

IMPACT: News Corp Australia is an Australian media conglomerate of newspapers, magazines, websites, and the cable television channel *Sky News*. Each month, nearly two in three Australians consume its media. Headed by Rupert Murdoch, News Corp Australia is institutionally linked to *Fox News* in the U.S., has strong links to conservative politicians and regularly promotes anti-Muslim views. News Corp Australia media content is also readily shared on white nationalist Facebook groups, including those that the Ōtautahi/Christchurch mass killer frequented.

- **News Corp Australia is an Australian media conglomerate which has been chaired since 1952 by Australia-born American Rupert Murdoch.** It is a subsidiary of News Corp, a global media corporation headquartered in the U.S. Rupert Murdoch's son, Lachlan Murdoch, is co-chairman of News Corp and is **"heavily involved in the operations of News Corp Australia."** News Corp Australia produces Australia's only national newspaper *The Australian*, mass circulation dailies in every state except Western Australia, websites including news.com.au, lifestyle websites and magazines, *Sky News TV channel*, and over 100 local newspapers. **According to its website, more than 16 million Australians – 63% of the population – consume News Corp Australia media each month.**
- **News Corp is widely seen as the world's most powerful media empire.** In April 2019, *The New York Times* published a series of articles based on interviews with 150 people, some of whom know the Murdoch family personally, and others who have actively opposed them. It argued that News Corp enables, promotes and profits from right-wing populism, stating, "What we as reporters had not fully appreciated until now is the extent to which these two stories – one of an **illiberal, right-wing reaction sweeping the globe, the other of a dynastic media family – are really one ... the White House – just like the prime ministers' offices in Britain and Australia – is just one tool among many that this family uses to exert influence over world events.**" In the run-up to the invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003, Murdoch media in Australia, the UK, and the U.S. played a coordinated role supporting the war effort. Murdoch newspapers in Australia have also campaigned against policies to address climate change, asylum seekers, "African gangs," and the Safe Schools anti-bullying program for LGBTQIA+ students.
- Professor David McKnight, who wrote a book on Rupert Murdoch's political power, argues that News Corp is not just a news organization. He says, **"Rupert Murdoch enjoys, and is determined to exercise, political influence."** **News Corp Australia newspapers have been blamed for the downfall of the three politically moderate Australian prime ministers** before Scott Morrison: Kevin Rudd (December 2007–June 2010, and June–September 2013), Julia Gillard (June 2010–June 2013) and Malcolm Turnbull (September 2015–August 2018). Malcolm Turnbull was deposed within weeks of Lachlan Murdoch signalling to News Corp Australia editors and television hosts he was unhappy with him. Shortly before he lost his job, Turnbull telephoned Rupert Murdoch and "plead[ed] with Murdoch to back off." Murdoch reportedly responded, "Let me have a look at it, and let me talk to Lachlan." Three days later, Rudd described Rupert Murdoch as "the greatest cancer on the Australian democracy." **Rudd has said politicians do not speak out, "Because they are frightened."**
- In June 2006, Rupert Murdoch commented on immigration in Australia, **stating that "you have to be careful about Muslims" because Islam "supersedes any sense of nationalism wherever they go."** In a January 2015 tweet, Murdoch stated, **"Maybe most Moslems [sic] peaceful, but until they recognize and destroy their growing jihadist cancer they must be held responsible."**
- In his memoir, former editor of *The Australian*, Chris Mitchell, notes that **conservative prime minister Tony Abbott (September 2013–September 2015), a friend of Lachlan's, discussed legislation with him and the Murdochs before introducing it.** According to Mitchell, "Lachlan's conservatism is more vigorous than that of any Australian politician ... and usually to the right of his father's views."
- Former News Corp Australia staff have described the culture at its newspapers as being driven by sales, "amoral," and promoting "bias[ed] and low-grade coverage." **In August 2014, the front page headline on *The Australian* read, "We'll fight Islam 100 years."** **In May 2015, the same paper published an "unflinching series of articles analysing Muslim Australia."** One editorial in this series stated that **Muslim migration and birth rates posed "a challenge of integration" which could lead to "radicalisation and extremism."** Another 800 word story, titled "Integrate new arrivals or let in crime, terror: minister," expanded on this theme, quoting at length former Social Services Minister Scott Morrison (now Prime Minister). Four years earlier, while the immigration spokesperson for then-Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, **Morrison reportedly urged his party "to capitalise on the electorate's growing concerns about 'Muslim immigration,' 'Muslims in Australia' and the 'inability' of Muslim migrants to integrate."**
- *The Australian's* "unflinching series" came three months after 39 of 100 Liberal MPs voted for a leadership spill of then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott's position because of dissatisfaction with his performance. **Chastised, Abbott pledged to "focus on jobs, families, the economy and national security."** **As the series ran, nine of Abbott's 19 cabinet members, in portfolios as diverse as treasury, immigration, foreign affairs and education, made public statements about terrorism.** Senator Cory Bernardi, who later founded the short-lived anti-Muslim party Australian Conservatives, also initiated an inquiry into Halal certification on the basis that funds could be used to support terrorism.

These actions prompted accusations that Abbott's government was trying to scare the public for political purposes.

- When Tony Abbott was ousted as Prime Minister in September 2015 by moderate Malcolm Turnbull, almost half of the 20 friends who attended a dinner to honor him were affiliated with News Corp, including Lachlan Murdoch. Later that year, Abbott wrote a News Corp opinion piece in the *Herald Sun* blaming terrorist attacks on **“the massive problem within Islam,”** and **“Islam’s bloody borders.”** The latter is a reference to American political scientist Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis, which popularized the anti-Muslim trope of civilizational difference between 'Islam' and 'the West' following the Cold War. This view was critiqued by Palestinian American public intellectual Edward Said as “vague,” “belligerent,” and a “demagoguery.”
- In December 2017, University of Technology Sydney and All Together Now, a non-profit organization that promotes racial equality in Australia, released a report on race-related reporting in Australian media. **Their research found that of 124 race-related opinion pieces published in the four most widely read Australian newspapers between January and July 2017, Muslims, who make up around 3% of the population in Australia, were discussed at double the rate of other minority groups.** In 63% of cases this portrayal was negative and Muslims were often equated with terrorism. **Three of the four newspapers were News Corp publications.** They printed 52 negative race related stories, while the non-News Corp publication printed one.
- In February 2018, OnePath Network, a non-profit Muslim media company, released a report on Islam in the media in 2017. **The report tracked the coverage of Muslims and Islam in five News Corp Australia newspapers in 2017 and counted 2891 negative stories about Muslims.** On 135 days of 2017, at least one News Corp Australia newspaper had a negative story about Muslims on the front page. They included, **“This is how you kill Aussies,” “Same Sex Jihad,” “Guerillas in our Midst,” “Canberra goes Burq-o,” and “Child Jihadi Strike Squad.”** Six of News Corp Australia’s most prolific conservative columnists devoted an average of 31% of their columns, a total of 320 opinion pieces, to Islam that year.
- All six columnists identified in the OnePath Network report also host shows or have appeared on *Sky News*, which News Corp fully acquired in late 2016. **Because of its constant news coverage, televisions in Parliament House are often tuned to the channel, and it is broadcast free to a potential audience of 8 million people in regional Australia. Sky News’ programming of conservative commentators from early evening has been compared to U.S. television channel Fox News, which is also owned by the Murdoch family.** ABC television’s *Media Watch* program linked “the Foxification of Sky News” to News Corp’s ownership. In October 2018, former Liberal Party politician Craig Laundy told *The Guardian*, *Sky News* was “trying to go the Fox News, US-style controversial rightwing shake-it-up ... and a lot of my colleagues take what they say as gospel.” A month later, *Sky News* evening commentator Paul Murray stated, “Sky News at night is a Liberal echo chamber.”
- In June 2016, **One Nation’s Pauline Hanson told Sky News program Paul Murray Live she wanted a royal commission on whether Islam is “truly a religion or a political ideology that is undermining our culture and our way of life.”** Other anti-Muslim activists who have appeared on *Sky* include Canadian **white nationalist Lauren Southern**, American anti-Muslim activist **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** (whose opinion pieces have also been published by News Corp outlets), and **white nationalist Milo Yiannopoulos**. During a friendly ten minute interview in August 2018, Australian neo-Nazi **Blair Cottrell**, the leader of the **United Patriots Front**, who has suggested Adolf Hitler’s picture should be hung in classrooms, promoted his **“fight club” organization, the Lads Society, and social media platforms** before host Adam Giles wished him “good luck” and stated, “I hope it all goes well for you.”
- Before Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant murdered 51 Muslims in two mosques in Ōtautahi/Christchurch in March 2019, he communicated on Facebook with Australian far-right groups including the Lads Society and the United Patriots Front (UPF). Tarrant also donated \$50 AUD to UPF. Both organizations are led by Cottrell, who Tarrant praised as “a true leader of the nationalist movement in Australia.”
- A Victoria University study of the **12 most influential far-right Facebook groups in Victoria found their main themes were “nationalism and patriotism; government and politics; and Muslims and Islam.”** News Corp outlets *The Australian*, *news.com.au*, *The Herald-Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *Sky News* were, combined, the **largest source of administrator posts to these far-right online groups.** In describing the impact this shared material had, Dr. Debra Smith, one of the study’s authors said, “I think ‘embolden’ is a really great word. It gives [far-right groups] a certain sense that these ideas are legitimate. They point to issues like this in the press to show that they are not outsiders, that they are not extreme.”
- After the July 2016 Nice truck attack, in which at least 30 of the 84 people murdered were Muslims aged between four and 70, Australia’s **“most influential columnist” Andrew Bolt wrote, “If our politicians will not ... protect us from Islam, watch out for a civil war. A frightened public will not put up with this for much longer and will defend**

themselves. ... God knows how soon non-Muslim vigilantes will themselves take up arms. Who could blame them.” Bolt, who breached the Racial Discrimination Act in two 2009 columns about Indigenous Australians, was signed by Lachlan Murdoch for his TV show *The Bolt Report*, which premiered in 2011, and **published 179 columns on Islam for News Corps in 2017.**

- **The 2019 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Sydney organized by The American Conservative Union included speeches by Australian anti-Islam commentators including current or former News Corp staff Mark Latham, Ross Cameron, Janet Albrechtsen, Peta Credlin (chief of staff when Abbott was Prime Minister) and Rita Panahi; current or former conservative politicians Tony Abbott, Craig Kelly and Malcolm Roberts; and international speakers Raheem Kassam, Jeanine Pirro and Nigel Farage.**
- In October 2019, **Facebook announced that News Corp outlets would supply some of the content for its news tab feature, which CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said will provide “high-quality and trustworthy information.”**

This factsheet is published in collaboration between the Bridge Initiative and researchers at the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University. More information about this project can be found [here](#).

Bridge Initiative Factsheet