

1.0 Executive Summary

The following research paper has been completed for Independent Chris Foley MP, Member for Maryborough at his request. As the title suggests, it is a study of the role Independents have played in the Queensland Parliament. To bring this into sharper focus, an examination of Independents prior to Liz Cunningham (1995) have been excluded. While the three Independents that were elected prior to 1995 are nonetheless important, for the purpose of this research current electoral trends pertaining to Independents have been examined.

This paper is divided into a number of sections in order to establish a background of the nature of Queensland politics, the roles that the two major political parties have played and most importantly, the rise in the Independent vote. In examining the rise in the phenomenon that is voting for Independents, an analysis of non-partisan and non-major party voting has been conducted. This helps centre the argument surrounding the decline in major party voting, party membership and attachment.

In the next section, the paper turns to the current climate of Independent voting. As found, it is difficult to map overall common trends in the four Independent electorates. Therefore, it has been necessary to engage in a seat-by-seat analysis. Given that the four electorates in question: Gladstone, Maryborough, Nicklin and Nanango, fall in to the Electoral Commission's classification or provincial city (the first two) and rural (the last two), overall trends have been mapped for these geo-classifications.

Importantly for Chris Foley MP, is the meteoric rise in his vote. While all other Independent Members vote declined in 2006, his continued to grow at an exponential rate. He gained a further 10% of preferences to add to his total vote, making his the safest seat in the state.

Finally, current issues are examined to determine if the role of Independents has longevity in Queensland or if this phenomenon, like many others in this jurisdiction, is short-term.

Completing this paper, at times has proved difficult, with limited secondary research in circulation. Much of this research paper has been centred around a two works completed by Associate Professor Paul Reynolds, one of few commentators, if not the only, on Queensland electoral politics.

This paper would not be complete without the continued support and useful contributions of Dr. Rae Wear my Academic Supervisor, to whom I am indebted. The faults that remain are the responsibility of myself alone.

Joshua O'Keefe

2.0 Introduction

In 1982, Don Aitkin wrote that individuals had a basic disposition, due to a psychological attachment, known as party identification, to favour a particular political party at consecutive elections. He argued: “Party identification became the basic determinant of vote, and was itself determined by the varying influences of upbringing, situation, education and life experience” (1982: 37). This theory, advocated notably by Campbell et al in the *American Voter* in 1960, has weathered the test of political time. The role of parties moreover, has been scored on to the political landscape. The nature of the Westminster derived political system that exists in Australia, creating government and opposition, reinforces the role of political parties with little room for others.

Even though the dominant role of political parties remains unthreatened (Reynolds 2002: 39), the recent proliferation of Independents in the Queensland Parliament deserves attention and explanation. As Costar and Curtin argue, Independents have been an element of parliament for many years, which is evident in the Queensland case (2004: 7). This jurisdiction is the focus for this paper in attempting to locate the phenomenon of non-partisan voting and examine the Members of Parliament who have benefited from such electoral behaviour.

Outside the federal and New South Wales parliaments (the largest State parliament in Australia), Queensland has returned the greatest number of Independents and longest serving Independent – namely, Tom Aikens. Thomas Aikens is the tenth longest serving member of the Queensland Parliament, recording more than 33 years of service as an Independent.¹ Even though Aikens served his North Queensland electorates (Mundingburra 1944-60, Townsville South 1960-77) for twelve terms, he stands as an exemplar, with the occurrence of Independents in Queensland prior to the mid-1990s sporadic. Given that the election of independents in increased numbers began during this period, independent Members Ed Casey (Mackay 1972 – 77) and Lindsay Hartwig (Callide 1983 – 86), have been excluded from in-depth study.

¹ Aikens was originally a member of the North Queensland Labour Party however, has been classified by Costar and Curtin, and is generally regarded, as an Independent.

The increased incidence of independents began in 1995, when Elizabeth Anne Cunningham was elected as the Member for Gladstone. She was the first female independent elected to the Queensland Parliament and the first non-aligned independent since 1969.² With less than twelve months of parliamentary service behind her, she “was thrust into the invidious position of holding the balance of power” (McCulloch 2005: 77). Cunningham was placed in a key political position whereby she determined which political party/ies would govern Queensland from February 1996. Not surprisingly, her semi-rural background as Mayor of Calliope Shire saw her give support to the National party. Peter Wellington, two years later as Member for Nicklin, was placed in the same unenviable position as Cunningham had been.

Reynolds argues Cunningham’s key position in 1996 “effectively focussed attention both on the role of Independents and the concept of the balance of power in a Lower House” (2002: 1). Moreover, he argues that such occurrences in other state jurisdictions³, “further brings the question into sharper focus” (2002: 1).

The focus for this paper then is three fold. Firstly, an examination of the nature of Queensland politics with emphasis on the polarisation of the two main political parties, Labor and National. More importantly, attention will be given to the rise of non-partisan voting especially in relation to Independents. The second section will be more clearly focussed on current Independent Members and their role in the Queensland Parliament. It is envisaged that through the above two discussions, an understanding will be reached in relation to the role of Independents’ permanency and whether issues such as party attachment and declining party membership represent a longer term weakening of political parties. It is important to remember that very little in politics remains the same and that past behaviour is no guarantee of future trends, with each election, electorate and elector distinct from the other.

² This is according to the *1995 Ballot Paper Survey*. Costar and Curtin’s analysis suggests otherwise indicating that the last Independent was Lindsay Hartwig who retired in 1986. Hartwig however, was affiliated with the Country Party. Prior to that Ed Casey served as an Independent however re-joined the ALP.

³ Independents have held the balance of power in the Lower House in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory in addition to Queensland (see Costar and Curtin 2004: 7-8).

3.0 The Nature of Queensland Politics – Polarisation of the Labor and National Parties

Unfortunately, little has been written in Australia, or abroad about the role of Independents. When Ian Moles wrote *A Majority of One: Tom Aikens and Independent Politics in Townsville*, he stated that scant attention (of any great depth or detail) has been paid to such parliamentarians. On the contrary, much has been written about the nature of Queensland politics. While this has been discussed elsewhere, a brief (re)introduction here seems valuable.

3.1 The Parties and their Leaders

As Colin Hughes argued, the nature of Queensland's political culture has always been different and distinctive (1980: 10). Notwithstanding climate, topography, decentralisation, the tyranny of distance and elongated lines of communication, Queensland politics have been characterised by long periods of one party rule. Both Labor and National (sometimes in coalition with the Liberals) parties have governed Queensland, often for long periods. Until the 1957 election, Labor had governed Queensland for 39 years, with a brief interregnum from 1929 – 1932 when Arthur Moore became the first Country Party Premier of Queensland. Premier William Forgan Smith returned Labor to power in 1932 and there it remained until 1957. In 1944, Labor reduced the National party to twelve seats. From 1957, the Country (now National) Party then governed continuously until 1989, a period of more than 32 years. In 1974, it was this party's turn to reduce the opposition to eleven seats in the House. This type of back and forth between the parties, albeit for long periods, has continued to characterise Queensland politics. Although the post 1989 period has been more volatile, the Beattie government appears to be entrenched in power.

More noticeably, the leaders of these parties, as argued in the *Premiers of Queensland*, have been strong, authoritarian, populist, sometimes autocratic and always male. By far the most memorable of these, at least in living memory, is Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen. While recounting all of this, in a paper about the role of Independents in Queensland seems irrelevant, it is important in positioning the increasing prevalence of non-partisan support that may have arisen out of a general lack of interest in the major political parties.

4.0 The Rise in the Non-Partisan and Non-major party vote

It is important to preface this section by defining the two key terms. Firstly, non-partisan voting means voting for an Independent or One Nation candidate. Secondly, non-major party voting means voting for any candidate other than that from Labor, National or Liberal parties. These concepts have been articulated by Reynolds (2002) and applied here. Although ON acted as a political party and were classified as such by the ECQ, through their own admission they were an anti-party establishment. Furthermore, Reynolds states that, “localism and regionalism continued a half-life outside the party system and tended to emerge during periods of economic uncertainty or rapid political change (2002: 3) such as existed in the 1990s. The hitherto alternation between major parties would continue however, it is because of these reasons that both Independent and ON voting patterns will be examined in combination. Finally, a number of former ON members became Independents consolidating the point that non-partisan voting exists in the guise of support for Independents, ON and where the latter become Independents.

The interest here in examining non-major party voting overall is to determine if there is a swing away from major parties.

4.1 Voting for Independents and One Nation Candidates

In 1992 almost 125 000 Queenslanders voted for Independents. Although this resulted in no such candidate achieving electoral success, it represented the voting interests of close to one in ten voters. While voting for Independents halved at the next election, non-major party voting increased by more than 20 000 votes, represented by a collage of Independent, Green, Democrat and Confederate Action Party interests. Although 1995 represented a halving of the Independent vote, one Independent achieved electoral success, the first to do so in a decade.⁴

Voters became uninterested and discontented with political parties, especially the National party, becoming forthrightly evident at the 1998 election. When the National party returned to power in 1996, much sooner than any elector let alone psephologist had expected, Premier Robert Borbidge and his party appeared to exhibit the political

⁴ As has been partly explained above, Cunningham was the first Independent elected in a quarter of a century to have no party alignment, nor previously be a member of a political party.

style of the old guard, and showed no impetus to modernity. Wear argues that “his own rhetoric became increasingly strident as he tried to manoeuvre the National Party towards the populist position it had abandoned under the leadership of Ahern, and which One Nation had taken up” (Wear in Cribb et al 2003: 399). This anti-party response captured the vote of nearly one in four Queenslanders in 1998. Pauline Hanson and her racist, populist rhetoric, mobilised the disenchanted and alienated voters of outer urban, provincial and rural areas. As will be discovered, these areas are where Independents are most likely to be, and were in fact elected.

After the 2001 election, the first of the new century, and the most successful for Labor since its return to power in 1989, more than one in five voted for non-major parties. While nearly one in three had voted for a non-major party at the previous election, it was the rapid demise in the ON vote that saw a decline overall. What is more pertinent to this study however, is the 322% increase in voting for Independents. The ratio of Independents as a component of non-major party voting was 1:2.5 or 40%. In essence, the greatest meaning that could be attached to this, was that a record five Independents were elected to the Parliament in this election.

Later that year following the resignation of Robert Borbidge, a sixth Independent joined the fold. Lex Bell’s success in Surfers Paradise contributed to the number of Independents in the Parliament. Overall, they accounted for twice the number of members of the parliamentary Liberal Party and represented just over half the number of Nationals. While the ON vote at this election was almost equal to (0.08% greater) the Independent vote, the latter secured five seats with the former only gaining three. The fact that ON lost ten seats in the two elections after 1998 indicates that this party was a short-term ephemeral force. After the most recent election this year (2006), 0.60% of Queenslanders gave their first preference to ON reaffirming its short-term nature. This minimal result represented a three thousand per cent decrease on the 1998 FPV of 22.68%. It must be stated that ON fielded only four candidates with one successful, Rosa Lee Long. While this paper does not treat her as an Independent, the nature of her rural hinterland seat is very similar to that of the Independents that will be examined.

4.2 2004 Election

In 2004, Ray Hopper returned to the National Party, Lex Bell was defeated with the remarkable transition of the long time National seat going to the Liberals, while Elisa Roberts was elected as an Independent representing Gympie. The net loss therefore stood at one. The FPV for Independents however, dropped by almost three per cent or 52000 votes. Furthermore, while the non-major party vote dropped by five per cent, one in three non-major party voters supported an Independent. Proportionate to the aforementioned decline was that in Independent support with a drop of the same percentage (38% in 2001 and 33% in 2004).

4.3 2006 Election

After the 2006 election, 8% of Queenslanders gave their first preference to the Greens. In 1998, the Greens received 45000 votes compared to 175000 in 2006, an increase of 130000 in eight years. Contesting 75 seats in 2006, the Green vote was widespread however; important factors emerge relating to preference flows. Reynolds has established that rural Greens (like rural ON voters) are more likely to preference Independents and surprisingly less likely to preference Labor (2004: 7). While this analysis examines rural voting for all Independents, it provides Peter Wellington in Nicklin and Dolly Pratt in Nanango with useful information for future preference deals.

For Independents in provincial seats viz: Liz Cunningham in Gladstone and Chris Foley in Maryborough,⁵ Reynolds' research points to the fact that voting for Independents had a very high level of exhaustion in provincial electorates. He argues, "this occurrence may owe something to the nature of provincial electoral politics centred on local networks, patterns of associational connections and high rates of visibility/perception" (2004: 7), or what he terms localism or connectional politics. Furthermore, he states, "... that loyalty to particular persons who seek office are not readily transferable to other candidates and/or parties" (2004: 7). This is most evident in Chris Foley's seat of Maryborough where he secured almost 70% of the FPV in 2006, to make his the safest seat in the State.

⁵ Four Independents were elected in 2006. Significant local factors in Gympie saw Elisa Roberts vote decimated to less than 9% even though she had withdrawn from the election. The two key issues were between her and former Liberal Leader Bob Quinn and an issue with her pet dog.

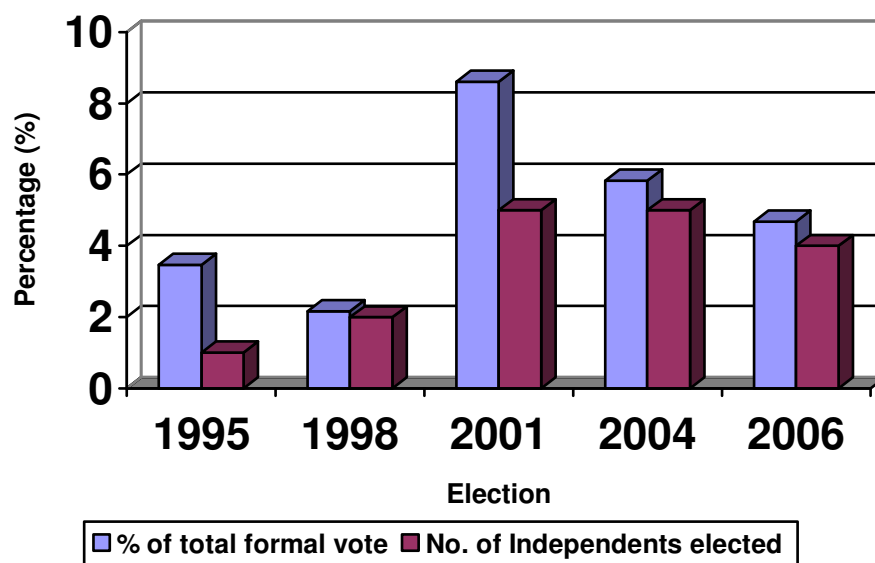
While four Independents were returned in 2006, the total FPV for Independents was significantly reduced by 22000 votes. While there was some expectation that disendorsed Labor Member for Noosa Cate Molloy would be successful as an Independent, this did not materialise and the Liberals were successful in the Sunshine Coast seat.

4.4 Significance to Independent Voting

From the above discussion, a number of salient factors emerge. Firstly, with the exclusion of 1998, due mainly to the rise of ON, a fairly consistent level of support for Independents suggests their continued relevance over a period of four elections. Secondly, it is not surprising that non-partisan and non-major party support peaked in 1998 given the factors mentioned previously. Foremost among these was the demise of the National vote augmented by the resentment shown to the government of 1996-1998. Thirdly, although the non-partisan vote is a combination of both Independent and ON votes, by 2006 the former represented almost ninety per cent of the total vote. Excluding the Member for Tablelands (ON), non-partisan voting would simply be comprised of the Independent vote. Finally, non-major party support plateaued at a level between 15-20% with Independents representing one third, indicates that support is not only stable but also continuous.

4.5 Voting for Independents

Figure 1: Total Vote for Independents and the Number of Successful Candidates



While most of the above information has focussed on non-major party and non-partisan voting patterns, the inclusion of Figure 1 is pertinent to the question at hand, namely the role of Independents. Even though voting for Independents dropped by a third in 1998, two such candidates were elected representing an increase of one. The rise of ON significantly impacted on the number of FPV's received by Independents. Its equally rapid demise saw the Independent vote more than quadruple at the following election. This resulted in the election of a further three Independents, two former members of ON. The pattern of voting for Independents over the last three consecutive elections, albeit reduced slightly in 2006, has remained stable. As Figure 1 indicates, the number of seats won by Independents has been relative to the number of votes gained with the greatest variation in 2001, with 3.61% more votes than seats. This paper will now turn to those Independent Members who currently serve their constituencies in the 51st Parliament.

5.0 The Modern Condition – Current Independent Members

Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive analysis of votes for, and profiles of, all Independent Members elected to the Queensland Parliament since Liz Cunningham in 1995. The aim of this section more broadly therefore, is to examine voting patterns for the four current Independents and the factors that pertain to such behaviour. It is

important to mention that it is difficult to determine a common trend among all four current Independent seats. Therefore, this section requires a seat by seat analysis. While most of this section relies on raw data, specifically the Electoral Commission Queensland's Statistical Returns, and also the Ballot Paper Surveys, Paul Reynolds article *Voting Support for Independents in Queensland 1992-2001*, seems an important place to start.

Colonial politics was premised on individual Members seeking economic support and development for their electorate with each seeing their interests as a higher priority than the other. This arrangement gave way to the party system in the late nineteenth century, which has existed since. Reynolds argues that while this occurred, Queensland politics distinctly retained a feature of localism and/or regionalism whereby the Members abiding interest was his or her constituents (2002: 2-3). While party members had a three-fold responsibility,⁶ to their electorate, their party and the parliament, Independents were accountable only to the first and the last. It is to the first that, at least in theory, they give their undivided attention without the demands of a political party. Nevertheless, in times of political volatility or trouble these Members are on their own. This is not to say the party system will always save/support members, especially when they compromise their party.

Given the nature of the cross benches, Independents are grouped together in the Chamber. During Parliamentary sitting weeks, Independents share office space on the same floor of the executive building, not to mention communicate with one another over coffee in the communal area. The nature of such proximity leads the cynical to suggest that such surroundings are conducive to a party-like environment. Nonetheless, the time they spend together is limited and they would probably share as much in difference as they would in commonality.

Reynolds suggests that Independent candidates emerge for a variety of reasons. Some are political "No Hoppers", some, such as Cate Molloy in 2006, are those who have been disendorsed and choose to run on their own, but it is the final group he argues that are important in the recent proliferation. This group "are those who have a high

⁶ Or perhaps four fold for Ministers, parliamentary secretaries, whips et cetera.

profile in their local community, often through community service, local government, local business-commercial activity... and would be ideal party candidates” (2002: 5).

As the following debate will discover, Independents have a much higher incidence in rural and provincial electorates. Moreover, incumbency is extremely important and powerful in Queensland politics. Numerous examples come to mind after the 2006 election. The resignation of Darryl Briskey in Cleveland saw the vacated seat tightly contested. A margin of more than 8% was held by the former Member, which signified very little for the incoming candidate. While this is one isolated example, others exist especially after the most recent election.

Incumbency was perhaps important for the sitting Independent Members in 2006 however, was imperative for Liz Cunningham in Gladstone with her total vote reduced by almost ten per cent. Her original rural background means that National preferences continue to flow to her at consecutive elections. This is the foundation to her strong credibility based on connectional networks emanating from her local government background (Reynolds 2002: 13). Labor continuously attempts to unseat Cunningham by running high profile candidates (they too represent localism in the provincial electorate) in Leo Zussino in 1998 and Chris Trevor in 2006, although unsuccessfully. Given the industrial and port base of this electorate, it appeared that the new federal government IR laws played a significant role in Gladstone this time around.

The role of an Independent is to champion the claims of their electorate and to push for local interests to be addressed. For them, there is no greater cause. This was advocated by Aikens; “Independents fail when they stop being independent, when they drift to one side or the other” (Moles 1979: 200). Perhaps it can be hypothesised that Chris Foley’s strong stand against damming the Mary River is mirrored in the strong vote he received at the September 2006 polls. Although his position is clearly in conflict to the Labor Government, he has not been seen to take the side of either conservative party. Instead, this is a decision based on the interests of his constituents and not an overriding partisan one.

The final point to make here is the importance of provincial and rural geographical areas to the increased prevalence of the Independent vote. Reynolds discovered that “nearly twice as many non-South East Queensland as SEQ voters reject the major parties” (2004: 8) in 2004. Of this non-major party vote, almost 51% go to Independents in these rural and provincial electorates suggesting “impressive evidence for the continuance of regionalism and localism as salient political factors in contemporary Queensland politics” (2004: 8). Of the four sitting Independents two each come from rural and provincial electorates as defined by the Electoral Commission of Queensland.

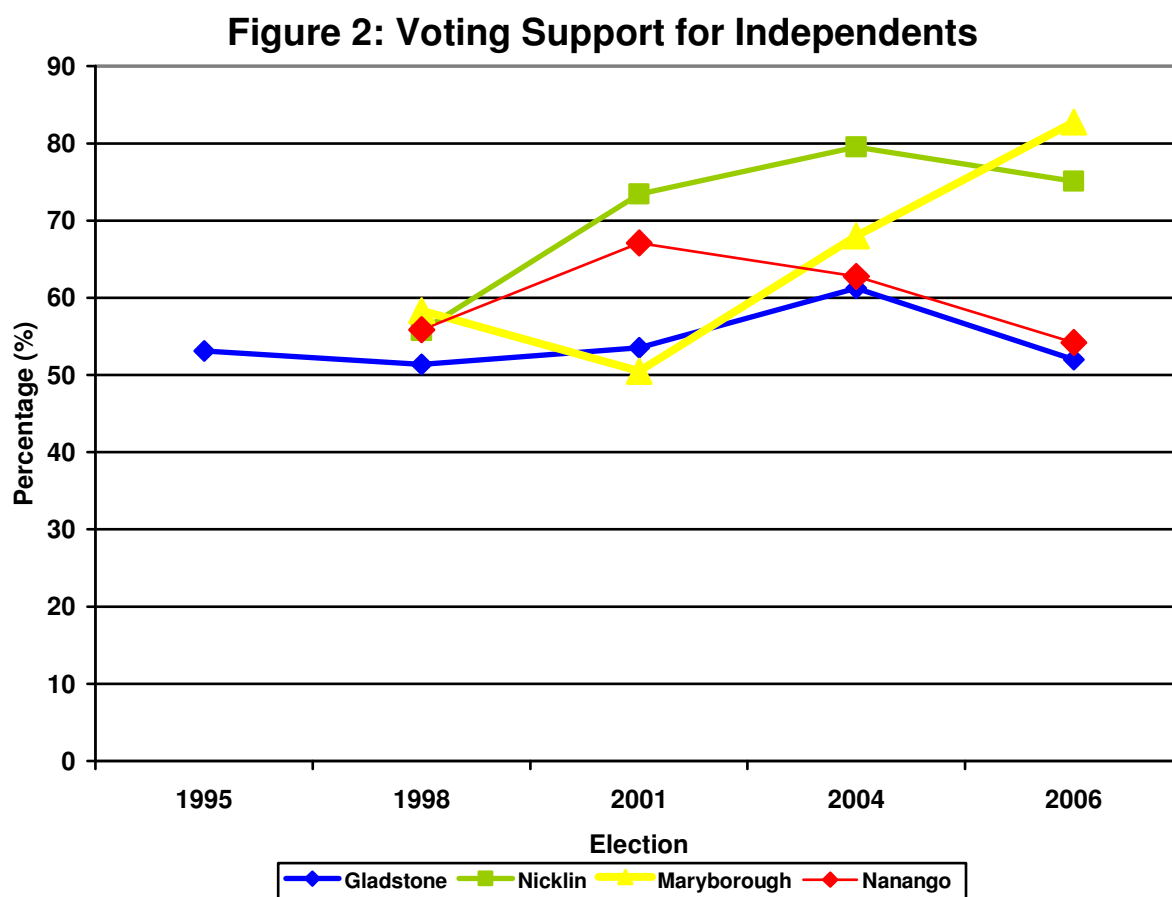


Table 1: Voting Support for Independents					
	1995	1998	2001	2004	2006
Gladstone	53.07	51.36	53.5	61.25	51.99
Nicklin		55.73	73.43	79.55	75.08
Maryborough		58.32 (ON)	50.5	67.98	82.73
Nanango		55.85 (ON)	67.07	62.73	54.24

NB. The Maryborough result includes both Kingston in 1998 and 2001 and Foley thereafter but does not include Foley's by-election result.

Table 1 and Figure 2 replicate the total vote each current Independent received during their terms in office. It is important to note, that for the purpose of continuity, ON Members elected in 1998 who became Independents, have been included and hereafter will be treated as Independents for the sake of *this* set of analyses. Notably, Figure 2 shows the consistent level of support provided to the 'leader of the pack', Cunningham, with no more than ten per cent variation. The addition of a further three Independents in 1998, showed that their total vote varied by as little as 2.59%, or 6.96% if Cunningham was included. Even though her vote has remained stable, amongst the others, hers has been the lowest at every election with the exception of 2001 where John Kingston (Maryborough) recorded 3% less. The others have recorded no such stability with an overall increase in their total vote with the exception of Pratt (Nanango). It is possible to hypothesise that Pratt's decline overall was more relative to her decline in 2006 due mainly to the Nationals running John Bjelke-Petersen (son of the former Premier) another aspirant to the political arena backed by connectionalism.

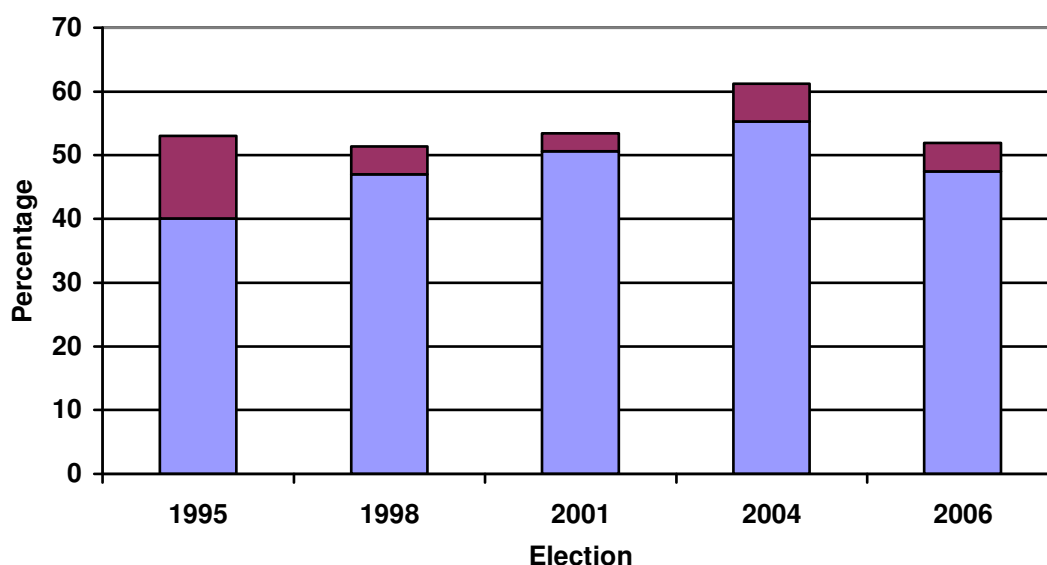
The sharp rise in voting for Independents in 2001 is replicated in Figure 2, although it was steadier for Cunningham and the opposite for Kingston. While the partial restoration of the Labor vote occurred in Maryborough "the anti-party sentiment of 1998 continued ... and largely remained attached to Kingston as an Independent" indicating that "incumbency, however narrowly won, can bring its own reward in single town electorates characterised by connectional networks and high profile community activity" (Reynolds 2002: 16). To extend this, Kingston's successor, Chris Foley has reinforced Reynolds' argument regarding incumbency. The marriage of strong localism, connectional networks and, furthermore incumbency, have

reaffirmed Foley's safe seat status to *the* safest seat in Queensland, even ahead of the normal victor, Inala.

Finally, voting decreased for three of the Independents at the 2006 election with incumbency remaining as a key factor. The obvious exception is the exponential growth in support for Chris Foley. In winning the 2003 by-election in his seat with a total vote of 53.59%, Foley worked fanatically to increase that to almost 68% by the general election in the following calendar year less than fourteen months later. The variation between his total vote and Cunningham's is almost thirty per cent.

5.2 Gladstone

Figure 3: Voting in Gladstone Represented by FPV and the Addition of Preferences

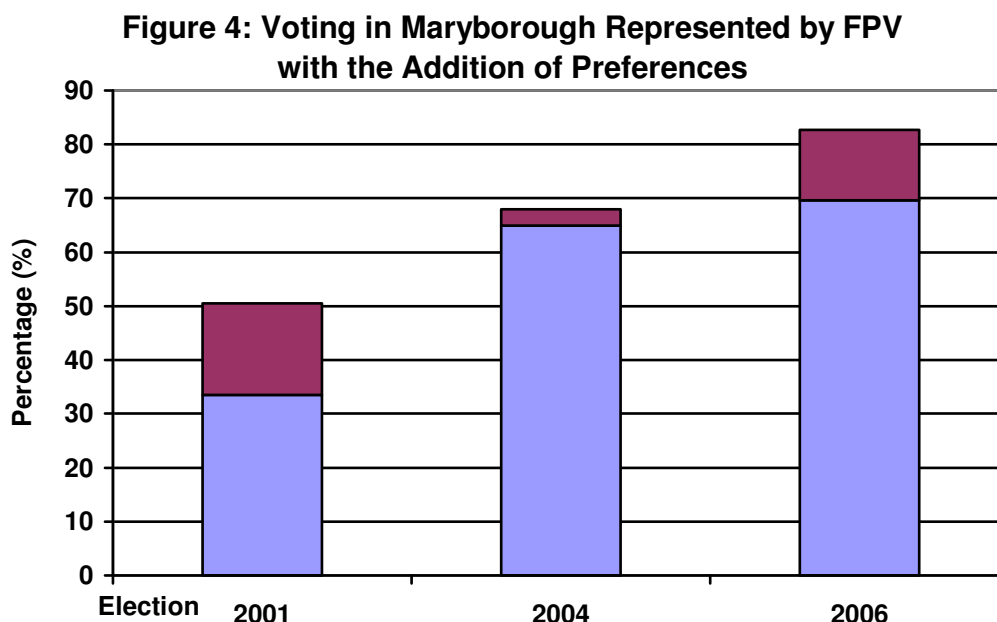


As has been indicated elsewhere (see Appendix 1), Figure 3 demonstrates the need for Cunningham to rely on preference flows. From this it is evident that the great majority of Independent votes were plumped (i.e. voters only preference one candidate. See ECQ 2002: 10). This correlates closely with Reynolds findings that plumping occurs at a higher rate in provincial electorates (2004: 7). Another explanation is that voters may have partially preferred with their first preference going to Cunningham. It is important to remember in Gladstone that Labor (who traditionally held the seat) continue to poll well and therefore the flow of preferences to Cunningham will be limited as the Nationals run a dead ticket. The impact this has on the outcome of the

seat, albeit significant, is providing Cunningham, on three occasions (1995, 1998 and 2006) with enough votes to secure victory.

5.3 Maryborough

Similar evidence below shows that Independent voters in provincial electorates are likely to exhaust their vote, if not partially vote, with their first preference going to the Independent. It is important to remember that spurious comparisons can occur as the number of candidates changes at each election. For example in Maryborough in 2004 only three candidates contested the seat while four did so in 2006. Although Figure 4 does not include Foley's 2003 by-election result his exponential electoral support is shown below. No further explanation seems necessary.



The flow of preferences in the following two rural seats proves to be more significant.⁷ Peter Wellington in Nicklin achieved 55.73% of the total vote in 1998 with thirty per cent of those votes coming from preferences.

⁷ This is not to say that preference flow is not important in Gladstone, given that sixty per cent of Cunningham's victories have been determined by preferences.

5.4 Nicklin

Figure 5: Voting in Nicklin Represented by FPV and the Addition of Preferences

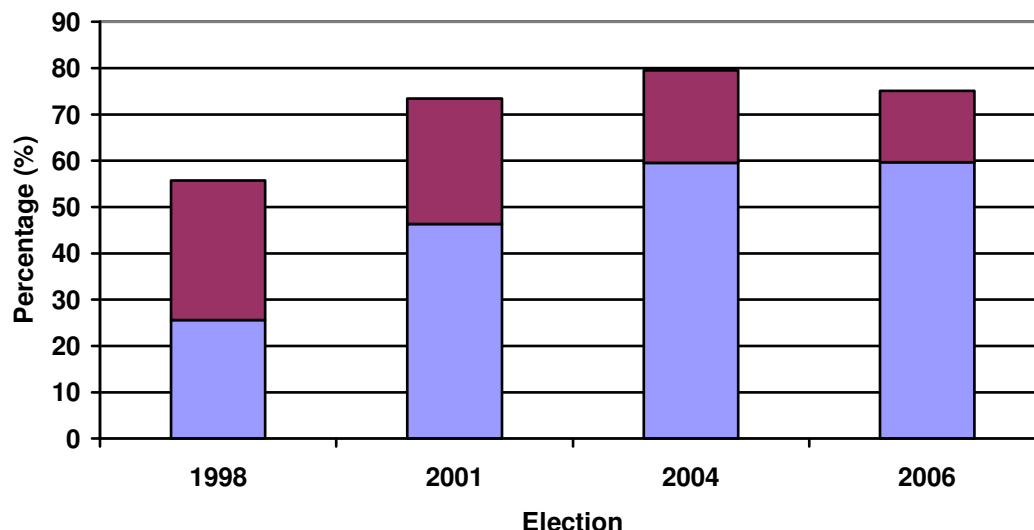


Figure 5 shows that on average almost one quarter of Wellington's vote is due to preferences. While in 2004 and 2006 he did not require any preferences, they determined the result of the previous two elections. Preferencing in Nicklin represents a mixed bag. Wellington's win was based on Labor preferences in 1998 and 2001, perhaps one obvious reason for supporting the first Beattie Labor Government when he held the balance of power. In 2004, whilst not requiring any preferences for electoral success, nine out of ten National preferences flowed to Wellington. As has been indicated in Appendix 1, the aforementioned party would be unlikely to recommend preferencing Labor, the Greens or ON leaving only Wellington.

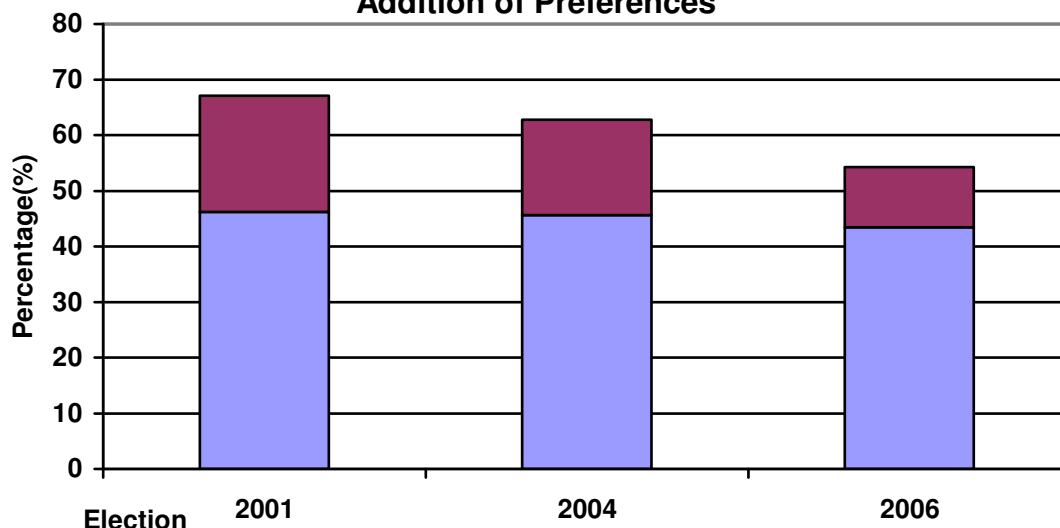
As the *2001 Ballot Paper Survey* found, rural voters are more likely to opt for partial or full preferential styles with almost half of all rural voters doing so. Just over forty-two per cent of those voting for Independents in rural areas however, exercised a part or full preferential style in 2001. It became evident in 2001 that the voting system employed four elections prior had seen an increase in the use of OPV.

While the majority of voters, 59.89% (ECQ 2002: 14) elected to plump at the 2001 election, a significant number of rural voters continued to use partial or full preferential voting. The rural voter seems more hesitant than metropolitan and

provincial voters to adopt the OPV method. In Nicklin, 53.93% of voters opted to plump their vote in 2001, increasing slightly in 2004 to 54.60%.

5.5 Nanango

Figure 6: Voting in Nanango Represented by FPV and the Addition of Preferences



On average, Pratt received 6% less preferences than Wellington did over the last three elections (remembering that Wellington contested four elections). Nonetheless, the rate of preferencing exists at a higher level than in provincial seats. It does not seem necessary to investigate this any further but simply to make two points. Unlike any of the other Independents, Pratt has required preferences to win her seat at every election (including that contested as a ON candidate). Her lowest FPV was recorded in 2006 at 43.46% and her highest recorded in 2001 at 46.18% a variation of 2.72%. Her total vote has varied by 12.83% depending on the number of preferences she receives. The power of incumbency has proved vital here also. The second point pertaining to this seat is where the preferences have originated. Like Wellington the source has varied with nine in ten coming from the Nationals in 2001, and the great majority coming from Labor in 2004 and 2006. Contrary to Reynolds' findings relating to lower exhaustion rates in rural seats compared to provincial seats, Nanango has exhibited a high rate of Labor votes exhausting. This may be an isolated case however, with the increased prevalence of OPV even in rural areas, it could mean a reduction in the core base of preferences for Independents. Such a decline is already taking place in Nanango.

6.0 Factors Pertaining to Long-term or Ephemeral Nature of Independents

It is difficult to identify a long-term lineage to Independent participation in Queensland politics. Obviously, colonial politics was the epitome of Independents and independence. The party system superseded previous models however, its imperfect nature was realised by Thomas Aikens in 1944, signalling the return of Independents. Serving twelve continuous terms as a Member of Parliament is no mean feat, partisan or not. The existence of only two Independents in the next twenty years, with only three combined terms of service, singled something of a rare and infrequent incidence. It is the recent experience and nature of ‘the modern Queensland’ that indicates not only a role, but also a foundation for a long-term existence of Independents in Queensland. The number of Independent Members elected in 2001 peaked at 6 and, their position was accentuated because two held the balance of power (Cunningham 1995, Wellington 1998), the ultimate political position for an Independent. The New South Wales Lower House is the only other jurisdiction⁸ with more (only by one) Independents than Queensland, in a State of almost three times the population. It is therefore advantageous to examine the current political climate, the reasons why Independents are elected and the institutional factors that are stacked against them.

6.1 Current Issues

The state of the economy, incumbency and declining party attachment denote a strengthening in Independent support. Although many of the factors have been mentioned above, it is important to reiterate and extend on these. The rise and subsequent fall of ON was a phenomenon almost exclusively relevant to Queensland. When the endemic corruption of the Bjelke-Petersen Government was revealed resulting in the consequent evolution of the Fitzgerald Inquiry, National Party rule had reached its nadir. In the period of reformation for this party, many disenchanted voters turned to the populist rhetoric of Pauline Hanson and her (anti-)party. The demise of the National Party has continued, with the other conservative party, the Liberals continuing along the road of “political irrelevance (since 1983)” (Reynolds 2002: 3). Labor, since 2001, has prospered although losing eight seats over the last three elections. The problems for the governing party have been issue specific, foremost among them, health.

⁸ In terms of Lower Houses.

After the 2006 election, few changes existed within the seats with Labor losing five, Independents one, the Liberals gaining five and the Nationals one. Given three by-elections were held during the term of the 50th Parliament, with Labor losing three seats, the changes are more minute. Unlike the previous two elections where changes were much greater, 2006 represented acceptance of the status quo. The nature of a maintaining election then, reaffirms overall support for the Government even though many possible fatal issues arose such as health and water restrictions this time around. On top of this, most voters were content with the work of their representative with minimal change to the Parliament.⁹ The uncertainty of the state of the economy also leads to similar patterns of voting from one election to the next given that most voters do not wish to interrupt the economic cycle. A number of issues have had significant impact on Queensland in the last twelve months. Overall the cost of living has risen due to three factors: higher petrol prices, cyclone Larry in Innisfail and a prolonged severe drought. In the last month, much relief has been given to motorists at least in the capital, with prices falling below \$1 per litre for the first time in months. The combination of the latter two, have meant an increase in the cost of food, a declining rural population and an increase in depression due to paltry agricultural returns resulting in limited, or in some cases, no economic return. While not a recession, rural and (to a lesser extent) provincial voters more regularly are suffering. For the constituents of Independents, they may realise now, more than ever, that they must have their interests advocated.

7.0 Conclusion

As Reynolds has argued, political parties remain unthreatened in Queensland. The entrenched Beattie Labor government is indicative of this argument. Beginning in the 1990s, a change in political behaviour saw the rise of Independents, chiefly with Liz Cunningham coming to power in 1995. Due to the fact that she, and Peter Wellington held the balance of power emphasised the role Independent Members of Parliament played during the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century. This rise has not, and more than likely will not, affect the position political parties hold in Queensland. Both

⁹ While many seats were vacated in 2006 by long serving MP's, most returned candidates of the same party.

Labor and National parties continue to alternate turns in government, with the former proving stronger at the present time.

The rise in non-partisan and non-major party support has shown that a lack of interest has emerged in relation to the major parties. While ON is all but extinct with the last bastion being Rosa Lee Long, Independents remain as the only viable non-partisan alternative. Support for this group has been centralised in provincial and rural electorates as defined by ECQ. Independent success has been mapped overall however; this research has found that a seat-by-seat analysis is imperative, as no common trend exists between the electorates. Although all Independents suffered a reduced vote in 2006, with the exception of Chris Foley, incumbency proved vital in their re-election. In fact, incumbency appears to be the cornerstone to continued electoral success in Queensland for all parties and Independents. The marriage of strong localism/regionalism and steadfast connections and networks as Reynolds has stated, with incumbency, appear to be vital in the Queensland electorate. This is a common thread that exists through all electorates: metropolitan, provincial and rural.

While there is no impetus to a Parliament of Independents due to the evolution of the party system (Reynolds 2002: 42), support for Independents, especially the current four, shows something of a lack of interest in the current arrangement. The fact that there are four sitting Independents and one electorate where such a candidate has been elected more than once, indicates changing political behaviour. Hence, incumbency appears to be the key however, as stated, this is the case for all Members of Parliament. A worsening in the current state of economy (i.e. a severe economic recession) may see all voters turn against their MP's regardless of their political strength. For now, the position of these four Independents seems to be as entrenched as the government itself. The rise of strong local issues remains the challenge to incumbency. If these Independents abiding interest remains with their community, and as Aikens advocated non-partisanship, their departure shall come at a time of their choosing.