

NSW Police Force Submission

Commonwealth Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

Inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism in Australia

Current threat environment in NSW

The principal terrorist threat in NSW comes from individuals who adhere to a violent Islamist extremist ideology, however, the terrorist threat from the extreme right-wing in Australia is increasing. The proportion of high threat individuals in NSW with an XRW ideology assessed by the NSWPF remains relatively low.

The NSWPF continue to identify, monitor, investigate, arrest and charge individuals and groups who exhibit extremist activity. The NSW Police Force works closely with other law enforcement and security agencies nationally and internationally in the prevention, deterrence and response to terrorism and violent extremism across all ideologies.

Islamist extremism (ISLEX)

Ongoing terrorism investigations indicate a small number of NSW-based violent Islamist extremists have the intent and capability to conduct a local terrorist attack.

The targeting of crowded places and police continues to be promoted in global violent Islamist extremist propaganda. In NSW, the most likely attack methods to be employed are assessed as being of low capability and involve the use of edged weapons, hostile vehicle attacks, or firearms. These types of attacks do not require specialist skills so can be undertaken by an individual or a small group. Low capability attacks also continue to feature in violent Islamist extremist propaganda disseminated online.

Online propaganda continues to instruct, recruit, inspire, cause fear and encourage attacks. It remains a significant driver for global terrorism and the targeting of crowded places in Western countries. ISLEX groups and individuals in NSW almost certainly continue to access and consume this propaganda and could be radicalised to violence by same.

Recent Al-Qa'ida propaganda emphasised community divisions during the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter, demonstrating that Al-Qa'ida remains globally minded in their strategy. In 2020, Al-Qa'ida noted its rationale for fighting America is "similar to your reaction against those who killed George Floyd" and is against "the tyranny imposed by your rulers" against the global Islamic community. Al-Qa'ida calls for "an all-out revolt" against the rulers occupying the White House and their promotion of white supremacy. While Al-Qa'ida statements and propaganda almost certainly resonate with those already committed to an Al-Qa'ida ideology in the U.S. and Australia, it is less likely to inspire those in Black Lives Matter movements who do not already hold Islamist extremist views.

Extreme Right Wing (XRW) extremism

Right wing views encompass diverse beliefs, including but not limited to, nationalism, anti-Semitic, anti-immigration, anti-establishment, anti-left, anti-LGBTI+, anti-Islam, and/or need for a strong state. These beliefs are often entwined into a narrative of 'traditional' values and the protection of Western values. Many people hold these views without being extremists and displeasure towards, or stereotyping, a subset of the community in isolation is not an indicator of extremism.

XRW individuals and groups diverge from conservatists through their violent rhetoric against ideological opponents. The XRW cohort frequently hold their ideological opponents responsible for perceived societal and personal failures, most of which are driven by conspiracy theories.

The NSW XRW movement remains relatively small, decentralised and idiosyncratic, with prominent groups and individuals remaining focused on ideology and organising activities to establish an effective domestic XRW movement. Membership of active XRW groups based in NSW is assessed as small. The online presence of some of these groups is larger.

XRW groups' propensity for terrorist acts in NSW remains low in comparison to violent Islamist extremists, however, a small number of decentralised NSW XRW individuals continue to express aspirations and desires for violence. While online violent rhetoric rarely results in real-world violence in NSW, there is an ongoing threat from individuals on the periphery of groups who seek direct action, notoriety and/or revenge.

Geographically dispersed XRW individuals in NSW engage online with national and international peers. Online XRW pages and chat groups known to the NSW Police Force are often not dedicated to, or affiliated with, a formal group. Unstructured online activity is more frequent than group-based or real-world organising in NSW. This unstructured online environment facilitates the spread of diverse XRW ideology, rhetoric and propaganda. While online violent rhetoric rarely results in real-world violence in NSW, there is an ongoing threat from individuals on the periphery of groups who seek direct action, notoriety and/or revenge.

XRW groups produced a large volume of commentary in relation to COVID-19, both locally and abroad. XRW cohorts often leverage conspiracies and emerging community issues to attract attention on mainstream social media platforms. This content can engage audiences before encouraging migration to less moderated platforms and more extreme content. Exposure to extremist rhetoric and statement, such as rejecting current government and democracy, endorsing violence, and promoting racial grievances could aid radicalisation to a violent XRW ideology.

COVID-19 and political events, both in Australia and abroad, motivated a growth of global accelerationist XRW propaganda. XRW accelerationist propaganda produced in the past six months advocates both offensive violent tactics and defensive survivalist tactics in response to the perceived collapse of society and racial violence triggered by COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter. The NSW Police Force is not aware of any specific threat reporting to indicate increased XRW violent intent or capability in NSW as a result of COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, or violent offshore propaganda. However, some individuals in NSW have likely strengthened their ideological convictions and commitment to the XRW cause as a result of ongoing XRW commentary.

Issue motivated extremism

Issue-motivated groups and protest movements in Australia rarely promote violence. However, COVID-19 triggered increased anti-establishment and conspiratorial rhetoric among some groups and individuals in NSW. While issue-motivated violence in crowded places is unlikely, aggrieved and/or at-risk individuals in this cohort could be triggered to use violence with little warning.

Extreme Left Wing (XLW) extremism

Internationally, the potential for violence from the extreme left also increased as anarchists, anti-establishment and anti-fascist movements took advantage of protest movements, social

unrest and individual incidents involving police to engage in, and encourage, violence against police. In NSW, XLW violent extremism targeting police is not expected, however, incidental or opportunistic violence against police may occur during public order events.

High Risk Terrorist Offenders

The NSWPF considers high risk terrorist offenders as a significant risk to the community. It is the NSWPF's view that offenders who pose a risk of committing a future terrorism offence should be included in the highest risk category.

In 2017, the NSW Government introduced the *Terrorism (High Risk Offenders) Act* (THRO), and in 2018 allocated \$114 million across four years to implement the THRO scheme. The NSW THRO scheme allows for offenders to be kept in prison, or under supervision in the community, if they pose an unacceptable risk of committing serious terrorism offences after their sentence expires.

Terrorist organisation listing

Subsection 102.1(2) of the Criminal Code provides that before the Governor-General makes regulations specifying an organisation for the purposes of paragraph (b) of the definition of 'terrorist organisation' in subsection 102.1(1), the Minister for Home Affairs must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the organisation is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act or advocates the doing of a terrorist act. In making a decision, the Minister for Home Affairs considers advice provided by ASIO. ASIO will consider whether there is information indicating that the organisation is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in, indirectly fostering, or advocating the doing of a terrorist act. ASIO may also have regard to a range of non-legislative factors: the organisation's engagement in terrorism; the organisation's ideology; links to other terrorist groups; links to Australia; threats to Australian interests; listing by the United Nations or like-minded countries, or engagement in peace or mediation processes.

The NSWPF consider the Commonwealth's terrorist organisation listing laws adequate in addressing current and emerging terrorist threats from organisations. Individuals exhibiting violent extreme views will continue to be identified, monitored and investigated (where appropriate) by law enforcement and security agencies.

Online

Extremist groups, across all ideologies including ISLEX and XRW, have consistently demonstrated a willingness to harness new technologies to amplify their messages, reach new audiences and coordinate activities. Digital platforms, including social media, encrypted messaging applications, live-streaming platforms and the dark web are able to be used effectively by extremist groups. These innovations have allowed new types of communities to emerge, where ideological affinity overcomes a lack of physical proximity. Internet-enabled technologies have provided an accessible, low-cost means to establish, engage and empower like-minded groups across divides.

Where platforms associated with extremist groups and implicated in terror attacks have been taken down by their hosts, rather than resulting in the demise of these platforms it has simply displaced them, emerging in altered forms and with new hosts. Pushing extremists to the fringes of the internet, away from mainstream users, could be a positive but it presents a different set of challenges for law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

The NSWPF utilises covert online capability for intelligence gathering and investigative functions. This capability is being used successfully to gather intelligence on Covert

operations, disrupt activity and to investigate individuals of concern. As with child exploitation, crime syndicates and other areas of crime that utilise digital platforms, the NSWPF online covert capability is a key part of the organisations strategy in combatting terrorism and violent extremism.