



# Broken Trust: Dysfunctional Government and Constitutional Reform (Constitutional Thinking)

*Stephen M. Griffin*

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Various and roundly perceived as gridlocked, incompetent, irresponsible, and corrupt, American government commands less respect and trust today than perhaps at any time in the nation's history. But the dysfunction in government that we like so little, along with the policy disasters it engenders, is in fact a product of that deep and persistent distrust, Stephen M. Griffin contends in *Broken Trust*, an accessible work of constitutional theory and history with profound implications for our troubled political system.

Undertaken with a deep concern about the way our government is performing, *Broken Trust* makes use of the debate over dysfunctional government to uncover significant flaws in the conventional wisdom as to how the Constitution works. Indeed, although Americans strongly believe that our government is dysfunctional, they are just as firmly convinced that the Constitution still works well. Griffin questions this conviction by examining how recent policy disasters—such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the response to Hurricane Katrina, and the 2008 financial crisis—are linked to our constitutional system. This leads him to pose the question of whether the government institutions we have inherited from the eighteenth century are poor fits for contemporary times.

Griffin argues that understanding the decline of trust in government requires investigating the historical circumstances of the last several decades as well as the constitutional experience of the states. In particular, he examines “hybrid democracy,” the form of constitutionalism prevailing in California and other western states that combines Madisonian-style representative government with direct democracy. Hybrid democracy offers valuable lessons relevant to our contemporary difficulties with dysfunctional government at the national level. These lessons underpin the agenda for reform that Griffin then proposes, emphasizing democratic innovations aimed at producing both more effective government and greater trust in our political institutions. Building on a better understanding of the sources and consequences of government dysfunction, his book holds genuine hope, as well as practical possibilities, for the repair of our broken political and constitutional system.

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