

“Get used to it”

Senate projections, Autumn 2018

The Australia Institute’s 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. 1

Bill Browne

May 2018

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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.

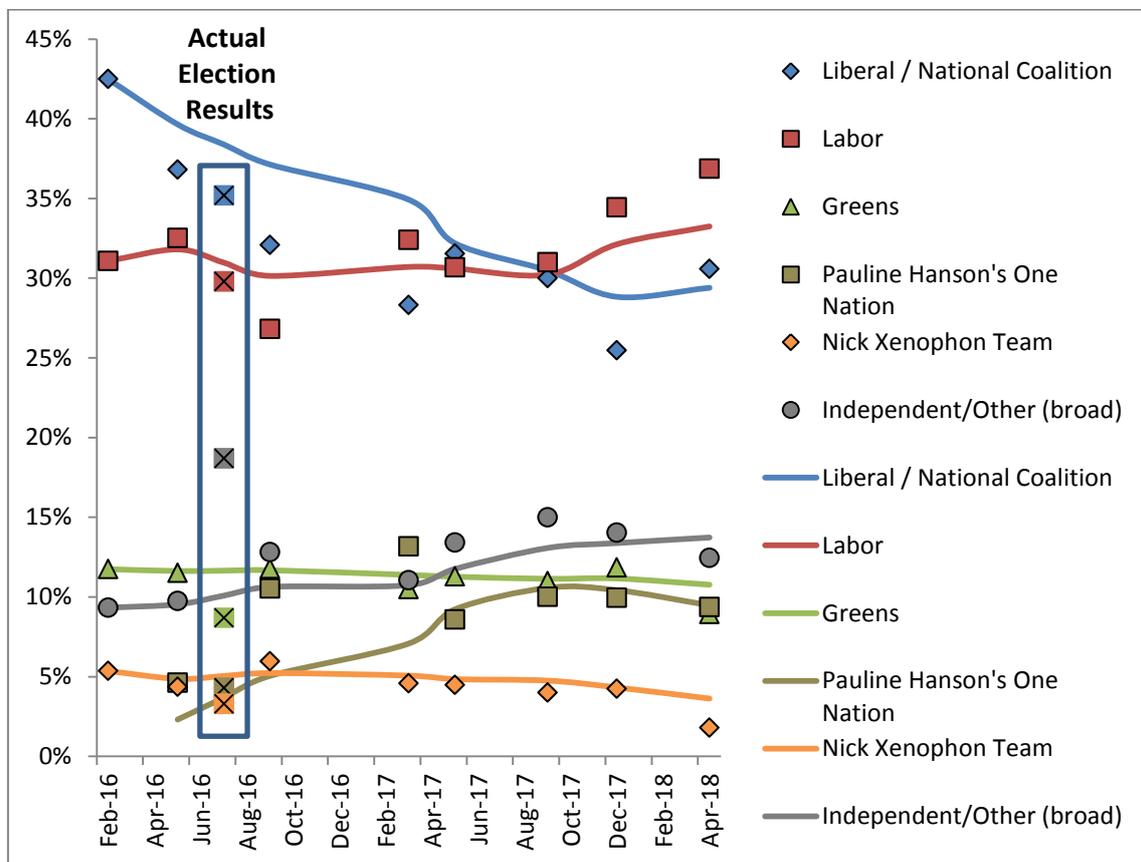
In this new report series, to be released quarterly, we will present and analyse the results of these Senate voting intention polls to project the potential makeup of the Senate following one or more elections.

The first edition of Senate Projections finds that, on current polling, future elections are likely to return a crossbench that is about as large and divided as the current one. A future Coalition government would have to cooperate with the Greens *or* multiple non-Green crossbench parties and independents and a future Labor government would have to cooperate with the Greens *and* multiple non-Green crossbench parties and independents.

Polling results

The results of our April 2018 poll show a continued improvement for the Labor Party’s prospects but an upturn for the LNP at the expense of smaller parties. However, the rolling average shows an ongoing decline for the LNP from its polling high in February 2016, with the Labor Party and independents strengthening their position. One Nation has plateaued since the middle of last year, but it is still polling well above its performance in the July 2016 election.

Figure 1: 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.

Note: Our polling pre-dates the change of name from “Nick Xenophon Team” to “Centre Alliance”. Our next batch of polling will ask about the Centre Alliance, and our Senate projections use the Nick Xenophon Team polling to forecast the results for the Centre Alliance.

Simulation

The Australia Institute uses a model to simulate future Senate elections, based on inputs like polling results, historical performance, likely preference flows, and so on.

As shown in the Senate results ranges below, the Senate is likely to retain a large and diverse crossbench. Our simulations show the LNP able to achieve a majority with either the Greens or multiple non-Green crossbenchers in most cases.

On the other hand, Labor and the Greens together will not be sufficient to reach a Senate majority. The additional cooperation of some crossbenchers would be required.

Of course, the Coalition and the Labor Party voting together would have a majority without any crossbench cooperation.

Table 1: Senate results in the middle half of cases across 1,000 simulations

Party	At 2016	Half-Senate	Two Half-Senates
LNP	30	32–34	30–33
Labor	26	27–28	26–28
Greens	9	7–8	8–10
One Nation	4	3–4	4–6
Centre Alliance	3	3–4	2–3
LDP	1		
Conservatives	1	1	
Lambie	1		0–1
Justice	1		0–1

Model explanation

The Australia Institute conducts quarterly polling of Senate voting intention by state. The most recent four poll results for each party in each state are combined in a rolling average.

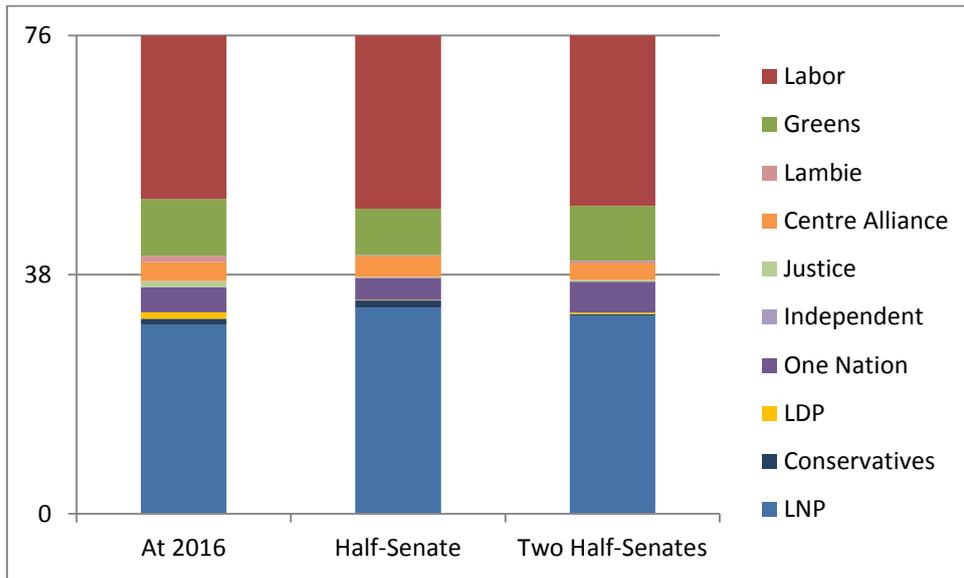
For each of the six Senate seats available in each state (and two available in each territory) at an election, we either assign a party guaranteed to win that seat (if that party is polling above or close to a quota) or we run a simulation to see which party is likely to win that seat. The odds are assigned based on our judgment, informed by the polling, historical performance, likely preference flows, and other factors.

These simulations are run 1,000 times and the results summed to get the percentage chance of different seat outcomes after the next election and the one after.

For example, a party that has a 10% chance in each state of winning a seat could win between zero and six seats in theory. Running the simulation 1,000 times allows us to explore the possibility of them winning zero, one, two or even six seats. In practice, such a party is most likely to win no seats (in just under half of simulations), and it winning five or six seats is extremely unlikely (occurring less than once every 1,000 simulations).

See the appendices for more details.

Figure 2: Average Senate results (1,000 simulations)



Note: The line at 38 seats marks the level required to block legislation. One additional vote (a total of 39) is required to pass legislation.

One Nation in Australian politics

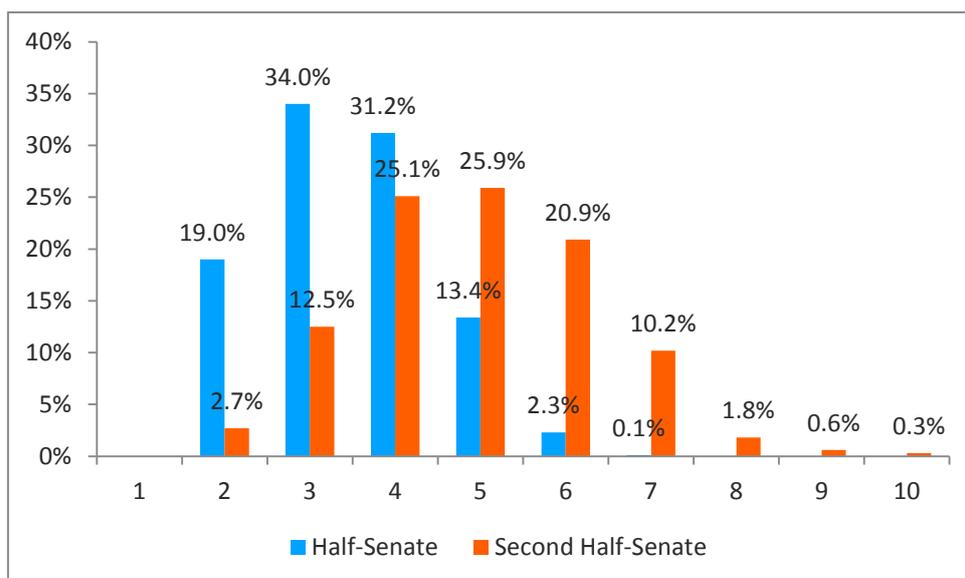
Since we began including One Nation in our polling April 2016, their support grew steadily until reaching a high of 13% in our March 2017 poll. Over the last four polls, their support has stayed within the band of 9–10%. This is about double their result in the July 2016 election.

Partly because of an unfavourable distribution of Senate terms (i.e. most One Nation senators are up for re-election), the party is most likely to have three (34% chance) or four seats (31.2% chance) following the next half-Senate election. In practice, four seats would improve their position by one as Fraser Anning left the party to sit as an independent.

However, there is a wide range of possibilities as they are competitive in several states – including dropping to two seats or increasing to six. By the time the second half-Senate election comes around, if polling remained static, an increased One Nation party room of five is the single most likely outcome (28% chance), with eight or nine senators an outside possibility.

Our worst case, but certainly possible, scenario for One Nation sees them falling to two seats following the next election (winning one in Queensland, combined with Pauline Hanson’s six-year term).

Figure 3: Likelihood of One Nation winning certain amounts of seats after the first and the second half-Senate election (1,000 simulations)



The Greens in the Senate

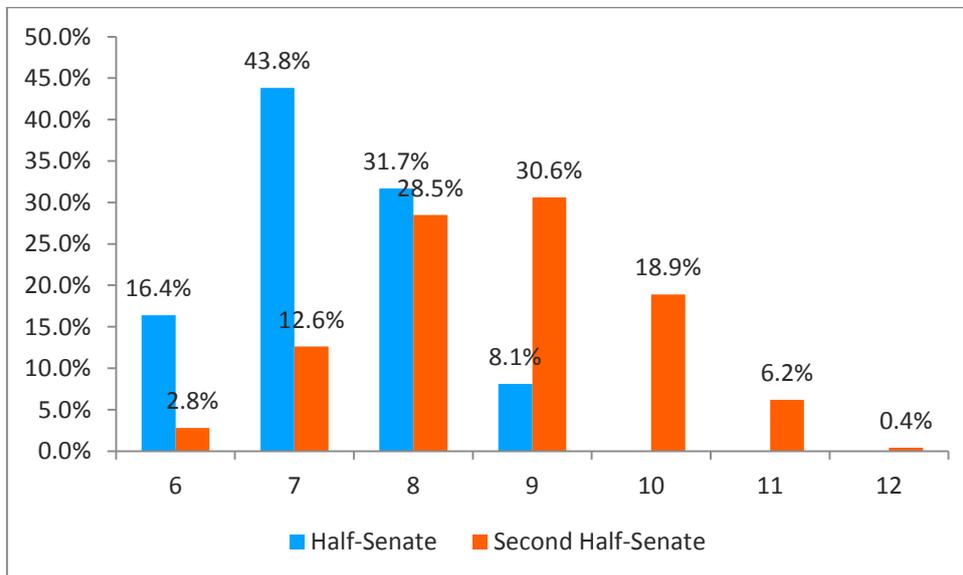
Our polling shows a small decline in the Greens' share of the vote since we began polling Senate intentions in February 2016.

As with One Nation, the Greens are hindered by an unbalanced allocation of three-year-term Senate seats, which means their Senate representation is likely to go backwards at the next half-Senate election.

However, their prospects look better at the subsequent half-Senate election, where nine seats is the single most likely outcome (31% chance). Rather than an improvement in the Greens vote, this reflects a fall in the major party vote, putting more Senate seats in play.

While the next election may result in a fall in Greens representation, in the long term there is no indication that the Greens share of parliamentarians is likely to decline significantly.

Figure 4: Likelihood of the Greens winning certain amounts of seats after the first and the second half-Senate election (1,000 simulations)

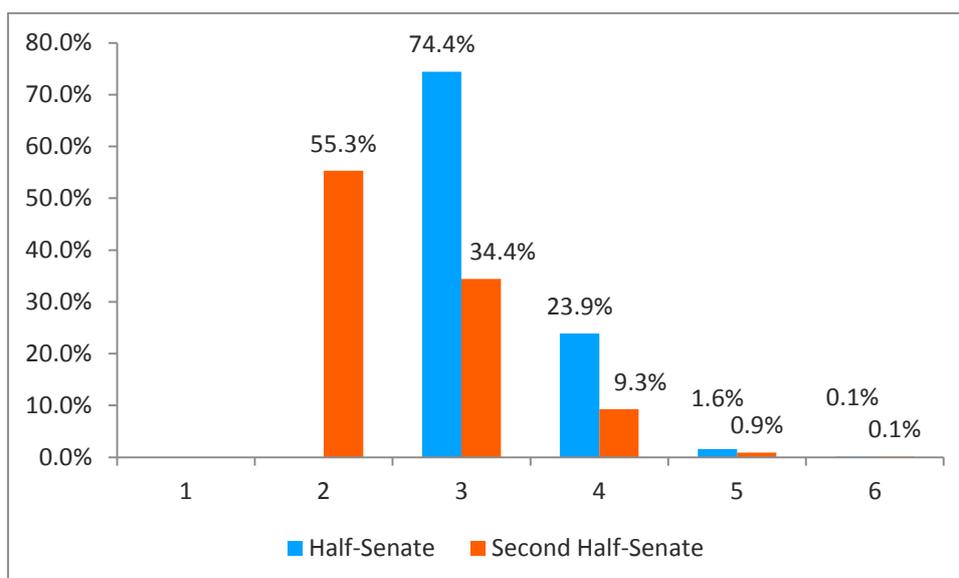


Centre Alliance after Nick Xenophon

The Centre Alliance (formerly the Nick Xenophon Team) faltered in the last poll, dropping to 2% support, but their performance in previous polls has been solid at 4–5%. Our use of a year-long rolling average therefore predicts a better performance for them at subsequent elections than their most recent polls would suggest.

Polling above a quota in South Australia means that our model guarantees the Centre Alliance one seat at each of the next half-Senate elections. The Alliance’s outside chances in NSW, Victoria and Queensland mean that they can potentially pick up more seats, although our model rates their chances as low.

Figure 5: Likelihood of Centre Alliance winning certain amounts of seats after the first and the second half-Senate election (1,000 simulations)



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 Kevin Rudd 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 is in Opposition).¹

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

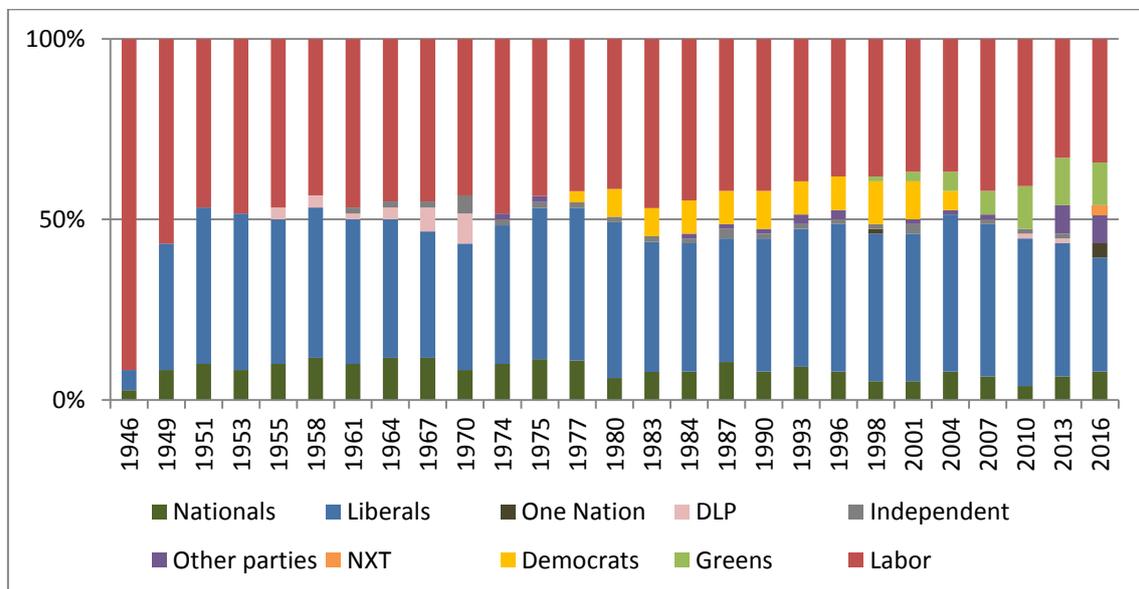
1. Work with the Opposition
2. Work with a large crossbench party or block, like the DLP, Democrats or (most recently) the Greens
3. Build agreement between other crossbench parties and independents, like the Nick Xenophon Team, One Nation, Australian Conservatives, etc.

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.

However, our polling shows a further decline in the major party vote, leaving Scenarios B and C – where the government must negotiate with the Greens or with multiple crossbenchers – as the most likely outcome following a half-Senate election. The mean result across all simulations point to Scenario D in the case of a Coalition government, and Scenario C in the case of a Labor government – after both the first and the second half-Senate elections.

As shown in Figure 6, 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 6: 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.

Among other questions, 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. “LNP” includes separate responses for Liberal and National.

Always included in the question are the Liberal and National parties (“LNP”), the Labor Party, the Greens, the Nick Xenophon Team,² the Jacqui Lambie Network and Independent/Other.

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 poll only
- Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party has been included since May 2017

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

Table 2: 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	

² Renamed to the Centre Alliance after the most recent poll: MacLennan (2018) *Nick Xenophon’s federal party drops his name*, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-10/nick-xenophons-party-drops-his-name/9636598>

Appendix 2: Process

The Senate projections in these documents use a rolling average of the most recent four national polls, which represents about a year of public opinion. The consequence of this rolling average is to dampen the results of any particular poll, particularly for the state-by-state breakdown for which samples are otherwise quite small.

The rolling average for each party in each state is then converted from share of the vote to number of quotas by multiplying it by (number of seats available +1), which is six for a half-Senate election and 12 for a double dissolution. See Table 3 as an example.

Table 3: Quota calculations (NSW)

	Rolling average to April 2018	Quotas
Liberal / National Coalition	30.0%	2.1
Labor	33.8%	2.4
Greens	10.1%	0.7
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	9.3%	0.7
Nick Xenophon Team	2.8%	0.2
Australian Conservatives	1.7%	0.1
Jacqui Lambie Network	0.7%	0.0
Liberal Democrats	0.2%	0.0
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	1.3%	0.1
Independent/Other	9.9%	0.7

Most of the Senate seats (four or five out of six in each state) are then allocated to “sure things”, which includes any party with a full quota. Parties with 0.9 or 0.8 quotas are also sometimes considered as “sure things”, depending on a number of factors including historical performance, how close other parties are to a full quota, and where preferences might flow.

The model deviates from the polling most dramatically in two ways: it returns fewer seats for Independents/Others than their poll numbers would suggest, and it returns more seats for the Coalition than their poll numbers would suggest.

The reason for downplaying the likelihood of Independent/Other success is that in polling this is the aggregate of support for all Independents/Others. Voters for one Independent are not likely to support all others in the race.

The Coalition is over-represented to reflect its campaigning advantage and its historic performance.

In the NSW example above, there would be four “sure things”, with two seats allocated to the LNP and two seats to the Labor Party.

Parties are then be allocated a chance of taking each remaining seat, based on how close to a quota they came, historical performance and where preferences might flow.

If a party takes one seat, it cannot take any other remaining seat. For example, in Table 4 the Greens have a 35% chance of taking each seat. If they take one seat, their 35% chance for the other seat is excluded and the race is only between the remaining candidates.

Table 4: Allocation of odds (NSW)

State	Party	Chance of taking a seat
NSW	LNP	17.5%
	Labor	10.0%
	Greens	35.0%
	One Nation	30.0%
	Centre Alliance	2.5%
	LDP	5.0%

Note: See below for all states.

The simulation then assigns a random number to each seat available. By checking it against the allocation of odds for each state, it determines which party wins that seat. This simulation is run 1,000 times, resulting in 1,000 different potential Senate outcomes for each of the first half-Senate (expected around 2019) and second half-Senate election (expected around 2022).

These resulting simulations are used in a variety of different ways in this report.

ALLOCATION BY STATE

What follows is the breakdown of how we allocated fixed seats that we considered (for the purposes of the model) that a party was guaranteed to win. For the open seats, we then allocated odds of taking a seat to each party. A party cannot win both open seats

in a state. For example, the Greens have a 35% chance of taking the first open seat in NSW. If they do take the first open seat, they have a 0% chance of taking the second open seat.

Table 5: Senate seat allocations by state and territory

NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	Territories
Labor	Labor	LNP	Labor	Labor	LNP	LNP
LNP	LNP	Labor	LNP	LNP	Labor	Labor
Labor	Labor	LNP	Labor	Labor	LNP	Labor
LNP	LNP	Labor	LNP	Centre Alliance	Labor	LNP
Open	Greens	One Nation	Greens	LNP	Greens	
Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	

Table 6: Allocation of odds

	Party	Chance of taking a seat
NSW	LNP	17.5%
	Labor	10.0%
	Greens	35.0%
	One Nation	30.0%
	Centre Alliance	2.5%
	LDP	5.0%
	Vic	LNP
One Nation		10.0%
Centre Alliance		15.0%
Justice		15.0%
Qld	LNP	20.0%
	Greens	60.0%
	One Nation	10.0%
	Centre Alliance	10.0%
WA	LNP	60.0%
	One Nation	40.0%
SA	LNP	40.0%
	Labor	10.0%
	Greens	40.0%
	Conservatives	10.0%
TAS	LNP	50.0%
	Labor	20.0%
	One Nation	10.0%
	Lambie	20.0%

PAST RESEARCH

In June 2017, we published *Faces of the Senate*, a briefing paper that projected the potential future makeup of the Senate based on an average of the two polls we had conducted in 2017 by that time.³

That analysis was more basic than the work in this report. We assigned seats based on which candidate was considered most likely to win, instead of assigning probabilities of victory then simulating multiple elections using those odds.

Our current analysis incorporates a longer period of polling, and takes more account of historical performance – which is the main reason why Independents do worse and the Coalition does better than in our *Faces of the Senate* analysis. Our current analysis also gives a better sense of the range of possibilities, rather than just giving the “most likely” result for each seat.

³ Browne (2017) *Faces of the Senate*, <http://www.tai.org.au/content/faces-senate>

Appendix 3: April 2018 poll

The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,557 people between 27 March and 7 April 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	Male	Female	NSW	Qld	VIC	WA
Liberal / National Coalition	27%	29%	24%	25%	23%	27%	29%
Labor	33%	32%	33%	31%	33%	34%	32%
Greens	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%	8%	6%
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	8%	7%	9%	9%	12%	7%	8%
Nick Xenophon Team	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Australian Conservatives	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%
Jacqui Lambie Network	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Independent/Other	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	15%	19%	17%	15%	17%	20%

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

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Qld	VIC	WA
Liberal / National Coalition	24%	26%	23%	28%	22%	23%	22%
Labor	25%	28%	24%	26%	30%	24%	16%
Greens	7%	5%	8%	6%	6%	7%	9%
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	8%	4%	10%	10%	12%	3%	6%
Nick Xenophon Team	2%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Australian Conservatives	2%	4%	0%	2%	4%	1%	0%
Jacqui Lambie Network	2%	1%	3%	1%	4%	3%	3%
Derryn Hinch's Justice Party	3%	0%	6%	1%	4%	4%	6%
Independent/Other	26%	31%	22%	25%	18%	34%	34%