Partisan Asymmetries in Earmark Representation

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Abstract

This paper examines the variation in earmarking behavior between Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives. After a ten-year moratorium, Congress brought back earmarks to the appropriations process in 2021 enabling members to request small grants for community programs in their districts. As part of a reform designed to limit corruption and wasteful spending, members had to submit written justifications for the grants, which provide insight into how members of Congress view their role as representatives. In performing a content analysis on 3,007 earmark justifications, we find that Democrats are more likely to justify their spending by noting its benefits to specific social groups in their party coalition, while Republicans rarely do so. Democrats are more likely to request grants on their core partisan priorities, while Republicans tend to focus on large local infrastructure projects that are seemingly unrelated to their national priorities. Finally, we find some, but limited, evidence that earmark requests are a result of the different kinds of districts that members represent.

After a ten-year moratorium, members of Congress could once again in 2021 request relatively small grants for individual projects within their districts or states through the earmarking process. As part of procedural reforms designed to bring more transparency to the process, members of Congress had to provide written justifications for how their earmarks would help their local communities. Through these justifications, we argue that we can study both the specific policymaking dynamics of the earmarking process and the variation in how the political parties represent their constituents.

Although representation has long been tied to constituencies (Fenno 1977; Fiorina 1973), Grossman and Hopkins (2016) more recently have discovered that it varies in systematic ways by party. Using a variety of documents such as State of the Union addresses, party platforms, and congressional floor speeches, they find that Democrats tend to adopt a transactional or distributional approach to representation, while Republicans tend to adopt a symbolic approach. This variation, according to Grossman and Hopkins, is caused by the composition of the parties' coalitions. The Democratic coalition is composed of many disconnected social groups (Stanley and Niemi 2006), while the Republican coalition is much more homogenous. Democratic social groups expect elected officials to deliver specific policy goals in return for their support. The Republican Party has fewer groups to service, allowing it to develop a more coherent symbolic message.

In this paper we test the asymmetric politics theory by examining earmark request justifications. First, we imbed the Grossman and Hopkins (2016) into the larger representation

literature in developing our argument that party differences can be revealed even in earmarks. Second, we describe how we collected and used the 3,007 earmark requests from member of the House of Representatives for FY2022 to identify any target populations expressed in the justification letter as well as the policy content and program type of the request. Third, we show strong support for partisan asymmetries in how members of Congress use earmark requests to represent their constituents. Democrats are more likely to specify the program benefits to core constituencies, especially those belonging to the Democratic coalition. Fourth, we discern no coherent issue agenda among Republican earmark requests. In the end, we can only ascertain part of these differences to the districts that the members represent. We conclude by outlining the next steps in this research agenda.

I. Representational Style and Earmarks

Congressional scholars have long observed that members of Congress choose different representational styles to accomplish their political, policy, electoral, and career goals (Grimmer 2013; Fenno 1978; Ramey, Klingler, and Hollinbaugh 2017; Bernhard and Sulkin 2018). Members may seek to develop a local reputation, represent a specific constituency, or achieve national goals that are not directly related to the specific concerns of their district. They often develop specific "homestyles" that blend their personality to fit their district (Fenno 1978).

Members can efficiently represent their districts through the earmarking process (Doyle 2011; Frisch 1998; Lazarus 2009; Mayhew 1974; Stratmann 2013). As evidenced by their frequent use of photos at ribbon cutting or groundbreaking ceremonies (Stein and Bickers 1997), members use earmarks to claim credit for funding discrete, tangible, particularized benefits within their districts (Mayhew 1974). While earmarking may (Lazarus 2009; Lazarus, Glas, and

Barbieri 2012; Stratmann 2013) or may not (Stein and Bickers 1997) help vulnerable members achieve reelection, even electorally safe members engage in it. By placing the authority for targeted federal spending into their hands, members can reveal the communities they prioritize. During the old earmarking regime, members could submit unlimited requests for earmarks, even if they expected only a fixed number to be included into law. The new rules implemented in 2021 limit members to just ten requests, which forced them into trading-off a request that benefits one group or policy priority for a different request for another group or priority (Guenther and Searle 2019).

Because Democrats approach politics as a transaction between a diverse coalition of interest groups and elites, we expect that they attempt to maintain their disparate coalition by requesting specific benefits to each group (Grossman and Hopkins 2016). Republicans, on the other hand, invoke broad symbolism and appeals to ideology. If the members of the two parties approach representation through earmarks differently, we should expect a significant difference in how members from the two parties target their requests.

Although earmarking has traditionally operated on a universalist norm where the majority party allows the minority party to participate in the process (Mayhew 1974), party leadership have at times used earmarks as a tool, either to help electorally vulnerable members or to persuade members to vote for a bill (Evans 2004). Members of the appropriations committee may receive more earmarks and may judge earmarks more on merit than theories of earmarks and electoral vulnerability often suggest (Clemens, Crespin, and Finocchiaro 2015). Chairs and ranking members of the appropriations committees – the so-called "cardinals" of Congress – receive more (Berry and Fowler 2016). Although Engstrom and Vanberg (2010) argue that the Democratic majority from 2007 to 2009 punished conservative Republicans by giving them

fewer earmarks, Fagan and Theriault (n.d.) find that at least during the FY2010 appropriations process, conservative Republicans requested fewer earmarks. Other factors such as gender of the legislator (Schultz 2013), campaign donations (Kaslovsky 2021; Rocca and Gordon 2013) may also impact earmarking. Because of the new rules adopted in the 117th Congress to govern the return of earmarks significantly limit the discretionary power of party and committee leadership, many previous findings may not apply to earmarking today.

If the parties' approaches to representation affect earmarking, we expect Democrats to direct particularized benefits toward specific constituencies. In justifying their earmarks, they explicitly call out social groups that benefit from the program in hopes of claiming credit with the group during subsequent elections. Republicans, on the other hand, understand their role as representing a specific vision for America. Earmarking, because of it particularized benefit to a targeted community are not the easiest means by which Republicans can articulate this vision. Subsequently, we expect Republicans to request fewer earmarks. When they do participate, they are significantly less likely than Democrats to frame their earmarks as benefitting specific social groups. These dual processes result in our first two hypotheses:

Participation Hypothesis: Republicans are less likely than Democrats to participate in earmarking.

Asymmetric Representation Hypothesis: Republicans are less likely than Democrats to justify their earmarks as benefitting specific social groups.

We note that these differences may arise for two different, perhaps overlapping, reasons. First, Democrats may request fundamentally different types of earmarks than Republicans. Second, it could be that the parties request similar types of earmarks, but that their justifications are different. We think an important first step is to show that the difference exists before we speculate about why they exist.

Ideology should make these differences stronger. Because conservative Republicans have strong ideological objections to federal government spending, they attacked the practice of earmarking in the mid-2000s as wasteful spending. They eventually forbade earmarks after winning control of the House of Representatives in the 2010 elections. Because this association likely persisted even during the decade-long moratorium, we expect more conservative Republicans to opt out of the earmarking process, just as they did in the late 2000s.

Conservative Participation Hypothesis: More conservative Republicans are less likely to request earmarks.

Nonetheless, we expect electorally vulnerable Republicans to use all the tools at their disposal to increase their electoral security. As such, we expect vulnerable Republicans to engage in the earmarking process

Competition Hypothesis: Republicans in more competitive districts are more likely to participate in earmarking.

Because Democrats do not hold ideological objections to earmarking, we do not expect a relationship between ideology and earmarking. Nonetheless, we do expect ideology to impact the justifications for their earmark requests. As Democrats become more liberal, they increasingly frame their role as a representative as a champion for Democratic constituencies. Party entrepreneurs use ideology to bind together the often disconnected social groups that make up a party coalition (Karol 2009, 2019; Noel 2014). Liberals see their role as representing not just their constituency, but disadvantaged groups within the Democratic coalition more broadly. When they justify their earmark requests, we expect that they evoke these social groups.

Liberal Targeting Hypothesis: More liberal Democrats are more likely to justify their earmarks as benefitting social groups.

Not only do we expect the targeting of groups in the earmarks to be different between the parties, but we also expect Democrats to request funds for different programs than Republicans;

and, we expect that this difference is based on their different issue prioritizations (Egan 2013;

Fagan 2019; Green and Jennings 2017). The Democratic Party tends to prioritize redistributive

programs and environmental policy, while the Republican Party tends to prioritize foreign policy

and law and order issues (Egan 2013). We often refer to these priorities as "owned issues," due

to their strong correlation with issues that the public tends to trust each party to handle (Budge

2015; Petrocik 1996; Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere 2015). Democrats can create small grants

for redistributive programs based in their local districts. Republicans can sponsor projects

focused on law and order, but the nature of foreign policy makes accomplishing those priorities

through earmarking difficult. We expect ideology to strengthen this behavior for members of

both parties; more liberal Democrats seek funds for projects on Democratic-owned issues while

more conservative Republicans seek funds for projects on Republican-owned issues. The

differences result in our fourth and fifth hypotheses:

> *Ownership Hypothesis*: The parties are more likely to request earmarks on the issue priorities that they own.
>
> *Ideology Ownership Hypothesis*: More ideological members request more earmarks on their party's owned issues.

We next turn to describing the data that we use to test these hypotheses.

II. The Congressional Earmarks Data

When Democrats announced a new process for members to request earmarks after

regaining control of government in the 2020 elections, they rebranded the earmarking process as

"Community Project Funding" and implemented new rules to prevent abuse.[1] Members could

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[1] The House Appropriations Committee's full details on these rules and the full list of Community Project Funding requests is available at https://appropriations.house.gov/transparency.

only make ten requests, but they had to be filed on-line and they not benefit a for-profit recipient, members or their families could not have a financial interest in the project, and members had to demonstrate community support for the project. The House Appropriations Committee collected all requests and posted them online in a spreadsheet, which we downloaded.

To measure the representational style of members of Congress, we first collected all earmark requests by members of Congress during the FY2022 appropriations process. As part of the new procedures for 2021 earmarks, members submitted detailed descriptions of the project including justifications of how it helped the community. As an example, Representative Katherine Clark (D-New York) asked for a $1 million grant to fund an interpreter services program at a community health clinic (see Box 1). She addressed the letter to Representatives Rosa DeLauro (D-Connecticut) and Kay Granger (R-Texas), the chair and ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, specifying both the recipient of the grant and declaring that she had no financial interest in it. The letter included a paragraph describing the project and justifying why it would be an effective use of taxpayer money. Clark described the services that the community health center offers, the local constituencies it benefits, and the reason why it needed additional funding for interpreter services. The House Appropriations Committee posted these earmark requests, the names of the requestors, and the descriptions of each project on its website. Members had until April 30, 2021, to submit requests.

Box 1. Example justification

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger,

I am requesting funding for the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center (Kennedy Community Health) Interpreter Services Program in fiscal year 2022 appropriations.

The entity to receive funding for this project is the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, Inc., located at 650 Lincoln Street, Worcester, Massachusetts, 01605.

The funding would be used for Kennedy Community Health's interpreter services program to address the language needs of the underserved communities of MetroWest and Central Massachusetts. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, Kennedy Community Health aims to provide quality, accessible and affordable health care to anyone in need. With a patient population that is predominantly low-income, as well as ethically, linguistically, and culturally diverse, achieving health equity is at the core of their mission. As the area's only provider of refugee health assessments, Kennedy Community Health has become the medical home for individuals who speak over 92 different languages, making the interpreter services program vital to their ability to communicate with their patients and provide high quality care.

I certify that I nor my immediate family has any financial interest in this project.

Sincerely,

Katherine M. Clark

Member of Congress

April 27, 2021

Notes: Underline added.

We use these descriptions to identify the content of these requests on four different dimensions.[2] The first dimension identified the target populations mentioned as beneficiaries of the grant, using the Grossman and Hopkins (2016) codebook (see appendix table 1). In the Clark example, we classified the justification as targeting both class-based social groups and race and ethnic-based social groups, because Clark specifically calls out these groups as benefitting from the program. More than 20 percent of the earmarks mentioned at least one target population (see table 1). Poor and working-class families, young people, and specific race or ethnic groups were the most common target populations.

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[2] Two trained research assistants (one of whom is an author on this paper) coded each of these independently. When the assistants disagreed, a third more experienced coder (who is an author on this paper) broke the tie.

Table 1: Distribution of Targets, Both Parties	
Target	Percent of Earmarks
Poor or Working Class	10.0%
Youth	6.3%
Race or Ethnic	5.8%
Interest Group	3.1%
Elderly	1.8%
Rural	1.8%
Women	1.7%
Military	1.3%
LGBTQ	0.6%
Religious Group	0.3%
Farmers	0.1%
Any Target	21.8%
Core Democratic Target	17.3%
Core Republican Target	5.1%

Notes: Targets are not mutually exclusive. Core Democratic group includes any of class, race or ethnic group, women, LGBTQ, or youth. Core Republican group includes any of religious groups, rural people, military or veterans, farmers, or the elderly.

The second dimension identified the program type of the earmark (see table 2). Most projects involved physical space or objects, such as purchasing equipment for a local fire department, repairing a road, or building a new community center. Members will often use images of these physical projects to claim credit for bringing an important project back to their community. Some projects involved only the creation of something intangible, such as violence intervention programs, workforce training, or mental health counseling. In the Clark example,

the earmark was coded as a service because it involved funding an interpreter program at a preexisting hospital rather than building or modifying an existing structure.

The third dimension classified the intended recipient of the grant (table 2). House rules banned earmarks to for-profit companies, but earmarks were directed toward various types of governmental and non-profit organizations. We classified any earmark that was not directed toward a governmental organization as benefitting a non-profit organization. In the Clark example, the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center is a non-profit organization. We also recorded if the recipient was a university, K-12 school or faith-based organization.

Table 2: Distribution of Targets, Both Parties	
Program Type or Location	Percent of Earmarks
Service	10.1%
K12 School	3.8%
Non-Profit	3.8%
Faith-based Organization	3.4%
College or University	2.8%

The fourth dimension identified the policy content of each earmark request using the Policy Agendas Project (Baumgartner, Jones, and Wilkerson 2002). The PAP topic categorization system assigns policy-related outputs to one of twenty major topic areas. We assigned each earmark request to one of twenty major topic areas based upon its title and justification letter.[3] In the Clark example, we coded the interpreter program under health care, because it would support the operations of a community health center.

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[3] Two trained research assistants read each project title and description and assigned it to a single major topic area. Where they disagreed, a third coder broke the tie. The initial two coders agreed on 66% of observations during their initial coding.

We found considerable variation in the policy topics of earmark requests. The most common policy topic was health care, which included grants to community health care programs, assistance to people with disabilities, and nursing programs. The next most frequent policy area was housing and community development, which included a wider variety of local programs such as building community centers, restoring local parks, and constructing public housing. The next two most frequent categories involved environmental and public lands projects; these projects range from dredging rivers to improving local drinking water systems. Many topics received few or no earmarks, such as immigration, macroeconomics, civil rights, and government operations.[4]

Figure 1: Distribution of Earmarks by Policy Topic

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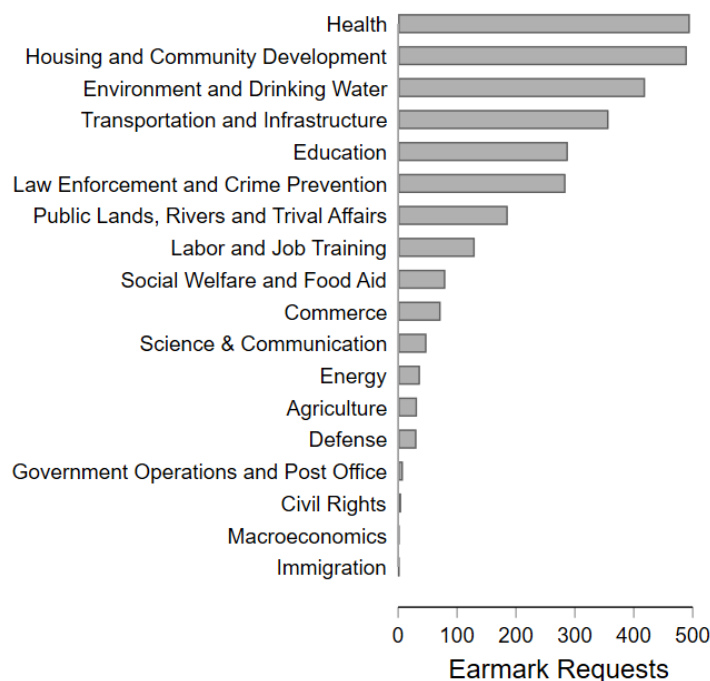
[4] No observations were coded into trade and foreign affairs.

We also collected data on the demographics and competitiveness of each congressional district and each member's ideology. We measured a district's demographics using its share of non-white residents, its poverty rate and its blue-collar share of the workforce. We measured the competitiveness of a congressional district by taking the absolute value of the margin of Joe Biden's vote share over Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election.[5] We measured member ideology using the first dimension of their DW-NOMINATE score (Lewis et al. 2019).

III. Partisan Differences in Earmark Justifications

The total number of earmark requests reveals a significant difference by party (see table 3). About half the Republican conference chose not to request any earmarks for FY2022, while just five Democrats opted out. Democrats who participated in the process requested on average 9.8 earmarks per member, close to the maximum of 10 allowed. Only nine Democrats requested fewer than the maximum. Republican members, on the other hand, requested just 7.8 earmarks per member; 56 of 107 members who engaged in earmarking did not reach the maximum number of requests. These results are consistent with our *Participation Hypothesis*. While they requested fewer earmarks, Republicans requested more expensive ones and their aggregated total was $500 million more ($4.0 billion for Republicans compared to $3.5 billion for Democrats). Republicans requested $37 million in earmarks per member (or $4.7 million per earmark), compared with $16 million for Democrats (or $1.7 million per earmark).

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[5] We collected data on presidential vote share and district demographics from the Almanac of American Politics (Cohen 2021).

Table 3: Distribution of Earmark Requests by Party

Party	Requesting Members	Percentage of Cauc. /Conf.	Requests Per Member	Average Value per Member	Average Value per Earmark
Democrats	218	97.8	9.8	$16 million	$1.7 million
Republicans	107	50.5	7.8	$37 million	$4.7 million

Ideology strongly predicted which Republicans opted to participate in the earmarking process (see table 4). More conservative Republicans were significantly less likely to request at least one earmark (see model 1, $p<0.001$). Members in more competitive districts were more likely to participate when ideology is not controlled for (see model 2, $p=0.01$), but the effect goes away entirely when ideology is included in the model (see model 3). By suggesting that electoral competition only pushed Republicans to engage in the earmarking process by encouraging moderation, we obtain support for the *Conservative Participation Hypothesis* but not the *Competition Hypothesis*.[6]

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[6] The results do not change using negative binomial estimation of the count of earmarks requested.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Estimation of Requesting At Least One Earmark, House Republicans Only

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
DW-NOMINATE (1st)	0.00002***		0.00001***
	(0.00003)		(0.00002)
Electoral Competitiveness		7.15*	0.42
		(6.64)	(0.50)
n	213	213	213
χ^2	87.58	4.61	88.11

Odds ratios. * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001. Standard errors in parenthesis.

We also find differences between each of our coded earmark dimensions. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to justify their earmark requests by specifying social groups within their party coalition (see table 5). Whereas 12.9 percent of Democratic earmark justifications target poor or working-class constituencies, only 2.9 percent of Republican earmark justifications explicitly mention these groups. Furthermore, Democrats are more likely to target earmarks to racial or ethnic groups, young people or children, women, the elderly, and LGBTQ communities. Surprisingly, Democrats are also slightly more likely to mention Republican constituencies, although the difference in means falls just below statistical significance in a two-tailed test *(p=0.067)*. Consistent with the *Asymmetric Representation Hypothesis*, Democrats frame their actions as representing social groups, even social groups that are not core members of their coalition, while Republicans do not.

The parties also target different program types in their earmark requests. Democrats are nearly five times as likely to request earmarks that provide an intangible service rather than physical construction. They were also more likely to direct grant requests toward schools, universities, and non-profits. Republican earmarks were much more likely to be directed toward

local government agencies. These results suggest that the earmarks – not just their justifications – are fundamentally different between the parties.

Table 5: Difference of Means Tests, Targets and Type of Program

Independent Variable	Republican Earmarks	Democratic Earmarks	Difference	t
Target				
Poor or Working Class	2.9%	12.9%	**-10.0%**	**-8.25**
Race or Ethnic	1.1%	7.6%	**-6.5%**	**-6.92**
Young	3.0%	7.7%	**-4.7%**	**-4.75**
Women	0.2%	2.3%	**-2.1%**	**-3.89**
Elderly	0.5%	2.3%	**-1.8%**	**-3.38**
LGBTQ	0.0%	0.9%	**-0.9%**	**-2.67**
Interest Group	2.2%	3.5%	-1.3%	-1.87
Religious Group	0.1%	0.4%	-0.3%	-1.14
Military or Veterans	1.4%	1.1%	0.3%	-0.72
Rural	2.3%	1.6%	0.7%	1.24
Farmers	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%	1.48
Any Target	10.6%	26.3%	**-15.7%**	**-9.4**
Core Democratic Target	6.2%	21.7%	**-15.5%**	**-10.17**
Core Republican Target	3.9%	5.6%	-1.7%	-1.83
Program Type or Location				
Service	2.7%	13.1%	**-10.3%**	**-8.47**
K12 School	1.6%	4.7%	**-3.2%**	**-4.08**
Non-Profit	1.6%	4.7%	**-3.1%**	**-4.04**
College or University	1.6%	3.3%	**-1.8%**	**-2.63**
Faith-based Organization	0.1%	0.4%	-0.3%	-1.28

Notes: Bold rows indicate p<.05. Core Democratic group includes any of class, race or ethnic group, women, LGBTQ, or youth. Core Republican group includes any of religious groups, rural people, military or veterans, farmers, or the elderly.

Next, we find asymmetries in how ideology impacts representational style (see table 6). An earmark justification letter from a more liberal Democratic representative was significantly more likely to mention any target population (p=0.004) or a target population at the core of the Democratic coalition (p=0.001). More conservative Republicans are less likely to name both any

target population and core social groups in the Republican coalition, but the coefficient is not statistically significant (p=0.118 for any targets, p=0.128 for Republican targets).

Table 6: Logistic Regression Estimation of Target Populations
Mentioned in House Earmark Justification Letters

	Democrats		Republicans	
Independent Variables	Any Target	Dem Target	Any Target	Rep Target
DW-NOMINATE (1st)	0.32**	0.25**	0.22	0.09
	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.21)	(0.14)
n	2120	2120	837	837
chi2	8.30	10.61	2.50	2.43

Odds ratios. * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001. Standard errors in parenthesis.

Finally, we examined the relationship between the target populations named in justification letters and dyadic representation (see table 7). Democratic earmark requests are more likely to mention racial or ethnic groups as target populations in less white districts (p=0.01), while Republicans are not (p=0.58). This relationship does not extend to class. Earmark requests from both parties are not more likely to mention poor or working-class target populations if the district has a higher poverty rate or larger share of blue-collar jobs. Rather, more liberal Democrats tend to mention poor or working-class target populations (p=0.03). In fact, earmark requests from districts with a higher blue-collar share of the workforce are less likely to mention poor or working-class target populations, although the coefficient is not statistically significant (p=0.11). This result broadly conforms to previous work, which found that liberal Democrats in richer, safer districts tend to prioritize poverty issues more than Democrats in highly impoverished districts (Miler 2018).

Table 7: Logistic Regression Estimation of Target Populations
Mentioned in House Earmark Justification Letters, Race and Class

Independent Variables	Democrats		Republicans	
	Target: Race	Target: Class	Target: Race	Target: Class
DW-NOMINATE (1st)	0.40	0.30*	0.11	0.10
	(0.27)	(0.16)	(0.31)	(0.19)
Percent Non-White	1.01*		1.02	
	(0.005)		(0.03)	
Poverty Rate		1.01		1.03
		(0.01)		(0.06)
Blue Collar Job Share		0.98		1.02
		(0.01)		(0.04)
n	2120	2120	837	837
chi2	11.99	9.37	0.84	2.65

Odds ratios. * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001. Standard errors in parenthesis.

IV. Policy Content of Earmark Requests

Next, we examine the differences between the policy content of Republican and Democratic earmark requests. We see a clear asymmetric relationship between the policy topics each party emphasizes (see table 8). The Democratic Party is significantly more likely to request earmarks on five of their core priorities: housing and community development, education, health care, social welfare and food aid, and labor and job training. These categories represent the core of the Democratic economic policy agenda, where government redistributes money toward the party's core constituencies. In contrast, Republicans do not place a heavy emphasis on their core issue priorities. Republicans were not significantly more likely to request earmarks on law enforcement and crime, immigration, or small business policy, and were slightly more likely to direct grants toward military bases and veterans. In fact, their most common policy topic was

environmental policy at 22 percent, double the rate of Democrats even though environmental policy has long been a core issue for Democrats. Most of Republican earmark requests on environmental policy were on local drinking water projects. Republicans two other top categories (transportation and public lands) involved other costly local infrastructure projects such as river dredging, road maintenance, and pipeline repairs. These types of projects may explain the odd divide in the Republican conference over whether to participate in the earmarking process: half of Republicans chose not to participate, while the other half requested more funding (but fewer total grants) than the average Democrat. The demands of a district might explain the divide. Many Republican members represent relatively poor, rural districts, while others might represent wealthier districts that stretch through suburban or urban districts due to gerrymandering. Rural districts may benefit more from the type of medium-scale physical infrastructure projects involving drinking water, river dredging or road building than less rural districts. Democrats, who increasingly represent more compact urban and suburban districts, may see less demand for these types of projects in their districts, where a significant infrastructure project may cost far more than a few million dollars.

Table 8: Difference of Means Tests, Policy Topic

Policy Topic	Republican Earmarks	Democratic Earmarks	Difference	t	Ownership
Housing and Community Development	9.10%	19.4%	**-10.3%**	**-6.89**	**Democratic**
Education	6.5%	11.0%	**-4.5%**	**-3.76**	**Democratic**
Health Care	13.1%	18.1%	**-5.0%**	**-3.25**	**Democratic**
Social Welfare and Food Aid	1.2%	3.3%	**-2.1%**	**-3.17**	**Democratic**
Labor and Job Training	2.6%	5.1%	**-2.5%**	**-2.93**	**Democratic**
Civil Rights	0.0%	0.2%	-0.2%	-1.4	Neither
Government Operations and Post Office	0.1%	0.3%	-0.2%	-0.98	Neither
Energy	1.4%	1.0%	0.4%	-0.9	Neither
Immigration	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	-0.89	Republican
Small Businesses and Disaster Relief	2.2%	2.5%	-0.3%	-0.61	Republican
Macroeconomics	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.25	Neither
Law Enforcement and Crime Prevention	10.4%	9.3%	1.1%	0.95	Republican
Science and Communication	2.0%	1.5%	0.5%	1.12	Neither
Agriculture	1.4%	0.9%	0.5%	1.17	Republican
Defense and Veterans	1.7%	0.8%	**0.9%**	**2.1**	**Republican**
Public Lands, Rivers, Tribal Affairs	7.9%	5.6%	**2.3%**	**2.27**	**Neither**
Transportation and Infrastructure	18.6%	9.4%	**9.2%**	**6.98**	**Neither**
Environment and Drinking Water	22.1%	11.0%	**11.1%**	**7.9**	**Democratic**

Bold rows indicate p<.05.

Finally, we test the relationship between issue ownership of policy topics contained in earmark requests and ideology (see Table 9). While a Democratic earmark on a Democratic-owned issue is significantly more likely to be requested by a more liberal representative (p<0.001), a Republican earmark is no more or less likely to be requested by a more conservative Republican (p=0.787). The ideological ownership hypothesis appears to be asymmetric depending on political party. Liberal Democrats used earmarks to accomplish their core policy goals, while moderate Democrats and Republicans spread them out on other issues, likely related to unique demands of their districts.

Table 9: Logistic Regression Estimation of Whether Earmark Requests are on Owned Issues		
Independent Variables	Democrats	Republicans
DW-NOMINATE (1st)	-0.21***	0.22
	(0.40)	(0.82)
n	2120	837
χ^2	31.81	0.07

Odds ratios. * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001.
Standard errors in parenthesis.

The representation differences between the parties extend to the earmarking process. Viewed through the lens of particularized benefits to their constituents, Republicans and Democrats approach their role as representatives differently. The Democratic Party's core issue priorities are derived from a transactional policy relationship between the party and the social groups that make up its diverse coalition. When justifying their earmark requests, they often specify the members of their coalition that the grant would support. When choosing which projects to fund, they focus on the party's core economic policy agenda supporting targeted redistributive policy, even if the projects support intangible services that may be difficult for which to claim credit. Republicans, in contrast, draw most of their policy priorities from nationalized symbolic issues. If the Republican Party were structured like the Democratic Party, we might see large grants to strengthen local police departments, faith-based organizations, or small businesses. Instead, they tend to use earmarks to support highly visible local infrastructure projects.

V. Conclusion

This paper performed an early analysis of the earmarking behavior of members of Congress after the practice returned from a decade-long moratorium. We find strong evidence of

partisan asymmetries in representation style when earmarking. Democrats use the earmarking process more than Republicans to direct particularized benefits towards the social groups that make up the core of their party coalition. When justifying their earmarks, Democrats are significantly more likely to specify that their earmark benefits these social groups. This difference is seen in both the core constituencies of the Democratic Party, which Democrats target at three times the rate of Republicans, but also in core Republican constituencies, which Democrats target more than Republicans though not as much as their own core constituencies. We also find that Democratic earmarks tend to be tightly focused on issues considered to be owned by the Democratic Party, such as health care and social welfare policy. Republican earmarks are less coherent and largely focused on funding large, expensive local infrastructure projects.

This analysis is only the first step in what we can learn about Congress and representation through earmark requests. Prior to the moratorium, Congress began to release significantly more data on the sponsors, costs, and costs of earmarks, and for one year even published requests that failed to make it into law. These data facilitated a rich literature on earmarking and distributional spending (Clemens, Crespin, and Finocchiaro 2015; Engstrom and Vanberg 2010; Lazarus 2009, 2010; Rocca and Gordon 2013; Stratmann 2013). If Congress continues to include earmarking in the appropriations process, researchers should try and replicate these findings. The late 2000s were a different era in American politics governed by more top-down, centralized earmarking rules. Furthermore, given that FY2022 earmarking was the first cycle that many members in the 117th Congress experienced the process, future cycles represent an opportunity to examine how legislators learn about and adapt to new phenomena.

We also believe we can learn about representational styles from these earmark request justification letters beyond party asymmetries. Researchers can explore the relationship between how members justify their behavior and notions of dyadic and descriptive representation. They might also examine how these factors impact the substantive characteristics of the earmarks that members seek. We speculated post hoc that the differences in the cost and policy content of each party's earmarks may be driven by district characteristics, such as how rural or poor the district is. We might also expect variation in earmark behavior based on how compact the district is, with members representing cohesive communities seeking grants for programs specific to that community's needs, while members representing fragmented districts are driven by more national or ideological concerns.

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