

ICV Submission to the Inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism in Australia The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS)

ICV view:

- Right-wing extremism (RWE) is the biggest terrorism/extremist threat to Australia, and more so than so-called “Islamist extremism”
- The government at all levels, and security agencies, have only recently understood this very real threat. Their response does not reflect the scale and urgency of the threat.
 - o For example, the government and security agencies have yet to proscribe a single RWE organisation to date.
- RWE ideology is shared internationally. It is a global problem and requires global coordination.
- What unifies all RWE groups is their hatred of Islam and Muslims. Some will talk about people of colour, Asians, Jews, migrants, refugees, LGBTIQ people. Many are however eschewing open hatred for these groups because of community backlash.
 - o Publicly attacking Islam and Muslims is fair game and carries little or no risk of ramification.
 - o Often these groups will say that they will focus on Muslims to recruit members and avoid being proscribed and say that they will come to these other groups at a later time.
 - o Saying that “I hate Islam” or “Islam is barbaric” or “evil”, there is an “Islamic conspiracy to take over the West” is now a euphemism for saying “I hate Muslims”, “Muslims are the enemy”, etc. This allows the user to bypass hate laws and racism laws, because they can say they are attacking an ideology called “Islam”, but they do not hate Muslims per se. They will say in a free society they should be able to express these views.
- Online hatred is a very serious problem. There is alarming incitement against Muslims that happens online. The response of the social media companies, especially Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have been very weak.
 - o There are double standards at play. One applied to Muslim extremist content, anti-black racism, anti-Semitism, and another to anti-Muslim hatred.
 - o This double standard is both in terms of the resources they have looking for RWE content and the algorithms they have developed to automatically detect. In terms of their response when community members report this hateful content and these RWE groups, it is best characterised as slow and often dismissive.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security’s Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia.

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) is the peak Muslim body in Victoria, Australia, with more than 70 member societies and representing over 200,000 Muslims, from over 100 diverse ethnic backgrounds. The ICV offers advocacy and social welfare services while leading state and national initiatives on cohesion and harmony through community consultations and advice to the Victorian and Australian Government.

It is the view of the ICV that right-wing extremism (RWE) constitutes the biggest terrorist and extremist threat to Australia, including through its disruption of multicultural cohesion. This is nowhere clearer than in the horrifying attack on two mosques in Christchurch by an Australian national in 2019, resulting in the murder of 51 Muslims. It is also evident in the concerning reports of possible right-wing extremism within the ranks of the Australian Defence Force (ADF)¹, and recent reports of emboldened groups conducting neo-Nazi rituals².

Anti-Muslim hatred is commonly referred to as Islamophobia. The ICV has published a public position statement³ that investigates the causes and impact of Islamophobia and makes a series of recommendations for government, law enforcement, media organisations, human rights groups, academia, and community groups. In the position statement, the ICV discusses the various definitions of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. In this submission, the ICV has chosen to use a term that has gained significant currency in recent academic and public discourse and that is 'anti-Muslim racism'. It should be understood that references to anti-Muslim racism are synonymous with references to Islamophobia.

Strong anti-Muslim sentiment is a hallmark of contemporary RWE in Australia and the West more broadly⁴. The normalisation of hate speech and anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic rhetoric during the fight against the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS) and during the US administration of President Donald J Trump between 2016-2020 have had a profoundly negative influence on the lives of Muslims in Australia. Australians consistently see Muslims the most negatively of any faith group – 37% of Australians indicate a negative view towards Muslims, versus 9% towards Jewish Australians⁵. Additionally, some national groups which have large Muslim populations are seen negatively by a seemingly large proportion of Australians, including those of Lebanese (42%), Iraqis (49%), and Sudanese (49%) origin⁶.

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-03/instagram-account-from-australian-special-forces-mocks-killings/12595062>

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-28/calls-grampians-far-right-group-labelled-terrorist-organisation/13098762>

³ ICV, 'Islamophobia Position Statement' (2020)

⁴ 'Kristy Campion, A "Lunatic Fringe"? The Persistence of Right-Wing Extremism in Australia" (2019) *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13(2), 2.

⁵ Andrew Markus, Mapping Social Cohesion: Scanlan Foundation Surveys 2020, 6.

⁶ Ibid, 7.

The ICV believes that an excessive focus on the purported threat posed by those who pervert Islam for their own political ends, so-called “Islamist” extremists, has meant that not enough political, legislative and security attention has been paid to the threat posed by those holding right-wing extremist views. The individuals, groups, and networks which spread anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic messages often intersect with those which spread conspiracy theories, such as the Great Replacement or “white genocide” theories. They are also often the same groups who harbour and espouse authoritarian and anti-government views, including undermining Covid-19 measures⁷. It is a major recommendation of this submission that the strong approach taken to remove violent imagery and content that incites hatred by those classified as Muslim extremists or “Islamists” should be taken against RWE groups.

The effects of anti-Muslim racism and anti-Islam sentiment on Australian Muslims are difficult to quantify. For example, anti-Muslim racism is known to affect the job prospects of those with Muslim sounding names at unacceptably high rates⁸. On the other end of the spectrum, the propensity for hate speech, conspiracy theories, and anti-Muslim racism to lead to violence is evident in the carefully prepared manifestos and dramatically staged violent events in Christchurch in 2019. This event, as has been widely reported, was connected by its Australian perpetrator to other similar massacres, such as the Quebec City mosque shooting in 2019 and a massacre against African immigrants by an Italian in 2018.

As the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has pointed out, far-right movements are international and diffuse, and the Internet has allowed quick and easy connections between like-minded people. These allow acts of violence, such as that in Christchurch, to be “encouraged, glorified, and promoted”⁹.

Despite claims that Australia’s deradicalization programs are meant to apply to all Australians regardless of religious, ideological, or political motives, it appears that the Government has not yet started to take this threat seriously. In February of 2020, Mike Burgess of ASIO pointed out that small cells of Australians meet regularly to salute Nazi flags, perform weapons inspections and receive combat training¹⁰. This should alarm all Australians.

This submission focusses on the perspective of Australian Muslims but recognises and underscores that anti-immigrant and racist attitudes, including those targeting Asian Australians, are likely to also affect Muslims.

⁷ All Together Now, 1.

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-38751307>

⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/more-organised-sophisticated-and-security-conscious-than-before-right-wing-extremist-threat-growing-20200829-p55q6a.html>

¹⁰ Ibid.

ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The recommendations and discussion in this submission cut across the terms of reference. For clarity, multiple terms of reference will be addressed at once, however this submission considers responses to the terms as a whole and should be considered together. We will address the terms of reference for the consideration of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security as follows:

1. **The nature and extent of, and the threat posed by, extremist movements and persons holding extremist views in Australia, with a particular focus on:**
 - a) **The motivations, objectives and capacity for violence of extremist groups including, but not limited to, Islamist and far right-wing extremist groups, and how these have changed during the COVID-19 Pandemic; and**
 - b) **The risk to the community of high-risk terrorist offenders**
2. **The geographic spread of these extremist movements and persons in Australia, and their links to international extremist organisations**

Issues for specific inquiry:

- a) **Changes that could be made to the Commonwealth's terrorist organisation listing laws to ensure they are fit for purpose, address current and emerging terrorist threats, reflect international best practice, and provide a barrier to those who may seek to promote extremist ideology in Australia**
- b) **Changes that could be made to Australia's counter terrorism strategy in relation to approaches with state, territory, and local governments**

Recommendation 1: That the Government treat right-wing extremism with the same seriousness that it treats other forms of terrorism; and

Recommendation 2: That the Government implement a consistent and transparent process for proscribing groups as terrorist groups and apply this framework to proscribe known RWE groups.

Australian Muslims, as members of the Australian community, deserve to feel safe and live with dignity. There is evidence that a majority of Australian Muslims are highly concerned about media reporting on Islam and Muslims (95.6%), discrimination against Muslims (95%), anti-Islam sentiments (94%), and terrorism by right-wing extremists (93.1%)¹¹. It is clear that Muslims in Australia see the threat posed by RWE groups and ideologies as a threat to their safety and place in Australia. The divisiveness and threat posed to cohesion by the mainstreaming of right-wing extremism online and in the community should be seen for the threat it is and should be addressed through policies and legislation supported by research.

¹¹ Halim Rane, Adis Duderija, Riyad H Rahmulla, et al., 'Islam in Australia: A National Survey of Muslim Australian Citizens and Permanent Residents', *Religions* (2020) 11(419), 13

The fact there is yet to be a single non-Islamist organisation on the list of proscribed organisations, despite the uptick in right-wing extremist terrorist events is of concern. The almost exclusive focus on “Islamist terrorism” despite the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment does little to assuage concerns in the Muslim community that, rather than a genuine attempt to protect all Australians regardless of faith or background, programs aimed at countering violent extremism unfairly profile and target Muslims.

There is evidence in both Victoria and New South Wales of the increased extremism of far-right groups, and an increased potential for violent outcomes¹². Further, other similar jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom have made the move from seeing radical far-right behavioural issues from a public disorder frame to a violent extremism frame because of concerns of violence¹³.

The urgency of the situation is brought into sharp relief by the reportedly neo-Nazi ritual which took place in the Grampians National Park over the Australia Day weekend. The toleration of groups like the National Socialist Network, which publicly burn crosses, a practice of the Klu Klux Klan, and openly chant “White Power” should be treated with the same seriousness as those who sympathise with proscribed terror groups¹⁴. This is especially so after the horrific massacre at Christchurch.

The ICV joins with other groups¹⁵ in calling for groups such as the National Socialist Network to be monitored and investigated, their links with other white supremacist groups to be researched, and where there is sufficient evidence, for them to be proscribed terrorist entities. We cannot wait for a repeat of Christchurch.

Recommendation 3: That the Federal Government, in collaboration with State Governments and civil society, implement strategies and programs that provide counter-narratives to combat anti-Muslim racism.

The ICV acknowledges that historically a prime ethno-religious target of RWE motivated hatred and violence has been the Jewish community worldwide. Without diminishing the historical and ongoing nature of the threat posed to Jewish groups, it is imperative that political leaders at the state and national level recognise and address the very real threat that these RWE groups pose to Muslims. As noted above, Muslims and Islam are the main target many contemporary RWE groups, and yet the countering of anti-Muslim, anti-Islam narratives seems to be almost totally absent from public responses to these events¹⁶.

¹² Vic uni, 82.

¹³ Vic uni 82.

¹⁴ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/we-do-not-need-to-wait-for-a-christchurch-grampians-cross-burning-spurs-call-for-action-20210128-p56xer.html>

¹⁵ Such as the Anti-Defamation League, *ibid*, n 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, n 12. Daniel Andrews refers specifically to Jewish Victorians and no other group; alternatively, the threat is downplayed altogether: Anthony Galloway (2021), ‘Immigration Minister under fire for claiming

The ICV calls on the Federal Government to consistently rebut anti-Muslim rhetoric, conspiracy theories, and other forms of anti-Muslim racism promoted and fuelled by RWE groups, and provide a consistent counter-narrative to those who seek to vilify Australian Muslims.

Recommendation 3: That the Government devote further resources to understanding right-wing extremism in Australia and its connections to international organisations.

Australian white supremacists and members of the 'alt-right' are well connected internationally¹⁷. While there is a need for greater research in this area, there is some evidence that RWE groups in Australia have evolved in tandem with a global RWE community at least since the 1930s¹⁸. There are also indications that the exchange of people, ideas, and training is an increasing issue and risk to members of the Australian community, especially Muslims, following the rise of conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement¹⁹ and theories of white genocide, including those amplified by Australian politicians²⁰.

In 2020, the US Government added the white supremacist, ultranationalist organisation Russian Imperial Movement to its list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists²¹. Canada also added that group, along with Atomwaffen Division, the Base, and the Proud Boys to its list of terrorist entities²². New Zealand added Brenton Tarrant to its list in 2020²³, and the UK has two white supremacist organisations on its own list²⁴. This makes Australia the only member of the UKUSA agreement, or "Five Eyes", which has not proscribed any RWE organisation. This is despite the fact that Australia's own security and intelligence services have recently (and belatedly) recognised the serious threat posed by RWE groups²⁵. A much deeper understanding of RWE, its causes, its presence in Australia, and the threat it poses to the Australian community and minority groups in particular is urgently required.

extremism not on the rise', *The Age*, <<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/extremism-isn-t-on-the-rise-in-australia-immigration-minister-20210204-p56zhl.html>>.

¹⁷ Vic uni, p 82

¹⁸ Ibid, n 2, 14.

¹⁹ Ibid, n 2, 14.

²⁰ Jon Piccini, 'Peter Dutton's 'fast track' for white South African farmers is a throwback to a long, racist, history', *The Conversation*, <<https://theconversation.com/peter-duttons-fast-track-for-white-south-african-farmers-is-a-throwback-to-a-long-racist-history-93476>>.

²¹ Executive Order 13224, US Department of State, <<https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/>>.

²² Public Safety Canada, 'Government of Canada lists 13 new groups as terrorist entities and completes review of seven others', 2021, <<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2021/02/government-of-canada-lists-13-new-groups-as-terrorist-entities-and-completes-review-of-seven-others.html>>.

²³ New Zealand Police, 'Lists associated with Resolution 1373', <<https://www.police.govt.nz/advice/personal-community/counterterrorism/designated-entities/lists-associated-with-resolution-1373?nondesktop>>.

²⁴ Home Office, 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations', <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2>>.

²⁵ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6971633/the-increasing-and-evolving-threat-taking-up-more-of-asios-time/>

The ICV therefore urge the Federal Government to take the measures necessary to ensure that the nature of the threat is understood and necessary actions to compressive address it are taken.

Issues for specific inquiry:

- a) **Further steps that the Commonwealth could take to disrupt and deter hate speech and establish thresholds to regulate the use of symbols and insignia associated with terrorism and extremism, including online, giving consideration to the experience of other countries,**
- b) **The role of social media, encrypted communications platforms, and the dark web in allowing extremists to communicate and organise**
- c) **Any other matters related to these terms of reference, noting the roles and responsibilities of states and territories in Australia's counter-terrorism arrangements and constitutional limitations**
- d)

Recommendation 4: That the Government consider ways to ensure social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube include anti-Muslim racism in their definitions of hate speech.

The Covid-19 pandemic has likely exacerbated trends towards right-wing extremism as more people have spent time online. RWE groups are using the internet to appeal to marginalised, unemployed young Australians and this must be countered.

Online hate speech against Muslims and other minorities normalises RWE ideologies and groups. The use of anti-Muslim hate speech to disseminate lies and encourage anti-Muslim sentiment was already widespread before the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in Victoria the interactions of 12 far-right groups in 2018, with largely anti-Islamic social media posts, reached a total of 591,393 users, who interacted a total of 3,776,282 times across Facebook²⁶. The increased use of alternative social media platforms to escape detection and regulation, such as Telegram, Gab, and MeWe²⁷, is likely to mean that this figure underrepresents the nature of consumption and support of such material.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are taking a more activist stance on hate speech and speech which incites violence, including recently suspending and banning the accounts of former President Donald J Trump.

²⁶ Peuker, M, Smith, D, and Iqbal M (2018), 'Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria', Melbourne, Victoria University, 4.

²⁷ All Together Now, 1.

In 2020, Facebook banned Holocaust denial content, due in part to a rise in anti-Semitic violence²⁸. In 2019, following the horrific Christchurch terrorist attack by a right-wing extremist, the Australian Parliament passed legislation purporting to ban the sharing of abhorrent violent material. This does not go far enough.

Dehumanisation, incitement of hatred, dehumanisation, and sharing of extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories against Muslims is rampant online. Social media companies have turned a blind eye to this and have not dedicated sufficient resources to identifying and removing offending content, and de-platforming groups that promote this content. There is anecdotal evidence that anti-Muslim narratives, memes, and opinions are viewed by social media platforms as not violating guidelines that apply to anti-Semitic material. The tragic consequences that persistent de-humanisation and vilification of Muslims can be seen not only in the attacks on individuals and mosques, but in genocidal policies being implemented by regimes in some parts of the world including Myanmar.

These companies have the means to tackle this scourge as evidenced by their relative success in removing anti-Semitic and anti-black hate speech. Despite repeated appeals by the Muslim community, the response by social media companies has been extremely disappointing.

We strongly recommend that the Government work with experts across all sectors to find ways to combat anti-Muslim hate speech, especially online. Where the policies, algorithms and practices of social media platforms fall short, we recommend that the government both monitor and provide mechanisms to address this.

Recommendation 5: That Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism be recognised alongside other kinds of ethno-religious racism as requiring protection under racial discrimination legislation and policies; and

Recommendation 6: The Federal Government should establish nationally consistent reporting of hate crimes and enact laws that make the recording of racial and religious hate crimes by state and federal police mandatory with the inclusion of additional mandatory offence classifications that reflect racial and religious vilification.

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10112455086578451>

Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism is a kind of racism rooted in the racialisation of Muslims and the targeting of ‘expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’²⁹. Like anti-Semitism, it relies on the process of racialisation whereby particular groups ‘become signified as ‘races’ within specific social contexts’. The religious, cultural, and “race”-based aspects of Islamophobia are why anti-Muslim racism affects those who are not Muslim but are mistaken for being Muslim³⁰.

Federal laws are inadequate in dealing with cases of anti-Muslim racism. As it currently stands, the Federal Racial Discrimination Act 1975 does not provide any protection to Australian Muslims against vilification based on their religious identity as the legislation does not extend to religion³¹.

The reporting of hate crimes in Australia is inconsistent and there is no central database that records hate crimes. Further, it generally is at the discretion of the police officer whether the hate incident is recorded as a hate crime. Australian research shows that prejudice motivated crime is less likely to be reported to police than other crimes³². The mandatory recording of hate crimes is important to build community trust in the value of reporting; to facilitate any subsequent court decision-making by magistrates; and for accurate data collection.

Recommendation 7: That the Government provide increased funding for community-focussed programmes to counter right-wing extremism.

While state-based laws and policing are the main method of dealing with right-wing extremist behaviours, RWE groups are not bound by state or even national borders. Therefore, the ICV echoes calls for a national strategy and funding for community-focussed activities to tackle surging RWE across the country³³.

The necessity for greater coordination and funding from the Federal Government is increased due to the economic and social conditions during Covid-19. Increased social isolation, unemployment, and especially youth unemployment, as well as increased time spent online means that at risk groups who feel disenfranchised are possibly at higher risk of recruitment by right-wing extremists³⁴.

²⁹ ‘Report on the Inquiry into A Working Definition of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred’, *All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims* (2018), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>.

³⁰ <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/10/319/htm>

³¹ Exposure Draft Religious Discrimination Bill – a joint submission made by several national and state-based organisations involved in the Australian Muslim community to the Australian Government 2 October 2019, page 15.

³² Wiedlitzka et al 2018 in Mason and Moran 2019

³³ All Together Now, ‘Right-wing Extremism and COvid-19 in Australia’, 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

The defunding of the Building Community Resilience grants program has meant that community-focussed preventative programs have failed to find support³⁵. The combination of less funding and a historical focus on the threat posed by “Islamist” extremism and under-emphasis on right-wing extremists means that the community work needed to stop escalation to violent extremism is likely to be absent.

Policing and legal responses to RWE are only one part of addressing a deeper problem. Proactive, community-led, and social responses to this rising threat should be considered as the first level of protection to ensure that all Victorians, regardless of their faith or background, can feel that they are safe and belong in Australia.

It is imperative that the threat posed by RWE to the Australian community be understood, evaluated, and taken seriously. A surge in visibility following the publicity around the horrific attack on New Zealand Muslims in Christchurch at the hands of an Australian national should spur the Australian Government and security agencies to take this phenomenon seriously. Australian Muslims should not have to live in fear while openly white supremacist, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant groups call for our denigration, expulsion, or destruction.

We would be pleased to respond to any questions or provide further information and explanation relating to the matters raised in this submission.

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³⁵ Ibid, 3.