

Reviews of Reinventing Democracy: Improving British political governance by David Kauders

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British citizens have faced great uncertainties in recent years, with a catalogue of chaos from the EU Referendum and Brexit to the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis.

Sadly, two things that aren't uncertain are the political scandals and accusations of gross mismanagement attached to these, and other nationwide issues.

If anything, they have become commonplace in the last few decades, as have sorry statistics about the UK's worsening economic and social decline.

These days, prime ministers and their cabinet cronies often escape the consequences of their actions as the enshrined principle of ministerial responsibility has eroded to the point that those in power can act with ministerial irresponsibility.

With a General Election just around the corner, it may be tempting to imagine that the problem can be swept away with a change in administration.

Not so, according to a timely new book by David Kauders: *Reinventing Democracy: Improving British political governance*.

In it, he puts forward a well-reasoned and evidenced-based argument that the root cause of our national woes is the very fabric of our governmental system.

The ruling party may change, he says, but those at the top will still follow a policy agenda that is self-serving and short-sighted, driven by flawed ideologies, financial greed, numeric superiority, and a sense of entitled immunity.

He compares our current state to that of the 17th century, simply swapping the divine right of kings with the absolute power of Government.

We have little say in affairs, other than at the ballot box once every few years, while our representatives do as they will.

And with a de facto England-first agenda, this often comes especially at the cost of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, unhappy members of a union in name only.

Kauders, an investment manager and a person credited with predicting the 2007-8 mortgage-related credit crunch, argues for a political system that actually works for everyone rather than just the privileged few.

In *Reinventing Democracy* he sets out the case for a federal United Kingdom, decentralizing power to its constituent nations and regions to promote democracy and fair representation, swapping scandal for transparency and propaganda for progress.

Reassuringly, in this new era of cooperative rule, British citizens would still retain the right to travel and settle freely throughout the UK.

Under this federal system, the Houses of Parliament would be replaced with five individual parliaments, with one for each of the four nations and one for those functions (such as national defence) which are best provided by joint agreement and which reflects a fairer voting system to counterbalance the greater number of English representatives.

Kauders, a British citizen who has lived in Switzerland for twelve years, makes reference to thriving federal systems in place around the world, including his adopted home and Canada, making clear his point how it is entirely possible to run a country effectively and efficiently when power is dispersed.

To ensure the public play a full part in governmental process, he sees the unelected and undemocratic House of Lords and Privy Council being replaced with a largely elected, apolitical People's Council.

The People's Council he envisages would give citizens a voice with the right to place items on the political agenda and approve all legislation, ending the government's 'under-the-counter' rubber stamping of legislation through the mechanism of Royal Assent.

He also proposes the introduction of a written constitution to formalize citizens' rights and responsibilities, providing a clear framework for governance.

It is the first time that a book has set down a proposed constitution and it is a brilliant idea, replacing the uncertainties of interpretation and manipulation that come with our present unwritten constitution with clarity, stability, and firm safeguards against the abuse of power.

Transitioning to a federal system will require careful planning and time but the appetite is clearly there, with a recent poll finding that more than 90 percent of Brits want political reform.

It may take up to 17 years, says Kauders, to fully implement the changes but before that, such a transition must first be sanctioned.

This is, of course, unlikely to happen with either the Conservatives or Labour in charge, since they would be effectively dismantling their own power base, but the real point of *Reinventing Democracy* is to seed the idea in people's minds that there is a viable alternative to the status quo and a pathway out of the political mire.

His call for change, and detailed and realistic representation of how this could look in practice, is inspiring and will, no doubt, help spark many a fruitful discussion between friends and colleagues.

Hopefully, it will reach the young generation of voters and encourage the next generation of parliamentary candidates to place the need for a federal UK on their manifestos, building momentum for a more participatory form of governance with the active involvement of citizens at its core.

Reinventing Democracy, then, is rallying cry for those who dare to believe in the possibility of a more just and equitable society.

It challenges us to imagine a future where political power is distributed more equitably and where our voices are actually heard; to redefine democracy for the needs of the 21st century;

and to be agents of change in creating a more responsive, inclusive, and accountable Britain.

Source: <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/entertainment/reinventing-democracy-by-david-kauders-371783/>

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There is no doubt that the British Government, and politics in general, have faced very turbulent times over the past few years.

The EU Referendum and resulting Brexit, the Covid pandemic, wars in Europe and the Middle East, the privatisation of utilities, and the global cost of living crisis have cumulatively had an incredible impact on the country and its citizens.

Scandals and gross mismanagement now seem embedded in the political infrastructure, and as the UK's economic fortunes continue to diminish on the world stage, social fragmentation and deprivation continue to escalate.

How much of this has hit those in charge, however, is debatable. Yes, prime ministers have fallen – even the Teflon-coated Boris Johnson – but to say they and their ministers have weathered the storm would be akin to saying the Normans just scraped by in the Battle of Hastings.

With their own financial portfolios and lucrative consultancy gigs to fall back upon, and a distinct lack of reputational consequences, they are insulated from the negative repercussions of their actions.

It is from this depressing backdrop that *Reinventing Democracy: Improving British political governance* by David Kauders emerges, tracing the UK's malaise ultimately back to one thing: its political system.

The current two-party model is deeply flawed, says Kauders, being unfit for the needs and complexities of the modern world. It is, he believes, a system that encourages short-termism and self-serving opportunism irrespective of the party in power and one that, by giving absolute power to a select few, is inherently undemocratic.

Indeed, he compares it to something straight out of the 17th century, albeit with the absolute power of Government having replaced the divine right of kings, and with a firmly England-first agenda at the cost of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In such terms, a change of government will not solve the UK's deep-set problems as it is merely replacing one powerful and privileged cabal with another.

What is clear is that change is urgently needed, and this is a sentiment shared by some 90 per cent of British electors, who according to recent research wish to see political reform.

But how can we make things better? *Reinventing Democracy* puts forward a compelling and detailed case for one model above all others: a federal United Kingdom.

According to Kauders, an investment manager who is credited with predicting the 2007-8 mortgage-related credit crunch, true democracy for the UK can only come by the replacement of its centralised government and power base with dispersed power throughout its

constituent nations and regions.

By enabling economic and social self-governance, England's dominance in the political management of the United Kingdom would cease. Under this system, the Houses of Parliament – ironically still viewed by many outsiders as a synonym with democracy – would be replaced with five parliaments: one for each of the four nations and one for those functions (such as defence) best provided jointly.

This federal parliament would, unlike within Westminster, give all individual home nations an equal say in policies and this would be supported by a fair voting system that mitigates the purely numerical dominance of English representatives.

Kauders refers to other working federal systems across the world, such as in Canada and Switzerland, his adopted home, and shows how their ability to manage a country efficiently, effectively, and transparently puts the UK's track record to shame. He writes ...

“Britain is highly centralised compared to the federal countries. Every British government department and agency has its own structure, local government spends central money according to central diktat, and face-to-face contact with anybody having decision-making authority requires lengthy journeys. No wonder citizens are alienated.”

By adopting a federal structure, British citizens would still enjoy unrestricted access throughout the UK while being a citizen of one of the home nations (which they would have the right to change).

Importantly, they would be given the keys to political governance in a way that has never happened before.

The current unelected, undemocratic, and autocratic House of Lords and Privy Council would be replaced by a largely elected, apolitical People's Council, with all citizens having the right to put items on the political agenda.

The People's Council would ensure that the people's voice is heard and would approve all legislation, seeing an end to the government's rubber stamping of legislation through Royal Assent.

As with all of the fundamental changes that he proposes to make the UK a federal country, Kauders sets out his proposed functions of the People's Council in detail.

Likewise, he details the contents of a proposed written constitution – being the first such book to do so – which would formally codify and cement all citizens' inalienable rights. Until now, the UK has prided itself on an unwritten constitution which, while flexible, is prone to erosion and erasure depending upon the whims of those in charge.

Together then, this represents a huge and unprecedented transfer of power. You could call it, in essence, a Magna Carta for the 21st century.

Gone would be the confusion inherent in trying to understand the tangle of legislation that has built up over the centuries. In its place, clarity, and with it, fairness.

That word, 'fairness', is what federalism seems to be about at its roots, and makes for very welcome reading to this humble citizen.

I feel that adoption of this new Constitution and a federal Britain, installed with careful consideration by the people, would be fairer, more transparent, and resistant to scandal and corruption, allowing the UK to be governed more effectively.

Of course, a federal system is for now just theoretical and it would no doubt need to be constructed over many years (Kauders envisages it taking up to 17 years from beginning to end).

However, the main purpose of *Reinventing Democracy* is to encourage thought-provoking debate on the virtues of replacing the current political system, and in this it succeeds admirably.

Writing in a dispassionate yet easy to understand way, Kauders' notion that we are, at present, little more than serfs in a powerful state, beholden to politicians who serve themselves whilst claiming to represent all, is hard to disagree with.

Since reading his book, which benefits from the vantage point of a British expatriate in a European democracy, I have found myself aligning with his call for change.

It has, in short, been enlightening, inspiring, and eye-opening, and has led to many interesting discussions with my family and friends.

Kauders' call for a bold revitalisation of democracy through a federal system – one that he argues with persuasion will truly empower the people – is timely and essential reading, making this book a valuable contribution to the discourse on political reform.

Available online at: <https://the-european.eu/story-33875/reinventing-democracy-by-david-kauders.html>

Guest article published in Journal of the Royal Society of Arts, 2024 issue 2

There's a pervading sense that, in modern Britain, nothing works as it should.

Many individual policy failures have brought about near-Victorian conditions. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 2023 annual *Destitution in the UK* report reads like a Dickensian novel: rising child poverty; deteriorating healthcare; insanitary housing. Recent news articles even report people using pliers to extract their own teeth because of the lack of reasonable access to NHS dental care.

It's not surprising, then, that the public have low levels of confidence in parliament. A study by the Policy Institute at King's College London found that confidence has halved since 1990. Meanwhile, a Focaldata survey examining the entire political system reported that 90% of UK citizens believe it needs reform.

In their book, *When Nothing Works*, academics Luca Calafati et al. describe three pillars of society: disposable (or residual) income, essential services and social infrastructure.

All three have been wrecked by deliberate policy choices, they argue, warning that UK policies are stuck in a quagmire, with too much regulatory weight given to market-oriented economists. Indeed, the share of national output going to employment fell by nearly 10% between 1976 and 2019, contributing to Britain's poverty.

Power failure

The Westminster model of absolute power has failed. Moreover, it has contributed to British economic and social decline. This became clear when the emotions and misrepresentations of the Brexit campaign collided with the principle that sovereignty is the Crown in parliament.

Centralised power simply cannot respond to the complexity of the 21st century and exponential rates of change affecting all levels of society.

How, then, can the UK build a more effective, participatory democracy and improve its political governance?

Federal government

The cultures of the four nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England) are different, so the UK is long overdue adopting a federal structure, which would enable decisions to be taken at the most appropriate level. Without this, there is the very real possibility that the UK will eventually break up. Switching to a federal structure would be a bold move, but one which works well elsewhere. However, such sweeping reform needs a written constitution regulating political governance.

Citizens need the right to put policies onto a democratic agenda. Young people need more say in determining their futures. And we need a democratic process of consent to legislation, instead of meaningless royal assent.

Voice of the people

The discussion starts now. What should a modern constitutional settlement look like? Labour created the Brown Commission, led by former prime minister Gordon Brown, to examine public dissatisfaction with politics. It called for more public involvement but offered an inadequate solution: electing a powerless upper house.

My concept is an elected People's Council that would replace both the House of Lords and the Privy Council. This would be completely separate from five unicameral legislatures, one federal and four national.

Dispersed power would replace central power, with sovereignty being the people of each of the four nations. The People's Council would provide a channel for all citizens to be heard and for strong checks to replace those that are so weak and ineffective today.

The federal legislature and People's Council will need to escape the bias towards English issues caused by England representing 84% of the total population. One simple solution would be to apportion numbers of members using a segment of the Fibonacci series. As an illustration, a representative federal assembly might consist of eight Northern Irish members, 13 Welsh, 21 Scottish, and 34 English — 76 members in total.

Necessary questions

There are valid concerns about whether the present chaos is capable of resolution by any government, and we need to ask ourselves: What is the point of adversarial politics when many neighbouring countries outperform Britain by consensus?

Should we wait five more years while a (at this point possible) Labour government struggles with the havoc they've inherited without the truly creative thinking and democratic consent required for tackling the deep changes that are needed?

I don't think so.

Escaping the dead end that Britain has reached requires constructive public participation.

Academics have examined policy alternatives using deliberative citizens' assemblies.

Academia and think tanks should recognise that our present political governance needs major redesign, and citizens' assemblies could debate these questions — now. Only the people can provide answers.

Tinkering with details to improve the present system is worthy, but unlikely to bring the country to a prosperous, cohesive future. Only a federal nation can truly unite the United Kingdom.

Georgina Weaver, FRSA contributed to this article.

This article is online: <https://www.thersa.org/rfa-journal/2024/issue-2/a-federal-future-for-the-uk>