

Framework for a **Fair Democracy**

The reforms we need to **strengthen our democracy**



#OurDemocracy

About the Framework

The Framework for a Fair Democracy outlines the reforms we need for a strong and fair democracy.

Our vision is for a political system where our elected representatives **reflect the values and concerns of our communities**, decision making is **balanced and fair**, and **people and the planet are at the heart of every decision.**

Unfortunately, this is often not the way Australian politics goes. Weak laws allow powerful industries and lobby groups to exploit democratic processes for their own financial gain. And, even when exposed, there are rarely consequences for corrupt and unethical behaviour.

The Framework draws on international best practice to outline essential measures to reduce corporate influence and restore balance in our politics.

It has been developed through significant consultation with leading experts, academics and organisations working on integrity issues, and is part of a growing campaign of people demanding greater integrity in our democracy.

We know the problem. We have the solutions. It's time to reset our democracy for the 21st century.

Find out more at OurDemocracy.com.au.

1. Stamp out corruption

Create a strong federal integrity commission

In a healthy democracy we should feel confident that our elected leaders represent the best interests of our communities — and that if they use their positions for personal gain, they will be investigated and held to account. Yet there is no federal agency with sufficient powers to investigate cases of alleged corruption.

We need a strong federal integrity body with broad powers to investigate allegations of corruption and ensure accountability when people do the wrong thing.

Introduce an enforceable code of conduct for politicians

Most people who hold positions of special responsibility in our society, like doctors, teachers and lawyers, must comply with ethical standards contained in professional codes of conduct. But when it comes to our politicians, we have no enforceable ethical standards with clear consequences for unacceptable behaviour.

We need a code of conduct for all federal politicians, to be overseen by an independent parliamentary scrutiny commissioner. The code should include proportionate penalties for those who do the wrong thing.

Strengthen the institutions that keep the federal government in check

Australian democracy relies on strong checks and balances, yet the institutions tasked with investigating wrongdoing are starved of the funding they need to hold the Australian government to account.

We need independent funding of integrity offices like the Australian National Audit Office and the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

Introduce a merit-based process for appointing government advisors

Too often, ministers stack independent advisory bodies with political allies and self-interested industry executives. This means the federal government is often not getting the best advice on what the community needs — but rather biased advice from people with vested interests.

We need a transparent, merit-based process for appointments to advisory boards and government task-forces to ensure decisions are made by the best minds in the country, not industry execs whose interests often conflict with the interests of our communities.

2. End cash for access

Make lobbying transparent

We have a right to know who is trying to influence politicians to make decisions that will maximise private profits, often at the expense of the public good. Powerful industries like gambling, tobacco and mining spend millions of dollars employing lobbyists to meet with politicians in secret.

We need ministers to publish their diaries, and all professional lobbyists to disclose who they've met with on a public register.

Stop ministers moving into industry jobs

Too often, ministers responsible for overseeing the regulation of powerful industries leave federal parliament to take up high-paid jobs in the very industry they regulated. This raises serious concerns of favouritism – did the minister cut the company a deal in exchange for a highly paid job post politics?

We need a mandatory cooling off period for ministers and their staff, banning them from taking paid jobs within their portfolio for three years.

Ban corrupting political donations

Politicians rely on big donations to fund their election campaigns, and industries like fossil fuels, banking and gambling are happy to oblige. Big political donations buy access to politicians and can dissuade them from regulating harmful industries properly.

We need to ban large donations to politicians altogether.

Shine a light on secret donations

Voters have a right to know who is donating to our elected representatives in an attempt to buy influence. But because of our outdated and ineffective electoral laws, more than one billion dollars in undeclared income has gone to the major parties in the past two decades.

We need all political donations over \$2,500 to be declared publicly, in real time.

3. Level the playing field in election debates

Stop corporations from spending millions on campaigning against regulation

When political donations aren't enough to get politicians to play ball, big industry has another tactic up its sleeve: threaten to spend millions campaigning against the politicians in the next election.

This leaves our elected representatives wedged: even when they want to support policies that would put community wellbeing before profit, politicians are pressured not to.

We need a limit on how much anyone can spend on trying to influence the outcome of an election.

Limit political party spending on election ads

When elections take place on a level playing field, Australians benefit from robust discussion from diverse perspectives, and the candidates with the best ideas rise to the top. Too often though, it's not the quality of a candidate's ideas, but the size of their bank balance which determines how much air time they get, and their chance of success.

We need limits on the amount that candidates and political parties can spend on election campaigns, opening up more space for diverse voices.

Introduce standards of honesty in election campaigns

A democracy thrives on diversity of opinion. But when candidates and other campaigners deliberately lie to voters, they sow distrust in our democratic processes, and potentially in elections themselves.

We need to introduce penalties for politicians and other campaigners who clearly and deliberately mislead the Australian public in an effort to influence the election result.

**Let's make our
democracy work
for all of us**

OurDemocracy.com.au