BUILDING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

Public Sphere Responses to Violent Extremism

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FINAL REPORT

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This report proposes a framework for democratic resilience, which can be used to examine and improve the public sphere response to violent extremism.

It outlines seven key factors that matter for building and maintaining a democratically resilient public sphere, and offers practical suggestions for building democratic resilience in New South Wales (NSW), Australia as part of the state's wider Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts.

The research conducted for this report includes in-depth analysis of the publicly available documents on CVE in NSW, a review of international best practices of tackling violent extremism, as well as interviews with NSW Government stakeholders, civil society organisations, journalists, and academics. The purpose of the research is not to draw generalisations, but to refine and contextualise the democratic resilience framework presented in this report and provide practical, relevant suggestions.

The research is conducted by academics from the University of Canberra, Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance and UNSW Canberra between February and July 2022. Funding for this research was provided by the NSW Government, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program 2022.

While the primary focus is NSW Government CVE practice, the report takes a broader approach and discusses both national and international practice in tackling violent extremism. As such, insights and ideas presented in this report are likely to be relevant for other jurisdictions and countries.

Violent Extremism and the Public Sphere

Violent extremism threatens human life and safety. Often overlooked is how extremists endanger the public sphere, which is comprised of the practices, institutions and actors that sustain communication about matters of common concern. The public sphere assumes multiple crucial functions in a democracy. Aside from being a site of deliberation through which public opinion is formed, the public sphere is also a site for cultural expression. It is a site where people engage in discourses about themselves, where they represent themselves to others, and discuss these representations. It is a site for identity formation and expression. It facilitates the formation of shared identities, alliances, solidarities, and connections across difference.

Violent extremists seek to undermine the public sphere by sowing division, distrust and fear to radically redraw the boundaries of liberal multicultural societies. When the public sphere is fractured and polarised, it loses the capacity to generate the deliberation on which democracy depends.

The acts of violent extremists alone cannot undermine the public sphere. Their impact on the public sphere depends in large part on the responses of the key public sphere actors including citizens, government, and the media.

Democratic Resilience

How the public sphere responds to extremist acts and threats matters deeply for democracy. This report introduces a framework of democratic resilience which can be used to assess and address the impact of violent extremism on the public sphere.

The most defining characteristic of a democratically resilient public sphere is its capacity to sustain integrative and tolerant public discourse when subjected to external shocks, such as a violent extremist threats and acts. *Resilient* public spheres can contain and process provocations in a fashion that maintains or even strengthens democratic integrity. By contrast, *fragile* public spheres descend into polarization, fragmentation and lose their capacity for the inclusive and cross-cultural deliberation on which a functioning democracy depends.

Building Democratic Resilience in the Public Sphere

Table 1 summarises seven key factors, formulated as questions for public sphere actors to reflect on and consider in their efforts to build and maintain democratic resilience in the face of violent extremism.

These factors were identified through theoretical and empirical research conducted for this report. Linked to these factors, the report presents a series of practical ways forward for building and maintaining democratic resilience in multicultural societies. Rather than a conclusive checklist, these suggestions should be seen as a set of issues public sphere actors should take into consideration in their efforts to build and maintain resilience in the face of violent extremism.
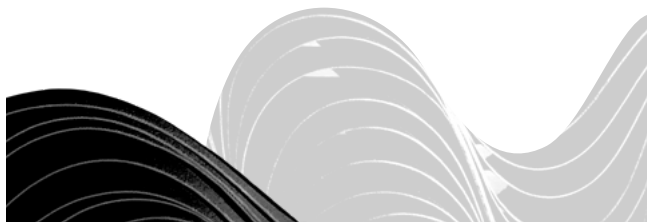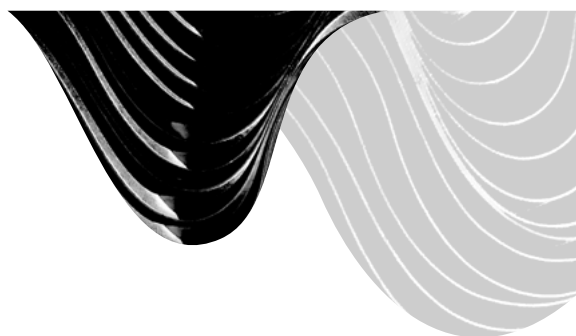
Table 1. Key Findings and Ways Forward for Building Democratic Resilience

What matters for building democratic resilience?	Enablers	Barriers	Ways Forward
1 How political leaders talk about violent extremism	Unifying language	Divisive language	**A:** Continue to develop speech guidelines for public-facing government actors and political leaders
2 How CVE is understood and implemented in policy and programming	Clear, consistent, and transparent communication around CVE	Vague and inconsistent communication around CVE	**B:** Clarify between CVE and counter terrorism activities to help minimise stigmatisation in the public sphere **C:** Promote a strong evidentiary basis for deliberation on violent extremism in NSW
3 How minorities are included in the public sphere of a multicultural society	Participation of diverse communities in the public sphere	Marginalisation of diverse communities in the public sphere	**D:** Promote ethnic and multicultural media in the public sphere **E:** Emphasise the intracultural diversity that exists within communities
4 How an inclusive collective identity is constructed in the public sphere	Performances and symbols of inclusive collective identity	Failure to recognise the unifying role of symbols and performances	**F:** Invest in commemoration and memorialisation practices that signal unity and resilience in the public sphere
5 How media reports on violent extremism	Responsible media reporting	Sensationalist media reporting	**G:** Explore ways to promote responsible media reporting on violent extremism
6 How government engages with the civil society organisations and the wider public	Authentic and consequential public engagement	Tokenistic and inconsequential public engagement	**H:** Foster consequential deliberation between government and civil society and the wider public **I:** Create spaces and opportunities for listening and reflection
7 How information pollution is tackled online	Media literacy and platform regulation	Poor media literacy and unregulated platforms	**J:** Enhance media literacy education for the public **K:** Develop strategies to address structural factors contributing to information pollution
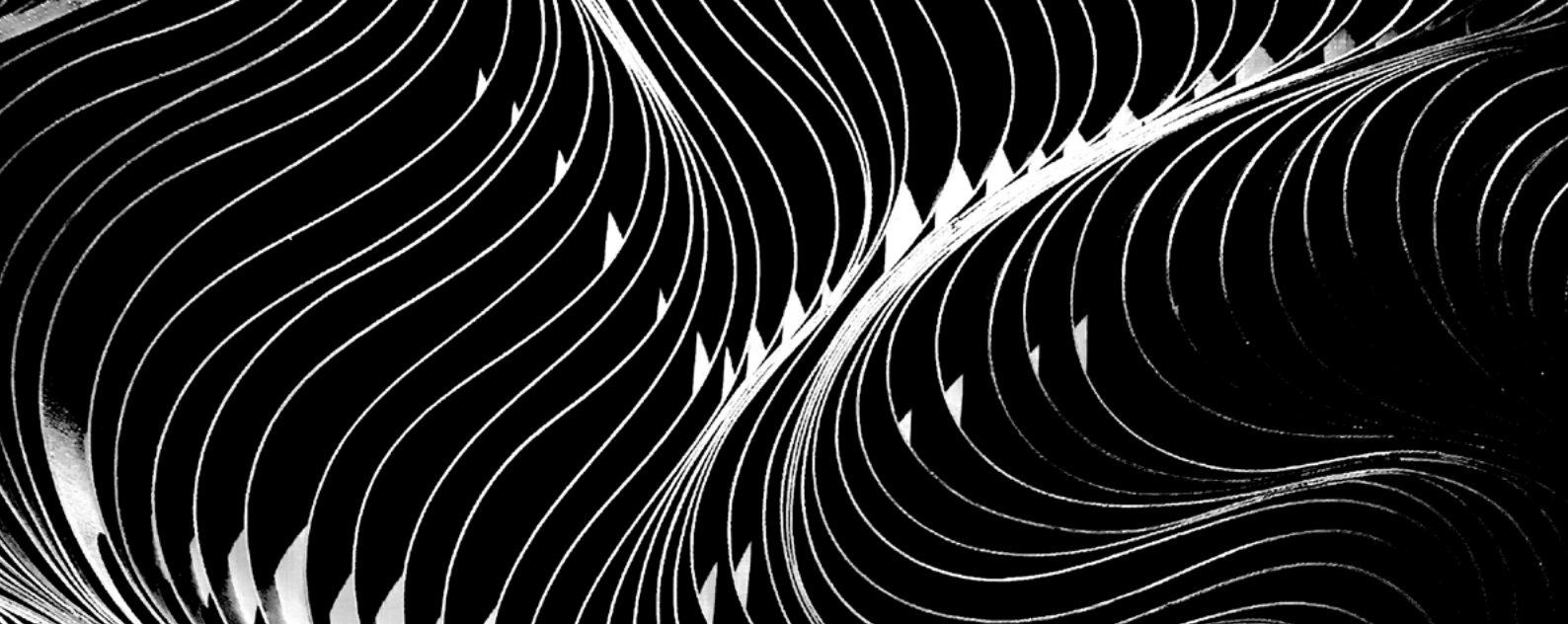
Introduction

Violent extremism is a serious challenge confronting contemporary societies. Globally thousands of people are killed every year because of acts of violent extremism.[1] While the loss of lives may be the most visible (and measurable) effect of violent extremism, it is not the only one. Violent extremism has many other devastating impacts on individuals, families, and communities.[2] This includes increased community tensions, psychological trauma, and economic shocks, as well the effects of repressive security and surveillance measures. This report focuses on the damage violent extremism poses to one particular, and often-overlooked aspect of democracy: the public sphere.

Violent extremists endanger the public sphere, a key site in any democracy that fulfils multiple important functions. The public sphere can be defined as the totality of a society's public communication about political issues. As such, it is where social and political problems are identified and discussed, public opinion is formed, and collective identities are constructed, validated or challenged. Violent extremists seek to sow division, distrust, and fear in the public sphere. Their acts are aimed at redrawing cultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries within the public sphere and damaging inclusive notions of collective identity.[3] Their success depends on the spread of polarising discourses within the public sphere, and the transformation of a tolerant, pluralistic society into an intolerant and exclusionist one.

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[1] Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index 2022', 2022.

[2] Mossarat Qadeem, 'Beyond Violence: The Impact of Extremism on Communities', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2020, 31 January.

[3] Donatella Della Porta et al., *Discursive Turns and Critical Junctures: Debating Citizenship after the Charlie Hebdo Attacks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

When highly polarised and riven with fear and distrust, the public sphere loses its capacity to generate the inclusive deliberation on which democracy depends. People may become more critical of others' culture or faith, and do not feel free to express themselves because of fear of negative consequences such as stigmatisation or marginalisation. Polarised public spheres lose their capacity to listen across difference, fail to identify social and political problems, and inhibit the development of collective identity and solidarity across difference.[4]

How the public sphere responds to violent extremism matters for building democratic resilience.

Resilient public spheres sustain and deepen integrative and tolerant public discourse when subjected to violent extremist threats. They contain and process provocations in a fashion that maintains or even strengthens their democratic integrity.

By contrast, *fragile* public spheres descend into polarisation or fragmentation and lose their capacity for inclusive deliberation on which functioning democracy depends. The question of whether a public sphere is resilient or fragile becomes most visible in the aftermath of a violent extremist attack intentionally seeking to divide it. However, it should not take a violent extremist attack to learn about democratic resilience. Democracies can take proactive steps to strengthen the resilience of the public sphere.

But what are the key ingredients of a resilient public sphere? What can be learned from other democracies which have shown signs of democratic resilience in the face of violent extremism? Who are the key public sphere actors that are responsible for building and maintaining democratic resilience in a democratic society?

This report responds to these questions and presents seven key factors for building democratic resilience, drawing on insights from the theory of deliberative democracy and on empirical research on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. As Australia's most populous state, the NSW community is extremely diverse with more than 275 different languages spoken and 144 religions practiced.[5] Particularly in the context of a marked rise in far-right extremism,[6] ensuring a resilient public sphere resistant to violent extremist shocks is vital for the health of democracy in the state. This report offers possible ways forward for public sphere actors in NSW to build its capacity to respond to violent extremism.

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[4] Carolyn M. Hendriks, Selen A. Ercan, and Sonya Duus, 'Listening in Polarised Controversies: A Study of Listening Practices in the Public Sphere', *Policy Sciences* 52, no. 1 (2019): 137–51.

[5] NSW Government, 'Key Facts about NSW', NSW Government, 20 January 2020.

[6] Mike Burgess, 'Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Estimates', Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 25 May 2021.
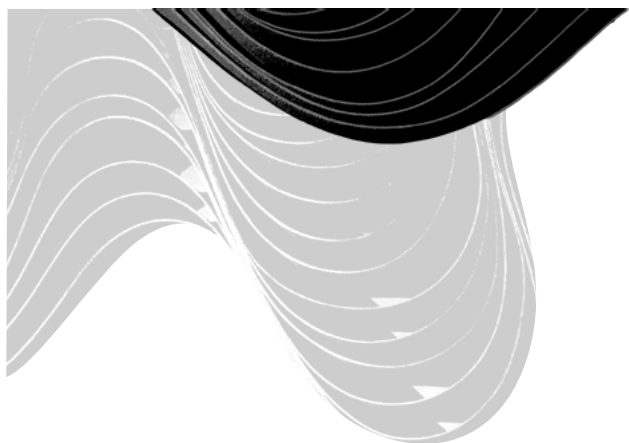
Deliberative democracy prizes free, inclusive, and competent public discourse, and the public sphere is the key site, where this kind of communication should take place.

Conceptually, the report draws on deliberative democracy, as this approach provides one of the most developed and compelling accounts of the public sphere to date.

The theory of deliberative democracy provides a description how an 'ideal' well-functioning public sphere should look and what democratic functions it should assume. By taking this ideal as our benchmark, we can assess the health of 'actually existing' public spheres and improve their resilience in the face of violent extremism.

Empirically, the research conducted for this report includes analysis of the publicly available documents on CVE in NSW, combined with 14 interviews with NSW government, civil society, journalists, and academics working in the areas of violent extremism,

social cohesion, and democracy, conducted between February-July 2022.[7] The purpose of the empirical research is not to draw generalisations, but to refine and contextualise the democratic resilience framework presented in this report. Where possible, the report also draws on international best practices showing examples of democratic resilience in practice. The purpose of these examples is to inform and inspire CVE programs and practice in NSW and in Australia more broadly. Australia has long been considered a world leader in deliberative democracy, ranking first among OECD countries in terms of the number of designed deliberative processes, especially on local levels.[8] It can also set an example for building a resilient public sphere by drawing on deliberative democratic thinking and practice.

The democratic resilience framework proposed in this report can be used to diagnose and address the threats violent extremism poses to the functioning of the public sphere. It is composed of seven factors that matter for building and maintaining a democratically resilient public sphere in multicultural societies.

The report is structured in three parts. **PART 1** focuses on the key functions of the public sphere in a democratic society, and shows how violent extremists target and seek to undermine these functions. **PART 2** outlines the democratic resilience framework and develops its key ingredients drawing on the empirical research conducted for this report. It explains how democratic resilience differs from and supplements the existing accounts of resilience such as 'community resilience,' which is the current resilience framework used by the NSW Government. Finally, **PART 3** presents possible ways forward to help key public sphere actors, including government, media, and civil society organisations to build and maintain democratic resilience in the face of violent extremism.

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[7] Research conducted for this report is approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra (11549).

[8] OECD, 'Catching the Deliberative Wave: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions' (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022).

The Public Sphere: An Overlooked Target of Violent Extremism
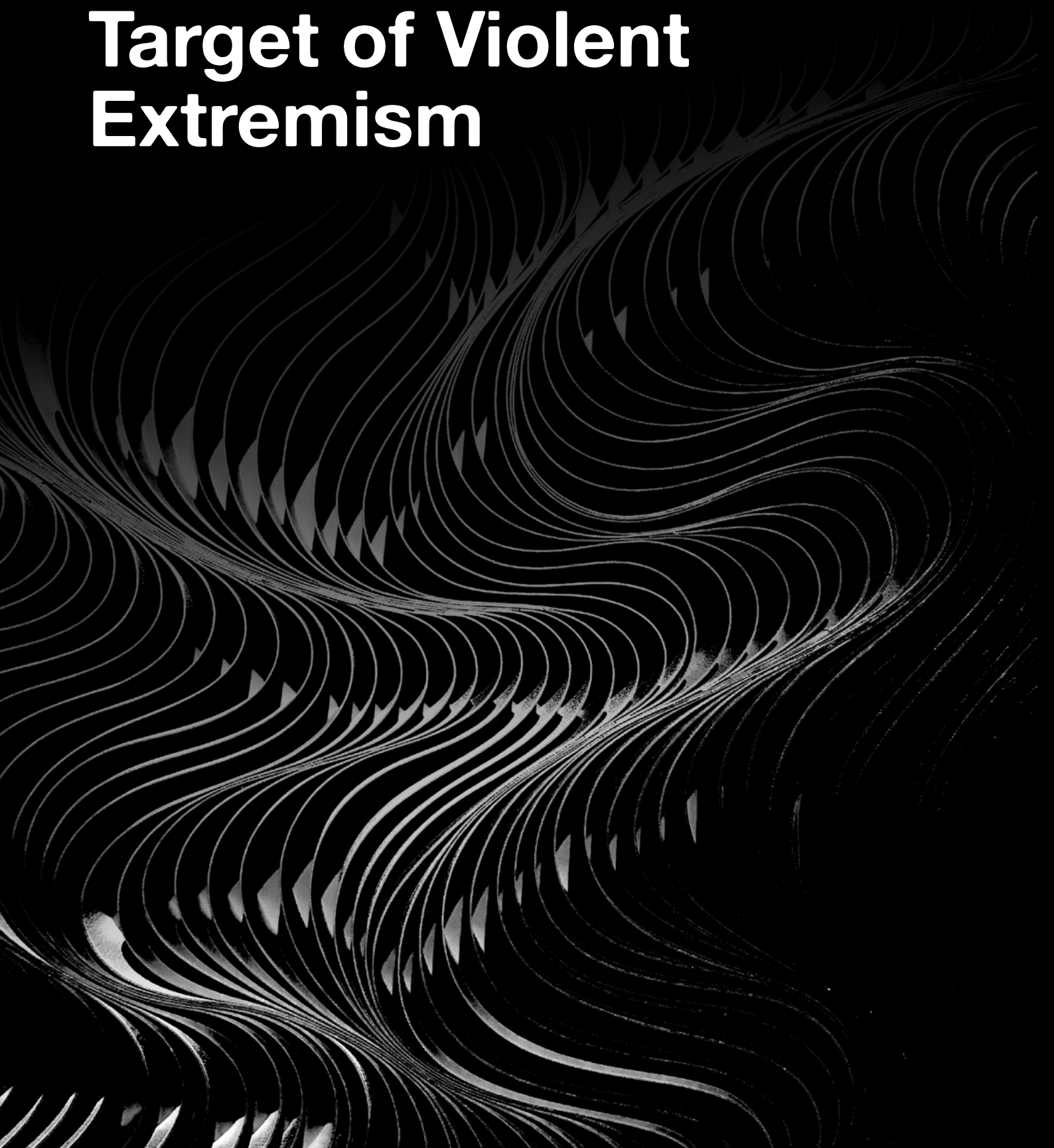
> " Violence is a tactic used to incite fear and incite discord in society. But there are other tactics that violent extremists use, such as the promotion of hate speech, promotion of schisms within communities; everything that violent extremists do when they're not actually committing an act of violence harms the public sphere in a multicultural society.

Dr Malcolm Haddon, Associate Director,
Community Resilience, Multicultural NSW

This report draws on the notion of the public sphere as suggested by deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy is a normative theory of democratic legitimacy based on the idea that those affected by a collective decision have the right, capacity, and opportunity to participate and deliberate in the making of those decisions. It is often described as 'talk-centric' rather than 'vote-centric' approach to democracy.[9] However, communication beyond talk, including listening and reflection, matter just as much as expression.[10] Deliberation involves a process of mutual justification where participants offer reasons for their positions, listen to the views of others, and then reconsider their preferences based on information and arguments they are exposed to during this process.

At the heart of deliberative democracy is a healthy public sphere, where citizens communicate about the issues of common concern as free and equal members of society. The contemporary understanding of the term goes back to the work of Jürgen Habermas, who provided a comprehensive analysis of the public sphere and its historical transformation.[11] The health of the public sphere, Habermas argues, is so vital to democracy that we can measure the state of democracy 'by taking the pulse of the life of its political public sphere'.[12]

The public sphere is a communicatively constructed site between state and society. It is where citizens come together as free and equal members of the society, exchange opinions on issues of common concern, and form public opinion. It is where social and political issues are identified, articulated, and furnished with possible solutions.[13] Apart from potentially being home to deliberation, the public sphere is also a cultural and performative site where collective identities are constructed, validated, or challenged. A well-functioning public sphere facilitates the free flow of information and communication among citizens, mediates between state and society, and enables the formation of shared identities, alliances, solidarities, and connections across difference.[14]

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[9] Simone Chambers, 'Deliberative Democratic Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 307–26.

[10] Selen A. Ercan, Carolyn M Hendriks, and John S. Dryzek, 'Public Deliberation in an Era of Communicative Plenty', *Policy & Politics* 47, no. 1 (2019): 19–36.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

[12] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 22.

[13] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

[14] Carolyn M Hendriks, Selen A. Ercan, and John Boswell, *Mending Democracy: Democratic Repair in Disconnected Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Craig J. Calhoun, 'Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere', Public Culture 14, no. 1 (2002): 147–71.

It is precisely these functions that violent extremists seek to disrupt when they target the public sphere. Violent extremists aim to reconstitute the public sphere and change its terms of engagement by:

- sowing division and distrust, hindering the prospects for communication across difference and the construction of an inclusive collective identity;
- attempting to shift the terms of debate to undermine its democratic and tolerant potential, and distort the formation of public opinion;
- spreading violent extremist content that pollutes the public sphere to undermine democratic institutions and make minorities feel threatened so that they disengage from civic life.

Specific examples of how violent extremists achieve these aims and reconstitute the public sphere include: engaging in media manipulation;[15] performing political stunts like a cross burning;[16] creating various media productions and networks;[17] creating information pollution about Covid-19;[18] and spreading propaganda online on mainstream platforms like Facebook and Twitter,[19] as well as alternative platforms like Gab and Telegram.[20]

These actions attend to several aims that take place in the public sphere: intimidating political opponents, identifying target communities for violence, undermining public trust in public institutions, enhancing the internal legitimacy of extremist actors, and provoking a government response. All have a potentially significant impact on the quality of the public sphere, and hence democracy. Their overarching aim is 'to create a hostile environment where people don't feel safe', according to Dr Kaz Ross, an independent researcher and expert on the Australian far right. But because such acts are not straightforwardly physically violent, she notes, 'we forget that they are doing violence and harm every time they graffiti a swastika or put up a hate sticker'.

When the public sphere is polarised, riven with fear and distrust because of violent acts, it loses its capacity to generate the deliberation on which democracy depends. The public sphere becomes unable to identify social and political problems, to transmit these problems to government, and generate an inclusive collective identity. It is therefore vital that efforts to address violent extremism are attentive to what violent extremists are doing when they are not being (physically) violent, and how their actions threaten the functioning of the public sphere.

Importantly, violent extremists cannot reconstitute the public sphere and change its terms of engagement alone. The reaction and interaction of other public sphere actors, such as the media, government, and everyday citizens, is crucial in either amplifying or containing violent extremist attempts to reconstitute the public sphere. The next section outlines the concept of democratic resilience, which provides a framework to better prepare the public sphere to deal with violent acts, and promote a more democratic recovery in the aftermath of such acts.

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[15] Lauren Williams, 'Islamic State Propaganda and the Mainstream Media', Lowy Institute, 29 February 2016; Cam Wilson, 'Leaked Neo-Nazis' Manual Reveals They're Manipulating Australia's Media to Recruit New Members', Crikey, 20 April 2021

[16] Nick McKenzie and Joel Tozer, 'Neo-Nazis Go Bush: Grampians Gathering Highlights Rise of Australia's Far Right', The Age, 27 January 2021.

[17] Kristoffer Holt, *Right-wing Alternative Media* (Routledge, 2019), 51-62; Haroro J. Ingram, 'An Analysis of Islamic State's Dabiq Magazine', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (2016): 458–477;

[18] Lise Waldek, Julian Droogan, and Brian Ballsun-Stanton, 'Online Far Right Extremist and Conspiratorial Narratives during the COVID-19 Pandemic' (2022).

[19] Maura Conway, Amy Louise Watkin, and Seán Looney, 'Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2021: The Year in Review' (VOX-Pol: RAN Policy Support, 2022)

[20] Greta Jasser et al., '"Welcome to the #GabFam": Far-Right Virtual Community on Gab', *New Media & Society,* 2021; Nico Prucha, 'IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 48–58.

PART 2

Building Democratic Resilience in the Public Sphere

Resilience is a widely used term in CVE discourse and policy.[21] Despite its centrality, what resilience is and who should be responsible for advancing it remains a contested topic.[22] The existing literature treats resilience in at least four different ways: as *resistance* to extremist ideology and narratives; as *prevention* of extremism taking root in individuals or communities; as *adaptation* to thrive in the face of adversity; and as *recovery* following crisis or disruption.[23]

While all four approaches are present in CVE contexts, it is usually the resistance and prevention approaches that dominate the relevant policies and programs both in Australia[24] and internationally.[25] The NSW Government approaches CVE in terms of community resilience, aimed not only to '*prevent* terrorist incidents but also to *recover* from them'.[26] The Community Action Partnership (COMPACT) Program, which is central to NSW CVE efforts, takes this further, adopting a 'whole-of-society' community resilience model that operates under the principles of preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery in addressing the challenges posed by violent extremist acts.[27]

Community resilience locates resilience in social processes, rather than in individual behavioural processes. This conceptualisation of resilience is prominent throughout the NSW Government's CVE efforts. Countering violent extremism in NSW aims to build resilience and cohesion in communities to be able to 'protect, divert and disengage individuals from violent extremism'.[28] Community engagement is 'fundamental' to NSW CVE efforts,[29] with a focus on 'proactively building networks across the community'.[30] Resilience is treated in terms of community-level resources,[31] generally framed in terms of social capital – emphasising social connectedness, community trust, and civic participation – and social cohesion.[32]

Although community resilience approaches have become more prominent in CVE contexts, it has not been without significant challenges and limitations. First, in contexts where the distinction between CVE and Counter Terrorism (CT) is not clear, community resilience has come to be seen as a potential 'trojan horse or proxy for other agendas related to government concerns with security

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[21] Michele Grossman, 'The Evolution of Resilience to Violent Extremism', in *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2021,* ed. Leanne Close and Daria Impiombato (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021), 78.

[22] Grossman, 'The Evolution of Resilience to Violent Extremism'; Clemence Humbert and Jonathan Joseph, 'Introduction: The Politics of Resilience: Problematising Current Approaches', Resilience 7, no. 3 (2019): 215–23; Sandra Walklate, Gabe Mythen, and Ross McGarry, 'States of Resilience and the Resilient State', *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 24, no. 2 (2012): 185–204.

[23] Michele Grossman, 'Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism: A Multisystemic Analysis', in *Multisystemic Resilience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 293–317.

[24] Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Coming of Age in the War on Terror* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2021).

[25] Grossman, 'Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism'.

[26] NSW Government, 'NSW Government Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security - Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia' (Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security: Commonwealth, 18 March 2021), 10.

[27] Multicultural NSW, 'Program-Level Outcomes: A Whole-of-Society, Resilience-based Approach', NSW Government, n.d.

[28] NSW Government, 'NSW Counter Terrorism Strategy January 2020' (2020), 6.

[29] Pia van de Zandt, Aftab Malik, and Madeleine Coorey, 'Countering Violent Extremism: The New South Wales Approach', in *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2021*, ed. Leanne Close and Daria Impiombato (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021), 92.

[30] NSW Government, 'NSW Counter Terrorism Strategy January 2020', 8.

[31] Patricia H. Longstaff et al., 'Building Resilient Communities: A Preliminary Framework for Assessment', *Homeland Security Affairs* 6 (2010).

[32] See for example: Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen and Patrick Schack, 'Community Resilience to Militant Islamism: Who and What?: An Explorative Study of Resilience in Three Danish Communities', *Democracy and Security* 12, no. 4 (2016): 309–27; Stevan Weine et al., 'Building Community Resilience to Counter Violent Extremism', *Democracy and Security 9*, no. 4 (2013): 327–33,; Grossman, 'Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism'.

and control'.[33] Second, as a result, resilience often becomes intertwined with the stigmatisation of specific communities, most significantly Muslim communities, simultaneously marking them as both responsible for *producing* and for *countering* violent extremism. This can put building resilience as a social good in and of itself 'at risk of being dismissed along with CVE as being not good for the community'.[34] Third, the focus on communities for building and maintaining resilience can shift the attention away from wider structures or systems crucial to the prevention (or uptake) of violent extremism, such as media and government, and the roles they can play in building resilience.[35]

The democratic resilience framework developed in this report seeks to address these limitations and challenges, supplementing the community resilience approach in important ways.

It is not only individuals and communities which need to be resilient to violent extremism, but also our democracies.
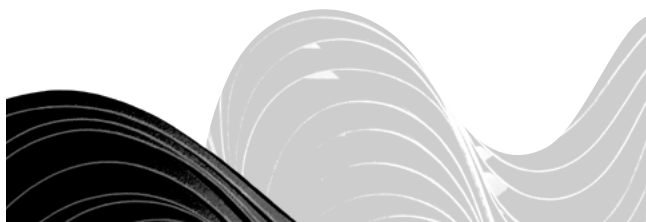
The democratic resilience framework shifts the attention from communities to the actors, practices, and institutions of the public sphere. When made resilient, the public sphere can not only help to contain the challenges posed by violent extremism, but also facilitate a recovery from violent extremist acts.

While factors facilitating community resilience such as dense networks of social ties, voluntary organisations, and reciprocal trust between government and communities may contribute to building democratic resilience, they are not sufficient in themselves for a democratically resilient public sphere. There are various other factors that matter for building democratic resilience in the public sphere. While the debate over a precise definition of democratic resilience continues in the extant literature,[36] it is usually defined as the ability of a political regime 'to prevent or react to challenges without losing its democratic character',[37] as well as the 'persistence of democratic institutions and practices' in the face of challenges.[38] In other words, it is defined as an attribute of the entire system of governance in the face of democratic backsliding.[39]

Our concept of democratic resilience has a more specific focus; it emphasises the wellbeing of the public sphere, which has a vital role to play in democracy understood in deliberative terms as noted in Part 1. It draws attention to the role of key public sphere actors, rather than the political regime or system of government for building or maintaining democratic resilience.

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[33] Grossman, 'Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism', 311.

[34] Stevan Weine, 'Resilience and Countering Violent Extremism', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Psychosocial Resilience,* ed. Updesh Kumar (London: Routledge, 2016), 198–99.

[35] Mark Dechesne, 'The Concept of Resilience in the Context of Counterterrorism', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Psychosocial Resilience,* ed. Updesh Kumar (London: Routledge, 2016), 414–23; Grossman, 'Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism'.

[36] For example: Vanessa A. Boese et al., 'How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-Stage Process', *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (2021): 885–907.

[37] Wolfgang Merkel and Anna Lührmann, 'Resilience of Democracies: Responses to Illiberal and Authoritarian Challenges', *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (2021): 872.

[38] Carlos Meléndez and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Negative Partisanship towards the Populist Radical Right and Democratic Resilience in Western Europe', *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (2021): 955.

[39] Peter Burnell and Peter Calvert, 'The Resilience of Democracy: An Introduction', *Democratization* 6, no. 1 (1999): 1–32

In what follows, drawing on the research conducted for this report, we present seven key factors that are instrumental in building democratic resilience in multicultural societies. Where possible, the report includes examples of international best practices that could serve as points of comparison or inspiration to policy makers, public servants, or civil society organisations working to address violent extremism in NSW. That said, it is important to note that developing insights and programs from international best practice is not a straightforward process. There are well established difficulties with the assessment of CVE as a field.[40] These issues are compounded by the cultural, legal, and political particularities of CVE programs internationally, as well as the local threat assessment.[41] It is therefore better to identify broad lessons that may be relevant elsewhere, and develop local programs according to local needs.[42]

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[40] Tore Bjørgo and Ingvild Gjelsvik, 'Norwegian Research on the Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Status of Knowledge' (Centre for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo, 2015); Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle, and Andrew Zammit, 'What Is Countering Violent Extremism? Exploring CVE Policy and Practice in Australia', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 8, no. 1 (2016): 6–24.

[41] Lorenzo Vidino and James Brandon, 'Countering Radicalization in Europe' (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012).

[42] Keiran Hardy, 'Countering Right-Wing Extremism: Lessons from Germany and Norway', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (2019): 262–79; Vidino and Brandon, 'Countering Radicalization in Europe'.
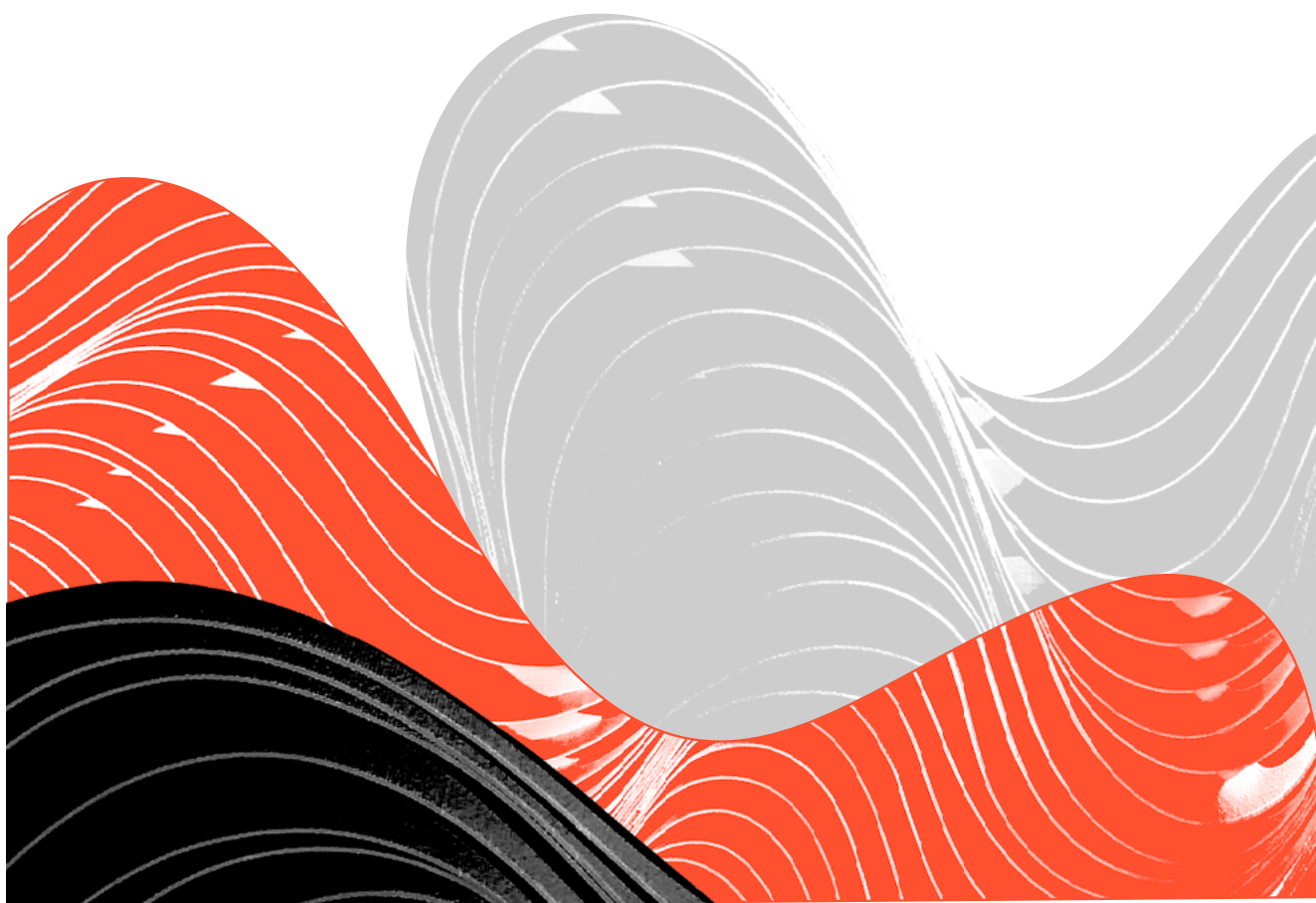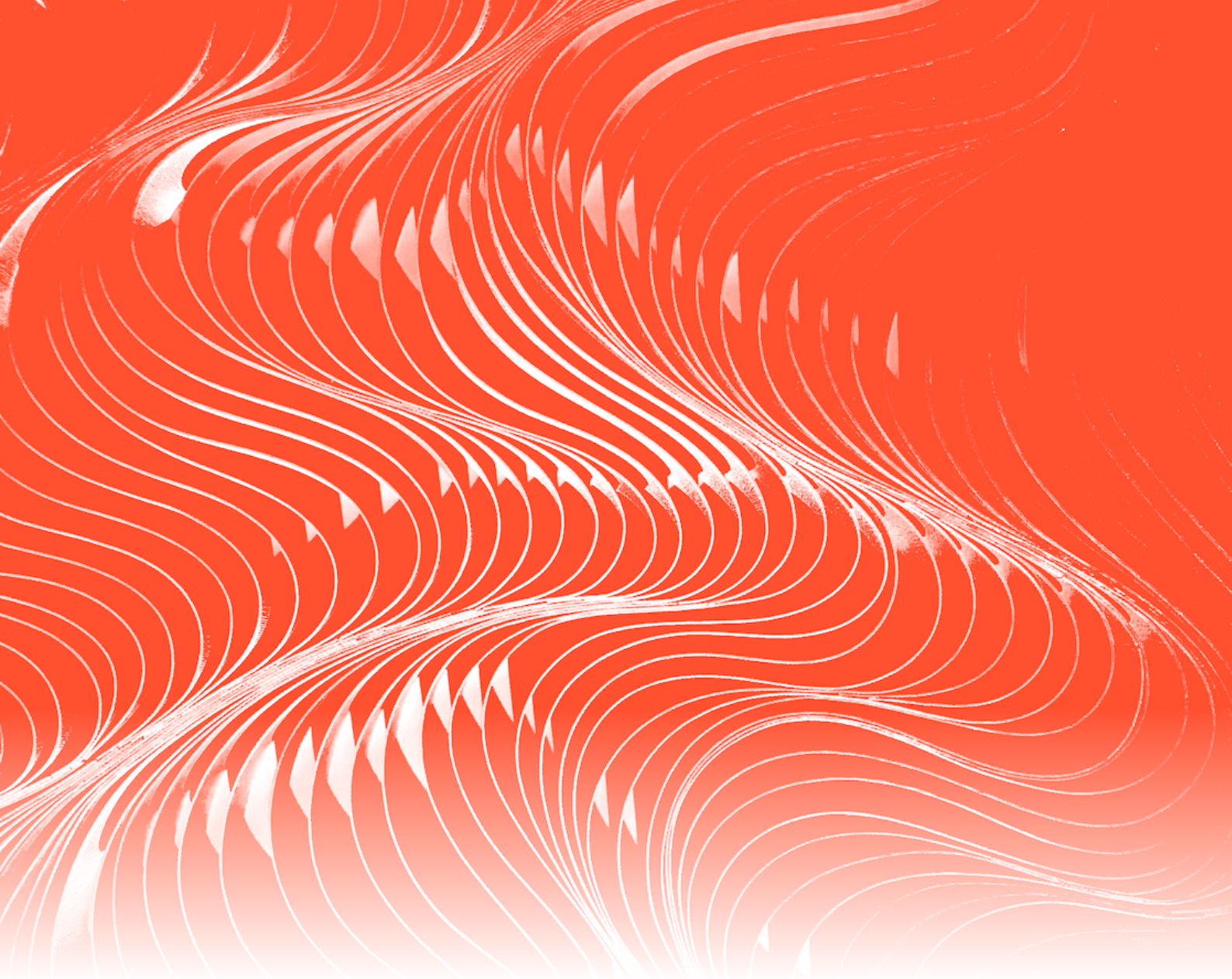
Seven Key Factors for Democratic Resilience

What matters for building democratic resilience?

1 How political leaders talk about violent extremism

2 How CVE is understood and implemented in policy and programming

3 How minorities are included in the public sphere of a multicultural society

4 How an inclusive collective identity is constructed in the public sphere
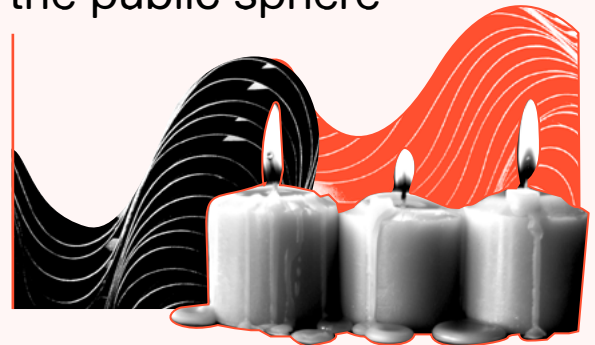
5 How media reports on violent extremism

6 How government engages with the civil society organisations and the wider public

7 How information pollution is tackled online

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How political leaders talk about violent extremism matters for building democratic resilience

> "
> The response of government can inflame something, or it can deflate pressure build up… Twenty years after 9/11 we should know better… government officials definitely need training in this area.

Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp, Director, Islamic Sciences and Research Academy Australia

The language political leaders use when addressing a violent extremist attack or threat plays a crucial role in determining the character of the public sphere. The language used in responding to a violent extremist attack 'can either give terrorists what they want or it can deny them what they want' according to Dr Malcolm Haddon, Associate Director at Community Resilience, Multicultural NSW. The words used by political leaders may have long lasting effects, such as increasing community tensions and fostering stigmatisation of minority groups. Avoiding civilisational and other racialised framings that reduce minorities to essentialised characteristics related to criminality, extremism, or violence[43] is crucial to building a democratically resilient public sphere. As one participant interviewed for this report cautioned, 'political leaders who have been willing to throw particular communities under the bus for political points have been much more damaging to democracy than any terror attack we have had'.[44]

Initial statements by government and political leaders are not only an opportunity to inform and reassure the community in the wake of a violent extremist attack or threat. These statements also help to establish the way media talks about violent extremism,[45] and shape later commemoration, memorialisation, and policy responses.[46] For this reason, it is vital that government and political leaders get the response right the first time. As one journalist[47] reporting on violent extremism in NSW explained, the initial press conference following a violent extremist attack will be broadcast 'over and over and over again'. Because of this, political leaders like the Premier get 'one shot to say the right thing… but it has to be the right words… the language, the tone will be defined there.'

Protecting democracy should be at the heart of any response, as the aftermath of the 2011 22 July Attacks

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[43] Enqi Weng and Fethi Mansouri, '"Swamped by Muslims" and Facing an "African Gang" Problem: Racialized and Religious Media Representations in Australia', *Continuum* 35, no. 3 (2021): 468–86; Randa Abdel-Fattah, 'Countering Violent Extremism, Governmentality and Australian Muslim Youth as "Becoming Terrorist"', *Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 3 (2020): 372–87; Henry Maher, Eda Gunaydin, and Jordan McSwiney, 'Western Civilizationism and White Supremacy: The Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation', *Patterns of Prejudice* 55, no. 4 (2021): 309–30.

[44] Interviewee requested anonymity.

[45] Stephen D. Reese and Seth C. Lewis, 'Framing the War on Terror: The Internationalization of Policy in the US Press', *Journalism* 10, no. 6 (2009).

[46] E.g. Nur Diyanah Anwar and Cameron Sumpter, 'Societal Resilience Following Terrorism: Community and Coordination in Christchurch', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 14, no. 1 (2022): 70–95; Eirik Vatnoey, 'Leaders' Response to Terrorism: The Role of Epideictic Rhetoric in Deliberative Democracies', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 11, no. 2 (2015).

[47] Interviewee requested anonymity.

CASE IN FOCUS: NORWAY

The immediate response of the Norwegian Government, and in particular Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, to the 2011 July 22 attacks is illustrative of a democratically resilient reply to violent extremism. Prime Minister Stoltenberg's addresses following the attack aimed to reassert a liberal and tolerant expression of Norwegian national character: 'Our response is more democracy, more openness, and more humanity.'

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in Norway illustrates. The response of government, and Norwegian society more broadly, highlight the most important qualities for responding in a democratically resilient way. These include: centring the stories of victims and survivors, rather than perpetrators; contextualising and localising the risk of violent extremism, rather than using inflammatory language; supporting targeted communities and ensuring they are fully-fledged members of society, not framing them as potential causes of concern; and strengthening the democratic character of the political system, not sacrificing some of its core values in the name of security.[48]

The NSW Government's Strategic Communications plan recognises the crucial role of the language used by political leaders in times of crisis. It views government communication as an opportunity to drive unity and cohesion, rather than to inadvertently drive polarisation. It is vital such an approach is maintained. This is because it is very easy to undo good work in building trust between community and government. As Associate Professor Mehemet Ozalp, director of the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy Australia explained, government 'can mess it up – 20 years of work, building trust – it can really diminish in one statement'.

Using unifying, rather than divisive language does

not mean ignoring the threat violent extremism poses to society. It is important that political leaders articulate and address those threats in their speeches and engagements with the wider public. However, this needs to be done in a way that 'localises the threat and makes it less generalised: so it is not "them" rising up against "us", but individual people who have behaved in a criminal fashion' according to Rabbi Zalman Kastel, Director of Together for Humanity. Government and political leaders should use the language of criminal justice, rather than 'some kind of civilisation struggle' explained Rabbi Kastel.

The broader problem here is compounded by a lack of a clear set of terminology with which to discuss the challenges of violent extremism in NSW, both within government and with the public. Notably, there is no standard policy definition of 'violent extremism' in the NSW counter terrorism and countering violent extremism strategy.[49] For NSW government agencies working in CVE, it has meant that some continue to operate by slightly different definitions of violent extremism. While this definitional plurality was not perceived as a major issue for government, it was seen as contributing to confusion among the public regarding CVE in NSW according to several interviewees. Additionally, the 'lack of a clear, consistent definition' of violent extremism is 'hugely

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[48] Cas Mudde, 'Norway's Democratic Example', in *On Extremism and Democracy in Europe* (Routledge, 2016), 125–27; Vatnoey, 'Leaders' Response to Terrorism'.

[49] NSW Government, 'NSW Counter Terrorism Strategy January 2020' (NSW Government, 2020)..

problematic' explained Lise Waldek, Senior Lecturer in Terrorism Studies at Macquarie University, because it can make it extremely difficult to reliably define what success looks like in CVE.[50]

One solution may be to standardise in line with the existing Commonwealth definition of violent extremism. The Commonwealth's *Safeguarding Our Community Together, Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2022* defines violent extremism as:

> a willingness to use unlawful violence, or support the use of violence by others, to promote a political, ideological or religious goal. It includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence and some forms of communal violence, such as racially motivated violence.[51]

However, the *Commonwealth's Safeguarding Our Community Together, Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2022* framework lacks an explicit engagement with the social impact of violent extremism, and specifically, the challenges posed by violent extremism to democracy. Recognition of the anti-democratic component has been at the centre of efforts to address violent extremism in countries such as Germany and Norway – examples often regarded as being world leaders for their social policy-oriented approaches to CVE. It may therefore be useful to adopt a policy definition in NSW which centres the threat to democracy. For example: 'the use or threat of violent action by irregular actors in the pursuit of political aims to *erode democratic processes and pluralistic values'*.[52] This would also better align with the aims of CVE outlined in the *National Framework to Counter Violent Extremism,* endorsed by Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments in 2017.[53] While the *National Framework to Counter Violent Extremism* adopts a definition of violent extremism comparable to the *Safeguarding Our Community* plan, the *National Framework to Counter Violent Extremism* emphasises the need to address the *social* impact of violent extremism.[54]

CASE IN FOCUS: GERMANY

'Strengthening democracy' has been a core thematic focus of addressing violent extremism in Germany. The largest of these programs, *Live Democracy!* works to promote 'civil society commitment to diverse and democratic coexistence and work against radicalization and polarization in society'

A new wide-ranging reform agenda to address the specific threat of far-right extremism in Germany includes increased political education to promote democracy and an emphasis on recognising the value of a diverse society, while also strengthening equal opportunities for migrants to participate in society.

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[50] See also: J.M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 155.

[51] Commonwealth of Australia, 'Safeguarding Our Community Together, Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy 2022', 2022, 9.

[52] Amy-Louise Watkin, Vivian Gerrand, and Maura Conway, 'Introduction: Exploring Societal Resilience to Online Polarization and Extremism', *First Monday*, 2022.

[53] Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee [ANZCTC], 'National Framework to Counter Violent Extremism', 10 May 2017.

[54] ANZCTC, 'National Framework to Counter Violent Extremism', 3; See also: ANZCTC, 'National Counter-Terrorism Plan 2017', 2017, 18-19.

2

How CVE and associated terms are understood and implemented matters for building democratic resilience

> " There is still an element of confusion in the community and the broader public around what is violent extremism, what is terrorism, what is the government doing about it.

Sophie Murray-Farrell, Associate Director, Connected Communities, Department of Premier and Cabinet

Countering Violent Extremism is generally framed as distinct from counter terrorism, with CVE often led by social policy agencies and CT by law enforcement. While this distinction may be clear for government agencies working in these areas, it is not necessarily clear to the public. Community concerns surrounding the nature of CVE and its relationship (real and perceived) to CT and broader security agendas is well established in the literature.[55] Due to their overlap with law enforcement and intelligence objectives, CVE community engagement programs can easily lead to the singling out of Muslim communities as 'suspect communities'.[56] This stigmatising effect has been acknowledged by NSW CVE.[57]

Similar concerns were echoed in several of our interviews with respect to the understanding and implementation of CVE in NSW. Even where the formal policy and program arrangements for CVE may be distinguished from CT, perception of this overlap persists and is a serious barrier to meaningful and effective participation of diverse communities in the public sphere. It falls to government to address these concerns and to clarify the nature and objectives of CVE. The democratic resilience framework presented in this report can offer one perspective for addressing this through its focus on fostering democracy and an inclusive public sphere.

[55] Randa Abdel-Fattah, 'Managing Belief and Speech as Incipient Violence: "I'm Giving You the Opportunity to Say That You Aren't"', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14, no. 1 (2019): 20–38; Grossman, 'Resilience to Violent Extremism and Terrorism'; Therese O'Toole, Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, and Tariq Modood, 'Balancing Tolerance, Security and Muslim Engagement in the United Kingdom: The Impact of the "Prevent" Agenda', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no. 3 (2012): 373–89; Neil D. Shortland, Nicholas Evans, and John Colautti, 'A Public Health Ethics Model of Countering Violent Extremism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, no. 2 (2021): 324–37; Paul Thomas, 'Failed and Friendless: The UK's "Preventing Violent Extremism" Programme', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2010): 442–58.

[56] Floris Vermeulen, 'Suspect Communities—Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 2 (2014): 286–306.

[57] Pia van de Zandt, Aftab Malik, and Madeleine Coorey, 'Countering Violent Extremism: The New South Wales Approach', in *Counterterrorism Yearbook 2021*, ed. Leanne Close and Daria Impiombato (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021), 92.

Examples of community-oriented CVE programs coming from other countries show that community engagement itself is not sufficient for shifting away from the dominant securitising programs and discourses, or preventing the stigmatisation of certain communities as being prone to violent extremism. For example, the *Prevent* component of the United Kingdom's national counterterrorism strategy – a program 'focused on addressing the ideologies and values underpinning (support for) terrorism' – has been widely criticised for its racist focus on Muslim communities and 'British values', and its wider role as a community surveillance and intelligence gathering program.[58] As the example of *Prevent* illustrates, it is not just whether the government engages with community in addressing violent extremism that matters, but how. Instead, Waldek suggests communities need to be approached in an open and collaborative manner:

> Telling people: you have a problem with violent extremism, and you need to solve that problem – just doesn't work… Instead, you should go to them and say: Australia has a problem with violent extremism. How is it effecting you? Is it effecting you? In what ways is it effecting you? How are conflicts abroad effecting you? How are daily societal pressures effecting you? What can we do to help you navigate those?

Revising the policy framework within government and the way that communities are approached is only part of the challenge to avoiding the stigmatisation of minority communities through CVE. There is a pressing need to clarify the role and objectives of CVE programs, and specifically their relationship with CT and wider law enforcement. NSW is already moving in this direction with a social policy approach to CVE. However, CVE remains implicitly tied to CT as part of the broader NSW *Counter Terrorism Strategy*.[59] Nevertheless, as Sophie Murray-Farrell, Associate Director of Connected Communities at the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet explained, those working on NSW CVE are 'very proud of our approach,' though noting that government could be 'more forward leaning in terms of communicating about the work that we do.'

At the same time however, introducing social cohesion objectives into CVE can raise new challenges by inadvertently reproducing stigmatisation. As Professor Debra Smith, an expert in CVE at the University of Victoria warns, 'there is a really tricky balance and tension around how you have something that is community led without inadvertently making it as if the community is the problem'. As such, as well as clearly differentiating CVE from CT and wider security and intelligence objectives, government also needs to 'clearly differentiate between what is CVE and what is social cohesion,' according to Prof. Smith.

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[58] Anne Lynn Dudenhoefer, 'Resisting Radicalisation: A Critical Analysis of the UK Prevent Duty', *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 14 (2018): 153–91; Arun Kundnani, 'Spooked: How Not to Prevent Violent Extremist' (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2009); O'Toole, DeHanas, and Modood, 'Balancing Tolerance, Security and Muslim Engagement in the United Kingdom'; Asim Qureshi, 'PREVENT: Creating "Radicals" to Strengthen Anti-Muslim Narratives', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 8, no. 1 (2015): 181–91; Thomas, 'Failed and Friendless'; Rob Faure Walker, *The Emergence of 'Extremism': Exposing the Violent Discourse and Language of Radicalisation* (Bloomsbury, 2021); Rizwaan Sabir, *The Suspect: Counterterrorism, Islam, and the Security State* (London: Pluto Press, 2022).

[59] NSW Government, 'NSW Counter Terrorism Strategy January 2020' (NSW Government, 2020).

CASE IN FOCUS: NEW ZEALAND

In 2020, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service adopted a new five-fold framework for categorising violent extremism 'to make it clear we're targeting violent extremists of varying ideologies, rather than communities'. These developments contributed to the new terminology adopted by ASIO. While the changes are not without criticism, the New Zealand approach does allow for more nuance, given its five categories including 'White Identity Violent Extremists'.

A consistent policy definition and operationalisation of key terms across NSW government and partner agencies may help address this problem. As noted above, this includes policy definitions for key terms like 'violent extremism', as well as clear and accessible vocabulary as the basis for engagement with the wider public. As one journalist[60] working in this area explained, 'if the language is too verbose and confusing' it will not mean anything to the public, undermining efforts to inform and reassure. They pointed to the updated terminology for talking about violent extremism adopted by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in 2021 as an example: 'ideologically motivated violent extremism… doesn't mean anything to the general public'. The language used needs to be 'correct and sensitive, but also specific,' they explained.

The problem is not just with public communication. The new ASIO terms also pose problems for academics, policy makers, and practitioners; 'the current definitions are inadequate' said Waldek. The problem is a lack of specificity in the new ASIO categories, namely ideologically motivated violent extremism, and religiously motivated violent extremism, according to Dr Kristy Campion, Lecturer in Terrorism Studies at Charles Sturt University. As Dr Campion explained, the terms 'create a lack of precision':

> You can have religious and ideological threats overlap… the ideologically motivated violent extremism framing fails to differentiate between left- and right-wing extremism. That has a real impact at a community level, because you are talking about the difference between safeguarding a mosque, and safeguarding a forestry plant.

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[60] Interviewee requested anonymity.

3

How minorities are included in the public sphere matters for building democratic resilience

> " Violent extremism flourishes in an environment, where a clash of civilisations narrative exists, and where the perception of 'us versus them' takes hold. We need to think about ways of bringing people along on the journey where they don't feel stigmatised and attacked.

Rabbi Zalman Kastel, Director,
Together for Humanity

Stigmatisation is a key barrier to a democratically resilient sphere. The public sphere cannot be democratically resilient if members of society feel marginalised and unable to participate confidently. This directly impedes the capacity for NSW CVE to deliver on its social policy objectives. While government actions may have the best intentions, they can unintentionally foster marginalisation of the vulnerable, pushing them outside the public sphere and undermining its democratic resilience.

Stigmatisation happens when a particular group of people are associated with negative stereotypes. A marker of stigma is usually a group membership. Stigma has negative consequences for a minority group. It reduces their sense of belonging in society and hinders their participation in the public sphere as free and equal citizens.

Muslims have experienced increased stigmatisation since 9/11 in many countries, including Australia.[61] Our interviewees identified this as a key barrier to a democratically resilient public sphere. To address this the NSW Government needs to encourage a sense of belonging where everyone can feel that they have a place in society irrespective of their ethnicity or religious beliefs. Democratic resilience requires the key public sphere actors to address the problem of stigmatisation in the public sphere. As Assoc. Prof. Mehemet Ozalp explained this can be resolved only when 'the rest of society sees Muslims as a part of this country, and not as people that can be ostracised, marginalised, or simply asked to go back to where you came from'.

Inclusion is key to avoiding stigmatisation and marginalisation and can take several forms.[62] First, it matters that minority voices are included

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[61] Harley Williamson, Kristina Murphy, and Elise Sargeant, 'The Grievance-Identity Relationship: Understanding the Role of Identity Processes and Stigmatisation on Muslims' Perceptions of Terrorist Grievances', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 15, no. 3 (2020): 209–27.

[62] Patti Tamara Lenard, 'Part I: Pro Multiculturalism', in Debating Multiculturalism: Should There Be Minority Rights?, by Patti Tamara Lenard and Peter Balint (Oxford University Press, 2021); Geoffrey Brahm Levey, 'Inclusion: A Missing Principle in Australian Multiculturalism', in *Liberal Multiculturalism and the Fair Terms of Integration*, ed. Peter Balint and Sophie Guérard de Latour, Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 109–25.

in government decision-making and that these voices are consequential. But it also matters that these voices are heard as well as 'seen' in the public sphere more broadly. Given the tendency towards marginalisation of minorities in the public sphere – especially when the state supports a more exclusive national identity[63] – the government and other public sphere actors may need to take active steps to promote inclusion.[64]

Nevertheless, the steps towards greater inclusion are not always easy to negotiate. The problem here is how to recognise minority identities without creating unintended consequences.[65] One such consequence concerns essentialising and reifying minority identities, and treating them as unitary and sealed items.[66] Acts of recognition can fix, distort, and even create identities.[67] Too much focus on the recognition of minority identities also risks failing to see the diversity that exists within each culture. This is framed in the extant literature as the 'minorities within minorities' problem,[68] which leaves those most vulnerable even more vulnerable. While the NSW Government engages a wide cross section of the community

in partnerships, both in CVE and other policy areas, continued vigilance is needed to ensure recognition does not focus only on the demands of the dominant community members and their versions of a community's identity.

Given such risks, government agencies need to be very careful when taking positive steps toward building a more inclusive and resilient public sphere. In general, government agencies should avoid the promotion of thicker national identities which can bolster marginalisation, and there is mounting evidence that many social goals can be achieved without these identities.[69] Where such identity-building is unavoidable, it should steer towards the basic commonalities of citizenship and away from thicker identity building. This is consistent with NSW policy regarding multicultural principles, as outlined in the Multicultural NSW Act 2000.[70] Minority recognition and inclusion needs to be done very carefully, with great care taken to avoid constructing minority communities to suit government needs. It is important to hear and to help expose minorities within minorities so that all voices are heard and seen in the public sphere.[71]

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[63] Peter Balint, *Respecting Toleration: Traditional Liberalism and Contemporary Diversity* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

[64] Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Tim Soutphommasane, *The Virtuous Citizen: Patriotism in a Multicultural Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[65] Ayelet Shachar, *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Ayelet Shachar, 'Privatizing Diversity: A Cautionary Tale from Religious Arbitration in Family Law', *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 9, no. 2 (2008): 573–607; Monique Deveaux, *Gender and Justice in Multicultural Liberal States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Sarah Song, *Justice, Gender and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[66] Magali Bessone, 'Beyond Liberal Multicultural Toleration: A Critical Approach to Groups', *European Journal of Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (2021): 271–87.

[67] Federico Zuolo, 'Beyond Groups? Types of Sharing and Normative Treatment', in *How Groups Matter: Challenges of Toleration in Pluralistic Societies*, ed. Gideon Calder, Magali Bessone, and Federico Zuolo (New York: Routledge, 2014), 199–218.

[68] Avigail Eisenberg and Jeff Spinner-Halev, eds., *Minorities within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[69] See for example: Balint, *Respecting Toleration: Traditional Liberalism and Contemporary Diversity*; Peter Balint, 'Diversity, National Identity and Social Cohesion: Welfare Redistribution and National Defence', in *Allegiance and Identity in a Globalised World*, ed. Fiona Jenkins, Mark Nolan, and Kim Rubenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 221–39.

[70] Multicultural NSW Act 2000 No 77 (NSW) S. 1(3).

[71] Avigail Eisenberg, 'Identity Politics and the Risks of Essentialism', in *Liberal Multiculturalism and the Fair Terms of Integration*, ed. Peter Balint and Sophie Guérard de Latour (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 159–76.

CASE IN FOCUS: AUSTRALIA

The Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is a world leader in multicultural and multilingual media, broadcasting across 68 languages. The broadcaster plays an important role both in representing and validating Australia's diverse communities. However, minority participation in the public sphere needs to be about more than just representation. Democratic media participation is not just about who can speak, but also 'who is heard, and to what end'.

Research undertaken for this report reveals that inclusion in the public sphere will work best when mainstream media are more representative of the voices of the broader community. As Tim Soutphommasane, Australia's former Race Discrimination Commissioner put it, 'if you have a public sphere that does not contain diversity, the real risk is that you deter people from entering the realm'.[72] Increased representation ideally dampens narrow conceptions of national identity – reducing the need for acts of counter-recognition of minorities with their attendant risks – while encouraging those from minority groups to see themselves as part of the public sphere. It may also help to promote a more nuanced discussion about violent extremism and how it impacts the lives of those communities targeted by violent extremism. As Cam Wilson, internet reporter at *Crikey* explained, Australian media has a 'blind spot' when it comes to 'sophisticated discussions of race', attributable in part to the lack of diversity in Australian media.

Mainstream media is not the only media that is part of the public sphere. Multicultural and multilingual media, when driven by a democratic ethos, also provides a space for issues of common concern to be discussed and deliberated, and it has an important role in fostering inclusion, countering stigmatisation, and tackling violent extremism. Multicultural and multilingual media ranging from the national Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) to local ethnic newspapers in NSW communities are an important part of 'meeting people where they are,' Wilson said, adding that 'everything we can do to build connections with our audiences is ultimately helpful' for encouraging an inclusive and resilient public sphere.

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[72] Fatima Measham, '"Multicultural Australia Is Mainstream Australia": Calling for True Diversity in Our Media', The Wheeler Centre, 22 July 2014.

4

How an inclusive collective identity is constructed in the public sphere matters for democratic resilience

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There is incredible complexity in the memorialisation of a terrorist attack… how do we honour the victims, without retraumatising the first responders?… how do we create something that is respectful without reinforcing existing traumas?

Dr Kristy Campion, Lecturer in Terrorism Studies, Charles Sturt University

The public sphere is not only a site where issues of common concern are identified and debated. It is also a site where collective identities are constructed and validated. This happens through both verbal and non-verbal communication, symbols, and performances.[73] In the public sphere collective identities are imagined and re-imagined in ongoing processes of communication, as well as through symbolic ceremonies, cultural expressions, public events, and monuments. All these practices, rituals, and artefacts structure the relationship between self and society, and function as crucial ingredients of the social imagery—who are we, what do we value, who belongs to this social imagery and who is outside of it.

When addressing violent extremism, the rituals and performance of commemoration and the processes of public memorialisation can play a crucial role for fostering democratic resilience and recovery. They can become instruments to construct a sense of belonging and collective identity that is inclusive and generate some of kind of continuity towards a shared future.

The crucial role of memorialisation in the aftermath of extremist attacks has been long acknowledged in the extant literature. Key in this context is not to treat these practices as tokenistic performances, but as sites of reflection and collective healing. According to a recent policy brief detailing memorialisation in the wake of terrorist attacks in Europe, the success of memorialisation depends on its authenticity and visibility in public space.[74] Memorials need to be accessible and ideally located close to the sites of an attack. The literature also emphasises the need for memorialisation and commemoration to be time sensitive. Spontaneous sites or acts of community grieving, such as the laying of flowers in Sydney's Martin Place following the 2014 Lindt Café

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[73] Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça, Selen A Ercan, and Hans Asenbaum, 'More than Words: A Multidimensional Approach to Deliberative Democracy', *Political Studies* 70, no. 1 (2022): 153–72.

[74] Ana Milosevic, 'The Efficacy of Memorialisation after Terrorism', 2022.

CASE IN FOCUS: NORWAY

Norway has established several memorials to honour the victims and survivors of the 2011 July 22 attacks, which invite reflection and negotiation of the attacks' significance on Norwegian society. In central Oslo where the attack began, the *22 July Centre* is a learning centre open to the public that works with the mediation of memory and knowledge about the terror attacks in Oslo and on Utøya.

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siege, are an important part of the healing process. Premature removal of such gestures can 'hinder societal elaboration of trauma,' while permanent memorials might be seen 'as a form of imposed closure'.[75] Incorporating aspects of spontaneous memorialisation into more permanent memorials is one way to navigate these tensions. For example, the Lindt Café Reflection memorial in Martin Place incorporates 210 flowers set in glass in the same place where floral tributes were laid following the attack.[76]

Governments can play an important role in facilitating meaningful practices of commemoration and memorialisation. To do so, they must work closely with those affected and the wider community, to determine not only how but when to act. The formation of both permanent memorial sites, as well as commemorative efforts, needs to include the public – and especially the victim's families, survivors, and first responders – in planning. This is not an easy task, as the experience of New York and the redevelopment of the World Trade Centre site in the wake of 9/11 illustrates. Incorporating deliberative and participatory planning processes may mean having to navigate between economic interests and legal obligations, the need to respect those impacted,

as well the desire to 'find a symbolic reply' to an attack.[77] But too much government direction risks politicising, and hence undermining, the collective healing commemoration and memorialisation affords. As Dr Campion points out, 'it should be the role of the state to pay for memorialisation, but it is up to community groups, advocates, and liaisons to talk to the community about what they want. Because at the end of the day, it is their trauma'.

Democratically resilient commemoration and memorialisation also requires a willingness to confront what happened in the past, and to use this to imagine a better future. For NSW, the home state of the white supremacist perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch Massacre, this requires a reckoning with racism and white supremacy. The German practice of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung,* translated as 'confronting the past' or 'working through the past', can offer a working model for this process. In practice this could include programs at the school curricular level, and wider public education through things such as museums and historical sites, holidays, commemorations and other public rituals, as well as potential reparations for both historical and ongoing injustices.[78]

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[75] Milosevic, 8.

[76] Monument Australia, '"Reflection" (Lindt Café Siege)', n.d.

[77] Maarten A. Hajer, 'Rebuilding Ground Zero. The Politics of Performance', *Planning Theory & Practice* 6, no. 4 (2005): 461.

[78] See for example: Thomas McArthy, 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery', *Political Theory* 30, no. 5 (2002): 623–48.

5

How media reports on violent extremism matters for democratic resilience

> "
> On the one hand, you want people to know what the threats are… But if every time there is a Nazi swastika scrawled on a street sign and it hits the media, it just gives the extremists exactly what they want, because they are engaged in an information war... It encourages them try to do more stunts to get in the media because they want more attention.

Dr Kaz Ross, independent researcher, expert on far-right extremism

Our research reveals that the media has a vital role to play in addressing violent extremism. As a key pillar of the public sphere, the media has the potential to undermine or enhance democratic resilience. Harmful framing of impacted communities can lead to fracturing through the process of stigmatisation outlined above. At the same time, the way in which violent extremist actors and events are covered can unintentionally further the reach (and harm) of violent extremist propaganda and provide legitimacy to extremist actors and narratives. While the need for a press free from government intervention or direction is vital for a healthy public sphere, there is a serious and urgent need to address media mis-practice in the violent extremism space. Media should be approached collaboratively. As Murray-Farrell suggested, there 'is an opportunity to share evidence and learnings [with media practitioners] and come together to have that conversation'. However, this needs to be proactive. Promoting best practice for reporting on violent extremism cannot 'wait until after something happens,' according to Rabbi Kastel.

In terms of the coverage of impacted communities, it is vital that reporting centres the stories of those affected. The way the New Zealand media covered the 2019 Christchurch Massacre and the ongoing effects it had on Muslim communities was frequently pointed to as a best-case example in our interviews. How Muslim communities are reported on in the aftermath of a violent extremist attack has a major effect 'on the way Muslim's see themselves as they belong to this country', according to Assoc. Prof. Ozalp.

Racism, negative stereotypes, and framing Muslim communities as somehow responsible for violent extremism makes Muslims feel that 'they don't belong to this country', Assoc. Prof. Ozalp explained. Discrepancies in how religiously motivated violent extremism is reported on and framed compared to reporting on far-right violent extremism both internationally[79] and in Australia[80] has perpetuated

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[79] Katherine M. Bell, 'By Any Other Name: Media and White-Supremacist Terrorism in the Trump Era', in *The Trump Presidency, Journalism, and Democracy*, ed. Robert E. Gutsche Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 118–39; Caroline Mala Corbin, 'Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda', *Fordham Law Review* 86 (2017): 455–85.

[80] Drew Rooke, 'Right-Wing Terrorism on the Rise in Australia', The Saturday Paper, 21 March 2020; Abdel-Fattah, *Coming of Age in the War on Terror*.

CASE IN FOCUS: NEW ZEALAND

Following the 2019 Christchurch Massacre, much of New Zealand's media adopted practices aimed at limiting the incidental harm their reporting could cause.

The initial breaking coverage was criticised for 'giving oxygen' to the shooter's white supremacist ideology, including airing clips from the livestream video of the attack. In the aftermath, the coverage shifted to concentrate on victims and minimise reporting of the shooter's ideology, treating those affected and Muslim communities with compassion and respect.

By the time of the shooter's trial in 2020, five major NZ news outlets agreed to a set of reporting guidelines for reporting on the court case. These guidelines were aimed at limiting coverage of 'statements that actively champion white supremacist or terrorist ideology'. This applied to the shooter's manifesto, as well as any symbols, imagery, or gestures made by the shooter promoting his ideology.

this. Such coverage causes people to withdraw from civic life and the public sphere. As Türkan Aksoy, the NSW coordinator of Welcoming Cities put it, sensationalised coverage linking violent extremism to Muslims 'really impacts their ability to engage, to stay engaged' in public life.

The soon to be relaunched NSW CVE initiative *Point Magazine* is one innovative approach for how to report on violent extremism within the NSW CVE setting. As Dr Haddon explained, the publication demonstrated that it was possible to report on 'contentious issues like violent extremism in a way that doesn't have to be divisive'. The magazine aims to empower communities to 'actually have a voice to talk about this in a safe environment where they could actually see their voices presented in a way that was balanced, that was nuanced, [and] not sensationalised'.

When it comes to reporting on violent extremists themselves, the media is a 'double edged sword' according to Charles Allen, Director of Partnerships at the Institute for Economics and Peace. Reporting on violent extremism has to balance between a very real public interest, while also ensuring reporting does not incidentally serve the objectives of violent extremists.[81] As Joey Watson, a Walkley Award winning broadcast journalist who reports on the far-right in Australia explained, 'the most difficult thing working in this space is the balance between telling the stories that matter and that are important for democracy and society, and platforming [extremists]'. While Watson believed it needed to be approached on a 'case by case basis', Dr Andre Obeler, CEO of the Online Hate Prevention Institute warned that Australian media often inadvertently 'do the propaganda work of extremists for them'.

Several of those interviewed for this report noted that Australian media is largely under-prepared

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[81] Charlie Beckett, 'Fanning the Flames: Reporting on Terrorism in a Networked World' (Tow Center for Digital Journalism: Columbia Journalism School, 2016); Jean Paul Marthoz, 'Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists' (UNESCO, 2017); Whitney Phillips, 'The Oxygen of Amplification - Part One - In Their Own Words: Trolling, Meme Culture, and Journalists' Reflections on the 2016 US Presidential Election', *Data & Society*, 2018; Alexander Ritzmann and Fabian Wichmann, 'Reporting about Violent Extremism and P/CVE: Challenges for Journalists - Recommendations for Practitioners' (Radicalisation Awareness Network: European Union, 2021).

CASE IN FOCUS: BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The Press Council in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in partnership with the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, have developed guidelines for journalists reporting on violent extremism and terrorism. It recommends a victim- and survivor-centred approach, taking care to avoid anti-hero framings of the perpetrator(s), and an attentiveness to social responsibility by avoiding linking acts of violence to a group identity.

and under-resourced when it comes to reporting on violent extremism. This presents a real problem for building a democratically resilient public sphere, as violent extremists 'understand what the weaknesses of the Australian media are and how to use it to their own ends,' according to Wilson.

In response to the challenges of reporting on violent extremism, some media outlets in several countries, including France, Germany, and New Zealand, have committed themselves to reporting on violent extremists with a 'no photos, no life story, no indirect fame' approach.[82] Reporting on violent extremists like neo-Nazi's should focus 'not on what they say, but what they do… and how those actions effect society', according to Watson. Dr Obeler agrees, noting that reporting on violent extremism needs to be guided by an approach that informs the public 'without giving violent extremists the oxygen that gives them celebrity status and helps them recruit and helps solidify their internal strength'. While not a complete solution, since interested parties can still access extremist materials by alternative sources (e.g., online), such an approach can still help to minimise the reach of violent extremist narratives among mainstream media audiences.

Best practice guidelines for reporting on sensitive topics, such as suicide, can provide a framework for how to better manage reporting on violent extremism.[83] These guidelines aim to promote a harm minimisation approach to reporting on suicide, such as the Australian Press Council's *Specific Standards on Coverage of Suicide*.[84] It is crucial that any guidelines for reporting on violent extremism are developed with specific attention to context. As one NSW-based journalist interviewed for this report noted, these issues need to be contextualised to the Australian (and NSW) context: 'we take so many of our cues from American reporting… are we making sure that the Australian nuance is properly conveyed?'[85]

Though different types of violent extremism may require specific guidelines, one of our interviewees explained that there are general questions reporters and editors can ask themselves to help promote responsible reporting: 'What group is it? Where do they come from? Are you putting them in proper context? Do you understand the conventions and typical media manipulations attempted by this group?'[86]

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[82] Ritzmann and Wichmann, 'Reporting about Violent Extremism and P/CVE: Challenges for Journalists - Recommendations for Practitioners', 10.

[83] Beckett, 'Fanning the Flames: Reporting on Terrorism in a Networked World'; Whitney Phillips, 'The Oxygen of Amplification - Part Three - The Forest and the Trees: Proposed Editorial Strategies', D*ata & Society,* 2018; Ritzmann and Wichmann, 'Reporting about Violent Extremism and P/CVE: Challenges for Journalists - Recommendations for Practitioners'.

[84] Australian Press Council, 'Specific Standards on Coverage of Suicide', 2014.

[85] Interviewee requested anonymity.

[86] Interviewee requested anonymity.

6

How government engages with the civil society and the wider public matters for democratic resilience

> "
> Ask yourself: who wasn't in the room? At times it feels like people are handpicked to sit in these consultations... you see and hear the same voices contributing to these conversations... You should be surprised with some of the things people say. That's a good thing... be comfortable with being uncomfortable, such spaces cultivate innovation.

Türkan Aksoy, NSW Coordinator, Welcoming Cities

Building a cohesive civil society network is central to the NSW CVE program. As noted in a recent evaluation of NSW CVE, 'further effort should be directed to community-based prevention,' with an emphasis on 'bottom-up' programs.[87] In doing so, the NSW Government will need to ensure that 'community networks are being led from within'.[88] However, interviews with civil society actors working in the CVE space at both the state and national level in Australia highlighted several barriers hindering the formation of a vibrant civil society network, and also wider issues of community trust.

What our interviews highlight is a pressing need for the NSW Government to increase its emphasis on 'consequentiality' in its engagement with community and civil society. Consequentiality is about deliberative engagements having an impact on outcomes.[89] This includes not only concrete policy decisions, but also informal effects such as the 'influence on decision makers' and 'cultural change'.[90]

Trust was also frequently cited as the issue inhibiting community relationships with the NSW Government in the CVE space. Several interviewees working in civil society organisations pointed to a series of workshops in 2015-2016 run by the Commonwealth Attorney General's office as a critical juncture where trust was severely damaged, and this impacted some of those working in NSW. According to Aksoy, many community and civil society organisations who attended these workshops were already sceptical of the sincerity (and ability) of government to meaningfully work with community in this space: 'they [AG office] weren't well aware

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[87] Acil Allen Consulting, 'NSW Countering Violent Extremism Program Evaluation' (Department of Communities and Justice: NSW Government, 2019), 65.

[88] Poppy Wise et al., 'Evaluation of the COMPACT Program' (NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet: NSW Government, 28 November 2018), 26.

[89] Andrea Felicetti, *Deliberative Democracy and Social Movements: Transition Initiatives in the Public Sphere* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

[90] John S. Dryzek, *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.

of the communities that were connecting to them. They didn't know how to engage with us'. When the workshop concluded with no decisive outcome and without follow-up, many felt the process to be little more than a box-ticking exercise on behalf of government. Further, there was a perception of a lack of meaningful deliberation and a limited range of perspectives, particularly a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. As a result, this has contributed to a lack of trust regarding the Federal Government's commitment to social cohesion, which appears to have carried over into NSW among those civil society actors interviewed for this report.

In addition to trust, the representatives of civil society organisations interviewed pointed repeatedly to issues of funding and the lack of sustained relationships with government as undermining the growth of a civil society network addressing violent extremism in the state. Even the flagship COMPACT Program, which was specifically designed to address some of these problems by providing multi-year grants through a partnership model,[91] was still impacted by these issues according to interviewees. Ultimately, while competitive submissions processes are standard for grant funding across a range of NSW Government programs areas, it can introduce unintended problems for civil society organisations. The matter of funding continuity and 'the fact that it comes in a fragmented way, with no guarantee… makes it very difficult to continue things and scale it up' explained Assoc. Prof. Ozalp. As Aksoy explained:

COMPACT brought together an incredible alliance around social cohesion at a time when it was much needed. But when the next funding round comes around and new projects get picked up, some of those amazing relationships are severed. We need a grants process that can integrate new projects with existing ones so that the knowledge and experience can be shared to better tackle these complex issues.

One way to improve civil society involvement in CVE programs may be to adopt 'participatory planning' strategies.[92] Another potential solution suggested by interviewees was flexibility in funding models, for example with regard to the timing for applications.

In addition, the inevitable turnover of civil society organisation as well as government personnel makes it difficult to maintain relationships between civil society and government. Several interviewees noted that the formation of a new government, budget cuts, and restructuring of departments and ministerial portfolios has meant that many relationships built up with government over the years had been lost.

Importantly, civil society is not in itself a panacea to violent extremism.[93] Civil society organisations are not necessarily pro-democracy. Indeed, civil society organisations can and have provided support for illiberal and anti-democratic movements.[94] Hence, the need to support the flourishing of a 'pro-democratic civil society'.[95] These are civil society organisations that contribute to democracy either by undermining extremist infrastructures and reducing

[91] Multicultural NSW, 'COMPACT', NSW Government, 2022.

[92] Stevan Weine et al., 'Addressing Violent Extremism as Public Health Policy and Practice', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 9, no. 3 (2017): 208–21.

[93] Erik Lundberg, 'Guardians of Democracy? On the Response of Civil Society Organisations to Right-Wing Extremism', *Scandinavian Political Studies* 44, no. 2 (2021): 170–94.

[94] For example: Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, 'Bad Civil Society', *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (2001): 837–65.

[95] Ami Pedahzur, 'The Potential Role of "pro-Democratic Civil Society'' in Responding to Extreme Right-Wing Challenges: The Case of Brandenburg"', *Contemporary Politics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 63–74.

CASE IN FOCUS: SWEDEN

In response to the mobilisation of far-right extremists in Swedish town of Ludvika, civil society organisations worked to promote the importance of democracy, encouraging dialogue with citizens about the challenges of (far-right) extremism, while actively trying to limit the visibility of extremist actors in the public sphere.

They did this by creating meeting spaces to both speak with the community and present a vocal, public 'counterforce' to the extremists; organising a joint march through the town in support of inclusivity and human rights; and encouraging residents to support local businesses whose owners had been threatened by the extremists.

In doing, these civil society organisations highlight the importance of a network of resolutely 'pro-democracy' (Pedhazur, 2003) civil society in fostering democratic resilience.

the scope of their activities, or by pushing back against state responses to anti-democratic threats that in themselves may undermine democratic principles. They do this by raising awareness, mobilising support against extremists, and supporting victims of violent extremism.[96]

One such example is the Ashfield Community Action group, a grassroots effort by local residents to shut down a so-called active club opened by the neo-Nazi organisation the Lads Society in Ashfield, in Sydney's Inner West.[97] Ashfield Community Action produced information flyers and posters in several languages to alert community members of the danger. According to Dr Ross, it was this 'local community pushback… that really helped close the Lads Society down in Ashfield'.

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[96] Lundberg, 'Guardians of Democracy?'
[97] Ashfield Community Action, 'Ashfield Community Action', [Facebook], 2018.

7

How information pollution is tackled online matters for democratic resilience

> " While access to information has increased, the reliability of information has declined... the decrease in the quality of information has had a negative impact on peacefulness.

Charles Allen, Director of Partnerships, Institute for Economics and Peace

The spread of dis-, mis-, and mal-information, or 'information pollution',[98] as well as violent extremist content, poses a serious threat to the public sphere. Particularly in the fast-moving digital space, the proliferation of information pollution can cause real-world harm: stoking community tensions, increasing political polarisation, and undermining trust in government.

Current programs aimed at media literacy focus on online safety and are targeted primarily at youth via school curriculum programs. While recent research by the Queensland University of Technology and Western Sydney University has highlighted a need for further curricular development and application of news and media education in schools,[99] these programs are not necessarily fit for purpose in terms of addressing the specific challenges of information pollution and violent extremist content. As Murray-Farrell explained: 'young people feel there is a disconnect between the skills they are learning in the [e-safety] curriculum… there is a gap between the real-world experience of what young people are experiencing online and their ability to translate critical thinking skills to that space'.

Broader educational initiatives to combat information pollution and violent extremist content are needed, and should not be limited to school programs but approached as a broader public health initiative. As Dr Obeler explained, there needs to be 'more education, awareness raising, etcetera, at the public education level. This is what we do with all sorts of campaigns to educate the public, whether it is about sun safety to prevent skin cancer, or water waste, or whatever. Yes, schools play a role, but they don't play the only role'. The Finnish approach to educating on information pollution, which has seen the country repeatedly top media literacy indexes[100] provides a potential model to do this.

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[98] Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner, *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021).

[99] Michael Dezuanni, Tanya Notley, and Kristy Corser, 'How News Media Is Taught in the Classroom', 2020, 32.

[100] OSIS, 'Media Literacy Index 2021', Open Society Institute Sofia, 14 March 2021.

CASE IN FOCUS: FINLAND

In Finland, media literacy is considered vital to the health of democracy. The Finnish government has coordinated with civil society to develop broad awareness raising campaigns, including in schools. These are not stand-alone topics but are integrated throughout the wider curriculum. For example, in maths classes, students might learn about how statistics can be misrepresented, or in art classes, about how images can be manipulated.

Along with curricular interventions, the Finnish Government has launched public education campaigns to inform about the challenges information pollution poses to democratic integrity. These campaigns, such as during the 2019 Finnish national elections, aim to 'support democracy education by increasing awareness of the changes that have taken place in the information environment'

While digital and media literacy is important, approaches that only address individual critical thinking are not enough. The challenge posed by information pollution and violent extremist content online also requires addressing the policy and technological structures that allow for such content to proliferate.[101] Though primarily the responsibility of the Commonwealth, there is an opportunity for the NSW Government to do more here. The NSW Government should be forthright in pushing for more action from the Commonwealth, and from major technology companies such as Google (YouTube), Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp), and ByteDance (TikTok) to address the circulation of information pollution and violent extremist content on their platforms.[102] As Wilson explained, 'the biggest issue to action on misinformation is that every technology company gets to set the terms of what information they share and how we understand it. They are all black boxes… [greater transparency] is what government should be pushing for to inform good policy'. The growth of so-called 'Alternative Technology' platforms such as Telegram and Gab introduce additional challenges. These platforms have been embraced by violent extremists as alternative and less-moderated online spaces where they can disseminate information pollution and violent extremist content with minimal platform intervention.[103]

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[101] Phillips and Milner, *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape.*

[102] Jordan McSwiney et al., 'Sharing the Hate? Memes and Transnationality in the Far Right's Digital Visual Culture', *Information, Communication & Society* 24, no. 16 (2021): 2502–21; Maura Conway, Amy Louise Watkin, and Seán Looney, 'Violent Extremism and Terrorism Online in 2021: The Year in Review' (VOX-Pol: RAN Policy Support, 2022); Gabriel Weimann and Natalie Masri, 'Research Note: Spreading Hate on TikTok', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 0, no. 0 (2020): 1–14.

[103] Greta Jasser et al., '"Welcome to the #GabFam": Far-Right Virtual Community on Gab', *New Media & Society*, 2021; Nico Prucha, 'IS and the Jihadist Information Highway – Projecting Influence and Religious Identity via Telegram', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 48–58.

PART 3
Ways Forward

A

Continue to develop speech guidelines for public facing government actors and political leaders

Our research shows that speeches given by prominent public figures in the aftermath of a violent extremist attack or threat have the potential to define events, shape the community's understanding, and set the tone for future deliberation and policy formation.

The response should therefore use inclusive and unifying language, while reiterating the democratic and inclusive character of society.

Public addresses in the wake of a violent extremist attack should centre the stories of victims and survivors, extending beyond the confines of citizenship to all members of the community impacted.

Where discussion of perpetrators is necessary, it is important to localise and use the language of criminal justice, rather than framings which can exacerbate harm such as a 'civilisational clash'.

B

Clarify between CVE and CT activities to help minimise stigmatisation in the public sphere

Our research shows that stigmatisation and exclusion are barriers to a democratically resilient public sphere. The public sphere cannot be democratically resilient if members of society feel marginalised and unable to participate confidently. The perception that CVE programs may be used for intelligence gathering precludes the building of trust between communities and government.

This undermines the ability for the CVE program to deliver on its social policy objectives.

Moving forward, the NSW Government should revaluate the relationship between CVE and CT, and seek to emphasize the social policy dimension of the former. This requires clearly disentangling CVE from wider security and intelligence objectives. Doing so may help to open the way for more civil society and community input into addressing the social threat posed by violent extremism in NSW.

C

Promote a strong evidentiary basis for deliberation on extremism in NSW

Accurate and reliable information is essential for a democratically resilient public sphere. It provides the evidence basis for good deliberation. There is currently no comprehensive dataset for violent extremism and bias crime in NSW. The lack of a comprehensive database makes it difficult to understand the scope of the problem.

The NSW Government should invest in the development of comprehensive datasets on social cohesion and bias crime.

By helping identify trends in social cohesion and bias crime in NSW, this would help inform policy formation and public debate, making an important contribution to the democratic resilience of the public sphere.

D

Promote ethnic and multicultural media in the public sphere

Multicultural and multilingual media provide an important space for issues of common concern to be discussed and deliberated.

It can play an important role in fostering inclusion and countering marginalisation by increasing avenues for minority participation in the public sphere.

The NSW Government should explore ways to further support multicultural and multilingual media in the state, such as local non-English newspapers and radio.

E

Emphasise the intracultural diversity that exists within communities

The NSW Government needs to be wary of unintentionally essentialising and fixing minority identities. Communications from government should emphasise the multiplicity of identities within minority communities and emphasising the commonalities of citizenship.

While it is easy to rely on the same spokespeople, the NSW Government needs to engage a multiplicity of community voices. It should also, whenever possible, consult and communicate with the broadest cross-section of the community rather than focus on particular identity groups.

F

Invest in memorialisation activities and use these to signal unity and solidarity in the public sphere

Along with speech and text, symbols play an important role in the public sphere. Sites of memorialisation can act as expressions of solidarity to foster democratic resilience.

Commemoration and memorialisation can bring community together to heal after a crisis and establish an inclusive public sphere. It also presents an opportunity to foster democratic resilience by contesting the imagery of violence and promoting the democratic, inclusive, and tolerant character of NSW in response to violent extremism.

The NSW Government should develop clear policy guidance for commemoration and memorialisation in relation to violent extremism. Policy guidance should underscore the importance of centering the needs of victims and survivors, adopting time-sensitive implementation strategies, and ensure public consultation and participation in planning.

G

Explore ways to promote responsible media reporting on violent extremism

A key barrier to inclusiveness identified in our interviews was the impact of media coverage of violent extremism. Sensationalist reporting can undermine the public sphere by furthering the reach of extremist narratives, and can lead to unnecessary fracturing through stigmatisation.

The NSW Government should explore ways to support NSW newsrooms to develop best practice guidelines for harm minimisation reporting on violent extremism, and create opportunities to share lessons from research with media practitioners.

This could involve the inclusion of a media-focused stream in future NSW Government facilitated conferences or workshops relating to extremism and social cohesion.

Partnerships with existing industry media training programs, like the 9-Fairfax and News Corp cadetship programs, could also be used to promote best practice reporting on violent extremism in NSW newsrooms.

Additionally, the NSW Government should encourage industry accountability by, for example, working with the Australian Press Council to develop Special Standards of Practice for reporting on violent extremism.

H

Foster consequential deliberation between government and civil society

Consequential deliberation between government and civil society is vital to a democratically resilient public sphere. Consequentiality means that deliberation should have an impact on collective decisions and social outcomes. The government needs to demonstrate how civil society input will be valued, and communicate the next steps.

To facilitate consequential deliberation, the NSW Government should establish regular conferences to promote greater knowledge sharing among those working in CVE, resilience, and social cohesion. This should include academics, civil society, government, and practitioners. It is vital to build and sustain ongoing working relationships, rather than rely on ad hoc contacts in response to a crisis.

The NSW CVE program has included several comparable initiatives in the past. However, interviewees noted the lack of continuity, and pointed to a need for repeat gatherings to develop collaborative networks and track best practice developments.

These sessions should be as open as possible. Attendance should be cost-neutral, with no attendance fee and provision of travel allowances as necessary to facilitate greater participation. Where possible, conference presentations and round table discussions should be publicly available, with recordings available online, to allow nonparticipants to engage.

I

Create spaces and opportunities for listening and reflection

While democracy is usually associated with the practice of expression – finding a 'voice', speaking up, and making oneself heard – listening and reflection are equally important practices in a well-functioning democracy.

The NSW Government can play a crucial role in creating spaces and opportunities for listening and reflection, where decision-makers and other empowered elites can listen and learn from the lived experiences of diverse communities. Such practices of 'institutional listening' shift the responsibility from citizens to express their voice onto government institutions to make themselves receptive and responsive.[104]

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[104] Mary F Scudder, Selen A Ercan, and Kerry McCallum, 'Institutional Listening in Deliberative Democracy: Towards a Deliberative Logic of Transmission', *Politics,* 2021.

J

Enhance media literacy education for the public

The spread of information pollution and violent extremist content, especially in time of crisis, poses a serious threat to the democratic resilience of the public sphere.

Educational initiatives to combat information pollution and extremist content in NSW are needed and should not be limited to school programs. The NSW Government should explore wider reaching approaches along the lines of public health initiatives to address information pollution.

K

Develop strategies to address structural factors contributing to information pollution

Though important, addressing individual media literacy in NSW is not enough to counter information pollution and the spread of violent extremist content online.

The NSW Government should be forthright in pushing for greater action from the Commonwealth and technology companies to address the reproduction and circulation of information pollution and violent extremist content on their platforms.
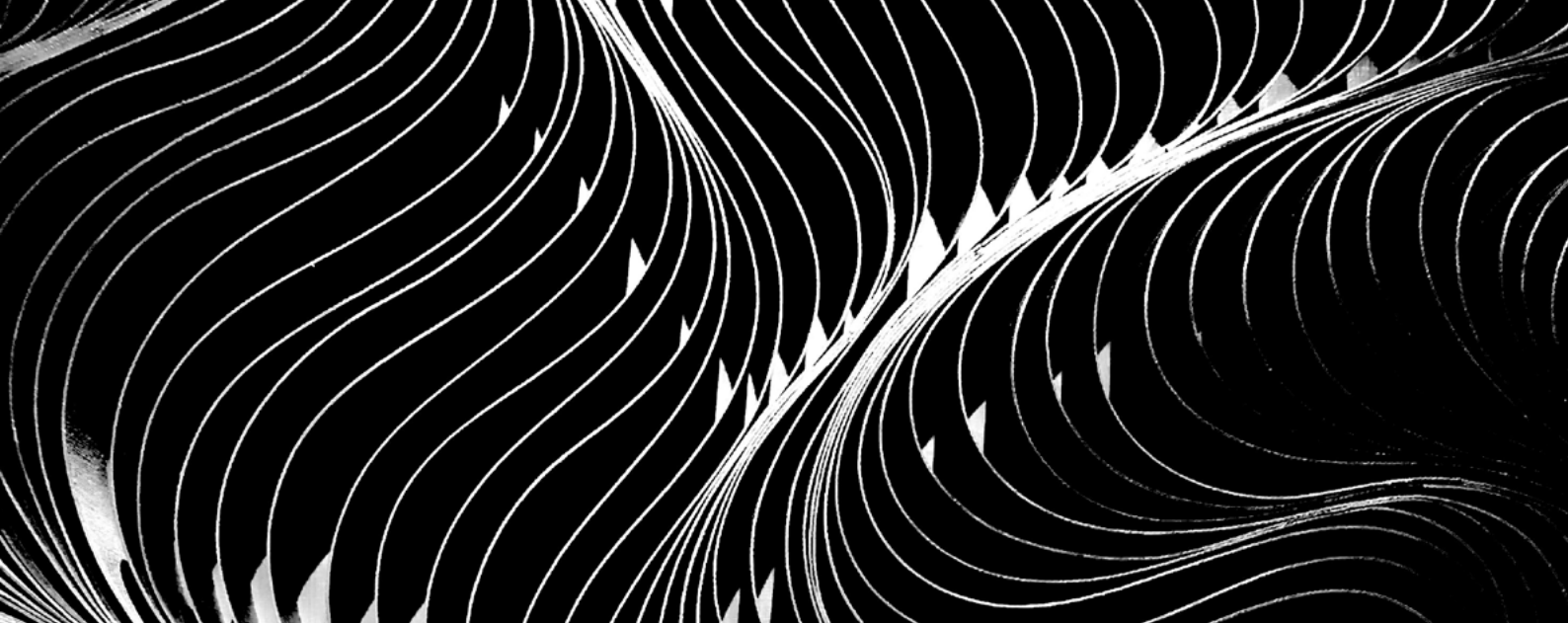
Conclusion

To date, the default approach in Australia has been, at least at the national level, to 'strengthen an already startling counter-terrorism law regime – not to develop innovative ways for countering the threat over the longer-term'.[105] This report seeks to offer alternative approaches by drawing on the theory of deliberative democracy and the public sphere, and by looking to countries like Germany, New Zealand, and Norway, for lessons on improving democratic resilience.

Our research shows democracies can take deliberate actions to build and strengthen the resilience of the public sphere in the face of violent extremism. Having said that, the purpose of this report is not to provide a checklist of required actions. Rather, this report aims to present a set of questions public sphere actors, such as government, need to reflect on and take into consideration in their CVE efforts. While the research conducted for this report focused on possible ways forward for the NSW government in Australia, it contains lessons for other jurisdictions, and other countries as well.

Finally, the democratic resilience framework presented in this report and associated suggestions have implications for addressing other crises and shocks. For example, the most recent crisis facing Australia and the world, the Covid-19 pandemic, raises a series of questions about the capacity of democracies to contain and process external shocks.[106] The framework proposed in this report can provide insights for democratic societies for building resilience without losing their democratic character.

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[105] Keiran Hardy, 'Countering Right-Wing Extremism: Lessons from Germany and Norway', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 14, no. 3 (2019): 274, https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2019.1662076.

[106] Club de Madrid, 'Democracy and Emergencies: Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic for Democratic Resilience' (Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies, 2021).