Activism and Protest

Edited by Justin Healey

ISSUES IN SOCIETY

Volume 451
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INTRODUCTION

Activism and Protest is Volume 451 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
In a free society such as Australia, the right to peaceful protest is a long-practised feature of our democracy. The nightly news frequently broadcasts images of activists rallying for social change on diverse issues ranging from animal rights to coal mines, gay marriage, religious freedom and anti-immigration views. Social change movements are increasingly championed online through social media and e-petitions as well as on the streets, placing pressure on political leaders and raising the public profile of a range of causes.

Anti-protest laws, expanded police powers, well-resourced activism campaigns during elections, chaotic vegan protests and mass climate change action by school students, have all directed a spotlight on the principles of protest and the role of activist groups in organising resistance and raising awareness of controversial causes.

This title examines protest movements, rights and protections, and explores how activism can influence public opinion and hold governments and business to account. Is the current climate of protest in Australia growing hotter for social change, reflecting the civil unrest seen in many other parts of the world? Is there a rising tide of activism that is shifting power to the people?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:
- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
CHAPTER 1  
Protest movements and rights

What do we want? Charting the rise and fall of protest in Australia

CLIVE HAMILTON REFLECTS ON THE HISTORY OF PROTEST IN AUSTRALIA

In 1965, when a few hundred anti-Vietnam War protesters in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra staged Australia’s first ever sit-down demonstrations, the authorities were apoplectic. How dare these agitators block the traffic and defy authority?

At the 1970 Vietnam Moratorium rallies around Australia, 200,000 marched against the war. Even the police were afraid. It was seen as a turning point in our history. The game was up. Our troops would have to be withdrawn from Vietnam, and across the nation people came to believe that taking to the streets could change the world.

In 2003, when the government under John Howard deployed troops to fight in Iraq, 600,000 Australians marched in protest. It was a number never approached before and in all likelihood will never be exceeded. But despite their massive size, the protests were simply ignored.

Many of those who had joined the rallies became disillusioned. In Australia and other places where similar protests proved futile, demonstrators could no longer believe that marching in the streets could make a difference.

Today protests have become a commonplace, even banal, part of political life. Back then the tabloids screamed “Mob rule!” and so did the politicians. So debased has the act of protest become that in response to the mining tax in 2010 Australia’s then second-richest person, Gina Rinehart, could mount a flatbed truck and bellow “axe the tax” to an assembly of well-dressed company employees sent along for the cameras.

For those whose understanding of the act of protest was formed in the decades when every demonstration was greeted by the authorities as a threat to the stability of the social order, the protests of some of Australia’s richest left a sick feeling. What had happened since the glory days of protest in the 1960s and 1970s?

OLD LEFT, NEW LEFT

This is just one of the conundrums I came up against while writing my new book, What Do We Want? The story of protest in Australia, commissioned and
When we think about the story of protest in Australia we are naturally drawn to the upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s because it was then that powerful waves of dissent broke over Australia.

Women members of the Party were also prominent as the second-wave of feminism took shape. Arguably, the first tremor of the new phase of the women’s movement was felt in 1967 when Zelda D’Aprano – a party member and clerk at the Meatworkers Union – chained herself to the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne in support of equal pay. Three years later she and a friend famously boarded a tram and insisted on paying only 75% of the fare because they were paid only 75% of men’s wages.

**RED TO GREEN?**

Even in the early years of gay liberation, activists who were also members of the CPA had a prominent role, working to radicalise the emerging movement. They argued (wrongly as it turned out) that discrimination against homosexuals was part of the broader pattern of capitalist oppression.

It was this implied solidarity that in 1974 saw the communist-led Builders Labourers Federation place a black ban on work at Macquarie University after the University excluded trainee teacher Penny Short because she had come out as a lesbian.

But ironically, given the hysterical claims of today’s conservatives that environmentalism is little more than socialism dressed in a green disguise, the Old Left played no role in the formation of the modern environment movement. In fact, it was often hostile to what appeared to be a middle-class indulgence.

There were exceptions – notably the “green bans” of the early 1970s staged by the Builders Labourers Federation – but, as any climate activist will attest, the battle for a safe climate has until recently been as much with unions as with the “greenhouse mafia” – the group of industry lobbyists who played a key role in climate policy under John Howard.

So the activism of the new social movements of the 1960s challenged the traditional left as well as conservatives. The New Left’s emerging agenda of social change began to eclipse the Old Left, locked as it was into the belief that only organised labour could create a new social order.

When economic change and the rise of the New Right in the 1980s saw the collapse of union power, the Old Left was history.
The climate change marches that took place in the lead-up to the Paris talks are the latest example of a form of popular protest that has become woven into the fabric of political life in almost every country on the planet. Keri Phillips from ABC Radio National reports on the role of street protest in social and political change.

Street protest has become almost a staple of daily news. The Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the US, the Greek rallies against austerity and the Slut Walk campaign against rape culture are just a few recent examples.

The roots of this kind of political action lie in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the emergence of the anti-slavery movement, the temperance movement and movements for working-class rights – the first major modern social movements.

The single demand that was found in more protests than any other was a demand for what you might call real democracy.

Sara Burke, policy analyst at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

While studying how social protest evolved during the 20th century, historian Sean Scalmer from the University of Melbourne looked at the approach taken by Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India’s independence movement.

“We know that Gandhi was highly influenced by western social movements. He spent time in London as a young man studying law, and he observed first-hand the protests of the suffragettes and also of non-conformist critics of the Education Act in England,” Scalmer says.

“He came to emphasise very strongly the capacity of non-violence to be at the core of social movement performances and he practised that kind of politics in South Africa against the South African government, and then, of course, on his return to India, against the British.

“He in turn exerted a profound influence on western social movements. African-American civil rights activists and the peace movement, which became the anti-nuclear movement, began to learn from Gandhi and to apply his lessons to western politics.

“We really see that come to fruition from the late 1950s and into the 1960s. The success of those movements, in terms of mobilising large numbers of people and the political success of the civil rights movement and the anti-nuclear movement, helped trigger broader mobilisations in western societies that we came to know as ‘the sixties’.”

Professor Chris Rootes, the director of the Centre for the Study of Social and Political Movements at the University of Kent, has been studying student and environmental activism since the 1960s. He says the numbers of people involved in street protest have waxed and waned since World War II.
“In Britain, the climate demonstrations – and there have been three large ones now – have all been significantly smaller than the demonstrations of the Countryside Alliance from 1998 through 2002, and certainly much smaller than the demonstration against the war in Iraq, when over a million people rallied in the streets of London.

“So there have certainly been large demonstrations in the past and there is nothing particularly remarkable about the numbers of people in very recent demonstrations.”

Research into public protest is difficult, but an investigation carried out for PopularResistance.org attempted to quantify and analyse protests that had happened around the world between 2006 and 2013. The years covered by this research include the Global Financial Crisis and the popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa that became known as the Arab Spring – events that sparked mass demonstrations.

The researchers selected 84 countries representing more than 90 per cent of the world population and carried out a search of news available online. They identified four main themes, according to Sara Burke, a senior policy analyst for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, a German foundation that works on international development and politics.

“By far the largest category was for economic justice or against austerity,” Burke says. “They were all the kinds of economic issues that people are concerned with in every country: good jobs, affordable food, water and housing, decent education, to bring down inequality, to have land reform, et cetera.

“There were also clusters to be found with issues dealing with a lack of political representation, with people’s concern about their democratic participation being watered down. There was another large group that had to do with global justice issues, with the climate issue, with natural resources. And then the final issue had to do with group rights – women’s rights, prisoners’ rights, the rights of migrants, racial rights.

“The interesting thing is that although the economic issues formed by far the largest group, the single issue, the single demand that was found in more protests than any other was a demand for what you might call real democracy, for meaningful political participation.”

Not all street protests are well-organised events – some are spontaneous, some qualify as riots – and not all social activism happens on the left wing of politics.

“If we think about the last 20 years or so, then some of the most influential mobilisations have been by movements of the right in Australia,” says Scalmer.

“The movement that was thrown up by Pauline Hanson’s maiden parliamentary speech in part gave birth to a political party, but it also involved a series of mass gatherings across the country which in turn triggered counter mobilisations by anti-racist protesters. And that has also happened over the last year or two in conflicts over Islam and government responses to migration.”

“...
One of the most widespread public protests in recent years was associated with Occupy Wall Street, which began in New York’s financial district in September 2011. David S Meyer, a professor of sociology and political science at the University of California, has been studying the movement.

“The original idea for Occupy came from a Canadian provocateur in a magazine,” he says. “It was taken up by some New York-based activists who were pretty far on the marginal left. And it was a tiny thing that got very little attention for about two weeks, while they were able to build support, partly by using their own media networks. One of the really exciting things that’s going on now that we are still trying to figure out is how social media can be used to get activists’ messages out unmediated, unfiltered by professionals.”

Meyer says the Occupy movement did change the conversation in the United States, at least for a short time.

“I’ve actually been tracking this with a team of graduate students, and we saw that talk about the federal deficit declined after Occupy and talk about inequality just took off,” he says.

“Then there were associated issues under the rubric of inequality, like health insurance and particularly debt and student debt that suddenly got more attention than they had gotten in years prior. Occupy got politicians and other political leaders, newspapers, columnists, to start paying attention to these issues. Now, were there policy reforms that came out of it? I can’t find them.”

Sarah Maddison, an associate professor of politics at the University of Melbourne and a board member of GetUp, interviewed Australian activists for a book she wrote with Sean Scalmer called Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements. She says not all social movements judge their success in terms of changes in the law.

“Although movement effectiveness is often measured in terms of policy change or legislative change, that’s often not what activists themselves are trying to achieve,” she says.

“Often social movement actors are trying to change the hearts and minds of people in the community in the belief that will lead to other changes, more material changes, but they are often themselves not particularly concerned with seeing those changes take place.

“Indeed, a lot of activists reject the idea that the state or the government should be the focus of their attention. They are interested in changing values and beliefs in the community, and that’s pretty difficult to measure.”

Looking back over public protest, you can find examples of both success and failure. The successful fight against the Franklin Dam project in Tasmania was one of the most significant environmental campaigns in Australian history. On the other hand, the millions who protested around the world against the invasion of Iraq – listed by the Guinness Book of Records as the largest protest ever – failed to prevent the war.

Ultimately, it’s impossible to answer the central question about street protests: how effective are they?

“It’s never just one thing that makes change,” says Meyer.

“I wasn’t that Rosa Parks decided not to move to the back of the bus that brought about the end of legal segregation in the United States. Rosa Parks was supported by well-organised groups, some of which were filing lawsuits, some of which were lobbying legislators at the national level, some of them were coordinating protests. It’s a lot of things at once in some kind of coordination.”

Rootes says he thinks street protests are effective when they are in the context of campaigns.

“There are, of course, cases where street protests, even spontaneous street protests, do have effects where they serve as a wake-up call to the powerful and put issues on political agendas where they weren’t before,” he says.

“But I think it’s always very difficult to demonstrate the impact of social movements, and it’s certainly very difficult to demonstrate the impact of particular street demonstrations.

“That said, I think it’s clear that street demonstrations have had a role in the development of social movements and have enabled social movements to keep issues on the agenda or at least in the focus of attention of politicians when otherwise they might have slipped from attention.”

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Background information

The interrelated rights of freedom of association and peaceful assembly empower individuals to exercise other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Freedom of association and peaceful assembly are not generally protected in Australian law. Several Australian laws limit these freedoms. Freedom of association is protected in the employment context through the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) which protects the right of persons to join or not join an industrial association.

While limits on these freedoms are permissible, any limits must be lawful and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Key issue

Jurisdictions in Australia have recently enacted ‘anti-bikie’ laws purporting to target organised crime conducted through motorcycle gangs that unjustifiably limit freedom of association.

These include:

- Anti-consorting laws, such as s 93X of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) which criminalise the act of people associating with each other rather than their criminal activities.
- Provisions of the *Vicious Lawless Association Disestablishment Act 2013* (Qld) which require the imposition of significant mandatory additional imprisonment of 15 to 25 years upon people deemed ‘vicious lawless associates’ who commit offences as part of their participation in a gang.

Some jurisdictions have enacted anti-protest laws that unfairly limit freedom of peaceful assembly and expression by criminalising certain protest activities, such as:

- The *Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Act 2014* (Tas) – which criminalises legitimate forms of peaceful protest
- The *Summary Offences and Sentencing Amendment Act 2014* (Vic) – an anti-protest law expanding police powers to move people on from public space
- The *G20 (Safety and Security) Act 2013* (Qld) – which granted police broad powers to control protesters during the 2014 Brisbane G20 summit.

Recommendation

The Commission recommends that state and territory governments amend anti-protest and anti-bikie laws so they do not unduly restrict human rights.

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Australian Human Rights Commission.  
*Freedom of association and peaceful assembly.*  
KNOW YOUR PROTESTING RIGHTS

Protests have been pivotal in the course of driving important political change and advocating for the rights of marginalised communities throughout Australian history. Asanga Seneviratne from the Foundation for Young Australians explains

Protests were at the forefront of ending our involvement in the Vietnam War, securing women’s right to vote and advancing Indigenous land rights. Recently, young people across Australia and the world have taken to the streets to demand better on the issues that matter to them.

Notable protests include the ongoing School Strike for Climate marches, rallies held on January 26, and International Women’s Day rallies. Protests continue to be a cornerstone of advocating for the issues important to us. As such, it’s important to understand your protesting rights to ensure you are safe while making sure your voice is heard.

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST
Interestingly, we do not have the right to protest written directly into our constitution, unlike many other countries. However, Victoria, Queensland (from January 2020) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) have protected the right to protest directly through their own state-based human rights acts.

Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties, two of which feature the right to freedom of assembly and association. There is no legislation that enshrines this right on a national level in Australia.

ORGANISING A PROTEST – LEGAL REQUIREMENTS
If you are organising a protest or demonstration in a public space, you’ll likely be required to notify the police or obtain a permit from your local council and/or your local roads authority. This will depend on which state you are organising the protest in.

In most states, a notification and/or a permit needs to be provided to the relevant authorities between five to seven days in advance of the planned protest. Approval for a protest will generally be given by the relevant authorities (with or without conditions) unless they are prevented from doing so by a court or they have a reasonable belief that the protest will endanger public safety, damage property or in some circumstances the protest is not in the public interest.

You can find the specific requirements for each state and territory summarised below:

VICTORIA
• Depending on the local area, the local council may require you to hold a permit.
• A permit from VicRoads may be required where a protest is likely to impact major roads and freeways.
the assembly from taking place.

- You should also send a notice of assembly to the local council responsible for the place where the assembly will be held.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- When more than three people in Western Australia come together in public for a protest, meeting or procession they must obtain a permit. Applications for a permit need to be made to the Commissioner of Police at least 4 days prior to the event. The Commissioner may approve a permit, but subject it to certain conditions (which must be followed). A permit cannot be refused unless the Commissioner believes the protest will damage property, create a public nuisance or obstruction, or place people in danger.
- If a protest or procession passes through several police districts the application can be lodged directly with the State Traffic Intelligence, Planning and Coordination Unit (STIPCU).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- When a protest or demonstration will be held in, or will move through, a public space in South Australia a notice of assembly must be approved by either the local council or the local police (where the event will be held).
- The notice must be given to the relevant authority at least four days before the protest or demonstration is held. The police or local council are only able to object if they think the event is contrary to the public interest.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

- A permit is required to hold a protest, demonstration or other event on a public street in the Northern Territory. Permits will need to be approved by both the NT Police and the relevant local council at least 7 days before the event will be held.
- If you are planning to hold a protest or demonstration in a public location other than on a public street, such as a local park, you should contact the local council to see whether a permit is required.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

- Different circumstances apply for the holding of a protest or demonstration in the ACT, depending on where the protest or demonstration will take place.
- Generally, if you are planning a protest or demonstration on 'national land' a permit is not needed unless you plan to erect a structure.

Notable protests include the ongoing School Strike for Climate marches, rallies held on January 26, and International Women’s Day rallies. Protests continue to be a cornerstone of advocating for the issues important to us.
• If you plan to hold a protest or demonstration within the Parliamentary Precincts you will need to obtain approval from Parliament House Security or the Australian Federal Police.
• For other areas in the ACT you should contact ‘Access Canberra’ to see what is required.

Check out Not-for-profit Law for more information: www.nfplaw.org.au/campaignsprotests

CAN YOU BE ASKED TO LEAVE A PROTEST?
Individual states and territories have laws specifying the requirements for when police can enforce ‘move-on’ laws or ask you to leave a public place.

In most states, police are only allowed to request you to vacate a public place or shut down a protest if your behaviour is a threat to public safety, property is being damaged, or protestors are engaging in violence. If you are asked to leave a public area, you are generally not allowed to return to that location for 24 hours.

See YouthLaw for more information about move-on laws: youthlaw.asn.au/learn-about-the-law/orders-to-move-on-and-stay-away

PICKING YOUR BATTLES: STAY CALM IF CONFRONTED BY POLICE
You may be confronted or questioned by police during a protest. It is best to stay calm during this process, and knowing your rights can help you do this.

Remember these key rights:
• The police do not have the right to demand your name or address without a reason. Generally, a police officer can only ask you to give your name and address if they believe you have committed an offence or are about to commit an offence. However, it is an offence to refuse to give police your name and address or to give police a false name and address if they have a lawful reason to ask you for your details.
• You are not required to provide any information beyond your name and address if questioned by police. In these cases, you are able to exercise your right to be silent to any other questions and state ‘no comment’.
• There is no such thing as speaking ‘off the record’. Anything you say to a police officer may be used by them to arrest or charge you. The police could use the things you said as evidence in court to show that you broke the law.
• If you are put under arrest, you must be told that you are being arrested and why.


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Australia has a long history of protests. Our rights should be better protected

We also have a history of governments trying to suppress protest. It’s time this changed, observes Hugh de Kretser from the Human Rights Law Centre

The deputy prime minister recently told school students they should be in school “learning about Australian history” instead of joining the global student strike for climate action on Friday. Half of what he said was good advice. For if the students researched Australia’s protest history, they would learn that protest has been critical to so many social advances that we often now take for granted.

Protest helped to win the eight-hour working day, to protect the Franklin and the Daintree and advance Aboriginal land rights. Protest helped to secure women’s right to vote, to stop our involvement in the Vietnam War and end the criminalisation of homosexuality. Protest continues to play a key role in highlighting the cruelty of our refugee policies, in protecting workers’ rights, in stopping coal seam gas exploration and so much more.

Protest is particularly important for those whose interests are often ignored by our formal political system, whether it’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people pushing for self-determination or school kids whose future is at stake and yet who can’t vote to choose the representatives who will determine it.

But while protest is vital for our democracy, its importance isn’t well understood, and our protest rights aren’t properly protected in Australian law. It’s time this changed. Because while Australia has a proud protest history, we also have a history of governments trying to suppress protest.

Most recently, state governments in Tasmania, New South Wales and Western Australia introduced or attempted to introduce harsh anti-protest laws with severe penalties, excessive police powers and broad, vague offences. These laws have targeted environmental protest in particular, prioritising vested corporate and government interests over people’s democratic rights.

Fortunately, the McGowan government, on taking office, tore up the proposed Western Australian laws. The Tasmanian laws were then struck down by the high court for breaching the constitution, with one judge describing the “Pythonesque absurdity” of their operation. But the Hodgman government is trying to resurrect the laws. And NSW anti-protest laws remain in force, with penalties of up to seven years jail for “interfering” with a mine including coal seam gas sites, although the NSW Labor opposition has promised to repeal them if elected on 23 March.
At the federal level, we have the construction watchdog pursuing workers with threats of fines of up to $42,000 for attending mass union protests late last year if they didn’t have written approval from their employer, as well as forcing employers to hand over workers’ names and addresses.

While Australia has a proud protest history, we also have a history of governments trying to suppress protest.

These issues will come into sharper focus in coming years with increased focus on climate change, workplace disruption, the push for implementation of the Uluru Statement and more. The exposure of Adani’s self-declared “attack dog” lawyers and their proposed tactics of pressuring government, silencing critics and financially crippling activists, gives a taste of what is to come.

All of this underscores the critical importance of properly protecting our protest rights in law. Yet Australian law fails to do this, making our ability to protest fragile and liable to be eroded.

The Whitlam government signed, and the Fraser government ratified the key international treaty which guarantees our human rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association which together enable our right to protest. But international treaties don’t automatically become part of Australian law. Instead, Australian governments are meant to implement them in our domestic laws.

In a major step forward, in February Queensland joined Victoria and the ACT as the only Australian jurisdictions with human rights charters which protect protest rights. Yet Australia is still the only Western democracy without a national charter of rights. Our constitution protects few rights. It took the High Court until the 1990s to recognise, by implication, that the constitution protects freedom of political communication. This important but limited safeguard falls short of the protection that should be afforded to protest rights.

The Human Rights Law Centre recently launched our report Say it loud: Protecting Protest in Australia which guides law makers, law enforcers and protestors on how to protect protest rights. While protest by its nature may be inconvenient or uncomfortable, it is an essential element of our liberal democracy. The report explains the duty of governments to facilitate protest and also when protest rights can justifiably be limited, for example to stop harassment and abuse outside abortion clinics or incitement to violence. It’s a blueprint for a democracy where protest rights are upheld.

Our democracy doesn’t start and end on election day. Its enduring success rests on vital foundations like press freedom, the ability of charities and community groups to advocate freely, the rule of law and the right to protest. When governments chip away at our protest rights, they erode our democracy. To protect our democracy and help ensure a better future for all Australians, we must protect our protest rights.

### PRINCIPLES TO PROTECT PROTEST

According to the Human Rights Law Centre, protest rights are absolutely essential to a healthy democracy. When governments chip away at our protest rights, they erode our democracy. Below are the ten principles set out in the report, Say it loud: Protecting Protest in Australia to guide the protection of protest.

#### TEN PRINCIPLES TO PROTECT PROTEST IN AUSTRALIA

1. Protest activities are protected by the Australian Constitution and international law.
2. Any regulation of protest must be limited to what is necessary and proportionate.
3. As far as possible, protesters should be able to choose how they protest.
4. Laws affecting protest should be drafted as clearly and carefully as possible.
5. Laws regulating protest should not rely on excessive police discretion, and where discretion is necessary it should be properly guided by the law.
6. Lawmakers and governments (including police) should take positive steps to promote freedoms of expression and assembly.
7. Notification procedures should facilitate, not restrict, peaceful protest.
8. Lawmakers and governments should not prohibit protest based on its message, except in narrow circumstances where that message causes harm to other people.
9. Other human rights of protesters must be respected, including privacy, equality and freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment.
10. The use of force by authorities should only occur in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort.

Hugh de Kretser is Executive Director of the Human Rights Law Centre.


This article first appeared in *The Guardian*. Hugh de Kretser is Executive Director of the Human Rights Law Centre.
Protest movements have helped to shape the world we live in. We associate protest with revolution, democracy and social movements. It takes varying forms and locations from the classic street protest and occupation to digital media activism (or clicktivism, as its critics maintain).

In 2011 *Time* magazine declared ‘the protestor’ to be its person of the year – “the defining trope of our times” and “once again ... a maker of history”. Here in Australia protest is seen as a critical aspect of our democratic society. It is practised, dismissed as messy and inconvenient, mythologised, celebrated and even outlawed.

But if protest is so fundamentally linked to our system of democratic politics, how is it protected in our legal system? Is there in fact a right to protest? This is a difficult question for a legal system that is federal in nature and lacking a bill of rights. But is it too easy then to say that there is no right to protest because it cannot be found in the Australian constitution?

There is no freestanding right to protest, but protest is protected indirectly and directly by the law. Firstly, the common law protects protest as a fundamental right and freedom, which in combination with an interpretive tool – the principle of legality – can mean that laws affecting protest might be interpreted restrictively.

Secondly, even without a bill of rights, the Australian constitution provides indirect constitutional protection for protest – as political speech – via the implied freedom of political communication. Australian case law on the implied freedom of political communication is confusing and to some extent unresolved. But with the right set of facts, there is the possibility of constitutional protection for protest.

There is no freestanding right to protest, but protest is protected indirectly and directly by the law.

The High Court first addressed this question in a case about duck shooting protests, where the majority of the judges recognised the activity of the protestors as being capable of constituting political communication, but found that restrictions on that protest were lawful as they were directed to the important countervailing rationale of safety.

A similar approach was taken in the more recent Occupy Sydney case in the Federal Court where laws prohibiting camping or staying overnight in Martin Place were found to be valid as they were directed to
“the legitimate ends of maintaining public health, safety and amenity in a high use public area, and preserving the ability of all members of the public to use the area.”

Notwithstanding the occasional recognition of protest as an object for legal protection, many of the cases illustrate the difficulty of balancing this with other interests at stake, notably public amenity, health or safety. The lofty rhetoric of speech protection rarely translates to legal success for protestors in a constitutional context. Conceptually, protest straddles categories ranging from speech to association and assembly, but it also struggles to achieve constitutional protection when operating as a ‘strategy of rupture’.

Protest can make history, it can speak truth to power, it can change the legal system itself, but it is indirectly and rather poorly protected.

Thirdly, protest is protected in various statutes regulating police powers, public order and local government. An example of such protection is found in section 200 of the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 in NSW. The accompanying section 199 creates an offence for failure to comply with a direction. Section 200 provides that a police officer is not authorised to give such a direction in relation to ‘an apparently genuine demonstration or protest’.

The difficulty with these kinds of laws is that they are often subject to the discretion of relevant authorities. You might end up being able to establish your ‘right’ to protest in any given context, but this could involve significant legal risk, the possibility of arrest and conviction or civil penalty.

Protest can make history, it can speak truth to power, it can change the legal system itself, but it is indirectly and rather poorly protected. Protest, like democracy, is often messy, disruptive, inconvenient and even annoying, but as with free speech more broadly, it deserves more formal recognition and legal protection in Australia.

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DO WE HAVE A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO PROTEST?
In this article from the Constitution Education Fund the implied right to political communication and the importance of proportionality in legislation is explained

On 18 October 2017 the full bench of the High Court handed down their findings in Brown v Tasmania. The case was brought about after former Greens leader Bob Brown and a number of other people were arrested in 2016 for protesting against logging in a Tasmanian forest. A majority of the High Court found that most of the legislation that the Tasmanian Government had implemented to make such protests illegal was invalid.

In this article we examine the implied right to political communication and the importance of proportionality in legislation.

BACKGROUND
The Tasmanian Liberal Government was elected in March 2014 on the promise of rebuilding the state’s forestry industry. One of the first pieces of legislation passed by the Parliament was the Workplace (Protection from Protesters) Act 2014.

This legislation criminalised some forms of protest that interfered with business activity at any business premises or business access areas on public or private land. Workplaces were already protected through existing legislation, but the new laws imposed much higher financial and criminal penalties (up to $250,000 and five years jail) and were easier for the police to enforce.

The police were also given preventative powers where they could ask people to leave an area (for up to three months) if they believed they were about to commence an activity that might disrupt a business, rather than the normal practice of asking active protesters to move on. The penalty for not moving on when directed to by the police was $10,000 and up to four years jail.

THE PROTEST
In January 2016 about 70 people arrived at Lapoinya in the north-west of Tasmania to protest the clearfelling of Forestry Tasmania’s 49-hectare regrowth forest. Bob Brown, Hobart nurse Jessica Hoyt and a number of others refused to leave the forest when directed to by the police. They were subsequently arrested using the state government’s anti-protest laws. This was the first time the laws had been used and those arrested were faced with the prospect of jail time and/or significant fines.

Two months later Bob Brown announced that he was going to challenge the laws in the High Court on the basis that they breach the implied constitutional right to political communication. Shortly afterwards the charges were dropped. This was viewed suspiciously by many as a way to prevent a challenge to the legislation, but this was denied by the Government and the police. However, the Tasmanian Government did attempt to have the case discontinued on the grounds that Bob Brown no longer had a special interest in the legislation and as such had no standing in the court. Eventually the Tasmanian government dropped the push to have the case discontinued on standing.

In the end, several other states and the Commonwealth joined the case on Tasmania’s side. It was suggested that whatever was decided by the High Court about the Tasmanian legislation may affect similar laws in the other states and the Commonwealth.

THE HIGH COURT
The first question the High Court had to answer was about whether Bob Brown and Jessica Hoyt had standing. Since the push against standing was dropped,
the High Court did not need to answer that question. The second question was: *Is the Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Act 2014 (Tas), either in its entirety or in its operation in respect of forestry land or business access areas in relation to forestry land, invalid because it impermissibly burdens the implied freedom of political communication contrary to the Commonwealth constitution?* 

The High Court found that most of the Act was invalid (seriously, we went through the legislation with a marker pen and crossed out all the bits that were invalid. Apart from the definitions, there wasn’t much else left).

The final question asked was who should pay the costs of the case and the answer to that was the Tasmanian government.

**The implied freedom of political communication**

The Australian constitution contains very few written rights. It was a deliberate decision of the writers of our constitution to trust the democratic process to protect our rights. You’ll find that we have property rights, the right to a trial by jury, the right to be treated equally by each state and religious freedoms all written directly in the constitution.

The High Court, through its interpretation of the constitution, has found that we have two implied democratic rights. These are the implied right to vote and the implied freedom of political communication. But these rights are limited. For instance, if a law infringes on the implied right to political communication, but the purpose of the law is reasonable and appropriate to achieve that purpose, then the law may be valid. An individual’s rights under the constitution often must be balanced with the protection of others in the community.

As such, when determining whether the Tasmanian anti-protest laws may have breached the implied right of political communication, the court examined the purpose of the law.

The majority of the High Court found that the legislation was excessive. The purpose of the law was to protect Forestry Tasmania from protests that interfere with their operations and access to forestry land. It was found that this is a reasonable purpose, but that the legislation was not reasonably appropriate or adapted to that purpose. The justices found that the legislation went far beyond what was reasonably necessary to achieve its purpose and is not compatible with the
implied freedom of political communication. Among other things, the legislation was considered too vague in its definition of the areas of forestry areas where people could not protest and the powers given to the police were found to be too wide.

The legislation gave the police the discretion to break up protests which was considered a discriminatory burden against political communication of a particular political view. Justice Gageler stated that laws that operate against particular political viewpoints require very close scrutiny.

So do we have a right to protest?
Not necessarily. This High Court decision may not affect other legislation that has been implemented that prevents some protests, as long as the purpose of the legislation is not broader than it needs to be to meet its purpose.

Some of the states have introduced legislation that prevents protests within a certain proximity to abortion clinics. These states will likely re-examine their legislation to ensure that it is reasonably appropriate and adapted for the purpose of protecting women and businesses to conduct lawful activities.

Part of the judgement from Justice Nettle clarifies this: The implied freedom of political communication is a freedom to communicate ideas to those who are willing to listen, not a right to force an unwanted message on those who do not wish to hear it, and still less to do so by preventing, disrupting or obstructing a listener’s lawful business activities. Persons lawfully carrying on their businesses are entitled to be left alone to get on with their businesses and a legislative purpose of securing them that entitlement is, for that reason, a legitimate governmental purpose.

Split decision
The High Court decision on this case was split. Chief Justice Kiefel and Justices Bell and Keane wrote a joint judgement that found that Section 6(1), (2), (3) and (4), s 8(1), s 11(1), (2), (6), (7) and (8), s 13 and Pt 4 of the legislation was invalid. Justices Gageler and Nettle agreed with the invalidity of the same sections of the legislation, but wrote their own reasoning. Justice Gordon dissented and found that only one section of the legislation was invalid and Justice Edelman also dissented, finding that the legislation in its entirety was lawful.

This may mean that the implied freedom of political communication is not yet settled. As such, we may see more protesters challenging other anti-protest legislation in the High Court.

The ‘Arab Spring’ was a wave of revolutionary demonstrations and civil wars that began in Tunisia in December 2010, spreading quickly across the Arab world. Images and videos of the uprisings went viral, instantly spreading to all corners of the globe.

Violent revolution has been a feature of civilization for thousands of years – indeed, people were revolting well before the advent of print media, let alone social media platforms.

Australia has, for the most part, enjoyed relatively stable political structure over the past century. Although our recent history has been dotted with political turmoil – such as the dismissal of the Whitlam government, or more recently the Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd saga – we are yet to experience a violent overthrow of the government.

Many believe that as long as living standards remain high, the public is unlikely to resort to violent revolution. However, if human history is anything to go by, poor living standards are not the only trigger for uprisings – indeed, political and social oppression, and wealth disparity regardless of living standards, has also led to revolt and coup d’etat.

In our hyper-globalised world, where institutions can crumble and financial markets collapse overnight, it is not impossible to envisage a situation where the public reaches its breaking point – especially where financial turmoil is accompanied by excessive governmental control.

With that in mind, an interesting question arises: is it ever legal to engage in violent revolution in Australia?

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS
A number of constitutions expressly contain the right to overthrow government. For example, Article 120 of the Greek Constitution states:

“Observance of the constitution is entrusted to the patriotism of the Greeks who shall have the right and the duty to resist by all possible means against anyone who attempts the violent abolition of the Constitution.”

It is particularly interesting that the Greek Constitution goes so far as to couch resistance against those who attempt violent abolition of the Constitution as not only a right, but in fact a duty.

In similar terms, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany recognises the right of the people to resist unconstitutional actions, if all other measures fail:

“All Germans shall have the right to resist any person seeking to abolish this constitutional order, if no other remedy is available.”

In contrast, the Australian Constitution is a decidedly bland document, principally concerned with the division of power between the states and Commonwealth rather than with the rights of citizens.

Indeed, only 5 rights are expressly contained within our constitution:

• The right to vote (Section 41),
• Protection against acquisition of property on unjust terms (Section 51 (xxi)),
• The right to a trial by jury for criminal cases in the higher courts (Section 80),
• Freedom of religion (Section 116), and
• Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of State of residency (Section 117).

In addition to these, the High Court has found an implied freedom of political communication, which is essential for the operation of our system of representative government as created by sections 7, 24, 64 and 128.

Unsurprisingly then, the constitution does not stipulate under what conditions, if any, citizens are entitled to violently overthrow the government. Indeed, a group that seeks to revolt – even if resisting an illegitimate or abusive leader – would likely be labelled a ‘terrorist organisation’ and prosecuted accordingly, without the ability to rely on a constitutional defence.

BILL OF RIGHTS
Some argue that fundamental human rights should be clearly recognised and enforceable by law.

Whilst the right to revolution may, at this time, be an interesting hypothetical, many argue that basic inalienable rights should be codified on a national level through the implementation of a bill of rights incorporated into the Australian Constitution – much like the Amendments to the US Constitution represent that country’s bill of rights.

Whilst some laws still exist which aim to safeguard against governmental abuse, many are concerned about the gradual encroachment of the state on the protections and liberties of citizens, arguing that a bill of rights would help protect against our current slide towards a police state.

In the meantime, those harbouring a desire to overthrow the Commonwealth or state governments might need to work within the existing framework – although sovereign citizens may have a different idea ...

Sydney Criminal Lawyers (30 September 2016). People power: is violent revolution constitutional?
Animal rights activists in Melbourne: green-collar criminals or civil ‘disobedients’?

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE HAS TRADITIONALLY PLAYED A POSITIVE ROLE IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES, OBSERVES PIERO MORARO

Thirty-nine people were arrested yesterday in Melbourne over an animal rights protest that blocked a major intersection. The protest caused chaos for commuters during the morning peak hour, and politicians and the media were quick to condemn the act.

The prime minister denounced the “shameful, un-Australian” conduct of “green-collared criminals”. The opposition leader commented that protesters should thank farmers, rather than attack them. And some people on social media ridiculed and abused those engaged in the protest.

Yet Australia, like most liberal regimes, should allow citizens to protest as part of their right to free speech. Civil disobedience has traditionally played a positive role in democratic societies. Indeed, the label “civil” is meant to signal something praiseworthy in the protest.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE ISN’T THE SAME AS NON-VIOLENCE

Civil disobedience is traditionally identified with the non-violent campaigns of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King junior. But as I explain in my book on this subject, this has had the unwelcome result of suggesting that “civil” means “non-violent”.

After 39 activists were arrested, Superintendent David Clayton explained yesterday that Victoria Police:

... respect the right of people to protest peacefully.

This statement suggests the Melbourne protest was not peaceful, despite the fact protesters were holding placards that read:

This is a peaceful protest.

What many found despicable in this protest was the disruption of public traffic. They think the right to protest does not imply the right to cause others to remain stranded on their way to work. From this standpoint, the activists’ disruptive conduct constituted an act of violence and, as such, was incompatible with the principles of civil disobedience.

THE DANGER OF NEUTRALISING DISSENT

But this reasoning is misguided and dangerous. It’s dangerous because it risks neutralising the potential of civil disobedience as a form of dissent. When the government claims that only non-disruptive protests are “civil”, it’s also implying that those who seek to go beyond mere symbolic actions, and have some...
impact on others through their protest, are censored as “criminal” and uncivil.

Sociologist Herbert Marcuse captured this risk with the notion of “repressive tolerance”. He argues that a government may successfully neutralise dissent by persuading citizens that there are “good” and “bad” ways of protesting. The good ones are those that cause no disruption, the bad ones are those that do – and citizens should engage in the good ones only.

But it is no coincidence that protests that cause no disruption are also the least likely to have an impact on public opinion and therefore force the government to take action.

This is exactly what occurred in Melbourne yesterday. After many non-disruptive protests that led to no answer from the government, the activists resorted to a disruptive act to force society to face the moral issue of animal treatment in the food industry. This was necessary to ensure their view, for once, was not ignored by the public.

WHAT CIVIL DISOBEEDIENCE IS AND ISN’T

I describe civil disobedience as an act of communication (albeit illegal). It is a way for citizens to “persuade” others of the necessity of changing a law, policy or practice. Its civility lies in the fact it shows respect and consideration for those it addresses.

When the government claims that only non-disruptive protests are “civil”, it’s also implying that those who seek to go beyond mere symbolic actions, and to have some impact on others through their protest, are censored as “criminal” and uncivil.

But this need not be done in strictly non-violent ways. For example, in some cases forcing others to face our opinion (even against their will) is not uncivil, insofar as they remain free to decide whether to endorse or reject our view.

The conduct becomes uncivil when it seeks to “coerce” others to accept one’s view – for example, via threats. This is why terrorism is inherently uncivil.

Many people defended Edward Snowden’s whistleblowing as a form of civil disobedience, since he claimed to have leaked classified documents to the public “so what affects all of us can be discussed by all of us in the light of day”.

The same could be said of the Melbourne protest. One of the protesters explained: All we want is for people to watch the documentary and understand what goes on in Australian abattoirs.

The protesters sought to persuade others to take action to promote animal welfare, not coerce them.

Of course, these activists resorted to an illegal act to carry out their protest, and for that reason they may be answerable to the law. Yet, I would argue, as civil “disobedients”, they should be treated with more leniency in comparison to standard lawbreakers.

NOT ALL PEACEFUL PROTEST IS CIVIL

There is another important reason why we should resist the idea of civility as synonymous with non-violence. When right-wing groups decide to organise a peaceful protest in support of their racist views, their action may certainly be described as “non-violent”, insofar as it causes neither injury nor disruption to others.

But this protest could never be considered “civil”, despite its non-disruptive nature, because at its heart lies an inherent disrespect for some segments of society.

Claiming that some people are less worthy than others, simply because they belong to a certain race or religion, is inherently uncivil. Those who engage in protest, even non-violent ones, to advance those claims should appropriately be condemned as uncivil disobedients.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Piero Moraro does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond his academic appointment.

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THE CONVERSATION

Activism and Protest

Issues in Society | Volume 451

SHOULD YOU LET YOUR KIDS SKIP SCHOOL TO BE PART OF A POLITICAL PROTEST?

A REPORT BY REBECCA HEWETT FOR ABC NEWS

History is scattered with examples of school students throwing themselves into political causes and taking their fight to the streets – think the anti-Vietnam movement and the March for Our Lives rallies in Washington.

On Monday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison made it clear how he felt about Australian students taking time off school to protest.

“We don’t support the idea of kids not going to school to participate in things that can be dealt with outside of school,” he said.

“We don’t support our schools being turned into parliaments. What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools.”

This week, hundreds of students around the country are ignoring that advice and heading to Student Strike for Climate Action rallies – Canberra held one on Wednesday, Hobart’s was on Thursday, and other capitals held theirs on Friday. Experts say taking part in activism is “all part of a civics education”.

What’s the impact of activism on kids?

Psychologist and author Steve Biddulph said student activism had very real mental health benefits.

“Scott Morrison is diametrically wrong on this one,” he said.

“It’s all part of a civics education, it’s getting students engaging in their civic responsibility.”

“Many children and teens are affected by the state of the world with climate and cruelty to refugees and the environment generally topping the list.

“Involvement in helping the world is the key to mental health and making good adults for the future.”

Professor Michael Platow from the Australian National University’s Research School of Psychology agreed.

“It’s all part of a civics education, it’s getting students engaging in their civic responsibility,” he said.

“Schools need to go beyond teaching maths and science because it’s part of a student’s role to engage – they’re required by the state to engage.

“Any democracy wants to replicate itself in the next generation, we don’t want demagogues to come in, we want a citizenship that embraces and engages with a vibrant democracy.”

He said adults shouldn’t let their own views cloud their judgment of their children’s political or social activities.

“We have to separate our own personal values about the topic, from the process of engaging in civic activity. We can disagree with the topic but we can’t disagree with the process.”

How young is too young?

Kevan Goodworth, chair of the Australian Council of State School Organisations, said age was “complex”.

“I think it’s more something that you would not imagine a younger person of five or six years old necessarily might have an interest in,” he said.

He said while some kids just wanted to skip school, most were genuinely engaged with the topic.

“We would almost always find a situation where one or two students saw this as a day off school, but that’s certainly not something that I am hearing from the passion being evinced this morning from the students who are taking a stand,” he said.

“We encourage the situation where parents and children are talking about these matters around the dinner table in the home and coming to considered opinions.”
A growing climate of youth protest

20 September 2019: An estimated 300,000 people attended rallies around Australia, calling on the government to take more extensive action on climate issues.

- Organisers estimate 300,000 Australians gathered at climate change rallies around the country in one of the largest protest events in the nation’s history, however more conservative estimates had the number closer to 180,000 demonstrators.
- Inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, the movement spread to Australia last October (2018) and tens of thousands of students nationally have taken part in rallies since then. The global day of action was held three days before the United Nations Climate Change Summit in New York.
- Strikers called on the government for no new coal, oil and gas projects, including the Adani mine, and to move towards 100% renewable energy generation and exports by 2030.
- Tens of thousands of adult workers joined the students; more than 2,500 Australian businesses took part, either closing their doors or allowing their employees to walk off the job.
- Acting Prime Minister Michael McCormack labelled the protests “a disruption” and said they should be held on weekends not school or regular work days, echoing statements by Prime Minister Scott Morrison in relation to the previous school climate strike in 2018.
- Punishment for missing school to attend the strike was decided on a state-by-state basis; many students missed exams to attend the rally.
- Many parents have been supportive of the students striking in support of climate action.

Compiled by The Spinney Press.

What about the time off school?

Rules about school absences vary from state to state.

In New South Wales, Education Department guidelines say principals may grant attendance exemptions for things like participation in elite sport or “employment in the entertainment industry”, but other activities have to be referred up.

In Tasmania, even with parental permission a student’s absence will be marked as “unauthorised” unless they are at a recognised state, national or international event or are “participating in a recognised learning experience”.

After an unspecified number of unauthorised absences the school will send a letter home asking for an explanation. Ultimately though, parental consent is the key.

Nelson File – the principal of the Friends school in Hobart – said he would prefer it if rallies were held on weekends, but that he supported students attending as long as their parents got them there and back.

“The goal of our school is to have students develop into adults who are actively engaged, who understand what the issues are and think about the kind of society they want to live in,” he said.

“Any democracy wants to replicate itself in the next generation, we don’t want demagogues to come in, we want a citizenship that embraces and engages with a vibrant democracy.”

“We want students who think clearly about how to create a more just society.”

‘The PM’s not doing anything, so we have to’

At today’s protest in Tasmania, student Amelie Hudspeth said she would not need to miss school if the government was doing its job on climate change.

“As young people it’s really important to us that we have a safe future, and at the moment it’s just not happening,” she said.

[The Prime Minister said] students shouldn’t miss school for anything that could be dealt with out of school, but he’s not doing anything so we had to.”

Woodbridge school student Imogen Viner said: “Without activism there’s no point in going to school because there won’t be a future we want to live in.

“Australia used to lead the world in renewables and now we’re not doing anything.”

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School climate strikes: what next for the latest generation of activists?

After students around the world went on strike to protest against the lack of action on climate change, what is the next step for young activists? By Marc Hudson

School students across the UK (and the world) went on strike on February 15, leaving their lessons to protest the lack of effective action on climate change. Coordinated school strikes may be a novel tactic, but mass environmental activism isn’t. So will things be any more successful this time around?

The first big global wave of ecological concern began in the late 1960s and involved fears of overpopulation, air and water pollution and the extinction of species. It peaked with the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, which kicked off international environmental politics.

The next mass movement began in the late 1980s with concerns over the ozone hole, Amazonian deforestation and newly-voiced fears of climate change – then known as the “greenhouse effect”. That wave peaked with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which sought to tackle both global warming and biodiversity, and marked the beginning of coordinated climate action through the UN. That conference was addressed by a passionate and articulate young woman (12-year-old Severn Cullis-Suzuki) representing “ECO” – the Environmental Children’s Organization.

From about 2006 to 2010 there was another, climate-specific wave, beginning with Al Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth documentary, and groups like Climate Camp in the UK. It climaxed (or fizzled out) with the 2009 UN climate summit in Copenhagen. This wave saw the creation of various “Youth Climate Coalition” organisations in Australia and the UK.

In academic terminology these periods of concern and relative indifference are known as the “Issue Attention Cycles”.

A NEW WAVE OF ACTIVISM

This latest wave of climate action emerged in 2018, in the shape of Extinction Rebellion and its French cousin (or inverse) the gilets jaunes (yellow vests movement). Earlier in the year, Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg had begun her solo “school strike” in Stockholm while, more or less simultaneously, activists in America launched the “Zero Hour” youth climate march.

Alongside this activism, the IPCC released its report on what it would take to keep global warming below 1.5°C, and Mother Nature lent a hand with blistering hot summers in the UK, California and (more recently) Australia. Previous bursts of environmental activism occurred before climate breakdown had been quite so obvious and severe. This time round, the heatwaves, hurricanes and floods will keep coming, perhaps making the latest wave of enthusiasm last longer.
occurred before climate breakdown had been quite so obvious and severe. This time round, the heatwaves, hurricanes and floods will keep coming, perhaps making the latest wave of enthusiasm last longer.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

But what goes up must come down, and the students will find that it is very hard indeed to sustain emotional and physical mobilisation for a prolonged period. Right now, this issue is roughly where the Parkland shooting protests were last year – newsworthy for now, but the media caravan will inevitably move on.

That has consequences: when protests and actions stop getting the same amount of attention, and it seems that momentum is stalling, internal disagreements as to what is the best way forward, beyond a cycle of marches and symbolic strikes, will emerge, and will need to be managed skilfully. Some will want to work “within the system” and get invited onto advisory panels and into consultative processes. Others will have to get on with real life (university, paying the rent, working on, ah, zero-hour contracts).

On one front, the young are lucky – their age means it is hard to see any direct infiltration and “strategic incapacitation” by undercover police. But the flip side is that social media offers virtually limitless surveillance possibilities.

One possibility is an attempt to discredit and demoralise those who seem vulnerable. Elements of special interests like the oil and gas industry often try to “pick off” individual scientists or activists rather than take on a whole field – climate scientist Michael Mann has dubbed this the Serengeti Strategy as it resembles lions hunting the weakest zebras. We are already seeing this strategy in the latest wave of climate activism: recently Greta Thunberg had to address some rumours being circulated about her.

Youth activists also face the problem that they may annoy their parents and grandparents. Yet before offering advice to the young, we older people have to ask ourselves, why should they listen to us? We’ve known about the problem and either been ineffective or done nothing. It is children who are owed an enormous apology and expression of humility.

So for the latest generation of climate campaigners, my top four pieces of advice, based on both my activism and my time in academia, are as follows:

• Be aware of emotions. People won’t be persuaded just by being given more information on global temperatures or carbon budgets – psychological skills will matter too.

• Your parents are probably wrestling with fear (aren’t we all?) and guilt for not having sorted this out before you had to. Fear and guilt can make people oscillate from action to inaction, pessimism to optimism.

• Traditional “social movement” activities (marches, petitions, protests, camps) have a short shelf-life. The media gets bored and stops reporting. Meanwhile, those in power learn how to cope with the pressure. Be very careful about getting drawn into the Big Marches In London syndrome. You’re going to need to innovate, repeatedly.

• Even though time is short, this is still a marathon, not a sprint.

But what would you say? How should we older people offer advice, when, who to, and about what? Suggestions in the comments please.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Marc Hudson does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond his academic appointment.

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THE CONVERSATION

Human rights activists are increasingly adopting innovative approaches and turning to new platforms to secure accountability for human rights violations, with the additional aim of bringing human rights challenges to the level of collective social concern, and especially in the business domains including mining, big data, AI and modern slavery in supply chains.

At Innovate Rights 2019, the first conference hosted by the Australian Human Rights Institute at UNSW Sydney, a panel of industry leaders and thinkers will discuss the emergence of innovative strategies in business and human rights activism.

Director Professor Louise Chappell says many of these have dominated our news feeds this year.

“Even though we are surrounded by new forms of activism, traditional forms of protest like the recent school climate strike, still garner wide attention,” Professor Chappell said. “What’s new is the online dimension, and the ability to quickly gather support from all corners of the globe.

Shareholder action, online petitions and social media campaigns are three prominent examples of activist strategies being used to hold business and policy-makers more accountable for decisions that impinge on human rights.

“I’m looking forward to this conversation at Innovate Rights that will explore the many creative ways that activists are inspiring companies to change their practices, and learning what works best.”

Shareholder action, online petitions and social media campaigns are three prominent examples of
**Forms of activism**

- Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society.

- Forms of activism range from building a mandate in the community (e.g. writing letters to newspapers), petitioning elected officials, running or contributing to a political campaign, preferential patronage or boycotting of businesses, and demonstrative forms of activism like rallies, street marches, strikes, sit-ins or hunger strikes.

- Activism may be performed on a day-to-day basis in a wide variety of ways, including through the creation of art (‘artivism’), computer hacking (‘hacktivism’), or in how one chooses to spend their money (‘economic activism’). For example, the refusal to buy clothes or other merchandise from a company as a protest against the exploitation of workers by that company is an expression of activism.

- The most highly visible and impactful activism often comes in the form of ‘collective action’, in which numerous individuals coordinate an act of protest together in order to make a bigger impact. Collective action that is purposeful, organised, and sustained over a period of time becomes known as a ‘social movement’.

- Historically, activists have used literature, including pamphlets, tracts, and books to disseminate or propagate their messages and attempt to persuade their readers of the justice of their cause. Contemporary activist groups tend to use online social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action.

- Typically, most activism in the past has focused on creating substantive changes in the policy or practice of a government or industry.

- Some activists try to persuade people to change their behaviour directly (‘direct action’), rather than to persuade governments to change laws. Direct action originated as a political activist term for economical and political acts in which the actors use their power (e.g. economic or physical) to directly reach certain goals of interest, in contrast to those actions that appeal to others (e.g. authorities) by, for instance, revealing an existing problem, using physical violence, highlighting an alternative, or demonstrating a possible solution.

- Other activists try to persuade people or government policy to remain the same, in an effort to counter change.


Activist strategies being used to hold business and policy-makers more accountable for decisions that impinge on human rights.

**SHAREHOLDER ACTION**

Shareholder action in Australia is growing and is only expected to increase, particularly in relation to corporations’ climate change commitments and compliance with privacy laws. Shareholders’ willingness to hold directors to account on a broad range of issues suggests that increasingly, profit maximisation is no longer the only concern to investors.

In late 2017, Guy and Kim Abrahams – two shareholders in the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) – challenged the bank on a breach of its disclosure requirements under the Corporations Act, claiming that CBA had failed to include information relating to the risk climate change posed to the company’s financial position in its 2016 report.

Though the case was dropped before it went to court, CBA responded by acknowledging in its 2017 annual report that “climate change is both a risk and opportunity for our business, for our customers and for the community”, as well as making other climate-related commitments.

This month, the Responsible Investment Association of Australasia released a report which identified Australia and New Zealand as world leaders in responsible investment approaches. RIAA acknowledged that this positive outcome was in large part because investors are increasingly waking up to the connection between profitability and positive environmental and social impact, driving new expectations of corporate governance.

**ONLINE PETITIONS**

Probably the best-known online petition platform, change.org reports that human rights was one of the top five categories of petitions created between 2015-2017, with 631,416 petitions created on change.org in 2017 to draw attention to human rights issues.

A petition calling for the Australian Parliament to recognise marriage equality proved the most popular in 2017, attracting 329,373 signatures. In late 2018 the #kidsoffnauru petition garnered widespread support and resulted in the evacuation of 11 children remaining on Nauru, as well as the #backthebill campaign aimed at securing the transfer from Nauru of men, women and children requiring urgent medical attention.

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Online petitions are a democratic, accessible and clearly effective way of calling for industry and government to honour their human rights obligations.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS
#MeToo, #TimesUp and #BlackLivesMatter are immediately recognisable examples of social media campaigns that have been used for political engagement and accountability. Internationally, the #whomademyclothes hashtag has been used to promote ethical and sustainable fashion and call brands that have poor rights practices to account.

Social media activism has the ability to unite a group of people with disparate backgrounds around a common cause in a short space of time. Even so, some experts warn that despite the benefits of social media activism – raising awareness, creating space for movements to emerge and galvanising collective action – it may only deliver a “temporary shock” to those who wield power in organisations and government.

Another factor to consider is “brand activism”, with businesses themselves often co-opting social causes and incorporating them as part of their branding strategies, Nike being a significant recent example.

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SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

Social movements are large, sometimes informal, groupings of individuals or organisations which focus on specific political or social issues with a view to carrying out, resisting, or undoing a change in society. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces.

Examples include:
- Animal rights
- Anti-capitalism
- Anti-consumerism
- Anti-corporate activism
- Anti-fascism
- Anti-globalisation
- Anti-nuclear
- Anti-racism
- Anti-vaccination
- Anti-war
- Black Lives Matter
- Children’s rights
- Civil rights
- Climate action
- Conservation
- Disability rights
- Environmental justice
- Extinction Rebellion
- Fair trade
- Feminism
- Gay rights
- Hippie
- Human rights
- Indigenous land rights
- Indigenous reconciliation
- LGBTQI rights (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex)
- Men’s rights
- #MeToo
- Non-violence
- Occupy
- Organic
- Pro-choice
- Pro-life
- Right to life
- Slow food
- Tea Party
- Time’s Up
- Union/labour movement
- Veganism
- Women Against War
- Women’s liberation
- Women’s suffrage
- World Cleanup Day
- Yellow vests.

Compiled by The Spinney Press.
AUSTRALIANS’ TRUST IN POLITICIANS AND DEMOCRACY HITS AN ALL-TIME LOW

The majority of Australians dislike the conflict-driven politics of the federal parliament, according to research conducted by Mark Evans, Gerry Stoker and Max Halupka

Over the past four years, we have conducted a range of attitudinal surveys with the Social Research Institute at Ipsos on the relationship between trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy in Australia.

Our latest research, conducted in July 2018 (prior to the Liberal Party’s leadership spill), includes a quantitative survey of a representative sample of 20 focus groups and 1,021 Australians from a wide range of demographic backgrounds. We understood political trust in this survey as “keeping promises and agreements”.

Our findings should give all democrats pause for thought. We continue to find compelling evidence of an increasing trust divide between government and citizens. This is reflected in the decline of democratic satisfaction and receding trust in politicians, political parties and other key institutions (especially media). We also found a lack of public confidence in the capacity of government to address public policy concerns.

DEMOCRATIC DECLINE AND RENEWAL

Australians should rightly be proud of their hard-won democratic traditions and freedoms and the achievement of stable government, which has delivered social and economic well-being for its citizens.

The majority of Australians dislike the conflict-driven politics of the federal parliament, but don’t dislike democratic values or democracy as a system of government.

When asked to select three aspects of Australian democracy that they liked the most, the top three in 2018 were (in order):

1. “Australia has been able to provide good education, health, welfare and other public services to its citizens”
2. “Australia has experienced a good economy and lifestyle”
3. “Australian elections are free and fair”.

Respondents were least likely to choose features that praised (or showed engagement) with current democratic politics. The findings suggest that Australians are happy with the underlying democratic infrastructure of Australian society that allows them to achieve a high standard of living, but are less positive or engaged about day-to-day political operations.

AUSTRALIANS ARE DEEPLY UNHAPPY WITH DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Fewer than 41% of Australian citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, down from 86% in 2007. Public satisfaction has fallen particularly sharply since 2013, when 72% of Australian citizens were satisfied. Generation X is least satisfied (31%) and the Baby Boomers most satisfied (50%).

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY IN AUSTRALIA

At a time of the “#Metoo” movement, women are generally less satisfied with democracy and more distrustful of politicians and political institutions.

In general, levels of trust in government and politicians in Australia are at their lowest levels since time-series data have been available.

Just 31% of the population trust federal government. State and local governments perform little better, with just over a third of people trusting them. Ministers and MPs (whether federal or state) rate at...
just 21%, while more than 60% of Australians believe
the honesty and integrity of politicians is very low.

The three biggest grievances people have with pol-
icians are:
1. They are not accountable for broken promises
2. They don’t deal with the issues that really matter
3. Big business has too much power (Liberal and
National Party voters identify trade unions
instead of big business).

The continued decline of political trust has also con-
taminated public confidence in other key political
institutions. Only five rate above 50% – police, military,
civic wellbeing organisations (such as Headspace or
community services), universities and healthcare
institutions.

Trust was lowest in political parties (16%) and web-
based media (20%). Trust in banks and web-based media
has significantly decreased since the last survey. This
reflects the impact of the banking Royal Commission
and the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal.

People who are more likely to feel satisfied with the
status quo include those aged over 55 (Baby Boomers),
those earning more than $200,000 a year and those
who vote for the National or Liberal parties. They
are more likely to be male and an immigrant, because
those born overseas tend to be more satisfied with
Australian politics than native-born.

Those who are most likely to be unhappy are Aus-
tralian-born, female, aged in their 40s (Generation X)
and struggling on less than $50,000 a year. They are
more likely to identify with minor political parties like
One Nation, Centre Alliance or independents.

THE PERFECT STORM FOR INDEPENDENTS

Levels of social trust are also in decline. Social trust
between people has fallen below 50% for the first time
to 47%. A majority, though, still believe that people in
their neighbourhood would help others out – except
for the very rich (47%).

Four attitudinal shifts are on display here.

First, many voters care more about effective and
competent government than promises of more dollars
in their pockets.

Second, there is a group of voters who are completely
disconnected from traditional politics. They are deeply
distrustful not just of politicians but almost every
major institution and authority figure listed in the
survey, except for their local GP.

Third, we can identify an increasingly large group
of Australians who are deeply critical of the main
political parties and are looking for an alternative
across the ideological spectrum.

And fourth, there is a group of Australians who
vote independent for tactical reasons, either to secure
greater resources for their communities or to register
a protest vote against the two-party system.

APPETITE FOR DEMOCRATIC
REFORM IS EXTREMELY STRONG

Our survey revealed a significant appetite for reform.
Nine out of 15 proposed reforms received net agree-
ment rates above 50%. The top five reforms favoured
in the survey were:
1. Limiting money donated to parties and spent
   in elections
2. The right for voters to recall ineffective local MPs
3. Giving all MPs a free vote in parliament
4. Co-designing policies with ordinary Australians
5. Citizen juries to solve complex problems that
   parliament can’t fix.

Reforms aimed at improving the practice of repre-
sentative politics were the most popular, followed by
reforms aimed at giving citizens a greater say. There
was also strong support for reforms aimed at creating a
stronger community or local focus to decision-making.
Only reforms aimed at guaranteeing the representation
of certain groups failed to attract majority support.

Remarkably, accessing more detailed information
about innovative reforms led to greater support for

PERCENTAGE OF CITIZENS SATISFIED WITH THE WAY DEMOCRACY WORKS IN AUSTRALIA, 1996-2018

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those reforms. This is an important finding, revealing the importance of strategic communication in winning the war of ideas.

WE ARE AT THE TIPPING POINT
Liberal democracies are founded on a delicate balance between trust and distrust. Our survey findings suggest we may have reached a tipping point due to a deepening trust divide in Australia, which has increased in scope and intensity since 2007.

Yet citizens still appear to value the overall stability of their political system, even if the lack of political trust means they doubt its ability to deliver, especially on more challenging policy issues.

Australians imagine their democracy in a way that demonstrates support for a new participatory politics but with the aim of shoring up representative democracy and developing a more integrated, inclusive and responsive democratic system.

In the light of this discovery, we believe an effective path to reform is not about choosing between representative and participatory democratic models, but finding linking arrangements between them.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT
The authors do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and have disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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Trust and Democracy in Australia: Democratic decline and renewal, by Gerry Stoker, Mark Evans and Max Halupka, December 2018.

This report is the first output from the initiative Democracy 2025 – bridging the trust divide. For other reports in this series visit: www.democracy2025.gov.au

ALLEGIANT AND ASSERTIVE MODELS OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allegiant</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on order and security</td>
<td>Emphasis on voice and participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deference to authority</td>
<td>Distance from authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust in institutions</td>
<td>Scepticism of institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited liberal view of democracy</td>
<td>Expanded democratic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited protest/protest potential</td>
<td>Direct, elite challenging action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional forms of participation</td>
<td>Mixture of traditional and new forms of participation</td>
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Can young people influence government?

A QUESTION OF INFLUENCE

Australians under 18 are citizens without a vote. Can they possibly have any influence on governments? Kate, a student in a high school in Victoria, says no:

We influence the world more through our tastes in fashion and music than our ideas on politics and human rights. And this isn’t because we don’t have ideas on politics and human rights and many other ‘grown-up’ issues – it’s because more often than not we are not listened to or taken seriously. (Quoted in Connect 112, 1998)

But is it because they are young, or because ordinary citizens of any age do not have any influence? John Hirst, author of Discovering Democracy: A Guide to Government and Law in Australia, believes that citizens do have an influence:

It is very easy to reach the view that citizens exert little influence over modern government. We commonly complain that governments ignore us or that the parties are too much alike or that politicians break promises. In fact our governments are still very responsive to citizens’ pressures. Think of some of the issues which concern governments today – the environment, heritage, equal opportunity, child care. Thirty years ago governments took little or no interest in these matters. They have been made important by citizens’ efforts. (Hirst, J, p.93)

DEBATE

Working as a whole class, you will think about and debate the question of influence. First, there will be

Examples of youth activism

Youth activism is defined by youth engagement in community organising for social change. Young people have taken lead roles in public protests and advocacy around the globe, including in Australia.

The use of digital media has changed the way youth participate in activism globally with mobile phones and social media facilitating organised gatherings and the spreading of protest messaging. Young people are underrepresented in politics because adults dominate the discourse. However, many young people are concerned and informed citizens who advocate for change within their communities. Recent global examples of youth activism include:

- **The Arab Spring**: a civil uprising by mainly Arab youths in Tunisia and Egypt which commenced in the early 2010s and became a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across North Africa and the Middle East.
- **Malala Yousafzai**: has been an activist for female education since 2009, initially in Pakistan; support for her cause reached international levels after she was shot by a Taliban gunman in 2012 because of her activism. Since then, Yousafzai has established a non-profit organisation and received the Nobel Peace Prize. She was also the catalyst for a United Nations campaign for children’s education worldwide.
- **Never Again MSD**: an American student-led political action committee for gun control advocating for tighter regulations to prevent gun violence. The Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in the US resulted in not only some Stoneman Douglas students becoming youth activists for gun control legislation, but also spurred a nationwide resurgence of youth activism, including school walkouts. A group of Stoneman Douglas students founded the advocacy group Never Again MSD which led March for Our Lives.
- **School climate strikes**: 15-year-old Swedish student Greta Thunberg began an individual school strike in 2018, avoiding classes every Friday to protest in front of Riksdag against political inaction on the global climate crisis. During the months that followed, Greta’s activism sparked a worldwide youth movement involving school strikes and rallies to pressure governments and companies to adopt urgent policies to mitigate climate change. She has also engaged in delivering speeches at international events, such as the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference.
- **Hong Kong protests**: The Hong Kong Federation of Students led the pro-democracy Umbrella Movement against the proposed (since withdrawn) legislation of the 2019 Hong Kong extradition bill.

Compiled by The Spinney Press.
Can young citizens have any influence on governments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organise a petition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sign a petition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speak at a public meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organise a public meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design leaflets and posters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute leaflets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Put up posters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote at national elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote at state government elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote at local council elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote at a referendum to change the constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Go to see a member of parliament or council about an issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wear a badge, ribbon or T-shirt supporting a cause</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write letters to newspapers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Go on talkback radio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join a street demonstration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perform street theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write to parliamentarians or councillors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join a political party</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stand for parliament or council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When groups have finished discussing the items, make one list. Working in groups, make a quick list of the things that prevent young citizens from having a say. Make a combined list to share with the class.

Some group work then a class debate. The question for debate is:

**CAN YOUNG CITIZENS HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON GOVERNMENTS?**

**Stage 1: A straw vote**

A straw vote is a vote taken before any discussion of an issue. It gives an idea of where people are starting from.

For this issue, the class votes on each of the opinions quoted above. A vote for Kate’s opinion supports the idea that young citizens do not have an influence. A vote for John Hirst’s opinion supports the idea that all citizens have an influence.

**Stage 2: How do citizens influence governments?**

Work in pairs or groups to use the checklist above. This checklist has 20 methods people can use to influence governments.

Print the list and tick the things that you think can be used by citizens under 18 to influence government. If you prefer, you can just write down the things from the list that apply to citizens under 18 years old.

**THE LAST WORD**

Now that you have discussed what’s involved in participating as a citizen, vote again as a class on the question:

*Is there any change from the straw vote? How would you explain this?*

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GetUp!’s brand of in-your-face activism is winning elections – and making enemies

Organised grassroots activist organisations from the left and right are growing and challenging the power of major political parties, observes Mark Rolfe

It can be hard for a political cause to get noticed in a jaded world awash with information, but conspiracy theories can go a long way.

This could help explain the motivations of the lobbying group Advance Australia (AA) in this election campaign. Advance Australia was founded late last year as a conservative antidote to the left-leaning GetUp! and has attracted prominent business leaders as financial backers.

Liberal luminaries like Eric Abetz have long been wary of GetUp!, viewing it as an arm of Labor and the Greens (despite the fact the Australian Electoral Commission has ruled the group is independent of any political party).

Following GetUp!’s success in unseating Liberal Bass MP Andrew Nikolic in the 2016 election, these conservative factions are now annoyed by the group’s aggressive campaigning against Tony Abbott in Warringah this campaign.

This is where the conspiracy theories come in.

According to a video released by Advance Australia in April, GetUp! is “imposing its secret agenda on Australia and seeking to control the Australian way of life”. It “flies under the radar” and is “hoodwinking

Major social action groups in Australia

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
www.amnesty.org.au

Amnesty International has a presence in over 150 countries around the world. AI stands with people and communities who come under attack, encourage governments and others to respect human rights and raise awareness of the international standards that protect us all. In Australia, AI puts pressure on the federal government to adopt laws that respect the human rights of all citizens and to meet international human rights obligations. Amnesty works closely with Indigenous communities and people seeking asylum to fight discrimination, unfair detention and to demand safety and a fair justice system for all. Amnesty also has active women’s and LGBTI activist networks campaigning on gender and sexuality issues.

AVAAZ
www.avaaz.org

Avaaz empowers millions of people from all walks of life to take action on pressing global, regional and national issues such as corruption, poverty, conflict and climate change. Their model of internet organising allows thousands of individual efforts to be rapidly combined into a powerful collective force. The Avaaz community campaigns in 15 languages, served by a core team on 6 continents and thousands of volunteers. Avaaz takes action through petitions, funding media campaigns and direct actions, emailing, lobbying governments, and organising public protests and events.

CHANGE.ORG
www.change.org

Change.org is the world’s largest petition platform, empowering people everywhere to create the change they want to see. There are over 200 million Change.org users in 196 countries, and every day people use Change.org tools to transform their communities – locally, nationally and globally. Whether it is a mother fighting bullying in her daughter’s school, customers pressing banks to drop unfair fees, or citizens holding corrupt officials to account, thousands of campaigns have been held on Change.org.

GETUP!
www.getup.org.au

GetUp! is an independent, grassroots community advocacy organisation which aims to build a more progressive Australia by giving everyday Australians the opportunity to get involved and hold politicians accountable on important issues. Actions to effect change include sending emails to members of parliament, engaging with the media, attending events and funding and airing television advertising. GetUp! claims it does not back any particular party, but aims to build an accountable and progressive Australia – an Australia which values economic fairness, social justice and environmental sustainability at its core. It is a not-for-profit organisation and relies on donations from the Australian public to fund its work and in-kind donations; it does not accept donations from political parties or governments.

GREENPEACE
www.greenpeace.org.au

Greenpeace is a non-government environmental organisation founded in 1971 with offices in over 39 countries and an international coordinating body in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Greenpeace states its goal is to “ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity” and focuses its campaigning on worldwide issues such as climate change, deforestation, overfishing, commercial whaling, genetic engineering and anti-nuclear issues. It uses direct action, lobbying, research, and ‘ecotage’ to achieve its goals. The global organisation does not accept funding from governments, corporations, or political parties, relying on three million individual supporters and foundation grants.

Compiled by The Spinney Press.
well-meaning Australians into implementing their radical agenda”.

The video also warns that GetUp! is linked to “a foreign network of left-wing activist groups” known as OPEN, which is authoritarian (“reminiscent of the old-style Soviet Union”) but somehow also “globalist”.

This hissy-fit of hyperbole prevents Advance Australia from seeing what stares the group in the face. GetUp! is none of those things. Rather, the organisation gives ordinary people a way to get involved in political life at the grassroots level – a commonplace phenomenon in American politics that is only possible in Australia outside our more dominant party structures.

GETUP!’S GROWTH AND INFLUENCE

GetUp! has emerged as a target in this campaign because of its increasing influence as a mobiliser of this sort of grassroots political participation.

GetUp!’s mission is to “bring participation back into our democracy” through various online and offline activities such as protests, vigils, door-knocking campaigns and donation drives – a strategy modelled on the American grassroots political group MoveOn. Its signature campaign was its push for marriage equality in Australia, with its powerful video garnering more than 16 million views on YouTube.

GetUp! now boasts more than 1 million members and aims to make 1 million phone calls in target electorates during this campaign – often organised through hundreds of “calling parties” in homes across Australia – and to knock on countless doors in key marginal seats.

It is not formally aligned with Labor or the Greens, but it certainly leans left: on its website, it vows to kick out the “hard right MPs” who it says have: ...

wrecked progressive policies and stifled public debate on climate change, refugees, multiculturalism, economics and democratic participation.

Advance Australia is small by comparison, with just 32,000 members. Its leader, Gerard Benedet, has noted how previous attempts at building a conservative grassroots movement in Australia have failed, but Advance Australia is aiming to be different.

However, the group’s awkward campaign tactics, which include a widely mocked anti-GetUp! superhero figure and reliance on wealthy backers instead of small donations, show it still has a long way to go in adopting a participatory model.

ORIGINS OF GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNING

The rise of GetUp! and other similar grassroots campaigns being run by independents – such as Zali Steggall’s “Voices For Warringah” campaign and the “Voices For Indi” campaigns of first Cathy McGowan and now Helen Haines – is linked in part with early American ideals of participatory democracy, anti-politics, and the power of the internet.

Beginning in the 1980s, American writers such as Steven Levy, Howard Rheingold, Bruce Sterling and a bevy of followers championed the internet as a way of helping empower those at the bottom against political elites. They linked the digital era to the sentimentalised American ideal of populist anti-politics and romanticised the digital-savvy outsiders who harnessed the power of grassroots democracy to ride into office and clean up Washington DC.

One of the first notable internet campaigns was Howard Dean’s presidential run in 2004, which adopted the digital innovations and political advice of MoveOn.

Barack Obama's presidential campaign of 2008 then further adapted the Dean model by creating a movement hinting at direct democracy and melding an online and offline grassroots organisational strategy through MyBarackObama, the campaign’s social network. This included more than 200,000 events, such as barbecues and parties, for the volunteers who were door-knocking and telephone canvassing for votes and donations.

The ALP hoped for similar success by importing senior American personnel from the 2012 Obama campaign to help run grassroots strategy for its 2014 Victorian state election campaign. It also imported Blue State Digital, a strategy and technology firm that has been important to Democrats since 2005 and managed Obama's digital campaign in 2008, to aid its less-successful 2013 federal campaign.

These efforts, however, were confined to party and union members, not the broader grassroots base now being reached by GetUp!.

Similarly in 2013, the Republican-aligned digital strategy firms IMGE and Engage were brought in to help the Liberal Party with digital fundraising and...
data-mining techniques. These innovations, though, also did not embrace participatory campaigning outside party members.

INDEPENDENTS ALSO EMBRACING DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING

In this year's campaign, independents like Steggall and Haines are also enthusiastically embracing community-based campaigning.

Both candidates, for instance, rely on NationBuilder, a Los Angeles-based software company, to create platforms for their online donations and communications efforts and offline activities for their volunteers. Since 2013, NationBuilder has also been the online platform of choice for ALP, Greens and the Australian Council of Trade Union campaigns.

Like McGowan and Haines, Steggall campaigns as a cleanskin unsoiled by party politics, with a “non-partisan community group” aiming to “bridge the gap between people and politics”. This anti-politics mantra contrasts with Abbott, who is viewed by many as one of the people responsible for Australians’ widespread distrust and disillusionment with government.

This distrust is a problem for the major parties, but a boon to GetUp! and the independents, who are projected to do well in this election. If the next government cannot counter such feelings among voters, these influential outsiders will continue to flourish in the foreseeable future with the help of digital outreach and the flush of excitement in ordinary citizens who want change, whatever that means to them.

Maybe even Advance Australia will start to harness this grassroots power on the conservative side, minus the conspiracy theories.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Mark Rolfe does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond his academic appointment.

Mark Rolfe is Honorary Associate, School of Social Sciences, UNSW.

Companies may adopt positions on social issues which some people may not like, but there's no reason why in a free society we should be telling companies to stay silent, writes Krystian Seibert

In recent times, we've seen an interesting development in Australia, with major companies more prominently adopting positions on social issues.

During the same-sex marriage postal survey campaign, hundreds of companies signed on to support the Equality Campaign. More recently, we've seen companies publicly support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for the establishment of a First Nations voice in the constitution.

For a while now, many Australian companies have included a focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) as part of their operations. CSR involves a company being accountable to a wider range of stakeholders than just its shareholders, and prompts a company to consider the broader societal impact of its actions. Whilst CSR has been around since at least the 1990s, the kind of 'social activism' that we're now seeing from some companies is a relatively new development in Australia.

This social activism has drawn some critics. In a new book, senior research fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies Jeremy Sammut takes aim at the "progressive agenda" of many companies and argues that their social activism is even harmful to our democracy. Whilst I don't agree with much of Jeremy's argument, it's always worthwhile to have a debate about new developments in our society.

As much as some people would like to portray them as such, companies are not just faceless entities – they tend to have values and an identity. They are collectives of capital, but they are also collective of people, be they board directors, management or employees.

Often these people are guided by a set of values which drive the company – and a well-run company will not impose these values from the top but seek to develop values collaboratively. If a company has values, in a liberal democracy such as Australia, I see no reason why they shouldn't be allowed to express these values in the public sphere.

Whilst corporate social responsibility has been around since at least the 1990s, the kind of 'social activism' that we're now seeing from some companies is a relatively new development in Australia.

There are checks and balances in place – a company can't just do what it wants. Four checks and balances are most relevant.

Firstly, a company is accountable to its shareholders. If shareholders aren't happy with the social activism of a company, as approved by its directors, under Australian law they can vote to change the directors of the company.

Secondly, a company is accountable to its customers. If customers have a problem with the social activism of a company, they may choose not to purchase its products.

Thirdly, a company is accountable to its employees. Accountability can manifest itself in terms of a collec-
tive voice of employees about the direction a company is taken. Employees, like consumers, who are not keen on the social activism of a company may also decide to work elsewhere.

Fourthly, there is also the accountability that comes from media and other stakeholder scrutiny more broadly – the news stories and opinion pieces in newspapers or the online petitions from people who may be unhappy with a company’s actions.

Now I accept that these forms of accountability, like most forms of accountability are not perfect. Sometimes there is no alternative supplier for a customer to switch to. And it’s not always easy for an employee to just choose to work elsewhere. Shareholders may not always be vigilant about the actions of a company. But the idea that companies can adopt positions on social issues that are completely at odds with the majority of their shareholders, customers and employees is rather fanciful. In fact, it seems that Australian companies only adopt positions on social issues when it is relatively “safe” to do so, when they have considered the issues in detail and thought about the benefits and risks of taking a stand. For now at least, they also tend to only adopt a position on social issues of major significance, rather than taking a stand on every issue in the public debate. To me, the social activism of Australian companies doesn’t seem like a knee-jerk reaction but comes across as rather carefully thought through.

From reading Jeremy’s arguments, part of his problem with the social activism of companies seems to be that they have tended to take what could be termed a “progressive” stance on issues such as marriage equality or constitutional recognition of First Nations, which he seems to believe is “out of touch” with “people in the outer suburbs and regions who hold more traditional views”. However, one big myth which the same-sex marriage postal survey dispelled is this idea that the outer suburbs and regions are necessarily “more traditional” in their views on social issues.

The results show that outer suburban electorates around Melbourne such as Aston, Deakin and Dunkley had large majorities voting Yes, as did regional electorates such as McMillan, Wannon and Indi. A number of outer suburban electorates and regional electorates around Australia had majorities voting No, but what the results show is that you can’t stereotype the outer suburbs and regions of Australia (and I say that as a person who until recently spent most of his life living in the middle and outer suburbs of Melbourne).

If a company has values, in a liberal democracy such as Australia, I see no reason why they shouldn’t be allowed to express these values in the public sphere.

I don’t doubt that companies may adopt positions on social issues which some people may not like. But in a liberal democracy like Australia, different groups and organisations will adopt particular positions and it’s inevitable that not everybody will agree on everything. Democracy is a contest of ideas, and that involves disagreement.

The main focus of companies is never likely to be social activism – rather it’s something they will undertake to complement their core business delivering whatever goods and services they exist to provide. But if companies have values, and feel strongly about them, I can’t understand why in a free society we should be telling them to stay silent.

Krystian Seibert is an industry fellow at the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University of Technology and has a strategic advisory role with Philanthropy Australia.

From slacktivism to ‘feel-good’ protests, activism is broken: here’s how to fix it

The future of effective, meaningful activism looks to be less aggressive, less about personal experience and more about targeted and defined objectives, observes Antony Funnell for Future Tense on ABC Radio National.

Michael White is something of a pariah these days. An activist since the age of 13, White co-founded the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011. He now openly considers it a failure.

White argues established activist organisations have ossified and become dominated by “groupthink”.

“A lot of people who protest against the status quo aren’t willing to protest against the status quo of protest. They don’t want to shake themselves up,” he says.

At the heart of White’s disenchantment lies the sense that huge public rallies and colourful street protests no longer result in meaningful change. They’re now exercises in what he terms “social marketing”.

“Activism has become about spreading ideas, changing the way people see the world,” he says.

“Those are positive and good things, but activism is supposed to be about positive, transformative social change that is inherently political.”

White believes the expectations of participants have also shifted.

“We’ve started doing these large spectacular marches, whose goal is not to actually overthrow the government or anything like that, but to be a beautiful experience,” he says.

“Going to a protest march is like the equivalent of going to see a show or a concert – it’s a way of connecting with one’s friends.”

The great revolutionaries of the 20th century, he says, lived under tremendous hardship.

“They never talked about the goal of revolution and activism being to somehow feel good,” White says.

The Occupy Wall Street movement spread across the Western world, but according to White, its lack of a coherent political strategy eventually saw it falter with little to show for its sound and fury. It’s now resigned to activist folklore.

“You know, Occupy Wall Street famously could not even decide on its one demand,” he says. White now advocates for direct political involvement.

“We live in a world where you can gain power either through winning elections or winning wars. It seems to me that we should try to win elections,” he says.

His approach mirrors that of the right-wing Tea Party movement, which gained enormous power in the United States by pursuing bottom-up, iterative political change. The movement built its power base by initially targeting small-town politics, getting supporters elected to
positions on school boards and local councils. It then built its strength from there.

But White prefers to draw analogies with the populist Five Star Movement in Italy or the left-wing Podemos in Spain: social movements that have also won elections, where power is still held by the grassroots, not by their elected representatives.

“One of the rules of the social movement getting started should be: once you are elected, you are a delegate of our movement – not a representative of our movement. You have to take the big questions back to us,” he says.

THE CRAFT OF NON-AGGRESSIVE ACTIVISM

London-based activist Sarah Corbett is another lifelong activist who has abandoned traditional protest. The Craftivist Collective she runs incorporates craft activities into political messaging and campaigning. The collective takes a deliberately non-aggressive and non-adversarial approach. Instead, they try to build relationships with “powerholders,” seeing them as “critical friends rather than aggressive enemies.”

Corbett is particularly proud of the success her movement had in persuading a major British retailer to pay the “living wage” to its employees.

The company’s 14 board members each received a small gift-box containing a hand-written letter and a handkerchief inscribed with the message: “Don’t blow it. We know your jobs are really tough, but we really hope that you use your power to help the most vulnerable people.”

Corbett says the firm’s management eventually agreed to talks and quickly changed their position.

“It didn’t feel ethical to scream at people and label them as ‘the evil ones’, when most of the time with injustices, we are all part of it in one shape or form,” she says.

But while the Craftivist approach might be meek, it isn’t weak. According to Corbett, it follows the non-violent tradition of Martin Luther King and Gandhi.

“If we want the world to be more beautiful, kind and just – which I think all activists do – then our activism should be beautiful and it should be kind and it should be just, or fair,” she says.

“We should treat people how we want to be treated.”

Craftivism also focuses on the need for personal commitment. Corbett says it emphasises physical involvement, thereby avoiding the easy activism of many online-only campaigns.

“I do feel like we need a way for people to engage more deeply and empower themselves, rather than be treated as activist robots or end up doing clicktivism or slacktivism, which is often what we end up doing,” she says.

‘NOT LOOKING AWAY’ IN A DIGITAL AGE

Arguably the most successful protest campaign of recent times is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Professor Nicholas Mirzoeff from New York University describes it as a new form of “visual activism”. He says its success lies in combining both digital and physical campaigning in a way that focuses on fighting injustice.

So, the future of effective, meaningful activism looks likely to be less aggressive, less about personal experience and more about targeted and defined objectives. Technology will enhance its effectiveness, but physical commitment and effort will be needed to underpin its success.

By using images of black oppression to continually and systematically confront US authorities, he argues, BLM draws on the successful experience of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. BLM’s use of social media to maintain a focus on violence against black Americans, Mirzoeff says, prevents authorities and the population at large from “looking away”.

“We have often been told that certain things shouldn’t be seen. Violence, in particular, should never be depicted. It might upset and frighten us,” Mirzoeff says.

“Yet what Black Lives Matter wants to say to us is that this is happening so frequently, this is happening so often – this is the country in which you live.”

Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag campaign. It spread quickly, but Mirzoeff says it would have faded long ago had it not been married to a corresponding ongoing physical campaign.

“What’s so crucial about making visual activism work is that it catalyses real life social activism through social media,” he says.

“If it’s just on social media, then very little will follow from that.

“But if, by seeing things, people are impelled to take action themselves, and they are helped to find out how to take that action themselves, then change can result.”

So, the future of effective, meaningful activism looks likely to be less aggressive, less about personal experience and more about targeted and defined objectives.

Technology will enhance its effectiveness, but physical commitment and effort will be needed to underpin its success.

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GOING VIRAL: WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISTS NEED TO KNOW

Social media activists need to be conscious that while this modern form of online activism may increase participation in online activities, it might merely create the impression of activism. By Shahla Ghobadi

Inspiring stories of social activism, such as the civil rights movement and the fight against climate change, abound in history. And it is generally thought that the new social media era has helped cases of activism to succeed. But our research has revealed some major threats, which activists need to understand if they are to be successful in getting their message across to the masses.

Social activism refers to a broad range of activities which are beneficial to society or particular interest groups. Social activists operate in groups to voice, educate and agitate for change, targeting global crises. Take, for example, environmental groups such as Greenpeace which aim to curb climate change by targeting governments and major manufacturers with poor environmental records. Or the anti-sweatshop movement, which started with a group of activists in the 19th century organising boycotts aimed at improving the conditions of workers in manufacturing places with low wages, poor working conditions and child labour.

ONLINE SOCIAL ACTIVISM

These days the voices of dissent have increasingly been carried via the evolving medium of the internet. From #MeToo, #TimesUp and #WeStrike to #NeverAgain and #BlackLivesMatter, social activists wield the power of the internet to pressure powerful organisations.

The group 350.org, for example, is made up of climate change activists. The group uses online campaigns and grassroots organising to oppose new coal, oil and gas projects. Its aim is to get society moving closer to clean energy solutions that work for all.

Online activism allows activists to organise events with high levels of engagement, focus and network strength. On the one hand, researchers suggest that the anonymity offered by online communication provides the possibility of expressing the views of marginalised minority groups that might otherwise be punished or sanctioned. Online activities reinforce collective identity by reducing attention to differences that exist within the group (such as education, social class, and ethnicity).

THE ONLINE THREATS

But other research argues that while this modern form of activism may increase participation in online activities, it might merely create the impression of activism. Or it may even have negative consequences, such as creating social stereotypes including those about feminists and environmentalists or getting social activists arrested as is the case in authoritarian countries.

The aim of our research was to develop insights that would obtain better outcomes from online activism, targeting some of society’s most important issues. During our study, we collected data from three YouTube cases of online activism. Our findings suggest that online activism delivers a temporary shock to the organisational elites, helps organise collective actions and amplifies the conditions for movements to form.

THE ELITES FIGHT BACK

But these initial outcomes provoke the elites into action, resulting in counter measures – such as increased surveillance to track activists. For example, some governmental authorities intensified internet filtering, blocked access to several websites and decreased the speed of the internet connection to slow down social activism. These
measures prompted self-censorship among activists and a loss of interest among the public in relation to the cause and contributed to the ultimate decline of social activism over time.

Our study challenged the optimistic hype around online activism in enabling grassroots social movements by suggesting there is a complex relationship between activists and those groups they are targeting, which makes the outcomes very difficult to predict. As different parties with different interests intervene, they either encourage or inhibit activism.

While encouraging actions can take the form of support (such as the thousands of women around the world who posted on social media sharing their stories under #metoo), inhibiting actions may come in the form of information asymmetry (strategies such as filtering and surveillance) from elites.

Inhibiting strategies are not limited to authoritarian organisations. Senior managers may also monitor email correspondence of staff, set up structures and hierarchies for access to organisational information, and use information provided by secretive companies to check the status of their employees (for example, blacklisting workers perceived as trouble-makers).

LESS EMOTION AND MORE STRATEGIC PATIENCE

Online activists should understand that the dynamics of reaching collective action might not necessarily be the result of critical thinking, lifelong learning or other dimensions of civic engagement.

Journalist Nicholas Kristoff has talked about how the anti-sweatshop movement “risks harming the impoverished workers it is hoping to help” by causing mass job redundancies. Similarly, our main message is that online activism could prompt reactions that will result in unintended and longlasting consequences for the activists involved.

A common and frequently used approach that risks these types of consequences is to share emotive information through social media. While this is used to inform and capture people's attention and mobilise as many people as possible, our study suggests that more thought should be put into the consequences of information sharing and what information is most appropriate to be shared.

Activists may need to spend more time and energy to create and share information that is less emotive and help people learn about the underlying causes of the problem. For example, the activism videos we have researched and commonly see on the internet are essentially reactive and emotive.

Instead of focusing on the problem and the need for change, activists can share information that explains why and how the current situation has been created and what can be learned for the future.

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Instead of focusing on the problem and the need for change, activists can share information that explains why and how the current situation has been created and what can be learned for the future.
More than ‘slacktivism’: we dismiss the power of politics online at our peril

Political groups of all stripes recognise the enormous power of online mass persuasion, one meme at a time, observes Joel Penney

Log on to Facebook or Twitter and you’re likely to see a deluge of political posts – a humorous meme or viral video skewering politicians like Donald Trump, the latest hashtag slogan in response to breaking news, maybe even a social movement symbol as an updated profile picture.

The sharing of political opinion on social media is now ubiquitous. But what does it mean for democracy?

For years, debate has raged about the significance of symbolic, expressive political activity at the level of the everyday citizen. Critics fear it is simply self-satisfying “slacktivism”. It gives people an easy way to feel they’re contributing to a cause while substituting for more intensive political participation.

Conversely, optimists see a flourishing of civic engagement on the internet that gives people an accessible entry point into politics. If it helps them to develop a sense of political identity and agency, that enables more participation down the line.

These contrasting positions both have merit. Yet are those who take them asking the right questions in the first place? By evaluating online political expression only in terms of possible impacts on traditional political activity, we risk sidestepping a far more crucial set of issues.

FORGET ‘SLACKTIVISM’

Myriad organisations and institutions see this citizen-level expression on social media as being far from just a private or personal affair. It is increasingly valued for its aggregate promotional power. The marketing professions know this as “electronic word of mouth”.

Political groups of all stripes promote social media participation to amplify the reach and credibility of their persuasive messages. Although each individual act of posting, linking, commenting and liking may look insignificant up close, at a macro level they add up to nothing less than the networked spread of ideas.

There is enormous power here for mass persuasion, one viral share at a time. We dismiss this power at our peril.

During the 2016 US presidential election cycle social media soared to new heights of prominence in the political media landscape. It appears we are finally starting to recognise this power for what it is.

For instance, controversy over fake news on sites like Facebook has drawn attention to how peer-to-peer sharing can influence public opinion and even the course of elections (in this case by spreading false and defamatory messages about Hillary Clinton that consolidated her image problems). New research has highlighted how:

... far-right groups develop techniques of ‘attention hacking’ to increase the visibility of their ideas through the strategic use of social media, memes and bots.

The so-called alt-right celebrates its “meme magic” in propagating white nationalist ideology online in service of Trump. The pro-Clinton Correct the Record political action committee admits to paying people to post on social media during her primary battle with Bernie Sanders. We are seeing the persuasive value of citizen-level political media coming into sharp focus.

By recognising the potential value of our own grassroots political marketing power, we can gain a foothold in a political media landscape that elite interests traditionally dominated.

We need to reflect on how we each use this power. That involves thinking through the consequences of what we share online and how it can both strengthen and harm democratic values.

THE CITIZEN MARKETER

Sharing political opinion on social media must be understood in no small part as participation in political marketing. Its practitioners have long circulated persuasive media messages to shape the public mind and influence political outcomes.

This understanding calls for a new kind of media literacy. It requires individuals to acknowledge their own position in circuits of media influence and take seriously their capacity to help shape the flow of political ideas across networks of peers.

We should no longer think of political marketing – or its conceptual forebear, propaganda – as something only powerful elites do. We must recognise that we are all now complicit in this process every time we spread political messages via media platforms that we personally control.

Many citizens are keenly aware of their capacity to persuade their peers through their online posting. They have embraced the role of social media influencer. Most often, they focus on trying to rally the like-minded or undecided, rather than winning over converts from the other side.

This citizen marketer approach to political action can be seen as an outgrowth of the more established concept of the citizen consumer. A citizen consumer deliberately uses their spending power as another way to influence the political sphere.

They may, for instance, buy only environmentally...
friendly products, or boycott companies whose CEOs donate to campaigns and causes that the consumer opposes. Similarly, we are seeing citizens use their power as micro-level agents of viral media promotion and word-of-mouth endorsement to advance a wide range of political interests and agendas.

There is an enormous opportunity to democratise the flow of political media messages and publicise causes that lie outside the mainstream.

Consider recent activist movements, often built around viral hashtags like #occupywallstreet and #blacklivesmatter. Here, citizens are co-opting the tools and logics of social media marketing to advocate for political ideas that are typically poorly represented in the corporate mass media.

By recognising the potential value of our own grassroots political marketing power, we can gain a foothold in a political media landscape that elite interests traditionally dominated.

Perhaps even more importantly, cultivating a sense of responsibility for what we share on social media puts us in a better position to navigate the emerging digital ecosystem in which these elite actors are capitalising upon – at times even exploiting – our electronic word of mouth.

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE POSTING, AND WHO YOU ARE POSTING FOR

Nowadays, major election campaigns and large-scale issue advocacy organisations have professional digital marketing teams. One of their tasks is to spur the promotional labour of everyday citizens to maximise the virality of their messages, whether these people are truly aware of their participation in political marketing or not.

In addition, for-profit political news sites like Breitbart and The Daily Kos have become dependent on social media shares to boost clicks and advertising revenue, as well as to advance their proprietors’ often-partisan agendas. In this environment, it is crucial that we make informed decisions when we lend our promotional labour and word-of-mouth endorsement to institutional actors and the interests and agendas they represent.

At times we may be eager to act as “brand evangelists” for candidates, parties, advocacy groups or news agencies whose political goals align with our own. At other times developing media literacy might cause us to pause and reflect before we amplify the latest trending political message.

Back in 2013, Facebook users posted a red equal sign as their profile picture to express their support for same-sex marriage. Some had no idea the symbol was the logo of the Human Rights Campaign. This organisation has had a controversial status in the LGBT movement because of its past treatment of transgender issues.

Would these citizens still have posted the image if they knew they were participating in a viral marketing campaign for an organisation that was not universally supported by the LGBT community, and whose message of equality has drawn criticism for emphasising assimilation over radical structural change?

Or would they have chosen instead to amplify an image and an organisation with a different shade of meaning?

These kinds of important conversations can only be opened up if we start to develop a critical literacy of the citizen marketer approach and how it is transforming what it means to be an active participant in our media-dominated, postmodern political reality.

If we see our online political expressions as mere “slacktivism”, a simple private matter, or just having fun with friends, then we become more vulnerable to manipulation by forces that seek to exploit our citizen marketing power to serve agendas that we may not share.

If we become more aware of our position in these circuits of power, we will be better equipped to resist this manipulation.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Joel Penney does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond his academic appointment.

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Is modern-day activism lazy or just smarter?

Candice Chung from Amnesty International notes that recent movements have proven the effectiveness of a well-organised, digital-first campaign

As someone who wouldn’t have called herself an activist before last year, Kate Taylor never imagined she would be rallying 10,000 protesters to march for women’s rights on Donald Trump’s inauguration day in January.

The law student first heard about the Women’s March on Washington through a friend who was working in the US. Inspired by the movement and angered by Trump’s sexist rhetoric, Kate decided to organise a sister march in Sydney. “When I started the Facebook page, I thought I’d get 50 people signing up,” she told Amnesty.

Before long, she was contacted by US expats Rebecca Turnbow and Mindy Freiband – who co-founded their own solidarity event in Sydney and invited her to join forces. From that, the core team of Sydney Women’s March was born.

‘Social media helped us find each other’

Digital activism is often dismissed by cynics as a lazy alternative to traditional, blood-and-sweat protests. But recent movements, like the worldwide Women’s March, have proven the effectiveness of a well-organised, digital-first campaign.

“Social media helped us find each other,” says Kate, “It’s incredible to suddenly have access to a brains trust of thousands of women all trying to work towards similar goals.”

For Kate and her team, what started as an online push soon “mushroomed” into a well-oiled organisation run by over 70 volunteers. Having successfully staged one of the biggest mass protests in Sydney, the group now uses its social media network to organise large-scale feminist events, including the March in the Park on 29 April, which aims to promote bodily autonomy and women’s health and safety.

“Our social media reach helps us identify people who are like-minded,” says Kate, “It’s about taking that anger, concern and unrest and turning it into positive action.”

‘Democracy is a slow and lumbering beast’

“One thing that the internet has done is condensing time, space and identity,” says Dr Max Halupka of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra.

In other words, technology has allowed more people to add their voices to social causes with much greater ease and urgency. Halupka calls this ‘connective action’ – the social shares, retweets, and storytelling that put difficult issues back in the public consciousness, ultimately challenging the broader political narrative.

Examples of this include shining a light on racial injustices using the hashtags #Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter, exposing the cruelty of Trump’s #MuslimBan, acknowledging Indigenous Australian dispossession with #ChangeTheDate, and sharing stories of everyday racism under #FreedomOfSpeech – a movement that contributed to the Senate rejecting potentially damaging changes to Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

“Democracy is a slow and lumbering beast,” says Dr Halupka. “But technology speeds the process along by opening up ways in which people can engage in politics.”

“Democracy is a slow and lumbering beast. But technology speeds the process along by opening up ways in which people can engage in politics.”

Beyond the feel-good click

So how exactly do we harness the power of our voices online? Change.org Director Nathan Elvery thinks it’s all about knowing when to turn those social moments
Hashtags are a great way to capture a mood... But what’s critical for tangible change is to capture those moments and transform them into ongoing action – and petitions are a useful tool to do this.

Nearly 4.4 million people now use Change.org to start online petitions, and a victory is declared every 48 hours.

But despite its popularity, there’s a misconception that signing a petition, like sharing a social post, is little more than a feel-good gesture. What sceptics don’t realise, says Elvery, is that a petition is only the first step in a long and often complex political battle.

Elvery cites Catholic priest Paul Kelly’s push to abolish the ‘gay panic’ murder defence in Queensland, which was used by people accused of murder to downgrade their conviction to manslaughter, due to an unwanted sexual advance.

The petition collected 290,000 signatures on Change.org and was finally won last month, after a five-year campaign – a result that wouldn’t have been possible without large-scale online support.

**When a signature saves lives**

In countries where the local media is suppressed, online actions are crucial to protecting someone who is at immediate threat of bodily harm.

“For someone at risk of torture, the fact that authorities in that country know that 100,000 people around the world are aware of it and are watching them makes a difference,” says Amnesty International Australia Activism Manager, Chris Holley.

Through organisations like Amnesty International, technology affords us an opportunity to campaign for the clemency of death row prisoners, demand an end to the inhumane treatment of refugees like Loghman Sawari – all with the click of a button.

“We don’t see online and offline as being completely separate things. And people often do both,” says Holley. Together with the research and groundwork done by advocacy staff, any signatures given or emails sent then become part of a larger lobbying effort.

“It’s really important, at this point in time in particular, that people defend the idea of human rights – it says we’re not going to allow fear to turn us inwards.”

Given the rise of the populist movement in the western world, Holley thinks it’s more important than ever to stay engaged. “It’s really important, at this point in time in particular, that people defend the idea of human rights – it says we’re not going to allow fear to turn us inwards.”

And if recent wins like the Women’s March have shown us anything thing, it’s that there is no better time for resistance than now.

Changing the world one online petition at a time: how social activism went mainstream

The connection between petition websites, social media and corporate social responsibility is intertwined, observe Monika Kansal and Ritesh Chugh

If you have recently signed an online petition – and then observed a result from it – you are far from alone. Once niche, websites such as Change.org, ipetitions.com and Avaaz.org have moved into the mainstream, shifting influence from organisations into the hands of individuals and fundamentally changing the way business and government respond to “people power”.

The use of petition websites has given individuals the immediate ability to become social activists, and coupled with social media, an unprecedented ability to force companies to amend the ways they operate.

The recent decision by Aldi Australia to stop selling eggs from caged hens after 97,007 supporters signed a successful petition campaign is a good example.

The petition, begun by Victorian school student Angelina Popovski, was quickly championed by animal welfare organisation, Animals Australia and widely reported on by mainstream media.

Once the champion of stories such as these, the traditional media’s role has morphed into picking up on these petitions – Change.org claims to receive 400 mentions by media every day.

Lobby groups already effectively embrace social media and viral campaigns to galvanise support for their causes and exploit business sensitivities around reputation. For instance, Greenpeace forced multinational Nestlé to stop purchasing palm oil from the suppliers responsible for the destruction of rainforests and peatland in Indonesia, after more than 1.5 million people viewed its Have a break? video posted on Youtube.

Petition websites also undoubtedly play an important role in pressuring organisations to act responsibly. More than a million campaigners signed a petition calling for Benetton, an Italian clothing company, to contribute towards a compensation fund for victims of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh that killed around 1100 people. Benetton later contributed US$1.1 million.

Organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières Australia use petition websites to encourage socially responsible practices from pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and GSK so the interaction model also becomes business-to-business.

WHO USES THEM?

A study of online petitions in Australia found that online petition signers are younger than the mean population and there is a high rate of participation amid women and under-represented groups.

From calling out Donald Trump on racism and calling for another EU referendum to exhorting Australian supermarkets to stock more Australian-made products, online activism has become a global phenomenon.

The use of petition websites has given individuals the immediate ability to become social activists, and coupled with social media, an unprecedented ability to force companies to amend the ways they operate.

Set up nine years ago, Avaaz.org claims to have 43,697,086 members globally spanning 194 countries. It allows petitioners to start their campaigns in 15 different languages and its annual priorities are derived from member polls. Avaaz.org is wholly member-funded and does not accept funding from governments or corporations.

Change.org was also established around the same time as Avaaz.org but has morphed into a for-profit ‘benefit corporation’ or ‘B Corp’ structure, which means it...
is certified as meeting stringent social and environmental performance targets. It boasts of having more than 100 million people in 196 countries as petition starters and supporters.

A study of online petitions in Australia found that online petition signers are younger than the mean population and there is a high rate of participation amid women and under-represented groups.

Change.org has claimed 18,462 victories in 196 countries. The largest Change.org petition in Australian history by a mother led to her son being awarded a bravery medal, although other “victories” are a lot more modest; Change.org defines a victory as a “win” when the petitioners feel that a concrete change has been made, although the change could also be slightly different than what was petitioned.

LESSONS FOR BUSINESS
It is increasingly evident that most online petitions are set up to lobby for social causes to achieve positive action. There is opportunity for companies to be on the front foot instead of at risk of being publicly shamed for perceived unethical practices.

For Corporate Social Responsible (CSR) oriented firms, the heart of CSR lies in “communication”. Companies have always been making efforts to communicate with their stakeholders (employees, investors, customers, environmental activists) traditionally through annual reports, newsletters and websites. Nonetheless, CSR communications often suffer from low awareness.

Through social media, companies can create a positive CSR “buzz”, sometimes even turning customers into CSR advocates for them. For example, Dollar General Corporation in the US collected customer donations of $1.8 million to benefit “Autism Speaks” in 2015. Such initiatives potentially spread very quickly through social media platforms used by “Autism Speaks” and the donor company.

In addition, most retail companies have significant online presence not only through corporate websites but through social media to communicate with stakeholders, understand consumers’ perceptions and to proactively address social issues.

Thus, the connection between petition websites, social media and CSR is intertwined.

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Not another online petition! But here’s why you should think before deleting it

IT’S A LAZY FORM OF ACTIVISM, BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN SIGNING ONLINE PETITIONS IS USELESS, EXPLAINS SKY CROESER

Online petitions are often seen as a form of “slacktivism” – small acts that don’t require much commitment and are more about helping us feel good than effective activism. But the impacts of online petitions can stretch beyond immediate results.

Whether they work to create legislative change, or just raise awareness of an issue, there’s some merit to signing them. Even if nothing happens immediately, petitions are one of many ways we can help build long-term change.

A HISTORY OF PETITIONS

Petitions have a long history in Western politics. They developed centuries ago as a way for people to have their voices heard in government or ask for legislative change. But they’ve also been seen as largely ineffective in this respect. One study found only three out of 2,589 petitions submitted to the Australian House of Representatives between 1999 and 2007 even received a ministerial response.

Before the end of the Second World War, fewer than 16 petitions a year were presented to Australia’s House of Representatives. The new political landscape of the early 1970s saw that number leap into the thousands.

In the 2000s, the House received around 300 petitions per year, and even with online tools, it’s still nowhere near what it was in the ’70s. According to the parliamentary website, an average of 121 petitions have been presented each year since 2008.

Although petitions rarely achieve direct change, they are an important part of the democratic process. Many governments have attempted to facilitate petitioning online. For example, the Australian parliamentary website helps citizens through the process of developing and submitting petitions. This is one way the internet has made creating and submitting petitions easier.

There are also independent sites that campaigners can use, such as Change.org and Avaaz. It can take under an hour to go from an idea to an online petition that’s ready to share on social media.

As well as petitions being a way for citizens to make requests of their governments, they are now used more broadly. Many petitions reach a global audience – they might call for change from companies, international institutions, or even society as a whole.

WHAT MAKES FOR AN EFFECTIVE PETITION?

The simplest way to gauge if a petition has been successful is to look at whether the requests made were granted. The front page of Change.org displays recent “victories”. These include a call to axe the so-called “tampon tax” (the GST on menstrual products) which states and territories agreed to remove come January 2019.

Change.org also boasts the petition for gender equality on cereal boxes as a victory, after Kelloggs sent a statement they would be updating their packaging in 2019 to include images of males and females. This petition only had 600 signatures, in comparison to the 75,000 against the tampon tax.

In 2012, a coalition of organisations mobilised a campaign against two proposed US laws that many saw as likely to restrict internet freedom. A circulating petition gathered 4.5 million signatures, which helped put pressure on US representatives not to vote for the bills.

However, all of these petitions were part of larger efforts. There have been campaigns to remove the tax on menstrual products since it was first imposed, there’s a broad movement for more equal gender representation, and there’s significant global activism against online censorship. None of these petitions can claim sole victory. But they may have pushed it over the line, or just added some weight to the groundswell of existing support.
Online petitions can have the obvious impact of changing the very thing they’re campaigning for. However, the type of petition also makes a difference to what change it can achieve.

**CHOOSING A PETITION WORTH SIGNING**

Knowing a few characteristics of successful petitions can be useful when you're deciding whether it's worth your time to sign and share something. Firstly, there should be a target and specific call for action. These can take many forms: petitions might request a politician vote “yes” on a specific law, demand changes to working conditions at a company, or even ask an advocacy organisation to begin campaigning around a new issue. Vague targets and unclear goals aren't well suited to petitions. Calls for “more gender equality in society” or “better rights for pets”, for example, are unlikely to achieve success.

Secondly, the goal needs to be realistic. This is so it’s possible to succeed and so supporters feel a sense of optimism. Petitioning for a significant change in a foreign government’s policy – for example, a call from world citizens for better gun control in the US – is unlikely to lead to results.

It’s easier to get politicians to change their vote on a single, relatively minor issue than to achieve sweeping legal changes. It’s also more likely a company will change its packaging than completely overhaul its approach to production.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, a petition’s chance of success depends largely on the strength of community supporting it. Petitions rarely work on their own. In her book *Twitter and Teargas*, Turkish writer Zeynep Tufekci argues the internet allows us to organise action far more quickly than in the past, outpacing the hard but essential work of community organising.

We can get thousands of people signing a petition and shouting in the streets well before we build coalitions and think about long-term strategies. But the most effective petitions will work in combination with other forms of activism.

**CHANGE HAPPENS GRADUALLY**

Even petitions that don’t achieve their stated aims or minor goals can play a role in activist efforts. Sharing petitions is one way to bring attention to issues that might otherwise remain off the agenda.

Most online petitions include the option of allowing further updates and contact. Organisations often use a petition to build momentum around an ongoing campaign. Creating, or even signing, online petitions can be a form of micro-activism that helps people start thinking of themselves as capable of creating change.

Signing petitions – and seeing that others have also done so – can help us feel we are part of a collective, working with others to shape our world.

It’s reasonable to think carefully about what we put our names to online, but we shouldn’t be too quick to dismiss online petitions as ineffective, or “slack”. Instead, we should think of them as one example of the diverse tactics that help build change over time.

**DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

Sky Croeser does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond her academic appointment.

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EXPLORING ISSUES

WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

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Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about activism and protest.

1. What is protest, and what forms can it take? Provide three (3) examples of prominent protest movements which have been recently active in Australia.

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2. How is the right to protest protected – both indirectly and directly – by the law in Australia?

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3. What is activism, and what forms can it take? Provide three (3) examples of prominent social change movements which have recently featured activism in Australia.

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4. How does activism hold government and business accountable on issues of collective social concern?

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__________________________________________________________________________
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

Shareholder action, online petitions and social media campaigns are three prominent examples of activist strategies being used to hold business and policy-makers more accountable for decisions that impinge on human rights.

Nechama Bassereabie, Australian Human Rights Institute

Consider the above statement, and explain how shareholder actions can bring about social change. Provide two (2) specific overseas examples with your response.

Consider the above statement, and explain how online petitions can bring about social change. Provide two (2) specific overseas examples with your response.

Consider the above statement, and explain how social media campaigns can bring about social change. Provide two (2) specific overseas examples with your response.
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

In recent times, we’ve seen an interesting development in Australia, with major companies more prominently adopting positions on social issues.

**Krystian Siebert, Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University of Technology**

Form into groups of two or more people and identify at least three (3) examples of corporate social activism. Do you think Australian companies should be involved in social activism, or not? Discuss your ideas with other groups in the class.

“We don’t support the idea of kids not going to school to participate in things that can be dealt with outside of school ... We don’t support our schools being turned into parliaments. What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools.”

**Prime Minister Scott Morrison, November 2018**

Should school students be allowed to skip school to be part of a political protest? Form into groups of two or more people and discuss. Share your ideas with other groups in the class.

Civil disobedience has traditionally played a positive role in democratic societies. Indeed, the label “civil” is meant to signal something praiseworthy in the protest.

**Piero Moraro, author/criminal justice lecturer, Charles Sturt University**

Form into groups of two or more people and explore the concept of ‘civil disobedience’, citing at least three (3) recent examples in Australia’s protest history. Is it the same as non-violence; and is all peaceful protest necessarily ‘civil’? Share your findings with other groups in the class.
Australia has a long history of protests. Our rights should be better protected. We also have a history of governments trying to suppress protest. It’s time this changed.

Hugh de Kretser, Human Rights Law Centre

Research Australia’s history of protest movements and explore how protest has contributed to social change. Create a timeline of at least five (5) noteworthy acts of public protest and briefly describe the outcomes of each of these protests. Where relevant, include information on how governments have tried to suppress these protests, such as in the form of criticism by political leaders, enactment of anti-protest laws, or the use of policing methods. In summary, explain how protestors’ rights could be better protected.
Complete the following activity on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

Online petitions are often seen as a form of “slacktivism” – small acts that don’t require much commitment and are more about helping us feel good than effective activism. But the impacts of online petitions can stretch beyond immediate results.

Sky Croeser, Media lecturer, Curtin University

In the space below, design a mock-up of an online petition.

Be sure to consider the following tips:

- Decide which issue you are petitioning on e.g. animals, human rights, health, economic justice, politics, local, environment, women’s rights ...
- Your petition title should be short and to the point in order to get people’s attention.
- Write clearly and concisely, explaining your goal; be sure to spellcheck and proofread your petition.
- Be polite and reasonable, and willing to acknowledge other points of view.
- Be ambitious, but also practical and realistic; the change you advocate should be concrete and achievable, so that others will be willing to share your goals and sign the petition.
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of the next page.

1. Which of the following are considered to be forms of social protest? (Select all that apply)
   a. Civil disobedience
   b. Rally/demonstration
   c. Boycott
   d. Parliamentary debate
   e. Strike
   f. Plebiscite
   g. Petition gathering
   h. Political disagreement

2. Which of the following states/territories in Australia currently protect the right to protest directly through their own state-based human rights acts?
   a. Australian Capital Territory (ACT)
   b. New South Wales (NSW)
   c. Northern Territory (NT)
   d. Queensland (Qld)
   e. South Australia (SA)
   f. Tasmania (Tas)
   g. Victoria (Vic)
   h. Western Australia (WA)

3. Which of the following are examples of past and present protest movements in Australia? (Select all that apply)
   a. Aboriginal Tent Embassy
   b. Anti-nuclear movement
   c. Australia Day: change the date
   d. Coal seam gas
   e. Eureka Rebellion
   f. Freedom Ride
   g. Green ban
   h. Reclaim Australia
   i. Refugee rights
   j. Same-sex marriage
   k. Save the Franklin Dam
   l. Stonewall riots
   m. Wave Hill Walk-off
   n. Women’s suffrage
   o. Yellow vests movement
4. Match up the following terms with their correct definitions

a. Activism 1. Action taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective.
b. Civil disobedience 2. Collective action using people in a given district, region, or community as basis for a political or economic movement.
c. Collective action 3. Refusal to comply with certain laws considered unjust, as a peaceful form of political protest.
d. Corporate activism 4. Public stance taken by a major company to positively impact social change or legislation.
e. Dissent 5. Formal written request, typically one signed by many people, appealing to authority in respect of a particular cause.
f. Grassroots movement 6. Holding or expression of opinions at variance with those commonly or officially held.
g. Hacktivism 7. Policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.
h. Petition 8. Act of misusing a computer system or network for a socially or politically motivated reason.
i. Protest 9. Consists of a number of people organised and coordinated to bring about social change.
j. Social movement 10. Statement or action expressing disapproval of, or objection to, something.

5. Respond to the following statements by circling either ‘True’ or ‘False’:

a. The Australian bill of rights protects the right to protest. True / False
b. In Australia’s constitution, while there is no freestanding right to protest, protest is protected indirectly and directly by the law. True / False
c. The common law protects protest as a fundamental right and freedom, which in combination with the principle of legality can mean that laws affecting protest might be interpreted restrictively. True / False
d. A number of countries have constitutions which expressly contain the right to overthrow the government, including Australia. True / False
e. The Australian constitution provides indirect constitutional protection for protest – as political speech – via the implied freedom of political communication. True / False
f. Australia’s trust in politicians and democracy has hit an all-time low. True / False

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS

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Looking back over public protest, you can find examples of both success and failure. The successful fight against the Franklin Dam project in Tasmania was one of the most significant environmental campaigns in Australian history. On the other hand, the millions who protested around the world against the invasion of Iraq failed to prevent the war (Phillips, K, Taking to the streets: the evolution of protest as a force for social change). (p.5)

Freedom of association and peaceful assembly are not generally protected in Australian law. Several Australian laws limit these freedoms (Australian Human Rights Commission, Freedom of association and peaceful assembly). (p.6)

Protests were at the forefront of ending our involvement in the Vietnam war, securing women's right to vote and advancing Indigenous land rights. Recently, young people across Australia and the world have taken to the streets to demand better on the issues that matter to them. Notable protests include the ongoing School Strike for Climate marches, rallies held on January 26, and International Women's Day rallies (Seneviratne, A, Know your protesting rights). (p.7)

Interestingly, we do not have the right to protest written directly into our constitution, unlike many other countries. However, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory have protected the right to protest directly through their own state-based human rights acts (ibid). (p.7)

Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties, two of which feature the right to freedom of assembly and association. There is no legislation that enshrines this right on a national level in Australia (ibid). (p.7)

Protest helped to win the eight-hour working day, to protect the Franklin and the Daintree and advance Aboriginal land rights. Protest helped to secure women's right to vote, to stop our involvement in the Vietnam War and end the criminalisation of homosexuality. Protest continues to play a key role in highlighting the cruelty of our refugee policies, in protecting workers' rights, in stopping coal seam gas exploration and so much more (de Kretser, H, Australia has a long history of protests). (p.10)

Most recently, state governments in Tasmania, New South Wales and Western Australia introduced or attempted to introduce harsh anti-protest laws with severe penalties, excessive police powers and broad, vague offences. These laws have targeted environmental protest in particular, prioritising vested corporate and government interests over people's democratic rights (ibid). (p.10)

Our democracy doesn't start and end on election day. Its enduring success rests on vital foundations like press freedom, the ability of charities and community groups to advocate freely, the rule of law and the right to protest. When governments chip away at our protest rights, they erode our democracy (ibid). (p.11)

Protest can make history, it can speak truth to power, it can change the legal system itself, but it is indirectly and rather poorly protected. Protest, like democracy, is often messy, disruptive, inconvenient and even annoying, but as with free speech more broadly, it deserves more formal recognition and legal protection in Australia (Joyce, D, Is there a right to protest in Australia?). (p.13)

Even though we are surrounded by new forms of activism, traditional forms of protest like the recent school climate strike, still garner wide attention. What's new is the online dimension, and the ability to quickly gather support from all corners of the globe (Basserabie, N, How activism is evolving to hold government and business accountable). (p.24)

Shareholder action, online petitions and social media campaigns are three prominent examples of activist strategies being used to make hold business and policy-makers more accountable for decisions that impinge on human rights (ibid). (p.24)

Social movements are large, and sometimes informal, groupings of individuals or organisations which focus on specific political or social issues with a view to carrying out, resisting, or undoing a change in society. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces (ibid). (p.26)

The rise of GetUp! and other similar grassroots campaigns being run by political independents is linked in part with early American ideals of participatory democracy, anti-politics, and the power of the internet (Rolfe, M, GetUp!s brand of in-your-face activism is winning elections – and making enemies). (p.33)

Social activism refers to a broad range of activities which are beneficial to society or particular interest groups. Social activists operate in groups to voice, educate and agitate for change, targeting global crises (Ghobadi, S, Going viral: what social media activists need to know). (p.39)

It is increasingly evident that most online petitions are set up to lobby for social causes to achieve positive action. There is opportunity for companies to be on the front foot instead of at risk of being publicly shamed for perceived unethical practices (Kansal, M, and Chugh, R, Changing the world one online petition at a time: how social activism went mainstream). (p.46)

Online petitions are often seen as a form of “slacktivism” – small acts that don’t require much commitment and are more about helping us feel good than effective activism. But the impacts of online petitions can stretch beyond immediate results. Whether they work to create legislative change, or just raise awareness of an issue, there’s some merit to signing them. Even if nothing happens immediately, petitions are one of many ways we can help build long-term change (Croeser, S, Not another online petition! But here’s why you should think before deleting it). (p.47)
Activism
Consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society. Forms of activism range from writing letters to newspapers, petitioning elected officials, running/contributing to a political campaign, preferential patronage/boycotting of businesses, and demonstrations like rallies, street marches, strikes, sit-ins or hunger strikes.

Anti-protest laws
Some jurisdictions in Australia have enacted anti-protest laws that unfairly limit freedom of peaceful assembly and expression by criminalising certain protest activities.

Civil disobedience
The active, professed refusal of a citizen to obey certain laws, demands, orders or commands of a government or occupying international power. By some definitions, civil disobedience has to be non-violent to be called 'civil'. Hence, civil disobedience is sometimes equated with peaceful protests or non-violent resistance.

Civil resistance
Political action that relies on the use of non-violent resistance by civil groups to challenge a particular power, force, policy or regime.

Clicktivism
Use of the internet and social media to advance social causes; uses the metrics available through web analytics to optimise web pages, emails and online petitions.

Collective action
Action taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective.

Corporate activism
Public stance taken by a major company to positively impact social change or legislation.

Corporate social responsibility
Type of international private business self-regulation that aims to contribute to societal goals of a philanthropic, activist, or charitable nature or by engaging in or supporting volunteering or ethically-oriented practices.

Dissent
A sentiment or philosophy of non-agreement or opposition to a prevailing idea (e.g. government policies) or an entity (e.g. an individual or political party which supports such policies).

Grassroots movement
Movement which uses the people in a given district, region, or community as the basis for a political or economic movement. Grassroots movements and organisations use collective action from the local level to affect change at the local, regional, national, or international level.

Hacktivism
A form of internet activism, hacktivism uses technology to promote a political agenda or a social change. With roots in hacker culture and hacker ethics, its ends are often related to the free speech, human rights, or freedom of information movements.

Online petition
An online petition (internet petition or e-petition) is a form of petition which is signed online, usually through a form on a website. Visitors to the online petition sign the petition by adding their details such as name and email address. Typically, after there are enough signatories, the resulting letter may be delivered to the subject of the petition, usually via e-mail. The online petition may also deliver an email to the target of the petition each time the petition is signed.

Protest
A statement or action expressing disapproval of, or objection to, something. A public protest can take many forms, including a rally, street demonstration, march, vigil, picket, symbolic display, boycott, riot and civil disobedience.

Right to freedom of assembly and association
The right to peaceful assembly protects the right of individuals and groups to meet and engage in peaceful protest. The right to freedom of association protects the right to form and join associations to pursue common goals.

Right to protest
Australia does not have the right to protest in its constitution or in legislation at a national level, unlike many other countries. However, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT have protected the right to protest directly through their own state-based human rights acts. Australia is a party to seven core international human rights treaties, two of which feature the right to freedom of assembly and association.

Slacktivism
A portmanteau of slacker and activism, slacktivism is a pejorative term for 'feel-good' measures in support of an issue or social cause. Slacktivism is showing support for a cause where the main purpose is boosting the egos of participants in the movement.

Social action group
Generally social action is an individual or group behaviour that involves interaction with other individuals or groups, especially organised action toward social reform. Prominent examples of these groups in Australia include GetUp!, Amnesty and Greenpeace.

Social change
Alteration of social order of a society; may include changes in social institutions, social behaviours or social relations.

Social movement
Social movements are large, and sometimes informal, groupings of individuals or organisations which focus on specific political or social issues with a view to carrying out, resisting, or undoing a change in society. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces.
Websites with further information on the topic

Amnesty International  www.amnesty.org.au
Animals Australia  www.animalsaustralia.org
Australian Human Rights Commission  www.humanrights.gov.au
Australian Human Rights Institute  www.humanrights.unsw.edu.au
Australian Youth Climate Coalition  www.aycc.org.au
Avaaz  www.Avaaz.org
Change.Org  www.change.org
Foundation for Young Australians  www.fya.org.au
GetUp!  www.getup.org.au
Greenpeace Australia Pacific  www.greenpeace.org.au
Human Rights Law Centre  www.hrlc.org.au
Ipetitions  www.ipetitions.com
PETA Australia  www.peta.org.au
Reconciliation Australia  www.reconciliation.org.au
Right Now  www.rightnow.org.au
The Conversation  http://theconversation.com

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