

# Our cross(bench) to bear

## Senate projections, Autumn 2019

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*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 near future.*

Senate projections series, no. 3

**Bill Browne**

**March 2019**

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The Australia Institute is an independent public policy think tank based in Canberra. It is funded by donations from philanthropic trusts and individuals and commissioned research. We barrack for ideas, not political parties or candidates. Since its launch in 1994, the Institute has carried out highly influential research on a broad range of economic, social and environmental issues.

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# Summary

The Australia Institute routinely polls a representative sample of the Australian population on a variety of issues, including how they intend to vote for the Senate at the next election.

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 the election.

Past issues in this series have predicted a Senate with a large and diverse crossbench. The new polling and analysis in this issue reinforces those previous predictions, but allows us to draw further conclusions:

- One Nation is more likely to gain seats in the Senate than the current political narrative suggests. A new senator in Queensland would keep their numbers stable at two; they are also likely to gain seats in Western Australia and New South Wales for a total of four. A victory in South Australia is also possible.
- Between them, Labor and the Greens are likely to win four of six seats in Victoria, and may do the same in Tasmania. If they did so in both states, Labor and the Greens together would have 38 seats – enough to block legislation.
- It is unlikely that Labor and the Greens together will reach 39 seats, which would allow them to pass legislation without working with other crossbenchers.
- On current polling, the Coalition will not win more than two seats in any state. Such a result would be unprecedented, and could affect the ratio of Liberals to Nationals in the Coalition, with Nationals tending to be lower in joint tickets.

Four non-Greens crossbenchers have six-year terms: Cory Bernardi (Conservatives), Pauline Hanson (One Nation), Rex Patrick and Stirling Griff (Centre Alliance). We predict they will be joined by other One Nation senators, and perhaps also by another Centre Alliance senator and a Tasmanian independent (Jacqui Lambie or Craig Garland).

Since no party will have a majority in the Senate, these crossbenchers will have significant influence after the 2019 election.

**Table: Range of likely Senate results**

Party	At 2016	2019 prediction	Best ALP outcome	Best LNP outcome	Best crossbench outcome
<b>LNP</b>	30	30–32	30	32	30
<b>Labor</b>	26	28–29	29	28	28
<b>Greens</b>	9	8–9	8–9	8–9	8–9
<b>One Nation</b>	4	4–5	4–5	4–5	4–5
<b>Centre Alliance</b>	3	2–3	2–3	2–3	2–3
<b>LDP</b>	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Conservatives</b>	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Hinch, Lambie, Garland</b>	2	0–1	0	0	1

# Prospects for the Labor reform agenda in the next Senate

With the Coalition Government continuing to poll poorly, interest has risen in what kind of Senate a Labor Government will face if it wins the next election. Given a Labor Government would likely require Greens support for most legislation that the Coalition did not support, the best prospect for a Shorten Government would be for Labor and Greens Senators to hold 39 seats between them.

The polling suggests that this is an unlikely, but not impossible, result. Working from a default assumption that each state's Senate seats tend to split 3–3 between Labor and Greens candidates on one side and Coalition and One Nation candidates on the other,<sup>1</sup> two states would have to split 4–2 for Labor and Greens senators to between them have a blocking 38 seats in the Senate.

For a legislation-passing majority of 39, three states would have to split 4–2 for Labor and the Greens. The polling suggests that the best candidates for this are Tasmania and Victoria.

If Centre Alliance is amenable to Labor legislation, the prospects for a majority improve dramatically. Only one state would have to split 4–2 for a Labor, Greens and Centre Alliance majority of 39 votes. Including Centre Alliance adds South Australia as a prospect for a 4–2 split.

For a state to split 4–2 is unusual, especially for it to split in Labor's favour. We identify five such cases from 1990 (the first half-Senate election after the 1987 reforms):

- 1990 NSW (3 Labor, 1 Democrats)
- 1998 NSW (3 Labor, 1 Democrats)
- 2007 South Australia (2 Labor, 1 Greens, 1 Nick Xenophon)
- 2007 Tasmania (3 Labor, 1 Greens)
- 2010 Tasmania (3 Labor, 1 Greens)

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the "Mackerras rule" that states normally elect three left-wing and three right-wing senators at a half-Senate election. Of course, what qualifies as "left-wing" or "right-wing" is debatable; the original Democrats were Liberal defectors, and Nick Xenophon is a former member of the Liberal Party. For more details on the Mackerras rule, see Colebatch (2018) *A Labor-friendly Senate? It could be a long wait*, <https://insidestory.org.au/a-labor-friendly-senate-it-could-be-a-long-wait/>

There is one debatable case, depending on how the communitarian Democratic Labour Party is classified:

- 2010 Victoria (2 Labor, 1 Greens, 1 DLP)

In most of these cases, Labor, Greens and other parties and candidates in the “4” side collectively received between 55% and 62% of the vote. This is well above what Labor and the Greens are collectively polling.

However, the 2019 election will be the first half-Senate election under the new voting rules. With optional preferential voting, tight preference agreements will matter less and the final seat is likely to be decided on less than a quota.

A proxy for a half-Senate election is the “section 282 recount” that the AEC conducted after the 2016 election. This gives a “half-Senate” result, with caveats,<sup>2</sup> for each state in the 2016 election.<sup>3</sup>

Analysing the section 282 recount results allows us to make a number of observations:

- Parties that received as much as 7% of the vote in a state did not always win a seat
- Parties that won one seat received between 6% and 11% of the vote in a state
- Parties that won two seats received between 26% and 34% of the vote in a state
- Parties that won three seats received between 35% and 41% of the vote in a state

If the same rules applied to our Senate polling results, Victoria would return three Labor senators and one Greens senator and South Australia would return two Labor, one Greens and one other senator, either Centre Alliance or One Nation. New South Wales is also an outside chance for three Labor senators and one Greens senator.

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<sup>2</sup> Most significantly, that only candidates that were elected in the full 12-seat vote are eligible.

<sup>3</sup> AEC (2016) *Re-counts of Senate votes pursuant to section 282*, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22publications/tabledpapers/709b6749-aabe-4b8e-9ae4-218aa86f8381%22>; Muller (2018) *The new Senate voting system and the 2016 election*, [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1718/SenateVotingSystem#\\_ftn78](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1718/SenateVotingSystem#_ftn78)

# Predictions

Liberal and National candidates are likely to pick up at least two seats in each state. Labor candidates are also likely to pick up at least 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 NSW, Queensland and Western Australia.

On current polling, Victoria is likely to return three Labor senators.

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

- **South Australia:** The Coalition, Greens, Centre Alliance and One Nation are competitive for the final two seats.
- **Tasmania:** The Coalition, Labor, Jacqui Lambie and Craig Garland are competitive for the final seat.

It is difficult to predict the outcome in Tasmania. Anywhere from three seats won by the Coalition to three seats won by Labor is possible, or both major parties winning two seats and an independent – either Jacqui Lambie or Craig Garland – picking up a seat. In any case, we expect the Greens to win one seat.

One Nation's polling has fallen considerably from their high point of 13.2% in our March 2017 poll to 7.9% in our March 2019 poll. However, 7.9% is still a significant share of the vote, and it exceeds that of the Greens in Queensland and (in this poll but not the rolling average) Western Australia. With the new Senate voting system, a party winning a Senate seat with 6% of the vote is not improbable. If One Nation wins two seats in the upcoming election, it will increase its total number of senators.

Another wild card is the high Independent/Other polling. Jacqui Lambie is a contender in Tasmania, as is Craig Garland, who won 11% in the July 2018 Braddon by-election. While the polling suggests that Derryn Hinch will not be returned in Victoria, he has high name recognition and certainly remains a possibility. The United Australia Party, headed by Clive Palmer, has grown in support over the last three polls. If that growth continues, it would potentially be competitive in Western Australia or Queensland. A United Australia Party win may come at the expense of One Nation – which is otherwise likely to win three Senate seats this election, as well as retaining Pauline Hanson who is now halfway through her six-year term.

**Table 1: Range of likely Senate results**

Party	At 2016	2019 prediction	Best ALP outcome	Best LNP outcome	Best crossbench outcome
LNP	30	30–32	30	32	30
Labor	26	28–29	29	28	28
Greens	9	8–9	8–9	8–9	8–9
One Nation	4	4–5	4–5	4–5	4–5
Centre Alliance	3	2–3	2–3	2–3	2–3
LDP	1	0	0	0	0
Conservatives	1	1	1	1	1
Hinch, Lambie, Garland	2	0–1	0	0	1



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 2: Results by state**

	Ongoing	Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT/NT
LNP	16	30–32	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Labor	13	28–29	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
Greens	3	8–9	1	1	1	1		1	
One Nation	1	4–5	1		1	1			
Centre Alliance	2	2–3							
Conservatives	1	1							
Hinch, Lambie, Garland		0–1							
Competitive							2	1	



**Table 3: Parties in contention for the final seat(s) in each state**

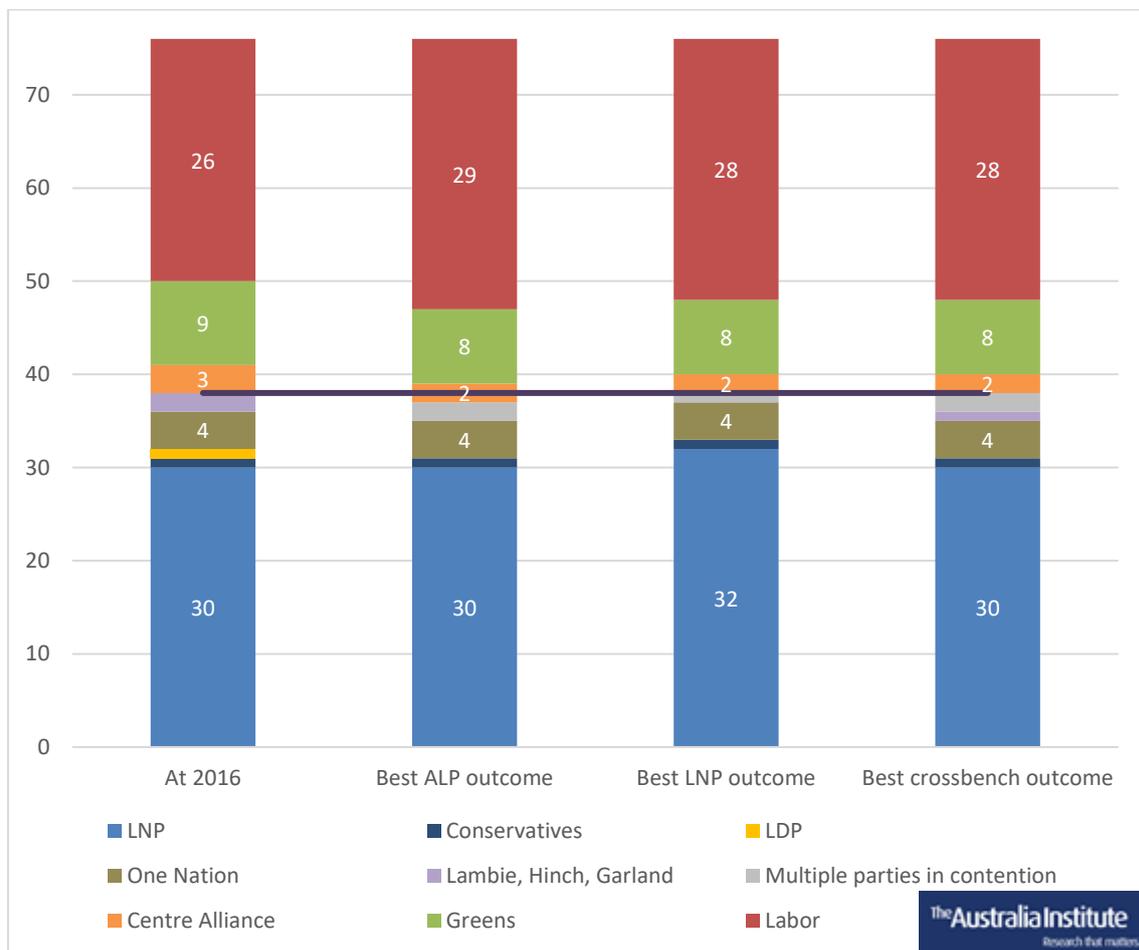
	SA	Tas
LNP	✓	✓
Labor		✓
Greens	✓	
One Nation	✓	
Centre Alliance	✓	
Conservatives		
Lambie, Garland		✓
Seats in contention	2	1



Figure 1 below shows the Senate as it was elected in 2016<sup>4</sup> 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 (two states splitting 4–2 Labor/Greens–others) would leave them with 38 senators only, allowing them to block – but not pass – legislation. Other crossbenchers – most prominently Centre Alliance – would be the kingmakers. Particularly notable are the one or more seats in each scenario where multiple crossbench parties are competitive.

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



<sup>4</sup> Parties are shown with their current names: Australian Conservatives instead of Family First and Centre Alliance instead of Nick Xenophon Team.

## COALITION CANDIDATES

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The Coalition most often wins three out of six seats in a state at half-Senate elections. In some states, the two Coalition partners – the Liberals and the Nationals – run separate tickets, or only one party runs a ticket. In other states, Coalition candidates run on a “joint” ticket where candidates are chosen by their respective parties but the order of candidates is agreed between the parties.

On current polling, the Coalition would not win three seats in any state at the next election – although we consider them to be in with a chance in South Australia and Tasmania. Since the 1987 Senate reforms, the Coalition has always won three seats in at least three states, and has twice won three or more seats in all six states.

The Coalition candidates who are in the third position on the ticket are:<sup>5</sup>

- **New South Wales:** Perin Davey, a Nationals candidate. Two Liberal candidates precede Davey: Andrew Bragg and Hollie Hughes.
- **Queensland:** Gerard Rennick, an LNP candidate. Two candidates precede Rennick: Paul Scarr (Liberal party room) and Susan McDonald (Nationals party room).
- **South Australia:** Alex Antic, a Liberal candidate. Two Liberal candidates precede Antic: sitting senators Anne Ruston and David Fawcett. Sitting Liberal senator Lucy Gichuhi is in the unwinnable fourth position.

The situation is more complicated in the remaining three states.

**Victoria:** The Liberals and Nationals run a joint ticket in Victoria, but neither party has concluded its preselection process. Sitting Liberal senators James Paterson and Jane Hume will be first and second on the joint ticket, respectively,<sup>6</sup> but as of 14 March the Liberals have not selected the remaining candidates. If the Coalition does win three seats in Victoria, the joint ticket’s candidate order will determine whether it is a Liberal or National that is returned.

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<sup>5</sup> Loussikian & Hunter (2018) *Surprise Liberal preselection result spells end of Jim Molan’s Senate career*, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/surprise-liberal-preselection-result-spells-end-of-jim-molan-s-senate-career-20181124-p50i3t.html>; Phelps (2018) *Susan McDonald set to become Super Senator*, <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/5514170/susan-mcdonald-set-to-become-super-senator/>; The Tally Room (2018) *Next Australian Federal Election*, <http://www.tallyroom.com.au/aus2019>; Wiggins (2018) *Veteran Queensland senators Ian Macdonald and Barry O’Sullivan dumped*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-06/lnp-senator-ian-macdonald-dumped/9949760>

<sup>6</sup> Correspondence with political offices; see also Norman (2018) *PM intervenes in Victorian factional row over preselection of senators*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-06/liberal-pre-selection-jane-hume-james-paterson-impasse-ends/10210388>

**Western Australia:** The Liberals and Nationals do not run a joint ticket. Either the second Liberal candidate, Slade Brockman, or the first National candidate, Nick Fardell, will miss out if the Coalition only wins two seats. Linda Reynolds, the first Liberal candidate, is safe.<sup>7</sup>

**Tasmania:** The Liberals and Nationals do not run a joint ticket.<sup>8</sup> Either the second Liberal candidate, Claire Chandler, or the first National candidate, Steve Martin, will miss out if the Coalition only wins two seats.<sup>9</sup>

If the Coalition only wins two seats in each state, it could affect the balance between Liberals and Nationals. Liberals could win both seats in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania; in each of NSW, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania, the Coalition winning three seats would make it much more likely that a National is returned.

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<sup>7</sup> The Tally Room (2018) *Next Australian Federal Election*

<sup>8</sup> The Nationals have not run at the federal level in Tasmania for two decades, but that is set to change with Senator Steve Martin.

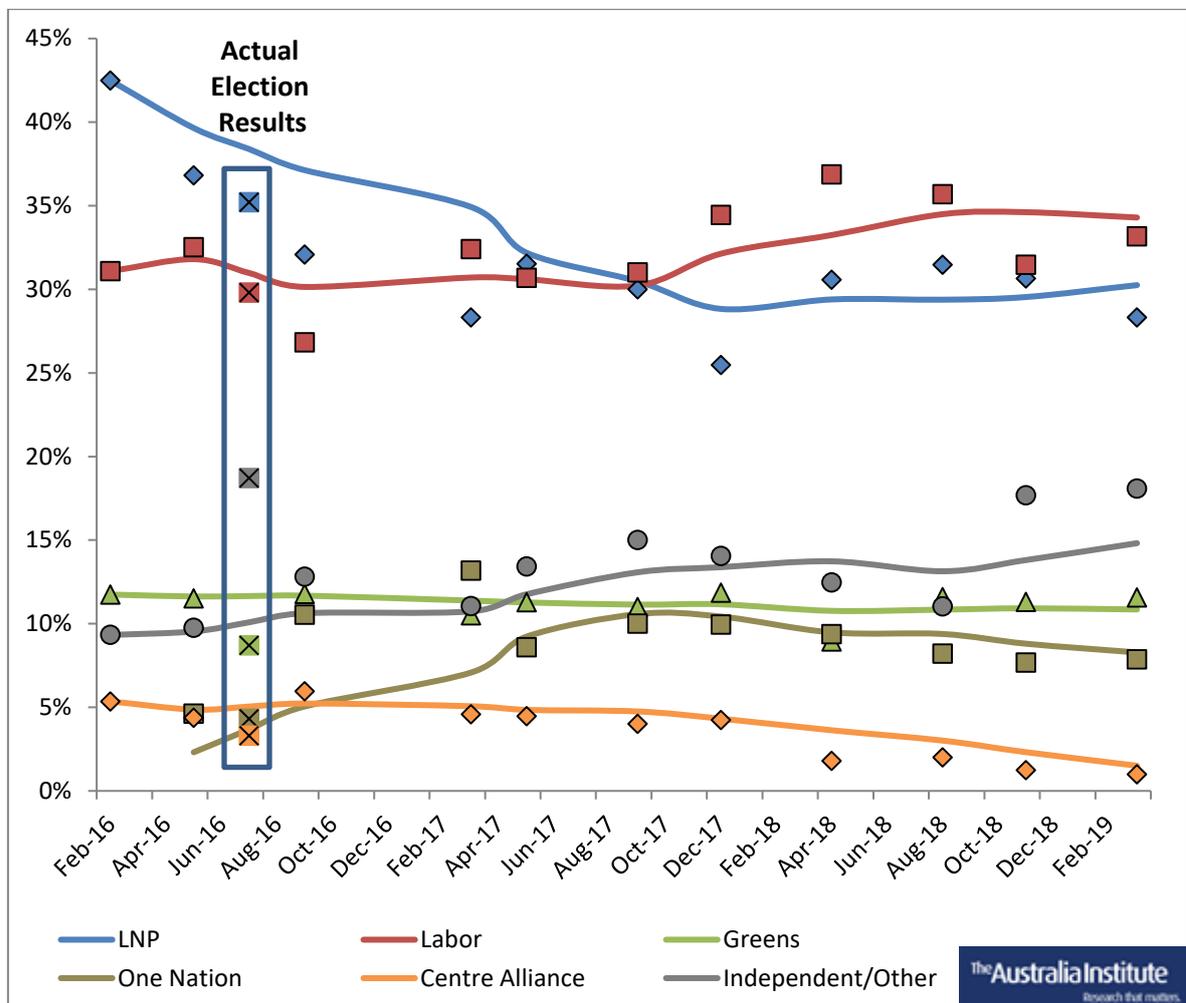
<sup>9</sup> Coulter (2018) *Tasmanian Liberal Senate hopeful eyes Hobart Lord Mayor job in the meantime*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-15/tasmanian-liberal-senate-hopeful-eyes-lord-mayor-job/10251704>

# Polling results

The results of our February–March 2019 poll show a rise in support for Labor and a fall in support for the LNP.

The polling shows little change in Independent/Other, Greens, One Nation or Centre Alliance polling since the last poll, although it is notable that the Independent/Other vote remains high after its sudden jump last quarter. Although not separately broken out in Figure 2, the Palmer United Party’s vote has grown in the last three polls, from 0.8% in August 2018 to 2.1% in March 2019.

**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, the Jacqui Lambie Team and Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party.

## SENATE VOTE SHORTFALL

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Australian voting patterns change between the House of Representatives and the Senate, meaning that polling on how people intend to vote in the House of Representatives will not reflect Senate votes. Unfortunately, Senate polling is much less frequent than House of Representatives polling.

A potential proxy is to find the average variation between House of Representatives and Senate votes in elections, and apply that to House of Representatives polling. What results is a rough measure of what a party's Senate vote may look like given its House of Representatives polling.

In the last three elections, the Senate vote of Labor and the Coalition have been between 83 and 92% of their House of Representatives vote. Overall, the Coalition's Senate vote was 85% of its HOR vote, and Labor's Senate vote was 89% of its HOR vote. The Greens vote was between 85% and 111% of their HOR vote, for an average of 99% of their HOR vote.

If we apply those ratios to the Poll Bludger aggregate at the time of writing,<sup>10</sup> Labor has a projected Senate vote of 33.6%, the Coalition 31.4% and the Greens 9.3%. This is close to our Omnipoll rolling average, but our polling puts Greens and Labor votes higher and Coalition votes lower – in each case by about one percentage point.

In Table 4, the House of Representatives aggregate polling according to Poll Bludger at time of writing is compared to that party's "Senate ratio" – the portion of House of Representatives votes that the party received in the Senate. This gives a "projected Senate" result. We have compared this result to our Senate-specific polling, used throughout this report.

**Table 4: Projected Senate results based on House of Representatives vote**

	HOR polling	Senate ratio	HOR * ratio	Compared to Senate-specific poll rolling average
<b>Coalition</b>	37.0%	85%	31.4%	30.3%
<b>Labor</b>	37.6%	89%	33.6%	34.3%
<b>Greens</b>	9.4%	99%	9.3%	10.9%
<b>One Nation</b>	5.6%	?	?	8.3%
<b>Other</b>	10.0%	?	?	16.3%

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<sup>10</sup> 8 March 2019: BludgerTrack 2019 (2019) *The Poll Bludger*, <https://www.pollbludger.net/bludgertrack2019/>

# Appendix 1: Polling

Roughly every four months, The Australia Institute conducts a national survey online through Dynata (formerly 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 poll, and in polls since August 2018
- 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 Dynata/Research Now poll, we sometimes conduct additional targeted polling. These results are included where appropriate.

**Table 5: Polls**

Date	Company	Respondents	Notes
<b>February 2016</b>	Research Now	1,412	
<b>May–June 2016</b>	Research Now	1,437	
<b>September 2016</b>	Research Now	1,443	
<b>March 2017</b>	Research Now	1,420	
<b>April–May 2017</b>	Research Now	1,408	
<b>September 2017</b>	Research Now	1,421	
<b>December 2017</b>	Research Now	1,417	
<b>March 2018</b>	Reachtel		Tasmania-only; phone polling
<b>April 2018</b>	Research Now	1,557	
<b>August 2018</b>	Research Now	1,449	
<b>November 2018</b>	Research Now	1,459	
<b>February–March 2019</b>	Dynata	2,019	Includes a 483-person “boost” in South Australia

## Appendix 2: Feb-March 2019 poll

The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,536 people in February–March 2019 online through Dynata with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory. We polled an additional 483 people in South Australia to improve the statistical significance of our SA-specific polling questions, including Senate voting intention.

We assess Senate voting intention through two questions. Most respondents answer the question “Which party are you intending to vote for in the Senate (upper house)?” by selecting a party or “Independent/Other”. The minority who select “Don’t know / Not sure” are asked a follow up question, “If you’re not sure, to which of the following do you have a leaning?”.

The table below is a combination of the share who nominated a party or “Independent/Other” in the first question and, pro rata, the leanings expressed in the second question by those who selected “Don’t know / Not sure” for the first question.

**Table 6: Senate voting intention**

	2016 result	Australia Institute Feb–Mar poll					
	Federal	Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
<b>Liberal / National Coalition</b>	35.2%	28%	31%	30%	26%	29%	31%
<b>Labor</b>	29.8%	33%	32%	39%	30%	27%	32%
<b>Greens</b>	8.7%	12%	12%	11%	10%	10%	8%
<b>Pauline Hanson's One Nation</b>	4.3%	8%	9%	4%	11%	10%	6%
<b>Centre Alliance</b>	3.3%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	5%
<b>Australian Conservatives</b>	1.4%	1%	2%	0%	2%	1%	2%
<b>United Australia Party</b>	0.2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	3%	3%
<b>Liberal Democratic Party</b>	2.2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
<b>Jacqui Lambie Network</b>	0.5%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
<b>Derryn Hinch's Justice Party</b>	1.9%	2%	0%	4%	1%	1%	1%
<b>Independent/Other</b>	12.5%	12%	10%	9%	14%	17%	10%