in so far that they influence decision-making on roll-call votes and other legislative behavior.

There is strong evidence that Congressional staffers are political professionals (Hertel-Fernandez *et al.* 2018; Montgomery and Nyhan 2017; Pertschuk 2017), but there is less certainty of how to classify state legislative staffers. There are studies on state legislative staffers' influence (Weissert and Weissert 2000), but most extant studies are insufficient to make a generalizable statement because they often focus on a single legislature or a group of legislatures with little variation between them. The study of state legislatures does not require all state legislatures to be analyzed (Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2002), but the selected legislatures must be of sufficient range in institutional design if one wishes to make a generalizable claim. A strength of the present study is that its three cases are, respectively, among the most (Arizona) and least (Indiana and New Mexico) professionalized state legislatures with shared personal staff.

One method to measure staffer utilization, whether staffers are clerks or political professionals, is staffer turnover rates (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981a; Jensen 2011). Turnover rates signify the percentage of staffers that are new in each session. A lower turnover rate signifies that a legislature has a relatively continuous staffer force. Continuity allows staffers to gain specialized knowledge of legislative norms (Matthews 1959; Herrick and Fisher 2007) and organization-specific tasks. This specialized knowledge allows staffers to act as political professionals. High turnover on the other hand means that continuity is not guaranteed and discourages staffers

from acquiring specialized knowledge through intensive work or from working extensively to become better connected in legislative networks.

Table 1 presents, among other descriptive statistics, staffer turnover rates for the United States, Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico House of Representatives. Notably, the turnover rate is much higher in legislatures than in the private sector. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates yearly turnover rates (defined as “quit rates”) in the low single digits for most of the private sector. The relatively high turnover rate among legislatures is because few personal staffers intend for it to be a lifelong profession (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981a). Many staffers intend to segue into adjacent professions such as lobbying (McCrain 2018; Rosenthal 2000) or run for political office themselves (Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001). Despite the overall high turnover rates among legislatures, there is significant variation across legislatures.

The Arizona House of Representatives has a staffer turnover rate of 38.04 percent. Indiana and New Mexico, respectively, have turnover rates of 39.02 and 75.86 percent each. For comparison, the United States House of Representatives has a personal staff turnover rate of 20 percent according to LegiStorm. These figures suggest that state legislative staffers have significantly less specialized knowledge than their Congressional counterparts because they have had little time to acquire it and or little incentive to develop it.

The differences between national and state legislative staffers are important because shared personal staff may not play as important a role as network bridges in less professionalized legislatures with high turnover rates. High turnover rates limit staffers’ ability to build specialized knowledge through intensive work or connections through extensive work that would allow them to maximize their potential as bridges in the legislative network.

In the United States House of Representatives there are 20 personal staffers per legislator. In the Arizona and New Mexico House of Representatives there are 0.5 staffers per legislator. In Indiana, there are 0.33 staffers per legislator. The low numbers of staffers in state legislatures places a burden on state legislators that can lead to conflict over staffer utilization.

One way to deal with the scarcity of staffers is to create clear rules on who can utilize a staffers’ time in each point of the day. While conducting background research for this manuscript I interviewed personal staffers in Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico. Many stated that they usually divided their day around lunch time. They’d work for legislator A in the morning and then work for legislator B in the afternoon. In some instances, staffers would physically move between the offices of legislators A and B. While this arrangement discourage antagonism between legislators by setting clear property rights to staffers’ time (Coase 1960), it does not facilitate coordination. One can imagine a story where legislator A (B) is in their office in the morning (afternoon) to coincide with their staffer and spends the remainder of their day elsewhere. This would mean that legislators A and B may be *less* likely to see each other in each day than if they did not share a staffer.

## Research design and discussion

In this article, I test if shared personal staffers networks are associated with legislators’ state legislators’ roll-call voting. I hypothesize that personal staffers may promote

congruent roll-call voting by serving as a network bridge between the legislators they share. Network bridges can be brokers of information between groups that otherwise have minimal to no contact with one another. Network bridges serve to coordinate behavior in this way. To serve as network bridges staffers must (a) develop specialized knowledge through intensive work, (b) have an extensive network through extensive work, and (c) be trusted by legislators.

If shared personal staffers are network bridges, then legislators with shared staff should be positively associated with roll-call voting congruency. That is, Legislators who share staffers should be more likely to vote the same way than legislators who do not share staffers. Conversely if staffers are network gaps, legislator with shared staffers should be less likely to vote the same way.

For empirics I rely on an original dataset of state legislative staffers serving in the Arizona (2015–2018), Indiana (2015–2018), and New Mexico (2017–2018) House of Representatives. The selected years are based on the availability of staffer network data. This dataset was created by web scrapping state legislative websites and from FOIA requests. Commercial providers exist for congressional staffer data, but historical data on state legislative staffers are rare. I have selected these three states because they represent a range of the most (Arizona) and least (Indiana and New Mexico) professionalized state legislatures as measured by both Squire (2017)'s professionalism index and staffer turnover rates. If I find or do not find that staffer networks are associated with roll-call vote congruency in all three cases, then I can be more confident in generalizing my results.

I append the original dataset of state legislative staffers with roll-call data from Open States, a nonprofit that has collected roll-call data for state legislatures since approximately 2010. This combined data allows me to test the influence of shared staff on congruent voting.

Vote congruency is a binary outcome that indicates when members of a dyad vote the same way, whether in favor, against, or abstaining (=1) on a given piece of legislation. Vote congruency as an outcome measure can be traced back to Rice (1925)'s proposed cohesion index for the study of legislative behavior. Congruency measures are commonly used in contemporary legislative network studies (Ringe *et al.* 2013; Parigi and Bergemann 2016; Harmon, Fisman, and Kamenica 2019; Wojcik 2018).

I converted my data into dyads between all possible pairs of legislators; see Table 2 for an example of the data frame. In some cases, missing data prevented the creation of a dyad. Note that dyads (ij) are embedded within legislative bills (l).

To further help understand the data, summary statistics of the legislator-legislation dyads (Table 3) and a description of how the variables were coded (Table 4) are presented below. Within the dataset, approximately 72-80 percent of

**Table 2.** Sample data frame

Bill	Legislator A	Staffer A	Legislator B	Staffer B	Shared staff
Bill A	A. Atreides	J. Doe	I. Corrino	J. Doe	Yes
Bill A	A. Atreides	J. Doe	F. Harkonnen	R. Roe	No
Bill A	A. Atreides	J. Doe	E. Ordos	J. Roe	No
Bill B	A. Atreides	J. Doe	I. Corrino	J. Doe	Yes
Bill B	A. Atreides	J. Doe	F. Harkonnen	R. Roe	No
Bill B	A. Atreides	J. Doe	E. Ordos	J. Roe	No

**Table 3.** Summary statistics

Variable	Arizona	Indiana	New Mexico
Shared Vote	72.59%	80.28%	79.88%
Shared Staff	0.82%	2.57%	5.08%
Shared Party	50.65%	60.28%	49.14%
Both Women	11.96%	N/A	15.61%
Shared Multimember District	1.76%	N/A	N/A
Both Hispanics	N/A	N/A	9.85%
<i>N</i>	1,853,591	290,087	935,488

**Table 4.** Description of variable coding

Variable	Description
Shared Vote	1 if both legislators voted congruently. 0 otherwise.
Shared Staff	1 if both legislators share personal staff. 0 otherwise.
Shared Party	1 if both legislators share party ID. 0 otherwise.
Both Women	1 if both legislators are women. 0 otherwise.
Shared Multimember District	1 if both legislators represent the same district. 0 otherwise.
Both Hispanics	1 if both legislators are Hispanics. 0 otherwise.

the dyads are shared votes, which means that legislators voted congruently. Approximately between 0.8-5.1 percent of dyads involve a shared personal staffer. Note that not all variables are available in all three states of Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico due to variation in data availability.

One of the great difficulties with analyzing network data is that network formation is endogenous; see [Supplementary Appendix 1](#). Given the absence of a randomized intervention such as a lottery to determine staffer assignment (Rogowski and Sinclair 2012), I refrain from making a strong causal claim. Conversely, if I do not find that dyad pairs with shared staff are more likely to vote congruently despite endogeneity, I am more confident in the null result. Regardless, data permitting, I account for potential confounders such as whether a dyad pair are from the same multimember district (available in the Arizona sample) or if they are co-ethnics (available in the New Mexico sample).

In [Table 5](#) I present the following linear probability model (LPM):  $\text{CongruentRollCall Vote}_{ij} = B_0 + B_1 \text{Shared Staffer}_{ij} + B_h H_{ij}$  for the Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico House of Representatives, respectively. Standard errors are clustered by dyad pair—as is standard in dyadic analysis (Green, Kim, and Yoon 2001). Probit results are reported in [Supplementary Appendix 3](#)—results are substantively the same as their LPM counterparts.

In [Table 5](#) column 1, I fail to find a relationship between shared staff and vote congruency in the Arizona House of Representatives ( $p = 0.672$ ). Similarly, in [Table 5](#) column 2 I fail to find evidence ( $p = 0.508$ ) that shared staff in the Indiana House of Representatives is associated with vote congruency. In [Table 5](#) column 3, I find that shared staffers are negatively associated with roll-call vote congruency ( $p < 0.001$ ) in the New Mexico House of Representatives. In [Table 5](#) column 4 I pool the data from the three respective legislatures and account for state legislature fixed effects. Pooled results find that shared staffers are associated with decreased congruent voting ( $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ).



**Table 5.** Association of shared staff with congruent Roll-Call voting, LPM

Variables	DV: congruent Roll-Call voting			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Shared Staff	-0.008 (0.019)	-0.017 (0.026)	-0.046*** (0.016)	-0.066*** (0.013)
Shared Party	0.223*** (0.004)	0.089*** (0.007)	0.076*** (0.004)	0.167*** (0.003)
Shared Multimember District	0.005 (0.018)			
Both Women	-0.020*** (0.005)		0.029*** (0.004)	
Both Hispanics			-0.052*** (0.011)	
Constant	0.616*** (0.002)	0.750*** (0.005)	0.764*** (0.003)	0.671*** (0.002)
Observations	1,853,591	290,087	935,488	3,079,166
R-squared	0.063	0.012	0.010	0.044
Time	2015–2018	2015–2018	2017–2018	Pooled
Legislature	Arizona House	Indiana House	New Mexico House	Pooled

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses and are clustered by dyad pair. State legislature fixed effects accounted for in Column 4. \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

It is worth noting that in all observed legislatures, staffers are only shared among partisans. Based on the pooled results from Table 5 column 4, this means that the baseline vote-congruency is approximately 67.1 percentage points for legislator dyads that does not share a political party and does not share a personal staffer. Vote congruency is approximately 83.8 percentage points when a legislator dyad shares a political party but does not share a personal staffer. Voting congruency is 77.2 percentage points when a legislator dyad shares a political party and a personal staffer. I do not observe an instance where a legislator dyad does not share a political party and does share a personal staffer.

The negative results may be evidence that staffers serve as network gaps. As discussed above, there is evidence that state legislative staffers adhere to a norm of not divulging information between their respective principal legislators to discourage incidents of staffers violating legislators' trust. The negative results are supportive of the existence of this norm.

There is debate in the methodological literature on how to deal with standard errors in dyadic analysis. The major issue is that the standard errors do not meet the independent and identically distributed (i.d.d.) assumption, that is, the voting behavior of a dyad in bill A is likely not independent of the dyad's behavior in bill B. One method of addressing the problem is to cluster the errors by dyad pair, as I have done in Table 5. An alternative method suggested by Erikson, Pinto, and Rader (2014) is to use randomization inference. Randomization inference does not require the i.d.d. assumption and instead produces a  $p$ -value by generating a distribution of the hypothetical coefficient of interest (Keele, McConnaughy, and White 2012). I conduct randomization inference using Heß (2017)'s package for Stata to compute 1,000 hypothetical distributions of  $p$ -values. Results are presented in Table 6. Covariates are suppressed for brevity.

After using randomization inference  $p$ -values, shared staffers in all three observed state legislatures are associated with a decrease in roll-call congruency. Even with the

**Table 6.** Association of shared staff with Congruent Roll-Call voting, LPM with randomization inference *p*-values

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	DV: Congruent Roll-Call voting			
Shared staff $\beta$	-0.008	-0.017	-0.046	-0.066
<i>p</i> -Value	0.026	0.000	0.000	0.000
Legislature	Arizona	Indiana	New Mexico	Pooled

Note: Covariates are suppressed for brevity.

bias in favor of finding a positive association due to staffer assignment being driven in part by homophily, shared staffer networks do not increase coordination between legislators. On the contrary, they appear to decrease coordination as measured by roll-call congruency. Additional robustness checks, including a falsification test, can be found in the [Supplementary Appendices](#).

## Conclusion

Staffers have the potential to play a significant role in the operation of legislatures and it is therefore important to understand their role in the policymaking process. Even a legislator well-endowed with financial resources and the latest machinery is limited by time. A legislator simply cannot do everything expected of them without delegating power to staffers. Staffers with a high degree of agency loss are problematic for representative government because they are not subject to the same electoral pressures as legislators. A growing literature shows that staffers wield significant influence in the United States House of Representatives (Montgomery and Nyhan 2017), the European Parliament (Ringe *et al.* 2013), and other legislative bodies.

I advance the extant literature by examining if prior findings can be generalized to state legislatures using a unique dataset of shared personal staff in the Arizona, Indiana, and New Mexico House of Representatives. These three legislatures are drawn from the most (Arizona) and least (Indiana and New Mexico) professionalized state legislatures. It is important to study the role of staffers in state legislatures because they vary considerably from other legislatures. MCs operate enterprises that employ an average of 20 full-time staffers with specialized political knowledge (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981b). State legislatures on the other hand operate mom-and-pop shops that employ personal staff shared by two or more legislators and have high staffer turnover rates. These differences in institutional design may impair state legislative staffer networks from influencing state legislators' roll-call voting.

Contrary to prior work using Congressional staffers, I do not find evidence that staffer networks created by shared personal staff are associated with roll-call voting congruency in state legislatures. From a representation perspective this is a 'good' finding - unelected officials should not have an independent influence on the lawmaking process. This finding emphasizes the need for further work to be conducted on the role of state legislative staffers compared to Congressional staffers. More broadly, this article serves to underpin the importance to revisit canonical theories of legislative behavior to account for institutional design differences across American legislatures.

Future work should exploit the variation in institutional design in state legislatures to test if and where staffers influence legislative behavior. The present article has focused on the influence of staffers on roll-call voting, but staffers have a myriad of other roles (e.g., controlling interest group access to legislators, providing constituency service, and so forth etc.) where they could be exerting influence.

**Supplementary material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at <http://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2024.22>.

**Data availability statement.** Replication materials are available on SPPQ Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.15139/S3/DPFIRU> (Landgrave 2024).

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