

Why policy changes during Obama presidency will be more significant than during Clinton, Reagan eras

May 6 2009

Unlike the post-election disappointment that has followed many election outcomes, the Obama presidency will likely break through a structural bias in American politics favoring the status quo and bring about significant changes in policy. This prediction is made by a new study grounded in a scientific theory of politics and conducted by political scientist Jonathan Woon (University of Pittsburgh).

The findings are presented in an article entitled "Change we Can Believe In? Using [Political Science](#) to Predict Policy Change in the Obama Presidency" which appears in the April issue of *PS: Political Science & Politics*, a journal of the American Political Science Association.

"Based on the results of the 2008 presidential and congressional elections, an analysis using theories and methods of modern political science...suggests that the conditions are ripe for real policy change. Specifically, we should expect policies to move significantly in a more liberal direction, few or no policies should move in a conservative direction, and many of the outcomes will be moderate or somewhat left of center," observes Woon. His study is based on the "pivotal politics" theory and employs the concept of the "gridlock interval" to assess the likelihood of policy change in Obama administration.

Gridlock intervals define the political zone in which existing policies are unlikely to change given supermajority voting requirements for

overriding vetoes on the one hand, and overcoming filibusters on the other. His study explains that the predictions of policy change are based on an expected shift in the gridlock interval, which is the result not only of Obama's election but also of Democratic gains in the Senate.

The sheer magnitude of the study's predicted policy changes during the Obama presidency is historically significant. For example, Woon determines the shift in favor of policy change that occurred in 2008 as being about twice as large as the one that occurred with Bill Clinton's election in 1992. Perhaps even more telling is the study's assessment that the shift favoring policy changes was 40% larger in 2008 than in 1980 when Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter, and even twice as large than in 1932 when FDR was first elected.

"Modern political science's analytical theory and methods provide us with a scientific basis for confidently predicting that the promise of change will become a reality," concludes Woon. "Even if the tone in Washington remains shrill and partisan, we can expect to observe a significant leftward shift in policies and therefore a clean break from the policymaking of the past 14 years."

Source: American Political Science Association

Citation: Why policy changes during Obama presidency will be more significant than during Clinton, Reagan eras (2009, May 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-05-policy-obama-significant-clinton-reagan.html>

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