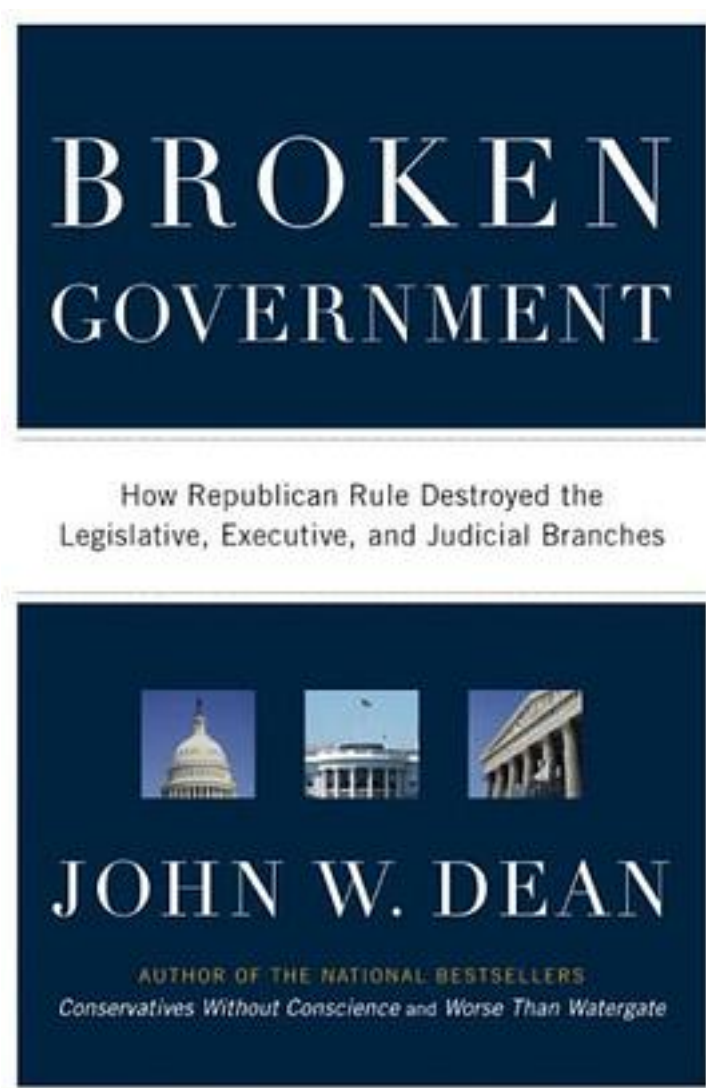


Broken Government



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The former White House counsel faults Republican mismanagement for the current state of the government

John Dean has become one of the most trenchant and respected commentators on the current state of American politics and one of the most outspoken and perceptive critics of the administration of George W. Bush in his New York Times bestsellers *Conservatives Without Conscience* and *Worse than Watergate*.

In his eighth book, Dean takes the broadest and deepest view yet of the dysfunctional chaos and institutional damage that the Republican Party and its core conservatives have inflicted on the federal government. He assesses the state of all three branches of government, tracing their decline through the presidencies of Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush I, and Bush II. Unlike most political commentary, which is concerned with policy, Dean looks instead at process--making the case that the 2008 presidential race must confront these fundamental problems as well. Finally, he addresses the question that he is so often asked at his speaking engagements: What, if anything, can and should politically moderate citizens do to combat the extremism, authoritarianism, incompetence, and increasing focus on divisive wedge issues of so many of today's conservative politicians?

With the Democrats now in control of both the House and Senate, the stakes for the 2008 presidential election have never been higher. This is a book for anyone who wants to return government to the spirit of the Constitution.

 http://g-ec2.images-amazon.com/images/G/01/books/promos/Dean_John_300._V6595928_.jpg **Amazon.com:** *Broken Government* is a book unabashedly about governmental "process," which, I'm sure your publisher told you, is not considered the sexiest of topics. But you make the case that voters are actually often more concerned with process than with policy. Could you explain?

Dean: Actually, my wife was the first to tell me that "process" is not sexy. In fact, if you think about it, process can be quite sexy. Allow me to translate into a different context. Dating, seduction, and courtship are all types of processes, while the object of one's efforts is a policy decision. The kind of car you drive is a policy decision, but the way you drive it is a process matter. To take the leap to government--the machinery of government is the process, while what we do with that machinery is policy. Most Washington insiders are more interested in process than they are policy because it is truly the name of the game. In making the case that many voters are actually more concerned with government process than policy, something I have intuitively known for a long time, I relied on empirical research which was uncovered by a team of political scientists at the University of Nebraska. In addition, early responses to the book have confirmed that voters are deeply interested in these operations, when they have discovered what the book is about.

Amazon.com: You assess the state of each of the three branches of government and conclude that Congress, after the Democrats took over from your former party, the Republicans, at the beginning of this year, is "broken but under repair." Congress's approval ratings have remained even lower than the president's. Do you think they are fixing their broken institution?

Dean: Congress has traditionally had the lowest approval ratings of

all the branches. In the book I explain why this is the case, along with the irony that most voters give their own representatives and senators high approval ratings, claiming it is merely the rest of them they don't approve of. After explaining the repairs that the Democrats have instituted since regaining control of the legislative branch, I explain that it is a Republican tactic to do all within their power to not allow the Democrats to get public credit for making Congress work again. Indeed, Republicans won control of Congress in the 1994 election after years of doing all they could to literally destroy Congress--it was really quite remarkable how they attacked the institution that they were part of, but it worked. Voters concluded that Democrats could not run Congress. After the GOP took control in 1995, they ran Congress not as a deliberative body but in a dictatorial manner that literally excluded Democrats, which meant over half the nation was not represented in Congress. Not surprisingly, by 2006 the efforts of the GOP to make their Congressional majority permanent through blatantly corrupt means and methods had backfired, and enough voters realized what was happening to take away control.

Now the GOP is back to trying their best to make the Congress not function, so that voters will put them back in control. The reason approval ratings are sinking is the GOP is succeeding--and the Democrats inexplicably refuse to talk about what the GOP is again doing to the process, and the media is not reminding voters. If Democrats continue to ignore process issues, if they refuse to make them an issue in 2008, not only will they lose but so will democracy as we know it.

Amazon.com: The battles between the White House and the Democratic Congress over the release of documents to congressional oversight committees raise all kinds of echoes from the Nixon era. How strange is it to see your old assistant in the Nixon White House counsel's office, Fred Fielding, return to the White House as point man in fighting some very similar skirmishes with Congress over executive privilege?

Dean: I cannot imagine why Fielding, whom I brought into the government in 1971, returned to the Bush/Cheney White House as counsel. I suspect his friend Dick Cheney leaned hard on him, for they needed help. Fielding has credibility on Capitol Hill, and while they may not like his stonewalling them, they know he is doing his boss's bidding and they understand that he is no doubt trying to get his boss to do the right thing. Fielding has never worked on the Hill, and his entire worldview of government is from the White House. When all is said and done, I think Fred will be viewed not as his own man, but just another who drank the Kool-Aid. I also know Pat Leahy and John Conyers, who chair the Senate and House Judiciary Committees, who are even more seasoned at the Washington game than Fielding. So it is going to be an interesting battle in the days ahead.

Amazon.com: What's particularly striking is that the White House appears to be winning those battles, or at least stalemating them successfully. What do you think this administration learned from Watergate? Why do you think they have been able to hold the line against congressional oversight?

Dean: No question that this administration learned from Watergate, and the landscape has changed significantly in the past three decades. When I returned to writing I never contemplated I would be writing political commentary, but when others were not talking about what was so obvious to me, I felt I had to do so. Republicans have taken Nixon's disgraced tactics and approach to presidential power as their starting point. They have learned that if caught, deny it. If that doesn't work, ignore the fact you have been caught and just keep doing it, and claim you have the

inherent power to do so. They can get away with it because right-wing talk radio and Fox Cable News have become the cheering section that did not exist during Watergate. As for oversight, during the first six years of the Bush/Cheney administration, the GOP-controlled Congress could not even spell the word "oversight." Only now are we approaching real tests of whether the Democratic Congress will go the distance to get the information they are entitled to have. </p> Amazon.com: You describe yourself as a "Goldwater conservative on many issues," but note that conservatives' "fundamentally antigovernmental attitude" can make it hard for them to govern effectively. In other words, if people hate government, why would they be good at it? What do you think are the models of good conservative governance?

Dean: Senator Goldwater said during the 1964 presidential campaign--and I have found him saying the same thing years later in speeches--that when history looked back on his political philosophy that he would be called a liberal. Goldwater conservatism is actually drawn from classic liberalism. I particularly admire Senator Goldwater's positions on "process" issues, the way he rejected the incivility and intellectual dishonesty that has overpowered conservatism. While he did not like big government--in fact, nobody does and he was merely ahead of his time in raising the issue--he believed that which was essential must function in the best interest of all Americans, not merely Republicans. He never embraced the Reagan mantra that government is the problem not the solution. I always thought Senator Goldwater's definition of conservatism a good motto for good conservative governance: "a conservative draws on the wisdom and best of the past to apply it to the present and the future." Today, conservatives are drawing on the worst of the past, not because they are true conservatives; rather they are radicals more interested in power for themselves and other Republicans instead of serving the general public interest. </p>

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