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Northern Territory election 2016

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Politics and Public Administration Section

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Introduction

The Northern Territory (NT) has a unicameral parliament—the Legislative Assembly—elected under the provisions of the *Electoral Act* (NT).¹ The NT has a fixed election date, the fourth Saturday in August, every four years: the previous election was held on 25 August 2012. The Northern Territory is divided into 25 divisions for Legislative Assembly (Assembly) elections. The Parliament was prorogued on 8 August 2016 with the election held on 27 August 2016.

In the lead up to the 2016 election political commentators seemed united in predicting a Country Liberal Party (CLP) defeat—the only question appeared to be by how much.² Polls suggested that leadership and cabinet instability could wipe out the CLP at the 2016 election.

Electoral changes

An electoral redistribution is conducted prior to each election by a process overseen by two independent committees.³ In September 2015 the Augmented Redistribution Committees recommended the electorate of Greatorex be abolished, contracted the electorate of Fong Lim into inner Darwin, and created a new seat called Spillett that runs from Darwin Airport into northern Palmerston.⁴ These new boundaries were in place for the 2016 election.⁵

In February 2016 the Assembly passed electoral reform legislation.⁶ The reforms were criticised by the Labor Opposition for being rushed through the Parliament six months before the election with little consultation on the measures.⁷ Two of the reforms that had significant political consequences for the 2016 NT election were:

- a switch from full to optional preferential voting, and
- a ban on posters, how-to-votes, handbills and all forms of campaigning within 100 metres of a polling place.

In addition the Government made it easier to cast a prepoll vote by removing the need to satisfy particular criteria and simply providing that any person entitled to a vote may apply for a postal vote.⁸

2012 election

The CLP, led by Terry Mills (Blain), won the 2012 election ending 11 years of Labor governments. Robyn Lambley (Araluen) was the Deputy Chief Minister. There was a 5.1 per cent two-party preferred swing to the CLP, which won 55.8 per cent of the overall two-party preferred vote. The party won 16 of the 25 seats in the Assembly, largely bolstered by gaining all the critical ‘bush’ seats (Arafura, Arnhem, Daly and Stuart).⁹

Table 1: results of the 2012 election for the Legislative Assembly

Party	Seats	Women	Indigenous
Country Liberal Party	16	6	4
Australian Labor Party	8	3	1
Independent	1		
Total	25	9	5

1. [Electoral Act](#) (NT), accessed 22 December 2016.

2. R Gerritsen, ‘[A moving trainwreck? Why the CLP will be swept from office in the Northern Territory](#)’, *The Conversation*, 17 August 2016; A Green, ‘[Northern Territory election preview](#)’, *NT Votes 2016*, Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) website. All references were accessed in September–October 2016 unless otherwise indicated.

3. Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC), ‘[Redistribution 2015](#)’, NTEC website, accessed 10 August 2016.

4. *Ibid.*; Redistribution Committee, ‘[2015 proposed redistribution of Legislative Assembly divisions](#)’, June 2015; Augmented Redistribution Committee, ‘[Final report: report on the redistribution of the Northern Territory into divisions](#)’, September 2015.

5. [Electorate maps](#) are available on the Northern Territory Electoral Commission website.

6. [Electoral Legislation Amendment Act 2016 \(No 1 of 2016\)](#).

7. M Gunner, ‘[Electoral Legislation Amendment Bill](#)’, Northern Territory, *Debates*, 10 February 2016.

8. A Giles, ‘[Electoral Legislation Amendment Bill](#)’, Northern Territory, *Debates*, 2 December 2015.

9. A Green, ‘[Final figures for 2012 Northern Territory Election](#)’, *Antony Green’s election blog*, ABC website, 2 September 2012.

Source: B Holmes, [Northern Territory election 2012](#), Background note, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, October 2012, accessed 1 September 2016.

Post 2012 election

Leadership and party changes

The period since the 2012 election has been turbulent, with a number of party switches and leadership challenges. By December 2015 the CLP was reduced to a minority government. From the beginning of the 12th Legislative Assembly to August 2016 there were numerous ministerial reshuffles including six changes in deputy chief minister.

On 25 January 2013 the leader of the ALP, Paul Henderson, resigned from the Legislative Assembly, triggering a by-election for the seat of Wanguri. Labor candidate Nicole Manison won the seat at the 16 February by-election.¹⁰

On 13 March 2013, whilst NT Chief Minister Terry Mills was travelling on official business in Japan, the CLP met and elected Adam Giles (Braitling) as its new leader by a vote of 11 to five. Mr Giles became the first Indigenous leader of a government in Australia. David Tollner (Fong Lim) was elected Deputy Leader. Giles was sworn in as Chief Minister on 14 March 2013.¹¹

On 12 April 2014 a by-election was held for the seat of Blain following the resignation of former Chief Minister, Terry Mills. Nathan Barrett retained the seat for the CLP.¹²

On 4 April 2014 three Indigenous members, Alison Anderson (Namatjira), Larisa Lee (Arnhem) and Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu (Arafura), resigned from the CLP and, on 27 April, joined the Palmer United Party (PUP).¹³ The number of CLP members was reduced to 13. On 8 September 2014 Mr Kurrupuwu rejoined the CLP. On 27 November Ms Anderson and Ms Lee resigned from PUP, joining the crossbench as independents.¹⁴ The CLP then had 14 Members in the Assembly.

In August 2014 Tollner, who was Treasurer as well as Deputy Chief Minister, was forced to resign his ministerial position and deputy position after making homophobic comments.¹⁵ Peter Chandler (Brennan) became Deputy Chief Minister on 1 September 2014.¹⁶

On 18 October 2014 a by-election was held for the seat of Casuarina following the resignation of ALP Member Kon Vatskalis. Lauren Moss retained the seat for Labor.¹⁷

On 2 February 2015 Willem Rudolf Westra van Holthe (Katherine) was elected Leader of the CLP, defeating Chief Minister Adam Giles, reportedly by a vote of nine to five.¹⁸ John Elferink (Port Darwin) was elected Deputy Chief Minister. However, on 3 February Giles refused to resign and facilitate the swearing-in of van Holthe by the Territory Administrator. It was argued that it had not been established that van Holthe had a majority in the Legislative Assembly. Later in the day, it was announced that Giles would remain leader and van Holthe would become his deputy.¹⁹

On 20 April 2015 Delia Lawrie (Karama) resigned as the Leader of the Labor Opposition following controversy over granting a rent-free lease of Stella Maris to Unions NT, and Michael Gunner (Fannie Bay) was elected unopposed.²⁰ In October 2015 Ms Lawrie was not preselected for her seat and on 8 October resigned from the ALP to sit as an Independent.²¹ Ms Lawrie failed to win her seat at the 2016 NT election.

10. Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC), [Legislative Assembly By-election 16 February 2013: Division of Wanguri](#), NTEC website.

11. M Gordon and D Harrison, 'NT coup ends with 'spoilt brat' on top', *The Age*, 14 March 2013, p.10.

12. A Aikman, 'Victory sees CLP reboot priorities', *The Australian*, 14 April 2014, p. 6.

13. A Aikman, 'Top End instability as MPs quit CLP', *The Australian*, 5 April 2014, p.8.

14. Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, [Members of the Legislative Assembly 1st Assembly 1974 to 13th Assembly current as at 23 September 2016](#), Legislative Assembly website.

15. Z Hope, 'Heavy toll', *Northern Territory News*, 23 August 2014, p. 1.

16. A Aikman, 'CLP votes in replacement for Tollner', *The Australian*, 2 September 2014, p.2.

17. Northern Territory Electoral Commission, [Legislative Assembly By-election 18 October 2014: Division of Casuarina](#), NTEC website.

18. C Walsh, 'Get on with it or get out: uneasy truce as Giles rolls rivals', *Northern Territory News*, 4 February 2015, p.1.

19. C Walsh, 'Willem, Elferink given nod in secret meeting to topple 'arrogant' Chief Minister', *Northern Territory News*, 3 February 2015, p. 7.

20. H Davidson, 'NT Labor leader Delia Lawrie resigns days into leadership battle', *Guardian (Australia)*, 19 April 2015.

21. Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, [Members of the Legislative Assembly 1st Assembly 1974 to 13th Assembly current as at 23 September 2016](#), op.cit.

On 17 June 2015 former Deputy Chief Minister Robyn Lambley (Araluen) left the CLP to sit as an Independent.²²

On 20 July 2015 the Speaker, Kezia Purick (Goyder), resigned from the CLP to sit as an Independent. Her resignation meant the CLP was reduced to a minority government, holding 12 seats. In November, in what has been described as a 'midnight coup', the Government unsuccessfully attempted to oust Speaker Purick and replace her with CLP member, Matt Conlon (Greatorex).²³ It is interesting to note that unlike Speakers in other Australian jurisdictions, the NT Speaker has a deliberative rather than a casting vote at all times and a second casting vote in the event of a tie.²⁴

Both Ms Lambley and Ms Purick were successful at the 2016 NT election as independents.

On 1 December 2015 the Leader of the Labor Opposition, Mr Gunner, took an opportunity to formally move a vote of no confidence in the Government. The motion was defeated with the crossbenchers voting against the motion, not wanting to bring on an early election.²⁵

In February 2016 Mr van Holthe was forced to resign as Deputy Chief Minister and from his ministry following a scandal over signing a share offer with a Vietnamese company that was looking at establishing a dragon fruit farm in the Territory.²⁶

On 15 February 2016 Peter Styles (Sanderson) was appointed Deputy Chief Minister.

On 11 June 2016 the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Nathan Barrett, resigned from the ministry following a sex scandal.²⁷

Other controversies

The Government was also rocked by a number of other scandals and controversies.

In July 2015 the *NT News* revealed that CLP members and politicians had 'direct involvement' in Foundation 51, an 'associated entity', which raised funds for the party.²⁸ The Northern Territory Electoral Commission and the Australian Electoral Commission both investigated the foundation, following the leak of emails detailing the closeness of the relationship between it and the Government, as well as various allegations of impropriety by disaffected former CLP members and a complaint by Territory Labor that it served as a 'slush fund' for the CLP. The Australian Electoral Commission dropped its investigation into the alleged 'slush fund' in August 2015.²⁹ The NT Electoral Commission had referred the matter to the NT Police. The NT Police investigated and released the findings in October 2015, which indicated a prima facie case had been established with 'a reasonable chance of conviction'. However, Director of Public Prosecutions Jack Karczewski dropped the matter claiming it was not in the public interest to pursue it.³⁰

A number of ministerial travel trips caused controversy such as Minister Bess Price's 10-day trip to New York including seven nights at the Waldorf Astoria.³¹

In July 2015 corruption charges were brought against Minister Price's chief of staff Paul Mossman for his role in Government travel bookings through Xana Kamitsis's Latitude Travel.³² Ms Kamitsis was arrested in November 2014 and faced charges over allegations she had rorted more than \$100,000 —she was sentenced to nearly four years jail in 2016.³³ The government travel scandal also led to the Police Commissioner resigning over allegations

22. C Walsh, '[Lambley quits CLP to end months of 'hell' \[The worst ever\]](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 18 June 2015, p.1.

23. A Green, '[Northern Territory speaker defeated and then re-elected](#)', *Antony Green's election blog*, 19 November 2015.

24. Subsection 27(2), *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978*.

25. M Gunner, '[Want of confidence in the Government](#)', Northern Territory, *Debates*, 1 December 2015; M Gunner, '[Opinion: Why I will move a motion of no confidence to get the Territory to an early election](#)', *Sunday Territorian*, 29 November 2015. Section 24 of the *NT Electoral Act* specifies the process for motions of no-confidence in the Government.

26. C Walsh, '[Giles restyles his team](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 16 February 2016, p. 5.

27. '[Minister quits over sex video](#)', *Sunday Times (Perth)*, 12 June 2016, p. 43.

28. C Walsh, '[CLP elite involved in covert F51 fund](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 1 July 2015, p. 3.

29. C Walsh, '[AEC pulls plug on inquiry](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 8 August 2015., p. 5

30. C Walsh and F McCue, '[CLP fund trial 'not in public interest'](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 24 October 2015, p.7.

31. C Walsh, '[The price is not right: Big Apple's massive price](#)', *Sunday Territorian*, 26 April 2015, p. 1.

32. C Walsh, '[Minister's staffer on corruption charges \[Corruption charges\]](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 18 July 2015, p.1.

33. S MacDonald, '[Corrupt agent given close to 4-year term](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 16 December 2016, p. 5.

he interfered with the investigation into Kamitsis' alleged larceny and the suspension of a Police Commander for his alleged role in the scandal.³⁴

Privatisation of government-owned assets with a stated purpose of funding infrastructure projects drew considerable opposition from the public. Northern Territorians had voiced concern over the selling off of the government-owned Territory Insurance Office, but the sale to Allianz was finalised in November 2014.³⁵ In October 2015 the NT Government announced the long term leasing of the Darwin port to a Chinese firm, sparking consternation not only in Australia but among American allies.³⁶

In September 2015 Attorney-General John Elferink was forced to apologise after telling a female Labor member that 'I am really tempted to give her a slap right now...'.³⁷ This was one of a number of issues relating to the treatment of women by CLP members and to the treatment of women within the party.³⁸

In August 2015 the 1 Territory party was founded by Braedon Earley, a former President of the CLP. The party received official registration in November 2015.³⁹ Although billed as an independent grassroots party, a number of its members were disaffected former CLP members. The party contested 13 seats at the election but was not successful in getting a candidate elected.

Just before the official campaign period commenced the NT Government and most Australians were shocked by the *Four Corners* revelations relating to the treatment of young offenders in detention in the NT, particularly activities occurring at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre.⁴⁰ Chief Minister Giles sacked John Elferink as Corrections Minister on 26 July 2016 following the *Four Corners* expose. The graphic treatment of the offenders led the Federal and NT governments to set up a royal commission to probe the abuses: the Royal Commission into Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems in the Northern Territory.⁴¹ Chief Minister Giles subsequently questioned the timing of the ABC program, claiming it was aired in early August to discredit the CLP in the lead up to the election.⁴²

Lead-up to the election

Composition of the Assembly: June 2016

The composition of the Parliament had changed considerably by the last sitting in June 2016 prior to the NT election: CLP holding 12 seats, ALP seven seats and six crossbenchers. A number of members retired or did not contest the election:

- David Tollner (CLP, Fong Lim; Tollner was not preselected to stand for the CLP)⁴³
- Nathan Barrett (CLP, Blain; Barrett had resigned from the CLP on 27 June 2016)⁴⁴
- John Elferink (CLP, Port Darwin)
- Matt Conlon (CLP, Greatorex, which had been abolished in the NT redistribution), and
- Alison Anderson (Independent).

Former Chief Minister Terry Mills resigned from the CLP to contest the seat of Blain as an Independent.⁴⁵

The Legislative Assembly sat for the last time on 27 June 2016. The Parliament was prorogued on 8 August 2016 for the election on 27 August 2016.

34. P Chandler (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services), [Statement: Resignation of the Police Commissioner](#), media release, 14 January 2015; C Walsh, ['Labor wants to know who knew what when'](#), *Northern Territory News*, 17 January 2015, p. 4.

35. C Walsh, ['Angry protests against TIO sale to fall on deaf ears'](#), *Northern Territory News*, 26 November 2014, p. 1.

36. L Murray, ['US in talks on Darwin port'](#), *The Australian Financial Review*, 4 December 2015, p. 3.

37. V Badham, ['Sexism in Northern Territory politics is a stain on Australia's DNA'](#), *Guardian (Australia)*, 19 September 2015.

38. C Walsh, ['CLP women ditch Giles'](#), *Northern Territory News*, 23 June 2015, p. 6.

39. B Earley, [Formation of the 1 Territory Party](#), media release, 11 August 2015.

40. H Davidson, P Karp and E Hunt, ['Abu Ghraib'-style images of children in detention in Australia trigger public inquiry'](#), *Guardian (Australia)*, 26 July 2016; ABC, [Four Corners](#), 25 August 2016.

41. M Grattan, ['Evidence of NT detention centre abuse was there for all to see'](#), *The Conversation*, 26 July 2016; A Giles (Chief Minister), [Statement: Royal Commission into Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems](#), media release, 28 July 2016.

42. H Davidson, ['Adam Giles says ABC aired report on Don Dale juvenile detention to damage him'](#), *Guardian (Australia)*, 11 August 2016.

43. J Poulsen, ['Dumping a shock to Tollner'](#), *Sunday Territorian*, 29 November 2015, p. 6.

44. C Walsh, ['Bye Bye, Barrett: Barrett to bow out at election'](#), *Northern Territory News*, 13 June 2016, p. 1; see footnote 25.

45. C Walsh, ['I'm back: Mills expected to run against CLP in Blain'](#), *Sunday Territorian*, 7 August 2016, p. 1.

Polling

A March 2015 ReachTel poll indicated that support for the CLP and Giles's leadership was crashing. First preference vote was 38.0 per cent to Labor and 30.2 per cent to the CLP.⁴⁶ Two-party preferred support put Labor ahead at 61.8 per cent to the CLP's 38.2 per cent, a huge 17.8 per cent swing to Labor compared with results from the 2012 election for the polling area (an area covering 18 electorates in the greater Darwin and Alice Springs regions).⁴⁷

A subsequent ReachTel poll in September 2015 indicated a worsening situation for the governing party with a two-party-preferred negative swing of 16 per cent putting it on 39 per cent to 61 per cent to the ALP. On preferred chief minister, 67 per cent of those surveyed preferred Labor's Michael Gunner as chief minister and 37 per cent rated the Giles government's performance as 'very poor'.⁴⁸

On 6 June 2016, the *NT News* reported on an MediaReach poll, conducted in the two Alice Springs seats of Braitling and Araluen, which showed much lower-than-usual primary voting intentions for both the CLP and Labor (CLP 28 per cent, Labor 24 per cent). Nearly half—46 per cent—of respondents to the poll said the CLP was a bad government. Only 21 per cent thought the Government was doing a good job and 33 per cent were undecided or had no view.⁴⁹

A MediaReach poll, conducted at the end of July 2016, indicated that Labor had a 64 per cent to 36 per cent lead in the two-party-preferred vote. Michael Gunner was the preferred Chief Minister 46 per cent to 29 per cent for Giles.⁵⁰

At the 2 July 2016 federal election, NT showed an eight per cent two-party preferred swing to Labor—considerably above the national swing to Labor of three per cent. This swing resulted in Labor's Luke Gosling defeating sitting CLP member, Natasha Griggs, in the seat of Solomon, covering Darwin and surrounding suburbs. Labor veteran Warren Snowden retained his seat of Lingiari with an increased two-party preferred swing of eight per cent compared to a minus 2.8 swing at the 2013 election.

The resulting 7.4 per cent swing against the CLP at the federal election on 2 July—the largest swing in the country—was a portent of what was to happen on 27 August.

Other voting patterns in the NT at the federal election were similar to national patterns. The Greens slightly increased their vote to nine per cent, near the national average.⁵¹ Other minor parties increased their primary vote from 11.7 per cent of first preferences in 2013 to nearly 17 per cent, again reflecting national patterns.⁵²

Campaign

The beginning of the campaign was dominated by the *Four Corners* revelation in regard to youth detention and the subsequent decision to establish a royal commission.

Other key themes included the economy, law and order, fracking, housing, and education and public schools. Cracking down on antisocial behaviour and alcohol-fuelled crime were big issues coupled with promises of more frontline police.⁵³

Each major party was fighting for the home owner vote, with renovation grants and cuts to stamp duty on offer.⁵⁴

The CLP were pushing fracking as a major jobs creator, but Labor raised environmental concerns, promising an indefinite moratorium on the controversial mining method before making a policy decision.⁵⁵

46. A Aikman, '[NT voters serve notice on Giles, CLP \[ReachTEL poll\]](#)', *The Australian*, 3 March 2015, p. 1.

47. Ibid.

48. A Aikman, '[Giles harming brand as CLP faces wipeout](#)', *The Australian*, 26 September 2015, p. 8.

49. C Walsh, '[Giles faces home threat: CLP takes hit in poll](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 6 June 2016, p. 1.

50. C Walsh, '[Big hit to CLP: Labor sitting pretty](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 1 August 2016, p. 1.

51. Federal election 2016, '[State of the parties](#)', ABC News website, 5 August 2016.

52. R Gerritsen, 'Northern Territory' in [State of the states: what were the issues and seats that mattered in Australia's states and territories?](#), *The Conversation*, 10 July 2016.

53. J Oaten, S Zillman and X La Canna, '[NT election 2016: Where the parties stand on the big issues](#)', ABC News website, 27 August 2016.

54. '[Both sides back construction, home buyer schemes](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 8 August 2016, p. 4.

55. Territory Labor, '[Labor's plan: Fracking](#)', Territory Labor website.

Labor promised to go back to the drawing board for water licences, promising a review on aquifer science and all licences granted under the CLP Government, possibly resulting in some water licences being revoked.⁵⁶

Transparency and accountability were also raised as important themes during the campaign. Both major parties made commitments to introduce an anti-corruption type body and Labor also promised electoral donations reform.⁵⁷ Labor also pledged to find budget savings by cutting the number of government departments from 31 to 20. Cuts to public service staff would be limited to 11 chief executive positions and 15 deputy chief executives.⁵⁸

Both parties announced big budgets for long-term plans to increase Indigenous housing.⁵⁹

The Leaders of the two major parties faced-off in two pre-election debates: on 3 August and 17 August. Both debates were dominated by questions on their policies for the economy and small business.⁶⁰ Mr Giles claimed a proven record of sound economic management and a genuine plan to create 24,000 jobs. Mr Gunner emphasised his stable and united team working to grow the economy and working with all sectors of the economy in full partnership to create more jobs.

At a forum of undecided voters on 25 August 2016 both leaders gave firm promises not to privatise any more public assets.⁶¹

The number of candidates was 115, up from 86 in 2012, including 40 independent candidates.⁶² Thirty-nine of the 115 candidates were female.

Six parties contested the election as well as independents. Only the ALP and CLP contested all 25 seats. The new party 1Territory contested 13 seats and independents stood in 20 seats.

Election result

The election resulted in a landslide win for Labor with voters punishing the CLP. Labor won 18 seats, the CLP two seats and independents five seats in the 25-seat Assembly. There was a swing of 5.7 per cent of the primary vote to Labor, triggered in part by a collapse in the CLP vote (18.8 per cent swing against the CLP) and swings to former CLP members turned independents who won their seats (Terry Mills, Kezia Purick and Robyn Lambley).⁶³ 'Others', which includes independents, the Citizen's Electoral Council (four candidates) and the Shooters and Fishers Party (two candidates), received a total primary vote of 19.6 per cent, with a swing of 9.9 per cent.⁶⁴

On 28 August 2016, election commentator Antony Green's analysis of the two-party preferred votes in the 18 seats where the contest was directly between Labor and the CLP indicated that Labor won 58.8 per cent of the vote and CLP won 41.2 per cent (a swing of 14.6 per cent to Labor).⁶⁵

The 'bush seats' (Arafura, Arnhem and Stuart), which were instrumental in the CLP winning in 2012, swung back to support Labor.⁶⁶ For example, Arnhem showed an 18.8 per cent and Stuart a 31.5 per cent two-party preferred swing to Labor.⁶⁷

The 1 Territory party did not do as well as expected, but did receive more votes than the Greens: 3.6 per cent of the primary vote compared to the Greens 2.9 per cent.⁶⁸

Table 2 sets out the results of the 2016 election.

56. A Manicaros, '[Territory cool on water](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 29 July 2016, p. 12.

57. A Manicaros, '[\\$3m to tackle double dealing](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 22 August 2016, p. 7.

58. C Walsh, '[Barbs traded on final day of long campaign](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 27 August 2016, p.5.

59. J Oaten, S Zillman and X La Canna, '[NT election 2016: Where the parties stand on the big issues](#)', ABC News website, 27 August 2016.

60. [NT leaders face off in pre-election debate](#), Sky news website, 3 August 2016.

61. H Sorensen, '[Giles, Gunner reveal their biggest regrets](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 26 August 2016, p. 7.

62. A Green, '[Summary of candidates and parties contesting the 2016 Northern Territory election](#)', *Antony Green's election blog*, ABC website, 12 August 2016.

63. 'Party vote totals', [NT votes 2016](#), ABC news website (figures updated to 12 September 2016).

64. *Ibid.*

65. A Green, '[Northern Territory 2-party preferred swings](#)', *Antony Green's election blog*, ABC website, 28 August 2016.

66. Z Hope, '[The tricky business of bush politics \[The battle for the bush\]](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 3 September 2016, p. 17.

67. *Ibid.*

68. 'Party vote totals', *op. cit.*

Losses

Overall nine sitting members lost their seats: seven CLP, one Independent and one Labor.

The incumbent Chief Minister (Adam Giles) and his former deputy (Willem Westra van Holthe) lost their 'unlosable CLP seats', in close contests.⁶⁹ The formerly safe CLP seats of Braitling and Katherine had never been held by Labor. Adam Giles became the first Chief Minister in the NT to lose his seat while in government. Mr Giles blamed the scandal surrounding youth detention in the NT, the electoral redistribution and independents for his defeat.⁷⁰ Other former CLP members and party insiders have attributed the loss partly to the 'toxic atmosphere' existing within the Giles Government.⁷¹

Some of the other notable losses were:

- the CLP Deputy Chief Minister Peter Styles
- former CLP minister Bess Price
- former CLP turned Independent Larissa Lee
- former Labor leader turned Independent Delia Lawrie and
- Labor deputy leader, Lynne Walker who lost to an Independent by eight votes in Nhulunbuy. On 19 September 2016, NT Labor announced it would not challenge the outcome in Nhulunbuy, a previously safe Labor seat.⁷²

Results

Table 2: results of the 2016 Northern Territory election

Seat	Party	Member	TCP %*	Gender	Indigenous
Arafura	Labor gain	Costa, Lawrence	54.7	Male	Indigenous
Araluen	IND retain	Lambley, Robyn	58.2	Female	
Arnhem	Labor gain	Uibo, Selena	64.3	Female	Indigenous
Barkley	Labor retain	McCarthy, Gerry	58.0	Male	
Blain	IND gain	Mills, Terry	51.4	Male	
Braitling	Labor gain	Wakefield, Dale	50.3	Female	
Brennan	Labor gain	Sievers, Tony	52.6	Male	
Casurina	Labor retain	Moss, Lauren	61.3	Female	
Daly	CLP retain	Higgins, Gary	52.3	Male	
Drysdale	Labor gain	Lawler, Eva	55.2	Female	
Fannie Bay	Labor retain	Gunner, Michael	64.2	Male	
Fong Lim	Labor gain	Collins, Jeff	57.8	Male	
Goyder	IND retain	Purick, Kezia	75.3	Female	
Johnston	Labor retain	Vowles, Ken	64.7	Male	Indigenous
Karama	Labor gain	Ah Kit, Ngaree Jane	50.8	Female	Indigenous
Katherine	Labor gain	Nelson, Sandra	50.5	Female	
Namatjira	Labor gain	Paech, Chansey	58.5	Male	Indigenous

69. A Aikman, 'Labor spoils for choice of ministers', *The Australian*, 10 September 2016, p. 8.

70. Ibid.

71. A Aikman, [Toxic atmosphere that brought down a government down](#), *The Australian*, 30 August 2016, p. 1.

72. M Gunner (Chief Minister), [Nhulunbuy Election Results](#), media release, 19 September 2016.

Nelson	IND retain	Wood, Gerry	73.0	Male	
Nhulunbuy	IND gain	Guyula, Yingiya Mark ⁷³	50.1	Male	Indigenous
Nightcliff	Labor retain	Fyles, Natasha	76.9	Female	
Port Darwin	Labor gain	Kirby, Paul	52.8	Male	
Sanderson	Labor gain	Worden, Kate	60.5	Female	
Spillett	CLP retain	Finocchiaro, Lia	63.1	Female	
Stuart	Labor gain	McConnell, Scott	75.4	Male	
Wanguri	Labor retain	Manison, Nicole	69.9	Female	

*two candidate preferred vote

Bolding denotes a new member of the Legislative Assembly

Source: Northern Territory Electoral Commission, (NTEC), '[2016 Territory election results](#)', NTEC website; Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), '[NT votes 2016](#)', ABC website.

The 13th Legislative Assembly

Of the 25 members of the Assembly 13 are new members. This includes six new female members (two of whom are also Indigenous) and three male Indigenous members. Ngaree Ah Kit, the new Labor member for Karama, is the daughter of former member and minister, Jack Ah Kit (Arnhem 1995–2005). Of Labor's 18 seats, nine were won by women. Overall the Parliament has 12 women, including one CLP member and two Independents. Overall there are six Indigenous members (five Labor and one Independent), the same number as in the previous Parliament. Of the six, only one, Ken Vowles, was an incumbent member. The member for Namatjira Mr Chansey Paech, is the first openly gay Indigenous Australian to be elected to parliament.⁷⁴

ALP ministry and Opposition leadership

On 31 August 2016 Mr Gunner was officially proclaimed the 11th Chief Minister of the Northern Territory with 38 portfolios, as part of three-person Government pending the full ministry being sworn in.⁷⁵ Mr Gunner, who was first elected in 2008, is the first Chief Minister to be born in the NT. Natasha Fyles was sworn in as the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Nicole Manison as Treasurer. On 11 September 2016 Mr Gunner announced his full ministry of eight, which includes five women (two of which are new to the Parliament: Eva Lawler and Dale Wakefield).⁷⁶ This ministry represents the highest proportion of women in any ministry in Australia at 62.5 per cent, overtaking Queensland Premier Palaszczuk's ministry following the 2015 Queensland election (52.9 per cent). Nicole Manison was sworn in as the Deputy Chief Minister. Three members from the former shadow ministry are also included in the ministry: Gerry McCarthy, Lauren Moss and Ken Vowles. Mr McCarthy is the only minister with previous ministerial experience. The ministry was sworn in on 13 September 2016.

Mr Gunner announced that the Government would support Independent Kezia Purick to continue in the role of Speaker.⁷⁷

CLP member Gary Higgins is Leader of the Opposition with Lia Finocchiaro as his deputy, each with eight to ten portfolios.⁷⁸ It is worth noting that at the 2005 election a similar situation occurred when the CLP only won four

73. On the 20 October 2016 the NT Electoral Commission (NTEC) referred Mr Guyula's election to the Court of Disputed Returns. NTEC, [Division of Nhulunbuy – Court of Disputed Returns 2016 Territory Election](#), media release, 20 October 2016. In the application filed by the NT Electoral Commission it states Mr Guyula could not 'be a candidate for election as a member of the Legislative Assembly because he held an appointment ...under a law of the Northern Territory and was entitled to remuneration or allowance'. S Brookes, [Mark Guyula's election in NT 'wholly void', Electoral Commission tells court](#), ABC News website, 26 October 2016. On 1 December the NTEC consented to the dismissal of its application to the Court of Disputed Returns so Mr Guyula will remain in the Assembly. NTEC, [Additional evidence prompts dismissal application](#), media release, 1 December 2016.

74. C Paech (Namatjira), '[Address-in-reply](#)', Northern Territory, *Debates*, 18 October 2016; H Davidson, '[I am young, I am gay, I am black, says Chansey Paech to NT parliament](#)', *Guardian (Australia)*, 19 October 2016.

75. J Breen, '[Labor leader Michael Gunner sworn in as Northern Territory Chief Minister](#)', ABC News website, 31 August 2016.

76. M Gunner (Chief Minister), [Labor announces a ministry for all Territorians](#), media release, 11 September 2016; A Manicaros, '[Rookies called up in Labor Cabinet](#)', *Northern Territory News*, 12 September 2016, p. 5.

77. Manicaros, *ibid*.

seats to Labor's 19 seats; but the CLP was able to return to power in 2012.⁷⁹ In a review of the 2005 loss former CLP President and former Chief Minister Shane Stone found the CLP 'had become disconnected with ordinary voters, MLAs were lazy and ill-disciplined, and the party had failed to get its policies across': a message that also appears to resonate at the 2016 election.⁸⁰ Following the 2016 election the first female President of the CLP, Tory Mencshelyi, resigned.⁸¹

The 13th Legislative Assembly first sat on 18 October 2016. Ms Purick was elected Speaker unopposed.

Other outcomes

Commencing at the 2016 election, the voting system was changed to optional preferential voting; previous NT elections used compulsory preferential voting. However, this change appears to have helped Labor. It is likely that minor party voters who were hostile to the CLP put the CLP last, while those who were better disposed to the CLP followed the CLP's advice, and just voted '1'.⁸² In the end, as the CLP was behind in most electorates, recommending 'Just vote 1' may not have been a positive tactic.

The introduction of optional preferential voting substantially cut the rate of informal voting. Across the Territory the rate reduced from 3.2 per cent in 2012 to 2.0 per cent in 2016. In the six electorates with majority Indigenous populations the rate of informal voting fell from 4.6 per cent to 1.9 per cent.⁸³

Also as a result of the changed electoral arrangements an increased number of voters voted early.⁸⁴ Turnout was relatively low for the bush seats: Arafura 49.2 per cent, Arnhem 57.6 per cent, Namatjira 58.3 per cent and Stuart 55.4 per cent. The highest turnout occurred in the urban seats in Darwin and Alice Springs: Wanguri 83.4 per cent, Sanderson 81.3 per cent and Braitling 82.9 per cent.⁸⁵ The overall turnout was 74.0 per cent.

Conclusion

The 2016 NT election result is another example of the volatility in the electoral fortunes of state governments where one term governments have been voted out: Victoria in 2014 and Queensland in 2015. It is also unusual in NT electoral history, which has been relatively stable: the CLP held government from 1974 to August 2001 and then Labor from August 2001 to August 2012.

The role of the Indigenous vote is becoming increasingly evident in deciding who will win government in the NT as demonstrated by the swinging bush seats at the 2012 and 2016 elections. Labor will need to work at stabilising that vote through policies aimed at providing services such as housing, and providing more power to the communities at the local level.⁸⁶

The CLP will need to work at reinvigorating the party (having lost a number of long term representatives and senior party officials) and building the trust of the electorate.

The lack of support for the CLP was possibly instrumental in the loss of Natasha Griggs's seat at the Federal election in 2016: however the Prime Minister has been reported as distancing himself from the CLP loss in the NT, suggesting the result was the result of local issues.⁸⁷

78. ['Shadow ministry by name'](#), Northern Territory Legislative Assembly website.

79. A Green, ['Past Northern Territory election results'](#), *NT Votes 2016*, ABC website.

80. N Adlam, ['Reform the only way up for CLP'](#), *Northern Territory News*, 3 September 2005, pp. 20–21.

81. C Walsh, ['President resigns from CLP'](#), *Northern Territory News*, 10 September 2016, p. 7.

82. A Beaumont, ['Labor easily wins NT election'](#), *The Conversation*, 28 August 2016.

83. A Green, ['Northern Territory election results update'](#), *Antony Green election blog*, ABC website, 28 August 2016.

84. A Green, ['Surge in early voting at 2016 Northern Territory election'](#), *Antony Green's election blog*, ABC website, 24 August 2016.

85. NT Electoral Commission (NTEC), ['NT summary of first preference votes by division'](#), NTEC website.

86. R Gerritsen, ['Disunity is death? The demise of the CLP government in the Northern Territory'](#), *The Conversation*, 29 August 2016.

87. J Massola, ['PM blames NT wipeout on local issues'](#), *The Age*, 29 August 2016, p. 4.

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