

JSCEM 2025 election inquiry

Response to questions on notice

October 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the inquiry into the 2025 federal election on 15 October 2025. We were asked to share our polling research into increasing the size of Parliament and familiarity with one's local MP.

We also wanted to take the opportunity to elaborate on a question the chair, Mr Jerome Laxale, asked about our calculations for increasing the number of parliamentarians.

POLLING RESEARCH

The Australia Institute has asked several related questions:

- **Voters' familiarity and comfort with approaching their local MP**, in 2017 and 2022 (published in *It's time ... for more politicians* and *Fortifying Australian democracy*).
- **Support for increasing the number of MPs**, in 2017 (published in *It's time ... for more politicians*)
- **Support for increasing the overall number of senators**, in 2020 (published in *Representative, still*)
- **Support for increasing the number of territory senators specifically**, in 2021 (published in *Fortifying Australian democracy*)

A selection of relevant results and commentary is reproduced below, and the full reports can be found on our website:

Browne (2018) *It's time ... For more politicians*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/its-time-for-more-politicians/>

Browne and Oquist (2021) *Representative, still*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/representative-still-the-role-of-the-senate-in-our-democracy/>

Browne and Shields (2022) *Fortifying Australian democracy*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/fortifying-australian-democracy/>

Relationship with local MP

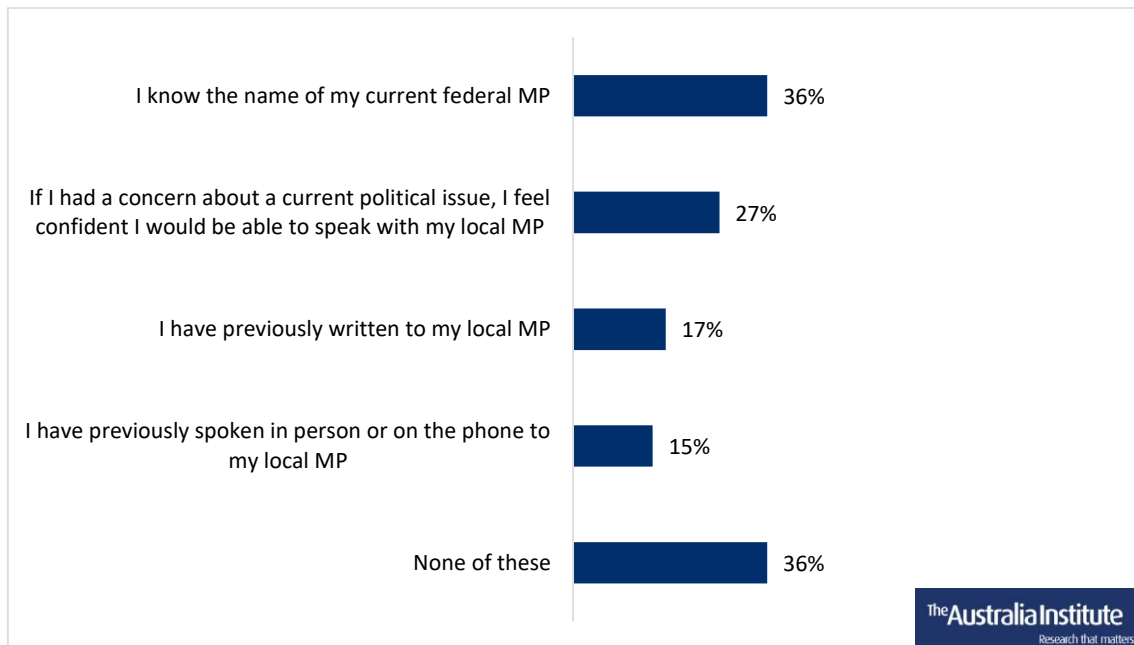
The Australia Institute has asked twice about Australians' relationship with their local MP, most recently in 2022.

Only 15% of Australians had previously spoken to their MP (in person or on the phone), slightly less than the 17% that have written to their local MP.

About one in four Australians (27%) felt confident that if they had a concern about a current political issue, they would be able to speak with their local MP.

Only one in three Australians (36%) said they know the name of their federal MP.

Figure 1: Relationship with local MP (2022 results)



Source: Australia Institute polling research

Increasing the number of MPs

When asked in 2017 if they thought there should be more or fewer parliamentarians, half (50%) of Australians said the number of federal parliamentarians should be decreased. Only 9% said that the number should be increased.

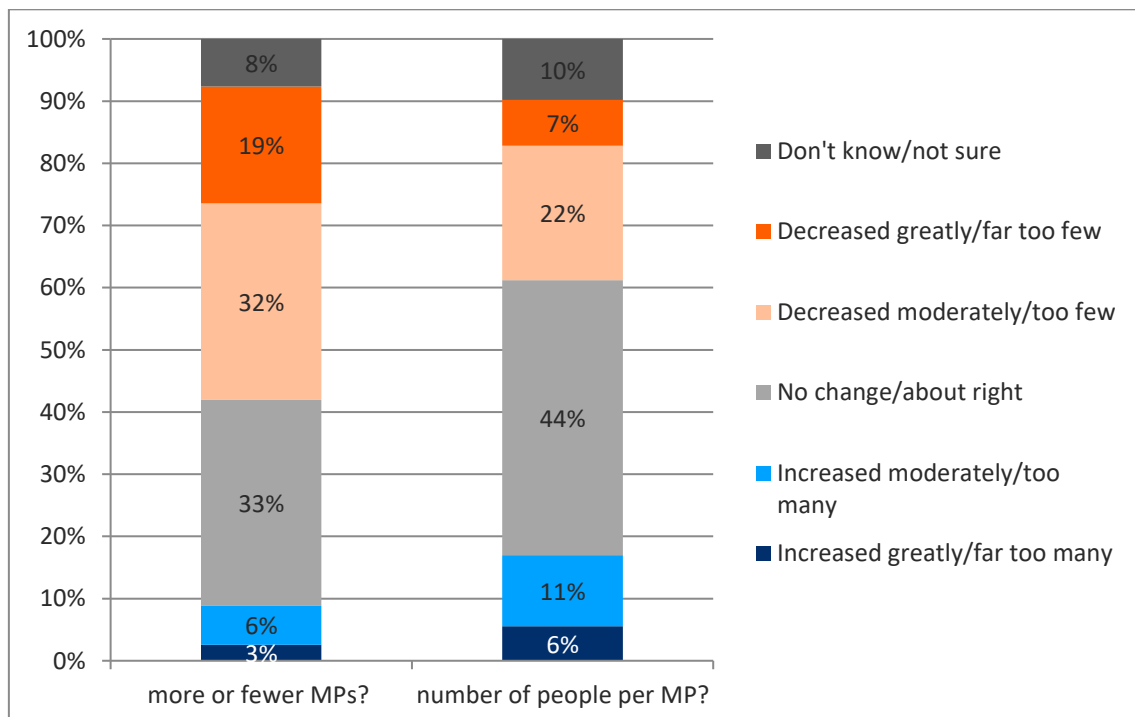
The poll then asked a similar question, posed in reverse. Respondents were told that each member of the House of Representatives is responsible for an electorate of about 100,000 voters. They were then asked if this was too many or too few.

A plurality (29%) said that 100,000 voters per member was too few or far too few. This was a substantial drop from the 50% who thought there should be fewer parliamentarians. It was still higher than the fifth (17%) said it was too many or far too many.

In other words, the additional context of just how many voters each member is responsible for did shift public opinion, albeit not decisively.

The figure below compares the results from each question.

Figure 2: Whether Australia should have more or fewer MPs and whether 100,000 voters per MP is too few or too many (2017 results)



Sources: The Australia Institute (2017) *April–May 2017 polling*

Increasing the number of senators

In 2020 polling research, respondents were told that there are about 220,000 enrolled voters for each federal senator, and were then asked if they thought that 220,000 enrolled voters were too many, too few or about right.

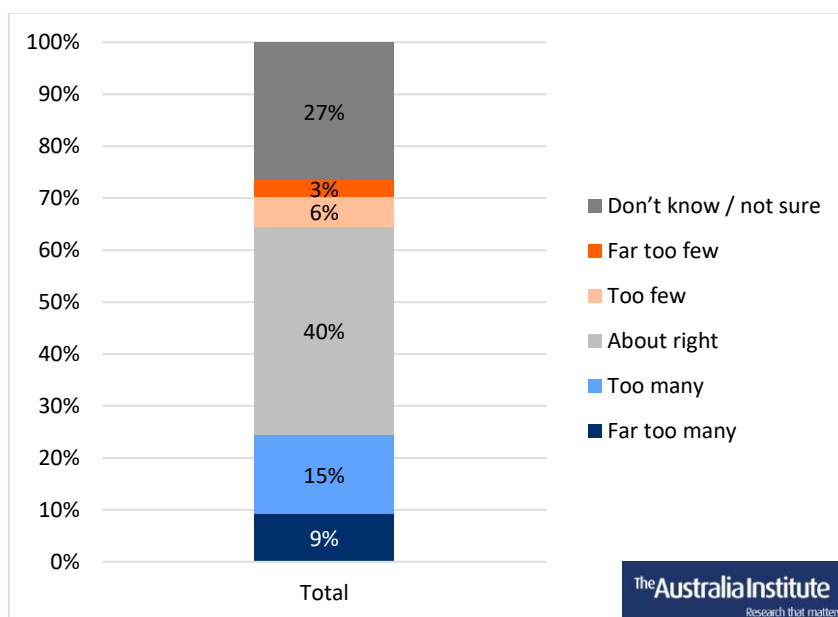
The single most popular response was that this number was about right (40%). More respondents said that this was too many voters per senator (24%) than said it was too few voters per senator (9%).

Interestingly, this is significantly different to the 2017 result regarding the House of Representatives (discussed above). Then, 17% said that there are too many enrolled voters per MP (at 100,000 per MP) compared to 29% who said that there are too few per MP.

This dramatic change may reflect that one question asked about the House of Representatives and the other about the Senate, or that opinions changed between 2017 and 2020 (or both). The sheer larger number of enrolled voters per senator compared to per member of the House of Representatives may also have influenced responses.

Regardless, it is interesting that Australians were more likely to say that senators are stretched too thin than MPs – given that constitutional reform has historically tried to break the “nexus” in order to have more MPs rather than more senators.

Figure 3: Is 220,000 enrolled voters per senator too many or too few?



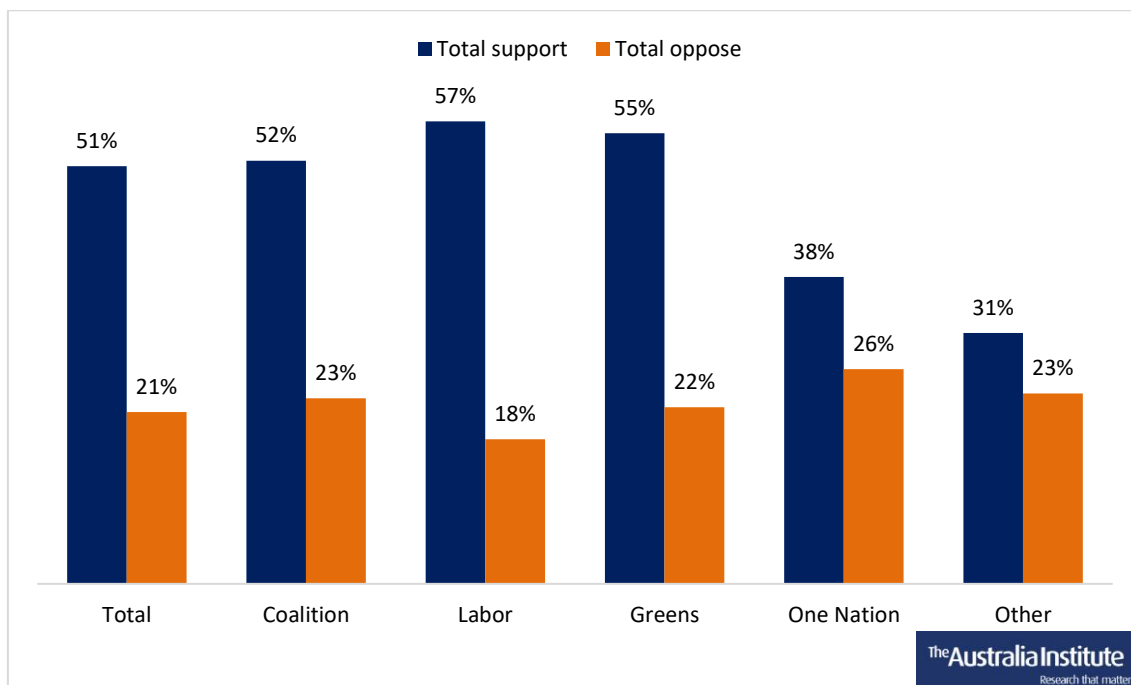
Increasing the number of territory senators

In a 2021 national poll, respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose an increase in the number of senators each territory elects from 2 to 4.

The question explained that every state elects 12 senators to the Australian Senate, but the ACT and the Northern Territory only elect 2 each.

One in two (51%) Australians supported increasing the number of senators elected by each territory from 2 to 4. One in five (21%) opposed increasing the number of senators each territory elects.

Figure 4: Increasing the number of territory senators from 2 each to 4 (2021 results)

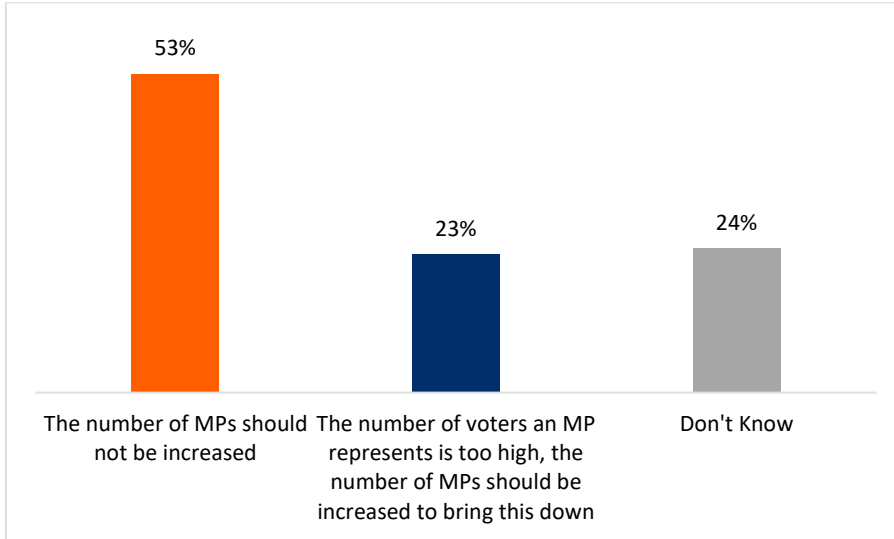


Source: Australia Institute polling research

2025 polling research

While not Australia Institute research, also relevant is DemosAU’s poll of Australians on increasing the size of parliament from earlier this year.¹

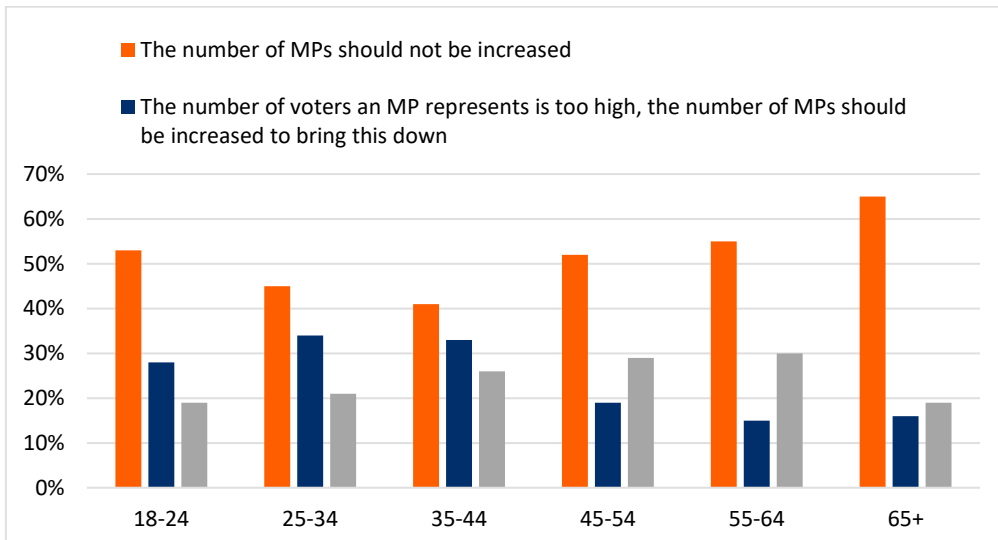
Figure 5: 2025 DemosAU polling on increasing the size of parliament



Source: DemosAU (2025) “Does Federal Parliament Need More MPs?”

Notably, the results show that younger Australians – particularly those aged 25-44 – are the most receptive to increasing the size of the parliament.

Figure 6: 2025 polling, by age group



Source: DemosAU (2025) “Does Federal Parliament Need More MPs?”

¹ DemosAU (2025) “Does Federal Parliament Need More MPs?” <https://demosau.com/news/does-federal-parliament-need-more-mps/>

OPTIONS FOR AN INCREASE IN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Two constitutional rules dictate how the number of parliamentarians can be increased:

1. The number of senators per state must be equal.
2. The number of state MPs in the House of Representatives will be (roughly) double the number of state senators in the Senate (called “the nexus”).²

Currently, there are six states electing 12 senators each, for a total of 72 state senators. That provides 144 state MPs (in the House of Representatives). There are currently 145 due to rounding.

To increase the number of MPs, the government must therefore increase the number of senators. And since only half the senators are elected at any given time, the number of senators per state will likely only be increased by an even number, for example plus 2 (to 14), plus 4 (to 16), plus 6 (to 18) or plus 8 (to 20).

With six states, that means the number of senators would increase by 12, 24, 36 or 48, and therefore the number of MPs would increase by (roughly) 24, 48, 72 or 96, and the overall number of parliamentarians by (roughly) 36, 72, 108 or 144.

Table 1: Options for an increase in the size of Parliament

	Senators per state	At half-Senate election	Total state senators	At half-Senate election	MPs for the states
Current	12	6	72	36	~144
+2 senators/state	14	7	84	42	~168
+4 senators/state	16	8	96	48	~192
+6 senators/state	18	9	108	54	~216
+8 senators/state	20	10	120	60	~240

Note: Only half of all state senators are up for election at any given time – this figure is given in the next column along.

Our recommendation is for the number of MPs to be increase by approximately 50% to bring representation back to 1984 levels – the last time parliament was expanded. This could be achieved through the addition of six senators per state, which would mean 108 senators and roughly 216 MPs across all six states. Territory MPs and senators are handled separately, by legislation.

² *Australian Constitution*, ss 7, 24

A note on territory parliamentarians

Currently the 4 territory senators make 76 senators total and the 5 territory MPs make 150 MPs total.

Because they are provided for separately, the number of territory senators could be increased without an increase in the number of state senators, or vice versa.³

In practice, we believe the number of territory senators should be increased to at least 4 even if there is no change in the overall size of Parliament.

If there *is* an increase in the overall size of Parliament, a further increase in territory senators would be appropriate – perhaps the territory allocation could be set at half as many senators as are received by each state. Since all territory senators are elected at once, there is no problem with there being an odd number per territory (for example, if there are 18 senators per state there could be 9 for the ACT and 9 for the Northern Territory).

³ The number of territory MPs in the House of Representatives would increase proportionately as the number of MPs overall increases, without separate action being required.