

LEGISLATORS, BUREAUCRATS, AND LOCATIONAL DECISIONS

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I. Introduction

Geography and Governmental Spending

Our government allocates an ever increasing proportion of the national output. National, state, and local government appropriate directly over one third of the Gross National Product. Indirectly, they affect how a considerable proportion of the rest is allocated, by means of extensive regulations and prohibitions and through positive inducements offered in the tax code. The expanding size and scope of governmental activities impel social scientists to develop better explanatory models of government behavior. Understanding how and why governments make the choices they do is increasingly important for understanding everything from the performance of the national economy to the changing fortunes of businesses, cities, and regions.

This paper investigates the world of government spending. Specifically, it explores how the federal government makes decisions about the geographic allocation of expenditures. The central questions are: Does it make any difference *how* such decisions are made? Do legislators make significantly different decisions from bureaucrats? Does it matter whether one employs allocational formulas rather than making individual case-by-case decisions?

Decisions about geographic allocation may appear peripheral and insignificant compared to obviously central decisions, such as the proper ends of government, appropriate means to those ends, priorities among competing programs, and the relative sizes of the public and private sectors. This view is mistaken. First, geographic decisions are important in their own right. Federal expenditures have an enormous impact on the fortunes of localities and regions, on the health of their economies, and on the quality of life for their inhabitants. Since the federal government spends nearly a quarter of national output, the differential geographic effects of that spending cannot be ignored any more than one could ignore its differential effects by income or race. Second, decisions about ends, means, priorities, and governmental size are not made independently from decisions about geographic allocation. In fact, choices about the former are often impossible without simultaneously resolving issues about the geographic allocation of benefits. Some have argued

that difficulties in resolving these allocational issues contribute to the adoption of inefficient or inappropriate means, distort priorities among programs, or foster governmental growth.

Thus, geographic allocation is important both because it is a significant policy issue itself and because it affects how other policy conflicts are resolved. Unfortunately, there is rather meager literature on the subject. Part of the literature explores how a legislature with geographic representation would handle the problem of allocation.¹ These works reach for broad generalizations, but ignore all the complexities of the real world where the differences between programs frequently outweigh their similarities. The others are case study literature that investigate the politics of geographic allocation for individual programs.² They demonstrate the importance that differences in process and policy can make, though not in any systematic fashion.

This essay is the fourth in a series on the politics of geographic allocation. My previous works developed a comparative framework for understanding allocational politics for various policy types, investigated the extent of congressional influence over bureaucrats' allocational decisions, explored how Congress shapes various programs of formula and project grants, and examined the logic of explanations for governmental growth that are based on models of legislative competition for local benefits.³ This paper builds on this empirical base and on the works of others, in an attempt to evaluate what difference it makes *how* allocational decisions are made.

Allocational Processes

Four alternative methods are available for making decisions about the geographic allocation of expenditures. Decisions can be made either by legislators or by bureaucrats, in the form of individual case-by-case decisions or by writing a general allocational formula. Currently, all four methods are being used for various federal expenditures. For some programs, Congress allocates funds geographically with either formulas or individual project

¹See, for example, James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 135-145; Brian Barry, *Political Argument* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 250-256; and Theodore J. Lowi, "American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political Theory," *World Politics* 16 (1964), pp. 677-715.

²Carol F. Goss, "Military Committee Membership and Defense-Related Benefits in the House of Representatives," in *Western Political Quarterly* 25 (1972), pp. 215-233; Charles R. Plott, "Some Organizational Influences on Urban Renewal Decisions," *American Economic Review* 58 (May 1968), pp. 306-321; Barry S. Rundquist, "Congressional Influences on the Distribution of Prime Military Contracts" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University 1973); Rundquist, "On Testing a Military Industrial Complex Theory," *American Politics Quarterly* 6 (1978), pp. 29-53; J. Theodore Anagnoson, "Politics in the Distribution of Federal Grants: The Case of the Economic Development Administration" (unpublished paper, University of California, Santa Barbara, October 1978); John A. Ferejohn, *Pork Barrel Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973).

³R. Douglas Arnold, *Congress and the Bureaucracy: A Theory of Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); "The Local Roots of Domestic Policy," in Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein (eds.), *The New Congress* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1981); and "Legislatures, Overspending, and Government Growth," Conference on the Causes and Consequences of Public Sector Growth (Dorado Beach, Puerto Rico, November, 1978).

decisions. For others, Congress delegates allocational authority to bureaucrats, who then either make individual decisions or write general formulas. Hybrid programs that combine elements from two or more methods exist, but they are not very common.

Most forms of federal spending could be allocated by any of the four methods. The question then arises: How ought one choose a method for allocating benefits in a specific program? Two approaches seem evident. The first consists of a detached analysis of process itself, in which one evaluates the internal logic and rationale of each method in an attempt to match one's principal policy aims with a compatible allocational method. The second deals less with process and more with outputs. Here, one estimates how benefits will actually be allocated under the various methods, taking into account the inevitable political pressures associated with geographic allocation. One then compares the estimated patterns of allocation with how one believes benefits should be allocated. This essay, after a brief discussion of the rationale of each method, concentrates on an analysis of outputs, particularly on how political pressures distort actual allocations from that which advocates first envisioned when designing programs and choosing allocational methods.

Allocation by formula rests on several assumptions: that differences between the needs and capabilities of rival claimants for benefits can be anticipated; that these differences are relatively simple and few in number; that they can be reliably measured; and that there are sensible ways to aggregate claimants' scores along various evaluative dimensions. Clearly, these criteria cannot be met for such complex decisions as the award of defense contracts, though they are met easily for the procurement of standardized commodities such as fuel. Formulas are used most commonly to allocate intergovernmental grants such as highway assistance, educational aid for federally impacted areas, and revenue sharing. These formulas typically include such factors as population, per capita income, land area, and the like.

The allocation of benefits on the basis of individual case-by-case decisions reflects a contrary philosophy. There is no presumption that the relevant differences between rival claimants can be anticipated, categorized, or measured with any precision. Complexity is openly acknowledged. Elaborate procedures for application, review, and negotiation over terms are designed to break down that complexity and expose claimants' individual strengths and weaknesses. There is also no presumption that all claimants deserve a share of benefits. The concentration of benefits in some areas and the denial of shares for other areas is perfectly legitimate. Individual case-by-case decisions are used for the procurement of complex items for the defense establishment, the location of military bases and other federal installations, and certain types of intergovernmental grants. They are particularly valuable for grant programs which are designed either to encourage innovation or to target benefits according to extreme need or distress.

Thus, allocation by formula and allocation by individual project decisions rest on

different rationales. The choice as to whether legislators or bureaucrats should make these decisions is less clear. Bureaucrats are clear favorites when technical expertise is required, such as the allocation of research grants. But technical expertise itself frequently can be codified for legislators in a way that allows them to make informed value choices. Bureaucrats are often thought to make fewer "political" allocations than legislators, and some see this as a great virtue. Later I examine just how extensively congressional politics--i.e., the competition among legislators for shares of local benefits -- affects both legislative and bureaucratic choices.

Abstract arguments about process can be made for or against each of the other allocational methods. In fact, the federal government has passed through various phases where one or another method was thought superior for entire collections of new programs.⁴ Intergovernmental grants have gone through at least three phases. Early grants were predominantly of the formula type. Their aim was to help state governments perform their traditional functions in areas such as highway construction, agricultural development, and vocational education. Simple formulas based on population and a few other factors were adequate for this task. Great Society legislation in the early 1960's sought to shift the emphasis towards local governments, and to target funds in areas of most extreme need. The obvious choice, given these objectives, was to have bureaucrats allocate funds on a project-by-project basis. Some of the programs established during this period include model cities, air pollution control, community action, and aid for educationally disadvantaged children. The "New Federalism" in the early 1970's sought to give local governments greater control over how money is spent and to diminish (national) bureaucratic power. Therefore, the federal government shifted to allocation by congressional formula for initiatives such as revenue sharing, and the series of block grant programs such as community development block grants. Here, local governments may determine exactly how money is to be spent once it arrives.

The Politics in Allocation

Evaluating alternative allocation processes in a detached fashion has its uses, particularly when one is concerned with broad issues such as bureaucratic versus local control. But there is also value in assessing how decisions are actually made under various allocational methods. Here, the question is not merely how methods look on paper, but how they operate in a very political environment. And the world of geographic allocation is *very* political.

⁴For a discussion of the development of the federal grant system, see James L. Sundquist, *Making Federalism Work* (Washington: Brookings 1969), pp. 1-13; Donald M. Haider, *When Governments Come to Washington* (New York: Free Press, 1974), pp. 54-57; and Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *Categorical Grants: Their Role and Design* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 15-47.

It is a world where legislators compete vigorously to acquire benefits for their districts. Congressmen care intensely about where benefits are allocated because they believe that playing this game well yields important electoral dividends. The wisdom on Capitol Hill is that voters are impressed by congressmen who bring home the bacon. It provides legislators with many opportunities to generate self-serving publicity. In addition, the direct beneficiaries of federal largess are excellent prospects for campaign contributions, organizational support, and public endorsements. In fact, whether the acquisition of shares of federal spending pays any electoral dividends is not known. But congressmen *think* it does, and it is this perception that impels them to compete vigorously for local shares of spending.⁵

None of the four allocational methods are immune from the effects of congressmen's quest for local benefits. Congressional conflict over funds can leave its imprint on policy regardless of whether allocational decisions are made in Congress or in the bureaucracy, individually or with formulas. The nature and extent of those policy effects, however, can vary widely depending on how decisions are made and by whom.

Here I assess the impact of congressmen's quest for local benefits on the shape of public policy according to two evaluative dimensions: political allocations and political repercussions. The former is meant to be a descriptive, value-neutral dimension. The latter is a value-laden dimension that focuses on the negative policy effects of various allocational mechanisms. As used here, it necessarily represents my own values.

Political allocations refer to actual geographic distributions of benefits that reflect congressmen's struggle for shares of spending. They can be contrasted with nonpolitical allocations, which are what would be expected from decision makers who share the same basic policy preferences as congressmen but who are unencumbered by any personal interest in geographic allocation. Conceptually, it is easy to distinguish between political and nonpolitical allocations. Empirically, it is more difficult, for one must compare known political allocations with estimated nonpolitical ones.

Political repercussions refer to the negative policy effects that flow from a system where legislators actively compete for local benefits. One such repercussion is that government may choose inefficient or inappropriate means towards agreed-upon ends. Congressional preference for solutions involving vast and politically visible public works (e.g., sewage treatment plants) rather than more indirect and invisible methods (effluent charges) is an example. A second repercussion is that government may overspend in a given functional area. This occurs when congressional politics dictate that unjustifiable projects in some geographic areas must be funded along with exemplary ones in other areas. A third is

⁵David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

that government may become unable to terminate a program after benefits begin to flow into every legislator's district. New programs are added, but old ones can never be displaced. A fourth possible repercussion, an outgrowth of the first three, is that governmental spending grows continuously.

Political allocations and political repercussions often occur jointly, but they need not. Benefits can be allocated politically without necessarily producing any of the above undesirable consequences. For example, NASA's choice of Houston as the center for manned space flight was almost certainly a political decision.⁶ But there were no obvious political repercussions associated with that decision or with the other political allocations of NASA facilities.

Political allocations and political repercussions may emerge no matter what policy or which allocational method is eventually adopted. But this emergence is not equally likely for all types of policies. It is easy to assume that the attractiveness of a policy depends *solely* on the allocation of local benefits. For some programs this may well be true. But most programs produce something of value other than shares of local benefits for congressmen.

One can imagine that policies offer (and congressmen evaluate) three classes of benefits. *General* benefits, such as national security, economic prosperity, and improved public health, are goods that people value because they believe that everyone profits, including themselves. *Group* benefits are those that accrue to one segment of society, for example teachers, oil companies, or airplane manufacturers. *Local* benefits are those which flow to specific geographic areas. Most policies include some combination of all three classes.

The importance of local benefits in the policy-making process depends on how citizens and congressmen evaluate whatever general or group benefits there might be.⁷ When general benefits are substantial and the support for them is widespread, programs survive and prosper without having to allocate local benefits carefully to maintain a congressional coalition. National defense, medical research, and the national park system are examples of programs where the importance of general benefits diminishes the role of local benefits. Other programs deliver relatively few general or group benefits. They survive only when local benefits are carefully allocated among legislators' districts. Many public works and intergovernmental grant programs are of this type.

⁶Thomas P. Murphy, *Science, Geopolitics, and Federal Spending* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath Lexington Books, 1971), pp. 210-218.

⁷Arnold (1979), pp. 37-71; (1980), pp. 4-6.

Five Propositions

This essay advances the following five propositions about the effects of alternative allocational mechanisms on public policy:

1. Political allocations tend to be greater when legislators, rather than bureaucrats, make allocational decisions.
2. Political allocations in the form of broadened distributions of benefits tend to be greater when formulas, rather than individual project decisions, are used to allocate benefits.
3. Political allocations in the form of larger shares for specific legislators tend to be greater when individual project decisions, rather than formulas, are used to allocate benefits.
4. Political allocations tend to be greater when programs supply relatively few general benefits and relatively few group benefits.
5. The extent of political repercussions tends to be directly related to the extent of political allocations.

The remaining sections advance these five propositions, both with arguments and with limited empirical evidence. In principle, it should be possible to test each of these propositions with systematic evidence. In practice, however, such an undertaking would require enormous resources. The major task is to identify and measure the extent of political allocations and political repercussions. This requires careful, painstaking work for even a single program; yet many such studies, spanning a broad range of programs, would be required before one could assess with confidence the validity of the propositions. At present, there are only a handful of empirical studies that are relevant to the problem.

II. The Effects of Allocational Mechanisms

Congress and Federal Projects

Before the rise of intergovernmental grants, geographic allocations were inevitably made by individual decisions about individual projects. Typical decisions included: where to build military installations, station troops, and harbor the navy; where to procure weapons and supplies; where to build public waterways improvements for irrigation, navigation, and flood control; and where and how to acquire, develop, and dispose of federal lands. These programs once constituted most of federal spending. Their size is still considerable, although they are now overshadowed by transfer payments to individuals (decisions lacking any geographic component), and by intergovernmental grants. Congress once directly allocated all of these benefits. Bureaucrats now handle all procurement contracts, and they dominate the early stages of decision making about the location of military

installations and other federal facilities. Congress continues to dominate locational decisions for water projects and issues related to federal lands.

Most of what we know about how Congress makes project decisions concerns the selection of water projects. The literature in this area is extensive, considering that less than one percent of the federal budget goes to water projects, and relatively consistent in its explanations and evaluations.⁸ Congress is thought to make relatively poor decisions about water policy, because everyone is looking out for local interests and no one is protecting the national interest.

The decision-making process is well known. Localities initially assemble proposals for developing harbors, deepening channels, connecting rivers, or building dams. Working through their congressmen, they petition Congress to authorize a feasibility study. For any congressman who does his homework, this is easily accomplished. The Army Corps of Engineers then performs studies which include cost-benefit analyses. Not all proposals are discovered to be worthy of investment, but many are. Disinterested observers have long noted that the Corps is remarkably generous when estimating benefits, and equally adept at underestimating the true costs. Such creative accounting is hardly surprising to students of bureaucratic politics, for it is the Corps itself that will eventually construct these works. Congress retains final control over the actual choice of projects, first at the authorization stage, where each project must be individually approved, and then at the appropriations stage, where mention in the committee report is essential.

The politics in this decision-making process follows naturally from the composition of benefits. Most projects produce concentrated benefits for groups and localities, and impose only diffuse costs on the general taxpayer. Group benefits accrue both to the common carriers who use waterways without fee and to those industries who enjoy lower transportation costs. Local benefits accrue to the areas where projects are built, both from the infusion of funds for construction and from the economic development that frequently follows improvements in transportation. Costs are born by the general taxpayer across the country. For any given project, then, the benefits are concentrated and visible, the potential beneficiaries have good reason to organize for action, and their representatives have powerful incentives to work with them. The costs, on the other hand, are diffuse and practically invisible. Those who pay have no incentive to organize, and few congressmen see profit for themselves in leading the opposition. Any given project could easily be defeated if it were considered alone, for even two or three enthusiastic supporters would be no match for four hundred weak opponents. This problem is overcome by placing all projects in a

⁸ Arthur Maass, *Muddy Waters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951); James T. Murphy, "The House Public Works Committee: Determinants and Consequences of Committee Behavior" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1969); John A. Ferejohn, *Pork Barrel Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973).

single omnibus bill, so that the supporters of individual projects must stand together. It is the classic American logroll; it is unbeatable.

Political allocations are inevitable, for they provide the glue that holds these coalitions so firmly together. They emerge in two forms. First, distributions of projects across as many congressional districts as possible are common. If meritorious proposals happen to be concentrated in a handful of districts, then less worthy projects from other districts must be included. Politics dictates that benefits must be widely dispersed if large supporting coalitions are to be maintained. Second, some congressmen garner more benefits for their districts than either merit or the political requirement for wide distributions would seem to allow. Typically, these congressmen sit on either the Public Works Committee or the Appropriations subcommittee that together pass upon all rivers and harbors projects.⁹ They use their committee positions to obtain disproportionate benefits for their own districts, either as more or larger projects. The huge, multi-billion dollar extravaganzas that capture journalists' attention, such as the Arkansas River project that made Tulsa, Oklahoma, a seaport, or the current attempt to connect the Tennessee River with the Gulf of Mexico through Alabama, invariably benefit committee members. Political allocations, then, reflect both forces of concentration and forces of dispersion.

Satisfying both forces produces political repercussions. The substitution of political criteria where acceptable merit-related criteria exist necessarily results in an inefficient allocation of resources. Cost-benefit analyses performed by disinterested observers have shown that some projects do not return benefits commensurate with their costs. For example, two economists who have examined the aforementioned 1.7 billion dollar project to provide a second route from the Tennessee River to the Gulf of Mexico estimate a return of only 39 cents on the dollar, while the more optimistic Army Corps of Engineers estimates a return of \$1.20.¹⁰ A second consequence is that the nation overspends on water projects. The problem is not simply that the system selects the wrong projects, for there is no long list of meritorious projects passed over in favor of politically more important ones. The problem is that the nation has already built most of the high-quality projects, and each year it must dip lower and lower into the barrel. Thus, it overspends on water projects, relative to competing needs. One ill that cannot be traced to the congressional system for allocating water projects is the growth of governmental spending. If anything, water projects have been a drag on such growth, not the engine behind it, since they have declined from 2.4 percent of federal expenditures in 1927, to .9 percent in 1957, to less than .5 percent today.¹¹

⁹Ferejohn (1973), pp. 129-232.

¹⁰Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., "The South's Unstoppable Waterway," *Fortune* (August 27, 1979), p. 81.

¹¹U.S. Bureau of the Budget, *The Budget of the U.S. Government* (1928, 1958, 1979).

Knowledge about the allocational system for water projects is probably more complete and extensive than it is for any other allocational decisions. Most observers agree that the system produces substantial political allocations and political repercussions. Why is this so? Is it simply a necessary consequence of having the legislature itself make decisions about individual projects? Or is the source of the problem more related to the nature of the policy itself, where concentrated local and group benefits overpower distributed general costs? Most likely, both are contributing causes. But at this point it is difficult to say with confidence which is the greater villain, largely because water projects are the only major project decisions that today's Congress makes. One gains some perspective by examining how bureaucrats make project decisions.

Bureaucrats and Federal Projects

Congress has delegated to bureaucrats the primary responsibility for allocating most other direct federal spending, except for intergovernmental grants and transfer payments. Included are: locational decisions for new federal facilities, office buildings, and military installations; decisions about where federal employees will work; the awarding of procurement contracts for both defense and non-defense items; and the allocation of research money among firms and universities. The fact that Congress has delegated much of the responsibility for these decisions to bureaucrats does not necessarily mean that congressional influence is less, nor that political allocations and political repercussions are less pronounced. Just as the Army Corps of Engineers accommodates congressmen's wishes when it studies the feasibility of water projects, so, too, can bureaucrats in other agencies be very accommodating when they make actual allocational decisions. After all, Congress can easily take back allocational authority if it does not like the way it is exercised.

Cooperation among congressmen and bureaucrats can be mutually satisfying. Congressmen want bureaucrats' help in channeling funds into their districts at appropriate times and with appropriate opportunities for congressional credit. Bureaucrats want congressmen to approve their budgetary requests, to give them wide latitude in areas unrelated to constituency benefits, and to avoid undue criticism at public hearings. As long as congressmen care more about constituency benefits than about bureaucrats' principal aims (and bureaucrats care less), there is ample room for mutual accommodations. Bureaucrats can defer to congressmen's allocational preferences in exchange for congressional deference to their goals.¹²

How much do bureaucrats accommodate congressmen's preferences? There is good reason to believe it varies from policy to policy. Unfortunately, the requisite empirical

¹²Arnold (1979), pp. 19-71.

studies to assess accurately how allocational decisions are made across all policies have not yet been done. The best one can do is to make inferences from the few existing studies.

Defense Benefits

One can probably speak most confidently about locational decisions related to military installations and defense contracts. These basic choices account for the eventual geographic distribution of 130 billion dollars annually, or one quarter of federal spending. For military installations, there are three locational decisions of consequence: where to build new bases (historically important, but now trivial because few are constructed), which bases should be closed, and how to allocate military personnel among existing installations. Congressmen apparently take greatest interest in closing decisions, for their constituencies have already acquired a large, visible stake in the outcome. Virtually all congressmen endeavor to keep bases in their districts open. All have not been equally successful, however, as more than a hundred major installations have been closed during the past two decades.

The question arises: Does congressional politics affect in any way bureaucrats' selection of bases to be closed? The presumption has always been that members of the military committees were able to protect military installations in their districts, but there has been little systematic evidence to support this hypothesis. Recently, I assembled appropriate data from Pentagon files on the closing of 58 Army and 67 Air Force installations between 1952 and 1974, and used it to test a multivariate model of how installations were selected for closing during this period. The evidence is compelling that bureaucrats avoided closing bases in districts with representatives on the military committees in the House--i.e., the Armed Services Committee and the two military subcommittees of the Appropriations Committee. Separate probit estimates for Army and Air Forces bases suggest that installations represented on military committees faced probabilities of closure that were less than half as great as those without such representation. This occurred during a period in which 41 percent of all installations were actually closed. These differences persist even when other effects related to installations' quality are controlled.¹³ The evidence is strong that bureaucrats defer to the locational preferences of those congressmen who are in the best position to affect bureaucrats' futures. Members of these committees must pass on all funds for the Pentagon and, thus, their good will and active support is crucial to bureaucrats' well being.

There is also evidence that locational decisions for new bases are affected by congressional politics. In a study of site selection for the 38 new Army and Air Force installations built between 1952 and 1974, I discovered that a disproportionate number of sites

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 107-115.

were chosen from districts represented on the military committees, and particularly the House Armed Services Committee. Again, this is evidence of bureaucrats bending their allocational decisions to suit their congressional overseers, though the extent of influence is somewhat smaller for site selection than it is for base closings.¹⁴ Thus far, I have not been able to model satisfactorily decisions about the allocation of military personnel among installations, nor to uncover any patterns of congressional influence over these decisions. Committee members appear to enjoy no special advantage here.¹⁵

The existence and extent of political allocations in the vast field of defense contracting is still an open question. Impressionistic, anecdotal, and largely circumstantial accounts see much smoke; but the best systematic studies have yet to uncover any fire.¹⁶ Immense data problems, relating to subcontracting and bureaucrats' limited range of alternatives when placing contracts, suggest that we are still a long way from accurate identification and measurement of whatever political allocations may exist here. Most likely, they are relatively slight, which is why they have been so elusive.

For military benefits, then, political allocations do exist, but their extent varies according to the particular type of benefit. In any event, these political allocations are substantially less extensive than for water projects and largely confined to members of military committees. Elsewhere, I have estimated from the appropriate probit equations that bureaucrats at the Pentagon have adjusted no more than 15 percent of all their closing and site selection decisions to conform with congressmen's allocational preferences.¹⁷ This contrasts with the case of water projects where many, perhaps most, such allocational decisions are largely political.

One explanation for this difference is that congressmen perceive defense policy and water policy in fundamentally different terms. Defense policy delivers substantial general benefits, as well as significant local and group benefits. Consequently, most congressmen support relatively high levels of defense spending regardless of whether their districts receive shares of local benefits. They support it for the general benefit of national security. This gives bureaucrats considerable freedom in allocating local benefits, for proper allocation is not the key to a winning coalition. Careful attention to committee members' districts still has value because their strong and enthusiastic support helps to grease the congressional wheels and ease the approval of requests from the military. However, it is not the key to survival. This contrasts with water policy, where there are few general benefits of consequence. Congressmen who are denied shares of local benefits have little reason to support

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 115-119.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 119-120.

¹⁶Rundquist (1973, 1978).

¹⁷Arnold (1979), pp. 115, 118.

rivers and harbors projects for everyone else. For water policy, then, local benefits are the key to a winning coalition.

Thus, differences in policy are important. But is it also important that Congress allocates water projects whereas bureaucrats allocate defense benefits? I think it is. Consider the case of closing military installations. During the past two decades, the Pentagon has closed well over a hundred military installations, in response to a decline in total military personnel and in an effort to economize by consolidating personnel at larger bases. Such decisions are clearly in bureaucrats' interests, for they conserve resources for new weapons and other priority items. They are not in congressmen's interests, however, and congressmen have fought them for years. Congressmen have never been sympathetic to imposing substantial local costs on their districts in return for modest economies. Even the most fiscally conservative legislator can instantly give an impassioned speech on "false economy" when his district's interests are at stake. Congressmen's efforts to stop the closing of military installations have been hampered by the fact that committee members seldom suffer this pain. Bureaucrats have been careful to spare congressmen who are best in a position to stop them. Imagine, however, that Congress itself were to make closing decisions. The most likely consequence would be that economy would take the back seat, and most bases would remain open. It is far easier for affected rank-and-file congressmen to defend their local turf when Congress makes the decisions than it is when they must somehow coalesce to reverse bureaucrats' decisions.

Other Federal Projects

Political allocations may also arise in other areas where bureaucrats make project decisions. Most decisions about where research and development funds are to be spent are relatively nonpolitical. Congressmen seldom meddle with the National Science Foundation in an attempt to channel more grants to universities in their districts. The existing distribution of universities and firms capable of high quality research is the constraint on allocational politics, not the activities of congressmen. Likewise, medical, defense, and scientific research survive on the basis of their general benefits, not in response to carefully devised allocational strategies. Although political considerations seldom override merit criteria in these areas, they do enter when the latter are inconclusive. This happens particularly when the federal government seeks to construct from scratch some totally new research installations. There may be acceptable criteria for separating good and bad locations, but seldom can one define objective criteria that lead to a single, best location. Political criteria are frequently used to choose among the most acceptable locations. Surely, it made little difference to NASA exactly where astronauts were to be trained. It did make a difference to Representative Thomas of Houston, chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee with

jurisdiction over NASA. And so a Manned Spacecraft Center was born – in Houston.¹⁸ The political logic was compelling. Similarly, it made little difference whether a new proton accelerator was located in New York, California, or Illinois. Organized pressure from mid-western congressmen made Weston, Illinois the choice.¹⁹ So, political allocations are not uncommon in areas related to research and development. But they arise principally when other criteria fail to produce a single choice, or when the differences between top-ranked choices are minor.

The logic is similar for locational decisions concerning other federal facilities such as office buildings. Initially, Congress battles over program-related questions about general and group benefits and costs. Later, the question arises of where all those workers who administer these programs will be located. Political allocations are possible here, too, but they usually occur peripherally. Battles over where new federal facilities should be located are sometimes intense, but they make little difference to anyone but the congressmen involved in the conflict (and their constituents).

Political allocations exist across the whole range of locational decisions that bureaucrats make. But these political allocations usually do not produce the serious political repercussions that they do when Congress selects water project. It is difficult to find examples of programs within this class that can survive only by the strategic allocation of local benefits, as was the case for water projects. Similarly, it is difficult to find programs that were originally passed only as a way to create barrels full of pork for congressmen.

The most serious political repercussions generally occur for programs that should be terminated or curtailed. If some congressmen are able to protect military installations in their districts from closure, then bases in other districts must suffer that fate. Such decisions are inefficient when the latter installations are actually superior to the former. More seriously, congressmen often band together to prevent termination of defense contracts. They keep production lines open for certain weapons systems long after the Pentagon's requirements have been met. One example is the F-111, which the Texas delegation was able to keep in production for four years after the administration recommended closure.²⁰ Politically, it is easier to keep a weapons system in production than to keep a single base open, because a single defense contract usually includes scores of major subcontracts distributed around the country.

It is instructive to compare water projects with other federal projects. One finds substantial political allocations when Congress handles water projects. These allocations are

¹⁸Murphy (1971), pp. 210-218.

¹⁹Murphy (1971), pp. 291-326; Theodore J. Lowi, and Benjamin Ginsberg, *Polliside* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 87-107.

²⁰Peter Ognibene, "Grounding the Texas Air Force", *New York Times* (May 10, 1975), p. 29.

essential to the survival of the program, and they inevitably lead to significant political repercussions. Much smaller political allocations associated with most programs are found when bureaucrats make individual locational decisions. Ordinarily, these allocations are helpful, but not essential, to a program's survival. Since they are less central to a program's existence, they tend to produce less severe political repercussions.

The source of this difference between water projects and other forms of direct federal spending is the existence of general benefits for the latter, which provide a firm basis for congressional support, and their nonexistence for water projects, which makes allocational politics the center of the entire game. But there are also important differences hinging upon who makes the allocational decisions, congressmen or bureaucrats. For congressmen, the allocation of local benefits is central to their political lives. For bureaucrats, allocating benefits is more a means to the end of satisfying their budgetary and other goals. Bureaucrats do defer to congressmen's allocational preferences, but only as it serves these other goals. Thus, by giving bureaucrats allocational authority, the extent of political allocations is diminished.

Intergovernmental Grants

In principle, intergovernmental grants can be allocated among states and localities according to any of the four allocational methods. In practice, two methods predominate: congressional allocation by formula, and bureaucratic allocation with individual project decisions. The questions here are: Does it make any difference which method is chosen? Are political allocations more common under one method? Are political repercussions more likely or more serious?

The world of intergovernmental grants is considerably different from that of direct federal spending. Most direct programs deliver substantial general benefits that both voters and congressmen value. They also deliver valuable local benefits, but these usually are of secondary importance when a program is first adopted. Congressmen compete vigorously for shares of local benefits, but their support is not contingent upon receiving them. Water projects, as I have noted, are the principal exception, for here general benefits are few, and local benefits predominate. Grant programs resemble water programs more than they do other forms of federal spending. Local benefits abound while general benefits are relatively scarce. Consequently, few congressmen support particular grant programs without first calculating how their own districts will benefit. The question of how local benefits are to be allocated is not a peripheral issue for grant programs. It is often the central issue.

Estimating just how political are the actual geographic allocations for various grant programs presumes that one has some standard for comparison--a sense of how benefits would be allocated in the absence of congressional competition for funds. Unfortunately,

there is no single standard of comparison. Such standards reflect conceptions of what ends these programs should serve, and there is little consensus on these ends. Should they be redistributive schemes that concentrate funds on poor areas? Should they reward those local governments that already tax themselves heavily? Or perhaps those with high taxes should be punished. Should they target funds according to local needs for services? Should equalization of services across localities be the principal aim? Should the federal government use its funds to encourage the development of innovative solutions to problems? Or should it merely subsidize traditional approaches? These questions, related to the fundamental purposes of particular programs, have obvious implications for how benefits are eventually allocated geographically.

Three types of decisions must be made for any grant program: decisions about the *broad purpose* of federal assistance (e.g., rejuvenate cities, train the unemployed), decisions about the *specific means* toward those ends (e.g., subsidize development, subsidize employers), and decisions about *geographic location*. These decisions are separable, and each, except the last, could be made by the legislature, the bureaucracy, or localities themselves. (Localities cannot allocate funds geographically.) As Table 1 shows, no institution has a monopoly on any of these decisions.

Table 1. Decision Making For Intergovernmental Grants.

DECISIONS ABOUT			
TYPES OF PROGRAMS	BROAD PURPOSE	SPECIFIC MEANS	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION
Categorical-Project	Congress	Congress and Bureaucracy	Bureaucracy
Categorical-Formula	Congress	Congress	Congress
Block-grant-Formula	Congress	Localities	Congress
Revenue sharing	Localities	Localities	Congress

Project Grants

The majority of grant programs dispense project grants, although together they account for only about one third of the total funds for intergovernmental assistance. Typically, these programs distribute funds to localities for specific, narrow purposes, in response to applications that detail exactly how localities propose to spend the funds. Congress defines the broad purposes for these categorical programs, and outlines what means are to be encouraged. Bureaucrats define more narrowly what means are acceptable, both through detailed regulations and through their actual acceptance of various types of local proposals. Bureaucrats also have authority to make all locational decisions. These are truly discretionary programs, with most authority vested in bureaucrats. Laws that authorize these programs may be only a few paragraphs long.

Project grants are usually the choice when program designers seek either to concentrate funds in areas of greatest need or to encourage localities to develop innovative solutions through competition for limited funds. They, alone, among the alternative mechanisms for delivering assistance, allow precise targeting of funds—at least in theory. But how close do real-world programs come to this ideal? It all depends on what that ideal is. If the aim is to concentrate funds so much that only a handful of congressional districts eventually benefit, then the ideal is never approached. Programs that promise benefits only for decaying inner cities have little chance of emerging from Congress intact. Most congressmen know from the beginning that their districts will not be included, and they react accordingly. On the other hand, if the aim is to concentrate funds in needy areas, but need is defined so that most districts have a few qualifying areas, then the ideal is often reached. Project grants permit concentration of funds, but congressional politics place limits on the degree of concentration.

Political allocations of project grants usually have their roots in the initial congressional consideration of a program. Those who design such programs occasionally try to enact ones that would truly concentrate benefits in areas of greatest need. The usual congressional reaction is to broaden the eligibility criteria so that benefits will flow into many more congressional districts. The classic case was the model cities program, which was initially designed to pour massive federal funds into a few urban communities to demonstrate how saturation spending could transform decaying areas into new cities. It was to be an experimental program with, at most, a dozen cities participating. By the time it emerged from Congress in late 1966, it spread the same funds among 150 cities. Congress even redefined "city" so that rural hamlets were included.²¹ The model cities example is typical of what happens when proposals for concentrated benefits move through Congress. A water and sewer program, intended for rapidly growing communities, is transformed into one that spreads funds thinly across all communities.²² Economic development programs are reshaped so that less distressed areas are included. Poverty programs suddenly encompass those 'pockets of poverty' that even economically healthy areas contain.

Political allocations, then, have their beginnings when Congress first considers these programs. It is here that they are broadened so that most congressional districts become eligible for shares of benefits. By examining actual allocational decisions, one sees that bureaucrats take excellent advantage of these broadened criteria. They tend to accept applications from as many districts as possible, thus satisfying as many congressmen as possible. The 150 model cities, for example, were chosen so that 226 congressional districts were included (some cities had multiple districts); only five districts received more than

²¹Arnold (1979), pp. 165-169.

²²Ibid., pp. 129-133.

one district.²³ Similarly, bureaucrats at HUD managed to place at least one water and sewer grant in each congressional district within a few years of that program's beginning.²⁴ The urban renewal program was originally passed in 1949 as a slum-clearance program for larger cities. As bureaucrats sought to build a broader coalition of support, it evolved into a program with benefits for communities of all sizes.²⁵

Political allocations may also take the form of extra shares of benefits for specific legislators who are important to a programs' prosperity. Typically, these are members of the relevant legislative committees and appropriations subcommittees, but others who have provided crucial support may also be rewarded. Again, the model cities program illustrates both tactics. Bureaucrats clearly gave special preference to members of those committees with authority over the program. They also accepted a disproportionate number of applications from rank-and-file congressmen who provided crucial support when model cities was first funded.²⁶ Evidence from other grant programs, such as water and sewer grants, urban renewal, and economic development grants, reveals similar rewards for specific legislators.²⁷ From the perspective of bureaucrats, such political allocations are rational, for they help protect their programs and budgets from congressional interference. The two forms of political allocations—broadened distribution of benefits and extra shares for specific legislators—are not mutually exclusive. One can, without contradiction, spread benefits more widely than originally intended while still providing extra shares for committee members. What inevitably suffers when these twin tactics are used is the concentration of benefits according to criteria of merit or need.

These political allocations have obvious political repercussions. Federal funds are not allocated strictly on the basis of merit or concentrated solely in areas of greatest need. Experimental programs such as the original model cities programs, designed to create a handful of demonstration cities, are virtually impossible, given the political constraints. If experimentation is the aim of policy makers, then political repercussions are practically guaranteed and of considerable magnitude, for a substantial proportion of funds are drained from the original purpose and spent politically to maintain a broad coalition of support. For programs with less ambitious aims, however, the repercussions are much less serious. Bureaucrats who allocated funds for the urban renewal program needed to spread funds across many congressional districts for political reasons. But they were still able to concentrate funds *within* districts, according to their perceptions of need. Similarly, they were

²³Ibid., pp. 165-206.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 129-164.

²⁵Plott (1968); Arnold (1979), p. 211-212.

²⁶Arnold (1979), pp. 165-206.

²⁷Arnold (1979), pp. 129-164; Plott (1968); and Anagnoson (1978).

able to adjust the amounts of the grants in any way they pleased so that political allocations would consume a relatively small share of funds.

The extent of political repercussions varies for different types of project grants. In general, they appear less severe than in the case of water projects, and somewhat greater for the other forms of direct federal spending. But much depends on whether or not designers have envisioned politically realistic programs from the start. Those that are not may become severely distorted and yield substantial political repercussions.

Formula Grants

Formula programs come in three varieties: categorical grants, block grants, and revenue sharing. They differ principally in how and by whom decisions are made about each program's spending (Table 1). For categorical programs, Congress defines their broad purposes, selects specific means to achieve those ends, and writes formulas for allocating funds among states and localities. For block-grant programs, Congress defines the broad purposes and writes the allocational formulas, but it is up to the localities to decide exactly how funds are to be spent within the congressionally defined purposes. Revenue sharing gives localities almost complete freedom in defining the purposes of spending and the means towards those ends. Congress merely writes the allocational formula. These programs differ, then, in how much discretion is given to states and localities. Bureaucrats administer all programs, but their role is relatively minor; they have no exclusive authority over any of the three decisions.

Formula programs emphasize allinclusive criteria. Unlike project grants, the question is not who should receive benefits and who should not. The question is simply how much each recipient should receive. Ordinarily, all governmental units at a certain level, i.e., state, county, city, village, are entitled to shares. Although formula programs tend to spread funds thinly across the nation rather than to concentrate them in limited areas, there is nothing inherent in the formula approach that leads to this outcome. Formulas *could* be written with thresholds: those scoring below a certain level would receive nothing, while those scoring above it would receive varying amounts according to the formula. However, they usually are not written this way.

In principle, one should be able to write a formula that reflects any combination of merit-related criteria that one wished to reward. Criteria related to need, competence, capacity, past accomplishment, or demand for governmental services can all be approximated with some measuring device that yields quantitative estimates that can be incorporated into a formula. In practice, formula writers usually adopt criteria for which data already exist for all possible recipients. For states, there are many indicators from which to choose. For localities, there are relatively few, chiefly those collected by the census, by

other governmental agencies, or by the localities themselves, such as school enrollments. These statistics are far from ideal. Reliance upon them alone makes it difficult to write good formulas that accurately reflect underlying needs and abilities.

It is not an easy task to estimate just how political the actual allocations are under the 150 or so formulas presently in use, for as yet there is no systematic literature on the subject. In a previous essay, I examined most of the current formulas, but this can only be the beginning. For now, however, it is all that is available. On this base, the following judgments rest.²⁸

Looking first at categorical formulas, one finds how infrequently formulas are constructed around even a modest collection of merit-related criteria. Many formulas completely ignore legitimate differences in demand for governmental services, even when rudimentary data do exist. For example, urban mass transit grants include factors of urban population and density, but not the actual use of mass transit. As a consequence, New York, a city built around mass transit, receives a subsidy of 2 cents per passenger, while Grand Rapids receives 45 cents per passenger.²⁹

Formulas rely most heavily on population data, with occasional data for various subpopulations such as school-age children. Such factors, in the absence of strong, counter-vailing merit-related factors, create relatively even distributions of funds among localities. These formulas reflect fundamental congressional forces toward political equity rather than the contrary forces toward concentration of funds by need, demand, or capacity.

Allocational rules that stress population are usually well received in the House. Such rules guarantee all congressmen relatively equal shares so that no congressman must face his electorate with less than others. The Senate, built on a different concept of political equity, frequently tinkers with these formulas. A favorite technique is to add a minimum and maximum allocation. This guarantees small states far more than their due while denying the largest two or three states their entitled allotment.

The reliance on population and the adoption of minimum floors and maximum ceilings are forms of political allocation, especially when they displace the search for good merit-related criteria. All this is done in a gentlemanly fashion. There is an easy acceptance of this political equity. Congressmen do not fight to obtain maximum shares for their districts or have a long debate about what allocations would best serve the public interest.

Recent block-grant programs, e.g., Community Development Block Grants, are larger and more broad-based than most of their categorical predecessors. One sees similar outcomes, but with some fascinating twists. Congress does not write these formulas in the

²⁸ Arnold (1981).

²⁹ William C. Freund, "Can Quotas, Tariffs, and Subsidies Save the Northeast?" in George Sternlieb and James W. Hughes (eds.), *Revitalizing the Northeast* (New Brunswick: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1978), p. 204.

nonconflictual environment just described for categorical grants, where political equity triumphs easily. Instead, there are endless quarrels, in subcommittee, in committee, on the floors of both House and Senate, and in conference, over exactly what 'merit' criteria belong in these formulas. Many of these conflicts have politics at the heart. Congressmen show a remarkable ability to vote for the formula factors that treat their districts best. Consider, for example, the recent fight over the allocational formula for a program of block grants to states, designed to help the poor pay their heating bills. The dispute evolved into a contest between North and South over the division of funds between them. On a roll call vote, congressmen from 35 frostbelt states were practically unanimous (93%) in support of a formula weighted towards colder states, while those from the remaining sunbelt states were equally united (96%) in opposition.³⁰ The rhetoric in such debates emphasizes differing conceptions of merit, but the actual votes reveal the conflicting interests of congressmen, each determined to improve his district's share.

It is not completely clear why formula writing is more political for the new block grants than it was for categorical programs. One explanation is that Congress now has its own computers, so that each congressman can know precisely how each minor change in a formula will affect his district.³¹ Thus, it is now considerably easier to fine tune formulas. Second, the new programs are much larger. Investing energy in long battles over each formula is potentially more worthwhile when many millions are at stake.

For whatever reasons, the formulas for these new programs are increasingly political. Their foundation is still one of political equity—large, relatively uniform shares for everyone. Unlike project grants, no one goes without a share. But at the margins, there is intense conflict over what localities will do best. The outcomes depend on the shifting coalitions of the time. Formulas are written not for the ages, but until a new coalition forms to write a better formula for its members.

Political allocations under formula programs appear far greater than under project grants. For project grants, political allocations appear in the form of broader distributions of benefits than program designers usually intend, and include relatively small extra allocations for members of important congressional committees. For categorical formula grants, they appear in the form of political equity and relatively uniform distributions of benefits, with arbitrary floors and ceilings that reward the smallest states and punish the largest. For broad-based programs, competition among congressmen becomes intense. Political allocations here reflect most forcefully the interests of those congressmen in the winning coalition of the moment.

³⁰Arnold (1981).

³¹Stephen E. Frantzich, "Computerized Information Technology in the U.S. House of Representatives," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 4 (1979), p. 266.

Political repercussions appear least under project grants. The proportion of benefits diverted for political purposes is usually relatively small, except in cases where benefits properly belong to but a small fraction of congressional districts. Ordinarily, bureaucrats can spread benefits across a wide range of congressional districts and award extra shares to important committee members *without* distorting a program's fundamental purpose. Benefits can be awarded largely according to bureaucrats' perceptions of recipients' needs, while still meeting these simple political constraints. This follows because, although bureaucrats may be forced to distribute benefits widely *across* districts, they can still concentrate them *within* districts according to whatever merit-related criteria they choose.

The repercussions appear somewhat greater under categorical formula grants. Attempts to concentrate funds according to need inevitably become watered down in Congress. The tendency to adopt formulas that spread benefits relatively evenly means that only a small proportion of all federal funds actually flow into areas of greatest need. Although the administrative neatness of formulas cannot be denied, the policy outcomes often depart considerably from the merit-related criteria upon which they supposedly rest. Political repercussions appear even greater for the new block grant programs. The competition over which factors will appear in these formulas seems to have moved them even further away from conceptions of merit. The principal limitation of formula programs as actually implemented is that they tend to distribute benefits broadly both *across* districts and *within* them.

III. The Choice of Allocational Mechanisms

Returning to the original question: Does it make a difference how allocational decisions are made, whether by legislators or bureaucrats, and whether with formulas or project decisions? As I hope to have shown, it makes a considerable difference. The choice of allocational mechanism is not a neutral decision.

The evidence needed for this judgment is far from complete. My inferences are drawn from a very limited literature. There are no studies of the politics of formulas when bureaucrats design them, and only one related to congressional design of formulas. Studies related to project decisions, either by congressmen or bureaucrats, are more numerous, but hardly extensive enough to create a firm foundation for confident judgment.

Also, remember that the allocational mechanism is only one factor that affects the nature of political allocations and repercussions. The relative composition of general, group, and local benefits is more important. Political allocations and repercussions are invariably greater when general and group benefits are slight relative to local benefits, as in water projects and most intergovernmental grants. Tinkering with allocational mechanisms may

reduce political allocations and repercussions in such cases, but the predominance of local benefits places real limits on how much they can be reduced.

Political allocations and repercussions appear to be less when bureaucrats rather than legislators make decisions, and when individual project decisions rather than formulas are used. To be sure, bureaucrats are capable of using local benefits to their advantage, and there is evidence that they make many shrewd political allocations. They make such allocations not out of habit, but rather as a means of advancing their principal goals and securing adequate support in Congress. Thus, one expects that bureaucrats allocate benefits strategically only to the extent necessary to maintain a supporting coalition. Congressmen, on the other hand, have every incentive to play the allocation game fully, even when further political allocations are unnecessary to maintain a coalition.

The argument that project decisions produce *fewer* political allocations than formula decisions runs contrary to first impressions. One might argue that project decisions are inherently more political because they can be allocated individually to reward committee members or other individual congressmen, whereas formula decisions cannot be targeted politically in the same way. The argument is true only if one's conception of political allocations is limited to those benefits that are traded individually for political support. Political allocations, however, should also include the congressional tendency to broaden programs and spread benefits relatively uniformly across the country. Although programs of project grants often end up spreading benefits more widely than early advocates might have hoped, this tendency is far greater and the actual allocations far more uniform for formula programs. The essential difference, then, is between project grants, which distribute benefits broadly across districts but which still allow concentration within districts, and formula grants, which spread benefits more evenly both across districts and within them.

Advocates of the "New Federalism" usually prefer formula grants, and especially block grants, to project grants because they believe such programs will redistribute power away from bureaucrats and toward local officials. Indeed they do. But the federal government must still allocate each program's funds geographically. One implication of this essay is that this diminution of bureaucratic control has come at the price of increased politicization of the allocational system. Whether this represents a gain or a loss, is not at issue here. But the case for the "New Federalism" is not as clearcut as those who focus solely on the issue of bureaucratic control might believe.

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