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‘Rosalind Dixon and William Partlett, The People’s Guide to the Australian Constitution’

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Rosalind Dixon and William Partlett, *The People's Guide to the Australian Constitution* (UNSW Press, 2026), 144pp. Paperback. A\$19.99. ISBN: 978-1-7611-7051-5.

This very compact book is an excellent introduction to the Australian Constitution. It is published in the context of the failed Voice Referendum of 2023 which the authors argue resulted in an overwhelming 'No' vote due to voters not understanding what was being proposed. Therefore, Dixon and Partlett have written the book in an extremely accessible way so that all Australians can learn more about their constitution, which the recent Covid-19 pandemic also illustrated (in terms of the powers of State governments especially) impacts the daily lives of Australians in so many ways.

The book is divided into seven main chapters along with a very useful introduction. The chapters focus on how the Australian constitution works, whether the Australian constitutional system is democratic, how many levels of government Australia has, what are Australia's constitutional values, do Australians have constitutional rights, who protects the Australian constitutional system, and how does the Australian constitutional system change.

A recurrent theme in the book is the fact that the Australian constitution not only draws on the British constitution but also the American. The result is a unique system which combines a Westminster style democracy (with associated principles of responsible government) with a federal system that provides for the equal representation of states in an elected upper chamber of parliament: the Senate. The Australian constitutional system also differs from the British one and is like that of the United States of America (USA) in that it has a clear separation of the legislative and judicial branches of government. It also has a written constitution like the USA, but it is not as rigid as it also incorporates considerable legislative and judicial law like the British constitution.

Dixon and Partlett also highlight that the Australian constitution is one of the oldest in the world, at over 125 years now. Except for the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government in 1975 by the then Governor-General Sir John Kerr, it has also functioned remarkably well (and the authors even point out that this constitutional crisis was a consequence of Kerr's misunderstanding of his constitutional position in the situation).

Another theme of the book and probably the most important is the vital role that Australians play in the functioning of their constitutional system. Unlike the USA and Canada, Australia does not have a clearly delineated bill of rights or charter of rights and freedoms. So, there is much more responsibility placed on Australians to hold their elected representatives to account and ensure that governments do not encroach on the hard-won rights and freedoms of the Australian people. In this responsibility they are not alone though, Australians courts and commissions such as the Australian Human Rights Commission are crucial allies.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. In my opinion the authors have carried out an incredibly important civic duty in trying to educate all Australians about their constitution. They most definitely achieve this noble goal through writing in a very accessible way and breaking down the Australian constitution into several themes which makes it much more manageable. Through this the book truly lives up to its title of being a *People's Guide*. So, I wholeheartedly recommend the book to readers, although by its very nature it will appeal more to general readers rather than specialist. All Australians should have a copy of this book or at least read it.

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