

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF  
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS  
PRESS RELEASE 912  
OUR POLITICIANS AND  
WHERE THEY WENT TO SCHOOL**

A recent article in the Sydney Morning Herald outlined the schooling background of our Members of Parliament. And it makes very interesting reading.

Given that two thirds of Australian children attend public schools, it could certainly be argued that they, their parents and their teachers are grossly under-represented in our current democratic system of government.

Private school graduates are over-represented – 30 per cent more Members of Parliament attended non-government schools. Of those, 71 per cent of Liberals and 67 per cent of Nationals attended private schools while only 46 per cent of Labor Members of Parliament attended private schools.

Four Members of Parliament, Julie Collins, Llew O'Brien, Terry Young and Jacqui Lambie – did not finish high school.

These figures perhaps explain the current disconnect between large sections of the voting population and their political representatives.

The trust in teachers has skyrocketed during the pandemic, but our trust in the political class, particularly at the federal level, is in decline. We are presented, on this front, with many politicians from a private school background who appear to think that they are entitled to rule, whatever the consequences to our public school system, - and even the climate future of all of our children.

The future for democracy lies in our public system of education and our public services, not in a private sector that has gone AWOL on the common good.

## **SYDNEY MORNING HERALD: RELEVANT SECTION OF THE ARTICLE:**

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### **Pathways to Parliament**

Australia's Parliament could be viewed as unrepresentative, elite and homogenous: it is stacked with private school graduates and MPs are twice as likely to be university educated. But this is not the full story.

by Noah Yim & [Daniel Carter](#)

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The average federal MP is a man born in 1969 who graduated from a private school, attained an arts degree and worked in business or management before being elected. However, our MPs come from more diverse walks of life than their counterparts in the UK and US: four didn't finish Year 12, and there are former farmers, truck drivers and sportspeople among the lawyers and lobbyists.

Liberal Party members are likely to have additional experience from fields such as the military, agriculture, or lobbying and the men are less likely to have an undergraduate degree than women in their party room.

In the Labor Party caucus, men and women have similar rates of undergraduate education, and are more likely to have attended public secondary schooling than members of the Coalition. Its members are likely to have worked in unions, public service, or education before Parliament.

Data collected for *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* takes a snapshot of the education and career backgrounds that members of the 46th Parliament bring with them.

In some ways, the Parliament is unrepresentative, elite, and homogenous: it is stacked with private school graduates; there is a preponderance of arts and law degrees and a shortage of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics degrees (although **12.8** per cent of female MPs have a STEM degree, compared to **6.4** per cent of men); and generally high-income fields such as law and business are overrepresented.

However, this is not the full story.

Inspired by an analysis in [The New York Times](#), this dataset is a cross-section of Australia's highest representative body and reveals idiosyncrasies that our democracy has fostered.

### **Where They Came From**

High School

Private school graduates are overrepresented in Parliament; **30 per cent** more MPs attended **non-government** schools than public schools.

In comparison, ABS data shows that in the 80s – when the average MP would have attended high school – **public** high schools catered for approximately **150** per cent more students than private schools.

Digging deeper into the numbers, **71** per cent of **Liberals** and **67** per cent of **Nationals** attended non-government schools...

...while only **46** per cent of **Labor** MPs attended non-government schools.

Senior MPs are more likely to have attended private schools. Of the **Coalition's** cabinet, **87** per cent attended private schools and **48** per cent of **Labor's** shadow cabinet attended non-government high schools.

Constituting just under **2** per cent of the Parliament, four MPs – **Julie Collins, Llew O'Brien, Terry Young, and Jacqui Lambie** – did not graduate high school. This compares to over **40** per cent not completing high school in the 1980s, when the average MP would have left high school.

Three MPs – **Gladys Liu, Mehreen Faruqi, and Kristina Keneally** – graduated high school overseas and one MP – **Jordon Steele-John** – was home-schooled.

### **Undergraduate** (University Education)

Over **three-quarters** of MPs (76 per cent) have at least one undergraduate degree.

This is more than **double** the rate among everyday Australians; the ABS reported in 2020 that **35** per cent of the Australians aged between 20 and 65 had at least one undergraduate degree.

Despite the apparent gulf between those two figures, Australia's Parliament has a strong contingent of representatives without university degrees compared to the US House of Representatives, where about **95** per cent have a university degree and the UK House of Commons (**85** per cent), according to latest available data.

The Liberal and Labor parties have similar rates of undergraduate education, with **82** per cent and **81** per cent of their caucuses respectively holding a bachelor's degree or higher. For the Greens it is **70** per cent.

Of the caucuses with at least 10 members, the Nationals are the least credentialed, with **57** per cent holding undergraduate degrees.

Of the MPs who have undergraduate degrees, **58** per cent studied **arts** and **35** per cent studied **law**...

...whereas only **13** per cent studied a **STEM or medicine degree**.

### Postgraduate Education

**Half** of all MPs with **postgraduate** qualifications sit in the **Liberal** party room.

Of them, **seven** attained their postgraduate degrees at either the prestigious British **Oxbridge** or American **Ivy League** universities (Treasurer Josh Frydenberg attended both, attaining a Master of Philosophy at the University of Oxford and a Master of Public Administration at Harvard University).

Eleven MPs came to Parliament armed with a PhD: two Liberals (**Katie Allen** and **Fiona Martin**); five Labor MPs (**Anne Aly**, **Jim Chalmers**, **Andrew Leigh**, **Daniel Mulino**, and **Jess Walsh**); two Greens (**Adam Bandt** and **Mehreen Faruqi**), one Nationals MP (**Anne Webster**), and Independent **Helen Haines**.

#### **Career:**

##### Blue-Collar or Service

The Australian Parliament has a strong representation of former **blue-collar** or **service** workers, with **22** per cent of MPs citing experience in non-professional fields. In comparison, less than **5** per cent of the US House in 2019 came from such backgrounds.

Of the 51 MPs who previously held blue-collar or service jobs, **half** are in the **Labor** Party, a by-product of the party's roots in the labour movement. This means **27** per cent of Labor MPs have blue-collar or service experience.

This is just behind **30** per cent of the **Greens**...

with the **Liberals** and **Nationals** trailing at **19** per cent apiece.

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