

The Way In

Representation in the 48th Australian Parliament



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About Per Capita

Per Capita is an independent public policy think tank. We work to build a new vision for Australia based on fairness, shared prosperity, and social justice.

Per Capita's research and policy prescriptions are rigorous, evidence-based, and long-term in outlook. All our publications and activities are intended to deepen political, social, and economic democracy, and we are focused on challenges for the next generations rather than the next election cycle.

The democracy Per Capita works for is one that shares its knowledge, wealth, and power, to ensure all its citizens can live meaningful and fulfilling lives, able to take care of each other and of our shared planet.

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Sarah McKenzie is a Research Associate at the Chifley Research Centre but, at the time of writing this report, she was Per Capita's Director of Policy and Research, in which role she oversaw a broad research agenda including industrial relations, social justice, and economic policy. Prior to working at Per Capita, Sarah worked at the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance and the Victorian Trades Hall Council, advocating for the rights and welfare of Australian workers. She also serves as a councillor and was formerly the Deputy Mayor of Yarra City Council. Sarah holds a Bachelor of Laws (Honours).

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Methodology

The data in this report was collected by Per Capita throughout 2025, building on earlier editions of *The Way In*. Unless otherwise stated, comparative data about the Australian population is drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, particularly the 2021 Census.

Most of the information about parliamentarians was derived from the *Parliamentary Handbook*,¹ supplemented by parliamentary biographies, Hansard, and media reporting. This was further supported by desktop research, drawing on a wide range of publicly available sources, including parliamentarians' personal and professional websites, press releases, interviews, and academic publications. We also made use of public disclosures on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter/X, and Facebook. Other sources are noted within the report.

Where possible, classification methods from previous editions have been retained to ensure comparability. However, some changes have been introduced to improve accuracy and relevance.

This report provides a snapshot of the composition of the Federal Parliament at the opening of the 48th Parliament, reflecting changes in party membership and chamber composition following the election in May 2025. It does not claim to capture every aspect of parliamentarians' identities or experiences. Rather, it seeks to map the structural pathways into politics and highlight where the composition of parliament aligns with, or diverges from, the society it represents.



¹ Parliament Library, Department of Parliamentary Service, Australian Government, *Parliamentary Handbook* (Web Page, September 2004) <https://handbook.aph.gov.au/>.



Introduction

Around the world democratic institutions are at a critical juncture. Trust in government is in decline across much of the OECD. While Australia fares better than the United States, the United Kingdom and the OECD average, fewer than half of Australians report high or moderately high trust in the federal government.² The Scanlon Foundation also reports that 45% of adults believe our system of government needs major change or replacement, up from 31% in 2020.³ According to the 2025 McKinnon Index, trust in Federal politicians is at 35.9% and political parties at 31.2%.⁴

Other measures are more promising. In the 2023 *Australian Public Service Commission Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy Survey*,⁵ 59% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia, while 13% said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. However, the same survey revealed significant concerns among those dissatisfied with democracy: 13% felt under-represented by politicians and government services. Against this background the composition of parliament matters.

Representation is not only symbolic; it also shapes how public policy responds to a diverse nation.

² OECD, *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment* (Report, OECD Publishing, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>.

³ James O'Donnell and Qing Guan, *Mapping Social Cohesion* (Report, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2024) <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Mapping-Social-Cohesion-2024-Report.pdf>.

⁴ McKinnon, *2025 McKinnon Index: Key Findings* (Report, McKinnon, 2025), <https://mckinnon.co/index>

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy: 2023 National Survey* (Report, Australian Public Service Commission, 2023).

Our parliament is formally based on principles of geographical representation, but there are growing calls for greater inclusion of Australians from diverse cultural backgrounds, people with disability, and others whose presence has traditionally been absent from the national legislature.

This edition of *The Way In* examines the 48th Australian Parliament, elected in 2025. It follows our analyses of the 45th, 46th and 47th parliaments, and continues to trace the pathways by which Australians enter political life. We explore representation through the lenses of gender, Indigeneity, cultural and ethnic background, education, age and employment, comparing those who sit in our national legislature with the people they serve.

One of the most significant gains of the 48th Parliament is the near achievement of gender parity. Women now make up almost half of all federal parliamentarians, the highest level in Australia's history, and for the first time the Federal Cabinet has a female majority.

Diversity in parliament has substantive effects on which issues are prioritised and how they are addressed. The entry of more women into parliament, for example, has been linked to greater attention to childcare, parental leave, family violence and pay equity reforms.

Yet class remains an under-acknowledged dimension of representation in Australia, and it

is difficult to capture with the metrics used in this report. Class continues to shape political experience and access to decision-making, even if it is less visible than gender or ethnicity. Some class markers are reflected in parliamentarians' occupational and educational backgrounds but these are not perfect measures.

What we can see is that the current parliament is heavily dominated by managers and professionals, especially those with training in law, business, and economics. While this may reflect the demands and structures of political life, the imbalance risks narrowing the scope of parliamentary debate.

Class is complex: it is not just about income, but about proximity to the levers of power. When parliament is dominated by professionals and managers, we risk the narrowing of our debate, and the absence of working-class voices leaves gaps in how redistribution, labour rights and public services are addressed. International research in comparable democracies shows when more working-class representatives are present in legislatures, governments are more likely to pursue redistributive policies and strengthen labour rights.⁶ The ongoing professionalisation of parliament should give us pause.

The Way In tells us something, but not everything: it provides a statistical snapshot of who sits in parliament and the pathways they have taken, while recognising that numbers alone cannot capture the full complexity of representation.

6 See eg, Tom O'Grady, 'Careerists Versus Coal-Miners: Welfare Reforms and the Substantive Representation of Social Groups in the British Labour Party' (2019) 52(4) *Comparative Political Studies* 544 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018784065>; Nicholas Carnes, *White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making* (University of Chicago Press, 2013); Hidekazu Miwa, 'Why Voters Prefer Politicians With Particular Personal Attributes: The Role of Voter Demand for Populists' (2025) 73(2) *Political Studies* 725 <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217241263295>.

Key Findings

Gender parity is closer than ever. Women now make up 49.6% of federal parliamentarians, the highest share in history. For the first time, the Federal Cabinet has a female majority (52.2%).

First Nations representation remains above population share. Nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parliamentarians (4%) sit in the 48th Parliament, but without collective mechanisms their influence depends heavily on party alignment.

Cultural diversity has broadened, but gaps persist. Parliament has become less Anglo-Celtic, yet large communities such as Chinese Australians remain under-represented.

Overseas-born Australians are under-represented in Parliament. Only 12.8% of MPs and Senators were born overseas, compared with 29.3% of the population. The constitutional prohibition on people with dual citizenship sitting in Parliament is a significant barrier for overseas-born Australians standing for federal office.

Parliament is ageing compared to voters. MPs and Senators are dominated by Generation X and Baby Boomers, while Millennials are under-represented and Gen Z almost absent. The median age of parliamentarians is about a decade older than the median age of voters.

Educational background is elite. Nearly one in three MPs and Senators hold postgraduate degrees (compared with 6.5% of Australians). Parliament is overwhelmingly university-educated relative to the general population.

Political pathways are narrow. Almost all MPs and Senators came from managerial or professional roles before entering Parliament, leaving vocational and working-class experiences largely absent.

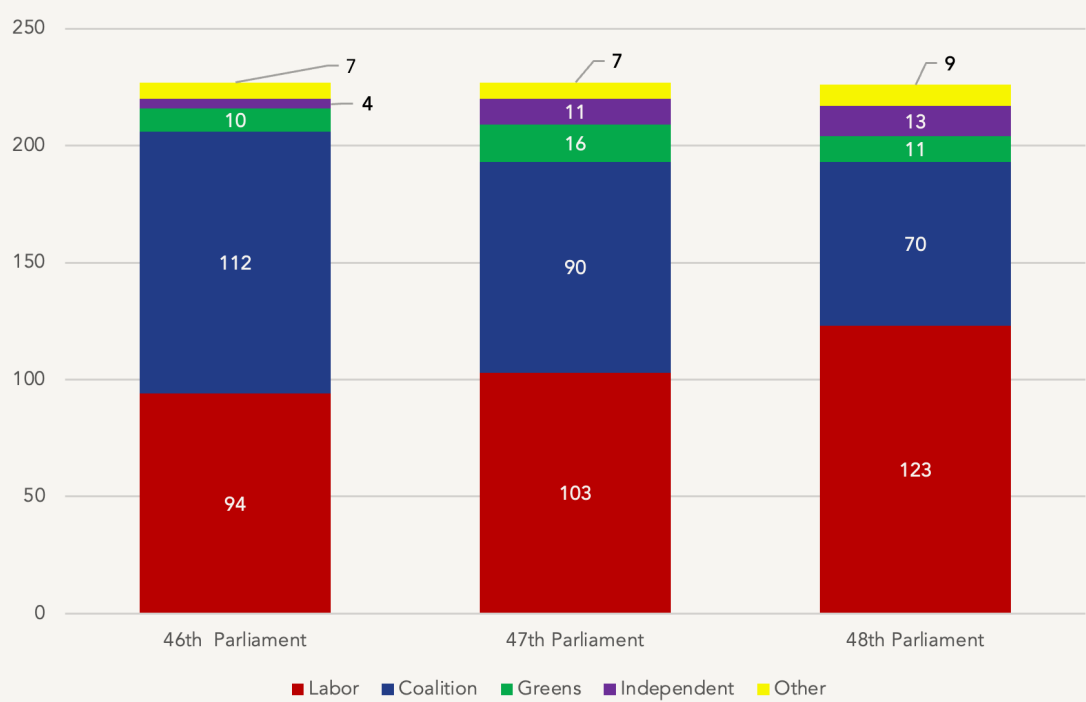
The 48th Australian Parliament

The composition of parliament shifts with every election. At the opening of the 48th parliament on 22 July 2025, compared with the opening of the 47th Parliament, Labor’s Federal Caucus increased by 20 seats while the Coalition’s reduced by 20.

Table 1
Seats by Party at Opening of the 48th Parliament (House and Senate)

Party	House	Senate	Parliament total
Australian Labor Party	94	29	123
Coalition	43	27	70
Independent	10	3	13
Australian Greens	1	10	11
Other parties	2	7	9
Total	150	76	226

Figure 1
46th, 47th and 48th Parliaments by Party (At Opening of Each Parliament)



The 2022 election could be described as a *disruption election*, ending nearly a decade of Coalition control and fracturing the two-party dominance of the Federal Parliament. While Labor gained nine seats, the Coalition lost 20, and rather than flowing to Labor, many were lost to Independent women in inner city electorates. Independents, together with the Greens and other minor parties, gained ground and strengthened the influence of the crossbench in both houses. By contrast, the 2025 election could be described as a *consolidation election*. While the Coalition continued to decline, minor parties also lost ground, and voters strongly backed Labor in the two-party-preferred contest. Labor's strong majority in the House reduces its reliance on the crossbench to pass legislation, although in the Senate the crossbench remains influential, holding 20 of the 76 seats and retaining the balance of power.

The 2025 general election was significant in several respects. Labor secured 62.7% of seats in the

House, its strongest result since Curtin's wartime victory in 1943, while the Coalition won only 28.7% of House seats, marking a historic low. But these headline results can mask what really happened at the ballot box. In 1943, Labor achieved victory with a primary vote of 49.9%, meaning one in two voters placed a 1 next to a Labor candidate's name on their lower house ballot paper. In 2025, Labor's primary vote was just 34.6%, meaning just one in three voters gave them their first preference. Although this is a two-percentage point rise on the 2022 election (32.6%), it was still the party's eighth-lowest primary vote at a general election since Federation.

This tells us that the 2025 landslide victory for Labor was delivered instead through preference flows in an increasingly crowded contest, with more Independents and smaller parties standing across the country. If this trend continues, the two-party hold will remain fragile, and the next election could further unsettle it.



Demographics of the 48th Parliament

Gender Representation

The 2025 election marked a historic milestone: Australia’s first gender equal government. While the parliament overall remains unequal, it is closer to achieving gender parity than ever before.

At the May poll, 92 women were elected: 70 in the House and 22 in the Senate. This brought the number of women holding seats at the opening of the 48th Parliament to 112 (49.6%), up from 101 (44.5%) at the opening of the 47th.

In the House, women now make up 46% of members, compared with 38% in the previous term. In the Senate, women continued to hold 56.6% of seats, unchanged from the start of the previous Parliament.⁷

Of the 38 new parliamentarians elected for their first term in 2025,⁸ 22 (57.9%) were women. Unlike in 2022, when a wave of female Independent candidates unseated several Liberal men, the gains

in 2025 were not driven by Independents. Instead, almost three quarters of newly elected first term parliamentarians (73.7%) came from the Australian Labor Party, and among them nearly two thirds were women (64.3%).

While women also comprised the majority of Greens and Independent parliamentarians across both houses, it is the size of Labor’s federal caucus that has proved decisive in lifting overall representation. Women now comprise 56.1% of MPs and Senators in the Labor Government.

By contrast, women now make up just one in three of all Coalition MPs and Senators (31.4%). This represents a 3.7 percentage point increase on the 47th Parliament, but it coincided with an overall reduction in Coalition numbers. The number of women in their ranks declined from 25 to 22, meaning the proportional increase reflects contraction rather than genuine gains.

Table 2
Gender Representation at Opening of the 48th Parliament, by Party

Party	Female	Male	Total	Share Female (%)
Australia’s Voice	1	0	1	100%
Australian Greens	7	4	11	63.6%
Australian Labor Party	69	54	123	56.1%
Centre Alliance	1	0	1	100%
Independent	10	3	13	76.9%
Jacqui Lambie Network	1	0	1	100%
Katter’s Australian Party	0	1	1	0%
Liberal Party of Australia	17	34	51	33.3%
Pauline Hanson’s One Nation	1	3	4	25%
The Nationals	5	14	19	26.3%
United Australia Party	0	1	1	0%
Total	112	114	226	49.6%

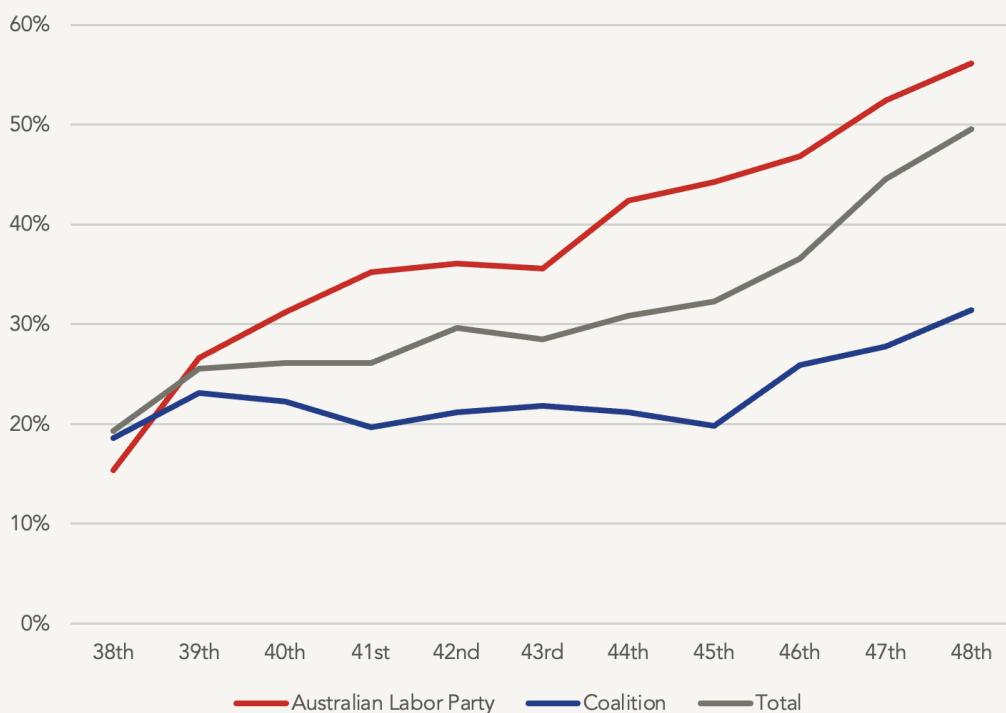
7 Since the opening of Parliament Warwick Stacey has been replaced by Sean Bell.

8 This only captures those enetering Federal Parliament for the first time excluding those who regained previously lost seats or moved to a different house of parliament.

Achieving near gender parity in parliament is a remarkable milestone, especially considering that just 15 years ago only one in four parliamentarians were women.⁹ But it did not happen by accident. It is largely the product of three decades of intentional affirmative action within the ALP. Affirmative action has fundamentally changed the composition of the ALP, substantially increasing the percentage of women in the party's federal caucus and, in turn, lifted women's representation across the entire Federal Parliament.

Since quotas were introduced at the 1994 ALP National Conference,¹⁰ the proportion of women in Labor's federal ranks has risen by 41 percentage points, while the Coalition's share has risen just 12 points.¹¹ Today, one in three members of the House of Representatives are Labor women, and in the Senate, Labor women made up one quarter of all senators.

Figure 2
Percentage of Women by Major Party in Commonwealth Parliaments 38th – 48th (Both Houses at Opening of Each Parliament)



⁹ In 2010 at the opening of the 43rd Parliament, 24.83% of all representatives were women.

¹⁰ Joy McCann and Janet Wilson, 'Representation of Women in Australian Parliaments 2014' (Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia, 9 July 2014) 18.

¹¹ Between the opening of the 38th Parliament and opening of the 48th Parliament.

Figure 3
Percentage of Women by Major Party in the Senate 38th – 48th (Opening of Each Parliament)

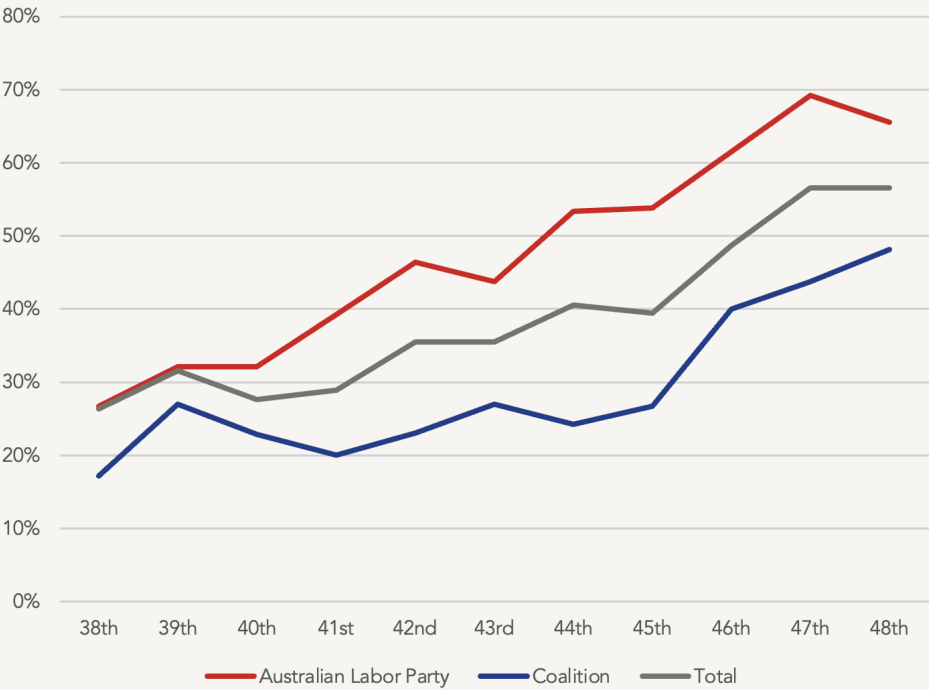
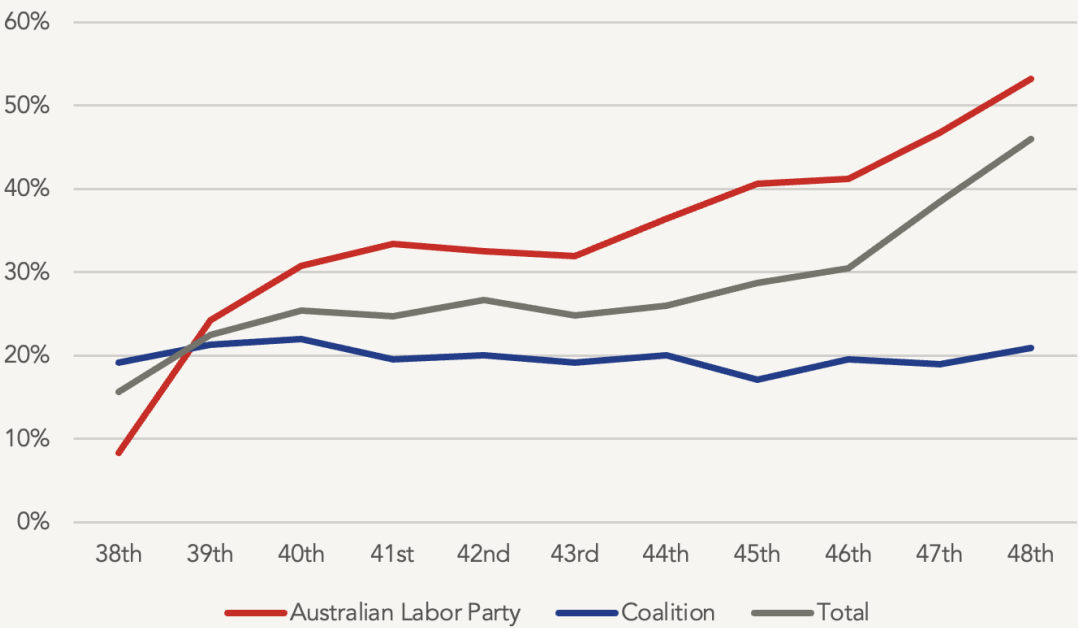


Figure 4
Percentage of Women by Major Party in the House of Representatives 38th – 48th (Opening of Each Parliament)



Gender at Elections

The 48th Parliament is the most gender-equal in Australian history, but that progress is still largely driven by the Labor Party and the significant number of Independent women in the House of Representatives. If Labor were to suffer a substantial loss, as it did in 1996 or 2013, or if the so-called *Teal Independents* lost their formerly Coalition-held seats to men, the proportion of women in parliament could drop sharply. Progress has been made, but it is fragile and can be undone if it is not consolidated.

Other jurisdictions have addressed this risk through legislated quotas. Argentina was the first country to legislate gender quotas in 1991, requiring 30% of candidates to be women; this quota was increased to 50% in 2017. In 2000, France passed a law mandating that political parties nominate equal numbers of male and female candidates, with financial penalties for non-compliance, such as the withdrawal of public funding. In 2007, Spain introduced legislation requiring parties to nominate at least 40% women on electoral lists.

The idea is not foreign to Australia either: in 2010 the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Gender Equality Blueprint* recommended concrete measures such as targets to increase the number of women running for election and entering Federal Parliament.¹²

This did not occur but, since 2010 female representation in federal elections has increased

markedly with more women standing for office across the political spectrum (Figure 5).

Labor's gender quotas apply across all categories of seats. Under party rules, affirmative action requirements extend to preselection in held seats, winnable not-held seats, and every other seat up for preselection.¹³

At the 2025 election, over half of Labor's House candidates were women (54%), compared with less than one-third for the Coalition (31.3%). Labor fielded 80 new House candidates in seats where a Labor MP was retiring or in seats not held by the party; of these, 47 (58.8%) were women. By contrast, the Coalition fielded 105 new candidates, of whom only 38 (36.2%) were women.¹⁴

Still, it is not enough just to preselect more women, to increase female representation in parliament they need to be preselected in winnable seats (those already held by a party or marginal seats requiring a swing of 6% or less in a TCP/TPP contest). On this measure, Labor fielded 30 new candidates in winnable seats, 19 of whom (63.3%) were women. The Coalition fielded 37 new candidates in winnable seats, but only 13 (35.1%) were women (Figure 6).

The lesson is clear: to achieve lasting gender equality in parliament, parties must not only select more women, but they must also ensure women are preselected in seats they can realistically win.

12 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Gender Equality Blueprint* 2010 (Report, 2010) 13 <https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/Gender_Equality_Blueprint.pdf>.

13 Australian Labor Party, ALP National Constitution (19 August 2023) Part C, Item 19 <<https://www.alp.org.au/media/3572/alp-national-constitution-adopted-19-august-2023.pdf>>.

14 Coalition candidates are defined here as the endorsed LNP candidate, or where more than one Coalition candidate contests a seat, the sitting member or the candidate considered the more competitive Liberal or National option. For this analysis, winnable seats are defined as those currently held, or notionally held following redistributions, across all categories: marginal (less than 56%), fairly safe (56 to 60%), and safe (greater than 60%), as well as marginal seats that are not currently held. Australian Electoral Commission, 'National Seat Status Fact Sheet: 2025 Federal Election', (Fact Sheet, 2025) <<https://www.aec.gov.au/media/files/Seat-status-fact-sheet-2025-federal-election.pdf>>; Australian Electoral Commission, 'National List of Candidates', (Data Download, 2025) <<https://results.aec.gov.au/31496/Website/Downloads/HouseCandidatesDownload-31496.csv>>.

Figure 5
Gender Breakdown of Candidates at Each Election, and Parliamentarians at the Opening of Parliaments

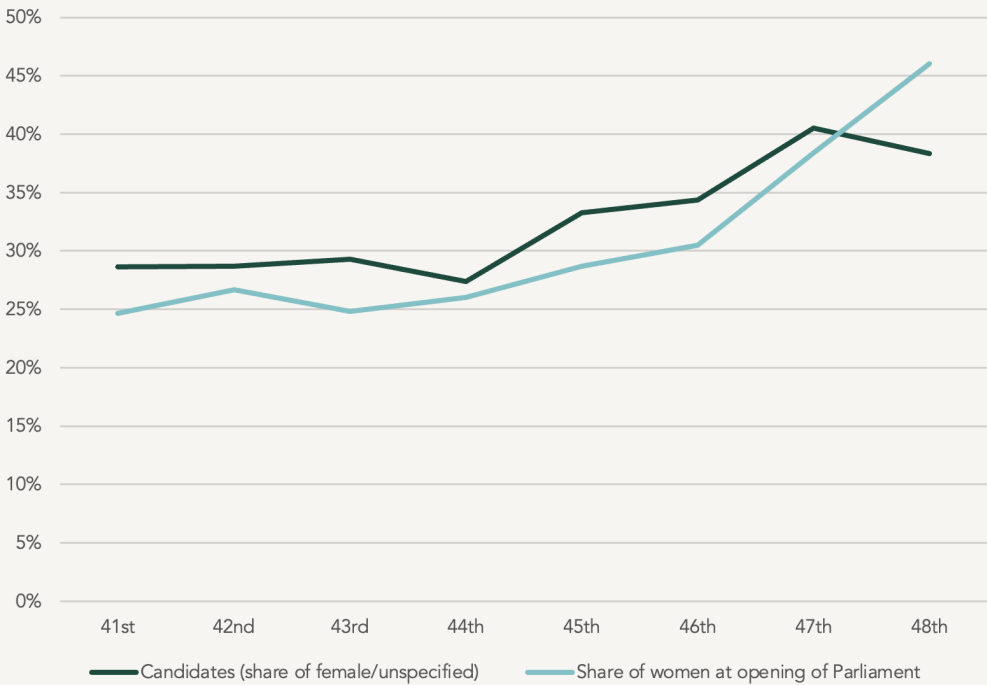
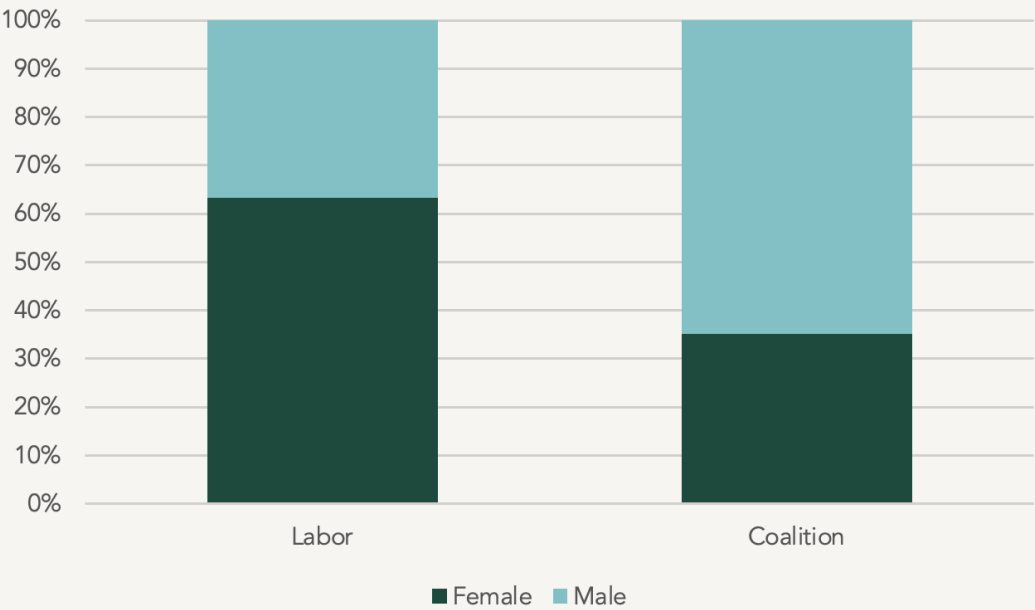


Figure 6
New House of Representatives Candidates in Winnable Seats, Party and Gender, 2025 Election





Gender in the Cabinet and Ministry

In Australia, the Cabinet is the top tier of the executive government. It brings together the most senior ministers, led by the Prime Minister, who make collective decisions on major policies, budgets, and national priorities.

The Ministry is the government's leadership team and includes all ministers, both those in Cabinet, those in the outer Ministry, and assistant Ministers. The Opposition mirrors this structure through a Shadow Ministry and a Shadow Cabinet.

Historically, it was Liberal governments that first promoted women into Cabinet and Ministry roles. The first woman to sit in a government Cabinet was Enid Lyons, appointed to Menzies' 3rd Ministry between December 1949 and April 1951. Women did not return to the Cabinet until November 1975, under the Fraser government following Whitlam's dismissal. While women were appointed to positions in the Ministry under Liberal and Australian Country Party leaders Holt, McEwen, Gorton, and McMahon, it was not until the later decades of the twentieth century that women began to feature more regularly in government leadership positions.

The first woman to be elected to a cabinet position in a Labor Government was the late Senator Susan Ryan, who appointed Minister for Education and Youth Affairs and Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women in the first Hawke Government in 1983. Today, it is Labor governments that promote women to leadership positions in unprecedented numbers. Albanese's second Ministry, formed in May 2025, featured the first government Cabinet in Australian history with majority female Cabinet Ministers. Twelve of the 23 Cabinet ministers are women (52.2%), and across the larger Ministry women hold 19 of 42 leadership roles (45.2%).

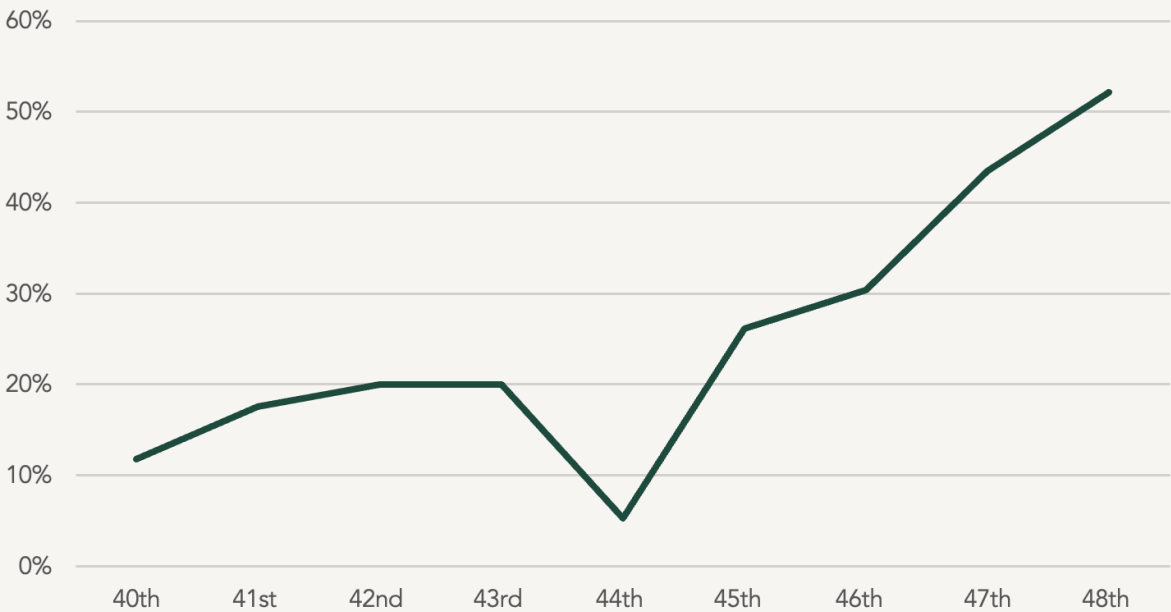
The Opposition's record is more modest. In Ley's Shadow Cabinet, just eight of the 23 Cabinet Ministers appointed immediately following the election were women (34.8%), and in the wider Shadow Ministry 14 of 41 were women (34.1%).¹⁵ Although Ley is the first woman to lead the Federal Coalition, the share of women in her first Shadow Cabinet is lower than in Dutton's first Cabinet of June 2022, which included 41.7% (10 of 24).

¹⁵ At opening of Parliament. This does not account for changes to the shadow cabinet such as Senator Jacinta Price who was cut from Ley's frontbench in September 2025.

Table 3
Female Share of Government and Opposition Leadership (September 2025)

	Government				Opposition			
	Female	Male	Total	Female share (%)	Female	Male	Total	Female share (%)
Cabinet/ Shadow Cabinet	12	11	23	52.2%	8	15	23	34.8%
Ministry/ Shadow Ministry	19	23	42	45.2%	14	27	41	34.1%

Figure 7
Percentage of Women in Federal Government Cabinet (Opening of Parliaments)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representation

There are nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parliamentarians sitting in the 48th Parliament. With a share of 4% of the parliament this represents a slightly higher proportion of Indigenous Australian federal representatives than the share of the Australian population (3.2% at Census 2021).

Although proportionally the Greens had the highest share of Indigenous parliamentarians at the opening of the 47th Parliament (12.5%), the minority party no longer has any Indigenous parliamentarians following Senator Lidia Thorpe’s resignation from the party in 2022 to sit as an Independent and Senator Dorinda Cox’s resignation to join the ALP prior to the opening of the 48th Parliament in 2025.

In recent parliaments, the share of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members has been higher than their share across the wider Australian population. On the surface, this looks like progress. But proportional representation does not mean the

same thing for every attribute of representation. In the case of gender, achieving numbers proportional to the general population has helped build a critical mass that sustains attention to issues such as childcare, equal pay and family violence. For Indigenous Australians, representation works differently. Members sit across the political spectrum and represent electorates not defined by Indigenous identity. Their views on recognition, treaties and policy vary, shaped as much by party alignment as by the community they represent.

The presence of Indigenous MPs and Senators in parliament is a step forward, but it cannot substitute for institutions designed to ensure First Nations people have a direct and collective voice in national decision-making. Numbers matter, but without a mechanism to bring Indigenous voices together, representation in parliament alone cannot achieve the same impact as a dedicated structure like the Voice was intended to.

Table 4
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Parliamentarians, by Party, 48th Parliament

48th Parliament	Australia (Census 2021)	Total Parliament	Labor	Coalition	Greens	Independent/ Other
No.	-	9	5	2	0	2
Share (%)	3.2%	4.0%	4.1%	2.9%	0.0%	9.1%

Cultural Background

Australia is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse nations in the world. Despite ongoing debate about immigration, migration and multiculturalism has long been seen as central to nation building and is a key reason that our country is one of the world's most successful multicultural societies. According to the Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion report 2024, 85% of Australians agree multiculturalism has been good

for Australia and 82% agree migrants are good for the economy.¹⁶

Lived experience of cultural diversity is an important consideration in parliament, similar to gender diversity, as it shapes how federal parliament addresses international affairs, trade, religion, and the worldviews reflected in debates and decision-making.

Ancestry

It is challenging to develop a clear picture of the ethnic diversity of the federal parliament. For this analysis we draw on the disclosures that members and senators make to show compliance with section 44 of the Constitution, which requires them to state the birth countries of their parents and grandparents.¹⁷ This allows for a clearer comparison with census data. At the opening of the 48th Parliament, 121 parliamentarians reported recent ancestry from at least one country outside of Australia and 58 reported ancestries from at least one non-English speaking country.

Ancestry figures are useful but limited for analysis for cultural diversity in parliament. Recorded ancestry from the past two generations can only ever show part of the picture. It does not always match how people view their own cultural or ethnic identity. Some parliamentarians with non-English-speaking ancestry may not identify with that heritage, while others without recorded ancestry still feel a strong connection to traditions passed down by earlier migrants in their families. Colonial

histories and shifting borders make ancestry even harder to interpret as a simple marker of identity.

Using ancestry to understand background or class also has other limits. For example, grouping together the children of post-war European migrants with those who came later under vastly different circumstances risks flattening diverse experiences. Why and when people migrated matters a great deal, but that level of detail is not available in a way that can be directly compared to broader population figures. Despite the limitations, what we can say with confidence is that parliament has shifted. It is no longer dominated by white men reporting ancestry only from Australia or the United Kingdom. Some of this change is visible in the numbers, but some of it is clear simply by looking at who is sitting in the chamber today.

The ancestry profile of the 48th Parliament shows clear differences from that of the wider population.¹⁸ Some ancestries are reported at higher rates among parliamentarians than in the

16 James O'Donnell and Qing Guan, *Mapping Social Cohesion* (Report, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2024) <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Mapping-Social-Cohesion-2024-Report.pdf>.

17 Parliament of Australia, 'Register of Members' qualifications – 48th Parliament, (Web Page, 2025) https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members/Qualifications; Parliament of Australia, 'Senate Standing Committee of Senators' Interests', (Web Page, 2025) https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Senators_Interests/Register_of_Senators_Qualifications.

18 The census ancestry measure (ANCP) is a multi-response variable. People can report more than one ancestry, and the figures show the percentage of respondents who reported each one. The sum of these percentages does not equal the total population. In the tables 5 and 6, the proportions for parliamentarians are calculated against the total number of members and senators, and for the census against the total number of respondents.

broader Australian population. For example, in the 48th Parliament, 46.5% of members and senators reported ancestry from Australia only, compared with 32% of census respondents.

Some ancestries that make up small proportions of the Australian population are relatively well represented in Parliament. People with Arab ancestry (2.7% vs 1.9%), those with Sub-Saharan African ancestry from Southern and East Africa (2.2% vs 1.1%), New Zealanders (4.0% vs 1.5%), people with Melanesian and Papuan ancestry (0.9% vs 0.1%), North Americans (3.1% vs 0.5%) and people with Caribbean ancestry (0.4% vs 0.05%) are all more common in parliament than in the wider population.

By contrast, some of the other, often larger, ancestry groups in the Australian population are less visible in Parliament. People with British ancestry make up 23.5% of parliamentarians, compared with 38.4% of census respondents. Fewer parliamentarians report Irish ancestry (3.5% vs 9.5%), Western European ancestry (3.5% vs

6.4%), Southern European ancestry (4.0% vs 5.8%), and Eastern European ancestry (0.4% vs 2.1%) than is found in the general population.

People with Chinese ancestry account for only 1.8% of parliamentarians compared with 5.6% of census respondents. Mainland South East Asian ancestry is also lower (1.3% vs 2.2%), although some other Asian ancestries such as Maritime South East Asian are more strongly represented in Parliament.

Some ancestries recorded in the census are absent from parliament altogether, including people with Central American, Central and West African, Micronesian and Northern European backgrounds.

There are also clear differences between parties. The Labor caucus includes all current parliamentarians with Arab and Chinese ancestry, and more who reported Maritime South East Asian and Sub-Saharan African backgrounds. The Coalition is more concentrated in Australian and British ancestries, with a higher share of members reporting New Zealand ancestry.



Table 5
Ancestry in the 48th Parliament

Ancestry (Broad Groups)	Ancestry (Detailed Groups)	48th Parliament (No.)	48th Parliament (%)	2021 Census (%)	Difference
North African and Middle Eastern	Arab	6	2.65%	1.87%	0.78%
North-East Asian	Chinese Asian	4	1.77%	5.56%	-3.79%
North-West European	British	53	23.45%	38.37%	-14.92%
	Irish	8	3.54%	9.48%	-5.94%
	Western European	8	3.54%	6.38%	-2.84%
Oceanian	Australian Peoples (only)	105	46.46%	31.96%	14.50%
	Melanesian and Papuan	2	0.88%	0.12%	0.77%
	New Zealand Peoples	9	3.98%	1.45%	2.54%
	Polynesian	2	0.88%	0.87%	0.01%
Peoples of the Americas	Caribbean Islander	1	0.44%	0.05%	0.39%
	North American	7	3.10%	0.51%	2.58%
	South American	1	0.44%	0.67%	-0.23%
South-East Asian	Mainland South-East Asian	3	1.33%	2.20%	-0.88%
	Maritime South-East Asian	7	3.10%	2.29%	0.81%
Southern and Central Asian	Central Asian	1	0.44%	0.50%	-0.06%
	Southern Asian	11	4.87%	6.03%	-1.17%
Southern and Eastern European	Eastern European	1	0.44%	2.09%	-1.65%
	South Eastern European	9	3.98%	3.65%	0.33%
	Southern European	9	3.98%	5.82%	-1.84%
Sub-Saharan African	Southern and East African	5	2.21%	1.13%	1.09%

Table 6
Ancestry in 48th Parliament, by Major Party

Ancestry (Broad Groups)	Ancestry (Detailed Groups)	ALP	Coalition	2021 Census (%)
North African and Middle Eastern	Arab	4.07%	0.00%	1.87%
North-East Asian	Chinese Asian	3.25%	0.00%	5.56%
North-West European	British	24.39%	22.86%	38.37%
	Irish	5.69%	0.00%	9.48%
	Western European	2.44%	4.29%	6.38%
Oceanian	Australian Peoples (only)	45.53%	50.00%	31.96%
	Melanesian and Papuan	0.81%	1.43%	0.12%
	New Zealand Peoples	1.63%	8.57%	1.45%
	Polynesian	1.63%	0.00%	0.87%
Peoples of the Americas	Caribbean Islander	0.00%	1.43%	0.05%
	North American	3.25%	2.86%	0.51%
	South American	0.81%	0.00%	0.67%
South-East Asian	Mainland South-East Asian	0.81%	0.00%	2.20%
	Maritime South-East Asian	4.07%	1.43%	2.29%
Southern and Central Asian	Central Asian	0.00%	0.00%	0.50%
	Southern Asian	4.88%	5.71%	6.03%
Southern and Eastern European	Eastern European	0.81%	0.00%	2.09%
	South Eastern European	4.07%	5.71%	3.65%
	Southern European	4.07%	4.29%	5.82%
Sub-Saharan African	Southern and East African	0.81%	0.00%	1.13%

Place of Birth

Place of birth, like ancestry, is another indicator of cultural diversity but is still only one part of the story. It cannot capture the full depth of cultural and ethnic identity in either the community or Parliament.

According to the 2021 Census, nearly one in three Australians (29.3%) were born overseas. In the 48th Parliament, only 12.8% (29 parliamentarians) were born overseas: roughly one in eight. A large majority of parliamentarians (84.5%) were born in Australia, compared with 70.7% of the total population (Table 7).¹⁹

Differences also emerge by party. 11.4% of those in the Labor caucus and 4.3% of those from the Coalition were born overseas.

A potential barrier to greater representation of overseas-born Australians in federal politics may lie in the eligibility rules of the Constitution. Under section 44, candidates must not be citizens of a foreign power at the time of nomination and must renounce any foreign citizenship. This may act as a deterrent in contesting a federal seat for those seeking to represent their communities as these restrictions do not apply at the state or local level of government.

Table 7
Representation by birthplace, by party

	Australia (Census 2021)	Total Parliament	Labor	Coalition	Greens	Independent	Other
Born Overseas	29.3%	12.8%	11.4%	4.3%	45.5%	23.1%	44.4%
Born in Australia	70.7%	84.51%	85.4%	92.9%	54.4%	76.9%	55.6%

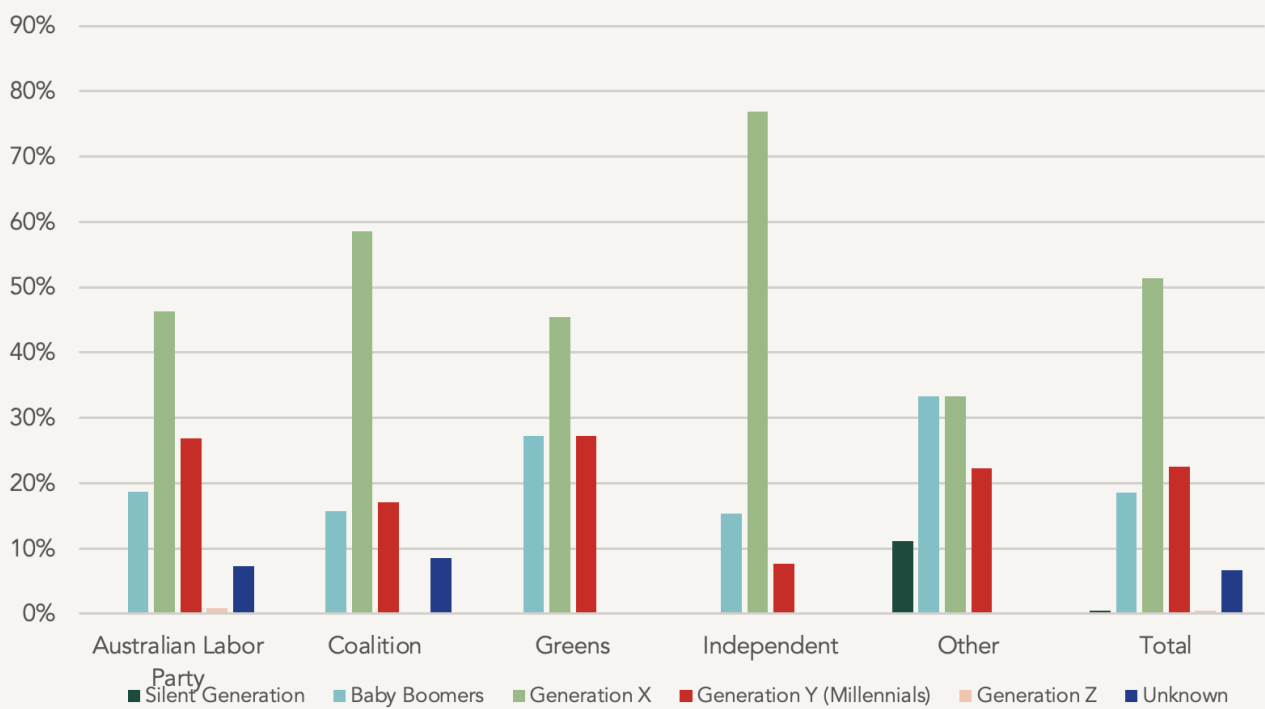
19 The figures do not sum to 100% because the birthplace of six parliamentarians is not publicly known.

Generational Representation

How different age groups are represented in parliament matters. It can shape which perspectives and priorities are brought into debate. In recent years, generational divides have become more pronounced across Australia. Younger Australians are more exposed to the long-term consequences of climate change, insecure housing, and stagnant wages, while many older Australians have longer benefited from economic conditions that offered greater stability and social mobility. Of course, you do not need to belong to a particular generation to champion its concerns, but having a mix of ages in parliament can add depth to debate and make it more likely that a wider range of voices and lived experiences shape the ideas put forward and the issues raised.

When the current parliament is broken down by generation, the picture is dominated by Generation X and Baby Boomers. Together, they account for more than two-thirds of all MPs and Senators. Millennials make up just over one in five parliamentarians, and the youngest and older generations are mostly absent. By party, Labor shows a younger profile than the Coalition, with a higher proportion of Millennials (27% vs 17%). Labor has slightly fewer representatives from Generation X, while the Coalition leans more heavily on Generation X (almost 60%).

Figure 8
Generational Representation in the 48th Parliament, by Party



Age Profiles of Voters and Politicians

This next section compares parliamentarians to the age profile of voters. The electorate is widely distributed across age groups, with young voters under 35 making up more than a quarter of the voting population and older Australians over 60 accounting for almost a third. Yet parliament is overwhelmingly clustered in the middle-aged cohorts. More than half of those sitting in parliament today are between 45 and 59, compared with only a quarter of voters. Younger adults are particularly under-represented: while one in four voters is under 35, fewer than 4% of parliamentarians are. At the other end, Australians aged 70 and over make up nearly one in five voters but just 4% of representatives.

The differences in ages in our federal parliament, compared to broader population, is not in itself a problem. There is no evidence that voters expect or even want to be represented by people their own age. But it is interesting in raising questions about how lived experiences across generations is reflected in parliamentary debate. Issues such as housing affordability, student debt, childcare, superannuation, and aged care are understood differently depending on where people sit in the life cycle. A parliament concentrated in the middle years of life might risk underweighting both younger and older perspectives, even though those groups make up a significant share of the electorate. The median age of parliamentarians is about one cohort older than the median voter age, reflecting how parties tend to preselect candidates at the peak of their professional and political careers. This provides experience and stability, but at the cost of breadth in generational representation.

Table 8
Age Ranges of the Electorate Compared to Parliamentarians in the 48th Parliament

	Voters	Parliamentarians
18-19	2.7%	0.0%
20-24	7.4%	0.5%
25-29	7.6%	0.0%
30-34	8.1%	3.3%
35-39	8.6%	7.1%
40-44	8.8%	13.7%
45-49	8.0%	11.4%
50-54	8.4%	20.4%
55-59	7.8%	22.7%
60-64	7.8%	12.3%
65-69	7.1%	4.3%
70+	17.8%	4.3%

Educational background of the 48th Australian Parliament

Secondary School Education

In many developed nations, education is considered a clear indicator of social and economic class, with those attending private schools coming primarily from wealthy backgrounds. The case in Australia, however, is different. Australia has a much higher rate of private education than in comparable countries: UK, USA, Canada, and New Zealand.²⁰ For this reason, the correlation between class and schooling, while still valid, is weaker in Australia than in comparable countries.

In 2024, 54.7% of Australian secondary school students were enrolled in government schools while 45.3% were enrolled in non-government secondary schools.²¹

The secondary schooling of federal representatives departs from the national picture. Among parliamentarians 40.7% were educated exclusively in government schools, while 42.0% were educated in non-government schools. A further 9.7% attended both systems at different points in their secondary schooling and information is not available for 7.5%. Because the mixed category includes people who attended both government and non-government schools, the data on parliamentarians cannot be directly compared with the broader population. A further complication is that parliamentarians span a wide range of ages, so their schooling reflects different periods in Australia's education system, whereas the national figures capture the schooling of the population in 2024.

It is also important to recognise that non-government secondary schools cover a wide spectrum. At one end are high-fee independent schools that provide extensive facilities and strong alumni networks; at the other are Catholic secondary schools, which educate a significant share of Australian students and are generally lower-fee, often serving communities closer in profile to the government school sector. Aggregating these schools together into a single non-government category somewhat conceals significant differences in the types of social capital they may provide.

Independent MPs and Senators show the strongest tilt towards non-government schooling of any group in Parliament. Just 23.1% of Independents were educated only in government secondary schools, compared with 69.2% who attended non-government schools. A small share (7.7%) attended both.

For the major parties, Labor's federal caucus most closely reflects the secondary schooling profile of the wider population, with nearly half educated in government schools and just over a third in non-government schools. By contrast, only 27.1% of Coalition parliamentarians were educated in government secondary schools, with around two-thirds attending non-government or mixed schooling. The Greens appear more government-schooled on average, though this is obscured by the high number of members whose secondary school background is not known.

20 Kate McGough and Harriet Agerholm, 'Private school pupil numbers drop by 11,000', BBC (Online, 6 June 2025) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2lk2p7wpr4o>>; Nicholas Larter, *School Education in New Zealand - Market Research Report (2015-2030)* (Report, IBIS World, January 2025) <<https://www.ibisworld.com/new-zealand/industry/school-education/741/#>>>; Olivia Bush, 'Education System Statistics in Canada', Made in CA (Web Page, 10 January 2025) <<https://madeinca.ca/education-system-statistics-canada/>>>.

21 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools - Data on Government and Non-government Students, Staff and Schools 2024* (Catalogue No 4221.0, 17 February 2025).

Figure 9
Secondary School Education of the 48th Parliament

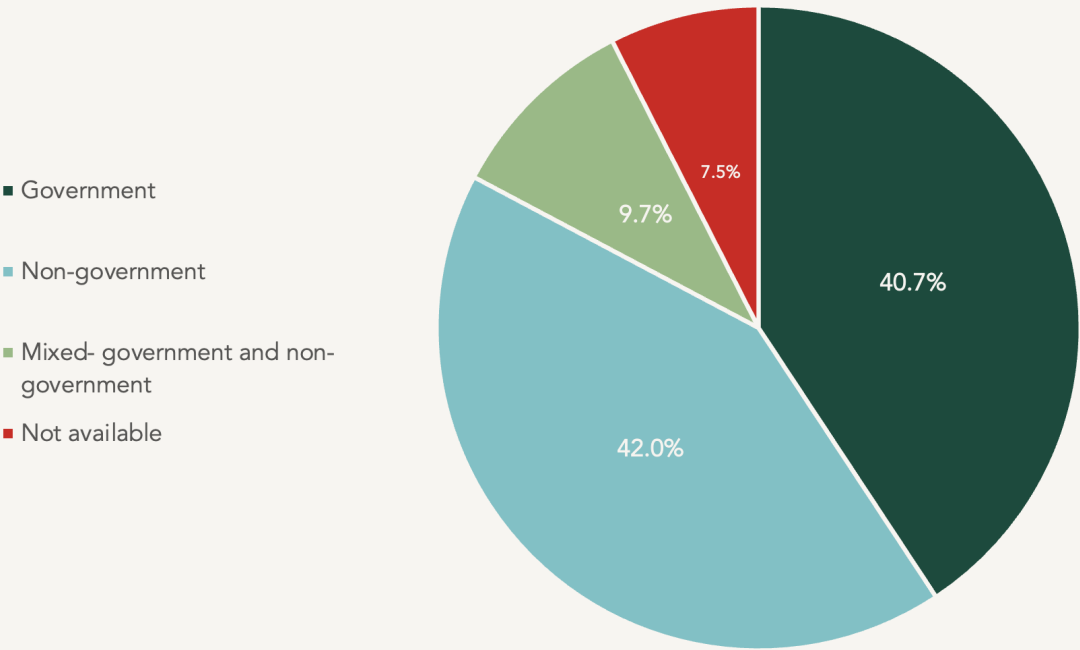


Table 9
Secondary School Education of the 48th Parliament

	Secondary Schooling in the Australian Population, 2024	Total Parliament	Australian Labor Party	Coalition	Greens	Independent	Other
Government	54.7%	40.7%	49.6%	27.1%	45.5%	23.1%	44.4%
Non-government	45.3%	42.0%	37.4%	50.0%	9.1%	69.2%	44.4%
Mixed- government and non-government	-	9.7%	6.5%	15.7%	9.1%	7.7%	11.1%
Not available	-	7.5%	6.5%	7.1%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%

In the Albanese Government Cabinet, 43.5% of ministers were government-schooled and 47.8% attended non-government schools in their secondary years. Labor’s leadership is slightly more non-government than its wider Federal caucus, but still closer to the national balance than most other parties. In Ley’s Shadow Cabinet, 34.8% were government-schooled, compared with just 27.1% across the Coalition caucus, though both remain dominated by non-government secondary schooling pathways.

Overall, the leadership groups of both major parties are more balanced than their wider caucuses, but in opposite directions: Labor’s Cabinet leans more non-government, while the Coalition’s Shadow Cabinet leans more government schooled.

Table 10
Secondary School Education in Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet

	Government	Non-government	Mixed-government and non-government	Not available
Cabinet	43.5%	47.8%	8.7%	0.0%
Shadow Cabinet	34.8%	43.5%	17.4%	4.3%



Post-School Education

The highest post-school qualifications held by federal parliamentarians differ sharply from the wider population. While 44.6% of Australians report no post-school qualification, only 11.9% of MPs and Senators fall into this category. At the other end, 32.3% hold a postgraduate degree as their highest qualification, compared with just 6.5% of Australians. Overall, parliamentarians are much more likely to hold university-level qualifications, especially at postgraduate level.

Vocational pathways are under-represented as the highest qualification. Only 8% of parliamentarians report an advanced diploma, diploma or certificate as their highest qualification, compared with 28.4% of the broader population. By contrast, bachelor's degrees are far more common as the highest qualification (36.7% versus 17.4%), as are graduate diplomas and certificates (11.1% versus 2.4%).

Party differences also emerge in the data. Labor parliamentarians are weighted towards bachelor's

degrees (40.7%), with a third holding postgraduate degrees as their highest qualification. The Coalition has fewer bachelor's degrees (32.9%) but a relatively high share of graduate diplomas and certificates (14.3%). Greens and Independents are the most postgraduate-qualified, with nearly half in each group holding a master's degree or PhD. Other parties are the least university-qualified, with 44.4% reporting no post-school qualifications.

Overall, parliament is an institution dominated by university graduates, particularly those with postgraduate qualifications. Vocational education, while a common pathway in the broader community, is markedly under-represented, and across the entire parliament members with no post-school qualification are scarcely present. This gap highlights the extent to which the lived educational experiences of parliamentarians differ from those of the people they represent.

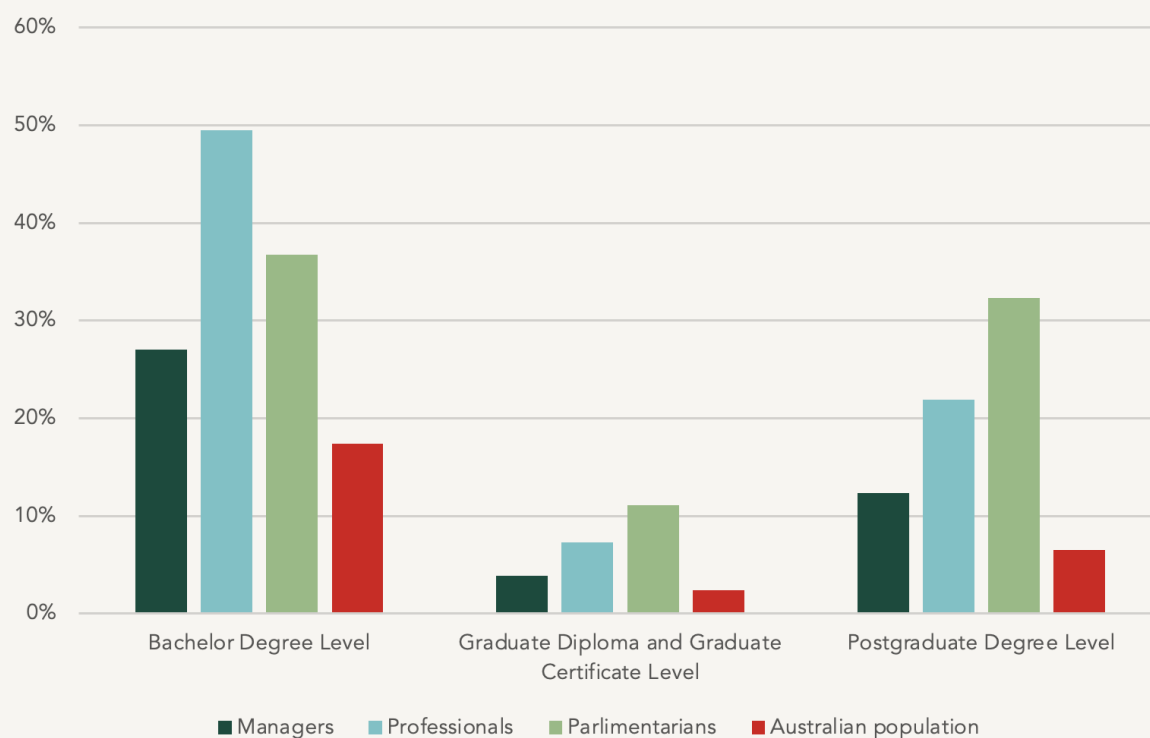
Table 11
Highest Level of Post-School Education Completed, 48th Parliament

Party	Advanced Diploma, Diploma and Certificate level	Bachelor's degree Level	Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate Level	Postgraduate Degree Level (master's and PhD)	Unknown/ no non-school qualification
Australian Labor Party	8.1%	40.7%	8.9%	32.5%	9.8%
Coalition	10.0%	32.9%	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%
Greens	0.0%	36.4%	9.1%	45.5%	9.1%
Independent	7.7%	30.8%	15.4%	46.2%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	22.2%	11.1%	22.2%	44.4%
Total	8.0%	36.7%	11.1%	32.3%	11.9%
Australian population	28.4%	17.4%	2.4%	6.5%	44.6%

If parliament is compared not to the population as a whole but to the sectors from which most MPs and Senators are recruited, managers and professionals, the picture looks quite different (Figure 10). Even so, the dominance of professional and managerial pathways into politics may mean something important is being lost. Australians who followed vocational routes, particularly in trades, technical fields and frontline services, are not strongly reflected in the educational backgrounds of parliamentarians. This under-representation risks limiting first-hand perspectives on skills shortages, industrial relations, training, and everyday working life in parliamentary debate.

Does parliament look professionalised because politics tends to attract those with higher education, or do the demands and structures of political life and policy-heavy workloads select against people without university-level qualifications? This raises a chicken or egg dilemma, but the answer is likely a mix of both. Either way, the outcome is the same: a parliament whose qualifications are closer to those of the professional workforce than to the Australian population at large, which may risk overlooking the insights and experiences of those educated through vocational pathways.

Figure 10
Highest Level of Post-School Education Completed, 48th Parliament,
Compared with Australian Population (18+), and with People Who Work in a Professional Occupation and
Managerial Occupation (Major Group 1 & 2 ANZSCO)

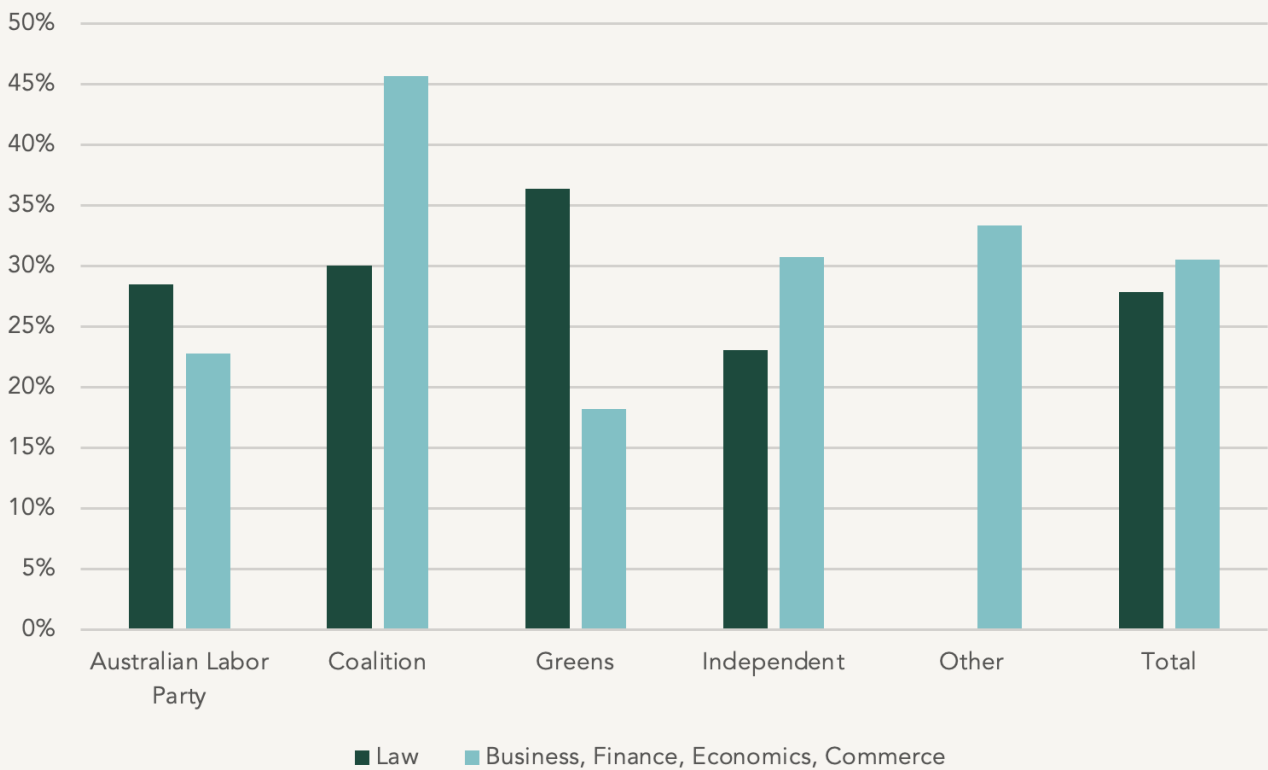


In our analysis we also consider the prominence of legal, economics, commerce and business studies in the make-up of the parliament. Legal studies are unsurprisingly a significant pathway, with 27.9% of members having studied law at some point in their post high school education. The share is highest among the Greens (36.4%), followed by the Coalition (30.0%) and Labor (28.5%). This reflects the long tradition of legal training as a stepping stone into political life, equipping many parliamentarians with skills in legislation, advocacy, and critical reasoning.

Economics, commerce, and business studies are another prominent field, with 30.5% of members having studied in these areas. They are particularly common among the Coalition, where 45.7% of members have such qualifications, compared with 22.8% in Labor and 18.2% in the Greens. Independents (30.8%) and other parties (33.3%) fall between these levels. This indicates a strong presence of economic and managerial perspectives within parliament.

Taken together, the figures highlight the central role of these educational backgrounds in shaping the skills and outlooks that members bring with them into parliamentary life. In the modern parliament they are arguably seen as required foundations for political careers. Whether that is beneficial or limiting is open to debate.

Figure 11
Parliamentarians Who Studied Law or Economics, Commerce and Business, by Party



Employment background of the 48th Australian Parliament

The work experience that leads people into politics can reveal much about the leadership of our country. The employment background of parliamentarians shapes their worldview, social networks, personal wealth and, arguably, their policy priorities. This first section looks at the most recent job held by members and senators immediately before entering Parliament.

Compared with the major occupation groups across the Australian workforce, the imbalance is stark. In the wider population, 14.3% of people aged 20 and over are in the managers group and 25.1% are in the professionals group. Among parliamentarians, almost half fell into the managers group (48%) and almost half into the professional occupation group (47%) at the time they entered parliament. Other major groups are far less visible: technicians and trades workers (12.9% of the population) account for less than 1% of parliamentarians' last jobs, and community and personal service workers (11.1%) account for just 3.5%. Others do not appear at all.

Table 12
Employment Backgrounds of the 48th Parliament in Most Recent Job (ANZSCO Major Group)

Occupation group	Australian population (20+ years) ²²	48th Parliament: occupation prior to entering Parliament
Managers	14.30%	47.80%
Professionals	25.10%	47.30%
Technicians and trades workers	12.90%	0.90%
Community and personal service workers	11.10%	3.50%
Clerical and administrative workers	13.10%	0%
Sales workers	6.80%	0%
Machinery operators and drivers	6.40%	0%
Labourers	8.30%	0%
Inadequately described / Not stated	1.90%	0.40%

22 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed July 2025* (Catalogue No 6291.0.55.001, 12 August 2025).

Table 13
Employment Backgrounds of the 48th Parliament in Most Recent Job, by Party (ANZSCO Major Group)

Occupation group	Australian population (20+ years)	48th Parliament: occupation prior to entering Parliament	Labor	Coalition	Independents	Greens	Other parties
Managers	14.30%	47.80%	49.6%	50.0%	38.5%	18.2%	55.6%
Professionals	25.10%	47.30%	48.0%	41.4%	61.5%	72.7%	33.3%
Technicians and trades workers	12.90%	0.90%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Community and personal service workers	11.10%	3.50%	2.4%	5.7%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Clerical and administrative workers	13.10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sales workers	6.80%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Machinery operators and drivers	6.40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Labourers	8.30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Inadequately described / Not stated	1.90%	0.40%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%

It is important to note that this snapshot does not reflect the full range of careers parliamentarians have had in their working lives. Many have worked across different occupations over their lifetimes, and often it is the jobs they identify with most and the ones that shaped their outlook and set them on the path to a career in public life, that matter more.

In Labor's federal caucus, 61 MPs and senators (49.6%) last worked in managerial roles, while 59 (48%) came directly from professional occupations. The Coalition shows a similar pattern, with 35 (50%) from managerial roles and 29 (41.4%) from professional ones. Among Independent MPs and Senators, the balance tips more heavily toward professional occupations (61.5%). That may reflect the need for recognised expertise and reputational standing to run without party backing.

Overall, parliament is largely made up of people whose last jobs were already at a senior or professional level.

Breaking down pathways into smaller categories provides further insight. The largest single feeder group as a last job prior to entering parliament is political staffers and advisers (36). For these parliamentarians, time in parliamentary or ministerial offices can act as a sort of finishing school or apprenticeship for politics, offering training in legislative process, policy detail, media management, and constituency work. Almost as many came from business and executive leadership roles (37) which brings management experience, financial independence, and networks of influence. In some ways, this is the mirror image of the staffer pathway: one builds skills inside the political system, the other outside it.

Elected union officials and staff (27) also remain a strong source, particularly for Labor, supplying experience in organising, advocacy and representation. The legal profession continues to provide a steady stream (23), reflecting its long-standing status as a classic route into politics, with skills in legal reasoning, advocacy, and debate.

Other groups are smaller but still notable: consulting and research (20), education (18), and the public service (15). Fewer came directly from roles in health care (9), media and the arts (6), farming (6), or from the environment and energy sectors (6). Only a handful entered from police and defence roles (5), trades and technical work (4), or straight out of being a student (1). These patterns show that parliament is rarely entered directly from frontline or traditionally working-class occupations.

Table 14
Pre-Parliament Careers of Federal Parliamentarians, by Party

	ALP	Coalition	Independents	Greens	Other parties	Total
Banking and Finance	2	8	0	0	0	10
Business and Executive Leadership	13	14	4	1	5	37
Consulting and Research	8	9	2	0	1	20
Corporate Affairs and Communications	1	1	0	1	0	3
Education	10	4	0	4	0	18
Environment and Energy	3	2	1	0	0	6
Farmer	2	4	0	0	0	6
Legal Profession	11	8	2	2	0	23
Media and Arts	4	1	0	1	0	6
Medical Care and Support	6	0	3	0	0	9
Police and Defence	1	3	0	0	1	5
Political Staff and Government Advisers and Party Officials	24	11	1	0	0	36
Public Servant	12	2	0	0	1	15
Student	0	0	0	1	0	1
Trades and Technical Work	1	2	0	1	0	4
Union Staffer or Elected Official	25	1	0	0	1	27
Total	123	70	13	11	9	226

Employment Pathways to Parliament

This last section looks beyond parliamentarians' most recent jobs to examine those who have had any experience in particular roles across their working lives. This perspective is useful because it highlights recurring pathways into politics that may not appear in last job analysis. It shows how roles such as staffers, union officials or lawyers often act as routes into parliamentary life. At the same time, it is necessarily selective. These pathways do not capture the full range of careers parliamentarians may have held, and we have not looked at other important roles in fields like healthcare, education or the arts that may also shape political outlooks. The aim is to highlight recurring tracks into politics, not to suggest these are the only forms of work that matter, or the only shared employment backgrounds across the 226 members and senators currently sitting in the federal Parliament.

Political Staffers, Union Workers, and Party Officers

A large share of parliamentarians had already worked inside politics before entering Parliament. In total, 92 parliamentarians, or around 40% of the Federal Parliament had at some point worked in a political office as a member of staff or advisor to a minister. For the major parties, internal roles continue to be a dominant pathway. Around

half of Labor's caucus and a third of Coalition parliamentarians had previously worked as staffers, learning the ropes of policy, legislation, and community representation inside the system before standing themselves. It is arguable that staffer roles function less as evidence of a closed party machine and more as a form of apprenticeship, where people learn how to navigate policy, legislation, and community concerns in preparation for the work of parliamentarians today.

In the current parliament, 20 representatives had previously held elected positions in unions (including student unions), 18 of which came from Labor (14.6% of its caucus). While unions no longer dominate candidate recruitment as they once did, the background continues to play a significant role in the Labor party, producing parliamentarians with skills in advocacy, negotiation and representation.

Party officer backgrounds are smaller again but still present. Fifteen parliamentarians had worked as party officers: 10 from Labor (8.1%) and five from the Coalition (7.1%). No Greens or Independents currently sitting in federal parliament have this background, which may reflect their looser organisational structures. Taken together, the staffer, union and party officer routes show that major parties still rely heavily on pathways that prepare people for parliamentary work before they stand for election.



Legal Profession

Across both chambers of Parliament, 46 parliamentarians, about one in five, previously worked as lawyers, solicitors or barristers. For the Greens, this pathway is especially prominent, with 36.4% of all parliamentarians having worked in a legal profession. Among Independents, three (23.1%) had legal backgrounds. Labor has 26 parliamentarians had previously worked as lawyers or barristers (21.1% of its caucus), while the Coalition has 13 (18.6%).

Law remains a classic training ground for political life, offering experience with legislation, advocacy and public argument. It also brings professional prestige and financial stability, which can support a transition into politics. The legal route is especially pronounced among the Greens and Independents, for whom legal practice often supplies both expertise and professional standing in the absence of staffer or union pathways.

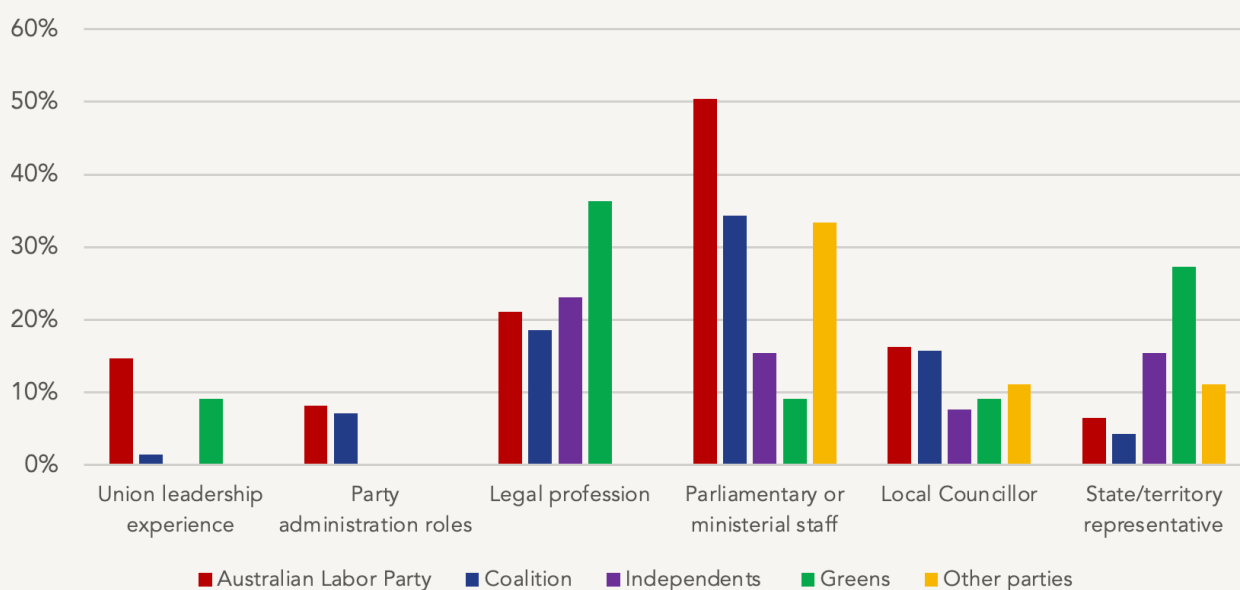
Previous Service in Local or State/Territory Parliaments

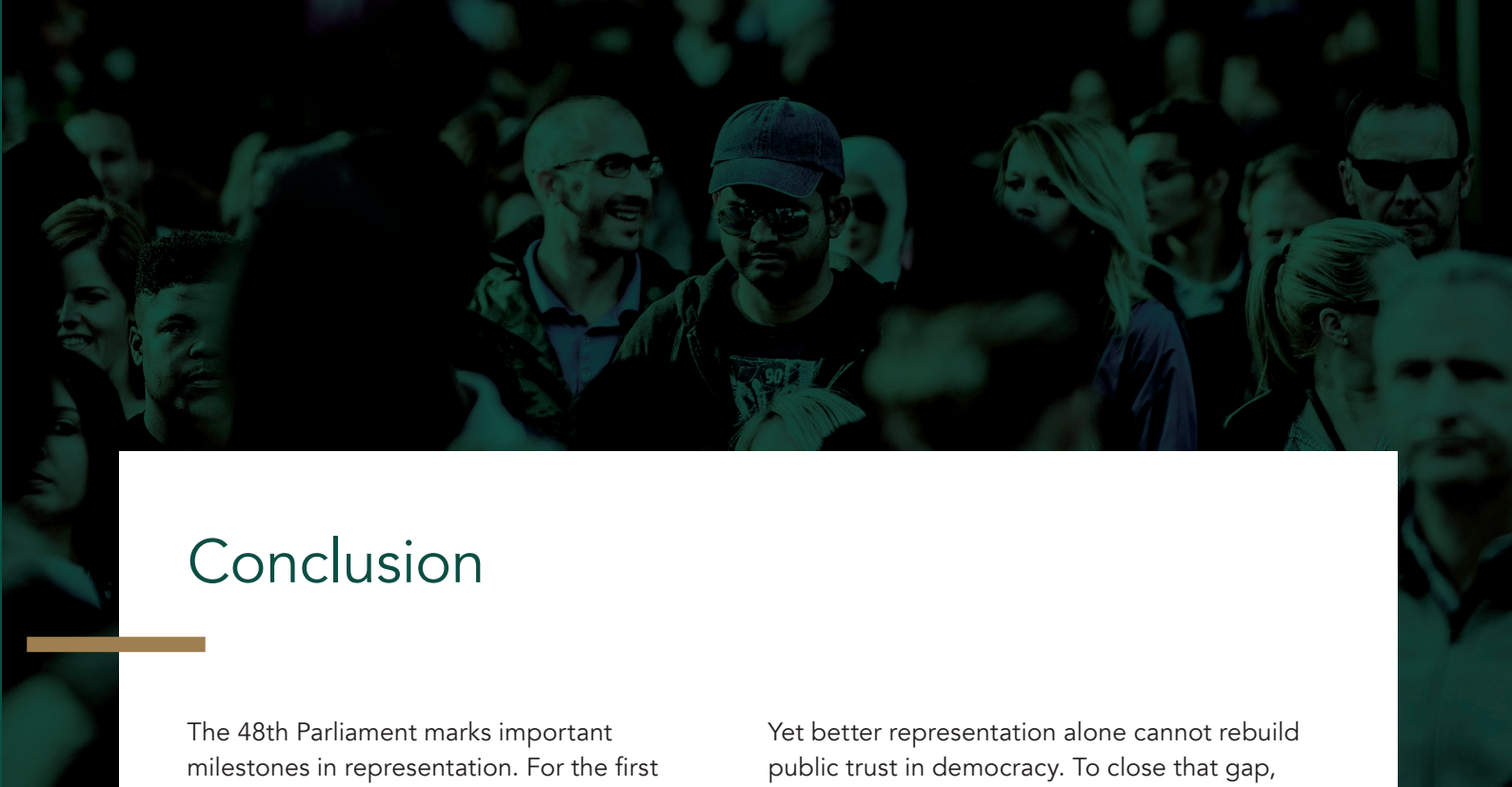
A minority of federal parliamentarians arrived with prior elected experience at the local or state/territory level, but the patterns differ between parties. For both Labor and the Coalition, around one in six parliamentarians had previously served on a local council (16.3% and 15.7% respectively). Councils remain a valuable form of political experience, providing governance skills, community recognition and a local base. By contrast, very few Independents (7.7%) or Greens (9.1%) in federal parliament have prior experience on local councils.

State and territory parliaments are a less common background overall, with just 17 parliamentarians having previously served in a state or territory parliament. Only 6.5% of Labor parliamentarians and 4.3% of Coalition parliamentarians have previously served at this level of government. In contrast, the proportions are higher for the Greens (27.3%). For the minor party, it seems state office can provide a platform to build recognition and credibility before running federally.

Taken together, the numbers suggest that while local councils and state parliaments contribute to the mix, they are not the primary backgrounds for federal politics.

Figure 12
Pathways to Parliament, Selected Background, by Party





Conclusion

The 48th Parliament marks important milestones in representation. For the first time, women make up nearly half of Australia's federal legislators, a transformation that has been three decades in the making through Labor's affirmative action quotas and the persistent efforts of community-based campaigns. Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has also remained above population share, and cultural diversity within parliament has broadened.

Despite this, the picture is uneven. Gains in gender parity remain fragile, heavily reliant on Labor's sustained commitment to quotas and the continued presence of Independent women in former Coalition strongholds. Cultural and linguistic diversity is still under-represented and parliament remains disproportionately shaped by those with professional and managerial backgrounds.

Representation is not just symbolic. The lived experiences of parliamentarians shape the questions asked, the policies pursued, and the solutions considered by those we elect to govern our nation. Greater diversity of identity, background, and occupation strengthens the capacity of parliament to reflect and respond to the realities of Australian life.

Yet better representation alone cannot rebuild public trust in democracy. To close that gap, transparency and accountability must improve. Measures such as routine diversity reporting, as recommended in the *Jenkins Review*,²³ would bring Australia in line with comparable democracies and provide the public with a clearer understanding of how far we have come, and how far we still need to go.

The 48th Parliament shows progress but also underlines the work ahead. If representation is to be both genuine and enduring, it must extend beyond gender parity and proportional numbers, to embrace the full spectrum of Australia's people, their stories, and their experiences.

This report provides a statistical snapshot of Parliament. Numbers can reveal patterns in gender, culture and class, but they cannot capture the full complexity of people's lives or the way individuals exercise political judgment. Parliamentarians are more than the sum of their demographic attributes: their values, experiences, and commitments cannot be reduced to census categories or occupational codes. Representation matters, but it is not everything: what ultimately counts is how those elected use their positions to serve the community.

