

(Continued)

ardent tea party Republicans, such as freshman Rep. Alan Nunnelee (Miss.), have faced primary challenges from the right for being too accommodationist. And Mitt Romney's rhetoric and positions offer no indication that he would govern differently if his party captures the White House and both chambers of Congress.

We understand the values of mainstream journalists, including the effort to report both sides of a story. But a balanced treatment of an unbalanced phenomenon distorts reality. If the political dynamics of Washington are unlikely to change anytime soon, at least we should change the way that reality is portrayed to the public.

Our advice to the press: Don't seek professional safety through the even-handed, unfiltered presentation of opposing views. Which politician is telling the truth? Who is taking hostages, at what risks and to what ends?

Also, stop lending legitimacy to Senate filibusters by treating a 60-vote hurdle as routine. The framers certainly didn't intend it to be. Report individual senators' abusive use of holds and identify every time the minority party uses a filibuster to kill a bill or nomination with majority support.

Look ahead to the likely consequences of voters' choices in the November elections. How would the candidates govern? What could they accomplish? What differences

can people expect from a unified Republican or Democratic government, or one divided between the parties?

In the end, while the press can make certain political choices understandable, it is up to voters to decide. If they can punish ideological extremism at the polls and look skeptically upon

candidates who profess to reject all dialogue and bargaining with opponents, then an insurgent outlier party will have some impetus to return to the center. Otherwise, our politics will get worse before it gets better.

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Consider the source and the audience: This article has a bipartisan author team and appeared in the *Washington Post*, known for its mainstream coverage of national politics. They take to task not only national politicians but also the media that cover them, all people who read the *Post*. Was that a gutsy move, astonishingly foolish, or just wrong-headed?

Lay out the argument, the values, and the assumptions: Mann and Ornstein's primary concern seems to be that politics in Washington today resembles a game of dangerous brinkmanship. Why do they hold Gingrich and Norquist responsible? What do they see as the primary role of parties? And what is the role of the media in a democracy? How would politics in the United States work if Mann and Ornstein had their way? What is the Republican case for not cooperating with Democrats?

Uncover the evidence: Mann and Ornstein rely in part on historical events to make their case. Can those events be interpreted differently? They also use the words of disaffected Republicans to show how the party has changed. Does that help support their case? Are there any other kinds of evidence you would like to see?

Evaluate the conclusion: Do you agree with Mann and Ornstein that politics-as-brinkmanship is a problem? Are they correct to blame changes within the Republican Party for that? How would Republicans respond to that? Do you agree that in American politics the effort to be "neutral" means that sometimes analysts and reporters fail to tell the whole story?

Sort out the political implications: The authors essentially say that it is up to the media and the voters to fix this situation if we want a government that can solve problems effectively. Are those two groups of people up to the task? How might Republicans be expected to react?