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**Kāfir Pride: An examination of the recent apparent rise in Australian anti-Islamic activity and the challenges it presents for national security****By: Douglas Fry<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

Multiple high-profile instances of anti-Islamic activity in Australia throughout 2015 – for example, the Reclaim Australia rallies in April and July, and the establishment of an anti-Islamic federal political party – is in keeping with increased Islamophobia observed in other western nations. While a key driving force behind this phenomenon is the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, ongoing jihadi violence – particularly atrocities committed by or on behalf of Islamic State –has served to reinforce anti-Islamic sentiment. Although objections to Islam are ostensibly cultural and religious, the prejudiced nature of Islamophobia essentially operates as racism. Emergent discourses about Islamic culture – for example, fears of Sharia law being imposed on western society – have positioned Muslims as an “enemy” who endanger western cultural values, and even present an existential threat. Accordingly, the risk of violence from anti-Islamic elements is not insignificant. To that end, this paper examines the range of security issues arising from Australian Islamophobic activity in two parts. First, it provides historical and cultural context for contemporary Islamophobia, noting the parallels and overlap with similar movements in the West. The primary themes promoted by anti-Islamic groups, and the manner by which they interact with audiences, are also analysed, noting the heavy emphasis on online communication, and how this translates to offline activities. Second, it will examine the types of potential or actual security risks that anti-Islamic activity presents to Australian authorities, describing a spectrum of increasing intensity that incorporates communication, physical violence, radicalisation and terrorism.

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## Introduction

There were several high-profile instances of anti-Islamic activity in Australia throughout 2015. Key examples include the Reclaim Australia rallies in April and July, which drew large numbers of demonstrators to multiple major cities; anti-mosque protests in Bendigo, Victoria organised by right-wing populist group the United Patriots Front (UPF); and the establishment of an anti-Islamic political party, the Australian Liberty Alliance, which was launched by prominent right-wing Dutch politician Geert Wilders.<sup>2</sup> This is in keeping with increased Islamophobia observed in other western nations.<sup>3</sup> While the underlying driving force behind this phenomenon is the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, ongoing jihadi violence – particularly atrocities committed by or on behalf of Islamic State – has served to reinforce anti-Islamic sentiment.

Although objections to Islam are ostensibly cultural and religious, the prejudiced nature of Islamophobia essentially operates as racism.<sup>4</sup> “When we see verbal and other attacks against Muslim Australians,” the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner notes, “it is often accompanied by a nastiness and logic that resembles racial hatred.”<sup>5</sup> By attaching negative signification to Muslims, van der Valk says, Islamophobia “underscores[s] their exclusion as ‘the Other’ whilst favouring unequal and discriminatory treatment,” thereby producing “culturally oriented racism.”<sup>6</sup> Islamophobia should thus be regarded as an ideological phenomenon, Allen argues, “manifested in signifiers and symbols that influence,

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<sup>2</sup> Day, L, “Australian Liberty Alliance: Geert Wilders unveils Senate candidates amid warnings over ‘blatant racism,’” ABC News, October 22, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-21/australian-liberty-alliance-candidates-unveiled-amid-racism-fear/6874336>

<sup>3</sup> See for example: European Police Office (EUROPOL), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2015*, EUROPOL, The Hague, 2015, p36; Potok, M, “FBI: Reported Hate Crimes Down Nationally, Except Against Muslims,” Southern Poverty Law Center, November 16, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016 at <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2015/11/16/fbi-reported-hate-crimes-down-nationally-except-against-muslims>

<sup>4</sup> Gardell, M, “Crusader Dreams: Oslo 22/7, Islamophobia, and the Quest for a Monocultural Europe,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(1), 2014, p133

<sup>5</sup> Soutphommasane, T, “Reflections on casual racism and the sentiments,” Australian Human Rights Commission, November 2014, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/reflections-casual-racism-and-sentiments>

<sup>6</sup> Van der Valk, I, “Youth Engagement in Right Wing Extremism: Comparative Cases from the Netherlands,” in Taylor, M, Holbrook, D and Currie, P (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p137

impact on and inform the social consensus about the Other.”<sup>7</sup> Emergent discourses about Islamic culture – for example, fears of Sharia law being imposed on western society – have positioned Muslims as an “enemy” who endanger western cultural values, and even present an existential threat. The result, Currie warns, is that “the risk of violence from counter-jihad discourse is not inconsiderable, and growing.”<sup>8</sup>

To that end, this paper examines the range of security issues arising from Islamophobic activity in Australia. It will address these issues in two parts. First, it will provide historical and cultural context for contemporary Islamophobia, noting the parallels and overlap with similar movements in the West. The primary themes promoted by anti-Islamic groups, and the manner in which they interact with audiences, will also be analysed, noting the heavy emphasis on online communication and how this translates to offline activities. Second, it will examine the types of potential or actual security risks that anti-Islamic activity presents, describing a spectrum of increasing intensity that incorporates communication, physical violence, radicalisation and terrorism.

### 1.1 Social and historical context

Although ethno-centrist racism has been a perpetual feature in the Australian political landscape – prominently represented by the White Australia Policy that governed migrant intakes for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – it was only in recent decades that a “more radical form of applied patriotism” began to emerge.<sup>9</sup> In response to increased Asian migration in the early 1980s, right-wing extremist groups proliferated by acting as “the little man’s mouthpiece” and targeting migrant communities to the point of violence.<sup>10</sup> Radical action against “Asianisation” persisted into the 1990s with the emergence of extreme right-wing political parties such as One Nation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Allen, C, “Opposing Islamification or promoting Islamophobia? Understanding the English Defence League,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, 45(4), 2011, p290

<sup>8</sup> Currie, PM, “Conclusion,” in Taylor, M, Holbrook, D and Currie, PM (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p246

<sup>9</sup> Royce, M, *The Rise and Propagation of Political Right-Wing Extremism: The Identification and Assessment of Common Sovereign Economic and Socio-Demographic Determinants*, Swiss Management Center University, Zurich, 2010, p12

<sup>10</sup> Royce, op cit, p14

<sup>11</sup> Royce, op cit, p15

Australian Muslims had already experienced periods of heightened discrimination prior to the September 11 terrorist attacks, including the 1990-91 Gulf War, moral panic over Lebanese gang activity, and Muslim asylum seekers being labelled “queue jumpers.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Poynting and Mason contend that “the upsurge of anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia [after September 11] arose...from the exacerbation of existing tendencies.”<sup>13</sup> The attacks served as “ideological payout” for groups who had presented Islam as incompatible with Australian society and cultural values.<sup>14</sup> This viewpoint is carried into contemporary Islamophobic discourse, which frequently presents Muslims as subhuman, depraved and deceptive (see Figure 1).



The social “demonization” of Australian Muslims has, on one hand, means that existing extreme right-wing groups have shifted their focus from “traditional” enemies

<sup>12</sup> Poynting, S and Mason, V, “The resistible rise of Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001,” *Journal of Sociology*, 43(1), 2007, pp71-79

<sup>13</sup> Poynting and Mason, op cit, p81

<sup>14</sup> ibid

<sup>15</sup> “Aussie Infidels” Facebook page, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/Aussie-Infidels-1468269180135616/>

(particularly Jewish people) to Muslims.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, it has produced heightened levels of nationalistic social identity within the general Australian community. A recent study by Fozdar et al, for example, notes very low levels of positivity towards Australian Muslims, and describes the increasingly overt and prolific manner in which the Australian flag is displayed.<sup>17</sup> These displays, which range from the mundane (eg. car bumper stickers) to the extreme (eg. young men who forced non-white attendees at the 2007 Sydney Big Day Out concert to kiss the flag), demonstrate that “the flag appears to have come to represent, to some Australians, an identity associated with the majority culture and race, and exclusive of difference.”<sup>18</sup>

While Australia is a highly multicultural society, and a generally inclusive one at that, James notes that “beneath the affable surface there exist persistent racist and other forms of intolerance that provide the oxygen for selective violence.”<sup>19</sup> A key example is a December 2005 incident where large numbers of whites descended on Cronulla beach, ostensibly as a display of patriotism and solidarity, but also to seek violent retribution after a lifeguard was allegedly attacked by Lebanese men. The Cronulla riots, Blüch et al argue, “represent evidence of the crystallization in Australian society of a group that sought to maintain the supremacy of the European Australian majority.”<sup>20</sup> A decade later, the “white civil uprising” at Cronulla continues to serve as a touchstone for anti-Islamic activity.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2 Australian anti-Islamic groups and themes

Contemporary anti-Islamic activity in Australia does not form a homogenous movement; rather, it incorporates a disparate spectrum of participants. It encompasses

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<sup>16</sup> Holbrook, D and Taylor, M, “Introduction,” in Taylor, M, Holbrook, D and Currie, PM (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p6

<sup>17</sup> Fozdar, F, Spittles, B and Hartley, L, “Australia Day, flags on cars and Australian nationalism,” *Journal of Sociology*, 51(2), 2015, p330

<sup>18</sup> Fozdar et al, op cit, p332

<sup>19</sup> James, S, “Policing Political Violence in Australia,” in Lowe, D, Turk, A and Das, D (eds.), *Examining Political Violence: Studies of Terrorism, Counterterrorism and Internal War*, CRC Press, Boca Raton, 2013, p330

<sup>20</sup> Blüch, A, McGarty, C, Hartley, L and Hendres, D, “Manipulating national identity: the strategic use of rhetoric by supporters and opponents of the ‘Cronulla riots’ in Australia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(12), 2012, pp2180-1

<sup>21</sup> Donnelly, B and Hall, B, “Anti-Islam ‘patriots’ set their sights on Cronulla, where it all began,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 22, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/antiislam-patriots-set-their-sights-on-cronulla-where-it-all-began-20151022-gkfsqo.html>

unaligned individuals, populist groups (eg. UPF, Patriots Defence League Australia), pro-Israel organisations (eg. Q Society), issue-based lobbyists (eg. Halal Choices, local mosque opposition groups), Christian ministries (eg. Catch the Fire), neo-Nazi gangs (eg. Combat 18) and political parties (eg. Australian Liberty Alliance, Rise Up Australia Party). Several federal politicians have also expressed Islamophobic sentiments, such as Senator Jacqui Lambie's push to outlaw burqas, or MP George Christensen's address at a Reclaim Australia rally.<sup>22</sup> There is marked overlap between anti-Islamic entities – for example, the Australian Liberty Alliance and Halal Choices emerged from the Q Society, and the anti-mosque group Rights For Bendigo Residents coordinated protest activity with the UPF. Conflict between – and fragmentation within – groups has also emerged. While the Islamophobic movement contains a wide range of viewpoints and agendas, Aly nevertheless identifies a number of common themes that have flourished unchecked in an “enabling environment” of mainstream political intolerance.<sup>23</sup>

A prominent theme among anti-Islamic groups – both in Australia and the broader western world – is that European historical and cultural heritage is under threat from “Islamification.” For example, Kundanini notes the “civilisational discourse” promoted by the English Defence League (EDL), a populist Islamophobic group formed in 2009, which describes Islam as incompatible with western traditions such as individual liberty, freedom of speech and gender equality.<sup>24</sup> This “identitarian narrative” presents a struggle against the social erosion brought about by multicultural policies of weak and complicit western governments.<sup>25</sup> These views are echoed by the Party For Freedom, a Sydney-based political

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<sup>22</sup> Bourke, L, “Parents face jail and \$34,000 fines under Jacqui Lambie’s burqa ban push,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 28, 2014, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/parents-face-jail-and-34000-fines-under-jacqui-lambies-burqa-ban-proposal-20141028-11cyzr.html>; Hair, J, “Reclaim Australia: Federal MP George Christensen tell crowd Australia ‘at war with radical Islam,’” ABC News, July 19, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-19/george-christensen-addresses-extreme-islam-at-mackay-rally/6632006>

<sup>23</sup> Aly, A, “Reclaim Australia is the product of rising rightwing extremism,” *The Guardian*, July 20, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/20/anne-aly-reclaim-australia-is-the-product-of-rising-right-wing-extremism>

<sup>24</sup> Kundanini, A, *Blind Spot? Security Narratives and Far-Right Violence in Europe*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 2012, p3

<sup>25</sup> Kundanini, op cit, p6



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organisation that derides the “multicultural treason” of successive governments, and seeks to halt Muslim immigration:

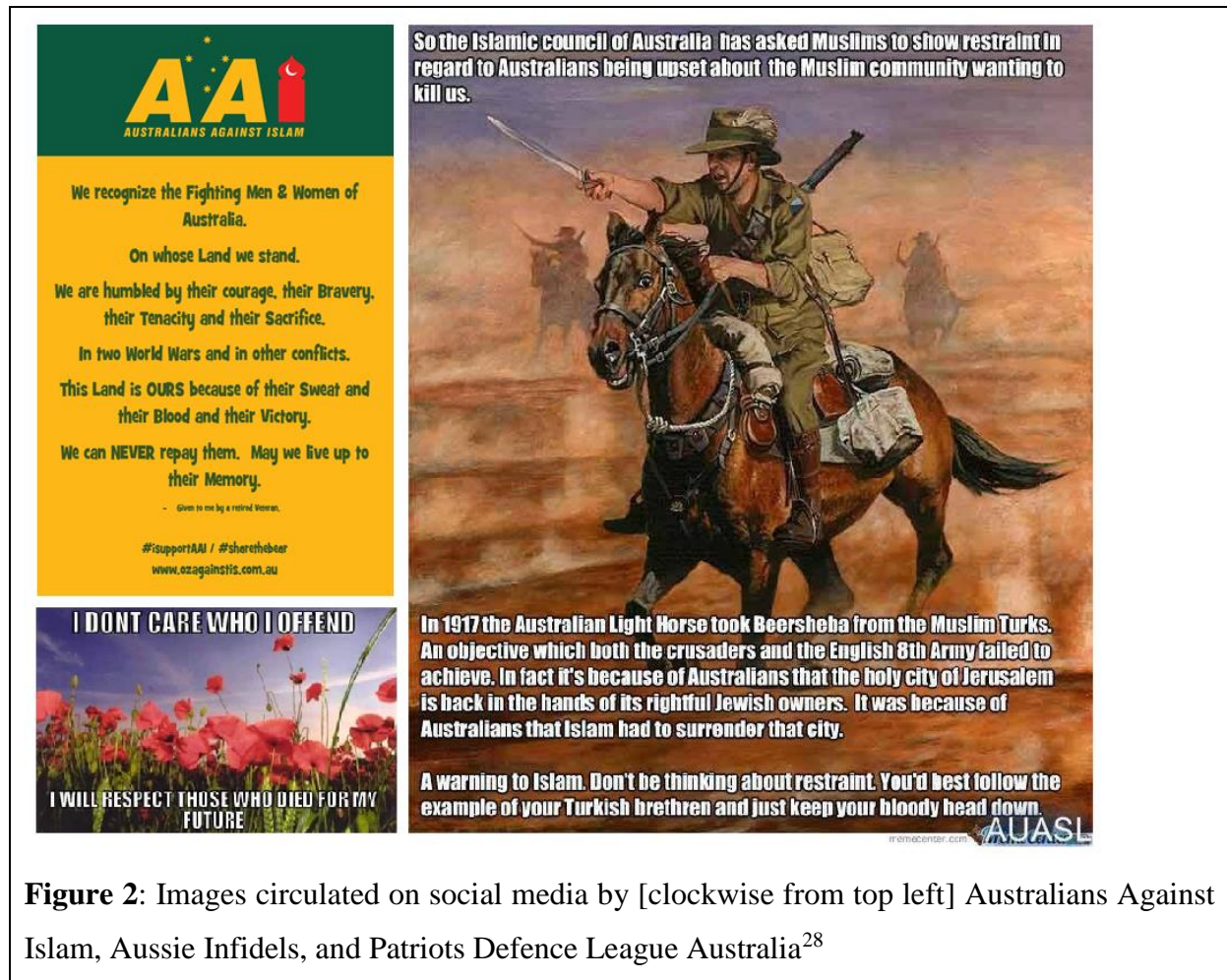
*Sharia Law, with its denigration and mistreatment of women and non-Muslims, is incompatible with the Australian way of life and secular, legal traditions. Certain cultural practices associated with Muslim populations, such as FGM (female genital mutilation), honour killings and polygamy, are also unacceptable and unwanted in Australia.*<sup>26</sup>

In its most extreme form, this oppositional narrative conjures a modern-day Crusade, where the West battling to survive against Islam, even struggling to prevent the systematic genocide of whites. In an Australian context, this wartime discourse is reinforced by recurrent references to “the ANZAC spirit” by anti-Islamic groups and their followers (see Figure 2). ANZAC soldiers are revered for having fought against the Ottoman Empire, a potent historical symbol of the Islamic Caliphate, while serving as an archetype for noble and brave Australians. Similarly, the EDL has constructed a “heroic narrative” around its actions by adopting wartime symbols and metaphors to present itself as a vanguard against Islamic hostility, while also reinforcing comradeship within the group.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Party For Freedom, “Policies,” Party For Freedom, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.partyforfreedom.org.au/policies/>

<sup>27</sup> Busher, J, “Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League: Discourse and Public (Dis)order,” in Taylor, M, Holbrook, D and Currie, PM (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p73



**Figure 2:** Images circulated on social media by [clockwise from top left] Australians Against Islam, Aussie Infidels, and Patriots Defence League Australia<sup>28</sup>

This sense of anti-Islamic comradeship is aided in large part by online activity, particularly social media platforms that facilitate peer-to-peer communication. In September 2015, the author identified no less than 30 Australian Islamophobic Facebook pages, a tally that excludes pages representing established anti-Islamic groups and political parties. Easily accessible, broadly appealing online material can help an extremist movement gain followers, while serving as an “echo chamber” that reinforces an individual’s ideology.<sup>29</sup> The internet, Koehler notes, “is especially suitable for the quick creation, adaption and distribution of

<sup>28</sup>Australians Against Islam, Image content on group website, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.azagainstis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAI-Quote38.png>; “Aussie Infidels” Facebook page, op cit; Patriots Defence League Australia, Facebook page, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/PDLA-Patriots-Defence-League-Australia-237357993132774/>

<sup>29</sup> Von Behr, I, Reding, A, Edwards, C and Gribbon, L, *Radicalisation in the digital era: The use of the internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism*, RAND Europe, Brussels, 2013, pp18-19; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Right wing Extremists and their Internet Presence*, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Berlin, 2013, p13



[symbolic] frames and is thereby thought to play a central role in building and maintaining the group's collective identity."<sup>30</sup>

Virtual interconnectedness not only builds a collective identity within – and among – domestic groups, it also promotes transnational solidarity.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, a “united global struggle” narrative can be witnessed among Islamophobic groups, largely resulting from ubiquitous online connectivity.<sup>32</sup> For example, the Q Society has closely collaborated with US-based group Stop Islamization of Nations.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Arizona-based Jon Ritzheimer organised the October 2015 “Global Rally For Humanity,” an international day of anti-Islamic protest with supporters in North America, Europe and Australia.<sup>34</sup> In a Facebook video announcing the protest, Ritzheimer makes specific reference to the UPF: “Our boys down in Australia, United Patriot [sic] Front, we here in America...are honoured to have this opportunity to stand with you against a common enemy.”<sup>35</sup> The UPF replied with a video declaring, “America, you’re our allies, so are England. Doesn’t matter whether it’s troops...or the citizens. You’re our allies, we’ve got each other’s backs.”<sup>36</sup>

Although the “Global Rally For Humanity” ultimately attracted low turnouts, it nevertheless points to the influence that the online sphere can wield in offline activities. An annual “Counterjihad” conference in Europe, for example, was founded in 2007 by online activists and bloggers.<sup>37</sup> Following an August 2015 protest against a mosque in Bendigo, the UPF declared it would hold a second demonstration if its Facebook video was shared more

<sup>30</sup> Koehler, D, “The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, Winter 2014/2015(1), 2015, p128

<sup>31</sup> Caiani, M and Kröll, P, “The transnationalization of the extreme right and the use of the Internet,” *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, DOI, 2014, p2

<sup>32</sup> Archer, T, “Breivik’s Mindset: The Counterjihad and the New Transatlantic Anti-Muslim Right,” in Taylor, M, Holbrook, D and Currie, PM (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, p173

<sup>33</sup> Geller, P, “New Australian political party: the Australian Liberty Alliance,” *Atlas Shrugs*, May 23, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://pamelageller.com/2015/05/new-australian-political-party-the-australian-liberty-alliance.html/>

<sup>34</sup> Wasser, M, “Phoenix’s Jon Ritzheimer Plans Global Anti-Islam Protest,” *Phoenix New Times*, August 10, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/phoenixs-jon-ritzheimer-plans-global-anti-islam-protest-7554126>

<sup>35</sup> Ritzheimer, J, Facebook video content, August 12, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/scrappyphx.rider/videos/426959944158478/?pnref=story>

<sup>36</sup> Burgess, S (“The Great Aussie Patriot”), Facebook video content, August 12, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=1042052465807783&fref=nf>

<sup>37</sup> Archer, op cit, p180

than 1000 times.<sup>38</sup> The internet can serve as “a permanent gateway to offline political activism,” Koehler notes, which allows would-be supporters to sample a range of group ideologies before committing to real world activism.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the internet can potentially also lead to more extreme real-world behaviour. An individual may internalise a group’s online narrative to explain a complex world, develop self-esteem, and merge the group’s ideology into their social identity.<sup>40</sup> This results in a scenario, Barrelle says, where the individual “clearly knows who is good and who is bad (based on in-group/out-group membership), and will fight ‘the enemy’ for himself, his comrades and in the name of his righteous cause.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, online material can serve to radicalise an individual, which may manifest in real-world extremist behaviour – including violence. This phenomenon will be addressed in greater detail in the following section.

## 2. Security issues arising from anti-Islamic activity

Anti-Islamic activity can be viewed as an escalating spectrum of actual and potential security risks, with incremental impact on public safety. The lower intensity end of this spectrum is represented by anti-social activity, and it progresses into moderate intensity activity with wider public impact. At the higher intensity level, anti-Islamic activity can lead to radicalisation, with the potential to result in violence, including backlash from the Muslim community.

### 2.1 Low intensity activity

As previously noted, Islamophobia essentially functions as racism. The Australian Human Rights Commission identifies harassment as “a component of racist violence” that encompasses “behaviour intended to intimidate or threaten the victim.”<sup>42</sup> Notable Australian

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<sup>38</sup> United Patriots Front, Facebook video content, August 31, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/unitedpatriotsfront/videos/167042850296842/>

<sup>39</sup> Koehler, op cit, p128

<sup>40</sup> Barrelle, K, “Disengagement from violent extremism” (conference paper), Global Terrorism Research Centre and Politics Department, Monash University, 2010, pp3-4

<sup>41</sup> Barrelle, op cit, p4

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia*, Australian Government, Canberra, 1991, p14

examples of low-intensity Islamophobia between November 2014 and November 2015 include:

- Multiple instances of Muslim Australians being verbally attacked on public transport<sup>43</sup>
- Intimidating letters posted to a Melbourne-based Muslim academic<sup>44</sup>
- A mutilated pig carcass being placed outside a Perth mosque<sup>45</sup>
- Multiple instances of mosques being subject to vandalism<sup>46</sup>
- UPF social media videos depicting group members visiting mosques and staging a mock beheading<sup>47</sup>

The immediate impact of these examples is localised, in the form of adverse psychological repercussions for the victim or worshippers at a particular mosque. However, these activities also produce a wider feeling of insecurity among Muslim Australians. In response to an apparent increase in harassment, an Islamophobia Register was privately established in September 2014 to collate anti-Islamic activity, with its founder noting: “The anxiety felt by victims...[has] detrimental impacts on all aspects of their lives and the broader families and communities.”<sup>48</sup>

To that end, Kundanini observes the political nature of racially motivated attacks may warrant terroristic categorisation, as “low-level harassment...inflicts a different but no less

<sup>43</sup> See for example: Mills, T, “Good Samaritan assaulted after standing up for Muslim women who were abused on Melbourne train,” *The Age*, May 26, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/good-samaritan-assaulted-after-standing-up-for-muslim-women-who-were-abused-on-melbourne-train-20150525-gh9j6x.html> and Taha, M, “Racist rant on Sydney train caught on video, passenger defends Muslim woman from tirade,” ABC News, April 16, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/racist-rant-on-sydney-train-caught-on-video/6398022>

<sup>44</sup> Hussein, S, Email correspondence with author, September 25, 2015

<sup>45</sup> Holland, S, “Bloody pig’s head found outside Perth mosque,” *WA Today*, November 24, 2014, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/bloody-pigs-head-found-outside-perth-mosque-20141124-11sr7g.html>

<sup>46</sup> See for example: The Australian, “Vandals spray anti-Islam graffiti on Brisbane mosque,” *The Australian*, September 25, 2014, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/vandals-spray-antiislam-graffiti-on-brisbane-mosque/story-e6frg6n6-1227069793961> and Perpetch, N, “White supremacist graffiti sprayed on Perth mosque in third attack in eight months,” ABC News, February 16, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-16/white-supremacist-graffiti-sprayed-on-mosque/6121596>

<sup>47</sup> United Patriots Front, Facebook video content, October 4, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/unitedpatriotsfront/videos/183124668688660/>

<sup>48</sup> Hocking, R, “‘Violent attack’ on Sydney Muslim woman highlights reports of Islamophobia,” SBS News, March 26, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/03/25/violent-attack-sydney-muslim-woman-highlights-reports-islamophobia>

powerful form of terror,”<sup>49</sup> while Lambert argues that it is insufficient to describe low-intensity attacks on Muslims as “hate crimes,” which should instead be regarded as political violence.<sup>50</sup> Even low-intensity activities such as harassment and property damage can be regarded as “a close cousin to terrorism,” according to Krueger and Malečková, as targeting is based on group identity, and the resultant effect “wreak[s] terror on a greater number of people than those directly affected by the violence.”<sup>51</sup> This assertion has not gone unchallenged; for example, Deloughery et al’s empirical study of hate crime and terrorism found “no association or negative association between the two,” which leads the authors to conclude that “the two behaviors are conceptually unique and likely driven by different social processes.”<sup>52</sup>

Even so, the Australian Government identifies low-intensity activity, including minor criminal activity, as a point of concern due to the fact it may represent the early stages of an individual becoming radicalised.<sup>53</sup> This notion is contested by Deloughery et al, who present evidence that hate crimes against minority groups are reactionary, rather than a precursor to further radical activity or outright terrorism.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting the case of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh here, however. In the years leading up to the 1995 attack on a US federal government building, McVeigh engaged in increasingly provocative communication directed at US authorities, while his criminal activity escalated to include trespass and theft from a military facility, and conspiring in the armed robbery of a firearm dealer.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kundanini, op cit, p29

<sup>50</sup> Lambert, R, “Anti-Muslim Violence in the UK: Extremist Nationalist Involvement and Influence,” in Taylor, M, Holbrook, D and Currie, PM (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013, pp55-6

<sup>51</sup> Krueger, A, and Malečková, J, “Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?” *The New Republic*, June 24, 2002, p28

<sup>52</sup> Deloughery, K, King, R, and Asal, V, “Close Cousins or Distant Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime,” *Crime & Delinquency*, 58(5), 2012, p681

<sup>53</sup> Attorney-General’s Department, *Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Australia*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2015, p7

<sup>54</sup> Deloughery et al, op cit, pp679-80

<sup>55</sup> Michel, L, and Herbeck, D, *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh & the Oklahoma City Bombing*, HarperCollins, New York, 2001

## 2.2 Moderate intensity activity

At this point in this spectrum, anti-Islamic activity presents a wider threat to general public safety, imposing greater economic and social costs, including property damage and injury. This includes, for example, an April 2015 arson attack on a mosque in Toowoomba, Queensland.<sup>56</sup> Anti-Islamic public demonstrations throughout 2015 also fall into this category. Although these demonstrations are a legally-sanctioned exercise in public protest, the inconvenience they present can impose economic costs: a UPF rally in October 2015, for example, led to the cancellation of a Bendigo wine festival.<sup>57</sup>

A large police presence may be required at anti-Islamic demonstrations, which diverts policing assets from general public safety duties, while also leading to the costly deployment of specialised resources such as air, mounted and tactical units.<sup>58</sup> The police presence results from the strong potential for violence. For example, multiple attacks on Lebanese people during the 2005 Cronulla riot required police intervention, while capsicum spray was deployed to quell unruly UPF supporters and opponents in August 2015.<sup>59</sup>

Noting similar unrest at EDL rallies, Busher describes how the demonstrations “seem to provide an outlet for violence, and an opportunity for marginalized (often young) men to enact an aggressive masculinity directed towards...the ‘dangerous Other.’”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, violence serves as evidence of an individual’s deepening engagement with extremist ideology.<sup>61</sup> As the Australian Government notes, “If someone begins to support the use of violence to promote a cause, radicalisation to violent extremism becomes a serious

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<sup>56</sup> Rego, F and Tlozek, E, “Arsonist believed responsible for Toowoomba mosque fire,” ABC News, April 17, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-17/fire-seriously-damages-toowoomba-mosque-qld/6399340>

<sup>57</sup> Baxendale, R, “Bendigo mosque protest fears kill Uncorked wine festival,” *The Australian*, October 8, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at [www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/terror/bendigo-mosque-protest-fears-kill-uncorked-wine-festival/story-fnnpdbcmu-1227561120972](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/terror/bendigo-mosque-protest-fears-kill-uncorked-wine-festival/story-fnnpdbcmu-1227561120972)

<sup>58</sup> Cowie, T, “Bendigo mosque protest: Anti-mosque and anti-racism protesters clash,” *The Age*, August 29, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/bendigo-mosque-protest-antimosque-and-antiracism-protesters-clash-20150829-gjaml8.html>

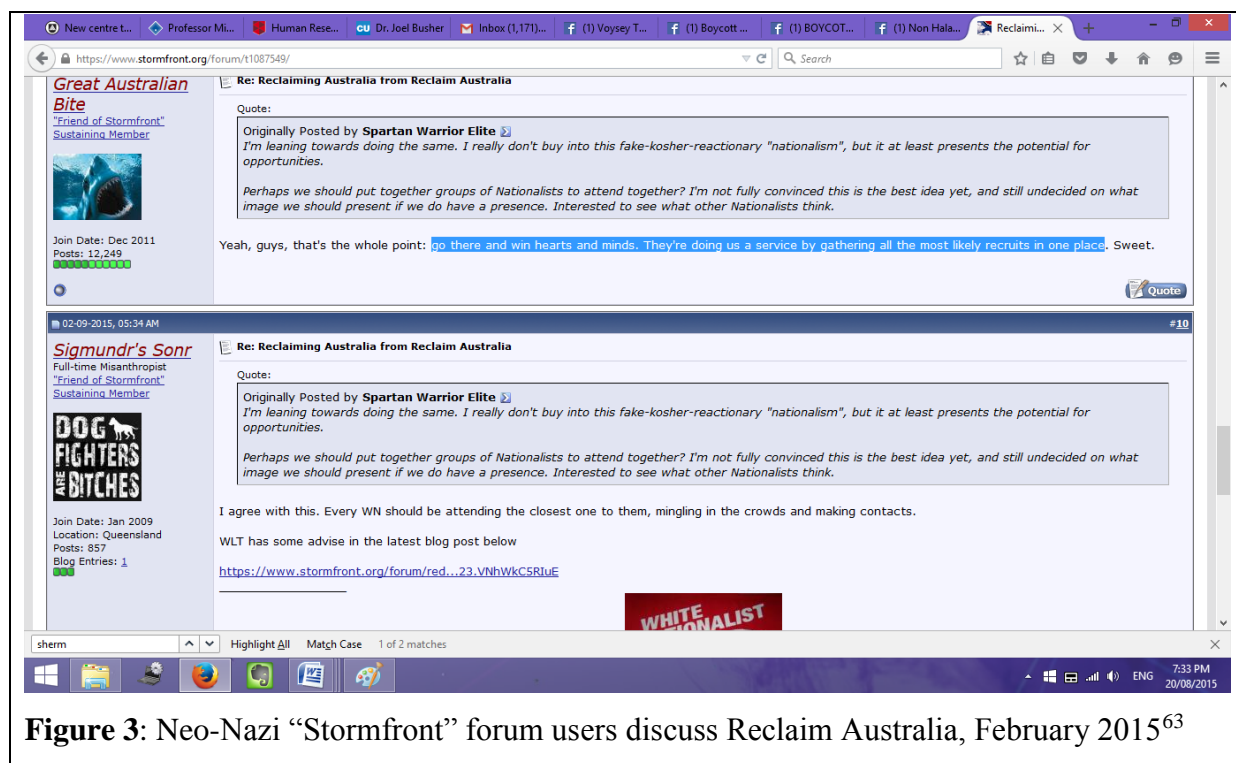
<sup>59</sup> Kilcullen, D, “An Afternoon with Australia’s Bendigo Mosque Protesters,” *Vice*, August 31, 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at [http://www.vice.com/en\\_au/read/a-day-and-night-with-the-bendigo-mosque-protesters](http://www.vice.com/en_au/read/a-day-and-night-with-the-bendigo-mosque-protesters)

<sup>60</sup> Busher 2013, op cit, p76

<sup>61</sup> Currie, op cit, p243



concern.”<sup>62</sup> There is also evidence that neo-Nazi groups targeted Reclaim Australia rallies to recruit new members (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Neo-Nazi “Stormfront” forum users discuss Reclaim Australia, February 2015<sup>63</sup>

### 2.3 High intensity activity

At this end of the scale, anti-Islamic activity presents a serious threat to public safety, with the potential to conduct – or provoke – violence that results in significant social and economic costs, multiple casualties, or even fatalities. Acts of this nature are undertaken by individuals who progressively internalise an extremist ideology to the point of radicalisation, with Bartlett and Miller observing a number of different models describing this process.<sup>64</sup> While radicalisation in itself is not problematic, Barrelle says, it can lead to terrorism under the right conditions.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Bjørge notes that most people with extremist views will not

<sup>62</sup> Attorney-General’s Department, op cit, p7

<sup>63</sup> Stormfront, “Reclaiming Australia from Reclaim Australia” (online forum), Stormfront, February 2015, accessed October 23, 2015 at <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t1087549/>

<sup>64</sup> Bartlett, J and Miller, C, “The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24(1), 2012, p13

<sup>65</sup> Barrelle, op cit, p4

undertake terrorism, but “certain events and developments may provide circumstances for radicalizing some groups and individuals to cross this threshold.”<sup>66</sup>

Extremist violence may be directly undertaken by a group, or by an otherwise unaffiliated individual who is nevertheless inspired by a group’s ideology. Lambert, for example, notes how far-right British organisations “have had a considerable influence in promoting racist violence carried out by ‘lone wolves.’”<sup>67</sup> In this regard, the internet serves a central role in the radicalisation process. Online engagement with anti-Islamic groups can lead a person to reject mainstream media in favour of “esoteric sources of information such as the various ‘counter-jihad’ blogs and web forums.”<sup>68</sup> As noted, this can serve to reinforce a person’s inherent biases, and further augment radicalisation.<sup>69</sup> A key case study is the perpetrator of the July 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway, Anders Breivik, who was a devoted reader of anti-Islamic blogs such as “Gates of Vienna” to the point that he plagiarised these websites in his manifesto.<sup>70</sup>

It is important at this point to distinguish between the state and non-state entities that might be targeted by extremist violence. Anti-Islamic activists view Muslims as the primary threat to Australian society, but as noted, many also believe the government is complicit in supporting this threat through multicultural policies (see Figure 4). This phenomenon is termed “split delegitimization” by Sprinzak, a staged process in which a right-wing group increasingly conflates the actions of a government with those of its primary enemy.<sup>71</sup> In the final stage, any person identified as complicit is “derogated into the ranks of the worst enemies or subhuman species,” which “makes it possible for the radicals to disengage morally and to commit atrocities without remorse.”<sup>72</sup> Sprinzak’s theory has, however, received

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<sup>66</sup> Bjørgo, T, “Editor’s preface,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(1), 1995, p10

<sup>67</sup> Lambert, op cit, p38

<sup>68</sup> Busher, J, “Anti-Muslim populism in the UK: The development of the English Defence League,” in Giusto, H, Kitching, D and Rizzo, S (eds.), *The Changing Faces of Populism: Systemic Challengers in Europe and the US*, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Brussels, 2013, p215

<sup>69</sup> McFarlane, B, “Online Violent Radicalisation (OVer): Challenges facing Law Enforcement Agencies and Policy Stakeholders” (conference paper), Global Terrorism Research Centre and Politics Department, Monash University, 2010, pp9-10

<sup>70</sup> Gardell, op cit, p132

<sup>71</sup> Sprinzak, E, “Right-wing terrorism in a comparative perspective: The case of split delegitimization,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(1), 1995, p18

<sup>72</sup> Sprinzak, op cit, p20

criticism for its “vague concepts, shaky assumptions...and empirical inaccuracies.”<sup>73</sup> A database examining contemporary right wing activity in Germany, for example, indicates that government facilities and personnel have consistently been a major target for right wing terrorism, rather than an adjunct to a campaign against ‘the Other’ as posited by Sprinzak’s theory.<sup>74</sup> Even so, the fact remains that in many instances, right-wing extremists view government authorities and an ethno-religious “enemy” as two sides of the same coin – for example, right wing militias in the US, and their misgivings about the US government’s supposed role within a grand Zionist conspiracy.

Again, Breivik serves as a critical case study in this regard, as his decision to attack government and left-wing targets was motivated by perceived betrayal in the face of a European-wide “civil war” against Islam.<sup>75</sup> While Breivik did consider directly striking Muslim and immigrant targets, he was concerned about stirring public sympathy and the consequent “counter-productive effect” it might have had, ultimately leading him to attack what he perceived to be complicit enemies.<sup>76</sup> Despite his apparent reluctance to inflict large numbers of civilian casualties (particularly children), they ultimately accounted for the vast majority of his victims.<sup>77</sup> “As a result of their ideological beliefs,” Drake notes, “terrorists often seek to identify their victims as being in some way deserving of the treatment meted out to them.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, Breivik’s anti-Islamic ideology shifted blame for the attacks onto the victims, who he deliberately targeted as supposed enablers of a grand “cultural Marxist” conspiracy.

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<sup>73</sup> Ravndal, J, “Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, Summer (3), 2015, p2

<sup>74</sup> Koehler, D, “German Right-Wing Terrorism in Historical Perspective. A First Quantitative Overview of the ‘Database on Terrorism in Germany (Right-Wing Extremism) – DTG rwx’ Project,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 8(5), 2014, p55

<sup>75</sup> Archer, op cit, pp181-2

<sup>76</sup> Hemmingby, C, and Bjørge, T, *The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders B. Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway*, Palgrave Pivot, London, 2015

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Drake, C.J.M., “The role of ideology in terrorists’ target selection,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 10(2), 1998, p57



United Patriots Front Muslims.. Politicians.. Media, whatever, they are all in the same cult. Everyday it becomes clearer that we are up against one big world enemy, not many different enemies - just one.

Like · Reply · 24 · Yesterday at 08:09

**Figure 4:** UPF Facebook post, September 2015

It is not only the actions of anti-Islamic groups or individuals that present a potential security concern for Australian authorities, however. A similar “blame shifting” dynamic can be seen as part of jihadi attacks on Western civilian targets, ostensibly in retribution for their democratic support of oppressive policies in Muslim nations. The Australian Government thus warns of the phenomenon of “reactive group radicalisation,” a spiralling feedback process where one group’s actions inform and influence another’s, and vice-versa.<sup>79</sup> This process was first described by Eatwell, who denoted British Muslim push-back against right-wing violence as “cumulative extremism – namely, the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms.”<sup>80</sup> Cumulative extremism is demonstrated in a Facebook post by a young Muslim Australian man who warned of violent retribution in response to the “Global Rally For Humanity” (see Figure 5).

Busher and Macklin rightly point out that “hard talk is not the name as action...[or] intent to cause physical harm,” and that over-application of the cumulative extremism concept may amplify the apocalyptic narrative of extremist groups.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, a discussion of the risk of high-level security threats in Australia should be placed in the appropriate context. Putting aside the contentious hate crime/terrorism nexus, there is only sporadic precedent for serious right-wing terrorism in Australia; a Christian extremist’s firearm attack on a Melbourne abortion clinic in 2001 serves as the sole example of a lethal right-wing terrorist operation in recent years.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, recent Islamist attacks – for example, a fatal siege in central Sydney in December 2014, and the murder of a NSW Police Force employee in October 2015 – have thus far been extremely limited in scope and impact.

<sup>79</sup> Attorney-General’s Department, op cit, p8

<sup>80</sup> Eatwell, R, “Community Cohesion and Cumulative Extremism in Contemporary Britain,” *The Political Quarterly*, 77(2), 2006, p205

<sup>81</sup> Busher, J and Macklin, G, “Interpreting ‘Cumulative Extremism’: Six Proposals for Enhancing Conceptual Clarity,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, DOI, 2014, pp3-5

<sup>82</sup> Zammit, A, “The potential for far-right terrorism in Australia,” *The Conversation*, October 11, 2012, accessed February 28, 2016 at <http://theconversation.com/the-potential-for-far-right-terrorism-in-australia-10036>

Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to support the idea that extremist actions – particularly violence – can produce a dangerous loop of escalating activity.<sup>83</sup> At the very least, there is frequently an observable spike in right wing hate crimes committed in the immediate wake of an Islamist terrorist attack.<sup>84</sup> For example, in the two weeks following the November 2015 jihadist attacks in Paris, the Islamophobia Register reported a significant increase in verbal and online harassment incidents towards Australian Muslims.<sup>85</sup> In addition, a UPF supporter who declared on social media that “we are the enemy [of Islam], and the people of Paris are the latest victim” was arrested in November 2015 for possessing prohibited weapons; a police search of his home located documents related to the manufacture of explosives.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

As in other western nations, Anti-Islamic activity in Australia markedly increased following the September 11 attacks, and there is evidence that it continues to gain momentum and evolve. Several populist groups and movements emerged in Australia during 2015, while existing far-right groups have reconfigured their “enemy” framework towards Muslims. Islamophobia has also entered mainstream politics, most notably with the foundation of the Australian Liberty Alliance, though the full impact of this phenomenon will not be borne out until the 2016 federal election. At the same time, high-profile international events will continue to heighten western misgivings surrounding the Muslim identity. Incidents such as the numerous alleged sexual assaults by Muslim asylum seekers in Germany on New Year’s Eve 2015, or violent atrocities linked to Islamic State – including “inspired” acts like the December 2015 mass shooting at a public servant function in California – will only serve to further feed the vitriol espoused by Australian anti-Islamic groups.

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<sup>83</sup> Busher and Macklin, op cit, p2

<sup>84</sup> See for example: Deloughery et al, op cit, pp675-6; King, R, and Sutton, G, “High Times For Hate Crimes: Explaining the Temporal Clustering of Hate-Motivated Offending,” *Criminology*, 51(4), 2013, pp884-6

<sup>85</sup> Islamophobia Register Australia, “Preliminary Findings Report 01-12-15,” Islamophobia Register Australia Facebook page, February 18, 2016, accessed February 28, 2016 at <https://www.facebook.com/islamophobiaregisteraustralia/posts/812147742241503>

<sup>86</sup> Dow, A, and Schetzer, A, “Police make arrests over claims weapons were to be brought to Melton anti-immigration rally,” *The Age*, November 20, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016 at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/police-make-arrest-over-claims-weapons-were-to-be-brought-to-melton-antiimmigration-rally-20151119-gl2zgd.html>



Anti-Islamic activity presents a spectrum of security threats that need to be proactively addressed by Australian law enforcement and intelligence agencies, though it has unquestionably been earmarked as an issue of concern; a senior NSW Police Force representative, for instance, noted in mid-2015 that “there is definitely activity on the extreme right wing of politics...We are not taking our eye off that.”<sup>87</sup> The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) also notes that right-wing activity “could have a bearing on Australia’s security environment in the future,” but assesses a low likelihood of violence.<sup>88</sup> This is in keeping with James’ observation that ASIO has reduced its interest in right-wing extremism to concentrate primarily on jihadist activity.<sup>89</sup> Weak anti-vilification legislation, and shortcomings in police cultural training, mean that Australian police often have “an unsophisticated grasp of the challenges faced by communities vulnerable to hate; as a consequence, there is ‘underpolicing’ of hate crimes.”<sup>90</sup>

It is therefore important for government officials acknowledge that even low-intensity anti-Islamic activity, such as harassment and vandalism, is a form of political violence; by doing so, Lambert argues, “it will help to ensure that adequate and commensurate resources are devoted to the threat.”<sup>91</sup> There does not appear to be a public database of hate crimes conducted against Muslim Australians (as compared, for example, to the annual *Hate Crime Statistics* report produced by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation). Instead, these statistics are privately compiled by Islamophobia Register based on voluntary reporting by victims. Public broadcast of anti-Islamic hate crime statistics may be a useful way to present the issue in ‘black and white’ and inspire open debate within policymaking domains, which could in turn provide reassurance to the Muslim community that their wellbeing is of active concern to Australian officials. On the other hand, such statistics may also provide the radical fringe element within this community with evidence to support a narrative of systemic vilification.

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<sup>87</sup> Olding, R, “Right-wing extremism equal to Muslim radicalisation, say academics,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 17, 2015, accessed February 28, 2016 at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/rightwing-extremism-equal-to-muslim-radicalisation-say-academics-20150716-giduqp.html>

<sup>88</sup> Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, *ASIO Report to Parliament 2013-14*, Australian Government, Canberra, 2014, p5

<sup>89</sup> James, op cit, p342

<sup>90</sup> James, op cit, pp338-9

<sup>91</sup> Lambert, op cit, pp55-6

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Moderate-intensity Islamophobic activity seems likely to increase as populist groups, most notably the UPF, transition their online presence to offline activism, with resultant public disorder. As a point in case, buoyed by the perceived success of its rallies in Bendigo, the UPF staged a demonstration in Perth, Western Australia, in late November 2015, with a view to expanding its activities nationwide.<sup>92</sup> These events help anti-Islamic groups gain mainstream media prominence and garner additional supporters, with the potential to attract or motivate individuals who may be susceptible to heightened radicalisation. Although high-level activity is thus far absent in Australia, the 2011 Norway attacks and an October 2015 incident in Sweden highlight the potential for serious anti-Islamic violence.<sup>93</sup> The established threat of local jihadi activity, meanwhile, may only be amplified by the provocative rhetoric and actions of the anti-Islamic movement.

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<sup>92</sup> United Patriots Front, Facebook video content, October 20, 2015, accessed October 24, 2015 at <https://www.facebook.com/unitedpatriotsfront/videos/188993951435065/>

<sup>93</sup> Miller, M and Murphy, B, "The terrifying sword-wielding man in Darth Vader-esque mask who attacked Swedish school, killing 2," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2014, accessed October 24, 2015 at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/10/23/the-terrifying-sword-wielding-man-in-darth-vader-mask-who-attacked-swedish-school-2-dead/>



**Figure 5:** Facebook post re: “Global Rally For Humanity” announcement, August 2015

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