“Gridlock is not a modern legislative condition. Although the term is said to have entered the American political lexicon after the 1980 elections, Alexander Hamilton complained more than two centuries ago about stalemate, at the time rooted in the design of the Continental Congress.”

“In many ways, stalemate, a frequent consequence of separated institutions sharing and competing for power, seems endemic to American politics. Periods of lawmaking prowess are the exception, rather than the norm.”

“Lawmaking is the process by which governments ‘legitimize substantive and procedural actions to reshape public problems, perhaps to resolve them.’”

“Some might object that interest in gridlock implies a normative preference for legislative activism and liberal policy change.”

“Unified party control of government cannot guarantee the compromise necessary for breaking deadlock in American politics.”

“Two... other factors shaping Congress’s policy performance command attention: the impact of parties and the consequences of bicameralism.”

“As the two parties have polarized and the political center has stretched think over the recent past, little evidence indicates that legislative performance has risen in lockstep. Paradoxically, far from ensuring that voters will be given meaningful choices between competing party programs, the polarization of the parties seems to encourage deadlock.”

“With limited electoral ties to the mass and moderate middle, legislators have only limited and occasional incentive to craft moderate policy compromises to public problems.”

“Bicameralism is perhaps the most critical structural factor shaping the parties of gridlock. Bicameralism– rather than the separation of power between the executive and legislative branches– seems most relevant in explaining stalemate in the postwar period. To be sure, both the separation of powers and bicameralism were central to the framers’ late-eighteenth century beliefs about the proper construction of political institutions.”

“The persistence of bicameral effects across the postwar period also sheds some light on the impact of divided and unified government on legislative performance”

“Because presidential vetoes are rare under unified government, I focus on the impact of the Senate filibuster.”
p. 161, ¶ 3–“Gridlock under unified government may have more to do with differences between the majority party’s House and Senate contingents than with supermajority constraints imposed by Senate rules...”

Ibid., ¶ 4–“...If the frequency of deadlock is largely a function of bicameral differences and polarization of the parties, the Congress’s legislative performance is a simple function of electoral outcomes and the evolution of constitutional design. There is little that legislators can do to reduce the barriers to legislative stalemate they typically encounter.”

Ibid., ¶ 6–“It is fair to say that legislators today toil in somewhat unusual political times. The decline of the political center has produced a political environment that more often than not gives legislators every incentive not to reach agreement.”

p. 162, ¶ 2–“To be sure, the notion of ‘fixing gridlock’ can be troubling. One person’s stalemate is another’s preferred legislative outcome.”