

17.251/252
Spring 2015
Final exam prompt

In *It's Even Worse than It Looks*, Mann and Ornstein claim to identify two sources of dysfunction in the current Congress. In their words...

The first is the serious mismatch between the political parties, which have become as vehemently adversarial as parliamentary parties, and a governing system that, unlike a parliamentary democracy, makes it extremely difficult for majorities to act....

The second is that fact that, ... one of the two major parties, the Republican Party, has become an insurgent outlier — ideologically extreme; contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime; scornful of compromise; unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence, and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.

Throughout this semester, you have been following the legislative process in Congress, including your contributions to the weekly roundtables. Write an essay in which you address the following questions/points:

1. What evidence can you provide from the opening days of the 114th Congress to the present that is consistent with Mann and Ornstein's argument about the two sources of dysfunction in Congress?
2. What evidence can you provide that is contrary to the argument made by Mann and Ornstein?
3. Pick one of the reform proposals that Mann and Ornstein propose in the chapter about reforming political institutions. Based on what you have observed in the 114th Congress, how effective would that proposal be in overcoming legislative dysfunction in the current Congress?