GetUp Election Review

2018-19

GetUp Election Campaign Launch, Manly Beach 11 April 2019

Table of Contents

01

Introduction

This election campaign GetUp members did more than ever before. A total of 9,433 volunteers contributed over 37,404 hours of phone banking, knocked on the doors of 36,315 households and were out on election day talking to their fellow voters at over 335 polling booths.

GetUp's election review has two main aims:
1. Recognising the hard work and achievements of GetUp members
2. Gathering key lessons from our campaign to take forward to future elections

In the face of the leadership turmoil in the Coalition Government in 2018, and long-term polling trends pointing to a Labor victory, the 2019 federal election produced the most unexpected election result in the past 26 years. Whenever there is an unexpected result, there are more questions to answer.

In order to determine key lessons from our own campaign, it's important to begin with some objective analysis of the election overall. That analysis is conducted with the benefit of hindsight, our own research and authoritative materials, such as the Australian Election Study, released in December.

We launched an ambitious campaign in 2019, focused on having a positive impact on climate action and renewable energy, protecting our ABC, properly funding services like health and education and safety for people seeking asylum. As in the 2016 election, the primary way we sought to achieve these aims was by removing the hard right politicians blocking change for the better on our issues.

This election GetUp members were instrumental in helping remove Tony Abbott from his seat of Warringah, alongside a range of other grassroots groups. As a former prime minister who had held his seat for 25 years, this was a monumental task. In terms of impact, Abbott was responsible for tearing down our country's most significant climate policy gains and consistently drove our politics to the right during his time in office.

Yet among six hard right target seats, this was the only positive outcome. Our results in the other 2019 target seats contrasted not only with Warringah, but with by-election results in Wentworth, Longman and Mayo in the lead up to the full election, as well as the success we achieved in the 2016 federal election. In all cases,

we used many of the same approaches and tactics. In order to look forward, we need to determine the key distinguishing factors between success and failure across these campaigns.

Evaluating what worked, what didn't and why will give us the compass point for future elections and ensure greater impact on our issues over time.

Why do members engage in elections?

As our statement of independence notes:

> **"**
>
> **Elections are great change moments.** Our movement engages fiercely whenever we have the opportunity and means to build a more fair, flourishing and just Australia for all.

Elections are the time when the greatest number of Australians are thinking about political issues. Parties and politicians may be the loudest voices, but they shouldn't have a monopoly on our democracy. Connected by a set of shared values, GetUp members campaign on the issues we're passionate about, including a safe climate and a flourishing natural world, safety for those seeking asylum, greater social and economic equality and a thriving democracy.

Like critical votes in parliament, major investment decisions by large corporations or big media moments, elections are among the greatest opportunities to have an impact on our issues. Not to engage would be to abandon that opportunity to those fighting against the causes we care about. In fact, elections can have profound policy impacts even when an electorate or a government doesn't change hands. For example:

- **The 2016 election** produced commitments from the Turnbull Government not to privatise or cut Medicare[1] and ultimately led to the end of the GP Medicare rebate freeze, which GetUp members specifically campaigned for in the election.[2]

- **The results of the 'Super Saturday' by-elections in July 2018** effectively killed the Turnbull Government's tax cuts for big corporations, which GetUp members campaigned against in the Queensland electorate of Longman.

- **The shock result in the Wentworth by-election in October 2018**, which saw the Liberal Party lose a seat they had held since 1944 to independent Kerryn Phelps, created the political pressure to finally get kids off Nauru and led directly to the passage of the Medevac legislation, which saw hundreds

---

[1] "Election 2016: Malcolm Turnbull dumps Medicare outsourcing plan", *Australian Financial Review*, 19 June 2016.
[2] "Medicare rebate freeze for GPs to be lifted by Turnbull government", *The Guardian*, 9 May 2017.

of sick people seeking asylum brought to Australia for treatment.[3] It also brought climate action to the forefront of our national politics.

Lastly, who sits in Parliament matters. MPs and senators not only cast votes, they shape party policy and vote on their leadership, with some playing outsized roles. It matters that Tony Abbott is no longer sitting in Parliament or the Liberal Party room, driving our politics to the right on climate change and much more. It matters that Peter Dutton, who launches divisive attacks on multicultural communities and keeps people suffering on Manus and Nauru, is still the most powerful minister in Government. When decisions are made by those in the room, sometimes you have to change the room.

---

[3] "Phelps fight reveals govt's Nauru deceit", *The Saturday Paper*, 9 February 2019.

02

Member Achievements

9,433 volunteers

935 polling booths

712,000 phone calls

36,315 doors knocked

37,404 hours of volunteer time

16,768 first GetUp actions taken

Ads seen **15 million** ads seen

This election campaign GetUp members did more than ever before.

More than 47,000 everyday Australians—mums and dads, teachers, nurses and tradies—chipped in an average of $24 per donation to help create the change they wanted to see. These contributions funded:

- Billboards in key electorates across the country
- Newspaper, TV, cinema, radio and Spotify advertising
- A social media campaign with over 1,000 digital ads seen over 15 million times
- A massive volunteer-led phone calling and door-knocking program
- 800,000 issue-based how-to-vote cards handed out by thousands of volunteers.

A total of 9,433 volunteers contributed more than 37,404 hours of phone banking, knocked on the doors of 36,315 households and were out in force on election day at over 335 polling booths across the country. There were also 16,768 new members who took their first action during the campaign. This reflects 250% more volunteers making 330% more calls than in 2016, along with a whole new doorknocking program. It was a massive experiment of unprecedented scale for GetUp.

Exit polls and rigorous follow-up phone polls show that GetUp members were effective in switching votes away from hard right candidates through a combination of volunteer calling, doorknocking, election day efforts and funding impactful advertising. The 712,000 phone calls GetUp members made focused on issues like climate, health, education and the economy and shifted votes at a greater rate than international benchmarks for similar programs.
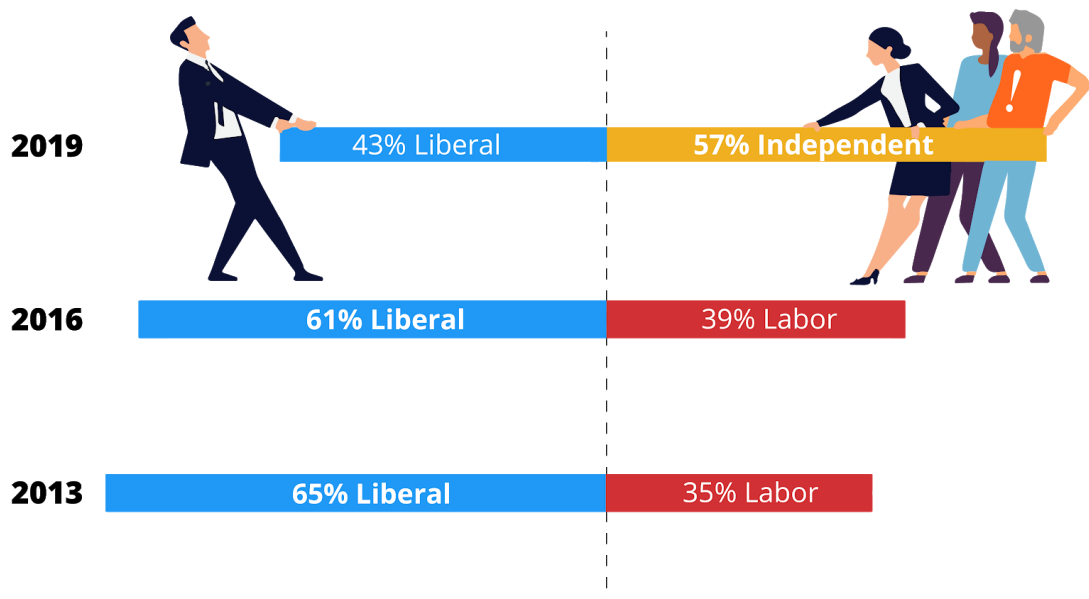
While in most electorates we lacked the scale to overcome an unexpected conservative swing in voting, members should be proud of the impact they had—**particularly their contribution to the win in Warringah.**

Tony Abbott said that "climate change itself is probably doing good"[4] and blocked climate action at every opportunity. In response, GetUp members knocked on more doors and made more calls in Warringah than any other electorate. Our climate message resonated with swing voters and ran through doorknocking scripts, Facebook and newspaper ads, billboards, yard signs, letterbox stickers, direct mail, how-to-vote cards and even coasters in pubs.

As well as a massive doorknocking and calling effort and holding several big community gatherings - the local Warringah Action Group led many high-impact stunts that told the story of Tony Abbott's outdated views on climate change to the media and local voters. These efforts made a major contribution to unseating Tony Abbott, alongside extremely effective campaigns by other local grassroots groups and his main political opponent.

It is extraordinary that a former prime minister went from winning 61% of the two-candidate preferred vote in 2016 to only 43% in 2019. The swing against Abbott was over 18%—the biggest of the election.

---

[4] "Tony Abbott says climate change is 'probably doing good'", *The Guardian*, 10 October 2017.

2019	43% Liberal	57% Independent
2016	61% Liberal	39% Labor
2013	65% Liberal	35% Labor

2013-2019 Two Candidate Preferred in Warringah

Our First Nations Justice team worked in remote communities for the first time in 2019. The team travelled over 4,000 km and had over 2,500 conversations at polling stations in the Northern Territory. We reached a further 125,000 people in electorates like Parkes in NSW, Durrack in WA and Lecihhardt and Herbert in Far North Queensland through social media advertising. This work resulted in votes against parties that patronise First Nations communities and the discriminatory and cruel Community Development Program (CDP), along with votes for fair housing programs. On election night, Antony Green said the seat of Lingiari would be decided by the votes in remote communities—adding proof that First Nations votes have the power to change elections.[2]

Colour Code—our national movement of multicultural, migrant, and First Nations peoples—successfully engaged multicultural communities working in languages other than English. We had 70 volunteers participate in phone banking, doorknocking and handing out specific how-to-vote cards on election day. Their work focussed on First Nations justice, calling out racism, supporting multiculturalism, reintroducing a fair migration system and protection for people seeking safety. While the sample size of this project was small, our analysis found that these conversations were exceptionally effective compared to international benchmarks.

Putting One Nation Last. In March, 51 Muslim men, women and children were killed by an Australian white supremecist in the Christchurch mosque attacks. It was an attack steeped in words of hate and bigotry that had been flowing from the mouths of right-wing politicians for years, stoking fear and division. Just weeks later, it was revealed that One Nation was soliciting millions of dollars and other support from the National Rifle Association (NRA) in America—the driving force of the

American gun lobby. GetUp members joined with the broader community by pressuring Scott Morrison and the Liberal Party into putting One Nation last in their election preferencing. Morrison's response to place One Nation down on Liberal how-to-vote cards successfully reduced One Nation's share of the vote.

By-elections

Wentworth By-election (October 2018)
Malcolm Turnbull resigned as the member for Wentworth not long after he was ousted as prime minister by a faction of the Liberal Party who were wedded to coal. Global warming and the environment was the top issue in Wentworth, while the dumping of Turnbull by his own party was a dominant narrative.[5] Wentworth voters were also concerned about the treatment of people seeking asylum, particularly getting kids off Nauru.[6]

GetUp members seized the opportunity of the Wentworth by-election to send a message to the Liberal Party on climate change. Members made more than 90,000 calls, organised stunts, handed out sixty thousand how-to-vote cards on election day and chipped in for mobile billboards, giant puppet heads and other advertising to grab public and media attention.

In the end, the Liberal Party lost the seat for the first time in 60 years to independent Keryn Phelps who went on to champion climate action in Parliament and was instrumental in passing the Medevac legislation, which brought hundreds of seriously ill asylum seekers to safety for proper treatment.

Longman By-election
In the Longman by-election GetUp members campaigned strongly against the $80 billion in corporate tax cuts proposed by the Turnbull Government, most of it slated for big business.

- Hundreds of GetUp volunteers made 27,000 calls in three weeks talking to Longman voters about how that public money would be better spent on our local schools and hospitals.

- An editorial in *The Australian* remarked about our campaign: "There is no conservative equivalent."[7]

- Members funded an advertising campaign seen by tens of thousands of people.

---

[5] "Wentworth becomes test bed for how federal election will treat climate change", *The Guardian*, 19 October 2018.
[6] "Most Wentworth voters want Nauru children brought to Australia", *The Guardian*, 6 October 2018.
[7] "Coalition must study the lessons from poll losses", *The Australian*, 29 July 2018.

An emphatic by-election defeat forced the Turnbull Government to reconsider its corporate tax policy.[8] Less than a month later, the Government failed to pass the cuts through the Senate and dropped it as government policy.[9]

Mayo By-election

Georgina Downer, daughter of former Liberal Leader and Cabinet Minister, Alexander Downer, ran against Rebekha Sharkie from Centre Alliance. Ms Downer had previously been a staffer at the conservative think tank, the Institute for Public Affairs (IPA), which advocated for privatising the ABC. In addition, the 2018 Federal Budget announced an $83.7 million cut to ABC funding over the next three years.[10] GetUp members worked to make the ABC a significant issue in the campaign:

- Volunteers dressed as Bananas in Pyjamas turned up to town halls, campaign events and at the polling booths, grabbing the spotlight for the ABC.

- Volunteers held events almost every day in the final weeks of the campaign.

- Volunteers handed out 20,000 how-to-vote cards on election day to show voters which parties had policies to protect the ABC from funding cuts.

Sharkie retained her seat, declaring funding for the ABC as one of her top priorities.[11]

---

[8] "Byelection defeat prompts rethink of Turnbull's company tax cuts", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 2018.

[9] "Turnbull government's company tax cuts defeated in the Senate", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 August 2018.

[10] "Budget 2018: ABC funding frozen in $84 million hit to bottom line", *ABC Online*, 8 May 2018.

[11] "Rebekha Sharkie credits 'people power' with byelection victory", *The Guardian*, 29 July 2018.

03

What Happened in the Election

Before delving into a review of GetUp's own election campaign (under 'What we learned', below), we begin with some broader contextual analysis of the 2019 election.

Defying expectations

The Coalition Government led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison won the federal election with 77 seats—an increase of one seat—giving the Coalition a working majority in the House of Representatives.

Nationally, there was a +1.17% swing towards the Coalition. There was a small two party preferred (2PP) swing to the Coalition in most states, with the largest swing of +4.34% in Queensland, while there was a small swing to Labor in Victoria. Warringah was one of only two seats (from a total of 151) lost by the Coalition between 2016 and 2019.

It was widely believed that a revolving door of prime ministers, combined with personal scandals, the exodus of long-standing ministers—such as Julie Bishop and Christopher Pyne—and lack of a substantial policy agenda would see the Coalition lose the 2019 election.

Nearly every poll and most credible commentators predicted that result. Those polls were also reinforced by the historic defeat of the Liberal Party in the Wentworth by-election and a strong result for Labor in the Victorian state election, which suggested a general swing against conservatives in the political landscape. This belief determined much of the strategy and actions of political actors—as well as public commentary—and in its own way contributed to the re-election of the Morrison Government.

The Australian National University has conducted a study of voters after every election since 1987. The recently released Australian Election Study for the 2019 federal election (AES Study)[12], in addition to our own research and related material, allows us to take a considered look at why the election result defied expectations. Our objective was to unseat hard right MPs in order to advance our issues, but the factors that led to this unexpected result provide critical context for evaluating our own campaign.

---

[12] "The 2019 Australian Federal Election: Results from the Australian Election Study", Sarah Cameron & Ian McAllister, ANU, December 2019.

Key issues

The AES Study found the biggest issue in the election was management of the economy, highlighted by 24% of voters. Combined with other economic factors, such as taxation, a total of 43% of voters identified an economic issue as the most important issue.

The second biggest issue for voters was health and Medicare (22%). This was followed closely by 21% of voters nominating either the environment or global warming as the most important issue—playing a bigger role than in any previous election. For comparison, fewer than 10% of voters identified an environmental issue as their top consideration in the 2016 election.

The AES Study found that among those who previously voted Labor the main reasons for switching to the Coalition were the economy and taxation, which drove 4.5% of voters to switch. Swings towards Labor were driven by the environment (1.5%) and health (1%).

In summary, there were a greater number of voters who switched from Labor to the Coalition based on economic issues, than from the Coalition to Labor based on environmental or health issues.

Comparative narratives

The Coalition campaign brought three key elements together:
1) Declining trust in government to get things done and act in our best interests
2) A scare campaign against the costs of Labor's complex policy agenda
3) The unpopularity of Bill Shorten and distrust that he could deliver on his agenda

As a general rule in Australia, opposition parties prefer to slide into government by offering a small target strategy, allowing voters to dispatch unpopular governments at the ballot box. In this case, Labor ran on a more significant policy reform agenda.

While some commentators have pointed to particular policies that damaged Labor, or the boldness of their agenda, more considered analyses attribute Labor's difficulties to the volume and complexity of their policies and, more importantly, the lack of a clear, defining narrative to drive their agenda. This is effectively the conclusion of Labor's own review.[13]

---

[13] Review of Labor's 2019 Federal Election Campaign, November 2019.

Both the reforms to negative gearing and franking credits enjoyed majority support, taken individually.[14] Additionally, Labor had taken negative gearing to the 2016 election with a positive result and, interestingly, the electorates most affected by the proposed changes to franking credits tended to swing towards Labor in 2019.[15] The issue was that Labor had a large cluster of policies around revenue and redistribution without a clear narrative to define them, which created a vacuum.

Moreover, there was a narrative disconnect between Labor's revenue raising policies and the things they promised to deliver. For example, reforms to franking credits were not linked in voters' minds to things like funding better health care for our seniors (or policy roads not taken, like increasing the pension). Those connections could have centred the debate on a choice between public funding to benefit all seniors and those in greatest need, over a tax advantage for a more fortunate group. This would have been much stronger territory for Labor than languishing in the 'cost' frame of franking credit reform, which is where the public debate largely sat. This narrative disconnect led swing voters to simultaneously hold two contradictory concerns: (1) the scale and impact of Labor's revenue raising measures was too great and (2) doubts that Labor could pay for the things they promised to deliver.

The Coalition and its allies exploited this narrative vacuum with a clear and concise message epitomised by the line "the Bill you can't afford". Their narrative generated fear in the costs of Labor's policies, tied to distrust in Bill Shorten's ability to deliver. That narrative was further reinforced by false and misleading campaigns from a variety of actors about 'a death tax', 'a car tax', etc, which were affixed to the ill-defined cluster of Labor policies.

It was very much a campaign about protecting the 'status quo' that led to a status quo election result, with few seats changing hands.

Relative leadership popularity

The AES Study indicates that Scott Morrison was a much more popular leader relative to Bill Shorten. Contributing to this was an effective set of negative campaigns unleashed against Shorten by the Coalition, its supporters, the Murdoch Press and other actors, such as Clive Palmer.

Whilst only a small number of voters said that party leadership decided their vote, many of those who did were swing voters. Based on voter responses, the AES Study estimates the net effect of leadership on the vote was 4% against Labor.

---

[14] "The 2019 Federal Election: Results from the Australian Election Study", Sarah Cameron & Ian McAllister, ANU, December 2019

[15] Inside Scott Morrison's Donald Trump-like election victory, *ABC Online*, 24 May 2019

Falling trust in Government

According to the AES Study, satisfaction with democracy is at its lowest level (59%) since the constitutional crisis of the 1970s. Only 25% of voters believe people in government can be trusted, while 56% of Australians believe that the government is run for 'a few big interests', and only 12% believe the government is run for 'all the people'.

This also came through anecdotally in the tens of thousands of phone conversations GetUp members had with voters during the election. We were shaken by the depth of hopelessness and cynicism across the community.

This distrust and dislike of government underwrote the Coalition's attack on Labor's policy agenda. As Lech Blaine noted in *The Monthly*, "The shift has produced a paradox: voters believe that politicians can hurt them but not help them, which is why Labor's scare campaign worked against Turnbull in 2016 but free cancer treatments and dental care for pensioners fell on deaf ears."[16]

Minor Party vote and preference flows

At the 2019 election, 24.7% of voters gave their first preference to minor parties and Independents—the largest percentage ever.

In contrast to previous elections, the preferences of minor party voters flowed overwhelmingly to the Liberal and National parties. For example, in 2013, the Coalition attracted 53.7% of Palmer United Party preferences, whilst in 2019 they received 65.2% of United Australia Party preferences. Clive Palmer's decision to invest much of his unprecedented advertising spending in attacking Labor and Bill Shorten appears to have been effective in influencing the preferences of his voters. [17]

A rise in support for minor parties contributed to the election result. This trend is associated with record low political partisanship. 21% of voters do not align with any political party.

Electorate factors

Electorates that swung harder to the Liberal and National parties were more likely to have higher unemployment, lower income, lower levels of education and fewer migrants, according to a *Guardian Australia* analysis[18].

---

[16] "How good is Queensland", *The Monthly*, November 2019.
[17] "Clive Palmer says he 'decided to polarise electorate' with anti-Labor ads to ensure Coalition win", *The Guardian*, 22 May 2019.
[18] The eight charts that help explain why the Coalition won the 2019 Australian Election, *The Guardian* 22 May 2019.

Conversely, electorates that swung to Labor were more likely to have higher levels of education, a greater percentage of young people, more people in work or study and more people over the age of 80.

Perhaps surprisingly, electorates with larger numbers of people receiving franking credit refunds or making use of negative gearing on properties were less likely to swing to the Coalition.

False and misleading campaigns run rampant

In 2019 false and misleading advertising ran rampant on the conservative side of politics, generally spread through social media or messaging platforms. Probably the best known of the fake news items was the scare campaign on death taxes. In mid-April, users of Facebook Messenger started receiving the following: *"Labor, the Greens and Unions have signed an agreement to introduce a 40% inheritance tax".* A few key points on that campaign:

- No-one knows how many people were reached, but the claim was helped along by various online forums and apps, and aided by the fact that Labor was proposing an ambitious agenda that wasn't well understood by voters.

- The genesis of the campaign had been a *Daily Telegraph* article on 21 July 2018 reporting that the Australian Council of Trade Unions supported an inheritance tax, an uncritical follow-up discussion on the Sunrise program the following day and a media release by Treasurer Josh Frydenberg on 24 January 2019 warning of Labor's supposed plans.

- Third-party Facebook groups, including an anti-Labor page named Rite-ON!, spread the death tax claim using paid Facebook ads, and it was amplified by Coalition figures, including by Liberal senator Jane Hume and Queensland LNP MP George Christensen.

- Labor Member for Newcastle Sharon Claydon told Katherine Murphy of *The Guardian* that by the final fortnight of the campaign her phone was "running hot" with constituents believing there was a pensioner tax, or an inheritance tax, or a death tax.[19]

- Claydon said the misinformation caught fire because a lot of voters were unable to differentiate between Labor's revenue-raising proposals, which were complicated and not well explained. *"The death tax got bundled up on the booths with a lot of other tax stories. It's serious then, because you can't carve it out,"* said Claydon.

- Disengaged voters are more likely to have their vote impacted by false and misleading campaigns. They are a group which tend to be

---

[19] "It felt like a big tide: how the death tax lie infected Australia's Election campaigning", *The Guardian*, 8 June 2019.

under-represented in polling, which may be one factor that helps explain why the polls failed to predict the election result.

A more concentrated media framing the debate

Bias in Rupert Murdoch's News Corp towards conservatives is nothing new, though it arguably reached new depths in the 2019 election. Former News Corp stalwart and five-time Walkley Award winning journalist Tony Koch offered the following observations:

"If it is not anti-Labor it is anti-Green or, quite ridiculously, anti-ABC. Anything except a story negative to the Liberal or National parties … Gone is the requirement for balance. One has only to look at the story selection and headlines on the front pages of the papers each day to see that an anti-Labor angle has been taken, however contorted had been the literary gymnastics required to finally arrive at that particular bit of stupidity."

This bias has been magnified by the higher concentration of media ownership since the previous Parliament passed legislation to scrap two key protections:

1. The "two out of three" rule, which prevented companies owning newspaper outlets, radio and television stations in the same city.

2. The "reach rule", which prevented a single TV broadcaster from reaching more than 75% of the population.

Clive Palmer

Queensland businessman Clive Palmer famously spent upwards of $60 million on the 2019 election[20], which was more than the Coalition and Labor combined and more than 15 times GetUp's election budget.

Well-placed pundits suggest that Palmer, who is set to profit significantly from the opening up of the Galilee Basin for coal development, entered this year's race in order to win seats but quickly discovered this was beyond him so settled for 3.5% of the national vote and keeping a pro-coal government in power.

- As the election campaign progressed, Clive Palmer's message of *"More lies from Liberal & Labor… "* progressed to attacks specifically on Bill Shorten and Labor, including *"Shifty Shorten"* ads, which played out across TV, print, online and via text message.

- There is little doubt that his rumoured $60 million spend on advertising helped swing the election result away from Labor.

---

[20] Clive Palmer to spend $60 million on election campaign advertising blitz, senator claims", *ABC Online*, 1 May 2019.

- As Palmer himself said, *"Scott Morrison has been returned as Prime Minister and he's only done so because of the 3.5 per cent vote of United Australia Party … Our Shifty Shorten ads across Australia … I think have been very successful in shifting the Labor vote."*

Australian Christian Lobby and Cherish Life

The 2019 Federal election saw the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) and Cherish Life engaging in extensive political campaigning, which would bring them into the definition of a Political Campaigner under the Electoral Act. However, Cherish Life is not registered with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and ACL is registered as a third party, not as a Political Campaigner, which requires greater transparency.

- During the 2019 election, the ACL used its platform to campaign on religious freedom, Safe Schools and abortion. The ACL's campaign included phone canvassing, doorknocking and hundreds of thousands of leaflets letterboxed by an army of supporters, alongside an extensive digital campaign.[21]

- In addition to online campaigning, the ACL selected one key seat in each state, including the marginal seats of Boothby in South Australia, Bass in Tasmania, Petrie in Queensland, Chisholm in Victoria and Canning in Western Australia. In New South Wales, the ACL chose the safe Labor seat of McMahon in western Sydney.[22]

- Martyn Iles, Managing Director of the ACL, said, *"This election has proved to be a great demonstration of ACL's successful field campaign … The results we have seen so far show that ACL's campaign impacted the outcome of this election.*

Similarly, Cherish Life, a Queensland anti-abortion group, urged voters to put Labor last, using digital ads and leaflets in the seats of Lindsay, Macquarie and Gilmore in New South Wales, Dickson, Forde and Petrie in Queensland and Cowan in Western Australia.

---

[21] ACL Media Statement, 20 May 2019.
[22] ACL Media Statement, 20 May 2019.

Cherish Life pursued a campaign claiming that "more babies would die under a Bill Shorten Labor government" and accused Labor of an "extreme late-term abortion agenda".

More babies would die under a Bill Shorten Labor Government
Federal Labor has an extreme late-term abortion agenda

BILL SHORTEN, LABOR LEADER
Pushing for extreme late-term abortion laws across Australia

The Labor Party's own review concluded that they lost some support among Christian voters—particularly devout, first-generation migrant Christians.[23]

If groups like the ACL and Cherish Life are engaging in vote-shifting political campaigning then they should register properly with the AEC and demonstrate the same transparency required of GetUp and other political actors.

Advance Australia (AA)

AA was launched in 2018 by conservative business figures to campaign in favour of a right-wing political agenda. Its director was former Tim Nicholls staffer Gerard Benedet.

During the 2019 federal election its target seats were Dickson, Deakin, Boothby, Indi and Warringah; although they arguably spent as much time attacking GetUp as they did the Liberal opponents in those seats.

AA reportedly raised $1.2 million and undertook a suite of activities which included:
- Election advertising (social, leaflets and outdoor)
- Public relations (mainly through "Captain Getup")

Their campaign was in line with the Liberal Party's approach, adopting almost identical key messages.

---

[23] Review of Labor's 2019 Federal Election Campaign, November 2019.

04

What We Learned

The path to progress on our issues is marked by countless successes and setbacks. An effective election review provides reflection on what worked, what didn't and why, in order to provide a compass point for future direction.

In 2019 GetUp members ran an issue-based campaign on climate, health and economic fairness in six key electorates held by hard right MPs: Boothby, Dickson, Flinders, Menzies, Pearce and Warringah. We also campaigned in Kooyong, specifically on the issue of climate action. The sitting hard right MPs retained five of the six seats, while former Prime Minister Tony Abbott was defeated by independent candidate Zali Steggall in Warringah.

We employed similar strategies and tactics in the 2019 federal election as we did in several by-elections leading up to it, as well as the 2016 federal election. Comparing and contrasting our results across all of this election work provides the best basis for determining the key elements for success.

Polling

The electoral polling leading up to the 2019 federal election proved inaccurate. This had cascading impacts on how GetUp, and the broader progressive movement, conducted campaign strategy and execution, including how many seats we engaged in, which seats were selected and where we put the most resources.

- **How we used polling and opinion research.** GetUp used a range of external polling companies, combined with public polling and other research methods, including focus groups, online surveys with representative panels of voters, feedback from callers and doorknockers and digital message testing.

- **In Warringah**, we made use of all of these methodologies, which delivered the clear finding that swing voters wanted climate action, disliked Tony Abbott, and found Abbott-focused climate messages highly persuasive.

- **The swing was on, in the other direction.** Long-term polling trends indicated a swing against conservatives was on the cards in 2019. This was reinforced by the shock result in the Wentworth by-election and the results in the Victorian state election. But the swing ended up being in the other direction. When a few percentage points can make all the difference in an

election, that polling miscalibration has a significant impact on strategy and execution.

- **Our strategy was deliberately bold**, and without that boldness, we never would have taken on Tony Abbott in Warringah. However, if we had more accurate data on the true state of the election race, we would have moderated our ambition to focus either on fewer seats or a different mix of seats held by hard right MPs.

- **Disengaged Voters**. Public polling uses the catchall category of "undecided voters", but a portion of that group are better characterised as "disengaged" (i.e., not following the election at all). It's particularly hard for pollsters to predict how this group will break in an election. While in the past they've tended to follow the rest of the 2PP vote, there is a strong suggestion that in 2019 they broke more towards the Coalition and that false scare campaigns about taxes were a contributing factor.[24]

- Most political actors, including much of the progressive movement, were similarly influenced by the polling. As a result of the false certainty in the result, there was less consistency on issues and messaging than in the lead up to the 2016 federal election.

Key takeaways

- **Monitor improvements in polling accuracy**. Major polling companies in Australia have acknowledged failures of their polls to predict the election result and are re-examining their methodologies.[25] It will be important to track changes in their approach to see if they have fully corrected the problems in the 2019 polling.

- **Place less reliance on 2PP polling.** While polling companies may improve, it's clear that, in future, we should place less confidence in two party preferred (2PP) polling of voting intention when making strategic decisions. The 2PP necessarily involves assumptions about preference flows, in addition to the ultimate flow of votes from undecided and disengaged voters, where even small inaccuracies can have an outsized impact in races decided at the margins.

- **Polling is useful in other ways**. Polling is very useful in identifying the most salient issues in an electorate, getting media attention to those issues, gauging the popularity of the sitting MP and helping to determine any dominant narratives. The common thread here is that these determinations are about getting a general sense of things, so are not greatly impacted if they are off by a few percentage points.

---

[24] "As pollsters, we are rightly in the firing line after the Australian election. What happened?", *The Guardian*, 21 May 2019.
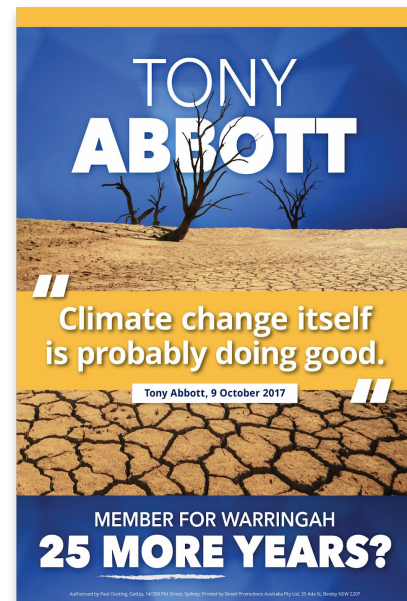[25] "Pollsters 95 per cent unsure how they got it wrong", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 2019.

- **Triangulate with other approaches**. While we should not over-rely on 2PP polling we cannot afford to ignore it either. In 2019 we triangulated and sense-checked 2PP polling in a number of ways, including looking at the consistency between electorate polling and state and national polling, as well as sense-checking against focus group results (where available) and other opinion research. Going forward, we should consider other ways to sense-check 2PP polling, such as against the popularity of the sitting MP, social listening and considering the dominant issue priorities and narratives in the electorate (discussed further below).

- **Keep the boldness, temper it with polling skepticism**. We must continue to be bold because our greatest victories, in and outside of elections, have come from being bold. We need to temper that boldness with skepticism about 2PP polling to make better judgements about the true state of the race.

Narrative

The political narrative is like the tide. Swimming with or against it makes all the difference.

- **What is a 'narrative'?** A narrative is a key storyline in an election or in our politics. It is informed and influenced by voters' issue priorities, but it is more than that. For instance, 'taxation' may be a high-ranking issue, but is the narrative about corporations dodging tax or whether middle class families should get a tax cut? Narratives exist outside specific policy issues as well, such as Malcolm Turnbull's removal as prime minister by his own party.

- **Why are narratives important?** The dominant narratives in an election shape the way people receive calls from GetUp volunteers, perceive our advertising and much more. They are the tide that we swim with or against.

- **Swimming with the tide**. Looking broadly, we tend to perform strongest in electorates where our issue-led campaign is aligned with a dominant national or local narrative. Our members had strong success in Warringah and the Wentworth by-election, where the need for climate action was a strong narrative in both the electorate and our campaign. This was also the case with corporate tax cuts and the Longman by-election, the ABC in the Mayo by-election and the Medicare GP rebate freeze and hospital funding cuts in multiple electorates in 2016, including Peter Dutton's seat of Dickson.

- **Linking strong narratives**. Campaigns perform best when strong narratives are linked together or reinforce each other. In Wentworth not only was climate change one of the dominant issues, it was connected to the toppling of Malcolm Turnbull as prime minister by a faction that wanted no action whatsoever on climate change (e.g., "They tore down Malcolm Turnbull. Now, they have no climate policy"). In Warringah climate change was connected to the feeling that Tony Abbott's views were out of touch and behind the times after 25 years in office (e.g.: "Imagine another 25 years of climate denial.")

- **Swimming against the tide**. It was harder to achieve our goals when either there was no dominant narrative in the electorate or we were swimming against the tide of either a local or national narrative. This was the case for our campaigns in both Dickson and Christian Porter's WA seat of Pearce, where it was more difficult to identify any dominant narrative that was resonating with voters, whether on economic, social or environmental issues. As discussed above, at a national level the Coalition and its allies steered the narrative towards fear of the costs of change. These electorates had a higher proportion of disengaged voters with a strong preference for the status quo.

- **Didn't see the changing tide.** In the latter half of 2018, there were three dominant narratives in our politics. The first was about leadership turmoil in the Government, following the spill of Turnbull's leadership and the battle to replace him. Second, there was the popular demand for climate action, amplified by the Wentworth by-election. Third, there was an undercurrent around fairness, stemming from the corporate tax cut debate brought to a head in the Super Saturday by-elections. As with the polling we, and many others, took for granted that these would remain the dominant narratives and either did not clearly see, or did not react sufficiently, as the tide changed heading into the election in 2019.

- **Fewer issues**. While we strive to punch above our weight, GetUp's election budget is small when compared to the major political parties and Clive Palmer's $60-70 million. So it is harder for us to run on multiple issues in any given electorate. Our campaigns have had greater cut-through and success when we focussed on one issue and one core message and repeated it consistently across all channels.

Key takeaways

Influencing the national political narrative is hard but it's critical to having greater success.

- **We need a strong national narrative**. In the 2019 election campaign the national narrative lacked a strong and bold vision of the nation we could become. It lacked a vision of a country with cleaner, more affordable energy sourced from our own sun, wind and water, and the benefits that could have for people's lives. Or what it would be like if everyone who wanted a job had one, and where Medicare covered not just everyone, but everything we need to properly look after our health.

- **Greater focus on the national narrative**. Given the polls suggested a broader progressive swing, we placed less priority on building a positive national narrative to focus more on the task of holding the hard right to account in our target seats. This not only ceded the field on narrative, it also fostered the impression of a negative campaign. In future we should consider more focus on influencing the narrative to support key progressive policies in the lead up to the election, as well as the election itself.

- **We can't do it alone.** While GetUp members have always accomplished a lot with less, influencing the national narrative is impossible to do alone. It will require a concerted effort by many progressive groups across civil society.

- **Starting now.** Dominant election narratives can certainly pivot during an election, but they are often built on years of political engagement. For example, the progressive response to Tony Abbott's 2014 austerity budget set the stage for a 2016 election largely fought on health and education.

- **Doing more to neutralise conservative scare campaigns.** It's clear that false conservative scare campaigns had at least some impact. As they become an increasing hallmark of our politics we need to devote more research and resources into how we overcome them.

- **Restoring faith in government.** There is increasing doubt among swing voters that government can get things done to benefit our lives, which underwrote the Morrison Government's election victory. Conservative governments foster this fear by making it harder for government to deliver services through cuts to public service jobs, outsourcing government services and programs like the fraudulent robodebt system. Yet whatever doubts people have about government, research that GetUp members helped fund shows people trust government over corporations to provide comprehensive services across many areas, especially health, education,

aged care, public transport and childcare.[26] There is an opportunity to put this strong preference at the heart of a new national narrative.

- **Narratives should help decide seat selection**. In considering the direction of the race in any electorate, greater weight should be placed on dominant issues and narratives in an electorate to sense-check the 2PP polling.

Organising, voter contact and volunteers

Our persuasive calling program was a massive experimental scale-up of the success we achieved in the 2016 federal election, several by-elections and the marriage equality postal ballot. GetUp members made 712,000 phone calls in our target electorates, having persuasive conversations with swing voters and exceeding established benchmarks for vote shifting. This was supplemented with a doorknocking program in which 550 GetUp volunteers knocked on 36,315 doors, 70% of them in Warringah.

- **Met or exceeded persuasion benchmarks**. Pre and post-election polling and related analysis demonstrates that GetUp members met or exceeded international benchmarks for shifting votes with persuasive phone calls.

- **Misled by polling, it wasn't enough**. Persuasive voter contact programs are most effective at the margins, where close contests are decided, or in less crowded election spaces, such as Bass in the 2016 federal election, where our persuasive calls contributed to a 10.13% swing. Because there was a national conservative swing in the 2019 election, instead of the progressive swing indicated by the polling, our voter contact program didn't have the scale to overcome the margin of difference in most cases.

- **Calling can shift votes, not narratives**. Calling and doorknocking programs can be powerful at switching votes when they are swimming with the tide of strongly resonant narratives in the electorate, such as concern about climate action or cuts to hospitals and Medicare. They are not an effective tool for raising up narratives that aren't already top of mind with those being called.

- **Calling is great for some, but not everyone**. Many GetUp volunteers enjoyed and excelled at making calls to their fellow voters in the 2019 federal election, and those volunteers had the vast majority of persuasive conversations. Other volunteers did not take to making calls and would have preferred to contribute to the campaign in other ways.

- **Doorknocking vs. calling**. Although doorknocking is more time intensive for volunteers, we engaged at scale for the first time because international evidence suggests that face-to-face conversations are even more effective

---

[26] "How to talk about economics: A Guide for Changing the Story", *Centre for Australian Progress*, 2017.

than phone conversations. Volunteers who took part in doorknocking (compared to calling) were more confident they made a meaningful contribution and it helped foster a greater sense of community amongst the members who took part.

Key takeaways

The massive scale-up of the calling program also created significant challenges and key learnings for the future. Key improvements, including stronger training, development and quality control should significantly increase the success and overall effectiveness of the program, as well as making the experience more rewarding for volunteers.

- **Vote-shifting conversations are harder.** Our voter contact programs are, in part, modelled on programs from the United States that aim to turn out progressive voters in a country without mandatory voting. Having a conversation with an undecided voter about how their local hard right MP is failing them on issues they care about is appreciably harder than American-style 'get out the vote' calls. It requires callers who are well-trained for having persuasive conversations.

- **Peer-to-peer coaching from 'power callers'.** In future, calling programs should be set up to provide peer-to-peer coaching on persuasive conversations from the most persuasive calling volunteers. We should also schedule check-ins to help volunteers who are new to calling, and to find other ways for them to contribute if they're not taking to calling after the first few shifts. This will allow for a leaner calling program in future, with similar or greater results.

- **Better feedback loops**. Initial feedback systems were too ad hoc and inconsistent. As the campaign progressed we developed better systems for receiving and responding to volunteer feedback. Consistent, prominent, easy-to-use feedback loops should be built into all future calling programs.

GetUp was seen as a bigger target in 2019

Following the success GetUp members had in the 2016 election, multiple by-elections and the marriage equality postal vote, we're perceived as a more powerful force in our national politics. This brought with it greater scrutiny of our 2019 campaign, which amplified both our opponents' attacks and our own mistakes.

Attacks from political opponents reached unprecedented levels in 2019. This included Advance Australia, which was largely funded by a few wealthy conservatives, as well as elements of the conservative media and a number of groups operating more in the shadows, such as RiteOn.

One way this played out is that our campaigns against hard right MPs were attacked for being too personal, even though we ran a similar campaign in 2016 without the same level of criticism. What helps explain this difference?

- **Personal attacks vs. democratic accountability**. The media is rife with attacks on politicians for their appearances, personality traits, personal faults and scandals. This is furthered by the constant flow of barbs traded between politicians in and outside of parliament. This is not how GetUp members conduct campaigns. What we do is unapologetically hold politicians to account for their policy positions, statements and actions—including their impacts on people and our planet. In a climate of increasing political suppression this is one of GetUp's most important functions. Politicians often use the charge of 'personal attacks' in order to deflect this form of democractic accountability.

- **The public member vote on target MPs**. In order to give members a greater say on our 2019 election campaign priorities, we asked them to vote on a list of potential target MPs, based on their positions and actions on the issues that matter to members. While the aim of the vote was to increase members' participation in setting a fully transparent election strategy, the resulting list of target MPs added to the perception that our campaign was 'personal' in nature.

- **Mistakes opened the door**. No election campaign is without mistakes and we made several mistakes during the campaign that opened the door to attacks. This included a prospective advertisement intending to spotlight Tony Abbott's lack of action on climate change; but which instead appeared to attack his service as a volunteer lifesaver. While we pulled the ad and apologised for the insensitivity before it went to air, it still received significant negative media attention. Additional mistakes involved claims in phone-calling scripts that we could not fully verify. Political opponents used these mistakes to further a narrative that our campaign was personal in nature. This included making completely false claims, such as accusing GetUp members of association with attacks on Nicole Flint's office in Boothby or with putting up crude posters of Tony Abbott in Warringah.

Key Takeaways

- **Understand the new context and be prepared.** We must understand that the perception of our power has changed the way the media reports on us and the way political opponents treat us. We must be prepared for heightened media scrutiny. We must be prepared for more unfounded attacks from better-resourced opponents.

- **People power, values and issues**. We must constantly remind the media and the public who we are through our words and actions. We are a member-driven organisation of mass democratic participation that champions issues grounded in a shared set of progressive values. Together we can have an impact on policies in any form of government, as well as elections. We must repeat those truths louder and more frequently than the falsehoods spread by our detractors.

- **Mistake-free as possible, without losing our edge**. No campaign can be free of mistakes. If we become too risk-averse, our campaigns will lose their edge and their impact. If we become too afraid of criticism, our campaigns will cease to say anything worth saying (e.g., attacks from the Murdoch Press are often a sign that we're doing something right). However, we must understand that any mistakes we make will receive a greater deal of attention than in the past. We have put in place additional steps before significant pieces of controversial content, such as advertising campaigns, go out the door, including sense-checking them with a few members and other trusted sources. We must also continue to be vigilant in maintaining and improving our fact-checking systems.

- **Always grounded in values and issues**. We must continue to be rigorous in grounding our critiques of politicians and parties in their words, policies and actions. We should be fearlessly irreverent, without veering into insult, and must keep our ultimate purpose in sight - to unleash positive change on the issues our members care about.

Other reflections and key takeaways

Visibility and stunts
Whether it was throwing a retirement party for Tony Abbott in Manly, or populating electorates with giant paper-mache heads of Tony Abbott and Peter Dutton—visibility and stunt campaigns were effective at attracting public attention. They also helped shape and reinforce campaign narratives in the electorate, especially when they were combined with local advertising campaigns, including billboards, cinema, radio and more. These can be effective, fun and impactful activities for volunteers—especially for those less interested in our voter contact programs.

They adapted, so must we

In any campaign that pits people power against powerful interests, when one side moves ahead by gaining a strategic or tactical advantage, the other side adapts, closes the gap or leaps forward.

In recent years we've had several strategic and tactical advantages, including our voter contact program and our digital advertising program. Through a combination of shifting tactics, swamping the election with money, false campaigns and dirty tricks, other political actors countered to reduce our impact. In order to be successful in the future we have to learn, adapt, neutralise new threats and regain our edge in our areas of strength, as well as find new and innovative ways to gain a tactical advantage.

A tale of two Dicksons

Table: Voting swings 2016 vs. 2019

Swing	Dickson 2016	Dickson 2019
National	3.13% against Coalition	1.21% to Coalition
Qld State	2.47% swing against LNP	4.34% to LNP
Petrie (neighbouring seat)	1.2% to LNP candidate	6.75% to LNP candidate
Dickson	5.12% against Dutton	2.95% to Dutton

In 2016 Dickson went from a safe to a marginal seat with a swing against Peter Dutton twice the size of the state swing against the LNP. As the seat was considered safe, there was less engagement by Dutton himself and other actors to counter GetUp's campaign.

In 2019 the swing to Dutton was less than the average swing to the LNP in Queensland and less than half the swing to the LNP in the neighbouring seat of Petrie, which has similar characteristics. That suggests our 2019 campaign also had an impact, but it is harder to judge given the greater number of actors and the fierce level of engagement from all sides. Below is a table of different factors surrounding the two campaigns.

Table: Dickson Campaign Factors 2016 vs. 2019[27]

Dickson 2016	Dickson 2019
National and state swings against LNP.	National swing and significant state and neighboring seat swings to LNP.
Few players in the campaign, as it was considered safe.	Much more crowded space, with several actors trying to thwart GetUp's campaign.
Caught Dutton off guard. He and the LNP weren't spending big and he wasn't spending as much time there.	Dutton raised big, spent big and spent time in Dickson. Dutton: "We didn't see GetUp coming [in 2016] … We are prepared this time."
Strong narrative around health, hospitals and Medicare, which featured in our campaign. Dutton was Health Minister responsible for GP co-payment policy in Abbott's 2014 austerity budget.	No clear dominant narrative, so we ran on multiple issues. It was harder to cut through in a crowded space with lots of players spending big.

---

[27] "Dutton safe, but other marginal seats in danger of falling", *The Australian*, 29 July 2018.

05

The Way Forward

GetUp engages in elections for one reason only—to build a more fair, flourishing and just Australia by delivering progress on issues our members care about across climate justice, human rights, economic fairness and democracy.

In this election GetUp members did more than ever before, building our power towards greater impact in the years to come. The 2019 election did not deliver the more progressive parliament we were hoping for, but the departure of Tony Abbott's toxic influence in our politics is a major achievement with significant impact.
The hard-won skills and lessons of this election campaign will prove invaluable as they propel us to learn, adapt, improve and innovate.

Already we are evolving our organising and volunteer program to take account of feedback from our amazing volunteers and the other key lessons learned from the election. This includes the development of campaign strategies with a far greater variety of tactics, enabling volunteers to make an impact in the ways that suit them best, whether that's calling their fellow voters or generating eye-catching and clever stunts to capture public attention, shine a light on our issues and shift the political narrative towards our values and priorities. It will involve more in-depth training and induction for new volunteers. Lastly, it means empowering local grassroots members with greater autonomy to drive campaigns forward in their local area.

Where we are now

The country is burning as a result of out-of-control and unaddressed climate change. In 2008 the Garnaut Climate Change Review warned us that "fire seasons will start earlier, end slightly later, and generally be more intense" with the effect "directly observable by 2020." But Mr Morrison failed to properly prepare or react to the crisis, because he was at pains to present these fires as normal -- in order to obscure the impact climate change is having on our weather, our land, our water, the air we breathe, our homes, our businesses and our lives.

Mr Morrison was put in power by those in his party who removed a prime minister to avoid any significant action on climate change. We're seeing that a government that refuses to address climate change cannot be counted on to keep us safe from the crises it creates.

National firefighting aircraft were not funded, meetings and a summit with former emergency services leaders were rejected and firefighters were left without

sufficient equipment and resources.[28] [29] [30] On the climate front, the government is letting the Australian Renewable Energy Agency run out of funding in the middle of next year and is taking steps to silence effective climate protests, while using dodgy accounting to fudge on our international climate commitments, as Australia's harmful carbon emissions continue to rise.[31] [32]

Mr Morrison is ignoring the climate concerns of bushfire survivors, firefighters and the general public. Instead he promotes a small-minded view of what Australia can achieve, by stoking fear of progress, social division and distrust in what good government can deliver. Meanwhile, the approach of his government to opposing views is to suppress, slander and deflect.

There's never been a more important time for a movement of members like GetUp to take a stand for a better future.

We need to help build a new national narrative—one that is grounded in the belief that government, more than corporations, will act in our best interests to address our common needs and the challenges of our times. A narrative that is hopeful and bold about what people in Australia, from all races and backgrounds, can achieve together. It includes a vision for a renewable energy future with cleaner, more affordable energy that brings forward new jobs and new opportunities, while also driving down the cost of doing business.

We need to progress that narrative by working across civil society to forge new broad-based constituencies of people who want change for the better.

We've begun by standing with the students leading the climate strikes and with First Nations people across the Northern Territory who are protecting their land and water from fracking. We're standing with the firefighters and bushfire survivors who are crying out for climate action and we're calling for better equipment and resources for those battling the blazes. We're ensuring that our national broadcaster is funded to keep us aware and alert to growing fire dangers, as well as empowered to report the truth about the role of climate change in making extreme weather events more frequent and dangerous.

This is only the beginning. As always, it starts with everyday people standing together for what we believe in.

---

[28] "Government rejected major air-tanker expansion", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 January 2020.
[29] "Morrison's government on the bushfires: from attacking climate 'lunatics' to calling in the troops", *The Guardian*, 4 January 2020.
[30] "'Hugely disappointed' emergency chiefs to hold bushfire summit with or without PM", *The Guardian*, 15 December 2019.
[31] "Australia's carbon emissions continue to rise despite Government assurances about climate change policy", ABC News, August 30 2019
[32] "Scott Morrison slams environmental groups 'targeting' businesses with 'selfish' secondary boycotts", ABC News, 1 November 2019.