

The Partisan Dimensions of Earmarking in the U.S. House of Representatives

Passing out federal dollars to specific projects in particular districts had been a popular way for congressional leaders to build large bipartisan majorities for major bills since the very first meeting of Congress during the Washington administration. By matching projects to districts, scholars have been able to systematically analyze which members were successful in getting their project funded. But for one year, though, the requests members submitted were never known. Using earmark requests data during the 111th Congress, we can know both the requests and the awards. Knowing the former changes our understanding of the latter. We find that the request process is largely driven by ideology, rather than electoral vulnerability. More moderate Republicans tended to seek more earmarks than their more conservative partisans; some of whom completely opted out of the process. The effect was the opposite for Democrats, whose moderates requested fewer earmarks. When these requests are taken into consideration, the awarding process appears to be even less partisan than the raw data would suggest, confirming the bipartisan nature of the earmarking process.

Keywords: Congress, Democrats, Republicans, political parties, earmarks, ideology, budgetary policy

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After some egregious examples of directed congressional spending – frequently called “earmarks” – the Democrats, in a last-ditch effort to save them, put guardrails on their use. For the first time in FY2010, members had to list their earmark requests on their websites before they could even be requested. Before long, though, the pressure to abandon them altogether became too great. Within a year of the Democrat’s tweak of the earmarking process, both parties in both chambers, with a plea from President Obama in the 2011 State of the Union, placed a moratorium on their use. For the moment, at least, deficit hawks had won the battle against earmarks.

The moratorium stayed in place until Democrats, who secured majorities in both chambers in the 2020 elections, reinstituted the practice in 2021 under similar guidelines that had been abandoned ten years before. Most thought that earmarks would only stick around as long as the Democratic hold the majority. Surprisingly, House Republicans kept the practice around even after they secured a majority in the 2022 elections, albeit with changes to limit requests to certain types of projects (Cassella, Fagan and Theriault, 2023). Now that the practice has survived at least one-party change in one chamber, it is time that political scientists use the one-year experiment more than a decade ago to analyze how our understanding of earmarks have changed in light of knowing earmark requests.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we explore the politics of earmarking, which first caused earmarks to proliferate, then created transparency reforms that allowed us a short observational window into the complete earmarking process. Next, we explore the predictors of earmarking based on the literature, which informs our hypotheses. We then present our results on the earmark requests and awards processes in the House of Representatives, finding that moderate Republicans were granted more earmarks, even independent of how many they

requested. Finally, we draw conclusions about the earmarking process then and what it means for how Congress operates today.

I. The History of Earmarks

Directed congressional spending is nearly as old as the American republic itself. The first public works law in the 1st Congress (1789-90) was the Lighthouse Act of 1789. The legislation, which sought to promote commerce in the new country by building lighthouses across the coast, initially divided North from South. It took the political skill of Congressman James Madison to put an enacting coalition together.¹ The Pennsylvania delegation, whose support was critical in bridging both divides, ended up supporting final passage when its members, who were facing pressure from prominent merchants in Philadelphia, inserted language into the bill that set aside federal funds for the construction of a local Philadelphia pier project. The Senate Historical Office names this directive as the first known instance of Congress funding a regional project through the appropriations process, known today as “earmarking” or, more derisively, “pork barrel politics.” Earmarking became a common practice in Congress until it was abruptly ended in 2011, though it has more recently made a comeback.

Two lessons from this very first earmark underscores what political scientists have systematically demonstrated across many years of study. First, targeting federal spending to their districts improved members’ relationships with their constituents (Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1981;

¹ For more about the legislative history of the Lighthouse Act, see: http://www.oceanworxonline.com/index_files/Lighthouses%20Act%20Article%20CAW.pdf (accessed on 22 July 2019).

Levitt and Snyder 1995; Mayhew 1974; Shepsle and Weingast 1981) even though some studies suggest that better earmarkers were not more electorally successful (Feldman and Jondrow 1984; Stein and Bickers 1995) or that success varied by party (Lazarus and Reilly 2009). Second, by providing leaders with an orthogonal issue on which they could build consensus, targeting earmarks to pivotal legislators helped leaders pass bills (Evans 2004, Clemens, Crespín and Finnochiario 2015a; Engstrom and Vanberg 2010; Lazarus 2009).

From the 1st Congress to the modern Congress, members enjoyed their earmarks. Although pork barreling is more consistent with the Democratic Party's governing philosophy, both parties participated in it. A classic example of earmarks in this era was the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, which passed the House 341-61 (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler 2014). Trent Lott, then a House member, explained: "Notice how quiet we are. We all got something in there." Another member quipped, "If it had a blade of grass and a squirrel, it got in the bill."² Leaders found, according to Mayhew (1974, 98), that "the costs of cutting in minority members are very low." Earmarking became the bedrock for a distributive strategy to build enacting coalitions (Shepsle and Weingast 1981 and Evans 1994). By cutting them into the deal, minority party members were less likely to criticize the entire process (Balla, Lawrence, Maltzman, and Sigelman 2002).

When the Republicans took over Congress in the 1994 elections, earmarking became a favorite tool of Newt Gingrich to shore up support for his vulnerable incumbents. He issued a memo entitled "Proposed Principles for Analyzing Each Appropriations Bill" with a list of questions for the appropriation subcommittees chairs. The memo posed to the drafters of the

² Quoted in Mary Russell, "'Pork-Barrell Bill' Clears House Panel," *The Washington Post*, June 22, 1978 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/06/22/pork-barrell-bill-clears-house-panel/5ae9ef0d-0317-43ad-85f3-4b663e7f299e/>; accessed on May 22, 2020).

spending bill: “Are there any Republican members who could be severely hurt by the bill or who need a specific district item in the bill?”³ For Gingrich, controlling government spending and maintaining the power of the purse were, in the end, sacrificed on the altar of electoral politics as the fragile Republican majority sought to lock-in its 1994 electoral gains. With this change in protocol, the number of earmarks dramatically increased, from 1,439 in 1996 to 13,999 in 2005. Likewise, federal spending on earmarks went from \$2 billion in 1995 to more than \$31 billion in 2005 (Wirtz and Clement 2008). Earmarking had grown so much that the practice had created large funding disparities between states according to who was influential enough to command additional grants, which continued even after they were banned (McLaughlin 2023).

As the earmarking process grew so did its attention from congressional scholars. The classic studies from the 1970s through the early 2000s reached conclusions with the best data available. While an earmark could be ascertained from the legislation, its actual requestor was left to conjecture. Doing the best that they could, political scientists geographically matched up the earmarks to the representatives. Because the statistical results matched the expectations of those who understood the earmarking process, the results became the conventional wisdom. In short, earmarks were awarded to both moderate lawmakers in hopes of securing their pivotal votes for the passage of legislation (Evans 2004) and to vulnerable members in hopes of securing their reelections (Bickers and Stein 1996, 2000; Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1981; Mayhew 1974; Stein and Bickers 1994). The earmark awards data was on stronger footing than the evidence that the award resulted in the intended outcomes. Mayhew admits as much when he suggests that the connection between distributive spending and electoral benefits is most likely just “lore” (Mayhew 1974, 57).

³ Quoted in Taylor, Andrew, August 3, 1996. “GOP Pet Projects Give Boost To Shaky Incumbents.” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, p. 2169-2173.

Gingrich's drastic increases in earmarks not only brought attention from congressional scholars, but also from earmark opponents. When the Republican Party transitioned from the majority party to the minority in both chambers of Congress in 2006, the long-run bipartisan consensus on earmarks faded. To stem the criticisms from anti-government spending Republicans inside Congress and their aligned interest groups outside, Democratic majorities passed the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007, which required public disclosure of earmarks beginning with FY2008. Because this reform mandated that the sponsors of each earmark included in appropriations bills be identified, political scientists no longer had to guess at who had requested which earmarks. The more explicit link between earmark and representative allowed for a finer-grained analysis.

The results from a new generation of studies validated the conventional wisdom. Electoral vulnerability members received more earmarks (Engstrom and Vanberg 2010; Lazarus 2009, 2010; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2010; Clemens, Crespín, Finocchiaro 2015a) as well as the moderate members who were needed to build an enacting coalition (Evans 2004). These newer studies, though, added two additional findings. First, Clemens, Crespín, and Finocchiaro (2015a) added the additional component of institutional position. Not surprisingly, members in leadership and on the Appropriations Committee were awarded more earmarks than their colleagues. Second, Republicans and conservatives were less successful in securing earmarks than their Democratic and liberal colleagues (Lazarus 2010; Clemens, Crespín, Finocchiaro 2015b).

The problem with this second conclusion, though, is that it assumes that conservative Republicans pursued earmarks with the same gusto as their more moderate fellow partisans, let alone the Democrats; an action fundamentally at odds with their fiscally conservative messaging. This second result put the cart before the horse because the data to tease out why conservative

Republicans were awarded fewer earmarks did not exist: it could be because the earmarking process was stacked against them, or it could be that they simply requested fewer earmarks. If the underlying data generating processes for requesting earmarks and awarding earmark is different, we must analyze the processes separately. We can only put the cart and horse in the proper order using data on who requests earmarks before understanding who is awarded them.

Due to a series of rule changes in the 110th and 111th Congresses, we can test a complete theory of earmarks.⁴ Because the first step was largely unknowable scholars restricted their tests to the second step, but the members always engaged earmarks as a two-step process. First, they requested earmarks. Second, leaders in the committee and party choose which projects to fund. Because of the transparency reforms put in place in 2007, researchers had access for the first time to comprehensive data on earmarks enacted into law. Because Democrats required earmark requestors in 2009 to list their earmarks on their webpages before they could even be considered in the legislative process, researchers had access for the first time to earmark requests. Because the earmarks were banned in 2010, the full earmarking process was known for only one fiscal year.

Washington Watch, an enterprising good government interest group, recorded and published all the earmark requests that members posted on their webpages for the FY2010 appropriations process. Using a scraping program, we collected these data, which to our knowledge have not been rigorously analyzed. In total, the 23,728 earmark requests from representatives were worth \$361 billion.⁵ We combine the requests data with the earmark awards

⁴ When earmarks returned during the 117th Congress, House Democrats added new rules to significantly change how earmarks were distributed. Each representative was limited to ten requests worth a maximum of \$125 million. Appropriators had little discretion to give additional awards to members. See (Cassella, Fagan and Theriault, 2023).

⁵ Many earmark requests are co-signed by multiple members of Congress. For example, senators will often co-sign requests with members of their state's delegation. Each of these requests is counted individually for each member, as

data from Taxpayers for Common Sense, which other scholars have used, to see how requests affect awards.⁶

The raw awards data is consistent with the results from the political science literature. Democrats did receive a disproportionate share of earmarks. Though they only comprised 59 percent of the House, they received 68 percent of the earmarks. Based on awards alone, Republicans, so it would seem, were being deprived of their fair share of earmarks. Democratic representatives, it turns out, requested 73 percent of all the earmarks. Furthermore, the data show that 38 Republicans and 4 Democrats opted out of the earmarking process all together. Once requests are considered and once those who did not make a single request are removed from the analysis, Republicans had a higher success rate than the Democrats, who were the majority party. While only 35 percent of Democratic requests were awarded, Republicans were awarded 47 percent of their requests (see table 1).⁷ These results, while confirming that which we knew (Democrats got more than their share of earmark awards), also shed light on what we did not know (Republicans got a higher proportion of their requests fulfilled).

Table 1: Earmarks Awards and Requests by Party in the House

	Democrats	Republicans	Proportion Democratic
Members	257	178	0.59
Earmark Awards	6185	2926	0.68
Earmark Requests	17440	6288	0.73
Requesting Members	253	140	0.64

our unit of analysis is member of Congress. Amounts will be double counted here if the request is reported on multiple members' websites.

⁶ We use a count of the number of earmarks rather than their dollar value. The dollar value data tend to be driven by a small number of very large projects that are not traditional district-driven distributive spending, such as a multi-billion-dollar military base in Afghanistan, and thus tend to be less informative when measured at the member unit of analysis. We estimate our same models using the logged dollar value of member's earmark requests in Appendix Table 1.

⁷ We only present results for the House of Representatives in the main body of this paper. Party leadership exerts much less control in the Senate, which tends to operate on universalist norms. We estimate the same models for the Senate in Appendix Tables 2 and 3, and Appendix Figure 1.

Success Rate	0.35	0.47
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Without knowing requests, it would appear that Republicans only got 16.4 awards per member compared to the Democrats who got 24.1 awards, which is almost 50 percent greater. Once those who opted out are removed from the calculations, Republicans got 20.9 awards per member compared to the Democrats who got 24.4 awards, which is only 16.7 percent more than the minority party Republicans and can be partially attributed to having more seats on the Appropriations Committee. What at once might have looked like a process heavily favoring the majority party becomes much more bipartisan once the unknown becomes known.

II. Earmark Awards Predictions

The first step in the earmarking process is an individual member making a request. The second step of awarding earmarks is a collective enterprise by the authors of appropriations bills and, ultimately, the chamber. Thus, different factors should predict each step. Up until both actions became knowable, though, a scholar would lump the whole process together and developed a single model to explain it. We take one step back to consider the two steps separately.

Individual members of Congress may request earmarks to help secure their reelection or to enact their policy preferences. Members who are more concerned with using earmarks as a valence issue to earn marginal votes request more earmarks, while members who are less concerned about winning marginal votes may request more or less according to their preferences. For conservatives, who tend to view domestic spending more critically, these two factors present

a trade-off. Vulnerable members may feel pressure to both bring projects home to their district but also maintain ideological consistency by reducing or eliminating their earmark requests.

Leaders in Congress, in turn, grant requests to further their own goals. In the most thorough analysis of how earmarks affect the legislative process, Diana Evans (2004) finds that party leaders, just like James Madison in the 1st Congress, use earmarks to secure the votes of members who are sitting on the fence for particular pieces of legislation. For most bills these days, those fence-sitters are more likely to be in the middle of the ideological distribution. While ideology can vary by issue, most studies show that most issues reliably collapse on to the one prevailing ideological dimension (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Leadership can entice potential swing legislators necessary for building an enacting coalition by awarding additional earmarks. Most scholarship shows that coalition building is an important component to the earmark awarding process.

Party leaders, as typified by Gingrich's explicit strategy, may also direct earmarks to their more vulnerable members in hopes of securing their re-elections (Bickers and Stein 1996; Engstrom and Vanberg 2010; Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1981; Grimmer 2013; Lazarus 2010; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2010; Mayhew 1974; Stein and Bickers 1994). The record that earmarks actually help vulnerable members is a bit more mixed. Some studies found that distributive spending in districts benefit incumbents (Crespin and Finocchiaro 2013, Levitt and Snyder 1997, Stratmann 2013), while other studies show little direct effect of distributive spending on district-level electoral outcomes (Anagnoson 1982; Stein and Bickers 1994; 1996). Others still have found that potential electoral benefits are contingent upon visibility (Owens and Wade 1984; Stein and Bickers 1994; 1997) or project type (Lazarus and Reilly 2009). We set these latter nuances aside in order to offer preliminary results on both steps to the earmarking process.

At the same time, leaders may deny projects to those members they expect to vote against their policy priorities or members of the opposite party who they expect to target in the upcoming election. If so, these members may be less likely to request earmarks because they are less likely to get them. If, however, members, regardless of ideology or electoral vulnerability, receive the same number of awards per request made, then the decision to request more or less earmarks is a function of the member's individual goals, rather than the leaders' strategic decisions.

We identify four sets of predictors for earmark awards and requests. Three of these sets, which are drawn from the literature, predict the distributions of both earmark requests and awards, although often for different reasons. When the number of earmark awards is the dependent variable, we also include a fourth predictor, earmark requests themselves. We explain our expectations for each predictor and how we operationalized them below.

A. Predictors of Earmark Requests and Awards

We operationalize several variables to test if the conventional wisdom continues to exert an effect in the more complete earmark dataset. Because of the similarity in the logic underlying request and awards, we develop the hypotheses together. We denote the request hypotheses with closed bullet points and award hypotheses with open bullet points.

Electoral Vulnerability: Previous research suggests that earmarks provide an effective valence issue for members to shore up their re-elections. Thus, individual members who are more vulnerable may seek more earmarks; if those members are in the majority party, we expect them to be more likely to get their requests fulfilled (Engstrom and Vanberg 2010; Grimmer 2013; Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1981, Lazarus 2009; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2010; Mayhew 1974).

To measure electoral vulnerability, we include two variables. The first is the margin of victory the representative received in the previous election. The second is President Obama's vote share in the 2008 presidential election, which captures the overall partisanship of their district.

We use those variables to test two versions of the vulnerability hypotheses:

- Members with smaller margins of victory request more earmarks.
- Members with fewer co-partisans in their district request more earmarks.
 - Majority party members who are more vulnerable are more likely to get more earmarks.

Ideology: We expect ideology to work differently for earmark requests and awards.

Earmarks are increased domestic spending, and so we expect more conservative members of Congress to request fewer earmarks. If earmarks are used to entice members who are otherwise on the fence to support the underlying legislation – ala the Philadelphia members in the first earmark – we would expect party leaders to award more earmarks to those in the middle of the ideological continuum than their colleagues at the extreme ends, who we would expect are already either in the “yea” or “nay” camps for the vote. We measure ideology using the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE for each member.

We offer the following two versions of our ideological hypotheses:

- More conservative members request fewer earmarks.
- More moderate members are awarded more earmarks.

Institutional Advantage: Strong evidence exists that members of the Appropriations Committees and more senior members of Congress receive relatively more earmarks (Berry and Fowler 2015; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2010; Lazarus 2010; Clemens, Crespino and Finocchiaro 2015b). We included these same variables to test the institutional position hypothesis:

- Members who sit on the Appropriations Committees request more earmarks.
- Senior members request more earmarks.
- Members who sit on the Appropriations Committees are awarded more earmarks.
- Senior members are awarded more earmarks.

B. Requesting Earmarks

Members of Congress who request more earmarks should receive more earmarks. This logic is not self-evident. Earmark requests after the FY2010 transparency reform may represent a form of cheap talk, providing members a low effort way of signaling support for their constituency, while the ultimate number of earmarks awarded to their district is mostly determined by other factors. If requests do indeed predict awards, they represent an important confounding variable that must be included in any model of earmark awards.

Because of the rules implemented during the FY2010 budget cycle, we know, for the first time, the totality of the actual requests.⁸ We included the number of earmark requests filed by each member of Congress in our model:

- Members who file more earmark requests receive more earmark awards

III. Results

⁸ Gelman (2021) hunted down earmark requests for two years (1994 and 1995 fiscal years) for the Department of Interior and Related Agencies appropriations bill. These confidential requests to the subcommittee chair were retained by a committee staffer and became part of the official records of the committee turned over to Legislative Records at the National Archives. After the 20 years of mandatory embargo, the records could finally be accessed and analyzed. To our current knowledge, no other request data are lurking in the committee files.

First, we present results on the number of earmark requests. Because our counts are over dispersed, we use negative binomial estimations of House⁹ earmark requests (see table 2). The coefficients in these tables are incidence rate ratios, calculated by exponentiating the negative binomial regression coefficient. Incidence rate ratios can be interpreted similarly to odds ratios, where a coefficient of 1.1 indicates that a one-unit change produces a 10% increase in the dependent variable while holding all other independent variables constant, and a coefficient of 0.9 indicates that it produces a 10% decrease.

Turning to the particular hypotheses, we find no evidence that electoral vulnerability effects earmark requests. Neither Republicans nor Democrats who were in marginal districts or who won their previous elections by smaller margins requested more earmarks. These results suggest that either legislators who feel threatened do not respond by seeking to bring more earmarks back to their districts or that all members of Congress are scared in running for reelection (Jacobson 1987), so they all avail themselves to the earmarking process.

We find that institutional advantages for both parties plays a small, but significant, role in determining the process. Democratic members of the Appropriations Committee request 38 percent more earmarks than their co-partisans ($p=0.003$), while Republican members of the Appropriations Committee request 64 percent more earmarks than their colleagues, although the result falls just outside the conventional bands of statistical significance ($p=0.102$). Seniority, as measured by years of service in the chamber, had no effect on earmark requests for members of either party.

⁹ Due to sample size issues, we only produce estimates for the House of Representatives in the main body of the paper. Appendix Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for Senators, and Appendix Table 3 and 4 show the model results for Senators.

Ideology is the most important predictor of earmark requests for members of both parties, although the relationship is not symmetric. More conservative members of each request fewer earmarks than their colleagues ($p=0.008$ for Democrats, $p<.001$ for Republicans). The most liberal Democrats requested about a hundred earmarks (panel A of figure 1), while the most conservative Republicans' requests approached zero (panel B of figure 1). The relationship is roughly linear across parties, although the most conservative Democrats requested slightly fewer earmarks than the most liberal Republicans; in fact, the most moderate Republicans requested earmarks at similar rates to a Democratic member with an average ideology. These results suggest that members from both parties sacrificed earmark requests as they moved in the conservative direction. It is noteworthy that the most left-leaning Republicans requested as many earmarks as the most liberal Democrats, and that the most right-leaning Democrats requested almost as few earmarks as the most conservative Republicans.

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Table 2: Predictors of Earmark Requests, Negative Binomial Regression Results

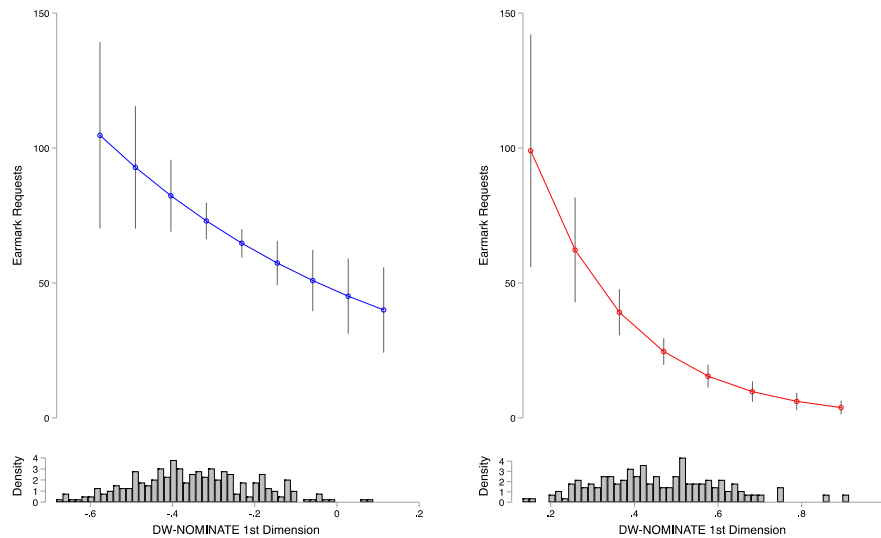
Independent Variables	Democrats	Republicans
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<u>Electoral Vulnerability</u>		
Winning Percentage	1.00 (0.003)	1.01 (0.01)
District Liberalness	0.99 (0.01)	0.98 (0.01)
<u>Institutional Advantage</u>		
Appropriations Comm.	1.38** (0.15)	1.64 (0.50)
Seniority	1.00 (0.004)	1.01 (0.01)
<u>Ideology</u>		
DW-NOMINATE	0.30*** (0.14)	0.01*** (0.01)
Constant	55.24*** (12.41)	106.30*** (62.25)
Alpha	0.34*** (0.04)	1.51*** (0.18)
Log Likelihood	-1272.79	-755.93
n	254	175
Incidence rate ratios reported. Standard errors in parenthesis. *		
p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001		

Figure 1: The Effect of Ideology on Earmark Requests

Panel A. Democrats

Panel B. Republicans



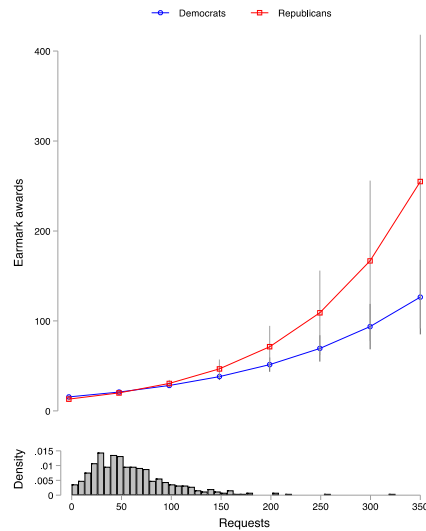
With a more rigorous understanding of who requests earmarks, we next turn to our negative binomial models estimating the number of earmarks awarded (see table 3). These models exclude all members of Congress who completely opted out of the earmarking process (that is, those who requested zero earmarks), as they, by definition, did not receive any awards. We include two models for each party. In models A and C, we include all covariates other than earmark requests. In models B and D, we include earmark requests.

All four models share two conclusions. First, electoral vulnerability does not significantly impact party leader's decisions to award earmarks. We should note that this result does not call in to question the results of those studies who find an effect for marginal members. It could be that for this cycle and this cycle alone, vulnerability had no effect on either the number of earmarks requested or the number awarded.

Second, members serving on the Appropriations Committee in both parties are granted considerably more earmarks; this result continues to hold even after considering their increased number of requests. The effect sizes for both Republican and Democrat appropriators are similar, suggesting a universalistic norm within the committee. When requests are included in models B and D, the effect of being on the Appropriations Committee decreases by 24% for Democrats and 40% for Republicans suggesting that members of the committee may file more requests in anticipation of receiving more awards. Nonetheless, a model that does not include requests would overstate the effect from serving on the committee. We do find that more senior Democrats are awarded more earmarks. For each additional year served in Congress, Democratic members receive 1 percent more earmarks. The effect is not significant in model A ($p=0.096$) but is when requests are controlled for in model B ($p=0.039$). Their Republican colleagues are not granted the same privilege ($p=0.687$ in Model D).

Next, we turn to how earmark requests affect earmark awards. Members of Congress who file more earmark requests receive significantly more awards ($p<0.001$). The effect size is nearly identical for Republicans and Democrats. For each additional request, members receive 1 percent more earmarks (see figure 2). Furthermore, requests greatly improve the model fit – comparing models A versus B (AIC=7.37 and 7.03) and C versus D (AIC=7.25 and 6.95), suggesting that earmark requests are a powerful explanatory variable explaining earmark awards independently the other covariates. Including requests also adjusts the effect caused by the other covariates.

Figure 2: The Effect of Earmark Requests on Awards



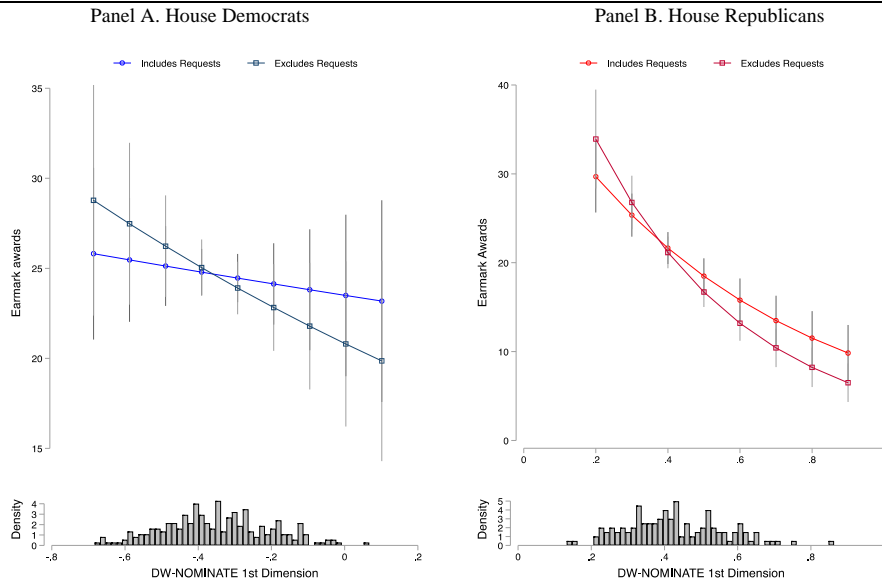
We want to note one other result from the analysis. Ideology is a powerful predictor of earmark awards, but only for Republicans. Focusing first on the results for the Democrats. While more conservative Democrats received fewer earmarks in model A ($p=0.14$), the result is not statistically significant. In model B, once the number of requests is taken into consideration, the result is even less substantively and statistically significant ($p=0.63$), suggesting that the effect of ideology on earmark awards for Democrats works entirely through the request step of the process. In model A, the most liberal Democrat receives 8 more earmark awards than the most conservative Democrat, but just 2.6 more in model B (see Figure 3, Panel A). Because the Democratic Party leadership did not award more earmarks to their more moderate members it suggests that distributive politics was alive and well in the Democratic Party at least at this point in time and within the earmarking process.

The same dynamic was not in place for the Republican Party. More moderate Republicans receive more earmarks ($p < .001$ in both models). The effect remains even after including earmark requests in the model. In model C, the most liberal Republican receives 23 more earmarks than the mean Republican and 36 more than the most conservative Republican. In model D, the most liberal Republican receives 14 more earmarks than the mean Republican and 24 more than the most conservative Republican. It should be noted that the effect of requests is understated because the multivariate analysis does not include the members who did not request earmarks, who are more likely to fall on the conservative side of the ideological continuum. These findings suggest that the Democratic leaders enticed the more moderate Republicans, at least those still willing to play the game, with earmarks in order to build bipartisan enacting coalitions. Whether the strategy resulted in these broader coalitions we leave for further research.

Table 3: Predictors of Earmark Awards, Negative Binomial Regression Results

Independent Variables	<i>House Democrats</i>		<i>House Republicans</i>	
	Model (A)	Model (B)	Model (C)	Model (D)
<u>Earmark Preferences</u>				
Requests		1.01*** (0.001)		1.01*** (0.001)
<u>Electoral Vulnerability</u>				
Winning Percentage	1.00 (0.002)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.004)	1.00 (0.004)
District Liberalness	1.00 (0.003)	1.00 (0.003)	0.99 (0.01)	1.00 (0.006)
<u>Institutional Advantage</u>				
Appropriations Comm.	1.94*** (0.14)	1.68*** (0.10)	2.02*** (0.23)	1.62*** (0.16)
Seniority	1.01 (0.003)	1.01* (0.003)	1.00 (0.01)	0.99 (0.004)
<u>Ideology</u>				
DW-NOMINATE	0.63 (0.20)	0.88 (0.23)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.07)
Constant	22.47*** (3.45)	15.75*** (2.13)	33.80*** (10.02)	19.04*** (5.02)
Alpha	0.13*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)
AIC	7.37	7.03	7.25	6.95
BIC	485.94	404.92	339.78	301.03
Log Likelihood	-913.83	-870.56	-489.69	-467.86
n	250	250	137	137

Incidence rate ratios reported. Standard errors in parenthesis. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Models exclude the 38 Republicans and 4 Democrats who requested zero earmarks, and six members for whom requests data are missing.

Figure 3: The Effect of Ideology on Earmark Awards

IV. Discussion

Nearly a decade after earmarks were banned, members of Congress have again entered the earmarking process, but it wasn't just Democrats who were supportive of bringing them back. Early in 2017, when Congress struggled to pass an immigration bill, President Trump remarked to a group of congressional leaders at the White House, "Maybe all of you should start thinking about going back to a form of earmarks."¹⁰ Trump, who prides himself on his deal-making skills, saw earmarks as a way of buying off potential swing votes. Unlike the previous

¹⁰ Quoted in Mason, Jeff and Susan Cornwell, "'Drain the Swamp' Trump suggests reviving 'earmarks' in Congress", Reuters, January 9th, 2018. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-earmarks/drain-the-swamp-trump-suggests-reviving-earmarks-in-congress-idUSKBN1EY2TG>) Accessed 7/23/2019.

generation of ideologically conservative Republicans, Trump was comfortable with a little grease on the wheels to help seal the deal. Ideological conservatives, nonetheless, remain fiercely opposed to earmarks. Indeed, a group of influential conservative organizations, including the Club for Growth, Americans for Tax Reform, and American Legislative Exchange Council, responded to President Trump in a letter by declaring:

Earmarks are the antithesis of the “drain the swamp” election that sent you to the White House... Earmarks are a lazy, unfair and corrupt way to circumvent the authorization and appropriations process. They have been roundly excoriated by the conservative movement upon which Republicans depend for their political lives.¹¹

Earmarks have a new lease on life now that they have survived the transition of majority party from Democrats to Republicans in the House of Representatives following the 2022 elections. Although it’s still in its infancy in its second life, we can use the data from ten years ago to speculate about what we might expect to find. Our analysis suggests that they could be used once again to build consensus in Congress. During the final budget process in which the old system was used, Democratic leaders in the House of Representatives granted additional earmarks to moderate Republicans independent of how many they requested. They did not attempt to grant additional earmarks to Democratic members in more vulnerable seats to shore up their reelections, or even to deny earmarks to Republicans in targeted seats. These patterns suggest that the Democratic leadership tried to use earmarks to grease the wheels of the legislative process, at least during the single fiscal year for which data on the complete earmarking process is available. Whether the war between the parties has become too entrenched since then for earmarks to play the same nonpartisan role now as they did then is open to

¹¹ Roth, Andrew. “Open Letter to President Trump: No to a Return of Earmarks.” *Club for Growth* (<https://www.clubforgrowth.org/government-spending/open-letter-to-president-trump>) Accessed 7/22/2019.

conjecture. We have evidence that at least in the near past, it was nonpartisan, which is more than we can say for most other congressional actions.

If one thing is in short supply in today's Congress, it is a bipartisan process than can yield consensus. The record of their second life is too thin to know if they will be the balm that their proponents suggest they may be (unlikely, but this argument is not any more hyperbolic than their opponents who claim that they help drive up deficits). Our analysis suggests that, in time, they may be able to combat some of this congressional dysfunction; that is if they are used in the same manner as they were just before they were banned. Congressional leaders took away some of their discretionary power to award earmarks when they ended the moratorium. While that decision may have been necessary to build a bipartisan coalition in support of the practice, it may have reduced the potential of earmarking to build consensus. Leaders may want to restore some of their authority to distribute earmarks to reward members who support broadly-appealing legislation.

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Appendix

Appendix Table 1: OLS Estimation of the Logged Dollar Value of House Earmark Requests

Independent Variables	Democrats	Republicans
<u>Electoral Vulnerability</u>		
Winning Percentage	-0.001 (0.01)	0.001 (0.01)
District Liberalness	-0.01 (0.01)	0.001 (0.02)
<u>Institutional Advantage</u>		
Appropriations Com.	0.23 (0.25)	0.39 (0.41)
Seniority	-0.002 (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)
<u>Ideology</u>		
DW-NOMINATE	-1.42 (1.01)	-1.07 (1.24)
Constant	4.90*** (0.50)	4.96*** (1.02)
r ²	0.01	0.05
n	250	137

Appendix Table 2: Predictors of Senate Earmark Requests, Negative Binomial Regression Results

Independent Variables	Democrats	Republicans
<u>Electoral Vulnerability</u>		
Winning Percentage	1.02 (0.72)	1.64 (1.58)
District Liberalness	1.02 (0.02)	0.98 (0.03)
<u>Institutional Advantage</u>		
Appropriations Com.	1.49 (0.42)	0.90 (0.44)
Seniority	1.00 (0.01)	1.01 (0.02)
<u>Ideology</u>		
DW-NOMINATE	1.93 (2.54)	0.02 (0.05)
Constant	191.16*** (88.43)	430.91*** (460.60)
Alpha	0.85*** (0.15)	1.36*** (0.29)
Log Likelihood	-367.19	-231.23
n	59	40

Incidence rate ratios reported. Standard errors in parenthesis. * p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001. Total number of Senators is 99 for FY2010, due to the delay in Sen. Al Franken's seating.

Appendix Table 2: Predictors of Senate Earmark Awards, Negative Binomial Regression Results

Independent Variables	<i>Democrats</i>		<i>Republicans</i>	
	Con. Wisdom (A)	With Requests (B)	Con. Wisdom (C)	With Requests (D)
<u>Earmark Preferences</u>				
Requests		1.00** (0.001)		1.01*** (0.001)
<u>Electoral Vulnerability</u>				
Winning Percentage	0.73 (0.44)	0.81 (0.46)	0.88 (0.64)	0.65 (0.38)
District Liberalness	1.00 (0.01)	0.99 (0.01)	0.99 (0.02)	1.02 (0.02)
<u>Institutional Advantage</u>				
Appropriations Com.	1.28 (0.30)	1.11 (0.24)	1.19 (0.47)	1.36 (0.41)
Seniority	1.01 (0.01)	1.01 (0.01)	1.01 (0.02)	1.01 (0.02)
<u>Ideology</u>				
DW-NOMINATE	0.52 (0.52)	0.27 (0.26)	0.06 (0.11)	0.36 (0.52)
Constant	67.68*** (23.65)	39.31*** (14.23)	152.58*** (132.12)	38.02*** (26.22)
Alpha	0.57*** (0.11)	0.48*** (0.10)	0.90*** (0.21)	0.54*** (0.15)
AIC	11.27	11.15	10.48	10.06
BIC	441.00	435.69	274.87	268.30
Log Likelihood	-324.48	-319.78	201.51	-193.17
n	59	59	40	40

Incidence rate ratios reported. Standard errors in parenthesis. *p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001. Total number of Senators is 99 for FY2010, due to the delay in Sen. Al Franken's seating.

Appendix Figure 1: The Effect of Earmark Requests on Senate awards

