



Conventional Wisdom: The Alternate Article V Mechanism for Proposing Amendments to the U.S. Constitution

John R. Vile

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Article V of the Constitution allows two-thirds majorities of both houses of Congress to propose amendments to the document and a three-fourths majority of the states to ratify them. Scholars and frustrated advocates of constitutional change have often criticized this process for being too difficult. Despite this, state legislatures have yet to use the other primary method that Article V outlines for proposing amendments: it permits two-thirds of the state legislatures to petition Congress to call a convention to propose amendments that, like those proposed by Congress, must be ratified by three-fourths of the states.

In this book, John R. Vile surveys more than two centuries of scholarship on Article V and concludes that the weight of the evidence (including a much-overlooked Federalist essay) indicates that states and Congress have the legal right to limit the scope of such conventions to a single subject and that political considerations would make a runaway convention unlikely. Charting a prudent course between those who fail to differentiate revolutionary change from constitutional change, those who fear ever using the Article V convention mechanism that the Framers clearly envisioned, and those who would vest total control of the convention in Congress, the states, or the convention itself, Vile's work will enhance modern debates on the subject.

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