

# POSITIONS: Democracy

## Democracy

Democracy has multiple attributes, it isn't just one thing

## What is a position?

Whilst the policy focus of the Animal Justice Party (AJP) is on animals and nature, we also have positions regarding non-animal matters which are important to the voting public. Voters must know how AJP representatives will vote on important non-animal issues. These positions bind our MPs but are not to be a campaign focus ahead of animal issues. All AJP positions, like this one, must flow from our four core values: Kindness, Equality, Rationality and Non-violence.

## Democracy

Democracy is a form of government where the people decide the outcome or choose representatives to decide on their behalf. Within the AJP itself, members democratically elect "Delegates" to form the executive and manage the party. The AJP agrees that a strong and robust democracy is required to achieve lasting reform in animal and environmental protection. Animals, nature and people will suffer more when there is less scrutiny and input into the decisions that impact us all. The AJP supports the rule of law, the principle of responsible government, and the separation of powers. Our system of government has provided stability for years, and yet Australians are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with democracy<sup>1</sup>. It is time to reimagine democracy to better serve us all: animals, nature and people. The AJP's position on democracy is generally informed by a list of potential reforms<sup>2</sup> for federal politics, developed by the University of Melbourne in collaboration with The *newDEMOCRACY Foundation* and the *Susan McKinnon Foundation*, in 2019. These can also be applied to democracy at state and local level, where relevant. What sets us apart from other parties, is that the AJP believes that an approach that focuses on human government lacks integrity, since significant elements are neglected; humanity must also acknowledge that our species has no right to claim sovereignty over other animals and nature. All species are interconnected, as are ecosystems, and we are dependent on nature to survive. Without properly considering non-human animals, even the best democratic reforms will continue to fail to protect our shared planet.

<sup>1</sup>[https://moad-web.s3.amazonaws.com/heracles-production/639/8ee/5b9/6398ee5b93f7d3522a74326405c462763f94d42db4059038885f3c82ad21/D2025\\_A5\\_revisedSept2019\\_FINAL.pdf](https://moad-web.s3.amazonaws.com/heracles-production/639/8ee/5b9/6398ee5b93f7d3522a74326405c462763f94d42db4059038885f3c82ad21/D2025_A5_revisedSept2019_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[https://about.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0036/88488/Reforming-our-Democracy-2019.pdf](https://about.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0036/88488/Reforming-our-Democracy-2019.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp0001/01RP04](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp0001/01RP04)

## Running Government

Huge industries, like oil, mining or animal agriculture, have armies of lobbyists meeting and persuading publicly elected politicians. Powerful industries such as gambling and property developers not only provide funds to political candidates and parties, but also have greater opportunity to share ideas, influence policy, and meet with MPs and their staff. The AJP advocates for reforms to greatly reduce the influence of lobbyists and increase the transparency around their industry. The public must know who is speaking to whom and why. The AJP also supports measures to prevent elected politicians from serving as paid lobbyists within five years of ending their political career, as this creates a clear conflict of interest.

AJP supports fixed parliamentary terms, four years in the lower house and eight years in the upper<sup>3</sup> to promote stability and long-term decision-making in government. The AJP agrees that enabling politicians to focus more on governing and less on campaigning, will lead to better decisions over time. There are also many smaller reforms regarding the day-to-day conduct of Parliament that could improve democracy for all Australians.

## Voting

Compulsory preferential voting (CPV) sets Australia apart from other jurisdictions like the UK or USA, which use first-past-the-post voting (FPTPV). With CPV, voters rank candidates in order from most-preferred to least-preferred. This gives every voter a say on the final two candidates and prevents issues like wasting your vote or vote splitting. The AJP supports CPV in all Lower House elections, and advocates for more to be done to educate voters on our electoral system.

For Upper Houses or "houses of review", like the Federal Senate or a Legislative Council, the AJP supports preferential, proportional representation by single transferable vote (STV). This system can properly reflect the views of the electorate, *i.e.* a party receiving 10% of the vote (after preferences) should win 10% of the seats. This ensures that all voices and opinions



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are fairly represented, with a diversity of perspective greatly enhancing the Upper Houses' role of review.

## Campaigning

The AJP believes that urgent reform is needed to improve our electoral processes around the country, by evening out the playing field and removing the influence of money. The AJP supports real-time disclosure of campaign donations and expenditure in a bid to increase transparency and public accountability. Donations should be capped at an annual limit within the reach of ordinary Australians, to reduce reliance on larger, perhaps more influential donors. Parties and candidates should also be limited by how much money they can spend on campaigning, preventing Palmer-style advertising sprees that drown out other voices.

Traditional election campaigns result in tonnes of single-use paper and plastic advertising being wasted each year. The AJP supports new and innovative means of campaigning which ensure fairer competition. Voters and parties both dislike the many how-to-vote cards and signs used for only a short campaign. Simple reforms, e.g. displaying a single how-to-vote card for each candidate at a booth, and a maximum number of signs at a polling booth for each candidate would prevent much of this waste.

The AJP supports legislation to stamp out misleading and deceptive political advertising, as it interferes with voters' ability to make informed decisions. Regulations should apply to political statements of facts that are false or inaccurate and that are intended or likely to mislead. They should not apply to political opinions in order to respect the constitutional freedom of political discussion. To preserve the integrity of our democratic system and the independence of state and federal Electoral Commissions, determinations as to whether a matter is misleading or deceptive should be decided by community panels.

## Access to democracy

Barriers to running should be kept low so that ordinary people can run, recognising that there must be some sort of fee

and regulation to deter "joke" and disingenuous candidates. Political parties should be regulated to prevent corruption, whilst avoiding overly burdensome regulatory requirements that benefit the major parties by excluding smaller parties unable to manage the additional administrative workload.

Similarly, barriers to voting should be kept to the minimum required to prevent voter fraud, and more must be done to empower the voter. As a start, all voters should understand the electoral system and voters from a non-English-speaking background should not be disenfranchised.

The AJP supports lowering the voting age to 16, and investigating ways of further engaging young people in democracy. Many young people under the age of 18 work, and when they do, they must pay taxes. Further, they may be allowed to drive a car, be detained, join the armed forces, consent to medical procedures, have sex, get married and even start a family - so why can they not vote? Young people should have the right to participate in federal, state and local elections, and influence decisions about various aspects of their lives and future. Young people have more access to information than ever before, and over the past few years have demonstrated their strong commitment to being engaged in shaping their own future, especially in relation to climate action.

## Other reforms

More radical, transformative reforms should be considered. The AJP supports trials of citizen panels or juries to decide complex and divisive issues.

Although only humans can vote in a democracy, our society must recognise that others too are impacted by our human government and our choices. Democracy can be further improved by recognising non-human stakeholders, and protecting the rights and interests of animals and nature (see our policies on Animal Law and Environmental Law). Democracy is concerned primarily with restricting totalitarian rule, and we must duly consider restricting the harm our own species inflicts on others and the planet, so that we become responsible members of a wider Earth community.



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