The Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism (AVERT) Research Network

Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

INQUIRY INTO EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS AND RADICALISM IN AUSTRALIA

12 February 2021

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security's inquiry into extremism and radicalisation in Australia. As a university-based Australian research network that is dedicated to the study of the multifaceted issues around violent extremism and social cohesion, we welcome this inquiry, which aims to understand and address the evolving nature and threat of extremism in Australia.

This inquiry is particularly timely, as the threat environment has evolved beyond one where the risk to Australia's security and social cohesion is primarily posed by jihadist actors and movements. Instead, we find ourselves at a moment in history where extremism is motivated and mobilised by a wide range of actors and movements, particularly within the diverse, contested space of the extreme right. A striking characteristic of contemporary extremist movements and beliefs right across the ideological spectrum now is the extent to which grievance-fuelled resentment and violence and the claiming of 'victim' status are being used to underpin both the narratives and the actions of extremists in Australia and around the world. This poses new challenges that the current inquiry is well-placed to consider and address.

The **Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism (AVERT) Research Network** is a multidisciplinary research initiative administered by Deakin University but involving a wide range of research experts from both Deakin and other Australian and international universities. It brings together an experienced group of highly engaged and critically informed social science, humanities and multidisciplinary research academics together with community and government partners who believe in

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conducting meaningful and robust research for the public good. As an Australian-based research network, we engage globally with research and practitioner colleagues, experts and institutions, while remaining strongly grounded in local contexts and knowledge relevant for Australian community and policy landscapes.

A critical aim of AVERT is to foster evidence-based understanding and reduction of the social harms created by violent extremism. Through its expert members, AVERT has significant expertise and research outputs and achievements focusing on various points along the continuum of understanding, preventing and intervening in radicalisation to all forms of ideological violence, and the implications and impacts of this for social and community wellbeing.

Through our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Home Affairs, we are working in partnership with the Department's Research and Evaluation Working Group of the Countering Violent Extremism Subcommittee (CVESC) to provide empirically based research and capacity-building to inform their policy decisions, highlight countering violent extremism best practices and advance relevant understandings of violent extremism both in Australia and internationally.

This submission was prepared by the following AVERT Network members: Professor Michele Grossman (AVERT Convenor), Professor Adrian Cherney, Professor Hass Dellal AO, Dr Joshua Roose, Mr Mark Duckworth and Ms Lydia Khalil (AVERT Coordinator). Brief biographies of each contributor explaining their expertise maybe found at the end of this document. The AVERT Research Network submission has been endorsed by AVERT's Executive Committee. For more information on AVERT, please see www.avert.net.au

Addressing the Terms of Reference

This submission will focus on the following terms of reference:

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

3. issues for specific inquiry including:
    b. changes that could be made to Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in relation to preventing further radicalisation to extremist views, including the capacity for further partnership approaches with state, territory and local governments;
    c. the role and influence of radical and extremist groups, which currently fall short of the legislative threshold for proscription, in fostering disharmony in Australia and as a conduit on a pathway to extremism, and
    d. further steps the Commonwealth could take to reinforce social cohesion, counter violent extremism and address the growing diversification of extremist ideology in Australia.

> *1 a. **The nature and extent of, and threat posed by, extremist movements and persons holding extremist views in Australia, with a particular focus on the motivations, objectives and capacity for violence of extremist groups, including but not limited to, Islamist and far right-wing extremist groups, and how these have changed during the COVID 19 pandemic.***

In addressing this term of reference, we would like to call attention to two broad issues that are impacting violent extremism rather than focusing on specific groups or movements. The first is the impact of disinformation and conspiracy theories and how conspiracy movements are becoming a violent extremist threat. The second is violent misogynist attitudes and ideologies that are driving radicalisation through movements such as the Incel phenomenon, with particular emphasis on how they are expressed and mobilised online and can lead to real-world harms.

Conspiracy movements as domestic extremist threat
Belief in conspiracy – the idea that hidden powerful forces are at play – lies at the heart of nearly all extremist movements, including Islamist, right-wing, sovereign-citizen and other ideological platforms. The reduction of complexity, the belief there is a purposeful yet hidden design behind complex structures or phenomena, the rejection of accepted

narratives around an event or issue, and the belief that current leaders and institutions are fundamentally corrupt and need exposing are also hallmarks of extremist ideologies across the spectrum. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that recent empirically based research has demonstrated "that a conspiracy mentality leads to increased violent extremist intentions" (Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). Conspiracy theories and conspiratorial mindsets are not new and have been identified as a factor in radicalising extremist movements, particularly right-wing extremist movements (Lipset, 1970). However, conspiratorial movements or individuals who believe in a conspiracy and are connected online, are now themselves emerging as a stand-alone domestic extremist threat.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has now labelled "conspiracy theory-driven domestic extremists" as an extremist threat. The FBI assessment posits that

> anti-government, identity-based, and fringe political conspiracy theories very likely will emerge, spread, and evolve in the modern information marketplace over the near term, fostering anti-government sentiment, promoting racial and religious prejudice, increasing political tensions, and occasionally driving both groups and individuals to commit criminal or violent acts. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019, p. 5)

The most obvious example of this is the QAnon movement, which emerged around 2017 but grew exponentially during the pandemic, and whose conspiracies most recently culminated in the January 2021 Capitol siege in Washington, D.C.

The January 6th Capitol insurrection clearly demonstrated how a networked online conspiracy movement can migrate from the online environment to cause real world harm and radicalise individuals to violence. Though there were a collection of movements that organised and participated in the insurrection, QAnon adherents, narratives and symbols were prevalent in the Capitol siege and QAnon networks contributed to spreading the lie that the election was illegitimate, presenting one of the gravest threats the world's leading democracy has ever faced to the integrity of the peaceful transfer of power. The Capitol insurrection was the culmination of years' worth of the dissemination and uptake of QAnon theories.

QAnon, and conspiracies like it, form a longer continuum towards violent extremism through contributing to 'transformational delegitimation' or the gradual disillusionment with democracy, the state and institutions of authority (Sprinzak, 1991). This anti-establishment, anti-institutional and anti-government sentiment did not begin with, but is both encapsulated and amplified by, QAnon conspiracy narratives.

The COVID pandemic has spurred the further proliferation of conspiracy theories and networks, again largely driven by the QAnon movement, but also encompassing COVID-19,

5G and "anti-vaxx" (anti-vaccination) conspiracies. These conspiracies have already inspired a number of plots, attacks and violations of government lockdown measures. Right-wing extremists allied with conspiracist movements have called on adherents to purposely spread the virus among minority communities and law enforcement targets. In the United States, law enforcement dealt with a number of terrorist plots directed at both the government, public health facilities and minority communities, fuelled by COVID and QAnon conspiracies (Khalil, 2019).

The evidence of this phenomenon is most prevalent in the US, but similar instances have occurred in Australia and Europe. One man was charged with sending threats to kill Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews over his government's pandemic response. A Europol briefing on the growth of right-wing extremism warned that "COVID-19 could further escalate some of these trends, given the potential economic and social impact of the pandemic worldwide … the propaganda of the various scenes has addressed the COVID pandemic, trying to capitalise from it and reinforce own narratives, propagate misinformation and perceived societal division" (Europol, 2020).

The states of emergency during the pandemic also played into the narratives of anti-government extremists. An expanded "sovereign citizen" movement fuelled by online conspiracies about the state of emergencies declared in Australia has held illegal anti-government protests over restrictions, leading to a number of arrests, and continues to actively undermine government legitimacy through its online communities. Necessary extensions of government authority and curtailing of individual liberties during an emergency are re-framed by extremists as tools of social control and evidence of authoritarian tendencies and are exploited to push forward narratives of government corruption and illegitimacy (Khalil, 2021).

Furthermore, the promotion of conspiracies and disinformation can itself be understood as a form of attack. For example, some right-wing extremist groups have encouraged followers to spread disinformation about the coronavirus in order to exacerbate tensions, undermining democracy and government authority and social cohesion (Silke, 2020).

Government must recognise and address in its preventative countering violent extremism strategies the role that conspiratorial thinking plays in the radicalisation process and the emergence of conspiratorial movements as extremist actors. While conspiracy movements like QAnon may come and go, future iterations driven by disinformation actors and amplifying populations can emerge.

Strategies and programs that integrate "inoculation theory" are a promising means to counter disinformation and conspiracy and mitigate the adoption of beliefs and attitudes consistent with violent extremism ideologies (Braddock, 2019). Inoculation theory, which

is a replicable evidence-based social communications theory that claims that you can "inoculate" individuals from credulity and persuasion to information or influence by pre-exposure to arguments that refute a given narrative or idea (MacGuire, 1961), is one potential way to combat disinformation and harmful conspiracies that Government should consider.

A number of recent studies have provided evidence that "pre-bunking" or inoculating against conspiracies and disinformation can be effective (Roozenbeek et al., 2020). However, it is most effective when the inoculation message is able to reach audiences before conspiracists do (Banas & Miller, 2013, p. 204). This is a challenge of agility in prevention for Government and will require an awareness and intelligence-led analysis of what conspiratorial messages are emerging. Government cannot rely solely on intervention methods but must also integrate media literacy programs and education in early prevention efforts.

Extreme misogynistic violence and online violence against women: A new form of violent extremism
Online violence against women and girls has been identified by the United Nations, the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian E-Safety Commissioner as a significant global problem, and one that has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (United Nations Women 2020; Hermant and Kent, 2020). The emergence of online anti-women movements both advocating and enacting violence against women is a critical societal challenge. These movements are vociferous in their online targeting of women and girls and contribute to the polarisation and exclusion within online environments that normalise the exclusion of women.

A Plan International survey in mid-2020 describes social media as 'the new frontier for gendered violence' and found that 65% of 1000 Australian teenagers and young women surveyed had been exposed to a spectrum of online violence, compared to 58% globally. Half reported experiencing emotional and mental distress. This online violence included abusive and insulting language (59%), deliberate embarrassment (41%), body shaming (39%) and threats of sexual violence (39%). Importantly, 22% of those surveyed feared for their physical safety as a result of online interactions (Plan 2020).

The Australian E-Safety Commissioner has stated that "women are abused online at an unacceptably high rate" with over one third (37%) of respondents to this survey stating that they felt their physical safety was threatened. Women who advocate for gender equality were particular targets, with Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins identifying that social media is extensively used to subject women who advocate on women's rights issues to online harassment and abuse (Jenkins, 2018).

The vast majority of international research on women's and girls' experiences of anti-women online violence occurs within cyberbullying scholarship, which is underpinned by psychological frameworks. Consequently, it considers gendered abuse and violence in the context of interpersonal relationships, failing to account for the impact of gender-political movements online (Ging and Neary, 2019). Yet these issues must be considered in the broader international context of increased political polarisation, the emergence of the far right and demagogic populist leaders with a track record of anti-women public commentary, and a global increase in attacks on women, including Incel terrorist violence. It is clear that this an urgent and pressing issue requiring rigorous research and conceptualisation of misogynistic extremism to inform innovative policy and whole of society solutions.

The online world inhabited by anti-women activists is often referred to as the "manosphere". The "manosphere" is clearly defined by a deep-seated resentment of women and of the advances made in women's rights. The 'manosphere' encompasses a variety of actors, including but not limited to male supremacists, pick up artists (PUAs), some men's rights groups and involuntary celibates ("Incels"). Internet studies research focuses on the discursive dimensions of the 'manosphere', but there has been a failure to engage with its actors or to pursue a sociological exploration of and socially based solutions to the pathways into and patterns of participation in extremist anti-women online movements.

Furthermore, there needs to be greater acknowledgment and understanding of the intersection of extremist political views and anti-women online activity and the consequent transformation of misogyny as an ideological platform for action. Paradoxically, despite the theoretical association between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal attitudes leading to violence against women, it is in these new 'red pill' discourses, which emphasise an "awakening" from society-induced stupor to the reality of a so-called "war against men", that an evolution in the genealogy of violence and the most dangerous new forms of targeted violence against women are located.

One area of particular concern has been the emergence of violent Incels. To frame the Incel movement and organised online violence against women and girls as a "hate crime'" or a manifestation of broader societal misogyny reflects an incomplete understanding of this extremist ideological phenomenon. Despite difficulties in discerning leadership and composition amongst a diverse, highly fluid online movement, it is clear that online manosphere (male supremacist) and Incel content has led to real-world harms by and inciting followers to sexual and terrorist violence (Roose, 2020). Recent incidences of such violence linked to the manosphere include mass shootings, vehicular attacks and stabbings in the United States, Canada and Germany along with sexual assaults, threats and harassment. Whilst these have so far been conducted by individuals, it is possible that more sophisticated, cooperative attacks may occur in the future.

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Male supremacists, and in particular the Incel movement, should be considered as ideological extremist actors. As Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware have argued in relation to Incels, "This violence is indisputably terroristic in that it seeks to repress and subjugate women as part of the incels' vision of a paternalistic, genderised society… By advocating bloodshed as a means of broader societal intimidation, Incel ideology conforms to the core definition of terrorism as violence designed to have far-reaching psychological effects" (Hoffman & Ware, 2020).

There is international precedent in other jurisdictions labelling and prosecuting Incels as such. After the deadly February 2020 attack on a Toronto massage parlour in Canada, the RCMP and the Toronto Police Service said their investigation determined the attack "was inspired by the Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremist (IMVE) movement commonly known as INCEL". As a result, terrorism proceedings were commenced, the first time a terrorism charge had been laid anywhere in the world over violence tied to the Incel movement (Global News Canada, 2020).

Australia is not immune to this phenomenon, with numerous Australian men participating in anti-women online forums and subscribing to an ideology centred on the violent subjugation of women (Roose, Flood & Alfano, 2020). Importantly, a considerable crossover in representations of women exists between far-right, jihadist and manosphere actors, indicating a preoccupation across violent extremist groups with the subordination and domestication of women (Roose, 2020).

This requires heightened vigilance by government and civil society actors to ensure that better understanding of patterns and rates of Incel and other extremist misogynistic movements involving Australians occurs, and to consider countermeasures to limit or mitigate the social influence and impacts of such movements. In part, this calls for clear acknowledgement of Incels as a variety of violent extremist ideology focused on resentment of, entitlement over and control of women through narratives and campaigns of hate speech, threats of violence and the instilling of fear.

1 b. *The nature and extent of, and threat posed by, extremist movements and persons holding extremist views in Australia, with a particular focus on high-risk offenders.*

The response to this term of reference draws on research conducted by AVERT Research Network member Prof Adrian Cherney, using the PIRA dataset he has compiled on 247 Australian individuals who have radicalised dating back to 1985, including those convicted of a terrorist offence or who have demonstrated extremist views and associations (Cherney & Belton, 2020). These data on extremist movements and persons in Australia indicate the following:

- Of the 202 cases analysed so far, individuals are predominantly male and the average age is 27 years old. Some of these individuals display a range of vulnerabilities, such as mental health problems, disengagement from school and work, past trauma, alcohol and drug misuse, and a history of violence and other criminal conduct.

- Of these 202 cases, the dominant form of extremism individuals are aligned with is Islamist extremism - 83%, followed by far right - 8%, far left - 6% and single issue ideology - 3 %. It should be noted that Islamist radicalisation saw an uptick from 2014, particularly for youth in Australia, coinciding with the emergence of Islamic State and the establishment of the so-called caliphate in Iraqi/Syrian territory.

- 23 individual cases out of a total of 247 are aligned with far-right ideology. Many of these cases have emerged from 2014 onwards and more recently these individuals have been involved in terrorist/violent attacks.

- Over half the sample are members of a formal (e.g. Islamic State) or informal extremist group, with many of these individuals having associations or connections with other radicalised persons outside of their specific group either in Australia or overseas.

- The internet and social media play a role in a person's radicalisation. For example, in over half of the 202 cases, social media played a minor or major role. However, we find that it is face-to-face and personal connections and associations that are more significant than the influence of social media in the process of radicalising to violent extremism. For example, social media was identified in only 23 individuals out of 202 cases as the main catalyst for a person's radicalisation.

With particular regard to the risk that current/former *terrorist offenders* present, the evidence indicates that we need to understand the risk that terrorist offenders present to the community in a highly nuanced way.

Research indicates that, specifically in the case of convicted terrorists who are released from prison into the community, there is a low rate of reengagement in violent extremism. For example, a recent study by Renard (2020) reviews international data concluding that there is a low rate of terrorist recidivism amongst released convicted terrorists.

However, studies that have examined the ongoing risks presented by radicalised individuals in the community indicate that they could face a number of specific barriers when attempting to leave an extremist group. For example, research on far-right individuals in the US by Jensen, James & Yates, (2020) shows that past incarceration and the presence of radical family members or romantic partners present barriers to disengagement from an extremist group or movement. Related issues of limited social mobility, such as poor education or work histories, substance abuse, and mental illness also act as barriers. Yet the findings also show that far-right extremists were more likely to disengage from extremism when exposed to support services that addressed underlying psychological issues and

socioeconomic disadvantages, such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation, mental health counselling, and education and work assistance programs.

Reducing community risks from terrorist offenders requires addressing these and a range of other reintegration challenges. For example, the challenges surrounding the transition and release of inmates charged for a terrorist offence, or who have demonstrated extremist views and associations, are not dissimilar to those for other high-risk inmates (Cherney, 2018a; Walkenhorst, et al., 2020; Weggemans & de Graaf, 2017). This cohort has similar reintegration needs and traits that relate to their likelihood of re-offending, which are characteristic of many offenders released from custody. For example, they encounter similar barriers to their reintegration (e.g., in securing work). Therefore, addressing standard forms of social support around education, work, physical and mental health, welfare and family assistance is centrally important in generating disengagement from extremism and reintegration (Cherney, 2018a; Koehler, 2017; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2019; Jensen, James & Yates, 2020; Weggemans & de Graaf, 2017).

Terrorist offenders do present an ongoing risk, but this risk has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis and can be mitigated in part by programs that aim to address barriers to reintegration. The critical take away from the research is that investment in reintegration and support programs offers a more viable and effective long-term investment in decreasing the risks terrorist offenders present to the community. Therefore, investment in reintegration initiatives and tailored support programs needs to be a central part of countering terrorism and radicalisation. It is through these types of initiatives that risks to the community are most likely to be reduced.

> **3 b.** *Changes that could be made to Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in relation to preventing further radicalisation to extremist views, including the capacity for further partnership approaches with state, territory and local governments.*

In 2015 the Council of Australian Governments published a high-level strategy on counter-terrorism. Since 2015 the nature of the terrorist threat has evolved and our understanding of which violent extremism and policies are, and are not, effective has become more sophisticated. There is now an opportunity to incorporate our greater understanding in a revised Strategy.

In 2015 the Strategy's focus was primarily on the Islamic State (IS), al Qaeda (AQ) and domestic individuals and homegrown groups within Australia inspired by their Salafi jihadist ideology and calls to commit self-directed terrorist acts on their behalf to followers around the world. Because of the pressing nature of the jihadist threat, there was only passing

reference to combating violent extremism and terrorist acts by other politically or ideologically motivated groups.

There is a consensus that a new Strategy should be updated to reflect the changing global security context – in particular, the end of the Islamic State "caliphate", the enduring nature of jihadism, the increased in threat posed by various extreme right-wing, white supremacist, neo-Nazi, violence misogynistic and male supremacist movements, and other anti-government/anti-democratic movements while also addressing the importance of online influence and penetration.

Any revised Strategy needs to place at its centre the comments made in February 2020 by the Director-General of Security Mike Burgess when he released the ASIO Director General's Annual Threat Assessment Report. In his remarks Burgess highlighted the increasing threat of right-wing extremism and stated, "Intolerance based on race, gender and identity, and the extreme political views that intolerance inspires, is on the rise across the western world in particular. Right-wing extremism has been in ASIO's sights for some time, but obviously this threat came into sharp, terrible focus [in 2019] in New Zealand."

In addition to acknowledging the different threat environment we face from violent extremism, a revised Strategy needs to incorporate the current best practices to countering violent extremism, community engagement and building community resilience and drawing on lessons learned, best practices, program evaluation and research since 2015.

A revised Strategy needs to incorporate more recent research findings on the factors motivating individual participation in violent extremism, such as: personal experiences of real or perceived victimhood or threat to one's in-group; identification with a cause linked to a victimised community (even though that community may be local or geographically distant); a search for a sense of purpose, socialisation through family or friends or associates; and the interplay of gendered dynamics of participation. A revised Strategy also needs to incorporate research findings that show that while ideology and extremist narratives can be important to give focus to perceived grievances against the government, those in power, or out-groups in society, ideological belief is not itself the only determinant of radicalisation to violence.

Resilience and recovery

A revised Strategy must also incorporate the government's approach to fostering resilient communities. We suggest to the Committee that the Government's strategy for fostering community resilience cannot be implemented through "top down" Government policy and action, nor can community-government community relations be securitised. Rather, a revised Strategy needs to show how Governments, working in partnership with communities, can help hold Australian society together at times of shock and stress. True

collaboration requires trust. Trust takes time to build. The result of this trust deficiency is that governments often revert to doing things "to" communities rather than "with" them.

In drafting a new Strategy much can be learnt from strategies developed in the emergency management context. The centrality of trust in community resilience is well set out in *A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action* published by US agency FEMA in 2011. It states:

> Trust is a recurring theme that underpins healthy and strong communities. It acts as the glue that holds different groups together, strengthens and sustains solidarity, and supports the means for collective action. It is crucial that partnerships are based on trust and not on fear or competition to ensure the success of the Whole Community approach. Building social trust requires more than conventional outreach focused on "trust issues"; it requires collaborating with communities in joint activities designed to address specific local problems....Fostering relationships and collaborating with community leaders is a way to build trust within the broader community as they are the links to individual community members. To this end, it is important that the government and its partners are transparent about information sharing, planning processes, and capabilities to deal with all threats and hazards. (FEMA, 2011)

An updated Strategy also needs to have a greater focus on the longer-term recovery from terrorist incidents. There is quite rightly a focus on the immediate victims impacted by these acts of violence. However, within Australia there has been little work on how we would recover from the broader societal consequences of a major terrorist event and how minority communities are often disproportionately impacted. We know one of the main aims of terrorists is to drive communities further apart and to de-legitimise the state. Any recovery effort incorporated into the Strategy should acknowledge the need to develop a cohesive emergency management and terrorist incident response that addresses the long-term effects of terrorist acts and extremist violence on social cohesion, trust in government and community resilience.

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3 c. *The role and influence of radical and extremist groups, which currently fall short of the legislative threshold for proscription, in fostering disharmony in Australia and as a conduit on a pathway to extremism*.

There are currently a number of extremist groups and movements that are not proscribed as terrorist organisations in Australia. There are number of reasons for this, but one major reason is that a growing number of extremist actors fall outside organisational structures and membership. Contemporary extremist actors and movements are increasingly less likely to be organised in traditional hierarchical organisational structures that can be

straightforwardly proscribed (Hoffman & Clarke, 2020), yet remain ever more networked via digitally enabled communications and platforms.

Additionally, defining the boundaries and strictures of various movements is becoming an ever more difficult task, because extremist movements (with the exception of jihadist movements) are becoming less ideologically and organisationally coherent (Hoffman & Clarke, 2020). Modern extremist movements shift, morph and incorporate various causes at much greater speed, often resulting in ambiguous ideologies and diffuse and impermanent structures. Because many new, emerging and reconstituted or revived extremist movements and actors may be ideologically inconsistent or organisationally dispersed and disaggregated, they can be very difficult to categorise and then proscribe.

A number of these movements, including groups such as the Proud Boys, the Boogaloo movement and other accelerationist forces, have originated out of the United States. But they have found adherents in Australia as well, with chapters of the Proud Boys present in various Australian states. The US sovereign citizen movement has also inspired the emergence of various Australian sovereign citizen movements as far back as the early 2000s, and who have amplified and increased in number when they joined common cause with the anti-lockdown movement protesting the use of emergency powers in during the pandemic in 2020.

While these Australian individuals and groups take on domestic characteristics and causes, they are also deeply connected via social media and other computer enabled communications to international compatriots, particularly the United States. Australian far right extremist groups in particular are in tune with and exercised by global events in addition to what is happening in the Australian context. They use the language of the international extreme right and draw on similar narratives, trends, hashtags and symbols and champion similar causes within the Australian context (Macquarie University, 2020; Moran 2011; Fleming and Mondon, 2018; Hutchinson, 2019).

Other groups in Australia, like the Lads Society, which has now morphed into an explicitly neo-Nazi movement that has extended into the 'European Australian Movement' (EAM) and the 'National Socialist Network' (NSN), share these characteristics of organisational ambiguity. They also have a strategic ambiguous stance on the use of violence to further their goals. While they claim that they do not explicitly call for violence, at the same time they do not denounce, and in fact often promote, the use of violence by others that share similar goals. The same strategic ambiguity around the use of violence applies to the Proud Boys, who have been involved in riots and street violence. It is also a feature of Islamist organisations like Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HUT). HUT is a global, pan-Islamic organisation with a presence in Australia that calls for a global caliphate and is against the integration of Muslims

into multicultural societies, but does so without overtly calling for violent action to achieve these goals. Their incitement to violence is, by design, more ambiguous.

The ideological inconsistency of extremist movements like the Proud Boys illustrates the difficulty of proscribing them as terrorist organisations, even though they have been involved in violent counter-protest action and, most recently, in the US Capitol siege. The Canadian Government has recently done so, which has put pressure on other 5 Eyes countries to do the same, but not without some controversy.

Because of the ideological inconsistency of groups like the Proud Boys, whose members espouse a range of political beliefs (for example, some members are explicitly white supremacist, others are not), it is unclear if there is evidence that they meet the threshold for terrorist proscription under the current Australian legislative framework. The Crimes Act defines a terrorist act as one where "action is done or the threat is made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause". When a movement does not have a clear or consistent "cause" it complicates the push for proscription.

The controversy around the Proud Boys proscription also reveals the insufficiency and limitations to the use of proscription as a tool to counter violent extremism. These challenges arise on three fronts.

First, as described above, the diffuse, networked and often ideologically inconsistent nature of emerging extremist threats makes it difficult to ring fence particular organisational groups for proscription. These groups are also coy about their calls for violence and action. These types of organisations are very adept at skirting the line around explicit calls for violence. They vociferously deny they are extremist or terrorist in nature while simultaneously spouting hateful, anti-government and conspiratorial rhetoric, alongside transgressive actions meant to provoke, offend and call attention to their movement and ideology. The recent display in the Grampians in Victoria by members of the National Socialist Network, which gathered to burn crosses (again, mimicking US white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan) is a case in point.

Both extreme right groups that espouse national socialism and white supremacy, as well as various anti-government groups and Islamist movements such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HUT), actively seek to denigrate and undermine Australian democratic, egalitarian and multicultural values through their actions and rhetoric, as well as undermine government legitimacy and authority. Each advocates for alternative societies and governance structures to replace democracy. Each also cultivates a narrow understanding of their 'in group' and denigrate those in their 'out group,' adopting strategies and positions that foster division and confrontation (Berger, 2018).

Second, there remains a significant threat posed by individual or lone actors who, like the Christchurch shooter, are networked and supported via online milieus, but nevertheless not tied to any particular organisation. Instead, they can be radicalised to violent action from a variety of narratives, group ideologies and through multiple social networks.   Proving their membership of any particular group is fraught and therefore proscription of movements will not necessarily provide the necessary framework to deter this kind of threat.

Third, there will always be individual beliefs and movements that fall outside the bounds of what is currently acceptable, desirable or even beneficial to broader society. Some of those beliefs may challenge social cohesion and the vision for a multicultural, egalitarian and free society. However, proscription is unlikely to be effective in in addressing challenging or socially harmful beliefs or movements. The focus of Government should remain on utilising the existing legislative frameworks that seeks to deter violence or other social harms, and on working with civil society organisations to minimise the social influence that such sub-threshold groups attempt to wield for radicalisation and recruitment purposes.

We also need to retain the distinction between legitimate democratic social protest, on the one hand, and terrorist action that seeks to undermine core liberal democratic structures and values on the other. Freedom to protest and freedom of expression *are* core values and rights of democratic societies. Any conduct that constitutes "advocacy, protest, dissent and industrial action" rightly lies outside our current legislative framework for what constitutes a terrorist act, provided that such conduct does not explicitly intend to cause a serious risk to health and safety of the public or purposefully cause death or endanger life. It is a false equivalence to equate protest-based movements that incorporate civic action or civil disobedience into their advocacy strategies with violent extremist movements that often enter the fray as counter-protesters.

Proscription can be an effective tool to counter violent extremism. However, there are a number of other preventative means by which harmful beliefs and movements can be addressed through the strengthening of community resilience and social cohesion, as described in the following section of this submission.

> **3 e.** *Further steps the Commonwealth could take to reinforce social cohesion, counter violent extremism and address the growing diversification of extremist ideology in Australia.*

As a nation Australia has long recognised the value of efforts to strengthen social cohesion as an essential pillar in its approach to countering violent extremism, as well as for the benefit of society more generally. Australia was an early adopter of, and has consistently privileged, the role of social cohesion in its efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) following both the 9/11 and the Bali bombings in 2002. Australian CVE policy has also long drawn a clear

distinction between 'extremism' and 'violent extremism', making clear that the Government does not want to interfere with people's rights to hold various beliefs, but will intervene if those beliefs support or lead to acts of violence against individuals, communities and society at large or jeopardise national security and community safety and wellbeing (https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/get-the-facts).

However, we face today new risks to social cohesion that can threaten our long track record of investing in and benefitting from this critical element of national wellbeing and resilience to the social and political harms of radicalised violence. Long-term investment in social cohesion initiatives is crucial in securing national safety and wellbeing: not only because stronger cohesion leads to a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion, making citizens more resilient to the appeals of violent extremist narratives that try to undermine national belonging, but also because it sends a clear message that government is interested in the overall welfare of communities, rather than in focusing simply on addressing the potential risks they may pose to national security (Tahiri and Grossman, 2013; Ellis and Abdi, 2017).

Moreover, social cohesion and social capital have been found to be directly linked to strengthening young people's resilience to violent extremism across a variety of culturally diverse communities (Grossman et al., 2020). Joint Australian-Canadian research with over 400 young people aged 18-30 (Grossman et al., 2017), leading to the development of the BRAVE (Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism) standardised measure (https://brave.resilienceresearch.org), revealed that the following five factors are critical to helping young people resist violent extremist ideology and appeals:

1. **Cultural identity and connectedness**: This is familiarity with one's own cultural heritage, practices, beliefs, traditions, values and norms (can involve more than one culture); knowledge of 'mainstream' cultural practices, beliefs, traditions, values and norms if different from own cultural heritage; having a sense of cultural pride; feeling anchored in one's own cultural beliefs and practices; feeling that one's culture is accepted by the wider community; feeling able to share one's culture with others.
2. **Bridging capital**: This relates to trust and confidence in people from other groups; support for and from people from other groups; strength of ties to people outside one's group; having the skills, knowledge and confidence to connect with other groups; valuing inter-group harmony; active engagement with people from other groups.
3. **Linking capital**: Trust and confidence in government and authority figures; trust in community organisations; having the skills, knowledge and resources to make use of institutions and organisations outside one's local community; ability to contribute to or influence policy and decision making relating to one's own community.

4. **Violence-related behaviours**: The willingness to speak out publicly against violence; willingness to challenge the use of violence by others; and to reject the acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of resolving conflicts.

5. **Violence-related beliefs**: The degree to which violence is seen to confer status and respect; degree to which violence is normalised or well tolerated for any age group in the community.

These findings, and particularly the role of factors 1 – 3 (cultural connectedness, bridging capital and linking capital), provide strong evidence of the essential role of social cohesion in building and sustaining resilience to violent extremism. The findings from the BRAVE study should be used by Government to inform future policy and program development focusing on young people's strengths and vulnerabilities in relation to violent extremism.

Key social cohesion threats
Negative sentiment towards Australian Muslims
There remain persistent threats to social cohesion in Australia, particularly manifest in attitudes towards Australian Muslims. The relatively fragile status of Muslim communities in Australia compared to other minority groups is borne out by the social cohesion data. The 2020 Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion Survey results (Markus, 2020), for example, show that support for multiculturalism in general has increased from already high levels (84% support for multiculturalism in 2020, an increase over 2018 [77%] and 2019 [80%]). This is accompanied by 82% opposed to discrimination on the basis of race and 76% on the basis of religion, coupled with a slight increase in majority support for socio-cultural integration by minority ethnic groups (60%).

However, the same survey data also show that negative opinion towards Muslims has remained both constant over time and is significantly higher (37% in 2020) when compared to attitudes towards other religious groups such as Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs (5%-13%). These results vary by age, with older Australians more likely to hold negative attitudes towards Muslims than younger Australians. These data are also consistent with Australian Muslims reporting the highest level of minority group experience of discrimination from 2018-2020 (55% Muslims, 37% Hindu, 31% Buddhist).

The continued prevalence of negative attitudes toward Australian Muslims, coupled with higher levels of experiences of discrimination by Muslims in Australia, requires renewed effort in social cohesion policy and programming. As Scanlon Survey author Prof. Andrew Markus noted in 2019, The 'level of negative sentiment towards those of the Muslim faith and by extension to immigrants from Muslim countries' therefore "remains a factor of significance in contemporary Australian society" (Markus, 2019, p. 60), with commensurate weakening effects on national social cohesion and potential strengthening effects on vulnerability to Islamist violent extremist appeals as a result.

Furthermore, the social cohesion on which successful CVE depends has been undermined or compromised at times by ambivalent or stigmatising messaging in relation to Muslim communities and to Islam as a religion both in Australia and elsewhere (Thomas, 2012; Vermeulen, 2014; Cherney and Murphy, 2017; Tahiri and Grossman, 2013). The messaging around inclusion and the valuing of contributions made by Australian Muslims to Australian society as a whole needs to be strengthened in order to consistently re-focus attention on bad actors, networks and influences, rather than on stigmatising the ethnic, religious or cultural groups from which they derive.

This does not mean avoiding the ways in which, for example, Islamist terrorists ascribe their motivations to a distorted re-interpretation of their religious beliefs and obligations. But it does mean we need to do exactly the same thing when we see violent right-wing extremists invoking distorted re-interpretations of Australian national or cultural identity to justify their violent aspirations. We do not stigmatise 'white' communities when racial categories are invoked by white supremacists; equally, we should not stigmatise Muslim communities when religious categories are invoked by jihadist extremists.

The impact of misinformation and conspiracy theories on social cohesion and conflict
In 2020, we have seen remarkable social cohesion across Australia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with governments at all tiers working together (despite a series of disagreements on particular elements of national or state-based pandemic management) and communities largely complying with public health directives and supporting one another across cultural and religious boundaries to help communities cope with the hardships created by the pandemic and its flow-on economic and social impacts. The ways in which Australian communities have by and large responded to government efforts to successfully manage the COVID-19 pandemic and minimise its risks and harms has also seen welcome rises in trust levels in government over the past year.

However, as articulated in the section above addressing TOR 1.a, at the same time we have also seen the rise of socially divisive rhetoric and action: in particular, the sharply accelerating rise of **conspiracy theories, misinformation, anti-government sentiment and right-wing extremist online and offline activity**. While all these features have already been present in Australian communities to some degree, particularly in online environments, their escalation and their potential to damage hard-won gains in social cohesion and social capital calls for further action.

We have seen that **conspiracy theories**, including those aligned to right-wing extremist narratives, are making headway in eroding trust in government institutions, laws and support systems. This has become all too apparent during the COVID pandemic, but it is by no means limited to uncertainty or trust issues regarding public health management. Recent research

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has shown that 'conspiracy theories are predisposed to view all authorities, institutions, leaders and communication as suspicious and likely to be withholding of truths' (Macquarie University, 2020, p. 41; Wilson, 2018). The consistent extent to which conspiracy theories, misinformation and anti-government sentiment seek to delegitimise government, as noted above under 1.a, directly erodes social cohesion by sowing doubt about the ability of governments to manage and regulate in the interests of all Australians. From this, it is a relatively short step to creating and enhancing social divisions that pit one group's interests against another's, promoting an environment in which social conflict becomes the norm and not the exception, and with dire consequences for civil harmony and cooperation in a multicultural pluralist society.

Right-wing extremism

The rise of right-wing extremism includes forms of white nationalism and supremacy in Australia and threatens social cohesion in specific and overt ways. This is all the more problematic given the ways in which social media and encrypted platforms have further enabled the dissemination of right-wing extremist views and contact with ideologies and groups to which individuals might not otherwise have been exposed prior to the digital era.

Right-wing extremist rhetoric advances doctrines focused on the supremacy of "white" ethnic and racial groups; the threat to the "Australian" way of life purportedly posed by minority ethnic and racial groups (including theories such as the Great Replacement, which casts minority population immigration and reproductive rates as a deliberate driver for the elimination of European background peoples), and the demonisation of particular ethnic, religious and cultural groups (including Jews, Muslims, African-Australians, Indigenous Australians and Asian-Australians) as unworthy of citizenship and full participation in a "European"-background country like Australia.

The impact of doctrines like the Great Replacement Theory, and the hateful rhetoric through which they are disseminated and promoted, has the potential to severely undermine Australia's social cohesion. It is not enough to dismiss such groups, and the narratives they espouse, as a "lunatic fringe", as some very recent commentary in the media has attempted to do. Regardless of the actual numbers of individuals who are committed adherents to such doctrines, the amplification of such views through social media, and also traditional media reportage, has the capacity to instil fear, alienation and disengagement by Australian minority communities who are explicitly targeted and attacked by such rhetoric.

If such experiences are compounded by perceptions that government and mainstream communities are doing little to robustly counter such narratives and actively promote the social cohesion and inclusiveness on which our national wellbeing depends, a risk then emerges that they will be vulnerable to narratives that emphasise self-reliance and self-

defence against such attacks, which can in turn lead a minority to radicalise to their own extreme positions, including positions that advocate the use of violence.

Social cohesion requires not only bonding and bridging capital (connecting with and supporting those who are like us and those who are different to us), but also *vertical* or *linking* capital – maintaining connection, confidence and trust in authorities and public institutions that have broad social power and capacity to influence and strengthen social wellbeing. The erosion of linking capital through conspiracy theory and anti-government sentiment and rhetoric, and the commensurate fragmentation of social cohesion, provides a ready environment in which vulnerable individuals and groups may feel the need to turn away from government toward alternative sources of support, including that offered by groups that seek to exploit such sentiments for violent extremist recruitment.

Improving our response to social cohesion threats
Accordingly, the Australian Government at all three tiers – Commonwealth, State/Territory, and local – needs to develop a coherent and integrated policy, program and communications strategy that:

- explicitly and robustly challenges the core elements of extremist and racially, ethnically or religiously supremacist hateful rhetoric, including hate speech, racial vilification, and memes, symbols and insignia designed to humiliate, demean, threaten or instil fear of "out groups" (noting that equivalent features of such rhetoric may be deployed by a variety of ideologically extremist movements and narratives);
- reaffirms the reality of threats to safety and wellbeing that we face in Australia, as opposed to the fabrication of "threat" environments in which minority groups are targeted as threats on the basis of their racial, ethnic or religious status;
- challenges through counter- and alternative narratives the prevalence of extremists' strategic grievance- and victimhood-led narratives seeking to undermine social cohesion, while at the same time emphasising legitimate channels for bringing forward and addressing genuine grievances and instances of victimisation;
- ensures that misinformation and disinformation are promptly and decisively rebutted using the same channels in which misinformation/disinformation is promoted by malevolent actors; and
- develops meaningful responses to the surge in conspiracy theories through enhancing critical and media literacy at all age levels of the population.

This last point is vital because recent work by **critical thinking** specialists suggests that directly confronting or dismissing conspiracy theories using factual contestation can be ineffective (Ellerton, 2014). Instead, providing strong tools for helping develop critical thinking and assessment capacity, coupled with alternative narratives that ask people to re-

think what they know (without directly challenging their conspiracy-based beliefs), is likely to prove more effective.

Information literacy, especially in our digitally immersed world, is of increasing importance as a tool of democratic values, civic participation and social cohesion, and specific effort should be made to ensure that information literacy policy, programming and resourcing is understood as part of the broader effort to combat the risks of radicalisation to extremist action by enhancing social cohesion through educational upskilling.

The lexicon of countering violent extremism
In pursuit of the strategies above, it is also imperative that we consider the language adopted in policy and communications terms to achieve these outcomes. A review of language as a means of dividing rather than uniting communities in the course of attempting to counter extremism warrants greater attention. For example, in the Victoria Police/Australian Multicultural Foundation and Attorney-General's Department's 2013 ***Guide on Talking about Terrorism in Australia***, it was found that "language is a key communication tool – it shapes our perception of our environment and its impact should not be underestimated. Research indicates that language represents a form of power and can in turn exert a strong influence over attitudes, behaviour, relationships, and even government policy both within and beyond national boundaries. In other words, language and the manner in which it is used is not trivial or inconsequential but is acknowledged to have the potential for significant and highly tangible effects on multiple levels".

The Guide also noted that "in determining the most effective language to use, it needs to be understood that language is an instrument available both to governments and terrorists alike. While terrorists have sought to use language to enhance their appeal and recruit others to their cause, governments too can use language in a way that deprives terrorists of this potential. Similarly, terrorists can also exploit government language that is divisive or that in some way lends credence to the terrorists' world view. In other words, governments should capitalise on every opportunity to deprive terrorists and their cause of legitimacy and moral superiority. The judicious and prudent use of language is one important means by which governments can negate the influence and reach of terrorists and their messages of hate."

The purpose of the *Talking about Terrorism* Guide was to

- provide information on the possible effects of terrorism-related language, whether positive or negative;
- offer information and advice on the risks and benefits associated with specific terrorism-related language. This advice, however, is not meant to be prescriptive. The circumstances in which certain terms and phrases should be used, or avoided,

- needs to be determined by the user and take into account matters such as the intended audience, the message being delivered and the position or role of the messenger; and

- enhance the utility and appropriateness of government communication in the context of terrorism and counterterrorism. This includes assisting government to engage constructively and effectively with communities.

This consideration of language is not about promoting political correctness at the expense of factual accuracy or surrendering to the interests and demands of terrorists. It is aimed, instead, at enabling government representatives to make informed choices about the use of language. It is intended to assist and guide rather than restrict freedom of speech or limit what can be said.

A recently completed unreleased research report titled *Exploring young Melburnians' perspectives on Islamophobia through peer-to-peer research* (July 2020) by the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation supports these arguments. This study found that the use of language and accompanying discourse, particularly through the deliberate manipulation of public anxiety, may lead to the normalisation of extremist concepts, thereby fragmenting social cohesion and enabling violent extremist views to take hold and normalise within the broader society.

As the report has noted, "Over the last decade in Australia, there has been a significant shift in the right-wing movement towards a more far extreme ideology (Dean, Bell & Vakhitova, 2016). The authors suggest that the growth of far-right extremism now targets Muslims and Islam 'under a thinly veiled guise of protecting Australia'. They describe RWE [right-wing extremism] in Australia as a heterogeneous movement positioned on an 'ideological spectrum of extremism from conservative anti-immigration, anti-Islam groups to far-right neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic, generally racist, white supremacy groups'".

The findings of this report also reinforce our earlier comments on the damage to social cohesion caused by pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment: "In his article on far-right extremist views, Bakali (2019) argues that while Islamophobic views exist across the political spectrum, the far right has become more overt and emboldened, due largely to contemporary Western political discourse legitimising anti-Muslim sentiment. Bakali states, however, that it is not only far right political figures and activists stoking Islamophobia, but also conservative perspectives contributing to the growing anti-Muslim attitudes in Europe and North America.

Bakali also shows that 'this form of "Othering" through racial and political posturing can have potentially devastating implications for Muslims living in Western nations and can result in such things as targeted legislation, hate crimes and social marginalisation'. The notion of the

legitimatisation of Islamophobia promoted through political and media discourse is supported by Poynting and Briskman (2018). The authors intimate that far right attitudes in public and political discourse normalise anti-Muslim bias, endangering democratic principles."

A recommendation from the Report suggests revisiting and updating 2013 *Guide on Talking about Terrorism in Australia* with a view to further develop and refine the original purpose of the Guide, and we support this timely strategy to fine-tune Government communication strategies on these critically important issues.

Social cohesion and government-community relations

The foregoing discussion highlights the need to redouble our efforts to continue to maintain and enhance social cohesion in the face of both persisting and new risks and threats. Such efforts rely very heavily on **continued and strengthened cooperation between government and civil society organisations**. This means further **targeted investment** in developing policy and program collaboration to tackle the issues summarised below in which government-community partnerships are foregrounded.

Making social cohesion policy and programming decisions in the absence of genuinely collaborative relationships with civil society expertise and outreach capacity will continue to fragment and weaken the social cohesion and resilience landscape and perpetuate pockets of distrust in government initiatives, making our efforts to counter violent extremism less effective and enduring (Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Grossman, 2021).

In addition to nurturing the well-established relationships between government and various civil society groups already focused on countering violent extremism and enhancing social cohesion and community resilience, new avenues for improving systems that rely very substantially on broad community participation and engagement should be pursued and strengthened.

Improving community reporting on violent extremism

A key example of this is the need to improve and integrate Australia's national strategy in relation to **community reporting on radicalisation and violent extremism.** As the research of AVERT's Prof. Michele Grossman and Prof. Paul Thomas has shown through a significant body of Australian and international research in the UK and, currently, Canada and the USA (Grossman 2015, 2018; Thomas et al. 2017, 2020), the people in the best but also most anguished and conflicted position to alert authorities to early signs that someone is radicalising to violence are the 'social intimates' around the person. This includes parents, spouses or partners, siblings, relatives and close friends or work colleagues.

Reporting concerns or knowledge of someone involved in violent extremism is a vital element of Australia's intelligence response to terrorist threats. However, willingness to come forward to report on a close friend or family member relies significantly on healthy and abiding relations of trust and confidence between communities and government. It also relies heavily on having alternative channels to the National Security Hotline (NSH), which most members of communities see as inappropriate for early interventions where diversion or localised support may be enough to turn someone away from extremist radicalisation (Grossman 2015; Thomas et al. 2017, 2020).

Australia currently has only one non-NSH community reporting support and information service, the Step Together program in New South Wales. This contrasts with the coordinated national approach taken by the UK recently through their Act Early campaign, helpline and web-based information and support service (www.actearly.org). National social cohesion is strengthened by national initiatives that provide consistent messaging and mechanisms around community safety and wellbeing. Leaving this to funding options and decisions made by States and Territories is an insufficient response given the recent diversification of terrorist risks and threats we currently face, and a national community reporting advice and support service is now needed more than ever, as originally envisaged by COAG in 2016.

It also requires stronger engagement with **key civil society service providers working at community level** who may in the past have shown reluctance to engage with government on CVE matters and initiatives. A national study conducted by a series of research teams across Australia demonstrated that many civil society groups are unwilling to engage in developing capacity to deliver CVE support services or else face barriers in doing so (Cherney et al., 2017). Such reluctance and barriers are understandable but also needs to be overcome if we are to significantly enhance a whole of society approach to CVE in a rapidly evolving threat landscape.

Summary of threats to social cohesion that enhance the risks of violent extremism
To conclude, the current risks and threats to social cohesion in a landscape of rapidly diversifying violent extremist ideology fall into seven (7) main areas:

1. Accelerating right-wing extremism that is transnationally resourced and domestically enacted with respect to social influence, recruitment and violent action;
2. Accelerating take-up of conspiracy theories delegitimising government and democratic rule of law, and casting particular religious, ethnic, racial or political groups as a threat to the Australian "identity" and "way of life" (conceived of as exclusively White and European);
3. A persisting 'frontier' landscape of under-regulated social media platforms that enable reinforcement of discrimination, bias and hate-based narratives and mis- and disinformation;

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4. The development and amplification of grievance-fuelled and victimhood-based narratives;
5. Gaps in critical and media literacy and the resulting capacity to effectively analyse and assess information, creating vulnerability to misinformation and disinformation;
6. Declining levels of trust and confidence in government and social institutions that have a key role to play in maintaining and advancing social cohesion, including in vital areas such as community reporting on early warning signs of radicalisation to violence, and
7. Persisting threats from Islamist violent extremists who maintain a commitment to fostering social conflict and division for the purpose of garnering continued support for violent extremist action.

As indicated in the discussion above, the measures for countermanding these risks require a **comprehensive and integrated national strategy implemented at all levels of government** across policy, programming and communications. In particular, **enhancing government-community partnerships, rebuilding trust and countering attacks on the legitimacy of government and core social institutions** (including education, health and the law) is vital, and will require renewed commitment to policies and strategies that transparently set out how governments are enacting efforts to build and strengthen the trust and participation of their citizens in working together to advance community safety and build resilience to extremist risks and threats.

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AVERT SUBMISSION AUTHORS

Professor Michele Grossman is Professor and Research Chair in Diversity and Community Resilience at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. She researches in the areas of countering violent extremism; building resilience against violent extremism and social harms; policing and communities, and gender and terrorism. Her work has had a consistent focus on the importance of engaging and involving communities in efforts to address and mitigate the uptake of violent extremism and has included theoretical, applied, topic- and issue-oriented research as well as a number of research-based program and policy evaluations. She has served as a chief investigator on over 26 research projects on countering violent extremism (CVE), social cohesion and community resilience. This includes Prof. Grossman's pioneering research on community reporting thresholds for violent extremism funded in Australia by ANZCTC's Countering Violent Extremism Subcommittee, by CREST (Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats/Economic and Social Research Council) in the UK, and by Public Safety Canada in Canada and National Institute of Justice in the USA.

She has also produced research on building youth resilience to violent extremism; the role of communities in reintegrating children and women returning from conflict zones; the roles of women in supporting and opposing violent extremism; community perspectives on violent

extremism and terrorism; harnessing resilience capital in communities to counter violent extremism, and mapping willingness and capacity for community-based CVE intervention support services. In 2016 she led the systematic literature and selected program review, the *Stocktake Research Report on Social Cohesion, Community Resilience and Violent Extremism 2011-2015* for the Victorian State Government.

Prof Grossman serves on a wide range of violent-extremism-related expert panels and advisory boards both in Australia and in the UK, Italy and Canada, amongst them membership of the UK Commonwealth Secretariat's Cadre of CVE Experts, the UK's National Counter-Terrorism Policing Headquarters Counter-Terrorism Advisory Network and Canada's International Consensus Guidelines Committee for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremist Violence (PVREV). She founded and continues to lead the AVERT Research Network, a multi-university Australian research consortium on violent extremism and terrorism that, amongst other activities and outputs, provides research capacity-building services to the Department of Home Affairs CVE Branch. She is also Director of the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Communities (CRIS), a multi-institution consortium of research and program development funded by the Victorian State Government.

Professor Adrian Cherney is Professor in the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland. He is also an Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellow. Professor Cherney has been conducting research on radicalisation and deradicalisation since 2014. His current work focuses on the evaluation of programs aimed at countering violent extremism and has undertaken research on the supervision of terrorist offenders who have been released into the community on parole.

Some of his projects include an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship focusing on radicalisation pathways and the evaluation of programs to counter violent extremism (CVE). He has completed two evaluations of Australian state-based diversion programs targeting radicalised individuals. And he also completed an evaluation of the Proactive Integrated Support Model (PRISM) intervention in New South Wales, that targets convicted terrorists and radicalised inmates (See Cherney, 2018b 2018c; Cherney & Belton 2019).

In 2017, Professor Cherney completed research in collaboration with New South Wales Corrective Services on mechanisms to support inmates exiting custody and/or completing a community-based order after the completion of a sentence for terrorism or demonstrating extremist views (see Cherney 2018a). Part of these various research projects have included access to the case files and interview convicted terrorists/radicalised individuals. Professor Cherney has received funding from the Australian Research Council, QLD government, Department of Home Affairs, US Department of Homeland Security, NSW Corrective Services and the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department and the Victorian CVE Unit.

Professor Bulent (Hass) Dellal AO is the Executive Director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation, an organisation established in 1989 to promote a strong commitment to Australia as one people drawn from many cultures. He is also the chair of the Board of Directors of SBS Television and Radio. Prof. Dellal has over 25 years of experience in multicultural affairs and serves on a number of committees and boards, including chair of the Centre for Multicultural Youth, chair of the Islamic Museum of Australia, co-chair of the Victoria Police Multifaith Council and is a fellow of the Williamson Leadership Program. Internationally, he co-founded and established the European Multicultural Foundation. He also introduced the biannual Diversity Matters Conferences for Commonwealth nations and has promoted the Australian multicultural experience internationally on many occasions.

Prof. Dellal has been conducting research and developing prevention and resilience programs on CVE and strengthening social cohesion programs since 2002. This has included collaborative research with Monash University and RMIT on Religion, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Australia, 2002, by Cahill, Bouma, Dellal and Leahy and Managing the Impact of Global Crisis Events on Community Relations in a Multicultural Australia, 2007, by Bouma, Dellal, Pickering and Halafoff.

Prof. Dellal has also worked in partnership with Victoria Police on the following reports and national guidelines: Lexicon on Terrorism – National Community Focus Group, 2009, by Tahiri, Dellal and Cain; Lexicon on Terrorism – Stage 2, National Testing of Terminology, 2010, by Tahiri, Dellal and Cain; Working with Muslim communities in Australia: A Review of the Community Policing Partnership Project, 2010, by Dellal and Cain; Community Awareness Training Manual: Building Resilience int the Community, 2013, by Dellal and Cain. He has also served as a co-researcher with Deakin University and Victoria University on the following research reports: A Systematic Literature and Selected Program Review on Social Cohesion, Community Resilience and Violent Extremism,2016, by Grossman, Peucker, Smith and Dellal; National Mapping of Community-Based Support Services for Youth at Risk of Violent Extremism, 2018, by Grossman, Dellal, Barolsky and Miller; Measuring Impacts of Countering Violent Extremism Programs Implications for Australia, 2018, by Grossman, Cameron, Dellal and Ranchand, and Exploring Young Victorian's Perspectives on the Impacts of Islamophobia, Far Right Extremism and Social Cohesion in Victoria', 2020, by Dellal, Miller, Prosser, Faelli and Grossman.

Dr Josh Roose is a Senior Research Fellow focusing on politics, law and religion and violent extremism at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. He has been a member of the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinets Expert Reference Group for Social Cohesion (2016-2018) and a member of the Federal Attorney-General's Expert Panel for Countering Violent Extremism.

Dr Roose received funding from the ARC to explore the Australian far right (2021-2023) and the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety to explore the role of masculinities in recruitment to violent extremism (2019-2020), resulting in the following study, 'Challenging the Use of Masculinity as a Recruitment Mechanism in Extremist

Narratives.' His broader body of research in the countering violent extremism arena has explored recruitment of foreign fighters to the Islamic State and local Salafi-jihadist groups, and the role of social trajectories, ideologies and masculinities.

His research agenda emphasises the exploration of societal level responses to violent extremism including the strengthening of citizenship, anti-discrimination legislation and key institutions. He has conducted fieldwork across the United Kingdom and United States including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Michigan and been a visiting scholar at the Graduate Centre, City University of New York, New York University and Harvard Law School. Most recently, his research has focused on the emergence of anti-women online movements and male supremacism as an emerging form of violent extremism. He is the author of *Political Islam and Masculinity: Australian Muslim Men* (2016) and *The New Demagogues: Religion, Masculinity and the Populist Epoch* (2021).

Mark Duckworth is a Senior Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University working in the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS). He held many senior executive roles including as Executive Director of Governance, Security and Intergovernmental Relations and as Chief Resilience Officer in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 Mark played a key role in establishing Australia's national counter-terrorism arrangements for which he was awarded the Public Service Medal in 2007. He was a member of the Australia and New Zealand Counter Terrorism Committee for thirteen years, and the inaugural co-chair of the ANZCTC Countering Violent Extremism Sub-committee.

Lydia Khalil is the Coordinator of the AVERT Research Network, Research Fellow at the Lowy Institute and a Research Associate at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. She has worked on matters relating to counter terrorism and countering violent extremism for over 15 years, including in a number of senior policy positions at the United States Department of Defense working on counterinsurgency and national security and counterterrorism policy.

She was a senior policy advisor to the Boston Police Department where she was responsible for drafting their countering violent extremism strategy and was a key author of the Boston CVE Framework, *A Framework for Prevention and Intervention Strategies*, and previously a senior analyst for the New York Police Department where she worked on intelligence analysis and casework. She was an International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York where she researched and published on national security policy, Middle East politics and counterterrorism.

In Australia, Lydia has held previous fellowships with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and Macquarie University, specialising in intelligence, national security and cyber security. She is currently leading the Lowy Institute's research partnership with the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET) and the Global Internet Counterterrorism Forum (GIFCT).