



How Australia's Anti-Hate Laws May Feed Its Far-Right Hydra

Donovan Tan



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By Donovan Tan

SYNOPSIS

Australia's recent anti-hate legislation, passed in January 2026, has ostensibly crippled domestic far-right organisations. The National Socialist Network's disbandment, which immediately followed, has been celebrated by some. However, disbandment merely reframes the threat, as far-right elements have decentralised to avoid prosecution. Decentralisation disperses extremists instead of defeating them. This risks catalysing the very violence the legislation seeks to prevent. Without addressing ideological motivations, restrictive measures may prove inadequate, and even counterproductive.

COMMENTARY

On January 20, 2026, Australia passed the "Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism Bill" following the December 14, 2025, Bondi Beach attack. The bill sanctions hate speech, reckless use of hate symbols, and "prohibited hate groups". It targets non-violent extremist organisations that proliferate incendiary exclusionist rhetoric while carefully avoiding explicit calls to violence.

The National Socialist Network (NSN) – Australia's most prominent neo-Nazi organisation – [disbanded itself](#) on January 16 to avoid prosecution under the new [legislation](#). For now, the bill has obstructed domestic non-violent extremist organisations like the NSN. But it would be premature to think it sufficient for a sustained suppression or eradication of the far-right extremist threat.

While the anti-hate laws have ostensibly crippled Australia's far-right, neo-Nazi extremists, the faction retains a zealous, albeit decentralised, support base that is poised to mobilise – even under "leaderless" banners like the anti-immigration March

for Australia (MFA) [rallies](#). Far-right extremism in Australia may have lost some momentum, but it still constitutes a credible threat.

While policies like Australia's anti-hate legislation can assist in threat suppression, these are inadequate in themselves. Effective organisation enables extremists to mobilise, but it is motivation that drives them to act. Without addressing extremists' motivation, Australia may find its anti-hate legislation wanting and counter-productive to its counter-extremism efforts. Given Australia's dynamic domestic politics and the far-right's proven [propensity](#) for political violence, nuisance rallies may readily give way to deadly lone-actor attacks.

NSN Reacts to Anti-Hate Legislation

Far-right groups like the NSN cannot continue operating legally: Upon designation, its leaders and members face severe penalties for recruitment, activism, and vile expressions like the Nazi salute.

However, disbandment has not meant disengagement. NSN supporters remain committed, viewing the legislation as confirmation that liberal democracy has failed white Australians – further evidence, in their reading, that political violence is the only viable recourse. Its leaders have adapted rather than retreated. Thomas Sewell, a neo-Nazi activist, continues broadcasting on social media and fundraising for a legal challenge to the legislation on [GiveSendGo](#), while other figureheads continue to operate publicly as nominally unaffiliated individuals.

Declining attendance at January's MFA rallies has triggered [speculation](#) about a slow death for the Australian far-right. This optimism may be premature. The detention of key organisers, the deterrent effect of the legislation, and [strategic caution](#) likely suppressed turnout – concerns vindicated when former NSN member Brandan Koschel was [sentenced](#) on February 18, to 12 months in jail with a nine-month non-parole period for inciting hatred.

Problems Posed by Decentralisation of Extremist Organisations

While harsher anti-hate policies effectively hinder far-right extremists' organisations and reach, their subsequent decentralisation creates new challenges that exceed the anti-hate legislation's scope. Firstly, banning hate organisations like the NSN disperses its support base. While a scattered support base is not necessarily harder to deal with, the task shifts from crowd control or monitoring of group activities to sifting out malicious lone actors from dense populations. In cities with millions of residents, or rural areas with inadequate surveillance and enforcement infrastructure, swiftly detaining these individuals is additionally challenging for overstretched security forces.

Decentralisation poses a greater risk: It creates conditions that can catalyse lone-actor violence. While lone-actor attacks (and those perpetrated by small cells) are [likelier to fail](#) than the sophisticated schemes of intricate terrorist networks, they escape surveillance more easily and are hence harder to prevent.

For transnational, violent extremist far-right organisations like [The Base](#), a neo-Nazi white supremacist organisation based in the US, decentralisation is essential and advantageous – not a hindrance. The Base comprises “Trouble Trios” – two to three-person splinter cells – that operate and train independently. These splinter cells rarely interact or cooperate with sister cells, although they are united by radical, neo-Nazi and accelerationist ideologies, and shared symbology and literature.

Disruption through international proscription (by the [UK](#), [Canada](#), and the [European Union](#)) and [arrests](#) has also done little to stymie their operations. Since each splinter cell is ignorant of sister cells’ plans or modus operandi, arresting a cell is less likely to implicate another.

Although a slew of arrests in the early 2020s crippled The Base, there is a worrying [resurgence](#) in its operations. Members of White Phoenix, a Ukraine-based affiliate of The Base have committed arson, sabotage, and even assassination as part of a campaign to establish a white ethnostate “by any means necessary”. This pattern is instructive. Proscription has proven ineffective against extremist networks that skillfully exploit decentralisation because it cannot address ideological motivations.

Violent Implications for Australia

Social cohesion demands that hate activists be deplatformed and their rallies stymied, but while not every NSN sympathiser will resort to mass violence, the lone-actor threat remains salient.

On February 5, 2026, Liam Alexander Hall was [charged](#) with terrorism for throwing a homemade “fragment bomb” packed with ball bearings and screws into a crowd of over 2,000 people at the Perth Invasion Day rally. Furthermore, mass killers like [Brenton Tarrant](#) and the [Bondi terrorists](#) have been responsible for some of the worst attacks connected to Australia in recent history. While they had fleeting involvement with extremist organisations, they ultimately acted on their own.

These attacks are among the most devastating repercussions of decentralised violence. Australia’s recent anti-hate legislation risks exacerbating a significant and credible lone-actor threat, though this may take time to incubate. In response to Hall’s attack, Western Australia Premier Roger Cook “alleged that the attacker was radicalised by online, hateful and racist ideology ... We must take more responsibility for how our words and actions can give oxygen to hate”.

Conclusion

Decentralisation may remove extremist organisations from the public eye – but, forced underground, the extremists are free to catalyse each other’s radicalisation. A hasty application of restrictive policies may even backfire by provoking mass violence, as these radicals become increasingly convinced that there is absolutely no alternative to mass violence. Restrictive measures should therefore be complemented by efforts that address the ideological convictions driving radicalisation. Without holistic, long-term policy solutions, such measures will quickly prove inadequate.

For now, Australia's anti-hate legislation has effectively suppressed the far-right's political activism – organisations like the NSN have had to divert time and resources into efforts that do not immediately advance their political agendas.

But it would be folly to mistake such measures as a permanent solution to far-right extremism. The zealously nationalist, misogynistic, and white supremacist sentiments that animate the movement are alive and well as the recent Invasion Day terrorist attack demonstrated.

Donovan Tan is a Research Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

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