



Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

Fear, antisemitism and social cohesion: distinguishing genuine threat
from institutional amplification and misclassification

5 May 2026

Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney

Formed in 2024, Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney (JVOIS) provides community and avenues for collective advocacy to local Jewish people who do not feel represented by the long-established Jewish organisations. We are committed to universal human rights and democratic freedoms, which includes working to reduce antisemitism and all forms of racism.

Members of JVOIS range in age, background and Jewish religious observance. Many of us are the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors who rebuilt their lives in Australia. In solidarity with many other groups, Jewish and non-Jewish, we campaign for justice and the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people and call on the Australian Government to end its support of Israel. As part of this effort, JVOIS members have attended numerous rallies and protests. We have not experienced antisemitism within the Palestine justice movement, where we have made many friends.

Terms of Reference addressed

This submission addresses the Commission's first term of reference, which requires the Commissioner to 'tackle antisemitism by: investigating the nature and prevalence of antisemitism in institutions and society, and examining its key drivers in Australia,' and its fourth term of reference regarding 'strengthening social cohesion in Australia.'

Submission Structure

The submission is structured as follows:

Section 1 provides recommendations.

Section 2 introduces why fear in Jewish communities is a problem for the Commission's understanding of antisemitism and social cohesion.

Section 3 establishes the academic framework for understanding how fear is cultivated and maintained in Jewish communities, drawing on Creese's Australian ethnography, Minkin's research on emotional frames, Novick's history of Holocaust instrumentalisation, and the broader scholarly literature on collective fear. It also engages directly with the counterargument that fear is justified by the real existence of antisemitism, and provides comparative evidence on fear levels across minority communities.

Section 4 examines the institutional mechanisms through which fear is maintained in the Australian context: annual antisemitism reports, communal media, the role of collective memory, and the transmission of fear through Jewish education and youth movements. It also addresses the methodological limitations of the principal surveys relied upon by communal organisations.

Section 5 analyses the consequences of maintained fear: the policing of internal dissent, the conflation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism, the suppression of pro-Palestinian advocacy, and the chilling effect on democratic discourse.

Section 6 addresses implications for social cohesion, including the mental health costs of institutionally maintained fear and the conflict between fear-maintenance and the intergroup contact that research shows is the most effective mechanism for reducing prejudice. It also provides guidance on how the Commission should handle the data problem created by reliance on advocacy-produced statistics.

1 Recommendations

In undertaking its work, the Commission should:

- 1.1 critically examine the methodology and political function of annual antisemitism reports including the extent to which legitimate political expression is categorised as antisemitism. In evaluating the reports, disaggregate the data to separate incidents involving physical violence or direct threats to safety from incidents involving political expression about Israel-Palestine, and assess the proportion of each category.
- 1.2 hear testimony from Jewish Australians who have experienced communal sanction for expressing views critical of Israel, including members of the JCA, AJDS, JVOIS and other non- and anti-Zionist Jewish groups.
- 1.3 consider the peer-reviewed academic research on the institutional cultivation of fear in Jewish communities – particularly Creese (2022, 2023), Minkin (2014), Novick (1999), Lerman (2022), and Scheitle et al. (2023) – when evaluating evidence about the prevalence and nature of antisemitism.
- 1.4 consider whether the educational institutions and youth movements are reinforcing the architecture of fear rather than equipping young Jewish Australians with the critical tools to distinguish genuine antisemitism from political disagreement.

The Commission should recommend that Australian Governments:

- 1.5 commission independent, methodologically rigorous research into the actual prevalence and nature of antisemitism in Australia, not reliant on data collected by advocacy organisations with a political interest in the findings.
- 1.6 support media literacy and critical engagement within Jewish communities that enables Jewish Australians to distinguish between genuine antisemitic threats and the political instrumentalisation of fear.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 JVOIS unequivocally condemns antisemitism, including the antisemitic terrorist attack at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025. This submission proceeds from the reality that antisemitism is real, dangerous and must be addressed. Its purpose is not to minimise antisemitism, but to assist the Commission to distinguish genuine antisemitic threat from overbroad classifications and institutional responses that may undermine social cohesion, democratic speech and the safety of all communities.
- 2.2 This submission elaborates on an important theme touched on in the JVOIS submission on defining antisemitism and the problems with the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA working definition). It examines, in detail, the role of communal Jewish organisations and Jewish media in cultivating and sustaining fear of antisemitism within Australian Jewish communities, and the consequences of that fear for democratic discourse, social cohesion and the rights of Palestinians.
- 2.3 Fear of antisemitism in Jewish communities arises from multiple sources: real contemporary antisemitism, family and collective historical memory, inherited trauma, current events in Israel-Palestine, media exposure, and communal institutional messaging. This submission focuses on the last of these: the ways in which communal organisations and media may amplify, channel or politicise historically grounded fear.
- 2.4 The submission does not deny that antisemitism exists in Australia or that Jewish Australians face real threats. The Bondi Beach attack was a horrific act of antisemitic terrorism. Rather, it argues that the institutional response to antisemitism is shaped by an organised architecture of fear that amplifies, inflates and instrumentalises perceptions of threat in ways that serve political interests unrelated to the safety of Jewish Australians.
- 2.5 This submission draws on scholarly, empirical and legal-policy literature, including peer-reviewed research, ethnography, historical analysis and insider accounts into the social function of fear in Jewish communities. The most directly relevant source is Dr Jennifer Creese’s anthropological study of fear and Jewish attitudes to antisemitism within the Australian Jewish community (2022), and her expanded ethnography of Australian Jewish communal life (2023).
- 2.6 The submission also draws on the work of Dr Sarah Anne Minkin (UC Berkeley) on emotional frames in Jewish organisational life; Professor Peter Novick’s prize-winning history of the instrumentalisation of the Holocaust; Antony Lerman’s institutional analysis of the “new antisemitism” project; Professor Daniel Bar-Tal’s research on collective fear; Kenneth Stern’s insider account of the weaponisation of the IHRA working definition he helped draft; and empirical data from the Gen17 Australian Jewish Community Survey and the Australian Jews in the Shadow of War (AJSW) study, notwithstanding their shortcomings (addressed in a separate JVOIS submission). These studies have some value but should not be treated as population-level prevalence measures without caution. Their recruitment methods, self-selection effects, communal-network sampling and question framing may limit their use for estimating the prevalence of antisemitism across the whole Australian Jewish population.

- 2.7 This submission argues that peak communal Jewish organisations in Australia – principally, but not exclusively, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) and its affiliates/allies – together with Jewish media outlets, systematically cultivate and maintain a heightened state of fear of antisemitism within Australian Jewish communities. This fear serves several functions: it reinforces communal cohesion around support for the State of Israel; it discourages internal dissent; and it provides the emotional and political basis for accusations of antisemitism that are deployed to suppress pro-Palestinian advocacy and shield Israel from international accountability, including sanctions.
- 2.8 The scale of the disjunction between levels of fear and actual danger is captured by the Gen17 Australian Jewish Community Survey, which found that 91 percent of respondents considered “combating anti-Semitism” central to their identity – yet the same survey’s authors concluded that antisemitism “does not impact in any significant way on the lives of most Australian Jews.” The gap between the perceived centrality of the threat and its limited material impact is precisely the space that the institutional cultivation of fear occupies.

3 The academic framework: how fear is cultivated and maintained in Jewish communities

- 3.1 This section establishes the academic basis for the submission's core claim: that fear of antisemitism in Jewish communities is not simply a natural response to external threat but is actively cultivated and maintained by communal organisations for political purposes. The academic literature on this question is substantial and spans multiple disciplines including anthropology, sociology, history and philosophy.

The Australian evidence: Creese on the “instrumentalisation of fear”

- 3.2 The most directly relevant academic study for the Commission's purposes is Dr Jennifer Creese's peer-reviewed anthropological analysis, 'We're Alone in This Together: The Anthropology of Fear and Jewish Attitudes to Antisemitism' (2022), based on fieldwork within Australian Jewish communities of South-East Queensland.¹
- 3.3 Creese draws on social theory of fear to examine how fear of antisemitism is both experienced and performed within community life. Her central finding is that Jewish individuals and organisations speak in specific ways about their fears of antisemitism, both inwardly to their communities and outwardly to the public, and that this discourse functions as a performative act which produces, regulates and constrains the identities of Jewish communities.
- 3.4 Crucially, Creese theorises using the term “instrumentalisation of fear” finding that whilst some communal benefits of fear arise as natural reactions to perceived danger, groups and their leaders often identifiably practise an instrumentalisation of fear through the rhetoric used to discuss concerns within the community and with outside forces. Fear at a moderate level, she observes, serves organisational ends: it encourages individuals to behave properly lest they have cause to fear, thereby reinforcing group behavioural norms.
- 3.5 Creese's expanded book-length ethnography, *Jewish Identity in Multicultural Australia* (2023), provides the most comprehensive account of how Australian Jewish communal norms – including those around antisemitism and fear – are constructed and reinforced.² She argues that Jewish identity is often presented as monolithic by Jewish communities to outsiders and society at large, and that contemporary Jewish communities work in certain, set ways and promote certain, set norms to forge a supported place for Jewish life. The Commission should give close attention to this work as the only full-length academic ethnography of Australian Jewish communal life.

¹ Jennifer Creese, 'We're Alone in This Together: The Anthropology of Fear and Jewish Attitudes to Antisemitism,' *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Taylor & Francis, 2022 (Vol. 23, Issue 1, 2024), 5-25. 'performative act which produces, regulates and constrains the identities of Jewish communities' p 5.

'Instrumentalisation of fear' and 'behave properly lest they have cause to fear' pp 7–8; Creese quotes sources for both phrases (her footnotes 10 and 12).

² Jennifer Creese, *Jewish Identity in Multicultural Australia*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023. The fear-related ethnography is concentrated in Chapter 6, 'If Something Happens, Then We're Alone Together.'

Fear as organisational strategy: Minkin and Bar-Tal

- 3.6 Creese's Australian findings are consistent with the broader international scholarship. Dr Sarah Anne Minkin's doctoral research at UC Berkeley, *Fear, Fantasy, and Family: Israel's Significance to American Jews* (2014), identifies three emotional frames through which dominant Jewish organisations promote connection to the State of Israel: familial love (the nation as family); collective fantasy (Israel as the culmination of Jewish values); and fear and vulnerability (the dual sense of historical persecution and the need for state power as protection).³
- 3.7 Minkin argues that these emotional frames are not organic or inevitable but the product of deliberate organisational strategy. Dominant Jewish organisations 'act like a social movement in mobilizing American Jews [Jewish people] to identify with a particular version of the Jewish collective, which contributes to nationalist and political goals.' The fear frame is of particular relevance: Minkin documents how Jewish organisations cultivate a sense of perpetual vulnerability and present the State of Israel as the primary guarantee of Jewish safety – even in contexts where Jewish communities are prosperous, well-integrated and face no existential threat.
- 3.8 This is consistent with the broader research of Professor Daniel Bar-Tal (Tel Aviv University), whose work on fear in intractable conflicts demonstrates that fear can become a chronic collective orientation maintained through societal mechanisms including education, media and communal institutions.⁴ Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal (2006) further establish that the "dominance of fear over hope" in collective life is not a natural condition but a constructed disposition.⁵

The historical dimension: Novick on the instrumentalisation of the Holocaust

- 3.9 Professor Peter Novick's *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999) is the foundational historical study of the post-1967 instrumentalisation of the Holocaust by American Jewish communal leadership.⁶ Its analytical contribution is twofold.
- 3.10 First, Novick establishes that the centrality of the Holocaust in contemporary Jewish communal life is the product of organisational decisions made by communal leaders who are, in Novick's formulation, more particularistic, religious and Israel-oriented than their followers, rather than an organic communal disposition.

³ Sarah Anne Minkin, *Fear, Fantasy, and Family: Israel's Significance to American Jews*, PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2014, quote from Abstract. Chapter 4 'Fear and Vulnerability: The Need and Source for Power.' Available at: <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3s57250z>>, 'act like a social movement...' quote from Abstract. The fear-frame analysis Chapter 4, 'Fear and Vulnerability: The Need and Source for Power,' pp. 91–130. Note that the pages in the pdf are not numbered so the end range is an estimate.

⁴ Daniel Bar-Tal, 'Why Does Fear Override Hope in Societies Engulfed by Intractable Conflict, as It Does in the Israeli Society?' *Political Psychology* 22(3):601-27, 2001. Bar-Tal's argument that fear becomes a chronic collective orientation maintained through education, media and communal institutions is developed throughout, with the societal-mechanism discussion at pp. 615–622.

⁵ Maria Jarymowicz and Daniel Bar-Tal, 'The Dominance of Fear over Hope in the Life of Individuals and Collectives,' *European Journal of Social Psychology* 36: 367-92, 2006.

⁶ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Houghton Mifflin, 1999. The post-1967 instrumentalisation discussion is in Chapters 7–9 (pp. 146–203 in the hardback). The discussion that current centrality reflects choices made by leaders 'more particularistic, religious and Israel-oriented than their followers' is in Chapter 9 / Conclusion (pp. 268–281). Our summary also considers the review in *Foreign Affairs*.

- 3.11 Second, Novick traces the specific function those decisions performed: emphasising the Holocaust as evidence of the Jewish people's constant state of existential peril, and channelling that emphasis into support for the State of Israel and resistance to assimilation.
- 3.12 The work is not a critique of Holocaust memory, which Novick treats as essential, but of its instrumentalisation. The Australian application of Novick's framework, refracted through Creese's ethnography in the next section, is the foundation of this submission's account of how fear is sustained over time.

The transmission mechanism: collective memory and persistent fear

- 3.13 The mechanism by which organisationally maintained fear persists across generations, independent of personal experience, has been empirically established in a peer-reviewed study by Scheitle et al. (2023) in *Social Forces*. The study finds that collective memory, particularly of catastrophic past events, is 'socially constructed, preserved, and mobilized by individuals, movements, and organized groups for political, moral, and legal purposes.'⁷ For Jewish adults, the Holocaust remains a ubiquitous basis of collective memory, providing scripts to understand past and present victimisation and contributing to a heightened level of ongoing fear – even among those who did not directly experience the events.
- 3.14 This finding is directly relevant to the Australian context. The Gen17 survey found that very high proportions of respondents considered the Holocaust to be important to their sense of Jewish identity, while the AJSW study documented how concern about antisemitism spiked dramatically after October 7, 2023, mediated significantly by social media and communal media consumption.^{8,9} The Scheitle et al. framework helps explain how communal organisations can amplify and sustain fear through the deliberate invocation of collective memory – a mechanism Novick documents historically and Creese observes ethnographically in the Australian setting.

⁷ Christopher Scheitle, Bianca Mabute-Louie, Jauhara Ferguson, Emily Hawkins and Elaine Howard Ecklund, 'Fear of Religious Hate Crime Victimization and the Residual Effects of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia,' *Social Forces*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (April 2023), pp. 2059–2086. 'socially constructed, preserved, and mobilized by individuals, movements, and organized groups for political, moral, and legal purposes' appears in the section 'Distal Sources of Fear: Collective Memory'. Mean fear scores by religion - Table 3 / Figure 1, p. 2070: Muslim 1.81, Jewish 1.53, Christian 1.26.

⁸ Bankier-Karp, A. and Graham, D., 'Australian Jews in the Shadow of War: Main Survey Findings,' 2024. Concern about antisemitism in Australia was approximately 10 times higher post-October 7 than in 2017.

⁹ Bankier-Karp, A. and Graham, D., 'Surrounded by Darkness, Enfolded in Light: Factors Influencing the Mental Health of Australian Jews in the October 7 Aftermath,' *Contemporary Jewry*, Springer, 2024, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 903–935. The study found that concerns about antisemitism mediated the relationship between social media use and anxiety 918–925

The “new antisemitism” as a political project

- 3.15 Antony Lerman, the former Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and a founding member of the Jewish Forum for Justice and Human Rights, provides a 40-year insider account of the political project of redefining antisemitism.¹⁰ In *Whatever Happened to Antisemitism?* (2022), Lerman shows that the notion of the “new antisemitism” has been codified in the IHRA working definition and forms the glue holding together an international network comprising the Israeli government, pro-Israel advocacy groups, Zionist organisations, Jewish communal defence bodies and sympathetic governments. He traces how what began as intellectual discussions gradually changed character as pro-Israel advocacy groups and major Jewish organisations took up the matter.
- 3.16 Lerman documents the chilling internal effect on Jewish dissent: Jews who do not accept that anti-Zionism is antisemitism are singled out for special vilification, being labelled “antisemitic,” “self-hating” or “fellow travellers” of antisemitism. He also observes that serious scholarly research into contemporary antisemitism has become virtually non-existent, and that the subject is now most frequently studied by people whose principal aim is to promote the anti-Zionism equals antisemitism equation.
- 3.17 Lerman’s findings mirror the experience of dissenting Jewish voices in Australia. Journalist Antony Loewenstein has documented how his criticism of Israeli policies led to his being branded a “self-hating Jew,” a “traitor,” and compared to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels – despite members of his own family having perished in the Holocaust. Members of the Jewish Council of Australia, the Australian Jewish Democratic Society, and JVOIS have reported similar patterns of ostracism and vilification for expressing views critical of Israel. The research report *Not in Our Name: Jewish Australians Speak Out* (Greenslade and Briskman) documents the breadth of this dissenting tradition and the communal costs experienced by those who participate in it.¹¹ The point is the explanatory link Lerman supplies: lateral violence is the predictable consequence of the fear-maintenance architecture, not an incidental side-effect.
- 3.18 Philosopher Brian Klug (Oxford) provides the foundational conceptual critique in his widely-cited peer-reviewed analysis in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2013).¹² Klug argues that the “new antisemitism” view conflates hostility to Israel with hostility to Jews and is therefore very difficult to sustain analytically. His argument is, in substance, that if the category of antisemitism is stretched to encompass all hostility to Israel, the concept loses its distinctive analytical force. Lerman credits Klug with having done all the heavy lifting in debunking “new antisemitism” and the false equivalence between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

¹⁰ Antony Lerman, *Whatever Happened to Antisemitism? Redefinition and the Myth of the ‘Collective Jew’*, Pluto Press, 2022. Lerman’s argument that the “new antisemitism” has been codified in the IHRA working definition and operates as the glue holding together a transnational network is developed in the Introduction (pp. 1–16) and Chapters 7–9 (pp. 124–173). The “virtually non-existent” claim is made in Chapters 1 and 4–5.

¹¹ Greenslade and Briskman, *Not in Our Name: Jewish Australians Speak Out*, 2026, <https://notinournameresearchreport.carrd.co/>

¹² Brian Klug, ‘Interrogating “New Anti-Semitism,”’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2013, pp. 468–482. The conclusion that the “new anti-Semitism” view is difficult to sustain analytically is at pp. 480–481.

- 3.19 Jonathan Judaken's peer-reviewed analysis in *Patterns of Prejudice* (2008) documents the recurrent, politically-timed nature of amplified antisemitism discourse: in the wake of every major struggle in the Arab-Israeli conflict since the Six Day War, prominent scholars and advocates have sounded the alarm about a crisis resulting from the rise of what they designated a "new antisemitism."¹³ This cyclical pattern is consistent with the instrumentalisation thesis advanced by Creese, Novick and Lerman.

The counterargument: is the fear justified?

- 3.20 This submission does not deny that antisemitism is real or that Jewish Australians face genuine threats. The Bondi Beach attack of 14 December 2025 was an act of antisemitic terrorism that caused profound fear and grief. The question this submission poses is not whether fear exists, but whether its institutional amplification serves the safety of Jewish Australians – or undermines it.
- 3.21 The existence of real antisemitic threats makes the institutional amplification of fear *more* harmful, not less. A community maintained in a generalised state of alarm is less able to accurately assess which threats are genuine. This submission does not seek to make factual findings about the Bondi attack beyond the public record and the Commission's own reports. It does, however, urge the Commission to distinguish carefully between antisemitic violence, extremist radicalisation, and lawful political advocacy concerning Israel-Palestine. Yet the architecture of fear documented in this submission directs communal attention and political energy overwhelmingly toward pro-Palestinian advocacy and criticism of Israel, while the actual sources of lethal antisemitic violence – far-right and religious extremism, online radicalisation, lone-actor terrorism – receive comparatively less institutional focus. The misdirection of threat assessment is itself a consequence of fear-maintenance.
- 3.22 The comparative evidence is instructive. Scheitle and colleagues' study examined fear of religious hate crime victimisation across Jewish, Muslim, Christian and other religious communities in the United States. The study found that both Jewish and Muslim adults reported significantly higher fear of religion-based victimisation than Christian adults, and that this elevated fear persisted even after controlling for past victimisation, knowledge of other victims, and religious visibility. The authors attribute this residual fear to 'the culture of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia within the United States and violence attributable to that culture, as well as the collective memory of historical religion-based victimization of Muslim and Jewish communities.'¹⁴
- 3.23 Notably, (referencing Figure 1) mean fear scores were higher among Muslim respondents (1.81) than among Jewish respondents (1.53), with both well above the Christian baseline (1.26). For present purposes, the study's key contribution is its empirical demonstration that fear can persist as a residual effect of collective memory and ambient cultural hostility, beyond what proximal predictors can explain. Comparative research on perceived threat across minority communities can assist the Commission to distinguish actual prevalence, perceived risk, institutional

¹³ Jonathan Judaken, 'So What's New? Rethinking the "New Antisemitism" in a Global Age,' *Patterns of Prejudice*, 42(4–5), Taylor & Francis, 2008, pp. 531–560.

¹⁴ Scheitle et al., *Fear of Religious...* (n 7), Abstract.

messaging and collective memory. The Commission should seek independent research that compares experiences of antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism, anti-Asian racism and anti-First Nations racism using consistent measures. If the Australian data show levels of fear within the Jewish community that materially exceed comparable groups facing comparable proximal threat, the Commission should consider whether institutional amplification is contributing to that disparity.

- 3.24 The implication for the Commission is significant: when evaluating evidence about the prevalence and severity of antisemitism in Australia, the Commission should be attentive to the distinction between the existence of antisemitism (which is real) and the institutional amplification of fear (which serves political purposes unrelated to safety). The academic literature summarised in this section provides the tools to make that distinction.

4 Institutional mechanisms of fear maintenance in Australia

Annual antisemitism reports

- 4.1 The ECAJ publishes an annual Report on Anti-Jewish Incidents in Australia, which serves as the primary statistical basis for public and political claims about antisemitism in this country.¹⁵ The methodology of these reports has been subjected to serious criticism for conflating legitimate political expression with antisemitic hatred – precisely the methodological confusion that the academic literature described in Section 3 predicts.
- 4.2 One analysis documented that the ECAJ report classified an anti-fascist rally chant – ‘Black, Indigenous, Arab, Asian and white – unite, unite, unite to fight the right!’ – under the category “Omitting Jews,” thereby construing opposition to neo-Nazism as an act of antisemitism.¹⁶ The same analysis noted that the report categorises pro-Palestinian slogans, use of the word “intifada,” and other commonplace political expressions as antisemitic incidents. The effect is to produce alarming headline statistics that serve both to maintain public and political anxiety and to conflate criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews. These are not isolated misclassifications. They are the predictable expression, at the methodological level, of the architecture of fear in operation.
- 4.3 The empirical data reveals a telling disjunction. The Gen17 Australian Jewish Community Survey found that 91 percent of respondents considered “combating anti-Semitism” to be “very” or “fairly” important to their sense of identity¹⁷ – yet the same survey’s authors concluded that antisemitism ‘does not impact in any significant way on the lives of most Australian Jews.’¹⁸ This gap between the centrality of antisemitism to communal identity and its limited impact on daily life is precisely the space that the institutional cultivation of fear – documented by Creese, Minkin and Novick – occupies and exploits.
- 4.4 The Australian Jews in the Shadows of War study (AJSW)¹⁹ found that concern about antisemitism was significantly higher after October 7, 2023, than in 2017. Bankier-Karp and Graham find that this concern *mediated* the relationship between social media use and anxiety²⁰ – suggesting that the amplification of antisemitism concerns through media (including communal media) is a significant driver of the fear experienced by Jewish Australians. This is consistent with Creese’s finding that

¹⁵ ECAJ Report on Anti-Jewish Incidents in Australia, various years. Available at: <https://www.ecaj.org.au>

¹⁶ Julie Nathan, *Report on Antisemitism in Australia: 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023*, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, November 2023, <https://www.ecaj.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/ECAJ-Antisemitism-Report-2023.pdf>, p 121.

¹⁷ Andrew Markus, Nicky Jacobs and Tanya Aronov, *Preliminary Findings: Gen17 Australian Jewish Community Survey*, Jewish Communal Appeal and Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University, 2018. 91% ‘combating anti-Semitism’ p 15.

¹⁸ ‘does not impact in any significant way on the lives of most Australian Jews’ in AJN, ‘Gen17 findings: Committed to Israel, unbowed by anti-Semitism,’ *Australian Jewish News*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/gen17-findings-committed-to-israel-unbowed-by-anti-semitism>.

¹⁹ *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* (AJSW), Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University. Project page: <https://www.monash.edu/arts/acjc/research-and-projects/current-projects/australian-jews-in-the-shadow-of-war-ajsw>.

²⁰ Bankier-Karp and Graham, *Surrounded by Darkness* (2024) (n 9).

communal organisations instrumentalise fear through the rhetoric used to discuss concerns.

- 4.5 Both the Gen17 survey and the AJSW study should be treated with methodological caution. The Gen17 survey was conducted by the Jewish Communal Appeal and Monash University's Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation – the former being a peak communal body with institutional commitments that may shape research design. Both studies relied on respondents recruited through Jewish communal networks (many self-selected), which will oversample those most engaged with communal institutions and most exposed to communal media. The AJSW questionnaire design primes threat-oriented responses by framing questions around antisemitism and security concerns. Neither study has been subject to independent methodological peer review of the kind standard in social science.²¹ The Commission should be aware that data collected by advocacy organisations with a political interest in the findings requires independent verification.

The role of communal media

- 4.6 The Australian Jewish News (AJN) functions as the primary internal media organ of organised pro-Israel Jewish communities in Australia. Research by Antony Loewenstein and others has documented how the AJN sustains a media environment in which the morality of Israeli actions was largely unquestioned and in which dissent on Israel is framed as disloyalty.²² The AJN has editorially suggested that Jewish organisations supporting boycotts of Israel were acting in ways 'so anathema to [communal] principles and so damaging to the Jewish State' as to warrant exclusion from communal life.²³
- 4.7 This aligns with Creese's finding that communal discourse about fear functions as a performative act which "produces, regulates and constrains" Jewish identities.²⁴ The communal media environment reinforces what Minkin identifies as the fear frame: the community is under siege, Israel is the guarantor of safety, and criticism of Israel threatens that safety. Lerman describes the effect as a community as almost presenting an image of itself as under siege while simultaneously failing to engage with the substance of the criticism directed at Israeli policies and actions.²⁵

²¹ Andrew Dean and Marc Mierowsky have done very useful, but not peer reviewed analysis, in *Ancient Hate, New Remedies*, Sydney Review of Books, <<https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essays/ancient-hate-new-remedies>> accessed 2 May 2026. For a full analysis refer to the JVOIS submission on Jewish survey methodologies.

²² Antony Loewenstein, *My Israel Question*, Melbourne University Publishing, 2006 (updated 2009).

²³ Australian Jewish News, editorial, c. August 2010, responding to the Australian Jewish Democratic Society's resolution to support boycotts. Reproduced in Loewenstein, A., 'Don't question uncritical love for Israel, says Aussie Zionist paper,' 23 August 2010 <<https://antonyloewenstein.com/dont-question-uncritical-love-for-israel-says-aussie-zionist-paper/>>, 23 August 2010.

²⁴ Creese (2022), as cited above. 'performative act which produces, regulates and constrains' p 5.

²⁵ Lerman (2022), as cited above.

Jewish education and youth movements as transmission mechanisms

- 4.8 The academic literature identifies Jewish education and youth movements as a further mechanism through which fear is transmitted across generations. Bar-Tal's research specifically identifies education as one of the societal mechanisms by which fear becomes a chronic collective orientation. Minkin documents how Jewish organisational spaces – including some religious schools, youth groups and educational programmes – cultivate the emotional disposition of vulnerability and the sense that Israel is the guarantor of Jewish safety. Novick traces how the Holocaust was progressively centred in Jewish educational curricula as a deliberate organisational choice designed to reinforce identification with Israel.
- 4.9 In the Australian context, the principal Zionist youth movements explicitly promote identification with the State of Israel as central to Jewish identity. These movements run school holiday camps, weekly programmes, and Israel study tours (including the March of the Living, which takes participants to Holocaust sites before proceeding to Israel) that embed the fear-and-identification frame described by Minkin: the Holocaust demonstrates perpetual Jewish vulnerability; Israel is the response to that vulnerability; and threats to Israel are threats to Jewish survival. The major Jewish day schools similarly integrate Holocaust education and Israel-focused programming throughout their curricula. The Commission should consider whether these educational programmes equip young Jewish Australians with the critical tools to distinguish genuine antisemitism from political disagreement, or whether they reinforce the architecture of fear by presenting an undifferentiated threat environment in which criticism of Israel is experienced as an existential danger.
- 4.10 The Gen17 survey found that 88 percent of respondents felt a sense of responsibility to ensure that the State of Israel continues to exist, with the youngest age group (18–29) self-identifying as Zionists at 75 percent – the highest rate of any age cohort.²⁶ These figures suggest that the fear-and-identification frame described by Minkin is being effectively transmitted through communal education and socialisation.

²⁶ Markus, Jacobs and Aronov, *Preliminary Findings: Gen17 Australian Jewish Community Survey*, (n 16). The 88% 'sense of responsibility to ensure that the State of Israel continues to exist' figure p 60 and the 75% Zionist self-identification rate among 18–29-year-olds p 61 (Figure 35).

5 Consequences: from maintained fear to the suppression of political speech

- 5.1 This section traces the mechanism by which maintained fear within Jewish communities is used to police internal dissent, is converted into the suppression of pro-Palestinian advocacy and, ultimately, the shielding of Israel from international accountability, including sanctions.

The policing of internal dissent

- 5.2 Other Jewish organisations have collected extensive testimony of Jewish Australians on social ostracism, harassment, doxxing and physical assault arising from their public dissent on Israel, and JVOIS members have contributed to that record
- 5.3 Jewish Australians who dissent from the communal line on Israel have reported being ostracised, branded as “self-hating Jews,” compared to Nazi collaborators - “Kapos”, or described as “traitors.”²⁷ This pattern has been documented in the experiences of members of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society, the Jewish Council of Australia, and JVOIS.²⁸
- 5.4 This submission provides the analytical account of why the policing happens. Lerman’s analysis explains this policing as a structural feature of the fear-maintenance architecture: Jews who do not accept the equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism ‘are singled out for special vilification’.²⁹ Creese observes the same dynamic in the Australian setting, finding that moderate fear serves to enforce communal behavioural norms. The lateral violence is not a malfunction of the architecture. It is the architecture working as designed. As established in JVOIS’s submission on the IHRA working definition (Defining Antisemitism), many Jewish Australians experience criticism of Zionism as a personal attack even when it is directed at state policies, because the relationship between Zionism and the lived experience of Palestinians remains largely unexamined within communal discourse.³⁰
- 5.5 ECAJ’s public guide invites community members to contact ECAJ about their submissions and, where appropriate, indicates that emails may be referred to the Jewish Centre for Law & Justice or Arnold Bloch Leibler.³¹ The Commission should consider whether this kind of centralised support may influence the range and framing of evidence presented by some communal networks.

²⁷ Loewenstein (2006), as cited above.

²⁸ Greenslade, L. and Briskman, L., *Not in Our Name: Jewish Australians Speak Out*, Research Report. <https://notinournameresearchreport.carrrd.co/>

²⁹ Lerman (2022), as cited above, 4, Introduction.

³⁰ JVOIS Defining antisemitism submission to the Royal Commission.

³¹ ECAJ, ‘Guide to making a submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion,’ March 2026. The guide invites community members to share their submissions with ECAJ and its lawyers, Arnold Bloch Leibler. <https://www.ecaj.org.au/guide-to-making-a-submission-to-the-royal-commission-on-antisemitism-and-social-cohesion/> under the drop-down “Make a submission” accessed 3 May 2026.

The IHRA working definition as the operational link

- 5.6 In the context of the fear-maintenance architecture described in Sections 3 and 4, the IHRA working definition functions as the operational tool that converts communal fear into institutional suppression. As JVOIS established in detail in its separate submission *Defining Antisemitism*, the definition is imprecise, and its illustrative examples conflate criticism of Israel with anti-Jewish racism.³² The IHRA working definition provides the classificatory basis on which accusations of antisemitism are levelled against critics of Israel, transforming the emotional disposition of fear into concrete acts of suppression.
- 5.7 The scholarly analysis supports this characterisation. Professor Neve Gordon (2024) has argued that the IHRA working definition operates on an affective level, interpolating people who identify as Jews to also identify with Israel and Zionism.³³ The lead drafter of the definition, Kenneth Stern, provides critical insider testimony: he has publicly stated that right-wing Jewish groups have “weaponised” the definition to suppress free speech on Israel, and warns that the perception of campuses aflame in antisemitic crisis is “simply not true” – a manufactured crisis that serves political ends while undermining genuine anti-racism efforts.^{34,35} The European Legal Support Centre (2023) documented that in the overwhelming majority of cases, allegations of antisemitism invoking the IHRA working definition were false, and that those targeted were disproportionately Palestinians, people of colour and Jewish advocates for Palestinian rights.³⁶ The full critique of the IHRA working definition is set out in JVOIS’s separate submission to the Commission.

Suppression in practice: the Australian record

- 5.8 The conversion of maintained fear into suppression has produced a documented record in Australia, examples in different domains include:
- 5.9 **Media:** Former ABC Middle East correspondent Sophie McNeill was subjected to a sustained campaign, including formal complaints to the ABC and the Australian Communications and Media Authority, following her reporting on Israel’s military actions. The campaign labelled her as antisemitic despite adherence to journalistic standards.³⁷
- 5.10 **Academia:** In 2021, a Jewish communal organisation complained about a single lecture on Palestinian history at the University of Melbourne led to changes in course

³² JVOIS Defining antisemitism submission to the Royal Commission.

³³ Neve Gordon, ‘Antisemitism and Zionism: The Internal Operations of the IHRA Definition,’ *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, Taylor & Francis, 2024, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2024, pp. 1–22.

³⁴ Deckers, J. and Coulter, J., ‘What Is Wrong with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Definition of Antisemitism?’ *Res Publica* 28: 733-752, 2022 (PMC 9092927). Stern’s testimony cited within: Kenneth Stern, prepared statement before the US House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary, ‘Examining Anti-Semitism on College Campuses,’ 7 November 2017. Discussion in Deckers and Coulter at pp. 740–743

³⁵ Kenneth S. Stern, *The Conflict Over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate*, University of Toronto Press, 2020, The ‘weaponised’ and ‘simply not true’ themes are developed throughout Chapters 4–6.

³⁶ European Legal Support Centre, *The Implementation of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism: An Overview of Recent Cases*, Amsterdam: ELSC, 2023.

³⁷ Blak and Black, ‘The Zionist Lobby’s Lawfare Against Journalists and Academics in Australia,’ 1 June 2025. <https://blakandblack.com/2025/06/01/the-zionist-lobbys-lawfare-against-journalists-and-academics-in-australia-a-threat-to-free-speech-and-democratic-discourse/>

content. In 2023, Jewish communal organisations condemned a University of Sydney lecture series featuring Palestinian scholars as “antisemitic.” The campaign to pressure universities to adopt the IHRA working definition has had mixed success; the ANU, University of Sydney and UNSW declined although through Universities Australia they did adopt a related and untested definition.^{38,39}

- 5.11 **Legal action:** In 2024, a Jewish communal organisation lodged a racial vilification complaint against journalist Mary Kostakidis following her criticism of Israel’s actions in Gaza, prompting her to temporarily limit her commentary.⁴⁰
- 5.12 **ASECA appointment:** The appointment of Jillian Segal – a former ECAJ president. Segal’s submission to the Senate inquiry argued that antisemitism was “embedded” in university culture. Segal has expressed a preference that Palestine solidarity marches are not allowed.⁴¹

The logic connecting fear to suppression

- 5.13 Each instance above follows the pattern theorised by Creese, Minkin and Lerman:
 - Jewish communal organisations maintain a heightened state of fear about antisemitism through the mechanisms documented in Section 4
 - political criticism of Israel is experienced, within that fearful state, as a threat to Jewish safety – a reaction that Minkin identifies as cultivated, not natural
 - the IHRA working definition provides the classificatory basis for labelling that criticism as antisemitism
 - the accusation is deployed through complaints, lawfare, media campaigns and political lobbying to suppress the criticism.
- 5.14 The net effect is that Israel is shielded from the kind of international pressure – including sanctions, boycotts and diplomatic consequences – that democratic societies routinely apply to states committing serious human rights abuses.

³⁸ Universities Australia, ‘Australian Universities Commitment to Action on Antisemitism,’ 2024. The commitment adopted a UA working definition of antisemitism rather than the IHRA working definition itself, but this definition has not been subject to independent academic analysis or legal scrutiny.

<https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/media-item/statement-on-racism/>

³⁹ Bayeh, J. and Riemer, N. ‘Palestine Solidarity and Zionist Backlash in Australian Universities,’ *Middle East Critique*, 33 (3), 2024, pp 411–432.

⁴⁰ Blak and Black, ‘Zionism and the Suppression of Dissent in Australia,’ 23 May 2025, <https://blakandblack.com/2025/05/23/zionism-and-the-suppression-of-dissent-in-australia/>

⁴¹ Sammak, T., Overland, ‘Blaming Palestine solidarity for the Bondi massacre helps, not curbs, antisemitism,’ December 2025, <https://overland.org.au/2025/12/blaming-palestine-solidarity-for-the-bondi-massacre-helps-not-curbs-antisemitism/>

6 Implications for social cohesion

- 6.1 This section relates to the recommendations.
- 6.2 The Royal Commission's terms of reference extend to "strengthening social cohesion in Australia." The institutional cultivation of fear within the Jewish community, and the deployment of antisemitism accusations to suppress pro-Palestinian advocacy, are themselves significant threats to social cohesion. They alienate Palestinian, Arab and Muslim Australians by delegitimising their political expression. They alienate Jewish Australians who dissent from the pro-Israel line taken by some communal organisations. And they distort public discourse by making honest debate about the Israel-Palestine conflict – a matter of profound concern to millions of Australians – effectively taboo.
- 6.3 Moreover, the inflation of antisemitism statistics and the broadening of the definition to encompass political criticism risk undermining the capacity of the broader public to recognise and respond to genuine antisemitism. As Klug argues, if the category of antisemitism is stretched to encompass all hostility to Israel, the concept loses its distinctive analytical force.⁴² This is directly relevant to the Commission's mandate: effective responses to antisemitism require accurate data and clear definitions, both of which are compromised by the fear-maintenance architecture documented in this submission.
- 6.4 The social psychology literature provides a further dimension. The landmark meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), encompassing 515 studies and over 250,000 participants, established that meaningful intergroup contact is the most effective mechanism for reducing prejudice.⁴³ The fear-maintenance architecture works directly against this: a community maintained in a state of perceived siege is less likely to form the cross-community bonds that the evidence shows reduce prejudice most effectively. When Jewish Australians are taught that criticism of Israel equates to antisemitism, and that engagement with pro-Palestinian Australians is engagement with hostility, the conditions for meaningful intergroup contact are undermined. The architecture of fear thus impedes the very mechanism – cross-community relationship-building – that would most effectively reduce the antisemitism it claims to address.
- 6.5 The mental health cost to Jewish Australians is a further consequence the Commission should consider. The AJSW study's own finding – that concern about antisemitism *mediated* the relationship between social media use and anxiety – indicates that the amplification of fear through communal media is producing measurable psychological harm within the community the fear-maintenance architecture claims to protect. If communal organisations are cultivating disproportionate fear, and that fear is generating anxiety, hypervigilance and social withdrawal, then the architecture of fear is not merely politically harmful but is actively damaging Jewish wellbeing. The Commission should consider this when evaluating the institutional practices documented in this submission.

⁴² Klug (2013), as cited above, pp 480–481.

⁴³ Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, 'A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 90, No. 5, 2006, pp. 751–783, 766.

- 6.6 In the opening hearing, Commissioner Bell stated: “I should note that it is uncontroversial that criticism of the policies that may be pursued by the government of Israel from time to time is not, of itself, antisemitic.”⁴⁴ This submission respectfully contends that the Commissioner’s sound position is actively undermined by the institutional practices documented here, which systematically blur the line between antisemitism and political criticism in order to maintain fear and suppress dissent.
- 6.7 Social cohesion is not served by the suppression of political speech. It is served by creating the conditions in which all Australians – including Jewish Australians, Palestinian Australians and those who advocate for both communities – can participate freely in democratic discourse. The fear-maintenance architecture documented in this submission works against that goal.

How the Commission should handle the data problem

- 6.8 The annual antisemitism reports are likely to be the primary statistical evidence before the Commission on the prevalence and nature of antisemitism in Australia. Given the methodological concerns documented in Section 3, the Commission should not treat these reports as authoritative without independent verification. Specifically, the Commission should: disaggregate the data to separate incidents involving physical violence or direct threats to safety from incidents involving political expression about Israel-Palestine; assess the proportion of each category; compare the methodology and findings with those of independent researchers; and commission its own independent, methodologically rigorous research into the actual prevalence and nature of antisemitism in Australia. Only with such disaggregation can the Commission accurately assess the threat environment and make recommendations that address genuine antisemitism rather than political disagreement.

ENDS

⁴⁴ Royal Commission Opening Hearing, lines 38–43. Opening Hearing Transcript, Sydney, 24 February 2026.