The failure of Congress and the president to solve major problems:
- Immigration reform
- Social Security & Medicare's financial problems
- Move toward a balanced budget
- Prevent the gov’t from shutting down
- In general: Agree on major legislation and pass it

What is Gridlock?

- United vs. Divide Gov’t: Presidency-House-Senate under control of one or both parties
- Question: Do divided or unified gov’ts pass more major legislation?
  - Many presume that united gov’t yields bigger policy changes
  - Evidence suggests not so, but some dispute this

With United Gov’t, Will Gridlock End?

- GOP Senate margin of 52 suggests: No
  - Senate Democrats can filibuster legislation
  - GOP holds 52 seats; Democrats 48 (with 2 allies)
- Budget bills cannot be filibustered
  - Affordable Care Act most important example
  - GOP is using same tactic to replace it
  - Cut in EPA & elsewhere can be done with budget

With United Gov’t, Will Gridlock End?

A Measure of Gridlock

- Gridlock occurs because of constitutional design & rules (e.g., the filibuster)
- Gridlock would lessen if we had unified, majoritarian democracy
  - Unified government, rather than divided
  - President - House - Senate divisions
  - Simple Majority rule, rather than requiring supermajorities (e.g., veto override)

Why Gridlock? Reason 1

- David Mayhew, Divided We Govern, 1991, 2005
Recall Madison’s design to prevent tyranny

- Our system of representation leads to dispersed power
  - Competing groups control different power points

- This leads to gridlock (which prevents tyranny)
  - Control of any step in the process allows a group to block legislation

Why Gridlock? Reason 2

- Polarization among legislators
  - The political distance between the parties is growing

- Think about issues:
  - Balance the budget
  - Raise taxes
  - Same sex marriage

- Polarization = Wide gap between parties
  - Parties can be moving left while the gap grows

Barriers to Legislation

- Attention
- Hearings
- Subcommittee majority
- Full committee majority
- Rules Committee (in the House)
- Getting to the Floor
  - Speaker discretion (House)
  - Hold or Potential filibuster (Senate)
- Floor passage
- House-Senate agreement
- Presidential signature
- Supreme Court review

10,000 bills submitted

350 laws passed

Why Gridlock? Reason 2

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- Polarization = Wide gap between parties
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Hare, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2014

Hare, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2014
Why Gridlock? Reason 3

- Party activists have been polarizing, not just legislators
- Activists dominate nominations
  - Democratic activists work for liberal candidates; Republicans for conservatives
- Activists are most likely to contact MCs
- The public has not polarized

Why Gridlock? Reason 4

- Rise of anti-govt rhetoric building distrust
  - If people do not trust the gov’t, they will not turn to it for solutions
  - Favors goal of small government
- Rise of conflict between parties
  - When people see nasty fights in D.C., they do not trust gov’t

Solutions to Gridlock:
Mann & Ornstein: Fix the party system

- Redistricting Reform: End “Gerrymandering”
  - Reapportionment every ten years
  - Drawing lines to make safe districts

Maryland 3rd (John Sarbanes, Dem)

- 1950s: Public trusts government
  - People turned to gov’t for help
  - Politicians said to build the economy:
    - Expand public education
    - Build an Interstate Highway system
- 2000s: Trust is low
  - Affordable Care Act was a tough sell

- Why Gridlock? Reason 4
- Why Gridlock? Reason 4

- Mann & Ornstein claim that this is Newt Gingrich’s strategy
  - They may be right, but both sides are pushing party conflict to new heights
  - “It takes two to fight”

- Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, It’s Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism
Redistricting Reform: Non-partisan commission to draw district lines (e.g., Calif.)
  - Assumption: Safe districts elect polarized politicians
  - Reality: Growing polarization regardless of districts
    - Senators becoming more polarized
    - Polarization rising in both safe & marginal districts
      • But some evidence that it makes a small difference

Open Primaries: run off among top 2
  - California Prop 14 in 2010
  - Assumption: Moderates/independents will beat extremists

Bibliography

4. Mann & Ornstein: Fix the party system