

Balance of power

Senate projections, Spring 2018

The Australia Institute conducts a quarterly poll of Senate voting intention. Our analysis shows that major parties should expect the crossbench to remain large and diverse for the foreseeable future.

Senate projections series, no. 2

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November 2018

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE

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ISSN: 1836-9014

Summary

The Australia Institute routinely polls a representative sample of the Australian population on a variety of issues, including how they intend to vote at the next election. While other pollsters only ask about House of Representatives voting intention, our polling also asks specifically about Senate voting intention.

In this report series, we present and analyse the results of these Senate voting intention polls to project the potential makeup of the Senate following one or more elections.

On current polling, future elections are likely to return a crossbench that is about as large and divided as the current one. Future governments – whether Coalition or Labor – should prepare for a number of possible crossbenches: one where Greens votes are necessary to pass legislation, one where micro-parties and independents are necessary to pass legislation, and one where Greens, micro-parties and independents are all necessary to pass legislation.

Table 1: Range of likely Senate results

Party	At 2016	2019 prediction	Best ALP outcome	Best LNP outcome	Best crossbench outcome
LNP	30	30–35	30	35	30
Labor	26	27–29	29	27	27
Greens	9	8–9	8–9	8–9	8–9
One Nation	4	2–5	3–4	2–3	3–5
Centre Alliance	3	2–3	2–3	2–3	2–3
LDP	1	0	0	0	0
Conservatives	1	1	1	1	1
Lambie, Hinch	2	0–2	1	0	1–2

Predictions

Liberal and National candidates are likely to pick up two seats in each state. Labor candidates are also likely to pick up two seats in each state. The Greens are well placed to pick up a seat in each of NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. One Nation is well placed in Queensland.

The remaining seat in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania, and the remaining two seats in South Australia, are likely to be highly contested.

- **NSW:** The Coalition, Labor and One Nation are competitive for the final seat.
- **Victoria:** The Coalition, Labor and Derryn Hinch are competitive for the final seat.
- **Western Australia:** The Coalition and One Nation are competitive for the final seat.
- **South Australia:** The Coalition, Greens, Centre Alliance and One Nation are competitive for the final two seats.
- **Tasmania:** The Coalition and Jacqui Lambie are competitive for the final seat.

The polling by itself does not suggest that the Coalition will pick up the third seat in any state, but our historical analysis suggests that the Coalition is more competitive than the polls alone would indicate.

Another wild card is the high Independent/Other polling. Although Jacqui Lambie and Derryn Hinch are contenders in their respective states, there is also the outside but real possibility of independent or minor party pick-ups in other states as well.

Table 2: Range of likely Senate results

Party	At 2016	2019 prediction	Best ALP outcome	Best LNP outcome	Best crossbench outcome
LNP	30	30–35	30	35	30
Labor	26	27–29	29	27	27
Greens	9	8–9	8–9	8–9	8–9
One Nation	4	2–5	3–4	2–3	3–5
Centre Alliance	3	2–3	2–3	2–3	2–3
LDP	1	0	0	0	0
Conservatives	1	1	1	1	1
Lambie, Hinch	2	0–2	1	0	1–2

Note: Best ALP and best LNP outcomes assume that the ALP or LNP respectively win any remaining seat in which they are a serious contender. Best crossbench outcome assumes that ALP and LNP lose any seat in which they are a serious contender.

Table 3: Results by state

	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>New</i>	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT/NT
LNP	16	14–19	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Labor	13	14–16	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Greens	3	5–6	1	1	1	1		1	
One Nation	1	1–4			1				
Centre Alliance	2	0–1							
Conservatives	1	0							
Hinch, Lambie	0	0–2							
Competitive	N/A	6	1	1		1	2	1	

Table 4: Parties in contention for the final seat(s) in each state

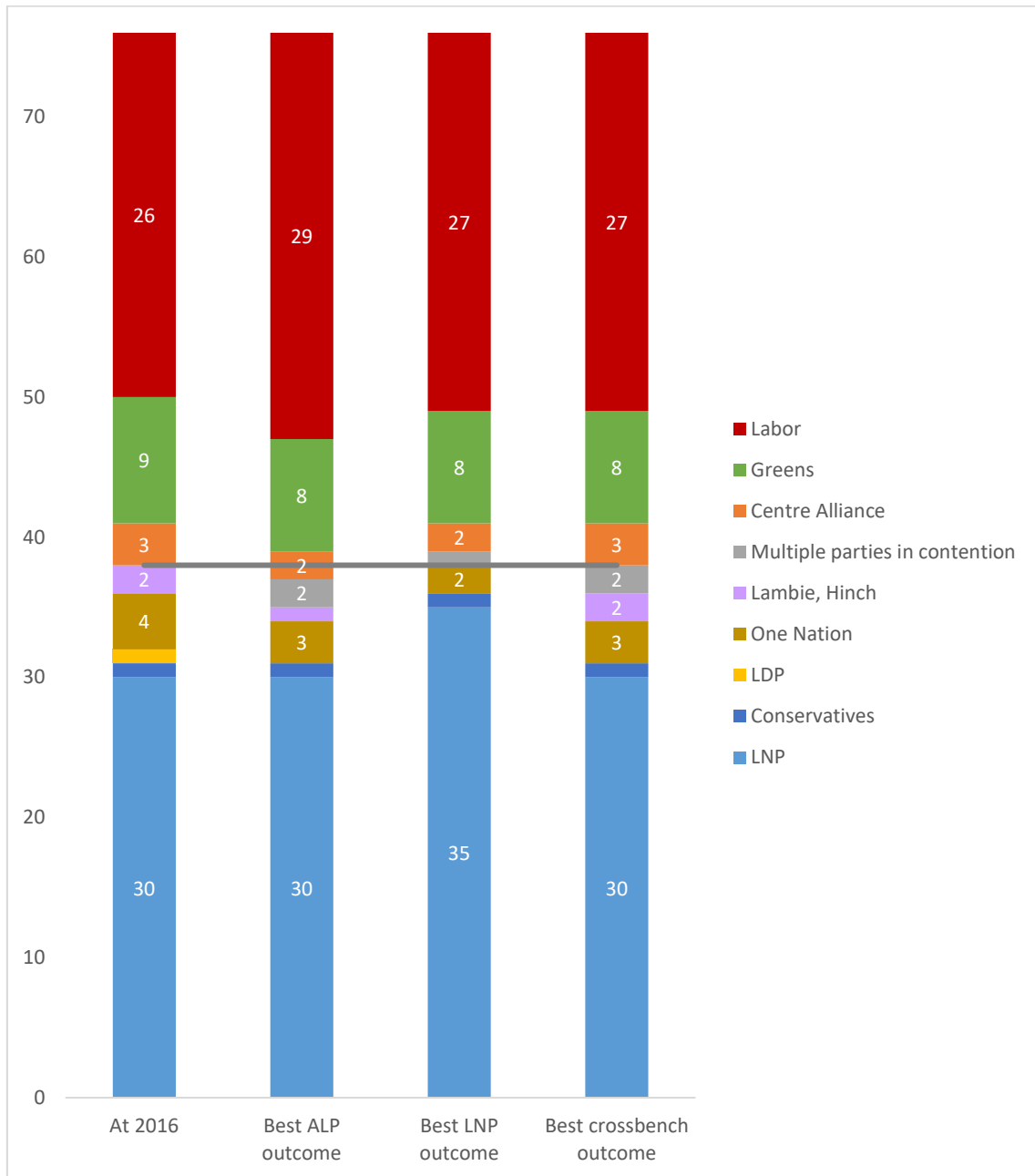
	NSW	Vic	WA	SA	Tas
LNP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Labor	✓	✓			
Greens				✓	
One Nation	✓		✓	✓	
Centre Alliance				✓	
Conservatives					
Hinch, Lambie		✓			✓
Seats in contention	1	1	1	2	1

Figure 1 below shows the Senate as it was in 2016¹ and under three possible outcomes of the next half-Senate election. The grey line indicates the 38 senators required to block legislation; 39 senators are needed to pass legislation.

The figure shows that even a best case scenario for Labor and the Greens would leave them with 38 senators only, allowing them to block – but not pass – legislation. Other crossbenchers – most prominently Centre Alliance – would have the deciding vote on legislation. Particularly notable are the one or more seats in each scenario where multiple crossbench parties are competitive.

¹ Parties are shown with their current names: Australian Conservatives instead of Family First and Centre Alliance instead of Nick Xenophon Team.

Figure 1: Best likely Senate outcomes for ALP, Coalition and crossbench

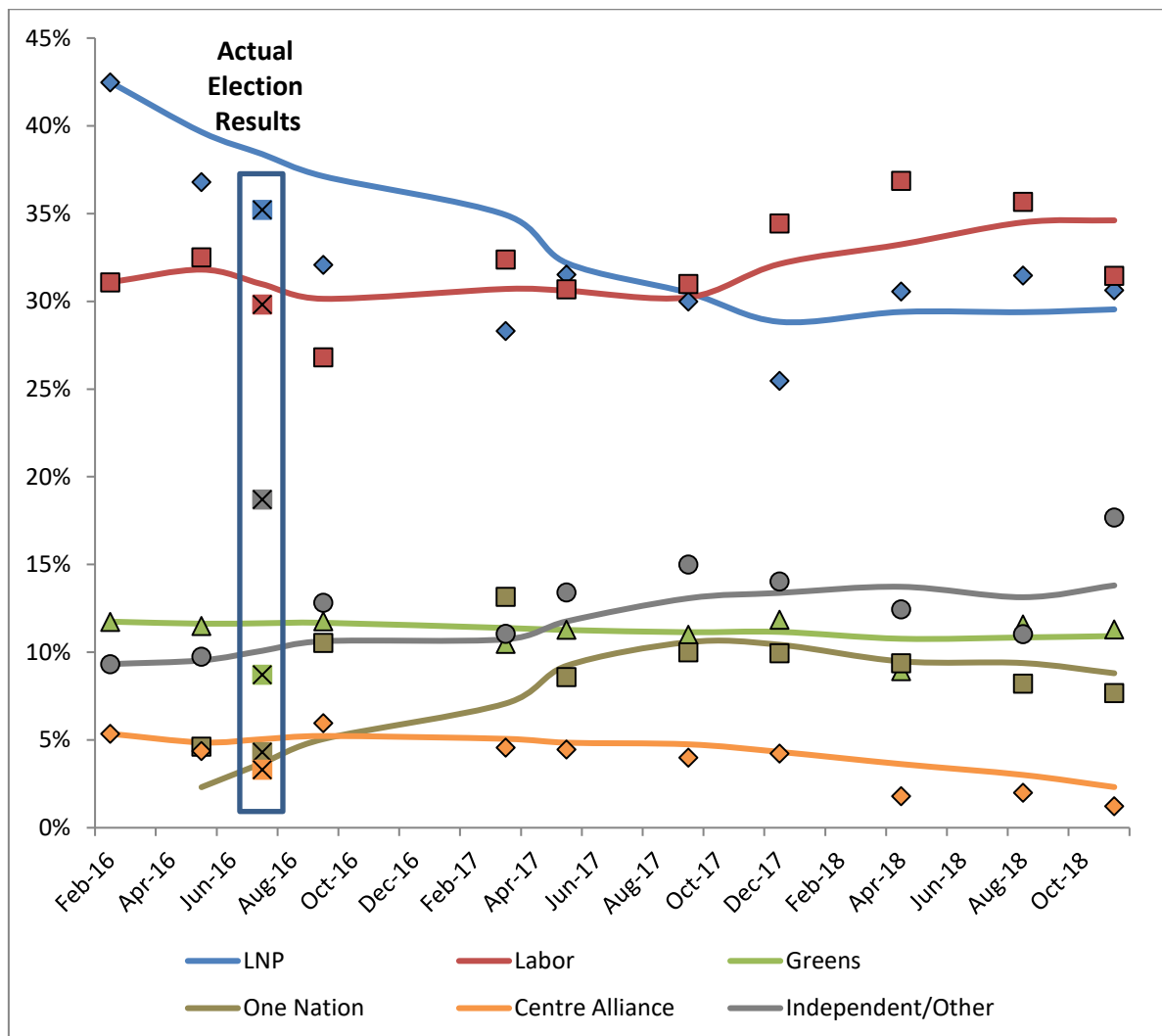


Polling results

The results of our November 2018 poll show a fall in support for Labor, the LNP, One Nation, the Greens and Centre Alliance, with a 5.6 percentage point increase in Independent/Other making up the difference. We suspect that the recent, high-profile win of independent Kerry Phelp in Wentworth contributed to this result.

The rolling average shows little change in LNP, Labor or Greens polling, with a small decline for One Nation and Centre Alliance.

Figure 2: National Senate polling (individual results and rolling average)



Note: Markers indicate the results of individual polls, with the line showing the rolling four-poll average. "Independent/Other" here includes Liberal Democrats, United Australia Party, Australian Conservatives, Jacqui Lambie Network and Derryn Hinch's Justice Party.

Analysis

On the range of likely Senate results presented here, either a Labor or Coalition government would have to cooperate with some portion of the crossbench.

While the last federal election was a double dissolution election, it is important to note this next election is a half-Senate election only, which doubles the quota – making it more difficult for minor parties and independents in particular.

It is particularly challenging to make Senate election predictions as this is the first half-Senate election held under the new voting laws.

A Coalition–Greens outright majority is likely but not guaranteed. A Labor–Greens outright majority is not likely.

A Coalition government that could not win the support of the Greens or Labor would have to win the support of at least one of One Nation and Centre Alliance, maybe both, and maybe other crossbenchers.

A Labor government that could not win the support of the Coalition would have to win the support of the Greens. Our range of likely Senate results leaves no other path through the crossbench. However, the Greens alone would not be enough. At best, Labor and the Greens would only need one other crossbencher. However, in the more likely case that two or more crossbenchers are needed, either Centre Alliance or One Nation support would be the most likely sources for additional votes.

As a more centrist party than One Nation, this places Centre Alliance in the likely balance of power position in the next Senate, regardless of which party wins power – especially if they win a third seat in South Australia.

Paths to passage: The types of crossbench

Political parties may aim for a majority in the Senate, but these have been atypical in the post-war period, and occurred only once since the Senate reforms of the 1980s.

This focus on majority risks distracting us from the diversity of minority Senates, which take at least four distinct forms each with their own character:

- A. The Opposition has majority control of the Senate, leaving the government with no option but to negotiate with them.
- B. The government can pass legislation with the support of one crossbench party/independent.
- C. The government can pass legislation with the support of multiple crossbench parties/independents.
- D. The government can pass legislation with the support of one crossbench party, *or* without that party with the support of other parties/independents.

Each scenario has occurred within the last decade:

- A. After the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007, the 2005–2008 Senate continued to sit until 30 June 2008. As such, the Labor government required the support of the Opposition, which had a majority.
- B. In the 2011–2014 Senate, the Labor government required the support of the nine Greens senators to pass legislation rejected by the Opposition.
- C. In the 2008–2011 Senate, the Labor government with the Greens did not have enough votes. The only option for legislation rejected by the Opposition was to win the support of multiple crossbench parties/independents.
- D. In the 2014–2016 and 2016–2019 Senates, the Coalition government has required either the support of the Greens or of a combination of other parties/independents (when Labor opposes the legislation).²

Because Senates with diverse crossbenches are often described as chaotic or opportunistic, they can be dismissed as difficult to work with. However, a majority

² In the period between Cory Bernardi leaving the Coalition and Lucy Gichuhi joining it, one additional party or independent was required on top of the support of the Greens (i.e., Scenario C).

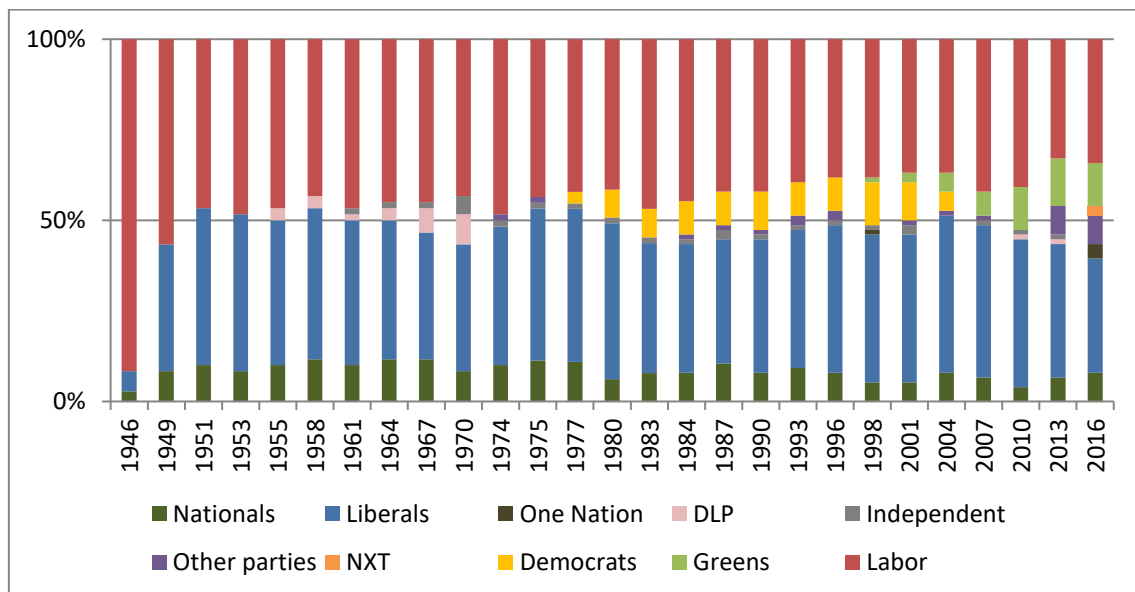
Senate comes along once a generation. In the interim, a large and varied crossbench like that found in Scenario D actually gives government the most options:

1. Work with the Opposition
2. Work with a large crossbench party or block, like the DLP, Democrats or (most recently) the Greens
3. Build agreement between other crossbench parties and independents, like Centre Alliance, One Nation, Australian Conservatives, etc.

This is the situation that the current Coalition government has been in for most of both of its terms, and at times the government has railed against the crossbench when it has refused to pass the government’s preferred legislation.

As shown in Figure 3, in the post-war period it has been common for a single cross-bench party to hold the balance of power. The 2013 and 2016 elections represent a shift to a bigger and more diverse crossbench.

Figure 3: Senate makeup since World War 2



Note: Senate makeup can change over the course of a term, either as individual senators change or as senators change party affiliation. These categories have necessarily collapsed some other parties like the Country Liberal Party.

Note: The year marks the year of their election. In some cases the newly-elected Senate’s term does not begin until the year after their election.

Appendix 1: Polling

Roughly every four months, The Australia Institute conducts a national survey online through Research Now with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory. Respondents are asked how they intend to vote in the Senate. Those who are undecided are asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention figures.

Always included in the question are the Liberal and National parties (“LNP”), the Labor Party, the Greens, the Centre Alliance, the Jacqui Lambie Network and Independent/Other. “LNP” includes separate responses for Liberal and National.

Other political parties have been included in some polls, depending on their representation in the Senate, their results in other polls, and other considerations.

- Pauline Hanson’s One Nation has been included in polls since May 2016
- Australian Conservatives have been included in polls since May 2017
- The Liberal Democrats were included in the May 2017 and August 2018 polls
- Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party has been included since May 2017
- The United Australia Party has been included since August 2018

As well as the quarterly Research Now poll, we sometimes conduct additional targeted polling. These results are included where appropriate.

Table 5: Polls

Date	Company	Respondents	Notes
February 2016	Research Now	1,412	
May–June 2016	Research Now	1,437	
September 2016	Research Now	1,443	
March 2017	Research Now	1,420	
April–May 2017	Research Now	1,408	
September 2017	Research Now	1,421	
December 2017	Research Now	1,417	
March 2018	Reachtel		Tasmania-only; phone polling
April 2018	Research Now	1,557	
August 2018	Research Now	1,449	
November 2018	Research Now	1,459	

Appendix 2: November 2018 poll

The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,459 people in November 2018 online through Research Now with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory. Results are shown only for larger states.

Which party are you intending to vote for in the Senate (upper house)?

	Total	NSW	Qld	Vic	WA
Liberal / National Coalition	27%	26%	31%	23%	30%
Labor	28%	26%	23%	32%	27%
Greens	9%	10%	7%	10%	9%
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	7%	7%	8%	7%	5%
Centre Alliance (formerly the Nick Xenophon Team)	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Australian Conservatives	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%
United Australia Party (Clive Palmer's new party)	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Liberal Democratic Party	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Jacqui Lambie Network	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Independent/Other	7%	8%	7%	5%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	17%	19%	18%	22%

If you're not sure, to which of the following do you have a leaning?

	Total	NSW	Qld	Vic	WA
Liberal / National Coalition	23%	22%	23%	28%	22%
Labor	22%	14%	25%	20%	34%
Greens	12%	10%	16%	13%	16%
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	5%	5%	9%	3%	3%
Centre Alliance (formerly the Nick Xenophon Team)	1%	1%	0%	3%	0%
Australian Conservatives	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%
United Australia Party (Clive Palmer's new party)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Liberal Democratic Party	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Jacqui Lambie Network	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%
Independent/Other	32%	44%	25%	28%	22%