

The Deadlock of Inefficient Decision-making of the US Government

-- Illustrated by Medical Insurance Reform

Jiaxuan Lang

Faculty of Public Administration, Humanities and Arts, Dalian Maritime University. Dalian, China

langjiaxuan178@163.com

Abstract

In recent years, the social division of the United States is becoming more prominent owing to the deepened division of the two major political parties. The opposition between the two parties' ideologies and policies is increasingly transmitted to the political operation level through a system of decentralized checks and balances. In addition, interest groups with strong influence are also exerting influence on government's Decision-making, which not only hinders the Decision-making efficiency of the U.S. government, but also has caused serious social impact. With the gradual deepening of social division in the United States, the differences between the two parties are likely to expand, and for the United States to eradicate the deadlock of inefficient government Decision-making would become more troublesome.

Keywords

Decision-making Efficiency; Decentralized System of Checks and Balances; Polarization of the Two Parties; Social Divisions.

1. Introduction

Political realities, such as swinging medical reform plans, and delays in passing gun control, have caused the academic circle to reach an agreement of US government's inefficiency in Decision-making. Consequently, the reasons for such inefficiency have attracted academic interest.

Some scholars believe that the system of separation of powers is the root for the inefficient Decision-making of the U.S. government. Fukuyama points out that the division of power in the U.S. leads to periodic power struggles between branches and conflicts for dominance. Different parts of the government can easily ground other parts work to a halt by acting as "vetoers" [1]. Jie Dalei believes that political polarization, coupled with the system of checks and balances in the United States, has resulted in inefficient government Decision-making [2]. Indeed, the inefficiency of Decision-making in the United States is the result of many factors: the increasing social division in the United States is transmitted to its political parties through elections, then to the process of political operations.

2. Case Study: The Zigzagging Path of American Health Insurance Reform

2.1. Decision-making Deadlock under the System of Decentralized Checks and Balances

The distrust towards government organizations has led the United States to form a system of decentralized checks and balances to restrict public power. Firstly, the United States

implements a system of separation of powers. The executive, legislative and judicial departments, as well as the Senate and the House of Representatives in the legislative branch, can hinder one another easily through exerting power given by constitution. Although the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" was passed by the House of Representatives in 2010, it was accused of partly unconstitutional. In June 2012, the Federal Supreme Court ruled that "the clauses that require states to participate in expanded Medicaid programs with federal funds as conditions are unconstitutional" [3]. This is a typical restriction of judicial power on legislative power, and ultimately eroded the achievements of Obamacare.

In addition, restrictions also exist between the federal government and state governments in the United States. The U.S. Constitution lists the powers enjoyed by the federal government, although it does not stipulate the powers of the states, other powers that are not listed as federal powers and all that not prohibited by the constitution are reserved power for the state government. Both the federal and state government powers come from the constitution and are to be regarded as the highest power to a certain degree. And "since the 1970s, the rise of new federalism advocated the return of power to the state and the government to the people. The state government should enjoy more financial and policy-making powers. The power of the state government has actually expanded, which in-turn creates a restrictive effect on the federal government"[4]. The "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" was opposed by 26 states after its passage, and the chief legal officers of 13 states sued the federal court claiming the "personal provisions" of the bill as unconstitutional. In this case, republicans and some interest groups made use of the checks and balances function of the state government to impede the federal government, and ultimately made part of the bill impossible to implement [3].

2.2. Inefficient Decision-making under the Polarization of the Two Parties

In the past, the system of decentralized checks and balances functioned well and played an important role in the stability and development of American society, but why has the government's Decision-making been inefficient in recent years? Some scholars believe that this is caused by the polarization of the two parties in the United States. With the widening of the wealth gap in the United States and the increase in the proportion of people of color, the American social classes are gradually becoming more divided, problems with group identity and racial identity also arise. These have led to the gradual division of political views and ideologies in American society. The division of voters is conducted through elections to the political party [5]. Coupled with the division of constituencies, the changes in the bipartisan voter structure, and the ever-increasing democratic degree of parties' primary elections, this division has made it easier for candidates with extreme ideologies and policy stances to win the election [2, 6]. This situation has led to increasing polarization between the two parties. In order to prevent the other one from taking an advantageous position, both parties would apply methods to prevent the other one's bill from being passed. During the entire medical insurance reforming process, almost all the retrogression or shelving of the reform was supported by the Republican Party. Clinton attempted to promoted health insurance reform, but when the Clinton administration submitted the reform plan to Congress, the Republican Party started delaying it. However, the plan could not get on the agenda until the day before Congress adjourned. After that, the Republican Party put it on hold on the grounds that the bill was lengthy and could not be reviewed during the remaining session. In September 1994, the Republican Party also used the approval of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade as a bargaining chip to force the Democratic Party abandon medical insurance reform [3]. Moreover, the two parties in the United States alternate in power and a president's term of office does not exceed 8 years. With different ideologies and policy positions, the presidential policies of different parties or even the same party may be very different. In this sense, the current president's policies can easily be shelved or abolished by the next president. For example,

Theodore Roosevelt proposed to establish universal health insurance in 1901, but with Wilson's victory, this proposal was shelved. Moreover, Kennedy and Johnson also strived to promote medical insurance reform, and in 1965, Congress passed the Medical Care and Medical Assistance Act. Later, Nixon also reached a preliminary consensus on medical insurance reform by negotiations with the Democratic Party. However, as Nixon stepped down, medical insurance reform was stopped again. After Reagan came to power, government spending was drastically cut, and medical insurance reform did not get any milestone under Reagan and Bush's republican administration for 12 years[8]. The two parties in the United States use the system of decentralized checks and balances to manipulate Congress and judicial power, and through the president-elect to shelve or abolish policies that diverge with them, which "results in increasing legislative stagnations, compromises and severe political deadlocks"[7].

2.3. Checks and Balances of Interest Groups

Interest groups in the United States are important participants in political Decision-making. They exert strong political influence and intervene in public choices by providing political contributions, supporting candidates, and lobbying. Interest groups often represent different interests and sometimes can be in conflict with one another. Therefore, in the process of Decision-making, the government not only needs to reconcile the contradictions of interest groups, but also needs to coordinate the interests of interest groups with public interest. Therefore, once the decision made by government harms the interests of interest groups, the government would face tremendous resistance from them. The government effort to negotiate and maneuver amongst many interest groups, which ultimately leads to inefficiency in Decision-making.

Interest groups such as the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Labor Union all have intervened in the reform of medical insurance. After winning the election, Truman hoped to establish a national medical insurance plan, but AMA took advantage of the anti-socialist sentiment during the Cold War and its strong economic power to vigorously declare that comprehensive medical insurance was "socialist medical" and should be boycotted. Consequently, the reform eventually met its downfall [8].

3. Conclusion

Since the 1970s, with the ever-widening economic gap in the United States and the emergence of identity crisis, the political polarization of the two parties in the United States has been intensifying. Coupled with the system of checks and balances in the United States, the two parties are preventing each other's bills on numerous issues from getting passed, including legislation, executive orders, immigration, medical insurance, gun control and environmental protection, etc.

As the degree of social division in the United States intensifies, it may not be much probable to improve the status quo of the inefficient Decision-making of the US government anytime soon. The United States has now realized the importance of re-integrating society, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, bridging the identity gap for different ethnic groups and consensus for the two parties. However, due to the serious social division and political antagonism, any proactive adjustment made by the United States itself would be extreme difficult.

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