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Presidential Pork and the Broken Electoral College

Swing States Favored in the Allocation of Federal Grant Money

Current Electoral College rules have an obvious impact on how presidential candidates campaign. In 2012, more than 99% of general election ad dollars were targeted at voters in only ten states, which were the only states to be visited for post-convention campaign rallies by the major party nominees. Now we have evidence of how the Electoral College affects the way that presidents govern as well.

In his dissertation *The Politics of Federal Grants: Presidential Influence over the Distribution of Federal Funds*, Dr. John Hudak, a Brookings Institution fellow, reported on these findings:

- **Swing states get more:** Overall, controlling for variables such as state size and natural disaster relief funds, presidential election swing states received **7.6% more federal grants** than did safe states, and about **5.7% more grant money** between 1996 and 2008.
- **The swing state edge rises close to elections:** Although all states experienced an increase in grant money in the two years prior to an election, swing states received the most: about **9% more grants** and **7% more grant money** than safe states. Overall, swing states experienced an **11.5% increase in grants** and an **8.2% increase in grant money** in the two years prior to an election compared to the first two years of a presidential term.
- **It's not just about re-election:** The difference in allocation between swing and safe states does not vary between a president's first and second terms. Presidents and their administrations apparently seek to ensure that their successor is of the same political party.
- **What it means for a spectator state:** If Tennessee had been a swing state in 2008, it would have likely received **300 more federal grants in 2007, for a total of \$60 million.**

Federal grants are paid for with tax dollars from Americans in all states. They should be awarded based on need, not as another "campaign resource." We can ask executive leaders to ignore electoral incentives, but it's more prudent to take away those incentives in the first place.

Under the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, the White House would always go the candidate who wins the most popular vote in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. All votes would be equally meaningful, and states would receive grants based on their needs, not politicians' electoral needs.

- For more on National Popular Vote plan, see <http://www.NationalPopularVote.com>
- For more on Dr. Hudak's work, see: <http://www.Brookings.edu/experts/hudakj>