



# It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism

By Thomas E. Mann, Norman J. Ornstein

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Hyperpartisanship has gridlocked the American government. Congress's approval ratings are at record lows, and both Democrats and Republicans are disgusted by the government's inability to get anything done. In *It's Even Worse than It Looks*, Congressional scholars Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein present a grim picture of how party polarization and tribal politics have led Congress—and the United States—to the brink of institutional failure.

In this revised edition, the authors bring their seminal book up-to-date in a political environment that is more divided than ever. The underlying dynamics of the situation—extremist Republicans holding government hostage to their own ideological, anti-government beliefs—have only gotten worse, further bolstering their argument that Republicans are not merely ideologically different from Democrats, but engaged in a unique form of politics that undermines the system itself. Without a fundamental change in the character and course of the Republican Party, we may have a long way to go before we hit rock bottom.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“In *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*, Mann and Ornstein diagnose the roots of our nation's new legislative order. In doing so, they draw attention to the forces holding back America's future and the changes we must make in order to overcome them.” **Robert G. Kaiser, Washington Post** “Reading this book is a little like quaffing a double espresso on an empty stomach — it's a jolt. For this reader it was a welcome jolt. . . . Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein have been Washington fixtures for three decades. They are two of the brightest, best informed and most scholarly students of our politics. . . . [As] Mann and Ornstein document so vividly, at a time when only good government could help us rediscover our footing as a nation, our Grand Old Party defines itself as the party of anti-government. This is why the title of this book is so good: Our situation really is even worse than it looks.” **Paul Krugman, New York Times**

“Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute and Thomas Mann of Brookings are highly respected analysts. . . . Coming from them, the claim that the American system is even worse than it looks deserves to be taken with the utmost seriousness. . . . Mann and Ornstein provide one of the most careful, forensic accounts so far of how Congress has worked in these conditions. They are also astonishingly frank about what they think of the Republican Party – and about the media.” **Eric Alterman, TheNation.com** “Written by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, two long-time Congressional scholars, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks* fillets the traditional media for perpetuating a principle of false equivalence in its coverage of the two parties, the effect of which, they say, has merely masked the GOP's unalloyed march toward the fringes of the right wing. . . . Insightful.” **Juan Williams, The Hill**

“[T]wo respected centrist scholars, Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann, have written a book that moves past the bland and lazy conventional wisdom. They argue, with a truckload of evidence, that the blame in Washington lies overwhelmingly with Republicans. . . . Our national politics has turned a strange corner. And it is a cop-out to say that both parties are equally to blame. Strained attempts to be even-handed distort the reality we face. . . . The book is titled *It's Even Worse Than It Looks* and it is both fascinating and alarming.” **Michael Brissenden, Australian Broadcasting Corporation** “[‘It's Even Worse Than It Looks’ has] blown the lid off the usually staid and predictable world of political punditry.” **Barrie Dunsmor, Barre-Montpelier Times Argus (Barre-Montpelier, VT)** “Mann and Ornstein are among the brightest and best informed political scientists in the country. . . . [T]his book really is a must read for anyone who cares about what is happening to this country.” **Ed Luce, Financial Times**

“The Congressional scholars Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein have been making waves with a new book acknowledging a truth that, until now, was unmentionable in polite circles. They say our political dysfunction is largely because of the transformation of the Republican Party into an extremist force that is “dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.” You can't get cooperation to serve the national interest when one side of the divide sees no distinction between the national interest and its own partisan triumph.” **Timothy Egan, New York Times** “[It] is encouraging to see two longtime Washington wise men — Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, sensible, nonpartisan scholars and impeccably credentialed authors of good advice that no one ever follows — come out with a full-blown polemic against the Republicans who have steered Congress off a cliff.” **The Economist** “What happens to a two-party political system when one party goes mad? That is the question posed in a powerful and angry new book by two scholars at two respected think-tanks, Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute.” **The Economist, Lexington Notebook Blog**

“[T]he authors know what they are talking about, lay it out clearly and are right to broadcast their concern about the health of US democracy. They are also correct – and brave – to emphasise the asymmetric nature of America's polarisation. . . . The book is chiefly about what ails Washington – and its diagnosis is depressingly convincing. The authors are right to point out that things may be even worse than they seem. If the era of ill-tempered partisanship is here to stay, then gridlocked governance is also a fixture. So, therefore, is America's decline.” **David Frum, CNN.com** “Ornstein and Mann offer a convincing array of explanations for the trend toward radicalism within the GOP, including changes in campaign finance and in the electorate itself. They offer too a range of proposals to work around GOP radicalism and restore the effective functioning of Congress. If those proposals have a faint wistful air to them, blame the inherent difficulty of the problem, not Mann and Ornstein. . . . [P]owerful and important.” **San Ramon Express (San Ramon, CA)**

“[Mann and Ornstein] have been navigating the shifting currents of the Potomac for more than 40 years each; their expertise is beyond serious debate, their credentials are impeccable, their reputations firmly established. Which is why it's extremely important to take note of their recent book “It's Even Worse Than It Looks.” In it, they lay blame for the current policy morass in Washington directly, unequivocally at the feet of one political party: the Republicans. . . . [A] blistering indictment.” **Richard L. Hasen, Slate.com** “Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein offer both an insightful diagnosis of the problem of a broken Washington and a set of proposed solutions. . . . Mann and Ornstein have done a great public service in opening a dialogue on how to fix the mismatch between our political and constitutional systems of government.”

#### ***The Weekly Standard***

“Mann and Ornstein . . . are the deans of the Beltway Establishment, at least its intellectual wing. For them to argue so tendentiously that the GOP is to blame for the ills of Washington offers compelling proof of how insiders view the Tea Party and modern conservatism, as well as the tactics they employ to get across these opinions.”

#### ***Hendrik Hertzberg, The New Yorker (online only)***

“We now have history's first draft of the story of this Congress. There is so much political fog right now that it is hard to get a clear view of the reason for the dysfunction on Capitol Hill. But three new books take a step back to get a clear look at the fray, and all three conclude that no-holds-barred, right-wing politics is to be blamed. . . . Mann and Ornstein paint sad pictures of a House Republican Conference that is ‘more loyal to party than to country’ and intentionally crippling Congress ‘at a time when the country faces unusually serious problems and grave threats.’” **R. Garrett Mitchell, The Mitchell Report** “[A] compelling analysis of the gridlock that characterizes America's domestic politics.” **Steve Benen, The Maddow Blog, MSNBC**

“Two of the most sage politics watchers of our time are congressional scholars Norm Ornstein of the (mainly conservative) American Enterprise Institute and Thomas Mann of the (more Democratic than not) Brookings Institution. Together they've written and just released a book called “It's Even Worse Than It Looks.” It is about our broken, dysfunctional, nonfunctioning partisan political system. . . . When and if voters learn to think strategically and reward problem solving, the American impasse might end. If they punish rather than reward obstruction, the blood of American democracy might start flowing once more.” **Catherine Poe, Washington Times Ad Lib Blog**

“Something awful happened on the way to the 21st Century. This should have been the new American century, but by the time the Republican Party got through with us, we were a country, battered, on its knees, reeling from the body blows. . . . Just out and stirring up debate. . . . [It's Even Worse Than It Looks] confronts our uniquely American problem head on.” **Tom Moran, New Jersey Star Ledger**

“[W]hat we have here is a group of respected, credible, inside-the-beltway establishment types who are now willing to acknowledge what is plainly true: Republican extremism has no modern precedent, and it is making governing and policymaking nearly impossible, even during times of crises – despite the demands that Very Serious People agree that “both sides” are always to blame for everything in all instances. Indeed, they’re making these pronouncements in a surprising, matter-of-fact sort of way. Here’s hoping other respected, credible, inside-the-beltway establishment types feel emboldened to be equally candid about reality.” **The Daily Kos** “[An] excellent book that... may have an impact on the 2012 campaign. . . . [It] should be read by every progressive. It’s not going to change many progressive minds, but it deepens our perspective on the history of this and the political science perspectives involved. . . . That is one of the keys to the brilliance of this book...Buy the book. Pass it around. Spread the word. Our nation has a crisis in Congress worse than anything we’ve seen in 150 years. The sooner more of us recognize that, the sooner we can get to work on solutions that are appropriate to the problem.” **Bonnie Erbe, Scripps Howard News Service**

#### About the Author

**Thomas E. Mann** is the W. Averell Harriman Chair and senior fellow in Governance Studies at The Brookings Institution. He is a former executive director of the American Political Science Association. He lives in Bethesda, Maryland.

**Norman J. Ornstein** is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of a weekly column for Roll Call, called “Congress Inside Out.” He lives in Washington, D.C. Both are fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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