

The Impact of US Presidential Elections on Major Public Policy Shifts

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Abstract

It is unclear whether American voters can affect major public policy shifts. By expressing their satisfaction or discontent with presidential candidates and their parties, the voters try to influence the formation of governmental public policy to protect their vital interests. The obstacles in the formation of public policy confronting voters are not only structural factors, but also operational factors. Many scholars point out that it is very difficult for individual voters to succeed in affecting government policy.

This paper examines these factors and analyzes historical facts as well as other scholars' studies to discover the possibility of American voters' influence on major public policy shifts through presidential elections. It is found that unified party control of the legislative and executive branches in the federal government has shown a strong pattern of association with critical elections. Economic or war crises are also often associated with periods of electoral realignment. Demands for changes in major public policies through presidential elections have thus been satisfied in American history.

Key Words: US presidential elections, incrementalism, critical elections, new coalition, realignment