



## Northern Territory election 2005

The outcome of the 2005 Northern Territory (NT) Legislative Assembly election stunned even the incumbent NT Chief Minister and leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). This was the ALP's first re-election campaign since it ousted Country Liberal Party (CLP) leader Denis Burke as Chief Minister in 2001. On 18 June 2005, by winning again, the Top End showed to the ALP that the victory in 2001 was no aberration.<sup>1</sup>

The NT election is conducted under the *Northern Territory Self Government Act 1978* and *The Electoral Act 2004*. The NT's 25-seat parliament represents a population of around 197 000 people, of which 111 954 are enrolled.<sup>2</sup>

### The state of the major parties

ALP leader Clare Martin became the Chief Minister of the NT Legislative Assembly on 18 August 2001 leading her ALP government with 13 of the 25 Assembly seats. The ALP won Darwin's crucial northern suburbs seats. During its first term, the ALP government focused on tax reform issues, improvements in the NT economy and employment of extra public sector staff such as police, nurses and teachers.<sup>3</sup>

The CLP lost the 2001 election and Denis Burke became the Opposition leader for two years. The party was led by Terry Mills in 2004 however in February 2005 it again turned to Burke for leadership.<sup>4</sup> In May 2005, MLA Peter Maley resigned from the CLP and chose to represent the seat of Goyder as an Independent. In the lead-up to the 2005 election, the CLP made some provocative statements in an attempt to woo 'black voters':<sup>5</sup> it declared its 'black-bashing days' were over; and Burke claimed he was no longer interested in the 'redneck vote'.<sup>6</sup>

### Mechanics of the election process

On 31 May 2005, Clare Martin called an election for 18 June. At that stage, the ALP held 13 seats in the parliament, the CLP had 10 and two seats were held by independent members. The NT election campaign ran for 18 days, the shortest in the NT's history.

The close of nominations was 6 June and 80 candidates stood for the election, down from 88 candidates in 2001. The ALP and the CLP each provided candidates for all 25 seats. Postal voting began on 9 June with the NT's individually-styled ballot papers: NT is the only state or territory in Australia where candidates are identified by their name and photographs<sup>7</sup> as well as by their party affiliation on ballot papers. Pre-poll voting started on 13 June, as a large area of the Northern Territory is serviced by mobile polling teams.<sup>8</sup>

### The campaign

Election commentators predicted that the ALP would retain its 13 seats and possibly increase its majority.<sup>9</sup> Both major parties acknowledged the importance of preferences

allocated to them from the 19 independent candidates and the 11 Green party candidates. One NT political scientist said the ALP and the CLP both had their work cut out to attract the estimated 20 per cent of swinging voters needed to win.<sup>10</sup>

Party	Seats contested	Seats won in '05 ('01)	1st pref votes %
CLP	25 (100%)	4 (10)	35.73
ALP	25 (100%)	19 (13)	51.94
Greens	11 (44%)	-	4.17
IND	13 (52%)	2 (2)	8.16

### The issues

Some of the key ingredients of NT politics are development politics and indigenous issues. Development politics has been described as being about 'places and things rather than people and ideas'.<sup>11</sup> Indigenous issues in the NT have often been reported in the media as including matters concerning public drunkenness, funding for indigenous groups, and land rights.<sup>12</sup> These are important issues in the NT as one quarter of its population is of indigenous origin.

For the 2005 election, each of the major parties focused on populist law and order policies, the economy, and 'the NT's unique lifestyle'. At the launch of the ALP campaign, Clare Martin promoted her party's improvements in the economy, pitching the NT as having the highest economic growth rate in Australia at about 7.2 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

The CLP focused on law and order issues, tax cuts and Statehood. Burke claimed his party would introduce a mobile police station and horse patrols in Alice Springs,<sup>14</sup> abolish five stamp duties worth \$22 million a year,<sup>15</sup> and provide an extra \$500 000 to the Statehood Steering Committee to consult with Territorians.<sup>16</sup> The CLP also promoted a plan to build a \$1.13 billion 3000-kilometre power line from Darwin to Queensland to connect to the national power grid.<sup>17</sup>

Both major parties were lobbied by the NT Cattlemen's Association for more road funding and improved rural road networks to assist pastoralists in meeting key export contracts.<sup>18</sup> The ALP and the CLP were both opposed to any moves to store nuclear waste in the NT.

Each major party also pledged to crack down on what they called 'anti-social behaviour' in urban areas. Voters in Darwin's northern suburb seats were unhappy at indigenous itinerants creating havoc in public, and both major parties attempted to appease these voters because they recognised these seats had held the key to the 2001 election.<sup>19</sup>

Clare Martin said the motivation for a policy to jail habitual drunks (mainly Aboriginal) who refuse treatment had come from senior indigenous men and women.<sup>20</sup> The ALP pledged an extra \$560 000 a year for treatment services, and \$200 000 to set up an alcohol court to deal with the offenders if it won the election.<sup>21</sup>

### The results

The ALP won 19 seats which gave it a majority of 13 (76 per cent of total seats). Clare Martin also retained her position as Chief Minister of the NT government.

The CLP held only four of its ten seats won at the 2001 election (35.7 per cent of the vote). The party lost six seats to the ALP: Brennan, Daly, Drysdale, Goyder, MacDonnell and Port Darwin. Denis Burke lost his seat of Brennan to ALP challenger James Burke.

Of the 20 non-major party candidates contesting the election, only two candidates won seats. Independent candidates Loraine Braham (50.9 per cent) narrowly retained the Alice Springs seat of Braitling; and Gerry Wood (66.1 per cent) comfortably retained the Darwin seat of Nelson. The voter turnout in the NT was 80 per cent.

### The tenth assembly

As a result of the 2005 election, the NT now has 10 female members in its Legislative Assembly. This is believed to be in the top 10 examples of female parliamentary representation in the world.<sup>22</sup> In the NT parliament, joining ALP leader Clare Martin, are Barbara McCarthy (Member for Arnhem–ALP), Delia Lawrie (Karama–ALP), Marion Scrymgour (Arafura–ALP), Alison Anderson (MacDonnell–ALP), Jane Aagaard (Nightcliff–ALP), Jodeen Carney (Araluen–CLP), Fay Miller (Katherine–CLP), Kerry Sacilotto (Port Darwin–CLP) and Loraine Braham (Braitling–IND).

Five indigenous members (all ALP) were elected to the NT Parliament, proportionately reflecting the population: Barbara McCarthy (Arnhem), Alison Anderson (MacDonnell), Marion Scrymgour (Arafura), Elliot McAdam (Barkly) and Matthew Bonson (Millner).

### CLP overhaul

This was the CLP's worst election result. CLP Senator Nigel Scullion described the election result as 'a political tsunami' for the CLP.<sup>23</sup> In an historic move, Central Australian MLA Jodeen Carney was elevated to the CLP leadership, and another woman, Fay Miller, was appointed deputy leader. Carney's appointment creates a rare political contest in Australia because it is only the second time that two women have led rival parties in a state or territory.<sup>24</sup> The first time occurred in 1995 when the ACT Liberal Party, led by Kate Carnell defeated the ALP, led by the Chief Minister Rosemary Follett.<sup>25</sup>

### Post-election outcomes

The ALP's win has maintained the party's dominance of all state and territory governments in Australia.

The 2005 election results were notable in the significant increase in the numbers of women politicians in the NT government. Furthermore, former Senator Aden Ridgeway commented that the result in the NT:

shows what can be achieved when political parties bite the bullet and preselect good indigenous candidates.<sup>26</sup>

## Endnotes

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24. I. Gerard, 'Leader makes for all-female Territory', *The Australian*, 28 June 2005, p. 4.
25. *Northern Territory News*, 'Female leader makes history', 28 June 2005, p. 6.
26. *Northern Territory News*, 'Poll wins lauded', 22 June 2005, p. 5.

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