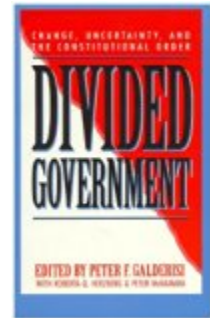


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Peter Galderisi, Roberta Q. Herzberg, Peter McNamara, eds. *Divided Government: Change, Uncertainty, and the Constitutional Order*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996. xi + 240 pp. \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-8296-6; \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8295-9.

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One in a series (Studies in American Political Institutions and Public Policy, James W. Caeser, general editor) seeking to answer the question of how institutions and policies best function to sustain a liberal democratic government in the United States, Peter Galderisi and his fellow editors contribute to this endeavor by surveying a recently revived scholarly interest in the subject of divided government. Through their survey, they redefine the conceptualization of divided government and argue that its roots go far deeper than solitary explanations of partisan politics or weakened American voters' party identification will allow. By broadening its scope, the existence of divided government can be traced throughout American political history. Indeed, divided government is mandated by the U.S. Constitution through the governing of separate institutions (the division of government functions between the executive, legislative and judicial branches), and is controlled by explicit checks and balances. In addition to this decentralization of power across three branches, the Constitution also subjects those branches (and divisions within the legislative branch, e.g., the bicameral and thus divided legislature) to separate periods of electoral evaluation.

Separation of powers was designed to make the exercise of political power difficult and is based on at least two basic premises: (1) the Framers' intent not to recreate a government with centralized power (as they saw King George's rule in Great Britain during the U.S. colonial period and the American Revolution); and (2) the idea traced to political philosopher John Locke that the exercise of government power must be limited so that the liberties of the people cannot be easily trampled. Even more to the point, the Constitution is a document written in a period of time when the Framers did not believe

in the efficacy (or even in the existence) of what we know today as political parties. In essence, divided government is the stuff from which politics are made.

Some political pundits speak about the existence of divided government pejoratively. Indeed, many people today point to contemporary problems in government such as policy grid-lock within Congress and between the branches as examples of the problem with government, as if the existence of unified government (defined here in the narrow sense that the same party controls both the executive and legislative branches simultaneously) somehow enables policy-making. The text's contributors don't want you to be too quick to view divided government as a necessarily negative phenomenon. As identified in the text, the United States has seen divided government more often than not. Because U.S. political parties are coalitions of interests and are not strictly ideologically driven, a unified government does not mean partisan heaven for a president faced with his own party's control of the legislature (e.g., see Jimmy Carter's experience during his only term in office and Bill Clinton's first two years in office).

The editors remind us that Bill Clinton's early policy successes (NAFTA in particular) were the result of an ability to gain support from legislators of the other party—the Republicans—without much vocal backing from fellow Democrats in Congress, especially the so-called Old (left-leaning) Democrats. According to the editors, this instance of a Democratic majority in Congress directly opposing a Democratic president, "certainly cast doubt on the traditional views of the positive effects of unified party control and may have actually helped the Republicans capture Congress in 1994" (p. 3). Although

many scholars contend that the propulsion of the conservative tide which landed a majority of Republicans in both houses of Congress in 1994 for the first time since the 1950's was fueled by such important factors as the state of the economy and redistricting based on the 1990 census, it certainly is not difficult to understand that the American electorate does not make a concerted effort to avoid divided government, due to its continued prevalence in American politics.

Divided Government contains intellectual contributions from a number of important political scientists and historians who together build a well-argued overview of divided government's existence and causes. Beginning with historian Joel Silby's generous historical perspective in "Divided Government in Historical Perspective, 1789-1996" in which he traces "pre-modern" divided government through three distinct time frames, the reader is led to contemporary discussions by Sidney Milkis, "The New Deal, the Modern Presidency, and Divided Government," Gary Jacobson, "Divided Government and the 1994 Elections," and Morris P. Fiorina, "The Causes and Consequences of Divided Government: Lessons of 1992-1994."

Discussion about the factors underlying the existence of divided government is quite ably handled by John Petrocik's and Joseph Doherty's illustrative "The Road to Divided Government: Paved without Intention," and its influences on policy-making are explored in depth in the chapters by Leroy N. Rieselbach and co-editor Roberta Q. Herzberg respectively. To round out the discussion, Peter McNamara posits a forward-looking perspective on the future of divided government in "Doing One's Job: A Constitutional Principle and a Political Strategy for an Uncertain Future," and reminds us that the existence of divided government is complex and should not be construed as being strictly controlled by the hands of a consciously "balancing" electorate. For example, Petrocik and Doherty find evidence which supports the image of a "ticket-splitting" electorate seeking to reward the dominant parties as they (the voters) perceive the ownership of issues by certain parties or candidates based on those

candidates' campaign rhetoric (p. 90).

Through my reading of the text, some questions came to mind, in part because of the expanded treatment of divided government. For example, if we are to go beyond partisan control in defining the concept, are we perhaps weakening discussion by including too many contextual factors, or are we strengthening the analysis through inclusion of such factors as different electoral cycles and campaign seasons, the effects of separation of powers, and, of course, partisan control? Is this definition of divided government generalizable across nations from a comparative perspective, or is it a uniquely American phenomenon due to the nature of our type of representative government at the federal level (a presidential not parliamentary form)? Finally, could we extend this analytical framework to state government and examine policy-making relations within and between the legislative and executive branches (e.g., in California, our "plural" executive branch has a shared policy-making amongst several public officials with different party affiliations and different mandates from the polity)?

These questions do not detract from the usefulness of this text in the classroom. I recommend this book to anyone teaching a national American policy-making course taking a thematic approach as a worthy inclusion to the course syllabus. The discussion this book would elicit in any upper-division undergraduate course, or graduate survey course, would clearly identify the causes and consequences of the American policy-making environment. The empirical evidence supporting these chapters is well referenced, with several chapters including clear charts and graphs. In addition, the bibliography provides a good starting point for students wanting to undertake a literature search of some of the most important scholars and practitioners in American government.

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