

THE OFFICE OF AUSTRALIA'S
SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT
ISLAMOPHOBIA

Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security:
Inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia

—

Aftab Malik
Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia

November 2026



"The definition [of terrorism] has not changed since it was enacted almost 25 years ago in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Yet the type of terrorism threat that Australia faces has changed significantly since that time."

INDEPENDENT NATIONAL SECURITY LEGISLATION MONITOR, *Annual Report 2025–26*

"The Special Envoy's submission highlights important connections between insecurities, encouraging us to situate violent events in relevant structural contexts including social grievances, lived experiences of discrimination, and technological developments. In so doing, it spotlights contiguities between types of extremism that are often treated as distinct or detached, rather than as moments in a complex social and political ecosystem that generates polarisation and opportunities for exploitation. Of Mr. Malik's 13 recommendations, I particularly endorse the importance of fostering trust, belonging and community confidence in order to diminish threats such as those within the Inquiry's remit. I echo, too, his emphasis on the importance of balanced and evidence-based approaches to communicating risk to Australia's publics. I read the Special Envoy's submission as occasion for reminding us that reducing radicalisation, extremism, and political violence is not the same as – and does not always, or only, involve – increasing arrests and convictions for radicalisation, extremism, and political violence. Augmenting empathy between communities while addressing social and political grievances – which requires time and the active participation of diverse stakeholders – is as vital for public experiences of safety, social flourishing, and positive peace within democracies like Australia."

LEE JARVIS, Professor of Security and Society, Adelaide University

"This is a well-researched submission that makes an important contribution to understanding the drivers of radicalisation in Australia. I particularly welcome its recognition that radicalisation cannot be explained by religion or ideology alone, and that social exclusion, discrimination, grievances and individual circumstances also need to be considered. The discussion of Islamophobia and its consequences for community trust and social cohesion is especially important. I also welcome the emphasis on prevention, early intervention and the role of religious and community leaders. The recommendations deserve serious consideration, particularly at a time when the nature of radicalisation is changing and young people are increasingly exposed to extremist influences online."

ABDULLAH SAEED, Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies & Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, University of Melbourne

"The Special Envoy's submission to the Inquiry into the Nature and Drivers of Radicalisation in Australia arrives at a critical juncture for Australian security and democracy. This submission draws upon advances in scholarship and community sentiment to analyse and understand radicalisation in contemporary Australia. It considers, realistically, the impact of policies and perceptions on various Australian communities. In doing so, it adds nuance to discourse around the criminalisation of marginal or vulnerable populations, including young people. These populations exist in Australia where labels are used carelessly, moral panic is cultivated, and everyday citizens are stereotyped as threats to life and order. This submission provides insightful recommendations about how the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia may be justly, ethically, and empirically addressed, while upholding Australian values and principles. This includes recommendations on language and communication, assessment frameworks, early interventions, and prosocial supports, among others. Illuminating the interface of social cohesion and trust, community safety, and national security, this submission foregrounds democratically informed and balanced approaches to addressing radicalisation in Australia."

KRISTY CAMPION, Associate Professor in Terrorism and Security Studies, Charles Sturt University

"In this vital submission, Australia's first Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia makes critical recommendations for how governments, agencies and society can respond to a rapidly changing threat environment. The submission offers a nuanced account of c urrently evolving threats, including youth radicalisation, nihilistic violent extremism, and the relationships between radicalisation, trust and social cohesion. Stand-out recommendations include the need for enhanced, evidence-based public communication about evolving threats and greater availability of non-criminal pathways for children exposed to extremist content online."

KEIRAN HARDY, Associate Professor, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University

"In the past decades since 9/11, the nature of radicalisation and terrorism has diversified significantly worldwide. In Australia, the threat environment has now become more diverse, decentralised and digitally mediated. While ISIS and other forms of "religiously motivated" violent extremism continue to pose a significant security threat, as this submission highlights, contemporary radicalisation is not confined to any single ideology. A narrow focus on religiously inspired extremism actually risks obscuring the broader range of pathways through which individuals become vulnerable to radicalisation and violence. From this point of view, this submission adopts a holistic approach to examine contemporary radicalisation and the evolving threat environment in Australia. It highlights the common drivers that cut across different forms of extremism, including grievance, social isolation, misogyny, identity-based vulnerabilities and a lack of belonging. Drawing on contemporary evidence, it also examines the role of digital platforms, algorithmic amplification and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, in reshaping pathways to radicalisation. A central argument of the submission, that effective prevention requires more than law enforcement and security responses alone is convincing and highly relevant, especially amid the diversified landscape of radicalisation and terrorism. The submission further argues convincingly that overcoming radicalisation requires policies and interventions that strengthen social cohesion, resilience, and community confidence. Above all, it argues that trust is one of Australia's most important protections against radicalisation, enabling families, communities and institutions to intervene early and reduce the likelihood that vulnerability develops into mobilisation towards violence."

D.B. SUBEDI, Lecturer in Peace and Conflict Studies, School of Political Science and International Studies, University of Queensland

"The Special Envoy does a commendable job in highlighting the complexities when it comes to the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia. Much of what Mr Malik talks about in his submission, such as social isolation, identity uncertainty, and the search for belonging and purpose, can be understood as unmet needs. It is important to understand and acknowledge the role they play in the radicalisation process, and how terrorist and violent extremist groups, individuals, or movements can fulfil these basic needs in extremely harmful ways. These needs can of course be met in other more pro-social ways. Therefore, non-criminal diversion programs, as well as rehabilitation and disengagement programs, should be fully supported in helping people step away from terrorism and violent extremism and lead more pro-social lives."

MUHAMMAD IQBAL, Associate Professor, Applied Security Science Partnership (ASSP), Institute for Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities (ISILC), Victoria University

"This submission captures the complexities surrounding the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia. It highlights the real challenges Muslims face, especially Muslim youth, in finding a sense of belonging at a time of heightened Islamophobia and negative attitudes towards Muslims that have a way of seeping into every thread of society. If we want to address radicalisation, we need to take this nuanced perspective seriously and respond to the issues it raises. Otherwise, we will be asking the same questions year after year. Radicalisation is complex and multifaceted, and this submission captures that well."

ZULEYHA KESKIN, Associate Professor, Charles Sturt University, Associate Head of School, Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation

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November 2026

Committee Secretary
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Dear Chair

Re: Submission for the inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. I write at a time when people in Australia have acutely felt the consequences of radicalisation. The anti-Semitic attack against the Jewish community at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025, which took the lives of 15 people celebrating Chanukah, is the worst terrorist attack on Australian soil. Since then, two teenagers in Darwin were charged with collecting or making documents to likely facilitate a terrorist act, there was an attempted bombing of the Invasion Day rally in Perth, ongoing threats have been made against mosques, and multiple plots have been disrupted demonstrating that the threat is real, increasingly diverse and involving younger people at unprecedented rates.

As Australia's first Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, I spend much of my time listening to Muslim Australians: parents, young people, community leaders, students and those who have been targeted by hate. Based on what I've heard, three observations inform my submission.

Firstly, Muslim Australians, particularly young people, are caught in a double bind. They are targeted by recruiters who claim to speak as authoritative religious interlocutors. They also face collective suspicion and hostility after each terror attack carried out by individuals who are Muslims. In the fortnight after the Bondi attack, Islamophobia reports increased by 740 per cent.

This occurred against a broader backdrop of deteriorating community attitudes. The most recent Scanlon Foundation *Mapping Social Cohesion survey* found that negative attitudes towards Muslims increased from 39 per cent in 2018 to 43 per cent in 2026, the largest increase ever recorded for any group surveyed. At the same time, positive attitudes declined, and for the first time, neutral views were equal to negative views.[1] These findings should be of particular concern. They suggest that negative attitudes towards Muslims are no longer confined to the margins, they are increasingly embedded within broader community sentiment.

1. O'Donnell, James, Alice Falkiner and Trish Prentice. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2026* (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2026), 73, https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SI_Mapping-Social-Cohesion_Report_2026.pdf.

Extremists seek to exploit precisely these moments. Every incidence of Islamophobic backlash. Every use of exclusionary rhetoric. Every act of collective blame. Each is used to reinforce a central message: that Muslims do not belong. Every act of exclusion serves that strategy. Conversely, every act of belonging defeats it.

Secondly, anti-Muslim hatred is not solely a social cohesion issue: it is a security issue. Anti-Muslim hatred is frequently an entry point to contemporary right-wing extremism. The ideology that motivated an Australian to kill 51 Muslim worshippers and seriously wound 40 others in a Christchurch mosque in New Zealand, continues to inspire threats, including recently in San Diego where the attackers referred to themselves as the "sons" of the Christchurch attacker.[2] This same ideology also threatens other minority communities. As such, understanding Islamophobia is essential to understanding radicalisation across the spectrum.

Thirdly, trust is a security asset, and it is fragile. Research and repeated experience demonstrate that two decades of counterterrorism architecture that disproportionately focused on one community has left a legacy of mistrust. As the threat environment diversifies, Australia can apply this lesson to meet new threats with effective, procedurally fair and evidence-based approaches that do not create new suspect communities.

The Committee may also wish to consider the role of foreign actors and their domestic affiliates in amplifying Islamophobic and other hate-based narratives as part of broader influence operations. Hostile actors do not need to create division in democratic societies. They need only identify existing social fractures and intensify them. In this context, strengthening social cohesion is also a matter of national resilience.

As such, building a cohesive, inclusive and connected society is not simply a social objective, but an important component of Australia's response to contemporary radicalisation and national security challenges. The broader social environment shapes many of the drivers this submission discusses, including grievance, isolation, identity-based vulnerabilities and social disconnection. Understanding and addressing these conditions is essential to preventing radicalisation, strengthening community resilience and maintaining social cohesion.

The goal I share with the Committee is a simple one: an Australia where every community feels safe, every person feels they belong and no young person is left vulnerable to those who would exploit them and radicalise them to violence.

I welcome any inquiries about my submission and am available for any more information you need. Please email my office at info@oseci.gov.au or via the website at www.oseci.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Aftab Malik

AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA

2. "San Diego Mosque Shooter's Apparent Manifestos Reveal Anti-Muslim Extremism, Antisemitism, and Broader Extremist Ideology," Anti-Defamation League, May 19, 2019, https://www.adl.org/resources/article/san-diego-mosque-shooters-apparent-manifestos-reveal-anti-muslim-extremism.

Acknowledgment of Country

Many Australians remain unaware of the deep and enduring relationship that has existed between Muslim communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Historical evidence reveals Muslim Macassan traders from Indonesia journeyed regularly to Arnhem Land from *at least* the mid-1600s, long before the arrival of Europeans.[3]

This longstanding engagement was not one of conflict or threat, but of profound mutual connection and respect.[4] Initially rooted in trade, this relationship blossomed to include intermarriage[5] and the exchange of language and tradition, with words from Muslim prayers woven into Yolngu people's spiritualty, songs and rituals.[6]

In the late 19th century, Aboriginal–Muslim relations grew with the arrival of Cameleers, who transported goods and opened up transport routes across the centre of the country. These relations were built on mutual respect, cultural and religious exchange, and were strengthened by shared values.[7]

The enduring and reciprocal, yet often overlooked, relationship between Muslim and Aboriginal communities deserves recognition. This shared history of material, social, and spiritual exchange echoes in the present, creating space for enduring respect, generosity and openness.

In acknowledging this shared history, I wish to pay my deepest respects to the traditional owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia. I honour their Elders, past and present, whose knowledge, cultural authority and wisdom continues to guide us.

3. Daryl Wesley, Sue O'Conner, and Jack N. Fenner, "Re-evaluating the Timing of the Indonesian Trepang Industry in North-West Arnhem Land: Chronological Investigations at Malara (Anuru Bay A)," *Archaeology in Oceania* 51 (2016): 169–195, https://doi.org/10.1002/arco.5091; Paul S. C. Taçon, Sally K. May, Stewart J. Fallon, Meg Travers, Daryl Wesley, and Ronald Lamilami, "A Minimum Age for Early Depictions of Southeast Asian Praus in the Rock Art of Arnhem Land," *Australian Archaeology* 71, no. 1 (2010): 1–10, https://www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/tacon_etal_2010.pdf.
4. Sally K. May, Daryl Wesley, Joakim Goldhahn, Ronald Lamilami, and Paul S.C. Taçon, "The Missing Macassans: Indigenous sovereignty, Rock Art and the Archaeology of Absence," *Australian Archaeology* 87, no. 2 (2021): 127–143, https://doi.org/10.1080/03122417.2021.1932243.
5. Janak Rogers, "When Islam Came to Australia," *BBC News*, June 24, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27260027.
6. Regina Gantner, "Remembering Muslim Histories of Australia," *La Trobe Journal* 89 (2012), https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/La-Trobe-Journal-89-Regina-Ganter.pdf; Nicholas Evans, "Macassan Loanwords in Top End languages," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12, no. 1 (1992): 45–91, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232837254_Macassan_Loanwords_in_Top_End_Languages.
7. Abu Bakr S. Cook and Salih Yucel, "Australia's Indigenous Peoples and Islam: Philosophical and Spiritual Convergences Between Belief Structures," *Comparative Islamic Studies 12*, no. 1–2 (2016): 165–185, https://doi.org/10.1558/cis.37033.

About Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia



Aftab Malik is Australia's first-ever Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia. He is also a designated UN Alliance of Civilisations' global expert on Muslim affairs and spent almost a decade working in the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet. His work bridges academic insight and policy practice, informing responses to hate, misinformation and structural discrimination at a national level.

Mr Malik led Australia's first government-backed conference on Islamophobia following the Christchurch attack on 15 March 2019, contributing to a shift in how institutions engage with anti-Muslim hate. His role as Special Envoy, dedicated to tackling Islamophobia, is one of the first of its kind globally. In March 2026, he marked the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by addressing a global audience of diplomats at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Most recently, he delivered his speech, *Rethinking, Thinking About Islam*, to a sold-out Sydney audience at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas.

Mr Malik has worked with senior global leaders, multilateral institutions and policymakers since the aftermath of September 11, bringing long-term perspective to some of the most complex questions around identity, security and public discourse. His work spans research, advisory and published commentary, positioning him as a key voice in contemporary debates on Islamophobia and global affairs. His message is clear: how societies speak about communities shapes policy, perception and lived reality – and changing that begins with informed, critical engagement.

Follow his work on the Office of the Special Envoy's Instagram account @oseci.au and at www.oseci.gov.au.

Overview

This submission responds to the Committee's inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia. It examines:

- contemporary radicalisation
- youth vulnerability
- pathways to radicalisation
- technology and online environments
- opportunities to strengthen prevention and early-intervention frameworks.

Contemporary radicalisation is shaped by broader social conditions

While religious terrorism accounts for the majority of ASIO's caseload, contemporary radicalisation extends beyond ISIS terrorism.[8] Talking about this does not downplay the significance of, or attempts to obscure, ASIOs caseload. Rather, focusing exclusively on religious terrorism obscures the actual terrorism landscape confronting Australians. Terrorism is in fact becoming more diverse, more digital and less confined to a single ideology. It is characterised by fluid and mixed intersecting beliefs, decentralised online networks and common drivers. As noted by the AFP, "counterterrorism investigators in Australia and throughout the world, are recording more instances of individuals who are not dogmatic about political or religious causes but are drawn to grievance, violence, and misogyny.[9]" Therefore, understanding the full range of factors that make individuals vulnerable to recruitment strengthens counter-terrorism efforts, it does not weaken them. Across the different pathways to radicalisation, common themes emerge, including vulnerability, grievance, social isolation and a lack of belonging. Specifically, misogyny, hostile gender attitudes and male grievance narratives are significant risk factors that cut across different ideologies. Extremist movements exploit these vulnerabilities and risk factors.

Technology and online platforms enable radicalisation

Technology has a growing role in reshaping radicalisation pathways. Contemporary radicalisation happens through multiplatform digital ecosystems involving:

- recommender algorithms
- social media platforms that normalise content
- encrypted communication applications

8. Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, *Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into the Nature and Drivers of Radicalisation in Australia* (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2026), 3, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/Radicalisation/Submissions.
9. Australian Federal Police, *Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into the Nature and Drivers of Radicalisation in Australia* (Australian Federal Police, 2026), 2, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/Radicalisation/Submissions.

- artificial intelligence-enabled content
- gaming environments.

Effective prevention requires attention to harmful content itself and, crucially, to digital platforms' design, operation and amplification mechanisms.

Australia's greatest protection against radicalisation is trust

Australia's response to radicalisation should be considered against a backdrop of growing social fragmentation and declining trust. Developments show that social cohesion, community safety and national security are increasingly interconnected. For example, recent research found that 43 per cent of Australians reported holding negative views of Muslims – the highest level recorded in the survey for any faith group.[10] And the Islamophobia Register Australia found that 92 per cent of victims reported lasting impacts on themselves, their families or their communities.[11] These findings sit alongside recent warnings from ASIO, including the disruption of a terrorist attack targeting Muslim Australians.[12]

Therefore, Australia's greatest protection against radicalisation is not simply a new law or a new power. It is trust. The trust that leads a parent to seek help, a community leader to raise concerns, a young person to step back from the edge. The Committee should test every policy it considers against one question: does it strengthen trust, belonging and resilience, or does it weaken them? Strengthening these foundations and introducing early intervention through non-criminal justice pathways are essential to preventing radicalisation, protecting communities and ensuring that fewer Australians become vulnerable to those who would seek to exploit them.

Recommendations

This submission makes 13 recommendations focused on:

- strengthening whole-of-society prevention frameworks
- reducing discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion
- addressing youth vulnerability and early intervention
- strengthening safeguarding approaches for vulnerable young people
- establishing trusted, non-criminal intervention pathways
- supporting parents and caregivers
- improving public understanding of contemporary radicalisation
- recognising the role of misogyny and male grievance in radicalisation pathways
- improving digital literacy and online safety
- addressing the role of algorithmic amplification, AI and platform design
- promoting safety-by-design approaches across online platforms and gaming environments.

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10. O'Donnell, James, Alice Falkiner and Trish Prentice. Mapping Social Cohesion 2026 (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2026), 73, https://scanloninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SI_Mapping-Social-Cohesion_Report_2026.pdf.
11. Islamophobia Register Australia, *Islamophobia in Australia: Report 5 2023–24* (Islamophobia Register Australia, 2025), 25, https://islamophobia.org.au/publications/our-reports/.
12. Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, *Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into the Nature and Drivers of Radicalisation in Australia* (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2026), 4, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/Radicalisation/Submissions.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Committee should recognise:

- contemporary radicalisation as both a national security and social cohesion challenge
- the need for a whole-of-society response that integrates counterterrorism, social cohesion, child protection, education, mental health, digital safety and community-based initiatives
- trust, belonging and community confidence as protective factors against radicalisation.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Committee should support the development and adoption of evidence-based guidance for public communication about radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. Such guidance should promote accurate and precise language, avoid attributing the actions of individuals to entire religious, ethnic or community groups, and support the public's understanding of the diverse and evolving nature of contemporary extremism. The guidance should encourage consistent and evidence-based discussion of the factors associated with violent extremism, recognising that disproportionate emphasis on religious identity in some cases, and on individual factors such as mental health in others, can distort public understandings of risk, contribute to stigma and undermine social cohesion.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Committee should recognise the growing role of misogyny, hostile gender attitudes and male grievance narratives as significant risk factors in contemporary radicalisation pathways. The Committee should support integrating these narratives into prevention, research, policy and intervention frameworks.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The Committee should support assessment frameworks that distinguish vulnerability from mobilisation toward violence, ensuring that neurodiversity, mental health and other support needs are not automatically treated as indicators of extremism. Counter-radicalisation and safeguarding frameworks should be informed by contemporary understandings of neurodiversity and vulnerability, with guidance from qualified practitioners.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

The Committee should support the establishment and public communication of clear non-criminal pathways for children and young people exposed to extremist material online. This includes accessible and confidential contacts for parents, families and young people seeking help. These pathways should be developed with affected communities, delivered through trusted intermediaries and communicated through culturally appropriate channels in multiple languages.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The Committee should recognise the important role that faith communities, religious leaders and religious literacy play as protective factors against radicalisation and support appropriately qualified community-led prevention and resilience initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

The Committee should recommend an independent review of the operation and impact of violent extremist material offences since their introduction, particularly their impact on children and vulnerable young people.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

The Committee should support measures that reduce discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion, including Islamophobia, recognising that extremist organisations often seek to exploit grievance, alienation and perceptions of exclusion to recruit and mobilise individuals.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

The Committee should support early-intervention and prevention measures for young people. These measures should include digital literacy, online safety education, mental health support and community-based programs that address social isolation, identity and other factors associated with youth radicalisation. Also, these measures should be developed with multicultural, multifaith and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

The Committee should recognise the role that recommender systems, platform design features, algorithmic amplification and artificial intelligence play in expanding pathways to radicalisation. The Committee should support regulatory and policy measures that address systemic online harm, including safety-by-design initiatives and the Digital Duty of Care reforms, alongside greater transparency about the operation and impacts of these systems.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

The Committee should support digital literacy and online safety initiatives that equip young people to recognise manipulation, extremist recruitment tactics, disinformation and harmful content in gaming and gaming-adjacent environments. These initiatives should be co-designed with young people to ensure their experience and insights inform policies and programs.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

The Committee should support parents and caregivers to understand online gaming environments, maintain open communication about online experiences, recognise indicators of online harms and promote healthy digital habits. This support should also be tailored for communities where there may be significant digital literacy gaps.

RECOMMENDATION 13:

The Committee should support, in collaboration with relevant agencies such as the eSafety Commissioner, the adoption of safety-by-design approaches across gaming environments and online platforms. These approaches should proactively reduce opportunities for recruitment, grooming and exposure to harmful content, rather than primarily rely on reactive moderation and content removal after harm has happened.

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Section 1: Contemporary radicalisation

1.1 Radicalisation is complex and has decentralised pathways

Radicalisation is a highly complex and individualised process, shaped by a unique combination of factors, experiences and motivations.[13] The University of Melbourne's report on misogyny, online radicalisation and youth extremism reflects that radicalisation in Australia is happening in a context of increasing political polarisation, eroding trust in institutions and rising anti-authoritarian beliefs.[14] As the global threat environment evolves, so too does the understanding of its manifestations, drivers and impacts.[15] Research shows that the pathways to and mechanisms for radicalisation work differently for different people.[16]

Radicalisation scholars continuously reinforce the need for better conceptualisations of radicalisation and stress its inherently non-linear nature.[17] Our submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion set out the challenge of contemporary radicalisation. It is a complex, multifaceted and highly individualised process that cannot be attributed to a single cause, pathway or set of characteristics.[18] Drawing on contemporary research, the submission noted there is no universally accepted profile of a radicalised individual, nor a single pathway people follow toward extremist beliefs or violence.[19]

Radicalisation happens through the intersection of personal, social, political and environmental factors, which may combine differently based on each individual's circumstances.[20] ASIO also recognised the growing prevalence of mixed and fluid ideological frameworks. In ASIO's 2026 annual threat assessment, Mike Burgess, the Director-General observed that individuals are increasingly embracing mixed ideologies, rather than fixed belief systems. He also noted that radicalisation is happening more rapidly, more frequently online in isolation and increasingly among younger individuals.[21] These developments reflect the growing complexity of contemporary radicalisation and the decentralised nature of modern radicalisation pathways.[22]

13. Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, *Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024), 35, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/RWExtremists23/Report.
14. Sara Meger, *Misogyny, Online Radicalisation, and Youth Extremism in Australia: Research Report* (The University of Melbourne, 2026), 5, https://doi.org/10.26188/33250176.
15. Jacob Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways: Unpacking the Mutating Dynamics of Contemporary Extremism," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 20, no. 3 (2025): 7, https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2025.2502580.
16. Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways," 6.
17. Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways," 6.
18. Aftab Malik, *Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion* (Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, 2026), 12–15, https://www.oseci.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/submission-royal-commission-antisemitism-social-cohesion.pdf.
19. Ibid, 12−15.
20. Ibid.
21. Mike Burgess, "Director-General's Annual Threat Assessment 2026," speech, June 24, 2026, 35 min., 26 sec., https://www.asio.gov.au/resources/speeches-and-statements/director-generals-annual-threat-assessment-2026.
22. Burgess, "Director-General's Annual Threat Assessment 2026".

1.2 Radicalisation is not confined to one religion, ethnicity or ideology

An important consideration in this current environment is the University of Melbourne's recent findings. It determined that contemporary radicalisation is not confined to one religion, ethnicity or ideological movement.[23] The study identified that misogynistic attitudes are a predictor of support for violent extremism that cuts across multiple movements, including:

- religious extremism
- white supremacy
- right- and left-wing extremism
- incel ideologies.

Importantly, the study identified that the relationship between extremist attitudes and key risk factors remained aligned, even after controlling for factors such as ethnicity, religion and religiosity. This outcome suggests that vulnerability to radicalisation cannot be reduced to a particular culture or religious community.[24]

1.3 Hostile and violent gender attitudes are the strongest predictors of violent extremism

The role of gender, particularly male grievance, is a significant element of contemporary radicalisation discourse. Researchers identified that while male grievance is not necessarily a distinct ideology, it frames the modern world as emasculating and men as victims of broader societal change.[25] This is particularly significant as it is overwhelmingly men who continue to perpetrate terrorist violence.[26] For example, a Canadian terrorism conviction recognised male grievance ideology as the primary motivation for the offence, illustrating the increasing concern about gender-based grievance narratives as a pathway toward extremist violence.[27] The University of Melbourne's recent study states, "hostile and violent gender attitudes are foundational to the architecture of violent extremism. The data shows that it is the strongest attitudinal predictor of violent extremism across the full ideological spectrum."[28]

23. Meger, *Misogyny, Online Radicalisation, and Youth Extremism in Australia*, 25.
24. Meger, *Misogyny, Online Radicalisation, and Youth Extremism in Australia,* 25.
25. "How Male Grievance Fuels Radicalisation and Extremist Violence," Australian Strategic Policy Institute: The Strategist, Haily Tran, July 25, 2025, https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-male-grievance-fuels-radicalisation-and-extremist-violence/.
26. John Young, Garth Stahl and Ben Adams, "Radicalisation as Redemption: Right-Wing Male Extremists Attempting to Reclaim Masculinity in Australia," *International Review of Sociology* (2026): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2026.2698531.
27. Young, Stahl and Adams, "Radicalisation as Redemption," 4.
28. Meger, *Misogyny, Online Radicalisation, and Youth Extremism in Australia,* 45.

Mixed beliefs are also subject to widespread variation. This is partly due to the complexity of intersecting ideologies that blend multiple, diverse and at times contradictory beliefs, which can make them more difficult to categorise with traditional frameworks.[29] This includes "salad bar" extremism, composite extremism, ideological convergence and idiosyncratic terrorism.[30] For example, the United Kingdom's 2018 "mixed, unstable and unclear" (MUU) ideology describes individuals who present with:

- mixed ideologies, involving a combination of elements from multiple ideologies
- unstable ideologies, who shift between different ideologies
- unclear ideologies, where an individual has no clear or coherent ideology, yet still poses a terrorism risk.[31]

Similarly, this mix appears among anti-immigrant, incel and radical masculinist groups who draw from different ideologies but rationalise violence as a way to provoke sociopolitical change and restore a perceived threatened social order.[32]

1.4 Push, pull and personal factors may make people more vulnerable to radicalisation

Radicalisation literature consistently agrees there is no single factor, pathway or set of motivations that can adequately explain why an individual becomes radicalised to violence. The same applies when a person becomes deradicalised or disengaged.[33] Scholars try to make sense of this diversity by using push, pull and personal factors.[34]

Push factors refer to the structural conditions that drive a person toward violence. This can include poverty, injustice or perceived state repression.[35] Pull factors refer to the features of groups, ideologies or movements that may attract or appeal to people and encourage their involvement.[36] This can include a sense of belonging, identity, status, purpose and community. Personal factors refer to specific individual characteristics or life circumstances that may increase vulnerability to radicalisation. This can include trauma, psychological vulnerabilities, social isolation, identity uncertainty and personality traits. Importantly, these push, pull and personal factors are not deterministic and do not, in themselves, cause radicalisation. Rather, they may create conditions that increase vulnerability toward radicalisation.[37]

While these categories are useful for understanding pathways toward radicalisation, they rarely operate in silos. Instead, radicalisation is generally understood as a complex and highly individualised process.[38] Push, pull and personal factors frequently intersect, overlapping and reinforcing one another.[39] A practical example is correctional or prison environments. While

29. Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways," 2.
30. Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways," 3.
31. Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways," 2.
32. Astley, "Ideological Idiosyncrasies and Individual-Level Radicalisation Pathways," 8.
33. Cherney et al., "The Push and Pull of Radicalization and Extremist Disengagement: The Application of Criminological Theory to Indonesian and Australian Cases of Radicalization," *Journal of Criminology* 54, n. 4 (2021): 407–424, https://doi.org/10.1177/26338076211034893.
34. Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar and Greg Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal. A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization into Violent Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 10 (2020): 856, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1505686.
35. Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar and Greg Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization," 856.
36. Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar and Greg Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization," 856.
37. Cristina Mattei and Sara Zeiger, *Factors Contributing to Radicalization: A Conceptual Framework* (Hedayah, 2021), 9, https://hedayah.com/resources/factors-contributing-to-radicalization/.
38. Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar and Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization," 857.
39. Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar and Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization," 857.

prisons do not inherently produce violent extremists, they can create conditions in which push, pull and personal factors converge. Prison radicalisation is therefore generally understood not as a direct consequence of incarceration but as the result of a complex interaction between vulnerabilities, social dynamics and institutional environments.

Radicalisation literature frequently identifies factors such as experiences of marginalisation and discrimination, including Islamophobia. These experiences do not intrinsically cause radicalisation, but they may increase vulnerability to extremist narratives by fostering feelings of alienation, disenfranchisement and social exclusion.[40] As such, addressing discrimination and marginalisation more broadly are key elements for limiting the conditions that extremist actors may use for recruitment or mobilisation.

1.5 Confusing vulnerability for radicalisation risks young people not getting the right help

One of the challenges for contemporary prevention frameworks is not in merely identifying risk, but distinguishing between vulnerability and radicalisation. Young people experiencing neurodiversity, mental health challenges, social isolation or identity-related difficulties may show behaviours that warrant support, without necessarily indicating movement toward violence or being categorised as a predictive measure of extremist intent.

For example, where vulnerable young people or their families perceive that seeking help may trigger a criminal justice response, opportunities for early intervention may be lost. This concern is illustrated by the experience of an Autistic 14-year-old Muslim whose parents sought help from police. The child instead became the subject of a covert counterterrorism operation. A magistrate later concluded that the response had effectively "doomed" the child's rehabilitation prospects.[41]

Since the introduction of offences for possession of violent extremist material in 2023, about 60 per cent of those charged have been children, including some as young as 10.[42] Concerns have been raised that such offences risk capturing vulnerable young people who may not fully understand the nature of the material they have accessed or the legal consequences of doing so.[43] The Law Council of Australia raised concerns that:

- the rule of law requires the law be readily known and available, certain and clear
- people know in advance whether their conduct may attract criminal sanctions.[44]

40. "Drivers of Violent Extremism," E4J University Module Series: Counter-Terrorism, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed October 23, 2026, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/drivers-of-violent-extremism.html.
41. Nino Bucci, "How Australian Undercover Police 'Fed' an Autistic 13-Year-Old's Fixation with Islamic State," *The Guardian*, February 3, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/feb/03/australian-undercover-police-autistic-13-year-old-fixation-islamic-state.
42. Ariel Bogle and Nino Bucci, "Australian Children Are Being Arrested Under Laws to 'Disrupt' Extremism: On Balance This Is a Bad Law'," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/mar/14/australian-children-arrested-charged-possessing-extremist-material-ntwnfb.
43. Bogle and Bucci, "Australian Children Are Being Arrested Under Laws to 'Disrupt' Extremism"
44. Bogle and Bucci, "Australian Children Are Being Arrested Under Laws to 'Disrupt' Extremism"

Further, in some cases children have been sent material on platforms, such as Discord, without knowing what they were being sent. Some far-right groups have explicitly discussed appealing to young people. For example, Thomas Sewell, the leader of Australia's National Socialist Network, joked about "recruiting hundreds of autistic teenagers."[45] Advocates and terrorism experts have raised concerns that charges based on possession of material may not be the right approach to youth radicalisation, noting the prevalence of this material online and as discussed above. The risks associated with these approaches extend beyond individual cases. They also have implications for trust in early-intervention and prevention frameworks.

1.6 Effective early intervention depends on trust

For Muslim communities that already significantly distrust law enforcement, these experiences no doubt compound their lack of trust, communication and willingness to seek help. Communities generally respond to institutions and interventions through the lens of their collective experiences. Where those experiences result in significant harm or loss of trust, the effects can extend well beyond the individual case, creating long-term challenges for rebuilding confidence and engagement.

Examples of international practice may provide useful models for Australia to consider. In Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees runs a national radicalisation hotline. It receives referrals from families, parents and community members, initially assesses the young people and refers them to local non-government partners such as HAYAT.[46] While the program is government funded, civil society organisations deliver it independently. It is designed to work directly with families, escalating matters to authorities only where there are clear intentions to commit a dangerous act. This provides parents with a trusted avenue to seek help without law enforcement serving as the default or initial contact.[47]

After a recommendation from the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall KC, the United Kingdom government introduced youth diversion orders. They are a counterterrorism tool designed specifically to divert young people away from the wider criminal justice system toward support and intervention pathways.[48]

Parents, families and young people must have confidence that asking for help will result in support, safeguarding and appropriate intervention rather than an automatic pathway to the criminal justice system. This requires clear policies, publicly communicated assurances that non-criminal pathways are being used, and examples of when and how this has happened. Without this confidence, the implication of these offences will continue to drive concerning behaviour further underground at precisely the point when intervention is most likely to succeed.

These factors remain relevant and an important foundation for understanding radicalisation. But researchers increasingly observe that contemporary radicalisation pathways are rapidly shifting, becoming faster, more digitally enabled and increasingly featuring young people.

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45. Bogle and Bucci, "Australian Children Are Being Arrested Under Laws to 'Disrupt' Extremism"
46. See: "HAYAT Program," Hedayah, accessed October 23, 2026, https://hedayah.com/program/hayat/.
47. See: "HAYAT Program," Hedayah.
48. Gina Vale and Craig Webber, "Youth Diversion Orders: Has Counter-Terrorism Finally Got the 'Child First' Memo?" *Youth Justice* (2026), https://doi.org/10.1177/14732254261468513.

Section 2: Pathways to radicalisation

2.1 Drivers of youth radicalisation vary, but it can happen in a matter of weeks

The Global Terrorism Index 2026 report identified youth radicalisation as the most pressing security concern in Western countries.[49] In Europe and North America, children and teenagers accounted for 42 per cent of terror-related investigations.[50] While the primary target age group for youth recruitment is between 15 and 25, children as young as eight have been targeted for active recruitment.[51] This shift is attributed to who engages with extremism and shows how radicalisation happens.[52]

A key feature of this shift is how radicalisation timelines are compressed. Historically, radicalisation often happened over extended periods of time: generally, across more than 12 months. Research shows that currently, radicalisation can happen in a matter of weeks, guided by short-form online propaganda, algorithmic amplification and the exploitation of teenagers' vulnerabilities.[53] The increasingly compressed timelines associated with youth radicalisation are creating an "acceleration gap." This refers to the growing gap between the speed at which youth are radicalised and the governments' capacity to respond.[54]

The drivers of youth radicalisation vary globally. In Western countries, the Global Terrorism Index 2026 report attributes it to alienation and social isolation. This includes findings that 87 per cent of radicalised young people have a history of neglect and psychological abuse, while 77 per cent experienced abandonment.[55] These findings establish the underlying vulnerabilities that can create the conditions in which radicalisation online resonates, establishing a sense of belonging, identity and purpose. Research also identifies a close connection between youth radicalisation and the rise in lone-actor terrorism. Over the past five years, lone-wolf actors have carried out 93 per cent of fatal terror attacks in the West and are three times more likely to be successful.[56] This reflects a general decentralisation of traditional terrorism.

49. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026), 3, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/resources/.
50. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 3.
51. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 63.
52. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 63.
53. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 63.
54. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 63.
55. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 5.
56. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 3.

2.2 ISIS distorts religion and uses nihilism to recruit young people online

ISIS extremism continues to present a serious security concern both nationally and internationally. The Global Terrorism Index 2026 report identifies that ISIS continues to function as a loosely affiliated global network.[57] ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess stated that ISIS-inspired terrorism remains an enduring security threat.[58]

Terrorism should never be excused, nor can the role of ideology be dismissed. Ideology should not be removed from the definition of terrorism, nor should the motive element be removed from terrorism offences. It should remain an important consideration in ASIO and AFP assessments, investigations and intelligence gatherings. However, contemporary research identifies a ***combination*** of ideological, social, psychological and environmental drivers, and as such, ideology *alone* should not be relied upon as the *only* reason for understanding radicalisation or terrorism.[59] Recognising the social, psychological and environmental drivers of radicalisation does not diminish the importance of ideology. Rather, it helps explain why some individuals may be susceptible to extremist ideologies while the overwhelming majority exposed to the same ideas do not. As Arun Kundani, author of *The Muslims are Coming!*[60] argues, "Rather than religious beliefs by themselves driving individuals to violence, the picture is one in which ideology becomes more extreme in response to a 'cognitive opening,' an 'identity crisis or a group bonding process… a more sophisticated [formulation] … addresses the interdependence of theology with emotions, identity and group dynamics."[61]

Religion should be removed from the definition of terrorism because extremist groups (such as ISIS) distort and exploit religious concepts, rather than represent an authentic expression of faith.[62] Naming the phenomenon that is used to justify Muslims carrying out terror and violence has been hotly debated. Over the past quarter century it has been described in many ways, including Islamic extremism,[63] Islamic terrorism, Islamist terrorism, Islamist extremism, Islamist violent extremism, radical Islam, jihadism, and radical Islamism. Most of these terms have been widely examined by academics, experts, and policymakers alike.[64] However, everyday Muslims and Islamic scholars reject any label that implies a connection between Islam and terrorism,[65] because what is fundamental to the violence carried out in the name of Islam generally, and by ISIS

57. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026,* 3.
58. Mike Burgess, "Director-General's Annual Threat Assessment 2025," speech, February 19, 2025,15:45, https://www.oni.gov.au/news/asio-annual-threat-assessment-2025.
59. Aftab Malik, *Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion* (Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, 2026), 3-4, https://www.oseci.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/submission-royal-commission-antisemitism-social-cohesion.pdf.
60. Arun Kundani, *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2015).
61. Cf., H.A. Hellyer and Michele Grossman, "A Framework for Understanding the Relationship between Radicalisation, Religion and Violence," *GREASE: Religion, Diversity and Radicalisation*, May 2019, https://grease.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/05/GREASE_D1.2_Hellyer-Grossman_Final1-1.pdf, 5.
62. See for example, Halim Rane, "Why It's Wrong to Describe Terrorism as 'Religiously Motivated' – and What to Call It Instead," *ABC Religion & Ethics*, December 24, 2025, https://www.abc.net.au/ religion/bondi-shootings-describing-terrorism-as religiously-motivated/106176980. Also see: Aftab Malik, *Submission to the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor (INSLM) on Defining terrorism: Review of the definition of a 'terrorist act' in section 100.1 of the Criminal Code Act 1995,* 2025, https://www.oseci.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-12/submission-independent-nat-sec-legislation-monitor-review-definition-of-terrorism.pdf
63. This term ceased to be used by ASIO in 2021 as Mike Burgess explained that "it stigmatises [Muslims] by encouraging stereotyping and stoking division." Andrew Greene, "ASIO boss Mike Burgess says agency is ditching 'Islamic' and 'right-wing' tags, will now refer to 'religious' or 'ideological' violence," Andrew Greene, "ASIO Boss Mike Burgess Says Agency Is Ditching 'Islamic' and 'Right-Wing' Tags, Will Now Refer to 'Religious' or 'Ideological' Violence," *ABC News*, March 17, 2021, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-17/asio-director-intelligence-language-change-islamic-extremism/13256828.
64. See for example, the diverse discussions around the meaning of "Islamism" in Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar (eds), *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010).
65. "Muslims Against ISIS Part 3: Open Letter to al Baghdadi," *Wilson Center*, September 2014, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/muslims-against-isis-part-3-open-letter-to-al-baghdadi.

specifically is a deviation, distortion, or a perversion of Islam.[66] ISIS wants to be acknowledged as having religious authority, something that President Obama was cognisant of not granting. "We are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam," he consistently said.[67] To associate terrorism with Islam only fuels ISIS's claim that the West is at war with Islam. Muslim communities and religious leaders consistently and unequivocally condemn acts of terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, rejecting both ISIS's actions and its ideology.[68] Further, researchers and Islamic scholars consistently emphasise nothing in Islamic theology justifies terrorism or the deliberate targeting of civilians.[69] While debates over naming conventions have raged across two decades, far less attention has been paid to the *impact and consequences* these labels have on the everyday lives of Muslim citizens.

These labels, carelessly used by some politicians and overly abused by some media, often leads to creating a moral panic over how Muslims dress, where they worship or partake in communal activities. It leads to everyday Muslims being stereotyped as terrorists and viewed as suspects, not Australians. This was a concern that even Mike Burgess himself acknowledged in 2021.[70] Political leaders should lead with precision, not generalisations about Australian Muslims and media coverage should report without turning an entire faith community into the story. When these lines are crossed, the result is suspicion, marginalisation, disenfranchisement and, most dangerously, a social license to abuse people because they are Muslim or are perceived to be. ISIS recruiters thrive on young Muslims who feel rejected and blamed. They have exactly one story to sell to a lonely teenager anywhere in this country: your nation and neighbours despise you; you will never belong.

Research shows that ISIS has successfully exploited societal injustices and vulnerabilities to recruit marginalised individuals.[71] For example, researchers sought to understand why nearly 40,000 foreign fighters joined ISIS. They identified a range of contributing factors and processes, including:

- uncertainty and instability in life
- challenges of collective identity
- experiences of alienation
- political grievances
- moral outrage
- feelings of revenge
- unmet fundamental human needs such as belonging, respect, purpose and self-esteem.[72]

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66. See for example, Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings* (Minhaj ul-Quran International, 2010) and HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Ibrahim Kalin, Mohammad Hashim Kamali (eds), *War and Peace in Islam: The Uses and Abuses of Jihad* (The Islamic Texts Society, 2013).
67. Jordyn Phelps, "Why President Obama won't use the term 'Radical Islam'," *ABC News*, June 13, 2016, https://abcnews.com/Politics/president-obama-term-radical-islam/story?id=39815449.
68. Aftab Malik, *Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion*, 3–4. Also see: Aftab Malik, *How Can the Healing Begin? Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism & Social Cohesion after Bondi* (OSECI, 2026), https://www.oseci.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/how-can-the-healing-begin.pdf, 2-11 specifically.
69. Muslim Scholars Denounce ISIS 'Caliphate', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 14 August 2014, https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/muslim-scholars-denounce-isis-caliphate. Also see: Aftab Malik, *Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion,* 3–4.
70. Andrew Greene, "ASIO Boss Mike Burgess Says Agency Is Ditching 'Islamic' and 'Right-Wing' Tags, Will Now Refer to 'Religious' or 'Ideological' Violence," *ABC News*, March 17, 2021, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-17/asio-director-intelligence-language-change-islamic-extremism/13256828.
71. Delaram Shafieioun and Hina Haq, "Radicalization from a Societal Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023): 2, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1197282.
72. Shafieioun and Haq, "Radicalization from a Societal Perspective," 2.

Radical groups often reinforce these vulnerabilities by manipulating positive emotions such as pride, empowerment, love and a sense of belonging, which they actively cultivate to engage, mobilise and retain members.[73]

Recent research also identifies that ISIS is broadening its online recruitment methods to incorporate nihilistic themes that resonate with vulnerable and socially isolated youth online.[74] For example, Saif Tahir states that in a similar way to networks such as 764 or No Lives Matter, ISIS propaganda seeks to exploit experiences of loneliness, social isolation and social alienation by using online platforms to provide a sense of belonging, purpose and community.[75] This research is significant as it shows that contemporary extremist movements are often drawing from the same at-risk and vulnerable cohorts.

Whether motivated by ISIS-inspired extremism, nihilistic violent extremism or other forms of extremism, recruiters frequently target vulnerable young people experiencing social isolation, identity uncertainty, grievance and a lack of belonging.[76] These findings reinforce the importance of prevention frameworks that focus on the underlying vulnerabilities that can make individuals susceptible to radicalisation across different environments.

None of this is an attempt to diminish the fact that violent extremists such as ISIS use a "theologically based ideology of violence."[77] A cursory reading of the ISIS English-language propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, proves that point.[78] Rather, it is to assert that the "religiosity of extremists"[79] is ideological heterodoxy, not religious normativity. Lauded as "one of the most well-respected western theologians" and whose "accomplishments place him amongst the most significant Muslims in the world," Cambridge University academic, Dr Tim Winter, asserts that "If Sunni Islam's leaders consider ISIS inauthentic, then that is what it is." He further contends that religions are "packed with fringe and fundamentalist groups that claim the mantle of total authenticity," and to accept their claim is "either naive or tendentious."[80] Importantly but often overlooked is the evidence demonstrating that a religious identity can both inoculate against extremism and violence and act as a protective factor against them.[81]

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73. Shafieioun and Haq, "Radicalization from a Societal Perspective," 2.
74. Saif Tahir, "The Void as the Caliphate: The Islamic State's Use of Nihilistic Aesthetics to Target Estranged Youth," Vox-Pol, June 3, 2026, https://voxpol.eu/is-nihilistic-tiktok-youth-radicalisation/.
75. Tahir, "The Void as the Caliphate".
76. Tahir, "The Void as the Caliphate".
77. H.A. Hellyer and Michele Grossman, "A Framework for Understanding the Relationship between Radicalisation, Religion and Violence," *GREASE: Religion, Diversity and Radicalisation*, May 2019, https://grease.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/05/GREASE_D1.2_Hellyer-Grossman_Final1-1.pdf, 7.
78. There remain huge debates among radicalisation theorists concerning the role of religion, ideology and radicalisation. They debate whether radicalisation happens first, or ideological indoctrination. Whether ideology is *the* primary radicalisation impetus, or political motivations. They also debate whether radicalisation is shaped primarily by social experiences such as disenfranchisement, humiliation, discrimination, exclusion, etc. Regardless, evidence demonstrates that radicalisation is a "complex, multi-level and multi-systemic process across a range of individual, social, political and cultural dynamics and environments." See H.A. Hellyer and Michele Grossman, "A Framework for Understanding the Relationship between Radicalisation, Religion and Violence," *GREASE: Religion, Diversity and Radicalisation*, May 2019, https://grease.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/05/GREASE_D1.2_Hellyer-Grossman_Final1-1.pdf,14.
79. H.A. Hellyer and Michele Grossman, "A Framework for Understanding the Relationship between Radicalisation, Religion and Violence," *GREASE: Religion, Diversity and Radicalisation*, May 2019, https://grease.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/05/GREASE_D1.2_Hellyer-Grossman_Final1-1.pdf, 23.
80. Mehdi Hasan, "How Islamic Is the Islamic State? Not at All," *The New Republic*, March 13, 2015, https://newrepublic.com/article/121286/how-islamic-islamic-state.
81. Alan Travis, "MI5 Report Challenges views on Terrorism in Britain," *The Guardian*, August 21, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/ aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1?CMP=share_btn_ url, and: Wesam Charkawi, Kevin Dunn, and Ana-Maria Bliuc, "The Influences of Social Identity and Perceptions of Injustice on Support to violent Extremism," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 13, no. 1 (2020), https://doi. org/10.1080/19434472.2020.1734046.

Over the past two decades, the drivers of al-Qa'ida and ISIS-inspired radicalisation have also been debated. Explanations range from geopolitical grievances, Western foreign policy and historic support for foreign militant groups in the Middle East to social, political and ideological factors.[82] However, as emphasised above, it is important to distinguish between the violent ideology promoted by ISIS and the beliefs of almost one million Australian Muslims. In repudiating the toxic ideology of ISIS,[83] we must ensure that we do not cast aspersions on everyday Australian Muslims, their institutions, religious leaders, dress, dietary practices, or question their Australianness. The actions of fringe Muslim extremists[84] betray the foundational principle of God's mercy and compassion,[85] ignores God's wisdom in creating diversity,[86] and makes a mockery of God's command to believers to protect the places of worship across different faiths.[87] And while ISIS's actions drive and fuel Islamophobia, ironically, Muslims remain among their primary victims.[88]

2.3 Right-wing extremists believe strongly in inequality and "us" versus "them" narratives

Right-wing extremism (RWE) has been present in Australia for over 90 years, with initial groups promoting anti-immigration views and focusing on preserving a perceived Australian identity.[89] Currently, RWE encompasses a wide range of political views and ideologies, making it difficult to define as it often merges and intersects with new and different ideologies.[90] But a key element of RWE is a strong belief in inequality and a reliance on "us" versus "them" narratives that promote hierarchy and superiority based on race, religion, ethnicity or gender.[91]

Right-wing extremists also strongly believe that their identity is under threat, often from minorities or the "other."[92] In Australia, there are significant intersections between misogyny, gender and RWE, and RWE remains disproportionately dominated by men.[93] Researchers have identified that when individuals experience the loss of traditional markers of significance, status or social belonging, extremist ideologies may become appealing as a way to reclaim a sense of purpose, agency and social value.[94]

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82. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026,* 3.
83. "Muslims Against ISIS Part 3: Open Letter to al Baghdadi," Wilson Centre, September 2014, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/muslims-against-isis-part-3-open-letter-to-al-baghdadi.
84. As noted elsewhere, these violent extremists are often religious illiterates: they know very little about their faith yet feel confident to kill in its name. See Aftab Malik, *How Can the Healing Begin? Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism & Social Cohesion after Bondi* (OSECI, 2026), https://www.oseci.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-07/how-can-the-healing-begin.pdf, 3-5.
85. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (HarperSanFrancisco: New York, NY, 2002), 203-209.
86. Qur'an 49:13.
87. Qur'an 22:40.
88. Miami Herald Editorial Board, "ISIS Is a Bigger Threat to Muslims," *Miami Herald*, August 11, 2016, https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/ editorials/article95163232.html.
89. Kristy Campion, "A 'Lunatic Fringe?' The Persistence of Right-Wing Extremism in Australia," *Perspectives on Terrorism,*13, no. 2 (2019): 2, https://pt.icct.nl/article/lunatic-fringe-persistence-right-wing-extremism-australia.
90. Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety, *Measures to Combat Right-Wing Extremism in New South Wales: Final Report* (Parliament of New South Wales, 2026), 8, https://apo.org.au/node/334178.
91. Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety, *Measures to Combat Right-Wing*, 8.
92. Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety, *Measures to Combat Right-Wing*, 8.
93. Young, Stahl and Adams, "Radicalisation as Redemption," 5.
94. Young, Stahl and Adams, "Radicalisation as Redemption," 5.

Radicalisation into RWE currently happens in online environments, with researchers arguing recruiters have developed deliberately "softer" entry points. For example, Active Clubs, a decentralised neo-Nazi network, recruits young men through fitness, combat sports and martial arts.[95] It presents white nationalism as a pathway to discipline, brotherhood and self-improvement.[96]Anti-Muslim hatred is also central to contemporary RWE. Researchers commonly identify ethnic exclusionism, nativism and exclusionary nationalism as core features of right-wing extremist ideology.[97] Muslims feel the impacts of these movements across a spectrum − behaviour can range from online hate and harassment to acts of mass violence. The most significant example is the 2019 Christchurch mosque attack where an Australian right-wing extremist murdered 51 worshippers and injured 40 others.[98] The attack was justified through the "great replacement" conspiracy theory. This theory falsely claims that migrant and minority communities are culturally and demographically replacing Anglo-European populations.[99]

Earlier this year, the NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety identified that prejudice fuels extremism.[100] It also noted that right-wing extremists promote forms of hate speech, including Islamophobia, and encourage forms of hate to become part of mainstream political discourse.[101] The Royal Commission into the 2019 Christchurch mosque attack found that while Islamic extremism remained a legitimate national safety concern, counterterrorism resources had been disproportionately concentrated on one threat environment, without assessing comparative risks.[102] Although the Royal Commission concluded that this imbalance was not the reason the attack remained undetected, it provides an important lesson for Australia. A threat picture shaped by one community may mean other emerging threats receive insufficient attention.

The Christchurch attacks show that RWE is neither a fringe nor historical movement, but a persistent and evolving threat with real-world consequences for targeted communities. The enduring influence of the attack in Australia and internationally highlights the capacity of ideologies to transcend borders and inspire subsequent acts of violence. For example, in each of the five years after the Christchurch attack, there was at least one copycat attack directly inspired by it.[103] Earlier this year, the alleged perpetrators of the San Diego mosque shooting declared themselves aligned with the Christchurch attacker."[104] Locally, in the weeks after the Bondi attack, Lakemba mosque received a letter that threatened to "burn them out" and referenced the Christchurch attacker.[105]

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95. "Rituals of Recruitment: How Right-Wing Extremist Combat Sports Groups Mobilise Young Men Online and Offline," Global Network on Extremism and Technology, Katri-Maaria Kyllönen, June 4, 2026, https://gnet-research.org/2026/06/04/rituals-of-recruitment-how-right-wing-extremist-combat-sports-groups-mobilise-young-men-online-and-offline/.
96. "Rituals of Recruitment," Kyllönen.
97. "Rituals of Recruitment," Kyllönen.
98. Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, *Submission to the Inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia* (Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, 2024), 4, https://amwchr.org.au/resources/?_sf_s=right%20wing%20extremist.
99. Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, *Submission to the Inquiry into Right Wing Extremist Movements in Australia*, 4.
100. Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety, *Measures to Combat Right-Wing Extremism*, 7.
101. Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety, *Measures to Combat Right-Wing Extremism*, 7.
102. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019, *Ko Tō Tātou Kāinga Tēnei: Report: Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019* (Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019, 2020), 14, https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/.
103. "Five Years on from Christchurch: Assessing the Evolution of the Threat Landscape and Policy Response," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Milo Comerford et al., March 15, 2024, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/five-years-on-from-christchurch-assessing-the-evolution-of-the-threat-landscape-and-policy-response/.
104. "San Diego Mosque Shooter's Apparent Manifestos Reveal Anti-Muslim Extremism, Antisemitism, and Broader Extremist Ideology," Anti-Defamation League, May 19, 2019, https://www.adl.org/resources/article/san-diego-mosque-shooters-apparent-manifestos-reveal-anti-muslim-extremism.
105. Dana Morse, "Racist Hate Mail Sent to Politicians Bears Hallmarks of Lakemba Mosque Letters," *ABC News*, February 20, 2026, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-02-20/racist-hate-mail-politicians-hallmarks-of-lakemba-mosque-letters/106367872.

Importantly, the lessons from Christchurch underscore the close relationship between RWE and Islamophobia. As extremist actors continue to exploit and amplify prejudice, addressing Islamophobia is not merely a matter of social cohesion or community safety. It is highly relevant to preventing the spread and normalisation of extremist narratives that seek to legitimise violence against communities.

2.4 Mischaracterising far-left extremism risks securitising lawful political expression

As stated previously, far-left extremism is discussed much less than other forms of violent extremism.[106] It mainly:

- draws on socialist, anarchist and Marxist traditions
- opposes capitalism, imperialism, colonialism and perceived systems of oppression
- advocates for radical social and political transformation.

Historically, Left-Wing extremism (LWE) has represented a comparatively low threat in Australia. But ASIO has identified an increase in some forms of far-left activity.[107] While instances of unlawful conduct should be appropriately addressed, it is important to avoid conflating or labelling lawful political expression as extremist activity.

Protests about Palestine involve a broad cross-section of Australians, the overwhelming majority of whom engage in lawful political expression. The mischaracterisation of people who participate in protests as far-left extremists is both inaccurate and risks securitising legitimate political participation.

2.5 Nihilistic violent extremism legitimises extreme violence

Recent studies show security agencies across Western democracies are facing an increase in violent acts that challenge traditional terrorism frameworks.[108] These incidents generally include young people, online radicalisation, grievances, targeted threats and symbolic or performative violence, without a consistent political, religious or ideological motive.[109] In response, many countries categorise such violence as "nihilistic violent extremism" (NVE). Smith, Cadenhead, and Broekaert define NVE as "a set of attitudes or beliefs involving disillusionment with or rejection of society; glorification of violence, both interpersonal and self-directed, and the desire to bring about or accelerate social instability, chaos or collapse."[110]

Although NVE networks do not follow a common ideological doctrine, they are united and characterised by a shared worldview that glorifies and incentivises extreme violence as a legitimate means of expression, status or influence.[111] NVE networks exploit social media, online forums and gaming platforms to identify and recruit vulnerable young people, especially those experiencing social isolation. Recruitment efforts disproportionately target youth under 25 and a significant

106. Aftab Malik, *Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion*, 15.

107. Burgess, "Director-General's Annual Threat Assessment 2026".

108. Adrian Cherney, Steve Barracosa and Sarah Stevenson, "Nihilistic Violent Extremism and Youth CVE Practice: Emerging Challenges for Assessment, Intervention and Service Delivery," *Journal for Deradicalization* no. 50 (2026): 269, https://journal-derad.com/index.php/jd/article/view/1286.

109. Cherney, Barracosa and Stevenson, "Nihilistic Violent Extremism and Youth CVE Practice," 269.

110. Cherney, Barracosa and Stevenson, "Nihilistic Violent Extremism and Youth CVE Practice," 270.

111. Julie Chernov Hwang, "*The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem: A Global Threat*," in *Global Terrorism Index 2026: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2026) 74, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/resources/.

proportion under 18.[112] These efforts simultaneously target specific vulnerabilities, including neurodiversity, eating disorders, social isolation, mental illness and family problems.[113] Once recruiters establish a relationship, often within in a matter of hours or days, they may groom, manipulate and extort youth to commit acts of self-harm and extreme violence.[114]

Emerging NVE networks are increasingly transnational, decentralised and youth focused. For example, networks such as 764, Maniac Murder Cult (MKY) and No Lives Matter operate internationally, exploiting social media and gaming platforms.[115] The international nature of these networks significantly challenges traditional prevention and law enforcement responses. For example, alleged perpetrators, facilitators and victims can be in different jurisdictions while online platforms facilitate recruitment, grooming and offending.[116] In many cases, both the perpetrator and victims are underage, creating challenging intersections of victimisation, vulnerability and offending behaviour.

Researchers recommend against considering NVE groups in isolation. Rather, they recommend considering them as interconnected parts of a broader ecosystem of online harm and radicalisation.[117] As the Institute for Strategic Dialogue highlights, "subcultures of nihilistic violence have inspired acts of violence comparable to ideologically motivated extremist movements and challenge existing prevention and intervention structures built to counter threats based on known, coherent ideologies."[118]

The United Kingdom's 2024 Southport case highlights this challenge. An inquiry identified that although the perpetrator was referred to early-intervention programs three separate times, he was ultimately not referred on because assessors could not identify a discernible ideology. This was despite him showing a range of concerning behavioural, psychosocial and clinical indicators, including a history of violence and targeted threats. A clear motivation was not established. But the case shows the potential limitations of assessment frameworks that prioritise more streamlined or coherent ideological commitments when the boundaries of violent extremism, nihilistic violence and identity-based violence become more blurred.[119]

2.6 Disproportionate attention has framed radicalisation as a uniquely Muslim issue

Public discourse about radicalisation and violent extremism has, since 11 September 2001, predominately and disproportionately focused on Muslim communities. While ISIS-inspired terrorism remains a significant threat, contemporary evidence shows that pathways to radicalisation emerge across a broad range of ideological, political, grievance-based and mixed-motivation contexts.

Securing community trust and participation in prevention efforts requires a shift in how radicalisation is discussed publicly. For over two decades, public discourse has framed radicalisation as a predominately and uniquely Muslim issue. Lessons from this period show that disproportionate attention on specific communities can distort public understandings of both radicalisation and risk.

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112. Chernov Hwang, "The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem," 74.
113. Chernov Hwang, "The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem," 74.
114. Chernov Hwang, "The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem," 74.
115. Chernov Hwang, "The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem," 74–76.
116. Chernov Hwang, "The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem," 74–76.
117. Chernov Hwang, "The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem," 76.
118. "Terror Without Ideology? The Rise of Nihilistic Violence," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, May 8, 2025, https://www.isdglobal.org/our-expertise/terrorism-and-extremism/hybrid-extremism-and-nihilistic-violence/page/3/.
119. "Terror Without Ideology?" Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

For example, De Coster et al. found that media coverage of terrorist attacks differed systematically, based on the perpetrator's perceived identity.[120] This contributed to negative perceptions of Muslim communities and risked minimising other forms of extremist violence.[121] The authors conclude that greater scrutiny is needed to assess how determinations about newsworthiness shape public discourse, public perception and policy responses.

Simultaneously, researchers such as Adams et al. argue that since 11 September 2001, approaches to countering violent extremism contributed to stigmatising Muslims and creating "suspect communities" based on generalised assumptions about intrinsic links between beliefs and violent behaviour.[122] This is a caution against determining the drivers of extremism based on specific beliefs rather than balancing a wider range of complex social, psychological and material features.[123] Further, this highlights the importance of ensuring contemporary discussions of radicalisation reflect the full spectrum of threats from ideological to grievance-based, rather than reinforcing traditional associations between extremism and a single community.

As patterns of radicalisation evolve, public discourse must evolve with them. A more balanced, evidence-based understanding of radicalisation can:

- improve community awareness
- reduce stigma
- strengthen trust in prevention efforts
- support early identification of concerning behaviours regardless of an individual's background, religion or ideological orientation.

120. De Coster et al., "Uncovering the Bias and Prejudice in Reporting on Islamist and Non-Islamist Terrorist Attacks in British and IS Newspapers," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 18, no. 3 (2024): 43–44, https://doi.org/10.19165/2024.3034.

121. De Coster et al., "Uncovering the Bias and Prejudice," 43–44.

122. Ben Adams, Garth Stahl and Glenys Oberg, "'The Ideology Becomes a Way to Make Sense of That Disconnection': Beliefs, Behaviour and Belonging – Does Ideology Matter in Countering Violent Extremism?" *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 16, no. 4 (2023): 648, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2023.2266951.

123. Adams, Stahl and Oberg, "'The Ideology Becomes a Way to Make Sense of That Disconnection'," 648.

Section 3: Technology, online platforms and digital radicalisation

3.1 Technology has reshaped radicalisation

Technology has fundamentally reshaped the speed and structure of contemporary radicalisation. Social media platforms increasingly shape how young people form identities, build relationships, access information and understand the world around them. As a result, the authority once exercised by traditional ideological organisations has increasingly shifted toward online networks and communities. Chiara Sulmoni notes, "today, extremist violence is increasingly associated with lone actors, often characterised by psychological vulnerabilities, personal crises or social marginalisation, while radicalisation has been reshaped by fluid digital subcultures, hybrid ideologies, and imitative online dynamics that rarely fit into traditional doctrinal categories."[124] These significant developments show that technology does not create vulnerability in isolation but increasingly shapes how existing vulnerabilities are identified, amplified and exploited.

A key part of this transformation is the emergence of multiplatform ecosystems, where different digital environments perform distinct functions in the radicalisation process. Mainstream social media platforms frequently initiate exposure to and the normalisation of extremist narratives.[125] And influencers and content creators can frame political, cultural or identity-based issues in a way that resonates at an emotional level.[126]

3.2 Recruiters gradually expose individuals to extreme content on social media

Contemporary recruitment tactics increasingly rely on what researchers describe as a "funnel strategy." This involves gradually exposing individuals to extreme content, starting with mainstream algorithm-driven platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube Shorts and Facebook.[127] These platforms maximise user engagement and retention with recommender systems and algorithms. For example, the Royal Commission identified YouTube as a significant source of inspiration and information for the Christchurch attacker and noted its importance in his pathway to radicalisation.[128]

124. "Young and Connected: How Platforms Reshape Youth Radicalisation," European Commission, Chiara Sulmoni, May 27, 2026, https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/home/items/939849/en.
125. "Young and Connected: How Platforms Reshape Youth Radicalisation," Sulmoni.
126. "Young and Connected: How Platforms Reshape Youth Radicalisation," Sulmoni.
127. "Young and Connected: How Platforms Reshape Youth Radicalisation," Sulmoni.
128. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019, *Ko Tō Tātou Kāinga Tēnei*, 10.

Exposure to extreme content may lead to further engagement with progressively extreme or emotionally charged content, such as short-form videos about school shooters, glorification of serial killers or normalisation of extremist aesthetic.[129] Once a young person shows an affinity, recruiters shift interactions to encrypted messaging platforms, such as Telegram, Signal or Wire, where they can indoctrinate young people in highly insulated echo chambers.[130] Researchers identify this shift as the critical point in the radicalisation process, where engagement with extremist material may evolve into behavioural radicalisation and ultimately mobilisation toward violence. [131]

A main accelerator for radicalisation is recommender algorithms, where algorithms actively direct users to extremist content. For example, a 2024 Dublin City University study found that new accounts registered as young boys and men were recommended toxic content within the first 23 minutes, whether they sought it out or not, and once they showed any interest, the volume quickly increased.[132] The design and operation of recommender systems limit independent scrutiny, external auditing and public accountability, making prevention and intervention challenging.

Our submission about the Digital Duty of Care reforms explains that it is not just individual pieces of content that create online harms. The way digital platforms are designed and operated contributes too.[133] Recommendation systems, algorithmic amplification, engagement-based ranking systems and virality mechanisms can all influence how content is distributed, consumed and normalised.[134] Safety, therefore, should not be viewed only as a post-harm moderation issue. Rather, safety should be a design principle that requires platforms to consider how product architecture may expose individuals to extremist content, online grooming, identity-based hatred and pathways toward radicalisation.

3.3 Artificial intelligence may increase extremist activity

Researchers identify three developments that are likely to shape the relationship between AI, terrorism and counterterrorism in the coming years. These are the:

- emergence of AI-enabled radicalisation
- convergence of AI with other emerging technologies
- rapid and near-simultaneous global adoption of AI systems.[135]

129. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019, *Ko Tō Tātou kāinga Tēnei*, 110.
130. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019, *Ko Tō Tātou kāinga Tēnei*, 110.
131. Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain on 15 March 2019, *Ko Tō Tātou kāinga Tēnei*, 65.
132. "New Research Shows How TikTok and YouTube Shorts Are Bombarding Users with Misogynist Content," Dublin City University, Dublin City University Institute of Education, April 17, 2024, https://www.dcu.ie/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/2024/apr/new-research-shows-how-tiktok-and-youtube-shorts-are.
133. See: Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, *Submission for the Digital Duty of Care Draft Bill 2026*.
134. See: Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, *Submission for the Digital Duty of Care Draft Bill 2026*.
135. Priyank Mathur, Clara Broekaert and Colin P. Clarke, *The Radicalization (and Counter-Radicalization) Potential of Artificial Intelligence* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2024), https://icct.nl/publication/radicalization-and-counter-radicalization-potential-artificial-intelligence.

These developments may increase the scale, sophistication and accessibility of extremist activity through personalised propaganda, misinformation, automated recruitment and the production of instruction material. Generative AI is helping to accelerate radicalisation, including disseminating propaganda and amplifying its reach.[136] The impact can already be seen such as in the 2024 United Kingdom riots after the Southport attack. Researchers found that AI-generated images shared during the riots consistently portrayed the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, recycling long-standing Islamophobia tropes.[137] By lowering the cost and technical barriers to produce convincing propaganda, synthetic media could dramatically accelerate the post-attack misinformation campaign that can place Muslim communities at heightened risks of violence.

3.4 Extremist actors disguise extremist content in online gaming environments

Online gaming environments allow extremist actors to bypass traditional community gatekeepers, including parents, educators and religious leaders, and engage directly with vulnerable young people.[138] In Australia, around nine in 10 children aged between 8 and 17 had played online games in 2023.[139] The gamification and weaponisation of online gaming communication platforms, such as Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft and Discord, provide ideal environments for social isolation, alternative community formation and the normalisation of violence.[140] In some cases, people have used these environments to digitally simulate and rehearse real-world violence, including attacks on mosques, synagogues and schools, which blurs the boundary between digital recreation and physical terrorism.[141]

The risks are not merely theoretical. In Singapore, two teenagers aged 15 and 16 were detained after becoming radicalised through online interactions on Roblox and Discord.[142] The Council on American–Islamic Relations raised with Roblox reports of significant anti-Muslim and hateful content on its platform through gaming chats and user-generated content.[143] The Council notes that the gaming platform features over 100 million daily users.[144] The challenge for online gaming platforms is not simply the presence of harmful content, but also the tendency to treat safety as a response rather than an embedded design principle. By the time moderators identify and remove extremist, hateful or grooming-related content, the harm may have already happened. Safety-by-design approaches seek to shift this paradigm by embedding safeguards into platform architecture from the outset to reduce opportunities for exposure and amplification.

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136. "OpenAI Report Highlights Need to Tackle Disinformation Actors," Tech Against Terrorism, May 31, 2024, https://techagainstterrorism.org/news/openai-report-highlights-need-tackle-disinformation.
137. "The Weaponisation of AI Visual Storytelling of the Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory Amid the Southport Riots," Global Network on Extremism and Technology, Beatriz Buarque, July 16, 2025, https://gnet-research.org/2025/07/16/the-weaponisation-of-ai-visual-storytelling-of-the-great-replacement-conspiracy-theory-amid-the-southport-riots/.
138. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, 65.
139. eSafety Commissioner, "eSafety Asks Gaming Giants What They Are Doing to Prevent Grooming and Radicalisation," media release, April 22, 2026, https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/esafety-asks-gaming-giants-what-they-are-doing-to-prevent-grooming-and-radicalisation.
140. eSafety Commissioner, "eSafety Asks Gaming Giants What They Are Doing to Prevent Grooming and Radicalisation".
141. "The Online Radicalization of Youth Remains a Growing Problem Worldwide," The Soufan Center, September 9, 2025, https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-september-9/.
142. "Youth and Adolescent Radicalisation: Critical Cases from Singapore," Global Network on Extremism and Technology, Kenneth Yeo and Ahmad Saiful Rijal, 18 November 2024, https://gnet-research.org/2024/11/18/youth-adolescent-and-online-radicalisation-in-singapore/.
143. Ulaa Kuziez, "Roblox Says It Is Investigating Anti-Muslim 'Brain Rot' Content on Gaming Platform," *Religion News Service*, October 17, 2025, https://religionnews.com/2025/10/17/roblox-says-it-is-investigating-anti-muslim-brain-rot-content-on-gaming-platform/.
144. Kuziez, "Roblox Says It Is Investigating Anti-Muslim 'Brain Rot'".

Gaming platforms and environments can contribute to both the normalisation and dissemination of extremist narratives.[145] A key feature of how extremist actors exploit gaming platforms is through digital camouflage, where they disguise extremist content as harmless entertainment, humour or social interaction.[146] By embedding extremist narratives in the norms, humour and aesthetics of gaming culture, extremist actors can mask radical messages as typical player behaviour, normalising them and making them more difficult to detect.[147] For example, far-right groups have used gaming platforms to disseminate propaganda, using symbols such as "1488," a neo-Nazi code.[148] Further, research finds that despite the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks, profiles and usernames glorifying the perpetrator continue to appear across gaming-related spaces.[149]

The risks are also compounded by moderation challenges. For example, multiple recreations of the Christchurch attacks have been identified on Roblox. The platform acknowledges difficulties in automatically removing such content without also affecting legitimate references to the city Christchurch. Such examples highlight the difficulties technology platforms face in identifying content and the lack of transparency about platform moderation.[150]

3.5 The transnational nature of online harms presents challenges for prevention efforts

Harmful content may originate overseas, be amplified by foreign actors or coordinated-online networks, and can facilitate radicalisation. For example, recent investigations identify misinformation networks administered in Vietnam that generate Facebook posts, including "AI slop," to influence Australian political discourse.[151] Other content farms and overseas-run accounts have also been initiated from Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and the United States.[152] This highlights the importance of transparency, independent research and greater understanding of how cross-border digital ecosystems can amplify extremist narratives.

145. Noah Kuttymartin, *Far-Right Extremism and Gaming: How Hijacks Play* (Nanyang Technological University, 2025), https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/far-right-extremism-and-gaming-how-hate-hijacks-play/.
146. Kuttymartin, "Far-Right Extremism and Gaming".
147. Kuttymartin, "Far-Right Extremism and Gaming".
148. Kuttymartin, "Far-Right Extremism and Gaming".
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150. Russell Brandom, "Roblox Is Struggling to Moderate Recreations of Mass Shootings," *The Verge*, August 18, 2021, https://www.theverge.com/2021/8/17/22628624/roblox-moderation-trust-and-safety-terrorist-content-christchurch.
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152. Ariel Bogle and Nick Evershed, "Pro-One Nation Facebook Groups Appear to Be Run by Foreign 'Meme Factories' That Monetise Content," *The Guardian*, June 28, 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/jun/28/pro-one-nation-facebook-groups-foreign-meme-factories-monetised-content-ntwnfb.

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This submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security examines the changing drivers of radicalisation in Australia, arguing that it is increasingly diverse, digitally enabled, and shaped by intersecting social, psychological, and environmental factors beyond any single ideology, religion, or community. It draws on contemporary research to cover topics including youth radicalisation, online recruitment, misogyny and male grievance narratives, nihilistic violent extremism, right-wing extremism, and the continued threat of ISIS-inspired terrorism, highlighting how extremist actors exploit common vulnerabilities such as isolation, identity uncertainty, grievance, and lack of belonging.

"The Special Envoy does a commendable job in highlighting the complexities when it comes to the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia. Much of what Mr Malik talks about in his submission, such as social isolation, identity uncertainty, and the search for belonging and purpose, can be understood as unmet needs. It is important to understand and acknowledge the role they play in the radicalisation process, and how terrorist and violent extremist groups, individuals, or movements can fulfil these basic needs in extremely harmful ways. These needs can of course be met in other more pro-social ways. Therefore, non-criminal diversion programs, as well as rehabilitation and disengagement programs, should be fully supported in helping people step away from terrorism and violent extremism and lead more pro-social lives."

MUHAMMAD IQBAL, Associate Professor, Applied Security Science Partnership (ASSP), Institute for Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities (ISILC), Victoria University

"… highlights important connections between insecurities, encouraging us to situate violent events in relevant structural contexts including social grievances, lived experiences of discrimination, and technological developments. In so doing, it spotlights contiguities between types of extremism that are often treated as distinct or detached, rather than as moments in a complex social and political ecosystem that generates polarisation and opportunities for exploitation. Of Mr. Malik's 13 recommendations, I particularly endorse the importance of fostering trust, belonging and community confidence in order to diminish threats such as those within the Inquiry's remit."

LEE JARVIS, Professor of Security and Society, Adelaide University

"… makes critical recommendations for how governments, agencies and society can respond to a rapidly changing threat environment. The submission offers a nuanced account of currently evolving threats, including youth radicalisation, nihilistic violent extremism, and the relationships between radicalisation, trust and social cohesion. Stand-out recommendations include the need for enhanced, evidence-based public communication about evolving threats and greater availability of non-criminal pathways for children exposed to extremist content online."

KEIRAN HARDY, Associate Professor, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University

"… draws upon advances in scholarship and community sentiment to analyse and understand radicalisation in contemporary Australia. It considers, realistically, the impact of policies and perceptions on various Australian communities. Illuminating the interface of social cohesion and trust, community safety, and national security, this submission foregrounds democratically informed and balanced approaches to addressing radicalisation in Australia."

KRISTY CAMPION, Associate Professor in Terrorism and Security Studies, Charles Sturt University

"This is a well-researched submission that makes an important contribution to understanding the drivers of radicalisation in Australia. I particularly welcome its recognition that radicalisation cannot be explained by religion or ideology alone, and that social exclusion, discrimination, grievances and individual circumstances also need to be considered. The discussion of Islamophobia and its consequences for community trust and social cohesion is especially important. I also welcome the emphasis on prevention, early intervention and the role of religious and community leaders. The recommendations deserve serious consideration."

ABDULLAH SAEED,
Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies & Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, University of Melbourne

"This submission captures the complexities surrounding the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia. It highlights the real challenges Muslims face, especially Muslim youth, in finding a sense of belonging at a time of heightened Islamophobia and negative attitudes towards Muslims that have a way of seeping into every thread of society. If we want to address radicalisation, we need to take this nuanced perspective seriously and respond to the issues it raises. Otherwise, we will be asking the same questions year after year. Radicalisation is complex and multifaceted, and this submission captures that well."

ZULEYHA KESKIN, Associate Professor, Charles Sturt University, Associate Head of School, Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation

THE OFFICE OF AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA

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