

Who Sits in Parliament? An Analysis of State and Federal Members of Parliament

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Introduction

In June 1998, eleven members of a new party, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, were elected to the Queensland parliament. While not entirely unexpected, their election seemed to signal a sea change in Australian politics. The party itself, with its highly populist but poorly articulated agenda, appeared to represent a shift in the political landscape and suggested the advent of a new era in Australian party politics. Its early success was highly unusual – new parties rarely perform so strongly on debut but One Nation, with its charismatic leader and intense media interest, won almost 24% of the vote and unseated several long serving, high profile sitting members.¹ The new members were also different suggesting the arrival of a new breed of politician – an ordinary person, with limited formal education and no previous political experience, who would speak in an ordinary voice for ordinary people. One newly elected member, Bill Feldman summed up the mood when he said, 'I'm just a poor old copper who wants to change things'. Another new member, a local vet, stressed his 'lack of "pretence"'. These new members had diverse occupational backgrounds – two vets, two police officers, a coffee shop proprietor, a mechanic, a painter and decorator, an ex serviceman, a professional fisherman and Father Christmas and an 'owner manager'. The new party also contributed to diversity in terms of age. The oldest (Jack Pfaff) and youngest (Sean Nelson) members of the chamber both represented the One Nation Party. However, with only one woman, the Party largely conformed to the norm in gender terms and all its parliamentary members were from English speaking backgrounds. One Nation's early success was not replicated in the federal election later that year when the Party failed to win a single lower house seat.

Many observers, including Goot (1998) Fletcher and Whip (2000) attributed the success of One Nation to a rising disillusionment with the existing political parties and political leadership more generally. For Brett (1998:29), this disillusionment was

linked with the existing parties' failure to represent both interests and *experiences*. Politicians, she argued came from an increasingly narrow occupational groups and the rise of professional politician had spurred some voters to look beyond candidates from the established parties.

One Nation's success not only raises questions about the importance of parliamentary representativeness in a system based on representation, it also raises questions about state parliaments. Was One Nation a peculiarly Queensland phenomena (see for example Reynolds 1998; Wear 2000), a product of this state's distinctive political culture, or does the experience suggest that state parliaments more generally may be more open to a wider range of members? This paper briefly canvases the issues of representation and state level representation before going on to explore the empirical evidence provided by four Australian parliaments in 1998/9. It examines the composition of Legislative Assemblies in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria and the federal House of Representatives in terms of age, place of birth, gender, education and occupation. It finds that while there are differences, they are not easily ascribed to any federal state divide but coincide more closely with party and state political culture.

Representativeness in Australia

The issue of representation is a conundrum of democracy; how do individuals represent the interests and aspirations of others? One way in which this question has been addressed is by looking at the role representatives play. This focus on the process of representation has concentrated on questions of accountability (to whom is a representative answerable to) and responsibility (to constituency, party or conscience). The question of representation can also be addressed by looking at what Sawyer and Zapalla (2001:280) call 'the parliamentary politics of presence', that is representatives' personal affinities with the electorate (their representativeness).

¹ Defeated long serving members included Tony Fitzgerald (18 years), Ken McElligott (15 years), Tom Gilmore (12 years), and Lorraine Bird (8 years).

Any systematic examination of the literature exploring representativeness and its relationship with democracy is beyond the scope of this preliminary survey. However, commentators, such as Jaensch (1987:53-6; 1997:123), McAllister (1992:201, 250-1), Norris (1997:6, 230), Sawyer (2001:57-8) and Zapalla (1997:5), who have considered the question of parliamentary diversity in a more empirical context, are in two minds on the composition of representative bodies. On the one hand they reject the notion that legislatures should 'mirror' society as a whole as impractical and, ultimately undesirable. For example, Jaensch (1987:55) argues that the quota system necessary to achieve mirror representativeness cuts across two key liberal principles of free elections based on an open preselection of candidates, and a representative who, once elected, speaks for the whole constituency. Moreover, McAllister (1992:232) classifies politicians, irrespective of their individual characteristics, as a political elite who are likely to share fundamental acceptance of the 'rules of the game'. Further, Kroger (1993) suggests that candidates with political experience are more likely to succeed. This also distinguishes them from those they represent and undermines any quest for a parliamentary 'mirror'.

On the other hand, representativeness is important for at least three reasons. First, Norris (1997:230), Zapalla (1997:5) and others have suggested that a parliament that is reflective of the community at large has greater legitimacy. Brett (1989:28) argues that,

People like to see in parliament people whom they can identify, who they recognise as in some way like themselves, bringing to the business of government values and experiences not too different from their own.

In addition, McAllister, (1992:201), maintains that open recruitment of political elites is an important contributor to political stability because an unrestricted opportunity to stand for parliament is a key symbol of social mobility (1992:204). For Jayasuriya (1991:25) full political participation is the essential precursor to achieving economic and social rights. On a more practical level, Jaensch (1987:55) suggests that members of parliament are more able to communicate effectively with their constituents if they share some common characteristics. Finally, Zetlin (1996:126) canvasses the

argument that increasing representativeness, in the case of women at least, increases the pool of talent on which the parliament can draw.

Given that some representativeness is important, it is useful to look at the diversity found in Australian. Jaensch, writing in 1987, said, 'It is obvious that the Australian parliament is disproportionately male, middle class, middle-aged and white' (1987:55). He might also have added professional and from an English speaking background. McAllister (1994:203-15), Zapalla (1997:4), and Sawer and Zapalla (2001) have reiterated these observations. There have, nevertheless been some shifts in terms of gender and background. For example, in 1987, there were 76 women members of parliament across Australia. By 1997, this number had climbed to 172 (van Acker, 1999:78-9). Pickering (1998), in his study of the '*The Class of 1996*' found that successful first time coalition members had more diverse backgrounds than their 1975 counterparts.

But are these characteristics replicated in state chambers? McAllister (1992:212) noted that there was little connection between state and federal members and that, unlike local government, service in the state arena tends not to be a stepping stone into federal politics. Instead, the two spheres provide two quite different career paths demanding different political skills and networks.² Hence, we might expect see differences between the members of state or federal parliaments. In addition, differences may arise because of variations in the size of the voting bases. At the end of the eighteenth century, James Maddison defended large federal electorates on the basis that they would deliver a wiser representative more suited to the task by filtering out lesser candidates (Phillips, 2001:20; Maddox, 2000:92). By implication, smaller state electorates would more likely to choose representatives 'just like themselves'. Moreover, the smaller, more conveniently located state parliaments might appear more approachable than their larger, more distant federal counterpart. For example, Sawer and Simms (1993:141) observe that distance can pose

² A study by Stinebricker (1984) found that mobility had been more significant in the past.

considerable difficulties for women with family commitments and this suggests that state parliaments may be more accessible.

Studying Representativeness in Australia

This paper examines the personal profile of the 384 members elected to lower houses in the Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Commonwealth in 1998-99. Lower Houses were chosen because they broadly share a number of characteristics. First, they are all composed of single member seats and all use a variant of the preferential voting method; second, they have similar terms (three years in Queensland and the Commonwealth, up to four in Victoria and New South Wales); third, they present similar patterns in terms of party participation (with the exception of One Nation in Queensland). They also have a similar number of sitting days and hence pose roughly equivalent time demands on members³.

The years 1998-99 offer the opportunity to compare the four chambers without the added complication of variations over time. However, this snapshot method has a number of limitations. Among these, first, and most importantly, because the approach captures a fixed point in time, it cannot reveal trends and is vulnerable to distortions caused by aberrations, such as the success of One Nation. Second, it does not take into account changes over life of a parliament which can be important when dealing with comparatively small numbers. For example, women replaced men in five of the ten by-elections held between 1999 and 2001. This represented an increase of 7% in the number of female parliamentarians. Third, the method cannot distinguish between long serving and newly elected members. This means that some current members are the product of past preselection preferences.

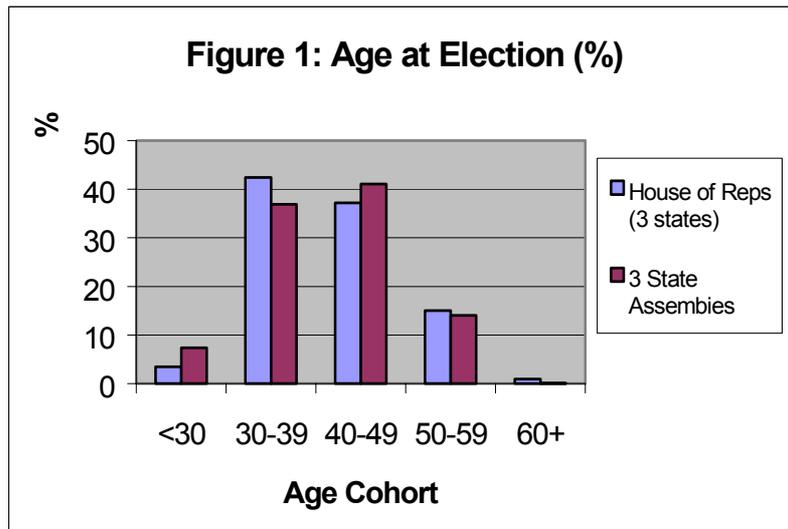
The paper draws on the information volunteered for the Commonwealth, NSW, Queensland and Victorian *Parliamentary Handbooks*. While the headings in these publications may be standardised, many of the entries are incomplete, especially in

³ While not the preferred nomenclature in all jurisdictions, this paper uses MLA to denote members of state lower houses and MHR to denote members of the federal House of Representatives.

the states. On one hand, gaps in the data limit the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn but on the other hand, they do tell us something about the characteristics that state members think relevant to their parliamentary service. While this preliminary analysis lacks the sophistication of more developed studies (McAllister 1992; Reynolds 1994; and Pickering 1998), the data set provides both interesting insights and a starting point for further work.

Age

While the typical politician is invariably characterised as white, male and middle aged, the age range of politicians has not attracted much attention. In his study of Queensland members of parliament, Reynolds (1994:87) analysed the age of incoming members and observed that the main features of the age distribution had changed little over the course of 80 or so years. The 41-50 cohort was the largest in all of his three samples (1930-32, 1978-80, and 1992), followed closely by the 31-40 cohort. There were however changes in the size of these cohorts; in 1992, over 80% of Queensland MLAs were aged between 31 and 50 (up from 63.8% in 1930-32). Generally, only a handful of members were under 30 years of age when first elected because, he speculated, political parties favoured candidates with some life experience in their selection processes. The only significant change was a contraction in the proportion of members aged over 50 from 23.5% in 1930-32 to only 9% in 1992. The median age of Queensland MLAs fluctuated between 40 and 48 and he attributed much of the variation to electoral outcomes – landslide elections where significant numbers of sitting members were replaced by newcomers, effectively brought down the age of the chamber.



The broad outlines of Reynolds’ findings are largely replicated in this study. Overall, relatively few (8.9%) of the 337 members who provided relevant information were under 30 years when first elected. A much larger percentage (38%) was aged between 30 and 39 and a similar proportion (38.6%) was between 40 and 49. Far fewer (13.9%) were between 50 and 59 and only 2 (0.5%) were sixty or over. There were, however, some differences between the federal and state spheres. As Figure 1 shows, state MLAs tend to be slightly more evenly spread across the age spectrum when compared with their federal lower house counterparts with a higher proportion of both younger and older members.

These aggregates obscure some differences between states. NSW, on the limited data available, appears to elect the youngest members to its state parliament. (See Table 1.) Almost 60% of NSW members were under 40 years of age when they were first elected (compared to about 40% in both Victoria and Queensland). By contrast, Queensland elected some of the oldest members, primarily from the One Nation Party; four of the eleven members were over 50 years of age when elected in 1998. National Party members also tended to be elected at an older age in Queensland and elsewhere. Six (18.2%) of the 33 state National Party members, who provided information, were over 50 when first elected. At the other end of the spectrum, the

ALP tended to dominate the younger age cohort with half of the 16 under 30s belonging to that Party.

A focus on members' age when first elected can be a little misleading because it does not indicate the age composition of a parliament at a given point in time. Many of those elected at a young age were also by 1999 the longest serving members. For example, the NSW MLA Jack Face was only 30 when he was first elected in 1970; he turned 57 in 1999. If we turn to look at the age composition of the various chambers in 1999, we find that the patterns are largely reversed. The ages of federal members are more evenly spread across the spectrum with the greatest concentrations in the 40-49 and 50-59 age groups. In the state sphere, there are comparatively few members under 40, a concentration in the 40-49 year cohort and almost identical share in the over 50 year old group.

Table 1: Age of MLAs when first elected by state 1998/9 (%)

Age Group	state s n214	state s %	NS Wn4 3	NS W %	Vic n84	Vic %	Qld n87	Qld %
< 30	16	7.4	5	11.6	5	6	6	6.9
30-39	79	36.9	20	47	29	34.5	30	34.5
40-49	88	41.1	14	32.6	39	46.4	35	40.2
50-59	30	14	4	9.3	11	13	15	17.2
60+	1	0.1	0	0%	0	0%	1	1.1

Again, these aggregates conceal considerable differences between states especially in the state sphere. In Queensland, of the 87 members who supplied their date of birth, 37.9% were in the 50-59 age group and a further 14.9% were 60 or over. In fact, the 50-59 year old cohort was the largest, closely followed by the 40-49 year old group

(36%). There were also fewer younger MLAs; only 10.3% were in the 30-39 group and a single member, One Nation's Sean Nelson, was under 30. The average age of Queensland MLAs was 51 (compared with 48 for Queensland MHRs).

In 1999, Victorian state MLAs tended to be somewhat younger than their Queensland counterparts. In that year, the majority of Lower House members (61.2%) were in the 40-49 age group, and only 25% were 50 and over. However, the figures for the under 40 cohort are similar. As in Queensland, younger members were more unusual; fewer than 10% were in the 30-39 groups and only two were under 30. Overall, the age distribution of Victorian lower house members was more concentrated; clustering in the 40-49 year range, and the average across the chamber was only 47. (The average of Victorian MHRs was also 47).

NSW state data is somewhat problematic because less than half of the MLAs under study included their date of birth in their biographical details. Moreover, those who provided age data tended to be the longer serving (and hence likely to be older) members. This limited data suggests that the NSW Legislative Assembly tends to be dominated by older members. While there is a comparable proportion of members in the over 60 group, the largest age cohort in NSW is 50-59 (41.9%). Fewer MLAs (30.2%) were in the 40-49 group but there was a similar proportion of younger members.

Reynolds' suggests that party allegiance is one factor that can affect the age composition of the parliament. More specifically, he notes that National Party MLAs tend to be older than their counterparts in other parties. For National Party MLAs, a parliamentary seat is more likely to be the capstone of a political career in producer groups and be taken on after they retire from active farming. The 1999 Queensland figures appear to bear this out. National Party members tend to be significantly older than the parliament as a whole. Over half of the 23 NPA members were in the 50-59 group and almost three-quarters were 50 or over. The NPA figures for the other states confirm this pattern. In NSW, four of the six MLAs who provided their date of

birth were between aged 50 and 59 and in Victoria, two of the five NPA MLAs were between 50 and 59 and another two were over 60. The average age for National Party members of state lower houses was 53 years.

Members of other parties in state parliaments tend to be younger. The average age of Liberal Party state members was 50 and the average for ALP members was 47. Over 50% of sitting members in both parties were aged between 40 and 49. The higher average for sitting Liberals can be attributed to the not insignificant number of members who were over 50 (over 45%). In the case of the ALP, only just over a third were over 50.

The age profile of National Party members might help explain the comparative maturity of the Queensland parliament as a whole because of the importance of the National Party in this state. In 1999, the National Party occupied 23 of the 89 Queensland seats compared with seven in Victoria and 13 in NSW. The Queensland Liberals also tended to be older than their interstate counterparts especially in Victoria where the largest group (over 60%) was in the 40-49 year old age group. This can be attributed, in part, to outcomes in 1990s elections which saw the coalition pick up a significant number of seats.

The link between age and length of service appears to be reinforced by a closer look at the characteristics of National Party members in the Queensland parliament. The age of sitting NPA members seems to be clearly linked to length of service in the parliament. If we look at the age National Party parliamentarians were when they were first elected, they were no older than MLAs from other parties. National Party state members tend to be older than other MLAs because they tend to have spent longer in the parliament than their colleagues from other parties. For example, Vince Lester, member for Keppel, is one of the oldest members of the Queensland parliament. He turned 60 in 1999 but was only 35 when he was first elected in 1974. Almost two-thirds of Queensland National Party state members were elected before 1989.

Overall, this analysis confirms the belief that politicians are 'middle aged'. The bulk (69%) of members in our federal sample were between 40 and 59 years old and over one-tenth were over 60. The remaining fifth were under 40. At first glance, the state parliaments look even older – three-quarters were in the 40-59 year old age range, the younger group was smaller (only 11.3% were under 40) and the oldest group slightly larger (13.6%). While these results must be treated with caution because of the nature of the gaps in the NSW data distort the state aggregates, they suggest some degree of correlation with both electoral stability and party composition, both factors which warrant further examination.

Place of Birth

If state parliaments are more easily accessed by groups under represented in the federal parliament, they could be expected to have a larger proportion of members born outside Australia. Generally, Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are consistently under represented amongst Australia's political elite (Smith 2001:245). Zappala's (2001:144) 1998 analysis of the federal parliament found low levels of NESB participation. He also found differences between federal and state spheres arguing that NESB representation was more common in state parliaments (and local councils). His figures, however, show some variation over time, between chambers and between states. Overall, NESB representation has strengthened between 1989 and 1998 but this may be, in part, attributable to changes in the size of chambers. In NSW, for example, the number of members with NESB remained constant despite reductions in the size of both chambers. Nevertheless, NESB representation was consistently higher in state upper houses. For example, in 1998 11.9% of members of the NSW Legislative Council and only 7% of Legislative Assembly members had NESB status. This may be, in some states at least a reflection of the use of a different method of electing members. NSW Legislative Councillors are elected under a proportional system and represent the whole state. Zappala's

work also showed that NESB representation varied across states. In 1998, it was lowest in Tasmania where there were no NESB MPs and highest in SA where 13.6% of Legislative Council members identified as NESB. Nevertheless, the numbers remained small – three in a chamber of 22. Overall, Zappala concluded that NESB representation was consistently highest in Victoria.

It is possible that the difference between federal and state parliaments, identified by Zappala, may be more a product of differences between states. At first glance, analysis based on the more simplistic ‘place of birth’ appears to confirm Zappala’s findings. The federal House of Representatives is overwhelmingly populated by Australian born members. Only 17 of the 148, or 11.5%, of the members were born outside Australia. Of these, eight were from English speaking countries - the UK, New Zealand and the USA. The share of overseas born is higher in state Lower Houses. 1999 figures show that, of the 178 members who nominated their place of birth, 24, or 13.4% were born overseas, about half in English speaking countries.

However, state aggregates must be treated with some caution because of limitations of the data, and because of variations between states. In NSW, only 16, of the 93 members of the 1999 Legislative Assembly declared their place of birth on the parliamentary website and only two of these were born outside Australia, one, John Acquilina, in Malta and the other, David Barr, in the UK. Nevertheless, the comparatively low number of overseas born is consistent with the pattern displayed by the NSW contingent in the federal House of Representatives where only four of the 50 NSW members were born outside Australia. Of the four, Jackie Kelly (NZ), John Fahey (NZ) and Tony Abbott (UK to Australian parents) were born in English speaking countries. The remaining overseas born member, Joanna Gash, came from the Netherlands.

Victorian politicians were more forthcoming on their place of birth and they appear to be the most diverse of our sample, at least in relation to their place of birth. The figures also suggest some difference between the spheres. Seven (18.9%) of the 37

strong Victorian contingent in the House of Representatives, and 12 (15.4%) of the 78 members of the Legislative Assembly who declared their place of birth, were born outside Australia. In both cases, a majority came from non-English speaking countries - Cyprus, Malta, Greece and Italy in the case of federal members, and Bosnia, Croatia, Greece (2), Germany (2), Holland, Cambodia and Uruguay in the case of state members.

In Queensland, the contingent of House of Representative members also displayed more diversity than its state counterpart. Four of the 27 Queensland members of the House of Representatives were born outside Australia, in France, Hungary Italy and Fiji. In the Queensland parliament, only eight, of the 84 members who declared their place of birth, were born outside Australia and only three were born in non-English speaking countries not including Dean Wells who was born in an Australian army camp in Japan. Interestingly, 24 were born outside the state as compared with only 5 Victorians.

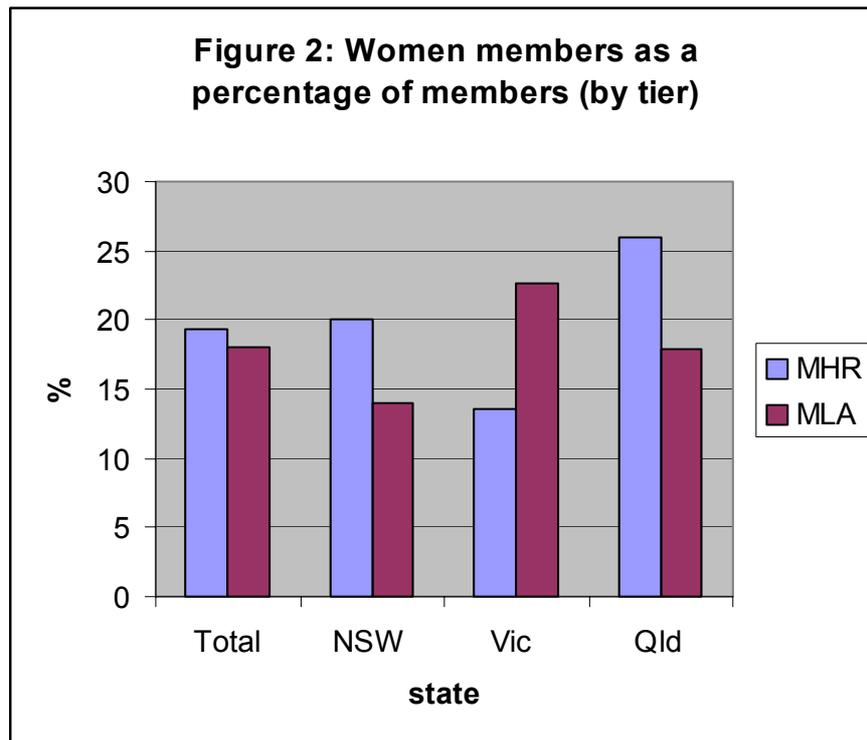
Do the small variations in the birthplace of members suggest something about the character of the different parliaments or are they more easily linked to other factors such as party? Zappala (2001:154) suggests that paradoxically the Liberal Party has been more instrumental in promoting NESB candidates. Hence, we would expect to find greater numbers of overseas born members where the Liberal party is stronger as in the House of Representatives. The figures for the House of Representatives confirm this where the majority of overseas born members belong to the Liberal party both for the chamber as a whole and in our three state sample. The picture is less clear when we turn to the state houses where the Liberal Party holds a smaller proportion of the seats. In Victoria, the Liberal Party's share of overseas born members is larger than its share of seats but is still outstripped by the Labor Party in percentage terms. The Liberal Party's junior status in Queensland and the small size of the sample in NSW make it impossible to make any claims.

In the case of birthplace, this analysis suggests that state parliaments are not necessarily more accessible than their federal counterparts. While more Victorian MPs born outside Australia sit in the state rather than the federal chamber, the situation is reversed in the Queensland case. The sample findings are inclined suggest that differences might be linked to state and party political dynamics and the limited NSW data tends to support this but more information is needed before any more concrete observations can be made.

Gender

The gender imbalance in Australia's representative institutions is probably one of their most obvious characteristics. The paucity of women representatives and the slow rate of change have attracted considerable comment (see for example, van Acker: 1999:69-82; Smith 2001:203). Prior to the 1980s, women did not have a permanent parliamentary presence, and participation has remained 'paltry' (van Acker 1999:78). However, the picture is not uniform across the institutional spectrum. Neylan and Tucker (1996:131), in their study of local government, found that women had increased their representation at the local level. They attributed this to the fact that local government arena was less competitive but also that local government service was part time, involved minimal travel, and focused on 'quality of life' issues (Neylan & Tucker 1996:131-2). The last two of these issues have some application at the state level and so we might expect higher levels of participation. This section asks is this the case?

By the late 1990s, only 74, or 19%, of the 384 MPs representing NSW, Queensland and Victoria in the federal House of Representatives or the states' lower houses were women and there was no difference between federal and state aggregates. However, as Figure 2 shows, the aggregate figures obscure noticeable differences both between and within states. When broken down, the figures show that women's presence in state lower houses range from 25% in Victoria, to 19% in Queensland to only 15% in NSW. Can these differences be ascribed to differences in state political cultures?



The gender composition of state contingents in the House of Representatives also shows considerable variation; Victoria, which had the highest proportion of women in its state lower house, sent the smallest contingent to Canberra. Women filled just six, or 16%, of the 37 Victorian seats. By contrast, women occupied seven, or 26%, of 27 Queensland seats. The NSW contingent of ten women was the largest numerically although this only constituted 20% of the total.

Linking gender to party provides some insights. Women clearly enjoy more success in the ALP when compared with the two other major players, the Liberal and National Parties. Overall, of the 74 women MPs in the sample, 46, or 62%, were members of the ALP, 18, or 29%, were Liberals and 6, or 10%, were Nationals. The remaining 4 women were elected as independents or members of minor parties and all sat in state lower houses.⁴ Women were generally under represented in the ranks of coalition MPs. In state lower houses, the coalition occupied 39% of the seats but could only claim 27% of women members. There was some variation across states, however. In NSW, the coalition's share of seats (37%) was matched by its share of

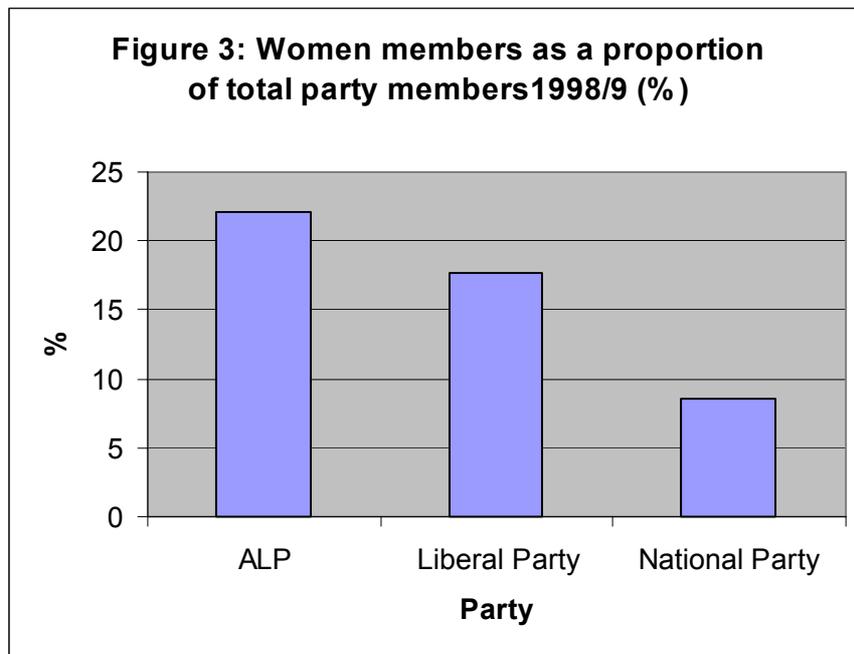
⁴ While independents are uncommon in Australian lower houses, women figured quite prominently among their numbers with one in each state.

women (37%). In both the Victorian and Queensland lower houses, women figured less prominently. Despite the coalition holding 46% and 36% of the seats, its share of women members is only 25% and 18% respectively. The Queensland results are easily attributable to unique position of the National Party in non-Labor politics in that state. Of the twenty three National Party members in the Queensland parliament, only two were women.

The ALP's success in promoting women parliamentarians was evident in both the state and federal arenas. Hence while the ALP held 53% of lower house seats in the NSW, Victoria and Queensland parliaments, it claimed 65% of women members. A breakdown by state reveals that while Labor held 51% of the seats in both the Victoria and Queensland Legislative Assemblies, it provided 67% and 70% of the women members respectively. The ALP had a slightly stronger presence in NSW (55%) but only contributed 57% of the women.

The ALP had a smaller presence in the House of Representatives; only 43% of NSW, Victorian and Queensland seats returned ALP members. But the ALP contributed over half (52%) of the women from these states. ALP women constituted 83% of all Victorian women MHRs 50% of New South Wales women MHRs but only 29% of Queensland women MHRs. The low Queensland figure may be due to Queensland ALP's relatively small presence in the House of Representatives of only eight members.

Do these figures point to the success of the ALP's 1994 adoption of affirmative action to increase the number of successful women candidates. Zetlin (1996:121) saw the implementation of a quota system as 'a significant step forward ... which shifted the onus from individual women to political institutions themselves'. Looking at the date ALP women were first elected seems to point to the success of the quota system.



Of the 42 ALP women the federal and state arenas, between 21 and 22% of all members were women. There is some indication of state based variations; women constituted a larger proportion of ALP members in both Victoria and Queensland (about a quarter) but were a much smaller group in NSW (16.8%). By contrast, women constituted 17.7% of Liberal Party representatives and only 8.5% of National Party representatives. (See Figure 3.)

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This analysis suggests that, in the case of gender, tier was less important than party. State parliaments were no more welcoming than the federal parliament (and in some

cases less). Differences are more easily explained by reference to party. It appears that the Labor Party has been more successful in promoting women lower house members than either of the coalition parties although, overall, the women's share of the parliamentary seats is far from 'mirroring' the population at large.

Education

When McAllister (1992:205) examined the educational background of candidates standing for federal election in 1990, he found that significant proportion had tertiary qualifications. This was most noticeable amongst Labor candidates; 76% had a university education. The Commonwealth parliament provides information on the education of sitting members, and while not strictly comparable, it shows that a significant proportion of members have tertiary education. In 1999, 79.1% of MHRs had post school qualifications, and increase of about 2% on the previous parliament. This was highest amongst ALP members (83.6%) and Liberal Party members (82.8%), compared to National Party members (43.8%).

These findings are broadly replicated in this survey of federal and state members albeit with some important qualifications. The data shows that the majority of parliamentary members in NSW, Victoria and Queensland had tertiary qualifications. Of the 384 members surveyed, indications are that 234 (or 60.9%) had tertiary qualifications. However, the aggregate has been depressed by the inclusion of state data. Qualifications are far more common amongst federal members (74.6%) than amongst state members (55.2%). There is also considerable variation between the states. Victorian MPs are the most highly qualified (64.8%) when compared with Queensland (50.6%) and NSW (50.5%). These state characteristics are replicated if we break down the Commonwealth picture by state. Only two (5.4%) of the 37 Victorian MHR's did not have a tertiary qualification while the figures are somewhat higher for both NSW (32%) and Queensland (40.7%)

Unlike some of the other characteristics investigated in this paper, this commonwealth state difference is not easily linked to either state characteristics or

party composition. While the Victorians had the most formal education, state politicians are had fewer qualifications than their federal counterparts. Looking at the party composition of the state chambers does not offer any clues either. While, ALP parliamentarians are the most highly qualified (71.6%) overall, followed by Liberal Party (66.4%) and National Party (40.1%), the differences between federal and state MPs are replicated at party level. Hence, while 83.6% of federal ALP members have tertiary qualifications, only 67.4% of state members have them. The difference is most marked in the case of National Party members (43.8% at the federal level compared with 16.3% at the state level).

The variations in formal education may be related to length of service. Both Reynolds (1994) and McAllister (1992:205) found that parliamentarians have become more highly qualified over time. For example, Reynolds (1994:87) reported that in 1930-32, only 12.5% of Queensland MLAs had a tertiary background, while by 1992 37.1% (50.6% in 1999). Perhaps an explanation for the difference can be found in by looking at when members were first elected. A large percentage (77.8%) of members of the House of Representatives in our three state sample were first elected during the 1990s with the largest intake occurring in 1996. By contrast, only 64.3% of state MLAs were first elected during the 1990s. Queensland had the smallest raft of new recruits in the 1990s (53.2%) and Victoria, the largest (77%).

However, any matching of educational achievement with time of election only goes so far. While it is true that a majority of MPs with tertiary qualifications in all jurisdictions were elected after 1990, more of the new members of the federal parliament admitted to tertiary qualifications than those entering the state parliaments. Hence 71.9% of members elected to the federal parliament in the '90s had a tertiary education compared with only 53.6% in the state arena. This state aggregate overstated the Queensland picture where less than a third had further education (rising to 42% if we allow for One Nation members). It is therefore possible that the differences in educational attainment may be linked to McAllister's (1992:212) suggestion that the different arenas demand different skills and attributes.

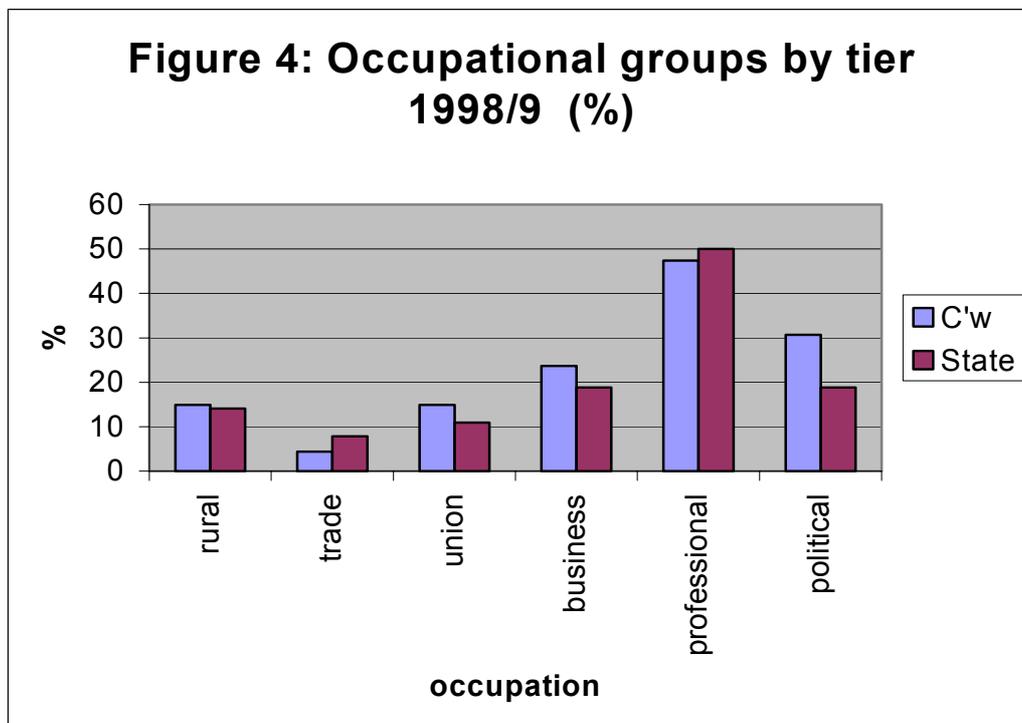
Occupation

Education is closely linked to occupation. McAllister (1992), Reynolds (1994) and Pickering (1998) have all considered the issue of occupation. Their work is not strictly comparable because of differences in categorisation, but they do suggest similar trends. MacAllister (1992:207) for example, found significant occupation differences between party elites and citizens. In 1990, electoral candidates were far more likely to come from 'non-manual' occupations when compared with the community at large. He also found that considerable changes had occurred over time amongst both Labor and National candidates. In 1901, the proportions of ALP candidates from 'manual' and 'non-manual' backgrounds were almost equal (44 and 47% respectively); but by 1987, the former had plummeted (to 5%) while the latter had soared (to 87%) increasing still further in 1990. Moreover, the majority were from the higher professionals 'strata'. While the changes were less dramatic in the case of the National Party, the percentage of 'non manual' candidates had increased considerably while the percentage coming from a rural occupational background had more than halved. In the Queensland case, Reynolds found that the parliament was overwhelmingly dominated by professionals (primarily from the education and legal/financial sub sectors), with smaller proportions of members from business or rural background. He also identified strong growth in participation of 'white collar' workers. He also found big changes in the occupations of Labor members. In the 1940s, almost half of Labor's parliamentarians came from a blue collar background. This had fallen to just over 10% after 1980 and they were replaced by professional and other white collar workers.

Pickering's more limited study of incoming federal Liberal MPs found indications of increasing occupational diversity amongst this group at least. The federal parliament (1999:296) collected data on occupation immediately prior to election. Its categorisation eschewed the traditional division between 'manual' and 'non manual', using instead 'Managers and Administrators', 'Professionals' with tradespersons, public servants, and real estate agents constituting 'other'. Its 1998 figures, show that

business people (executives and managers) constitute the largest single group in the House of Representatives, followed by legal professionals, members of state/territory legislatures, researchers and electoral officers, and political consultants, advisers and lobbyists. Only one member had been working as a tradesperson prior to election and one as a public servant. Not surprisingly, a majority of the business people were Liberal Party members while the ALP figured prominently among the research and consultant groups.

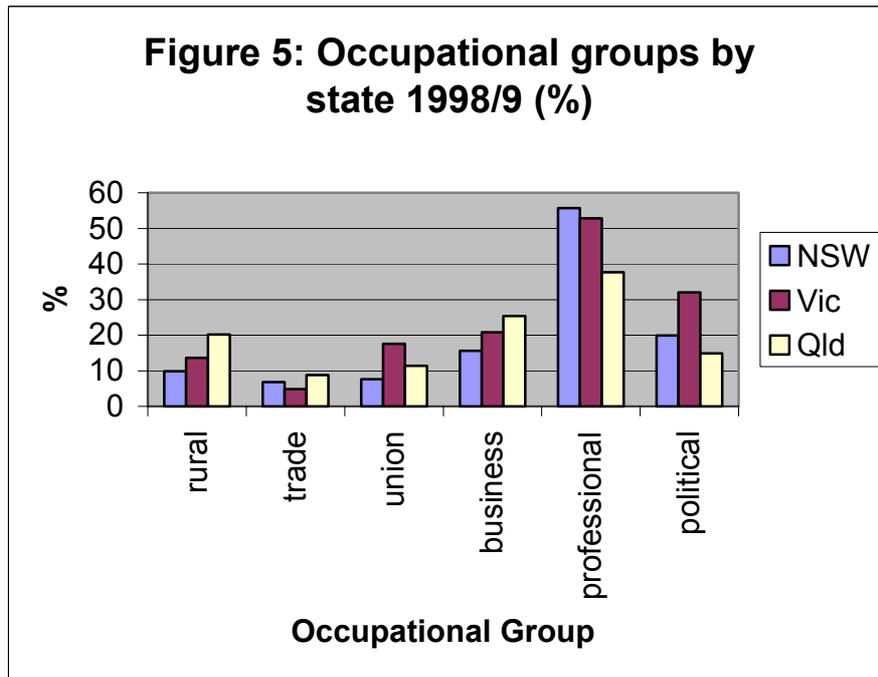
This paper looks at occupation more broadly drawing on parliamentarians' occupational history as listed in their parliamentary biographies. Its three state sample finds that professionals constitute the largest single occupational group. Of the 370 members who provided occupational details, almost half (49.2%) had worked in a professional capacity, especially teaching and law. A considerable number (22.4%) of members had worked in a political capacity, either for a political party or a member of parliament and slightly fewer (20.3%) identified themselves as business people. Smaller numbers were involved in primary industries (14.3%) or trade unions (12.1%) and only 25 (6.8%) had trade experience.



Interestingly, these aggregates hide considerable differences between the commonwealth and state parliamentary arenas in some areas. While the proportion involved in rural activity is largely the same, a higher proportion of commonwealth members have business experience, or have worked in political or union jobs. Conversely, there are comparatively fewer professionals and tradespeople representing our three states in the commonwealth parliament compared with the parliaments in those states. (See Figure 4.)

The differences between federal and state parliaments could be attributable to differences in the party composition of the different tiers. Both McAllister (1992: 206) and Reynolds (1994:80) identified party affiliation as an important influence over occupational background and party is clearly significant in relation to some occupational groups. For example, all union workers represented the ALP in parliament. Similarly, 18 of 25 tradespeople were Labor members. Professional and political groups were also prominent amongst Labor members. Patterns are also clear in the case of farming and business. Of the 53 in the primary industry group, only 3 were members of the ALP, while 15 were members of the Liberal Party and 28 belonged to the National Party. In the case of the 75 businesspeople, 41 represented the Liberal Party, 19 the National Party and only 9 the Labor party.

While the position of the three dominant parties is different in the commonwealth and state spheres, the differences in occupational background are not fully addressed by looking at party. This becomes clear when we look at the differences *within* a single party. For example, in the case of the Labor Party, 99 (52.1%) party representatives came from a professional background but this was higher amongst state members (53.9%) and lower amongst federal members (46.9%). However, proportionately fewer state Labor members had worked in political or union positions when compared with their federal counterparts (43% compared with 67.3%). While the differences are not as acute amongst coalition MPs, there are some variations between tiers.



Looking at occupation by state provides a different picture. (See Figure 5.) Not surprisingly, given the strength of the National Party and the success of One Nation, Queensland parliamentarians were more likely to have a rural or trade occupational background and than their counterparts in other states. There were also fewer Queenslanders with a professional background. By contrast, Victoria had a larger share of politicians with a union or political employment background. Whilst the strong showing was largely due to ALP members, eight Liberal Party representatives had worked for the party or a member of parliament before being elected themselves. NSW had the highest proportion of politicians coming from a professional background and the smallest from business.

While this survey of parliamentarian’s occupational background confirmed the prevailing belief that the majority have a professional background, it also revealed some differences between tiers, but also between states and within parties.

Conclusion

This paper began by asking whether Australian state parliaments attracted a different type of representative from the federal counterpart. In other words, did the smaller, more local arenas attract members with different skills and characteristics

and were they more or less open to participation from a wider range of members of the community? In an effort to address such questions, the paper analysed the biographies provided by members representing the three largest states in the lower houses of either the federal or state parliaments. Overall, it found that, in many respects there was little difference between the two tiers. Overall, the majority of members sitting in the parliaments surveyed were Australian born, male, and middle aged. While comparisons in the areas of gender, age and place of birth showed some variations, these could not be clearly linked to tier. There were, however, some areas of difference when it came to educational and occupational characteristics; a lower proportion of state members admitted to tertiary qualifications but paradoxically there were comparatively more professionals amongst their ranks. This might suggest that there are some differences in the skills and attributes state and federal members bring to the job.

While the differences between spheres were somewhat muted, party and state differences emerged. The ALP appeared to have had some success in promoting women candidates and more of its members had worked in political or union positions, prior to their election. National Party members tended to be older than their counterparts, especially in the state context although this seems to be linked to their length of service rather than a party predilection for promoting older members. They were also, unsurprisingly, more likely to have a rural occupational background. Liberal Party members were more likely to come from a business background. This study also threw up differences between states. Victoria displayed the largest share of overseas born members, Queensland the smallest share of tertiary educated professionals and New South Wales MPs the highest.

These findings must be treated with caution; the data is incomplete, the numbers are small, and the snapshot approach may hide anomalies. The stability of the various chambers is an important factor that needs to be taken into account before any more definite conclusions could be drawn. Nevertheless, this analysis suggests that, although political elites remain predominantly, white, male, middle class and middle

aged, this set of generalizations hides differences based on sphere, party and state. Perhaps political culture and practice is less than uniform across the eastern region. It is an issue that warrants further investigation.

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