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NASA PUBLIC OPINION AND THE FEDERAL BUDGET: ASTRONOMICAL EVENTS CAN SPARKING PUBLIC INTEREST IN SPACE.

Abstract

This paper will explore the factors influencing the budget for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration including economic growth (GDP per capita) and public opinion. These trends are interesting and relevant to the Astronomy and Astrophysics community through the funding aspect and the public association of NASA with Astronomy and space. Through evaluating data from the General Social Survey, U.S. Gross Domestic Product, Office of Management and Budget, this paper explores relationships between public opinion, economic trends and NASA's budget. Due to the drawbacks of GSS survey data, this paper also examines other relationships of public interest using Google Trends, most notably during the solar eclipse of 2017. Findings confirm previous studies that the NASA budget is infra marginally responsive to public opinion, significantly correlated with the previous year's GDP, and the 2017 eclipse did have an impact on searches for NASA. Implications of this research show that high economic trends result in more spending with little impact from public interest and other factors on how much money the national government spends on outer space. Implications for Space Policy include that though public opinion does not impact the NASA budget directly, important events in Astronomy can generate interest in NASA in regions that do not generally show interest. Given the public interest in astronomical events, space agencies can increase the transparency of the organization through education and outreach.