

Is there any point to protests?

Marching in the streets or signing a petition – can protests really make a difference?

IN DEMAND
When the UK Government launched its own e-petitions website in 2011, so many people used it on its first day (1,000 a minute) that it crashed.

What you need to know

- People protest in different ways about different issues. For example, they may gather in large groups with banners, or they might sign a petition. A petition is a written document demanding action from a government or other authority.
- Nowadays petitions are often created online and signed with a click of a mouse. In the UK, any Government petition that is signed by more than 100,000 people is considered for debate in Parliament.
- On 27 January, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, invited the US president, Donald Trump, on an official visit to the UK. Some people think he should visit, others think he shouldn't. The visit might now be debated in Parliament.

People take to the streets of London to protest against President Trump.



People protest for lots of different reasons. The protests might be about war, animal cruelty or climate change. There are many different types of protest, such as wearing a badge with a slogan, refusing to buy things from a certain country or company (known as a boycott) or signing a petition. Recently, there have been worldwide protests against the US president, Donald Trump. Thousands of people have attended rallies objecting to his ban preventing people from mainly Muslim countries from entering the US, and more than 1.8 million people have added their names to a petition to prevent Trump coming to the UK on a state visit. More than 300,000 people have signed another petition to say that he should be allowed to come. Some say that protests create real change, but others say that they don't achieve much.

Protests are a waste of time

Protests are often simply ignored. For example, in 2003, millions of people all over the world demonstrated against a war in Iraq, but politicians in many countries (including the UK) decided to go to war anyway. People get swept up in the excitement of protesting, but some of them forget about the issue soon afterwards. Joining a protest or clicking to sign a petition is easy enough, but lots of people do both without understanding the issue properly. Protests can backfire too, particularly if they turn violent. Violent or badly organised protests take the focus away from the message and put people off. The only way to bring about meaningful change is through long, complex discussions between politicians, not ordinary people. We should trust politicians and let them get on with the job they were elected to do.

Protests make a difference

It's important that ordinary people have the right to express how they feel. Protests can have a remarkably powerful impact, particularly in countries where ordinary people have few rights. In 2010 and 2011, people in several Middle Eastern and North African countries who wanted more freedom held huge street protests. Some of these were so powerful that entire governments were overthrown from power. Big rallies are hard to ignore as they are noisy, cause traffic jams and disrupt normal life. They also might get reported in the news, which means that politicians take more notice. In the UK, if enough people sign a petition, the issue is debated in Parliament, which could lead to MPs changing their minds. Even if protests don't always work, it's nice to know other people care.

GETTY IMAGES

YES 3 reasons why it's worth protesting

- 1 Protests allow ordinary people to have their say – if you don't agree with something, you should speak up.
- 2 Protests grab people's attention so that those in power have to take notice.
- 3 It's good to know that other people share your views and that you're not alone.

NO 3 reasons why there is no point to protests

- 1 Real change requires long-term, steady political work, not just a loud march or a one-off petition.
- 2 Protests can do more harm than good – particularly if they are badly organised or turn violent.
- 3 We should trust politicians to do the job that they were elected to do.

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