

# The rise of prejudice and why facts still matter

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Credit: Gage Skidmore, Flickr

Researchers at The Australian National University (ANU) are calling on people around the world to take part in the biggest ever study into helping understand, and reduce prejudice.

Lead researcher Professor Michael Platow said prominent world figures like Donald Trump and Pauline Hansen are setting new social 'norms'

that allow prejudice to thrive.

"Our leaders have reset the norms of what is appropriate," Professor Platow said.

"By our leaders expressing these views they are setting the norms and showing that it's OK to say these things."

Professor Platow believes part of the problems lies in the changing the way in which groups of people view facts.

In the wake of the US election many have argued that facts are no longer as influential in [public debate](#) and "post-truth" was chosen by the Oxford Dictionary as 2016's international word of the year. But Professor Platow said it was not accurate to say that facts no longer matter.

"This isn't true. What you have in the racism debate, as in the [climate change debate](#), is that both sides have their own facts. The point is that facts themselves are social constructions," he said.

"We're in an era where the common frame of reference for judging what is a fact and what is not, is disintegrating.

"We need to reconstruct a shared perspective of what are facts. We need a shared set of values and norms to allow us to move forward."

Professor Platow said this disconnect in people's understanding of reality is what leads to people like Senator Pauline Hansen claiming she has never been a racist.

The research study, called the Prejudice Census, asks people to act as "citizen scientists", recording any experiences with prejudice that they may encounter in their daily lives.

"The Prejudice Census will allow us build a better understanding of exactly what people think prejudice is in the first place," Professor Platow said.

"What we need is an analysis of what people believe to be prejudice and how and why these beliefs are changed and maintained."

The Prejudice Census is based in the Research School of Psychology at The Australian National University, in collaboration with researchers at the University of Adelaide, Groningen University (the Netherlands), and Tel Aviv University (Israel).

**More information:** People can take part in the Prejudice Census here: [psychology.anu.edu.au/node/791 ... dit/prejudice-census](https://psychology.anu.edu.au/node/791...dit/prejudice-census)

Provided by Australian National University

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