

One, Two or Many Queenslands? Disaggregating the Regional Vote at the 2017 Queensland State Election*

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* Double-blind reviewed article.

INTRODUCTION

Queensland has long been described as comprising very distinct demographics borne of very different geographies, industries, civic cultures and voter behaviours. This variegation of Queensland political, economic and cultural life has usually been acknowledged by way of the so-called ‘two Queenslands’ thesis—a thesis itself manifest in two distinct interpretations: a divide between coastal Queensland and the rural interior¹ and, more commonly, a divide between Brisbane and ‘the bush’.² Given Queensland’s enormous physical size of 1.85 million km², it is perhaps unremarkable such strong contrasts should be found among the most decentralised population of any Australian state or territory.³

Veteran psephologist Malcolm Mackerras was an early scholar to explore this phenomenon, when he identified two distinct electoral demographics in Queensland at the 1972 Australian federal election.⁴ Paradoxically, this dichotomisation runs counter to a major thesis underpinning much of Mackerras’s work: that a ‘uniform swing’ can be deduced from raw results to indicate the totality and uniformity of a

¹ J. Holmes, ‘Coast versus Inland: Two Different Queenslands?’. *Australian Geographical Studies*, 32(2), 1994, pp. 167-182.

² P. Bowers, ‘How an Old Friend Turned on Sir Joh’. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 25 October 1986, p. 27; P.D. Williams, ‘Rebel Yell a Wake-Up Call on Queensland’s Great Divide’. *Courier Mail*. 27 November 2012, p. 18.

³ Queensland is the only State where more people live outside the capital city than within it.

⁴ M. Mackerras, ‘The Swing: Variability and Uniformity’. *Politics*, 8(1), 1973, p. 238.

state or nation's electoral mood.⁵ Despite the obvious utility of translating what is merely a mean aggregate swing into a concept of state or national 'uniform' swing—a reductionist approach suited to journalism to make sense, for the generalist reader, of changes in voter support between successive elections—the concept of 'uniform swing' has found numerous detractors over the past five decades.⁶ Indeed, it is the unsustainability of the 'uniform swing' thesis that adds weight to the argument that Queensland remains economically, socially, culturally and electorally heterogeneous.

In this context, over 20 years ago Holmes retooled the 'two Queensland' thesis via a geographical analysis that argued Australia—and especially Queensland—'shows a spatial dichotomy between a restricted but relatively well-endowed coastal strip and a vast, under-endowed interior'.⁷ Holmes noted that this dichotomy, acknowledged since Queensland's colonial days, has manifested itself in occasional calls for North Queensland separatism.⁸ Moreover, Holmes argued that distinctions between coastal and inland Queensland had become starker since 1960 as rural populations, in an age of mechanised agriculture, migrated to the coastal strip.⁹ The thesis was updated in 2018, when Kraaier analysed data from the 2017 Same Sex Marriage Postal Survey and concluded the 'single geographic state of Queensland has cleaved over time into two entities quite distinct in economic, political, social and cultural form'.¹⁰

⁵ M. Mackerras, *Australian General Elections*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972; M. Mackerras, 'Uniform Swing: Analysis of the 1975 Election'. *Politics*, 11(1), 1976, pp. 41-46; M. Mackerras, 'No Change: Analysis of the 1977 Election'. *Politics*, 13(1), 1978, pp. 131-38.

⁶ B. Austen, 'A Comment on Malcolm Mackerras'. *Politics*, 13(2), 1978, pp. 342-44; C. Sharman, 'Swing and the Two-Party Preferred Vote: A Comment on Malcolm Mackerras'. *Politics*, 13, 1978, pp. 336-39; E. Thompson and T. Wheelwright, 'An Analysis of the 1977 Federal Election in New South Wales'. *Politics*, 13(1), 1978, pp. 139-46; O. Hughes, 'Uniform Swing Revisited: Further Comments on Mackerras'. *Politics*, 19(2), 1984, pp. 111-18; M. Goot, 'The Transformation of Australian Electoral Analysis: The Two-Party Preferred Vote—Origins, Impacts, and Critics'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 62(1), 2016, pp.59-86.

⁷ Holmes, 'Coast versus Inland', p. 167.

⁸ Holmes, 'Coast versus Inland', p. 169.

⁹ Holmes, 'Coast versus Inland', p. 174.

¹⁰ N. Kraaier, 'How the 2017 Same-Sex Marriage Postal Survey and the 2017 Queensland State Election Underscore the "Two Queensland" Thesis'. *Queensland Review*, 25(1), 2018, p. 39.

PURPOSE

This article reveals the most recent geographical variations among Queenslanders' vote choices that, in turn, can assist our understanding of where—and perhaps why—Queensland voters in recent years have eschewed traditional major party loyalties to support minor parties such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) and the Greens. This study is especially germane to a state such as Queensland which has long boasted an almost static political culture that, in the twentieth century, produced politically very stable governments with long incumbencies under large parliamentary majorities: a phenomenon described elsewhere as Queensland's electoral 'hegemonies'.¹¹ In the century since the birth of Queensland's modern bi-polar party system in 1915, the state has seen just three such hegemonies, interrupted by just four single-term aberrations.¹²

The relevance of this study is further underscored given these patterns of stability have been interrupted recently by increasing electoral volatility. In the two decades between 1996 and 2017, Queensland elections produced no fewer than three hung parliaments,¹³ and saw the Newman Government—elected in 2012 with the largest lower house majority in Australian history—defeated after a single term.¹⁴ Most profoundly, this volatility has seen significant haemorrhaging of support from the major parties. The 2017 Queensland State Election was the first occasion since 1915

¹¹ P.D. Williams, 'The Queensland Election of 17 February 2001: Reforging the Electoral Landscape?'. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 36(2), 2001, pp. 363-71; P.D. Williams, 'The Queensland Election of 7 February 2004: The Coming of the Second Labor Hegemony?'. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 39(3), 2004, pp. 635-44; P.D. Williams, 'How Did They Do it? Explaining Queensland Labor's Second Electoral Hegemony'. *Queensland Review: Labor in Queensland, 1989-2011*, 18(2), 2011, pp. 112-33; P.D. Williams, 'Back from the Brink: Labor's Re-Election at the 2017 Queensland State Election'. *Queensland Review*, 25(1), 2018, pp. 6-26.

¹² Labor governed Queensland from 1915 to 1957 (interrupted by a single-term Moore Country and Progressive National Party Government between 1929 and 1932); the Country-Liberal Coalition (later renamed the National-Liberal Coalition) and later the National Party alone, governed between 1957 and 1989; Labor has governed from 1989 to the present, with two single term interruptions (the Borbidge-Sheldon National-Liberal Coalition Government from 1996 to 1998 and the Newman Liberal National Party Government from 2012 to 2015).

¹³ The Borbidge-Sheldon National-Liberal Coalition Government (1996-98); the Beattie Labor Government (1998); and the Palaszczuk Labor Government (2015-17).

¹⁴ Williams, 'Back from the Brink'; P.D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle—Queensland, July-December, 2017'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 64(2), 2018, pp. 328-37.

to produce a combined major party primary vote below 70 percent.¹⁵ Given that much of the minor party support is found in the state's northern and western regions, where political disenchantment and populist sentiments are strong, understanding how Queensland's electoral behaviour varies according to geography can aid scholars understand the nature and causes of electoral volatility and political disenchantment.

HYPOTHESES

This article tests twin hypotheses. The first argues the 2017 Queensland election was the most regionally focused—in terms of leader visits, policy commitments and news media coverage—in at least a decade. As outlined below, the key issues of the 2017 campaign—after stability and jobs—included the contentious share of infrastructure funding between Brisbane and regional Queensland, environmental concerns for the Great Barrier Reef, tree-clearing, the Adani coal mine and public loans for rail links. Each of these issues brought a sharp focus to bear on regional Queensland and, more critically, to the potential of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party (PHON)—fuelled by regional voter discontent—to hold the balance of power after the election.

The article's second hypothesis is that the traditional 'two Queensland' thesis outlined above is a blunt instrument incapable of properly analysing increasingly variegated patterns of voter behaviour, especially the growth in minor party support. This article therefore offers a 'six Queensland' thesis that argues at least six Queensland regions—Brisbane City, Brisbane Fringe, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Eastern Provincial, Western Rural—must be explored to map adequately the State's current electoral volatility.

METHOD

Following contextual descriptions of the 55th Parliament and the 2017 campaign, and after a tabling of overall results of the 25 November election, this article's first

¹⁵ In producing a combined major party primary vote of just 69.12 percent, the 2017 Queensland State Election falls below Queensland's 1957 Labor 'split' election (which saw a combined major party primary vote of 72.12 percent), and below the State's 1998 'One Nation' election (which returned a combined major party primary vote of 70.12 percent).

method, in testing Hypothesis 1, is to contrast southeast Queenslanders' opinions and issue salience with those of regional Queenslanders.¹⁶ The article also tests Hypothesis 1 via a rudimentary content analysis of print media news coverage in the *Courier Mail*, the *Brisbane Times* and *The Australian*, using the Factiva database to search items on 'Queensland and region* and protest', and 'Queensland and region* and vote*' that appeared during the month before the 2009 to 2017 state elections.¹⁷

The article's second method, testing Hypothesis 2, is to disaggregate the primary vote of each of Queensland's four most significant parties—Labor, LNP, PHON and the Greens—across six geographical regions: Brisbane City (districts up to 20 km from Brisbane's Central Business District), Brisbane Fringe (outlying suburbs and satellite towns including Logan, Ipswich, Moreton Shire and Redlands Shire), Gold Coast (Coolangatta to Logan), Sunshine Coast (Moreton Shire to Maroochydore), Eastern Provincial (coastal strip from Gympie to Cairns), and Western Rural regions (west of the Great Dividing Range). Finally, the article constructs a composite matrix cataloguing the level of support ('strong', 'moderate' or 'weak') each party received in each of these six regions. Party support in a region is defined by each party's primary vote in that region, relative to its own state total and to its competitors within the region.

The article acknowledges the inexactness of delineating both the regional boundaries and the criteria of party support, an imprecision Holmes also notes, given 'there is no single, consistent, all-purpose boundary' in such analyses.¹⁸ The article also acknowledges the complexity of comparing two successive election outcomes separated by a major electoral redistribution that included the first expansion of the Queensland Legislative Assembly since 1986 (from 89 to 93 seats). In 2017, the Legislative Assembly comprised 21 seats in Brisbane City (down one from 2015), 19 seats in Brisbane Fringe (up two), 11 seats on the Gold Coast (up one), nine seats on the Sunshine Coast (up one), 21 seats in the Eastern Provinces (up one), and 12 seats in the Western Rural regions (no change).

¹⁶ For discussion of issue salience, see D. Repass, 'Issue Salience and Party Choice'. *American Political Science Review*, 65(2), 1971, pp. 389-400.

¹⁷ The dates are 21 February to 21 March 2009, 24 February to 24 March 2012, 31 December 2014 to 31 January 2015 and 25 October to 25 November 2017. For discussion of content analysis, see D. Riff, S. Lacy and F. Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2014.

¹⁸ Holmes, 'Coast versus Inland', p. 168.

THE 55TH PARLIAMENT: MINOR GOVERNMENT IN FORM – MAJOR IN IMPACT

Given that extensive descriptions of both the 55th Queensland Parliament (2015-17) and the 2017 election campaign (29 October-25 November) have been detailed elsewhere,¹⁹ only a brief summary of each is required here, notwithstanding the significance of the 2017 election. First, this election saw the Liberal-National Party (LNP) relegated to Opposition just three years after winning the largest parliamentary majority in Australian history. Second, the survival of the minority Palaszczuk Labor Government was questioned from its first days, questioning that increased after two MPs deserted Labor to sit as Independents,²⁰ and after three ministers resigned—and another stood aside—over policy or personal failings.²¹ Third, the Parliament produced a comprehensive legislative program—a so-called ‘de-Newmanisation’ process²²—while suffering just two significant defeats on the floor of Parliament.²³ Fourth, the Government endured mixed economic fortunes that saw continued high unemployment despite a revival of the mining, and especially coal, industries. Fifth, despite these tribulations, Anastacia Palaszczuk maintained a relatively strong level of popular support. The failure of Opposition Leader Lawrence Springborg to arrest Palaszczuk’s lead in public opinion polls saw former Newman Government treasurer Tim Nicholls defeat him in an LNP Party room spill in mid 2016.

¹⁹ Williams, ‘Back from the Brink’; Williams, ‘Political Chronicle—Queensland, July-December, 2017’.

²⁰ The Palaszczuk Government, winning 44 seats in January 2015, was reduced to 42 following the resignations of Billy Gordon (Cook) in early 2015, and Rob Pyne (Cairns) in early 2016. The two Katter’s Australian Party (KAP) MPs often supported the Palaszczuk Government. The LNP’s initial 42 seat total was reduced to 41 when Steve Dickson (Buderim) defected to PHON in 2017.

²¹ Police Minister Jo-An Miller resigned in late 2015 following an adverse CCC report on her ‘reckless’ disposal of confidential documents, and thereafter exercised considerable independence to the point of embarrassing the Government during Estimates Committee hearings. Agriculture Minister Leanne Donaldson resigned in late 2016 over unpaid council rates. Transport Minister Stirling Hinchliffe resigned in early 2017 after ongoing structural problems in *Queensland Rail*. Main Roads Minister Mark Bailey stood aside—and was later cleared by the CCC—in 2017 following allegations of improper private email use for ministerial business.

²² Williams, P. D. ‘Political Chronicle—Queensland, July-December 2015’. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*. 62(2), 2016, pp. 301-08.

²³ Labor failed to block the Katter’s Australian Party (KAP) *Sugar Industry* bill in late 2015, and saw its *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement)* Bill defeated in early 2016. Labor, however, managed to pass tough alcohol management laws in early 2016 (see P.D. Williams, ‘Political Chronicle—Queensland, July-December 2016’. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 63(2), 2017, p. 309.

The Parliament also saw major structural change, after a 2016 referendum approved the introduction of fixed four-year terms.²⁴ The timing and (arguably manipulative) manner in which Labor then moved to reintroduce compulsory preferential voting (CPV) fuelled Opposition anger. Confronted by the LNP's *Electoral (Improving Representation) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill* to expand the Legislative Assembly from 89 to 93 seats, the Palaszczuk Government initially balked, regarding a smaller chamber as an opportunity for the Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) to abolish several LNP-held rural seats with dwindling populations. Labor agreed to increase the chamber, however, after moving—with just 18 minutes' notice—an amendment to return the state to a CPV model last used in Queensland in 1989.²⁵ The amendment passed with the support of Labor defector Rob Pyne, despite the LNP arguing the amendment was merely a Labor instrument to secure Green preferences in inner Brisbane seats.²⁶ As detailed below, the LNP indeed had much to lament: not only did Green preferences flow generously to Labor but, more damagingly for the Opposition, LNP voters moving to PHON—and now forced to number all ballot paper squares—preferenced Labor before the LNP at rates approaching 50 percent in some districts.

THE 2017 QUEENSLAND ELECTION CAMPAIGN: REWRITING ORTHODOXIES

The paradox of the 2017 Queensland election campaign lies in Labor's ability to secure victory despite what appeared to be a largely disordered and *ad hoc* campaign with few tangible policy commitments. By contrast, the LNP's 'textbook' campaign of smoothly organised events and detailed policy announcements failed to engage voters. The regional flavour of the campaign became apparent from the first day as Palaszczuk flew to north Queensland where, at her first media conference, she was interrupted by anti-Adani protestors. LNP Leader Tim Nicholls 'front-ended' his campaign with major policy announcements, including: the creation of 500,000 jobs over 10 years; the construction of a north Queensland coal-fired power station;

²⁴ The next Queensland election is scheduled on 31 October, 2020.

²⁵ P.D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle—Queensland, January-June 2017'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 63(4), 2017, pp. 641-48.

²⁶ S. Elks and M. McKenna, 'Row over rushed voting changes'. *The Australian*, 22 April 2016, p. 2.

overseeing a \$1.3 billion 'drought-proofing' dam plan; and imposing a youth curfew in north Queensland to combat juvenile crime.²⁷

In return, Labor reminded voters state debt had fallen by \$600 million earned from government-owned enterprises the Newman Government had planned to sell or lease. Labor's most critical event of the first week arrived with Palaszczuk's media conference on 3 November, when the Premier announced her intention to veto a \$900 million loan to Adani from the Commonwealth Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF). Palaszczuk's initial rationale for exceeding the Integrity Commissioner's advice—merely to remove herself from the loan decision-making process—was that she wanted to counter a potential conflict of interest, given that her life-partner, Shaun Drabsch, had worked in the private sector on the NAIF application. Commentators soon argued such a dramatic economic policy shift mid-campaign created the impression of a chaotic government beholden to sectional interests.²⁸ When it was revealed Labor had conducted focus group research and found regional Queenslanders opposed to any Adani loan, it was clear Palaszczuk had secured real political advantage.

The campaign's second week began with Opposition Leader Nicholls pledging expenditure to counter domestic violence and ice addiction, as well as upgrades to the M1 motorway. Palaszczuk's fortunes improved from this point. The news media subjected Nicholls to closer scrutiny, after he was forced to repeat an earlier commitment to rule out Newman-style cuts to the public service. Palaszczuk then found a positive reception in Maryborough—where Labor would later record a 19.4 percent primary vote swing—when she pledged that Queensland trains would be built locally.

The week also saw PHON Leader Pauline Hanson return to Australia and enter a campaign that she said would produce a result 'bigger than 1998'.²⁹ After announcing a preference deal with Katter's Australian Party (KAP)—her only formal agreement of the campaign—Hanson launched her campaign 'Battler Bus'. But PHON

²⁷ M. Ludlow, 'Hanson Aide Accused of "Bullying, Threatening" Crossbench Staffer'. *The Australian*, 3 November 2017, p. 10.

²⁸ J. Walker, 'Palaszczuk Rolls the Dice on Adani'. *The Australian*, 11 November 2017, p. 18; S. Wardill, 'Qld Premier Wades Through Minefield With Veto of Federal Loan'. *Courier Mail*, 4 November 2017, p. 9; P.D. Williams, 'Premier Has a Miner Problem'. *Courier Mail*, 7 November 2017, p. 20.

²⁹ J. Marszalek and T. Akers. 'Leading Question'. *Courier Mail*, 7 November, 2017.

soon suffered significant campaign setbacks. In Townsville, journalists questioned Thuringowa candidate Mark Thornton over a sex shop webpage under his ownership that opined ‘good sex should be in the grey area between tickle fight and domestic violence’.³⁰ Hanson attacked the ‘Safe Schools’ program that, she alleged, instructed children on sexual practices, an accusation state PHON Leader Steve Dickson repeated. Anecdotal evidence suggested that many voters saw the PHON Leaders’ comments as political overreach, a perception that likely shaped some voters’ negative responses to the LNP’s long-awaited decision to preference PHON before Labor in 49 of the 61 seats PHON contested.³¹

Arguably, PHON’s most significant turning point arrived at the beginning of the third week of the campaign, when Fraser Anning resigned from PHON to sit as an Independent, just an hour after being sworn in as a Queensland Senator to replace the disqualified Malcom Roberts.³² Given a *Galaxy* poll found 41 percent of Queenslanders less likely to support PHON after Anning’s resignation, and just seven percent more likely—a net deficit of 37 points³³—any vote preferencing relationship between the LNP with PHON would have been received poorly by voters seeking stability. Both Palaszczuk and Nicholls soon returned to regional Queensland, as Nicholls continued to avoid journalists’ questions around PHON support for a minority LNP Government. Palaszczuk, by contrast, continued to pledge ‘no deals’ with PHON.³⁴

Labor appeared troubled by a *Galaxy* poll which indicated Deputy Premier Jackie Trad would lose her South Brisbane seat to the Greens, 49 to 51 percent.³⁵ But the LNP took little comfort from the campaign’s only leaders’ debate (which included PHON’s Dickson but not a Greens representative) on 16 November. In contrast with Palaszczuk’s more confident style, Nicholls was needled when he conceded the LNP would ‘accept the will of the people [and] work with the Parliament that the people

³⁰ T. Akers, ‘Fifty Shades of Red’. *Courier Mail*, 11 November 2017, p. 9.

³¹ M. Schliebs, C. Peel and S. Elks. ‘How Adani Veto Turned Tide for ALP’. *The Australian*, 9 December, 2017, p. 9. The LNP preferenced Labor ahead of PHON only in Stretton, Toohey, Thuringowa, Logan, Hervey Bay, Mudgeeraba, Buderim and Nicklin, and ran ‘split tickets’ in Coomera, Theodore, Lockyer and Scenic Rim.

³² See also ‘From the Tables – July 2017 to June 2018’ later in this issue of the *Australasian Parliamentary Review*.

³³ S. Wardill, ‘Anning’s Walk Hits Pauline’. *Courier Mail*, 21 November 2017, p. 9.

³⁴ T. Akers, ‘Gloves Off and Rivals Hit Out’. *Courier Mail*, 19 November 2017, p. 5.

³⁵ S. Wardill, ‘Trad on the Edge of Her Seat’. *Courier Mail*, 13 November 2017, p. 4.

of Queensland provide'.³⁶ Sixty percent of the forum's 100 undecided voters said they would now vote Labor, with just 12 percent supporting the LNP, 10 percent supporting PHON and 18 percent undecided.³⁷

The final week saw both major parties officially launch their campaigns. While Labor pledged an extension of the \$20,000 First Home Owners Grant, an extra \$20 million to attract film and television projects, and \$107 million to employ 'quality teachers',³⁸ Nicholls again distanced himself from the Newman Government. The week also saw Pauline Hanson and the independently-minded Labor MP Jo-Ann Miller (Bundamba) embrace at a pre-poll station in what was most likely a staged event that undermined Labor's mantra of 'no deals'.³⁹ The major parties then released costings: Labor pledged new wealth taxes on landowners, luxury car owners and online gambling companies to raise almost \$500 million, while the LNP pledged to cut \$2.5 billion from Brisbane's Cross River Rail, oversee a 'government efficiency program' to save \$1.6 billion, and offer almost \$1 billion in cost of living relief.⁴⁰ In an election only occasionally marked by specific spending commitments, LNP promises totalled \$4.3 billion while Labor's totalled \$1.6 billion. The campaign's final *Galaxy* poll bolstered Palaszczuk and underscored the heterogeneity of the state. Where Labor led the LNP after preferences 52 to 48 percent overall, the Government enjoyed an eight-point lead, 54 to 46 percent, over the LNP in southeast Queensland, while the LNP enjoyed a narrower lead, 52 to 48 percent, in the regions.⁴¹

THE ELECTION RESULTS

Table 1 reveals that in 2017 Labor contained the primary swing against it to 2.04 percent while winning an additional four seats with a 0.1 percent two-party preferred (2PP) swing toward it. It also reveals the LNP's net loss of three seats in a 7.63

36 T. Akers, 'Nicholls Admits a Deal May Be Done'. *Courier Mail*, 18 November 2017, p. 11.

37 J. Marszalek and S. Vogler, 'Voters Apply the Blowtorch'. *Courier Mail*, 17 November 2017, p. 6.

38 S. Vogler, 'Champ's in Her Corner'. *Courier Mail*, 20 November 2017, p. 4.

39 S. Vogler, 'Trail Fails'. *Courier Mail*, 25 November 2017, p. 8.

40 C. Peel, and S. Elks. 'Premier Asks for LNP Vote as Nichols Warns of Tax Grab'. *The Australian*, 25 November 2017, p. 11.

41 S. Wardill, 'Battle Down to a Split Decision'. *Courier Mail*, 24 November 2017, p. 9.

percent negative primary swing.⁴² The Greens' 10.0 percent was a slight improvement over 2015, and not unexpected given the campaign's strong environmental profile.

Table 1. Primary and Two-Party Preferred (2PP) Vote (%) and Seat Share, Queensland Election, 25 November, 2017

	2017 Candidates (2015)	2017 Primary Vote (%)	Primary Swing since 2015 (%)	2017 2PP Vote (%)	2PP Swing since 2015*	Seats won 2017	Seats change (+/-)
Labor	93 (89)	35.43	-2.04	51.2	+0.1	48	+4
LNP	93 (89)	33.69	-7.63	48.8	-0.1	39	-3
Greens	93 (89)	10.00	+1.57			1	+1
KAP	10 (11)	2.32	+0.39			3	+1
PHON	61 (11)	13.73	+12.81			1	+1
CR	8 (0)	0.27	+0.27			0	0
PUP	0 (50)	-	-5.11			-	-
FF	0 (28)	-	-1.19	-	-	-	-
Other	95 (66)	4.58	+0.95			1	0

Source: Electoral Commission of Queensland.

*2PP figures are Dr Kevin Bonham's estimate
<http://kevinbonham.blogspot.com.au/2017/12/queensland-2017-final-results-and.html>

Key: LNP=Liberal-National Party; PUP=Palmer United Party; KAP= Katter's Australian Party; FF= Family First; CR = Civil Liberties, Consumer Rights, No Tolls; PHON=Pauline Hanson's One Nation; Other includes Independents.

⁴² Between 2012 and 2017, the LNP lost 15.96 percent of its primary vote support.

Perhaps the most significant result in Table 1 is PHON's mixed fortunes. While the Party won just 13.73 percent across the state, it attracted 20.11 percent in the 61 seats it contested.⁴³ However, the fact PHON won just a single district (Mirani)—far below Party Leaders' predictions of 20 seats—suggests PHON failed to meet public expectations.⁴⁴

As has been argued elsewhere,⁴⁵ the factors behind Labor's unexpectedly easy return to majority government include: a desire for political stability; Palaszczuk's personal popularity; approval of Labor's creation of 120,000 jobs since 2015; approval of Labor's veto of public loans for Adani; the LNP's contentious decision to preference PHON above Labor in 49 of PHON's 61 seats; a leakage of up to 50 percent of PHON preferences to Labor; voter rejection of Nicholls as a former Treasurer in the unpopular Newman Government; and fears about privatisation and public service cuts under the LNP.

HYPOTHESIS 1: THE 2017 ELECTION AS THE MOST REGIONAL FOR A DECADE

The article now tests the first hypothesis: that the 2017 Queensland election assumed a greater regional focus than any in the previous decade. Initial evidence of the regional nature of the 2017 campaign is found in two *Galaxy* opinion polls which indicate regional Queenslanders rated both their state's prosperity and the campaign's issues very differently from southeast Queensland voters. As revealed in Table 2, a February 2017 *Galaxy* poll found southeast Queensland voters were significantly more optimistic as to the future of their state than were regional voters.

The same opinion poll offers more evidence of the campaign's regional focus in the finding that almost 75 percent of regional Queenslanders believed the Palaszczuk Government unfairly 'skewed' its 2016-17 budget infrastructure spending toward the southeast, with just 54 percent of all Queenslanders agreeing.⁴⁶ The reality of the 2016-17 Queensland budget, however, is very different: with \$5.69 billion allocated

⁴³ Author's calculation.

⁴⁴ M. McKenna and S. Elks, 'Hanson to Target 20 Seats at State Poll'. *The Australian*, 3 October 2017, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Williams, 'Back from the Brink'; P.D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle—Queensland, July-December, 2017', pp. 328-37.

⁴⁶ D. Passmore, 'Keep Share Fair'. *Courier Mail*, 14 February, 2017, p. 7.

to southeast Queensland projects (covering 68 percent of the state population) and \$4.94 billion allocated to regional projects (covering 32 percent of the state population), regional infrastructure investment of \$3,150 per capita far outstripped the \$1,709 spent per capita in southeast Queensland.⁴⁷ This key finding goes far to explain the nature and origins of the (arguably misplaced) disenchantment felt by regional voters who felt sufficiently disillusioned to abandon the major parties and engage with populist parties such as PHON that exploit anti-elite and anti-capital city hostilities in the regions.⁴⁸

Table 2. Queenslanders’ Opinions of State ‘Direction’, by Region, February, 2017 (%)

Region	‘Headed in right direction’	‘Headed in wrong direction’
Brisbane	49	37
Regional Qld	37	49

Source: P. Syvret, ‘Regions Take Gloomy View of Where We’re Going’. *Courier Mail*, 24 February 2017, p. 13.

Further evidence of regionalism is found in Table 3, which shows a mid-campaign *Galaxy* poll finding voters in Queensland’s southeast prioritised issues markedly differently from those in the state’s regions. Where, for example, 40 percent of regional voters rated ‘jobs’ as a salient issue, just 29 percent of southeast Queensland voters did so. Similarly, regional voters found ‘power prices’ a more pressing issue than did those in the southeast. Interestingly, however, ‘stable government’ and ‘leadership’ proved roughly equal in significance for all voters, while Adani rated surprisingly lowly across the state.

⁴⁷ Author’s calculation.

⁴⁸ R. Stimson and R. Davis, ‘Disillusionment and Disenchantment at the Fringe: Explaining the Geography of the One Nation Party Vote at the Queensland Election’. *People and Place*, 6(3), 1998, pp. 69-82; P. McManus, and B. Pritchard, ‘Geography and the Emergence of Rural and Regional Australia’. *Australian Geographer*, 31(3), 2000, pp. 383-91; D. Marr, ‘The White Queen: One Nation and the Politics of Race’. *Quarterly Essay*, 65, 2017, pp. 1-102.

Table 3. Voters' Issue Salience (%), *Galaxy* opinion poll, November 2017

Issue	SE Qld	Other Qld Regions
Jobs	29	40
Stable government	29	28
Health	32	31
Leadership	24	27
Power prices	19	29
Roads	24	19
Economy / Debt	23	20
Adani	16	17

Source: J. Marszalek, 'Greens take it to Trad'. *Courier Mail*, 26 November 2017, p. 6..

Finally, Hypothesis 1 is further supported by evidence in Table 4, which reveals print news media items during the month prior to polling day reported on regional politics more widely than during any previous election of the past decade. News media references to 'regional protest' during the 2017 campaign were almost double the 2015 total, almost five times the 2012 total, and seven times the 2009 total. Similarly, print news media references to a 'regional protest vote' in 2017 were more than three times the 2009 total, and more than double the 2015 and 2012 tallies.

Table 4. Print News Media References to 'Regional Protest' and 'Vote', Queensland Election Campaigns, 2009-2017

Election Year	Queensland + region* + protest	Queensland + region* + vote*
2009	4	31
2012	6	39
2015	15	47
2017	28	99

Source: Author's calculations from Factiva searches of *Courier Mail*, *Brisbane Times* and *The Australian* items published one month before polling day.

HYPOTHESIS 2: SIX QUEENSLAND REGIONS

The article now tests the second hypothesis: that Queensland electoral behaviour requires analysis across six regions. In so doing, this section disaggregates the primary vote for Labor, the LNP, PHON and the Greens across seats in Brisbane City, Brisbane Fringe, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Eastern Provincial and Western Rural regions.

Table 5. Labor Primary Vote (%), 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	2017 Primary	2015 Primary	Primary Swing (+/-)
Brisbane City	41.70	42.59	-0.89
Brisbane Fringe	43.10	47.37	-4.27
Gold Coast	30.44	29.76	+0.68
Sunshine Coast	24.94	26.42	-1.48
Eastern Provincial	34.74	38.52	-3.78
Western Rural	23.93	27.06	-3.13

Source: Author's calculations from Electoral Commission of Queensland data. Accessed at: <http://results.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/state/State2015/results/summary.html> and <https://www.ecq.qld.gov.au/elections/2017-state-general-election2/2017-state-election-results>.

Table 5 reveals that in 2017 Labor suffered a negligible primary swing against it in Brisbane City, a small swing against it on the Sunshine Coast, and moderate swings—partly attributable to the surge in PHON vote—against it in Brisbane Fringe, Eastern Provincial Western Rural seats. Labor also attained a small swing to it on the Gold Coast.

Table 6. Labor Seats Won, 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	Total Seats in Region 2017 (2015 total in parentheses)	Number of Seats Won By ALP in 2017	Percentage of Region's Seats Won by ALP in 2017	Number of Seats Won By ALP in 2015	Percentage of Region's Seats Won by ALP in 2017	Percentage ALP Seat Change, 2015-17
Brisbane City	21 (22)	16	67	14	64	+3
Brisbane Fringe	19 (17)	18	95	14	82	+13
Gold Coast	11 (10)	1	9	0	0	+9
Sunshine Coast	9 (8)	0	0	1	13	-13
Eastern Provincial	21 (20)	12	57	14	70	-13
Western Rural	12 (12)	1	8	1	8	0

Source: As for Table 5.

Table 6 indicates Labor increased its seat share most substantially in the Brisbane Fringe via a significant leakage of PHON preferences to Labor. The Party's representation also grew modestly in Brisbane City and on the Gold Coast, but declined on the Sunshine Coast and in the Eastern provinces. Labor's representation remained low and unchanged in Western Rural districts.

Table 7 details the dramatic collapse in the LNP's primary vote across most regions, with Brisbane Fringe, Eastern Provincial and Western Rural seats—where PHON support was strongest—delivering the largest swings against the LNP. Only on the Gold Coast was the anti-LNP swing contained.

Table 7. Liberal-National Party Primary Vote (%), 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	2017 Primary	2015 Primary	Primary Swing (+/-)
Brisbane City	36.37	42.31	-5.94
Brisbane Fringe	25.37	36.80	-11.43
Gold Coast	47.04	48.14	-1.10
Sunshine Coast	35.57	45.10	-9.53
Eastern Provincial	27.18	38.52	-11.34
Western Rural	37.46	54.54	-17.08

Source: As for Table 5.

Table 8 details the LNP's decline in representation as a result of the 2017 election. Where the LNP slightly increased its seat share on the Sunshine Coast and in the West, the Party suffered modest declines in Brisbane Fringe, Gold Coast and Eastern Provincial seats. LNP strategists would have been most alarmed, however, at the Party's substantial loss of seats in Brisbane City, with the Party's representation there halved, largely, it can be argued, because progressive LNP voters received poorly the Party's flirtation with PHON.

Table 8. LNP Seats Won, 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	Total Seats in Region 2017 (2015 total in parentheses)	Number of Seats Won By LNP in 2017	Percentage of Region's Seats Won by LNP in 2017	Number of Seats Won By LNP in 2015	Percentage of Region's Seats Won by LNP in 2017	Percentage LNP Seat Change, 2015-17
Brisbane City	21 (22)	4	19	8	36	-17
Brisbane Fringe	19 (17)	1	6	2	12	-6
Gold Coast	11 (10)	10	91	10	100	-9
Sunshine Coast	9 (8)	8	89	6	75	+14
Eastern Provincial	21 (20)	6	29	7	35	-6
Western Rural	12 (12)	10	83	9	75	+12

Source: As for Table 5.

PHON contested just 61 of the expanded Parliament's 93 seats and left many Brisbane City districts uncontested. Table 9 therefore details the swing PHON received across entire regions, plus the swing it received only those seats that the Party contested in each region. On both measures, PHON support grew across all regions, partly because the Party stood 50 more candidates in 2017 than in 2015. Not unexpectedly, PHON's vote increased most dramatically in Western Rural, Eastern Provincial, Sunshine Coast and Brisbane Fringe seats.

Table 9. PHON Primary Vote (%), 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	2017 Primary	2015 Primary	Primary Swing (+/-)	Primary Vote in Seats Contested by PHON in 2017 (number of seats in parentheses)	Primary Vote in Seats Contested by PHON in 2015 (number of seats in parentheses)	Primary Swing in Seats Contested by PHON in 2015 and/or 2017 (+/-)
Brisbane City	3.17	0	+3.17	11.09 (6)	0 (0)	+11.09
Brisbane Fringe	13.84	0.40	+13.44	20.23 (13)	6.75 (1)	+13.48
Gold Coast	7.15	0.74	+6.41	19.67 (4)	3.68 (2)	+15.99
Sunshine Coast	18.32	0	+18.32	20.61 (8)	0(0)	+20.61
Eastern Provinces	21.75	1.42	+20.33	22.83 (20)	5.38 (5)	+17.45
Western Rural	20.83	3.40	+17.43	24.99 (10)	13.61 (3)	+11.38

Source: As for Table 5.

Table 10. PHON Seats Won, 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	Total Seats in Region 2017 (2015 total in parentheses)	Number of Seats Won By PHON in 2017	Percentage of Region's Seats Won by PHON in 2017	Number of Seats Won By PHON in 2015	Percentage of Region's Seats Won by PHON in 2017
Brisbane City	21 (22)	0	0	0	0
Brisbane Fringe	19 (17)	0	0	0	0
Gold Coast	11 (10)	0	0	0	0
Sunshine Coast	9 (8)	0	0	0	0
Eastern Provincial	21 (20)	1	5	0	0
Western Rural	12 (12)	0	0	0	0

Source: As for Table 5.

Table 10 shows that PHON secured just one seat despite a 20.11 percent vote across contested seats. The factors behind PHON's failure lie partly in the Party's poor campaign, its subsequently low primary vote totals—often finishing third and, therefore, denied LNP preferences—and Queensland's return to compulsory preferential voting that saw Labor voters—many of whom had 'exhausted' their ballots with no preference allocation in previous elections—preferencing the LNP in rural seats where Labor finished third. Not unexpectedly, given previous election results, PHON's only representation (Mirani) is in Eastern Provincial Queensland.

Table 11. Greens Primary Vote (%), 2015 and 2017 Elections, by Region

Region	2017 Primary	2015 Primary	Primary Swing (+/-)
Brisbane City	16.85	12.30	+4.55
Brisbane Fringe	8.63	8.27	+0.36
Gold Coast	10.24	8.02	+2.02
Sunshine Coast	11.47	11.71	-0.24
Eastern Province	5.96	5.27	+0.69
Western Rural	5.21	4.41	+0.80

Source: As for Table 5.

Table 11 reveals the Greens, contesting all 93 seats, increased their vote share in all regions except the Sunshine Coast. Unsurprisingly, the Greens’ largest increases occurred in Brisbane City and Gold Coast seats; less expected were increases in Eastern Provincial and Western Rural Queensland.

Table 12 reveals the Greens’ single victory—in Maiwar (formerly Indooroopilly)—emerged in Brisbane City. Labor ran third in this western Brisbane seat, with the vast majority of Labor voter preferences moving to the Greens, leading to the defeat of an LNP candidate who received the most primary votes.

Table 12. Greens seat, 2015 and 2017 elections, by region

Region	Total Seats in Region 2017 (2015 total in parentheses)	Number of Seats Won By Greens in 2017	Percentage of Region’s Seats Won by Greens in 2017	Number of Seats Won By Greens in 2015	Percentage of Region’s Seats Won by Greens in 2017
Brisbane City	21 (22)	1	4.76	0	0
Brisbane Fringe	19 (17)	0	0	0	0
Gold Coast	11 (10)	0	0	0	0
Sunshine Coast	9 (8)	0	0	0	0
Eastern Provincial	21 (20)	0	0	0	0
Western Rural	12 (12)	0	0	0	0

Source: As for Table 5.

Table 13 represents a composite matrix of the relative support that each party attracted in 2017 across the six regions used in this study. The criteria of ‘strong’, ‘moderate’ and ‘weak’ party support are defined by each party’s primary vote total, relative to its own state total, and to its competitors within each region. As expected, Labor performed strongly in Brisbane City and Brisbane Fringe seats, moderately well in the Eastern Provinces, and weakly on the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coasts and Western Rural districts.

Table 13. Relative Strength of Party Support, 2017 Election, by Region

Party	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Labor	Brisbane City Brisbane Fringe	Eastern Provincial	Gold Coast Sunshine Coast West Rural
LNP	Gold Coast	Brisbane City Sunshine Coast Western Rural	Brisbane Fringe Eastern Provincial
PHON	Eastern Provincial Western Rural	Brisbane Fringe Sunshine Coast	Brisbane City Gold Coast
Greens	Brisbane City	Gold Coast Sunshine Coast Brisbane Fringe	Eastern Provincial Western Rural

Source: As for Table 5.

Not unexpectedly, LNP support remained strongest on the Gold Coast and weakest in Brisbane Fringe and Eastern Provincial seats. More surprising, however, was the LNP's merely 'moderate' support—in the wake of PHON's resurgence—in Sunshine Coast and Western Rural seats. Observers would be unsurprised, however, by PHON's strong performance in Eastern Provincial and Western Rural seats, and its relatively poor results in Brisbane City and Gold Coast districts. Conversely, the Greens' strength in Brisbane City seats, and their weakness in socially conservative Eastern Provincial and Western Rural seats, remains consistent with previous Queensland results.

Perhaps the most significant observation to be made about Table 13 is that only two of the matrix's nine cells are identical. PHON's strong support in Eastern Provincial and Western Rural seats is the exact inverse of the Greens' weak support in these same regions. This evidence confirms two points: first, PHON support is unlikely to be found in the same geographical regions or among the same voter demographics. Second, and more broadly, the different permutations found in seven of the matrix's nine cells confirm the variability of Queensland electoral behaviour among the State's four most significant parties and across its six regions.

CONCLUSION

Queensland has long been described as comprising two very different demographics born of very different geographies, industries and civic cultures. This so-called ‘two Queenslands’ thesis has been widely cited to describe the pronounced differences in voter behaviour between coastal and inland Queensland, or between Brisbane and ‘the bush’. In challenging this thesis, this article has argued, first, that the 2017 Queensland election campaign boasted a heavy regional focus: one that fuelled existing anti-capital city sentiments in regional Queensland and, in turn, support for PHON.

Evidence supporting this hypothesis was offered via opinion polls which found regional Queenslanders rated the salience of election issues very differently, while they also held very different perceptions of their state’s future compared with their southeast cousins. The hypothesis was further supported by content analysis which revealed the 2017 Queensland election campaign to be the most heavily marked by regional references in the news media in at least a decade.

This article also argued that a ‘six Queenslands’ model is appropriate to most accurately analyse the variations in voter behaviour in an age of surging minor party support in the regions. The potential of this analysis to assist our understanding of Queensland electoral politics is found in the article’s composite matrix which—in categorising each party’s regional support in terms of ‘strong’, ‘moderate’ or ‘weak’ support—revealed the patterns in seven of the matrix’s nine cells to be different.

This critical finding confirms the hypothesis that Queensland voter behaviour is extremely variegated, and that a mere ‘two Queenslands’ thesis is inadequate for meaningfully explaining it. In confirming the regional variegation of Queensland’s vote, the pessimism and resentment regional voters often feel towards the capital city, and populist parties’ exploitation of those sentiments to harvest regional votes, the article suggests that more finely-grained analyses of how and where populist parties draw support will help suggest solutions to counter these potentially destabilising political forces.