

Controversies over the Consequences of Divided Government in American Politics: The Perspective of Public Administration and Policy

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Abstract

In the past decade, research on “divided government” and “unified government” has become one of the salient issues in American politics. In light of the important theoretical implications of this field, this study focuses on public administration and policy, examining the consequences for it of divided and unified government. The paper examines the following issues: 1) whether or not the process of lawmaking experiences gridlock; 2) arguments on the quality of legislation; 3) the conduct of defense and foreign policies under divided government; 4) debates about coherence across policies; 5) differences in macroeconomic performance and the problem of rising fiscal deficits; 6) arguments on the promotion of social welfare; 7) highly public investigations in which congressional committees expose alleged misbehavior in the executive branch; and, 8) Congress’s thrust toward “micromanaging” the executive branch, reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration. Research on the consequences of divided government has produced some interesting findings and stimulated several lively controversies. In other words, the question — do policy gridlock, stalemate, deadlock, and

inefficiency arise under divided government? — remains contentious. This study concludes that divided government is an important issue in the study of public administration and policy, and is deserving of further academic attention from a comparative perspective.

Key Words: divided government, party government, split-ticket voting, policy-making, policy-implementation