The Way In

Representation in the 46th Australian Parliament

percapita

FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

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About Per Capita

Per Capita is an independent public policy think tank, dedicated to fighting inequality in Australia. We work to build a new vision for Australia based on fairness, shared prosperity, community and social justice. Our research is rigorous, evidence-based and long-term in its outlook.

We consider the national challenges of the next decade rather than the next election cycle. We ask original questions and offer fresh solutions, drawing on new thinking in social science, economics and public policy.

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Introduction

Representation matters. Within our society a lot of attention is paid to how power is used, and in whose interests, but the issue of *who* has power is of equal importance. Indeed, the way in which political representation is constructed and perpetuated are central to the way our democracy functions. When power is concentrated in the hands of people who have very similar backgrounds and life experiences, and who are increasingly unrepresentative of the demographically changing communities that they are supposed to represent, democracy is diminished.

By exploring representation broadly through different lenses this report seeks to understand the paths to political power in the federal parliament, and shine a light on the often invisible, yet significant, barriers to entry faced by too many people within our electoral system.

Understanding to what extent our parliament, and by extension our democracy, is inclusive and accessible is critical to understanding the agency of its citizenry. Our democracy operates within a real community made up of real people, and as a result it is fallible – indeed, there is no perfect model of representation, and there are complex trade-offs in pursuing 'perfect' political representation aligned with the ever-changing social, economic and cultural demographics of Australian society.

Nonetheless, given the dearth of analyses considering diversity and political representation in our public discourse, it is imperative that we highlight the deficiencies in our contemporary parliament and work towards correcting any persistent underrepresentation of the Australian people.

This report explores the path to parliament taken by our current representative members of federal parliament, and considers a wide variety of identity, vocational and experiential factors, building on the previous Per Capita report looking at the 45th Federal Parliament, and published in 2019.[1] At its core, the research seeks to understand whether there is a particular path to parliament that allows one group to exercise a much greater degree of power and influence than any other, and shine a light on the underrepresented parts of our community.

[1] Lewis, A. (2019). *The Way In: Representation in the Australian Parliament*. https://percapita.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Way-In-Representation-in-the-Australian-Parliament-2.pdf

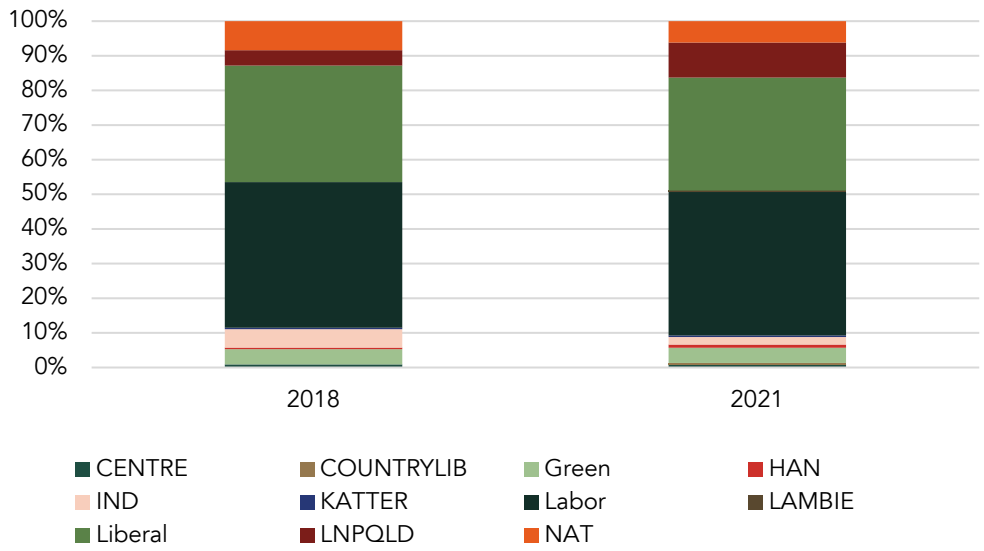
Key changes between the 45th and 46th Australian Parliaments

At its core, an election is a choice. It's a choice about what direction the country should be heading in, how we might get there and how quickly we want to get there. However, it's also a choice who we want to be driving us and how much trust them to deliver on the promises they make.

There were a number of changes to the composition of our parliament made at the last federal election. Most obviously, the political composition of the parliament changed, however marginally (see Figure 1). In the House of Representatives where government is formed, the governing Liberal/National Coalition won 77 seats, the Labor opposition won 68 seats and the minor parties and independents saw no change to the number of seats held. This represented a net gain of 1 seat for the Coalition and a net loss of 1 seat for Labor, with 10 seats changing hands.[2]

However, within that relatively small overall change in the Government's majority, there were significant gains by the Queensland Liberal National Party, and a reduction in the number of independents in parliament.

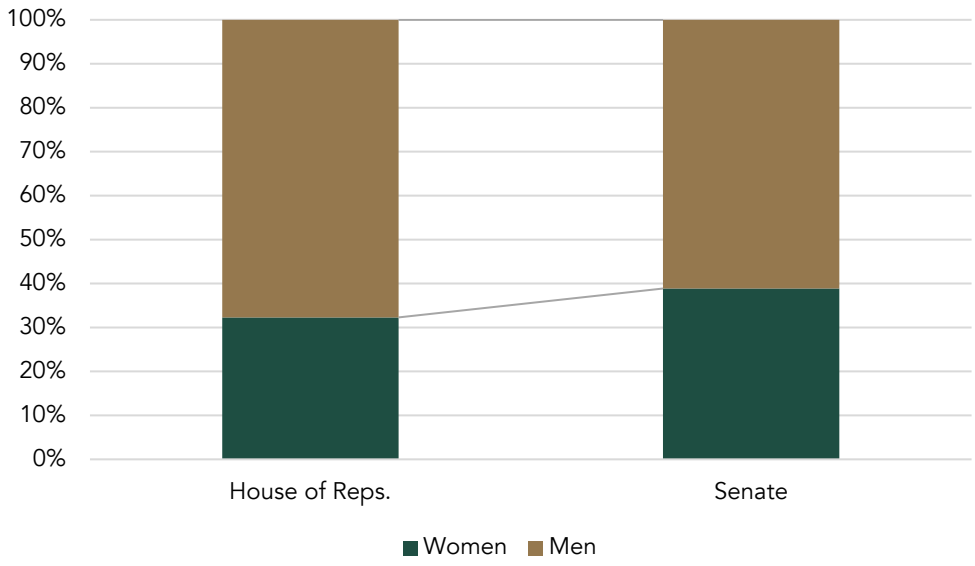
Figure 1
45th and 46th Parliaments by party affiliation



[2] While the seat of Indi saw the retiring independent Cathy McGowan step down and a new independent Helen Haines take the seat, Ms. Haines was chosen by Ms. McGowan and the *Voices of Indi* movement as her successor and thus is viewed as an independent retention rather than a seat changing hands.

At the election, there were a total of 1056 candidates nominating for a seat in the House of Representatives, standing to represent the communities in their electorate. Of this cohort, 32.29% or 341 were women (see Figure 2). After the election, 46 women were elected meaning that 30.67% of elected representatives within the House were women.

Figure 2
Candidates by gender, 2019 federal election



Within the Senate, there were a total of 458 candidates, where 178 or 38.86% were women. However, following the election approximately 52.5% of senators were women. As a result of the most recent election and crucial changes to the laws governing the election of senators, the Senate is now approaching parity with a ratio of 39 men to 37 women.

Demographics of the 46th Australian Parliament

Gender

Despite years of focus on gender representation in parliament, men remain overrepresented in parliament at the expense of all other gender identities. Overall, representativeness has improved since the last study was conducted, but the results are still dominated by men (see Table 1). Labor (47.9%) and the Greens (60%) have done most of the heavy lifting regarding women's participation in parliament: within the Coalition, the situation remains dire. While the Liberals have seen some modest improvements in representation, both Coalition parties are overwhelmingly dominated by men. As yet, no elected federal MPs or Senators have identified as non-binary.

Table 1
Party level gender representation data

	Australia	Parliament (227)	ALP (94)	Coalition (112)	Liberal (75)	LNP (23)	National (14)	Greens (10)	Independent /Other (11)
Women	50.7%	37.9% (86)	47.9% (45)	26.8% (30)	30.7% (23)	13.0% (3)	28.6% (4)	60% (6)	45.5% (5)
Men	49.3%	62.1% (141)	52.1% (49)	73.2% (82)	69.3% (52)	87.0% (20)	71.4% (10)	40% (4)	54.5% (6)
Non-binary	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Gender representation in cabinet presents an interesting pattern that reflects the overall pattern of representation. Labor's shadow cabinet has significantly more women than the Coalition's governmental cabinet. However, this is due in part to the Coalition being comprised of multiple political entities (namely the Liberal Party, the Country Liberal Party, the Queensland Liberal National Party, and the Nationals), each with lower than average representation of women in positions of leadership. This plays a role in limiting opportunities for women, as each woman faces institutional barriers and biases in their own sub-party systems, which are then also encountered in the federal parliamentary system.

Notably, the Australian parliament lags many others significantly in gender diversity. Data procured from the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) suggests that Australia ranks 50th in parliamentary gender diversity[3] (see Appendix 3 for further analyses).

[3] https://www.ipu.org/parliament/au

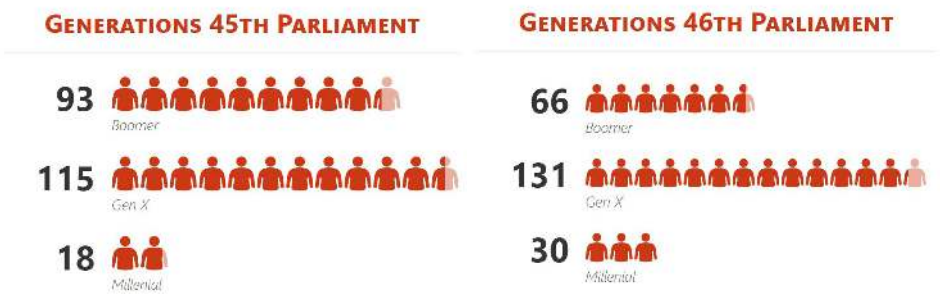
Generational Representation

The way that generational priorities affect politics has drawn much attention over recent years, as the ramifications of climate change will be felt longer and more acutely by younger generations. Australia is also experiencing a growing generational divide between older people who have benefitted from economic and social policies which provided them opportunities to access free education and affordable housing, and subsequently to increase their wealth through property holdings and secure jobs that are increasingly out of reach for younger Australians. Therefore, the adequacy of representation from a generational perspective is critical to ensure our parliament is serving the interests of the nation equally, with an eye to its future prosperity.

When exploring the generational diversity of our parliament, it is worth noting that age diversity is improving, as would be anticipated (see Figure 3). However, as with other identity categories, the current parliament remains unrepresentative on generational lines.

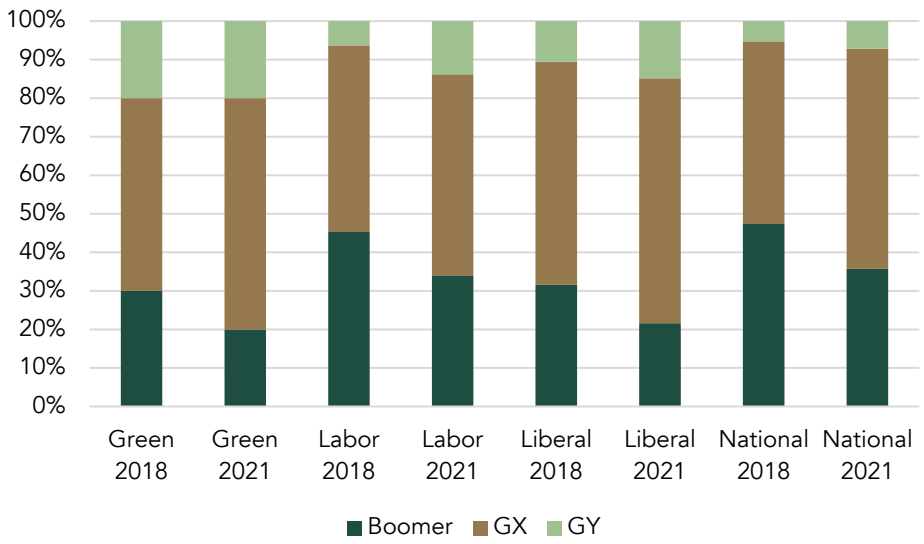
The 46th Parliament represented somewhat of a generational shift, with the ratio of Baby Boomers to Gen X changing markedly from the 45th Parliament. Gen X is now the largest cohort in parliament by a significant margin. Unsurprisingly, both ends of the generational landscape are absent from parliament, with no representation of the Silent Generation or Gen Z.

Figure 3
Generational representation in the 45th and 46th Parliaments



Within the 45th Parliament, the Labor and National parties contained large cohorts from the Baby Boomer generation, while the Greens and Liberal parties had large Gen X cohorts (see Figure 4). The Greens show the most balance across the three cohorts, where parity is easier to attain given the small sample size of the party. At the 2019 election, both the Labor and Liberal parties increased their Millenial cohorts, with the Labor party also increasing its representation of Gen X.

Figure 4
Generational representation by party, 45th & 46th Parliaments



Place of Birth

A significant proportion of the Australian population is born overseas, nearly one in three of us,[4] and it would be logical to assume that this would result in an approximate number of parliamentarians who were born overseas as well. However, Australian parliamentarians are overwhelmingly born locally (see Table 2).

Table 2
Representation by birthplace, by party

	Australian population	Parliament (227)	ALP (94)	Coalition (112)	Liberal (75)	LNP (23)	National (14)	Greens (10)	Independent/ Other (11)
Born in Australia	70.2%	89.4% (203)	89.4% (84)	94.6% (106)	92.0% (69)	100% (23)	100% (14)	50% (5)	72.7% (8)
Born overseas	29.8%	10.6% (24)	10.6% (10)	5.4% (6)	8.0% (6)	0% (0)	0% (0)	50% (5)	27.3% (3)

When we consider the birthplaces of our current parliamentarians, considerable differences are apparent between parties, but all fall well short of being representative of the wider community. Notably, the National party has no parliamentarians born overseas, while both

[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). 30% of Australia's Population Born Overseas. https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/30-australias-population-born-overseas

the Labor and Liberal parties have significant minorities of foreign-born parliamentarians. The minor parties and independents have the largest foreign-born cohorts.

There is also a lack of diversity *within* the overseas-born cohort of current parliamentarians, with the majority of those born overseas come from continental Europe (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Countires of Birth, 46th Parliament

It is important to note that while representation of place of birth is important, it does not adequately capture the diversity of ethnic and cultural identity in the Australian community.

Cultural background

Australia is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse nations in the world. Research has shown that Australia is also arguably the most successful multicultural nation in the world, with migrants to Australia experiencing the quickest rate of social mobility between the generations. [5] Yet, as shown in our 2018 report on the make-up of the 45th Parliament, this is yet to translate into comparable diversity in our elected representatives.

The results of our current analysis are consistent with that of the 2018 report. While there has been some modest improvement in diversity along the lines of cultural background, the vast majority of cultural and ethnic diversity derives from individuals with European and North American heritage (see Table 3).

[5] Soutphommasane, T. (2012). *Don't go back to where you came from: Australia's Multicultural Genius.* NewSouth Books.

Table 3
Cultural background, by party

	Australia	Parliament (227)	ALP (94)	Coalition (112)	LP & CLP (75)	LNP (23)	NP (14)	Greens (10)	Independent (11)
'Australian' + NW European	~78.3%	86.9% (197)	85.1% (80)	88.4% (99)	86.7% (65)	91.3% (21)	92.3% (13)	70% (7)	100% (11)
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander	2.80%	3.2% (7)	4.4% (4)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	20% (2)	0% (0)
Oceanian excl. Australian & ATSI	1.68%	0.4% (1)	0% (0)	0.9% (1)	0% (0)	4.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Italian	4.27%	3.5% (8)	3.2% (3)	4.5% (5)	4.0% (3)	4.3% (1)	7.1% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Greek	1.70%	1.3% (3)	2.1% (2)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Southern & Eastern European excl. Italian & Greek	4.98%	0.9% (2)	1.1% (1)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
North African & Middle Eastern	2.83%	1.3% (3)	2.1% (2)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Filipino	1.30%	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Vietnamese	1.26%	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
South-East Asian excl. Filipino & Vietnamese	1.31%	0.9% (2)	1.1% (1)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Chinese	5.19%	0.4% (1)	0% (0)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
North-East Asian excl. Chinese	0.88%	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Indian	2.65%	0.4% (1)	0% (0)	0.9% (1)	1.3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Southern & Central Asian excl. Indian	2.15%	0.4% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	10% (1)	0% (0)
Peoples of the Americas	1.13%	0.4% (1)	1.1% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Sub-Saharan African	1.11%	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0	0% (0)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation

While the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) parliamentarians has increased since the 45th Parliament, only Labor (4.4%) and the Greens (22%) have enough parliamentarians from ATSI backgrounds to adequately represent the Indigenous population (2.8%).

The Greens, having appointed their first two Indigenous senators to casual vacancies since the 2019 election, now have the largest percentage of Indigenous representatives, with two of their ten members possessing ATSI heritage, whereas they had none until June 2020.

The Labor party has the largest number of members with ATSI heritage, with four Indigenous parliamentarians at the time data was collected for this report.[6]

One member of the crossbench, Senator Jacqui Lambie, is listed as identifying as Indigenous[7].

This is the area in which we have seen the most progress in representation between the 45th and 46th Parliament, due to recent Senate appointments by the Greens and the ALP. The current parliament is now proportionally representative of Indigenous Australians, with a parliamentary share of 3.2% compared to a population share of 2.8%.
It is important to note that, while the 46th Australian Parliament has the largest number of Indigenous representatives in its history, constitutional recognition of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament remains the critical representative model developed through a deliberative process and agreed to by Indigenous people through the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) representation

The 46th Federal Parliament is slightly more culturally and ethnically diverse than the 45th, but there remains significant underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, as reflected in Table 3 above.

[6] We note that the number of Labor parliamentarians with ATSI heritage has since increased to five with the appointment of Senator Jana Stewart to fill a casual vacancy caused by the death of Senator Kimberly Kitching on 5 April 2022. For the purposes of this report, we have not included Senator Stewart as she was appointed to the Senate just five days before the 46th Parliament was prorogued on 11 April 2022)

[7] Richards, L. (2021). Indigenous Australian parliamentarians in federal and state / territory parliaments: a quick guide (Issue June).

As with gender, Labor leads the parties in terms of cultural diversity.[8] The overall diversity trend in parliament is positive, suggesting that parliament is slowly becoming more diverse, particularly in terms of electing more parliamentarians with South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) and South East Asian heritage. Even so, only 7% of current parliamentarians have a non-European cultural background despite approximately 18.6% of Australians identifying with a non-European cultural heritage.

[8] While the Greens have the lowest amount of European heritage, they only have First Nations representation outside of European heritage, representing lesser overall diversity.

Educational background of the 46th Australian Parliament

School education

In 2020, 65.6% of Australian school students were enrolled in government schools, 19.4% in Catholic schools, and 15.0% in private independent schools.[9] The 46th Parliament does not align to the broader population, with parliamentarians being much more likely to receive a private education than the broader population.

Coalition parliamentarians are the most likely to receive a private education, with three quarters of Coalition MPs and Senators being educated independently. Parliamentarians from Labor, the Greens and Independents, are more likely to have received a public education. Note that Green Senator Jordan Steel-John was home-schooled.

Table 4
School education of the 46th Parliament

	Australia	Parliament (227)	ALP (94)	Coalition (112)	Liberal (75)	LNP QLD (23)	National (14)	Greens (10)	Independent/ Other (11)
Government	65.6%	38.8% (88)	50.0% (47)	25.9% (29)	26.7% (20)	30.4% (7)	14.2% (2)	60% (6)	54.5% (6)
Catholic	19.4%	22.9% (52)	26.6% (25)	23.2% (26)	22.7% (17)	17.4% (4)	35.7% (5)	0% (0)	9.1%% (1)
Private (independent)	15.0%	22.0% (50)	11.7% (11)	31.3% (35)	32.0% (24)	34.8% (8)	21.4% (3)	20% (2)	18.2% (2)
Unknown		15.9% (36)	11.7% (11)	19.6% (22)	18.7% (14)	17.4% (4)	28.6% (4)	20% (1)	18.2% (2)
Home-schooled		0.44% (1)						10% (1)	

Post-School Education

The level of post-school education varies significantly amongst the parties (see Table 5). The Nationals were the most likely party to have received a High School Certificate (21%), Diploma (13%) or Undergraduate degree (40%), and no members held any postgraduate qualification. At the other end of the scale, the Greens were most likely to have a PhD (20%) while the Liberals were most likely to hold a Master's degree (34%).

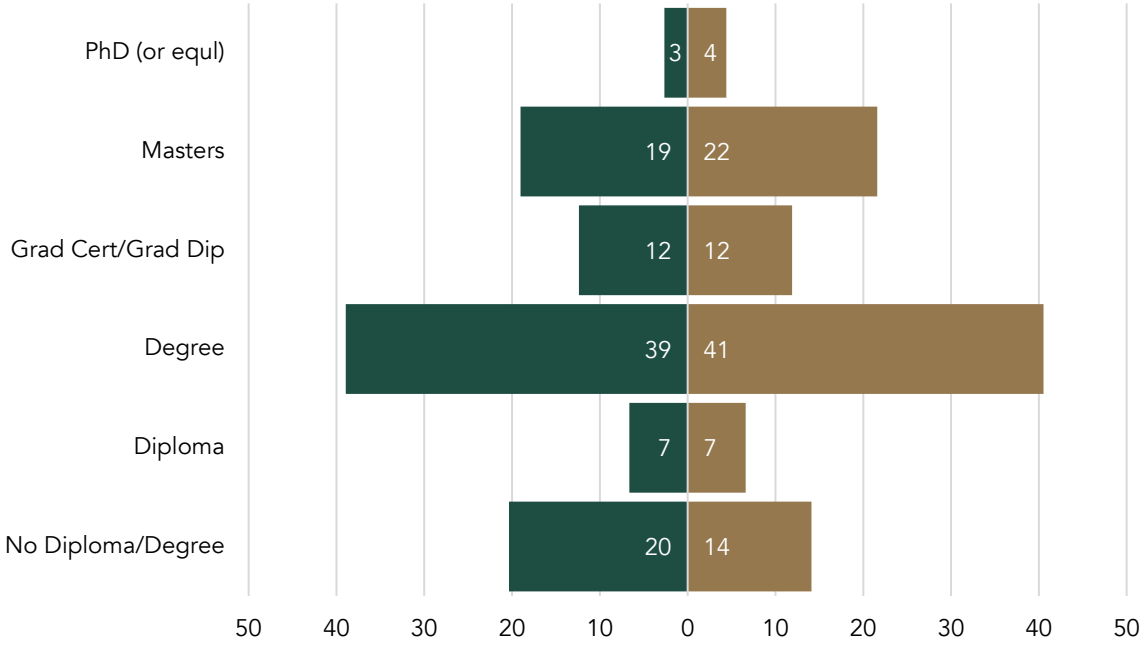
[9] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release

Table 5
Post-school education of the 46th Parliament

	Labor	Coalition	Liberal	LNP QLD	National	Green	Independent /Other
High School	11%	15%	9%	26%	21%	10%	45%
Diploma	6%	7%	4%	13%	14%	0%	0%
UG degree	44%	40%	35%	35%	64%	40%	9%
Grad Cert/Dip	15%	8%	12%	9%	0%	10%	27%
Masters	19%	26%	34%	17%	0%	20%	9%
PhD	5%	2%	3%	0%	0%	20%	0%
Unknown	0%	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The number of parliamentarians holding a Masters or PhD has increased significantly since the 45th Parliament (see Figure 9). To determine the overall change in qualification levels, we assign a score to each qualification based on the AQF level framework differences between qualifications. In the simplest sense, qualifications are assigned an ascending score based on their level for example from certificate, to undergraduate degree to PhD. The overall level of qualifications evidenced by members of parliament has also increased.

Figure 6
Post-school qualifications, 45th and 46th Parliament (by percentage)



In average terms the qualification level of a parliamentarian is between an undergraduate degree level, and a graduate certificate level, equating to an undergraduate degree and

50% of a graduate certificate. The change from the 45th Parliament, when the average was almost exactly at the undergraduate level, equates to an 8.99% increase in qualification levels. The number of parliamentarians with a Master's degree or above rose from 22% in the last study to 26% in the most recent study.

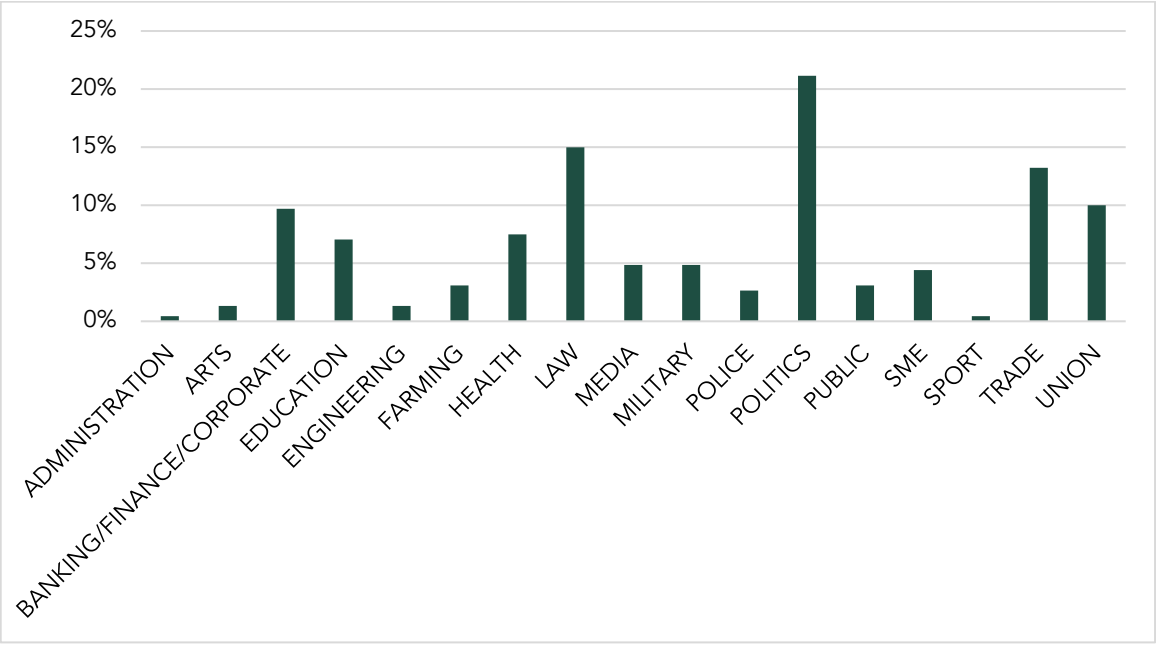
With 79% of parliamentarians possessing a degree qualification and just over 24.3% of the Australian population possessing a degree qualification, the university educated are significantly overrepresented compared to those with a vocational background.

Vocational background of the 46th Australian Parliament

The experience that leads people into politics can tell us a lot about our parliamentary representation and the leadership of our country. The occupational background of parliamentarians influences their worldview, their social networks, their personal wealth and, therefore, their policy priorities.

The current parliament has a diversity of vocational backgrounds, but the 46th Parliament continues to be dominated by people who have come from the legal profession and the ranks of political and parliamentary staff (see Figure 7). Whether this is beneficial or deleterious to the political process is open to interpretation, but the lack of diversity in vocational backgrounds of parliamentarians is notable, and arguably narrows the range of knowledge and expertise of elected policy makers.

Figure 7
Vocational background of the 46th Parliament



While the obvious benefit of a background in law is clear within a legislature, and experience as a policy adviser or political staffer is undoubtedly valuable, it is self-evident that greater representation among parliamentarians from other fields of enterprise would strengthen the diversity of views and breadth of understanding of the needs and experiences of the Australian community.

Further, given the significance of farming, health, engineering and education industries within Australia, the expertise that greater representation from those backgrounds would provide could only be helpful to our elected policy makers.

The difference across party lines is also interesting. As the 'party of workers', 26% of Labor parliamentarians have a trade union background, and many of those started work 'on the shop floor'. Similarly, where the Liberal party is closely associated with business interests, 18% of Liberal parliamentarians come from the banking and finance or corporate sectors, which is the dominant background for all Coalition parties other than politics (working as a policy adviser or political staffer). The latter is the background of around one in five current parliamentarians, with similar proportions of former political staff across the aisle. Both major parties have 15% of representatives from a legal background.

Interestingly, 21% of National Party representatives are from the corporate sector, while only 7% of their members outside Queensland have a background in farming. Among the Queensland LNP that figure is 4%, while 22% come from small business. The most common occupational background for parliamentarians from the Greens Party is in health care, while the cross-bench has a significant proportion of former military officers and small business people.

Table 6

Occupational background of the 46th Parliament

	Parliament	Labor	Coalition	Liberal	LNP QLD	National	Greens	Independent/ Other
ADMINISTRATION	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	0%
ARTS	1%	1%	2%	0%	4%	7%	0%	0%
BANKING/FINANCE/ CORPORATE	10%	1%	18%	18%	17%	21%	10%	0%
EDUCATION	7%	12%	4%	4%	0%	7%	10%	0%
ENGINEERING	1%	0%	2%	0%	9%	0%	0%	8%
FARMING	3%	0%	5%	5%	4%	7%	0%	8%
HEALTH/COMMUNITY	7%	7%	5%	4%	4%	7%	30%	17%
LAW	15%	15%	15%	22%	0%	7%	20%	8%
MEDIA	5%	6%	5%	3%	4%	14%	0%	0%
MILITARY	5%	1%	6%	7%	9%	0%	0%	25%
POLICE	3%	1%	4%	1%	9%	7%	10%	0%
POLITICS	21%	24%	23%	30%	4%	14%	0%	0%
PUBLIC	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	0%	0%	8%
SME	4%	0%	6%	3%	22%	0%	0%	25%
SPORT	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
TRADE	3%	2%	3%	0%	9%	7%	10%	0%
UNION	11%	26%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Tenure of Parliamentarians in the 46th Australian Parliament

Little is known about the tenure of parliamentarians, yet it plays an important role in the functioning of democracy. By understanding parliamentary tenure, we are better equipped to understand not only the volatility of particular electorates but also the types of people who are likely to ascend to positions of ministerial responsibility or party leadership.

Tenure is an imperfect measure of competence and experience given that it considers neither the proximate experience nor the level of appointment, but it is a worthwhile starting point. As anticipated the major political parties contain a mixture of highly experienced longstanding members and more recent novice parliamentarians. The average tenure of the current members of parliament is 8.62 years (we note that this is influenced by the different parliamentary terms in each house, with Senators serving six year terms compared to an average three-year term in the House of Representatives (see Table 7).

Labor parliamentarians have increased their tenure from 8.65 years in 2018 to 9.59 years in 2021, while their Coalition counterparts have remained stagnant, decreasing slightly from 8.2 to 8.11 over the same period. The Greens tenure remains at 6-6.5 years, which is most likely explained by their presence in the Senate versus their single lower house parliamentarian. Additionally, tenure averages amongst independents is particularly short.

Table 7
Tenure of members of the 45th and 46th Parliaments, by party (in years)

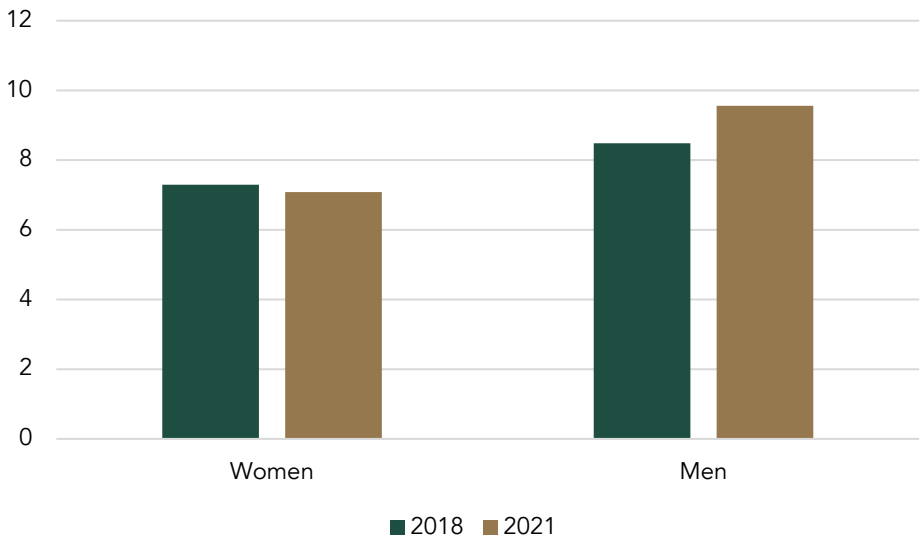
	LABOR	LIBERAL	LNP QLD	NATIONAL	GREENS	PHON	INDEPENDENT/ OTHER
45th	8.7	8.6	9.1	6.3	6.0	4.0	4.3
46th	9.6	8.2	8.7	6.9	6.5	5.0	6.0

The average tenure of men in the most recent parliament continues to be greater than the tenure of women (see Figure 8), with men serving a full two years longer on average than women.

Worse still, women's tenure in parliament has decreased following the high-profile resignations of a number of female Coalition MPs, citing gender based conflict as a reason for departure.

Figure 8

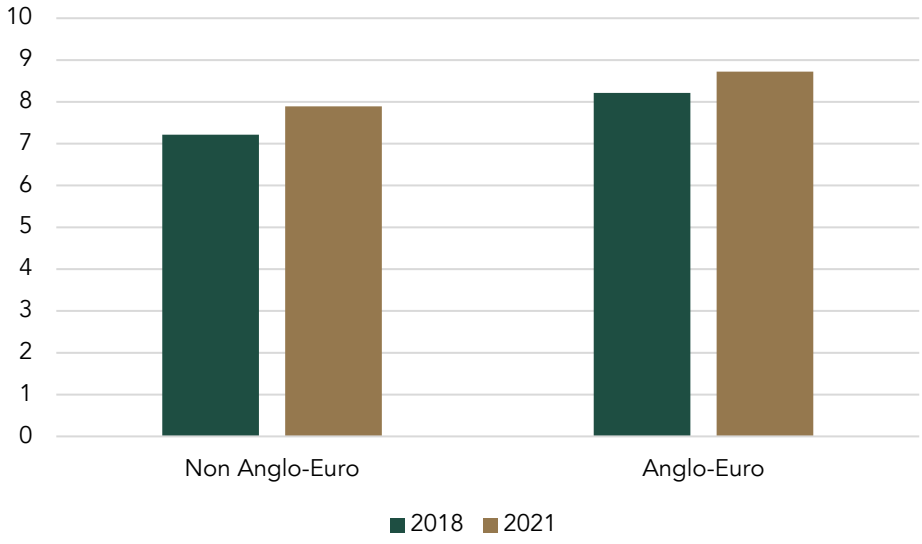
Average parliamentary tenure by gender



Cultural and ethnic background also plays a significant role in determining tenure, with culturally diverse parliamentarians serving a full year less than their Anglo-European counterparts on average (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Average parliamentary tenure by cultural / ethnic background



Conclusion

Despite some improvements – most notably in the proportion of Indigenous representation, driven by Labor and the Greens – the Australian Parliament continues to be dominated by white, Anglo-European men with backgrounds in law and politics.

Favourably, there is a trend towards gender parity, again largely driven by the efforts of Labor and the Greens to increase the numbers of women in their ranks. Similarly, there have been positive steps towards more equal generational and cultural representation.

But there is a long way to go before our parliament can claim to be truly representative of its people. Not only are white men, born in Australia, from English-speaking backgrounds, with a tertiary education and a prior career in law or politics more likely to get elected, our political tenure analysis shows that they also stay longer in parliament, suggesting they are more likely to be pre-selected to stand for election in safer, less politically volatile electorates.

Overall, trends within the parliamentary data suggest that modest but not insignificant progress has been made in a number of important dimensions of representativeness, including, as noted, in the representation of Indigenous Australians and women within Labor and the Greens, and through notable generational renewal, particularly among Coalition parliamentarians, at the last federal election.

Nevertheless, the Australian Parliament continues to lag well behind its international counterparts in the ethnic and cultural diversity of its membership, and falls far short of adequately reflecting the changing demographics of our nation. Further analyses of the key dimensions of gender and ethnicity are detailed in the appendices.

What remains striking is the significant educational divide between the Australian people and their elected representatives, and the relatively narrow range of the prior vocational occupations of our elected representatives, with those from legal or political staffing backgrounds dominant. This vocational trend towards the professionalisation of politics has accelerated markedly over the last three decades, as demonstrated in our 2018 analysis, which compared the 45th Parliament with the 35th, in 1988.

This strongly suggests that politics has become a vocation in itself, rather than a public service undertaken by people with experience in different walks of life choosing to represent their local communities in Canberra. Whether this trend is disrupted by the significant number of independent, community-based candidates running at the 2022 election remains to be seen. It will be a pertinent question for the next study in this series.

Appendix 1: Methodology

The data within this report was collected by Per Capita over 2021, drawing on the 2018 version of this report.[10] Consistent with the 2018 iteration, this report compiles information on every federal MP from the 1988 and 2018 Parliaments across four categories: demographic backgrounds, schooling, tertiary education, and career experience. It adds to further dimensions, generational representation and cabinet portfolio assignment. The most recent iteration also employs entropy measures (a statistical measure of uncertainty or variability within our modelling) to quantify diversity across key dimensions.

For comparability, we construct entropy measures employing the well understood and accepted HHI (Herfindahl Hirschman Index) for political parties with member representation of 10 or greater, noting that including smaller counts may be misleading.[11] We include general percentage comparisons for all parties with representation equal to or greater than five, or where such presentation is valid.

Information was derived from parliamentary biographies, parliamentarians' own websites, and from media reporting, interviews and Hansard. Information on 1988's MPs came from ParlInfo biographies, obituaries, and the Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate.

Some differences in classification methods and the use of associated entropy measures may result in variations between this report and the 2018 edition. Wherever possible, we have retained the classification methods employed in the 2018 edition to facilitate comparability.

Parties are explored through multiple dimensions reflecting their independence and their association as broader political groups. The data is then compared against figures for broad Australian public, taken mostly from the 2016 Census but also from other ABS tables and data sets, which are referenced throughout below.

HHI Methodology

The HHI is commonly employed to measure diversity and concentration in different markets and is akin to the Simpson Index in the applied sciences. The HHI is determined by simply squaring the individual shares of a given category and summing the result, where 1 denotes extreme concentration and 0.01 denotes extreme diversity.

$$HHI = \sum_{i=1}^{n} shares_i^2$$

[10] Lewis, A. (2018). *The Way In: Representation in the Australian Parliament*. https://percapita.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Way-In-Representation-in-the-Australian-Parliament-2.pdf

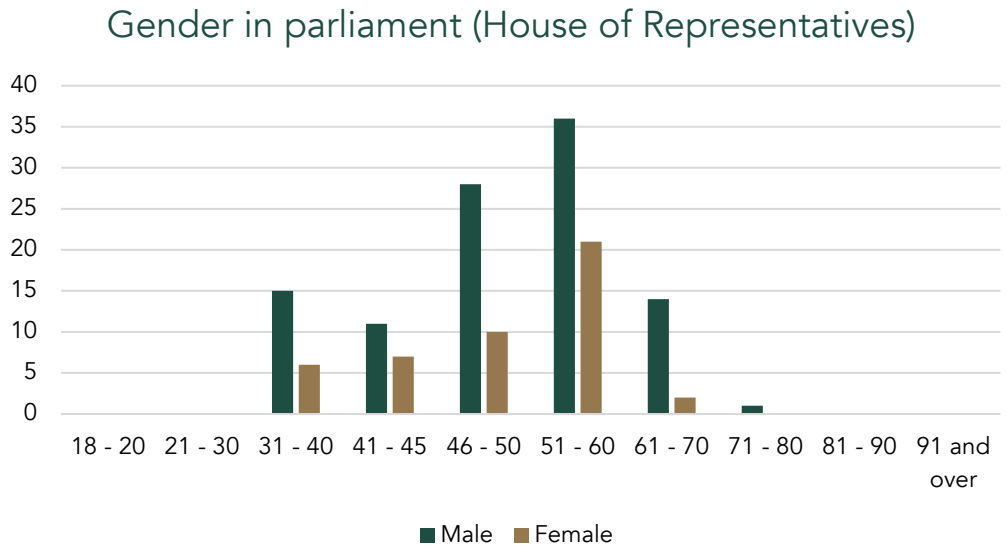
[11] In particular, Australia has a number of minority parties with 10 or less members in parliament, making their outcomes in this model less sidnificant than the major parties.

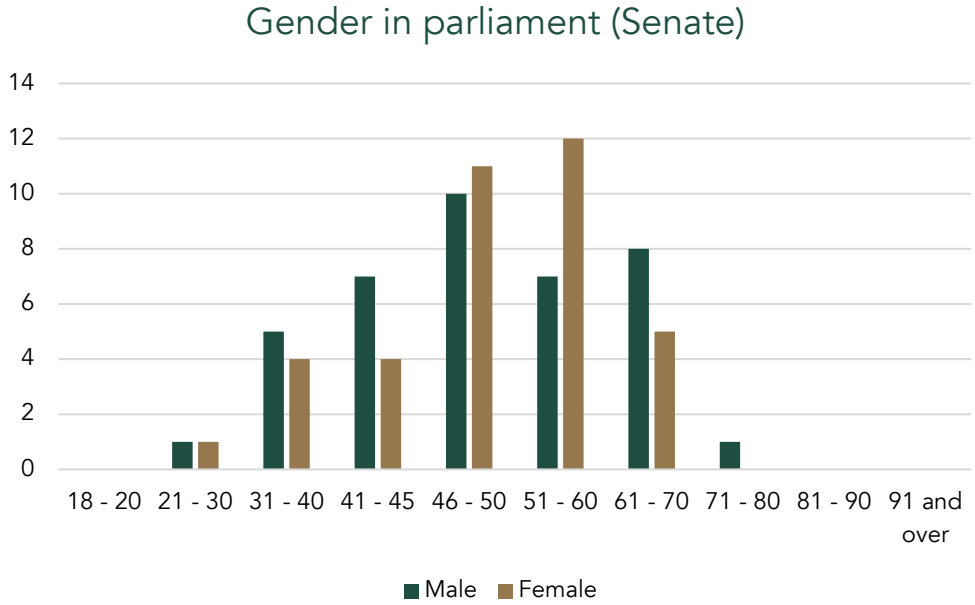
Appendix 2: Further trends in political representation

We briefly outline further trends in representation by exploring additional dimensions in the TWI dataset. Specifically, we explore age by gender and ethnicity, and tenure by ethnicity and gender, assuming a logical association between tenure and age. We also explore the association between cabinet and tenure as well as the age of new members of parliament.

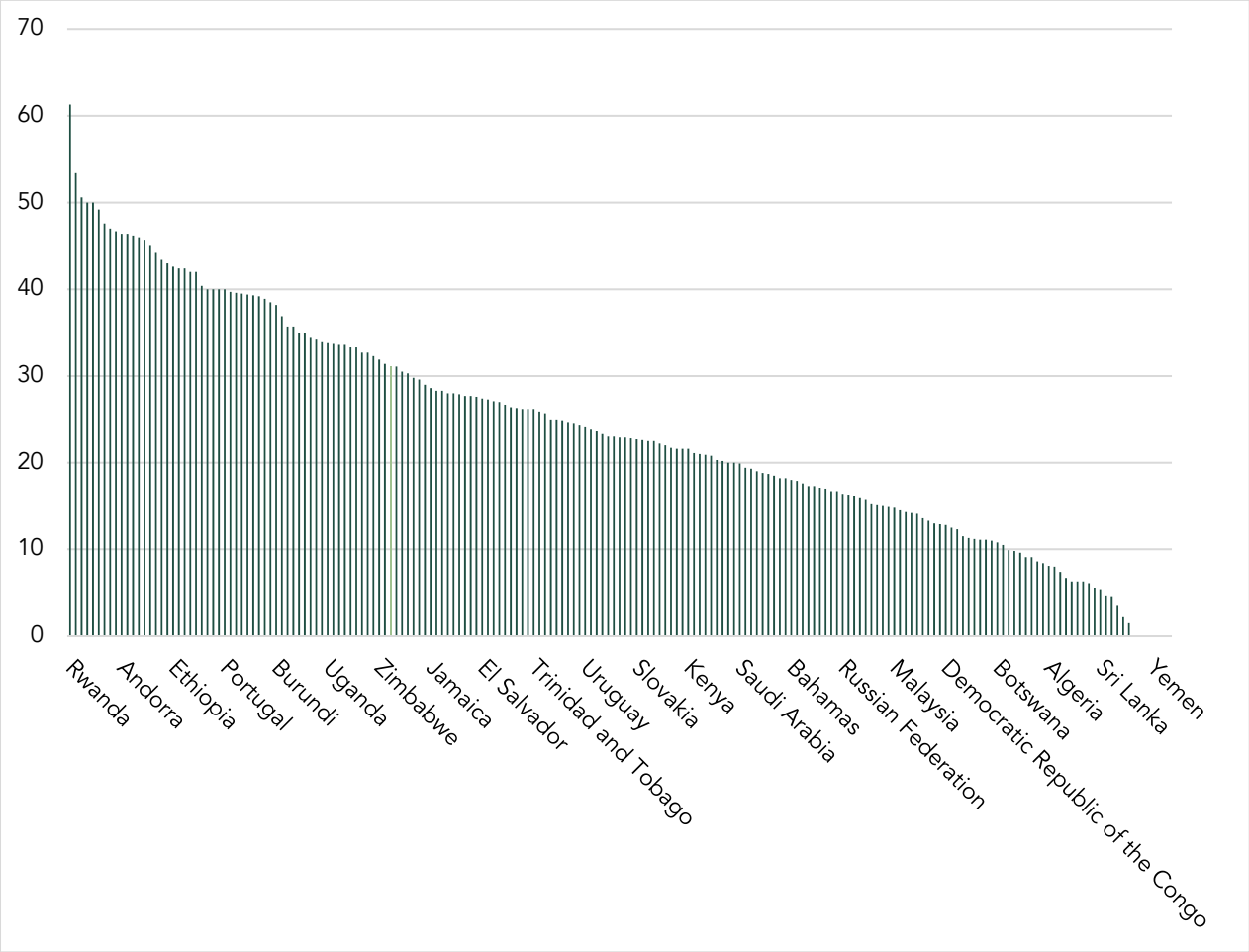
Gender and age distribution

Women continue to be less well represented in the 46-50, 51-60 and 61-70 cohorts within parliament. This trend is only evident within the House of Representatives, noting that the Senate is near parity overall and observes less variation within each age cohort, by gender.





Appendix 3: International benchmarking in gender representation and intergenerational representation

Australia still lags much of the OECD and many non-OECD countries in regard to gender equality in parliament. At the time of writing data supplied by the Inter Parliamentary Union suggests that Australia ranks 50th Globally in terms of equality of representation in government.

Gender diversity in parliament rankings