

Conspiracy cults breeding terrorism through protests

By *Bilal Cleland*

24 November 2021



Protests by right-wing groups over vaccine mandates have seen a rise in extremist behaviour, with death threats carried out against politicians, writes [Bilal Cleland](#).

IN MELBOURNE over several days, “freedom” protesters carried nooses and a mobile gallows to the front of Parliament House and [one protester](#) said she looked forward to seeing Victorian Premier [Dan Andrews](#) “dance on the end of a rope”.

Anti-terror detectives [charged two men](#) on 18 November with incitement over threats to the Premier and MPs.

[Michelle Pini](#) noted of the [protest movement](#), ‘chief dog-whistlers cheerleading the fray’ included members of the Victorian Liberal Opposition.

Saturday 20 November saw anti-vaccination, anti-emergency powers demonstrations in

Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth and Brisbane.

PRGuy [tweeted](#):

‘As many as 10,000 protesters have descended on Melbourne today to protest a range of issues including Satanic Ritual Abuse, medical apartheid, medical experiments, imaginary dictators, hoax pandemics, etc. Signs were predominantly QAnon-themed.’

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— PRCGuy (@PRGuy17) [November 20, 2021](#)

In Brisbane, mining billionaire [Clive Palmer](#), the main backer of the United Australia Party, and MP [Craig Kelly](#) said at the rally [he'd rather](#) “go out of business” than listen to vaccine advice from Queensland’s Premier — who he called “Palachook”.

The anti-vaccine protests were

already extreme enough in Western Australia for the Premier to close his electorate office, due to [threats of rape](#) against his staff and the bombing of his office.

The decline of the Liberal Party from its traditional conservatism into a supporter of radical reactionary politics in this protest movement is dangerous.

The weak statement of the Prime Minister created great concern.

Shadow Treasurer [Jim Chalmers](#) tweeted:

'Scott Morrison undermines the collective efforts of mainstream Australia by cosyng up to extremists making violent threats with dangerous consequences.'

We live in a society and that means we have obligations to protect each other. Scott Morrison undermines the collective efforts of mainstream Australia by cosyng up to extremists making violent threats with dangerous consequences.

[#auspol](#) [#insiders](#)
pic.twitter.com/Fm1SLIDflu

— Jim Chalmers MP
(@JEChalmers) [November 20, 2021](#)

Terrorism is a real danger.

A terrorist act in our law is an act, or a threat, that intends to coerce or influence the public

or any government by intimidation to advance a political, religious or ideological cause and causes, amongst other examples, death, serious harm or danger to a person.

The [Christchurch massacre](#) is an example.

The [annual threat assessment](#) 2021 by ASIO stated that ideological extremism takes up some 40 per cent of its current caseload.

According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies ([CSIS](#)), QAnon is part of that threat:

'It has since [2017] amassed millions of supporters, a small portion of whom have been motivated to conduct QAnon-inspired violence, [leading the FBI](#) to label it a domestic terrorism threat in 2019.'

Not all those taking part are QAnon. The wellness industry has contributed substantially to the number of protesters.

However, the BBC [Anti-disinformation Unit](#) warned in 2020 that the anti-vaccination and the QAnon conspiracy theories are merging.

It noted that these groups also have a money-raising function.

[Josh Roose](#) of Deakin University recalls that Victoria police warned a parliamentary

inquiry into extremism:

'...online commentary on COVID-19 has provided a recruiting tool for right-wing extremist groups, linking those interested in alternative wellness, anti-vaccination and anti-authority conspiracy theories with White supremacist ideologies.'

A [valuable analysis](#) is in *QAnon and on: A short and shocking history of internet conspiracy cults* by [Van Badham](#).

The theory has penetrated quite deeply into Australia.

Badham [writes](#):

A [2020 paper](#)... revealed that, after the U.S., Britain and Canada, Australia was the fourth-largest producer of QAnon content worldwide. Australia created more QAnon content than Russia.

[It has] created fusion paranoia in Australia, not only with anti-vax communities but also anti-lockdown protesters and anti-migration and antisemitic tropes as well as the community of anti-5G mobile phone tower activists.

[Cam Wilson exposed](#) one major source of the anti-vax agitation in Victoria involving a former [Family First](#) leader and

a property mogul:

'What separates [Ruby] Janssen and [Peter] Harris from some other anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown groups is their organisation: building big email lists, growing a social media following and touring the country — all while making money along the way.'

There may also be votes to harvest from the 10 per cent who resist vaccination against the virus, but if this comes at the cost of fomenting domestic terrorism, it is too high.

[Bilal Cleland](#) *is a retired secondary teacher and was Secretary of the [Islamic Council of Victoria](#), [Chairman of the Muslim Welfare Board Victoria](#) and [Secretary of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils](#). You can follow Bilal on Twitter [@BilalCleland](#).*