



The Government Taketh Away: The Politics of Pain in the United States and Canada (American Governance and Public Policy series) (American Government and Public Policy)

Leslie A. Pal

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Democratic government is about making choices. Sometimes those choices involve the distribution of benefits. At other times they involve the imposition of some type of loss—a program cut, increased taxes, or new regulatory standards. Citizens will resist such impositions if they can, or will try to punish governments at election time. The dynamics of loss imposition are therefore a universal, if unpleasant, element of democratic governance. *The Government Taketh Away* examines the repercussions of unpopular government decisions in Canada and the United States, the two great democratic nations of North America.

Pal, Weaver, and their contributors compare the capacities of the U.S. presidential system and the Canadian Westminster system to impose different types of losses: symbolic losses (gun control and abortion), geographically concentrated losses (military base closings and nuclear waste disposal), geographically dispersed losses (cuts to pensions and to health care), and losses imposed on business (telecommunications deregulation and tobacco control). Theory holds that Westminster-style systems should, all things being equal, have a comparative advantage in loss imposition because they concentrate power and authority, though this can make it easier to pin blame on politicians too. The empirical findings of the cases in this book paint a more complex picture. Westminster systems do appear to have some robust abilities to impose losses, and US institutions provide more opportunities for loss-avoiders to resist government policy in some sectors. But in most sectors, outcomes in the two countries are strikingly similar.

The Government Taketh Away is essential for the scholar and students of public policy or comparative policy. It is also an important book for the average citizen who wants to know more about the complexities of living in a democratic society where the government can give—but how it can also, sometimes painfully, "taketh away."

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