



# SUMMARY VICTORIAN **ANTISEMITISM REPORT – JUNE 2023**

We do not make any representation that people or organisations named in this Report are or are not antisemitic.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This is a summary of the full report which we encourage you to read in its entirety.**

78 years after the Holocaust ended, antisemitism remains prevalent across Victoria and Australia, spearheaded by racial and political ideologies on the right and left. Hate incidents against Jews are being perpetrated across the community, on the street, in schools, on sports grounds, and at university. Concerningly, the number of in-person antisemitic incidents, as well as incidents in Jewish suburbs has increased. The language used by some local protest movements has also veered into antisemitism, where legitimate political grievances are infused with conspiracy theories and extremist rhetoric.

This report examines the key incidents, trends and ideologies driving the growth in antisemitism, which is becoming more threatening and visible, and also reviews the key far-left and far-right groups operating in Victoria, the impact of Covid-19 on these organisations and their leaders in Victoria and nationally. Finally, the report describes, in general terms, the state of rising antisemitism globally to provide the direction in which Australian and Victorian antisemitism may be heading.



## WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM?

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) provides a comprehensive definition of antisemitism that was adopted by the Australian Government in October 2021 and the Victorian Government in May 2022.

This definition reads:

*Antisemitism is a perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*

*Manifestations might include the targeting of the State of Israel, perceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country or of its policies (actual vs constructed or misrepresented) cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.*

Antisemitism can take the form of vilification or discrimination and occurs on- and offline. Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries. Through social media platforms, individuals who hold antisemitic views can conceal their identities and gain rapid visibility for the antisemitic theories they propagate, which include conspiracy theories, incitements of violence against Jews, refutation, and manipulation of the Holocaust, as well as the so-called "new antisemitism," which targets Israel.

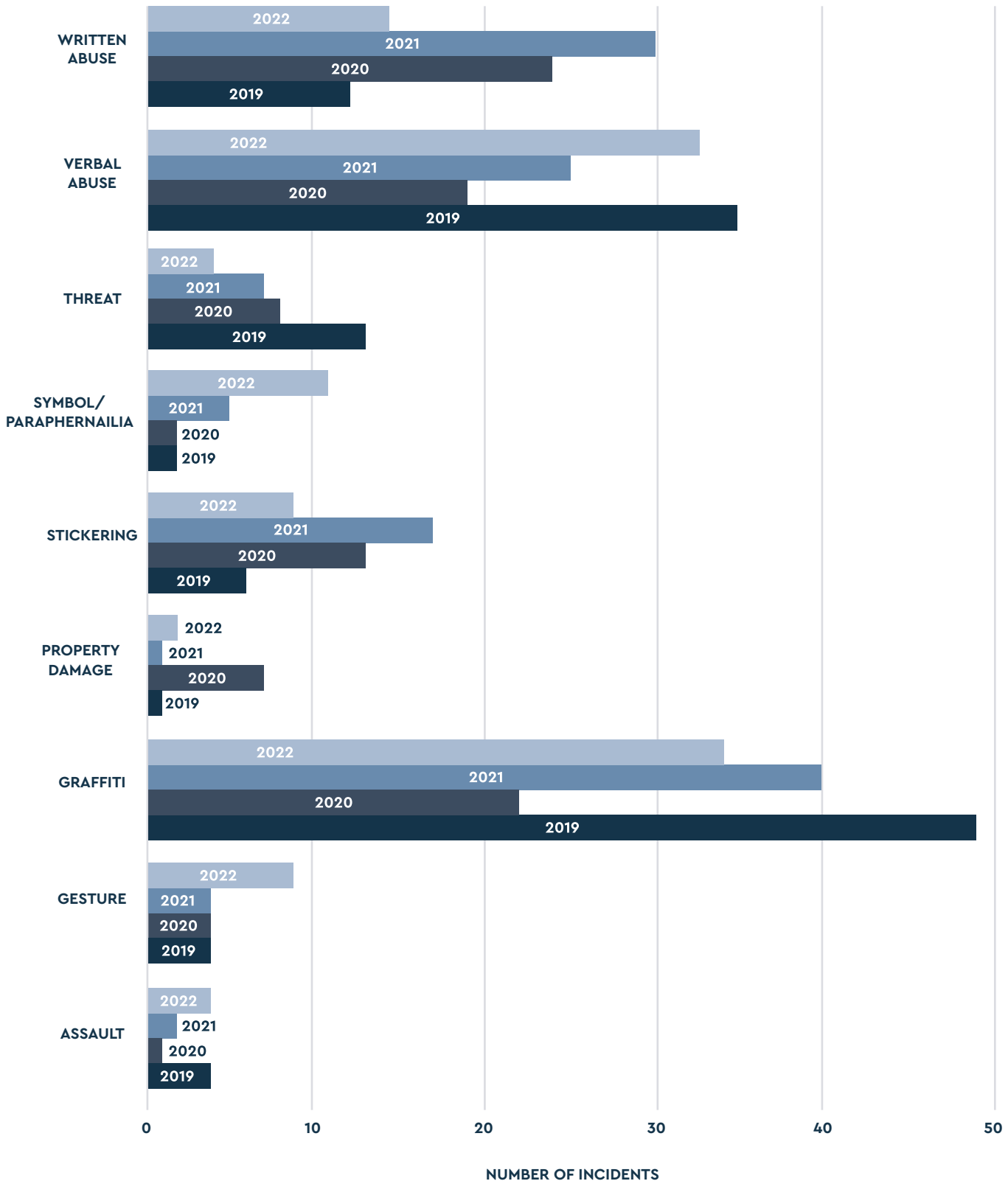
Online antisemitism is particularly dangerous as it reaches large and diverse audiences instantly, making it an effective method to disseminate hateful and manipulated disinformation, and it is difficult to monitor and regulate.

# ANTISEMITISM IN VICTORIA

The graph and table below contain reported antisemitic incidents in Victoria by category from 2019–2022. These incidents have been reported to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry or the Community Security Group by Jewish Victorians. It is anticipated that these reports reflect just a fraction of the total antisemitic incidents that have taken place in the community.

The term “identifiably Jewish” refers to someone wearing traditional Jewish garb, such as a kippah/yarmulke (skull-cap) in the case of a male, the Jewish Star of David necklace, and the like.

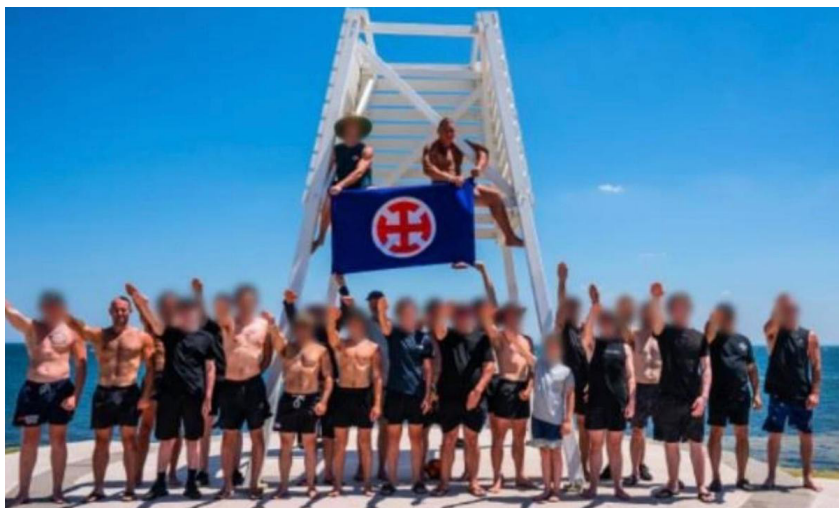
The graph contains data and statistics of the number and type of incidents during 2019–2022.



The second table below contains specific examples of antisemitic incidents during the period 2020–2023.

CATEGORY	DATE	LOCATION	INCIDENT
Stickers, Posters, Placards, Banners, Leaflets Etc	October-December 2020	Ashwood/Burwood	National Socialist Network (NSN) stickers ('Join NSN', 'Australia for the White Man', 'White Revolution is the Only Solution', 'National Socialism Now') were stuck in multiple places, including along Gardiners Creek Trail, near a Jewish school, on several council signposts, at a Woolworths carpark, Ashwood Reserve, and elsewhere
Postal Mail	14 April 2021	Not Applicable	A letter from "Global Citizens [sic] Workers (Global Citizens)" was sent to a Jewish organisation in Caulfield. Inside the envelope was a newspaper article focusing on Victoria's Rich List and a prominent member of the Jewish community, whose picture was defaced with the word "Jew" and a dollar sign on his face. On the side of the article was written, "Your corrupt money system allows you to live an obscene parasite life-style. It must be abolished now."
Graffiti	26 Aug. 2021	St Kilda	Graffiti stating "Jews Do Your Children Feel Safe Or Do U Sodom'z Molest... And Abuse... Them... Like Insane... Lying... Criminals..." was sprayed on the wall at a tram stop in St Kilda by a male who then sat and verbally abused Jews who walked by
Graffiti	23 Sep. 2021	Richmond	Graffiti of "NO JEW JAB FOR OZ" and "NO JEW JAB" was left in Richmond
Abuse, Harassment, Intimidation Or Threats Of Violence	3 Dec. 2021	Mount Martha	Verbal abuse of boys in an identifiably Jewish Venturer Scouts group by boys in another Venturer Scouts group (aged 15-17) through a series of antisemitic comments, including "Go gas yourselves" and "Hitler is my dad", at a Boys Scout Camp in Mount Martha
Stickers, Posters, Placards, Banners, Leaflets Etc	21 April 2022	Mount Evelyn	Swastikas were carved into the turf at Mount Evelyn in Melbourne's outer east – they were spotted by a Jewish man during a helicopter flight but can be seen from the ground too
Abuse, Harassment, Intimidation Or Threats Of Violence	23 May 2022	St Kilda	A Glen Eira College student yelled "Heil Hitler!" at students from a Jewish school during an inter-school sport competition, Heatherton, Melbourne.
Vandalism	Nov. 2022	South Yarra	A cross was etched into the door of a home with a Jewish resident. The door had a mezuzah on it, identifying the resident as Jewish
Abuse, Harassment, Intimidation Or Threats Of Violence	Jan 2023	Elwood	25 males gathered at Elwood's Ormond Point lookout, in which the European Australia Movement flag was hoisted followed by the Nazi salute

In some categories, there is a spike in 2021 incidents as a result of the conflict with Hamas in May 2021.



# IMPACT OF AND TRENDS ARISING SINCE COVID 19

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in Australia in early 2020, has produced its own forms of antisemitism in Victoria and elsewhere. In its latest report in early 2023, ASIO maintained that violent extremism remains a persistent and resilient threat, constantly adapting and evolving, and is an endlessly demanding problem. However, ASIO chief Mike Burgess did acknowledge that the threat from right-wing extremist groups had receded since Covid restrictions were removed. Nevertheless, antisemites latched onto the pandemic, using it as part of their arsenal of false charges against Jews. Much of this was documented and exposed in an extensive article published in May 2020: *Covid-19 and the plague of online antisemitism*. The claims, posted on extremist sites, said that Covid-19 was created by Jews, spread by Jews, part of a Jewish plot to control the world, was a Jewish hoax, a Jewish money-making scam, that Jews are receiving divine punishment, and also mocked the Holocaust and expressed joy at Jewish deaths.

As the pandemic went on, Covid-related antisemitism became much more public and mainstream, rather than remaining on extremist websites (where it remains prolific). It was spread by politicians, street protesters, anti-vaxxers and others. Only antisemitism expressed on mainstream sites, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, is included in this section.

There were two particular incidents where small groups of Jews in Melbourne held gatherings in breach of Covid regulations. These resulted in media publicity and elicited numerous antisemitic comments online. These breaches were loudly condemned by Jewish leaders and most of the Jewish community, but nevertheless led to a significant rise in aggressive antisemitic activity in Melbourne.

Conversely, a peculiar trend developed whereby Covid deniers and those opposed to government health measures, such as vaccinations and lockdowns, appropriated the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis in the 1940s as a protest against government regulations. While this practice is not necessarily done with intentional hostility toward Jews, it is highly offensive as it minimises and trivialises the Holocaust.

## MELBOURNE ENGAGEMENT PARTY BY ORTHODOX JEWS IN BREACH OF COVID REGULATIONS

Following an engagement party held by Orthodox Jews in a private St Kilda house on 11 August 2021, attended by 69 people, media coverage on 16 August elicited antisemitic comments online. Some examples are:

Doreen Bonello, a clinical assistant at The Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH), posted a comment on a Facebook group which led to her dismissal from the RMH. Bonello wrote, "Put\_them\_in\_a\_gas\_chamber." Her dismissal became a media story and elicited further antisemitic comments online.

- o **Channel 7 News: pixelation:**
  - **Channel 7 News posted an article titled "Royal Melbourne Hospital worker sacked after anti-Semitic 'gas chamber' comment about**

**partygoers". There was a stark difference in coverage of the engagement party people and Bonello.**

- **In the article, the photo of Bonello and her name were pixelated, and only her comment – "Put them in a gas chamber" – was not pixelated. In contrast, the article published three photos, each showing the faces of many who attended the party. The faces were clearly visible and identifiable.**
- **Channel 7 protected the identity of the person calling for the gassing of Jews, via pixelation, and revealed the faces of the Jews who were targeted with this threat.**

### Twitter comments

- **Hi I'm Fox@Fox95165518 · Aug 16, 2021**
  - o **Why doesn't our federal government just ask Germany if we can borrow Auschwitz for a bit. I'll gladly dress up in an SS uniform and toss these fucking idiots into the oven. Lock down fucking sucks.**

## ROSH HASHANAH SYNAGOGUE SERVICE IN MELBOURNE IN BREACH OF COVID REGULATIONS

The Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) began on the evening of 6 September 2021. With lockdown in place in Melbourne and elsewhere, places of worship, including synagogues, were closed. In breach of the regulations, a small group of ultra-Orthodox Jews held services in a Ripponlea synagogue. Police were called and surrounded the venue.

The Age ran several stories on the matter and posted them on Facebook. In at least four posts, The Age "limited who can comment on this post", meaning that no comments could be made at all, and thus avoided having antisemitic comments on its posts. However, The Age did open one post to comments:

<sup>1</sup> <https://theconversation.com/covid-wasnt-a-bumper-campaign-for-right-wing-extremists-but-the-threat-from-terror-remains-199964>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jwire.com.au/covid-19-and-the-plague-of-online-antisemitism/>.

**Twitter comments –**

- **Kharlos Rino Jobbitt:** They cry for freedom all the time how about the palestinians on the west bank ?
- **Elle Palma:** Typical behaviour from this lot of people putting others in danger. Feeling entitled and exempt!!!
- **Ian Pennington:** These so called non Australians are the biggest problem,
- **In response to an Opinion piece in The Herald Sun on 8**

**September 2021 "Ultra-Orthodox worshippers showed an appalling disregard for public health with a gathering far more dangerous than Nadia Bartel's nonsense", were these Twitter posts:**

- o **Craig Kennedy:** take it from Ripponlea / Balaclava locals... theyre about to get smacked up the side of the head. We have had enough of them
- o **Michael Mdn:** Good Luck getting them to pay the fines.
- o **Al Kades:** tax deductions!!

## UNIVERSITY INCIDENTS:

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE FAR-LEFT

**There are concerning patterns of antisemitism at university campuses around the world, often disguised as support for Palestinians and/or criticism of Israel. The University of Melbourne saw similar instances in 2022. On 29 April the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) passed a resolution endorsing the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.**

The impact of the campaign for, and effects since, the passing of anti-Israel motions have been profound. Threats and intimidation of Victorian university students (eg. **"Fuck Zionism" graffiti**) and the reluctance of some Jewish and Israeli students to reveal their real identity out of fear of false accusations of racism are just some of the results of student organisations passing BDS motions.

In response, Zionist Federation of Australia president Jeremy Leibler said that Zionism is Jewish self-determination and a central component of modern Jewish identity. "This motion denies to Jews – and only to Jews – the right to self-determination. It is intrinsically antisemitic. It is difficult to imagine the impact that this antisemitic resolution will have on the wellbeing and safety of Jewish students on campus. It seems that the student union has great regard for all minorities on campus other than the Jewish students".

After a second BDS resolution was passed in August 2022, Jewish organisations accused the UMSU of targeting Jewish students and wrongly accusing the Jewish state of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. They further noted that Jewish students in Victoria have, in some instances, been excluded from supporting progressive causes unless they denounce their support for Zionism and Israel, and others have also been targets of "death threats and a planned stabbing".

The Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) said, "Jewish students are determined to fight against this insidious form of racism and fight back against anyone who is making Jewish students feel unsafe on Australian university campuses with every legal means at our disposal".

When student representatives deny the Jewish connection to Israel, they deny Jewish students the right to their own identity. When they promote hatred of Israel, they are telling Jewish students and faculty that they don't belong on campus unless

they forego their own identity. This has real-world implications, with Jewish students facing intimidation and threats as a result.

One Jewish student at the university, who wanted to remain anonymous due to fear of being "targeted", said he no longer felt safe on campus and tried to hide his Jewish identity due to UMSU's actions. With posters such as "Why we should oppose the Israeli apartheid" plastered around campus, the student said he was ashamed of being Jewish and Israeli at university. The student, who said he was hesitant to say his own name while in class out of fear that his peers would realise he was Israeli, claimed UMSU was not representative of many students.

### VICTORIA – THE FAR- RIGHT

The Antipodean Resistance was formed in late 2016, a neo-Nazi group with a flag that featured a swastika. The group promoted hatred and violence through anti-Jewish posters including one that called for the legalisation of the killing of Jews. This transformed into the Lads Society in 2018. It had club houses in Sydney and Melbourne, its members began performing Nazi salutes.

In 2020, the National Socialist Network (NSN) was formed, and is now referred to as the European Australia Movement (EAM). Sewell was one of the organisers of a January 2021 group trip to the Grampians, which was reported on by local news outlets. An undercover reporter filmed parts of the trip, including members performing Nazi salutes, engaging in antisemitic and racist behaviour and discussions. Before being allowed to join the trip, the undercover infiltrator had to demonstrate to NSN members that he was an antisemite.

There have been numerous incidents carried out by these groups or people supporting or inspired by them. These include:

- National Socialist Network (NSN) stickers ('Join NSN',

'Australia for the White Man', 'White Revolution is the Only Solution', 'National Socialism Now') were stuck in multiple places, including along Gardiners Creek Trail, near a Jewish school, on several council signposts, at Woolworths carpark, Ashwood Reserve, and elsewhere, in the Melbourne suburbs of Ashwood and Burwood (throughout October – December 2020).

- Increasingly brazen presence of neo-Nazi affiliated individuals distributing antisemitic posters, stickers, and graffiti in suburbs with large Jewish populations, such as Caulfield and Balaclava.
- A gathering of 25 males at Elwood's Point Ormond Lookout on January 17, 2023, in which a neo-Nazi flag was hoisted, accompanied by the Nazi salute.



- On Saturday, 18 March 2023, Neo-Nazis gate-crashed an anti-transgender rally on the steps of the Victorian Parliament where some members performed the Nazi salute. In response the Victorian Labour Government and the federal Coalition proposed a ban of the Nazi symbol but it remains to be seen whether such a move would have any meaningful impact fighting the hateful ideology, as The Age reported in late March 2023 that early evidence suggests that the criminalisation of the public display of the Swastika in December 2022 may have led an increase in the public display of Nazism.



## VICTORIAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK – ANALYSIS OF LEGAL MEANS AVAILABLE TO FIGHT ANTISEMITISM:

**The most commonly used legal instrument for the prevention and punishment of antisemitism in Victoria is currently the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of 2001 (RRTA) (Vic), which came into effect in January 2002. This Act is an essential element of Victoria's human rights framework, alongside the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (EOA) (Vic) and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) (the Charter).**

The object of the RRTA is stated as being to promote the full and equal participation of every person in a society which values the freedom of expression, and which is an open and multicultural democracy. In essence, the RRTA was intended to promote harmony and multiculturalism in Victoria.

It appears that the law, which was intended to be the solution to increasing racial and religious vilification in Victoria, lacks teeth.



# AUSTRALIAN ANTISEMITISM RECENT HISTORY

## YOM KIPPUR INCIDENT – SYDNEY, SEPTEMBER 2021

**Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish year and in 2021, it occurred on 16 September. The NSW Government provided an exemption for members of the Jewish community to pray at specific outdoor locations in Sydney. Attendees had to comply with strict regulations including being doubly vaccinated, remaining within 5km of their own LGA, wear masks, social distancing, and the like. Police were present to ensure compliance.**

The Daily Mail ran an article titled "Jewish community in ultra-elite harbourside suburb in Sydney's east is given an exemption to gather in a park to celebrate Yom Kippur during lockdown". This article was posted on a Facebook group, 'Western Sydney starter packs', and elicited many antisemitic comments. It is well known that Sydney's eastern suburbs have a high proportion of Jewish residents. It is to be noted that western Sydney at this time had many Covid cases and was under stricter lockdown regulations than other areas of Sydney. The article elicited traffic on Twitter, such as:

- **Jaye Cochrane: Disgusting arrest them all**
- **Wendy Mulligan: Send them all back to where they come from**
- **Asher Cooper: did they pay off local council or government?**

A trend has developed whereby Covid deniers and those opposed to government health measures, such as vaccinations and lockdowns, have appropriated the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Under Nazi Germany, the star was meant to further isolate Jews, speed up deportations, and deter the public from interfering. Sociologists call this kind of behaviour by anti-vaxxers "secondary antisemitism" – a hatred of Jews not despite the Holocaust, but because of it.



# SPEARHEADING THE RISE OF ANTISEMITISM

The National Socialist Network is now our nation's most prominent neo-Nazi group; it includes former members of Reclaim Australia, the Lads Society and Antipodean Resistance.

Other groups include the Proud Boys, Binary Australia, True Blue Crew and Australia First, as well as some lesser-known white supremacist groups, such as the Australian Natives Association, SA Mens Health Club and White Wellbeing Australia.

## RECENT STATISTICS

During the twelve-month period from 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022, there were 478 antisemitic incidents logged across Australia by volunteer Community Security Groups (CSGs), official Jewish state roof bodies and the ECAJ, a 6.9% increase over the 447 incidents recorded in the previous 12-month period to 30 September 2021, which itself accounted for a significant 35% increase above the number reported for the 12-months ended 30 September 2020. The average number of reported antisemitic incidents each year from 2013 to 2020 was 298.

The categories of incidents that saw the greatest increases were the use of posters/stickers/flags/clothing (up 70% following a much steeper rise of over 150% from the previous 12-month period) and graffiti (up almost 20% after a sharp rise from the previous 12-month period), both emerging during and after the numerous street protests and anti-lockdown and anti-vax activities prevalent in Melbourne, which also led to numerous anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, in addition to an uptick in far-right and increasingly brazen neo-Nazi propaganda activities online and predominantly in the eastern states.

The number of physical assaults was down from 8 to 5 (following a year where there was no change) as was antisemitic messaging; verbal abuse was slightly down (from 147 to 138 incidents), whilst vandalism was up from 10 to 11 incidents. The emerging trend of verbal abuse of Jewish students at public and private schools and lack of affirmative action by school administrations has continued; abuse/harassment (up 14% from 128 in 2020 to 147 in 2021). There were minimal decreases in the number of incidents of postal and telephone threats and a larger decrease in the number of email threats.

**Hizb ut'Tahrir**, an extremist Muslim group, organised an anti-Israel protest in Lakemba, Sydney, in May 2021 during the armed conflict with Hamas in Gaza, where several speakers chanted slogans vilifying and calling for violence against Jews. These included: "Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews! The army of Muhammad will return!", "Destroy the Jews!", "Oh Allah, give us the necks of the Jews!", "Oh Allah, give us the necks of those evildoers!", and "Oh Allah, help us purify the Al-Aqsa Mosque from their filth!".

On the right, the NSN remains a source of concern, as the ECAJ has reported for some years, and its threat level is rising. It is active in recruiting, group bonding activities, and sharing propaganda. Its leadership and other prominent members have been vocally vilified Jews online, citing the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' (an entirely fabricated document from the early

20th century), espousing support for Hitler, and the like. Like Antipodean Resistance before it, NSN's long-term goal is one of developing a vanguard with which to eventually take power and institute a regime of National Socialism in Australia.\

Places of worship, schools, communal organisations, and community centres of the Jewish community need, for security reasons, to operate under the protection of high fences, armed guards, metal detectors, CCTV cameras and the like. This necessity is recognised by Australia's law enforcement agencies, and arises from the entrenched and rising threat of antisemitism in Western and Middle Eastern cultures, which have resulted in a high rate of physical attacks against Jews and Jewish communal buildings in those places over the last three decades.



A swastika on a tram stop on Hawthorn Rd Caulfield, just up from the Beth Weizmann Community Centre. Photo: Peter Haskin

## CONCLUSION

Incidents of antisemitism in Australia, and particularly Victoria, were always present but relatively low compared to incidents in North America and Europe. While antisemitism is a greater problem in the abovementioned places, both the severity and scope of antisemitic incidents is rising in Victoria, with threats stemming from both extreme right-wing groups on the one hand, and far-left groups, including those associated with Palestinian and BDS causes. This report provides the data and analysis of events taking place on university grounds, at schools, and in the community at large.

The authors of this report appreciate initiatives undertaken by the Victorian Government to combat the rise in extremism and antisemitism through the introduction of legislation to address shortcomings in the current legal framework for protecting targets of vilification. This report encourages both the government and law enforcement agencies to do more, and to implement recommendations from the inquiry into vilification in areas where the law remains inadequate to protect the vulnerable.



**COMMUNITY  
SECURITY GROUP**  
VICTORIA