

THE CONVERSATION

Palmer misses the party as PUPs struggle to be heard in Queensland

January 19, 2015 6.20am AEDT

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Palmer United Party founder Clive Palmer had to miss the Queensland election launch, leaving it to state leader John Bjelke-Petersen – backed by senators Glenn Lazarus and Dio Wang – to make the pitch to voters. AAP/Jamie McKinnell

It's been a surprisingly muted campaign from the Palmer United Party (PUP) ahead of Queensland's January 31 poll – and on Sunday, the man who started it all couldn't even make it to his own party.

At the 2013 federal election, you could hardly turn on your TV, go to your letterbox or drive up a major highway in southeast Queensland without seeing Clive Palmer's beaming face on a bright yellow background.

Only a year-and-a-half later, Palmer and his PUPs have been largely missing in action in the snap Queensland election, while the Liberal National government and Labor opposition have run prominent primetime broadcast, print and social media campaigns.

Just like the federal campaign launch, PUP's Queensland election launch was held at the Palmer Coolum Resort on the Sunshine Coast. But unlike in 2013, when party founder Palmer made a dramatic entrance to the soundtrack of Eye of the Tiger, this time he made

headlines for being a “no-show” with the flu.

Instead, it was left to John Bjelke-Petersen – who was only appointed as the new state party leader several weeks ago and who is best known as the son of long-serving Queensland Premier Sir Joh – to pledge to abolish Queensland’s payroll tax and stop coal seam gas exploration until the water table is secured.



Clive Palmer poses with Jeff the dinosaur at his Cooloolan resort in 2012. AAP/Dave Hunt



Palmer United Party ✓
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Our fantastic candidates for the Qld election at today's campaign launch #qldvotes @JohnBjelkePUP @CliveFPalmer

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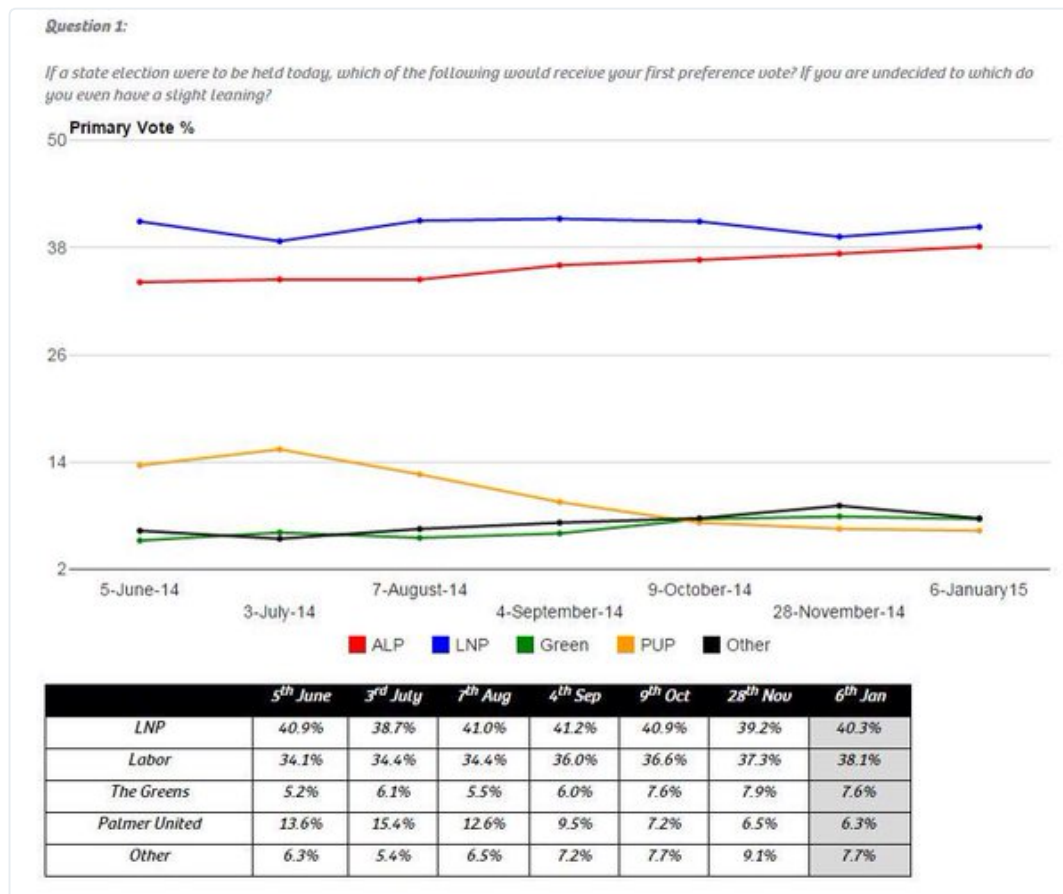
PUP's prospects

Polling currently suggests that PUP will struggle to win any seats in the next state parliament.

Only days after the early election was called, Queensland’s Courier-Mail newspaper reported a Galaxy poll showed PUP support falling from 12% of voters surveyed in August 2014 to just 3% this month. The newspaper’s state political editor, Steven Wardill, declared:

The Palmer United Party's first Queensland election is now over before it officially began.

Other polling for Seven News Brisbane found the party's support had dropped from 15% in July last year to 6% this month.



Peter Doherty 
@PeterDoherty7

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Graph tracking party support since June for @7NewsBrisbane. Support slump for PUP #qldpol #qldvotes

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But when asked last week what had gone wrong in Queensland, Palmer replied:

Absolutely nothing. Our support's increased in Queensland ... I think we'll achieve the balance of power in Queensland and stand as the last centurion of the gates to protect the sale of our schools and hospitals.

From the main stage to a sideshow

For Palmer, this state election is personal. Even though he's not standing for election, the former LNP lifetime member had a spectacular falling out with the Newman government after its election in March 2012, sparking his decision to form his own political party in April 2013.

In the lead-up to the 2013 federal election, Palmer wasn't shy about setting his sights high.

Offering himself as “the next prime minister of Australia”, Palmer declared in his TV ads and speeches: “Don’t you know, we’re talking about a revolution.” The leader of the new Palmer United Party was everywhere, blanketing not only Queensland but many other electorates nationwide with ads promising tax cuts and a better deal for pensioners.

Although he didn’t make it to the Lodge, in the 2013 election Palmer was elected in the lower house electorate of Fairfax on the Sunshine Coast, together with three PUP senators from Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania.



Palmer celebrates at the Liberal National Party’s election-night party in March 2012. AAP/Dave Hunt

At the time, a significant number of Australians were attracted to the maverick value of the Palmer brand. Here was someone, a former insider, set to give the major parties a shake-up.

Since then, the PUP’s parliamentary performances have suggested a party still finding its feet, its organisation dominated by its leader’s personality.

Federally, Palmer has imposed himself far more than most first-time MPs, working with his senators to broker crucial deals on issues like the carbon tax repeal. But more recently, the resignation of one of his three senators, Tasmanian Jacqui Lambie, and the chairing of a Senate inquiry into the Queensland government (which got off to a shaky start) haven’t helped Palmer’s cause.

In state politics, the party has a similarly mixed record.

Within the Queensland parliament, two government MPs (Alex Douglas from Gaven and Carl Judge from Yeerongpilly) quit the LNP to join the PUP – only to both resign from the PUP last year.

Douglas accused the party of a “jobs for the boys” culture, while Judge said he felt the fledgling party was better off focusing on federal issues.

Like Queensland, in the Northern Territory there has been interest in the PUP brand among restless members of the Legislative Assembly. But all three members who defected to PUP have since left the party to return to the Country Liberal Party or to sit on the crossbench.

And at the most recent state election before this Queensland campaign – Victoria’s poll last November – PUP candidates garnered a mere 1.95% of the votes for the upper house and failed to win a seat.

Who else might Queensland’s protest voters support?

Overall Upper House results

Party	First Pref Votes counted	% First Pref Votes counted	Seats won
ANIMAL JUSTICE PARTY	5823	11.70%	0
AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIANS	3018	11.02%	0
AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY ALLIANCE	2319	9.88%	0
AUSTRALIAN CYCLISTS PARTY	2099	9.81%	0
AUSTRALIAN GREENS	36792	10.71%	5
AUSTRALIAN LABOUR PARTY	114274	35.48%	14
DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY (DLP)	7928	2.32%	1
FAMILY FIRST	6242	1.82%	0
LIBERAL	71148	20.82%	10
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS	16810	5.08%	0
LIBERAL/THE NATIONALS	52810	15.32%	6
PALMER UNITED PARTY	68874	19.95%	0
PEOPLE POWER VICTORIANO SMART METERS	1202	0.36%	0
RISE UP AUSTRALIA PARTY	17610	5.2%	0
SEA PARTY	8837	2.62%	1
SHOOTERS AND FISHERS PARTY VICTORIA	9827	2.88%	2
THE BANGS ROCK 'N' ROLL PARTY	6340	1.88%	0
VOICE FOR THE WEST	11984	3.52%	0
VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA PARTY VICTORIANO	16789	4.9%	0
VOTE 1 LOCAL JOBS	7158	2.1%	1
Other Candidates	4873	1.4%	0
Total	343086	100%	40

The 2014 election results for Victoria’s upper house.

Victorian Electoral Commission

Queensland is famous for producing political mavericks and eponymous political parties.

This election, Pauline Hanson is also back for **another go**, in the seat of Lockyer.

In 2011, federal member Bob Katter has lent his name to a party aiming to capture some of the seats in the north of the state. Katter's Australian Party (KAP) holds three of the 89 state seats, but its support has slipped since the 2012 election and pollsters have tipped the KAP may hang on to only two of those.

What about the Greens? I'd have to agree with **Adrian Beaumont**, who's noted elsewhere on The Conversation that:

Queensland has never been a great state for the Greens, and on current polling they will probably do worse than their 7.5% at the 2012 election.

Queenslanders like their independents and a number are tipped to either hold or win their seats, including Peter Wellington in Nicklin, Chris Foley in Maryborough and Julie Boyd in Mackay.

Wellington, Foley and the KAP's Robbie Katter and Shane Knuth have already held talks about an "informal coalition" to block asset leases and wind back bikie laws – two of the LNP government's signature policies.

After January 31, there's a good chance Clive Palmer will continue to use his federal platform to niggle his LNP nemesis in Queensland. But it is looking less and less likely there will be a PUP member on board what promises to be a colourful state crossbench.



Bob Katter

Clive Palmer

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