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Assignment 3B Research Essay

Essay Topic: Pauline Hanson’s One Nation: Ideology, Core Beliefs & Challenges

By

Tut Nienkel

Swinburne University

Pauline Hanson’s One Nation: Ideology, Core Beliefs & Challenges

Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party like other far rights groups in the Western World, has experienced a sharp rise which is linked to the deep resentment and hostility among the masses and working-class populations, with the Australian political institutions. The party was founded in 1997 and played a key role in shifting the political spectrum towards the right, and owing to this ability, manages to stay important in Australian political despite dwindling support. The paper will examine the ideology, core beliefs and support base of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, and outline the challenges it faces in becoming a viable player in future Australian politics. It will be argued that despite its ability to make a strong impact, Hanson's One Nation party is in a critical situation as it continues to lose relevance in mainstream Australian politics despite having considerable support base from working-class native-born Australians, a sizeable segment of the population, whom her view still resonate with. The mainstream Australian voter, however, does not commonly share racist views with regards to immigrants and ethnic minorities as does One Nation.

Pauline Hanson became the first woman to win an independent seat in Australia’s House of Representatives in 1996. She initially represented the Liberal party for the federal seat of Oxley, Queensland, but was disendorsed by the party only 16 days after the elections owing to some of her politically incorrect remarks with regards to the Aboriginal community in a speech where she asked for abolishing special federal assistance for Aboriginals. The speech made her the subject of television and newspaper headlines across Australia, in which she further claimed that Australia risks being swamped by Asians and criticised political correctness (Leach, et al., 2000). Although she also spoke about foreign debt, compulsory national service for dropouts, unemployment and family law, but the highlights of her speech was her call to abolish multi-culturalism and for any special privileges to the Aboriginal community. Australian were shocked, yet many extended open support to her opinions (Leach, et al., 2000). Her positions on contentious issues, her personality and advocacy polarised public opinion and ultimately formed the basis of the One Nation Party, a party that would challenge mainstream political correctness (Ahluwalia & McCarthy, 2008).

Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party chose its name to illustrate its belief in national unity opposing a perceived division caused by pro-immigrant and pro-indigenous policies at the expense of Australia’s white majority (Leach, et al., 2000). Inclined towards the older White-European view of Australian history, she formed the party on the idea that Australian must be one nation under one flag to remain strong and united as opposed to splitting Australia into multiple-groups that have different rights and privileges. Hanson blamed white guilt and a self-loathing and cynical attitude of those on the political left that was being fostered among Australians which has led to that (Hanson, 2018). Therefore ‘One Nation’ signifies national unity as opposed to divisions in the name of immigrant and indigenous rights. A core belief that exists within the party is that other political parties are focused too much on political correctness, and is not in touch with mainstream Australia (Jackman, 1998). It was clear that ‘One Nation’ was running for office on a protectionist and populist platform, promising to abolish discriminatory and divisive policies, drastically reducing immigration, and battle the reverse racism that mainstream Australians apparently face as a result of parties that promoted political correctness (Ahluwalia & McCarthy, 2008). Using nationalist rhetoric, she expressed her identification with hard-working, honest and ordinary people, admitting that she was not a seasoned or polished politician, and often talked about self-reliance, discipline and the importance of small business. It gave the impression of a politically naïve, yet sincere, politician who wanted change (Saunders, 2005).

Although the cultural argument was frequently brought up to condemn multiculturalism, terming it as a risk to the identity, culture, and values of Australia, there was an economic element to the call as well. Ahluwalia and McCarthy (2008) suggest that the issues of difference and identity that lie at the heart of the multiculturalism debate, in fact, are perceived threats to existing power relationships within Australian society, that risks a loss of privilege for some groups. This is what may be the driving force behind Pauline Hanson's One Nation. Moreover, the party's denouncement of globalisation and economic rationalism reflected the dissatisfaction of the working-classes with neo-liberal economic policies that major Australian political parties had embraced (Leach, et al., 2000). Economic protectionist policies of the party advocated the revival of Australian manufacturing, import tariffs and more support for the rural sector and small businesses (One Nation, 2018). Additionally, the party opposes foreign ownership and cites the economic burden from immigration to justify its strong opposition to it, arguing that that the current Australian way of life is not sustainable if an undue pressure on Australia’s hospitals, education, housing prices, roads, transport, and welfare system remains high because of rising immigrant numbers (One Nation, 2018).

In terms of electoral performance, One Nation Party (ONP) reached its peak support in the 1998 state elections of Queensland, wherein it won 23% of the vote. However, at the 1998 federal election, Hanson lost to a Liberal Candidate. As the years passed, the party began to see a decline from the massive initial success it had seen. In 2001, it won 8.7% of the primary vote in Queensland’s state election, winning three seats here as well as three seats in Western Australia. Hanson's party vote fell to 5.5% in the 2001 federal elections, and she could also not win a Senate seat. In the 2003 state elections in NSW, she once again failed to win a seat (Leach, et al., 2000). However, despite the dismal performance, later on, the party's appeal to certain sections of Australian society continues today. A 2016 survey of the party's support revealed that nearly 98% of the party’s voters were native-born Australians. Moreover, the party had support from an older voter base, but recent survey results showed that one-third of their supporters were under 44. Similarly, the party began to draw more female supporters in recent polls (Marr, 2017). Furthermore, in its 20 years since inception, a significant majority of its voters are from the working-class. Most of them are middling prosperous and not on welfare. At the same time, Hanson did not attract the religious vote, and survey results showed that more than half of the support base were non-church going Christians. Furthermore, contrary to its image as a bush party, One Nation has a significantly strong city presence. However, a significant finding from Marr (2017) is that ONP voters are pessimistic about their personal financial and economic prospects, as well as highly pessimistic about the state of Australia’s economy, with nearly 73% rating the economy to be a lot worse than it was (Marr, 2017). A predictable trend was the voter's strong opposition to immigration within which 80% of voters wanted significant cuts. Hence, the unified causes for all ONP voters are a general dissatisfaction with the political class, the government and the economy and strong sentiments against immigration (Stimson & Davis, 1998). It is difficult to believe that a party that demonstrates such hostility towards immigration is not motivated by racial forces.

Political correctness is defined in Australia in context of the cultural and political norms that arise from their sensitivity to sexism and racism. Analysing the One Nation party's arguments and rhetoric, it can be observed that aims at creating the ‘other' whom Australians need to defend against (Ahluwalia & McCarthy, 2008). The racial component of Australian political ideology often resurfaces in debates over immigration and Aboriginal rights (Hage, 2014). Pauline Hanson and her party’s appeal to mainstream Australians to support her claims and views can be understood in light of the perceived divide between political elites and mainstream Australia, especially on matters of race. According to Hage (2014), the racism espoused by Pauline Hanson's One-Nation party is numerical racism. It seems to be based off numbers, comparing the native white population to other ethnic minorities, yet however, it borrows a lot from existential racism, that is based off disgust and hostility towards ethnic minorities, which concurrently is also on the rise. Hanson's racism has inherited a lot of these features and is thus un-Australian in nature given the less-overt nature of racism in Australia compared to other countries. Jackman (1998) also challenges the ONP’s supposed representation of the mainstream by demonstrating that on many issues Australian voters and elite remain largely in agreement, and therefore playing the race card in electoral politics may not be wise for Hanson.

Despite its relatively meagre electoral performance, Hanson’s ONP, since inception, has attracted huge media coverage. The press has described and critiqued the party in multiple ways, which in a way affirms that the Hanson’s ONP, has managed to leave a major impact on Australian politics, especially in the late 1990s. At the federal and state level, its primary effect has been to threaten the support base of the National Party (NP) by splitting the conservative vote, which in turn exerted great pressure on the NP. Moreover, an analysis of Hanson’s party’s support base revealed that a number of voters are dissatisfied and discontent with major political parties. Many policies adopted by other governments were noted by Hanson to be the same as what she advocated earlier, presumably to win back voters that defected to ONP. Furthermore, she managed to successfully challenge the notions of political correctness, the impact of which can be measured by the adoption of many of her policies by other parties (One Nation, 2018). Its spectacular demise, as well as rise, earned it considerable space in local and international media (Leach, et al., 2000). Furthermore, the party’s broader campaign against radical Islam, in which they advocated that Islam cannot be termed as a religion, was meant to exclude Muslims from Australian life, society, and politics. Consequently, its impact can be seen in the rise of similar thought patterns and policies adopted by far-right groups in Europe and America (Dorling, 2017). Although her analysis of the role of national and state governments, globalization as well as the economy seemed simplistic and naïve, Saunders (2005) finds it fascinating how an inarticulate, less educated, and gaudily attired woman could attract such attention, appeal, and devotion, when her only asset seems to be an unshakeable self-belief that she represents mainstream Australians in ways that other politicians cannot.

Since the ONP’s peak in 1998, the party has seen a number of external and internal challenges. A prominent candidate, Oldfield, was expelled by Hanson for trying to usurp power and trying to gain control of the party, signifying troubling internal divisions within. The party was also subject to a campaign in which Tony Abbot asked for crowdfunding to finance civil court cases against Hanson’s party. Furthermore, a challenge for the party is to modify its outlook since racial politics have never been mainstream in Australia. It has also made controversial statements on Islam that attracted a lot of criticism, however appealing to certain quarters. The party’s rhetoric against Islam became the focus of its 2016 federal campaign and now remains a core political agenda. With rising communities of Asian and Muslim immigrants, and their rising influence as well as investments and contribution to the Australian economy, the party’s policies may not once again bear fruit. As the ONP grows older, it has to adopt more sophistication and field higher quality candidates to stand a chance. As Pauline Hanson retires, the party is now eyeing to widen its outreach, however, without the appeal and charisma of Hanson, that will remain a challenge. One Nation is planning to field candidates in NSW and Victorian state elections in 2019 for which it began a process to vet out unsuitable candidates; nevertheless, polls show that the party's support has further declined (Kelly & Lewis, 2018).

To conclude, Hanson’s One Nation party is in a critical situation as it continues to lose relevance in mainstream Australian politics, dominated by the Labour and the National Party. Its support base, according to recent polls, has dropped to a meagre 2 per cent; however, many of the social processes, which contributed to the formation of the party are still existent and continue to play a significant role in Australian politics which is hard to ignore. The party attracting disenchanted and angry voters along with the overall impact its rhetoric has had on Australian politics, and the social and political psyche of Australia is hard to ignore. The mainstream Australian voter, however, does not commonly share racist views with regards to immigrants and ethnic minorities contrary to what Pauline Hanson may claim. A quick look at the existing support base of One Nation, however, reveals that most are native-born Australians that belong to the working class. Despite little chance for electoral success, it indicates that her views still resonate with a sizeable segment of the population.

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