

**Challenging Racism Project (CRP) submission to the
Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion**

June 2026

Background

The Challenging Racism Project (CRP) is the leading national research program on racism and anti-racism in Australia. It is a highly successful research collective dedicated to advancing social justice, equity and harmony via rigorous research, community engagement, and the practical application of our findings. Established in 2002, the CRP supports a new generation of anti-racism researchers and practitioners and partners with government, non-government, and community organisations that share a vision for intergroup relations and anti-racism initiatives. 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. The Challenging Racism Project (at Western Sydney University) have published more than 100 peer reviewed journal articles in the field of Ethnic and Racial Studies since 2010.

The CRP has global esteem for its research impact in countering racism and improving community relations. The CRP has an impressive track record of partnering, including funded projects with over twenty agencies including the: NSW Department of Communities and Justice; VIC Department of Premier and Cabinet; Australian Human Rights Commission; VicHealth; Multicultural NSW; NSW & VIC Departments of Education; NSW Police Force; Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) Australia; Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC); South Eastern Sydney Local Health District; and many more.

The Challenging Racism Project also makes significant contributions to policies related to racism, multiculturalism and cultural diversity. We have made submissions to several Government Inquiries, including the Inquiry into Right-wing Extremist Movements in Australia (2024), the Inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Hate Crimes) Bill (2024), the Inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Prohibition of Nazi Symbols) Bill 2023, the Multicultural Framework Review – Terms of Reference (draft) 2023, the Budget Estimates Inquiry 2023 & 2024, the Inquiry into Freedom of Speech 2016, the Inquiry into Strengthening Multiculturalism 2017, and the Inquiry into Strengthening Australian Citizenship 2018. CRP works closely with government departments to ensure policy is backed by rigorous academic research. Recent engagements include working with the Department of Premier and Cabinet Victoria, the NSW Premier's Department, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Department of Education, the Attorney General's Department, and the Department of Home Affairs. We also make consistent contributions to the work of the Australian Human Rights Commission including the Spectator Sporting Guidelines and the recently launched National Anti-Racism Framework.

The nature and prevalence of antisemitism and impacts (ToR a[i,iv])

For more than two decades the CRP has collected substantial data sets on the prevalence and nature of racism. These have included very large survey-based data sets. Since our very first surveys we have collected data on the experiences of non-Christian Australians, including Jewish Australians. As well as data on interpersonal racist experiences, CRP have collected data on attitudes towards non-Christian groups. Interpersonal attitudes have been tracked largely using social distance measures, particularly the Bogardus (1933) battery of measures (see Berry & Kalin 1995: 306-7; Peach 1976). In

one of our earliest peer-reviewed publications we commented on the enduring longevity of the intolerance towards Jewish Australians (Dunn et al., 2004: 416).

In this submission, we report to the Commission on data from two recent large-scale surveys (2021 Victoria [n:4,305]; 2024 Nationwide [n:6,282]). We provide data on the experience of racism for the major non-Christian religious groups, for categories such as Christian and non-Christian, and for all respondents. In a recent report to the NSW State Government on anti-racism gaps, we stated that anti-Jewish sentiment had worsened in the most recent data: "Anti-Jewish sentiment has remained among one-third of NSW survey respondents, and has worsened over the period" (Challenging Racism Project 2026 p.42,49). This was based on our review of all reliable time series available. This is also reflected in Scanlon Foundation data (Challenging Racism Project 2026, p.55).

The Challenging Racism Project has replicated Bogardus social distance measures in a series of surveys across the last decade. The surveys ask whether a person would be concerned if a close relative were to marry someone from different backgrounds, including religion, ancestry and racial groups. Table 1 present three data points for NSW (2015; 2019 and 2023/4). Over the period, social distance towards Jewish Australians worsened, moving from 41% to 49% of respondents. Social distance towards Muslims remained high at about 64% of respondents throughout the same time period. It should also be noted that social distance towards Christians also worsened over that period (from 23% to 35%). Our large survey of Victorians in 2023 showed the same high level of social distance towards Jews (46.4%) Muslims (61.3%) and Christians (29.5%) (Dunn et al. 2024:18).

Tables 2 and 3 provide data on the experiences of racism for non-Christian faith groups, in different settings and of varied forms of racism. Table 1 draws on a survey sample of Victorians collected as part of the *Can Do Better* report on anti-racism capacity in Victoria in 2021 (Dunn et al 2024). This was funded by the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies, with financial support from the Victorian Government. Table 2 draws on an SBS sponsored nationwide survey 'What Australia Means to Me'. It must be noted that the SBS nationwide survey had a hurdle question that asked whether respondents had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months because of their skin colour, ethnic/cultural background, or religion. Only those who answered in the affirmative were asked about the different forms of, and settings where, racism had occurred. This explains the smaller proportion in the 2023 data. However the variations across religion are similar. In that 2023 survey, the reported rates of experience of racism in the last 12 months were: Muslim (37.6%); Jewish (37.5%); Buddhist (29.0%); Hindu (26.4%); Christian (12.0%); No Religion (9.3%).

We offer eight observations from Tables 2 and 3 on the experience of racism across religion. First, these data show that in Australia those who are believers of a religious faith experience more racism than those who are non-religious. Second, non-Christian Australians experience higher rates of racism than Christian Australians. Third, for many of the forms of racism the rates of experience of Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists are similar. Racist distrust is especially felt by Hindu Australians in the earlier Victorian survey but is highest for Muslims and Jews in the 2023 nationwide survey. Fourth, racist disrespect is more strongly experienced by Jewish Australians, as well as Muslims in 2023/4. Fifth, only the 2023/4 nationwide survey asked about racist physical attack, and that was most strongly experienced by non-Christians, especially Jewish and Muslim Australians. Sixth, all non-Christian groups reported higher experiences of racism in the workplace and in education. Seventh, the experience of racism in the other settings was lesser for Jewish respondents, though still slightly higher than for Christian respondents and similar for policing, shopping and health services. Eighth, in the 2023/4 survey Muslims had the highest experiences of racism across most settings.

The *Can Do Better Report* reported on Victorian's preparedness to reach across cultural difference. One question proposed: "It is common for me to greet people from different cultures whom I don't know." While 79.6% of Muslims felt able to answer in the affirmative, whereas among Jewish Victorians it was only 48.1%. The average for all respondents was 54.4% (Dunn et al., 2024: 15-16). This could be seen as a negative effect on potential allyship from recent anti-Semitism.

Responses of governments, counteracting anti-Semitism (ToR a[ii,iii], d)

Over the last decade work has been done on charting the necessary nation-building work for a multicultural Australia. Inquiries and Reviews have consulted community leaders and reached out to everyday Australians. Expensive and robust work has been undertaken by key agencies. Academics have offered cutting edge findings and leading conceptual contributions. There are four sets of findings that have been neglected to a varied extent by Government at all levels: the Multicultural Framework Review, the National Anti-Racism Strategy, the Antisemitism Envoy Report, and the Islamophobia Envoy Report. National and State Government ought to be held to account. Regrettably, the inaction of governments on such issues is not unusual across the globe. Liberal democratic governments have been prodded into inaction in the face of rising racism and extremism, which has been supercharged by misinformation, interpersonal and institutional distrust, and social media. Meanwhile, populist parties elected to govern have exploited division and scapegoated minorities for social malaise. Social democratic parties have been slow to counteract these political narratives, demonstrating reluctance to lead on so-called cultural wars or to defend scapegoated minorities. In the post Bondi era, the Australia government will need to lead, to call out populist racism and extremism, and to protect public order. The findings of the above-mentioned Reviews provide roadmaps for that work.

The concept of Social Cohesion

The term social cohesion has not been without criticism. In the United Kingdom there was deep community concern that the concept had been deployed in a way that was intolerant of cultural diversity. Social programs that had been developed had inferred or insisted that minority groups should cohere to a dominant cultural norm. There was an association with law and order and Countering / Preventing Violent Extremism (C/PVE). Social cohesion can be an acceptable term so long as it does not infer hostility to unreconciled cultural and religious differences. The Australian embrace of multiculturalism was a transition from assimilationism. Social cohesion cannot be used as a conceptual tool to drive Australia back towards an Anglo-Celtic cultural supremacy. Social cohesion needs to be seen as a conceptual frame to build social resilience in the context of unreconciled cultural diversity. This is a dynamic process that must include a reckoning with the foundational racism associated with colonisation and a challenge to Anglo supremacism. More generally, social cohesion requires the tools and customs to work through differences, to see diversity as a strength, to identify shared values, build trust and allyship, and develop processes and relationships that allow us to respectfully disagree. This is how social cohesion ought to be framed in the nation building work ahead.

Yours sincerely

The Challenging Racism Project

Professor Kevin Dunn, Executive Dean (Faculty of Social Science, Arts, Business, Education and Law (SABEL)), Challenging Racism Project Lead, Western Sydney University.

Dr Alanna Kamp, Senior Lecturer in Social & Cultural Geography (School of Social Sciences), Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University.

Mr Aaron Lauterbach, PhD Candidate in Social Psychology, ACSPRI Fellow 2026/27, School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University.

Professor Nida Denson, Professor in Sociology (School of Social Sciences), Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University.

Dr Rachel Sharples, Senior Lecturer in Sociology (School of Social Sciences), Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University.

Dr Alison Guo, Research Officer, Challenging Racism Project, School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University.

Works cited

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Dunn, K.M., Forrest, J., Burnley, I. & McDonald, A., 2004: "Constructing racism in Australia", Australian Journal of Social Issues, 39(4), 409-430. ISSN 0157-6321).

Tables

Table 1 Social Distance Towards Christians, Muslims and Jews, NSW, 2015-24

Dataset	Data Collection Year(s)	National Sample Size	NSW Sample Size	Christian Faith	Muslim Faith	Jewish Faith
Face up to Racism	2015 & 2016	6001	1972	22.8	64.4	40.8
What Next for Diversity?	2019	2015	689	32	69.6	50.6
What Australia Means to Me	2023-4	6282	1955	34.5	63.4	49.1

Question wording: In your opinion, how concerned would you feel if one of your closest relatives were to marry a person of [insert] background?

Response options: Not at all Concerned, Slightly Concerned, Concerned, Very Concerned, Extremely Concerned. This table indicates collated frequency of responses for Slightly Concerned – Extremely Concerned as a %.

Table 2. Experience of racism by religious groups, by type and setting, Victoria (2021).

Experience type	Buddhist (n: 156)	Christian (n: 1898)	Hindu (n: 196)	Jewish (n: 52)	Muslim (n: 105)	Non-Christian (n: 591)	No religion, agnostic or atheist (n: 419)	All (n 4203) *
Not trusted	73.7%	59.8%	86.2%	73.1%	77.9%	76.9%	55.9%	60.7%
Called names & insulted	71.8%	51.1%	69.7%	70.6%	70.9%	68.4%	47.1%	52.0%
Less respected	73.5%	54.5%	75.4%	80.8%	58.5%	73.1%	53.2%	56.7%
Workplace	67.3%	42.6%	70.4%	61.5%	59.6%	63.6%	37.0%	43.5%
Education	67.9%	42.1%	59.2%	69.2%	44.4%	60.2%	36.8%	42.7%
Accommodation	63.5%	32.9%	69.7%	38.5%	51.0%	57.7%	30.3%	35.6%
Police & CJ	65.2%	31.1%	56.1%	31.4%	54.4%	53.6%	28.3%	33.3%
Shop / Restaurant	63.4%	38.7%	68.4%	38.5%	65.7%	64.0%	35.1%	40.9%
Public settings	71.2%	38.6%	73.5%	48.1%	67%	66.1%	36.7%	41.8%
Sports	54.5%	34.3%	61.2%	38.5%	51.9%	54.9%	30.2%	35.6%
Health	62.6%	30.9%	56.0%	32.7%	48.1%	51.4%	28.0%	32.7%
Online	65.8%	34.0%	59.2%	48.1%	58.3%	57.4%	33.5%	37.2%
Home	40.6%	22.5%	42.3%	28.8%	38.5%	37.3%	20.3%	23.8%
Friends / Family	43.8%	27.6%	49.7%	30.8%	39.4%	43.8%	24.4%	28.6%

*Valid sample only n:4203.

Table 3. Experience of racism by religious groups, by type and setting, Australia (2023/4).

Experience type	Buddhist (n:138)	Christian (n:2568)	Hindu (n:106)	Jewish (n:32)	Muslim (n:133)	Non-Christian (n:684)	No religion, agnostic or atheist (n:2905)	All (n:6157)
Not trusted	28.3%	9.9%	22.6%	34.4%	33.8%	23.7%	7.8%	10.5%
Called names / Insulted	26.1%	10.5%	19.8%	25.0%	31.6%	22.1%	8.2%	10.7%
Less respected	28.3%	11.7%	26.4%	37.5%	36.1%	25.7%	8.9%	11.9%
Physically assaulted	13.0%	5.0%	12.3%	21.9%	21.1%	11.8%	3.9%	5.2%
Workplace	18.8%	6.2%	15.1%	18.8%	26.3%	16.2%	5.3%	6.9%
Education	18.1%	4.9%	14.2%	12.5%	28.6%	14.5%	3.2%	5.2%
Accommodation	15.9%	4.5%	13.2%	15.6%	24.1%	13.6%	4.0%	5.2%
Police & CJ	13.8%	4.8%	10.4%	12.5%	21.1%	11.5%	3.4%	4.9%
Public settings	26.8%	8.9%	26.4%	28.1%	33.8%	22.7%	6.9%	9.5%
Sports	18.8%	4.9%	12.3%	12.5%	24.1%	13.6%	3.6%	5.2%
Health	19.6%	5.8%	10.4%	15.6%	25.6%	14.8%	4.2%	6.1%
Online	18.1%	7.3%	14.2%	25.0%	28.6%	16.5%	5.9%	7.7%
Home	10.1%	3.2%	4.7%	6.2%	15.0%	7.6%	1.5%	2.9%
Friends / Family	10.9%	4.3%	6.6%	18.8%	20.3%	11.0%	2.7%	4.3%
Neighbours	16.7%	6.0%	12.3%	18.8%	25.6%	13.7%	3.9%	5.9%
Taxi / rideshare	17.4%	4.5%	12.3%	9.4%	20.3%	11.4%	3.1%	4.6%
Provision of services	20.3%	6.0%	11.3%	12.5%	27.1%	14.0%	4.1%	6.0%

Percentages are among all respondents with valid K1 data in each religion group, including those who answered No, Don't know/not sure, or Prefer not to say. The numerator is respondents answering Yes to K1 who reported the type/form from *Rarely* through *All the time*; the answer *Not applicable to me* (for settings) is not counted *Valid sample 6157 (Religion = "Prefer not say" excluded n:125).