Chapter 1

Introduction

Divided nation. Polarized America. These are the terms conspicuously used when the media, party elites, and voters describe the United States today. Every day, various news media report a profound split in the populace and the government on numerous issues, and the nation appears to be sharply divided based on partisanship. On December 17 to 19, 2010, CNN Opinion Research Corporation asked poll respondents whether they hoped that President Barack Obama's policies would succeed or fail.[1] The poll revealed a stark difference in the response between Democratic and Republican voters. While 89 percent of the Democratic voters responded that they hoped Obama's policies would succeed, only 27 percent of the Republican voters responded the same. In fact, 61 percent of Republican voters answered that they hoped Obama's policies would fail, whereas 5 percent of the Democratic voters responded the same. On June 28, 2012, the Supreme Court upheld President Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) bill, which included the individual mandate requiring most Americans to have health insurance or to pay a penalty. In a few days, several polls unveiled that Americans were divided on the landmark decision by the Supreme Court. A poll conducted by Gallup showed that 46 percent of Americans agreed with the court's ruling, while 46 percent said they disagreed. Opinions were divided along party lines: 79 percent of Democrats agreed with the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the president's law while 83 percent of Republicans disagreed with the ruling.[2]

Researchers note that partisan differences on political issues have significantly widened in past decades. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center reports that the average difference between the opinions of Republican and Democratic voters on 48 political and social issues stands at 18 percentage points as of 2012.[3] This is nearly twice

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the size of the gap in a similar survey conducted in 1988. Brewer and Stonecash (2007) posit that the increasing income inequality and the emergence of cultural issues heightened the political divide along party lines in the nation. The analysts note that since 1960, the income of the high-income Americans has been increasing whereas the income of low-income Americans is declining. Also, since the 1980s, various cultural issues have emerged, such as homosexuality, abortion, gun control, church-state relationship, and so on. Brewer and Stonecash (2007) explain that these cultural controversies, in addition to the deep division in economic class, split the populace along party lines, which have propelled polarized policy alternatives on such cultural issues.

As for the government, division between party elites appears to be even deeper than the division in the populace today. During the 2008 presidential election, both the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates frequently pledged to build bipartisanship. Nonetheless, on February 11, 2009, less than a month after the inauguration of President Obama, the newly convened 111th Congress narrowly passed a $787 billion economic stimulus package with no support from any Republican House members and the support of only three Republican senators. Thus, in just a few weeks after the inauguration of the new president and Congress, it was revealed that the American government remained severely divided. On December 24, 2009, the Senate passed a landmark law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. This so-called Obamacare bill was passed by a vote of 60 to 39, a vote divided along party lines. Although all Democratic senators and two Independents voted for the legislation, all but one Republican senator voted against the bill. Similarly, the House vote on the measure was also divided along party lines. The House passed the bill with a vote of 219 to 212 on March 21, 2010, with all of the Republicans members voting against the measure. The next day, the House Republicans introduced a bill to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Furthermore, on December 15, 2010, the Democratic-majority House passed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act to end barring openly homosexual persons from military service, with the support of only fifteen Republican members. Three days later, the Senate passed the measure with the support of only eight Republican senators.

Thus, the ideological schism currently appears to be at its pinnacle in the realm of the public, as well as the government. However, there are some indicators that seem to proffer a revision in the myth of a "polarized America." Pertaining to the American electorate, for

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instance, some studies indicate that a majority of voters remain moderate and the overall ideological proclivity of the populace has not changed much in the past few decades (Fiorina and Abrams 2009; Fiorina et al. 2011; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Hetherington 2009; Levendusky 2009). Fiorina et al. (2011) examine the preferences of voters on various controversial issues, including abortion and gay marriage. The findings suggest that the preferences of voters have been stable for decades and most voters have been moderate.

Figure 1.1 shows the percentages of voters who self-identify as moderate, slightly conservative, or slightly liberal in the General Social Survey (GSS).[4] The figure suggests that a majority of voters are moderate, slightly conservative, or slightly liberal, and this has been the case for decades. Although the percentage of voters that say they are moderate, slightly conservative, or slightly liberal, marginally decreased in the late 1980s, the number has been remarkably stable in the past few decades and has accounted for approximately 65 percent of the populace. As for pure moderates, not including slightly conservative or slightly liberal, moderate has been the largest, if not a majority, group in the electorate for decades. Moderate voters have accounted for approximately 40 per-

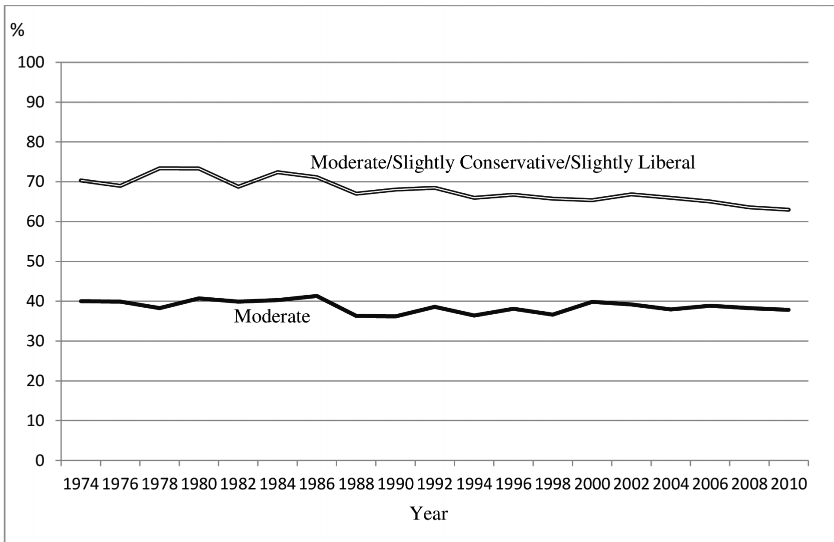

Figure 1.1. Percentage of Moderate, Slightly Conservative or Slightly Liberal: GSS 1974–2010

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cent of the populace. Thus, Figure 1.1 does not illustrate any significant decrease in the percentages of the aforementioned groups. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, overall, there was no significant change in voters' ideology in the past few decades, and a majority of the electorate has always been moderate, slightly liberal, or slightly conservative.

Fiorina et al. (2011) expound that the appearance of an ideological split in the public is due to the elevated homogeneity in voters' ideology *within* parties, which resulted in greater distance in the voters' preferences *between* parties (Fiorina and Abrams 2009; Fiorina et al. 2011; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006). In this *party-sorting* thesis, the Fiorina school posits that whereas the aggregate distributions of conservative, liberal, and moderate voters have remained similar for decades, conservative voters in the Democratic Party and liberal voters in the Republican Party diminished, thereby extending the ideological difference between Democratic and Republican voters.

As for party elites, scholars began to notice an increase in partisanship in the 1990s (i.e., Aldrich 1995; Bond and Fleisher 2000; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1995). In 2013, Keith Poole studied the difference between Republican and Democratic parties in voting preferences in Congress, and noted that as of 2012 the polarization within the House and the Senate was at the highest level since the end of Reconstruction.[5] While several scholars measured a degree of polarization in Congress with a difference between the two parties on ideological indices, effectually none have studied the ideological shifts of the two parties separately. When researchers have studied the causes and effects of the ideological divide in Congress, they measured polarization as a unitary, monistic development. The tacit and untested premise was that *both* the Democratic and the Republican parties moved away from the ideological center. Thus, potentially differential dynamics for the ideological shifts of the Democratic and Republican parties in Congress, separately, were not studied.

Figure 1.2 reports the mean values of the DW-Nominate Dimension 1 scores, henceforth Nominate scores, of Republicans and Democrats in the House. The Nominate scores, which indicate congressional members' ideological predilections, are constructed based on legislators' voting preferences through roll call votes. Predicated upon an assumption of legislators with single-peaked preferences in Euclidean space, the Nominate scale produces ideal points and cutting planes for the roll call votes that maximize the number of correctly classified voting decisions (Poole 2005).[6] The values of the Nominate score assigned to each

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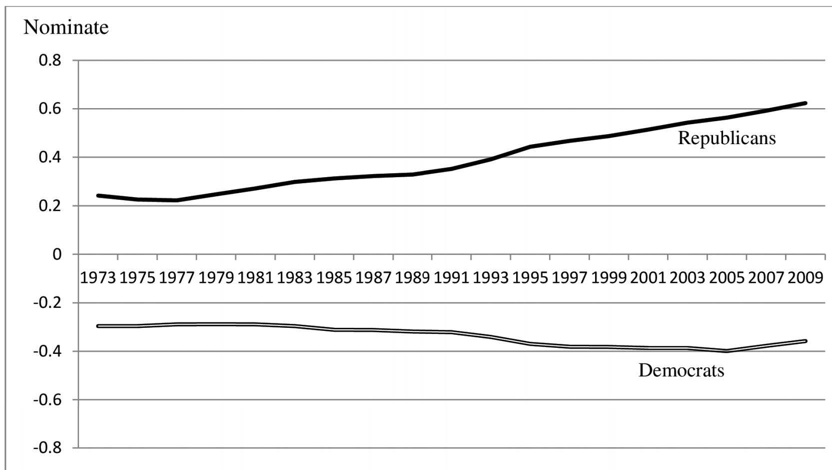

Figure 1.2. Nominate Scores in the House: 1973–2010

legislator range from –1, most liberal, to +1, most conservative.[7] As shown in Figure 1.2, the preferences of House Democrats have been stable most of the time. Figure 1.2 displays a moderate leftward shift of Democratic members in the early to mid-1990s. However, the ideology of House Democrats generally remained similar after 1997 and slightly moved in the conservative direction after 2005. In stark contrast to the ideology of Democrats, Figure 1.2 reveals a sizable conservative shift of House Republicans. The rightward swing by Republicans began in the early 1980s, and the rightward shift has continued until today. Overall, while the mean Nominate score of House Democrats changed by approximately 0.06, which is only 3 percent of the two-point scale, over the years 1973 to 2010 the score of Republican members shifted by approximately 0.38, 19 percent of the scale.

Figure 1.3 shows the mean Nominate scores of Republicans and Democrats in the Senate. As shown in the figure, the ideology of Democratic and Republican senators exhibit movements parallel to their House counterparts. The ideology of Democratic senators has been stable most of the time. Although the ideology of Democratic senators slightly moved toward the left in the early to mid-1990s, it has remained similar since 1997. For Republican senators, similar to the House Republicans, the rightward swing began in the early 1980s and the conservative shift

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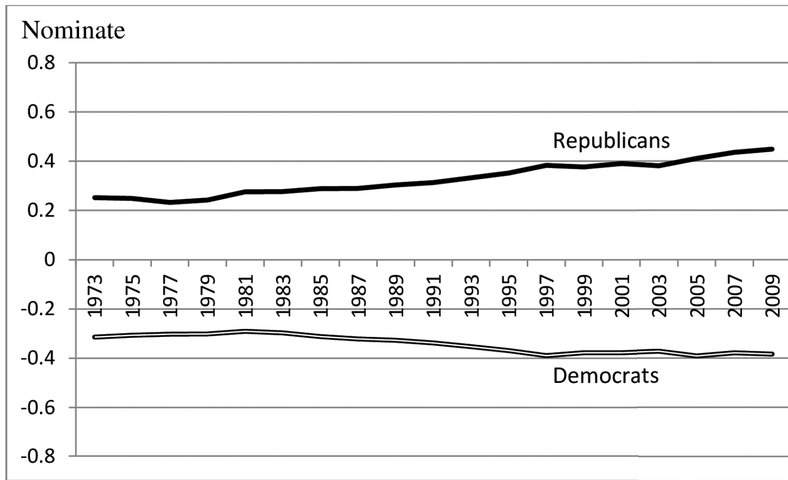

Figure 1.3. Nominate Scores in the Senate: 1973–2010

has continued today. While the mean Nominate score of Democratic senators changed by approximately 0.07, which is less than 4 percent of the two-point scale, during the years 1973 to 2010, the score of Republican senators shifted by approximately 0.20, which is 10 percent of the scale. Thus, the ideological shift by Republican senators is far larger than that of Democratic senators, if smaller than that of House Republican members. These findings on ideological shifts of Democratic and Republican parties in the House and the Senate indicate that the so-called polarization in Congress is mostly due to a conservative shift by the Republican members. The ideology of Democratic members in Congress has been stable, and has mostly remained similar.

The Chicken or the Egg?

To the populace and researchers, it may appear that both elected officials and voters have *simultaneously* become more partisan in the past few decades. Several public opinion scholars posit that the polarization between party elites *ex ante* is causal to the divide among partisan voters *ex post* (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Hetherington 2001, 2009; Layman and Carsey 2002; Fiorina 2006; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006;

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Levendusky 2009). Fiorina (2006) predicates that polarization in partisan voters is a consequence of elite polarization, indicating that a shift in the ideological disposition of the elite causes a change in voters' preferences within parties. Fiorina explains that the Democratic Party and Republican Party held a substantial amount of conservative and liberal voters, respectively, before the 1980s. However, in the 1980s, with the increased ideological split among party elites, conservative voters in the Democratic Party and liberal voters in the Republican Party either assimilated their preferences to their party elites' ideology or switched to the ideologically more relevant parties. This then resulted in the heightened homogeneity within parties, and a deeper divide between parties.

Fiorina's explanation exemplifies the *elite cue* thesis in the new orthodoxy of post-Zallerian literature. Several public opinion scholars maintain that elite ideology and behavior are the core instruments in individual opinion change (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Hetherington 2001; Brewer 2005, Layman and Carsey 2002; Zaller 1992; Page and Shapiro 1992; Carmines and Stimson 1989). However, some researchers on legislative politics inversely postulate that the preferences of partisan voters influence the ideology of party elites (Miller and Stokes 1963; Fiorina 1974; Peltzman 1984; Enelow and Hinich 1989; Erikson and Romero 1990; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Clinton 2006; Aldrich et al. 2008). Fenno (1978) explicates that fellow partisan voters are an essential component of what he calls "reelection constituencies," which are the reliable supporters for incumbent congressional members' reelection campaigns. Fenno notes that legislators maintain proximity between their overall voting records and the preferences of their reelection constituencies.

Thus, in contrast to the elite cue thesis, the symmetry between elite polarization and the divide in partisan voters could be a result of influence of the mass on elites. Because of increasing partisan voting in congressional elections and the growing amount of one-party dominant constituencies, strategic incumbents who seek reelection would target their partisan members for supportive votes (Goldenberg and Traugott 1984; Herrnson 2008). Accordingly, incumbent members of Congress are likely to maintain voting records and policy positions concurrent with the median preference of their partisan voters. In chapter 4, a Vector Autoregression (VAR) model is employed to examine whether changes in the preferences of members in Congress lead to changes in the ideology of partisan voters, or vice versa.

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Does It Matter?

Does the ideological polarization in government, which is largely due to the rightward shift of Republican elites, have any impact on policy making? It seems to be self-evident that the ideological divide in government would have an adversarial effect on legislative efficacy. However, there have been few empirical studies on the potential consequences of polarization on legislative output or efficacy. Within the scarce literature, scholars tend to observe that the polarization in the American government causes *gridlock*, which is governmental inability to change policy (McCarty 2007; Binder 2008; Brady, Ferejohn, and Harbridge 2008). McCarty (2007) notes a negative relationship between the ideological divide in Congress and the number of important laws enacted. Brady, Ferejohn, and Harbridge (2008) find a relationship between polarization and the budget incrementalism in environmental and energy policies, if not in other policies. Also, Binder (2008) observes that polarization reduces the confirmation rate of judicial nominees.

As for the causal mechanism of the polarization-gridlock thesis, the ideological split in government could amplify the difficulty of building a coalition to pass legislation. Scholars observe that polarization in Congress hinders bipartisan support for bills, which is necessary for the passage of legislation to occur. Brady, Ferejohn, and Harbridge predicate that "as polarization of the congressional parties increases, Congress will be less able to sustain the coalitions needed to pass legislative changes" (2008, 195). More formerly, McCarty (2007) advances that polarization increases the width of the so-called gridlock interval between the supermajoritarian pivots, maintaining that a widened gridlock interval causes gridlock.[8]

However, this book explains that even if the gridlock interval is large, the government is more likely to enact laws to change policy when the ideological location of the gridlock interval significantly changes. The supermajoritarian school (Krehbiel 1996, 1998; Brady and Volden 1998, 2006) expound that forty-one senators[9] could successfully filibuster a bill that would move the status quo policy away from their preferences. Also, in conjunction with the presidential veto, one-third plus one congressional members whose preference is more extreme than the president's preference in *either* chamber, could reject legislation that would move the status quo policy away from their preferences. Consequently, policy cannot be changed when its status quo is in the gridlock interval between the ideal points of veto and filibuster pivots. Accordingly, in

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chapter 5, this book explains that regardless of the *width* of the gridlock interval, a significant *change* in the position of the gridlock interval would release the hitherto status quo policies from the old gridlock interval for a policy change.

This book also studies the influence of polarization and the supermajoritarian features in American government on the presidential veto and congressional override of veto, since the veto and override are exerted on much salient and divisive agendas and a sustained veto and overridden veto would indicate gridlock and policy change, respectively. In chapter 6, this book explains that uncertainty in the ideologue legislators' voting behavior and the ideological distance between the preferences of the president and the veto pivot, but not polarization, affect the numbers of sustained and overridden vetoes.

Plan of the Book

As suggested in the previous sections, scholars and the public hold some presumptions about polarization that have not been adequately tested. This book examines some of these assumptions, offers different explanations and tests the hypotheses derived from the alternative theories. The following chapter examines various measures of ideological shifts of voters in the electorate. The chapter reveals that the overall ideological configuration of the public has remained mostly the same in the past few decades. However, the chapter exhibits a moderate rightward shift in the ideology of Republican voters and a small leftward swing in the ideology of Democratic voters. In addition, the chapter examines the percentages of liberals among Republican voters and conservatives among Democratic voters in the years 1974 to 2010, and the results show a significant decrease in the indicators since the 1990s. Overall, these findings support the party sorting thesis by Fiorina et al. (Fiorina and Abrams 2009; Fiorina et al. 2011; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006).

Chapter 3 explores the ideology of members of Congress in the years 1955 to 2010. The findings show an extensive conservative shift of Republican members over the decades, in contrast to a modest liberal movement by southern Democrats and stable preferences of nonsouthern Democratic members. Contrary to the "Southern Realignment" thesis, the results indicate that the Democratic Party in Congress maintained a similar amount of members from the South in the 1960s and 1970s. The conservative shift in the ideology of the Republican Party

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began in the early 1980s. Also, the Vector Autoregression (VAR) model tests the relationship between the ideology of southern Democrats and the percentage of Democratic members in the South. Contrary to the southern realignment thesis, which posits that the evaporation of centrist Democrats in the South caused the leftward shift in the ideology of southern Democrats, the results rather indicate that the liberal shift of southern Democrats *ex ante* negatively influenced the percentage of Democratic members in the South *ex post*. In addition, the chapter examines the relationship between the income inequality and the ideological shifts of partisan members. The findings suggest that the changes in percentage distributions of the aggregate income by the lowest quintile and the top quintile populations, respectively, have no significant impact on the changes in the ideology of Democratic and Republican members in Congress. Thus, there is unlikely a causal relationship between the income inequality in the nation and the ideological divide in Congress.

In chapter 4, the Vector Autoregression analysis tests whether changes in the preferences of members of Congress lead to changes in the ideology of partisan voters, or vice versa. The findings indicate that the ideological shift of House Republicans affects the change in Republican voters' preferences, which in turn influences the ideology of Senate Republicans. In contrast, the findings suggest no relationship between the ideology of Democratic legislators and Democratic voters. Also, the VAR model examines if the changes in ideology of partisan legislators influence the preferences of the voters in the *opposition* party. The results suggest that the rightward shift in ideology of Republican House members and senators result in the leftward shift of Democratic voters. This indicates that as Republican elites became more conservative on various issues, conservative voters in the Democratic Party switched to the Republican Party.

Chapter 5 examines the influence of polarization on policy change, which is the inverse of gridlock, as measured by the passage of important laws selected by Americans for Democratic Action in twenty-eight Congresses from 1955 to 2011. The findings indicate that polarization does not hamper policy change. Rather, policy change is influenced by the width of *residuum* in the supermajoritarian, pivotal gridlock interval. The pivotal residuum is a portion of the pivotal gridlock interval of the previous Congress not overlapped by the pivotal interval of the new Congress, whereas the pivotal gridlock interval is the ideological interval between the ideal points of veto pivot members and filibuster pivot members in Congress. The empirical findings suggest that when

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there is a wide residuum in the pivotal gridlock interval, there are more enactments of important laws to change policies.

In chapter 6, the influence of polarization and the supermajoritarian mechanism in the government on the presidential veto and congressional override of veto are studied. The chapter proffers that a sustained veto and overridden veto lead to questions as to why Congress passes bills that are likely to be successfully vetoed by the president and why the president exerts vetoes that are likely to be successfully overridden by Congress. The study explores the ideological, as well as political, contexts, and examines the influence of uncertainty in the pivotal members' voting behavior, ideological distance between the president and the veto pivot, and presidential popularity.

Chapter 7 examines the question of whether partisan discipline in U.S. Congress causes polarization in legislators' voting preferences (partisan effect), or if the polarization in legislators' *individualistic* preferences generates the appearance of partisanship (preferential effect). In a study of 28 Congresses from 1955 to 2011, the Vector Autoregression model tests the relationship between party unity on party-split votes and the ideological radicalization of members within parties. In addition, the VAR model examines the relationship between party unity and the ideological homogeneity within parties. The results suggest that party unities in Democratic and Republican parties, measured by the party unity scores, are substantially responsive to homogeneity and radicalization of the legislators' preferences within parties. In contrast, the results show minimal indication for the impact of party unity on members' preferential configuration within parties. This suggests that the ideological shifts in legislators' individualistic preferences are likely to be causal for the facet of intensified partisanship. The book concludes in chapter 8 by addressing the findings on polarization. This chapter also discusses the influences of polarization on the efficacy of American government.

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