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One Nation blasted over 'deeply disturbing' car-ramming cartoon after Helen Haines attack

While robust criticism is essential to democracy, depicting political opponents as deserving of harm crosses an important ethical line, a communications expert argues.



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One Nation is facing pressure to remove a political cartoon in which former and serving politicians are seen being rammed by an SUV. Source: One Nation/Getty

One Nation is being urged to pull down a "disturbing" cartoon depicting politicians getting rammed by an SUV, which has resurfaced in the days after the horrific attack on federal MP Helen Haines.

Haines' husband Phil fronted the media on Wednesday evening, confirming both of his wife's legs had been amputated after the incident.

The animation, released several years ago, features cartoon versions of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and former Victorian premier Daniel Andrews being struck by a vehicle.

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Titled "The State of Melbourne", the cartoon begins with a reference to Andrews' involvement in a collision with a teenage cyclist before taking a darker turn, depicting politicians — and even Robert Irwin and Bluey — being deliberately run down.

Resurfacing this week in a social media post criticising the cartoon in the wake of the tragedy in Wangaratta, Australians online demanded the rising political party "remove it and apologise".

There is no suggestion the video influenced the alleged attack on Haines or that the two incidents are linked.

Yahoo News Australia has sought comment from One Nation with regard to criticisms over its cartoons.

Depicted acts of violence can trivialise aggression, media expert says

UNSW academic Dr Ayesha Jehangir, whose research examines how media narratives can shape perceptions of conflict and violence, branded the video "deeply disturbing" and called for One Nation to take accountability.



In the satirical video, Robert Irwin and former Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews are hit by an SUV.
Source: One Nation

In an interview with *Yahoo News Australia*, Dr Jehangir warned, "Satire is not a free pass from responsibility".

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"If a political cartoon depicts elected representatives being struck by a vehicle, then we should question what exactly is being satirised and why violence is being used as the punchline," she said.

"From a conflict communication perspective, repeated depictions of political opponents as objects of violence risk trivialising aggression.

"Something can be intended as satire and still contribute to a culture in which hostility towards political opponents becomes entertainment."

Australian Federal Police Commissioner Krissy Barrett said in a press conference this morning, authorities are charging "almost one individual every week" for targeting Commonwealth parliamentarians or high office holders with threats.

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She said it is one of the "biggest parts of the business".

What purpose do violent cartoons, like One Nation's, actually serve?

Dr Jehangir argued that while robust criticism is essential to democracy, depicting political opponents as deserving of harm crosses an important ethical line.

"The question is not simply whether a cartoon depicts violence, but how that violence is framed.

Is it exposing an injustice, condemning aggression, or inviting audiences to laugh at the prospect of a political opponent being harmed?" she asked.

"Those are fundamentally different forms of political communication."

She thinks political satire doesn't need to be polite or restrained, but questioned whether violent imagery served any purpose beyond entertainment.

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"When violence becomes the joke, we should be asking whether the content is scrutinising political power or simply turning aggression into entertainment," Dr Jehangir said.

"Free speech protects the right to criticise politicians. It does not place political communication beyond ethical scrutiny."



Former Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews is violently struck in the depiction. Source: One Nation

The growing problem of hostility in Australian politics

One Nation had already [faced widespread criticism this week after another of its cartoons mocked independent senator Jacqui Lambie's battle with vaginal and bladder prolapse](#), a debilitating condition she previously revealed was linked to injuries sustained during her military service.

Dr Jenangir said that cartoon was "particularly troubling" because it turned a "woman's medical experience into a political punchline".

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"It can reinforce gendered hostility, especially when we are already dealing with the expanding manosphere and global wave of far-right extremism," she said.

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"These representations signal that personal degradation is an acceptable part of political debate, which must not be the message.

"We should be asking what these cartoons contribute to public understanding, beyond generating outrage and attention."

One Nation isn't the only political presence facing scrutiny over inflammatory rhetoric right now.

This week, Liberal frontbencher Angie Bell was forced to walk back comments she made toward the prime minister and Small Business Minister Anne Aly in parliament, saying they were "regrettable".



Angie Bell (right) said the PM and the small business minister should be 'shamed and stoned in the square'. She later said the comments were "regrettable". Source: Getty (Hilary Wardhaugh via Get...[More](#)

During an earlier speech to parliament, Bell said the pair should be "shamed and stoned in the square" over the ATO's move to ban credit card payments.

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It's exactly that kind of language that Dr Jenangir denounces.

"Aly subsequently revealed that she had received 19 death threats in a single week, including previous threats using that very language," she said.

"We need to stop treating political hostility as an unavoidable feature of democratic debate. It is not.

"Politicians should be prepared to challenge policies fiercely without turning their opponens into enemies or objects of violence."

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Has politics become too hostile in Australia?

☐	Yes, undoubtedly
☐	No, I don't think so
☐	People have a right to be mad
☐	I'm unsure
☐	I think things need to be turned down somewhat



OPINARY

What role is social media playing in amplifying hostility?

Today, One Nation's own candidate for Bass, Nikole Schellekens, called out the "relentless personal attacks" she receives online.

"No matter how thick-skinned you try to be, being judged, insulted or treated as less than human simply because of your political beliefs can be pretty awful," she wrote in a lengthy social media post.

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Dr Jenangir said social media plays a big role here.

"It allows provocative messages to be circulated, repeated, and stripped of context, often rewarding the most emotionally charged material with attention," she said.

Ultimately, we need to distinguish between three things, she said — political disagreement, political hostility and political violence.



Independent federal MP Helen Haines remains in a critical but stable condition after being hit by a car outside her electorate office. Source: NCA NewsWire.

"They are not the same," Dr Jenangir said.

"I am very concerned that hostility is increasingly being treated as a form of political entertainment."

"When political disagreement becomes a competition over who can deliver the most humiliating insult or provocative attack, we lose sight of the issues that actually matter to citizens."

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