Shooters party set to wield power in NSW

With NSW facing the possibility of a hung parliament, fear grows that the state’s gun laws – already eroded by two decades of deal-making with the Shooters party – will be further traded away. By Paddy Manning.

As the New South Wales election hangs in the balance, there is a real possibility that the Shooters, Farmers and Fishers Party could become kingmaker in the state. The latest published polls, including Newspoll and YouGov Galaxy, have the two major parties locked at 50-50. It’s a result that indicates a swing away from the Christians and Greens Coalition government, though not one sufficient to deliver a majority to Labor, led by Michael Daley, whose final campaigning week was marred by a video surfacing of inappropriate comments he made about Asian immigration at a police-in-the-pub event six months ago, as well as stumbles in the final leaders’ debate.

Most analysts expect today’s election will result in a hung parliament with an enlarged crossbench, comprising a medley crew of three or four independents, up to four Greens and up to four Shooters MPs.

The Liberal Party this week enlisted former prime minister John Howard, who pushed through Australia’s National Firearms Agreement (NFA) after the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, for a high-rotation television ad. “Michael Daley has done a preference deal with the Shooters party. That’s bad”, Howard warned. “If Labor wins, they will demand a weakening of our gun laws. That must never happen.”

Shooters Party leader Robert Forsak says the Howard campaign is “the best thing they could’ve done for us”.

After Christchurch

Following the killing of 50 Muslims by an Australian terrorist, local security agencies face questions of whether they overlooked the threat posed by white extremists. Karen Middleton reports.

In the places Australians extremists gather online, some of those defending and even celebrating what happened last week in Christchurch mock the widespread disbelief that such a peaceful little city could be chosen for mass murder.

In posts, they taunt ‘Buddhist mosques in a place called Christchurch and what do you expect?’. On websites championing what users claim to be free speech, purported excuses for the Christchurch attack are swiftly dismissed in an incoherent jumble of bizarre conspiracy theories and attempts to rationalise this act of racist violence.

Across the wider community, though, and especially among Australian Muslims, different questions are being asked. In prioritising Muslim radicalisation, have governments given other extremist threats enough attention? Does this attack represent a specific intelligence failure?

The president of the Australian Institute of Professional Intelligence Officers, Phil Kowalick, answers “no” to both questions.

“I think agencies in Australia are focused on extremism as a problem, not on any one community,” Kowalick tells The Saturday Paper.

“We are looking at extremist groups, we are looking at politically motivated violence, we are looking at terrorism. The emphasis has been on small pockets of the Islamic community, but that’s not to say that’s the only place that extremism is going to come from.”

But Kowalick says those lacking public debate tend to emphasise only one threat. “I think our messaging is in some ways problematic because the rhetoric is often about Islamic extremism and that paints the whole Islamic community [where] there are only small pockets that are a problem,” he says.

“I think we need to talk about extremism more generally, not limit it to certain groups... it’s got to start at the leadership level. There’s a big role for the media as well.”

He warns that the nature of public debate has hampered efforts to deal with extremism generally. “It’s difficult to have an educated, adult debate about some of these things without being labelled racist and that’s disappointing,” he says. “These are the things we need to have an open and honest conversation about.”

On the issue of whether Australian security agencies should have detected the alleged Christchurch shooter before...
his attack, Kowalski says it is "extremely easy to pass off false in confidence, but it's incredibly difficult to predict". He says agencies are very well equipped as there is a question about co-operation, one the new Office of National Intelligence structure goes some way to resolving.

Kowalski is advocating for more co-operation in intelligence gathering between individual federal agencies – and the adoption of an international professional intelligence standards to foster better quality strategic intelligence and predictive analysis. What was true of the Christchurch massacre, security agencies will be reviewing their priorities. They are finding what was the last source of light in what is now known about the event, the surveillance, and how their movements during seven years of world travel, apparently handed through an international terrorist's father.

The Saturday Paper understands agencies are likely to take a particular interest in Christchurch, and central Europe, where right-wing extremism is on the rise. They will look for anything that might have been missed, including people with whom the alleged shooters have had contact, whether they may have been involved and any further actions could be planned.

Tim Shadbolt's article is among the Muslim organisations that have warned for some time of the escalating threat from right-wing extremists.

Spokesman Adal Salam believes not enough is being done. "We're not confident they're taking the threat of far-right extremism as seriously as they do – I'll see their terminology, though I don't know if it's Islamic-based or jihadist terrorism," he tells The Saturday Paper. "This is a very, very toxic form of white nationalist and white extremist ideology." He says governments are not doing enough to support public statements condemning falsehoods, "It's about time that our authorities ... do it seriously," he says. "They may be doing it behind the scenes, but they're not doing it on the open stage.

Security experts say while agencies have been focused on white supremacists, it is the co-operation, capacity and reach of Muslims extremist organisations that sets them apart from others and other right-wing groups. While both seek to pervert religious doctrine, and last week is more evident in the way each can do, the scale of one compared with the other is what has directed the priorities.

In a speech to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute on the day before the Christchurch shootings, Home Affairs Department secretary Michael Pezzullo outlined what he called the greatest security threats to Australia in the next decade, including "radicalising" and "Islamist terrorism". Pezzullo said, "It is hard enough when it is just [Lindt cafe siege perpetrator] Man Haron Monis, who had nothing like the firepower the Christchurch guy had." New Zealand's gun laws allowed the accumulation of that arsenal. They were tightened dramatically on Thursday amid criticism that NZ intelligence agencies were under-resourced and a long way behind on the white supremacist threat. Blairland also points to political permisiveness. "Words matter," he says, "When a government in power is encouraging their followers to march on the streets, andating violence, or putting on the mantle of state legitimacy, of group think where you're not allowed to express dissent or critical political ideas."

Pezzullo and Blairland doubt agencies could reasonably have detected the alleged shooter if the slices of the world weren't so密切ly interconnected. "It was an extremely rare attack by an individual who struck because there were no links with known groups. Kowalski and others point to the Christchurch activity. They are involved in involving possibly huge volumes of hostile material and other ongoing activity, such as "shift posting" – and boosting that kind of content in search of notoriety.

Online, the idea for this extreme virtul vigilante and most commonly Muslim, people of colour and the LGBTQIA community and women.

The chaotic discourse makes it difficult to tell which, if any, of the hate prepositions are likely to shift from rhetoric to action. By all accounts, the alleged Christchurch shooter saw no discernible sign.

Like many others, he was active on Twitter and Facebook – where he live-streamed 17 minutes of his shooting rampage – and on other messaging sites. But he had not been red-flagged.

His Twitter profile bore a photograph of the covered body of a young victim of the 2019 truck attack in Nice, France, lying in the street. Along with his Facebook page, that profile has now been removed from view. In addition, they have been控股股东, the mass shootings, with some users circulating a screenshot message that appears to belong to the alleged attacker. In it, the anonymous writer threatens a general intent, as well as to "do it, too" and "go live" in the "daily life effort", saying he intended to "attack the invaders" and "go live" in his Facebook.

"The poster farewell the "invest" in one case did not survive and provided links, including to a manifesto that was also shared on Facebook, in which the attacker described the "motive" of the mass shooting. The attack was preceded by a series of minutes before the shooting began."

"That's been a stark warning, says Kowalski, who has been working closely with the state for decades to make the moves we have seen in the past few years. Since then it truly has been. But this snowball effect was not accidental, not unprecedented. It was the deliberate work of those groups, who are making their move for global dominance as we speak.

That "in a make-it-or-break-it moment for the Western world as a whole. Either this cancer is excised from society or it will destroy it."