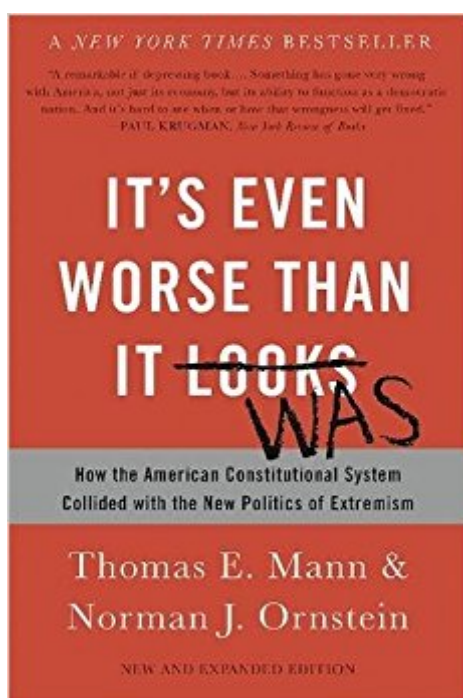


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# It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How The American Constitutional System Collided With The New Politics Of Extremism



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Basic Books; Revised, Expanded ed. edition (April 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0465096204

ISBN-13: 978-0465096206

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 386 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #14,800 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > United States > Legislative Branch #19 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Elections & Political Process > Political Parties #26 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Democracy

## Customer Reviews

Paul A. Volcker, former Chairman of the Federal Reserve; More than anytime in my lifetime, the United States is challenged at home and so is our place in the world. When Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein get together to sound a loud alarm about the way our political system is being torn apart, it's time to listen—and listen hard. Then the tough part—how do we restore

some sense of common purpose, of working together to make our government work? Mann and Ornstein set out ways to rebuild political bridges, beginning right now. We better get to work.â Chuck Hagel, U.S. Senator (1997&#150;2009), Distinguished Professor, Georgetown University&#147;This is an exceptionally important and cogent analysis of Americaâs breakdown in self-governance. It is an urgent warning of the consequences of our intolerant politics and governing paralysis, and ways to fix it.â Tom Daschle, former Senate Majority Leader&#147;One doesn't have to agree with every one of Mann and Ornsteinâs proposals to appreciate the extraordinary contribution to improving governance that they make in this important book. We could do no better than to use it as a compelling blueprint for urgently needed reform. If every member of Congress would read just one book on the subject, my wish is that it would be this one.â E. J. Dionne, author ofâ Our Divided Political Heart&#147;The phrase &#145;essential reading&#146; does not begin to get at the importance of this passionate warning by two of our very best political scientists about our nationâs capacity to govern itself. Mann and Ornstein sweep aside the timid conventional wisdom to inform Americans that our problems are even worse than we think they are. It is absolutely vital that this bookâs findings and message enter the consciousness and consciences of journalists, politicians and citizens who care about the future of our republic.â William Jefferson Clinton, 42nd President of the United States of America&#147;In Itâs Even Worse Than It Looks, Mann and Ornstein diagnose the roots of our nationâs new legislative order. In doing so, they draw attention to the forces holding back Americaâs future and the changes we must make in order to overcome them.â Robert G. Kaiser, Washington Post &#147;Reading this book is a little like quaffing a double espresso on an empty stomach &#151; itâs a jolt. For this reader it was a welcome jolt. . . .â 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.â Paul Krugman, New York Times&#147;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 &#147;dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.â You canâ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.â Timothy Egan, New York

Times&#147;[It] is encouraging to see two longtime Washington wise men &#151; Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, sensible, nonpartisan scholars and impeccably credentialed authors of good advice that no one ever follows &#151; come out with a full-blown polemic against the Republicans who have steered Congress off a cliff.â The Economist&#147;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.â The Economist, Lexington Notebook Blog&#147;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 &#150; and about the media.â Eric Alterman, TheNation.com&#147;Written by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, two long-time Congressional scholars, Itâ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 GOPâs unalloyed march toward the fringes of the right wing. . . . Insightful.â Juan Williams, The Hill&#147;We now have historyâ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.â . . . Mann and Ornstein paint sad pictures of a House Republican Conference that is &#145;more loyal to party than to countryâ and intentionally crippling Congress &#145;at a time when the country faces unusually serious problems and grave threats.â R. Garrett Mitchell, The Mitchell Report&#147;[A] compelling analysis of the gridlock that characterizes Americaâs domestic politics.â Steve Benen, The Maddow Blog, MSNBC&#147;[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 making governing and policymaking nearly impossible, even during times of crises &#150; despite the demands that Very Serious People agree that &#147;both sidesâ are always to blame for everything in all instances. Indeed, theyâre making these pronouncements in a surprising, matter-of-fact sort of way. Hereâs hoping other respected, credible, inside-the-beltway establishment types feel emboldened to be equally candid about reality.â The Daily Kos&#147;[An] excellent book that&#133; 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; 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; [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 Dunsmore, 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; [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); it's Even Worse Than It Looks is a cogent, concise, and, in its think-tank way, passionate book. One of its strengths is that the authors go beyond simply (and quite persuasively) scolding the Republicans. They recognize that the G.O.P.'s New Politics of Extremism is enabled by the American Constitutional System broadly understood. . . . The emperor has no clothes, and kudos to Ornstein and Mann for pointing it out. Unfortunately, the Republican solution is to turn the country into one big nudist camp." Wall Street Journal; [R]eading It's Even Worse Than It Looks by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein may give you indigestion. That isn't the fault of the authors, who are two of the nation's keenest political analysts. Rather, the blame belongs to the sorry state of America's two-party political system." New Yorker News Desk's Ten Best Political Books of 2012; An accessible study of the most important political trend of the past few decades: asymmetrical polarization. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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.

As a writer and former journalist, I've always found myself interested in stories about how systems work. It's one of the most enjoyable aspects of being a writer: I'm allowed by trade to ask people loads of questions. Because of that, I normally find myself engrossed with books such as *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*, which sets off to answer the question, "Why is the American government dysfunctional." While the book's authors are both knowledgeable and credible (long-time) observers of the Washington phenomenon, they skim (what I consider) the most interesting details of the political machine and jump ahead to their final conclusions and analysis, which makes reading the book much like seeing only Act 3 of a play. This isn't to say I discount their findings. It's clear their arguments are based upon both anecdotal observations and a rigorous (if not scientific) study of the "politics of opposition." But the narrative decisions the authors made regarding how to tell the story left me wanting to better understand how Congress transformed from a legislative body into an obstructionist body. Moreover, I suspect their findings will fall flat on those who have right-leaning tendencies because much of their evidence is left behind the narrative. Still, its contribution to the larger story of Congressional dysfunction can't be undersold. Taken together with books such as Lawrence Lessig's *Republic, Lost* (which the authors argue is a well-written critique but ultimately unrealistic in its goal), one can begin to understand the deep, underlying forces that have disrupted traditional governance -- at least on a federal level -- in the United States. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks* reads more like a book you'd pick up after spending time with Lessig's work than one you'd read to start trying to understand politics in modern America.

A true refresher of what the REAL motivations of the conservatives in Congress is based on. Fair & balanced analysis of the dysfunctional faults and where responsibility for them should be laid. A primer for the well-informed voting American Citizen.

Know this: Whether you are American or not--conservative or liberal--Democrat or Republican--it is crucial that you read this book. I cannot review this book with Justice here. Please read my review

on GoodReads: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18949291-it-s-even-worse-than-it-looks#>

It is refreshing to find mainstream scholars who are willing to say that the truth is not a matter of splitting the difference between our two major political parties. However, my personal nit is with the authors' statement that the Democrats "took the confrontation over judicial nominations to a new level with their brutal attacks on Robert Bork." Given Bork's public writings and his role in the Nixon administration (specifically, in the "Saturday Night Massacre"), it is reasonable to say that the nomination of Bork was itself a highly provocative action, and it is reasonable to suggest that Bork did not show that he had the temperament appropriate for a Supreme Court Justice. The Democrats responded just as President Reagan should have expected. The authors' procedural recommendations for reform in Chapter 6 might seem like small change, but, collectively, they could make a difference. In Chapter 7, however, the authors seem unwilling to blame the public for the current dilemma and they seem too willing to believe that people can be scolded into taking responsible actions. Overall, a courageous book. The authors make arguments that are not very fashionable in the institutions in which they are employed.

Treats the disintegration of our contemporary government with precision and depth. As an indirect off-shoot and very long term consequence of enduring racism and, more recently, simmering and deep-seated resentment of the high price tag for social programs, such as the New Deal, Great Society and Civil Rights, the authors identify today's culprits driving an uncompromising and "take no prisoners" mentality among a minority of ultra conservatives determined to dismantle our progressive-leaning government. Some of this minority are bold enough to make their own party leaders cower in fear. We'll see if Paul Ryan's possible ascendancy to House Speaker has any salving effects.

Worse than it looks, is better than its title. This should be required reading at every high school and college. I thought I understood the gridlock, but with this book I know the reasons Congress has been ripping off the American taxpayers. Thomas Mann's research and analysis is eye opening. Perfect time to read it, BEFORE YOU VOTE.

"It's Even Worse Than It Looks" is a must read for every voter - and every voter should read it before the Fall elections. Then read it again after the election to see what work we still need to do. I bought this book since it was supposed to supply some possible steps to correct the polarized



system we are currently experiencing. And the authors do give suggestions - the most powerful one, and one we can act on immediately - is to vote smartly. The electorate (that's each of us) have the power: we must hold our elected officials accountable for the stubborn (hostage-taking), partisan, extremism form of politics that we have witnessed. The situation did not arise overnight, and it will take some time to swing back to a more normal state of statesmanship. The next election will be telling as to whether there is optimism or pessimism about the chance to swing back.

Great read that objectively outlines today's political dysfunction. Parliamentary politics practiced in a constitutional democracy with divided government. Read the book. It will make sense. Honest.

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