

A close-up photograph of a person's face, focusing on their eyes. They are wearing blue contact lenses and have blonde hair. The image is partially obscured by a red overlay at the top and bottom.

# Mediating Extremist Violence:

## A Report on the Role of Media, Far-Right Politics and Gender in Extremist Violence and Social Cohesion in Victoria

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# **Mediating Extremist Violence:**

A Report on the Role of Media, Far-Right Politics and Gender in  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1.0 Introduction**

In seeking to strengthen social cohesion and community resilience in Victoria, the State Government is investing in research and programs which enhance well-being and security, and which ameliorate conditions that contribute to the attraction or participation in extremist violence and anti-social behaviours.

To support these objectives, the Government's Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce commissioned the Human Security and Disasters Research Program at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to examine those conditions that could lead to the attraction to or participation in violent extremism. This research examined these conditions in relation to media, gender, and particular organisations which contribute to polarisation, exclusivism and violent extremism in Victoria.

The research applied a theoretical and multi-method approach to examine the ways in which these organisations use broadcast and online media systems to pursue their political and cultural objectives. Far-right, anti-diversity organisations emerged as a significant contributor to the social conditions and spiral of antagonisms which are threatening social cohesion in Victoria.

It was significant that these organisations express their 'experience' and 'perspectives' of social cohesion through online and broadcast media systems as they seek to influence broader public opinion and government policy.

### **2.0 Background to the Problem**

## **2.1 Global Geopolitics and Domestic Insecurity**

Australia is often characterized as a successful migrant, multicultural society (Hassan and Martin, 2015; Markus, 2015, 2016). Global geo-political conditions linked to the Middle East are placing increasing strain on social cohesion in Australia and in Victoria specifically (Essential, 2016; Grossman et al, 2016; IPSOS, 2016; also Koehler 2016). As we examined in this study, this strain on social cohesion is not simply a matter of actual threat—it is an effect of the ways in which Australian governments, media, social groups and citizens perceive, respond to, and experience these threats to security.

## **2.2 Media**

Significantly, the vast majority of Australians have no direct experience of the physical harm that militant groups like IS perpetrate. However, the experiences and perception of risk are largely formed through the citizens' engagement with online and broadcast media systems (Lewis, 2005, 2008, 2011; Lewis and Lewis, 2014). The 'information' that media presents as 'discourse', however is not a precise and truthful re-presentation of reality. Rather, the information that is carried and formed through media is filtered through complex human psychological, emotional and cultural processes. Thus, media discourses form various truths, untruths, narratives, sensibilities, images and imaginings of the world.

The interaction between online and broadcast media systems adds further complexity, creating an 'echo chamber' in which discourses can be amplified as they are broadly disseminated.

Nevertheless, as a primary cultural and communication tool in modern societies, media are critical to the functioning of deliberative and participative democracy—and hence to the successful functioning of society itself, culture and social cohesion.

### **2.3 Violent Extremism and Spiralling Antagonisms**

Broadcast and online media systems provide significant communicative and cultural space for the expression of citizens' experience and perceptions of threat (Lewis, 2005, 2011, 2013, 2016; Cameron, 2014; Stevens and Vaughan-Williams, 2016). As an expressive space, therefore, media enable citizens to contribute to polemical discussions which manifest as antagonism. While these antagonisms may be constrained within the zone of deliberative and participative democracy, they may lead to more extreme antagonisms which manifest in the extremes of hate, exclusivism and violence.

Fortified through the current conditions of geopolitical insecurity and risk, these extreme antagonisms are motivating various groups and their political and cultural objectives. Many of these groups pursue these objectives through actual violence and militant strategies. Such groups include religious militants and members of the far-left and far-right.

This research case studies focused on the far-right, and the expression of its anti-diversity, anti-Muslim perspectives in online and broadcast media systems. The case studies examined the far-right in relation to the pro-diversity far-left, and those social groups it seeks to exclude (Muslims). The research paid particular attention to the issue of gender as a significant dimension of the far-right, anti-diversity demeanour, media strategy and cultural-political objectives.

### **2.4 Defining the Far-Right in Australia**

There have been numerous attempts to define the far-right, along with their economic, cultural and political ideology and objectives (Lewis, 2013; Lazaridis et al, 2016; Kontig, et al; 2016; Loehler, 2016, Frank, 2016; Dean et al, 2016).

Different far-right groups hold varying views on sexual diversity, economic protectionism, Christianity, ethnicity, migration and democracy (see Appendix One). A number of commentators refer to the far-right, anti-diversity groups as the New Far-Right (NFR) because of its strong hostility to pluralism and 'non-western' cultures (Polakow-Suransky, 2017). We discuss this approach in Appendix One.

This research project, however, identified several common characteristics and beliefs. These include the following—

- A nostalgic, ultra-nationalism in which Australia is imagined as heroic, virtuous and unified. ‘True Australians’ are characterised by shared values and cultural characteristics a form of social cohesion—which is threatened by dangerous and resistant outsiders;
- A stereotyping and deep antipathy toward Islam, Muslims and Muslim cultures;
- A belief that all migrant groups, if they are to be admitted at all, should shed their old cultural practices and beliefs, and become assimilated into a unitary Australian culture;
- A strong sense of ‘heroic masculinity’ which subscribes to traditional, (especially heterosexual) models of gender distinction (Kontig et al, 2016). This heroic masculinity conceives of women (and ‘femininity’) as capable but vulnerable, needing protection from the insidious, immoral and repressive violence of alien cultures, especially Islam;
- A support for strong statehood, government and leadership, particularly in terms of national security and defence;
- A willingness to support violence and militant activities in defence of nation and national culture;
- A willingness to defend the state against poor government, including democratically elected governments whose policies and actions threaten the integrity of nation;
- A sense of representing the ‘common person’, especially the working person who has been the victim of government policies which threaten livelihoods, especially through the aegis of globalisation, environmental policies, migration and trade;
- A general disdain for progressive people and ideas, including those that support multiculturalism, Islam, environmentalism, public broadcasting, human rights and animal rights.



## **2.5 Gender**

Gender, and specifically ‘masculinity’, have been identified as central feature of the media and public’s engagement with extremist violence. Numerous studies have focused on the role of masculinity in Islamist terrorism and other forms of extremist militancy (Bouachnne, 2015; Roose, 2015; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Lewis, 2013). A number of these studies have linked patriarchal violence with processes of Islamic radicalisation.

Our research, however, has identified a form of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence (HSMV) as a common thread in various forms of violent extremism—including far-right extremism (see Appendix One and Two). HSMV is characterized by a form of masculinity which seeks to ‘save’ the world, culture, nation, or the purity of religion through the exercise of violence and exclusivism. As this research identified, these far-right, anti-diversity groups are contributing significantly to the spiral of social antagonisms that threaten cohesion in Victoria. Gender and masculinity represent an important dimension of the far-right’s cultural and political objectives (discussed in detail in Appendix One and Two).

## **2.6 The Problem**

The problem that was identified by this research project refers to the role of media and gender in extremist violence which threatens social cohesion, diversity and community resilience in Victoria.

## **3.0 Key Research Questions**

1. How have recent strains on social cohesion evolved across global and local security conditions, and how have these strains been expressed through community antagonisms and media systems?

2. How in particular are far-right, anti-diversity organisations contributing to these antagonisms and their expression in media?
3. How are issues of gender implicated in these antagonisms, particularly through the political and cultural objectives of the far-right and their expression in media?
4. How are these antagonisms and media discourses impacting on social cohesion and democratic processes in Victoria?
5. What are the further considerations for resolving these problems and enhancing social cohesion in Victoria?

#### **4.0 Methods**

Our overarching research method is described as Critical Discourse Analysis. Under this general frame, we used multi-method strategies, including—

1. **Theoretical framework.** The development of a theoretical framework which enabled researchers to examine media, gender and extremist violence. This theoretical-conceptual framework was designed specifically for the study of extremist violence in Victoria in ways that did not—a) create a causal connect between Islam and extremism; b) alienate people of Muslim faith; and c) compromise multiculturalism, community resilience and social cohesion.
2. **Content analysis.** Media ‘content analysis’ was used to count, measure and examine both broadcast and online news reporting,

news commentary and public conversations through Twitter. Content analysis was used in conjunction with some automated data scraping. Twitter data was downloaded through the API system. Google Trend data was also analysed.

3. **Textual analysis.** Media ‘purposive textual analysis’ was used to conduct ‘close reading’ of news reporting, news commentary, examples of social media sites such as Facebook, and specific Tweet samples.
4. **Case Studies.** The above methods were deployed around two case studies: the May 26, 2016, Coburg Riots; and the appearance on July 18, 2016, of Pauline Hanson on the ABC’s *Q&A* program. These two case studies were chosen because they illustrate—
  - a. The ways in which media may function to support or undermine the workings of deliberative and participative democracy, and hence social cohesion in Victoria;
  - b. The current conditions of antagonism, and especially the ways in which far-right groups are seeking to influence democracy, public opinion and government ;
  - c. The ways in which gender is being mobilized in current discussions and antagonisms around social cohesion;
  - d. The illustrate the ways in which the interaction between online and broadcast media discourses create a cultural and political echo chamber which is affecting cohesion and resilience.

## **5.0 Conclusions**

These conclusions are linked directly to the project’s key research questions (Section 3 of Executive Summary)

*Key Question 1:* How have recent strains on social cohesion evolved across global and local security conditions, and how have these strains been expressed through community antagonisms and media systems?

1. Global and local security conditions associated with Islamic State have placed significant strain on democratic processes and social cohesion in Australia and Victoria.
2. Government, media and public scrutiny of Muslim communities has placed increasing strains on social cohesion.
3. The value of government-sponsored deradicalisation programs within the Countering Violent Extremism strategies has not been fully evaluated. They may, in fact, be counter-productive, contributing to increased public and media scrutiny of Muslim communities. These programs may also augment far-right, anti-diversity, anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The online and broadcast media analyses conducted in this research project identified a high level of distress among Muslim communities in Victoria and Australia. Many of the websites and media discourses that were generated by Muslim Australians were angered, distressed and alienated by the high level of scrutiny and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

4. Professional and broadcast media subscribe to their own organisational and political agenda, protocols and news values. While constrained by various regulations and codes of practice, professional broadcast media nevertheless seek out those violent, conflict-based or controversial personalities that will attract audiences and market value. In the specific analyses we conducted, broadcast media emphasised polemics, action and conflicts, as is common to news values. Extremist groups—militant, far-right and far-left—seek to exploit these news values, creating events which will stimulate broadcast and online media activity and hence influence government and publics.
5. Significant anxieties and antagonisms have, thus, been generated around—

- a. Electoral processes with the election of anti-diversity and anti-Islam politicians;
- b. Online and broadcast media activity which is generated around contentious issues associated with diversity, immigration, refugees and Islam; and
- c. The interaction between media and propagated events involving violent street clashes between pro-and anti-diversity activists.

*Key Question 2:* How in particular are far-right, anti-diversity organisations contributing to these antagonisms and their expression in media?

- 6. Violent extremism is exercised in acts of physical and psychological harm. However, it is also exercised through the exclusivism and authoritarianism that some groups and citizens express through the media. All of these contending groups, the far-right, far-left and militant organizations such as IS affiliates, strategically deploy this interaction between media and extremist violence to achieve their political and cultural objectives.
- 7. Each of these groups uses violence to promote its specific version of an exclusivist form of 'social cohesion'. For far-right groups, in particular, social cohesion means monadic culture and nation. These monadic conceptions of nation and culture are generally connected to equally antagonistic views about government and constraints on freedom—including freedom of speech and the rights of the nation and its people to exclude those whom it regards as 'dangerous others'. The far-right insists that governments allow the interests of minority ethnic and religious groups to override the interests of the majority. On a broader scale, far-right groups insist, equally, that Australia's national interests are subjugated by international treaties, especially over human rights, environmental protection, migration, refugees and trade (cf. Mark, 2015).

8. The far-right is also adept at using the echo chamber of broadcast and online media systems. Online media are used to organize and promote particular cultural and political objectives. Groups promote themselves through 'events' which are likely to involve aggressive self-presentation, violent clashes, and broadcast media coverage. It is this interaction between events, identity promotion and online-broadcast media activity which has the most powerful political and social resonance.
9. There are significant public and scholarly disagreements about the influence of the far-right on democracy, public opinion and on social cohesion as defined by the Federal and Victorian governments in Australia. The increasing electoral successes of populist, anti-diversity politicians and parties in Western nations suggests a general rise in far-right influence.
10. The far-right has emerged as a significant threat to authorised social cohesion. However, much of the literature on the far-right is highly critical of their views and actions. Less research has focused on the broader social, economic and cultural issues behind these attitudes, especially as they relate to the impact of globalization (see Frank, 2016; Pilger, 2017). There has also been little significant research into the relationship between far-right politics and perceived or actual failings of social and economic policy in Victoria and Australia. We know very little about the impact of these policies on people on the lower socio-economic echelons and the appeal of far-right political idealism. Little research has been directed toward a better understanding of these policies and their connection to issues of speech freedom, human rights, participative democracy, the composition and role of nation, and the ways in which principles of equity, equality and opportunity within a fundamentally hierarchical economic and social order.

11. This research project's analysis of Twitter suggests that the far-right movement in Australia has strong international links (cf Wilson, 2016).

*Key Question 3:* How are issues of gender implicated in these antagonisms, particularly through the political and cultural objectives of the far-right and their expression in media?

12. Gender is especially significant to violent extremism, and to the ways in which these spiralling antagonisms are being played out through the media and public spheres. In particular, the far-right—like other extremists—invoke a form of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence in defence of nation, culture and the citizenry. This dimension of far-right politics is inscribed into various forms of political and cultural conservatism and the ways in which violence is justified and perpetrated. Gender, and women in particular, represent a critical cultural and political battlefield for both pro and anti-diversity groups in Victoria and Australia (see Appendix Two). In fact, both pro- and anti- diversity groups claim to represent the interests of women though their own respective versions of nation and social cohesion. This includes contentions over who is most responsible for violence against women in Australia.
13. Pauline Hanson represents the pinnacle of righteous femininity for many far-right groups. As the case studies in this research project demonstrated, Hanson is both a heroine and victim of cultural and political slurs. Like nation, Hanson needs the support and protection of HSMV.
14. A number of women are active supporters of far-right cultural and political objectives, including various forms of violent exclusivism. However, women are less visible in the actual physical violence, such as street clashes. This is partly due to the ways in which 'femininity' is

conceived and exercised through the far-right's cultural agenda (see Appendix One). These women include high-profile supporters such as Sonia Kruger, prominent politicians such as Pauline Hanson and Rosalie Crestani (Casey Council), and activists such as the members of Women for Aryan Unity.

15. The far-right deploys their own gender distinctions—masculinity and femininity—in conflict events which are designed to attract media attention. They also promote these distinctions into the weave of nationalism and anti-diversity through online media systems. The websites and Twitter activity examined in the Appendices illustrate how far-right groups invoke gender and HSMV to justify their own violence against the supposed gender violence of Islam. Website discourses and tweets that are generated around the contentious events we examined make frequent reference to Muslims' oppression of and violence toward women. The far-right uses this putative violence against women to universally condemn Islam in Australia. According to one far-right Twitter user— 'According to Islam, rape is a human right #RespectDiversity #IslamIsTheProblem #qanda'

*Key Question 4:* How are these antagonisms and media discourses impacting on social cohesion and democratic processes in Victoria?

16. The ideals of social cohesion and diversity are under threat in Victoria, not only by far-right, anti-diversity groups, but across various communities. The prominence of far-right politicians within conventional electoral democratic processes epitomizes deeper misgivings and anxieties associated with security and crime.
17. Despite government's official and authorised usage, 'Social Cohesion' is a highly contested term in public conceptions and debates. Many of Victoria's diverse political and community groups have extremely different conceptions of 'social cohesion'.



- Far-right groups identify social cohesion with monadic and unitary (Western- ‘authentic Australian’) culture, nation and nationalism. This perspective is directly at odds with the Victorian Government’s authorised perspective;
- Many pro-diversity groups view social cohesion as a platform for pursuing political values and ideologies associated with refugees, immigration and multiculturalism;
- Some far-left groups consider their own version of ‘social cohesion’ to be a platform for challenging state authority and economic liberalism;
- Some migrant-ethnic groups regard ‘social cohesion’ as a state imposed code for Anglo-Western culture’s oppression of true diversity and the autonomy of minority cultures and religions (see Appendix One) .

18. The issue of violence remains the critical tipping point for social cohesion and hence democratic process in Victoria. While antagonisms such as those identified by this research are a feature of most complex modern societies, we conclude that the real threats to democracy and social cohesion become critical when they involve acts of harm—physical, psychological and cultural. That is, when political and cultural differences become expressed in violence, then democratic societies are at greatest risk. It is really this issue of violence which confounds many of the discussions on extremism, security, cohesion, democracy and culture.

19. The media’s role in these forms of violence remains under-researched, particularly in terms of—

- The interaction between broadcast and online media and the ways in which users and audiences construct ‘knowledge’;
- The ways in which violence—including and especially ‘extremist violence’ as we define it in this report— is legitimated through media discourses and systems (cf. Lewis, 2005);

- The ways in which gender is mobilized through media systems, particularly in terms of masculinities and specifically HSMV, including domestic violence.

## **6.0 Further Considerations**

1. Violence is at the core of the problems we have identified. Governments necessarily manage violence within the criminal code and through separate departmental responsibilities. Our findings, however, regard violence as a fundamental core of anti-social values and cultural codes. The research project's focus on Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence connects extremist violence to gender, domestic, youth and criminal violence. It would be valuable, therefore, for government to lead a broader public discussion and interrogation of the problem of violence itself. This could take place in a broad cross-departmental forum. Such a forum could focus on the ways in which violence is shaped and inculcated through cultural sub-groups and values. It could focus on education and prevention. Rather than singling out particular ethnic or religious communities, the forum could examine violence in terms of the values and practices which justify or even impel harm to others.

This approach could consider the cultural, political, economic and social underpinnings of violence and its legitimization in domestic, criminal and political contexts.

Furthermore, this approach could encourage a greater sense of collective and community responsibility for human security. With a particular focus on education and the espousal of democratic values—including diversity—this approach could discuss and analyse 'extremism' within a broader framework of social belonging and 'communalism'. Such an approach might usefully debate concepts like 'cohesion' and its relationship to the complexities of social competition and hierarchy.

An open discussion of these issues and the ways in which violence functions in social settings might facilitate a broader interrogation and understanding of the pathways that lead to acts of violence—including gendered, political and socially constituted extremist violence.

2. As we noted, the media echo chamber enables the amplification of ideas, perspectives, values and knowledge. Media do not determine cultural and social effects, but they exert influence and allow the possibility for particular perspectives to become normative. This is a particular issue for the social antagonisms and Islamophobia examined in this research.

However, for both practical and cultural reasons, we *do not* recommend greater constraints on broadcast or online media.

Moreover, it seems almost impossible to constrain online media systems. Efforts by Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Google to manage extremist use of their systems have proven largely ineffectual (Klausen, 2015; Quinn, 2016; Lewis and Lewis, 2017). Rather, we would recommend that media are considered in terms of the forums suggested above.

It is important, in our view, for government to support a robust media in which issues of speech freedom, diversity and cohesion are given full voice with as much ‘equality of access’ as possible. For the Victorian Government this may mean direct interventions into the language wars of violence and exclusivism. That is, Government could consider developing an integrated, multi-level media strategy to generate community discussions around the problem of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence in Victoria.

We would also suggest a careful review and evaluation of CVE counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programs—particularly those involving online media. The two most common strategies are—1. Re-

directing 'suspicious' Google searches to counter-radicalisation websites, 2. Major social media systems (eg Twitter, YouTube) surveil and remove extremist websites and accounts. Neither of these approaches, however, has proven effective, and may in fact be counter-productive, sending searchers into the Dark Web, or toward real-life criminal groups and their more direct approbations of violence.

More broadly, the deradicalisation framework adds further to the public anxiety about Muslims and Islam (see Appendix One). As we found in our research, deradicalisation programs create anxiety across Muslim communities in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia and the UK. Such programs also feed into far-right objectives and media strategies (cf. Patel, 2016).

3. Gender is a key component of these issues relating to extremist violence in Victoria. As we argued in this report, Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence is a common thread in extremist forms of political violence. It is an ideology which is inscribed into various belief systems, including those that appear to be in direct contention with one another. For far-right groups this is expressed as a form of violent exclusivism and defence of nation. This form of gendered social violence would therefore be a valuable discussion topic for the forum we propose above. We would also suggest that the sort of heroic violence that is frequently exalted in a broad range of cultural narratives—including popular culture in the west—be examined and challenged through new forms of gender and media education. This would sit within a broader interrogation of the politics of gender-based violence.
4. In terms of further research, we would suggest an examination of the broader social causes of violence and its endorsement and deployment by specific social and cultural groups. However, rather than emphasising the groups who exercise violence, we would suggest, as noted above, that

researchers should examine the pathways, practices, modes of thinking and psycho-cultural complexities which legitimize and lead to violence.

5. The findings in this report suggest a need for further research into the relationship between gender, political extremism and violence. This study has shown that Heroic and Salvational Masculinity is deeply inscribed in extremist values, objectives and strategies. However, this connection between violent extremism and gender requires much deeper investigation, particularly as it is deployed by female and male members of extremist groups and representative political parties like One Nation. The differences between sex-based groups like Women for Aryan Unity also remains under-examined.
6. This report suggests further research into the concept of 'social cohesion' and the ways in which these various groups consider the relationship between cohesion, diversity, 'speech freedom' and democracy. As a range of Western elections are demonstrating, there is an increasing electoral disposition toward a far-right populism which threatens diversity, the politics of human rights and democratic progressivism.
7. We would suggest research, more broadly, into far-right groups and their perspectives on social cohesion, democracy and violence. This research should be designed around—
  - The ways in which these groups deploy media, including their use of broadcast and online media for message dissemination and social disruption;
  - Qualitative interview research to explore their attitudes and perspectives. This research would provide in-depth insights into their 'grievances' and avoid presumptuous condemnations;
  - Further media and interview research to better understand the spiralling antagonisms which are affecting all Victorians. This is especially important for Muslim communities who are

the subjects of high level surveillance, government authorised deradicalisation programs, far-right rhetoric and broad-based public and media scrutiny;

- Further research into far-right global networks, and their impact and influence on democracy, politicians, governments and publics in Victoria and across the world.

## **FULL REPORT**

### **SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH**

#### **1.0 Research Questions**

1. How have recent strains on social cohesion evolved across global and local security conditions, and how have these strains been expressed through community antagonisms and media systems?
2. How in particular are far-right, anti-diversity organisations contributing to these antagonisms and their expression in media?
3. How are issues of gender implicated in these antagonisms, particularly through the political and cultural objectives of the far-right and their expression in media?
4. How are these antagonisms and media discourses impacting on social cohesion and democratic processes in Victoria?
5. What are the further considerations for resolving these problems and enhancing social cohesion in Victoria?

#### **2.0 The Cultural and Social Context to the Research**

##### **2.1 Global Geopolitics**

The military and territorial successes of Islamic State in Iraq and Syrian through 2011-2014 had a broad and far-reaching impact on global geopolitics. Australia became directly involved in warfare in these regions, extending earlier Australian military activities in the Middle East (Lewis, 2016; Chilcot, 2016).

##### **2.2 Domestic Insecurity**

Australia generally, and Victoria in particular, have experienced an increased threat of 'extremist violence' since the emergence of Islamic State and Australia's participation in warfare against this group. Initially, this threat was identified by Australian and other western governments in terms of the threat posed by IS affiliates and supporters. This threat had three dimensions—

1. IS-inspired attacks within Australia;
2. Recruitment of IS fighters, supporters and 'brides' to the war in Iraq and Syria;
3. Financial and propaganda support for IS.

### 2.3 Broader effects of global geopolitical conditions

The confluence of global and domestic conditions of insecurity stimulated—

1. Support for IS by a small minority of Australians who use Islam to pursue criminal, political and cultural objectives. This support has been expressed in active military service in the Middle East, as well as planned and prosecuted militant attacks within Australia, including Victoria;
2. In order to neutralize threat, Australian governments invested in enhanced policing, intelligence, surveillance and other security service strategies (Barker, 2016).
3. These strategies were augmented through Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs—the cornerstone of which became the 'de-radicalisation' of Australian Muslims (Bell, 2015; Zeiger and Aly, 2015).
4. Significant increases in online and broadcast media reporting, discussion and representation of violent extremism (Ferguson, 2016);
5. Profound public anxiety about the nature and significance of the threat posed by Islamic State affiliates in Australia (Hassan and Martin, 2015);



6. The amplification of these anxieties as increased suspicion, exclusivism and aggression toward members of Australia's Muslim communities, particularly by far-right, anti-diversity political organisations (Grossman, 2016; Dean et al, 2016).

## 2.4 Far-Right and Anti-Diversity Violent Extremism

### 2.4.1 Extremist Violence and Islamist militants

At its worst, the increased government, public and media scrutiny of Muslim communities and Islam more generally has evolved as a form of 'cultural racism' and Islamophobia (Gole, 2011; Hassan and Martin, 2015; Grossman, 2016; Koehler, 2016: esp. 88). Events like the 9/11 attacks on New York, the 2002/5 Bali Bombings and 2005 London Underground attacks incited various forms of anti-Islamic sentiment in Australia.

### 2.4.2 Islamist militantism and Far-Right Extremism

More recently, the rise of Islamic State and related militant attacks in Western nations have been invoked by groups like Reclaim Australia, Untied Patriots Front and One Nation to justify their anti-diversity, anti-immigration and anti-Islam political and cultural objectives (Ayubi, 2015; Dean et al, 2016).

Far-right organisations have seen these events as evidence of Islam's fundamental deficiencies, constituting an essential difference between Muslim and Western values (UPF, 2016; Hanson, 2016; Dean et al, 2016).

These far-right groups are contributing to a broad-based cultural sentiment which opposes Victoria's model of social cohesion based on diversity, multiculturalism and community resilience (Grossman, 2016; Dean et al, 2016).

### 2.4.3 Democracy, Government and the Far-Right

The rise of far-right, anti-diversity groups across the developed world, including Australia, has alerted governments, public commentators and academics to the serious dangers posed by exclusivist and ultra-nationalist forms of extremist violence (Lewis, 2013; 2015a, 2015b).

Governments in the West—including Australia— are coming to realise that the threat of ‘violent extremism’ is being perpetrated by far-right organisations, as well as affiliates and supporters of Islamic State. These far-right groups invoke authoritarian ideology to define their specific version of national and cultural cohesion. Violence is justified in terms of the protection and salvation of nation and cultural purity (Lewis, 2013; Hassan and Martin, 2015; Dean et al, 2016).

### **3.0 The Problem**

#### **3.1 Spiralling Antagonisms**

Significant disagreements have emerged over social cohesion in Australia and in Victoria, in particular. Marshalling ongoing research into social cohesion in Australia, Andrew Markus (2015), concedes that militant attacks in Western states have strained social cohesion and public attitudes to diversity. However, Markus insists that Australia remains a ‘highly cohesive’ society by international standards. An Essential survey conducted in 2016, on the other hand, claims that nearly half of all Australians oppose Muslim immigration (Essential, 2016; also a response by Markus, 2016). This poll was followed in 2017 by a Fairfax IPSOS Poll which claimed that around 60% of Australians shared the political disaffections which contributed to Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 US election (IPSOS, 2017).

##### **3.1.1 The 2016 Federal Election and the Far-Right**

Other research points to an increasing level of Islamophobia in Australia (e.g. Hassan, and Martin, 2015). The election of Pauline Hanson and other One Nation Senators in the 2016 Federal Election confirms a swing toward anti-diversity in Australia. While electoral support for One Nation is relatively low in Victoria (1.81%), in Queensland the party won around 9% of Senate votes (Murray, 2016; Austpol, 2016).

What is clear, therefore, is that the social antagonisms relating to global geopolitical conditions, and their transposition as domestic insecurities, are posing a significant threat to social cohesion. This threat draws together a

complex interaction of actual and perceived conditions of insecurity within an equally complex set of political and cultural antagonisms. These antagonisms have their most dangerous expression in various forms of exclusivism and extremist violence.

## 3.2 The Role of Media

### 3.2.1 The Media and the Rise of the Far-Right

According to Michele Grossman et al (2016) and other researchers, the media are especially culpable in regard to these antagonisms. Grossman et al argue that the media have devoted a disproportionate level of attention, for example, to far-right groups and their perspectives. Other researchers argue that the media's excessive focus on these far-right groups dignifies anti-diversity perspectives, exalting them as 'normative'. That is, these far-right, anti-diversity perspectives become so familiar to the public that they gain social credibility and are accepted as reasonable, mainstream and even normal (Smith, 2013; Allaq, 2016; Dean et al, 2016).

In their review of programs and research into social cohesion, Grossman et al (2016: esp. 27-28) exhorted researchers to address the ways in which media contribute to social antagonisms and threats to social cohesion.

### 3.2.2 This Report and Media Research

In taking up this challenge, this research project, *Media, Gender and Extremist Violence in Victoria*, has focused on—

1. The ways in which different groups express their 'experience' and 'perspectives' of security conditions and related antagonisms, specifically as they are reported and represented through online and broadcast media systems.

The research examined the media discourses which are generated by 'groups' such as professional journalists, political organisations, and members of nominated communities. For the purposes of this research, it was the 'discourses' that were of primary interest. These discourses

were analysed in terms of the functioning of media and their role in democratic processes and deliberations which support (or threaten) social cohesion in Victoria.

2. The ways in which these groups' experiences and perspectives are affecting democratic processes and social cohesion in Victoria.
3. This focus has led inevitably to an investigation of the media discourses which are being generated by far-right organisations that promote a distinctive, anti-diversity ideology.

While also examining far-left forms of extremist violence, the research was particularly interested in the proposition that far-right groups are using the media to pursue cultural and political objectives that threaten democracy and social cohesion in Victoria. Through this analysis, we also reflected upon the idea that the far-right is attracting a disproportionate level of media attention, amplifying their capacity to affect democratic processes and social cohesion.

4. Pathways and possibilities which may contribute to the values espoused within the social cohesion framework.

### 3.3 Limitations of Other Approaches to Media-based Research

The approach adopted by this study seeks to overcome the limitations of other recent media research into conditions of insecurity. These other studies tend to— a) focus on Islamic State propaganda and especially the use of online systems (Gartenstein-Ross et al, 2016); and b) support counter- narratives which are shaped around a CVE de-radicalisation framework (Silverman et al, 2016).

#### 3.3.1 Media and De-radicalisation Strategies

There is a significant limitation of these forms of media research, particularly in relation to the stated objectives of the Victorian Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities and its endorsement of diversity, multiculturalism and community resilience. By focusing on the threats posed by Islamic State and the radicalisation of especially young, western Muslims, these forms of research risk the restoration of dominant cultural narratives and stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. Indeed, the whole CVE/de-radicalisation contingency is underscored by the same risks.

Until recently, in fact, government interventions and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs have focused their attention on Muslim communities. These CVE/de-radicalisation programs were designed to complement policing, intelligence and various surveillance strategies. However, de-radicalisation interventions have often sought to co-opt Muslim communities themselves. These forms of co-option have both explicitly (including by Prime Minister and senior Federal Ministers) and implicitly blamed Muslim communities for the criminal activities of militant extremists who invoke Islam as justification for their violence. The implied blame can be forged through claims that the Muslim community 'isn't doing enough' to detect and thwart the terrorists in their midst (Aly, 2012; Hoque, 2015; Lewis, 2015a, 2015b; Anderson, 2016).

### 3.3.2 Criticisms of De-radicalisation CVE Programs

In this light, it is reasonable to ask questions about CVE programs and the ways which have been promoted through government policy and interventions and the media. It is reasonable to ask, further, whether these programs and their dissemination through media, community and the research sector have contributed to negative perceptions of Muslims and Islam more generally—and whether these negative perceptions haven't played into to far-right, anti-diversity activism. Answers to these questions provide a foundation for the approach which the current research project has adopted, particularly as it seeks to contribute to government policies around violent extremism and its impact on social cohesion in Victoria (Hoque, 2015; Kundnani, 2015; Williams, 2016; Ferguson, 2016). Whether unwittingly or by intent, these programs

fortify broader public suspicions of Muslims and Islam because they often contribute to—

- The stereotyping of diverse Muslim communities and individuals;
- A cultural ‘narrative’ which links Muslim people and Islam to criminal militants who use Islam to promote their political interests;
- A sense of alienation for particular Muslim communities and individuals who feel as though non-Muslims Australians regard them as ‘other’ and ‘dangerous’ (Shanahan, 2014; Hassan and Martin, 2015; Hoque, 2015; Kundnani, 2015).

It is precisely these forms of stereotyping and experiences of alienation which far-right, anti-diversity groups seek to exploit in pursuit of their political and cultural objectives. It is also clear that this form of stereotyping and social scrutiny might well be counter-productive, providing a moral and political justification for that criminal violence which Islamic State and other militant groups exhort (Shanahan, 2015; Hoque, 2015; Nolan, 2016).

### 3.3.3 British Government Review of *CVE-Prevent* Program

Partly in response to these criticisms, the British Government reviewed its Prevent Strategy established in 2011. In his written submission to the Home Affairs Select Committee into Terrorism Prevention, an independent reviewer of government legislation, David Anderson QC (2016), expressed a lack of confidence in the Prevent Strategy. Quoting Ruth Lister, Anderson argued that the Prevent strategy was failing because it—

‘... reinforces an us and them view of the world, divides communities, and sows mistrust of Muslims’... [Lister] called on the Government ‘to end its ineffective Prevent policy and rather adopt an approach that is based on dialogue and openness’ (Anderson, 2016).

Anderson’s criticisms, however, appear to have been ignored by the British Home Office (Travis, 2016; Patel, 2016). Indeed, rather than re-direct or reform the Prevent program, the UK government appears determined to fortify its de-radicalisation and securitization strategies through a new Counter-terrorism and Safeguarding Bill (2017). This new Bill establishes sanctions for individuals

holding dogmatic and ‘extremist’ views—whether or not there is any violent intention or action involved (Patel, 2017).

Strategic analyst, Sofia Patel (2017), points out that the security and social effectiveness of the Prevent program has never been properly evaluated. For many members of the Muslim community, Patel argues, Prevent is ‘simply covert government agenda-pushing, which has a counter productive effect’. Alan Travis (2017) exemplifies this negative impact in the 400 British Muslims under the age of 10 who have been referred to police, mostly by teachers who have overheard religious chatter or observed their students’ war play and mimicry mimicry. Travis also points out that nearly 80% of all cases of suspected radicalisation are investigated. Far-right politicians and media invoke such referrals and their implied dangers in order to stimulate public interest and anxiety.

Parallel research conducted by the authors of this report indicates that Victoria Police have their own concerns about the de-radicalisation programs, particularly community engagement strategies.

### 3.3.4 Criticisms by Muslim Communities of CVE

Australia’s CVE programs parallel those in Britain and elsewhere, both through a focus on securitization and community-based de-radicalisation programs (Shanahan, 2014; Patel, 2017). While promoting themselves as ‘world’s best practice’ with an emphasis on ‘inclusiveness’, ‘engagement’ and ‘community resilience’ (Keenan, 2015; A-G, 2017), Australia’s CVE strategies remain besieged by similar problems as those in the UK.

The grievance that is often expressed by Muslim communities is that the government, media and public scrutiny to which they are continually subjected simply restores reductive stereotypes which foster an ‘us’ and ‘them’ cultural narrative (Shanahan, 2014; Hoque, 2015; Kundnani, 2015; Hassan and Martin, 2015; Ferguson, 2016; Patel, 2017). Our research partner, the Islamic Council of Victoria, has also expressed these concerns. On endorsing our research project,

the ICV noted that their constituents—Muslim communities and individuals—were ‘over-researched’ and frustrated by the continued public and media sentiments which link extremist violence to Islam. In framing this research project, therefore, we have explored alternative narratives that deviate from the de-radicalisation discourses and dimensions of CVE.

According to the ICV, this alignment of media and government securitization and de-radicalization narratives contributes to public anxieties about Islam, which in turn feeds the political rhetoric of right-wing, anti-diversity groups.

## **4.0 Violent Extremism and Issues of Gender**

### **4.1 Australian Government’s definition of Violent Extremism**

The Australian Government defines ‘violent extremism’ in the following terms—

Violent extremism describes the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence and some forms of communal violence. All forms of violent extremism ... *seek change through fear and intimidation rather than positive and democratic processes.* (A-G, 2017: 1 Emphasis added)

While emphasising physical violence and terrorism, this definition nevertheless acknowledges that violent extremism may involve a ‘belief’ in violence as well as its physical exercise. It is sufficient, in this sense, for the violence to be a condition of ‘belief’ and ‘threat’, as much as a matter of action.

### **4.2 Academic Definitions of Violent Extremism**

This definition accords with significant academic literature and theorisations which propose that violence can be exercised through discourse, institutions and practices of exclusivism (Arendt, 1970; Žižek, 2009; Lewis and Lewis, 2014; Lewis, 2016; Malešević, 2016). That is, the ‘threat’ of violence can be exercised



through interpersonal relations, speech and actions; but it can also be exercised through formalised institutional processes and structures (Galtung, 1990; Zizek, 2009; Lewis, 2016). These processes denigrate or deny the rights and dignity of individuals and particular classes of individuals (based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality and so on).

#### 4.3 Gender and Violent Extremism-Cultural Dimensions

While issues of ethnicity, religion, culture and migration have been central to the current discussions on extremist violence in Victoria, less attention has been paid to matters of gender. Studies on gender and extremist violence have often focused on the role of masculinity and patriarchy in Islam (Bouachnne, 2015; Roose, 2015; Abu-Lughod, 2015). The current research project focused on gender not as an adjunct to violent extremism, but as a central feature of the antagonisms which promulgate extremism and violence. Our research has demonstrated that issues of gender are implicated in aggressive forms of political expression. An heroic and violent masculinity is often invoked to justify this aggression and the pursuit of cultural and political objectives.

As we will outline below in the conceptual framework, gender is very strongly invoked by the IS militant forms of exclusivism and violence. Gender is also mobilized by far-right, anti-diversity groups and their approach to culture, cultural racism and cultural exclusivism. Specifically, we identified a form of 'Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence' as a central feature, theme and 'motif' in extremist violence and its expression through broadcast and online media systems. (The term 'motif' refers to a frequently repeated image forming a pattern which distinguishes specific ideas and ideologies).

The next section of this report describes the conceptual framework and methodology utilized in this research.

## SECTION TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

### 5.0 Methodology

This research project has three distinct but mutually informing components—

1. **Theoretical framework.** The development of an original theoretical-conceptual framework enabled researchers to overcome the limitations of current approaches to media, gender and extremist violence. This theoretical-conceptual framework was designed specifically for the study of extremist violence in Victoria in ways that did not—a) create a causal connect between Islam and extremism; b) alienate people of Muslim faith; and c) compromise multiculturalism, community resilience and social cohesion.
2. **Case studies.** The theoretical framework was applied to two critical events. The research analysed these events as they were represented in the media as discourse. The case studies highlighted the ways in which particular groups expressed their experiences and perspectives of security conditions and related social antagonisms. The research sought to elucidate these experiences and perspectives as they threaten social cohesion in Victoria. The research highlighted the role of gender-HSMV in these experiences and perspectives.

These case studies applied a set of methods which were defined collectively as Critical Discourse Analysis.

3. Using the theoretical framework and empirical findings, the research offers specific **considerations** for policy, program development and further research.

### 5.1 Conceptual Framework

### 5.1.1 Media and Extremist Violence

The research interrogated the ways in which media can be studied and understood in the context of violent extremism and social cohesion in Victoria. Deriving from critical media and cultural studies (Lewis, 2005, 2008; Lewis and Lewis, 2014), this research began with the following assumptions—

1. Broadcast and online media overlap and are mutually informing;
2. Broadcast and online media interact with audiences and users in complex ways to form an ‘echo chamber’ in which knowledge is formed and shared by given social groups;
3. Broadcast and online media systems represent a primary cultural agency, enabling individuals and groups in a society to communicate with one another; these interactions contribute to the formation of collective modes of thinking and ‘cultural consciousness’;
4. Different groups and organisations in a society have unequal access to the media, especially broadcast media;
5. Online media have enabled significantly enhanced opportunities for less socially empowered groups and individuals in a society to access communication resources;
6. The broader the distribution of media messages, the more likely these messages will influence the perspectives, attitudes and knowledge of larger numbers of citizens. However, this is not necessarily the case: media do not *determine* outcomes in attitudes, perspectives, knowledge and actions.

Given these assumptions, the research developed a framework for empirical research that examined the ways in which particular communities and community members expressed their experience and perspectives of violent extremism through various forms of media. The aim of this theory-building was

to provide a framework for examining and understanding media discourses about violent extremism, including and especially the role of exclusivism and gender.

In order to do this, the research focused on issues of language and the ways in which different groups approach concepts like, 'nation', 'diversity', 'culture', 'religion', gender' and 'social cohesion'.

### 5.1.2 Gender: Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence

As noted, gender is a key component of extremist forms of violence, and indeed all cultural practices and symbolic systems (Lewis, 2008, 2015a, 2015b; Butler, 2010). Our aim in examining gender issues, however, was not to locate all extremist violence as gender-based, but rather to investigate the far-right's broader political and cultural objectives, *including* the role of gender. The research examined these objectives through an analysis of the far-right's mediated discourses as they were generated through two key events. These key events comprise the case studies we outline below (see also Appendices).

Cultural and Feminist Studies have alerted researchers to the ways in which issues of gender are inscribed into the attitudes, perspectives and modes of thinking which characterise particular social groups and their cultures (Butler, 1990, 2010). Culture in this sense refers to a social group's:

- values (concepts of right and wrong),
- practices (what members do as regular and patterned activities), and
- meanings (the ways in which members collectively make sense of the world) (Lewis, 2005, 2008).

Critical to a given group's culture is the 'cultural identity' which is fostered by the group to give it a sense of belonging and purpose (Lewis, 2008).

Gender is significant to a social group's culture and cultural identity. Gender discrimination and gender-based violence have been key features of 'patriarchy' and patriarchal cultural systems which subjugate women to the interests and ideology of men (Lewis and Lewis, 2014). In some societies and cultural groups this subjugation expresses itself in direct physical violence or a threat of violence which is inscribed into various institutional forms, including modes of

exclusivism (Zizek, 2009; Lewis and Lewis, 2014). This exclusivism is often expressed through an alibi of patriarchal privilege which is necessary for the protection of the 'collective' (nation, caliphate, culture) and its vulnerable members—especially women (Kottig et al, 2016).

The current research identified a particular cultural expression of this form of violence. Specifically, the research project identified this form of violence in various media discourses that were generated by IS (Lewis, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). The same narratives and motifs of violence were identified in far-right discourses which promulgated exclusivism on the basis of particular kinds of cultural difference.

The research identified these discourses as 'Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence' (HSMV). The concept is designed to illustrate the ways in which the ideals, ideology and symbolic force of patriarchy are conscripted into the service of other, more directly specified political objectives. That is, HSMV and violent masculine culture more generally are marshalled into a political project that is designed to 'save' society, the nation, culture, particular 'values', or the world at large.

This dimension of the study builds on Kottig et al (2016) and their recent examination of gender and far-right politics in Europe.

In the current project, the researchers examined the ways in which this HSMV narrative was deployed in media discourses to promote specific political and cultural objectives. The research examined the relationship between gender and extremist violence through empirically-based case studies.

## 5.2 Case Study Methodology

The case study research applied the theoretical framework and a multi-method approach to explore the ways particular organisations use broadcast and online media systems to pursue their political and cultural objectives – and in doing so, contribute to polarisation, exclusivism and violent extremism in Victoria.

The case studies focused on the far-right, and the expression of its anti-diversity, anti-Muslim perspectives in online and broadcast media systems. The

case studies examined the far-right in relation to the pro-diversity far-left, and those social groups it seeks to exclude (Muslims). This analysis included a focus on the role of gender in the anti-diversity perspectives and discourses of the far-right.

The research focused primarily on two ‘events’ which stimulated significant broadcast and online media activity: i) the May 26, 2016, Coburg Riots; and ii) the post-election appearance on July 18, 2016, of Pauline Hanson on the ABC’s *Q&A* program.

The rationale for the methodology is outlined below.

### 5.2.1 Far-Right Broadcast Media Strategies

As the theoretical research developed, it became increasingly clear that the narrative which continually connects Muslims and Islam to extremist violence both represents and amplifies public conceptions of threat. Far right, anti-diversity groups were able to exploit these public anxieties in order to advance their own cultural and political objectives. Indeed, these far-right organisations sought deliberately to provoke the spiralling antagonisms which were contributing to public discussion and anxieties, and to transform discussions of security into fears of Islam, Muslims, multiculturalism and immigration (Dean et al, 2016; also, Lewis, 2013; Koehler, 2016).

The far-right groups and events that were studied in this groups created a narrative, character-style and various images to promote their political and cultural objectives through the media. Gender and the HSMV motifs were part of this narrative. As we outline in the case studies, the far-right groups present a form of masculine power which is inscribed into the narrative of ‘our nation’ and national defence. The far-right’s anti-diversity objectives are thus ‘played out’ in the violent clashes they ‘choreograph’ for media reporting.

Related research has demonstrated substantial spikes in broadcast media audience ratings and newspaper sales during security related events like the 2014 Sydney siege and the 2015 militant attacks in Paris (Lewis, 2013; Koblin, 2015). In recognizing the media potency of such violent events, far-right organisations— i) use these events to promote their own cultural and political

agenda; ii) seek to attract media attention through the incitement of their own conflict and violence events in the community.

This is precisely the strategy which has been adopted by Islamic State and other militant groups. Following standard public relations strategies, these militant organisations create dramatic conflict events to attract media attention. These events are planned in accord with broadcast 'news values' (the reporting priorities on people and events which attracts news organisations) (Lewis and Lewis, 2014).

With limited access to broadcast media resources, far-right organisations create violent events in order to influence publics and attract supporters through widespread media attention (Lewis, 2005; Matusitz, 2012). These far-right, anti-diversity militants, activists and politicians have become increasingly adept at creating events which attract media attention (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012; Trilling, 2013; Lewis, 2013: 130-138; Dean et al, 2016).

### 5.2.2 Far-Right and Online Media

Also like IS and other militant and extremist organisations, Australian far-right groups use a combination of broadcast and online media resources to create an echo chamber which amplifies their perspectives and ideas. Dean et al (2016) have examined, specifically, Australian far-right organisations' use of social media to promote themselves and their causes. This study concluded that these organisations rely on social media to disseminate their views, organise events and use these events to stimulate broadcast media interest.

In order to understand this echo chamber effect, our research examined both broadcast and online media. The research focused on two 'events' which stimulated significant broadcast and online media activity. Both events occurred during 2016 and both represent significant dimensions of the democratic process—participative, deliberative and electoral.

The ideals of a deliberative democracy—one that engages citizens in a contemplative political discussion—represents a critical condition for the success of social cohesion, community resilience and diversity. The reciprocal is also the case: social cohesion is a critical component of deliberative and

participative models of democracy in modern societies—specifically in the State of Victoria.

### 5.2.3 The Coburg Riots

On May 26 2016 Moreland councillor Sue Bolton organised an anti-racism rally ‘Moreland Say NO to Racism’ in Coburg. While exercising ‘free speech’, a cornerstone of western democratic processes, the demonstration erupted into violent clashes between far-right, anti-diversity groups, and pro-diversity activists, some of whom are identified as ‘far-left’. Both the far-left and the far-right played out their conflict in order to promote their respective political and cultural objectives—including their views on social cohesion, nation and HSMV. Women, for example, became marginalised in the violent conflicts, which were largely played out by men and exalted by women. This Case Study is detailed in Appendix One.

### 5.2.4 Hanson on Q&A

The appearance of then Senator Elect Pauline Hanson on the ABC’s Q&A television program on July 18 2016 stimulated significant media activity. While attracting only around 4% of the national vote for the Senate, Hanson’s One Nation party attracted significant media attention in the week following the July 2016 Federal Election. Hanson and her anti-diversity, anti-Islam theme was the first political issue to be featured in the post-election Q&A programming. This suggests a level of media attention which is ‘disproportionate’ to One Nation’s electoral appeal. However, it is in keeping with broadcast media’s overall news values and focus on conflict and controversy.

The research examined the interaction between the broadcast media TV program, Q&A, and online-social media discourses generated through Facebook (see Appendix One) and Twitter (see Appendix Two)

The research sought to illuminate the workings of deliberative and participative democracy and its role in shaping or threatening social cohesion.

Both Case Study 1 (Coburg Riots) and Case study 2 (Hanson on Q&A) were selected because they illustrate—



1. The ways in which media may function to support or undermine the workings of deliberative and participative democracy, and hence social cohesion in Victoria;
2. The current conditions of antagonism, and especially the ways in which far-right groups are seeking to influence democracy, public opinion and government ;
3. The ways in which gender is being mobilized in current discussions and antagonisms around social cohesion;
4. The ways in which the interaction between online and broadcast media discourses function as a cultural and political echo chamber in which information, opinions and events are amplified and this is affecting social cohesion and resilience.

### 5.3 Empirical Methods

The case studies examined a selection of broadcast and online media discourses that were generated principally around these two events. The overarching research method is described as Critical Discourse Analysis. Under this general frame, we used multi-method strategies, including—

1. **Theoretical framework.** The development of the theoretical framework which enabled researchers to examine media, gender and extremist violence.
2. **Content analysis.** Media ‘content analysis’ was used to count, measure and examine both broadcast and online news reporting, news commentary and public conversations through Twitter. Content analysis was used in conjunction with some automated data scraping. Twitter data was downloaded through the API system. Google Trend data was also analysed.
3. **Textual analysis.** Media ‘purposive textual analysis’ was used to conduct ‘close reading’ of news reporting, news commentary,

examples of social media sites such as Facebook, and specific Tweet samples.

### 5.3.1 Key Areas

**Broadcast media:** Using purposive sampling strategies, the research examined broadcast media reporting of the events to illuminate the ways in which major media corporations and their professional journalists engage with the antagonisms which are affecting social cohesion in Victoria.

**Case study 1 Coburg Riots:** This primarily examined the social media posts by principal antagonists—particularly the anti-diversity, far-right groups who opposed the Coburg 2016 pro-diversity rally. However, the research also examined social media discourses that were formed around the pro-diversity, left wing groups, including those who engaged in violence at the rally. A combination of content and textual analysis was utilised (see Appendix One).

**Case study 2 Hanson Q&A:** In order to examine the online discourses associated with Pauline Hanson's Q&A appearance, Twitter data was analyzed. Tweets were accessed only through public data available via the Twitter API (Application Programming Interface). Analysis used combination of quantitative methods for broad content analysis of Twitter datasets, followed by qualitative methods to examine specific Tweets. Sentiment analysis was applied to the data sets (see Appendix Two).

**Google trend data:** Trend data surrounding both events was analysed. Spikes in Google Trends for both Pauline Hanson and Coburg Riots clearly followed broadcast media activity around these key events (Google, 2016). For Hanson, however, the most significant spike in Google searches occurred during the election period (June 26-July 3), although there was a significant spike through the Q&A appearance (July 18). Google searches also peaked following broadcast news reports of the May Coburg Riot.

**YouTube hits:** YouTube hits were examined for the Coburg Riots. The most popular channels attracted around 5,000 hits each, aggregating to around 22,000 total hits for the event.

This interaction between broadcast and social media systems has illuminated the ‘echo effect’ by which the two systems interact and feed upon one another, increasing the cultural and social impact of events that become actively mediated. Selected findings are discussed below in Section four: Findings and Analysis of Empirical Data. Further detail is located in Appendices 1 and 2.

## **SECTION THREE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA.**

### **6.0 Findings**

#### **6.1 The Coburg Riots**

The May 26 Coburg Riot was widely reported in the Australian broadcast media, including their online platforms.

##### **6.1.1 Broadcast Media Reporting**

We examined the broadcast media reporting of the May Riot for the 24-hour period following the event. We examined the online reports in *The Age*, *The Herald-Sun* and *The Australian* newspapers. Using critical discourse analysis, we found the following—

1. Reporting across the three news media was generally consistent, using similar story structures, themes and personalities. Differences between the reports related mostly to the political leaders whom the media interviewed and cited. The overlap in reporting can be explained in part by syndication of the reports through organisations like Australian Associated Press and Reuters. (These syndications are themselves an effect of reduced resourcing in mainstream news media, as well as convergences in broadcast media systems.)
2. All news reports emphasised the conflict and violence of the event. Police and law and order issues were central to the reports.

3. The terms 'ugly' and 'ugly clashes' were used in all reports, focusing on threats to peace and social harmony. All outlets used the language of warfare to describe the 'battle' between pro and anti-diversity advocates.
4. All reports had a strong focus on the male participants, as women organizers and protestors were marginalized by the fighting men. This was not just an effect of the violence itself, but of the ways in which the event was reported. Thus, while women were significant in organizing the rally and counter-rally, men and masculinity usurped the event, transforming it into a violent conflict for media consumption. Males on both sides promoted the battle as one that involved nation and national culture. HSMV, therefore, was a central component of the event, the participants and the media reporting.
5. All outlets focused on the 'mask wearing' of adversaries. Some of this is designed to avoid criminal prosecution, although there were also references to the Muslim veil.
6. Greater emphasis and profile was placed on the anti-diversity groups, particularly the United Patriots Front and their leader Blair Cottrell.
7. All outlets used similar visual and audio-visual images. These were largely focused on masculine violence and the challenges being posed to social order. Police were also featured in riot gear, engaging in acts of force and violence. In most cases, the imagery suggested a clash of masculinities fused with legitimate and illegitimate violence and power.
8. Our broader research indicated that women are very active in far-right organisations, particularly in online contexts. However, the violence at Coburg was dominated by men on both the far-right and the far-left.

9. *The Australian*, which is generally regarded as a centrist-conservative news outlet, primarily cited national leaders. This included the Prime Minister who declared Australia to be a generally harmonious society. Greens Leader, Richard Di Natale, was more strident, emphasising the need for restraints on hate speech. *The Australian*- AAP report also quoted a key member of the Islamic Council of Victoria, Kuranda Seyit, who called for more effective policing of such clashes.

10. Little attention was paid to the 'far left' component of the pro-diversity combatants. It was noted, however, that one faction of the anti-diversity group identified itself as 'Stop the Far Left'. It was also noted that some members of the pro-diversity group wore masks, as did many members of the anti-diversity group.

11. *The Age*, generally viewed as a centrist-progressive news outlet, noted that demonstrators from the 'left wing and right wing' groups were injured.

#### 6.1.2 Online Social Media

1. One major finding was that Muslim community groups have become increasingly reluctant to engage in public discussions around politics and security based issues. The main reason for this is a general fear of policing and surveillance processes which would link community members with 'terrorist' groups or activities. To this end, discussions have ceased altogether or migrated to encrypted email systems, and in some cases 'dark web' forums (Weiman, 2016).

This retreat from public discussion is evident in the Coburg Riots where most community members did not participate in the second pro-diversity rally, fearing the outbreak of violence which erupted in the first of the Riots.

2. Far-left organisations remain relatively invisible and the researchers found it difficult to locate and access a web presence for these organisations. This may suggest several things—a) The group is largely disorganised and sporadic; b) The group is cellular and carefully manages itself and its activities, preferring to work in clandestine ways; c) The primary aim of this group is social disruption, suggesting that their pro-diversity activism may be a surface strategy to engage right wing activists in violence and a battle for the extreme, anti-democratic spaces which shape anarchy on the one hand and extreme authoritarianism on the other.
3. Facebook is a critical site for the propagation of various groups' political and cultural objectives: it is used by many groups for personalizing perspectives and objectives; administration and organization of events; , propaganda and rallying; argument; identity-building; and attacking others.
4. Attempts by Facebook to manage and control hate or other forms of anti-social behaviours are largely unsuccessful.
5. Far-right organisations use the cultural potency of masculinity to justify violence and the need to save Australia, Australian values, and the Australian way of life. It is critical to the idea of 'defending' a white, Christian heritage against the pernicious invasion of Islam. To this end, the Far-Right use their web presence to promote the idea of an apocalyptic battle in which masculine warriors will protect women and nation from terrorists and the general banner of Islam.

## 6.2 Hanson on Q&A

### 6.2.1 Broadcast Media and One Nation

As noted earlier, a range of researchers argue that the far-right, anti-diversity activists and politicians receive a disproportionate amount of media attention. In order to test such a proposition thoroughly, researchers would need to undertake an extensive, comparative study of major newspapers and broadcast media to quantify the relative time and space that is allocated to different political and cultural groups. Our study has made a modest start on such a project undertaking a simple content analysis of online newspaper content following the July 2016 Federal Election.

We concluded that in the week following the election, most online news media allocated the greatest proportion of space to Malcolm Turnbull, followed closely by Bill Shorten, with Pauline Hanson a clear but significant third. While the Greens received nearly twice the number of votes as One Nation (Australia Votes, 2016; Austpol, 2016), their leader, Richard Di Natale, was allocated considerably less online news space than Pauline Hanson.

The simple fact that Q&A's first political representatives following the election included Pauline Hanson illustrates the public significance of diversity, cohesion and migration issues. It is not possible to conclude that the media is stimulating this prominence—or simply responding to broader public concerns. As per the assumptions outlined in our conceptual framework, it is reasonable to assume that the significance of these issues is an effect of much more complex and widespread issues of public anxiety, and the cultural politics of insecurity which are being generated through broadcast and online media.

Gender was again a significant component of the appearance of Pauline Hanson and the ways in which the politics of the far-right are being played out. In some respects, it may appear contradictory that the most significant figure in far-right politics in Australia is a woman, given the social conservatism and gender traditionalism which is often attributed to far-right politics. However, this apparent paradox is replicated in Tea Party politics in the US and the prominence of far-right politicians like Marine Le Pen in Europe.

Our research found, however, that women are active organizers and activists on the far-right; women invoke the language of violent exclusivism, but are less prominent in the exercise of actual physical violence, particularly street

violence. A conservative model of femininity, thereby, fits within the framework of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence, as this femininity and its attributes need to be defended.

Supporters of Pauline Hanson expressed these sentiments through the interaction of the broadcast and online media systems. The Twitter dialogue which surrounded Hanson's appearance in *Q&A* is characterised by battles over the character and sense of nation which Hanson represents.

### 6.2.2 Twitter and Hanson

Tweets were gathered from the beginning of the Hanson *Q&A* appearance and concluded 30 hours later. The researchers identified 82,248 tweets containing #QandA. As a result of this process, we were able to attribute 18,565 unique users to these Tweets.

The bios of those users were used to identify an 'interest' group defined by a list of keywords: 'muslim', 'islam', 'christ', 'national', 'ideology', 'fascism', 'immigration', 'liberal', 'conservative', 'infidel', 'atheist'.

Researchers identified 741 'anti-social' (which we define as far-right, anti-diversity) accounts responsible for 5,211 tweets.

These groups were more 'active' on Twitter based on the following—

- Total tweets:  $82,248 / 18,565 = 4.43$  tweets per user
- Anti-social groups:  $5,211 / 741 = 7.03$  tweets per user.

### *Sentiment Analysis*

At baseline, negative sentiment are marginally stronger than positive sentiment towards Hanson (-0.02 vs 0.017). Comparison of sentiment over time suggests polarisation there is a close mirroring of +ve/-ve extremes.

This suggests that Hanson supporters and detractors were active on Twitter through the thirty hours of our data gathering period. This sentiment analysis indicates that far-right, anti-diversity groups made a clear effort to promote their perspectives and engage opponent views.



These 'clashes' reflect a broader social trend suggesting increasing social antagonisms, polarisation and threats to social cohesion that are evident in participative and electoral democratic processes. These challenges are global, as much as they are local and domestic. Far-right organisations appear to be rallying their resentments across national and regional borders (Wilson, 2016).

## SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This research project began with five key research questions (Section One of Full Report). The Conclusions section below refers to the first four of these questions. The Further Considerations section address the fifth question.

### **7.0 Conclusions**

*Key Question 1:* How have recent strains on social cohesion evolved across global and local security conditions, and how have these strains been expressed through community antagonisms and media systems?

1. Global and local security conditions associated with Islamic State have placed significant strain on democratic processes and social cohesion in Australia and Victoria.
2. Government, media and public scrutiny of Muslim communities has placed increasing strains on social cohesion.
3. The value of government-sponsored deradicalisation programs within the Countering Violent Extremism strategies has not been fully evaluated. They may, in fact, be counter-productive, contributing to increased public and media scrutiny of Muslim communities.

These programs may also augment far-right, anti-diversity, anti-Muslim rhetoric. The online and broadcast media analyses conducted in this research project identified a high level of distress among Muslim communities in Victoria and Australia. Many of the websites and media discourses that were generated by Muslim Australians were angered, distressed and alienated by the high level of scrutiny and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

4. Professional and broadcast media subscribe to their own organisational and political agenda, protocols and news values. While

constrained by various regulations and codes of practice, professional broadcast media nevertheless seek out those violent, conflict-based or controversial personalities that will attract audiences and market value. In the specific analyses we conducted, broadcast media emphasised polemics, action and conflicts, as is common to news values. Extremist groups—militant, far-right and far-left—seek to exploit these news values, creating events which will stimulate broadcast and online media activity and hence influence government and publics.

5. Significant anxieties and antagonisms have, thus, been generated around—
  - a. Electoral processes with the election of anti-diversity and anti-Islam politicians;
  - b. Online and broadcast media activity which is generated around contentious issues associated with diversity, immigration, refugees and Islam; and
  - c. The interaction between media and propagated events involving violent street clashes between pro-and anti-diversity activists.

*Key Question 2:* How in particular are far-right, anti-diversity organisations contributing to these antagonisms and their expression in media?

1. Violent extremism is exercised in acts of physical and psychological harm. However, it is also exercised through the exclusivism and authoritarianism that some groups and citizens express through the media. All of these contending groups, the far-right, far-left and militant organizations such as IS affiliates, strategically deploy this interaction between media and extremist violence to achieve their political and cultural objectives.
2. Each of these groups uses violence to promote its specific version of an exclusivist form of ‘social cohesion’. For far-right groups, in particular, social cohesion means monadic culture and nation. These

monadic conceptions of nation and culture are generally connected to equally antagonistic views about government and constraints on freedom—including freedom of speech and the rights of the nation and its people to exclude those whom it regards as ‘dangerous others’. The far-right insists that governments allow the interests of minority ethnic and religious groups to override the interests of the majority. On a broader scale, far-right groups insist, equally, that Australia’s national interests are subjugated by international treaties, especially over human rights, environmental protection, migration, refugees and trade (cf. Mark, 2015).

3. The far-right is also adept at using the echo chamber of broadcast and online media systems. Online media are used to organize and promote particular cultural and political objectives. Groups promote themselves through ‘events’ which are likely to involve aggressive self-presentation, violent clashes, and broadcast media coverage. It is this interaction between events, identity promotion and online-broadcast media activity which has the most powerful political and social resonance.
4. There are significant public and scholarly disagreements about the influence of the far-right on democracy, public opinion and on social cohesion as defined by the Federal and Victorian governments in Australia. The increasing electoral successes of populist, anti-diversity politicians and parties in Western nations suggests a general rise in far-right influence.
5. The far-right has emerged as a significant threat to authorised social cohesion. However, much of the literature on the far-right is highly critical of their views and actions. Less research has focused on the broader social, economic and cultural issues behind these attitudes, especially as they relate to the impact of globalization (see Frank, 2016; Pilger, 2017). There has also been little significant research

into the relationship between far-right politics and perceived or actual failings of social and economic policy in Victoria and Australia. We know very little about the impact of these policies on people on the lower socio-economic echelons and the appeal of far-right political idealism. Little research has been directed toward a better understanding of these policies and their connection to issues of speech freedom, human rights, participative democracy, the composition and role of nation, and the ways in which principles of equity, equality and opportunity within a fundamentally hierarchical economic and social order.

6. This research project's analysis of Twitter suggests that the far-right movement in Australia has strong international links (cf Wilson, 2016).

*Key Question 3:* How are issues of gender implicated in these antagonisms, particularly through the political and cultural objectives of the far-right and their expression in media?

1. Gender is especially significant to violent extremism, and to the ways in which these spiralling antagonisms are being played out through the media and public spheres. In particular, the far-right—like other extremists—invoke a form of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence in defence of nation, culture and the citizenry. This dimension of far-right politics is inscribed into various forms of political and cultural conservatism and the ways in which violence is justified and perpetrated. Gender, and women in particular, represent a critical cultural and political battlefield for both pro and anti-diversity groups in Victoria and Australia (see Appendix Two). In fact, both pro- and anti- diversity groups claim to represent the interests of women through their own respective versions of nation

and social cohesion. This includes contentions over who is most responsible for violence against women in Australia.

2. Pauline Hanson represents the pinnacle of righteous femininity for many far-right groups. As the case studies in this research project demonstrated, Hanson is both a heroine and victim of cultural and political slurs. Like nation, Hanson needs the support and protection of HSMV.
3. A number of women are active supporters of far-right cultural and political objectives, including various forms of violent exclusivism. However, women are less visible in the actual physical violence, such as street clashes. This is partly due to the ways in which 'femininity' is conceived and exercised through the far-right's cultural agenda (see Appendix One). These women include high-profile supporters such as Sonia Kruger, prominent politicians such as Pauline Hanson and Rosalie Crestani (Casey Council), and activists such as the members of Women for Aryan Unity.
4. The far-right deploys their own gender distinctions—masculinity and femininity—in conflict events which are designed to attract media attention. They also promote these distinctions into the weave of nationalism and anti-diversity through online media systems. The websites and Twitter activity examined in the Appendices illustrate how far-right groups invoke gender and HSMV to justify their own violence against the supposed gender violence of Islam. Website discourses and tweets that are generated around the contentious events we examined make frequent reference to Muslims' oppression of and violence toward women. The far-right uses this putative violence against women to universally condemn Islam in Australia. According to one far-right Twitter user—'According to Islam, rape is a human right #RespectDiversity #IslamIsTheProblem #qanda'

*Key Question 4:* How are these antagonisms and media discourses impacting on social cohesion and democratic processes in Victoria?

1. The ideals of social cohesion and diversity are under threat in Victoria, not only by far-right, anti-diversity groups, but across various communities. The prominence of far-right politicians within conventional electoral democratic processes epitomizes deeper misgivings and anxieties associated with security and crime.
2. Despite government's official and authorised usage, 'Social Cohesion' is a highly contested term in public conceptions and debates. Many of Victoria's diverse political and community groups have extremely different conceptions of 'social cohesion'—
  - Far-right groups identify social cohesion with monadic and unitary (Western- 'authentic Australian') culture, nation and nationalism. This perspective is directly at odds with the Victorian Government's authorised perspective;
  - Many pro-diversity groups view social cohesion as a platform for pursuing political values and ideologies associated with refugees, immigration and multiculturalism;
  - Some far-left groups consider their own version of 'social cohesion' to be a platform for challenging state authority and economic liberalism;
  - Some migrant-ethnic groups regard 'social cohesion' as a state imposed code for Anglo-Western culture's oppression of true diversity and the autonomy of minority cultures and religions (see Appendix One) .
3. The issue of violence remains the critical tipping point for social cohesion and hence democratic process in Victoria. While antagonisms such as those identified by this research are a feature

of most complex modern societies, we conclude that the real threats to democracy and social cohesion become critical when they involve acts of harm—physical, psychological and cultural. That is, when political and cultural differences become expressed in violence, then democratic societies are at greatest risk. It is really this issue of violence which confounds many of the discussions on extremism, security, cohesion, democracy and culture.

4. The media's role in these forms of violence remains under-researched, particularly in terms of—
  - The interaction between broadcast and online media and the ways in which users and audiences construct 'knowledge';
  - The ways in which violence—including and especially 'extremist violence' as we define it in this report— is legitimated through media discourses and systems (cf. Lewis, 2005);
  - The ways in which gender is mobilized through media systems, particularly in terms of masculinities and specifically HSMV, including domestic violence.

## **8.0 Further Considerations**

1. Violence is at the core of the problems we have identified. Governments necessarily manage violence within the criminal code and through separate departmental responsibilities. Our findings, however, regard violence as a fundamental core of anti-social values and cultural codes. The research project's focus on Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence connects extremist violence to gender, domestic, youth and criminal violence. It would be valuable, therefore, for government to lead a broader public discussion and interrogation of the problem of violence itself. This could take place in a broad cross-departmental forum. Such a forum could focus on the ways in which violence is shaped and



inculcated through cultural sub-groups and values. It could focus on education and prevention. Rather than singling out particular ethnic or religious communities, the forum could examine violence in terms of the values and practices which justify or even impel harm to others.

This approach could consider the cultural, political, economic and social underpinnings of violence and its legitimization in domestic, criminal and political contexts.

Furthermore, this approach could encourage a greater sense of collective and community responsibility for human security. With a particular focus on education and the espousal of democratic values—including diversity—this approach could discuss and analyse ‘extremism’ within a broader framework of social belonging and ‘communalism’. Such an approach might usefully debate concepts like ‘cohesion’ and its relationship to the complexities of social competition and hierarchy.

An open discussion of these issues and the ways in which violence functions in social settings might facilitate a broader interrogation and understanding of the pathways that lead to acts of violence—including gendered, political and socially constituted extremist violence.

2. As we noted, the media echo chamber enables the amplification of ideas, perspectives, values and knowledge. Media do not determine cultural and social effects, but they exert influence and allow the possibility for particular perspectives to become normative. This is a particular issue for the social antagonisms and Islamophobia examined in this research.

However, for both practical and cultural reasons, we *do not* recommend greater constraints on broadcast or online media.

Moreover, it seems almost impossible to constrain online media systems. Efforts by Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Google to manage extremist use of their systems have proven largely ineffectual (Klausen, 2015; Quinn, 2016; Lewis and Lewis, 2017). Rather, we would recommend that media are considered in terms of the forums suggested above.

It is important, in our view, for government to support a robust media in which issues of speech freedom, diversity and cohesion are given full voice with as much ‘equality of access’ as possible. For the Victorian Government this may mean direct interventions into the language wars of violence and exclusivism. That is, Government could consider developing an integrated, multi-level media strategy to generate community discussions around the problem of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence in Victoria.

We would also suggest a careful review and evaluation of CVE counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programs—particularly those involving online media. The two most common strategies are—1. Redirecting ‘suspicious’ Google searches to counter-radicalisation websites, 2. Major social media systems (eg Twitter, YouTube) surveil and remove extremist websites and accounts. Neither of these approaches, however, has proven effective, and may in fact be counter-productive, sending searchers into the Dark Web, or toward real-life criminal groups and their more direct approbations of violence.

More broadly, the deradicalisation framework adds further to the public anxiety about Muslims and Islam (see Appendix One). As we found in our research, deradicalisation programs create anxiety across Muslim communities in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia and the UK. Such programs also feed into far-right objectives and media strategies (cf. Patel, 2016).

3. Gender is a key component of these issues relating to extremist violence in Victoria. As we argued in this report, Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence is a common thread in extremist forms of political violence. It is an ideology which is inscribed into various belief systems, including those that appear to be in direct contention with one another. For far-right groups this is expressed as a form of violent exclusivism and defence of nation. This form of gendered social violence would therefore be a valuable discussion topic for the forum we propose above. We would also suggest that the sort of heroic violence that is frequently exalted in a broad range of cultural narratives—including popular culture in the west—be examined and challenged through new forms of gender and media education. This would sit within a broader interrogation of the politics of gender-based violence.
4. In terms of further research, we would suggest an examination of the broader social causes of violence and its endorsement and deployment by specific social and cultural groups. However, rather than emphasising the groups who exercise violence, we would suggest, as noted above, that researchers should examine the pathways, practices, modes of thinking and psycho-cultural complexities which legitimize and lead to violence.
5. The findings in this report suggest a need for further research into the relationship between gender, political extremism and violence. This study has shown that Heroic and Salvational Masculinity is deeply inscribed in extremist values, objectives and strategies. However, this connection between violent extremism and gender requires much deeper investigation, particularly as it is deployed by female and male members of extremist groups and representative political parties like One Nation. The differences between sex-based groups like Women for Aryan Unity also remains under-examined.
6. This report suggests further research into the concept of 'social cohesion' and the ways in which these various groups consider the relationship

between cohesion, diversity, 'speech freedom' and democracy. As a range of Western elections are demonstrating, there is an increasing electoral disposition toward a far-right populism which threatens diversity, the politics of human rights and democratic progressivism.

7. We would suggest research, more broadly, into far-right groups and their perspectives on social cohesion, democracy and violence. This research should be designed around—
  - The ways in which these groups deploy media, including their use of broadcast and online media for message dissemination and social disruption;
  - Qualitative interview research to explore their attitudes and perspectives. This research would provide in-depth insights into their 'grievances' and avoid presumptuous condemnations;
  - Further media and interview research to better understand the spiralling antagonisms which are affecting all Victorians. This is especially important for Muslim communities who are the subjects of high level surveillance, government authorised deradicalisation programs, far-right rhetoric and broad-based public and media scrutiny;
  - Further research into far-right global networks, and their impact and influence on democracy, politicians, governments and publics in Victoria and across the world.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX ONE

#### DETAILED CASE STUDY ONE

##### **Facebook Analysis: The Far-Right, Far-Left and Violent Media Events**

#### **1.0 Primary Question and Background to Study**

This case study examined the online social media pages generated by significant far-right and far-left organizations in Australia. The study focused on the impact of these media discourses on the spiralling antagonisms which threaten social cohesion in Victoria. Using Critical Discourse Analysis methods, this case study provides a background to these groups, their ideas and ideology. The case study elucidates the perspectives and experiences of these groups as they are expressed through their pages. It examines, in particular, the ways in which the groups' participated in two key events—the May 26 Coburg Riots, and the appearance on July 18 of Pauline Hanson on the ABC's Q&A television program.

#### **1.1 Overarching Question**

The case study directly asks the question—

How do the media discourses generated by far-right and far-left groups contribute to the spiralling and polarised forms of extremist violence and antagonisms which threaten social cohesion in Victoria?

The more specific questions pertaining to textual analysis of the far-right and far-left Facebook sites are outlined below.

#### **1.2 Background: Examining Social Media**

Studies on online media, including social media, demonstrate that these technologies have become an increasingly important platform for information, misinformation, intuitive, emotional, sensate and interpersonal communication.

Significantly for this research project, social media have become a significant source of deliberative and participative democracy where different groups communicate, sharing experiences, perspectives and opinions (Loader and Mercea, 2012; Margetts et al, 2016).

(Note: we distinguish between deliberative democracy as reflective and considered assessment of issues; and participative democracy which is simply the engagement of publics in political processes: this includes everything from lobbying government to political activism and dissidence. See also Appendix Two).

This model of deliberative and participatory democracy, however, also invites vitriol and the sort of antagonisms which contribute to hate speech, anti-diversity attitudes and various forms of violent exclusivism which threaten social cohesion, diversity and community resilience.

Indeed, while the emergence of ‘virtual communities’ during the 1990s was hailed as a positive cultural and political innovation, particularly for the advancement of participative democracy, information sharing, connection and identity-building—the same facility has evolved as a platform for race-based hatred (Lewis, 2008; Daniels 2012; Rauch and Schanz 2013). Software systems like Facebook have evolved as a primary conduit for these positive and negative forms of community and identity building.

#### 1.2.1 Social Media, Hate and Exclusivism

The high content of racialised material on Facebook is also echoed on Twitter. A report released by UK-based think tank, Demos, found that on average, there are 10,000 uses (per day) of racist and ethnic slurs in English being used on Twitter (Bartlett, et al., 2014). Such trends are echoed in wider polls in Australia showing consistent anti-Muslim sentiments in the past few years with a September 2016 survey of a thousand people, with half expressing they wanted a ban on Muslim immigration (Essential, 2016). Similar sentiments were expressed in an earlier survey in 2011 as part of a 12-year study involving 12,512 people which found 48% of them showed anti-Muslim sentiments (News.com., 2011). Academic research done by Kevin Dunn similarly concluded

that Muslims and Aboriginal communities are the most vulnerable to racism (Dunn 2004; also Dunn et al, 2015).

### 1.2.2 Anti-Muslim Sentiment and Global Geopolitics

This public mood coincides with post-9/11 academic research on Muslims around the themes of multiculturalism, security, identity, radicalisation and terrorism (Aly and Carland 2010). Considering the increasing negative perception of Muslims, this case study research expands the framework beyond 'vulnerable communities' to looking at the ways in which particular groups engage with and experience conditions of insecurity that are being propagated around global geo-politics and in particular the rise of Islamic State.

### 1.3 Focus of this Case Study

This part of the research project examined, in particular, the spiralling antagonisms that are affecting social cohesion in Victoria—most particularly as these antagonisms are being played out through media and mediated events like the 2016 Coburg Riots.

Specifically, this case study (Case Study One) examined these riots in terms of prevailing anti-diversity and anti-Muslim sentiment which is threatening social cohesion and multiculturalism in Victoria. The research examined the ways in which these sentiments and antagonisms are being played out through social media.

This case study uses the concepts of 'the other' and 'otherness' to describe the ways in which particular citizens and organizations experience fear of those whom they regard as outsiders—individuals and communities that they perceive as 'different' or not obviously subscribing to some imagined standard of normality—common practices and values.

#### 1.3.1 The Experiences and Perspectives of Groups Expressed through Facebook

This case study examined the experiences and perspectives of various groups as they are represented through online media systems. Specifically, it focuses on the antagonisms and discourses that are being generated around Muslims, refugees/immigration and terrorism. This refocus, the research contends,

allows a better understanding of how the proliferation of fear of the ‘other’ has resulted in a proliferation of violence and anti-social views. We locate this form of violence in two polarizing groups which were highly active in the Coburg Riots—the Far-Right populism on the one hand; and the Far-Left populism on the other. While there are a range of rhetorical nuances with each of these groups, their rhetoric and various constituencies, we are describing the former as ‘anti-diversity’, and the latter as ‘pro-diversity’.

### 1.3.2 Gender and Polarisation

One of the common factors of this polarised and extremist violence is its heavy investment in a gendered cultural politics, one that mobilises patriarchal and masculinist ideologies in support of its political objectives. As outlined in the main body of this research report, this form of gendered violence can be defined as Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence (HSMV). Thus, political extremism often justifies its violence in terms of global, national, cultural, ideological and social salvation. A certain kind of heroic violence is demanded of followers who are exposed (in their view) to the violence and threats posed by others. Both the far-right and far-left organizations we studied in terms of the 2016 Coburg Riots justified themselves and their violence in terms of this social and cultural salvation. Islam and Muslim communities, rather than being the progenitors of violence, emerged as ‘cultural territory’ over which this salvational battle would be fought.

This case study, therefore, sought to examine and offer explanations for this polarised and extremist violence, particularly as it was represented through broadcast and online media discourses. As with the case study on Pauline Hanson’s appearance on *Q&A*, this Coburg Riots case study examined the interaction between online and broadcast media in order to explain the ways in which these antagonisms resonate and are amplified through the cultural echo chamber.



## **2.0 Polarised Populism: The Far-Right**

### **2.1 The Far-Right in Australia**

#### **2.1.1 Background**

The group that is generically known as the 'far-right' has been described by various online media discourses as the 'lunatic fringe', 'extremists', 'modern fascists', 'populists', or even 'deplorables' (Lazaridis, et al, 2016). They historically have included Neo-Nazis, Skinheads, white nationalists and (nationalist) conservatives. These movements vary in geography and emphasise different degrees of interest, but though studies recognise their diverse nature (Mudde 2002, Rupert 2013, Dean et al 2016, Bruter and Harrison, 2011) they acknowledge there are shared themes around anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism, masculinism (extreme masculinities, macho patriarchy), moralism, nativism, extreme nationalism, law and order, paranoid conspiracies of the 'enemy within', and anti-establishment/elite (Dean et al, 2016).

The degrees of emphasis of these key themes have suggested, for some researchers, a distinction between older movements that were more closely aligned with fascism and the 'new right wing' groups (NRR) which are nationalism, anti-immigration and protecting western values (Guibernau, 2010; Dean et al 2016).

#### **2.1.2 A New Far-Right(NFR) ?**

Though such distinctions may be valuable to distinguish the historical evolution of the far-right, we would add a clear anti-establishment sentiment as a new theme of NFR, indicating a desire, amongst the above communities, for a 'renewed order'.

We suggest that the language has shifted but the political impetus is still centred around what Roger Griffin describes as the 'mythic core' of fascism which is a 'vision of the (perceived) crisis of the nation as 'the birth-pangs of a new order' rising from the ashes of the old (Rupert, 2013). In other words, in the current conditions of global geo-politics and domestic insecurities, the threat of an enemy within has rejuvenated a vision of the nation that will 'save' the nation from this threat, like it had in the past.

### 2.1.3 Post 9/11 and the Salvation of Nation

In post-911 we have seen this crisis played out in debates on ‘the Muslim question’ and the mainstreaming of Islamophobia in public discourse (Norton 2013). In this political climate of fear and insecurity, there has been an impetus to identify and neutralise Muslims as ‘un-Australian’ elements, an Other perceived as disloyal, and a cultural menace: the *sole cause* of all the world’s problems (Hassan and Martin, 2015; CAIR, 2016). The public views on Muslims as ‘others’ and the growing popularity of a sentiment of ‘the silent majority’ (the ‘real Australians’), has suggested for some commentators, at least, the increased mainstreaming of anti-social or *anti-diversity* views (Essential, 2016).

### 2.2 The Public Attraction to Far-Right Politics

The perceived shock of Brexit in the UK where a majority of the British public voted to leave the European Union; the November 2016 electoral victory of Donald Trump as president of the United States, and the return of Pauline Hanson to the Senate in Australia in 2015, has seen the popularising of this anti-diversity position around ‘the Muslim question’. Equally, these events demonstrate a certain ‘mainstreaming’ of a less condemnatory label of the ‘alt-right’ (The Atlantic, 2016) This new label suggests a new branding – a new order – that offers something different but in the name of the old.

The difficulty in naming these views, and the movements they’re attributed to, indicates a shift in what Nilofur Gole describes as a ‘rhetorical register’ that can no longer be traced directly to the 1970s populist discourse. Accordingly— ‘Today, the category of race assumes religious undertones’ (Gole, 2011), suggesting that the far-right needs to be understood in terms of a ‘cultural racism’ that deploys a range of discourses and rhetorical strategies in order to achieve its objectives.

#### 2.2.1 Mainstreaming the Far-Right

Far-right groups in Australia include— Reclaim Australia, United Patriot’s Front, Rise Up Australia, National Alternative, True Blue Crew, Women for Aryan Unity, Australian Liberty Alliance, Blood and Honour, Australian Sovereign Citizens. These Australian far-right groups seek to present themselves as a

diverse collective of citizens rather than violent exclusivists. They frequently define themselves in terms of an inclusive and protective assembly of citizens who care about Australia, citizen rights, freedom (especially speech freedom) and women's rights. Groups like Reclaim Australia and Rise Up Australia, which have a strong Christian cultural ethos, announce themselves as pluralistic. A senior office bearer of Rise Up Australia, for example, is of Sri Lankan descent. Even One Nation, which has a female head excluded a candidate who expressed homophobic views for the 2017 Queensland election.

### 2.2.2 Gender and the Far-Right

Far-right groups often deploy notions of gender and sexual equality, democracy and pro-diversity as symbols that service a 'nation in crisis'. In turn, this creates what is considered to be an exceptional form of racism, legitimate even, as it aims to defend a threat to 'our' way of life—at the same time it deploys racialised discourses in its definition of that way of life and cultural values (Tyrer 2015).

It is worth noting that these groups have a strong female supporter base and significant female leadership. On the surface, this female presence might appear to conform to feminist and democratic principles. As we will outline below, however, this form of 'conservative' and far-right feminism (Lewis, 2008) conforms to the authoritarianism which derives directly from patriarchy, and more specifically the ideals of an Heroic and Violent Masculinity. As noted in the main body of this Report, the deployment of masculine violence is not abjured by this form of authoritarianism, but is rather channelled into a form of violence that supports an enhanced, rather than abrogated, concept of gender difference and gender roles. Pauline Hanson and other far-right women, that is, subscribe to a form of violent exclusivism which provides women with a powerful and protected cultural, social and political status.

### **3.0 Polarised Populism: The Far-Left in Australia**

#### **3.1 Right, Left and Centre Politics**

As Anthony Giddens (1994) and numerous other commentators have noted, since the 1980s the left and right polemic has converged into a more centrist and liberal political frame. In Australia, as in the United Kingdom, the major political parties—Liberal/National (centre right) and Labor (centre left) have adopted similar economic policies based on free trade, labour de-regulation and free market principles. Even the Greens, which claims to have more progressive ecological and pro-human rights policies than Labor, is economically centrist. Further right parties, like One Nation, is distinguished more by its anti-diversity and anti-Islamic policies, than by its economic policies.

It has become difficult, therefore, to identify a genuinely socialist political entity in Australia, as in most other western democracies. Progressive policies around migration, multiculturalism, human rights, international law and free trade have been embraced by centre-liberal progressives on both sides of the old left-right polemic (Gray, 2007; Terretta, 2013). Over the past decade and a half, social media have become increasingly significant for the circulation of these policies and perspectives, allowing users to attach them to a mainstream conception of nation and national values (Iriye et al, 2012).

##### **3.1.1 Progressive Left and Islam**

The diversity within progressive-left politics in Australia is really distinguished by a matter of emphasis than matters of kind.

While environmental issues draw up some of this variation, to a large extent the centre-progressive groups vacillate around the issues of pro-diversity, refugees and social cohesion. The further left has therefore become less distinguished by socialist policies, and more identified with pro-refugee, open immigration and pro-Muslim perspectives. While anarchism and socialism may well lie at the core of these policies and perspectives for some members of the far-left, at least in terms of public profile, there is a strong self-presentation which emphasizes these diversity-based principles.

### 3.2 Far Left and Social Media

Although there is no equivalent party or movement in Australia, in recent years the successes of Spain's left wing party Podemos, Greek radical left party Syriza and Senator Bernie Sanders 2016 campaign have empowered pro-diversity sentiments. These communities in Australia have a strong presence on social media and often campaign, organise and protest, around support for Muslims against Islamophobia such as counter-demonstrations against mosque protests. They also are prominent in their support for refugee rights.

Whilst the online world of open communication and accessibility has seen the mobilisation of far-right populism, it has also allowed for more frequent, and therefore, more volatile encounters between these communities. From the research undertaken in this case study, we have found that the anti-diversity groups are more collectively organised around 'active' pages whereas their pro-diversity left counterpart are scattered – focused on specific issues. It could also be that some of these pages are private and not visible to the public.

Public pages enable anyone to access posts, read comments and – provided there are no restrictions – you can comment. But where there have been encounters on public pages, there have seen aggressive clashes, which have mobilised both sides *in response to each other* online and offline. Both sides reveal in their interactions – whether direct or indirect, a sense of masculinised heroism: each empowered by their vying to defend their vision of the nation and salvage it from those that they perceive to threaten it.

### 4.0 Gendered Populism

We understand gender to be what Judith Butler describes as the 'performance' of masculinity and femininity that may or may not correlate to biological sexual difference (Butler 1993: 95). By performance Butler means the ways in which members of a society present themselves and act out the norms, values and expectations which give order, cultural validity and structure to that society. Whatever the physical (biological and neurobiological) distinctions that may exist between individuals, the cultural construction of gender amplifies

particular characteristics and ‘performances’ in order to meet these norms, values and expectations.

#### 4.1 Gender and Nation

A gender lens allows us to better understand the relationship between physicality, identity, and authority (Norocel 2010: 172). This approach to gender allows researchers to understand the proliferation of fear and violence in the current geo-political conditions because it helps trace the norms and values which inform the politics of nationalism, nationhood and ‘collective consciousness’. As we noted in the main body of this report, masculinity that is aggressive, domineering and violent has been a key part of the history of nationalism. It remains for a range of citizens and groups in Western countries like Australia a central and defining dimension of nation and nationalism. For these citizens, the nation is masculine, aggressive, powerful and culturally monadic (Norocel 2010: 172).

##### 4.1.1 Gender, Nation and Social Media

Moreover, the gendered dimension also helps examine the way in which social media has become a site for democratic deliberation and participation, and the propagation of various perspectives on nation and gender. Social media enables this often furious debate about the ‘meaning of nation’ and its ‘defence’. It allows the expression of aggressive and gendered perspectives, including those far-right perspectives which see the nation (and masculinity) as besieged by Islam, diversity, refugees and the insidious political correctness which they attach to an ‘aggressive’ and ‘insidious’ femininity (Norocel, 2010: 171). The far-right, therefore, mobilise social media in order to defend their version of a masculinist nation against the repressive forces of PC and Human Rights advocates who oppress the traditions of speech freedom and the rights of white Australia. This oppression is often attached to the broadcast media systems, especially the ABC and SBS.

Norocel (2010) has acknowledged the importance of gender in the far-right political and cultural objectives. However, women are not excluded from the conservative agenda; rather, women are expected to subscribe to a masculinity

which is vested in issues of heroic leadership, monadic culture, Christian values, security, pride and standardized-collective purpose. As noted above, women, in fact, are prominent in the far-right movement with public figures like Pauline Hanson (One Nation) and Rosalie Crestani (Rise Up Australia) prominent in the anti-Islam and anti-diversity vanguard. These and other women who are active online or in the broadcast media frequently advocate a masculinist and strongly monadic nation. Our research found, however, that women are less active in the physical violence which erupted in events like the Coburg Riots, presumably allowing men to undertake the front line of this violence.

## **5.0 Methodology**

### **5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

This case study used a critical discourse analysis to examine the online media being generated by far-right and far-left organizations in Australia. For the purposes of this project, the critical discourse analysis examined the media discourses that were generated around two key events, the May 26 2016 Coburg Riots; and the appearance on July 18 of Pauline Hanson on the ABC's Q&A forum-based television program. While the second of these two events is also analysed in Case Study Two in relation to Twitter data, this case study examines the various social media discourses which are generated through social media sites like Facebook.

#### **5.1.1 Content Analysis and Textual Analysis**

There are two dimensions to the critical discourse analysis we deployed—

1. Content Analysis. We measured and analysed the amount of online media that was generated by far-right and far-left groups.
2. Purposive Textual Analysis. We selected and analysed particular samples of online media texts in order to elucidate the key themes outlined in the Introduction to this case study.

### **5.2 Principal Far-Right and Far-Left Groups**

*Table 1. Far Right and Far-Left Membership Numbers (As of 8/1/2017)*

<b>Far-right/Anti-diversity</b> (membership-subscriber numbers)	<b>Far-left/Pro-diversity</b> (Membership-subscriber numbers)
United Patriots Front (97, 014) Reclaim Australia (57, 427) True Blue Crew (3,339) One Nation Party (36, 240) Australian Liberty Alliance (34, 740) Rise Up Australia Party (15, 485) Q Society (15, 539) Australian Settler Rebellion (35, 820)	Melbourne Antifascist Info ( 3143) Antifa Australia (4,069) Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (7,452) No Room for Racism (18,320) Slackbastard (12, 242)

### 5.2.1 Far-Right Groups and their Online Pages

Our research focused on the most active pages on social media, which were the *United Patriot Front (UPF)*, majority of whom are from Australia, but many are also from Europe and America. This group aims to resist what it describes as ‘the spread of Islam and far-left treason’. Victorian group *Rise Up Australia Party* Page aims to keep ‘Australia Australian’. Similarly, *The True Blue Crew* describe themselves as ‘active Pro-Australian group against Islamisation, open border policies, refugees, asylum seekers, and the left wing’.

Although the latter has less numbers (see Table 1), they are active daily and have organised events throughout Victoria. *Reclaim Australia* is of interest because of its more widespread audience around the country and also demonstrates a broader nationalism that appears more inclusive insofar as one is ‘patriotic’ and ‘stands against Islamicisation and home grown terror.’ *Q Society* is an organisation of educated individuals who aim to establish an anti-



Muslim movement in Australia. It claims to be a 'secular source on all things Islam in Australia'; it has in the past invited prominent critics of Islam such as author Ayaan Hirsi, Ali Robert Spencer of *Jihad Watch*, and Pamela Geller of *Stop the Islamicisation of America*. *Australian Settlers Rebellion* are hard-line nationalists who operate mainly online with a focus on anti-Muslim and anti-left agenda.

The relevance of social media for populist politics, particularly for the far-right strand, is given further urgency if we consider the data used by Dean et al (2016) of online discussions of far-right groups ending at 27 January 2016. Since Dean et al the data we provide indicates a dramatic growth of just over 70,000 *UPF*, 10,000 for *Australian Liberty Alliance*, but a 6000 drop in *Reclaim*, after this period in this year in online subscribers to the pages. The latter could be explained due to the split with *UPF* in April 2015 and the alternative *Townsville Reclaim Rally* page of 15000. Other possible explanations for this drop are new pages like *True Blue Crew*, *Australian Settlers Rebellion*, and *The Unshackled* established in 2016, and *Rise Up Australia*'s loose coalition with *UPF* as alternatives.

### 5.3 The Pro-Diversity Circle

In the 'pro-diversity circle', we focused on Melbourne anti-fascist Info, Australia Antifa, Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, No Room For Racism. These groups, despite their lower numbers (see Table 1), are active and have organised events that mainly oppose far-right rallies, protests and other events, usually centred around Muslims and refugee rights. The primary motivation for these events is to monitor what they identify to be 'fascist groups', which include all of the groups listed above. The groups frequently justify their actions in order to protect an Australia that supports refugee rights, women's rights and 'anti-racism'. This form of protection is linked to a broader commitment to groups on the lowest socio-economic scale and the notional working classes of Australia.

We also observed *Slackbastard*'s page which is generated by an anonymous but high-profiled Melbourne anarchist, who closely documents the far-right. A lot of

leftist responses to the anti-diversity sentiments are discussed, organised and celebrated on this page.

#### 5.4 Monitoring the Far-Right and Far-Left through Media Events

We monitored and examined these groups' Facebook pages from May 1, 2016—January 8, 2017. We used data-scraping methods and also searched key events, focusing ultimately on two events—the May 26 Coburg Riot, and the appearance on July 18 of Pauline Hanson on the ABC's Q&A television program. While other 'minor events' were analysed, the bulk of the data we analysed was generated around these two events.

Our data included both comments and memes – the latter which was widely used and disseminated – that centred around key events in this period where we have seen the most active responses by these groups online. (Memes are images which are over-scribed by comments that appear to be coming from the person featured in the meme. Memes are used for social commentary, including the ridicule of the featured person).

##### 5.4.1. The Coburg Riots (May-June 2016).

On May 26 2016 Moreland councillor Sue Bolton organised an anti-racism rally 'Moreland Say NO to Racism' in Coburg. The rally aimed at protesting the treatment of asylum seekers, the closure of Aboriginal communities and the rise of Islamophobia. The rally had the support of the anti-fascist coalition *Antifa*, a loose coalition of different groups who aim to confront far-right groups like the *UPF*. The rally organisers were discouraged from continuing with the rally once it became clear that groups like *UPF* were planning a counter protest titled 'Stop the Far-left' and encouraging 'force' against the 'enemy agents'. The rally went ahead and saw hundreds of anti-racism protestors and 50-100 anti-diversity protestors, along with a strong police presence of 500 officers who conducted 275 searches for weapons converge into the main business district of Coburg. There were frequent violent clashes between protestors on both sides, culminating in 7 arrests and calls to ban face masks and move-along orders. Both the far-right and far-left have claimed victory with *UPF*'s leader Blair Cottrel stating 'this is just the beginning....we grow stronger every time we

rally'. The pro-diversity's response was more concise: successful removal of racists and the message 'stay out!' was repeated (Sydney Morning Herald, 2016). The Coburg Riots represent a fundamental and often-invoked democratic tenet for freedom of speech, including right to public demonstration and religious expression.

#### 5.4.2 Pauline Hanson's Election and Appearance on Q&A.

The second 'event' refers to the election of Pauline Hanson and One Nation candidates into the Australian Senate in 2016. We examined this event, specifically, through the lens of Hanson's appearance on the ABC's Q&A program in July 2016 (See also Case Study Two). The Hanson event is relevant as it refers to the issues of political representation and freedom of speech, especially in a national forum like ABC's program.

#### 5.4.3 Supplementary Events

As points of comparison, we also monitored a number of other 'events' which stimulated a level of online activity within the polarised groups' sites.

*Donald Trump's campaign and election.* The third event refers to Trump's campaign and electoral victory, attributed to his mobilisation of the 'white working class' (PEW, 2016; Frank, 2016; Pilger, 2016). The American campaign was seen by far-right circles in Australia in the same vein as Hanson's return to the senate in 2015. Both leaders are perceived as a sign of the eventual victory of far-right ideals and nationalist vision. Like Hanson and One Nation's election success, the Trump election was celebrated in far-right circles as representative democracy finally working for the everyday Australian. In contrast, the far-left saw Trump's victory as an ominous sign of the mainstreaming of anti-diversity views in Australia and the manipulation of economic anxiety. The international interacting with the domestic is a significant dimension to online populism which has historically been very locally focused.

*Mosque and Islamic centre protests.* These are scattered events that have occurred around the country but Bendigo has been the flashpoint of some of the biggest clashes between locals, including some members of the council, members of the *UPF*, and counter-protests involving around 1000 people, which resulted in some arrests. The opposition organisers to the mosque have set up an FB page *Stop the Mosque in Bendigo* with 45,801 subscribers. The protests have also focused on halal certification, multiculturalism, refugees and immigration.

*Halal certification.* This is a nation-wide campaign involving a range of groups including One Nation, United Patriots Front, Reclaim Australia, and others. The Facebook page *Boycott Halal in Australia* has 98,251 subscribers. The campaign has been so prominent that it has prompted an investigative report by ABC's Four Corners and debated on *Q&A*. The far-left has responded to this campaign with mockery and ridicule.

We chose to focus on the two main events (Coburg and Hanson) because they generated intense responses on social media around the issues of 'community', identity, security and culture. Because of social media's perceived virtual mask, these events allowed us to observe an unhindered expression of public emotions around issues like immigration, refugees, Muslims., etc. and anti-social behaviour. They also reveal how political engagement is changing in nuanced ways where we see virtual and physical engagement happening simultaneously and fuelling one another. The way these real-time events are taken up on social media, discussed, and provoke responses -- both online and offline, this focus enabled researchers to better understand the shifting public space as a site of politics, community engagement and participation, in our digital age.

### 5.5 Focused Textual Analysis Questions

Under the general rubric of our overarching research question, we asked the following specific questions—

1. What were the key concerns of these groups?
2. What kind of language was used to express opposition and grievance?
3. How did they rationalise their opposition?

#### 4. How do these groups imagine social (dis)cohesion?

## **6.0 Findings**

### **6.1 Polarisation**

Research found that the far-right groups were generally more vocal and active than the far-left groups. Though both groups were highly antagonistic to one another, the far-right groups seem to be more politically energetic at present, particularly as they pursue their anti-diversity, anti-Islam objectives. This additional visibility and activity has prompted researchers to focus more on the far-right, than on the far-left. Moreover, the anti-diversity exclusivism, which we have identified as a major threat to social cohesion in Victoria, is more clearly evident in the political and cultural objectives of the far-right.

### **6.2 Anti-Diversity Themes**

Our analysis of written and visual text in response to *the* Coburg Riots indicates that HSMV is a critical factor in the ways in which this event erupted into violence. The discourses were generated through online media, broadcast media and in the actual performance of the riots. We found that HSMV poses a significant threat to social cohesion because HSMV empowers two extremes of Left and Right demonstrators and commentators. In highlighting the drama and physical conflict of the event, the broadcast media reinforced the ways in which these conflicts are driving broader debates around diversity and immigration.

For instance, if mainstream media did not provide the correct framing or omitted details, there was outrage on both sides on Facebook – such as who were to blame for the protest, in this case. Further, mainstream coverage of the incident, would prompt debates on Facebook, suggesting it is the mainstream media which establishes what is ‘news worthy’, often choosing sensationalised headlines to engender debate. The event demonstrated a cognate transfer of geopolitical violence into the context of Victoria which is echoed throughout the other events because they were centred around Muslims.

In addition to the examination of Twitter data and *Q&A* outlined in Case Study 2, we found that on Facebook HSMV had a profound presence in the responses of both groups but also the wider public. We observed that there wasn't a clear distinction between public pages such as *Q&A*'s FB post and the specific posts by these groups. The language was antagonistic, combative, oscillating between victimhood and triumph. This is because Hanson's presence and 'courage' to be on the show was celebrated at the same time the criticism she received reinforced the victimhood of this 'silent majority'. Comment sections were consistently critical of Islam to reinforce Hanson's own criticism of the Muslim community is shared by 'the public'.

There also accusations of politicians being scared, elite lawyers detached from the common people, and suggestions that the ABC 'mafia' is controlled by the Muslims. Due to the nature of their activism online, there is also indication that many of the anti-diversity groups attempt to comment on these public pages, seeing them as extensions of public space that must be secured.

The minor events of Trump's election echo the same response to Hanson: both are salvational masculine figures who 'speak out' courageously in the name of the 'silent majority'. Some who saw Hanson's *Q&A* presence as a defeat, 'ambushed by a pack Muslims and lefties' use the occasion to appeal to more masculine approaches in the figure of Trump.

*The mosque and halal certification* opposition are both echoed in these two main events as they fall into the main concerns of these groups and which these events represent: opposition to Islam and the perceived loss of Australian values and culture.

In our observations of these events we identified three core themes that ground the discourse of anti-diversity sentiments. These themes echo other findings done by research around the six themes of the radical right— anti-immigrant, anti-establishment, protection of western values, commitment to democratic reforms, traditional values, and strong state (Dean et al 2016, Bruter and Harisson 2011, Mudde 2002). Our findings reinforce these studies but we have reframed them around key themes that better reflect more explicitly the over-determined presence of an anti-Muslim and anti-leftist agenda. This is

important because the focus on Muslims as a perceived non-racial group provides a cloak to protect against the charge of racism, and presents the concerns as legitimate and rational: a fear and suspicion of Muslims they see as commonly held, hence not racist as it is not unique to them.

In so doing, the 'legitimate' threat empowers HSMV, and those who are seen as implicated in multiculturalism and refugee rights, all references to diversity and openness become codes for pro-Islam agenda. Moreover, the themes of this study reflect the role of language is relevant to the way gendered identities are essentialised and exercised.

## 6.2 The Far-Right's use of Language in Political Rhetoric

### 6.2.1 White Australia as Victim

On the Facebook pages of several far-right groups such as *UPF* and *Reclaim* references to 'loss', 'betrayal', 'bias' and 'conspiracy' is repeated, paradoxically making use of the language of victimhood to call to rally 'a silent majority'.

'It was definitely one sided against Pauline especially from the greens bitch!' (UPF, 28 July, 2016).

'Yes it was a disgrace I watched it twice and was ashamed for her she was railroaded' (UPF, 28 July, 2016).

This language is deeply emotive and portrays the far-right as innocent and only concerned about community and cultural values. As such they feel victimised by critics who talk about them as 'bogans', uneducated, and ignorant of the issues they are discussing. The responses to Hanson on *Q&A* brought this out more forcefully when Hanson's criticism of Islam was perceived by anti-diversity circles to be ridiculed, attempting to humiliate those with shared concerns about the spread of Islam.

The responses suggest a sense of alienation from public discourse and resentment towards what they describe as 'liberal' forums like *Q&A*. *UPF* and *ASR* also openly endorse Trump for the same reason: he represents someone

that refuses to be PC and wants to support the 'rightful owners' left behind. The former holding two rallies in celebration and the latter with a video to Trump supporters that Australia needs a Trump America so that other 'patriots' can follow suit. The video has 1.2 million views so far ( 5 January 2017) The following comments illustrate some of these anti-Muslim sentiments and the admiration for Hanson to speak to them despite the perceived hostile environment she was in:

'We should do our part for keeping our country the way it is was'. And not become 'what Europe has become.' (T\*B\*C, 31 May, 2016).

'Islam should be banned in all countries in civilised societies, it was invent by a murdering, raping, paedophile warlord, there are good Muslim's but despite the abhorrent so called religion' (UPF, 28 July, 2016)

'Good to see a TV show and reporters representing the beliefs of the Australian people rather than wimping out and being nothing but leftist apologists. We may yet have a chance to save our Culture.' (Reclaim Australia, 10 December 2016)

'At least they are speaking out. Since Trump was elected President of US and Pauline and Cory Bernardi speaking out many are becoming courageous about IsLAME/MsLEME's evil ideology. It will only get better.' (Reclaim Australia, 10 December 2016)

'Pauline Hanson was right 20 years ago...She deserves apology from all politicians...' (UPF, 28 July, 2016).



‘She was ambushed at the start, but she held her own, ON YA PAULINE’  
(Reclaim Australia Rally, 18 July, 2016).

‘Well if they ambush her as is expected .... We have the power of  
Facebook to demand fair play’ (Reclaim Australia Rally, 18 July, 2016).

‘Pauline Hanson was right 20 years ago...She deserves apology from all  
politicians...’ (UPF 28 July, 2016).

‘They too easily forget that Pauline was duly elected on her views,  
opinions and platform where she digresses what so many Australians  
think and feel’ (T\*B\*C, 30 July, 2016).

‘Biggest problem is that there are to many gutless wonders living here in  
Aus that are to weak to tell it how it is Incase they offend some Muslim  
cunt but fuck that grow some balls and brains...’ (UPF, 28 July, 2016)

‘Q&A is extremely left wing which typifies ABC. Funding should be  
retracted...until it shows unbiased stance on most community matters  
such as homosexual ‘marriage’, moslem cult in Australia, aboriginal  
recognition in the constitution...’ (UPF, 29 July, 2016)

‘Love Pauline to pieces. Anyone hurts that beautiful girl or threatens her  
in any way will have to go through me.’ (T\*B\*C, 5 July, 2016)

### 6.2.2 Anti-Diversity Equates with Anti-Islam

Anti-diversity sentiments were highly visible where these groups rehearsed conversations that were invested in a feeling of being swamped by the Other. This was the most consistent theme throughout and brought together many of these groups in a shared opposition. This anti-diversity sentiment, though not necessarily new to far-right movements, curiously centred on an Other who was consistently identified as Muslim. Muslims are perceived as a symptom of the failure of multiculturalism and too much tolerance.

Evidence of this failure is frequently provided with examples of terrorism, halal certification, growth of mosques as 'radicalisation' centres, etc. The visibility of Muslim practice was identified as a sign of Muslim concept for Australian values and an unwillingness to be part of Australia. Differences between groups like *Reclaim* and *UPF* weren't as visible as expected. Both express opposition to Islam and diversity generally in largely a similar way. One point of difference worth noting in response to the Coburg protest is that whereas *Reclaim* opposes violence and frames opposition as 'unAustralian', *UPF* is more hardline nationalist and less apologetic about violent tactics. Our research found no official use of the term unAustralian on the UPF page. The comments sections on these pages, as we see below, indicate they did not differ significantly when it came to issues on Islam often focused on halal certification, mosques, and terrorism:

'All Muslims believe sharia is gods law and should be adhered to world wide.' (UPF, 30 July, 2016)

'No one gives a crap about your soft tissue injury or bad back we don't give a damn that you were born here...Your actions are clearly UnAustralian! You and your supporters can piss off to an Islamic Country, we don't want you here!' (Reclaim Australia Rally, 23 December, 2016). (Reclaim Australia Rally, November 2016)

'I don't buy from Coles anyway. And anyone who support cruel slaughter practices should be shot.' (UPF, 12 March, 2016)

'Its a load of crap. Slaughter table faces towards mecca. And a stoned muslim cuts the throat and lets the animal bleed to death.' (UPF, 12 March, 2016)

'Please support Lindt Chocolates! This company has been threatened by Moslems because they refuse to certify there products halal.' (Reclaim Australia Rally, 19 December, 2016)

'Yes, yes definitely all mosque and muslims schools if they wanna live in democracy they should respecte our way of life or go back to they country' (Reclaim Australia Rally, 5 December, 2016)

'Blow them up [mosques] on a Friday afternoon..' (Reclaim Australia Rally, 5 December, 2016)

The opposition to Islam is exclusively discussed in civilisational terms with which there can only be a zero-sum engagement. It is seen not as a religion, and this point is endlessly rehearsed through conversations that deny Islam a religious status, but a political ideology whose only language is terror. Everything about Islam that might contradict such view is labelled as a lie perpetuated by lying Muslims, and non-Muslims who are perceived as chronically disabled by political correctness.

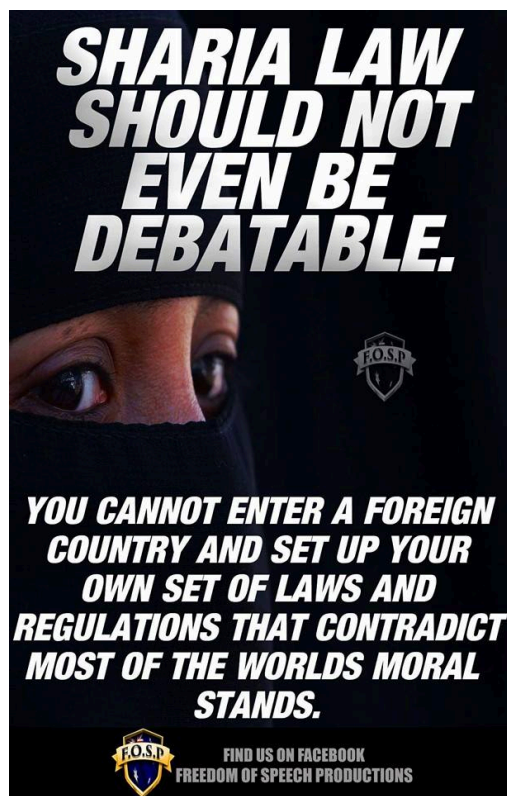
Hence, terrorism is not simply a security threat to state power but a symptom of social fragmentation the loss of values (freedom of speech) and something introduced from the 'outside'. Again we see evidence of redefining racism along cultural lines where Islam becomes an essential threat, with all Muslim practices

being interpreted as a security threat. In addition to angry commentary, memes were often used to capture this opposition to Islam.

‘Dirty goat fuckers, as usual they can't accept the facts, Islam breeds terrorist.’ (UPF, 28 July, 2016)



(UPF, November 2016)



(Reclaim Australia post, 13 k, 55k shares)

Diversity is therefore seen as a cultural menace where migrants within are linked with, and overlaid with, dangerous foreigners. For the anti-diversity communities, the best anti-terrorism policy is a strict, maybe even expulsion based, immigration policy. The denial of racialising, and exclusionary politics in the name of security relies on activating HSMV in the mode of courage to take existing mainstream concerns and immigration policy to 'its desired conclusion'. Confronting the barriers of 'PC' culture and offending 'migrants' are signs of courage, national pride and a willingness to stand up for what is right. The Coburg protest, Hanson's appearance on *Q&A*, opposition to mosque and halal certification, become celebrated examples of this courage, despite the consequence of a backlash: from ridicule to being labelled as a racist. The activation of HSMV also positions opponents as weak and compromised, and willingly being manipulated. This sentiment finds expression in a *UPF* and Australian Settlers Rebellion posts:

'Leftists, try-hard communists, Neo-Marxists you're all weak as piss, dumbasses. And the only reason you've been given any legitimacy is because a foreign power system is using you to destroy your own society and country' (*UPF*, 6 August, 2016)

'She [Pauline Hanson] is only saying what most think stuff the Muslims trying to take over our country!' (*UPF*, 29 July, 2016)



(Australian Settlers Rebellion, 20 December 2016, 274 likes, 278 shares)

### 6.2.3. Rights, Censorship and Political Correctness as anti-Speech Freedom

There are recurrent criticism of diversity as encroaching on the right for Australians to express their concerns about Islam, including protests against mosques and the 'right' to know what they are consuming in terms of halal certification.

Freedom of speech is frequently referred to as a way to empower themselves against what they describe as a 'PC' discourse that they believe demonises and shames them into silent acquiescence. Something they consider their fellow white, non-far-right country men (and women) have already fallen victim. They see themselves speaking for a 'silent majority' who can't speak out in an

atmosphere where concern about terrorism, Islam and refugees is immediately labelled as anti-social and racist.

Though not always acknowledged explicitly, this 'silent majority' are those of an Anglo-Euro Christian heritage. In this sense, a 'patriot' is about expressing and celebrating this heritage and not being embarrassed by defending a nation that privileges their social location; a place that 'reflects' them (literally) as white masculine subjects. For some participants this is underlined by anti-Indigenous, particularly negative stances towards recognitions of violent settlement.

But the racial dimension is often skirted around and only visible *through the opposition to Muslims* who represent a civilisational threat to principles such as freedom of speech, women's rights, which define the values of Western tradition.

'Q&A is extremely left wing which typifies ABC.' 'Funding should be retracted...until it shows unbiased stance on most community matters such as homosexual 'marriage', moslem cult in Australia, aboriginal recognition in the constitution...' (UPF, 29 July 2016)



2017 starts off with a serious challenge to our right to speak the truth about Islamic impositions in our own country. Our legal defence team is gearing up to defend this fundamental right at a 4-5 week jury trial at the Supreme Court of NSW starting mid March.

This will be a landmark case with far-reaching consequences for freedom of speech in Australia.

<http://qsociety.org.au/news.html>



The image shows a Facebook post from the 'Q Society of Australia' page. The post features a banner with the text 'Halal CHOICES' in a stylized font, a red banner reading 'Defending Freedom of Speech', and the event details 'SYDNEY & MELBOURNE 9 and 10 February 2017'. Below this, a list of speakers is provided: Senator Cory Bernardi, Dr Mark Durie, Larry Pickering, Ross Cameron, Gabrielle Lord, George Christensen MP, Debbie Robinson, Kirralie Smith, and Angry Anderson. A row of ten blurred portraits of these individuals is shown. The post text identifies the group as 'Q Society of Australia - Defending Freedom of Speech' and describes it as 'the secular source for all things Islam in Australia'. The URL 'QSOCIETY.ORG.AU' is also present. At the bottom, there are interaction buttons for 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share', along with a reaction count of '1.1k' and a link to 'Top comments'.

**Halal CHOICES**

**Defending Freedom of Speech**

**SYDNEY & MELBOURNE**  
**9 and 10 February 2017**

Featuring: Senator Cory Bernardi, Dr Mark Durie, Larry Pickering, Ross Cameron, Gabrielle Lord, George Christensen MP, Debbie Robinson, Kirralie Smith and Angry Anderson

**Q Society of Australia - Defending Freedom of Speech**  
Q Society of Australia Inc the secular source for all things Islam in Australia  
QSOCIETY.ORG.AU

Like Comment Share

1.1k Top comments

(Q Society post, 9 December 2016, 1.1 k likes, 11 shares)



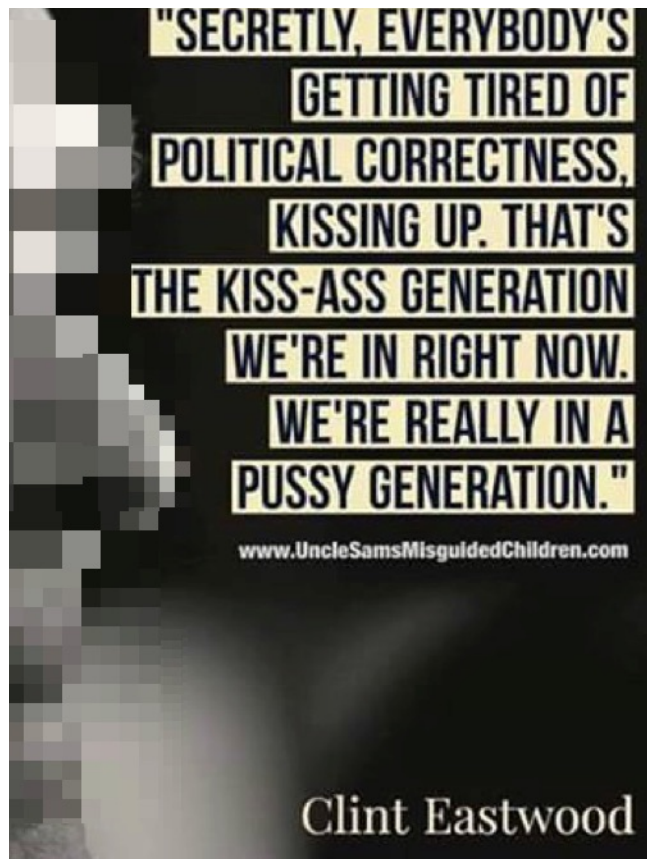


#### 6.2.4 The Politics of 'Being Offended' (Offence)

We found in all anti-diversity groups the use of a politics of offence (Norton 2011, Tryer 2013) at the perceived threat Muslims pose to Australia's 'way of life.' This concept of 'politics of offence' refers to the ways in which particular groups deploy offensive language in pursuit of their cultural and political objectives—this offence includes insults which relate to an individual and group's personal qualities, beliefs, values and religion. Diversity's incessant demands on Australians to be tolerant, inclusive, accommodating, offends as Muslims are seen to be exploitative, exclusivist, and disrespecting 'our way of life'.

The politics of offense empowers a heroic masculine role of protectors against this cultural menace, and gives agency and legitimacy to their activities. As Tyrer notes about the politics of offence, it is appropriated in order to avoid the accusation of racism (2013: 20). Masculine heroism becomes a value and identified by the frequent references to 'courage' because of an acknowledgement that it has become increasingly unacceptable to criticise immigration, protest Islam, etc. This is to be due to 'PC culture' or the 'pussy generation' which implicates government, far-left, media, who are seen to betray the nation and have given it up to the enemy.

'Q&A the soft cock unAustralian program which promotes the destruction of oz.' (UPF, 28 July, 2016)



(UPF post, 17 August 2016, 22k likes and 1337 shares)



(True Blue Crew from Trump rally, 20 November 2016, 79 likes, 16 shares)

They are empowered by these barriers and seduced by the simplicity of their logic 'Australia v Islam', and the hyper-masculinity of their image offers a complete, non-fragmented identity as patriotic defenders of nationhood, brotherhood, culture and a way of life.

### 6.3 The Pro-Diversity Far-Left

#### 6.3.1 Politics of Offending

Whereas the anti-diversity appropriate the politics of offence, the language used by the pro-diversity camp such as *Melbourne Antifacist Info* and the others also aimed to offend. This approach reflected specific themes that identified the politics of these movements. The first being an incessant use of 'fascism' to describe anti-diversity opponents which situated their anger and righteousness in history such as the Third Reich in Germany.

By referring to history, there is a mobilisation of a 'we' that failed in the past and serves as a cathartic moment where the warning against fascism will be heeded and history will not be repeated. The repeated use of the word 'fascism' often meant discussions revolved around history to invoke a sense of guilt in the 'we'.

Secondly, like the use of 'fascism', language also carries with it the desire to humiliate, offend and discredit the other. There is the mockery of the far-right – echoing the American variant of Trump supporters being 'deplorables'— in frequent references to them being 'ignorant', 'uneducated' and unreflective of the changing times. These descriptions aim to disparage anti-diversity groups, which some acknowledge are responding to a misplaced sense of loss (such as reclaiming what never was theirs or was never lost).

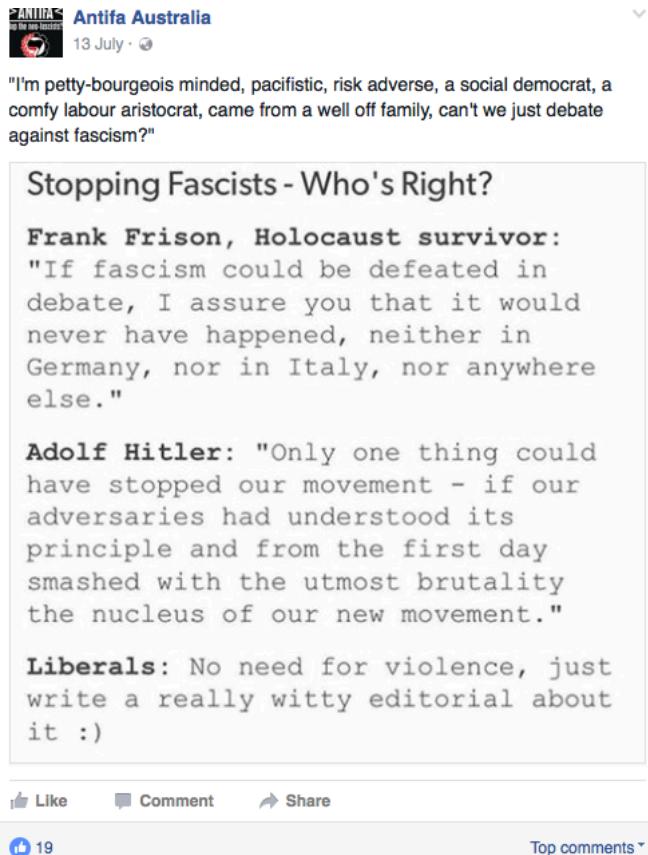
Mocking their opponents empowers the pro-diversity critic and demonstrates the gendered component to their politics. The diversity groups deploy gendered concepts such as humiliation and shame in an effort to discredit their opponents and bolster their political vision as defenders against fascism. Humiliation and threats of violence are important tools for both the right and the left, however for the left they use it to undermine the agency of far-right members.

Thirdly, the language used is symptomatic of a process of hyper-masculinising in its tone of confidence, challenge and hostility: 'scum', 'cowards', 'embarrassing'. In this regard both sides claim knowledge over the other, both use this knowledge to empower their sense of self and being on the right side of history. For example, the use of historical knowledge and education is used as a weapon to dismiss an opponent in the exchange below on the *AntiFa Australia* page.

User 1: You're a bunch of fucking clowns, step to me any day with your fucking homo shit I got bullets waiting here hippy fucks.

User 2 reply: Big words for a little man, you love Napoleon or what? Also...there's no excuse for 'your' instead of 'you're'. Education, English, School. You following?

User 1 reply: A bullet never lies (AntiFa Australia, 30 May, 2016)



### 6.3.2 The Far-Left and HSMV

The language also is part of a performative politics of HSVM in the way they see the far-right as unworthy opponents who are discussed in a dismissive way and frequently described in pejorative and classist tone which mock the lack of education of those in the anti-diversity camp. There is also a need to perform one's masculinity through performances of violence. A refusal to look fragile either as a result of internalisation of far-right accusation of femininity or violence as the final stroke required to proof commitment to one's principles.

Offline, however, the physical interaction with them is different as they are treated as a threat and needing to be removed from 'our' streets. The anti-diversity groups' imagining of the pro-diversity groups to be unheroic and feminine activates an aggressive masculinity which aims to masculinise and similarly becomes a form of expressing entitlement to and claiming public space. Masculinity for both is performed as possessors of knowledge *over* the

other and the possession of space *from* the other. As such, the pro-diversity camp constructs an exclusivism around culture and space—an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dialectic—which is aggressively defended much the same way as their antagonists.

‘They aren’t moderates, they are fucking spineless liberals’ (AntiFa, 3 July, 2016).

‘One Nation winning senate seats off the Libs. The rise in popularity of fascist, extreme right wing and neo-Nazi grassroots organisations since 2015 was one of the key factors emboldening Hanson to crawl out from her rock. Now her fascist joke of a party might be integral to the senate balance of power. All you moderates who want us to ignore the fascists at street level because they’ll just go away? FUCK YOU’ (Melbourne Antifascist Info, 3 July, 2016).

### 6.3.3 Heroic Defenders of Multiculturalism, Refugees and Muslims

As pro-diversity groups, these ‘active’ members assume the role of defending diversity. Empowered by the rightness of this position they see themselves as defenders against historical forces, and assume protection and therefore policing ‘our’ streets, which is discernible in frequent messages during the Coburg protest to ‘stay out’ or counter protesting mosque protests. This sense of being empowered occurs because the police are perceived as too preoccupied with protecting the ‘fascists’.

Like the anti-diversity camp, they are critical of the police who are perceived as defending the anti-diversity protestors, and the state is seen as aligned with them or serving to capitalise on these issues by expanding its power. This sense of heroism is also activated in the language of security because the response is framed as a danger of violence, disturbing communities, Muslims and others

being attacked and needing protection. This heroic sentiment is discernible in the post below framed by the hashtag '#WhyWeFight' and the second post of working class solidarity.

## **7.0 Conclusions**

### **7.1 Victorian Muslims and Political Agency**

There are several wider observations to be extrapolated from these themes. There is a clear absence of Muslims as active participants in these online discussions. While we expected the anti-diversity camp to be less accommodating or engaged with Muslims, our findings demonstrated that the pro-diversity camp too seems to have been less engaged with the community they are claiming to defend. Muslims, minorities, refugees are *talked about* rather than *talked to*. This is a startling conclusion considering just how pertinent Muslims are to the politics of both sides and definitive to the very identity of these groups.

### **7.2 Law and Special Treatment**

More broadly, this case study research found that the outrage of the far-right is fortified by a sense of their own exclusion from 'special treatment' which they imagine to be the purpose of particular kinds of 'fair treatment' and broad-based legal protection for all citizens. The far-right's interpretation of laws which protect the rights of all citizens is constituted around a sense that these laws are 'actually' special laws designed to protect the Other.

The law, consequently, is seen as encroaching on 'our' freedom and should be directed against 'them' instead of being in the service of 'them'. References to



'Elites', 'lefties', 'PC culture', 'anti-racists', 'self-hating Australians', etc. suggest that they are all 'dangerous' because they undermine and confuse the question: 'Whose law? (Whose country?).' Feminism, multiculturalism, postmodern critiques/PC culture, are perceived as a cultural threat because they threaten the binaries of good and evil, and seen as sites of cultural contamination as they blur boundaries necessary to make a 'us' from 'them'.

This anxiety captures how masculinity is at once heroic (correcting loss, recognising, recovering) and inherently fragile, unable, at a deep ontological sense, to secure its place with regard to the ultimate sovereign, the state. The state is not however becoming weak in their eyes, rather its being hijacked by a competing masculinity, i.e. terrorists and 'unpatriotic men' who have been crippled by a sense of 'guilt' and have lost all direction.

#### 7.2.1 The Failure of Institutions

Worthy to note the perceived failure of institutions is often shared by both groups. Both are critical of what they call 'liberals' who talk about community cohesion, discourse and tolerance but seem to be part of a 'post-politics' world where community concerns seem to be watered down in a discourse that lacks conviction.

The politics of offence and offending indicates they both see themselves as addressing community tensions/antagonisms, but with different aspirations. They are activated by a denial of their grievances because they see themselves swallowed up by a homogenising language that aims at concealing community issues rather than confronting them. The government and state representations are positioned as weak actors in their heroic oppositional narratives.

#### 7.3 Managing Media

Like other social media, Facebook was welcomed as a virtual utopia in which the tyrannies of distance and social fragmentation could be ameliorated through new online forms of networking, friendship and community-building.

Eventually, too, social media became conscripted into the imaginings of a new deliberative and participative democracy. This utopian imagining, however, has not been realised, largely because democracy itself is an uneven assemblage of

complex ideas, ideologies, sensibilities and various forms of individual and communal self-interest.

Even so, a robust modern democracy is fortified, rather than weakened by this diversity and complexity. The only real threat is posed by those who would seek to dismantle the processes of collective self-management and the ideals of institutional democracy through violence. this violence implies both actual physical harm and the more arcane processes of exclusion and oppression. From this perspective, what might be called 'extremist violence' is ultimately the political violence which is perpetrated against others, however they are defined.

This case study of the far-right and far-left polemic has demonstrated how this form of politically motivated extremist violence functions, not simply in action, but in language and media. The research has shown how the cultural echo chamber, created through the interaction of broadcast and online media systems, functions precariously in a democratic ecosystem where opinions so easily evolve into violence.

From our perspective, the issue is not so much about freedom of speech against media management or censorship. It is rather a matter of how community itself imagines itself and the issues which divide us. The far-right and far-left continually deviate from issues and deliberation in order to foster a rhetoric of sectional interests in which Islam is merely booty, rather than a matter of significant conversation. In this sense, democratic participation simply thwarts the ideals of deliberation and the possibility of sound solutions to the spiralling antagonisms which besiege modern societies like Australia. In this sense, the grievances of the far-right might need to be considered, as much as the grievances of disaffected young Muslims who turn to Islamic State for their answers.

Conversations need to be heard, but it is the management of violence which requires the most careful attention of governments working with communities. The idea of 'social cohesion'—what it means and for whom—needs to be at the centre of these conversations.

## APPENDIX TWO

### DETAILED CASE STUDY 2

#### Twitter Analysis: Pauline Hanson on Q&A

##### **1.0 Rationale and Background of Case study**

##### **1.1 Twitter and Information Exchange**

Twitter has become a critical communicative and networking platform. While Twitter was originally viewed as a social and community-building tool, it is now a central part of political discourse and dissemination of ideas and information. It is used by activists, dissidents and the United States President Donald Trump (Manjoo, 2016).

According to a social media report by Sensis (2014), 65% of Australians use social media and of these 20% use Twitter, although by state, Victoria is the highest at 24%. Aggregated according to age groups, Twitter usage is highest amongst with 27% of 20-29 year-olds and 23% of 30-39 year-olds nationally. While 95% of social media users in Australia are on Facebook, giving it far greater penetration throughout Australian society, there are other advantages of Twitter.

Unlike other social media platforms Twitter is quite open because tweets are made publicly rather than communications on closed social networks. This affords greater access to the entire body of tweets across specific temporal, spatial, topical or other frames of reference.

It is this quality that has led researchers to describe it as a digital 'public agora' that 'promotes the free exchange of opinions and ideas' (Williams and Burnap, 2015: 8). Social media is often represented as an open and egalitarian space that

can perform an emancipatory role for public opinions compared with mainstream media that can privilege elite or celebrity viewpoints (Khondker, 2011; Lim, 2012, Loader and Mercea; 2011; Shirky, 2011; Christensen, 2011).

### 1.2 Deliberative and Participative Democracy

Deliberative democracy is an idea popularized by Jurgen Habermas.

Deliberative democracy suggests that citizens consider issues and debate them through a public sphere. While this public sphere may have once been the town square, in modern societies deliberation is often exercised through the media in what John Hartley(1996) and Jeff Lewis (2011) call the mediasphere.

For the purposes of this research project, we distinguish this form of deliberative democracy from models of ‘participative’ democracy, which simply encourages participation in a broad-based political contest. While operating through a broad base of interpersonal and institutional politics, the most commonly cited forms of participative democracy includes lobbying, activism and protest. Twitter is regarded as a framework for both deliberative and participative democracy.

### 1.3 Q&A and Deliberative Democracy

The ABC television forum program, *Q&A*, explicitly represents itself in terms of a deliberative mediasphere, seeking to bring the open and deliberative qualities of online debate into the studio discussion of a broadcast television production. *Q&A* states on its website that it—

... is driven by interaction: *Q&A* provides a rare opportunity for Australian citizens to directly question and hold to account politicians and key opinion leaders in a national public forum and *Q&A* is broadcast live so that not the studio audience but also the wider audience can get involved.

#### 1.3.1 Twitter and the *Q&A* Mediasphere

So while panelists might represent elite viewpoints within institutional politics, media commentary and celebrity culture, the show also aims to be openly

accessible and facilitating the participation of all viewers through the platform of Twitter.

For tweets to appear on screen or to be posed as questions to guests during the show they have to be vetted by moderators and producers, the online discussion is as open as Twitter regulations allow, which is very open, to the point where effective deliberative discussion may be stifled due to threats, bullying and online abuse, a problematic aspect of the Twitter platform which will be addressed in the next section (Henry and Powell, 2015). In spite of the conduct it may generate, which may inhibit effective discussions, there is nonetheless very little barrier to user participation on Twitter.

### 1.3.2 Twitter and the Audience-Citizen

The analysis of Twitter is an ideal way to study how audiences actively, as opposed to passively, engage with mainstream media through online. As suggested in the main body of this report, this active engagement with media involves the drawing on a broad array of cultural resources with pre-existing meanings, values and knowledge (Lewis, 2008; Marwick, 2011). In particular this study highlighted how race and national identity invokes particular conceptions of masculinity, specifically Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence.

The analysis of Twitter user behaviour and interaction around the episode of ABC's *Q&A* featuring Pauline Hanson will therefore examine the nature of public debate that can be facilitated through this forum. This study took at face value the idea that social media platforms can function as digital spaces for public debate but also allows for the possibility that the ideals of this deliberative mode may not be achieved and instead a more combative mode associated with the concept of 'language wars' might instead emerge (Pond et al, 2013).

### 1.4 Limits to the use of Twitter

It is important to acknowledge the limited influence of individual tweets within the Twitter ecosystem. There are certainly tweets that have great influence, take for example those of US President Donald Trump who, throughout 2016 and into 2017 managed much of his public communications through the medium of

tweets. Examples such as this, however, are not simply just a Twitter or social media phenomenon. If a particular tweet goes 'viral' it is no longer confined to social media but will also be reported in regular media channels and popular culture. This is a process of 'co-construction' where new and traditional medias amplify one another (McCosker, 2013.)

This of course goes both ways. It has become increasingly common in news media reporting to take individual tweets and treat them as indicators of public opinion. There are significant limitations to this approach (Hermida, 2010; Tonkin et al, 2012). The method adopted here has sought to give a sense of the relative influence of tweets and users within the Twitter-sphere, prior to into any detailed examination of the content of specific tweets.

#### 1.4.1 Deliberative Democracy, Emotional Anti-Democracy and Social Abuse

It is becoming increasingly recognised that Twitter has become a site for systematic online abuse, particularly in regards to gender and race (Henry and Powell, 2016; Rutenberg, 2016). Given that this case study looks at the question of masculinity using interactions in this site, it is important to address this broader question and the effect the normative behaviours of Twitter may have on the data.

What became clear in the examination of the content of specific tweets is that the expected social norms regarding interpersonal etiquette do not apply on Twitter or other social media platforms. While it is not to suggest these are now acceptable forms of behaviour in online contexts, it has become normal for many users to engage in discussions primarily via insults and even death threats.

For many users of Twitter and other online platforms this is highly upsetting behaviour (Powell and Henry, 2016). These differing standards of conduct in themselves, especially when occurring across lines of gender or race are likely to undermine the qualities of social cohesion being pursued by the Victorian and Federal governments.

### 1.5 The Twitter Hashtag on Q&A

The Twitter experience of *Q&A* is intended to be live participatory experience across viewers but in practice it is not so straight-forward. The broadcast viewing and the accompanying online Twitter discussion can be viewed at the time of live broadcast or after the fact. The show itself goes live over terrestrial television and streamed online through via the ABC website. The online discussion occurs at the same time and is managed using the '#QandA' hashtag. The use of the hashtag convention (words with a # prefix) allows users to mark their tweets in order to be identified as part of particular discussion (Boyd et al, 2010). A 'trending' hashtag is one that is particularly popular within the tweet stream, highlighting a peak of activity. Because the '#QandA' is the official hashtag determined by the show and repeated throughout the broadcast, it is very clear to anyone wishing to engage in the conversation how to do so.

The most common viewing of tweets in real time will be to see those that were most recently tweeted or retweeted, allowing users to see responses that have minimal time lag from what is being broadcast. *Q&A* can also be viewed retrospectively although there are limits to how effective the online engagement will be. This is done via the ABC website. The online discussion can also be experienced retrospectively via Twitter by searching the '#QandA' hashtag.

#### 1.5.1 Twitter and Time-Space

This, however, will produce a different experience of the debate based on the tweets as they will not be appearing chronologically but rather based on the Twitter search algorithm (Pond, 2016; Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). This means that retrospective viewing is less likely to produce the sense of following the debate online, even less that of being part of the debate.

Regardless of whether or not the Twitter discussion is followed along with the live stream, there are limits to ability of users to engage in effective deliberate debate. According to Pond (2016), the rhythm and pacing or 'temporality' of the *Q&A* ABC broadcast and the '#QandA' hashtag Twitter stream that would be needed to facilitate effective deliberative discussion are different. TV time and 'Twitter Time' are in this sense different. The live broadcast of *Q&A* "imposes a

rigid clock-based rhythm on discussion” and at this speed, users are more likely to publish tweets “that take the form of positional contributions to an imaginary mediasphere” (Pond, 2016: 16).

For effective deliberative discussion to occur via Twitter it would be best done in a more contemplative manner, as opposed reactive fashion encouraged by the temporality of the Q&A broadcast. This temporal disjunction demonstrates, therefore, that the interaction between broadcast and online media systems is more complicated than may be initially assumed. This complexity is particularly apposite for an analysis of Twitter and its impact on far-right political activism, deliberative democracy and social cohesion in Victoria.

## **2.0 Twitter Methodology**

The method adopted in this analysis of the Twitter activity during the ABC Q&A episode was designed to analyse and elucidate the role that social media and micro-blogging platform discussions might play in fostering speech that can strengthen or weaken social cohesion.

### **2.1 Primary Questions**

1. Does Twitter function as a digital space for deliberative debate to extend, critique and engage the discussions raised on Q&A?
2. Or, it is staging point for language wars between increasingly polarized, partisan and disconnected online viewpoints?
3. Or is it some combination of both?

### **2.2 Stages of Analysis**

This analysis occurred in two stages. The first was a macro or quantitative content analysis of a large dataset in order to understand broad trends within the tweet sample and to identify a more targeted set of users. This analysis enabled comparisons between the general user set and this specific group. Narrowing the user set also allowed for a more detailed analysis of specific tweets can be conducted in the second stage of this method.



### 2.2.1 Stage One Analysis

The first stage quantitative analysis pursues a rationale for determining a specific set of users who may be particularly concerned with issues that might positively or negatively impact on social cohesion. It should be stated up front that this is not, done in order to profile specific users or even to determine a generic user profile that could be considered beneficial or threatening to social cohesion. Rather, the aim is to identify tweets that are generated around pro-social or anti-social tendencies—and how these tweets contribute to conditions of a deliberative democracy which is itself a condition of social cohesion in Victoria.

The identification of these tweets and their role in deliberative democracy can then be compared with the wider Twitter user community discussing *Q&A* during this time period.

Identifying sub-categories of users for the purposes of comparative analytics and managing large datasets is quite common in Twitter analysis (Lotan et al, 2011; Procter, Vis and Voss, 2013). In order to identify the specific user list, a set of keywords associated with the thematics being studied was devised. This list of terms will be used to position a specific set of users in comparison to the general Twitter population with the time period and ‘#QandA’ hashtag sample identified. It will not be used to create a profile of specific users or to predict particular kinds of behaviours. Within the dataset generated from the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) there are a number of fields that can be analysed.

The fields that most readily come to mind are the username and the body text of the tweet message as these are most prominently displayed in most user interfaces. While the username is vital for identifying users and the contents of specific tweets will be analysed subsequently, there are other vital fields of identifying user data that the keywords will be applied to, namely the ‘user bio’, or self-description that user has entered for their Twitter account.

The ‘user bio’ is probably the most effective method for determining how each specific user identifies their interests and concerns more generally, rather than

just in the moment of a particular tweet. It is in this way of conveying to other Twitter users a long-term conception of their interests and reasons for using Twitter. Identifying users with one or more of the thematic keywords in their 'user bio' will allow a list of what will be described here as 'engaged' users to be identified and compared with the field of 'general' users within the sample.

Having identified the general and engaged groups in the sample, analysis was undertaken to determine the user sentiment of these respective groups. This involved deploying a proprietary algorithm developed by project researcher Phillip Pond in order to identify positive or negative sentiment within the sample of tweets. This allowed a comparison of the rates of positive and negative sentiment within the general group and the engaged group to be determined in order to see whether and how their attitudes differ in regards to central topics of concern in Q&A.

### 2.2.2 Stage Two Analysis

The second stage of analysis shifts to a qualitative analysis, examining specific tweets that demonstrate the themes of heroic and salvational masculine violence (HSMV). This analysis was focused on the engaged user sample, having identified a set of tweets that come from users whose 'user bios' identify them as having an ongoing interest in key themes revolve around specific ideologies of nation and culture that we have suggested function to inscribe gender-based motifs and narratives in a way that can amplify attitudes that can undermine or reinforce social cohesion.

The keywords selected were words which, when used unreflectively or uncritically, tend to reinforce the masculinist conceptions of religion and the state. In that instance it is likely to have negative effects on social cohesion as it is not an inclusive vision of society. There was also the possibility that users may be using these terms reflectively and critically, in which case there may be an attempt to reframe these concepts in a way that is more inclusive and is likely to foster social cohesion.

In order to elaborate these concepts, a *purposive* sample of representative tweets was selected. The tweets were annotated in a thematic fashion to

highlight key thematics that can be found across the engaged sample. This qualitative method did not go into great deconstructive, linguistic or hermeneutic analysis of individual tweets, Rather a set of tweets was selected which, together, clearly illustrated the issues that discussed and challenged issues around social cohesion.

### **3.0 Findings**

#### **3.1 Quantitative Analysis of Tweet Sample**

The clean sample of Twitter data containing the '#QandA' hashtag contains 82,248 tweets. The initial sample was larger but contained non-relevant tweets that would skew the analysis. Amongst the total number of tweets there were 18,565 unique users, averaging at 4.43 tweets per user.

##### **3.1.1 Keyword search and sampling**

This represents the overall population sample of users and tweets being analysed. The secondary sample identified is the Twitter users whose 'user bio' fields identify an interest in or concern with the following keywords:

'muslim', 'islam', 'christ', 'national', 'ideology', 'facism', 'immigration',  
'liberal', 'conservative', 'infidel', 'atheist'.

These keywords were determined through an inductive process of examining samples of the Twitter dataset to find what words were associated with the research focus of heroic and salvational masculinity and social cohesion.

Amongst this sample there were 741 users who made a total of 5211 tweets. The average tweets per user of 7.03 of the engaged group is noticeably higher than the 4.43 tweets per user of the general group.

By manually analysing the 'location' field of this user list it can be determined where users consider themselves based. This is an open field that is not GPS-confirmed, so it is entirely at user discretion as to how it is filled out. This means some are not geographical locations but rather a description or an action (for example 'Right here when you're ready' or 'Locating terrorists on a

scope') and some are empty, both of which are treated here as non-entries and account 29.1% of users. 52.6% of overall users locate themselves in Australia.

*Table One: User location by state*

NSW	13.2%
Vic	11.1%
QLD	8.2%
WA	3.4%
ACT	1.3%
Tas	1.2%
NT	.5%

The remaining 18.3% of users are from outside of Australia, predominantly the United States. This correlates with other Australian-based studies of Twitter that suggest users are predominantly based along the eastern sea-board.

We also examined commonly used words amongst this engaged cohort. By mapping the most commonly used words amongst the engaged group produces the following word cloud:



A proprietary script is then employed to determine average sentiment each of the positive and negative sentiment tweets within each of the general and engaged samples, taken in fifteen minute intervals across the timeframe being examined. The positive and negative tweets are separated from one another in this analysis because equal levels of positive and negative sentiment would be effectively masked as it would appear as a neutral overall average.

Sentiment analysis revealed different expressed opinions regarding Pauline Hanson within the two sample groups. Analysing user sentiment in relation to the word 'Hanson' among the general sample population shows a relatively even split between positive and negative sentiments, with negative sentiment being slightly higher. Comparison of this sentiment over the time period shows a correlation between these sentiments, suggesting that there is mirroring of positive and negative viewpoints, indicative of a level of polarisation between them on certain issues that emerged during the *Q&A* discussion.

Amongst the engaged population, there was much lower, nearly negligible levels of negative sentiment towards Pauline Hanson. While positive sentiment was also lower than in the general sample it was noticeably relative to the negative sentiments. This suggests that the engaged group was more likely to be aligned with Pauline Hanson.

What can be taken from this analysis is that users who self-identify through their 'user bio' as having an interest in keywords associated with views that may affect social cohesion are likely to tweet more often and be positively aligned with Pauline Hanson. Important to note is that when sentiment analysis is performed, inferences cannot be made about the attitude of all individuals, only expressed attitudes. For instance, while there was very low negative sentiment expressed about Hanson amongst the engaged group, this does not mean those users hold ambivalent views of Hanson, only that they did not actively express negative views.

### 3.2 Qualitative-Textual Analysis of Specific Tweets

While the quantitative methods of analysis revealed broad themes across the dataset, a more detailed analysis of individual tweets allows for greater specificity. This is especially important for an examination of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence within the broader theme of extremism and far-right, anti-diversity cultural politics.

Initial analysis was done at a population sample level to see if automated analysis could be done on the way in which gendered language was being used. The construction of gendered narratives and motifs is more complex as it functions through the contextual location and use of the 'concepts and themes' keywords listed above that were used to identify the engaged users.

This makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions from sentiment analysis of the keywords, as was done with the most commonly used words.

By examining specific tweets, however, our research was able to identify more clearly the deployment of gender-based narratives and motifs by users.

It is important to remember that these tweets are not claimed to be 'representative' in a quantitative sense; they do not proportionately represent the views of either the general or engaged sample. Rather they are indicative of specific thematic threads within the sample—and the ways in which the cultural politics of extremist violence are being played out via two related media spheres.

These cultural politics also indicate significant issues around deliberative democracy and its embedding within social cohesion, diversity and community resilience.

### 3.2.1 Social Cohesion and the Far-Right

One key theme that emerged is a contestation or language war over what it means to be a cohesive society. In particular, social cohesion is addressed directly through the debate over the expectation that Muslims integrate into Australian life.

Consider for example tweets suggesting there is an inherent barrier to social cohesion associated with the Muslim faith that makes it incompatible with western democracy:

- #qanda Islam is NOT inclusive.'
- One reason that some Islamists don't feel included in society is that it's not a sharia society. #qanda"
- According to Islam, rape is a human right #RespectDiversity #IslamIsTheProblem #qanda'

### 3.2.2 Deliberative Democracy

Tweets such as these epitomise a worldview that sees Islam as a monadic belief system determined to adopt a militant dissident approach to community regardless of the social context with which it interacts. This discussion, however, was not always one way; there were some instances where this issue was debated when counter-arguments to this pessimistic view of the likelihood of effective cohesion were made:

- @MariamVeiszadeh @QandA Social Harmony. What planet are you living on. Non existent. World under seige from Islam variants.'
- Largest muslim nation in the region - Malaysia- has an ongoing problem with Islamic terrorism. Remember Bali ? #qanda'
- True integration is to love the country in which you live & to be completely loyal to it. \xf0\x9f\x87\xa6\xf0\x9f\x87\xba #QandA #KhalifaOfIslam http'
- Name ONE country where Islam has assimilated into Western culture #qanda'

The ideal of effective deliberative discussion, however, isn't evident in these tweets as these arguments seem to be playing out pre-existing positions rather than engaging with the alternative perspectives being offered.

### 3.2.3 The Far-Left, pro-Diversity Perspective



A similar line of argument was presented by pro-diversity left-wing perspectives. Rather than put forward an ad hominem attack on her intelligence, it invokes a consequentialist account of the impact on society:

- Pauline Hanson FEEDS Radicalism ON BOTH SIDES. #QANDA'
- Pauline hanson is a threat, now we know who is scaring who.#Qanda'
- People like Pauline hanson and Sonia Kruger are putting muslims lives in danger.#Qanda'

Here also emerging in these tweets is the invocation of a kind of counterpoint heroic salvational masculinity against the pro-nationalist position. Pauline Hanson's Islamophobia is invoked as harmful to broader society because of fear it creates and the damage it does to trust. While there were a greater number that invoked Islam as a threat to integration and national identity, pro-diversity left views likewise position Pauline Hanson as a threat to social cohesion.

The characterisation of Pauline Hanson within this engaged group tended to break-down into two clearly demarcated positions. First was the more negative argument that she was stupid:

- Sam Dastyari wanted a battle of wits with Pauline Hanson, but she came unarmed #qanda'
- Who else loved Pauline's face when she heard Indonesia the biggest Islamic country in the world is successful & enforces democracy
- Wow, Pauline Hanson cannot stand up to being fact checked to her face. Tony Jones just destroyed her. #qanda'

Clear here is that the focus of these posts is not about countering her argument. On one level tweets such as these seek to describe her failure to effectively put forward a convincing argument against her political opponent, but the clear sub-text is that is due to some kind of intellectual deficiency on her part:

- I remember seeing Hanson as a young child & thinking she was an insignificant woman & a dying breed. I wish I had been right. #qanda'
- "I'm really looking forward to Hanson making a goose of herself - she's such a fucking bird brain #QandA"
- Pauline Hanson is glimmering with evil connivance as @samdastyari speaks #qanda #auspol'

Here negative gendered themes become more explicit. Hanson is positioned as being beyond her station, attempting to do something she has no right to do. She is not the right person for the job. While salvational and heroic masculinity is the focus, it is worth mentioning there seems to be a strong class subtext in play as well.

What is also noteworthy is that this view of her intelligence was not limited to those who demonstrated negative sentiment towards her. This view was evident even amongst some who agreed with her views on Islam:

- @MAK1985\_AU @PaulineHansonOz may be awkward but she is only one saying anything real, #qanda panel can only say it's racist
- Pauline Hanson might not be the most eloquent speaker but at least she isn't afraid to talk about Islam. #qanda

Here, however, her gender and class outsider status accord with a grudging respect for her brave willingness to say what more conventionally educated, often male conservative politicians do not. She is granted a counterpoint heroic and salvational status.

### 3.2.4 Gendered Hanson Heroics

The second characterisation of Pauline Hanson in the engaged group was that she was a strong and brave politician who was willing publicly sound the alarm about the dangers of Islam. This position takes a similar position on her question of Islam as the previous comments but rather than positioning Hanson and unintelligent, she is portrayed as tenacious and righteous:

- @mirandadevine @QandA @PaulineHansonOz she will become Prime minister of Australia . A true patriot . And she is no racist'
- Her we go an Islamic putting Pauline down. Get into her Pauline #qanda'
- Hanson\'s views on Islam dominate #QandA <https://t.co/oDR39r2stQ>  
Better title: "PC tag team bullies Hanson."

This was a common theme throughout the anti-Muslim, pro-nationalist viewpoints. A theme emerging here in these tweets is feminine-gendered version of the heroic, salvational masculinity. Hanson is seen as brave for being willing to take on a leadership role in the face of conventional politicians and commentators who are scared to say what everyone is thinking:

- Sorry Muslims & #qanda but I agree with @KirralieS. @SoniaKruger @PaulineHansonOz & Hungary Halt Islamic immigration'
- Hypocrite @MariamVeiszadeh would praise #QandA if #AnneAzzaAly was on panel Complains about Elected @PaulineHansonOz [https://t/](https://t.co/)
- @pruemacsween did you expect anything less Prue? She has more guts than most to walk into that pit! @QandA @PaulineHansonOz'

One thing that is notable here is that the commentators mentioned regularly in tweets in the engaged sample group are women.

Prominent commentators at the time who held public positions against Muslim immigration in addition to Hanson were Sonia Kruger, Kirralie Smith and Miranda Devine. Similarly advocates for pro-diversity positions who were mentioned regularly in Twitter conversations included Q&A panelist Larissa Waters and other prominent commentators Mariam Veiszadeh and Anne Aly. This could just be a coincidence but there also seems to be a degree of subversion of masculine narratives occurring on both sides of the discussion.

Gender emerges as an ongoing theme not only in the commentators referred to in tweets but also the perspective adopted. A gendered counterpoint critique

was invoked in this way by both sides to advance their respective positions. For example a number of tweets address the question of domestic violence:

- Shall we look at domestic violence in Islamic marriages? #qanda'
- #QandA Do we honestly want to argue that Islam respects women! The prophet married a nine year old girl!!!'
- Last nights #qanda was the verbal equivalent of a pack rape. Fitting, considering #Islam was the main topic...'

While these arguments are extremely crude in their framing they are nonetheless an attempt to shift in some way from the more conventionally masculinist patriotic nationalism by invoking purportedly detrimental experiences of women at the hands of Muslim men.

### 3.2.5 Pro-Diversity Feminists and Deliberative Democracy

On the question of gender, the deployment of pro-feminist arguments by those with negative sentiment towards Hanson in the engaged group were more reflective and considered:

- Things more likely to kill you than #Islam: Your SPOUSE! #Domestic violence #qanda'
- Too right I'm fearful of walking down my street - but it's not because of Islam, it's violence against women in general #QandA

Continuing the gendered theme there were also a number of instances where the question of Pauline Hanson's gender was explicitly invoked in order to make arguments against panelists and other prominent left-wing feminists:

- #QandA Dystiari u have no respect for women, the way u spoke to Pauline Hanson makes me think u'r muslim heritage is still with u.
- Will @clementine\_ford, @rubyhamad and @CatherineDeveny condemn the misogynist attacks on @PaulineHansonOz on #qanda last night?

The gendered nature of these critiques don't function to undermine the heroic, salvational masculinist narrative. Rather they offer a counterpoint that replicates the logic and mirrors it, insofar as it is operationalised in order to vanquish the argument of those on the other side of the political spectrum who are positioned as detrimental or threaten to the body politic and society more generally.

### 3.2.6 HSMV as Exclusivism

A final key point of tension regarding Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence (exclusivism) evident in a number of tweets emerged when a question was asked on *Q&A* by Khaled Elomar of Pauline Hanson. Mr Elomar explained that he had been asked to explain the concept of Islamophobia by his 11-year-old son and in order to do so used videos of Pauline Hanson.

This generated significant mainstream media reportage and pressure on the ABC to moderate certain kinds of political views. Preceding media reaction, more immediate reactions could be seen in a number of tweets:

- #qanda what is Islamophobia dad? Tell u'r son its when ppl are scared of islamic terrorism that kills many ppl.
- The muslim mans son is has no fear in this country except of radical Islam #qanda'
- The little boy is equal - so long as he denounces Islam - its the infidels #qanda #youknowitmakesense'

Again these pro-nationalist or anti-diversity views don't really engage with the point being raised, drawing on established stereotypes of Muslim threat. Ideals of deliberative debate are not being met.

## **4.0 Conclusions:**

### 4.1 Implication of Findings for Social Cohesion

The greater representation of far-right and pro diversity left views than militant dissident views expressed by those who identify as Muslim

What can be seen in the Twitter based interactions of viewers of ABC's *Q&A* is a cycle of anti-social modelling likely to undermine social cohesion. As suggested in the earlier stages of the report, the success in the 2016 Federal election of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party has highlighted and legitimated a growing consternation about Islamist extremism in Australia, acting as a proxy for wider concerns around Muslims and multiculturalism.

This, however, is not a phenomenon limited to one particular cross-section of Australian society. It interacts with other groups such as progressive, pro-multicultural left, pro-secular rationalists and the Muslim community. The interaction between these groups generated by this consternation creates a feedback loop that reinforces a negative cycle of recriminations and accusations.

The interaction of these groups online can play a key role in pre-figuring outbreaks of physical violence. The preceding case study of the Coburg Riots demonstrates just how this can occur. It was not an isolated incident but one precipitated by online interaction of antagonistic groups. While not all anti-social online interactions will generate real-life violence, it is part of the generative process.

#### 4.2 The Media Echo Chamber and Social Cohesion

We note that broadcast media play a significant role in agenda-setting: that is, on defining and determining issues for public discussion and deliberation. This is certainly the aim of forum programs like *Q&A*, as noted in the program's website. Such deliberative discussions, however, are located within a narrow band of the political and cultural élite with non-mainstream or institutional voices being directed to the online Twitter-sphere

The election of Pauline Hanson to the institutional realm of parliament enabled a far-right voice to gain institutional, public and mainstream media credibility. Hanson and her Islamophobic, anti-diversity views were enabled, giving credibility to this form of violent exclusivism.

This credibility contrasts with the exclusion more radical voices and perspectives, including those that are laced by an equally violent form of

extremism. The presence, for example, on *Q&A* of Islamic activist, Zaky Mallah in 2015 prompted the Federal Government to censure the ABC, threatening the viability of the *Q&A* program itself. While the exclusion of Mallah and his subterfuge of violence may be reasonable on ethical or ideological grounds, it nevertheless reflects both the solipsism of the political and media élite, as well as the inadequacies of deliberative democracy which suppresses minority perspectives.

The online media system, however, provides opportunities for a much broader political debate and level of inclusion. This inclusiveness inevitably provides space for radical ideas. It also provides space for the promulgation of exclusivism and violence which threaten social cohesion, diversity and community resilience.

The difficulty for government is how to modulate the free expression of ideas and perspectives, against the dangers that are inscribed in those ideas and perspectives—including and especially exclusivism. The interaction of online and broadcast media systems creates a cultural and political echo chamber in which this modulation becomes increasingly fraught and difficult. The language wars which operate through a healthy democracy become confounded by the threat of emotional excess, intuitive opinion-making and the threat and performance of violence.

Suppression of these expressive spaces, however, may equally contribute to these threats. The rise of far-right populism and the mobilization of Heroic and Salvational Masculine Violence may well be symptoms of this form of repression and censure—as much as they are seeking to repress the freedom and free expression of others whom they fear.





