

1. Voting

One method that citizens can use to impact social and political change overlaps with another responsibility of citizens, voting.

Voting rights in the United States today are universally applied to all U.S. citizens who meet age and residency requirements. This was not always the case. Early in U.S. history, voting was restricted to white males, with some states enacting property requirements as well. The property requirements began to go away over the first half of the 1800s. Voting has since expanded to include African Americans, Native Americans, women, and those 18 and above.

By voting, citizens help decide who represents them in elected office. Voters also help indicate support for that person's positions and priorities, which can serve as an encouragement or warning to those in office as they lead.



2. Peaceful Protests

One of the protections provided by the First Amendment is the right to peaceably assemble. Throughout history, peaceful protest has been an important way to impact social and political change by showing support for a particular issue or cause.

Protests can include such tactics as mass assembly, boycotts, and strikes. The goal of peaceful protest is often to leverage size of participation to influence public opinion and decision-makers. Many peaceful protests, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955) had a powerful and lasting impact.

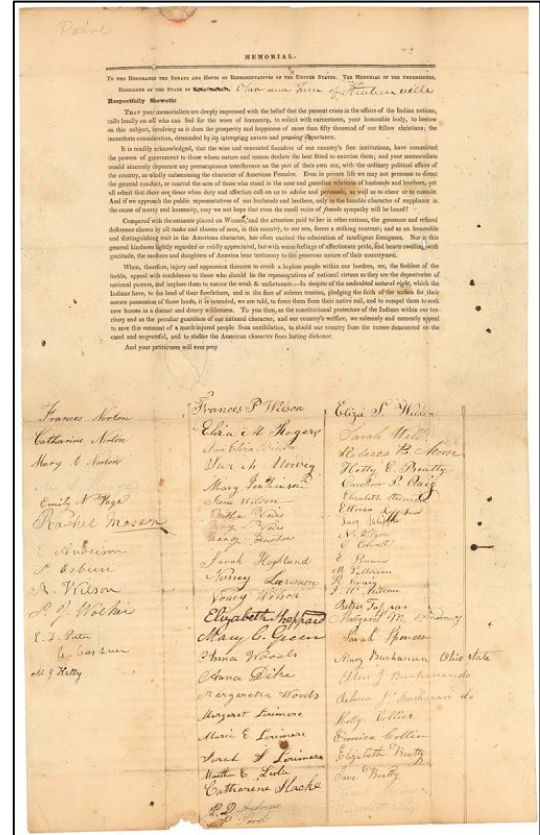


3. Petitions

Americans have a long tradition of petitioning their government for a redress of grievances. Colonists repeatedly petitioned King George III in the lead up to the American Revolution.

After independence, the first nationally organized petition drive was against the Indian Removal Act. In Steubenville, OH, 60 women urged President Jackson and Congress to reconsider. In this case, although Congress received tons of petitions that year, the Indian Removal Act went into effect anyway.

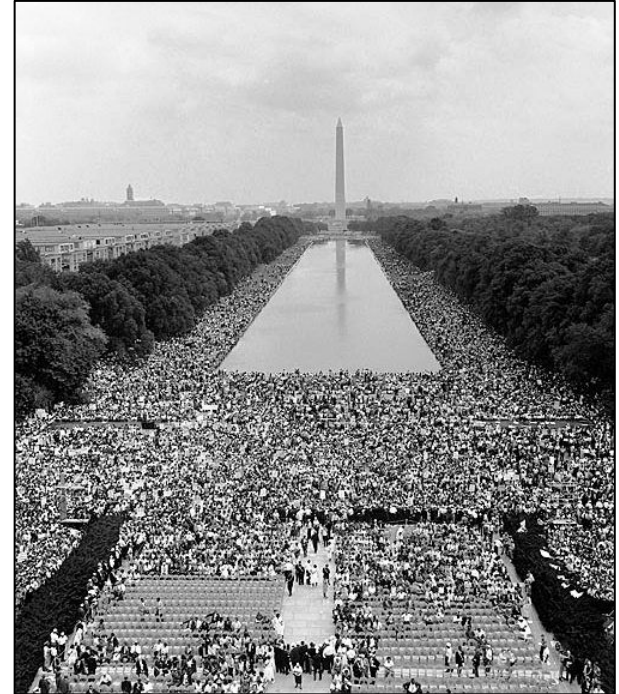
Petitions are often written statements in support or opposition to something, signed by those passionate about the cause. By petitioning, one can indicate to elected officials the level of popular support for a given action, decision, or change, helping guide those officials as they weigh the choices before them.



4. Demonstrations

Demonstrations are large rallies that aim to raise awareness and garner attention and public support. While demonstrations can be done by individuals, they often rely on mass numbers to effectively make their cause known. Demonstrations will often engage their audience in a public display or exhibit.

One important mass demonstration in American history was the 1963 March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous “I Have A Dream Speech” to 250,000 demonstrators and the watching world.



5. Contacting Government Offices

Another way to impact social or political change would be to contact government offices and/or elected officials.

It is the job of elected officials to represent their *constituents*- the voters that elected them to the office they hold. Government officials depend on citizens to make their feelings about issues known so that the official can best represent their constituents.

While contacting elected officials doesn't mean that they will make the change requested, it is important in a republic that all citizens make their voice heard.



Sources

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