



# Congressional Staff Attitudes Toward the Foreign Service and the Department of State

A Report Based on 28 One-on-One Interviews with Congressional Staff  
Prepared by Nicholas Kralev for the American Foreign Service Association  
June 2013

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## Executive Summary

Congressional staff attitudes toward the Foreign Service (FS) and the Department of State (State) have improved in the past decade, but a high level of distrust between the Foreign Service/Department of State and Capitol Hill remains, according to a study conducted for the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA). While some distrust between the executive and legislative branches of the federal government is not unusual, participants in the study suggested that a greater outreach effort by Foreign Service/Department of State to members of Congress and their staff, along with articulating a clear and direct link between U.S. diplomacy abroad and the lives of Americans at home, would lead to a better relationship.

In interviews with 28 staff members, evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate, an overwhelming majority (82%) described their experience with the Foreign Service and Department of State as “mostly positive.” Respondents view Foreign Service members as dedicated, intelligent and patriotic public servants who make significant sacrifices, although they are also perceived by some as out-of-touch, risk-averse and even socially inept.

Most of the respondents said that their perceptions of the Foreign Service before they ever dealt with it were inaccurate. Even though almost all (93%) said they now consider themselves knowledgeable about the Foreign Service lifestyle and main duties, the author found that to be not always the case. While only half of the participants in the study consider diplomacy a profession, almost all associate it with national security, which many said is not the case with all members of Congress.

Half of the respondents also think that the resources the Foreign Service and Department of State have are insufficient, but no one expects a bigger budget anytime soon. As much as members and staff on Capitol Hill value diplomacy, especially since 9/11 and after two long wars, the Foreign Service will probably never truly have a strong constituency in Congress, because its activities are not tied to votes -- as is the case with the U.S. military, which operates in many states.

The majority of those interviewed said there is no interest in their offices in the professional development and training of the Foreign Service. They also see minimal

interest by members in undertaking any reforms of Foreign Service/Department of State operations. Among the recommendations respondents made are the following:

- Content about diplomacy and the Foreign Service should be included in the middle school and high school curriculum.
- The Foreign Service promotion system needs to be more transparent.
- Foreign Service members should have the flexibility to extend overseas tour beyond three years, if managements determine they are doing a good job and should stay.
- The Foreign Service mission in war zones should be clearer, beyond “fix it.”
- The Department of State should “loosen the reins” on employees and encourage more initiative.
- In recruitment, the Department should aim for diversity of political views.
- The Foreign Service should be more family-friendly.
- FSOs should be allowed to stay in the Service longer.
- The Foreign Service should be better at anticipating major shifts and changes in foreign countries.
- The Foreign Service should do more cross-training with the military and intelligence services.
- There should be better coordination among the various agencies represented at overseas posts.

## Key Findings

### General Impressions of the Foreign Service and State

⇒ Foreign Service/Department of State experience mostly positive

Asked to describe their experience with the Foreign Service and Department, 82% said it was “mostly positive,” and 18% called it “mixed” (See Appendix 1). No one described it as “negative,” which was the third option offered to respondents. Among the reasons cited for “mixed” experience were a lack of responsiveness to inquiries, some FSOs being “disorganized,” a lack of understanding of how Congress works and how to deal with it, seeing Congress as an “impediment,” not providing enough support to a codel because of a disagreement between two bureaus at State, using the presence of a codel to complain about problems affecting a particular post, or “taking advantage” of a visiting member of Congress to gain access to host government officials who were otherwise off limits to the embassy.

The most frequently used adjectives to describe Foreign Service members in general were: dedicated (25%), intelligent (21%), smart (18%), knowledgeable (14%) and hard-working (11%). Other adjectives with positive connotations were: selfless, energetic, insightful, helpful, competent, focused, committed, pragmatic, courteous, capable and courageous. Among the adjectives with negative connotations were: odd, elitist, out-of-touch, stiff, defensive, risk-averse, socially inept and arrogant.

On the “elitist” point, a senior House Republican aide cited a recent op-ed piece about the Foreign Service in the *Washington Post* by AFSA President Susan R. Johnson, Ambassador Ronald Neumann and Ambassador Thomas Pickering -- “I found it accurate, but it was written at a level that the common man does not understand, so you immediately sound like an elitist by leaving out 90% of the people who may be interested but have no idea what you are talking about,” the aide said. A House Democratic aide said many FSOs are not “good managers.”

⇒ Previous perception of the Foreign Service inaccurate and “romanticized”

Fewer than half of the respondents (39%) were able to remember their first interaction with the Foreign Service or State as congressional staffers, which in every case was on a delegation abroad. At the same time, 75% remembered their most recent interaction (See Appendix 2). Only 11% said they knew the rank or exact title of the Department of State employees they have dealt with -- the rest said they typically seek “the right person” for whatever need they have. In addition, 82% said their perceptions about the Foreign Service before they began dealing with it had been inaccurate.

The most common surprise cited by respondents was how much less “romanticized” and more “bureaucratic” the service is. A Senate Democratic aide recalled that, when a friend worked at the Department’s Operations Center, “she essentially was a glorified operator handling the secretary’s calls. I still don’t understand what they do there, but apparently that is a posting for a year or two in the Foreign Service,” the aide said. “Then she had a posting in the Situation Room at the White House for a year, and again I was surprised that FSOs are there.”

A senior House Democratic aide expressed amazement at “how little control these folks have over their lives and their careers. I looked into it when I was an undergrad, and now I’m glad I didn’t do it. I think in many ways it’s a wonderful life, but I think it’s also brutal on families. We all talk about the sacrifices the military makes, but these guys make a huge sacrifice as well.” Two House Republican aides had similar comments about the “burden” of the Foreign Service lifestyle, especially in hardship posts. However, one of them also expressed “surprise” at the “extraordinary level of perks” Foreign Service members receive overseas.

⇒ Only half of respondents see diplomacy as a profession

Although 86% of respondents said they consider Foreign Service members to be professionals, only 50% defined their profession as “diplomacy” -- 7% described it as “representing the United States,” and 4% each as “public service” and “being an adviser.” The other 35% had no answer (See Appendix 3).

The division on whether diplomacy is a profession was not along party lines. A senior Senate Republican aide called diplomacy “an art and a profession,” and a House Democratic aide said “it’s not something one can just walk in and do.” At the same time, another House Democratic aide said: “I wouldn’t view it as a profession; I would view it

as a career. But I wouldn't view my job as a profession, either." Two senior House Republican aides described diplomacy as a "calling," while a Senate Republican aide said: "Would I say that you need some specialized training to do it? Probably not. Probably any smart person who has an interest in living abroad could do it."

A senior Senate Democratic aide said: "When you say you are a diplomat, I don't know what that body of knowledge is." Another senior Senate Republican aide took "issue with the use of the word profession," because it should only apply to fields that require a specific body of knowledge and a clear and published set of skills that are tested, according to the aide, who cited law and the military as appropriate examples, but said the Foreign Service entrance exams don't rise to the same level.

Asked whether they consider themselves knowledgeable about the Foreign Service lifestyle and main duties, 93% answered yes (See Appendix 4). However, in the subsequent conversations with the report's author, it became apparent that several of those respondents didn't have a full or realistic perception. Their exact number is not specified, because for the purposes of quantifying the results of this study, it mattered what the participants said, rather than what the author thought. Some analysis by the author is offered later in the report.

## Purpose and Value of FS

⇒ No clear differentiation between FS and DOS

Just over half of the respondents (54%) said they consider the Foreign Service and the Department of State to be the same, while 32% said they are usually able to distinguish between Foreign Service members, civil servants and political appointees when interacting with State employees (See Appendix 5).

"I generally know who is political," said a Senate Democratic aide. "They are more arrogant, a little less knowledgeable and less nuanced. They act more like us." A Senate Republican aide said Foreign Service members and Civil Service employees "are much more cautious about speaking their mind," while political appointees are "a lot more forward-leaning." A senior House Democratic aide said that FSOs are "seen as superior to Civil Service folks." A Senate Republican aide brought up the drastic surge of political

appointees at the Department of State in recent years -- “I was stunned when I saw the numbers,” the aide said.

As for the Foreign Service personnel system’s similarities to the military (rank in person, up or out, worldwide available), 25% said they were aware of them (See Appendix 6). Those respondents also said the main difference between the Foreign Service and Civil Service at the Department is overseas tours -- they were unaware of other differences, with the exceptions of the two former FSOs. Almost all (89%) said the Foreign Service should preserve the requirement for worldwide availability, though many urged to be “mindful of regional expertise” (See Appendix 7). Those who disagreed cited medical clearance issues -- for example, one respondent said that not being physically fit to serve in Afghanistan doesn’t mean you wouldn’t do a good job in non-war zones.

Several participants said that, while they appreciate the “going native” argument when it comes to limiting the duration of a foreign tour, they don’t understand why Foreign Service members have to rotate as often as every three years or less.

A Senate Republican aide brought up the infamous 2007 Town Hall meeting at DOS where an FSO likened service in Iraq with a “death sentence,” saying it “very much hurt the perception that these people are fine at dinners and receptions in foreign capitals,” but not in hard conditions. “It’s hard to separate fact from fiction” about how widespread such a view was in the Foreign Service, the aide noted.

⇒ No full and accurate idea about what the FS does

Among the duties performed by the Foreign Service that respondents consider most important, the most often-cited were reporting and representing the U.S. and its interests, with 39% each, followed by consular services (36%), interaction with foreign governments and populations (25%), supporting codels and staffdels (14%), promoting trade and commercial ties (11%), foreign assistance and public diplomacy (7% each). Again, the total exceeds 100%, because participants could name more than one duty.

When asked to define the mission of the Foreign Service, respondents cited representing U.S. interests abroad (46%), implementing U.S. foreign policy (36%), conducting foreign relations (12%), assisting Americans and maintaining peace and stability (3% each). As the above results make apparent, most respondents weren’t quite clear about the differences between mission, goals, objectives, strategies, tactics and duties.



“I’m not really sure what the Department of State does” for American business, a senior Senate Republican aide said, wondering why there are economic sections at embassies that have representatives of the Foreign Commercial Service. “Other agencies invite us to their offices to learn about what they do. I think it would be good for State to do that.”

Only 18% of the respondents said they are familiar with the Vienna Convention, which establishes the international diplomatic legal order, and most of them have passing familiarity (with the exceptions of the two former FSOs). Even fewer (11%) distinguish between diplomatic service and diplomatic corps -- for the rest, the two have the same meaning (See Appendices 8-9). Those who do make a difference attributed their awareness to the introduction of the foreign diplomatic corps before the president’s State of the Union address.

⇒ Link between diplomacy and national security seen as not sufficiently direct

On one of the most important questions in the study -- whether respondents associate diplomacy with national security -- 96% said yes. They pointed to diplomacy’s role in trying to “defuse tensions,” “mitigate threats” and “prevent conflict.” “If there are escalating tensions with another country, you have several stages before you enact sanctions or a blockade or before the military aspects come in,” a House Republican aide said.

However, many respondents admitted they struggle to find a “more direct link” between diplomacy and national security -- or to describe how exactly the Foreign Service fulfills the above-mentioned tasks. Others said the link is clear in their minds, but they find it difficult to articulate it to others. “That’s the \$64,000 question,” a senior Senate Republican aide said. Another Senate Republican aide said diplomacy is about making sure that other countries understand American values, because if they don’t, “then they could potentially be enemies.” A House Democratic aide said the Foreign Service’s role is to “keep lines of communication open, giving us a much bigger sense of what’s actually happening” in a foreign country.

“At the end of the day, true security is fostered by relationships, but I do know that many members of Congress don’t share this view,” a senior House Republican aide said.

In fact, when asked whether they believe that most members of Congress associate diplomacy with national security, only 43% of the respondents said yes. “They see it as not necessarily vital, because they don’t take the time to understand it, and they don’t take the time to educate their constituents,” a senior Senate Democratic aide said. Even if members see a link between diplomacy and national security, they think that “defense trumps diplomacy,” a House Democratic aide said. Despite the Obama administration’s forceful arguments that diplomacy and defense are equal elements of U.S. national security, on Capitol Hill, “diplomacy is still the red-headed stepchild of the American national security apparatus,” said a senior House Democratic aide.

A senior Senate Republican aide said that, “by and large, Republicans are more national security-focused, while Democrats are more internationalist when it comes to foreign policy” -- and that a link between international engagement and national security is rarely seen. “Republicans view the Foreign Service as more of an adjunct to our national security interests,” because for them the Foreign Service is “our way of helping other countries,” even if it’s not “in our benefit,” the aide said. For Republicans, the top priority is to “keep us safe,” while for Democrats it’s to “make the world a better place,” the aide added.

However, a senior House Republican aide said the Republican Party “has this image of national security, but I heard some of the new Republican members asking why we are defending Japan and Korea -- and that they are rich countries and can defend themselves.”

As to whether the American public associates diplomacy with national security, only 4% said yes. In theory, they probably “know that diplomatic attempts are made to avoid wars,” a senior Senate Republican aide said (See Appendix 10).

⇒ Doubts FS will ever have a domestic constituency, but more outreach urged

While noting that the events in Benghazi raised the Foreign Service’s visibility, all respondents expressed doubt that the service will ever truly have a domestic constituency, including on Capitol Hill, mainly because “they are not bringing any votes to the table,” as one Senate Republican aide put it. In fact, that aide said that Foreign Service members “already get so much utility by being abroad to make them feel good about themselves.” Most respondents, however, didn’t feel this way and wished the Foreign Service had a constituency. At the same time, each of them was critical of outreach efforts by the

Foreign Service and the Department of State as inadequate and urged a significant improvement.

“The Foreign Service has an absolutely amazing story to tell, but that is going to take an investment,” said a senior House Democratic aide, who suggested that codels and staffdels be invited to tour embassies and learn what various sections do. As a start, “State needs to sell itself up here more,” the aide said. “The military services constantly have happy hours, they are sponsoring lunches. I realize the money is really tight, but if somehow someone can get them \$1,500 in pizza money that they can use to put on lunch briefings for Hill staff. They have this weekly newsletter they send out, but they should gussy that up a little bit more.” A House Republican aide said the newsletter “doesn’t tell the story of the Foreign Service.” Another House Democratic aide said those e-mails are “usually quite large in terms of size and kind of hard to read -- there is a lot of pictures but not a lot of information.”

Yet another House Democratic aide said that “members of Congress, just like staff, don’t stop long enough to understand much about much, since these phones are always ringing. So State should find creative ways to show how the work of the Foreign Service affects the lives of ordinary Americans, the aide said. A senior Senate Democratic aide agreed. “You have to make the connection for the members and for the public that this is something that relates to their daily lives. You have to do a much more sophisticated job of selling the relevance of the institution,” the aide said. A senior House Republican aide added: “They should be the ones getting the message out on what it is they do and what value they add to our government.”

⇒ Most respondents not bothered by political appointee practices

On the question of whether other countries’ perceptions of U.S. diplomacy are affected by the large number of political appointees in key ambassadorship and other posts, 35% see no impact, 11% see a negative impact and 4% positive. Most respondents (50%) said the impact is mixed, because some countries prefer political ambassadors and others don’t (See Appendix 11).

“I’m not aware of this causing any particular problem lately,” said a Senate Democratic aide. “I don’t think it says that we don’t care about the country. We send political ambassadors to England, right? It’s not like we don’t care about England. It’s that we don’t worry that England is going to go to war with the U.S.” A senior Senate Republican

aide said that, in some countries, “we need people who understand American politics and have some political skill.” Another Senate Republican aide said this is not an issue, because ambassadors are just “figureheads.”

A third Senate Republican aide said the “acid test” of whether a political appointee would make a good ambassador is “the confirmation hearing.” The aide cited Cynthia Stroum, President Obama’s first ambassador to Luxembourg, who was forced to resign after a scathing OIG report in 2011. “She had a horrible confirmation hearing,” the aide said.

## Quality and Effectiveness of the Foreign Service

⇒ Most Foreign Service members seen as patriots and dedicated public servants

A majority of the respondents (71%) said they believe that Foreign Service members generally put U.S. interests before political or other personal considerations, while 7% answered no, 11% not always, and 11% were not sure (See Appendix 12). A senior Senate Republican aide said “it’s their own perceptions of U.S. interests,” and another senior Senate Republican aide said “there is a calculation they have to make, because they have families. It’s very difficult these days, because there are a lot of unaccompanied posts and you are asking people to not see their families. I do not doubt for one second the desire to serve and to serve anywhere and to meet the nation’s needs.”

A Senate Democratic aide said FSOs are very good at representing the positions of the administration in office. That said, “I have had times when it is obvious to me that the person is saying what they have to say, and they may agree with me that what they are saying is wrong, but it is the policy of the administration,” the aide added. A House Republican aide said FSOs don’t “represent all sides of the political spectrum equally and as passionately, and a Senate Democratic aide said: “I’ve seen some people who are more critical of their own country than they should be.”

⇒ Limited support for more resources for Foreign Service/Department of State

Asked whether the Foreign Service and State have adequate or sufficient resources to fulfill their mission, 50% said no, 29% said yes, and 21% said they were not sure (See

Appendix 13). “I think it is a sufficient amount of money,” a senior Senate Republican aide said. “Is it always prioritized the right way? Is it always spent the best way? No, it’s not.” One of the respondents who answered yes preferred to use the word “appropriate” instead of “adequate” or “sufficient.” Several in all three categories noted that they believe there is significant “waste” at State.

“This is one I struggle with every day,” a House Republican aide said of the foreign affairs budget. “It’s a really hard sell up here, especially for members on our side of the aisle.” Another House Republican aide said “it’s hard to sell that you need money to have more nice dinners.” A Senate Democratic aide agreed that some members think “diplomacy is cheap,” because it’s just “people talking to each other, and not something that they think requires large amounts of money.”

Several respondents made comparisons with the Department of Defense budget, usually accompanied by a comment that it’s too large -- one even used the word “ridiculous.” A House Republican aide said the DOD budget was three times bigger than the foreign affairs budget (it’s actually 12 times bigger). Another House Republican aide said “there is a perception, whether justified or not, that DOD gets things done.” A senior Senate Democratic aide complained that certain authorities are sometimes transferred from State to DOD, because State “doesn’t have enough funds” -- “that’s not a reason to transfer the authority to DOD; transfer the funds. There is a mismatch there,” the aide said.

That same aide also cited a “flaw with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where they have basically ceded the annual legislative process to the appropriators. I’ve been here for 10 years, and have never seen an FRC authorization bill. I’ve had conversations with staffers during Kerry’s time, and it was clear the chairman had no interest in doing the authorization bill. Maybe it comes back to the fact that they end up contentious, with no domestic constituency, so people wonder if it is even worth it.”

The aide also said that, in response to former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ call for greater investment in diplomacy and the Foreign Service, the Senate “created the Global Security Contingency Fund, and it was new as of the National Defense Authorization Bill last year. For every dollar that State puts into the fund, DOD can put in up to \$4, so it’s a way of trying to bridge these authorities’ resource problems.” It’s worth noting that three Republican staffers said they never heard about Gates’ appeal, while others said it had “minimal resonance” on Capitol Hill.

⇒ State-Congress “distrust” still exists, seen as inherent

On the question of whether most Foreign Service members fully understand the role of Congress in foreign policy, 43% said no, 32% said yes, and 25% were not sure (See Appendix 14). Those who answered yes hastened to add that understanding doesn't mean liking. “For the most part, they understand what Congress is going to do, but they don't like it,” said a Senate Democratic aide. “I think that's how they want it to be. They think that Congress often oversteps its bounds. They would prefer that we not be an equal branch of government. They would prefer that we don't determine their budget, but we do.”

A Senate Republican staffer said that FSOs “view Congress as an annoyance and an impediment. It stops them from what they want to do. That's one of the reasons they are disliked up here. They are famous for having an attitude of superiority, like they are the cream of the crop and don't necessarily need to be wasting their time on our issues.” At the same time, the aide conceded that “people are more competent in the Foreign Service relative to other agencies; I think they are higher quality.”

Several respondents decried the “distrust” between State and Capitol Hill. “State does not trust us,” said a House Democratic aide. “They don't think we deserve all the information. State's perception is that we do all the leaking, which is not true. Right now, because of the trust deficit, it becomes more adversarial because we feel on our side that we are being lied to, because we don't get all the information. It's important for us to have the information, because we need it to make decisions.” Another House Democratic aide agreed, saying “There is a great degree of distrust and antagonism between the executive branch and the legislative branch when it comes to foreign policy.”

⇒ State seen as moderately responsive; mixed feelings about “H”

Asked whether they find Foreign Service members responsive to congressional needs, 39% said yes, 43% said sometimes, and 18% said no (See Appendix 15). Those same answers apply to State in general, because respondents said they almost never contact an overseas post directly. In addition, 86% said they have dealt with the Bureau of Legislative Affairs (“H”), while 7% each said they either contact people they know in another bureau or have their staff deal with H. Only 39% said they have dealt with the State Liaison Office on Capitol Hill -- half of them do so at least once a month (See Appendix 16).

Attitudes toward “H” were very mixed. “Sometimes, they are very responsive,” a Senate Democratic staffer said. “Sometimes, they are eventually helpful, but it takes a while. Sometimes, they just totally blow you off.” A senior House Republican aide, agreed, adding, “I wouldn’t say ‘H’ is better or worse than other” legislative affairs divisions in the federal government. Another House Republican aide praised that particular office’s “single point of contact” at “H” as “extremely helpful” and “invaluable,” because “she can translate” congressional needs “to people in the building.” “I give them constructive criticism four days out of five,” the aide said. “Most of the time, they take the advice and appreciate it. We have so many things that are difficult in the relationship, that if there are things that I can do to make it a little bit easier, I try.” It makes a big difference, the aide added, whether “H has an open door to the secretary and the secretary’s top people.”

Other staffers, however, expressed strong negative feelings about “H.” It’s “the worst legislative affairs office I’ve ever worked with,” said a senior House Democratic aide. “There are some individually very nice people working there, but I get better service out of the CIA than I do from State. They act like Congress is the enemy, and in many ways the department’s worst enemy is their legislative affairs bureau. I don’t know if they don’t get it or they’ve been burned too many times. They are very reluctant to give out information. If this office is asking a question, we are not doing it because we want to ruin someone’s life -- it’s usually because we are trying to help.”

A senior Senate Democratic staffer said that “H is dysfunctional for reasons I find to be utterly mysterious, because I’ve seen plenty of people in other jobs [at State] who are good, capable people. And “H” -- and this is over several administrations -- is just terrible. There are a lot of issues where it shouldn’t have to be responding to an inquiry from us. They should be engaging us at the front end of the process. Making sure that, if the president will be announcing something tomorrow, we know about it -- that would be in their interest, because maybe the chairman of the committee could issue a press release supporting the initiative, as opposed to scrambling to catch up to it.”

Several staffers said they sometimes contact regional bureaus directly, though some noted that they have been reprimanded for bypassing “H”. But, a Senate Democratic aide said, “I wouldn’t be able to do my job if I waited for “H” on everything. It’s just impossible.” A House Democratic aide said: “I don’t blame “H” for the poor responses. That’s the bureaus.” A senior Senate Republican staffer was puzzled that “H gets a lot of calls from us [on Capitol Hill] on the same issues, and they act like it’s the first time they heard it

every time.” The aide, however, praised “H” for being proactive on the recent Russian adoption issue. “State was very quick in reaching out to us, saying this is what we know, this is what they are doing, because they knew we have constituents that were upset and stuck in the middle of it. So they put together conference calls for congressional staff and family members, and then they had this website where family members could register, so that State has an idea of how many people are in various stages of adoption.”

A Senate Republican staffer and a House Republican staffer were the most self-critical on the issue of State responsiveness. “Congressional staff are, by and large, notoriously lazy, because we want the answer yesterday and we want you to give a complete response, so I can just read it and give it to the senator, because he has 13 seconds to understand this issue,” the Senate Republican aide said. “So if I have to spend hours getting information from different sources and then putting together a briefer, it’s going to take a lot of hours -- and I have 150 different issues that I have to take care of.” The House Republican staffer agreed that congressional staffers are “very demanding of time, even on a very minor issue, so I’ve learned that giving time frames and priority rankings for requests really helps.”

Nearly all respondents (96%) deemed it a good idea for FSOs to visit their hometown members of Congress during trips to Washington and provide them with updates about their work. A Senate Democratic staffer was the only one whose office has actually done so. “We get FSOs from [the senator’s state] who are in town come by and say, ‘I’m posted in Indonesia, but I’m here for a week and just wanted to let you know what I’m doing.’” A House Republican aide said it “would be nice to give a face to the cause,” and a Senate Republican aide said: “My boss is like a lot of senators -- he likes to have a story, and the stories are what stick with him.” Several staffers expressed doubt that their members, especially in the Senate, would have time to meet with individual FSOs, and a senior Senate Republican aide ventured that “H would say you need a reason to come up.” A Senate Democratic aide expressed doubt that “State could ever regularize” such initiative, “but they certainly should never penalize it.”

⇒ Professional development, training of limited interest

A majority of respondents (61%) said they and their offices were not interested in the issue of professional formation and development of Foreign Service members (See Appendix 17). At the same time, 33% said they thought there is sufficient training in the Foreign Service, though all admitted that their answers were based on assumptions, rather



than factual knowledge. For 21%, the training is not sufficient, and 46% didn't know enough to make a judgment (See Appendix 18).

"I don't think there is a perception that there is a problem, so why fix it?" asked a Senate Democratic aide. "I think that's nothing they can't learn on the job. I don't think it's something that requires them to be in a classroom." A House Republican staffer said: "I know they have the center in Arlington. What I don't have a sense of is how much that is integrated into their career advancement system." A senior House Democratic aide brought up the military's "incredibly sophisticated professional development program" and said that, "if State is not doing that, we ought to know about it." A senior Senate Republican staffer was aware of stepped-up training for State employees going to Iraq and Afghanistan, but added that the training "needs to be much longer." Another Senate Republican aide said their office was writing legislation requiring certain training of FSOs at different stages of their careers.

⇒ Minimal interest on Capitol Hill in Foreign Service/Department of State reforms

The respondents offered some ideas for improving Foreign Service/State operations, but with the exception of those working on committees exercising State oversight, they said there is minimal interest in their offices in any reforms. Several staffers said they wished State were "less bureaucratic" and better at "big-picture" issues. Other recommendations included:

- State should explain better how what it does overseas affects the lives of Americans at home.
- Content about diplomacy and the Foreign Service should be included in the middle school and high school curriculum.
- Oral assessment panels should include non-FSOs.
- The promotion system needs to be more transparent.
- "Duplicative programs" in regional and functional bureaus should be better coordinated.
- Contract oversight for development projects overseas should be better.
- Foreign Service members should have the flexibility to extend overseas tours beyond three years, if managements determine they are doing a good job and should stay.
- The Foreign Service mission in war zones should be clearer, beyond "fix it."

- State should “loosen the reins” on employees and encourage more initiative.
- In recruitment, State should aim for diversity of political views.
- The Foreign Service should be more family-friendly.
- FSOs should be allowed to stay in the Service longer.
- State should have better longer-term strategic vision and look 10 years ahead.
- The Foreign Service should be better at anticipating major shifts and changes in foreign countries.
- The Foreign Service should do more cross-training with the military and intelligence services.
- There should be better coordination among the various agencies represented at overseas posts.
- State should improve career development and training in both the Foreign Service and Civil Service.
- Pearson Fellows should have their follow-on assignments in “H” to educate State employees about Congress and help improve relations.

## **Methodology**

This study is based on 28 one-on-one interviews with congressional staffers conducted between March and May 2013. The respondents were evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate (seven each). There was a mix of personal and committee staff members, and of aides dealing with authorizations and appropriations. The committees represented in the study include Foreign Relations (Affairs), Armed Services, Intelligence, Appropriations, Economic, Small Business, Energy, Homeland Security and Government Reform. Staffers at several minority caucuses were included, as well.

All interviews were done on the condition of anonymity. They were conducted in person, recorded and transcribed -- with one exception, where the respondent was interviewed by phone and insisted that the conversation not be taped. Although interviews were usually scheduled to last 30-45 minutes, in many cases they lasted an hour or more.

Each respondent was asked the same questions -- generally in the same order -- though follow-up questions and clarifications depended on the respondent's initial response. Participants were given the opportunity to comment and elaborate on certain issues as much or as little as they preferred.

Participants were recruited mainly by e-mail. Some of those who declined to take part cited office rules not allowing them to participate in surveys.

## **Respondent Profiles**

Diversity was key when deciding on participants in the study. The respondents represent all age groups -- from 20s to 60s -- as shown in Appendix 19. That same appendix shows that staffers' Capitol Hill experience is varied, too -- more than half have worked in Congress over five years. In addition, 36% had previous foreign policy experience, and 36% hold a degree in a related field. Two were FSOs years ago. Another 10 have had other executive branch experience. Eight are women, and six are minorities.

Respondents' foreign policy interests and expertise have a wide range -- from every geographic region to issues like arms control, foreign assistance, consular affairs, personnel matters and embassy security. Many deal with State or the Foreign Service on a regular basis (several times a week), while some have interactions only sporadically (every few weeks), and a few do only when traveling overseas (a few times a year). Eleven respondents work on personal staff and 17 on committee staff. The most junior participant is a legislative correspondent, and the most senior is chief of staff.

Most respondents (93%) said they based their impressions of Foreign Service members at least in part on their experiences as participants in congressional and staff delegations (codel/staffdel) to foreign countries; 64% based them on various inquiries they have made at the State Department (State); 54% on briefings by Foreign Service officers (FSOs) and other department officials; and 32% on their work preparing for congressional hearings. Participants in the study could choose any or all of the above four options, which is why the total percentage exceeds 100% (See Appendix 20).

## **About AFSA**

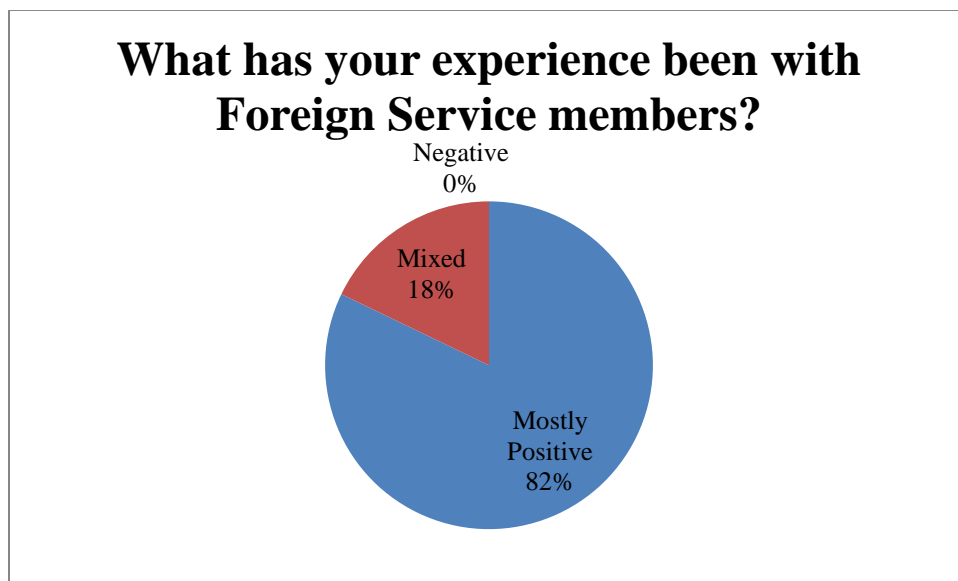
The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), established in 1924, is the professional association and labor union of the United States Foreign Service. With 16,000 dues-paying members, AFSA represents more than 30,000 active and retired Foreign Service employees of the Department of State, Agency for International Development (AID), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

AFSA's principal missions are to promote a strong, effective professional career Foreign Service as the institutional backbone of American diplomacy, enhance the effectiveness of the Foreign Service, to protect the professional interests and rights of its members, ensure the maintenance of high professional standards for all American diplomats, career or political appointees, and to promote understanding of the critical role of diplomacy and development in promoting America's national security and economic prosperity. AFSA seeks to be an effective voice and strong advocate for the Foreign Service with management, the Congress and the American public.

## **About Nicholas Kralev**

Nicholas Kralev is an author, journalist and expert on international affairs, diplomacy and global travel. A former *Financial Times* and *Washington Times* correspondent, he has traveled around the world with four U.S. Secretaries of State: Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Madeleine Albright. He is the author of *America's Other Army: The U.S. Foreign Service and 21st Century Diplomacy*, and the host and executive producer of "Conversations with Nicholas Kralev," a weekly program on diplomacy and global affairs. He is also a contributor to *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Policy Magazine* and *The Huffington Post*. He holds a master's degree in public policy from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and speaks five languages.

## Appendix 1

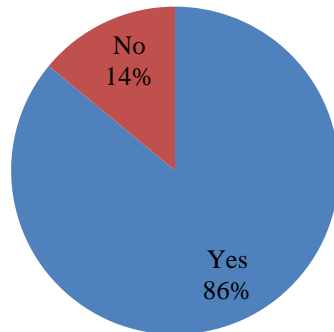


## Appendix 2

<b>Respondent interactions with Foreign Service/State</b>	
Remember first interaction	39%
Remember most recent interaction	75%

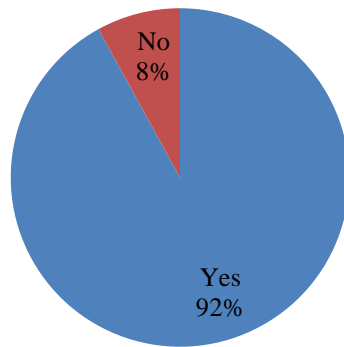
Appendix 3

**Do you consider Foreign Service members to be professionals?**



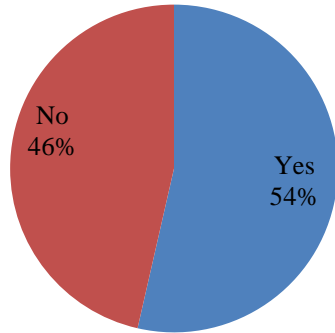
Appendix 4

**Do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the Foreign Service lifestyle?**



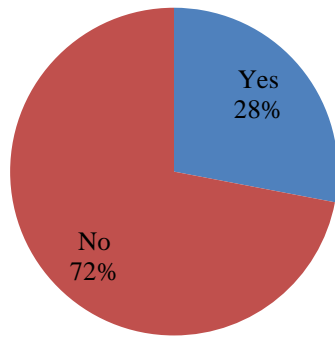
Appendix 5

**Do you consider the Foreign Service and State Dept. to be the same?**



Appendix 6

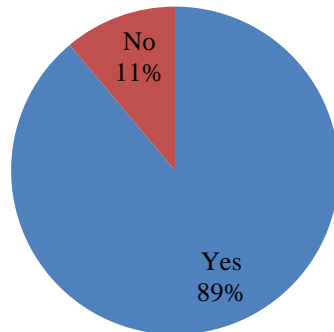
**Are you familiar with the Foreign Service personnel system?**





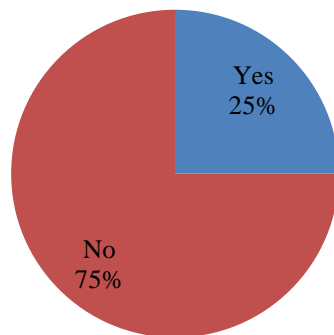
Appendix 7

**Should Foreign Service members be worldwide available?**

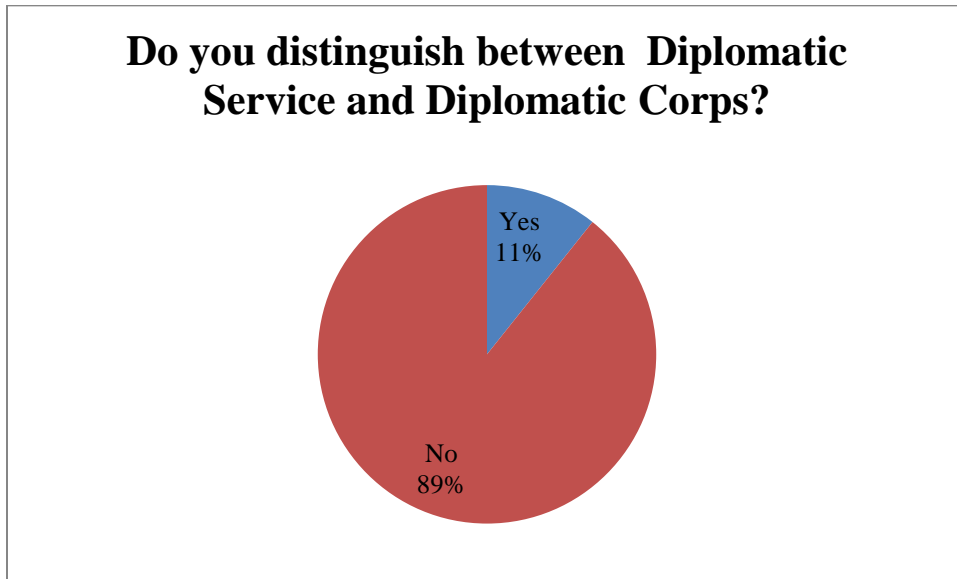


Appendix 8

**Are you familiar with the Vienna Convention?**

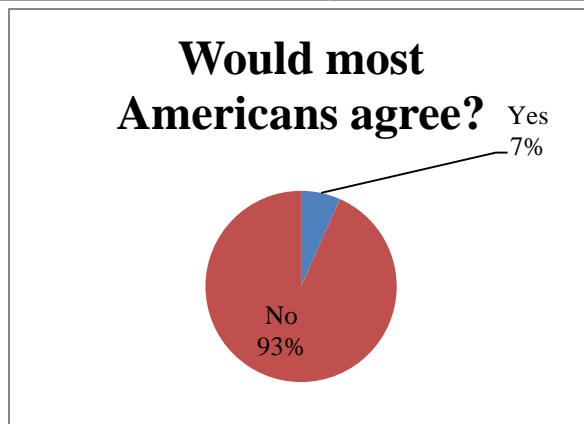
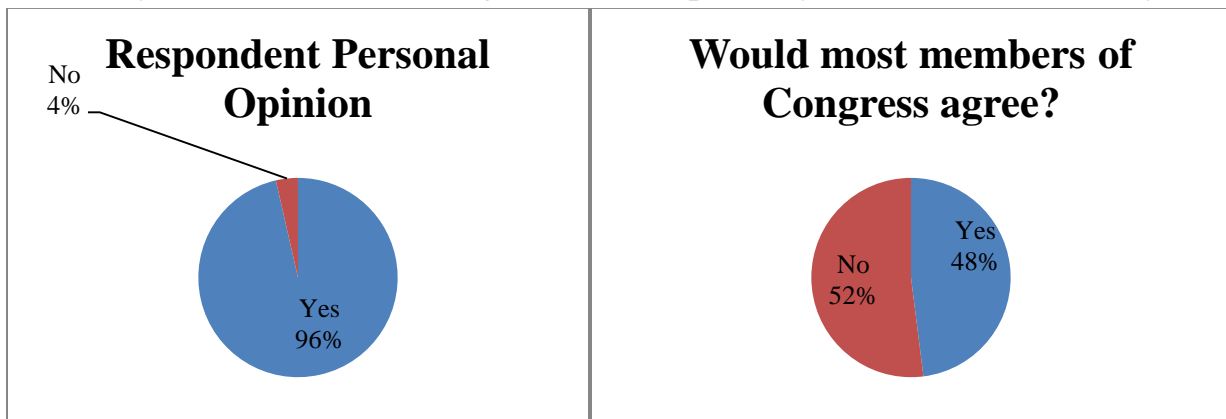


Appendix 9

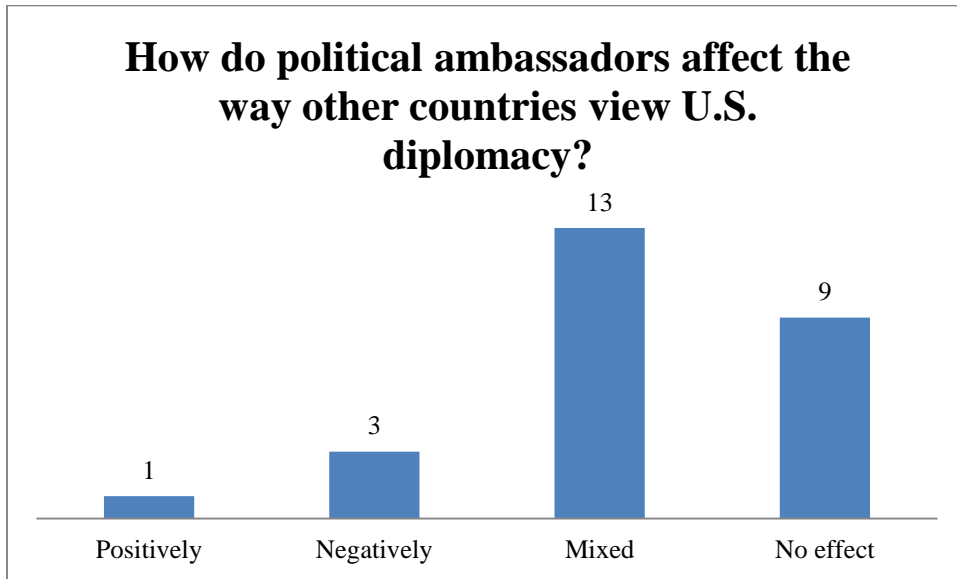


Appendix 10

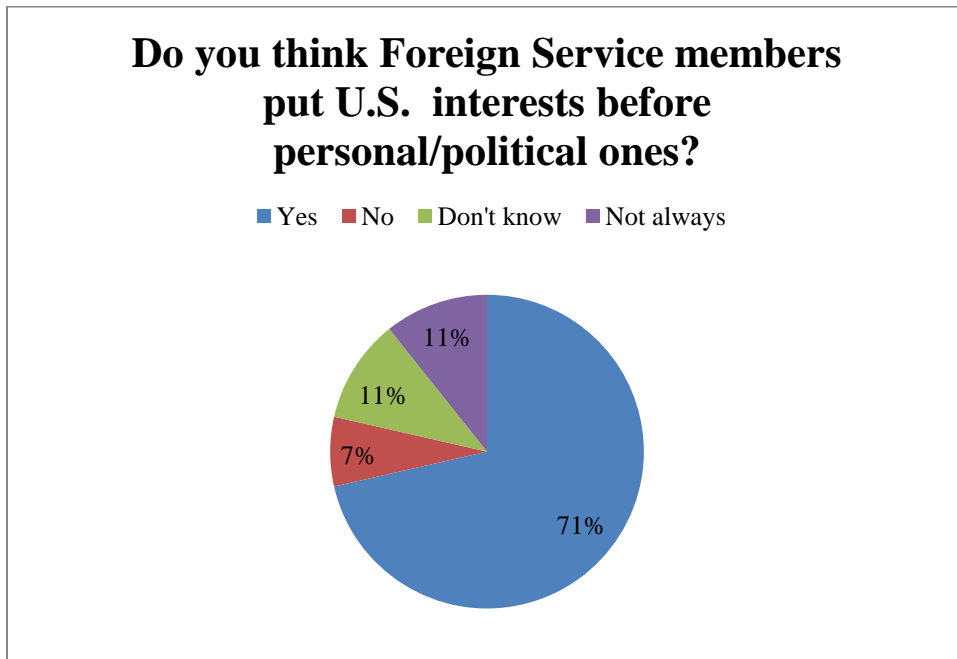
Do you associate the Foreign Service (diplomacy) with national security?



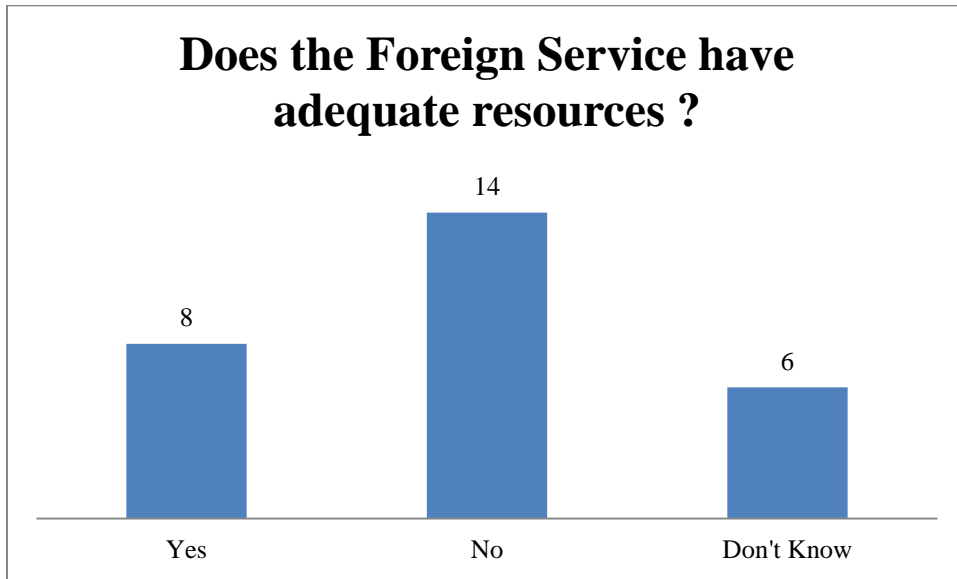
Appendix 11



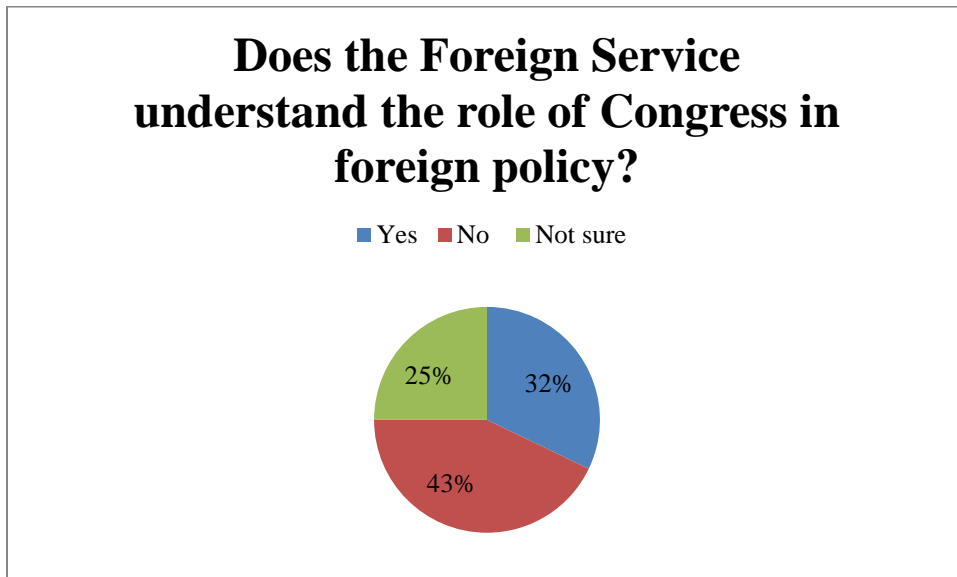
Appendix 12



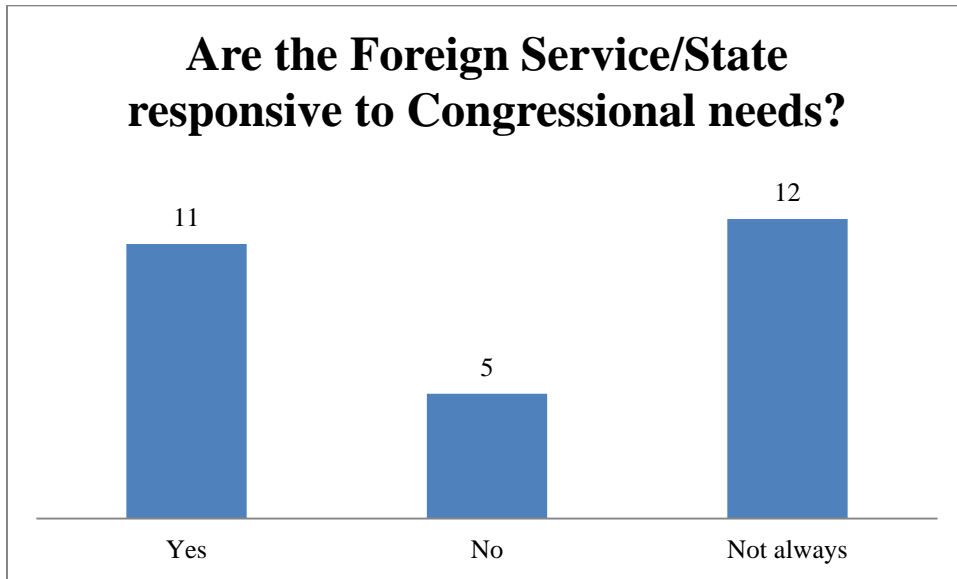
Appendix 13



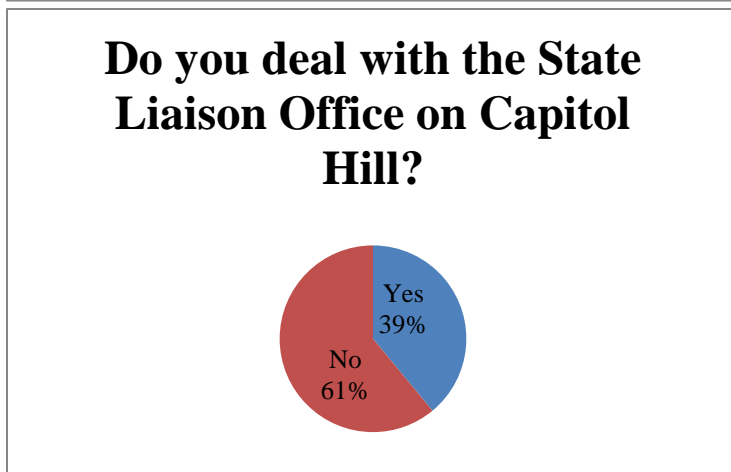
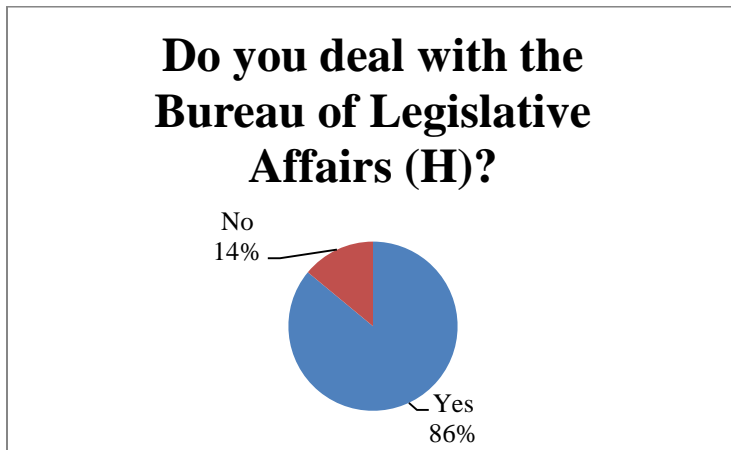
Appendix 14



Appendix 15

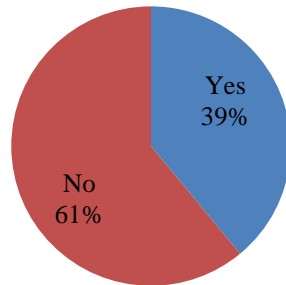


Appendix 16



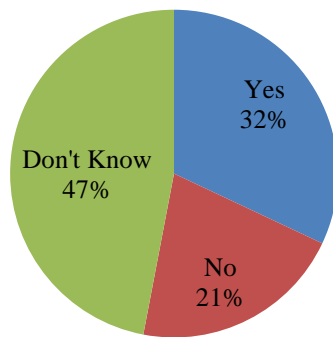
Appendix 17

**Are you interested in training and professional development of the Foreign Service?**

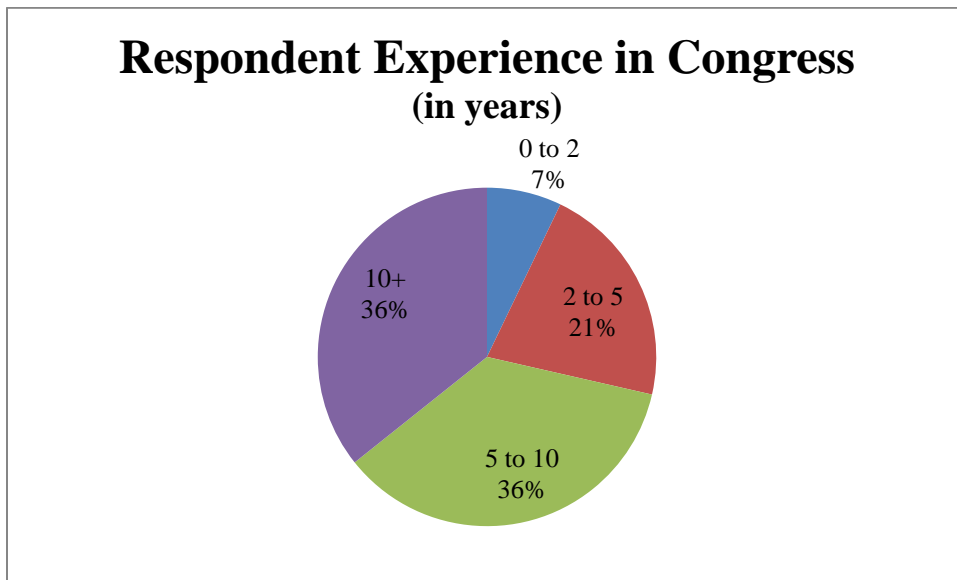
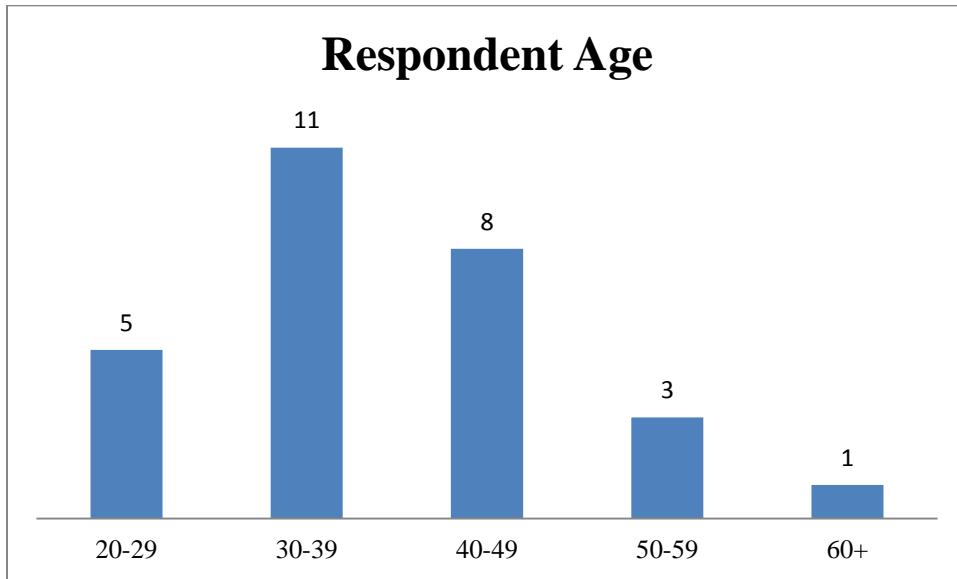


Appendix 18

**Does professional development of the Foreign Service exist?**

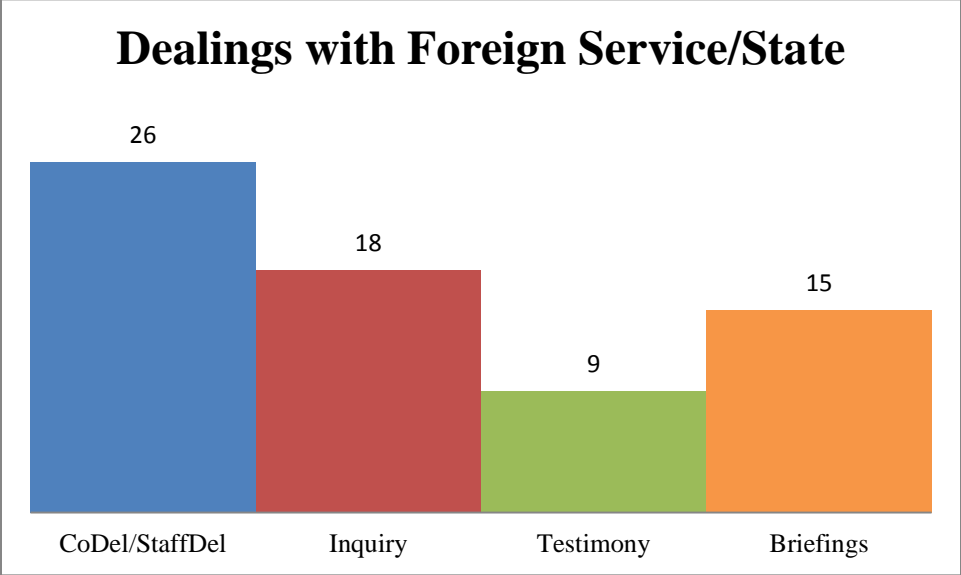


Appendix 19



<b>Respondents with previous foreign policy experience</b>	
Work experience	36%
Relevant college degree	36%
Foreign Service officer	7%

Appendix 20







# American Foreign Service Association

Promoting a strong, professional Foreign Service  
as the backbone of American diplomacy

2101 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
202.338.4045