

THE QUEENSLAND ORIGINS OF 'ONE NATION'¹

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INTRODUCTION

There are complex explanations for the resurgence of the One Nation party to take centre stage in the analysis of Queensland politics in 2016. The party did not rate a mention in the TJRyan Research Report, *Palaszczuk's First Year*.³ Often perceived as a refuge for eccentric candidates outside the mainstream, by mid-2016 One Nation was emerging as a political party with enough political clout to offer a viable alternative for people with serious political aspirations willing to migrate from major parties.

Since the national election in July 2016, when One Nation polled 4.29% national Senate vote, including 9.19% in Queensland, there has been an outpouring of analyses of this sudden change in the political landscape. This turned into a torrent after the US Presidential election where Donald Trump had both methodological and ideological similarities to One Nation. The local threat posed by the Trump victory was that it demonstrated a series of ideological preferences, strategies and tactics which could be adopted by One Nation to mobilise a similar core of disenfranchised voters in Australia.

'Authenticity' is offered as one part of the explanation, with the One Nation party, and particularly its leader, giving the appearance of saying what 'ordinary people' would like to hear. 'Alienation' is closely-related to this, with 'ordinary people' feeling that their problems have been ignored by conventional party leaders and their supporters in political and administrative roles. The 'political class' was seen to be cut off and isolated from 'the real world', alienating voters to the extent that they wished to play no part at all in a political process. Ian Macfarlane, a former federal minister who felt he had been badly treated by his own leader, suggested that this elite could be typified as

¹ This Research Report will serve as background for the forthcoming e-monograph in the TJRyan Foundation series evaluating the annual performance of Queensland governments: Scott R and Scott A, [Research Report 1: Parliament under Campbell Newman 2012-2013](#); Scott R, [Research Report 13: Parliament under Campbell Newman 2014](#); Scott R and Guille H, [Research Report 45: Palaszczuk's First Year: a political juggling act](#).

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³ Scott R and Guille H, [Research Report 45: Palaszczuk's First Year: a political juggling act](#), TJRyan Foundation, February 2015.

'white bread politicians', those who look alike and talk alike, having hardly any life experience outside the world of party politics, trade unions and staff work.⁴

WHY IS QUEENSLAND DIFFERENT - OR IS IT?

Queensland stands out in this shift to One Nation and so we offer here a Queensland-specific review of the historical context which underlies the impact of One Nation on the current party system. Queensland is sometimes viewed as their core constituency. Past minor parties and independents represented in the Senate from other states had not placed themselves outside the mainstream of political discourse. Recently, however, national polls and public demonstrations in places like suburban Sydney seem to support the view that issues such as race and nationalism are of concern in sections of the community not represented within the prevailing political structures.

Queensland, on the other hand, has a long history of accommodating ultra-conservative views within the political process. At times this has taken place within the dominant Country/National Party and at others, separate parties like One Nation gained direct representation.

The roots of rural protectionism shared by both these groupings can be traced back to pre-war Queensland and the emergence of a Social Credit movement in the mid 1930s. As described by Michael Madigan:

Social Credit incorporates a form of protectionism and believes consumers should have control of the production of goods and services while some supporters also suggest our global financial system is the hands of an ill-defined cohort of people who wish to dominate the world. ... It represented a rural fundamentalism, a quasi-religious view of the land.⁵

Thirty years ago, political scientists were examining rural fundamentalism in Queensland, and asking whether Queenslanders were different from the rest of Australia or were just lagging behind in political modernisation and would catch up over time.⁶ Was this distinctiveness a reflection of Queensland's decentralisation, with the greater proportion of the population located outside the Brisbane area; the backward nature of the education system; the different mix of immigrants; and/or the strength of religious affiliations, particularly with the less permissive forms of Protestantism?

This begs the question of what is this 'fundamentalism', a term deliberately chosen to avoid other words more loaded with ideological baggage. It is important to recognise that the 1970's version was, like the current manifestation, heavily influenced by attitudes and organizational strategies borrowed from the non-urban USA. The mainspring remained the same – the need to resist modernism and defend traditional values, especially religious values.

The threat of modernism was linked to economic changes moving communities away from agriculture and living in country towns, and/or from technologies which reduced labour-intensive

⁴ *Courier-Mail*, 19.11.16.

⁵ Madigan M, 'A different stripe', *Courier-Mail*, 19.11.16.

⁶ Boyce P and Cribb M (eds), *Politics in Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, 1980; Browne R and Botsman P, *Community attitudes to education in Queensland: a study undertaken during 1977*, Australian College of Education, Melbourne 1978; Freeland J 'Class struggle in schooling: MACOS and SEMP in Queensland', *Intervention*, 12, April 1979; MacQueen H, 'Queensland: a State of Mind', *Meanjin*, April 1979; Murphy D, 'Queensland's image and Australian nationalism', *Australian Quarterly*, 50, 2, 1968.

industries towards forms of automation. It was also linked to the competition offered for increasingly scarce jobs from recently arrived non-Anglo-Celtic migrants or the longer established, but viewed as inferior, native races being overly-generously treated by welfare support.

In the late 1970s, the most obvious area of conflict over values occurred in the school system.⁷ This has never gone away. One Nation now argues about the perversion of climate science to serve a variety of external masters such as the UN or NASA; in the 1970's the villains were the UN, and particularly UNESCO⁸ (which was seen as part of a move to 'one world government'), and contested curriculum content in subjects such as sociology, geomorphology, biology and the teaching of evolution. Both Catholic and non-Catholic fundamentalists objected to changes in the education system. The Association of Catholic Parents wrote a submission saying:

All books, materials and courses should conform to traditional Christian culture and standards which would automatically EXCLUDE such social sciences courses as MACOS, SEMP, Study of Society (SOS), thanatology, etc. and the doctrines of the following educators - Dewey, Skinner, Piaget, Simon, Raths, Kohlberg, Carl Rogers, Maslow, Glasser, Bruner, Ruggs, Counts and others who, as behavioural scientists or specialists in mind-manipulating and attitude- change want a Godless Society controlled by a future 'ONE WORLD GOVERNMENT'.⁹

Sex education was added to the litany of complaints. State school library holdings came under close scrutiny with a call to ban books by authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, as well as Australian writers such as Thomas Kenneally, Donald Horne, and Katharine Susannah Prichard. Eventually education became too much of a public battleground and the government appointed a parliamentary select committee examine all the issues.¹⁰

Creationists believe that the Bible should be interpreted literally. State schools were seen to be undermining the social fabric of family authority if they called this truth into question. In the 1970s this led to the rejection of the state education system by a significant number of groups and the introduction of the US-initiated Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) schooling system.¹¹ There are now at least 50 'Christian Colleges' in Queensland, as well as ACE home schooling materials being available via the internet.¹² Many alumni from these schools are now in influential positions.

⁷ Scott A and Scott R, 'Reform And Reaction In The Deep North: Education and policy-making in Queensland, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, 1980; Scott A, ['The Ahern Committee and Education Policymaking in Queensland'](#), PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1984.

⁸ Probably referring to the UNESCO [Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960](#).

⁹ In Queensland the social studies teaching materials 'Man: A Course of Study' (designed in the US) and 'The Social Education Materials Project' (designed in Canberra) were banned by Bjelke-Petersen. See Gowers A and Scott R, *'Fundamentals and Fundamentalists: A case-study of education and policymaking in Queensland'*, Monograph 22, Australasian Political Studies Association, 1979.

¹⁰ See Scott A, [The Ahern Committee and the education policy-making process in Queensland](#), PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1984.

¹¹ [Australian Christian Home Schooling](#), and the [Accelerated Christian Education](#) website states it 'has been assisting pastors and homeschool parents with a Bible-based K-12 curriculum for more than 45 years. From its humble beginnings in 1970, A.C.E. is now worldwide, with a reach in more than 140 countries.

¹² See materials and video on the [South East Home Schooling](#) website.

Concerns in the 1970s were similar to those of today's One Nation supporters: that 'social engineering' was occurring in state schools and that this was also aimed at weakening the authority of the family, the fundamentalist church they attended, and the moral certainty of their approaches to education. This anti-secular view persists. As recently as 2014, Kevin Donnelly, who has gained recognition by contemporary conservative governments, was quoted as saying that the Australian education had 'become too secular, and the federation's Judeo-Christian heritage should be better reflected in the curriculum'.¹³

The American connection in the 1970's and 1980's was with bodies such as the John Birch Society, the equivalent then of the 'Alt-Right' Republicans, and fundamentalist theological institutions based in southern American states identified as 'the Bible belt'.¹⁴ Australian training institutions were founded to produce local clergy and educators. With the sponsorship of the Bjelke-Petersen regime and judicious land grants, these formed the basis of what became the Christian Heritage University, and proponents of this form of Christianity rose to significant levels in the political elite.

There are other similarities between the 1970s and the present and these are the issues which differentiated One Nation from the elite leaders and the majority of voters for the major parties. One Nation supported groups who were resisting compulsory vaccination of children; resisting the introduction of fluoride into the water supply; and resisting the loosening of ethical standards. These 'ethical standards' were epitomised by resistance to gay marriage, abortion, legalized marijuana use for medical purposes and – at the end of that spectrum – medically assisted suicide.

There was also constant recourse to the 'slippery slope' argument about the undermining of individual choice by intrusive government – including support for the 'right to bear arms' held fallaciously to be implicit in the Australian constitution (the pro-gun lobby that emerged after the Port Arthur massacre and the imposition of Howard's gun controls has always been strong in Queensland¹⁵). But other 'rights' included the right to remove vegetation, to use pesticides, and to fish without restriction or thought to the consequences. In northern New South Wales this libertarian stream saw the shock defeat of a National Party candidate by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers party.

In the One Nation contemporary view of the world, there was the primacy accorded those who owned and worked the land. This translated into resistance to native title claims and other policies which were interpreted as unequally privileging the original inhabitants. There was also resistance to government interventions imposed in the name of climate change environmentalism - because climate change alarmism is seen as an international conspiracy.

¹³ See [Education reviewer Kevin Donnelly makes case for more religion to be taught in public schools](#), ABC, 12.1.14; and Australian Government Department of Education, [Review of the Australian Curriculum Final Report](#), October 2014.

¹⁴ The American Bible Society records the most '[Bible-minded cities in America](#)', on its website (visited 8.11.16). 'Locations in the South, particularly those in the Bible Belt, continue to lead U.S. cities in Bible-mindedness, according to the 2016 report.'

¹⁵ "Thank you, Mr ALP and LNP, because you'll never learn the lesson that the more freedoms you'll take away from us, the more that that helps we smaller parties such as Katter's Australia Party. God bless you and thank you. It's a great Christmas present to us.", '[Adler shotgun decision a 'Christmas present' for minor parties](#)', Federal member Bob Katter, *Huffington Post*, 10.12.16.

Finally, there was an exclusive definition of national identity, symbolized by the use of the flag as a symbol. The appearance of potentially disloyal immigrants from various Asian countries underscored the need for rigorous defence of borders to preserve this national identity.

Between the 1970s and 2016, the mixture of policy imperatives shifted. The economic orientation towards mining when China replaced Britain as the major economic partner meant that the threatening 'significant other' became identified with the Islamic faith. So the underlying attitudes embodied in One Nation were not a sudden and startling break from a benign past; the roots are deeply entrenched, especially in Queensland. This continuity was illustrated in a commentary in the Guardian written by Jason Wilson entitled 'How conservatives made Hanson's ideas part of the political future'.¹⁶

There are, of course, important differences. The most significant is the ease of communications. In the 1970s the links with US groups had to be maintained through telephone calls, snail-mails or international travel. Once the internet arrived, followed by email, and, most recently the plethora of social media but groups could learn immediately from successful political strategies applied elsewhere. Obama's Democratic Party campaign strategies were ahead of his competition in using new media, but the Democrats were eclipsed by Donald Trump's use of social media. And Trump all but demolished the influential Tea Party, which had held considerable sway over the Republican Party (and influenced Australian right-wing politics) since 2009.¹⁷¹⁸

For the conservatives who want to turn back the clock to a more secure past, the internet has presented threats and opportunities. Not only does the clock appear to be shifting into a fast forward mode, the internet has exposed a dangerous external world and undermined the controls and censorship that were easier to apply in the past. The censorship horse may have bolted, but international communication with like-minded groups is far easier, and the Trump win raises questions about the continuing influence of the evangelical Right:

Evangelicals make up approximately 25 per cent of the US population and exit polling suggests 80 per cent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump, compared to just 15 per cent of African-American/Hispanic/Asian evangelicals. ...

The evangelical vote was ... effectively harnessed by the Reagan and Bush campaigns. For many pundits, by the mid-noughties, the evangelicals were a spent force, the demographics had changed, America was less white and less religious. How wrong they were! The evangelicals were dormant, but not gone.¹⁹

Neither Donald Trump nor Hanson's One Nation party are aggressively anti-secular, apart from linking Muslims to extremism and the need for immigration control, but it is likely that the vote of the evangelical Christians is significant in Queensland's support for One Nation.

¹⁶ Wilson J, '[How conservatives made Hanson's ideas part of the political furniture](#)', *The Guardian*, 4.10.16.

¹⁷ Jossey P, '[How we killed the Tea Party](#)', *Politico Magazine*, 14.8.16.

¹⁸ Chait J, '[Donald Trump Has Proven Liberals Right About the Tea Party](#)', *New York Daily Intelligencer*, 7.12.16.

¹⁹ Bird M, '[US election: Why did evangelicals vote for Donald Trump?](#)', *ABC*, 16.11.16.

Conservative, reactionary and/or Alt Right?

Those wishing to diminish the rational basis underlying One Nation and its supporters refer variously to the Party as 'conservative' and 'reactionary' and (very recently) as the local manifestation of 'Alt-Right'. Each of these descriptors is worth examining.

One Nation is 'conservative' in that it wishes to defend values which it perceives to be under threat, particularly the values held by white Anglo-Celtic long-term inhabitants. It is 'reactionary' in that it fears that these values were better established in a relatively recent past and seeks to turn back the clock by removing recent innovations in social and economic policy. It is part of the 'Alt-Right' in that it wishes to promote a series of changes designed to facilitate this conservation or restoration, often radical reversals in public policy priorities on free trade and growth departing from the prevailing policies which may be jointly held by the two largest political parties.

These are also values shared to some extent with those on the fringes of the major parties, especially within the National Party²⁰, and within the independents and minor parties represented in the Queensland parliament by Katter's Australia Party. But it is possible to identify a clustering of values, policy attitudes and social characteristics most likely to be appear in supporters of One Nation.

Class

An Essential Report published in November found a growing awareness of the role of class among all political groups but it was striking, as pointed out by *The Guardian's* correspondent, Peter Lewis, that self-identification as working class appeared more strongly with potential One Nation voters ("Others") than with ALP voters:

While Labor is still recognised as the principal custodian of the working class, One Nation is seen to be challenging it with its old Labor agenda of protectionism and support of the White Australia policy.²¹

However, shifting of class loyalties away from the ALP may be too simple as an explanation. In November 2016, the annual Scanlon Foundation Review *Mapping Social Cohesion* pointed to a growing alienation and distrust from all the major parties across a wide class spectrum, even among supporters of the particular party in power. Analysing the annual results, Andrew Markus points to a surprisingly high level of popular consensus about the failure of governments at state or national level, of either political persuasion, to deal with what they viewed as 'big issues'.²²

Immigration

The continuing theme which has received most prominence in One Nation's appeal is Hanson's base-line hostility towards migration of non-white migrants, initially 'Asians' and now Muslims, plus the perceived inequality of the distribution of public funding in favour of Aboriginal Australians. The hostility to immigrants is largely the result of the perception that they are taking 'Australian' jobs.

²⁰ Knott M, ['Why it's time to take George Christensen seriously'](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2.12.16.

²¹ Lewis P, ['Looking through a Marxist lens \(and why class is the new black\)'](#), *The Guardian*, 30.11.16.

²² Markus A, [Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation maps 2016](#), Scanlon Foundation, November 2016. The 2016 survey identified four popular issues of long standing that are getting nowhere in Australian politics: prescription of medical marijuana – 83% support; medically approved euthanasia – 80% support; reduced reliance on coal for electricity generation – 70% support; marriage equality for same sex couples – 66%.

This was fully appreciated by John Howard after the outpouring of support for Hanson in 1996. He dedicated a whole chapter of his book to this topic and pursued policies on national security and immigration control to assuage the concerns of those of her supporters who might otherwise revert to Labor. In his book, he denied that her broad appeal was racist but played on fears about the pace of change:

She also echoes long-smouldering resentments about attitudes which have been imposed upon the majority of the Australian community without the majority feeling it has even had an opportunity of debating those issues.²³

The measure of her success a generation after Howard's time in office was identified by Tim Dunlop as one of the key 'six points about Australian politics at the moment':

Pauline Hanson's One Nation can no longer in any way be considered maverick, independent, anti-establishment, anti-elitist, or in any other way marginal to the political process and the political class. They are now well and truly an establishment party, legitimised by the Turnbull Government. This will be part of Turnbull's lasting legacy. The resentment and anger that has always driven Hanson's politics is now being assuaged by this courtship and legitimisation. She has got what she has always wanted: a seat at the table, an invitation to all the best parties, and the ability to entrench her own exceptionalism.²⁴

Economic inequality and pessimism about the future

One analysis – from a well-placed observer from the Queensland ALP, Jim Chalmers, argued strongly that the primary challenge from One Nation is not about race, religion and immigration so much as about economic inequality and pessimism about the future.

In some quarters and including here in Australia in respect to One Nation, there's an over-reliance on the dark and disgraceful cultural, racial and religious elements of the populist revolt which obscures its fundamental economic underpinnings.

I'm worried that this failure to understand the underlying problem jeopardises our ability to respond effectively. I'm worried the Turnbull government shares in this failure. Because, for as long as governments like our own ignore or even exacerbate and accelerate the undercurrents which convince people they have no place in the modern economy, that they have nothing to lose, extreme and populist parties will thrive.²⁵

The Goss modernisation

It is important to remember that Queensland has faced these challenges in the past. The election of the Goss ALP government in 1989 was seen by optimists as a rite of passage to a more modern view of the world, accelerated by a shift from agriculture to mining and tourism. But between 1996 and 1998 the traditional values of the previous decades resurfaced. One Nation emerged almost accidentally from a casual racial slur which led Hanson to be expelled from the Liberal Party. Her

²³ Howard J, *Lazarus Rising: A Personal and Political Autobiography*, HarperCollins, 2011.

²⁴ Dunlop T, '[Six quick thoughts about AusPol at the moment](#)', *The Big Smoke*, 2.11.16.

²⁵ Chalmers J, '[Hillary, Hanson and the economics of our political predicament](#)', speech, Queensland University of Technology, 14.11.16.

embrace of economic protectionism was framed in fears about Asians swamping the workforce and Aboriginal land rights causing havoc in suburban land ownership. This struck a chord within both the National Party and, significantly, the Labor Party (echoing the strong support that the union movement had provided for the maintenance of a White Australia policy on immigration in the years before Whitlam). Hanson's constituency in the national parliament was suburban, working-class Ipswich, not rural Kingaroy, reflecting the social diversity of her support.

'Authenticity' in leaders reached its peak during the long reign (1968 to 1987) of Premier Joh Bjelke Petersen but it remained a sought-after commodity, self-consciously imitated by the ALP's Peter Beattie (Premier from 1998 to 2007) and his oft-quoted roots in the Atherton tableland. Both leaders sought to distance themselves from effete full-time politicians: city-slickers they were prepared to roundly criticise and disown.

Bjelke Petersen offered balm to the problems of rural depopulation in the form of interventionist policies aimed at satisfying rural needs. But his latter years seemed to be dominated by the so-called 'white shoe brigade': entrepreneurs developing property on the coastal fringe to house newcomers attracted by the end of death duties. The 'white shoe brigade' were white male property entrepreneurs (like Donald Trump), many of whom became bankrupt (as did Trump in the 1990s), or whose business practices were so dodgy as to cause a few to be jailed (bribes to politicians), skip the country (Christopher Skase) or remerge from bankruptcy in the guise of a different 'phoenix' entity. In today's environment they would probably be One Nation donors, as they were to Bjelke-Petersen and the then Nationals.

After Joh, rural alienation was sustained by the dominance of Brisbane and Southeast Queensland over both political and economic decision-making.

Queensland now

A whole smorgasbord of fundamentalist policy preferences from the 1970s lived on in Queensland and had been preserved and transmitted by a committed minority ever since. The mining boom papered this over but when National Party Premier Rob Borbidge (1996 to 1998) adopted centrist approach he was ultimately undone by residual fundamentalist appeals inside his own National Party (disowning his attempts to confront One Nation) and by the success of the One Nation onslaught in a significant number of seats in rural and fringe suburban areas.

Queensland was very narrowly spared a regime dominated by One Nation and the reduced LNP representation. Beattie held on by a single vote in Parliament, not unlike the present tenuous grip of Palaszczuk. Quite quickly, he was able to convert this into a more substantial hold through by-election victories as the One Nation group fell apart, deprived (as it now would be) by the absence of their leader diverted to the other parliament in Canberra.

This internal collapse is the consequence of minor parties having little in the way of constituency structure and the attraction such parties offer to individuals with particular policy axes to grind which may not be central to the primary ideological motivation of the party. This undermined Clive Palmer's attempt to build a structure around his own wealth and celebrity and it appears something similar is threatening in the Senate with One Nation's diverse representatives holding eccentric views about the nature of the Australian constitution and conspiratorial explanations for the parlous state of the nation's finances and its climate.

But, to return to the main theme, Queensland's parliament is different from the Senate. One Nation voters here can identify with a relevant past and it is clear that the leadership will have learnt lessons from that past when it comes to the next state election. Given the extra financial resources (courtesy of government funding generated from past electoral performances) and encouraging opinion polls, better quality candidates are likely to make themselves available to contest for a glittering prize. And Hanson herself will have learnt how to play a canny political game, as she has already demonstrated in manipulating her relationship with Turnbull.

So both the ALP and other political organisations need to accept the advice offered recently by another Queenslander now in Canberra:

Progressive politicians need to be clear their problem is with Hanson, not with her base. Arrogantly attacking people with real fears and real economic concerns will make things worse

The only valid approach is to deal constructively with the economic anxieties by protecting the social safety net, protecting universal healthcare and ensuring adequate industrial protections

If practical steps aren't taken, the current trends will gather pace. If we don't listen, if we don't learn, if we don't put all our energy into this task, if we don't find a place for them in the economy, if we don't get closer to those we represent, we don't deserve their support.

More people will head for the polar extremes of politics, there will be more Trumps and more Hansons, more supporters with nothing to lose.²⁶

And there is an echo here of the lessons drawn by Siro Zavos in his review of our 1979 book on education policymaking in Queensland.²⁷ Zavos pointed out that the victory of 'the reactionaries' in Queensland may be attributed in part to the failure by the professionals to appreciate the need to carry public opinion with them.

His review ended with a quotation from the book:

Educationists must realise the extent to which they need to convince the public in advance before introducing radical ideas which seem to threaten a decline in standards and a decline in parental influence over the upbringing of their children. Humility brings its own rewards.²⁸

The same can be said of the 'white bread politicians' in Queensland coping with the roughage of the wider challenge of One Nation.

²⁶ Chalmers J, '[Hillary, Hanson and the economics of our political predicament](#)', speech, Queensland University of Technology, 14.11.16.

²⁷ Zavos S, 'The lesson taught by Mrs Joyner', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19.6.79.

²⁸ From Gowers A and Scott R, *Fundamentals and Fundamentalists: A Case Study of Education and Policy-Making in Queensland*, Australasian Political Studies Association, Monograph 22, 1979.