
***YES, We Can... ...Rewrite the Australian Constitution*, by Klaas Woldring. Milton Keynes: Lightning Source, 2018. pp. 94. ISBN: 978-1-925457-75-9 Paperback approximately \$30.00.**

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YES, We Can... ...Rewrite the Australian Constitution presents an examination of the problems of Australia's Constitution in a lively and accessible way. The Australian Constitution is not usually a topic that brings much excitement, but Klaas Woldring's account of the necessity of its wholesale reform is both well read and enthusiastic. In calling for reform, Woldring states that the approach of his book is to 'reach and inform the general public about basics' (p. 5). And indeed, the book delivers on this promise through a series of chapters that examine what Woldring argues are some of the most problematic aspects of the document.

Chapter 1 looks at some of the difficulties of section 44, in particular the prohibition of dual citizens standing for election to the Commonwealth Parliament, and the High Court's most recent interpretation of this section in the 'Citizenship Seven' case. Chapter 2 outlines the process of judicial appointment in Australia and argues the need to reform the federal system. Chapter 3 advocates for the overhaul of several aspects of Australian politics and governance: the electoral system, federal-state relations and aspects of the Westminster system, including the appointment of ministers. Chapter 4 takes stock of previous recommendations from public inquiries and law academics, with a specific focus on section 116 concerning freedom of religion (pp. 69-70). In Chapter 5, Woldring argues for the importance of civics education and reports the results of a survey conducted by Bede Harris of Charles Sturt University that showed respondents' knowledge of the Constitution was sketchy. Chapter 6 argues that constitutional reform, conceptualised as electoral system reform, would be a useful way to improve the diversity of representatives and foster multiculturalism and social inclusion.

The introduction to the volume frames these issues in terms of declining trust in representative politics and the unwillingness of Australia's politicians and parties to commit to the process of reform. Despite the lacklustre history of constitutional referenda throughout Australia's history, Woldring argues that if the government presented a series of governance system changes to the electorate, '[i]t would ... find that the voters, when properly informed, would favour massive changes impossible to achieve with the current constitutional system' (p. 12).

This is debatable. In some ways the Same Sex Marriage Postal Survey illustrated that many Australians hold progressive views on this social issue, but in other respects the Survey revealed deep divisions within Australian society that complicate the enumeration of rights in a diverse, multicultural society. Indeed, some of the issues that Woldring identifies as necessary constitutional reforms—for example, the electoral system and federal-state relations—can be achieved through legislative rather than constitutional means.

A further point to note is that although the problems of politics in Australia are equated with an antiquated constitution, these sentiments of democratic disaffection are widespread throughout the world. Democratic malaise, populist parties and leaders, which are regarded by many scholars as a worrying portent of anti-democratic rule, have emerged in constitutional democracies such as the United States of America, where the founding documents have evolved. The Australian Constitution, like the founding documents of many other democracies, is only part of the problem, and its reform cannot be the whole solution.

A final issue concerns the process of reform. Examples of popular referenda and direct democracy overseas, notably the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, have highlighted many of the tensions and unintended consequences that can emerge when complex political and constitutional issues are reduced to simplified statements and objectives that are capable of being the subject of public deliberation. Woldring is right to suggest that we cannot always rely on the High Court to provide creative and progressive interpretations of the Constitution, but Australia's Constitution is also notable for its brevity, and hence flexibility, allowing for judicial interpretation and legislative clarification as a way to reshape Australia's system of governance as social and political attitudes change.

YES, we can... is a lively interjection into the debate about electoral, political and constitutional reform in Australia. While it does not offer many concrete solutions or suggestions for overcoming the political stasis that has developed around constitutional reform issues in Australia, it is nonetheless a welcome call to arms over this important and often neglected topic.