

Introduction

Images and proper nouns arise in a jumble as we reflect on the history and underpinnings of American policy making — the New Deal era, the Bush tax cuts, gridlock, electoral realignments, the congressional pork barrel, long Senate debates, midterm earthquakes, the Reagan upsurge of 1980, the Great Society of the 1960s, the Iraq Resolution of 2002. A great deal of complicated history has taken place and continues to do so.

Scholars try to bring order to jumbles like these. That can involve *theorizing*, a term that implies a universalistic kind of explanation. “Rational actor”-type accounts are one kind of example, although there are others. The scholarly role can also involve *generalizing*, which in the study of American policy making can quickly lead backward into a search for historical patterns. In political science, probably for good reason, the line between theorizing and generalizing is often blurry or invisible.¹ Ordinarily we aim for satisfying intellectual order regardless of whether theorizing and generalizing are being emphasized or blended.

As history unfolds, *learning* is another exercise of the scholarly life. Explanatory theories are crafted or updated as new political realities kick into place. On the generalizing side, a wonderful aspect of history is that it keeps adding new material for time-series patterns. Updating can thus take place in both the theoretical and the generalizing realms. Yet such updating doesn't seem to