

Good Muslims make Good Aussies

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Research objectives

The research presented here is part of a broader project looking at the hopes, aspirations, concerns and worries of Muslim Australians. It is an evidence-based description of the nature of Muslim experiences in Australia, in particular a group of Muslims living in Sydney, NSW. It asks: How do Muslims living in Australia experience Australian identity and values?

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed with eighty questions on various themes to do with living in Australia. Data collection for this part of the research was gathered during the period of March to August 2007. In all, 290 questionnaires were returned through an online survey and by participants who voluntarily attended meetings organised in cooperation with various Muslim organisations.

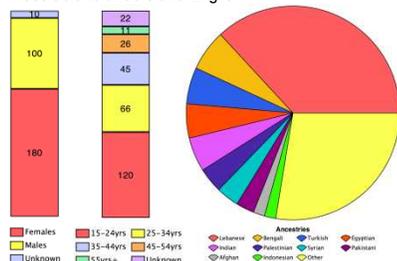
Questionnaire responses were entered into database software and then verified for accuracy. The database was queried for the return of basic frequencies that covered quantitative aspects of the research. Longer blocks of text were mind-mapped and coded to allow for qualitative analysis. More complex queries were then developed to cross-tabulate the data to expand on themes that appeared upon analysis of the sets and the textual data. These themes were then developed and written up.

Population

Muslims ≥ 16 years old, living in Sydney NSW, and self-identified as religious.

A broad demographic was sought and obtained re: denomination; migrant status; ancestry; socio-economic status; employment status; housing-ownership status; level of education; age; gender. However, the study was not statistically representative by design.

The questionnaire was written in English, but a small number of Arabic responses were returned and translated. One session of thirty participants had the questionnaire translated by an Arabic translator. However, in the present study there is a bias towards those able to understand English.



Being Australian

Participants were asked to rank the strength of their agreement or disagreement with the statement "I can be a good Muslim and a good Australian." Overwhelmingly, the majority of participants who answered, strongly agreed.

Strength	%
Strongly agree	84.0
Agree	8.9
Neutral	2.8
Disagree	0.0
Strongly disagree	4.3
Responses	n=282

Of the very small number of participants who strongly disagreed, there appeared to be some ambiguity in how they understood being Australian: linking it with Anglo-Saxon or Celtic ancestry, or requiring them to engage in activities in direct conflict with their religious requirements (such as drinking alcohol and eating pork).

"I see no opposition between being a good loyal Australian citizen and a Muslim, since Islamic values teach me to love and work diligently towards the betterment of any community I live in."
(Male/21yrs/Birthplace: Syria/Immigrated: 1990)

Participants were asked to indicate their preference on the level of importance of maintaining variously their Australian, ethnic and Muslim identities. Of the three, that it was extremely important to maintain a Muslim identity received the strongest response. This is unsurprising, as the current research concentrated on recruiting participants who identified as religious. Only 4.6 percent felt it was not important to them to maintain an Australian identity and 5.7 percent were not interested in maintaining an ethnic identity.

How important is it to maintain the following identities?		Not at all important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Important (%)	Very important (%)	Extremely important (%)
Australian identity	Australian-borns say:	7.8	12.7	15.7	27.5	36.3
	Migrants say:	1.6	13.1	20.5	36.9	27.9
Ethnic identity	Australian-borns say:	8.9	8.9	21.8	14.9	45.5
	Migrants say:	1.6	10.6	22.8	29.3	35.8
Muslim identity	Australian-borns say:	0	0	3.9	7.8	88.2
	Migrants say:	0	0.8	2.4	11.4	85.4

References: ¹Department of Education, Training and Science. *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2005. ²Smith, Philip and Tim Phillips. "Popular Understandings of 'UnAustralian': An Investigation of the Un-National." *Journal of Sociology* 37, (December 2001): 323-339.

Values

A list of Australian values was drawn from the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools.¹ As well, a list of un-Australian attributes was drawn from research undertaken by Philip Smith and Tim Phillips, described in "Popular understandings of 'unAustralian': An investigation of the un-national."²

Participants were asked to choose from the combined and alphabetised list of the values and attributes, as to the top five choices they experienced in Australian society. The aim was to ascertain how participants experienced these values and attributes, rather than to identify whether a particular item was Australian or un-Australian. This is because an idealised list of values does not necessarily reflect the reality of lived experiences.

The most commonly selected five values and attributes chosen by Muslim Australian participants in the current survey were: freedom; trend towards Americanization; fair go; doing your best; and care and compassion.

"In Australia, we are very fortunate in that we are able to practice our religion with greater freedom and access than in many other Muslim countries."
(M/19yrs/Birthplace: Bangladesh/Immigrated: 1994)

Concluding Remarks

Religiously observant Muslims in Australia believe they can be both good Muslims and good Australians and that their adherence to Islam can even make them better citizens. Maintaining an Australian identity as well as an ethnic identity is important to participants, but religious identity is the most important. Muslims in Australia encounter a variety of values and attributes in their social experiences of life in Australia. Most strongly are the values of freedom, a fair go, doing your best, care and compassion among others. Nevertheless, there is a strong 'un-Australian' experience of an Americanization trend.