# RELIGIOSITY, ATTITUDES ON DIVERSITY AND BELONGING AMONG ORDINARY AUSTRALIAN MUSLIMS

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**Abstract:** Islamic incompatibility is a core discourse of fringe political parties, mostly from the right of the political spectrum, who have agitated against religious diversity and also against immigration of Muslims, especially from certain parts of the world. Smaller scale political alliances, against mosque developments, private Islamic schools or halal certification, also draw heavily on this pre-supposition. Despite the preponderance of such despondent commentary, there is surprisingly little by way of empirical analysis of this assumption of incompatibility. This paper draws on a community survey (n:585) and the results show high rates intercultural mixing in workplaces, educational settings and socially, with little evidence for separatism. These Australian Muslims have very positive views about cultural diversity, most perceive there to be consistency between Islam and Australian norms, and they see themselves as Australian. Those with stronger levels of religiosity have even more positive views on diversity and consistency. We offer two explanations, one based on official multiculturalism, and the other on tenets of Islamic thinking on toleration and moderation.

**Keywords:** *Australian Muslims*, *religiosity*, *attitudes*, *toleration*, *belonging*, *Islam, multicultural policy*, *intercultural contact*

## DESPONDENCY ON 'CULTURAL FIT': DEBATE, EMPIRICS, POLICY AND FAITH

Huntington's assertion about Islamic incompatibility with Western values has provided a theoretical underpinning for a great deal of public commentary.[1] There has also been a vast set of blogging and commentary, which has fed into public discussion. For example, Islamic incompatibility is a core discourse of fringe political parties, mostly from the right of the political spectrum, who have agitated against religious diversity and also against Muslim immigration to Western nations, especially from certain parts of the world. Smaller scale political alliances, against mosque developments, private Islamic schools or halal certification, draw heavily on this pre-supposition. Despite the preponderance of such despondent

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[1]    Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993).

commentary there is surprisingly little by way of empirical analysis of this assumption of incompatibility. This paper draws on a community survey (n:585), and reports on the attitudes and senses of belonging and fit among Sydney Muslims. The paper also reports on their cross-cultural contact. Finally, we assess the influence of religiosity on attitudes and senses of fit.

There may be sound sociological forces that could explain why Muslims may find it difficult to feel they belong in Western countries. These include widespread Islamophobia and Muslims' experiences of racism on the basis of their faith. Islamophobia in countries like Australia is well-documented.[2] Australian Muslims have high rates of exposure to racism across all life settings.[3] Dunn et al. found the exposure to racism in spheres like education and the workplace was three times the average national exposure to racism.[4] However, this negative exposure has not been found to have a meaningful social impact for Australian Muslims and the way they relate to Australia, notwithstanding the possibility that such levels of racism may have a negative impact on perceived social inclusion and equal opportunity.[5] In other words, the general resilience of Australian Muslims is such that experiences of racism are not generating widespread alienation and separatism.[6] Speculations on the sources of this resilience point to the Australian national agreement on multiculturalism and freedom of religion (despite the fringe detractors),[7] and also to the teachings and philosophy of Islam.[8]

The settlement and activity patterns of Western Muslims are another social force that could reflect and generate alienation and separatism. Spatial segregation has long been assumed to be linked to Islamophobia and the experience of racism (constraint factors), but also to cultural separatism (choice factors). The theory is that social distance is reflected in spatial distance. In

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[2]    James Carr and Amanda Haynes, "A Clash of Racializations: The Policing of 'Race' and of Anti-Muslim Racism in Ireland," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015); Kevin M. Dunn, Natasha Klocker and Tanya Salabay, "Contemporary Racism and Islamophobia: Racialising Religion," *Ethnicities* 7, no. 4 (2007); Scott Poynting and Victoria Mason, "The Resistible Rise of Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim Racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001," *Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 1 (2007).

[3]    Shahram Akbarzadeh, Gary Bouma and Rachel Woodlock, *Muslim Voices: Hopes and Aspirations of Muslim Australians* (Melbourne: Monash University, 2009); Alison Booth, Andrew Leigh and Elena Varganova, Does Ethnic Discrimination Vary Across Minority Groups? Evidence from a Field Experiment," *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 74, no. 4 (2012); Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Ismaع Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice Against Arab and Muslim Australians* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004); Scott Poynting and Greg Noble, *Living with Racism: The Experience and Reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of Discrimination, Abuse and Violence since 11 September, 2001* (Sydney, Australia: Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004), www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/ research/UWSReport.pdf.

[4]    Kevin M. Dunn et al., *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims: Attitudes and Experiences of Muslims Report* (Sydney: Western Sydney University and the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy, 2015).

[5]    Kevin M. Dunn, Rosalie Atie and Virginia Mapedzahama, "Ordinary Cosmopolitanisms: Sydney Muslims' Attitudes to Diversity," *Australian Geographer* 47, no. 3 (2016), 281-294 http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/ 00049182.2016.1191132.

[6]    Dunn et al., *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims*; ibid.

[7]    Dunn et al., *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims*.

[8]    Amelia Johns, Fethi Mansouri and Michele Lobo, "Religiosity, Citizenship and Belonging: The Everyday Experiences of Young Australian Muslims," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015), 171; Fethi Mansouri, Michele Lobo and Amelia Johns, "Addressing the 'Muslim Question,'" *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015).

the UK, this assumption was evident in the debates about 'parallel lives' that gave rise to the Cantle Report and the Community Cohesion policy agenda.[9] However, the social geographers in the UK found no substantive evidence of Muslims' self-segregation.[10] Despite some strong evidence of socio-economic disadvantage among Australian Muslims, relative to non-Muslims,[11] there is no geography of religious segregation in Australia. In this paper we present Australian data on Muslims' reported interaction with non-Muslims.

Australia's official policy stance on the management of cultural diversity is Multiculturalism. The policy was developed from the 1970s and into the 1980s. The key components of the policy were crystallised in the 1989 *Agenda Statement*.[12] The policy adopted a stance of reciprocity, setting out two sets of dimensions that could be characterised as rights and obligations. The rights were around cultural maintenance and expression, and freedom from discrimination. The obligations of Australia's multicultural policy included a reciprocal expectation that cultural expression of others is tolerated, and a normative requirement to adopt core values and practices of Australian democracy.[13] The official Australian setting is one that celebrates and facilitates diversity, even though there is co-existent intolerance and racism. In that context, non-Christian religious practice should not be seen as inconsistent with 'national norms,' so long as it does not transgress the normative values as set out in the *Agenda Statement*. Australia's statements on Multicultural Policy have been somewhat silent on religious diversity.[14] Nonetheless, religious freedom has been found to be a well-anchored base of toleration in Australia.[15] In a multicultural setting we might therefore expect religiosity, including Muslim religiosity, to be associated with a stronger sense of belonging and cultural fit.

The abovementioned discourses of non-belonging of Muslims in Western nations relies on an assumption that Islamic faith and practice are inconsistent with Western values. There is an inference and perception that Islamic teaching is anti-toleration. Contemporary scholars of Islamic principles would contest that assumption on non-toleration. They argue that Islam discourages extremist understanding of faith and advocates a moderate path in all aspects of

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9    Community Cohesion Panel, *The End of Parallel Lives? The Report of the Community Cohesion Panel Home Office* (London: Community Cohesion Panel, 2004); Claire Worley, "It's not about Race It's about the Community': New Labour and 'Community Cohesion,'" *Critical Social Policy* 25, no. 4 (2005).

10   Richard Gale, "Religious Residential Segregation and Internal Migration: The British Muslim Case," *Environment and Planning A* 45, no. 4 (2013); Peter E. Hopkins and Susan J. Smith, "Scaling Segregation; Racializing Fear," in *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*, ed, Rachel Pain and Susan J. Smith, 103–16 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Deborah Phillips, "Parallel Lives? Challenging Discourses of British Muslim Self-Segregation," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24, no. 1 (2006).

11   Riaz Hassan, *Australian Muslims. A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia* (Adelaide, South Australia: International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, 2015).

12   Office of Multicultural Affairs, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia ... Sharing Our Future* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1989).

13   Ibid.

14   Jacqueline Nelson, Alphia Possamai-Inesedy and Kevin M. Dunn, "Reinforcing Substantive Religious Inequality : A Critical Analysis of Submissions to the Review of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Australia Inquiry," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 47, no. 3 (2016).

15   Kevin M. Dunn, "Public Attitudes Towards Hijab-Wearing in Australia," in *Beyond the Hijab Debates: New Conversations on Gender, Race and Religion*, ed, Tanja Dreher and Christina Ho, 31–52 (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009).

religious thought and practice.[16] Further, they insist, that even though Islam is a proselytising faith, it also teaches the principle that there is no compulsion in religion. They also point to teachings giving rise to peaceful co-existence of diverse cultures and faiths in traditional Muslims societies over a long history of Islam.[17] On this basis, we might expect that Muslims with higher stated levels of religiosity would be more positive about diversity and have a stronger sense of their fit and belonging in Australia.

## METHOD

The data drawn on in this paper comes from a research project undertaken by Western Sydney University (WSU), together with the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA), with the aim of capturing the attitudes and experiences of everyday Australian Muslims. A survey was devised to generate empirical data that might address political and scholarly debates concerning Muslims in Western countries and build a robust empirical picture of life as an Australian Muslim. The survey incorporated a range of well-established survey questions utilised in Australia for over two decades to test personal attitudes and experiences. The surveys also incorporated novel questions aimed at generating a broader picture of the everyday life of Australian Muslims, testing for civic participation, cross-cultural contact and participation in the labour force. Demographic data, including information on religiosity and religious practice, were also collected.

The survey was rolled out in two phases, with phase one being a face-to-face sample collected outside mosques, as well as Islamic centres and Eid festivals by ISRA staff and volunteers. Approximately half of the surveyors were male and half female, so as to seek a gender balance in the completed sample. A diversity of Sydney mosques were targeted, including those established by Turkish-Australians (Auburn, Bonnyrigg), Lebanese-Australians (Lakemba, Cabramatta, Arncliffe), Iranian-Australians (Earlwood), Bangladeshi-Australians (Sefton), Bosnian-Australians (Smithfield), and multi-ethnic mosques (Parramatta, Rooty Hill, Surry Hills, Leumeah). Three hundred and forty-five face-to-face surveys were collected. Data from the face-to-face surveys were placed into an SPSS data set by the WSU research assistant. The authors (Dunn, Atie and Ozalp) as well as other staff from ISRA devised a coding regime for the open response comments.

The second phase of data collection involved a random telephone survey distributed by the Social Research Centre (SRC). A sample frame of 2979 names was put together by Cultural Partners, drawn from a *White Pages* search for 'Muslim names' in Sydney. The survey was converted into a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview format by the SRC together with the research team. The questions were not modified except for a small number that after piloting were revised to enhance clarity, and a small number of questions were omitted based on a

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[16]    Mohammad H. Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'ānic Principle of Wasaṭiyyah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[17]    Mehmet Ozalp, "Da'wah as Mission in Islam," in *Mission in Religion*, ed. Aaron J Ghiloni, 183–213 (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

reassessment of their usefulness. After a 'soft launch' of the survey (*n*=23), further changes were made to the survey. The introduction was revised to emphasise the role of ISRA in the research. A list of definitions was also developed by the research team to assist with a small number of comprehension issues that had arisen.

Two hundred and forty surveys were completed between 6 March and 12 April 2013, with a response rate of 48% – similar to other studies conducted by the SRC. The sample was randomised by callers asking to speak to the person in the household with the most recent birthday. The data from the telephone survey was entered into SPSS by SRC in a format similar to that of the face-to-face survey. The data from the two groups of respondents was then combined to make a completed sample of 585.

## SYDNEY MUSLIMS' EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES

To address the question of Australian Muslims' supposed separateness or discomfort with Western norms, respondents were asked to what degree they mixed with non-Muslims in the workplace, socially and in educational settings. It was very common for the face-to-face and the telephone respondents to mix with non-Muslims in the workplace (81.5% and 87.7%, respectively) and educational settings (71.2% and 86.8%, respectively) (see Table 1). However, it was less common for both groups to mix with non-Muslims socially. This was particularly the case for the face-to-face group. Slightly less than two-thirds of the face-to-face respondents (59.5%) and three-quarters of the telephone respondents (75.6%) frequently engaged with non-Muslims in social circumstances. The fact that the face-to-face survey was distributed at Muslim social events may account for the higher number of people who associate more often with Muslims rather than non-Muslims socially. One could argue that the figures imply some separateness. However, it is important to note that the findings generally show strong intercultural mixing. Very few of the respondents hardly ever had contact with non-Muslims in the workplace (5.9%), social life (8.1%) or educational settings (9.9%). Those rates of cross-religious contact are high and challenge any assumptions of separateness, purposeful or otherwise, as a result of alienation. This reflects the high levels of Muslim public engagement that were uncovered by Akbarzadeh, Bouma and Woodlock's research.[18]

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[18]     Akbarzadeh, Bouma and Woodlock, *Muslim Voices*, 28–29.

**Table 1: Sydney Muslims' levels of intercultural mixing (2011; 2013)**

|  |  | Face-to-face | Telephone | All |
|---|---|---:|---:|---:|
| **Workplace** | Very often or often | 81.5 | 87.7 | 84 |
|  | Sometimes | 10.6 | 9.3 | 10.1 |
|  | Never or hardly ever | 7.9 | 2.9 | 5.9 |
| **Social life** | Very often or often | 59.5 | 75.6 | 66.1 |
|  | Sometimes | 29.3 | 20.6 | 25.7 |
|  | Never or hardly ever | 11.1 | 3.8 | 8.1 |
| **Educational settings** | Very often or often | 71.2 | 86.8 | 77.5 |
|  | Sometimes | 17.3 | 5.7 | 12.6 |
|  | Never or hardly ever | 11.5 | 7.5 | 9.9 |

Source: Dunn et al., *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims*

The comfort with intercultural mixing discussed above is reflected in tables 2 and 3, which demonstrate the attitudes of Sydney Muslims towards diversity, equality, integration and belonging. Almost all (97%) agreed it is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures (see Table 2). This pro-diversity stance was even stronger than for the average of all Australians (87%).[19] The majority of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that all races of people are equal (86.5%). The proposition that "Australia is weakened by people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways" is a test of the extent to which people agree with an assimilationist view on managing cultural diversity. Only one-third of both groups agreed with this assimilationist proposition (32.2%), while half (54.1%) disagreed with this statement. Again, this is higher than the Australia-wide population average (42%).[20] Sydney Muslims are very positive about cultural diversity.

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[19]   Dunn, Atie and Mapedzahama, "Ordinary Cosmopolitans."
[20]   Ibid.

**Table 2: Perceptions towards diversity and equality, by religiosity, Sydney Muslims, 2011-13 (n:585)**

| | | Importance of religion in daily life % | | | | | | | | | | p |
| | | Very Important | | Important | | Somewhat Important | | Not important at all | | Total | | |
| | | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | |
| It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures | Agree | 442 | 96.7 | 88 | 100 | 20 | 95.2 | 10 | 90.9 | 560 | 97.1 | .168 |
| | Neutral | 7 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4.8 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 1.4 | |
| | Disagree | 8 | 1.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9.1 | 9 | 1.6 | |
| | Total | 457 | 100 | 88 | 100 | 21 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 577 | 100 | |
| There is racial prejudice in Australia | Agree | 321 | 72 | 60 | 69 | 10 | 52.6 | 5 | 45.5 | 396 | 70.3 | .153 |
| | Neutral | 53 | 11.9 | 12 | 13.8 | 2 | 10.5 | 2 | 18.2 | 69 | 12.3 | |
| | Disagree | 72 | 16.1 | 15 | 17.2 | 7 | 36.8 | 4 | 36.4 | 98 | 17.4 | |
| | Total | 446 | 100 | 87 | 100 | 19 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 563 | 100 | |
| Australia is weakened by people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways | Agree | 133 | 30.4 | 32 | 36.4 | 9 | 42.9 | 5 | 50 | 179 | 32.2 | .653 |
| | Neutral | 63 | 14.4 | 10 | 11.4 | 2 | 9.5 | 1 | 10 | 76 | 13.7 | |
| | Disagree | 241 | 55.1 | 46 | 52.3 | 10 | 47.6 | 4 | 40 | 301 | 54.1 | |
| | Total | 437 | 100 | 88 | 100 | 21 | 100 | 10 | 100 | 556 | 100 | |
| All races of people ARE equal | Agree | 386 | 85.8 | 78 | 88.6 | 18 | 85.7 | 11 | 100 | 493 | 86.5 | .424 |
| | Neutral | 19 | 4.2 | 1 | 1.1 | 2 | 9.5 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 3.9 | |
| | Disagree | 45 | 10 | 9 | 10.2 | 1 | 4.8 | 0 | 0 | 55 | 9.6 | |
| | Total | 450 | 100 | 88 | 100 | 21 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 570 | 100 | |

Source: Dunn et al., *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims*.
Likert response options, to question wordings as above.

Two-thirds of respondents (61.4%) said that relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were friendly (see Table 3). This supports findings from the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria survey of non-Muslim Australians.[21] However, a majority of participants agreed that there was racial prejudice in Australia (70.3%) and there was a strong sense of unfair treatment, with an overwhelming majority indicating that they felt that Australian media portrayal of Muslims was unfair (78.8%). This perceived sense of unfair media treatment has been found in other research, and it is a perception shared by non-Muslims, as shown by El Matrah and Dimopoulos in Melbourne.[22] The media mistreatment and acknowledgement of racial prejudice may account for the third of participants who were unsure or disagreed that relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were friendly (23.4% and 15.1%, respectively).

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[21]    Joumanah El Matrah and Maria Dimopoulos, *Race, Faith and Gender: Converging Discriminations Against Muslim Women in Victoria. The Ongoing Impact of September 11, 2001. A Summary Report on Racism Against Muslim Women* (Northcote: Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, 2008), 11.
[22]    Ibid, 67–68.

**Table 3: Perceptions towards integration and belonging, by religiosity, Sydney Muslims, 2011-13 (n:585)**

| | | Importance of religion in daily life % | | | | | | | | | | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Very Important | | Important | | Somewhat Important | | Not important at all | | Total | | |
| | | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | |
| **Islam is consistent with Australian norms and society** | **Agree** | 309 | 72 | 64 | 74.4 | 13 | 65 | 5 | 50 | 391 | 71.7 | .061 * |
| | **Neutral** | 61 | 14.2 | 9 | 10.5 | 3 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 73 | 13.4 | |
| | **Disagree** | 59 | 13.8 | 13 | 15.1 | 4 | 20 | 5 | 50 | 81 | 14.9 | |
| | **Total** | 429 | 100 | 86 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 10 | 100 | 545 | 100 | |
| **The Australian media's portrayal of Muslims is unfair** | **Agree** | 352 | 80.5 | 65 | 75.6 | 13 | 65 | 8 | 72.7 | 438 | 79.1 | .394 |
| | **Neutral** | 30 | 6.9 | 8 | 9.3 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 7.2 | |
| | **Disagree** | 55 | 12.6 | 13 | 15.1 | 5 | 25 | 3 | 27.3 | 76 | 13.7 | |
| | **Total** | 437 | 100 | 86 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 554 | 100 | |
| **Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Australia are friendly** | **Agree** | 276 | 61.3 | 52 | 60.5 | 14 | 66.7 | 7 | 63.6 | 349 | 61.4 | .750 |
| | **Neutral** | 109 | 24.2 | 20 | 23.3 | 3 | 14.3 | 1 | 9.1 | 133 | 23.4 | |
| | **Disagree** | 65 | 14.4 | 14 | 16.3 | 4 | 19 | 3 | 27.3 | 86 | 15.1 | |
| | **Total** | 450 | 100 | 86 | 100 | 21 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 568 | 100 | |
| **Muslims are well integrated into Australian society** | **Agree** | 278 | 62.2 | 57 | 64 | 11 | 52.4 | 5 | 45.5 | 351 | 61.8 | .006 * |
| | **Neutral** | 93 | 20.8 | 19 | 21.3 | 2 | 9.5 | 0 | 0 | 114 | 20.1 | |
| | **Disagree** | 76 | 17 | 13 | 14.6 | 8 | 38.1 | 6 | 54.5 | 103 | 18.1 | |
| | **Total** | 447 | 100 | 89 | 100 | 21 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 568 | 100 | |
| **I feel I am an Australian** | **Agree** | 379 | 84.2 | 72 | 80.9 | 17 | 81 | 10 | 90.9 | 478 | 83.7 | .476 |
| | **Neutral** | 44 | 9.8 | 14 | 15.7 | 2 | 9.5 | 0 | 0 | 60 | 10.5 | |
| | **Disagree** | 27 | 6 | 3 | 3.4 | 2 | 9.5 | 1 | 9.1 | 33 | 5.8 | |
| | **Total** | 450 | 100 | 89 | 100 | 21 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 571 | 100 | |
| **It is important to me that my children are/ would be fully accepted as Australians** | **Agree** | 402 | 88.4 | 83 | 93.3 | 19 | 95 | 11 | 100 | 515 | 89.6 | .596 |
| | **Neutral** | 35 | 7.7 | 3 | 3.4 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 39 | 6.8 | |
| | **Disagree** | 18 | 4 | 3 | 3.4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 3.7 | |
| | **Total** | 455 | 100 | 89 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 575 | 100 | |

Source: Dunn et al., *The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims*.
Likert response options, to question wordings as above

Two-thirds of participants felt that Muslims were well-integrated into Australian society (61.8%). A substantial minority (18%) could not agree to that proposition. However, a majority were confident in asserting that Islam is consistent with Australian norms and society (71.7%). In terms of belonging, a majority of respondents (83.7%) were comfortable identifying themselves as Australians and an overwhelmingly majority agreed that it was important to them that their children be accepted as Australians (89.6%) (see Table 3). This indicates a very strong

sense of belonging amongst the respondents. Broadly, the data revealed the very settled and non-problematic nature of Muslim and non-Muslim relations from the perspective of Sydney Muslims. Akbarzadeh, Bouma and Woodlock also found that the overwhelming majority of Australian Muslims saw no such clash between being a good Muslim and a good Australia (93%).[23] Official Multiculturalism likely provides a context in which Muslim Australians would be enabled to see their faith and practice as consistent with national identity and norms. What we are unable to answer from these survey data is whether Multicultural Policy has influenced these Australians' opinions. It could also be that these Australians (and perhaps their migrant ancestors) had a pro-diversity disposition before they came to Australia, and were in part attracted by Multicultural Policy and associated democratic freedoms. This is a less likely explanation of the attitudes of the four-in-ten who were born in Australia.[24]

## RELIGIOSITY AND PERSPECTIVES ON BELONGING AND FIT

Overall, the sample is a fairly religious one. In the survey, questions were asked about time spent fasting, frequency of mosque attendance and prayer, and the giving of *zakat* (charity). These were asked in addition to a more straightforward question about the importance of religion in everyday life. The questions gauged both the commitment of respondents to Islamic practice and the significance of religion in their lives, and showed most respondents to be "practising and observant Muslims" rather than being "'cultural' or 'nominal' Muslims."[25] When asked about the importance of religion in their daily lives, most respondents (79.1%) agreed that religion was very important. The relationship between the religiosity of the sample and the method of survey administration proved statistically significant when a chi-square test was run ($\chi^2(3, N = 579) = 18.58$, $p = 0.000$). The distribution of the face-to-face survey at mosques and Islamic events is probably responsible for this relationship, as these are sites where more religious Muslims are likely to congregate, whereas the telephone survey attempted to represent a more random sample (in terms of religiosity) of Sydney Muslims. Still, our findings regarding solid religiosity among Australian Muslims is consistent with other findings in Australia.[26]

We tested to see if the extent of religiosity had an impact upon the attitudes of Sydney Muslims. The question was whether the extent of a respondent's faith commitment had a negative or positive effect on feelings of belonging and sense of fit in Australia. The earlier mentioned discourses in Australia infer that stronger religiosity among Muslims might result in higher levels of perceived inconsistency between Australian norms and Islam, for example. In Table 2, we provide cross-tabulations of religiosity with perceptions on diversity, belonging

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[23]   Akbarzadeh, Bouma and Woodlock, *Muslim Voices*, 18–20.
[24]   Ibid, 15–16.
[25]   Hanifa Deen, *Caravanserai: Journey Among Australian Muslims* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 44–46; Abdullah Saeed, *Muslims Australians: Their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions* (Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Australian Multicultural Foundation, 2004), 28.
[26]   See for example: Rachel Woodlock, "Being an Aussie Mossie: Muslim and Australian Identity among Australian-born Muslims," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 22, no. 4 (2011).

and Muslim and non-Muslim relations. Even though religiosity was high on average, across all the respondents there were still some clearly significant relationships in the data. The P values show that higher religiosity was positively associated with a sense that Islam fits well into Australia and a perception that Muslims are well integrated into Australian society. Being more religious did not generate a sense that Muslims were not integrated into Australian life. Indeed, religiosity was more statistically associated with stronger levels of perceived integration.

There was no statistical relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards diversity and equality, nor did religiosity impact belongingness. This combats assumptions regarding the inconsistency of Islam with Western toleration or secularism. Neither is there evidence of feelings of separateness of Australian Muslim as being linked to religiosity. The table does show that 17 per cent of those for whom religion was important did perceive an integration issue. However, the statistical association in general was positive, meaning that Muslim faithfulness was associated with social integration.

## AUSTRALIAN MUSLIMS' NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISLAM, MULTICULTURALISM AND INTOLERANCE

Harmonious education and employment are critical to successful social cohesion and inclusion. Sydney Muslims' levels of intercultural mixing in educational and work settings were high. The learning and teaching methods in current educational institutions often involve discussions, peer-to-peer interactions and friendships, which can lead to better understanding of society and respect for diversity.[27] Even though the nature of interactions in workplace settings can be more transactional, Muslims have a higher representation as professionals in corporations where people have to work in teams and engage in workplace relationships. However, there are also higher rates of unemployment among Australian Muslims, showing some bifurcation or workplace success and social mobility.[28] Promoting education and facilitating employment of Muslims would further increase social inclusion and cohesion, especially for those that are struggling to enter the labour market.

Levels of interactions in social life were lower than for education and the workplace, but still significant. As previously mentioned, the lower rate of social interaction of the face-to-face respondents as compared to phone surveys could mean that Muslims belonging to these organisations meet their social connection needs in those organisations and social settings.

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[27] Forrest, James, Garth Lean and Kevin M. Dunn. "Challenging Racism through Schools: Teacher Attitudes to Cultural Diversity and Multicultural Education in Sydney, Australia", *Race Ethnicity and Education* 19, no. 3 (2015), 618-638; Henslin et al. *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach* (Australia: Pearson Higher Education Australia, 2015); Possamai, Adam, Kevin M. Dunn, Peter Hopkins, Faroque Amin, Lisa Worthington and Jan Ali. "Muslim Students' Religious and Cultural Experiences in the Micro-publics of University Campuses in NSW, Australia", *Australian Geographer* 47, no. 3 (2016): 311–324.

[28] Akbarzadeh, Bouma and Woodlock, *Muslim Voices*, 26–27; James Forrest, "Melting Pot or Segmentation? The Structural and Spatial Integration/Assimilation of Muslim Immigrants in Sydney, Australia. The 1st and 2nd Generation" (presented at the AAG Conference, San Francisco, April 1, 2016); Hassan, *Australian Muslims*.

Given that interactions in social life are often voluntary, deeper and more meaningful, two-thirds of religious Australian Muslims actively engaging in social interaction is important.

The very high pro-diversity stance of Sydney Muslims could be interpreted in two ways. First, the result indicates that Sydney Muslims generally appreciate the value of diversity and the freedom and opportunity it offers to them and others. The disadvantage of living in less-free societies may be better appreciated by Australian Muslims, leading them to appreciate the value of Australian society and values of respecting multiculturalism and diversity. Second, given that Muslims experience racism at three times the rate of other Australians, the high degree of pro-diversity stance would be a sentiment against the racism to which they are more attuned. The greater extent to which Australia is recognised as culturally and religiously diverse, the less racism Muslims may expect to experience. So, Australian Muslims' support for diversity could be their sensitivity and reaction to racism they feel and experience. Multiculturalism may be seen as a social salve or systemic bulwark to religious intolerance and other forms of racism. If official Multiculturalism builds confidence in religious toleration, especially for non-Christians, then it would follow that more religious Muslims would be more positively disposed to diversity and more confident of their own citizenship in a religiously plural society.

There are alternate interpretations of the high rates of agreement with the existence of racial prejudice in Australia, the perceived unfair portrayal of Muslims in media and the less than ideal rating of the friendliness of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims (61.4% see as friendly). Australian Muslims may interpret the Islamophobia, prejudice and unfairness, as unfriendliness towards Muslims and consequently reciprocate the disposition. In contrast, Australian Muslims may think that there is unfriendliness towards them, from some quarters, even though they may consider themselves as friendly to the wider society. The minority that answered the questions despondently, such that they indicated disharmony, may be reflecting the views of the wider society to Muslims, rather than the other way around. Given that there are very high levels of identification with being Australian, the second interpretation seems to be the more likely.

The lower rate of feeling well-integrated into Australian society (61.8%) in comparison to a much higher rate (83.7%) of identifying as Australian is interesting. It suggests that while Muslims wish to integrate into Australian society, their integration is either not completed as yet or full integration is prevented by the prejudice and unfair treatment of Muslims by the media. Muslims want to feel Australian, but this is somewhat prevented by a society influenced by Islamophobic rhetoric and racism.

The support for equality of all humans is not surprising as this is a value shared with Australian democratic values and the strong egalitarian teachings found in Islam. The result that Islamic religiosity is statistically associated with stronger levels of perceived integration and Islam's positive place in Australia, suggests that respondents do not perceive there is anything inherent with Islam that would prevent Muslims integrating well into Australian society. Much of the sample were recruited from mosques and religious organisations that teach

and promote a scholarly tradition of Islam and highlight the importance of proper learning in Islamic disciplines. It is plausible to conclude that much of that component of the sample may have acquired their perspectives on toleration and moderation through a robust education on Islam through those institutions.

This study has produced important conclusions that stand to change the way Australian Muslims are perceived by sections of the public. The study shows that there is a strong willingness of Muslims wanting to integrate to Australia and feel part and parcel of the country and its society. The more religious Muslims are and the more they are educated in the Islamic scholarly tradition, the more likely they are to see the consistency between Australian norms and Islamic practice. Muslims are expected to integrate to multicultural Australia. Multicultural policy has a reciprocal expectation that non-Muslims show a willingness to allow and support that integration to take place. Among those Muslims with a more despondent attitude, it seems likely that these outlooks may be reflecting the views of the wider society towards Muslims, rather than the other way around, particularly given the high levels of identification with being Australian.

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