

Voters bypass their own representatives and reward Presidents for federal spending, new research shows

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Voters of all political stripes tend to reward Presidents for federal spending in their areas, new research shows.

Contrary to the perception that voters will give credit to their [members of congress](#) and senators for any federal largesse that comes the way of their county, research by two Assistant Professors from Boston University reveals that it is the incumbent President (or the party nominee who is running for office) who gets the thanks - and the votes at election time.

Writing in the [American Political Science Review](#), Douglas L Kriner and Andrew Reeves draw on comprehensive election and federal spending data at the county level for all presidential contests from 1988 to 2008 to examine the electoral consequences of federal spending. Their resulting paper, 'The Influence of Federal Spending on Presidential Elections' reaches the conclusion that voters bypass their own representatives and hand the credit to the President.

Kriner and Reeves research shows that in 2008, voters of all partisan stripes rewarded the Republican candidate in districts where federal spending had increased under the Republican administration of George W Bush. The evidence from Gallup polling data revealed that increased federal spending in a voter's district during the final year of the Bush administration significantly raised the likelihood of that voter opting to

support [John McCain](#).

The only role played by the member of congress or senator appears to be in boosting the President even more in the eyes of voters if he happens to be of the same political persuasion as their local representatives. Hence, a Republican President receives even more electoral rewards from federal spending decisions in a county if the local member(s) of Congress and both senators are also Republican.

Kriner and Reeves also found that voters from liberal and moderate counties are more likely to reward presidents for federal cash spent in their area than [voters](#) from conservative counties.

Kriner says the research presents a hitherto unsuspected aspect of electoral behavior and that previous research has looked for links between federal spending and voter action in the wrong place:

"Virtually every academic inquiry into the electoral consequences of [federal spending](#) has focused on Congress. The image of pork-barreling legislators jockeying to channel federal dollars to their districts to secure re-election is firmly entrenched in the popular consciousness. Our study shows, for the first time, that it is actually Presidents who are reaping the rewards."

Reeves adds that, as they found the effect was 'particularly dramatic' in battleground states, it is one to which future Presidential campaigns would do well to pay close attention:

"Given that relatively small vote margins in battleground states determined the [presidential elections](#) of 2000 and 2004, deciding where to spend federal funds may be pivotal in determining who wins the White House."

Douglas L. Kriner and Andrew Reeves are Assistant Professors at the Department of Political Science, Boston University.

Provided by Cambridge University Press

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