

# NSW election: Paul Toole's primary vote falls dramatically in Oberon

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*DECISION DAY: Volunteers handing out how-to-vote flyers at the Bathurst West Public School polling booth on Saturday morning. Photo: PHIL BLATCH*

THE people of Oberon *do* have long memories.

They had waited three long years to make Paul Toole pay for trying to amalgamate their local council with Bathurst Regional Council - and they didn't miss when they got the chance.

A booth-by-booth analysis of Saturday's voting across the Bathurst electorate shows Mr Toole won every booth [he was beaten by Labor's Cassandra Coleman at just one, Kandos High, in 2015], but his primary vote was dramatically slashed in Oberon.

In 2015, Mr Toole picked up 1044 first preference votes out of the 1536 cast at Oberon High [68 per cent] but four years on that number was down to 570 out of 1219 votes cast [47 per cent].

That's almost 500 votes lost in what used to be Nationals heartland for the party.

And it is certainly the community's response to the Coalition Government's bid to force Oberon into an amalgamation with Bathurst - with Mr Toole leading the campaign as the local government minister.

Calare MP Andrew Gee had to endure the "Put Nats Last" campaign in Oberon during the federal election in 2016 but hundreds in the community have maintained the rage long enough to send a clear message to Mr Toole, as well.



*CLEAR MESSAGE: Oberon's No Amalgamation co-ordinator Marj Armstrong (front) leads a community rally in Bathurst in 2016. The town sent a clear message to Bathurst MP Paul Toole at Saturday's state election.*

Brenden May from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party was the main beneficiary of the backlash against Mr Toole, picking up 364 primary votes [30 per cent] - his best result from the 41 booths across the electorate and double his overall first preference percentage of 14.24.

By picking up one-in-seven primary votes across the electorate, Mr May's presence on the ballot paper meant the Nationals, Labor and The Greens all saw a drop in first preferences.

Mr May's how-to-vote flyers preferred Country Labor's Beau Riley number two but the distribution of preferences from all the minor candidates saw them evenly shared between Mr Toole and Mr Riley.

That suggests that while many people of Oberon, in particular, might be disillusioned with the Nationals, they are not yet ready to support a Labor candidate.

The other telling result on Saturday was a slump in Labor's primary vote in Lithgow, a former party stronghold and home of Gerard Martin, who served as Bathurst MP for 12 years before his retirement in 2011.

In 2015, the party's primary vote at Lithgow Public was 535 of the 1368 votes cast [39 per cent], up from 389 out of 1305 [30 per cent] in the Tooleside of 2011, but those gains were wiped out on Saturday night.

Mr Riley's primary vote of 369 out of 1257 put Labor back at 2011 levels but, again, Mr May [12.5pc] benefited more than Mr Toole [46pc].

<https://www.westernadvocate.com.au/story/5970694/long-memories-oberon-voters-take-a-big-swing-at-tooles-primary-vote/>