



# THE BONDI ATTACK AND ITS AFTERMATH

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It was Dr Gary North (1942-2022) who commented that,

The power elite expects to maintain power by means of social control. Jesus talked about this from the beginning. He said that the leadership of the church should not be modelled after the leadership of nations. It should be based on service, not on power. The elite bases its control in terms of power, and it only gives lip service to the principle of service. We hear the language of public service, but it really means public control.<sup>1</sup>

These observations are clearly relevant to the political climate now facing Australia. In times of national crisis, citizens rightly expect governments to demonstrate moral clarity, courage, and competence. Yet history repeatedly shows that crises often become opportunities for political elites to expand authority rather than address root causes. The tension between genuine service and political control is not merely theoretical, it shapes legislative priorities, policing responses, and public confidence in institutions.

The Jewish community and the Australian population are still shocked by the events at Bondi in December 2025. How is it that such a shooting could take place? What errors were made leading up to this disaster? These questions are not merely emotional reactions to

tragedy; they are essential inquiries into governance, accountability, and the role of the state in protecting citizens.

National trauma often exposes institutional weaknesses that might otherwise remain hidden. When violence occurs on such a public and shocking scale, the public naturally assumes that failures of prevention, intelligence, or response must have occurred. Trust in authorities depends heavily on whether governments demonstrate transparency and seriousness in investigating those failures.

Thankfully, the Prime Minister, after steadfastly denying there was a need, belatedly called for a Royal Commission into the murders. But as Dennis Shanahan has explained,

an absolute commitment to playing politics led Albanese to resist a royal commission into the Bondi massacre with a series of objections and then to reluctantly recall parliament to deal with a flawed and fraught omnibus hate speech and gun reform. Albanese belatedly conceded a royal commission had to be called, overturning his detailed list of objections, and has now conceded this omnibus bill, like an albatross tied around his neck and threatening to drag him down, had to be abandoned because the political wedge he sought to drive through the Coalition had been turned against Labor... Albanese has suffered two

disastrous reversals in two weeks with a confused response to the Bondi massacre and an all-consuming commitment to politics and blame-shifting.<sup>2</sup>

This criticism highlights a central concern: when political calculation appears to override national interest, public trust deteriorates rapidly. Citizens are perceptive. They recognise when leaders are focused more on partisan advantage than on solving urgent problems.

None of this gives the electorate confidence that the relevant governments (both NSW and Federally) are on top of the issues, or are willing to confront Islamic extremism, head-on. Some of the NSW government's hasty decisions appear to be based on a complete misunderstanding of what's needed. Needlessly requiring law-abiding firearm owners to divest themselves of weapons because they have more than an arbitrarily determined number, is a foolish requirement. This only illustrates that public confidence in leadership is not restored through symbolism or rhetoric. It is restored through decisive, competent action that addresses causes rather than symptoms.

## An Independent View

The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) commented on Labor's initial legislative attempts, saying that:

The Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism Bill 2026 represents a profound overreach of criminal law. It would criminalise opinions on key matters of public policy, impose severe criminal penalties in the absence of any actual victim or harm, and abandon fundamental rule of law principles that protect Australians from arbitrary state power. The drafting of the bill ensures the legislation will not be used against extremists but rather mainstream Australians engaging in political debate.<sup>3</sup>

This critique raises a deeply important principle: the rule of law exists to protect citizens from arbitrary government power. Democracies distinguish themselves from authoritarian systems precisely because speech, opinion, and dissent are protected unless they directly incite violence or criminal acts.

The concern expressed by the IPA is not merely ideological disagreement. It reflects a longstanding legal tradition that warns against vague or overly broad criminal provisions. When laws are drafted without clear boundaries, they risk selective enforcement, often against political opponents or unpopular viewpoints.

John Steenhof, Principal Lawyer at the Human Rights Law Alliance, argues that hate speech laws fundamentally misdiagnose Australia's social fracturing. He observes that "never have hate speech laws where the government gets to police what people say, actually contributed to social cohesion," adding that "neither have they been effective at dealing with these kinds of extreme groups promoting violence and the destruction of our Australian way of life."<sup>4</sup>

According to Steenhof, the real danger lies in feelings-based protections where "the truth of the statement or the genuineness of the statement is completely irrelevant and you can be investigated and charged because what you said was deemed to be offensive by a particular person."<sup>4</sup>

This illustrates just how misguided our political leaders have been, in response to Bondi. And it hasn't got any better. Jewish residents and other Australians are no safer. Public safety is achieved

through effective policing, intelligence cooperation, and deterrence, not by expanding speech regulation.

### Labor's Response?

It's no coincidence that a number of western Sydney Labor MPs have a significant cohort of voters of Middle Eastern extraction, and these MPs try to avoid offending them. But could this deliberate and structured subservience mean that good and just governance in Australia is compromised, because our nation's leaders are afraid of alienating a sizeable and vocal minority? It certainly looks like it!

Democratic leadership requires fairness across all communities, without fear or favour. When governments appear reluctant to confront difficult realities because of electoral considerations, the perception of unequal treatment emerges. That perception alone can be damaging, even apart from policy outcomes.

Unfortunately, the Labor Party has chosen, not to confront criminal Islamic violence, but law-abiding Australians, along with Australia's traditions of freedom of speech. The implications of this are most serious. NSW Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon, ...has announced restrictions on protests in parts of Sydney will be extended. However, Commissioner Lanyon said he had "significantly limited its scope".<sup>5</sup> Effectively, the extended restrictions now go from Darling Harbour through the north of the CBD to Oxford Street and all of the Eastern Suburbs Police Area Command and does not include Hyde Park.

Restrictions on public assembly raise serious civil liberty concerns in any democratic society. Freedom of assembly has long been recognised as a cornerstone of democratic participation. While temporary measures may sometimes be justified for public order, they must remain proportionate, transparent, and clearly limited.

Not one part of these decisions is helpful. Governments stubbornly refuse to go to the heart of the problem, so that (as Greg Sheridan pointed out),

It is in confronting the anti-Semitism on the cultural left that Albanese and

his government are likely to be totally ineffective, if they make any effort at all. Because the Albanese government is not only a poor government. It is also, given its dismal primary vote, and notwithstanding a huge parliamentary majority, a remarkably cowardly government.<sup>6</sup>

James McPherson also concluded that:

Tony Burke went on to explain that his hate speech laws would deal with the motivation of the Bondi terrorists. The only problem? Well, he couldn't quite bring himself to say what their motivation actually was." He told Peter Stefanovic, "Their motivation was a deep form of bigotry, a deep form of antisemitism. Their motivation was a deep form of bigotry? That's... helpful. For a man about to enact what he boasts will be the toughest hate speech laws this nation has ever seen... "bigotry" is a bit vague, isn't it?<sup>7</sup>

McPherson wasn't the only commentator expressing scepticism. The Australian's Dennis Shanahan also commented that:

A day after a special parliamentary session of condolences for the victims of the Bondi Beach massacre and just 48 hours before a day of national mourning for those same murdered Jewish Australians, Anthony Albanese actually increased the politicisation of the issue with a premeditated and unedifying spectacle of blame-shifting and rewriting of history.<sup>8</sup>

Despite this, Susan Ley was willing to pass modified legislation, which she claimed was "...Narrowed, strengthened and properly focused on keeping Australians safe."

### The Political Failures Continue

On February 15th, the Australian's Henry Ergas and Alex McDermott commented that:

Even before the Coalition implosion of recent weeks, the contemporary crisis in political leadership compelled national attention. That implosion's immediate beneficiary, Anthony Albanese, had himself provided striking proof of the nation's leadership deficit in the wake of the Bondi

Beach massacre. His appearance then, halting and incoherent, came as the nation did not just call but screamed in desperation for clear and genuine direction.<sup>9</sup>

Leadership matters most during crises. Citizens look for reassurance, clarity, and moral conviction. Hesitation or confusion at such moments can have lasting political consequences, but more importantly, they erode institutional credibility.

Australians don't want their freedom of speech impeded. George Washington commented that If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.<sup>10</sup>

Australia is a proud democracy, that prides itself on robust public debate on any matter of interest, from the composition of the nation's cricket team to interest rate rises to choices about Australia's defence weaponry. Is there any other way for true democracy to operate, or for individuals to have their say?

And here's the thing: freedom of speech and public debate is a tough environment for shysters to survive, because they quickly get found out in the rough and tumble of public media scrutiny. But this is what truth and freedom of speech leads to, and we should never shy away from it.

Religious and political violence have been almost unknown in this country, largely because the individual's freedom of speech has rarely been threatened. Now, the latest hate-speech legislation is retrospective. Anyone could be sent to gaol for something they uttered 10 years ago, when it was legal to make such statements.

This raises profound rule-of-law concerns. Retrospective criminal legislation undermines the basic principle that citizens must know in advance what conduct is illegal. Without that certainty, the legal system itself becomes unpredictable and therefore unjust.

This is the problem when people really do believe in salvation by legislation. It creates enormous difficulties for anyone to be confident that their utterances won't get them into trouble. And we

thought we were "...young and free?"

If opinion polls can be relied on, the public was hardly impressed with the involvement of Susan Ley, the Liberals, or the Labor Party. One Nation has now overtaken the Liberals in the published polls, and the mood of the electorate appears to be shifting towards conservatism. Political realignment often occurs when mainstream parties are perceived to have abandoned core principles such as liberty, fairness, and security.

Within a fortnight of these bills being passed, Joshua Spasaro of "The Daily Declaration," reported that: "Thousands marched in Melbourne on Australia Day, voicing concerns about new hate speech laws, mass immigration, and freedom of speech, while proudly showing their support for national pride and traditions." He added that "...a strong sentiment among those who marched from Flinders St to Victorian Parliament House was that this [hate speech] law could now see them imprisoned for simply speaking their minds because of their conservative beliefs."<sup>11</sup>

Harrison McLean, who organises separate events through his group Melbourne Freedom Rally, believes that the new hate speech laws have led instantly to a fraying of the national psyche because people are now scared to make their views public regarding mass immigration.

Harrison also claimed that:

There are a lot of infringements on freedom of speech at the moment. There was the under -16 social media ban. Even the Liberal Party is now voting for these things...going after all Australians' freedoms on the basis of that [the Bondi terrorist attack] is ridiculous.<sup>12</sup>

Public fear of expressing opinions is itself evidence of chilling effects. Democracies depend not merely on formal freedoms, but on citizens' confidence that they can exercise those freedoms without unjust punishment.

### Broader Cultural and Moral Implications

Beyond immediate political debates lies a deeper cultural issue: the erosion

of confidence in Western democratic values. When speech becomes regulated, when assemblies are restricted, and when governments appear hesitant to confront ideological violence directly, citizens begin to question whether traditional freedoms are secure.

Steenhof identifies a fundamental shift in Australia's social fabric:

"We saw ourselves as a primarily Christian nation at the 1971 census when 86% of Australians ticked Christian in the census," which had "plunged to just 44% in 2021."<sup>4</sup>

He argues that "we have largely lost connection with the fertile moral clarity that we used to have that drove our identity as an Australian nation," creating "a vacuum that has been filled by hostile voices of deconstruction."<sup>4</sup>

Looking to international precedents, Steenhof warns that "one only needs to look to the UK to see how these laws have been used as backdoor blasphemy laws," where individuals "have made political statements by burning copies of the Quran as a political protest and then been arrested and charged by the UK police for offensive behaviour towards Islam."<sup>4</sup>

Democracies throughout history have often faced moments of crisis that tested the balance between security and liberty. In many cases, governments have responded to threats by expanding state authority, sometimes with the genuine intention of protecting citizens, but often with unintended consequences that eroded freedoms over time.

One of the enduring lessons from democratic history is that fear can be a powerful motivator for legislative change. When communities are frightened, they naturally look to government for reassurance and protection. Political leaders, in turn, feel pressure to demonstrate decisive action. However, decisive action is not always wise action. Laws created in haste, particularly after traumatic events, frequently prove to be poorly targeted, overly broad, or misdirected. This pattern has been observed repeatedly in various nations, where emergency powers introduced in response to crises remained in place long after the immediate threat had subsided.

Australia has historically been cautious about such overreach, which is one reason the nation has maintained relatively strong traditions of open debate and civil liberty. Unlike many other countries, Australia has long benefited from social cohesion, geographic isolation, and comparatively low levels of political violence. These advantages, however, should not lead to complacency. They also impose a responsibility on political leaders to preserve the freedoms that have contributed to national stability.

Another important historical lesson concerns the nature of extremism itself. Extremist violence rarely emerges suddenly without warning signs. It often develops over time, nurtured by ideological influences, social networks, and opportunities created by institutional weakness. Effective responses therefore require clear-eyed recognition of underlying causes, rather than symbolic legislative gestures. Policies that fail to address root causes may create the appearance of action while leaving the underlying risks unchanged.

Public confidence in institutions is also a critical factor in national resilience. When citizens believe that their leaders are competent, honest, and willing to confront difficult truths, trust grows. Conversely, when leaders appear evasive, indecisive, or politically motivated, trust erodes. Once lost, trust is difficult to rebuild. The perception that governments are prioritising political advantage over public safety can have long-term consequences for democratic legitimacy.

It is also worth reflecting on the role of civil society organisations, including groups such as FamilyVoice, in maintaining democratic health. Civil society provides an essential counterbalance to state power by encouraging participation, advocacy, and accountability. When citizens engage respectfully but firmly with their elected representatives, they help ensure that policies reflect community values rather than bureaucratic convenience.

Freedom of speech plays a central role in this process. Robust debate allows societies to test ideas, challenge assumptions, and expose errors.

Suppressing speech may temporarily reduce visible conflict, but it often drives disagreement underground, where grievances can intensify without scrutiny. Open discussion, by contrast, allows harmful ideas to be confronted and rebutted publicly. This dynamic is particularly important when addressing extremist ideologies, which thrive in environments where scrutiny is limited.

Ultimately, the goal must be to create a society that is both secure and free. These objectives are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they reinforce one another. Citizens who feel respected and free are more likely to cooperate with authorities, support lawful institutions, and reject extremist influences. Conversely, citizens who feel constrained or mistrusted may become disengaged or resentful.

Australia's democratic heritage has been shaped by generations who valued liberty, responsibility, and fairness. Preserving that heritage requires vigilance, particularly during times of crisis. It was Margaret Thatcher who once observed that

The fundamental battles in society are moral before they are political.<sup>13</sup>

And that insight applies here. A society confident in its values will defend them openly. A society uncertain of its values may resort to control mechanisms to maintain order.

Freedom of speech is not merely a legal right; it is a cultural habit. It depends on tolerance of disagreement and confidence that truth can withstand scrutiny. Suppressing debate does not eliminate disagreement, but it drives it underground where resentment grows.

## Conclusion

Bondi's tragedy was clearly related to a failure of government departments, State and Federal. But just as importantly, the alleged gunmen had every reason to observe weakness and indecisiveness from both NSW police and political leaders.

What's evident from Bondi is that mouthing firm leadership is worthless, unless it's backed up with actions that match provocation. When NSW Police and its political leaders didn't know how to deal with an angry crowd at the Opera

House, chanting "Gas the Jews," but looked the other way, hoping it would go away, violence against Jewish people became astonishingly predictable.

For the government of the day to then pass intrusive "Hate Speech" legislation, that only restricts the speech and movements of law-abiding people further, shows us this: many of our current parliamentarians have no concern for either the necessity or the implications of individual liberty that our forebears in two world wars, fought and died for.

The path forward requires courage to confront difficult realities, courage to resist political expediency, and courage to defend liberty even when doing so is unpopular. If these qualities guide future decisions, Australia can emerge from this period not weakened, but strengthened, with institutions that are more resilient and communities that are more united.

We should contact our political representatives at both State and Federal level, encouraging them to protect our freedoms, and to stop intruding on our freedom of speech and assembly.

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