

Independents in government: a case-study of Ireland

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Introduction

New parties have been studied, analysed and placed into different typologies, which include various residual groups ranging from personal vehicle parties (Pedersen 1982) to challengers (Duchon 1985). The problem with these categories is that some of the parties are pretty much one-man bands, which have been forced to establish a party because of the electoral laws which do not allow non-party (i.e. Independent) candidates to stand. An example is the List Pym Fortuyn which centred on the eponymous party leader, and without whom the group has fragmented. My argument is that Independents in Ireland do not differ greatly from these new parties. Firstly I will outline the comparison between the two groups, before going on to look at the role of Independents in the formation of governments.

Although not parties per se, Independents have participated a great deal in Irish governments, with 30% of all administrations dependent on their support. Through an analysis of four case-studies of governments reliant on Independents, this paper looks at the effects this support (and at times participation) has had on the organisation, strategy and goal orientation of the Independents. It will examine why some Independents supported the government, what they achieved for this support (e.g. policy concessions), and what effect this had on the Independents, e.g. did they join the government party, or did they lose their seat for betraying their 'independent stance'?

Why are Independents like new parties?

In the definitive analysis of minor parties in Irish political life, Coakley says "it is not always obvious how a minor party is to be distinguished from a group of independents" (Coakley 1990: 270). Pedersen's definition of a minor party as "an organisation-however loosely or strongly organised-which either presents or nominates candidates for public election, or which at least, has the declared intention to do so" (Pedersen 1982: 5 in Coakley 1990: 270) is so broad that it could include a wide array of Independents that have participated at Irish elections. For example, from the foundation of the state in 1922 up to the 1960s there was a group of Independent Unionists continuously present in the Dáil. These deputies represented the larger Protestant communities who were located in the border counties and boroughs of Dublin. Local Protestant associations formed election committees to select candidates who would represent their interests in parliament. The chosen nominees, if successful, were kept in constant reminder of their role as a representative of the Protestant community, and whenever an important issue arose, the TD consulted the local organisations to decide what stance to take in relation to the particular matter. If an Independent Unionist TD ignored the express wishes of his electorate, he was expected to stand down, and if he didn't he would certainly be de-selected at the next convention.

Other Independent groups functioned in much the same style, ranging from Neil Blaney's Independent Fianna Fáil, Oliver Flanagan's Monetary Reform Association, to the Independent Business candidates who represented various interest groups. These groups all had considerable organisations mobilised to support their candidacy and the issue(s) they promoted. The only difference between these candidates and minor and/or new parties is that the latter had a party name. Examination of the legal criterion for inclusion on the official registry of political parties shows that the lack of a party name was not a major hindrance, and that most Independents could have secured a title if they desired.

The Electoral Acts 1963, 1998, and 2001 stipulate the requirements to qualify for registration on the official list of parties. One of the major conditions is that the group must have 300 recorded members *or* at least 1 TD or 3 local authority members. They must also have a

written constitution and an annual conference of the party. Based on these rules, should any Independent win a seat in the Dáil, all (s)he needs to do to form a party is draw up a list of rules and hold a meeting once a year. Accordingly, should the Independent TDs desire party status, any of them could easily form a party, which would qualify as a personal vehicle party, according to Pedersen's categorisation. Under these circumstances, the only difference between Independents and such new parties is the Independents' decision to place a party label alongside their name on the ballot sheet.

In this respect, because individual candidates are allowed stand as Independents they do not seek a party name. If they were required to contest elections as a party, as occurs in most European systems, most of them would qualify as a party, and these Independents would simply be analysed as minor or personal vehicle parties. It is therefore clear that there is little difference between Independents and some new parties in other countries, with the difference stemming from electoral rules permitting Independents to stand, and the Irish political culture, which allows Independent candidates to flourish. Table 1 details their share of the candidates, votes and seats at all Dáil elections, and shows that Independents have maintained a consistent presence, often with a greater weight in parliament than any small or new party.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Another similarity between new parties and Independents is that the size of the Independents' parliamentary representation (i.e. one seat) does not determine their influence. There are plenty of new parties who hold just one seat in national parliaments, and there is no major difference between these and Independents. The Socialist Party in Ireland is a notable example. Their solitary TD, Joe Higgins, is often confusingly labelled an Independent, since there appears to be no practical difference between him and other Independent TDs who are answerable and responsible to political organisations. For example, another socialist Independent TD in the current Dáil, Séamus Healy represents the interests of the Workers and Unemployed Action Group. Both Healy and Higgins represent left-wing working-class organisations that selected them to run for the Dáil and also have other political representatives. Practically, there is no difference between them, except Higgins is labelled a new party, and Healy an Independent.

Finally, the main parties often view the Independents as political units akin to parties if they require their support to form a government. This is detailed later in the paper, where it is shown that Independents negotiate with governments as a political unit, just like they negotiate with other parties as single units. In addition, Independents do not necessarily act as independent, isolated politicians. On many occasions they have come together to form a bargaining unit within parliament, especially when they hold the balance of power. The case studies detailed in this paper indicate how the Independents work together, and although they may disagree on policy issues, this is no different to differences that occur within parties, especially within small new parties.

Why study Independents over new parties?

There have been examples of new parties in the Irish political system, from the Green Party to the now-defunct Democratic Left (DL) to the Progressive Democrats (PDs)¹, who have been in government with Fianna Fáil since 1997. However, apart from the PDs and a two-year stint in

¹ Although the latter two are transformation and breakaway parties respectively, and do not qualify as a new party according to Lucardie's (2000) definition.

the 1990s for DL, new parties have not participated in government in Ireland since the 1950s. One major reason for this is the presence of Independents. When Fianna Fáil or the Fine Gael-Labour alliance have fallen short of a parliamentary majority, they have not looked to the support of a small party as occurs in continental Europe. Rather than conceding a cabinet seat and policy concessions to a minor party, the large parties have found the support of Independents a much more manageable task. The presence of Independents and their willingness to support, and participate, in governments, explains why there have been few new parties in government in Ireland. The following sections look at the role of Independents in propping up minority administrations, and how this participation has affected their electoral performance, their policy, their strategy and their organisation. It will also examine the effect of Independents on government policy, in order to assess what Independents gained in return for their support.

Independents in government:

There have been 10 cases of governments dependent on Independents in Ireland. I have chosen to look at 4 notable examples:

1. 1948-51 inter-party government
2. 1951-54 minority Fianna Fáil government
3. February 1982-November 1982 Fine Gael-Labour coalition
4. 1997-2002 Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrats coalition

1. 1948-51 inter-party government:

Following the 1948 election, the outgoing Fianna Fáil government were 6 seats short of a majority, but seemed set for a return to office, since the opposition were a mish-mash collection ranging from the conservative Fine Gael to the radical Clann na Poblachta, led by a former Chief-of-Staff of the IRA. However, after 16 years of uninterrupted one-party rule, there was a common desire amongst the opposition to 'get Dev² out'. A similar desire amongst a disillusioned electorate resulted in Independent candidates winning over 8% of the seats and votes with only 30 candidates.

Once rumours of a coalition began, a group of 6 Independent TDs came together as a bargaining unit to negotiate a government with the five opposition parties. They chose Oliver Flanagan as their spokesman and negotiator in the ensuing intra-party talks, since he had received a huge vote at the election, over 30% of all valid votes in his constituency. The 6 Independents were predominantly farming TDs, who represented constituencies where agriculture was the predominant industry. As well as sharing a common policy interest, they also had a previous working relationship, having collaborated on the 1945 presidential campaign for Independent candidate, Patrick McCartan. At the intra-party talks, the Independents managed to secure a ministry, and one that was close to their hearts, Agriculture. James Dillon, one of the six, was given this post.

Effect of government on Independents

Electoral performance:

One might imagine that because the Independent TDs had forsaken their 'independent' status and come together to act as a partisan (i.e. non-independent) group, they might have been punished by their respective electorates for this betrayal of their independence. One of the main

² Eamon de Valera, leader of Fianna Fáil 1926-1959, and Taoiseach 1932-48, 51-54, 57-59.

reasons why electors vote for Independents is because they are not attached to any party, and thus if independents lose this non-aligned status they should in theory lose their major source of support.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

As Table 2 indicates, the six Independents had a mixed electoral record at the succeeding election in 1951. Dillon's vote increased by 33%, a gain probably due to his positive record and exposure as a Minister in the intra-party government. His constituency was a rural agricultural-based district, and with developments like the increase in agricultural production by 84%, this was bound to have a positive effect on his vote share, which outweighed the negative effect of his compromising his independent status.

4 of the other 5 independents suffered a loss in vote, and this may have been related to their lack of ministerial status, although this cannot be measured. The 2 urban TDs (Byrne and son) were part of a family dynasty that had represented Dublin as Independent TDs since the state's foundations. The shifting of their position may have had a negative effect on their vote, but they had a tradition of being pro-Fine Gael and it is likely that their voters would have supported their decision to put de Valera out of government.

Oliver Flanagan emerged in the 1940s and was well-renowned for his forthright views. He had founded a minor party, Monetary Reform, in 1943, which could best be described as a personal vehicle party. The surge in its vote in 1948 was entirely due to his individual personality, which he had exercised in attacking the monetarist policies of the establishment. His decision to negate this independent position and join the establishment by supporting the formation of a government probably had a negative effect on his vote. When he first entered coalition talks it was believed that he would get a parliamentary secretaryship (equivalent of a junior ministry), but the other parties were not prepared to have two independents in government. Had he received this post it may have had positive consequences as Dillon experienced, as he could not offer his electorate any recompense for joining partisan parliamentary benches.

Policy:

Because of their individual status, Independents rarely have detailed policies like a political party manifesto. They tend to concentrate on local issues, and to promote the interests of the constituency. Barring Dillon, and perhaps Flanagan, this tended to be no different in 1948.

The more interesting aspect to Independents and policies is their claim to approach each policy issue independently, and to make a decision based on the merits of the policy, and not whether it is party line to support the issue, as is the fate of party TDs. The main effect participation in government could have on Independents is that they might have to support government policies regardless of whether they supported the policy per se, thus undermining their independent stance on policies

In the 1948-51 government the participatory Independents did not always follow the government line, and they were not afraid to dissent if they disagreed with a government motion. For example, when the Taoiseach introduced the Republic of Ireland Bill which resolved Ireland's ambiguous constitutional status, two of the Independents supporting the government introduced a motion against the bill, because of concerns that it would lessen the chances of ending partition on the island. Another controversial policy area was the Social Welfare (Insurance) Bill, which sought to adopt the British model and extend protection of workers via a

redistributive insurance welfare scheme. Many of the Independents resented this perceived intrusion of the State into society, with one Independent, Patrick Cogan, labelling it “a slavish imitation of British Socialism” (Cogan in McCullagh: 194). Because the provisions of the proposed scheme also excluded casual workers and farmers (i.e. a large source of support for Independents), several of them joined with Fianna Fáil in opposing it in the Dáil. In an attempt to procure their support, the Minister for Health amended the bill to include measures that would appease the Independents (notably pension increases and an easing of the means test), but they came at a cost of an extra £1.25 million, a sizeable amount when we take into account that total annual spending on the new social welfare scheme was estimated to be £10 million. McCullagh called this “an expensive purchase of Independent votes” (McCullagh: 195), and it showed the effect Independents could have on policy if they exercised their strategically advantageous position.

Strategy:

Having agreed to come down off the independent fence and support a government, it was expected that this would have an effect on their strategy. However, as stated in the previous section, the Independents by and large maintained their independent strategy during the lifetime of the government. They were not afraid to vote against a government motion, even though it ran the risk of bringing the administration down.

In addition, despite forming a government as a single bargaining unit, the Independents did not always pursue this team strategy when in office. They were not bound by any whip nor threat of party expulsion, but only by their conscience. As such, it was inevitable that they would disagree on policies and not always vote as one in unison. Indeed, after a few years of working together, Independents became increasingly angry at the dominance of the largest party, Fine Gael, within the coalition. The latter tended to initiate and direct most of the cabinet’s policies, and any measures supported by all the other government partners but not in agreement with Fine Gael’s wishes were rejected; the defeat of the controversial Mother and Child Scheme was one notable example. One of the Independent TDs, William Sheldon, thus withdrew his support in late 1950 in opposition to many of the government policies, most notably their severing of links with the British Commonwealth.

The issue on which the government fell was one close to the heart of Independent TDs-agriculture. Dillon, the Independent Minister for Agriculture wanted to lower milk prices, but as a concession to his fellow Independents he offered a minimal penny per gallon increase. Most of the Independent TDs thus joined with Fianna Fáil to defeat the motion, and it resulted in the collapse of the government. Independents chose not to betray their independent position on policies and strategies, rather than continue supporting the government.

Organisation:

In terms of organisation, there are several predicted consequences of Independents participating in government. One possible scenario is that common bonds may be forged while working on the same side, and Independents might be lured into a party by the offer of a secure seat or a cabinet portfolio. In addition, the life of an Independent can be a lonely job, and working as part of a team could also entice Independents to forsake their autonomous stance. This is precisely what happened in 1948-51. A year after the fall of the government, the effects of participation in government on Independents’ strategy and organisation materialised. Two Independents who had previously been Fine Gael TDs rejoined the party in 1952, evidence that working alongside their

former colleagues had renewed old acquaintances. In addition, the leader of the bargaining team of 1948, Oliver Flanagan also chose to join Fine Gael at the same time, as he realised he shared similar policy concerns with the party.

Because of the close collaboration with the government, Independents forged common links with the parties. This slightly undermined their independent status and led to a loss in votes at the succeeding election. However, the main effect it had on their strategy and organisation was that half of them joined the main government party, Fine Gael. Participation in government convinced them of the value of life in a party compared with a life of frustration on the independent benches, where they often have little capacity to influence policy.

2. 1951-54 government:

In 1951, another electoral deadlock loomed. Neither the outgoing government nor the opposition Fianna Fáil had secured a majority at the election, and the fate of a new government once again rested on the shoulders of Independent TDs. The latter, comprising 14 TDs after a successful election, met frequently to discuss a group strategy, akin to a new party discussing its role when holding the balance of power. 5 of the 6 Independents who had supported the previous government re-formed as a bargaining unit to support Fine Gael. However, the others, notably Noel Browne and Michael ffrench-O'Carroll, decided to vote for Fianna Fáil after the latter made vague promises to continue their reform of the health service. A study of this administration is worthwhile, because although it depended on Independents, they were not a part of the government and did not extract any concessions in return for their support. It is useful to examine the effect this has on Independents, since they forsake their independent status for nothing, tantamount to a form of political suicide. This section will by and large examine the role of Noel Browne, since there is an abundance of information on his political career, in stark contrast to the other Independents of the time.

Effect on policies

Despite the government's dependence on several Independents, Fianna Fáil was determined not to play to the whims of these deputies as had occurred in the previous administration. The Independents had little to no effect on policy, given the government's refusal to barter any deals. For example, in 1952 the Minister for Finance introduced a penal budget, which amongst other austere measures, withdrew the subsidies which had kept food prices down during the economic recession of the 1950s. Rather than court Independent support, Fianna Fáil decided to call their bluff and took the chance that Independents would not vote to bring down the government so soon after an election. This strategy worked, and the Independents controversially voted with the budget.

Because the government did not modify their policies in response to the wishes of the Independents, the latter were forced to modify their policies to create the image that they supported the government line, there thus being no reason to extract concessions. In fact the main change in policy for the Independents came when several of them joined the government party, as is outlined below.

Effect on strategy, organisation and goal orientation:

Noel Browne had entered the election of 1951 as a dissident from one of the coalition parties. Life on the independent benches brought a new outlook on politics for him. He realised he could not achieve the major policy changes he desired as an Independent TD, even when governments

were dependent upon his support. Since his goals were different to other Independents, this also had an effect on his strategy. Constituency-minded Independents like the recent crop of 1997-2002 including Healy-Rae, Fox and others have few goals beyond securing largesse for their constituency. Thus, a period in which a government is dependent upon their support has little effect upon their goal orientation, since they are usually not concerned about the national macro-policies. In fact, a tenure supporting an administration usually just reinforces this goal orientation, since the Independents have an increased ability to deliver pork for their constituents. However, Independents like Browne who have national policy reform as their goals have to re-assess their strategies when supporting a government. Their ability to achieve their goals depends on the price the government puts on the Independents' support. It is most unlikely that any government is willing to concede major policy concessions to an Independent, and the latter may realise that his best strategy to achieve policy reform is to join a party. This is exactly what happened to Noel Browne following his support of the 1951-54 minority government.

Convinced of the worthlessness of life on the Independent benches, Browne took steps to forming a new party from the left-minded Independent TDs. He wanted to rally the forces of the left, and had established the foundations of a new party in 1952. However, due to personal disputes over Browne's style of leadership, the proposed party fell apart before it had even begun.

Following this failure, Browne realised he needed a change of strategy, and looked to joining a party rather than forming a new organisation. He saw that the Fianna Fáil leader de Valera was close to retirement, and that there may be an opportunity to push new policies when a new party leader took charge. Browne thus joined the Fianna Fáil party, thereby changing his strategy from being an Independent who failed to gain policy concessions on the outside to a party politician who hoped to reform policy from the inside. Along with Browne, 3 other Independent TDs joined FF. Their change in strategy was similar to a new party who enter government with the goal of major policy change, but are disillusioned with their lack of power, and therefore join with a major party to increase their bargaining power in order to achieve their desired policies.

Effect on electoral performance:

One would imagine that Independents deserting their independent status and joining a party might be seen as treacherous behaviour by their supporters. The following table gives details of their performance at the succeeding election in 1954.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

As can be seen, all bar Flynn lost votes, and all bar Flynn lost their seat. Flynn had a long tradition of being pro-de Valera, and it was neither a major surprise nor a disappointment to his supporters when he decided to join Fianna Fáil. This explains why this move to the government benches did not have a negative effect on his support.

However, the others, especially Browne, were renowned for their independent views, as they regularly challenged all parties in the Dáil on the credibility of their policies. Browne and ffrench-O'Carroll had both left a government party on a matter of principle in relation to the government's refusal to implement the controversial Mother and Child Scheme in 1950. Cogan had been a staunch critic of both government and opposition while an Independent TD in the

1948-51 Dáil, and had been especially forthright in his criticisms of the Independent Minister for Agriculture. Celebrated in his constituency as a politician who was not afraid to 'stick one up' on the big boys, his decision to join the big boys rankled his supporters. For these Independent TDs, the decision to join the dominant party in the Irish party system thus had a negative effect on their electoral fortunes, with Browne and Cogan losing one-third of their 1951 votes.

This experience of supporting a government and yet being on the outside demonstrates that this form of participation has a negative effect for Independents. They have nothing to gain, except perhaps credibility for backing a government rather than rejecting all options, which would result in another election. They stand to lose all the good faith they established as independent critics of the establishment. At the same time, life on these Independent benches convinced them of the powerless and purposeless nature of this role (Horgan 2000). If they wished to have an influence on government, they felt compelled to join them. The insights gained here is that if Independents are going to back an administration they must extract some form of concessions, or else it will have a detrimental effect on their organisation and electoral performance, and will undermine the validity of their strategy and the credibility of their policies.

3. Feb 1982-Nov 1982:

The outgoing government was a short-lived administration of 9 months, which fell due to the vote of an Independent who refused to back a budget that cut food subsidies and taxed footwear and children's clothes. Following the February election, neither government option held a majority of seats, with three Independents, Neil Blaney, Jim Kemmy and Tony Gregory, holding the balance of power. Each of these Independents had considerable organisations behind them, akin in many ways to personal vehicle parties. Blaney's group, Independent Fianna Fáil, ran several candidates at elections and campaigned as a party. Kemmy's left-wing movement mobilised a socialist vote in Limerick, and it evolved into his Democratic Socialist Party during 1982, running 7 candidates at the November 1982 general election. Gregory had 1st run for the Dáil in 1981 as a Community candidate, and represented the many local Community organisations that sprang up around Dublin during this period. These 3 Independents-cum-personal vehicle parties all bore similarities to the original movements which spawned new parties in other countries. They had crossed the thresholds of authorisation and representation, but had not yet declared themselves as parties. Kemmy and Gregory debated taking this one step further to cross the thresholds of declaration and relevance. They worked on a pact amongst the five socialist-minded TDs (including the 3 Sinn Féin the Workers' Party TDs) who would pledge to support a govt for 12 months between the current Budget and the next. Gregory believed that this would be the beginning of a left alliance which would hold the balance of power in future Dála. However, the SFWP who were already a formed party did not support this idea of an alliance, and the talks collapsed without any outcome.

Nevertheless, Gregory did not see his position undermined because he had not formed a new party, let alone an alliance. His stance as an Independent in a hung parliament meant he had just as much bargaining power as a new party. With Blaney likely to vote for Haughey, and Kemmy for Fitzgerald, Gregory held the trump card as to who would form the next government. In a situation that was described as a tail wagging two dogs, Gregory met the two potential Taoisigh, the leaders of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, over a series of meetings to determine what either side was willing to offer him in return for his support. When the new Dáil assembled in March, Gregory voted for Haughey as Taoiseach, returning Fianna Fáil to power. The cost of his

support was then revealed when Gregory announced the cost to the country of this bout of auction politics.

Effects of Independents in government:

Policy

Gregory's 'shopping list' was a detailed 30-page document, which outlined a raft of provisions Haughey promised for Dublin inner city (Gregory's constituency). The 'Gregory Deal' was to cost £80m in 1982 alone; the total cost was estimated to be around £150m, a remarkable amount of money at a time when severe cutbacks were required to address the country's growing budget deficit problem. The policy concessions were mainly 'pork' which involved a change of policy in relation to urban regeneration. For example, the massive 27-acre Port and Docks Board site, which was to have been used for offices, was now to be divided between houses, offices, and recreation space. £91m was to be given to Dublin Corporation that year to construct 3,000 new houses. The maintenance budget for Dublin Corporation housing, which had been cut from £7.5 to £2.7m that year, was increased to £10m. The deal included a wide range of further largesse, and yet no details were provided of where the money was going to come from. This threatened to have a detrimental effect on national economic policy, since the country's borrowing capacity was threatened by reckless promises of profligate spending like the Gregory Deal. The country's national economic policy was saved in the end when the government collapsed before the end of the year, thus leaving much of the Gregory Deal unimplemented. When Fine Gael and Labour formed a majority government, the country's first after 3 elections, they scrapped many of the policy provisions promised to Gregory; one such example was an environment public works scheme which had employed 500 men in Dublin's inner city.

Stability:

Following the fall of the previous government on the whims of an Independent it was anticipated that another government dependent on an Independent would result in further political instability. Ironically, Gregory's support wasn't crucial for Haughey's election as Taoiseach, since the SFWP decided to support his nomination. In addition, Gregory also said he would not vote consistently for Fianna Fáil; rather he would vote on the merits of each issue as they arose. What was the point of the Gregory Deal if Gregory was under no mandate to hold up his end of the agreement?

Haughey just wanted Gregory's support to implement the austerity budget. Once this was out of the way, he was determined to end his dependence on Gregory and form a more stable government. One such Machiavellian manoeuvre was appointing a Fine Gael TD as EEC Commissioner, hoping that Fianna Fáil would win the resulting by-election for his vacated seat. In the end, Fine Gael won the by-election, one Fianna Fáil TD died, another was seriously ill, and the minority government lurched from one crisis to another. Haughey became ever more dependent on the support of the left alliance in the Dáil, as both Gregory and the SFWP were loathe to call another election, what would be the third in just over 12 months.

Despite the predictions of instability due its dependence on an Independent, Gregory by and large backed Haughey on many motions. Ultimately, it was the internal dissension within his own party which was to prove Haughey's undoing. Indeed, on the vote of confidence which defeated the government, Gregory chose to abstain rather than vote with the opposition. What this shows is that when Independents are treated like a coalition partner rather than a prop, they can be like partners in government. Although many condemned the auction politics between

Gregory and Haughey, how was this any different between two parties hammering out a political deal? Don't small parties usually fight for concerns close to their heart, including largesse for their constituents to ensure their few TDs can retain their seats at the next election? The previous government had fallen because the minority Fine Gael-Labour government had not done any deal with Independents, and did not regularly ascertain their stance on controversial policy issues. The effect on government stability of dependence on Independents is not necessarily negative; it rests entirely on the attitude of the government. If they ignore the Independent(s) they are likely to lose their support as they would if they ignored the wishes of a coalition partner.

Gregory's electoral performance, strategy, and organisation:

Although Gregory did not promise continuous support for Haughey, he became the prop upon which the stability of the government rested. Much of his support was based on his Independent status at a time of growing alienation and disaffection from the established parties. However, the negative effects of his undermining this status by supporting a government should have been offset by the deal he delivered for his constituents. In the succeeding election of November 1982 he increased his vote by 40%, a reversal of the national trend which saw a slight fall in the overall vote for Independents, probably reflective of anger (outside Dublin) at the Gregory Deal.

Gregory's strategy was not to forsake his Independent position. As stated above, just because he had procured £150m from Charles Haughey did not mean he would be his 'puppet on a string'. He approached each vote in the Dáil independently, but was also mindful that the country needed stability. This responsibility meant he also had to take into account the country's interests, and just his own, when voting. This explains his abstinence on the motion of no confidence which defeated the government.

Gregory's organisation did not change because of his supporting an administration. As shown above, other Independents working with governments had been lured into parties. It was rumoured that Haughey had made similar overtures to Gregory, and it would not have been totally surprising given his other actions during the lifetime of that government. Gregory's working with Kemmy and the SFWP might have renewed hope of forming a left alliance, but the continued non-compliance of the latter quelled any such hopes.

Gregory's support of the minority Fianna Fáil government had many consequences, most notably in policy terms, to which the Gregory Deal is tantamount evidence. This had a negative effect on the public's view of governments dependent on Independents. It was perceived to be unfair and undemocratic that one TD could hold the country to ransom just because some parties refused to coalesce with one another³. However, just 5 years later, Haughey was calling on the support of Gregory again to put him back into office.

4. 1997-2002:

Following another indecisive election, the two opposing coalition pacts again looked to Independents for support in forming a government. The advantage lay with the Fianna-Progressive Democrat alliance, who were just 3 seats shy of a majority, because three of the six

³ Fianna Fáil had a principle of refusing to be part of any coalition, a policy which changed in 1989 when they entered government with the Progressive Democrats. In addition, the two main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, refuse to coalesce with one another.

Independents had previous associations with Fianna Fáil⁴. Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats formed a minority government after negotiating individual deals with these three Independents. A year into the term of the government, the coalition also secured the support of another Independent, Tom Gildea. During the lifetime of this government, the Independents in effect acted as a single bargaining unit, meeting the government chief whip usually once a week. He would discuss the government's intentions regarding various bills, and would clarify the stance of Independents in relation to these issues to ensure there would be no public conflict in the Dáil. This group became known as the 'Gang of Four', and because they worked in harmony they were able to secure a wide range of policy concessions during the lifetime of the government.

Effect of Independents in government:

Policy:

The Independents had contested the 1997 election with specific policy desires in mind. Healy-Rae and Fox were largely concerned with securing largesse for their constituencies, to help ensure that they would not suffer the fate of many first-time Independent TDs who fail to hold their seats. For example, Healy-Rae wanted the roads in his constituency improved, and Fox wanted schools updated and new hospital facilities for her Wicklow voters. She was also concerned about the abortion issue. Blaney was more concerned with 'reassurance' over two certain policies (Mitchell : 205): adopting a republican line vis-à-vis the Unionists in Northern Ireland, and to clarify a policy of opposition to the introduction of abortion. Gildea was elected on the issue of preventing the closure of a television deflector which provided British television station free of charge. Their policy concerns were not affected by their supporting of the minority government, and they managed to affect the policies of the government by extracting concessions in return for their support.

In terms of distributive policy, the four Independents secured significant pork for their constituencies which might otherwise have been invested in other policy areas. The 3 Independents who stood at the succeeding election listed these benefits in their manifestos. Healy-Rae's electoral pamphlet was solely concerned with this, listing securing of funding for hospitals, a new factory providing 300 jobs, and a range of other provisions from school extensions to the upgrading of fishing facilities. He listed the cost of every piece of pork delivered, and they amounted to £250m, an amount which motivated political commentators to claim that "Healy-Rae appears to have redrawn the boundaries for the State's regionalisation programme" (Brennock 1998).

Fox extracted pledges of a new secondary school at Kilcoole, the upgrading of the N81 road, the making up of a shortfall of £80,000 for a CAT scan at Loughlinstown Hospital, a Wicklow County Council sub-office to be provided for Blessington, and a new district veterinary office for Co Wicklow. Blaney also got a local promise with a commitment to spending on Donegal's roads and infrastructure. He alone got commitments on national issues. The Government assured him it would work unstintingly for an inclusive settlement in the North, and

⁴ Jackie Healy-Rae had been a party member since the 1950s, who ran Independent in 1997 because he was not selected to run for the party at the local constituency selection convention. Mildred Fox was daughter of former 'Independent Fianna Fáil' TD Johnny Fox, who first ran Independent for similar rebellious reasons to Healy-Rae. Harry Blaney was brother of Neil Blaney, a former Fianna Fáil TD who ran Independent in disagreement with their policy on Northern Ireland. Both Blaney and Healy-Rae ran under the title 'Independent Fianna Fáil', which made it clear to which parties they leaned towards.

that there would be no changes to Articles 2 and 3 unless there was such a settlement. The Government was also to deal with the abortion issue, although nothing more specific was outlined.

In terms of national policy, the Independents extracted two major concessions. They forced the Minister for Environment into a U-turn on his policy to end the dual mandate where TDs could also hold local government seats. The four Independent TDs opposed this, since their local government seats were the base of their electoral support. They also demanded, and got, a referendum on abortion, which was held in March 2002.

The influence of the Gang of Four was a much-debated topic during the lifetime of the government. Backbenchers (even from the government side) looked on with envy at the influence the Independents yielded, akin to any new party in government. Such was their success in relation to national and local policies, many Independents ran in 2002 with the aim of securing a similar-type position vis-à-vis another (expected) minority government.

Strategy and goal orientation:

Prior to entering their deal with government, the Independents all shared one common strategy, simply that of winning a seat. They were too concerned with securing their own election to be worried about the national electoral scene, especially if a hung parliament was going to ensue. Three of the Independents, who all shared some form of historical links with Fianna Fáil, had the additional strategy of aiming to dent Fianna Fáil's electoral performance in their constituencies, and thus gaining public approval of their respective estrangements from the party. For Thomas Gildea, his strategy was to gain as many votes as possible to highlight the single-issue he had been selected to stand for, the television deflector.

Apart from Blaney, none of the 4 Independents had any sense of a national strategy when they ran for election in 1997. However, their transition into a government-supporting unit had an effect upon their strategies. Once they realised the power an independent could wield they developed a national strategy, examples including their stance on regionalisation policy, abortion, and the state of the country's infrastructure. Such was their success as a bargaining unit, independent candidates at the succeeding election in 2002 realised the advantages of having a united strategy, rather than acting as a single individual. Thus there were several 'alliances' of Independents in 2002 who had a common manifesto, selected their candidates and differed little from some new parties. Examples of these alliances included the Independents Health Alliance who ran 8 candidates across the country, and the pre-electoral deal between Independents in the West of Ireland, who came together to highlight the lack of under-development in the region. These included Jerry Cowley in Mayo, Marion Harkin in Sligo-Leitrim, and Una Quinn in Longford Roscommon, whom together won more votes than Joe Higgins' new left party, the Socialist Party.

Electoral performance

Of the 'Gang of Four', Tom Gildea and Harry Blaney did not contest the 2002 election. Blaney's son, however, did seek to hold onto his father's seat. If we examine the electoral performance of Niall Blaney and the other two Independents, we might have expected them to retain their vote, if not increase it, because of the 'goodies' they delivered for their constituencies.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

The findings contradict this theory, since only Blaney comfortably held the family seat, despite a loss of 25% of their 1997 vote. Healy-Rae and Fox both struggled to retain their seats against stiff party competition. However, rather than indicate electorate disapproval with their strategies, the fact that they held their seats at all should be an indication of the success of their policies. All 3 were first-time TDs in 1997⁵, and the fate of a lot of Independents TDs is to lose their seats at the first attempt, since they tend to be ‘one-term wonders’.

In addition, the national vote for Independents soared, as they won 10% of the vote and 13 seats in the new Dáil, doubling their representation. This success stemmed from the largesse the Gang of Four delivered for their constituencies. Other local electorates looked on with envy at the new roads, hospitals, and jobs provided in Kerry, Wicklow, and Donegal. With another minority administration expected, electors were motivated to vote for Independents who could extract pork for their constituencies in 2002.

The outgoing government was actually returned with a majority, which ended the influence of the Independents. In light of this, the return of 13 such TDs may be seen as a wasted vote. If their vote falls at the next election, this will provide strong evidence that the main reason why the vote for Independents increased in 2002 was due to the benefits achieved by the Independents supporting the 1997-2002 government. All politics may indeed be local, and Irish voters are not disdained by the negative effects Independents may have on distributive policy, but rather aspire to be the recipients of such mal-distributions.

Conclusion

Independents are not so different from new parties. They can be selected by an election committee, be subject to the wishes of an association, and have a considerable organisation mobilised to further certain policy interests. The Independents who have come to prominence in Ireland could have qualified as parties according to the requirements of the various Electoral Acts. Therefore, if we were studying these political actors in any other country in Europe, they would most likely be new parties, and would fit into a neat comparative framework. Having shown the similarities between Independents in Irish politics and new parties, this paper examined the effects of their supporting the various minority governments.

The 4 case-studies provided rich detail on the extent to which Independents participated in government. The level of their participation affected the consequences for the various political actors. For example, when Browne and others supported Fianna Fáil in 1951, they failed to secure any concessions, and the futility of their position as Independents with no leverage led them to join the government party. In contrast, James Dillon had a considerable influence on national policy as Minister for Agriculture during the 1948-51 government. Sitting at the cabinet table, he managed to procure largesse and favourable policies for his constituents. This had the effect of increasing his vote by 40% at the next election.

Participation in government had a positive effect for Independents in terms of their strategy and electoral performance when they managed to secure ‘pork’ as recompense for their support. It also affected their organisation and policy on some occasions, when working with a party established friendships and shared common interests, which led some Independents to join the parties. Like the protest parties who tend to suffer when they enter government because they are then part of the establishment, it might have been expected that Independents would suffer a similar fate. However, these case-studies have shown that as long as the Independents can deliver largesse for their constituents, they do not suffer a backlash.

⁵ Fox was first elected at a by-election in 1995 following the death of her father.

In conclusion, supporting a government can have a variety of effects for Independents. However, the nature of the effects depends largely on the nature of the relationship between the government and the concerned Independents. To negate their 'independent' position does not necessarily have negative consequences, and they can continue to pursue an independent strategy, policy and goal even while voting as a partisan for a government. Independents and their policies, strategies, and goals can even prosper from this support, as evidenced by the 'Gregory Deal' and the bounties received by the recent 'Gang of Four'.

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Table 1. Performance of Independent candidates at Dáil elections 1922-2002.

Year	% Seats		% candidates	% Votes	Number	No.	Total	
	% Votes	Ind Ind	Ind	Ind	Candidates	Seats	Total seats	candidates
1922	11.1	7.81	7.61	10.1	21	10	128	276
1923	9.4	11.11	14.93	9.4	56	17	153	375
1927 (1)	14.02	10.46	15.16	13.4	57	16	153	376
1927 (2)	8.06	8.50	12.55	7.9	33	13	153	263
1932	10.46	9.15	12.19	10.1	34	14	153	279
1933	4.97	5.88	5.31	4.97	13	9	153	245
1937	9.7	5.80	12.99	9.7	33	8	138	254
1938	4.72	5.07	4.21	4.72	9	7	138	214
1943	8.03	7.97	10.42	9	37	11	138	355
1944	8.49	7.97	7.97	8.6	20	11	138	251
1948	8.27	8.16	7.39	8.3	30	12	147	406
1951	9.58	9.52	9.46	9.5	28	14	147	296
1954	5.68	3.40	6.62	5.3	20	5	147	302
1957	6.55	6.12	8.30	6	24	9	147	289
1961	5.77	4.17	8.67	5.6	26	6	144	300
1965	2.11	1.39	7.07	3.2	20	2	144	283
1969	3.22	0.69	7.26	3.2	27	1	144	372
1973	2.95	1.39	8.08	2.9	27	2	144	334
1977	5.5	2.70	13.87	5.5	52	4	148	375
1981	6.2	2.41	9.93	3.7	40	4	166	403
1982 (1)	2.9	2.41	15.89	2.8	58	4	166	365
1982 (2)	2.5	1.81	13.19	2.7	48	3	166	364
1987	4	2.41	18.24	4.4	85	4	166	466
1989	3.9	2.41	13.24	4.8	49	4	166	370
1992	6	3.01	21.41	6	103	5	166	481
1997	6.9	3.61	21.49	6.9	104	6	166	484
2002	9.5	7.83	20.52	9.5	95	13	166	463

Table 2. Electoral performance of Independents supporting government, 1948-51.

Year	TD	% Vote			Year	% Vote			Seat
		Vote	Vote	Constituency		Vote	Vote	Change	
1948	James Dillon	23.14	6621	Monaghan	1951	33.14	9285	+2664	Held
1948	Alfred Byrne	29.32	13066	Dublin North-East	1951	22.41	10397	-2669	Held
1948	Alfred Byrne(jr.)	20.13	4669	Dublin North-West	1951	18.88	4485	-184	Held
1948	Patrick Cogan	13.68	3618	Wicklow	1951	16.11	4350	+732	Held
1948	Oliver J. Flanagan	30.33	14369	Laonis-Offaly	1951	23.60	11034	-3335	Held
1948	Charles Fagan	15.17	6319	L'ford-Westmeath	1951	14.50	6009	-310	Held

Table 3. Electoral performance of Independents joining government party, 1951-54.

Year	TD	% Vote	Vote	Constituency	Year	% Vote	Vote	Vote Change	Seat
1951	Patrick Cogan	16.11	4350	Wicklow	1954	11.28	3053	-1297	Lost
1951	John Flynn	21.19	5337	Kerry South	1954	23.39	5834	+497	Held
1951	Michael ffrench- O'Carroll	13.91	5842	Dublin South- West	1954	11.64	5080	-762	Lost
1951	Noel Browne	28.88	8473	Dublin South- East	1954	20.47	5489	-2984	Lost

Table 4. Electoral performance of Independents supporting government, 1997-2002.

Year	TD	% Vote	Vote	Constituency	Year	% Vote	Vote	Vote Change	Seat
1997	Harry Blaney	21.06	7484	Donegal North-East	2002	16.85	6124	-1360	Held
1997	Jackie Healy-Rae	20.34	7220	Kerry South	2002	17	6229	-991	Held
1997	Mildred Fox	10.69	5590	Wicklow	2002	11.59	6324	+734	Held