

Challenging Racism Project
School of Social Sciences
Western Sydney University
Locked Bag 1797
PENRITH NSW 2751
ChallengingRacism@westernsydney.edu.au

Measures to combat right-wing extremism – Submission by the Challenging Racism Project (CRP), Western Sydney University

NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety

Dear Committee

The Challenging Racism Project (CRP) at Western Sydney University is the leading national research program on racism and anti-racism in Australia. It has a commitment to social justice and quality empirical research. The CRP has global esteem for its research impact in countering racism and improving community relations. Since 2001, members of the CRP have pursued research on experiences of racism across a variety of settings including housing, education, and online, Australian attitudes to multiculturalism and cultural diversity, Islamophobia, bystander anti-racism, hate speech and right-wing extremism.

Our submission in response to the Inquiry into Measures to combat right-wing extremism focuses on 7 key areas:

- 1) Extremist views threaten cultural diversity and social cohesion
- 2) Addressing dis/misinformation and other threats to democracy
- 3) Building trust among declining levels of trust in government and other institutions
- 4) The role of online platforms in promoting right-wing extremism
- 5) The regulation of hate speech
- 6) Activating and empowering middle Australia through anti-racism training and diversity education
- 7) The Crimes and Summary Offences Amendment Bill 2025

1) Extremist views threaten cultural diversity and social cohesion

Over the last four decades, Australia has been consistently billed as a successful multicultural nation. Surveys over the past decade have shown high levels of support for cultural diversity (see for example the CRP 2022 national survey 80%; Scanlon

Foundation 2023 survey 89%¹) and high levels of willingness to take anti-racism action (see for example CRP 2016 national survey 77%²; CRP 2019 Victorian survey 69%³).

However, extremist views pose a significant threat to this status. For example, a 2019 CRP survey of the Victorian population⁴ (n: 4019) found that those with very negative views towards Islam and Muslims (9% of the sample) were more likely to be at the extreme and negative end of attitudes on diversity, were more likely to support political violence, were more likely to see Muslims as a threat and as a touchstone for political mobilisation, and had higher levels of distrust of key institutions. This group of people with extremist views, demonstrate a supremacist hostile disposition towards Islam and Muslims. Research conducted by the CRP and the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS)⁵, has also shown that having negative attitudes to ethnic and religious minorities and having negative attitudes to diversity are significant predictors of support for political violence in right-wing groups. **Extremist views that are anti-diversity and target ethnic, racial and religious minority groups, are a significant threat to Australia's cultural diversity, and the maintenance of a socially cohesive society in NSW.**

One of the key threats to a culturally diverse and cohesive society is privilege (for eg. race, gender, class). Research conducted on claims of anti-white racism in Australia, and the associated denial of white privilege, found such claimants were twice as likely as the general population to have negative views on cultural diversity, prejudice, immigration, privilege and racism⁶. CRP research shows that denial of privilege is an impediment to a multicultural, socially cohesive society in at least 3 ways. One, it facilitates the denial of racism and undermines a broad social commitment to challenging racism. Two, a lack of personal responsibility for racism (and anti-racism) is paralleled by a rejection of structural or systemic racism. International research has consistently shown that a denial of structural racism is associated with a rejection of any forms of anti-racism. It is our conviction that the foundational challenge to systemic racism is the raising of awareness and acknowledgement through the confronting of denial. And three, the practice of intervention to confront privilege is underdeveloped, and the same can be said of evidence-based evaluation. **We recommend further empirical research to test interventions that confront privilege in NSW.**

¹ O'Donnell, J. 2023. Mapping Social Cohesion 2023. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute.

² Blair, K., Dunn, K. M., Kamp, A., & Alam, O. 2017. Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey Report. <https://doi.org/10.4225/35/58cb62d270392>.

³ Dunn, K., Sharples, R., Diallo, T., Derbas, A., Vergani, M., McGarty, C., Mansouri, F., Paradies, Y. & Elias, A. 2020. Understanding Varied Attitudes Towards Muslims, July 2020. Sydney: Western Sydney University, <https://doi.org/10.26183/bkkk-0195>

⁴ Dunn, K., Sharples, R., Diallo, T., Derbas, A., Vergani, M., McGarty, C., Mansouri, F., Paradies, Y. & Elias, A. 2020. Understanding Varied Attitudes Towards Muslims, July 2020. Sydney: Western Sydney University, <https://doi.org/10.26183/bkkk-0195>

⁵ Vergani, M., Diallo, T., Mansouri, F., Dunn, K., Sharples, R., Paradies, Y., & Elias, A. 2022. Racist and Anti-diversity Attitudes as Predictors of Support for Political Violence among Supporters of Mainstream Political Parties. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 35(5), 1085–1105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.2010716>.

⁶ Sharples, R. & Blair K. 2020. 'Claiming anti-white racism in Australia: victimhood, identity, and privilege', *Journal of Sociology*, 57(3): 559-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783320934184>.

Research also points to the evidence of the harmful effects of mainstreaming racist and extremist views across media and political platforms⁷. The mainstreaming of these views normalises these claims and gives legitimacy to those making them, and can increase the reach and influence of racist and extremist views across a broader section of society. Racist and extremist ideologies can incite violence and cause great harm to individuals, particularly ethnic-minority groups who are often the targets of these ideologies, but also causing greater societal harm. **We recommend government and platform regulation that ensures racist and extremist content is neutralised and that anti-racism norms are established that prohibit the platforming of such content.**

2) Addressing mis/disinformation and other threats to democracy

The research findings in Australia affirm the danger posed to a harmonious multicultural society from far-right extremism and misinformation and conspiracy theories. Numerous studies have shown that conspiracy beliefs are positively associated with non-normative behaviours and negatively associated with prosocial behaviours⁸. For example, believing in conspiracy theories encourages risky public behaviour such as being less likely to adhere to recommended safety measures⁹. The spread of such ideas can occur in online spaces but can also cause substantial offline harm¹⁰. This has also led many to express concerns over how misinformation and conspiracy theories are a vector through which some social groups can be made vulnerable to extremism. There is evidence that extremist groups use misinformation, more appropriately described as disinformation when used intentionally, to recruit target segments (e.g., young white males) or to widen their community reach¹¹. Misinformation in some conspiracy theories has also been linked to right-wing extremist radicalisation of white men, through confirmation of a felt sense of grievance and the entrenchment of the myths that fuel this¹².

⁷ See for example Pecker, M. 2023. *Media reporting on far-right extremism in Australia: Between strategic silence and harmful amplification*. Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies; Sharples, R. & Blair, K. (forthcoming 2026). *White Privilege, 'Anti-white Racism' and White Supremacy in Australia: A Slippery Slope to Societal Harm*. Bloomsbury: New York.

⁸ Uscinski, J., Enders, A., Klostad, C., Seelig, M., Drochon, H. and Premaratne, K. 2022. Have beliefs in conspiracy theories increased over time? *PLOS ONE*, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270429>.

⁹ Chayinska, M., Uluğ, Ö. M., Ayanian, A. H., Gratzel, J. C., Brik, T., Kende, A., & McGarty, C. 2021. Coronavirus conspiracy beliefs and distrust of science predict risky public health behaviours through optimistically biased risk perceptions in Ukraine, Turkey, and Germany. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220978278>.

¹⁰ Bruns, A. Harrington, S., and Hurcombe, E. 2020. 'Corona? 5G? or both?': the dynamics of COVID-19/5G conspiracy theories on Facebook. *Media International Australia*, 177(1), 12-29.

¹¹ Marwick, A. and Lewis, R. 2017. *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online*. Data & Society Research Institute. Available at: https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/DataAndSociety_MediaManipulationAndDisinformationOnline-1.pdf.

¹² Agius, C., Cook, K., Nicholas, L., Ahmed, A., Jehangir, H., Safa, N. Hardwick, T & Clark, S. 2020. Mapping right wing extremism in Victoria: Applying a gender lens to develop prevention and deradicalisation approaches. Melbourne: Victorian Government, Department of Justice and Community Safety: Countering Violent Extremism Unit and Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.25916/5f3a26da94911>.

From a 2022 survey of the NSW population (n:5276), the Challenging Racism Project found that one-third of respondents believed in COVID misinformation, and at least one-in-ten believed in other forms of conspiratorial belief. Those who believed this misinformation were twice as likely to defy public health orders, and up to four times more likely to be supportive of political violence and political action that breaks the law¹³. **The political narratives and misinformation propagated by right-wing extremists are a harm to diversity and to many Australian cultural groups, but it is also a fundamental threat to public order and democracy.**

Research has also found that contemporary far-right groups leverage existing local tensions and other popular hate discourses, such as spreading anti-feminist sentiments as vehicles for circulating extreme-right ideologies¹⁴. Anti-feminism has become a 'uniting ideology' in far-right extremism, unifying key themes that animate extreme-right ideology, such as hierarchy, order, power, and a preference for 'tradition'¹⁵. Other forms of far-right populism, including libertarianism, antisemitism and counter-jihad, have also become key components of the "culturalist" branch of the right-wing movement, commonly referred to as "alt-lite" to distinguish it from the overtly racist and misogynist "alt-right"¹⁶. These alt-lite ideologies aim to recruit support from the mainstream by being more socially acceptable. In recent years, trans-exclusionary feminists have also aligned with the extreme right¹⁷. In the protest movement against Australia's COVID-19 lockdowns, online commentary linking alternative wellness, anti-vaccination and anti-authority conspiracy beliefs exploited the anger at COVID-19 lockdowns and radicalised people to public disorder and right-wing causes¹⁸. Right-wing extremist ideologies pitted against immigration, Islam, political correctness, Indigenous people and anti-asylum seekers were also present.

Far-right extremism and its links to mis/disinformation pose a clear threat to a socially cohesive society in NSW and work to undermine the principles of our democratic State. The Australian draft National Science and Research Priorities have included the challenge of misinformation and disinformation as a challenge to building a stronger and more resilient nation. The Priorities call out the causes of misinformation

¹³ Sharples, R., Kamp, A., Dunn, K., Denson, N., Nicholas, L., & Ovensden, G. 2025. Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories During the Covid-19 Pandemic in NSW, Australia and the Risks for Social Cohesion. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2025.248139>.

¹⁴ Lewis, H. 2019, 'To Learn About the Far Right, Start With the "Manosphere"', *The Atlantic*, 7 August, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/anti-feminism-gateway-farright/595642/>.

¹⁵ Agius, C., Cook, K., Nicholas, L., Ahmed, A., Jehangir, H., Safa, N. Hardwick, T & Clark, S. 2020. Mapping right wing extremism in Victoria: Applying a gender lens to develop prevention and deradicalisation approaches. Melbourne: Victorian Government, Department of Justice and Community Safety: Countering Violent Extremism Unit and Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.25916/5f3a26da94911>.

¹⁶ Pertwee, E., Simas, C. and Larson, H.J., 2022. An epidemic of uncertainty: rumours, conspiracy theories and vaccine hesitancy. *Nature Medicine*, 28, 456–459.

¹⁷ Bassi, S. & La Fleur, G. 2022. *Trans-Exclusionary Feminisms and the Global New Right*. Duke University Press.

¹⁸ Roose, J. 'It's almost like grooming': how anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, and the far-right came together over COVID. *The Conversation*, 21 September 2021. Available at: ['It's almost like grooming': how anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, and the far-right came together over COVID](#)

belief and technologies as critical research areas¹⁹. The global research is clear that misinformation/ disinformation and conspiratorial thinking are associated with far-right hate, authoritarianism, and anti-democratic narratives.

Emerging work on ‘inoculation’ is proving successful in building resilience to racist misinformation in Australia²⁰. Contextualised, topic-specific misinformation training (e.g., on racism) is more effective than broad-spectrum approaches, highlighting the important limitations of generalisable ‘inoculation’ strategies. While generalised education around identifying misinformation remains important, this is insufficient for addressing extremist misinformation. **Training that offers authentic doses of the ‘disease’ (extremist misinformation) can be developed for schools, community groups and online use in NSW.**

3) Building trust among declining levels of trust in government and other institutions

Following global trends, Australia shows increasing levels of distrust in key public institutions. The latest Mapping Social Cohesion report has trust in government and the political system at 36%²¹, while the CRP 2022 national survey reports trust in Australian political parties at 20%. The CRP 2022 NSW survey found that trust in the Australian government ‘to do the right thing’ was at 36%, while trust in the media was 25% and the criminal justice system 45%.

Australians’ distrust in key institutions such as government, media, courts, and police are a key barrier to social cohesion and successful multiculturalism. Our research²² shows that only 26% of Australians are largely trusting (15% very distrusting, 17% largely unsure about how much they can trust various groups and institutions; 42% somewhat trusting), and that 74% have some level of distrust in key institutions (government, media, political parties). Our research also shows correlations between distrust in institutions and anti-diversity sentiment such as discomfort with cultural difference.

This context of (dis)trust needs urgent attention given the relationship between trust and the successful functioning of society – politically, economically and socially. For example, trust in institutions and social trust is seen as a key variable in civic and social cooperation and thus economic growth and the performance of society’s institutions²³.

¹⁹ Australia’s draft National Science and Research Priorities, Commonwealth of Australia 2023, [Australia’s draft National Science and Research Priorities](#).

²⁰ Denson, N., Lee, A., Kamp, A., Mansouri, F., Elias, A., Sharples, R., Sahin, O., Connelly, K., Paradies, Y., McGarty, C. & Dunn, K. 2025. Inoculation against racist misinformation: An Australian online test. Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies. <https://doi.org/10.56311/VDHK1859>

²¹ O’Donnell, J. 2023. Mapping Social Cohesion 2023. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute.

²² Kamp, A., Dunn, K., Sharples, R., Denson, N., Diallo, T. 2023. Understanding Trust in Contemporary Australia Using Latent Class Analysis. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15:2, 84–104. <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v15.i2.8595>

²³ See for example: Fazio, G., Giambona, F., Vassallo, E., Vassiliadis, E. 2018. A measure of trust: The Italian regional divide in a latent class approach. *Social Indicators Research*, 140, 209–242.

Trust (and corresponding cooperation) has also been found to be central to wellbeing²⁴. On the other hand, distrust has been linked to support for populist politics and right-wing extremism, and subsequent fear, and a reality, of social division²⁵. **Building trust in public institutions in NSW is therefore in need of urgent attention.**

4) The role of online platforms in promoting right-wing extremism

There is an urgent need to study online platforms for the ways in which they promote racism and right-wing extremism, with a view to understanding and improving it. UNESCO (2015) recognised racist speech as a substantial subset of hate speech. They concluded in regard to countering hate speech that: “Exhaustive evaluations, however, are still lacking, and it is difficult to assess whether and to which extent these initiatives are successful in combating hate speech or affecting groups that are most likely to engage in hate speech online” and that “there are not clear and public guidelines on how to evaluate or report impact”.

We note that cybersecurity is a National Science and Research Priority and the practical research challenge is to understand and raise awareness about the social factors informing individual, organisational, and national attitudes towards cyber security. Our work has shown the importance of raising awareness of online incivility, the case for regulation, and guides for action. Rigorous data can prompt better reporting and encourage change. As online activity is an increasingly important part of human life it is critical that research mechanisms for supporting civility and equity are developed, and this should include support for countering far-right extremist ideologies online. **Further support and resources to develop research-informed anti-racism disruptors/initiatives/guidelines for NSW are a priority.**

A key mechanism for addressing online right-wing extremism is the need for anti-racist regulation by authorities and platforms. This has been drawn into sharp relief since the Christchurch terror attacks and the Assyrian bishop stabbing in Wakeley, Sydney, where platforms have been slow or defiant in their responses to removing hate and other harmful speech from their platforms. In addition, platforms have tended to rely on the community and individuals to document and report incidents online or on ‘in-platform’ complaint mechanisms that are rarely open, public or provide adequate recompense to targets²⁶. **Greater monitoring and enforcement of platforms license to operate if they fail to meet community expectations and no harm principles should be examined in NSW.**

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1756-4>; Moesen, W., Van Puyenbroeck, T., & Cherchye, L. 2000. Trust as societal capital: Economic growth in European regions. Discussions paper series, 1. Center for Economic Studies, Catholic University of Leuven; Zak, P. J., & Knack, S., 2001. Trust and growth. *The Economic Journal*, 111, 295–321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0297.00609>.

²⁴ See for example: Hudson, J. 2006. Institutional Trust and Subjective Well-Being across the EU. *Kyklos*, 59(1), 43-62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6435.2006.00319.x>; Putnam, R. D., 2000. *Bowling alone: The collapse of America's social capital*. Simon and Schuster.

²⁵ Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. 2017. *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Jakubowicz, A. Dunn, Kevin M., Mason, G. Paradies, Y. Bliuc, A-M. Bahfen, N. Atie, R. Connelly, K. 2017 *Cyber Racism and Community Resilience* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke)

While existing research²⁷ has highlighted the role of platforms such as Twitter/X, YouTube, and community-based sites including 4chan and Reddit in mobilising popular support for far-right electoral campaigns and, in some cases, organised political violence, it is important to recognise that these platforms also function as key infrastructures of recruitment and networking. They actively cluster like-minded users, normalise extremist narratives, and facilitate the growth of transnational far-right connections. Through online connectivity, ideologies, symbols, and organisational strategies circulate across borders, contributing to the emergence of Australian-based branches of globally connected hate groups. This underscores the need for regulatory and research frameworks that address recruitment, networking, and mobilisation processes on online platforms, rather than focusing solely on content moderation.

5) Regulation of hate speech

Hate speech and right-wing extremist ideologies pose a significant threat to Australian society. Research conducted by the CRP and CRIS found that hate speech has direct and consequent effects on society and are a means to mobilise and rally supporters for far-right extremism in Australia²⁸.

We found that far-right ideologies have been framed within freedom of speech debates where hate speech is erroneously conflated with free speech, creating a fertile environment for hate speech to thrive. We found that grassroots and political activism have seen effective countering of hate speech, highlighting the ongoing need to call out hate speech in order to establish social norms and future discourses that address and disrupt the systematic discrimination perpetuated by hateful speech. According to Gelber and McNamara²⁹, hate speech contains two kinds of harm: constitutive and consequential. Constitutive harm originates from a hate speech act and includes the immediate impacts of fear and other forms of emotional stress. Consequential harm is more structural and is what happens due to that act. These consequential harms change norms, weakening the citizenship and belonging of minority groups, worsening community relations, and threatening harmony and order. Hate speech has been allowed to fester in a volatile political climate where freedom of speech debates have grown increasingly hostile toward minority and vulnerable groups. **In the interests of establishing strong social norms that devalue hate ideologies and set standards against hate speech**, we also emphasise the need for strong opposing messages from political and civic leaders in NSW; a more critical mainstream media coverage; and appropriate bodies to be more outspoken against the views espoused.

²⁷ See for example: Devries, M., Bessant, J., & Watts, R. (Eds.). 2021. *Rise of the far right: Technologies of recruitment and mobilization*. Rowman & Littlefield; and Hutchinson, J., Iqbal, M., Peucker, M., & Smith, D. 2022. Online and offline coordination in Australia's far-right: A study of true blue crew. *Social Sciences*, 11(9), 421.

²⁸ Sharples, R., Safa, N., Dunn, K. & Dastyari, A. 2025. Far-Right Hate Speaker Tours in Australia: Ideologies, Platforms, Risks, and Effective Interventions. *Int J Polit Cult Soc*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-025-09517-5>.

²⁹ Gelber, K., & McNamara, L. 2015. The Effects of Civil Hate Speech Laws: Lessons from Australia. *Law & Society Review*, 49(3), 631-664.

Effective regulation of hate speech is also of great importance. We know there is an under-utilisation of vilification laws when it comes to hate speech. The reasons are complex and varied, but the high standard of proof required is one such barrier. We also know that incidents of hate speech and other forms of vilification (racism, sexism etc.) are under-reported. Research we have conducted³⁰ indicate that Australians overwhelmingly do not report incidents of racism. Lack of trust in statutory agencies and their response to racism reports was a frequent barrier to reporting. Feelings of hopelessness, shame or disempowerment and insufficient education of reporting tools and human rights were other barriers. This is increasingly recognised at the government level. For example, the recent Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections included a dedicated chapter on online vilification, and recommended collaborations with community organisations to improve data collection, increase online safety skills, and raise awareness about anti-vilification laws online (Parliament of Victoria, 2021). For the effective regulation of hate speech, **lifting the confidence of people to report remains an urgent task, as does the development of safe, appropriate, culturally-sensitive and trusted reporting mechanisms.**

The parameters of what constitutes hate speech within the NSW Act requires expansion. Researchers have concluded that uneven treatment across ‘race’ is functionally equivalent to unevenness across other cultural attributes, such as religion. All forms of racism can be expressed in a myriad ways such as Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Blackness, casteism and xenophobia³¹. Racism constructs and reinforces social inequality through markers of difference which are then attached to generalisations about character, culture, merit and worthiness³². The reason that Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have been characterised as forms of racism, is that the mechanism, purposes and impacts have functional equivalence to racism³³. Researchers have generally argued that all forms of inequality across cultural axes ought to be conceived as racism³⁴. Legislation and government policy has expanded the set of protected attributes in anti-racism instruments. However, this expansion has lagged and groups have been left without protection, giving rise to unevenness of protection, and a sense that some groups are more valued than others, or retain a higher standard of suffering. The New South Wales *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* considers racial discrimination (Section 7) to occur if someone, on the grounds of race (or the race of a relative / associate): 1) treats another person less favourably than a person of a different race in similar circumstances; 2) segregates the person from others of a different race; or 3) imposes requirements or conditions that disproportionately disadvantage people of that race, unless reasonable in context.

³⁰ Kamp, A., Sharples, R., Vergani, M., and Denson, N. 2023. Asian Australian’s Experiences and Reporting of Racism During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 45 (3): 452-472.

³¹ Grosfoguel, R., Oso, L., and Christou, A. 2015. ‘Racism’, intersectionality and migration studies: framing some theoretical reflections. *Identities*, 22 (6): 635-652.

³² See for example: Dunn, K., Klocker, N. and Salabay, T. 2007. Contemporary racism and Islamophobia in Australia. *Ethnicities*, 7(4): 564-589; Fredrickson, G.M. 2002. *Racism: A short history*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

³³ All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. (2018) *Islamophobia Defined: The inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia*. London: UK Parliament.

³⁴ Yuval-Davis, N. (2024). Antisemitism is a Form of Racism—or is it?. *Sociology*, 58(4), 779-79.

Race under the Act includes colour, nationality, descent, ethnic and/or ethno-religious background but does not extend to religion as such. As a result, protection for members of universalist religions (i.e. religions with diverse ethnic membership open to adherents to join through conversion) are uneven and contingent, often depending on whether discrimination can be characterised as racial or ethnic rather than religious. This leaves some individuals without protection where the discrimination they experience is religious in nature but cannot be reframed as race-based. **The protected attributes in the NSW Act should cover all religions in line with the Federal legislation.**

6) Activating and empowering middle Australia through anti-racism training and diversity education

Segmentation analysis has shown that approximately 10% of Australians occupy an extremist disposition with a further 15% occupying an adjacent disposition of assimilationist ideology rather than hierarchical and supremacist ideologies. Another 20% are strongly multicultural and pro-diversity. The rest (middle Australia) have greater or lesser convictions about diversity, multiculturalism and anti-racism³⁵. Given the size of the population who fall into this category, a key concern is to arrest any trend toward the extremist position. We believe it is not good policy to only focus on those who already occupy the right-wing extremism space, but to identify vulnerable populations and develop a variety of evidence-based interventions that can arrest movement toward an extremist disposition. The evidence outlined in our submission has identified three general areas for this action. First, stronger regulation of hate speech, greater anti-racist regulation of online spaces by platforms and authorities and more accessible mechanisms of reporting with higher levels of complainant satisfaction. Second, research on how to build trust across key institutions, how to best address mis/disinformation and the associated threats to democracy, and how to confront extremist views that threaten Australia as a multicultural and socially cohesive society. And third, developing resources and trainings for schools, workplaces and other key social spaces, to build people's capacity for anti-racist action and to safeguard against violent extremism.

These interventions must set out to build confidence in our diversity and its management and re-establish certainty on what is acceptable behaviour and speech. Middle Australia are an important political resource that need to be activated and empowered to upstand, speak out and reach out. Awareness raising and upstander training have been proven to work in schools, universities, clubs, workplaces and community settings and need to be scaled up to face the current challenges to social cohesion.

³⁵ See for example our work: Dunn, K., Ben, J., Sharples, R., Denson, N., Elias, A., Mansouri, F., McGarty, C., Paradies, Y., & Sahin, O. 2024. Can Do Better: mapping ordinary ant-racism and pro-sociality in Victoria Report. Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies AND Dunn, K. M., Diallo, T. M., & Sharples, R. 2021. Segmenting anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia: Insights for the diverse project of countering Islamophobia. *Ethnicities*, 21(3), 538-562. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796821989819>

Democratic governments worldwide have been prodded into inactivity in this field. This is manifest as taking a 'neutral stance' in the culture wars, and being hesitant to take overt action against hateful discourse and actors. When geopolitical events have given rise to local cross-cultural tensions, governments have been slow to intervene, fearful of being visibly involved or of becoming a target in those debates. Governments fear being accused of social engineering or of inhibiting free speech. Empirical work informed by 'consensus theory' has found that if extremists are given any sense that their attitudes are tolerated and supported, then they are much more likely to take racist action³⁶. The opposite has also been proven. If racism is sufficiently condemned and constructed with opprobrium, then this sets new norms in that context that make racist acts more difficult and less likely. Right wing extremist movements, and other forms of political extremism, are real threats to public order and they are deliberative in their intent to undermine democratic systems. **The NSW Government through its political leaders and agencies must take a bold and declarative approach to setting norms around diversity and citizenship.**

7) The Crimes and Summary Offences Amendment Bill 2025

The Challenging Racism Project supports the addition of **recklessness** as an intention threshold for the offences of urging force or violence, or threatening force or violence, against targeted groups and members of groups. In a large scale survey of the Victorian population (n:4,516) between November 2020 and January 2021 we found that 'everyday racisms' were the most common forms of racism experienced³⁷. These included being mistrusted because of cultural or religious background (61%) or called names (52%). Racism had also been experienced within settings like the workplace (44%); education (43%) on public transport (42%) sporting venues (36%). By reducing the threshold to reckless, the law will better cover these most common forms of racism, which when experienced frequently have morbid effects on well-being and belonging.

CRP supports exploring how to ensure that **intersectionality** is countenanced in the legislation. Existing research has identified the links between extremism, racism and misogyny³⁸. Our research has also found that contemporary far-right groups leverage

³⁶ Nelson, J., Paradies, Y & Dunn, KM. 2011. Bystander Anti-Racism: A Review of the Literature. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 11(1), 263-284).

³⁷ Dunn, K., Ben, J., Sharples, R., Denson, N., Elias, A., Mansouri, F., McGarty, C., Paradies, Y., & Sahin, O., 2024. Can Do Better: mapping ordinary ant-racism and pro-sociality in Victoria Report. Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies.

³⁸ See for example: Sharples, R., Kamp, A., Dunn, K., Denson, N., Nicholas, L., & Ovenden, G. 2025. Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories During the Covid-19 Pandemic in NSW, Australia and the Risks for Social Cohesion. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2025.248139>; Agius, C., Cook, K., Nicholas, L., Ahmed, A., Jehangir, H., Safa, N. Hardwick, T & Clark, S. 2020. Mapping right wing extremism in Victoria: Applying a gender lens to develop prevention and deradicalisation approaches. Melbourne: Victorian Government, Department of Justice and Community Safety: Countering Violent Extremism Unit and Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.25916/5f3a26da94911>; and Roose, J., Flood, M., Greig, A., Alfano, M. & Copland, S. 2022. *Masculinity and Violent Extremism*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

existing local tensions and other popular hate discourses, such as spreading anti-feminist sentiments as vehicles for circulating extreme-right ideologies³⁹.

This evidence exposes the limits of offence-based or attribute-specific legal frameworks, which tend to treat forms of harm in isolation. In reality, hate-motivated conduct is often driven by, and experienced through, overlapping forms of discrimination. People are targeted not just because of one characteristic, but at the intersection of race, gender, religion, and other protected attributes. When legal frameworks cannot recognise this complexity, serious harms can fall through the cracks. A comprehensive Human Rights Act would offer a more coherent and principled response. By grounding the law in substantive equality and human dignity, it would allow courts, lawmakers, and decision-makers to recognise intersecting rights violations as they occur in practice, rather than forcing them into narrow or artificial legal categories. It would also provide a stronger basis for assessing proportionality, responsibility, and harm where conduct is shaped by multiple forms of discrimination, strengthening the legal system's ability to respond to evolving and interconnected harms.

CRP supports the **removal of a good faith provision**. Free speech does not extend to hate speech. Research conducted by the CRP demonstrates that hate speech is a clear threat to a socially cohesive society and undermines the principles of a democratic country⁴⁰. Constitutive harm originates from a hate speech act and includes the immediate impacts of fear and other forms of emotional stress⁴¹. In the light of these harms there is no good faith defence for offences that of urging or threatening force or violence across culture and religion.

CRP acknowledges that Nazi symbols are powerful symbols of hate and racism that cause significant harm to individuals and communities. These symbols are also used to incite hatred, violence and discrimination. The display of Nazi symbols during hateful public events in public spaces is highly offensive to many Australians, especially to those from Jewish and other minority communities who have faced genocide, discrimination and persecution. The most common form of racism in Australia is hate discourse. Any criminal code amendment bill should ensure that the use, display or dissemination of Nazi symbols for promoting racist and antisemitic thoughts and actions is illegal. For the CRP, it is also important that any such Bill acknowledges the legitimate use of swastikas as a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism that is unrelated to the promotion of Nazi ideology. The Bill should also allow exemption for the legitimate use of Nazi symbols in the context of scientific, educational, artistic, journalistic, or public interest purposes. We would recommend that these permitted

³⁹ Sharples, R., Safa, N., Dunn, K. & Dastyari, A. 2025. Far-Right Hate Speaker Tours in Australia: Ideologies, Platforms, Risks, and Effective Interventions. *Int J Polit Cult Soc*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-025-09517-5>.

⁴⁰ Sharples, R., Safa, N., Dunn, K. & Dastyari, A. 2025. Far-Right Hate Speaker Tours in Australia: Ideologies, Platforms, Risks, and Effective Interventions. *Int J Polit Cult Soc*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-025-09517-5>.

⁴¹ Gelber, K., & McNamara, L. 2016. Evidencing the harms of hate speech. *Social Identities*, 22(3), 324–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2015.1128810>

uses might overtly reference anti-racist research as an exemption, as well as other legitimate anti-racist uses.

Yours sincerely

The Challenging Racism Project

Dr Rachel Sharples, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Western Sydney University

Prof Kevin M Dunn, Executive Dean SABEL, Western Sydney University

Dr Alanna Kamp, Senior Lecturer in Geography and Urban Studies, Western Sydney University

Prof Azadeh Dastyari, Director, Centre for Western Sydney

Prof Nida Denson, Professor in the Social Sciences, Western Sydney University

Dr Noorie Safa, Associate Lecturer in Sociology, University of Wollongong

Dr Aaron Teo, Lecturer, University of Southern Queensland

Shaista Khan, Research Assistant, Western Sydney University