

Russian Influence and Far-Right Narratives in Australia

Introduction

Amid rising geopolitical tensions, there is growing scrutiny of **Russian influence operations** and their impact on political discourse abroad. In Australia, evidence suggests that Kremlin-aligned propaganda has sought to **encourage far-right narratives** – including **anti-Ukraine sentiment, climate change denial, sovereignty-based anti-globalism, and distrust in institutions** – that echo Russian geopolitical interests. This report examines public commentary by key Australian figures (Senator Ralph Babet, One Nation’s Pauline Hanson, Senator Matt Canavan, and Barnaby Joyce), alongside investigations into disinformation campaigns and online amplification patterns. We draw on intelligence reports, government inquiries, and credible media/think-tank analyses to assess how Russian state-backed or affiliated actors may be **amplifying or exploiting far-right themes** in Australia’s political landscape. Key findings and actors are summarized in the table below, followed by detailed analysis.

Key Actors, Narratives, and Indicators of Russian Influence

Actor/Group	Narratives Promoted	Indicators of Russian Influence
Senator Ralph Babet (UAP)	<i>– Anti-Ukraine, pro-Kremlin:</i> Calls the Ukraine-Russia war a Western-provoked conflict; labels President Zelenskyy a tool of “globalist agenda.” <i>– Conspiracy themes:</i> Opposes “globalist” interventions, echoes anti-establishment lines.	– Spreads Kremlin talking points: Claimed Ukraine’s division was “not by Russian aggression, but by Western interference”[1]. – Cited in inquiries: Named in a 2024 parliamentary submission for “actively spreading Russian disinformation”[2]. – Fringe media ally: Regular on conspiracy outlets (e.g. TNT Radio) which push pro-Russia stances[3].
Pauline Hanson & One Nation	<i>– Admiration for Putin:</i> Praised Vladimir Putin’s leadership and patriotism[4]. <i>– Skepticism of Ukraine support:</i> Opposes Australian military aid or troop involvement abroad, insisting on “Australia First” focus[5]. <i>– Anti-UN/globalism:</i> Denounces international agreements (climate accords, migration pacts) as threats to sovereignty. <i>– Distrust in institutions:</i>	– Pro-Kremlin rhetoric: Questioned Russia’s culpability for MH17 and expressed “respect” for Putin’s nationalism[4], statements later condemned by Australian leaders. – Disinformation content: Produced a 2022 cartoon alleging voter fraud (a baseless trope drawn from U.S. far-right conspiracies) which the Electoral Commission said undermines democracy[6]. Such narratives of a “rigged election”

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Senator Matt Canavan (Nationals)	<p>Peddles election fraud claims and “fake news” accusations against mainstream media.</p> <p>– <i>Climate change denial</i>: Argues that “net zero is dead” and champions coal, often citing Europe’s reliance on Russian gas as justification[9]. Frames climate action as a threat to Australian “sovereignty” and jobs.
– <i>Ukraine skepticism</i>: Urges peace talks and criticizes the “absence of conversations to end the conflict,” implying Western policy is prolonging war. Has downplayed some Russian attacks as accidental and suggested focus should be on diplomacy over military aid.</p>	<p>mirror tactics used by Russian trolls to erode trust.
– Foreign amplification: Hanson’s profile is sometimes weaponized by offshore actors (e.g. a Vietnam-run Facebook page recently spread <i>fabricated</i> stories about her suing the PM in a U.S. court[7][8], mimicking disinfo techniques used globally).</p> <p>– Aligned energy narrative: Embraces the line that green policies <i>enabled</i> Russia’s aggression (Europe “crippled the grid” with renewables, then depended on Russian fuel[10]), a narrative Russian outlets have promoted to deflect blame and discourage climate action.
– Appeals for ‘peace’: Publicly called for a negotiated settlement in Ukraine, reflecting a position Moscow advocates as it seeks sanctions relief. His emphasis on stopping the war <i>immediately</i> dovetails with Kremlin desires to freeze the conflict on favorable terms.
– Social media crossover: Canavan’s commentary on Ukraine – e.g. implying moral equivalence or questioning the efficacy of aiding Kyiv – has been seized on by online extremists. (One review noted he echoed a Russian “talking point” by blaming “Deep State” U.S. actors for instigating the 2014 Ukraine crisis[11], a conspiratorial narrative popularized by Kremlin media.)</p>
Barnaby Joyce (Nationals)	<p>– <i>Climate backlash</i>: Dismisses climate change urgency, often contrasting it with “real” crises like war. Famously said “Those carrying coffins out of Ukraine...are not focused on</p>	<p>– Climate narrative synergy: By using the Ukraine war to downplay climate action, Joyce amplifies a fossil-fuel-friendly stance that benefits oil and gas exporters (notably Russia). His 2022 remark belittling student climate</p>

Actor/Group	Narratives Promoted	Indicators of Russian Influence
	<p>climate change”, suggesting climate concerns are a luxury in a dangerous world[12].
– <i>Nationalist populism</i>: Condemns international pressure on Australia (on climate or trade) as “bullying,” and favors resource independence.</p>	<p>protests in light of the invasion[12] aligns with a broader Russian disinformation theme: that Western “green policies” are naïve and weaken national security[10].
– Shared platforms: While Joyce himself is a former Deputy PM, his talking points (sovereignty over global agendas, skepticism of climate science) are routinely amplified by far-right pundits and, indirectly, by Russia’s state-sponsored outlets that highlight Western dissent. There is no evidence Joyce coordinates with foreign actors; however, the overlap in messaging is notable.</p>
<p>Simeon Boikov (“Aussie Cossack”)</p>	<p>– <i>Open pro-Russia propaganda</i>: Publishes pro-Kremlin content glorifying Putin and denigrating Ukraine. Rallies against Australian support for Ukraine, parroting narratives of “NATO expansion” and “Ukrainian nazis,” and promotes various anti-government conspiracies.
– <i>Anti-establishment activism</i>: Encourages defiance of Australian authorities (e.g. during COVID lockdowns), aligning with other far-right protest leaders.</p>	<p>– Direct Russian link: Boikov is a self-styled Kremlin influencer now <i>sheltering in the Russian consulate</i> to avoid arrest[13]. Roughly 25% of the content on the Russian-run <i>Pravda Australia</i> disinformation site was <i>copied verbatim</i> from Boikov’s social media posts[13], effectively laundering his propaganda into a Kremlin information operation.
– State media platform: He has appeared on Russian state outlets and was reportedly the “most prominent contributor” to the <i>Pravda Australia</i> project (though he claims it was without his knowledge)[14][15]. Boikov exemplifies how a domestic agitator can serve as a conduit for foreign influence, bridging Australian far-right networks and Moscow’s propaganda ecosystem.</p>

Table: Australian political actors and groups promoting narratives that align with Russian interests, with evidence of influence or amplification by Russian-backed outlets. Indicators range from *direct interactions* (content sharing, praise for Putin) to *thematic parallels* exploited by “state-sanctioned trolls” online.

Russian Influence Operations Targeting Australia

Multiple investigations have uncovered *Kremlin-linked influence campaigns* in Australia, consistent with Moscow's global strategy of fomenting division and undermining support for Ukraine. A 2025 European report found that **“almost all of Russia's disinformation operations aim to weaken international support for Ukraine.”**[16] In line with this goal, Australian security agencies and researchers have observed Russia seeding or amplifying polarizing narratives in Australia:

- **State-Sponsored Trolls:** In November 2025, ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess warned that *“state-sanctioned trolls”* linked to foreign governments (notably Russia and Iran) are actively working to *“turn hot-button issues into burning issues, tipping disagreement into division and division into violence.”*[17][18] He revealed that ASIO is *“investigating pro-Russian social media influencers”* collaborating with an offshore media outlet to **discredit Australia's support for Kyiv, while simultaneously spreading vitriolic commentary about anti-immigration protests**[19]. In other words, Russian operatives have sought to exploit Australia's far-right talking points – opposition to immigration and to aiding Ukraine – as vehicles to **sow social discord**. Burgess noted neo-Nazi groups inside Australia likewise tried to leverage recent anti-immigration rallies[20], illustrating a toxic convergence between foreign agitators and domestic extremists. (Fortunately, he assessed these efforts were gaining “limited traction” so far[21].)
- **“Pravda” Propaganda Network:** Ahead of Australia's 2025 federal election, ABC News uncovered a *largely-automated pro-Russian website* called **“Pravda Australia,”** part of a global propaganda network designed to **“launder” disinformation and pro-Kremlin narratives** into the infosphere[22][23]. Analysts allege this network's true aim is insidious: retraining Western AI chatbots on *“the Russian perspective”* by pumping out thousands of articles on local topics[24][25]. In Australia's case, *Pravda Australia* suddenly ramped up to as many as 155 articles per day during the election period[25][26] – about 40% of them focused on Australian politics[27] – despite having virtually no human readership[28]. The content closely mirrored Kremlin talking points: any mention of **Russia-Ukraine, “disharmony” among Western allies, or embarrassing Western leadership moments** was heavily featured[29]. Crucially, much of this “news” was *copied directly from fringe Telegram channels*, including Australia's own **“Aussie Cossack” (Simeon Boikov)**[30]. Recorded Future, a cybersecurity firm, traced the Pravda network's origins to Russian-occupied Crimea and noted it has been evolving since 2014[31]. While *Pravda Australia* drew scant genuine traffic, experts pointed out that **humans are not the primary target – AI algorithms are**. By camouflaging propaganda under a local-sounding, generic news domain, the Russians seek to have these narratives indexed and later **regurgitated by chatbots** that cannot recognize Pravda as a disinformation source[32][33]. This novel tactic effectively “poisons” the well of information: as one analyst put it, *“chatbots absorb*

content that would otherwise be excluded [as Kremlin propaganda]” when it comes via a cut-out site[33]. The operation (codenamed “**Portal Kombat**” in intelligence circles) underscores Russia’s long game: “*They’re ultimately trying to increase division across Australia, or really undermine the democratic process itself.*”[34]

- **Foreign Amplification of Extremist Themes: Beyond high-tech efforts, Russian influence often manifests in the amplification of polarizing content on social media. The Five Eyes intelligence community has observed patterns – fake accounts, bot networks, coordinated inauthentic pages – pushing narratives sympathetic to Moscow or simply divisive in nature. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent protest movements, Australian authorities noted an influx of misinforming posts from abroad. In late 2025, The New Daily reported on foreign-run Facebook pages (operated out of Vietnam) that were spreading false stories about Australian politicians – notably One Nation’s Pauline Hanson – and other hot-button hoaxes[7][8]. While in that case the motive appeared largely to be “engagement bait” for ad revenue[8][35], the pattern of using outrageous fake news to inflame political sentiment is one perfected by Russian troll farms. Such content erodes trust in public figures and institutions by design. Likewise, Australian misinformation trackers have pointed out how satirical segments from Pauline Hanson’s One Nation blur the line between genuine critique and falsehood, potentially feeding a social media ecosystem ripe for manipulation[6].**
- **Intelligence and Policy Responses:** Australian authorities are increasingly attuned to the Russian disinformation threat. A **2024 Senate inquiry into Australia’s support for Ukraine** devoted significant attention to propaganda and foreign interference. In its October 2024 report, the inquiry stated bluntly: “*Russia is not being held to account for its dissemination of propaganda [regarding the war],*” and it recommended bolstering government resources to “**identify and address foreign interference and disinformation activities in Australia, including from Russian actors.**”[36][37] The Australian government formally agreed, pledging new efforts to protect democratic institutions and to engage with at-risk communities on disinformation[38][39]. This followed public controversies such as the ABC’s airing of a documentary with a pro-Russian slant (“Ukraine’s War: The Other Side”) in 2024, which Ukrainian-Australian groups criticized as “**completely regurgitated Russian propaganda.**”[40][41] The incident, cited in multiple inquiry submissions, exemplified how *even well-meaning attempts at “balance” in journalism can become vectors for disinformation*[42][43]. The ABC defended the broadcast on free speech grounds, but the debate highlighted the fine line between legitimate debate and the laundered narratives of a foreign adversary[44][45].

In summary, **Russia’s influence campaigns in Australia** operate on two reinforcing levels: **(1)** direct intervention in the information space (via troll accounts, proxy websites like Pravda Australia, and diaspora influencers connected to Russian state organs), and **(2)** opportunistic amplification of existing far-right or anti-establishment sentiments that align

with Moscow's interests. These operations have explicitly targeted issues such as **Australia's Ukraine policy, immigration, and climate/energy debates**, seeking to polarize public opinion and fracture the political consensus.

Far-Right Narratives in Australia Echoing Kremlin Lines

Australia's far-right and populist figures have, in various instances, espoused narratives strikingly congruent with those pushed by Russian propaganda. Whether by ideological affinity, contrarian instinct, or genuine belief, these politicians and pundits often **cast themselves as skeptics of "globalist" agendas and defenders of national interest** – positions that Russian state media eagerly amplifies to undermine Western unity. Below we examine several key narrative themes and examples:

1. Anti-Ukraine Sentiment and Pro-Russia Apologia

From the outset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Feb 2022), most of Australia's political spectrum – government and opposition alike – strongly condemned Moscow's aggression and supported aid to Kyiv. Yet a *pocket of right-wing dissenters* questioned this stance, echoing arguments familiar from Kremlin propaganda:

- **Calls to Halt Support for Ukraine:** One Nation and like-minded voices argue Australia should “*stop focusing on international conflicts*” and mind its own problems. One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts, for instance, declared in mid-2023 that Australia must “*completely reject any call to put boots on the ground in Ukraine,*” complaining that “*over a billion dollars [spent] on Ukraine*” meant *neglecting hospitals and the homeless at home*^{[5][46]}. This zero-sum framing – **aid to Ukraine vs. care for Australians** – deliberately mirrors isolationist rhetoric seen in both far-right U.S. circles and Russian talking points (which portray Western support to Ukraine as futile or self-harming). Similarly, former Liberal MP **Gerard Rennick** (now in the populist “People First” party) has amplified outright conspiracy theories about the war. In late 2024 he asserted that “*the Deep State Democrats took over Ukraine in a coup in 2014 and...designed [the war] to bleed Russia to the last Ukrainian. Defending Ukraine has nothing to do with defending democracy.*”^[11] Such claims – painting Ukraine as a mere pawn of a U.S. cabal – **directly originate from Kremlin disinformation**, which falsely casts Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity as a CIA plot. The fact that an Australian senator repeated this narrative on social media demonstrates the seepage of Russian-aligned conspiracies into our political discourse.
- **Ralph Babet's Pro-Kremlin Rhetoric:** United Australia Party Senator **Ralph Babet** has been “*the most outspoken*” parliamentarian in opposing Australia's stance on Ukraine^[47]. On his official platforms, Babet spreads themes almost indistinguishable from Russian state propaganda. In a video titled “*Zelenskyy has been exposed to the world,*” Babet described modern Ukraine as a “*relatively new invention*” and flatly claimed “*the division between Ukraine and Russia was*

provoked, not by Russian aggression, but by Western interference.”[1] He has accused President Zelenskyy of “*burning his country to the ground so he can rule over the ashes,*” and warns that Australian leaders are part of a “*globalist agenda*” pushing us toward war in Europe[48]. This narrative – that the West or “globalists” are to blame for the Ukraine war, and that Ukraine’s government is corrupt or Nazi-aligned – is heavily promoted by Kremlin outlets to deflect Russian culpability[49]. Babet’s messaging was prominent enough to be noted in a submission to the Senate’s Ukraine inquiry, which cited him as an example of MPs “*actively spreading Russian disinformation*” in Australian public debate[2]. (Notably, Babet has also opposed sanctions on Russia and questioned Australia’s joining of NATO initiatives, consistent with his non-interventionist stance.)

- **Praise for Putin’s Leadership:** Going back a few years, One Nation leader **Pauline Hanson** openly professed admiration for Vladimir Putin – a stance rare among Western politicians. In a 2017 interview, Hanson said “*I respect the man...He’s very patriotic towards his country...So many Australians here want that leadership here in Australia.*”[4] She even cast doubt on Russia’s role in shooting down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 (which killed 38 Australians in 2014), asking “*Did he [Putin] push the button?*” and demanding proof of Russia’s involvement[50]. These comments, which came “**[more than] 8 years ago**”, drew sharp rebukes from then-PM Malcolm Turnbull and other leaders[51]. Hanson’s affinity for Putin – whom she saw as a strong, nationalist, anti-Islamist leader – aligns with a strain of far-right sentiment globally that views Putin’s Russia as a bastion of traditional values against liberal globalism. It is a narrative the Kremlin is happy to encourage. (Indeed, Russian media at times highlight Hanson and others as evidence of Western publics “wanting” pro-Russia policies.)
- **“Peace” Narrative vs. “Proxy War” Narrative:** Some Australian conservatives have adopted the language of “*seeking peace*” in Ukraine – which in practice means pressuring Ukraine to concede territory or for the West to stop military aid. Nationals Senator **Matt Canavan** has publicly lamented the “*complete absence of conversations to bring an end to the conflict*” and suggested Australia and the U.S. should push harder for negotiations[52]. While advocating for peace is not objectionable per se, in context this often dovetails with the **Russian line that prolonging the war is the West’s fault**. If calls for “peace” entail Ukraine’s capitulation to aggression, they serve Moscow’s objectives. Canavan has also reportedly downplayed Russian atrocities – for example, characterizing a deadly Russian missile strike on civilians as a likely “mistake” – and shifted blame onto Ukraine for ongoing fighting (according to critical commentators)[53]. This inclination to **both-sides** or minimize Moscow’s wrongdoing, even subtly, is characteristic of far-right and far-left skeptics in many countries who suspect Western governments of ulterior motives in supporting Kyiv.

In summary, the **Australian far-right narrative on Ukraine** often frames the conflict as “*not our fight*” or even as a **proxy war engineered by global elites**, casting doubt on

Ukraine's legitimacy and urging Australia to disengage. These views are amplified by Russian propaganda because they serve to fracture the pro-Ukraine consensus. As NewsGuard's disinformation analysts observed, one of the false narratives seeded online in Australia's election season was that *"the Australian Muslim Party was formed to compete in the 2025 election"* – a complete fiction[54] designed to inflame anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant fears (thereby dividing communities). Another was that *"the Bank of Australia sued Foreign Minister Penny Wong"* over a crypto scam[55] – nonsense aimed at undermining faith in officials. The common thread is exploiting whatever wedge issues resonate with the far-right base (immigration, Islam, "globalist bankers", etc.) to undermine unity. **Supporting Ukraine's fight**, unfortunately, has become one such partisan wedge due to these influence efforts.

2. Climate Change Denial and Energy Sovereignty

Climate and energy policy is another domain where far-right Australian narratives align with Russian interests. Russia, as a petro-state, benefits from global dependence on fossil fuels and has a long record of funding or amplifying climate-science skepticism in the West (to delay the transition to renewables). In Australia:

- **"Net Zero is Dead" – Using War to Undermine Climate Action:** During the Ukraine war, Russia's leverage as a gas supplier came into sharp relief. Rather than viewing this as a cautionary tale about fossil-fuel geopolitics, Australian coal advocates turned it into a talking point against climate action. In April 2022, Senator **Matt Canavan** sparked a political row by declaring that *"the net zero [emissions target] thing is all sort of dead...It's all over bar the shouting here."*[9] Citing how European countries were scrambling to reopen coal mines and gas plants after Russia's invasion, Canavan gleefully argued that Australia should likewise **double down on coal**[56]. He noted, *"Germany is building coal and gas infrastructure, Italy's reopening coal-fired power plants,"* and thus claimed the green transition had collapsed[9]. This framing was **identical to Russian media's narrative** at the time, which trumpeted Europe's energy crisis as proof that "green policies" had failed and that fossil fuels remain king. Canavan's stance, while domestically driven (the Nationals have long opposed emissions cuts), objectively serves Moscow's interest by questioning the viability of decarbonization. It's no surprise Russian outlets highlighted such comments – they bolster the idea that even Western politicians admit climate pledges are futile.
- **Sovereignty and Coal: Joyce and Canavan:** Both **Barnaby Joyce** and Matt Canavan often cast climate initiatives as an elitist imposition on Australian sovereignty. Joyce, a former Nationals leader, insisted he *"won't be bullied on climate science"* and demanded more recognition of Australia's right to develop its resources[57]. In a 2022 speech amid the Ukraine conflict, Joyce admonished young climate activists to *"count their blessings"* and not take peace for granted. *"Those carrying coffins out of Ukrainian churches are not focused on climate change,"* he quipped, noting that Putin's negotiators never mention CO₂ emissions

when bargaining for ceasefires[12]. The implication was that **military and economic security trump environmental concerns** – a narrative closely aligned with the climate denial community (and by extension, fossil fuel exporters). By invoking the war’s horror to belittle climate action, Joyce inadvertently echoed a **Kremlin talking point**: Russian officials often say Western sanctions or green policies hurt average people more than they hurt Russia, urging Europe to abandon “ideological” climate goals. The Australian far-right’s **“energy sovereignty”** argument (that Australia should burn coal to remain independent and prosperous) resonates strongly with Russia’s aim to keep coal, gas, and oil as the backbone of world energy. Indeed, NewsGuard found one falsehood circulating online claimed *“wind farms cause drought”*[58] – a patent absurdity, yet reflective of the misinformation aimed at discrediting renewable energy. Such climate-science denial, whether domestic or foreign in origin, ultimately aligns with the Kremlin’s economic interests.

- **Attacks on Global Climate Institutions:** One Nation figures frequently lambaste international bodies like the **United Nations, World Economic Forum (WEF)**, or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Malcolm Roberts (One Nation Senator) is well-known for calling climate change a “UN conspiracy” to establish world government. Pauline Hanson herself has railed against agreements like the Paris Climate Accord, suggesting they undermine Australian jobs and freedoms. While these positions are not dictated by Moscow, the *anti-global governance* narrative dovetails with Russia’s objectives of **splintering international cooperation**. As one security analyst noted, *“Russia has a real interest in destabilising international alliances”* and weakening coordinated action by groups like the EU or Five Eyes[59]. Climate cooperation is one such alliance. When Australian skeptics ridicule climate science as a hoax or demand an “Aus-exit” from U.N. agendas, Russian info ops are likely to amplify those voices online (in the same way Russian media touted Brexit voices or anti-EU populists in Europe).

In short, **climate denial and resource nationalism** form a narrative nexus between Australian far-right actors and Russian strategic propaganda. Both promote the idea that *“green transitions”* are dangerous plots by global elites and that sticking with coal and gas is the patriotic path. This narrative undermines not just environmental policy but also Western cohesion (as climate action is a key shared goal of NATO/EU allies). Australian politicians like Canavan, Joyce, and Hanson, by championing fossil fuels and scorning global climate efforts, provide ready-made soundbites that **Russian outlets can use to show division and hypocrisy in Western countries**[10].

3. Sovereignty-Based Anti-Globalism

A core theme in far-right discourse is that *“globalists”* – whether foreign governments, multilateral bodies, or cosmopolitan elites – threaten national sovereignty. In Australia, this has manifested as opposition to treaties, migration compacts, the UN, and even

pandemic cooperation. These views align neatly with Russian propaganda that seeks to discredit Western-led international norms:

- **“Australia First” and Distrust of Multilateralism:** Pauline Hanson’s One Nation has long used the slogan “Australia First,” opposing what it sees as ceding authority to outsiders. Hanson introduced bills to **withdraw Australia from the United Nations** (echoing conspiracy claims that the UN’s Agenda 21/2030 will erase national sovereignty). While such ideas predate current tensions, they are eagerly picked up by adversarial actors. Russian info campaigns consistently promote **nationalist and separatist movements in the West**, from secessionist parties to anti-EU campaigns, as a way to break up larger blocs. In Australia’s case, encouraging sentiment against bodies like the UN, the World Health Organization (during COVID), or the World Economic Forum (a frequent target of “New World Order” conspiracies) serves to isolate Australia from global cooperation – something strategic competitors welcome. For example, during the pandemic, Kremlin-affiliated social accounts amplified anti-lockdown protests and narratives in many countries. Australian anti-lockdown rallies (some attended or supported by One Nation and UAP figures) likewise drew support from a global echo chamber of anti-vaccine and anti-globalist groups, some with clear Russian ties[60].
- **Agenda Framing – WEF and “Great Reset”:** Senator Malcolm Roberts infamously claimed that the World Economic Forum’s “Great Reset” was a plot to impose socialism, a theory popular in QAnon and Russian disinformation circles. Such rhetoric found its way into Australian parliamentary debate, with Roberts and others denouncing any influence of WEF or “Davos” on Australian policy. While Russia doesn’t control these narratives, its state media amplifies them because they erode trust in Western leaders. The **far-right portrayal of global institutions as malevolent** dovetails with Moscow’s messaging that Western liberalism is a failure. When an Australian Senator in 2024 labeled the WEF a threat, one could find similar talking points on Russian outlets like RT or Sputnik on the same day – part of a *convergent disinformation ecosystem*.
- **Resistance to International Law/Alliances:** Another aspect is skepticism toward alliances like NATO or AUKUS. Although Australia is not a NATO member, far-right commentators have warned against “NATO expansionism” or Australia being pulled into NATO’s ambit. For instance, Ralph Babet and others criticized discussions of closer NATO-Australia ties, framing them as Canberra subordinating itself to a foreign agenda (again playing on sovereignty fears). This is precisely what Russian officials want Western publics to feel – that alliances are a liability, not an asset. Australia’s strong stance with the US and UK (through AUKUS and the Quad) makes it a target: as **Moscow-based propagandist John Dougan** admitted in January 2025, Russia is working to “*increase division amongst Australians in the long term*” so that support for alliances (like aiding Ukraine) wanes[61][59]. A divided or isolationist Australia is less effective as a U.S. ally in Asia-Pacific and less vocal against Russian aggression globally.

In summary, Australia's far-right pushes an **anti-globalist, sovereignty-above-all** message – be it “taking back control” from the UN, rejecting climate or migration treaties, or cautioning against entanglements in foreign wars. These stances, rooted in genuine domestic populism, nonetheless provide fertile ground for Russian influence to **amplify grievances and alienation**. Every time Australians are led to believe their democracy is being hijacked by unseen foreign forces (be it UN bureaucrats or “globalist bankers”), it erodes trust in the very institutions that uphold our resilience to interference.

4. Distrust in Institutions and Conspiracy Theories

Finally, a hallmark of both far-right movements and Russian active measures is the erosion of trust in **mainstream institutions** – governments, media, electoral systems, science bodies, etc. In Australia, we see this through:

- **Election Disinformation:** Pauline Hanson's 2022 animated video falsely claiming large-scale voter fraud (with outrageous scenarios like Penny Wong plotting to “steal” ballots) is a prime example[62][63]. The video was so misleading that social platforms removed it after the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) intervened[64][65]. The AEC noted there was “*no evidence*” of significant multiple voting and condemned the video for undermining confidence in our elections[66][67]. A misinformation expert warned that Hanson's use of parody and racist tropes “*weaponised...hateful, polarising and divisive content*” to sow doubt among voters[6][68]. This mirrors precisely the tactic used by Russian trolls in the US election: spread unfounded fraud claims to delegitimize the outcome. It's telling that One Nation imported this narrative despite Australia's robust voting system. Notably, Russia's Internet Research Agency in 2016 famously pushed the idea of election fraud on social media to support Donald Trump. Now a fringe of Australian politics has embraced the “**stolen election**” trope, and while there's no evidence Russia started it here, such rhetoric is *highly beneficial to autocratic rivals*. If citizens don't trust their elections, democracy is weakened from within.
- **“Fake News” and Media Distrust:** Borrowing from Donald Trump's playbook, Pauline Hanson and others frequently accuse the Australian mainstream media (ABC, SBS, major newspapers) of bias or lying. Hanson called a 2019 media exposé a “*day of shame*” and “*fake news,*” claiming a conspiracy against her[69]. This constant undermining of independent media plays into the hands of disinformation peddlers – when people reject credible news as “*fake,*” the field is open for fake news to pose as credible. Russian influence operations absolutely exploit this: they try to **flood the information space** with so many conflicting claims that the public “*loses faith in the truth*”[70]. As one journalist in the SBS report observed, “*the Russian government is trying to overload people with...terrible stories, hoping that some will stick...preventing them from thinking rationally.*”[70] Distrust in traditional media is both a goal and a means for the Kremlin's active measures.

- **Anti-Science and Other Conspiracies:** Australian far-right figures have also spread disinformation on topics like COVID-19 (e.g. **Hanson calling vaccination mandates “blackmail” and “a dictatorship”**^{[71][72]}) and immigration (fearmongering about “replacement” or crime). Each of these has been *actively amplified by Russian disinformation globally*. During the pandemic, for instance, Russia promoted anti-vax propaganda to undermine trust in Western public health. In Australia, elements of the UAP/One Nation did the same – railing against lockdowns and vaccines. This created an information milieu where Russian outlets like RT could quote Australian protesters or dissenting MPs to legitimize anti-vax narratives, and conversely where Australian conspiracy theorists cited Russia-friendly sources in a circular echo. **TNT Radio**, an online station that became a hub for Australian conspiracy theorists, exemplified this cross-pollination. Its hosts and guests (including Ralph Babet) deny climate change, peddle vaccine fears, and “*take pro-Russian stances towards the Russia-Ukraine war,*” essentially serving as an **unofficial pipeline for Russian-friendly narratives** into Australian audiences^[73]. (Tellingly, TNT Radio itself was founded by individuals who openly wanted to “go against the mainstream media” and cater to those who believe in alternative truths^{[74][75]}.)

In aggregate, these trends show a dangerous synergy: **Australian far-right narratives are often indistinguishable from the narratives Russian propagandists want Western publics to believe**. Whether it’s “You can’t trust the vote count,” “The media is lying to you,” “Experts (scientists, doctors) are plotting against your freedom,” or “Your leaders care more about Ukraine/climate than about you,” – all sow cynicism and anger.

Russian influence doesn’t need to create these messages out of thin air in Australia; it finds ready messengers. The role of Russian state actors is chiefly to **amplify, finance, nudge, and occasionally directly feed** such narratives into the Australian information ecosystem. For example, the *Pravda Australia* site mentioned earlier acted as a force-multiplier: it took the tirades of a local agitator (Boikov) and rebroadcast them across a network of websites, ensuring that even if Australians ignored it, the *content would be picked up by search engines and possibly AI assistants*^{[32][76]}. This laundering of fringe conspiracy content into algorithm-friendly formats is a novel tactic, but the underlying strategy is old: “*They exploit the weaknesses of our media systems,*” as researcher Patrick Boehler observed^{[77][78]}. By taking advantage of Western media’s commitment to free expression and balance, malicious actors insert falsehoods under the guise of opinion or satire, ultimately “**undermining trust in the institutional systems**” we rely on^{[42][79]}.

Conclusion

Investigations to date show **a convergence of Russian influence efforts with far-right political narratives in Australia**. While there may not be evidence of direct collusion between Australian politicians and the Kremlin, the alignment is often striking and mutually reinforcing. Russian state media and trolls eagerly amplify voices like Hanson’s and Babet’s when they criticize Western policies on Ukraine or laud Putin, since this lends

an *Australian face* to Kremlin talking points. Conversely, Australian conspiracy networks sometimes draw on Russian propaganda as “evidence” to bolster their claims, creating a feedback loop of disinformation. The overall effect is to inject doubt – about the righteousness of supporting Ukraine, about the reality of climate change, about the fairness of our elections, about who is telling the truth – into Australian public discourse. As ASIO’s Mike Burgess cautioned, **“community cohesion is under attack in an unprecedented way”**[80], and *multiple foreign actors, including Russia, are attempting to fan the flames of division in Australia.*

That said, Australia has so far proven relatively resilient. Public support for Ukraine remains solid, and overtly pro-Putin sentiment is marginal. Efforts by Russian-linked entities (like the Pravda site or troll accounts) have, according to officials, achieved **“limited traction”** with Australian audiences[21]. Key reasons include Australia’s strong institutions – compulsory voting, a robust public broadcaster, and proactive agencies like the AEC and ACMA calling out misinformation[21]. Going forward, vigilance is required. Government inquiries and think tanks (e.g. the Australian Strategic Policy Institute) continue to recommend transparency, digital media literacy, and sanctions on foreign disinformation agents. Keeping our political debate vigorous **but reality-based** is the best defense.

In summary, there is credible evidence that **Russian influence – directly via disinformation campaigns and indirectly via narrative alignment – is encouraging far-right political narratives in Australia** that serve Moscow’s interests. These include **anti-Ukraine and pro-Russia messaging, climate science denial, hyper-nationalist “sovereignty” rhetoric, and attacks on democratic institutions.** Australian far-right figures have amplified such narratives for their own purposes, creating an opening that Russian propaganda eagerly exploits. The Australian government and civil society are increasingly aware of this nexus. As one Senate inquiry bluntly put it, failing to counter Russia’s propaganda on our soil means **“Russia is not being held to account”**[81] – a gap we can ill afford in an era of hybrid warfare. By shining light on these influence efforts and strengthening the public’s informational immunities, Australia aims to ensure that **our political debates are decided by Australians based on facts – not by foreign trolls sowing fiction and fear.**

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