

Women Leaders and the Gender Pay Gap in Municipal Government

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Abstract

How do female political leaders influence gender pay gaps in the public sector? Using over 2 million salary records for employees across 457 California cities from 2011 to 2022, we study the relationship between women's representation on city councils and employment outcomes using a within-city design. We first document that differences in seniority and the specific jobs held by men and women can explain most of the gender wage gap in city government. But as women gain seats on city councils, the salary difference between women and men does not improve and in fact widens modestly. This finding is most pronounced in smaller cities and is driven in part because lower paid men leave their jobs after women gain power. While research on gender and descriptive representation often focuses on policy outcomes, this paper demonstrates the importance of studying how women leaders shape administrative outcomes within public sector bureaucracies.

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1 Introduction

Scholars have long recognized that women’s representation among elected officials matters for policy outcomes. Women in office prioritize policies that are important to women constituents—including education, healthcare, and family issues—and are more likely to advocate for gender equality, reproductive rights, and measures addressing violence against women (Swers 2002; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Swers 2013; Reingold and Smith 2012). Female legislators are more collaborative and consensus-driven in their approach, leading to bipartisan efforts and inclusive policymaking (Kathlene 1994; Swift and VanderMolen 2021; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). Women representatives are also more likely to exert effort in case work for women constituents (Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019).

Women in office also produce symbolic benefits for constituents (Pitkin 2023). For example, more female state legislators are associated with higher levels of expressed political efficacy among women citizens (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007) and a reduction in the gender knowledge gap about political issues (Dassonneville and McAllister 2018). As Mansbridge (1999) summarizes, “Easier communication with one’s representative, awareness that one’s interests are being represented with sensitivity, and knowledge that certain features of one’s identity do not mark one as less able to govern all contribute to making one feel more included in the polity. This feeling of inclusion in turn makes the polity democratically more legitimate in one’s eyes” (pg. 651).

In addition to the policymaking and symbolic benefits of women’s political representation, women leaders can impact government hiring and compensation practices. We have ample evidence from the private sector on the importance of female leadership. For example, while the gender wage gap persists (Card, Cardoso, and Kline 2016), women managers are associated with lower pay inequality, more vocal support of fair hiring practices, and increased hiring of female employees (Cohen and Huffman 2003; Cohen and Broschak 2013).

Women business owners are also more likely to achieve balanced gender composition among their employees (Carrington and Troske 1995). As Cotter et al. (1997) explains: “As more women in [positions of authority] make crucial decisions about salaries, promotions, hiring, and firing, gender differences in earnings should decline” (pg. 715).

However, we know less about the effects of women political leaders on women’s hiring and pay in the public sector. This is a troubling omission given that gender wage gaps persist in the U.S. within both the federal government (Bolitzer and Godtland 2012) and at the local level (Mason 2017), as well as in other countries (e.g. Jones, Makepeace, and Wass 2018).

How do female political leaders affect women’s status in government jobs? We study this question in the context of city councils in the United States. City governments employed 14.2 million employees as of 2023, comprising a large share of the state and local government workforce in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau 2023). We study whether and how women in city council positions influence the gender wage gap among employees. To do this, we use fine-grained data on over 2 million employee salary records from California for over 450 cities between the years 2011 and 2022 combined with detailed data on local demographics and elections.

Women remain underrepresented in city government (Holman 2017). Research on gender and local politics suggest that many of the same theoretical benefits associated with women in higher office are also present at the local level. Women are more likely to employ inclusive local government budgeting processes (Weikart et al. 2007), and women mayors tend to emphasize congeniality and cooperation over hierarchy (Tolleson-Rinehart 1991). Women are also less likely to perceive conflict with other leaders on their council (Heidbreder et al. 2011). In cities with female mayors, more residents and diverse community groups participate in public meetings (Holman 2015). Cross-sectionally, women mayors are also associated with higher numbers of women employees working in nonclerical city jobs (Saltzstein 1986).

However, only a handful of papers study how women leaders affect the gender pay gap in city government. In Spain, women mayors earn lower salaries than men, although this

gap decreases when more women are present on the city council (Guillamón, Cuadrado-Ballesteros, and Ríos 2024). Funk, Silva, and Escobar-Lemmon (2019) offer the most directly relevant research on this topic. They find that in Brazil, the election of women mayors leads to municipal bureaucracies that are more balanced in terms of gender and that earnings increase for women bureaucrats. Our project applies a similar approach to the U.S. context and provides some of the first systematic evidence on the effects of gender representation on city government employment.

There are several channels through which descriptive representation among elected city leaders might translate into descriptive gains among government employees. Women are generally more supportive of policies designed to overcome gender inequality and to ensure equitable hiring and promotion (Baunach 2002). As a result, women leaders might be especially sensitive to achieving gender balance among city workers both in terms of composition and pay. Because city council members do not hire city workers directly, one possible mechanism through which women council members might affect hiring and salaries is through appointing a city manager who is sensitive to these issues. City councils also actively help craft and approve city budgets and can authorize employee bonuses. Given the empirical evidence from the private sector that women managers are often able to reduce gender pay disparities (Hultin and Szulkin 2003; Cohen and Huffman 2007), we hypothesize that more women city council members will be associated with a decrease in the pay gap between men and women.

However, it is also possible that any discretion that city leaders exercise in terms of addressing salary inequalities could be dwarfed by structural constraints on municipal hiring and wage practices. In theory, California has strict equal pay laws and rigid salary classifications. And yet, among state workers, women earn 20.5% less than male employees. According to a Los Angeles Times article, a spokesperson said that to close this gap, the state needs to focus on “recruiting women into higher-paid jobs and encouraging upward mobility to help women scale the salary rungs” (Mason 2017). As we discuss more in the

next section, it is also possible that not all women city council members prioritize reducing pay disparities or that gender stereotypes constrain the actions available to female leaders as they gain power in traditionally masculine hierarchies.

Ultimately, whether the composition of the city council matters for the status of women workers in city government remains an open empirical question with important implications for the literature on descriptive representation and the gender wage gap in the public sector. In the next section, we introduce the institutional context of our study and discuss the channels through which women elected leaders might influence our outcomes of interest.

2 Institutional Context

In the U.S., cities employ millions of workers—far more than the state or federal level. In addition, cities vary dramatically in the gender composition of their city councils and workforces, making them an ideal place to study how women’s representation affects bureaucratic hiring and salary dynamics.

We focus on women gaining seats on city councils rather than serving as mayors for both practical and empirical reasons. First, in California, only a handful of cities have strong elected mayors with separate executive authority. The vast majority of cities instead use a council-manager form of government where an elected city council appoints a city manager to handle executive tasks including preparing and submitting annual budgets, overseeing various city departments, and hiring and recruiting staff. Beyond California, this form of government is common across the U.S., with 59% of cities employing a council-manager form of government and only 33% electing a strong executive mayor (International City/County Management Association 2011). In council-manager systems, the city manager is appointed by the council and is tasked with implementing the council’s policy vision.

Here, we briefly note that a growing literature in public administration studies the direct effects of women city managers on a variety of administrative outcomes (e.g. Fox and

Schuhmann 1999; Hamidullah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015). We instead ask a question more central to political science: can descriptive representation among elected officials produce downstream consequences inside the public sector bureaucracy? Elected officials occupy a distinctive position in democratic governance. Unlike appointed administrators, they are selected by voters, are publicly accountable to constituents, and possess formal authority over budgets, oversight, agenda-setting, and the appointment or retention of senior administrators. If citizens seek to address gender inequality through democratic institutions, one of the few scalable mechanisms available to them is the election of representatives who may prioritize these concerns.

A variety of channels exist through which women city council members might affect the hiring and compensation of public employees. In council-manager systems, one of the simplest ways would be to appoint a city manager who cares about gender parity or to instruct the city manager to hire more women and ensure they are equitably compensated. Women city council members who prioritize reducing gender salary gaps and improving outcomes for women can communicate these priorities to the city manager, who may then make hiring and compensation decisions accordingly. City councils sometimes conduct city audits to check for wage inequalities, and women council members may be more motivated to collect such information. Several city councils in California have recently signed an Equal Pay Pledge, a pledge designed to ensure pay equity for men and women working in the same jobs. Thus, city council members can play an important agenda-setting role in shaping municipal labor practices, even if they do not directly carry out personnel decisions.

Women council members may also be more likely to enact family friendly leave policies for city staff (e.g. Bratton and Ray 2002; Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Goedert 2014). While cities in California must meet minimum state requirements for leave policies, some cities offer more generous benefits for workers. If women council members are more likely to push for those benefits, and if those benefits attract high quality women workers to the public sector,

this provides another channel through which the gender composition of city leadership might affect the gender wage gap.

At the same time, there are a variety of reasons why women in elected office might not decrease the gender wage gap among bureaucrats. First, civil service rules (commonly called the “step system” in California) govern employee compensation. These rules should in theory ensure that employees are earning equal pay for equal work. However, it turns out that there is substantial variation in the range of allowable monthly salaries even within the same step. Figure A.1 in the online appendix shows these ranges for a sample of jobs in Los Angeles. There is enough flexibility that pay disparities can emerge even within the same jobs.

Another possibility is that women leaders themselves vary in their commitment to addressing gender pay disparities. Although women, on average, may be more aware of and concerned about such inequities than their male counterparts, not all women in office share the same priorities or policy goals (Chaudhuri et al. 2024; Klar 2018). The extent to which female representation translates into measurable changes in pay equity likely depends on both the magnitude of these attitudinal differences and the number of women serving on the council. There may be a threshold of representation below which individual preferences are insufficient to alter institutional practices.

While there is some evidence from the comparative context that citizens positively evaluate women for discussing gender equality (e.g. Schöll, Gallego, and Le Mens 2024), research from the U.S. typically finds that women face gender stereotypes and double standards when running for office, with many voters doubting women’s suitability for elected roles (for recent reviews see Ashworth, Berry, and Bueno de Mesquita (2024) and Anzia and Bernhard (2022)). As a result, some scholars have argued that women are often forced to adopt masculine traits to advance within politics (Silva, Pullan, and Wäckerle 2023), which might cut against efforts to advance gender equality.

Finally, it is likely that broader societal and labor market forces beyond the control of elected leaders are contributing to the salary dynamics that we are studying (Miller, Kerr,

and Reid 1999). For example, public safety jobs like police and firefighters are some of the most common municipal jobs. Men tend to dominate these fields; women elected officials may or may not be able to increase the number of women in these positions depending on employee supply. Or, even if cities with women in power manage to hire more women police officers and fire fighters, one large source of pay disparity in these jobs is that some people work more overtime than others. If women prefer not to work overtime due to life and family considerations, it's not clear that this is a problem and not clear that more women city council members would change this pattern. We return to this issue after presenting the results.

3 Data Collection

To conduct this research, we scraped every available city employee salary record from the Transparent California website. This organization collects and aggregates data on state and local employee pay directly from government agencies under the California Public Records Act, which requires information about government compensation to be publicly available. The website provides the most comprehensive database available on public pay in California with data for 457 cities starting in 2011 and going up to 2022.

Each salary record lists a city, a year, an employee's name, a job title, and various salary measures, including regular pay, overtime pay, benefits, and total pay. Our population of interest was all employees earning over \$10,000 per year, which includes over 2.8 million full-time and part-time employees but excludes short term temporary employees. We estimate the gender of employees using their first name and the **gender** package in R (Mullen 2021), which relies on historical Social Security data to estimate the probability that a name belongs to a man or a woman. The algorithm was able to assign a gender to 95.6% of employees.

A research assistant checked a sample of 5,000 names and found that the algorithm was extremely accurate, assigning the correct gender 97% of the time. Missing data on gender

should only bias our estimates of the gender pay gap if the missingness is systematically non-random with respect to both gender and salary as well as respect to treatment timing (that is, women gaining seats on the city council). For meaningful bias to be introduced from the missing data, this would require that the unclassified 5% of employees be heavily concentrated in a group with atypical salaries—for example, disproportionately high-earning women or low-earning men—and in shares very different from the rest of the sample. As a robustness check, we put bounds on the possible measurement error introduced by the missing data by assigning all unclassified employees to be either men or women and find that the substantive results remain unchanged.

Next, to harmonize the large volume of self-reported job titles in the municipal employee data, we implemented a multi-stage text-as-data pipeline that combines systematic preprocessing with string distance-based clustering. After preprocessing the text (for example, standardizing case, removing punctuation, expanding abbreviations, and regularizing common acronyms), we applied the Jaro–Winkler string distance metric using the `stringdist` package in R to identify pairs of job titles with high lexical similarity. The Jaro–Winkler algorithm is well suited for this task because it measures similarity based on the number and order of matching characters while giving additional weight to common prefixes—an approach that captures both typographical errors and systematic abbreviations (e.g., “sr.” vs. “senior”).

We calibrated the clustering threshold iteratively to ensure that clusters grouped genuinely equivalent titles without over-merging distinct occupations. The result is a high-fidelity set of standardized job clusters that preserves meaningful occupational distinctions while eliminating noisy textual variation, enabling cleaner estimation of pay differences across employees and cities. From 85,674 original self-reported job titles, we were able to obtain 37,661 clean exact matching job titles and 24,553 job clusters.

Table 1 shows the most common words in job titles held by men and women in the sample. Police officers are by far the most common municipal employee in California, although there

are over three times as many male police officers as female police officers. Women are more likely to hold a job title containing the word “assistant,” and they are much more likely to work in fields like community development and library services. On the other hand, men are more likely to work in maintenance, as fire fighters, in engineering, and water utilities.

Table 1: Most Common Words in Job Titles by Employee Gender

Female Jobs		Male Jobs	
Word	Count	Word	Count
police	102891	police	359712
assistant	95701	officer	299459
officer	74533	maintenance	129460
senior	72535	worker	118295
clerk	70388	fire	97755
services	66134	operator	86504
specialist	61817	firefighter	82440
administrative	60781	senior	81796
analyst	50374	engineer	77572
recreation	46043	services	60912
technician	41686	assistant	57310
community	36993	technician	54271
manager	31683	sergeant	50866
dispatcher	28888	supervisor	50758
city	26424	captain	47804
supervisor	25686	specialist	46496
library	25285	manager	39747
management	25182	inspector	39242
office	23163	recreation	38427
coordinator	23093	water	37104

4 Descriptive Results

Table 2 presents estimates of the overall gender pay gap among city employees in California. All specifications include city and year fixed effects, so the coefficients reflect differences between men and women employed within the same city and year, net of average pay differences across cities or across time. All models also include seniority fixed effects based on an employee’s start year to adjust for relative experience. We also weight observations by

the inverse of the total number of city employees to ensure that a few large cities like Los Angeles are not driving the results. Summary statistics for individual employees are shown in Table A.1 in the online appendix, and summary statistics for the cities in the sample are shown in table A.2.

Table 2: Women Employees Earn Less Than Men

	City Employee Regular Pay				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Female	-11,701.1* (395.1)	-2,494.5* (271.3)	-2,462.3* (271.5)	-544.1* (213.0)	-512.3* (214.2)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Position Start Year FE	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Exact Job FEs	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	70,824.16	70,824.16	70,824.16	70,824.16	70,824.16
Observations	2,281,332	2,281,332	2,281,332	2,281,332	2,281,332
Adjusted R ²	0.23	0.68	0.68	0.73	0.73

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

According to Column 1, women earn about \$11,700 less than men, on average. Adding job cluster fixed effects in Column 2 sharply reduces the gap to roughly \$2,500, indicating that much of the raw disparity reflects occupational sorting, with women concentrated in lower-paying job types. Controlling for the start year within each job cluster (Column 3) or for exact job titles (Columns 4–5) narrows the gap further to about \$500, suggesting that men and women holding the same positions at the same time are paid quite similarly. With the most stringent set of job and seniority controls, a small and precise pay gap remains, but these differences are modest and suggest fairly high levels of pay equity in municipal employment in California.

We note that the exact job fixed effects provide the strictest comparison, comparing employees who hold precisely the same job title within the same city and year. But this

approach is often overly restrictive. Because they are self-reported, even after extensive cleaning many of the exact job titles contain small typographical differences or administrative variants that fragment substantively identical positions into separate categories. As a result, the sample within each exact job becomes sparse, and our design requires meaningful numbers of men and women within the same position to generate effective comparisons.

Aggregating titles into broader job clusters alleviates these issues by grouping together highly similar positions, increasing sample size and improving comparability across genders. The trade-off is that clusters may group together jobs that are not perfectly equivalent, potentially introducing some heterogeneity in pay scales or responsibilities. In this sense, the choice involves a bias–variance trade-off: exact job fixed effects maximize precision in defining “same job” comparisons but can yield noisier or less representative estimates due to small-sample limitations, while job clusters sacrifice some definitional precision in exchange for more stable and inclusive estimates of gender differences. We generally prefer specifications with job cluster fixed effects, but all results are robust to including exact job fixed effects.

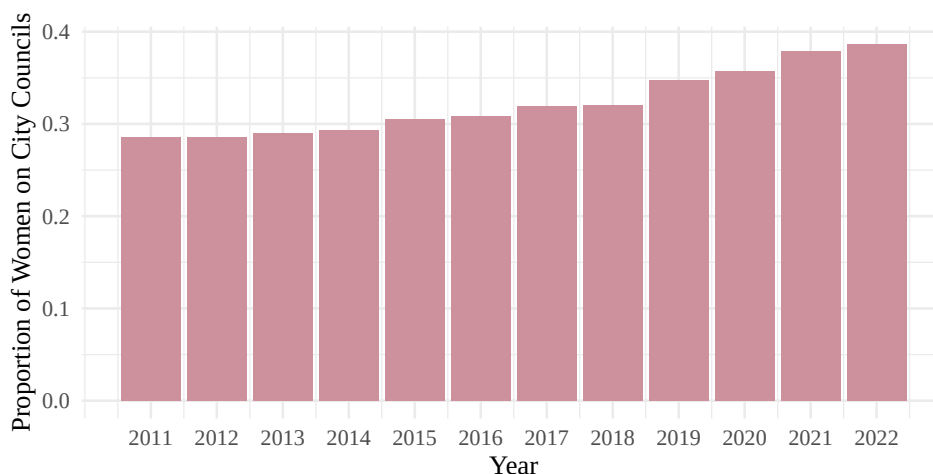
Figure 1: Gender Pay Gap Increases with Seniority



Notes: Shows how men and women’s pay evolves over time with employee seniority. Predictions rely on estimates from models with city, year, and job cluster fixed effects.

Next, we examine how the gender pay gap evolves over time with employee seniority. To do this, we employ the baseline model described in Column 3 in Table 2 (comparing employees within job cluster) but also include an interaction between gender and the number of years an employee has served to allow differential changes to salary over time. The results are shown in Figure 1. As expected based on research in the private sector, regular pay gradually rises with the number of year of city employment. While the average employee in their first year on the job earns just over \$50,000, salaries increase to over \$80,000 for employees in their twelfth year. However, salaries increase more quickly for men than for women, resulting in a gender pay gap that widens over time.

Figure 2: Gender Composition of California City Councils Over Time



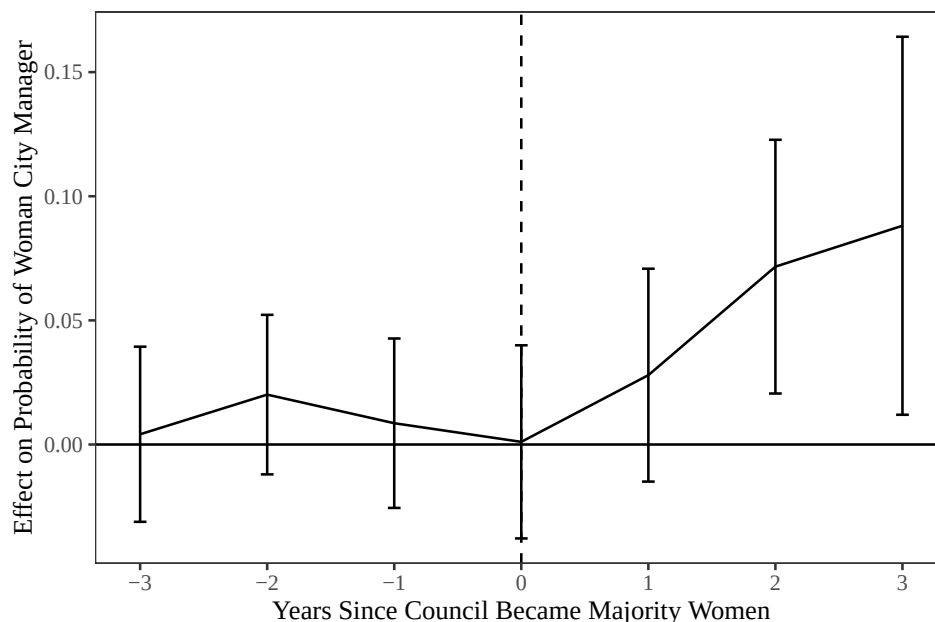
Notes: Data on city councils comes from Transparent California and the California Election Data Archive (CEDA).

Our main research question asks how the election of women leaders contributes to this observed disparity in pay between men and women. Figure 2 plots the gender composition of California city councils over time. Women have made gains in elected office at the city-level, although they still comprise less than 40% of council seats. Table 2 in the online appendix shows the correlates of the share of women on city councils both across and within cities. Across cities, women are more likely to gain power in places with more Democratic voters and cities with a higher proportion of white residents. But within-city, there is not a systematic

correlation between demographic variables and women gaining power. As women gain seats, does this change hiring and compensation dynamics for city employees?

We begin by showing evidence that when women gain a majority on a city council, the probability that they appoint a woman city manager increases by about 5 percentage points. To estimate dynamic treatment effects around the timing of women gaining a majority on city councils, we use the `fect` package in R (Xu 2017; Liu, Wang, and Xu 2024), which implements the Fixed Effects Counterfactual (FEC) method for panel data. The approach extends traditional difference-in-differences and event-study designs to settings where treatment timing varies across units.

Figure 3: Majority Women Councils More Likely to Appoint Female City Managers



Notes: Fixed effects counterfactual estimates from `fect` (Liu, Wang, and Xu 2024) package.

Instead of relying on untreated units as direct controls, `fect` uses pre-treatment outcomes and unit and time fixed effects to construct unit-specific counterfactual trajectories—that is, predictions of what each treated unit’s outcomes would have been in the absence of treatment. These counterfactuals are generated through a two-step interactive fixed-effects model that estimates latent factors capturing common time shocks and unit-specific responses. The

resulting counterfactual estimates allow for flexible heterogeneity across cities and over time, yielding dynamic treatment effects that are less sensitive to violations of strict parallel trends. Using this framework, we find that when councils become majority women, the probability that they appoint a woman as city manager rises by roughly five percentage points relative to the counterfactual predicted by the `fect` model. Table A.4 in the online appendix shows the results in tabular format.

5 Council Gender Composition and Municipal Pay Gaps

While the gender composition of the council positively predicts the appointment of a woman city manager, things are more complicated when it comes to addressing salary disparities. To study how the gender gap evolves as women gain power, we interact a variable capturing the share of women on the city council with an indicator for employee gender, testing whether the salaries of men and women diverge differentially after women gain seats on the council. Surprisingly, the gender gap actually *widens* after women take office.

Table 3 reports estimates from models predicting regular pay as a function of employee gender and the share of women on the city council, with an increasingly demanding set of fixed effects. All specifications adjust for employee seniority and include city and year fixed effects, so the coefficients capture within-city changes over time as councils become more gender-balanced. In Column 1, women earn roughly \$11,000 less than men on average, and the gender pay gap widens by about \$2,100 as the gender composition on the council shifts from a council with no women to a council with all women. The standard deviation of the variable capturing the proportion of women on a city council is 0.2, which would be associated with the pay gap increasing by just under \$500. After adding job cluster fixed effects in Column 2, the interaction term remains negative and becomes even more precise, indicating that the pay gap continues to widen modestly as more women serve on the council.

Table 3: More Women on City Council Worsens Gender Pay Gap

	City Employee Regular Pay			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-11,005.1* (591.9)	-1,885.0* (381.3)	252.2 (340.0)	327.9 (343.3)
Prop. Women on Council	722.1 (1,083.2)	983.6 (808.6)	905.0 (775.5)	1,214.3 (753.9)
Female $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	-2,088.5 (1,570.4)	-1,760.3* (845.3)	-2,280.9* (813.7)	-2,517.4* (815.8)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	No	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes	Yes
City Controls	No	No	No	Yes
Mean Outcome	70,823.09	70,823.09	70,823.09	70,818.08
Observations	2,280,452	2,280,452	2,280,452	2,275,478
Adjusted R ²	0.23	0.68	0.73	0.73

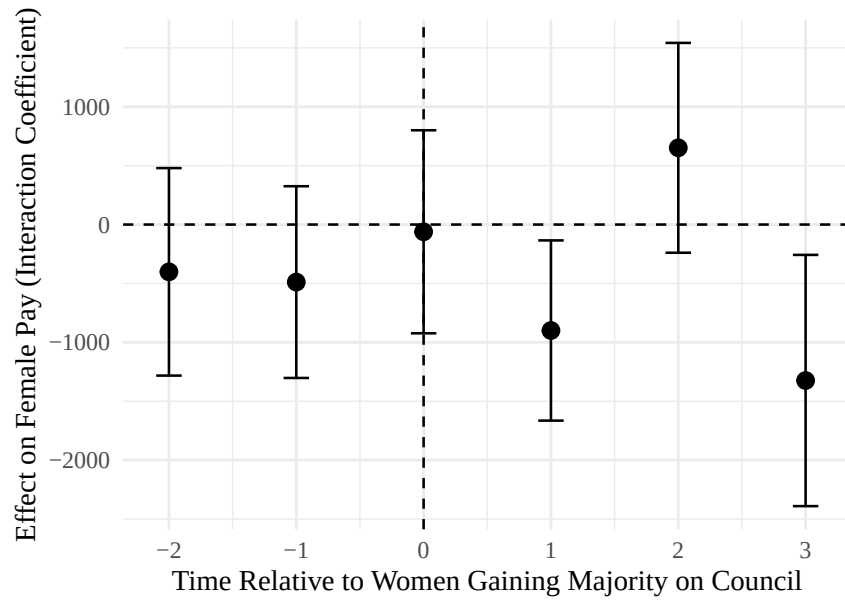
Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. City controls include city population (logged), the proportion of voters registered as Democrats, median income (logged), proportion white, and median housing value (logged). Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Column 3 introduces exact job title fixed effects, which ensures that we are comparing men and women holding identical positions at the same time. In this specification, the baseline gender pay gap disappears, but the negative and statistically precise interaction persists, implying that women’s relative pay declines as female representation on the council increases even within identical job titles.

Finally, Column 4 adds a range of city-level covariates (including population, median income, partisanship, proportion white, and median home value), and the results are virtually unchanged. Table A.5 in the online appendix shows that the results are consistent although slightly attenuated when the treatment is a binary variable indicating if women comprise a majority of the city council. Theoretically, the literature is not clear whether the treatment of interest is simply increasing shares of women or a majority of women. But reassuringly, all results are always consistent across these two approaches.

Next, we examine the timing of the widening wage gap relative to women gaining seats on the city council. To do this, we include simultaneous leads and lags of the treatment indicator interacted with employee gender, along with city, year, and job-cluster fixed effects. The inclusion of pre-treatment lead terms allows a test for anticipatory effects. However, as shown in the figure, the coefficients for the two years preceding the switch are close to zero and statistically insignificant, suggesting that salary trajectories for men and women were parallel prior to treatment. Following the transition to a female-majority council, the coefficients trend downward, indicating a widening pay gap in the years after women gain power.

Figure 4: Gender Pay Gap Event Study



The point estimate two years after the switch is positive but not statistically significant, which likely reflects the strong overtime correlations inherent in models with multiple overlapping lag terms rather than a meaningful reversal. When the second lag is estimated in isolation, the interaction is negative and significant, reinforcing the interpretation that women's relative pay declines modestly but persistently in the years after women assume

majority control of the council. Overall, the pattern is consistent with a post-treatment widening of the gender pay gap rather than anticipatory or transitory effects.

In the online appendix, we show that the widening of the gender pay gap following women gaining council seats persists under a variety of approaches and specifications. First, we show that this result is not driven by public safety employees. If anything, non-public safety employees experience a greater increase in the gap between men and women’s pay following an influx of women on the council (Table A.7). Next, we show that the results are very similar for both full-time and part-time employees (Table A.8). We also show that the results hold both before and after 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered local government hiring and finances (Table A.9). Finally, in Table A.10 we show that the gender gap increases for each type of salary—regular pay, overtime pay, total pay, and total pay and benefits. In fact, the estimated effects for total pay and total pay with benefits are quite a bit larger and more precise than that for regular pay. Across a wide variety of specifications and conditions, we find no evidence that the presence of women on city councils reduces the gender pay gap. Instead, the difference in earnings between men and women systematically widens, albeit modestly.

5.1 The Role of City Managers

Why does the gender pay gap fail to improve and even slightly worsen when women gain power on city councils? First, we probe the fact that we uncovered two results that at first seem surprising: city councils with more women are associated both with an increased probability of the appointment of a female city manager and also with an increase in the gender pay gap among employees. Are women city managers making hiring and administrative choices that contribute to greater salary disparities? Existing literature from public administration suggests this is unlikely (Burns 1980; Fox and Schuhmann 1999; Hamidullah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015). In line with this research, we do not find that female city managers exacerbate gender pay inequality. Using the same within-city design discussed in

the previous section, Table 4 shows the direct effect of appointing a woman city manager on pay for female versus male employees.

Table 4: Direct Effect of Women City Managers on Gender Pay Gap

	City Employee Regular Pay			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-12,964.2* (404.5)	-2,662.0* (294.7)	-629.2* (221.3)	-596.1* (222.4)
Woman City Manager	-3,376.2* (575.0)	-1,492.1* (431.8)	-1,346.5* (403.4)	-1,264.6* (391.2)
Female $\times$ Woman City Manager	6,394.4* (894.8)	1,135.8* (469.8)	545.8 (455.4)	400.6 (448.8)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	No	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes	Yes
City Controls	No	No	No	Yes
Mean Outcome	68,815.44	68,815.44	68,815.44	68,802.24
Observations	1,624,348	1,624,348	1,624,348	1,619,374
Adjusted R ²	0.23	0.68	0.73	0.73

Notes: Treatment is now the appointment of a woman city manager. Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

If anything, women's salaries tend to *increase* relative to men's in places where the city council hires a female city manager. This result attenuates and is not statistically meaningful after accounting for exact job fixed effects, but the data clearly show that women city managers are not associated with a widening gender pay gap. Women city managers remain quite rare in California, with only 20% of the cities in our sample ever appointing a woman city manager. Recall that we detect only a modest increase in the probability that a city installs a female manager after women gain a majority of council seats (around 5 percentage points). If women employee salaries are decreasing overall relative to men's in cities where women gain power on the city council, this pattern is occurring despite the fact that a few of these cities are appointing female city managers, not as a result.

5.2 Heterogeneity by City Size

Where might we expect women city leaders to matter the most for municipal salary patterns? While there are many types of potential heterogeneity that we could explore, we focus on city size—a theoretically important characteristic that dramatically shapes the scope and activities of city government (Oliver, Ha, and Callen 2012). Smaller cities have less formalized public-sector labor markets and face fewer bureaucratic constraints, making personnel and salary decisions more responsive to local leadership. By contrast, larger cities are more likely to have unionized workforces (Trejo 1991), which may limit the scope for salary adjustments. They also face higher compensation costs and less flexibility in personnel management (Anzia and Moe 2015), and hiring and promotion decisions may depend more heavily on personal and political connections (Barbosa and Ferreira 2023), potentially giving elected officials greater influence over personnel outcomes. As a result, smaller cities should have greater discretion over hiring and compensation practices because municipal jobs are often less formalized and less unionized. By contrast, larger cities may rely more heavily on bureaucratic step systems, which can help guard against the emergence of salary disparities.

To test whether the relationship between city leadership and gender pay gaps varies by city size, we split cities into population terciles following Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2019) by dividing municipalities into three equally sized groups based on the distribution of city population. We then estimate the effect of women gaining council seats separately within each tercile. This approach allows us to assess whether the association between women’s election to office and the gender salary gap varies by city size while ensuring support of the moderator and relaxing the assumption of linear effects. Under this binning strategy, large cities have populations above 56,200, medium cities have populations above 16,300, and small cities have populations below this threshold.

When we examine how women’s salaries evolve relative to men’s in small, medium, and large cities, we find the strongest effects in smaller cities. While women gaining seats on the

city council is associated with a widening gender pay gap in all cities, this pattern is most pronounced in cities in the bottom tercile of population. Table 5 shows these results.

Table 5: Council Gender Composition and Pay Gap Varies by City Size

	City Employee Regular Pay		
	Small	Medium	Large
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	818.99 (869.31)	220.47 (413.25)	112.93 (338.62)
Council Prop. Women	1,737.54 (1,562.52)	1,172.26 (1,153.63)	938.05 (1,071.30)
Female $\times$ Council Prop. Women	-4,090.15* (1,637.06)	-2,470.89* (1,060.17)	-1,754.27* (851.22)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exact Job FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	61,427.69	66,338.19	71,898.39
Observations	84,956	279,960	1,914,829
Adjusted R ²	0.7	0.75	0.77

Notes: Cities split into small, medium, and large samples by baseline population at the beginning of the panel. Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Interestingly, this pattern does not simply reflect city partisanship. When we adjust for the proportion of registered Democrats in a municipality, the results remain unchanged. This pattern provides suggestive evidence about the institutional conditions under which descriptive representation in elected office is most likely to translate into changes in the municipal workforce. While city size itself is a moderator rather than a mechanism, it captures differences in the organization of local government that may condition the relationship between elected leadership and employee outcomes and helps to motivate the mechanism tests that follow.

6 Mechanisms

In the previous section, we ruled out that female city managers are responsible for the gender pay gap increasing after women gain power on city councils, and we also found that these effects are most pronounced in smaller cities. We now consider two main categories of possible mechanisms to explain these results. One broad class of explanations for a widening gender pay gap following women’s electoral gains involves compositional changes in the municipal workforce. When women come to power, they may reshape hiring or retention patterns, either intentionally or indirectly, in ways that alter the mix of employees. Councils led by women might prioritize gender diversity and bring more women into public employment, particularly in administrative or service-oriented roles that tend to pay less than positions held by men. Even without changes in within-job pay equity, a shift in workforce composition toward lower-paid roles or newer, less senior employees could mechanically widen the overall gender pay gap.

Another compositional dynamic may operate through differential attrition among men, often described as the “mediocre man” effect. This hypothesis, articulated by Besley et al. (2017), suggests that gender quotas to ensure women’s representation can lead to the displacement of less qualified men rather than the crowding out of highly competent ones. In the context of city governments, when women gain political power, less qualified or lower-performing men may feel displaced, undervalued, or less comfortable in the new organizational environment and consequently choose to leave their positions. At the same time, more successful or higher-status men with greater confidence in their own standing may remain. If lower-paid men exit and higher-paid men stay, the average male salary rises even if no individual’s pay changes, producing an apparent widening of the gender gap.

A second class of explanations focuses not on who is employed but on how pay evolves for those who remain. Even holding workforce composition constant, gender differences in salary trajectories may emerge or intensify after women gain political power. Women’s

representation in leadership could trigger shifts in bureaucratic culture, promotion processes, or perceptions of merit that alter the pace of salary growth across genders. For instance, women might face subtle resistance from middle managers, slower advancement through pay grades, or reduced access to discretionary raises. Alternatively, men could experience relatively steeper wage trajectories if they are more likely to negotiate, receive performance-based pay increases, or remain concentrated in positions with greater upward mobility. In this sense, the widening pay gap could reflect not immediate compositional turnover but diverging salary growth rates among incumbents—a dynamic in which men’s and women’s pay trajectories increasingly separate over time, even within the same jobs and departments.

Table 6: Effects of Council Gender Composition on Annual Pay Increases

	One-Year Regular Pay Raise		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	−595.63* (150.83)	−373.96* (174.69)	−387.27* (171.96)
Prop. Women on Council	493.01 (468.01)	331.80 (479.13)	253.57 (484.54)
Female × Prop. Women on Council	−244.49 (402.77)	−104.98 (424.39)	112.44 (433.90)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	2,807.73	2,807.73	2,807.73
Adjusted R ²	0.05	0.08	0.08

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

We employ several tests to distinguish between these two mechanisms. First, we examine whether one year within-employee pay changes differentially for men and women after women gain seats on the city council. Table 6 shows the results. Women do earn slightly lower pay

increases each year than men—almost \$600 less on average (Column 1). This pattern is consistent with the fact that the gender pay gap between men and women slowly increases with employee tenure, as shown previously in Figure 1. However, these differences in pay increases do not vary by the gender composition of the city council. We similarly find no difference in the promotion rates of male and female employees after women gain seats on the city council (Table A.11 in the online appendix). These results suggest that compositional changes are likely a more important driver of the widening gender pay gap than changes to individual employee trajectories, at least in the short term.

At the same time, annual pay changes and promotions capture only one dimension of individual salary trajectories. The widening gender pay gap could still emerge through differences that accumulate over longer periods or through differences in the salaries of newly hired employees. To better distinguish among these possibilities, we next split employees into four categories: new employees in their first year, early employees who are in their second through fourth year of service, senior employees who are in their fifth through eleventh year of employment, and “career” employees who are present in all twelve years in the data. We then estimate the effect of women gaining council seats on the gender wage gap within these different groups.

If the wage gap is exacerbated because new women are being hired and tend to start out at lower wages, we should observe a widening of the wage gap for the “new” subsample. Alternatively, the subsample of employees who appear in the data all twelve years have no attrition, by definition; any changes to the wage gap among this distinct set of employees should be driven by individual salary trajectories and promotions rather than compositional effects, as this sample is balanced across each year. If the effects are concentrated among employees who are somewhere in the middle of their career and who are not present in the data all twelve years, this suggests that compositional effects are likely.

Table 7 shows the results of this exercise and paints a mixed picture about the sources of the widening gender pay gap. On the one hand, new male and female employees in their first

Table 7: Effects of Council Gender Composition by Employee Sample

	Regular Employee Salary			
	New	Early	Senior	Career
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-80.2 (545.9)	-1,375.7 (847.0)	-1,828.6* (583.0)	-2,313.8* (705.9)
Prop. Women on Council	267.5 (1,502.7)	1,944.4 (1,691.3)	1,942.4 (1,179.6)	2,842.5* (1,407.6)
Female $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	-855.0 (1,150.9)	62.9 (1,630.6)	-4,228.9* (1,458.2)	-3,169.9* (1,582.5)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	39,056.21	58,844.17	78,445.67	87,603.24
Observations	270,687	271,785	619,421	514,903
Adjusted R ²	0.51	0.62	0.68	0.82

Notes: New employee sample restricted to employees in their first year. Early sample includes employees who have worked between two and four years and are not present for all twelve years. Senior employee sample includes employees who have worked between five and eleven years but are not present for all twelve years. Career sample includes a balanced panel of employees who appear in the data all twelve years. Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

year do not earn substantially different salaries when women gain seats on the city council. While the sign on the relevant interaction coefficient is negative, the estimate is quite noisy. There is even less evidence that pay is diverging for early stage employees over their first few years working for city government. The largest increase in the gender pay gap emerges for mid-career employees who have worked for somewhere between 5 and 11 years (Column 3). As we will see, there do seem to be important compositional and attrition differences among these employees that can partly explain the results.

However, there is also a detectable widening of the gender pay gap after women gain power among employees who were present in all 12 years of the data. This result suggests that, by definition, within-employee trajectories of men and women are diverging over time within this group after women gain seats on the council. However, since the set of long-term

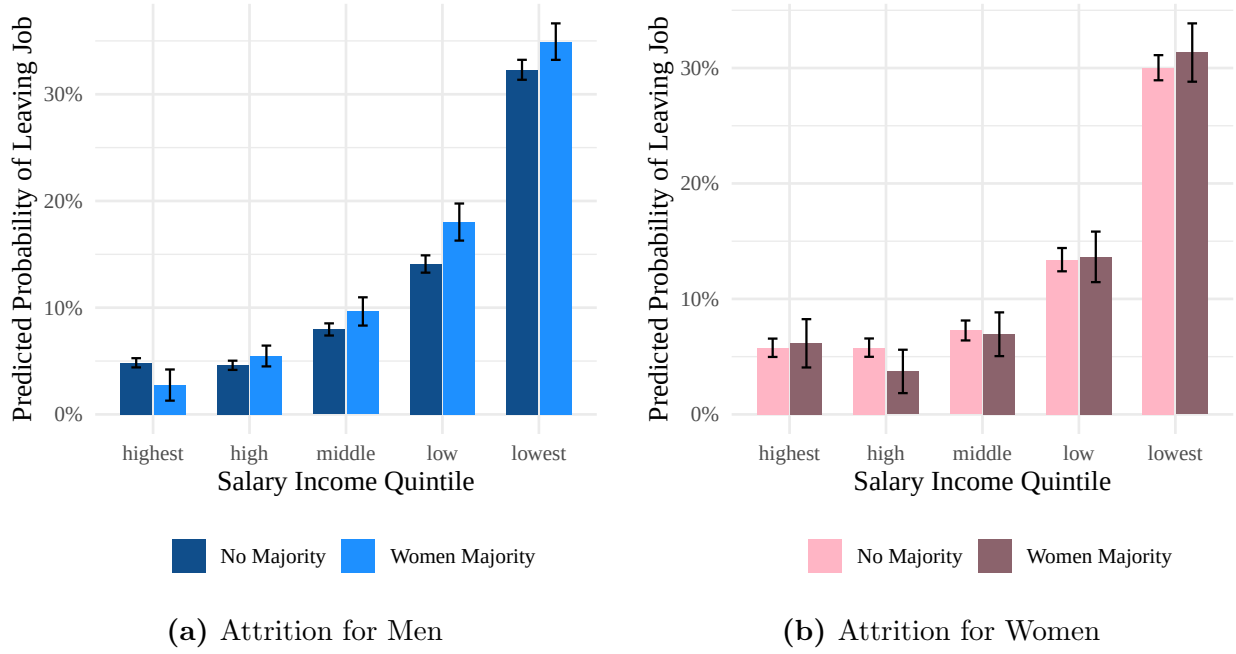
stayers is itself selective, this result does not fully eliminate the possibility that selection on unobserved career trajectories contributes to the observed pattern. The men and women who remain employed continuously are a very specific subset—likely older, more stable employees committed to public sector careers. If these men systematically differ in unobserved ways (e.g., more likely to be in high-paying administrative or public safety roles), then the widening gap could reflect the fact that the kinds of men who stay are not directly comparable to the kinds of women who stay. Specifically, if the men who leave after women gain power are precisely those with flatter salary trajectories, then the remaining men are disproportionately those on steep upward trajectories. So while this sample of employees is attrition-free by construction, its composition may still be endogenously determined by earlier attrition processes.

6.1 How Employee Attrition Contributes to the Gender Pay Gap

What does this attrition process look like? As previously discussed, one possible explanation for the widening gap among the sample of mid-career employees is that lower paid men might be more likely to leave their positions when more women are elected to office. To test this possibility, we create an indicator variable that takes a value of one for an employee’s last year in the data before exiting city government. We then estimate the probability that women and men across different pay grades leave their job following the election of women to the city council. Specifically, we split our sample into men and women and allow employee exit to vary across salary quintile (constructed within each city and year).

Figure 5 shows the probability of employees leaving their jobs after women gain a majority on the city council. Tabular results are show in Appendix Table A.12. Unsurprisingly, employees with lower salaries are more likely to exit their job in any given year, with substantial rates of turnover among the lowest pay quintile. However, the rate of exit varies depending on the gender composition of the council. Among the highest paid men, employees are actually slightly less likely to leave their positions when women gain a majority. Among

Figure 5: Exit by Salary and Gender After Women Gain Majority



the bottom three quintiles of the salary distribution (defined as the middle, low, and lowest quintiles), men are anywhere from 2 to 5 percentage points more likely to quit after women gain power. This is not the case among female employees, who are equally likely to leave their positions regardless of the composition of the council. As a result, the average salaries of the men who stay increases mechanically, while the same is not true for women.

Another way to demonstrate that lower paid men have higher rates of attrition after women gain seats on the city council is simply to look at the average pay of the male and female employees who leave their jobs as the gender composition of the council changes. Table A.13 in the online appendix tells a very similar story as Figure 5. In this table, the variable *Exit* is an indicator identifying employees who leave their jobs in the next year. Predicting salary as a function of this variable shows that employees who go on to leave their position in city government earn less than employees who stay, and this is true among both men and women. But the men who exit after women gain power on the council earn significantly less than the men who stay, whereas the female employees who exit do not earn statistically less than the women who remain. When we include leads of the treatment

variable to test for anticipatory effects, we confirm that lower paid men are only leaving their jobs once women actually gain seats on the city council (Appendix Table A.14 and Figure A.2).

This estimate is largely driven by men in smaller cities. Table 8 shows the results. While the men who leave their jobs earn substantially lower pay than the men who stay in all cities, men who exit city employment after women gain political power are especially likely to be lower paid workers in small cities, earning over \$8,200 less than men who remain (Column 2).

Table 8: Attrition of Lower Paid Men is Concentrated in Smaller Cities

	Regular Employee Pay (Men)			
	Full Sample	Small Cities	Medium Cities	Large Cities
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exit Indicator	-17,810.37* (957.97)	-13,538.04* (1,432.03)	-17,996.67* (1,840.88)	-22,949.94* (1,344.48)
Council Prop. Women	210.24 (1,187.55)	1,573.64 (2,093.76)	-437.75 (1,931.38)	283.24 (1,877.84)
Exit $\times$ Council Prop. Women	-5,049.22 (2,689.92)	-8,265.45* (3,566.17)	-4,451.02 (5,634.23)	-2,421.02 (4,041.59)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	74,877.34	64,604.09	70,585.07	75,922
Observations	1,359,051	48,732	161,716	1,148,210
Adjusted R ²	0.26	0.29	0.24	0.24

Notes: Exit indicator takes a value of 1 in an employee's last year working for the city. Cities split into size terciles based on log population in the first year of the panel. Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

This result aligns with the city-size heterogeneity documented in the previous section. The disproportionate departure of lower-paid men after women gain council seats is most pronounced in smaller cities, where personnel systems may be less formalized and where individual departures can have larger effects on the observed gender pay gap. Again, the evidence points toward a broader compositional process in which changes in elected leadership

coincide with shifts in the municipal workforce, especially among lower-paid men in smaller and less bureaucratized cities. In the online appendix, we replicate Figure A.13 broken down by city size to visualize this pattern (Figure A.3).

7 Discussion

To summarize, while the pay gap between male and female city employees increases slightly once women gain power on city councils, this pattern appears to be at least in part compositional and driven by senior employees in smaller cities. To be clear, we are not arguing that compositional changes and attrition by lower paid men are the only or even the main mechanisms contributing to this result. But the evidence suggests that these patterns are an important part of the story, particularly as salary raises and promotion rates for individual male and female employees are not diverging after women gain council seats, at least in the short-term.

We should note that one remaining possibility that would be consistent with our results is that when women gain elected office, they face various pressures and constraints on their actions that lead them to de-prioritize pursuing gender equality. Or, perhaps the gender of city council members matters less than some unobserved ideological commitment to gender parity. While we are unable to test these alternative explanations with the large-scale observational data that we use in this study, future research might consider further unpacking these potential mechanisms.

Overall, it's difficult to assess the normative implications of these results. Existing literature is clear that, on average, women leaders care about achieving gender parity in the workplace. As a result, women city council members are probably not intentionally enacting policies or encouraging hiring decisions that would exacerbate pay disparities between men and women. However, the data suggest that any potential efforts by women city council members to address gender pay gaps are dwarfed by larger structural economic and workforce

trends. This interpretation mirrors that of Saltzstein (1986), who concluded that women mayors matter for the occupational sorting of female city employees, but “that influence operates against a backdrop of pervasive societal patterns of occupational segregation that result from both supply and demand influences on female labor force participation” (pg. 159).

If men and women have different preferences over how much they work and which sorts of positions they are willing to accept, it’s not clear that institutional interventions will change those dynamics. Moreover, if less-qualified men tend to leave their city jobs when women gain power, the gender pay gap may mechanically increase, but the quality of remaining employees might also improve. As a result, it’s difficult to draw conclusions about the equity and welfare implications, either for individual workers or the city as a whole.

8 Conclusion

This paper examined whether women’s political representation affects gender pay disparities within the local public workforce. Building on theories of descriptive representation and gendered leadership, we studied how the gender composition of city councils influences hiring patterns and the pay gap between men and women employed by city governments. Leveraging a rich longitudinal dataset that links over two million municipal employee salary records from more than 450 California cities between 2011 and 2022 with detailed information on local elections and demographics, we applied event-study and fixed-effects designs to isolate changes in employment outcomes before and after women gained seats on their city councils. This approach allows for a fine-grained assessment of whether the symbolic and substantive benefits of women’s political power extend into the public sector bureaucracy.

In doing so, this paper connects research on gender and local administration to a broader political science literature on descriptive representation. Existing work shows that the gender of elected officials can shape policy priorities, public goods provision, legislative behavior,

and citizens' perceptions of legitimacy. Yet we know less about whether and how women's descriptive representation in elected office translates into changes within the administrative state itself.

While city councils do not typically make individual employment decisions directly, they do structure the institutional environment in which those decisions are made. Council composition may matter through multiple channels, including the selection and oversight of city managers, budgetary priorities, pressure on departments, agenda-setting, symbolic signals about gender equity, or broader organizational norms. Because elected officials sit upstream of administrative leadership and are the primary mechanism through which voters can influence municipal governance, their effects may be indirect, diffuse, and mediated by professional administrators. But those equilibrium effects are precisely what make our research question important. They speak to whether descriptive representation in democratic institutions is capable of producing substantive gains inside public organizations, or whether the translation from electoral representation to administrative equity is weaker, more contingent, or more complicated than theories of representation often imply.

Our results reveal a complex picture. When women gain a majority on the council, the likelihood that the city appoints a woman as the city manager rises by roughly five percentage points, consistent with theories that women leaders open doors for other women and influence administrative hiring priorities. Yet, counter to expectations drawn from the private sector, women's representation on the council is associated with a modest increase in the gender pay gap among city employees. Closer inspection suggests that this widening is not primarily driven by direct discrimination or by changes in pay structures that favor men, but rather by compositional and trajectory effects within the workforce.

Specifically, lower-paid men in smaller cities are more likely to leave city employment after women gain power, consistent with mediocre man theories emphasizing status threat. Higher-earning men remain and continue to experience faster salary growth. At the same time, even among senior employees who remain in their jobs for the entire sample period,

men’s pay trajectories become steeper relative to women’s, suggesting that within-person dynamics, in addition to workforce composition, may contribute to the widening gap.

These findings underscore that increasing women’s political power does not necessarily translate into eliminating pay gaps between male and female workers in the public sector. While women in elected office appear to open leadership opportunities for other women, they may also inadvertently trigger patterns of attrition and salary growth that exacerbate inequality among those who remain. This highlights how institutional constraints and broad economic forces can constrain whether gains in women’s descriptive representation in the electoral realm translate into economic gains among public sector bureaucrats.

Future research should extend these analyses to other states and levels of government, explore how institutional design (such as council–manager versus strong-mayor systems) moderates these effects, and incorporate qualitative evidence on workplace culture and managerial decision-making to better understand how gendered leadership shapes organizational dynamics. These patterns may also reflect forces beyond gendered leadership itself. Ideological differences among elected officials (which may reflect differences in labor agendas), as well as compositional constraints within municipal bureaucracies, could shape whether representation at the top translates into improved outcomes below. For example, if women remain underrepresented in senior roles, there may simply be fewer women positioned for promotion. More broadly, this work suggests that the path from women’s political representation to gender pay equality in the workplace is not linear. Descriptive gains at the top can coexist with widening disparities among ordinary workers, revealing both the promise and the limits of representation as a tool for achieving substantive equality in public employment.

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Online Appendix

Intended for online publication only.

A.1 Background and Summary Statistics	A-2
A.2 Additional Results	A-6
A.3 Mechanisms	A-13

A.1 Background and Summary Statistics

Figure A.1: Salary Variation in Local Public Sector Jobs in California

Classification	Schedule	Minimum	Maximum	Bargaining Unit
Account Clerk I	77J	3,453.18	4,772.82	111
Accountant I	87F	5,281.00	6,047.55	121
Administrative Analyst	103E	6,908.36	9,310.00	999
Application Developer II	105D	7,681.27	9,804.09	121

Notes: Sample of public employees pay scale from Los Angeles County Class and Salary Listings. Substantial pay variation can exist within each job title..

Table A.1: Individual Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Female	2,281,332	0.341	0.474	0	1
Total Pay	2,281,332	85,824	53,539	10,000	932,623
Regular Pay	2,281,332	70,824	39,562	10,000	505,891
Overtime Pay	2,281,162	8,273	18,092	−5,433	502,681
Other Pay	2,281,257	6,728	11,591	−76,665	864,454
Grand Total Pay and Benefits	2,281,332	116,397	75,341	−108,096	2,185,357
Years in Data	2,281,332	7.836	3.587	1	12
Part-Time	2,281,332	0.029	0.168	0	1
Public Safety	2,281,332	0.315	0.464	0	1
Exit Job	2,061,304	0.117	0.321	0	1
Change Job	1,725,529	0.150	0.357	0	1

Notes: Employee data come from Transparent California. Years in Data shows how many years an individual employee appears in the salary data. Part-Time is an indicator for part-time employees. Public Safety is an indicator for employees in police or firefighter jobs. Job Exit is an indicator for the last year an employee appears in the data, capturing the probability of exit. Change Job is an indicator for switching jobs from one year to the next.

Table A.2: City Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Total Employees	5,092	448	2,290	1	56,266
Total Male Employees	5,092	295	1,572	0	39,440
Total Female Employees	5,092	153	720	0	17,105
Regular Male Pay	5,073	69,384	17,426	10,228	196,118
Regular Female Pay	5,088	56,689	14,228	10,380	137,060
Female Average Tenure	5,088	3.804	1.686	1.000	12.000
Male Average Tenure	5,073	4.044	1.887	1.000	11.000
City Council Prop. Women	5,637	0.322	0.210	0.000	1.000
City Council Majority Women	5,637	0.177	0.382	0	1
Woman City Manager	5,553	0.191	0.393	0	1
Population	5,664	66,611	205,101	59	3,973,278
Prop. Democrat	5,670	0.440	0.130	0.000	0.830
Prop. White	5,664	0.440	0.250	0.009	0.925
Prop. Hispanic	5,664	0.371	0.257	0.019	0.980
Median Income (Log)	5,664	10.364	0.418	7.824	11.602
Median House Value (Log)	5,664	525,681	397,864	46,000	2,000,001
Prop. College Degree	5,664	0.135	0.081	0.003	0.401
Total City Revenues (Log)	5,697	16.573	1.450	11.560	23.300

Notes: Employee and salary data come from Transparent California. Council gender composition come from Transparent California and California Local Election Data Archive. City demographic variables come from the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Table A.3: Correlates of Women Gaining City Council Seats

	Gender Composition on City Council			
	Prop. Women	Majority Women	Prop. Women	Majority Women
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Total City Employees (Log)	0.011 (0.012)	0.029 (0.018)	0.025* (0.014)	0.041* (0.021)
Population (Log)	0.005 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.016)	-0.102 (0.100)	0.005 (0.175)
Prop. Democrat	0.406** (0.062)	0.543** (0.103)	0.200 (0.141)	0.171 (0.259)
Median Income (Log)	-0.036 (0.032)	-0.044 (0.054)	0.001 (0.072)	-0.101 (0.126)
Prop. White	0.157** (0.045)	0.213** (0.077)	0.118 (0.186)	0.003 (0.329)
Prop. College Degree	0.264 (0.171)	0.212 (0.277)	-0.165 (0.387)	-0.390 (0.715)
City Revenue (Log)	-0.013 (0.010)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.009)	-0.032** (0.015)
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
City FEs	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	0.33	0.18	0.33	0.18
Observations	5,017	5,017	5,017	5,017

Notes: The outcome variable *Prop. Women* measures the proportion of city council seats held by women, while the outcome *Majority Women* takes a value of 1 when women hold a majority of council seats.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05

Cross-sectionally, women are more likely to gain power in cities with more registered Democrats and higher proportions of white residents (Columns 1 and 2). Within city, women are modestly more likely to gain council seats as cities hire more employees.

A.2 Additional Results

Table A.4: Effect of Female Majority Council on Probability of a Woman City Manager

	Prob. Woman City Manager		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Majority Women on Council	0.034 (0.022)	0.040* (0.024)	0.039* (0.023)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Control for Number of City Employees	No	Yes	Yes
Full Controls	No	No	Yes
Mean Outcome	0.19	0.19	0.19
Observations	5,495	4,980	4,931
Adjusted R ²	0.391	0.402	0.402

Notes: Full controls include city population, proportion registered Democrat, proportion white, and log median housing value. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.5: Gaining a Female Majority on City Council Worsens Gender Pay Gap

	City Employee Regular Pay				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Female	-11,593.1* (405.1)	-2,321.9* (290.6)	-2,284.1* (291.3)	-346.5 (231.0)	-308.7 (232.3)
Council Majority Women	-3.4 (459.1)	220.6 (354.5)	223.0 (352.7)	263.1 (330.0)	262.8 (329.5)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women	-517.1 (833.3)	-773.9 (431.1)	-811.0 (430.9)	-824.1* (392.9)	-856.8* (396.9)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Position Start Year FE	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Exact Job FEs	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	70,823.09	70,823.09	70,823.09	70,823.09	70,823.09
Observations	2,280,452	2,280,452	2,280,452	2,280,452	2,280,452
Adjusted R ²	0.23	0.68	0.68	0.73	0.73

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.6: Salary Gap and Timing of Women Gaining Majority: Leads and Lags

	City Employee Regular Pay
Female	-1,955.1* (333.7)
Council Majority Women t+2	459.6 (407.7)
Council Majority Women t+1	92.0 (370.4)
Council Majority Women	-352.1 (351.7)
Council Majority Women t-1	389.4 (336.0)
Council Majority Women t-2	297.3 (384.9)
Council Majority Women t-3	588.7 (458.3)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women t+2	-436.7 (459.7)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women t+1	-472.0 (421.8)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women	-47.8 (440.0)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women t-1	-908.2* (399.1)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women t-2	576.7 (463.6)
Female $\times$ Council Majority Women t-3	-1,313.2* (552.2)
City + Year FEs	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes
Mean Outcome	69,903.06
Observations	1,362,999
Adjusted R ²	0.66

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.7: Gender Composition of Council and Gender Pay Gap: Comparison of Public Safety Employees

	City Employee Regular Pay			
	Public Safety Employees		Non-Public Safety Employees	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-2,298.8* (579.0)	-176.7 (509.7)	-1,981.0* (421.3)	-86.9 (358.0)
Prop. Women on Council	-1,996.6 (1,352.8)	-1,407.1 (1,300.5)	1,481.8 (842.5)	1,129.6 (786.7)
Female $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	-127.3 (1,433.8)	-1,141.6 (1,354.4)	-1,133.9 (843.1)	-1,629.3* (766.3)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes	Yes	No	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	90,085.39	90,085.39	61,981.62	61,981.62
Observations	717,432	717,432	1,563,020	1,563,020
Adjusted R ²	0.6	0.68	0.69	0.74

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.8: Gender Composition of Council and Gender Pay Gap: Full-Time Versus Part-Time Employees

	City Employee Regular Pay			
	Part Time		Full Time	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	204.5 (373.0)	171.7 (350.4)	-1,875.7* (385.6)	340.7 (334.5)
Prop. Women on Council	486.5 (1,039.8)	65.0 (964.4)	1,161.5 (819.4)	1,031.0 (794.2)
Female $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	-1,412.7 (1,073.8)	-992.3 (970.4)	-1,766.7* (850.6)	-2,301.0* (808.3)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes	Yes	No	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	21,464.26	21,464.26	72,298.92	72,298.92
Observations	66,206	66,206	2,214,246	2,214,246
Adjusted R ²	0.54	0.57	0.67	0.73

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.9: Gender Composition of Council and Gender Pay Gap: Pre- and Post-2020

	City Employee Regular Pay			
	Post-2020		Pre-2020	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	−1,823.0* (843.2)	991.7 (689.1)	−1,656.5* (403.6)	363.6 (379.7)
Prop. Women on Council	1,061.4 (2,639.7)	−120.5 (2,764.6)	1,044.9 (914.6)	741.4 (885.9)
Female × Prop. Women on Council	−1,357.1 (1,574.1)	−2,975.5* (1,420.8)	−2,713.0* (1,019.7)	−2,921.5* (985.9)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes	No	Yes	No
Exact Job FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean Outcome	78,158.75	78,158.75	67,842.35	67,842.35
Observations	429,524	429,524	1,641,978	1,641,978
Adjusted R ²	0.64	0.71	0.65	0.72
Observations	429,524	429,524	1,641,978	1,641,978
Adjusted R ²	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.10: Gender Composition of Council and Gender Pay Gap Across Type of Earnings

	City Employee Pay			
	Regular Pay	Overtime Pay	Total Pay	Total Pay + Benefits
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-1,885.0* (381.3)	-404.3* (151.7)	-2,565.3* (510.0)	-2,553.9* (721.4)
Council Prop. Women	983.6 (808.6)	413.5 (366.7)	1,247.5 (1,140.8)	1,403.7 (1,825.8)
Female $\times$ Council Prop. Women	-1,760.3* (845.3)	-1,301.8* (440.5)	-3,615.0* (1,249.4)	-6,887.8* (1,838.0)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	70,823.09	8,273.94	85,824.09	116,397.5
Observations	2,280,452	2,280,282	2,280,452	2,280,452
Adjusted R ²	0.68	0.49	0.69	0.7

Notes: Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

A.3 Mechanisms

Table A.11: Men and Women Promoted At Equal Rates After Women Gain Seats on Council

	Probability of Promotion		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	0.01* (0.004)	0.01 (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)
Prop. Women on Council	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Female $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	0.001 (0.01)	-0.002 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	0.09	0.09	0.09
Adjusted R ²	0.04	0.11	0.13

Notes: Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.12: Employee Exit by Pay Quintile After Women Gain Seats on Council

	Probability of Leaving Job	
	Men	Women
	(1)	(2)
Pay Quintile (High)	−0.004 (0.004)	0.001 (0.006)
Pay Quintile (Middle)	0.027* (0.005)	0.015* (0.008)
Pay Quintile (Low)	0.077* (0.007)	0.077* (0.008)
Pay Quintile (Lowest)	0.266* (0.007)	0.238* (0.009)
Council Prop. Women	−0.056* (0.018)	−0.012 (0.022)
Pay Quintile (High) × Council Majority Women	0.009 (0.011)	−0.012 (0.017)
Pay Quintile (Middle) × Council Majority Women	0.025 (0.013)	−0.002 (0.019)
Pay Quintile (Low) × Council Majority Women	0.070* (0.018)	−0.0001 (0.022)
Pay Quintile (Lowest) × Council Majority Women	0.040* (0.018)	0.021 (0.025)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	0.11	0.14
Observations	1,359,051	701,373
Adjusted R ²	0.12	0.09

Notes: Omitted category is highest pay quintile. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.13: Salary for Employees Who Exit City Government After Women Gain Seats on Council

	Regular Employee Salary			
	Men	Men	Women	Women
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exit Indicator	-15,077.96* (739.59)	-14,706.33* (732.53)	-13,961.03* (574.42)	-13,178.00* (535.77)
Prop. Women on Council	77.59 (901.70)	-3.59 (898.70)	604.01 (821.59)	-62.06 (776.77)
Exit $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	-4,047.45* (2,022.88)	-4,103.04* (1,992.07)	-996.68 (1,526.01)	-1,853.73 (1,494.22)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	Yes	No	Yes	No
Exact Job FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	74,877.34	74,877.34	60,684.85	60,684.85
Observations	1,359,051	1,359,051	701,373	701,373
Adjusted R ²	0.71	0.76	0.69	0.75

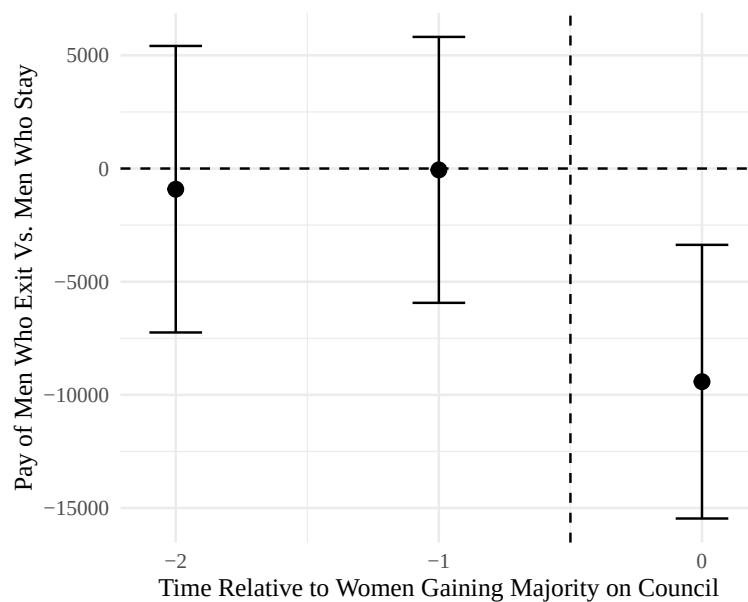
Notes: Exit indicator takes a value of 1 in an employee's last year working for the city. Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Table A.14: Employee Exit and Council Gender Composition: Anticipatory Effects

	Regular Employee Salary (Men)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Exit Indicator	-17,439.80* (1,158.85)	-15,014.33* (884.83)	-14,610.61* (862.94)
Prop. Women on Council (t - 2)	587.99 (1,057.08)	505.77 (836.22)	110.59 (811.35)
Prop. Women on Council (t - 1)	1,801.25* (910.37)	720.75 (684.01)	434.75 (673.14)
Prop. Women on Council	-551.42 (1,148.65)	-204.20 (920.68)	-107.53 (924.24)
Exit $\times$ Prop. Women on Council (t - 2)	2,481.15 (3,432.72)	933.17 (2,769.57)	1,118.08 (2,570.64)
Exit $\times$ Prop. Women on Council (t - 1)	724.24 (3,451.49)	3,610.82 (2,776.20)	1,963.60 (2,692.74)
Exit $\times$ Prop. Women on Council	-9,003.88* (3,467.51)	-8,238.08* (2,756.63)	-7,048.51* (2,768.28)
City + Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job Cluster FEs	No	Yes	No
Exact Job FEs	No	No	Yes
Seniority FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean Outcome	73,922.91	73,922.91	73,922.91
Observations	1,219,461	1,219,461	1,219,461
Adjusted R ²	0.26	0.72	0.76

Notes: Exit indicator takes a value of 1 in an employee's last year working for the city. Observations weighted by the inverse of the total number of city employees. Standard errors clustered by city. *p<0.05

Figure A.2: Lower Paid Men Only Exit After Women Gain Seats on Council



Notes: Visualizes results from Table A.14 Column 1.

Figure A.3: Exit by City Size and Employee Salary for Men

