

RESEARCH REPORT 25: POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY QUEENSLAND¹

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The Queensland election of January 2015 may well have signalled a shift in voter attitudes to leadership, in a state long-known for its embrace of the political strong man. In this paper I consider the question of leadership in contemporary Queensland by weaving together three strands: the history of political leadership in this state; some data from the Vote Compass-Queensland project; and a perspective from political marketing.

Queensland has a long tradition of strong, authoritarian, and populist leaders.³ This pattern of 'Premier-Presidents'⁴ evolved to deal with the frontier-like conditions and shifting political allegiances which prevailed in colonial times.⁵ The pattern took hold in a state which became characterised by cultural isolation, low levels of education, a uni-cameral parliament, and a political culture more accepting of authoritarian leaders than other states⁶ Over the past half century, Queensland has produced strong, authoritarian, and populist leaders like Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Wayne Goss, Peter Beattie, and Campbell Newman.

Premier Newman fitted perfectly into this tradition. He traded on the 'Can Do' image that he had cultivated from the time he ran for Brisbane Lord Mayor in 2004. He loved the word 'strong' – offering a strong team, strong policies, and *Strong Choices* - sometimes to

¹ This paper has been adapted from a presentation that was delivered as part of a post-election panel held by the Australasian Study of Parliament Group-Queensland Chapter, on 25 March, 2015.

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³ Williams, Paul D. 2009. 'Leaders and Political Culture: The Development of the Queensland Premiership, 1859–2009'. *Queensland Review* 16(1): 15-34. p.16; and Reynolds, Paul 2007. 'The Politics of Queensland 1980-2007'. Unpublished manuscript. St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland, p.7.

⁴ Wear, Rae. 2007. 'Queensland Premiers'. In *The Oxford Companion to Australian Politics*, eds. B. Galligan and W. Roberts. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Williams 2009. op cit p17; and Wear 2007. op cit.

⁶ Bean, Clive. 1993. 'Conservative Cynicism: Political Culture In Australia. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 5(1): 58-77. p74; McQueen, Humphrey. 1979. States of the Nation: Queensland - a State of Mind'. *Meanjin* 38(1): 41-51. p.43; Reynolds 2007. op cit, p7; and Williams 2009. op cit, p.17.

the point of media ridicule in the 2015 election campaign.⁷ He seemed to revel in tough decisions, provoked confrontations with multiple interest groups and was dismissive of critics. During the campaign, he became a pork-barrelling populist, throwing around a lot of money, especially in his own electorate of Ashgrove which was offered more than \$18 million in election promises.⁸

But a funny thing happened on the way to the poll – voters turned against the strong man. This begs the question of what happened to the Queensland tradition of supporting a strong leader. Data from the Vote Compass-Queensland project tells part of the story. Vote Compass was an online survey which ran in conjunction with the election campaign, and which asked questions related to party policies and leaders. The questions were based on research and advice provided by a panel which involved University of Queensland scholars, including Professor Peter Spearritt, Dr Chris Salisbury, Dr Alastair Stark, Simon Kelly and Lorann Downer. The survey was hosted by the ABC and was taken by around 150,000 people prior to the election.

One of the Vote Compass questions asked about the competence of the major party leaders. Figure 1 shows the results across all those who took the survey.⁹ Labor leader Annastacia Palaszczuk was placed just ahead of Campbell Newman, on 4.2 out of 10 compared to 4.1.

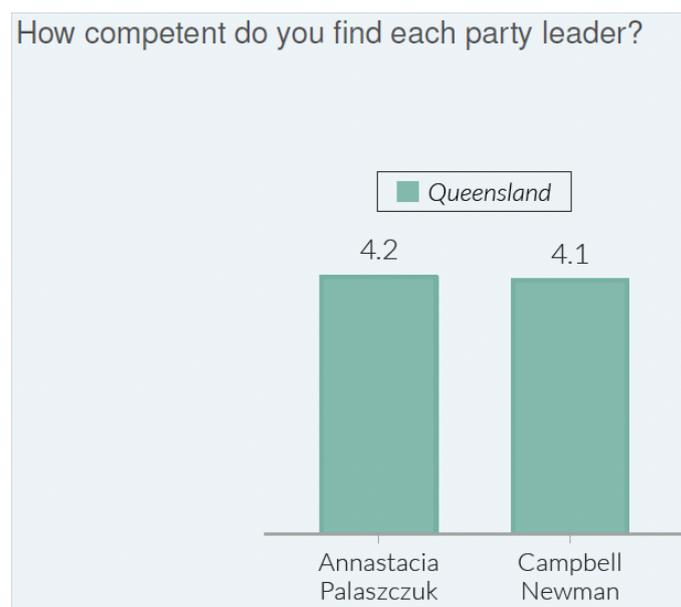


Figure 1. Results from Vox Pops Lab report on Vote Compass-Queensland on the question of the competence of the major party leaders, across all respondents.

⁷ Remeikis, Amy. 2015. 'Queensland election: Campbell Newman tight-lipped on anything but strong plan'. *Brisbane Times* 26 January. Accessed 20 March 2015. Available at <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/queensland-state-election-2015/queensland-election-campbell-newman-tightlipped-on-anything-but-strong-plan-20150126-12y9eg.html>

⁸ Remeikis, Amy. 2015. 'Campbell Newman refuses to discuss Ashgrove pork barrelling claims'. *Brisbane Times* 27 January. Accessed 20 March 2015. Available at <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/queensland-state-election-2015/campbell-newman-refuses-to-discuss-asghrove-pork-barrelling-claims-20150126-12ykap.html>

⁹ Vox Pop Labs. 2015. 'Vote Compass results: Attitudes toward the two major party leaders'. Unpublished report. 27 January. p.6.

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of responses across self-identified supporters of different parties.¹⁰ LNP supporters scored Newman at 7.3 out of 10 for competence, while Labor supporters scored Palaszczuk at 6.5, a marked difference. However, in the scores for each leader from supporters of other parties, Palaszczuk scored better with every group except Katter’s Australian Party voters, where she just trailed Newman. Overall, the leaders scored almost evenly on competence.

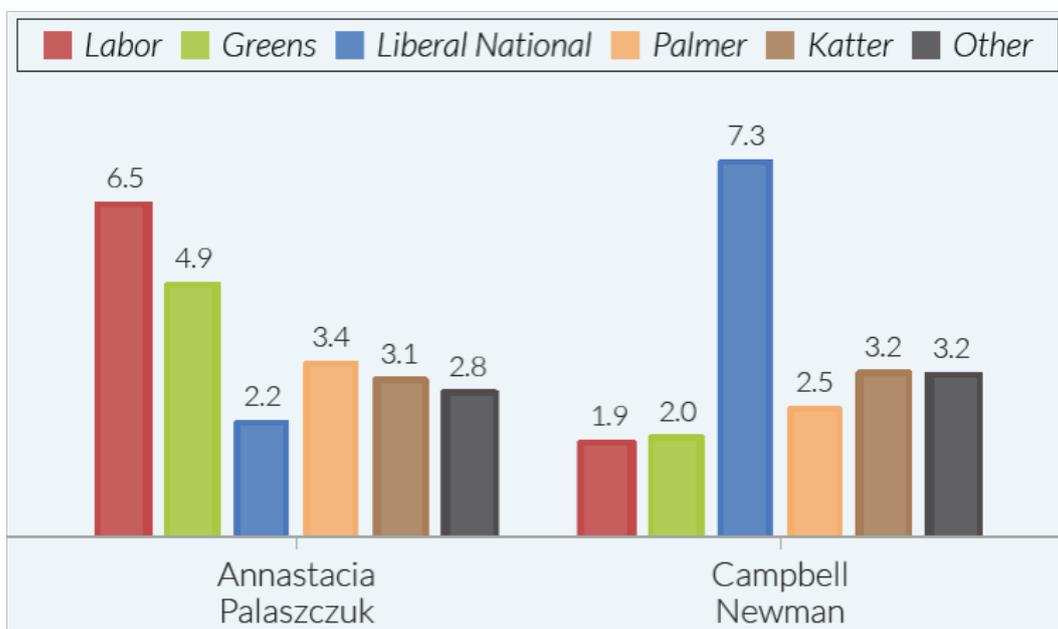


Figure 2. Results from Vox Pops Lab report on Vote Compass-Queensland on the question of the competence of the major party leaders, across self-identified supporters of different parties

¹⁰ Vox Pop Labs. 2015. *ibid.*

Another Vote Compass question asked people how much they trusted each major party leader. Figure 3 shows the results across voters as a whole¹¹.

Palaszczuk was well ahead of Newman, on 4.4 out of 10 compared to 3.2.

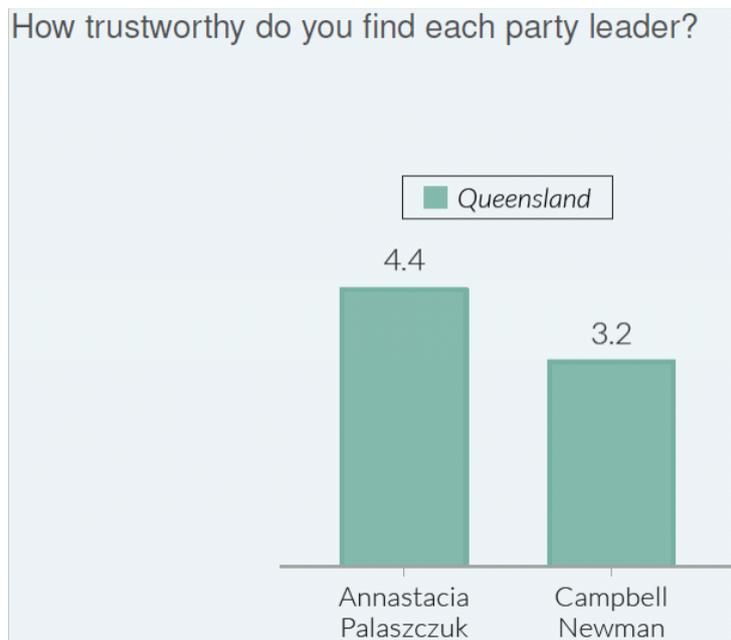


Figure 3. Results from Vox Pops Lab report on Vote Compass-Queensland on the question of the trustworthiness of the major party leaders, across all respondents

¹¹ Vox Pop Labs. 2015. 'Vote Compass results: Attitudes toward the two major party leaders'. Unpublished report. 27 January. p.1.

Figure 4 shows the breakdown across self-identified supporters of different parties.¹²

Here, too, Palaszczuk was well ahead. She received a score of 6.9 out of 10 from Labor supporters, while Newman received 6.5 from LNP supporters.

In the scores for each leader from supporters of other parties, Palaszczuk scored quite well with Greens voters on 5.1, and also reasonably well with Palmer United Party voters on 3.5 and Katter's Australian Party supporters on 3.1.

Newman's scores, however, are much lower among supporters of all parties other than his own. The highest score he gets is 2.2 from supporters of Katter's Australian Party and Others. Overall, Palaszczuk performed much better than Newman on the question of trust.

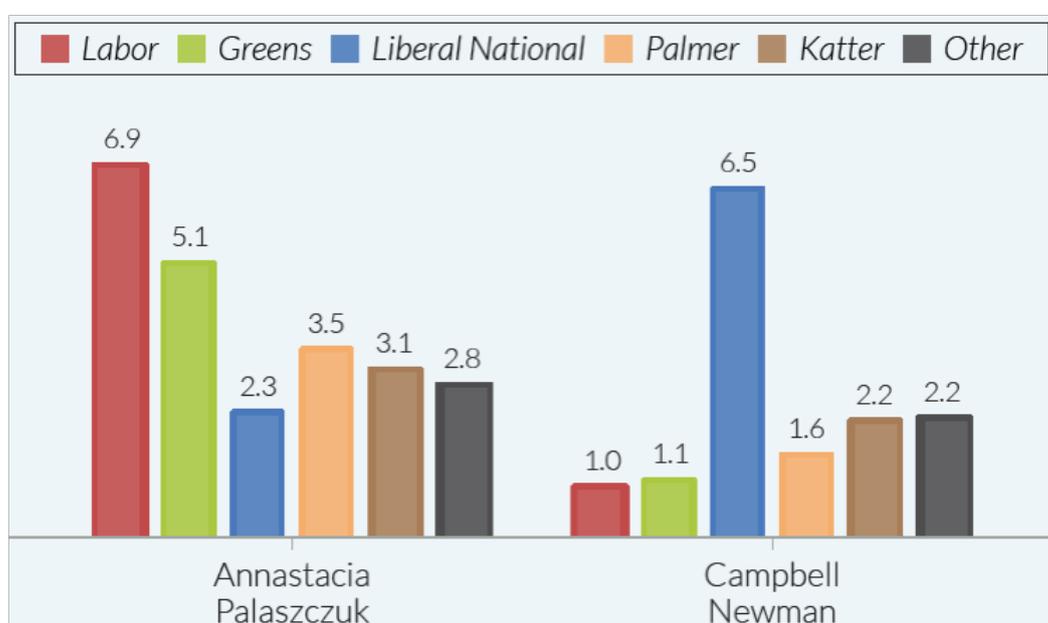


Figure 4. Results from Vox Pops Lab report on Vote Compass-Queensland on the question of the trustworthiness of the major party leaders, across self-identified supporters of different parties

¹² Vox Pop Labs. 2015. *ibid.*

These results are important, from a political marketing perspective. Political marketing argues that a political offering - a candidate, party or policy¹³ - can have functional and emotional appeal.¹⁴

Functional means practical or tangible¹⁵, and functional appeal includes things like being seen as competent in government.¹⁶

Emotional means symbolic or intangible¹⁷, and emotional appeal includes things like being seen as trustworthy.¹⁸

Further, political marketing argues that a political offering *should* have both functional and emotional appeal¹⁹, for two reasons. Consumers in a political market respond as they do in a commercial market; they respond emotionally, sub-consciously, first and then look for a rational, conscious explanation for their choice. As well, consumers can develop deep, emotional connections with political products and brands as they do with commercial products and brands.²⁰ The mistake that Newman made in the 2015 campaign, and arguably throughout his term in office, was that he was functional only. He was the strong, authoritarian, populist Premier-President. He ignored 'the human cost of so-called reform'.²¹ In contrast, Palaszczuk offered emotion as well as functionality. Her chief functional offering was a promise not to sell or lease state-owned assets. Her emotional offerings included presenting as approachable, consultative and authentic.

With their responses to the Vote Compass survey and their choices on polling day, Queensland voters seemed to be indicating a preference for a more nuanced, more emotionally-attuned leadership than was offered during the premiership of Campbell Newman. Voters have some experience of such leadership from some previous Premiers, including Beattie and his successor, Anna Bligh, both of whom were rewarded at the ballot box. The contemporary Queensland political leader, I suggest, needs to be able to meld both the functional and the emotional to present an attractive offering to voters.

¹³ Cosgrove, Kenneth. M. 2014. 'Political branding in the modern age: Effective strategies, tools and techniques'. In *Routledge Handbook of Political Marketing, Special edition*, ed. Jennifer Lees-Marshment. Oxon: Routledge. p107.

¹⁴ Scammell, Margaret. 2007. 'Political Brands and Consumer Citizens: The Rebranding of Tony Blair'. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611(May): 176-192. p.187; White, Jon and Leslie de Chernatony. 2002. 'New Labour: A Study of the Creation, Development and Demise of a Political Brand'. *Journal of Political Marketing* 1(2): 45-52. p.48.

¹⁵ Keller, Kevin Lane. 2008. *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity*, 3rd ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc. p.2.

¹⁶ Scammell 2007. op cit.

¹⁷ Keller 2008. op cit.

¹⁸ Scammell 2007. op cit; White and de Chernatony. 2002. op cit.

¹⁹ Scammell 2007. op cit.

²⁰ Burkitt, Catherine. 2002. 'Are You Less "Emotionally Intelligent" Than Blair? And, if so, Why Should You Care?'. Paper presented at the Political Studies Association Conference, Aberdeen. p.5.

²¹ Bahnisch, Mark. 2015. 'Queensland rejected hubris and unrestrained power when it rejected Campbell Newman'. *The Guardian*. 2 February. Accessed 20 March. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/02/queensland-rejected-hubris-and-unrestrained-power-when-it-rejected-campbell-newman>