

Submission to Royal Commission on Social Cohesion and Antisemitism

The Golden Rule as a foundation to strengthen social cohesion and counter extremism in Australia

This submission addresses paragraph (d) of the Commission's terms of reference. The submission offers recommendations that should contribute to strengthening social cohesion in Australia and countering the spread of ideologically and religiously motivated extremism in Australia.

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Summary of submission

The murders by terrorists at Bondi in December 2025 and the prevalence of antisemitism are part of the challenges faced by Australia in relation to social cohesion.

Prejudiced and discriminatory conduct is widespread and affects many ethnic and other social groups. In-group preference and prejudice is promoted by many socioeconomic factors operating in Australia today, including increasing segregation. Statements by some political leaders and other influencers promote fear among particular groups and use euphemism and ambiguity under cover of freedom of expression to blur social norms and lower the barriers to harmful conduct. Even when non-violent, that process undermines social cohesion.

Currently, well-motivated leaders and influencers lack a set of principles to clearly and convincingly articulate when political and other messaging is harmful. Accordingly, considerable harm is done under assertions of the right to freedom of expression which are difficult to challenge.

In this submission, I describe some of the origins of prejudice and the mechanisms by which people can be led to undertake harmful conduct while holding the belief that they are acting with good moral principles.

I then recommend development of foundational principles for promoting understanding and tolerance based on a non-denominational formulation of the golden rule, plus a clear expression of acceptable social norms in the form of a definition of non-violent extremism.

Finally, I provide a set of recommendations related to:

- the establishment of a foundational principle based on the golden rule and a revised definition of Australian values
- changes to education policies
- enactment of a definition of non-violent extremism to define core social norms
- the regulation of public messaging outside of the criminal law.

The goal is to promote understanding and tolerance and to provide tools to enable a more effective push-back against messaging that undermines social norms.

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The Golden Rule as a foundation to strengthen social cohesion and counter extremism in Australia

The problem

Background – Bondi and antisemitism

The Bondi murders by terrorists in December 2025 shocked the nation. They occurred within a broad context of antisemitism and controversy that has been sharpened by the war in Gaza and surrounding areas following the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023.

The harm caused by the Bondi terrorists extends beyond the people they murdered, their families and friends. The acts of terrorism have created a widespread fear among the Jewish community, and the community more broadly, that such actions may be repeated. For many, their core sense of security is undermined.

Initial government responses to the Bondi murders have largely focussed on increased criminal sanctions for hate crimes and increased security measures.

In this submission, I argue that we need a broader response that will address the issues of ethnic and other prejudices in a more systematic way.

The broader problem in Australia

Social cohesion is not only threatened by violent acts. It is also threatened by non-violent prejudiced behaviour.

People who feel insecure or fearful may develop prejudices and be susceptible to stereotyping. They also may be easily influenced by prejudiced and manipulative actors.

Over the past 50 years or more, Australia has become a multi-ethnic society. Significant numbers of people were born outside of Australia and many more are the children of immigrants. In many respects that demographic and social change has been quite successful, although far from perfect. However, as recent events have demonstrated, social cohesion is fragile and under strain.

Antisemitism is not the only form of ethnic prejudice affecting Australia. Islamophobia is widespread, with multiple instances of violence by Australians. Expressions of prejudice against various immigrant groups, against Aboriginal groups, and against people based on sex and gender identification are also common.

Despite our multi-ethnic composition, there is considerable debate in Australia about national identity and immigration. There are strong currents of European nationalism. Recently, terms such as “mass migration”, “low quality migration”, or “we want our culture back” have become common. Opinion leaders demand that immigrants sign up to “Australian values” without articulating what that actually means. Recently, there have been major policy proposals related to housing shortage and budget integrity that have been tied to immigration levels or to immigrants who are not yet citizens.

Erosion of social norms

The messaging in these cases is disturbing. Phrases such as “mass migration” and “low quality migration” could fairly be described as dog whistling. Those terms are ambiguous and invoke the idea of being overwhelmed or invaded. They are highly emotive and perpetuate feelings of insecurity and fear. While not explicitly targeted against any group, they convey a message to those who are receptive to the idea that immigrants, or particular groups of immigrants, can be held responsible for particular social and economic problems.

It is legitimate to debate migration levels and entitlements to social programs. A genuine debate would require care to avoid creating emotive responses based on stereotyping. Instead, when messaging fails to define the specific problem under consideration and uses euphemistic, ambiguous or emotive language, it is fair to be concerned about the intention and the effects. I am not alone in this concern (Karvelas 2026).

The kinds of messages described above are not entirely new. However, it does appear that there is a general loosening of social norms against language that may incite negative attitudes towards others.

Immigrants from many different ethnic backgrounds must be highly alarmed.

The problem is not just that particular ethnic or other groups may have a fear that they are being targeted. It is clear from extensive research on moral agency and moral disengagement (Bandura 2016), that the way people determine their moral codes operates within a broad social context. Social norms can promote moral behaviour or lead to the weakening of restraints on harmful behaviour.

The unequal battle

While there has been some push-back from leaders and the media against the statements I describe, I contend that those efforts are insufficient and largely ineffective. The harmful messaging has not been delegitimised effectively and it continues. It appears that there are many people who are either indifferent to its consequences or they are actively drawn to it.

Leaders and social influencers who belligerently advocate for outright prejudiced measures or who voice the types of messages described earlier are doing great harm to Australia by undermining social cohesion. In the following sections, I describe how that occurs.

Those promoting prejudice, explicitly or implicitly do so by asserting rights to freedom of expression. When euphemistic and ambiguous language is employed, it can be very difficult to make a convincing rebuttal that is widely understood. That is where we are now.

Few people appear to have the tools available to them to forcefully de-legitimise the harmful messaging. The NSW Police appeared to lack an understanding of the real message and potential harm caused by the neo-Nazi demonstration in November 2025 with the “Abolish the Jewish Lobby” theme. Accordingly, they failed to even attempt to prevent it.

Australia is a multi-ethnic society. There is no turning back. We must do everything possible to limit prejudice and discrimination, and promote understanding and tolerance.

In this submission, I identify underlying sources of prejudice and the factors that exacerbate it. I then propose a range of changes outside of the criminal law that ought to:

- promote greater understanding and empathy to underpin improved social cohesion
- provide better tools to enable leaders, influencers and media commentators to more effectively push back against prejudiced and harmful messaging that undermines social norms and weakens the restraints on harmful behaviour.

Some positive historical anecdotes

In Australia, we have witnessed some of the positive effects of the malleability of in-group prejudice. Substantial changes in behaviours have occurred over a few generations.

Not so long ago, there were sharp religious differences between Catholics and Protestants with high levels of ignorance and distrust between them. We can forget how that created serious fractures in society. That difference is hardly noticed today.

During the post war early immigration period, many immigrants from some European countries experienced serious prejudice and discrimination. Now those same countries are considered by even the most nationalist voices to be perfectly acceptable sources of European immigration.

That history supports an optimistic view that attitudes can further change over time, as the broader environment changes.

In-group preference, prejudice and moral agency

In-group preference and prejudice

There is substantial evidence that humans have a natural predisposition toward in-group preference. In-group preference is a deeply embedded feature of human cognition with evolutionary origins, linked to cooperation and survival. In-group preference is observed across human societies and can arise even in artificially created groups (Masuda & Fu 2015). We commonly see it with sporting team fans where it is generally, but not always, harmless.

In-group preference does not necessarily imply hostility to others and it does not automatically lead to violence.

In-group preference is malleable. As we have experienced in Australia, it can change in positive ways. However, under certain conditions, in-group preference provides a foundation on which prejudice and discrimination can develop. That prejudice can progress to violence.

Moral agency

The evolutionary predisposition towards in-group preference is not the whole story. We are agents who can devise ways of adapting flexibly to remarkably diverse geographic, climatic, and social environments.

In relation to the social environment, we are moral agents. Development of morality is directly affected by observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and media influences (Bandura 2016).

Construction of morality is complicated. People experience much diversity and inconsistency in the standards being socially prescribed and modelled. The standards that people adopt are based on reflections on diverse sources of morally relevant information (Bandura 2016).

In the face of inducements to behave in inhumane ways, we can choose to behave humanely by exerting self-influence. However, there are many social and psychological manoeuvres by which moral self-sanctions can be disengaged from inhumane conduct (Bandura 2016). We can come to justify as moral, conduct which is injurious to others. Some can come to justify even murderous conduct.

In moral agentic theory, affective self-sanctions are the major mechanism by which people come to live in accordance with their moral standards (Bandura 2016).

Individuals draw on a variety of sources in constructing their standards of morality. They are especially influenced by the evaluative reactions of those to whom they are emotionally attached and whose views they value (Bandura 2016). That corresponds to the in-group preference described earlier. The way in which personal standards are developed can be influenced by values that are taught directly or symbolically. Social norms are critical. Under appropriate social conditions, decent, ordinary people can be led to do extraordinarily cruel things. That is moral disengagement. (Bandura 2016).

The challenge for strengthening social cohesion is to create an environment that promotes positive moral standards and discourages actions that can lead people to treat as moral, conduct which is harmful to others.

Factors which may exacerbate in-group preference and prejudice

It is not productive to draw a clear line between factors that promote in-group preference and those that operate to promote moral disengagement from harmful conduct. The factors overlap in many ways.

Certain factors promote in-group preference and lead to negative views to out-groups:

1. Actual and perceived economic and social conditions that affect security, status, identity and trust in government

Today, in Australia, many people are concerned about employment security due to off-shoring, the energy transition (human induced climate change) and the rapid development of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence. Many are also concerned about rising energy costs and housing affordability. Those are just the most obvious conditions.

The effect of those conditions is to increase feelings of insecurity and anxiety. In that environment, many people may look for simple solutions and become susceptible to stereotyping and scapegoating.

2. Segregation of social groups that limits understanding and tolerance

Segregation may arise from the way that social groups form, say based on ethnicity, from ideological and religious belief systems, differences in wealth, or from institutional separation, say in schools or the work environment. Many of these factors overlap.

Segregation in religious private schools, but also more broadly based on socio economic factors, limits inter-group contact and understanding. People develop misconceptions about others. Ideological and religious beliefs can create a sense of moral certainty.

A lack of understanding and fear of difference can lead to stereotyping and out-group distrust.

The path to moral disengagement

According to moral agency theory, moral disengagement does not alter moral standards. It provides a means for those who morally disengage to circumvent moral standards. It is the selective suspension of morality for harmful activities that enables people to retain their positive self-regard while doing harm (Bandura 2016).

The first sentence above is not intuitive. We tend to think that bad people have adopted bad moral standards. But moral standards are about self-regulation and self-sanctioning. Because individuals have to live with themselves, they strive to preserve a self-view as decent, self-respecting people (Bandura 2016). The worst terrorists think they are doing a noble thing.

Nothing in that framing absolves people of responsibility for their harmful conduct. It simply explains why they can profess to be good while doing harm.

The psychosocial mechanisms by which people selectively disengage moral self-regulation from harmful conduct (Bandura 2016) are:

1. Moral, social and economic justification

People sanctify harmful actions by investing them with worthy social and moral purposes. Influencers can build images of worthy goals based on righteous ideologies, religious principles, social, economic or political doctrines and nationalistic imperatives. Commonly that process involves blaming an out-group or the assertion of a social or economic benefit.

In recent policy proposals, immigrants are in some way responsible for the housing shortage and are accessing social benefits that threaten budget integrity. Cutting immigration is said to be a solution to the housing shortage. Removing entitlements from immigrants who are not yet citizens is supposed to help to fix the budget.

2. Palliative comparison or advantageous comparison

By comparing one's action with more flagrant inhumanities, or by citing the transgressions of others, harmful conduct can be rendered benign on utilitarian grounds. For example, belief that one's harmful actions will prevent more human suffering than they cause makes the behaviour appear to be justified.

3. Euphemistic labelling

It becomes easier for people to justify harmful activities when they are cloaked by euphemistic descriptions. These may include sanitizing and convoluted language, use of the agentless passive form, or borrowing from specialised jargon from respectable sources. Thus, civilians killed in war are "collateral damage".

Terms such as "mass migration" or "low quality migration" are euphemisms in an agentless, passive form. The slogan "Abolish the Jewish Lobby" is a euphemism. What is the Jewish lobby? Why should it be abolished? What does abolition mean? The clear intent is that Jewish people should be shut down in some way, a clear violation of their humanity.

4. Displacement of responsibility

People may obscure or minimise their role in causing harm. This may occur where a legitimate authority approves of the conduct. More commonly, sanctioning is surreptitious, where no one assumes responsibility, such as occurs within organisations. Leaders blame rogue subordinates and deny knowledge.

5. Diffusion of responsibility

In large organisations, group decision making can result in otherwise good people committing harm. In decisions that favour the interests of the organisation or its leaders over others, each member of the group can discount their involvement and responsibility.

6. Minimising or ignoring the consequences

It is common for those who have a motivation to pursue a particular action to minimise the harm or dispute that there is harm at all. This is again common in organisations, such as to dispute the existence of global warming and whether it is caused by human activity.

Political leaders using the terms referred to earlier are choosing to ignore the effect of their statements on immigrants generally and on the broader community.

In the recent policy proposal to remove the entitlements of non-citizen immigrants, no consideration was given to the likely economic and social harms to affected families, or to the broader flow-on effects from leaving people without needed support.

7. Dehumanisation

The strength of moral self-censure for harmful practices depends on how the perpetrators regard the people they are targeting. It is difficult to inflict suffering on fellow humans, but it is easy to do so without guilt if they are diminished to subhuman status.

Dehumanisation is a common practice among those practising discrimination. In various parts of the world, it has been used repeatedly against specific ethnic or political groups, or against other perceived enemies.

There are clear currents of dehumanisation in each of the recent political statements described earlier in this submission. “Mass migration” conjures images of an invasive horde. “Low quality migration” casts people as of less than acceptable quality.

8. Attribution of blame (victim blaming)

In attribution of blame, victims are alleged to have behaved in a way that brought the maltreatment on themselves. This can have the perverse and devastating effect that victims can come to believe a degrading characterisation of themselves.

Victim blaming can begin with negative stereotyping, where the flaws of a few are attributed to a whole group.

In recent policy proposals, immigrants who have not secured citizenship have failed to sufficiently demonstrate their commitment to “Australian values” and are therefore to be denied access to various social programs, regardless of their actual commitments as community members, workers and taxpayers.

Promoting social cohesion

What do we want?

I suggest that a socially cohesive Australia is a pluralist democracy in which we strive that all persons enjoy equal opportunity and security in a prosperous and sustainable economy, and a sustainable environment.

Such a framing does not support either extreme individuality or a highly collective society. Nor does it support assertions of the primacy of particular social rules based on ideological or religious grounds.

I offer that framing as a foundation for a revised statement of Australian values.

Assimilation vs multiculturalism

Some in Australia argue that, while we should not overtly discriminate in our immigration mix, the problem is with multiculturalism.

The expressed concern with multiculturalism is that immigrant groups segregate and retain their cultural and linguistic origins. It is said that they do not sign up to Australian values, but may promote changes in Australian society to reflect their cultural preferences.

Those concerned about multiculturalism argue that the solution is to discourage multiculturalism and to promote assimilation. For some, assimilation appears to require that immigrants leave behind all cultural and linguistic traditions that conflict with the level of cultural homogeneity desired by the advocate of assimilation.

Experience in Australia has shown that, over generations, immigrant groups tend to take on many local cultural characteristics. Most learn English. Doing so should be encouraged. The children of immigrants often lose fluency in their parents' language. At the same time, much of the immigrants' cultural and linguistic heritage may persist and contribute to a continuously evolving Australian culture. I expect that the vast majority of Australians regard this as a good thing.

I submit that debates about assimilation vs multiculturalism can only lead us into insoluble problems of definition. What level of assimilation is important and where does the boundary lie? Based on the objectives I described earlier, we should not need to be prescriptive.

Solution framework

Principles relevant to limiting prejudice

Bandura (Bandura 2016), draws on research to establish that most people refuse to behave cruelly towards humanised others, even under strong authoritarian commands and when they are directly aware of the harm that they would cause.

Bandura argues that the affirmation of common humanity can bring out the best in people. Key actions to promote humanisation include:

- Promote shared experiences to expand in-group perceptions and create empathy and compassion. These are enhanced through correlated shared experiences. They can also be enhanced vicariously from observing the emotional reactions of others. The degree of social connectedness is critical. Much of people's perceived

connectedness is linked to membership in groups of people like oneself. Expanding that group through shared experiences is effective in transforming a lack of empathy into empathy. This is supported by contact theory research (McLeod 2023) and by work on the development of in-group identity (Gaertner et al 1996). See also the meta-analysis by (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006).

- Actively unmask self-exonerative methods of moral disengagement. Focus on prosocial solutions to conflicts and provide communications that identify and call out mechanisms of moral disengagement. Doing so can effectively foster moral re-engagement.

Strategies limiting moral disengagement

Based on those principles, three broad strategies are proposed that ought to reduce in-group preference and prejudice, and help to minimise moral disengagement:

1. Reduce segregation, provide structured intergroup contact and promote development of common in-group identity

- Adopt policies that reduce school and residential segregation.
- Within de-segregated environments, such as schools, provide sustained interaction across groups on the basis of equal status, shared goals and cooperation.
- Provide comparative, pluralist religious education.
- Explicitly teach civic values and ethics. Teach how stereotyping, scapegoating and dehumanisation occur, and their harms.

The overall goals are to build understanding, trust and empathy, and to transform members' perceptions of group boundaries from "us" and "them" to a more inclusive "we".

In relation to secular education, see (OECD 2024) and (van Boven 2017).

2. Provide tools that enable leaders and positive influencers to set and reinforce positive social norms

Leaders should be encouraged to provide clear, consistent signals that all forms of discrimination are unacceptable and that inclusion is expected.

There should be a clear statement of social norms so that non-criminal conduct that violates those norms can be clearly identified and called out.

Leaders, influencers and the media should be made aware of the mechanisms of moral disengagement and be encouraged to avoid conduct that promotes or enables moral disengagement.

Leaders, positive influencers and the media should be encouraged to:

- Call out dehumanising language, stereotyping and scapegoating.

- Call out and unmask communications that enable self-exoneration and moral disengagement.

Where conduct is unlawful, prompt enforcement should occur.

Misinformation is ‘sticky’ and difficult to rebut. Certain attempts to counter incorrect information may backfire and reinforce the incorrect beliefs. Misinformation and stereotypes might be countered with:

- fact based alternative accounts that are repeated
- simple, brief rebuttals
- an alternative explanation that is plausible and that explains why the misinformation was thought to be correct, where applicable
- evidence provided in world-view affirming manner by endorsing key values of the audience, where applicable.

Those actions can reduce reliance on false information (Lewandowsky et al 2012).

3. Reinforce fair and transparent public institutions

Ensure visible fairness in law enforcement, public services and public policy decision making.

There is a strong correlation between institutional trust and social cohesion (Tyler 2010).

[The golden rule as a foundation principle for social norms](#)

We already have a range of prohibitions on conduct related to the expression of prejudice and discrimination. Leaders and the media may call out unacceptable behaviour. However, there is no clear principle underpinning our social rules. Nor is there a clear statement of social norms. That leads to inconsistent and ineffective enforcement of those norms.

I propose that we try to anchor public discourse in the ancient principle known in European culture as the “golden rule”. Expressed in various forms, the principle is widespread across many cultures and religions (Wikipedia nd).

If it is expressed and described in a non-denominational form, the golden rule should be acceptable to everyone but the rigidly cynical.

[Mutual regard principle derived from the golden rule](#)

I propose adoption of a positive formulation of the golden rule that does not require specific inquiry about the state of mind of the other person. The proposed maxim is:

“Individuals should treat others with the same basic dignity, fairness and regard they expect for themselves.”

In this submission, to avoid denominational origins, I refer to the maxim as the “mutual regard principle”.

Use of the mutual regard principle

Promotion of the mutual regard principle won't diminish prejudice overnight and it is not a complete solution. However, research has established that a general message on the moral importance of the golden rule in everyday life had a positive effect on tolerance of normative protest actions of one's least-liked ideological group. It has utility in encouraging adherence to liberal democratic principles (Verkuyten et al 2023).

I submit that the mutual regard principle should be clearly articulated in all education and public messaging that is designed to minimise in-group prejudice and delegitimise conduct that facilitates moral disengagement. The benefits of doing so include:

1. The golden rule is one of the most widespread and recognisable moral principles across religious and secular traditions. If an underlying principle is useful to help build social cohesion, it should raise the fewest objections.
2. It can provide a clear moral justification for positive social norms in public discourse. It ought to reduce the acceptability of expressions of prejudice. The need to do so is supported by social norms research (Crandall et al 2002) and (Bandura 2016).
3. It can be referred to by anyone who needs to rebut or delegitimise prejudiced speech or discriminatory conduct, or behaviours that lead people to treat as moral, conduct which is harmful to others. As a shield against prejudice, it is likely to be far more effective in reducing biased speech for someone to be able to say "that violates the mutual regard principle" than to say "that's hurtful", or "that's prejudiced".

Limitations of the mutual regard principle

On its own, the mutual regard principle is subjective. It requires people to make their own judgment about reasonable conduct towards others. People will inevitably interpret it differently. Those who deliberately or carelessly harm others will find excuses to justify their actions. For example, those who demonise and scapegoat immigrants in the way they talk about housing affordability or other public policy measures will easily find apparent justifications for their claims. There is no way out of this. The issues will have to be litigated in the public market place for ideas. In that process, the mutual regard principle will provide a useful, additional tool.

Define non-violent extremism to establish social norms

The limitations of a broad principle in norm setting can be overcome with a more specific definition of norms by defining non-violent extremism.

The Commission's terms of reference focus on countering ideologically and religiously motivated extremism. Extremism is not defined in the terms of reference. There appears to be no settled definition.

The terms of reference and some definitions (UK, 2024) require ideological or religious motivations for extremism. It is unclear why that should be so. Surely, the essential elements of extremism involve conduct that is harmful to others and to social cohesion. Often, there will be an ideological or religious belief behind the conduct, but that may be difficult to identify in some cases. It is not clear how it helps to identify the ideological or religious motivation before conduct can be challenged.

The proposed definition of non-violent extremism is underpinned by the mutual regard principle. The objective is to find a practical balance that will not unduly restrict freedom of expression while challenging prejudice and behaviours that lead people to treat as moral, conduct which is harmful to others.

Definition of non-violent extremism

The proposed definition aims to set the core principles only. It is not necessarily aligned with the definition of “hate crime” in the Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) (**CCA**), provisions of State laws or with provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) (**RDA**).

Non-violent extremism includes conduct that:

- (a) has the effect of dehumanising, demonising, intimidating or discriminating against persons based on their race, national or ethnic origin, religion (or absence of religious belief), gender, sexual orientation, age or disability; or
- (b) based on attributes identified in paragraph (a), uses false, deceptive, euphemistic, confusing or misleading messaging (text or imagery) that has the reasonably foreseeable effect of dehumanising or framing individuals or groups as less worthy of equal regard or as a threat, or of promoting or justifying fear or hostility toward them, or promoting or justifying discrimination against them.

In following topics, I refer to this as “**extremism**”.

In relation to the age and disability elements of paragraph (a), there must be an exception that relates to exclusion in employment where a particular individual may objectively lack the necessary capabilities to perform a role.

The proposed definition does not require evidence of an ideological basis for the conduct. Nor does it require intent. It is focused on reasonably foreseeable effects.

Further, the proposed definition combines all forms of discrimination, including religious discrimination in a single framework.

Extremism and s. 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)

S. 18C(1)(a) of the RDA makes it unlawful to do an act that “is reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people”.

The s. 18C conduct is unlawful, but s. 26 of the RDA does not make it a criminal offence.

I suggest that s. 18C is not well targeted. For many, some of the proscribed effects are not sufficient to attract legal sanction. As a result, the section is heavily contested.

More critically, s. 18C fails to explicitly capture more harmful language, such as that described in paragraph (b) extremism.

Extensions to the extremism definition to catch systemic effects

Extremist conduct may be directed to overturning or subverting democracy through impositions on free political expression or participation.

Political actors may assert rights to freedom of expression to normalise exclusionary narratives. Later, after gaining power, they may act to restrict the freedoms of those they have cast as enemies, along with their political opponents. This is a well-worn playbook that we can see in operation in various parts of the world today. It could happen in Australia.

Accordingly, there is a case for extending the definition of extremism to include:

- (c) conduct that has the reasonably foreseeable effect of unreasonably restricting the exercise of free political expression by other persons; [Note: restrictions based on paragraphs (a) and (b) of the extremism definition should not be considered unreasonable, although I have not examined the High Court's reasoning in relation to the implied freedom of political speech in Australia.]
- (d) conduct that has the reasonably foreseeable effect of undermining or unreasonably limiting the exercise of democratic voting rights of any person or group; or
- (e) conduct that undermines, or seeks to undermine or replace democratic government in Australia based on equal representation for all citizens.

Graduated responses to extremism

I propose legislating the definition in a form similar to s. 18C of the RDA.

Clearly, only some conduct captured by the proposed definition of extremism would justify criminal sanctions. Discriminatory conduct described in paragraph (a) extremism would likely be caught by s. 9(1) of the RDA. It may not constitute a hate crime under the CCA.

The response to much of the other condemned conduct, particularly paragraph (b) extremism should occur outside the criminal law.

I propose three levels of consequences for non-violent extremist conduct:

- Criminal offence, where there is actual harm or incitement to harm.
- Corrective action required, where an authoritative body can require a speaker to make a correction. This might be relevant in the political area as part of truth in political advertising.

- Public scrutiny, under which an authoritative body provides factual correction or explicitly calls out the harmful nature of the speech in circumstances where that is not achievable through the normal news media.

It might be reasonable to require political candidates to state their real meaning and to use accurate language. Imposition of such a correction would require improvements to truth in political advertising laws.

For such a mechanism to work during a political campaign, the complaints process would have to operate exceptionally swiftly. It might easily be overwhelmed.

The definition of non-violent extremism might also be used as a basis for deciding whether protests or demonstrations are to be permitted. Possibly, local authorities could draw upon determinations by the authoritative body that proposed messaging is extremism.

Ultimately, the primary method of enforcement for paragraph (b) extremism should occur through robust public advocacy from leaders and influencers, and debate in the news media.

Examples of possible extremist conduct

Earlier, I referred to the current use of the terms “mass immigration” and “low quality migration” which I suggest are used as a form of dog whistling. In the section “The path to moral disengagement” I have described how those messages, and others, may operate to undermine social norms and weaken the restraints on harmful behaviour.

It is very likely that recent immigrants of non-European background would reasonably consider that they are being targeted by references to “mass immigration” or “low quality migration”. I suggest they would reasonably feel that they are being framed as less worthy of equal regard or as a threat, or that the messaging is promoting fear or hostility toward them, or discrimination against them.

Persons using those terms are clearly advocating something different to the economically and socially sustainable level of overall immigration. If they were so focused, they could easily use plain language to frame their arguments.

I suggest that the slogan “Abolish the Jewish Lobby” is even more clearly extremism under paragraph (b). It uses euphemism to frame Jewish groups as less worthy of equal regard or as a threat, or of promoting or justifying fear or hostility toward them, or promoting or justifying discrimination against them. Jewish people, and others, viewing the protestors and their banner would have had no doubt about the existential nature of the underlying threat.

Australian values

Political leaders and influencers often refer to “Australian values” without explaining what that means.

The Australian Values Statement (Department of Home Affairs nd) may be the source of their meaning. However, that statement is rather vague, fails to cover some key points and leaves much to subjective assessment.

I propose a revised version of the statement in Attachment 1 to provide greater clarity.

Cultural and religious expression – The relationship between education and religion

One of the most effective ways to promote and strengthen the mutual regard principle is through education.

Over several decades there has been a substantial growth in the number of religious private schools and in the number of students attending such schools instead of public schools. This likely has several causes, including:

- Increased funding for private schools from the Commonwealth Government.
- Diminished real funding for public schools by State governments who appear to allow cost shifting to the Commonwealth level and to parents.
- Publicity about behavioural problems in some public schools that would inhibit the quality of education available in those schools.
- A desire by many to send their children to a school that reinforces their cultural and religious values.

Parents who are anxious about the quality of education or the social conditions provided by public schools may seek out private schools, at considerable expense.

Alternatively, parents move to suburbs within the catchment of better-quality public schools, adding competitive pressure on housing prices in those suburbs.

Parents either pay high school fees or purchase expensive real estate. In this process there is a high level of segregation based on wealth and social factors.

The proliferation of those schools, and the geographical scarcity of high-quality public schools segregates children along religious and socioeconomic lines. It feeds directly into the tendency to in-group preference described earlier.

I submit that the growth of private schools, particularly those operated by religious bodies, is contrary to the promotion of social cohesion.

There is no simple solution

The problems of prejudice and moral disengagement, prompted by some political leaders and influencers, are serious and gathering pace. It appears that large numbers of people are being led to believe in the rightness of actions that must be harmful to others.

Dehumanising language, stereotyping and scapegoating are being used to imply simple

solutions to complex problems. Some political leaders are willing to engage in that process regardless of consequences in order to further their personal advancement.

No single change will be effective.

Minor changes to public policy or the law will have little effect.

Strengthening social cohesion will require changes that counter those tendencies by addressing the root causes. Those tendencies exist naturally and are being exacerbated by current economic and social factors. It will be necessary to develop a program to effect substantial changes in Australian culture over a very long period, probably generations.

Governments may be unwilling to engage in the difficult advocacy that will be required to implement recommendations of the kind in this submission. They may prefer to receive a set of not-too-controversial recommendations from the Royal Commission that are relatively easy to implement, and then get back to normal business.

Acquiescing to that desire would be a mistake. Australia is at a critical point. There is no possibility of a cohesive society if current trends are allowed to continue unchecked. A society that allows prejudice and hostility to develop and for people to be able to justify harm to others under the guise of righteousness will ultimately fail.

The Commission has a unique opportunity to hold a mirror up to the community and deliver a forceful message. We may not get another opportunity. I implore the Commission to not shrink from controversial measures that may require a long-term commitment to be effective. The Commission should frankly explain the problems and address the issues robustly. Clear, robust recommendations on their own will have a positive effect on the national conversation. The rest is up to national and state leaders.

Recommendations

Provide a clear statement of Australian identity and values

Recommendations:

1. Frankly explain the problems faced by Australia and the adverse consequences of a failure to reduce prejudice and restore social norms.
2. Define an underlying principle to support social cohesion initiatives based on the mutual regard principle.
3. Define non-violent extremism to clearly define unacceptable conduct. The definition should address messaging that is evasive or euphemistic and aimed at lowering social norms against conduct that is harmful to others.
4. Revise the Australian Values statement to explicitly incorporate the mutual regard principle along the lines of the proposal in Attachment 1.

5. Use the mutual regard principle and the definition of extremism in education and public awareness campaigns.
6. Use the revised Australian Values statement for immigration purposes.

Education

Recommendations:

7. Publicly articulate that our current policy of facilitating private, religious schools is creating segregation that inhibits understanding, tolerance and social cohesion. Assertions of religious freedom should not override the need for an education system that promotes social cohesion.
8. On a national basis (Commonwealth and States), increase funding for public schools and aim to improve public schools so that demand for private schools will be substantially reduced. Over time, reduce government support for private schools. Establish the following goals over a reasonable transition period:
 - a. The overwhelming majority of students (over 75%) attend public schools at high school level.
 - b. Public schools in low socio-economic areas offer equivalent education quality to those in higher socio-economic areas.
 - c. Most public schools are seen to provide equivalent or better-quality education than most private schools.
9. Include civics and ethics education in the required curricula for all schools, based around the mutual regard principle and the definition of extremism. Develop the programs using expert advice and incorporating lessons learned from other countries. The program should be substantial, not tokenistic.
10. Prohibit religious private schools from imposing admission criteria based on religious background.
11. Specifically require that all religious content taught in government-funded schools is taught in a comparative, pluralist, and critical way that disavows the teaching of exclusivism. Failure to comply should result in removal of government funding.
12. Require religious schools that also provide religious services and ceremonies for students, and that also promote exclusivity in their religious doctrine, must also teach how that doctrine is consistent with the mutual regard principle and how it is compliant with the definition of extremism. Failure to comply should result in removal of government funding.
13. Prohibit all discrimination (based on paragraph (a) extremism) in employment of teachers and other staff in government funded religious private schools. Failure to comply should result in removal of government funding.

These recommendations may be controversial. However, effectively promoting contact across groups and education are the two most effective ways to reduce prejudice.

Anti-discrimination laws

Recommendations:

14. Standardise anti-discrimination laws nationally around the mutual regard principle and a definition of non-violent extremism.
15. Eliminate existing laws that criminalise specific speech and focus instead on a principles-based prohibition directed at reducing specific harms.
16. Develop a framework that balances reasonable freedom of expression with prohibitions on harmful messaging. Adopt a graded approach to consequences for breach as suggested earlier.
17. In implementing the preceding recommendation, consider empowering an authoritative administrative body to make determinations of extremism in relation to harmful speech and to publish those determinations with reasons.
18. Develop a model for selection of respected persons to the administrative body that does not involve unfettered selection or arbitrary removal by the executive government.

Political messaging and public discourse

Recommendations:

19. Strengthen truth in political advertising laws to discourage or prohibit the use of extremist messaging in political advertising and messaging.
20. Require all registered political parties to agree to honour the mutual regard principle and definition of extremism, in full.

Attachment 1 – Suggested revised Australian Values Statement

1. Australia is a pluralist democracy in which we strive that all persons enjoy equal opportunity and security in a prosperous and sustainable economy, and a sustainable environment.
2. The guiding principle of Australian society is that individuals should treat others with the same basic dignity, fairness and regard they expect for themselves.
3. Subject to that principle, Australians enjoy freedom of religion (including the freedom not to follow a particular religion), freedom of speech, and freedom of association.
4. All persons are equal at law and subject to it. All persons are entitled to expect the law to be applied consistently, fairly and impartially.
5. Laws made by elected parliaments at national and state levels override all inconsistent customs and religious “laws”.
6. The English language is the national language, and is an important unifying element of Australian society. Subject to limitations of personal circumstances, all persons resident in the country must make reasonable efforts to learn the English language if it is not their native language.

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