

Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into right wing extremist movements in Australia

Introduction and Terminology

The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) appreciates the opportunity to lodge a submission in response to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee’s inquiry into right wing extremist movements in Australia. AIJAC is the premier independent public affairs organisation for the Australian Jewish community.

It is puzzling that, despite the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and other Australian security agencies shelving the nebulous and – from both an analytical as well as policy perspective – questionable category “Right-wing extremism” three years ago, this term was still used as the basis for this inquiry. As the Victoria Police, among other domestic and international security agencies, have noted, “Individuals and groups who adhere to [right-wing extremist] ideologies have diverse and multifaceted ideological views. It is not a cohesive cohort.”¹

The correct terminology when discussing extremist threats, as explained by ASIO in 2021, is to speak of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE) and Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism (RMVE).

There is a subset of IMVE that includes Nazis, neo-Nazis, White Nationalists and White Supremacists and associated organisations, referred to as Nationalist and Racist Violent Extremism (NRVE). As AIJAC explained in its submission to the inquiry into extremism in Victoria in 2022:

These groups, almost all of which are part of a transnational network and share members and ideologies, are “accelerationist”, meaning that they are “preparing and pushing for a ‘race war’, which...will cause societal collapse and the subsequent creation of a ‘white ethno-state’” who “believe societal collapse can be expedited through violence, including lone-actor terrorist attacks.”²

In its submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) on its review into the listing of Hizballah and The Base as terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code Act 1995, AIJAC further explained:

It is difficult to discern whether NRVEs are splintering into multiple groups, whether some are umbrellas for the others, or whether they are all a single network that operates under different aliases across the world to try to avoid listing and law enforcement. What is clear is that many of these so-called groups have the same membership and leadership, often simultaneously.³

¹ Oved Lobel, “Understanding the security threat from violent extremists”, *AIJAC* (8 July 2022), <https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/understanding-the-security-threat-from-violent-extremists/>

² AIJAC, “Submission to the Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria”, p. 4, <https://aijac.org.au/submissions/submission-to-the-inquiry-into-extremism-in-victoria/>

³ AIJAC, “Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security on its review into the listing of Hizballah and The Base as terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code Act 1995”, <https://aijac.org.au/submissions/submission-to-the-parliamentary-joint-committee-on-intelligence->

AIJAC urges the Committee to peruse both submissions for a detailed analysis of NRVE movements and the nature of the threat to Australia.

Not only is the term “right wing extremist” no longer considered appropriate by the professionals charged with monitoring extremism, but it is also unclear why this inquiry would want to retain such a narrow scope. Is there a change in the overall political or security situation that warranted an inquiry solely into “right wing extremist movements in Australia” that did not explicitly include other IMVE and RMVE extremist movements, including, for instance, the far more dangerous Islamist ones. AIJAC is not aware of any evidence of any increased security threat from NRVE movements that would explain the timing and substance of this inquiry.

This is not to say NRVE is not an ongoing threat to Australian society in general and the Australian Jewish community more specifically. AIJAC is very proud of our long-history of ground-breaking work exposing the tactics, ideology, beliefs and association of groups that would previously have been termed “right-wing extremist” – including the League of Rights, the Citizens Electoral Council, National Action, Holocaust deniers, “Christian Identity” groups, the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and elements of the One Nation party.

We also take pride in our public policy advocacy seeking to improve legal protections against NRVE groups – such as our efforts to encourage state and federal bans on fascist symbols such as Swastikas and Nazi salutes.

Yet despite this, AIJAC is concerned the sole focus on “right-wing” extremism in this inquiry obscures more than it enlightens regarding the problems created by NRVE, given the links, imitation, affinities and similarities that unite NRVE groups with the wider spectrum of IMVE.

In particular, we would call the committee’s attention to the fact that the entire spectrum of IMVE and RMVE intersect around antisemitism. A still-unreleased, informal AIJAC study of social media has demonstrated how extremist rhetoric, imagery and activity have become so indistinguishable that it is often difficult to know whether a neo-Nazi, a far-left activist or an Islamist extremist is responsible for some of the quotes proliferating on various social media platforms targeting Jews over the past year.

We thus find it concerning that this very narrowly-focused inquiry was announced shortly after Hamas’ invasion of Israel on October 7, 2023 - yet the consequent outbreak of antisemitism in Australia and the threat it poses to the security and well-being of Jews as well as to Australian multiculturalism overall was not explicitly included in the Terms of Reference.

Today widespread vandalism, intimidation and hateful, incendiary and even racist rhetoric under the guise of pro-Palestinian activism is arguably the foremost IMVE concern in Australia, as both the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader appropriately highlighted on June 5.

[and-security-on-its-review-into-the-listing-of-hizballah-and-the-base-as-terrorist-organisations-under-the-criminal-code-act-1995/](#)

Moreover, the Jewish community is extremely concerned that almost no mainstream Muslim or Arab community organisations or leaders of note were willing to publicly condemn October 7, Hamas or the explosion of antisemitism in Australia emerging from their communities that has accompanied it. Indeed, the fact that some clerics and leaders, including mainstream ones, openly legitimised and even lauded the attack⁴, while several preachers also engaged in blatantly antisemitic speech from the pulpit – arguably should merit their own inquiry into RMVE extremism in Australia.

It is also vital that the Government avoid concerning itself with personal beliefs. As AIJAC said in its Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Prohibition of Nazi Symbols) Bill 2023:

It is neither possible nor desirable for the Government to build re-education camps or otherwise punish citizens for their internal beliefs, no matter how noxious... No bill or policy can ever realistically destroy a belief system, but beliefs themselves are not a problem for liberal democracies, only actions based upon them.⁵

Finally, terms like “extremism” and “radicalisation” need to be very clearly defined to avoid wasting limited resources and manpower and general government overreach.

Recommendations:

- Investigate whether there is a link between autism and mental health and NRVE to establish which social and mental health interventions, rather than security-oriented ones, might mitigate susceptibility to the associated ideas and activities.
- List the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) – a major funder and inspirer of almost all NRVE groups in Australia - as a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code.
- Conduct a nationwide assessment, based on concrete metrics, of the efficacy and outcomes of all Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Deradicalisation initiatives in Australia along the lines of that conducted by William Shawcross in the UK of its own CVE program, Prevent.
- Ensure that the Australian Government allocates anti-IMVE more resources and attention to the most urgent threats. While never neglecting NRVE, this currently requires an even greater focus on the immediate and far more prevalent threat to security and social cohesion posed by RMVE and far-left, anti-Israel, anti-Western and sometimes antisemitic IMVE groups.

Politics must remain in the political sphere

⁴ Zaina Cheema, “We can’t turn blind eye to extremist, anti-Semitic hate in Australia”, *Australian* (9 Nov. 2023), <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/we-cant-turn-blind-eye-to-extremist-antisemitic-hate-at-home/news-story/2f0b500510bc41b3e317fc722e9e85ed>; Olivia Ireland, “Footage shows passenger shooting fireworks, others wave Palestinian flags in Sydney’s south-west”, *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 Oct. 2023), <https://www.smh.com.au/national/footage-shows-ute-with-fireworks-flaring-as-passengers-wave-palestinian-flag-in-sydney-s-south-west-20231009-p5eap8.html>; “October 7 attack ‘legitimate’: Islamic Council rep”, *J-Wire* (28 Feb. 2024), <https://www.jwire.com.au/october-7-attack-legitimate-islamic-council-rep/>.

⁵ AIJAC, “Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Prohibition of Nazi Symbols) Bill 2023”, pp. 2-3, <https://aijac.org.au/submissions/submission-to-the-inquiry-into-the-criminal-code-amendment-prohibition-of-nazi-symbols-bill-2023/>

AIJAC believes it is dangerous to conflate legitimate political positions often associated with conservatism – such as immigration restrictionism, reducing refugee intake and ensuring the interests of religious institutions are protected and balanced with broader LGBTQ rights – with extremism. Excepting clear violations of the law, the job of those that disagree with these ideas is to debate them and to work within the political system to pass or obstruct legislation, not to attempt to criminalise the attitudes of a large segment of Australian society.

There is no sign of an escalating NRVE security threat

The Government already has all the tools it needs to combat the activities of NRVE groups through hate speech legislation and other legislative frameworks, including the recently ratified Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Prohibited Hate Symbols and Other Measures) Bill 2023, which banned the Nazi salute and other related symbols.

AIJAC emphasised in its submission to the inquiry into extremism in Victoria that NRVE activity is “overwhelmingly characterised by intimidation, threats and harassment in the form of phone calls and letters, graffiti and vandalism and noxious remarks and gestures, including the Nazi salute.”⁶

AIJAC further clarified:

To date, no contemporary nationalist and racist violent extremist group, foreign or domestic, has been involved in a serious terrorist attack [in Australia], despite their chatter online and off. This is perhaps partly because security agencies are extremely effective in monitoring and infiltrating such groups, but to a much greater degree it reflects the lack of capability and possibly even genuine aspiration to conduct mass-casualty attacks.

Instead, these groups function as little more than extremist fraternities and, despite their hateful rhetoric, have never translated their millenarian beliefs about a “race war” into real-world violent action or even inspired the “leaderless resistance” they claim to champion.

Furthermore, the milieu of nationalist and racist violent extremism in Australia, as elsewhere, is extremely fractured. For example, Thomas Sewell’s National Socialist Network was described by security sources as a “disorganised, amateurish outfit, riven with internal conflicts” and comprising mostly “blowhards”. Ethan Tilling, a short-lived Australian member of regional white supremacist group Right Wing Resistance, referred to its members as “absolutely useless human beings”. In real life, the activities of these groups in Australia are overwhelmingly characterised by graffiti and vandalism as well as hateful, intimidating posters, flyers and messages.

Individuals not necessarily affiliated with any nationalist or racist violent extremist group have physically abused political opponents and members of ethnic minorities—although even this rarely translates into actual physical assault—and one or two have even allegedly planned to bomb infrastructure associated with their perceived opponents. Nevertheless, none of these attacks—which can be counted on one hand over a decade—ever got beyond

⁶ See note 2

the planning stage, and no evidence exists that any was aimed specifically at causing casualties.⁷

In its own submission to that inquiry, ASIO confirmed that “the vast majority of established nationalist and racist groups are more likely to focus on recruitment and radicalisation rather than attack planning in the foreseeable future.”⁸ It is notable that the only NRVE activities documented by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in its submission to the inquiry consisted of “offensive behaviour”, including the Nazi salute.⁹ The most damning thing ASIO could say about the worst NRVE individuals in its submission is that some were “endorsing” – not planning – “attacks against critical infrastructure.”¹⁰

The AFP also emphasised the pragmatism of NRVE groups, explaining that “most consider proactive violence to be counter-productive at the current time” and that they “anticipate that the inevitable legal and governmental response to an act of onshore terrorism would likely severely undermine their ability to organise and operate, and potentially threaten the existence of their movements entirely.”¹¹

These groups are not an urgent threat from a security perspective, based on the available evidence, but in certain cases may even help restrain the genuine threat stemming from unaffiliated, self-radicalised “lone wolves”. One of Australia's leading experts on this subject, Dr Kristy Campion, testified to Victoria’s parliamentary inquiry into extremism in 2022 that “[NRVE] groups can act as a handbrake for violence.”¹²

Analysing NRVE attacks globally corroborates this: there have been few, if any, terrorist attacks planned or launched by organised NRVE groups. Those that have occurred are usually by former members disillusioned with the non-violence of their organisations.¹³ This is not to discount the role of these groups in indoctrinating individuals to carry out terrorist violence – which remains a serious concern. However, the threat of serious large-scale violence – as opposed to low-level street thuggery – does not mainly emanate from the groups themselves but from the extremist ideological milieu they collectively create.

Russia and toxic online ecosystems

Insofar as any NRVE security threat to Australia may potentially exist, AIJAC has previously argued that it emanates from two sources: unaffiliated and self-radicalised actors emerging from toxic digital ecosystems and Russian NRVE proxies.

Regarding the former, AIJAC explained:

This toxic online ecosystem, while horizontal and leaderless, works as a cohesive organism to encourage mass-casualty violence, promoting attacks and manifestos designed to inspire copycat attacks transnationally. As long as these online ecosystems exist, Australia will face a threat, one that is particularly difficult to disrupt because only a

⁷ See note 1

⁸ p. 3

⁹ pp. 4-5

¹⁰ p. 4

¹¹ p. 5

¹² See note 1

¹³ Oved Lobel, “The Far-Right Foreign Fighter Threat That Wasn’t”, *European Eye on Radicalization* (14 June 2022), <https://www.kyleorton.com/p/far-right-foreign-fighters-ukraine-by-oved-lobel>

handful of the thousands or tens of thousands of users involved in these networks will actually translate online rhetoric into action.¹⁴

Thankfully, security agencies are aware of the lone wolf threat and have to date been entirely successful in thwarting any major terror plots in Australia, assuming a concrete and large-scale attack has actually been planned here. ASIO stated in the submission to the Victorian extremism inquiry that the “biggest IMVE-related concern is the threat from lone actors who could move to violence without warning.”¹⁵ AFP commissioner Reece Kershaw said in 2021 that Australia has “concentrated investigative efforts on individuals or small networks of three to four individuals who are not aligned to members of a specific nationalist or racist group.”¹⁶

The closest Australia seems to have come to such an attack was the case of then 18-year-old neo-Nazi Tyler Jakovac, but even here it seems Jakovac, who was autistic¹⁷ – a seemingly common phenomenon among young NRVE individuals¹⁸ and an important link to investigate when assessing potential threats in Australia – likely went no further than online talk.

In AIJAC’s submission to the PJCIS regarding The Base, we warned of the potential danger of the transnational NRVE networks often headquartered in and seemingly sponsored by Moscow:

Given the transnational reach of these inter-related, Russia-based NRVE groups and the building tensions with Russia over Ukraine, the threat of such groups mounting attacks against Australia on Russia’s behalf needs to be factored into the overall risk analysis.¹⁹

This danger was underlined by a series of bombings in Spain in 2022 attributed to the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) – an NRVE group listed as a terrorist organisation by the US – and conducted on behalf of Russian military intelligence.²⁰ AIJAC has called for RIM to be listed as a terrorist organisation under Australia’s Criminal Code.

However, potential attacks by Russian NRVE proxies – a problem in the West since long before the fall of the Soviet Union – are a foreign policy and security issue as much as one about domestic extremism.

The RMVE threat dwarfs the NRVE threat in quality and quantity

Despite rampant misreporting to the contrary, the greatest threat by far to the security of Australian citizens today remains RMVE-related; that is, Islamist extremism. In its submission, ASIO explained that only 25% of its priority counter-terrorism caseload related

¹⁴ See note 1

¹⁵ p. 3

¹⁶ See note 1

¹⁷ Georgina Mitchell, “Man guilty of advocating terrorism to be released from jail”, *Sydney Morning Herald* (25 July 2022), <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/man-guilty-of-advocating-terrorism-to-be-released-from-jail-20220725-p5b4en.html>

¹⁸ Raffaello Pantucci, “Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism in the UK: How Concerned Should We Be?”, *RUSI* (21 July 2022), <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/extreme-right-wing-terrorism-uk-how-concerned-should-we-be>

¹⁹ See note 3

²⁰ Oved Lobel, “Russia is the Iran of White Supremacy”, *AIJAC* (31 Jan. 2023), <https://aijac.org.au/featured/russia-is-the-iran-of-white-supremacy/>

to IMVE, indicating 75% of ASIO's caseload is RMVE.²¹ Importantly, this means all IMVE cases, not just NRVE, which is a much smaller proportion. As ASIO underlined regarding IMVE cases, "There is a cohort of individuals motivated by a hybrid of conspiracies, grievances and anti-authority beliefs. It is neither helpful nor accurate to assign these individuals a place on the political spectrum."²²

ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess further clarified regarding NRVE cases in 2021, "These groups promote hateful ideologies but that does not automatically put them in the same threat category as ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] or al-Qa'ida. ASIO has the difficult but critical job of distinguishing between talk and action, aspiration and capability." NRVE cases almost always only involve talk – though of course examples like Christchurch underscore the importance of not ignoring the possibility that talk will lead to action in a minority of cases.²³

Similarly, Kershaw asserted in 2021 that "Religiously motivated violent extremism (i.e. jihadi terrorism) remains the biggest threat. Eighty-five per cent of investigations relate to RMVE." Meanwhile, 75% of arrests by the AFP are related to RMVE.²⁴

In addition, there is no comparison between the maladjusted "keyboard warriors" and racist braggarts of NRVE and the generally well-adjusted would-be terrorists of the Islamist and jihadist RMVE caseload. Unlike the incoherence and ever-evolving and changing conspiracy theories and grievances of IMVE – reportedly characterised by overrepresentation of autism and other cognitive difficulties – RMVE is consistent, coherent and reasonably pervasive in some communities, attracting all demographics.

A 2019 Lowy Institute study of 173 Australian citizens and residents charged with terrorism offences or with actually joining Islamic terrorist organisations found that the average Australian jihadi has no mental health issues; no prior criminal record; shows no remorse for their crimes; is judged to have relatively poor prospects of rehabilitation; has finished high school; is employed and is or has been married,²⁵ among other indications that, in contrast to the NRVE cohort, no social or mental health interventions would mitigate RMVE.

The recent stabbing by a 16-year-old of a Bishop in Sydney and subsequent arrest of several jihadist adolescents, some under 16, for planning terrorist attacks – incredibly disturbing chats between this group of teenagers conveyed their excitement to murder and die while targeting Jews and infidels²⁶ – is testament to the very real and dangerous problem of RMVE today.

²¹ p. 3

²² p. 2

²³ See note 1

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ Rodger Shanahan, "Typology of Terror — The Backgrounds of Australian Jihadis", *Lowy Institute* (Nov. 2019), p. 12, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/Shanahan%2C%20Typology%20of%20Terror%20revised%2C%20January%202020.pdf>

²⁶ Derrick Krusche, "NSW Police intercept texts revealing alleged Islamic teen plot to unleash terror in Sydney", *Daily Telegraph* (29 April 2024), <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/i-wanna-kill-inside-the-alleged-islamic-teen-plot-to-unleash-terror-in-sydney/news-story/3272e6536b15ba221c71ce359a4ea1a9>

There has long been a widespread problem with extensive support in certain Australian communities for listed Islamist terrorist organisations – particularly Hamas and Hezbollah as well as Ansar Allah – and their activities, one brought to the fore again by the October 7 terror attack in southern Israel.

Roland Jabbour, then chairman of the Australian Arabic Council, told the *Australian* in 2010 that “There’s no question about [there being] fairly large support from a large part of the Australian community who support and sympathise with Hezbollah in Australia.”²⁷ Kamal Mousselmani, head of the Supreme Islamic Shia Council of Australia, said “I support Hezbollah” in 2007 and insisted that the entire Shia community in Australia did so, as well.²⁸

Hundreds of people have recently attended funerals in Sydney held for Australians killed fighting for Hezbollah against Israel;²⁹ prevalent support for both Hamas and Ansar Allah is also publicly demonstrated in both Islamist as well as far-left spaces.

Interests and worldviews shared between Islamists and neo-Nazis

AIJAC noted in its submission on listing The Base that the worst of the NRVE groups also support and occasionally transition to jihadi terrorism:

NRVE groups often support jihadi terrorists and occasionally members convert to Islam and join groups like Al-Qaeda. This was the case of David Myatt, the Satanist O9A leader and key Combat 18 and National Socialist Movement figure who converted to Islam and became an Al-Qaeda propagandist until renouncing extremism overall later in life. There is also the 2017 case of Devon Arthurs, a former neo-Nazi convert to Islam who murdered his roommate. Most disturbingly, a US soldier and neo-Nazi passed classified information to O9A on his unit’s movements in Turkey to essentially orchestrate a jihadi attack.³⁰

Neo-Nazis have also openly celebrated Hamas’ October 7 attack,³¹ among other terrorist attacks against the West.

In addition, Islamist RMVE has had a direct relationship with Nazi antisemitism since the 1930s and has incorporated it into its worldview.³² Variations of support for the Hitler, including the phrase “Hitler was right!”, proliferate in many Arab and Muslim communities,³³ alongside pervasive Holocaust denial and distortion and Western antisemitic literature like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

²⁷ Sally Neighbour, “On the track of Tehran's agents”, *Australian* (6 April 2010), <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/on-the-track-of-tehrans-agents/news-story/574ed97c904dba133d1d7c76efd78b4f>

²⁸ “Australian government defends terrorism: cleric”, *Sydney Morning Herald* (23 June 2007), <https://www.smh.com.au/national/australian-government-defends-terrorism-cleric-20070623-gdqgij.html>

²⁹ David Southwell, “Sheikh Youssef Nabha: Australian Imam labels Hezbollah terrorists 'martyrs' after they were killed while firing mortars into Israel”, *Daily Mail* (22 Oct. 2023), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12658591/Sheikh-Youssef-Nabha-Hezbollah-terrorists-martyrs.html>

³⁰ See note 3

³¹ James Angelos, “Israel-Hamas war cuts deep into Germany’s soul”, *Politico* (21 Oct. 2023), <https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-hamas-war-germany-germany-berlin/>

³² Oved Lobel, “Hamas is the cause, not the effect, of Israeli policies”, *AIJAC* (22 Dec. 2023), <https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/hamas-is-the-cause-not-the-effect-of-israeli-policies/>

³³ Simon Wiesenthal Center, “2013 Top Ten Anti-Semitic/Anti-Israel Slurs”, p. 4

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Deradicalisation initiatives

There is little evidence to support the effectiveness of any CVE or deradicalisation initiatives currently operating in Australia, and some evidence that they are counterproductive.

The *Australian* reported in 2020 that “Frustrated youth workers have warned that millions of dollars are being wasted on taxpayer-funded ‘deradicalisation’ programs that either achieve nothing or, in some cases, actually connect at-risk children with radical recruiters.”³⁴

An in-depth 2018 report by Israel’s International Institute of Counter-Terrorism on Australia’s deradicalisation programs concluded that “Deradicalization in Australian prisons has proven to be not only inefficient, but also counterproductive at times.”³⁵

Extremism expert Clarke Jones, speaking about Australian deradicalisation programs in 2019, said:

It’s a field everyone’s still learning and trying to strive to improve and do the right thing. I would suggest there’s a number of issues. It’s got to be the right program for the right person and there’s all sorts of complexities around culture and religion. We talk about responsivity — what makes someone want to be part of the program or eligible for the program? What helps them stay in the program and what are the measures of success when they’re released ... into the community? We’ve a lot more work to do to work around those challenges.³⁶

There have been multiple cases around the world, most infamously that of Usman Khan in the UK,³⁷ of terrorists conducting attacks while in or just after going through a deradicalisation program, including in Australia. This includes Yacub Khayre³⁸ and, more recently, a 16-year-old convert to Islam who conducted a stabbing attack in Perth before being shot.³⁹

The primary issue with CVE and deradicalisation is conceptual rather than in implementation. Human beings have personal agency and choose to engage in certain actions as well as to adopt certain beliefs and worldviews; nobody is radicalised against their will.

³⁴ Steve Jackson, “Radical Islamists ‘fishing’ in teen programs”, *Australian* (6 Dec. 2020), <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/radical-islamists-fishing-in-teen-programs/news-story/f2ae4d40f3c6bb3965f35be0642b6a4d>

³⁵ Ido Levy, “Deradicalization Programs in Australia and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon”, *ICT* (April 2018), p. 21, <https://www.ict.org.il/images/Australia%20foreign%20fighters.pdf>

³⁶ Mark Schliebs, “Deradicalisation ‘still has a long way to go’”, *Australian* (2 Dec. 2019), <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/deradicalisation-still-has-a-long-way-to-go/news-story/05344193b4729eb380bb07e42fc0bfe5>

³⁷ Roland Elliott Brown, “A Clockwork Jihadi”, *The Critic* (June 2021), <https://thecritic.co.uk/issues/june-2021/a-clockwork-jihadi/>

³⁸ Chip Le Grand, “Muslim mentors walk away from jail deradicalisation program”, *Australian* (9 June 2017), <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/muslim-mentors-walk-away-from-jail-deradicalisation-program/news-story/9411aadf130f14ed39f0254975d53782>

³⁹ Gian De Poloni and Georgie Hewson, “Police shoot dead 16yo armed with a knife in Perth, premier suggests teen was radicalised online”, *ABC* (5 May 2024), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-05/willetton-knife-attack-police-shooting-perth/103806436?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=twitter

One expert summed the problem up as follows:

As I understand it, ‘radicalisation’ is a form demonic possession, whereby ‘extremism’ embeds itself into somebody’s mind and they are powerless to resist it. Terrorists are a risk to others, but in this discourse, the terrorist is vulnerable. The whole thing needs to be put on hold. We need to ask fundamental questions about what we can and should be doing.⁴⁰

Others have made a similar point. Writing on the Independent Review of Prevent, the UK’s CVE program, by William Shawcross, analyst Kyle Orton explained:

In terms of the problem Prevent was actually set up to deal with, the “vulnerability” framing, which usually goes hand-in-hand with the medicalised conception of extremism as a contagion that poses “risks” to people’s “well-being”, is misleading and potentially quite dangerous. As one counter-terrorism expert explained, “it has removed the agency from the individuals who willingly decide to pursue or support violence for political ends”. Shawcross adds that it fails to grapple with the reality that many if not most extremists and terrorists are “highly rational, calculated, and astute”.⁴¹

It is worth emphasising that one of the severe issues noted by Shawcross with Prevent was a disproportionate and unwarranted focus on poorly and far too expansively defined “right wing extremism”.⁴²

Particularly in the case of Islamist RMVE, the problem is not just one of individual extremists. As Liam Duffy noted regarding terrorism in Europe:

There has been a shift away from individualising the problem — the idea that radicalisation happens when mysterious online recruiters reach into bedrooms to groom unsuspecting victims with hypnotic propaganda — and towards the ideological milieus where terrorists are socialised and competing values are inculcated.⁴³

Extremist preachers in large mosques and groups including Hizb ut-Tahrir and Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama’ah (ASWJ) are allowed to say whatever they want and operate their social and educational networks with complete impunity in Australia. The latter is considered among the most extreme RMVE groups in Australia.⁴⁴

This environment, not individual radicalisation, should be the key political concern, even as security services focus on preventing individual plots and attacks. No similar environment exists with relation to NRVE offline.

Nor is there any useful and comprehensive theory supported by strong empirical evidence, about what causes people to radicalise towards violent extremism. Importantly, vanishingly

⁴⁰ See note 36

⁴¹ Kyle Orton, “How British Counter-Extremism and Counter-Terrorism Policy Went Wrong”, *It Can Always Get Worse* (16 March 2023), <https://www.kyleorton.com/p/shawcross-review-prevent-what-went-wrong>

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ Liam Duffy, “Sweden joins France in defence of sovereignty”, *UnHerd* (13 Nov. 2020), <https://unherd.com/newsroom/sweden-joins-france-in-defence-of-sovereignty/>

⁴⁴ Ran Porat, “Jihad in the Suburbs redux”, *Australia/Israel Review* (29 March 2018), <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/jihad-in-the-suburbs-redux/>

few extremists ever actually make the leap to violent action, and it seems all but impossible to predict who will do so. Thus, for policy purposes, preventing individuals moving from extremist ideas to violent action appears not systematically achievable within the current level of knowledge available.

In any case, the only means of coming to a definitive conclusion about the merits of CVE and deradicalisation programs, and whether the federal or state governments should continue funding any of these initiatives, is a systematic and evidence-based review with concrete metrics, assuming enough data exists to conduct one. To incentivise real data collection, funding should be withheld from any initiative that doesn't keep accurate records of all relevant data on every aspect of its program in order to facilitate best-practice reviews of its efficacy.

Conclusion

“Right wing extremism” is not a useful category for analytical or policy purposes. If by this term the inquiry meant NRVE groups and individuals, then they currently appear to be a security threat dwarfed by other threats from other forms of extremism. Security agencies are already very effective at monitoring the relatively few individuals and groups comprising the NRVE cohort, and the police appear to currently have all the legislation they need to deal with their offensive, though rarely dangerous, behaviour – though of course any proposals for additional legal tools should always be welcomed and examined seriously.

It is important that CVE and other initiatives don't end up “carrying the weight for mental health services,” as Shawcross said of Prevent in the UK. NRVE radicalisation, particularly among the youth, can in part be a mental health issue to be addressed by social and mental health services. Further investigation of such links is very necessary.

On the other hand, RMVE, particularly Islamist extremism, has exploded since October 7, as has the “other side” of the IMVE “political spectrum” on the far left – though as noted, AIJAC does not consider the use of the “left-right” political spectrum a useful tool for either understanding or countering IMVE. As we have noted, RMVE encompasses not only incendiary rhetoric, incitement to violence and support for listed terrorist groups, but also outright antisemitism indistinguishable from that promoted by the NRVE cohort, and currently appears to be both much more widespread and less effectively countered by our security services.

These other forms of IMVE have led to rampant vandalism and intimidation of Jews or anyone deemed insufficiently anti-Israel. Unlike NRVE, these phenomenon collectively represent a systemic threat to Australian multiculturalism, political stability and interfaith tolerance that should be addressed urgently. An inquiry which focuses solely on “right-wing extremism” in isolation from the rest of IMVE spectrum is more likely to detract from, rather than assist, in this imperative need.

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