

A CONFIDENT NATION, AN ANXIOUS ONE

What Australians believe about
tolerance and antisemitism

Peter Kurti





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Analysis Paper 109

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Introduction

Since 7 October 2023, and especially since the massacre at Bondi Beach in December 2025, Australia has been in the midst of an intense national conversation about antisemitism; a conversation that has frequently been couched in terms of hostility to Israel and the actions of the Israeli government.

That conversation is not taking place in isolation. Internationally, Israel's standing is at a low ebb. A recent Pew Research Center survey found that across 36 countries, a median of 67% of respondents held an unfavourable view of Israel while only 25% had a favourable one. Views of Israel are particularly negative in Muslim-majority countries, such as Pakistan (95%) and Turkey (97%). Of course, hostility to Israel is not necessarily the same thing as antisemitism. But it is the international weather. The harder question for Australia is what that weather does to the climate at home.

How are Australians responding to the social and moral crisis of antisemitism? Although governments promise — and attempt to enact — tough new legislative measures to address 'hate speech' and vilification, new Australian data suggests the public is wary of simply resorting to more law and is thinking about the problem in a more nuanced way.

The New Intolerance Study is a major new national survey of 5,023 Australians commissioned by the Centre for Independent Studies and conducted by McCrindle in February and March 2026. The survey measures sentiment towards Jewish Australians specifically, distinct from views about Israel, and research reveals a nation confident about what binds it yet anxious about whether those bonds will hold.

This report sets out to summarise this significant piece of research by examining 16 of its key findings, and describing the narrative thread that runs through them. The CIS is releasing this initial analysis ahead of the full body of

research findings for two reasons: first, the survey data was used to inform the CIS's substantial submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion; and, second, in order to contribute promptly to a fast-moving national conversation about antisemitism and social cohesion. A more comprehensive treatment of the survey data will follow publication of the full report.

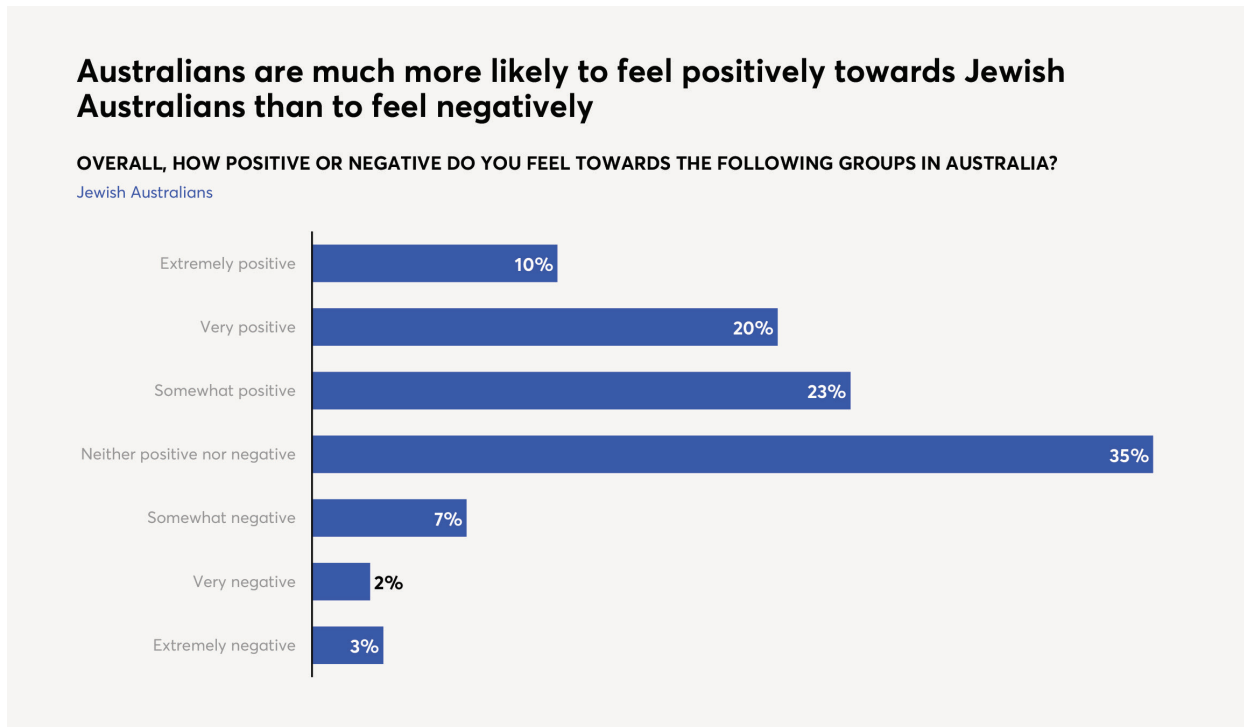
The McCrindle survey portrays a nation that is confident and broadly tolerant, but one that is nonetheless convinced that intolerance is serious, on the rise and about to get worse. What emerges from the survey is a tension — between a national mood of confidence on the one hand, and one of anxiety on the other — that is unlikely to be resolved easily in one direction or another.

At the outset, three significant features of the research findings need to be noted because they are important for understanding the impact of this empirical inquiry. First, the warmth Australians express toward minorities, including Jewish Australians, is genuine but unevenly distributed. When broken down by age, it contradicts much of the alarm frequently sounded about antisemitism; a contradiction that recurs throughout the data.

Second, Australians are concerned that antisemitism is rising and expect that it will get worse. This suggests that the public has calculated a deterioration of our civic culture. Third, anxiety about antisemitism and civic deterioration tends to be shaped both by salient events and by intimate personal networks rather than by direct encounter with it. Each of these features has a direct bearing on a principal civic question posed by the study: who should respond to intolerance, and by what means?

A confident, broadly tolerant nation

Finding 1. Australians regard Jewish Australians warmly: positive sentiment outweighs negative by more than four to one



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023 represented by age, gender and state/territory. Percentages are as published in the McCrindle summary report; component figures may not sum to 100 owing to rounding and the suppression of labels $\leq 3\%$. "Overall, how positive or negative do you feel towards the following groups in Australia?" (Jewish Australians).

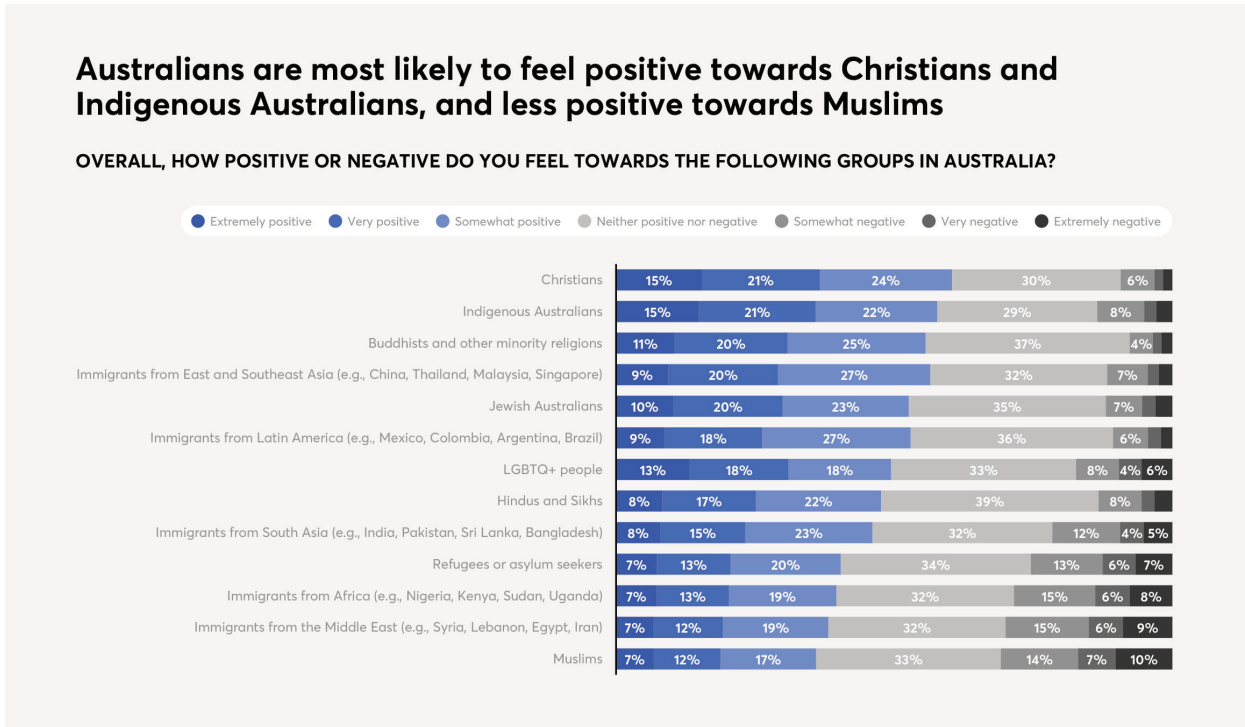
Feelings and attitudes toward Jewish Australians are generally encouraging, with a clear majority (53%) of us expressing some degree of positive feeling. Only around one in eight hold any degree of negative feeling, and the largest non-positive response is indifference rather than hostility (35%).

Finding 1 is significant because it suggests that in terms of attitude alone, Australia does not have a particular problem with antisemitism.

Yet as will emerge in this report, the public's warmth towards Jewish Australians coexists in tension with a widespread and growing conviction that antisemitism is both serious and rising.

A principal question arising from this research is whether — and how — this tension can be resolved while recognising the weight, or value, contained in each position.

Finding 2. That warmth is real but ranked: Jewish Australians sit in the upper half of a stable 'hierarchy of regard'



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. Total positive = extremely + very + somewhat positive. "Overall, how positive or negative do you feel towards the following groups in Australia?"

The warmth identified in Finding 1 is confirmed in **Finding 2** but also qualified when set alongside feelings about other groups in the community.

Australians arrange minorities into a recognisable 'hierarchy of regard', with Christians, Indigenous Australians and several established migrant communities near the top, and Muslims, Middle Eastern and African migrants at the bottom.

Jewish Australians sit comfortably in the upper half. Negative attitudes to Jewish Australians (12% from Finding 1) are

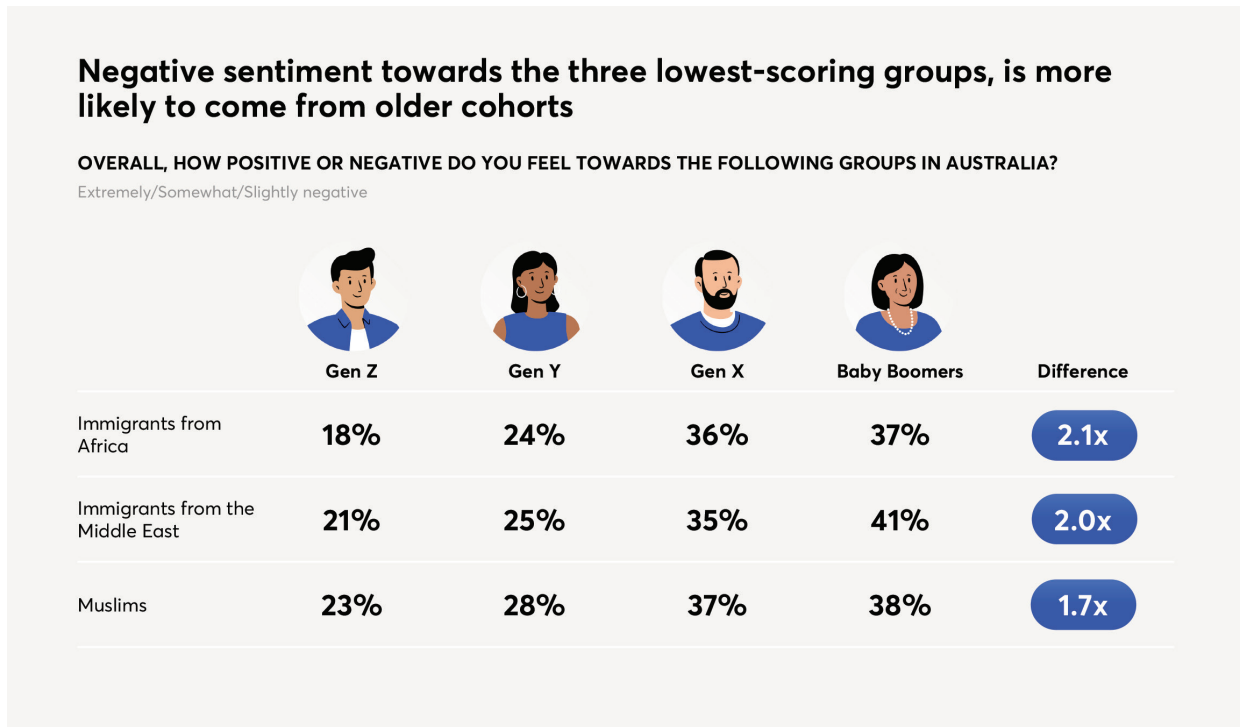
less than half of the negative attitudes towards Muslims (31%).

Any serious account of intolerance has to take into account what appears to be a structured ranking rather than random feelings of dislike.

This structure suggests that 'intolerance' is more nuanced and differentiated than popular accounts allow, as will be seen in Finding 3.

The inversion, and an anxiety that is rising

Finding 3. Negative feeling towards the least-favoured groups is concentrated among older Australians



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. Extremely / somewhat / slightly negative, by generation. "How positive or negative do you feel towards the following groups?"

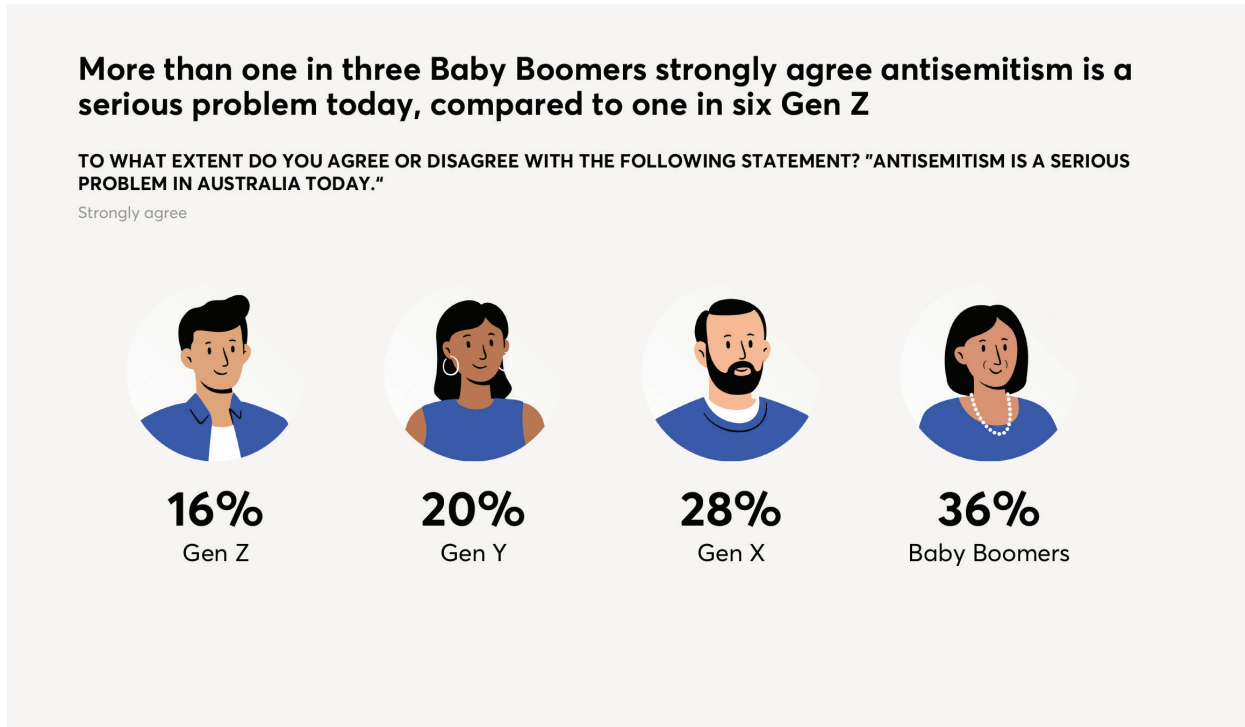
The hierarchy of regard acquires a generational profile when broken down by age, as shown in **Finding 3**.

Negative sentiment toward the three lowest-scoring groups is not evenly spread, but roughly doubles from the youngest cohort (often assumed to be the least prejudiced) to the oldest (who are often assumed to be the most prejudiced).

This emerging contrast between older and younger Australians is just one element of the inversion that runs through the survey.

When the subject changes from Muslims and migrants to Jewish Australians, the gradient of this contrast changes, as is clear from Finding 4.

Finding 4. Older Australians are most convinced antisemitism is serious: the warmth and the alarm run in opposite directions



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. "Antisemitism is a serious problem in Australia today" — strongly agree, by generation.

Older Australians who expressed the most reserve toward Muslims and migrants are also the ones who are most likely to regard antisemitism as a serious problem.

The margin is wide, showing that older Australians are more than twice as likely as the youngest cohort to say so strongly.

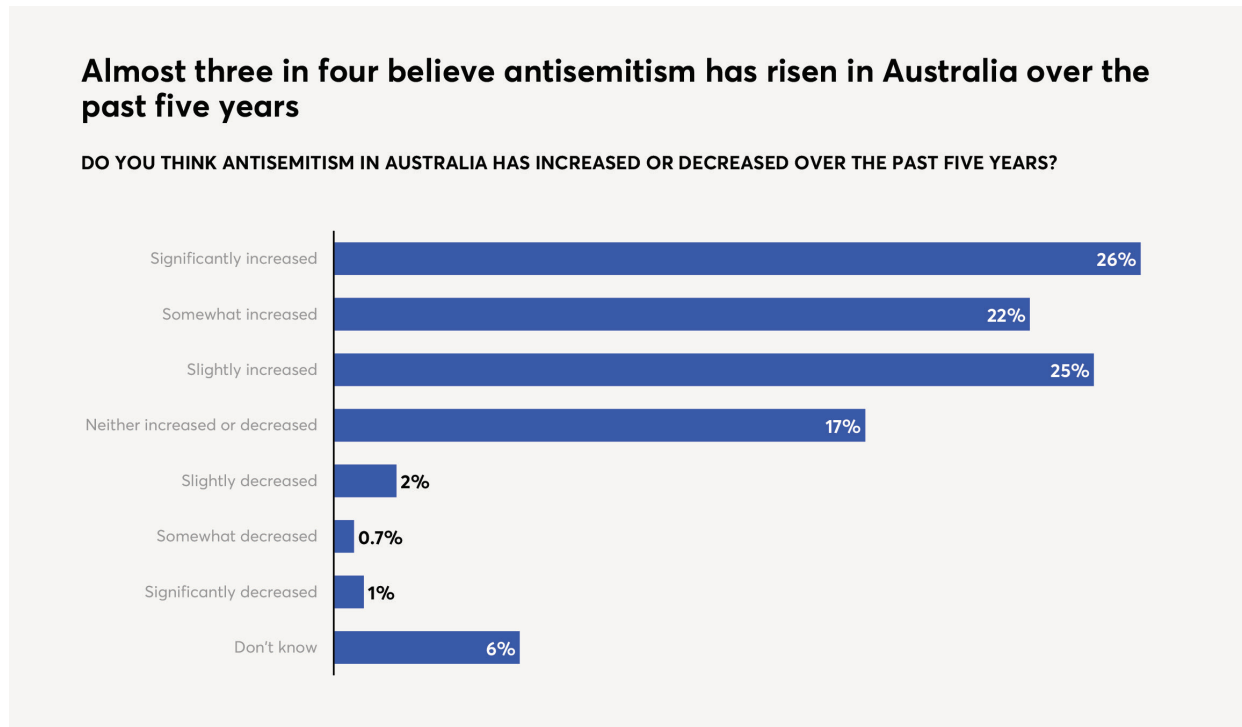
This pairing suggests that concern about antisemitism is not principally an expression of one cohort's affection for Jewish Australians; after all, the younger cohorts appear to be far less concerned about antisemitism. One possible interpretation is that this may be due to antisemitism becoming more normalised

and socially (and politically) acceptable to those cohorts.

Rather, **Finding 4** reflects a broader and heightened generational attitude to a perceived breakdown of public order and shared norms.

In other words, this finding needs to be registered at the level of public awareness rather than personal relationship, indicating how the generations read and respond to the same phenomenon in different ways (see also Finding 10).

Finding 5. Most Australians believe antisemitism has risen over the past five years

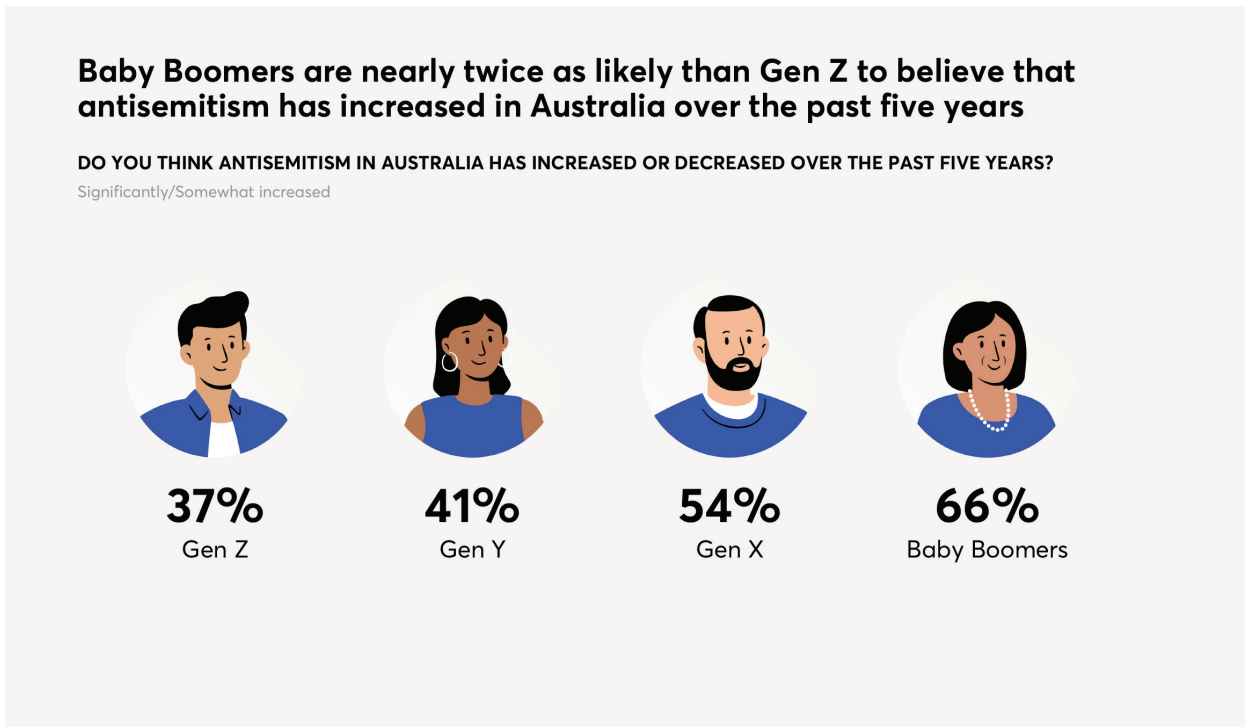


Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. "Do you think antisemitism in Australia has increased or decreased over the past five years?"

Three in four Australians believe antisemitism has increased over the past five years, with 26% saying it has increased significantly, as shown in **Finding 5**.

Belief in any decline is negligible. Given that this is a settled public judgment rather than a contested one, it is the baseline against which the public is likely to read each new antisemitic incident (see also Finding 8).

Finding 6. And the belief that it has risen climbs steeply with age



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. By generation.

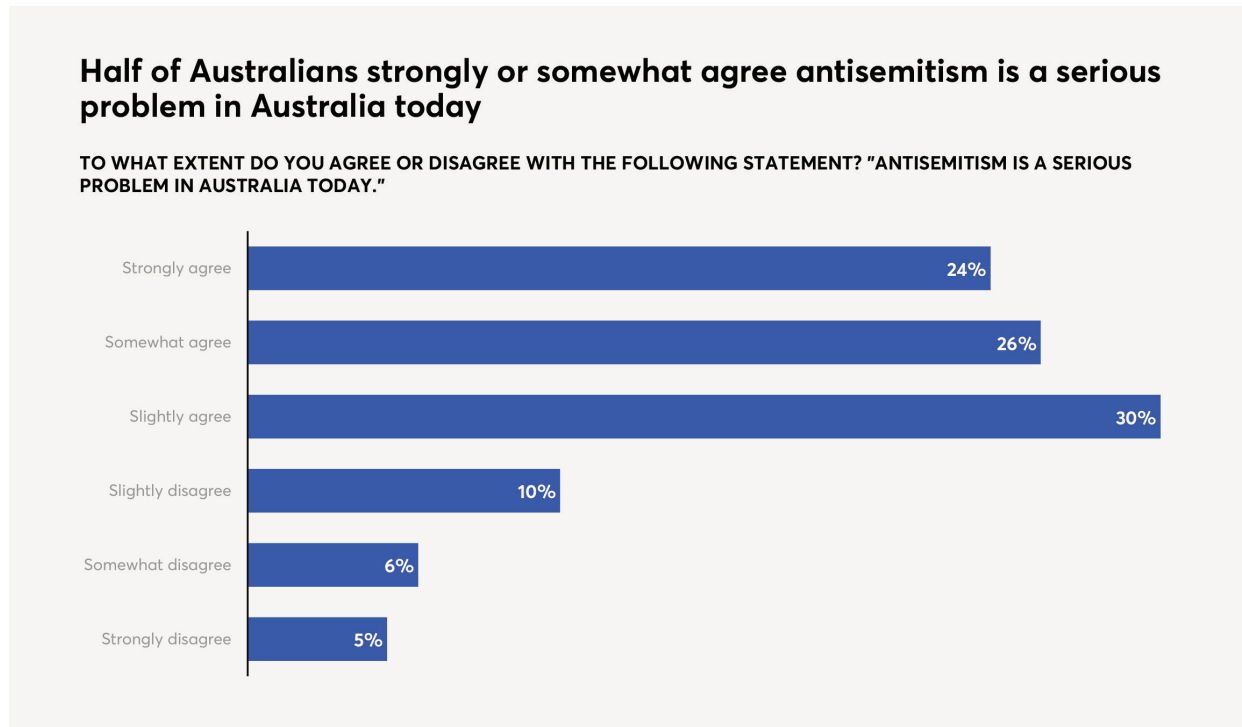
Yet the distribution about the judgment regarding the increase of antisemitism is far from uniform, **Finding 6** shows. The belief that it has risen climbs from a little over a third of the youngest cohort to almost double (two-thirds) of the oldest.

This means the trajectory of public perception is largely a function of who is doing the perceiving.

This is bound to have an impact on policy responses; a problem that is 'rising' invites a very different response from one understood as 'serious but stable'.

Since Australians do not agree on the degree of seriousness of the problem, there is consequently no agreement on the appropriate policy response.

Finding 7. Half the country now considers antisemitism serious; four in five concede it is at least a minor problem

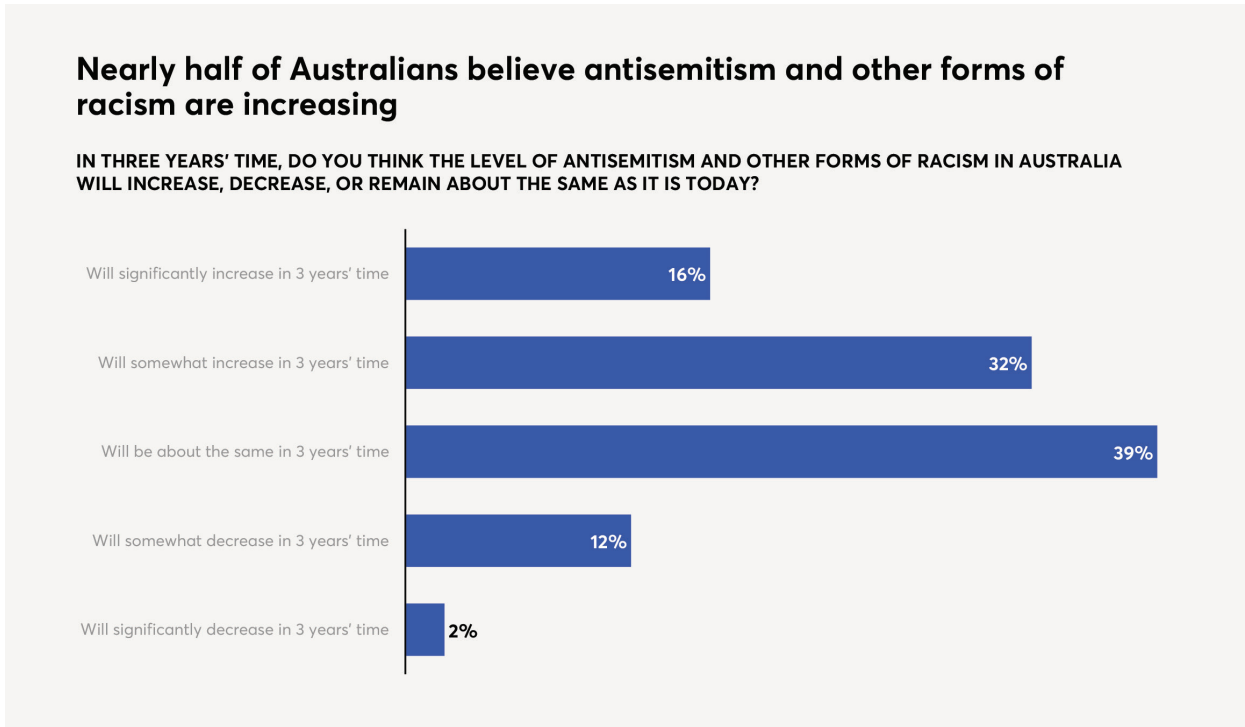


Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023.

Australians are quite evenly divided on the question of the seriousness of antisemitism. **Finding 7** shows half of us strongly or somewhat agree antisemitism is now serious. When the slighter forms of agreement are included, four in five concede at least some problem, and only one in five reject the proposition outright.

The mass of opinion sits in the qualified middle ('slightly agree' is the single largest response) suggesting that the public takes the issue of antisemitism to be real, but at one remove.

Finding 8. Nearly half expect antisemitism and racism to worsen in the future; almost none expect improvement



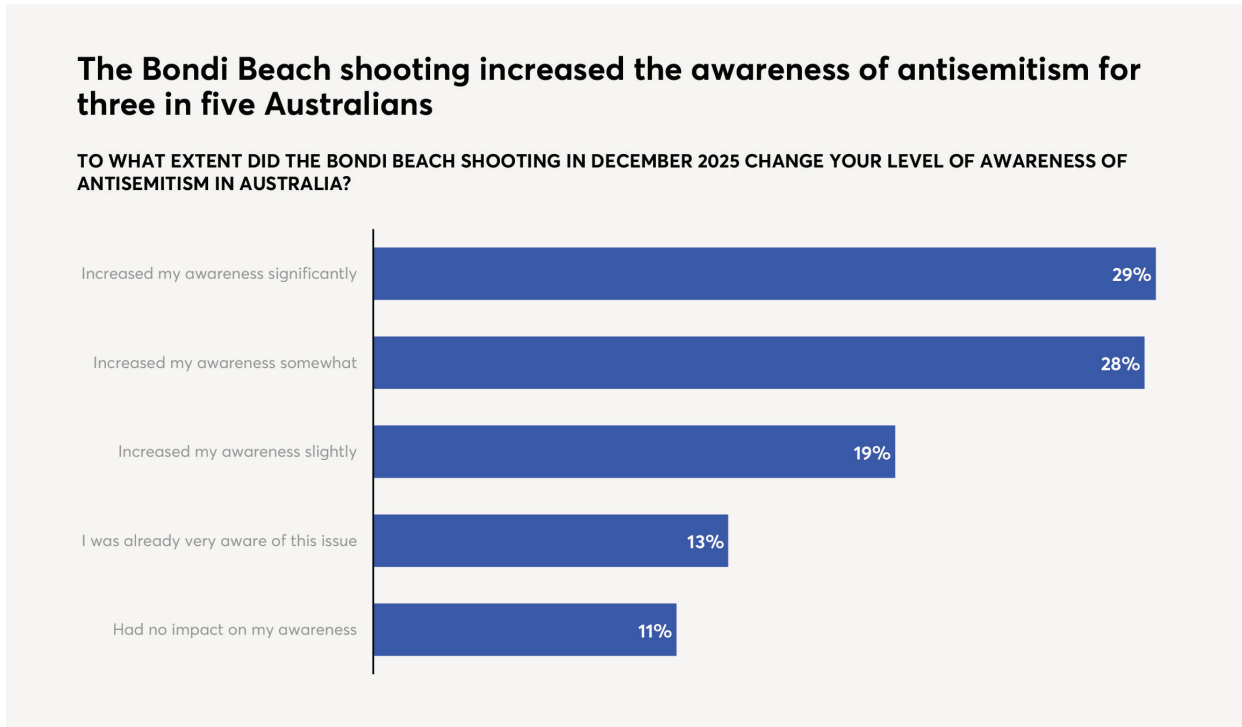
Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023.

This mood is confirmed by evidence regarding future expectations about antisemitism. Nearly half of respondents in **Finding 8** expect antisemitism and other forms of racism to worsen over the next three years; whereas only one in seven expects improvement, and the rest expect no change.

The default view is one of pessimism. The public believes that a problem has risen, considers it serious now, and expects it to deteriorate further. This reflects a state of opinion that serves as a baseline shaping public appetite for intervention.

What feeds the anxiety?

Finding 9. The Bondi Beach attack reset the reference point for antisemitism, lifting awareness for three in five Australians



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023.

For a clear majority, the December 2025 Bondi Beach attack was an important driver in raising awareness about antisemitism.

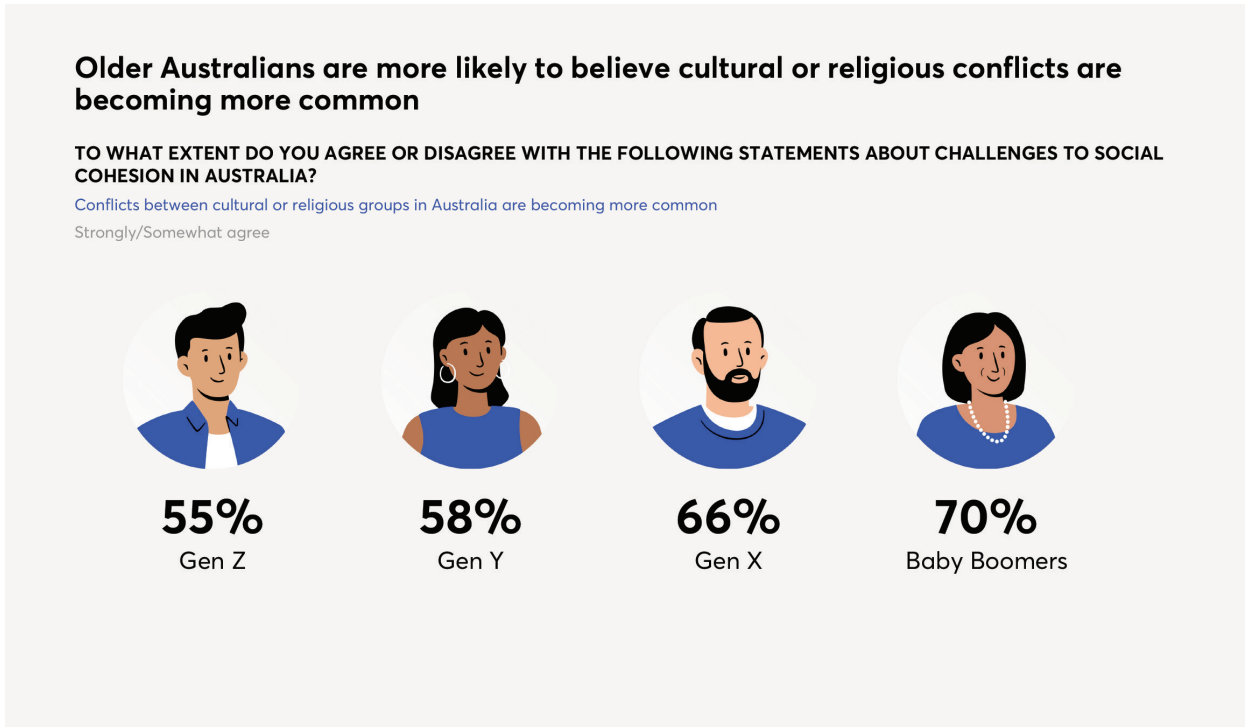
In **Finding 9**, three in five reported that their awareness increased significantly or somewhat, more than three-quarters reported at least some increase.

Only around one in nine said it had no effect on their awareness.

Bondi Beach set a new baseline for public judgment about levels of antisemitism in Australia. This suggests that awareness of antisemitism is, in part, driven by events.

The intensity of that awareness is responsive to discrete shocks, such as the Bondi massacre, rather than to a steady accumulation of personal experience.

Finding 10. The sense of fraying is broader than the issue of antisemitism and is sharpest among the old



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. Strongly / somewhat agree, by generation.

The unease identified in this research is not confined to antisemitism, **Finding 10** shows.

A clear majority across every age group believes conflict between cultural and religious groups is becoming more common; this belief is held most strongly by older Australians.

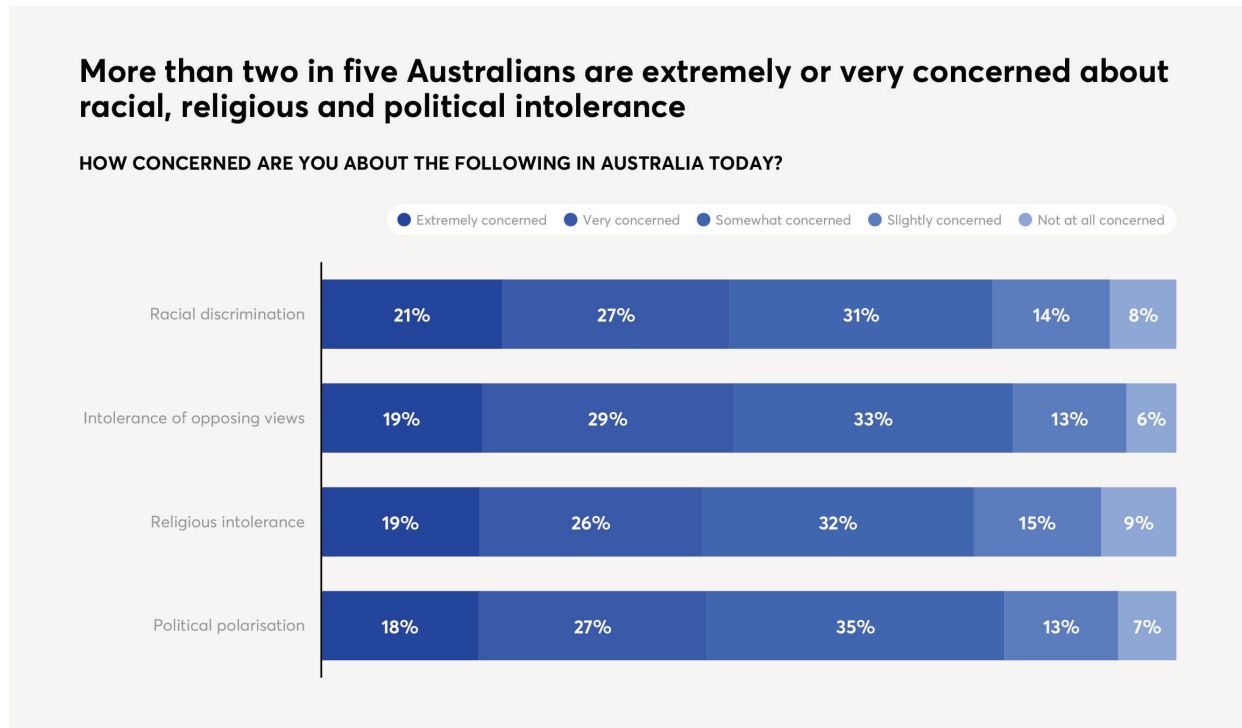
Antisemitism appears to be the sharpest instance of a more general perception that the social fabric is fraying.

The younger cohort that is warmest toward Jewish Australians in the abstract,

and most engaged across difference in practice, is the least persuaded that conflict is rising — although, as noted in Finding 4, one reading of this may be a growing normalisation of antisemitism for that generation.

The generational structure of the anxiety about Australia’s social cohesion identified earlier in this report appears to be consistent across the board.

Finding 11. Concern about intolerance is both broad and notably even across racial, religious and political lines



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. Extremely + very concerned. “How concerned are you about the following in Australia today?”

A generalised concern about various forms of intolerance is both broad and remarkably flat.

Roughly equal shares (a little under half in each case) in **Finding 11** are extremely or very concerned about racial discrimination, intolerance of opposing views, religious intolerance and political polarisation.

The evenness indicates that public concern is less about any one target than about a perceived coarsening of public life.

Intolerance is felt in the abstract as a deterioration in the temperature and tone of national debate of which antisemitism is the most acute symptom rather than a standalone concern.

Divergent remedies and a thin civic core

Finding 12. On remedy, the generations part company: the young reach first for representation

Younger Australians are more likely to believe that greater representation of minority groups in public will be effective in combating antisemitism and racism

IN YOUR VIEW, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MEASURES WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM AND OTHER FORMS OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIA?

Greater representation of minority groups in public life, media, and institutions



25%

Gen Z



22%

Gen Y



15%

Gen X



12%

Baby Boomers

Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. "Which measures would be most effective in addressing antisemitism and other forms of racism?" (greater representation of minority groups in public life, media and institutions), by generation.

When opinions are sought about appropriate remedies, **Finding 12** shows the generations part company.

Younger Australians are roughly twice as likely as the oldest to nominate greater representation of minorities (such as increased visibility in public life, media and institutions) as the most effective response.

The young reach first for inclusion: the remedy they favour works by widening

who is seen and heard rather than by constraining what may be said.

This response reflects an intuition that tolerance is secured by enlarging the circle of belonging.

The contrary intuition that tolerance is secured by sanction, belongs disproportionately to older Australians, as is explained in Finding 13.

Finding 13. Older Australians reach for law, and the generational gap is wide

Younger Australians are less convinced that harsher legislation effectively combats antisemitism and racism

IN YOUR VIEW, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MEASURES WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM AND OTHER FORMS OF RACISM IN AUSTRALIA?

Stronger laws and enforcement against hate speech and discrimination



39%

Gen Z



42%

Gen Y



50%

Gen X



59%

Baby Boomers

Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. "Which measures would be most effective in addressing antisemitism and other forms of racism?" (stronger laws and enforcement against hate speech and discrimination), by generation.

Support for stronger laws and enforcement as the most effective remedy climbs steadily with age, from under two in five of the youngest cohort to nearly three in five of the oldest, as shown in **Finding 13**. Read together with Finding 12, these two findings describe a single divide: the young favour visibility, the old favour sanction, and the cross-over sits around the middle of the age range. The young reach for inclusion and the old for prohibition not because they disagree about the seriousness of the problem, but because they hold different views of what tolerance requires and how it is secured.

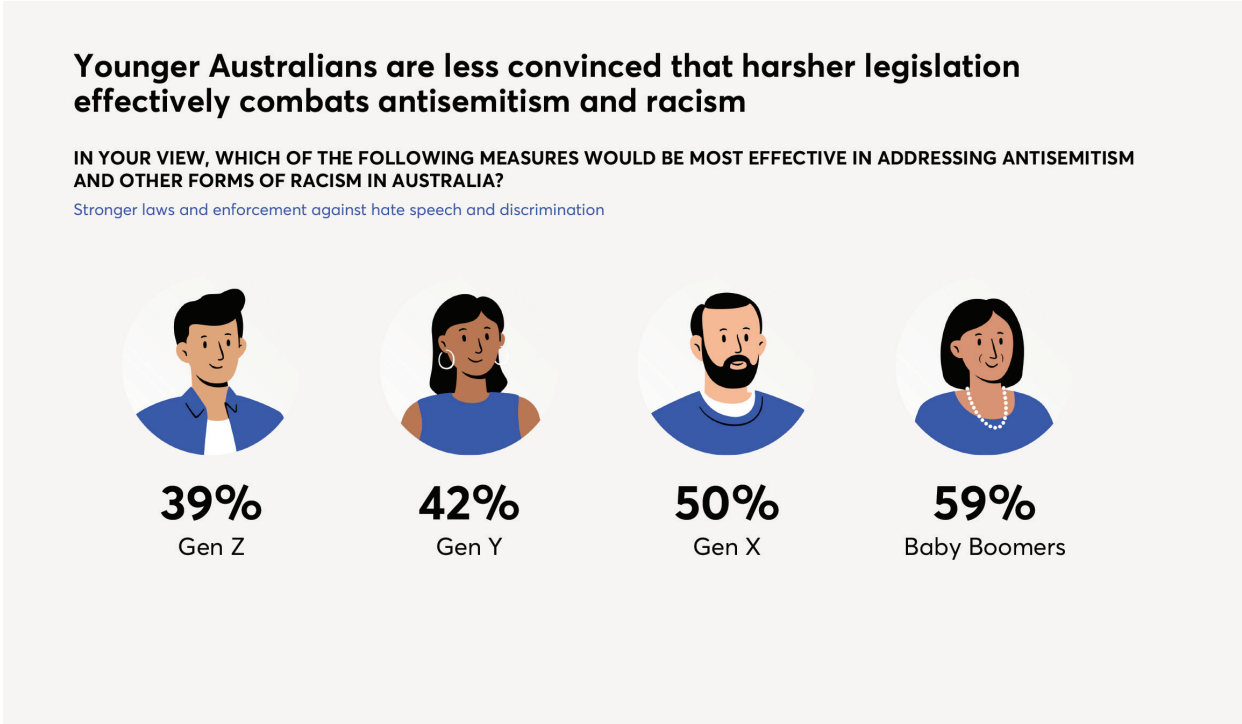
This is where the research points most clearly to the risk of over-legalisation.

The cohorts most alarmed about antisemitism, most convinced it has risen and most expectant that it will worsen (Findings 4, 6 and 8) are the very cohorts most drawn to a legislative response.

An anxiety driven by events but not grounded in direct experience of antisemitism is precisely the condition under which each new incident generates fresh demand for statutory response and under which the regulatory ratchet advances. Restrictions are far easier to enact than to repeal.

The generational politics of the issue thus carries a built-in bias toward the steady accretion of law, irrespective of whether

Finding 14. The young are also twice as likely to actually talk across difference



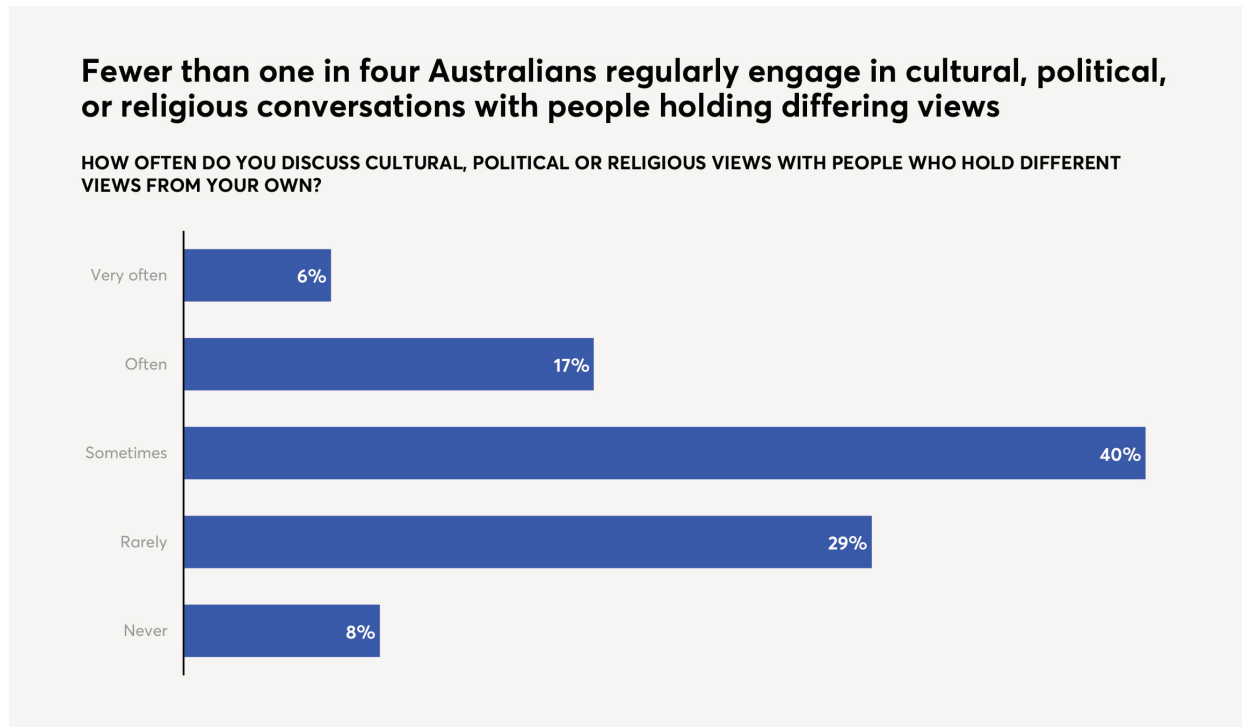
Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. Very often / often, by generation. “How often do you discuss cultural, political or religious views with people who hold different views from your own?”

earlier measures have proven effective. However, legislators should note that the cohort most disposed to legislate is also the cohort least willing to talk across difference, as noted in Finding 14.

As seen in **Finding 14**, the generational pattern on remedy is mirrored in behaviour. Younger Australians are twice as likely as the oldest to engage regularly with people who hold different cultural, political or religious views. The cohort most relaxed about minorities in the abstract is also the one most often in actual contact across difference. That correlation should temper any reading of youthful attitudes as naive. On this evidence, the warmth of the young is accompanied by, and perhaps partly

grounded in, a higher rate of genuine exposure to disagreement which is the very characteristic a liberal civic order depends upon. However, the acute issue of antisemitism on university campuses suggests such exposure may often be less than genuine and may, instead, have contributed to what might be read as the normalisation of intolerant discourse.

Finding 15. But for the country as a whole, conversation across difference is rare



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023.

For the nation as a whole, however, exposure to disagreement appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

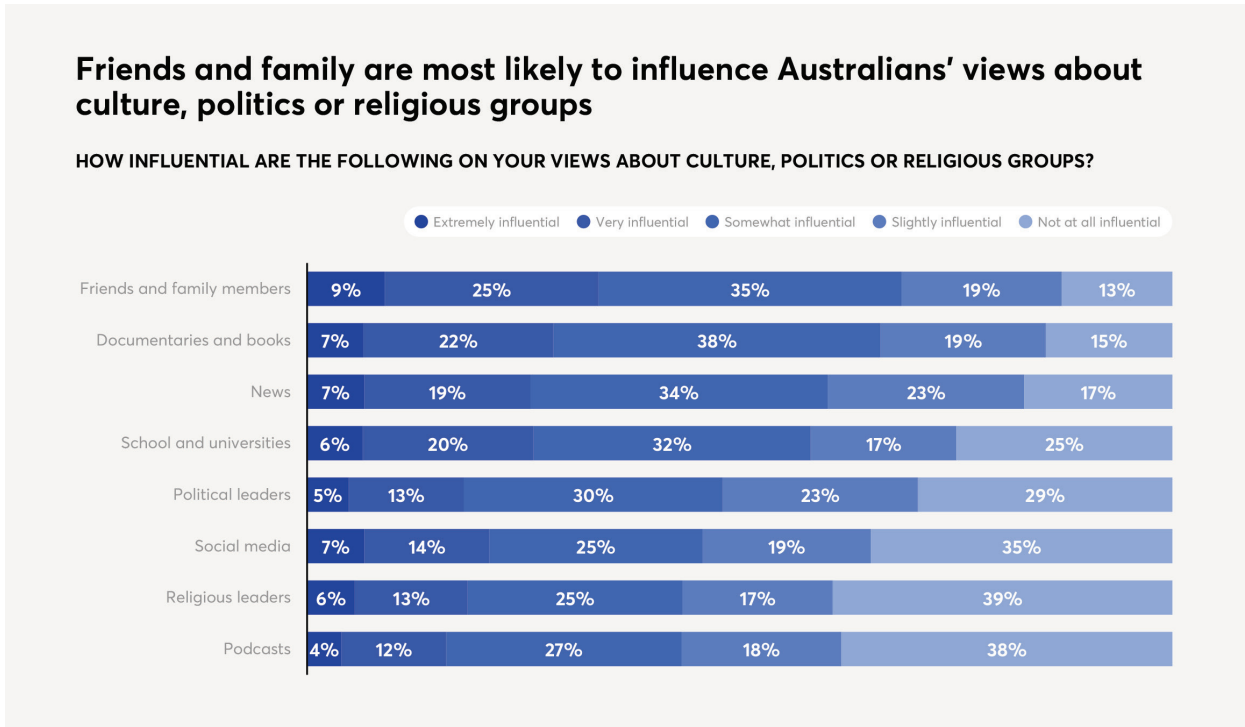
Fewer than one in four engage often across difference, while more than a third do so rarely or never.

The civic compact that expresses the disposition to live alongside those with whom one disagrees depends on routine exposure to disagreement.

Yet the data of **Finding 15** suggest exposure is actually quite thin, and thinning with age.

A public that perceives rising division while seldom encountering the other side directly is a public whose sense of the social temperature is formed vicariously.

Finding 16. Views are formed less in public debate than around the kitchen table



Source: The New Intolerance Study, n=5,023. "How influential are the following on your views about culture, politics or religious groups?"

How is that sense of the social temperature formed? **Finding 16** shows it appears to be formed overwhelmingly through intimate and informal conversation.

Friends and family are the single most influential source of Australians' views about cultural, political and religious groups, followed by news, education and social media, and well ahead of political and religious leaders — even though those are the very institutions most often called upon to lead a response.

If attitudes are set largely within trusted personal networks rather than through public institutions or direct encounter, the public's picture of intolerance is assembled far more from second-hand report than from first-hand experience.

This means that while the anxiety *The New Intolerance Study* documents is real, widely shared and rising, it is to a substantial degree a represented anxiety, a factor that bears directly on who can credibly address it — and how.

Conclusion: warmth, anxiety and the limits of law

Liberal democracies recognise that not every social problem can be solved in the same way. While we depend upon the criminal law to address coercion, intimidation and harm, when it comes to building civic trust, we depend not so much on law as on institutions and norms. In addition, we need to retain the confidence that disagreement itself remains legitimate.

These key findings of The New Intolerance Study define the country the survey describes. Australia is genuinely warm toward its minorities, including Jewish Australians. While there is hostility towards minority groups, it is a minority phenomenon. For the most part, Australians respond with goodwill or indifference rather than enmity.

At the same time, Australia is a deeply anxious nation: there is a conviction that antisemitism has risen, that it is serious and is likely to worsen.

As the findings indicate, that conviction inverts the usual generational story: the cohorts coolest toward Muslims and migrants are the warmest toward Jewish Australians in sentiment and the most alarmed about antisemitism in fact.

This anxiety is also formed at a distance, lifted by discrete shocks such as Bondi, transmitted through friends and family, and only rarely tested against direct contact across difference, which is shown to be scarce and scarcest among those most worried.

There are civic implications that flow from this diagnosis. A public anxiety that is event-driven, that follows particular generational patterns and — for the most part — is mediated indirectly is not best met by measures pitched at the surface manifestation of the problem.

Restriction and penalty answer the demand for visible action; a demand that is loudest among precisely the cohort most disposed to react with legislation.

But legislation alone does little to rebuild the routine, cross-cutting contact and trustworthy formation in which durable tolerance is actually forged.

A liberal society cannot maintain social cohesion simply by expanding categories of prohibited speech and imposing new penalties. While laws can prohibit intimidation, they cannot make neighbours trust one another again — or even make them talk to one another.

The harder and more lasting work lies in rebuilding that trust. It is slower work, but trust is the bedrock of a cohesive and plural society. And it matters especially in a country like Australia where social cohesion has never depended on ethnicity or religion alone. The challenge for all Australian governments in the months ahead is not merely to show they are acting, but that they are acting in ways that strengthen the civic compact underpinning our successful multicultural society rather than weaken it.

This study indicates that success depends on continuing the work of fostering the everyday encounters and the credible institutions through which Australians come to understand one another and thereby come to share a common civic future.

The warmth the study records is real and worth conserving. The task is to address the anxiety without ratcheting away the freedoms that make the warmth possible in the first place.

Endnote

1 Laura Silver and Laura Clancy, "Most people across 36 countries have negative views of Israel and little confidence in Netanyahu", Pew Research Centre (4 June 2026) <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/06/04/most-people-across-36-countries-have-negative-views-of-israel-and-little-confidence-in-netanyahu/>

This paper presents findings from The New Intolerance Study, a national survey of 5,023 Australians conducted for the Centre for Independent Studies in early 2026. It examines public attitudes towards Jewish Australians, antisemitism, social cohesion and tolerance in Australia.

The study finds that Australians generally hold positive views of Jewish Australians, with positive sentiment far outweighing negative sentiment. However, despite this goodwill, most Australians believe antisemitism has increased over the past five years, regard it as a significant issue, and expect it to worsen in the future. Public concern has been strongly influenced by major events, particularly the Bondi Beach attack in December 2025.

A key finding is the generational divide. Older Australians are more likely to see antisemitism as a serious and growing problem and favour stronger legal responses. Younger Australians tend to be more positive towards minority groups, more willing to engage with people holding different views, and more likely to support inclusion and representation as solutions to intolerance.

The paper suggests that concern about antisemitism reflects broader anxieties about social cohesion, political polarisation and intolerance. Many Australians believe social divisions are increasing, although these perceptions are often shaped by media, major events and personal networks rather than direct experience. It concludes that Australia remains a broadly tolerant society but one increasingly concerned about the future. While laws have a role in addressing discrimination, lasting social cohesion depends on rebuilding trust, encouraging engagement across differences and strengthening the civic institutions that support a diverse and pluralistic society.



About the Author

Peter Kurti is Director of the Culture, Prosperity & Civil Society program at the CIS.

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