

Revisiting Six Queenslands: Disaggregating the Regional Vote at the 2020 Queensland State Election*

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Abstract: The 2020 Queensland state election was the first Australian state (but not territory) poll conducted under the pall of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite often unpopular border closures and severe business restrictions, the Palaszczuk Labor Government was easily re-elected to a third term with a net seat gain. As always, the results revealed a heterogenous electorate varying widely in vote preference according to geographical location. This article argues that, unlike early analyses of Queensland elections, the state is not dichotomised simply between 'Coast' and 'Inland' or between 'Brisbane' and 'the Bush'. Instead, the article builds on previous research to argue Queensland divides into six regions of voter behaviour, each with its own distinct economic and demographic characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

The 2020 Queensland election of 31 October was notable as the first poll since the 1890s to elect a Queensland parliament of longer than three years' duration. By virtue of the 2016 referendum, Queensland premiers no longer choose the timing of an election; parliaments now run for fixed, four-year terms.¹ The 2020 election was also

¹ Paul D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle: Queensland, July-December, 2017'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 64 (2) 2018, pp. 329-38.

the first Australian state (but not territory) election² where both government and opposition leaders were women. Given Queensland's was the first state (but not territory) election³ conducted under the pall of the COVID-19 pandemic, national observers were eager to measure a public response to a government's strict pandemic rules. This election also saw 597 candidates stand in Queensland's 93 electoral districts – including a record 219 women. Yet the result – in which the Labor Government under Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, seeking a third term, received a swing to it before seizing an additional four seats despite high unemployment, growing debt and localised protests over 'hard' border closures – surprised few.

While the factors driving the result – namely, public acceptance of the Government's tough pandemic rules via a Queensland cultural predilection for 'strong' leadership and state 'parochialism' – have been explored elsewhere,⁴ exactly where votes were dispersed across Queensland has not. Indeed, identifying patterns in regional electoral support is particularly critical for a large and deeply decentralized state⁵ boasting significant economic and demographic diversity, a populist political culture and no upper house of parliament – characteristics that make comparisons with other Australian states and territories difficult.⁶

Finally, this election was a victory for Palaszczuk herself. Palaszczuk is now Australia's only female leader to have won three consecutive elections and, by the close of the 57th parliament, she will be the third longest-serving Queensland premier and the

² The 1995 Australian Capital Territory election saw the Liberal Chief Minister Kate Carnell face Labor Opposition leader Ros Follett.

³ The Northern Territory held its election on 22 August 2020, and the Australian Capital Territory its poll on 17 October 2020. Kevin Bonham, 'Queensland 2020 elections will be a test of state's Covid response'. *The Guardian*, 20 September 2020; Paul D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle: Queensland, July-December 2020'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 67 (2) 2021, pp. 369-75.

⁴ Paul D. Williams, 'The Grateful State: The 2020 Queensland Election'. *Queensland Review* 28 (1) 2021, pp. 57-72; Paul D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle: Queensland, July-December 2020'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 67 (2) 2021, pp. 369-75.

⁵ Paul D. Williams, 'Queensland', in P. Chen, N. Barry, J. Butcher, D. Clune, I. Cook, A. Garnier, Y. Haigh, S. Motta and M. Taflaga (eds) *Australia's Politics and Public Policy* 2nd ed. Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 2021, pp. 248-68.

⁶ Paul D. Williams, 'Queensland's quandary: To reintroduce a Legislative Council?' *Queensland Review* 29 (1) 2022, pp. 36-48; Paul D. Williams, 'Queensland's unpredictable election begins', *The Conversation*, 5 October, 2020. Accessed at: <https://theconversation.com/queenslands-unpredictable-election-begins-expect-a-close-campaign-focused-on-3-questions-146927>

longest-serving female head at any level of government in Australian history. Ultimately, the 2020 election underscores the value of ‘strong’ leadership in Queensland political culture, with Palaszczuk playing a key role in extending Queensland Labor’s second electoral hegemony.⁷

THE SIX QUEENSLANDS THESIS

The research question driving this article is explicit: how variegated was the 2020 Queensland election result given conventional analysis once characterised differences in Queensland electoral behaviour as a simple dichotomy between ‘Coast’ and ‘Inland’ or between ‘Brisbane’ and ‘the Bush’?⁸ In answer to this question, I argue that, as in 2017, the 2020 election demonstrated markedly varied patterns of voter behaviour across six distinct regions. As such, this article builds on earlier research⁹ that found Queensland behaves electorally not as one but as at least six distinct constituencies.

⁷ See, for example, Paul D. Williams, ‘The Queensland Election of 17 February 2001: Reforging the Electoral Landscape?’ *Australian Journal of Political Science* 36 (2) 2001, pp. 363-71; Paul 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; Paul D. Williams, ‘The Greening of the Queensland Electorate?’ *Australian Journal of Political Science* 41 (3) 2006, pp. 325-37; Paul D. Williams, ‘Defying the Odds: Peter Beattie and the 2006 Queensland Election’. *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 22 (2) 2007, pp. 212-20; Paul D. Williams, ‘Leaders and Political Culture: The Development of the Queensland Premiership, 1859-2009.’ *Queensland Review*, 16 (1) 2009, pp. 15-34; Paul D. Williams, ‘The Queensland Election of 21 March 2009: Labor’s swim against the tide’. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 45 (2) 2010, pp. 277-83; Paul D. Williams, ‘Time of Transition: The Queensland Parliament and Electoral Volatility, 2008-09.’ *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 25 (1) 2010, pp. 224-39; Paul D. Williams, ‘How did they do it? Explaining Queensland Labor’s Second Electoral Hegemony’. *Queensland Review* 18 (2), 2011, pp. 112-33; Paul D. Williams, ‘Leadership or Policy: Explaining the Queensland Election of 31 January, 2015’. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 64 (2) 2018, pp. 1-17; Paul D. Williams, ‘Back from the brink: Labor’s re-election at the 2017 Queensland state election’. *Queensland Review* 25 (1) 2018, pp. 6-26; Williams, ‘The Grateful State’.

⁸ John Holmes, ‘Coast versus Inland: Two Different Queensland?’ *Australian Geographical Studies* 32(2) 1994, pp. 167-182.

⁹ Paul D. Williams, ‘One, Two or Many Queensland? Disaggregating the regional vote at the 2017 Queensland state election’. *Australian Parliamentary Review* 33 (2) 2018, pp. 57-79.

The first region, Brisbane City¹⁰ – corresponding closely to the confines of the Brisbane City Council administrative area – is home to approximately 1.3 million people.¹¹ Hemmed by a radius of approximately 20 km from the Central Business District, the Brisbane City region enjoys a broad occupational mix dominated by professionals, managers, administrators, and retail. Around 38 per cent of Brisbane City residents hold a bachelor’s degree or above: a rate significantly higher than the Queensland mean.

The second region, the Brisbane Fringe,¹² consists of four satellite cities: Logan City to the south, Ipswich to the west, Moreton Shire to the north and Redlands City to the east. The Brisbane Fringe is home to approximately 1.2 million people, with technical and trade workers comprising a significant proportion of the workforce. Weekly median incomes in, for example, Logan, are lower than those in Brisbane City.¹³

The third region, Gold Coast,¹⁴ boasts a population of approximately 625,000 and runs from the Tweed River in the south to the Albert River in the north and abuts the Scenic Rim in the west. The local economy is dominated by small business – especially tourism and hospitality – and the proportion of residents with tertiary qualifications approximates the Queensland mean.¹⁵

The Sunshine Coast,¹⁶ running from Moreton Shire in the south to Pomona in the north and to Montville in the east, comprises the fourth region. Home to approximately

¹⁰ Brisbane City region includes the seats of Aspley, Mansfield, South Brisbane, Ferny Grove, Mt Ommaney, McConnel, Miller, Stretton, Toohey, Greenslopes, Cooper, Bulimba, Lytton, Stafford, Inala, Clayfield, Chatsworth, Everton, Moggill, Maiwar and Nudgee.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], ‘2021 Australian Census Data’. ‘Brisbane’. Accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA31000>. Accessed 1 April, 2023.

¹² Brisbane Fringe region includes the seats of Capalaba, Redlands, Springwood, Redcliffe, Pine Rivers, Bancroft, Logan, Kurwongbah, Macalister, Morayfield, Murrumba, Jordan, Waterford, Ipswich, Sandgate, Algester, Bundamba, Oodgeroo and Woodridge.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘2021 Australian Census Data’. ‘Logan’. Accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA34590>. Accessed 1 April, 2023.

¹⁴ Gold Coast region includes the seats of Gaven, Bonney, Currumbin, Coomera, Theodore, Burleigh, Mermaid Beach, Southport, Mudgeraba, Broadwater and Surfers Paradise.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘2021 Australian Census Data’. ‘Gold Coast’. Accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA33430>. Accessed on 1 April, 2023.

¹⁶ Sunshine Coast includes the seats of Pumicestone, Glass House, Nicklin, Ninderry, Maroochydore, Buderim, Kawana, Noosa and Caloundra.

350,000 people, this region is also dominated by tourism and small business but, as a destination for wealthy retirees, boasts a population significantly older than the Gold Coast.¹⁷

The fifth region, Eastern Provincial,¹⁸ is comprised of localities running along Queensland's coast, from Noosa in the south to Port Douglas in the north, and largely bordered by the Great Dividing Range in the west. Home to approximately 700,000 people, local economies are largely dependent on primary industries, with Rockhampton long associated with beef, Mackay with sugar, and Gladstone a key port for mining exports. By contrast, Cairns enjoys a strong tourism sector while Townsville is a military base - a city which boasts incomes above the Queensland mean but houses fewer university graduates and more blue-collar workers.¹⁹

The sixth region, the less populated Western Rural,²⁰ is found west of the Great Dividing Range from the New South Wales border in the south to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north. Again, primary industries dominate local economies, with the mining sector a significant employer in central and north-west Queensland, and with pastoralism particularly pronounced in the north-east, and agriculture in the south. Fewer voters in Western Rural will boast university qualifications than the Queensland mean, but voters here will have a higher proportion of Christian identity, and have parents born in Australia, than the state average. The district of Warrego is a typical example.²¹

¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], '2021 Australian Census Data'. 'Sunshine Coast'. Accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA36720>. Accessed 1 April, 2023.

¹⁸ Eastern Provincial includes the seats of Townsville, Mundingburra, Barron River, Maryborough, Keppel, Cairns, Thuringowa, Rockhampton, Cook, Mackay, Mulgrave, Gladstone, Whitsunday, Burdekin, Bundaberg, Gympie, Hervey Bay, Mirani, Hinchinbrook, Hill and Burnett.

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, '2021 Australian Census Data'. 'Townsville'. Accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA37010>. Accessed on 1 April, 2023.

²⁰ Western Rural includes the seats of Traeger, Ipswich West, Gregory, Nanango, Scenic Rim, Southern Downs, Toowoomba North, Toowoomba South, Condamine, Warrego, Lockyer and Callide.

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, '2021 Australian Census Data'. 'Warrego'. Accessed at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SED30090>. Accessed on 1 April, 2023.

QUEENSLAND POLITICS, 2017-2020

The events leading up to the 2020 Queensland election, and the campaign itself, have been covered in detail elsewhere.²² This article therefore offers only a summary of the 56th Parliament and of the 2020 election campaign.

Queensland politics between 2017 and 2020 were dominated by five core themes. The first, evident long before the pandemic, was economic challenge. For much of the term, Queensland unemployment hovered around six per cent – higher than the national average – and peaked at 8.8 per cent in July, 2020. Regional and youth unemployment were far higher.²³ State debt, too, plagued the economy, with Queensland’s Treasurer then forecasting debt to swell to \$130 billion by 2024.²⁴

The second, and arguably dominant, theme was the pandemic itself which, from 2020, steered Queensland political discourse for two years. Queensland was the first Australian jurisdiction to declare a COVID-19 emergency in early 2020, with the Health Minister granting special powers to the Chief Health Officer.²⁵ After Palaszczuk described COVID-19 as ‘30 cyclones hitting the state at once’,²⁶ the Queensland Government offered economic rescue packages as COVID-19 moved quickly throughout the state. Restaurants, hotels, gymnasia, cinemas and churches soon closed and, in March, Palaszczuk sealed Queensland’s borders for the first time in a century; they remained closed until December, 2021. Schools became pupil-free for many weeks, and residents were told to stay home except for essential work, to buy food, for medical reasons or to exercise.

Palaszczuk’s strict pandemic rules, especially border closures, met with some opposition within the state and more truculent criticism from outside. New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and conservative commentators were especially virulent in their condemnation. Yet Palaszczuk’s tough pandemic rules – her refrain of ‘We don’t want to put Queenslanders at risk’ contrasted

²² Williams, Political Chronicle: Queensland, July-December, 2020; Williams, ‘The Grateful State’.

²³ Queensland Government, ‘Labour and Employment’ *Queensland Government Statistics*. 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/economy/labour-employment/state>.

²⁴ Williams, Political Chronicle: Queensland, July-December, 2020, p. 371.

²⁵ Paul D. Williams, ‘Political Chronicle: Queensland, January to June, 2020’. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 66 (4) 2020, pp. 681-87.

²⁶ Janelle Miles, ‘A constant state of readiness’. *The Courier Mail*, 18 April 2020, p. 4.

sharply with LNP leader Deb Frecklington's mixed messages on COVID-19 restrictions²⁷ – appeared to resonate with older voters, even in LNP strongholds.²⁸ Problematically for the LNP, Frecklington's prevarication on border re-openings came just as Victoria entered a second and more deadly pandemic wave. By contrast, Palaszczuk's populist pitch undoubtedly appealed to regional political culture and its predilection for 'strong' leadership and state 'parochialism'.²⁹

Third, the issue of coal mining loomed as the state's southeast, largely opposed to the coal industry, found itself at odds with regional and rural voter support of coal. Indeed, Queensland Labor had performed poorly at the 2019 federal election as regional Queenslanders rejected what appeared to be Labor leader Bill Shorten's opposition to an expanded coal industry.³⁰ At the heart of this debate was the Indian-owned Adani coal mine in the Galilee Basin, and the plausibility of Stage Three of the Acland coal mine near Toowoomba. Critically, this debate unfolded as several natural disasters plagued the state. In 2018, Cyclone Owen caused flooding in north Queensland despite 67 per cent of the state remaining drought-declared.³¹

Integrity comprised a fourth theme. In 2018, Main Roads Minister Mark Bailey was referred to, and eventually cleared by, the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) for his use of a private email account to conduct ministerial business. That same year, former Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) Senator Fraser Anning, later adopted by Katter's Australian Party (KAP), called for a 'Final Solution' to Australia's immigration 'problem'. Palaszczuk joined the near-universal condemnation of Anning and, when the KAP refused to condemn Anning, Palaszczuk withdrew some of the KAP's parliamentary resources. KAP MP Robbie Katter referred Palaszczuk to the CCC which handed the matter to the Legislative Assembly's Ethics Committee. Palaszczuk then became the

²⁷ Mark Ludlow, 'Neighbours who 'just don't like each other''. *Australian Financial Review*, 28 May 2020, p. 10; Hayden Johnson and Jack Mackay, 'Jobs go but blockade stays'. *Courier Mail*, 20 June 2020, p. 9.

²⁸ Charlie Peel, 'Palaszczuk pensioners rewarded border action'. *The Australian*, 3 November, 2020, p. 4.

²⁹ Paul D. Williams, 'Queensland's Role in the 2019 Australian Federal Election: A case study of regional difference'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 67 (1) 2021, pp. 150-68.

³⁰ Williams, 'Queensland's Role in the 2019 Australian Federal Election'.

³¹ Paul D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle: Queensland, January to June, 2018'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 64 (4) 2018, pp. 673-80.

first Queensland premier found guilty of contempt of Parliament.³² In 2019, it was revealed that Treasurer and Cross River Rail (CCR) Minister Jacqui Trad had purchased an investment property in Woolloongabba along the proposed CCR route.³³ Trad referred herself to the CCC which found she had not committed a crime but had breached cabinet rules. Trad was again referred to the CCC for allegedly interfering in the selection of a school principal in her South Brisbane electorate.³⁴ Trad later resigned from Cabinet and lost her seat after the LNP directed preferences to the Greens.³⁵

A fifth theme was conservative disunity, particularly between its organisational wing (which allegedly leaked unflattering LNP polling data to the news media) and the parliamentary wing which had largely supported Frecklington.³⁶ Disunity was also evidenced in the party's response to Labor's *Termination of Pregnancy Bill* that, in 2018, removed abortion from the state's Criminal Code. Both major parties offered a conscience vote to easily pass the bill despite LNP President Gary Spence warning his MPs not to support the legislation. Three LNP MPs defied the president and crossed the floor, with one, Jann Stuckey, alleging victimisation. Stuckey later resigned her Currumbin seat. The fact Labor attained the first by-election swing to a Queensland government in two decades at the subsequent by-election demonstrated the damage the LNP had sustained.³⁷

THE CAMPAIGN

Governor Paul de Jersey issued election writs on 6 October. Long before that, the major parties released a significant number of policies to frame a campaign around pandemic

³² Sarah Vogler, 'Ethics Committee hits out at Katter comments'. *Courier Mail*, 5 November 2019, p. 5; Domani Cameron and Sarah Vogler, 'Sorry Premier guilty of contempt'. *Courier Mail*, 23 October 2019, p. 5.

³³ Steven Wardill, 'Jack's shack could make her a stack'. *Courier Mail*, 18 July 2019, p. 2.

³⁴ Paul D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle: Queensland, July-December, 2019'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 66 (2) 2020, pp. 339-46.

³⁵ Paul D. Williams, 'Political Chronicle: Queensland, January to June, 2019'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 65 (4) 2010, pp. 669-76.

³⁶ Paul D. Williams, 'Frecklington may follow the same path as Shorten'. *Courier Mail*, 10 June, 2020, p. 50.

³⁷ Electoral Commission of Queensland. 'Currumbin State By-election'. 2020. Accessed at: https://results1.elections.qld.gov.au/currumbin2020/currumbin_

management, economic recovery (Palaszczuk pledged she was '[k]eeping Queensland safe and keeping people in work'³⁸), major infrastructure and law and order. Labor pledged a \$50 billion 'infrastructure guarantee'; the building of a second M1 Gold Coast freeway; new police officers for youth crime hot spots; the construction of new schools and regional hospitals; mining royalty 'freezes' for LNG and coal companies; and \$145 million for renewable energy.³⁹ The LNP, in turn, promised a \$33 billion Bruce Highway upgrade between Gympie and Cairns (80 per cent of which relied upon federal funding not secured from Prime Minister Scott Morrison); a revival of the 1930s Bradfield irrigation scheme to divert northern rivers westward; the hiring of new police officers to mitigate youth crime; Galilee Basin mining projects totalling \$50 billion; the establishment of an Economic Recovery Agency; and a pledge to 'stabilise' debt.⁴⁰

The campaign's second week saw an *ABC News* website report⁴¹ Frecklington's attendance at fundraising dinners with LNP supporters alleged to have been property developers proscribed from donating under Queensland electoral law. Frecklington conceded she had attended the functions but stood by her integrity. Despite initially appearing terminally injurious to the LNP's campaign, the story soon disappeared. Other key moments included regional Labor candidates – supported by the Queensland Council of Unions – ignoring Labor's instruction to number PHON candidates last,⁴² and Clive Palmer's United Australia Party (UAP) echoing a 2019 federal election meme in alleging, without evidence, a secret Labor 'death tax'.⁴³ The campaign closed with the LNP attracting criticism – even from the usually sympathetic *Courier Mail* newspaper – for failing to reveal policy costings until the campaign's dying hours.⁴⁴ The final week underscored the role of regionalism in Queensland politics when both major party leaders visited Townsville for a fourth time.

³⁸ Annastacia Palaszczuk, 'State can't risk going backwards'. *Courier Mail*, 6 October 2020, p. 70.

³⁹ Editorial, 'The big pitch: What the parties are promising'. *Courier Mail*, 6 October 2020, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Editorial, 'Best choice to ensure state moves forward'. *Courier Mail*, 25 October 2020, p. 70.

⁴¹ Josh Robertson, 'LNP Opposition Leader Deb Frecklington campaign in crisis after being referred by own party to election watchdog'. ABC News, 13 October 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-13/lnp-crisis-as-deb-frecklington-referred-to-election-watchdog/12748400>.

⁴² Sarah Elks, 'Unions at war over freeze in wages'. *The Australian*, 9 June 2020, p. 4.

⁴³ Jessica Marszalek and Domani Cameron, 'Miles' bid to kill off death tax campaign'. *Courier Mail*, 27 October 2020, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Editorial, 'Costings blow will hurt Deb if not put to bed'. *Courier Mail*, 29 October 2020, p. 44.

PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion polls for much of the period suggested an easy victory for Labor: only on two occasions – in June⁴⁵ and July⁴⁶, 2020 – did Labor fall behind the LNP on the two party-preferred (2PP) vote. Indeed, the campaign's final *Newspoll* pegged Labor at 37 per cent primary support, with the LNP on 36 per cent, the Greens on 11 per cent, PHON on 10 per cent, and 'Others' on six per cent. After preferences, Labor led the LNP, 51.5 to 48.5 per cent.⁴⁷ That poll also revealed 56 per cent of voters preferred Palaszczuk as premier, and just 32 per cent Frecklington. Palaszczuk also boasted a 63 per cent approval rating and a 33 per cent disapproval rating for net rating of +30 points. Just 37 per cent approved of Frecklington's leadership while 44 per cent disapproved for a net rating of -7 points.

Critically, most Queenslanders also approved of Labor's management of the pandemic. A July *Newspoll* found, for example, 81 per cent of Queenslanders approving of Palaszczuk's handling of COVID-19, with 69 per cent approving in late September. Only one in five Queenslanders was dissatisfied with Palaszczuk's COVID-19 management. Moreover, a majority of Queenslanders (53 per cent) believed Palaszczuk's border restrictions were 'about right', with 37 per cent saying they were 'too strict' and just seven per cent 'too lenient'.⁴⁸ Equally important was an *Ipsos* poll that found 50 per cent of Queensland voters regarded Palaszczuk a better economic manager than Frecklington.⁴⁹ A mid-campaign *Newspoll* later found 43 per cent of voters believed Labor would be 'more effective' in job creation, with just 29 per cent of voters expressing similar confidence in the LNP.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Steven Wardill, 'A vote for change.' *Courier Mail*, 7 June 2020, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Jamie Walker, 'Popular Premier but poll party postponed'. *The Australian*, 31 July 2020, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Jessica Marszalek and Jerney Pierce, 'Divide and Conquer'. *Courier Mail*, 31 October 2020, p.1.

⁴⁸ Ellen Ransley, 'Two-thirds of Queenslanders back Annastacia Palaszczuk as state election looms'. *News.com*, 22 September 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.news.com.au/national/queensland/politics/twothirds-of-queenslanders-back-annastacia-palaszczuk-as-state-election-looms/news-story/46b9fb24eb42bf41a50719db7f132094>.

⁴⁹ Mark Ludlow, 'Poll backs Palaszczuk to manage economy'. *Australian Financial Review*, 28 October 2020, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Andrew Fraser and Jamie Walker, 'Election polls back Labor's jobs push'. *The Australian*, 19 October 2020, p. 2.

RESULTS

Table 1. 2020 Queensland State Election, by Primary & 2PP Vote and Swing (%)⁵¹

Party	Primary vote 2020	Primary swing over 2017 (+/-)	2PP vote 2020	2PP swing over 2017 (+/-)	Nom. 2020	Nom. change over 2017 (+/-)	Seats won 2020	Seats change over 2017 (+/-)
Labor	39.57	+4.14	53.2	+1.9	93	0	52	+4
LNP	35.89	+2.20	46.8	-1.9	93	0	34	-5
Greens	9.47	-0.53	-	-	93	0	2	+1
PHON	7.12	-6.60	-	-	90	+29	1	0
KAP	2.52	+0.20	-	-	13	+3	3	0
UAP	0.62	+0.62	-	-	55	+55	0	0
LCQP	0.91	+0.91	-	-	23	+23	0	0
IMOP	0.61	+0.61	-	-	31	+31	0	0
AJ	0.34	+0.34	-	-	13	+13	0	0
NQF	0.20	+0.20	-	-	5	+5	0	0
CLMP	0.18	-0.08	-	-	16	+8	0	0
SFF	0.10	+0.10	-	-	3	+3	0	0
Ind.	2.48	-2.10	-	-	597	+144	1	0

⁵¹ Source: Electoral Commission of Queensland, '2020 State General Election'. Accessed at: <https://results.elections.qld.gov.au/state2020>. NB: Nom. = Nominations; LNP = Liberal-National Party; PHON = Pauline Hanson's One Nation; KAP = Katter's Australian Party; UAP = Clive Palmer's United Australia Party; LCQP = Legalise Cannabis Queensland; IMOP = Informed Medical Options Party; AJ = Animal Justice Party; NQF = North Queensland First; CLMP = Civil Liberties & Motorists' Party.

Table One reveals Labor enjoyed a 4.14 per cent primary swing, or 1.9 per cent 2PP, and a net increase of four districts for a total of 52 seats. Labor, in winning five seats from the LNP (Bundaberg, Caloundra, Hervey Bay, Nicklin and Pumicestone), made inroads into the LNP-dominated Sunshine Coast (see below). Labor lost one seat (South Brisbane) to the Greens while the LNP recaptured Whitsunday from North Queensland First for a Legislative Assembly share of 34. While the LNP lost representation, it nonetheless increased its primary vote by 2.2 percentage points. The Greens' extra seat arrived despite a slight diminution in its overall vote, while PHON and KAP maintained their previous representation (of one and three seats respectively) despite PHON's vote almost halving, and despite PHON's significantly increased candidate field. Support for some micro-parties increased but the overall Independent vote declined; Noosa Independent MP Noosa Sandy Bolton was easily returned. Despite an estimated advertising expenditure of \$8 million,⁵² UAP recorded just 0.62 per cent of the primary vote. The informal vote was 3.4 per cent (down 0.94 points from 2017), and participation was 87.92 (up 0.39 points). This election also saw a record number of pre-poll votes cast (1.29 million, or a 74 per cent increase over 2017), and 750,000 postal votes, more than double the 2017 total.⁵³

Table 2. Labor Primary Vote and Swing (%), 2020 Queensland State Election, by Region⁵⁴

Region	Primary Vote 2020 %	Primary Vote 2017 %	Primary Swing % (+/-)
Brisbane City	42.98	41.70	+1.28
Brisbane Fringe	50.84	43.10	+7.74
Gold Coast	33.47	30.44	+3.03
Sunshine Coast	31.73	24.94	+6.79

⁵² Mackenzie Scott and Sarah Elks, 'Palmer millions count for nothing'. *The Australian*, 2 November 2020, p. 9.

⁵³ Felicity Caldwell, 'Future elections could go fully postal amid fallout from COVID-19'. *Brisbane Times*, 18 November 2020.

⁵⁴ Author's calculation from ECQ data.

Eastern Provincial	38.90	34.74	+4.16
Western Rural	27.89	23.93	+3.96

Table Two reveals Labor continued to enjoy robust support in Brisbane City and on the Brisbane Fringe. Remarkably, it also indicates Labor swings across all six regions, with movements in the Brisbane Fringe and on the Sunshine Coast the most profound. Swings to Labor in such LNP strongholds as the Gold Coast (abutting the New South Wales border) and Western Rural districts (home to voters most likely to embrace a Queensland ‘parochialism’) also offer evidence of voter ‘gratitude’ for a government implementing tight pandemic management rules.

Table 3. Labor seats won, 2017 and 2020 Queensland State elections, by Region⁵⁵

Region	Total seats in region	Seats won 2020	% region won 2020	Seats won 2017	% region won 2017	% change 2017-20
Brisbane City	21	15	71.4	16	76.2	-4.8
Brisbane Fringe	19	18	94.7	18	94.7	0
Gold Coast	11	1	9.1	1	9.1	0
Sunshine Coast	9	3	33.3	0	0	∞
Eastern Provincial	21	14	66.7	12	57.1	+9.6
Western Rural	12	1	8.3	1	8.3	0

Table Three indicates how Labor, despite an increase in primary votes in Brisbane, suffered a decline in seat share after losing South Brisbane to the Greens - a loss largely attributable to a conflict-of-interest scandal involving MP Jacqui Trad, and the LNP’s decision to preference the Greens above Labor. By contrast, the growth in Labor

⁵⁵ Author’s calculation from ECQ data.

representation on the Sunshine Coast and in Eastern Provincial seats again offers evidence of a ‘gratitude’ vote among typically ‘parochial’ voters.

Table 4. LNP Primary Vote and Swing (%), 2020 Queensland State Election, by Region⁵⁶

Region	Primary Vote 2020 %	Primary Vote 2017 %	Primary Swing % (+/-)
Brisbane City	34.24	36.37	-2.13
Brisbane Fringe	26.53	25.37	+1.16
Gold Coast	46.04	47.04	-1.00
Sunshine Coast	40.75	35.57	+5.18
Eastern Provincial	31.27	27.18	+4.09
Western Rural	46.22	37.46	+8.76

Table Four reveals the LNP made gains in the mercurial Eastern Provincial region and in its usually safe Western Rural region. It also indicates healthy LNP growth (but at a rate lower than Labor’s) in the traditionally strong LNP Sunshine Coast seats – largely at the expense of PHON and UAP. Despite a slight increase in the Brisbane Fringe, the LNP suffered a slight decline on the Gold Coast – an unexpected result given Gold Coast communities were most affected by border closures – and a larger decline in Brisbane City: a lamentable result for the party given Brisbane City electorates comprise an essential path to government. Probable causes for the LNP’s decline in Brisbane City include leader Deb Frecklington’s rural identity – Brisbane has not endorsed a rural leader since Joh Bjelke-Petersen in the 1980s – and Frecklington’s arguably ambiguous positions on COVID-19 border controls.

⁵⁶ Author’s calculation from ECQ data.

Table 5. LNP seats won, 2017 and 2020 Queensland State elections, by Region⁵⁷

Region	Total seats in region	Seats won 2020	% region won 2020	Seats won 2017	% region won 2017	% change 2017-20
Brisbane City	21	4	19.1	4	19.1	0
Brisbane Fringe	19	1	5.3	1	5.3	0
Gold Coast	11	10	90.9	10	90.9	0
Sunshine Coast	9	5	55.6	8	88.9	-33.3
Eastern Provincial	21	4	19.1	6	28.6	-9.5
Western Rural	12	10	83.3	10	83.3	0

Table Five offers evidence of how the LNP, despite a growth in primary vote in four regions, suffered reduced parliamentary representation. While the LNP saw no further losses in the Labor-dominated Brisbane and Brisbane Fringe regions – or in the safe LNP regions of the Gold Coast and Western Rural – the party lost seats in the Eastern Provincial region, and in the Sunshine Coast’s LNP heartland. Anecdotal evidence suggests the Palaszczuk Government’s tough COVID-19 management strategies – buttressed by Palaszczuk’s rhetoric appealing to Queensland parochialism⁵⁸ – enjoyed the support of retired (especially women) voters, living on the Sunshine Coast and aged over 65 years, who hitherto comprised key constituencies for the LNP, PHON and UAP.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Author’s calculation from ECQ data.

⁵⁸ Williams, ‘Queensland’s Role in the 2019 Australian Federal Election’.

⁵⁹ Andrew Fraser, ‘Pensioners’ swayed by Premier’s grit’. *The Australian*, 26 October 2020, p. 7.

Table 6. Greens Primary Vote and Swing (%), 2020 Queensland State Election, by Region⁶⁰

Region	Primary Vote 2020	Primary Vote 2017	Primary Swing (+/-)
Brisbane City	17.39	16.85	+0.54
Brisbane Fringe	7.92	8.63	-0.71
Gold Coast	8.14	10.24	-2.10
Sunshine Coast	10.09	11.47	-1.38
Eastern Provincial	5.08	5.96	-0.88
Western Rural	4.72	5.21	-0.49

Table 7. Greens seats won, 2017 and 2020 Queensland State elections, by Region⁶¹

Region	Total seats in region	Seats won 2020	% region won 2020	Seats won 2017	% region won 2017	% change 2017-20
Brisbane City	21	2	9.5	1	4.8	+4.7
Brisbane Fringe	19	0	0	0	0	0
Gold Coast	11	0	0	0	0	0
Sunshine Coast	9	0	0	0	0	0
Eastern Provincial	21	0	0	0	0	0
Western Rural	12	0	0	0	0	0

Tables Six and Seven offer paradoxical data. Despite the increasing salience of environmental issues in Queensland politics – and Labor’s expected defeat in South Brisbane – the Greens’ primary vote declined in all regions except Brisbane City. This could be attributable to the marginalization of minor parties during times of political crisis – from pandemics to war – that routinely reduce the news media coverage of non-major parties.⁶² Yet the fact the Greens doubled their state parliamentary representation, and captured the seats of Griffith (from Labor) and Brisbane and Ryan

(from the LNP) at the 2022 federal election, offer further evidence of growing Greens support in Brisbane City.

Table 8. PHON Primary Vote and Swing (%), 2020 Queensland State Election, by Region⁶³

Region	Primary Vote 2020	Primary Vote 2017	Primary Swing (+/-)
Brisbane City	2.76	3.17	-0.41
Brisbane Fringe	8.31	13.84	-5.53
Gold Coast	6.31	7.15	-1.19
Sunshine Coast	6.16	18.32	-12.16
Eastern Provincial	9.72	21.75	-12.03
Western Rural	10.10	20.83	-10.73

Table 8 reveals a decline in the vote PHON vote across all six regions, with populist support collapsing most spectacularly in three of the party's once-strong regions: the Sunshine Coast, Eastern Provincial and Western Rural. The decline in PHON vote again suggests many electors saw the 2020 poll as a 'crisis' referendum on pandemic management and, therefore, a contest between Labor and the LNP at which minor parties were marginalised. The fact PHON's collapse was especially steep also suggests most Queenslanders rejected Pauline Hanson's skepticism – and occasional hostility – toward pandemic management rules.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Author's calculation from ECQ data.

⁶¹ Author's calculation from ECQ data.

⁶² David Denemark, Ian Ward and Clive Bean, 'Election Campaigns and Television News Coverage: The Case of the 2001 Australian Election'. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42 (1) 2007, pp. 89-109.

⁶³ Author's calculation from ECQ data.

⁶⁴ Jane Hansen, 'Are these Aussies our worst Covid threat?' Courier Mail, 30 August 2020, p. 22.

Table 9. PHON seats won, 2017 and 2020 Queensland State elections, by Region⁶⁵

Region	Total seats in region	Seats won 2020	% region won 2020	Seats won 2017	% region won 2017	% change 2017-20
Brisbane City	21	0	0	0	0	0
Brisbane Fringe	19	0	0	0	0	0
Gold Coast	11	0	0	0	0	0
Sunshine Coast	9	0	0	0	0	0
Eastern Provincial	21	1	4.7	1	4.7	0
Western Rural	12	0	0	0	0	0

Table Nine suggests that, in maintaining its sole seat of Mirani in north Queensland, PHON has reached a new low plateau of representation far below its 11-seat presence attained at the 1998 Queensland election. It can be argued that the future of PHON is grim, and one resting directly on the future choices of leader Pauline Hanson who, at the expiry of her current Senate term in 2028, will be 76 years of age.

Table 10. 'Other' Primary Vote and Swing (%), 2020 Queensland State Election, by Region⁶⁶

Region	Primary Vote 2020	Primary Vote 2017	Primary Swing (+/-)
Brisbane City	2.63	1.91	+0.72
Brisbane Fringe	6.40	9.06	-2.66
Gold Coast	6.04	5.13	+0.91
Sunshine Coast	11.27	9.70	+1.57
Eastern Provincial	15.03	10.37	+4.66
Western Rural	11.07	12.57	-1.50

Table Ten reveals a growth in ‘Other’ minor and micro party and Independent support in four of the six regions. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the record number of candidates standing in this election – a tally boosted by the growth in KAP vote in Eastern Provincial, and by the appearance of such new micro parties as Legalise Cannabis, Informed Medical Options, Animal Justice, North Queensland First and the Civil Liberties & Motorists’ Party. The fact the ‘Other’ vote grew most significantly in Eastern Provincial seats – where PHON support has been historically strong – suggests an appetite remains for populist parties such as IMOP, NQF and CLMP.

Table 11. ‘Other’ seats won, 2017 and 2020 Queensland State elections, by Region⁶⁷

Region	Total seats in region	Seats won 2020	% region won 2020	Seats won 2017	% region won 2017	% change 2017-20
Brisbane City	21	0	0	0	0	0
Brisbane Fringe	19	0	0	0	0	0
Gold Coast	11	0	0	0	0	0
Sunshine Coast	9	1	4.8	1	4.8	0
Eastern Provincial	21	2	9.5	2	9.5	0
Western Rural	12	1	4.8	1	4.8	0

Table 11 reveals no change in ‘Other’ parliamentary representation despite an increased vote in four regions. KAP maintained its two seats (Hinchinbrook and Hill) in Eastern Provincial and its sole Western Rural seat (Traeger) in the Western Rural region. Independent Sandy Bolton (Noosa) was easily re-elected.

⁶⁵ Author’s calculation from ECQ data.

⁶⁶ Author’s calculation from ECQ data. Other’ includes Katter’s Australian Party; Clive Palmer’s United Australia Party; Legalise Cannabis Queensland; Informed Medical Options Party; Animal Justice; North Queensland First; Civil Liberties & Motorists’ Party; and non-aligned Independents.

⁶⁷ Author’s calculation from ECQ data.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Queensland voters at the 2020 election, like the 2017 election, behaved as at least six distinct constituencies. The evidence presented demonstrates that no party enjoyed identical support across all six regions; all parties saw wide variations in both primary vote and seat share. Moreover, the levels of support each party received in 2020 varied considerably from 2017, suggesting that electoral support in Queensland is neither geographically nor temporally fixed. This was demonstrated most clearly in 2020 in Labor's capture of three seats on the Sunshine Coast. Anecdotally, Labor's increased vote on the Sunshine Coast appeared to come from conservative voters, aged over 65 years, grateful to Labor for safe pandemic management. The article concludes with a recommendation to test this hypothesis in future research.