

# Localism, Diversity and Volatility: The 2016 Australian Federal Election and the 'Rise' of Populism\*

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## Abstract

The outcome of a series of recent international electoral events has revised interest in the impact of populism on the politics of liberal-democratic states. Australia is just such an example of this given the return of candidates from the One Nation Party at the 2016 general election. This paper analyses the result of this election in order to dispute claims that the One Nation performance is part of this international trend. Rather, the paper argues that the electoral performance of populist parties of all types in Australia was actually quite weak and confined to specific geographic regions within the national electorate. It also finds that populist representational success owed more to the vagaries of Australia's electoral system than to amassing any particularly significant support within the national electorate.

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent election results in the United States and Europe have revived interest in the impact of populism on the voting choices of electors in late industrial liberal democratic states—including Australia. The success of Donald Trump as the Republican Party candidate for the United States presidential election, the emergence of Marine Le Pen as one of the two candidates in the French presidential run-off, and the success of the 'Brexit' campaign in the British referendum on that country's future in the European Union have all been cited as manifestations of a resurgent

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'populism'.<sup>1</sup> Populism is understood in this context as a voter reaction against what is perceived as the main features of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, including veneration of economic liberalisation, advocacy of the importance of the global transfer of humanitarian values as well as humans themselves, and of the importance of tolerance when dealing with social and humanitarian minorities.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, populism has been characterised as the advocacy of a return to protectionism in a bid to defend local employment, the call for a reduction in rates of immigration, and the articulation of a rather narrow and jingoistic approach to national identity based on view that that identity is under threat from external cultural and/or geostrategic threats.<sup>3</sup>

Australia's political commentary community has often sought to conflate these international developments with local events to demonstrate the relevance of populism to this nation's politics.<sup>4</sup> One such local event has been the return of Pauline Hanson and the political party that bears her name, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, to the national parliament as a Senator and leader of other Senators elected

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<sup>1</sup> A. Nossiter, 'Marine Le Pen Echoes Trump's Bleak Populism in French Campaign Kickoff', *New York Times* 5 February 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/05/world/europe/marine-le-pen-trump-populism-france-election.html>; P. McPhee, 'After Brexit and Trump, France is the Next Big Test for Populism', *Sydney Morning Herald* 20 April 2017.

<sup>2</sup> P.A. Taggart, *The New Populism and the New Politics: New Protest Parties in Sweden in a Comparative Perspective*, London, Macmillan Press, 1996: 34; A. Mughan, C. Bean and I. McAllister, 'Economic Globalization, Job Insecurity and the Populist Reaction', *Electoral Studies*, 22(4) 2003: 619-620; C. Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39 (4) 2004: 544-545.

<sup>3</sup> H.G. Betz and S. Immerfall (eds.), *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1998: 4; H.G. Betz, 'Conditions Favouring the Success and Failure of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies', in Y. Mény and Y. Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002: 198-199; A. Zaslove, 'Here to Stay? Populism as a New Party Type', *European Review* 16(3) 2008: 327; P. Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*, New York, Routledge, 2008: 11; M. Krzyzanowski, 'From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: Continuities and Shifts in Recent Discourses and Patterns of Political Communication and the Freedom Party of Austria', in R. Wodak, M. Khosravi-Nik B. Mral (eds.), *Right-Wing Populism in Europe*, Sydney, Bloomsbury, 2013: 142.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Senate Results: New South Wales, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/federal-election-2013/results/senate/nsw/>; P. Hartcher, 'The Twin Threats Facing Malcolm Turnbull: Donald Trump and Pauline Hanson', *Sydney Morning Herald* 4 February 2017; R. Kurland, *Rogue Nation: Dispatches from Australia's Populist Uprisings and Outsider Politics*, Sydney, Hachette, 2017.

under the One Nation rubric at the 2016 Federal Election.<sup>5</sup> Hanson's first foray into Australian national politics occurred in 1996 when, as a candidate endorsed by the Liberal Party of Australia to contest the previously safe Labor federal electoral division of Oxley, her comments criticising the alleged racial imbalance of national welfare policy in favour of Australia's indigenous community caused party leader, John Howard, acute embarrassment.<sup>6</sup> Hanson's Liberal endorsement was withdrawn as a result, but Hanson still managed to win the seat. Sitting as an independent MP in the House of Representatives, Hanson was able to use the parliament as a platform to attack indigenous affairs policy, the rate of Asian immigration to Australia, and the principles of 'multi-culturalism'. She also worked to put a party organisation together in anticipation of being able to contest future state and federal elections.<sup>7</sup>

Hanson's actions precipitated enormous media attention (not to mention furious protest reaction particularly from Australia's radical left), but by 1998 both she and her party achieved very limited electoral success. After a stellar performance in the Queensland state election where it secured 11 seats, the One Nation Party soon imploded with the entire state parliamentary wing of the party resigning *en masse* to create a new organisation, the Country City Alliance.<sup>8</sup> In the 1998 Federal Election held soon after, Hanson failed in her bid to win the lower house division of Blair, and the party's sole success was the securing of a Senate position in Queensland.<sup>9</sup> Hanson then left her party, spent some time in gaol for alleged electoral fraud (a conviction later overturned on appeal), became a minor television personality and something of an habitual candidate in state and federal elections. These campaigns did not result in her being returned to the national parliament, although the effect of her candidature on the non-Labor vote in the Senate contest for Queensland in 2004 helped the

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<sup>5</sup> B. Winsor, 'Trump, Hanson and Brexit: The Real Reason it's Happening Now', In The Feed, Special Broadcasting Service, 16 November 2016. Accessed at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/thefeed/article/2016/11/16/trump-hanson-and-brexit-real-reason-its-happening-now>; E. Tamkin, 'Australia Greeted 25 Recession-Free Years with Rising Populism', *Foreign Policy* 1 March 2017. Accessed at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/01/australia-greets-25-recession-free-years-with-rising-populism/>

<sup>6</sup> M. Gordon, 'A Martyr to the End', *The Age* 23 August 2003; see also Rodney Smith, *Against the Machines: Minor Parties and Independents in New South Wales, 1910-2006*, Sydney, Federation Press, 2006: 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates. Canberra: House of Representatives: 1996: 3862.

<sup>8</sup> Z. Ghazarian, *The Making of a Party System: Minor Parties in the Australian Senate*, Melbourne, Monash University Publishing, 2015: 135.

<sup>9</sup> M. Kingston, *Off the Rails: The Pauline Hanson Trip*, Crows Nest, Allen and Unwin, 2001: x.

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Liberal and National parties secure a rare Senate majority, and Hanson herself nearly won a Senate seat in the New South Wales contest in 2013.<sup>10</sup>

By 2016, however, Hanson had returned to the One Nation Party that then contested the national election held in that year with some success. Hanson was re-elected to the national parliament, this time as a Senator from Queensland, and her ticket's vote was large enough to secure a second seat.<sup>11</sup> One Nation was also successful in the Senate contests in Western Australia and New South Wales, and fell less than 200 preferences short of defeating the Greens for the final position available in the Senate election for Tasmania.<sup>12</sup> In total, Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party secured four Senate seats—one more than the next largest party on the Senate cross-bench, the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT). Given the importance of the Senate to the legislative process in Australia, One Nation has since figured as a significant part of the upper house cross-bench with whom the Liberal-National coalition government must negotiate. With its four Senators and a media ready to obsess about its leader, One Nation gives the impression of being the focal point of a surge in Australian populism commensurate with similar instances of populist politics in other liberal democratic states.

This article seeks to analyse the electoral basis upon which the impression of One Nation's leadership of Australian populism is based. It finds that, in reality, the electoral foundation for the resurgence of Hanson and One Nation was based on a comparatively small vote share that is regionally specific to a very narrow part of the Australian community, and that the party's ability to secure so many Senate seats was due in no small way to the fact that the 2016 contest was a full Senate election. Indeed, when the 2016 Senate result is considered, it becomes clear that Hanson and her party do not have a monopoly over Australian populism, but in fact have to share this segment of the electorate with some other parties (and their prominent leading candidates) that have a similarly narrow electoral base either in terms of their very small share of the vote, and/or the regional specificity of their appeal. As it turns out,

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<sup>10</sup> N. Economou, 'A right-of-centre triumph: The 2004 Australian half-Senate election', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 41(4) 2006: 501-516; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Senate Results: New South Wales, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, 2016 Federal Election Results. Accessed at: [http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Federal\\_Elections/2016/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Federal_Elections/2016/index.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Australian Electoral Commission, 2016 Federal Election Results.

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Australia's populist parties pose a minor threat to the direct contest for executive power. Their very small share of electoral support might make them competitive in Senate contests, but they cannot be competitive in contests for the single member electoral districts that return representatives to the House of Representatives – the parliamentary chamber that decides which party or parties shall form a government. Moreover, Australia's populist parties lack organisational discipline and have proven incapable of suffering from internal dysfunction and/or an inability to survive beyond one or two turns of the electoral cycle.

### IDENTIFYING 'POPULIST' PARTIES

There has been much discussion in recent years about the characteristics of populist candidates.<sup>13</sup> As Betz has argued, providing a concise and universally accepted definition of populist politics is difficult, especially as populism could be associated with candidates from the right or left of the political spectrum.<sup>14</sup> In Europe, for example, populism has often been associated with candidates from the right who have opposed immigration and cosmopolitanism while in other polities, such as South America, populism has been a feature of candidates from the left who have sought to oppose neoliberalism.<sup>15</sup> There are, however, three distinctive characteristics of populism that are apparent across the political spectrum and are also observable in the Australian minor parties examined here.

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<sup>13</sup> L. Helms, 'Right-Wing Populist Parties in Austria and Switzerland: A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Support and Conditions of Success', *West European Politics* 20(2) 1997: 37-52; W. van der Brug and A. Mughan, 'Charisma, Leader Effects and Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties', *Party Politics* 13(1) 2007: 29-51; .S. Bowler, D. Denmark, T. Donovan and D. McDonnell, 'Right-Wing Populist Party Supporters: Dissatisfied but not Direct Democrats', *European Journal of Political Research* 56(1) 2017: 70-91.

<sup>14</sup> Betz, 'Conditions Favouring the Success and Failure': 4; see also C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*: 2; see also C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo and P. Ostiguy, 'Populism: An overview of the Concept and the State of the Art', in C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo and P. Ostiguy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017; K. Burgess and S. Levitsky, 'Explaining Populist Party Adaptation in Latin America: Environmental and Organizational Determinants of Party Change in Argentina, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela', *Comparative Political Studies* 36(8) 2003: 881-911; S. Levitsky and K.M. Roberts (eds.), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

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First, populism is confrontational.<sup>16</sup> Populists most commonly argue that they represent ‘the common people’ who had been consistently ignored by the political establishment.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, populist candidates sought to manufacture a sense of division in society by arguing that the policy demands of the ‘ordinary people’ were being overlooked by the powerful elites.<sup>18</sup> According to populist candidates, these elites had ‘lost touch’ with ordinary citizens and were not capable, or interested, in addressing the policy concerns of ordinary people.<sup>19</sup> Established parties were often seen to be pursuing policies that were at odds with the interests of the broader population. It was the populist’s goal, therefore, to advance the interests of ordinary citizens who were ‘pure’ and ‘innocent’ while countering the influence of the elites who were ‘corrupt’ and did not work as hard, ‘other than to further their self-interest’.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the leadership approach of populist candidates is also distinctive as they seek to present themselves as qualitatively different to leaders of established parties. They position themselves as champions for the ordinary citizen and, unlike those from established political parties, populists make a virtue of displaying ‘bad manners’ in their leadership performances.<sup>21</sup> Appearing to be suspicious about state institutions, corporations and other established political actors is part of the performance repertoire of populists as is the promise they will change the status quo if elected to parliament.<sup>22</sup> While populist leaders may not necessarily be charismatic in the traditional sense (such as by being strong oratorical performers), they garner the public’s attention by railing against the norms advanced by established parties in the pursuit of advancing the interests of ‘ordinary citizens’.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> David Arter, ‘The Breakthrough of Another West European Populist Radical Right Party? The Case of the True Finns’, *Government and Opposition* 45(4) 2010: 490.

<sup>17</sup> J.W. Muller, *What is Populism?* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

<sup>19</sup> K. Abts and S. Rummens, ‘Populism versus Democracy’, *Political Studies* 55(2) 2007: 405-424; Bowler et al, ‘Right-Wing Populist Party Supporters’.

<sup>20</sup> Muller, *What is Populism?*: 23.

<sup>21</sup> B. Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016: 8.

<sup>22</sup> Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*; Dennis Altman, ‘Perils of Populism’, *Griffith Review* 57 2017: 80-92.

<sup>23</sup> D. McDonnell, ‘Populist Leadership’, *Social Alternatives* 36(3) 2017: 26-30.

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Third, populist parties tend to have distinctive organisational characteristics. In particular, they are specifically structured to advance the political aspirations of the leader. As Ignazi put it, the leader is the most important feature of new populist parties as ‘no formal organization existed before or beyond the leader: the party is ‘insignificant’ vis-à-vis the leader’.<sup>24</sup> As we shall see, the parties examined in this paper demonstrated populist characteristics. In particular, they were all confrontational in so far as positioning themselves as champions for the ‘ordinary citizen’ and advanced a policy agenda that contrasted with those of the established parties. Organisationally, these parties were also somewhat brittle, with one example struggling to remain a cohesive entity shortly after entering parliament. Furthermore, these parties were led by ‘charismatic’ leaders who sought to use their high public-profile as a lightning-rod to mobilise electoral support. It is also typical for these leader-dominated organisations to become dysfunctional or to even collapse. Populist parties are thus characterised by significant internal volatility.

## **PRELUDE TO THE RISE OF AUSTRALIAN ‘POPULISM’: THE 2013 SENATE CONTEST**

General elections in Australia actually involve two separate elections – one for the House of Representatives where electors vote for candidates contesting in single member districts using a majoritarian voting system, and the other for the Australian Senate utilising multi-member districts and the single transferrable vote (STV) to allocate seats proportionally (at least in theory).<sup>25</sup> Most commentary attention focuses on the contest for the House of Representatives given the importance of the election to determining the party nature of government and its rather more straightforward majoritarian electoral system. The Senate’s STV system is far more complicated, and takes much more time to count. Representational outcomes can sometimes surprise. In the 2013 Senate contest, for example, the election of Ricky Muir in Victoria—a candidate from the hitherto unknown Australian Motor Enthusiasts Party (AMEP)—caused outrage given his rather paltry share of the state-wide primary vote cast (0.5 percent). Of course, under the STV system Muir did

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<sup>24</sup> P. Ignazi, ‘The Crisis of Parties and the Rise of New Political Parties’, *Party Politics* 2(4) 1996: 552.

<sup>25</sup> D. Farrell and I. McAllister, *The Australian Electoral System: Origins, Variations and Consequences*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2006.

achieve the requisite quota after the distribution of preferences but this fact was rarely acknowledged in the expression of dismay at his presence in a finely balanced upper house.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, the infamy of this result made its way in to the national parliament's legislative response to the 2013 election. The nature of the Senate contest and its outcome became a major issue for the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM), the parliamentary committee that reflects on elections post fact and recommends amendments to Australia's national electoral laws. Two matters in particular preoccupied the Committee and those members of the public who made submissions to it. These were, first, the matter of how the existing Group Vote Ticket (GVT) system of preference allocation in which electors would vote for a party ticket that then directed preferences to all other candidates (as distinct from filling in their own preferences) had contributed to Muir's success; and, second, the exponential increase in the number of political parties that had been formed and had nominated to appear on Senate ballots across the states. On the first matter, the JSCEM recommended (and the government later accepted and legislated) to do away with the party determination of preference allocation and replace it instead with a rather cumbersome system of optional preferential voting.<sup>27</sup> This reform was linked to the second objective of both discouraging the rate of party formation ahead of an election and, if these parties nominated anyway, severely curtailing their likelihood of winning a Senate seat by trying to deny them a full allocation of preferences from previously eliminated candidates.

It is worth reflecting on the implications of the JSCEM's approach, particularly to the issue of party formation. The Committee was clearly persuaded by arguments that the increase in the number of political parties being formed ahead of the 2013 election was the result of deliberate attempts by a small number of political operatives to try to impact on Senate outcomes by registering as many parties and candidates as possible.<sup>28</sup> The polite language employed by the JSCEM to describe this alleged corruption was 'gaming' the system and was linked to cross-preference

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<sup>26</sup> S. Morey 'How Do We Solve a Problem Like the Senate?' *The Conversation*, 2013. Accessed at: <https://theconversation.com/how-do-we-solve-a-problem-like-the-senate-18042>.

<sup>27</sup>Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *The 2013 Federal Election: Report on the Conduct of the 2013 Election and Matters Related Thereto*, Canberra, Parliament of Australia: 2015: 2.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *The 2013 Federal Election*: 190.



agreements entered in to by so many of these parties made possible under the auspices of the GVT system.<sup>29</sup> Kefford has also noted the way the political commentary community had delineated these emerging parties from other 'minor' parties (such as the Australian Greens, for example) by utilising the term 'micro-party' to describe them.<sup>30</sup>

Both approaches sought to de-legitimise these parties and the opprobrium that arose from Muir's election was a reflection of this. Of course, an alternative interpretation of political events leading up to the 2013 election could be made based on a more benign view of party formation as outlined by Sharman, who once observed:

The question of what explains the emergence and persistence of minor parties is a contentious one in political science, but there are three elements involved. The first is broad social and political change and the emergence of new issues which existing parties have not accommodated, thus giving a new party the chance to articulate a distinctive political agenda. The second is the occurrence of political events which trigger the formation of a new party or splits in an existing party. The third is the effect of the electoral system in encouraging the formation or persistence of small parties by making parliamentary representation an avenue for pursuing influence.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, the rise in the rate of party formation ahead of the 2013 election may well have been due to responses to the political debate at the time. The 2013 election came after two terms of a Labor national government where, in the second term, there was a period where Labor and the Australian Greens had a majority in the Senate, and during which time such contentious matters as climate change and marriage equality had dominated the policy debate. By far the greatest proportion of the parties being formed for the 2013 election were from the right of Australian

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<sup>29</sup> Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Interim Report on the Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2013 Federal Election: Senate Voting Practices, Canberra, Parliament of Australia, 2014: vi.

<sup>30</sup> G. Kefford, 'Rethinking Small Political Parties: From Micro to Peripheral', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 52(1) 2017: 95-109.

<sup>31</sup> C. Sharman, 'The Representation of Small Parties and Independents in the Senate', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 34(4) 1999: 356-357.

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politics.<sup>32</sup> These parties had policy positions that either advocated conservative social policy positions, were highly critical of directions that environmental policy (including climate change policy) had taken under the leadership of the Labor governments of both Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, or were seeking to mobilise a sense of voter resentment at the approaches of both major parties in their seeking to consolidate Australia as part of a free trading, globalised economy.<sup>33</sup>

This latter group included the Palmer United Party (PUP), the party that was to win the largest proportion of what turned out to be significant levels of voter support for this plethora of right-tending non-major parties contesting the Senate. It was the PUP that ended up with the largest block of cross-bench seats after the 2013 election, as well as a lower house seat with the election of the party's leader, property developer, industrialist and former Liberal National Party office-bearer, Clive Palmer, to the Queensland seat of Fairfax. The PUP qualifies as a populist party, in as much as it appeared to be mobilised on the basis of a strong sense of opposition to whatever was happening in the political debate at the time without actually articulating a coherent manifesto as to what it was the party would achieve were it to exercise executive power.<sup>34</sup> The party's leader typified the sort of charismatic yet domineering personality type also commonly associated with populist politics, as indeed did the sense that the party's organisation was centred on the leader's aspirations and outlooks and any challenge to the leader from some party luminary (usually in the form of a member of the parliamentary wing) could precipitate an organisational implosion.<sup>35</sup> This is precisely what occurred, with two of the four members of the PUP parliamentary wing resigning soon after their election to the Senate and Palmer himself coming under increased scrutiny over his business interests.<sup>36</sup>

The 2013 Senate contest was thus very important precursor to the 2016 contest for a number of reasons. First, this was the election that was characterised by a significant

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<sup>32</sup> N. Economou. 'An Instance of Cartel Behaviour? The Politics of Senate Electoral Reform 2016'. Electoral Regulation Research Network, Democratic Audit of Australia, Working Paper No. 40 2016: 6. Accessed at: [http://law.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/1939870/WP40\\_Economou.pdf](http://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1939870/WP40_Economou.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Ghazarian, *The Making of a Party System*: 190-191.

<sup>34</sup> Ghazarian, *The Making of a Party System*: 187.

<sup>35</sup> Ignazi, 'The Crisis of Parties': 552.

<sup>36</sup> P. Colgan, 'Clive Palmer's Political Project is Disintegrating', *Business Insider Australia* 13 May 2015. Accessed at: <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/clive-palmers-political-project-is-disintegrating-2015-3>.

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increase in the number of non-major parties being created and nominating candidates for the election, with the vast majority of these parties being identified (courtesy of their GVTs) with the right-of-centre of Australian politics. Second, this election resulted in a significant right-of-centre, non-major party vote although this significant share (equal in all but one instance to more than the quota of 14.4 percent in each state) was spread out over a large number of competing tickets. The capacity of this vote share to result in a representational outcome depended on a full flow-through of preferences guaranteed under the GVT system, and this duly occurred in each state. In addition to Palmer's success in winning the lower house district of Fairfax, PUP won the largest share of the non-major party right-of-centre Senate vote in three states, giving the party a total of three Senators (including Jacqui Lambie from Tasmania, who would figure prominently in the re-casting of the populist party system ahead of the 2016 election).

## THE 2016 FULL SENATE ELECTION

Despite the efforts of the JSCEM and the Turnbull government to deter them, a proliferation of minor parties registered with the AEC with the intention to contest the 2016 full Senate election.<sup>37</sup> Based on the aforementioned criteria, some of these parties qualified as 'populist' and a list of these (including the percentage of the national primary vote won in the Senate contest) is provided in Table 1. Pauline Hanson's One Nation (PHON) party was arguably the most prominent of the overtly populist parties and the Table shows that the party obtained the largest share of the populist vote. In addition to One Nation were parties formed by charismatic individuals. These included ex-rugby league player and former PUP Senator, Glen Lazarus; Jacqui Lambie under the new banner of the Jacqui Lambie Network (JLN); former Victorian journalist and broadcaster Derryn Hinch, who created and led the Derryn Hinch Justice Party (the DHJP); former Democratic Labor Party Senator John Madigan, who contested under the John Madigan's Manufacturers and Farmers Party (MMFP); and former independent South Australian Senator Nick Xenophon, who organised a Nick Xenophon Team (NXT) and ran tickets in every state Senate contest. The Katter Australia Party (KAP) is also included in this list, notwithstanding the fact

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<sup>37</sup> A. Green, 'Federal Election 2016', Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2016. Accessed at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/federal-election-2016/guide/senate/>.

that the party's charismatic leader, Bob Katter, concentrated his efforts on retaining his lower house division of Kennedy.

**Table 1. 'Populist' Party Vote at the 2016 Australian Election**

Party	Senate			House of Representatives	
	Australia-wide primary votes (percentages in brackets)	Vote as percentage of overall populist vote	Seats won	Australia-wide primary votes (percentages in brackets)	Seats won
PHON	593,013 (4.2)	39.1	4	175,020 (1.3)	
NXT	456,369 (3.2)	30.1	2	250,333 (1.8)	1
DHJP	266,607 (1.9)	17.5	1	16,885 (0.1)	
JLN	69,079 (0.5)	4.5	1	--	
KAP	53,123 (0.4)	3.5		72,879 (0.5)	1
GLT	45,149 (0.3)	2.9		10,094 (0.5)	
PUP	26,210 (0.2)	1.7		315 (0.0)	
MMFP	5,268 (0.03)	0.3		--	
Total	1,514,818 (10.9)	100.0	8	525,526 (3.8)	2

**Key:** PHON (Pauline Hanson's One Nation), NXT (Nick Xenophon Team), DHJP (Derryn Hinch Justice Party), JLN (Jacqui Lambie Network), KAP (Katter Australian Party), GLT (Glen Lazarus Team), PUP (Palmer United Party), MMFP (John Madigan's Manufacturers and Farmers Party).

**Source:** Australian Electoral Commission, 2016 Federal Election Results. Accessed at: [http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Federal\\_Elections/2016/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Federal_Elections/2016/index.htm)

If the primary vote cast for these tickets across the nation is tallied, the 'populist' vote cast at the 2016 full Senate election can be quantified. The 1,514,818 primary votes cast for the parties listed in Table 1 constituted 10.9 percent of the national Senate vote. The PHON tickets accounted for nearly 40 percent of the populist vote, followed by the NXT with 30 percent, and the DHJP with 17.5 percent. The JLN share of the national populist vote was 4.5 percent and mere 0.5 percent of the national Senate primary vote, but this was sufficient for the ticket to win a seat in the Tasmanian Senate contest. At the conclusion of the Senate count, PHON secured four Senate seats, the NXT two seats, the DHJP one seat, and the JLM one seat. The PHON, NXT and DHJP also fielded candidates in some House of Representatives divisions, with the Xenophon Team concentrating its efforts in South Australia and securing one

lower house seat (Mayo) from the Liberal Party. The KAP ran Senate tickets but the party's best performance was in the return of Katter as the Member for Kennedy. The total national populist vote for the House of Representatives was 3.8 percent – a much smaller return than the Senate doubtlessly influenced by the limited number of populist candidates contesting the lower house.

The national results provide an incomplete picture of the nature of the populist vote in 2016—a point highlighted by the fact that the JLT could win a seat in the Senate with a paltry national vote of less than 1 percent. Given that the Senate contest involved a full Senate election, the consequent diminution of the quota needed to secure one of the twelve seats for each state to 7.7 percent enhanced the potential for the non-major parties to secure a Senate seat. The importance of this aspect of the contest can be appreciated when the populist performance is measured by state, rather than nationally. Such a state-based comparison, provided by Table 2, gives an insight to the significant regional variation in the populist vote. Given that the PHON, NXT, DHJP and JLN parties were arguably the most significant of the populist cohort in terms of both their share of the populist vote and that these were the parties to win Senate representation, a comparison of the state-by-state performance of the four re-enforces the notion of regional variation in Australian populism.

**Table 2. 'Populist' Party Performance in the 2016 Senate Election by state**

Party	State					
	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS
PHON	4.1	1.8	9.2	4.0	2.9	2.5
NXT	1.7	1.5	2.0	2.1	21.7	1.5
DHJP	0.07	6.0	0.06	0.7	0.2	0.4
JLN	0.04	0.05	0.04	--	--	8.3

Source: As for Table 1.

The Table shows quite clearly that PHON performed best in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. In South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania, however, the party's performance was much weaker and certainly subordinate to another populist ticket. In Victoria this was the DHJP and Hinch was to secure a Senate seat. In South Australia, the NXT polled 21.7 percent and, in so doing, won two seats. The specificity of the NXT to South Australian politics is revealed in the Table: in no other state did the party secure a primary vote of anything more than 2.1 percent. Meanwhile, the

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JLT was the preferred ticket for Tasmania's populist vote, although it is also true that the exhaustion of preferences from the Shooters and Fishers ticket denied PHON the last Senate position that ended up being won by the Greens.

Table 2 indicates a state-based variability in the populist vote. It is possible to discern an intra-state regional variation at least in the case of support for PHON and the JLT in the case of their strongest states although, by the same token, support for the DHJP in Victoria and the NXT in South Australia was much more evenly spread. Figure 1 plots the primary vote cast for the strongest populist Senate ticket by House of Representative electoral division in each of the states. The x-axis on the graph ranks the highest to lowest populist voting divisions for the preeminent populist ticket in that state. In the case of those states in which One Nation was the main recipient of this vote, a pattern emerges. In Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia the One Nation primary vote was strongest in rural and regional seats, and weakest in metropolitan divisions. Tasmania replicates this pattern, although in that case it was the JLN, rather than PHON, securing the vote. These graphs confirm previously held views that populist politics resonates most in non-metropolitan regions dependent on agriculture or decentralised industrial activity, where there are lower median family incomes, lower levels of educational attainment and so on.

The graphs that plot the distribution of the populist vote for the pre-eminent tickets in Victoria (the DHJP) and South Australia (the NXT) vary somewhat from the axiomatic pattern observable in the other states. In both cases a much more even distribution of the primary vote occurs. Further, the rural/regional versus metropolitan divide discernible in the other states does not apply to the same extent. Indeed, in the case of South Australia, some of the NXT's best divisions were urban-based seats such as Sturt and especially the seat of Mayo, where an NXT candidate was elected. The pattern of support for the DHJP in Victoria was similarly quite evenly distributed, with a number of suburban-based seats figuring amongst the strongest divisions for the ticket.

What the data shows is that, while it may be possible to quantify a national populist vote, this needs to be understood against a backdrop of regional diversity. The regional variation helps account for why some charismatic leaders resonated in some parts of the country and not in others. It also accounts for differences in the approach these parties took to the policy debate and how voters responded to their agendas. One Nation can now said to have a long tradition of campaigning on race, criticism of immigration and expressions of concerns about national identity in addition to seeking to critique liberal free market economics. Indeed, Pauline Hanson and One Nation are the closest Australian populism comes to conforming to the typology

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constructed by international scholarship. The results show that PHON is the dominant populist party in Queensland and New South Wales and its approach appears to resonate in those states plus Western Australia. In the other three states, however, the appeal of One Nation is weak.

It is arguable that the JLN in Tasmania comes closest to the PHON model, and Jacqui Lambie was also known to dabble in debates about immigration and national identity.<sup>38</sup> However, voter support for her, as both a PUP candidate and then under the auspices of the JLT, was driven less by national identity politics (which does not usually resonate in Tasmania) and more by community responses to the impact of industrial restructuring on the Tasmanian economy, especially in the north western region of the state, which has been Lambie's solid electoral base for two elections.<sup>39</sup> Whilst her performance and message may sometimes replicate Pauline Hanson, Lambie and her organisation are actually more like the NXT and its leader, Nick Xenophon, whose campaign resonated against a backdrop of South Australia's industrial restructuring, in which the manufacturing sector was severely diminished.

Meanwhile, in Victoria, if Derryn Hinch is known for anything it is for his crusade on a series of law and order issues more relevant to state politics than the national debate. A strong sense of dissatisfaction with 'the system' has always underpinned Senator Hinch's contribution to the public debate even in the days before his election to parliament. This message clearly resonated in Victoria but, as the results show, nowhere else in Australia. Similarly, the JLT resonated in Tasmania and nowhere else. Even the impact of the seemingly omnipresent Nick Xenophon was confined to his home state. The only party that could claim to resonate beyond its home state was One Nation, and even this was based on a fairly small share of the primary vote.

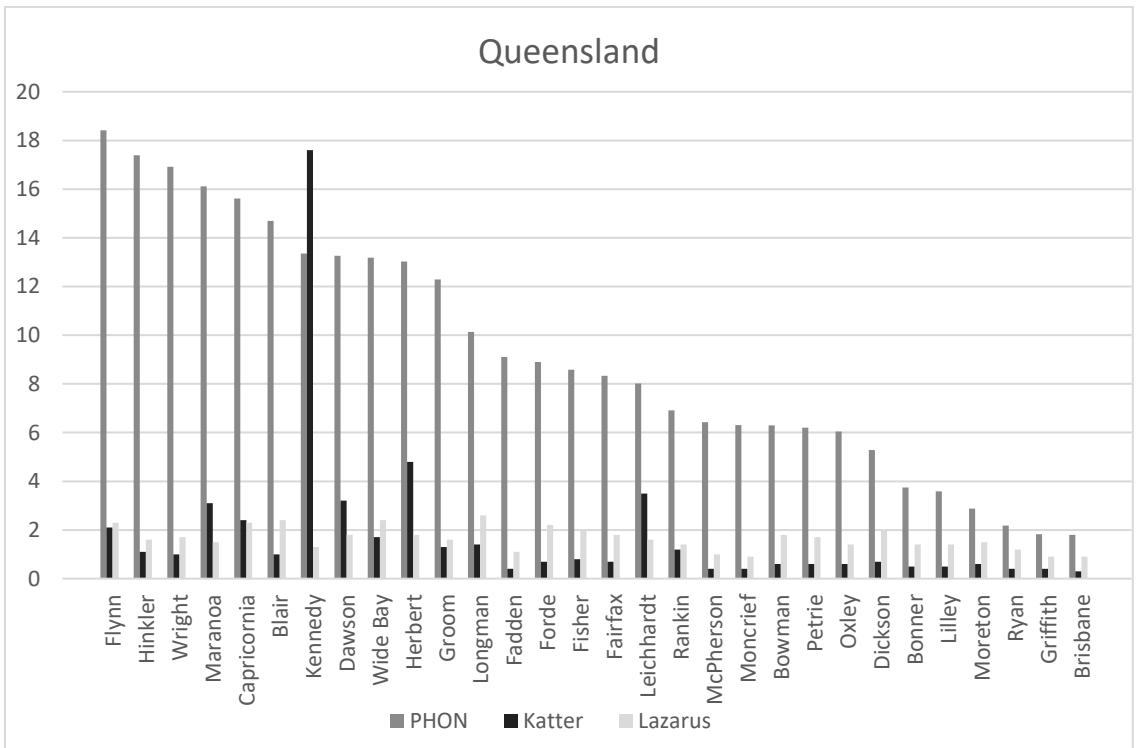
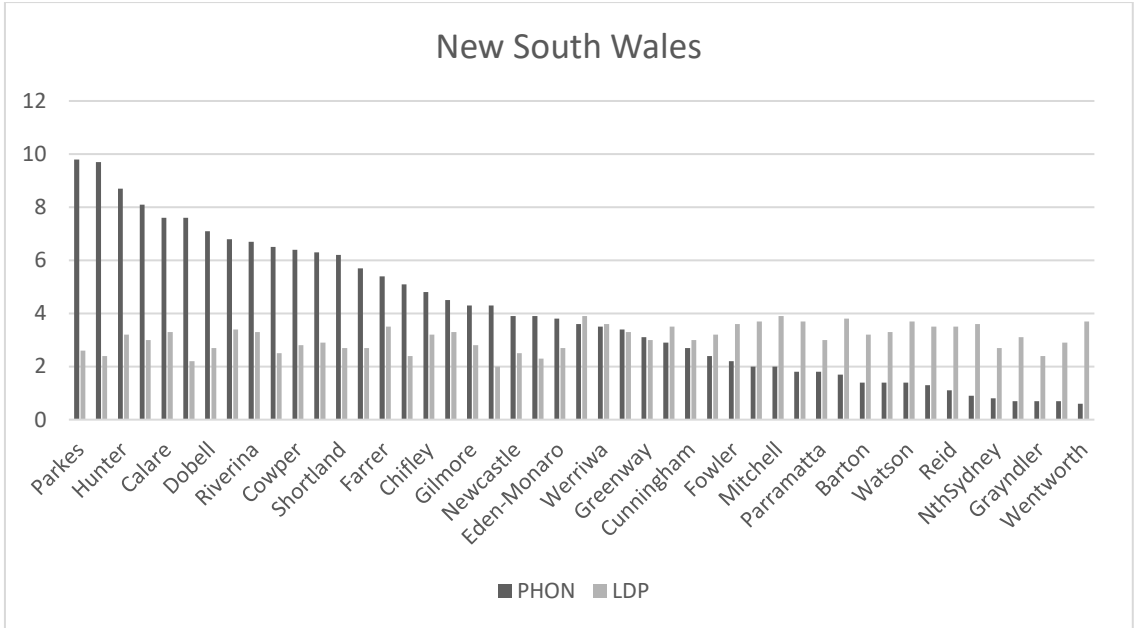
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<sup>38</sup> L. Cox, 'Jacqui Lambie Questions Refugee Intake, Recommends Electronic Tagging', *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 November 2015.

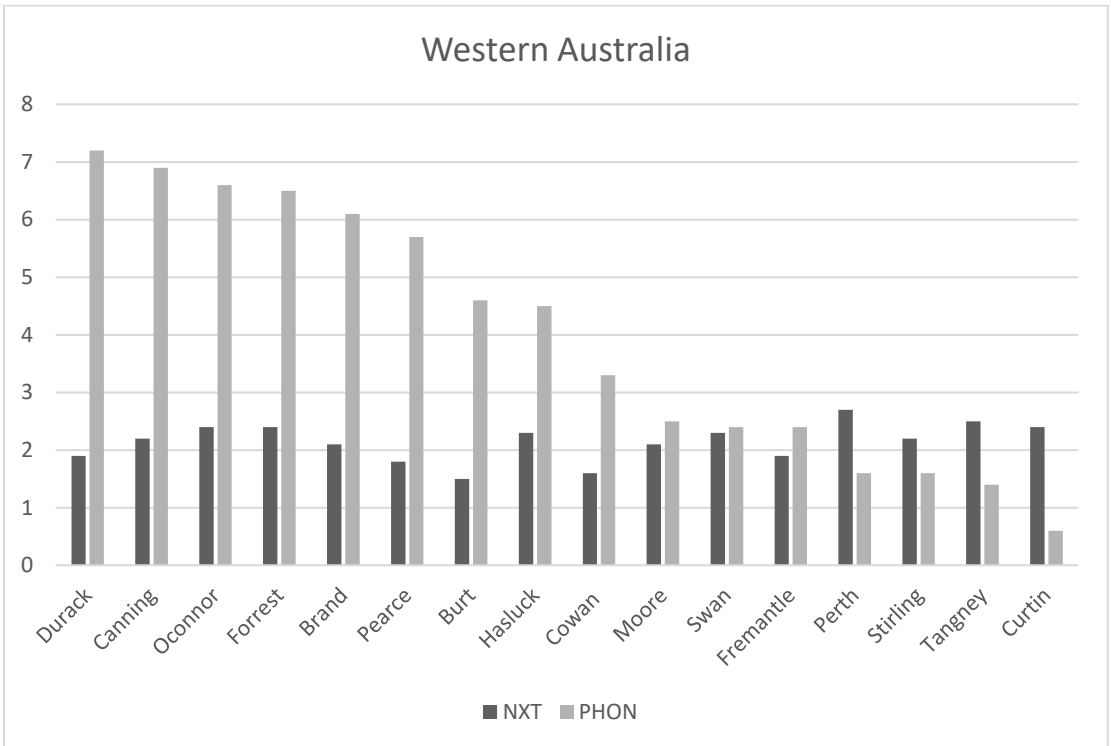
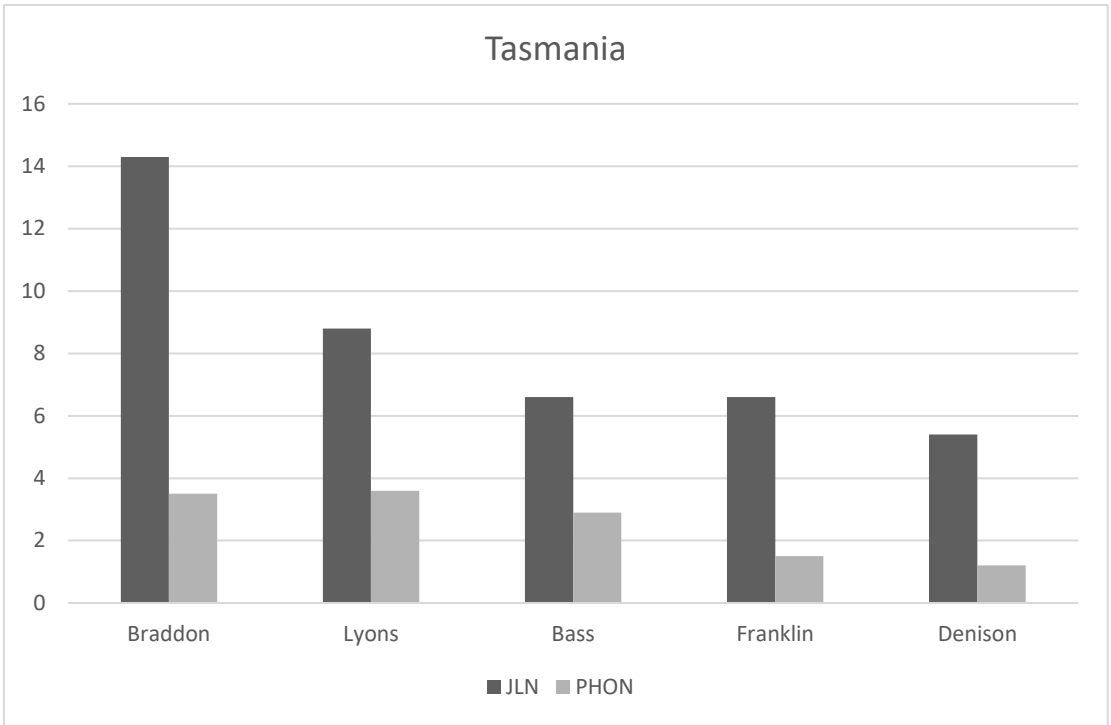
<sup>39</sup> L. Bourke, 'Senator Jacqui Lambie Claims Tasmanians Are Worried About Sharia Law, Foreign Aid Spend'. *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 April 2015.

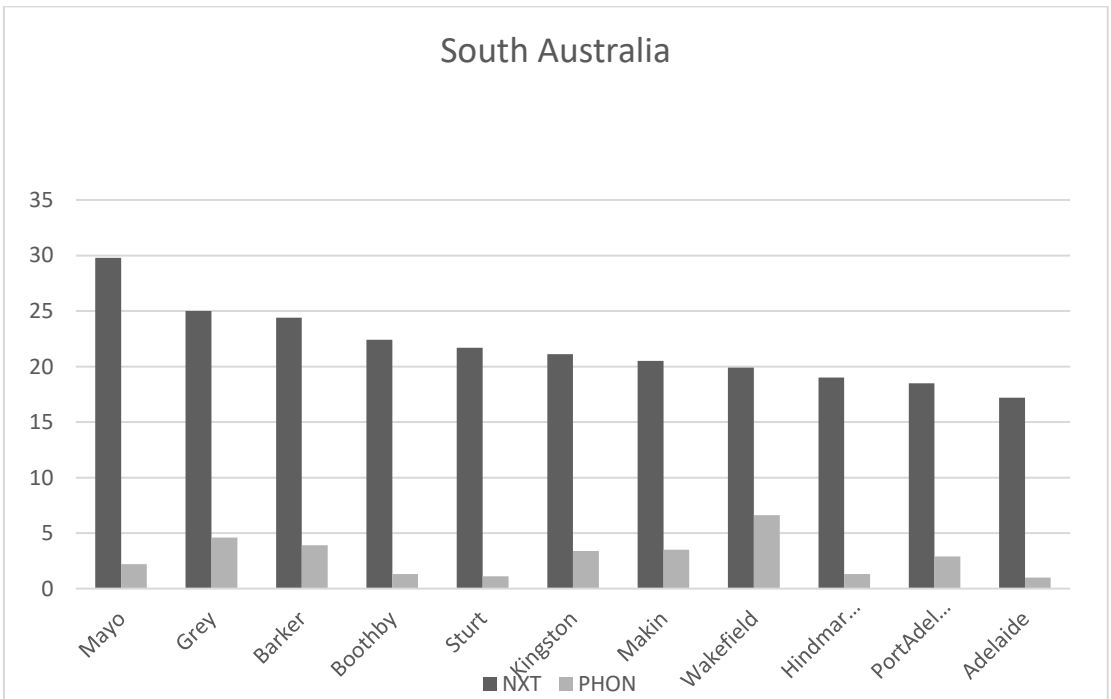
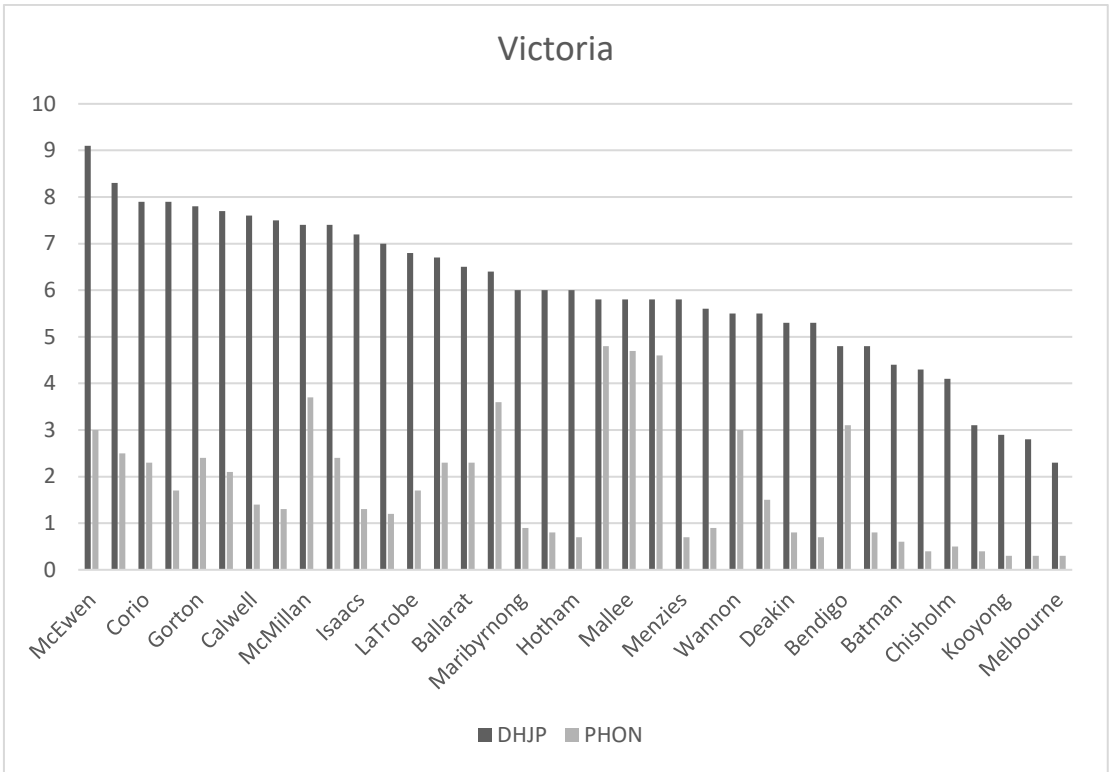
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**Figure 1. Populist Voting in the 2016 Senate Election by House of Representatives District and State**









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## DISCUSSION

Despite advancing divergent policy demands, each of the parties explored above correspond to the populist type identified in other liberal democracies.<sup>40</sup> They presented themselves as champions for ordinary citizens and railed against what they identified as ‘the establishment’ by highlighting what they perceived as the significant policy and personnel shortcomings of the major parties. Moreover, they all had high-profile leaders who were prominent before, and during, the election campaign. These leaders also demonstrated populist tendencies as they were central to the development of their party and sought to use the party to advance their political aspirations. All bar the DHJP were to experience significant internal stresses soon after the election. Senator Hanson seemed to be involved in ceaseless struggles for control of her party, amidst the disqualification of elected Senators for various breaches of Section 44 of the Australian Constitution. Senator Lambie was also disqualified by the High Court due to uncertainty about her citizenship, and Senator Xenophon departed the national parliament to undertake an unsuccessful tilt at South Australian state politics. His NXT organisation has since been re-branded as ‘Centre Alliance’.

Disaggregating the 2016 Senate election result does much to clarify the nature of Australian populism, both in terms of the party system and the nature and extent of a ‘populist’ vote. The impression emanating from media interest with Pauline Hanson is that One Nation was the national lightning rod for populist dissatisfaction with the policy debate and/or the political system. Election data suggests that populist politics is much more regionally diverse than this and, in terms of national support, it involves a relatively minor share of the national electorate. By considering the state and local district variations in the electoral performance of these parties, the following actual characteristics of Australian populism can be observed.

First, the data indicate that in all jurisdictions, bar South Australia, the vote for those whom might be considered populist was only a very small share of the total vote, and the greatest collective impact was on the result in the Senate (the NXT lower house success in South Australia notwithstanding). The variation of the rate of support in South Australia only really holds if the NXT is considered to be part of the ‘populist’ type—a proposition that the NXT itself objects to. Even if the NXT result is excluded,

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<sup>40</sup> Muller, *What is Populism?*.

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there is little change to the overarching national reality that, as a proportion of the national electorate, support for populism was relatively weak and confined primarily to rural and peri-urban districts especially in Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales.

Second, the 2016 Federal Election showed that Hanson was not the only charismatic anti-system leader trying to attract voter support. Hanson's attempt to be seen as a populist leader was challenged in at least three including Tasmania (Jacqui Lambie and the JLT), Victoria (Derryn Hinch and the DHJP) and South Australia (Nick Xenophon and the NXT). Here again the question of localism arises: as capable as these characters were of garnering national media attention, the pattern of the vote won by their respective parties highlighted their regional alignment. Beyond their home states, these leaders attracted next to no support. One Nation was able to perform more strongly in Western Australia and New South Wales, but this was due to the lack of a local charismatic figure who could discharge the role in these states commensurate with that of Lambie, Hinch or Senator Xenophon.

Finally, any assessment about the impact populism had on the 2016 Federal Election result must be assessed against the fact that the election for the all-important Senate was for the entire chamber and that this, in turn, significantly reduced the minimum vote required by a candidate to secure a seat. Given the extent of the number of seats won by minor party candidates, including those who might be thought of as populist, the community could be forgiven for thinking that this alone confirms claims of a rising populist constituency. The problem here is that the double dissolution that precipitated the 2016 Federal Election had the effect of lowering the quota in order to win a seat, and that this allowed candidates who might otherwise have failed to secure a seat to become Senators. Only three of the populist Senators returned in the 2016 election are entitled to serve six year terms under the auspices of section 15 of the Australian Constitution. The rest will face the next election with the added hurdles of a much higher quota and an altered electoral system that now no longer allows for the Group Vote Ticket option—a reform designed to prevent the flow of preferences from the vast array of minor parties winning paltry shares of the primary vote through to a more competitive minor-party ticket. Their re-election prospects will be extremely remote unless the various populist tickets are able to win a significantly higher share of the vote than they have done so far.

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## CONCLUSION

The results of the 2016 Australian election revised interest in debates about populism in liberal democracies. After all, several minor parties that corresponded to the populist type all won parliamentary representation. Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party returned to the Senate almost twenty years after it first won parliamentary representation, while Victorian media personality Derry Hinch was elected to the Senate for the first time. The former PUP Senator Jacqui Lambie also returned to the Senate and former independent Senator Nick Xenophon was also very successful in this election not only in the Senate but also in the lower house district of Mayo. These results coincided with international electoral results, such as Donald Trump becoming President of the United States, Marine Le Pen being one of the two candidates in the French presidential run-off, and the success of the 'Brexit' campaign in the British referendum. As a result, the 2016 Australian Federal Election was seen to be part of a global trend where populist candidates were achieving significant electoral success. This paper has argued that the Australian manifestation of populism is nowhere near as dynamic as these aforementioned international instances.

Indeed, Australian populism is a case study in localised politics in which variations between, and within, states makes a significant contribution to the type of personality that seeks to win a Senate seat, the agenda pursued by the organisation they put together to tackle the electoral process, and the way the electors respond to their campaigns. A sense of proportionality needs to be retained when considering Australian populism. This paper finds a national populist vote of 10.9 percent for the Senate, and 3.8 percent for the House of Representatives. This may be a level of support that can win Senate seats, although the potential for this to happen is influenced by whether all or half of the upper house is up for election. If the 2016 election is any guide, then the following can be said about populism in Australia: the populist vote is only a small proportion of the national electorate, although it is regionally varied and is shared by a variety of parties and candidates. It is a volatile vote that provides the basis for a volatile and erratic populist party system that faces a bleak future should the next election be for only half of the Senate.

One final point should be made in relation to the rate of party formation ahead of national elections that was of such concern to the JSCEM after the 2013 election. The pattern of populist party politics associated with the 2016 election (including the election result) does not conform with the JSCEM view that party formation has been subjected to 'gaming' of the system by a small ground of political operatives. The regional variation in the nature of populist party politics suggests that the formation of these parties was driven by localised responses to issues in the national political

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debate. These responses might have been the source of discomfort to some observers, as the regionally-based populist agenda tends to face its sternest criticism and opposition from the metropolitan-based social progressives.<sup>41</sup> The comforting aspect of this, however, is that all participants still seem to have faith in the process of party formation and in participating in the electoral process especially for the Senate. In this way, the 2016 election confirms Sharman's view of the reasons why citizens in a liberal democracy seek to form parties and contest elections, and, in so doing, challenges the much more cynical approach of the JSCEM.

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<sup>41</sup> B. Tranter and M. Western, 'Overstating Value Change: Question Ordering in the Postmaterial Values Index', *European Sociological Review* 26(5) 2009: 571-583.

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