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Towards understanding what Australia's Muslims really think



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Abstract

Over the past decade, issues concerning Islam and Muslims have featured prominently in public and media discourse. Much of this discourse is stereotypical, anecdotal and often unsubstantiated. Indeed, relative to the extent of comment on Islam and Muslims, few factual data exist on what Muslims really think. This article presents the views and opinions of the Queensland Muslim community based on the findings of a survey conducted at the 2009 Muslim Eid Festival in Brisbane. The findings of this research contradict many of the assumptions made about Australia's Muslims concerning their views and opinions on a range of social and political issues. The research shows that Muslims highly value Australia's key social and political institutions, including its democracy, judiciary, education and health-care systems. However, Muslims do express a lack of trust in certain institutions, namely the mass media. Also, consistent with the views of people globally, Muslims are deeply concerned about conflicts in the Middle East as well as the environmental crisis. This article suggests the need for a shift in public discourse to more accurately reflect the commonality, rather than incongruity, between Muslim views, opinions and concerns and those of the wider society.

Keywords: attitudes, Islam, minorities, Muslims, opinions, public policy

Introduction

In recent years many Australians have taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of the nation's complex and diverse Muslim communities. Indeed, Islam in Australia has become a central and ongoing theme of political and media discourse, where a long list of politicians, religious figures, community representatives, academics and journalists have offered opinions and comments on the perceived incompatibility of Islam with the broader Australian public. Much of this commentary has espoused a remarkably negative and overly reductive picture of Islam and its adherents. Underpinning this are several assumptions about Australia's Muslims: that their beliefs are antithetical to Australian values; that they cannot assimilate; that they are inherently violent and condone extremism and martyrdom; that they prefer theocracy and Islamic law to democracy and secular Australian law and that they actively oppress women.

But is this what Australia's Muslims really think? Some existing literature has sought to compare and contrast the attitudes of Muslims and non-Muslims towards violence and democracy, to examine perceptions of the 'war on terror' or of US foreign policy, or to ascertain attitudes towards women's role in society. Other research has included global studies of Islam, indicating the degree of religious commitment and piety, attitudes towards jihad and reactions to globalization among the world-wide Islamic community. More locally, various Australian studies have focused on Australia's Muslims and their religiosity, their experiences in the Australian education system and the rising tide of fear and Islamophobia since the 9/11 attacks. However, despite the strength and merit of these studies, none provides any comprehensive empirical analysis of the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of Australia's Muslims.

This study seeks to confront the above-described lacuna by addressing a fundamental question: what do Muslims in Australia really think? The challenge has been one of identifying a sufficiently broad cross-section or representative sample of Muslims to study. While some recent studies have highlighted the limitations of the survey method of research (Savage and Burrows, 2007), it remains for the time being, at least, among the most efficient methods for gathering large amounts of data concerning the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of social groups from samples that are generalizable to a broader population. The current research has taken the innovative approach of conducting self-administered questionnaires at a Muslim festival that attracts a broad cross-section of Muslims in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic level, educational attainment and religiosity. Its findings, based on a survey conducted at the 2009 Brisbane *Eid* Festival, have significant implications not only in terms of challenging existing assumptions about Muslims in Australia but also in methodological terms concerning how data on the views of Muslims and other religious communities might best be collected.

Before addressing the question proper, it is important to acknowledge heightened tensions between Australia's Muslim communities and the wider society, prompted by a series of complex local and global events (Dunn et al., 2007; Islam, 2005). Locally, these events have included the controversial 'ethnic' gang rapes in Sydney during 2000–1 and the arrival of several boatloads of (largely Muslim) asylum seekers on the maritime borders of Australia since 2001 (Poynting and Noble, 2003; Poynting et al., 2004). Animosity towards Islam was heightened by the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath. Although the majority of Muslims around the world condemned the 9/11 attacks, the terrorists responsible for them acted under the banner of Islam, which has become inextricably linked to terrorism in popular parlance ever since (Kellner, 2002). This is evident in the coverage of the so-called 'war on terror'. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, practices such as suicide bombings have often been equated with the allegedly violent nature of Islam rather than seen as a manifestation of a people's resistance to foreign invasion and occupation (Brown, 2006; Esposito and Mogahed, 2007; Richardson, 2007; Ryan, 2004). The perceived connection between Islam and suicide bombings has been compounded by a series of other terrorist attacks in Madrid and London and, most poignantly for Australians, the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, in which innocent Australians were killed (Lewis, 2006; Lewis and deMasi, 2007).

Contemporaneous to these developments has been an ongoing discussion about the perceived opposition between Islam and Australian values – especially the ostensible preference of Australia's Muslims for theocracy and Shariah law over democracy and secular law. For instance, in an interview on ABC's *Lateline* program, the former Treasurer and deputy leader of the Liberal party, Peter Costello, appeared to draw a line between Australia's 'core beliefs – democracy, the rule of law, the independent judiciary, independent liberty' and Islam, which he perceived as not only antithetical to such concepts but a distinct threat to 'Australian values' (Jones, 2005). More importantly, former Prime Minister John Howard is quoted as arguing in *The Howard Factor* that:

There is a fragment [of the Australian Islamic community] which is utterly antagonistic to our kind of society... There is no equivalent [among other Australian immigrants] of raving on about jihad, but that is the major problem, and I think some of the associated attitudes towards women [are] a problem. (Megalogenis, 2006: 121)

Such sentiments arguably directly impact on the conscience of the broader Australian population. This became evident in the beachside suburb of Cronulla at the end of 2005, when Australia experienced perhaps its worst ever race-related riots (Noble, 2009). More recently, when Sydney's Muslim community applied to build an Islamic school in the suburb of Camden in mid-2008, the president of the Camden-Macarthur Residents' Group, Emil Sremchevich, claimed:

Islam is a monoculture which does not want to integrate itself with any existing cultures. Most other cultures do integrate themselves and coexist, and want to do that, but Islam does not do that because it cannot. Its teachings are such that it does not allow integration into other societies. (O'Rourke, 2008)

Reinforcing this image of Islam, however, are the statements of certain leaders of Australia's Muslim communities about the faith and its adherents, whom they purport to represent. Perhaps the best-known example is the 2006 comments by Australia's former Mufti Sheikh Taj Al-Din Al-Hilaly, who compared sexual assault against provocatively dressed women to 'uncovered meat', concluding that 'if she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred'. In 2007, Hilaly appeared on Egyptian TV, this time arguing that 'Western people are the biggest liars and oppressors', while at the same time stating 'that the Australian law guarantees freedoms to the point of insanity' (Kerbaj, 2007).

Unfortunately, Hilaly is not the only leader to espouse such problematic rhetoric. For example, Samir Mohtadi (aka Abu Hamza), Sheik Khalid Yasin and Feiz Mohamad are reported to have argued that Muslim women can be raped within marriage, that disobedient wives should be beaten and that women who had been raped after displaying their beauty to the world have no one to blame but themselves (Devine, 2005; Dunn, 2009a). Additionally, Feiz Mohamad's inflammatory *Death Series* DVD compounds the problem, as it is reported that he calls on parents to teach their children the 'zeal of jihad and a love of martyrdom' (Kearney, 2007). Abu Hamza, on the other hand, is reported to have commented about the moral character of majority Australia, referring to them as 'boozers who are hooked on gambling and prostitution' (Dunn, 2009b). Unfortunately, the sentiments expressed by these individuals, who are presented in the media as authorities on Islam and leaders of Australia's Muslims, receive extensive coverage in the Australian press to the point where they obfuscate more moderate and representative voices.

Given these events and the overly racist and negative portrayal of Islam, an entire collection of research has emerged. Studies by Hassan, Tessler and others provide empirical evidence on a complex matrix of factors that affect religiosity and piety within Muslim-majority countries and the relationship this has with their views on political issues, democracy, gender and images of the 'other' (Hassan, 2002a, 2008; Jamal and Tessler, 2008; Tessler, 2007; Tessler and Nachtwey, 1998). Further, both Zogby International and World Public Opinion have conducted several, large-scale surveys involving thousands of Muslims internationally. Among the findings of these that contradict the popular representation is that while many Muslims are critical of US foreign policy and believe that the USA is trying to divide Islam, they are opposed to attacks on American civilians (Kull, 2007, 2009; Zogby, 2005). The results of these studies are often quite at odds with prevailing assumptions of Islam in the West. The data enable a snapshot of

the differences within and between Muslims of various backgrounds or cultural contexts and enable analysis of where and how the beliefs, values and attitudes held by Muslims either differ from or concur with the general public or so-called 'Western' values.

Perhaps the most robust empirical study of sentiments in Muslim-majority countries is Esposito and Mogahed's recent work, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007). This research, conducted by the Gallup Organization, used face-to-face interviews with Muslims from different backgrounds and socio-economic statuses across more than 35 Muslim countries. Confirming findings from earlier studies, this study shows that the Muslim world holds remarkably complex views on issues such as democracy versus theocracy, violence and radicalism, gender issues and relationships with the West. It highlights the disparity between popular notions of non-Muslim Westerners and what Muslims actually think and believe.

Similar analysis is extended to some degree in research conducted by the *World Values Survey* and the *Pew Global Attitudes Project*. These studies provide a detailed picture of the world's Muslim populations and the differences that exist between them, and comparisons between the perceptions of Muslims and non-Muslims on several complex issues. There are in these studies pervading assumptions about the regressive nature of Muslims and the implicit differences between Islam and the West. These are accentuated by data which paint a sophisticated, albeit negative, picture of Muslim value systems, responses to 9/11, support for terrorism and Islamic extremism, and their integration into Western societies (Kohut et al., 2005; Kohut, Allen et al., 2006; Kohut, Doherty et al., 2006; Kohut et al., 2008; Kohut et al., 2007; Moaddel, 2007).

Furthermore, various social empirical studies have been conducted on Muslim minorities living in Western countries such as Canada, Britain and the United States (Ameli, 2002: 124; Karim, 2008: 85; Modood, 2005; Modood et al., 1997; Schmidt, 2004; Yousif, 1993: 127; Zogby, 2007). In Australia, several recent empirical studies have sought to illustrate the experiences and beliefs of Australia's Muslims. Much of this literature focuses on their experiences in the Australian education system. The evidence uncovers a lack of cultural understanding, high degrees of discrimination, and negative university and high school experiences that affected their perceptions of belonging, identity and citizenship (Asmar, 2001; Mansouri & Wood, 2008; Suliman & McInerney, 2003). In terms of gender issues, both Yasmeen and Kamalkhani have investigated the settlement needs of female Muslim immigrants, demonstrating that they are often socially and economically marginalized by the larger society in Australia and that their needs are very rarely taken into account (Kamalkhani, 2001; Yasmeen, 2001).

On another note, Hassan has conducted a handful of studies that suggest significant differences in all aspects of religiosity between Australia's Christians

and Muslims, with Muslims being particularly sensitive to issues such as blasphemy (Hassan, 2002b, 2007). Other Australian studies have examined ways in which certain global and local events pertaining to Islam have negatively impacted on Australia's Muslims. For example, Balnaves and Aly administered a nation-wide 'metric of fear' and found that there has been a 'significant drop in feelings of safety after 9/11 across the full range of demographics, with very significant restrictive and assertive behaviours among selected demographics, such as Moslems' (Balnaves and Aly, 2007: 110).

Similar issues have been investigated in a report which found that 'The climate of fear and divisive political and media discourse has produced a suspicion toward "the ethnic other"' (Bouma et al., 2007: 5). These were accompanied by an increase in Islamophobia and attacks against Muslim communities, especially Muslim women. A more robust empirical study of Australia's inter-faith and inter-cultural relations was undertaken in the *Australia Deliberates* study in 2007 (IDA, 2007). This large project included a national random survey of 1401 non-Muslims, a parallel survey of 160 Muslims, a series of 21 focus group deliberations involving over 200 Muslims and a deliberative workshop that brought together hundreds of non-Muslim and Muslims.¹ Of particular interest was the finding that a significant proportion of non-Muslim respondents thought there were definite incompatibilities between Islam and the West, particularly on issues such as terrorism, national security and the Australian way of life. However, demonstrating the power of inter-cultural dialogue, the participants were found to have dramatically reduced their negative perceptions of Islam following a weekend of intensive deliberations between Muslim and non-Muslim participants.

Despite the strength and significance of this earlier body of research, there has to date been no comprehensive empirical study of the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of Australia's Muslim communities concerning the social and public policy issues most frequently associated with the discourse on Islam and Muslims in Australia. This study is the first in a series of research initiatives aimed at examining what Australia's Muslims think. For now, this article is based on research conducted with Queensland's Muslim community, constituting a significant insight into the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of this varied and under-studied community.

What Muslims think

Methodology, sample and instrument

The focus of this study was to identify the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of Muslims on a number of key social and public policy issues, particularly those that have been the subject of media coverage concerning Islam and Muslims, such as integration, gender equality, violence and terrorism, democracy and Muslim perceptions of the West. Consistent

with other studies, we divided our instrument into thematic constructs and used a survey questionnaire as the data collection medium (Dunn et al., 2004; Hassan, 2008).

The population of interest were Muslim citizens and permanent residents of Australia aged 18 years and over living in Queensland. A sample size of 500 was decided on to ensure population representativeness based on a number of criteria. This sample is based on population-level data from the 2006 Population Census, with an estimated Muslim population of Queensland of 23,700.² Setting the population size at a maximum of 25,000, the calculated sample size is 378, which is the minimum number of respondents required to ensure a 95 percent confidence ($p = 0.05$).³

The choice of the Brisbane Eid Festival and the Muslims of Queensland to conduct this survey was deliberate. Muslims have been well established in Queensland for over a century. In 2008, both the State and Federal governments joined the Muslim community in a celebration of the centenary of the building of the Holland Park Mosque in Brisbane, the first mosque built on the east coast of Australia (Ally, 2008). The number of Muslims in Queensland increased between the 1996 Census and the 2001 Census. The 2006 Census indicates an increase to 20,320 in 2006, compared to 14,783 in 2001 and 9325 in 1996. With reference to the major statistical region of South East Queensland that includes Brisbane, the number of Muslims increased from 2827 in 1996 to 4083 in 2001 and to 5733 in 2006, with males (55%) higher in proportion than females (45%). More importantly, the Muslim community of Queensland, which is mainly concentrated in the Brisbane metropolitan area, is highly diverse in terms of ethnicity. Unlike New South Wales, where Muslims of Lebanese background are a majority, or Victoria, where Muslims of Turkish background are predominant, Queensland has a broad cross-section of the various nationalities and ethnicities that comprise Australia's Muslim communities, with no one particular group forming a majority. The main ethnic backgrounds of Queensland's Muslims include the Middle East, Turkey, Africa, South Asia and South East Asia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

In response to the challenge of surveying a community that identifies with a particular religion, this study took the innovative step of administering questionnaires at a community festival. This festival, known as *Eidfest*, is held annually at the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. It was selected as the appropriate event for a number of reasons. First, the occasion constitutes the largest and most diverse gathering of Queensland's Muslims on a single occasion; it attracts several thousand people and a broad cross-section of the Muslim community in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic level, educational attainment and religiosity. It is estimated that about 5000 Muslims attended the Brisbane *Eid* festival in 2009, which is almost one-quarter of the entire Muslim population of Queensland.⁴ Second, the potential for bias in sampling is reduced, since the researchers have no control over visitor attendance.

Third, as the event is pervasively Muslim, comprising different age groups, gender and ethnicity, the occasion allows heterogeneous selection in terms of demographic profiles. Finally, we used partial face-to-face contact as a means of administering the survey instrument, reducing non-response errors as well as encouraging questionnaire completion (Iselin et al., 2004).

The survey was administered at a centrally located tent at the festival. Research assistants were dispatched around the festival grounds and invited attendees to participate in a survey on 'what Muslims really think about a range of social and political issues'. Participants were directed to the designated tent, which was arranged to accommodate up to 20 participants at a time. A facilitator within the tent handed a copy of the questionnaire to participants and provided basic instructions concerning the structure of the instrument. The questionnaire was then completed by the participant and placed in a secure box.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part A included initial screening questions to ensure: respondents' eligibility in terms of Australian citizenship or residency; competence to complete the questionnaire in English; age restriction (18 years or older); and self-identification as a Muslim. Part B consisted of the questionnaire's main questions and part C contained demographic questions including gender, age, education level, length of residence in Australia, employment status and income. Part B consisted of six main themes that asked respondents questions concerning national and religious identity, trust in Australian institutions, views on local and global political issues, opinions on gender issues, views on violence and extremism, and religiosity. In total, 428 questionnaires were deposited in the secure boxes provided, of which 418 were sufficiently completed and included in the dataset for analysis.

In designing questionnaire content, we drew on ideas in a number of questionnaires used in previous Australian and overseas studies for guidance, layout and style. Using this method allowed us to validate items for inclusion close to or similar to issues tested in those studies. Intuitively, applying previously tested concepts assumes there may be less likelihood of non-response problems (Neuman, 2006). We added two constructs incorporating different measurement scales. The purpose was to determine whether respondents do indeed respond significantly and in different ways to a series of scale items. The first is a five-item Likert response scale related to 'trust in Australian institutions', defined as: the media; the judiciary; police services; the education, health and political systems; and religious services. Scale items range from 'complete trust' to 'no trust'. The second is a seven-point Likert response scale related to a number of topical policy issue items, including 'current local/global affairs'; the role of Shariah; Australian involvement in global conflicts; environmental issues; asylum seekers and refugee issues. Scale items range from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Ranking responses along such an ordered scale allows for a more refined measurement of attitudinal responses (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007).

Findings

Demographics

The survey was completed by a broad cross-section of the Muslim community and the sample is reflective of the wider Muslim population of Queensland. Fifty-nine percent of respondents were male and 41 percent were female. That four in 10 respondents were female signifies a high receptiveness by Muslim women to engage in current debate surrounding contemporary socio-political affairs. In terms of age: 28 percent of respondents were aged 18–25; 46 percent were aged 26–40; 21 percent were 41–55 years, and 5 percent were over 55 years of age. The mean age was 33.5 years, with a range of 18–68 years. In terms of age categorization, consistent with Hassan's (2008) methodology, two-thirds (66.7%) of respondents fell in the 26–55 age group.

Over half of the respondents (51%) had a university degree, while 21 percent had a diploma or trade certificate and 22 percent had at least a high school certificate. Forty-two percent of respondents were either born in Australia or migrated to Australia prior to the age of 18 (21%). Thirty-seven percent arrived in Australia as adults aged 20–40 years, while another 20 percent arrived after age 40. In terms of employment status, 43 percent were employed full-time and 14 percent part-time, while 19 percent of respondents were university students. Ten percent of respondents stated that they were unemployed and another 9 percent stated that they were engaged in home duties.

Identity and integration

Almost half of the respondents (49%) identified themselves as 'a Muslim first and then an Australian'. However, 29 percent stated that they identified themselves as 'an Australian and a Muslim equally'. While these findings are encouraging in terms of Muslims feeling part of Australian society, there is an indication that limitations to feelings of 'Australianness' among Muslims may be due to perceptions of exclusion and being part of an out-group rather than an unwillingness to integrate.

When asked how they felt about integration, 71 percent of respondents stated that 'Muslims should integrate by learning English and by other social, economic and political means but should retain their religious identity', while another 13 percent expressed that 'Muslims should become completely integrated into Australian society'. Only 14 percent felt 'Muslims should integrate by learning English but retain all other parts of their identity and mix with their own community as much as possible', and only one percent of respondents stated that 'Muslims should not integrate at all'. While 13 percent advocate complete integration, the majority of Muslims (71%) favour integration at all levels of engagement, having due regard for religious identity. Taken together, 83 percent support integration at some level into Australian society.

Table 1: Support for integration within educated groups

<i>Feelings about integration</i>	<i>Highest level of education achieved (%)</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Primary or little education</i>	<i>High school education</i>	<i>Trade & diploma</i>	<i>University education</i>	
<i>Male</i>					
Complete integration	9.1	9.3	21.0	14.2	13.9
Integrate + retain religious identity	36.4	74.0	63.2	76.6	72.2
Integrate + retain all other identities	45.4	13.0	15.8	9.2	12.7
No integration	9.1	3.7	0.0	0.0	1.2
<i>Female</i>					
Complete integration	9.1	10.5	10.2	13.9	11.8
Integrate + retain religious identity	63.6	65.8	73.5	70.8	70.0
Integrate + retain all other identities	27.3	21.1	14.3	15.3	17.1
No integration	0.0	2.6	2.0	0.0	1.2

Note: Survey question – ‘Which one of the following statements best describes how you feel about integration?’

Chi-squared tests of independence were performed to determine which demographic profiles were significantly related to ‘integration’. The relationship is only significant in relation to educational status; $\chi^2(9, N = 414) = 20.06$, $p = 0.018$. Table 1 suggests that the desire for integration increases with higher levels of education. Favouring integration at all levels is strong among males (86%) as well as females (82%). For males, integration is positive and strongly related to increase in education levels $\chi^2(9, N = 244) = 26.55$, $p = 0.002$. The same is not true for females who display strong dispositions for independence $\chi^2(9, N = 170) = 4.10$, $p = 0.905$. These results rebut portrayals of Muslims being recalcitrant to integration into Australian society. Viewed in terms of cultural diversity, the results support observations in the *Issues Deliberations Australia* (2007) study and by Dunn et al. (2004) that strong retention of cultural (religious) mores does not weaken feelings of association with Australia. The evidence shows there is almost no support for feelings against integration (1%).

Trust in institutions

Respondents were asked about their level of trust in a range of institutions, including the media, judiciary, police services, education system, health-care system, government and Mosques. High levels of trust in certain institutions were expressed, while very low levels of trust were expressed for others (see Table 2).

Table 2: Trust in institutions

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Level of trust (%)</i>					
	<i>No trust</i>	<i>Very little trust</i>	<i>Some trust</i>	<i>Most trust</i>	<i>Complete trust</i>	<i>No response</i>
The media	28.5	35.6	22.2	8.4	3.8	1.4
The judiciary	6.5	11.5	29.9	34.0	15.3	2.9
The police service	8.4	10.5	36.1	30.9	11.7	2.4
The education system	1.7	5.3	24.4	45.0	20.6	3.1
The health system	3.6	4.1	22.2	41.9	24.6	3.6
The political system	12.9	18.7	36.4	23.0	6.2	2.9
Mosque/Muslim religious institution	3.6	5.5	15.8	40.4	33.3	1.4

Note: Survey question: 'From your experience, what level of trust do you have in the following Australian institutions?'

The institution for which respondents expressed the lowest level of trust was the mass media (newspapers, television, radio, etc.), with 55 percent stating that they had 'no trust' (29%) or 'very little trust' (36%). By contrast, high levels of trust were expressed for the health-care system, including hospitals and clinics, with 67 percent stating that they had 'complete trust' or that they 'mostly trust' the institution. Similarly, 66 percent of respondents stated having 'complete trust' or that they 'mostly trust' the education system, including schools, colleges and universities. However, the institution for which respondents expressed the most trust was the Mosque, with 73 percent of respondents stating that they have 'complete trust' or that they 'mostly trust' the religious institution.

Friedman's one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare ranked values in a chi-squared analysis to see whether differences in 'trustworthiness' rankings were significant. Table 3 indicates that 'media' and 'political systems' were ranked the least trustworthy institutions, while Muslim religious institutions were ranked the most trustworthy. The high mean ranking of Muslim religious institutions suggests a high regard for these institutions. The rankings were very significant $\chi^2(6, N = 391) = 868.533$, $p = 0.000$.

Views on democracy

Respondents were asked for their response to the statement that 'democracy is a Western form of government and is not compatible with Islam'. The overwhelming majority rejected the statement (74%), with 50 percent stating that 'most aspects of Islam are compatible with democracy' and the other 24 percent stating that they 'totally disagree with the statement'. We

also observed a positive relationship between this view and education levels – support was strongest among university-educated respondents. Further, the relationship was very significant, since $\chi^2(9, N = 415) = 23.69, p = 0.005$. Only 14 percent of respondents totally agreed with the statement and only 12 percent expressed that they ‘think that most aspects of Islam are not compatible with democracy’.

Support for democracy is not unique to Muslims in Australia but is consistent with trends observed among Muslims globally. Polls conducted around the Muslim world show strong demand for democratization; most Muslims believe that democracy can work in their countries. A study conducted as part of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey in 2005 found that large and growing majorities in Morocco (83%), Lebanon (83%), Jordan (80%) and Indonesia (77%) support democratization. Pluralities in Turkey (48%) and Pakistan (43%) said democracy can and does work well. The overriding point expressed by Muslims in different parts of the Muslim world according to the study is that democracy is not just for the West (Kohut, 2006). More recently, a World Public Opinion poll in 2008 entitled ‘World Public Opinion on Governance and Democracy’ found that in all 19 nations surveyed, the majority of Muslim respondents supported the principles of democracy (Kull, 2008).

Views on terrorism

Respondents were asked for their response to the statement that ‘the targeting of innocent civilians is never allowed in Islam’. An overwhelming majority of 90 percent agreed with the statement. The support was evident at all levels of education. Moreover, the relationship was also very significant; $\chi^2(9, N = 407) = 23.48, p = 0.005$. Only 6 percent stated that ‘targeting innocent civilians is sometimes permitted in Islam’. Moreover, only 3 percent disagreed with the statement and only 2 percent stated that ‘targeting innocent civilians is usually permitted in Islam’.

Respondents were also asked how they would respond if they ‘knew of a Muslim planning a terrorist attack in Australia’. Indicative of the Muslim community’s almost complete rejection of terrorism, 97 percent of respondents expressed opposition by stating that they would either ‘advise the person against committing the act’ (17%), ‘report the person to a leader of the Muslim community’ (24%), or ‘report the person to the police’ (56%). Opposition to terrorism is apparent across all levels of education and the relationship is significant; $\chi^2(9, N = 414) = 17.68, p = 0.039$ – the significance value is below the alpha level of .05.

The rejection of terrorism by Australia’s Muslims is also consistent with a growing opposition to terrorism among Muslims around the world. Polls conducted as part of the Pew Global Attitudes Project and Terror Free Tomorrow, published in 2006, found strong opposition to terrorism and suicide bombings among Muslims surveyed both in Muslim-majority

countries and living in the West. When asked about 'suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets', the majority of respondents from each country, with the exceptions of Egypt, Jordan and Nigeria, said that suicide bombing and violence against civilians was 'never justified': Indonesia (71%), Pakistan (66%), Jordan (43%), Egypt (45%), Nigeria (28%), Turkey (61%), Germany (83%), France (64%), Britain (70%) and Spain (69%). Additionally, smaller proportions of respondents stated that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets were 'rarely justified': Indonesia (18%), Pakistan (18%), Jordan (28%), Egypt (25%), Nigeria (23%), Turkey (9%), Germany (6%), France (19%), Britain (9%) and Spain (9%) (WorldPublicOpinion.org, 2006).

Views on gender equality

When asked whether they believed that Islam supports gender equality, 89 percent of respondents replied in the affirmative. Contrary to popular misconceptions that associate misogyny with Islamic religiosity, we observed a positive relationship between religiosity and the view that Islam supports gender equality. Among respondents who stated that they had a 'very strong' or 'strong' commitment to Islam, 94 percent and 89 percent respectively agreed that Islam supports gender equality. By contrast, agreement with the view that Islam supports gender equality was less common among those who stated having a 'moderate' (84%) or 'slight' (45%) commitment to Islam. The relationship between the variables is significant, as shown by the chi-square test; $\chi^2(3, N = 413) = 26.43, p = 0.000$.

The adverse circumstances of women in Muslim countries are documented by numerous organizations, including the UN, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House. Freedom House, for instance, in a recent report on women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa, states that:

Deeply entrenched societal norms, combined with conservative interpretations of Islamic law, continue to relegate women to a subordinate status. Women in the region are significantly underrepresented in senior positions in politics and the

Table 3: Friedman one-way ANOVA ranking of institutional trustworthiness

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Trustworthiness (mean ranking)</i>
Media (newspapers, radio & TV)	2.00
Judiciary (courts & law)	4.15
Police services (state and federal)	3.80
Education system (schools, colleges & universities)	4.87
Health system (hospitals & clinics)	4.99
Political system (local, state & federal)	3.08
Religious services (mosques & Islamic leadership)	5.10

private sector, and in some countries they are completely absent from the judiciary. Perhaps most visibly, women face gender-based discrimination in personal-status laws, which regulate marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other aspects of family life. Family laws in most of the region declare that the husband is the head of the family, give the husband power over his wife's right to work and travel, and in some instances specifically require the wife to obey her husband. Domestic violence also remains a significant problem. (Kelly, 2009)

On the basis of such reports and related media coverage, the assumption is often made in the West that Islam is the problem. However, the finding that there was not a positive correlation between Islamic religiosity and misogynistic attitudes among the Muslims surveyed corresponds with research across the Muslim world (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007). A potential limitation of our study is that it did not provide a definition of gender equality but left this term open to respondents. Consistent with our findings, however, is Esposito and Mogahed's research, which studied the views of thousands of Muslims across 35 countries and concluded that religiosity among Muslim men does not correlate with less egalitarian views towards women, and that women's lagging status in much of the Muslim world cannot be attributed to Islamic principles. Esposito and Mogahed found that the majority of men found guilty of violence against women, for instance, did not observe basic Islamic rituals such as prayer and fasting and a large proportion were illiterate or were raised in broken homes (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007).

Views on public policy issues

Discourse on local and global issues often reflects perceptions of public policy and political issues. Using a seven-point Likert response matrix, we asked respondents to rate 24 statements to examine their level of consciousness and concern over these issues. Responses to the matrix statements provide a useful indicator of the general sentiments of Queensland's Muslim community in terms of how they define their faith, relate to the wider society, and issues about which they are most concerned. Of the 24 statements, 9 elicited particularly strong responses, suggesting that these issues are of primary concern to the Muslim community (Table 4). In order of proportion of respondents that stated they 'strongly agree' with the statement, the most prominent were defining Islam as a religion of kindness to other human beings (80%), terrorism as antithetical to Islam (76%), maintaining an Islamic identity (73%), and opposition to Israel's policies and practices towards the Palestinians (70%).

Contrary to popular perceptions of Muslims being exclusivist or even adversarial towards non-Muslims, the Queensland Muslim community identifies being good, fair and kind to fellow human beings as a central component of Islam. Moreover, contrary to the strong association between

Table 4: Issues of most importance to Muslims

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Along with the worship of God alone, the main emphasis of Islam is being good, fair and kind to other human beings	335	80
Muslims who engage in acts of terrorism misrepresent Islam	319	76
Maintaining my identity as a Muslim in Australia is very important	307	73
Integration does not mean that Muslims need to abandon their Islamic identity in order to be Australians	304	73
Israel's policies and practices towards the Palestinians is a major concern for Muslims	294	70
The Australian government should support a resolution of the Israel–Palestine conflict on the basis of international law and human rights rather than negotiations	271	65
It was a mistake for Australia to participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq	260	62
Muslims are duty-bound by faith to protect the environment	254	61
The mass media is the main cause of negative attitudes towards Muslims in Australia	241	57

Islam and terrorism over the past decade, the Queensland Muslim community overwhelmingly regards terrorism as antithetical to Islam. That Muslims want to maintain an Islamic identity in Australia should not be perceived as a rejection of Australian society. Clearly, Australia's most fundamental systems and institutions, including its democracy, judiciary, education and health-care, are all valued and trusted by the Muslim community. However, Muslims do express a lack of trust in certain institutions, namely the mass media, and do perceive the media as being the main cause of negative attitudes towards Muslims in Australia.

Additionally, Muslims are critical of certain policies of the Australian government and have strong views on certain issues. Consistent with the concerns of Muslims globally, the Israel–Palestine conflict ranks as the most important global issue for the Queensland Muslim community. Opposition to Israel's policies and practices against the Palestinian people is very strong and Queensland's Muslims overwhelmingly support a resolution on the basis of human rights and international law. This may be indicative of a general tendency among Muslims to regard military intervention as ineffective or counterproductive, as the Queensland Muslim community overwhelmingly expressed that it was a mistake for Australia to participate in the United States-led invasion of Iraq. Such views on both of these issues transcend religious affiliation and are consistent with the sentiments of people in the West generally. Similarly, the concern of Muslims about the

environmental crisis is consistent with that of people globally, regardless of religion. That respondents so strongly expressed concern for the environment and even regarded its protection as an Islamic obligation is indicative of a broader trend among Muslims to relate and adapt Islam to evolving norms, values and concerns.

Responses to all 24 statements were factor analysed to extract core variable components of foremost importance in the estimation of respondents. Initial principal component analysis with varimax rotation extracted seven components. Although these components explain 62.5 percent of all variances, the extraction was rejected, as only two components showed eigenvalues > 1 , explaining 22.2 percent of variances. The procedure was re-run to retain only components with eigenvalues > 1 after removing three variances resulting in Cronbach's alpha = .744. The factor rotation only retained 9 statements for both components. After extraction, the results in Table 5 identify two components with unique dimensions: (1) ethical concern and (2) political concern. Both components show strong variable loadings.

These two components explain 47 percent of total variance and identify the structure of Muslim opinion on local and global political and ethical issues. The loading patterns are well defined in terms of dimensions – both components are strongly correlated with the variables. However, the low percentage of variance suggests higher degrees of independence, especially in relation to component 2. The need to be a part of Australian society and engaging in environmental concerns in component 1 suggest a strong desire for such ethical issues. Component 2 separates out the Israel–Palestine issue and the duplicitous political stand on human rights as major concerns in Muslim opinion.

Table 5: Rotated component matrix

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Components</i>	
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
Mass media cause of negative attitudes	.066	.716
Western double standards on human rights	.123	.787
Israel's policies are a major concern	.340	.702
Australia to support Israel–Palestine human rights resolution	.416	.482
Australian mistake to support US invasion of Iraq	.546	.285
Muslims duty-bound to protect environment	.786	.067
Environmental responsibility must be promoted by Muslim leaders	.734	.176
Government must increase migrant intake	.346	.182
Muslims who engage misrepresent Islam	.567	.083

Note: Strong variable loadings shown in bold type

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the viability of utilizing the Muslim *Eid* festival as a venue for conducting a representative survey of the Muslim community. Such events attract Muslims, males and females, of diverse ages, ethnicities, cultures, socio-economic levels, educational attainment, ideological approaches to Islam and levels of religiosity. They therefore offer the opportunity to survey a sample of Muslims that is more representative of the broader Muslim population than would be achieved by targeting mosques, at which one is most likely to find an overrepresentation of religious Muslims or specific Muslim organizations that are likely to be comprised along ethnic and ideological lines. The findings of this study provide a useful corrective to the common public, media and political discourses, which frequently assert that Muslims refuse to integrate, hold values contrary to member of the wider society, support violence and terrorism and oppose Australia's democratic systems and institutions.

To the contrary, this study has found that while Muslims value their Islamic identity, they seek to integrate into Australian society. Negative experiences have no doubt shaken the trust of many Muslims in certain social institutions such as the mass media, but their trust in other institutions, particularly health-care, education, judiciary and their own religious institutions, remains high. While trust in government is low, Muslims strongly support Australia's democracy and overwhelmingly find it compatible with Islam. Moreover, on the issues with which Muslims have been most negatively associated – the use of violence and oppression of women – this study has found responses that stand in stark contrast to popular representations and discourse. Respondents to this study overwhelmingly oppose terrorism, view the targeting of civilians as incompatible with Islam's teachings and consider Islam to support gender equality. Such views are consistent with those of Muslims globally, as shown in recent research such as that conducted by Esposito and Mogahed (2007).

Also consistent with the views of Muslims globally, respondents to this study expressed overwhelmingly that Israel's policies and practices towards Palestinians were a major concern. Such findings should not be read, however, as indicative of anti-Western or hostile sentiments towards non-Muslims in general. One of the major findings of this study is that Muslims in Australia are engaging in a process of redefining the priorities of their faith in the context of contemporary Western society. This study, while limited in scope, suggests that the direction of this process is towards the harmonization of Islam with the values and institutions of Australian society and its people.

Notes

- 1 An initiative of Issues Deliberation Australia (IDA) – a not-for-profit and non-partisan public policy think tank.

- 2 Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census of Population and Housing (2914.0.55.002), showing 20,320 Muslims living in Queensland. We allowed for a 5 percent annual increase in population size between 2006 and 2009. On this basis, the population estimate is 23,700, calculated in terms of the formula $(.005 \times 3,904,500) (1+.05)^3$ where the first value represents the percentage of Muslims in Queensland and the third value represents the annual increase.
- 3 Based on 95 percent confidence level; population size 25,000; 5 percent confidence interval and a proportion of 0.5 using the sample size calculator provided by the National Statistical Service (an agency of the Australian Bureau of Statistics), accessible at: <http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/NSS/0A4A642C712719DCCA2571AB00243DC6?opendocument>
- 4 Estimated by the organizers, who base their estimations on paid entry sales and averages from past year attendances.

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