

Politics



Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE]

Unit 1: Politics, power and political actors

Unit 2: Democracy, stability and change

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VCE Units 1 and 2

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Please note that this publication includes the images and words of people who have died.

Preface and acknowledgements

On behalf of Social Education Victoria (SEV), we are so pleased to share our textbook for students and teachers of VCE Politics (Units 1 and 2) with you.

This text was produced and printed on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Wadawurrung, Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and express our gratitude for the continuing cultures and knowledge of First Nations people and their enduring connection to Country, including lands, waters and animals.

Our outstanding team of authors, editors and designers have endeavoured to make every decision regarding this text with students and teachers in mind – striking a balance between accessibility, structure, academic rigour, the study design and assessment standards.

Our team of dedicated authors, editors and designers, having brought with them a wealth of diverse knowledge and experiences, have worked diligently to develop a user-friendly text for both students and teachers. Translating the often highly conceptual and abstract ideas associated with the study of politics into content that is engaging and accessible for students, supported with relevant contextualised examples is no mean feat – this is a rewarding challenge we have been able to take on together.

The production of any textbook is a complex task subject to very tight timeframes. We congratulate the authors, researchers, design team, editors, proofreaders and printers for their commitment, diligence, patience and deftness of skill exhibited over the course of this journey. This team also includes those who, like us, have the privilege of working within and on behalf of Social Education Victoria on an ongoing basis; their unwavering commitment to delivering this textbook has been truly incredible. We are also grateful for the support of our executive, our management committee and our textbook and resource subcommittee.

We consider that we have an ongoing commitment to you when you purchase this text. We strongly encourage you to check in regularly with the online library of supplementary resources we provide using the URL provided below.

We trust that this text and its accompanying online resources will play a part in your enjoyment and understanding of this subject, and we wish you all the best with your studies.

sev.asn.au/textbook-resources/pol12

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Introduction

The study of politics matters now more than ever.

“Critical thinking without hope is cynicism. Hope without critical thinking is naïveté . . . But in order to survive – both as individuals and as a civilization – and especially in order to thrive, we need the right balance of critical thinking and hope.

A plant needs water in order to survive, and needs the right amount of water in order to thrive. Overwater it and it rots with excess. Underwater it and it dries up inside.”

Maria Popova, 2015. ‘Hope, cynicism, and the stories we tell ourselves’. *The Marginalian*.
themarginalian.org/2015/02/09/hope-cynicism

There is an ironic saying (often misattributed as an old Chinese curse) which goes – ‘may you live in interesting times’. For students and teachers undertaking VCE Politics, these are certainly interesting times to be living in.

As the VCAA study design for VCE Politics was being developed, Russian forces were continuing their invasion of Ukraine. Many observers (and certainly Russian ones) had anticipated a fast operation, with some reports even suggesting that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, had ordered his officers to pack their dress uniforms in preparation for a victory parade in Kyiv within the first week. Instead, the invasion had developed into a protracted conflict.

With a victory parade nowhere in sight, in September 2022 Putin escalated the stakes of the conflict further. In a speech announcing a partial mobilisation, the Russian leader went on to threaten to make use of nuclear weapons. In the speech, Putin responded to what he described as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)’s ‘nuclear blackmail’ with an eerie warning of his own:

“Nuclear blackmail has also been used. We are talking not only about the shelling of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant – encouraged by the West – which threatens to cause a nuclear catastrophe but also about statements from senior representatives of NATO countries about the possibility and permissibility of using weapons of mass destruction against Russia: nuclear weapons.

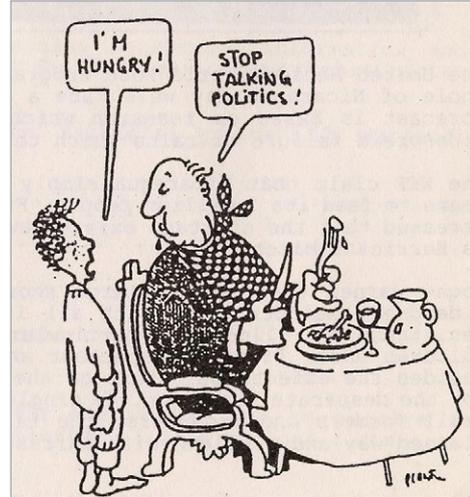
I would like to remind those who make such statements about Russia that our country also possesses various means of destruction, and in some cases, they are more modern than those of NATO countries. When the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we, of course, will use all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and our people.

This is not a bluff. And those who try to blackmail us with nuclear weapons should know that the weathervane can turn and point towards them.

Citizens of Russia can be convinced that our territorial independence and freedom will be provided, and I emphasise this one more time, with all means that we have at our disposal.”

So eighty years after the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and more than thirty since the end of the Cold War, we once again faced the threat of nuclear exchange and potential extinction. This serves to remind us why the study of politics matters now more than ever.

While students will find many such issues confronting, neither study of VCE Politics nor this text should be taken as mere pessimistic snapshot of world problems about which readers should feel powerless. Rather, by actively engaging with the key concepts, knowledge and skills involved in thinking politically (in this textbook and elsewhere), you embark on an intellectual act of courage, which requires you to weigh-up multiple viewpoints and test ideas and assumptions based on evidence in order to reach reasonable conclusions. These are all important steps in developing your own informed perspective, and by extension realising your agency as a person capable of *contributing* to the resolution of challenges we face as a community – whether at a local, national, regional or global level.



From all of us at the writing team, we wish you a fulfilling learning and teaching journey ahead.

Overview

This textbook is designed to provide students and teachers with a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts, knowledge and skills associated with VCE Politics Unit 1 – Politics, power and political actors – and Unit 2 – Democracy: stability and change.

Each chapter corresponds with an area of study and follows roughly the same format:

- an overview of the area of study
- in-depth exploration of relevant key knowledge, interspersed with definitions, examples, quotes, external resource recommendations and activities designed to help students check and develop their understanding
- at least one in-depth case study which explores the key themes of the study design in relation to a specific contemporary issue, or set of issues.
- revision questions and advice for tackling them.



Controversial issues

This text contains a variety of representations and perspectives on many sensitive and (as you would image) *contentious* issues. Our team doesn't pretend to be apolitical – rather, we celebrate the diversity of our experiences and perspectives and think it makes for a more robust and interesting way to engage with the material at hand. The study design itself reflects a set of conclusions about the nature of politics, and we have worked very hard to engage with it constructively – even if we sometimes disagree.

We have tried to include a variety of reliable and accessible recommendations for further investigation for each topic being discussed (noting this can sometimes be challenging in a media landscape where a lot of reporting on contemporary political issues often falls behind a paywall). Students are encouraged to follow their own interests, read widely, reflect critically and talk to each other.

Advice to get you started

Key knowledge and key skills

Each chapter of this text corresponds to one of the four areas of study in the study design, and summarises the relevant key knowledge and key skills of each before diving in. Remember: key knowledge is simply what you're learning *about*, while key skills are what you're learning to *do* with that knowledge.

Thinking politically

VCE Politics is organised into elements which are referred to as the **characteristics of the study** (or, alternatively, 'political thinking concepts'). Such characteristics introduce the central concepts and skills that underpin the study of politics as envisioned by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA).

There are eight political thinking concepts referred to throughout Units 1–4. These include:

- 1 undertaking political **inquiry**
- 2 applying political **concepts**
- 3 analysing **causes** and **consequences**
- 4 identifying and analysing differing political **interests**
- 5 identifying and analysing political **perspectives**
- 6 discussing political stability and **change**
- 7 evaluating political **significance**
- 8 constructing reasoned and evidence-informed **arguments**.

Together, these form the basis of thinking politically, and are used to develop your skills in political understanding and reasoning, along with civic and civil discourse. They are also used to assist in investigating and understanding political phenomena (events, issues and patterns of behaviour).

We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with the VCE Politics study design, particularly pages 12 to 14, which provide a detailed elaboration on each political thinking concept.

 vcaa.vic.edu.au/documents/vce/politics/2024PoliticsSD.docx

Key skills and action verbs

All key skills include an **command term** (also known as a 'action verb'). These guide your learning by indicating the level of complexity with which you should think about and demonstrate your understanding of specific key knowledge points.

Page 15 of the VCE Politics study design provides a table which organises and 'maps' to the characteristics of the study, which we have reproduced below. This is a great resource for helping you to visualise the action verbs that will drive much of your study in your first year of VCE Politics.

When looking at this table, we can see that some of the more prominent command terms that feature in Units 1 and 2 are:

- analyse
- construct an argument
- describe

- explain
- formulate and ask questions
- interpret.

We recommend you investigate the following resources for more detailed guidance on understanding and responding to command terms in your writing:

- 📖 VCAA, 2023. 'Glossary of command terms'.
vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/vce-assessment/Pages/GlossaryofCommandTerms.aspx
- 📖 University of Melbourne, 2023. 'Task analysis: Direction words'. bit.ly/47cWdWp
- 📖 Monash University, 2023. 'Understand your assessment'.
monash.edu/student-academic-success/understand-assessments/understand-your-assessment

Constructing an argument

One of the main characteristics of the study and the key skills you should seek to develop in Units 1 and 2 is the ability to construct reasoned and evidence-informed arguments.

While there is no universal formula for constructing an argument, we have provided three suggestions for 'frameworks' which might assist you in organising your thinking when trying to put together and communicate your political arguments. Regardless of whether you use one of these frameworks, a necessary ingredient in constructing a political argument is *intellectual humility*. Unlike the hard sciences, the nature of the study of politics (and the social sciences more generally) is that human affairs are never entirely 'yes' or 'no', 'black' or 'white'. We live and work in the *grey zone*, where every 'yes' has a 'but', and every 'no' has a 'however'. Understanding your own core values and then working out how they relate to political concepts is also incredibly important. We believe the best use of political knowledge is in the spirit of open dialogue and mutual compassion, along with being (at the very least) willing to hear the other side out. As you develop your ability to construct good arguments, you'll see that this generally requires that you *research well*, *listen humbly* and *disagree respectfully*. If you find yourself getting passionate about a particular topic (which is in and of itself something that should be celebrated), be mindful of talking *with* rather than *over* your classmates – even if you find yourself disagreeing strongly.

Say it, Support it, Reinforce it

Say it → Take a position or stance on a specific political issue.

Support it → Defend your perspective with reference to detailed, relevant and accurate information.

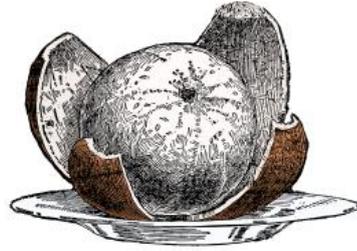
Use credible and relevant facts, figures, statistics, relevant contemporary examples (from the last 10 years) which demonstrate the point of your argument.

Reinforce it → Link your supporting information back to the position you stated initially.



P-E-E-L

- Point** → Clearly spell out what your position or overall perspective is on an issue.
- Evidence** → Present a relevant example or piece of information.
- Explain** → Using your evidence, elaborate your point of view and explain how and why it is persuasive. This is also a good spot to consider and weigh up alternative perspectives on what your evidence means.
- Link** → Establish a logical link from your evidence and explanation back to your overall point.



The **Toulmin method** of argumentation (named after philosopher Stephen E. Toulmin) is a way of structuring an argument by breaking it down into six parts:

claim → **grounds** → **warrant** → **qualifier** → **rebuttal** → **backing**

A helpful breakdown of each element of this method can be found here:

- 📖 Perdue Online Writing Lab, 2023. 'Toulmin Argument'. owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/historical_perspectives_on_argumentation/toulmin_argument.html

A note on logic and good faith

Political discussions are especially prone to featuring poor logic and 'bad faith' arguments, whereby individuals intend to mislead, misrepresent and avoid inconvenient facts. We encourage you to keep an eye out for these pitfalls, and avoid falling into them yourself when constructing your own political arguments.

See the following suggested resources which discuss some of the more common bad arguments and logical fallacies in greater detail.

- 📖 Ali Almosawi, 2013. *An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments* (eBook). bookofbadarguments.com
- 📖 'Thou shall not commit logical fallacies'. yourlogicalfallacyis.com
- 📖 'Strawmen and slippery slopes: how to spot politicians tinkering with the truth'. The Guardian, 2022. theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/13/strawmen-and-slippery-slopes-how-to-spot-politicians-tinkering-with-the-truth

1.1

Unit 1,
Area of study 1:



Power and national political actors

“Unit 1, Area of Study 1: Power and national political actors

On completion of this unit the student should be able to explain the sources of power and legitimacy of national political actors and analyse the political significance of Australian political actors' use of power in a contested domestic political issue.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

- 1 the key concepts:
 - 1.1 power
 - 1.2 legitimacy
 - 1.3 authority
 - 1.4 participation
 - 1.5 popular sovereignty
 - 1.6 parliamentary sovereignty
 - 1.7 federalism
 - 1.8 responsible government
 - 1.9 separation of powers
 - 1.10 political interests
 - 1.11 political perspectives
 - 1.12 political significance
 - 1.13 political stability and/or change
- 2 the different types of political actors that may be involved in an issue, such as
 - 2.1 states
 - 2.2 government leaders
 - 2.3 institutions of global governance
 - 2.4 political parties
 - 2.5 media
 - 2.6 non-government organisations
 - 2.7 corporations
 - 2.8 social movements
 - 2.9 groups and individuals
- 3 different ways of organising formal power within states, such as
 - 3.1 federalism
 - 3.2 responsible government
 - 3.3 the separation of executive, legislative or judicial power
- 4 the sources of legitimacy of political actors, such as
 - 4.1 democratic processes
 - 4.2 ideology
 - 4.3 coercion
 - 4.4 economic performance
 - 4.5 the impact of these sources on how power is exercised
- 5 the key political actors in Australia, such as
 - 5.1 the Commonwealth and state governments
 - 5.2 parliaments and leaders
 - 5.3 political parties
 - 5.4 the High Court of Australia
 - 5.5 media
 - 5.6 business
 - 5.7 social movements
 - 5.8 special interest groups

- 6** the sources and forms of power of Australian political actors that may be involved in an issue, such as
- 6.1** authority and office
 - 6.2** leadership qualities
 - 6.3** parliamentary sovereignty
 - 6.4** popular sovereignty through elections and referenda
 - 6.5** economic resources
 - 6.6** technological capacity
 - 6.7** military capacity
 - 6.8** diplomatic capacity
 - 6.9** social capacity
 - 6.10** cultural capacity
- 7** access to power and participation in decision-making in Australia, such as through
- 7.1** social movements, campaigns, protests and citizen power
 - 7.2** party membership
 - 7.3** submissions to committees
 - 7.4** the media
- 8** the political significance of key Australian political actors in at least one contested political issue, including the sources and forms of their power, their perspectives and legitimising narratives about contributions to political stability and change, their competing interests and the consequences of the actions taken.

Key skills

- i** formulate a range of questions to investigate the source and use of power of national political actors within Australia
- ii** examine sources of information to explain the interests, perspectives and power of national political actors
- iii** explain the sources of legitimacy and power of national political actors
- iv** explain the causes of a contested Australian domestic policy issue
- v** explain the interests of Australian political actors in a contested policy issue
- vi** describe the different political actors' perspectives on an Australian domestic political issue
- vii** explain the consequences of a contested domestic political issue for political stability and/or change in Australia
- viii** discuss the political significance of political actors in Australian domestic politics
- ix** construct an argument about the capacity of political actors to achieve their interests using perspectives and evidence from sources.

Key questions

What is the source of political power and legitimacy within a state?

How do political actors use power to achieve political stability and/or change within states?

Who are the key political actors within states and within Australia?

How is power legitimised, distributed and used in Australia?

Preface

In this area of study, students are introduced to the central concepts of power and legitimacy. Power comes in different forms and arises from different sources, such as legal authority, or military, economic, diplomatic, cultural and technological capacities. This capacity can be thought of as ‘power to ...’ do something. Political actors can also use power in more coercive, even illegitimate, ways that can be thought of as ‘power over ...’ other political actors or ordinary people.

Students investigate the types of political actors within states including Australia, and the sources and forms of their power. Legitimacy is the belief that an institution, party or ruler has the right to exercise power. This transforms power into authority and is necessary for the maintenance of political stability and the peaceful achievement of change. Legitimacy may be democratic (for example, through elections), or non-democratic (for example, through manipulation, fear or economic performance), any of which may provide a kind of consent to being governed over. Domestic political actors may be formal political institutions such as the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, or groups and individuals outside the formal institutions of government. The sources and forms of power of domestic political actors, and their claimed legitimacy or legitimising narratives, are linked to the type of political system those domestic political actors belong to.

In this area of study, students engage with political thinking through the ideas, institutions and processes that underpin the legitimacy of the Australian system of government. Using one example of a contested political issue, students assess the political significance of the use of power by different political actors. This example may be in the context of any of the following: a state or federal election; a federal-state issue; a negotiation between political parties in the Australian parliament; a leadership contest; a community protest or movement; a judicial investigation into an issue or person; a media exposé of an issue, organisation or political actor; a national crisis or responses to a natural, environmental or man-made disaster; or another appropriate example. ”

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2023.
‘VCE Politics Study Design, 2024–2028’.
vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/2024PoliticsSD.docx

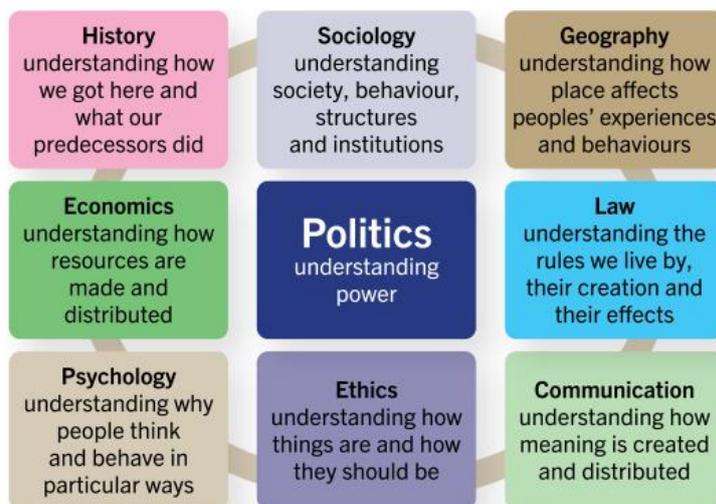
Power and national political actors

This chapter will introduce the study of politics by exploring the different types of political actors that may be involved in a political issue. It will also highlight the ideas, **institutions** and processes that underpin the legitimacy of the Australian system of government and further assess the **political significance** of the use of power by different political actors in a contemporary context.

The key concepts ^{1.1.1}

What do we mean when we talk about politics?

Politics can be understood as a cross-disciplinary approach that draws on and incorporates elements of many overlapping and complementary areas of social science, particularly history, ethics, economics, sociology and law.



In the most basic sense, politics is about **power**: who gets what they want and how much of it? Power is the capacity of **political actors** to exert influence, control or authority over or in relation to other actors. In turn, this helps to determine the extent to which they get to realise their goals and serve their **political interests** in the **political change** that results from their intervention. The expansion of their own power and influence is a common interest among all political actors. The extent to which a political actor's interests are seen as 'good' or 'bad', moral or immoral is subjective and open to interpretation. In other words, it depends entirely on the values or interests of the person making the judgment (their **political perspective**).

An **institution** is an established framework for structuring and regulating certain aspects of human social life.

Political significance refers to the importance, impact or relevance of a political event, action, decision or actor within the context of a particular society, government or political system.

Power is an ability to influence outcomes within a system.

Political actors are the individuals, groups, institutions or entities that participate in and influence the political processes that determine which decisions, policies and actions are taken.

Political interests are the desires, motivations and goals that both shape and drive the behaviour of political actors.

Political change refers to the extent to which political outcomes differ over time, including as a result of the actions of political actors; a lack of change is taken to indicate political stability.

Political perspectives are the ways in which political actors see and understand their interests, which are influenced by their ideas, values, experiences and contextual factors.

Consider the following quotation on justifying means and ends:

“A means can be justified only by its end. But the end in its turn needs to be justified.”

Leon Trotsky, 1938. *Their Morals and Ours*. Pathfinder Press.



Politics as 'applied ethics'

The way political actors and observers understand the nature of right and wrong varies considerably, but this can mostly be looped into the following broad categories:

- virtue ethics focuses on the character, attributes or intentions of an actor
- intuitive ethics sees goodness as an inherent sense – something that can be just known, a gut feeling
- rights-based ethics focus on the extent to which an actor's behaviour adheres to moral principles or rules
- consequentialism maintains that morality should be determined based on the outcome or result of an action.

The basis of an actor's understanding of ethics forms an important foundation upon which they build and shape their own perspectives, as well as how they understand and justify their own interests.

A common way of identifying your own ethical approach is using the thought experiment known as the 'trolley problem', which you can learn more about here:

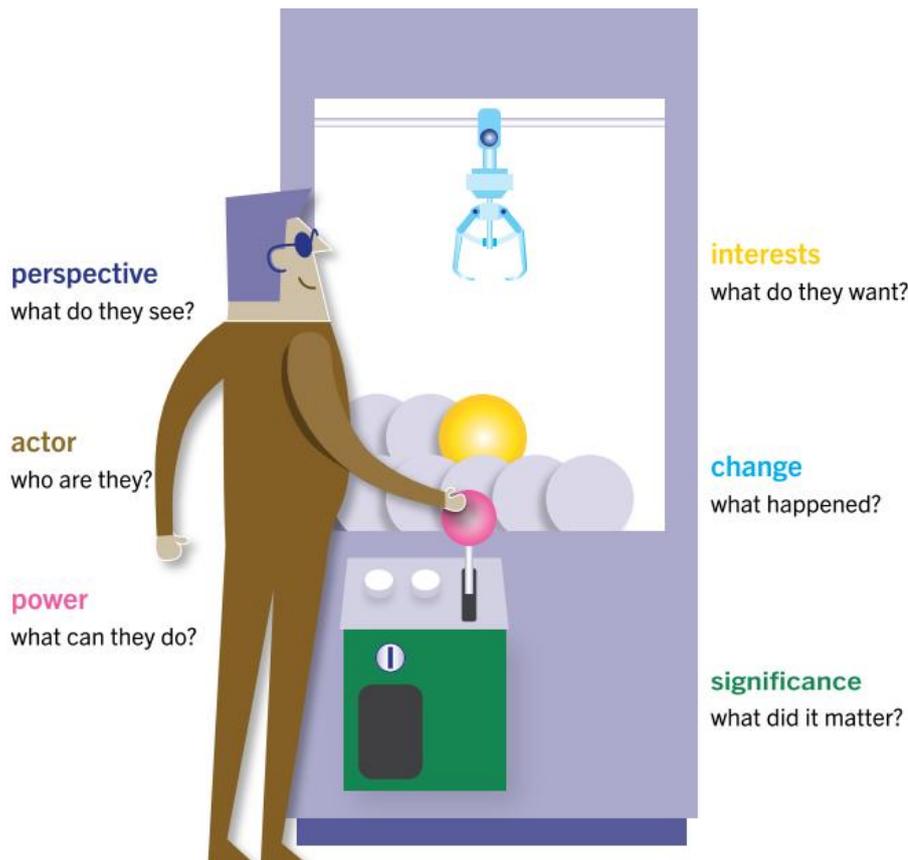
- 📌 Laura D'Olimpio, 2016. 'The trolley dilemma: Would you kill one person to save five?' The Conversation. theconversation.com/the-trolley-dilemma-would-you-kill-one-person-to-save-five-57111

All political actors have varying degrees of **capacity** (in terms of their potential power and means of influencing others), which they might draw on to advance their interests. The nature and means by which they influence outcomes vary widely, depending on the political actor and the political issue. In this way, a political actor's capacity (or lack thereof) can determine the extent to which they can successfully turn their preferences into reality. This set of mechanisms also determines different actors' ability to either push back on or try to frustrate other political actors' own agendas when their interests are opposed. The types of resources actors can draw on to influence outcomes may be largely economic, technological, military, diplomatic, social or cultural in nature.

Capacity is the potential or ability to do something or influence an outcome.

Political significance involves understanding how a specific political occurrence or individual's role can influence **policies**, public opinion, social dynamics, governance, or the overall direction of a nation or community. Political actors are considered effective in achieving their interests if they can ensure the results (what they get) match up with their preferences (what they want). Conversely, political actors that fail to achieve results that reflect their preferences are considered ineffective.

A **policy** is an agreed-upon set of ideas or a plan for how a government or other group will respond in particular situations, typically expressed in statements, laws or other rules.



Political actors are also understood to perform different roles and functions in relation to each other. The interests and actions a particular actor adopts while serving a role may not always be agreeable to other actors operating within the same political system. In this way, competition over roles can be a source of tension between political actors.

You will notice that some of the key concepts outlined in our study design's first key knowledge point are woven throughout the general discussions in our text. This helps to introduce you to key concepts in context.

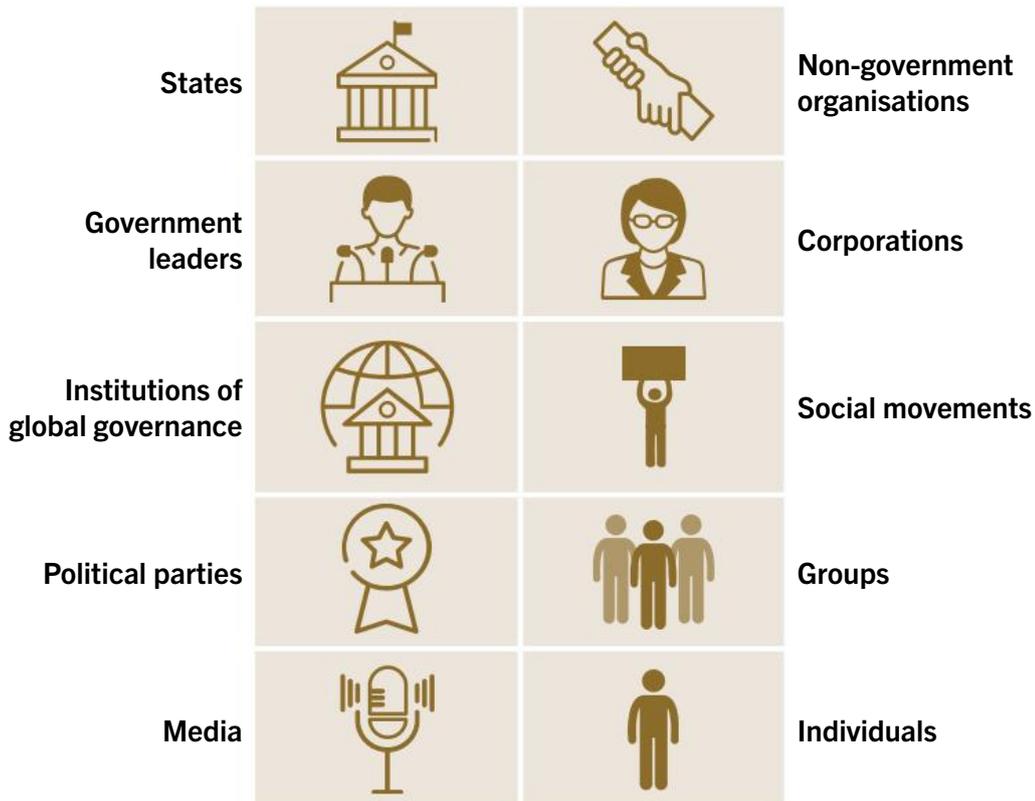
Different types of political actors 1.1.2

“There are two types of changes I want to discuss. One is power transition, which is change of power amongst states. ... The other is power diffusion, the way power is moving from all states ... to non-state actors. Those two things are the huge shifts of power in our century. ... The age of the state is over. The state still matters, but the stage is crowded; the state's not alone. There are many, many actors.”

Joseph Nye, 2010. 'Joseph Nye on global power shifts'. TED (21 min). youtu.be/796LfXwzIUk

As noted, political actors can be individuals, groups, institutions or **entities** involved in any political issue. Our study design invites us to first consider 10 different types of actors, with these types being general in nature rather than specific to Australia. The 10 types are shown in the table on the next page:

Entities are organisations founded for a particular cause or purpose, such as religion, government, education, professions or a social purpose.



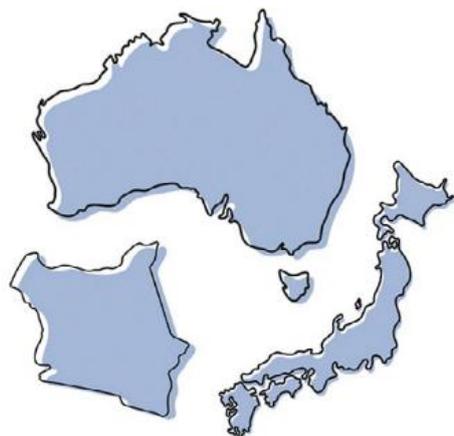
Remember as you make your way through this section that actors tend to overlap in many respects. By definition, institutions and entities are comprised of the many individuals who work *within* them, who have their own sets of interests, perspectives and group affiliations.

States ^{1.1.2.1}

Perhaps confusingly, in the study of politics the word **nation** is often used interchangeably with the term **state**, or sometimes blended into a hybrid term, **nation-state**. The related term country also gets an honourable mention. Let's try to clarify.

A nation is a community of people based on a particular identity. They have common bonds through shared culture, language, history, ethnicity and religion. Nations can be fluid, overlapping and contested concepts. For example, in this country, people of the Yorta Yorta nation may also identify to some extent with an Australian national identity; similarly, people in Wales might consider it a nation, either part of or exclusive to a wider British national identity. Writing in 1983, Anglo-Irish political scientist Benedict Anderson somewhat controversially characterised nations as 'imagined political communities'.

Many nations can and do exist despite not being associated with a corresponding 'state'. For instance, Kurdistan is widely considered a stateless nation whose territory and population are split between the states of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.



The term **state** refers to something that is both a political community and a territorial entity, and that has the following five characteristics:

- 1 a permanent population
- 2 defined territory
- 3 a functioning government
- 4 the ability to engage in relations with other states
- 5 international recognition from other sovereign states.

A **state** is a political unit that has a permanent population, defined territory, a distinct government and recognised sovereignty; states are traditionally considered the central actors in global politics.

The term 'state' is also used to refer to entities that share many of these attributes but exist within a broader **nation-state**; for example, in Australia, we have the *states* of Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland. This use of 'state' is best understood as equivalent to the name given to subnational political entities in other parts of the world; for example, Canada and Indonesia are divided into provinces, while France has administrative regions. Readers can generally distinguish which sort of state is being referred to depending on what is being discussed. When discussing global politics, we are less likely to be talking about the state of Queensland and much more likely to be referring to the state of Australia.

The term **country** has a broader meaning that may be used to refer to any distinct part of the world, which *may* also be a state, a nation, or any other sort of political entity.

States may be largely **multicultural** like Australia, or they can be more **culturally homogeneous** like Japan. In turn, culturally homogenous states are commonly referred to as nation-states. The identity of states and their inhabitants may be tied up in questions of culture, language or of civic values, which can be expressed in a variety of ways:

- whether there is an official (or unofficial) national language, or languages
- what is required from those seeking to become citizens (do they need to demonstrate specific ancestry, have specific knowledge about civic institutions or values, or be from a particular religious group?)
- the extent to which there are particular skills, levels of wealth or educational attainment that make it easier to become a citizen.

Multicultural means several different cultures coexisting peacefully and equitably in a single country.

Culturally homogeneous refers to a country or other group sharing an overwhelmingly dominant or uniform culture.

Regardless of these variables, if the five criteria for statehood are present, then a state is considered **sovereign**. In effect, sovereignty represents statehood 'status', whereby a state can exercise exclusive and ultimate control over a geographically defined territory.

Despite real differences in size and power, there is a certain formal and legal equality between states, who generally expect one another to respect each other's borders.

Sovereignty is the legitimate or widely recognised ability to exercise effective control over matters in a particular area, or within particular borders.

States can be classified (sorted into types) in many ways:

- How **powerful** they are relative to others: for example, superpowers have considerable ability to enforce their preferences across the globe, while regional or 'middle' powers are far more constrained in what they can hope to achieve beyond their immediate borders, without the cooperation of other states.

- **Political systems:** for example, **liberal democracies** such as New Zealand or the United States, absolute monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, theocracies such as Afghanistan, and many hybrids thereof.
- **Economic systems:** **capitalist** systems where property rights and private ownership dominate, such as Switzerland, or where the state or collective interests control economic decisions (such as Cuba) – also with many different combinations of elements of both.
- Degree of **stability:** for example, in 2023 the Fragile State Index rated Finland, Norway, Iceland and New Zealand as highly stable, while Somalia and Yemen were considered the most fragile.
- Levels of **wealth** and/or **income:** This generally refers to the *average* income of individuals within a country. Australia is a higher-income country, while neighbouring Timor-Leste’s average income is much lower. Depending on where lines are drawn, we can sometimes also talk about countries such as India or China as being ‘middle income’.

Liberal democracy refers to a form of democracy in which the power of government is limited and counterbalanced by the rights and freedoms of individuals, which are protected by constitutions, established norms and institutions.

Capitalism refers to a social and economic system where privately owned and operated businesses produce goods and services for a profit; it usually features systems of private property, wage labour, market competition and the accumulation of capital (wealth).

Stability refers to a political system’s ability to maintain things as they are, and/or where decisions and changes do not substantially affect the current distribution of power among actors (particularly institutions and governments) within that system.



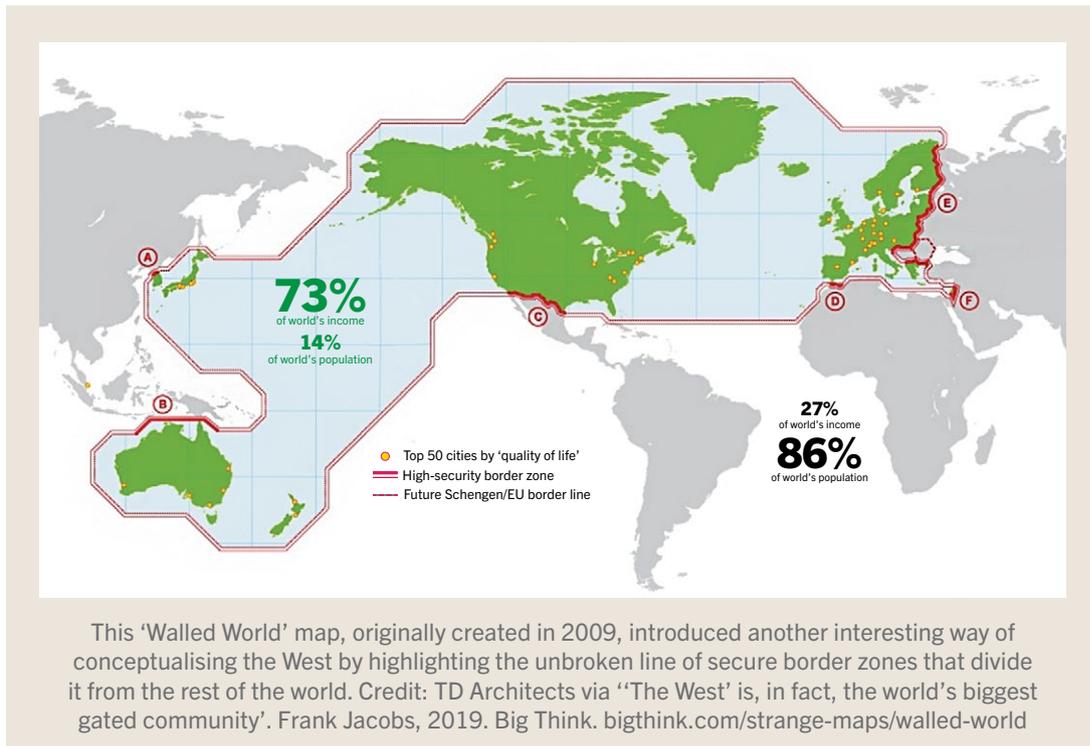
‘The West’ and the rest

As you work your way through resources touching on the differences between countries, you will recognise several different ways of referring to what we have generally opted to describe as ‘higher (or lower) income countries’. Each of these comes with its own set of objections, generalisations and, well, baggage.

the West / the rest	the west / the east
developed / developing	wealthy / poor
global north / global south	first world / third world
advanced / less advanced	fat / lean
high income / low income	high growth / low growth

As with any attempt to divide any set of data from the real world into two or three distinct categories, it is not too hard to find examples that don’t seem to fit well into either. For example, Saudi Arabia boasts higher than average per-person incomes and considerable wealth but is still classified as ‘developing’ by the IMF, with high rates of economic growth. Geopolitically it aligns with the interests of the liberal democracies of the West more often than not, yet it shares remarkably few of their political characteristics.

As mentioned, the idea of the West also has strong political, rather than just economic, connotations. While this use also has its problems (particularly because of how imprecise it can be – think about whether Australia, Japan or New Zealand can be considered part of the West, given they are all about as *east* as a country can get from Western Europe), there aren’t many good alternatives. This is why the term continues to be widely used in discussions of global politics.



Continuity and change in the global order

The Western world and US hegemony

World affairs over the last 200 years have been dominated by competition between established European great powers including the United Kingdom and France, along with emerging great powers including the United States, Italy, Germany, Russia and Japan. To vastly oversimplify a very complex process, these states rose to power through a process of industrialisation and modernisation, fuelled in part by economic and military domination (including campaigns of dispossession and enslavement) they visited on most of the rest of the world.

The West traditionally comprises those parts of the world dominated by the primarily Christian peoples and cultures of Western Europe, who by virtue of their military expansion came to include most of the North American continent (the United States and Canada) as well as Australasia. In broad terms they can be seen as contrasting with other groupings of countries with similar kinds of cultural and regional ties; this includes East Asia and the Indian subcontinent, the Muslim and Orthodox worlds, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Politically, Western states are predominantly liberal democracies. Economically, they embrace varying degrees of capitalism. Culturally, they have been informed most by Greco-Roman philosophy, ideas and laws, Judeo-Christian values and traditions, and secular humanist ideals such as **individualism** and **pluralism**. Historically, these states have been shaped by developments including the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment; experiences of empire and **colonisation**; revolutions such as those in England, the United States and France; the Industrial Revolution; the two world wars; the Cold War; and the so-called war on terror.

Individualism is a perspective that considers the individual as the central and primary actor in society and prioritises individual autonomy and self-reliance.

Pluralism is a perspective that recognises and values diversity in society; pluralist societies allow for many different groups, parties and ideologies to coexist and participate in political processes.

Colonisation is the action or process of establishing control over, and often settling among, the existing inhabitants of an area, usually enforced through violence and dispossession.

In contemporary global politics, the West is associated with, among other things, the Group of 7 (G7) economic forum, the regional grouping of the European Union (EU), the collective security agreement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the intelligence alliance known as the 'Five Eyes', and American popular culture.

The current rules-based order

Following World War II, the West played a significant role in shaping the current rules-based international order, sometimes also referred to as the liberal international order. Both terms beg the questions, *whose rules? And who benefits from such an order?* In short, they imply a global order framed around US military and economic **hegemony, laissez-faire** capitalism, rights-based rhetoric and the promotion of liberal democratic political systems.

For many *non*-Western states, alternatives to a Western-dominated global order and enormous cultural influence have been keenly sought.

Hegemony refers to the capacity of a superpower state to dominate the global political order.

Laissez-faire refers to governments preferring not to intervene in or interfere with the workings of markets.

The return of China and the rise of BRICS

The major global power shifts between states in the early 21st century include the return of China to global superpower status, along with the increasing economic strength of other non-Western states. The former has seen China approach, and on some metrics already *surpass*, the United States in terms of its power and influence, dislodging it from 'hegemon' status. China has sought to develop alternative regional and international structures – such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank – which have allowed it to reorient a greater proportion of global trade and investment flows.

This transition can also be seen in the emergence of a loose coalition of countries known as the BRICS, an acronym referring to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Alongside others, such as Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Turkey and Mexico, each of the BRICS nations has sought to develop alternative approaches to those favoured by the West.



The five BRICS countries represent around 42 per cent of the world's population and 27 per cent of its economic activity. On both metrics, they are growing rapidly.



Activity A – Key concept recap

- 1 Explain the difference between political interests and political perspectives.
- 2 Using the knowledge you have gained so far, assess the following statements and mark them as true or false.

Statement	T	F
States are comprised of people who speak the same language.		
Queensland and Tasmania are examples of a nation-state.		
Political actors are considered effective if they can turn their preferences into outcomes.		
Countries are like states except that they lack any territory.		

Statement	T	F
When a state is 'sovereign', that means it has ultimate authority over its territory.		
'Country' can mean any part of the world, regardless of whether it is a state.		
The G7 is a group of states seeking an alternative to Western dominance.		
Pragmatism means being concerned with solid and measurable results.		
Australia is a liberal democracy.		

Government leaders 1.1.2.2

Government leaders are individuals that represent states on the global stage, whose decisions and actions steer the direction of a state's foreign and domestic policies. Senior members of the government typically represent states on the global stage. They are considered leaders in that they also have followers. In an Australian context, this includes the prime minister and defence, trade and foreign ministers.

Government leaders

are holders of the most powerful offices in national governments, including heads of state, cabinet ministers, special advisers and other high-ranking government officials; generally, their most senior are termed prime minister or president.

They rely on:

- the institutions, departments and agencies that make up the 'machinery' of government (more generally) and actually implement government policies
- the people who work within the government – sometimes termed 'public servants'.

Government leaders also depend on other *non*-government actors who may lend them various forms of support, including the public at large, who pay taxes or contribute in other ways. In turn, this provides the government with the resources needed to implement government leaders' agenda(s).



US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meet as part of Quad talks in Hiroshima. Credit: Kenny Holston/Reuters.

Institutions of global governance 1.1.2.3

Institutions of global governance (IGGs) are institutions that seek to establish rules, norms and legal arrangements that encourage cooperation between states and assist states in managing their relations with one another. IGGs facilitate and promote **multilateral** approaches to various challenges. They are seen as the international umpires over designated areas of world affairs, such as international peace and security, global investment flows, trade and criminal matters.

Major IGGs include the **United Nations (UN)**, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** and the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**.

IGGs are intergovernmental in nature, drawing their membership from states. In effect, they are clubs for states who will join even though they are jealous guardians of their own sovereignty – this is notably because IGGs offer the possibility of more effective coordination and negotiation with other states.

This means that IGGs can, in some sense, be at the mercy of their members, who only cooperate and support them to the extent to which they serve their own perceived interests. As a result, they tend to only be as effective as their member states allow them to be.

Global governance offers an alternative approach to the potential chaos of the global political arena, considering the absence of a supreme overriding authority capable of 'keeping the peace' among global actors. It is generally believed that IGGs decrease the possibility of constant conflict (which is a lose-lose situation for everyone), while shaping those tendencies into relatively peaceful strategic competition.



Multilateralism refers to a system of coordinating relations between three or more global actors, usually in pursuit of specific objectives.

Global governance refers to the loose framework of global rules and regulations upheld by the founding of permanent international institutions, the codification of international law and the establishment of international norms (values and principles that inform global standards and expectations).



Activity B – States, leaders and institutions

- 1 In pairs or small groups, research and create a brief eight dot-point biography of four current or recent government leaders (you *could* choose the four Quad leaders that appear in the photo in the previous section). Note the following:
 - a their background or profession before entering politics
 - b their current position and time served in that role
 - c two policy changes they proposed or pursued during their time in office
 - d which other government leaders opposed the changes they pursued (these might be elected officials from an opposing political party, or leaders from other states).
- 2 Why do states participate in IGGs?
- 3 Watch the following video and answer the questions that follow:

 'Why are the IMF and World Bank so controversial?' Money Uncharted, 2022 (11 min).
youtu.be/1aSdTz20i6k

 - a In what ways might the interests of leaders of higher-income countries be served by these two institutions?
 - b In what ways might these IGGs serve the interests of government leaders of *lower*-income countries?
 - c Who might object to the policies and behaviour of these institutions (e.g. regarding conditions they enforce on debtor nations while serving as a 'lender of last resort')?
 - d To what extent do you agree with these objections, and why?



Political parties 1.1.2.4

Political parties seek to acquire and exercise political power through contesting elections, rallying sympathetic groups and/or taking power through force. Whether they are formally in power or not, parties compete or cooperate with other parties and groups in local, regional and national political settings, in the hope of influencing policy decisions and outcomes.

Political parties are formal membership-based organisations that seek to represent particular groups and ideas about how society should be organised.

Political parties typically operate within one-, two- or multiparty systems. As the names suggest, each system identifies how many political parties typically dominate in a given political environment, as well as how many have a realistic chance of leading a government.

In a **one-party** political system, a single party dominates. It is often aided by various measures that make it difficult or impossible for other parties to form or effectively challenge the ruling party for influence or control over government decisions. Avenues for contesting decisions are generally limited to *within* the ruling party, which depends on the rules parties themselves use to mediate internal disagreements over policy. This system is often associated with more authoritarian regimes such as China.

In a **two-party** system, two parties dominate formal politics. It is often aided by measures that either filter or funnel dissenting voices and interests (those that might otherwise form the basis of competitive third parties) into effective support for maintaining the binary system. Examples include the United States and, to a certain extent, Australia. In these systems, various legal and electoral measures ensure that candidates from the two dominant parties are typically awarded a larger proportion of the seats available in the legislature (parliament) than their *actual* proportion of support amongst voters.

In a **multiparty** system, more than two political parties can form government. These systems tend to produce coalition governments, where two or more parties with enough *combined* support in the legislature to be confident about their ability to pass laws agree to cooperate and 'share' government (usually by negotiating a written coalition agreement). Multiparty systems tend to be more common in continental European countries.



The type of party system a country has is not fixed, and each example has its own exceptions. Federally, Australia features elements of both multiparty and two-party systems. For example, the National Party has been in close coalition with the Liberal Party for many decades, and the Australian Greens have been an electorally competitive third party to some extent. Australian state and territory governments have also experienced extended periods of rule by a single party. Notably, the conservative Bjelke-Petersen government in Queensland (1968–87) featured significant changes to laws around elections and press freedom that served to entrench its position; this is not dissimilar in nature to how some one-party systems have emerged in other countries.

Media 1.1.2.5

The term **media** can refer to entities that produce content, as well as the content they produce *and* the means by which they distribute or ‘broadcast’ that content. Together, established media entities can also be understood as an institution.

Media entities and the people who work within them are a varied group. They can display a number of different characteristics that often shape how they behave as political actors:

- they may be involved in **traditional** (print and broadcast) or **digital** (online or computer-based) media
- they may be within companies or organisations of various sizes, along with independent or small-scale producers
- they may be involved in reporting on factual matters, sharing opinions or ideas, or in creating and sharing fictional stories
- they may seek to inform, entertain, make money, improve their own social standing or prestige, or otherwise influence peoples’ ideas, decisions or behaviour
- they may be funded by the state, donations, advertising revenue, subscriptions and sales, or be cross-subsidised by other parts of a parent organisation
- they provide information, including *political* information – facts, opinions, or fiction – to their consumers, the nature of which will be coloured by many of the factors noted above.

Prior to the advent of the printing press in the 1440s, only those institutions with the resources to copy out text by hand (like the Catholic Church in Western Europe) could hope to relay ideas to a mass audience – and even then, this would rely on local elites relaying information to them by literally reading text out loud to assemblies of locals (who themselves were largely illiterate). The spread of the printing press and growing literacy went some way to democratising media, as anyone who could read could buy or borrow a book, or be handed a pamphlet. The introduction of radio and television removed even more barriers to mass media consumption. In turn, the digital revolution significantly democratised the *production* of media, while also allowing for producers and consumers to communicate with one another more directly – without having to worry about whether a TV network or newspaper (for example) would facilitate.

Media is the means by which communication happens between large groups of people.

Traditional media refers to means of mass communication that rely primarily on predigital broadcast methods, such as radio, television and print (notably newspapers and magazines).

Digital media is any form of communication delivered primarily using computer technology, typically broadcast through a screen and a speaker via the internet.

In enabling the mass communication of ideas among and on behalf of others in society, media as an institution serves several core functions. Media outlets may shape and curate their content in ways that either promote the perspectives and actions of other actors to whom they are sympathetic, or undermine those whose values they oppose. In repressive or authoritarian states, the media may be tightly controlled and directed to advance the views or interests of the state. However, in a liberal democracy, a free and independent media is considered a crucial pillar in a well-functioning democratic society. This is because it:



Credit: Jimmy Margulies, 2018.

- allows for a range of ideas and proposals to be exchanged, developed and improved by exposure to criticism, with the idea being that the best ideas will 'rise to the top'
- provides regular people with information about the behaviour of the political and business elites whose decisions affect everyone
- creates a forum in which these behaviours and decisions can be scrutinised and discussed.

Consequently, elites are thought to be more likely to make better decisions and less likely to engage in ways that are corrupt, unethical or unpopular.

Collectively, these functions are part of the idea of the media (as an institution) as the **fourth estate**. This term, which originated in the 18th century, identified the then-emerging newspaper-based media as complementing the three groups that were traditionally considered to make up a society: the clergy, the nobility and the common people.

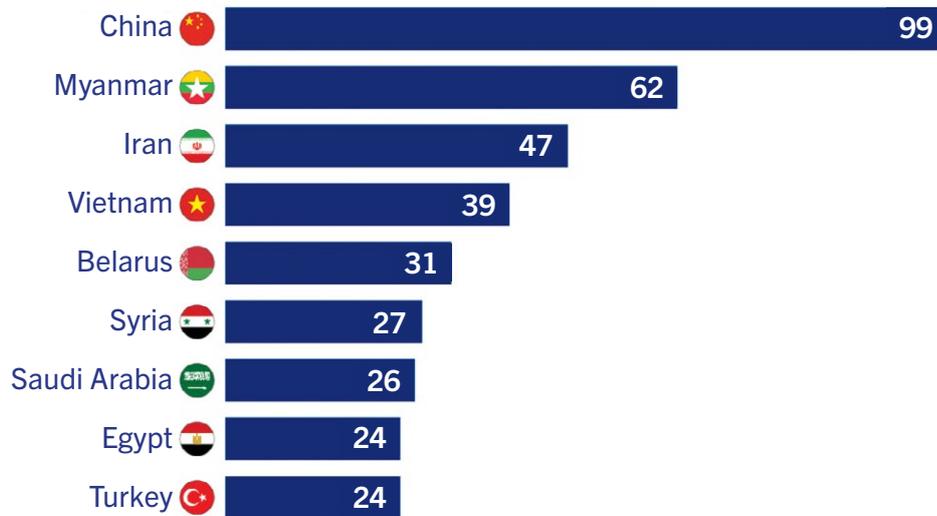
Experience also shows that in relatively free democratic societies, the media can be seen performing somewhat less selfless functions:

- The media **sets the agenda**: by making decisions about what to report on (and what *not* to report on), it focuses popular and elite attention on particular events or issues it deems newsworthy.
- The media **shapes public opinion**: by presenting issues in particular ways (framing), and through repetition, the media prepares (primes) consumers to draw particular links or conclusions between things.
- The media **directly affects decisions made by policymakers**: because they rely on media to communicate with their audiences, political elites tend to shape their decisions around how they expect to be treated in the media and employ people who specialise in media strategies to assist.

Media may seek to persuade consumers of a particular viewpoint by intentionally leaving out facts or perspectives that contradict those viewpoints. This can constitute misinformation (or disinformation) or propaganda.

Across more or less authoritarian states, individual journalists also face particular challenges when their reporting provokes state repression or retaliation from non-state actors, including imprisonment, violence and even death.

Countries with the highest number of imprisoned journalists in 2022.



Credit: Adapted from Martin Armstrong/Statista. Data from Reporters Without Borders. [statista.com/chart/3310/countries-with-most-imprisoned-journalists](https://www.statista.com/chart/3310/countries-with-most-imprisoned-journalists)



Press freedom and the perils of journalism

Shireen Abu Akleh was a Palestinian-American journalist who had worked for the Al Jazeera Media Network since 1997, lauded for her reporting on the experiences of Palestinians of all religious backgrounds. On 11 May 2022, Israeli forces shot and killed Abu Akleh while she was reporting from Jenin, a Palestinian city in the occupied West Bank. She passed away shortly after being rushed to hospital. She was killed while wearing a press vest and standing with a group of other journalists.

Witnesses claimed there was no confrontation between Palestinians and the Israeli army, disputing an Israeli statement referencing the possibility that Abu Akleh had been caught in crossfire. Witnesses also claimed the Israeli army shot at the journalists without asking them to leave or stop filming and maintain it was a direct targeting of the journalists with the intent to shoot to kill.

Abu Akleh's funeral was held soon after in East Jerusalem. Israeli police confiscated Palestinian flags from mourners and attacked the procession while her coffin was being carried to a church nearby. Images showed police kicking and hitting people with batons, causing those carrying the coffin to lose balance and drop it to the ground. The windows of Abu Akleh's hearse were also smashed.

Following an investigation into police conduct at the funeral, the Israeli media reported that neither the officers nor their commanders would be penalised. Al Jazeera later submitted a formal request to the ICC to investigate and prosecute those responsible for Abu Akleh's death. The Israel Defense Forces later issued an apology for her death.



Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian journalist who was shot and killed by Israeli forces while reporting. Credit: Al Jazeera, 2022. [w.wiki/78Px](https://www.wiki/78Px)



Activity C – The role of the media

- 1 Select a journalist or group of journalists working in the media who have reported on the actions or decisions of a state or government leader. Then answer the questions that follow.

You may choose to use Shireen Abu Akleh (information provided), one of the following suggestions that include some ideas for initial reading, or choose your own.

Peter Greste reports on challenges posed to the Egyptian government by the Muslim Brotherhood:

- 📄 “It was normal journalism’: Peter Greste explains how it all began’. Amnesty International, 2016. [amnesty.org.au/peter-greste-explains](https://www.amnesty.org.au/peter-greste-explains)

Bellingcat investigates the alleged poisoning of Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny:

- 📄 ‘Russian agent reportedly divulged poisoning plot to Alexey Navalny’. NowThis News, 2020 (3 min). youtu.be/SWOKwN14QGg
- 📄 ‘Russia bans news outlet Bellingcat, labels it a security threat’. Reuters, 2022. [reuters.com/world/europe/russia-bans-news-outlet-bellingcat-labels-it-security-threat-2022-07-15](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-bans-news-outlet-bellingcat-labels-it-security-threat-2022-07-15)

A whistleblower reveals that Australia’s spy agency bugged the offices of Timor-Leste’s prime minister to give it an advantage in a dispute over control of lucrative oil and gas fields:

- 📄 Christopher Knaus, 2019. ‘Witness K and the ‘outrageous’ spy scandal that failed to shame Australia’. The Guardian. [theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/10/witness-k-and-the-outrageous-spy-scandal-that-failed-to-shame-australia](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/aug/10/witness-k-and-the-outrageous-spy-scandal-that-failed-to-shame-australia)

- a Outline the actions taken by the state in response to the reporting of your selected journalist(s).
 - b Which state’s (and/or government leader’s) interests were challenged by their reporting?
- 2 Why is a free and independent media considered crucial in a well-functioning democratic society?
 - 3 How might the media (either in general or a specific media *entity*) influence how a government leader or their political party approaches a difficult policy issue? Explain using an example.

Non-government organisations ^{1.1.2.6}

Non-government organisations (NGOs) are generally not-for-profit entities that engage in advocacy for issues of concern across local, regional, national and international sectors. While for-profit businesses (regardless of size) are technically not government entities, by convention ‘non-government organisation’ typically means an entity that is not intended to generate profits for owners or **stakeholders**. NGOs also differ from political parties in that they do not seek to form government and are free of government influence. That said, they may receive government funding, and due to their status as not-for-profits they generally do not have to pay as much tax.

Some common characteristics of NGOs:

- they tend to be associated with charitable causes, human rights and humanitarianism
- they tend to be funded by individual fees paid by members, donations, grants or bequests
- they tend to be adept users of digital and social media, relying on these platforms to maintain networks and coordinate their activities

Non-government organisations are non-profit or charitable groups whose purpose is to address a social or political issue, and who are independent of government.

A **stakeholder** is an individual or entity that has a particular interest in an organisation, process or outcome.

- they employ a variety of strategies to promote their agenda, including:
 - raising awareness and building support among the population
 - coordinating with governments and media outlets
 - arranging protests and demonstrations
 - exerting various forms of moral and diplomatic pressure on other actors, including directly **lobbying** political leaders and policymakers.

Lobbying refers to the practice of attempting to influence the actions, policies or decisions of government officials.

- they include paid staff, members and activists, along with those more casually or infrequently engaged (people who might sign a petition, give modest one-off donations or engage with the NGO on social media).

Larger NGOs tend to be international in scope, the more prominent examples being:

- Amnesty International – focused on combating human rights abuses and unjust imprisonment
- Greenpeace – focused on resisting environmental destruction and ecological crises
- Oxfam – focused on alleviating poverty and providing famine relief.

NGOs tend to overlap significantly in some respects with social movements (discussed later in this chapter). The key difference is that social movements may contain any number of organisations (non-government or otherwise) and individuals who agree with and lend their support to the goals of the movement. In certain instances, social movements may lack significant organisation or structure.

Certain types of NGOs are more likely to appear as politically active within national, or domestic, political settings (see the table provided for examples).

Types of domestic NGOs	Australian examples
Trade unions and professional associations	Australian Medical Association Retail and Fast Food Workers Union Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU)
Community service providers	Brotherhood of St Laurence Australian Council of Social Services Cancer Council Australia Most schools, universities and hospitals
Think tanks	The Australia Institute Grattan Institute Centre for Independent Studies

Many NGOs (as well as for-profit businesses) seek to influence the political process directly by lobbying key decision-makers. In certain situations, they may seek to use their own advertising (in a sense, transferring economic resources to a media entity in return for use of their technological and cultural capacity; i.e. the ability to broadcast a message) to influence the opinions of the public.

You can read more about lobbying in an Australian context here:

- 📖 Nick Evershed and Christopher Knaus, 2018. 'Lobbying in Australia: How big business connects to government'. The Guardian. [theguardian.com/australia-news/ng-interactive/2018/sep/19/lobbying-in-australia-how-big-business-connects-to-government](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/ng-interactive/2018/sep/19/lobbying-in-australia-how-big-business-connects-to-government)



Amnesty International supporters march in support of refugees as part of that organisation's contingent in the Palm Sunday Walk for Justice and Freedom for Refugees in Melbourne in 2022.
Credit: Amnesty International.

Corporations 1.1.2.7

Corporations as political actors tend to be larger businesses with significant economic power and influence. They may or may not be located entirely within a specific nation-state. **Transnational corporations** (TNCs) are characterised by their considerable and increasing dominance over the production and trade of goods and services on a global scale. The development of less restrictive attitudes and rules regarding interstate economic relationships, along with significant technological changes, have allowed corporations to pursue their goals of profit maximisation with fewer constraints.

Corporations tend to:

- seek to lower their production costs by sourcing inputs (including worker time and skills, materials, equipment and investment) in ways that provide the best dollar-for-dollar value for a company
- seek to increase their sales, turning what they have produced into something that returns a profit; this also allows for cheaper production per unit and (if sales come at the expense of another producer) reduces the ongoing viability of their competitors
- be managed by a CEO and other officeholders in a defined and hierarchical structure, answerable to a board of directors, who, in turn, are elected by shareholders
- disburse their profits to shareholders
- use various strategies to manage and insulate themselves from risks to their flow of profit – including using their economic resources to incentivise the cooperation of other political actors.

Corporations are entities that conduct business operations in pursuit of profit; they may be owned or controlled by wealthy individuals, shareholders, governments, or some combination thereof.

Transnational corporations are entities that conduct their operations across multiple states and, due to their size, can have a significant influence on flows of global production, trade, commerce and investment.

In addition to these characteristics, TNCs also tend to:

- specialise in particular industries, such as mining, agriculture, fossil fuels, manufacturing (including motor vehicles, computers, clothing and components thereof), medicine, media and IT
- structure their operations in a way that allows them to pay fewer taxes – including relocating elements of their business to different countries offering more favourable treatment
- have an even wider *global* ‘menu’ from which to choose their inputs – particularly, where they base their operations and which labour markets they draw their workers from
- include complex webs of subsidiary and affiliate entities (usually other companies)
- seek to acquire other companies and business (including other TNCs or parts thereof), or otherwise expand their operations into new markets.

A 2016 analysis by the World Bank estimated that TNCs and their affiliates produced 36 per cent of the value of total global output, accounting for around two-thirds of global exports and more than half of all imports.



Logos of the ‘Big Five’ tech giants, sometimes referred to as the ‘MAMAA’ group following recent rebrands.

For these reasons, in some contexts, TNCs are criticised for being predatory and exploitative because of how they tend to engage with lower-income ‘host’ states who are in need of investment. TNCs can use their wealth and influence as leverage to pressure governments to relax laws or provide special treatment regarding conditions for workers and/or environmental regulations. This can extend to ongoing political influence within a hosting country, where political elites may grant further favours in return for financial support from TNCs, which can be used to fund election campaigns.

TNCs are skilled at expanding into markets of goods and services that were previously seen as the domain of domestic (*mononational*) producers. For example, four corporations – Bayer, Corteva, ChemChina and Limagrain – control more than 50 per cent of the world’s seeds, dominating global food supply. ‘Big tech’ firms similarly exert enormous influence over communications infrastructure as well as hosting and having access to enormous amounts of individuals’ personal information.



Activity D – NGOs and TNCs

- 1 What are the main characteristics of TNCs? How do they operate across multiple states to maximise their profit?
- 2 Watch the video linked below and answer the questions that follow:
 ‘Is Adani’s Carmichael mine the political benchmark for fossil fuels in Australia?’ ABC News/The Drum, 2019 (6 min). youtu.be/j_kTKVo7Q8Y

- a What are the interests of TNC Adani regarding the Carmichael mine proposal?
 - b Who opposes the proposal?
 - c Outline some of the interests in the community that align with the proposal.
- 3 Describe the common characteristics of NGOs, including their funding sources and strategies for promoting their agendas.
 - 4 Teachers should divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the prominent international NGOs mentioned (e.g. Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Oxfam). In these groups, research the NGO's history, political perspectives and recent initiatives that align with their core goals. Students may summarise and present their findings to the rest of the group in the form of posters or short presentations.

Social movements 1.1.2.8

As with NGOs, **social movements** advocate to advance a particular cause. These movements are social in that they are comprised of individuals and groups who form more loose and informal associations to promote or resist some form of change that may have social, political, economic or cultural dimensions. At their most successful, social movements can shift societal attitudes, influence lawmaking and change policies. Social movements tend to gain momentum when enough people are willing to speak out or act on a particular issue.

Social movements are groups of individuals who, through some organised effort, seek to achieve a certain social change or political goal.

Social movements can be understood by what strategies their supporters might choose to use:

- reformist movements focus on working *within* systems to change them or the outcomes they produce
- revolutionary tendencies usually focus their efforts on building power outside systems and using that power to dismantle and/or replace them
- reactionary movements tend to resist change and/or seek to *revive* past arrangements they see as superior to the status quo.



Black Lives Matter protest signs showing the number of known Aboriginal deaths in custody since the Royal Commission delivered its final report in 1991.
Composite image credit: The Guardian/Getty/AAP/EPA.
theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/09/black-lives-matter-protesters-referred-to-our-count-of-432-aboriginal-deaths-in-custody-its-now-437

Groups and individuals 1.1.2.9

Readers will note that all of the actors discussed so far are, by definition, *groups* made up of *individuals*. For the purposes of our study, we consider 'groups and individuals' to refer to those who do not quite fit into one of our other categories of actor.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Attributed to cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead.

The function that regular people may play as political actors can be understood in a few different ways.

- In a democratic society, the **legitimacy** of political elites is thought to derive from the assumed consent of the majority of the population. If only for pragmatic reasons, they have neither the time nor the inclination to be involved in every decision themselves and so delegate their **authority** to others – their *representatives*.
- Individuals who oppose particular decisions or policies may form associations with others of similar perspectives. When these groups start doing something about it, that may become part of a broader social movement, an NGO or a political party.
- Individuals also form groups for reasons that may not appear specifically political in nature but may nonetheless serve political functions where circumstances align. For example:
 - criminal gangs whose motivations are mostly economic may seek to pressure or bribe elected officials to protect their operations from scrutiny
 - a book club organised as a social outlet may end up discussing and acting on shared political ideas
 - a native plants group may oppose and try to resist council plans to allow development in a neighbouring national park.

Changes in communications and other technologies have also significantly changed the potential for individuals and smaller groups to exert political influence, even if they lack the enormous personal wealth that such outsized influence would usually have required. (Consider how easy it is to pull up a recording of someone sharing their political opinions on any topic.)



The sign outside Gosford Anglican Church following a 2018 incident in which one of its Saturday evening masses was interrupted by a far-right group protesting the Church's vocal progressive stance on social justice matters, including welcoming refugees, action on climate change, and their support of Muslims and the LGBTQIA+ community. Credit: Rod Bower.

Legitimacy is the perception that an act, actor, group or institution is justified in its exercise of power; legitimacy is thought to transform power into *authority*.

Authority is the degree to which the use(s) of power by particular actors are considered rightful or *legitimate*.



Mike Cannon-Brookes

Mike Cannon-Brookes is co-founder and co-CEO of collaboration software firm Atlassian. Along with being a tech billionaire, he is part-owner of both the South Sydney Rabbitohs rugby league club and the Utah Jazz NBA basketball team. Cannon-Brookes is also an active philanthropist and climate activist, having pledged to spend \$1 billion on climate investments and \$500 million on climate philanthropy by 2030.

In 2022, he was the third-richest person overall in Australia, with a personal wealth of \$27.83 billion. This wealth and investing power combined with his environmental conscience have seen Cannon-Brookes initiate an effective board takeover of AGL –



Mike Cannon-Brookes, ranked ninth in the *Australian Financial Review's* list of Australia's 10 most powerful people in 2022. Credit: Atlassian.

Australia's largest energy company and carbon emitter – with the goal of transforming the company into a private business while accelerating the schedule for retiring its fleet of fossil-fuel-consuming power plants. Through his investment company Grok Ventures, Cannon-Brookes has spent about \$650 million to acquire an 11.3 per cent stake in AGL, making him the company's single biggest shareholder. This has allowed him to coordinate sympathetic shareholders to support his proposed board directors.

Cannon-Brookes's actions show how an individual (admittedly, one with considerable economic resources) can, through shareholder activism, pressure a major player in the energy industry to decarbonise. Rather than just divesting (shifting funds) out of fossil fuel energy, Cannon-Brookes shows how an individual can remain invested in a big polluter and leverage their influence effectively and strategically in a way that has made a material difference to environmental outcomes.

Different ways of organising formal power within states 1.1.3

Democratic and authoritarian states are not in their own nature free. Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments – and even in these it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power. But constant experience shows us that any person invested with power is apt to abuse it and to carry their authority as far as it will go.

“To prevent this abuse, it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power. A government may be so constituted, as no man shall be compelled to do things to which the law does not oblige him, nor forced to abstain from things which the law permits.”

Charles Montesquieu, 1748. *The Spirit of Laws*. Chez Barrillot and Fils.

As noted by Montesquieu, one of the key considerations when thinking about power is how we can best channel and shape it in ways that minimise the risks associated with it becoming overconcentrated, while also ensuring that it has sufficient force when its application is justified.

The way in which states organise their formal power varies depending on political systems and historical and cultural factors. Our study design asks us to focus on three of the most important ways in which formal power is organised in many liberal democratic states such as Australia. These are (1) the principles of federalism, (2) responsible government and (3) the separation of powers.

First, some foregrounding. **Liberal democracies** are political systems that combine two sets of ideas: **liberalism** (the idea that individuals should be protected from unreasonable exercises of power) and **democracy** (that rules governing a community should be decided by the people living in them). The graphic provided on the next page illustrates some of the key and shared features of both concepts, as well as some apparent contradictions. In this sense, we can see how the two ideas at the core of the *theory* of liberal democracy counterbalance one another.

Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on the rights of the individual, liberty and political equality.

Democracy is a system of government where power and the ability to make rules rests with, and is exercised by, the people to whom those rules apply.

Liberal democracy refers to a form of democracy in which the power of government is limited and counterbalanced by the rights and freedoms of individuals, which are protected by constitutions, established norms and institutions.

Together, federalism, responsible government and the separation of powers, complemented by other democratic norms, processes and principles, are thought to act as safeguards against the unjustified accumulation and use of power by governments and the elites who operate them.

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”
English historian John Acton, 1887

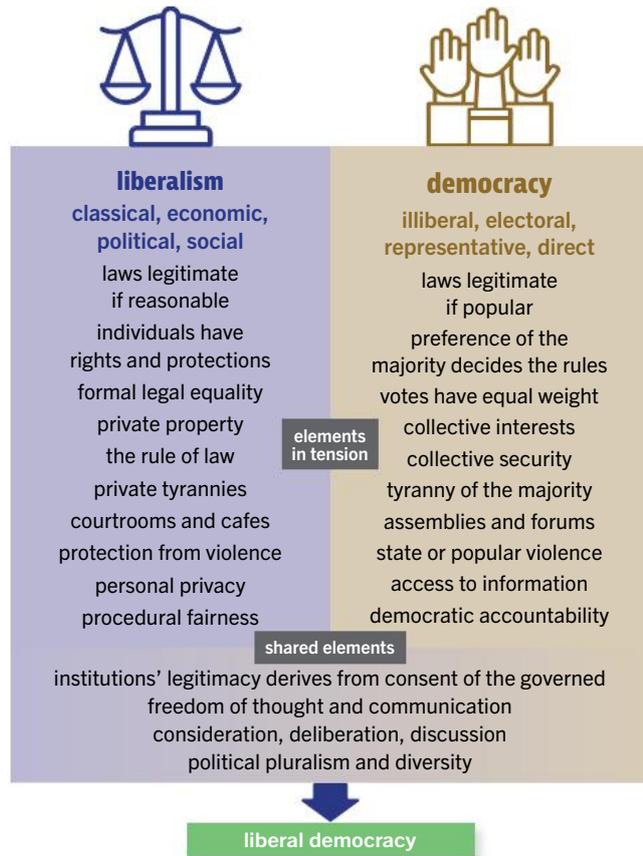
Readers will note that the impact of these sources on how power is exercised (key knowledge point 1.1.4.5) is interwoven in discussions of each.

Federalism 1.1.3.1

The Commonwealth of Australia is a **federation** made up of six states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia), each with their own constitution and institutions of government, as well as two self-governing territories (the Australian Capital Territory [ACT] and the Northern Territory [NT]). Prior to Federation in 1901, each state was separately administered as a British colony; in agreeing to federate, each allocated a certain set of responsibilities to the joint federal government, with the remainder staying with the states. Since Federation, the Australian Constitution has continued to enforce these divisions, although certain legal and political developments have seen the federal government adopt a growing share of responsibilities and powers – not just at the expense of the states, but also from the United Kingdom, as the latter relinquished its political, diplomatic and military involvement in Australia.

One key example of this dynamic is taxes on income, which make up around two-thirds of *all* governments’ revenues. From 1900, income taxes went from being collected *only* by states, to being collected by both levels from 1915, to being collected only by the Commonwealth from 1942. Both developments were initially justified by the need to fund Australia’s involvement in both world wars. This dynamic has given the federal government considerable economic power compared to the states. Approximately one-half of state governments’ income is made up of federal government grants, many of which are tied to particular conditions or programs being administered by the states.

Other examples of federal systems include the 50 states that form the United States, as well as the 16 states that make up the Federal Republic of Germany. In all federal systems, state or provincial governments retain significant responsibilities



Federalism is a system of government where power is divided between a central national government and more geographically dispersed subnational governments that administer smaller regional or local jurisdictions.

independent of the national government; in all three examples provided, these include partial or total control over health care, education, policing and planning. Federalism stands in contrast with the notion of a **unitary state**, where the national government retains ultimate authority over the majority of policy areas (although it may create or abolish administrative subdivisions). New Zealand, Indonesia and Philippines are examples of unitary states.

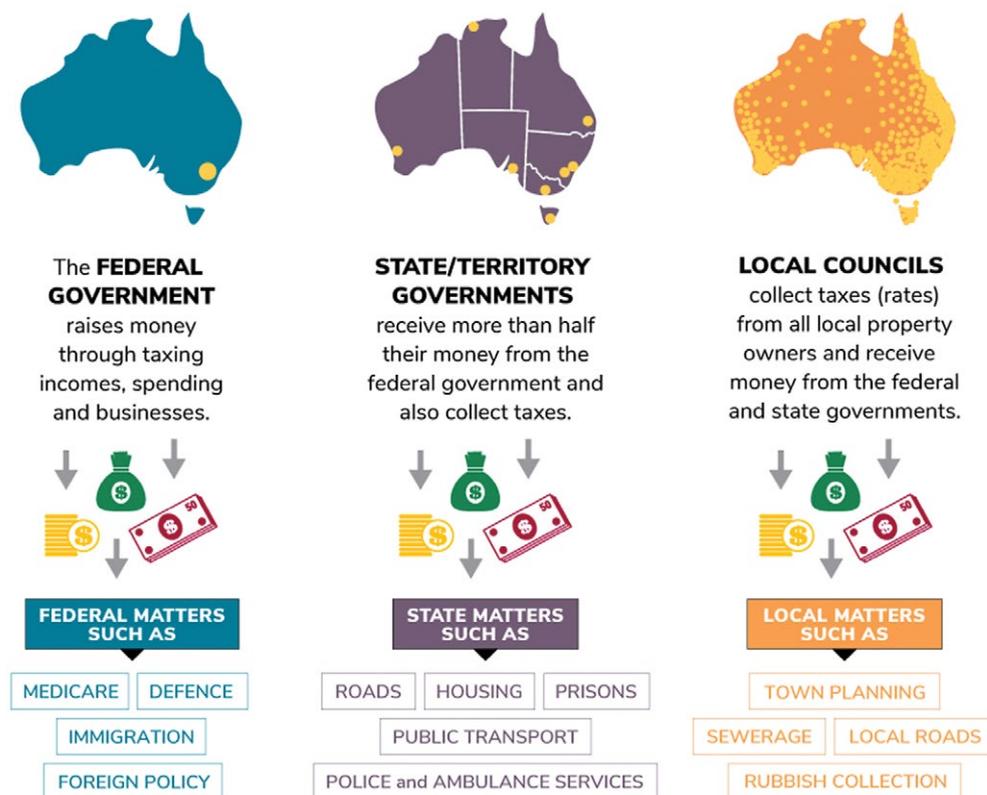
Unitary states are those in which most or all of state power resides in a centralised, national government.

In turn, Australian states are divided into around 500 local government areas, variously known as councils, shires, cities or municipalities. Arrangements vary from state to state, but councils generally collect some form of land-based taxes ('rates').

Federalism can be collaborative. The most recent significant expression of this was the creation of the intergovernmental forum known as National Cabinet, which replaced the former Council of Australian Governments (COAG) as the core piece of federal relations architecture. Comprised of a prime minister, state premiers and territory chief ministers, the National Cabinet was initially established as an effective joint response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federalism can be competitive in the sense that it occasionally sees competition between states that extends beyond football. However, it can also permit competition between states and the federal government. Most commonly, this occurs when different political parties are in control of federal and state governments, or when state and federal leaders simply have differing perspectives and interests regarding issues of shared responsibility.

Learn more about federalism in Australia using resources developed by the Parliamentary Education Office (link included in the image caption below).



'Three levels of government in Australia'. Parliamentary Education Office, 2022.
peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/three-levels-of-government



Activity E – Federalism at work

- 1 Read the article linked below and complete the task that follows:

Benita Kolovos, 2022. 'What to know about Anthony Albanese's \$2.2bn pledge for Victoria's Suburban Rail Loop'. The Guardian. [theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/10/what-to-know-about-anthony-albanese-22bn-pledge-for-victoria-suburban-rail-loop](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/10/what-to-know-about-anthony-albanese-22bn-pledge-for-victoria-suburban-rail-loop)

Outline the political perspectives, interests and power of the following three actors in relation to the issues outlined in the article:

- Scott Morrison, then Australian prime minister and leader of the Liberal-National Coalition government
 - Daniel Andrews, then Victorian premier and leader of the state Labor government
 - Anthony Albanese, then federal opposition leader and leader of the Labor Party.
- 2 Using what you have learnt so far, make a 10-point list featuring what might be considered strengths and weaknesses of having a federal system of government.

Responsible government 1.1.3.2

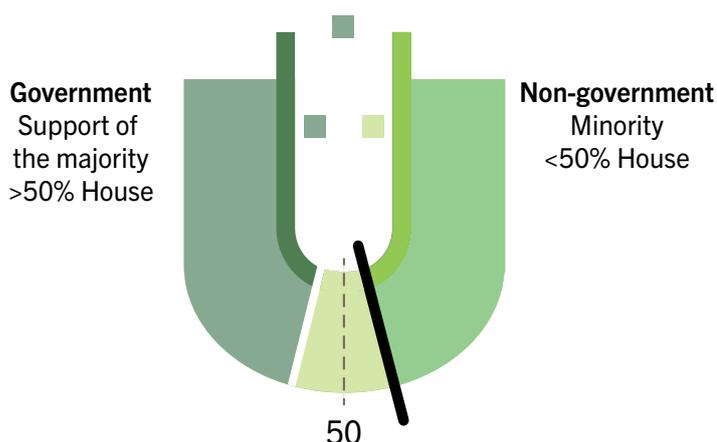
Responsible government is the expectation of accountability of executive governments to parliament and (by extension) the public. It includes a number of related conventions and assumptions that were developed from the Westminster system (the model of parliamentary government that emerged in England and has been adapted by Australia).

Responsible government refers to the expectation that executive governments must be answerable to parliaments, and that their decisions and actions must be exposed to public scrutiny.

In Australia, responsible government is based on two complementary forms of accountability: **collective** and **individual**.

Collective accountability is associated with the idea that the government as a whole (generally derived from the party or parties receiving the majority of members elected to the House of Representatives; see more on this in the next section) must answer reasonable questions and allow itself to be scrutinised by the *entire* parliament,

including members from other parties and the Senate. This principle seeks to ensure that the executive's power to implement laws do not exceed proper limits.



Individual accountability is associated with the expectation and requirement that ministers within the government must be held personally responsible for the activities and decisions taken by them, as well as the government departments they administer.

- the government is formed in the House of Representatives
- the government must maintain the support of the House of Representatives to stay in power
- the government is responsible to the Parliament
- the government is not formed in the Senate



Question Time

In the Australian Parliament, there is a special period known as 'Question Time' that is reserved for all members to ask questions of government ministers. This is one of the more *visible* expressions of the idea of responsible government, because it allows for non-government (opposition and independent) members to ask probing questions of ministers and hold them to public account.

You can learn more about Question Time (and find out who Dorothy Dix is) here:

- 🔗 Gregory Melleuish, 2021. 'Question time reforms are worthy but won't solve the problem of a broken political culture'. *The Conversation*. theconversation.com/question-time-reforms-are-worthy-but-wont-solve-the-problem-of-a-broken-political-culture-160867

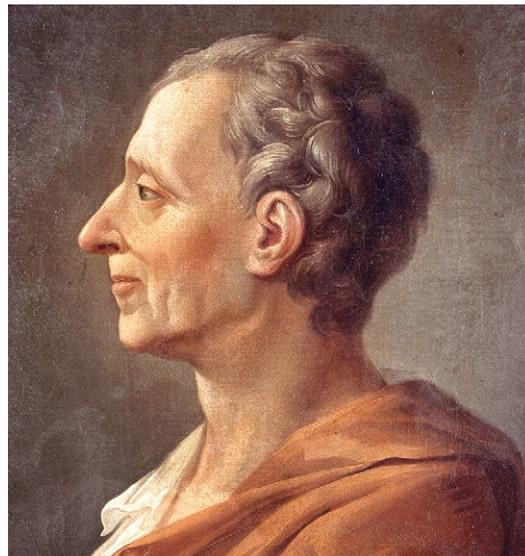
The separation of executive, legislative and judicial power 1.1.3.3

The **separation of powers** is a principle that stems from French political thinker Charles de Montesquieu in his book *De l'esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of Laws*, 1748). It is the fundamental concept at the heart of modern liberal democracy.

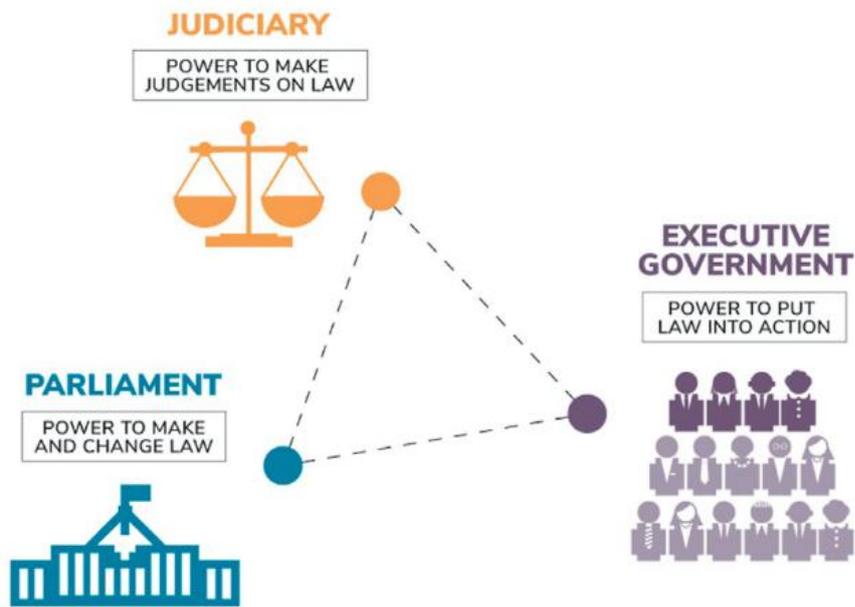
Montesquieu proposed that the greatest threat to liberty was tyranny (oppressive government) and that to prevent the emergence of tyranny, the government itself must be divided into three branches:

- 1 The **legislature** (usually referred to as 'parliament') has the power to debate, create and amend laws. In Australia, this arm of government comprises the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- 2 The **executive** (usually referred to as 'the government') has the power to implement and enforce laws. In Australia, this arm of government comprises the Federal Cabinet, which includes all senior ministers and the prime minister. Ministers must also be members of Parliament and are typically drawn by the party or parties who hold the majority of seats in the House of Representatives. In a formal sense, executive power in Australia stems from the monarch through to their representative, the governor-general. Although, by convention, the latter always acts on the advice of the Cabinet.
- 3 The **judiciary** (sometimes referred to as 'the courts') have the power to interpret and make judgments regarding the application of laws. In Australia, this arm of government is composed of the High Court and other federal courts.

Separation of powers refers to the distribution of power to govern between three branches of government; each branch is independent of and has the ability to block the other, which is thought to guard against any one branch (or member thereof) becoming too powerful.



Portrait of French philosopher Charles de Montesquieu, widely credited as the first person to formalise the concept of the separation of powers.



‘Separation of powers: Parliament, executive and judiciary’. Parliamentary Education Office, 2023. peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/system-of-government/separation-of-powers

Australia does not have a complete separation of powers; there is some overlap in between the roles of the Parliament, the executive and the judiciary – the most consequential being that those who lead the executive branch (cabinet ministers) are drawn from the Parliament. This contrasts with the United States, where the president (as chief executive) is elected in a separate process to the Congress (as parliament) and, in turn, appoints their own cabinet (executive). This is also the case in France, which possesses a hybrid of both models – having both a prime minister appointed by parliament and a directly elected president.

The sources of legitimacy of political actors ^{1.1.4}

“Kindly remember that he whom you call your slave sprang from the same stock, is smiled upon by the same skies, and on equal terms with yourself breathes, lives, and dies. It is just as possible for you to see in him a free-born man as for him to see in you a slave.”

Seneca, 65 CE. ‘Letter XLVII. On Master and Slave’. *Moral Letters to Lucilius*.

As a concept, **legitimacy** sits at the crossroads between authority, justice and mutual obligation. It signifies the extent to which the authority and uses of power by some political actors over others are considered appropriate and justified. In such cases, the authority may still be obeyed, even if it is loathed. This is usually because a source of power that can coerce people into acquiescence, obedience and compliance is underpinning the authority.



A demonstrator protesting outside the US Supreme Court. Credit: AP/Andrew Harnik.

Unsurprisingly, the same act or actor can be considered more or less legitimate by others depending on what values and interests are possessed by each. It is a highly subjective concept.

When exploring the concept of legitimacy, three fundamental questions arise:

- 1 Whom do political actors feel compelled to answer to, and why?
- 2 Where does the authority of political actors stem from?
- 3 Why are political actors obeyed, and by whom?

While legitimacy has relevance to all political actors, it is most commonly applied to the state and institutions of government (whether local, regional, national or global). Political actors tend to rely on multiple sources of legitimacy, four of which the study design asks us to focus on: democratic processes, ideology, coercion and economic performance.

Democratic processes 1.1.4.1

In democratic systems, legitimacy is said to derive from the support and consent of a majority of the population (the **consent of the governed**), generally expressed through **elections**. This means that those who occupy the offices of government (in the legislature and the executive), and use the powers associated with them, can justify doing so as an expression and representation of that popular will – they have sought and been granted permission.

Consent of the governed

refers to the idea that a government's legitimate use of state power is justified when the people over whom that power is exercised agree or consent to it.

Elections are the formal process by which a population decides which individuals will hold particular positions of authority.

The lower house and single-member electorates

Parliaments in Australia tend to feature either one or two **houses**. The lower house is known as the House of Representatives (or sometimes Legislative Assembly), and the upper is known as the Senate (or sometimes the Legislative Council). At a federal level and in most states and territories, the lower house is made up of single-member districts (variously called seats, electorates or divisions). During an election (where voting is compulsory for all adult citizens), voters rank their preferred candidates. The Electoral Commission then removes the candidates receiving the lowest number of first preference votes and reallocates them according to their next preference, repeating this process until only two candidates remain. Of these two candidates, the one with the highest number of votes is declared the winner and elected as the member for that seat. This system is commonly referred to as **preferential voting** and contrasts with many other systems where votes for unsuccessful candidates are *discarded*, rather than reallocated.

Preferential voting in Australia

In a race with 100k voters and four candidates, the following primary votes are counted:

Ingrid (CYA)	22k
Joanne (ORA)	12k
Ahmad (GOL)	30k
Nicola (PUR)	36k

1st count

The candidate with the fewest votes has their redistributed according to their voters' second preferences:

Ingrid (CYA)	↑ 25k
Joanne (ORA)	
Ahmad (GOL)	↑↑ 38k
Nicola (PUR)	37k

2nd count

The process is repeated until only two remain (revealing the 'two-candidate preferred' vote):

Ingrid (PUR)	
Ahmad (GOL)	↑ 53k
Nicola (PUR)	↑ 47k

3rd count

Of the two remaining, the candidate with the highest number of votes is elected:

Ahmad (GOL)	53k
Nicola (PUR)	47k

result

The upper house and multi-member electorates

The upper house is generally made up of larger, **multi-member** electorates. Members of the upper house (or senators in a federal context) *usually* serve for twice as long as those in the lower house, with voting staggered so that only half face re-election at any given election. Preferences from unsuccessful candidates are also redistributed on the basis of voters' next highest preference. However, multi-member electorates tend to produce more diversity in terms of party representation, because candidates only need a fraction of voters to preference them (instead of more than half of the electorate) to be elected. By convention, the number of seats in an upper house tends to be approximately half that of those in the lower house. For instance, the Australian Parliament elected in 2022 had 151 seats in the House of Representatives, while the Senate had 76.

Queensland, the NT and the ACT have what is known as a unicameral system – where there is no second or upper house. The ACT and Tasmania also differ from other states and territories in that they use a form of multi-member electorates in their *lower* houses.

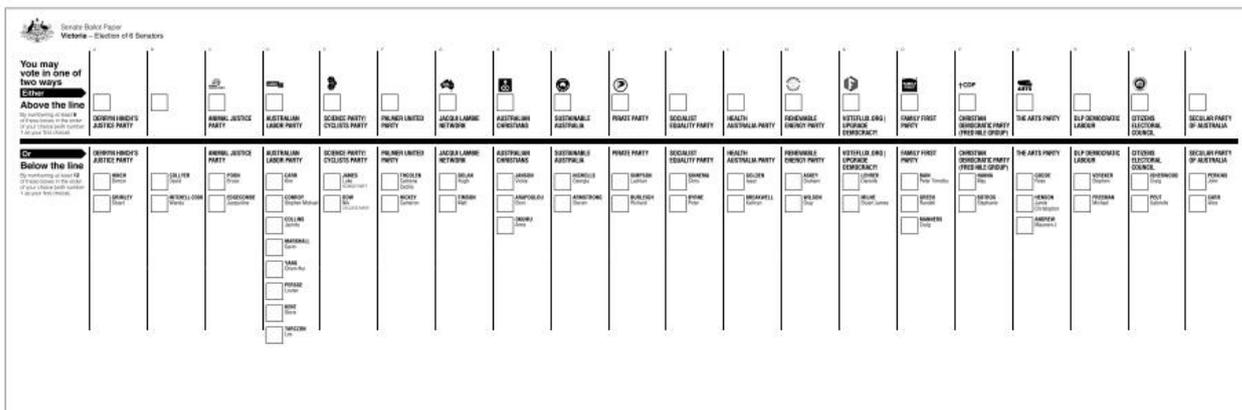
By virtue of living within the boundaries of a particular electorate, people assume the role of constituents of the representatives of that electorate, regardless of whether they actually voted for them.

Parliamentary processes

More broadly, governments often seek to promote the narrative of having a mandate. This allows them to claim that their status as the party winning the most seats at the last election means that voters endorsed the particular set of policies they took to that election. The reality or extent of a mandate is largely subjective, not least of which because it disregards voters' preferences regarding the *individual* policies within the governing party's overall package. Another potential problem associated with the idea of a mandate, and of the system more broadly, is that the party with the *least unpopular* package of policies seems more likely to win, rather than the party with the most popular one. As long-time clerk of the Australian Senate Harry Evans noted in 2005, 'if the government has a mandate, what is a parliament for?'

You can read more about the contemporary uses of the idea of a mandate in Australia here:

 Rachel Withers, 2023. 'Dial 'M' for mandate'. The Monthly. themonthly.com.au/issue/2023/april/rachel-withers/dial-m-mandate



One side effect of the Senate's increased capacity for diversity is that there tends to be a much wider range of parties and candidates on the ballot paper.

The extent to which democracies actually translate the preferences of the population into policy depends on the processes being used. In liberal and **representative democracies** like Australia, various measures are in place that act to ‘filter’ or mediate between what the majority prefers and what becomes a policy reality.

Representative democracies are those in which some people are elected to exercise power on behalf of the population.

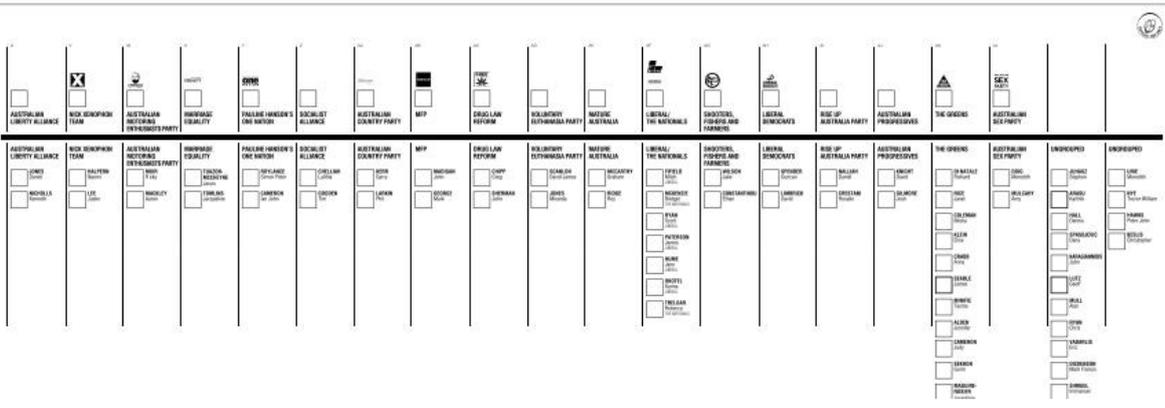
Consider what is generally required to become a member of parliament:

- good verbal and written communication **skills**, as well as the ability to organise and persuade others
- successfully sought **endorsement(s)** of a prominent political party and/or other entities who can lend effective support
- access to financial and campaign **resources**, including volunteers and advertising budgets – normally but not necessarily provided by their affiliated party – which they need to communicate and persuade voters in the electorate
- be in an electorate or contest where they (through their party affiliation and/or other factors) actually have a chance of winning the **support** of enough voters to be successful.

Once elected, parliaments deliberate on (think about and discuss) proposed laws while considering input from colleagues and interest groups, then decide how they will vote on an issue. Compared with the early days of self-government in the Australian colonies – notably the 19th century, when most members of parliament were independents and party structures had not yet emerged – parliamentarians are much more likely to do this within meetings of their party colleagues (‘caucuses’) *first* and then vote the same way (as a ‘bloc’) when a proposal comes before parliament.

Other democratic processes that impact the legitimacy of governments include parliamentary scrutiny, the effectiveness of the media in holding governments to account, and transparency requirements, such as political donation disclosure systems and public registers. In the latter, government officials are required to declare personal interests that could conflict with their official responsibilities. Juries (essentially a randomly selected group of people called to listen to and give verdicts on certain legal cases) represent another important non-electoral form of democratic **participation** – in Australia, this is mostly confined to some types of court cases administered by the judicial branch.

Participation refers to a broad range of activities through which people might develop and express their opinions and preferences regarding social, political, economic or organisational matters.



During the 2016 federal election, the Victorian ballot paper pictured above featured 38 parties and 166 individual candidates. Credit: w.wiki/7BHU

Ideology 1.1.4.2

“Ideology may be loosely defined as any system of ideas directing political action. The key words here are ‘system’ and ‘action’. An ideology involves firstly an interconnected set of ideas that forms a perspective of the world. . . . Political ideologies normally contain three key elements: an analysis of existing social and political arrangements, a political idea or vision of the future and a strategy for realising that ideal.”

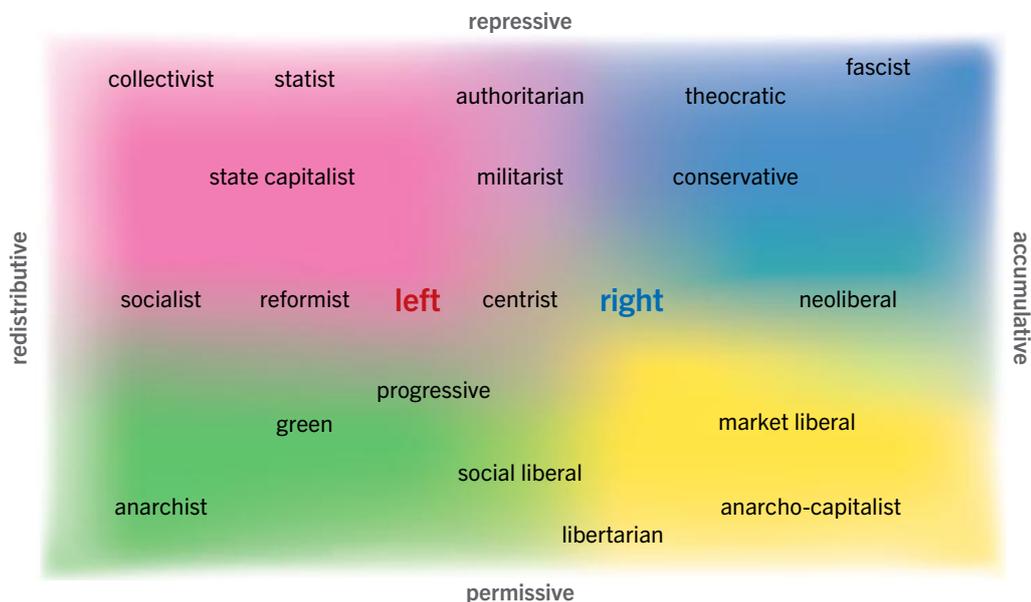
Robert Leach, 2008. *The Politics Companion*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Since their emergence in the French Revolution (when groups of radicals and groups of aristocrats sat together in the chamber), the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ have been the dominant shorthand for identifying the broad **ideological** spectrum of political thought. Some have found it helpful to further distinguish ideologies by plotting where they sit in relation to basic questions of economics (distribution) and social tolerance – if only because two axes are likely to tell us more than just one. Nonetheless, accurate portrayals of the ideological spectrum are notoriously difficult to make, as they rely on many subjective, historical and (unsurprisingly) ideological assumptions. Keep this in mind when interpreting the adapted ‘political compass’ graphic provided here.

Ideology refers to interrelated sets of values and beliefs around how things are and how they should be.

Peoples’ ideological perspectives can be shaped by a range of complex factors, including influences from family and friends, formative experiences and education, along with their own personal and material interests. In turn, these shape not only their decisions as voters but also their behaviour regarding the entities they *are part of* (workplaces, communities, families) or *interact with* (governments, employers, businesses).

Conversely, the role of media has an equally important function in shaping individual perspectives. Public advocacy for certain views, ideologies or even pundits can be pushed or promoted by ‘paid lobbyists’ who ‘are not content to be the conduits of power [but] aspire to be power itself’ (as noted by author Tim Winton in *The Boy Behind the Curtain*, 2016). Despite the implied responsibility that media outlets and parliamentarians have to be impartial and serve the interests of the general public,



the public should, according to Winton, ‘never underestimate’ where information comes from and why.

An actor’s ideology can significantly influence whether a political actor’s ‘legitimising narrative’ (the story an actor promotes to justify how they exercise their power) is ultimately accepted or rejected by others. Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) further developed this idea through his concept of **cultural hegemony**. Gramsci proposed that any political order has an ‘elite’ (a dominant ruling class) whose prime objective is to try to stay in power. Further, the dominance of this ruling class is not maintained through coercion alone but also by consent, which is cultivated through elites’ control over the systems that shape meaning within culture itself.

Coercion 1.1.4.3

The use of **coercion** as a source of legitimacy is broadly associated with **authoritarian** perspectives on state matters.

The People’s Republic of China is ruled by the Chinese Communist Party, which operates as a one-party state. It has a sizeable military, strict policing measures, internal surveillance and prison system. Since coming to power in mainland China following decades of civil war and the devastation of World War II, the Chinese Communist Party has retained considerable dominance over society in part through its control over the Chinese military, the People’s Liberation Army. This was expressed most visibly in the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 in Beijing, where pro-democracy demonstrators were fired on, injured, killed or imprisoned on the orders of then-leader Deng Xiaoping. Today, China is among many states that justify their internal repression of various social elements (including **secessionist** movements in Xinjiang and Tibet, and democracy advocates in Hong Kong and China more broadly) by identifying them with related *external* security threats. China’s historical memory of being repeatedly invaded, dominated and carved up into ‘spheres of influence’ by various foreign powers (including the United States, Britain and Japan) during the Century of Humiliation (1840–1940) means these claims are able to resonate with a significant element of the broader Chinese population. This lends further credibility and legitimacy to the government’s use of repressive and coercive policies.

Coercion is the practice of persuading someone using threats or force.

Authoritarianism is an approach to politics that favours using strong, centralised power to enforce the status quo and ensure obedience to authority, typically at the expense of personal freedoms.

Secession is the act or pursuit of becoming independent of or withdrawing from a state or other territorial entity.



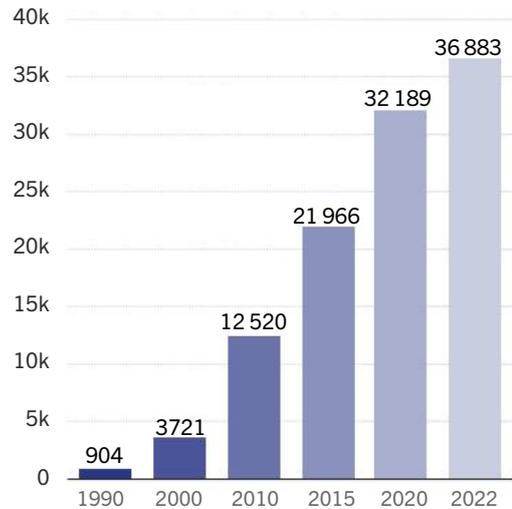
‘The Tank Man’, known for temporarily blocking an advancing tank column, was one of the many thousands who participated in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing.
Credit: Associated Press/Jeff Widener.

Economic performance 1.1.4.4

In all states, regardless of how democratic or authoritarian they may be, being seen to create conditions that lead to economic prosperity can be an effective way for elites to grow their support and strengthen their own legitimacy.

In the case of China, beyond its desire to maintain a monopoly over the political system, the Chinese Communist Party has also permitted citizens varying degrees of individual economic freedom under a framework of state-directed capitalism. This has coincided with an enormous degree of economic growth and prosperity across many elements of Chinese society. In societies like Australia, too, sustained economic growth has some correlation with the electoral success of incumbent (currently in office) governments, while the reverse also holds. That is, periods of low growth, high inflation or other markers of economic instability can accelerate the transition of power to new leaders (between elections) or political parties (during elections).

Average annual disposable income of households in China, 1990 to 2022 (in yuan)



Adapted from Statista, 2023, using data from National Bureau of Statistics of China. [statista.com/statistics/278698/annual-per-capita-income-of-households-in-china](https://www.statista.com/statistics/278698/annual-per-capita-income-of-households-in-china)



Activity F – Legitimacy and ideology

- 1 Imagine you are a political leader seeking legitimacy for your actions. Which of the following sources of legitimacy do you think you might prioritise, and why?
 - democratic processes
 - ideology
 - coercion
 - economic performance.
- 2 Read the following article and answer the questions that follow.

'Party's over: In a nation of cynics, we're flocking to the fringe'. ABC News, 2019. [abc.net.au/news/2018-09-20/in-a-nation-of-cynics-we-are-flocking-to-the-fringe/10281522](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-20/in-a-nation-of-cynics-we-are-flocking-to-the-fringe/10281522)

 - a What were some of the key findings regarding the level of trust in government ministers and members of parliament?
 - b How might a lack of trust influence the degree of legitimacy that political actors and institutions can expect to rely on?
- 3 Read the following article and complete the tasks outlined below.

'Federal election 2019: Could these 15 ideas restore faith in politics?' ABC News, 2019. [abc.net.au/news/2019-05-07/federal-election-2019-sees-ideas-pitched-to-reform-democracy/11082216](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-07/federal-election-2019-sees-ideas-pitched-to-reform-democracy/11082216)

 - a Select one of the 15 ideas listed in the article that you think would help to improve the perceived legitimacy of the Australian Parliament.
 - b Determine the important key words in your idea and use these to conduct your own research into the idea. See if you can find at least one set of arguments **for** and one **against** the reform being suggested.
 - c How might adopting your selected reform influence the perceived legitimacy of the political process?

The key political actors in Australia 1.1.5

“If public advocacy teaches you anything, it’s to find out who has real political responsibility and who is owed a favour. Learn who the idealists are in cabinet, and by that I mean people with genuine conviction. Watch out for those who will only ever jump the way the numbers are likely to fall. Don’t assume the party politics are coherent. As with the media, make it your business to know who each member’s real boss is. And never underestimate the role of paid lobbyists: they’re the mercenaries in the mix. They make journos and backbenchers look like romantics. These are the people you’re never told about in school. Sometimes ... they are not content to be the conduits of power, they aspire to be power itself.

Don’t make assumptions about anyone based on their job or their clothes or the suburb they live in. The stockbroker in the Jag could be an ally. The lady in the twinset and pearls might be weary of being misunderstood and secretly ashamed of what her husband does for a living. Don’t give up on the shabby older journo hoisting his gut from the company car; he might have a memory and a soft spot for the little people.”

Tim Winton, on the battle to save Ningaloo Reef, in *The Boy Behind the Curtain* (2016)

In this section, you will be guided in your own research of some of the most prominent political actors in Australia. An important part of engaging your political imagination is reading about ongoing and contemporary political issues and the actors involved in contests over policy. So, while we will be providing you with some suggestions, you should always be thinking about what you find the most interesting, which is probably something that is affecting you *now*.

We’ve opted to rearrange the order in which our study design presents these actors (from smallest to largest) to help us develop our perspective about the different ways that individuals and groups use power in relation to each other.



Who runs this place?

Students may like to start this section by first listening to some of the *Who Runs This Place?* podcast series by ABC Radio National (2019). There are four episodes, each running for around 38 minutes.

-  ‘The Triangle’ – abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rn-presents/the-triangle/11208780
-  ‘The Lobbyists’ – abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rn-presents/the-lobbyists/11228690
-  ‘The States’ – abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rn-presents/the-states/11228974
-  ‘The People’ – abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rn-presents/the-people/11229012



Activity G – Profiling Australian political actors

Follow the steps below to complete a guided note-taking task to build a profile of each key Australian political actor.

- 1 Use the information provided earlier in this chapter – *different types of political actors* – along with the information and suggestions provided to conduct your own independent research into one of each of the 10 types of *Australian* political actors listed in the following pages.

- 2 For each key Australian political actor write a series of ‘10 in 20’ summary notes: 10 bullet points for each actor, with no bullet point being longer than 20 words. Aim to be concise (to the point) and coherent (understandable) – this exercise should leave you with a roughly 200-word summary profile for each actor.

Use the scaffold below to structure your profile.

The actor's ...	What to think about
role [one bullet point]	What is the actor's purpose and function?
interests [two bullet points]	What goals does the actor seek to achieve?
capacity to pursue their interests, and... [4 bullet points]	What modes of influence does this actor have at their disposal? How does this actor exercise power? What sources of legitimacy or authority does this actor draw on? To what extent does this actor successfully achieve their interests?
impact, citing contemporary examples. [3 bullet points]	Outline key information relevant to a few examples of the actor in action – note the nature and extent to which they have impacted actual political outcomes.

Special interest groups

Special interest groups work to advance the concerns, goals and interests of their members or the communities they represent by lobbying government officials, conducting public awareness campaigns, engaging in grassroots activism, and sometimes making political contributions. In a sense, *any* non-individual entity can be an interest group – students will note significant overlap between this concept and others explored in this chapter – including NGOs, corporations and/or businesses. They play an important role in democracy (people should be able to advocate on behalf of themselves to government), but they are *also* the means by which already-powerful entities can magnify their power even further, sometimes to the detriment of the public's interests overall.

Special interest groups are any organised association of individuals or entities that seek to influence public policy or decision-making.

For example: **The Yarra Residents Collective** – a community lobby group representing ratepayers in the City of Yarra.

📖 ‘Putting up a stink: Revolt against a Melbourne council's levy starts debate about waste’. The Guardian, 2023. [theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/mar/16/putting-up-a-stink-revolt-against-a-melbourne-councils-levy-starts-debate-about-waste](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/mar/16/putting-up-a-stink-revolt-against-a-melbourne-councils-levy-starts-debate-about-waste)

📖 ‘Bin the tax!': Rowdy crowds as Yarra council passes new waste charge'. The Age, 2023. [theage.com.au/national/victoria/bin-the-tax-rowdy-crowds-at-yarra-council-meeting-protest-waste-charge-20230308-p5cqca.html](https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/bin-the-tax-rowdy-crowds-at-yarra-council-meeting-protest-waste-charge-20230308-p5cqca.html)

Other suggestions for this type of actor: CFMEU, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Australian Medical Association, Anglicare; Australian Taxpayers' Alliance, GetUp!

Social movements

As outlined earlier in this chapter, social movements are comprised of many individuals and sympathetic groups that can include NGOs, businesses and interest groups.

The **Black Lives Matter** movement in Australia – a movement challenging institutional racism expressed in the criminal justice system.

- 📖 'Black Lives Matter movement in Australia: First Nations perspectives'. UNSW, 2021. newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/business-law/black-lives-matter-movement-australia-first-nations-perspectives
- 📖 'Why does the BLM movement matter in Australia?' United Nations Association of Australia, 2021. unaa.org.au/2021/11/03/why-does-the-blm-movement-matter-in-australia
- 📖 'Three years on from the Black Lives Matter marches, Indigenous deaths in custody are at a record high'. SBS/NITV, 2023. sbs.com.au/nitv/article/three-years-on-from-the-black-lives-matter-marches-indigenous-deaths-in-custody-are-at-a-record-high/ma6sjvm32



A Black Lives Matter demonstrator in Cairns, 2022. Credit: Oscar Lupton.

Other suggestions for this type of actor: School Strike for Climate, the First Nations land rights movement, the anti-vax movement.

Businesses

Businesses can be as small as your local handy person (who works for and by themselves) or as large as the Commonwealth Bank. They can be structured in many ways – as individual sole traders, trusts, private companies, publicly listed companies (otherwise known as corporations), cooperatives or partnerships between any number of these. Some businesses (such as V/Line) are government owned but may have interests that are distinct from the government overall. Smaller businesses with similar interests often band together to form **peak bodies** to advocate on their behalf, in a way that makes these bodies both businesses and interest groups (as demonstrated by our suggestion for your actor profile).

Businesses are any organisations or entities engaged in commercial, industrial or professional activities with the primary goal of generating profit for owners.

The **Pharmacy Guild of Australia** is an industry lobby group and peak body.

- 📖 'About us'. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia. guild.org.au/about-us
- 📖 'Why the Pharmacy Guild is the most powerful lobby group you've never heard of'. ABC News, 2019. abc.net.au/news/2019-06-20/pharmacy-guild-lobby-wields-great-political-power/11217028
- 📖 'Here's why pharmacists are angry at script changes – and why the government is making them anyway'. The Conversation, 2023. theconversation.com/heres-why-pharmacists-are-angry-at-script-changes-and-why-the-government-is-making-them-anyway-204028

Other suggestions for this type of actor: PricewaterhouseCoopers (more commonly PwC), Wesfarmers, Woodside Energy, Australian Retailers Association (also an interest group), VicRoads, Coles.

Media

As we know, media can variously refer to individual journalists, the news organisations they work within, and various platforms that facilitate mass communication. This is somewhat distinct from *the* media, which refers to news media as a whole, rather than any specific actor. Media entities are typically also businesses, often corporations, and occasionally NGOs.

News Corp Australia – Australia’s largest private media company. The last link provided explores a specific example relating in part to then political editor of one of News Corp’s publications, The Sunday Telegraph – Annika Smethurst.

- 📖 ‘How does media work in Australia?’ (15 min) SBS, 2022. [sbs.com.au/language/english/en/podcast-episode/how-does-media-in-australia-work/zzov16xin](https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/en/podcast-episode/how-does-media-in-australia-work/zzov16xin)
- 📖 ‘Media interests snapshot’. Australian Communication and Media Authority, 2023. acma.gov.au/media-interests-snapshot
- 📖 ‘How large is Rupert Murdoch’s reach through News Corp in Australia media, old and new?’ ABC News/RMIT Fact Check, 2021. [abc.net.au/news/2021-04-14/fact-file-rupert-murdoch-media-reach-in-australia/100056660](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-14/fact-file-rupert-murdoch-media-reach-in-australia/100056660)
- 📖 ‘The 2019 AFP raids on Australian journalists’. University of Queensland, 2020. law.uq.edu.au/files/60164/afp-raids.pdf

Other media actors: Nine Entertainment, ABC, 3AW.

The High Court of Australia

The **High Court of Australia** is the highest court in the Australian judicial system, serving on the ultimate authority on matters of law. It has the power of judicial review and interprets the Constitution to ensure the validity of laws passed by federal and state governments. It also serves as the final court of appeal for both federal and state matters.



Courtroom at the High Court of Australia in Canberra. Credit: w.wiki/7QDX

- 📖 ‘High, Supreme, Federal, Family, County – what do all our different courts actually do?’ The Conversation, 2023. theconversation.com/high-supreme-federal-family-county-what-do-all-our-different-courts-actually-do-193228
- 📖 ‘Parliament and the courts’. Parliamentary Education Office, 2023. peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/system-of-government/parliament-and-the-courts
- 📖 ‘Accused Rebels bikies lose High Court appeal to overturn Serious Crime Prevention Orders’. ABC News, 2019. [abc.net.au/news/2019-11-06/accused-rebels-bikies-lose-high-court-appeal-to-overturn-orders/11675934](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-06/accused-rebels-bikies-lose-high-court-appeal-to-overturn-orders/11675934)

Political parties

Political parties are membership-based organisations that seek to influence policy outcomes, typically by having their members successfully elected to parliament. We’re not going to tell you which one to profile, but we have provided you with some suggestions for where to start your research. A word of caution when conducting your own research – political parties are not required by law to provide factual information on their websites, so make sure if you include these in your research, you read *critically*.

- 📖 ‘Election lingo – parties’. ABC/BTN, 2022. [abc.net.au/btn/classroom/election-lingo---parties/13858392](https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/election-lingo---parties/13858392)
- 📖 Vote Compass. Vox Pop Labs/ABC, 2022. votecompass.abc.net.au
- 📖 ‘Political parties’. Parliamentary Education Office, 2023. peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/parliament-and-its-people/people-in-parliament/political-parties

Parliaments and leaders

This is a very broad category that includes *all* parliaments in Australia. Leaders, in this context, can be taken to mean the leaders of political parties who are represented in a parliament, who may or may not have other roles (such as prime

minister, leader of the opposition, member of parliament or senator). Analysing parliaments as actors can be difficult because while they do act (so much so that laws are known as Acts of Parliament), they include many actors who have many contradictory interests and perspectives.

Daniel Andrews is, at the time of writing, the premier of Victoria (since 2014) as well as the leader of the Labor Party in the Victorian Parliament (since 2010).

📖 'Bronze Age: How do Dan Andrews' 3000 days as premier measure up?' The Age, 2023. theage.com.au/politics/victoria/bronze-age-how-do-dan-andrews-3000-days-as-premier-measure-up-20230217-p5c1b1.html

📖 'What drives Daniel Andrews?' Inside Story, 2022. insidestory.org.au/what-drives-daniel-andrews

Senate estimates – a function of the Commonwealth parliament that allows senators to scrutinise government spending, policies and operations, which involve the appearance of government ministers and senior public servants appearing before relevant Senate committees, each made up of six senators.

📖 'Senate estimates'. Parliamentary Education Office, 2023. peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/parliament-at-work/senate-estimates

📖 'PwC tax leaks saga the subject of Senate estimates hearings'. ABC, 2023 (3 min). youtu.be/xhNqm4ZpDJc

📖 'PwC scandal raises questions about use of private contractors in government'. ABC News/7.30, 2023 (16 min). youtu.be/u5Ye4Of3SIA

Other options: Victorian Parliament (the lower house, upper house or both), any federal or state opposition leader, the Speaker of the House.

State governments

As with the federal government, state governments are generally formed by the largest party or coalition of parties in the lower house of that state's parliament.

Treaty negotiations in Victoria – the state government supported the establishment of a First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, which would be empowered to negotiate a treaty with Victoria covering a wide range of issues.

📖 'Treaty Authority establishment'. Victorian Government, 2022. firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/treaty-authority-establishment

📖 'Victoria Treaty negotiations cement path forward at landmark ceremony'. SBS/NITV, 2022. sbs.com.au/nitv/article/victoria-treaty-negotiations-cement-path-forward-at-landmark-ceremony/89ueqox6y

📖 'First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria elected to negotiate state treaty'. ABC News, 2023. abc.net.au/news/2023-06-18/victoria-treaty-first-peoples-assembly-members-elected-voice/102490242



The parliamentary mace, which represents the authority of the Speaker as they oversee the lower house (Legislative Assembly) of Victoria's Parliament.

The Commonwealth government

As outlined, the perspectives and interests of the Australian Government can be considered closely related to those of the prime minister as an individual leader, their colleagues in Cabinet (the executive) and other ministers, as well as the vast array of government institutions that are answerable to them. Don't forget to consider domestic *and* international dimensions of this actor.

Australia and the AUKUS submarine deal – the 30-year commitment to source eight nuclear submarines from the United States announced by the Albanese government.

- 📖 'What is the AUKUS submarine deal and what does it mean?' The Guardian, 2023. theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/14/what-is-the-aukus-submarine-deal-and-what-does-it-mean-the-key-facts
- 📺 'The federal government's 'difficult sell' as the AUKUS submarine plan is revealed'. ABC News, 2023 (9 min). youtu.be/2vl_P0817R0

The sources and forms of power of Australian political actors that may be involved in an issue ^{1.1.6}

This part of our study analyses some of the forms of power used by actors in an Australian context. As you make your way through your upcoming issue study, keep an eye out for expressions of these different types.



Authority and office ^{1.1.6.1}

According to Max Weber, prominent German sociologist and political thinker, **legitimate authority** may be understood and classified into three 'ideal' types. Weber asserted that the development of the state could be seen *progressing* through reliance on each of these three types, in the order listed below.



Traditional

Rests on long-established custom or precedent.

(‘Things have always been this way’: e.g. hereditary monarchy, feudal lords, family patriarchs)



Charismatic

Rests on personal qualities or behaviour of an individual that serve to inspire belief in them, such as the personal or persuasive appeal of a populist or religious figure.



Legal-rational

Rests on accepted rules and procedures vested in a title, office, post or rank, rather than the actual individual person occupying the position – a judge, a police officer. Offices are the roles or titles occupied by *officials* within institutions of government, such as those of a local councillor, justice of the peace, police commissioner or state premier. They are associated with particular responsibilities and corresponding official powers to allow them to undertake certain duties.

Leadership qualities 1.1.6.2

Leadership is a somewhat contested concept, but it can be understood more clearly as a package of several different elements, which might be broken down as follows.

the ability to interpret	This element reflects the capacity for someone to comprehend and understand complex situations and information, as well as a variety of different perspectives, and to begin to develop strategies for pursuing their goals.
the ability to coordinate	This element reflects the capacity to help organise and align other actors or resources in ways that advance their goals more effectively. This might involve helping others to identify their strengths and weaknesses regarding particular roles.
the ability to persuade	This element involves the ability to guide and realign the perspectives of others, such as by reasoning with them, appealing to emotion or to shared values, or by revealing and explaining information that might previously have been unclear.
the ability to dominate	This element relies on a leader's willingness and ability to use their authority or other leverage (including implied or explicit threats to deprive others of access to resources, or even subject them to violence) to assert control or force a particular outcome.

Perceptions of particular leadership qualities can play a significant role in the development of narratives around prominent individual actors, especially in times of crisis. This can be seen in the remarkable increase in popularity experienced by some state government leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly then premier of Western Australia Mark McGowan. His firm commitment to widely popular strict border control policies during the pandemic, in the face of some opposition from the federal government, was credited with rates of personal approval for him as premier in excess of 90 per cent.

Parliamentary sovereignty 1.1.6.3

The Parliament itself articulates this concept – its own supremacy in matters of law – as follows:

“ In Australia this concept is taken to mean that parliament has the right to make, amend or repeal any law – within the limits of the Constitution. Parliament cannot make a law that a future parliament cannot change and, in general, parliament takes priority over the executive and judicial arms of government. ”

Parliament of Australia. 'Infosheet 23 – Basic legal expressions'.
aph.gov.au/about_parliament/house_of_representatives/powers_practice_and_procedure/00_-_infosheets

The Parliament is considered supreme, in part due to being the only one of the three branches that is elected by the public, and because both the executive and judicial branches derive their relationship with the laws of the land from the decisions of Parliament (as reflected in our discussions around responsible government and accountability mechanisms earlier in this chapter).

Popular sovereignty through elections and referenda 1.1.6.4

Popular sovereignty is in some ways a repackaging of the core idea of democracy. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, in a democracy these are expressed through regular and fairly administered elections, along with measures that allow for discussion and deliberation among and between the different elements of the public ('civil society') and the officials who decide on and enforce policy.

Popular sovereignty refers to the 'power of the people' (the body of citizens that form the society of a state) expressed through the electorate, who by exercising their right to vote in free, fair and regular elections (as well as referenda) are empowered to influence and ultimately confer a government with a mandate to govern. The concept is often associated with the ideas 'consent of the governed', 'representative democracy' and 'responsible government' (all of which have been mentioned in this chapter). Put another way, popular sovereignty is the idea that a liberal and representative democratic system is ultimately accountable to the electorate, precisely because the parliament is directly elected *from* and *by* the people.

Referendums typically emerge in response to proposed changes to the constitution. They generally require in-principal support from the government – even if the majority of the government party actually *oppose* a proposed change, they may see strategic or practical reasons to allow a referendum to go ahead. To be successful, a proposal must achieve a **double majority** – not just a majority of votes, but a majority in at least four of the six states.

A **referendum** is a direct vote in which the entire electorate is invited to vote on a particular proposal (typically a significant constitutional or legislative issue) to determine public support for or opposition to the proposed measure.

Referendums are a fairly rare instance of **direct democracy** in Australian policymaking because they significantly bypass the otherwise 'supreme' parliament, as well as the executive and the parties that dominate them. The related practice of a **plebiscite** (which involves a direct popular vote, but only on a question *not* related to constitution) can serve as a release valve for tensions that might emerge between popular and parliamentary supremacy, or where parliament is for some reason unwilling or unable to resolve the question internally.

Direct democracy is a form of governance where laws and policies are decided by the population (or the majority thereof), rather than by a body of their elected representatives.

A key contemporary example of this source of power in action is the referendum on a First Nations Voice to Parliament in 2023.



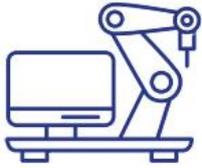
Economic resources 1.1.6.5

Economic resources can be classified into:

- natural resources (land, water, minerals)
- labour (human skills and effort)
- commodities (raw materials or consumer products)
- capital (physical and financial assets such as machinery or money)
- ideas (information or reputation).

Economic resources are physical or intangible 'things' that have value to other actors within a system and can be combined and transformed in ways that produce more; they can typically be exchanged between actors.

In a society like Australia, actors with greater-than-average access to economic resources are considered wealthy and can use them to multiply their influence beyond their customary entitlements as individual citizens (who, regardless of their wealth, are otherwise considered equal in a *formal* sense). This can include literally paying other actors through donations, inducements (incentives), aid or even bribes to influence outcomes in a particular direction. It can also include commercial transactions such as investments, lending and trading, as well as threats or acts to *withdraw* from financial or commercial arrangements, such as by boycotting, divesting, sanctioning, freezing assets and/or enforcing trade embargoes.



Technological capacity 1.1.6.6

Technological capacity refers to the capability to exercise power through advances and innovations in technology in strategic areas. This can lend actors

important economic and military advantages in relation to others, as well as leading to broader social benefits. A key example of this in action is surveillance technology, which various state and private actors can use to identify or deter hostile actions against key sectors. It is often associated with cutting-edge research and development. At times, it can also be associated with entrepreneurialism and the creation of new products, market opportunities and industries.

Some suggested reading:

- 📖 'Big tech surveillance could damage democracy'. The Conversation, 2019. theconversation.com/big-tech-surveillance-could-damage-democracy-115684

Technological capacity

refers to the application of scientific knowledge, skills or tools to create, modify or use systems, processes and products more effectively.



Military capacity 1.1.6.7

Military capacity is generally associated with involvement in armed conflict, military interventions and covert actions;

expenditure and build-up of weapons systems; joining defence alliances; and providing or receiving military aid. To a certain extent military resources can also be employed in response to other sorts of challenges, such as in state responses to humanitarian disasters.

Military capacity

refers to an actor's ability to exercise power through organised violence.



Operation Bushfire Assist

One prominent example of the Australian Government's use of military is that of Operation Bushfire Assist. From September 2019 to March 2020, during Australia's Black Summer bushfire season, the Australian Defence Force was deployed by the Commonwealth to aid state and local authorities in their responses and recovery efforts.



Their duties included:

- constructing and repairing fire breaks and fences
- clearing roads
- distributing drinking water to devastated communities
- providing meals to displaced civilians
- offering defence facilities and equipment to emergency services personnel and evacuees.

The operation also included the use of naval ships HMAS *Choules* and MV *Sycamore* to evacuate residents and tourists from Mallacoota, one of the worst hit areas in the disaster.



Diplomatic capacity 1.1.6.8

At higher levels, **diplomatic capacity** is often associated with states managing their interstate relationships by participation in regional groupings and IGGs via discussions, leader summits, and

bilateral and multilateral agreements. It can also include public condemnation or criticism of specific actions or policies of actors, either individually or as part of a multilateral effort.

Diplomatic capacity is the ability to influence outcomes through negotiation and persuasion.



Social capacity 1.1.6.9

One's **social capacity** is typically demonstrated through organising and mobilising around a particular issue, to foster a sense of connection and community. This is related to the concept

of a 'civil society', where individuals and groups outside formal politics or large business interests join voluntarily to pursue shared goals. Social cohesion refers to the extent to which members of a society are united and bonded together in their perspectives and priorities, and usually implies an optimism about society's capacity to make others feel included in it.

Social capacity is the ability of groups and individuals in society to share information, coordinate and act together effectively.



Cultural capacity 1.1.6.10

Cultural capacity reflects the strength that can be found in shared behaviour and systems of belief. This can include moral perspectives on particular issues, which

can be an effective way of mobilising support from people who understand right and wrong in similar ways. Producers of media are considered to have the most cultural capacity – think of the impact that American film, television and music have in Australia. Cultural capacity itself relates heavily to the idea of **soft power**, whereby influence is exercised through persuasion, appeal and attraction. Ideology can also be thought of as part of culture, with both being the means by which actors can promote their own self-legitimising narratives, which other actors may buy in to.

Cultural capacity refers to an actor's ability to influence or harness shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and social norms that characterise a particular group of people or society.

Access to power and participation in decision-making in Australia ^{1.1.7}

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Frederick Douglass, 1857. ‘West India Emancipation’ speech

Social movements, campaigns, protests and citizen power ^{1.1.7.1}

Social movements empower individuals and groups to gather and exercise their democratic rights – freedom of assembly, association and expression – to organise and mobilise around issues and advance political causes by trying to persuade others, shift societal attitudes, influence lawmaking and change policies. Protests may take the form of a challenge to the physical space occupied by decision-making institutions. For instance, in Victoria crowds often congregate in front of Victoria’s Parliament House building or march down major streets in the CBD, attracting thousands and disrupting the everyday workings of those places.

You can read more about the various non-violent methods of protest and pressure that might be used by social movements here:

 commonslibrary.org/198-methods-of-nonviolent-action

 commonslibrary.org/198-nonviolent-methods-upgraded

Party membership ^{1.1.7.2}

Parties allow for individuals to join formal organisations made up of others who share similar views on how society should be organised. Individual party members can then (depending on how their chosen party allows for this) shape and influence a party’s positions (the **platform**) and, in some cases, seek to become an election candidate endorsed by the party. Parties are usually structured in a way that includes a formal leadership *beyond* those who might be leaders of the members of the parliamentary party (the members who are actually in parliament), who have outsized influence over decisions regarding the direction and organisation of the party. Elites within the major parties tend to be career politicians with long associations with the party and/or like-minded lobby groups. In turn, the broader membership are relied upon to serve as a temporary labour force that works to promote and support the party and its candidates during election campaigns.

Submissions to committees ^{1.1.7.3}

Parliamentary committees are a means by which the houses of parliament seek input and testimony on particular issues outside the electoral process and behind-the-scenes lobbying. They are formed as subgroups of parliamentarians, usually representing a relatively diverse cross-section of non-ministerial members from each party. Any interested individual or organisation can make a submission to any



The structure and participants in a hearing being conducted by the Australian Senate.
Credit: aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/getting_involved

parliamentary committee, hearing or inquiry they are tasked with (either by referral from their respective house, or by a process referred to as self-referral). Participants can engage in an inquiry by making a written or spoken submission and providing it to the committee, attending a public hearing or briefing as an observer, or as a witness to give oral evidence.

The media 1.1.7.4

As discussed throughout this chapter, the media allows for individuals and groups to participate in decision-making by keeping them informed of facts that have bearing on their lives and (to a certain extent) by providing a platform for interests within society to be expressed and debated. The media is considered fundamental to a functional democracy because reporting on and interpreting political issues allows for regular people to take part in scrutinising the decisions and actions of actors that are made on their behalf. Media players are also powerful political actors in their own right through their ability to set the agenda, shape public opinion and influence other actors.

The political significance of key Australian political actors 1.1.8

This text features case studies of two contested domestic policy issues in Australia: COVID-19 and the Black Summer bushfires. In these, we seek to apply many of the concepts introduced and discussed so far, including:

- the political **significance** of key Australian political actors regarding the issue
- the **sources and forms** of their power
- their **perspectives** and legitimising narratives about contributions to political stability and change
- their competing **interests**
- the **consequences** of the actions taken.

Case study: The Black Summer bushfires

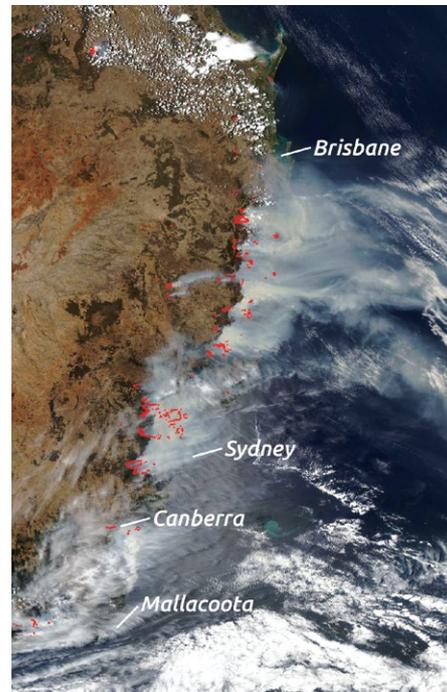
The Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20 are the most significant bushfires in Australia’s history.

A bushfire is an unplanned vegetation fire – it encompasses grass fires, forest fires and scrub fires (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2023a). Bushfires occur for a variety of reasons, including natural causes (such as lightning) and weather conditions, or they can be started by people either accidentally or on purpose.

The Black Summer bushfires caused immense and widespread damage to property, infrastructure, communities and people. It is estimated that the fires burnt over 24 million hectares across Australia, including in the ACT, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. A combination of weather conditions and **climate change** contributed to the immensity of the bushfires. We can observe the scale of the bushfires through a snapshot of the destruction caused across Australian states:

- Over the course of the 2019–20 bushfire season, an estimated 36 000 hectares burnt in Tasmania.
- From July 2019 to March 2020, there were more than 11 400 bush and grass fires across New South Wales. The fires burnt 6.2 per cent of the state – the largest burnt area recorded in a single fire season in eastern Australia.
- The bushfires in Victoria caused the loss of five lives and destroyed more than 300 homes and 6000 livestock. The fires burnt more than 1.5 million hectares of public and private land, including forests, native timber assets, critical animal habitats and water catchments.

This national natural disaster event led to unprecedented responses from the federal and state governments at the time, including the Liberal-National Coalition government led by Scott Morrison. The fires also prompted considerable debate in Parliament and among the public regarding the underlying causes of the intensity and scale of the bushfires. Topics of debate included climate change and the role of fire management practices and responsibilities. This resulted in a national **Royal Commission** and numerous **state-based inquiries** examining the preparedness for, response to and recovery from the natural disaster.



NASA satellite imagery showing the extent of the bushfires on Australia’s east coast, 7 December 2019.

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns; on Earth, these have been accelerated by human activities including the burning of fossil fuels since the 1800s, which have released heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere.

A **Royal Commission** is an investigation into a matter of public importance conducted at arm’s length from the government; it has broad powers to hold public hearings, call witnesses under oath, compel evidence and make recommendations to government.

Causes and consequences



Analysing causes and consequences

Studying political issues and crises involves looking at why they happen (causes) and what effects they have (consequences).

Both are influenced by an often-complex mixture of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, technological and environmental factors. In VCE Politics, it's important to be aware of both older historical reasons and more recent causes (those that can be seen in effect in the last 10 years). These causes must connect directly to the issue or event being studied. Discussions of what causes particular issues and crises are often highly contested, because actors have different understandings about how the world works – informed by their perspectives, interests and ideology. When investigating issues, it's important to read and think critically about others' claims about causes and weigh the evidence before coming to a conclusion.

We also need to remember that the effects of actions may be planned (predictable) or unexpected. As students of politics, we must acknowledge that analysing consequences can involve making value judgements (remember our discussion of politics as applied to ethics earlier in this chapter). In other words, we need to develop our own view of what actually matters to weigh the significance of the different effects flowing from the issue or crisis.

Working to understand causes and consequences helps us to understand the importance of the problems we're investigating and the actors involved. Some suggested causes and consequences regarding this case study are provided in this graphic and unpacked in the following section.

Causes			issue crisis event	Consequences		
(historical)	(medium term)	(<10 years)		(immediate)	(medium term)	(long term)
Colonisation and settlement	Changed bushfire management practices	Complacency and lack of preparation	Black Summer 2019–20	Federal-state crisis coordination	Long-term changes to forest management	?
Natural weather patterns	Dry season	Lots of fuel, strong winds		Economic and humanitarian effects	Political damage to Morrison government	?
Industrial Revolution	Fossil fuel use and the greenhouse effect	Record temperatures		Loss of forests and wildlife	Pollution and effects on human health	?
feedback						

Causes

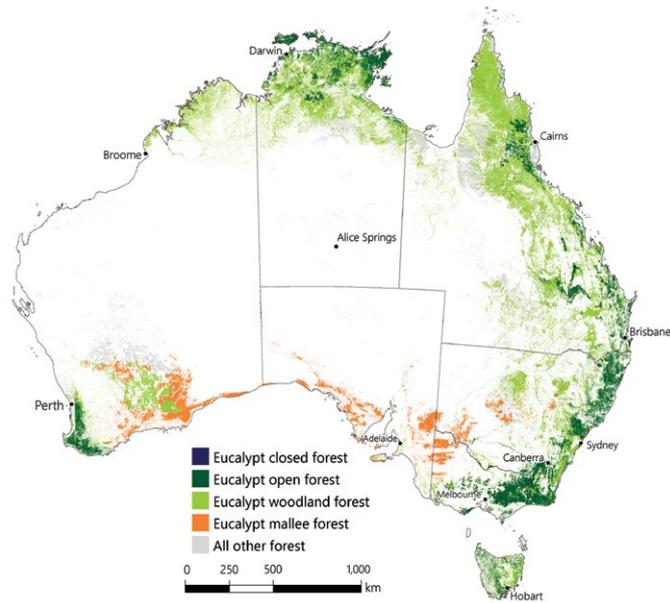
A variety of factors contributed to the fires, including changes to the climate and natural occurrences of the weather.

While the seasonality of the **Australian fire season** varies considerably across the continent, the effects of climate change have lengthened local fire seasons and made severe fire events far less predictable. Hot, dry weather makes it easy for fires to start and spread, and when combined with record-breaking temperatures, drought and strong winds, this makes it ideal for large fires to grow rapidly.

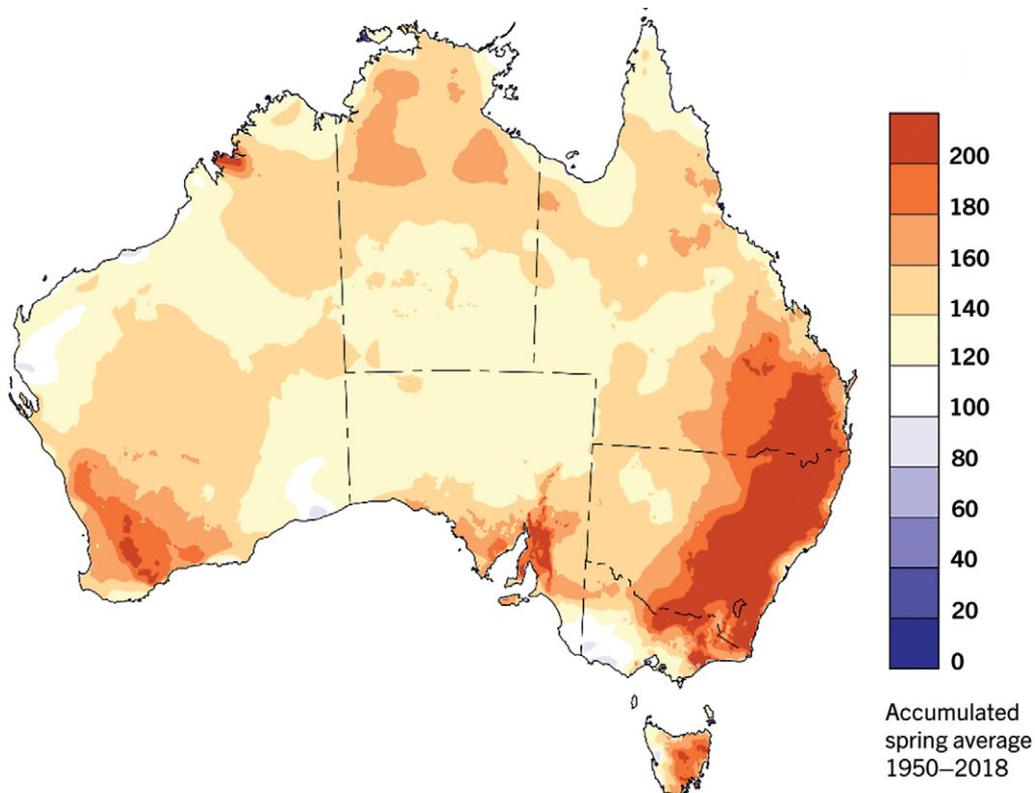
Dry lightning is attributed as a key cause for many of the fires that started in Victoria's East Gippsland region in December 2019. When dry lightning hits drought-affected areas, forests fires can start and spread very quickly.

In the months prior to the end of 2019, **record warmth** in Australia was accompanied by record low rainfall over eastern Australia. This followed a period of much warmer than average weather and dryer conditions across the country for most of the year (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2023b). The Bureau of Meteorology's annual climate statement

for 2019 declared the year to be the driest and warmest on record, with Australia experiencing both its lowest rainfall and highest temperatures for the first time since records began. Further, low moisture levels in bushfire-prone regions following several years of drought enabled fires to occur across the eastern seaboard. These unusually dry conditions meant that the behaviour of the fires was more erratic and less predictable than in the past, resulting in less effective firefighting techniques.



Forest distribution in Australia, 2018.
Credit: Commonwealth Department of Agriculture.



Accumulated Forest Fire Danger Index values for spring in 2019 were more than double the long-term average in large parts of eastern Australia, while the national average was well in excess of the previous record set in the spring of 2002. Credit: Bureau of Meteorology, 2019.

In Victoria, many **high temperature records** were set during the month of November 2019 as the dry conditions experienced across the year continued. On 21 November, a total fire ban was declared across the entire state, but as storm activity increased, over 150 fires started in Victoria that day (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2023b). These fires burnt over 326 000 hectares of land, and by the end of the day 60 fires remained active including in the north near Shepparton, in East Gippsland near Bruthen and in the north-east near Mount Bogong.

This pattern of weather continued for much of December. By the end of the month, Victorian authorities warned individuals to leave high-risk areas in a 15 000 square kilometre area spanning from Bairnsdale to Cann River and the border with New South Wales; more than 60 000 people evacuated the East Gippsland region as a result (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2023b). On 30 December, three fires continued to burn in East Gippsland with a combined area of more than 130 000 hectares. Some fires burnt with such ferocity and intensity that they were able to create pyrocumulonimbus clouds (which form above a source of intense heat) that generated their own thunder and lightning (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2023b).

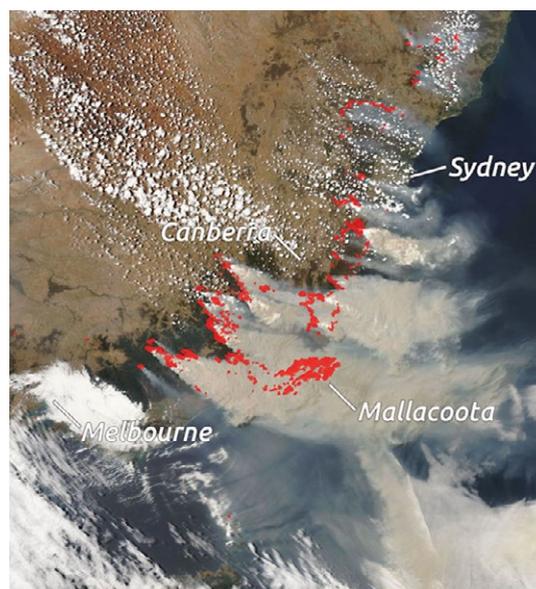
The Victorian road system was significantly impacted by the fires, and this cut off access to many communities, including to the coastal town of Mallacoota. On New Year's Day 2020, approximately 4000 people gathered on the town's foreshore as the fire front came through. On 2 January, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews declared a state of disaster. On 3 January, the Australian Defence Force helped nearly 2000 people flee Mallacoota by air and sea, which was the largest ever maritime evacuation of Australian citizens following a natural disaster (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2023b).

Consequences

The consequences of the bushfires are far-reaching and will have a lasting impact for many years to come. Across Australia more than 24 million hectares of land was burnt, over 3000 homes were lost and 33 people were killed.

Climate

Research undertaken by the CSIRO found that the Black Summer bushfires are part of a trend of worsening fire weather and larger forest fires. Their research found that before the 1990s Australia experienced forest fires that were infrequent yet damaging, with a given area burning at an interval of between 20 years and 100 years. Only a small amount of the total forest areas burnt in any one year. An example of this is the 1939 Black Friday bushfires in Victoria. Before 2002, this was the only megafire to have occurred in the 90 years that Australian states have been keeping records (Cook et al., 2021). Instead, since 2001, there have been three megafires, which can be defined as a year in which more than one million hectares have burnt.



NASA satellite imagery showing the concentration of bushfires in the south-eastern corner of the continent, 4 January 2019.

In addition, Australian fire seasons are getting longer and fires in the cooler months of March to August are growing exponentially at 14 per cent per year (CSIRO, 2022). Fires get larger and more dangerous when they have more fuel to access and will start when the weather is hot, dry and windy. In Australia we use the Forest Fire Danger Index to measure the overall risk of forest fire, temperature, humidity, wind and soil moisture in a single figure; this index has been getting worse over the past 40 years (CSIRO, 2022).

This research is consistent with other findings. There is a clear link between the Black Summer bushfires and predictions that severe fire weather conditions will increase and intensify as climate change does as well (Dowdy et al., 2019). Researchers from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom concluded that the fires likely damaged the ozone layer and caused the highest temperatures in the stratosphere in over 30 years. The study found that the temperature in the stratosphere rose by 0.7 degrees Celsius, while above Australia it rose by 3 degrees Celsius, creating ‘a very large, deep and long-lived ozone hole’.

Read the article linked below to learn more:

 ‘Australia’s Black Summer bushfires were catastrophic enough. Now scientists say they caused a ‘deep, long-lived’ hole in the ozone layer’. ABC, 2022.
abc.net.au/news/2022-08-26/black-summer-bushfires-caused-ozone-hole/101376644



The ‘Summer of Crisis’ report

In March 2020, the Climate Council produced the first overview of the climate impacts experienced by Australians during the Black Summer bushfires. According to the ‘Summer of Crisis’ report, the fires produced an average of 900 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere – this is roughly the same as the annual emissions produced from all commercial air travel across the globe. This is likely to contribute further to climate change and extreme fires in the future.

The report also concluded that:

- climate change fuelled the Black Summer bushfires
- nearly 80 per cent of Australians were affected either directly or indirectly
- approximately 21 per cent of Australia’s temperate forests (i.e. forests that are neither very hot, nor very cold) were burnt
- catastrophic fire danger ratings were experienced in places and at homes never previously recorded.

Health

By March 2020, most of the fires on the eastern seaboard had been extinguished by rain. However, those who were evacuated from their homes remained displaced in temporary accommodation for many months. A range of joint Australian and state-based government disaster relief measures and payments were made available.

It is estimated that the fires exposed three-quarters of Australia’s population to **prolonged levels of smoke and pollution**. This smoke was carried to New Zealand and across the Pacific Ocean to South America (Dickman, 2021). Across 2019–20, this resulted in 417 excess deaths, over 3000 hospital admissions for respiratory problems and approximately 1300 emergency hospital visits for asthma. In Victoria, a preliminary evaluation of the health burden of the bushfires estimated that smoke was associated with over 120 excess deaths and 410 emergency hospital presentations for asthma.

Research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* found that fire-affected regions in the ACT, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland experienced ‘substantial’ health impacts between October 2019 and February 2020 (Borchers Arriagada et al., 2020). Epidemiologists in the study estimated that 80 per cent of Australia’s population of 25 million was blanketed by smoke over the summer of 2019–20: ‘the fires were unprecedented in Australia’s history, in terms of . . . the high populations affected by the smoke and the long duration’ (Pickrell, 2020).

Biodiversity and environment

Australia’s biodiversity was also significantly impacted due to the **unprecedented size and number** of the fires. While many ecosystems in Australia have evolved over time to patterns of intense and frequent fires – known as the fire regime – the Black Summer fires represented a change in the prevailing regime. This is particularly notable in Victoria, where the fires burnt vast areas that had already been burnt two or three times in the previous 25 years (Dickman, 2021).

Because of this, the **ecological** consequences of the fires are profound and will be for decades into the future. Three billion animals are estimated to have been killed or displaced in the fires, including rare and threatened animals. More than 350 species and ecosystems were pushed much closer to extinction (Rumpff et al., 2023). More than 14 000 invertebrates – such as insects, spiders and worms – lost habitats during the fires (Cox, 2021). In the months after, the Australian Government committed an initial \$50 million to restore and protect wildlife as well as support long-term restoration efforts. The agricultural industry also experienced immense loss, with thousands of farms impacted by the loss of livestock.

The fires across New South Wales also resulted in the **loss or damage of significant sites of Indigenous cultural and heritage values**, including scarred trees, stone arrangements, rock art, artefacts, forest resources, waterholes, and animals or birds of ancestral and spiritual significance. The destruction of these values caused immense trauma and grief within Indigenous communities and groups. The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (2020) noted this in its submission to the New South Wales bushfire inquiry, stating:

Ecology refers to the web of relationships that all living organisms (including humans) have with their physical surroundings.



US Forest Service employee Brian Stearns pictured holding a rescued kangaroo joey while assisting Australian fire crews in January 2020. Credit: US Forest Service.

“...[T]his trauma has been amplified by the fact that important cultural and sacred sites, homes and livelihoods have been destroyed. Country, trees, plants and animals are intensely significant to Aboriginal people, as a conduit for connecting Traditional Custodians to their culture, country, lore and ancestors. As such, any damage to country causes an immense sense of grief.”



Activity H – The causes and consequences of Black Summer

- 1 Using the causes and consequences outlined in the text, complete a table using the model below to summarise your understanding. You may also choose to undertake additional external research to deepen your understanding.

	Description (three dot points)	Evidence of this (three dot points)	How it contributes to or advances the political issues (two dot points)
Cause 1			
Cause 2			
Consequence 1			
Consequence 2			

- 2 Complete the following practice questions.
- Identify one cause of the Black Summer bushfires.
 - Explain the cause of the Black Summer bushfires identified in the previous question.
 - Identify one consequence of the Black Summer bushfires.
 - Explain the consequence of the Black Summer bushfires identified in the previous question.

Differing political interests

The Black Summer bushfires presented an **unprecedented challenge** to citizens and different levels of government across the country. With hundreds of bushfires raging across multiple states, the ferocity of this natural disaster called for a new level of coordination **between federal and state and territory governments** in approaching the bushfire recovery effort. Governments were required to coordinate the large-scale evacuation of people, mobilise aid and financial assistance, and protect the health and safety of many communities. Because of this, the political interests of different political actors aligned in the common strategic understanding that immediate assistance and support were required in bushfire-affected areas.



This section explains the interests of the federal government at the time, led by then prime minister Scott Morrison, and the state governments of Victoria and New South Wales, led by Premier Daniel Andrews and former premier Gladys Berejiklian, respectively.

Federal government

In January 2020, the federal government established the **National Bushfire Recovery Agency** to lead and coordinate the national response to supporting and rebuilding communities impacted by the fires, and to administer the **National Bushfire Recovery Fund**. This fund was initially worth \$2 billion and subsequently grew to approximately \$2.2 billion, paid and committed through a range of

rebuilding programs (Australian Public Service Commission, 2021). The agency developed a wide range of support measures relating to infrastructure, economic support, tourism, community health and small business assistance. These programs will extend into the long term as communities recover from the fires and continue to reduce the impact of future natural disasters.

Further, for the first time in Australia’s history, Governor-General David Hurley issued a compulsory deployment of over 3000 Australian Defence Force reservists to assist with civil aid and humanitarian, medical and disaster support across Australian states during the first few months of 2020 (Australian Public Service Commission, 2021).

State governments

In January 2020, **Emergency Recovery Victoria** was established. This agency was created by the Victorian Government to provide dedicated focus to the coordination of fire recovery across the far east of the state. In recognising the necessity of such an agency, since the fires Emergency Recovery Victoria continues to work directly with impacted communities, all levels of government and industry organisations to coordinate timely and effective support to communities recovering from a major emergency in Victoria.



‘Bushfire recovery progress: Some of our key achievements’. Victorian Government. vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-progress

In addition, by January 2022 more than \$62 million in government funding through the Bushfire Biodiversity Response and Recovery program had delivered 145 projects to rejuvenate the fire-affected landscapes and habitats of native species. The Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D’Ambrosio said that ‘it is both heartening to see the recovery that has taken place and a stark reminder of how extensive and damaging the black summer bushfires were for our native wildlife and landscapes’ (Premier of Victoria, 2022).

In New South Wales, the Rural Fire Service was the lead combat agency for the bushfires. Under the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, the service is directly responsible for preventing and suppressing bushfires in rural fire districts. As such, fire management programs, cultural burning, hazard reduction and the state’s Bushfire Risk Management framework all informed the Rural Fire Service’s response to the fires. Former New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian called the season’s bushfires ‘the biggest challenge we have faced in more than a century’ (Carmody, 2020).

On 12 January 2020, prime minister Scott Morrison announced the processes to establish the **Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements**. Both Victoria and New South Wales also announced independent inquiries into the 2019–20 bushfire season in the same month to learn from the experiences of the fires and to make recommendations for future bushfire preparedness and response. The New South Wales Bushfire Inquiry made a total of 76 recommendations, and all were accepted by the New South Wales Government. The Inspector-General for Emergency Management inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian fire season made 32 recommendations, and all were accepted by the Victorian Government in 2021. The political perspectives surrounding the Royal Commission and state-based inquiries into the fires are discussed in the next section.



Activity I – The interests of key actors in the Black Summer bushfires

- 1 Conduct your own research into the various mechanisms established by the federal and state and territory governments in the wake of the Black Summer bushfires:
 - National Bushfire Recovery Agency
 - Emergency Recovery Victoria
 - Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.
- 2 Using this research, consider the following questions:
 - a What are the aims of each mechanism?
 - b How does each mechanism reflect the given responsibilities of the level of government that created it?
 - c How does each mechanism help to explain the interest(s) of the political actor who created it or was engaged with it?

Differing political perspectives

The political perspectives of different national political actors relate mostly to future preparedness and prevention of bushfires. These perspectives stem from the divergent interests and normative rivalry (i.e. the ongoing competition for power between political actors) that exists between different political parties, as well as between different levels of government in Australia.

Royal Commission and state-based inquiries

The **Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements**, announced by Scott Morrison in January 2020, was directed to examine numerous aspects of the Black Summer bushfires response, including:

- the responsibilities of, and coordination between, Australian, state, territory and local governments relating to natural disasters
- Australia’s arrangements for improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions
- what actions should be taken to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters
- whether changes are needed to Australia’s legal framework for the involvement of the Commonwealth in responding to national emergencies.

Australian Government, 2020. ‘Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements’. naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/pdf

The findings from the Royal Commission were tabled in Parliament by the Morrison government in October 2020. The findings recognised that action on multiple fronts was needed to prevent future natural disasters. The report also outlined 80 recommendations that covered areas including federal and state government responsibilities, understanding climate risks, and improving firefighting resources and capacities.

The following table lists some of the major key findings and recommendations.

States and territories have primary responsibility
<p>11. In Australia, state and territory governments have primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment, within their jurisdictions.</p> <p>14. There are compelling reasons for state and territory governments to continue to be responsible for disaster management. They have considerable experience, capacity and capability to manage natural disasters. Many praised state and territory agencies, and the Australian Government acknowledged that it should ‘enhance and support, not supplant’ the capabilities of the states and territories.</p>
We need a national approach
<p>30. We have concluded that Australia needs a national approach to natural disasters. This does not mean that the Australian Government should ‘take over’ from state and territory governments. Rather, it means that we need ‘whole-of-nation’, ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ cooperation and effort.</p>
More cooperation and coordination
<p>33. A national approach calls for greater cooperation and coordination across governments and agencies; a greater sharing of resources across jurisdictions; an agile emergency response and recovery capability, with skills and technology that can be used across the country.</p> <p>34. Action and cooperation will increasingly be required across all levels of government. The community expects governments to work together to build our social and economic resilience. A ‘pluralism of governmental actors, with complementary capabilities’ has been called a ‘defining feature of Australian democracy’.</p>
A greater role for the Australian Government
<p>37. A national approach to natural disasters calls for the Australian Government to play a greater role than it currently plays. Generally, the Australian Government should complement, enhance and support the role of the states and territories. It should continue to be focused primarily on areas in which national consistency, coordination and cooperation across jurisdictions would help the states and territories to manage natural disasters more effectively.</p> <p>38. The Australian Government also has capabilities and capacities not available to the states and territories. It can play a greater role in assisting the states and territories to respond to and recover from natural disasters on a national scale – for which a declaration of a state of national emergency, assistance from the Australian Defence Force, and other national measures and resources, may be necessary.</p>
Declaration of national emergency
<p>42. For some disasters, the assistance of the Australian Government will be particularly necessary and pressing. We have concluded that the Australian Government has the power to, and should, play a greater role in relation to natural disasters on a national scale. For such disasters, the Australian Government should be able to declare a state of national emergency.</p> <p>43. The declaration should be made by the prime minister, and legislation should be clear about the circumstances in which a declaration may be made, and the actions that the Australian Government can then take to support state and territory governments.</p>

Source: Australian Government, 2020. ‘Overview’. in ‘Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements’. naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/html-report/overview

The federal government and Australian Parliament accepted the report and agreed to support (either in full or in principle) the majority of the recommendations, with the notable exception of the proposal to establish a national aerial firefighting fleet. The federal Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management Minister at the time, David Littleproud, stated that the report revealed important lessons to governments about how bushfires must be prepared for the future:

“What it is telling us is there needs to be a more nationally coordinated approach in terms of preparedness in fighting these disasters and where the trigger points are for the Federal Government to get involved. . . . The recovery should be consistent between the states to make sure that no-one has felt like they are left behind. . . . [We] have already started on a pathway . . . by understanding and learning organically from some of the things that happened last year around how we can do things better in making sure that there is some greater national consistency.”

David Littleproud, quoted in Luke Cooper, 2020. “There is still work to do’: Governments to learn from Black Summer bushfires report’. Nine News. [9news.com.au/national/australia-bushfires-black-summer-royal-commission-disaster-response-government-preparation-emergencies](https://www.9news.com.au/national/australia-bushfires-black-summer-royal-commission-disaster-response-government-preparation-emergencies)

However, the Morrison government was criticised for allegedly failing to act swiftly and decisively on prior warnings of a catastrophic fire season anticipated for 2019 and 2020. In response to the findings of the Royal Commission, the Labor Party in opposition – led by Anthony Albanese – called out the government’s lack of action and failure to support bushfire victims. In a press statement in October 2020, former Shadow Minister for Disaster and Emergency Management Senator Murray Watt stated:



“The Royal Commission makes clear that national leadership was needed for last year’s fires, but that leadership was lacking. While the report acknowledges the scale of the fires was unprecedented, it sums up the government’s failures with one damning line: *‘Unprecedented is not a reason to be unprepared.’* Even though the report says climate change will drive more frequent and more intense natural disasters, the Morrison government still won’t take real action on climate change.”

Senator Murray Watt, 2020. ‘Royal Commission reveals Morrison’s bushfire failures’. bit.ly/3PadNT4

In Victoria, the findings of the state-based inquiry saw the Victorian Government accept that land and fire agencies needed to improve their communication and engagement with communities living in bushfire-prone areas. The significant investment and transformation of Victoria’s emergency management arrangements and systems following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires meant that the state’s emergency management sector had a strong foundation upon which it could continue to build.

Provided on the next page is an excerpt from the Victorian Government’s response to the independent inquiry and federal Royal Commission.

“Victoria supports the intent of all the recommendations and the desire to continue to strengthen and improve emergency management outcomes, community-led recovery and enhanced disaster resilience for all Australians.

As acknowledged by the Royal Commission, state and territory governments have – and will continue to have – primary responsibility and accountability for emergency management. Victoria looks forward to working with all jurisdictions to improve emergency management outcomes for all Australians.

Victoria remains concerned about reform that may impact state-based coordination arrangements. This includes Recommendation 5.1 (to make provision for a declaration of a state of emergency) which would enable unilateral action by the Commonwealth to declare a national state of emergency. The introduction of new laws that empower the Commonwealth to declare a national emergency, without consultation with states and territories in some circumstances, is concerning. The circumstances in which a declaration may be made and the actions that the Commonwealth can take must be clear and understood, in line with the Royal Commission’s recommendations. . . .

Victoria welcomes the Royal Commission’s acknowledgement of the impact that climate change is having on driving more severe and intense natural disasters. Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world and, as climate change accelerates, the compounding effects of more frequent and intense natural disasters will present greater challenges to our communities, infrastructure, economies and ecosystems.”

Source: Victorian State Government, 2021. ‘Overview of Victoria’s position’. vic.gov.au/victorian-government-response-royal-commission-national-natural-disaster-arrangements/overview



Activity J – Differing perspectives on the bushfires

- 1 Summarise the perspectives outlined in this issue study so far using the table modelled below. You may also complete additional external research to further your understanding.

Political actor	Perspective (three dot points)	Evidence of this (three dot points)	How this perspective links to their political interests (two dot points)
Liberal-National Coalition government and the Royal Commission			
Victorian Government and state-based inquiries			

- 2 Complete the following extended response prompt. Your finished response should be one paragraph of approximately 200–350 words.

Analyse the impact of the different interests and perspectives of domestic political actors in relation to the Black Summer bushfires.



Understanding 'stability and change'

Our study designs asks us to consider the following when trying to judge political significance:

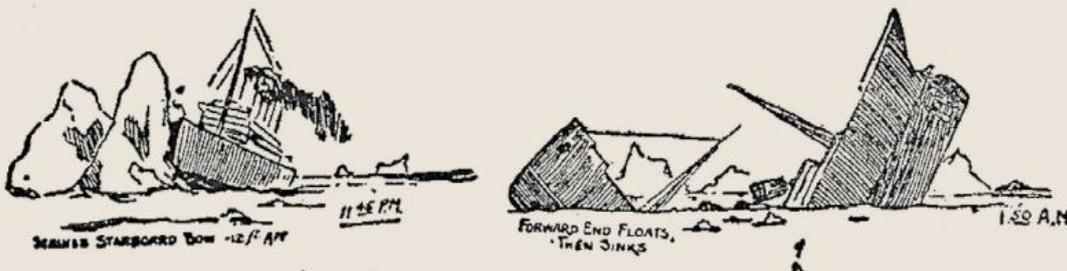
“The concepts of political stability and political change require students to analyse how and why political actors, institutions, processes and crises change over time or why they remain the same. Politics is often found in the tension between political stability and change. There are forces working to maintain the status quo and forces working to achieve change to the status quo in any human situation. These forces can be created or harnessed by any of the range of political actors who have their own interests to pursue. Change may be fiercely resisted by these actors. Importantly, political stability is not always a desirable outcome and change can contribute to stability and/or instability. The concepts of stability and/or change are best understood as relational and multifaceted. Students develop their ability to think politically by recognising that these tensions exist, analysing those forces favouring stability and those forces encouraging change in any given issue or crisis and applying this understanding to their interpretation of political issues. So, the management of contemporary issues and crises, and challenges to that management, can contribute to political stability and/or change.”

VCAA, 2023. 'VCE Politics Study Design, 2024–2028'.
vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/2024PoliticsSD.docx

As this excerpt notes, while the concepts of stability and change are in many ways intuitive, it can sometimes be difficult to maintain your grip on them when applying them to complex, real-world issues. Consider the following.

- An actor that benefits from the status quo may promote or advocate changes that serve to further improve their own standing, or to protect it from the risks associated with other (perhaps more radical) changes to which they are opposed.
- Actors can draw incorrect conclusions about what actions might be in their best interest.
- Attempts to maintain stability can sometimes unintentionally trigger unexpected and considerable changes (and vice versa – attempts at change can backfire and strengthen the status quo).
- Recent human history has seen the pace of change accelerate enormously across societies generally. In this sense, 'stability' should be considered a highly relative term.
- Actors may seek to promote stability about one area while seeking change regarding others.

When trying to weigh the effect of an issue on stability and change, it can be helpful to try to imagine how things might have turned out had the issue not emerged. This can be complicated, even when the issue emerges as a sort of surprise – as with the two crises we investigate in this chapter. If we accept that increased bushfire risk is an inevitable consequence of climate change, then perhaps a horror season was bound to happen, but it may not have coincided with the other specific factors that were at play (different political parties or leaders might have been in charge, crisis management frameworks might have been more or less prepared or well resourced).



Consider yourself the captain (actor) aboard the *Titanic*, with an iceberg (issue) spotted off the bow. What sort of role might the ideas of stability, change and impact play when working out what to do with your crew? To what extent does everyone on the ship have the same interests?

Consequences for political stability and change

The **consequences** of the Black Summer bushfires had a profound impact on **political stability and change** in Australia. Commentary surrounding the preparedness of the Morrison government following the findings of the Royal Commission, as well as Morrison's leadership throughout the natural disaster, contributed to criticism from other political parties, the media and everyday Australians. This criticism contributed to the end of the Morrison government and heavily impacted the prominence of the Liberal Party in Australian politics. Consequently, the Australian Labor Party was elected to government at the 2022 federal election.

Links to climate change

In the aftermath of the fires the Morrison government faced criticism from media outlets and climate experts for its reluctance to draw links between the fires and climate change. The Royal Commission's final report explicitly acknowledged the contribution of climate change to the increased risk and impact of natural disasters. Prior to the fires, Morrison was hesitant to adequately probe how much climate change was contributing to the increased frequency of natural disasters in Australia (Bowman, 2020). While some political appetite saw the Morrison government increase federal funding for natural disaster relief, it fundamentally preferred to stick to the Liberal Party's status quo regarding climate action.

Frank Jotzo, director of the Centre for Climate and Energy Policy at the Australian National University, provided constructive advice to Scott Morrison in the months following the Royal Commission, stating that he and his cabinet needed to 'drop the old anti-climate-change stance'.

“You've been politically locked into a no-action position, but the bushfires give you the reason to change. ... You can make it your mission to protect the country from harm, an essential conservative cause.”

Frank Jotzo, 2020. 'The bushfire crisis has given the government a political 'out' to its climate change problem'. ABC News.
[abc.net.au/news/2020-01-06/bushfires-climate-change-opportunity-to-change/11839530](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-06/bushfires-climate-change-opportunity-to-change/11839530)

Despite this, Scott Morrison continued to fall back on his usual position when pressed by the Australian media about what his government was doing to face climate change in the aftermath of the bushfires:

“I am sure you would also agree that no response by any one government anywhere in the world can be linked to one fire event.”

Scott Morrison, quoted in Tony Walker, 2020. 'Listen to your people Scott Morrison: The bushfires demand a climate policy reboot'. The Conversation. theconversation.com/listen-to-your-people-scott-morrison-the-bushfires-demand-a-climate-policy-reboot-129348

In parallel, commentary from the country's major media organisations continued to reach the same conclusion: that Australians expected, and perhaps even demanded, that any government of any political persuasion needed to face up to the 'new normal' associated with climate change or risk backlash at the next federal election.

This criticism was amplified once it was revealed that the prime minister also refused to meet with a group of former emergency services leaders in 2019, prior to the fires. The group, known as the Emergency Leaders for Climate Change,

was led by Greg Mullins, a former New South Wales Fire Rescue Commissioner, who explicitly wrote to Scott Morrison in April and September to warn him of the increasing threat of catastrophic and extreme weather events. The prime minister did not meet with them. Documents released in the second half of 2020 under freedom of information laws also revealed that while some parts of government bureaucracy were aware of the impending horror fire season by August 2019, this information did not reach leaders in the Morrison government with the urgency it should have (Davies, 2020).

Holidaying in Hawaii

Although criticism of Scott Morrison's leadership throughout the fires stemmed from perceptions of a lack of preparedness – along with an ideological opposition to climate change mitigation – Morrison's own individual actions during the crisis also greatly contributed to the end of his prime ministership in 2022. The benchmark for a prime



One of the first photos of the prime minister that emerged from Hawaii. Credit: Ben Downie/Twitter.

ministerial response to a natural disaster or any crisis is often to demonstrate leadership through empathy, clear communication and thoughtful decision-making. Scott Morrison's decision to take a family holiday to Hawaii as the fires started to burn in December 2019, and the subsequent controversies around this decision that followed, greatly damaged his image and credibility as the country's leader. It also became emblematic of the federal government's response to the natural disaster, which was to be caught unaware and unprepared.

The holiday became controversial after the prime minister's office refused to reveal to the media where the Morrison family were travelling. Michael McCormack, deputy prime minister at the time, was appointed acting prime minister in Scott Morrison's absence. Momentum gathered across social media as people asked #WhereisScottMorrison? The country continued to experience hot weather, with many locations reaching average temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius. It was finally revealed that the prime minister was in Hawaii after a photograph of him, taken by other Australian tourists, ended up on Twitter.

In an analysis published in The Guardian, Australian journalist Katharine Murphy stated that:

“People are angry about Morrison's mini-break because it symbolises the lack of leadership he has shown on the bushfires; the lack of principled leadership Australia showed last week in Madrid on climate change and the Coalition's indefensible record on climate at home. . . . The Morrison holiday has accumulated public outrage because it symbolises absence: a prime minister missing in action on important things. A prime minister too regularly substituting rhetoric for action. A prime minister apparently too pleased with himself to understand that people need more from government than they are getting.”

Katharine Murphy, 2019. 'Scott Morrison's holiday is not the problem, his lack of leadership on the bushfires is'. The Guardian [theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/18/scott-morrison-holiday-is-not-the-problem-his-lack-of-leadership-on-the-bushfires-is](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/18/scott-morrison-holiday-is-not-the-problem-his-lack-of-leadership-on-the-bushfires-is)

Prior to his return to Australia, Morrison phoned Sydney radio station 2GB to explain his actions. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of this interview.

“ I took leave in June as well and we did follow exactly the same practice. So I mean, we don't always say where we're going.

But I think on this occasion, ... because there have been such horrendous events that have understandably caused a lot of anxiety, I deeply regret that and so does Jenny [Scott Morrison's wife] and to all those who were affected by the fires especially, we deeply regret it. And I'll be getting back there as soon as I can. ...

They know that, you know, I don't hold a hose, mate, and I don't sit in a control room. That's the brave people who do that are doing that job. But I know that Australians would want me back at this time out of these fatalities. So I'll happily come back and do that. ”

Scott Morrison, quoted in Amy Remeikis, 2019.

'Scott Morrison's Hawaii horror show: How a PR disaster unfolded'. The Guardian.

[theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/21/scott-morrison-hawaii-horror-show-pr-disaster-unfolded](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/21/scott-morrison-hawaii-horror-show-pr-disaster-unfolded)

'I don't hold a hose, mate' would become an all-encompassing catchphrase used to deride Scott Morrison's lack of leadership throughout the bushfire crisis and haunt him until he left office in 2022. Even upon his return from Hawaii, the prime minister still had trouble demonstrating genuine empathy for victims of the fires. During a visit to Cobargo in rural New South Wales, Morrison was met with contempt as he toured the fire-destroyed town. Now infamous footage of locals heckling the prime minister and stating that he was not welcome further served to solidify the already negative public sentiment towards him. In a rare rebuke of Morrison's character from within the Liberal Party, former senior minister Andrew Constance said he got 'the welcome he probably deserved' (Nguyen and Dalzell, 2020).

Relationship with states and territories

Finally, one of the most important questions and findings of the Royal Commission was whether federal and state bodies effectively coordinated their response to the fires. While **disaster management** is largely a state responsibility, as outlined in the Australian Constitution, the Commonwealth also plays a role when significant resources are needed or when fires cross state boundaries. Despite the Morrison government's awareness by August 2019 of a dire outlook for the approaching fire season, it was found to be lacking the urgency to secure more funding for aerial firefighting equipment and overly small minded to how terrible the impending bushfire season was going to be. A funding agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories for a National Aerial Firefighting Centre (which was reached in 2003) established that the federal government would provide 50 per cent of funding each year, but this had reduced to 23 per cent by 2017 (Davies, 2020).

Morrison and his government were criticised for their lack of understanding when it came to the urgency and shared responsibility that the Commonwealth had to assist the states in coping with the fires. It took weeks for the government to call the Australian Defence Force to assist as Morrison laboured to acknowledge the extent of the natural disaster. In an opinion piece published in The Guardian, former Labor Party prime minister Kevin Rudd (2020) commented that the government's response had been 'evasive, tepid, tone-deaf and, above all, too late'. Further, he stated that the response had been 'conducted as an exercise in 'issue management', rather than a substantive response to one of the worst natural disasters in our history'.

Seizing this opportunity, in the lead-up to the 2022 federal election the Labor Party campaigned on a platform of policies related to disaster readiness. This included policies to invest up to \$200 million each year on disaster prevention and resilience through the Disaster Ready Fund, commitment to establishing a sovereign aerial firefighting fleet in partnership with state and territory governments, and improvement to the efficiency of disaster recovery processes (Satherley and May, 2022).



Activity K – Consequences, stability and change

- Using the events outlined in the text, create a brief timeline (8–12 events) summarising the Morrison government's response to the Black Summer bushfires and criticism from the media. You may also complete additional external research to further your understanding.
- Using the reference list provided at the end of this case study, as well as your own additional online research create a quotation bank that identifies the differing perspectives of domestic political actors. Consider how these perspectives may have contributed to political stability and change in Australian politics at the time.

Political actor	Useful quotations (including source reference)	How this may have contributed to political stability and/or change
Liberal-National Coalition government		
Australia media outlets		
Australian Labor Party (in opposition)		

- Complete the following extended response prompt. Your finished response should be one paragraph of approximately 200–350 words.

'The management of contemporary issues and crises, and challenges to that management, can contribute to political stability and/or change.' Discuss in relation to the Morrison government's management of the Black Summer bushfires.

Evaluating political significance

The political **significance** of the Black Summer bushfires can be summarised through discussion of the **interests** and **perspectives** of national political actors engaged in the issue. As covered throughout this case study, the **causes** and **consequences** of this natural disaster can be attributed to climate change, but they can also be attributed to variations in leadership and preparedness at different levels of the Australian federation. The political significance of the fires can be summarised through its contribution to government policy and through reforms to the disaster management arrangements between the Commonwealth and states and territories.

The political significance of Black Summer and its responses

Government policy	Disaster management reforms
Move from 'shared responsibility' for disaster to a more decisive role for the Commonwealth	Resources and funding earmarked for emergency responses and natural disasters
Better clarification of ministerial responsibilities	Supports for community recovery and resilience in areas affected by disaster

Government policy

The strategic foundation for federal disaster arrangements prior to the fires framed disaster resilience as ‘a shared responsibility for individuals, households, businesses and communities, as well as for governments’ (National Emergency Management Agency, 2011). In the wake of the fires, academics criticised this ‘shared responsibility’ for its ambiguity and the tension it created between the role of the government and wider communities (Satherley and May, 2022).

In addition, the **Australian Government Crisis Management Framework** outlines that ‘states and territories are the first responders to any incident that occurs within their jurisdiction and have primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment within the bounds of their jurisdiction’, but that the Australian Government ‘can ensure decisive action is taken during a nationally significant crisis’ (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2022). The framework also outlines the types of financial and non-financial assistance the Australian Government can provide throughout a crisis, including direct financial support such as disaster recovery payments to individuals and disaster funding to the states and territories.

However, one of the key reasons why the government was so slow to respond to the fires is that no single minister or department had clear ownership of planning for a nationwide natural disaster (Davies, 2020). In such a situation, at least five different ministerial portfolios, including Home Affairs, Health, Defence, Communications and Energy, have control over necessary resources. Other governmental agencies such as the Bureau of Meteorology also have an important role to play.

Reforms to disaster management arrangements

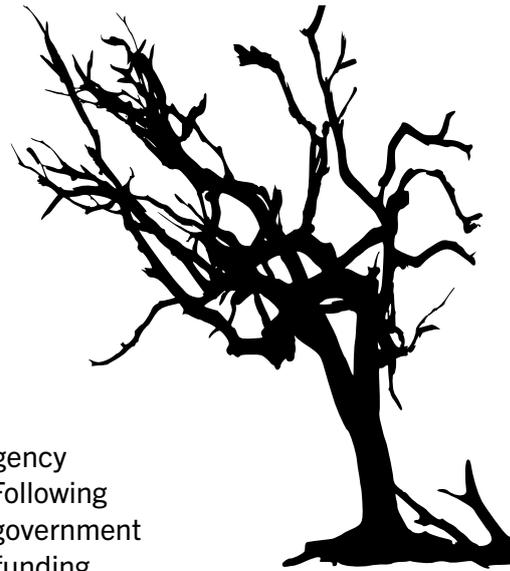
The Morrison government made changes to **natural disaster arrangements** and the structure of many institutions responsible for managing national emergencies. This was largely in response to the findings of the Royal Commission as well as continued analysis and criticism of the government’s lack of preparedness and slow response to the fires. Further, the government also sought to clarify and support the codified responsibility of the state and territory governments in the Australian Constitution to primarily manage natural disasters within their territorial boundaries.

Many of these changes were passed through the 46th Parliament under the *National Emergency Declaration Act 2020*. Under the Act, the governor-general on the advice of the prime minister may declare a national emergency, and a range of ministerial powers may be granted to ministers to assist with emergency response and recovery. The following is a list of other reforms and changes made by the Morrison government.

- **The Australian Government Disaster Response Plan was updated in December 2020.** This clarified the process for the Australian Government to respond to requests for assistance from state and territory governments during an emergency, including for the use of Australian Defence Force assets.
- **The National Recovery and Resilience Agency was created in May 2021.** The agency aims to ‘provide support to local communities during the relief and recovery phases following major disasters’ (Satherley and May, 2022). The creation of the National Recovery and Resilience Agency saw the merging of the former National Bushfire Recovery Agency and the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency, which was created in the aftermath of the east-coast flood disaster of early 2021. Importantly, the National Recovery and Resilience Agency is also designed to provide advice on mitigation programs for future major disasters.

- **The Emergency Response Fund paid out \$50 million in the 2020–21 financial year and \$150 million in 2021–22.**

Created in 2019, the fund is to be used for the financial assistance associated with enhancing disaster recovery. It also enables the Australian Government to access up to \$150 million each year to support emergency response and recovery following natural disasters. A further \$50 million is granted annually to fund resilience initiatives to reduce the risk of future disasters. In June 2021, the Emergency Response Fund was valued at \$4.7 billion. Following the fires, it was revealed that the Morrison government had not released the full amount of annual funding available from the Emergency Response Fund since its creation and that substantial payments were made between 2020 and 2022.



Above all, while these changes demonstrated the Coalition government's willingness to reform disaster management arrangements to assist in future national emergencies, many other aspects of the government's response to the fires (as discussed in the previous section) are also politically significant: they contributed to the end of Scott Morrison's time in office and may have paved the way for the election of a new Labor government under Anthony Albanese in May 2022.



Activity L – Black Summer's political significance

- 1 Undertake additional online research to further understand the changes that were passed through the National Emergency Declaration Act. Consider the following questions:
 - a How do these changes consider the recommendations suggested by the Royal Commission?
 - b What do these changes suggest about the way federal and state and territory governments should manage national natural disasters in the future?
 - c How do these changes challenge or modify traditional aspects of 'emergency powers' as outlined in the Australian Constitution?
 - d Overall, why were the changes in the Act so politically significant?
- 2 In groups, discuss your findings of the previous task. Use these findings to reach an overall judgement about the political significance of the Black Summer bushfires as a political issue. Consider the following questions:
 - a How did the interests and perspectives of different political actors contribute to their responses to the causes and consequences of the bushfires?
 - b How effective were the responses of different political actors and what were their outcomes? What further impacts did these responses create?
 - c How did the responses of different political actors contribute to political stability and change within Australian politics?

Revision questions

Short-answer questions

- 1 Identify one cause of the Black Summer bushfires.
- 2 Identify one national political actor and their political perspective in relation to the Black Summer bushfires.
- 3 State two consequences of the Black Summer bushfires on political stability and/or change in Australia.
- 4 Explain the political interests of one national political actor in relation to the Black Summer bushfires.
- 5 Describe the political interests of two national political actors in relation to the Black Summer bushfires.
- 6 Compare the political perspectives of two national political actors in relation to the Black Summer bushfires.
- 7 Evaluate the political significance of reforms to disaster management arrangements in relation to the Black Summer bushfires.

Extended response question

- 1 Analyse how criticisms of the federal government's response to the Black Summer bushfires contributed to political change in Australia. In your response, refer to the quotation below.

“People are angry about Morrison's mini-break because it symbolises the lack of leadership he has shown on the bushfires; the lack of principled leadership Australia showed last week in Madrid on climate change and the Coalition's indefensible record on climate at home. ... The Morrison holiday has accumulated public outrage because it symbolises absence: a prime minister missing in action on important things.”

Katharine Murphy, 2019. 'Scott Morrison's holiday is not the problem, his lack of leadership on the bushfires is'. The Guardian.
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Further resources

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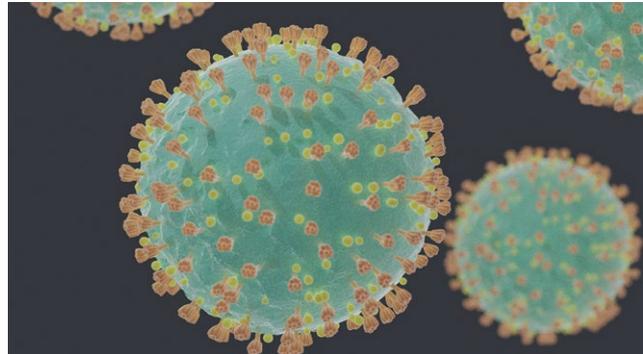
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Case study: COVID-19 in Australia

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It has posed a major public health challenge worldwide since it emerged and began spreading in early 2020.



Credit: w.wiki/7E24

Australia was able to avoid the worst effects of the virus with an initial strategy of suppression at the start of the pandemic, but COVID-19 had, and continues to have, a profound impact on Australians' health and wellbeing.

COVID-19 is a very infectious disease. For most people who contract it, it is a mild to moderate respiratory illness, but in some cases it can make humans seriously ill. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions are more likely to develop serious illness if they contract COVID-19. It is spread by particles or droplets from an infected person's mouth or nose when they cough, sneeze, speak or breathe.

Australia's first COVID-19 case was detected on 25 January 2020. This outbreak set off a chain reaction as Australia's federation of governments implemented a series of emergency plans to stop the spread of the virus. Federal, state and territory health organisations began meeting daily from late January; national coordination arrangements were organised and restrictions on daily life were soon imposed on citizens. Social distancing and border controls were some of the most powerful measures enforced in Australia during the first few months of the outbreak as federal, state and territory governments sought to control the spread of the virus.

Key developments at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, January–March 2020

Milestone	Details
19 January	The Chief Medical Officer stated that 'the Australian Government Department of Health is aware of the cases of novel coronavirus ... from the region of Wuhan in China and [is] watching developments very closely'.
21 January	Following a decision by the Chief Medical Officer, 'human coronavirus with pandemic potential' was added to the <i>Biosecurity (Listed Human Diseases) Determination 2016</i> . This decision triggered 'the standing up of the national incident centre, the standing up of the National Medical Stockpile, the readiness and activation of the national trauma centre, ... and meetings of state, territory and Commonwealth health ministers to discuss pandemic readiness'.

Milestone	Details
25 January	The Australian Government confirmed the first case of a novel (new) coronavirus in Australia. The patient was a man travelling from Wuhan, China to Melbourne. Victorian health authorities isolated the patient and began contact tracing. The Australian Government also confirmed three further cases of COVID-19 in New South Wales.
30 January	The World Health Organization declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus as a 'public health emergency of international concern', recommending that all countries 'be prepared for containment, including active surveillance, early detection, isolation and case management, contact tracing and prevention of onward spread'.
1 February	The Australian Government announced updated travel advice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign nationals (excluding permanent residents) who had been in mainland China from 1 February were banned from entering Australia for 14 days from the time they left or transited through mainland China. • 500 000 masks would be made available for airport and port staff and arriving passengers, and handheld thermometers would be made available at impacted ports.
12 March	The Australian Government announced a \$17.6 billion economic support package, which included support for business and stimulus payments to households.
13 March	The prime minister announced that the 'Commonwealth, State and Territory governments have agreed to provide public advice against holding non-essential, organised public gatherings of more than 500 people from Monday 16 March 2020'. The formation of National Cabinet, made up of the prime minister, premiers and chief ministers, would meet weekly to address Australia's response to the coronavirus.
15 March	The first National Cabinet meeting was held. The prime minister announced that from midnight all people coming into Australia would be required to self-isolate for 14 days as a precaution.
22 March	National Cabinet implemented new Stage 1 restrictions on social gatherings. These restrictions came into effect from midday 23 March 2020 and were expected to be in place for at least six months. The following facilities were restricted from opening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pubs, hotels, and registered and licenced clubs • gyms and indoor sporting venues • cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos and nightclubs • restaurants and cafes, restricted to takeaway and/or home delivery • religious gatherings, places of worship or funerals.

Table adapted from Kelsey Campbell and Emma Vines, 2021. 'COVID-19: A chronology of Australian Government announcements (up until 30 June 2020)'. aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp2021/Chronologies/COVID-19AustralianGovernmentAnnouncements

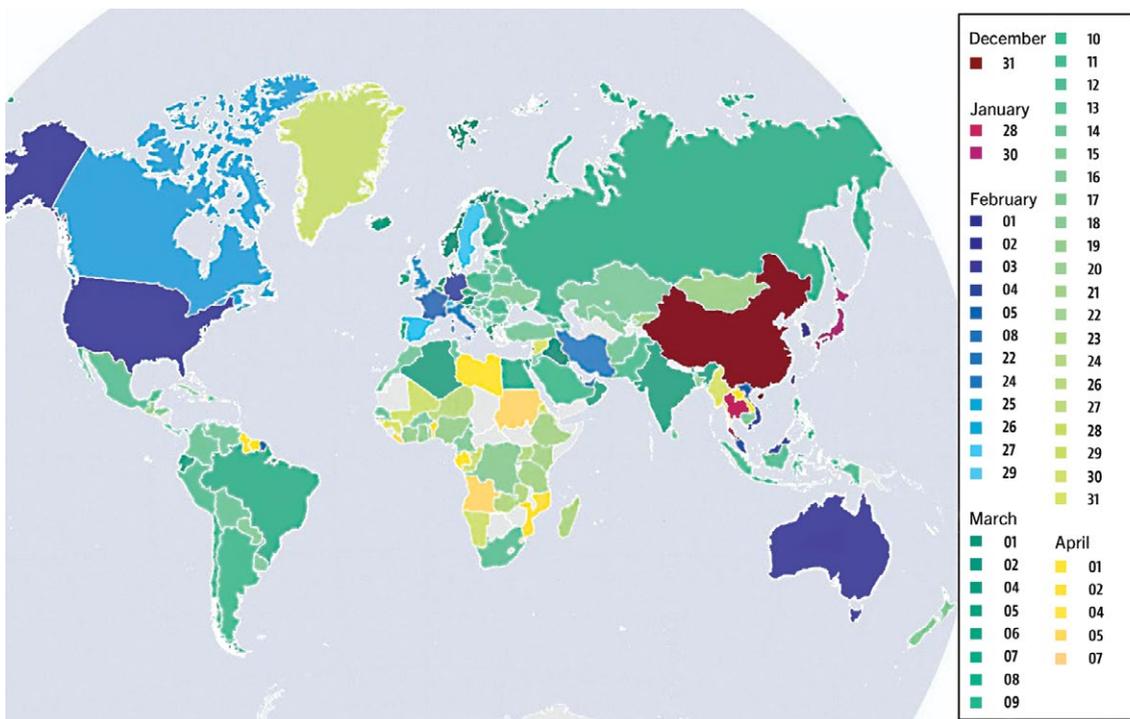
Causes and consequences

Causes

The causes of the pandemic reside in a variety of factors and include the origins of the virus and its global spread facilitated through the processes of globalisation.

On 5 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) notified all member states that an outbreak of pneumonia with unknown causes had been identified in Wuhan, China. More cases emerged across the same month in Singapore, South Korea, Japan and Thailand. The WHO declared a **public health emergency** of international concern on 30 January 2020. On 11 February 2020, the WHO announced that this illness had been classified as SARS-CoV-2, also known as a coronavirus, causing the disease COVID-19. On 11 March 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a **global pandemic**.

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses known to cause respiratory illness in humans and include the common cold. They are called 'corona' because of the crown-like spikes on the surface of the virus (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Coronaviruses are often found in animals such as bats, cats and camels, who can transmit the virus to different animal species, mutating the virus as they transfer it. Thus, the virus can eventually jump from animals to humans. Although SARS-CoV-2 has been confirmed as a zoonotic virus (a disease that can transfer to humans from another animal species), its origins are still yet to be precisely determined. However, it is thought that COVID-19 originated from a food market in Wuhan, which sold meat, fish and live animals. Broadly, the emergence of similar viruses has been attributed to **factory farming**, which leads to large numbers of farmed animals being kept in close proximity to each other as well as to wild animal populations. This is thought to create ideal conditions for viruses to develop mutations and spread from wild animals, to farmed animals, and on to people.



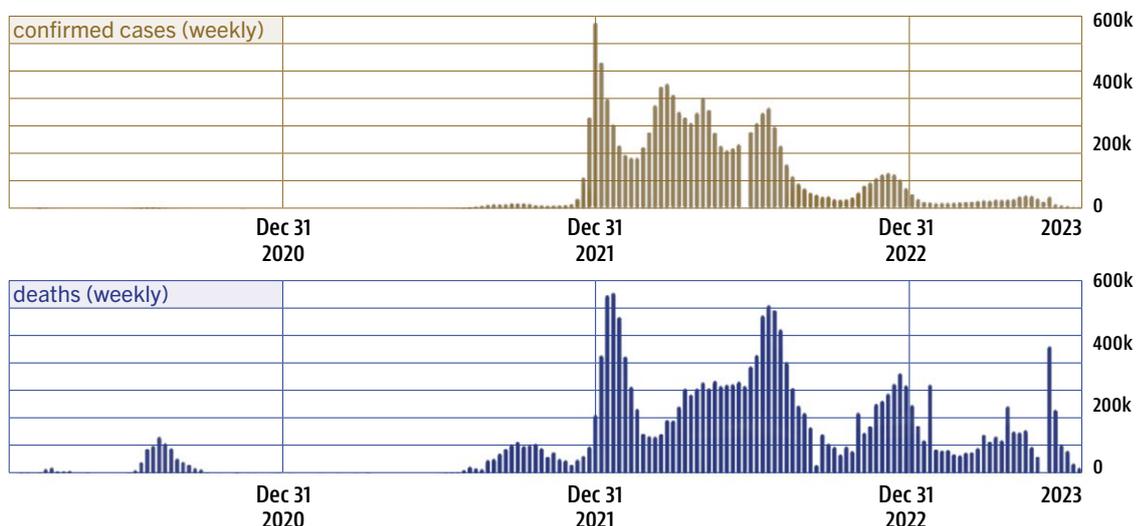
The global spread of COVID-19 from December 2019 (the date when the threshold of 10 cases was exceeded).
Source: Ludovic Jeanne et al., 2023. 'Economic globalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic: Global spread and inequalities'. *GeoJournal*. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8916502

As the WHO's initial response to the pandemic suggests, in just a few weeks the disease became a global crisis. The spread of COVID-19 and its speed of transmission can be linked to **globalisation** and, in particular, the interconnectedness of the world's economic and geopolitical systems. Globalisation is characterised by the increase in human mobility and the exchange of goods throughout the world – the exact elements that can be considered a driving cause of the spread of pandemics. Mapping of global deaths due to COVID-19 up until April 2020 demonstrates that the virus was active across the globe and in all societies and human groups *except* the most isolated regions of Africa and Asia (Jeanne et al., 2023). The pandemic was able to spread worldwide in four months and closely followed the economic geography of the modern world, as demonstrated in the map provided.

This map demonstrates that Thailand, South Korea and Japan were the first countries to report cases of COVID-19 in the same month that the virus was discovered, due to their **geographical proximity** to Wuhan. Iran and the United Arab Emirates soon followed, noting their first cases in early February; this can be justified by their positioning as and proximity to **intercontinental air hubs**, since many commercial flights stop in this region between Europe and Asia. Further, the extent of a country's participation in **international trade and economic systems** also impacted their number of COVID-19 cases. Countries and regions where trade relations with China are strong – such as Western Europe, North America and Australia – were most impacted at the beginning of the pandemic (Jeanne et al., 2023).

Consequences

The consequences of the pandemic globally and in Australia are far-reaching and will have impacts for many years to come. In Australia from January 2020 to August 2023, there had been over 11 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, more than 22 400 deaths, and approximately 68 million vaccine doses administered.



Adapted from 'COVID-19: Australia situation'. WHO, 2023. covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/au

By the end of March 2020, Australia had experienced 19 deaths and over 4500 confirmed cases of COVID-19. There were many uncertainties around how the country would be affected in the short term and the long term. This included how many cases and deaths would occur, the strength of the health system and the length of the pandemic. Australia started to grapple with the intense health, social and economic implications of the pandemic in the first six months of 2020, including increasing infection numbers, employment losses, border closures, supply chain issues and physical distancing requirements.

Despite all these consequences, Australia's control of the spread of COVID-19 meant that compared to the rest of the world the country fared remarkably well in the long term, minimising the number of deaths in the first few years of the pandemic. At the time of writing, key challenges that remain include the emergence of new variants of the virus, vaccination rates among the Australian public, and the continued flow-on effects of more severe situations in other countries.



A snapshot of the consequences of the pandemic in Australia (2020–21)

Health

- By the end of 2020, there had been approximately 28 500 cases of COVID-19 in Australia. The country experienced two distinct peaks, or 'waves'. The first was in March and April, which affected all states and territories, with most infections being acquired overseas. The second was in June to September, which mainly affected Victoria, with most infections being acquired through community transmission.
- By the end of 2020, there were approximately 900 deaths from COVID-19 in Australia. Around 88 per cent of deaths were in Victoria alone.
- There were changes to how the Australian health system was operated and used, including a reduction in elective surgery admissions to public hospitals by 9.3 per cent between 2019 and 2020.
- There was a significant rise in mental health services being subsidised by Medicare between March and December 2020.
- Visits to general practitioners during this time were supported by the uptake of new telemedicine provisions (people connecting with healthcare providers by phone or video).



Social

- Social constraints put in place to stop the spread of the virus forced citizens to adapt to isolation measures. Notably, educational organisations began using asynchronous (not occurring at the same time) and remote online learning.
- An online survey of 15 000 women found that 5 per cent experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner they lived with between February and May 2020.
- An increase in suspected child abuse and neglect notifications after April 2020 was larger than in post-school break periods in previous years. This suggests that COVID-19 restrictions may have had an added effect.



Economic

- Many government-support programs were put in place during 2020, including the JobKeeper subsidy and the Coronavirus Supplement paid to recipients of JobSeeker. These payments contributed to reductions in poverty for some groups, such as single parents, but many citizens experienced a fall in income.
- In April 2020, 20 per cent of Australians in the labour force were either unemployed or underemployed. By June 2021, this had declined to 12.8 per cent, which was lower than late 2019 levels.
- Unemployment increased from 5.1 per cent in February 2020 to a peak of 7.5 per cent in July 2020. This returned to pre-pandemic levels by May 2021.



➤ Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021. 'The first year of COVID-19 in Australia: Direct and indirect health effects'. aihw.gov.au/reports/burden-of-disease/the-first-year-of-covid-19-in-australia/summary



Activity M – The causes and consequences of the pandemic

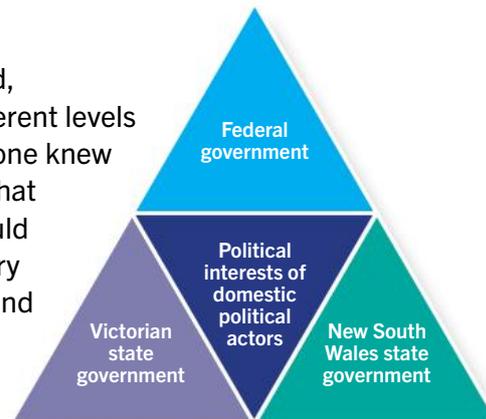
- 1 Using the information about the causes and consequences of the pandemic provided so far, as well as your own research and prior knowledge, create a table using the headings modelled below to summarise your understanding.

	Description (three dot points)	Evidence (three dot points)	How it influences the issue (two dot points)
Cause #1			
Cause #2			
Consequence #1			
Consequence #2			

- 2 Complete the following short-answer questions.
- Identify one cause of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.
 - Explain the cause of the pandemic in Australia identified in the previous question.
 - Identify one consequence of the pandemic in Australia.
 - Explain the consequence of the pandemic in Australia identified in the previous question.

Differing political interests

The pandemic has presented an unprecedented, once-in-a-lifetime challenge to citizens and different levels of government across the country. Because no one knew how long or severe the pandemic would be or what the scope of its impact on every facet of life would be, it was vital that the federal, state and territory governments work together to protect citizens and national and state infrastructure. Governments were required to coordinate **large-scale public health measures** to protect citizens from the virus, prepare and mobilise health systems for an influx of patients, and organise financial assistance to keep the Australian economy afloat. Because of this, the political interests of different political actors aligned in the broadly shared **strategic understanding** that immediate protection of Australia's borders, infrastructure and citizens was required across the entire country.



This section explains the interests of the federal government at the time, led by prime minister Scott Morrison, and the state governments of Victoria and New South Wales, led by Daniel Andrews and Gladys Berejiklian, respectively.

Federal government

The political interests and decision-making of the federal government were driven by two COVID-19 variants in the initial years of the pandemic. This included the **L-strain**, which arrived in Australia in January 2020, and the **Delta strain**, which was first detected in Australia in June 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).



The initial response of the federal government coincided with the detection of Australia's first cases of COVID-19 at the end of January 2020 (see timeline at the beginning of this case study for more information). This **involved various border security measures, including restrictions on foreign nationals** entering the country from specific locations such as China and discouraging Australians from leaving the country for non-essential reasons. By the end of March 2020, border restrictions were extended to all non-citizens and non-permanent residents, effectively shutting Australia off from the rest of the world.

The need for clear, consistent and coherent communication from all levels of government was supported by the formation of the **National Cabinet** at the end of March 2020. This was the result of numerous days in the weeks prior where governments at all levels, confused by the speed at which the crisis was progressing, considered introducing social distancing measures that were largely incoherent and inconsistent to each other (Davies, 2020). A clear example of this was on 13 March 2020, when prime minister Scott Morrison announced that the federal, state and territory governments had agreed to ban all outdoor gatherings of more than 500 people indefinitely – however, he would still be attending a rugby league match the next day. This mixed messaging to the public about how seriously to take the social distancing measures became quickly apparent, and within hours the prime minister announced he would no longer be attending the game (O'Sullivan et al., 2020).

Further, to support citizens and businesses, the federal government provided economic relief in the form of subsidies and payments across the first few years of the pandemic. This was in response to the decline in hours worked by many employees due to lockdowns and trading restrictions. Traditionally, the Australian Government has supported the states and territories in managing emergencies by providing logistical and financial assistance. This power is granted under **Section 96** of the Australian Constitution, which allows the Commonwealth to provide financial assistance to any state 'on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit'.

Above all, the pandemic highlighted many challenges to how the federal government managed Australia's international relationships and revealed many vulnerabilities in the country's health structures and supply chains (Australian Parliament, 2020).

State governments

In Victoria and New South Wales, the state governments also imposed public health restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including self-isolation, changes to business functioning, stricter border controls and restrictions on social gatherings.

In New South Wales, these restrictions were first introduced on 15 March 2020 by Minister for Health and Medical Research Brad Hazzard through the *Public Health Act 2010*. Since this time, successive health ministers have made, extended and amended over 70 public health orders. In Victoria, a state of emergency was declared under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* on 16 March 2020. Following this, Governor-General David Hurley declared a **human biosecurity emergency** across Australia under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* on 18 March 2020. These three declarations gave extraordinary powers to Victorian Chief Health Officer Dr Brett Sutton, New South Wales Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant and Minister for Health and Aged Care Greg Hunt to issue determinations that 'locked down' Victoria, New South Wales, and Australia's citizens and economy generally, to minimise the spread of the virus. The pandemic marks the first time that these emergency powers were activated under these Acts.

In Victoria, this was later supported by the declaration of a state of disaster under the *Emergency Management Act 1986* on 2 August 2020. This gave Victoria Police greater power to enforce public health directions. At the time, authorities at both governmental and institutional levels were empowered to impose restrictions on individual freedoms and movement that suspended many constitutional norms. The significance of this will be discussed in later sections of this case study.



An empty Bourke Street Mall on a Friday afternoon during Victoria's second lockdown.
Credit: Philip Mallis, 2020. [flic.kr/p/2jXVDNU](https://www.flic.kr/p/2jXVDNU)



Activity N – Interests of key actors in relation to the pandemic

- 1 Undertake your own research into the various mechanisms used by federal, state and/or territory governments during the first two years of the pandemic, with a focus on:
 - various national border security measures, including restrictions on foreign nationals
 - the creation and functioning of the National Cabinet
 - implementation of various internal restrictions, including those relating to social gatherings, self-isolation and business activities, as well as movement controls within and between states.
- 2 Using your findings and the information provided in this text, answer the following questions.
 - a What are the aims of each mechanism?
 - b How does each mechanism reflect the given responsibilities of the level of government that created it?
 - c How does each mechanism assist to explain the interest(s) of the political actor who created it or was engaged with it?

Differing political perspectives

Political and social debate surrounded many aspects of the government response to the pandemic. The perspectives of different political actors on this issue relate mostly to **the role of the federal, state and territory governments** and their preparedness and use of **emergency powers**. These perspectives stem from the divergent interests and normative rivalry that exists between different political parties, as well as between different levels of government in Australia.

Role of federal, state and territory governments

The need for clear and decisive leadership was highlighted early, in the first few months of the pandemic in Australia. This was particularly front of mind for Australians, as Scott Morrison had been widely criticised for not providing adequate leadership during the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires, which concluded in



The *Ruby Princess* cruise ship docked in Sydney Harbour.
Credit: Dietmar Rabich. w.wiki/7EcH

the weeks prior to the first COVID-19 cases being detected in Australia. Although swift, clear and decisive leadership did develop with the creation of the **National Cabinet** at the end of March 2020, there remained disagreement between the federal government and the states and territories over numerous matters. One of the biggest points of tension was over quarantine measures at Australian ports, particularly for cruise ships.

The disembarkation of 2700 passengers on the **Ruby**

Princess cruise ship in Sydney on 19 March 2020 incited clear disagreement between the federal government and the New South Wales Government. Infected passengers had been allowed to leave the cruise ship, and by 17 April 2020 the ship's passengers accounted for one-quarter of all Australian COVID-19 deaths to date (Burke, 2020). More than 1000 cases of COVID-19 were estimated to have come from the ship's passengers (Crowe, 2020).

As a cruise ship approaches an Australian port it is subject to several statutes and associated administrative protocols that have relevance to the Biosecurity Act, the *Migration Act 1958* and the *Customs Act 1901*. **Section 51** of the Australian Constitution provides the Australian Parliament with the power to make laws with respect to quarantine, immigration and emigration. In particular, the Biosecurity Act outlines the management of the risk of infectious human diseases entering Australia. Chapter 8 of the Act provides the governor-general with the power to declare a human biosecurity emergency of no longer than three months and allows the Minister for Health and Aged Care to exercise broad powers. This declaration in relation to the pandemic was made on 18 March 2020. On 15 March 2020 the Australian Government enforced a 30-day ban on cruise ship arrivals from any international ports destined for Australia. However, the *Ruby Princess* had departed for its destination before this date and as such was exempt from this determination and allowed to enter the Port of Sydney.

The **Special Commission of Inquiry into the *Ruby Princess*** initiated by the New South Wales Government investigated the circumstances of the decision to allow passengers to disembark. It was found that mistakes by federal and state health officials were the main cause of the debacle. The inquiry subsequently recommended that 'the Commonwealth Department of Health and NSW Health develop better awareness of their own and each other's roles and responsibilities for human biosecurity, and more formal protocols for their interaction and communication' (Inspector-General of Biosecurity, 2021).

Emergency powers

Emergency powers can be defined as the 'range of special powers available to respond to emergencies that threaten safety, property, or the integrity of the state' (Trakic, 2021). When invoked, these emergency powers set aside the normal

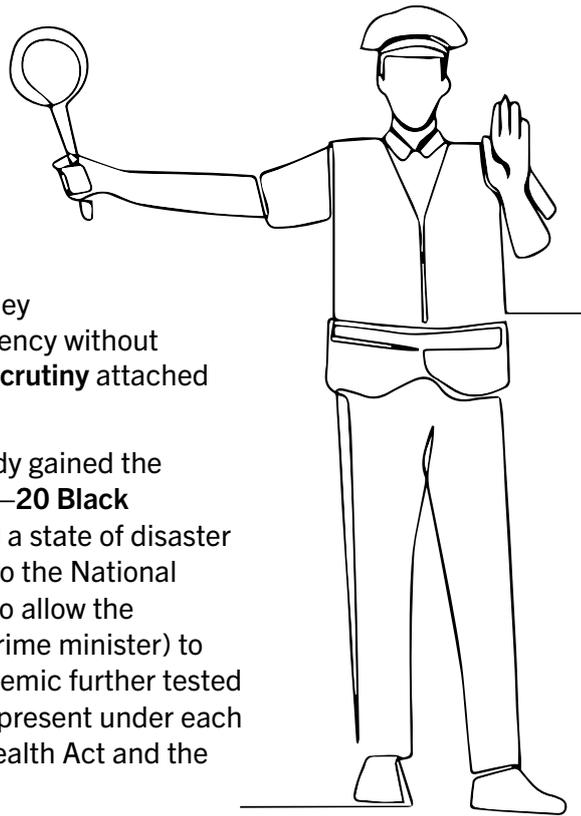
legislative and executive powers established within the **Australian Constitution** or state and territory statutes and focus broad regulation-making powers in the hands of a few officials within the relevant executive government. The use of these powers means that the executive government is authorised to enact regulations that they deem necessary to respond to an emergency without the normal processes of **parliamentary scrutiny** attached (Mclean and Huf, 2020).

The use of emergency powers had already gained the attention of Australians during the **2019–20 Black Summer bushfires**. This event prompted a state of disaster to be declared in Victoria, and changes to the National Emergency Declaration Act were made to allow the governor-general (on the advice of the prime minister) to declare a **national emergency**. The pandemic further tested the tension between the special powers present under each state and territory’s respective Public Health Act and the federal government’s Biosecurity Act.

These powers under emergency law have impacted the distribution of power across the **Australian federation**. This is because the use of emergency powers suspends many aspects of the normal distribution of power outlined in the Australian Constitution. Australia’s system of federalism means that power is divided between the federal national government and the regional state and territory governments. As such, when emergency powers are invoked, this presents challenges to the distribution of power and how the emergency response is shaped by the cultures of different public health and emergency management agencies at different levels of government (Mclean and Huf, 2020). It also raises many questions about balancing the security of the country and the safety of citizens with **individual freedoms** that are considered fundamental in a liberal democracy.

Chief Medical Officer Professor Brendan Murphy stated in November 2020 that ‘every member of the federation of Australia has responded well. One of the great legacies of this outbreak is how our federation has worked well’ (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2020). Constitutional law experts also noted that ‘the remarkable trait of a liberal democracy is that while the powers to cope with [an] emergency provide the potential for authoritarian rule, such powers are terminated with the restoration of normalcy’ (Lee et al., 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that although the use of emergency powers during the pandemic centralised extraordinary decision-making powers to respond to the crisis, this was largely conducted in a manner that strengthened the use of emergency law between the federal, state and territory governments.

In Victoria, this was further affirmed by the introduction of a pandemic-specific framework in 2021 to ensure that the state could effectively continue to manage the pandemic and any future pandemics (Victorian Department of Health, 2023). This was the first pandemic legislation of its kind in Australia and contains a number of safeguards and oversight of decision-making processes.





Activity 0 – Perspectives on the pandemic

- 1 Use the outline of the different perspectives of various actors provided along with your own research to complete a table modelled on the example below.

	Perspective (three dot points)	Evidence (three dot points)	How this perspective links to their political interests (two dot points)
The federal Morrison government			
The NSW Berejiklian government and the <i>Ruby Princess</i>			
The Victorian Andrews government and emergency powers			

- 2 Plan and prepare a response the following question. Try to keep your answer to no more than 350 words.

Analyse the impact of the different interests and perspectives of domestic political actors in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia during 2020 and 2021.

Discussing political stability and change

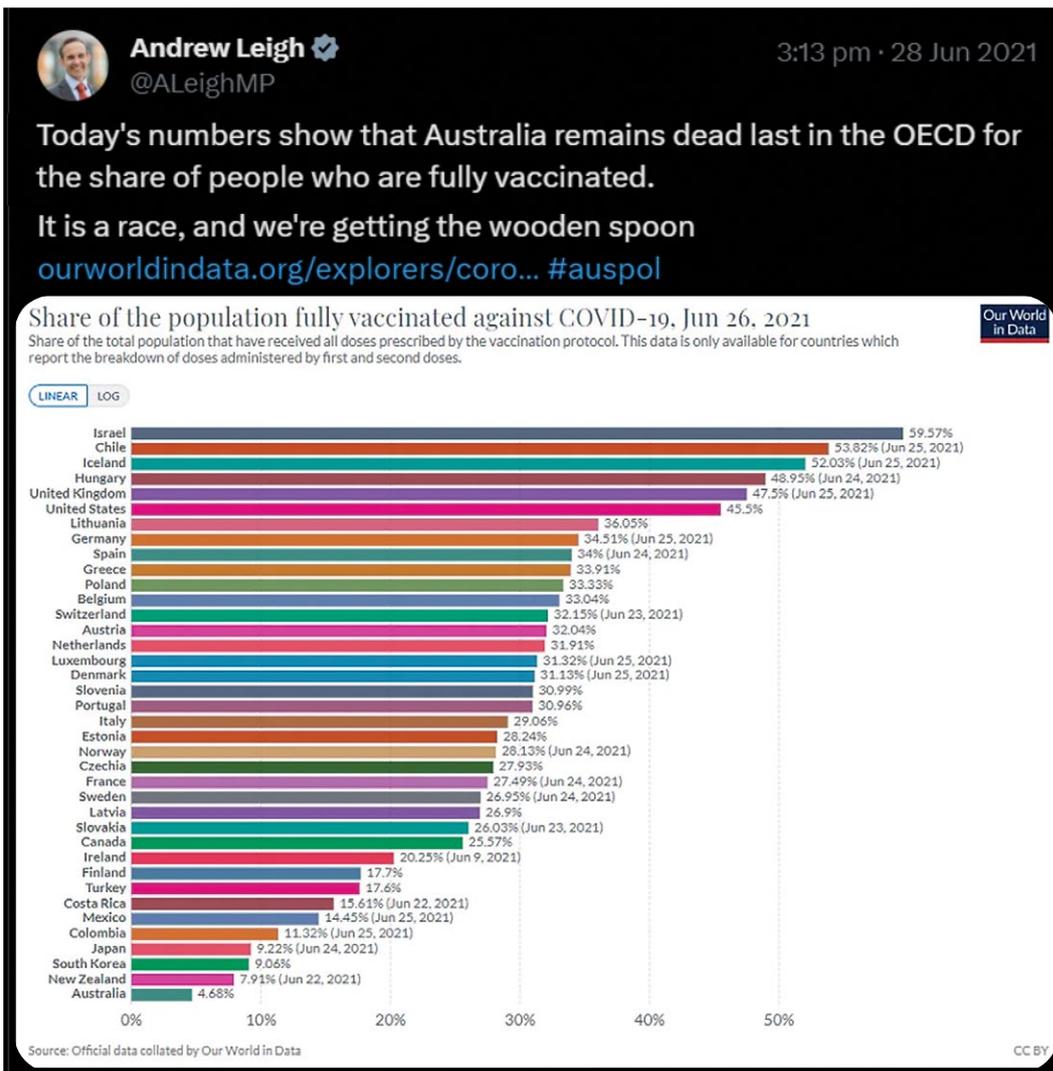
The **consequences** of the pandemic had a profound impact on **political stability and change** in Australia. Commentary surrounding the response of the Morrison government, as well as Scott Morrison’s leadership throughout the crisis, contributed to criticism from other political parties, the media and everyday Australians. According to many analyses, this criticism had a considerable negative impact on voter sentiment. In turn, this appears to have played a significant part in the Australian Labor Party being elected to government at the 2022 federal election.

You can read more about the extent to which management of the pandemic influenced voters here:

- 📖 ‘What explained the seismic 2022 federal election? The Australian Election Study has answers’. The Conversation, 2022. theconversation.com/what-explained-the-seismic-2022-federal-election-the-australian-election-study-has-answers-195286

Criticisms of federal government response

The Morrison government’s early handling of the pandemic and the establishment of the **National Cabinet** in March 2020 provided Australians with initial confidence that the country would escape the worst effects of COVID-19. While the National Cabinet worked well to begin with, Morrison increasingly became caught between the majority of Australians who supported the tough measures proposed by the state and territory governments and an influential minority of state and federal Liberal Party individuals who were aggressively attacking different levels of government and fighting for ‘freedom’ against lockdowns and vaccines (Savva, 2022). Tension between state and territory governments and the federal government became clearer as the *Ruby Princess* debacle cleared the way for further disagreements on school closures, lockdowns and the shutdown of some business sectors.



Members of the opposition Labor Party, such as Treasury and Charities spokesperson Andrew Leigh, sought to amplify criticism of the government's perceived delay in Australia's vaccine rollout.
Chart credit: Our World in Data, 2021, via twitter.com/ALeighMP/status/1409379306308980739

Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT superseded the decision-making of the National Cabinet on 22 March 2022 when they announced that all schools would transition to remote learning, the closure of non-essential business, and stricter social-distancing laws (Savva, 2022). This action demonstrated the power of the states and territories to exercise independent decision-making away from Scott Morrison and subsequently influenced the federal government to announce the \$130 billion **JobKeeper package** to support Australians. As the states and territories continued to go their own way on border closures and lockdowns, the prime minister's control of the agenda and his authority was weakened within National Cabinet. Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk stated in 2022 that 'in the early days, National Cabinet worked collectively in the national interest', but Morrison 'squandered the greatest opportunity a prime minister could ever have, to unite the entire country' (Savva, 2022).

This disunity continued into 2021, the second year of the pandemic, when Scott Morrison set a target to have four million Australians vaccinated against COVID-19 by the end of March. By April 2021, the federal government had missed this target by approximately 3.4 million people (Zhou, 2021). This led to the federal

government asserting that the vaccine rollout was ‘a marathon, not a sprint’ and that the rollout was ‘not a race’. However, the government was too slow to back away from this message before it became the catchcry to describe Morrison’s lack of preparedness in obtaining enough vaccines for Australians in comparison to the rest of the world. At this time, the Delta wave saw most of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria in lockdown.

In 2021 Stephen Duckett, Director of the Health Program at the Grattan Institute, argued that the federal government had bungled the vaccine rollout in four ways: the wrong pace, phasing, model and messaging. In particular, the federal government’s decision to invest in the local production of **AstraZeneca** vaccines before it emerged that there were some possible associated health risks – forcing the government to procure **Pfizer** vaccines instead – contributed to mixed and convoluted messaging to the Australian public.

Under mounting pressure from the Australian media, Scott Morrison apologised for the country’s slow vaccination rollout in July 2021.

“I’m certainly sorry we haven’t been able to achieve the marks that we hoped for at the beginning of this year. . . . But what’s important is that we’re totally focused on ensuring that we’ve been turning this around. I take responsibility for the vaccination program [and] I also take responsibility for the challenges we’ve had.”

Scott Morrison, quoted in Katherine Murphy, 2021. ‘I’m sorry’: Scott Morrison apologises for slow pace of Australia’s vaccine rollout’. *The Guardian*. [theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/22/im-sorry-scott-morrison-apologises-for-slow-pace-of-australias-vaccine-rollout](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/22/im-sorry-scott-morrison-apologises-for-slow-pace-of-australias-vaccine-rollout)

He also said that the changing public health advice about the AstraZeneca vaccine had ‘caused some hesitation amongst people, particularly older people’ (Murphy, 2021).

At the same time, it was also revealed that the former Labor prime minister Kevin Rudd had been in contact with Albert Bourla, the global chairman and chief executive of Pfizer, to assure accelerated delivery of the vaccine to Australia. The changing health advice regarding AstraZeneca meant that Pfizer had become the preferred vaccine for Australians under 60 years old, but that the 40 million doses of the vaccine contracted by the government were not due to arrive in the country before the end of 2021. Thus, the desire to achieve early access to a larger supply of the vaccine also came amid reports that the federal government had bungled its initial negotiations with Pfizer in July 2020, which displayed a ‘rude, dismissive and penny pinching’ approach. Australia eventually signed a deal with Pfizer for 10 million doses of the vaccine in November 2020, which was four months behind many other countries (Tingle, 2021).



Credit: vectorportal.com

The Department of Health denied these reports. Rudd wrote to Morrison in June 2021, advising him that he had been in contact with Bourla and that he used the ‘opportunity to ask Dr Bourla whether there was any possible way, given Pfizer’s current international contractual obligations, to advance the dispatch of significant quantities of the Pfizer vaccine to Australia’. Without responding to this, and facing criticism from the state and territory governments about shortages of vaccine supply amid a spike in COVID-19 cases, Morrison announced that there would be an additional 300 000 doses (including 150 000 from Pfizer) made available to New South Wales.

However, this was not enough in the broader scheme of the vaccine rollout. The Guardian further reported that Australia's delay in securing a deal with Pfizer was 'unfortunate', and that according to Pfizer's former chief president of research and development, John LaMattina, 'ordering a mere 10 million doses was unconscionable'. He also said that:

“when both Pfizer and Moderna demonstrated the potent efficacy of their vaccines, every country should immediately have reached out to these companies to place their orders. In the case of Australia, enough vaccine to inoculate its entire population over the age of 18 should have been done at once.”

John LaMattina, quoted in Laura Tingle, 2021. 'Senior business figures turned to former PM Kevin Rudd to intervene in bringing forward Australia's Pfizer vaccine supply'. ABC News. abc.net.au/news/2021-07-11/kevin-rudd-australia-covid-pfizer-vaccine-supply-senior-execs/100284902

Reflecting on lessons from Australia's public health response, an Australian expert panel identified the following key lessons (Basseal et al., 2022).

- Movement restrictions were effective, but their implementation requires careful consideration of adverse impacts.
- Disease modelling was valuable, but its limitations should be acknowledged.
- Decision-making that is evidence-based and consultative is essential to maintain trust.
- Adequate infection prevention and control frameworks are critically important.

While it does seem that Australia avoided the worst effects of the pandemic due to strident border security measures, collaboration within the National Cabinet and strict social distancing measures, the country still experienced several negative impacts, many of which were widely linked to various missteps on the part of the federal government in 2020 and 2021.



Activity P – Political consequences of the pandemic

- 1 Using the events outlined in the text, create a brief timeline (8–12 events) that summarises the Morrison government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as criticism of those responses in the media. You may also complete additional external research to further your understanding.
- 2 Using the reference list provided at the end of this case study, as well as your own additional online research, create a quotation bank that identifies the differing perspectives of the key domestic political actors related to this issue. Consider how these perspectives may have contributed to political stability and change in Australian politics at the time.

	Useful quotations (including source reference)	How this may have contributed to political stability and/or change
The federal Coalition government		
An Australian media outlet		
The federal Labor opposition		

- Plan and prepare a response to the following question, limiting your answer to 350 words or less.

‘The management of contemporary issues and crises, and challenges to that management, can contribute to political stability and/or change.’ Discuss in relation to the Morrison government’s management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evaluating political significance

The political significance of the pandemic can be summarised through analysis of the responses of political actors engaged in the crisis. As discussed in this case study, the causes and consequences of this global crisis can be attributed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and globalisation, but they can also be attributed to variations in leadership and preparedness at both the federal and state or territory levels of government. While the political significance of the pandemic will continue to resonate in many ways for many more years, this section will discuss its significance on the role of the Australian Government in emergency management and the constitutional, policy and human rights issues brought about by this.

The political significance of the pandemic and its responses

Australian federalism	Human rights
Increased scope overall for federal intervention and coordination of policy nationally, via National Cabinet	Freedom of movement overridden by public health concerns
Road test of emergency powers (otherwise rarely used since World War II)	Freedom of communication limited to combat disinformation about the virus, vaccines and the government’s role
Influence of states over national decision-making	Disproportionate economic and social impacts on vulnerable groups (poor, elderly, migrants, those with disabilities)
Further stress testing (following the bushfires) of Australia’s overall crisis management framework	Disproportionate impact of policing and enforcement of lockdown measures on vulnerable groups (as above)

Role of the Australian Government

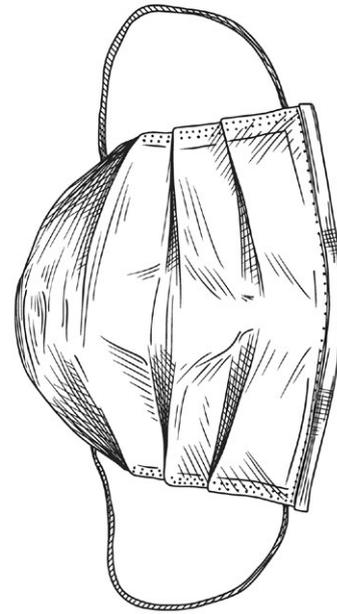
In Australia, the changing nature of emergencies such as bushfires and pandemics has prompted a shift in the relationship between federal, state and territory governments and their response and management of emergencies. This has included changes such as:

- the standardisation of emergency laws in each state and territory, such as through Emergency Management Acts and Public Health Acts
- the creation of Commonwealth legislation to respond to national emergencies
- the creation of intergovernmental agreements and plans between the federal, state and territory governments in areas such as the environment, biosecurity and public health that are designed to provide a coordinated response to emergencies (Mclean and Huf, 2020).

The prominence of these changes has been illuminated through both the Black Summer bushfires and the pandemic. These changes reflect a pattern wherein the Australian Government has increasingly asserted its constitutional power to coordinate emergency action, and this has raised questions about the distribution of power within the Australian federation. For example, the ability of the governor-general (on the advice of the prime minister) to declare a national emergency following the Black Summer bushfires via the National Emergency Declaration Act established the legal framework to permit the federal government power

over a domain traditionally considered the jurisdiction of the states and territories. Because of this, the pandemic has fuelled the need to centralise responses to emergencies and the exercise of emergency powers. However, this has brought into question the distribution of power in Australia's federal system of government (McClean and Huf, 2020).

The Australian Constitution grants the government powers to respond to health crises including through quarantine, which is exercised via the Biosecurity Act. The Australian Government coordinates responses to public health emergencies through three components: legislation, emergency management frameworks and committees, and response plans. This is underpinned by the *National Health Security Act 2007*, which provides the framework in which states and territories and the Commonwealth must coordinate and share information in response to public health emergencies. This is supported by the *National Security Health Agreement 2008*, which has been signed by all Australian states and territories and explicitly recognises their individual 'responsibility for responding to significant public health events within their jurisdictions' (McClean and Huf, 2020). Above that, the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework, created in 2017, is the overarching decision-making framework that was designed to manage all Australian crises.



The pandemic characterised a departure from these existing plans, particularly in the creation of the National Cabinet, which replaced the COAG meeting. This was the first time a crisis cabinet had been established by a federal government to include state and territory government leaders. Although the National Cabinet made decisions designed to support the emergency response to COVID-19, the state and territory governments remained responsible for the implementation of these decisions under their own emergency and public health legislation (McClean and Huf, 2020). The Victorian Government supported this decision and described the National Cabinet as effective, because it 'established national principles that recognise the sovereignty of states and territories to implement policies according to local circumstances' (Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2020).

Constitutional, policy and human rights issues

The emergency response to the pandemic following the Black Summer bushfires has brought increased interest to a range of **constitutional, policy and human rights issues** that these powers and frameworks may pose to Australia's system of federalism.

The **policy and administrative changes** brought about the formation of the National Cabinet, the abolition of COAG, and the creation of the National Federation Reform Council, prompting mixed reactions from the Australian media and academics. Some have noted this as an opportunity to streamline and improve Australian federalism, while others have warned that a cabinet with the prime minister as chair may undermine its effectiveness (McInerney, 2020). Health experts have also questioned whether this change will allow the Australian Government to set the agenda of health emergency

Human rights are the basic entitlements and freedoms believed to be owed to every person by every other; the character and extent of specific rights are often politically contested.



responses, drawing attention away from other important issues, while also effectively overriding the constitutional powers of the states and territories as being responsible for their health systems.

A review undertaken by the Grattan Institute in 2020 praised the National Cabinet's initial cooperation and employment of experts but also argued that the 'grand realignment of responsibilities of the Commonwealth and states [necessary for effective emergency responses] has not been achieved' (Duckett et al., 2020). They instead argued that better on-the-ground coordination through primary care agreements between the Australian Government and each state and territory would improve this. Further, instances of hotel quarantine breaches that occurred in Melbourne during lockdown suggested the necessity for an independent national centre for disease control that would provide all levels of government with a uniform and informed source of direction (Duckett et al., 2020).

As discussed earlier in this case study, the use of **emergency powers** also suspends many aspects of the enshrined distribution of power outlined in the Australian Constitution. Emergency powers are broadly considered legitimate, as they are provided for through legislation created in the traditional lawmaking process, but they do still encroach on many aspects of Australia's liberal democracy. The pandemic has called into question how different levels of government achieve security and safety for their citizens while balancing individual liberties and freedoms.

Australia justifiably placed significant emphasis on protecting the right to life and health of citizens in the initial stages of the pandemic. However, significant restrictions on movement and association impacted many aspects of fundamental human rights. A report published by the **Australian Human Rights Commission** in 2021 expressed concern 'about the impacts of Australia's response to the pandemic on vulnerable groups', including older persons, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, people with a disability, and culturally and linguistically diverse people.

The emergency powers enforced by different Australian governments all significantly restricted movement and association around the nation. Restrictions included closing overseas and interstate borders, restricting when people were permitted to leave their homes (including by way of curfew in Victoria), limiting the number of attendees at funerals and wedding, restricting access to family members living in aged care facilities, limiting the size of public gatherings, and restricting the number of people who may gather in private residences, restaurants and businesses. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) also maintained that 'there has been limited transparency about decisions made to restrict human rights. Many of the emergency measures have been enacted using delegated legislation, which means they are usually made without the opportunity for public consultation.'

Australia has been one of the more successful developed states globally in stopping the spread of COVID-19. A variety of factors have contributed to this, including the country's geographical isolation, stable political system, system of universal health care, and relatively high rate of national wealth. Despite this, the complexity of Australia's emergency management arrangements within the Federation were tested during the pandemic. A myriad of strengths and weaknesses allowing flexible and targeted responses – which also exposed incoherent messaging and tension between different jurisdictions – resulted in some errors in governmental response and preparedness.



Activity Q – Analysing the political significance of the pandemic

- 1 Undertake your own online research into how the creation of Commonwealth legislation to respond to national emergencies following the Black Summer bushfires via the National Emergency Declaration Act contributed to new methods of managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. Consider and respond to the following questions.
 - a What were the main changes involved in this Act?
 - b What do these changes suggest about the way federal, state and territory governments should manage national natural disasters in the future?
 - c How do these changes challenge or modify traditional aspects of ‘emergency powers’ as outlined in the Australian Constitution?
 - d Overall, why were the changes in the Act so politically significant?
- 2 In groups, discuss your findings of the previous task. Use these findings to make an overall judgement about the political significance of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. To do this, consider and attempt to answer the following questions.
 - a How did the interests and perspectives of different political actors contribute to their responses to the causes and consequences of the pandemic in Australia?
 - b How effective were the responses taken by different political actors and what were their outcomes? What further impacts did these responses create?
 - c How did the responses of different political actors contribute to political stability and change within Australian politics?

Revision questions

Short-answer questions

- 1 Identify one cause of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.
- 2 Identify one national political actor and their political perspective in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.
- 3 State two consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on political stability and/or change in Australia.
- 4 Explain the political interests of one national political actor in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.
- 5 Describe the political interests of two national political actors in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.
- 6 Compare the political perspectives of two national political actors in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.
- 7 Evaluate the political significance of the role of the Australian Government in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.

Extended response question

- 1 Analyse how criticisms of the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to political change in Australia. In your response, refer to the quotation below.

“I'm certainly sorry we haven't been able to achieve the marks that we hoped for at the beginning of this year. ... But what's important is that we're totally focused on ensuring that we've been turning this around. I take responsibility for the vaccination program [and] I also take responsibility for the challenges we've had.”

Scott Morrison, quoted in Katherine Murphy, 2021. 'I'm sorry': Scott Morrison apologises for slow pace of Australia's vaccine rollout'. *The Guardian*. [theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/22/im-sorry-scott-morrison-apologises-for-slow-pace-of-australias-vaccine-rollout](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/22/im-sorry-scott-morrison-apologises-for-slow-pace-of-australias-vaccine-rollout)

Further resources

Articles

ABC News. 'Coronavirus'. [abc.net.au/news/story-streams/coronavirus](https://www.abc.net.au/news/story-streams/coronavirus)

Liam Mannix, 2021. 'What went wrong with Australia's vaccine rollout?' The Sydney Morning Herald. [smh.com.au/national/what-went-wrong-with-australia-s-vaccine-rollout-20210331-p57for.html](https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-went-wrong-with-australia-s-vaccine-rollout-20210331-p57for.html)

The Guardian. 'Coronavirus'. [theguardian.com/world/coronavirus-outbreak](https://www.theguardian.com/world/coronavirus-outbreak)

Podcasts

7am. 'COVID-19'. [7am podcast.com.au/episodes/topic:covid19](https://www.7am podcast.com.au/episodes/topic:covid19)

Coronacast. [abc.net.au/radio/programs/coronacast](https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/coronacast)

Video

Four Corners. 'The cost of corona' (45 min). [abc.net.au/news/2020-04-20/4cs_economy_2004/12165974](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-20/4cs-economy_2004/12165974)

Website

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1.2

**Unit 1,
Area of study 2:**



Power and global political actors

“Unit 1, Area of Study 2: Power and global political actors

In this area of study students analyse the power, interests and perspectives of global political actors and evaluate their political significance in at least one global issue. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

- 1 the key concepts:
 - 1.1 power
 - 1.2 legitimacy
 - 1.3 sovereignty
 - 1.4 global interconnectedness
 - 1.5 state
 - 1.6 nation
 - 1.7 causes and consequences
 - 1.8 ideology
 - 1.9 political interests
 - 1.10 political perspectives
 - 1.11 political significance
- 2 the state as a global actor, such as
 - 2.1 powers arising from its possession of sovereignty
 - 2.2 the state's role of representing its citizens abroad
 - 2.3 the state's legitimacy and ability to use coercive power
 - 2.4 the state's relationship with other global actors
- 3 the forms of power that may be used by global political actors to pursue their interests, such as
 - 3.1 political power
 - 3.2 military power
 - 3.3 economic power
 - 3.4 diplomatic power
 - 3.5 cultural power
 - 3.6 technological power
- 4 the perspectives that inform global political actors' actions of conflict or cooperation, such as
 - 4.1 nationalism
 - 4.2 ideology
 - 4.3 humanitarian concerns
 - 4.4 global influence
- 5 the interests of global political actors and their ability to achieve political stability or create change
- 6 the theories that attempt to explain how global actors operate or how they should operate, such as
 - 6.1 cosmopolitanism
 - 6.2 liberalism
 - 6.3 realism
- 7 the impact of global interconnectedness on the power of global actors
- 8 the political significance of key global political actors in at least one global issue, including the sources and forms of their power, their perspectives and legitimising narratives about contributions to political stability and change, their competing interests and the consequences of the actions taken.

Key skills

- i ask a range of questions to investigate the of power of global political actors
- ii compare and interpret sources to explain the interests and perspectives of global political actors
- iii describe how global political actors can challenge the sovereignty of states
- iv describe the causes and consequences of global interconnectedness for global political actors
- v explain how global political actors use power in pursuit of their interests
- vi compare the different perspectives of global political actors
- vii discuss how global political actors use power to achieve political stability and/or change
- viii evaluate the political significance of the use of power by global political actors in the pursuit of their interests
- ix construct an argument to evaluate the significance of global political actors in at least one global issue using evidence from sources.

Key questions

Which actors can act globally?

What makes a global political actor powerful?

What are the interests and perspectives of various global actors?

How does global interconnectedness impact on the power of global actors?

What is the political significance of global actors?

Preface

In this area of study, students focus on the political actors who can move beyond and across national and regional boundaries to pursue their interests globally. This has been facilitated by the increasing interconnectedness of the world. These 'global' actors are predominantly states and their leaders, institutions of global governance or of regional cooperation, non-government organisations, transnational corporations of all kinds and some high-profile individuals. For the purposes of this study, global actors are defined as states, regional groupings, institutions of global governance and non-state actors. States include actors who have defined territory, permanent populations and widely recognised sovereignty. States can be organised into formal regional groupings such as the European Union, ASEAN or the Pacific Islands Forum. Institutions of global governance have global scope and states as members; they facilitate cooperation and manage relations between states, develop and enforce global rules and law, and play a part in dispute resolution. Non-state actors include any other actors on the global stage, including nations, transnational corporations, individuals, non-government organisations and illegal groups.

Since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) placed state sovereignty at the centre of the European political system, the principle of sovereignty has been widely accepted, allowing states to become prominent global actors, unlike some nations who are at a significant disadvantage because they are not regarded as sovereign entities.

States are able to use various forms of power in the pursuit of their interests in a global setting and this use can be either legitimate or illegitimate. However, the rise of other global actors, largely as a result of global interconnectedness, has challenged the power and primacy of states as political actors.

The increasingly interconnected global system influences the ability and power of all global political actors to pursue and achieve their interests. When actors share interests, they may use their power to cooperate. However, a divergence of interests between actors may lead to conflict. The actions of global political actors in the pursuit of their interests have consequences for other actors and impacts on political stability and/or change.

Students engage with political thinking through an inquiry into the power, interests and perspectives of global actors' responses to an issue. They explain how ideology and interests can lead to a global political actor becoming involved in conflict or cooperation. They analyse the power of a variety of global political actors and examine the impact of global interconnectedness on that power, leading to an assessment of the political significance of those actors. ”

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2023.
'VCE Politics Study Design, 2024–2028'.
vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/2024PoliticsSD.docx

Power and global political actors

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the political actors who can move beyond and across national and regional boundaries to pursue their interests globally. It will also highlight the impact of global interconnectedness on the power of global actors and explore two main interactions between them: cooperation based on shared interests and conflict arising from divergent interests. This chapter also features an in-depth investigation into climate change as a global issue, including its political significance and the associated uses of power by global political actors.

Readers will note that key ideas outlined in the first part of this area of study have largely been explored in the previous chapter and are invoked again throughout the rest of the chapter in context.

The state as a global actor ^{1.2.2}

“Political units everywhere, to greater or lesser degrees, are the products or playthings, winners or losers, victims or survivors of the self-help imperative of international relations over time. Much of what we take for granted in the daily activities of life on earth today is the result of battles between states long, or not so long ago. ...

To put it simply, each of us is born into a specific national context, with a particular history, geography, culture and set of opportunities and constraints in the international system. ...

Our lives to some degree take place in a context constructed by how well or badly particular governments in the past conducted themselves. We are all, whether we recognize it or not, the children of international relations. ...

‘International relations’ is defined simply as ‘the international level of world politics’. By ‘international level’ I mean the interactions largely (but not exclusively) of sovereign states; by ‘world politics’ I mean ‘who gets what, when and how across the world’. ...

Today’s political map of the world – a pattern of 196 differently shaped and sized states – is normalized in our collective mind. It is the result obviously, of long and complex historical processes. ”

Ken Booth, 2014. *All That Matters: International Relations*. Hodder & Stoughton.



A quick recap...

Remember what we’ve already learnt in the previous area of study – these core concepts appear throughout our study regardless of whether the focus is on domestic or international matters.

- **State** refers to a global political actor that is both a political community and a territorial entity, based on five characteristics: a permanent population, a defined territory, a functioning government, the ability to engage in relations with other states, and international recognition from other states. The state has traditionally been regarded as the central actor in global politics and is said to have sovereignty.

- **Nation** refers to a community of people, based on a particular identity, through common bonds such as a shared culture, language, history, ethnicity and religion. For example, the Kurds are regarded as the world's largest stateless nation.
- **Sovereignty** refers to a state's ability to exercise exclusive and ultimate control over a geographically defined territory. Sovereignty is also the central organising principle that underpins modern international relations. Traditionally, a state's sovereignty can be challenged internally (e.g. by separatist groups seeking the creation of a breakaway state) or externally (e.g. one state invading another).
- **Legitimacy** refers to the belief that an institution, party or leader has the right to exercise power. This transforms power into authority. Legitimacy may be democratic (e.g. through elections) or non-democratic (e.g. through manipulation, fear or economic performance), either of which may provide a kind of consent over which to be governed.
- **Political perspectives** refer to the positions from which political actors see and understand their interests, including the ideologies, ideas, values and events that inform these perspectives. Political perspectives may also be influenced by the social, political, economic, historical, cultural, environmental, and spatial conditions and contexts in which actors are located.

CMP

The VCE Politics study design encourages us to divide our analysis of politics and power into domestic and global settings. **Domestic** focuses on the behaviour of actors and issues falling largely within state borders, and **global** focuses on those that transcend them.

Nonetheless, in an era of ever-increasing **global interconnectedness** and interdependence, the

distinction between each arena may sometimes appear blurred. A prominent example of a *domestic* political issue is our case study on the Black Summer bushfires in the previous chapter, which is strongly interrelated with the global political issue of climate change explored in detail in this chapter.

Global interconnectedness

refers to the intricate web of interactions and interdependencies that link countries, societies and individuals across the world.

The study design states that, for the purposes of our study, global actors are:

- states
- regional groupings
- IGGs
- non-state actors, which include any other actors on the global stage such as nations, TNCs, individuals, NGOs and illegal groups.

Of all the key global actors, the state has traditionally been seen as the central actor in global politics. With a scarce number of exceptions, part of the world is subject to the overarching power of at least one state. As noted by Ken Booth (2014), states are 'today's dominant and domineering marker of political identity'.

The state's power arising from its possession of sovereignty 1.2.2.1

Domestically, the possession of sovereignty enables national governments (as the chief representatives of states) to have supreme authority over internal matters within their defined territory. Globally, though, sovereignty acts as the central organising principle that underpins modern international relations. Hence, the possession of sovereignty serves as somewhat of an insurance policy for states. This ensures that there is a certain formal and legal equality between states and, thus, encourages (at least in theory) a mutual respect for borders, while establishing the expectations of non-interference and the non-use of force in interstate relations.



The evolution of sovereignty

Ancient sovereignty

The birth of the idea of sovereignty is often associated with modern European states and the 1648 Peace of Westphalia (explained below). However, the continued existence and survival of First Nations peoples from around the world and the living Indigenous cultures, wisdom and lore (spanning centuries and even millennia) they represent remind us that the idea of sovereignty actually goes back much further.

Ancient sovereignty refers to the ancestral links and spiritual connection to land that many First Nations peoples have as traditional owners and custodians of land they were dispossessed of (often forcibly) due to colonisation. In Australia, claims to a more ancient form of sovereignty can be seen in phrases such as ‘Always Was, Always Will Be Aboriginal Land’ and ‘Sovereignty Was Never Ceded’, as well as in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, which declares:

“our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60 000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or Mother Nature, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born there from remain attached thereto and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil [and of] sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and coexists with the sovereignty of the Crown.”

‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’, 2023. ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement

Traditional (Westphalian) sovereignty

The concept of sovereignty is associated with the Peace of Westphalia, a set of treaties dating back to 1648 that sealed the end of the brutal Thirty Years War (1618–48). This largely religious conflict was fought in Western Europe, killing more than eight million people from associated battles, sieges, famine and disease. Prior to this, the situation in Europe featured comparatively more jumbled and overlapping claims to authority. Emperors, princes and nobles held significant military power and were all endorsed to some extent by the Pope and the Catholic Church, which was theoretically supreme over all of Christendom (the Christian world). In turn, the legitimacy of the Church was being challenged by various movements and rulers who favoured religious reform.

The element of Westphalian peace considered most important by many international relations scholars was that of ‘whose rule, his religion’, in which heads of each political unit were considered the supreme decision-maker within the boundaries of their own territory. This included some precursor to the idea of formal *equality* between sovereigns, whereby all sovereign states are expected to respect one another’s independence by not interfering in each other’s domestic affairs.

This perspective of sovereignty continued to develop (and be exported through force of arms) over the next few hundred years, to the point of being part of the foundations of the UN Charter – which is widely considered the basis for international relations since World War II.



In front of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. The letters planted in the ground spell out ‘SOVEREIGNTY’.
Credit: Alan Porritt/AAP.

Consider the following UN Charter provisions:

“**Chapter I, Article 2(4):** All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

Chapter I, Article 2(7): Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

Chapter VII, Article 39: The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

Chapter VII, Article 41: The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.

Chapter VII, Article 42: Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.”

UN Charter, 1945. un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text

Towards a more 'elastic' idea of sovereignty

Contemporary understandings of sovereignty are shifting further due to the following factors:

- **Regional groupings:** States willingly choose to forfeit aspects of their own sovereignty. For example, the EU is a regional grouping where member states pool their national resources together to form a more integrated regional bloc. In doing so, EU member states are thought to delegate elements of their own sovereignty upwards to a supranational entity, therefore, binding themselves to follow EU laws and participate in the pursuit of shared objectives.
- Issues and crises requiring **multilateral** approaches: States confront complex challenges and problems that transcend national and/or regional boundaries. Addressing these issues effectively requires international cooperation and coordination. Examples include managing the rapid spread of a global pandemic, the causes and consequences of climate change, and the violence of global terrorist movements.
- International **norms** and expectations: Sovereignty is less an absolute right of states and more earned on the basis of how they behave. States who deviate significantly from such norms may not be able to take the principle of non-interference for granted. Powerful actors may (either unilaterally or together with other states) intervene if they deem that a state is unwilling or unable to protect their own populations from egregious human rights violations, genocide or ethnic cleansing.

Regional groupings are groupings of states based on a particular geographic territory.

Norms refer to shared and commonly accepted ways of doing things; in global politics these are often associated with justice and ethical concerns.

States can serve many different functions but tend to understand their own purpose as to advance the interests of their citizens – sometimes this is framed as the **national interest**. This often includes protecting citizens from internal and external threats, along with the preservation of their own sovereignty. In this study, we focus on four key state interests: **security, economic prosperity, regional relationships and regional standing**.

National interests are the objectives and priorities pursued by states to safeguard their security, economic prosperity, sovereignty and influence through diplomatic, military, economic and cultural means; they are often multifaceted and changeable, depending on the interests of the domestic political actors that influence state policy.

The state's role of representing its citizens abroad ^{1.2.2.2}

Another major role for the state is representing its citizens abroad. This can include membership in IGGs and regional groupings, signing and ratifying international laws and regional agreements, upholding international norms and participating in bilateral and multilateral initiatives.



In representing its population and interests abroad, states engage in **foreign policy**. This refers to how a state pursues its priorities regarding issues located mostly outside its own national borders and how it interacts with other states and actors to manage the regional and global external environment. This typically involves the use of policy instruments such as diplomacy, trade, aid and military action.

Foreign policy refers to a government's decisions and strategies in dealing with other global political actors and/or any matters beyond its own borders.

States may also pursue their national interests through **domestic policy**. This refers to the decisions and actions taken by a government to deal with internal issues within its own borders and relating to its population. This includes many of the policy areas mentioned in the previous chapter, such as taxation, social services, infrastructure, health care and the justice system.

Domestic policy is the strategies and decisions that a government makes that relate primarily to its own population and/or to matters within its own borders.

However, due to increasing global interconnectedness and interdependence, the distinction between the domestic and foreign policy spheres is not always clear-cut.

The state's legitimacy and ability to use coercive power ^{1.2.2.3}

For modern liberal (and representative) democratic states, legitimacy is said to derive from the consent of the governed. All states, whether democratic or authoritarian, are thought to have a broadly legitimate monopoly on the use of violence within their borders to enforce laws that underpin the social and economic order, such as the right to property. These powers extend to state-backed institutions such as the courts, police, tax authorities, customs agents and branches of military. In turn, these institutions are supposed to act in accordance with the laws that are decided upon by parliament(s), enforced by the executive, and implemented and monitored by the judiciary.

The state also has considerable economic power. This largely stems from its ability to generate income through the taxes it can apply to various economic activities within its borders and to direct control over natural resources and other valuable assets.

In return for accepting the coercive capacity of the state, there is an assumption that the state must act to advance the needs of its citizens. These needs can be framed around five core social values: **security, freedom, welfare, order and justice**. This interplay between the state and its population is sometimes understood as being the basis of a **social contract**.

The state's relationship with other global actors 1.2.2.4

In an era defined by interconnectedness and interdependence, states contend with many types of global actors. All other global actors are to varying degrees capable of challenging the supremacy of states, and states, in turn, have varying capacity to push back. This poses the question, *when it comes to contemporary global politics, are states still calling the shots?*

Other states

Interstate relationships can be categorised by various interactions, and states can engage with one another through cooperation, competition or conflict.

Cooperation can be based on cultural links such as shared value systems or historical ties. It can also draw on strong people-to-people links or be more reciprocal/ transactional (e.g. based on mutually beneficial trade).

Competition and conflict usually result from strategic rivalries, which strain relations, increase tensions, intensify contests and exacerbate flashpoints; this can lead to outbreaks of hostility and violence.

States also tend to pursue their national interests in a manner that is either:

- **unilateral** (a state acting alone)
- **bilateral** (two states coordinating aspects of their national policies in partnership)
- **multilateral** (three or more states working together to fulfil common shared objectives).

Examples of different contemporary interstate relationships include the 2021 trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, known as AUKUS. Ongoing tensions between the United States and China also dominate overall discussions about contemporary geopolitics and feature many 'threads', including the so-called 'chip wars' to dominate microchip technology. The Biden administration has since imposed export controls seeking to limit the Chinese government's access to advanced semiconductors and related products.

You can read more about the chip wars here:

📖 'Chip wars: How semiconductors became a flashpoint in the US-China relationship'. The Guardian, 2023. [theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/05/chip-wars-how-semiconductors-became-a-flashpoint-in-the-us-china-relationship](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/05/chip-wars-how-semiconductors-became-a-flashpoint-in-the-us-china-relationship)



English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes was an influential proponent of the theory of the social contract in his 1651 book *Leviathan* (cover image pictured here). Hobbes argued that the only way individuals could protect themselves from the risks of disordered violence was by agreeing to submit themselves to a powerful monarch with absolute sovereignty over them.

Regional groupings

Regional groupings are intergovernmental in nature, being comprised of states and the governments who represent them (as with IGGs). However, rather than being universal in principle, they tend to reflect the priorities and interests of countries that are geographically close and as such tend to have strong cultural and economic ties, along with shared political and strategic interests.

For the purposes of our study, regional groupings must have their own **organisational structure** beyond the states included within them to be considered actors in their own right. Two or more countries simply having a meeting, agreement or treaty does not necessarily mean that a regional grouping has been created.

Specific examples of regional groupings include:

	# members	type of integration being pursued					
		trade	currency	development	diplomatic	military	political
European Union (EU)	27	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)	10	✓	planned		✓		planned
Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)	18	planned		✓	✓	peace keeping	
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)	32					✓	
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	6	✓	planned			✓	
African Union (AU)	55	✓		✓	✓	peace keeping	
Caribbean Community (CARICOM)	15	✓		✓			✓

The state's relationships with regional groupings can be characterised by cooperation, integration and tension.

Cooperation is when fellow member states agree to work together based on a degree of geographic preferentialism (favouritism) in pursuit of mutual benefits, but with no obligation to harmonise (bring together) their domestic laws or pursue common actions abroad.

Integration is when fellow member states go beyond *just* cooperation and instead bind themselves to common rules, enforced through the creation of a supranational institution. This describes a new entity with some state-like characteristics that sits above individual states, with some power to override the national decisions of individual members.

Tension is when rift(s) develop between a regional grouping and one or more of its member states. While states initially join regional groupings willingly, sometimes a regional grouping's policy direction is seen to encroach on the independence and autonomy of a member state beyond what that state's political system is willing to tolerate.



Supporters demonstrate in favour of Britain's exit from the EU in 2019. The historic and unprecedented departure came more than three years after 51.89 per cent of people from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar voted to 'leave'. Credit: Guy Bell / Alamy.

Examples of such tensions include:

- the narrow victory via referendum for Brexit in 2016, which led to the United Kingdom withdrawing from the EU
- ongoing disputes between the EU and Hungary over various policy areas
- the four-year blockade imposed on Qatar from 2017–21 by other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as supported by Egypt.

Institutions of global governance

In seeking to establish rules, norms and legal arrangements, IGGs operate as a platform that facilitates and encourages cooperation and communication between states.

IGGs vary in terms of how many states they count as members. As of 2023, the UN and IMF were composed of 193 and 190 member states respectively, while only 123 countries are state parties to the Rome Statute (the governing treaty of the ICC).

Similar to regional groupings, tensions may arise if an IGG is perceived to be encroaching on a member state's autonomy and independence when it comes to policymaking. Such tensions visibly came to a head in 2020 when the United States (not an ICC signatory) under the Trump administration imposed sanctions, such as financial asset freezes and travel bans, on senior officials in the ICC – including its then chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda. This was done to pressure the ICC to drop its investigation into allegations of potential US war crimes committed in Afghanistan during the global war on terror.

Non-state actors

This section outlines some of the ways in which different non-state actors can interact with the state from a global political perspective.

Nations

People whose national identities (comprised of cultural, linguistic, religious and/or historical elements) align with the character or interests of a state can serve to reinforce its general effectiveness as a political actor. Where this overlap is significant, this entity might sometimes be referred to as a *nation-state*.

People who support particular national identities may find themselves as minorities within the borders of a sovereign state associated with other *dominant* national identities. This can coincide with histories of invasion, violence or ethnic tension. Such tensions can fuel movements of people who support **separation**, the creation of a new state or joining another, or simply policy changes that allow for greater cultural protections or self-government. For example, consider some of the repression, suppression and violence attributed to the Chinese government regarding minority groups in the regions of Tibet and Xinjiang,



Political cartoon commenting on the relationship between the United States and the ICC.
Credit: Bruce Petty.

Separatism refers to a political or social movement that advocates for the separation or independence of a particular region, group or community from a larger political entity, often seeking to establish its own distinct political, cultural or social identity and forms of governance.

home to Buddhist Tibetans and Uighur Muslims (and other ethnic minority Muslims) respectively. Many members of each group do not consider themselves as ‘Chinese’, and some would prefer that their territories were not part of the Chinese state. Other notable examples of nations in tension with states include Scotland, Kurdistan, Catalonia, Quebec, Donbas and West Papua (each with their own complicated and nuanced history).

Transnational corporations

TNCs are often recognised for their ability to use their considerable economic power to push for their preferred outcomes in states. Depending on the extent to which this happens, the state can be considered ‘**captured**’ by the interests of TNCs. States tend to consider economic prosperity a key part of the national interest. TNCs can enhance this interest through foreign direct investment and by offering employment, thus making TNCs attractive strategic partners for many states. TNCs can also leverage their economic power and investment capacity to exert pressure – particularly on the governments of developing states – to relax laws regarding working conditions, environmental protection and corporate tax rates to maximise their profits. Such dynamics are seen by critics of the conduct of TNCs as being predatory and exploitative.

State capture refers to the strong influence of corporation(s) or other interests over a state’s decision-making so that those benefits serve their private interests rather than those of the community more broadly.

Similarly, TNCs can also buy political influence in the form of direct access to state decision-makers by making direct donations and funding industry interest groups. There is often considerable overlap in terms of who actually works at the higher levels of corporations and governments (leading to the perception of a ‘revolving door’ between the two).

Watch the following video for a helpful discussion of state capture:

📺 ‘What is state capture?’ Transparency International, 2021 (2 min). youtu.be/my_jt1Gvhpl

Individuals

Individuals’ relationships to the state can vary from loyalty and **patriotism** to anti-government sentiment and an outright rejection of the legitimacy of the state.

A prominent example of this is the growth in both Australia and the United States of the so-called ‘sovereign citizen’ movement. These individuals reject the authority of the state and other levels of government and understand themselves to be exempt from the law. While small, they do represent a considerable challenge to state sovereignty; in 2015, the US Department of Homeland Security listed sovereign citizens as the number one domestic terror threat in the United States. This movement was boosted somewhat during the COVID-19 pandemic when, in response to lockdown measures, vaccination and mask mandates, such views appeared to converge and cross-pollinate with other right-wing conspiracy theories.



Sovereign citizens and groups such as ‘freemen’ tend to reject the idea they are required to recognise legal instruments used by the state (including their birth certificates). This is partly based on the idea that they have never *consented* to be bound by them – as reflected by this billboard spotted in Liverpool in 2016. Credit: flic.kr/p/Ht3iiq

Patriotism is a strong sense of loyalty, pride and devotion towards one’s own country or nation, often involving a deep, emotional connection to its culture, history and interests.

Non-government organisations

NGOs do at times coordinate their action with states when their interests appear to align. However, generally NGOs are seen to perform a sort of watchdog role in scrutinising the actions taken by states and other actors.

Amnesty International (2023) outlines its three-step ‘formula’ for effecting change:

- **research** – conducting investigations into human rights violations
- **advocacy and lobbying** – using research findings to grab the attention of key decision-makers and press the accused to cease their human rights violations
- **campaigns and actions** – using petitions, letters and protests to encourage action from relevant people and institutions.

This process demonstrates how Amnesty International as an NGO pressures states, particularly by naming and shaming governments and attempting to influence public opinion to then organise and mobilise people power. This action is not necessarily against the state per se but against the state’s chief representatives – notably governments who stand accused of perpetrating acts of human rights violations.

Illegal groups

Terrorist organisations typically do not accept the legitimacy of the state and seek to overthrow or replace it. In turn, states engage in various measures to counter, delegitimise or destroy terrorist groups. Instead of engaging in outright confrontation and hostility with the state, terrorist groups typically attempt to destroy symbolic buildings and structures, make targeted attacks on government officials and personnel, or engage in relatively indiscriminate violence against particular groups. In November 2015, operatives linked to Daesh (also known as ISIS, ISIL or the Islamic State) attacked sites across France’s capital Paris, including the Bataclan concert hall, France’s national sports stadium and other sites across the city, killing 130 people; this was one of the deadliest attacks in France’s peacetime history.

Terrorism refers to the use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, for political aims; the exact scope of what classifies as terrorism is contested and politicised, but it generally carries the implication that the behaviour is immoral and/or unlawful.

Other examples of illegal groups may include organised criminal networks and outlawed gangs, who along with terrorist organisations challenge the state’s monopoly on violence. According to a July 2020 Congressional Research Service report, between 2006 and 2018, about 125 000–150 000 homicides in Mexico were related to organised crime (Beittel, 2020). Likewise, illegal groups may also draw on economic power. According to reporting by Reuters, in 2018 the Mexican government believed drug cartels were earning more than \$21 billion annually from drug sales in the United States alone (Stargardter, 2018).



Activity A – The World Cup (for states that don’t exist)

- 1 Using a combination of the stimulus prompt provided and resources suggested on the next page, along with your own research, write a reflection (no more than 300 words) that explains and explores how unrecognised countries can advocate for their statehood. Ensure that any examples you use are from the last 10 years.

There are almost 200 hundred states in the world and depending on who you ask (itself a political act), the 'official' countries list varies from 193 to 195 or 196 states and may or may not include places like Palestine and Taiwan. On any given day there are several groups, territories and governments fighting for their independence and sovereignty.

- 📌 Confederation of Independent Football Associations (CONIFA). conifa.org/en
- 📌 'CONIFA World Football Cup brings players from unrecognised states together'. ABC News, 2016. abc.net.au/news/2016-05-31/conifa-world-cup-kicks-off-in-abkhazia/7460564
- 📌 'A World Cup for unrecognised states'. BBC News, 2016. bbc.com/news/world-asia-36429207
- 📌 'The alternative World Cup'. The Guardian, 2018. theguardian.com/football/ng-interactive/2018/jun/09/the-alternative-world-cup
- 📌 'CONIFA: The other World Cup'. VICE, 2018 (24 min). youtu.be/rqz1CVP4wpM

The forms of power that may be used by global political actors to pursue their interests ^{1.2.3}

“Power ... determines who gets to determine the rules of the game.”

Eric Liu, 2014. 'How to understand power' (7 min). youtu.be/c_Eutci7ack

Both national and global political actors use power to pursue their interests. A key task for any student of politics is to consider why and how political actors use power and the consequences of that use. Power can be understood as being exercised in a 'hard' or 'soft' fashion, the latter having been coined by prominent political scientist Joseph Nye.

Hard power refers to power exercised through coercion or economic incentives.

Soft power refers to power exercised through shaping the preferences of others by attraction and appealing to shared cultural or political values.

“Power is simply the ability to affect others to get the outcomes you want, and you can do it in three ways. You can do it with threats of coercion, 'sticks', you can do it with payments, 'carrots', or you can do it by getting others to want what you want. And that ability to get others to want what you want, to get the outcomes you want without coercion or payment, is what I call soft power. ... Indeed, if you can learn to use more soft power, you can save a lot on carrots and sticks.

Traditionally, the way people thought about power was primarily in terms of military power. ... But we need a new narrative if we're to understand power in the 21st century. It's not just prevailing at war, though war still persists. It's not whose army wins; it's also whose story wins. And we have to think much more in terms of narratives and whose narrative is going to be effective.”

Joseph Nye, 2010. 'Global power shifts' (18 min). TED. ted.com/talks/joseph_nye_global_power_shifts

Nye makes two further points regarding the distinguishing features of soft power.

“When I introduced the concept of soft power in 1990, I wrote that it is characterised by voluntarism and indirection, while hard power rests on threats and inducements. If someone aims a gun at you, demands your money, and takes your wallet, what you think and want is irrelevant. That is hard power. If he persuades you to give him your money, he has changed what you think and want. That is soft power.”

Joseph Nye, 2018. 'China's soft and sharp power'. The Strategist/ASPI. aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-soft-sharp-power

“Attraction rests in the eye of beholder and can be generated by impressions of kindness, competence, or charisma. . . . To a greater degree than with hard power, soft power depends on the minds of the target audiences. A given cultural resource such as a Hollywood film may produce attraction in Brazil at the same time it produces repulsion in Saudi Arabia.”

Joseph Nye, 2021. ‘Soft power: The evolution of a concept’. *Journal of Political Power*, vol. 14. doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2021.1879572

Global political actors, like domestic ones, use a range of forms or types of power to pursue their interests. Readers will note that many of the types of power discussed here have been explored in the previous chapter; our goal here is to give them further depth and provide examples from a *global* political perspective.

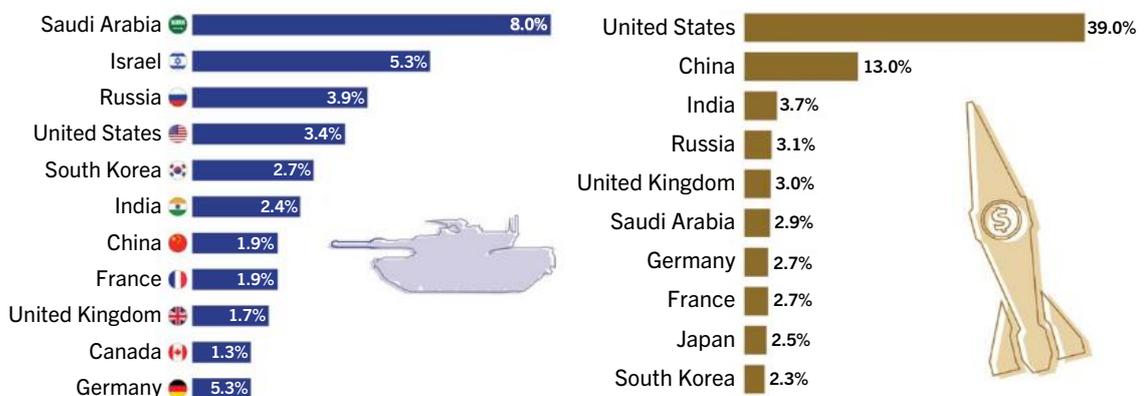
Political power 1.2.3.1

Political power in this context is almost exclusively associated with states and mechanisms of government, such as the law, deployed in ways that align with ruling parties’ interests and ideologies. A contemporary example is the way in which states may use cybersecurity laws to enforce internet surveillance and/or censorship to safeguard their own interests. In China, the Chinese Communist Party–dominated state apparatus controls the flow of online information to ensure that only regime-friendly narratives appear and the spread of dissenting views is suppressed. This includes preventing many perspectives originating from outside China, such as those of state and non-government critics of the Chinese Communist Party’s human rights, trade or military policies.

Military power 1.2.3.2

Military power is usually associated with states (or groups thereof). Occasionally, certain actors with state-like ambitions can take up arms and develop their own capacity to use violence for political ends, such as:

- illegal groups, including
 - armed separatist movements
 - local militias and vigilantes
 - organised crime syndicates
 - terrorist movements



Credit: Statista/Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
[statista.com/chart/3591/the-biggest-military-budgets-as-a-percentage-of-gdp](https://www.statista.com/chart/3591/the-biggest-military-budgets-as-a-percentage-of-gdp)
[statista.com/chart/24728/countries-largest-share-global-military-spending](https://www.statista.com/chart/24728/countries-largest-share-global-military-spending)
[statista.com/chart/24728/countries-largest-share-global-military-spending](https://www.statista.com/chart/24728/countries-largest-share-global-military-spending)

- social movements, such as those constituted around
 - religion, ethnicity or language
 - economic interests (as workers, farmers or landowners)
 - opposition to other groups
- TNCs, such as private military companies.



Police officers of the UN Integrated Mission in East Timor wearing their iconic 'blue berets'.
Credit: UN Photo/Martine Perret, 2007.
flic.kr/p/65rKNL

Additionally, sections of a state's formal military may use their power to influence political decisions and outcomes. This can range from lobbying for particular forms of investment or strategic decisions taken by the state, to more extreme cases in which they may themselves seek to overthrow their own government through force (often in coordination with sympathetic domestic or foreign interests).

In rare instances, IGGs may also employ military power. For instance, while the UN has no standing army or police force of its own it may nevertheless draw on military and police personnel from UN member states who agree to participate in specific peacekeeping missions and other operations under the mantle of the UN. A relatively recent local example of this was the UN Integrated Mission in East Timor between 2006 and 2012, which provided support during the consolidation of the new government of Timor-Leste following its independence from Indonesia in 1999.

Economic power ^{1.2.3.3}

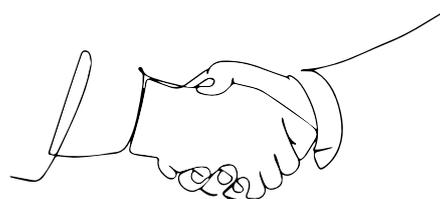
Economic power is very much associated with states and large corporations. A 2018 study conducted by researchers and academics from the University of Amsterdam ranked the 100 largest corporations and countries based on their revenues in 2016. They found that states occupied the top rankings. However, of the top 100 revenue generators, 71 were corporations. Read more about the study using the link below.

📖 'Who is more powerful – states or corporations?' The Conversation, 2018.
theconversation.com/who-is-more-powerful-states-or-corporations-99616

Wealthy individuals and illegal groups can also exercise considerable economic power. As at the time of writing there are no trillionaires on Earth, media reports throughout the early 2020s have either Elon Musk (CEO of SpaceX, Tesla and owner of X – formerly Twitter) or Jeff Bezos (Executive Chairman of Amazon) on track to become the world's first trillionaire sometime before 2030. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, citing the UN and the IMF, an estimated \$1.6 trillion (around 2.7 per cent of global GDP) is laundered annually, while approximately \$1 trillion per year is spent bribing public officials (Caparini, 2022).

Diplomatic power ^{1.2.3.4}

The capacity for formal diplomacy is almost exclusively associated with the state. It emphasises negotiation via discussions, leaders' summits, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and representation of its citizens abroad through participation in regional groupings and IGGs. It can also include diplomatic coercion such as public condemnation and criticism of a state (or other global actor).



Credit: Blinx/Shutterstock.

This also includes multilateral efforts where states work collectively as a coalition or as a lobbying bloc to sanction or isolate another state or actor from the rest of the international community.

Diplomatic power is also associated with IGGs, which serve an integral role in coordinating diplomacy. IGGs encourage cooperation and facilitate states in managing their relations with one another.

Since its emergence in the 2000s, social media has become an increasingly prominent tool through which states and leaders conduct diplomacy. This reflects a broader trend influencing the dynamics of contemporary international relations, whereby traditional interstate diplomacy (generally based on formal and private exchanges) is at times now practised on platforms that are largely informal and very public. Examples include Donald Trump in 2018 as US president taunting then German chancellor Angela Merkel (a key US ally) over her ‘open-door’ immigration policy towards Syrian refugees.

Cultural power ^{1.2.3.5}

Cultural power refers to the exercise of power through the transfer and exchange of culture. It also encompasses the ability (or *cultural capacity*) to influence a situation and/or achieve a political interest through exhibiting behaviours, values or ways of living that others find appealing. Cultural power itself is a source of soft power, whereby power is exercised through persuasion, appeal and attraction. It is often associated with the promotion of a legitimising narrative, which other global actors buy into due to the potential of mutual benefits. While mainly associated with states, TNCs (often through the popularity of a particular consumer product) can also acquire cultural power.

A prominent example of this is the so-called Nordic model that emerged in countries such as Denmark and Finland. Both countries have high levels of social welfare and state intervention in their economy, along with personal autonomy, and are associated with high standards of living, social trust and a lack of corruption. These perceived successes have given those countries an outsized influence over the development of political culture in Europe and more broadly.

An example of Australia’s attempts at projecting cultural power is *Australia now*, an Australian Government initiative by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. According to the department:

“*Australia now* is a celebration of Australia delivered annually in a country or region of significance. The program aims to strengthen bilateral ties and promote an image of modern Australia. Most of all *Australia now* is about building relationships for the future. *Australia now* programs provide a platform to showcase our capabilities, open markets and promote modern Australia; to deepen people-to-people links, strengthen networks and foster exchange, collaboration and partnership; to reflect on the cultural richness of Australia, demonstrating how Australia draws on its strong Indigenous culture and multicultural heritage; and to promote Australia as a key destination for business, investment, tourism and study.”

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2023. ‘Australia now’. dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/public-diplomacy/australia-now

Previous *Australia now* events have been held in France (2021–22), Malaysia (2021–22), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (2019), Japan (2018), Germany (2017), Brazil (2016) and Türkiye (2015).

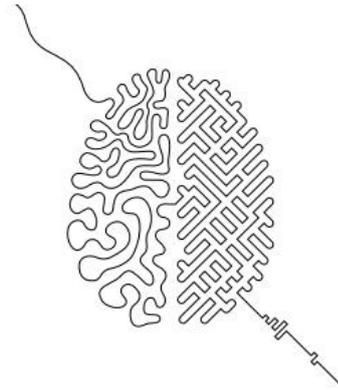
Technological power 1.2.3.6

Actors most strongly associated with this power are states and TNCs, notably those who can best invest in cutting-edge research and development that drives technological innovation.

NGOs have also demonstrated novel uses of technology to further their interests. For example, in 2016, Amnesty International was investigating Sudan's alleged use of chemical weapons against its own civilians in Darfur. While the government of Sudan barred Amnesty entry into its sovereign territory, it was still able to use technology to conduct its 'name and shame' investigation report ('Scorched Earth, Poisoned Air: Sudanese Government Forces Ravage Jebel Marra, Darfur'). In effect, Amnesty used technology to enter the country virtually/digitally by using satellite imagery as part of its investigation. This innovation has now led to Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps, an initiative where Amnesty partners with six universities around the world to train volunteer students to verify videos and photos of potential human rights violations from various global conflicts and crises.

As at the time of writing, the latest development in technological power with potentially major consequences for global politics is the advancement of artificial intelligence, again with states and TNCs largely at the forefront of these developments. Below is a series of interactive online reading links that explore artificial intelligence and the potential challenge it poses to humanity as a destabilising force in contemporary global politics.

- 📖 'Loab is showing us the unimaginable future of artificial intelligence'. ABC News, 2022. [abc.net.au/news/2022-11-26/loab-age-of-artificial-intelligence-future/101678206](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-26/loab-age-of-artificial-intelligence-future/101678206)
- 📖 'How to wrench open the black box of algorithms that decide our fate'. ABC News, 2022. [abc.net.au/news/2022-12-12/robodebt-algorithms-black-box-explainer/101215902](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-12/robodebt-algorithms-black-box-explainer/101215902)
- 📖 'What's your p[doom]? How AI could be learning a deceptive trick'. ABC News, 2023. [abc.net.au/news/2023-07-15/whats-your-pdoom-ai-researchers-worry-catastrophe/102591340](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-15/whats-your-pdoom-ai-researchers-worry-catastrophe/102591340)



Credit: Oleksandr Khoma/
Shutterstock.



Activity B – Forms of power in the Indo-Pacific

- 1 Consider the definitions and explanations of hard and soft power provided, as well as the discussion of the six different forms of power noted in our study design.
 - a To what extent can each form of power be classified as 'soft', 'hard' or both?
 - b For each form of power, provide an example to justify your previous answer.
- 2 Using the interactive map and report linked below, compare and contrast the key findings associated with the power of Australia, China and the United States.
 - 📖 'Asia Power Index 2023 edition'. Lowy Institute. power.lowyinstitute.org
 - 📖 '2023 key findings report'. Lowy Institute. power.lowyinstitute.org/downloads/lowy-institute-2023-asia-power-index-key-findings-report.pdf
 - a Use the eight measures of power (four 'resources' and four 'influences') on pages 21–28 of the key findings report to create your own summary of each.
 - b Write a personal reflection (no more than 200 words) on whether you agree or disagree with the use of these eight measures as the main indicators of a state's power. Explain and justify your argument.

3 Watch and read the following resources:

- 📄 '2023 key findings report'. Lowy Institute Asia Power Index, 2023. power.lowyinstitute.org/downloads/lowy-institute-2023-asia-power-index-key-findings-report.pdf
- 📺 'Inside China's accelerating bid for chip supremacy'. Bloomberg Originals, 2021 (20 min). youtu.be/SUfjtKtkS2U
- 📺 'Why China is losing the microchip war'. Vox, 2023 (10 min). youtu.be/Uh4QGey2zTk
- 📺 'Why Taiwan dominates the semiconductor industry, as US and China's tech war heats up'. ABC News, 2023 (7 min). youtu.be/KTi--TWTr9c
- 📺 'Rival superpowers race to boost microchip industries'. DW News, 2023 (7 min). youtu.be/QQxvOFslkHg

With reference to the provided material and your own research, develop an answer to the following extended response–style question:

What does the US–China chip war rivalry reveal about both states' political, diplomatic and technological power?

Try to keep your introductory and concluding sentences short and sharp and include at least three substantial main body paragraphs addressing each type of power noted in the question.

The perspectives that inform global political actors' actions of conflict and/or cooperation ^{1.2.4}

“Cora Crawley: 'Are we to be friends then?'
Countess Violet: 'We are allies, my dear, which can be a good deal more effective.'”
Dialogue from the first series of period drama *Downton Abbey*, 2010.

The phrase **contemporary global political arena** refers to the context in which politics has played out on a regional and planetary level within the last 10 years. In other words, it describes the recent interactions of conflict and/or cooperation between key global political actors that shape world affairs.

The word 'arena' also implies adversarial combat between duelling gladiators. While there is certainly no shortage of tensions between global political actors – who jostle for power and influence – their actual interactions are not characterised by 'dog eat dog' ruthlessness. As we've discussed, this scene is characterised by strategic competition (at times even outright conflict and violence) as well as cooperation – including alliances of convenience.

The perspectives of different global actors inform the extent to which they opt to interact with one another either cooperatively or through conflict. Four of the key perspectives that shape how different global actors see and understand their interests are **nationalism, ideology, humanitarian concerns** and **global influence**. These perspectives act as 'drivers' that influence the decisions ultimately taken by global actors and, thus, 'steer' them down particular policy pathways, motivating different courses of action. Another way to think about these perspectives is to see them as the factors shaping a global actor's pursuit of a particular interest.

Nationalism ^{1.2.4.1}

Nationalism is a perspective associated with nations and states. It refers to the idea that the most important political identity is that of the nation, whereby people organise themselves into national communities or societies that require loyalty and service from its constituting members.

Nationalism refers to identifying with one's own state and support for its interests, particularly to the exclusion or detriment of other states' interests.

It's important to note that there are many different sorts of nationalisms. For example, ethnic nationalism refers to the commitment by a group that shares (or imagines itself to share) common bonds of culture and heritage. In this variant of nationalism, the concepts of 'nation' and 'state' merge to form an ethno-nationalist identity. Conversely, civic nationalism refers to a commitment to a state based on its ideals, values and principles. This brand of nationalism tends to be associated with multi-ethnic states.

Subsequently, there are also forms of nationalism that seek to support, extend and develop existing states to better align with nationalists' priorities. This can include pushes to integrate or expel members of other ethnic groups (using education and migration policies), or to push state governments to seek to absorb or 'annex' territories currently held by *other* states with whom they share cultural affinities. Conversely, nationalism can also take the form of secessionism, in which proponents seek to break away from a state to create their own and/or join another.

Ideology 1.2.4.2

As we've learnt, **Ideology** refers to a set of interconnected ideas that are organised and formalised into a worldview or guiding philosophy. These ideas form a value system of core beliefs and principles, which can shape a political actor's perspective of the world, influence political decisions and drive political actions.

Ideologies are generally underpinned by three key considerations:

- assumptions regarding how politics operates
- preferences or visions for how society should be organised
- strategies for how to bring about their goals.

All global actors have perspectives that are informed by ideology, whether stated explicitly or otherwise. States tend to be governed by members of political parties who, in turn, have their own established (and evolving) political ideologies, interests and sympathies. NGOs also have ideologies, although these tend to be organised around *particular* issues or principles that may be less overtly political. For example, Greenpeace is strongly influenced by two ideologies (as suggested by its name). The first is environmentalism, which focuses on the protection of nature and biodiversity and preventing pollution. The second is pacifism, which focuses on non-violence and disarmament. The extent to which NGOs ensure their own financial independence (in relying on donations from private contributions rather than from governments, corporations or political parties) may also be understood in some sense as a sort of ideological position.

The way that global actors articulate their own goals and values (such as on their websites and social media) can be taken as expressions of their ideology. That said, it is important to think critically and seek different perspectives to develop a fuller picture of what ideological positions inform an actor's behaviour. Actors may make strategic decisions about what they say and do that seek to 'manage the brand' (what looks good), which they may prioritise over sincerely expressing their ideas and interests.

Humanitarian concerns 1.2.4.3

As a perspective, **humanitarian** concerns are often associated with particular IGGs (notably the UN) and NGOs, but at times can also apply to states, regional groupings and other non-state actors such as nations and individuals.

Humanitarianism is the active belief in the value of human life, where individuals assist each other to improve the conditions of humanity for moral and unselfish reasons.

Consider the third core purpose of the UN:

“To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”

UN Charter, 1945. [un.org/en/about-us/un-charter](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter)

One of the most prominent humanitarian organisations is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRC). The ICRC has seven fundamental principles that serve as a framework for humanitarian assistance (helping people in need during armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies). These are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.



Consider the ICRC's first principle of humanity:

“This principle, which underpins all the other principles, encompasses several ideas. Suffering is universal and requires a response: it cannot be met with indifference. Respect for human dignity is paramount in everything the Movement [the ICRC] does. It implies helping and protecting others regardless of who they are or what they have done. The Movement protects life and health by promoting international humanitarian law, preventing disaster and disease, and undertaking life-saving activities, from first aid to the provision of food and shelter.”

ICRC, 2015. 'The fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement'. [icrc.org/sites/default/files/topic/file_plus_list/4046-the_fundamental_principles_of_the_international_red_cross_and_red_crescent_movement.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/topic/file_plus_list/4046-the_fundamental_principles_of_the_international_red_cross_and_red_crescent_movement.pdf)

Global influence 1.2.4.4

Because of their ability to operate beyond the constraints of just one country, all global actors have some ability to exert influence on a global scale.

In 2019, tech giant Meta (formerly Facebook) announced its plan to introduce a digital currency named Libra, intended as a 'global currency and financial infrastructure'. This initiative aimed to enable billions of users worldwide to conduct financial transactions across borders. While Meta aimed to extend access to the 1.7 billion people lacking bank accounts globally, many states perceived Libra's potential global impact as a challenge to their financial sovereignty, as it threatened to undermine their central banks' ability to effectively manage economies through their control over the supply of money. Fears about Libra enabling money laundering and potentially destabilising the global financial system following the 2008 crisis were also raised. In response to widespread state opposition and pressure, Meta dropped its cryptocurrency project and sold its assets in 2022.



Activity C – The World Food Programme

- Using a combination of the suggested resources below and your own research, create an infographic on the work of the UN World Food Programme to combat the global hunger crisis, which has been worsened by the effects of climate change, armed conflict and disruptions to food supply.
 - United Nations World Food Programme. wfp.org
 - 'Live HungerMap'. United Nations World Food Programme. hungermap.wfp.org
 - 'The Nobel Peace Prize 2020: World Food Programme facts'. The Nobel Prize, 2020. nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2020/wfp/facts
 - 'The Nobel Peace Prize 2020: World Food Programme'. United Nations, 2020. un.org/en/about-us/nobel-peace-prize/wfp-2020
 - 'Nobel Peace Prize: United Nations World Food Programme wins for efforts to combat hunger'. BBC News, 2020. bbc.com/news/world-54476569
 - '6 things you should know about WFP'. World Food Program USA, 2021 (1 min). youtu.be/rgP20B5AOic
 - 'Behind the scenes: WFP humanitarian airdrops'. World Food Programme, 2020 (3 min). youtu.be/Rt8N4NnomVA
 - 'A world going hungry? How conflict and climate change disrupt global food supply'. DW Business Beyond, 2022 (20 min). youtu.be/5YcvKvxWaCE
 - 'Former head of World Food Programme discusses global hunger crisis'. CBS News, 2023 (5 min). youtu.be/uufNAXmK20Y

The interests of global political actors and their ability to achieve political stability or create change ^{1.2.5}

“History may not repeat itself, but it often does rhyme.”

Attributed to American writer and humourist Mark Twain.

Provided is a concise summary of the interests pursued by different global political actors. (Remember – the expansion of power and influence, as well as ensuring their own survival, tends to be an interest common to all political actors.)

Global actor	Interests they tend to have and pursue
States	Strategic national interests framed in terms of security, economic prosperity, regional relationships and regional standing
Regional groupings	Advancing regional cooperation (and/or integration) with member states along economic, political or military lines
IGGs	Promoting cooperation and multilateralism by facilitating relationships between states and promoting international norms and laws
NGOs	Raising awareness, organising and mobilising actions, and advocating for a particular cause (e.g. human rights or the environment)
TNCs	Maximising profits and creating value for shareholders

The ability of actors to achieve political stability or create change is extremely broad and often best explored in context. All political acts affect the distribution of power within a given system; those acts that reinforce existing patterns, such as behaving predictably or in line with international norms, might be considered acts that promote stability. Conversely, acts that deviate from those norms and/or transform how power is distributed tend to create change.

The case study at the end of this chapter includes a multifaceted exploration of change and stability regarding the issue of climate change.

The theories that explain how global actors operate or how they should operate ^{1.2.6}

When considering any political issue or situation, every observer brings their own set of assumptions and beliefs that influence and colour how they appear. In matters of global politics, prominent theories about ‘how things are, and how they should be’ operate in this way – as lenses – not dissimilar to how ideology exaggerates or minimises certain elements in national political issues. Our study design asks us to focus on three of the most prominent schools of thought in global politics: **cosmopolitanism**, **liberalism** and **realism**. These serve as theories that attempt to explain and interpret how and why global actors make (or should make) particular decisions.



Cosmopolitanism ^{1.2.6.1}

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”
Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

Cosmopolitanism is a theory that promotes the idea of the oneness of humanity. Ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope is credited with the first use of the word. When asked ‘where are you from?’, Diogenes replied, ‘I am a citizen of the world’. Cosmopolitanism tends to view humankind as one moral community, whereby identity extends beyond national borders and, thus, by extension, so too do our ethical obligations to one another as fellow humans.

Cosmopolitanism is the idea that all human beings are members of a single moral community that transcends national boundaries; this leads them to prioritise cooperation to reach common goals and meet challenges faced by the global community.

Subsequently, cosmopolitanism has also assisted with the spread of the concept of **global citizenship**. According to the UN (2023), this is defined as ‘the umbrella term for social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale’. In short, it serves as an expectation on *all* global actors that they act responsibly, ethically and sustainably in their interactions with one another.

The most prominent contemporary expression of cosmopolitanism is in relation to human rights, generally through various international legal instruments (declarations, treaties, bilateral and multilateral agreements, UN resolutions). These are supported by various norms, such as the ‘responsibility to protect’, and the work of particular IGGs (such as the ICC) and various NGOs. Together they form an international human rights architecture that seeks to corral and encourage various global actors (particularly states, corporations and individuals) to respect human rights.

Underpinning human rights are various principles – such as universality, non-discrimination and equality – which can themselves be considered cosmopolitan in nature:

- universality is a principle that states human rights belong to everyone, everywhere, all the time
- human rights apply equally to everyone
- people must be protected from unjustified discrimination, whether based on ethnicity, sex, gender, language, religion or political persuasion.

Liberalism 1.2.6.2

“The search for liberty is simply part of the greater search for a world where respect for the rule of law and human rights is universal – a world free of dictators, terrorists, warmongers and fanatics, where men and women of all nationalities, races, traditions and creeds can coexist in the culture of freedom, where borders give way to bridges that people cross to reach their goals limited only by free will and respect for one another’s rights.”

Mario Vargas Llosa, 2011. ‘Literature and the search for liberty’. Wall Street Journal.
[wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203687504577005983807718496](https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203687504577005983807718496)

Liberalism, as the name implies, is based on the pursuit of liberty. Key liberal thinker John Stuart Mill articulated this perspective as follows.

“The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it. Each is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily, or mental or spiritual. Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.”

John Stuart Mill, 1859. *On Liberty*. J.W. Parker and Sons.

When applied to the global political arena, liberalism (in this context often referred to as **liberal internationalism**) is a theory that claims global cooperation – and by extension world peace – is very much possible if coordinated and promoted by international institutions driven by such values.

Liberal internationalism is a belief that supports international institutions, open markets, liberal democracy and collective cooperative security.

These values include:

- the rule of law applying to everyone (governments *and* individuals)
- liberal democracy
- human rights
- justice – including procedural fairness and proportionality (where punishments and rewards are deserved)
- equality – all people are seen as having the same inherent value
- minimally regulated capitalism, based on private property and the pursuit of profit
- free trade, with minimal restrictions on trade across boundaries
- collective security through alliances and defensive pacts.

The rules-based international order that developed after World War II (of which significant elements persist today) is sometimes also referred to and understood as a **liberal** international order. Implicit in the liberal perspective on global politics is that the possibilities for peace and prosperity allowed for by this kind of international order offer states and actors an incentive to work to maintain it – a sort of win-win situation for all involved.

Realism 1.2.6.3

“What state in its right mind would want other powerful states located in its region? ... In the anarchic world of international politics, it is better to be Godzilla than Bambi. ... The fact is that international politics is a nasty and dangerous business and no amount of goodwill can ameliorate the intense security competition that sets in when an aspiring hegemon appears. ... That is the tragedy of great power politics.”

John J. Mearsheimer, 2005. 'The rise of China will not be peaceful at all'.
The Australian. bit.ly/3EG46as

Of the three theories we explore in this study, **realism** has traditionally played a dominant role in shaping the approach of key decision-makers within states. It is largely the prevailing mindset among many of the key decision-makers driving the actual policies of states who tend to dominate global politics.

Realism is the idea that global actors prioritise their own interests over the needs of others, often seeking to maximise their own power to safeguard their own survival.

The key assumptions of this theory are that all states operate in a global political arena where there is no supreme overriding authority capable of maintaining peace or ensuring justice. This is sometimes referred to as an **anarchic** order – a term often misunderstood as meaning chaos, lawlessness or a lack of 'rules', but in truth simply means to be without a ruler.

Anarchy refers to a state of power relations where there is no dominant ruler or overall authority.

Due to this structure, whereby states and other actors cannot appeal to a higher authority, realists contend that states must effectively look after themselves. In this view, interstate relationships tend to take the shape of strategic competition; this sees states prioritise their own interests and survival by maximising their power – particularly in terms of material resources such as military might and economic strength. In contrast to liberal perspectives, realists tend to understand global politics as more of a 'win-lose' system, where states may only benefit at the expense of others.

The impact of global interconnectedness on the power of global actors 1.2.7

“Globalization is associated with an evolving global political system. This system embraces an enormous diversity of states, international agencies, non-state actors, and civil society organizations. Power in this global political system is no longer the monopoly of states, but is highly diffused, with important consequences for who gets what, how, when and where. This gives rise to a distinctive form of contentious global politics: a politics of domination, competition, and resistance among and between powerful states and powerful non-state forces.

'Global politics' is a term which acknowledges that the scale of political life has been transformed: politics is not confined within territorial boundaries. Decisions and actions taken in one locale affect the security and prosperity of communities in distant parts of the globe, and vice versa, such that local politics is globalized and world politics becomes 'localised'.”

Anthony McGrew, 2020. 'Globalization and global politics', in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by J. Baylis et al. Oxford University Press.

An important caveat for any discussion about increasing **global interconnectedness** is that it is not really new. Various periods of human history have featured accelerated growth in connectivity. The military expansion of the Roman Empire (tied together through its construction of an unprecedentedly extensive road network) brought people from across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East under the same political system. Other examples include the spread of ideas and religion along the ancient Silk Road; the colonisation of and subsequent exchanges between the Americas and the rest of the world from the 15th century; changes in global production and distribution triggered by the printing press, the Industrial Revolution and the telegraph; and the mass migration of peoples in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

The globalisation of the last 30 years differs in its intensity and in the *rate* of change regarding interconnectedness – aided by the enormous changes in technology relating to communications, travel and trade. Far from the hyperlocal lives most people experienced just a few hundred years ago, the world is now more entangled, enmeshed and ever-shrinking, as ‘over there’ collides with ‘over here’. The implication is that many political issues and crises are likely to transcend national borders and regional boundaries.

The impact of global interconnectedness on the power for global actors has been mixed and varied, depending on a number of contextual factors.

States

While states have derived many benefits from global interconnectedness, this dynamic has also been associated with a decline in their dominance relative to other types of actors. In other words, while the state still persists and dominates, it must now contend with many other types of global actors whose capacities have been multiplied by changes in technology – more so, arguably, than states’ own capacities have. However, some states have demonstrated their ability to resist and push back when it comes to these challenges.

Increased economic interconnectedness appears to have made war between states less likely. This is because states have more to lose from disruptions to their own access to global supply chains than they might expect to gain from military actions. This effect more or less scales with the extent to which a particular state is involved in trade relationships with its neighbours and in globalised trade networks more broadly. Conversely, states that are politically isolated may then find themselves



The value of interstate trade of goods and services as a share of the global economy (estimated) – 1500 to 2021. Adapted from ‘Globalization over 5 centuries’. Our World in Data, 2021. ourworldindata.org/grapher/globalization-over-5-centuries; ‘Trade (% GDP)’. The World Bank, 2023. data.worldbank.org/indicator/ne.trd.gnfs.zs

having less intense economic ties with other states, potentially pushing them towards becoming more self-reliant and/or reorienting their economic relationships towards states and actors who are also isolated. After a period of modest integration with Western economies following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has since the 2010s been subjected to escalating sanctions and divestment as a political response to their military interventions in neighbouring countries. In turn, this has led to their increased reliance on trade relationships with non-Western states – chiefly China and India (Lipsky and Graham, 2023).

You can read more about this example here:

 'Economic ties among nations spur peace. Or do they?' The New York Times, 2022.
[nytimes.com/2022/03/04/business/economy/ukraine-russia-global-economy.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/business/economy/ukraine-russia-global-economy.html)

Modern information and communication technology – most importantly the internet – has also changed how states respond to and justify actions taken in the global political arena. Government leaders have new and more direct avenues of engaging with a global audience, including their own social media, which they can use to exert pressure on other leaders, states and actors in a way that is remarkably different to how they might have done even 70 years ago. Serious geopolitical confrontations like the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 involved a set of frantic and behind-closed-doors negotiations between the major players, with conventional news media gradually trailing behind in their reporting. A comparably serious situation in the 2020s (such as the Wagner Group's rebellion in Russia in 2023) was far more likely to feature concerns about public perception and brand management, and would include rapid information exchange (social media chatter and footage) being circulated in real time – feedback that then influences how leaders behave.

Institutions of global governance

Compared to their predecessors, IGGs have become much more inclusive of additional stakeholders in their operations in policymaking – mainly due to greater capacity for international travel and instantaneous communication. Consider the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) in which just five European powers negotiated among themselves a set of new boundaries and political arrangements that were applied to the rest of Europe, parts of Africa and the Americas (despite protests from smaller states and interest groups present at the Congress); these arrangements remained more or less intact until the outbreak of World War I a century later (Murphy, 2015). Today, while the UN Security Council too features just five permanent members with veto power, there are 10 other seats that are rotated among other member states. Increased inclusiveness of smaller powers and non-state actors to some extent enhances the claims to legitimacy made by IGGs, which, in turn, lends them additional moral authority.

As they have matured, IGGs have also developed a 'mandate' to coordinate actions and responses across a wider range of policy areas where consequences have regional or global implications. This includes issues and crises relating to human rights, climate change, financial crises and pandemics. The WHO's role during the early COVID-19 pandemic involved:

- coordinating global efforts to monitor, understand and respond to the virus
- providing timely information, guidelines and recommendations to member states, health professionals and the public
- facilitating information sharing and supporting research
- advocating for fair distribution of essential supplies including vaccines.

This contrasts heavily with the extremely limited funding and role played by the Health Section of the League of Nations (the predecessor to the UN) in coordinating responses to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–19.

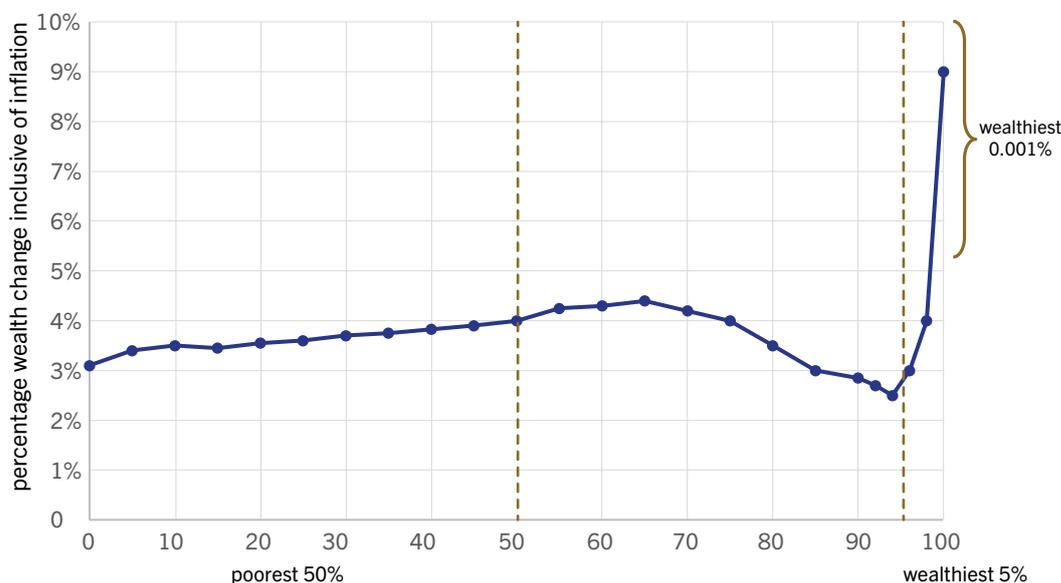
Non-government organisations

Facilitated by dramatic changes in communications and technology – itself a direct result of global interconnectedness – modern NGOs have global reach far beyond their equivalents from the mid-20th century. This allows them to serve as a channel for citizens to participate in and push the decisions and actions of states in particular directions. Through their grasp of digital technology, NGOs can even bypass the physical barriers that states may otherwise use to bar NGOs from entering their sovereign territory. Likewise, through their own independent investigations and awareness raising, NGOs can also scrutinise and report on the behaviour of states and other actors.

Transnational corporations

One of the main impacts of economic interconnectedness has been a significant increase in the power that TNCs have in global politics and the global economy. Like NGOs, this power is also facilitated by dramatic changes in communications and technology (again, this is itself a direct result of global interconnectedness). Through global interconnectedness, many TNCs are also at the forefront of driving progress and innovation, particularly when developments have the potential to generate a profit for shareholders.

Average annual wealth growth rate by wealth group (estimated) – 1995 to 2021



The vast majority of the very wealthiest individuals have the bulk of their wealth invested in TNCs. Since 1995, the wealthiest 0.001 per cent have seen their real wealth grow by 5–9 per cent each year, while the bottom half have seen theirs grow by less than 4 per cent each year.

The political significance of key global political actors in at least one global issue 1.2.8

The case study that follows features an in-depth discussion and analysis of the political significance of key political actors regarding one specific issue: climate change.

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Case study: Climate change

Climate change can be considered one of the greatest moral challenges of our time. It presents a challenge to the very existence of humanity and it calls into question the type of world we want to live in today, as well as the type of world we want to cultivate for future generations.

Climate change refers to ‘long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns’. Many of these shifts are natural, but since the 1800s human activity has been the main driver of climate change – primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil. As a result of this, Earth is now approximately 1.1 degrees Celsius warmer than it was in the late 1800s, with the decade from 2011–20 being the warmest on record (UN, 2023).

A good general overview of climate change as a global political issue is available here:

📄 ‘What is climate change?’ United Nations, 2023. un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change

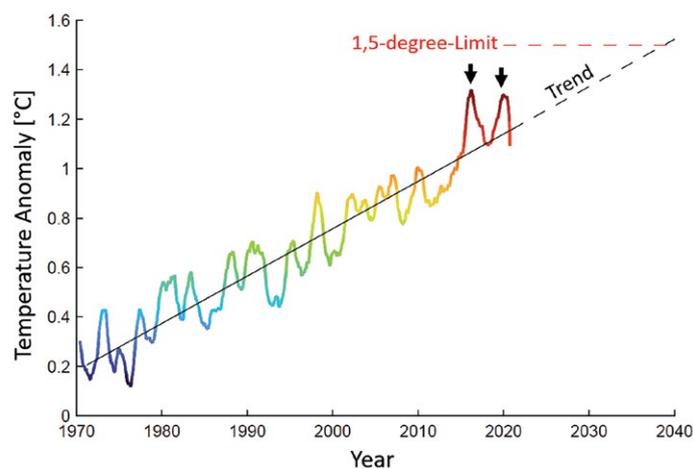
The **consequences** of climate change require urgent action from global political actors including IGGs, states and individuals. These include the increased frequency and severity of climate events such as droughts and bushfires, rising sea levels and the loss of environmental biodiversity. Our study design invites us to consider whether national interests prevail over finding solutions to global climate challenges and how other economic priorities and political factors affect its resolution.

Climate change is being experienced by humanity in diverse ways. It is changing humanity’s health, our ability to access food and safe housing, and the way we work. Some locations and groups of people are already more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change than others, such as those living in low-lying island states and developing locations.

In a series of reports released by the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** for six years up until 2023, scientists stipulated that limiting the global

temperature increase to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius would help humanity avoid the worst impacts of climate change and maintain a liveable world (UN, 2023). Despite this, a lack of inaction by many of the world’s governments sees current policies in place pointing to a 2.8 degrees Celsius temperature increase by the end of this century.

Many of the **political issues** that exist in responding to climate change revolve around the ethical implications of this global issue. The emissions that cause climate change come from every part of the world and affect all of humanity in



Average global temperature each year from 1970 to 2020 (relative to mean 1880–1910, NASA data) along with trend line (extended to 2040). Credit: Stefan Rahmstorf, 2021. RealClimate. realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2021/04/two-graphs-show-the-path-to-1-5-degrees

different ways. However, there is disagreement over who is truly responsible for producing these emissions and, hence, who has the greatest responsibility to act first. Dealing with climate change requires significant financial investment and changes to diplomacy and the global economy that many global political actors (such as states) are reluctant to make.



Key terms overview

- **Adaptation** is the adjustment or preparation of natural or human systems to a new or changing environment that moderates harm.
- **Anthropogenic** refers to something being made by people or resulting from human activity.
- **Atmosphere** is the gaseous envelope that surrounds Earth.
- **Carbon dioxide (or CO₂)** is a naturally occurring gas that is also released as a by-product of burning fossil fuels, particular forms of land use and other industrial processes; it is the principal greenhouse gas that affects Earth's atmosphere.
- **Climate** refers to the average weather over a period ranging from months to thousands of years.
- **Emissions** refers to the release of substances – usually gases in the context of climate change – into the atmosphere.
- **Fossil fuel** is a general term for organic materials formed from decayed plants and animals that have been converted into coal, oil or gas by exposure to heat and pressure in Earth's crust over hundreds of millions of years.
- **Global warming** describes the ongoing global average increase in temperature near Earth's surface.
- **Greenhouse gases** are gases that absorb infrared radiation in the atmosphere; some examples include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide.
- **Mitigation** refers to human interventions to reduce the human impact on the climate system, including strategies to reduce greenhouse gas sources and emissions.
- **Weather** is the atmospheric condition at any given time or place, measured in terms of factors such as wind, temperature, humidity and precipitation.

Adapted from United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2016. 'Glossary of climate change terms'. [19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange/glossary-climate-change-terms_.html](https://www.epa.gov/climatechange/glossary-climate-change-terms_.html)

Causes and consequences

The causes and consequences of climate change are complex and include a combination of social, historical, economic and environmental factors. These causes and consequences are highly interconnected and can be attributed to many of the processes associated with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s and the emergence of globalisation in the 20th century. Climate change can be considered especially diabolical as a policy issue because many of the consequences of climate change may *further* exacerbate global warming. This is sometimes referred to as a 'feedback loop' (see the end of this section for a visualisation).

Causes

According to the UN (2023), the following factors are the most influential causes of climate change. They contribute both historical and immediate understanding of how climate change has come about.

Generating electricity

Making electricity through the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil is a primary contributor to the creation of global emissions. These electricity generation methods produce carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide, which, as greenhouse gases, trap the sun's heat within Earth's atmosphere.

Manufacturing goods

The global manufacturing industry produces greenhouse gas emissions by burning fossil fuels to produce energy to assist the creation of consumer goods such as clothing, plastics, electronics, iron, steel and cement. The manufacturing industry is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions globally.

Deforestation

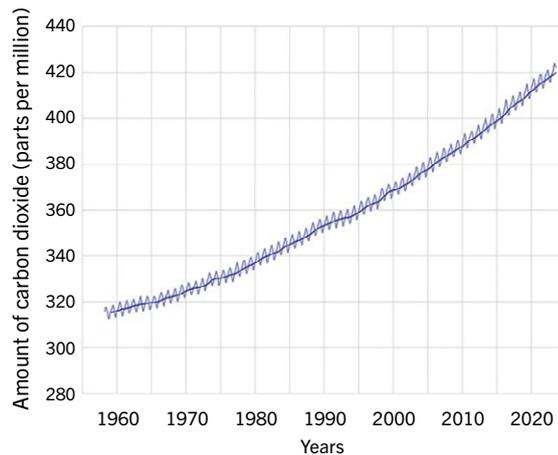
The clearing of forests to be used as resources – or of land more generally to create infrastructure such as farmland – contributes to the production of greenhouse emissions, as trees release the carbon dioxide they have been storing when they are cut down. Because forests absorb carbon dioxide, deforestation undermines nature's natural processes that keep greenhouse emissions out of the atmosphere. Deforestation and agricultural land use is responsible for approximately one-quarter of all global greenhouse gas emissions.

Transportation

Global usage of transportation powered by fossil fuels, such as cars, trucks, ships and planes, makes transportation a key contributor to carbon emissions. Global transportation is responsible for approximately one-quarter of all global greenhouse gas emissions, and research suggests that this will continue to increase in the immediate future.

Production and consumption

Food production is another contributor to carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases through deforestation and the clearing of land for agricultural use. The food production process requires many steps that create global emissions through the use of fertilisers to grow crops, energy to run farming equipment, and transportation to distribute goods. Further, human consumption of goods such as clothing, electronics, plastics and meat-based diets contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.



Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere over time, 1960–2020. Source: Rebecca Lindsey, 2023. 'Climate change: Atmospheric carbon dioxide'. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide

Consequences

The consequences of climate change are far reaching and truly global. They will continue to have an impact as long as global political actors continue to burn fossil fuels to sustain many elements of modern life. According to the UN (2023), the following factors are the most urgent consequences of climate change. They contribute both historical and immediate understanding of how the causes of climate change in some instances have permanently changed life on Earth.

Consequences of climate change	Higher than average temperatures 	Disruptions to fresh water supplies	Disruptions to agriculture
		Changing rainfall patterns	Heat-induced illnesses
	Increased natural disasters 	Storms, cyclones and hurricanes	Drought
		Bush and forest fires	Flooding
	A warmer, rising ocean 	Higher sea levels	Population displacement
		Accelerated melting of ice sheets	Cyclones
		Increasing acidity	Threats to marine species

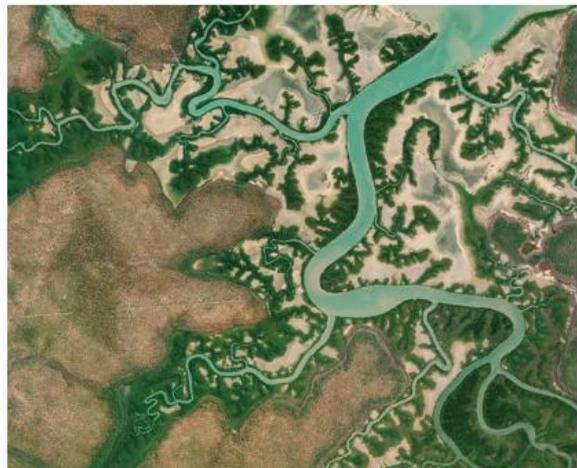


Increased temperatures

The increase in greenhouse gas emissions correlates with the rise in Earth's global surface temperature. Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one, with nearly all locations on Earth experiencing hotter days and increased frequency of heatwaves. Temperatures in the Arctic have warmed at least twice as fast as the global average.

Increased natural disasters

Climate change is creating more frequent and intense natural disasters such as storms and bushfires. This is because as temperatures rise, more moisture evaporates, and this increases extreme rainfall, flooding and storms. Cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons also occur more frequently, as they feed on the warm waters at the ocean's surface. Further, climate change is exacerbating water shortages in already water-stressed regions, which has led to more harsh periods of drought. These droughts not only dry out agricultural land, placing pressure on food systems, but also (paired with an increase in temperature) raise the likelihood of bushfires.



Credit: Naeblys/Shutterstock.

A warming, rising ocean

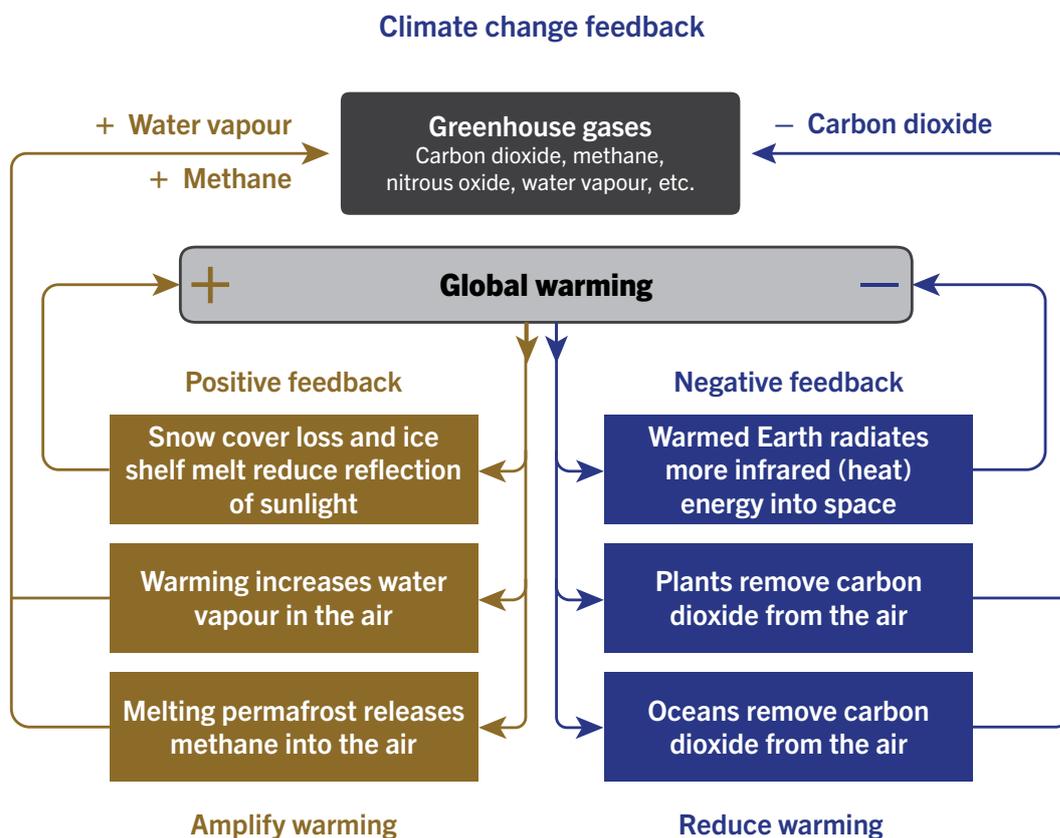
Oceans across all parts of the world have significantly warmed over the past two decades, soaking up most of the heat created through industrial processes and the use of fossil fuels. As the oceans heat up, their volume also increases, since water expands as it gets warmer. In conjunction with this, melting ice sheets in Arctic regions causes sea levels to rise. The ocean also absorbs carbon dioxide, keeping it away from the atmosphere; however, this causes the ocean to become more acidic, which has major effects on marine life and coral reefs.

Species decline

As temperatures on land and in the ocean increase, climate change poses a risk to countless animal species. The world is currently losing species at a rate 1000 times greater than any other time in human history. Currently, one million species are estimated to be at risk of extinction within the next two decades. In addition, increased natural disasters also threaten species preservation.

Health, poverty and displacement

Climate change and its consequences is the single biggest contemporary threat to humanity. The results of climate change are already harming the environment, and this has a direct flow-on effect on our general health. Key factors of consequence include increased air pollution, exposure to extreme weather events, outbreaks of disease, forced displacement and inadequate access to food. Climate change also increases the factors that create and keep people in poverty, including water scarcity and the impact of extreme weather events on home, safety and work.





Activity D – Climate change: Causes and consequences

- 1 Using the causes and consequences outlined in the text, and supplemented by your own research, create and fill out a table modelled as below to summarise your understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change.

	What is it? (three dot points)	Evidence of this (three dot points)	Is this an intended or unintended consequence? Justify your response (two dot points)
Cause 1			
Cause 2			
Consequence 1			
Consequence 2			

- 2 Answer the following practice questions.
 - a Identify one cause of climate change.
 - b Explain the cause of climate change identified in the previous question.
 - c Identify one consequence of climate change.
 - d Explain the consequence of climate change identified in the previous question.
 - e Analyse how one cause has directly contributed to one consequence of climate change.

Differing political interests

The **causes** and **consequences** of climate change present an immense challenge to global political actors. The actions of political actors in the context of this global crisis are motivated by several interests, including:

- the expansion of influence through **diplomatic power** used by IGGs
- the national and strategic interests of states through **political power**
- the economic interests of TNCs through **economic power**
- the **social capacity** of individuals and social movements.

Evidently, the interests of different political actors should align in the common understanding that immediate action against climate change is needed. Instead, the complexities of global politics demonstrate that varied political interests are at play in this global crisis.

Institutions of global governance

The **UN** is the world's most predominant IGG equipped to deal with the causes and consequences of climate change. Its political interests are primarily in utilising diplomatic power to influence and guide member states' responses to this global crisis.

The UN has established two key mechanisms that assist the pursuit of its political interests:

- 1 **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:** The IPCC was established in 1988 by the UN Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization. Its purpose is to assess information in scientific and technical literature related to all aspects of climate change. The IPCC draws on the expertise of scientists from over 60 states who contribute to their periodic assessments of the scientific understanding of climate change and its consequences (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2017). The IPCC is viewed as the official advisory body to

the UN's member states on the science of climate change. Because of this, it remains one of the key mechanisms of the UN's use of diplomatic power to influence its member states' actions on climate change.

- 2 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):** The UNFCCC establishes the overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to face the consequences of climate change. The Convention recognises that climate change is a global crisis because the climate system is a shared resource affected by industrial activity worldwide. The UNFCCC outlines that governments:
- must gather and share information on greenhouse gas emissions, policies and best practices
 - must launch national strategies for addressing greenhouse gas emissions and cooperate in preparing to adapt to the impacts of climate change (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2017).

The framework possesses near universal membership of the UN's member states, with 189 of 193 states ratifying the Convention since its inception in March 1994. In this way, the UNFCCC supports the practical application of the IPCC in influencing member states to collaborate and use diplomacy to face the consequences of climate change.



States

Despite the UN establishing the global framework for member states' responses to climate change, tension exists between each state's national and strategic interests to maintain their **sovereignty** over the collective interests of the wider **international community**. The prevailing **realist** mindset of states also contributes to inaction on climate change, as the state is (by default) a self-interested global political actor.

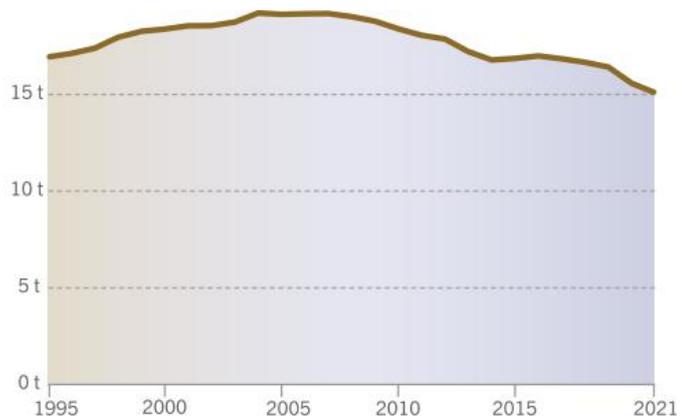
Climate change remains one of the toughest and most complex global issues for states. This is because it transcends the government of the day and exists beyond the ideological viewpoints of different states' political parties and domestic issues. In the context of **Australia** and the **United States** as liberal democracies, the political interests of both states reside in their domestic use of political power and willingness to address climate change.

In the United States, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions being produced has been consistent since the 1990s, even though the state's economy and population has grown (Kamarck, 2019). Global emissions have continued to increase in the meantime. Because of this, although scientific evidence about the causes and consequences of climate change have increased, many citizens and important members of the political class have remained indifferent about the global crisis, instead preferring to prioritise other domestic issues such as employment and dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compared to the United States, Australia's emissions continue to increase, with emissions for the year to March 2022 estimated to be up 1.5 per cent from 2021 (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 2022). Notably, Australia has one of the highest carbon dioxide emission rates *per person* (sometimes noted as 'per capita') in the world, so much so that the average Australian generates approximately double the amount of carbon dioxide pollution than the average person in mainland China.

Australians have also experienced considerable environmental impacts from climate change with increasing severity in recent years – this will only continue in the coming decades due to ongoing disruptions to the weather and climate. It is predicted that Australia will experience a continued increase in the number of dangerous fire weather days, rising sea levels and acidification of the oceans surrounding Australia (Bureau of Meteorology, 2022). Despite this, a lack of **bipartisan agreement** between the two major political parties in Australia – the Liberal Party and the Labor Party – in how best to deal with the visible and tangible consequences of climate change has meant that other domestic issues concerning the economy and COVID-19 have been prioritised instead.

Average annual CO₂ emissions per person in Australia (tonnes)



Data from World Bank, via Data Commons, 2023.
datacommons.org/place/country/AUS

The use of political power by both states demonstrates that while there is some national and strategic interest to address climate change, its demanding nature sees states more interested in pursuing other elements of the domestic policy and power agenda.



The threat posed by rising sea levels to peoples and states of the Pacific Islands

Many of the low-lying states in the Pacific face a number of unique and particularly severe challenges in relation to the effects of climate change:

- **Vulnerability to rising sea levels:** low-lying states are exceptionally vulnerable to rising sea levels due to their minimal elevation above the sea; this results in the loss of land (including that used for agriculture), coastal erosion and sources of fresh water.
- **Relocation and displacement:** rising sea levels force many residents to consider relocation, presenting complex challenges in terms of where and how to move entire communities while maintaining their cultural identities and political autonomy.
- **Loss of sovereignty:** the possibility of losing their territories completely to inundation poses an enormous risk to the viability of states themselves; such challenges demand unconventional solutions in a global political environment where sovereignty is tied so closely to territory.



The island nation of Kiribati, as captured by the International Space Station in 2002.

You can learn more about these (from a Kiribatian perspective) here:

- 'The seas are coming for us in Kiribati. Will Australia rehome us?' The Conversation, 2023.
theconversation.com/the-seas-are-coming-for-us-in-kiribati-will-australia-rehome-us-172137

Transnational corporations

The economic interests of TNCs lie in their use of economic power to influence the decision-making of states and the global economy. These interests relate to climate change, as they have an immense influence on the production of global emissions and, in turn, the power to contribute to action against the crisis. TNCs are largely driven by profit and **multinational investment** (i.e. investment flows that cross state borders). Thus, their economic power is yet to be fully rationalised in a way that seeks to slow down the consequences of climate change.

The **global supply chains** of major TNCs are responsible for nearly one-fifth of global emissions. For example, the emissions produced by Coca-Cola's global supply chain are almost equivalent to China's food production sector, which feeds over 1.3 billion people. This is comparable to the emissions of Walmart, which total more than Germany's entire retail sector, and Samsung, which produces more emissions than all electronic manufacturers in India, Thailand and Vietnam combined (Win, 2020).

Beyond this, the economic power of TNCs often undermines other global efforts to combat the consequences of climate change due to investments in developing states. This not only reduces the emissions of *developed* states but also places more burden on and redirects emissions to *developing* states.



Credit: lapandr/Depositphotos.



Activity E – Political interests and climate change

- Using the information provided and supplemented by your own research, complete the table below to summarise your understanding of the interests that different political actors have regarding climate change.

Global political actor	Summary of political interests (three dot points)	Evidence of this (three dot points)	Types of power used to achieve political interests (three dot points)
IGGs			
One state			
A second state			
TNCs			

- 2 After completing the table above, discuss the following questions in small groups in relation to climate change.
- a How might the interests of each type of global political actor outlined in the table **oppose** or **complement** the interests of the others?
 - b How do the interests of each global political actor either **contribute to** or **mitigate** the causes and consequences of climate change?

Differing political perspectives

Global political actors see and understand their interests in climate change through a variety of ideologies, ideas, values and events. Their political perspectives are shaped by their context as global political actors as well as how they relate to and interact with each other.

The perspectives of different global political actors on climate change mostly stem from their status in global politics and their ideological beliefs.

The perspectives of IGGs such as the UN reside in their political interests as forefront to the system of **global governance** as well as what they seek to achieve as **cosmopolitan** political actors. In the domestic political systems of states, these perspectives stem from the **divergent interests** and **normative rivalry** that exist between different political parties.

This section will compare the differing political perspectives of the UN as an IGG and the states of Australia and the United States.

Institutions of global governance

Gaps exist between the aspirations of the **international community** to resolve global issues such as climate change and their ability to do so. This is because tension exists between the more cosmopolitan perspective and motives of IGGs (such as the UN) and the desire of member states to prioritise their sovereignty over the collective interests of the wider international community. Cosmopolitanism is a key driver of global governance, as it promotes the pattern of relationships supported by the UN in fostering international peace and security through diplomacy and dialogue.

The UN aims to guide its member states through **climate negotiations and agreements**, providing the mechanisms to respond to the causes and consequences of climate change in a cosmopolitan manner. As discussed in the previous section, the UNFCCC supports how this actually occurs, with yearly climate negotiations known as the Conference of the Parties (COP) taking place to progress the UN's climate agenda. The most significant COPs in recent years include the following.

COP21 Paris, 2015	Member states agree to limit global warming to 'well below' 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, with parties pledging to pursue efforts to limit this to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
COP25 Madrid, 2019	Member states fail to agree on the key outcomes that were needed at the summit: setting a rulebook for the Paris Agreement and designing a global carbon market.
COP26 Glasgow, 2021	The Glasgow Climate Pact is welcomed by many for its commitment to doubling adaptation financing and requesting that states present more ambitious climate pledges next year.
COP27 Egypt, 2022	A fund is established to aid states facing severe damage from climate change, with aims to implement this at COP28. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres tells world leaders that 'we are in the fight of our lives and we are losing. . . . Our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible' (Harvey and Carrington, 2022).

Although the UNFCCC COPs demonstrate that the UN's cosmopolitan agenda is welcomed by many of its member states, the extent to which this viewpoint tangibly enforces climate action by state governments remains in question. This is because different perspectives exist in comparison to the UN's cosmopolitan perspective. Indeed, this challenges the extent to which this IGG can truly influence member states to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change.

For context, although COP21 was hailed as the world's 'greatest diplomatic success' and perceived as 'historic, durable and ambitious' (Harvey, 2015), it was also criticised for being 'predicated upon an assumption – that high polluters such as China, United States, India, Canada, Russia, Indonesia and Australia, which generate more than half the world's greenhouse gas emissions, will somehow drive down their carbon pollution voluntarily' (Firzli, 2016). Thus, many criticisms of this political perspective reside in the notion that the COPs are non-binding agreements that member states can ignore or accept.

Further, these **non-binding agreements** are argued as being too ambitious, too vague and too reliant on global political actors 'doing the right thing'. Without enforcement mechanisms, the UN's cosmopolitan perspective is largely ineffective, as it is unlikely that truly global solutions and subsequent actions against climate change can be achieved when there are so many competing perspectives from other global political actors involved in this process.

Critics such as international relations expert David Victor have questioned whether the UN is the appropriate venue for climate negotiations, arguing that such a cosmopolitan forum will inevitably lead to a decision-making gridlock (Hudson, 2019). However, the counterargument is that if any climate negotiations or deals are created outside the forum of the UN, they may be perceived as illegitimate, as they do not involve all state actors. Ultimately, this demonstrates that tension exists between the cosmopolitan perspective of global political actors such as the UN and the perspectives of state-based actors in dealing with climate change.

States

In comparison to IGGs such as the UN, the political perspectives of states regarding climate change largely reside in their prioritisation of **sovereignty** as a global political actor and domestically in the divergent interests that exist between different political parties. Thus, it can be argued that while states may also possess a cosmopolitan perspective towards dealing with the causes and consequences of climate change, they are also concerned with the realist priority of states as the most important actors in global politics and the power dynamics that exist between different political actors internally.

Australia's 'in principle' commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement and subsequent COPs indicate cooperation with the global community and alignment with the political perspective of the UN. However, the subsequent domestic policies that have been created by the two major political parties in Australia demonstrate a realist prioritisation of the state's economic interests. Under the Morrison Liberal government, Australia's emissions target was set at a 26–28 per cent reduction by 2030 in national emissions compared to 2005 levels; however, this was not compatible with the internationally agreed 2 degrees Celsius goal. With the election of the Labor Albanese government in 2022, a new bill was passed through Parliament to lock in a 43 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 and to achieve net zero by 2050 – this updated Australia's obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement.

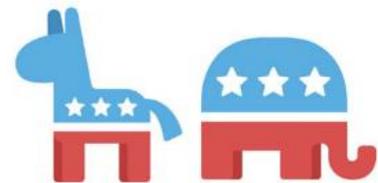
This lack of **bipartisan** support and perspective between the two major political parties in Australia concerning how best to deal with climate change has politicised the topic and further fuelled the state’s realist perspective, particularly regarding economic prosperity. The state has faced global and regional criticism for its overt prioritisation of domestic industries (particularly related to coal) over tangible action to mitigate climate change. In a speech at the Pacific Islands Forum in 2019, former Fijian prime minister Frank Bainimarama (whose state is already feeling the impacts of climate change) stated:

“I appeal to Australia to do everything possible to achieve a rapid transition from coal to energy sources that do not contribute to climate change. That transition should be just for your own people and just for us here in the Pacific, where we face an existential threat that you don’t face.”

Frank Bainimarama, quoted in Fiji Government, 2019.
 ‘Keynote address at the Sautalaga event of the 50th Pacific Islands Forum’.
fiji.gov.fj/media-centre/speeches/english/pm-bainimarama-s-keynote-address-at-the-sautalaga

Above all, Australia has straddled its role as an international **middle power** by affirming its commitment to the global governance and cosmopolitan perspective advocated for by the UN, while simultaneously exercising its diplomatic, political and economic power.

Comparatively, the United States has used its position as a dominant state superpower in global politics to exercise political perspectives related to climate change that have aligned to different presidential administrations. Changes in political leadership from Barack Obama (2009–17, Democrat) to Donald Trump (2017–21, Republican) to Joe Biden (2021–present at the time of writing, Democrat) have signalled changes in the state’s use of its diplomatic, political and economic power – linking directly to its perspectives on sovereignty, economic prosperity and international standing.

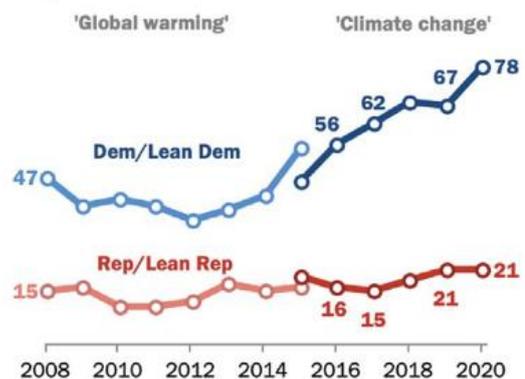


Credit: Sudowoodo/Depositphotos.

Most notably, the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement under Trump in 2019 demonstrated a realist perspective aligned with the former president’s political ideology of ‘America First’. This undercut the collective efforts established by the international community in 2015 to reduce global emissions and transition to renewable energy sources. Domestically, the opinions of the American population also demonstrate differences in the political perspectives towards climate change that exist between the two major political parties, the **Democratic Party** and the **Republican Party**. An opinion poll conducted in the summer of 2019 during record heatwaves in the United States found that only 42 per cent of the American public were very concerned about climate change, with only

Republicans and Democrats are deeply divided on whether climate change should be a top priority

% of U.S. adults who say dealing with global climate change should be a top priority for the president and Congress



Credit: Pew Research, 2021.
pewrsr.ch/2T8QzkN

22 per cent of Republican voters agreeing with this statement (Kamarck, 2019). This follows a historical trend, as demonstrated in the graph provided, which shows the gulf that exists between the Democrats and Republicans on climate change.

A lack of bipartisanship agreement on climate change has influenced the political perspectives of the major political parties in the United States. While this may not be as extreme in Australia, both states demonstrate the realist prioritisation of sovereignty and other domestic interests such as the economy over the UN's cosmopolitan perspective in responding to the causes and consequences of climate change.



Activity F – Differing perspectives on climate change

- 1 Review the UNFCCC's achievements across the past 25 years in relation to climate change here:

 unfccc.int/timeline

Choose five events you believe to be politically significant. Rank each event in order of significance from 1 to 5, justifying your first and last choices.

- 2 Using the perspectives outlined in the text and your own research, complete the table below to summarise your understanding of the following global actors' perspectives on climate change.

Political actor	Perspective (three dot points)	Evidence of this (three dot points)	How this perspective links to their interests (two dot points)
UN			
Australia			
United States			

- 3 Using the following suggested resources and at least one other relevant resource of your own choosing, reflect on the different interests and perspectives that different TNCs might have about climate change.

 'The triple bottom line: What it is and why it's important.' Harvard Business School, 2020. online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-the-triple-bottom-line

 'How do corporations influence decisions on climate action?' Global Witness, 2021. globalwitness.org/en/blog/how-do-corporations-influence-decisions-climate-action

In small groups, discuss the following and note down your conclusions.

- a What factors might explain why certain TNCs would oppose more radical approaches to reducing carbon dioxide emissions, or see them as harmful?
 - b What factors might explain why certain TNCs might support *stronger* measures?
 - c What might lead some TNCs to be more *successful* in influencing decisions than others?
- 4 Plan and write an answer to the following extended response question. Your finished response should be one paragraph of approximately 200–350 words.

Analyse the impact of the different interests and perspectives of global political actors in relation to the causes and consequences of climate change.

Discussing political stability and change

The motivating **interests** and **perspectives** in the previous sections provide the basis for understanding and discussing how global political actors have used

power to promote political stability and/or change in relation to climate change. The management of this global issue presents vast challenges to **domestic political contexts** and as such can contribute to political stability and change. This section will analyse how these motivating interests and perspectives have impacted political stability and change in the domestic political environments of Australia and the United States.

Australia

A lack of bipartisan support and common ground between Australia's two major political parties regarding policy responses to climate change are part of the reason why the state has been unable to make even modest progress. Relative to many comparable countries, the issue is highly politicised and has featured heavily in federal election campaigns. The presence of the **Australian Greens** – the country's third-largest political party, with its origins traced to the early environmental movement in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s – has reflected and served to amplify many Australians' concerns about the inadequacy of the political system to respond appropriately to climate change. Combined with recent extreme natural disasters such as the **2019–20 Black Summer bushfires** and the **2021 east-coast floods**, the issue of climate change in Australia remains a highly divisive issue among the Australian public and politicians alike.



A placard at a rally in 2020 criticising Scott Morrison's support of the fossil fuel industry. Credit: Sandwalker/Depositphotos.

In the aftermath of the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires the **Morrison Coalition government** faced criticism from media outlets and climate experts for its reluctance to draw links between the bushfires and climate change. Prior to the disaster, Scott Morrison was unwilling to adequately probe how much climate change was contributing to the increased frequency of natural disasters in Australia (Walker, 2020). While some political appetite saw the Morrison government increase federal funding for natural disaster relief after the bushfires, it fundamentally preferred to stick to the Liberal Party's status quo regarding climate action. This can be summarised as largely **conservative**, with a preference to prioritise fortunes of lucrative but highly polluting industries in Australia – including those directly involved in the extraction and use of fossil fuels that export them to other states around the world.

In the lead-up to the 2022 federal election, the Australian Labor Party positioned prominently in their campaign a suite of policies intended to improve Australia's disaster readiness. This included a proposal to invest up to \$200 million per year on disaster prevention and resilience through a **Disaster Ready Fund**, as well as a commitment to establish a sovereign aerial firefighting fleet in partnership with state and territory governments (Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, 2021). Along with broader perceptions that Labor was intent on being more ambitious in lowering its emissions, this strategy appears to have been fruitful. The party was successfully elected to government in May 2022 on the back of preferences from other candidates who had been vocal about their concerns regarding Australia's climate policy.

You can read more about the impact of concerns about climate change on voter preferences during the 2022 election on the Australian Election Study website:

 australianelectionstudy.org

**Results of the 2022 Australian federal election
(House of Representatives) – party totals**

party	# votes	% votes	% change vs. 2019	# seats won	# seats change
Liberal/National Coalition	5.2 mil	35.7	– 5.73	58	–19
Labor	4.8 mil	32.6	– 0.76	77	+ 9
Greens	1.8 mil	12.3	+ 1.85	4	+ 3
Independents	0.8 mil	5.3	+ 1.92	10	+ 7
One Nation	0.7 mil	5.0	+ 1.89	0	-
United Australia Party	0.6 mil	4.1	+ 0.69	0	-
Other	0.7 mil	5.1	– 6.36	2	-
Total (inc. rounding)	14.7 mil	100.0		151	

Following Labor’s election, the Climate Change (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2022 outlined Australia’s target of reducing emissions by 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050 (Australian Parliament, 2022). This was supplemented by the Safeguard Mechanism (Crediting) Amendment Bill 2023, which amended the safeguard mechanisms created under previous Liberal governments to target big polluters and limit the amount of greenhouse gas emissions they can create (Karp, 2023).

United States

The United States has sought to utilise its position as a dominant global political actor to exercise its political interests and perspectives related to climate change. Changes in the state’s use of **diplomatic, political and economic power** have been largely aligned to different presidential administrations. Because of this, the global response to the United States’ interests and perspectives has influenced this state’s political stability on the international stage as well as political change within its domestic political system.

The United States has most notably been subject to **international criticism** for its lack of action against the causes and consequences of climate change, particularly during the Trump administration. Other states view the United States as vital to the global efforts to achieve the targets set out in the Paris Climate Agreement – given its position in global politics as the world’s largest economy and the current second-largest carbon emitter after China (Hill and Babin, 2022). The election of the Biden administration in 2021 saw the state re-enter the Paris Climate Agreement on Biden’s first day in office and commence a period of rebuilding diplomatic relationships and clout within global climate negotiations. This was supported by John Kerry, the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, in the months prior to COP27:

“Our job is to create the sense of urgency that summons the political will to follow through on the pledges and commitments we have already made, knowing one thing above all: the world will not follow our advice; it will follow our example.”

John Kerry, quoted in US Department of State, 2023.
‘The climate crisis: Working together for future generations’.
state.gov/policy-issues/climate-crisis

President Biden has further sought to lead globally on climate change by passing a bipartisan infrastructure bill in 2021 and the *Inflation Reduction Act 2022*, which is the most ambitious climate legislation in US history. It provides approximately US\$370 billion in climate-related funding to help the state meet its commitment to reducing emissions by 50–52 per cent below 2003 levels by 2030 (Hill and Babin, 2022).

In conjunction with this, the politics of climate change continue to challenge the Democrats and Republicans within domestic politics. Unlike in Australia, climate change has struggled to gain much visibility in American mid-term and presidential elections, because voters are more focused on economic issues such as inflation and employment (Singh et al., 2022). In addition, no Republicans in Congress voted to support the Inflation Reduction Act, and many Republican members continue to deny the realities of human-induced climate change.

Regardless of whether the Democrats or the Republicans hold majority control of the **Congress**, in the United States it is equally important that leadership on climate action is taken at the state level to achieve climate goals. Like Australia, the sentiment of voters who are driven by progressive ideals may also influence the ways in which the Republicans in particular re-examine their position on climate change. By 2024, it is estimated that millennial (1981–96) and gen Z (1997–2013) voters will outnumber older generations in the American electorate (Hill and Babin, 2022).



Activity G – Global responses, stability and change

- Using the events outlined in this text and supplemented by your own research, create a brief timeline (8–12 events) that summarises the Morrison government’s response to the Black Summer bushfires and criticism from the media regarding links to climate change.
- Using the events outlined in the text, create a brief timeline (8–12 events) that summarises the Biden administration’s policy decisions and actions regarding climate change.
- Using the references provided at the end of this chapter, as well as your own research, create a quotation bank that identifies the differing perspectives of global political actors. Consider how these perspectives may have contributed to political stability and change both in the domestic political environments of each country and regarding the UN’s efforts to coordinate global responses to the challenge of climate change.

Political actor	Useful quotations (including source reference)	How this may have contributed to political stability and/or change
Australia		
United States		

- Answer the following extended response prompt. Your finished response should be one paragraph of approximately 200–350 words.

‘The management of contemporary issues and crises, and challenges to that management, can contribute to political stability and/or change.’

Discuss in relation to Australia’s and/or the United States’ response to climate change.

Evaluating political significance

The political significance of climate change can be summarised by discussing the **interests** and **perspectives** of global political actors engaged in the issue. It can also be assessed through evaluation of the use of **power** by global political actors pursuing these interests.

This section will assess the political significance of climate change through the responses of global political actors, considering the role of IGGs, disagreement over responsibility and domestic political disagreements.

The role of institutions of global governance

As discussed throughout this case study, IGGs such as the UN provide the frameworks and mechanisms that support the system of global governance to address climate change. However, the politics of climate change arise from the different perspectives that exist in responding to the crisis.

The UN has demonstrated the use of diplomatic power that is informed by cosmopolitan theory in guiding member states through climate negotiations and agreements. It can be argued that much of this use of power is purely influential. That is, although climate agreements are often non-binding on member states, their prioritisation of sovereignty remains a key factor challenging the UN's fulfilment of its climate agenda. While there is undoubtedly a role for IGGs in responding to climate change, the politics surrounding the issue mean that the significance of this use of power can vary.

Disagreement over responsibility

Disagreement over responsibility challenges the role that IGGs such as the UN play in dealing with the different climate threats faced by states. States' use of diplomatic and economic power has divided responses to climate change in disagreements over the responsibility between countries with higher or lower levels of income, wealth and emissions (whether overall or per person, historically or presently). This is politically significant, as the moral question posed to states is, *who is responsible for climate change, and what is a fair solution?*

Although the UN has established cosmopolitan-informed frameworks for how states must respond to climate change, their use of diplomatic and economic power has sought to either support or undermine these global approaches. In the 21st century there has been increased attention in some states to climate policies that go well beyond what has been committed to at an international level, and conversely, some states have blatantly disregarded their international obligations in the face of other political and economic interests. Reduction of global emissions will not slow down the consequences of climate change unless the overall volume of emissions declines across the entire world.

Underpinning this disagreement is the continued use of fossil fuels by states. At COP26 in 2021, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China and Australia opposed an article in the draft agreement calling to phase out all coal and fossil fuel subsidies (Dewan et al., 2021). These states are *all* some of the world's largest producers and consumers of fossil fuels. Conversely, Bolivia's chief negotiator Diego Pacheco said that his state and 21 other allies also considered developing states – including China and India – should not have the same targets as rich states who have had a greater historical role in the climate crisis. He accused rich states of trying to ‘transfer responsibility’ to the Global South’ (Dewan et al., 2021).

While states' use of diplomatic and economic power may protect their own interests, in the context of global climate negotiations this use of power fuels disagreement over responsibility – which largely undermines collaborative action against climate change.

The rise of people power and direct action

In the face of inaction by state governments, citizens have challenged the political power of domestic political parties to incite climate action. This has seen the rise of individuals as global political actors. Most notably, **Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future movement** has been influential in raising public awareness of the threat of climate change and has challenged world leaders to take immediate climate mitigation action. In 2022, she stated that Joe Biden:

“is the leader of the most powerful country in the world [and] has lots of responsibility. When the United States is in fact expanding fossil fuel infrastructure, that is a clear sign that they are not really treating the climate crisis as an emergency.”

Greta Thunberg, quoted in 'Greta Thunberg: Activist calls on banks to stop funding climate 'destruction''. BBC News, 2022. [bbc.com/news/uk-politics-59090943](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-59090943)

In this way, domestic political disagreements are also politically significant, as the use (or lack of use) of political power by political parties can contribute to domestic political stability and change brought about by individual and collective people power.



Fridays for Future student demonstrators demanding stronger measures from the government and industry to prevent catastrophic climate change. Bergamo, Italy, 2019.

Credit: Fabio Michele Capelli/Shutterstock.



Activity H – Evaluating the political significance of climate change

- 1 In groups, discuss your understanding of the three points of political significance outlined in this section. Then, verbally summarise your understanding in one sentence for each point, using the following sentence stems.
 - ‘The role of IGGs is politically significant in responding to climate change, because ...’
 - ‘Disagreement over responsibility towards climate change is politically significant, because ...’
 - ‘The rise of people power and direct action is politically significant, because ...’
- 2 Use these findings to reach an overall judgement about the political significance of climate change as a contemporary crisis.
 - a How do the interests and perspectives of different global political actors contribute to their responses to the causes and consequences brought about by climate change?
 - b How effective are the responses taken by different political actors, and what were their outcomes? What further impacts do these responses create?
 - c How do the responses taken by different political actors contribute to political stability and change within domestic political environments?

Revision questions

- 1 Identify one cause of climate change.
- 2 Identify one global political actor and their political perspectives on climate change.
- 3 State two consequences of climate change.
- 4 Describe the political interests of two global political actors in relation to climate change.
- 5 Explain the political interests of one global political actor in relation to climate change.
- 6 Compare the political perspectives of two global political actors in relation to climate change.
- 7 Evaluate the political significance of disagreement over responsibility in relation to climate change.
- 8 Discuss how global political actors' responses to climate change have contributed to creating political stability and/or change. Refer to the quotation below in your response.

“At the beginning of COP27, I am calling for a historic pact between developed and emerging economies – a climate solidarity pact. ... The two largest economies – the United States and China – have a particular responsibility to join efforts to make this pact a reality.”

Antonio Guterres, 2022. 'Secretary-General's remarks to high-level opening of COP27, as delivered'. United Nations. un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-11-07/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-opening-of-cop27-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english-version

Further resources

For more resources relevant to this area of study, access the online resource library associated with this textbook: sev.asn.au/textbook-resources/pol12

Articles

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2.1

Unit 2,
Area of study 1:



**Issues for
Australian democracy**

“Unit 2, Area of Study 1: Issues for Australian democracy

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse at least one Australian political issue and evaluate the extent to which Australian democracy and democratic principles are upheld.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 1.

Key knowledge

- 1 the key concepts:
 - 1.1 political culture
 - 1.2 liberal democracy
 - 1.3 responsible government
 - 1.4 constitutional government
 - 1.5 constitutional monarchy
 - 1.6 commitment to a rules-based order
- 2 the expression of democratic principles and practices in Australia’s political system, such as
 - 2.1 free and fair elections
 - 2.2 human rights
 - 2.3 accountability and transparency
 - 2.4 rule of law
 - 2.5 active participation
 - 2.6 equality
 - 2.7 division of powers between federal and state governments
- 3 the significance of a democratic political culture in contributing to political stability and change in Australia, such as
 - 3.1 participation in and engagement with democratic processes
 - 3.2 trust in government
 - 3.3 the existence of many political parties
 - 3.4 political ideology
 - 3.5 the acceptance of democratic values
 - 3.6 the constitution
 - 3.7 agreement on the validity of elections to determine government
 - 3.8 leadership and succession
 - 3.9 the influence of the media
- 4 the strengths and weaknesses of Australian political institutions and processes, such as
 - 4.1 the constitution
 - 4.2 constitutional monarchy
 - 4.3 responsible government
 - 4.4 mechanisms for accountability
 - 4.5 federalism and the division of powers
 - 4.6 the electoral system and representation
 - 4.7 the public service
 - 4.8 the rule of law
 - 4.9 rights and freedom
- 5 the extent to which Australian political culture, institutions and process promote, enhance, or undermine democratic principles in relation to at least one political issue
- 6 the interests and perspectives of political actors involved in at least one political issue.

Key skills

- i ask and use a range of political questions to investigate one contemporary political issue for Australian democracy
- ii interpret a range of sources of information on one political issue for Australian democracy
- iii explain how democratic principles are promoted, enhanced and/or undermined in Australia
- iv explain the causes and consequences of one Australian political issue
- v analyse how different political interests impact on Australian democracy
- vi explain a range of different political actors' perspectives on one Australian political issue
- vii explain how the political issue and responses to the issue contribute to political stability and/or change
- viii analyse the political significance of the political issue for Australian democracy
- ix construct an argument about the significance of one Australian political issue and the extent to which responses to the issue uphold democratic principles, using evidence from sources.

Key questions

To what extent does Australia have a democratic culture?

What are the principles, values and features that nurture Australian democracy?

How democratic are Australia's political institutions and processes?

What are the political issues facing Australian democracy today?

Preface

In this area of study, students analyse the operation of Australian democracy, democratic institutions and processes, and assess the political significance of challenges to democratic principles. Students investigate at least one of the issues detailed below and consider its relationship to the success of Australian democracy, the tensions and conflict between forces working for political stability and those working for change, and how the democratic rights of citizens may challenge established policies, practices and norms. This investigation requires students to broaden their knowledge of the key Australian democratic institutions and processes that operate in Australia and the ability of Australian citizens to participate meaningfully in the political system. Students engage with political thinking through an investigation into at least one of the listed options to evaluate the strength of Australian democracy and consider if reforms to Australia's political system are appropriate or required.

In developing a course, teachers select at least one of the following political issues within Australia's democracy to be studied in-depth.

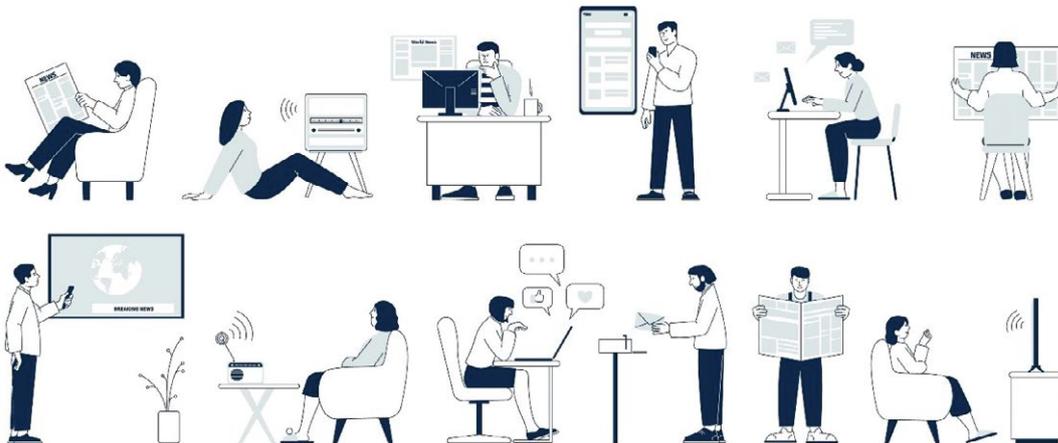
- Australia's First Nations peoples: voice, treaty, truth
- Challenges to democratic policy-making
- Australia's constitution
- Human rights for all: the protection of rights and freedoms in Australia
- Integrity, trust and accountability in government and politics
- Media ownership, media bias and disinformation
- The people's voice: representation of all Australians?
- Women and power
- Big money and democracy
- Australia's federal system: fractured or fit for purpose?
- Party politics, participation and partisanship. ”

Australia and global citizenship Adapted from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2023. 'VCE Politics Study Design, 2024–2028'.
vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/2024PoliticsSD.docx

Issues for Australian democracy

In previous chapters, we focused on setting up our general political knowledge with some focus on Australian politics specifically. In doing so we've explored some of the principles and ideas underlying democracy and have seen how it encompasses not only structures but also the ideologies and practices that influence a society's political culture. Students have also been introduced to many of the specific structures that make up the Australian political system.

In this unit, students will go a step further by considering the extent to which Australia's political system upholds these ideals and values. This will be primarily through investigating two current political issues or crises that have posed particular challenges to that system. These case studies will invite readers to think carefully about how political reforms progress from an idea to becoming enshrined in law. Our goal is to critically assess the role that political interests and actors play in negotiating and shaping changes to the shared rules of political life. Students will need to look beyond Australia to international examples of democracy for models of possible reforms that could be implemented in Australia.



Key questions in this area of study

As you work through these case studies, consider the following key questions from the study design.

To what extent does Australia have a democratic culture?

'Political culture' refers to something more than the rules and structures that govern Australian politics such as the Constitution or the Senate. Australia's political culture refers to the ways that politicians, officials and citizens engage with the processes of government. For example, the acceptance of election results by all parties is a crucial element of democratic culture that is often absent in countries where democracy is in decline.

What are the principles, values and features that nurture Australian democracy?

A political culture is built on principles, values and institutions. At the foundation of Australia's democracy are models and practices imported from Britain through the Westminster system and from the United States through the federal system. This has been further extended and adapted through the creation of political parties, pressure groups and institutions of government.

How democratic are Australia's political institutions and processes?

To answer this question, readers must have a solid grasp of the processes, purposes and ideals that each political institution addresses. For example, the electoral system is meant to uphold the democratic ideal of representation, while Question Time upholds the democratic ideal of accountability.

What are the political issues facing Australian democracy today?

Every time you read or watch the news, you are interacting with the political issues of today. Political issues and challenges arise when a group in society believes that their principles and values are not reflected in Australia's political system and culture. Your job is to identify – in relation to a current issue – which principles and values are at stake and which aspects of the political system and culture are in dispute.

Key concepts in Australia's formal political system ^{2.1.1}

Building on what we learnt in the first chapter, this chapter first explores the origin of many of the key concepts in Australia's formal political system. Where not already defined in earlier chapters, key concepts specified in this key knowledge point are introduced in context.

Political developments in Britain prior to colonisation

Australia's system of government – the Westminster system – is a modified version of that which evolved in Britain. Like many other countries, this emerged from a complex interplay of factors in the late medieval period, which was characterised by jockeying between the different powerful players of that time:

- the **monarch** (king or queen) and their families ('the Crown')
- religious officials at various levels ('the Church')
- hereditary owners of significant amounts of land ('the nobility')
- those whose wealth was derived from trade, investment and manufacturing ('merchants' and eventually 'capitalists')
- those who lacked significant wealth and who worked the land ('peasants') or in factories in towns and cities ('workers').

Parliaments emerged simply as forums in which the different interest groups that made up medieval societies could articulate and discuss their preferences and relay them to the government, which was personified by the monarch. Early conflicts over the rights of the nobility were punctuated by the issuance of the Magna Carta in 1215, whereby rebellious nobles sought to force the monarch to **commit to certain rules** and principles in their application of the law, particularly the legal equality between individuals and protection from arbitrary (inconsistent) uses of state power. These are generally considered the basis for modern understandings of the rule of law, as well as for **constitutional** law and government in the United Kingdom.

Monarchy refers to a political system in which one person is the head of state for life, or until they abdicate the position; typically the role of monarch is inherited.

Parliament is a supreme lawmaking (legislative) body where elected representatives debate, create and modify laws that govern activity within their jurisdiction, as well as scrutinise the actions of the executive government.

Commitment to a rules-based order is a political actor's adherence to the framework of norms and laws that shape the operation of the broader political system.

Constitutional government refers to the political system's ability to follow the body of laws and rules that set out how a state or country must (or 'ought to') be governed.

The Reformation (in which many Christians ceased to recognise the pope as the head of the Church) led to a stronger alignment of the majority of the Church to the interests of the Crown, who became the official head of the new majority Anglican Church in the 1500s. This was followed by conflicts between parliament and the Crown in the 1600s, which became so heated that the monarch was executed. At the same time a civil war took place between these and other forces over the course of decades – the latter years of which featured a significant period when England was governed as a republic (the Commonwealth of England). The resolution of this series of conflicts, in part, confirmed the supremacy of the parliament while formally retaining the monarchy, which was permitted to continue to exert some limited influence and ceremonial involvement in formal decision-making.



A later depiction of William III's arrival in England in 1688 to overthrow the government of his father-in-law, being hailed by supporters as a 'protector of liberty' as he accepts the Declaration of Rights.

Following the English Civil War, the republican government under Oliver Cromwell collapsed soon after his death in 1660. Parliament then invited the previously exiled king, Charles II, to take up the throne. Charles's brother James II succeeded him after the former's death in 1685, but parliament was so opposed to the new king's policies that they invited William III (his Dutch son-in-law) to replace him on the condition that he sign a new bill of rights that guaranteed certain privileges and protections for landowners and for parliament. Learning of the plot to replace him, James fled to France in 1688; William's arrival in England, acceptance of the bill of rights and ascension to the throne became known as the Glorious Revolution.

Over this time, this arrangement was supplemented by the development of several conventions that came to shape formal politics and that became part of the 'unwritten' British constitution. In turn, when Britain sought military and economic domination of large swathes of the planet, colonial governments tended to bring many elements of British **political culture**, conventions and expectations with them, formalising them in colonial law (with some variations) and imposing them over colonised peoples. These political practices came to be known as the Westminster system and tended to include certain limited and symbolic roles for the monarch – sometimes understood as **constitutional monarchy** – within a parliamentary system.

Political culture refers to the deeply ingrained attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours that shape how individuals and groups perceive and participate in political processes, including expectations around the behaviour of other actors (i.e. political parties accepting electoral results).

Constitutional monarchies are those in which a monarch serves as the head of state within the parameters of a constitution, with limited powers, while an elected government (typically a parliament) is the primary political authority.

Political arrangements in the early colonial period

After initially being governed under military law, the new colonies established by Britain on the Australian continent sought increasing levels of self-government. This included colonies forming their own parliaments, with governors acting on behalf of the distant monarch and commissioning executive governments, in line with formal written constitutions adapted from British conventions. When the



Twenty years after the founding of New South Wales, the colony's governor, William Bligh, was accused of being a tyrant, arrested and deposed by the New South Wales Corps, who sought to protect its members' lucrative control over the rum trade. The so-called Rum Rebellion of 1808 was the first and only time in Australia's history that military force was used to overthrow a government.

colonies sought to federate in the 1890s into the new Commonwealth of Australia, political elites from each colony began developing a new draft constitution with oversight from the British government, yielding similar results (notwithstanding some inspiration from other sources, particularly the United States). Following Federation in 1901, each of the six colonies became the states we know today, and initially quite small and relatively 'weak' branches of the new federal government were established, including a parliament, executive and judiciary.

Notably, the Australian Constitution does not mention the role of the most important player in the formal political system – the prime minister – even though the position had emerged as a key part of the British system in the 1800s. Formally speaking, the power residing in the prime minister stems from the collective consent of Cabinet (discussed in the first chapter of this text), comprising ministers who are appointed by the governor-general, as set out in the Constitution.

In contrast to today, early Australian political systems featured:

- parliaments that were mostly comprised of members who were not aligned to any political party
- premiers (and later prime ministers) who were less powerful relative to their own ministerial colleagues
- federal governments that were less powerful than their respective parliaments
- following Federation, state governments that were relatively more powerful than the federal government.

Key players in Australian Parliament

The Australian Parliament features a range of different formal positions, titles, hierarchies and functions – see over the page for a summary of some of the most important ones.

You can learn more about who *currently* serves in these roles here:

📖 'People in Parliament'. Parliamentary Education Office, 2020.
peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/parliament-and-its-people/people-in-parliament

House of Representatives		the 'lower' of the two houses of Parliament, in which the government is formed; sometimes abbreviated to the House or the Reps
Senate		the 'upper' of the two houses of Parliament, in which legislation and government actions are reviewed and scrutinised
Parliament		an assembly of elected lawmaking representatives; in Australia, Parliament consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate

member		a person elected to the House of Representatives, sometimes abbreviated to MP
senator		a person elected to the Senate
parliamentarian		a general term for any person elected to either house of Parliament

government		the parliamentary grouping that has the support of a majority of members in the lower house; it forms the executive and seeks to implement its agenda
opposition		the largest party or coalition of parties that does not have the support of the majority of members of the lower house to form government
crossbench		parliamentarians in either house who are neither a member of the government nor the opposition
frontbench		members of Parliament from either the government or the opposition who are either ministers or shadow ministers (respectively)

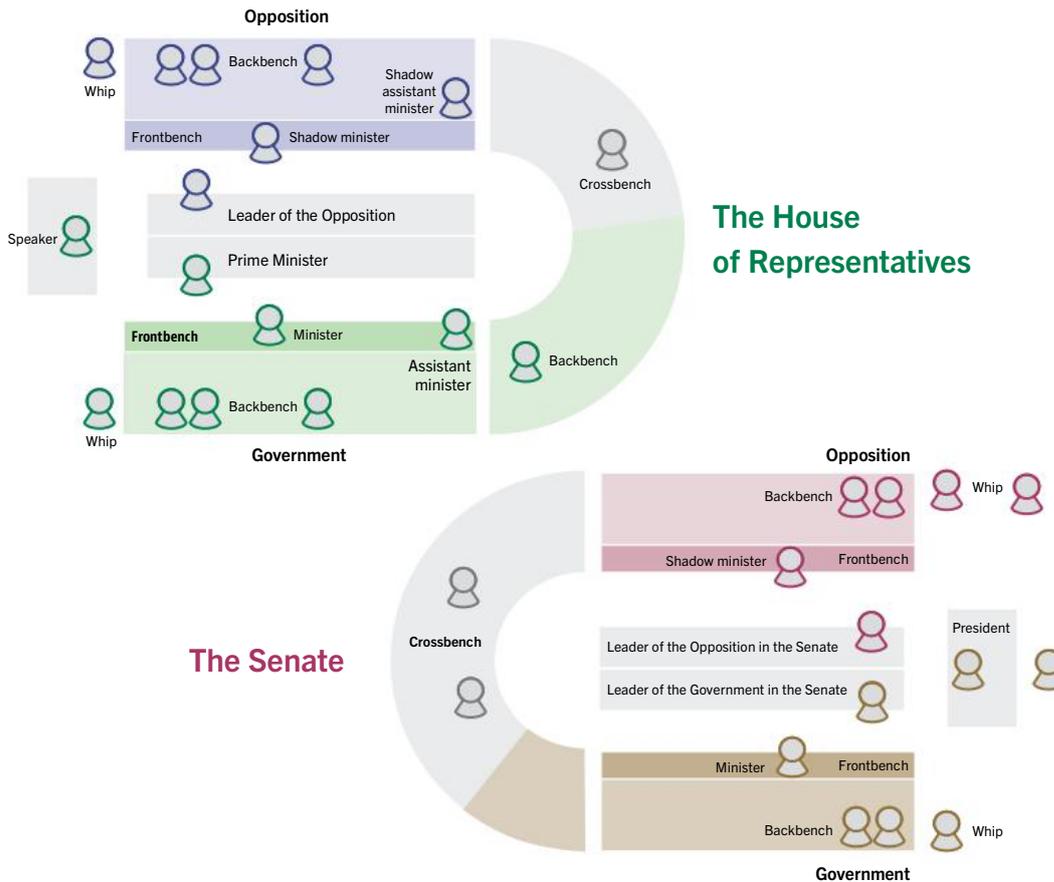
minister		a member of the government who has been given official responsibility and executive authority over an area of policy (such as government finances, industry or health)
portfolio		an area of policy that is overseen by a responsible minister or shadow minister
assistant minister		a junior minister who assists another minister with a certain part of their portfolio; sometimes known as a parliamentary secretary
prime minister		the head of the government who leads the parliamentary grouping that has the support of the majority of members in the lower house, as well as the Cabinet and the broader ministry

cabinet		the group of senior ministers (including the prime minister) who collectively make important decisions and form the core of the executive branch of government
leader of the opposition		the member of Parliament who leads the largest party grouping that is not in government
shadow minister		a member of the opposition who scrutinises the work of a particular minister and explains opposition policies; sometimes referred to as simply a 'spokesperson'

parliamentary party		a political party with at least one member elected to a parliament
coalition		an ongoing agreement between two or more parliamentary parties to cooperate and act as a larger group
party room		private gatherings of parliamentary party members where they discuss and coordinate strategies, particularly regarding legislative business
whip		a member or senator selected by their parliamentary party to coordinate them and manage their strategy when it comes to votes on legislation

law		a written rule, agreed to by both houses of Parliament and made official with the signature of the governor-general, which applies to everyone within the Parliament's jurisdiction; sometimes called legislation or (formally) an Act of Parliament
bill		a document detailing a proposed new law; sometimes also referred to as legislation

Speaker of the House		a member chosen by other members to run meetings of the House and to ensure the standing orders are followed; often abbreviated to Speaker
President of the Senate		a senator chosen by other senators to run meetings of the Senate and to ensure the standing orders are followed; often abbreviated to President
standing orders		the rules used to manage the operation of the House of Representatives or the Senate



Expression of democratic principles and practices in Australia's political system ^{2.1.2}

“The electoral road to breakdown is dangerously deceptive. With the classic coup d'état, as in Pinochet's Chile, the death of democracy is immediate and evident to all. The presidential palace burns. The president is killed, imprisoned or shipped off to exile. The constitution is suspended or scrapped. On the electoral road, none of these things happen. There are no tanks in the streets. Constitutions and other nominally democratic institutions remain in place. People still vote. Elected autocrats maintain a veneer of democracy while eviscerating its substance.”

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, 2018. *How Democracies Die*. Penguin.

In casual conversation, it's common to hear countries referred to as democracies or **dictatorships**. From your studies in the course so far, you will have now learnt enough to know that it isn't so straightforward. Democracies are complex structures built on complex ideas and upheld by complex institutions. 'Healthy' democracies always have people within them who might aspire to be despots or dictators but are restrained by various checks and balances and by the actions of other actors from living out their fantasies of unrestrained power. In the past decade, there has been a noticeable decline in the number of countries classified as democratic in surveys such as the Economist's Democracy Index. This reflects the fact that although most of the world's countries identify themselves as democracies and display certain democratic features (such as

Dictatorship is a form of government characterised by the rule of a single person or a small group with absolute and centralised power, often acquired and maintained through force and by preventing meaningful ways for the population to remove them from power; sometimes also known as *autocracy*.

holding elections), many of the institutions and practices of democracy have been rolled back by autocrats. This section of the area of study invites readers to consider the democratic health of Australia’s institutions.

Free and fair elections 2.1.2.1

There are very few states in the world today without some form of election process for public officials. However, for an election to be broadly considered ‘free and fair’, several important criteria must be satisfied.

Elections in Australia are underpinned by the following features.

Free and fair elections	
‘free’	‘fair’
freedom of speech, assembly and movement	transparent electoral process
freedom from fear in relation to the election	no special privileges to any party, person or group
equal and universal right to vote	independent and impartial officials conduct the election



Regularity – Under section 28 of the Australian Constitution, the maximum term of the House of Representatives is three years, while section 32 requires that an election must be ordered within 10 days of Parliament being dissolved. Senate elections have been held at the same time as House elections for several decades.

An impartial umpire – The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), which is an impartial government body, conducts and supervises elections, ensuring they are subjected to minimal influence by the governing party or parties.



One vote, one value – The AEC regularly redraws electoral boundaries to ensure that electorates in the House of Representatives include approximately equal numbers of voters.

Preferential voting – Australia is unusual in its use of preferential voting, in which voters rank candidates in order of preference.



Compulsory voting – All those registered on the electoral roll must vote. In practice, this means that voters must attend a polling booth and have their name marked off. Since 1912, elections have also been held on Saturdays to ensure that voting is easier for those who work or study Monday to Friday.

Conduct of campaigns – The conduct of campaigns is regulated by a range of laws and conventions. Political advertisements must carry the name of the person authorising them, and there is a ban on broadcasting any electoral advertising three days before the date of the election. There are procedures for registering parties with the AEC.



Public funding – Political parties and independents receive funding that is proportional to the number of primary votes they receive. This helps to sustain the activities of minor parties and independents who have limited access to resources, as well as bolstering the finances of major parties.

Transparent vote counting – Votes are counted by AEC staff members. Political parties and independent candidates can appoint ‘scrutineers’ who observe the vote count on their behalf and may dispute decisions or report on any irregularities. Major television networks and news agencies run live commentary as the votes are counted and broadcast the results to the broader population.





Who's running?

Nearly all states in the world have elections, but the trick for autocrats is to design them to be won by one party. For example, in the 2019 North Korean election, all 682 seats were won by the Fatherland Front (currently led by Kim Jong-un), consisting notionally of three political parties. Voter turnout was 99.99 per cent.



Learn more about how this election occurred and what a flawed or 'sham' election looks like:

'Kim Jong-un expected to win 100 per cent of votes in 'sham' North Korea election'. ABC News, 2019. abc.net.au/news/2019-03-12/north-korea-kim-jong-un-elections-pyongyang/10889100



Activity A – Participation and representation

- 1 One measure of democratic participation is the percentage of voters who actually vote. While Australia has high rates of voting, this is influenced by the fact that voting is compulsory. Examine the resource provided, which compares voter turnout in different countries.

'Voter turnout, 2021'. Our World in Data. ourworldindata.org/grapher/voter-turnout

- a Which countries have the highest and lowest rates of voting?
- b Are these countries democracies?
- c Compare this data to other tables available, such as 'age of electoral democracy'. What patterns can you see?

- 2 Electoral reform is difficult because it involves changing the rules of democracy, which are *shared*. Read the resources provided and use these to inform your position on the following proposition:

'Australian elections must be reformed.'

'Australia's experience of compulsory voting'. ABC Religion and Ethics, 2022. abc.net.au/religion/bonotti-strangio-australian-experience-of-compulsory-voting/13531720

'Here's who funded the 2022 election'. Grattan Institute, 2023. grattan.edu.au/news/heres-who-funded-the-2022-election

- 3 Conduct a class line debate on the proposition in question 2 about electoral reform.

A line debate (also known as a 'barometer') works as follows.

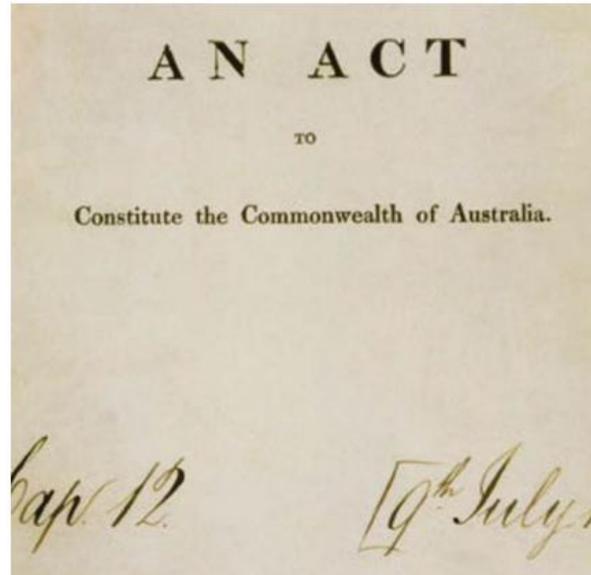
- a Create three signs: '**strongly agree**', '**strongly disagree**' and '**neutral**'. Place the 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree' signs on the opposite ends of a line or a 'U' shape, with the 'neutral' sign in the middle.
- b After taking time to reflect on the prompt provided and form an opinion, every member of the class should choose a place to sit anywhere between the two ends of the 'continuum', corresponding with how strongly they agree or disagree.
- c The teacher will then select people from along the line and ask them to explain or justify their position. After they've finished, students whose opinion has been influenced one way or the other can relocate to a new position on the line. Try to keep an open mind when listening to others and try to use evidence and examples when it's your turn to speak.
- d Remember: while you might disagree with (or not understand how they've arrived at) your classmates' opinions, the value of this exercise is in getting comfortable with constructive disagreement, which will help you to inform and develop your own perspective.

- e If you disagree with something that someone else has said and it's your turn to speak, try to use 'I' language rather than 'you' or 'they' when expressing your viewpoint. Be honest but respectful of others' opinions and voices.
 - f Once everyone has had a turn to speak, you can discuss and reflect on the activity as a class, noting whether there were significant 'movements' of opinion in either direction.
- 4 To what extent is the Australian Parliament representative of the Australian people? Using the resource provided, create a list of strengths and weaknesses of the Australian Parliament in representing Australians as a whole.
-  'Pathways to Parliament'. The Sydney Morning Herald, 2021. smh.com.au/interactive/2021/careers-before-politics
 -  'The 47th parliament is the most diverse ever – but still doesn't reflect Australia'. The Guardian, 2022. theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/25/the-47th-parliament-is-the-most-diverse-ever-but-still-doesnt-reflect-australia

Human rights 2.1.2.2

Human rights in Australia are protected by legislation passed by state and federal parliaments. Australia's Constitution is unusual in a global sense in that it contains very few specific references to the rights of citizens, or a **bill of rights**. Nonetheless, the Constitution does establish a number of basic rights, including:

- the right to vote (s. 41)
- protection against the unjust acquisition of property on unjust terms (s. 51)
- trial by jury (s. 80)
- freedom of religion (s. 116)
- prohibition of discrimination based on residence in a particular state (s. 117).



The High Court of Australia has also established several **implied rights**, including 'freedom of political communication'. Several states and territories, such as Victoria, have created bills of rights by passing them through their own parliaments.

The Australian Human Rights Commission was established in 1986 to act as an independent body that can investigate infringements of human rights in Australia. The group conducts public inquiries and publishes reports on human rights issues that include recommendations to the government. It also involves several commissioners who report publicly on particular areas of human rights such as social justice for First Nations peoples, the rights of children and the right to privacy. Australia is also signatory to several international treaties and resolutions on human rights under the auspices of the UN, including:

- the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



Activity B – The Australian Human Rights Commission

- 1 The Australian Human Rights Commission website includes information on current investigations, resources and programs, sorted by topics such as ‘race discrimination’ or ‘rights and freedoms’.

 humanrights.gov.au

Select and research one current investigation/issue. Using the headings modelled below, create a table that spans an A4 page to organise your findings. Share and compare your case study file with your classmates.

Issue	Key details
What human right is being broken? What does this breach of human rights look like for those involved?	Note important statistics, individuals, events or dates. What actions or responses is the Australian Human Rights Commission taking?

- 2 Australian Human Rights Commission investigations have sometimes caused tension with the government of the day. For example, in 2018 the Turnbull government refused to renew the appointment of Human Rights Commissioner Gillian Triggs amid allegations that the Commission had mishandled a case of accused racial vilification. Using similar tools to those you used for the previous question, as well as the suggested readings provided, investigate the dispute over the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* that led to this event.

 ‘Australia’s human rights debate has always been political’. The Conversation, 2016.
theconversation.com/australias-human-rights-debate-has-always-been-political-68070

 ‘Gillian Triggs to go as human rights chief, Turnbull confirms’. The Guardian, 2016.
theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/16/gillian-triggs-to-go-as-human-rights-chief-turnbull-confirms

 ‘Human rights and harassment’. Q+A. ABC, 2017 (13 min). abc.net.au/qanda/18c-qut/10649822

Accountability and transparency 2.1.2.3

Transparency is promoted by a wide range of features of the Australian political system. Some of the more prominent of these include:

Transparency refers to the idea that the operation of government should be visible to the people.

- **Question Time** – During each sitting week, Question Time allows parliamentarians (from the government, opposition or crossbench) to question ministers about their portfolios.
- **Freedom of information** – Legislation at the state and federal levels gives citizens the power to request information held by any government department. Freedom of information requests are one of the main ways that journalists can find information that contributes to reporting on controversial issues.
- **Press gallery** – The parliamentary press galleries consist of accredited journalists from across the media who are dedicated entirely to political reporting. They have exclusive viewing areas in the state and federal parliament chambers, offices and studios within the buildings and cultivate contacts with politicians.
- **A free media** – In practice, this is one of the key ways the government is held accountable by journalists from the traditional media. This is why questions of media ownership and bias are central to concerns about accountability and transparency of government.

- **Watchdogs** – Several government agencies, such as the Human Rights Commission, scrutinise government decision-making, as do some NGOs. Their reports and hearings can, in turn, encourage political reforms. Anti-corruption commissions also perform watchdog-like functions at the state level.
- **Engagement with voters** – As an Australian resident, you can request a meeting with any state or federal politician to discuss your concerns. You can also start a petition that, if it has enough signatures, will be tabled in Parliament.



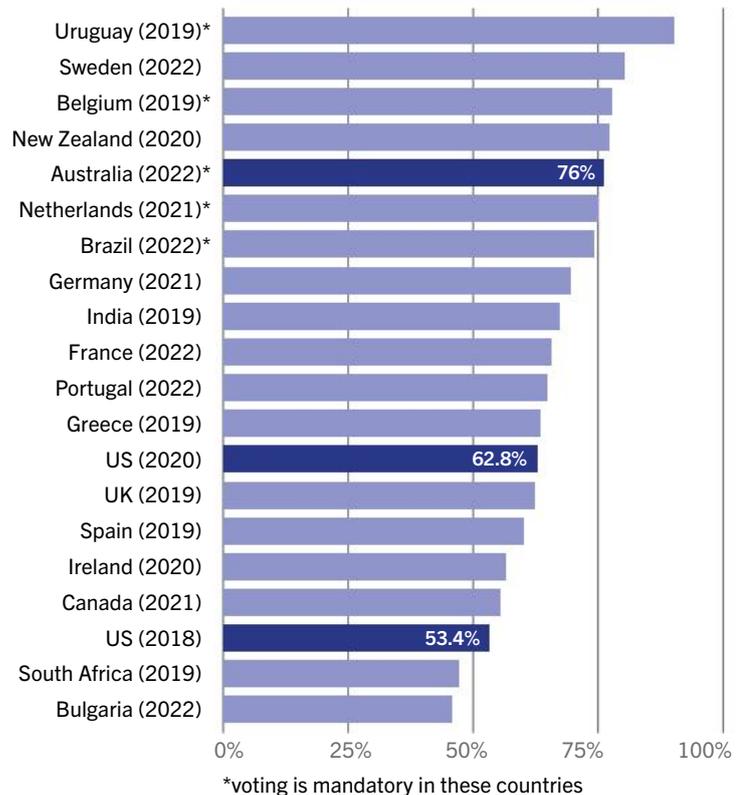
Activity C – Reforming Parliament

- 1 Provided is a list of possible reforms to the Australian Parliament that call on the democratic principles that have been examined. Summarise the proposals discussed in the following articles (in no more than five sentences for each), then share the key points and discuss with your class.

- 📖 'As Question Time becomes political theatre, does it still play a vital role in government?' The Conversation, 2019. theconversation.com/as-question-time-becomes-political-theatre-does-it-still-play-a-vital-role-in-government-121177
- 📖 'Let's give 16-year-olds the right to vote – they're more than ready'. ABC News, 2018. abc.net.au/news/2018-09-18/16-year-old-australians-should-have-the-right-to-vote/10241852
- 📖 'Labor calls for political donation cap following Nationals payment from Clive Palmer's company Mineralogy'. ABC News, 2021. abc.net.au/news/2021-02-02/labor-calls-for-political-donation-cap-nationals-clive-palmer/13110666
- 📖 'A truly independent Speaker could renew Australia's parliamentary democracy'. The Conversation, 2015. theconversation.com/a-truly-independent-speaker-could-renew-australias-parliamentary-democracy-44915
- 📖 'Government MPs call for mandatory voter identification at federal elections'. The Sydney Morning Herald, 2018. smh.com.au/politics/federal/government-mps-call-for-mandatory-voter-identification-at-federal-elections-20181205-p50kfb.html

The rule of law 2.1.2.4

The **rule of law** is simply the acknowledgement by government and people that the law exists and applies to them, and that it does so equally. The Australian political system includes a variety of features that uphold the rule of law, including the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial, natural justice and the ability of citizens to challenge the actions of the government. The Constitution, along with the conventions of government, also reflect agreement between major political parties and actors over how politics should be conducted.



Source: 'Midterms turnout: Could Australia-style voting help in US?' BBC News, 2022. bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-63470826

Any changes to this system must be made within these rules. When considering the case studies that follow, readers must consider both the proposals that are being made and the methods that are proposed to change the political system.

Active participation ^{2.1.2.5}

Due to compulsory voting, Australia has high turnout rates at elections, with over 90 per cent of eligible voters registering and participating in federal elections. Notwithstanding this, meaningful participation in elections extends beyond the simple act of voting. Many people follow politics closely through the media, including social media. They may engage with or even become members of a political party or join a campaign. Members of parties can participate in internal debates, contribute to party policy and participate in selecting who will run as the party's endorsed candidates in local, state and federal elections. In addition to political parties, a variety of voluntary **pressure groups** campaign for political change in very specific areas. Australian residents may arrange to meet with any state or federal politician to discuss their concerns or start a petition, which, if it has enough signatures, may be tabled and/or debated in Parliament. Ultimately, any Australian citizen over the age of 18 can stand for election and participate in Parliament itself.

The following resources are provided as suggestions for further reading on this topic:

- 📖 'Midterms turnout: Could Australia-style voting help in US?' BBC News, 2022. [bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-63470826](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-63470826)
- 📖 'As Australia's parliament returns, meet the youngest MPs doing things differently'. SBS News, 2020. [sbs.com.au/news/article/as-australias-parliament-returns-meet-the-youngest-mps-doing-things-differently/u5etr8hai](https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/as-australias-parliament-returns-meet-the-youngest-mps-doing-things-differently/u5etr8hai)

The **rule of law** refers to the principle that laws will be applied equally to all and that anyone will be held accountable for wrongdoing, regardless of their power.





Activity D – Participating in democracy locally

- 1 Investigate opportunities for political participation in your local area. Some suggestions are provided.
 - a Create a folded pamphlet that explains how people can get involved in political issues in your local area.
 - b Find out where the local branches of political parties meet, how you can view a council meeting and details of local pressure groups.
 - c Investigate the links between your school and political pressure groups such as teachers' unions, educational lobby groups or activist organisations.

Equality 2.1.2.6

Equality is an enduring concept in politics, with a number of different facets. In addition to important principles inherent to voting rights (such as 'one vote, one value'), the rule of law and other measures provide significant protections in favour of **legal and political equality**. Most important of these is the range of federal and state laws, such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, that formally prohibit discrimination based on attributes such as ethnicity, sex, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

As mentioned in previous chapters, economic inequality is a consistent element of social reality in Australia and similar societies – where the benefits of economic growth mostly accumulate to those who are already wealthy. The concentration and inheritance of wealth can be understood as a significant challenge to overall experiences of disempowerment in the Australian social and political system, especially where access to economic resources can be so readily translated into political power (and vice versa). These dynamics can mean that people who are unable to break out of poverty, as well as those who fear falling into it, may be understandably disenchanted with elements of that system; in turn, this undermines perceptions of the legitimacy of these systems.

Division of powers between federal and state governments 2.1.2.7

As discussed in the first chapter, Australia has a federal system of government, meaning that different powers are reserved for state and federal governments. The Australian Constitution outlines the powers of the federal government, which include **exclusive powers** (held by the federal government only) and **concurrent powers** (shared between the states and federation).

The federal government has exclusive power over areas such as defence, foreign policy, taxation, currency and citizenship. Concurrent powers are more complicated. Consider the following examples:

- in the policy area of education, the federal government has control over universities, while the states operate primary and secondary schools
- in health, while state governments manage hospitals, the federal government pays doctors and provides medicines through Medicare, which is the government-owned health insurance scheme for Australians.

Tussles between the state and federal governments over the concurrent powers are a perennial (everlasting) feature of Australian politics. The division of powers between the states and federation is further complicated by the fact that the federal government has the power to raise the most significant types of tax,

including income tax, corporations tax and the goods and services tax (or GST), and redistributes this taxation money to state and territory governments through what are known as ‘tied grants’. In practice, this gives the federal government considerable ability to influence how states govern and administer policy in areas that are otherwise exclusively *theirs*, by attaching conditions to the funding provided.

You can watch a broader discussion of these issues in the following video:

📺 ‘Fiscal federalism in Australia’. Aussie Law, 2023 (9 min). youtu.be/1kbA5emMbkw



Activity E – Federalism in Australia

- 1 Reforming the federation is considered difficult because it usually requires reform to the Constitution. Examine the article provided, which suggests several ways the federation could be improved. Make a table showing the strengths and weaknesses of Australia’s federal system according to this author, as well as the solution suggested for each.
 - 📖 ‘Federalism is a natural fit for Australia, but we need to make it work’. The Conversation, 2014. theconversation.com/federalism-is-a-natural-fit-for-australia-but-we-need-to-make-it-work-31846
- 2 Bob Katter’s Australia Party wants North Queensland to become a separate state. Investigate one other proposed new state in Australia.
 - a What are the arguments given by its supporters?
 - b Do you agree with the proposal? Why, or why not?

The 24 States of Australia If all statehood proposals had succeeded



Credit: Sasha Trubetskoy, 2014. sashamaps.net/docs/maps/proposed-australian-states

The significance of a democratic political culture in contributing to political stability and change in Australia 2.1.3

Democratic institutions are maintained by officials and citizens who uphold democratic norms. Therefore, the health of the institutions depends on how they will act when confronted by an anti-democratic challenge.

Participation in and engagement with democratic processes 2.1.3.1

In considering the question of political participation beyond what we've already discussed in the previous section, readers should consider not just whether people can participate but also the extent to which they actually *do*, and why.

Surveys show that many people are sceptical about the power of their vote to effect meaningful change, so the number of people who actively participate in political parties currently is low (compared to, say, a good chunk of the 20th century). Active participation in political groups and campaigns takes time, effort and, in some cases, money. Many people are also unwilling to take up opportunities for political participation because of a perception that their own voice won't be heard, especially if they perceive political activities or conversations as things that require special knowledge or skills (rather than something we *all* have an innate capacity for).

In the case studies that follow, students must consider not only whether all Australians have the opportunity to participate but also whether they are able or willing to take this opportunity. Students must also consider the extent to which methods of accountability and transparency encourage participation by ordinary citizens.

Trust in government 2.1.3.2

Read ahead for our first featured case study, which discusses trust in government in detail.

The existence of many political parties 2.1.3.3

Australian politics has always included a wide variety of political parties; however, it has historically been primarily a two-party system. Over the last 20 years, votes for the major parties have declined significantly, and independent politicians and minor parties, who used to be a rarity, have become commonplace at the state and federal levels. This reflects a general decline in support for major parties across the world. The increasing shift towards a multiparty system has implications for the nature of Australian democracy, with some arguing that it will lead to weaker government, while others maintain that it reflects a more diverse range of political positions.

Political ideology 2.1.3.4

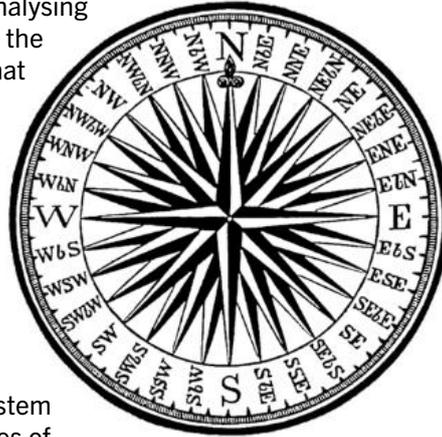
The platforms of the major Australian parties make clear references to their ideological underpinnings. Historically, the strong two-party system in Australia – led by the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party of Australia – meant that parties were more pragmatic than ideological. Political ideology tended to focus on economic matters, reflecting the Cold War division between the competing economic and social systems of the Soviet Union and the United States. Following the end of the Cold War in 1991, the ideological questions around the economy have become less contested, with both major parties agreeing on the neoliberal consensus of relatively minimal government intervention in the economy. However, there are sharp ideological divisions over social and cultural questions – the 'culture wars' – particularly relating

to the interpretation of Australian history, the role of religion in public life, personal morality, and Australia's international alliances and foreign policy. These divisions are often expressed in ideological terms.



Activity F – Party ideologies and electoral systems

- 1 The Political Compass website provides one way of analysing the ideologies of Australian political parties. Examine the major parties in another two-party system, such as that of the United States. Compare and contrast the political positions of the major centre-left and centre-right parties in the two countries.
 - 📄 'Australian federal election 2022'. The Political Compass, 2022. politicalcompass.org/aus2022
- 2 Australia's two-party system contrasts with countries that use proportional representation, which leads to a greater range of parties being represented in Parliament. Using the resources provided, create a one-page guide to the electoral system in one country, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of this country's political system. Two suggestions are provided.



New Zealand

- 📄 'What is MMP?' Electoral Commission New Zealand, 2023. elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/what-is-new-zealands-system-of-government/what-is-mmp
- 📄 'New Zealand's MMP electoral system: What is it and how does it work?' The Guardian, 2020. theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/12/new-zealands-mmp-electoral-system-what-is-it-and-how-does-it-work
- 📄 '3 reasons why New Zealand has the best-designed government in the world'. Vox, 2015. vox.com/2014/9/23/6831777/new-zealand-electoral-system-constitution-mixed-member-unicameral
- 📄 'Parliamentary parties'. New Zealand Parliament, 2023. parliament.nz/en/mps-and-electorates/political-parties

Italy

- 📄 'Who is running, how does voting work in Italy's election?' Al Jazeera, 2022. aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/19/who-is-running-how-voting-works-in-italys-election
- 📄 'Italy elections: Who's who and how the vote works'. BBC News, 2022. bbc.com/news/world-europe-62726468
- 📄 'Italy: Parties at a glance'. Politpro. politpro.eu/en/italy/parties
- 📄 'Italy election explained: Who is running? How does it work? Who is likely to win?' Euronews, 2022. euronews.com/my-europe/2022/09/23/italy-election-explained-why-now-who-is-running-how-does-it-work-who-is-likely-to-win

Acceptance of democratic values 2.1.3.5

As we've learnt, democratic principles and values are multifaceted, and peoples' perspectives on which values are most crucial or are being undermined by a particular policy or political actor can vary widely depending on their ideologies, interests and even the types of media they consume. Nonetheless, one 2017 Pew Research Center study with respondents from 38 countries (including Australia) revealed overwhelming support for democracy as the best form of government – albeit with 17 per cent of people describing representative democracy as a 'bad' way of government and 24 per cent describing the prospect of being ruled by the military as 'good':

- 📄 'Globally, broad support for representative and direct democracy'. Pew Research Center, 2017. pewresearch.org/global/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy

Mistrust in government is often a primary reason that autocrats argue for powers that can challenge the maintenance of democratic norms. Further, it has contributed to the phenomenon of ‘democratic backsliding’ across the world in the last 10 years. Investigate the recommended resources provided to learn more:

- 📖 ‘Democracy is losing’. Vox, 2021. [vox.com/the-weeds/22791528/biden-democracy-freedom-house-build-back-better](https://www.vox.com/the-weeds/22791528/biden-democracy-freedom-house-build-back-better)
- 📖 ‘The global democratic recession may finally be ending, a new report finds’. Time, 2023. time.com/6261065/freedom-house-report-democratic-backsliding



Activity G – Democratic backsliding

- 1 In recent years a number of countries have slipped further from conventional ideas of liberal democracy towards less liberal and less democratic forms of government. Using what you’ve learnt so far, along with the suggested resources provided and your own research, investigate the extent to which a specific country other than Australia might be considered democratic at the present time.
- 2 Use the labels provided to organise your notes and reflections. You can use one of the three suggested countries (along with the suggested resources) or choose your own. Categorise by:
 - a country name
 - b current government leaders (i.e. prime minister, president)
 - c basic features (location, population, gross domestic product [GDP])
 - d democratic features that are present (list three)
 - e democratic features that are *not* present (list three)
 - f important events in last the 10 years.

Hungary

- 📖 ‘Hungary country profile’. BBC News, 2023. [bbc.com/news/world-europe-17380792](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17380792)
- 📖 ‘Victory for Hungary’s Orban means a headache for the EU’. BBC News, 2022. [bbc.com/news/world-europe-60978909](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60978909)
- 📖 ‘How Viktor Orban built his illiberal state’. The New Republic, 2022. [newrepublic.com/article/165953/viktor-orban-built-illiberal-state](https://www.newrepublic.com/article/165953/viktor-orban-built-illiberal-state)
- 📖 ‘Viktor Orban’s ‘illiberal democracy’’. BBC Newsnight, 2018 (14 min). youtu.be/QrftUpWOsc

Turkey

- 📖 ‘Erdogan: Turkey’s all-powerful leader of 20 years’. BBC News, 2023. [bbc.com/news/world-europe-13746679](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13746679)
- 📖 ‘How the 20 year rule of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has transformed Turkey’. The Conversation, 2022. theconversation.com/how-the-20-year-rule-of-recep-tayyip-erdogan-has-transformed-turkey-188211
- 📖 ‘How Recep Tayyip Erdogan became Turkey’s most powerful leader’. NPR, 2023. [npr.org/2023/05/13/1175887249/turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-leader-president-election](https://www.npr.org/2023/05/13/1175887249/turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-leader-president-election)

Venezuela

- 📖 ‘Venezuela crisis: How the political situation escalated’. BBC News, 2021. [bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36319877](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36319877)
- 📖 ‘Venezuela elections: Maduro wins second term’. BBC News, 2018. [theguardian.com/world/2018/may/21/venezuela-elections-nicolas-maduro-wins-second-term](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/21/venezuela-elections-nicolas-maduro-wins-second-term)
- 📖 ‘Venezuela: The rise and fall of a petrostate’. Council on Foreign Relations, 2023. [cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-crisis](https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-crisis)

The Constitution 2.1.3.6

Australia has one of the world’s oldest unchanged constitutions. Unlike those of many other democracies, the Australian Constitution does not feature grand statements of values and beliefs. This could be seen as a strength in that it

creates a narrower, shared set of institutional rules, but it can also be criticised for not outlining the principles and shared values that underpin Australian political institutions.

Agreement on the validity of elections to determine government 2.1.3.7

One of the most important moments in Australian democratic culture occurs when a party loses office and the prime minister personally visits the governor-general to advise them to appoint the opposition leader as prime minister. This moment, in which a sitting government acknowledges their defeat and relinquishes power, is one of the most important in a representative democracy. This is partly because those with weaker democratic institutional norms can and have been overtaken by the impulse of an outgoing (incumbent) government to deny the validity of an election, or to invoke a national emergency to justify clinging to power.

Despite disagreements over procedural aspects of elections such as compulsory voting, the existence and independence of the AEC is supported by political parties in Australia and contributes to a strong democratic culture. Moreover, in the Westminster system, Parliament has a central role in holding the executive to account and can remove the prime minister at any time. Therefore, one measure of the health of Australian democracy is the level of respect that politicians hold for the institution of Parliament and its procedures.

Leadership and succession 2.1.3.8

In Australia, prime ministers and premiers are formally ‘first among equals’ with their colleagues in Cabinet, who together form the core of the executive arm of the government. Nonetheless, contemporary expectations and pressures facing government leaders in Australia have – partly as a result of modern media’s primary role in representing government in people’s lives – meant that the faces and voices



Former and future leaders Tony Abbott and Peter Dutton seated in the Liberals’ party room, backed by portraits of earlier leaders. Credit: Mick Tsikas/Australian Associated Press.

of party and government leaders are incredibly prominent elements of people's engagement with political issues. While this does lend leaders greater power in some sense, it can also increase *risk* when leaders are perceived (either by the public or their party colleagues) to lack particular qualities thought necessary for good leadership. This may include their level of charisma or their willingness to consult, strategise, communicate and campaign effectively.

Anxieties around any number of these factors can sometimes gain momentum and lead to campaigns to replace leaders. The period from 2007–22 is considered by some as evidence of increasing instability in party leadership. During this time, at a federal level both a Labor government (2007–13) and a Liberal-National government (2013–22) had *two* instances of a sitting prime minister being forced to step aside due to an internal challenge to their leadership. Despite the more visible and metaphorically bloody contests over leadership, it's important to take a broad view that shows (among state governments over the same period, at least) that relatively civil transitions between leaders are also just as common.

The influence of the media 2.1.3.9

Compared to other democracies, Australia has a high concentration of media ownership. In relation to traditional media, the newspaper market is nearly totally dominated by two companies: News Corp Australia and Nine Entertainment. Former prime ministers Kevin Rudd (Labor) and Malcolm Turnbull (Liberal) have been at the forefront of calls for a Royal Commission into the dominant role played by News Corp in media and its influence over the operation of Australia's democracy. Ironically, this may reflect the declining role of traditional media generally, as the media landscape has become dominated by foreign-owned social media companies, such as Meta, X and TikTok. Increasingly, most traditional media outlets in Australia are subsidiaries of larger entities headquartered overseas, such as The Guardian and the Daily Mail (both based in London) or News Corp (based in New York). Debates over media ownership are, in part, reflective of disagreement over what interpretations of reality are *broadly* accepted among political actors with varied interests and ideological perspectives. In other words, some common ground is necessary for liberal democracies to survive and remain stable.

The following article provides a good overview of media concentration in Australia (complementing what you may have already explored in the first chapter):

 'Australia's newspaper ownership is among the most concentrated in the world'. The Guardian, 2020. [theguardian.com/news/datablog/2020/nov/13/australia-newspaper-ownership-is-among-the-most-concentrated-in-the-world](https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2020/nov/13/australia-newspaper-ownership-is-among-the-most-concentrated-in-the-world)



Activity H – Media ownership in Australia

- 1 Undertake your own research into the concerns raised by former prime ministers Turnbull and Rudd regarding the concentration of media ownership and the role of News Corp in Australian domestic politics. Interviews on the topic available on YouTube may be a good place to start.
 - a Summarise each former leader's arguments.
 - b Do you agree or disagree with their concerns? Why, or why not?

The strengths and weaknesses of Australian political institutions and processes 2.1.4



Designing your own case study

The study design lists a broad range of potential case studies for this area of study. The list of enduring strengths and criticisms of the Australian political system provided can be used as a reference point for teachers and students to craft their own case studies from contemporary issues. Of course, the explanatory power of the ‘strengths and weaknesses’ model is contested and can sometimes be better framed as ‘strengths and areas for reform’. When focusing on any particular institution or process, students should ensure that they consider a variety of interests and perspectives while conducting their own research.

The Constitution 2.1.4.1



Strengths

- Australia has the world’s tenth-oldest constitution. The political structures created in 1901 and adapted since have created an enduring and stable democracy.
- The Constitution draws on the best aspects of the British Westminster system and the federal system of the United States.
- The Constitution can only be changed through a democratic and transparent process.



Weaknesses

- The Constitution does not contain many features found in other constitutions, such as a preamble stating the country’s principles.
- The Constitution does not mention key political institutions, including the prime minister and Cabinet. The reserve powers of the governor-general and state governors are vast and have been the subject of historical dispute.
- The Constitution contains clauses such as ‘the race power’, which would not be introduced if it were written today.

Constitutional monarchy 2.1.4.2



Strengths

- The monarch and their representatives sit above party politics and act as unifying and impartial leaders in the political system.
- A proposal to make Australia a republic was defeated by popular vote in 1999.
- The monarchy reflects Australia’s historical links with the United Kingdom.



Weaknesses

- The monarch is not elected by the Australian people and has limited interaction with Australia.
- The monarchy is not representative of the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of modern Australia.

Responsible government 2.1.4.3

Strengths

- The Westminster system of responsible government ensures that the executive (prime minister and Cabinet) is accountable to Parliament through structures and processes including Question Time, ministerial responsibility and the federal opposition.
- Responsible government creates a dynamic system of government in which the prime minister must have the confidence of the House at all times.

Weaknesses

- Aspects of responsible government such as ministerial responsibility are built on conventions that have been increasingly flouted in recent years.
- A variety of other political systems around the world have produced enduring democracies through different political structures, and Australia can learn from them.

Mechanisms of accountability 2.1.4.4

Strengths

- The Australian political system includes a wide range of accountability measures including regular elections, Question Time, an independent media and independent watchdogs.
- Regular changes of government and leadership, along with high-profile inquiries into corruption at the state level, show that the system is effective in holding officials to account.

Weaknesses

- The legitimacy and effectiveness of some accountability measures, particularly watchdogs relating to human rights and corruption, are sometimes undermined by criticism from influential political actors.
- Corruption watchdogs are active at the state level but do not exist at the federal level (see *public service*).
- The concentration of traditional media ownership diminishes the variety of voices that are heard in the media landscape. Meanwhile, the unregulated nature of social media means that misinformation and disinformation can thrive.

Federalism and the division of powers 2.1.4.5

Strengths

- The federal system divides responsibilities and thereby creates greater accountability to voters for the delivery of services such as health and transport.
- The Federal Cabinet (formerly COAG) promotes cooperation between state and federal governments often through various parties; this contributes to a democratic political culture.
- The federal Senate increases the power of smaller states, thereby diminishing the domination of Australian politics by the populous eastern states of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

Weaknesses

- State boundaries are based on the colonial boundaries set in 1901 and do not reflect the distribution of the Australian population. State boundaries would likely be different if they were created today.
- Two of the territories (ACT and NT) have elected governments; however, these can be overruled by the federal government at any time.
- The federal system entrenches malapportionment (unequal numbers of ‘seats’ per head of population, which breaks the rule of ‘one vote, one value’) in the federal Parliament.

The electoral system and representation 2.1.4.6

Strengths

- The AEC acts as an independent umpire in elections and is respected by all political actors.
- Compulsory voting ensures high turnout at elections and gives governments legitimacy.
- The use of single-member electorates and the system of allocating preferences in the House of Representatives tends to produce ‘stable’ governments with parliamentary majorities. Conversely, the use of preferential voting and proportional representation in the Senate tends to allow for the election a broader range of independents and minor parties that can hold the government to account.

Weaknesses

- Malapportionment is entrenched in the federal Parliament.
 - In the Senate, states are equally represented, with 12 senators each, and the territories each have two. This overrepresents smaller states such as Tasmania (pop. 500 000) and underrepresents larger states such as New South Wales (pop. eight million) and territories such as the ACT (pop. 400 000).
 - In the House, electorates cannot cross state/territory boundaries, meaning that there can be significant variation in the number of voters per electorate despite the independent role of the AEC.
- There are ongoing disputes over aspects of the electoral system such as compulsory voting, registration and public funding of political parties and as the process for registering on the electoral roll.
- Some argue that the electoral system overrepresents major parties despite the increase in support for minor parties and independents. And some argue greater representation could be achieved through alternative voting systems such as first-past-the-post voting or proportional representation.

The public service 2.1.4.7

Strengths

- The Australian Public Service acts as an independent and impartial body providing expert advice to the government of the day.
- Australia scores highly on international measures of political corruption in the public sector, currently ranked thirteenth out of 178 countries that are assessed by the Corruption Perceptions Index.



Weaknesses

- The increasing role of political advisers has politicised the traditional roles of the public service – thus, diminishing the role of the public service in contributing to decision-making.
- The outsourcing of public services to private providers and the widespread use of private consultants has diminished the expertise and capacity of the public service.
- Corruption inquiries at the state level have often drawn attention to corrupt conduct by public servants. No corruption investigation body exists at the federal level.

Rule of law 2.1.4.8



Strengths

- The Australian legal system upholds the rule of law through important principles including the presumption of innocence, protections against unlawful imprisonment, and the ability of Australians to challenge the government in courts and in the media.
- The Australian Law Reform Commission exists to provide independent recommendations on law reform to the government.



Weaknesses

- The principle of the separation of powers is not always recognised by politicians, who sometimes criticise actions of the judiciary.
- See *rights and freedoms*.

Rights and freedoms 2.1.4.9



Strengths

- The Australian Constitution gives several rights to Australians, while further rights are enshrined in legislation.
- A variety of watchdogs, including the Australian Human Rights Commission, have the power to investigate and publicise human rights abuses.
- Australia consistently ranks highly on global indexes of human rights.



Weaknesses

- Unlike most democratic constitutions and many undemocratic ones, the Australian Constitution does not contain a bill of rights.
- Australia has been harshly criticised by UN agencies for its treatment of minorities and refugees.

The extent to which Australian political culture, institutions and process promote, enhance or undermine democratic principles ^{2.2.5}

The preceding list of strengths and weaknesses also offers some consideration of certain ways that the Australian political system promotes and undermines democratic principles. Some of these observations can often seem contradictory, partly because they are routinely disputed. Nonetheless, the information and learning students will have undertaken in their study so far should put them in a position to form and justify their own opinions on the extent to which the principles they feel are most important to a functional democracy are promoted, enhanced or undermined by the specific characteristics of the Australian system.

Students may already be aware of political disputes where either or both sides base their arguments in terms of whether something is, or isn't, 'democratic'. The debate over whether Australia should become a republic is a prominent example of this. Consider the different perspectives provided.

“Quite apart from the fact that Queen Elizabeth’s reign has been such a model of endeavour and achievement, such that there wouldn’t be a country on earth proud to have such a head of state, to tamper with our limited, self-effacing, democratic and constitutional monarchy would be an act of institutional vandalism.”

Former prime minister Tony Abbott, 2022. ‘Australia is stronger thanks to the monarchy’.
tonyabbott.com.au/2022/06/australia-is-stronger-thanks-to-the-monarchy

“It must be extremely irksome to do all the hard and democratic legwork of being elected and then be forced to make a pledge to an undemocratic head of state to take your place in parliament.”

Chris Kenny, 2023. ‘God save us all, for nothing should save the monarchy’. *The Australian*.
theaustralian.com.au/commentary/god-save-us-all-for-nothing-should-save-the-monarchy/news-story/456ce27018b56827d93a2c674e87935a

In these examples, Tony Abbott and Chris Kenny – who sit together on the right wing of politics and agree on many political issues – provide opposing views of the monarchy while appealing to differing views of what a democracy fundamentally is or should be. You will find this occurs *often* in political debates – everyone claims to be on the side of democracy and appeals to democratic values.

The interests and perspectives of political actors ^{2.2.6}

Later sections of this chapter feature two case studies that explore the extent to which Australian political culture, institutions and process promote, enhance or undermine democratic principles, along with the interests and perspectives of political actors (the last two key knowledge points of our area of study). These case studies will explore these questions in relation to two prominent issues, as articulated by our study design: **integrity, trust and accountability** and **First Nations peoples: voice, treaty, truth**.

Revision questions

Response breakdown

Examine the practice question, sample response and marking scheme provided, then highlight in the sample response each of the features noted in the marking scheme.

Explain one way that a democratic political culture is demonstrated in the Australian political system.

Sample response

One way that democratic political culture is demonstrated in the Australian political system is through the existence of multiple political parties. Political parties provide opportunities for citizen participation in politics through memberships and involvement in political campaigns and policymaking. For example, during 2023 the Liberal Party of Australia, which has over 50 000 members, introduced plebiscites at some state-level branches that allowed members a greater say over who would be pre-selected to run as the party's endorsed candidates. These plebiscites demonstrate the role of party members and the party as a whole in contributing to a democratic culture.

Marking scheme

	Write a topic sentence using key words from the prompt ('democratic political culture', 'demonstrated').
	Identify a case study.
	Give evidence using SPEDD (statistics, people, events, dates and/or deals).
	Write a linking sentence showing the relationship between the case study and the democratic features.

Further resources

For more resources relevant to this area of study, access the online resource library associated with this textbook: sev.asn.au/textbook-resources/pol12

Data set

Jilius-Maximilians-Universitat Wurzburg, 2020. 'Ranking of countries by quality of democracy'. democracymatrix.com/ranking

Podcast

ABC Listen, 2023. 'Cathy McGowan's lessons for lasting change' (54 min). abc.net.au/listen/programs/bigideas/cathy-mcgowan-indi-independent-lessons-for-lasting-change/102747790

Report

Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020. 'Democracy Index 2020: In sickness and in health?' eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020

Website

Bastian Herre, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, 2023. 'Democracy'. Our World in Data. ourworldindata.org/democracy

Case study: Integrity, trust and accountability

It may seem obvious that principles such as **integrity** and **trust** are essential to good governance. However, we can see that such principles are not universally accepted in instances when a politician is found to have engaged in **corruption** and yet remains popular across the electorate. Corruption can occur through a range of actions, such as bribery, fraud, dishonesty or the improper use of influence. It can be grand in nature, involving a systemic subversion across high levels of government, or petty, involving low-level officials in their interactions with the public. The common perception that all politicians are self-serving and dishonest reflects, in part, a begrudging acceptance that some subversion of the **public interest** is inevitable in any system involving government authority. We also recognise that rigorous adherence to principles of accountability and integrity among public officials are not actually essential to the functioning of a state. Australian barrister Fiona McLeod (2021) refers to this as the ‘resigned group-shrug of Australian voters’.

Perhaps the most striking example of this in the public consciousness is Donald Trump, who has remained relatively popular despite a multitude of scandals and an apparent lack of concern about perceptions of his own self-serving behaviour while in public office. Depending on how we analyse his electoral successes, this highlights the extent to which there are factors that voters may prioritise ahead of the appearance of integrity. These may include perceptions of a leader’s ‘strength’, or their championing the interests of particular social groups.

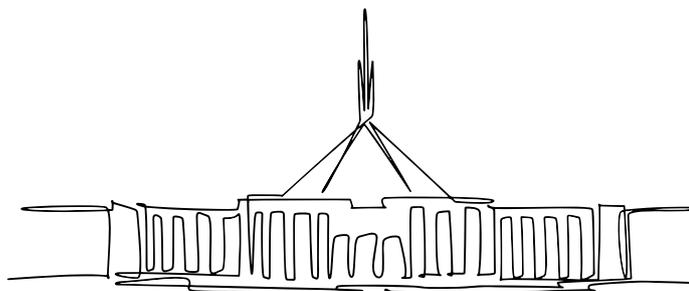
Integrity refers to public officials acting in ways that reflect ‘good faith’ attempts to advance the common good, in line with due process and accountability measures and in a way that is detached from their own personal interests.

Trust in this context refers to the popular belief that political systems operate in a predictable manner and to the best interests of all; this is closely linked to the concept of legitimacy, which populations confer to their governments expecting they will use their authority in society’s best interests.

Corruption refers to public officials, policy decisions or systems of government being compromised in a way that leads to personal interests being prioritised over the common good.

The **public interest** is the primary goal of good decision-making, whereby decisions increase the overall wellbeing of the people affected by them.

WELCOME TO



Canberra

Credit: Simple Line/Adobe.



Activity I – Foregrounding integrity

- 1 Before reading on, let's reflect on what we already think and know about the interrelated concepts of integrity, accountability and trust. Write a brief response to each of the following questions.
 - a Why does integrity in government matter?
 - b What does integrity look like?
 - c What are the relationships between integrity, trust and accountability?

In many parts of the world, corruption is a predictable part of daily life. For instance, in China the payment of a bribe using a red envelope, known as *hongbao*, is considered a cultural practice. It is commonly accepted that money may be given to advance a waiting list for a medical procedure or to enrol children into a school. Chinese people also use the term *guanxi* to refer to networks of power in which individuals regularly exchange 'favours' such as business contracts or employment opportunities:

 'From envelopes of cash to cigarettes: The hidden agenda of China's widespread bribery culture'. ABC News, 2018. abc.net.au/news/2018-11-22/the-hidden-agenda-of-chinas-widespread-bribery-culture/10498074

Similarly, a 2021 Mexican survey found that one-quarter of respondents had paid a bribe or were asked to pay a bribe that year (Statista, 2023). While such levels of unethical behaviour are not present in Australia, there are many examples of corruption that also show that integrity in government is far from guaranteed.

According to the NGO Transparency International Australia, integrity in government involves the following aspects:

- transparency over who is giving money to political parties, and how much
- transparency over who is trying to influence politicians, and why
- fair and merit-based public funding decisions and job appointments
- transparency over government decision-making
- fair and honest election campaign advertising.

Source: 'Political integrity'. Transparency International Australia, 2022. transparency.org.au/accountable-government/political-integrity

The intention of these principles is to ensure that elections are a genuine contest of the best values and ideas.

As mentioned, Transparency International ranks Australia as thirteenth in the world on their 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, scoring 75 out of 100 on a range of measures. Although this places Australia among the top ranked countries in the world for integrity, the organisation notes that Australia has dropped 10 points since 2012. They argue there should be reforms to political donations, including caps and real-time disclosure, as well as greater transparency regarding lobbying.

Perceived corruption in Australia, 2012–20 (score and international ranking)



‘Corruption Perceptions Index – Australia’s results 2012–21’.

Source: Transparency International Australia, 2022. transparency.org.au/better-politics



Activity J – Corruption in government

- Undertake your own research into corruption allegations around a recent or currently serving government leader. Some suggested examples are provided.

Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel)

Recep Erdoğan (Turkey)

Sebastian Kurz (Austria)

Narendra Modi (India)

Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina)

Boris Johnson (United Kingdom)

Outline the allegations of corruption against the leader, as well as their degree of popularity, as part of your research.

- Consider the following quotation and answer the question that follows.

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”

Lord Acton, 1887.

Are all politicians corrupt? Does power corrupt, and if so, how?

- In 2014 Barry O’Farrell resigned as NSW premier after it was discovered that he had received a \$3000 bottle of wine that was never declared. O’Farrell stated that he forgot he received the gift, but nevertheless took responsibility for the mistake. At the time it was suggested that resignation was too strong a consequence for this error.

You can read more about this incident here:

📄 ‘NSW Premier Barry O’Farrell to resign over ‘massive memory fail’ at ICAC’. ABC News, 2014. [abc.net.au/news/2014-04-16/nsw-premier-barry-ofarrell-to-resign-over-icac-grange-wine/5393478](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-16/nsw-premier-barry-ofarrell-to-resign-over-icac-grange-wine/5393478)

Write a paragraph outlining your perspective on this issue. What is the difference between an honest error and corrupt behaviour? Is it possible to act entirely ethically in politics?



Trust in government

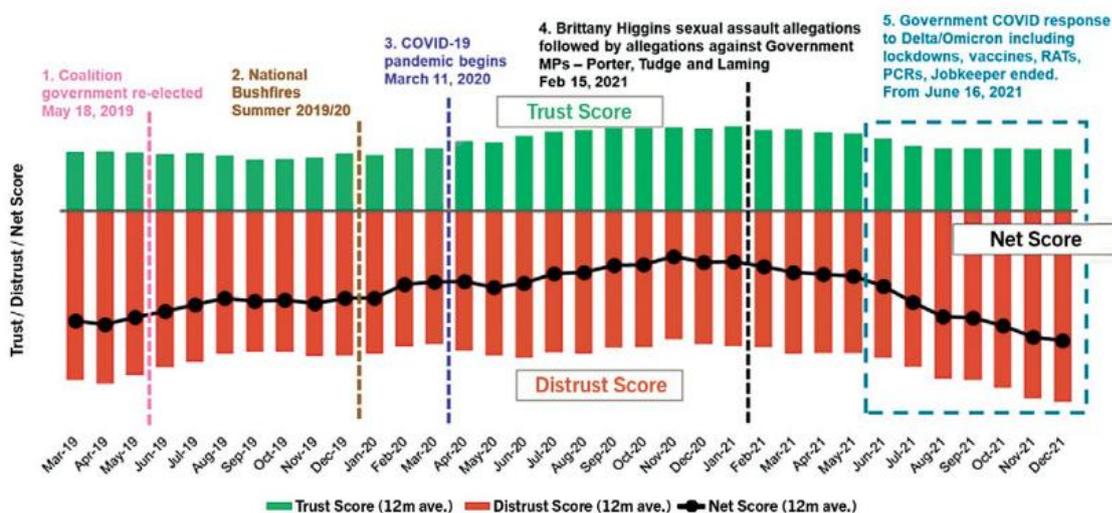
Public trust in the Australian political system has fluctuated in recent years. Perhaps surprisingly, trust in politicians improved during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when governments came to have unprecedented involvement in people's lives. This included much of the population relying on significant (if temporary) government interventions such as providing 'JobKeeper' payments to employers to allow them to retain staff, increasing the rate of welfare payments for the unemployed, and public health measures including social distancing, lockdowns and travel restrictions.

However, polling organisation Roy Morgan found that 40 per cent of those surveyed in 2020 expressed distrust in the government. Following the withdrawal of many temporary measures, and as the pandemic entered a new phase, reported rates of distrust rose significantly to 55 per cent in 2021. Roy Morgan suggested that this could also be attributed to a range of other factors, including perceptions that the recent vaccination rollout had been mishandled, as well as a range of sexual assault allegations being aired against members of Parliament and their staff.

The Australian Election Study (which is completed following every federal election) also found a decline in public trust over the longer term. The proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement 'people in government can be trusted' declined from an average of 38 per cent over the period 2001–10 to an average of 28 per cent over 2013–22 (Cameron et al., 2022). Curiously, the 2022 Australian Public Services report found that 61 per cent of Australians trust the public service – a score that increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following is a list of recommended and further reading on this topic:

- 📖 'Trust slumps in government and media as division rules, Edelman survey shows'. ABC News, 2023. abc.net.au/news/2023-02-08/trust-slump-as-division-rules/101939406
- 📖 'Since March 2019 government trust and distrust have fluctuated but 2021 ended with soaring levels of distrust'. Roy Morgan, 2022. roymorgan.com/findings/since-march-2019-government-trust-distrust-have-fluctuated-but-2021-ended-with-soaring-levels-of-distrust
- 📖 'Trust in government soars in Australia and New Zealand during pandemic'. The Conversation, 2021. theconversation.com/trust-in-government-soars-in-australia-and-new-zealand-during-pandemic-154948
- 📖 'Trust in Australian public services: 2022 annual report'. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2022. apsreform.gov.au/resources/reports/taps-2022



The COVID-19 pandemic saw levels of distrust in government grow to record highs.
Source: Roy Morgan, 2022. roymorgan.com/findings/since-march-2019-government-trust-distrust-have-fluctuated-but-2021-ended-with-soaring-levels-of-distrust



Activity K – Levels of trust

- 1 Reflect on what you have learnt and read so far. What conclusions can you make from this information? In general, do Australians trust or distrust government?
- 2 Write a paragraph on what you think should be a satisfactory level of trust in government.
- 3 What actions could the government take to improve trust? Write an action plan addressed to the prime minister's office that suggests 1–2 actions that could be taken to improve trust.

An action plan should include:

- a an explanation of the nature and extent of the problem
- b an outline of a potential action or strategy, including who would be involved
- c a description of the intended effect of your suggested strategy on the problem
- d discussion of the potential limitations or drawbacks of your suggestion.

At the time of writing there is no code of conduct for all federal parliamentarians; however, one exists for ministers. The code lists the following ethical standards:

- ministers must ensure that they act with **integrity** – that is, through the lawful and disinterested exercise of the statutory and other powers available to their office
- ministers must observe **fairness** in making official decisions
- ministers must accept that they are **accountable** for the exercise of the powers and functions of their office
- ministers must accept the full implications of the principle of ministerial **responsibility**
- ministers must act in the **public interest** based on their best judgement of what will advance the common good of the people of Australia.

You can view the full code of conduct here:

 'Code of conduct for ministers'. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2022.
pmc.gov.au/resources/code-conduct-ministers

Trust in government is significant, as the stability of the political and social system in liberal democracies rests on the idea that leaders and institutions operate in a predictable and impersonal manner. This forms an essential part of the general concept of the rule of law.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):

“Public trust leads to greater compliance with a wide range of public policies, such as public health responses, regulations and the tax system. It also nurtures political participation, strengthens social cohesion, and builds institutional legitimacy. In the longer term, trust is needed to help governments tackle long-term societal challenges such as climate change, ageing populations, and changing labour markets.”

OECD, 2023. 'Trust in government'. oecd.org/governance/trust-in-government

Trust in government ensures that we act according to rules that aren't always directly beneficial to us. For example, criminal conduct in the workplace, such as embezzlement, may be more personally advantageous than obeying the law. However, in most cases we choose to act honestly out of the belief that it is in our long-term interest to do so. Trust nurtures the bonds of the **social contract** that is

thought to exist between members of society, which in turn allows for community-mindedness and feelings of general social goodwill to develop – even towards those we may not know personally. This is sometimes expressed as social or political ‘capital’ – the latter envisaging goodwill as something that can be banked by government leaders and drawn upon when they need to persuade others about the merit of a particular decision or policy.

In contrast, corruption follows the opposite logic. Where corruption is widespread, distrust of individual public officials can translate into a broader lack of faith in formal political institutions. This is particularly the case when lawmaking *itself* is seen to benefit individuals, groups or lawmakers, rather than society as a whole. In turn, there is less willingness to follow laws, as there is no longer a belief that they will be upheld equally for all. As Professor Anne Twomey puts it:

“This is what the decay of democracy looks and smells like. It is by no means full-blown decay. Australia is still one of the most law-abiding and democratic countries in the world. But when the rule of law is disregarded because it is inconvenient, when governments calculate how they should behave according to what they can get away with, when public servants facilitate such action rather than insisting upon the application of the law, and when power is seen as giving immunity from the application of rules and impunity from the legal consequences, then the rot in the democratic system has begun and will spread unless action is taken to stop it.”

Anne Twomey, 2021. ‘Constitutional risk’, disrespect for the rule of law and democratic decay’. *Canadian Journal of Comparative and Contemporary Law*, vol. 293. canlii.ca/t/t5k3

Social instability is one potential response to a widespread perception of government corruption, such as riots in Brazil in 2023 following corruption claims involving former president Jair Bolsonaro (McCoy, 2021). Similarly, the degree to which Melburnians adhered to relatively heavy restrictions during COVID lockdowns might be attributed to the degree of trust among the public that painful or onerous emergency measures implemented by the government were justified.

Accountability

There are a variety of processes in place to ensure that governments are conducted with integrity and are held accountable for their actions – many of which have been explored earlier in this text. These include:

- elections
- the Senate (including its additional powers of review and the ‘estimates’ process)
- parliamentary committees, inquiries and hearings
- general parliamentary scrutiny
- the High Court
- media
- **ombudsmen** and **auditors**
- **whistleblowers**
- investigative corruption bodies
- the broader criminal justice system.

An **ombudsman** is an independent official who investigates complaints against government departments and industries.

An **audit** is an examination of the conduct of a department to ensure that it follows correct processes and upholds social expectations.

A **whistleblower** is an individual with inside knowledge of unethical or illegal activities conducted within an organisation (including governments or private entities) who reports this activity publicly without authorisation of that entity; while laws sometimes exist to protect whistleblowers, they can and do often face sanctions and criminal penalties.

These checks and balances are designed to limit corrupt behaviour in the Australian political system. Despite this, practices that many perceive as unethical or corrupt still occur across different parts of the political system.



Richard Boyle

A prominent recent example of a whistleblower in a government department is former Australian Taxation Office staff member Richard Boyle, who publicly revealed his concerns about the aggressive and unethical debt collection practices at the organisation. Despite widespread calls to halt the prosecution of Boyle (including by the Human Rights Law Centre), Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus refused to use his powers under the *Judiciary Act 1903* to intervene.

'Prosecution of ATO whistleblower Richard Boyle is 'insanity', says taxpayer he helped'. ABC News, 2023. [abc.net.au/news/2023-09-18/ato-whistleblower-richard-boyle-prosecution-to-test-protections/102860814](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-18/ato-whistleblower-richard-boyle-prosecution-to-test-protections/102860814)



Examples of corruption in Australian politics

This section features several case studies exploring instances of a lack of integrity in Australian politics. As you read about the case studies, keep in mind the key concepts set out in the study design:

- causes
- consequences
- interests and perspectives
- effect on stability and change
- political significance.

The 'sports rorts' affair

The sports rorts affair involved over \$100 million worth of grants made by the Morrison government in 2019 to a variety of sporting clubs. These grants were awarded under the Community Sport Infrastructure Grant Program. A report by the Australian National Audit Office found that the program failed to award grants on the basis of merit, instead using public funds primarily for political purposes. When revealed, this practice was seen as a particularly blatant example of **pork-barrelling** and caused significant scandal for the Morrison government.

Pork-barrelling refers to the provision of government funding to projects or areas based on their ability to generate political support.

The program was originally intended for the Australian Sports Commission (also known as Sport Australia) to assess grant proposals and award them based on the following principles:

- community participation
- community need
- project design and delivery.

Proposals were assessed by Sport Australia and graded out of 100, with those scoring 74 or higher being recommended for funding.

As a statutory body, Sport Australia had the power to award grants independent of the government. However, this did not occur, and proposals were instead sent to the Sports Minister, Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie, for approval. McKenzie's office appeared to have disregarded Sport Australia's recommendations and instead maintained a parallel list that judged applications based on their political impact. The audit office found that more than 60 per cent of the applications McKenzie approved did not meet Sport Australia's target score.

The audit office concluded the following:



The infamous colour-coded spreadsheet that was leaked to the media. It showed that some applicants had been awarded grants despite their applications being judged of lower merit than others.

Credit: ABC News.

“The award of funding reflected the approach documented by the Minister's Office of focusing on 'marginal' electorates held by the Coalition as well as those electorates held by other parties or independent members that were to be 'targeted' by the Coalition at the 2019 Election. Applications from projects located in those electorates were more successful in being awarded funding than if funding was allocated on the basis of merit assessed against the published program guidelines.”

Australian National Audit Office, 2020. 'Award of funding under the Community Sport Infrastructure Program'. anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/award-funding-under-the-community-sport-infrastructure-program

In the wake of this episode, McKenzie resigned from the ministry. This occurred after it was revealed that a grant was provided to a shooting club of which she herself was a member.

You can read more about the scandal and its repercussions here:

- 📖 'Rorts scandals in politics are rife. So what exactly are the rules?' The Conversation, 2021. theconversation.com/rorts-scandals-in-politics-are-rife-so-what-exactly-are-the-rules-157411
- 📖 'Full report into so-called 'sports rorts scandal' released years after Bridget McKenzie quit'. ABC News, 2022. abc.net.au/news/2022-11-08/bridget-mckenzie-gaetjens-report-sports-grants/101627502

The Morrison ministries scandal

In August 2022 it was revealed that former prime minister Scott Morrison had secretly appointed himself as minister for several Cabinet positions during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–21). Acting on the direction of the prime minister, Governor-General David Hurley signed him into the positions without the usual swearing in ceremony. In addition to his existing portfolio responsibilities as prime minister and Minister for the Public Service, Morrison was appointed (effectively by himself) minister for:

- health
- treasury
- finance

- home affairs
- industry, science, energy and resources.

(Morrison had also considered making himself minister for the agriculture, water and environment portfolios but did not ultimately do so.) The ministers for these portfolios were not replaced, creating a situation where there were two ministers for each portfolio during this time. In most cases, ministers were not informed of the arrangement. The revelation of these secret ministries was unique in Australian politics and received criticism for contradicting the principles of the Westminster system of government.



Credit: ABC News/Matt Roberts.
abc.net.au/news/2022-08-16/morrison-secret-ministerial-appointments-legal-or-not-icac/101318718

Morrison argued that the appointments were necessitated by the pandemic, arguing that he was ‘steering the ship in the middle of the tempest’. He stated that the appointments were effectively emergency powers and that he only used them once – to reject a resources project.

“ Those safeguards were put in place for precautionary, for prudent and responsible reasons and I didn’t consider at the time, given everything else that was going on and the other priorities we were dealing with, that it was a matter that needed to be raised at that point. ”

Scott Morrison speaking to reporters, quoted in Kirsty Needham, 2022. ‘Australia’s Morrison says he secretly took five ministries because responsibility was his’. Reuters. reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-morrison-says-he-took-five-ministries-because-he-was-steering-ship-2022-08-17

According to a solicitor-general’s report investigating this issue, the appointment of secret ministries was neither illegal nor unconstitutional. However, the solicitor-general did criticise the appointments, stating:

“ it is impossible for parliament and the public to hold ministers accountable for the proper administration of particular departments if the identity of the ministers who have been appointed to administer those departments is not publicised. ”

Solicitor-General Stephen Donaghue, quoted in Paul Karp, 2022. ‘Scott Morrison’s secret ministries ‘fundamentally undermined’ responsible government, advice shows’. The Guardian. theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/23/scott-morrison-secret-ministries-minister-portfolios-fundamentally-undermined-responsible-government-advice-shows

As a result, Morrison became the first former prime minister to be formally censured by Parliament. The Albanese government has since sought advice on changing relevant legislation to ensure that future ministerial appointments are formally announced.

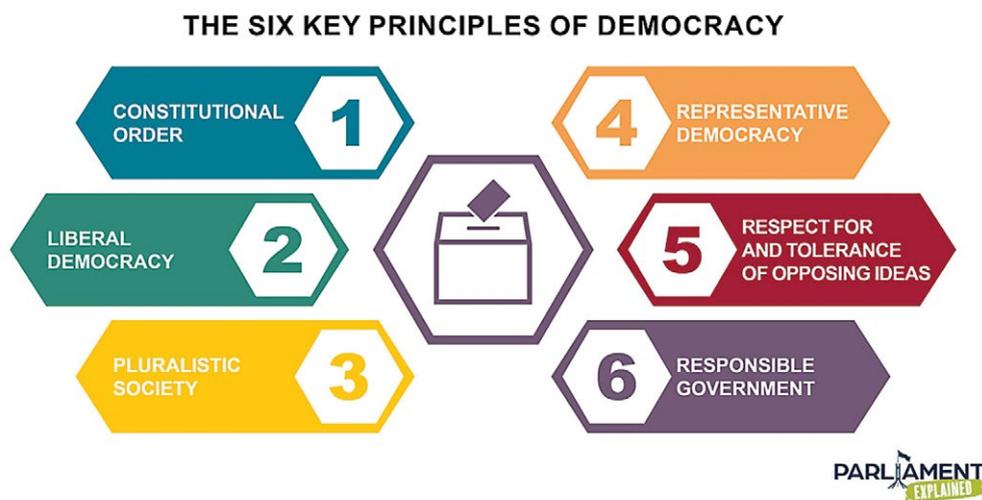


Activity L – The Morrison ministries scandal

- 1 Consider the democratic principles explored earlier in this chapter. Outline which of these were challenged by the Morrison ministries scandal.
- 2 Is it reasonable for government leaders to suspend the normal processes of government during a crisis or emergency? Why, or why not? Consider other potential crises affecting Australia and how they might be used to justify actions that are contrary to liberal democratic norms. You might choose to discuss your reflections as a class debate.
- 3 Discuss and reflect on the following statement.

‘The problem wasn’t what Morrison did, it was that he kept it secret. If he had announced what he was doing it wouldn’t have been an issue.’

Do you agree or disagree, and why?



Source: ‘Parliament explained: Democracy’. Parliament of Australia, 2022.
aph.gov.au/about_parliament/house_of_representatives/about_the_house_news/news/parliament_explained_democracy

The secret ministries episode also raises questions regarding the role of the governor-general in ensuring that principles of democracy are upheld. Governor-General David Hurley stated that he acted within the Constitution and that it was the responsibility of the government itself to announce ministerial appointments. The solicitor-general agreed, stating that ‘the Governor-General has no discretion to refuse to accept the Prime Minister’s advice in relation to such an appointment’ (Razik, 2022).

Despite this, these events raised questions over whether Hurley had formed a view on the ethics of Morrison’s actions and, if he did, whether he had a duty to either refuse to cooperate or to report those concerns. More broadly, this posed a challenge to the proper role of the position of the governor-general: does the effectively symbolic nature of that position, which in many respects is subservient to that of the prime minister, mean that they can play no role in counterbalancing the latter when their actions are seen to undermine the integrity of the political system as a whole?

‘Parliament must act to ensure Australia never has ‘secret ministers’ again’. The Conversation, 2022. theconversation.com/parliament-must-act-to-ensure-australia-never-has-secret-ministers-again-188884

Operation Daintree

At a state level, the Andrews Labor government in Victoria was subject to accusations of corruption over its nine years in office. Among these was a scandal involving a \$1.2 million contract awarded to the Health Workers Union (HWU) shortly before the 2018 state election.

The contract was for a branch of the HWU to provide training to 575 frontline health workers to manage violence they may encounter in the course of their work. The perception of corruption partly hinged on the fact that the HWU, like many unions, had strong connections to the governing Victorian Labor Party and regularly made donations to it.

After receiving a complaint, Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) investigated this process under the alias Operation Daintree. It concluded that there had not been a competitive **tender** process and that the establishment of the program had been improperly influenced by advisers to both the Premier (Daniel Andrews) and Minister for Health (Jenny Mikakos). An adviser in the Health Minister's office had helped to develop the HWU's proposal for the training program, which was then sent to the Department of Health and Human Services for consideration. The same adviser then contacted the department to hasten the process and led public servants to believe that the government wished for the HWU to be appointed as the training organisation. The report also found that the HWU lacked the capacity to deliver the program, with only 83 staff receiving training.

According to IBAC's report:

“the combined effect of these failings and unethical conduct resulted in a contract that should not have been entered into with the union and an outcome [that] was not in the public interest.”

IBAC, 2023. 'Operation Daintree: Special report'. State of Victoria.
ibac.vic.gov.au/operation-daintree-special-report

IBAC's investigation concluded that the program did indeed amount to misconduct, but that *corruption* did not occur in this instance. This is because IBAC is only able to make findings of corruption if actions constitute a criminal offence. It did not make findings against Premier Andrews, Minister Mikakos or HWU secretary Diana Asmar. However, IBAC's chief commissioner Robert Redlich labelled the program 'grey corruption', in that while it technically did not break the law it was not in the spirit of democratic principles.

This episode also highlights concerns regarding the centralisation of power in the premier's office. Andrews has confirmed that the premier's private office has 90 staff members whose power over decision-making in Victoria rivals the Cabinet and yet are unaccountable to the Parliament. Andrews has often faced calls for greater transparency, including to release advice from the Chief Health Officer on lockdowns and the business plan for the \$125 billion Suburban Rail Loop.



A **tender** typically refers to an application by an organisation to provide a good or service financed by the government; tender processes usually involve multiple providers being invited to 'bid', with the intention being that the best value for money application is selected, thus, benefitting the taxpayer.

PricewaterhouseCoopers tax scandal

In 2023, it was revealed that international consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) had sold confidential government information to multinational corporations to assist them in avoiding Australian tax law. In 2014, PwC was contracted by the federal government to provide advice on strategies to tax multinational corporations. The government at the time had been concerned about tax avoidance by multinational corporations, including the practice of shifting profits offshore. However, PwC used confidential information it had gained to advise 14 global corporations on strategies to avoid the government's new laws. In doing so it breached non-disclosure agreements with the federal government and engaged in a direct conflict of interest. Estimates suggest that PwC's actions put at risk up to \$180 million in revenue that the government had sought to collect from these global companies.

We got this outcome because:

- we identified US tech two years ago as representing a significant (at least for controversy!) upside sector for the Australian firm as the ATO reacted to problems it had with their structures, and diligently built relationships with key offshore buyers
- we were aggressive in telling these relationships they needed to act early (heavily helped by the accuracy of the intelligence that Peter Collins was able to supply us, and our analysis of the politics)
- we were first to them with innovative approaches to the problem ([redacted] was critical in stimulating their thinking and presenting ideas no one else had, especially in relation to the first draft of the law)
- we were able to use our relationships to identify approaches suggested by our competitors [redacted]

An email from inside PwC noting how the firm's successes with new clients was 'heavily helped' by insider knowledge of the government's approach to taxing multinational companies.

Source: Senate Estimates via 'What is the PwC tax scandal? Who is Peter-John Collins? Who knew about it? Why does it matter?' ABC News, 2023. abc.net.au/news/2023-06-05/pwc-pricewaterhousecoopers-government-tax-leak-scandal-explained/102409528



The 'big four' (or 'five?') accounting firms

While private consulting firms have long been sought out by government agencies to assist with certain functions – particularly auditing their own activities – the value and scope of their contracts with federal government departments grew at a remarkable pace under the Coalition government (2013–22). As noted by one reporter:



“when the Coalition came to power in 2013, spending with the big four was less than \$400 million a year; when they left a decade later, it was at least \$1.4 billion including new contracts and contract extensions.”

Ronald Mizen, 2022. 'Accenture beats the big four in record \$2b for Canberra work'. Australian Financial Review. afr.com/politics/federal/the-big-consulting-winners-from-record-government-spend-20220809-p5b8bb

Read more here:

- 'How the big four accounting firms infiltrated governments, earning more than \$10b over a decade while taxpayers are in the dark'. ABC News, 2023. abc.net.au/news/2023-07-17/pwc-ey-kpmg-deloitte-government-10-billion/102602370

The PwC revelation highlights another question of integrity in Australian politics: the practice of contracting work to private organisations instead of using the public service to perform government work. Governments use consulting firms such as PwC because their advice is often considered more expert than voices within the public service and, therefore, can be presented as more legitimate. Nonetheless, unlike the public service, the motivations of private corporations is guided primarily by the pursuit of profit for shareholders.

Advice to the Senate has suggested that the government had signed \$255 million worth of contracts with PwC as of 2023 and had current contracts totalling \$2 billion with the five big consulting firms (Accenture, KPMG, Deloitte, EY and PwC) more generally. Similarly, in the 2021–22 financial year alone the government spent \$21 billion on outsourced labour, often but not solely in the form of consultancy fees, which is roughly equivalent to the amount spent on secondary education that year (Crowe, 2023).

At the time of writing, it is unclear what the full consequences of this scandal will be for PwC, but they include:

- the senior partner directly involved in sharing confidential government information being banned from acting as a tax agent in Australia for two years, although he may also face criminal charges
- the CEO of PwC Australia being replaced, and eight partners sacked
- the section of PwC that deals with the government being sold to a private equity firm for \$1.

The Australian Greens also called for all PwC contracts to be cancelled. The Labor government – whose Senator Deborah O’Neill had been at the forefront of public reprimands of PwC over its conduct – pledged in its 2022 election campaign to reduce the government’s reliance on contractors and consultants (Mulgan, 2023). It remains to be seen just how far-reaching the consequences of the scandal will be and the extent to which outsourcing will actually be reduced.



Activity M – Further investigations

- 1 Choose one of the four examples provided of scandals involving real or perceived corruption. Investigate the responses by the relevant **accountability** processes and instruments listed earlier in this section.
- 2 Imagine you are working as an adviser to a government minister or as a spokesperson for the opposition or a minor party. Create a list of talking points, either defending or criticising one of the examples of corruption above.

Talking points are a communication tool used by politicians to help them make persuasive and consistent statements about an issue, especially in response to queries from the media. They usually take the form of a series of dot points that comprise the overall perspective of their political party, as well as anticipating likely follow-up questions or arguments that might be raised. A typical page of talking points might comprise between five and 10 dot-point notes. You can read more about talking points here:

 ‘Talking points’. Political Dictionary, 2023. politicaldictionary.com/words/talking-points

- 3 Unfortunately, Australian politics is replete with examples of corrupt or unethical behaviour – it’s impossible for us cover them all in this section. You may like to explore other case studies as you investigate this area. Examples that are current as at the time of writing are provided in the following table.

Year	Example	Political party
2014–18	Red shirts scandal, whereby state-funded electorate office staff were directed by their members of Parliament to campaign for the Labor Party	Victorian Labor Party
2017	Sam Dastyari accepting donations from individuals and companies aligned with the Chinese government	Australian Labor Party
2016–20	Robodebt scandal and the subsequent inquiry into unlawful debt assessment and recovery programs	Liberal Party of Australia
2021	Accusations that Senator Katy Gallagher misled Parliament regarding her knowledge of alleged sexual misconduct	Australian Labor Party
2021–23	Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry into former premier Gladys Berejiklian’s involvement in approving grants to institutions located in her former partner’s electorate	NSW Liberal Party
2022	Former deputy premier John Barilaro’s inappropriate interference in the selection and appointment of a senior trade envoy	NSW National Party and NSW Liberal Party
2023	Former government services minister Stuart Robert’s links to lobbying firm Synergy 360	Liberal Party of Australia
2023	Accusations of the inappropriate use of influence levelled at Home Affairs Secretary Mike Pezzullo	Australian Labor Party and Liberal Party of Australia

Causes

Individual greed

Greed or desire for power is in most instances the immediate cause for corrupt behaviour. It is due to the individual character of politicians, public servants and other community leaders that they may engage in actions considered self-interested and damaging to the public good. We know this is the case, as there are more situations when an individual can act corruptly but chooses not to compared to instances when they do. However, it is likely that politics tends to attract individuals who are predisposed to act in a self-serving manner, as it is an obvious source of power, social prestige and potential wealth. Political scientist Brian Klaas has argued that individuals who are drawn to politics are often ill-suited to the profession, whereas those who would be most likely to act with integrity are less inclined to enter the field:

“ A certain kind of person is good at political survival and the brutality of the political arena amplifies undesirable traits, culling those who can’t (or won’t) cut it. . . . This distils the potential pool further, getting rid of too many good, decent people who want to serve, not wield power for its own sake. ”

Brian Klaas, 2023. ‘How many politicians are psychopaths?’ The Garden of Forking Paths. forkingpaths.co/p/how-many-politicians-are-psychopaths

Lacking transparency

Unethical behaviour may go unnoticed because of the complexity of modern politics. The political process becomes particularly opaque when the private sector is directly involved in government, such as through the privatisation of public services or lobbying. To some extent a lack of transparency occurred in every case study explored in this section, but it is particularly relevant for the PwC scandal.

Entrenched power

Another cause of corruption is the length of time a government has remained in office. As governments become entrenched, they may begin to see their rule as rightful or 'natural' and their decisions as inherently legitimate. This is evident both in the Coalition's term of office at the federal level from 2013–22 and in the Victorian Labor government, which took office in 2014 and is ongoing at the time of writing.

Partisan rigidity

Another potential cause of corruption is extreme political polarisation and the inability to find common ground between political parties. Alongside this is the dysfunction that can sometimes emerge when people's alignment to their party or ideology acts as an obstacle to good judgement and decision-making. If parties come to see their opponents as illegitimate, then political contests can take on a more existential 'us versus them' character (what former Labor minister Graham Richardson has referred to as a 'whatever it takes' mentality). Therefore, politicians may excuse unethical behaviour on their 'team', as winning a political battle is thought to justify whatever shady means by which it was achieved. Pork-barrelling is an example of this, particularly when defended by the argument that the opposition would act similarly were they in the position to do so.

You can read more about these issues here:

- 📖 'Extreme political polarization weakens democracy – can the US avoid that fate?' The Conversation, 2018. theconversation.com/extreme-political-polarization-weakens-democracy-can-the-us-avoid-that-fate-105540



Activity N – How corruptible are you?

- 1 Watch the following clip from Brian Klaas.
 - 📺 'Why psychopaths rise to power'. Big Think, 2023 (9 min). youtu.be/PpyIZ4DGIK8
 - a Outline Klaas's argument.
 - b To what extent do you agree or disagree with the argument?
- 2 As a politics student your own individual character is worth examination. To what degree are you attracted to politics because it might be a way of allowing you to exert power over others? Are there circumstances in which you might act corruptly?
- 3 Is it possible to prevent individuals from acting corruptly? Which do you think is more significant to prevent corruption, ensuring the good **character** of public leaders, or developing **structures** to ensure accountability?

Consequences

Misallocation of scarce resources

The most immediate consequence of a lack of integrity in our political system is that taxpayer funds are misspent. Rather than going towards the best possible endeavour on the basis of merit, corruption causes government revenue to be used for either political appeal or private gain. The sports rorts scandal clearly demonstrates this: over 400 applicants who received funding were below Sport Australia's target to receive it, while 618 that had met the target were rejected (Charles and Williams, 2022). Contrastingly, the PwC scandal potentially caused the government to lose revenue it might otherwise have gained. In turn, these instances led to a less prosperous or fair Australian society overall.



Systems of patronage

Arguably the most significant consequence of politics that lacks integrity is that it promotes systems of **patronage** or clientelism. In corrupt political systems politicians are motivated to benefit themselves and those who maintain their power. This can occur as an individual system of patronage – for example, mutual support between a politician and a lobbyist – and can lead to a systemic approach to politics overall, known as clientelism. Political scientist Francis Fukuyama describes clientelism in this manner:

Patronage is the act of rewarding supporters and allies with favourable policies, employment opportunities or job contracts; known also as a 'spoils system' – in which electoral success leads to dividing the 'spoils' of government – this can also be reciprocated in the form of ex-politicians being rewarded with highly paid positions in private firms.

“ In a clientelistic system, politicians provide individualised benefits only to political supporters in exchange for their votes. These benefits can include jobs in the public sector, cash payments, political favours, or even public goods like schools and clinics that are selectively given only to political supporters. ”

Francis Fukuyama, 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay*. Profile Books.

Political clientelism involves politicians developing policies and awarding funding to those they see as political allies, while disregarding the concerns of rival groups. This practice encourages opposition parties to act in the same manner as a form of retribution if they come to power. The outcome is that political antagonism is exacerbated and the notion of the 'common good' is rarely considered.

Significant response – the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission

A major issue of the 2022 federal election was the establishment of a federal anti-corruption commission. Such an organisation would mirror similar bodies in state governments, such as the IBAC in Victoria and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in New South Wales. The latter gained prominence after

several scandals in the state, including the resignation of premier Gladys Berejiklian in 2021. Events such as this, as well as the sports rorts scandal, led to calls for a federal anti-corruption commission that would investigate wrongdoing by federal politicians and bureaucrats.



The Morrison government initially promised to introduce such a body during the 2019 election. It then developed a proposal that was criticised by transparency advocates for lacking the power to initiate investigations on its own, to hold public hearings or to make findings of corruption. However, the Coalition failed to introduce a bill to Parliament prior to the 2022 election, as the proposal faced certain rejection by the opposition and the crossbench, and because the government refused to make amendments to the bill.

On coming to power the Albanese government introduced its own legislation, setting up the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) in November 2022. At the time of writing the commission has only just begun operating.

The NACC is an independent body and may freely choose to investigate suspected instances of serious or systemic corruption based on the commissioner's judgement. It will be able to investigate members of Parliament and public officials if it is believed they:

- adversely affect their own or another public official's honesty or impartiality in the way they carry out their official duties
- breach public trust
- abuse their office as a public official
- misuse information they have gained in their capacity as a public official.

The NACC's powers are retrospective, meaning it can investigate any matter that occurred before its establishment.

The NACC has a range of powers, including the abilities to:

- enter Commonwealth premises and require Commonwealth information without a warrant
- make people and organisations give the NACC documents and items and allow the NACC to search their property
- conduct private hearings and, if it is in the public interest and exceptional circumstances justify doing so, conduct public hearings
- access a range of covert investigative capabilities, such as intercepting telecommunications.

 'What is the NACC?' Attorney-General's Department, 2023.
ag.gov.au/integrity/national-anti-corruption-commission/what-nacc

One debate regarding Labor's model is over its decision to make NACC hearings private by default. The commission can hold public hearings, but only under 'exceptional circumstances'. This is a higher threshold than that of most state-based anti-corruption bodies, who can make hearings public if they deem it to be in the public interest. The 'exceptional circumstances' test represents a compromise between the Liberal position that all NACC investigations should be private and those of the crossbench, who support more public hearings.



Activity 0 – Public or private?

- 1 Should anti-corruption hearings be held publicly or privately? Organise your findings and reflections in a table that includes reasons both for and against.
- 2 Will the establishment of the NACC be able to address corruption effectively? In a paragraph explain why, or why not.

The interests and perspectives of different political actors

Provided are quotations expressing a range of perspectives on corruption and the case studies explored in this section. It should be noted that almost all political actors believe that governments should act with integrity and that individuals should be held accountable for instances of corrupt behaviour. However, there is discrepancy between those who believe that an action is only corrupt if it is illegal and others who suggest that corruption can encompass legal but unethical behaviour.



“ I make no apology for exercising Ministerial discretion. To do so was my prerogative, but more importantly, it was my responsibility. In the Westminster system, Ministers are given the responsibility of making the final decisions in the execution of programs in their portfolios. . . . Whilst it can make sense for some decisions about less significant matters to be delegated entirely to public servants, in our democracy it is Ministers who are expected to arbitrate and intervene in order to implement the policy of the elected Government. ”

Bridget McKenzie, 2020. 'Statement to the Senate Select Committee on Administration of Sports Grants'. bridgetmckenzie.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Submission-to-the-Senate-Select-Committee-on-Administration-of-Sports-Grants.pdf

“ Some assert that there was no private gain involved, so it was not corruption. That is, of course, nonsense. Those involved in the exercise were using illegal methods to get themselves re-elected. The private gain was the reward of political power, and the perks and benefits of office. ”

Stephen Charles and Catherine Williams , 2022. *Keeping Them Honest*. Scribe Publications.

“ Our system is responsible government, the executive are here in [Parliament] for the purpose of being held to account every day the legislature sits. That entire concept of responsible government only works if the Parliament, and through the Parliament, the Australian people, know which members of the executive are responsible for what. . . . [Morrison] in doing this did not just fall below the standards that were expected. He undermined them. He rejected them. He attacked them. And he abused them. ”

Tony Burke MP, 2022. 'Today I moved a censure motion against Scott Morrison' (13 min). youtu.be/pxR7-o_LmuY

“ We thank [IBAC] for what they term an educational report, a report under their, if you like, the role that they play in trying to educate all of us about risks and about ways in which we can deliver continuous improvement. . . . There are no findings against anyone in this report, it is an educational report, . . . that's the way that IBAC themselves have described this. ”

Daniel Andrews, quoted in ABC News (Australia), 2023. 'Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews responds to corruption probe findings' (1 hr 2 min). youtube.com/live/L7BQLIZDStM

“Very often ... it becomes apparent [in an investigation] that it isn't a crime that has been committed, but soft corruption, that is, non-compliance with processes, breaches of standards and conventions, which from my perspective is equally serious and has the same consequences as hard corruption.”

IBAC commissioner Robert Redlich, quoted in IBAC, 2022. 'In conversation with IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich AM KC' (58 min). youtu.be/A8FnwsgX6Ug

“What we call 'pork barrelling' is investment. ... I dare you to turn up to these communities and tell them why they don't deserve these projects. When you think about it, every single election that every party goes to, we make commitments. You want to call that pork barrelling, you want to call that buying votes, it's what the elections are for.”

John Barilaro, former NSW deputy premier, quoted in Mark McGowan, 2021. 'Pork barrelling is 'what elections are for': John Barilaro defends bushfire grants'. ABC News. theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/08/nsw-deputy-premier-john-barilaro-defends-bushfire-grants-program-against-claims-of-pork-barrelling

“I have seen the lives destroyed by a commission such as that which becomes a kangaroo court and goes around and seems to operate through politics and shaming people.”

Scott Morrison, quoted in James Robertson, 2022. 'Fear of probes drove Scott Morrison to scuttle corruption commission: ICAC ex-counsel'. The New Daily. thenewdaily.com.au/news/politics/2022/04/15/morrison-corruption-commission-icac

“Public hearings, as we have seen, are more difficult to conduct. They raise questions about reputational harm which are not faced when you hold private hearings.”

Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, quoted in Paul Karp, 2022. 'Labor faces crossbench backlash over integrity commission's private hearings'. The Guardian. theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/sep/27/labors-national-anti-corruption-commission-to-hold-most-hearings-in-private

“The idea that there is a problem with having these hearings in public because they embarrass people is nonsense. The public is entitled to know what is being done by their representatives, whether they're public servants or politicians, especially when public money is involved. The courts investigate people's behaviour constantly and they do it openly. The public has a right to know what is happening in public life.”

Tony Fitzgerald AC, quoted in Stephen Charles and Catherine Williams, 2022. *Keeping Them Honest*. Scribe Publications.



Activity P – Perspectives on corruption

- 1 In your own words, summarise each of the nine quotations about corruption and integrity provided.

Effect on stability and change

The degree to which the examples provided reflect stability or change is largely dependent on an individual's perspective of corruption in the political system more broadly. Possible interpretations include:

- Perhaps these examples show that Australia has begun a worrying descent into corruption, where unethical behaviour and systems of patronage are becoming normalised in a 'post-truth' world.
- Alternatively, they could demonstrate 'business as usual' and that Australia's political system has always been significantly corrupt and dominated by vested interests.
- Another interpretation is that these are examples of 'rotten apples' against a backdrop of primarily honourable governance.
- Perhaps we have seen a temporary decline in standards, particularly under the Morrison government, and that democratic norms will be reasserted under a new government.

The same is true for the establishment of the NACC as the most significant response to corruption federally. It may be the case that the NACC will cause major change in Australian politics by promoting democratic principles, holding governments to account and preventing future instances of corrupt behaviour. Conversely, it may be overly bureaucratic and lack sufficient powers to hold politicians accountable for their actions.

Political significance

The discussion in this section serves to highlight that integrity is of critical importance to democracy. Corrupt behaviour by public officials should not be viewed as isolated instances of wrongdoing. Instead, it threatens democracy itself, as corruption attacks the principles that underpin our system of government. In doing so, such behaviour encourages more and worse corruption, in turn.



Activity Q – Evaluating corruption in Australia

- 1 To what extent is corruption prevalent in Australian politics? Plan and write an argument from your own perspective.
- 2 In your opinion, what has been the trend in government integrity? What evidence can you provide to support your view?
- 3 The Australian political system must manage many significant and complex challenges. How significant is the issue of corruption compared to other issues, such as climate change or health care? Create a list of political issues ranked by importance, which includes corruption among them.

Further resources

For more resources relevant to this area of study, access the online resource library associated with this textbook: sev.asn.au/textbook-resources/pol12

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Parliamentary paper

Charles Sampford, 2011. 'Parliament, political ethics and national integrity systems'. Parliament of Australia. aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/pops/pop55/c01

TV/video

Four Corners, 2023. 'Shadow state: How consultants infiltrated government' (41 min). abc.net.au/news/2023-08-07/shadow-state-how-consultants-infiltrated/102699746

GetUp! Australia, 2022. 'The cost: Whistleblowers in Australia' (23 min). youtu.be/_ALY8gXxba0

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Case study: First Nations peoples – Voice, Treaty, Truth

Learning safely

Teachers and students should be aware that this part of the text includes the names and images of people who have died. It also includes information about colonisation, child removal and other government policies, as well as insensitive depictions of First Nations peoples that continue to cause pain and suffering today. We encourage you to go gently into this content. We have only included images with express permission.

Moving with care and hope into the future requires all Australians to understand our shared history, and to be aware of the heroic work that First Nations peoples are doing to survive and thrive. This content may make you feel uncomfortable, so if you feel it having an impact on your mental health we encourage you to talk to your teacher or your family members, and/or access your school's wellbeing support services. Otherwise, you can access additional supports through:

- (for First Nations peoples) '13 Yarn': 13 72 96
- headspace: headspace.org.au
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800.

We also encourage teachers to explore the following resources before embarking on this area of study:

- 📖 'Teaching First Nations knowledges and perspectives'. Culture is Life. cultureislife.org/education/resources/teaching-first-nations-knowledges-perspectives
- 📖 'First Nations culture and history: A reading list'. Social Education Victoria. sev.asn.au/blog/have-you-read-this

A note on language

It is always best to use the labels that First Nations people request. This is often the name of the specific nation or cultural group the person is a part of – for example, 'Sophie is a proud Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri woman'. Often, the best thing to do is to ask people directly how they would like to be described or addressed.

Internationally, 'First Nations' is used to refer to First Nations peoples from all places, so in an international context this term would usually include 'Australian' at the beginning (e.g. 'Australian First Nations peoples'). We use the qualifier 'Australian' sparingly and only when necessary for clarity, in recognition of the fact that some First Nations peoples and groups object to the use of a non-Indigenous language term to describe these lands, and do not recognise the sovereignty claims of the Australian Government. The non-Indigenous term 'Australian' may be seen as being in contradiction with First Nations peoples' enduring and unceded sovereignty over this continent.

'Koorie' (or 'Koori') is a term generally understood to describe Aboriginal people from the south-eastern region of Australia, including Victoria and parts of southern New South Wales. In this text, we've tried to use the names of specific nations and cultural groups rather than Koorie, although the term is happily used and claimed by many people.

We ask that you do not use 'ATSI' or other acronyms to describe First Nations peoples (except in instances where this forms part of the abbreviated title of an organisation, such as AIATSIS). You may also see 'Aborigine' and other historical terms used to describe First Nations people in historical representations used in the text. These are provided only to help you learn our shared history; such labels are considered highly offensive and should only be used when quoting directly from primary sources.

The labels that First Nations peoples choose to describe themselves are changing; we encourage you to keep yourself updated on this. Here are some resources to help:

- 📖 'Australia's First Peoples'. Australian Institute of Australian and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). aiatsis.gov.au/explore/australias-first-peoples
- 📖 Luke Pearson, 2021. 'Appropriate terminology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – it's complicated'. IndigenousX. indigenoux.com.au/appropriate-terminology-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-its-complicated
- 📖 'Preferences in terminology when referring to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples'. ACT Council of Social Service, 2016. actcoss.org.au/publication/gulanga-good-practice-guides

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Owners of this land. Aboriginal Australians come from mainland Australia and Tasmania, while Torres Strait Islanders are from the hundreds of islands between the northern tip of Queensland and Papua New Guinea. The identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is connected to their cultural and ancestral homelands. The famous AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia reveals the diversity of Indigenous Australia, which consists of more than 250 language groups and many hundreds of dialects and nations.

This chapter was written as the 2023 referendum on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament took place and finalised shortly after the referendum failed to pass. The 2023 referendum was politically significant for two main reasons:

- It proposed a reform that sought to identify and resolve, at least in part, the nature of the roles, rights and representation that First Nations people would have within the formal Australian political system – a very complex question given this system was born out of their mass dispossession from 1788. In the lead-up to the referendum, these questions became more prominent in political conversations, and brought to public attention a variety of viewpoints and speakers who might otherwise have been lesser known.
- The proposed reform was to Australia's fundamental political document, the constitution. This was the first attempt at a referendum since the unsuccessful republic referendum of 1999 and if successful would have been the first change to the constitution since 1977.

To understand what happened, we should seek to dive deeper into both of these perspectives. At times, this requires a longer perspective than the 'ten-year rule' demands. This section of the text approaches these topics with a longer view. Readers will recognise that many of the themes, issues and political strategies employed by key actors in regard to this set of issues form part of a longer tradition, which can be helpful in developing understanding about *other* reform proposals relating to First Nations peoples, such as state-based 'Voices', treaty negotiations and attempts at truth-telling. As we write in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of the referendum, we strongly encourage teachers and students to check in to the collection of online resources associated with the textbook for more up-to-date content and recommendations for further reading.

This is undoubtedly a broad and complex topic (worthy of its own textbook). Our issue study touches on these elements in the following order:

- the historical-political context of First Nations people in Australia
- the historical-political context of the Australian constitution, its recognition of First Nations peoples and attempts at reform
- contemporary developments in discussions on the recognition of indigenous peoples in Australia and other countries
- the origins, context and substance of the Voice proposal and the referendum process
- the interests and perspectives of relevant actors
- the result of the 2023 referendum and its significance.



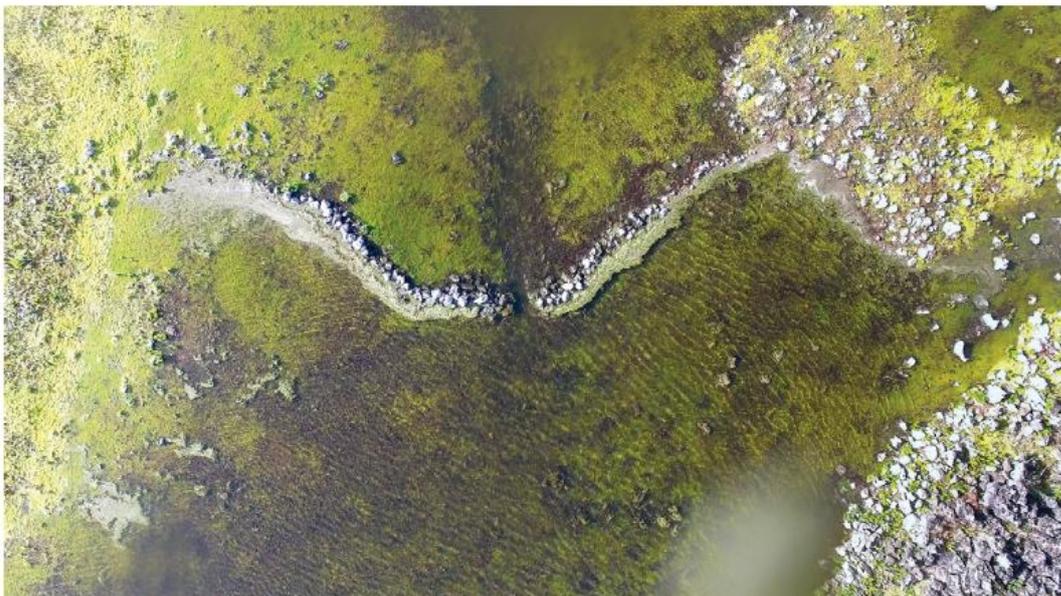
Activity R – First Nations owners of your local area

- 1 Who are the Traditional Owners of the lands your school is on? Use the following resources to explore the Indigenous history of your local area:

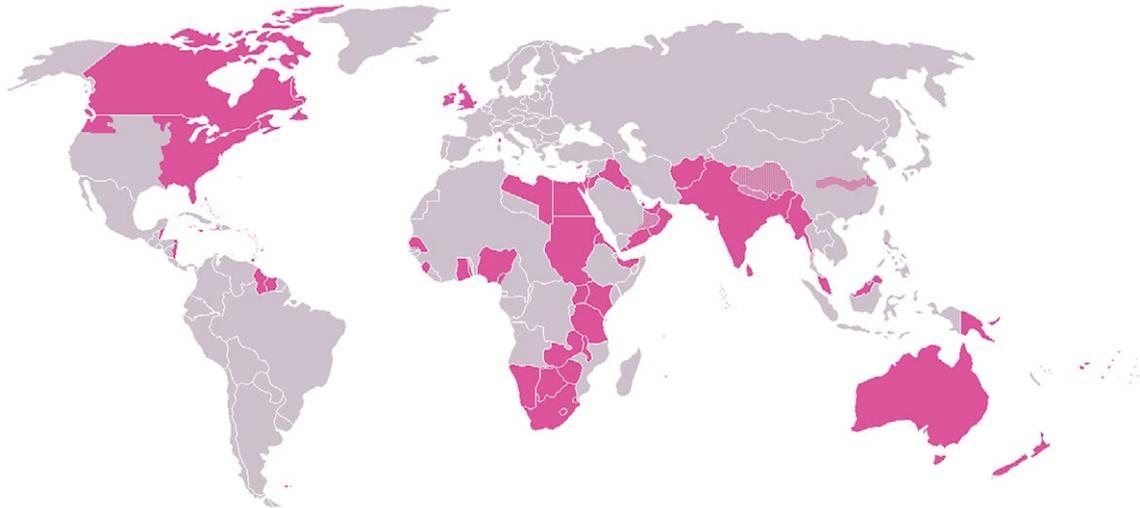
- 📄 AIATSIS. 'Map of Indigenous Australia'. aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia
- 📄 ANTaR Victoria. 'Local Nations'. antarvictoria.org.au/local-nations

Historical context

For more than 65 000 years (and some research suggests the timeframe could be much longer than that) First Nations peoples lived according to complex lore and customs. Hundreds of nations and language groups across Australia and the Torres Strait cultivated and developed sources of food, shelter and craft; conducted trade; and negotiated and resolved disputes while caring for Country. The enduring strength of the communities fostered by these practices is often excluded from conversations about Australian law – as if First Nations communities didn't have their own complex political and moral dilemmas to contend with before Europeans arrived.



Drone image of aquaculture systems built and maintained by the Gunditjmarra people over the course of millennia. Credit: Lovett-Murray, 2017. Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation. whc.unesco.org/en/documents/167829



This map depicts areas taken and held by the British over the Empire's long history ('areas of influence' are shown as shaded, other invasions and occupations not shown).

Colonisation and the Frontier Wars

From the 16th to the early 20th century European powers such as Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands (then Holland) were intent on growing their empires and trading interests, which led them to seize control of enormous swathes of territory beyond Europe. At its largest, the British Empire controlled 24 per cent of the world's landmass.

British **colonisation** of Australia began with the landing of forces under Captain Arthur Phillip in Botany Bay in 1788. The following century was marked by significant violence on the frontier as European settlers spread from ports and coastal settlements into the interior, leading to the effective displacement of prior inhabitants. First Nations peoples in Australia faced particularly harsh treatment in comparison with some of those peoples affected by British colonial policy elsewhere, such as New Zealand or Botswana, where the local inhabitants, their customs and right over their land received *some* degree of recognition and protection by British colonial authorities.

See the University of Newcastle's massacre map for more information about the scale of violence during the colonial period:

 Lyndall Ryan et al, 2022. 'Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788–1930'. c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php

Paternalism, 'protection' and assimilation

The personhood of First Nations peoples was formally denied and their rights ignored for much of Australia's history. Until the 1960s, the lives of First Nations peoples were regularly subject to direct control by government agencies, often called 'protectors', who had the power to decide where they could live and work (often forcing them to live in separated settlements known as 'missions', 'reserves' or 'stations') and who they might marry. The tone of government policies very gradually shifted towards the goal of 'assimilation', whereby Aboriginal people were pressed to live among and adopt the mannerisms of 'white' Australians in an attempt to erase their distinctive cultural identities.

A key feature of assimilationist policies from the 1860s until the 1970s was the removal of First Nations children from their families – these are known as the



A group of Aboriginal men (possibly Gunaikurnai) pose for a photograph taken by Antoine Fauchery and Richard Daintree, circa 1858. Credit: State Library Victoria. victoriancollections.net.au/stories/early-photographs-indigenous-victorians

Stolen Generations. An estimated one in three children were removed from their parents by government authorities during this period. Stolen children were placed in religious institutions or with white families, and often made to work as servants, as part of an official policy to strip them of contact with their own culture, family and heritage. The extent of forced removals was outlined in the landmark 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report. In 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised for the role of governments in ‘inflicting profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians’ through these policies of forced removal.

Political representation

A period of reform from the 1960s saw First Nations peoples recognised as formally equal within the Australian political and legal system, including having voting rights in federal elections. This saw the eventual election of the first Indigenous member of any Australian parliament, Senator Neville Bonner, in 1971. Since then, a total of eleven First Nations people have been elected to parliament – eight of these only since 2010 (Richards, 2021).

The constitutional context

The Australian Constitution was created through a process of three constitutional conventions during the 1890s, including delegates from all the colonies. Their proposed constitution was approved via a referendum and then ratified as an Act of Parliament in 1900, coming into force in 1901.

WANGKI VOTINGPURRU ENROLMENT and VOTING



The earliest known example of electoral education material being translated into a written Aboriginal language, produced for Walmatjari (Walmajarri) speakers by the Adult Aboriginal Education Division of the WA government’s Department of Education in 1975. Credit: aiatsis.gov.au/explore/right-vote

A sticking point in debates prior to Federation was the role of and representation of First Nations people, who were excluded from the constitutional conventions. The constitution was therefore written in order to allow colonial policies that discriminated against First Nations people to continue. The constitution includes measures that explicitly excluded them from being counted as part of Australia's population. Effectively, this led to First Nations peoples being entirely governed by state and territory governments until 1967. Under these arrangements, Queensland, the Northern Territory (under federal control) and Western Australia banned First Nations people voting entirely throughout the early 20th century.

Relevant sections of the constitution:

- **Section 25** allows states to disqualify 'persons of any race' from voting. In practice, this is negated by the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (see below), but the latter could legally be amended at any time by the federal parliament.
- **Section 51 (xxvi)** – the 'race power' – allows the parliament to 'make laws for 'the people of any race for whom it is necessary to make special laws'. The phrase 'other than the aboriginal [sic] race' was deleted following the 1967 referendum.
- **Section 122** – the territories power – permits the federal government to make laws over the territories. Although most of the territories have self-government established under legislation, this nonetheless gives the federal government the ability to override territory government decisions. This has had significant implications for the powers of the NT government, where First Nations peoples make up around a quarter of the population.
- **Section 128** sets out the process by which the constitution can be changed. A constitutional amendment must be put to a referendum and achieve a majority of votes nationally, *as well as* in a majority of states. This makes constitutional change difficult without overwhelming support nationally, which in turn often implies no active opposition from either major party.

Ongoing disadvantage

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, First Nations peoples today face significant challenges that are a legacy of Australia's colonial history. This includes average life expectancy of approximately ten years fewer than other Australians, an unemployment rate double the national average, a rate of imprisonment approximately 15 times that of non-Indigenous adults, and a rate of imprisonment of children 26 times that of non-Indigenous children.

Find out more about the ongoing disadvantage experienced by First Nations peoples here:

- 📖 'The Wound'. Australians Together, 2023. australianstogether.org.au/discover-and-learn/the-wound
- 📖 'Indigenous kids in prison: Australia's national disgrace'. Amnesty International, 2020. amnesty.org.au/indigenous-kids-in-prison-australias-national-disgrace
- 📖 'The overrepresentation problem: First Nations kids are 26 times more likely to be incarcerated than their classmates'. Amnesty International, 2022. amnesty.org.au/overrepresentation-explainer-first-nations-kids-are-26-times-more-likely-to-be-incarcerated



Activity 5 – The impacts of colonisation

- 1 Conduct your own reading and research into how historic and current government policies have affected First Nations peoples. This is a broad topic – we've offered some questions below to help guide your reflections. Try to come up with a couple of bullet points per question.
 - a What are some of the factors contributing to shorter life expectancy?
 - b What are the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma?
 - c What actions have First Nations peoples and organisations taken to improve these outcomes?
 - d How have government policies influenced this situation?

An overview of constitutional reform

The 1967 referendum

After successful lobbying and pressure by First Nations groups and their allies, the Liberal government led by Robert Menzies agreed to promote changes to section 51 (xxvi) (see above) and to remove section 127 (which stated that Indigenous people were not to be counted in the census) via a referendum in 1967. The referendum passed with bipartisan support and 90% of voters voting 'yes'.

Beyond the specific legal implications allowing the federal parliament to make laws relating to them, the 1967 result had a broader social and symbolic effect on many First Nations and non-Indigenous people and their understanding of the former being accepted as formal participants in the Australian 'body politic'. The change guaranteed voting rights for First Nations peoples and also paved the way for several pieces of crucial legislation to be passed despite the reluctance of some state governments, particularly the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, which outlawed racial discrimination nationally for the first time, and the *Aboriginal Land Rights*



Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) campaigners demonstrating alongside Aboriginal children in favour of a 'Yes' vote in the upcoming 1967 referendum during May Day celebrations in Brisbane.

Credit: University of Queensland Library.

(*Northern Territory*) Act 1975, which recognised Aboriginal land ownership in the NT. Nonetheless, the legal effects of the 1967 referendum have been criticised by some for reaffirming (rather than abolishing) the race power, which remains in force and has been invoked by the federal government to intervene in ways that many First Nations people feel are detrimental to their lives.

1992: the Mabo decision and Native Title

In the 1980s Torres Strait Islander land rights activists led by Eddie Koiki Mabo appealed to the High Court of Australia to require that the Queensland government recognise the traditional ownership claims of the Meriam people over three islands in the Torres Strait (known as Mer, Daua and Waua). In their ruling in 1992, the High Court overturned the doctrine of terra nullius (a key foundation of property law in colonial Australia), which had held that Britain's seizure of Australia had been lawful by virtue of the land being 'uninhabited'. In response to this decision, the Keating Labor government passed the *Native Title Act 1993*, which codified ways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples to claim their traditional rights in regards to land.

1990–2004: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

In 1989, the Hawke government passed legislation establishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) as a representative body for First Nations peoples. It had a variety of functions, including representation and delivery of services. ATSIC included national, state and regional bodies. But after the national body was embroiled in controversy and perceptions of ineffectiveness, it was abolished by the Howard government in 2005 with bipartisan support. Later, the Voice design process recommended that the Voice should have a narrower range of functions than ATSIC, focusing on representation rather than service delivery. The debate leading to the Voice to Parliament proposal in large part flowed on from the abolition of ATSIC.



1999: The republic and the Preamble

The development of the republic referendum, which took place in 1999, stirred discussion over the recognition of First Nations peoples in the constitution. The proposed preamble, which was narrowly rejected by voters in 1999, would have featured recognition of 'the nation's first people, for their deep kinship with their lands and for their ancient and pertaining cultures which enrich the life of our country'. After the 1999 referendum failed no constitutional change was attempted on *any* issue for the following two decades. The failure of the 2023 referendum meant that no constitutional change has been successful since 1977.

2007–2017: The Apology and constitutional recognition

Prime Minister Rudd's 2007 apology to the Stolen Generations spurred renewed interest in the cause of constitutional recognition, which had bipartisan support at the time. A report was delivered to parliament on this proposal in 2012, which also recommended inclusion of a section against racial discrimination, but this was rejected in 2013 by the newly elected Abbott government.



Members of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria in 2023. Credit: Blake Byron-Smith.

Reforms at state level

Alongside these developments, a wide variety of reforms were and continue to be pursued by various actors at the state level. Such measures have included the extension of native title rights, the banning of racial discrimination in legislated Bill(s) of Rights, and the creation and promotion of Indigenous corporations and representative bodies. For example, Victoria's First People's Assembly was formed following elections in 2019 and is tasked with negotiations for a treaty. More recently, South Australia and Victoria have engaged in treaty-making with First Nations peoples, along with the creation of truth-telling commissions.



Activity T – Timeline of First Nations rights

- 1 As a class, create a shared slideshow entitled 'Timeline of First Nations rights'. Allocate each of the following significant events to small groups of two or three. Each group should create a single slide explaining the effects of the event. The list below includes some events not discussed in the text which might require you to do your own research.

1938 Day of Mourning	1967 Referendum	1975 Racial Discrimination Act
1990 Creation of ATSIC	1992 Mabo decision	1993 Native Title Act
1993 Redfern speech	2007 The Intervention	2007 The Apology

Indigenous peoples in international law

Self-determination

The right to self-determination holds that peoples have the right to make decisions about their own lives. This principle, expressed in the UN charter, was the foundation of the emergence of many of the 'new' states that emerged from the slow disintegration of European colonial empires over the course of the 20th century. Conflicts between the preferences of ethnic and cultural groups may be understood as a difference in how the principle of self-determination applies in practice: to what extent are minority groups obliged to respect and participate in political systems whose rules have been determined by dominant groups? The reality of First Nations demography in Australia is such that there are very few areas where they make up a majority of the population, which means (unlike other countries faced with similar conflicts) the prospects of *territorial* autonomy or separatism are relatively poor.



Credit: ChameleonsEye/Shutterstock, 2019.

The United Nations and international law

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established in 2000 to represent approximately 370 million indigenous people globally within the UN system. In 2007, the United Nations passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). UNDRIP includes the rights to preservation of cultures, equality before the law, self-determination, and government of own affairs. It also sets out a 'roadmap' for indigenous peoples resisting assimilation into dominant cultures. Australia, along with Canada, New Zealand and the United States, was one of four countries to oppose UNDRIP at the time, however it subsequently changed its position.

Many supporters of the Voice to Parliament proposal considered UNDRIP a valuable instrument for pursuing self-determination for First Nations peoples and, thereby, Australia's international obligations. Since 2007, several First Nations Australians have served on the UN's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNEMRIP), which reports to the UN Human Rights Council. The continuing elaboration of the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination has increased pressure on Australia to afford greater recognition, and First Nations advocates have coordinated and discussed shared interests with their equivalents on a global scale.



Activity U – Indigenous peoples at the United Nations

- 1 Read the full text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples linked below and then discuss the questions that follow as a class.

un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

- a What are the key protections it gives to indigenous peoples?
- b To what extent are these rights protected in Australia?
- c Why do you think the Australian government objected to aspects of this declaration?

2 Visit the websites of UNPFII and UNEMRIP:

-  social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfii
-  ohchr.org/en/hrc-subsiidiaries/expert-mechanism-on-indigenous-peoples
- a Find one current campaign or issue either entity is working on, and explain it to the class.
- b Create a profile of a key representative to either of these bodies from around the world.



Indigenous representation around the world

The Australian debate is informed by the experiences of other countries that have similar colonial histories. Their methods of affording indigenous peoples formal positions of influence in policymaking are often referred to as models that Australia might emulate.

Canada

Canada, whose federation under British rule in 1867 provided considerable inspiration for the model eventually used for Australia's federation, is often held up as a model for Australian constitutional reform. First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada were subject to similar policies of assimilation, including the removal of children from their parents to be raised in state institutions. A key feature is Canada's autonomous Inuit province of Nunavut. There is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which continues to investigate the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools, a Bill of Rights was enshrined in Canada's constitution in 1960 and the treaty rights were affirmed in the constitution in 1982.

New Zealand

The sovereignty of New Zealand is built on the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed by the British Consul and Māori Chiefs of the North Island. Since 1867, New Zealand has reserved several seats for Māori people, who are elected by a separate Māori electoral roll. Māori candidates can choose whether to enrol for the Māori seats or general seats.



The Māori Select Committee has a dedicated meeting room at Parliament House in Wellington.
Credit: VNP/Daniela Maoate-Cox.

The original Māori Affairs Committee Room in the New Zealand Parliament is placed in a symbolically important position, directly opposite the parliamentary chamber. Since 2012, there have been seven Māori seats, representing 6% of the 120 seats in New Zealand's House of Representatives (note – New Zealand is a unicameral system with no 'upper house'). There are currently 261 426 people on the Māori roll, comprising 8% of the national electorate.

United States

American colonisation and expansion caused ongoing conflict with Native Americans. Native American tribes were originally recognised by the American government as independent nations, with various treaties being signed in the country's first century. The US constitution recognises the sovereignty of tribal governments, conceding them some autonomy over their own affairs in a way somewhat comparable to the autonomy of American state governments, including having their own laws and courts. Tribal governments control autonomous Native American communities, referred to as 'reservations', which cover around 2% of the territory of the United States. However, the vast majority of Native Americans live outside the reservations. Reservations are often on poor-quality land, with more productive land having been taken by settlers. First Nations peoples of the United States also face many similar challenges in terms of economic disempowerment and poverty as those experienced by First Nations people in Australia.



Activity V – First Nations representation around the world

Create a briefing paper for your class that outlines the way First Nations peoples are represented in the political and legal systems of one country other than Australia. You could research one of the states noted above, or select another as the basis for your own research. Your briefing paper should be no more than one A4 page and should include the following:

- 1 Who are the First Nations peoples of this country? Give an outline of their cultures, languages and social customs.
- 2 Outline how the interests of First Nations peoples are represented in the political system. In particular:
 - a Are there any representative bodies for First Nations peoples?
 - b Does the constitution deal with First Nations language, cultural or land rights?
 - c Are any of the following features present?
 - a treaty with First Nations peoples
 - seats reserved for First Nations peoples in legislatures
 - a truth-telling commission.
- 3 Give a brief profile of at least one prominent First Nations leader, including key details of their life and political positions.

The interests and perspectives of different political actors

- “
1. Be attentive to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Stop telling them what is good for them. Start listening to them. Accept that they know what is good for them, just as we know what is good for us and our loved ones.
 2. Don't expect all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to agree about legal, political and constitutional questions. It's called living in a democracy.
 3. Form a respectful relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and engage in respectful conversations.”

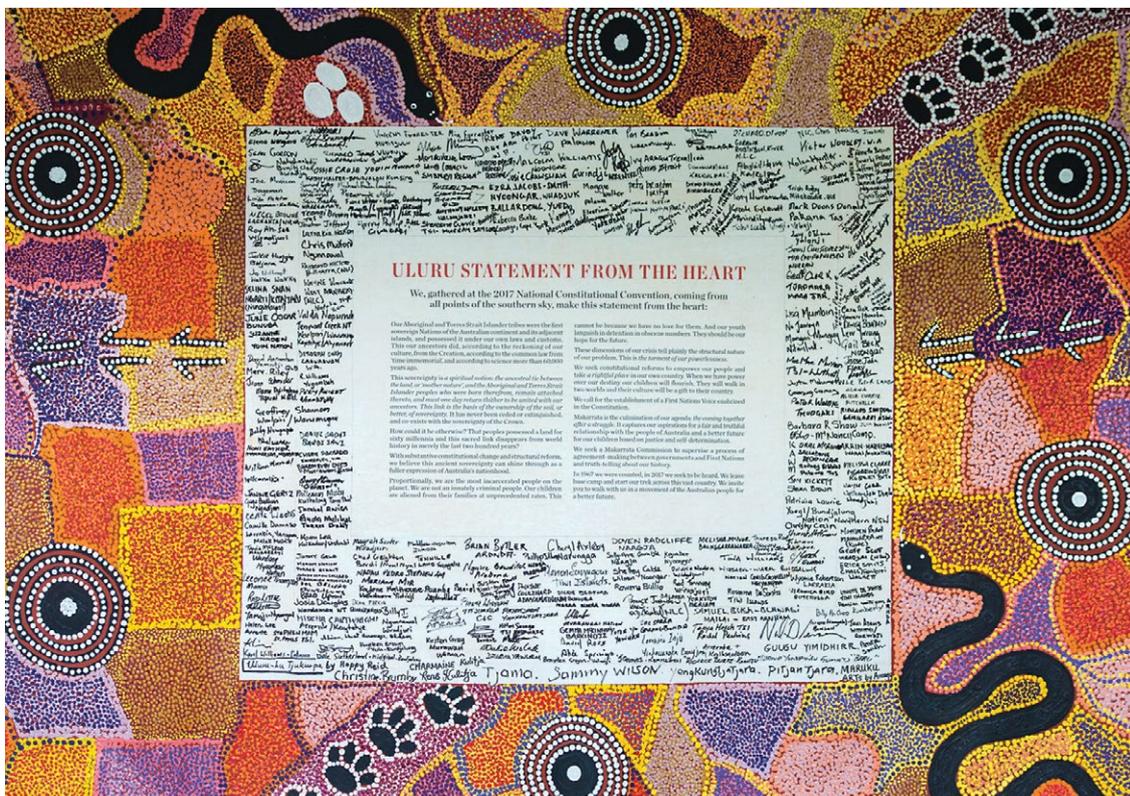
Human rights lawyer and academic Frank Brennan, 2023.
An Indigenous Voice to Parliament: Considering a Constitutional Bridge. Garratt Publishing.

The key proposals: Voice, Treaty and Truth

In the aftermath of ATSIC's abolition in 2005, the Voice proposal attracted much of the energy of those interested in political and legal reform in regard to First Nations peoples. The Voice proposal emerged from and was refined in the course a series of committees and reports that considered several key models for reform of the constitution. These proposals to a considerable extent reflected a compromise between the desire for constitutional reform and the intense political challenges involved in actually passing a proposal via referendums in Australia. Over this period, four key models for reform were at the centre of the debate. A common and recurring point of concern among supporters of many of these models was their principled opposition to retaining references to the fiction of race in constitution.

The proposal for **constitutional recognition** drew on the debates going back to the 1988 Bill of Rights and the 1999 republic referendum. It argued for the insertion of a clause in the preamble which would recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of Australia. Supporters argued that this was an important symbol of recognition, while opponents argued that it was symbolic *rather than* a meaningful change in the lives of First Nations people. Nonetheless, the campaign for constitutional recognition gained significant support from across the political spectrum.

The idea of an Indigenous advisory body enshrined in the constitution was first laid out in a 2014 Quarterly Essay by Noel Pearson. In 2016 a bipartisan Referendum Council was appointed. It engaged in a consultation process with First Nations Australians, meeting with more than 1200 people around the country. This culminated in the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in 2017, where delegates drafted the **Uluru Statement from the Heart**. The Uluru Statement called for reforms,



Uluru Statement from the Heart, 2017.

Credit: nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/uluru-statement-heart

which can be summarised as Voice, Treaty and Truth, including the establishment of a ‘First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution’. The Referendum Council’s final report recommended that a referendum be called on this matter.

We recommend you read the Uluru Statement in full:

referendumcouncil.org.au/event/uluru-statement-from-the-heart.html

The Uluru Statement also called for a **Makarrata Commission – a truth and reconciliation commission** – which would ‘supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history’, including documenting the historic human rights abuses committed against First Nations peoples. This draws on overseas models, particularly those of Canada and South Africa. Similar proposals have now been implemented in several Australian states or territories. The Uluru Statement also calls for a process of **treaty-making** between the Australian government and First Nations peoples. This would draw on the international models discussed earlier, with the Canadian model being particularly significant.

The reform continuum

This case study examines four key models for constitutional, legal and political reform in First Nations affairs, with a particular focus on the Voice proposal. The most prominent recent proposals for change can be thought of as places on a ‘continuum of change’ represented below.



In turn, the methods for achieving this change can be expressed on a continuum:

activism → government policy → legislation → constitutional change

The extent to which these changes can take place may vary across any of the levels of the Australian political system:

local → regional → state/territory → national → international

One pattern you may notice in the perspectives of various key actors discussed further on in our case study is that, even where they agree on one aspect (such as the *model* for change), there might be a disagreement on the methods used to pursue it. Further points of disagreement may also hinge on prioritisation – which is the most important issue at which particular time?

How was the Voice proposal formulated?

The process leading to the Voice to Parliament proposal took several years and involved a wide range of consultations and dialogues among various stakeholders.

- The first key element was the appointment of the bipartisan Referendum Council of 16 members in May 2017.
- This was followed by the First Nations National Constitutional Convention, which met in 2017 at Uluru. The members of the Constitutional Convention were appointed by the Referendum Council. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was approved by the convention.

- The *Final Report of the Referendum Council (2017)* recommended the creation of a ‘representative body that gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations a Voice to the Commonwealth Parliament’, and in particular that the Voice’s role should include ‘monitoring’ uses of the race power and territories powers in the constitution (s. 51 and s. 122 respectively).
- In 2018, the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition recommended that a ‘co-design process’ should guide the creation of the Voice proposal.

The co-design process model

The co-design process culminated in the final report in 2021, which laid out a model for the final form of the Voice to Parliament that would be created via legislation. The model, drawing on the former ATSIC structure, provided for a network of local and regional ‘Voices’ that would engage with communities, advise governments and provide advice to the national voice when required. The process of finding members for these groups was not explicitly defined but would involve elections or appointments guided by more traditional nomination processes, and would be linked with and have input from existing bodies. Sub-national Voice bodies would also have partnerships with local and state governments. The report proposed 35 regional voices, with the precise details of these regions to be decided later after the matter had been decided in principle.

In the national political debates preceding the 2023 referendum, many elements of the exact nature and function of the Voice were left undefined. However, the co-design process did propose a model for a national Voice that would consist of 24 individual members, including:

- two from each state and territory, as well as from the Torres Strait Islands; these members could be appointed by the regional voices from their state, or by a state or territory assembly, or by a combination of both
- a third for ‘remote representation’ in South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, the Torres Strait and New South Wales
- provisions for ensuring gender balance
- the option for up to two additional members selected jointly by the Voice body itself and the federal government.



Credit: Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Senior Advisory Group, 2021. ‘Final Report to the Australian Government’. apo.org.au/node/316024

Which bodies would have been represented had the national Voice proposal succeeded?

There are thousands of organisations and pressure groups across Australia representing First Nations peoples, coordinating communities, caring for country and providing services.

Land councils	Land councils, formed under state and federal legislation, represent local land areas and administer land held under native title. They are influential in representing particular regions and would form part of the regional Voice structure.
Indigenous corporations	Registered with the federal government, Indigenous corporations provide services such as healthcare, housing and community facilities to First Nations people and communities (and can be either for-profit or not-for-profit entities).
Community organisations	As with any community within Australia, there are many local, regional and national groups that bring First Nations people together, for activities such as sport, music, cultural pursuits or hobbies.
Peak bodies	The entities draw together and advocate on behalf of groups of First Nations organisations with common interests. Examples include the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and the Coalition of Peaks and the former National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (2009–19).

While they differ in how explicit they are about such questions, each of these organisations has had some role to play in the ongoing debates over representation, treaty-making and truth-telling. Many were involved in the consultation process extending back to the Referendum Council and were key actors in the 2023 referendum debate. Had the national proposal succeeded, they would also have played a role in constituting the local and regional structures that would be part of the Voice, and many do or will in cases where state or territory governments have implemented equivalent processes.



Activity W – First Nations organisations

- 1 One way in which First Nations groups are represented in Victoria to the state government is by Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs). A full list is available at the website below.

 maggolee.org.au/registered-aboriginal-parties

Using the information provided, along with your own research, make notes of the following features of one RAP:

- a Which First Nations group(s) are represented?
 - b Which projects, services and events does this organisation provide?
 - c Who are some of the key people involved?
 - d Do they have a position on Voice, Treaty and Truth? Have they run any campaigns or programs on these issues?
- 2 Research one First Nations community organisation in the area of sport, arts or culture. Some suggestions are provided below.

 Rumbalara Football Netball Club, Shepparton. rfnc.com.au

 Clothing the Gaps Foundation, Melbourne. clothingthegapsfoundation.org.au

 Bangarra Theatre, Sydney. bangarra.com.au

- a What is the purpose of this group?
- b What are their main activities?



Credit: Shutterstock/ChameleonsEye



Activity X – The Uluru Statement from the Heart

- 1 Read the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart as a class:

 ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement

Examine the following report from The Guardian summarising the co-design process final report. If you want to extend yourself, examine the report itself.

 'What is the Indigenous Voice to Parliament?'. Guardian Australia, 2023.
theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/13/what-is-the-indigenous-voice-to-parliament-australia-when-referendum-2023-explained-yes-no-campaign-wording

- a To what extent do you think voters in the referendum were aware of these proposals?
- b How do you think these might have been more effectively communicated to the public?
- c Create a ten-question survey relating to key aspects of the Voice proposal.
- d If you can, survey ten friends or family to find out how much they knew about the proposals, and report your results to the class.

Arguments for and against the constitutional reform

The list of arguments for and against constitutional recognition outlined by constitutional law experts George Williams and Megan Davis in 2016 provide an enduring guide to the political debates that have taken place since, including the framing of the 2023 referendum.



The 'Yes' case:

1. The Constitution was drafted to **exclude** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the political settlement that brought about the Australian nation.
2. It is important that the Constitution, the founding document of the nation, recognises Australia's full **history**, not just the period of British settlement.

3. We need to remove **discrimination** from our Constitution, it should prevent rather than permit racial discrimination so that all Australians are treated equally.
4. Recognition in the Constitution would protect against the future loss of Australia's unique Indigenous **cultures** which are a vital part of our national identity. Recognition would help improve Indigenous **health and wellbeing**.
5. A successful referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples in the Constitution would be an **uplifting achievement** that unites Australians.

The 'No' case:

1. There are **more important issues** to address. Rather than changing the constitution, Australia's politicians should focus on ending Indigenous disadvantage by way of health and education reforms.
2. Changing the Constitution is **expensive**, there are better things to spend tens of millions of dollars on.
3. The constitution has **worked well enough** for more than half a century; it should not be changed or tinkered with unless there is a compelling reason. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
4. The High Court would be left to make sense of what the changes mean, and judges could bring about **unintended consequences**.
5. There is **no agreement** about how the Constitution should be changed. Even Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have different views. Until there is unanimity, no referendum should be held. ”

Excerpt from Megan Davis and Marcia Langton (eds), 2016.
It's Our Country: Indigenous Arguments for Meaningful Constitutional Recognition and Reform.
(emphasis added)

The referendum process

In 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that a referendum would be held on the Voice to Parliament, which eventually took place on 14 October 2023. The question put to the Australian public was:

“ A proposed law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.
Do you approve this proposed alteration? ”

The proposal was to insert the following text into the Australian constitution:

“ **Chapter IX: Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**
129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice
In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:
i. There shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
ii. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
iii. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.

The referendum campaign generated a fresh and sustained wave of political debate and organisation as key players in the Voice debate coalesced into the 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns.

Key actors

There are a range of influential individuals who have been involved in debates over voice, treaty and truth over the past ten years. The list below is not exhaustive and should be used as a starting point for your own research.

	First Nations	2012 expert panel	2016 Referendum Council	Co-Design Senior Advisory	Campaigned for 'Yes'	Campaigned for 'No'	
Noel Pearson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former leader of the Cape York Land Council and veteran of native title cases of the 1990s First advocated for the Voice in an influential Quarterly Essay in 2014 Has been a consistent supporter of the Voice proposal and the political compromise that it represents
Ngungai Warren Mundine	✓					✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former president of the ALP who undertook a 'conservative turn' in the 2010s and ran as a Liberal candidate in 2019 Prominent opponent of the Voice proposal and leading spokesperson for the 'No' campaign Argued that it would be 'nothing more than another huge bureaucracy to control Indigenous lives'
Marcia Langton	✓			✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, Melbourne University The first Indigenous honours graduate in anthropology in Australia and involved in a wide range of community organisations Co-chair of the Senior Advisory Group
Megan Davis	✓	✓	✓		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professor of law and an expert at the UN's Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Influential figure in favour of constitutional recognition and movement in favour of the Voice
Frank Brennan				✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesuit priest and constitutional lawyer who has been involved in Indigenous legal affairs since the 1970s Expressed reservations about aspects of the 2023 Voice proposal Argued that changes to the proposal would help to increase its appeal to constitutional conservatives

	First Nations	2012 expert panel	2016 Referendum Council	Co-Design Senior Advisory	Campaigned for 'Yes'	Campaigned for 'No'
Pat Dodson	✓	✓			✓	
Linda Burney	✓				✓	
Julian Leeser					✓	
Ken Wyatt	✓				✓	
Jacinta Nampijinpa Price	✓					✓

- Labor Senator for Western Australia and Special Envoy for Reconciliation and Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- Elder of the Yaruwu people and an ordained Roman Catholic priest. Previously served on Indigenous land councils
- One of five commissioners during the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1989–91)

- Minister for First Australians and first Indigenous member of the NSW parliament
- Previously worked as a teacher, as well as serving as director-general of the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs
- Launched the referendum campaign with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese

- Liberal MP for Berowra, former Indigenous Affairs spokesperson for the Liberal Party (2022–23)
- Part of the working group for the failed 1999 preamble proposal, along with late Indigenous parliamentarian Neville Bonner
- Resigned from the frontbench after the Liberal Party announced its support of the 'No' campaign, to allow him to campaign for the Voice

- Former Liberal MP from Western Australia (2010–22) and Minister for Indigenous Australians (2019–22) in the Morrison government
- Steered the co-design process and senior advisory group in his role as minister
- Resigned from the Liberal Party in 2023 following its adoption of the 'No' position; campaigned in support of the Voice proposal

- Senator for the Northern Territory and Shadow Minister for First Australians (succeeding Julian Leeser)
- Former Alice Springs councillor and high-profile critic of the Voice to Parliament proposal
- Has been critical of 'pointless virtue signalling' in Indigenous affairs, including in regard to the Voice

	First Nations	2012 expert panel	2016 Referendum Council	Co-Design Senior Advisory	Campaigned for 'Yes'	Campaigned for 'No'	
Anthony Dillon						✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic and commentator for the conservative-leaning Spectator magazine Argued that the proposed constitutional change was inherently divisive, and that a mandated body could lead to unintended consequences
Lidia Thorpe	✓					✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal senator from Victoria who left the Greens during 2023 in opposition to their support of the Voice, and to advance the interests of the Blak Sovereignty movement Argued that constitutional recognition would diminish or seek to invalidate the sovereignty of First Nations peoples

The perspectives of Australian political parties

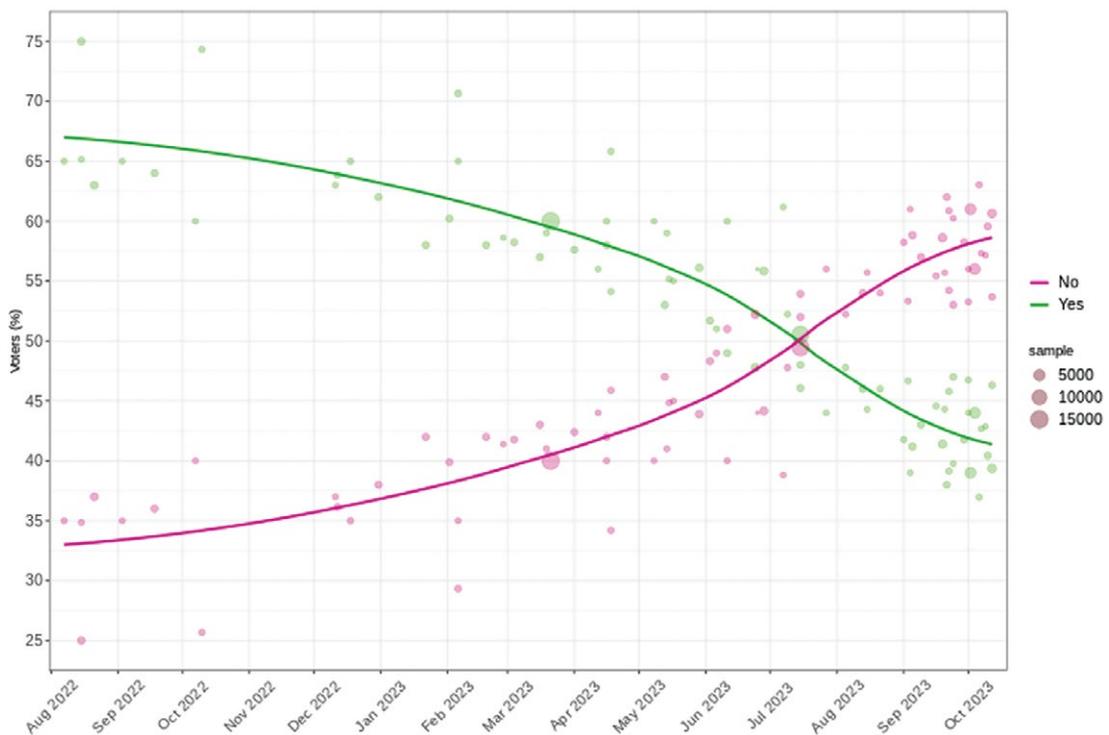
Party positions on representation, treaty-making and truth-telling continue to evolve at the state and federal levels. It is worth noting that there are some important differences in the position taken by some parties at state level and federal level.

- The **Labor Party** launched the 2023 Indigenous Voice referendum and remained committed to the model. At the time of writing, however, the party (currently in government) had not yet fully articulated their preferred way forward in light of the 'No' campaign's eventual victory.
- The **Liberal Party** supported constitutional recognition in the early 2010s but had been split on the question of the Voice body, with a particular focus on its powers, its method of election and the constitutional consequences of its creation. While the federal party opposed the Voice, key moderate figures at various levels campaigned in support of the proposal.
- The **Greens** support the Voice in principle while objecting to the prioritisation of the Voice over Truth and Treaty. Internal debates over how to approach the referendum culminated in Senator Lidia Thorpe's dramatic departure from the party at the end of 2022. Thorpe took a dim view of the Voice proposal's effectiveness in improving the lives of First Nations peoples; she committed herself to the 'Blak Sovereignty' movement.
- The **Nationals** opposed the Voice from the start, reflecting longstanding concerns over property rights in primary industry and opposition to the creation of separate institutions. The relatively strong influence of more conservative elements in the party (such as the Queensland branch) also appears to have been decisive.
- The considerable number of **independents and minor parties** in the federal parliament meant that a variety of perspectives on the Voice emerged from these groups.



Activity Y – Key players in the Voice referendum

- 1 Create an online media scrapbook and gather various articles and information on the Voice proposal. To challenge yourself, you can try focusing on one particular media outlet and take note of any changes or patterns in their media coverage over the course of 2023.
- 2 Create a report for your class that outlines the life experiences and political positions of one of the key people featured in the mini-profiles provided. As you undertake your own research, try to find and use key quotes from the person themselves in your report. Your presentation should seek to address the following questions:
 - a How and why did this person become involved in First Nations issues?
 - b What is their most recent position on the Voice proposal?
 - c Which organisations and groups has this person represented recently? If they represent a political party, how much influence does that party have in the federal parliament (i.e. number of seats)? If they are a prominent media figure, how big is their audience and who are they (e.g. old, young, conservative, moderate, regional)?
 - d Was this person involved in previous initiatives, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission or the Constitutional Recognition proposal?
 - e Find three further quotes from this person that best encapsulate their position on the Indigenous Voice proposal, a treaty process and/or truth-telling.
- 3 Once these presentations are finished, create a political compass that shows the positions of key actors on this proposal. What patterns do you notice, particularly on the political left and right? Are there any idiosyncratic (unusual or inconsistent) positions?
- 4 Investigate the position of one political party on questions of Voice, Treaty and Truth in further details. Create a fact file that includes key quotes from current spokespeople in the party you've selected.
- 5 Invite your local member of parliament to share their or their party's perspective on these issues with your class. To what extent do you agree or disagree with their position?



The referendum process

The Voice to Parliament referendum took place on 14 October 2023. In the months preceding the referendum, public support for the proposal markedly declined. The Albanese government chose to proceed with the referendum despite the Coalition eventually announcing its opposition, as well as opinion polling indicating softening and eventually declining support for the proposal.

The proposal put to voters was rejected by a majority of Australian voters in every state or territory except the ACT. Turnout was 86.39% – slightly lower than the typical turnout in a federal election.



Activity Z – Referendum results

- 1 News organisations have published a range of articles and graphic features that show the results of the referendum to the local level, including at individual polling booths.

'Voice referendum live results and updates'. ABC News, 2023. abc.net.au/news/elections/referendum/2023/results

'How did your electorate vote in the voice referendum?'. The Guardian, 2023 theguardian.com/news/datablog/ng-interactive/2023/oct/15/how-did-your-area-vote-in-the-voice-referendum-check-out-our-interactive-map

'The Voice referendum results by vote type and electoral division'. Antony Green, 2023. antonygreen.com.au/some-graphs-on-the-voice-referendum-result/

Examine the results for your own electorate and, if possible, the polling place closest to where you live. Compare these results to the results nationally. Note any patterns and differences you see generally in regards to:

- a urban, rural and regional areas
 - b inner city, inner suburbs and outer suburbs
 - c Australia's east, west, north and south
 - d states and territories.
- 2 Compare the results for your local area against the atlas.id map of your local government area. Can you see any patterns in booth votes and demographic factors, such as average age, cultural background or education level?

atlas.id.com.au

Political significance

At the time of writing, the 2023 referendum had recently been defeated. The full significance of this will only be revealed with the passage of time, but several themes have already emerged. 'Yes' campaigners and supporters were, understandably, disappointed by the results. For many members of First Nations communities, the defeat had broader symbolic and sometimes personal significance, being taken as emblematic of Australia's irredeemable hostility to reform. The 2023 referendum has political significance because of the underlying political ideas and structures that the proposal was built upon, and because of how it is expected to shape how the political system approaches First Nations issues and further constitutional change for a generation.

Political ideas

Questions of Voice, Treaty and Truth go to the political principles around the social contract, representation and the nature of conflicting claims over what sovereignty means in an Australian context. The referendum provoked strong

debate about the way representation for First Nations peoples should be embodied in the political system. For opponents, the proposal represented a threat to the principle of one-vote, one-value, while for proponents the Voice was an important organ of self-determination for First Nations people that would be less diluted by non-Indigenous voices in parliament and the executive branch.

Political structures

Much of the debate over these issues can be understood as a ‘proxy’ debate over how constitutional structures can best represent political ideas. The particular model put forward at the 2023 referendum (an advisory council without the ability to make or block new laws) was rejected. The proposal was a political compromise and it disappointed many who wanted *more* power for First Nations people in the political system, as well as those who wanted less. The sense that some of the more specific details about the Voice had not been explained also served as a key point of contention. Following the referendum, it appears that any similar model now effectively has cross-party opposition and whatever comes next is unlikely to be put to referendum. Meanwhile, at the state or territory level (where constitutional changes rarely require approval via a referendum), there are many structures and bodies similar to the Voice.

First Nations politics

There is a long history of activism, protest and debate around questions of how best to represent and advance the interests of First Nations peoples in the Australian political system. Debate on questions of Voice, Treaty and Truth continue to be informed by thousands of Indigenous organisations, who represent a wide range of experiences and political positions on questions of political reform. The referendum debate has also brought the ‘Blak Sovereignty’ movement to the fore, as well as conservative and anti-Voice proponents aligned with the views of Coalition senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price. To a certain extent, the perspectives of those who might oppose any changes to Australia’s constitution on principle now appear to be more influential. While none of these political positions are new, they appear to have renewed prominence as a result of the Voice debate and campaigns that may in turn define the course set by future politicians and decision-makers.

Global resonance

First Nations people in Australia are part of a global push for greater political power and self-governance for indigenous peoples worldwide. The Australian experience both informs and is informed by the experiences of indigenous people in other countries – and, in particular by the UNDRIP. In rejecting the Voice, Australian voters have indicated that political reforms intended as means for greater self-determination for indigenous people may be unlikely to succeed in other, similar contexts.

The constitution and referenda

There has been little change to the Australian constitution since Federation, with only eight of 45 proposals put to a referendum succeeding since 1901. The willingness of governments to put constitutional reforms to referendum has also slowed remarkably since the close of the 20th century. A referendum is a significant political event and an illustration of an otherwise rarely apparent measure of *direct* democracy (where people are asked to vote on a decision rather than have people make decisions on their behalf) in the Australian system. With the failure of the

referendum, the constitution has now remained unchanged since the last successful referendum in 1977 – and many influential actors appear to have concluded that future attempts will be ‘off the table’ for some time.

Notably, many of the voting patterns displayed in the 1999 referendum were repeated in 2023, with ‘No’ votes correlating strongly with lower levels of formal educational attainment and income (a far stronger correlation than party affiliation). Other aspects of referenda, such as the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ booklets mailed to households by the AEC, seemed outdated in an environment dominated by digital media. The strategy employed by the Albanese government in 2023 was significantly informed by the 1999 experience, where many supporters of the republic proposal had argued that the proposed model of a governor-general elected by parliament had offered *too much* detail, with some republic supporters voting ‘No’ because of their opposition to those specifics. Conversely, many observers argued that the lack of detail in the 2023 proposal contributed to a falling away of support from those who might otherwise have been supportive.

Read more about responses to the result here:

 ‘From ‘gut-wrenching’ to ‘respect’: how prominent Australians reacted to the voice referendum result’. The Guardian, 2023. [theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/14/day-of-sadness-how-prominent-australians-reacted-to-the-indigenous-voice-referendum-result](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/14/day-of-sadness-how-prominent-australians-reacted-to-the-indigenous-voice-referendum-result)

Effects on stability and change

This case study has featured various proposals for different degrees of change in the ways that First Nations people and cultures are recognised and represented within the Australian polity. In doing so, this text has provided you with a framework you can use to understand change at different levels of the Australian political system. You have also been introduced to the complexity of constitutional reform as a method for political change, as well as actors and parties who:

- supported the Voice because they thought it constituted meaningful change, such as being a step towards realising a treaty with First Nations people
- supported it due to agreeing with or conceding to the necessity of modest changes, mainly confined to amplifying First Nations peoples’ influence over government decisions
- opposed the Voice because they thought it would lead to (or ‘lock in’) insufficient change (such as those who thought it would *surrender* First Nations peoples’ sovereignty before a treaty)
- opposed it because they thought it would lead to undesirable radical change and/or have unintended consequences.

A similar spectrum of support and opposition exists on every political issue. The Voice referendum shows the complexity involved in building coalitions to support or oppose political change at a national scale.

Revision questions

Analysing a SAC-style question

Examine the question, marking scheme and sample response provided. Highlight each of the features in the marking scheme below.

Analyse the democratic principles that inform the Voice to Parliament proposal. (6 marks)

1 mark	A topic sentence that uses key words from the prompt ('democratic political culture', 'demonstrated')
+1 marks	Several democratic principles from the study design are identified and signposted.
+1 mark	Democratic principles are linked to aspects of the voice.
+2 marks	Evidence is giving using SPEDD (Statistics, People, Events, Dates and Deals).
+1 mark	Linking sentences show the link between the case study and the democratic features.



Sample response

The Voice Proposal upholds several democratic principles. First, it upholds democratic ideals of representation by providing an institution that represents First Nations Australians. Supporters argue that this upholds Australia's obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. First Nations peoples represent about 3% of the Australian population, but they have been significantly underrepresented in parliament, with most Indigenous MPs elected since Federation being elected since 2014. A second democratic principle underpinning the Voice is the role of the constitution. Supporters of the Voice argue that it must be constitutionally entrenched to ensure it is able to criticise the government of the day. This draws attention to the role of constitutions in underpinning democratic principles and upholding rights (the liberal aspect of liberal democracy). A third democratic principle upheld by the Voice is accountability and transparency. The federal government spends a significant amount on services for First Nations peoples, and the Voice would play a key role in shedding light on these spending decisions. In its advisory role, the Voice would be able to investigate government programs and advise the government on them.

SAC-style analysis activity

Task instructions

You have four lessons in which to complete a research report according to the outline provided here. You can use support materials, including your notes and laptop, in the first two lessons. In the two writing lessons, you will only be able to use the essay plan you have created.

Word length: 1 000–1 200 words (approx.)

Research time: 2 hrs

Writing time: 2 hrs

Suggested structure

Introduction (100 words):

- Introduce the Voice to Parliament.
- Outline the key events, dates and people involved.
- Give an overview of the extent to which the needs of relevant groups have been met.

Case study (200 words):

- Outline the case study.
- Explain the reasons for the Voice to Parliament proposal.
- Outline the proposed model and briefly outline alternative proposals.

Party positions (200 words):

- Using the party policy platforms we have examined, as well as relevant media articles, outline the position of at least two parties on this issue. What solutions do they propose? How much would they cost? How effective would they be? Is there commentary from experts analysing these policies?

Pressure groups and key individuals (200 words):

- Identify the interests and perspectives of other relevant actors (other than political parties) regarding the issue – these might be referred to as ‘interest groups’.
- Explain their background, their sources of funding, who supports them, and what methods they use to advance their agenda.

Media reportage (200 words)

- Write an analysis of how this issue has been reported on in the Australian media.
- Outline which elements of the issue might have been over- or underemphasised.
- Note the prominence of the issue – for example, how high a story is placed on the home page of a news website, how long the articles are, and whether they are also subjected to analysis, comment or opinion.
- Using your notes from earlier lessons, comment on which audiences might have been intended for different types of reporting: for example, if something has been primarily reported on in a print newspaper rather than on television or online, who might be more likely to read a print newspaper?

Analysis (200 words)

- Analyse the extent to which you think this issue is being resolved by the Australian political system.
- Discuss what political principles and ideals are at stake.
- Explain what you think an ideal solution to the problem might look like, based on what you’ve seen so far.
- Identify some of the biggest barriers to change.

Conclusion (80 words)

- Remind us of your key conclusions about the issue.

Further resources

For more resources relevant to this area of study, access the online resource library associated with this textbook: sev.asn.au/textbook-resources/pol12

Articles

ABC, 2023. 'The Yes and No arguments have been published without fact checking. Here's what you need to know'. abc.net.au/news/2023-07-19/fact-check-yes-no-campaign-pamphlets-aec/102614710

James Blackwell, 2023. 'Regional communities were central to the Uluru Statement and they must also be for the Voice to Parliament'. *The Conversation*. theconversation.com/regional-communities-were-central-to-uluu-statement-and-they-must-also-be-for-the-voice-to-parliament-206288

Malcolm Turnbull, 2023. 'Australia's constitutional history told us the Voice referendum was unwinnable. Sadly that was right'. *The Guardian*. theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/22/australias-constitutional-history-told-us-the-voice-referendum-was-unwinnable-sadly-that-was-right-malcolm-turnbull

Web resources

AEC, 2023. 'Your official referendum booklet'. aec.gov.au/referendums/files/pamphlet/referendum-booklet.pdf

Daniel McKay, 2017. 'Uluru Statement: A quick guide'. Research paper series, 2016–17, Parliamentary Library. aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/Quick_Guides/UluruStatement

James Haughton and Appeline Kohen. 'Indigenous constitutional recognition and representation'. Parliamentary Library. aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook46p/IndigenousRecognition

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SBS, 2022. 'The journey to the Uluru Statement from the Heart'. sbs.com.au/language/english/en/article/the-journey-to-the-uluu-statement-from-the-heart/vkgmybdyp

Shireen Morris, 2019. 'Insights for design of direct public participation: Australia's Uluru process as a case study'. Melbourne Forum on Constitution Building. law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/3230377/MF19-Australia-paper.pdf

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Pearson, N. 2014. *A Rightful Place: Race, Recognition and a More Complete Commonwealth*. Quarterly Essay.

Referendum Council. 2017. *Final Report of the Referendum Council*.
referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/report_attachments/Referendum_Council_Final_Report.pdf.

Richards, L. 2021. 'Indigenous Australian parliamentarians in federal and state/territory parliaments: A quick guide'. Parliamentary Library. aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp2021/Quick_Guides/IndigenousParliamentarians2021

2.2

Unit 2,
Area of study 2:



**Global challenges
to democracy**

“Unit 2, Area of Study 2: Global challenges to democracy

In this area of study students analyse global challenges to the principles of democracy and assess threats to their effectiveness, legitimacy, spread and impact.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

Key knowledge

- 1 the key concepts:
 - 1.1 international law
 - 1.2 rules-based order
 - 1.3 states
 - 1.4 nations
 - 1.5 sovereignty
 - 1.6 liberal democracy
 - 1.7 authoritarianism
 - 1.8 ideology
 - 1.9 global governance
- 2 the principles that underlie democracy globally, such as
 - 2.1 free, fair and multiparty elections
 - 2.2 accountability of governments to the people
 - 2.3 transparency of decision-making
 - 2.4 adherence to the rule of law
 - 2.5 active participation in civic processes
 - 2.6 political and legal equality
 - 2.7 checks on government power
 - 2.8 respect for sovereignty
 - 2.9 economic liberalism
 - 2.10 political liberalism
 - 2.11 human rights and freedoms
- 3 the ideologies that inform systems of national governance and global governance, such as
 - 3.1 democracy
 - 3.2 liberalism
 - 3.3 cosmopolitanism
 - 3.4 authoritarianism
 - 3.5 populism
 - 3.6 totalitarianism
 - 3.7 theism
- 4 the main political differences between liberal democracies, illiberal democracies and authoritarian systems, such as
 - 4.1 political ideology
 - 4.2 the separation of church and state
 - 4.3 separation or concentration of powers
 - 4.4 a written constitution
 - 4.5 free and fair elections
 - 4.6 the existence of checks on political power
 - 4.7 the rule of law
 - 4.8 the institutions of global governance that reinforce the current rules-based international order, such as
 - 4.9 the United Nations
 - 4.10 International Court of Justice
 - 4.11 International Criminal Court
 - 4.12 International Monetary Fund
 - 4.13 the World Trade Organization

- 5 the challenges to the legitimacy and spread of democracy globally, such as
- | | |
|---|---|
| 5.1 authoritarianism | 5.5 cyber interference |
| 5.2 illiberalism | 5.6 perceived western cultural bias |
| 5.3 populism | 5.7 problems with the current rules-based international order |
| 5.4 media misinformation and disinformation | |
- 6 the causes and consequences of challenges to the legitimacy and spread of democracy.

Key skills

- i ask and use a range of political questions to investigate one contemporary global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy
- ii interpret a range of sources of information on one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy
- iii explain how ideologies may undermine or support the acceptance of democratic values and processes
- iv explain the causes and consequences of one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy
- v analyse how the interests of global actors may challenge democratic values and processes
- vi explain a range of different global actors' perspectives on one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy
- vii analyse how one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy has led to political stability and/or change
- viii analyse the political significance of global political actors' responses to one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy
- ix construct an argument to evaluate the significance of one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy and the extent to which democratic principles are upheld using evidence from sources.

Key questions

What are the challenges to the legitimacy and spread of democracy globally?

How politically significant are the global challenges to democracy?

To what extent does democracy contribute to global stability and/or opportunities for change?

Preface

In this area of study, students analyse global challenges to the principles of democracy and assess threats to their effectiveness, legitimacy, spread and impact. Students explore at least one global issue or crisis that challenges the importance of democratic principles and consider the causes and consequences of this issue or crisis. Through their investigation, students discover the significant impact states and other global actors may have on the legitimacy and spread of democratic principles, such as free and fair elections, accountability and transparency in political processes, rule of law, human rights, equality and the separation of powers. They analyse the degree to which the interests of global actors can significantly undermine or promote these principles, especially in situations of crisis where political, economic or security needs may be prioritised over human rights or the rule of law. ”

Adapted from Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2023.

‘VCE Politics: Study Design, 2024–2028’.

vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/politics/2024PoliticsSD.docx

Global challenges to democracy

This chapter will seek to understand, analyse and explain the various challenges to the prevalence and effectiveness of democracy globally. Students will first be reintroduced to many of the principles that underlie democratic systems of government; then they will explore the ways in which these principles are informed by certain ideologies and supported by various international institutions. Students will next examine some of the influences and ideologies that oppose and/or undermine these principles and, in doing so, serve to limit its spread. This will include a discussion of additional challenges that have emerged in the 21st century that may not only limit the spread of democracy but also contribute to the erosion of formerly strong democratic governments – the dynamic of ‘democratic backsliding’ touched on in the previous chapter.

Finally, this chapter will focus on the particular challenges posed by the phenomenon known as **populism**. Populism is a political and ideological tendency that sees contemporary and globalised democratic systems of government as having been taken over by elites, leaving many feeling disadvantaged and disempowered.

Many of the key concepts specified in the first key knowledge point of this area of study have been explored earlier in the text. They are discussed in more detail and in context throughout this chapter.



Supporters of Donald Trump attack the US Congress on 6 January 2021. For many, this event served as a very visible crescendo of the pressures posed by populism to democratic institutions and legitimacy. Credit: Tyler Merbler, 2021. [w.wiki/6mRp](https://www.wiki/6mRp)

The principles that underlie democracy globally 2.2.2

Before considering how democracy is being challenged around the world, it is important to first acknowledge that democracy cannot succeed in a state without structures and institutions to support it. The term **democracy** is derived from the Greek *dēmos* (people) and *kratos* (rule) and, therefore, literally refers to ‘rule by the people’. While we tend to think of democracy as we understand it originating in the Ancient Greek city-states such as Athens, this 5th century BCE version of democracy bore little resemblance to the principles and practices of modern democratic states. Though it established some important precedents such as an independent judiciary (or court system), Athenian democracy was restricted to a privileged minority of the population (adult males who had completed military service, which was roughly 10–20 per cent of the population). It wasn’t until the major



Athenian leader Pericles delivers his ‘Funeral Oration’ to the Assembly in Athens, speaking about the virtues of democracy, circa 431 BCE. Artwork by Philipp von Foltz, 1853.

social upheavals in England, the colonies that became the United States of America, and France in the 17th and 18th centuries CE that the elements of liberal and representative democracy we recognise today began to take shape.

Our study design asks us to examine 11 specific principles considered key to the claims to legitimacy and the effective operation of democracy globally. The table provided suggests a number of earlier sections in this text that explore these principles and other closely related concepts. Students may find it helpful to review these before proceeding.

free, fair and multiparty elections	<i>political parties</i> p. 15–16 <i>democratic processes</i> p. 31–3
accountability of governments to the people	<i>responsible government</i> p. 28 <i>popular sovereignty through elections and referenda</i> p. 44
transparency of decision-making	<i>media</i> p. 16–17 <i>parliamentary processes</i> p. 32–3
adherence to the rule of law	<i>parliamentary sovereignty</i> p. 43 <i>the state’s legitimacy and ability to use coercive power</i> pp. 103–4
active participation in civic processes	<i>social movements, campaigns, protests and citizen power</i> p. 47 <i>party membership</i> p. 47
political and legal equality	<i>cosmopolitanism</i> p. 118 <i>equality</i> p. 166
checks on governmental power	<i>federalism</i> p. 26–7 <i>the separation of executive, legislative and judicial power</i> p. 29–30
respect for sovereignty	<i>states</i> p. 9–10 <i>the state’s power arising from its possession of sovereignty</i> p. 100–3
economic liberalism	<i>continuity and change in the global order</i> p. 11–12 <i>corporations</i> p. 21–2
political liberalism	<i>different ways of organising formal power within states</i> p. 25–6 <i>liberalism</i> p. 119
human rights and freedoms	<i>politics as ‘applied ethics’</i> p. 6 <i>coercion</i> p. 35

Respect for sovereignty

Modern understandings of sovereignty were solidified in Europe by the Peace of Westphalia treaties of 1648 that ended the Thirty Years War (1618–48). This featured broader acceptance of the notion that sovereign states should have control over matters within their territories and, as such, should not intervene in and should instead respect the independence of *fellow* sovereign states.

As democracies are intended to respond to the views of their population – and since people generally prefer peace to war – democracies are broadly considered more sensitive to the costs of invading another state. Democracies also assume that other democracies similarly prefer the peaceful settlement of disputes and the use of force only as a last resort. In what has become known as the **democratic peace thesis**, German philosopher Immanuel Kant took this further by proposing in his 1795 book *Perpetual Peace* that democracies were inherently peaceful and, therefore, do not go to war with one another. In his 1999 book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, author Thomas Friedman offered a modern take on this, observing that, at that point, no two countries with a McDonald’s franchise (itself a symbol of global capitalism) had ever gone to war with each other. Nonetheless, this ‘Golden Arches Theory’ has been challenged in recent times. Read more at the link below:

 ‘The golden arches go to war’. Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2022. aspistrategist.org.au/the-golden-arches-go-to-war



The ratification of the Peace of Münster as part of the Peace of Westphalia. Artwork by Gerard ter Borch, 1648.

Human rights and freedoms

All democracies are considered systems in which citizens freely make political decisions by majority rule. However, rule by the majority is not necessarily democratic. In liberal democracies, majority rule must be combined with and offset by certain protections for individuals and minority groups. Liberal democratic states have played a prominent role in the establishment of **international laws** and treaties that aim to promote many individual human rights concepts in other political systems. This principle of the protection of individual human rights is now embodied in laws and treaties throughout the world, such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which serves as the basis for advocacy by non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

 ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. United Nations, 1948. un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights



Eleanor Roosevelt holds up a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in December 1948.

International law refers to a body of rules established by custom or written legal agreements that are accepted as binding upon the international community and that apply to all global actors; written legal agreements, such as treaties, are only binding to those who give consent through explicit ratification.



Activity A – What makes a strong democracy?

- 1 Using the structure in the table provided, and aided by your own research, summarise the principles of a democracy by detailing their purpose and individual parts.

Principle	Parts Outline the important components of this principle.	Purpose In one sentence, describe what this principle aims to achieve.	Significance In one sentence, describe what might happen in a democracy without this principle.
Free, fair and multiparty elections			
Accountability of governments to the people			
Transparency of decision-making			
Adherence to the rule of law			
Active participation in civic processes			
Political and legal equality			
Checks on government power			
Respect for sovereignty			
Political liberalism			
Economic liberalism			
Human rights and freedoms			

- 2 Work through the following activity with a group of fellow students.
 - a Print a piece of paper listing the 11 principles that underlie democracy globally, then cut them into small cards.
 - b In small groups, discuss and try to rank each of these principles by importance, arranging them in a line from most important to least important.
 - c Debate your rankings with other groups in the class, with a view to answering the following reflection questions.
- 3 Individual reflection questions:
 - a Identify which principle of democracy you thought was most important. Explain why you chose this principle.
 - b Describe what you learnt from the ranking exercise.
 - c Discuss whether you think ranking these components is worthwhile.
 - d To what extent do you think *all* of our 11 principles are essential for a democracy to be effective?

Ideologies informing systems of national and global governance 2.2.3

As discussed in earlier chapters, ideologies provide a sort of language for expressing the views, values and beliefs that different groups of people have regarding how the world should be organised – including on a global level. On a national level, ideologies also help to explain why different individuals and groups may form contrasting views on key political questions, such as the proper role of government and/or the nature and extent of the social contract.

Notwithstanding the fact that views in this area are themselves often a reflection of the ideological assumption of the person expressing them, certain ideologies are considered more beneficial to sustaining democracy within a state – notably for allowing its inhabitants to have better lives. On a global level, these same ideologies may also serve to encourage the spread of democratic norms and can work to strengthen the operation of certain elements of the rules-based international order that generally aligns with the interests of liberal democracies.

“Theory can therefore be useful: it is often better than unconscious adherence to the prejudices of the day.”

Robert Keohane, 1986. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. Columbia University Press.

Democracy 2.2.3.1

Having a strong belief that the government should be constituted by the general population (typically the election of representatives to make decisions on their behalf) helps to not only sustain existing democracies but also promote democratic principles in states without a history of representative government.

“Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish.”

Abraham Lincoln, 1863, in his ‘Gettysburg Address’.

Liberalism 2.2.3.2

Refer to *Liberalism* in chapter 1.2.

Cosmopolitanism 2.2.3.3

Refer to *Cosmopolitanism* in chapter 1.2.

Authoritarianism 2.2.3.4

Authoritarianism refers to a system of government characterised by a strong central government and limited democratic rights and freedoms. Authoritarianism promotes the idea that democracies are inefficient and that more closed political systems facilitate decision-making that is quick, consistent and not handicapped by the need to refer to a potentially critical public.

Populism 2.2.3.5

Populism is a political perspective that emphasises the idea of ‘the people’, typically juxtaposing this group against ‘the elite’. In recent times, this has been taken to mean that ‘the people’ are those who have been excluded from power

due to their sociocultural and socio-economic status, and 'the elite' are those holding positions of power in politics, the economy, the media and the arts.

Populists share a suspicion of and hostility towards elites, mainstream politics, established institutions and global interconnectedness. Populism informs political systems where established democratic institutions are identified as corrupt and only serving the interests of the political elites that created them. In this way, populism undermines the ability of democracies to sustain the principles on which they were founded.

Totalitarianism 2.2.3.6

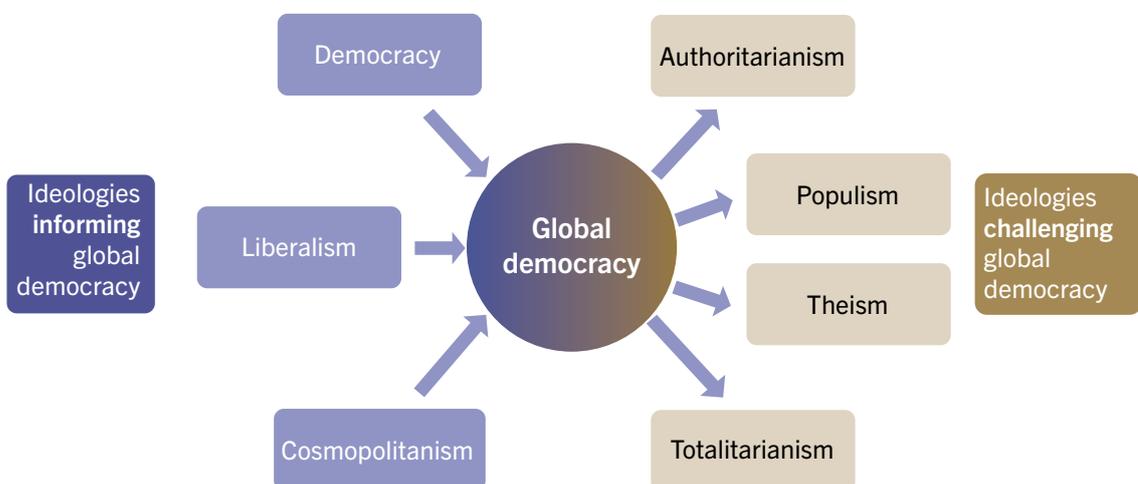
If authoritarians seek to control all aspects of the government within a state, totalitarianism tends to seek control over all aspects of *life* within a state. Totalitarian ideologies permit little in the way of individual freedom and seek to subordinate most aspects of individual life to the authority of the state. Totalitarianism informs political systems in which citizens are typically led to believe that only one person or family is capable of effectively pursuing the national interests of the state. They typically include effective and total control over means of communication, systems of terror in the name of safety, and militarisation extending into many areas of everyday life. Modern examples of totalitarian ideologies and systems include that of Juche in North Korea and the Taliban in Afghanistan.



Italian dictator Benito Mussolini coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to characterise the newly fascist state of Italy.

Theism 2.2.3.7

Theism is a belief that all things in life are dependent on one supreme or ultimate being. In politics, this usually manifests in political systems known as theocracies, where the government is organised around the beliefs of a particular religious faith.



Political differences between liberal democracies, illiberal democracies and authoritarian systems 2.2.4

As we've explored, the systems of government seen across the West broadly adhere to the principles of a liberal democracy. Nonetheless, many liberal democratic states have struggled to maintain and express the principles associated with liberal democracy. This development serves as a reminder of the relative rather than absolute nature of the idea of a state, institution or organisation as being 'democratic' (in other words, a *spectrum* rather than a *category*). It leads us to instead consider states in which our democratic principles have less weight as **illiberal democracies**. Again, many states may have so little expression of democratic principles in their systems of governance that they may be considered **authoritarian** states.

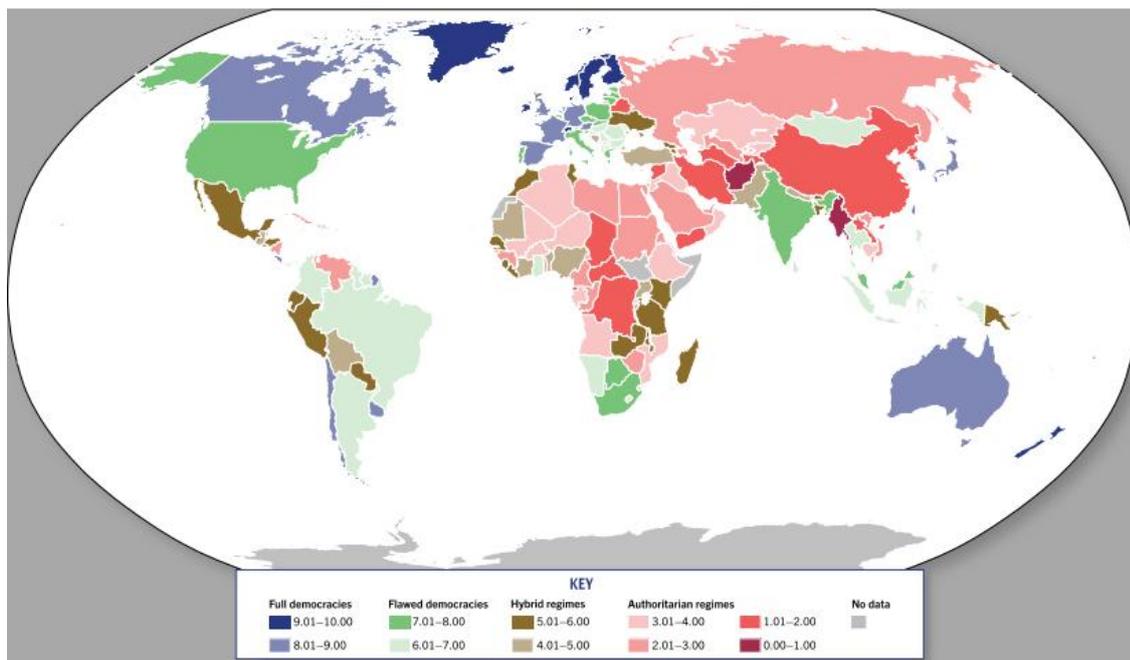
Systems of government around the world

The Economist newspaper, itself considered an influential voice in favour of economic and social liberalism, compiles and publishes *The Economist Democracy Index* each year using five categories:

- electoral process and pluralism
- civil liberties
- functioning of government
- political participation
- political culture.

Its 2022 release identified only 24 of the 167 states it analysed as 'full democracies'.

Map showing countries/territories by Democracy Index score, 2022



Map adapted from the Economist Democracy Index, 2022. Economist Intelligence Unit.
Credit: [eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022](https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022) and [w.wiki/6nLd](https://www.wiki/6nLd)

Liberal democracy

The ubiquity of liberal democratic principles across European nations and the English-speaking world reached a high point in the early 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc and the unravelling of the Soviet Union itself. These developments were perceived as very influential in delegitimising Soviet-style state involvement in the economy and societies across the world. This led American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama to infamously proclaim the ‘end of history’ in his influential 1992 essay of the same name. Fukuyama saw the triumph of liberal democracy over communism as the final and least imperfect form of human government and political organisation. However, Fukuyama’s thesis has been widely challenged, in part by the continuation of illiberal and authoritarian elements in many states – most notably those in China – but also in countries much closer to the traditional ‘core’ of the West.



The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.
Credit: Raphaël Thiérmard. flic.kr/p/6bRKQE

Illiberal democracy

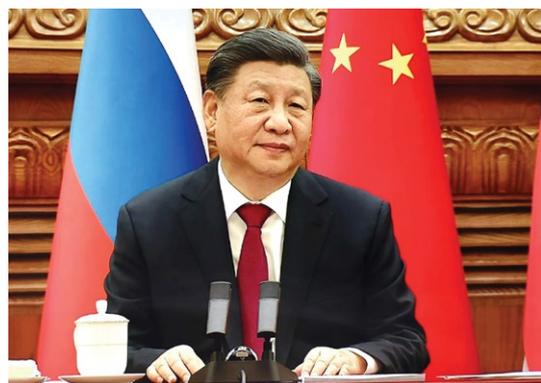
The term **illiberal democracy** was coined by Fareed Zakaria in a 1997 article published in *Foreign Affairs* (an influential journal focused on US foreign policy and international affairs). In ‘The Rise of Illiberal Democracy’, Zakaria (1997) defines illiberal democracies as ‘democratically elected regimes [that] routinely [ignore] constitutional limits on their power and [deprive] their citizens of basic rights and freedoms’. The related process of a legitimately elected leader who uses their position to incrementally erode the institutions, rules and norms that sustain an existing liberal democracy has come to be known broadly as ‘democratic backsliding’. Such leaders often seek to maintain the illusion that their power and legitimacy in this task derive from their popularity, and are often aided by efforts to subtly or overtly manipulate the media, opposition forces and electoral processes.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has often been criticised for using illiberal methods to remain in power, including imprisoning journalists and interfering in the judicial system.
Credit: Mikhail Klimentyev, 2020. w.wiki/6nLg

Authoritarian systems

Authoritarian systems of government concentrate power in the hands of a select few people or, in some cases, a single person. Democracies can begin to develop authoritarian features when leaders seek to centralise power and are faced with ineffective resistance, or complicity, from



Chinese President Xi Jinping.

other domestic political actors. Authoritarianism tends to be associated with the following types of political systems:

- **Absolute monarchy:** all power resides with an unelected head of state (e.g. Saudi Arabia) whose position is inherited.
- **One-party state:** the constitution or relevant legislation effectively or explicitly reserves the right to govern for one political party (e.g. China).
- **Military junta:** typically formed when the nation's military seizes control, often on the pretext of protecting the country from the consequences of a political crisis (e.g. Myanmar).
- **Theocracy:** government power is intertwined with the authority held by members and leaders within a particular religion, who tend to apply strict religious perspectives in the creation and application of laws (e.g. Iran).

Authoritarian governments may seek to convince their populations of doing away with the inconvenience of competitive elections, or that the dismantling of institutions and norms that serve as counterweights to their authority is a necessary part of creating a better, secure or more prosperous society. While coercion and the threat of violence are important tools for authoritarians seeking the compliance of other domestic actors, they also rely on more traditional methods: using state power to reward and strengthen allies and reward compliance. Authoritarians, like other leaders, may seek to shape or control the flow of information (e.g. via social media or the education system) in ways that promote their own ideological preferences, or indeed to cultivate the belief that there is no reasonable alternative to their own continued domination of the political system.



Beware the tyranny of... *categorisation*

Students should keep in mind that there is no universal test for determining whether a state is authoritarian, illiberal or democratic – many may contain elements of two (or indeed, confusingly, all three). In many cases these three labels are best used to understand features, tendencies and possibilities within *all* political systems, rather than distinct categories into which different states should necessarily be slotted.

Political differences

The following characteristics serve to further highlight the perceived differences between liberal democracies, illiberal democracies and authoritarian systems.

	Liberal democracy	Illiberal democracy	Authoritarian systems
Political ideology	A belief in democratic principles and associated ideas (e.g. liberalism, cosmopolitanism).	Disregards liberalism and democracy. Embraces popular or anti-establishment ideas (e.g. populism).	A belief in ideologies that consolidate power in a central government (e.g. authoritarianism, theism).
Separation of church and state	Broadly speaking, the church organised and institutionalised religion and has little to no influence on the political process. This is often termed secularism. In France, the separation of church and state (termed <i>laïcité</i>) is taken very seriously.	Often, but not always, influenced by religious values, particularly in more conservative instances. Many populist leaders have gained support from religious groups.	In some cases, there is no interaction between church and state, such as in China. In other cases, the church is heavily entwined with the state, leading to the establishment of a theocracy, such as in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
Separation or concentration of powers	A clear separation of power between executive, legislature and judiciary.	The separation of powers is blurred. In recent years, there has been a trend to reduce the independence of the judiciary.	All power is centralised and all branches of government are under the authority of a small group of people, or more commonly one person.
A written constitution	The principles of a state's democracy are enshrined in a written document, or set of documents, that cannot be changed easily by those in power.	A written constitution likely exists; however, pertinent sections can be circumvented (bypassed) by self-serving politicians.	A written constitution likely exists but is easily changed by those in power.
Free and fair elections	All citizens have an equal vote in regular, transparent elections where there are multiple parties that have a realistic chance of success. Scandinavian states such as Norway and Sweden often top the democracy rankings for their transparent electoral processes.	Elections exist and play a crucial role in providing a leader with an illusion of legitimacy. They often lack transparency, are irregular, or do not offer rival parties a realistic chance of success. Contemporary examples include Turkey and Cambodia.	There are no elections. New leaders are usually appointed through a succession plan, such as in a one-party state like China, or they are anointed as part of a family succession, such as in a hereditary monarchy like Saudi Arabia. Often, there are lengthy or no term limits.
The existence of checks on political power	A clear separation of powers, with mechanisms that prevent one person from gaining excess power within any one branch of government.	Checks on political power exist, such as the separation of powers; however, they are often breached without consequence.	A small group of people, or more commonly one person, possess unlimited power to exercise their political will.
The rule of law	A belief that no one is above or outside the law, including those in power. Includes an independent judiciary.	Inconsistent application of the rule of law, often to allow those in power the ability to evade legal constraints.	The rule of law is arbitrary and does not apply to those in power, but it can be wielded upon citizens erratically.



Challenges to the separation of powers in Israel

During the first half of 2023, tens of thousands of Israelis protested Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to overhaul the judiciary. Netanyahu was elected prime minister for a sixth term in 2022, but to establish a majority in parliament he needed to form a coalition between his nationalist Likud party and a bloc of extreme conservative and religious parties. Thus, Israel's most right-wing government in its history set about enacting a mandate to increase and extend effective Israeli sovereignty into the occupied



Protests against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's nationalist coalition government's contentious plans for a judicial overhaul in Tel Aviv, 2023. Credit: Amir Terkel. w.wiki/6nLv

West Bank (Palestinian) territories and undo elements of social reform implemented under previous, more progressive administrations. To fulfill these wishes, Netanyahu's government proposed legislation that would prevent the Supreme Court from overriding laws and allow the government to reject any Supreme Court ruling, as well as exercise direct control over judicial appointments. Supporters of Netanyahu's proposals argued that the Israeli Supreme Court in its current form had too much power. In turn, objectors have articulated concerns that the proposals would result in an erosion of democratic norms and the rule of law. The protests were then given additional weight due to the unusual nature of Israel's democracy – in that it does not have a written constitution but rather a single (unicameral) legislature and an already considerably powerful executive branch. The government suspended the proposed legislation in mid-2023.

- 'What are the Israeli protests about and what happens next?' The Guardian, 2023. [theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/27/what-are-the-israeli-protests-about-and-what-happens-next](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/27/what-are-the-israeli-protests-about-and-what-happens-next)
- 'Israel and the debate over the role of the judiciary in democratic government'. Council on Foreign Relations, 2023. [cfr.org/article/israel-and-debate-over-role-judiciary-democratic-government](https://www.cfr.org/article/israel-and-debate-over-role-judiciary-democratic-government)



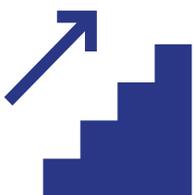
Activity B – Understanding political differences

- 1 With reference to the Israeli judicial reform case study provided, identify the principles of democracy that were being contested.
- 2 Explain why protesters might have felt that Israel was at risk of becoming an illiberal democracy.
- 3 To what extent do you think Israel remains a legitimate and effective democracy? Why?
- 4 Describe the characteristics of a liberal democracy.
- 5 Explain how a liberal democracy might become an illiberal democracy.
- 6 Describe three types of authoritarian political systems.
- 7 Complete the 'connect, extend, challenge' thinking routine. Make sure you refer to the table provided earlier, which included information about some of the differences between liberal, illiberal and authoritarian political systems.

Connect – Extend – Challenge



How are the ideas and information presented **connected** to what you already knew?



What new ideas did you get that **extended** or broadened your thinking in new directions?



What **challenges** or puzzles have come up in your mind from the ideas and information presented?



This routine helps learners make connections between new ideas and prior knowledge. It also encourages them to take stock of ongoing questions, puzzles and difficulties as they reflect on what they are learning.

Source: 'Connect, extend, challenge'. Project Zero / Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2015.
pz.harvard.edu/resources/connect-extend-challenge

Institutions of global governance that reinforce the current rules-based international order ^{2.2.5}

As discussed earlier in this text, contemporary IGGs broadly seek to encourage global interdependence, provide forums for diplomatic resolutions to global issues, and reduce interstate conflict. Be careful not to confuse global governance with two other concepts:

- 'world government' implies a singular or unitary authority (this simply doesn't exist)
- 'multilateralism' involves three or more states working together to reach an agreement and tends to involve states collaborating to solve a *specific* problem.

Global governance implies a wider and ongoing set of arrangements for addressing problems and includes the institutions, rules, norms and legal agreements that seek to *facilitate* multilateral cooperation between states. The IGGs listed that exist in contemporary global politics provide a framework of informal ethical norms and formal legal rules, termed the **rules-based international order**.

The **rules-based international order** refers to the set of structured relationships, expectations and behaviours that have evolved and dominated the operation of global politics since World War II; it is rooted in economic and political liberalism and extends into international law, regional security arrangements, trade agreements and immigration protocols.



The rules-based international order

The rules-based international order is a fluid concept that has evolved gradually since the end of World War II and the creation of the UN. As many of these institutions, rules and norms are underpinned by the principles of liberalism and democracy, the rules-based international order has come to be seen as a reflection of the success or inherent merit of liberal democracy.

In this sense, liberal democratic states often tend to participate more enthusiastically in the maintenance of this order and to be supportive of IGGs. These institutions exist to maintain and promote established norms and, therefore, will be inclined to demand action from member states whose actions deviate from convention. Nonetheless, their legitimacy and survival rely on the bulk of member states accepting their power. If states choose to ignore these institutions or bypass them altogether and conduct their affairs through smaller bilateral and multilateral agreements – or indeed act unilaterally – this can make these institutions appear far less effective.

United Nations 2.2.5.1

Founded in the wake of World War II and currently comprised of 193 member states, the UN is the world's primary IGG. It aims to maintain international peace and security, promote international economic and social cooperation, and advocate respect for human rights. While often criticised for its inability to hold powerful states to account, the UN has been a key actor in significant areas of progress across development, human rights, humanitarian and health emergencies, gender equality, food production and sustainability. The UN has many component bodies, termed 'organs'. This section explores three important ones.



United Nations General Assembly

The UN's main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ is its General Assembly. All 193 member states are represented in the General Assembly, making it the only UN body that provides universal and nominally 'equal' representation of all states. It has a wide-ranging mandate, from discussing and debating global



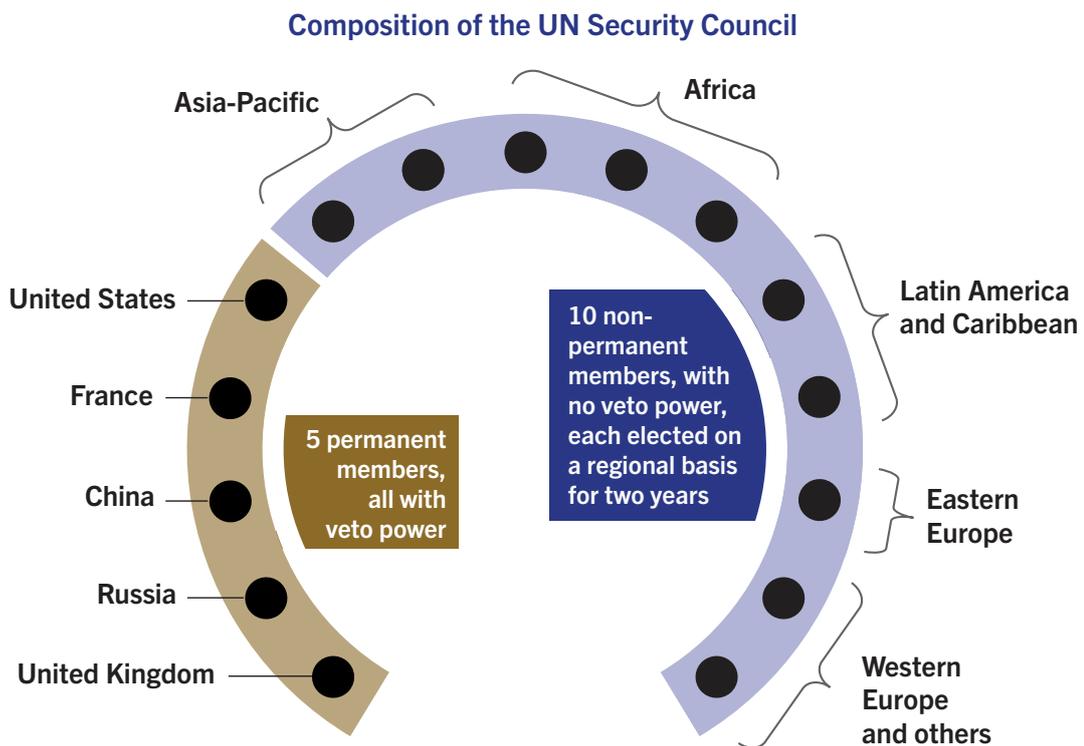
US President Joe Biden addressing the UN General Assembly in 2023.

issues and crises, to more procedural and administrative responsibilities (such as establishing subsidiary organisations). While it does earn praise because it provides every state (however small) a voice regarding any issue, the General Assembly is also seen by many as inefficient and ineffective, not least because it lacks the power to enforce its decisions and resolutions.

United Nations Security Council

The UN Security Council has primary responsibility under the UN Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security. It has 15 members – five permanent and 10 rotating non-permanent members – each of whom has one vote. Crucially, the five permanent members of the Security Council also have the ability to **veto** any proposed agreement, which is all but guaranteed if any proposal is seen as counterproductive to the interests of any permanent member. Under the UN Charter, all member states are obliged to comply with Security Council decisions. The Council meets to identify threats to peace or acts of aggression, then calls on parties to the dispute to settle through peaceful means, while recommending methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In some cases, the Security Council may seek to impose sanctions on states, or even authorise the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

A **veto** is the power or ability to unilaterally stop a proposal, decision or action.



International Court of Justice 2.2.5.2

Often termed The Hague (in reference to the Dutch city in which it is headquartered), the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the UN. It is the only one of the six principal UN organs not located in New York. The court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by states against other **states**, and to provide advisory opinions on any legal questions referred to it by authorised UN organs and specialist agencies.

International Criminal Court 2.2.5.3

Unlike the ICJ, which settles disputes between states, the ICC mandate relates to **individuals** who have perpetrated serious crimes of international concern. The ICC was established under the UN Rome Statute of 1998 with the principal aim to ensure the worst perpetrators of crimes of concern to the international community are held to account. It has the jurisdiction to investigate crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression, and it does so when the perpetrator's own government is either unable or unwilling to act.



The ICC has been criticised for only being able to successfully prosecute several leaders of *non*-state paramilitary groups in Africa, as opposed to those accused of war crimes who are shielded by the power of states, such as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin. In turn, these failings stem from two key limitations: several crucial states (e.g. the United States, China and Russia) have refused to join the ICC, and it has no mechanism for enforcement beyond state cooperation.

International Monetary Fund 2.2.5.4

The IMF's fundamental mission is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system. It does this in three ways:

- 1 keeping track of the global economy and the economies of member countries
- 2 lending to countries with balance-of-payment difficulties
- 3 giving practical help to members.



The IMF raises its money through a quota system, with each member making an annual contribution based on their ranking within the world economy – that is, richer states pay more than poorer states. Importantly, with the ranking comes voting power, with those states who contribute more having a greater say in decisions.

The IMF's power broadly lies with the conditions it attaches to the loans and grants it provides to states, often including a requirement to reduce spending. Critics argue that such conditions can exacerbate real economic decline, which then reduces the capacity of states to pay the interest on loans (creating so-called 'debt traps'), *while* disproportionately impacting the living standards of those on lower incomes.

World Trade Organization 2.2.5.5

The WTO is the principal forum for setting the rules of international trade. It supports the liberal democratic idea that economic interdependence reduces the likelihood of conflict. Since its inception in 1995, the WTO has facilitated trade negotiations among its 164 members, up from 123 when it formed. The organisation also monitors the implementation of trade agreements, produces research on global trade and



economic policy, and serves as a forum for settling trade disputes between countries. The WTO has sought to reduce the prevalence of **protectionist** trade measures in both goods and services and has created a dispute resolution system that supporters say has reduced the threat of trade wars.

Protectionism refers to measures that restrict imports on goods from other countries, such as charging taxes or duties on them ('tariffs') or setting physical limits on quantities of imported goods ('quotas'), usually motivated by a desire to shield local businesses from foreign competition.

Nonetheless, the WTO faces considerable obstacles. A shift to more protectionist attitudes among many states, as well as the enormous disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have coincided with a decline in international trade. Unsurprisingly, this has increased uncertainty about the future of global supply chains, prompting many WTO members to engage in separate bilateral and regional free-trade agreements to advance their trade interests.

Progressive critics of the WTO have also long objected to many elements of the WTO's agenda, which they see as being aligned with the more exploitative and profit-driven interests of TNCs. In this view, the unwinding of protectionist measures promoted by the WTO has led to a global 'race to the bottom', which has increased the wealth of shareholders at the expense of workers' wages and the environment.



The WTO Ministerial Conference held in Seattle in 1999 inspired protests involving tens of thousands of demonstrators motivated by concerns about labour issues, the environment and consumer protection.

Activity C – The strengths and weaknesses of institutions

- 1 Complete the following 'plus, minus, interesting' thinking routine, referring to the IGGs that reinforce the current rules-based international order.

Plus	Minus	Interesting
Identify the ways in which institutions are successful in reinforcing the rules-based international order.	Identify the ways in which institutions face challenges when attempting to promote the rules-based international order.	Identify at least one feature of an international institution you found interesting, and explain why.
		

Credit: 'Plus, minus, interesting'. Edward de Bono. shorturl.at/oPQZ7

Challenges to the legitimacy and spread of democracy globally ^{2.2.6}

According to Kant's **democratic peace thesis**, democracies assume that other democracies are inherently peaceful and, therefore, believe that spreading democratic principles ought to lead to a safer world. This model relies on at least two key assumptions:

- **Spread:** for liberal democratic states to effectively export particular principles and norms, influential actors in less democratic states who are receptive and willing must accept them as their own.
- **Legitimacy:** liberal democracies themselves must continue to be seen to adhere, consistently and credibly, to the very democratic principles and norms they claim to model for others.

Throughout history, and most recently since the collapse of the Soviet system, there have been strong objections (on practical and ethical grounds) to the prospect of some states imposing their own systems of government on others. This reached a turning point with the United States' invasion and 20-year (2001–22) occupation of Afghanistan, in which its efforts to supplant the fundamentalist Taliban movement eventually failed and were rolled back. Liberal democracies have instead tended to focus on creating and expanding collective security agreements – even to the extent that many participants of such agreements themselves are far from the 'liberal' end of the liberal authoritarian scale (e.g. US security arrangements with Saudi Arabia, or Turkey's membership of NATO). Among this, democratic states are nonetheless keen to ensure that their systems of government appear legitimate, both internally and on the global stage.

The following is a selection of ideologies that have already been discussed, as well as some other circumstances that challenge the legitimacy and spread of democracy in global politics.

Authoritarianism ^{2.2.6.1}

The perception that states whose political systems feature strong central governments and limited democratic rights and freedoms have rebounded and become more prevalent since the 1990s has, in some sense, challenged the view that democracies are actually the most effective form of government. Many authoritarian states seek to undermine the legitimacy of democracies by highlighting their inefficiencies (such as political deadlock, social problems and economic stagnation), or through more threatening efforts to undermine democratic institutions and processes. Some actors have looked to the prominent example of China and its unprecedentedly rapid and massive degree of economic growth over the past four decades as evidence that prosperity doesn't necessarily stem from a state's acceptance of liberal or Western preferences regarding political norms and civil freedoms.

Illiberalism ^{2.2.6.2}

There is a perception that countries in the liberal democratic 'core' are becoming less democratic. There are many cases in which legitimately elected leaders seek changes that are seen to incrementally erode the institutions, rules and norms that sustain democracy. Such leaders may go to great efforts to support the impression that their leadership and policy agenda are legitimate by using various measures to manipulate elections or the media.

Populism 2.2.6.3

Read ahead for our case study on populism, which discusses this challenge in detail.

Media misinformation and disinformation 2.2.6.4

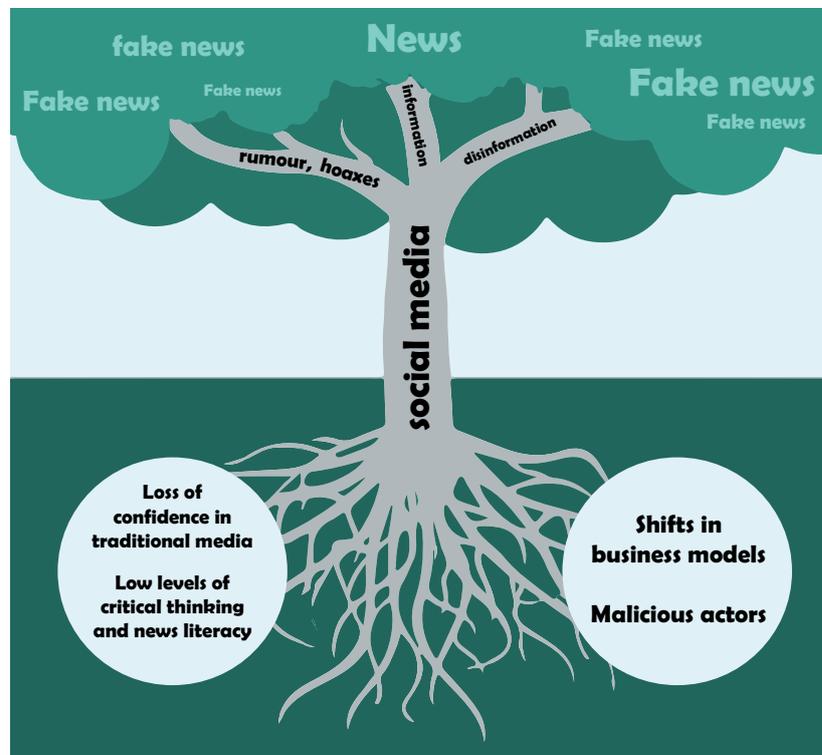
Misinformation and **disinformation** may serve to spread fear and sow distrust among different social groups in society, including undermining trust in democratic processes and institutions themselves. While social media is often tapped as the main way in which misinformation and disinformation proliferate in a given political system, it's important to remember that they are also present across all communication platforms, including more traditional forms of media, the education system and even verbally within social networks.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information, such as rumours, insults and pranks.

Disinformation involves deliberate attempts to mislead, such as hoaxes, phishing and propaganda.

Cyber interference 2.2.6.5

Over the past decade, various state and non-state actors have attempted to use the digitisation of election systems to influence results and disrupt the campaigns of rivals. Such interference can include seeking to directly influence voters' opinions about candidates through paid advertising, or directing funding to domestic allies, often in ways that seek to bypass local laws about external influences over electoral processes.



The roots of 'fake news'. Source: 'World trends in freedom of expression and media development: Global report 2017/2018'. UNESCO, 2018. w.wiki/6nXR

Perceived Western cultural bias 2.2.6.6

Much of the key thought that underpins liberalism and democracy seemingly originates in European and Western philosophical traditions. The heavy legacy of colonisation, dispossession, exploitation and enslavement – which played such a fundamental role in shaping many lower-income countries’ historical and political memories – have served to delegitimise many of the ways in which these principles are expressed in Western political traditions. This can be expressed through leaders choosing to draw on and prioritise local political traditions, which may appear more authoritarian and less democratic to outside observers.

Problems with the current rules-based international order 2.2.6.7

As discussed in the first chapter, many actors in the global political system have interests and perspectives that lead them to question or challenge the current international order and the distribution and arrangement of the power it underpins.

The following article from the Council on Foreign Relations outlines Chinese and Russian relations and discusses their shared desire to ‘curb the United States’ power and challenge its hegemony’.

 ‘China and Russia: Exploring ties between two authoritarian powers’. Council on Foreign Relations, 2022. [cfr.org/backgrounder/china-russia-relationship-xi-putin-taiwan-ukraine](https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-russia-relationship-xi-putin-taiwan-ukraine)



Activity D – Evaluating political significance

- 1 Plan a response to the following extended response question.

Discuss the extent to which one challenge to democracy threatens political stability.

Consider the following while developing your answer.

- a Does this challenge threaten one or more of the principles of democracy, such as adherence to the rule of law, checks on government power, or free, fair and multiparty elections?
- b How might this challenge undermine the rules, norms and protocols that characterise the rules-based international order?
- c How might institutions (governments, judiciaries, IGGs) be able to guard against this challenge and prevent political instability?

Remember the VCAA command term glossary, which specifies how to best respond to a ‘discuss’ question:

Discuss: present a clear, considered and balanced argument or prose that identifies issues and shows the strengths and weaknesses of, or points for and against, one or more arguments, concepts, factors, hypotheses, narratives and/or opinions.

The causes and consequences of challenges to the legitimacy and spread of democracy 2.2.7

This text will explore the causes and consequences of challenges to the legitimacy and spread of democracy through the lens of one challenge: **populism**.



Case study: Populism

The term **populism** has become a mainstay in the political lexicon since 2016. This was when the United Kingdom turned away from regional integration and voted to leave the EU, an event known as Brexit. It was the same year that the United States elected a nationalist, unconventional and anti-establishment president in Donald Trump.

It became clear that democracy was under threat when two pioneers of this system of government, the United Kingdom and the United States, chose through popular vote to put aside some of the democratic principles that they had established. Since then, many more politicians, heads of government, political parties and interest groups have been labelled 'populist'.



Boris Johnson campaigning for the United Kingdom to leave the EU prior to becoming prime minister.

Defining populism

Populism as a political term has had a varied journey. It emerged in the late 19th century in the United States and later was used to describe the post–World War II left-wing and socialist governments of Latin America, such as Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Perón in Argentina. Despite there being some examples of left-wing populism today that are worth exploration (such as Spain's Podemos party), for convenience this section will focus on right-wing and nationalist strains of populism that gained prominence in the 2010s, with a particular focus on Europe and the United States.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* named populism its Word of the Year for 2017, referring to its importance as 'a phenomenon that's both truly local and truly global, as populations and their leaders across the world wrestle with issues of immigration and trade, resurgent nationalism, and economic discontent' (University of Cambridge, 2017).

Political scholar Ben Moffitt (2020) further identified 'that most academic specialists are of the view that populism revolves around a **central division between 'the people' and 'the elite'**'. Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) defined these groups as:

- 'the people', being the common person who has been excluded from power due to their sociocultural and socio-economic status
- 'the elite', being those holding positions of power in politics, the economy, the media and the arts.

Scholar Carla Norrlof explained in 2019 that polling and election data, particularly in the United States, show that the 'people' and the 'elite' are often delineated depending on how well-educated a person is and where they live. Norrlof argued that the 'people' tend to have a lower level of education and/or live in rural areas, whereas the 'elite' almost always are highly educated and live in urban areas.

That said, the common populist interpretation of a ‘pure people’ versus a ‘corrupt elite’, as Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) put it, shows how populism can be understood as moral framing, rather than situational. Moral framing allows populists to refer to themselves as anti-elite and advocating for the common person, even after they have gained positions of power.

An extension of this anti-elite sentiment is what political scholar Fareed Zakaria (2016) called populists’ shared suspicion of, and hostility towards, established institutions. This anti-establishment sentiment argues that the structures of representative democracy and the principles of economic liberalism have actively worked against the everyday person and left them disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) also defined a third distinct element of populism as one of nativism – an ideology that is more or less the opposite of the cosmopolitanism discussed in earlier chapters. Populists argue that elite politicians and academics have supported increasing globally interconnectedness, free(r) trade and open borders, which have undermined the cultural identity of the state and its established or dominant ethnic groups.

Zakaria summarised that ‘populism remains an opposition movement’. It is one of negatives: anti-elite, anti-institution and anti-global.



Populism’s core tenets

- sees the core political distinction as ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’
- suspicion of, and hostility towards, established institutions
- nativist and, therefore, anti-global(ism).

“Populism sees itself as speaking for the forgotten ‘ordinary’ person and often imagines itself as the voice of genuine patriotism.”

Fareed Zakaria, 2016. ‘Populism on the march: Why the west is in trouble’. *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 6. [jstor.org/stable/43948376](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43948376)

“Populists are defined by their claim that they alone represent the people and that all others are illegitimate.”

Jan-Werner Müller, 2016. *What Is Populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press.

“[Populism] calls for kicking out the political establishment, but it doesn’t specify what should replace it.”

Uri Friedman, 2017. ‘What is a populist?’ *The Atlantic*. [theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/02/what-is-populist-trump/516525](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/02/what-is-populist-trump/516525)

“Populism is the political science of providing simple answers to complex questions.”

David Von Drehle, 2019. ‘Populists are popular because they give easy answers to problems that don’t have them’. *The Washington Post*. [washingtonpost.com/opinions/populists-are-popular-because-they-give-easy-answers-to-problems-that-dont-have-them/2019/10/11/73dac4c8-ec47-11e9-85c0-85a098e47b37_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/populists-are-popular-because-they-give-easy-answers-to-problems-that-dont-have-them/2019/10/11/73dac4c8-ec47-11e9-85c0-85a098e47b37_story.html)



Thinking critically about (anti-)populism

Some scholars question the usefulness of populism as a descriptor for people, movements or ideologies, partly because a ‘people versus elites’ framework can be found across a vast range of ideologies that might otherwise be seen to have very little in common (ranging from revolutionary Marxists to religious movements; from liberal reformers to unapologetic authoritarians). This is because political actors looking to use such rhetoric have a wide range of elites to choose from (are they government bureaucrats, the very rich, the highly educated, the media, politicians, or some combination thereof?).

The term ‘populism’ also has negative connotations, particularly in academic and policy circles. Author Thomas Frank offers the following critique of its contemporary uses in reference to figures such as Donald Trump, whose political views have little in common with the radical progressivism of 19th-century populists who coined the term:

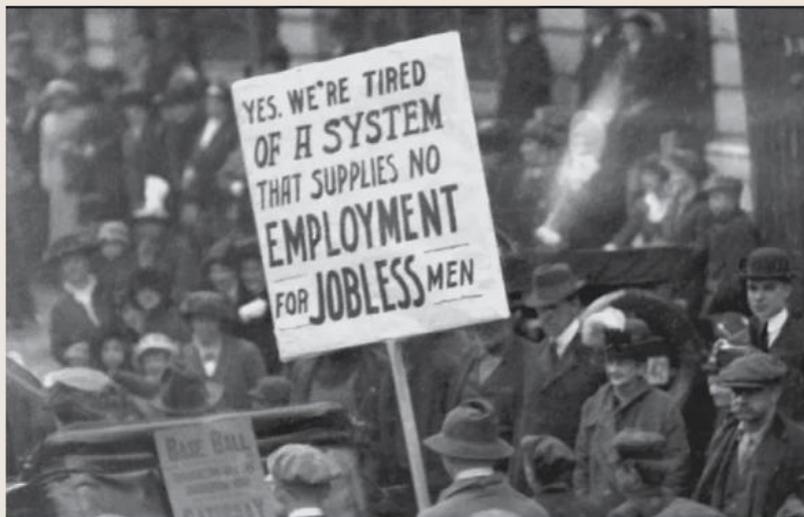
“Reversing the meaning of ‘populist’ tells us something important about the people who reversed it: denunciations of populism like the ones we hear so frequently nowadays arise from a long tradition of pessimism about popular sovereignty and democratic participation. And it is that pessimism – that tradition of quasi-aristocratic scorn – that has allowed the paranoid right to flower so abundantly.”

Thomas Frank, 2020. *The People, No*. Metropolitan Books.

This hints at a bit of a paradox for us, students of VCE Politics, when we consider how populism ‘challenges the legitimacy and spread of democracy globally’. If a populist political movement does in fact advocate for what ‘the people’ want over what elites want, then it is in some sense inherently pro-democratic, even if illiberally so. In practice, recent parties and movements that have been labelled as populist have been able to hone in on social and cultural issues (such as immigration) and stoke them in a way that not only benefits them politically, but also helps to distract attention from their other less popular policy positions.

With these considerations in mind, we have, in the context of this case study:

- taken ‘populism’ to mean *contemporary* populism, which in addition to the ‘people versus elites’ rhetoric is also defined by its suspicion around norms and institutions that are largely liberal in nature
- taken reference to ‘democracy’ in this area of study to specifically mean *liberal* democracy, noting that many of our 11 principles of democracy stem from liberal ideas and perspectives.



The first populists emerged as a reformist movement seeking to challenge the effects of growing economic inequality in the United States from the 1870s through to the early 1900s. Following a stock market collapse in 1893, an army of thousands of unemployed (pictured) marched on Washington to demand that the government invest in building roads and railways to create jobs.

Causes of populism

Three key causes emerge that explain the rise of political actors who advocate for the common person, campaign against the establishment, and oppose a globally interconnected world:

- 1 economic insecurity
- 2 increased movement of people
- 3 the perceived erosion of traditional cultural values.

Economic insecurity

Since the 1970s, moves towards the liberalisation and removal of barriers to trade endorsed by Western liberal democracies have played a part in increasing the wealth of a significant section of the population. Nonetheless, over the same period, many manufacturing jobs have been relocated to lower-income countries, and the degree of economic inequality has also accelerated. For example, the income of the average American has not increased in real terms since the 1970s, and the real earnings of many groups – especially men with lower levels of formal education – have actually fallen. This economic inequality has underscored an increasing sense of cultural and political volatility in the West. Those who have failed to benefit from economic growth have become **disillusioned with the established political system** and the elites who operate it on their behalf, as many grapple with frustration over a sense of decline in their own social standing and general wellbeing.

In a more interconnected world, economic shocks in one state are more likely to have knock-on effects in others. Significant economic crises in the past two decades have marked periods of recession and lower rates of growth – the extent and frequency of which have highlighted the vulnerabilities of a more interconnected world:

- the global financial crisis of 2008–9
- the eurozone debt crisis of the 2010s
- the COVID-19 recession of 2020–22.

The eurozone financial crisis led to increased unemployment (rising in some parts of Europe to more than 20 per cent) and featured wealthier EU member states reacting negatively to the prospect of funding large bailouts. Populists, in turn, captured the **anger felt in poorer states** at the austerity measures imposed by elites at the helm of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF. Austerity programs required a reduction in government spending, which typically hit working-class people hardest. Many Europeans felt powerless



This cartoon depicts the disillusionment felt at the spending restrictions (known as ‘austerity measures’) imposed on European governments by the EU and the IMF to curb the eurozone financial crisis.

Credit: Patrick Chappatte, 2012.

chappatte.com/en/images/more-austerity-for-greece

as their elected politicians willingly transferred power from national governments to international organisations such as the EU and the IMF. These organisations – each strongly associated with the liberal democratic world order – were seen as imposing decrees that demolished the living standards of working people. This sense of disillusionment provided fertile ground for populist tendencies that portrayed these institutions as undemocratic and controlled by a shadowy elite who were unconcerned with the plight of regular people.

Watch the following video for a discussion of modern populism’s emergence in Greece, the epicentre of the eurozone crisis:

 ‘The rise of modern populism – Takis S. Pappas’. TED-Ed, 2020 (6 min). youtu.be/uMNwUh0X5el

Increased movement of people

While people movement has long been a feature of the global economy, there have been specific developments over the last few decades that have changed the nature of migration and its political responses. One prominent feature of this has been skilled workers relocating in search of better employment prospects. Many populists have used the global movement of skills and labour to explain why job opportunities for ‘locals’ (or, as is often the case, for the dominant ethnic group) have diminished.



Anti-immigration protesters gathered in Central Florida in 2019. Credit: w.wiki/6nbe

Perhaps more dramatic has been the rise of refugees and asylum seekers as a significant and contentious political issue in the West, which has created an environment rich for exploitation by populist actors. Political and civil unrest across lower-income countries in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa saw the number of people forcibly displaced more than double between 2012 and 2022 (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). In turn, this has seen a significant rise in asylum seeker applications in Europe and the United States. Populist politicians have exploited this surge in migration to draw connections with the spectre of terrorism and to construct narratives that identify certain migrant groups as a threat to security. Populists have also stoked more visceral fears that a massive wave of migrants will lead to **rapid changes in national identity**. The combination and exploitation of these perceptions – that migrants are a threat to economic prosperity, national security and national identity – have been considerably effective in amplifying populists’ electoral fortunes and political influence.

Perceived erosion of traditional cultural values

The liberal democratic principles of individualism, equality and human rights are thought to underpin a more harmonious society that ensures fairness and representation for minority groups. For some populists, these principles serve to weaken or threaten the traditional cultural values of the dominant ethnic group.



Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro. Credit: Palácio do Planalto, 2022. w.wiki/6njm

During the 1980s and 1990s, Western political parties from the centre-left and the centre-right increasingly converged on questions of economic policy, favouring greater integration between states, multi-ethnic societies and fewer restrictions on trade. This led to significant numbers of voters becoming detached from centrist parties who they felt no longer offered a meaningful choice. Many also believed that traditional conservative stances on **issues relating to gender, race and the environment** were no longer being advocated in the mainstream. This backlash against the perceived erosion of traditional values, as described by former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro (pictured), served to create a space for populists to appeal to those voters who sought representatives and leaders they thought would hold the forces of cultural and social change at bay.

“Let’s unite the people. Value the family, respect religions and our Judeo-Christian tradition, fight gender ideology, and preserve our values. Brazil will once again be a country free from ideological shackles.”

Jair Bolsonaro, 2018.

We recommend reading the following article, which explores some of the themes discussed in this section in further detail:

 ‘Who wins and who loses from globalization? There are (at least) six answers’. BigThink, 2021. bigthink.com/the-present/six-faces-globalization

The interests, perspectives and effects of populist leaders

As we’ve learnt, the actions of political actors are motivated by specific **interests** and shaped by their **perspectives**. Populism is exemplified by charismatic individuals who advocate for the ‘common people’ in opposition to an elite who are seen as corrupt. In this section, we analyse the ways in which specific individuals have attracted and maintained popular support on their way to gaining power and influence. Each profile offers an analysis of the perspective with which each populist leader sees and understands their own interests – this will include some of the ideologies, ideas, values and events that have informed these perspectives. Finally, each case study will analyse the effect these actors have on **political stability and change**, looking at how, why and to what extent the political actors, institutions, processes and crises involved have changed over time.

While the actors profiled in this section all have unique political stories, we have summarised some of the most common interests, perspectives and effects on stability and change in the table provided to help understand the consequences and significance of populism in a general sense.

Common characteristics of populist actors

Interests	Attract and maintain popular support Gain power and influence
Perspectives	Oppose the establishment Oppose immigration Oppose progressive social change
Effect on political stability	Disregard for democratic principles Disregard for international institutions Disregard for liberal values

This section will focus on two political leaders in depth: Donald Trump (United States) and Marine Le Pen (France).

One key dynamic that has emerged since populism's surge in prominence in the late 2010s has been its success at challenging democracies in the very places where modern liberalism and democracy are thought to have emerged and later became dominant in the 20th century – the so-called 'core' of Western Europe and North America. As such, we begin our profiles with two states that pioneered liberalism and democracy in the 18th century and are now having these foundations challenged: the United States and France. Later, we will briefly touch on other examples of populist leaders from different countries, which students may take as a starting point for their own investigation.

Donald Trump (United States)

Interests

Before Donald Trump launched his campaign in 2015 to become president of the United States, he was best known as a property developer, entrepreneur and reality television host. Many observers discounted the possibility of him winning the candidacy of the Republican Party and/or of his ability to defeat an experienced Democratic candidate (Hillary Clinton) supported by a popular outgoing president from the same party. This outcome, which was surprising to many, partly stemmed from Trump's ability to capture the attention of large parts of the American public who felt they had been ignored by the existing political establishment. His political messaging on matters such as 'standing up to' globalist world leaders and institutions, reducing the number of migrants arriving in the United States, and halting progressive social reforms and protecting traditional Christian values proved effective at **attracting and maintaining public support**.

Trump's campaign resonated with large swathes of the American public. In the lead-up to his win in 2016, 65 per cent of white Americans polled said they would support a party dedicated to 'stopping mass immigration, providing American jobs to American workers, preserving America's Christian heritage and stopping the threat of Islam' (Gest, 2016). Despite securing almost three million fewer votes, Trump (due to some perplexing characteristics of the US electoral system) defeated Clinton and went on to serve four years as US president. In doing so he became the first modern populist to win national office and **gain significant political power and influence**. In the 2020 election, Trump narrowly lost to his Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, a result Trump and his supporters disputed. In late 2022, Trump announced his intention to again seek the nomination as the Republican candidate in the upcoming 2024 US presidential election.



Donald Trump speaks to supporters at a rally in Arizona, 2022.
Credit: Gage Skidmore. flic.kr/p/2mXGzSR

“Working-class whites ... found themselves increasingly alienated by the cosmopolitan Democrats and more comfortable with a Republican Party that promised to reflect their [conservative] values on ‘the three Gs’ – guns, God and gays. ... Trump’s political genius was to realize that many Republican voters were unmoved by the standard party

gospel of free trade, low taxes, deregulation and entitlement reform but would respond well to a different appeal based on cultural fears and nationalist sentiment.”

Fareed Zakaria, 2016. 'Populism on the march: Why the west is in trouble'. *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95.

Perspectives

Donald Trump's two most famous slogans used during his successful election campaign of 2016 were 'Make America great again' and 'Drain the swamp'. The first, often abbreviated as 'MAGA' when referring to Trump's new populist wing of the Republican Party, evoked the nationalist sentiments among his growing support base. The success of this campaign confirmed that a large portion of the US electorate had become disillusioned with the United States' role in global affairs, particularly regarding trade policy with China. The success of the MAGA 'movement' hinged on the idea of **opposing the establishment**; it argued that the political elites were more interested in international diplomacy, trade and solving conflicts in faraway places, and that in doing so they had forgotten to look after America's interests. The second slogan, 'Drain the swamp', evoked a sense that the political establishment in Washington, DC (the United States' capital) was corrupt and inept and, therefore, needed to be cleared out by a new generation of unconventional and uncompromised politicians cut from the same cloth as Trump himself.

“The future does not belong to the globalists. ... The future belongs to patriots. If you want freedom, take pride in your country. ... Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first.”

Donald Trump speaking at the UN General Assembly in 2019.

“On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong.”

Donald Trump writing in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2016.
[wsj.com/articles/let-me-ask-america-a-question-1460675882](https://www.wsj.com/articles/let-me-ask-america-a-question-1460675882)

As a settler-colonial state, the modern United States has by definition been composed of many waves of migrants and their descendants, towards which the government had been relatively open. However, in the 21st century, continued high rates of migration have become an unpalatable prospect for many Americans. As a side effect of the government's decades-long war on terror, migrants from the Middle East had been, for many voters, explicitly and unfairly associated with terrorism. Migrants from Latin America arriving across the United States' border with Mexico were similarly associated with organised crime and the drug trade. Trump exploited and contributed to these fears, outwardly **opposed immigration** in his campaign, and promised to lower levels of migrants and (perhaps most controversially) complete the construction of a wall along the border with Mexico.



Donald Trump's signature campaign promise to finish constructing a border wall with Mexico. Credit: Gage Skidmore, 2018. flic.kr/p/2cePv98

Trump's 2016 election success was due to his ability to attract support from working-class, white, rural and non-college (university) educated voters – those groups that tended to be most apprehensive about the nature of social and cultural change in the United States. Accordingly, Trump actively **opposed social reform** in his campaign as a way to reach these segments of the American public. The most important issue for these voters was to appoint conservative judges to the US Supreme Court. In due course, this would facilitate the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, which allowed decisions on the legality or illegality of abortion to be made by individual states. A woman's right to seek abortion – a longstanding issue in the 'culture war' dominating debates on social policy in America – took its place alongside other issues around race, homosexuality, transgender rights and education that Trump has continued to use to attract and motivate supporters.

“Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children. ... The American people ... will not allow our country, and all of its values, history and culture, to be taken from them. ... This left-wing cultural revolution is designed to ... destroy [our] civilisation.”

Donald Trump speaking at an Independence Day event in 2020.

Effect on political stability

Donald Trump's presidency was characterised by ongoing scandals and, not infrequently, **open disregard for liberal democratic norms**. One of the most significant instances of this led Congress (the legislative branch of the US government) to vote to **impeach** him on grounds of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. Trump was said to have directed White House officials to ignore formal requests for documents relating to allegations that he had improperly pressured the Ukrainian government to announce an investigation into the dealings of his political rival Joe Biden's son, Hunter. In 2021, the legislative branch voted a second time to impeach Trump, this time for allegedly inciting the insurrection and attack on the US Capitol building on 6 January 2021. Neither impeachment proceeding resulted in a conviction, as there were enough Republican supporters of Trump in the US Senate to ensure that each would fail to reach the two-thirds majority required for a guilty verdict.

Impeachment is a formal investigation and/or charge of misconduct against a public official; the term is usually but not exclusively used in an American context.



Attack on the US Capitol: 6 January 2021

As a special joint session of the US Congress convened on 6 January 2021 to certify Joe Biden's 2020 election victory, Donald Trump addressed his supporters outside the White House, claiming that the election results were 'rigged'. Trump maintained that 'we won this election, and we won it by a landslide'. He told his supporters that 'we will stop the steal. ... If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore. ... You will have an illegitimate president.'

Given that Trump's claims had been endorsed by prominent anchors on the sympathetic Fox News network, many Americans believed that Biden's electoral success was the result of fraud. Subsequently, a large mob gathered outside the US Capitol and then stormed the building seeking to prevent the certification of the 2020 election.

Hundreds were injured in the attack, and six people lost their lives: three law enforcement officers, and three Trump supporters. The FBI and the Justice Department arrested more than 725 rioters. In the aftermath, the House of Representatives voted to impeach Trump for incitement of insurrection. Trump was later acquitted by the Senate, which, at 57 votes to 43, failed to reach the required two-thirds majority for a guilty verdict. State and federal judges dismissed more than 50 lawsuits presented by Trump and his allies that had sought to challenge the election or its outcome.

For its part, Fox News eventually settled out of court for USD\$787.5 million with the voting company about which it had knowingly made false accusations of electoral fraud.

Compiled using information from the following sources:

- 'January 6 US Capitol attack'. Britannica, 2023. [britannica.com/event/January-6-U-S-Capitol-attack](https://www.britannica.com/event/January-6-U-S-Capitol-attack)
- 'Fox and Dominion settle for \$787.5m in defamation lawsuit over US election lies'. The Guardian, 2023. [theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/18/fox-dominion-settle-us-defamation-lawsuit](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/18/fox-dominion-settle-us-defamation-lawsuit)
- 'Fact check: Courts have dismissed multiple lawsuits of alleged electoral fraud presented by Trump campaign'. Reuters, 2021. [reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-courts-election-idUSKBN2AF1G1](https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-courts-election-idUSKBN2AF1G1)
- 'Fox and the big lie – part one' (45 min). *Four Corners*, 2021. [abc.net.au/news/2021-08-23/fox-and-the-big-lie-how-the-network-promoted/13510238](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-23/fox-and-the-big-lie-how-the-network-promoted/13510238)
- 'Fox and the big lie – part two' (46 min). *Four Corners*, 2023. [abc.net.au/news/2023-04-24/fox-and-the-big-lie---part-two/102262050](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-04-24/fox-and-the-big-lie---part-two/102262050)



Former president Donald Trump speaks at a rally on 6 January 2021 protesting the electoral college certification of Joe Biden, just before attendees breached the US Capitol. Credit: Evan Vucci/AP Photo.

Donald Trump's nationalist 'America first' policies were deliberately designed to reduce the US's involvement in international diplomacy, trade and conflict. As a result of his **disregard for international institutions**, the liberal international rules-based order, which the United States had played a lead role in creating and maintaining, looked decidedly less orderly during the four years of the Trump administration. Some notable policies enacted as part of this nation-first agenda involved:

- introducing new import tariffs on Chinese goods (in breach of WTO protocols)
- removing the United States from various UN-initiated responses to global crises (most notably the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal)
- threatening to withdraw the United States from international organisations such as NATO and, during the early stages of the pandemic, from the WHO
- imposing travel bans and economic sanctions on ICC prosecutors who had opened an investigation into alleged war crimes during the United States' 20-year war in Afghanistan.

Liberal ideas around the promotion of individual freedoms, the benefits of increasing global interconnection and the protection of human rights were all challenged during Trump's presidency. His support of conservative policies that targeted individuals from minority groups and harsh positions regarding immigration—including measures to reduce the intake of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as separating immigrant children from their parents—serve to illustrate Trumpian populism's disregard for liberal values.

Additional reading

- 📖 'Trump and American populism'. *Foreign Affairs*, 2016. foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-06/trump-and-american-populism
- 📖 'The vexing rise of the transnational right'. *Foreign Affairs*, 2023. foreignaffairs.com/world/vexing-rise-transnational-right
- 📖 'How Donald Trump's populist narrative led directly to the assault on the US Capitol'. *The Conversation*, 2021. theconversation.com/how-donald-trumps-populist-narrative-led-directly-to-the-assault-on-the-us-capitol-153277
- 📖 'US awol from world stage as China tries on global leadership for size'. *The Guardian*, 2020. theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/29/us-awol-from-world-stage-as-china-tries-on-global-leadership-for-size

Marine Le Pen (France)

Interests

Perhaps ironically for a politician who stands against the political establishment, perennial candidate for the French presidency, Marine Le Pen, is the daughter of another political and repeat-presidential candidate. Her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, was part of French politics for two decades and was every bit as unconventional. Marine Le Pen has spent her time in politics seeking to turn the National Front party founded by her father into a vehicle for electoral success.

In 2017, the younger Le Pen was able to outpoll the traditional centre-left and centre-right parties in French politics and make it to the second-round run-off election in France's **two-round system** for presidential elections. In this case she gained 34 per cent of the votes against a completely new party, the liberal centrist En Marche! led by former investment banker Emmanuel Macron.

Five years later, in the 2022 presidential election, Le Pen again surpassed the traditional parties and made it to the second round of voting. This time, at the helm of a rebranded National Rally party, her attempts to **gain power and influence** saw her campaign more forcefully against Macron's liberal, centrist and pro-global message. In doing so she was able to increase her share of the two-candidate preferred vote to 41.5 per cent.

Despite two election defeats, Le Pen's success in uniting the nationalist, anti-establishment and conservative voters to make it to the second round in both elections illustrates her ability to **attract and maintain popular support**. To this end, in mid-2023 she suggested that she was likely to contest the next French presidential election due to be held in 2027.

Perspectives

Marine Le Pen channelled an **anti-establishment agenda** by capitalising on the resentment many French voters felt towards the economic restrictions imposed in the course of its membership of the EU, particularly in the wake of the eurozone financial crisis of the 2010s. Many voters felt that by handing over significant powers and decision-making to bureaucrats based in the EU's headquarters in



Marine Le Pen campaigning for the French presidency in 2017 with the slogan, 'In the name of the people'.

Two-round electoral systems comprise a first stage with many candidates and a second ('run-off') stage in which voters must select between the two candidates that received the highest number of votes in the first round.

Brussels, France had surrendered too much of its sovereignty. Le Pen was also able to conduct an anti-establishment campaign against Macron, highlighting his prestigious education and previous career as an investment banker while branding him as an elite out to disadvantage the ‘common people’.

“The French want to regain control of their own country. They want to determine the course of their own economy and their immigration policies. They want their own laws to take precedence over those of the European Union.”

Marine Le Pen in an interview with German newspaper Der Spiegel, 2014.
[spiegel.de/international/europe/interview-with-french-front-national-leader-marine-le-pen-a-972925.html](https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/interview-with-french-front-national-leader-marine-le-pen-a-972925.html)

As a member of the EU, France is part of a single, integrated labour market. This means that any EU resident can live and work in any other EU member state. However, many French voters feel that this system allows for too many workers from poorer member states to relocate to France, creating additional and unwelcome competition in the labour market (a common misconception known as the ‘lump of labour fallacy’, which assumes there is a ‘fixed’ amount of jobs in a country; in reality, migrants spend what they earn on the goods and services they need, which increases the number of jobs, leading to a net effect of zero on rates of unemployment). France is also a member of the Schengen Agreement which allows any non-EU citizen free passage between the majority of EU member states that have signed the agreement. As a result, France has become a key destination for refugees and asylum seekers entering Europe through other states to the south and east who are seeking refuge in a safe and prosperous destination.

Public fears regarding immigration extended beyond those grounded in economic fears. When France was the target of a series of deadly terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, many politicians and media outlets falsely attributed them to increased immigration. Le Pen openly **opposed immigration** during her campaign and used public fears surrounding the prospect of unemployment due to economic migration, fuelling security fears relating to refugees and asylum seekers in an effort to tighten France’s border controls.



Demonstrators protesting against a fuel tax and the Macron government at the Champs-Élysées in Paris are met with tear gas. Credit: Mo Wu, 2018.

“The April 2022 election will be about our civilisation. Will France remain France or be brushed aside by the uncontrolled torrent of massive migration flows that will wipe out our culture, our values, our way of life?”

Marine Le Pen speaking at a press conference in 2021.

France itself has strong legal protections for workers relative to other high-income countries, including a standardised 35-hour working week, strong trade unions and one of the earliest retirement ages in Europe. In 2018, French politics was dominated by what became known as the *gilet jaunes* (yellow vest) protests. What began as opposition to a fuel tax morphed into a large-scale anti-government and anti-elite movement targeting President Macron. While Le Pen said that she did not support violent protests, she remained an advocate for ‘poor workers, admirable single mums, and needy pensioners’ (Kirkby, 2019).

In 2023, large-scale protests erupted again, this time in response to President Macron’s proposal to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64. Despite this measure having featured in his re-election campaign and rhetoric around the need to offset a €14 billion annual budget deficit due to an ageing population, the unpopularity of the proposal meant Macron was forced to bypass a parliamentary vote and implement the bill by presidential decree. Le Pen pounced on this, not only to highlight the undemocratic nature of the measure but also to underline her **opposition to social reforms** proposed by established elites at the expense of regular people.

Effect on political stability

While at the time of writing Marine Le Pen has not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate her style of governance, we can observe how her brand of populism may have affected the French political climate more generally. One key component of her 2022 campaign was to pledge a ‘referendum revolution’ on issues such as



Protesters in Paris march against President Macron’s plan to lift the retirement age. (The sign pictured roughly translates to ‘Macron gives money to millionaires but not to grandmothers’.)

Credit: Jeanne Menjoulet, 2023. flic.kr/p/2oew3hm

making school uniforms mandatory, increasing police powers, restricting housing access for foreigners and limiting immigration – many of which may have faced challenges due to potential conflicts with France’s constitution. Nevertheless, Le Pen’s argument in favour of **direct democracy** was that it would empower the ‘forgotten’ citizens of France. This highlights in stark terms the potential for conflict between liberal and democratic principles; **popular but repressive measures** championed by Le Pen challenge liberal values around protecting the rights of minorities.

“During my mandate, I count on consulting the only expert that Emmanuel Macron never consulted: the people.”

Marine Le Pen campaigning ahead of the 2022 French presidential election.

Le Pen rose to political prominence in the mid-2010s when the eurozone financial crisis dominated political debates and when waves of refugees and asylum seekers were arriving in wealthier European countries, fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Her **disregard for international institutions** highlighted the ways in which France had relinquished elements of its sovereignty by being an active member of an international institution like the EU. This attitude appears to have been at least moderately successful as a political strategy. The EU’s formation in the wake of two world wars and during the threat of a nuclear one explains why many liberal internationalists have promoted its benefits, leaning on the promise of collective security, prosperity, harmonious cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism.

As an extension of her anti-immigration perspective, Le Pen is perhaps most notable for her negative views of Muslims. An important value of liberal democracies is to ensure equal human rights for all, including the freedom of association regarding religion and faith. Like many European countries with a history of globe-spanning colonial networks, France’s multi-ethnic experience is at least (in part) a legacy of empire. Many French Muslims can trace their ancestry to past French governments’ invasion and integration of overseas populations (such as those in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), which mandated teaching of the French language; naturally, this has increased interest in migration to France by French-speaking Muslims looking for economic opportunities. Due to a significant portion of the French public now harbouring fears that continued migration from majority Muslim states would see a rise in terror, Le Pen has been able to motivate and attract supporters, reflecting a growing **disregard for liberal values**.

“The progressive Islamisation of our country and the increase in political-religious demands are calling into question the survival of our civilisation.”

Marine Le Pen in an interview with British newspaper The Telegraph, 2010.

Other populist leaders around the world

The following mini profiles serve to highlight that populism can challenge democratic principles in a variety of different regions of the world. However, these profiles also highlight how the interests, perspectives and effects on political stability are remarkably similar to that seen in the earlier, more comprehensive profiles of Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen.

Giorgia Meloni (Italy)

In 2022, Giorgia Meloni took her populist Brothers of Italy party from political obscurity to lead a government comprised of a coalition of right and far-right parties. The fact that her party traced its origins to the post–World War II and neo-fascist Italian Social Movement led one newspaper, *Il Tirreno*, to claim that the historical significance of fascism had been lost in ‘a sea of indifference and populism’ among Italians (*The Economist*, 2022). Fears did nonetheless emerge about what this might mean for the maintenance of liberal democratic norms in Italy (with similar concerns surrounding her populist coalition partners, Northern League and Forza Italia). At the time of writing, changes to the status of Italy’s membership of the EU and its support for Ukraine have not materialised.



While Meloni has advocated for more conservative social policies, particularly around the role of women in the workforce, Meloni appears to have been governing in a more moderate fashion than many commentators had predicted. One area where Meloni *has* followed through on her pre-election rhetoric concerns anti-immigration policies: laws preventing the docking of asylum seeker boats have been strengthened, along with restrictions relating to humanitarian aid vessels seeking to rescue asylum seekers, and a deal to redirect some asylum seekers to Albania. Her government also increased financial aid to Tunisia and Libya, which was tied to their ongoing cooperation in preventing migrants from making the journey by sea across the Mediterranean.

“ I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian. ”

Giorgia Meloni’s proclamation during a campaign rally in Rome, 2019.

Viktor Orbán (Hungary)

In 2022, Viktor Orbán won a fourth consecutive term as Hungarian prime minister. His leadership of the Fidesz party has been characterised by vehement anti-immigration policies including a notorious border fence with Serbia and a conservative stance on many social issues. He contends that the promotion of gender diversity in schools and the media threatens Hungary’s Christian beliefs, using the same argument to justify restrictions on migrants of Muslim faith and his attacks on Jewish faith leaders. His critics accuse his administration of corruption, claim he has weakened the independence of the judicial system, and insist he has restricted the freedoms of opposition parties, academic institutions and the media. Nevertheless, he remains very popular with the Hungarian public.



“ The horrors of Nazis and communists happened because some western states in continental Europe abandoned . . . Christian values, and today’s progressives are planning to do the same. They want to give up on western values and create a new world, a post-western world. . . . We have seen what kind of future the globalist ruling class has to offer. But we have a different future in mind. . . . The globalists can all go to hell. ”

Viktor Orbán speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Dallas, 2022.

Narendra Modi (India)

India possesses the world's largest population and is, by virtue of its parliamentary system, the world's largest democracy. Since his election in 2014, the administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been accused of eroding liberal and democratic principles that underpin the Indian political system. Keen to protect and advance his religious and conservative ideals of a Hindu nationalist state, Modi has sought to strengthen the power of his Bharatiya Janata Party by rolling back judicial independence, limiting the power of opposition parties, and targeting the freedoms of the significant Muslim minority.

Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil)

Serving as Brazilian president from 2019–22 and referred to as the 'Trump of the Tropics', Jair Bolsonaro's anti-establishment presidency was characterised by a hard-line approach to law and order, pro-business economic policies, socially conservative views, and a disregard for environmental laws. Of particular note was his seeming dismissal of the COVID-19 pandemic as worthy of government attention. In 2023, Bolsonaro faced charges of spreading false information about Brazil's electoral system in the lead-up to his 2022 election loss. His failure to concede defeat resulted in riots outside Brazil's Congress, mirroring those on the US Capitol two years prior.

Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines)

Serving as president of the Philippines between 2016 and 2022, Rodrigo Duterte came to power amid promises to shift control away from elites based in the capital (Manila) and take a hard-line approach to poverty, corruption and drugs. Take a hard-line approach he did, as by the end of his tenure at least 6000 people died in the course of his war on drugs; this included extensive extrajudicial killings of drug addicts, for which Duterte was subjected to investigation by the ICC (Reuters, 2022). Critics have argued that Duterte's legacy is a state in which the rule of law, human rights and the independence of the media have been significantly compromised. Even after his preferred successor, Ferdinand Marcos Jr (himself the son of a former dictator), won the election to succeed him as president, Duterte remains a popular figure among Filipinos.

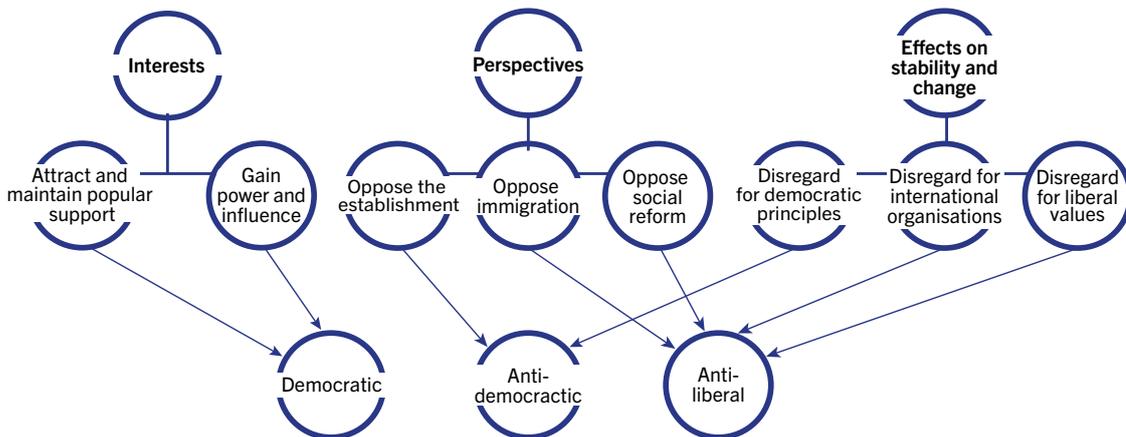
**Activity E – Profile of a populist**

- 1 Prepare a multimedia presentation to share with your class using a similar structure to the profiles of Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen provided earlier in this section. You may want to use some of the suggestions and structure modelled in the table provided to plan your presentation.
 - a Identify whether your chosen actor exhibits the following common characteristics often associated with populists.
 - b Connect these characteristics to specific actions made by your chosen actor.
 - c Elaborate on how these actions challenge democracy in the actor's state.

	Identify	Connect	Elaborate
Interests	Attract and maintain popular support Gain power and influence		
Perspectives	Oppose the establishment Oppose immigration Oppose social reform		
Effect on political stability	Disregard for democratic principles Disregard for international institutions Disregard for liberal values		

Evaluating political significance

To evaluate political significance, students must **construct an argument that reaffirms the consequences of populism and its effect on political stability.** By mapping how populism has either promoted or challenged liberal democratic principles we can draw conclusions about populism's ability to undermine the effectiveness, legitimacy, spread and impact of democracy.



Drawing conclusions on the political significance of populism.

From this exercise, the following arguments *could* be made:

- 1 in situations where populist leaders can attract and maintain popular support, **populism is democratic**, as it represents the will of the people
- 2 populism cannot be considered democratic, as in many cases it **threatens established principles of democracy**
- 3 **populism is illiberal**, as in most cases it disregards liberal values of individual freedoms, global interconnection and human rights.

To support these arguments, students should provide reasoning to explain their position(s) along with evidence that reaffirms and supports their claims regarding populism's effect on political stability. Summarising the major findings from the political actor profiles using the 'argument, reasoning, evidence' template provided can help students to develop a foundation on which to construct an informed evaluation of populism's overall political significance.

Argument

In situations where populist leaders can attract and maintain popular support, populism is democratic, as it represents the will of the people.

Reasoning

Populism can mobilise sectors of society who have felt disengaged and disenfranchised by established politics. It can increase democratic accountability by making issues and policies perceived as ‘forgotten’ part of the political realm. The success of populist leaders has been most apparent in states experiencing rapid social change due to global interconnectedness. However, it is worth noting that this section has only profiled three examples of populism in detail. A thorough analysis of contemporary politics would show that populist leaders win government less often than they succeed.

Evidence

- Donald Trump’s electoral success in 2016, narrow loss in 2020 and continued support in the lead-up to the 2024 election
 - Marine Le Pen’s ability to unseat traditional candidates and represent the voice of protest movements (e.g. *gilets jaunes* and anti-pension reform).
-

Argument

Populism cannot be considered democratic, as in many cases it threatens established principles of democracy.

Reasoning

Populism can use the notion of popular sovereignty to erode the institutions specialised in the protection of fundamental rights and checks on government power. The belief of populist leaders that only they speak for the people and that all other politicians are illegitimate polarises public opinion and discredits the effectiveness of plural multiparty democracies. Populism can lead to a polarisation of cultural issues, whereby reaching political agreements becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. Together, this further undermines the credibility of democracy as a system of government and empowers the legitimacy of authoritarian leaders.

Evidence

- Donald Trump’s refusal to accept the results of the 2020 election
 - Marine Le Pen’s plan to use simple majority referenda to decide French policy if elected.
-

Argument

Populism is illiberal, as in most cases it disregards liberal values of individual freedoms, global interconnection and human rights.

Reasoning

Populism can use the notion of majority rule to circumvent minority rights. Nativist ideas threaten the principles of democracy that are founded on the ideology of liberalism and human rights, and those of individual liberty, economic freedom, and political and legal equality. Policies and rhetoric that place the nation first lead to international competition rather than cooperation. States would then lose the benefits associated with the free movement of people, goods, services and capital.

Evidence

- Donald Trump’s disregard for immigrants, minorities and international institutions
- Marine Le Pen’s anti-Europe and anti-immigrant stances.



Activity F – Evaluating the ‘threat’ of populism

- 1 Debate the following as a class:

Evaluate the impact of populism on the legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy and democratic principles worldwide.

You should use arguments, reasoning and evidence gathered from the profiles in this section, as well as additional evidence gathered in Activity E, where you created a profile of a different populist political actor.

- 2 Consider the following claim:

Populism is a significant threat to the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic principles.

Structure your classroom discussion as a line debate (instructions provided in the previous chapter).

- 3 Prepare a brief (300 words) reflection summarising your final thoughts on populism’s threat to democracy. Remember, a strong political evaluation should consider both sides of an argument and then fall convincingly to one side.

A sample response is provided.



Sample evaluation

When considering populism’s threat to the legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy, it is apparent that while populism may appear to represent the will of the people, it in fact masks a crude attempt to undermine democracy from within. If democracy can be summarised as rule by the will of the majority of citizens, then in essence populists are democratic. Populism has given a voice to groups of people who did not previously feel represented by the political elite. However, studying the examples of Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen shows that populism’s ability to speak for only one group of citizens drowns out the voices of other groups. Populism’s belief that its leaders are the only true voice of the people and that all other voices are illegitimate has the effect of undoing important democratic principles that limit power. Finally, populism’s core perspectives that oppose international institutions and social reform directly oppose the liberal rights and freedoms that make democracies successful.

Consequences of populism

The final component of this case study is to explain the consequences of the chosen global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy. The most instructive way in this instance is to consider two important political leaders’ responses to populism. Earlier in this chapter, we profiled and explored the impact of some prominent populist actors in the United States and France. Conversely, the electoral success of Emmanuel Macron in France and Joe Biden in the United States have been attributed in part to their somewhat effective resistance in the face of populist rivals.

Macron’s globalist centrism

French President Emmanuel Macron’s ability to resist political pressure in France from the nationalist right (led by Marine Le Pen), but also the socialist left (led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon), has defied the European trend of the past decade towards populism.



French President
Emmanuel Macron.

Macron's Renaissance party, rebranded from En Marche!, has maintained its promotion of economic liberalism and social reform in the face of large-scale popular protests. With the departure of German chancellor Angela Merkel, Macron has attempted to reaffirm France's role as Europe's pre-eminent diplomatic power and to serve as a guardian of the liberal rules-based international order.

Biden's return to multilateralism and cooperation

Joe Biden's successful campaign for the 2020 presidency was arguably based on an undertaking to *not* be Donald Trump. Biden's rhetoric emphasised a 'return to normality' and featured undertakings to respect democratic principles, uphold liberal values, and return the United States to a position of respectability in global politics after four years of Trump's disregard for the rules-based international order.



US President Joe Biden.

On the global stage, the United States under President Biden became a more active participant in multilateralism and global governance, including returning to the Paris Climate Agreement; this has led international efforts to provide military, economic and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Domestically, Biden passed legislation pledging significant funding towards climate change mitigation, infrastructure and social welfare. However, many of Trump's supporters were critical of the return to an internationally focused administration, instead of one that puts the desires of American citizens first.

To learn more about the future of populism and extend your understanding of this topic, we recommend exploring the following resources:

- 📖 'We can't fight authoritarianism without understanding populism's allure'. *The Conversation*, 2023. theconversation.com/we-cant-fight-authoritarianism-without-understanding-populisms-allure-201544
- 📖 'The rise and rise of far-right populists: Why democracies can't be smug'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2023. smh.com.au/national/the-rise-and-rise-of-far-right-populists-why-democracies-cant-be-smug-20230101-p5c9p2.html
- 📖 'Populists in Europe – especially those on the right – have increased their vote shares in recent elections'. *Pew Research Center*, 2022. pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/10/06/populists-in-europe-especially-those-on-the-right-have-increased-their-vote-shares-in-recent-elections



Activity G – The challenge of populism

- 1 Complete the following short-answer questions to review your understanding of how populism threatens the legitimacy and spread of democracy.
 - a Explain the **causes** of populism. Be sure to focus on specific events from within the past 10 years to show how these causes are still relevant.
 - b Analyse how the **interests** of populist political actors can challenge democratic values and processes.
 - c Compare two different global actors' **perspectives** on populism. Two options for comparison based on case studies in this section could be:
 - Donald Trump and Joe Biden
 - Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron.
 - d Analyse how the **consequences** of populism have led to political **instability** and **change**.

Revision questions

Test your understanding of this chapter with the following short-answer and extended response questions.

- 1 State the aim(s) of one of the following IGGs:
 - a United Nations
 - b International Court of Justice
 - c International Criminal Court
 - d International Monetary Fund
 - e World Trade Organization.
- 2 Identify and describe an ideology that informs democratic systems of government.
- 3 Define the key characteristics of liberalism.
- 4 Contrast the main political differences between liberal democracies and authoritarian systems of government.
- 5 Explain two causes of one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy.
- 6 Discuss two different global actors' perspectives of one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy.
- 7 Analyse the significance of one global actor's response to one global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy.
- 8 Evaluate the political significance of populism as a global challenge to the legitimacy and spread of democracy.



Sample response for Question 6

Former US president Donald Trump perceived that liberalism and the principles of democracy had created a system of government that countered the interests of the state and its people. This is demonstrated by his policies of opposing international institutions, significantly restricting the migration of people into the United States and actively opposing many social reforms. His view that the rules-based international order is a threat to the security and prosperity of the United States is best exemplified by the following statement at the 2019 UN General Assembly: 'The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots.'

In contrast, current US President Joe Biden perceives that America plays a crucial role in promoting the legitimacy and spread of democracy globally. His presidency has seen the United States become a more active participant in multilateralism and global governance, including returning the country to the Paris Climate Agreement and leading the global economic, military and humanitarian assistance of Ukraine. At over USD\$76 billion by July 2023, the United States has provided significantly more aid to Ukraine than any other state, demonstrating Biden's liberal preference for international issues, as opposed to Trump's populist preference for domestic issues.

Further resources

For more resources relevant to this area of study, access the online resource library associated with this textbook: sev.asn.au/textbook-resources/pol12

Articles

Daniel Drache and Marc Froese, 2023. 'We can't fight authoritarianism without understanding populism's allure'. *The Conversation*. theconversation.com/we-cant-fight-authoritarianism-without-understanding-populisms-allure-201544

Duncan McDonnell, 2023. 'The rise and rise of far-right populists: Why democracies can't be smug'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. smh.com.au/national/the-rise-and-rise-of-far-right-populists-why-democracies-can-t-be-smug-20230101-p5c9p2.html

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Thomas Graham, 2023. 'The precarious future of Russian democracy'. *Council on Foreign Relations*. cfr.org/article/precarious-future-russian-democracy

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Monash University, 2018. 'The rise of populism – a different lens' (11 min). youtu.be/TyxQ-A2bXT0

Thomas Frank, 2021. 'America's forgotten populist history'. *Jacobin* (11 min). youtu.be/9VgeB-GG76U

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Glossary

Anarchy refers to a state of power relations where there is no dominant ruler or overall authority.

An **audit** is an examination of the conduct of a department to ensure that it follows correct processes and upholds social expectations.

Authoritarianism is an approach to politics that favours using strong, centralised power to enforce the status quo and ensure obedience to authority, typically at the expense of personal freedoms.

Authority is the degree to which the use(s) of power by particular actors are considered rightful or *legitimate*.

Businesses are organisations or entities engaged in commercial, industrial or professional activities with the primary goal of generating profit for owners.

Capacity is the potential or ability to do something or influence an outcome.

Capitalism refers to a social and economic system where privately owned and operated businesses produce goods and services for a profit; it usually features systems of private property, wage labour, market competition and the accumulation of capital (wealth).

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns; on Earth, these have been accelerated by human activities including the burning of fossil fuels since the 1800s, which have released heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere.

Coercion is the practice of persuading someone using threats or force.

Commitment to a rules-based order is a political actor's adherence to the framework of norms and laws that shape the operation of the broader political system.

Consent of the governed refers to the idea that a government's legitimate use of state power is justified when the people over whom that power is exercised agree or consent to it.

Constitutional government refers to the political system's ability to follow the body of laws and rules that set out how a state or country must be governed.

Constitutional monarchies are those in which a monarch serves as the head of state within the parameters of a constitution, with limited powers, while an elected government (typically a parliament) is the primary political authority.

Corporations are entities that conduct business operations in pursuit of profit; they may be owned or controlled by wealthy individuals, shareholders, governments, or some combination thereof.

Cosmopolitanism is the idea that all human beings are members of a single moral community that transcends national boundaries; this leads them to prioritise cooperation to reach common goals and meet challenges faced by the global community.

Cultural capacity refers to an actor's ability to influence or harness shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and social norms that characterise a particular group of people or society.

Democracy is a system of government where power and the ability to make rules rests with, and is exercised by, the people to whom those rules apply.

Dictatorship is a form of government characterised by the rule of a single person or a small group with absolute and centralised power, often acquired and maintained through force and by preventing meaningful ways for the population to remove them from power; sometimes also known as *autocracy*.

Digital media is any form of communication delivered primarily using computer technology, typically broadcast through a screen and a speaker via the internet.

Diplomatic capacity is the ability to influence outcomes through negotiation and persuasion.

Direct democracy is a form of governance where laws and policies are decided by the population (or the majority thereof), rather than by a body of their elected representatives.

Disinformation involves deliberate attempts to mislead, such as hoaxes, phishing and propaganda.

Domestic policy is the strategies and decisions that a government makes that relate primarily to its own population and/or to matters within its own borders.

Economic resources are physical or intangible 'things' that have value to other actors within a system and can be combined and transformed in ways that produce more; they can typically be exchanged between actors.

Elections are the formal process by which a population decides which individual(s) will hold particular positions of authority.

Entities are organisations founded for a particular cause or purpose, such as religion, government, education, professions or social purpose.

Federalism is a system of government where power is divided between a central national government and more geographically dispersed subnational governments that administer smaller regional or local jurisdictions.

Foreign policy refers to a government's decisions and strategies in dealing with other global political actors and/or any matters beyond its own borders.

Global governance refers to the loose framework of global rules and regulations upheld by the founding of permanent international institutions, the codification of international law and the establishment of international norms (values and principles that inform global standards and expectations).

Global interconnectedness refers to the intricate web of interactions and interdependencies that link countries, societies and individuals across the world.

Government leaders are holders of the most powerful offices in national governments, including heads of state, Cabinet ministers, special advisers and other high-ranking government officials; generally, their most senior are termed prime minister or president.

Hard power refers to power exercised through coercion or economic incentives.

Hegemony refers to the capacity of a superpower state to dominate the global political order.

Humanitarianism is the active belief in the value of human life, where individuals assist each other to improve the conditions of humanity for moral and unselfish reasons.

Ideology refers to interrelated sets of values and beliefs around how things are and how they should be.

Impeachment is a formal investigation and/or charge of misconduct against a public official; the term is usually but not exclusively used in an American context.

Individualism is a perspective that considers the individual as the central and primary actor in society and prioritises individual autonomy and self-reliance.

An **institution** is an established framework for structuring and regulating certain aspects of human social life.

Integrity refers to public officials acting in ways that reflect ‘good faith’ attempts to advance the common good, in line with due process and accountability measures and in a way that is detached from their own personal interests.

International law refers to a body of rules established by custom or written legal agreements that are accepted as binding upon the international community and that apply to all global actors; written legal agreements, such as treaties, are only binding to those who give consent through explicit ratification.

Laissez-faire refers to governments preferring not to intervene in or interfere with the workings of markets.

Legitimacy is the perception that an act, actor, group or institution is justified in its exercise of power; legitimacy is thought to transform power into *authority*.

Liberal democracy refers to a form of democracy in which the power of government is limited and counterbalanced by the rights and freedoms of individuals, which are protected by constitutions, established norms and institutions.

Liberal internationalism is a belief that supports international institutions, open markets, liberal democracy and collective cooperative security.

Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on the rights of the individual, liberty and political equality.

Lobbying refers to the practice of attempting to influence the actions, policies or decisions of government officials.

Media is the means by which communication happens between large groups of people.

Military capacity refers to an actor’s ability to exercise power through organised violence.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information, such as rumours, insults and pranks.

Monarchy refers to a political system in which one person is the head of state for life, or until they abdicate the position.

Multilateralism refers to a system of coordinating relations between three or more global actors, usually in pursuit of specific objectives.

National interests are the objectives and priorities pursued by states to safeguard their security, economic prosperity, sovereignty and influence through diplomatic, military, economic and cultural means; they are often multifaceted and changeable, depending on the interests of the domestic political actors that influence state policy.

Nationalism refers to identifying with one’s own state and support for its interests, particularly to the exclusion or detriment of other states’ interests.

Non-government organisations are non-profit or charitable groups whose purpose is to address a social or political issue, and who are independent of government.

Norms refer to shared and commonly accepted ways of doing things; in global politics these are often associated with justice and ethical concerns.

An **ombudsman** is an independent official who investigates complaints against government departments and industries.

Parliament is a supreme lawmaking (legislative) body where elected representatives debate, create and modify laws that govern activity within their jurisdiction, as well as scrutinise the actions of the executive government.

Participation refers to a broad range of activities through which people might develop and express their opinions and preferences regarding social, political, economic or organisational matters.

Patriotism is a strong sense of loyalty, pride and devotion towards one's own country or nation, often involving a deep, emotional connection to its culture, history and interests.

Patronage is the act of rewarding supporters and allies with favourable policies, employment opportunities or job contracts; known also as a 'spoils system' – in which electoral success leads to dividing the 'spoils' of government – this can also be reciprocated in the form of ex-politicians being rewarded with highly paid positions in private firms.

Pluralism is a perspective that recognises and values diversity in society; pluralist societies allow for many different groups, parties and ideologies to coexist and participate in political processes.

A **policy** is an agreed-upon set of ideas or a plan for how a government or other group will respond in particular situations, typically expressed in statements, laws or other rules.

Political culture refers to the deeply ingrained attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours that shape how individuals and groups perceive and participate in political processes, including expectations around the behaviour of other actors (i.e. political parties accepting electoral results).

Pork-barrelling refers to the provision of government funding to projects or areas based on their ability to generate political support.

Protectionism refers to measures that restrict imports on goods from other countries, such as charging taxes or duties on them ('tariffs') or setting physical limits on quantities of imported goods ('quotas'), usually motivated by a desire to shield local businesses from foreign competition.

The **public interest** is the primary goal of good decision-making, whereby decisions increase the overall wellbeing of the people affected by them.

Realism is the idea that global actors prioritise their own interests over the needs of others, often seeking to maximise their own power to safeguard their own survival.

A **referendum** is a direct vote in which the entire electorate is invited to vote on a particular proposal (typically a significant constitutional or legislative issue) to determine public support for or opposition to the proposed measure.

Regional groupings are groupings of states based on a particular geographic territory.

Responsible government refers to the expectation that executive governments must be answerable to parliaments, and that their decisions and actions must be exposed to public scrutiny.

A **Royal Commission** is an investigation into a matter of public importance conducted at arm's length from the government; it has broad powers to hold public hearings, call witnesses under oath, compel evidence and make recommendations to government.

The **rule of law** refers to the principle that laws will be applied equally to all and that anyone will be held accountable for wrongdoing, regardless of their power.

The **rules-based international order** refers to the set of structured relationships, expectations and behaviours that have evolved and dominated the operation of global politics since World War II; it is rooted in economic and political liberalism and extends into international law, regional security arrangements, trade agreements and immigration protocols.

Secession is the act or pursuit of becoming independent of or withdrawing from a state or other territorial entity.

Separation of powers refers to the distribution of power to govern between three branches of government; each branch is independent of and has the ability to block the other, which is thought to guard against any one branch (or member thereof) becoming too powerful.

Separatism refers to a political or social movement that advocates for the separation or independence of a particular region, group or community from a larger political entity, often seeking to establish its own distinct political, cultural or social identity and forms of governance.

Social capacity refers to an actor's ability to exercise power through personal and/or informal networks.

Social movements are groups of individuals who, through some organised effort, seek to achieve a certain social change or political goal.

Soft power refers to power exercised through attraction, such as through diplomacy or cultural ties.

Sovereignty is the legitimate or widely recognised ability to exercise effective control over matters in a particular area, or within particular borders.

Special interest groups are any organised association of individuals or entities that seek to influence public policy or decision-making.

Stability refers to a political system's ability to maintain things as they are, and/or where decisions and changes do not substantially affect the current distribution of power among actors (particularly institutions and governments) within that system.

A **stakeholder** is an individual or entity that has a particular interest in an organisation, process or outcome.

A **state** is a political unit that has a permanent population, defined territory, a distinct government and recognised sovereignty; states are traditionally considered the central actors in global politics.

State capture refers to the strong influence of corporation(s) or other interests over a state's decision-making so that those benefits serve their private interests rather than those of the community more broadly.

Technological capacity refers to the application of scientific knowledge, skills or tools to create, modify or use systems, processes and products more effectively.

A **tender** typically refers to an application by an organisation to provide a good or service financed by the government; tender processes usually involve multiple providers being invited to 'bid', with the intention being that the best value for money application is selected, thus, benefitting the taxpayer.

Terrorism refers to the use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, for political aims; the exact scope of what classifies as terrorism is contested and politicised, but it generally carries the implication that the behaviour is immoral and/or unlawful.

Traditional media refers to means of mass communication that rely primarily on predigital broadcast methods, such as radio, television and print (notably newspapers and magazines).

Transnational corporations are entities that conduct their operations across multiple states and, due to their size, can have a significant influence on flows of global production, trade, commerce and investment.

Transparency refers to the idea that the operation of government should be visible to the people.

Trust in this context refers to the popular belief that political systems operate in a predictable manner and to the best interests of all; this is closely linked to the concept of legitimacy, which populations confer to their governments expecting they will use their authority in society's best interests.

Two-round electoral systems comprise a first stage with many candidates and a second ('run-off') stage in which voters must select between the two candidates that received the highest number of votes in the first round.

Unitary states are those in which most or all of state power resides in a centralised, national government.

A **veto** is the power or ability to unilaterally stop a proposal, decision or action.

A **whistleblower** is an individual with inside knowledge of unethical or illegal activities conducted within an organisation (including governments or private entities) who reports this activity publicly without authorisation of that entity; while laws sometimes exist to protect whistleblowers, they can and do often face sanctions and criminal penalties.



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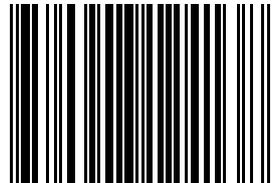
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