

The Stafford by-election

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Labor has high expectations of bridging the 7.1 percent margin needed to reclaim the seat of Stafford which it lost to the LNP in the 2012 general election amidst a high tide of anti-Labor sentiment which swept the Bligh government from office.

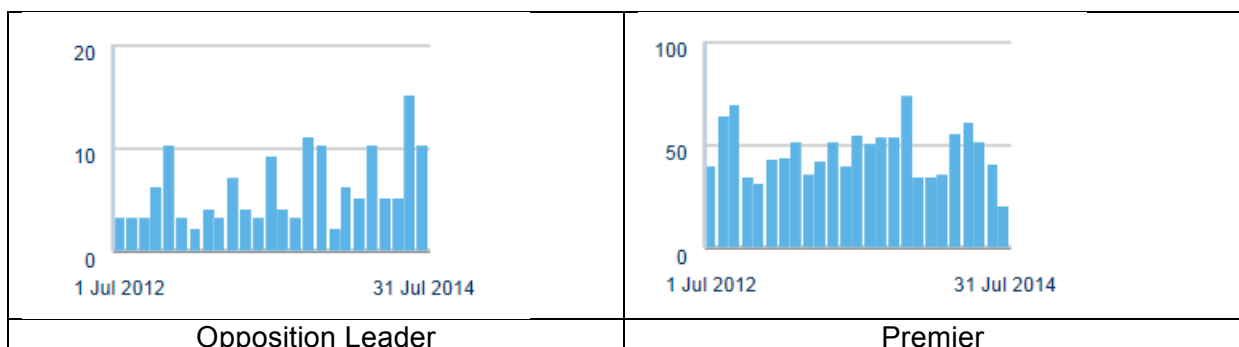
The Stafford by-election follows in the wake of the 2013 Redcliffe by-election at which Labor secured a [17.2 percent swing](#) to regather a seat it had lost in 2012 (by a 10.1% margin). Since the Redcliffe poll the Newman government has continued to slide in the polls.

Both the LNP and Labor will understand that the Stafford election will set the pattern for the run up to the 2015 general election, now less than a year away. Indeed the Opposition Leader has painted the Stafford by election as a [“test of Campbell Newman’s leadership.”](#)

In reality, though, Stafford is just as much a test for the Opposition Leader who has been substantially invisible since 2012. To be fair Anastacia Palaszczuk inherited an ALP with even fewer seats than Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party did in 1998. Ms Palaszczuk faced—and still faces—a huge challenge to restore the Queensland ALP as a credible political force.

If you search the *Courier Mail* using the keywords “Anastacia Palaszczuk” and “Campbell Newman” the task facing the Opposition Leader is abundantly clear. In this age of *Twitter* and *Facebook* parties have a variety of ways of communicating with voters but the traditional media, and the *Courier Mail* in particular, remain especially important.

My quick search of the *Factiva* data base shows that for the last two years the Opposition Leader has struggled to average a mention a week in the *Courier Mail*. Each bar in the graphs below represents the number of mentions each leader achieved in the course of month. The Premier (as is to be expected) is much more frequently mentioned.



Not all the publicity the Premier secures is favourable. But his personal “brand” is well established. Ms Palaszczuk is much more an unknown quantity. Witness the [Newspoll](#)

published by the Australian at the end of June. It revealed that more than a quarter of Queenslanders (28%) were unable to say one way or another whether the Opposition Leader was doing a good job.

The latest [Galaxy poll published by the Courier Mail](#) explores the voting intentions of electors in the seats of Gaven, Hervey Bay, Maroochydore and Pumicestone. With the ALP being substantially invisible and Clive Palmer commanding the headlines, many of the voters who have grown disillusioned with the Newman government are drifting toward the Palmer United Party.

Palmer at least has a story to tell. Labor doesn't. It has a parliamentary leader who has failed to 'cut through'. More than this, it has little more than a netball team of MPs and — visibly under resourced in this way—has been unable to develop a coherent alternative set of policies. Presently the ALP lacks both a story teller and a convincing story to tell voters in 2015.

The Stafford election result will not be a forerunner of next year's state elections. There is no PUP in the kennel: the Palmer United Party is not running a candidate. In 2015 it will in seats across Queensland. This time the optional preferential system of voting introduced in 1992 by the Goss government with an eye to securing an electoral benefit for the ALP will work to the advantage of the LNP. Labor won't gain any advantage where dissident voters who switch to PUP 'just vote one'.

Government's traditionally do poorly in by-elections. If it wins Stafford back, Labor should take no comfort from victory. It has much work to do to be electorally competitive in 2015. It faces a major challenge with emergence of PUP as an alternative destination for voters whom the Newman government has disappointed.

Unlike Ms Palaszczuk, Palmer is universally known. His 'brand name' has given PUP a solid platform from which to make a pitch for disaffected voters. The Labor leader needs to find a way of reaching those one in four Queenslanders who don't yet know her well enough to say whether or not she is doing a good job.

Otherwise Queensland will face a further period of government without an effective Opposition which is no one's interest.

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