

Sharp rise in anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian violence in Australia

Oscar Grenfell
17 March 2025

A report released by the Islamophobia Register last week recorded the highest levels of anti-Muslim racism in Australia since the organisation began operations a decade ago. The findings, which have received minimal media coverage, are a significant exposure of the political and media establishment.

Since the Israeli genocide in Gaza began in October 2023, governments and the press have aggressively vilified mass opposition. That has centred on the lie that hostility to, and criticism of, the Zionist war crimes, and Australia's complicity in them, constitutes antisemitism.

Defenders of the Palestinians have been presented as stooges of Hamas and demented Islamists. Meanwhile, Zionist supporters of the atrocities have been depicted as victims of a supposedly unprecedented wave of antisemitism, conflated entirely with opposition to the genocide. That line has facilitated and stoked anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian attacks, while being used to crackdown on the civil liberties of the entire population.

The latest report is based on data from the beginning of 2023, until the end of November 2024. It thus directly covers a substantial portion of the Israeli genocide. The Islamophobia accompanying the onslaught on Gaza has built on the promotion of anti-Muslim racism by the ruling elite for more than 20 years, in the course of the bogus “war on terror.”

In the reporting period, there were 309 instances of in-person Islamophobia. That compared with an average of 123 in all comparative periods since 2014. Online instances of abuse skyrocketed to 366, compared with 415 in the entire period between 2014 and 2021.

The authors of the report emphasised that they employed a rigorous verification procedure for each documented instance. This, combined with the fact that the data is based on self-reports by victims of Islamophobia, means, they write, that the reported level of such racism is likely a “substantial underestimation” of the truth.

In their introduction, the authors noted: “This surge in reported incidents of Islamophobia—which included physical

assaults that caused hospitalisations, a genuine bomb being left at a home, an arson attack, graffiti attacks calling for the killing of Muslims, vandalism, hate mail, Muslim women having their hijabs pulled off and being spat on, school children being targeted, and hundreds of instances of Islamophobic abuse and threat—happened over a backdrop of dangerous rhetoric by some Australian politicians that argued Islamophobia was fictitious or that it was not an issue.”

That has been the line of senior members of the Liberal-National Coalition, who have combined anti-Muslim dogwhistling, with a bogus concern over antisemitism, which they have used to develop close ties to far-right Zionists.

Labor, while occasionally referencing Islamophobia as an afterthought, has spearheaded the demonisation of the pro-Palestinian movement, and has adapted to the line of the Coalition as well as the Murdoch press. That has included claims that those opposing the Israeli war crimes are seeking to “reproduce” Middle Eastern conflicts in “the Australian community,” and warnings against Islamic “segregation,” in the context of political organising around Gaza.

All of this played a major role in the spike in Islamophobia. A section of the report on the relationship between anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism described the beginning of the Israeli genocide as a “spark event” for a substantial increase of Islamophobia, comparable to such things as the 2019 Christchurch massacre, when Australian fascist Brenton Tarrant massacred 51 people in New Zealand mosques.

In the three weeks following the Hamas military operation of October 7, 2023, there was a 1,300 percent surge in reports to the Islamophobia register.

The report's authors noted a conflation, in official discourse, between Islam and the defence of the Palestinians.

“[T]he media often demonises or reduces the Palestinians' activism against the Israeli occupation, framing Palestinian nationalism and global support only as an Islamic struggle.

This framing has contributed to the Islamisation of the Palestinian cause.” In a number of instances documented in the report, racist perpetrators directly identified their hatred of the Palestinians with their hatred of Muslims.

For the past 18 months, protests opposing the genocide have been presented by the powers that be as a threat to “social cohesion.” Zionists have ludicrously claimed that the peaceful protests, involving many anti-Zionist Jewish activists, make Jews feel “unsafe.” Governments, primarily Labor, have sought to shut the demonstrations down, through police attacks, court actions and the passage of draconian “hate speech” and anti-protest laws.

The report underscores the fact that the official narrative about the rallies is an inversion of reality. In fact, the protests and their environs have been a significant site of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim bigotry, with Zionists and far-right individuals directing racist comments towards participants.

The authors stated: “Reported incidents at pro-Palestinian protests constituted 8% of the total reported incidents in 2023, all occurring after October 7. In 2024, incidents at pro-Palestinian protests slightly exceeded 5% of the total, while those reported at pro-Palestinian university encampments made up 8%. Additionally, incidents involving victims displaying pro-Palestinian symbols accounted for 8% of total incidents in 2023 and rose to one quarter of all reported incidents (25%) in 2024.”

The report cited several examples. In one, a victim noted, “Our group of mothers with babies were gathered on the steps of Parliament and were doing a silent demonstration/protest calling for a ceasefire. An Israeli supporter came 2 hours after we set up and started to intimidate us, saying we were standing in his space.” The man physically assaulted the women, pushing them, declared that all Palestinians were terrorists, and that they deserved to be “slaughtered.”

Other incidents, not related to the protests, including a group of people wearing Keffiyehs being beaten by a drunk man, who used anti-Muslim slurs, and the placement of a bomb on the car of a family which flew the Palestinian flag in their front yard. It was later found that the perpetrator was a Zionist activist. He was not charged with terrorism, but was convicted of relatively minor criminal offences and given a short custodial sentence.

The stoking of anti-Palestinian racism has fed into broader Islamophobia. Many of those incidents, not directly related to the genocide, are shocking for their brazen violence. There are repeated examples of women wearing the Hijab being assaulted, including seriously, by persons unknown to them. More than two-thirds of the in-person incidents documented in the report were committed against women.

It is a coincidence, but the timing of the report was highly revealing. It was released shortly after the Australian Federal Police and the New South Wales Police confirmed that a spate of “antisemitic attacks” in Sydney, between November and January, had been a hoax. Those incidents, including the placement of explosives in an unattended caravan, and crude anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish graffiti, sometimes combined with arson, had been perpetrated by a criminal group, who were seeking to advance their own illegal activities.

As the WSWs has noted, many questions remain unanswered. The hoax attacks were used by the Israeli regime as well as the federal Labor and NSW Labor administrations to push “hate speech” laws, which could criminalise strident condemnations of Zionism. Such legislation was rushed through the federal and NSW parliaments in February, shortly before the “attacks,” used to legitimise them, were exposed as bogus.

The governments and agencies that utilised the phoney attacks would be prime suspects in any genuinely objective and politically informed investigation of the incidents—if not in the sense of direct perpetration, then potentially in having allowed the attacks to continue after the perpetrators were known.

In any event, it is striking that the hoax attacks were given infinitely more attention, by politicians and the media, than the actual acts of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian racism, meticulously documented in the Islamophobia Register’s report.

The report exposes the sham of all of the nonsense spouted by politicians about the need for “social cohesion” and “lowering the temperature” of discourse. To justify their support for some of the worst war crimes since the Holocaust, they have whipped up a hothouse atmosphere and deliberately incited racism and division.

The struggle against all forms of xenophobia can only be taken forward in a fight against the entire political establishment. It means the struggle to unite the entire working class, regardless of race, religion or gender, in a common movement against war, exploitation, authoritarianism and their source: the capitalist system.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact