

Congress and the Political Economy of the National Endowment for the Arts

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We examine the relationship between the Congress and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), from the agency's inception in the mid-1960s to the present. The NEA has seen its fortunes rise and fall over time, as congressional appropriations and scrutiny have fluctuated with ideological and partisan change in the House and Senate. While the NEA has enjoyed some bipartisan support throughout its tenure, assistance for the agency has been more likely to come from more liberal members (viewed in terms of ideology) and Democrats (viewed in terms of party), respectively. We also uncover some evidence that particular states and districts benefit more of less from NEA grants. Overall, states and districts represented by Democrats do better in terms of both grants and grant dollars than states and districts represented by Republicans, with the most liberal Democratic House members doing especially well.

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Introduction

On March 11, 2019, President Donald Trump unveiled his budget for Fiscal Year 2020.¹ While the budget itself was the largest in history – at \$4.75 billion – the Trump administration’s proposal also included a variety of deep cuts in existing federal programs. One such cut was to the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), an independent federal agency established by Congress in 1965.² The NEA provides funding and support for Americans such that they have “the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities.” The NEA does this “through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector.”³ The Trump administration’s FY2020 budget allocated \$29 million to the NEA – down from the \$155 million the agency received in 2019 – which provided “sufficient funding for orderly termination of all operations over two years.”⁴ Stated differently, the Trump administration put the NEA on the chopping block.

President Trump’s desire to terminate the NEA, however, was not new. In both 2017 and 2018, the Trump administration released budgets that would have eliminated the NEA, as well as the National Endowment of the Humanities (Kinsella 2017; Boucher 2018). And both times, in budget negotiations with the Congress, the NEA survived – and even saw its budget increase marginally.⁵ This may be surprising, as the Republicans enjoyed unified government in the 115th Congress (2017-18), and federal arts programs are usually considered the domain of the

¹ See “A Budget for a Better America,” at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/msar-fy2020.pdf>

² See Cascone (2019) and Kreighbaum (2019) for a summary.

³ See <https://www.arts.gov/about-nea>

⁴ “A Budget for a Better America,” 98.

⁵ See <https://www.arts.gov/open-government/national-endowment-arts-appropriations-history>

Democratic Party. But a number of Republicans went on record in 2017 opposing the Trump administration's plan to eliminate the NEA (Boucher 2017). Indeed, rather than being a purely partisan issue, the arts endowment is quite distributive in nature, as the NEA sends grants to every state and every congressional district in the nation (Cooper and Deb 2017). As a result, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), chair of the appropriations subcommittee that oversees funding for the NEA, said "I believe we can find a way to commit to fiscal responsibility while continuing to support the important benefits the NEA and NEH provide" (Johnson 2017). And the NEA survived. The same would be true in 2019, as budget negotiations eventual led to a \$7.25 million increase – and \$162.25 million appropriation overall – in the NEA's budget for FY2020 (Hertweck 20019; Keener 2020).

While presidential and congressional approaches to and support of the NEA appear in the news quite frequently, especially when budget negotiations between the branches are occurring, social scientists have rarely examined the politics of the NEA in any kind of systematic way.⁶ We seek to fill that gap in this paper, which will examine Congress's role in the political economy of the NEA from its inception in 1965 through the present day. In doing so, we will explore the macro-level factors that have influenced NEA appropriations over time, along with role that partisan and ideological factors have played on congressional roll-call votes involving the NEA. We will also look at the distribution of NEA grants and grant dollars by party and ideology within party.

⁶ Some exceptions include Wyszomirski (1988), Moen (1997), and DiMaggio and Pettit (1999).

The NEA and Congress: A Brief History

The historical roots in what would become the National Endowment of the Arts were in the New Deal Era, with the Section on Fine Arts and the Art Relief Project of the Works Project Administration (WPA). While primary goal of these programs was to relieve unemployment, the advancement of arts and artists was a positive byproduct. By the end of the 1930s, however, federal support for the arts had waned, and Congress moved to significantly cut back on the WPA programs, which many members viewed as subversive and spreaders of Communism.⁷ In the 1940s, Congress would eliminate the remaining federal arts projects (Larson 1983, 13-19).

While an attempt was made by the Eisenhower administration to revive a federal arts program in the mid-1950s, real strides would only be made when John F. Kennedy entered the White House. The Democratic Party platform had an arts plank in 1960, and once elected, Kennedy – surrounded by a young, cultured staff – sought the establishment of a “federal advisory agency concerned with the cultural resources of the nation” (Wyszomirski 1988, 126).⁸ And while bills would be considered in Congress to create a cultural equivalent to the National Science Foundation, all such legislation would face legislative roadblocks – especially in the House (Larson 1983, 169-75). As a result, on June 12, 1963, President Kennedy created an Advisory Council on the Arts by Executive Order.⁹ Before much could be done in staffing the council, however, Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963. His death helped his successor,

⁷ In particular, the Federal Theater Project was eliminated and the remaining arts projects were placed under state sponsorship and control.

⁸ On the Kennedy administration’s role in arts policy more generally, see Cummings (1982).

⁹ For the text of Executive Order 11112, see

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11112-establishing-the-presidents-advisory-council-the-arts>

Lyndon B. Johnson, secure congressional approval for a National Council on the Arts (Larson 1983, 192-94) in September 1964.¹⁰

Funding from Congress for the arts, however, would be another matter. Securing such funds was made easier by Johnson's landslide presidential victory in November 1964, and he made federal support for the arts a component of the education program in his Great Society agenda. In early 1965, the administration sought legislation for a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, with separate endowments for the arts and humanities. By the summer, a bill (HR 9460) had made its way through committee in the House, but was stymied in the conservative-controlled Rules Committee. Eventually, with Johnson applying pressure, the 21-day rule was invoked and the bill was discharged from Rules. HR 9460 was then passed by voice vote in both the House and Senate on consecutive days (September 15-16), and signed by President Johnson on September 25, in a special rose garden ceremony (Binkiewicz 2004, 87-89).¹¹ Supplemental appropriations would be adopted a little more than a month later (P.L. 89-309), which provided \$2.5 million to the NEA for FY1966 along with up to any additional \$2 million in federal matching grants.

The congressional appropriation for FY1967 jumped to over \$8 million, but then stagnated – and even declined a bit in FY1968 – through FY1970. As Wyszomirski (1988, 129) notes, President Johnson's various domestic and international struggles in 1967 and 1968 hampered his ability to continue supporting the program; thus, "old congressional opponents of

¹⁰ This was accomplished through the passage of the National Arts and Cultural Development Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-579). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg905.pdf>

¹¹ P.L. 89-209. For a legislative summary, see "Foundation on the Arts and Humanities." In *CQ Almanac 1965*, 21st ed., 621-27. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1966. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal65-1259837>.

federal arts support sought to make the NEA's appropriation a test vote about fiscal responsibility." Arts supporters, however, would find a new champion in Republican Richard M. Nixon. Working with NEA chair Nancy Hanks, President Nixon made a substantial commitment to the NEA, supporting reauthorization of the agency and promising significant budget increases for several years. He went public with his support in a December 1969 special message to Congress on the arts and humanities.¹² Moreover, Hanks worked diligently to widen the scope of arts in nation, creating partnerships with a variety of nonprofit arts organizations and expanding the geographic reach of NEA-funded works. She also spent considerably time deliberating with members of Congress from both parties, and worked seamlessly with Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), Rep. John Brademas (D-IN), and Rep. Julia Butler Hansen (D-WA), who controlled the important subcommittees in each chamber (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 36; Wyszomirski 1988, 131).

Thanks to Hanks's various efforts, the NEA's appropriation over her term in office – she resigned in October 1977 – increased over 1,000 percent, as the FY1978 budget sat at \$123.85 million. Her successor at NEA chair, Nicholas Biddle, was a favorite of Senator Pell's, and he continued Hanks's positive efforts by emphasizing access and availability, through the promotion of "folk, popular, and amateur art ... [and shifting] additional support to new and minority-based art activities" (Wyszomirski 1988, 131-32). The American Arts Alliance, the first arts organization devoted exclusively to advocacy, also emerged during this time, and focused on lobbying in Washington to protect and promote art interests. As a result, the national arts community was in a strong position through the end of the Carter administration, and NEA

¹² Richard M. Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress about Funding and Authorization of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities," in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1969* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970), 1018-20.

appropriations continued to grow through FY1981, where the agency's budget stood at \$158.8 million.

Republican Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in 1980 would prove to be a new challenge for the NEA. Unlike previous presidents, Reagan – despite a long acting career – was not an enthusiastic proponent of federal funding for the arts. His general philosophy was a smaller federal government, and thus David Stockman, Director of the Office and Management and Budget in the Reagan administration, initially sought a 50 percent cut in the NEA's budget for FY1982. Arts advocates in the public cried foul and lobbied against Stockman, Rep. Fred Richardson (D-NY) started the Congressional Arts Caucus to organize opposition within the legislative branch to such deep cuts,¹³ and NEA chair Biddle strategically targeted programs that were congressionally popular, believing members would not agree to such reductions. This arts “alliance” was generally successful – while the NEA saw its budget cut 10 percent (to \$143.46 million), this was far short of Stockman's initial goal and in line with similar cuts during the early administration's first year in power (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 69-71; Wyszomirski 1988, 134). The remainder of the Reagan years would see the NEA's situation improve slightly. Congress would reauthorize the NEA in 1985 for five years, and by FY1989, the NEA's budget stood at \$169.1 million.

However, a harbinger of things to come for the NEA would appear in 1985, when Reps. Tom DeLay (R-TX) and Dick Armey (R-TX) attacked the Arts Endowment for distributing grants that they considered “pornography.” Moreover, Armey argued that the NEA was a hotbed of cronyism, that biased the agency's grant decisions toward radicalism. While the DeLay-

¹³ As Moen (1997, 191) notes, the Congressional Arts Caucus was one of 27 “personal interest” caucuses to form during these years, as a way to organize and fend off cuts in various program areas.

Armev criticism did not lead to negative actions toward the NEA – as NEA Chair Frank Hodsell made an impassioned defense for artistic freedom – other critics also emerged, to note that the NEA’s grant distribution was not geographically representative, and that grantees were concentrated among a set of small presses (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 79-82).

These concerns would resurface in similar form in 1989, when the NEA would be charged with funding projects that were considered “obscene.” Two exhibits in particular drew critical ire. The first was Andrew Serrano’s “Piss Christ,” a photograph of a crucifix submerged in a container filled with the artist’s urine. The second was Robert Mapplethorpe’s “The Perfect Moment,” a retrospective of the artist’s career that included graphic sexual images. (Moen 1997, 192; Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 89-90). In the House, attacks on the NEA were led by Charles Stenholm (D-TX), Clifford Stearns (R-FL), Armev, and Rohrabacher (D-CA), with members focusing on cuts to the agency’s budget as a penalty. In the Senate, attacks were led by Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Robert Byrd (D-WV), who sought to place “content restrictions” on projects that were eligible for NEA funding. In the end, the NEA came away relatively unscathed, as its budget was reduced by \$45,000 (the cost of the grants made to Serrano and Mapplethorpe) and was prohibited from funding any obscene projects, which were defined as lacking “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (Moen 1997, 192-94).¹⁴

In the 1990s, the NEA continued to be a flashpoint between supports of free speech and opponents of obscenity. Each year a spirited battle was waged, but the NEA’s budget crept up incrementally in FY1991 and FY1992. But after a tiny reduction in FY1993, a 2 percent cut in FY1994 was followed by a 4 percent cut in FY1995, as deficit reduction was a guiding principle

¹⁴ The Stenholm amendment called for the \$45,000 cut. The Stearns and Armev amendments sought a 5 percent and 10 percent reduction in the NEA’s budget, respectively. The Rohrabacher amendment called for the elimination of the NEA’s entire budget.

in the early years of the Clinton administration. However, as Bauerlein and Grantham (2009, 116) note: “These small cuts ... reflected only the beginning of a shift in Congressional support.” This was because the Republican had a major electoral breakthrough in the 1994 midterms, which would result in them having majority control of both chambers of Congress for the first time in more than 40 years. While Nancy Kassenbaum (R-KS) sought a mild – 5 percent – trim to the NEA’s budget, the House appropriation committee pushed a considerably more severe cut – nearly 39 percent – and thanks to active House leadership, led by Speaker New Gingrich (R-GA), the latter was implemented. The FY1996 budget would be \$99.5 million. The same would be true in FY1997, before House Republicans voted to eliminate the NEA’s budget altogether for FY 1998. NEA supporters, however, found more Republican supporters, like Slade Gorton (R-WA), in the Senate. And, with President Clinton threatening a veto if an appropriations bill with zero NEA funding made its way to his desk, Gorton and Rep. Ralph Regula (R-OH), hammered out a compromise in conference (Miller 2000, 1436-37; Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 121-23).

One requirement of the GOP’s preservation of the NEA, however, was for the agency to achieve greater geographic representation – and provide funds in states that had been (previously) underrepresented. Under new NEA chair Bill Ivey, the agency’s goal was to make the arts endowment appear less “culturally elite” – less support for the fine arts of urban areas, and instead more initiatives focused on “government facilities, obsolete suburban malls, schools, and the stewardship of rural areas, [while establishing] arts programs inside juvenile justice facilities and in ‘at-risk’ neighborhoods” (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 132).¹⁵ Ivey thus created the “Challenge America” program, which emphasized outreach and arts education for

¹⁵ In addition to “culturally elite,” the NEA was charged with over-serving the “coastal elite.” Hence, the more geographic representation was focused largely on the states in “middle America.”

previously underserved areas. Challenge America was a hit with members of Congress, and led to sizeable increases in the NEA's budget in FY2001 through FY2004 – with all additional money earmarked exclusively for Challenge America. Ivey's successor, Dana Gioia, expanded Challenge America until it awarded a direct grant to every congressional district in the nation (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 134). Bipartisan support for the NEA continued through the end of the George W. Bush administration, with Congress providing a 16 percent increase in the NEA's budget for FY2008.

The NEA's advance continued through the first two years of the Obama administration, when the Democratic Congress approved budget increases of 7 and 8 percent for FY2009 and FY2010, respectively. The return of Republicans to power in the House after the 2010 midterms, however, saw the NEA's budget decline for three straight years (by 7, 5, and 5 percent). A 5 percent increase occurred in FY2014, and the congressional appropriation has only increased – but marginally – since then. In addition, for the first time in two decades, a serious effort has been made to eliminate the NEA entirely. Led by the Trump administration, these (now-annual) efforts have been rejected by Congress, thanks (in part) to the geographic distribution of NEA awards that Challenge America provides. As a result, it is harder now than in the mid-1990s to make a compelling case to eliminate the NEA, since doing so would cost every congressional district money (Cooper and Deb 2017). Thanks to strategic NEA leadership in the late-1990s, the modern arts endowment provides an excellent example of policy feedback, or what E. E. Schattschneider (1935) first referred to as “policy making politics.”¹⁶

¹⁶ For a review of the literature on policy feedback, see Campbell (2012).

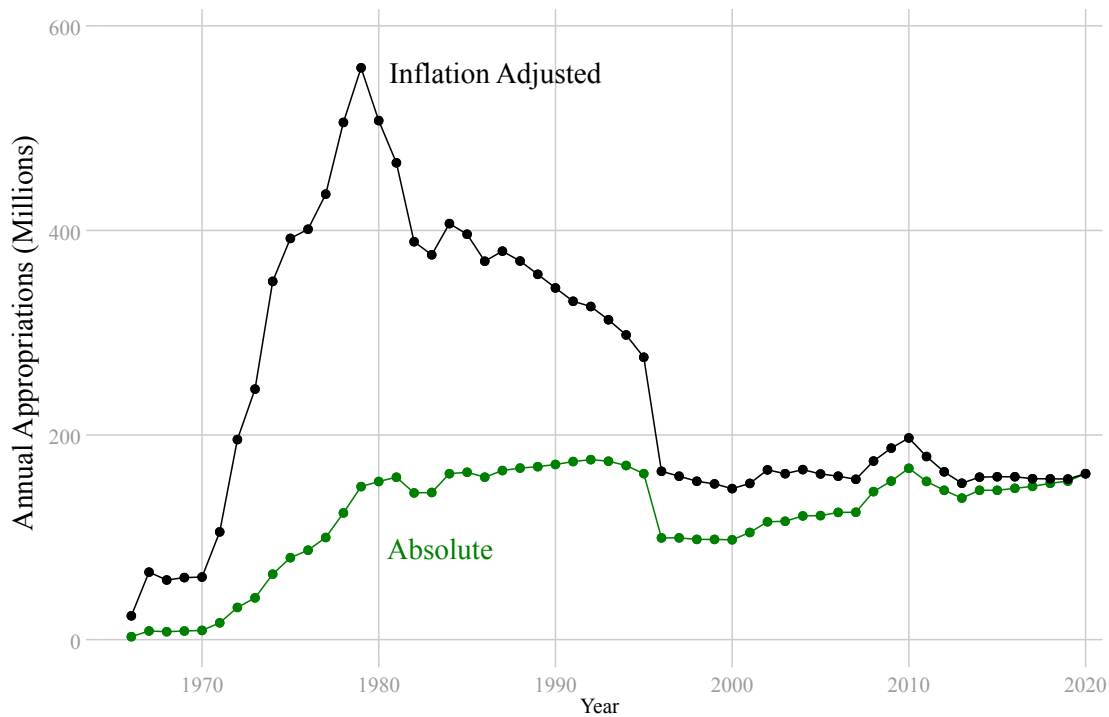
Data and Empirics

While this history is suggestive about factors that have been important in congressional decisions regarding NEA funding over time, we explore the issue more systematically in this section. We do so in two ways. First, we take a macro-level approach, by examining NEA appropriations from 1966 through 2019 in a time-series analysis. Second, we adopt a more micro-level approach, by examining individual-level voting decisions on all roll calls involving the NEA over time in a pooled cross-sectional analysis.

Time-Series Analysis

We first estimate a model on NEA appropriations across time. The data appear in Figure 1, both in absolute and inflation-adjusted values. As we noted in the prior section, NEA appropriations were relatively flat through the 1960s, but increased significantly through the 1970s. Small cuts occurred in the early-1980s, during the Reagan administration, but by the late-1980s and into the early-1990s, regular increases in the arts budget occurred. The all-time high was in FY1992, at \$175.95 million, during the George H. W. Bush administration. A significant cut occurred in FY1996, led by the new Republican majority in Congress, and funding stayed at that reduced level through the end of the century. Steady increases began again during the George W. Bush administration, as the NEA worked to make grant decisions more inclusive. Small cuts occurred again when the GOP took back the House during the Obama administration, but marginal increases have been common since then.

Figure 1. NEA Appropriations, 1966 – 2020



We look for any discernable patterns in this time series. In Model 1, we first regress NEA appropriations (in millions) on three covariates, all lagged one year: (1) first, the size of the federal outlays (in millions), (2) a unified Democratic government variable (which takes on a value of 1 if the House, Senate, and president were controlled by the the Democrats, and zero otherwise), and (3) a unified Republican government variable (which takes on a value of 1 if the House, Senate, and president were controlled by the the GOP, and zero otherwise). Including the size of the federal government in its absolute terms approximates adjustments for inflation. Alternative specifications with inflation-adjusted values and percentage-of-all-federal-expenses analyses yield similar results. We also include a lagged version of the dependent variable and a time trend. In Model 2, we add two more covariates: the budgetary situation (the budget surplus or deficit as a percentage of government outlays) lagged by one year and policy mood (the

standard measure of public support for government programs on the liberal-conservative continuum developed by James Stimson).¹⁷

Table 1: Estimating NEA Appropriations across Time

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Federal Budget (Millions \$)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Unified Dem. Government	6.81* (3.94)	8.68* (4.67)
Unified Rep. Government	2.19 (3.13)	-0.66 (3.15)
Budgetary Situation		-7.58 (18.51)
Policy Mood		0.78 (0.56)
N	54	52
R ²	0.95	0.95

Note: Numbers in cells are Ordinary Least Squares coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Models include a lagged version of the dependent variable, a time trend, and a constant, which we do not present. *= $p < 0.05$; **= $p < 0.01$; one-tailed tests where clear predictions are held.

Interestingly, we find that only the presence of unified Democratic government is correlated with any systematic change in NEA appropriations. When all of the levers of government are held by Democrats, the NEA tends to receive between six and nine million dollars more than would otherwise be expected given the larger national fiscal situation. The vast majority of the data is explained simply through the prior year's appropriation level, which implies that in most situations the existing funding level serves as a powerful anchor. In the

¹⁷ For more on the policy mood measure, see Stimson (1991). Note that the policy mood measure only goes through 2018, so recent years are not included in the analysis. Data can be acquired here: <http://stimson.web.unc.edu/data/>.

absence of any major political fight, the previous year's value can be slightly updated without much difficulty.

Vote-Choice Analysis

Next, we estimate a model of vote choices by members of Congress, analyzing each member-vote individually. We collect the entire universe of recorded roll calls in Congress that pertain specifically and only to the NEA. This means we exclude votes in which the NEA was part of broader funding and budgetary policy. Many of the votes that directly pertained to the NEA were amendments to bigger policies, but in which the amendment addressed only the NEA. We use this entire set of roll calls – 89 in total – and determine for each one which direction was supportive of the NEA. We define supportive as any proposition that would increase the funding or discretion or power of the NEA, while limiting propositions reduce those things. For each roll call, one side is expansive for the NEA and the other is not. From this, we create our dependent variable: **Pro-NEA Vote**, which is “1” when the member of Congress voted in the direction which expanded the NEA and “0” otherwise.

We include three explanatory variables. The first two are the **First** and **Second Dimension DW-NOMINATE Common Space Scores**, utilizing the Nokken-Poole versions of these scores that allow for member movement within their careers.¹⁸ The First NOMINATE Dimension is generally seen as a measure of a member's ideal preferences for the role of the state in the economy. We expect that (economic) conservatives would be more likely to oppose using tax dollars to subsidize non-profitable industries such as the arts. Given this, we expect a

¹⁸ See Nokken and Poole (2004) for a description of these scores. The Nokken-Poole scores are so highly correlated with conventional DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole and Rosenthal 2007) that switching between the measures produces identical results.

negative coefficient for this variable. The Second NOMINATE Dimension is generally associated with a type of cultural conservatism. Again, we expect that cultural conservatives may oppose subsidizing the arts, which are often seen as projecting liberal and modern, rather than traditional, values. This would also lead us to expect a negative coefficient for this variable. Both of these expectations comport with the understanding of the 20th century development of the NEA from historical studies.

Separately, we also include a simple party measure, **Republican**, which takes the value “1” for Republicans and “0” for all non-Republicans. Though we do not present them, we also include separate dummy variables for all third parties, leaving Democrats in the base category. Given that we expect conservatism to be associated with opposition to the NEA, it is not surprising that we also expect Republicans to be more opposed than Democrats. This would also result in a negative coefficient for Republican. Finally, we also include fixed effects for each individual roll call, as well as for the state the member of Congress was from. We cluster the standard errors on each individual member as we expect errors to be correlated within members’ votes. We present the results in Table 2.

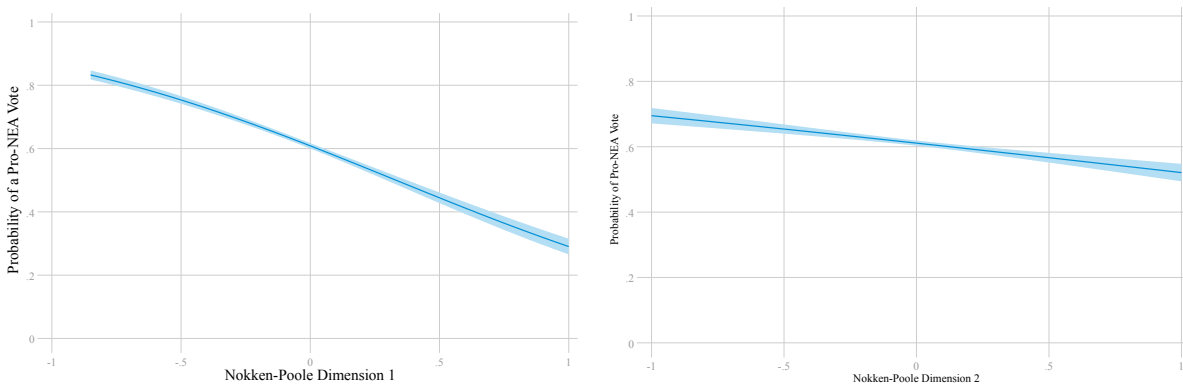
Table 2. Logistic Regression of Vote Choices by Members of Congress on NEA Votes

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
NOMINATE 1st Dimension	-1.56** (0.07)	
NOMINATE 2nd Dimension	-0.46** (0.07)	
Republican		-0.89** (0.04)
Clustering Level	Member of Congress	Member of Congress
Number of Clusters	2,374	2,377
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Roll-Call Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
N	31,122	31,140
Pseudo R ²	0.15	0.14

Note: Numbers in cells are logistic regression coefficients with cluster-adjusted robust standard errors in parentheses. *= $p < 0.05$; **= $p < 0.01$

In Model 1, we find that both DW-NOMINATE dimensions have significant explanatory power. In each case, the more conservative a member was, the less likely they were to vote for a NEA-expansive provision. Though both are significant, the First NOMINATE Dimension has a much stronger effect. The difference between the extremes of the range of the First NOMINATE Dimension score is nearly 50 percentage points in the likelihood of supporting the NEA in a vote. In comparison, the same difference on the Second NOMINATE Dimension corresponds to about a twenty percentage-point change. We present these predicted probabilities in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities of Supporting the NEA in a Roll Call as a Function of First and Second Dimension NOMINATE Scores



In Model 2, we see similar results, with Republicans much less likely to support the NEA than Democrats. Specifically, Republicans, all else equal, were about 17.6 percentage points less likely to support the NEA than Democrats. While this is a substantial effect, it is smaller than observed for the ideology variables in Model 1 and it explains less of the variation in the data – with an R^2 of 0.13 compared to 0.15 of Model 1. Party appears to be a useful heuristic for explaining support for the NEA, however it is successful largely by capturing ideological differences between typical Republicans and typical Democrats.

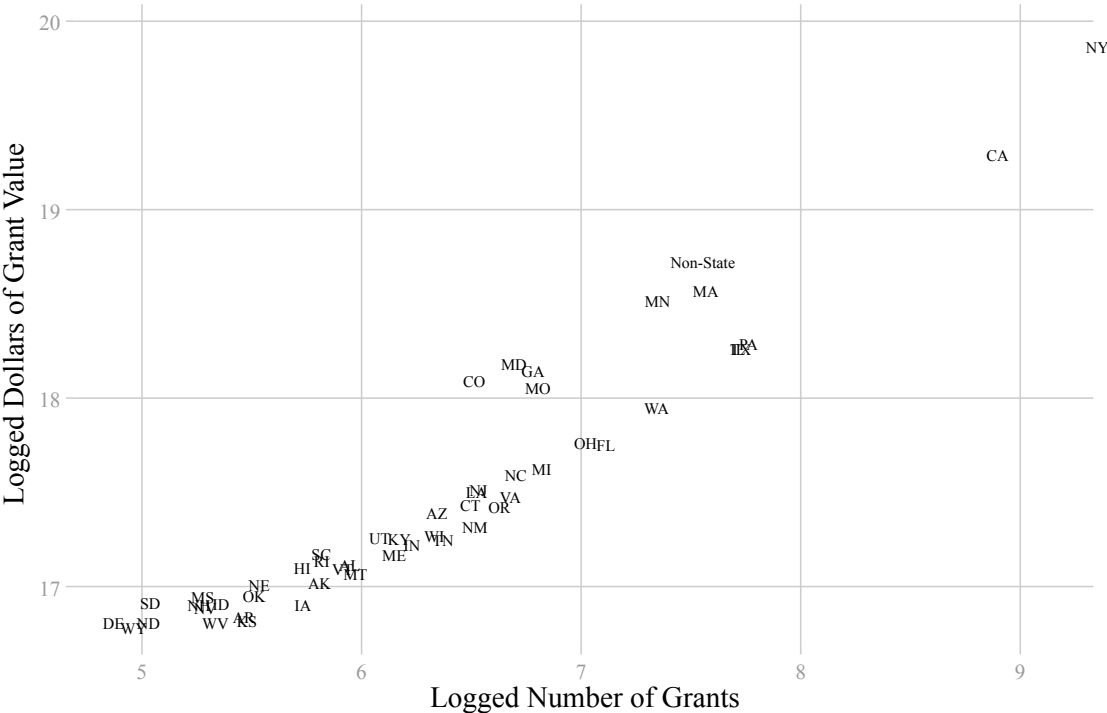
Who Receives NEA Grants?

The preceding sections dealt with aggregate appropriations to the NEA and vote choices about expanding those appropriations. Yet, the money given to the NEA is then redistributed to the states and individual organizations within them. One common argument is that these dollars are distributed inequitably and that conservatives and Republicans have a rational basis for their lower levels of support: their districts simply receive fewer grants. To assess this, we collect data on all individual grants by the NEA. Though incomplete at this point of writing, this data

collection effort allows us to place the NEA’s grant-giving behavior in context for states since 1998 and for House districts since 2013.

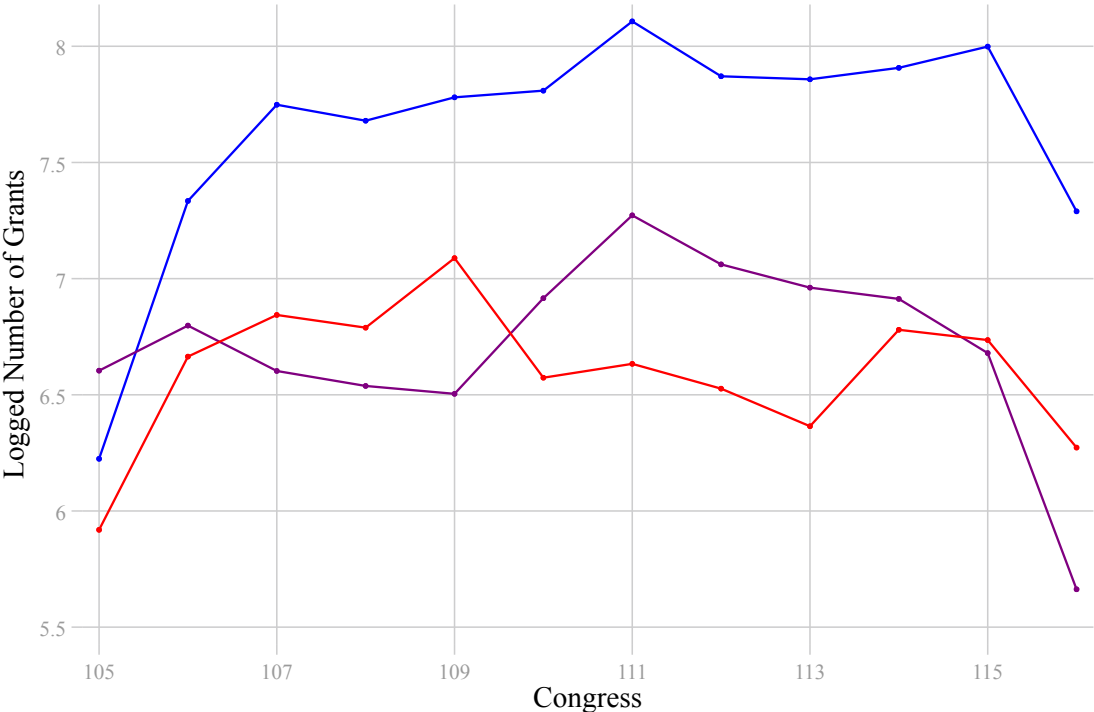
First, we analyze grants by state for the combined period of 1998 to 2019. In Figure 3, we present two pieces of data for each state: the logged number of grants received and the logged combined dollar value of those combined. These dollar values are inflation-adjusted to represent 2019-equivalent dollars. We choose to log the data because of the nature of the raw distribution, which features several significant outliers, New York and California. These two states received considerably more than any other state. Though they are large by population and economic productivity, a similar state (Texas) does not place so highly. Large “blue states” appear to be overrepresented. Given the NEA’s mandate, however, this should be unsurprising. The institutions that would advance its purposes are disproportionately found in blue states.

Figure 3. Logged NEA Grants and Grant Dollars by State, 1998-2019



We visualize the partisan differences in Figure 4, where we plot the logged number of grants in each Congress, collapsed into three categories: states represented only by Republicans in the Senate, states represented only by Democrats in the Senate, and states that had at least one of each serve during the Congress. In every Congress since the 105th, states represented solely by Democrats received more grants – and also dollars, though those data are not presented – than states represented solely by Republicans. This gap has been quite large since the 106th Congress. The evident difference is not due to Democrats greatly outnumbering Republicans in the Senate. In fact, Republicans have enjoyed Senate majorities for most of this period.

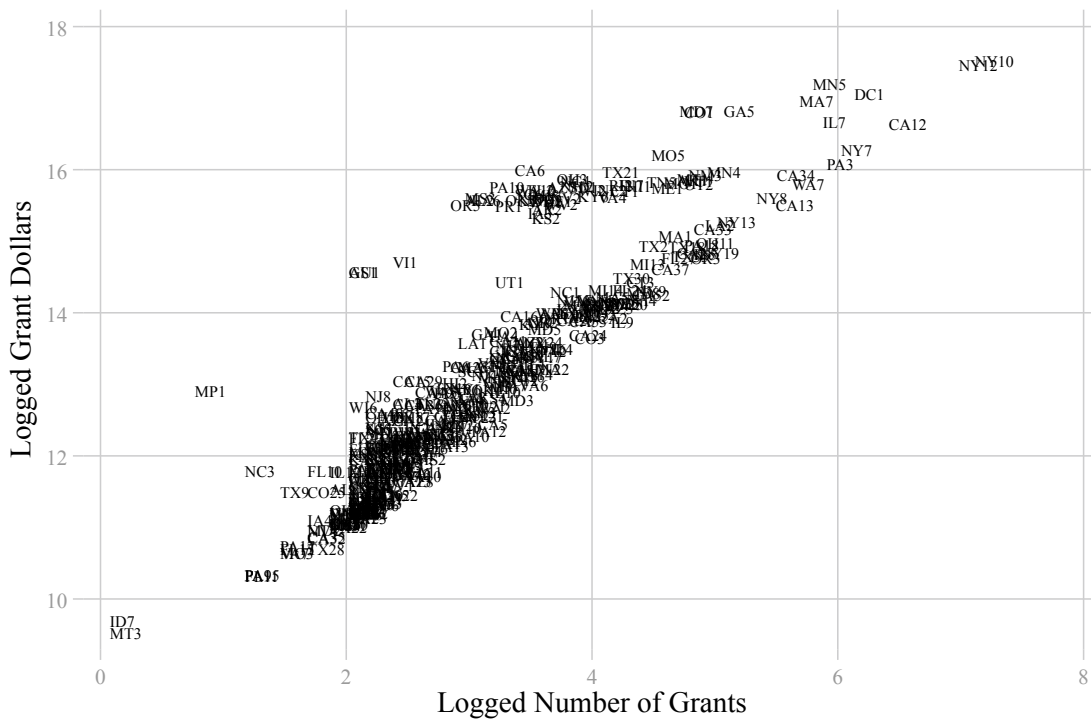
Figure 4. Partisan Differences in Grants by Congress, 105th-116th Congresses



We can extend this similar analysis to the House for recent years. Though our data are currently incomplete due to changing district lines, we are able to present grants by House

district from 2013-2019. We present these data in Figure 5. The pattern largely replicates from Figure 3: large “blue states” are overrepresented. However, by going down to the district level, we see a much larger number of low values who received very little in the time period covered. While most states receive a meaningful amount, individual districts may only receive a grant a year. More than a hundred districts receive fewer than two grants a year.

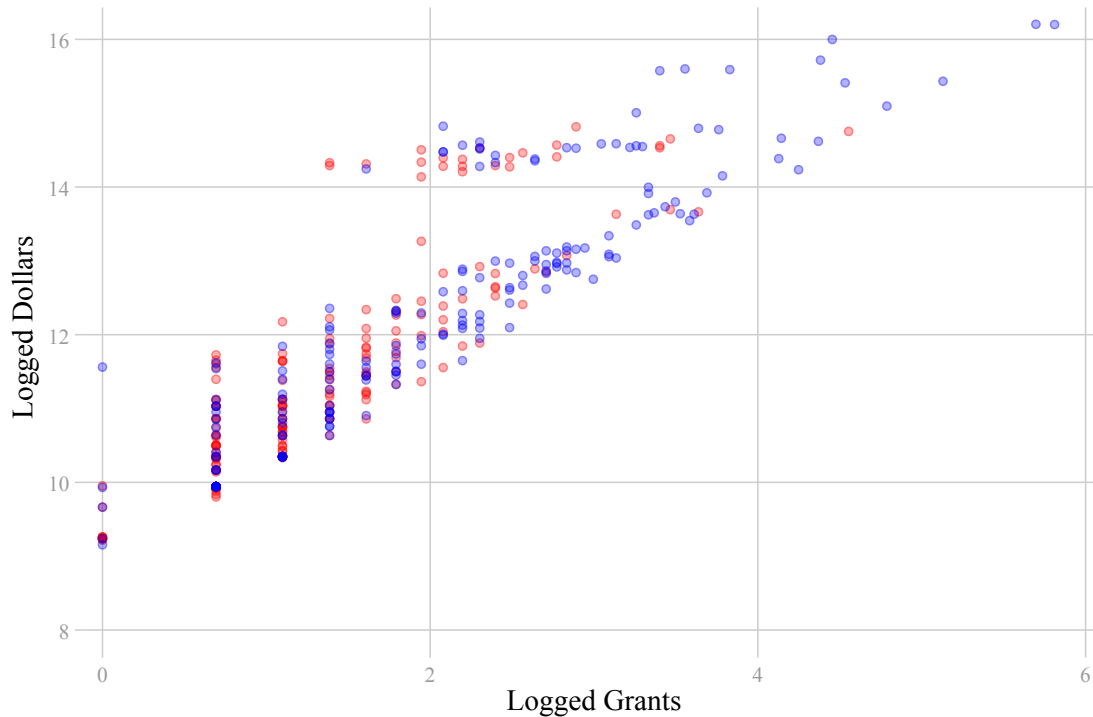
Figure 5. Logged NEA Grants and Grant Dollars by Congressional District, 2013-2019



We again re-analyze through a partisan lens by looking just at the 115th Congress (2017 and 2018). By collapsing all grants by district and matching that to the identity of a representative, we are able to plot the partisan distribution of these grants, which is presented in Figure 6. Again, the pattern is the same. The vast majority of states that received a large number

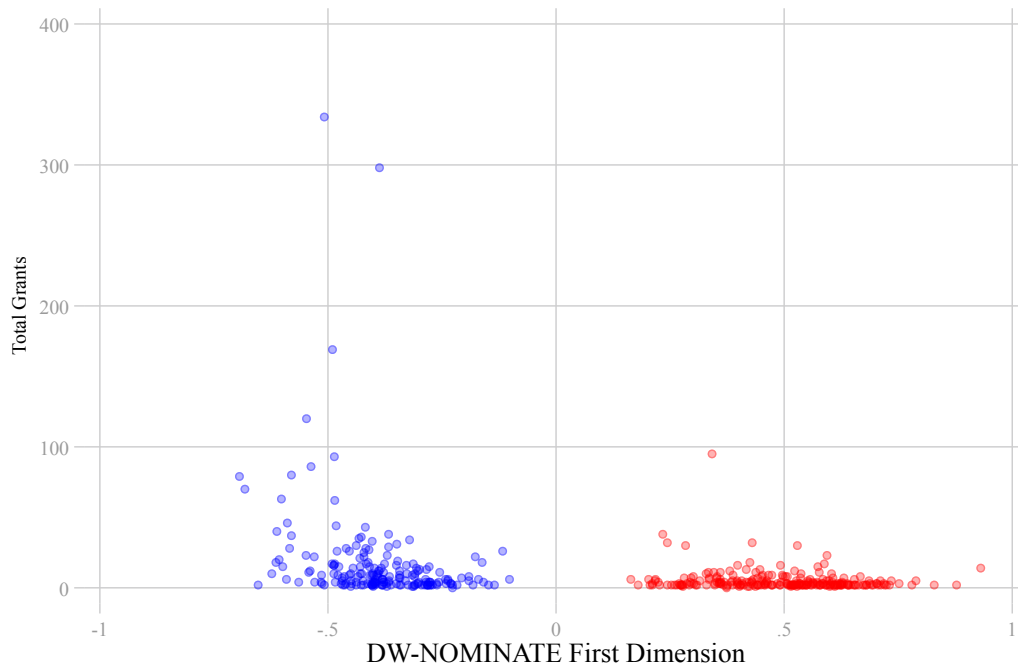
of grants (the right side of the figure) and a lot of money (the top of the figure) were represented by Democrats.

Figure 6. NEA Grants and Dollars by Partisan Representation in the House, 115th Congress



Not only do these grants show a slant towards Democrats, but also to liberals within the Democratic Party. In Figure 7, we present a plot of the number of grants, by district, in the 115th Congress matched with the DW-NOMINATE 1st Dimension score of the representative in that district. All of the outlier districts were represented by members left of the Democratic party's median, and there is a clear "hockey stick" nature to the graph, with observations jumping sharply at the furthest left region of the graph. This reinforces the fact that the NEA pours millions of dollars into hundreds of grants for districts in New York and California that elect the most liberal members of Congress.

Figure 7. Number of Grants by DW-NOMINATE Score, 115th Congress



Conclusion

The National Endowment for the Arts has seen its fortunes rise and fall over time, as congressional appropriations have fluctuated with ideological and partisan change in the House and Senate. While the NEA has enjoyed some bipartisan support throughout its tenure, by and large support for the agency has been more likely to come from more liberal members (viewed in terms of ideology) and Democrats (viewed in terms of party), respectively. We also find some evidence that particular states and districts benefit more or less from NEA grants. Specifically, constituencies represented by Democrats have done disproportionately well in terms of both grant allocation and grant dollars, while the very most liberal members of Congress tend to represent outlier districts that receive far more grants and grant dollars than hundreds of other districts.

This has been a first cut at the congressional politics surrounding the NEA. Much more can be done. One obvious avenue is to consider the geographic locations of NEA grants over time in more detail. These data are available via NEA annual reports, and once collected will provide a much better sense of the “electoral connection” behind NEA politics. That is, those states (and districts) that benefit more from NEA grants – and have developed a constituency in favor of the arts and the NEA – will make it more likely that a member of Congress from that geographic unit will support the NEA, all else equal. In addition, much more can be done on the demand-side, by examining how the NEA itself has changed its behavior (i.e., grant making) over time in response to the changing political conditions in Washington.

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