

Chapter 2: Participating in Australian democracy

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Chapter 2: Participating in Australian democracy

Overview

What do all of the following groups have in common?

- In late 2013 and early 2014, police clashed with protesters in the inner-northern suburbs of Melbourne. The protesters had gathered to oppose the Victorian state government's proposed road tunnel to link two of the city's busiest freeways.
- On 26 January 2014, more than 2000 protesters gathered in a Brisbane park. They were there to protest against the Queensland state government's laws to restrict the activities of bikie gangs.
- On 23 February 2014, about 15 000 people around Australia commemorated the death of an asylum seeker in an Australian-operated detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. In Melbourne, 5000 people gathered in Federation Square; in Sydney, 4000 gathered outside the town hall; smaller numbers gathered in other cities and towns. They all lit candles in memory of the dead man, and to protest over the Australian government's treatment of asylum seekers.
- Knitting has taken on a new purpose as groups of women, known as 'knitting nannas', have been protesting peacefully at sites across Australia. In the northern rivers region of New South Wales, the knitting nannas are protesting against the possible damage that coal seam gas mining could do to local farmlands. In the Toolangi forest region of Victoria, they have been protesting against the logging of native forests. In the town of Tecoma, east of Melbourne, the protest was directed against the building of a fast-food restaurant.

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Norty Knitting Nannas

All these groups have been participating in Australia's democracy.



FIGURE 1

People throughout Australia held a candlelit vigil to protest against the Australian government's treatment of asylum seekers.

What makes Australia a democracy? Most people would probably say that the right to vote for our government is the answer to that question. While voting in elections is important, it is certainly not the only way of participating in the democratic process. There are many other ways in which we can have our voices heard and influence the future of our country.

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STARTER QUESTIONS

1. Are you aware of any protest rallies or marches that have taken place recently? When and where were they, and what were the people protesting about?
2. Think of any changes you would like to see in your community or in Australia as a whole. What do you think you could do to achieve that change?

2.1 Having an influence

One of our key rights as Australian citizens is the right to actively take part in the democratic processes. We can do this in a number of ways. First, there is our right to vote — a right that can be exercised by all Australian citizens over the age of 18. Then there is our right to freedom of speech, which allows us to express our opinions through a variety of methods. We can write letters to the newspapers, we can phone in to talkback radio, and we can publicise our views on social media using Facebook or Twitter, or even create our own website or blog. In addition, there are opinion polling companies that conduct surveys of ordinary people on all sorts of issues. They then publish the results of these surveys.

The electoral system

Our system of government is a democracy. This means it is based on the idea that we elect representatives to make laws for us. Because we vote for them, these representatives would be expected to make laws that we agree with. If they do not do that, then we can vote for different representatives at the next election. Those with the right to vote have the opportunity to elect representatives to:

- the Commonwealth Parliament in Canberra
- the state or territory parliament sitting in each capital city
- local councils in the city, town or shire in which the electors live.

Voting is compulsory in Australia, and all Australian citizens aged 18 years or over are legally required to enrol to vote. You can actually enrol any time after your sixteenth birthday, and you can do so online or by filling in a paper form.

Electing a Commonwealth Parliament

The Australian parliament is bicameral, which means it consists of two 'houses' – the House of Representatives (the lower house) and the Senate (the upper house). Elections for both houses are usually held at the same time, but members of the two houses are elected in a different way:

- The House of Representatives has 150 members, each elected for three years. Each member represents an **electorate** or 'seat' that covers a particular geographic area. All electorates have roughly the same number of electors, about 90 000 each. States with larger populations, such as New South Wales and Victoria, elect the largest number of members. States with smaller populations, such as Tasmania and South Australia, elect much smaller numbers.

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Voting enrolment form



FIGURE 1 The population and the number of elected representatives of each state and territory

- The Senate has 76 members. Each of the six states elects twelve senators regardless of size or population, and the Northern Territory and ACT each elect two senators. In contrast, the members of the lower house are elected on the basis of population. Because there are so many representatives from New South Wales and Victoria, they could out-vote all the other members combined. The Senate was therefore created with equal numbers from each state to act as a safeguard against this happening in the upper house.

Electing a state or territory parliament

Five of the six states also have bicameral parliaments, while the Queensland and two territory parliaments each have only one house. Each parliament has its own electoral system, but the basic principle remains similar to that of the Commonwealth Parliament: representatives are elected to reflect the wishes of the voters. If the voters do not believe that their representatives are doing a good job, they can vote them out at the next election.

Because Australia has a democratic form of government, the most basic way in which we participate is by exercising our right to vote. Recent figures have suggested that as many as 25 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 have not enrolled to vote. This means they are missing out on an opportunity to participate, and are allowing other people to make decisions for them.



FIGURE 2

Many young people have not registered to vote, so they are allowing others to make decisions for them.

Social media

In today's world, it seems that millions of people are almost constantly connected. Your ability to access websites, emails and social media from almost anywhere through your smartphone means that you can express an opinion on any issue, to almost anyone, anytime, anywhere. In the same way, you can access the opinions of others or seek information almost continuously if you wish. Social media has allowed individuals and groups to participate in the democratic processes in a variety of ways. Here are some examples:

- The activist group GetUp! has conducted online campaigns on political issues including Australia's migration laws, the Murray–Darling Basin environment, and coal seam gas mining. GetUp! uses its website as a means by which its members and followers can express their opinions and call for changes in the law.
- The online organisation Change.org allows people to create petitions and get others to sign them on its website.
- In 2011, protest groups in different cities throughout the world set out to occupy significant public places to promote their views on the need for change in society. These groups, known as the 'Occupy movement', set up their own Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. These were used to allow members to express their opinions on political and social issues, and to keep followers updated. Social media also allowed the Occupy movement to bring large numbers of people to its protest activities.



FIGURE 3

The Occupy movement used social media to inform supporters of the location of protest activities.

- In March 2014, protest marches took place around Australia under the banner of 'March in March'. The stated aim of the organisers was 'a vote of no confidence in the Abbott government'. The participants were protesting against certain policies of the federal Liberal–National Party coalition government. The protest began with a Twitter account set up in December 2013 followed by a Facebook page, which was used to provide information to supporters. By the time the protest marches actually took place, the campaign had 45 000 online followers. It was estimated that as many as 100 000 protesters participated across Australia, with the largest crowd of 30 000 being recorded in Melbourne.
- Almost every member of parliament in Australia today has a Twitter account. One of the first to do so was the former prime minister, Kevin Rudd. At its peak, his Twitter account had over 1.3 million followers. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has over 270 000 Twitter followers.

Members of parliament, supporters of particular political parties, opponents of the same political parties, as well as people campaigning for new laws can all use social media to get their message

Polling companies conduct many different surveys in their attempts to measure people's opinions. They can be hired by businesses to survey what potential customers think about new products. They can also conduct surveys to find out whether a particular advertising campaign has been effective by asking people about their awareness of certain advertisements shown on television.

A small but important part of their business is to conduct surveys on people's attitudes to government policies and actions. To achieve this, they will survey people to find out whether they support or oppose a proposed law or other government action. When an election is close, they will also conduct surveys to find out who people intend voting for. Such opinion polls play an important role in our democratic processes.

The major polling companies often have an arrangement with the daily newspapers in Australia's capital cities to provide information about the popularity of political parties and their leaders. Polling company Nielsen Australia has such an arrangement with the *Age* in Melbourne and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. These newspapers publish poll results conducted by Nielsen. Melbourne's *Herald-Sun*, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, Adelaide's *Advertiser* and Hobart's *Mercury* all publish political polling carried out by Galaxy Research. The slightly different method used by each company means they sometimes get different results, but they can still be a valuable way for people to participate in the democratic process.



FIGURE 6 Daily newspapers regularly publish the results of opinion polls.

Effectiveness of opinion polls

Opinion poll results can tell members of parliament whether or not the decisions they have made, and the laws they have introduced, are acceptable to voters. Polling companies regularly survey people to find out who they would vote for if an election were to be held immediately. In the months leading up to an election, they carry out surveys every week. These will often tell both the politicians and the public whether the government is likely to be re-elected or whether a change of government is likely. They are also a good way of finding out what the average citizen would like a government to do in the future.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What is an electorate?
2. What is the estimated percentage of people aged between 18 and 24 who have not registered to vote?
3. How do opinion polling companies carry out surveys of people's opinions?
4. Why do polling companies ask about age and level of income?
5. Why do the major newspapers have close relationships with particular polling companies?

EXPLAIN

6. What particular right do Australians have that makes this country a democracy?
7. Why is the Senate elected in a different way from the House of Representatives?
8. Explain one way in which social media has been used to influence political debate in Australia.

DISCOVER

9. Use the **GetUp!** weblink in your Resources section to answer these questions:
 - a. Describe one issue the organisation has been campaigning on recently.
 - b. Identify an issue that the organisation claims to have campaigned successfully on in the past.

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10. Use internet resources to find a newspaper report of an opinion poll.
 - a. Which newspaper published the report?
 - b. Which polling company conducted the poll?
 - c. When was the poll conducted, and how many people were surveyed?
 - d. What were the results of the poll?

THINK

11. Opinion polls on people's voting intentions are sometimes believed to influence the way people vote. One influence is called the 'bandwagon effect'. It suggests that if undecided voters see an opinion poll showing that a particular person or party is more

popular, they will 'jump on the bandwagon' and decide to vote for that person or party. Another influence is called the 'underdog effect'. This suggests that if some people see a poll showing that a particular person or party is likely to lose an election, they will feel sorry for this 'underdog' and will therefore vote for that person or party.

Which of these effects do you think is likely to be the most powerful? Give reasons for your answer. Compare your answers with others in your class.

2.2 What can my local member do?

Members of parliament sit in the parliamentary chamber, debating legislation and voting to pass or reject it. However, this is only a small part of their work. As representatives of a particular electorate, they have an important role in the local community that is represented by that electorate. In this community role, they can often be approached by ordinary citizens requesting them to take some action and work to make improvements in that community.

Members of parliament in the local community

Federal parliament sits for only about 18 to 20 weeks per year, so many members of parliament can often spend as much as 30 weeks of each year in their local electorates. It is during this time that a member will be engaged in a variety of electorate activities.

Helping the community

Because each electorate has a similar number of voters, the electorates can vary in geographical size depending on how densely populated they are. This means that an inner-city electorate will be smaller in area than a rural electorate because the population in the country is more thinly spread. For example, the smallest Australian electorate in terms of geographical size is Wentworth, which is in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. It has a total area of 30 square kilometres. The largest in area is Durack, which takes up most of country Western Australia. It covers more than 1.5 million square kilometres. This is approximately 60 per cent of the total area of Western Australia, equivalent to more than 20 per cent of the total landmass of Australia. Its voters are spread out on cattle stations, mining towns and remote Indigenous communities. As you can imagine, it is much harder for the member for Durack to maintain contact with the voters than it is for the member for Wentworth. Nevertheless, both members will attempt to perform similar duties in relation to their respective communities.



FIGURE 1 Many of the voters in the electorate of Durack live in remote locations.

Every member of parliament maintains an office in his or her electorate. Members representing very large electorates such as Durack will probably have electorate offices in more than one town. Those in large electorates also spend a great deal of time travelling around the electorate. Members are regularly called on to visit schools, sporting clubs and various other community groups. They often have the task of making presentations to individuals and groups, and performing opening ceremonies for new community facilities.



FIGURE 2 Members of parliament are often called upon to perform official opening ceremonies in their electorates.

Members also take up issues on behalf of their electorates as a whole. An example would be a local project, such as the construction of a major road or the provision of some other community facility. The local member will often take up the case with the relevant government minister. A member might also raise the issue of a local industry that is under threat of closure, potentially causing unemployment in the area. In early 2014, the fruit-processing company SPC Ardmona in Shepparton, Victoria, was looking for government funding to help its business survive. The local member, Dr Sharman Stone, took up the case with the government at the time, but the funding was denied. Dr Stone was very critical of the prime minister and other government leaders for

refusing the funding, even though she was a member of the same political party as the government. Supporting an industry in her community took priority for her as a local member.



FIGURE 3 Sharman Stone, member for the federal electorate of Murray, spoke up to support business in her electorate.

Ultimately, it is the voters in each electorate who judge the performance of their local members of parliament at every election. Members need to maintain strong links with their local communities and to publicly support the interests of their electorates if they want to be re-elected.

Helping individual voters

When they are in their electorates, members of parliament spend much of their time helping individual voters. They have a small staff in their electorate offices to help them do this. Voters may have problems dealing with Centrelink or some other government department. Or they may be seeking assistance with immigration or taxation issues, or dealing with problems concerning health or education matters.



FIGURE 4 A member of parliament can often help individual voters in his or her electorate.

The member can intervene personally in the issue and may write to the relevant minister or telephone a contact within the government department concerned. Members of parliament are influential people and usually have lots of contacts, including those in community groups as well as in government departments. If a member personally intervenes on behalf of someone in his or her electorate, this will usually get high priority attention from the government department.

Providing a direct link to parliament

Voters can sometimes raise issues that have significance beyond the electorate. When several members are approached on a similar issue, this may become a matter for the government to investigate further. In many country areas, farmers have expressed concern about the possible impact of coal seam gas mining on their farms. They are concerned that the extraction of coal seam gas may pollute water supplies and have other serious effects on agricultural land. As a result of citizens raising this issue with their local members, inquiries have been initiated by the Commonwealth Parliament as well as state parliaments in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Some of these parliaments have introduced new laws to regulate the coal seam gas industry.

Members of parliament often make themselves available to meet people from their electorate who are visiting Parliament House in Canberra. This often happens when groups of people contact the member's office before travelling to Canberra. Members also regularly meet school groups from their electorates and will take the time to show them around the parliament. There is an education centre in Parliament House where visiting school groups can meet their federal members and learn all about the operation of parliament.

Helping with petitions to the House of Representatives

An important way in which voters can bring an issue to the attention of the parliament is to organise a petition. Members of parliament can provide advice on the preparation of petitions to be presented to the House of Representatives. Members will also make sure the petition goes through the formal processes that are necessary for the petition to be dealt with.

If an individual or group wishes to petition the House of Representatives, the petition needs to meet the following requirements:

- The petition must have a principal petitioner (that is, the main person organising the petition). This person's name and contact details should appear at the beginning of the petition.
- It must be formally addressed to 'The Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives'.
- The petition must state the reasons the petition has been prepared. These are the issues or problems that have been identified by the petitioners.
- It must also contain the request for action desired by the petitioners. This is the action the petitioners want parliament to take to solve the problem.
- The petition must be written in moderate language that is not abusive or offensive.
- The main body of the petition should be divided into three columns to include the name, address and signature of each petitioner. Each petitioner should be numbered.

- The request for action should be repeated at the top of every page, and every name and address should be handwritten by each petitioner. Photocopied names and signatures are not accepted.

The House of Representatives has a Petitions Committee to deal with all petitions to be presented to the lower house. The local member will ensure that the petition is passed on to the Petitions Committee. The following procedure is then followed:

- The chairperson of the Petitions Committee usually presents petitions to parliament on the Monday of each sitting week.
- Details of petitions are published on the website of the Petitions Committee.
- The issues raised will usually be brought to the attention of the relevant minister, who is expected to arrange a response from his department.
- Details of ministerial responses to the petitions are published on the website of the Petitions Committee.

Helping with petitions to the Senate

Petitions can also be presented to the Senate. The requirements for a petition to be presented to the Senate are similar to those that apply to the House of Representatives, with some differences in procedure. Only senators can present petitions to the Senate, so voters will usually approach one of the senators representing their state or territory to present the petition for them. The Senate also accepts petitions that have been posted on a website, with people having 'signed' it by adding their names and addresses online. A petition such as this must still be presented by a senator, and it must take the form of a printout that includes the names and addresses of all the signatories.

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Senate requirements for electronic petitions

How effective are petitions?

Parliament receives hundreds of petitions each year and not all will result in action from the government. Petitions alone are usually not enough to force a government to take action, but they can be successful in drawing parliament's attention to an issue. Petitions can gain support because they are a peaceful means of effecting change. Any citizen can organise a petition, but petitions that gain more signatures are more likely to bring about change. Two of the most famous petitions presented to parliament were prepared in 1963 by the Yolngu people of Yirrkala, in the Northern Territory, raising issues relating to their dispossession from their traditional lands. These petitions were made on pieces of bark, with traditional designs painted around the outside and typed petitions glued in the centre. These are now on display at Parliament House in Canberra (see figure 5).



FIGURE 5 The famous Yirrkala petitions were presented on bark, with traditional paintings around the outside.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. Roughly how many weeks per year are members of parliament likely to spend in their electorates?
2. What is the smallest federal electorate in Australia in terms of area?
3. Describe three ways in which members of parliament can assist people in their local community.
4. What is a petition?

EXPLAIN

5. Why do electorates vary so much in geographical size?
6. Explain three formal requirements of any petition that is to be presented to parliament.
7. How are petitions dealt with once they reach parliament?

DISCOVER

8. Use internet sources to find out who is the member for Durack, how many electorate offices that member has and where those offices are located.
9. Who is your local member of federal parliament? Where is his or her office located?
10. Who is your local member of state parliament? Where is his or her office located?
11. Use the **Change.org** weblink in your Resources section to identify a petition on the Change.org website that you believe is worth supporting. Prepare a one-minute speech to convince the rest of your class to support that petition.

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PREDICT

12. Imagine you wanted to present a petition to parliament. Identify and explain three things that you might need to do if you wanted to increase the chances of that petition being successful.

2.3 Lobby groups and others

While individuals and community groups may approach their local member of parliament to promote a particular issue, there are organisations set up to carry out this activity in a more professional manner. Known as lobby groups and pressure groups, they operate with the aim of influencing the decisions that governments make.

Lobby groups

Lobbying is a process of approaching members of parliament to argue a case for change in the law. Many organisations seek meetings with their local member or the relevant government minister to put forward a case for change. In recent years, lobbying has become a professional activity. Businesses have been set up to carry out lobbying on behalf of various clients, who pay the lobbying business a fee.



FIGURE 1

Former government minister Alexander Downer now runs a business that lobbies members of parliament on behalf of business clients.

The Commonwealth Government has established a special **code of conduct** for lobbyists, as well as a register of lobbying businesses and their clients. Almost 300 lobbying businesses are registered, employing more than 600 lobbyists. About 2000 organisations are registered as clients of these lobbyists, including businesses such as the major banks, and major manufacturing and mining companies; sporting bodies such as the Australian Football League and National Rugby League; educational organisations such as universities; and community organisations as diverse as the Salvation Army and the Wilderness Society. All are prepared to pay a fee to have a lobbyist present their views to members of parliament.

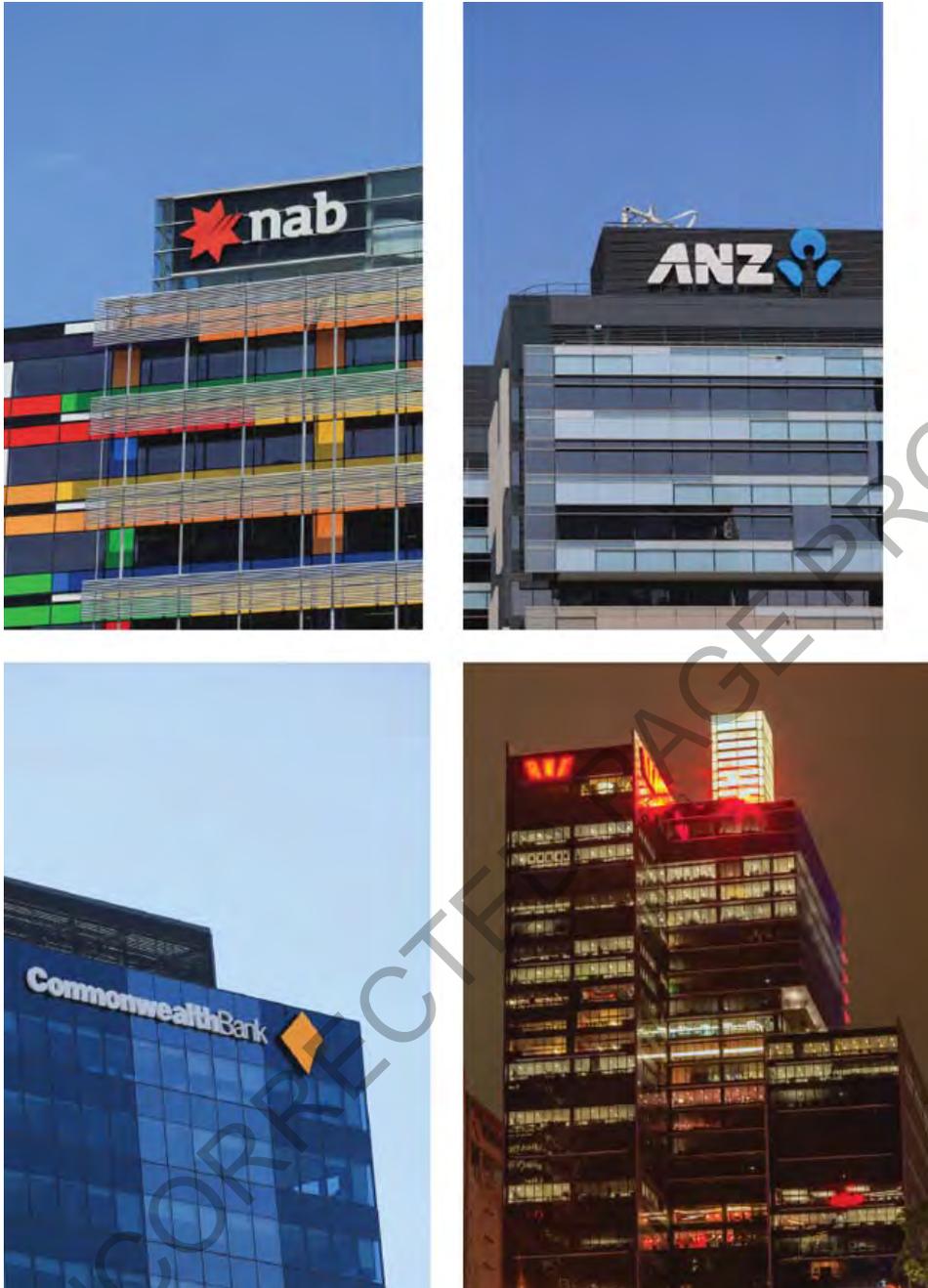


FIGURE 2

The big four Australian banks are all clients of lobbying businesses.

Employing the services of an expert to lobby for your cause can be effective because many lobbyists are former members of parliament or former government officials. These people know the workings of government and have personal contact with many serving members of parliament. The downside of using an organisation to lobby for your cause is that you must pay a fee for this service.

Pressure groups

A pressure group is any group that attempts to influence public opinion on particular issues. Like lobby groups, pressure groups also try to convince governments to make or change laws to help achieve their aims. Examples of pressure groups include environmental groups, as well as groups formed to campaign for improvements in particular community facilities. Organisations representing the interests of employers and employees also operate as pressure groups.

Environmental groups

Organisations campaigning to protect the natural environment have been active in Australia since the 1960s. Generally, they aim to prevent the actions of business or government from damaging areas of environmental importance. Organisations such as the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Wilderness Society engage in fundraising to help them pay for these campaigns. The ACF began by campaigning for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef in the 1960s, and has run many other successful campaigns since then. The Wilderness Society came to national attention in 1982, when it led the campaign to save the Franklin River in southwest Tasmania from being flooded by a new dam. Since then it has campaigned to protect native forests in Tasmania and Victoria, and areas of natural beauty as widespread as the Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia and the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary in South Australia.

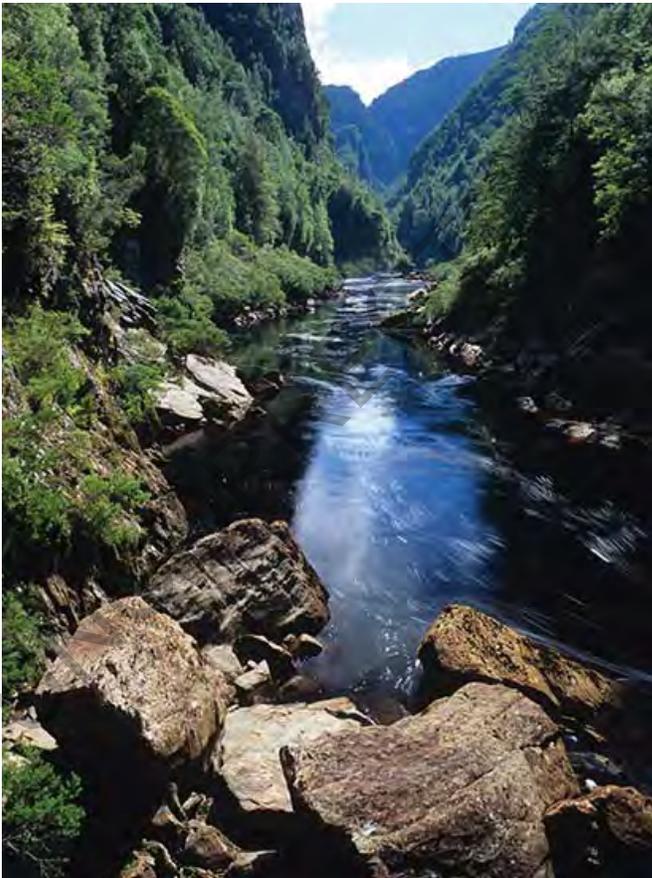


FIGURE 3

A campaign in 1982 led by the Wilderness Society saved the Franklin River in Tasmania from being flooded.

Employee and employer groups

Traditionally, employee groups such as **trade unions** have been set up to protect the interests of workers in a particular industry or workplace. Examples include organisations such as the Australian Workers' Union; the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association; and the Australian Services Union. Unions often conduct campaigns on issues that affect their members.



FIGURE 4 Unions often conduct campaigns on issues that affect their members.

In the same way, employers in many industries have set up organisations to help them when they are negotiating wage and conditions agreements with their employees. Examples include Master Builders Australia and the Australian Retailers Association.



FIGURE 5 Unions and employer organisations represent the interests of their members.

Both employer organisations and unions have also set up national organisations to protect their larger interests and to campaign on broad issues. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) operates as a pressure group, campaigning on issues that affect all employees. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) performs a similar function for employers.

FIGURE 6 National union and employer bodies operate as pressure groups to further the interests of their members.

An example of the way in which these organisations operate can be seen in the issue of penalty rates. Penalty rates are higher wages paid to employees who work on weekends or public holidays, or at other times outside traditional weekday hours. They were originally established to compensate employees for having to work at these more difficult times. Many people argue that, since so many businesses now operate seven days a week, having special rates of pay for weekends is out of date.

In early 2014, the federal government set up an inquiry to examine the operation of the laws that govern wages and working conditions. One of the areas to be looked at was the issue of penalty rates. The ACCI argues that penalty rates should be abolished because they impose an unfair cost on employers in restaurants, cafés and shops that operate seven days a week. The ACTU argues that penalty rates should be retained because they compensate people for having to work on weekends when they could be spending time with their families.



FIGURE 7 Workers in the hospitality industry are often paid penalty rates for working on weekends.

In campaigns like this, both sides try to influence the government in relation to any possible changes to the law. They also run advertising and publicity campaigns to try and influence the general public, knowing that governments will take notice of what the voters want. If opinion polls show that most voters believe that penalty rates are a good thing, the government would be

reluctant to remove them. If opinion polls show that the majority of voters are opposed to penalty rates, the government would be more likely to change the law to abolish penalty rates. Pressure groups like the ACTU and the ACCI can have a strong influence on the final result.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What is a lobby group?
2. List two different organisations that use lobby groups to present their views to members of parliament.
3. What is a pressure group?
4. What is the difference between the ACTU and the ACCI?
5. What are penalty rates?

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Interactivity

The road interactivity

Searchlight ID: INT-5432

EXPLAIN

6. Why do lobby groups often employ former members of parliament?
7. Identify and explain two examples where pressure groups have been successful.

DISCOVER

8. Use either the **Australian Conservation Foundation** weblink or the **Wilderness Society** weblink in your Resources section to identify two campaigns that your chosen organisation is focusing on.

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9. Use internet resources to investigate the activities of Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd organisation. What are these groups trying to achieve. What activities do they undertake to achieve these aims?
10. Use the **Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry** weblink in your Resources section to visit the ACCI website and identify one campaign that the organisation is currently engaged in.

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11. Use the **Australian Council of Trade Unions** weblink in your Resources section to visit the ACTU website and identify one campaign that the organisation is currently engaged in.

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THINK

- Working in small groups, identify two arguments in favour of people being paid penalty rates and two arguments against. Which arguments do you think are the stronger? Is your group opposed to or in favour of penalty rates? Compare your views with the rest of the class.

2.4 Taking direct action

Most of the time, people are prepared to participate in Australia's democracy by exercising their right to vote at state, federal and local government elections. Circumstances arise at other times when many feel that an issue requires immediate action, or they believe that the government is making the wrong decisions. In these circumstances, people will often take direct action to influence government actions. Direct action usually consists of some form of public demonstration, and can sometimes involve citizens deliberately breaking the law to bring their views to public attention.

Demonstrations

A demonstration is a public protest in which people take to the streets to protest against the actions of government, or to raise awareness of an issue of concern. The success of a demonstration depends on how many people participate. It also depends on how well they can capture public support. Most demonstrations involve marching through the city streets or protesting outside a significant public location.



FIGURE 1

A demonstration is a way different groups can make their views known to government and the general public.

Over the years, many causes have resulted in different types of demonstration. Not all involved street marches.

- In the late 1960s, demonstrations against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War were relatively small, often with only a few hundred protesters. They were largely dismissed by government as the views of a small minority. As more people became aware of the issues, the size of the demonstrations grew, culminating in protest marches in all major cities and towns across Australia in May 1970. More than 200 000 demonstrators marched in total, with 100 000 of these in Melbourne. Within 18 months, Australian troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam.



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Melbourne moratorium march

FIGURE 2

In May 1970, marchers outside the Melbourne Town Hall protested against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

- In late 1982, protests were growing against the construction of a dam in southwest Tasmania that would have flooded the Franklin River. At that time, a federal **by-election** was held for the federal electorate of Flinders in Victoria. Voters were encouraged to write the words 'No dams' on their ballot papers, and around 42 per cent of voters did so. This action is credited with encouraging both major parties to promise to intervene in the Franklin Dam issue during the federal election that was held in March 1983.



FIGURE 3 The proposed dam on the Franklin River in Tasmania became a federal election issue in 1983.

- In 2007, the Victorian state government introduced new liquor licensing laws requiring all live music venues to have increased security. For many smaller venues, the additional cost made the provision of live music too expensive and they began closing down their live music activities. When one of the most popular venues, the Tote Hotel in Collingwood, faced closure in early 2010, between 20 000 and 50 000 demonstrators protested in the streets of Melbourne. This led to a relaxation of some of these laws, with small music venues allowed greater flexibility to organise their own security.



FIGURE 4 Protests against the closure of the Tote Hotel in Melbourne led to changes in the security requirements of live music venues.

Defiance of the law

Another very public way of campaigning on an issue is to deliberately break the law. This is sometimes done when a group of people believe that a particular law is bad or unfair. They argue that if enough people deliberately break the law, it will convince the government to change or repeal that law. On other occasions, protesters deliberately break the law because they realise that their arrest and trial will help publicise an issue.

- In the late 1960s, one of the main grievances arising from Australia's participation in the Vietnam War was the use of **conscription** to increase the number of soldiers that could be sent to fight in that war. Many of those conscripted chose to defy the law by burning their conscription documents and refusing to join the army. The court cases and imprisonment of many of these young men helped to turn public opinion against the war.

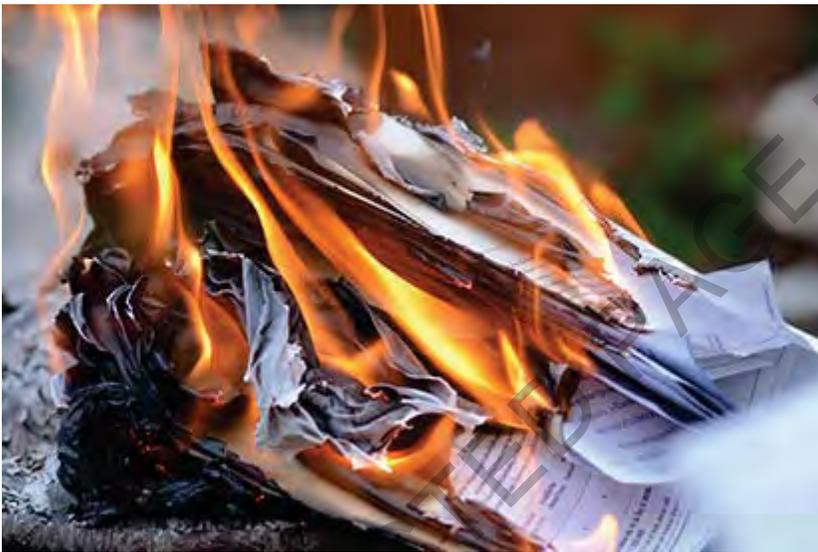


FIGURE 5

Many of those conscripted to fight in the Vietnam War burned their conscription documents and refused to report to the army.

- In 1982, as protests grew against the proposed Franklin Dam, the Tasmanian government passed laws making much of the area around the construction site private property. It also began to prosecute anyone caught trespassing there. Protesters attempted to set up a blockade to prevent earth-moving equipment from being used on the dam site. Over 1400 people were arrested for trespassing, and more than 500 were imprisoned. In 1983, the newly elected federal government passed laws prohibiting construction of the dam.

eBook plus

Weblink

Franklin River blockade 1



FIGURE 6

Protesters set up a blockade in 1982 to prevent earth-moving equipment being brought onto the dam site.

- In 2011, fast-food company McDonald's proposed the building of a fast-food restaurant in Tecoma, a small town in the hills to the east of Melbourne. Most of the local population of about 2100 people opposed the building of the restaurant because they felt it was not appropriate for the character of their community. They formed a pressure group to campaign against the building of the restaurant. The local council refused to provide a permit for the restaurant to be built. McDonald's appealed to the state planning tribunal and was granted a permit. When work commenced in 2013, protesters gathered to try and prevent the demolition of an old dairy that occupied the site of the proposed restaurant. People were arrested for entering the site illegally, including a woman who climbed onto the roof of the dairy in protest. McDonald's was able to continue with its building but local campaigners vowed to continue the fight.



FIGURE 7

Residents of Tecoma campaigning against the building of a McDonald's outlet in their town in 2013

eBook plus

Weblink

Franklin River blockade 2

eBook plus

Weblink

Tecoma protest

The effectiveness of direct action

Demonstrations can be effective if they attract media attention. This highlights the issue and can influence members of parliament, particularly if the cause gains public support. When Victorian nurses staged a protest in Melbourne in 2012, many patients and members of the public joined the protest to support the nurses in their bid for better working conditions. If demonstrations become violent, however, they may be less effective because they are less likely to win community support.

Disobeying the law can be effective if it raises media awareness of the issue. It can be particularly useful if it can show that the law is out of date or unfair, and needs to be changed. Breaking the law to highlight a cause, however, can lead to prosecution and may result only in turning public opinion against that cause.

ACTIVITIES

REMEMBER

1. What is a by-election?
2. How were voters able to influence the major political parties in the by-election in late 1982?
3. How were supporters of live music able to convince the Victorian state government to abandon its strict security requirements for live music venues?

EXPLAIN

4. What do we mean by 'direct action' as a form of political activity?
5. Why did some young men opposed to conscription break the law? How did they do this?
6. How did the Franklin River protesters defy the law during that campaign?

DISCOVER

7. Why were so many people in Australia opposed to this country's involvement in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 1970s? Use internet resources to research the main reasons for this opposition.
8. Use internet resources to find out what eventually happened with the McDonald's Tecoma dispute.
 - a. Were the protesters able to continue any form of opposition once the outlet was built?
 - b. What has happened with the protesters more recently?

THINK

9. In both the anti-conscription campaign during the Vietnam War and the Franklin blockade, people broke the law to achieve their aims. Their campaigns were ultimately successful.
 - a. Is it appropriate for people to break the law to achieve the changes they want? Give reasons for your answer.
 - b. Can you think of occasions when it would definitely not be appropriate to break the law?

SkillBuilder: Communication and reflection

Tell me

An advertisement is designed to convince individuals or groups of people to take particular action. Most advertising we see is aimed at encouraging us to buy particular products, but advertising can also be used to encourage people to take action on a political issue.

A good advertisement:

- is designed to attract attention
- uses bold colours and simple images
- provides key information in bold print
- uses recognisable symbols and logos
- provides reasons for action
- makes use of simple, easy-to-read language.

An advertisement that aims to encourage participation in a democratic activity should include all these features.

Show me

The following advertisement was used to encourage people to attend a rally at Federation Square to support the protest against the building of a McDonald's outlet in Tecoma. The advertisement has these features:

- It uses bright colours, including some of the colours used by McDonald's in its own advertising.
- The key information (time, date and location of the protest) is shown in the centre, in large print, using white lettering on a red background.



- The original poster included two logos widely used in the Tecoma anti-McDonald's campaign — a burger and the 'golden arches' logo — each with a circle and diagonal line. The circle and diagonal line are widely accepted as negative symbols. For copyright reasons we have been unable to reproduce the McDonald's logo here. However, you can see the original poster by using the '**Burger off**' campaign weblink in your Resources section.



- The slogan 'Burger off' was widely used in the Tecoma campaign and so has a level of recognition from that campaign. The phrases 'Tecoma goes to town' and 'No Maccas in the hills' also clearly identify the purpose of the protest.
- The information that the MC for the protest is Rod Quantock (a well-known Melbourne comedian), and the phrases 'See the film', 'Hear the music' and 'Meet the people' are all

designed to encourage people to attend. It is particularly designed to attract those who do not live in Tecoma but wish to show their support for the campaign.

- The addresses of two websites for further information is also an important part of the advertisement.

Let me do it

Using the above model, design an advertisement to encourage more young people to enrol to vote before they turn 18. Your advertisement should contain the features discussed above.

Review and reflect

Review

Australia is recognised as a democracy because we have the right to elect representatives to parliament to make laws on our behalf. If we do not like those laws, we can vote for different representatives at the next election. While voting in elections is important, it is not the only way of participating in the democratic process. There are lots of other ways in which we can have our voices heard and influence the future of our country.

- All citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote in Australian elections, although they need to register to take full advantage of this right.
- Social media can be used to spread ideas and opinions, and to gain support for changes in the law.
- Participating in opinion polls allows us to have our views communicated to our members of parliament, and may influence some of their decisions.
- Local members of parliament can assist individuals in their electorates, and can ensure that petitions from the voters are tabled in parliament.
- Lobby groups attempt to influence members of parliament on behalf of businesses and other groups. They aim to have laws passed that favour the group they represent, or have laws changed if they disadvantage that group.
- Pressure groups are groups of people who try to influence public opinion on particular issues. They include groups such as environmental campaigners and trade unions.
- Some groups and individuals attempt to influence parliament by taking direct action. This can include demonstrations and protest marches, as well as defiance of the law.


Interactivity
Multiple choice
Searchlight ID: INT-4303


Interactivity
True/false
Searchlight ID: INT-4304


Interactivity
Crossword
Searchlight ID: INT-5317

Reflect

The state government has decided to build a new freeway to connect two existing freeways. The planned route of the new freeway is through parkland that contains sporting grounds, as well as a nature reserve. The local council decides the freeway is inappropriate and votes to not allow it. The local state member of parliament is a government minister, and supports the freeway. The local federal member of parliament has strong links with some of the sporting clubs based in the parkland. The state government is hoping that the federal government will help pay for the cost of the new freeway. Local sporting club members, and supporters of the nature reserve, vow to do everything they can to protect the parkland.

1. How could the people opposed to the freeway use the electoral system to encourage the state member of parliament to change his or her position?
2. If an opinion poll was taken of local attitudes to the freeway, how might that influence the debate over the issue?
3. How might the federal member of parliament be able to assist those opposed to the freeway?
4. The local sporting clubs wish to organise a petition to the federal parliament.
 - a. Write the wording you think they could use at the start of the petition. (This is the request for action that is repeated at the top of each page in a formal petition to parliament.)
 - b. Explain what will happen to that petition once it is sent to Canberra.
5. How can the state government use lobbying to convince the federal government to help fund the freeway?
6. The opponents of the freeway join together to form a pressure group to campaign against the freeway. What might they call their group? Create a slogan and a logo for the group.
7. Identify two ways in which the newly formed group might use social media to help its campaign.
8. The group decides to stage a demonstration on the site of the proposed freeway. What should its members do to make sure the demonstration is effective?