

# STUDIA ISLAMIKA



# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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## Australian Public Knowledge of Islam

**Abstraksi:** Beberapa tahun terakhir ini, hubungan Australia dan Indonesia sedikit terganggu menyusul serangkaian peristiwa yang menyulut ketegangan antara Islam dan Barat. Sebagai bagian dari masyarakat Barat, Australia tentu mendapat imbas dari fenomena global yang tengah terjadi ini berupa ketegangan peradaban antara Islam dan Barat. Ditambah lagi terdapat sejumlah aksi teror yang jelas-jelas ditujukan kepada masyarakat dan simbol-simbol Australia. Sebut saja dua kali peristiwa Bom Bali dan pengeboman Kedubes Australia di Jakarta yang mengundang kemarahan sejumlah warga Australia. Menurut Huntington peradaban antara Islam dan Barat memiliki nilai-nilai yang berbeda bahkan bertolak belakang. Karena itu peristiwa-peristiwa pengeboman yang terjadi di Tanah Air harus dipahami sebagai "benturan peradaban".

Setelah terjadinya peristiwa 11 September, yang ditengarai dilakukan Osama bin Laden, sejumlah warga Australia melakukan tindakan "pembalasan" yang menyiratkan kebencian dan antipati mereka terhadap kelompok Muslim yang berada di negara tersebut. Tindakan-tindakan tersebut berupa aksi teror, perusakan masjid, penyerangan, maupun pernyataan-pernyataan sinis yang dikeluarkan media maupun anggota masyarakat biasa. Meskipun memang tindakan tersebut dapat dikendalikan, hal tersebut perlu dicermati karena ini menyangkut tentang pandangan dan sikap warga sebuah negara terhadap Islam dan masyarakat Muslim.

Populasi muslim di Australia yang mencapai 1,5 persen dari total penduduk, atau sekitar 280.871 jiwa, merupakan bagian penting dari masyarakat Australia secara umum. Mereka umumnya pendatang yang berasal dari Timur Tengah, Turki, Iran, dan Indonesia, dengan mata pencaharian sebagai pedagang, buruh, profesional, dan akademisi. Sejak lebih kurang tiga puluh tahun yang lalu mereka bermigrasi ke Australia dengan tujuan mencari kehidupan yang lebih baik. Australia merupakan negara yang menerapkan prinsip-prinsip multikulturalisme. Segecap kelompok masyarakat dengan budaya dan agama yang berbeda hidup saling berdampingan dan hormat menghormati.

Bagaimana sebenarnya pandangan dan sikap warga negara Australia terhadap Islam dan kaum muslim? Apakah tindakan-tindakan yang mencoreng semangat multikulturalisme Australia yang terjadi pasca 11 September atau Bom Bali mencer-

minkan pandangan dan sikap umum warga Australia ataukah tindakan segelintir orang saja? Di sinilah letak signifikansi artikel ini, yang berisi laporan hasil survei yang dilakukan pada 2003 oleh Roy Morgan Research.

Berdasarkan hasil survei, sebanyak 40,1 persen responden menyatakan mereka tidak tahu sama sekali tentang Islam. Sementara generasi yang lebih muda terdapat kecenderungan untuk tidak tahu tentang Islam. Sebanyak 46,85 persen responden, berumur antara 14 s/d 24 tahun, menyatakan mereka sama sekali tidak tahu tentang Islam dan para pemeluknya. Hanya 16 persen responden yang menyatakan mereka memiliki pengetahuan tentang Islam. Pengetahuan masyarakat Australia tentang Islam berupa kritisisme (38 %), amal ibadah (20 %), dan keyakinan (40 %).

Sementara itu survei memberi penekanan yang lebih khusus mengenai Islam di Indonesia. Pada umumnya masyarakat Australia beranggapan bahwa Islam Indonesia berbeda dengan Islam Timur Tengah. Islam Indonesia lebih moderat dan toleran, sementara Islam Timur Tengah lebih radikal dan fanatik. Namun ketika ditanya tentang peristiwa bom Bali, masyarakat Australia menjawab itu merupakan bukti bahwa radikalisme Islam berkembang di Indonesia dan Jama'ah Islamiyah terlibat dalam peristiwa tersebut.

Yang menarik dari survei ini adalah, pengetahuan warga Australia tentang Islam dan masyarakat muslim sangat terbatas. Ini pada gilirannya menyebabkan timbulnya prasangka dan generalisasi. Banyak prasangka dan generalisasi yang muncul di masyarakat apalagi setelah terjadinya bom Bali. Mungkin ada benarnya untuk mengatakan bahwa Barat pada umumnya tidak mau tahu tentang Islam. Namun pandangan ini perlu diberi catatan khusus, karena pada sisi lain tumbuh perhatian kalangan generasi Australia untuk mengenal Islam lebih lanjut. Pada dasarnya pengetahuan kaum muda Australia lebih miskin dibandingkan generasi tuanya. Namun mereka ingin terus belajar. Sementara itu pengetahuan generasi tua Australia tentang Islam lebih banyak berupa prasangka dan generalisasi. Pada kalangan pekerja kasar (blue collar), kaum perempuan, dan warga yang berpendidikan hanya SMP (non-tertiary education), pengetahuan dan kontak tentang Islam lebih miskin lagi.

Berdasarkan temuan survei, dapat disimpulkan bahwa terbatasnya pengetahuan masyarakat Australia tentang Islam membuktikan bahwa pada umumnya masyarakat Australia masa bodoh (ignorant). Pada sisi lain terbatasnya pergaulan mereka dengan masyarakat muslim juga menyebabkan timbulnya ketakutan yang berlebihan (Islamophobia) di lingkungan mereka. Akan tetapi yang menarik dari survei ini adalah, masyarakat Australia bisa membedakan secara kritis varian-varian Islam yang ada. Mereka misalnya berpendapat bahwa Islam di Indonesia lebih ramah dibanding Islam di Timur Tengah. Kritisisme ini penting untuk membangun sebuah pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif tentang Islam di lingkungan warga Australia.



Kevin M. Dunn

## Australian Public Knowledge of Islam

خلاصة: يبدو أن العلاقة الثنائية بين أستراليا وإندونيسيا في السنوات الأخيرة منزعجة نتيجة مجموعة من الأحداث التي تثير تسوّرات بين الإسلام والغرب. وحظيت أستراليا باعتبارها جزءا من المجتمع الغربي بتأثيرات سلبية للظواهر العالمية القائمة حاليا من صراع الحضارات بين الإسلام والغرب، بالإضافة إلى إحداث مجموعات من الأعمال الإرهابية الموجهة إلى المجتمع الغربي وشعاره. ويتمثل ذلك في حادثة تفجير القنبلة ببالي (Bali) وتفجير القنبلة أمام سفارة الحكومة الأسترالية بجاكرتا. وهذه الحادثة قد أثارت عددا كبيرا من المواطنين الأستراليين إظهار غضبهم على إندونيسيا.

وبعد حدوث حادث ١١ سبتمبر، قام عدد من المواطنين الأستراليين باعتداءات تشير إلى غضبهم وكرهيتهم ضدّ المسلمين داخل بلاد أستراليا. وتمثل هذه الاعتداءات في العمل الإرهابي، وإفساد المساجد، والهجوم على المسلمين، ونشر تصريحات سخريّة أو تهكمية أصدرها الوسائل الإعلامية أو أفراد المجتمع. ورغم أن هذه التصرفات خاضعة للتحكم بها، إلا أن ذلك في حاجة إلى ملاحظتها بدقة؛ لأن ذلك يرتبط بأنظار المواطنين ومواقفهم في دولة من الإسلام والمسلمين.

يبلغ عدد سكان أستراليا المسلمين ١,٥% من مجموع سكان البلاد أو حوالي ٢٨٠,٨٧١ نسمة، وهم جزء لا يتجزأ من المجتمع الأسترالي بصفة عامة. ومعظمهم مهاجرون من دول الشرق الأوسط، وتركيا، وإيران،

وإندونيسيا، يشتغلون تجارا، وعمالا، ومهنيين، وأكاديميين. وقد هاجروا إلى أستراليا منذ أقل من ٣٠ سنة ماضية مستهدين اكتساب الأرزاق ونيل مستوى أفضل من معيشتهم. وتعتبر أستراليا من الشعوب التي تطبق المبادئ المتعددة الثقافات. فيتعايش أفراد المجتمع المتنوع الثقافات والأديان تعايشا سلميا متبادلي الاحترام فيما بينهم.

انطلاقا من ذلك، نتساءل: "كيف وجهة نظر المواطنين الأستراليين وموقفهم من الإسلام والمسلمين؟ وهل كانت تصرفاتهم المقبحة للروح المتعددة الثقافات بإستراليا والتي حدثت بعد ١١ سبتمبر أو تفجير القنبلة بيالي تعكس على نظر المواطنين الأستراليين وموقفهم من الإسلام والمسلمين أو أن ذلك تصرفات عدد قليل من المواطنين؟" وفي هذا الصدد تبرز أهمية هذه المقالة التي تناول تقرير دراسة مسحية قام بها راي مورغان للبحوث العلمية (Roy Morgan Research) عام ٢٠٠٣.

وتعطي الدراسة تركيزها على الإسلام باندونيسيا على وجه الخصوص. يزعم معظم أفراد المجتمع الأسترالي أن الإسلام باندونيسيا يختلف عن الإسلام بالشرق الأوسط. فالإسلام باندونيسيا يسير على اتجاه أكثر وسطيا وسمحا، بينما الإسلام بالشرق الأوسط أكثر تعصبا وراдикаليا. غير أنهم عندما سئلوا عن حادثة تفجير القنبلة بيالي، أجابوا بأن ذلك دليل قاطع على أن الراديكالية الإسلامية تتطور باندونيسيا.

ومن الملاحظ أن معرفة المواطنين الأستراليين بالإسلام والمجتمع الإسلامي محدودة للغاية، مما يؤدي إلى إبراز اتهامات وتعميمات. فقد ظهر كثير من الاتهامات والتعميمات في المجتمع الأسترالي، فضلا عما بعد حادثة تفجير القنبلة بيالي. ويمكن أن يصح القول إن الغرب عامة متجاهلة عن الإسلام، غير أن هذا النظر يلاحظ ملاحظة خاصة، لأن الاهتمام بمعرفة الإسلام لدى الناشئين الأستراليين ينمو بشكل متزايد. وبحق يمكن القول إن معرفة الناشئين بالإسلام أقل من معرفة كبارهم به. ولكنهم يرغبون في دراسة الإسلام، في حين أن معرفة الكبار بالإسلام تنعكس على اتهامات وتعميمات. ومعرفة العمال، والنساء، والمواطنين المتخرجين في المدرسة المتوسطة واتصالهم بالإسلام أقل بكثير.

This research outlines the extent and nature of the Australian peoples' knowledge of Islam. Only one-fifth of respondents had a reasonable or better knowledge of Islam, and half knew a little about Islam. Males, middle-aged (25-49) and older respondents (50+) were much more likely to claim a fragmentary or better knowledge of Islam. By far the greatest variation in knowledge of Islam was between those with and without some tertiary education. The forms of respondent knowledge of Islam took the form of critique of Muslims, knowledge of Amal (key performances), or understandings of Iman (core theology). Forty-two per cent of respondents stated "they knew a few people who were Muslim". Older respondents had lower rates of direct contact with Muslims, yet those Australians claimed higher rates of knowledge of Islam, this took the form of the critiques and stereotypes of Islam. A majority of Australians were aware that Islam was the faith followed by most Indonesians. Those with tertiary education, males, and older respondents were more likely to demonstrate this competency. A bare majority of respondents felt that Islam in Indonesia was different to that practiced in the Middle East. Dominant perceptions of this variation were focussed on a stricter or more fundamentalist Islamic practice in the Middle East. Respondents were more likely to mention direct experiences of Indonesia, and relied more upon media images of the Middle East. Direct experience and contact with Islamic countries seems to generate a much more positive perception of Islam than media representations. Many Australians are ignorant of, or have a partial knowledge of Islam, and low levels of contact with Muslims. This research demonstrates that knowledge of Islam, and more especially contact with Muslims, can have dramatic and positive effects upon Western Islamophobia and tolerance.

### **Knowledge, Ignorance and Stereotypes of Islam**

There is now a considerable range of scholarship on Western perceptions of Islam, beginning most seminally with the work of Edward Said (1981). The central thrust of this scholarship has been focussed on the poor Western portrayals of Islam and of Muslims. Key spheres of critique have included the media, academe, creative literature and government texts. Australian research has similarly identified very problematic representations of Islam in these forms

of media. A range of reports and academic analyses has demonstrated how key western stereotypes of fanaticism, fundamentalism, alien-ism, and misogyny circulate in such documents (Dunn, 2001; Goodall et al. 1994: 61-5; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lowe 1985; Poynting et al., 2004; Shboul 1988). In recent years, Islam has continued to be prominent in Western media, perhaps more so than ever before. There is also, in countries like Australia, evidence for some considerable public interest in Islam. Wider and deeper awareness of Islam in the West is likely to be a core means for assuaging the power of the abovementioned stereotypes. This paper reports findings on the state of Australian public knowledge of Islam, and knowledge of Islam in Indonesia in particular, and ends with reflection on the implications of knowledge and ignorance.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census data indicate Muslims constitute at least 1.5 per cent of the Australian population, which is approximately 280,871 persons (Dunn, 2004a). In a city like Sydney the civic presence is even greater with 134,366 Muslims comprising 3.4 per cent of the city's population. The dominant birthplace of Australian Muslims is Australia (36.4%), the major overseas birthplaces include Lebanon (10.4%), Turkey (8.3%), and then a range of other countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Cyprus, Egypt, Fiji, India, Indonesia (2.8%), Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia (1.0%), Pakistan, Singapore, Somalia and Syria. Islam in Australia is very ethnically diverse. Muslims constitute a significant and diverse component of the Australian citizenry.

## Method

Between June 11 and 20 of 2003 Roy Morgan Research conducted the Attitudes Towards Islam Survey for the Australia-Indonesia Institute. The telephone survey addressed ten questions regarding Islam, to 1311 respondents. Respondents under the age of 14 were excluded, and the sample was stratified to ensure representativeness by age, gender, and state of residence. Details of the sample composition are outlined in Table A1. Answers to the first six questions are reported in this paper. Questions 1, 2, 4 and 6 generated data on the respondents' knowledge of Islam, of Islam within Indonesia, and of their own personal contact with Islam (Table 1). The open response to Question 3 was intended to elicit a justification

from the respondent following their answer to Question 2. Respondents were expected to justify why they had said that Islam in Indonesia was either the same as, slightly different, or very different, to Islam in the Middle East. The wording of Question 5 (on perceptions of followers of Islam) was not contingent on a previous question, although it had followed a question on the degree of the respondent's knowledge of Islam. The various data are reported as frequencies, in the case of the closed response questions (Qs 1, 2, 4 & 6), and in a qualitative manner for the open response data (Qs 3 & 5). Findings from answers to the other questions in the survey are reported elsewhere (Dunn 2004b; 2004c). Cross tabulations, by age, gender and indicators of class, have been run against the above-mentioned frequencies to demonstrate the demographic variation in knowledge of Islam and contact with Islam.

Table 1

Survey questions, and response options offered,  
Attitudes Towards Islam survey, June 2003.

QIS1	: "To the best of your knowledge what religion is followed by most Indonesians? Would you say: Buddhism; Hinduism; Muslim / Islam; Christianity; Judaism (Other and Don't Know, not read)".
QIS2	: "Which of the following statements best describes your perception of Islam as practiced in Indonesia as compared with Islam practiced in the Middle East Would you say: ... (Islam in Indonesia is very different to Islam practised in the Middle East; Islam in Indonesia is Slightly Different to Islam practised in the Middle East; Islam in Indonesia is the same as Islam practised in the Middle East)".
QIS3A	: "Why do you say Islam practised in the Middle East and Indonesia is very different?" (Open response).
QIS3B	: "Why do you think Islam practised in the Middle East and Indonesia is slightly different?" (Open response).
QIS3C	: "Why do you think Islam practised in the Middle East and Indonesia is the same?" (Open response).
QIS4	: "Which of the following best describes your knowledge of Islam and its followers? (I don't know anything about Islam and its followers; I know a little bit about Islam and its followers; I know a reasonable amount about Islam and its followers; I know a lot about Islam and its followers)".
QIS5	: "Describe your perceptions of the beliefs held by followers of Islam?"
QIS6	: "Which of the following statements best describes you? (I am a Muslim myself; I know a few people who are Muslim; I don't know any Muslim people)".

## Australian Public Knowledge of Islam

A lack of understanding, or knowledge, of Islam is a contributing element of community apprehension regarding Muslims. The final column of Table 2 demonstrates the proportion of respondents who had a reasonable, fragmentary or a lack of knowledge of Islam. The least encouraging aspect of these data is that not even one-fifth (16%) of respondents had a reasonable or better knowledge of Islam. This converts to only about 2.5 million Australians. However, half of the sample felt that they knew a "little bit" about of Islam, and this reflects the greater proportion of the sample. This extent of knowledge among a largely non-Muslim sample is an expected finding. One-third of the respondents (446) admitted they knew nothing about Islam (Table 2). According to Roy Morgan weightings, this group represents 5.3 million Australians. In Question 5, respondents were asked to detail their perceptions of Islam. It is noteworthy, that 40.1 per cent of respondents felt unable to enunciate a perception when asked to. This indicates that the degree of ignorance is even higher than one-third. A very common statement was "*I don't know*". Others included "*I'd only be guessing really*", "*Can't think of anything*", "*I am stumped, actually*". Respondent statements on their perceptions revealed not only the lack of knowledge, but also misunderstandings.

*They [Muslims] make peace rings and place them on the streets – not too sure if it's true.*

*Are they the people who can't eat cows? No. They have a God.*

*Cows are sacred. They believe in God.*

Clearly, lack of knowledge is a setting onto which any construction or idea can take root, such as the misunderstanding that Islam has a prohibition on the eating of beef, not to mention other outlandish ideas. This suggests that there is considerable scope for a widening of community knowledge of Islam as a faith, and of Muslims in Australia and the region.

Table 2  
Knowledge of Islam, June 2003,  
by age groups, gender, and education

Extent of respondent stated knowledge of Islam	14 to 24 (n: 254)	25-49 (n: 612)	50+ (n: 445)	Men (n: 646)	Women (n: 665)	No-tertiary education (n: 810)	Some tertiary education (n: 501)	All	%
I don't know anything about Islam and its followers	46.85%	31.86%	29.66%	29.57%	38.35%	44.20%	17.56%	446	34.02%
I know a little bit about Islam and its followers	40.55%	50.98%	50.34%	50.00%	47.52%	44.69%	55.29%	639	48.74%
I know a reasonable amount about Islam and its followers	10.63%	14.71%	15.73%	16.87%	11.73%	8.64%	23.35%	187	14.26%
I know a lot about Islam and its followers	1.18%	2.12%	1.80%	2.17%	1.50%	1.11%	2.99%	24	1.83%
None of these	0.00%	0.33%	0.67%	0.46%	0.30%	0.49%	0.20%	5	0.38%
Can't say	0.79%	0.00%	1.80%	0.93%	0.60%	0.86%	0.60%	10	0.76%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	1311	100.00%

Source: Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute. Question wording: Which of the following best describes your knowledge of Islam and its followers? (options in first four rows of first column above).

Knowledge of Islam varied quite dramatically by the age of respondents. Middle-aged and older respondents were much more likely to have a reasonable or at least fragmentary knowledge of Islam. Those in the youthful category (ages 14 to 24) were much more likely to know nothing of Islam (47%), compared to about 30 per cent for the other two groups (Table 2). It is to be expected that non-Muslim Australians, over the course of their lives, are more likely to absorb some knowledge of Islam, and this is reflected in Table 2. The sources form, and desirability of such acquired knowledge are explored in the section after this.

Gender was another clear separator of respondent knowledge of Islam. As Table 2 demonstrates male respondents had much higher rates of reasonable or better knowledge (19% against 13%). By far the greatest variation in knowledge of Islam was between those with and without some tertiary education. Ignorance regarding Islam was more than double among the non-tertiary educated (Table 2). The reverse was also true: the tertiary educated were almost three times more likely to claim a reasonable or stronger knowledge of Islam. This is not to suggest that the subject matter of tertiary education accounts for this variation. It is more likely that tertiary education provides learning skills and thinking patterns that are more conducive to a higher awareness of Islam. Both the gender and education variations in knowledge demonstrate that community awareness initiatives outside of the education sector are necessary. The variation among those in blue- or white-collar professions or not possessing an occupation, and by income categories or affluence (data not shown here), reflected the findings for the tertiary and non-tertiary education. These data indicate the importance of initiatives to address the greater lack of knowledge of Islam among women, the non-tertiary educated, and blue-collar employees. There is a need for community awareness initiatives outside of the education sector, among popular cultural products and media consumed by these groups (such as in magazines and in popular television programs).

### **Forms of Knowledge of Islam among the Australia Public**

The dominant forms of respondent knowledge of Islam took the form of critique of Muslims (38%), key performances or Amal (20%), and understandings of core theology or Iman (40%). As discussed in the previous section, older respondents claimed a higher knowl-



edge of Islam. However, the life course accumulation of impressions and representations may not of itself be particularly helpful to community relations. In the previous section it was noted that 40.1 per cent of respondents were unable to provide a comment on their perceptions of Islam (Question 5), which was itself a substantial indicator of ignorance. These data suggest that some of what passes for knowledge of Islam is quite problematic.

Thirty-eight per cent (307 comments) of the commentary made in response to Question 5 (perceptions of Islam) contained a criticism of Islam, such as comment on the perceived problems of the faith or of Muslims. Many of these criticisms were non-specific. "I think they're a bit crazy", "I am worried about it", "A bad thing for us is a good thing for them". Just under half of the 'problem as knowledge' comments could be coded by the key stereotypes of Islam (see Dunn, 2001). The most common references to problems included suggestions that Muslims are intolerant of other faiths, that they are fundamentalists, as well as references to fanaticism, militancy, misogyny and alien-ness (Table 3). These are clearly a poor form of knowledge of Islam and of Muslims, and may mitigate a more rounded understanding. They are not a strong basis for improved community attitudes.

Table 3  
Key stereotypes of Islam, offered as 'perceptions of Islam',  
percentage of all such 'problem' references

Category of stereotype	Count	Proportion
Fanatic	15	11.11%
Intolerant	33	24.44%
Militant	12	8.89%
Fundamentalist	36	26.67%
Misogynist	15	11.11%
The Other (alien)	13	9.63%
Illegality	4	2.96%
Natural calamity	0	0.00%
Other negative	7	5.19%
TOTAL*	135	100.00%

\* Only 135 of the problem references in response to Question 5 could be coded using the stereotype categories above, other criticisms or findings of fault were non-specific.  
Source: Latent coding of open responses to Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute.

One-fifth (180 comments) of those able to offer a perception of Islam spoke about key performances or Amal. This category of perceptions included references to some of the five pillars, such as Salat (prayer regimes), Sawm (fasting), and Hajj (pilgrimage), but also to dietary prohibitions, gender relations, dress and family arrangements. The Zakat (charity) pillar of Islam was not prominent among the stated knowledges of Islam. Some core aspects of the Iman pillar (belief) were present, and these are outlined later in this section. Many respondents qualified their statements by noting their ignorance, or the shallow nature of their understandings.

*They have certain food ... oh, not sure, haven't really got a clue.*

*Believe in Mohamed. Religion is based on tasks rather than beliefs. After they die they go to a place where they indulge in alcohol and women, I think its called paradise.*

*They believe in Buddha. I'm not sure about that.*

As the quotations above demonstrate, many of the references to 'performances as knowledge' were also inaccurate. The most generous comments on performances were made in regard to family and community values. Examples included:

*Family oriented, religious, moral, close-knit community in Australia. More diverse than portrayed on TV.*

*Very similar to Christianity only a bit more moral and stricter than Christians are these days. Can be a nice religion.*

Many of the above types of comment entailed a positive perception of Islam, and some were suggestive of the similarity of Islam to their own faith or moral order. The two commonest forms of 'performances as knowledge' concerned Salat (prayer) and diet.

The most prominent of the Salat references were mentions of the frequency of prayers (five times per day) and the facing towards Mecca.

*Follow Koran. Pray much more than Christians do. Observe extended periods of fasting as Christians do less and less.*

*They follow the Koran. Style of dress-women should be covered head to toe. Think it's fanatical. Females are circumcised. Don't eat certain meat (pork). Use specific types of meat. In some countries they believe war is a holy thing, permitted by Koran.*

*They pray to Mecca, they pray several times a day. They cover their women. They take their shoes off to pray. They face north for prayer.*

*They follow Allah. Mohammed is their prophet. Share same religious sites as Christians. Pray five times a day. Must face Mecca. Must take pilgrimage to Mecca once in their life. Koran is peaceful to read.*

Other lesser-mentioned aspects of Salat included the use of mosques on Fridays, the removal of shoes, and gender separation. However, most 'knowledge of performances' type comments focused on what respondents' would consider as extraordinary performances of Muslims, as judged against their own faith commitments and cultural mores.

The most prominent dietary references were to prohibitions, specifically the exclusion of pig products and alcohol, but also to the blessing of butchered animals and the system of halal and haram food. There were references to the Hajj (pilgrimage) that each Muslim must attempt to make once during their lifetime, and a handful of respondents actually made references to there being five pillars of Islamic faith. Other comments regarded gender relations and dress, the supposed prohibition of make-up, and hair cover and length. Initiatives to improve community attitudes towards Islam in Australia should capitalise upon what are generally held as positive cultural performances. It would also be productive to increase community understanding of those performances that may seem odd or arduous to non-Muslims in the West. This could be done through enhanced celebration and visibility of key events, such as Eid festivals and Hajj departures.

The most frequent form of expressed knowledge of Islam was in regard to key aspects of Islamic theology or Iman (40% of responses). These included references to Kalimas (core beliefs) such as Allah or God, monotheism, Mohammed (pbuh<sup>1</sup>) and the other prophets including Jesus (pbuh), belief in Heaven and Hell, and the key role of the *Koran* and other texts as spiritual guides. The three most common forms of reference were to three specific Kalimas: monotheistic belief in one God, to the prophets of Islam, and the core role of the *Koran*.

*They believe in a single god who holds no characteristics to Creation. 13 fundamental principles. They share a brotherhood with Christians and Jews. And every-one else is an unbeliever.*

*Stems from the same Moses, follow different branch of it. Same branch as the Old Testament. David as well I think. Prophet that came, bit like Jesus, but he came and taught slightly differently. I don't know a lot about it.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Peace be upon him (pbuh). In some Muslim texts this acronym, or similar, traditionally follows any written mention of the Prophet Mohammed. As a simple courtesy to the Islamic communities of Australia I have also adopted this reference of respect to the first mention of Mohammed.

*They follow the prophet Mohammed which is a different branch of the family of Abraham from the Christians and Jews. All three religions have the same God and none of them listen to anything you have to say.*

Reference to the monotheistic belief in one God was generally associated with a very positive disposition towards Islam. Many respondents identified the monotheism of Islam, and went on to articulate the similarity to Christianity and also Judaism. The above quotations also indicate how similarities between Islam and Christianity and Judaism were articulated in one of two ways. Firstly, as a statement of how Islam was like "us", by which the respondents meant Christianity. Alternatively, the respondents were casting all three faiths as being within the same tradition or spiritual root. The latter would seem to be the strongest manner of articulating equivalence and inclusive citizenship.

References to Mohammad, and the other prophets of Islam, especially Jesus, generated a sense of similarity to Christianity. However, more often a sense of deviation was constructed.

*They believe in the interpretation of the old testament as laid down by Mohammed, the basis of the religion is of peace, Mohammed is the prophet to Islam as Jesus is to Christians.*

*They're monotheistic, they hold their prophet Mohammed in high regard, but not in the same way as Christians worship Jesus. It is a religion based on compassion, peace and goodwill to all people.*

*Mohammed is the prophet of god, don't believe Jesus is the son of God, he is a prophet.*

References to the Islamic recognition of Jesus as a prophet emphasised the shared teachings of Islam and Christianity. However, the status of Mohammad as last and senior prophet, and more especially the refusal to accept Jesus as the "Son of God", was seen as a major division between the Islam and Christianity.

The "Koran" was referred to by 153 respondents. As for references to Mohammed, parallels to the Judeo-Christian texts were sometimes drawn when the Koran was mentioned.

*They believe in one god Allah. They believe Mohammed as being his prophet and foremost amongst the prophets. They recognise the prophets of the Old Testament including Jesus whom they also see as a prophet. Religion is based on the writing of the Koran.*

A handful of comment (2.5% of answers to Q.5) was made in regards to the origins of Islam, both geographically and temporally. The nature and quantity of such references to Islamic theology and its origins are indicative of a good deal of community knowl-

edge of Islam. That is, at least ten per cent of the community knew enough about Islamic theology to mention Allah, Mohammad or the *Koran*.

An interesting anecdote collected through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) Isma'Ú project was that recent geo-politics and terror events had created an enhanced community interest in the principles of Islam by Australians. A member of the Indonesian Muslim community in Victoria stated to HREOC researchers that:

*Since 11 September and the Bali bombings, people at work are starting to learn about what is Islam. I pray in a special room at work and I am the only Muslim. Because of this I have been asked a lot about Islam (Statement to Isma'Ú Project, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2003, HREOC, 2003:9).*

Events of the last few years have no doubt generated a stronger Australian public interest to learn more about Islam. The knowledge of Islam outlined in this section, problematic and limited though some are, may well partly reflect that enhanced interest. Public information campaigns, aimed at improving community attitudes towards Islam, should capitalise upon this period in which non-Muslim interest is at its highest. Older people are more likely, over the course of a longer life, to have accumulated some 'awareness' of Islam, albeit problematic. Structured forms of awareness generation (school-based), especially among the information poor (younger Australians), are clearly a key means for improving both the extent and content of awareness of Islam. There is a clear and continuing need for schooling programs and learning objects that spread awareness of Islam. However, information raised among older Australians, the blue-collar and non-tertiary educated, requires initiatives outside of the education sector, such as in popular culture and media.

### **Australians' Contact with Islam**

The sociology of inter-communal relations has long held that lack of communication (interpreted as understanding) between different cultural groups is a cause of indifference, and provides a fecund circumstance for mis-understandings and the reinforcement of stereotypes. For this reason, urban sociologists in the Chicago School argued that cross-cultural contact was a positive influence (Burgess, 1925:54; Park, 1950:82-4). While the Chicago School no-

tions of assimilation are now generally held as problematic, their basic premise regarding contact still holds merit. For example, contemporary work on the geography of racism has found that parts of Australian cities that have a longer history of cultural diversity have higher rates of 'tolerance', whereas areas with more recent contact are least tolerant (Dunn & Geeraert, 2003; Dunn et al., 2004). The nature of such cultural contact is also critical. For example, compulsory forms of contact (within the workplace) are not as effective as more voluntary forms (e.g. social settings) (Geeraert, 2003). Non-Muslim contact with Muslims, especially with Australian Muslims in everyday life, should be a force for improved community attitudes to Islam, through a 'normalising' of the faith and by confronting pre-conceptions.

Table 4 shows that 42 per cent of respondents stated "they knew a few people who were Muslim". This is quite high, and says a lot for non-Muslim / Muslim relations in Australia. According to Roy Morgan Research population weightings, this represents over six-and-a-half million Australians. This is suggestive that Australian Muslims are by no means a segregated set of communities. The spatial distribution of Australian Muslims confirms this. Muslims have been found to be located in parts of the city associated with lower socio-economic status with immigrant reception and industrial activities (Burnley, 1996:288; Omar & Allen, 1996:29-30). Two such Sydney contiguous Statistical Local Areas (SLAs), Canterbury and Bankstown, do account for over a quarter of all Sydney Muslims in 2001 (Dunn, 2004a). However, in both SLAs the proportion of the population that is Muslim remains at only about 12 per cent. Finally, Australian Islam in these areas is culturally diverse, as it is generally. While most Australian mosques were built by ethnic-based associations they have developed increasingly diverse Jamaah (congregations). Australian Muslims have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, migration and settlement experiences, different needs and varying approaches to their faith and religious performance. Deen's (1995) personal survey of Australian Islam found that Muslims defined themselves in a variety of ways, some of which included: "practising Muslim, pious Muslim, devout Muslim, pragmatic Muslim, part-time Muslim, statistical Muslim, nominal Muslim, strict Muslim, fanatical Muslim, secular Muslim, etc" (Deen, 1995:44-6). This reflects another everyday aspect of Australian Islam: its complexity and diversity. Nonetheless, Table 4 demonstrates that a considerable proportion of non-Muslim Australians (55%)

Table 4

Contact with Muslims, June 2003,  
by age groups, gender and education

Respondent stated contact with Muslims	14 to 24 (n: 254)	25-49 (n: 612)	50+ (n: 445)	Men (n: 646)	Women (n: 665)	No-tertiary education (n: 810)	Some tertiary education (n: 501)	All	%
I am a Muslim myself	0.79%	1.14%	0.67%	1.24%	0.60%	0.74%	1.20%	12	0.92%
I know a few people who are Muslim	43.70%	45.26%	37.53%	47.06%	37.74%	34.20%	55.49%	555	42.33%
I don't know any Muslim people	53.94%	52.45%	59.55%	50.15%	60.00%	63.58%	41.52%	723	55.15%
None of these	0.79%	0.49%	1.12%	0.46%	1.05%	0.74%	0.80%	10	0.76%
Can't say	0.79%	0.65%	1.12%	1.08%	0.60%	0.74%	1.00%	11	0.84%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	1311	100.00%

Source: Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute. Question wording: Which of the following statements best describes you? (options in first three rows of first column above).

do not know any Muslim people. Hopefully, the everyday presence and distribution of Australian Muslims will mitigate this lack of contact over time.

Contact with Muslims by non-Muslim Australians was socially uneven. Older Australians, and women, the non-tertiary educated and the poor appear less likely to know any Muslims. Table 4 demonstrates the effect of age. Only 37 per cent of respondents aged 50 years and above knew a few people who were Muslim, whereas the proportion amongst the two younger aged groups was close to 45 per cent. In an earlier section the point was made that younger respondents tended to express lesser rates of awareness of Islam. The opposite was true for contact. It may well be that while older Australians feel able to claim some knowledge of Islam, they have collected this knowledge without first hand contact with Australian Muslims, and have depended on other sources for their information. This information may well have been provided during the period of the White Australia Policy and the assimilation era, when a Christian hegemony was officially sanctioned, and when non-Christian faiths were branded as inferior. While older Australians claim higher rates of knowledge of Islam there is cause for concern that much of the knowledge they retain is of the problematic form outlined in the previous section. Community relations campaigns aimed at improving non-Muslims attitudes towards Islam should retain a sub-emphasis upon the specific stereotypes and information that has been inculcated to older Australians.

Male and female knowledge and contact with Islam were consistent. That is, women were less likely to know Muslims (only 37% against men at 47%) and less likely to claim a reasonable knowledge about Islam. Among those respondents without tertiary education 64 per cent said they did not know any Muslims, whereas the rate was almost half that for those with some tertiary education. This could indicate two things. First, that higher education and professional employment, enhances contact with Muslims. Second, tertiary education may have attuned respondents to the fact that people they are in contact with are Muslims. That is, they are more aware of, and perhaps less reluctant to inquire after, the religious status of people in their workplace, social circles, sports, or other clubs and societies. Those with higher incomes were much more likely to have had contact with Muslims. Sixty-two per cent of those respondents in the lowest household income category did not know any Muslim people (Table 5). Conversely, half of those in



the richest category did know a few Muslims, which was well above the average of 42 per cent. This may partly reflect the greater mobility of the affluent; they have greater opportunity to travel (including internationally) and to seek wider social circles (including those based around the creative and performing arts, or even ecumenical exchanges). Approximately forty respondents noted that they had personal contact or experience with Islam in Indonesia or the Middle East. However, much of the difference in contact by income is most likely linked to the employment and education variations mentioned above.

Table 5

Contact with Muslims, June 2003,  
by household income categories

Respondent stated contact with Muslims	Less than \$50K (n: 326)	\$50K & \$100K (n: 346)	Above \$100K (n: 250)	No answer (n: 389)	All	%
I am a Muslim myself	1.53%	0.58%	0.40%	1.03%	12	0.92%
I know a few people who are Muslim	35.58%	44.51%	50.40%	40.87%	555	42.33%
I don't know any Muslim people	61.66%	53.18%	48.00%	56.04%	723	55.15%
None of these	0.61%	0.58%	0.80%	1.03%	10	0.76%
Can't say	0.61%	1.16%	0.40%	1.03%	11	0.84%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	1311	100.00%

Source: Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute. Question wording: Which of the following statements best describes you? (options in first three rows of first column above).

Table 6 demonstrates some obvious links between contact and knowledge. Those who were Muslim (only 12 respondents) had the strongest knowledge of Islam. Those without contact had by far the highest rates of stated ignorance (45.7%), which was more than double the rate for those with some contact (21%). Indeed, more than half of the non-Muslim respondents with some contact claimed to know a little bit about Islam, and a quarter claimed even higher competencies. This again affirms how important contact with Muslims in Australia is to community attitudes.

Table 6

Contact with Muslims, June 2003,  
by knowledge of Islam

Extent of respondent stated knowledge of Islam**	Respondent stated contact with Muslims*				
	I am a Muslim	Contact with Muslims	No contact with Muslims	None of these	All
I don't know anything	16.67%	21.08%	44.67%	19.05%	34.02%
I know a little bit	8.33%	53.33%	45.50%	61.90%	48.74%
A reasonable amount	16.67%	22.52%	8.16%	4.76%	14.26%
I know a lot	58.33%	2.70%	0.28%	0.00%	1.83%
None of these	0.00%	0.00%	0.55%	4.76%	0.38%
Can't say	0.00%	0.36%	0.83%	9.52%	0.76%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute. Question wordings:

\*Which of the following statements best describes you? (I am a Muslim myself; I know a few people who are Muslim; I don't know any Muslim people)

\*\*Which of the following best describes your knowledge of Islam and its followers? (I don't know anything about Islam and its followers; I know a little bit about Islam and its followers; I know a reasonable amount about Islam and its followers; I know a lot about Islam and its followers)".

## Knowledge of Religion in Indonesia

Respondents were asked to indicate which religion was the faith followed by most Indonesians. Most (65.5%) correctly stated that it was Islam, or they said Muslim (see final row of Table 7). However, a quarter selected one of the incorrect response options, which included Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism or another faith. The most common incorrect answer was Buddhism, followed by Hinduism and then Christianity. Hinduism is indeed a major faith in Bali, with which many Australians have had contact as tourists. The prominence of Buddhism as an answer may also be associated within the Chinese minority present within Indonesia. A further ten per cent could not answer, or replied that they didn't know. Table 7 also reveals that older Australians had a much stronger understanding of the religion of Indonesia. This mirrors the findings on knowledge of Islam reviewed above. Respondents from the youngest age group were much less likely to state that Islam (only 50%) was the dominant faith in Indonesia, and were much more likely to select incorrectly (38%). These findings support the argument for more learning objects on Islam in the Asia-Pacific region within Australian schools.

Table 7

Respondent understanding of the dominant faith in Indonesia,  
June 2003, age groups, gender and education

Faith	14 to 24 (n: 254)	25-49 (n: 612)	50+ (n: 445)	Men (n: 646)	Women (n: 665)	No-tertiary education (n: 810)	Some tertiary education (n: 501)	ALL	%
Buddhism	18.11%	11.44%	6.07%	8.36%	13.38%	13.33%	6.99%	143	10.91%
Hinduism	11.81%	10.78%	6.97%	7.28%	12.03%	9.63%	9.78%	127	9.69%
Muslim / Islam	50.00%	64.05%	76.63%	73.68%	57.74%	58.40%	77.25%	860	65.60%
Christianity	5.91%	3.10%	1.35%	2.01%	4.06%	3.58%	2.20%	40	3.05%
Judaism	1.57%	0.33%	0.00%	0.77%	0.15%	0.74%	0.00%	6	0.46%
Other	0.39%	0.16%	0.45%	0.46%	0.15%	0.37%	0.20%	4	0.31%
Don't Know	12.20%	10.13%	8.54%	7.43%	12.48%	13.95%	3.59%	131	9.99%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	1311	100.00%

Source: Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute. Question wording: To the best of your knowledge what religion is followed by most Indonesians? Would you say: Buddhism; Hinduism; Muslim / Islam, Christianity; Judaism (Other and Don't know, not read).

Gender variations in knowledge of religion in Indonesia were quite dramatic, more so than for knowledge of Islam (see earlier) (Table 7). Almost three-quarters of male respondents correctly answered Islam, whereas only 58 per cent of women did. This supports the argument for educative campaigns that target Australian women. Another key variable across which respondent knowledge of Islam in Indonesia was divided was education. The differentiation was a little stronger than that for gender, with those having been exposed to some tertiary education having much higher rates (77%) of correct understanding of the main faith in Indonesia (Table 7). The non-tertiary educated had an average correct response rate of 58 per cent, and had almost four times the rate of 'don't know' responses. Buddhism was the most prominent of the incorrect choices by the non-tertiary educated. The findings for respondents in blue-collar and white-collar occupations (not shown here) largely reflected, though to a less strong degree, the findings for education. And those with no occupation had the weakest, and most incorrect, understandings of religion within Indonesia. More affluent respondents (as indicated by household income) were more likely to select Islam, and half as likely to reply that they did not know what was the main faith in Indonesia. These trends reflect the earlier data on education and type of occupation. Poorer respondents are generally less likely to have travelled to Indonesia, and would therefore have had less contact and experience with the cultures of that country. Together these data confirm an earlier recommendation on the need for information campaigns directed towards blue-collar workers and those without tertiary education.

### **Perceptions of Islam in Indonesia**

Respondents were asked to comment on whether Islam, as practiced in Indonesia, varied from how it was practised in the Middle East (Table 1: Question 2). Islam is a universalising faith that has a core set of beliefs (*Iman*) and performances (*Amal*) that are constant across the countries and cultures where it is practiced. However, it is also fair to say that there is a varied array of appearances and performances of Islam, often reflecting the cultures, dynamism and other aspects of the societies where it is practiced. This diversity also pertains to various prohibitions and prescriptions, including those regarding dress, tolerance of non-Muslim practices, the centrality of Sharia law, and secularism.

The last column of Table 8 shows that around one-fifth of respondents felt that Islam in Indonesia is the same as that practiced in the Middle East. This proportion varied little across the socio-demographic variables available in this sample. Around a quarter of respondents were unable to say whether Islam as practiced in Indonesia, is the same, or different, from that in the Middle East (Table 8). Cross-tabulations with socio-demographic variables revealed that inability to express a view on this question was strongest among women, the non-tertiary educated, blue-collar employees, and poorer respondents. These trends strongly mirror the above-mentioned findings on knowledge about Islam, and of knowledge of religion in Indonesia. The respondents who were more likely to state that Islam in Indonesia varied from that in the Middle East were younger respondents, the tertiary educated and white-collar employees (Table 8). Again, this demonstrates the influence of education, both in tertiary and perhaps secondary education, in generating more rounded impressions of Islam, and of Islam as practiced in the Asia-Pacific region.

Respondents were asked to justify their answers as to why Islam in Indonesia was either the same or different from the Islam practiced in the Middle East. Of those who had commented that the religion was the same (287 respondents) most provided a justification for that view (241). Similarly most of those who expressed the view that the religion was *very* different provided an explanation (183 out of the 206). Whereas, those who thought the religion varied only slightly were less able to provide a reason for that view (192 of the 490). This is suggestive that the wording of the question itself may have encouraged many respondents to select the 'slightly different' response option, even though they were unsure. Indeed, another problem with the framing of this question was the comparison of a region (the Middle East) with a country (Indonesia). More problematically, the use of the term "Middle East" is likely to have activated particular stereotypes, specifically those to do with terrorism, military actions and political tensions (Said, 1981).

The reasons given for either variation or similarity are instructive (Table 1: Question 3). Those asked to justify their response that Islam was different in Indonesia and the Middle East provided three very different forms of reply. Some provided examples of how Islam as practiced, so far as they knew, differed in the two places (176 comments). Another form of reply, attempted an explanation for why Islam differed, such as to do with different cultures (196

Table 8  
Perceptions on the similarity of Islam in Indonesia and the Middle East, June 2003, age groups, gender and education

	14 to 24 (n: 254)	25-49 (n: 612)	50+ (n: 445)	Men (n: 646)	Women (n: 665)	No-tertiary education (n: 810)	Some tertiary education (n: 501)	All	%
Islam in Indonesia is very different to Islam practised in Middle East	14.57%	17.32%	14.16%	16.25%	15.19%	14.57%	17.56%	206	15.71%
Islam in Indonesia is slightly different to Islam practised in the Middle East	47.64%	35.78%	33.71%	38.85%	35.94%	33.21%	44.11%	490	37.38%
Islam in Indonesia is the same as Islam practised in the Middle East	18.90%	25.65%	18.43%	23.53%	20.30%	21.85%	21.96%	287	21.89%
None of these	0.79%	0.98%	1.35%	1.08%	1.05%	1.11%	1.00%	14	1.07%
Can't say	18.11%	20.26%	32.36%	20.28%	27.52%	29.26%	15.37%	314	23.95%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	1311	100.00%

Source: Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, Roy Morgan Research, Commissioned by Australia-Indonesia Institute. Question wording: Which of the following statements best describes your perception of Islam as practiced in Indonesia as compared with Islam \ practiced in the Middle East? Would you say: ... (options in first three rows of first column above).

comments), and the geographic distance and differences between the two places (46 comments). Finally, some offered explanations for why they had come to a view that Islam varied, and these included personal experiences (35 comments) and media representations (55 comments). Many respondents gave multiple justifications. These three categories of justification are reviewed below.

The most prominent comments on the different practices of Islam regarded the perceived strictness or fundamentalism of Islamic practice in the Middle East, and the more moderate or relaxed nature of Islam in Indonesia.

*I think they're more fundamentalist in the Middle East. Indonesia is a little bit more relaxed. Not so strict with the practice of Islam.*

*Just from reading different books in the early ages. Do not see any people in Indonesia without hands and feet as in the Middle East. More cruel in Middle East than in Indonesia.*

*I don't know, just get the feeling it's a bit more suppressive towards women in the Middle East as opposed to in Indonesia. That's not the focus in Indonesia.*

A sub-theme of the comments on fundamentalism were comments made in regard to the more formal institution of Sharia law in the Middle East, and there were also references to differing levels of secularism. Another key rhetoric, beyond strictness and fundamentalism, were assertions regarding the relative fanaticism or radicalism of Islam in the Middle East. The latter was also constructed as more aggressive, militant, and more associated with cruelty, and severe punishments for outlawed performances. Prominent among all of these comments were concerns that gender relations in the Middle East were more problematic than in Indonesia. It is noteworthy that quite a few respondents, while accepting the general proposition that Islam was different in the two places, questioned the extent to which that was still correct.

*Well, I normally would have said that it was less fanatical but with the recent Bali bombing it appears that some of the Islamic views are very fanatical.*

Respondents were pointing to the terror bombings in Bali, and to Jemaah Islamiah, as events and groups that undermined a simple differentiation. However, in most of the commentary reviewed above, Islam in the Middle East was portrayed as reprehensible, whereas Islamic practise in Indonesia was portrayed as 'less reprehensible': "Less extremists in Indonesia than the Middle East". There are two

immediate problems with this construction. First, it affirms the presence of the Western stereotype of the 'bad Muslim' in the Middle East and elsewhere. Second, Indonesian Islam is not portrayed as the 'good' Islam per se, but as the least bad or less reprehensible form.

The most prominent category of responses to Question 3, on why respondents thought Islam in Indonesia was different to that in the Middle East, were those explanations of why, rather than in what way, this variation occurred. Broadly there were two related themes. The first was to argue that the cultures of these parts of the world gave rise to a different form of Islam, and the second was to assert the importance of place and context upon culture, and through that to religious interpretation and performance.

*They are a different culture. They have different traditions so they would practice their religion differently to other cultures.*

*They are a different race to the Middle East. They are not as radical as the Middle East.*

Many respondents simply pointed to the specific cultural backgrounds of Indonesia, others simply asserted that religion was always variously interpreted. Some respondents noted that it was the presence and mix of a diversity of faiths in Indonesia that had generated a more tolerant form of Islam. Others pointed to a stronger influence of 'Western culture' on Indonesia. Respondents often overtly used a sociobiological language of 'race' to demarcate between Indonesian and Middle Eastern Islam. On occasion this involved the identification of 'Asians' as a 'race' with whom certain laudable characteristics were attributed, such as tranquillity, peacefulness, and docility. While the former were associated with modesty and politeness, and the latter associated with violence and volatility.

The second key theme presented to explain variations in practices were geographic in nature (48 overt references).

*Different geographies create different people and practices. Cultures are different.*

*Because they [Indonesians] are not as close to the birthplace of Islam.*

These included references to national variations, and to Indonesia being an archipelago of islands and 'local places'. There were also a handful a bio-physical references to environment and climate. Another geographic explanation offered to explain variation was the distance between Indonesia and the Middle East and to the geo-



graphic origin of Islam. An underlying suggestion is that the Islam of the Middle East remains less changed and least progressive. It was encouraging to detect this general level of community literacy on the importance of place and context on culture and through that upon religious practice. It is also generally desirable that non-Muslim Australians are aware of the variations and diversities of Islam. However, the generally more disparaging perceptions of Islam in the Middle East generate the problems identified earlier: they confirm the Western stereotype of the fanatical Muslim.

As stated earlier, respondents offered two types of explanation for why they had come to think that Islam in Indonesia was varied from that in the Middle East. About 55 respondents made reference to the role of news media and other texts in influencing their opinion, and about 35 based their decisions on personal experiences of those countries or second-hand stories from friends or relatives whom had. The former sources of knowledge include not only news media, such as television and newspapers, but also formal texts (some within schools or tertiary education).

*I'm studying it in history at school. Every country has different perceptions about their religions and everything.*

*Just a perception I have. Maybe because we hear so much about the Middle East in the media, more so than Indonesia.*

*I've been to Indonesia and have met good Islamic people but I have heard bad things in the media about Islam people in the Middle East.*

Most of these observations were based on knowledge of Indonesia alone. In only a handful of circumstances did respondents have personal knowledge of both places. Respondents mostly relied upon media images of the "Middle East". Clearly, direct experience and contact with Islamic countries seems to generate a much more positive perception of Islam, insofar as it leads respondents to have views which run counter to the dominant Western media image of Islam.

Around 22 per cent of respondents were of the view that Islam in Indonesia was the same as that in the Middle East (Table 8). They were of this opinion despite the question wording that lent itself to agreement on variation rather than similarity, suggesting a stronger degree of conviction among those respondents. They also were those most likely to be able to support their view with a justification, 241 of the 287 respondents (84%), whereas only 54 per cent of those who selected variation were able to provide a justification of

their view. There were three key reasons provided for why Islam in Indonesia and the Middle East were the same. The first, and by far the most common, was the view that Islam was a universal faith comprised of core beliefs that would pertain in all national circumstances (189 comments). The second reason for similarity involved reference to the core problems of Islam, so far as the respondent saw them (38 comments). A final, and least popular, reason was a reference to media, in which it was suggested that Islam in both places was portrayed in much the same way (17 comments).

These findings provide further information about Australian public knowledge of Islam generally (or lack thereof), of Islam in Indonesia specifically, and of the sources of their knowledge. The key problem with the notion that there is a bad Islam, and a less bad Islam, is that it affirms the general negative Western perception of that faith and of Muslims. Information campaigns aimed at generating an improved set of community attitudes of Islam should avoid any such simplistic and ultimately un-helpful dichotomies. At the same time, it would be generally productive and accurate to encourage an understanding of the complexity and diversity within Islam and among Muslims. Drawing upon Australians' own contact with, and understanding of, Islam as practiced within Indonesia would also appear to be a generally productive means of improving community attitudes.

### **Conclusion: Ways Forward**

The findings from the Attitudes Towards Islam Survey are both saddening and hopeful. The more pessimistic picture suggests that non-Muslim Australians are ignorant of, or have only a partial knowledge of Islam, and low levels of contact with Muslims. Knowledge of Islam, and more especially contact with Muslims, has dramatic and positive effects upon Islamophobia and tolerance (see Dunn, 2004c). It would be generally productive and accurate to encourage a wider Australian understanding of the complexity and diversity within Islam. Drawing upon Australians' own contact with, and understanding of, Islam as practiced within Indonesia would also appear to be a generally productive means of improving community attitudes. Information campaigns aimed at generating an improved set of community attitudes of Islam should encourage an understanding of the diversity of Islam. Such campaigns would be best to eschew suggestions of good and bad regional versions of Islam.

To address the greater lack of knowledge of Islam among women, the non-tertiary educated, and blue-collar employees, there is a need for community awareness initiatives outside of the education sector, among popular cultural products and media consumed by these groups (magazines, popular TV shows). Improving non-Muslim tolerance of Islam would benefit from the normalising of key performances, including those of Salat (prayer), Sawm (fasting), Zakat (community works and charity) and Hajj (pilgrimage). This could be done through enhanced celebration and visibility of key events, such as Eid festivals and pilgrim departures. Government departments and agencies should also work to further normalise Muslim performances within workplaces and public spaces. Such initiatives are especially important with regard to older Australians, who claim higher rates of understanding of Islam, but whose stated knowledge is heavily (mis)informed by accumulated stereotypes. For youth, education campaigns within formal schooling will be the most effective initiatives.

Events of the last few years have generated a stronger public interest in Islam. Public information campaigns, aimed at improving community attitudes towards Islam in Australia, should capitalise upon this period in which non-Muslim interest is at its highest. There is considerable scope for widening community knowledge of Islam as a faith, and of Muslim communities in Australia, and of Islam as it is practised throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Collaborative research, between government agencies, academics and peak Islamic associations, is needed on the nature and diversity of Islam in Australia and in nearby countries. Nearby countries would include Indonesia and Malaysia, but also countries with Islamic minorities such as Singapore and Thailand. Such research should critically examine the extent to which Muslim performance and politics can be considered to be fundamentalist, radical or extremist.

## Note

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Appendix: Table A1  
 Sample characteristics, age, gender, class and  
 geographic variables, Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, June 2003

Variables	Categories and proportions							
	14 to 24	25-49	50+					
Age	19.37%	46.68%	33.94%					
Gender	Men	Women						
	49.28%	50.72%						
Education:	Non-tertiary educated		Some tertiary education					
	61.78%		38.22%					
Employment status	Employed, home duties, students		Looking for work, don't work		Retired			
	73.53%		9.23%		17.24%			
White or blue collar	Professional, Semi-, sales, other white collar		Skilled trades, semi-, and un-skilled		No occupation recorded			
	62.09%		33.26%		4.65%			
Household income	Less than \$50K		\$50K to \$100K		More than \$100K			No answer
	24.87%		26.39%		19.07%			29.67%
Urban or rural	Capital cities							Country areas
	62.55%							37.45%
State or territory	NSW	Victoria	QLD	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	
	36.00%	25.40%	17.54%	7.63%	10.45%	2.29%	0.69%	

Source: Roy Morgan Research, Attitudes Towards Islam Survey, 2003.

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