

Dear Reader,

Nobody likes the hyper-partisanship that dominates American politics in these polarized times—but most people think the heart of the problem is partisanship itself, not how it is enacted. Not so, says the eminent Princeton political historian Julian Zelizer, in this fresh and deeply researched book. In a country as large and diverse as the United States, Zelizer argues, nonpartisanship or bipartisanship would be a disaster, because it would inevitably exclude many voices and interests that deserve to be heard. Our often unlovely but astonishingly durable political parties are meant to bring two large categories into common cause, so that they can bargain together to determine the country's future.

Zelizer takes us through a fascinating and little-known history of efforts to reform the parties that often wound up backfiring or going awry. There were efforts to make the parties more responsive to ordinary voters; to transfer more power to the White House and away from Congress; to put Congress under the dominion of an all-powerful leader. And in the background, American politics as a whole was becoming an ideological war. What resulted was a system that can't function to address the country's needs, only to squabble.

It doesn't have to be this way. Zelizer gives us a big idea—that partisanship is healthy—and also a detailed program for reform. Putting the focus on Congress, the essential institution in the American government, he makes a series of specific proposals that can turn partisanship from an obstacle to a workable system of governing. *In Defense of Partisanship* will give you an entirely new, and far more hopeful, way of thinking about a topic that we all encounter in every day's news.

Best,



Nicholas Lemann
Director, Columbia Global Reports