



By: *Sharmila Devi*

Australia wonders if Pauline Hanson is fit to lead



Might the 30-year journey of right-wing rabble-rouser Pauline Hanson that started on the cold fringes of Australian politics end at the pinnacle of national leadership?

Hanson's conviction for electoral fraud and a Senate rebuke for Islamophobic comments are seen as akin to badges of honour to her many supporters and her star is rising in opinion polls.

But she will no doubt be watching closely the travails of kindred spirit **Nigel Farage** during her current visit to Britain. Amid a slew of financial scandals, the Reform party leader will be fighting for his parliamentary seat next month against only one candidate – the comic Count Binface.

Britain's major parties decided to let Farage battle unopposed to ridicule him in his “anti-establishment” crusade and Hanson's opponents in Australia will also be taking note on whether such tactics can defeat the appeal of populism.

Hanson will rub shoulders with fellow travellers at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in London on 16 July. “Gold” tickets include attendance at a “Sir Winston Churchill Gala Dinner” and cost a cool £10,000.

Hanson is one of several women who have led or currently lead right-wing parties such as Liz Truss in the UK, who is also chairing CPAC, Marine Le Pen in France, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, and Alice Weidel in Germany.

Their male cheerleader is US President Donald Trump and other like-minded men include Javier Milei of Argentina, Abelardo De La Espriella of Colombia, and Farage.

The monoculture debate

Hanson's **One Nation party** has seen a surge in support to poll higher than the governing Labor party led by Anthony Albanese and the centre-right Liberal-National coalition.

But voter unease over her hardline opposition on issues such as workers' rights and multiculturalism is already being registered by surveys and may point to insurmountable obstacles on her path to power.

Paul Hogan, Australian actor and national treasure who lives in the US, was blunt in his assessment of Hanson after she lauded him as a good example of Australian “monoculture” in contrast to multiculturalism at an Australian National Press Club speech last month.

Around 75% agree with Hogan that multiculturalism is good for society, according to a recent poll by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

“Outrageous. So racist. It sounds very much like this stupid boofhead over here, Trump,” Hogan told the Australian Financial Review. “How can [Australia] be a monoculture? We're all migrants except the Aboriginals, who as far as we know have been [in Australia] for 60,000 years.”

Around 75% agree with Hogan that multiculturalism is good for society, according to a recent poll by the **Australian Bureau of Statistics**. Other polls conducted after Hanson's speech showed her net approval falling by 10 points.

Her speech was televised and she took the occasion to lay into several targets including the climate change “hoax”, “radical Islam”, the media, abortion, a rise in the minimum wage, and she warned Australia was at risk of being “swamped by Asians”.

Unprepared to govern

Hanson is backed by mining billionaire Gina Rinehart, who has given a private plane worth more than \$1.5 million to the One Nation leader, who considers the magnate a “friend” and unofficial policy advisor.

Hanson is 72 and was an independent member of parliament after being dropped by the Liberal party when she made offensive remarks about Aboriginal Australians in 1997. She co-founded One Nation in the same year but the party expelled her in 2002 after a fraud scandal that led to her spending several months in jail. She rejoined One Nation and became its leader in 2014 and elected senator in 2016.

Australian analysts say as voters learn the details about Hanson's policies, more may turn away

Like voters in many industrialised countries, Australians say they are fed up with the high cost of living and other economic travails. Meanwhile, the shooting dead of 15 people at a Jewish festival at Bondi Beach last December sparked a wave of anti-Muslim sentiment on which Hanson is riding.

But Australian analysts say as voters learn the details about Hanson's policies, more may turn away. For example, she had no answers when questioned about how her push to pull out of the **United Nations** would invalidate Australia's shipping and aviation treaties, wrote Peter Lewis in *The Guardian*.

"Genuine scrutiny of her policies revealed how unprepared she is to govern," he said. "A majority of One Nation-curious voters fear the party is not equipped to govern – even those saying they would vote for Hanson are concerned about this."

Eying the next federal elections

One Nation won its first-ever lower-house seat in May and recorded the second-highest number of votes of any political party in the South Australian state election in March. The party is eyeing the next federal elections to be held by May 2028.



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But another ghost from Hanson's past is also relevant to a present controversy over Australia's biggest ever defence project: a \$239 billion deal in which Australia will buy second-hand US submarines that is the subject of a crowd-funded review that will hold public hearings.

In 2016, Hanson questioned senior defence officers about another Australian submarine deal and asked: "Is it true that pump-jet submarines can only stay underwater for 20 minutes?" A rear admiral was forced to explain how a pump jet is a form of propeller that had no bearing how deep or how long a submarine can stay under water.

"Voters closer to an election may put more scrutiny on One Nation's policies around economic management, or their positions on vaccines, abortion and gun control. With migration falling, the importance of their core issue area may have lessened as well," wrote **Pandanus Petter** of Australian National University.

Attendees at CPAC next week are unlikely to worry about adhering to logic and on the opposite end of the political spectrum, such a stance may even propel **Count Binface over Farage**.