


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

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Objective. 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. *Methods.* We use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and logistic regression models to examine the politics of the NEA systematically. *Results.* We find that 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 and Democrats, respectively. We also uncover some evidence that particular states and districts benefit more of less from NEA grants. *Conclusion.* 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 are doing especially well.

On February 10, 2020, President Donald Trump unveiled his budget for Fiscal Year 2021.¹ Despite a total proposal of \$4.8 trillion, the Trump administration proposed deep cuts to 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. The NEA provides funding and support for Americans to 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.”² The Trump administration's FY2021 budget proposal allocated \$30 million to the NEA—an 82 percent cut—which provided “sufficient funding for orderly termination of all operations in 2021.”³ Stated differently, the Trump administration put the NEA—whose activities it did not consider “to be core Federal responsibilities”—on the chopping block (Kinsella, 2020).

President Trump's desire to terminate the NEA was not new. In each year of his presidency, the Trump administration had released budgets that would have eliminated the NEA, as well as the National Endowment for the Humanities (Kinsella, 2017; Boucher, 2018; Cascone, 2019). Each time, in budget negotiations with the Congress, the NEA survived and even saw its budget increase marginally. This may be surprising, as the Republicans enjoyed unified government in the 115th Congress (2017–2018), and federal arts programs are usually considered the domain of the Democratic Party. But a number

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¹See “A Budget for America's Future,” at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/budget_fy21.pdf.

²See <https://www.arts.gov/about-nea>.

³“A Budget for America's Future: Major Savings and Reforms,” at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/msar_fy21.pdf, 106.

of Republicans in Congress 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). In total, the NEA has distributed about \$13.1 billion 2020-adjusted dollars to states and arts institutions across the country since its inception. 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 they did.

Social scientists have rarely examined the politics of the NEA systematically.⁴ We fill that gap by examining Congress's role in the political economy of the NEA since its inception in 1965. In doing so, we 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 also look at the distribution of NEA grants and grant dollars by party and ideology within party. We find that 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 and Democrats. We also find that states and districts represented by Democrats more grants and grant dollars from the NEA than states and districts represented by Republicans, with the most liberal Democratic House members—who generally come from America's large coastal cities with numerous arts institutions—doing especially well.

The NEA and Congress: A Brief History

The historical roots of what would become the National Endowment of the Arts trace back to the New Deal Era, with the Section on Fine Arts and the Art Relief Project of the Works Project Administration (WPA). While the primary goal of these programs was to relieve unemployment, advancing the arts was a positive by-product. By the end of the 1930s, however, Congress cut WPA art programs, which many members came to view as subversive. In the 1940s, Congress eliminated the remaining federal arts funding (Larson, 1983:13–9).

While the Eisenhower administration attempted to revive federal arts funding in the mid-1950s, real strides would only be made when John F. Kennedy entered the White House. Once elected, Kennedy sought to establish a "federal advisory agency concerned with the cultural resources of the nation" (Wyszomirski, 1988:126).⁵ Various proposals to create a cultural equivalent to the National Science Foundation were considered in Congress, but each faced roadblocks in the House (Larson, 1983:169–75). Lyndon B. Johnson secured congressional approval for a National Council on the Arts in 1964 (Larson, 1983:192–94).⁶

Securing Congressional funding for the arts was made easier by Johnson's landslide victory in 1964. He had made federal support for the arts a component of his Great Society agenda, and in early 1965 the Johnson administration sought legislation for a National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities with separate endowments for each. By the summer, a bill had made its way through committee in the House, but was stymied in the Rules Committee. Eventually, with Johnson applying pressure, the bill was discharged

⁴Some exceptions include Wyszomirski (1988), Moen (1997), and DiMaggio and Pettit (1999).

⁵On the Kennedy administration's role in arts policy more generally, see Cummings (1982).

⁶See the National Arts and Cultural Development Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-579).

from Rules. It was then passed by voice vote in each chamber and Johnson signed it into law in a special Rose Garden ceremony (Binkiewicz, 2004:87–9).⁷ Subsequently, Congress appropriated \$2.5 million for FY1966 along with up to \$2 million more in matching grants (P.L. 89–309).

The congressional appropriation for FY1967 jumped to over \$8 million, but then stagnated. As Wyszomirski (1988:129) notes, President Johnson's struggles in 1967 and 1968 hampered his ability to support the program; thus, "old congressional opponents of federal arts support sought to make the NEA's appropriation a test vote about fiscal responsibility." Arts supporters found a new champion in President Richard M. Nixon. Working with NEA chair Nancy Hanks, Nixon supported reauthorization of the agency and promised significant budget increases. He went public with his support in a 1969 special message to Congress.⁸ Meanwhile, Hanks expanded the geographic reach of NEA-funded works and created new partnerships with arts organizations. She also spent considerable time working with the important subcommittee chairs 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 1977—increased over 1,000 percent. Her successor as NEA chair, Nicholas Biddle 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 to promote art interests. As a result, NEA appropriations grew through FY1981.

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,⁹ 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, this was far short of Stockman's initial goal (Bauerlein and Grantham, 2009:69–71; Wyszomirski, 1988:134). The NEA's situation improved over the remainder of the Reagan years. Congress reauthorized the NEA in 1985 for five years and its budget grew to \$169.1 million by the end of the decade.

A harbinger of things to come for the NEA appeared 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, which biased the agency's grant decisions toward radicalism. While the DeLay-Arme criticism did not lead to negative actions toward the NEA—as NEA Chair Frank

⁷PL 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>.

⁸Richard 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.

⁹As Moen (1997:191) notes, the Congressional Arts Caucus was one of 27 "personal interest" caucuses to form during this period, as a way to fend off cuts in various program areas.

Hodsell made an impassioned defense for artistic freedom—other critics also emerged, to note that the NEA’s grant distribution was not geographically representative (Bauerlein and Grantham, 2009:79–82).

These concerns resurfaced in 1989, when the NEA was charged with funding projects that were considered “obscene.” Two particular exhibits drew criticism. The first was Andrew Serrano’s “Piss Christ,” a photograph of a crucifix submerged in a container of 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 Armeijah Faria (R-CA), Charles Stenholm (D-TX), and Clifford Stearns (R-FL), with members seeking to penalize the agency via budget cuts. 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. To avoid First Amendment difficulties, Congress relied on the United States Supreme Court’s definition of obscenity in *Miller v. California* (1973): offensive sexual material lacking “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (Moen, 1997:192–94).¹⁰

In the 1990s, the NEA continued to be a flashpoint between supporters of free speech and opponents of obscenity. Each year a spirited battle was waged, but the NEA’s budget increased incrementally in FY1991 and FY1992. But after a tiny reduction in FY1993, a two percent cut in FY1994 was followed by a four percent cut in FY1995, as deficit reduction was a guiding principle 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 Republicans had a major electoral breakthrough in the 1994 midterms, which gave them majority control of both chambers of Congress for the first time in more than 40 years. While Nancy Kassenbaum (R-KS) sought a mild—five 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 Newt 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 FY1998. 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).

The GOP required the agency to achieve greater geographic representation and to 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” by increased focus 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).¹¹ Ivey thus created the “Challenge America” program, which emphasized arts education for previously

¹⁰The Stenholm amendment called for the \$45,000 cut. The Stearns and Armeijah Faria 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.

¹¹In addition to “culturally elite,” the NEA was criticized for over-serving the “coastal elite.” Thus, the increased geographic representation largely targeted states in “middle America.”

underserved areas. Challenge America was a hit in Congress, and led to sizeable increases in the NEA's budget through FY2004—with all additional money earmarked exclusively for Challenge America. Ivey's successor, Dana Gioia, expanded the program so that it awarded a direct grant to every congressional district (Bauerlein and Grantham, 2009:134). Bipartisan support for the NEA continued through the end of the George W. Bush administration.

The NEA's advance continued through the first two years of the Obama administration, when the Democratic Congress approved budget increases of seven and eight percent for FY2009 and FY2010, respectively. The Republican return to power in the House after the 2010 midterms, however, saw the NEA's budget decline for three straight years. A five percent increase occurred in FY2014, and the congressional appropriation has only increased—if 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.”

Data and Empirics

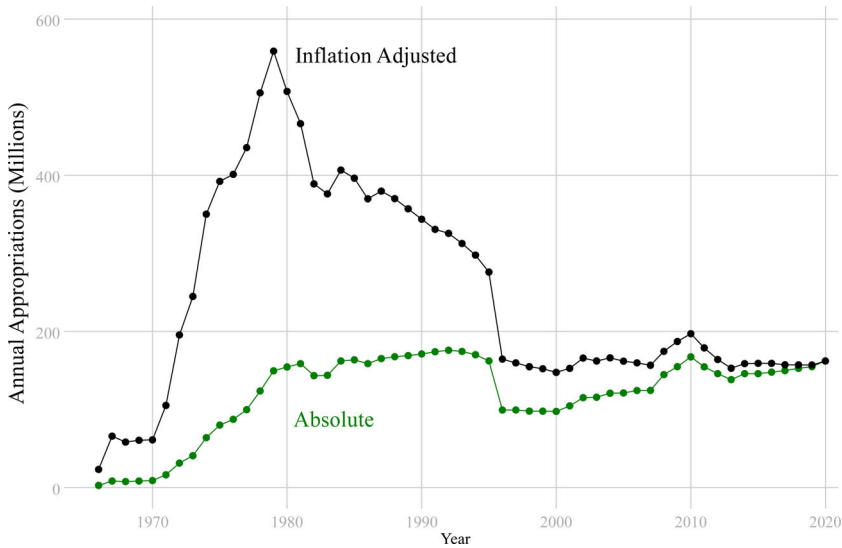
While this history is suggestive about factors that have been important in congressional decisions regarding NEA funding over time, we explore the issue more systematically in this section. We do so in two ways. First, we take a macro-level approach by examining NEA appropriations from 1966 through 2020 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. Finally, we examine the distribution of NEA grants and grant dollars by party and ideology—both at the state and district levels.

Time Series Analysis

Data on NEA appropriations across time appear in Figure 1, both in absolute and inflation-adjusted values.¹² As we noted in the previous section, NEA appropriations were relatively flat in the late 1960s, but increased significantly through the 1970s. Small cuts occurred during the Reagan administration, but by the late-1980s and into the early-1990s, regular increases occurred. The all-time high (adjusted for inflation) was in FY1992, at \$175.95 million, during the George H. W. Bush administration. A major cut occurred in FY1996, led by the new Republican majority in Congress, and funding stayed at that 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.

¹²Absolute values taken from <https://www.arts.gov/open-government/national-endowment-arts-appropriations-history>. The deflator used was the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

FIGURE 1
NEA Appropriations, 1966–2020



In Table 1, we look for any discernable patterns in these data via time-series estimation. In Model 1, we regress NEA appropriations (in millions) on three covariates, all lagged one year: (1) 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 Democrats, and “0” otherwise), and (3) a Republican unified government variable (which takes on a value of “1” if Congress and the White House were controlled by the GOP, and “0” otherwise). 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 more government programs developed by James Stimson).¹³

We find that only the presence of unified Democratic government is associated with any systematic change in NEA appropriations. When all 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. Most of the data are 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 absence of any major political fight, the previous year’s value can be slightly updated without much difficulty.

¹³For more on the policy mood measure, see Stimson (1991). Data can be acquired at <http://stimson.web.unc.edu/data/>.

TABLE 1
Estimating NEA Appropriations, 1966–2020

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.

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. We thus 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. For each of the 89 roll calls we use, we determine which direction was supportive of the NEA. We define supportive as any proposition that would increase the funding, discretion, or power of the NEA. For each roll call, one side is more expansive for the NEA than other. 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 Scores*, utilizing the Nokken–Poole versions of these scores that allow for member movement in either direction (left or right) within their careers.¹⁴ 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 negative coefficient for this variable. The Second NOMINATE Dimension is generally associated with cultural preferences. Again, we expect that cultural conservatives may oppose subsidizing the arts, which are often seen as projecting liberal 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.

¹⁴See 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.

TABLE 2

Logistic Regression of Vote Choices by Members of Congress on NEA Votes, 91st–115th Congresses

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
NOMINATE First Dimension	−1.12** (0.06)	
NOMINATE Second Dimension	−0.26** (0.06)	
Republican		−0.68** (0.04)
State Arts Appropriations Per Capita (1K 2020 \$s)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)
Clustering Level	Member of Congress	Member of Congress
Number of Clusters	2,036	2,036
State Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Roll-Call Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
N	27,003	27,003
Pseudo R ²	0.13	0.13

NOTE: Numbers in cells are logistic regression coefficients with cluster-adjusted robust standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$;

** $p < 0.01$.

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, we also expect Republicans to be more opposed to the NEA than Democrats. This would result in a negative coefficient for Republican.

We also consider the possibility that there is variation in belief at the state level, even within the parties, or within ideological groupings, over the value or legitimacy of public spending on the arts. To measure this possible variation, we utilize data maintained by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) on each state’s annual appropriations to arts in their state.¹⁵ (These data begin in 1970.) We adjust each annual amount to be equivalent to 2020 dollars based on the U.S. Federal Reserve’s CPI updating values. We then combine each two-year value corresponding to each Congress. For example, 2017 and 2018 are each individually adjusted to reflect 2020 dollar values, and then combined to produce a number for each state in the 115th Congress. We then divide by the state’s population at the start of the Congress, as given by the Correlates of State Policy Dataset, as well as the U.S. Census Bureau. This produces *State Art Appropriations Per Capita* as our measure.

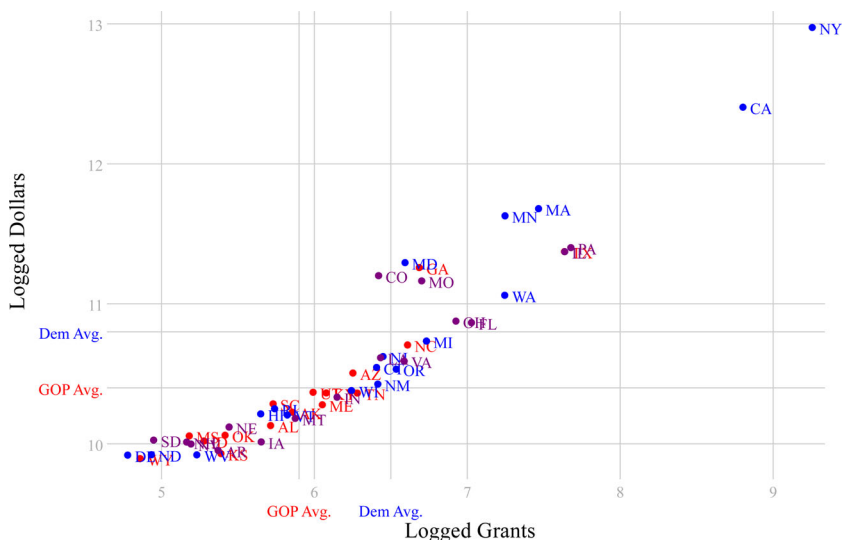
Results appear in Table 2. Model 1 contains both ideology measures as well as Logged State Art Appropriations, while Model 2 contains party indicators and Logged State Art Appropriations. We also include fixed effects for each individual roll call, as well as for the state the member of Congress was from. We cluster the standard errors on each individual member as we expect errors to be correlated within members’ votes.

In Model 1, we find that both NOMINATE dimensions have significant explanatory power. In each case, the more conservative a member was, the less likely they were to

¹⁵For more information on NASAA, see <https://nasaa-arts.org/>.

FIGURE 2

Logged NEA Grants and Logged Grant Dollars by State, 1998–2019



vote for a NEA-expansive provision. Though both are significant, the First NOMINATE Dimension has a much stronger association. The difference between the extremes of the range of the First NOMINATE Dimension score is nearly 51 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 10 percentage point change.

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 14 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. Party appears to be a useful heuristic for explaining support for the NEA; however, it is successful largely by capturing ideological differences between the parties.

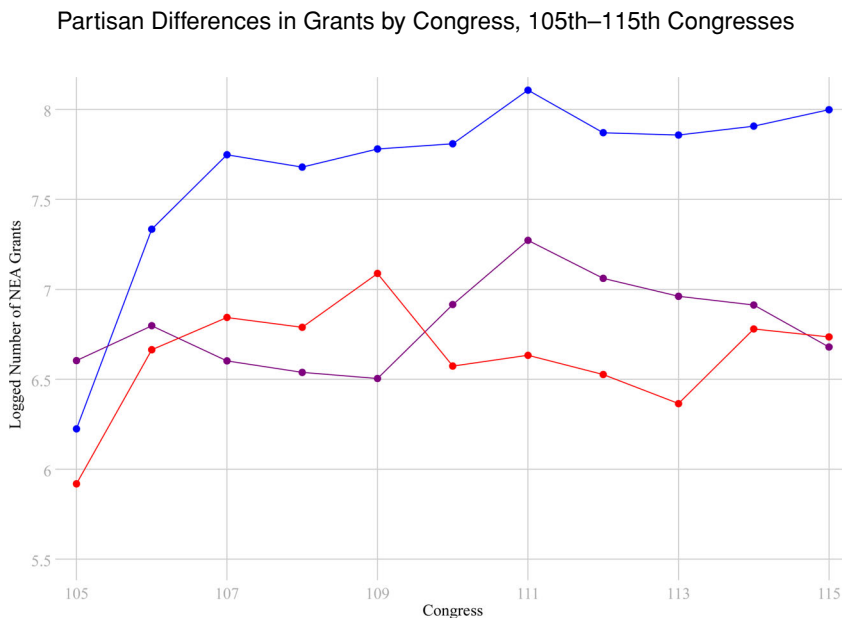
Who Receives NEA Grants?

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 distributed 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 receive fewer grants. To assess this, we collect data on all individual grants by the NEA since 1998.¹⁶

First, we analyze grants by state for the 1998–2019 period. In Figure 2, 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 2020-equivalent dollars. We choose to log the data because of the nature of the raw

¹⁶Data are provided electronically by the NEA beginning in 1998. See <https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/>.

FIGURE 3



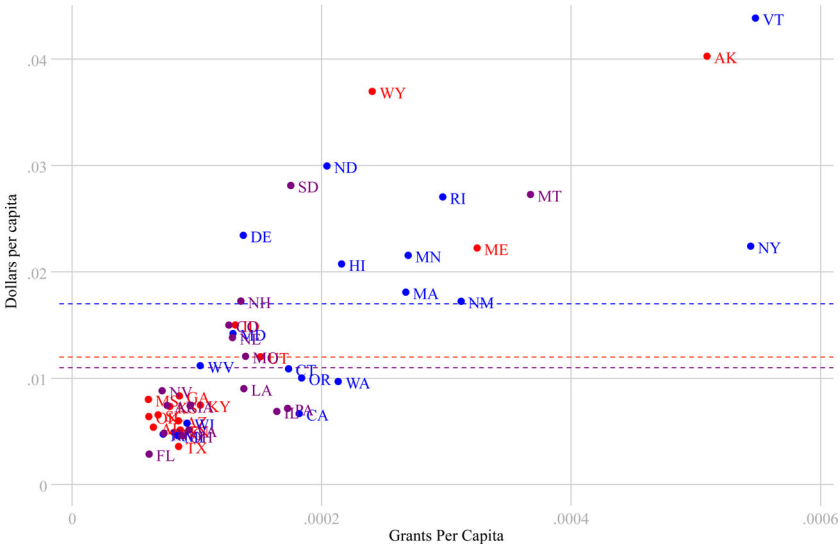
distribution, which features several significant outliers, such as New York and California. Given the NEA's mandate, however, this should not be surprising. The institutions that would advance its purposes are disproportionately found in these states. States are color coded by whether they were primarily Republican (≥ 75 percent of those senators who represented the state in the period) or Democrat (the same definition, but for Democrats), and a purple group for those who fail to meet either criteria. We find clear differences between Democrats and Republicans in both number and cumulative amounts of NEA grant dollars, with Democrats receiving the higher amounts.

In Figure 3, we visualize the partisan differences over time, where we plot the logged number of grants in each Congress, collapsed into three categories: states represented only by Republicans in the Senate within a given Congress, states represented only by Democrats in the Senate in a given Congress, 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. This gap may indicate potential coalitional problems as the NEA grant allocation system, even if unintentionally, has largely created interests in blue states.

Next, we consider the per capita values. These take into account substantial differences in sizes of states. It is likely that the largest states, such as California, submit more grant applications—data not available to us—than a small state, like Wyoming, does. In Figure 4, we plot the data, analogous to Figure 2, now with per capita values of each. As we see, these values do turn the data a bit. Now, we see many of the states with the best per capita NEA results are small states. This is unsurprising, as it would take only a few grants for a state as small as Alaska or Wyoming to receive even more per-person than NY or CA do, with their massive populations. Despite the decreased importance of the massive blue

FIGURE 4

NEA Grants Per Capita and Grant Dollars Per Capita by State, 1998–2019



states, we see that the averages—indicated by colored dotted lines—still show benefits to states that featured Democratic representation.

In Table 3, we analyze these data in regression models to assess whether the apparent visual pattern is robust to controlling for fixed effects and a time trend, as well as State Arts Appropriations as a proxy for state-level variation in preferences about funding the arts. We find that it is, generally. We consider four different constructions of the dependent variable: NEA funding, with the unit being the state-congress. In Model 1, we look at raw total dollars given to entities within a given state within a two-year Congress, in units of 1,000s. In Model 2, we log the values used in Model 1. In Model 3, we divide the values in Model 1 by the state population in the given year, as given by the Correlates of State Policy Database maintained by the IPPSR at Michigan State University.¹⁷ Finally, in Model 4, we log the values of Model 3. In each model, the measurement of State Arts Appropriations matches the measurement of the dependent variable. Thus, in Model 3, when we analyze the relationship with NEA grant dollars per capita, State Arts Appropriations is also measured per capita.

We include a partisan indicator for whether there was a unified Republican Senate delegation or a split-party delegation. Each of these is compared to a unified Democratic Senate delegation base category. Note that this is defined based on any Senator who served any amount of time in a given Congress, not simply the two who began the Congress or the two who served the longest. We expect, based on the visualizations of the data, that states with Republican senators do worse than states with Democratic senators in terms of obtaining money from the NEA. Finally, we include state fixed effects and a congressional time trend to account for changes over time as well as unobserved factors specific to states (such as their size and number of prominent museums). Because we include these

¹⁷For more information on the Correlates of State Policy Database, see <http://ippsr.msu.edu/public-policy/correlates-state-policy>.

fixed effects, it is best to interpret the variable coefficients as describing the relationship as variables change within a state.

TABLE 3
Regression of NEA Appropriations, 105th – 115th Congresses

Variables	Total Dollars, 1000s	Logged Dollars	Dollars Per Capita	Logged Dollars Per Capita
State Arts Appropriations (in same form as DV)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.08** (0.03)	0.03* (0.01)	0.07* (0.03)
Republican Delegation	−634.04* (303.62)	−0.08 (0.05)	−0.12* (0.06)	−0.10* (0.05)
Split Delegation	−525.75 (317.24)	−0.06* (0.04)	−0.11* (0.06)	−0.07 (0.04)
N	550	549	550	549
Fixed Effects	50 States	50 States	50 States	50 States
R ²	0.94	0.90	0.89	0.91

NOTE: Numbers in cells are ordinary least squares coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. A congress trend line (increasing by one every two years) is also included but not shown.

$p < 0.10$;

* $p < 0.05$;

** $p < 0.01$.

Across all four models, there is a generally consistent finding that states receive less money when they have Republican senators than when they have Democratic senators. In raw numbers, this amounts to about \$634,000 (2020-adjusted) per Congress, per state, based on Model 1; or about 12 (2020-adjusted) cents per person in a state, based on Model 3. Models 2 and 4 yield similar directional results, but are less interpretable due to the log scale. The coefficients reach conventional levels of statistical significance in Models 1, 3, and 4, and reach the $p < 0.10$ level in Model 2. We note that these effects are modest, and most of the high R^2 value is reached through state fixed effects. But as states have moved from Democratic to Republican representation in the Senate, their success with the NEA has declined.

A Recent Look at the U.S. House

We can extend this analysis to the House for recent years. We present these data (2013–2019) in Figure 5. The pattern largely replicates from Figure 2: large “blue states” are overrepresented. However, by going down to the district level, we see a much larger number of districts that received very little in the time period covered. While most states receive a meaningful amount, individual districts may only receive a single grant each year. More than 100 districts received fewer than two grants a year from 2013 to 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. These data are 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 5

Logged NEA Grants and Grant Dollars by Congressional District, 2013–2019

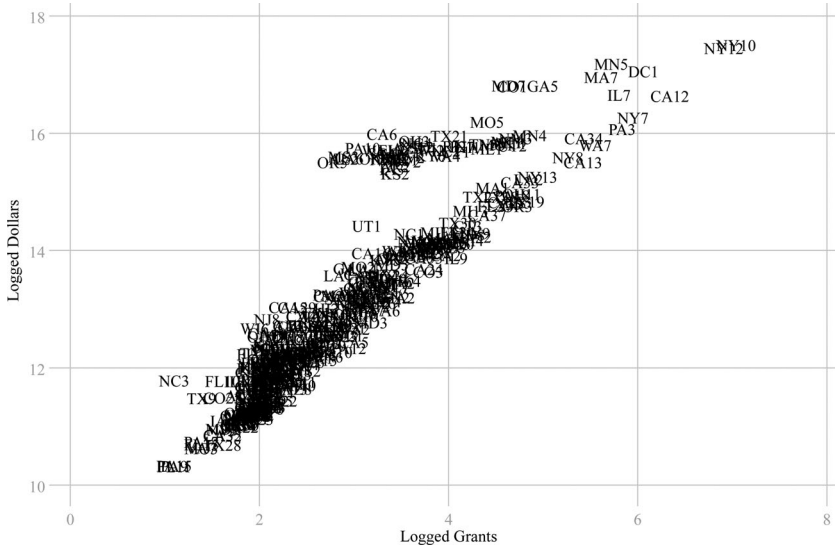
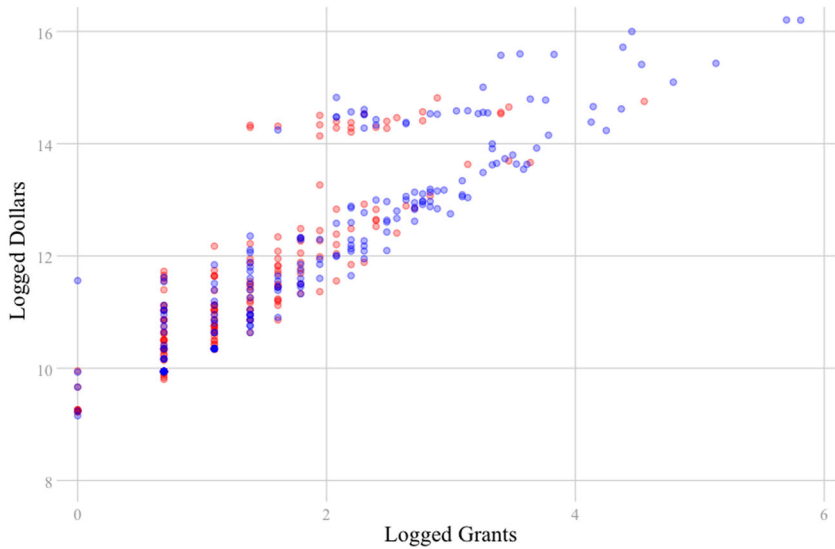


FIGURE 6

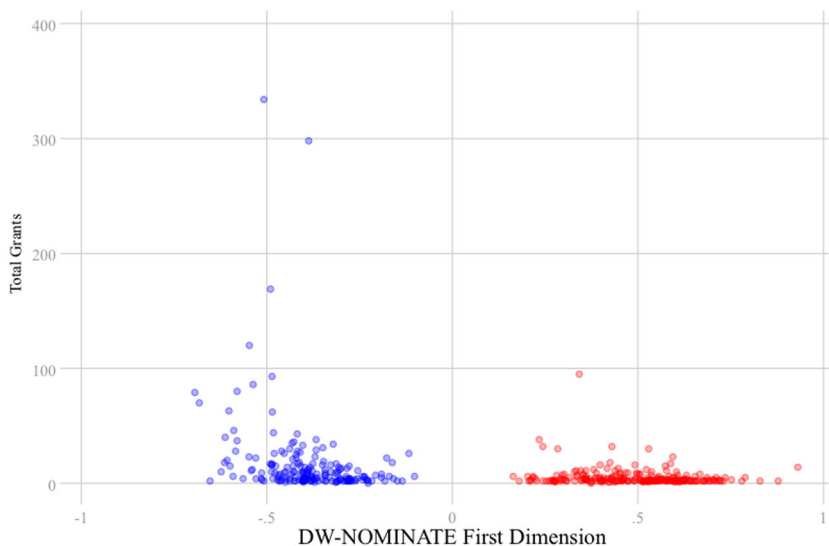
NEA Grants and Dollars by House Partisanship, 115th Congress



Finally, in Figure 7, we present a plot of the number of grants, by district, in the 115th Congress matched with the First NOMINATE Dimension score of the representative in that district. Not only do these grants show that districts that elected Democrats received more, but also that the most liberal representatives within the Democratic Party received the most. All of the outlier districts were represented by members left of the Democratic

FIGURE 7

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



party's median, and there is a “hockey stick” nature to the graph, with observations jumping sharply at the furthest left region of the graph. This reinforces 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.

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 of 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 most other districts.

The relationship between members of Congress and the NEA is not surprising, given the distribution of awards. Even if NEA officials are not exhibiting ideological or partisan bias when reviewing proposals and granting awards, the ultimate distribution—thanks to the nature of representation and political geography—favors recipients living in Democratic districts and states. As a result, Republican (and conservative) members of Congress are less supportive of the NEA than are Democratic (and liberal) members of Congress. Bianco (2019) finds the same relationship between grants and partisan voting for the National Science Foundation over a similar period.

Despite the partisan inequities in awards over time, the NEA has managed to survive attempts to defund it. This is also true of its sister organizations: the National Endowment of the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This same pattern may also be found in other policy areas as well. In the NEA's case, strategic leadership decisions in the George W. Bush years to ensure that all states and all congressional districts received awards has built enough bipartisan support in Congress to keep the agency off the chopping block. And this has continued to be the case in the years since.

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