

**Submission
No 27**

MEASURES TO COMBAT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: AVERT Research Network

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AVERT Research Network: Inquiry into Measures to Combat Right-Wing Extremism in New South Wales

**Submission to the NSW Legislative Assembly Law and Safety Committee
3 February 2026**

INTRODUCTION

The **AVERT (Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism) Research** Network welcomes the opportunity to make a public submission to the NSW Legislative Assembly Law and Safety Committee's Inquiry into measures to combat right-wing extremism in New South Wales.

Right-wing extremism in Australia, including in NSW, is best understood as a diverse, fragmented and increasingly hybrid set of ideologies, movements, and networks that nevertheless share several beliefs, narratives, and features in common. These movements draw on racialised and antisemitic grievance-based narratives, the assertion of racial or ethnic superiority or supremacy by one group over others, conspiratorial thinking, nationalist sentiments, anti-democratic beliefs and, in many cases, deeply gendered and exclusionary worldviews. While only a small proportion of individuals involved in these milieus will engage in violence, the broader social harms posed by right-wing extremism – including intimidation, harassment, the erosion of liberal institutions and social cohesion, and the normalisation of hate – warrant sustained and evidence-based policy responses.

AVERT's research consistently demonstrates that effective responses to right-wing extremism must prioritise prevention, early intervention, and the fostering of community resilience alongside proportionate legislative and law enforcement measures. Overly narrow or exclusively punitive approaches risk missing the pathways through which individuals become radicalised, as well as the broader social and political conditions that enable extremist ideas to resonate. They also jeopardise the delicate but necessary balance between maintaining democratic freedoms on the one hand and preventing or minimising social harms to specific groups or to society on the other.

This submission addresses the Inquiry's Terms of Reference below. In doing so, it highlights four core principles for addressing right-wing extremism in NSW:

1. Prevention and early intervention should be central pillars of the state's response, with sustained investment in community-based, educational and public health-informed approaches. These include efforts to heighten public awareness of what constitutes

right-wing extremism, the harms and threats it poses, and what communities can do to help prevent or minimise its uptake.

2. Responses to right-wing extremism must be informed by robust evidence, evaluation and research, rather than reactive or symbolic policy measures.
3. Legislative and policy measures should be proportionate, carefully targeted, and attentive to unintended consequences, including the risk of further grievance-based mobilisation.
4. Addressing right-wing extremism requires whole-of-government and whole-of-society coordination, including meaningful engagement with communities, civil society, and researchers. This includes continuous assessment of where community vulnerabilities may lie, for example amongst young people, and resourcing those institutions and services, such as schools and youth-focused community programs, that can work successfully on prevention and intervention initiatives.

AVERT offers the analysis and recommendations below in the spirit of constructive engagement and stands ready to assist the Committee further, including through oral evidence or expert briefings.

This submission is based on input by the following AVERT Research Network members:

Professor Julian Droogan (AVERT Co-Convenor), Professor Michele Grossman (AVERT Co-Convenor), Professor Kristina Murphy, Professor Lee Jarvis, Professor Winnifred Lewis, Dr Imogen Richards, Dr Gerard Gill and Ms Maya Arguello. It also draws substantially on previous submissions related to government inquiries on right-wing extremism involving AVERT members Ms Lydia Khalil (former AVERT Co-Convenor), Associate Professor Mario Peucker, Associate Professor Joshua Roose, Dr Jared Dmello, Dr Vivian Gerrand, Associate Professor Helen Young and Dr Shannon Zimmerman. Biographies of each contributor explaining their expertise can be found on the AVERT website. This AVERT Research Network submission has been endorsed by AVERT's Executive Committee. For more information on AVERT, please see: www.avert.net.au

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ABOUT THE AVERT RESEARCH NETWORK

AVERT is a multidisciplinary, multi-institutional research network based in Australia but comprising a broad range of both national and international research members. AVERT brings together leading scholars from the social sciences, humanities, information technology, law, and related disciplines whose research focuses on addressing and preventing terrorism, radicalisation, and violent extremism.

A critical aim of AVERT is to foster evidence-based understanding that helps prevent or reduce where possible the social harms created by various forms of terrorism and violent extremism. AVERT members conduct research and engage with practitioners across the continuum of

prevention, early intervention and disengagement, and are committed to producing work that informs effective policy, practice, and public debate. As an Australian-based research network, AVERT remains strongly grounded in local contexts while engaging closely with international research and researchers, emerging trends, policy developments and global best practice.

Engagement with government, community, and civil society stakeholders is central to AVERT's mission. Through formal and informal partnerships, including longstanding engagement with Commonwealth and State agencies, AVERT contributes empirically grounded research, evaluation and capacity-building to support effective counter-extremism policy responses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations provided below are structured in line with the Inquiry's focus on community-building programs, deradicalisation initiatives, legislative and policy measures, and best practice examples from Australia and overseas. They are grounded in AVERT's research and previous governmental submissions and emphasise prevention, proportionality, evidence, and fostering long-term community resilience.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

ONE: THE THREAT THAT RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS AND ORGANISATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES POSE TO THE COMMUNITY AND IMPACT THAT THEY HAVE ON PARTICULAR MEMBERS IN THE COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THOSE THEY SEEK TO RECRUIT

Right wing extremism (RWE) is best understood as a *spectrum* of socio-political movements, and one that is increasingly complex, fragmented, and diverse. Like many other extremist movements and networks, they are characterised by two key features: first, the holding and nurturing of grievances, and second, the belief that they are the victims of external forces and actors that seek to limit or oppress their identity and security.

Examples of movements that fall within RWE in Australia are most obviously white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups but also include movements and ideologies that promote exclusivist nationalism, fascism, racism, antisemitism, chauvinism, and certain anti-government and conspiracist movements.

In research reports¹ produced for the NSW Department of Communities and Justice by members of the AVERT Network, RWE in NSW has been described as communities and individuals committed to extreme positions that are pro-white identity while actively hostile to perceived 'non-white' groups (i.e., Muslims, Jews) and those elites who they believe enable them. It involves a victim mentality, viewing the in-group as being existentially threatened² which in turn is used to justify violent pushback and hostile action, including in some cases violent extremism and terrorism, as necessary for in-group survival.

Common RWE ideological positions include nostalgia for an idealized past, viewing women as subservient, believing in elite-driven anti-white conspiracies (typically attributed to Jewish control), desiring authoritarian leadership to restore white dominance, and seeking to undermine liberal democracy through legal or illegal means.³ White supremacy - the belief in white genetic/cultural superiority that requires restricted citizenship for non-whites in 'white' nations - is prevalent. More explicitly extremist far-right ideologies support fascism, neo-Nazism, and the desired removal or elimination from Australian society of out-groups such as immigrants, Jews, or Muslims.

Research increasingly demonstrates the centrality of gender to right-wing extremist recruitment, particularly through the online 'manosphere' subcultures that frame masculinity as under threat and promote misogynistic grievance narratives.⁴ These spaces, including incel forums, men's rights communities, and 'tradwife' influencer networks, serve as gateways to more explicitly extremist content. The targeting of women, LGBTIQ+ people, and feminist

¹ Lise Waldek, Julian Droogan, Brian Ballsun-Stanton, Debra Smith, Mario Peucker, and Muhammad Iqbal, "Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales," NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 2020, <https://zenodo.org/record/4071472#.YpljxJNBwq0>; Julian Droogan, Brian Ballsun-Stanton, and Lise Waldek, "Online Far Right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Macquarie University, 2021, <https://zenodo.org/records/5732611>.

² J. M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

³ Lydia Khalil, *Rise of the Extreme Right: The New Global Extremism and the Threat to Democracy* (London: Penguin, 2022).

⁴ Sherryn Groch, 'An Andrew Tate inside is helping Australian Nazis recruit teens', *The Age*, November 2, 2025. [Nhttps://www.smh.com.au/national/an-andrew-tate-insider-is-helping-australian-nazis-recruit-teens-20250523-p5m1ra.html](https://www.smh.com.au/national/an-andrew-tate-insider-is-helping-australian-nazis-recruit-teens-20250523-p5m1ra.html).

movements, is not incidental to RWE but foundational to its worldview, and responses to RWE must account for its deeply gendered dimensions.⁵

RWE poses a series of threats to society, its institutions, and individual and group public safety. These risks can include:

A threat to participatory democracy and civil society: Broadly speaking, RWE movements and ideologies share an anti-democratic opposition to equality.⁶ They reject democratic governance and use, or justify the use of violence, to effect societal and political change. While RWE ideologies are increasingly fluid, fragmented, and hybrid, it is important not to overlook their ideological convergences. For example, in addition to their anti-democratic opposition to equality, RWEs view the current social and political order as corrupt and on the brink of a conflict for which they must prepare. RWE provides pathways for those who are disenchanted with the current direction or structure of society (including its economic, social and political structures) that allow or encourage them to opt out of civil society participation to ‘fight back’ against and dismantle elites and liberal democracy. Anti-government rhetoric or sentiments that may have begun based on a single-issue grievance, such as state-led COVID restrictions during the pandemic, can be leveraged by RWEs to foster more intensive and programmatic anti-government platforms aligned with their ideological standpoints.⁷

A threat to multiculturalism and social cohesion: RWE depends upon a racialised ‘us vs them’ mentality dominated by rigid in-group/out-group dynamics. The predominant experience for adherents of RWE is one of being under siege from a perceived enemy, whether it be a putative ‘radical left’, corrupt cultural and political elites, immigrants, or perceived inferior yet menacing races. Individuals and movements on the RWE spectrum often share entrenched xenophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes. RWE also centres on exclusivism, defined as:

An umbrella term for a set of attitudes and actions informed by the assumption of inequality between groups and especially the superiority of one’s own group. Exclusivist viewpoints tend to define group boundaries in rigid terms based on assumed fixed sets of values, traits and ‘in/out’ criteria. ... Socially harmful manifestations of exclusivism [include forms of] racism and violent extremism that aim to humiliate, denigrate and/or harm others based on their actual or perceived membership of or identification with a particular ethnic, racial, cultural or religious group.⁸

At its most extreme, such exclusivism dehumanises its targets and transforms them into a threat that is then deployed to legitimate the use of violence against them.⁹

⁵ Imogen Richards, *The Aesthetic Politics of Far-Right Environmentalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025); Callum Jones, Shanon Roberts, and Brady Robards, "White Warriors and Weak Women: Identifying Central Discourses of Masculinity in Neo-Nazi Telegram Channels," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Published Online, (2024): 1–26; Imogen Richards, Callum Jones, and Verity Trott, "Neoliberal Capitalism and the Political Aesthetics of Tradwife Imagery," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, Published Online, (2025): 1–16.

⁶ Elisabeth Carter, "Right-Wing Extremism/Radicalism: Reconstructing the Concept," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 157–182.

⁷ Michele Grossman, "How Has COVID-19 Changed the Violent Extremist Landscape?," *CREST Security Review*, Issue 12, October 21, 2021.

⁸ Michele Grossman, Mario Peucker, Debra Smith, and Hass Dellal, *Stocktake Research Project: A Systematic Literature and Selected Program Review on Social Cohesion, Community Resilience and Violent Extremism 2011–2015* (Melbourne: Victoria University, 2016), 4.

⁹ Berger, *Extremism*.

In sum, RWE desire to dismantle social cohesion in an attempt to assert and enact group superiority, and undermine and destabilise multicultural and liberal society.

A threat to social consensus on evidence and truthfulness: The extreme right has a history and association with conspiratorial thinking.¹⁰ The contribution of conspiratorial belief to violent extremism is well researched.¹¹ Recent research corroborates this conspiratorial tendency in modern RWE movements, finding that people with RWE views are more likely to engage in conspiratorial thinking, have paranoid ideations and a strong distrust of government.¹² A confluence of anti-government scepticism, conspiratorialism, and RWE ideologies occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. RWE groups such as the National Socialist Network (NSN) actively attempted to align their narratives with mainstream anxieties, particularly online. This resulted in wider segments of the NSW population being exposed to RWE ideology and radicalism.¹³

Drivers and motivations for right-wing extremism

The motivations and drivers of RWE are complex, and they complicate in turn the risk landscape in relation to radicalisation and recruitment to right-wing extremism. As with all forms of extremism, recruitment into RWE groups and movements capitalises upon a set of grievances and sense of victimhood, frustration or anxiety held by some individuals and groups within a given society. Those who may be more susceptible to recruitment narratives and appeals can include:

Those who seek simple solutions in the face of perceived insecurity: The rise in RWE is connected to broader political and social factors. The world has undergone profound stress and upheaval in the past two decades. This has included environmental crises, a global financial crisis, growing inequality, a global pandemic, and the rise of anti-liberal and authoritarian politics. This has corresponded with the growth of far-right populism, disaffection with democracy, neoliberalism, and global capitalism which has increased the lack of trust in government and institutions. In conditions of perceived insecurity and uncertainty, individuals may be drawn to simplified and highly structured explanations of complex social phenomena. Political extremism and conspiracy beliefs are closely associated, reflecting a cognitive style orientated towards making sense of societal events through rigid and reductionist frameworks.¹⁴

¹⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1964, <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics>; Tiahna Mulholland, Kristina Murphy, Keiran Hardy, and Louise Porter, "Understanding Right Wing Extremism in Australia: Testing an Integrated Unfairness Grievance and Outgroup Threat Framework," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 20, no. 1 (2025): 1–22; Kristina Murphy, Tiahna Mulholland, and Keiran Hardy, "Down the 'Rabbit Hole' of Conspiracy-Fuelled White Nationalism: Linking Outgroup Threat and Uncertainty to Conspiracy Beliefs and Prejudice Towards Immigrants," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Published Online, (2024).

¹¹ Emma Belton, Tiahna Mulholland, and Kristina Murphy, "Linking Conspiracy Beliefs with Violence: A Scoping Review of the Empirical Literature," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Published Online, (2025): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2025.2462601>; Kristina Murphy, Adrian Cherney, Keiran Hardy, Sabryna Sas, and Emma Shakespeare, "Linking Conspiracy Beliefs to Violent Anti-Government Extremism: Mitigating the Threat with Procedurally Just Governance," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Published Online, 2025): 1–24.

¹² Sander van der Linden, Costas Panagopoulos, Flavio Azevedo, and John T. Jost, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited: An Ideological Asymmetry in Conspiratorial Thinking," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2021): 23–51.

¹³ Julian Droogan, Brian Ballsun-Stanton, and Lise Waldek, "Online Far Right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives During the COVID-19 Pandemic," Macquarie University, 2021, <https://zenodo.org/records/5732611>.

¹⁴ Jan-Willem van Prooijen, André P. M. Krouwel, and Thomas V. Pollet, "Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6, no. 5 (2015): 570–578.

A RWE ideology that promotes the dismantling of liberal democracy and institutions, and their replacement with racialised and nativist alternatives, has been adopted by both anti-state elites and groups, particularly youth, who feel they have missed out on the benefits of globalisation and the current political system.

Those who perceive themselves to be economically and socially marginalised: There have been deep and rapid societal changes resulting from the decline of the welfare state and key societal institutions, including trade unions and organised religion. Neoliberal economic policies have led to precarious and insecure work and declines in traditional blue and white-collar work that typically benefited men.¹⁵ While Australia has comparatively high levels of welfare and wellbeing,¹⁶ it has not been immune to these dynamics – including worsening inflation and cost of living pressures – and the accompanying growth of extreme and far-right tendencies. The Edelman’s Trust Barometer (2023) warns that Australia is headed toward greater polarisation: with “almost half of Australians (45%) saying the nation is more divided today, than in the past.” Perceptions of inequality and anti-elite sentiment seem to be driving most of this, with 72% identifying the “rich and powerful” as the major dividing force, followed by hostile foreign governments (69%), journalists (51%), and government leaders (49%).¹⁷ The 2025 Trust Barometer goes further noting that one in three Australians, and more than half of those aged 18-34, consider hostile activism a viable method to drive change.¹⁸ This is supported by the 2024 McKinnon Partisanship, Polarisation and Social Cohesion in Australia poll showing that 55% of Australians feel the country has become more polarised, while a third of Gen Z voters (18-24) are prepared to support practices including encouraging or using violence or intimidation.¹⁹

Those who belong to alienated groups within a society: Some young people, and especially young men, in Western countries have turned to internet-based right-wing extremist subcultures to attempt to build greater social capital and peer-to-peer affinity networks. RWE has become foundational to a set of internet-based youth subcultures that often appeal to young men who feel politically, economically, and socially alienated. These online quasi-political movements are usually mixed with performative trolling, irony, and entertainment. They include a mix of right-wing gaming and meme subcultures,²⁰ nihilistic trolling movements such as the Groyper Army, great replacement conspiracy theories, anti-social accelerationism, anti-modern neo-traditionalist movements, manosphere and incel groups, and online cults such as QAnon. This mix of RWE ideologies is dynamic, fast-changing, and sometimes incoherent. Research demonstrates that social media algorithms actively drive extremist content towards young men, coining the terms 'misogynist radicalisation' when describing the sudden shift in attitudes towards women and girls.²¹ The 2024 Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) Threat Briefing notes that “ideologically motivated extremists” - the terminology that

¹⁵ Joshua M. Roose, *The New Demagogues: Religion, Masculinity and the Populist Epoch* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Measures of Welfare and Wellbeing for Australia and Similar Countries," September 7, 2023, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/international-comparisons-of-welfare-data>.

¹⁷ Edelman Australia, "Trust Barometer 2023 Australia," 2023, <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer>.

¹⁸ Edelman Australia, "Trust Barometer 2025 Australia," 2025, <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2025/trust-barometer>.

¹⁹ Susan McKinnon Foundation, "Partisanship, Polarisation and Social Cohesion in Australia," 2024, accessed January 16, 2026, https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2024-11/apo-nid329191_0.pdf.

²⁰ Helen Young and Geoff Boucher, "Normalising Conspiracy Theories: Videogames, Violence and the Far-Right," *Disruptr*, 2020, <https://disruptr.deakin.edu.au/society/normalising-conspiracy-theories-videogames-violence-and-the-far-right>.

²¹ Stephen Coats and Stephanie Wescottsee, "We research online 'misogynist radicalisation'. Here's what parents of boys should know," Monash Len, 2024, <https://lens.monash.edu/we-research-online-misogynist-radicalisation-heres-what-parents-of-boys-should-know/>.

ASIO has adopted to express RWE - are “switching between ideologies and merging components from different ones to create new, hybrid beliefs; a perverse ‘choose your own adventure’ approach to radicalisation.”²² The 2025 ASIO Threat Briefing adds to this noting the confluence of ideologically motivated extremism, antisemitism, and foreign interference directed by state actors.²³ This dynamic of picking and choosing different elements of ideologies to give voice to their grievance has also been referred to as ‘ideological promiscuity’ or ‘salad bar extremism’.²⁴

RWE in NSW and Australia is linked to wider currents of internet-based extremism. It is transnational, with research demonstrating that NSW extremists are enmeshed in an online network of web-based social movements, particularly those emanating from the United States and Europe.²⁵ Recent investigations²⁶ have also revealed direct links between ‘manosphere’ influencer networks and neo-Nazi recruitment in Australia, with figures connected to misogynist influencer Andrew Tate actively involved in recruiting young men into groups such as the National Socialist Network. These recruitment efforts target wealthy and socially isolated teenagers, exploiting grievances around masculinity, status and belonging, demonstrating how the manosphere and elite networks function as a gateway to more explicit forms of right-wing extremism.

Amidst profound social uncertainty, anomie, and global crises, feelings of anxiety, existential dread, and anger have led some young people toward dangerous behaviour. Online communities known as ‘The Com’ participate in acts of extreme violence and predation motivated by misanthropy and a pursuit of significance, not by a structured political ideology.²⁷ This corresponds with psychological studies identifying the ‘significance quest’ as a central driver in radicalization processes.²⁸ While eschewing any real ideological trappings, this subculture uses esoteric fascist aesthetics drawn from sources such as Atomwaffen and the Order of Nine Angles. Individuals associated with the Com have been responsible for acts of violence worldwide including in Australia.

Acknowledging the similarities and throughlines²⁹ between various RWE milieus can help us make sense of the diversity of its manifestations and identify their potential to give rise to new and as yet unidentified forms of RWE. Recent research on the Australian far right demonstrates significant interaction between far-right political parties and the broader non-party sector, including activist groups, alternative media, and online communities. Notably, non-party actors’

²² Mike Burgess, "ASIO Annual Threat Assessment 2024," Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2024, <https://www.asio.gov.au/asio-annual-threat-assessment-2024>.

²³ Mike Burgess, "ASIO Annual Threat Assessment 2025," Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2025, <https://www.asio.gov.au/director-generals-annual-threat-assessment-2025>.

²⁴ John Horgan, "Keynote Address - Terrorism in a Time of Ideological Promiscuity: A Catalyst for Re-thinking Approaches to Motivation," AVERT (Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism) Research Network Research Symposium, 2022, <https://www.avert.net.au/ars2022-recordings>.

²⁵ Julian Droogan, Lise Waldek, Brian Ballsun-Stanton, and Jade Hutchinson, "Mapping a Social Media Ecosystem: Outlinking on Gab & Twitter Amongst the Australian Far-Right Milieu," The RESOLVE Network, 2022, <https://scispace.com/pdf/mapping-a-social-media-ecosystem-outlinking-on-gab-twitter-2s9yvxp8.pdf>.

²⁶ Groch, "An Andrew Tate Insider Is Helping Australian Nazis Recruit Teens."

²⁷ Gill, G., "Meaning Through Its Opposite: Significance Quest Theory and Nihilistic Violent Extremism," GNET, July 18, 2025, <https://gnet-research.org/2025/07/18/meaning-through-its-opposite-significance-quest-theory-and-nihilistic-violent-extremism/>.

²⁸ Arie W. Kruglanski, Michele J. Gelfand, Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Anna Sheveland, Malkanthi Hetiarachchi, and Rohan Gunaratna, "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism," *Advances in Political Psychology* 35, Supplement 1 (2014): 69–93.

²⁹ Khalil, *Rise of the Extreme Right*.

support for particular parties tends to be short-lived and contingent on perceived electoral competitiveness or political opportunity, rather than ideological alignment alone. When parties fail electorally or deregister, key figures often remain active within the non-party sector, transitioning into alternative media or advocacy organisations, highlighting the strategic and adaptive nature of far-right political engagement. This fluidity between party and non-party spaces has implications for policy responses. Interventions targeting formal political organisations may have limited effect if the underlying networks and actors simply reconstitute in other forms.³⁰

Those facing environmental insecurity and despair: The lack of effective coordinated action on climate change has opened space for the revival of ‘eco’ fascist ideas that promote chauvinistic solutions to environmental concerns. For RWEs, protecting the environment has become not a global collective effort that will benefit humankind and the natural world, but a means to exclude or eradicate certain segments of the population for the benefit of those believed to be organically connected to a particular place. Environmental protection is recast as a means of defending an organic connection between land and a narrowly defined group, rather than as a project orientated toward ecological sustainability for everyone.³¹ Eco-fascism has emerged within this landscape as one response to the degradation of the environment and alleges a link between the environmental effects of climate change and overpopulation and global migration.

Eco-fascist narratives have gained traction in Australia, particularly in the wake of the 2019-20 bushfires, with far-right actors framing environmental crisis as justification for exclusionary population policies and anti-immigration sentiment. Research on far-right environmental politics in Australia also demonstrates how territorial nationalism, settler colonialism, and racialised understandings of belonging are collectively mobilised alongside ecological concerns.³²

Those who are opting out of existing economic and political systems: RWE provides an anti-social ‘social alternative’ for the alienated. The rise in RWE is also correlated with global democratic decline. Anti-establishment and anti-elite sentiment is rife within RWE and so too is the feeling that democratic governance is ineffective at best and corrupt at worst.³³ Measurements around the effectiveness of government to provide solutions to people’s problems in democracies have shown a sharp drop.³⁴ Political accountability and competitiveness in democracies are declining, with many people feeling like the system is rigged. Australia’s democratic health is strong by many measures, yet, as referenced above,

³⁰ Imogen Richards, Callum Jones, Jordan McSwiney, and Kurt Sengul, "What Does the Non-Party Sector Think About Far-Right Political Parties? Understanding the Place of Parties in the Australian Far Right," *Political Studies*, Published Online, (2025).

³¹ Graham Macklin, "The Extreme Right, Climate Change and Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 5 (2022): 979–996.

³² Imogen Richards, Gearóid Brinn, and Callum Jones, *Global Heating and the Australian Far Right* (London: Routledge, 2023).

³³ Richard Wike, Laura Silver, and Alexandra Castillo, "Many Across the Globe Are Dissatisfied with How Democracy Is Working," Pew Research Center, April 29, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/29/many-across-the-globe-are-dissatisfied-with-how-democracy-is-working/>.

³⁴ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health?," accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.satp.org/Docs/Document/1192.pdf>.

levels of trust in government in Australia are among the lowest in the world.³⁵ There are an increasing number of citizens with grievances who are seeking solutions outside establishment politics and institutions. In periods of social, political and economic uncertainty and growing polarisation, extremism can grow, and the disaffected can be recruited into these movements. Violent extremists attempt to exploit these insecurities and widening rifts. They amplify narratives emphasising perceived victimisation and marginalisation, attributing blame for these issues to identified out-groups.

Paradoxically, they also deliver rewards and fulfil needs for those who become involved in such movements. They can offer an enhanced sense of belonging, efficacy and purpose, often highlighting the absence of these features within existing modern society.³⁶ The appeal of such narratives, and the tangible rewards experienced by members of these groups, represents one of the key challenges for prevention and intervention efforts focused on right-wing extremism.

³⁵ Mark Evans, Will Jennings, and Gerry Stoker, "How Does Australia Compare: What Makes a Leading Democracy?," Democracy 2025 Report No. 6, April 2, 2020, <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/documents/Democracy2025-report6.pdf>.

³⁶ Waldek et al., "Mapping Networks and Narratives of Online Right-Wing Extremists in New South Wales."

TWO: AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE TO COMBAT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

Despite the growth of RWE and its drivers in Australia, in comparison with other developed, multicultural democracies, NSW and Australia demonstrate relatively high levels of political stability and social cohesion. There are existing examples of best practice that demonstrate how NSW leads in addressing the drivers and repercussions of RWE hatred and violence.

The NSW COMPACT (Community Partnership Action) program is an example of an innovative community resilience-building program that engages with those at risk of RWE and other forms of extremism. The program empowers marginalised groups and individuals to stand united against social division, hate, and violence. COMPACT funded RWE-focussed programs in its first funding grants round in 2016, and has continued to do so since. Outside specifically funded programs community resilience to RWE is built through the COMPACT program by strengthening the social fabric through creating and supporting an alliance of communities, many representing marginalised groups. Community resilience is also built through the building of networked preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery.

Another instance of NSW leadership in fostering enhanced capacity in prevention and intervention against all forms of violent extremism, including RWE, is the Step Together program. Now being rolled out nationally, Step Together was first trialled and evaluated as a NSW-led program underpinned by robust research on better supporting those who may wish or need to come forward to report to authorities on concerns about someone close who may be radicalising to extremist violence.³⁷ This support and advice service for community members and frontline service providers enables better early intervention and support opportunities for both those radicalising to all forms of extremism, but also those around them who may also need support and guidance in dealing with the challenges posed by radicalisation to extremism, including RWE.

Recommendation 1: Draw on evidence-based best practice from Australia and comparable democracies

AVERT recommends that NSW draw on best practice examples from Australia and overseas that prioritise community-based prevention, evaluation, and community partnership.

International and domestic experience demonstrates that effective approaches:

- Invest in long-term prevention rather than short-term or reactive measures.
- Scale up existing successful programs such as COMPACT to further reach those who may be susceptible to right-wing extremist recruitment efforts and narrative appeals.

³⁷ Michele Grossman, "Community Reporting Thresholds: Sharing Information with Authorities Concerning Violent Extremist Activity and Involvement in Foreign Conflict," CVESC-funded Research Report (Melbourne: Victoria University, 2015); Michele Grossman, "When the 'Right Thing to Do' Feels So Wrong: Australian Muslim Perspectives on 'Intimates' Reporting to Authorities About Violent Extremism," in *Islamophobia and Radicalization: Breeding Intolerance and Violence*, ed. John L. Esposito and Derya Iner (Springer, 2019), 203–222; Paul Thomas, Michele Grossman, Kris Christmann, and Shamim Miah, "Community Reporting on Violent Extremism by 'Intimates': Emergent Findings from International Evidence," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13, no. 4 (2020): 638–659.

- Embed evaluation and evidence generation into program design.
- Foster collaboration between government, researchers, civil society, and affected communities.
- Adapt interventions to evolving threat landscapes rather than relying on static models.

THREE: METHODS AND PRACTICES THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT ADOPT TO COMBAT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM, INCLUDING: COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMS, DERADICALISATION PROGRAMS, ANY OTHER MECHANISMS THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERS APPROPRIATE

Recommendation 1: Invest in long-term community-building programs that strengthen social cohesion and democratic resilience

AVERT recommends sustained investment in community-building programs that address the underlying social and structural conditions that allow right-wing extremist narratives to gain traction in ways that are responsive to both age and gender dynamics and demographics. Research demonstrates that exclusion, social isolation, perceived marginalisation, and declining trust in institutions are key factors exploited by right-wing extremist movements.

Effective community-building programs should engage with young people to identify and empower authentic grassroots pro-social movements and youth-generated responses to the drivers of RWE. These should:

- Provide a space where grievances associated with perceived marginalisation and alienation can be expressed in a positive social manner to inform healthy youth-led responses.
- Strengthen social inclusion, trust, and participation in democratic institutions.
- Support locally grounded initiatives that foster dialogue, belonging, and civic engagement.
- Be delivered in partnership with community organisations, civil society actors, and local stakeholders, rather than framed solely as security or law enforcement interventions.
- Avoid stigmatising particular communities or demographics, recognising that right-wing extremist grievances cut across socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural lines.

Recommendation 2: Embed prevention and resilience-building within education systems, particularly for young people

AVERT recommends expanding education-based community programs that build critical thinking, media literacy, emotional literacy, and democratic engagement, particularly among young people who are disproportionately exposed to extremist content online.

Such initiatives should:

- Be embedded within broader education, wellbeing, and inclusion frameworks rather than delivered as standalone counter-extremism programs.
- Equip students to critically assess extremist narratives relating to identity, gender, history, politics, and grievance.
- Include digital and media literacy components that address misinformation, disinformation, and conspiratorial thinking.
- Be age-appropriate, inclusive, and non-punitive, supporting young people rather than surveilling or criminalising them.

- Be subject to independent evaluation to ensure effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen non-securitised early intervention and support pathways

AVERT recommends the expansion of accessible, non-securitised early intervention pathways that allow families, peers, educators, and community members to seek advice and support when concerned about an individual's exposure to extremist ideas.

Early intervention initiatives should:

- Provide confidential, voluntary support rather than defaulting to law enforcement responses.
- Be clearly communicated so communities understand when and how to seek help.
- Be integrated across education, health, youth services, and community organisations to ensure coordinated and proportionate responses.
- Focus on disengagement and support rather than punishment, particularly where no criminal offence has occurred.

Recommendation 4: Treat disengagement and reintegration as core components of long-term risk reduction

AVERT recommends that disengagement and reintegration initiatives be recognised as a central pillar of effective responses to right-wing extremism. Research consistently shows that successful disengagement depends on addressing underlying social, psychological, and economic factors rather than ideology alone.

Effective initiatives should:

- Provide tailored support addressing education, employment, housing, mental health, substance use, and family relationships.
- Recognise that individuals may disengage from extremist movements without entering the criminal justice system and still require support.
- Adopt coordinated, multi-agency approaches to avoid fragmented or inconsistent service provision.
- Be grounded in ethical practice, safeguarding, and respect for human rights.

FOUR: EXISTING OFFENCES AND POWERS IN BOTH NEW SOUTH WALES AND COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATION

Recommendation 1: Ensure legislative responses are proportionate, evidence-based, and attentive to unintended consequences

AVERT recommends that legislative and policy responses to right-wing extremism be carefully calibrated to avoid unintended consequences, including grievance mobilisation, further radicalisation, or erosion of democratic norms.

Policy development should:

- Clearly articulate thresholds for intervention and enforcement.
- Distinguish between violent extremism, non-violent extremist activity, and broader hateful or exclusionary expression.
- Avoid symbolic or overly broad measures that may have limited preventative impact.
- Be informed by empirical evidence and subject to regular review.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen coordination between state and national counter-extremism frameworks

AVERT recommends that NSW's approach to countering right-wing extremism:

- Align with national countering violent extremism frameworks while remaining responsive to local contexts and risks.
- Invest in structures – both government and academic – that can facilitate cross-jurisdictional and cross-agency lessons, knowledge exchange and best practice.

This includes:

- Consistency in definitions, principles, and thresholds across jurisdictions.
- Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities across Commonwealth, state, and local government actors.
- Information-sharing arrangements that respect privacy, proportionality, and community trust.

FIVE: ANY OTHER RELATED MATTERS

Recommendation 1: Public institutions must commit to procedurally just governance

While local initiatives and programs are critical to addressing the factors that radicalise individuals, governments and other public authorities must also make a commitment to govern in ways that protect the public's trust in their authority and perceived right to govern. Without governments addressing their own approach to governance, it fails to address the grievances individuals can come to hold about the political elite. Research consistently shows that procedural justice is critical to garnering public trust in institutions, with recent Australian research showing that procedurally just governance is critical to mitigating extremist beliefs and behaviours amongst those most likely to distrust authority.³⁸ To be considered procedurally just, governments and other public authorities must:

- Enact power in ways that demonstrate respect and dignity for citizens,
- Convey trustworthy motives,
- Be transparent and make neutral decisions, and
- Allow genuine citizens voice before important decisions or policy changes are made.

Recommendation 2: Invest in ongoing research, evaluation, and transparency

AVERT recommends sustained investment in independent research and evaluation to strengthen understanding of right-wing extremism and improve the effectiveness of responses.

This should include:

- Funding longitudinal and comparative research on radicalisation, prevention, and disengagement.
- Improving transparency around program objectives and outcomes to build public confidence.
- Ensuring research findings are meaningfully integrated into policy and practice.

³⁸ Kristina Murphy, Adrian Cherney, Keiran Hardy, Sabryna Sas, and Emma Shakespeare, "Linking Conspiracy Beliefs and Violent Anti-Government Extremism: Mitigating the Threat with Procedurally Just Governance," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Published Online, (2025); Kristina Murphy, "Policing Conspiracy Theorists: The Importance of Procedural Justice Policing and Trust," *Policing: An International Journal* 48, no. 2 (2025): 336–353.