

A CLIMATE OF FEAR: An Empirical Report on the Suppression of Speech on Palestine in Australia

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5 DECEMBER, 2025



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for Palestine WA



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South Australia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We begin by acknowledging that all of us are incredibly grateful to live and work on Aboriginal land. We therefore also acknowledge the violent history of dispossession upon which our presence here was made possible. We hope to do our best now and in the future to decolonise our minds, hearts and land. We pay our respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present. This land, like Palestine, was never ceded. It always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the 527 individuals residing in Australia who generously and often courageously contributed their time and personal experiences to this sensitive survey. This report is a direct result of their willingness to speak out.

We could not possibly have done justice to the richness of the qualitative data provided by respondents in the open text box. Many of the short testimonies submitted are alarming. We did our best to represent the spirit of these submissions, but we also had to summarise them, as well as pay attention not to reveal too much of the people at the heart of these testimonies, even if we do not and cannot know who they are.

Finally, we wish to thank all the grassroots organisers, advocacy networks, and social media pages and profiles that helped us circulate the survey, allowing us to collect over 500 submissions.

May we all one day be free.

Academics for Palestine WA and
Academics for Palestine SA.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an empirical analysis of quantitative and qualitative survey data detailing the experiences of 527 respondents regarding freedom of expression on the topic of Palestine in Australia. The respondents come from diverse professions (including healthcare, academia, public service, and the arts), and reside across all Australian states and territories. Utilising a targeted non-probability sampling approach, this study surveyed a cohort predominantly composed of individuals supportive of Palestinian human rights—precisely the group most vulnerable to the silencing phenomena under investigation. See the methodological appendix for full details.

The findings reveal a significant and measurable ‘Palestine exception’ to free speech, a widespread climate of fear driven by professional and institutional threats, and a severe psychological toll on those who wish to speak. The quantitative data establishes a stark disparity: respondents feel significantly less free to express views on Palestine than on other political topics. The quantitative data establishes a two-stage erosion of speech. While respondents typically feel comfortable expressing political views (5.33/7), this freedom dipped generally over the last year (4.67). However, regarding Palestine, it collapsed to 3.1 – a specific 34% ‘Palestine exception’ below the baseline, and a cumulative 42% ‘freedom deficit’ from their usual disposition to speak about political topics other than Palestine.¹

This climate of fear is primarily driven by a rational calculation of material risk, not by social discomfort. The single most-cited reason for self-censorship (selected by 257 respondents) is the ‘Fear of direct professional consequences,’ including job loss and disciplinary investigations.

These fears are substantiated by extensive qualitative testimony. Respondents detail a pattern of active, systemic suppression across major Australian institutions, including:

- **Higher Education:** Staff and students report being disciplined or suspended for “misconduct” for protesting, being subjected to surveillance via “CCTV and Wi-Fi”, and being warned that pro-Palestine advocacy has led to colleagues being “fired” or “disproportionately targeted” for redundancies.
- **Healthcare:** Medical professionals report that the language of ‘neutrality’ and ‘safety’ is weaponised to silence advocacy, with governing bodies like the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) being used to investigate “vexatious complaints” and hospital management removing “pro-Palestine materials” for “causing harm”.

- **Public Service:** Employees describe a culture of ‘enforced alignment’ where “Codes of Conduct” are used to issue warnings, ban cultural symbols like the keffiyeh, and discipline staff who sign petitions.

This institutional suppression is amplified by a ‘feedback loop’ where external actors (e.g., doxxers, media outlets) report individuals to their employers, triggering formal disciplinary action. The burden of this silencing is intersectional, falling most heavily on respondents identifying as Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim, who report that their very identity is treated as a political provocation. Jewish respondents supportive of Palestine describe a unique ‘double bind’, facing isolation from their own communities while being silenced by managers who misuse a monolithic concept of ‘Jewish sensitivity’ as an excuse to restrict pro-Palestinian speech.

The result is not only silence but lasting psychological harm—described by respondents as “dehumanising” and “isolating”—and the displacement of speech from everyday discourse into either atomised, private conversations or highly visible public protests.

This study contributes to a growing body of investigations into ‘the Palestine exception’, joining recent Australian works such as the *Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia’s Report*, the *People’s Inquiry’s Into Campus Free Speech on Palestine* (preliminary report), and APAN’s *Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools*, as well as series of overseas reports in the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, etc. These existing reports focus mostly on the qualitative aspects of discrimination and censorship; this report sought to add quantitative insights to the inquiry.

1 Analysis based on N = 215 respondents post-July 21st clarification; see methodology appendix for details.
2 International inquiries have reached similar conclusions both before and after October 7th, 2023. Key reports include: US: Palestine Legal & CCR, *The Palestine Exception*; Canada: Independent Jewish Voices, *Unveiling the Chilly Climate*, and CAUT, *Report on Academic Freedom*; UK: Liberty, *The Worsening Crackdown on Pro-Palestinian Activism*, and BRISMES, *Free Speech Issues in UK Universities*; Europe: ELSC, *Suppressing Palestinian Rights Advocacy*, and FU Berlin, *Friedenswarte*; Global (UN): UN Special Rapporteur, *Report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 (Aug 2024)*.
3 As noted, we added a description to questions Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7) on the 21st of July. Given that the number of submissions we received after this provides a large enough sample (215 submissions) and given that this added precision is more reflective of what we were hoping to measure, this is the data that we use to

analyse the ‘Palestine Exception’ in this section.

4 ‘General Chill’ (Q1 vs Q2): A paired-samples t-test showed a significant difference between Q1 and Q2, $t(214) = 6.50, p < .001$. Ratings for Q2 were lower than for Q1, with a mean difference of 0.67 units (SD = 1.50). The effect size was substantial ($d = 0.44$), indicating a significant difference in participants’ perceived comfort in expressing opinions on political topics unrelated to Palestine compared to their perceived freedom to express views on political or social issues unrelated to Palestine without fear of negative reactions.
5 The Palestine Exception (Q2 vs Q5): A paired-samples t-test showed a significant difference between the two items, $t(214) = -11.52, p < .001$. Ratings for Q5 were lower than for Q2, with a mean difference of 1.57 units (SD = 2.01). The effect size was large ($d = -0.78$), indicating a substantial reduction in participants’ perceived freedom to speak on Palestinian issues compared to other issues.

6 Cumulative Deficit (Q1 vs Q5): A paired-samples t-test showed a significant difference between Q1 and Q5, $t(214) = 16.89, p < .001$. Ratings for Q5 were lower than for Q1, with a mean difference of 2.24 units (SD = 1.78). The effect size was large ($d = -1.15$), indicating a substantial difference in participants’ perceived comfort in expressing opinions on political topics unrelated to Palestine compared to their perceived freedom to express views on Palestine without fear of negative consequences.

7 As noted in our methodology section, this is also largely confirmed by the many reports produced here in Australia and abroad.

SECTION ①: THE ‘PALESTINE EXCEPTION’ TO FREE EXPRESSION

The foundational finding of this analysis is a quantifiable and significant disparity between an individual’s perceived freedom to discuss general political topics and their freedom to discuss Palestine. This ‘Palestine exception’ suggests that freedom of speech in Australia is not a universal constant but is topic-dependent, with Palestine perceived as uniquely ‘dangerous’ to engage with.

This conclusion is drawn from a comparison of responses to three questions in the survey, all rated on a 7-point scale where 1 represents extreme discomfort or restriction and 7 represents extreme comfort or freedom.

1. **Q1: General Comfort:** “In general, how comfortable do you feel expressing your opinions on political topics unrelated to Palestine?”
2. **Q2: General Freedom:** “On a scale of 1 to 7, how free have you felt in the last 12 months to express your views... unrelated to Palestine without fear of negative reactions?”
3. **Q5: Palestine-Specific Freedom:** “On a scale of 1 to 7, how free have you felt in the last 12 months to express your views on Palestine without fear of negative consequences?”

The analysis reveals a ‘two-step’ erosion of speech. First, we observed a general contraction in political comfort. While respondents reported a high baseline for general political comfort (Q1 Average: 5.33), their perceived freedom over the last 12 months (Q2 Average: 4.67) was statistically lower. This suggests a ‘general chill’ in the political climate, representing a meaningful drop of 0.67 points from their usual disposition.

However, the primary driver of suppression is the topic of Palestine itself. When comparing identical conditions over the last 12 months, perceived freedom collapsed from 4.67 (General) to 3.10 (Palestine). This gap of 1.57 points represents a large and statistically significant ‘Palestine exception’ that cannot be explained by the general political environment.

Cumulatively, these two factors create a massive deficit. There is a 2.24 point gap between how comfortable respondents normally feel expressing political views and how free they currently feel speaking on Palestine. This large effect size ($d = -1.15$) demonstrates that for this cohort, Palestine is perceived as a particularly hazardous topic, activating regulatory mechanisms that otherwise lie dormant for other controversial issues.

The qualitative data confirms this quantitative gap. Multiple respondents who are otherwise encouraged to discuss contentious issues report that Palestine is the explicit exception. One academic, who teaches criminology at a major Australian University and is “usually supported/encouraged to speak on crimes & other harms”, reported that “we have been advised to avoid the topic of Palestine”. This quantitative gap, therefore, is the statistical-level evidence of a widespread, qualitatively-confirmed ‘Palestine exception’ that creates a chilling effect before a single word is spoken.

While the statistical evidence for these two disparities is robust, the causal link between them is a matter of interpretation. We speculate that the ‘general chill’ (Q1 to Q2) is not an unrelated phenomenon, but possibly a spillover effect of the severe repression measured in Q5. When the discussion of the gravest of international crimes – genocide – is stigmatised, it arguably signals a suspension of normal free speech norms. If the most urgent human rights issue of the day cannot be discussed safely, confidence in the freedom to discuss other political issues may also erode. Thus, we interpret the ‘Palestine exception’ as acting as a dampener on the entire ecosystem of political expression, potentially explaining part of the broader decline in political confidence.

Average Scores for Questions 1, 2, and 5 (Submissions on or after July 21st, 2025)

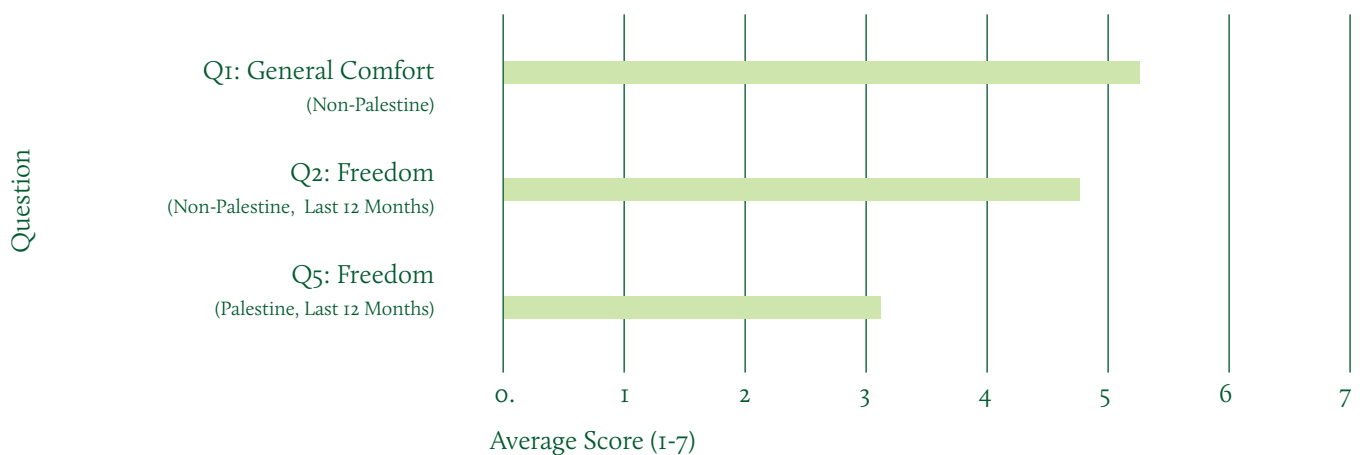


Figure 1.1: Comparative Freedom of Expression: Average scores (1–7 scale) for General Comfort vs. Palestine-Specific Freedom (N=215).

SECTION 2: HIERARCHY OF FEAR: DRIVERS OF SELF-CENSORSHIP

The significant drop in perceived freedom detailed in Section 1 is not an abstract feeling. It is a direct result of a rational calculation of specific, severe, and anticipated negative consequences. When respondents who restricted their views were asked to identify the primary reasons (Q8), their answers revealed a clear hierarchy of fear.

The primary driver of this self-censorship is the perceived threat to livelihood and professional stability, rather than social discomfort or ‘cancel culture’.⁸ The single most-cited reason for restricting expression is the “Fear of direct professional consequences” (257 responses). When combined with fears of “disciplinary measures” (83) and “legal consequences” (51), a total of 324 respondents (62%) identify ‘top-down’ institutional silencing as a driver.⁹

This significantly outweighs the 242 respondents (46%) who cited social reasons, such as “social harassment” (109), “losing friends” (106) or “violent harassment” (74).¹⁰ While there is an intersection of risks—150 respondents cited both—the hierarchy is clear. Respondents are making a calculated decision that speaking on this topic poses a direct material risk to their employment, financial security, and career progression.¹¹

This finding is the critical link between the feeling of suppression (Q5) and the institutional actions detailed in the qualitative data (Q15). The widespread fear of professional consequences suggests that the institutional silencing documented in Section 4 is not a series of isolated anecdotes, but rather the confirmation of a risk that is statistically widespread and well-understood by the cohort.

Average Scores for Questions 1, 2, and 5 (Submissions on or after July 21st, 2025)

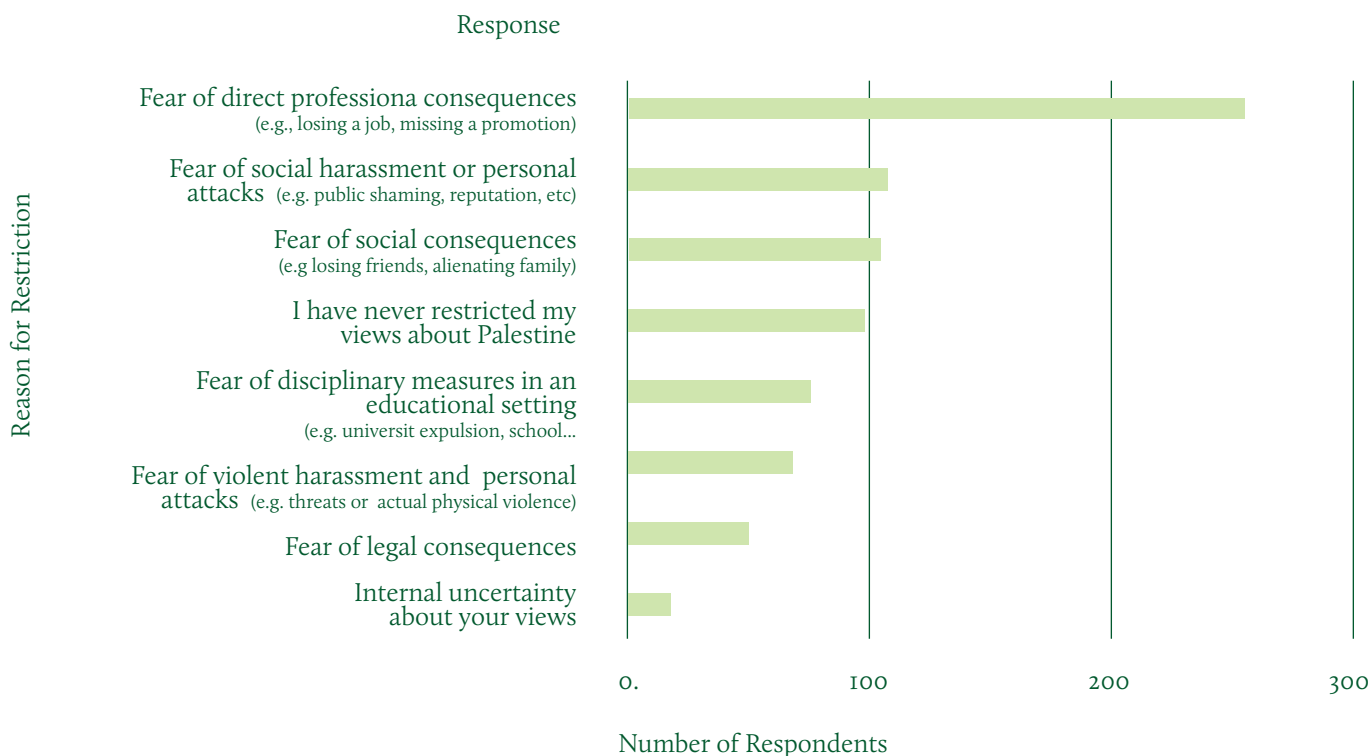


Figure 2.1: Primary Drivers of Self-Censorship (Q8), the total number exceeds 527, because Q8 allowed for a minimum of one option and a maximum of two options.

⁸ In this report, ‘cancel culture’ refers to decentralised, peer-driven actions where individuals or groups leverage social media and collective organisation to generate public pressure aimed at punishing, shaming, or professionally sanctioning a target for their speech or views. The mechanism is primarily social sanction and reputational harm. In contrast, ‘institutional silencing’ refers to centralised actions executed by formal power structures, such as employers, university administration, or other governing bodies. This mechanism involves the use of formal, procedural, or contractual sanctions (e.g., disciplinary action, dismissal, or withdrawal of financial/platform support) to restrict, suppress, or punish speech.

It should be acknowledged that in the real world, the boundaries between ‘cancel culture’ and ‘institutional silencing’ are often blurred, frequently operating within a dynamic feedback loop where one triggers the other. However, to achieve methodological rigour and effectively analyse the distinct sources of power shaping speech, this research implemented a clear analytic distinction between bottom-up, peer-driven social sanctions (cancel culture) and top-down, procedurally-driven formal sanctions (institutional silencing). This separation allows us to quantify and compare the relative prevalence and impact of institutional control versus public pressure in the suppression of speech.

⁹ This total excludes 67 overlapping responses to ensure that individuals who selected multiple options were not double-counted.

¹⁰ This total excludes 47 overlapping responses to ensure that individuals who selected multiple options were not double-counted.

¹¹ Section 4.5 provides a state-level analysis (comparing NSW, SA, VIC, and WA) which confirms these results. Crucially, South Australia—the state with the highest perceived freedom score (4.26)—was the only jurisdiction

¹² We interpret this apparent contradiction – feeling ‘free’ despite being disciplined – as an assertion of defiance. These respondents likely equated ‘freedom’ with their own internal determination to speak, regardless of the cost, rather than the external safety of the environment. This distinction prompted the July 21st clarification to ensure the survey measured the institutional climate of censorship, not the personal resilience of the speaker in the face of censorship.

SECTION ③: THE SPECTRUM OF SILENCING: FROM RISK TO REALITY

The climate of fear, driven by professional and social risks, manifests in a spectrum of lived experiences. The data allows for a quantitative progression from (1) the generalised feeling of risk, to (2) the act of self-silencing, to (3) the experience of active, external silencing.

First, the perception of risk (Q6) is near-ubiquitous. The vast majority of respondents selected either “I have often felt there were risks associated with voicing my opinion on Palestine” (242 responses) or “I have occasionally felt there were risks associated with voicing my opinion on Palestine” (194 responses), thus 83% of the total responses. This highlights the ‘Palestine exception’, establishing that the danger is not a niche concern but a baseline assumption for this cohort.

Second, the data from Q7 (“were you ever actually silenced...”) provides a critical insight into the outcome of this perceived risk. The responses differentiate between active, external suppression and proactive, internal self-regulation.

- A significant portion of respondents selected “I have been actually silenced” (e.g., “told not to speak”, “asked not to wear or hold symbols”), with 180 responses (out of 511 responses (excluding ‘other’ and ‘blank’, thus 35%). While the distinction between broad institutional directives and specific individual targeting can be porous, these figures rely on respondents’ own assessment of whether they were subjected to active suppression.
- An equally significant portion selected “I have not been actually silenced but I ‘self-silence’”, with 207 responses (out of 511 responses, thus 40%).

This ‘self-silencing’ phenomenon is a key finding that can be read not as apathy or lack of opinion, but rather, as the successful outcome of a climate of fear due to a ‘chilling effect’ – precisely what institutional censorship seeks to achieve. It indicates that these institutions have failed in their positive duty to actively protect political expression, allowing risk-aversion to override academic and democratic freedom. In other words, the institutional and social risks, identified in Q8 (‘reasons for restricting expression on Palestine’) and confirmed in Q15 (open text box), are so credible and so well-communicated that the individual self-regulates. This can be termed the ‘panoptic effect’: the mere possibility of being watched – or reported by external actors – compels individuals to internalise the censorship, policing their own speech to align with institutional norms.

This form of suppression is more insidious and pervasive than active silencing. It is invisible, self-perpetuating, and highly effective. The institution does not even need to act; the employee, student, or community member has seen or heard of enough examples of disciplinary actions taken against others that they silence themselves to pre-empt the threat to their livelihood, safety, or social standing.

However, suppression does not always yield silence. A notable subset of respondents indicated a determination to speak despite these threats, viewing their ‘freedom’ as an internal act of resistance rather than an external condition of safety.¹²

Responses to Question 7: Were you actually silenced?

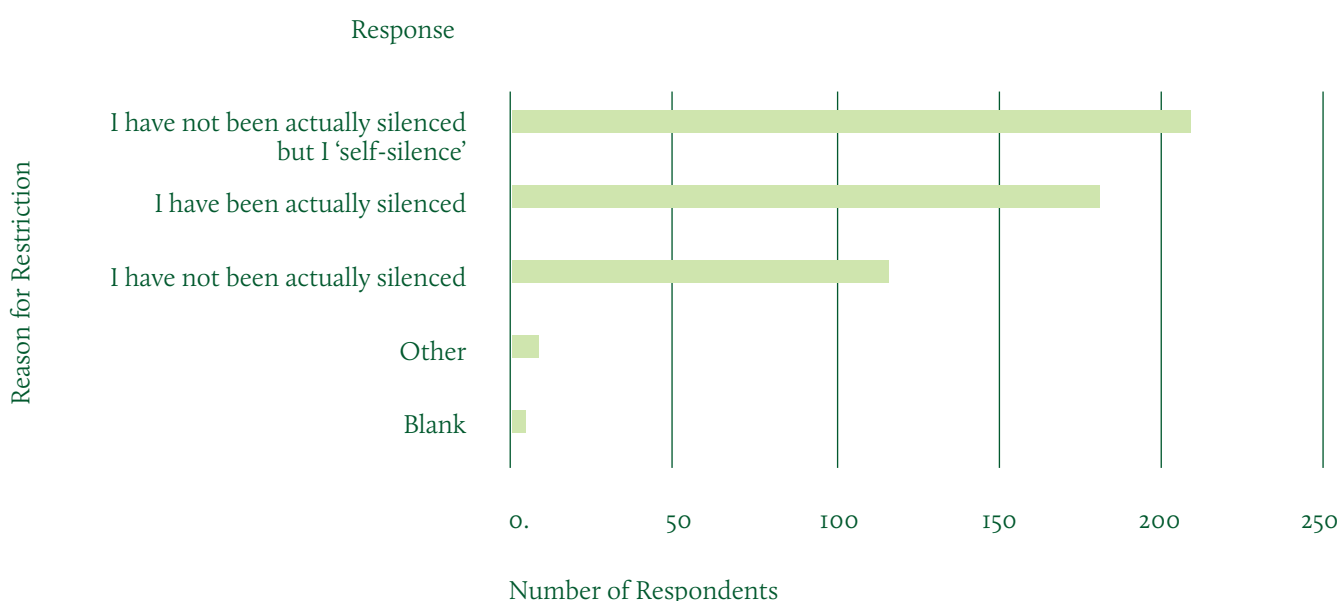


Figure 3.1: Question 7: In the last 12 months, were you ever actually silenced when voicing your opinion on Palestine (i.e. told not to speak, asked not to wear or hold symbols and slogans associated with Palestine, prevented from accessing an otherwise accessible platform)?

Regarding those who were ‘actually silenced’ (Q7), the survey data does not definitively show whether they subsequently retreated into self-censorship. However, their individual reaction is perhaps less systemically significant than the signal their punishment sends to the collective. The significant number of respondents who have not been silenced but who pre-emptively ‘self-silence’ suggests that the public punishment of the few has successfully coerced the quiet compliance of the many.

Further, the ‘pre-emptive hedging’ observed among individuals is mirrored at the institutional level. Just as individuals self-censor to avoid career risks, institutions pre-emptively silence speech to avoid ‘reputational risks’ – often acting before any complaint is even made to ‘avoid the headache.’

This rationale was explicitly communicated in multiple workplaces, such as the legal firm that circulated emails stating “Palestine and the genocide are not to be discussed at all in the workplace”, and the corporate retailer which pre-emptively decided they would no longer speak on “political or religious” matters after October 7.

As the qualitative data shows, institutions of all kinds now deem standard humanitarian actions and statements ‘unnecessarily risky,’ believing silence is safer. These suppressed actions include fundraising for aid in Gaza, hosting informational sessions by experts, or demanding institutions follow UN guidance to cut ties with arms manufacturers. This was exemplified when a major Perth private school refused to hire out their venue—which is normally “open to hire”—for a visiting Palestinian mental health specialist.

SECTION ④: THE INSTITUTIONAL EPICENTRES: ARENAS OF SUPPRESSION

The qualitative data from Q15 provides exhaustive, detailed testimony that the “fear of direct professional consequences” identified in Section 2 is based on a widespread, lived reality. This section documents the specific mechanisms of suppression reported by respondents across key public and private institutions in Australia.

4.1: ‘ADVISED TO AVOID’: SILENCING IN THE ACADEMY

As already detailed by the *preliminary findings of the People’s Inquiry into Campus Free Speech*, the modern university is described by respondents to that inquiry not as a bastion of free inquiry, but as a highly surveilled, managerialist environment where academic freedom is actively and systemically curtailed on the issue of Palestine. The mechanisms of suppression are not subtle; they are formal, technological, and tied to employment precarity.

- **Direct Managerial Directives:** Academics and students report receiving explicit instructions to avoid the topic. One academic staff member at [name of two major Australian universities ‘A’ and ‘B’], despite teaching criminology, was “advised to avoid the topic of Palestine”. Another, who teaches international law, was “told directly not to talk about Palestine”.¹³
- **Explicit Disciplinary Action:** The consequences of speaking are severe. One [major Australian university ‘A’] sessional academic was one of three “disciplined for ‘misconduct’ pertaining to protest”. Another respondent from the same institution noted “a colleague was fired for saying Israel/the IDF have committed war crimes”. At [major Australian university ‘C’], a student was “suspended for 1 year purely for non-targeted, non-violent political speech on online platforms”. Another PhD student at a different university was “told to stop speaking by a professor who then warned me that the ‘university does not support that position’” during a milestone evaluation.
- **Surveillance:** The disciplinary actions are backed by institutional surveillance. The academic disciplined at [major Australian university ‘A’] stated, “The university wrote a letter to me indicating that they used CCTV and Wi-Fi to locate me in the area”.

- **Weaponised Complaints and Precarity:** The institutional actions are often triggered by external complaints, which faculty fear. One academic reported “fear, and experience, of strategic anonymised student complaints... by Zionist/pro-Israel students”. This is acutely felt by those in precarious positions. The academic disciplined for “misconduct” noted their union was unsupportive because “I was a casual staff member”.

- **External Pressure and Redundancies:** The pressure is also described as coming from external political and lobbying entities, which the university management then enforces internally. One academic reported being “surveilled and harassed by 5A”.¹⁴ They go on to say that “I have had absurd censorship restrictions put on me. This has never happened in my 20-year academic career on any other issue. My university is currently making forced redundancies and we believe people who have been vocal on Palestine have been disproportionately targeted during these job cuts”.

4.2: ‘SAFETY AND NEUTRALITY’: SUPPRESSION IN HEALTHCARE

For healthcare workers, the data reveals a deep ethical conflict. Respondents who feel a professional duty to speak out against the “bombing of hospitals” and “medicide”¹⁵ in Gaza are instead silenced by their own institutions, often under the inverted rubrics of ‘safety’ and ‘neutrality’.

- **Weaponised Regulatory Bodies:** The primary fear is that pro-Palestine advocacy will be framed as unprofessional or antisemitic, triggering “vexatious complaints” to regulatory bodies. One respondent noted, “AHPRA... investigate doctors” for such complaints. Another healthcare worker “was reported to AHPRA for supporting Palestine on social media”. A doctor reported their practice was targeted by a “campaign of generic letters from the local Zionist community” demanding a doctor who spoke out “be asked to leave the practice”, followed by a fraudulent call from someone impersonating an actual AHPRA investigator.¹⁶

- **Misuse of ‘Safety’ and ‘Neutrality’:** This is the most common institutional mechanism. A trauma counsellor was “told we are required to remain ‘neutral’ because ‘pro-Palestine’ material is ‘political’ and causing psychological harm to colleagues”.¹⁷ A worker at [major Australian healthcare institution] reported being “directed... to remove any ‘pro-Palestine materials’ from our offices” because “the words ‘Palestine’ and ‘Gaza’ cannot appear at work as they are causing harm to an Israeli coworker”. A doctor at a public hospital “received an email from my head of department... advising us to limit discussion related to international conflicts... out of respect for our colleagues”.
- **Direct Professional Costs:** The consequences are tangible. A senior doctor, “the chair of [a major medical indemnity body] had to step down from his role because he openly posted about the injustice in Gaza”. A psychologist reported, “The Psychology industry has made overt moves to silence and punish... Our registrations threatened”, and “I also believe I was made redundant as a result of my initial attempts to speak up”. An emergency nurse manager was “hailed into the director’s office” and “taken off work one shift for investigation for speaking at a ‘political rally’”.
- **Direct Prohibition and Disciplinary Action:** The silencing is explicit. In that NSW department, “Keffiyehs were also specifically banned in our workplace”. A public servant who “wasn’t allowed to speak about Palestinian women on international women’s day” was “given a code of conduct warning” and “eventually quit”. An employee at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet reported, “The Department disciplined staff who signed a petition in support of Palestine”.¹⁸
- **Enforced Alignment:** Respondents are clear that this is not ‘neutrality’ but enforced complicity. One federal government worker noted, “we serve the government of the day’ the government of this day does not support a free Palestine”. Another at DFAT wrote, “I grapple with a sense of being silenced amidst the ongoing genocide in Palestine and the hypocrisy of the western world”.¹⁹

4.4: ‘PRECARIOUS LIVELIHOODS’: THE ECONOMIC COST IN ARTS, UNIONS, AND CORPORATE SECTORS

Across other sectors, the data shows that economic precarity is the primary lever for suppression. The link between speech and livelihood is immediate and stark.

Applying ‘psychological safety’ in this manner reveals a disturbing double standard. The data suggests that institutions are prioritising the emotional discomfort of staff unaffected by the violence over the actual trauma of Palestinian and Arab staff, many of whom are grieving the violent deaths of family members. In this hierarchy of safety, the institution effectively demands that those suffering the violence remain silent to ensure that those observing it remain comfortable.

This inversion of ‘safety’ – where speech against a genocide is framed as the cause of harm – creates an Orwellian dynamic where healthcare professionals are silenced by the very institutions they feel should be “publicly making statements and calling it out themselves”.

4.3: THE CODE OF CONDUCT’: SILENCING IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Respondents in the Australian Public Service (APS) and state-level government roles report that the ‘apolitical’ nature of their employment is weaponised to enforce silence and alignment with state policy.

- **Weaponised Code of Conduct:** The Code of Conduct is the primary instrument of silencing. A NSW public servant who signed a public letter “prompted someone from [the Department of Premier and Cabinet] to send around an email to every public servant in NSW to ‘remind them of the code of conduct’ and what it says about political speech”. An APS worker of Arab background was “reminded’ of the APS values and Code of Conduct” and subjected to “gaslighting, muzzling, and removal from certain work responsibilities” after giving a presentation on the conflict’s history.
- **Job and Contract Loss:** The threat of job loss (Q8) is a reality. One respondent was “sacked [because of] Palestine activism” from their role as an Electoral Officer. A union organiser reported a worker was “sacked for standing up for others who organised a petition”. An arts/music industry professional “lost a significant amount of work”. Staff at a “major cultural institution” who were “vocal support for Palestine” were “targeted for redundancy”.
- **Client and Funding Pressure:** In the arts and marketing, suppression comes from funding sources. A respondent in a marketing agency reported, “clients insist that we were not to show support for Palestine”. An Arts & Media professional “lost many funding opportunities due to a specific project focusing on Palestine”.
- **Corporate Policy:** In the corporate world, ‘neutrality’ is enforced. An employee at [a major corporate retailer] reported that after October 7, the company decided “they would no longer speak on ‘political or religious’ matters and that we should leave politics at the door”.

¹³ Square brackets [...] within quotations indicate where text has been modified or redacted by the authors. This is done primarily to de-identify individuals and institutions to protect respondent anonymity, or occasionally to improve spelling and grammatical flow without altering the original meaning of the testimony.

¹⁴ Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism (5A) is a non-profit organisation that was established in late 2023. It is described as a network of academics and professionals from 32 Australian universities and medical institutions, with a stated goal of addressing and combating antisemitism in the higher education sector.

¹⁵ In this context, “medicide” is the systematic destruction of a healthcare system, wholly or partially, with the intent of impairing or eliminating the conditions necessary to save and sustain the lives of the sick and injured. This specific application of the term has been used by UN experts, academics, and advocacy groups to describe the situation in Gaza.

¹⁶ The submission goes on to note that “[A]lthough this was easily proven as false the doctor deleted their online account and ceased expressing their views publicly on the Palestinian issue”.

¹⁷ This same submission then goes on to state that they themselves “have taken multiple stress leave days” because of this.

¹⁸ This submission goes on to state: “The role of the public service is to provide frank and fearless advice to government but this is definitely not the case in relation to Palestine. Staff will not brief or provide advice outside of the Government’s talking points on Palestine e.g. it is a ‘conflict’”.

¹⁹ This submission goes on to state that “[I]f I weren’t a single parent and financially constrained, I would have already resigned [...] And that restrained agency, that misalignment with values weighs heavily”.

4.5: GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES: A STATE-LEVEL ANALYSIS

The institutional suppression documented in this report is not experienced uniformly across Australia. A statistical analysis of responses by State or Territory reveals a significant geographic variation in the perceived climate of fear.

Focusing on the four states with the largest sample sizes—South Australia (n = 32), Victoria (n = 49), New South Wales (n = 52), and Western Australia (n = 61)—a clear pattern emerges.²⁰

- **Perceived Freedom (Q5):** Respondents in Victoria report the lowest average freedom score, 2.55 (on a 7-point scale). This is followed by NSW at 2.75. Respondents in Western Australia reported a noticeably higher (though still low) average score of 3.13. South Australians report the highest freedom to express their views on Palestine with an average score of 4.09. This suggests the “chilling effect” is most pronounced in Victoria.
- **Actual Silencing (Q7):** This perception of suppression is mirrored by the reported rates of actual silencing. In Victoria, 63% (31 of 49) of respondents reported being “actually silenced”. In NSW, the rate was 52% (27 of 52). In WA and South Australia, the rate was substantially lower at 40% (24 of 59) and 26% (8 of 31).

This data strongly suggests that the institutional silencing detailed in this report is geographically concentrated. Respondents in Victoria, followed by NSW, experience the most intense, widespread, and “actual” suppression, a finding that provides a quantitative foundation for the high volume of qualitative examples originating from those states.

However, ‘social silencing’ could nonetheless be the main explanatory variable for state disparity. Consequently, we undertook a further analysis of the reasons for this silencing (Q8) by state, which confirms that this geographic disparity is driven primarily by fear of institutional, rather than social, repercussions.

In the states with the lowest freedom scores, the fear of top-down silencing is most dominant, and in the states with the highest freedom scores, the fear of top-down silencing is lowest, to the point that it becomes lower than the fear of social silencing (South Australia):

- **Victoria (VIC):** 84% (41 of 49) of respondents cited institutional reasons for self-censorship (fear of professional, educational, or legal consequences), compared to 41% (20 of 49) who cited social reasons. Out of these respondents, 15 cited both institutional and social reasons.
- **New South Wales (NSW):** Similarly, 75% (39 of 52) reported institutional reasons, compared to 54% (28 of 52) citing social reasons. Out of these respondents, 19 cited both institutional and social reasons. 12% (6 of 52) reported never restricting their views about Palestine.
- **Western Australia (WA):** While the gap is smaller, institutional reasons (77%, 47 of 61) still outpaced social reasons (44%, 27 of 61). Out of these respondents, 20 cited both institutional and social reasons. 13% (8 of 61) reported never restricting their views about Palestine.
- **South Australia (SA):** South Australia is the outlier with 35% (11 of 31) citing institutional silencing, compared to 48% (15 of 31) reporting social reasons. Out of these respondents, 4 cited both institutional and social reasons. 26% (8 of 31) reported never restricting their views about Palestine.

The data suggests that in Victoria and New South Wales, respondents are more likely to report reasons for restricting their speech on Palestine due to institutional factors rather than purely social ones. While social silencing is also a significant concern, the fear of professional, educational, or legal repercussions appears to be the dominant driver of self-censorship in the most suppressed states (VIC/NSW), whereas this trend reverses in the state with the highest freedom (SA), where social silencing outweighs institutional factors.

SECTION 5: THE ‘OUTSOURCED’ SUPPRESSION: DOXXING, HARASSMENT, AND SOCIAL COSTS

While the previous sections detailed internal mechanisms of institutional control, this section examines the role of external pressure. However, it is critical to distinguish between the incidence of external harassment and its systemic impact.

The data suggests that active ‘doxxing’—while severe in its consequences—does not need to be widespread to be effective. Instead, it functions as a ‘spectre of risk’. The occasional, highly visible targeting of individuals serves as a disciplinary signal to the majority, creating a climate where the mere possibility of external disruption drives institutional behaviour.²¹

Consequently, the dominant dynamic observed is not necessarily a high volume of external complaints, but rather an institutional culture of pre-emptive risk management. Institutions, seeking to ‘avoid the headache’ of potential bad publicity or donor backlash, frequently enact silence pre-emptively—cancelling events, banning symbols, and issuing ‘neutrality’ directives—so that external actors never have a reason to intervene.

When this pre-emptive silence fails, or when an individual refuses to self-censor, the ‘feedback loop’ of active suppression described below is triggered.

1. An individual speaks or posts online in support of Palestine.
2. An external actor (e.g., a doxxer, an organised lobby, a media outlet) screenshots, decontextualises, and sends the content to the individual’s employer or regulatory body.
3. The institution, now ‘aware’ of a ‘complaint’, is pressured to ‘manage risk’ or uphold its ‘neutrality’ policy.
4. The institution then silences the employee through formal HR mechanisms, validating the fear of “professional consequences” for all other employees and justifying widespread self-silencing.

The qualitative data provides clear evidence of this loop:

- Doxxing and Reporting to Employers: “People have screenshotted my social media posts about Palestine and sent to my workplace as a ‘customer complaint’ in an attempt to silence me”. “I have been doxxed for my online posts”. “I [have] been doxxed by pro-Israel individuals and organisations”.
- Media and Political Pressure: “I was threatened by Sky News in an email to my work... Sky News then contacted my healthcare service... I was phoned by high level exec... and asked to immediately delete my page and stop speaking out”. “I have a HR serious misconduct accusation added based on Israellycool to have me fired”.²²
- Weaponised Legal and State Apparatus: The threat of state or federal legal repercussions is a recurring theme. This includes reports of malicious claims being directed to the Australian Federal Police (AFP), doxxing incidents being reported to the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), and one respondent reporting they had been visited by “state terror cops at my house twice for social media”, demonstrating a perceived fear of direct state intrusion into private life.

This ‘feedback loop’ reveals a critical failure of institutional duty. The data suggests that many institutions—universities, hospitals, and government departments—are not acting as defenders of their staff or as arbiters of truth. Instead, they are responding pre-emptively to the risk of a complaint, often from anonymous or bad-faith external actors.

By accepting unverified, decontextualised screenshots or media-driven outrage as a valid basis for formal disciplinary action, these institutions effectively validate the doxxers’ tactics. They become participants in the suppression, choosing to manage their own reputational risk by silencing their employee rather than standing by their staff’s right to personal expression. This pattern is a hallmark of a censorious society, where institutional structures become tools for authoritarian control.

Beyond this feedback loop, respondents report a severe and distinct layer of direct, non-institutional harassment and social ostracisation.

- Physical Threats and Harassment: “I have been threatened to be beaten... by middle aged men in public”. “Tyres slashed”. “I’ve been yelled at twice”. “I have been verbally assaulted in public numerous times”.
- Targeting of Cultural Symbols: “I have been called a terrorist supporter for wearing Keffiyeh”. “I have been targeted, photographed, stalked FOR WEARING WATERMELON EARRINGS”.
- Social Ostracisation: This was a pervasive theme. “I have lost friends” was a common statement. “My family had stopped talking to me claiming I am antisemitic”. “I didn’t realise I was surrounded by so many people neutral or supportive of Israel’s systematic and cruel genocide”.

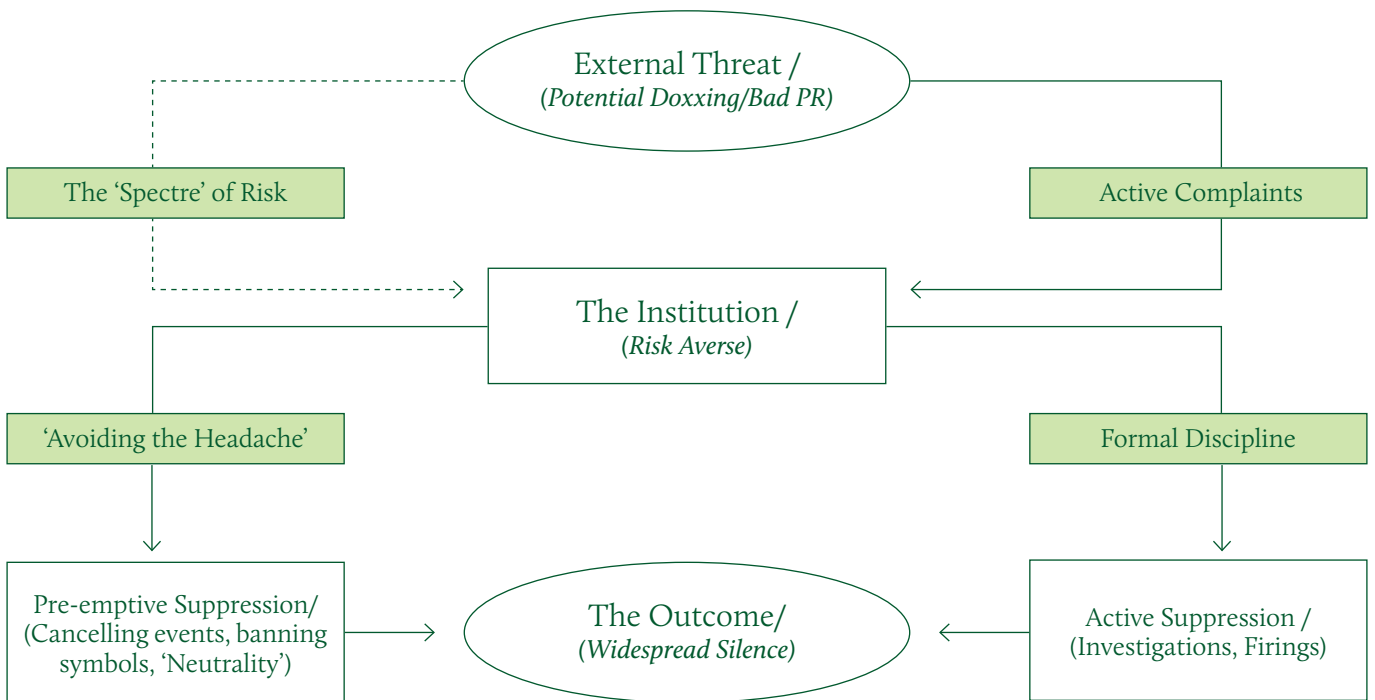


Figure 5.1: The Suppression Feedback Loop.

²⁰ This section analyses the N = 215 subset to ensure methodological consistency with the freedom scores (Q5) and silencing rates (Q7) presented elsewhere in this report. However, a parallel analysis of the full dataset (N = 527) confirms that these geographic trends are robust across both metrics. Specifically, the larger dataset replicates the exact same hierarchy regarding the level of freedom (with Victoria lowest and South Australia highest) and the drivers of silencing (where Victoria is dominated by institutional fear, while South Australia remains the unique outlier where this trend reverses—with social silencing outweighing institutional factors).

²¹ The term doxxing (also often spelled doxing) is an abbreviation of “dropping documents” (or “dox”) and refers to the malicious act of publicly revealing private or identifying information about an individual or organisation, usually via the internet, without their consent and with the intent to cause harm.

²² Israellycool is a prominent, long-running blog that focuses on pro-Israel advocacy. This submission goes on to state the calls from “accounts which labelled me a faggot and had the Israeli flag as their profile picture, which HR blacked out to disguise the fact it was from a pro-Zionist”.

SECTION 6: INTERSECTIONAL BURDENS: IDENTITY AND SILENCING

The climate of fear and suppression is not experienced uniformly. The data shows that the burden falls most heavily on those whose very identity is bound to the issue. This section analyses how identity markers (Q12) and political labels (Q13) intersect with the experiences of silencing (Q5, Q7, Q6, Q10).²³

6.1: 'INHERENTLY POLITICAL': THE PALESTINIAN, ARAB, AND MUSLIM EXPERIENCE

For respondents identifying as Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim, the suppression is not merely about their opinions but their existence, culture, and grief. This is not just a qualitative feeling; it is one of the most statistically significant findings in the data. Out of 527 total submissions, 107 respondents identified as Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim. A comparison of this cohort's experiences with the 420 respondents from 'Other Identity' groups reveals a striking and measurable disparity across every metric of silencing.

10. In the last 12 months, have you personally been subjected to negative comments, stereotypes, or discrimination because of your actual or perceived Palestinian or Arab background? (tick a box OR detail your answer under 'other')

I do not have actual or perceived Arab background

Yes, often

Yes, occasionally

Yes, rarely

No

Other

← PREVIOUS NEXT →

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Figure 6.1: Question 10: anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian discrimination.

- **Lower Perceived Freedom:** The burden of silencing is not shared equally. Participants who identified as Palestinian, Arab and/or Muslim rated their freedom to speak on Palestine significantly lower (average 2.48) than those who did not identify with these groups (average 3.31).²⁴
- **Higher Experience of Discrimination:** Direct, identity-based discrimination (Q10) is significant. Out of those who identify as Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim, and who are perceived as such,²⁵ a striking 63% of respondents reported experiencing negative comments, stereotypes, or discrimination due to their background 'often' (28%) or 'occasionally' (35%). If we add those who experienced this 'rarely', then 82% of these respondents experience discrimination.

- **Greater Risk and Actual Silencing:** While the perception of risk is high across the entire sample, the reality of silencing falls disproportionately on this group.

93% of Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim (PAM) respondents felt risks associated with voicing their opinions on Palestine often or occasionally, compared to 84% of non-PAM respondents.²⁶

However, a statistically significant disparity emerges regarding actual outcomes. 54% of PAM respondents reported being actually silenced, compared to 38% of non-PAM respondents.²⁷

This hierarchy of suppression is most acute for Palestinians themselves. Within the specific subgroup of respondents identifying as Palestinian (n = 13), the rate of actual silencing rises to 62%.

Crucially, the gap in actual silencing (16 percentage points) is wider than the gap in perceived risk (9 percentage points). This discrepancy suggests that this cohort may be underestimating the discrimination they face. Far from demonstrating a 'chip on the shoulder,' the data indicates that their conscious perception of risk actually lags behind the severe reality of identity-based silencing.

This data provides the quantitative context for the qualitative testimonies, which show that for this group, silencing manifests as the active denial of their identity and culture, and the invalidation of their trauma in this time of genocide.

- **Identity as Provocation:** The qualitative data shows that their identity itself is treated as a political statement. "Being Arab means the world inherently views me as political", one respondent wrote. An Arab APS worker reported being "led to feel like I was an internal threat and part of the 5th column".²⁸
- **Cultural Erasure:** Cultural symbols are banned as 'political' provocations. "Wearing a kuffiyeh has become a way of being targeted at work". A Palestinian educator reported, "if I wear anything that represents my cultural identity (a kuffiyeh... etc) I fear being disciplined".
- **Invalidation of Trauma:** The most damaging silencing is the invalidation of personal trauma and grief. A Palestinian respondent was "asked when sharing my experience as a Palestinian to keep it personal and not political". A Muslim mother, seeking therapy for the trauma of "seeing mutilated children", was told by her psychologist, "do you ever think about how Jews feel?... I was mortified and humiliated... I feel like we have no representation to talk about OUR feelings". A Palestinian public servant whose family died in Gaza was met with a nervous laugh and the comment, "I guess you are more affected by this because you have a connection there". This denial of empathy and displacement of grief, especially for those suffering personal loss, compounds the psychological harm and constitutes a form of political violence and trauma in itself.

For this group, "silence" is a form of active discrimination that denies their right to identify, grieve, or exist publicly without being seen as a threat.

6.2: 'A DANGEROUS POSITION': THE JEWISH PRO-PALESTINE EXPERIENCE

The survey data includes a crucial cohort of respondents who identify as Jewish and "Supportive of Palestine" or "Supportive of international law / human rights". Their testimonies reveal a unique and acute 'double-bind' of silencing.

- **High-Risk Profile:** One respondent articulated this position clearly: "I am Jewish... being pro-Palestinian is dangerous".
- **Internal Community Silencing:** These respondents face social ostracisation from their own communities. One Jewish respondent wrote, "I don't feel able to speak to my cousins, aunts, uncles and one Jewish friend about Palestine because they are either Zionists[...] Their actions and views break my heart [...] My grandmother survived the Holocaust and it sickens and horrifies me that this is happening 'in our name'. The rage and sadness I feel is huge". Another Jewish person reported being "abused many times on social media for stating... my dismay and disgust... I have been called a 'kapo'".

The 'Double-Bind' at Work: This social isolation is compounded by institutional silencing from non-Jewish managers who weaponise a false, monolithic "Jewish sensitivity" to enforce 'neutrality'. The starkest example comes from a Jewish public servant: "At work, I have been pulled into the Director's office after refusing to take down a poster about Palestine and told, in no uncertain terms... that it's too 'political' and may offend Jewish members of staff. My response? To my knowledge, I am the only Jewish member of staff!".

These Jewish respondents are thus uniquely isolated: they are ostracised by their in-group for their political stance and simultaneously silenced by their out-group (institutional management) who co-opt a distorted version of their identity to shut down the very speech they are trying to make.

SECTION 7: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL TOLL

The intended or unintended consequence of this pervasive climate of suppression is not just silence; it is predictably lasting psychological harm. The qualitative data is replete with language of trauma, betrayal, and isolation, demonstrating that for these respondents, this is not a simple political disagreement but a significant moral and psychological burden.

- **Trauma, Isolation, and Transformation:** Respondents describe the experience as life-altering. "The genocide and the silencing has changed me forever and altered my life, my trust in humanity and trust in the ethics of government, health and education systems", wrote one psychologist. Another respondent echoed this: "Overall, life really has never been the same... I am permanently a different person". This leads to profound social isolation: "I feel incredibly isolated". "I feel a massive disconnect with people who I once would have said I felt close to".

- **Institutional Betrayal and Dehumanisation:** The experience of being silenced by institutions that respondents expected to protect them (universities, hospitals, human rights bodies) is a key source of this trauma. The academic who reported that the university had used CCTV and Wi-Fi to locate them in the area, says that the meeting with HR and the Head of School was "dehumanising and condescending". The APS worker who was "reminded" of the Code of Conduct described that "the gaslighting, muzzling... was unprecedented". This sense of institutional betrayal was summarised by a healthcare worker: "I have been shocked at the institutional silencing".

- **Pervasive Fear and Anxiety:** This climate produces a constant state of fear. "I feel scared of what might happen if I raise my voice even more", wrote one Muslim student. This fear is debilitating, leading to a sense of powerlessness: "I wish I was braver and I wish I felt safer to speak up more".

23 While this report focuses on the intersection of political expression with racial and religious identity (specifically Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and Jewish identities), we acknowledge that gender remains a critical variable in the mechanics of silencing. Research suggests that workplace hierarchies and 'safety' discourses are often gendered. While a full gender analysis was beyond the scope of this initial report, it remains a vital area for future inquiry.

24 Statistically Significant Disparity: Analysis based on the N = 215 subset. A t-test confirmed the difference between the Palestinian/Arab/Muslim cohort (M = 2.48, SD = 1.39, n = 56) and the non-Arab/Muslim cohort (M = 3.31, SD = 1.84, n = 159) was statistically significant ($t(213) = -3.09, p = .002$). The effect size was moderate ($d = -0.48$).

25 We acknowledge that some of this cohort, while having actual Arab, Palestinian and/or Muslim roots, may not be perceived as such, and therefore are less likely to experience discrimination on the basis of their identity.

26 Perceived Risk (O6): Analysis based on the N = 215 subset. While the PAM cohort reported higher perceived risk (93% vs 84%), this difference did not reach the threshold for statistical significance ($p = 0.11$).

27 Actual Silencing (Q7): Analysis based on the N = 215 subset. The difference in actual silencing rates (54% for PAM vs 38% for non-PAM) was statistically significant ($p = 0.019$).

28 APS: Australian Public Service. 'Part of the 5th column': A phrase used to describe a group of people viewed as traitors or internal enemies working to undermine the institution from within.

SECTION 8: CHANNELS OF RESISTANCE: 'SAFE' MODES OF EXPRESSION

This report concludes by analysing how respondents continue to speak, despite the extensive risks documented. When public and professional speech is suppressed, expression is not eliminated; it is displaced into channels perceived to be 'safer' or 'less visible'.

The analysis of Q9 ("what has been your preferred way to express your views on Palestine safely?") reveals a sharp strategic split in the cohort's response to the climate of fear.

- **Collectivisation ("Protests or activism"):** This is the most-selected method of expression (326 responses). Instead of retreating, these respondents escalate their speech from the individual context (e.g., at work) to a collective public context. Presumably, this strategy relies on safety in numbers, distributing the risk of reprisal across a large group.
- **Atomisation ("Private conversations"):** This is the second most common method of expression (286 responses). It represents the polar opposite from public protest, a strategic retreat from the public and professional spheres, which might be perceived as high-risk (as per Q8). This method is politically atomising; it allows for expression and emotional release but prevents the formation of collective solidarity and public political pressure.

In relation to the institutional silencing that this report examines, it is, in effect, a 'successful' suppression by the environment, as it moves dissent from the public square to the private sphere. However, it is important to note the possibility of the counter-perspective: that this process of atomised, "Private conversations [with trusted people]" is a necessary precursor to collective action, providing the intimate space required to build individual consciousness and commitment before individuals feel safe or ready to engage in the high-risk public sphere.

This 'strategic split' is a critical finding. It suggests that the 'climate of fear' is most effective at silencing the 'moderate middle'—the individual, everyday water-cooler conversations, the casual social media post, the wearing of a pin at a work desk. The environment of suppression is so effective at hollowing out this space for normalised, everyday discussion that it forces dissenters into a binary choice: either go fully underground (private) or fully public and confrontational (protests).

Preferred Ways to Express Views on Palestine Safely (Last 12 Months)

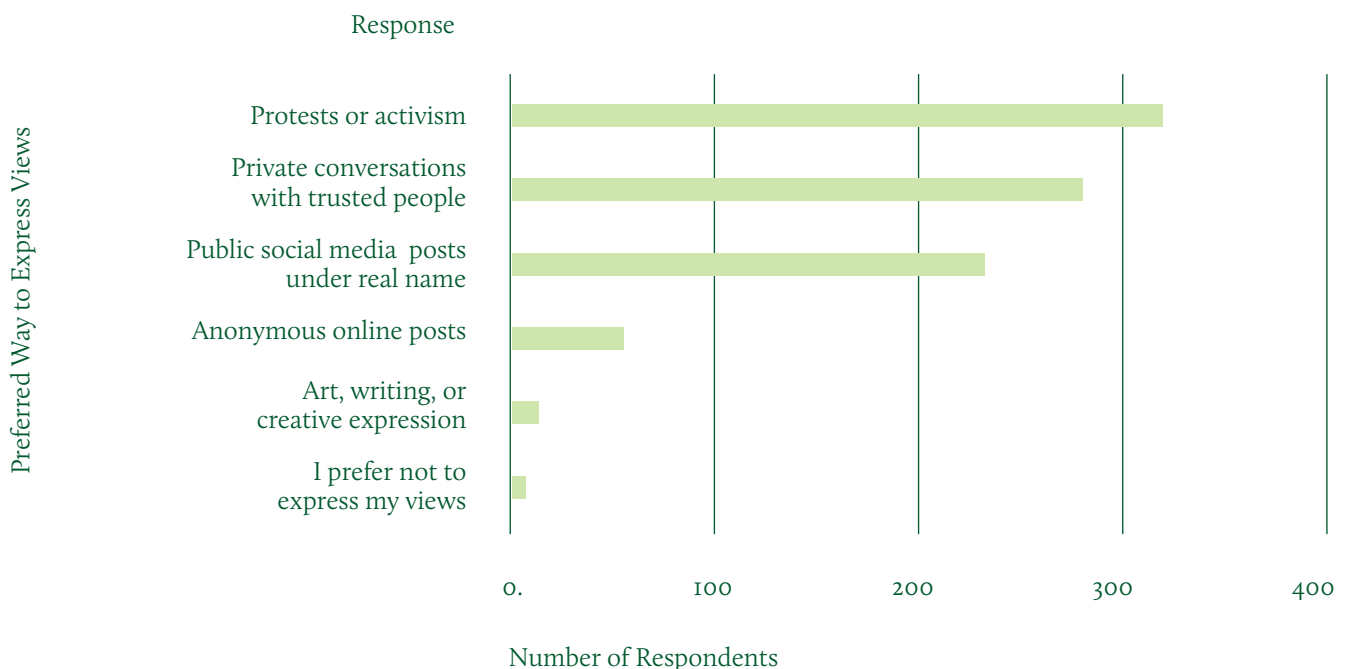


Figure 8.1: Preferred Methods for 'Safe' Expression (Q9), respondents could select up to two options.

SECTION 9: CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS

This report has provided an empirical analysis of survey data from 527 respondents on the suppression of speech on Palestine. The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals a clear and consistent narrative. The key findings are as follows.

1. **The “Palestine Exception” is Real and Measurable:** The data empirically demonstrates a measurable ‘Palestine exception’ to free expression. While general political freedom dipped over the last 12 months (average 4.67), freedom to speak on Palestine collapsed to 3.10. This 1.57-point drop (34%) represents the specific ‘Palestine exception’. When compared to respondents’ usual political disposition (5.33), this creates a cumulative 42% ‘freedom deficit’. The drop is further compounded if it is Palestinians, Arabs or Muslims speaking about Palestine.
2. **Fear is Professional, Not Just Social:** This suppression is primarily driven by a rational, widespread fear of professional and economic consequences, not by a fear of social disapproval. “Fear of direct professional consequences” was the most-cited reason for self-censorship (257 responses).
3. **Institutions are the Epicentres of Silencing:** Respondents’ fears are justified by a lived reality of active, systemic suppression. This report has documented specific mechanisms used by universities (surveillance, misconduct charges, redundancies), healthcare bodies (weaponised ‘neutrality’, regulatory threats), and public service departments (Code of Conduct, ‘enforced alignment’) to enforce silence.
4. **Suppression is Geographically Concentrated:** The intensity of silencing varies by state, confirming the decisive role of institutional culture. Victoria emerged as the epicentre of suppression (63% actually silenced), driven by high levels of institutional fear. Conversely, South Australia was the freest state and the only jurisdiction where social concerns outweighed institutional ones. This geographic disparity reinforces that institutional pressure, rather than social pressure, is the primary variable driving suppression.
5. **A ‘Suppression Feedback Loop’ Exists:** Decentralised, anonymous harassment (doxing, media campaigns, vexatious complaints) is used to trigger formal, institutional suppression. This ‘outsourced enforcement’ creates a censorious climate where institutions, rather than protecting staff, participate in the silencing.
6. **Silencing is Intersectional:** The burden of suppression is not shared equally. It falls most heavily on Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims, who are demonstrably the most suppressed group within an already-suppressed sample (e.g., 54% of this group were “actually silenced” vs. 38% of others; this rises to 62% for Palestinians specifically). It also places Jewish pro-Palestine allies in a unique ‘double-bind’, isolating them from both their own communities and their professional institutions.

7. **The Result is Psychological Harm and Speech Displacement:** The final impacts of this climate are twofold. First, it inflicts lasting psychological harm on respondents, who describe their experiences as ‘dehumanising’, ‘isolating’, and ‘traumatic’. Second, it does not eliminate speech but displaces it from everyday discourse, forcing it into either collectivised public protests (326 responses) or atomised private conversations (286 responses), hollowing out the space for normalised discussion.

The empirical data – from the 1.57-point ‘Palestine exception’ to the 257 respondents fearing for their jobs – provides a clear, measurable anatomy of a systemic silencing. This is not a case of social discomfort, but of a widespread, rational fear of institutional and economic reprisal. The qualitative testimonies confirm that universities, healthcare bodies, and public service departments are actively enforcing this ‘Palestine exception’ to free speech, often by capitulating to external pressure and doxing campaigns. The result is a censorious climate that inflicts profound psychological harm, disproportionately burdens Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim communities, and displaces an essential political conversation from the public square.

The quantitative data presented here validates the anecdotal and qualitative accounts detailed in recent Australian reports, including APAN’s study on schools and the People’s Inquiry into Campus Free Speech. This triangulation of Australian data—quantitative and qualitative—demonstrates that our national institutions are mirroring a global pattern of suppression, consistent with findings from similar human rights investigations in North America and Europe.

Implications:

Ultimately, the findings of this report are as significant as they are worrying. These findings suggest a serious and concerning erosion of free expression in Australia. This erosion is all the more grave given the specific topic being suppressed. The ‘Palestine exception’ is, in effect, a ‘genocide exception’. The data confirms that the speech being actively silenced is that which aligns with the findings of the UN Special Rapporteur, the International Court of Justice’s provisional measures, and international human rights bodies – speech that names the State of Israel’s violence as genocide.²⁹ The stakes of this silencing are therefore not limited to the psychological and socio-economic harm documented in Australia. This climate of fear is a critical enabler, muting the democratic dissent required to hold Australian institutions and government accountable for their own complicity – through arms deals, political euphemism, and diplomatic cover – in these international crimes.

²⁹ See: *UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), UN Special Rapporteur Albanese, International Court of Justice (ICJ), B’Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (PHRI), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Association of Genocide Scholars.*

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This report is based on an empirical analysis of a survey which gathered 527 individual responses between May 13 and September 28, 2025. The impetus for the survey came from anecdotal reports of widespread disciplinary actions within institutions accompanied by confidentiality clauses. These anecdotal reports meant that the level and pervasiveness of institutional censorship could be poorly understood – a knowledge gap this survey and report hopes to partially address.

Ethics: This research, while not conducted under the auspices of an academic institution, was designed to adhere to the core principles of the [Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(NS\)](#). Specifically, procedures ensured voluntary and informed consent, guaranteed anonymity (including a warning on self-identification in open text boxes), and clearly articulated the purpose and dissemination of results, mirroring the ethical standards applied in similar Australian reports. This research was conducted independently and was not undertaken under the mantle of any academic or professional institution with which the researchers are currently employed.

Mixed Method Research: The primary aim of this inquiry is twofold: to identify quantitative patterns that demonstrate the scale and statistical significance of the anecdotal evidence received, and to seek causal explanations within the rich qualitative data provided.

Sampling: The survey utilised a targeted, non-probability sampling approach. It was primarily circulated via flyers containing QR codes distributed at public rallies and online via hyperlinks, largely promoted through Instagram profiles dedicated to advocacy against the genocide.³⁰ This distribution method successfully collected data from all States and Territories in Australia, capturing a broad demographic profile with respondents ranging from students to retirees, and encompassing a variety of occupations and industries. This sampling method was deliberately chosen to gather data from a cohort known to be actively engaged in public expression and most likely to have experienced institutional silencing.

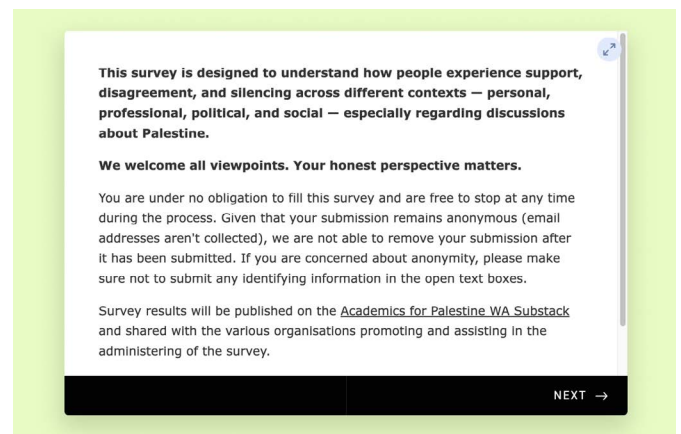


Figure 0.1: Information & consent screen (slide 2) of the survey.

Question 11: Which of the following apply to you?

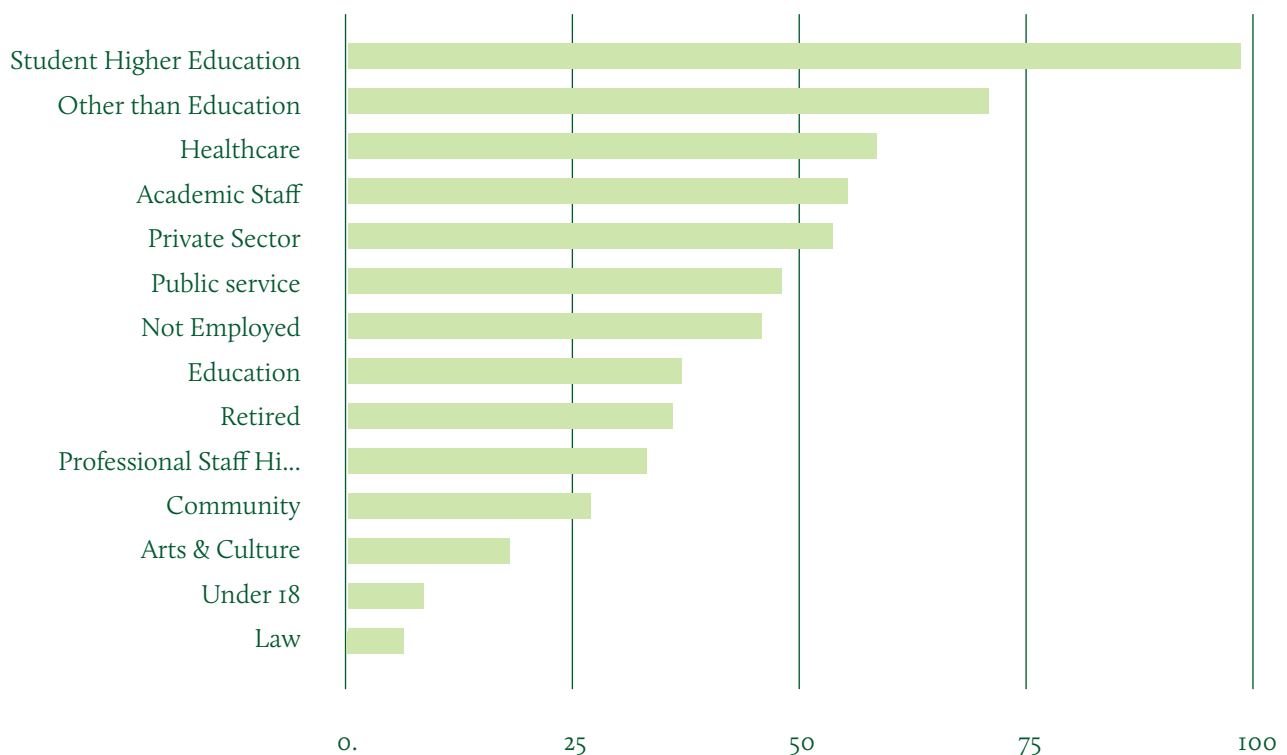


Figure 0.2: Occupation Profile of Survey Respondents, the total count of categories (598) exceeds the total number of respondents (N = 527) because participants were permitted to select all categories relevant to their current professional or educational situation.

Statistical Significance:

The statistical power of this report lies in the relative differences observed between variables, rather than absolute population prevalence. Specifically, this approach validates three distinct categories of findings:

1. **Comparative Disparity (The “Gap”):** By using respondents as their own control group, we identified a cumulative erosion of speech. The analysis distinguishes between a general contraction in political freedom over the last 12 months (the ‘General chill’) and a further, statistically significant divergence regarding Palestine (the ‘Palestine exception’). This isolates the topic of “Palestine”—rather than just a tense political climate—as the specific independent variable driving the most severe suppression.
2. **Cross-Sectional Analysis (Demographics & Geography):** The sample size (N = 215) is sufficient to establish statistically significant variances between sub-groups. The findings regarding the disproportionate silencing of Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim respondents, as well as the variance in suppression between States, represent valid internal trends that cannot be attributed to chance. The results were replicated with the total sample size (N = 527).
3. **Hierarchical Distribution (Motivations):** The data establishes a clear, non-random hierarchy of fear, where “professional consequences” consistently outrank “social consequences” across the cohort.

Therefore, while the frequency of silencing in this report reflects the experience of an engaged cohort, the mechanisms, disparities, and chilling effects identified represent statistically robust patterns that exist within Australian institutions.

Precision: Finally, it is important to note that on July 21st, 2025, a clarifying description was added to several key questions (Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7). The clarification—“we are interested in gauging your perception of the level of censorship, not your determination to resist or comply”—was added to distinguish between a respondent’s perception of freedom and their willingness to resist silencing measures. This was intended to account for multiple respondents who reported being disciplined or facing consequences while simultaneously stating they felt “free” to speak about Palestine (i.e., their determination to speak was undeterred by the risks). This led to more valid responses, and hence all statistical analysis for Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6 & Q7 is drawn only from the 215 responses given after July 21st. Analysis of remaining questions used the entire sample of 527 responses.

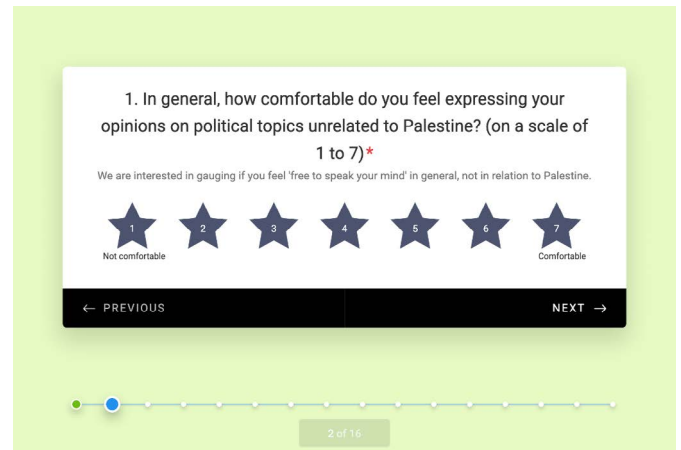


Figure 0.3: see added description under the question.

Limitation of Verification: It is important to note that the data presented in this report relays information provided directly by respondents. Due to the completely anonymous nature of the survey, and the commitment to protecting participant confidentiality, it was not possible for the researchers to verify the truth or details of individual claims made in the open-text boxes.

Scope and Generalisability: Finally, it is acknowledged that this study utilises a targeted cohort, and future research would benefit from comparing these findings against a representative sample of the broader Australian population. However, the absence of a general population baseline does not diminish the gravity of the data presented here.

The statistical power of this report is derived from the internal disparities observed within the sample itself. While the data reveals a general contraction of political freedom (Q1 to Q2), the primary finding is the distinct ‘Palestine exception’ – a statistically significant drop between general freedom (Q2) and freedom on Palestine (Q5). Regardless of how the general public feels, the fact that a significant, engaged sector of Australian society feels markedly less free to speak on Palestine than on any other issue is, in itself, an alarming indicator of democratic erosion.

30 *It is a genocide: UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), UN Special Rapporteur Albanese, International Court of Justice (ICJ), B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (PHRI), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Association of Genocide Scholars.*

A CLIMATE OF FEAR:
AN EMPIRICAL REPORT ON THE SUPPRESSION OF SPEECH ON PALESTINE IN AUSTRALIA



Academics
for Palestine WA



Academics for Palestine
South Australia