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Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Government--and Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency

William G. Howell, Terry M. Moe

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Our government is failing us. From health care to immigration, from the tax code to climate change, our political institutions cannot deal effectively with the challenges of modern society. Why the dysfunction? Contemporary reformers single out the usual suspects, including polarization and the rise in campaign spending. But what if the roots go much deeper, to the nation's founding?

In *Relic*, William Howell and Terry Moe point to the Constitution as the main culprit. The framers designed the Constitution some 225 years ago for a simple agrarian society. But the form of government they settled upon, a separation of powers system with a parochial Congress at its center, is entirely ill-equipped to address the serious social problems that arise in a complex, post-industrial nation. We are prisoners of the past, burdened with an antiquated government that cannot make effective policy, and often cannot do anything at all.

The solution is to update the Constitution for modern times. This can be accomplished, Howell and Moe argue, through reforms that push Congress and all its pathologies to the periphery of the lawmaking process, and bring presidents--whose concern for legacy drives them to seek coherent policy solutions--to the center of decision making. As Howell and Moe reveal, the key to effective government for modern America is a more powerful presidency.

Relic is a bold, provocative, and essential book for our era of political dysfunction and popular despair. It sheds new light on what is wrong with our government and what can be done about it, challenging us to reconsider the very foundation of the American experiment.

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