

We are all in this together – Measures to curb online extremism

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As churches and Christians, we seek to bring God's vision of a reconciled and renewed world into the present, to reflect God's love for everyone, work for justice and peace and follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus taught what it means to love one's neighbour and one's enemy and he challenged the systems and structures of oppression in his society.

Harmony Week

From 17 to 23 March 2025, Harmony Week in Australia will take place, which will occur around the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Harmony Week has been celebrated since 1999.

Harmony Week is a time to celebrate Australian multiculturalism. Australia is one of the world's most successful multicultural countries. We should celebrate this and work to maintain it.

Harmony Week is about inclusiveness, respect and belonging for all Australians, regardless of cultural or linguistic background, united by a set of core values. Our cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths and is at the heart of who we are.

Orange is the colour chosen to represent Harmony Week. Traditionally, orange signifies social communication and meaningful conversations. You can choose to wear something orange during Harmony Week to show your support for cultural diversity and an inclusive Australia.

Addressing Racism

In November 2024, the Australian Human Rights Commission released its recommendation for a national anti-racism framework. It made 63 recommendations to government. One of the recommendations was for the Commonwealth Government to legislate regulation that enforces the liability of digital platforms in the sharing of online hate.

In December 2024, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee issued its report on its inquiry into [Right wing extremist movements in Australia](#). The Committee found that right-wing extremism began to re-emerge in Australia on a scale not seen for decades in the 2010s.

Many of the right-wing extremist groups in Australia share a nostalgic view of Australia, where “true Australians” share values and cultural characteristics that are threatened by “outsiders” who are a risk to Australia’s social fabric. The people who pose these threats are non-“white” immigrants, Muslims and those who support multiculturalism, environmentalism, and land rights for First People.

The Committee also heard that hostility to feminism had become a unifying ideology in far-right extremism, which promotes themes of hierarchy, order, power and a preference for “tradition”.

The online world has facilitated easy communication between extremists internationally. While right-wing extremist movements have maintained strong local and national characteristics, some narratives, ideologies and strategies have become transnational. The trend is especially true among right-wing extremists in English-speaking countries.

The intelligence agency ASIO told the Committee that the online world:

- Allowed extremists to access detailed instructions on committing violent attacks, which can build the capability of the extremist to inflict harm;
- Has accelerated the speed at which individuals can become radicalised to become extremists, in days or weeks; and,
- Is the primary way that teenagers become radicalised to become extremists.

The Australian Institute of Criminology released a paper in 2023 that reported the available evidence showed that up to 60% of extremists that carry out violent attacks were either radicalised online or had significant online influences in their radicalisation.

In one case, Australian law enforcement was tipped off through Crime Stoppers that a 14-year-old had become involved in online nationalist and racist violent extremism. They were actively posting on their Snapchat violent extremist content and were planning to conduct a school shooting. They had taken racist actions against Asian and First Nations students at their school. A search of their home found a tactical vest. They were charged with making threats online and advocating terrorism. They were sentenced to a two-year good behaviour bond and a year of probation. They were allocated a case manager to work with them to de-escalate their extremist ideology and behaviours.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP

Attorney General
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash

Shadow Attorney General
PO Box 6100
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Senator Cash

Points to make in your letter:

- Welcome that Australia is a multicultural society, with most Australians acting towards each other with inclusiveness and respect.
- Ask that they act on the recommendations by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee report into *Right wing extremist movements in Australia*:
 - To require the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to develop best practice guidelines to verify that social media corporations are enforcing terms of service to exclude harmful extremist content; and,
 - The Commonwealth Government provides funding to the Australian Institute of Criminology and the eSafety Commissioner to research violent extremism in the online environment, including on social media platforms and gaming platforms. The research should examine how extremist actors may use those platforms to spread propaganda and recruit members, particularly concerning young people.
- Ask that the Parliament pass legislation that enforces the requirement on digital platform corporations to prevent and remove posts of online hate.

Further Reading: Both Naomi Klein's "Doppelganger" (2023) and Dan Ariely's "Misbelief. What Makes Rational People Believe Irrational Things" (2023) are great additional reading for anyone wanting to understand extremist movements and their interaction with the online world.