

The Age of Independence? Independents in Australian Parliaments

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, independent candidates have improved their share of the vote in Australian elections. The number of independents elected to sit in Australian parliaments is still small, but it is growing. In 2004 Brian Costar and Jennifer Curtin examined the rise of independents and noted that independents ‘hold an allure for an increasing number of electors disenchanted with the ageing party system’.¹ This paper provides an overview of the current representation of independents in Australia’s parliaments taking into account the most recent election results. The second part of the paper examines trends and makes observations concerning the influence of former party affiliations to the success of independents, the representation of independents in rural and regional areas, and the extent to which independents, rather than minor parties, are a threat to the major parties. There have been 14 Australian elections at the federal, state and territory level since Costar and Curtin observed the allure of independents. But do independents still hold such an allure?

Introduction

The year 2009 marks the centenary of the two-party system of parliamentary democracy in Australia. It was in May 1909 that the Protectionist and Anti-Socialist parties joined forces to create the Commonwealth Liberal Party and form a united opposition against the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government at the federal level.² Most states had seen the creation of Liberal and Labor parties by 1910. Following the 1910 federal election, the number of parties represented in the House of Representatives decreased from five to two, the lowest representation of parties in the Australian parliament since federation. Since the federal election of 1919, a number of minor parties have achieved a varying degree of success in the

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1. B Costar & J Curtin, *Rebels with a cause: independents in Australian politics*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2004, p. 8.
2. The Liberal Party at that time was also referred to as the Fusion, or the Deakinite Liberal Party. Its successors are the Nationalist Party of Australia, the United Australia Party and the Liberal Party of Australia (the modern Liberal Party). The Anti-Socialist Party was formerly the Free Trade Party (officially Australian Free Trade and Liberal Association).

national parliament. The formation of the modern Liberal Party of Australia in 1944 further entrenched the two-party system. The dominance of the two major parties has contributed to Australia being regarded as having one of the most stable political systems in the world.

The establishment of the two-party system imparted a fundamental change to the formal pattern of politics.³ Ian Marsh observed:

In the earlier order, so-called parties were a parliamentary grouping with barely any role in electoral politics. Parliament functioned as a genuine deliberative assembly with the detail of legislation, expenditure and revenue regularly changed by votes on the floor of parliament. Governments were made and unmade by the votes of individual MPs as well as by electoral votes. The two-party system reversed all these features of the liberal-individualist order ... The effect of these changes was to create a new order of politics in which political parties became the exclusive agents of representation.⁴

Against the backdrop of major party success, has been the slow but steady increase in support for minor and single issue party and independent candidates, particularly in the 1990s. In each decade from the 1950s to the 1980s, first preference votes for major parties in the House of Representatives averaged around 92 per cent. This dropped to an average of 84 per cent for the seven House elections since the 1990s, signalling a trend away from major parties. The Queensland state election of 1998 appeared to have confirmed this trend by registering a 20 per cent swing against the major parties, largely due to the electoral debut of the One Nation Party founded by federal MP Pauline Hanson. Commentators speculated about the possible drift away from the major parties, how enduring the drift would be and its implications for the party system. For example, in 1999 Scott Bennett of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library argued that:

... shifts in voting behaviour, bringing about significant minor party and independent electoral successes of the past decade, may well be causing significant change in Australian parliaments, to the extent that if they continue, Australia may be faced with the prospect of having its first minority national government since the Menzies, Fadden and Curtin Governments of 1940-43.⁵

There is no doubt that over the past 30 years, independent candidates have improved their share of the vote in Australian elections. In 2004 Costar and Curtin noted that 'Australia is currently home to more non-party independent parliamentarians than any other comparable

3. P Loveday, 'Emergence: realignment and consolidation', in P Loveday, AW Martin & RS Parker (eds.) *The emergence of the Australian party system*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney 1977, p. 453.

4. I Marsh, *Beyond the two party system: Political representation, economic competitiveness and Australian politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 3.

5. S Bennett, 'The decline in support for Australian major parties and the prospect of minority government', *Research paper 10*, 1998-99, Parliamentary Library, p. 2.

western democracy'.⁶ The main purpose of this work-in-progress paper is to take stock of independent representation in Australia's federal, state and territory parliaments. The paper examines the nature of the electoral drift towards minor party and independent candidates focusing on the qualities of successful independent candidates and what they have been able to achieve in office. The paper then reflects on the extent to which independents could still be considered part of a threat to the dominance of the major parties and the party system as we have come to know it over the past 100 years.

Defining independents

Independent political candidates are typically defined as those who stand for election while not formally affiliated with any political party and not bound by a party platform.⁷ The most basic test of whether a candidate is independent is whether a party name appears beside their name on a ballot. Beyond that simple test, the extent to which independent candidates are truly independent can vary and some distinctions can be made in determining the characteristics of independents for this study. For example, some independent candidates may be formally or informally supported by a political party. Some independents may have gained knowledge of the political system or a prominent public profile through a former association with a political party. There is also an issue concerning whether sitting independent members of parliament should be included in a study of independents if they had the benefit of being first elected as endorsed candidates of a political party but subsequently resigned from the party during their period in office.⁸

A distinguishing feature of independent members of parliament is that they are not bound to a fixed party bloc when voting.⁹ Yet some independents have been informally associated with a political party through a tendency to vote with a particular party in parliament, by supporting one side over the other where there is a hung parliament, or by accepting ministerial positions. Some independents have also been current or former party members but have not fully supported the party's platform. These independents have chosen to indicate their independence of mind by prefixing the word 'independent' with their party name on the

6. B Costar & J Curtin, *Rebels with a cause: independents in Australian politics*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2004, p. 9.

7. J Uhr, 'Independents', in B Galligan and W Roberts (eds.), *The Oxford companion to Australian politics*, Oxford university press, 2007, p. 266; D Brancati, 'Winning alone: the electoral fate on independent candidates worldwide', *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 70, no. 3, July 2008, p. 650.

8. Costar and Curtin have excluded from their study, independents who were first elected as party candidates. B Costar & J Curtin, *Rebels with a cause: independents in Australian politics*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2004, p. 85; see also S Miskin, 'Politician overboard: jumping the party ship', *Research Paper No. 4*, 200203, Parliamentary Library, 2003, viewed 9 September 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/Pubs/rp/2002-03/03RP04.pdf>

9. C Sharman, 'Politics at the margin: independents and the Australian political system', *Papers on Parliament*, Vol. 39, 2002, p. 55.

ballot paper (for example, Independent Labor).¹⁰ Occasionally a small number of independent candidates group themselves together to pool their votes under the proportional representation system of voting.¹¹ As some of these distinctions can be important in considering the success of independent candidates and their influence in office, this paper has taken an inclusive approach in identifying independent members at the Commonwealth level and in states and territories in the post-war period.

Trends in support for independents

Institutional factors

The broad electoral system and the method of voting are important factors in the success of independent political candidates. Historically, electoral systems have tended to impose a greater administrative burden on independent candidates compared to candidates endorsed by major parties. The further administrative requirements for nomination and campaigning by independents have been documented elsewhere but may include limited access to electoral roll information, restrictive tax rules on donations, stricter funding and disclosure regulations, and onerous nomination thresholds including signature and deposit requirements.¹² These rules vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction but could potentially offer an incentive for independent candidates to form small political parties through which to campaign.

In election campaigning, candidates endorsed by major parties benefit from an established organisational structure and secure financial backing. Incumbent candidates (who are overwhelmingly party endorsed), also benefit from the additional support of parliamentary allowances and entitlements.¹³ For example, staffing entitlements and postal and printing

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10. Interestingly, the University of Western Australia Australian Government and Politics Database also lists 20 political parties, that have contested state and federal elections, with the word independent in their name including such parties as, the Independent Country Party, the Independent Opposition Party and the Independent Protestant Labor Party. (Viewed 9 September 2009, <http://elections.uwa.edu.au/>)
 11. For example, former Member for the federal seat of Calare, Peter Andren, formed the Peter Andren Independent Group to contest the Senate in 2007. See: Australian Electoral Commission, 'Party registration decision: Peter Andren Independent Group', viewed 9 September 2009, http://www.aec.gov.au/Parties_and_Representatives/Party_Registration/Registration_Decisions/peter_andren.htm (Mr Andren Passed away prior to polling day).
 12. J Curtin, 'Getting elected as an independent: electoral laws and party favouritism', *Democratic Audit of Australia*, May 2005.
 13. L Manthorpe, C Madden & D McKeown, 'Parliamentary allowances, salaries of office and entitlements', *Background Note*, Parliamentary Library, 2009, viewed 9 September 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/pol/parlrem.htm>

allowances afforded to members of parliament has been used for electioneering purposes.¹⁴ It has been argued that the availability of these measures is a 'shift away from the democratic principle of political equality for candidates in an election'.¹⁵

Lower houses across Australia primarily use the preferential voting system with full or optional allocation of preferences, whereas most upper houses use the proportional representation system of voting, with some small variations. The main exception is that the Tasmanian lower house uses the proportional representation system and the upper house uses preferential voting system.¹⁶ The preferential voting system used in single member electorates is generally regarded as advantaging the major parties, due to the high level of first preference votes required for a candidate to be competitive. The perceived low likelihood of a non-major party candidate being elected under this system could be a further disincentive for people to vote for them. A recognised advantage of preferential voting is that it supports stable democracy by affirming the dominance of the two party system. By contrast, the proportional representation system of voting allocates seats according to a candidate's share of the total vote in a district. As a result, proportional representation tends to return more minor party candidates than the preferential voting system. Up to 95 per cent of ballots cast under this system are for parties as candidates are grouped 'above the line', whereas more effort is required to vote for independent candidates mostly listed below the line. Occasionally, a number of independents will group themselves to appear above the line, however, this may lead to the impression that grouped independents are not truly independent candidates¹⁷. Australia's system of compulsory voting introduced federally in 1924 is another institutional factor that could increase the vote for independent and minor party candidates.

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14. P Andren, 'Level democratic playing field—you must be joking', *Democratic Audit of Australia*, November 2004, p. 1. This issue is now being addressed at the Commonwealth level, see: Australian National Audit Office, *Administration of Parliamentarians' Entitlements by the Department of Finance and Deregulation, Report no. 3, 2009/10*, ANAO 2009, viewed 9 September 2009, http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/2009-10_ANAO_Audit_Report_3_.pdf; Sen. J Ludwig (Special Minister of State), Reform of parliamentary entitlements, Media release, 8 September 2009, viewed 9 September 2009; http://www.smos.gov.au/media/2009/mr_352009.html
 15. Democratic Audit of Australia, Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Submission no. 97, 2005, p. 15.
 16. Electoral Council of Australia, 'Electoral systems', viewed 9 September 2009, <http://www.eca.gov.au/systems/index.htm>
 17. B Costar & J Curtin, *Rebels with a cause: independents in Australian politics*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2004, p. 48.

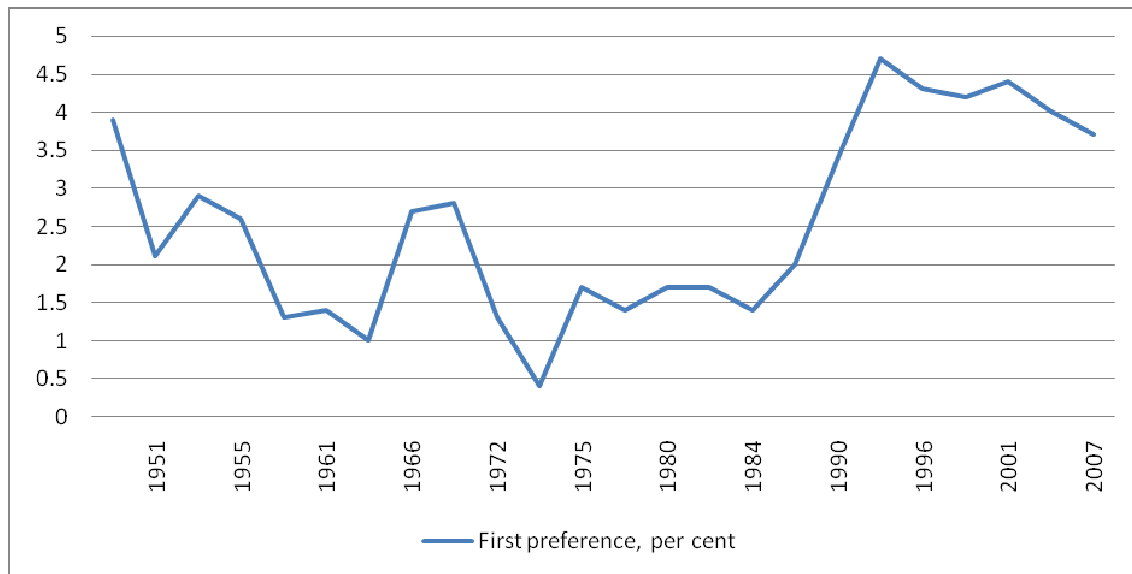
Voting trends

The institutional and administrative aspects of the voting system and prevailing cultural values have shaped the dominance of the party system on representative democracy in Australia. Despite the advantages afforded to major parties through the electoral system, there are some signs that the electoral dominance of the major parties has diminished over recent decades. As already noted, first preference votes for major parties in the House of Representatives averaged around 92 per cent until the end of the 1980s. Since the 1990 election, the average first preference vote for the major parties dropped to 84 per cent for House of Representative elections. While individual election results can produce anomalies, it is interesting to contrast the apparent dramatic shift from the major parties between the 1987 and 1990 House of Representatives elections. In 1987 the major parties attracted a total of 91.8 per cent of the first preference vote. This figure dropped to 82.6 per cent in 1990. Since then, the combined major party first preference vote has not exceeded 88.9 per cent gained in 1993. In the most recent federal election, the major parties attracted a total of 85.5 per cent of the first preference vote.

Against this decline in the first preference vote for major parties, there has also been a small but noticeable trend towards minor parties, micro parties and independents. For example, for the 16 House of Representative elections between the 1950s and 1980s, micro parties and independents have attracted an average of 1.8 per cent of the first preference vote.¹⁸ For the four elections in the 1980s the average was 1.7 per cent. By contrast, independents and micro parties attracted 4.2 per cent of first preferences in the 1990s and 4.1 per cent in all House of Representative elections since the 1980s. Figure 1 below graphs the share of first preferences to micro parties and independents in House of Representative elections in the post-war period.

18. The use of the word micro parties in this paper refer to very small political parties that do not support candidates in every seat, have not supported a successful candidate at an election and attract a very small proportion of the national first preference vote (less than 0.3%).

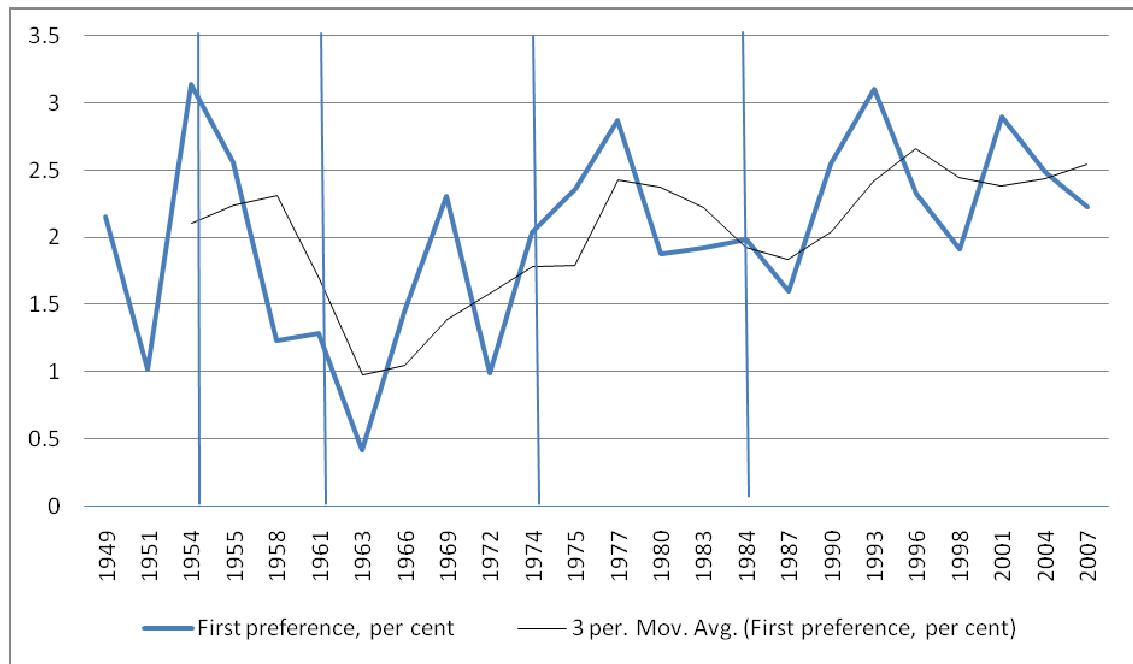
Figure 1 Votes for independents and micro parties, House of Representatives elections



Source: S Barber, C Lawley, S Bennett & G Newman, 'Federal election results 1901-2007', *Research paper*, no. 17, Parliamentary Library, 2008, <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/rp/2008-09/09rp17.pdf>

The graph shows a general decline in voter support for micro party and independent candidates at House of Representative elections between the 1949 and 1987. Support for these candidates then peaked in the 1990 election and the trend has been in decline since, yet still much higher than the earlier rates. The graph indicates that there has been a relatively major shift in support away from the major parties between the 1987 and 1990 elections and this has been somewhat sustained since 1990. Figure 2 graphs the share of the first preference vote to independents (using a different data set).

Figure 2 Votes for independents, House of Representative elections



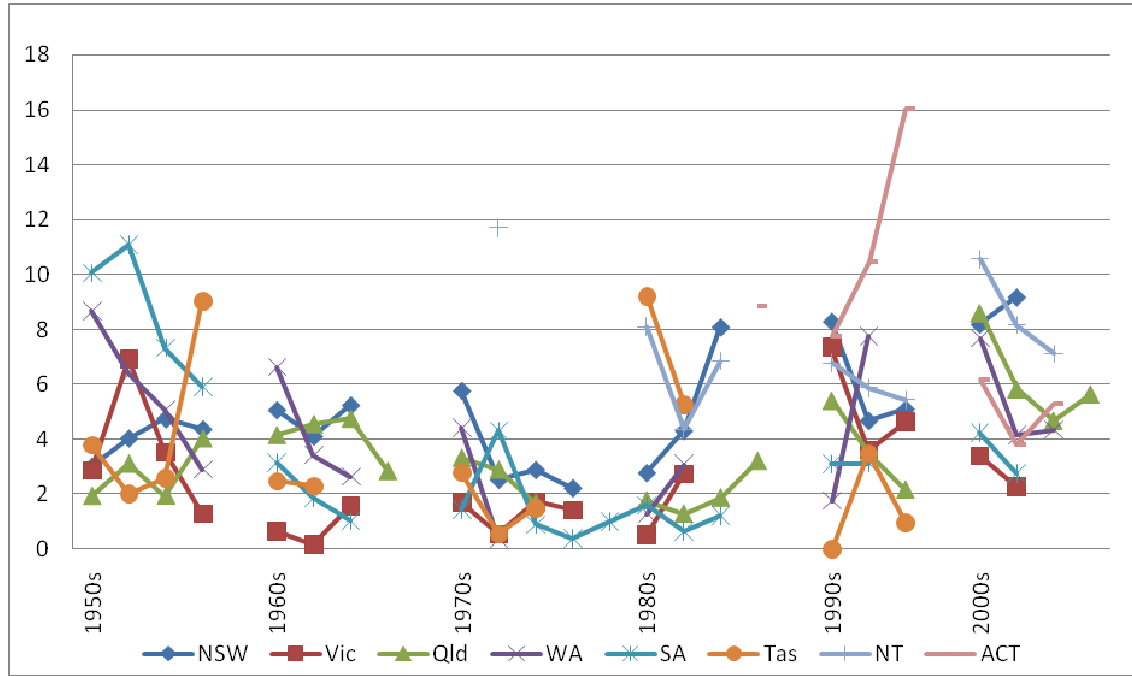
Source: Australian Government and Politics Database, University of Western Australia. Note, data on votes for independents 1954-1961 and 1974-1984 was not available and votes for other than listed parties was used in these years as a replacement.

Drawing on data from the Australian Government and Politics Database (AGPD), this graph indicates a general trend of increasing support for independents in elections for the House of Representatives from the 1963 election, particularly since the 1987 election. Another noticeable feature is the level of volatility in support across a number of elections, in part due to the very low level of support generally. However, there are some limitations with AGPD data on independents that could inflate the actual level of support for independents.¹⁹

The general trend of increasing support for independent candidates in the post-war period is supported by outcomes in states and territories, particularly since the late 1980s. Figure 3 illustrates first preference votes (per cent) for independents in state and territory lower house elections (where the data is available).

19. AGPD data on independents excludes those that add the name of a party to their description on the ballot paper (eg. Independent Liberal), and includes those that may have campaigned as a member of a party but failed to register their party name. AGPD, 'Glossary', viewed 9 September 2009, <http://elections.uwa.edu.au/>

Figure 3: First preference votes, per cent, for independents, state and territory lower houses

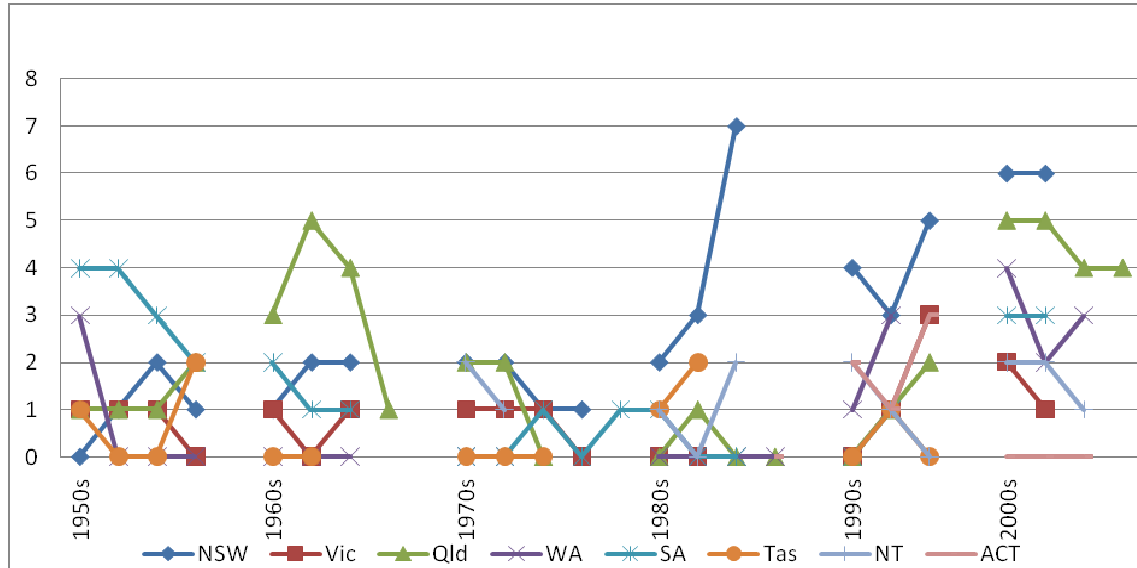


Source: Australian Government and Politics Database, first preference per cent of the vote for independents, where available, excludes the first election of the Northern Territory in the 1974, includes ACT grouped independents.

The data suggests that there has been a noticeable increase in first preferences for independents since the late 1980s after a period of decline from the 1950s. In the 1950s, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania returned a higher level of support by this measure that was not matched until the 1990s. The average percentage of first preference votes for independent candidates across the states in the 1950s was 4.87 per cent. This measure dropped to 3.15 per cent in the 1960s and increased to 5.8 per cent in the 2000s. The first election of the Northern Territory recorded relatively high first preference votes for independent candidates at 20.54 per cent in 1974. The data from this election has been excluded from the figure in order to better illustrate the range of the data from other states and territories.

A stronger signal of the resurgence of independent candidates is their success in being elected. The success of independent candidates at House of Representatives elections dramatically improved in the 1990s. Since the 1990s there have been eight individual independent candidates elected at general elections compared with only one other in the post-war period (in the late 1960s, discussed further below). Independents have enjoyed greater success at state and territory lower house elections in the post-war period, there has been a noticeable increase in their success in the 1990s, as illustrated in Figure 4.

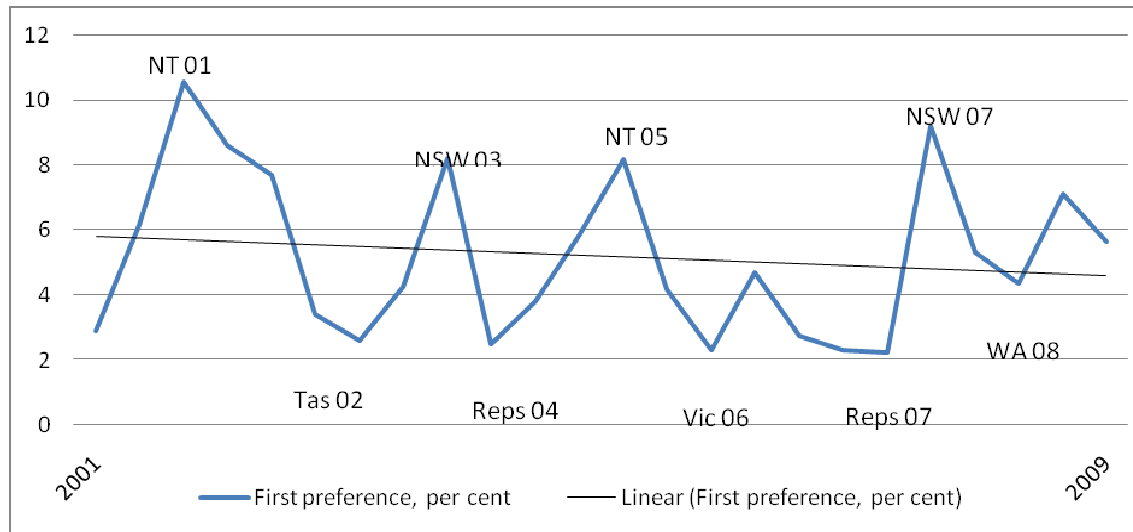
Figure 4: The election of independent candidates at lower house state and territory elections



Source: Australian Government and Politics Database.

More recently Australian lower house election results indicate that while a small number of independents are elected (or re-elected) in greater numbers than in previous decades, there appears to be a slight trend away from independents. Since 2001, each jurisdiction has had three or four elections. While comparisons between jurisdictions are problematic, a small trend away from independents is evident between the 2001 Western Australian election and the 2009 Queensland election. Figure 5 below uses data on first preference votes at Australian elections from 2001.

Figure 5: First preference votes for independents, per cent, Australian lower house elections since 2001



Source: Australian Government and Politics Database.

Over the ten most recent lower house elections, there has been an average first preference swing against independent candidates of -0.22 per cent and -0.27 per cent against independents over the 24 elections from 2001. Overall, this suggests that while there has been an increase in voter support for independent candidates from the 1990s, this increase has been small and off a very low base. This increase is now established, albeit with a small recent decline. Since the 1990s independent candidates have also been more successful at elections.

Broad explanations of the trends away from major parties

There is a broad range of literature that attempts to explain the decline in support for major parties and rise in minor party and independent parliamentary representation. Briefly, these include the decline in party identification and membership, the context of changing demographics in the population, workplace and family and the rise of new social movements, 'post-material politics', the growing middle class, economic security, higher education, the decline in union membership and the decline of class-based politics. Ian Marsh has categorised the history of the party system into periods of establishment (1889-1944), the golden age of strong mass parties (1944-1970s), the catch-all period characterised by the rise

of new social movements (1970s to the early 1980s) and the cartel period marked an ideological convergence between the major parties (early 1980s to the present).²⁰

Others have pointed to disillusionment with the major parties, disenchantment with the nature of leadership in modern politics, declining trust and social capital in society and the impact of protest voting.²¹ On the other hand, Andrew Norton has identified issues concerning the performance of major parties, political entrepreneurship, and social change rather than political disillusionment.²²

Changing demographics has been cited as a factor in a possible decline in support for the Nationals. Costar and Curtin have suggested that independents have been more successful in regional/rural electorates and could be a possible threat to the National Party.²³ The Australian Democrats, One Nation and the Greens have been minor party beneficiaries of the change in voting patterns over the past 30 years, although only the Greens remain viable as an established minor party.²⁴

Profile of independents

Costar and Curtin focused on the role of independent parliamentarians over the last two decades (c. 1984-2004), and listed all independent Members of the House of Representatives since federation, and state and territory lower house independents since the 1960s. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's election analyst, Antony Green, has examined all independents elected to single-member electorates in the lower houses of the federal and state parliaments (i.e. excluding Tasmania and the Territories) since 1970. This study adopts a broader approach by focusing on the post-war period order to establish more significant electoral trends. The 1950s also coincided with the emergence of a stable two-party system, after the 1944 formation of the modern Liberal Party, which many nominal independents

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20. I Marsh, 'Policy convergence between the major parties and the representation gap in Australian politics', in Marsh (ed.) *Political Parties in Transition?*, The Federation Press, p. 116.
 21. H Mackay, *Reinventing Australia: the mind and mood of Australia in the 90s*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993, p. 169; P Kelly, *The End of Certainty. Power, politics and business in Australia*, rev. edn, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p. 661.
 22. A Norton, 'prospects for the two-party system in a pluralising political world', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 61(2), 2002, p. 33-50.
 23. B Costar & J Curtin, *Rebels with a cause: independents in Australian politics*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2004.
 24. S Bennett, 'The rise of the Australian Greens', *Research Paper No. 8*, 200809, Parliamentary Library, 2008, viewed 9 September 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/Pubs/rp/2008-09/09rp08.pdf> C Madden, 'Australian Democrats: the passing of an era', *Research Paper No. 25*, 200809, Parliamentary Library, 2009, viewed 9 September 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/2008-09/09rp25.pdf>

began to join. This paper is also considers every state and territory election including the directly elected upper houses (although excluding the Tasmanian upper house, which has never been dominated by parties). Consistent with previous studies, by-election wins are not included unless consolidated at a successive general election. Appointments to upper houses are also not included.

Commonwealth

There have been ten independent Members elected to the House of Representatives in the post-war period—nine since 1990 (see Table 1 below).²⁵ All have been male and six were sitting MPs (two each from Labor, Liberals and Nationals). Benson was expelled from Labor just before the 1966 election, while Filing, Rocher and Campbell failed to retain Liberal Party preselection for the 1996 election, and sat as independents before successfully recontesting their seats. Katter (former Queensland state MP) and Oakeshott (initially as a NSW state MP) resigned in protest over party matters from the Nationals. While Windsor was not a sitting MP, he was a member of the National party and also resigned in protest. Only three have been independents throughout their entire political careers, and unsurprisingly all were well-known local identities. Mack was a mayor and an independent state MP; Cleary was a prominent football coach; and Andren was a journalist. Two were elected at by-elections after the resignations of high-profile Members; Cleary won the seat of former Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Rob Oakeshott (not included in the table) won the seat of former Nationals Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile at a 2008 by-election.

Table 1: Independent Members of the Australian House of Representatives elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1966-69	Samuel Benson	Batman	Labor MP		Retired	Labor
1990-96	Ted Mack	North Sydney		Liberal	Retired	Liberal
1993-96 [#]	Phil Cleary	Wills		Labor	Defeated	Labor
1995-98	Paul Filing	Moore	Liberal MP		Defeated	Liberal
1995-98	Alan Rocher	Curtin	Liberal MP		Defeated	Liberal
1995-98	Graeme Campbell	Kalgoorlie	Labor MP		Defeated	Liberal
1996-07	Peter Andren	Calare		Labor	Retired	National
2001-	<i>Bob Katter</i>	<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>National MP</i>			
2001-	<i>Tony Windsor</i>	<i>New England</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>National</i>		

[#] Cleary's 1992 by-election win was declared void.

25. While Pauline Hanson was disendorsed by the Liberal Party before her election, she still appeared on the ballot paper as a Liberal candidate and is therefore not categorised in this paper as an independent.

During the past decade independents have been most successful in the National Party's rural and regional heartland, but this is only a recent trend. The other seven independents have won Labor and Liberal seats, including metropolitan five seats in Melbourne (Batman and Wills), Perth (Moore and Curtin) and Sydney (North Sydney). There are currently three independent Members of the House of Representatives, including Oakeshott. Of the seven former Members, four were defeated by major party candidates after only one full term, while three retired. Andren originally planned to contest a Senate seat but withdrew due to ill-health. All these seats returned to parties, usually the original party.

There have only been five elected independent Senators in the post-war period (see Table 2 below), with the Senate home to more minor party Senators than independents. Conversely, minor parties have not won a seat in the House of Representatives at a general election since the Second World War.²⁶ Once again, all independent Senators have been male and represented the least-populous states, particularly the smallest state of Tasmania. The three Tasmanian Senators were also former members of one of the major parties. Both Harradine and Turnbull were expelled from the Labor Party, while Townley left the Liberal party in 1969 after failing to gain party endorsement for a lower house seat. He rejoined the Liberals in 1975 and continued as a Senator, while Harradine and Turnbull eventually retired. Negus was defeated in the 1974 double-dissolution election. Both Turnbull and Xenophon successfully transitioned from a state upper house to Senate. There is currently only one independent Senator, with South Australian Nick Xenophon sharing the balance of power in the Senate. Both Harradine and Xenophon were elected with quotas in their own right, but Harradine was first elected at a double-dissolution election.

Table 2: Independent Members of the Australian Senate elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>
1962-74	Reg Turnbull	Tasmania	Labor [#]		Retired	
1975-05	Brian Harradine	Tasmania	Labor		Retired	
1971-74	Sydney Negus	Western Australia			Defeated	
1971-75	Michael Townley	Tasmania	Liberal		Rejoined Liberals	
2008-	<i>Nick Xenophon</i>	<i>South Australia</i>				

* Multi-member electorates using proportional representation.

[#] Briefly leader of the Australia Party.

26. Minor parties have tended to attract greater support at by-elections. In 2002, Australian Greens member Michael Organ won a by-election for the NSW seat of Cunningham.

New South Wales

The parliament of New South Wales has not only been home to more independents than any other Australian parliament, but also to the most independents without any previous party affiliations and the most women (yet only four have been women). Only seven of the twenty-six independents elected at a general election since 1950 were sitting members of a party, while Coates and Windsor had previously been members of a party (see Table 3 on the next page). While Geraghty, Seiffert, Darby and Lawson lost their party's endorsement, Chalmers, Duncan and Oakeshott left their parties. The other independents had strong local profiles

Table 3: Independent Members of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1950-53	James Geraghty	North Sydney	Labor MLA		Defeated	Labor
1950-53	John Seiffert	Monaro	Labor MLA		Rejoined	Labor
1953-57	Thomas Armstrong	Kahibah		Labor	Deceased	Labor
1953-56	James Chalmers	Hartley	Labor MLA		Defeated%	Labor
1956-62; 1964-65	Frank Purdue	Waratah		Labor	Defeated; Defeated	Labor
1962-66	Douglas Darby	Manly		Liberal MLA	Rejoined	Liberals
1965-76	Harold Coates	Hartley/ Blue Mountains	Liberal	Labor	Defeated	Labor
1968-73	Joe Lawson	Murray	Country Party MLA		Deceased	Liberal
1973-95	John Hatton	South Coast		Liberal	Retired	Liberal
1981-88	Ted Mack	North Shore		<i>new</i> [^]	Retired	Ind.
1984-88	Bruce Duncan	Lismore	National MLA		Retired	National
1984-91	Frank Arkell	Wollongong		Labor	Defeated	Labor
1988-91	Dawn Fraser	Balmain		Labor	Defeated@	Labor
1988-	<i>Clover Moore</i>	<i>Bligh/Sydney</i>		<i>Liberal</i>		
1988-91	George Keegan	Newcastle		Labor	Defeated	Labor
1988-91	Ivan Welsh	Swansea		Labor	Defeated	Labor
1988-91	Robyn Read	North Shore		Ind.	Defeated	Liberal
1991-01	Tony Windsor	Tamworth	National	National	Retired	National
1991-99	Peter Macdonald	Manly		Liberal	Retired	Ind.
1999-04	Tony McGrane	Dubbo		National	Deceased	Ind.
1999-	<i>Richard Torbay</i>	<i>Northern Tablelands</i>		<i>National</i>		
1999-07	David Barr	Manly		Ind.	Defeated	Liberal
2002-08	Rob Oakeshott	Port Macquarie	National MLA		Retired	Ind.

2003-	<i>Peter Draper</i>	<i>Tamworth</i>	<i>National</i>
2004-	<i>Dawn Fardell</i>	<i>Dubbo</i>	<i>Ind.</i>
2007-	<i>Greg Piper</i>	<i>Lake Macquarie</i>	<i>Labor</i>

% Contested different seat of Nepean.

^ Existed as a multi-member electorate until 1927.

@ Contested Port Jackson after Balmain was abolished.

before entering parliament: Armstrong, Purdue, Coates, Hatton, Mack, Arkell, McGrane, Torbay and Piper were local mayors, and Moore, Welsh, Read, Macdonald and Barr were also involved in local government. Keegan was president of the local business chamber and Fraser was well-known as a former Olympic swimmer. Purdue, Hatton, Read, Draper and Fardell won their seats as independents at by-elections before consolidating their wins at a general election.

The Labor Party has lost more seats to independents than any other party during this period, with eleven seats falling. However, junior coalition partner the National/Country party has lost seven seats compared to only four Liberal losses. Notably, several seats in New South Wales have passed from independent to independent such as North Shore (Mack to Read), Manly (Macdonald to Barr), Dubbo (McGrane to Fardell), and most recently by-election, Oakeshott's seat of Port Macquarie was won by Peter Besseling in a by-election. Other seats like Harley/Blue Mountains, Tamworth and areas along the Central Coast have a history of independent representation. Most of the seats are located in rural and regional areas, with only North Sydney, North Shore, Balmain, Bligh/Sydney, and Manly located in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Ten of the independents were ultimately defeated by either the Labor or Liberal parties; the Nationals have not been able to win a seat back from a sitting independent. Six retired from state parliament, with Mack, Windsor and Oakeshott successfully transferring to federal parliament. Three died in office while one rejoined her original party. There are currently six independents in the Legislative Assembly—Bligh, Torbay, Draper, Fardell, Piper and Besseling (who is not listed in the table as he is yet to win at a general election).

Since 1978, the Legislative Council has been directly elected on a state-wide basis using proportional representation. No independent has even been directly elected to this upper house.

Victoria

Only six elected independents have sat in the Victorian Legislative Assembly since 1950 (see Table 4 on the next page). Most have been members of a major party and again most have been male. Charles Mutton was a local shire councillor and president before running as an Independent Labor candidate for the metropolitan Melbourne seat of Coburg. Upon election he was expelled from Labor for running against an endorsed candidate, but rejoined the party and continued as an MLA until 1967. His son, John Mutton, failed to win Labor preselection

for the seat, so he too successfully ran as an Independent, but was eventually defeated by Labor. Suggett was a Liberal and Country Party MLA who, after failing to retain state executive endorsement, was re-elected as an Independent Liberal for the metropolitan Melbourne seat of Moorabbin. He rejoined the party and continued as an MLA. More recently independents have been successful in rural and regional Victoria. Former local shire councillor and president, Russell Savage, defeated a sitting Liberal MLA, while the Nationals defeated Savage ten years later. The only female independent, Susan Davies, was originally the endorsed Labor candidate for Gippsland West at the 1996 election. However she resigned from the party in early 1997 and successfully won a by-election in the same seat as an independent when the sitting Liberal MLA retired and Labor declined to field a candidate. Her seat was abolished at a redistribution and she lost to the Liberal candidate in the new seat of Bass. There is currently only one independent in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, with a relatively unknown abalone diver, Craig Ingram, campaigning on restoring Snowy River water flows and defeating a sitting National MLA at the 1999 election.

Table 4: Independent Members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly elected since 1950[#]

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1940-56	Charles Mutton	Coburg	Labor	Labor	Rejoined Labor	
1961-64	Robert Suggett	Moorabbin	Liberal & Country MLA		Rejoined Lib. & Count.	
1967-79	John Mutton	Coburg	Labor	Labor	Defeated	Labor
1996-06	Russell Savage	Mildura		Liberal	Defeated	Nationals
1997-02	Susan Davies	Gippsland West	Labor	Liberal	Defeated	Abolished
1999-	<i>Craig Ingram</i>	<i>Gippsland East</i>		<i>National</i>		

[#] Includes Charles Mutton, whose term as an independent began before 1950.

There has only been one elected independent Member of the Legislative Council since 1950 (see Table 5). Clifden Eager was first elected as an MLC in 1930 and represented various conservative parties, before losing endorsement in 1952 for refusing to vote against the Greater Melbourne Council Bill. He was elected as an Independent Liberal at the following election, but was defeated after one term by a Liberal and Country Party candidate.

Table 5: Independent Members of the Victorian Legislative Council elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1952-58	Clifden Eager	East Yarra	Liberal & Country MLC		Defeated	Lib. & Co.

Queensland

Since 1950 twelve independents have been elected to Queensland's unicameral parliament, the Legislative Assembly (see Table 6 on the next page).²⁷ Local principal Arthur Coburn won the newly created North Queensland seat of Burdekin in 1950 and became the longest-serving independent member of the Queensland Parliament. Upon his retirement the seat became a National/Country Party stronghold. 'Bunny' Adair and Edward Walsh were among several Labor MPs who formed the Queensland Labor Party with expelled Labor Premier Vince Gair. They were the only two who successfully retained their regional seats as independents, and upon their retirements their seats reverted back to Labor. Labor MP Ed Casey was disendorsed by the party before the 1972 election but successfully retained his regional seat of Mackay as an independent over two successive elections before rejoining the Labor Party in 1977 and shortly after became the leader. National Party MP Lindsay Hartwig was expelled from the party but retained his rural seat as an independent. After a major redistribution he retired and his seat reverted back to the Nationals.

More recently, local mayor, Liz Cunningham, and local councillor, Peter Wellington, won their regional seats at general election and are still in parliament. Cunningham won Gladstone from Labor and Wellington won Nicklin from the Nationals. Ray Hopper won the Nationals' rural seat of the Darling Downs as an independent but shortly after joined the Nationals. Three independents successfully emerged from the disintegration of the One Nation Party—Kingston, Pratt and Roberts. Pratt is still in parliament despite strong challenges from the Nationals in her rural seat of Nanago, while Roberts was ultimately defeated by the Nationals in the regional seat of Gympie. Notably, when Kingston retired from parliament due to ill-health, his seat was won at by-election by another independent, Chris Foley. Foley was a local media personality and has since retained the regional seat of Maryborough at two successive elections. All the seats won by independents in Queensland at general election have been in rural and regional areas, and therefore have been at the expense of the Labor and National parties (as the Liberals, until recently, have focused on Brisbane seats). Of the twelve independents listed here, only three have been women. There are currently four independents in the Queensland parliament—Cunningham, Wellington, Pratt, and Foley.

Table 6: Independent Members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1950-69	Arthur Coburn	Burdekin		<i>new</i>	Retired	Country
1963-68	Bunny Adair	Cook	Labor MP+	Labor	Retired	Labor
1963-69	Edward Walsh	Bundaberg	Labor MP+	Labor	Retired	Labor
1972-77	Ed Casey	Mackay	Labor MP	Labor	Rejoined Labor	

27. Queensland's upper house was abolished in 1922.

1981-86	Lindsay Hartwig	Callide	National MP	National	Retired	Nationals
1995-	<i>Liz Cunningham</i>	<i>Gladstone</i>		<i>Labor</i>		
1998-	<i>Peter Wellington</i>	<i>Nicklin</i>		<i>National</i>		
1999-03	John Kingston	Maryborough	One Nation MP	Labor	Retired	
1999-	<i>Dolly Pratt</i>	<i>Nanango</i>	<i>One Nation MP</i>	<i>National</i>		
2001	Ray Hopper	Darling Downs		National	Joined Nationals	
2003-	<i>Chris Foley</i>	<i>Maryborough</i>		<i>Ind.</i>		
2002-06	Elisa Roberts	Gympie	One Nation MP	National	Defeated	Nationals

* Also Queensland Labor Party.

Western Australia

Excluding the two independents first elected before 1950 and ‘liberals for forests’ candidate, Janet Woollard, the eight other independents have been members of one of the major parties (see Table 7 on next page). Five independents—Oldfield, Pental, Bridge, Graham, and Bowler—were sitting party MLAs, and William Grayden was previously a Liberal MLA and federal MP before returning to state parliament as an Independent Liberal. He rejoined the Liberals, while former Liberal MLA-turned independent Oldfield joined Labor. David Grayden was an endorsed Liberal candidate at a previous election, but lasted only one term as an independent, defeated by future Liberal Premier Charles Court. Constable was also Liberal Party member who withdrew from the preselection process, before winning the seat as an independent in a by-election. Unlike some of the other states, most of these independently-held electorates have been in the Perth metropolitan area

Notably, there have been two female independent Members of the Legislative Assembly, and the first Aboriginal MLA and Cabinet Minister in Australia, Ernie Bridge (although he was first elected as a Labor candidate). There are currently three independents in Western Australia’s lower house, and Constable is a Cabinet Minister.

Table 7: Independent Members of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1936-51	Harry Shearn	Maylands		Labor	Deceased	Liberal
1945-53	William Read	Victoria Park		Labor	Retired	Labor
1950-53	David Grayden	Nedlands	Liberal	Liberal	Defeated	Liberal
1956-62	William Grayden	South Perth	Liberal	Liberal	Rejoined Liberal	
1956-62	Edward Oldfield	Mt Lawley	Liberal MLA	Liberal	Joined Labor	
1991-	<i>Liz Constable</i>	<i>Floreat/Churchlands</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Liberal</i>		
1995-05	Phillip Pental	South Perth	Liberal MLA	Liberal	Retired	Liberal
1996-01	Ernie Bridge	Kimberley	Labor MLA	Labor	Retired	Labor

2000-05	Larry Graham	Pilbara	Labor MLA	Labor	Retired	Labor
2001-	Janet Woollard	Alfred Cove		Liberal		
2007-	John Bowler	Kalgoorlie®	Labor MLA	Liberal^		

® First represented Murchison-Eyre as independent after resigning from Labor before contesting Kalgoorlie as an independent.

^ Redistributed seat notionally Liberal.

There has only been one independent elected to the Western Australian Legislative Council since 1950 (see Table 8 below). Davis was first elected as a Liberal MLC for the Perth-based upper house seat, before becoming an independent in 1991 and successfully retaining his seat at the 1993 election. He was unable to repeat this feat at the 1996 election and his term ended in 1997.

Table 8: Independent Members of the Western Australian Legislative Council elected since 1950

Period	Member	Seat	Party Background		Fate	
			Member	Seat*	Member	Seat*
1991-97	Reginald Davis	North Metro Region	Liberal MLC		Defeated	

* Multi-member electorates using proportional representation.

South Australia

Most of the independents who have sat in the South Australian lower house have been members of a major party (see Table 9 below). Only Macgillivray and Fletcher, first elected in 1938 along with thirteen other independents when South Australia changed from multi-member to single-member electorates, were not members of parties. Tom Stott is the longest serving independent member of an Australian parliament.

Table 9: Independent Members of the South Australian House of Assembly elected since 1950[#]

Period	Member	Seat	Party Background		Fate	
			Member	Seat	Member	Seat
1933-70	Tom Stott	Albert/Ridley	Country	new^	Retired	Liberal
1938-56	William Macgillivray	Chaffey		new	Defeated	Liberal & County
1938-58	John Fletcher	Mount Gambier		new	Deceased	Labor
1948-62	Percival Quirke	Stanley/Burra	Labor MHA	Liberal & Country	Joined Liberal & Country	
1975-77	Ted Connelly	Pirie	Labor	Labor	Rejoined Labor	
1977	Keith Russack	Goyder	Liberal MHA	Liberal	Rejoined Liberal	
1979-93	Norm Peterson	Semaphore	Labor	Labor	Retired	Abolished

1984-93	Martyn Evans	Elizabeth	Labor	Labor	Rejoined Labor
1985-86	Stan Evans	Davenport	Liberal MHA	Liberal	Rejoined Liberal
1997-	Rory McEwen	Mt Gambier	Liberal	Liberal	
1997-99	Mitch Williams	MacKillop	Liberal	Liberal	Rejoined Liberal
2000-	Bob Such	Fisher	Liberal MHA	Liberal	
2002-06	Peter Lewis	Hammond	Liberal MHA	Liberal	Retired Liberal
2006-	Kris Hanna	Mitchell	Labor [^] MHA	Labor [%]	

[#] Includes four members whose terms as independents began before 1950.

[^] Ridley was a new seat while Albert was a multi-member electorate.

[%] Defected to the Greens before becoming an independent.

About half the electorates are located in rural and regional areas and half in Adelaide. All fourteen independents have been male, and six were sitting MHAs. The most common reason for leaving a party was preselection disputes, particularly due to Labor's centralised preselection process and the splits within the Liberal and Country League (spawning the progressive Liberal Movement, one of the forerunners to the Australian Democrats). Connelly was a local mayor, and upon election and with Labor failing to achieve a majority by one seat, he accepted the speakership and later rejoined the Labor Party. Similarly, Evans was another local mayor whose election also coincided with Labor's inability to win a majority. He too accepted the Deputy Speakership and eventually a Cabinet position before rejoining the Labor Party. The other independent balance of power holder, Peterson, accepted the Speakership. He won his seat an Independent Labor candidate after failing to win Labor preselection. When his seat was abolished in a redistribution, he unsuccessfully contested an upper house seat. Labor MHA Quirke was initially suspended from the Labor Party, before resigning to sit as an independent. He eventually joined the Liberal and Country Party and became a Minister. Hanna was also a Labor MHA before defecting to the Greens. After failing to win Greens' preselection for the top position on their Legislative Council ticket, he became an independent.

On the Liberal side, sitting conservative MHAs Russack and Evans ran as independents against party endorsed moderates, and rejoined the party after election. Liberal party member Williams won his seat as an Independent Liberal, drawing upon local discontent with the sitting Liberal MHA, and joined the parliamentary Liberal Party a few years later. Other sitting Liberal MHAs remained independents. Such became an independent after being demoted from the Ministry while maverick Lewis was expelled from the party, and eventually accepted the Speakership in support of a Labor government. He eventually resigned his lower house seat to unsuccessfully contest an upper house seat. McEwen also supported a Labor government in exchange for a Cabinet position. He ran as an independent after failing to win Liberal Party preselection. McEwen, along with Such and Hanna are the three independents who currently sit in the South Australian House of Assembly.

Like the NSW Legislative Council, South Australia's upper house is elected on a state-wide basis using proportional representation. This changed occurred in 1973, along with universal suffrage for upper house election. Nevertheless, only two independents have been elected to

the South Australian Legislative Council since 1950 (see Table 10 below). Xenophon was elected on a 'No Pokies' platform, receiving just 2.86 percent of the primary vote but winning the second last seat on preferences. At the 2006 election (as the term for SA MLCs is eight years) Xenophon won an unprecedented 20.5 percent of the primary vote, which was enough to elect his running mate, Bressington, who is currently the only elected independent Member of the Legislative Council (Xenophon's replacement was appointed). As previously noted, Xenophon resigned to successfully contest the Senate.

Table 10: Independent Members of the South Australian Legislative Council elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Party Background</i>		<i>Fate</i>	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>
1997-07	Nick Xenophon	The State			Retired	
2006-	Ann Bressington	The State				

* Multi-member electorates using proportional representation.

Tasmania

While Tasmania's Legislative Council has largely been the domain of independents, its lower house has seated only nine independent members since 1950 (see Table 11 on the next page). Most have been male and each of Tasmania's five electorates has elected an independent candidate at some time. Turnbull and Lowe were Labor Members of the House of Assembly before continuing in the Assembly as independents; Turnbull was a Treasurer and Lowe was a Premier. While Turnbull was expelled from the party, Lowe resigned after losing the leadership in a vote of no confidence in relation to his handling of a referendum on the location of a hydroelectric dam. Turnbull eventually used his profile to successfully transition to the Senate, while Lowe switched to the Legislative Council. Wedd had switched from the Council, and initially retired before successfully recontesting the same seat a few years later, although that term ended in electoral defeat. Goodluck was a Liberal Member of the House of Representatives, and after retiring from federal politics, was elected to the same electorate (Tasmania's electorates are the same for both federal and state elections) as an independent in 1996. The other five independents were environmental activists, and were widely known as 'green' independents when elected. Brown was the first such independent elected on a countback of votes from the previous election to fill the casual vacancy of a retiring Democrat Member. In 1992, Brown, Bates, Armstrong, Hollister and Milne formed the Tasmanian Greens parliamentary party. Brown and Milne have since become Greens Senators. There are currently no independents in the Assembly, with Tasmania becoming the Greens heartland.

Table 11: Independent Members of the Tasmanian House of Assembly elected since 1950

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>
1948-53; 1959-64	Bill Wedd	Denison			Retired; Defeated	
1959-61	Reg Turnbull	Bass	Labor		Retired	
1982-86	Doug Lowe	Franklin	Labor		Retired	
1983-92	Bob Brown	Denison			Became Greens MP	
1986-92	Gerry Bates	Franklin			Became Greens MP	
1989-92	Lance Armstrong	Bass			Became Greens MP	
1989-92	Dianne Hollister	Braddon			Became Greens MP	
1989-92	Christine Milne	Lyons			Became Greens MP	
1996-98	Bruce Goodluck	Franklin	Liberal		Retired	

* Multi-member electorates using proportional representation.

Australian Capital Territory

The Australia Capital Territory was granted self-government in 1988 with a unicameral Legislative Assembly elected using proportional representation. There have been four independent Members of the Legislative Assembly, including one woman (see Table 12 on the next page). Moore was originally elected on the Residents Rally ticket during the early unstable years of self-government. His popularity resulted in the election of Szuty and he went on to become the ACT's first independent Minister in a minority Liberal government. Osborne was a well-known local sportsperson, and support for his ticket resulted in the election of Rugendyke. There are currently no independent Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Table 12: Independent Members of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly elected since 1988

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat*</i>
1992-02	Michael Moore	Molonglo	Residents Rally		Retired	
1992-95	Helen Szuty%	Ginninderra			Defeated	
1995-01	Paul Osborne	Brindabella			Defeated	
1998-01	Dave Rugendyke^	Ginninderra			Defeated	

* Multi-member electorates using proportional representation.

% Elected on the Michael Moore Independent Group ticket.

^ Elected on the Osborne Independent Group ticket.

Northern Territory

Since the Northern Territory was granted full representative government in 1974, the Country Liberal Party has dominated the political scene (until the recent election of a Labor government in 2005). The two independents elected to the first Legislative Assembly were eventually defeated by Country Liberal candidates (see Table 13 below). Padgham-Purich, Collins and Braham were all sitting Country Liberal MLAs before losing the party's endorsement and successfully recontesting their seats as independents. Wood is the only independent to have won his seat from a major party, using his profile as a local mayor to defeat the sitting Country Liberal MLA. He is the currently the only elected independent in the Legislative Assembly, sharing the balance of power with a former Labor MLA.

The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australian where half of the elected independents have been women. All of the seats are either in the Darwin or Alice Springs regions.

Table 13: Independent Members of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly elected since 1974

<i>Period</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	Party Background		Fate	
			<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1974-83	Dawn Lawrie	Nightcliff		<i>new</i>	Defeated	C.Liberal
1974-77	Ron Withnall	Port Darwin		<i>new</i>	Defeated	C.Liberal
1987-97	Cecilia Noel Padgham-Purich	Koolpinyah; Nelson	Country Liberal MLA		Retired	C.Liberal
1987-94	Denis Collins	Sadadeen/Greatorex	Country Liberal MLA		Defeated	C.Liberal
2001-08	Loraine Braham	Braitling	Country Liberal MLA		Retired	C.Liberal
2001-	Gerry Wood	Nelson		<i>C.Liberal</i>		

Independents and political power

The major parties campaign to win government, and often argue that independents and minor parties can never achieve the *real* political power of government. Yet minor parties and independents have sometimes held the 'balance of power'. While minor parties and a couple of independent Senators have popularised this term, as typically neither Labor or the Coalition have held the majority of seats in the federal upper house, independents have supported minority governments in lower houses across Australia. In 1941, two independents switched support from Country Party Prime Minister Arthur Fadden to bring Labor to power. Since then independents have not come close to holding the balance of power in the House of Representatives. However, at a state and territory level, independents have not only wielded power to extract significant concessions from governments, but have also attained powerful positions for themselves, including speakerships and ministries.

South Australia has long history of both independent and third party representation. In the 1938 South Australian election, fourteen independents (plus the Single Tax League's sole representative) won as many seats as the Liberal Country League government and more than the Labor Party's nine seats. While independents have never since come close to that high-water mark of 35 percent of lower house seats, independents supported minority Liberal and Country League governments at various times from the late 1930s to the 1960s.²⁸ After the 1975 election, Independent Labor Member Ted Connelly accepted the Speakership, enabling the Don Dunstan Labor government to remain in power. After the 1989 election Labor-leaning independents Norm Peterson and Martyn Evans accepted the Speakership and Deputy Speakership, respectively, to once again enable Labor to continue governing, under the premiership of John Bannon. More recently, the John Olsen Liberal government continued with the support of two former Liberal party members, Mitch Williams and Rory McEwen, after they were elected as independents at the 1997 election. At the following 2002 election, Labor's Mike Rann came to power when Rory McEwen switched allegiance and accepted a ministry, while another former Liberal, Peter Lewis, accepted the Speakership. Despite being a former Liberal Party member of 25 years, Rory McEwen became trade minister in a minority Labor government. He remained independent in terms of retaining the right to criticise the government.²⁹ The *Compact for Good Government* (2002) between former Liberal MLA Peter Lewis and Labor Premier Mike Rann included improvements to ministerial accountability, parliamentary reforms, assistance to rural South Australia, and significantly a Constitutional Convention.³⁰ Lewis also became the Speaker, but resigned in 2005 after making unfounded allegations against another Member of Parliament. As Labor had also invited a National into Cabinet, and with its parliamentary majority assured it distanced itself from Lewis, and supported another independent as Speaker. Labor won a majority in its own right at the 2006 election and Lewis failed in his bid for an upper house seat. Curiously Rann retained the independent and National in his Cabinet.

Hung parliaments with independent crossbenchers were also common in New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. After the 1950 New South Wales election, Labor Premier James McGirr governed with the support of two former Labor parliamentarians who ran as independents. After the 1965 election, the Liberal-Country Coalition led by Robert Askin came to power with the support of two conservative independents. By 1967, they had a majority with the readmission of one of the independents to the Liberal Party and a by-election win over Labor. In Tasmania, there were Labor minority governments after the 1950 and the 1959 elections. Premier Robert Cosgrove continued governing with the support of independent Bill Wedd from 1950 to 1955. Cosgrove's successor as Premier, Eric Reece, was also one seat short of a majority after the 1959 election, with two elected independents (Wedd and Turnbull) on the crossbench and a

28. B Costar & J Curtin, *Rebels with a cause: independents in Australian politics*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2004, p. 14.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-43 & 92.

number of disaffected Liberal parliamentarians becoming independents during that term. In Western Australia the Coalition of the Liberal and Country League and the Country and Democratic League fell short of a majority after the 1950 election (under Premier Ross McLarty), and again after the 1959 election (under Premier David Brand). Independent Liberals were also elected at these elections, enabling the Coalition to govern.

In recent decades, independents have not only held the balance of power in these states, but wielded this power to force concessions. After the 1989 Tasmanian election, Labor came to power under Premier Michael Field after reaching an agreement with the Green Independents. The *Tasmanian Parliamentary Accord* (1989) between the green independents and Labor Premier Michael Field was based primarily on detailed and prescriptive environment policy demands, and ultimately collapsed along with the government in 1991.³¹ Similarly, after the 1991 New South Wales election, Premier Nick Greiner's incumbent Liberal-National Coalition was forced to negotiate with independents to retain power. The New South Wales' *Memorandum of Understanding* (1991) between John Hatton, Clover Moore, Peter Macdonald and the Liberal-National Coalition Premier Nick Greiner, was also detailed but only policy-prescriptive in relation to legal and constitutional reform.³² It aimed to enhance accountability, freedom of information, the powers of the ombudsman and the auditor-general, defamation laws and whistleblower protection. Greiner eventually resigned after an adverse Independent Commission Against Corruption finding and the independents' threat of a no confidence vote. Most recently, the Liberal-National Coalition in Western Australia formed a minority government under Premier Colin Barnett, with Independent Liberal Liz Constable included in his Cabinet as Minister for Education and Tourism.

Victoria and Queensland have only relatively recently experienced minority governments reliant on independent support. From the 1995 Queensland election until just after the following 1998 election power shifted several times. The Wayne Goss Labor government narrowly retained government in 1995 before losing their one seat majority in a court-ordered by-election and ceding the balance of power to sole independent Liz Cunningham, who supported a new Rob Borbidge National-Liberal Coalition government. After the 1996 Queensland election and a subsequent court-ordered by-election, Liz Cunningham entered a loosely-termed *Agreement* to support the National-Liberal Coalition government led by Premier Rob Borbidge on all matters related to confidence and supply, and received extra staffing entitlements.³³ The coalition lost power at the 1998 election when an *Agreement* (1998) was reached between Peter Wellington and Labor Premier Peter Beattie to reform parliament, maintain surplus budgets, enforce detailed guidelines on ministerial entitlements, and hold regular 'community cabinet meetings'.³⁴ Due to resignations and by-elections Labor

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

won a majority during that term and emphatically won the 2001 election while Wellington also comfortably retained his seat.

In Victoria, independents held the balance of power from the 1999 election until the 2002 election, enabling Steve Bracks' Labor Party to assume government from Jeff Kennett's Liberal-National Coalition. The *Independents' Charter Victoria 1999* between Russell Savage, Susan Davies, Craig Ingram and Labor Premier Steve Bracks was based more on general principles of government accountability (such as restoring the auditor-general's powers), parliamentary reform (particularly the upper house) and social and economic rejuvenation for rural Victoria.³⁵ Labor convincingly won the 2002 election, although Davies was defeated.

Minority governments and relatively large crossbenches have been a common feature of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly. Independents shared the balance of power with minor parties from 1992 to 2001, and in 1998 Michael Moore became the health, housing and community services minister in a Liberal Cabinet. He was only bound by the conventions of collective cabinet solidarity in relation to his portfolio areas and annual budget bills, and even succeeded in legalising supervised drug-injecting rooms despite two of his Cabinet colleagues (in a Cabinet of only five) voting against it.³⁶

Independents currently hold the balance of power in the Northern Territory for the first time ever, with the resignation Alison Anderson from the Labor Party who now sits on the crossbench with Gerry Wood. Labor retained power with the support of Wood.

Conclusion

This study suggests that independent candidates still hold an allure for voters who may be disenchanted with the major parties. However, following the last 20 or so Australian elections, it now appears that the attraction has stabilised and that independents in general are no long increasing their support; rather, they are maintaining the level of support that they have already achieved. In terms of representation, the major parties still dominate but not quite as much as they did prior to the 1990s. Voting patterns indicate a shift away from the major parties that occurred in 1990 and the effect largely remains.

But who are Australians voting for? Depending of the state, independents are generally more successful in non-metropolitan areas, and tend to be men with a background in party politics. Since the 1990s there has been a small but growing trend of former state independents becoming independents at the Commonwealth level, and more recently, there have been a small number of independents gaining ministerial positions at state level. Experience in a political party seems to be very important in getting elected as an independent. As there are

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., p. 23.

more former party independents being elected, it could be argued that the dominance of the major parties have more or less continued since the 1990s, albeit in a different way.

The decline in the influence of the major parties since the 1990s should not be exaggerated as they continue to be very important in the political socialisation of independent candidates. The change in the fortunes of independents can be seen as modest re-alignment rather than a fundamental shift. The greater number of independents elected has therefore not resulted in particularly 'different' people being elected, that is, while they are not party insiders, by definition, nor are they political outsiders. This is an important consideration if the strength of democracy is to be assessed with reference to the number of non-party members elected. The current allure of independents may represent only a minor exception to the rule, perhaps best expressed by Joseph Schumpeter's realist characterisation of democracy, as the periodic competition of self-chosen elites.

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