Analysis Paper 99 | February 2026

OVERCOMING ENMITY AND RESTORING TOLERANCE

Antisemitism's challenge to our civic compact

Damien Freeman

CULTURE

THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES

A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

OVERCOMING ENMITY AND RESTORING TOLERANCE

Antisemitism's challenge to our civic compact

Damien Freeman

This paper is part of The Centre for Independent Studies research program, The New Intolerance: Antisemitism and religious hatred in a fracturing civic compact. The program of antisemitism research has been made possible by the generous support of Simon Mordant AO and the Luminis Foundation.

Analysis Paper 99

Contents

Foreword

When the Book of Genesis speaks of enmity between the serpent and the descendants of Eve, it describes a hatred that transcends reason and resists extinction. Damien Freeman's decision to begin this new report with that ancient text is deliberate and unsettling. He asks us to consider whether antisemitism might be similarly primordial – not merely another form of prejudice that education might eliminate, but something that resurfaces with each generation, demanding constant vigilance.

The events catalogued here confirm Freeman's diagnosis. The huge recent increase in antisemitic incidents, as documented by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, represents not statistical variation but civilisational failure. From the Adass Israel Synagogue arson to the Bondi Beach massacre, we have witnessed the progression from harassment to violence that characterises antisemitism's deadly logic. Each incident was both shocking and, in retrospect, predictable.

Freeman's central contribution is his analysis of why Australia's civic compact has proven inadequate to this challenge. Drawing on my own work on multiculturalism and value pluralism, he demonstrates that a framework designed to manage moral disagreement through tolerance and procedural neutrality cannot address a phenomenon that refuses to remain within bounds. Antisemitism does not seek accommodation within our pluralist democracy; it seeks the elimination of Jews from public life.

Freeman shows how the myths that have sustained antisemitism across centuries, such as the blood libel, continue to adapt and change as they colonise new ideological spaces. The transition from theological anti-Judaism to racial antisemitism to contemporary anti-Zionism demonstrates hatred's capacity for reinvention. Each form appears novel to its generation; each claims rational justification; and each produces the same result.

Freeman's analysis of the Generalised Antisemitism scale is of particular value. By distinguishing between Judeophobic and anti-Zionist antisemitism, he provides tools for measuring what many still resist acknowledging: that opposition to Israel's existence has become, for many, simply the latest vehicle for ancient hatred.

His focus on restoring tolerance requires Australians to recognise that managing difference is insufficient when difference becomes enmity. His recommendations around education, institutional reform and clearer legal frameworks provide practical steps forward. But they require something deeper: honest reckoning with how thoroughly our institutions have accommodated antisemitism through studied neutrality.

What Freeman ultimately demands of us is uncomfortable but necessary. We cannot manage hatred out of existence through pluralist accommodation. We must name it, constrain it — and actively oppose it.

The Bondi massacre should end any illusions about antisemitism's benign nature in contemporary Australia. Freeman has provided both diagnosis and prescription.

Peter Kurti

Director - Culture, Prosperity & Civil Society Program

Introduction

The Book of Genesis recounts how, after the serpent beguiled Eve into eating from the tree of knowledge, the Lord told the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman". This enmity was something that would ensure there was no peaceful co-existence between mankind and serpentkind, and this could not be easily undone: it was to be "between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel".

This is surely the oldest hatred. Anyone who has turned a corner when bushwalking and been suddenly confronted by a snake on the path metres away knows how visceral this fear is. It is not something rational. The sight of the snake continues to arouse a primordial fear that is not anchored in personal experience or natural science. The Book of Genesis seeks to explain the origin of this enmity and why it never fades over millennia. No matter how much we understand about a particular species of snake that is not particularly dangerous, nothing seems to diminish the immediate sense of fear. Every chance encounter with a snake seems to summon up in us a feeling worthy of the punishment meted out by God for that first act of disobedience.

If this is, indeed, the oldest hatred, then antisemitism is surely the second oldest hatred. And in the current climate, it seems that it will endure for as long as the enmity between the seed of Eve and the serpent.

Many of us had been beguiled into believing antisemitism had not taken hold in Australia, but its sudden dramatic resurgence does seem to be of biblical proportions. This has involved not only a resurgence of 'old' neo-Nazi antisemitism, but a worrying rise in a different form of antisemitism associated with Islamicism in parts of the Muslim community that have been exposed to radicalisation, and the 'new' antisemitism that has risen dramatically in left-wing political circles.[1] In 2024, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry revealed that reports of antisemitic incidents in the 12 months to 30 September 2024 had increased by 316% on the previous year.[2] This statistic alone reveals the magnitude of the change that has occurred in Australia.

And yet, the tell-tale signs did not result in steps being taken to address the problem. On 6 December 2024, there was an arson attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne's Ripponlea. A spate of antisemitic incidents followed in Sydney, including graffiti at Allawah and Newtown synagogues and a childcare centre near a synagogue in Maroubra, as well as arson attacks on cars in the city's eastern suburbs. On 5 July 2025, flammable liquid was poured onto the door of East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and ignited while worshippers were gathered inside for the Jewish sabbath. On the same night, a group of some 20 protesters converged on Miznon, an Israeli restaurant, chanting slogans such as "Death to the IDF," throwing chairs, and generally causing distress for diners at the establishment.

Throughout the period, there was also an increase in less violent forms of antisemitism, including the doxxing of some 600 Jewish creatives, online hate, and reports of verbal abuse and intimidation. None of this prepared anyone for the hate that was unleashed on 14 December 2025, when 15 innocent people celebrating the festival of Chanukah at Bondi Beach were shot dead. The year of antisemitism concluded with the firebombing of a rabbi's car bearing a Happy Chanukah sign in Melbourne on Christmas Day.

Coming to terms with the violence that antisemitism has unleashed brings with it a further realisation about Australian society more generally. The astonishing increase in antisemitism can leave no one in any doubt that social cohesion is disintegrating within Australia alongside people's sense of personal security. It is by no means the only indicator of the deterioration in social cohesion. The Scanlon Institute's 2025 report reveals that whereas 64% of Australians had a great sense of belonging in 2020, by 2025 this figure dropped to 46%, and, for Millennials, it drops further to 34%.[3]

Why is it that Australia's civic compact seems unable to maintain social cohesion in the face of rising antisemitism? To answer this question requires us to understand something about the nature of antisemitism and something about the nature of the civic compact. What emerges from this investigation is the realisation that Australia's civic compact is not designed to deal with problems such as antisemitism.

Australia's civic compact

In his 2025 CIS paper, *The Ties That Bind: Reconciling value pluralism and national identity*, Peter Kurti develops his earlier body of work on multiculturalism and gives us an account of the challenge that value pluralism presents for national identity in Australia.[4] He offers a suggestion for how these can be reconciled. In doing so, he also provides a vision of how he believes the civic compact in Australia should operate. He believes that Australia's multicultural model is predicated on a "dual commitment to unity and diversity [that] reflects an implicit accommodation of a plurality of values, even if this is not articulated in philosophical terms".[5] His novel proposal is to offer a suggestion for how this accommodation of unity and diversity works: "Rather than relying on shared values, national identity must be grounded in shared political practices and institutions that are capable of managing, rather than resolving, moral disagreement".[6]

Kurti proposes three foundational ideas for an Australian civic compact that does not simply manage difference, but which conceptualises "national belonging in ways that do not erase or marginalise it".[7] First, he adopts an approach to value pluralism that eschews universalism. Influenced by the work of John Gray,[8] Kurti argues that liberalism in Australia "must be understood as a *modus vivendi* which recognises that a liberal society is not a community of shared values; rather it is to be understood as a framework for peaceful coexistence ... a practical arrangement that allows different value systems to coexist within a single political framework".[9]

Secondly, he considers what role nationalism should play in cultivating national identity in such a liberal society. Nationalism presents a "highly complex" issue in a society that is not a community of shared values. In other situations, nationalism "can be understood as the political ideology that seeks to preserve and promote [the] idea of a shared identity, often through the sovereign state".[10] In a pluralist society, nationalism "can help to generate social cohesion, encourage civic engagement and legitimise political institutions" but "it can also exclude and marginalise", leading Kurti to conclude that in such a society, "the construction of national identity must navigate between the need for unity and the imperative to respect difference".[11]

This leads Kurti to his third concept: multiculturalism. He accepts that multiculturalism is "both a sociological fact and a political response to cultural diversity".[12] What he wants to know is whether there is a form of multiculturalism that can operate within the kind of liberal society that he has sketched out and which is compatible with a unifying sense of national identity. Multiculturalism requires that divergent cultural practices and value pluralism be tolerated while still maintaining social cohesion. In such a society, national identity might appear to be threatened but Kurti proposes a way forward: "unity must be built not on shared values but on shared procedures and institutions that can mediate moral conflict".[13]

At the core of Kurti's civic compact is tolerance for different moral outlooks. There are, of course, limits to what can be tolerated, but, he explains, "A civic national identity rooted in democratic participation, legal equality and mutual respect can accommodate a wide range of moral outlooks".[14] Unity, in such a society, is not anchored in ethnic nationalism, and may be harder to maintain without "a high level of political maturity and institutional robustness ... But it does offer a viable foundation for unity in the face of the kind of diversity to be found in contemporary Australia".[15] The civic framework that Kurti extols is one that enables citizens "to live with disagreement" through "the promise of a pluralist nationalism: a nation not united by sameness, but by a shared commitment to managing difference in a democratic way".[16]

Kurti concludes that multiculturalism, liberalism, and national identity can coexist in Australia, however, this "depends not just on celebrating diversity but on learning how to live with deep disagreement".[17]

If we understand the civic compact in this way, our social cohesion can be maintained by learning how tolerance can provide us with the means of living with deep disagreement. This is surely a good thing, but how far does it really get us? Does it provide us with the resources to address the rise of antisemitism in Australia?

Understanding antisemitism

In order to understand the challenge that antisemitism presents for Australia's civic compact, we need to understand what antisemitism is. The term dates from the 1870s, when a German journalist, Wilhelm Marr, coined the expression to capture the idea of a 'non-confessional' hatred of Jews.[18] Marr's Antisemitic League aimed to attract atheists and anticlericals, for whom the traditional Christian hatred of the Jews as the people who killed or rejected Christ did not resonate.

In Enlightenment Germany, in the decade following Jewish emancipation, there were those whose hatred was motivated by social, economic, political, or 'racial' ideas, and these were all welcome to join the Antisemitic League. It was a movement for people who believed for one reason or another that Jews posed a threat to the survival of Germany, and a newly invented 'Semitism' was contrasted with 'Aryanism' (until then, 'Semitic' had referred to the language group that included Hebrew). In the years since then, the concept of 'antisemitism' has been used to describe all forms of Jew-hatred.

Marr sought to draw in people for whom a range of different myths appealed. These are central to antisemitism because the perpetuation of false claims about Jews has enabled the hatred to grow around a seemingly eternal truth. In *The 7 Deadly Myths*, Alex Ryvchin provides a potted history of seven of the most persistent false claims about the Jews:[19]

- The blood libel
  that Jews need to murder an innocent to use his blood for a ritual purpose

- Christ-killers
  that the Jews are held responsible for the death of Christ in the New Testament

- Global domination
  that Jews have an ancient agreement amongst themselves to take over the world

- The chosen people
  that Jews believe they are superior to all other people because they were chosen by God

- Love of money
  that Jews have an insatiable desire for money

- Dual loyalties
  that Jews are never truly loyal to their country of citizenship because they have a conflicting loyalty to the Jewish people

- The inversion of oppression
  that the Jews are the cause of their own oppression, and, more recently, that they have treated Palestinians in the same way that the Nazis treated them.

As Ryvchin explains, these claims continue to be reasserted in different forms throughout history, even though earlier forms have been proven to be false. Their capacity to morph over time nourishes hatred.

It is now relatively uncontentious to acknowledge that the religious persecution of Jews spearheaded by the mediaeval Catholic church is a form of antisemitism or Jew-hate. Likewise, it is uncontentious to acknowledge that the 'racial' theorising that culminated in the policies of Nazi Germany and its Final Solution is a form of antisemitism or Jew-hate. What is more difficult to acknowledge is the form of antisemitism or Jew-hate that arose when the Zionist aspiration for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was realised with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Thus, defining the concept of antisemitism is tricky because it needs to capture a phenomenon that has persisted for millennia, and yet has manifested itself differently over time. The most widely accepted understanding is the working definition developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2016.[20] In addition to the older forms of antisemitism, the working definition aims to capture the sense in which contemporary discourse about the State of Israel can constitute antisemitism even if it does not include any direct reference to Jews or Judaism.

In order to measure contemporary antisemitic attitudes, as captured by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition, Daniel Allington, David Hirsh, and Louise Katz developed the Generalised Antisemitism scale.[21] The scale consists of two subscales: the Judeophobic Antisemitism subscale which measures attitudes that are associated with the 'old' antisemitism,

and the anti-Zionist Antisemitism subscale which measures attitudes associated with the 'new' antisemitism. It draws on a questionnaire that invites responses to six statements related to Judeophobia and six related to anti-Zionism. Responses are measured on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The statements to which responses are invited are as follows:

- **Judeophobia**

  "Jewish people can be trusted just as much as other [nationality] people in business"

  "Jewish people are just as loyal to [nation] as other [nationality] people"

  "I am just as open to having Jewish friends as I am to having friends from other sections of [nationality] society"

  "Compared to other groups, Jewish people have too much power in the media"

  "Jewish people talk about the Holocaust just to further their political agenda"

  "Jewish people chase money more than other people do"

- **Anti-Zionism**

  "I am comfortable spending time with people who openly support Israel"

  "Israel has a right to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people"

  "Israel is right to defend itself against those who want to destroy it"

  "Israel and its supporters are a bad influence on our democracy"

  "Israel can get away with anything because its supporters control the media"

  "Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews".

Allington *et al* explain why they believe responses to each of these statements "can be assumed to reflect the presence or absence of potentially antisemitic attitudes" and that the statements in each subscale "relate to the same group of traditional stereotypes about Jewishness".[22] It is important that they can establish both subscales are dealing with the same stereotypes, given Peter Beattie's finding that there is a correlation between those who hold what the Generalised Antisemitism scale treats as Judeophobic attitudes and those who hold *strongly* anti-Zionist attitudes, although the correlation does not hold for those who hold only *moderately* anti-Zionist attitudes.[23]

From its creators' perspective, the value of the Generalised Antisemitism scale is that it increases the accuracy and replicability of antisemitism research. For present purposes, what matters is that it gives us a clear basis for understanding what is being measured is the strength of hateful attitudes towards Jews and Israel as their homeland.

Historically, this Jew-hatred has invited a variety of responses: forced conversion, confinement, expulsion, or extermination of those who are the object of such hatred. Such responses would be widely condemned today. What cannot be denied, however, is that these are not irrational responses to the object of such hatred. That which is hateful cannot be tolerated, and so these are natural responses to the intolerable.

Turning to more recent times, it becomes understandable why the abolition of the State of Israel seems like a legitimate and proportionate response for those who feel a hatred of the State of Israel. Given the current crisis in the Middle East, it is also understandable why there are critics of the Israeli government's policies and practices who do not necessarily harbour a hatred of the State of Israel. The Generalised Antisemitism scale seeks to distinguish such legitimate criticism from the expression of hatred.

Thus, to the extent that a population records a high score according to the Generalised Antisemitism scale, we can conclude that a particular form of hatred is prevalent in that population. It follows that the population would be intolerant of the object of that hatred. To the extent that the hatred is justified, the intolerance will also be justified. If we are unwilling to accept this level of intolerance and also unwilling to eliminate the object of hatred, then it will be necessary to address the hatred.

Enmity, disagreement and tolerance

We now need to turn to the distinction between enmity and disagreement, as these are defined by the Oxford English Dictionary.

'Enmity' means "the disposition or the feelings characteristic of an enemy; ill-will, hatred." It entered English as a borrowing from old French, and before that from late Latin *inimīcus*, or 'enemy'.

'Disagreement' means "want of agreement or harmony; difference; discordancy, discrepancy." There can be a disagreement without necessarily feeling that the person with whom one disagrees is 'disagreeable' (where 'disagreeable' has the sense of "not in accordance with one's taste or liking; exciting displeasure or disgust; unpleasing, unpleasant, offensive").

So enmity and disagreement are two quite different things. We can readily imagine two friends finding themselves in a state of disagreement. We cannot imagine two friends in a state of enmity. Once enmity has set in, the friends have become enemies and ceased being friends. Opponents need not feel ill-will or hatred. They can disagree without regarding one another as enemies.

The civic compact in Australia has been designed to deal with disagreement. It does this through the device of tolerance, which will be discussed in full along with its antithesis in a forthcoming paper. It is precisely because I can disagree with someone without finding the person disagreeable that I can tolerate an opponent.

If my feelings towards someone or something are those of ill-will or hatred, tolerance is not going to be an option for managing my relationship with that person or thing. It is not only unreasonable to expect someone to tolerate that which is hateful, but, indeed, is positively immoral to encourage tolerance of the hateful. We should be intolerant of that which is hateful, and we should seek to eliminate it from our lives.

In such circumstances, we are right to speak of 'zero tolerance'. Such is the case with paedophilia and domestic violence. These are things that we, as a society, find hateful, and which we refuse to tolerate. More than that, we would rightly denounce anyone who encouraged us to be tolerant of these things. We are rightly intolerant of them.

The Generalised Antisemitism scale measures attitudes of ill-will or hatred. The hatred of Jews and Israel is a form of enmity. It is not a matter of disagreement. If it were a matter of disagreement, it would be reasonable and desirable to encourage people to tolerate the words and deeds of those with whom they disagree. It is, however, irrational and immoral to insist that people tolerate that which is hateful. The troubling conclusion is that, if it is legitimate to hate Jews and Israel, then it is also legitimate to seek to eliminate them. For this reason, the Australian civic compact, grounded as it is in tolerance, is not going to be able to deal with increasing antisemitism in Australia. We cannot hope that people will tolerate what they hate. On the contrary, we should encourage people to be intolerant of that which is hateful.

Of course, that does not mean we should allow people to be intolerant of Jews in Australia. What it does mean, however, is that we need to take a deeper look at this and other forms of enmity in Australia and how they can be addressed.

The referendum in 2023 about constitutional recognition of Australia's Indigenous peoples was an important moment in the transition from disagreement to enmity in Australian public life. In my book, *The End of Settlement*, I trace how an attempt to find common ground gave way to a confrontation between identity politics radicals and right-wing opponents, so that meaningful debate about disagreement was stifled and the fracturing of Australian society was exposed.[24]

To the extent that the challenges to social cohesion in Australia are now traced to enmity rather than disagreement, tolerance will not be an option. Kurti acknowledges that there are limits to what can be tolerated. One way of capturing these limits might be to say that tolerance ends when disagreement starts to involve enmity.

The limits of tolerance

Although he is a great advocate for tolerance, Kurti readily admits that it has its limits. Tolerance is invoked to manage disagreement within a multicultural society, but, although a civic compact based on tolerance can accommodate a wide range of practices, there are lines to be drawn. He proposes the hypothetical reappearance of *sati* (the historical Hindu practice of widow-burning) as an example of something that could not be tolerated. He argues that this is because "such practices fundamentally conflict with the principles of human dignity and equality embedded in Australia's democratic order" and that accommodation of pluralism "is bounded by a shared legal framework that secures individual rights", and that such examples "are a reminder that the challenge for pluralism is not merely to draw hard legal lines, but to foster a civic culture capable of managing difference with fairness and restraint".[25]

What should now be apparent is that examples like sati are not nearly as challenging as all this suggests. The correct analysis is that sati gives rise to feelings of hatefulness, not mere disagreement. It is in the category of things like paedophilia, domestic violence, and incest that are simply intolerable. Hard legal lines can readily be drawn here because we are presented with something hateful.

Another challenge for tolerance appears to involve antisemitism. Kurti writes:

It is, therefore, important to distinguish between types of disagreement: public crises driven by international conflict (such as the Israel/Gaza war) may call for legal enforcement and moral clarity, whereas enduring moral disagreements call for negotiation, civic education, and institution-building.[26]

What Kurti seems to be getting at with the enduring moral disagreements are situations in which disagreement should be managed through tolerance. In contrast, he seems to be saying that the public crisis in Australia driven by the Israel/Gaza war requires legal enforcement. It is not entirely clear, but it seems that what he has in mind here is the rise in antisemitism in Australia that he regards as a public crisis driven by the war.

Again, what should now be apparent is the contrast: the public crisis involves hatred, whereas the moral disagreements are just disagreements that are not motivated by hatred. The legal enforcement and moral clarity has to do with the fact that the hatred in question is morally intolerable, and legal enforcement is necessary to deal with expressions of such hatred.

There are disagreements that do not involve enmity, and in these cases value pluralism applies. Then there are practices that arouse a hatred that is a genuinely legitimate hatred, such as sati, and, in this case, tolerance does not apply as we strive as a society to eliminate such intolerable practices. Finally, there are situations that involve a hatred that we do not accept as a legitimate hatred, such as Jew-hate or antisemitism. Unlike legitimate hatreds, which can be perpetuated, these illegitimate hatreds need to be eliminated from society. Legitimate hatreds can be tolerated; illegitimate hatreds need to be eliminated. It is for this reason that law enforcement is rightly invoked to eradicate illegitimate hatreds as much as it is invoked to affirm legitimate hatreds.

Tolerance and disagreement

Kurti's conception of the civic compact has its genesis in the English political tradition that the Australian colonies inherited when they developed out of penal settlements into mature polities. In *The End of Settlement*, I explain the way that the establishment of the Church of England as a settlement informed a whole approach to politics as 'settlement' through which tolerance allowed people to agree about terms on which they could live together peacefully, while nevertheless maintaining profound disagreements that meant they could rationalise the settlement in quite different ways.[27]

The emergence of a civic compact based on tolerance naturally fits with the development of the kind of liberal democracy that Australia became in the 20th century. Both these developments occurred while Australia was still a part of the British Empire or Commonwealth, as it became when several self-governing parts

of the empire were recognised as having Dominion status — a status that accorded their governments equal standing alongside the British government. Other Dominions included Canada, Newfoundland (which was subsequently absorbed into Canada), New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and the Irish Free State.

Canada and New Zealand were able to maintain social cohesion through a civic compact similar to that in Australia. In those countries, disagreement could be managed through tolerance. In South Africa and Ireland, tolerance was inadequate to secure social cohesion. At the risk of oversimplification, let us consider one possible analysis of the different social situations in these two groups of former British Dominions. There can be no doubt that a central feature of apartheid in South Africa was enmity between the racial groups that were separated and then treated in a discriminatory way.

The long history of Protestant England's domination in Ireland and suppression of the Catholic Church there resulted in enmity between the religious groups and ongoing violence, known as the Troubles, following the partition of Ireland. In the face of such enmity, a civic compact based on tolerance was never going to be adequate to restore social cohesion. Once such profound racial or religious enmity has set in, something more than tolerance is required to establish social cohesion.

Why is it that social cohesion could be maintained in some of these Dominions through a civic compact based on tolerance but not in others? The Australian colonies were comprised of significant numbers of Catholics as well as the dominant Protestant denominations, and yet the history was so radically different that enmity did not become entrenched. Rather, religious diversity became a matter of disagreement that was ultimately susceptible to tolerance.

Although the Church of England tended to be treated as an established church in Australia's penal colonies, the decisive moment for religious tolerance came with the Church Building Act 1836. Through this statute, the enlightened governor, Sir Richard Bourke, sought to put the major Christian denominations on an equal footing in the colony, with the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches each to be provided with funds for church buildings and clerical stipends to be provided by the colonial treasury in proportion to their number of adherents in the colony. This was subsequently extended to Methodist and Baptist churches, as well as to the Jewish community.

Although sectarianism would remain a feature of Australian society for another century and a half, Bourke's actions are emblematic of an approach to religious difference that enabled tolerance rather than genuine enmity in Australia during this period. In this way, religious conflict did not threaten social cohesion, and the civic compact prevailed in a way that it could not in other similar countries.

What of racial conflict, the other source of enmity experienced in similar countries? Initially, in Australia, an ethnically and culturally diverse population was not a threat to Australian social cohesion because the White Australia policy ensured that Australian society was largely homogeneous. Sir Keith Hancock argued that this was the fundamental policy of Australia because it provided social cohesion, which he believed was only possible by avoiding difference, rather than learning to tolerate it.[28]

Whatever one thinks of Hancock's defence of the White Australia policy, it was redundant once British migrants could no longer meet Australia's immigration needs after World War II, and Australia had to accept immigrants who were not Anglo-Celtic. As the ethnic and cultural diversity of immigrants increased, social cohesion would require managing difference rather than avoiding it.

It may be argued that even in 1901 Australia was not as socially homogeneous as Hancock imagines. The Indigenous populations, it might be argued, are proof that Hancock was wrong. Hancock seems to reflect an attitude to Indigenous Australians that saw them living apart from mainstream Australian society. As such, they did not form part of the civic compact. Thus, he would support reservations for 'full blood Aborigines' so that they could continue to live their traditional lives apart from those Australians who formed part of the civic compact, and assimilation for 'half castes', so that they could be brought within the civic compact.

As it came to be accepted that Indigenous Australians did not lie outside the social compact, assimilation gave way to

reconciliation. In this way, reconciliation with Indigenous people needs to be seen as a necessary complement to multiculturalism in maintaining social cohesion.

One further source of social discord in the 20th century lay in the Marxist analysis of the class struggle and the socialist solution for overcoming it. Marxists might be taken to assert that social classes stand in a relationship of enmity in which those with capital use social structures to oppress the working classes. On this analysis, revolution is required in order to liberate the working classes from their oppression. In Australia and New Zealand, however, a different approach developed for addressing the needs of the working classes.

In 1899, the French historian and geographer, Albert Métin, paid a visit to Australia to study social and economic development in the colonies. The visit resulted in the publication of a book in 1901, *Le socialisme sans doctrines*, or Socialism without Doctrine in translation. The book contained his assessment of Australian public policy, which, he argued, saw the state adopt policies that achieved the objectives of socialism in labour and economic policy, but did so without acknowledging any socialist ideological objective.

Many have come to appreciate the accuracy of Métin's insight.29 It allowed for the broad acceptance of these policies. The anti-socialist parties could never have accepted policies that were advanced as the realisation of socialism in Australia. They could accept policies, however, if they were detached from socialist ideology. Socialism without doctrine is not exactly an example of tolerance of difference, but it is a further example of the way difference was managed without promoting enmity.

It is all good and well to say that an ethnically, culturally, and religiously homogeneous society will feature low levels of enmity and high levels of social cohesion, but what of a society that is ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse? The official response to this question in Australia from the 1970s onwards has been multiculturalism.

Kurti advances his value-pluralism critique of Australian multiculturalism not only as a way of rescuing multiculturalism, but as a more desirable alternative to another response that has been gaining increasing prominence in Australian political discourse: identity politics.

Converting disagreement into enmity

In the 1970s, critical race theory emerged in American law schools as a theoretical explanation for the persisting disadvantaged position of African Americans. Critical race theory argued that the discrimination that these people experienced was not simply a matter of the personal prejudices of individual (white) Americans. It was perpetuated through institutions. Critical race theorists drew on Marxist theorising about the struggle between social classes, and the way capitalists used social structures to oppress the working classes.

When this is transferred to race, the theory is that social structures can be used by one racial group to suppress another racial group in a similar way to how they are used by one class to oppress another. What both situations have in common is that there is an *oppressed group* that is subjected to disadvantage by an *oppressor group* that deploys political institutions to maintain this oppression. In both cases, there is an enmity between the two groups.

Critical race theory provides the intellectual basis for a political movement that emerged around the same time: identity politics. The Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 is widely accepted as the beginning of identity politics. The Combahee River Collective emerged as a response to perceived shortcomings of the civil rights and feminist movements. Although they supported its efforts to liberate black people, its members felt that the civil rights movement was sexist and homophobic. Similarly, feminism, they maintained, was driven by white heterosexual women who failed to understand the needs of lesbians and black women. Thus, they concluded, a distinct voice for black lesbian women was required. They proclaim in the statement, "We realise that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us." This is the insight that forms the basis for their belief that only members of an oppressed group are able to determine what political action is necessary in order to overcome the

institutional oppression that that group experiences.

Drawing on critical race theory, identity politics calls for political action to overcome entrenched oppression. There is entrenched enmity between the oppressors and the oppressed, and the only way to overcome this oppression is to enable the oppressed group to take whatever political action they deem necessary in order to overcome the oppression. Only political action can overcome the entrenched oppression and only the oppressed group can determine what political action is necessary to overcome this entrenched oppression.

Identity politics has become the dominant approach to progressive politics in Australia. It is now a constant refrain amongst the Greens and parts of the Labor Party that oppressed groups must be supported in determining for themselves how they can overcome their oppression. Of course, we should all be concerned about the plight of people who are suffering, and look for public policy options for addressing this where possible, as we should also look to civil society institutions to help address it. That does not mean, however, that we should see politics fundamentally as a struggle in which the oppressed group seeks to overthrow the oppressor group. The rise of identity politics has had the effect that Australian politicians now see enmity in Australian society, where they previously saw disagreement.

If identity politics is correct, then there is no common good. This is because the good of an oppressed group within a society is diametrically opposed to the good of the oppressor group in that society. Politics is then an endless struggle between opponents who seek to overpower one another. Thus, the introduction of identity politics into Australian political life is a very serious matter. It presents Australian society as consisting of groups between which there is enduring enmity. For this reason, identity politics presents a distinct threat to the Australian civic compact.

As we have seen, the civic compact can promote social cohesion through tolerance of those with whom we disagree. The rise of identity politics means that increasing numbers of people are being encouraged to see enmity where previously they might have seen disagreement and so the window for tolerance shrinks.

Converting enmity into disagreement

In a social world that values the freedom of its members, social cohesion can only be achieved through some sort of civic compact. There will have to be some basis on which the members of the society can agree to live together cohesively.

As presented by Kurti, Australia's civic compact has the capacity to manage disagreement in a multicultural liberal democracy. Yet, as disagreement has given way to enmity in Australia, as evidenced by the rise of antisemitism, it is hardly surprising that social cohesion has been breaking down and the civic compact has failed to address this. We cannot expect to manage increasing enmity through tolerance.

Given these developments, we have two options. Either we adopt a new civic compact that can deal with enmity, or we convert enmity into disagreement, so that it can be managed through the existing civic compact based on tolerance. Neither option will be achieved simply, but this is the challenge of the moment, so we do well to consider both.

First, adopting a new civic compact. It is not clear what a new civic compact would look like. That is not to say that it could not be devised or adopted. What is apparent, however, is that to abandon the existing civic compact would be to change Australia in a fundamental way. The idea that Australia aspires to be a tolerant society is central to the idea of giving everyone a fair go; that we as a society should create space for all to live as they choose — providing they let everyone else do so too.

That Australia should remain fundamentally the same is not a universally accepted axiom. As we have seen, those who advocate identity politics, for instance, are explicitly committed to changing Australia in a fundamental way. If Australia is not to be changed in a fundamental way, then the civic compact needs to be upheld, and we need to consider the second option: converting enmity into disagreement. If this could be achieved, then the disagreement could be managed through tolerance. How might enmity be converted into disagreement, so that it can be managed through tolerance? Converting

enmity into disagreement is no mean feat. It requires a practical response. Rabbi Zalman Kastel offers an example of one such practical way forward.

In 2006, Kastel established the Together for Humanity Foundation, building on informal activities under the auspices of the Chabad House of the North Shore and the Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations that had begun in 2002. The foundation offers programs primarily aimed at bringing schoolchildren from various religious and cultural backgrounds into contact with either peers or adults from backgrounds that are different from their own. These are delivered jointly by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim facilitators, who model the kind of relations that they hope to cultivate amongst the children with whom they are engaging. The aim of their programs is to reduce prejudice and increase belonging, in the hope that this will contribute to greater social cohesion.

Kastel explains that his programs demonstrate how prejudice can be replaced by a combination of empathy, awareness of common values, and an ability to work together.[30] The challenge, he writes, is to address perceptions, or attitudes that have been described as 'indirect-experiential function', "where information received from the media or friends about objectionable behaviour such as terrorism shapes the perception of the whole group that is seen to be linked to this behaviour." Kastel invites the participants to engage in activities that stimulate self-reflection. This is prompted by participating in positive activities with members of the group in question, so that they can "imagine 'alternative possibilities' to our entrenched way of seeing reality."

The schoolchildren are guided through activities in the hope that they will ask themselves, "Do we tend to think of 'them' as essentially evil? Or can we see them as human beings who are responding in a way that for us is terrible, but which might make some sense to them, based on their story? This is not to say we cannot stand up for justice as we understand it: it is rather an argument for refusing to dehumanise the other side."

The approach taken by Together for Humanity is based on the premise that inter-group relations can improve through a combination of empathy, inter-group contact and cognitive approaches. It is self-evident that increased empathy will result in decreased feelings of prejudice. It has also been empirically verified by an independent academic evaluation of Together for Humanity's work.[31] This study found that Together for Humanity programs are effective in assisting students to challenge stereotypes and alleviate their fears; empowering students to deal with prejudice and discrimination; and promoting the acquisition of empathy and mutual acceptance and belonging.

Kastel's work has established that empathy for a particular group also increases as contact with that group increases, as the program guides the participants through shared activities that have the effect of breaking down the perception of the group as 'other'. While such experiential learning is necessary, it is not sufficient. Together For Humanity's approach also depends upon providing information that refutes false beliefs (notably, Ryvchin's seven myths summarised above) as "the idea of 'reasonableness' is a significant factor in why people reject prejudice".

The work of Together for Humanity demonstrates how enmity can be broken down and reconfigured as disagreement. In this way, it prepares citizens for the civic compact. Kastel and his team do this through cultivating appropriate civic virtues in schoolchildren. Once they have these, they experience disagreement rather than enmity, and it is open to them to choose tolerance. It is at this point that Kurti's analysis becomes relevant. Citizens who choose to tolerate those with whom they disagree can live in a society that is both multicultural and socially cohesive.

Policy possibilities

Kastel and Kurti should not have the last word. They are advanced as the first word in a new conversation. They show us how it might be possible to convert enmity into disagreement, and then disagreement into tolerance. The fact that it is possible to move from enmity to tolerance via disagreement means that the current erosion of social cohesion does not require us to abandon the existing civic compact. Having established this, we should consider briefly a few suggestions for how policy might help move things in the right direction.

Kurti put forward a series of recommendations recently in *The Ties that Bind* that concentrate on how Australia could cultivate a civic national identity that is compatible with value pluralism. His recommendations include:

- Civic education reform
- Citizenship test revision
- Intercultural dialogue initiatives
- Conflict resolution mechanisms.

Kastel and his colleagues at Together for Humanity recently made a number of policy recommendations to the federal Minister for Education. These synthesise recommendations of the special envoys to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia and the race discrimination commissioner, and include the following:

- Increase opportunities for encounters between students and people from different cultures and faiths, and encourage education systems to prioritise such encounters;
- Improve learning of civic values and skills, including thinking critically, taking other perspectives, resolving conflicts constructively, tolerance, respect for diversity, empathy, open-mindedness, justice and fairness for everyone;
- Train the teachers of tomorrow to develop skills and values that enable them to 'disagree well', and to foster this capacity in their students.

Thinking more broadly about the role of education, Catholic Schools New South Wales recently published a discussion paper, *A Return to Beauty*, that considered how liberal arts education could be introduced into New South Wales schools within the constraints of the current curriculum and regulation system.[32] In particular, it draws on the account of liberal arts as an education for the whole person developed by Anthony Fisher, the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney. The idea that schools should offer an education for the whole person is a way of making the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues central to a child's educational experience. This sort of approach could be deployed to assist in helping develop in children the capacity for tolerating difference rather than instilling enmity.

These recommendations focus on how we can cultivate the necessary virtues for restoring a civic compact anchored in tolerance. This is central to addressing the problem and necessarily invites close attention to opportunities for improving education in the broadest sense. While cultivating virtue in children through education is important, so is the cultivation of institutions and public discourse.

Institutions are an important means of transmitting values. These include civil society as well as public institutions. Scout packs, for instance, affirm the importance of certain values and encourage and reward members who demonstrate these values. The Council of Christians and Jews is a very different kind of civil society institution that is committed to cultivating other values. We need to think about how existing institutions might do more to affirm the civic compact, and, indeed, whether there is a need to establish new institutions for this purpose.

Public discourse is also fundamental to affirming confidence in the civic compact. In bygone days, newspapers would publish the weekly sermons of bishops, as well as speeches of prominent statesmen. Such sermons and speeches were a means of reaffirming that society was right to have confidence in its shared values. We now live in a world of influencers, and how messages are communicated has changed radically. This does not change the fact that there is a critical role for those in leadership positions in public life and civil society. Leaders need to speak up and affirm the virtues that are cultivated through education and perpetuated through institutions.

Returning to the specific case of antisemitism, we need to think about what can be done now to contain the hatred that has swollen in recent years. Kastel emphasises the importance of contact with people who are 'other'. There is no doubt that this is effective in cultivating empathy. In the case of antisemitism, however, we need to be mindful of the fact that Jews constitute 0.46% of the Australian population and tend to live in a small number of postcodes in Melbourne and Sydney. This means that most Australians will never have direct contact with Jewish people. We need to think creatively about ways in which more

Australians can encounter Jewish culture. There are opportunities offered by Israeli film and Jewish food festivals, for instance, through which larger numbers of people can experience Jewish and Israeli life. Such initiatives need to be prioritised if we are to de-escalate the increasing hostility that Jewish and Israeli people are currently experiencing in Australia.

In December 2025, the Australian government announced its response to the Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism. This response did not contain all the answers, but it did suggest that public policy would take more seriously the need to eliminate antisemitism and restore social cohesion. It was followed in January by the passing of *the Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism Bill* by a recalled federal parliament which, in practical terms, changed little on the ground. In its final version, the Bill does not create new hate-speech offences or ban political slogans; instead, it largely restates existing Commonwealth law and adds limited clarifications around antisemitism. However, the broad scope of the rushed legislation could have unintended consequences in terms of freedom of speech.

If hate speech is to be further restricted, there is a question over ministers of religion who incite hatred in the course of their religious duties. The Federal Court case of *Wertheim v Haddad*[33] brought the problem that hate preachers pose under current legislation to public attention. The government had intended to create a carve-out in the proposed hate speech offence that would have meant that it did not apply to the utterance of religious texts. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry argued that the carve-out was not necessary, and that discussion of religious texts should be subject to ordinary hate crimes legislation.

The fact that the government could not get the support of the Jewish community for a religious texts exception to new hate speech laws; that sections of the Liberal Party thought that the proposed law went too far in restricting freedom of speech; and that the Greens thought it did not go far enough in covering all categories of people in need of protection, demonstrates just how difficult it will be to deal with this problem.

While there is a strong view that radical clerics should not be allowed to use religious discourse as a cloak for promoting hatred within Australian society, there is precious little agreement on how to address this problem. It is, however, a critical threat to social cohesion, and one that the civic compact cannot deal with on its own. In the aftermath of the Bondi massacre, lawmakers cannot avoid having to grapple with how hate speech is outlawed in the context of religious preaching.

Conclusion

Overcoming enmity and restoring tolerance

In the aftermath of an antisemitic massacre that killed 15 innocent people peacefully celebrating at Bondi Beach, there can be no doubt that Australia's civic compact is under pressure. Kurti has demonstrated how it can maintain social cohesion in a multicultural society through tolerance of different values. Such tolerance can manage disagreement, but it cannot manage enmity.

The rise of antisemitism in Australia has demonstrated not an increase in levels of disagreement, but an increase in levels of enmity. What the Generalised Antisemitism scale measures is not how much people in a particular society disagree with Jews or Israel, but how strongly they feel hatred towards them. It is this increase in feelings of hostility that has threatened Australia's social cohesion, not increased disagreement about how we should like to live our lives.

If we want to reinforce the civic compact's capacity to maintain social cohesion, we need to reduce the level of enmity. This can be done by removing the pernicious influence of critical race theory and identity politics, which encourage people to understand social problems in terms of enmity.

From an early age, children need to have the correct virtues cultivated, so that they approach others with empathy and see difference in terms of disagreement rather than enmity. Only in that way can we hope to restore the role of tolerance in Australian society.

Antisemitism exemplifies the growth of hatred that is fracturing Australia's civic compact. It is important that we call it out as a form of hatred, and acknowledge that Jew-hatred is a hatred that cannot be tolerated in Australia. Only then can we address the causes of this hatred.

The good news is that the civic compact need not remain under pressure. If we commit ourselves to cultivating virtues that enable enmity to be converted into genuine disagreement, value pluralism can then be invoked, and tolerance can maintain social cohesion in a multicultural Australia.

Endnotes

1 See two earlier papers in this series, Reframing an Ancient Hatred: the intersection of left-wing antisemitism and anti-Zionism, by Julie Claridge and Progressive Intolerance. The contemporary antisemitism landscape in Australia by Philip endes.

2 Nathan, Julie (2024). Anti-Jewish Incidents. Report of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry: Sydney.

3 SI0001_MappingSocialCohesion_2025_v6.pdf

4 Kurti, Peter, The Ties that Bind: Reconciling value pluralism and national identity in Australia. Centre for Independent Studies Analysis Paper 81, 2025.

5 Kurti, p. 2.

6 Kurti, p. 3.

7 Kurti, p. 3.

8 Gray, John, Two Faces of Liberalism (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1995), 2nd edition.

9 Kurti, p. 4.

10 Kurti, p. 6.

11 Kurti, p. 7.

12 Kurti, p. 7.

13 Kurti, p. 7.

14 Kurti, p. 8.

15 Kurti, p. 8.

16 Kurti, p. 9.

17 Kurti, p. 15.

18 Wistrich, Robert S., Antisemitism: The longest hatred (London: Thames Mandarin, 1992), p. xv.

19 Ryvchin, Alex, The 7 Deadly Myths: antisemitism from the time of Christ to Kanye West (Cherry Orchard Books: Boston, 2023).

20 Working Definition of Antisemitism (Bucharest: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016).

21 Allington, Daniel, David Hirsh and Louise Katz (2022). "The Generalised Antisemitism (GeAs) Scale: A questionnaire instrument for measuring antisemitism as expressed in relation both to Jews and to Israel", Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism, Vol. 5(1), pp.37-48.

22 Allington et al, p. 40.

23 Beattie, Peter (2017). "Anti-Semitism and Opposition to Israeli Government Policies: The roles of prejudice and information", Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 40(15), pp. 2749-2767, p. 2762.

24 Freeman, Damien, The End of Settlement: why the 2023 referendum failed (Connor Court: Redland Bay Qld, 2024).

25 Kurti, p. 10.

26 Kurti, p. 11.

27 Freeman, Damien, The End of Settlement. Connor Court: Redland Bay, Queensland, 2024).

28 Hancock, W. K., Australia (London: Ernest Benn, 1930).

29 E.g. Kelly, Paul, The End of Certainty: The story of the 1980s (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992).

30 Kastel, Zalman, "Positive relations between members of groups with divergent beliefs and cultures" in S. Roffey (ed.), Positive Relationships: Evidence based practice across the world (Springer Science + Business Media, 2012).

31 Gale, F., Edenborough, M., Boccanfuso E., Hawkins, M., Sell, C. (2019). Promoting intercultural understanding, connectedness and belonging: An independent qualitative evaluation of Together For Humanity programs. Western Sydney University, Australia.

32 A Return to Beauty: Liberal Arts and Classical Education, Catholic Schools NSW Discussion Paper, August 2025: discussion-paper-liberal-arts-and-classical-education-return-beauty.

33 [2025] FCA 720 - 311 FCR 263.

This report is part of a three-year project led by The Centre for Independent Studies, examining how antisemitism and religious hatred are testing Australia's pluralist democracy. This paper provides a moral and civic analysis of the pressures undermining Australia's traditional civic compact. It explores how rising antisemitism reflects broader civic and cultural fragmentation in Australia, how the principles underpinning the Australian civic compact are being fragmented by a number of factors, in particular identity politics and left-wing antisemitism, and how civic cohesion and pluralist confidence can be restored.

About the Author

Damien Freeman is a Fellow of the Robert Menzies Institute at the University of Melbourne. He has written Occasional Papers for The Centre for Independent Studies, including on the future of multiculturalism. He also is the author of T*he End of Settlement: Why the 2023 referendum failed*.

Related Works

Philip Mendes. *Progressive Intolerance. The contemporary antisemitism landscape in Australia.* CIS Analysis Paper 98. January 2026

Julie Claridge. *Reframing an Ancient Hatred: the intersection of left-wing antisemitism and anti-Zionism*. CIS Analysis Paper 97. December 2025.

THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES

Analysis Paper 99(AP99) • ISSN: 2209-3753 (Online) 2209-3745 (Print) • ISBN: 978-1-923462-29-8
Published February 2026 by the Centre for Independent Studies Limited. Views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre's staff, advisors, directors or officers.

This publication is available from the Centre for Independent Studies. Visit **cis.org.au**

Level 1, 131 Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000 • **phone:** 02 9438 4377 • **email:** cis@cis.org.au