Introduction: Volume 19 No. 4: The US Senate

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The US Senate intrigues and frustrates many. Despite its past characterizations as “the world’s greatest deliberative body,” many now see it as unrepresentative and as dominated by minority rule and obstruction. In this volume we look at how the Senate got to where it is, the role of the filibuster and the prospects for change. We also include an assessment of the first year of the Biden administration.

Carlos Algara and Savannah Johnston first address how the polarization of American politics has registered in the Senate, with party voting steadily increasing over time. As this polarization has risen, the use of the filibuster has also increased over time. Steven S. Smith documents how use of the filibuster has evolved. The origins and use of the filibuster is an important matter to understand and Daniel Wirls reviews the history of using it and what purposes were pursued while using it.

The filibuster has drawn so much attention because of how it has affected the work of the Senate.

Molly E Reynolds examines how the filibuster has led to the use of reconciliation to try to get legislation through the deadlock of the Senate. Jason M. Roberts and Emily M. Cottle focus on how well the Senate is able to process presidential nominations for administrative positions and judicial appointments.

Although party polarization and the filibuster are often seen as paralyzing majorities in the Senate, Sarah Binder finds evidence that there is a gradual movement toward increasing the powers of the majority and limiting the minority. Equally interesting, James M Curry and Frances E. Lee argue that an important matter limiting majorities from enacting their agenda is the internal diversity and inability to reach agreement within each party.

Finally, after a year of the Biden presidency, Nicholas F. Jacobs and Sidney M. Milkis review the administration’s efforts and successes and how frustrations with Congress continue the push for the executive office to take a greater role in setting public policy.


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