

Polling - The Australian Senate

March 2022

Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed nationally representative samples of 1,000 Australians for their views on the Australian Senate, and the principle of proportional representation.

The results show that:

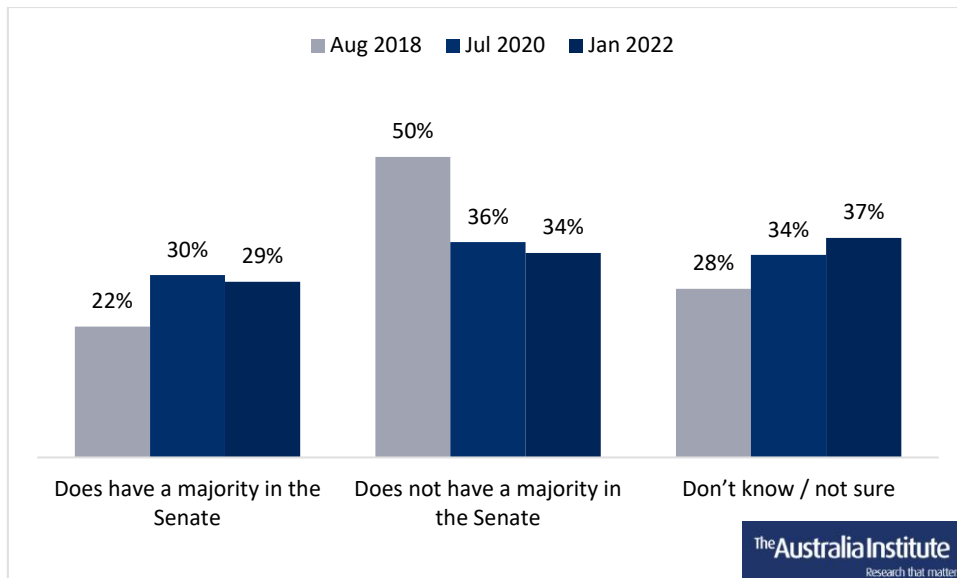
- Respondents were asked whether the Coalition Government has a majority in the Senate. Respondents are somewhat more likely to select the correct answer, that it does not have a majority in the Senate (34%) than the incorrect answer (29%).
- Australians are as likely to say it is better if the Government has a Senate majority (33%) as to say it is better if it does not (32%).
- One in two Australians (50%) agree that the Senate should choose an Independent or minor party senator to be its president.
- Six in 10 Australians (63%) agree that when the Senate and the Government disagree on whether the Government has to hand over information, the Senate should insist on its interpretation.
- Seven in 10 Australians (71%) agree that the Senate should use its powers to make reports written for the Government by private consultants public.
- 46% of Australians agree that the Senate should refuse to hold a vote on bills that the House of Representatives passes if the House of Representatives is refusing to hold a vote on a bill that the Senate passed, while 27% disagree.
- When given two options for elections in the House of Representatives, 34% prefer that a party should win seats proportional to the overall number of votes that it receives, while 44% prefer the status quo.

Senate majority

Respondents were asked whether the Coalition Government has a majority in the Senate. Respondents were somewhat more likely to select the correct answer, that it does not have a majority in the Senate (34%) than the incorrect answer (29%).

When the Australia Institute first asked this question in 2018, respondents were significantly more likely to give the correct answer (50%). The increase in confusion about the Senate balance of power may reflect that the crossbench is smaller now than it was in 2018.

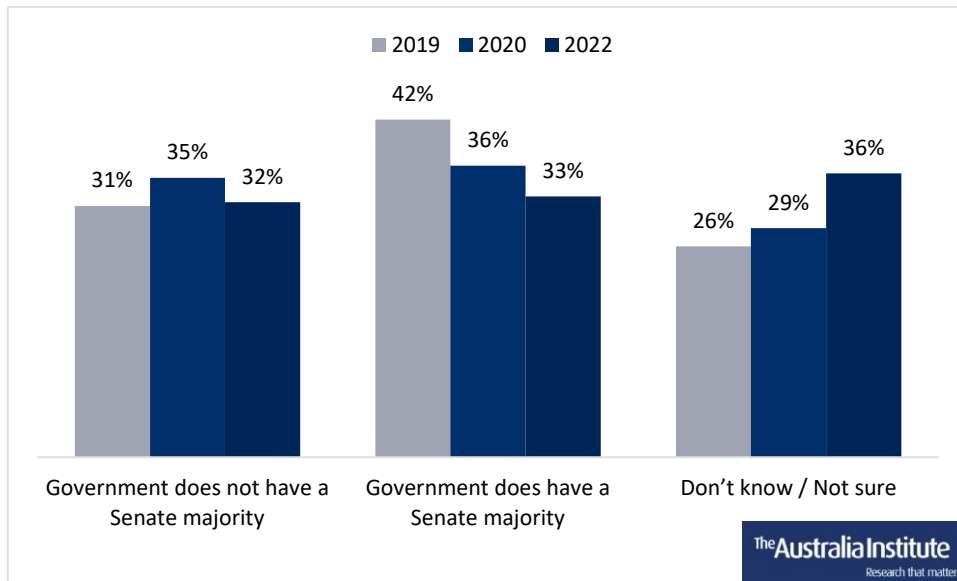
Figure 1: Does the Coalition Government currently have a majority in the Senate?



Australians were also asked whether, in their view, it is better for Australia for the Government of the day to have or to not have a Senate majority.

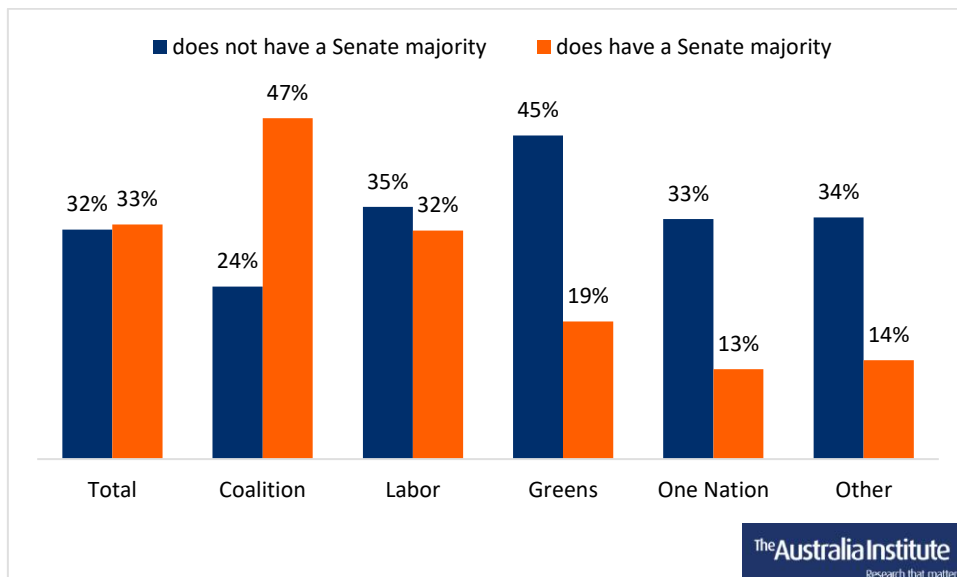
Australians were as likely to say it is better if the Government has a Senate majority (33%) as to say it is better if it does not (32%). This is a change since the question was first asked in 2019, when 31% said it was better if the Government does not have a Senate majority and 42% said it was better if the Government does have a Senate majority.

Figure 2: Better for Australia if the Government does or does not have a Senate majority



There were significant differences by voting intention. Looking at voting intention for the Senate specifically, half of Coalition voters (47%) said it is better if the Government of the day has a Senate majority, compared to one in four (24%) who said it is better if it does not have a majority. Among Labor, Greens and Other voters, more said it is better for the Government of the day to not have a Senate majority.

Figure 3: Better if the Government does/does not have a Senate majority



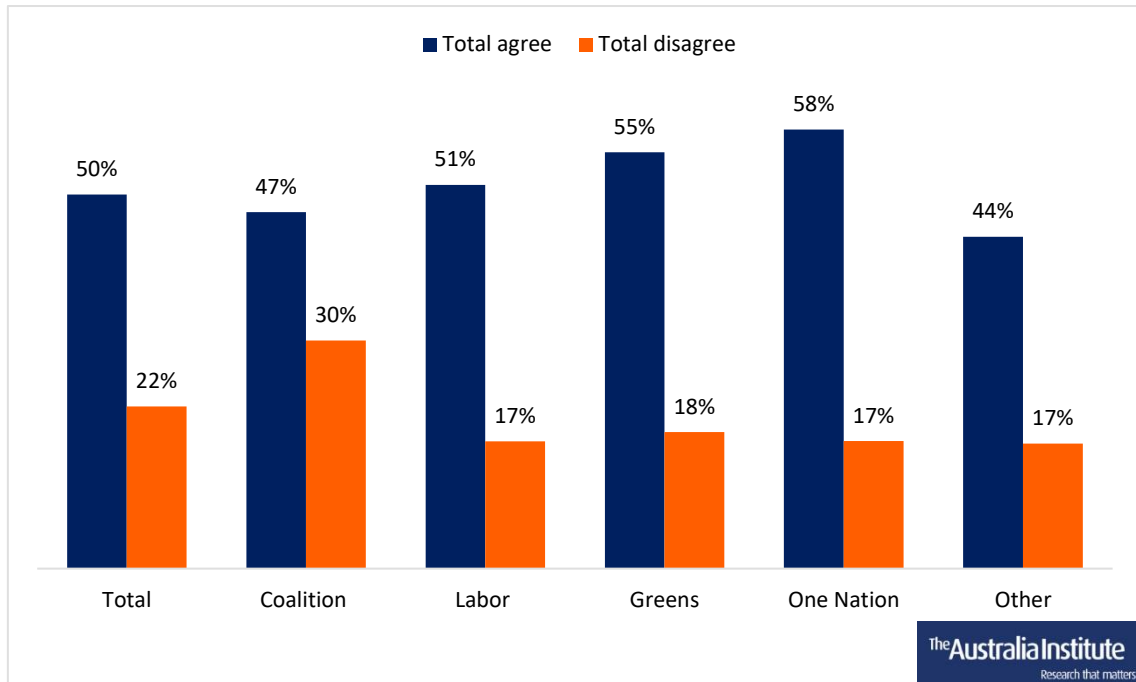
The Australian Senate's use of its powers

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with a series of options for ways in which the Senate could choose to operate.

Asked whether they agree or disagree that the Senate should choose an Independent or minor party senator to be its president, one in two Australians (50%) agree.

- 47% of Coalition, 51% of Labor, 55% of Greens and 58% of One Nation voters agree that the Senate should choose an Independent or minor party senator to be its president.
- Agreement was lowest among Independent/Other voters, with 44% in agreement. 17% disagreed, with a large number answering “Don't know/Not sure”.

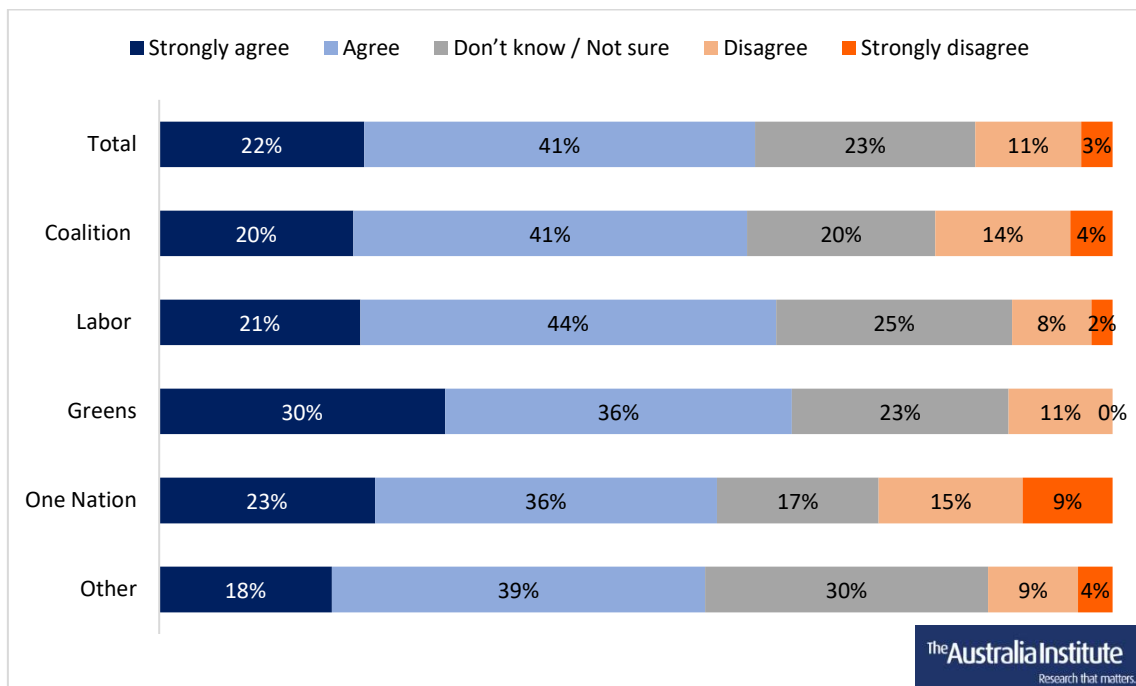
Figure 4: Independent/minor party senator for Senate president, by voting intention



When asked whether, if the Senate and the Government disagree on whether the Government has to hand over information, the Senate should insist on its interpretation, six in 10 Australians (63%) agree.

- 62% of Coalition, 65% of Labor, 66% of Greens, 58% of One Nation and 57% of Independent/Other voters agree that if the Senate and the Government disagree on whether the Government has to hand over information, the Senate should insist on its interpretation.

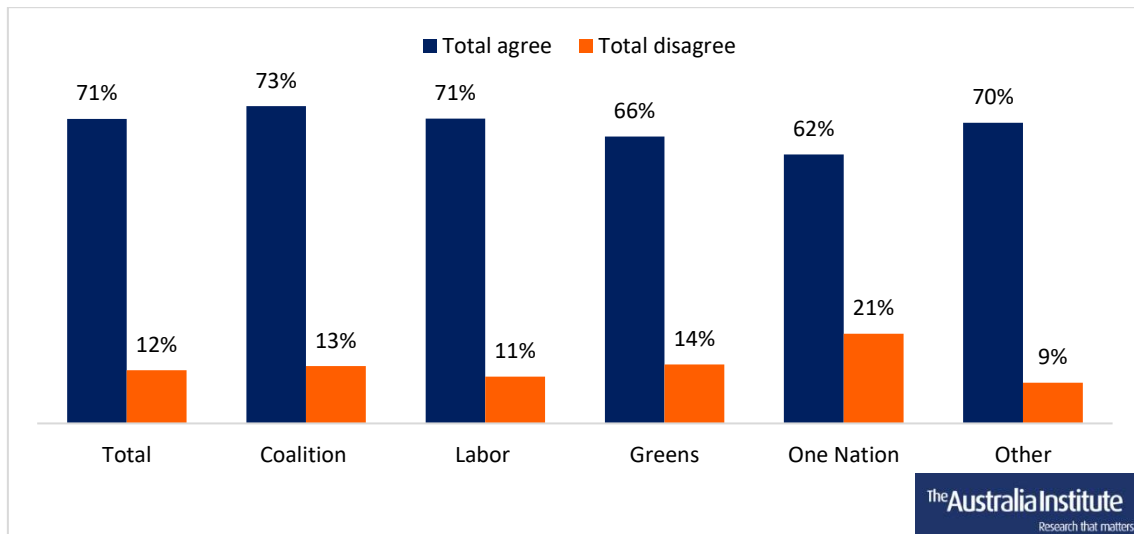
Figure 5: Senate should insist on its interpretation of privilege, by voting intention



When asked whether the Senate should use its powers to make reports written for the Government by private consultants public, seven in 10 Australians (71%) agree.

- 73% of Coalition, 71% of Labor, 66% of Greens, 62% of One Nation and 70% of Independent/Other voters agree that the Senate should use its powers to make reports written for the Government by private consultants public.
- This proposal is at the heart of a 2021 Australia Institute paper, *Talk isn't cheap*.¹

Figure 6: Make private consultant reports for Government public, by voting intention

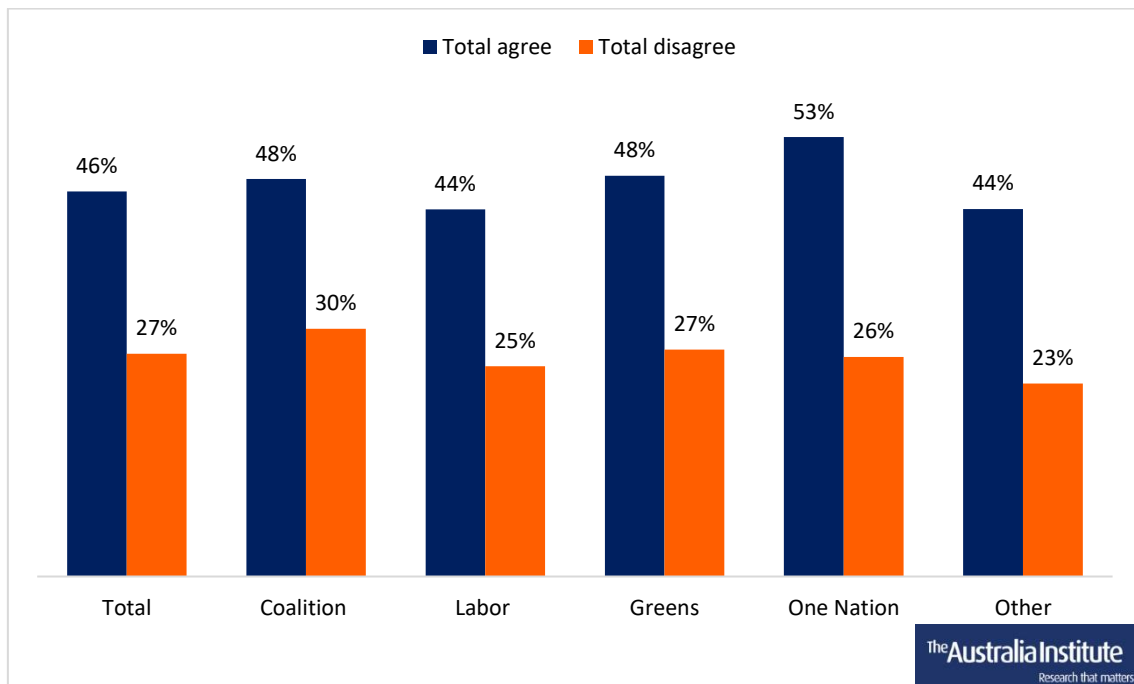


¹ Browne (2021) *Talk isn't cheap*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/talk-isnt-cheap/>

When asked whether the Senate should refuse to hold a vote on bills that the House of Representatives passes if the House of Representatives is refusing to hold a vote on a bill that the Senate passed, 46% of Australians agree, with 27% disagreeing.

- 48% of Coalition, 44% of Labor, 48% of Greens, 53% of One Nation and 44% of Independent/Other voters agree that the Senate should refuse to hold a vote on bills that the House of Representatives passes if the House of Representatives is refusing to hold a vote on a bill that the Senate passed.

Figure 7: Senate should hold up bills if House refuses to vote on a Senate bill, by voting intention



Preferred model for House of Representatives elections

Respondents were then asked about their preferred model of representation for the House of Representatives. Respondents were presented with two options:

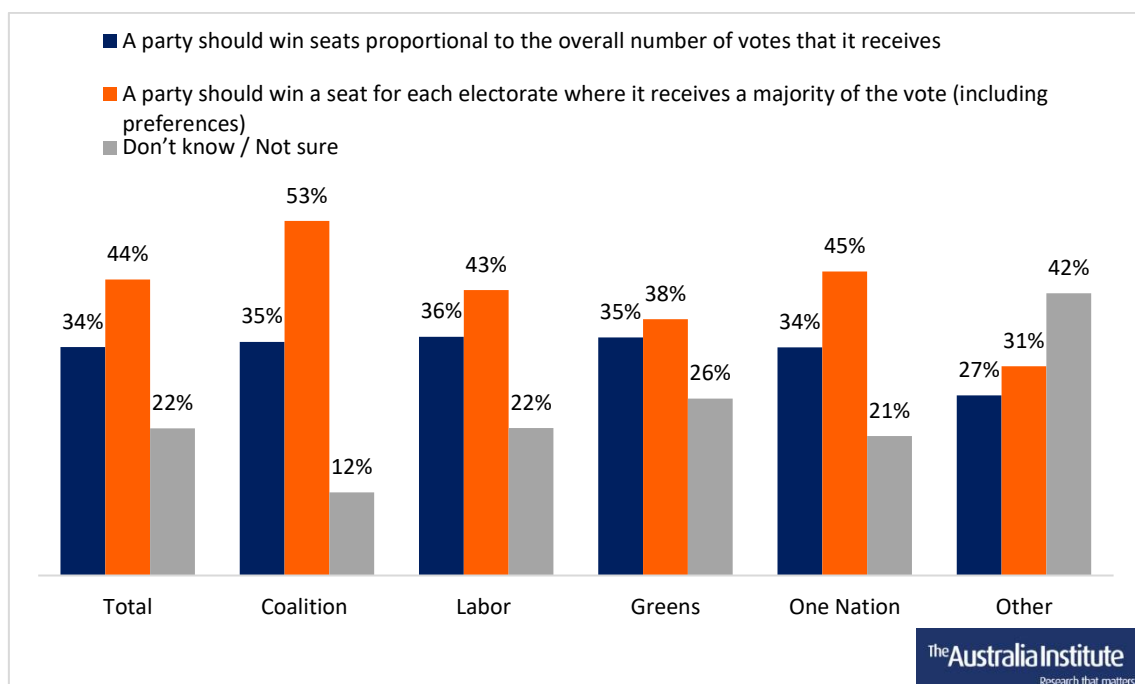
- A party should win seats proportional to the overall number of votes that it receives; or
- A party should win a seat for each electorate where it receives a majority of the vote (including preferences).

The latter is the status quo, although respondents were not told this when presented with the option in order to reduce status quo bias (of course, many respondents would have already known this).

One third of Australians (34%) would prefer that a party should win seats proportional to the overall number of votes that it receives in the House of Representatives. 44% of Australians would prefer that a party should win a seat for each electorate where it receives a majority of the vote (including preferences).

- The status quo was preferred to proportional representation by all voting intentions, although the margin was greatest for Coalition voters (53% status quo, 35% proportional) and narrowest for Greens voters (38% status quo, 35% proportional).
- Among voting intentions, it was only Coalition voters where more than half preferred the status quo to proportional voting.

Figure 8: Preference for House of Representatives elections, by voting intention



Method

The Australia Institute surveyed 1,000 adults living in Australia on 14 to 17 January 2021 and 1,000 adults living in Australia on 25 to 28 January, online through Dynata's panel, with nationally representative samples by gender, age and region.

The results were weighted by three variables (gender, age group and state/territory) based on the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data, using the raking method. This resulted in an effective sample size of 970 (14 to 17 January poll) and 910 (25 to 28 January poll).

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is 3%.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting intention questions appeared just after the initial demographic questions, before policy questions. Lower house voting intention was asked first, followed by upper house voting intention.

Respondents who answered "Don't know / Not sure" for voting intention questions were then asked a leaning question.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. "Coalition" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" refers to Independent/Other.



**Australian
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Detailed results (14 to 17 January)

What follows are statements about whether and in what circumstances the Senate (the upper house of the Australian Parliament) should use its powers. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

The Senate should choose an independent or minor party senator to be its president.

| | Total | Male | Female | NSW | VIC | QLD | WA |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 18% | 22% | 14% | 20% | 17% | 18% | 16% |
| Agree | 32% | 31% | 33% | 31% | 29% | 34% | 39% |
| Disagree | 15% | 19% | 12% | 16% | 15% | 14% | 11% |
| Strongly disagree | 7% | 7% | 6% | 7% | 8% | 6% | 6% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 29% | 21% | 35% | 26% | 31% | 27% | 28% |

| | Total | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Strongly agree | 18% | 24% | 20% | 18% | 15% | 15% |
| Agree | 32% | 34% | 37% | 35% | 24% | 31% |
| Disagree | 15% | 15% | 15% | 13% | 14% | 20% |
| Strongly disagree | 7% | 5% | 4% | 6% | 9% | 8% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 29% | 23% | 24% | 29% | 38% | 27% |

| | Total | Coalition | Labor | Greens | PHON | Other |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| Strongly agree | 18% | 15% | 16% | 25% | 26% | 20% |
| Agree | 32% | 32% | 36% | 30% | 32% | 25% |
| Disagree | 15% | 21% | 13% | 13% | 11% | 10% |
| Strongly disagree | 7% | 10% | 4% | 5% | 6% | 7% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 29% | 22% | 32% | 26% | 25% | 39% |

If the Senate and the Government disagree on whether the Government has to hand over information, the Senate should insist on its interpretation.

| | Total | Male | Female | NSW | VIC | QLD | WA |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 22% | 27% | 17% | 19% | 21% | 28% | 21% |
| Agree | 41% | 40% | 41% | 44% | 42% | 38% | 38% |
| Disagree | 11% | 12% | 11% | 13% | 10% | 9% | 11% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 4% | 3% | 4% | 4% | 2% | 1% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 23% | 17% | 28% | 20% | 23% | 23% | 29% |

| | Total | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Strongly agree | 22% | 20% | 24% | 16% | 24% | 24% |
| Agree | 41% | 45% | 39% | 47% | 34% | 42% |
| Disagree | 11% | 13% | 13% | 11% | 10% | 9% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 1% | 3% | 2% | 5% | 4% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 23% | 20% | 21% | 24% | 27% | 22% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>PHON</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| Strongly agree | 22% | 20% | 21% | 30% | 23% | 18% |
| Agree | 41% | 41% | 44% | 36% | 36% | 39% |
| Disagree | 11% | 14% | 8% | 11% | 15% | 9% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 4% | 2% | 0% | 9% | 4% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 23% | 20% | 25% | 23% | 17% | 30% |

If the Government pays private consultants to write reports, the Senate should use its powers to make those reports public.

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 29% | 36% | 23% | 28% | 30% | 33% | 25% |
| Agree | 42% | 39% | 44% | 43% | 39% | 42% | 48% |
| Disagree | 9% | 10% | 8% | 11% | 9% | 6% | 6% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 4% | 4% | 0% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 17% | 11% | 22% | 15% | 17% | 14% | 21% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Strongly agree | 29% | 24% | 25% | 25% | 32% | 37% |
| Agree | 42% | 37% | 45% | 41% | 38% | 45% |
| Disagree | 9% | 18% | 10% | 10% | 5% | 6% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 3% | 4% | 3% | 5% | 2% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 17% | 18% | 16% | 21% | 19% | 11% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>PHON</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| Strongly agree | 29% | 26% | 30% | 30% | 32% | 31% |
| Agree | 42% | 47% | 41% | 36% | 30% | 38% |
| Disagree | 9% | 10% | 8% | 10% | 13% | 7% |
| Strongly disagree | 3% | 3% | 3% | 4% | 8% | 3% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 17% | 13% | 19% | 20% | 17% | 21% |

If the House of Representatives is refusing to hold a vote on a bill that the Senate passed, the Senate should refuse to hold a vote on bills that the House of Representatives passes.

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Strongly agree | 15% | 18% | 13% | 15% | 13% | 17% | 16% |
| Agree | 31% | 33% | 29% | 33% | 29% | 26% | 38% |
| Disagree | 18% | 19% | 17% | 17% | 21% | 18% | 12% |
| Strongly disagree | 9% | 9% | 9% | 11% | 10% | 10% | 2% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 27% | 20% | 32% | 24% | 26% | 28% | 32% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Strongly agree | 15% | 22% | 19% | 8% | 16% | 15% |
| Agree | 31% | 35% | 34% | 37% | 22% | 28% |
| Disagree | 18% | 18% | 18% | 19% | 16% | 19% |
| Strongly disagree | 9% | 3% | 5% | 8% | 12% | 14% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 27% | 23% | 24% | 28% | 34% | 25% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>PHON</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| Strongly agree | 15% | 14% | 13% | 20% | 25% | 16% |
| Agree | 31% | 34% | 31% | 28% | 28% | 28% |
| Disagree | 18% | 18% | 19% | 19% | 17% | 13% |
| Strongly disagree | 9% | 12% | 6% | 8% | 9% | 10% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 27% | 22% | 31% | 25% | 21% | 33% |

Thinking about elections for the House of Representatives (the lower house of the Australian Parliament), which principle would you prefer?

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| A party should win seats proportional to the overall number of votes that it receives | 34% | 36% | 33% | 32% | 35% | 36% | 31% |
| A party should win a seat for each electorate where it receives a majority of the vote (including preferences) | 44% | 50% | 39% | 50% | 41% | 46% | 41% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 22% | 14% | 28% | 19% | 24% | 19% | 28% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| A party should win seats proportional to the overall number of votes that it receives | 34% | 37% | 38% | 29% | 29% | 39% |
| A party should win a seat for each electorate where it receives a majority of the vote (including preferences) | 44% | 39% | 41% | 42% | 47% | 49% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 22% | 24% | 21% | 28% | 23% | 13% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>PHON</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| A party should win seats proportional to the overall number of votes that it receives | 34% | 35% | 36% | 35% | 34% | 27% |
| A party should win a seat for each electorate where it receives a majority of the vote (including preferences) | 44% | 53% | 43% | 38% | 45% | 31% |
| Don't know/Not sure | 22% | 12% | 22% | 26% | 21% | 42% |

Detailed results (25 to 28 January)

If the government of the day does not have a majority in the Senate, it must gain support from other Senators in order to pass legislation into law.

In your view, is it better for Australia if the government of the day

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| does not have a Senate majority and must seek support from other Senators to pass legislation. | 32% | 37% | 28% | 30% | 34% | 30% | 34% |
| does have a Senate majority and can pass legislation itself. | 33% | 38% | 28% | 36% | 37% | 29% | 23% |
| Don't know / Not sure | 36% | 25% | 44% | 34% | 30% | 42% | 43% |

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>One Nation</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| does not have a Senate majority and must seek support from other Senators to pass legislation. | 32% | 24% | 35% | 45% | 33% | 34% |
| does have a Senate majority and can pass legislation itself. | 33% | 47% | 32% | 19% | 13% | 14% |
| Don't know / Not sure | 36% | 29% | 33% | 36% | 54% | 53% |

We will tell you the correct answer to the following question afterwards.

To the best of your knowledge, does the Coalition Government currently have a majority in the Senate, and can pass legislation by itself? Or does it not have a majority in the Senate, and need support from other Senators to pass legislation?

The Coalition Government currently

| | <i>Total</i> | Male | Female | NSW | VIC | QLD | WA |
|---|--------------|------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Does have a majority in the Senate | 29% | 30% | 29% | 28% | 30% | 31% | 29% |
| Does not have a majority in the Senate | 34% | 41% | 28% | 33% | 37% | 29% | 33% |
| Don't know / not sure | 37% | 29% | 43% | 39% | 32% | 40% | 38% |

| | <i>Total</i> | Coalition | Labor | Greens | One Nation | Other |
|---|--------------|-----------|-------|--------|------------|-------|
| Does have a majority in the Senate | 29% | 32% | 30% | 24% | 31% | 23% |
| Does not have a majority in the Senate | 34% | 38% | 35% | 37% | 17% | 24% |
| Don't know / not sure | 37% | 29% | 35% | 39% | 52% | 53% |