

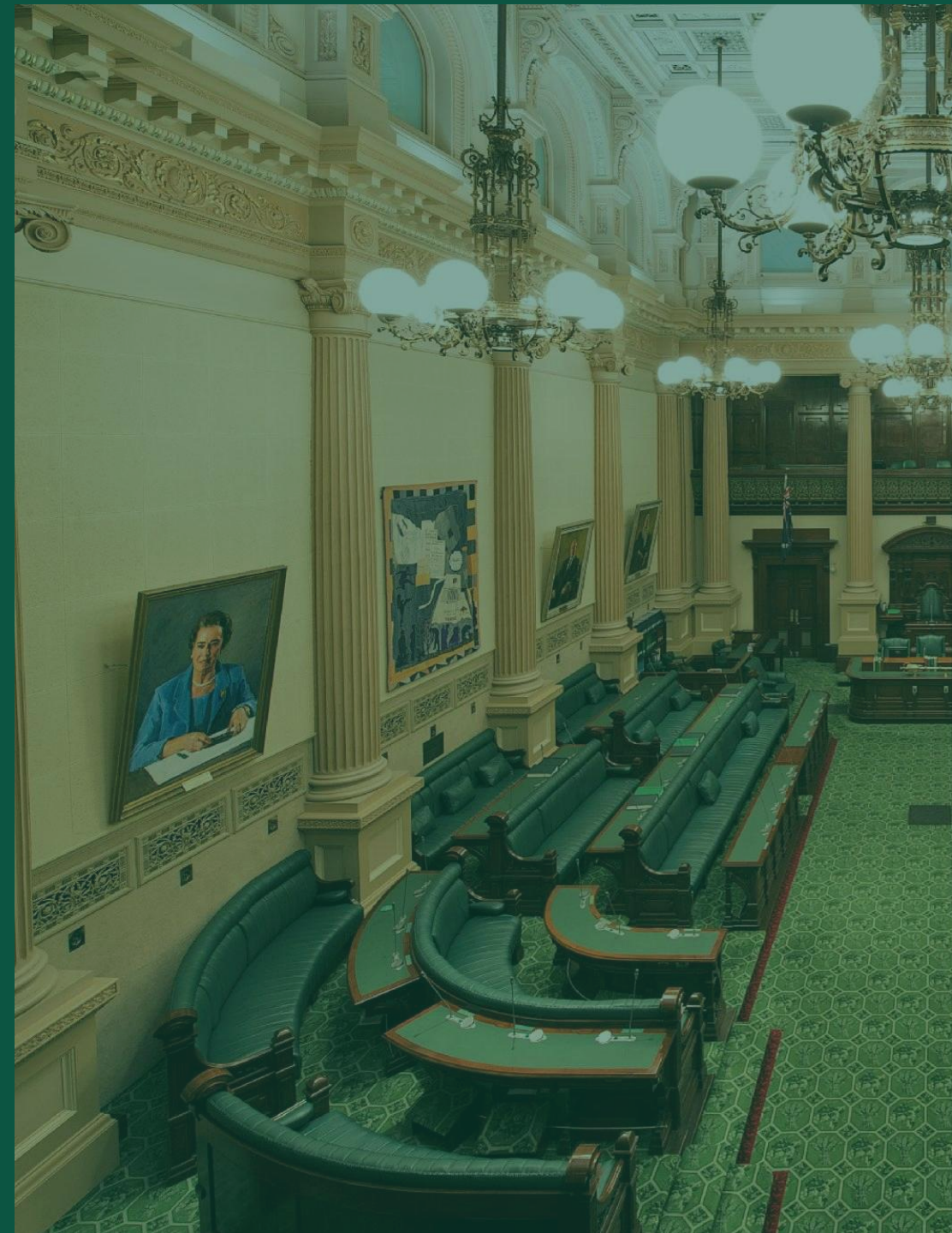


**House of
Assembly**

End of the Binary?

Crossbench Fragmentation in the
House of Assembly,
56th Parliament of South Australia

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Sydney



Overview

A chamber built for two blocs now seats three

2026 result: Labor 34, Liberal 5, One Nation 4, Independents 4 — eight of 47 Members now sit outside the major parties for the first time in a century for South Australia

1 Opposition
Status

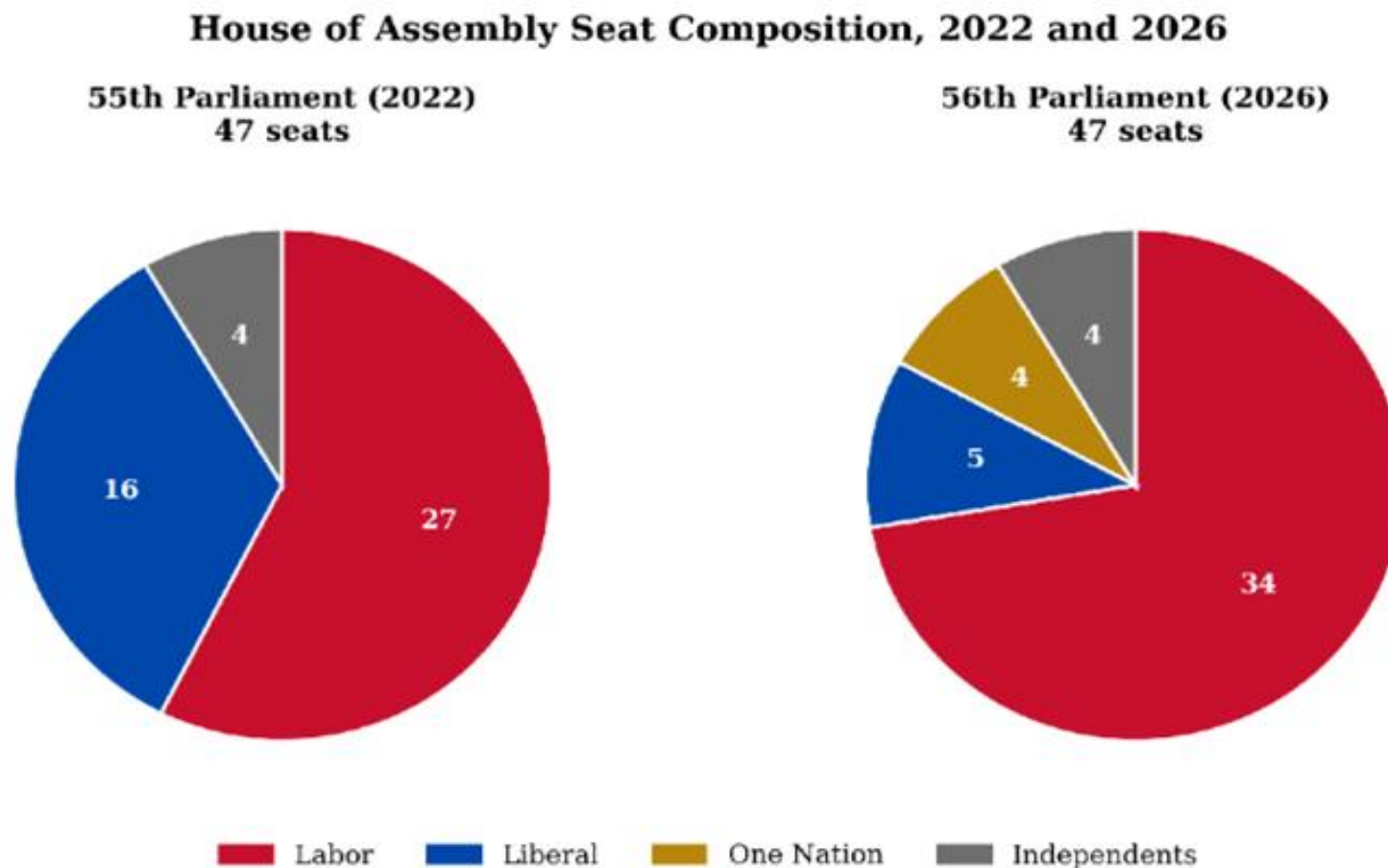
2 Question
Time

3 Private
Members'
Business (inc.
Grievances/Statements)

4 House of
Assembly
Committees

The 2022–2026 Electoral Shift

- Labor increased their majority from 27 (29) to 34
- Liberal collapsed from 16 to 5 seats — its worst result since single-member electorates
- One Nation's first lower house seats outside Queensland: 4, from 0
- One Nation's 22.9% vote share exceeded the Liberals' 18.9% — yet the Liberals still won one more seat
- Greens: highest-ever vote share (10.4%), zero seats



Note. Figure created by author using data from Electoral Commission of South Australia, 2026, *2026 State Election Results*, <https://www.ecsa.sa.gov.au>.

Three Features of the Shift

1. Seats and votes inverted

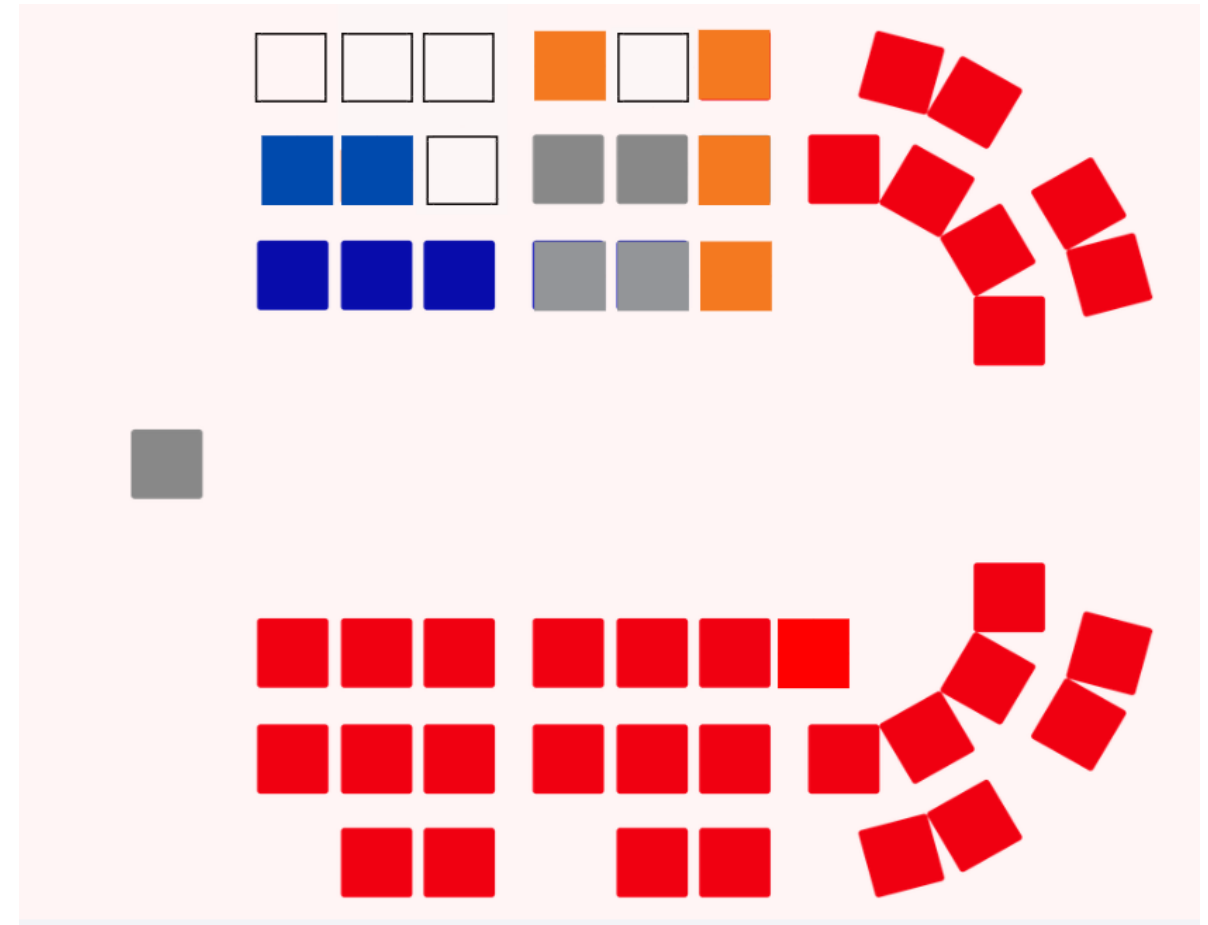
One Nation's 22.9% primary vote exceeded the Liberal Party's 18.9% — yet the Liberals still returned one more seat, the factual premise for the opposition-status dispute.

2. A crossbench that looks static, but isn't

Independent seats held steady at four, but three of the four changed hands — one retained independent, two independent-to-independent, and one Liberal seat (Finniss) won by an independent challenger.

3. A genuine electoral breakthrough

One Nation's four seats are its first lower-house wins outside Queensland — and the first won by a party other than Labor or the Liberals in SA since 2006.



House of Assembly Chamber Seating Plan 56th Parliament, 1st Session. Note. Figure created by author using data from the House of Assembly Seating Plan. Liberal Party denoted in Blue, Labor Party in Red, One Nation in Orange, Independents in Grey.

A Chamber Built for Two

Standing Orders assume a government and a single, cohesive Opposition

- Question Time call, pairing conventions, and committee ratios all presume two disciplined parties
- For most of the chamber's history the assumption held — minor party and independent representation was marginal
- Tasmania (Hare-Clark) and the federal Senate already operate with substantial, fragmented crossbenches — and have built procedural adaptations SA lacks
- **One prior question conditions everything that follows: which grouping is the Opposition at all?**

"I want to be the official opposition," One Nation SA leader Cory Bernardi said on Wednesday, flanked by his new parliamentary colleagues.

"I think there's even a moral case that you could say we should be the official opposition in this state."

Ms Hurn hit back on Thursday, replying: "The English cricket side said that they had the moral victory over Australia in the Ashes – it didn't mean that they won the Ashes."

"The rules are the rules, and we are the formal opposition."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-04/one-nation-leaves-sa-liberals-clinging-to-opposition-status/106522580>

Analysis

One Nation leaves SA Liberals clinging to opposition status

By state political reporter Thomas Kelsall

State and Territory Elections

Posted 4 Apr 2026 at 6:43am



One Nation has only one seat less than the SA Liberals in the lower house, leaving opposition leader Ashton Hurn little margin for error. (ABC News/Lincoln Rothall)

Who is the Opposition?

No statute, no Standing Order — convention alone, and convention favours seats over votes

- Erskine May test: the largest minority party prepared to take office if government resigns — a seat-based test never previously stress-tested in SA
- March–April 2026: One Nation pressed a vote-share claim; the Liberals held firm — “The rules are the rules, and we are the formal opposition”
- Resolved by one seat, without formal dispute. Elsewhere: Speaker’s ruling (Canada 1996, Alberta 1983); House ballot (NT 2020); House resolution under its Standing Orders (ACT 1989)
- **A one-seat margin currently separates settled convention from an unprecedented procedural dispute**

Question Time: An Uncodified Discretion

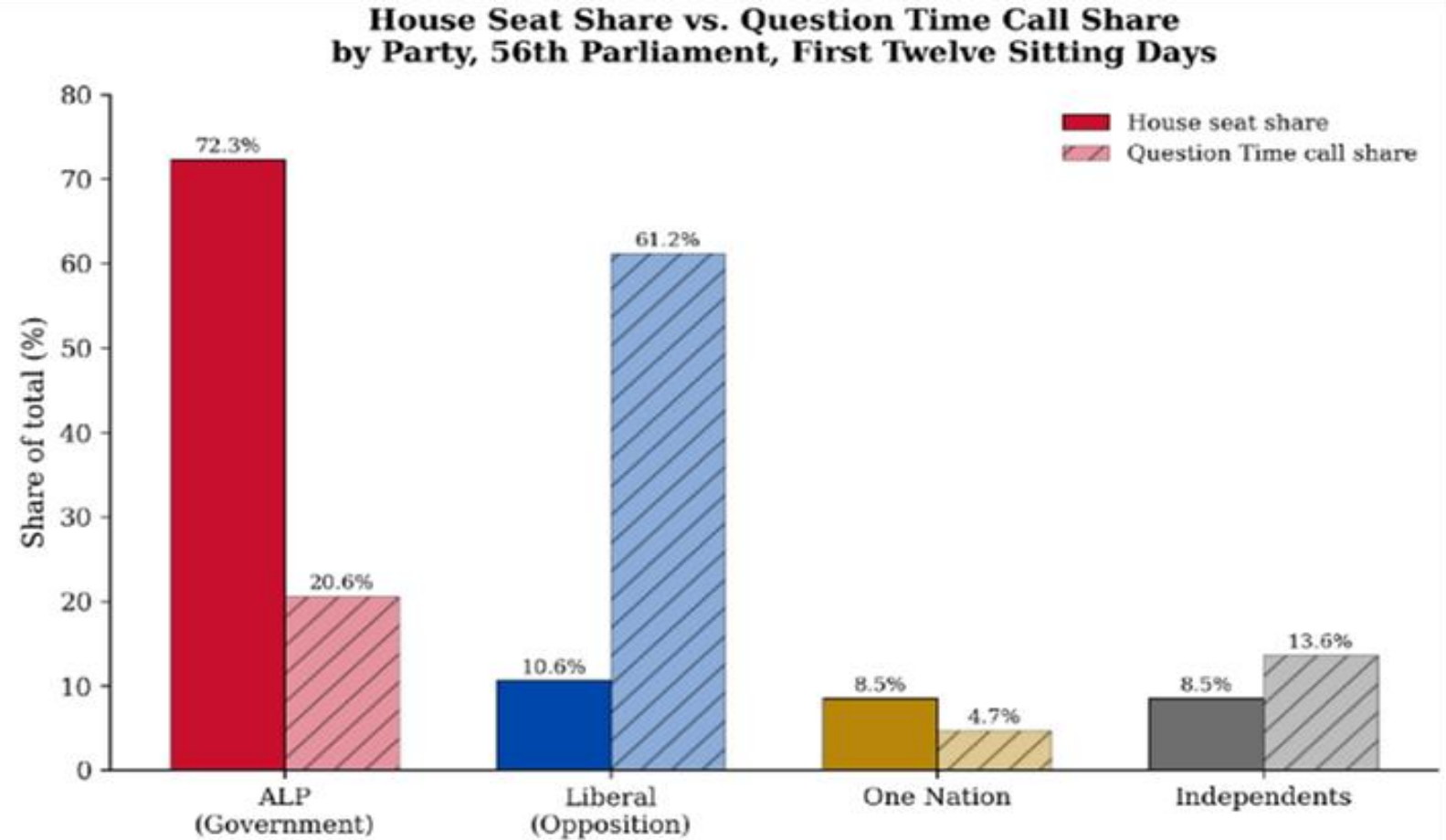
SO 106: the Speaker calls whoever rose first — no proportionality benchmark exists

- No sessional order on crossbench call allocation has been adopted since the 56th Parliament first sat
- Distribution of call among Government, Opposition and crossbench reflects discretionary practice, not codified entitlement
- Measured against the whole House the answer is uninformative: Government holds 72.3% of seats but attracts only 20.6% of call, because Question Time exists to enable non-government scrutiny
- **The meaningful test lies within the non-government cohort — where the Speaker's discretion under SO 106 actually operates**

Question Time: Seats vs Call

Within the non-government cohort

- Liberal: 38.5% of seats → **77.0% of call** (ratio 2.00)
- Crossbench: 61.5% of seats → **just 23.0% of call** (ratio 0.37)
- Independents (17.1%) outperform One Nation (5.9%) despite an identical 30.8% seat share
- *Opposition status functions as a fixed entitlement, not one scaled to seats*



Note. Figure created by author using data from the House of Assembly Sitting Statistics 56th Parliament, 1st Session.

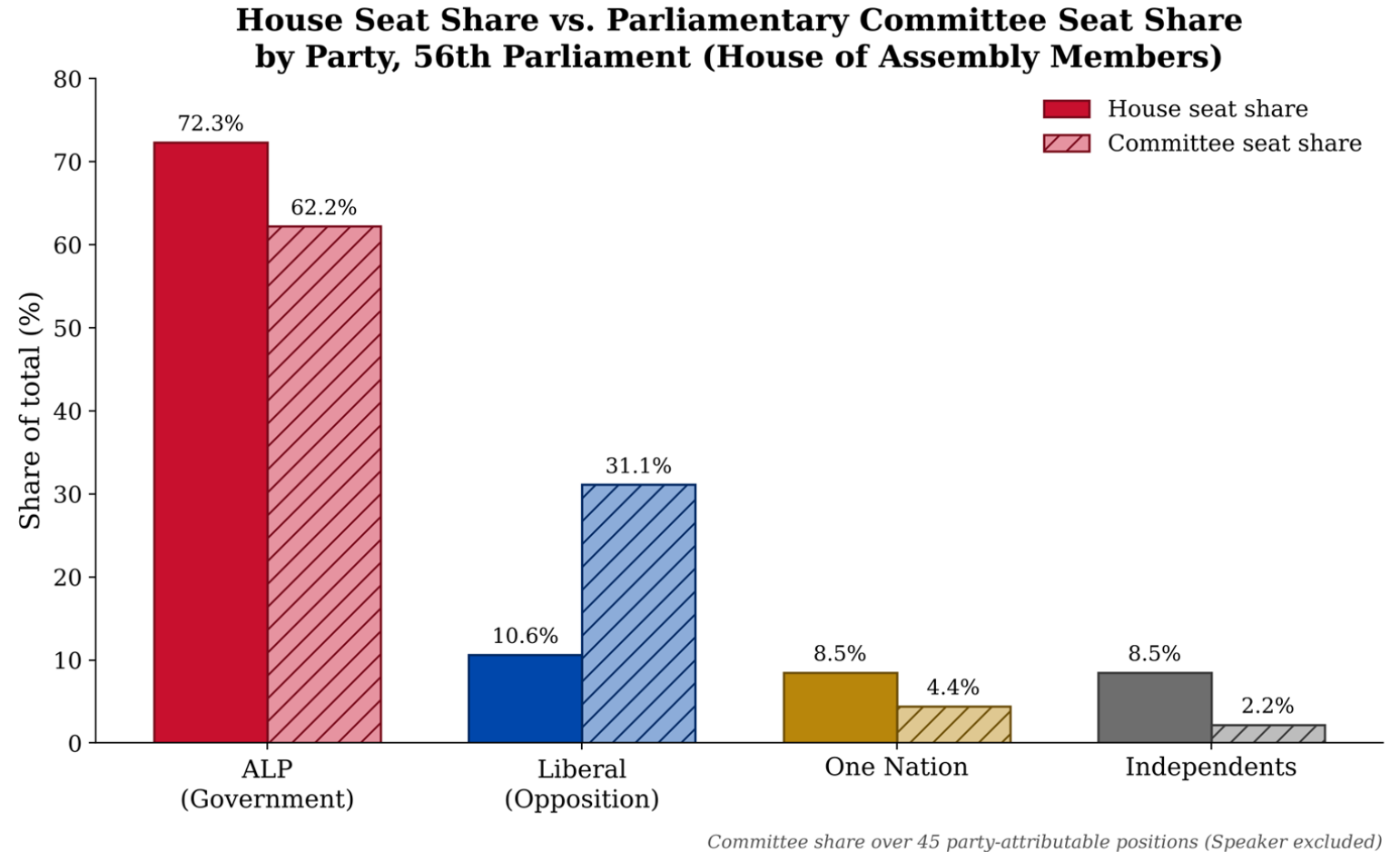
Private Members' Business

SA: informal Whip negotiation, split evenly Government/Opposition — the crossbench has no formal standing

- No Standing Orders govern the Grievance Debate (SO 81A) or Members' Statements (SO 81B) — practice only
- SO 115's weekly Premier–Opposition Leader meeting is bilateral — crossbench numbers given no seat at the table
- Three comparative models: informal Whip negotiation (Western Australia); codified sessional-order formula (Tasmania; the Commonwealth); a cross-party Business Committee (New Zealand)
- ***Codification has followed, not preceded, crossbench growth in Tasmania and the Commonwealth***

Committees: Seats vs Positions

- Liberal: 38.5% of non-govt seats → 82.4% of non-govt committee positions (ratio 2.14) — 14 positions across a 5-Member party room, 2.8 each
- Independents are the most underrepresented bloc on committees (ratio 0.19) — the reverse of the Question Time pattern
- Estimates A and B: no Member appointed to the seventh position; crossbench participated at the Chair's discretion under SO 269(13)

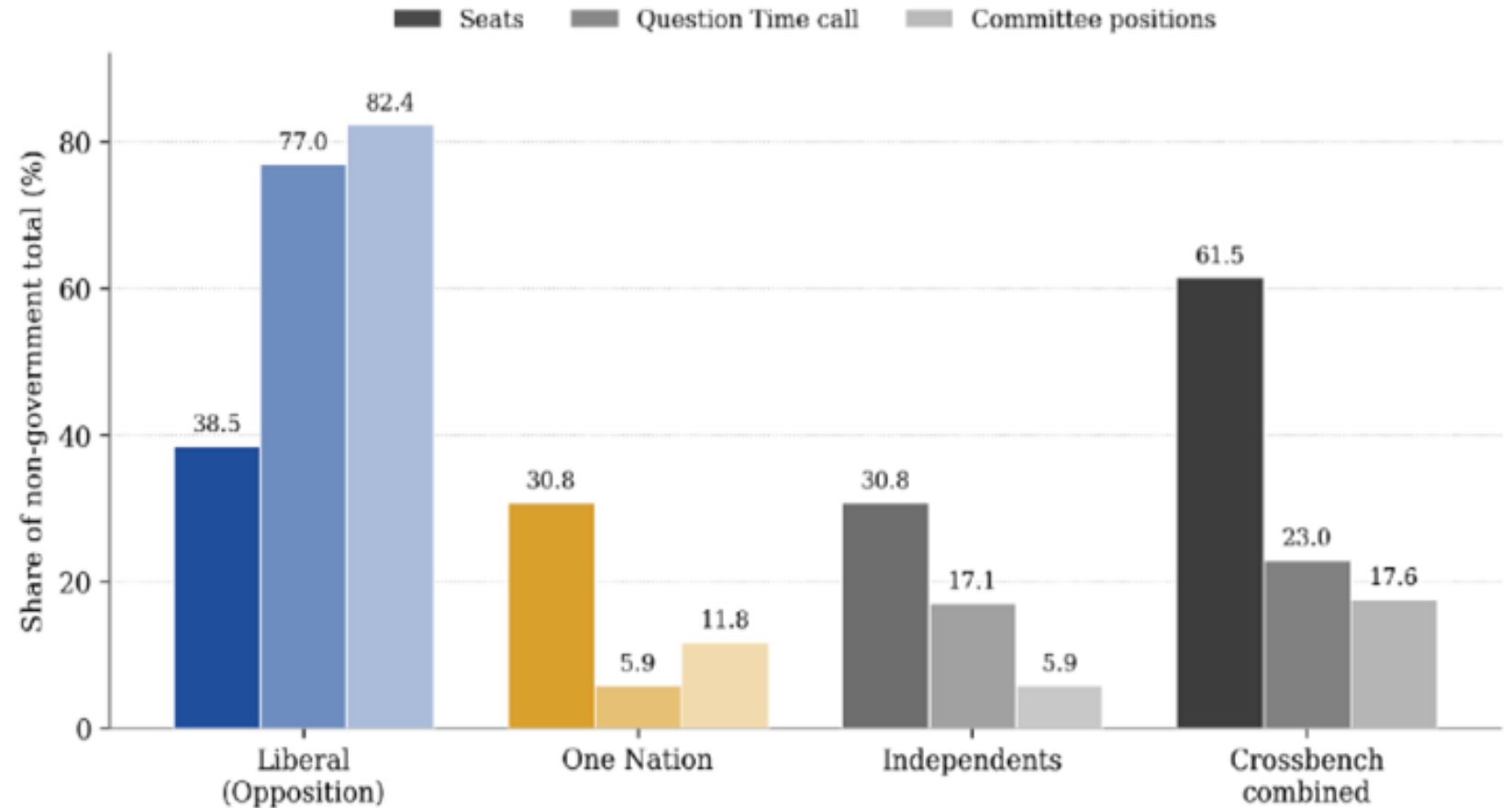


Note. Figure created by author using data from the House of Assembly Notice Paper Committee Membership as at 20 August 2026, 56th Parliament, 1st Session.

Two Routes, One Outcome

A real-time discretion and a negotiated process converge

- Crossbench: 61.5% of non-govt seats → **23.0% of QT call, 17.6% of committee positions**
- Official Opposition: 38.5% of non-govt seats → **77.0% of call, 82.4% of non-govt allocated committee positions**



Note. Figure created by author using data from the House of Assembly Notice Paper Committee Membership and House of Assembly Sitting Statistics, 56th Parliament, 1st Session.

Conclusion

Practices built for a binary chamber still operate after it has ceased to be one

- The architecture hasn't failed: business proceeded, an Opposition was recognised, committees sat, Question Time relatively unchanged for the function of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition
- But the clearest pattern is Opposition status treated as a fixed entitlement, not one scaled to seats — visible identically at Question Time and on committees
- The crossbench is not one bloc: Independents fare better at Question Time, One Nation fares better on committees; individual initiative against collective negotiating capacity
- Opposition status was settled in 2026 by a single seat, on convention alone.
- **Standing Orders built for two blocs are coping, so far. Whether that holds if the numbers change remains to be seen.**



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Thank You

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