



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/CDZS3895>

‘Kevin G. Lynch and James R. Mitchell, A New Blueprint for Government: Reshaping Power, the PMO, and the Public Service’

Alex Marland

To cite this book review: Alex Marland, ‘Kevin G. Lynch and James R. Mitchell, A New Blueprint for Government: Reshaping Power, the PMO, and the Public Service’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 6 (September 2026): 164-165, <https://doi.org/10.52230/JEYK8047>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Kevin G. Lynch and James R. Mitchell, *A New Blueprint for Government: Reshaping Power, the PMO, and the Public Service* (University of Regina Press, 2025), 218pp. Paperback. C\$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-7794-0111-3.

Quick: is your country's democracy and its institutions thriving or are they deteriorating? On any given day, the news and social media are filled with accounts of executive aggrandizement, government bungling, online harassment, foreign interference, and more. In some cases, the concerns about declining trust and democratic backsliding are all too real. Yet there is also evidence that democratic government is improving, particularly as elite institutions are compelled to be more responsive to a more diverse population.

If you have worked in central agencies at the apex of the public service, you are probably deeply conditioned to see problems lurking throughout politics and government. From 2006 to 2009, Kevin Lynch reached the pinnacle as Clerk of the Privy Council of Canada, meaning he was simultaneously head of the federal public service, secretary to the cabinet, and the prime minister's main non-partisan advisor. Until 1994, James Mitchell worked in the Privy Council Office and Treasury Board Secretariat and subsequently operated a government consulting business. They know a thing or two about how the Government of Canada operates on the inside and have something to say about how to improve it.

In *A New Blueprint for Government*, Lynch and Mitchell argue that the Canadian parliamentary system of government is in rough shape. They selectively present data to support their argument, which they bolster with anecdotes and recent events. We are told that productivity is declining; the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and staff have too much power; things are working better in other countries; and so forth. There is little here to reassure readers who already believe government and parliamentary institutions are in decline. However, the book follows a classic structure: first diagnosing the problems, then presenting solutions proposed by experts.

The intellectual contribution of their book is found in nuggets of information that only retired public servants could feel free to share. They offer an assortment of policy ideas to improve Canadian government (pages 175-181). Four main objectives guide two dozen proposed reforms: restoring Cabinet authority, decentralizing the PMO, modernizing core institutions, and implementing the changes. The authors position reforms that range from giving parliamentary committees more power to modernizing the public service as both reasonable and manageable. Their optimism and conviction about fixing deeply entrenched elements of government is an intriguing contrast to their pessimism about current circumstances. Many of the proposals are worthy, yet they are unlikely to find political suitors, many of whom benefit from the status quo and have other priorities.

This is not an academic book; it is more like an imprint, or a manuscript suited for a popular press. Scholarly standards of research do not apply, for example, there is a breezy writing style punctuated with claims for which academics would demand citations. Almost all the limited footnotes are from online sources, and the list of further reading is mostly op-eds by the authors. Ideas from women are almost non-existent. Even so, the authors succeed in distilling complex ideas into accessible writing, making the work approachable for a broader audience. This is why, in part, it was shortlisted for the prestigious Donner Prize for best public policy book in Canada.

A New Blueprint for Government complements other books for readers frustrated or puzzled by today's democracy. It provides an engaging perspective for those seeking practical ideas to strengthen and revitalize Canadian government, with lessons that might also apply to other countries using the Westminster model.

Alex Marland, Acadia University