

**Two Presidents Are Better Than One:  
The Case for a Bipartisan Executive Branch**

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This poster will be based on my “Two Presidents” book, which argues that political dysfunction can best be addressed by ensuring that presidential power is shared in a bipartisan executive branch.

While observers typically blame political dysfunction on a hyperpartisan Congress, they should look instead at the executive branch. Modern presidents exercise an exceptional amount of power—what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., aptly characterized as an imperial presidency.

When one person exercises the enormous power of the modern U.S. presidency, we should not be surprised that the system breaks down. A single president represents the views of just one political party. All citizens want to have a voice in their government, but half the public feels that its interests and concerns are not represented in a politically dominant White House. It is no wonder that the party out of power spends more of its time trying to regain the Oval Office and less of its time trying to address the country’s needs.

Under the current system, Democrats and Republicans fight tooth and nail to capture the White House, spending billions of dollars. Moreover, once an election is over, each party launches its effort to win the next presidential race. The party of the president lines up behind the president’s initiatives to ensure a successful administration. The losing party tries to block the president’s proposals so it can persuade voters to change parties at the next presidential election.

If, on the other hand, each party knew it would elect a partner in a coalition presidency every four years, it would not stand to gain as much political advantage through partisan tactics. Instead, each party would be freer to judge legislative proposals on their merits. And when proposals would be judged on their merits, both sides would have an incentive to support them because the proposals would be bipartisan proposals.

In a two-person presidency in other words, nearly all voters would have their preferred candidate serving and would be much more comfortable with the initiatives that emerge from the executive branch. Instead of half the public feeling disempowered and inclined to break the president’s administration, almost all voters would have a stake in the success of the executive branch. There no longer would be a mass of disaffected voters receptive to a policy of partisan obstruction.

It is not only the case that incentives to fight the White House would dissipate. The party out of power also would have incentives to cooperate. Its members of Congress could share credit for presidential achievements; they also would be better positioned to help their constituents by cultivating warm relationships with the executive branch.

Currently, elected officials have powerful incentives to act in a highly partisan fashion. We need to counter those incentives with incentives to act in a bipartisan fashion. A bipartisan executive would provide an effective counterbalance to partisan conflict not only from the imperial presidency but also from other causes of partisan conflict.