If You Can’t Beat ‘Em, Appropriate ‘Em:
How The Political Establishment Neutralised Extremist Challengers in Contemporary Australia
Through ‘Mainstreaming’ and Legal Challenges

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This paper addresses the establishment’s reaction to extremist challengers in contemporary Australia, and shows why the adaption and ‘mainstreaming’ of elements of extremists’ discourse and policies have essentially neutered extremist challengers’ chances at power and legitimacy at the present time.

Unlike the recent experience of many European countries, Australia has not experienced the rise or particular success of any sustained extremist political movement or party over the past decade, despite a number of such challengers emerging. Much of this has to do with the continued legacy of how the ascendance of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party was neutralised in the late 1990s by the two major political parties. The ruling Liberal-National Coalition nullified One Nation’s encroachment onto their traditional conservative voter base not by outright repudiating One Nation, but by selectively adopting elements of Hanson’s rhetoric and refiguring these elements in a ‘softer’ manner, and by adapting elements of their policy platform to the extent that Hanson accused the Prime Minister of stealing her party’s policies. In the meantime, current Prime Minister Tony Abbott then secretly established a ‘slush fund’ to back legal challenges against One Nation.

The success of these tactics – and the continued adoption by both major parties of those elements that were previously described as ‘extremist’ – have left a situation in which genuinely extremist challengers have failed to gain a foothold, and instead, perceptions of ‘extremism’ are foisted upon third-party alternatives that fall outside the narrow ideological gap between the major parties, with such actors being portrayed as ‘extremists’, ‘nutters’ or ‘socialists’, often with enthusiastic backing from the Murdoch press. This paper will trace these trends, and consider what the Australian combination of policy and discourse ‘mainstreaming’, legal challenges and a sympathetic media can tell us more broadly about how the establishment deals with extremist challengers.
INTRODUCTION

If we are to believe the press and a number of prominent members of the European political and financial elite, Europe is standing on the precipice of disaster as extremism spreads, and even threatens to take over the European Parliament come May (Malmström 2014; Painter 2013; Stearns 2014). Indeed, the rise of extremist parties and movements in Europe over the past two decades has led to a small cottage industry around the topic amongst academics, journal editors and publishers. Yet on the other side of the world, in Australia, the situation is very different: political extremists do not pose any kind of credible electoral threat, and indeed, fail to even register in prominent political debates in the country. Unlike many countries in Europe, Australia has not experienced the rise or particular success of any sustained extremist political movement or party over the past decade. Since the fall of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation in the late 1990s, while there has been a loose ‘supply’ of extremist challengers as well as political opportunities for extremists in the form of race riots and heated debates about asylum seekers and immigration, extremists have simply not received the media coverage or political support that they have garnered in other parts of the world. While in the UK and the US – Australia’s core political allies and models of influence – Nigel Farage’s UKIP and the Tea Party have enjoyed a great deal of attention and some political success, it simply has not been the case Down Under. How can we understand this situation?

This paper argues that in contemporary Australia, the adaption and ‘mainstreaming’ of elements of extremists’ discourse and policies have essentially neutered extremist challengers’ chances at power and legitimacy. Following the neutralisation of the threat of One Nation in the late 1990s, both the major political parties (the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party) have selectively adopted elements of the extremist right’s rhetoric and reconfigured these elements in a ‘softer’ and more palatable manner. With the ‘race to the bottom’ undertaken by both parties on matters of immigration, there has been little room for extremist challengers to emerge and take issue ownership of the usually salient issues for extremists. With such extremists sidelined, the major parties – along with a Coalition-aligned Murdoch press – have taken to portraying the third party in Australia politics, the Greens, as the true extremists in the Australian political landscape. This paper provides an outline of these processes, considering what the Australian combination of policy and discourse ‘mainstreaming’, legal challenges and a sympathetic media
can tell us about how the establishment deals with extremist challengers, and more broadly, how the sometimes porous line between ‘mainstream’ and ‘extreme’ operates.

The paper lays out this argument over four sections. First, it provides context by explaining the current political situation in Australia following the 2013 Federal Election. Here, it maps out the failure of the far right or far left in Australia to achieve anything approaching influence or electoral success over past years, and introduces the other main players who are perceived in Australia as ‘extremist’. Second, it outlines the process of ‘mainstreaming’, in which extremist actors (or their ideas) are made more legitimate, palatable and acceptable in democratic political systems. Third, it examines how the most pertinent extremist threat in contemporary Australian politics was neutralized through ‘mainstreaming’ and legal actions by considering the case of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation and the strategy adopted by the ruling Coalition government. Fourth, it considers the repercussions of these processes, examining the way in which the ‘extremist threat’ was shifted from the right to the left in the targeting of the Australian Greens.

POLITICAL EXTREMISM IN AUSTRALIA TODAY
To put it bluntly, political extremists\(^1\) of the left or right are not a particularly potent political force in the contemporary Australian political landscape. While many extremist groups exist, they are relatively small, are not particularly united, and lack any meaningful organizational structure. On the extreme right, the Rise Up Australia Party, One Nation, Australia First Party, and Australian Protectionist Party – all offering more or less virulent forms of nationalist, racist or anti-immigrant sentiment – performed woefully in the 2013 Federal Elections. In terms of first preference voting for the House of Representatives, the Rise Up Australia Party received 0.38%, One Nation 0.17%, Australia First 0.06% and the Australian Protectionist Party 0.01%, which combined, adds up to a not particularly impressive 0.62% of the entire first preferences nationally.

\(^{1}\) Although the term ‘extremist’ can be used as an epithet to describe parties that are not particularly extreme, as shall be seen in the case of the Australian Greens later in this paper, the term is used in this section of the paper following the still-relevant definition of Powell (Powell 1986: 358-359): “The extremist party represents a demand for major transformation of the society, either towards some future vision or back to an idealized past. Such demands diverge from the general, current policy consensus; their presence severely strains the ability to reconcile expressed interests in the political system. From this point of view, extremist parties are those parties promoting clearly articulated issue proposals that are at odds with those promoted by most other parties”.
Although these far right parties have failed to make an electoral dent in Australian politics in recent years, far right organisations such as the Australian League of Rights and Australian Defence League, as well as smaller groups like the neo-Nazi Blood and Honour, the Patriotic Youth League and the Eureka Youth League have received more attention, particularly following the participation of a number of these groups in the Cronulla race riots of 2005 (Poynting 2006, 2007). The most prominent of these groups to emerge in recent years has been the Q Society, an organisation which came to prominence last year for organizing and hosting Dutch populist Geert Wilders’ speaking tour of Australia in 2013. The Q Society is planning to launch a Wilders-backed party, the Australian Liberty Alliance, to contest the next federal election.

On the other side of the electoral spectrum, the far left in Australia is electorally represented by a collection of Communist, Trotskyist and Socialist parties including the Communist League, Socialist Alliance, Social Equality Party and Socialist Party. Of these parties, only the Socialist Alliance ran federally in the House of Representatives in 2013, receiving 0.04% of the vote. In terms of far left organisations, the main extreme left group is Socialist Alternative.²

Table 1: Australian Federal Election Results, House of Representatives, First Preferences by Party 1998-2013³

² The youth organisation Resistance was also quite prominent, but in February 2014 merged into the Socialist Alliance as their youth wing.
³ In this table, ‘Extreme Right’ refers to the combined vote of One Nation, the Rise Up Australia Party, Australia First Party and Australian Protectionist Party. ‘Extreme Left’ refers to Socialist Alliance, Socialist Equality Party, Communist Alliance and the Democratic Socialist Electoral League.
As the table above shows, the poor electoral showing of both the extreme right and left in Australia is unsurprising given the gradual slide away of support from extreme parties since the late 1990s. Australia has not seen anything approaching a successful ‘extremist’ political party since the demise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party, and no extremist party has stepped into the vacuum opened up by the party’s electoral misfortune. While protest parties may have won big in the 2013 Federal Election, they were not extremist, but centre-right offshoots of the Coalition (the Palmer United Party and Katter Australian Party being the main players). As it stands, rather than right extremists being seen as a threat to pluralism, or left extremists being portrayed as vanguards of the next stage in Australia’s political-economic development, these extremists have suffered the fate of being punchlines to jokes, targets of satire, and perhaps most damningly, the majority of these parties have failed to penetrate the public’s political consciousness at all.

So if those political actors that are typically construed as ‘extremist’ are electorally impotent, as well as culturally irrelevant in Australia circa-2014, can we expect that talk of extremism would be relatively absent from Australian politics? Not at all. The ‘extremist’ epithet still has considerable purchase in contemporary Australian political discourse. The difference is that in the absence of any credible threat to mainstream parties from the extremes of either side of the ideological divide, it is now applied to a party that is more ideologically moderate – the Australian Greens (Miragliotta 2006). How did Australia get to this situation? The process of ‘mainstreaming’ right extremism has played a particularly effective role in bringing Australia to this current state of affairs.

**MAINSTREAMING AS NEUTRALISATION**

What does it mean to speak of ‘mainstreaming’? While the concept is used relatively indiscriminately in the political science literature – particularly in the literatures on populism and extremism – there are very few attempts to provide a clear definition of the term. Nonetheless, there are two central (interrelated) usages that can be discerned. The first refers to the way that the ideology, policies, discourse or style of non-mainstream actors are adopted by mainstream political actors, usually in order to compete with or neutralise a potential electoral threat from the non-mainstream actor. For example, in the Australian context, Curran (2004: 38) uses the term to refer to the “the incorporation of populist notions into the political mainstream” and argues that
“this embrace by mainstream electoral parties of the themes and policies urged by neo-populist parties – including anti-immigration and anti-asylum policies – demonstrates a clear appropriation of populism’s style and content”.

The second usage refers to the process of the gradual *legitimation* of non-mainstream actors (again, usually extremist or populist political actors) – that is, bringing the *actual actors* into the mainstream. This can be done by the non-mainstream actors by presenting themselves as legitimate and less radical than they may have done previously – a good example here is Marine Le Pen’s repositioning of the Front National as a legitimate and ‘mainstream’ political force rather than positioning itself as an outsider party (Shields 2013). This mainstreaming can also be done by other actors who seek to present the non-mainstream actor in a legitimate light. This may be an electoral necessity, undertaken by established political parties who seek to ‘mainstream’ another party that is needed to form a coalition or minority government. It can also be done by media actors, as in the case of Fox News and CNN’s coverage of the Tea Party, which Guardino and Snyder (2012: 537) argue “operated to mainstream the Tea Party as a representative social force, as a political constituency, and as a source of policy ideas”.

While the ideational outcome of both of these processes may be the same – the legitimation of previously taboo or extreme ideologies/policies/discourses – the position of the ‘extreme’ actor obviously differs in each. In the first case, other political actors seek to neutralise the non-mainstream actor’s appeal through appropriation, thus making them irrelevant, while in the second case, the non-mainstream actors are eventually brought *into* the mainstream, giving them legitimacy, and ostensibly increased political and electoral purchase.

In either case, the line between the mainstream and the extreme is marked by both blurriness and porousness in regards to who belongs in the latter category, and how one goes about crossing the border between the two. Kallis (2013) has explored both of these dimensions in his mainstreaming. The blurriness between the two resides in the fact that the distinction may differ across different settings, cultures or times, and that the distinction is reliant on both local and broader global shifts in political and cultural attitudes. Mainstream and extreme, in other words, are not scientific, set categories. They rely entirely on *perceptions* of ‘mainstreamness’ or ‘extremeness’ – as Shields (2013: 194) puts it when discussing the future of the Front National, “in the end, the extent to which the FN brand is or is not detoxified will depend neither on the
FN itself nor on its supporters. In politics, perception is all. Until the FN is seen as a normal party, it will not be one”.

The porousness between mainstream and extreme categories, however, seems to rely primarily on the willingness of mainstream actors to allow extreme actors into the fold. As Kallis puts it, ‘boundary-crossing’ can result both in and from boundary-blurring. This is true of even the appellation extremist, which is juxtaposed to an alleged mainstream. One exists by virtue of the recognition of the other; in theory, however, it is the latter that draws the lines of admissibility regarding the former and formalizes the distinction...Sometimes it is easier to draw the distinction—for example, vis-à-vis a radical party and discourse that openly (and sometimes violently) challenges the fundamental norms of a political system and society. In many cases, however, the distinction may be deployed mostly as a rhetorical weapon by mainstream political and social actors, without necessarily mapping onto the putative mainstream–extreme divide. (Kallis 2013: 226).

As we shall see, this has been the case in drawing the divisions between the mainstream and the extreme in the contemporary Australian political landscape. The following sections address how mainstream parties in Australia used the first variety of ‘mainstreaming’ discussed above – combined with legal challenges – to defeat the electoral threat of the extreme right in the form of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party in the late 1990s. It will then address how mainstream parties have used the distinction between mainstream and extreme as a ‘rhetorical weapon’ against the Greens following One Nation’s downfall.

**NEUTRALISING RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM: MAINSTREAMING & LEGAL CHALLENGES**

The most eminent extremist threat to mainstream parties in contemporary Australia came ironically from within the mainstream parties’ very own ranks. Pauline Hanson, a fish and chip shop owner from suburban Queensland, joined the Liberal Party in 1995 and was endorsed as the Party’s candidate for the seat of Oxley, a safe Labor seat, in the following year’s Federal Election. However, two months before the election, Hanson publicly announced (via a letter to the editor of her local newspaper) her views on abolishing special assistance to Aborigines, claiming that “government showers them with money, facilities and opportunities” and that “the problem is that politicians in all their profound wisdom have and are causing a racism problem” (Hanson 1996b: 14). The Liberal Party disendorsed Hanson a few weeks later following an
ensuing outcry. The ballots for the election, however, had already been printed and the nominations closed by the time Hanson was disendorsed, so despite Hanson running as an independent, she was still listed as a Liberal on the ballot papers. The combined publicity and confusion around her party status worked in her favour, as she was elected with a massive swing against Labor.

While already a prominent figure following the commotion around her disendorsement, Hanson truly burst into the national political consciousness following her maiden speech in Parliament on 10 September 1996, in which she rallied against multiculturalism, immigration and Aboriginal rights, portraying them as pet causes of ‘the elite’, and claiming that “reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians”. She particularly targeted Asian immigration, arguing that Australia was “in danger of being swamped by Asians” (Hanson 1996a). While the majority of the Australian media and many politicians were strongly critical of Hanson, then Prime Minister John Howard (of the ruling Liberal-National Coalition) refused to censure or critique her, and instead claimed that Hanson’s presence in Parliament was a good thing, given that it opened the door for Australians to "speak a little more freely and a little more openly about what they feel" (Howard 1996: 13).

A party was formed around Hanson in April 1997 – One Nation – and despite its amateurism and an almost constant run of controversies, it did very well in the 1998 Queensland state election, winning 22.7% of the vote and picking up 11 out of 89 seats – the highest percentage of the vote that any third party has ever received in Australia. While Labor suffered a swing of 4% away from them in the election, it is the Liberal Party and their coalition partners, the Nationals, who bore the brunt of the One Nation vote, with the Liberals suffering a 6.7% swing and the Nationals suffering an 11% swing.

The threat to the Liberal-National Coalition was obvious by this point. Although the state results were not necessarily transferable to a national setting, they set an ominous sign for the party facing a Federal Election the following year. At this time, the Liberals adopted a “two-track strategy” (Head 2003: 265) to fight the ‘extremist’ threat that Hanson and One Nation presented to their electoral base. The first of these strategies was to ‘mainstream’ elements of One Nation’s program and adopt their discourse to win back disaffected voters and render One Nation
politically impotent, while the second strategy was to destroy the party and present it as corrupt and illegitimate through legal challenges.

MAINSTREAMING HANSON’S EXTREMISM
While Howard had been flirting with populism before the rise of Hanson – claiming that “there is a frustrated mainstream in Australia today which sees government decisions increasingly driven by the noisy, self-interested clamour of powerful vested interests” and denouncing political correctness as “minority fundamentalism” (Howard 1995) – it was the arrival (and threat) of Hanson that allowed him to push his populism further and appropriating the ethno-exclusivist aspects of Hanson’s discourse in the process. Combined with the mainstreaming of elements of the One Nation policy platform, this aimed to sideline Hanson and her party as a prominent political threat to the Coalition.

On the discursive front, Howard proved himself adept at adapting Hanson’s virulent nationalism and recasting it in a ‘softer’ manner that proved more palatable to wider audiences. While Hanson’s discourse was explicitly about ‘reverse racism’ and ‘separatism’, pivoting on the relationship between white Australians and others, Howard was able to recast this divide as one between ‘mainstream Australia’ and those who sought to denigrate or attack it. While the ghosts of ethno-exclusivism still haunted his discourse – as Johnson notes, his notion of ‘mainstream Australia’ was “white, anglo-celtic heterosexual men and women in traditional family/gender relationships” (Johnson 2000: 20) – it was not as blatantly obvious nor as discriminatory as Hanson’s.

As Mondon (2013) outlines, Howard’s blurry designation of ‘the mainstream’ allowed him to combine the exclusivist elements of Hanson’s ethno-exclusivism with his own ideas about ‘mateship’ and ‘egalitarianism’ that he saw as inherent to the Australian character. Whereas Hanson worried primarily about the dangers of multiculturalism and the dilution of Australian identity by increased immigration, Howard framed the problem as one of ‘fairness’. Asylum seekers were not a problem because of their culture – it was because they were ‘queue jumpers’. Special interest groups and minorities were a problem because they did not represent the mainstream, and thus were an attack on Australia’s egalitarianism. As Snow and Moffitt (2012) have argued, Howard combined this discursive reframing of Hanson’s populism and ethno-extremism with a carefully cultivated public appeal as being, in his own words, “average and
ordinary” (in O’Brien 2006) – a tracksuit-wearing, white suburban dad who loved cricket and maintained his ordinariness through a “bland style, modest appearance, flat tones and affectless presence” (Rossiter 2010: 18).

Nonetheless, the ethno-exclusivist elements of Howard’s discourse did shine through at times. He began to more actively attack elements of multiculturalism, claiming that “multiculturalism suggests that we can’t make up our minds about who we are or what we believe in”, and that “I don’t like hyphenated Australians, I just like Australians” (Errington & van Onselen 2007: 157, 221; Johnson 2007: 202). He also engaged in the ‘history wars’ around the interpretation and teaching of Australian history, advocating a colonialist, Anglo-centric and pro-military ‘three cheers’ (Blainey 1993: 13) view of the nation’s history, as opposed to the ‘black armband’ view, which more fully acknowledged the atrocities that had been brought upon Australia’s indigenous people in the European colonization of the country.

Some commentators have argued that this increased negativism was a mistake: Howard “defined what he was against more than what he was for – against the Aboriginal apology, the republic, gay marriage, Kyoto, boat arrivals, multiculturalism, and finally, he was viscerally against Keating’s identity agenda“ (Kelly 2010: 331). Yet in the light of Howard’s mainstreaming of Hanson’s discourse, none of this seems like a ‘blunder’, but more so a careful and deliberate discursive strategy for mainstreaming a more extreme discourse. As Ang (2003: 53) ultimately puts it, "one of Howard’s (arguably dubious) achievements has been to make Hanson’s crude white populism respectable by translating it into mainstream common sense", or as Mondon (2013) puts it, creating a ‘populist hegemony’.

On the policy front, Howard went about implementing elements of One Nation’s policy program, thus taking issue ownership on a number of salient areas from Hanson. This hit a boiling point when in 2001, Hanson actually accused Howard of stealing her policies (Errington & van Onselen 2007; Hanson 2007: x). The issues on which Howard was able to capitalize on were quite diverse, but all revolved around the aforementioned divide between ‘ordinary Australians’ or ‘the mainstream’ versus ‘special interests’, who were usually construed as asylum seekers, welfare recipients or ‘the elite’ who supported them with lenient policies. As Wear (2008: 625) puts it “Howard recast policies on Aboriginal affairs, multiculturalism, immigration, social welfare and Australian nationalism to match more closely those advocated by Hanson”. The
most pertinent of these policies tended to revolve around multiculturalism and immigration, and
the most prominent examples of Howard’s strategy in this regard can be found in the cases of the
MV Tampa and Children Overboard affairs.

The MV Tampa incident occurred when Howard prevented a Norwegian cargo ship, which had
rescued 439 Afghani asylum seekers from a sinking vessel, from entering Australian waters.
Accused by many of disregarding the asylum seekers’ human rights (Bostock 2002; Burnside
2002; Mathew 2002), Howard’s approach legitimised public concerns about opportunistic
‘queue-jumpers’ and potential terrorist threats to Australia’s national security. This was further
compounded in the Children Overboard affair, during which Howard and other Coalition
Ministers claimed that ‘Middle Eastern’ asylum seekers had thrown their children from their
vessel in an attempt to stop an Australian ship from turning them away from Australian waters.
Although a subsequent Senate enquiry found that no children had actually been thrown
overboard (Australia 2002), Howard was re-elected with an increased majority shortly after the
affair. This approach to asylum seekers, and national security more generally, is reflected in
Howard’s now famous maxim, “we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances
in which they come” (Goot & Watson 2007: 267) – not far from the claim that Hanson made in
her maiden speech that “I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home,
then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country” (Hanson 1996a). Other
examples of Howard’s ‘mainstreaming’ of Hanson’s policies included cutting immigration
intakes; abolishing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission (ATSIC), which was
Australia’s peak body for indigenous Australians, and whose abolition Hanson also advocated in
her maiden speech; and the denial of the existence of a ‘stolen generation’ of indigenous
Australians amongst others (Brett 2005; Goot & Watson 2007; Wear 2008).

LEGAL CHALLENGES: THE SLUSH FUND

The Coalition combined this mainstreaming of Hanson’s discourse and policies with an attack on
One Nation on the legal front.4 Following One Nation’s rather stunning results in the 1998
Queensland State Election, Tony Abbott (then Employment and Education Minister, now Prime
Minister) began publicly raising doubts about the legal status of One Nation’s party registration,
asking in parliament: “Is it a party or is it a business? Is it a democracy or is it a dictatorship?...Is

4 The account of Abbott’s role in the Hanson slush fund is drawn from Shaw (2012) and Kingston (2013).
One Nation a constitutional entity in any meaningful sense or is it just a couple of political and financial brigands trying to hoodwink decent patriotic Australians in the way Jimmy Swaggart once tricked pious Americans?” (in Australia, House of Representantives 1998: 5970), and going so far as to lobby the Queensland Electoral Commission to look into the matter. In July of that year, Abbott met dissidents from the One National party to look into the possibility of launching civil actions against Hanson, offering free legal services as well as a guarantee that the dissidents would not be out-of-pocket for the costs of the actions.

In August, Abbott established a slush fund under the name ‘Australians for Honest Politics Trust’ to “support actions to challenge the activities of a political party or association within Australia which is alleged to conduct its affairs in breach of the laws of Australia” (in Shaw 2012). The fund achieved its goal. A Supreme Court writ was issued against One Nation, with the Court eventually ordering that One Nation pay back 500,000 AUD it was paid by the Australia Electoral Commission following the 1998 Federal Election, and police investigations launched against the party. The ostensible reason for this is that when the party was registered in 1997, the 500 necessary people on the membership list were not actual members of the party, but ‘supporters’. One Nation eventually paid back the money in 2001.

Following the police investigation, in 2002 both Pauline Hanson and One Nation co-founder David Ettridge were committed to stand trial for fraud in obtaining public monies and fraud in registering a political party. The trial took place in July and August of 2003, and both Hanson and Ettridge, despite claiming that they were not guilty, were sentenced to three years jail. Both Abbott and then-Prime Minister John Howard publicly claimed that the sentence was ultimately too severe for the crime. Three months later, Hanson and Ettridge were freed following a successful appeal, in which it was concluded that the 500 signatories to the member list, although ‘supporters’ at the time, eventually became official members of One Nation.

As legal scholar Head (2003) argued at the time, the court case against Hanson and her ultimate jailing was a worrying example of how the ‘civilised’ mainstream parties could use legal means to remove electoral threats from more ‘extreme’ parties:

Hanson’s jailing set a dangerous precedent for use against any electoral grouping considered a threat to the political establishment…a careful review of the case shoes that after a protracted political and legal campaign, involving senior members of the Howard government, the law was
misused to remove an opposition party from the political scene, violating basic democratic rights in the process (2003: 264).

Throughout this period, Abbott was continually adamant that the fund had nothing to do with the Liberal Party, and rather that he had launched the fund “as a citizen and a democrat, because One Nation is a fraud on the taxpayers and must be exposed” (in Wilkinson 1998). However, some doubt has been raised about the veracity of such claims, especially given Abbott was very careful to ensure the anonymity of those who donated to the fund from the outset (Kingston 2013; O’Brien 2003; Shaw 2012). When the Australian Electoral Commission asked Abbott to reveal the names on the list to ensure that it was not an ‘associated entity’ – that is, controlled by or operating for the benefit of a political party – Abbott refused, citing legal advice he had received prior to setting to up the fund. Indeed, of the twelve donors that contributed to the fund, only two have ever been publicly identified – major Liberal Party donor Harold Clough; and former employer of Tony Abbott at the influential Australian magazine, The Bulletin, Trevor Kennedy.

THE AFTERMATH
As the electoral results presented earlier in this paper present, the combined attack of mainstreaming Hanson’s discourse and policies as well as legal attacks on One Nation were wildly successful. One Nation’s vote share dropped off rapidly over the Federal Elections following Hanson’s initial rise in 1996. While the party received strong results in the 1998 election, gaining 8.43% of the national first-preference votes for the House of Representatives, Hanson failed to return to office, and the only seat the party won was in the Queensland Senate. The following federal elections saw the party lose approximately half its vote each time, dropping to 4.34% in 2001, 1.19% in 2004, and well below 1% in subsequent elections. None of these results were helped by the fact that both the Coalition and Labor had made the decision to preference One Nation last. Beyond this, Hanson’s repeated attempts to gain office – contesting two New South Wales state elections, one Queensland state election and five federal elections as variously part of One Nation, as part of a short-lived party called Pauline’s United Australia Party, and a number of times as an independent – have been unsuccessful, with Hanson perhaps now seen more as a media figure than a politician in Australia. She has transitioned to television with appearances on morning television shows, tabloid current affair shows, as well as reality shows including Dancing With The Stars and The Celebrity Apprentice. It also must be acknowledged that Hanson’s fall and the increasing irrelevance of One Nation was certainly
accelerated by an unstable party structure, infighting within the party, erratic policy advisors and an antagonistic relationship with the mass media (Pasquarelli 1998: 304).

Despite Hanson and One Nation’s now marginal status in Australia, her shadow looms large across the Australian political landscape. Following Howard’s ‘mainstreaming’ of Hanson’s policies, the Labor Party almost completely accepted the Coalition’s increasingly hardline policies on asylum seekers, and in a race to determine who could be more tougher on ‘boat people’, as they became known in Australian parlance, the two major parties have fought to prove their strong-man credentials. As Adams (2013: online) notes, “since Kim Beazley tossed in the towel over Tampa, Labor’s history on refugees has been disgraceful. People forget Mark Latham wanted to out-Ruddock Philip Ruddock [the former Liberal Immigration Minister], as did Julia Gillard. And now Rudd.” Indeed, Hanson gave her support to Labor’s immigration policy in 2010 – not a particularly edifying look for an ostensibly social-democratic party of the Left.

Labor’s capitulation to the mainstreamed version of Hanson’s policies and discourse that was proffered by Howard thus left the political landscape in Australia looking rather hostile for the extremist right to make any inroads. As Mondon (2013: 163) puts it, “Howard had smothered both the radical right and the moderate left, leaving as the only real opposition to his populism two small parties: the Greens and the Democrats”. In shifting the ‘issue ownership’ of matters of immigration, border security and other topics that have tended to be the domain of the radical right to the centre of the Australian ideological spectrum, while at the same time defanging them through legal battles, he was able to remove any demand for radical right extremism.

This left somewhat of a vacuum for ‘extremists’ in Australian politics. The extremist right had nowhere to go, given that the major two parties were already engaged in arms race as to who could punish asylum seekers more harshly, while the extreme left was disorganized, ravaged by infighting, and continued to be electorally ineffectual. With the ‘extremists’ of both ideological colours sidelined by the mid-2000s, the ‘extremist’ epithet was open for redefinition in Australian politics.

MAKING THE GREENS EXTREME
The extremist tag thus began to be applied, unsurprisingly, to the next growing electoral force that had the potential to woo voters away from the mainstream parties: the Australian Greens. Following the implosion of the third party of Australian politics, the Australian Democrats following the 2001 election, the Greens became the new third party. The Australian Greens, part of the global Green movement, was established in 1992, drawing together a number of environment groups from around Australia. Despite its relative newness in the Australian political system, “the Greens have emerged as one of the strongest performing Green parties in electoral terms, out-polling older and more established Green parties elsewhere” (Miragliotta 2013: 706). Since their formation in the early 1990s, the party has increased their overall vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate in every Federal Election up to 2010 (barring a small dip in the Senate vote in 1996). However, following the retirement of their long-time leader Bob Brown in 2012, as well as the party’s (quite unpopular) partnership with the Labor Party in a minority government, the Greens suffered a negative swing of 3.3% in the Lower House and 4.4% in the Upper House in 2013. Ideologically, the Greens fit on the post-materialist left, balancing environmentalism with a more radical/socialist wing (Jackson 2011; Manning & Rootes 2005; Miragliotta 2006), although others have argued that the Greens should also be viewed as an extension of social democratic ideology (Fredman 2013).

In other words, the Greens are not, in any accurate sense of the word, ‘extremist’. They are typical of other established Greens parties elsewhere in the developed world. Yet they have continually been portrayed as extremists in the Australian press. As Miragliotta (2006: 586) puts it, “political commentators are fond of using adjectives such as ‘feral’, ‘extremists’, ‘idealistic’, ‘watermelon party’ and ‘radical left wing party’ to describe the party”, and as we shall see, this labelling has only increased in veracity and frequency in recent years.

The ‘extreming’ of the Greens – that is, the opposite of ‘mainstreaming’ – began in earnest in the mid-2000s, as the party’s performance in polls leading up to the 2004 Federal Election began to rise. Before this, the party was seen as a relatively harmless minor party popular with ‘greenies’, but due to the increasing bipartisanship between the two major parties on matters of immigration, asylum seekers and the war on Afghanistan, the party began attracting much more attention as they began to speak as the defacto left voice on these issues in the Australia press. As the free-market Liberal-aligned think tank the Institute of Public Affairs put it quaintly at the time,
“Green policies now matter as their voter base grows, their parliamentary power increases and their policy ambit widens” (Hoggett 2004: 2).

The earliest prominent labelling of the Greens as extremists came in October 2003, when Liberal Senator (and now Attorney-General) George Brandis claimed in a speech to parliament that “the commonalities between contemporary Green politics and old-fashioned fascism and Nazism are chilling”, called the Greens “true fanatics”, accused them of “zealotry” and “fundamentalism”, and claimed “that this is the kind of crypto-fascist politics we do not want in this country” (in Australia, Senate, 2003: 17000-17002). This rather virulent attack on the Greens earned only a mild rebuke from the Prime Minister John Howard’s office, which stated that “while the PM understands and supports Senator Brandis’s criticism of the Greens’ opportunistic behaviour, a comparison with Nazis is not one he would have made” (Lateline 2003).

As the 2004 Federal Election grew closer, the Coalition leadership joined the chorus of denouncing the Greens as extremists, with Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson calling them “extremists” and claiming that “they are watermelons, many of them – green on the outside and very, very, very red on the inside” (in Blenkin 2004), and John Howard calling their policies “kooky” (in Caldwell 2004). This was combined with advertisements from minor Christian parties Family First and the Christian Democratic Party that attacked the Greens, the former claiming that “a vote for the Greens is a vote for extremes” and that Greens wanted to “giv[e] my kids easy access to marijuana”, while the latter claimed that the Greens policy of lowering the age of consent for homosexuals “was good news for child abusers” (in Caldwell 2004). The tarring of the Greens as extremists continued throughout the 2000s, with concerns being raised before the 2007 Federal Election that Greens would hold the balance of power in the Senate, something that the Coalition Senate leader Nick Minchin claimed that voters “should be extremely concerned about” as they were “Australia’s most extreme left-wing party” (Murphy 2007).

However, cries of Green extremism became most vociferous following the 2010 Federal Election. Labor and the Coalition both won 72 seats in the House of Representatives, leaving both parties four seats short of majority government. Labor was able to form a minority government with the support of three independents and the single Green in the House of Representatives, Adam Bandt. In this process, the Greens signed a formal agreement with Labor,
agreeing to vote to ensure supply to the government, to oppose any no-confidence motions, as well as a number of other demands including commitment to climate change legislation.

These claims of extremism were most prominent in the Murdoch press stable, particularly in the News Corporation newspapers, which account for 59% of all daily newspapers sold in Australia, and even larger share of the capital city and national papers – 65% (Flew 2013). A number of studies have noted the political links between the Murdoch press in Australia and the conservative side of Australian politics (Arsenault & Castells 2008; McKnight 2010; Tiffen 2014), and Murdoch himself has made no secret of his engagement with politics: asked in 2007 what the most pleasurable part of his business empire was, he answered “‘being involved with the editor of a paper in a day-to-day campaign…trying to influence people” (Auletta 2007). This influence was on show in a visit to Australia in 2010, when he called Australia “a wonderful land of opportunity”, but warned that “whatever you do, don’t let the bloody Greens mess it up” (in Manne 2011).

A short look at the Murdoch press’ coverage of the Greens reveals not only an increase in instances of the Greens being referred to as ‘extremists’, but an increase in the veracity of attacks on the party, particularly after the 2010 election. A search of the Factiva database of Murdoch’s five largest Australian newspapers – *The Herald-Sun, The Daily Telegraph, The Courier-Mail, The Advertiser* and *The Australian* – for the terms “greens” and “extremis*” (i.e. any word beginning with ‘extremis’ – i.e. extremism, extremist, extremists, etc.) reveals a rapid spike in articles that include the two terms post-2010. While reports of the Greens being extremists were relatively steady in the Murdoch papers throughout the mid-2000s, hovering between 24-48 per year (with the outlier of 1998 being a relatively quiet year, with 15 stories) between 2000-2009, these reports exploded with a jump to 65 stories in 2010, 171 in 2011 and 134 in 2012.
This does not even take into account other related epithets that are lobbed the Greens’ way, such as those noted earlier. If we include the terms “watermelon*”, “communis*”, “nazi*”, “fascis*”, “zealot*” or “fanatic*” in the search, the spike is similar – while relatively steady throughout the mid-2000s, hovering between 69 and 147 articles per year between 2000 and 2009, the pejorative attacks increase greatly in 2010, with 216 articles in 2010, 342 in 2011 and 298 in 2012.

Table 3: Articles that mention the term “greens” and “extremis*”, “watermelon*”, “communis*”, “nazi*”, “fascis*”, “zealot*” or “fanatic*” in the five largest Murdoch papers, 1996-2014
This attack on the Greens, which has been documented at length by Manne (2011), has involved a sustained attempt to discredit and smear the Greens as *the* extremist danger in Australian politics. Indeed Manne argues that the coverage by Murdoch’s flagship paper, *The Australian*, in the eighteen days between the election and the announcement of the minority government in 2010 “was so unrelenting, so desperately unbalanced and unfair, that reading through the relevant articles is a comical experience” (Manne 2011: 99). To back up claims of bias, the leader of the Greens at the time, Bob Brown, ordered the Parliamentary Library to undertake an assessment of the coverage of the Greens in *The Australian* between January 2000 and January 2011: the Library found 188 negative articles and only five positive ones. Manne’s own study of the paper in the month following the election found one positive article and 50 negative ones (Manne 2011). Perhaps the most blatant of these examples was the editorial run on 9 September 2010, which stated plainly: “Greens leader Bob Brown has accused The Australian of trying to wreck the alliance between the Greens and Labor. We wear Senator Brown’s criticism with pride. We believe he and his Green colleagues are hypocrites; that they are bad for the nation; and that they should be destroyed at the ballot box” (The Australian 2010).

While the frequency of the attacks on the Greens has subsided somewhat in the Murdoch press, as the graphs above show, the anti-Green sentiment is still strong. The past years have seen headlines as “A party of ignorant extremists” (Sheridan 2011) in *The Australian*, “The low road to anarchy: how the Greens hijacked democracy” (Houghton 2014: 30) in *The Courier-Mail*, and an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* that claimed the Green’s “vision for Australia is more aligned with former communist bloc nations than anything with which mainstream Australia is familiar. The Greens are, to put it simply, a party of far-left clowns” (The Daily Telegraph 2013). Meanwhile, prominent conservative Australian magazine *Quadrant* has raised the spectre of fascism once again by linking the Greens to ‘eco-fascism’ (Bendle 2011) while Liberal Senator Eric Abetz last year referred to the party as “epitome of extremism” (in Swan et al. 2013).

Even those from within Labor’s ranks have jumped on board. Then General Secretary of the NSW ALP – and now Labor Senator – Sam Dastyari called the Greens “extremists not unlike One Nation” (in Haise 2012) in 2012, while the then-head of the Australian Workers’ Union, Paul Howes, wrote an opinion piece in Murdoch’s *The Sunday Telegraph* with the familiar headline “Labor must turn on the Greens and destroy them”. He echoed Dastyari’s claim by
claiming that “the Greens are most successful, and therefore the most dangerous of the fringe parties - the left-wing version of what Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party did to the Nationals’ vote”, accusing them of “openly want[ing] to crush the jobs of hardworking Australians” and calling them “extremists who threaten our democracy” (Howes 2012).

The sustained attack on the Greens from both sides of party politics has had its effect. In the lead-up to the 2013 Federal Election, the Coalition continued to attack the Greens and smear Labor as having been beholden to these ‘extremists’, with Abbott making a large show of preferencing against the Greens and challenging Labor to do the same. Meanwhile, Labor attempted to distance itself from the Greens and the deeply unpopular minority government. As a result, in 2013 the Greens lost a quarter of its 2010 vote in the House of Representatives, and a third in the Senate. This result, and the perception of the party as extreme and somehow responsible for the unpopular minority government with Labor, has led to much soul-searching in the Australian media about the future of the party (Brown 2013; Hurst 2013; Rhiannon 2013).

However, what is clear from this case is that once the ‘extremist’ epithet is associated with a party, it is difficult to shake, and it can have concrete effects. Throughout the campaign for the 2103 Federal Election, the Greens made numerous attempts to repudiate claims about their extremism, including streamlining their policy platform by dropping some of their more controversial policies around private health insurance, education funding and taxes (Taylor 2012), as well as Milne openly labelling the party as a ‘mainstream party’ and claiming that the conservative parties are "where the extremism is in Australian politics and the Greens actually represent mainstream values and mainstream opinion” (ABC/AAP 2012). So while political scientists may argue that “it is a mistake…to dismiss the party as a motley collection of extremists or idealists lacking in electoral strategy or political wherewithal (Miragliotta 2006: 595), this mistake seems hard to reverse in mainstream Australian political discourse. Indeed, this reinforces the point made by Kallis earlier in this piece that ‘mainstreaming’ – and we might now add ‘extreming’ – of parties is very much in the hands of mainstream actors. It now suits the major parties to continue to present the Greens as an extremist party, so unless the Greens have a clever plan to break through this perception, it is unlikely to change anytime soon.
CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to outline the reactions of the ‘mainstream’ in regards to extremist challengers in contemporary Australian politics. It has argued that the ‘mainstreaming’ of extremist discourse and policies, combined with effective legal challenges, was successful in neutralising the electoral threat of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party in the late 1990s. However, the ‘defeat’ of extremist forces in Australia should not be celebrated too quickly: Australia is a clear example of a situation whereby the “mainstreaming of taboo language, ideas, and practices by putatively moderate political forces invariably have a profound transformational (i.e., agenda-setting) effect on the broader cognitive context in which these issues are debated for years to come” (Kallis 2013: 237). This ‘mainstreaming’ was indeed profound and transformational, with bipartisan support on a number of ‘One Nation-lite’ policies – and later, policies completely in line with One Nation – seeing the centre-right become hegemonic in Australian politics, and the extreme right unable to capitalise on any issues. The latter section of this paper has shown how in such an environment, the ‘extremist’ epithet shifted across ideological lines, from the extremist right to a more moderate left, with the Australian Greens being targeted as the most threatening ‘extremist’ force in Australia, not only by the Coalition government, but also by the conservative Murdoch press, and eventually, the Labor Party.

This analysis of events demonstrates not only the possible efficacy of neutralising extremist threats by ‘mainstreaming’ elements of their policy and discourse, but also of the flexibility – and imprecision – of the term ‘extremist’ in Australian political discourse. The divide between extreme and mainstream in Australian politics no longer maps closely onto the traditional ideological divide between centre parties and those at the ideological extremes, but rather runs on a rather narrow spectrum in which the only legitimate ‘mainstream’ actors are those associated with the two major parties, or former members of those parties’ ideologically similar smaller parties (such as Palmer’s United Party or Katter’s Australia Party). With asylum seekers and immigration still very much salient issues in Australian politics, and the Coalition advocating ever-harsher policies in these areas, it is unlikely that the extreme right will have any genuine chance at building their support or even having their voice heard in public debates in the very near future. Meanwhile, the Greens will likely continue to attempt to shake the extremist tag, and fight to position themselves as a genuine mainstream party and contender in Australian politics. Australia thus stands as a case where processes of mainstreaming – and its opposite,
‘extreming’ – have worked together to ensure a comfortable position for mainstream parties for some time to come.
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