

# Islam and MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA: The challenges facing Muslim diasporas in the Western Countries like Australia.

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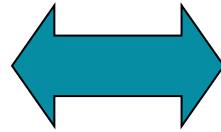
By  
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# A key framing challenge:

## ISLAM IN THE WEST: A BROADER SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Enlightenment tradition
- Liberalism
- Multiculturalism



- Modernisation/Secularisation
- Privatisation of religion
- Post-secularism: de-privatisation of religion

Negotiating the degree of public recognition of religious rights

# Major international challenge

Increased **problematization** of 'Islam' and 'Muslims' (especially within Western '**secular**' discourses) 'Islamism', or the political ideology articulated within Islamic references, has been on an evolutionary trajectory. 9/11 epitomised a metamorphosis that had started at least two decades earlier. In fact, Al-Qaeda stood at the extreme end of Islamism in two key areas:

On the **national/international** and the **violence/non-violence matrix**, Al-Qaeda brand of radicalism occupied the extreme internationally violent corner. This new brand was not confined to state-demarcated objectives. Neo-Islamism, as represented more recently by DAECH (IS and the multitude of its affiliates) is: **global** in its strategy and tactics;

It is also **uninhibited by any sense of common humanity**, maintaining a **rigidly dichotomous** perception of good and evil, where anyone not affiliated with their brand of radical ideology would by definition belong to the opposite/Infidel camp.

This **binary perspective** presents serious social, political and security challenges (black and white view in its outlook, witness DABIQ's reference to a desire to get rid of 'grey zones' e.g. Western Muslims).

The emergence of various Islamist/Extremist groups engaged in political violence/terrorist activities has added a worrying dimension to the already vexed relationship between the Muslim world and the West.

# A key framing challenge: legacy of Orientalism in homogenising public discourse on Islam and Muslims

- 'Islam was a real provocation in many ways. It lay uneasily close to Christianity, it could boast of unrivalled military and political successes. Nor was this all. ... From the end of the seventh century until the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam in either its Arab, Ottoman, or North African and Spanish form dominated or effectively threatened European Christianity. That Islam outstripped and outshone Rome cannot have been absent from the mind of any European past or present.' (Said, 1978:74)
- 'So long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilizations and ways of life will continue to define their relations to the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries.' (Huntington, 2002:212).

# Domestic challenge: problematising MUSLIM PRESENCE IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia, the early presence of Muslims is actually not a completely recent phenomenon. Indeed, Muslim presence can be traced to the sixteenth century with the arrival of Macassan fishermen and later Malay pearlers, Afghan cameleers and Indian hawkers.

The Muslim population increased significantly in the post-war period and was 22, 311 in 1971 as compared to 2,704 in 1947 (and it is getting close to 1 Million in 2024).

Such an increase can be attributed to the abolition of the White Australia Policy in 1972, displacement following civil war in the Middle East (Lebanon), and government policies of industrial expansion and assisted migration.

More recent increases in the Muslim-Australian population, however, can be attributed to migration following conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan, the recruitment of professional and skilled workers, the arrival of tertiary students and the growth in the Australian-born.

## Cont....

The social inclusion of **ethno-religious groups in Australia** was first understood within the ideology and **policy of multiculturalism** introduced in the 1970s that replaced the **White Australia Policy** with its emphasis on cultural assimilation.

Increasing ethnic diversity coupled with international political events engendered **increasing fear about ethnic diversity** and **antagonism towards the arrival of Muslim** migrants.

This atmosphere of fear was heightened following the events of **September 11**, when Muslims began to be viewed as residents who threatened the cultural unity and security of the nation.

The **emergence of DAECH** has further exacerbated this problem with an even greater scrutiny being place on the role of Islam in international conflicts and the threat posed by 'home-grown' terrorists who might embrace the violent ideology of the likes of IS.

# How Muslim Australians are seen/perceived? Snapshot from recent research/polls

- Australian citizens display **disproportionately more negative attitudes towards Muslims** than towards other migrant and religious groups in Australia: they are at times four to five times more negative towards Muslims than they are towards Christians and Buddhists (Mansouri et al 2017; Scanlon Foundation 2023).
- The two issues (perceived **threats of terrorism and negative attitudes** towards Muslims) are connected in Australian public discourse, with 71 per cent of Australians concerned about the possible rise of violent Islamist extremism (Sheppard, 2016).
- This situation is not peculiar to Australia, **similar trends have been reported in other multicultural societies** especially in Europe and North America (Triandafyllidou and Modood, 2017).

## Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in Australia

- The case of Islam/Muslims in Australia is an interesting one for several reasons.
- According to the 2021 Census there are **813,392** Muslims in Australia (**3.2%** of the population) ([ABS 2021](#)). Yet Muslims evoke a **disproportionately negative public response** when compared to other religious groups in Australia.
- The Scanlon Foundation Survey (2023) reports that in terms of attitudes towards religious groups, **27%** of people expressed a negative attitude towards Muslims and **16%** towards Christians in 2023.
- Encouragingly (or not), the proportion of people with a negative attitude towards Muslims declined from **41% in 2019 to 27% in 2023**. Compare this with attitudes towards other faith traditions: negative attitudes towards Christians (3% in 2014) and Buddhists (5% in 2014).



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# ESTABLISHED DIASPORAS

- The established (Muslim) Diasporas in Australia are:
  - Lebanese (77.9% arrived before 2001)
    - The peak migration flows were during the 70s, 80s and 90s.
  - Turkish (77.5% arrived before 2001)
    - The major wave of migration took place in the 1960s and 70s after Australia and Turkey signed a bilateral agreement.
  - Egyptian (75.9% arrived before 2001)
    - Peak migration was in the 1960s and 70s on account of pan-Arabist policies and the 1967 war with Israel.
  - Bosnian (84.9% arrived before 2001)
    - Significant numbers arrived in the 90s under the humanitarian program on account of the civil war in former Yugoslavia.
  - Syrian (70.1% arrived before 2001)
    - Steady stream (small numbers) since the 1960s following the easing of immigration restrictions; mainly through the Family program.

# SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT MUSLIM AUSTRALIANS

- heterogeneity at the level of:
  - ethnicity
  - nationality
  - Geography
  - Language
  - Migration history/pattern
- Common problems at the level of public perception especially in recent (securitised) times

# SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA

- Though largely this has been successful and mirrors the pathways of other migrant groups (supported through multicultural policies), nevertheless Muslim Australians have been affected by certain international and domestic events:
  - In general: a perception of an **inherent incompatibility** between certain Islamic values and Australian (Western/Secular) norms as per the 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis;
  - Internationally: the role played by **Western countries in Middle Eastern conflicts** dating back from Iran; Afghanistan and Iraq and most recently civil conflict in the Arab spring countries;
  - The ongoing **Israeli/Palestinian conflict**: this continues to be one of the main arguments and narratives exploited by extremists
  - Domestically: the rise of a new breed of **Diaspora leadership** that is more assertive, outspoken in some cases highlighting **sectarian identities** and externally oriented (utilising social media);
  - A **new visibility** of among Muslim communities that reflect tensions/conflicts overseas (in countries of origin)

# INSIGHTS FROM Two projects on ISLAMIC RELIGIOSITY in the West (ARC DP 2015-; AuSSA Survey 2016-)

There is renewed (more intense) debate on **the role of religiosity in the public sphere**, especially as it relates to Muslims living in the West (Ramadan 2004; Roy 2007; Turner, 2008; Mansouri 2013; 2015).

Implicit in this debate is a central and significant question of **whether Muslims living in the West have the individual capacity and the societal means to be fully active citizens** without betraying their religious values and practices.

Addressing this important question, the project examined empirically the role of **Islamic beliefs, rituals, and faith-based community practices** in shaping grounded experiences of belonging and political engagement in three culturally diverse sites - Melbourne, Detroit and Lyon/Grenoble.

## Defining Islamic Religiosity:

- Islamic religiosity is defined in this project as having two key dimensions:
- **Faith** is the belief in the basic tenets of Islam and the performance of religious rituals
- **Practice** is an observance of overall religious norms as they pertain to social behaviour

## Figure 1. Research data sources and number of participants

Empirical site/ Data source	Questionnaires	Focus groups	Photo-elicitation/in-depth interviews
Melbourne	96 participants	26 participants (4 sessions)	49 participants
Lyon/Grenoble	93 participants	0 participants	33 participants
Detroit	48 participants	0 participants	33 participants
<b>Total per task</b>	<b>237 participants</b>	<b>26 participants (4 sessions)</b>	<b>115 participants</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>378 participants</b>		

## Why these 3 jurisdictions?

- **Melbourne/OZ: (+/+)** constitutional rights of religious practice (Section 116 of the Constitution explicitly provides that the Commonwealth shall not legislate to establish any religion, impose any religious observance, or prohibit the free exercise of any religion.) Furthermore, and since early 1970s state introduced multiculturalism as an enabling social policy for support/recognition; but increasingly against a background of rising social and political conservatism;
- **USA (Detroit): (+/-)** constitutional rights or **religious freedom** (first Amendment but no coherent enabling policies as per multiculturalism): In addition to Arab/Muslim migration; religious *identity* more pronounced among African American Muslim groups (NOI). In the context of socio-economic decay associated e.g. with GFC, Islam is increasingly understood to be a source of resistance challenging systematic histories of racial injustice and helping to rebuild experiences of self-worth, confidence, and agency
- **France: (-/-)** secular/republican laws **prohibiting visible religious** practice (e.g. 2011 headscarf **ban**) and no social policies in support of diversity as such. These secular laws act as a barrier, not only to public expressions of religiosity, but also to subjective feelings of freedom, agency, and hope.



## Key findings:

### 1. Self-identity and Islamic Rituals

- Overall, Islamic practices nourish a **grounded sense of social justice, responsibility and respect** for the rights of others including non-Muslim neighbours, co-citizens and the environment.
- Islamic religiosity **does not weaken a sense of belonging to and engagement** with a political community, on the contrary it provides strong directives for active citizenship and local attachment.
- RE *subjective* dimensions of religiosity, the overarching theme indicates that the **relationship between God and the individual is developed and nurtured through daily rituals and practices**. This is significant for the participants' self-identity, worldview and ethical orientation toward others.
- In particular, **the rituals connect individuals to society** and enhance their agentic capacities.

## 2. Religious Practices, Public Space and Social Connectedness

- Religious practice and related rituals are **associated with positive attitudinal and behavioural outcomes**.
- Generally, religious practices in Islam tend to generate an **inclination to reach out to others**, including through actions that called for social justice.

### 3. Citizenship, Belonging and Political Engagement

- research findings indicate that some of the core practices of Islam correspond with ***republican* traditions of citizenship** in Western liberal democracies.
- There is a strong focus on values of **equality, diversity and rights**: many of the core rituals encourage practices of active citizenship through interventions committed to social justice and a 'common good'.

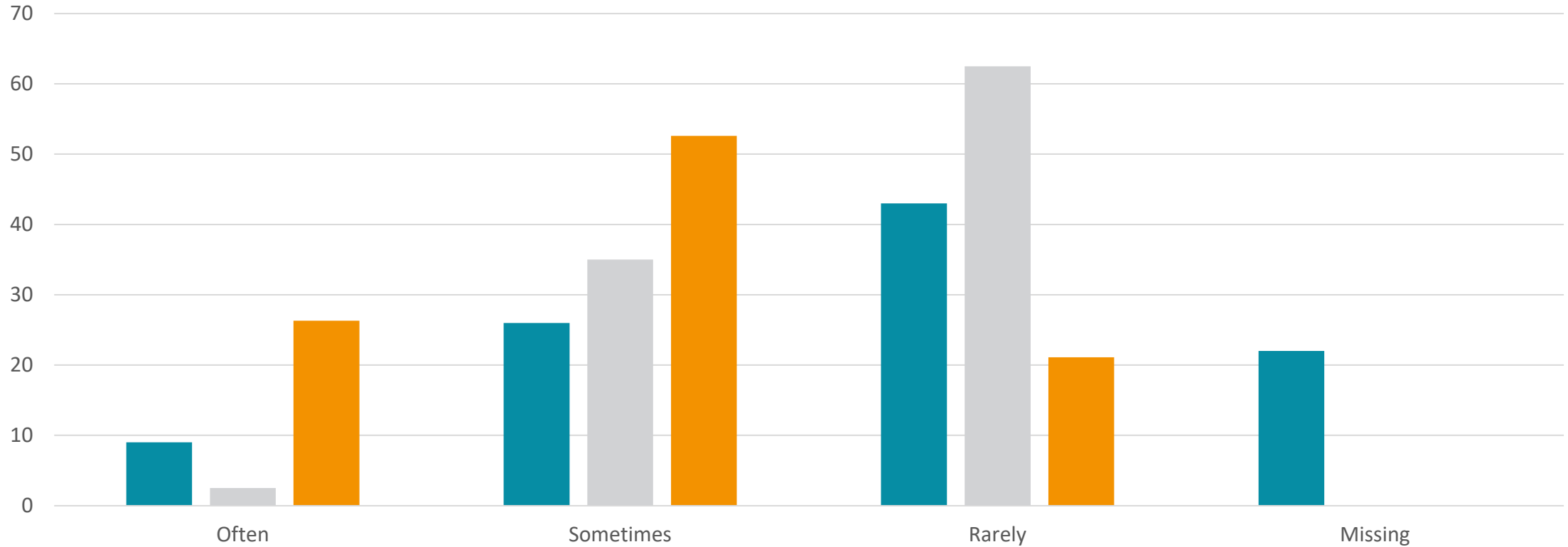
## SUMMARY OF KEY STATISTICAL FINDINGS

- -majority **<70% indicate** they can integrate aspects of Islamic values with domestic Law
- Almost **95% indicate** performing Islamic rituals engender **positive attitudes** including: openness; love and tolerance. Less than 2% selected negative attitudes (Resistance/lack of engagement)
- More than **70% indicate** Islamic practice makes them **better citizens** (more engaged/contributing to society/etc...)
- And despite rising levels of Islamophobia, still more than **60% indicate** that Islamic Practice helps them to **feel and build stronger local attachment**; and
- But almost **30%** indicated that they face significant everyday **challenges as Muslims in their local neighbourhood**

# THE LOCAL CHALLENGE OF BEING MUSLIM (Three Countries)

Do you feel being Muslim in your local neighbourhood is a challenge?

Australia USA France



## AuSSA 2016- data

Sample (N = 1004)

- Age: M=54.66 (SD=17.45), range from 19 to 92
- Gender: male = 144 (47.4%), female = 154 (50.7%)
- Party affiliation: Labor = 59 (19.4%), Liberal = 71 (23.4%), Greens = 24 (7.9%), National = 14 (4.6%), No affiliation 116 (38.2%)

Analyses:

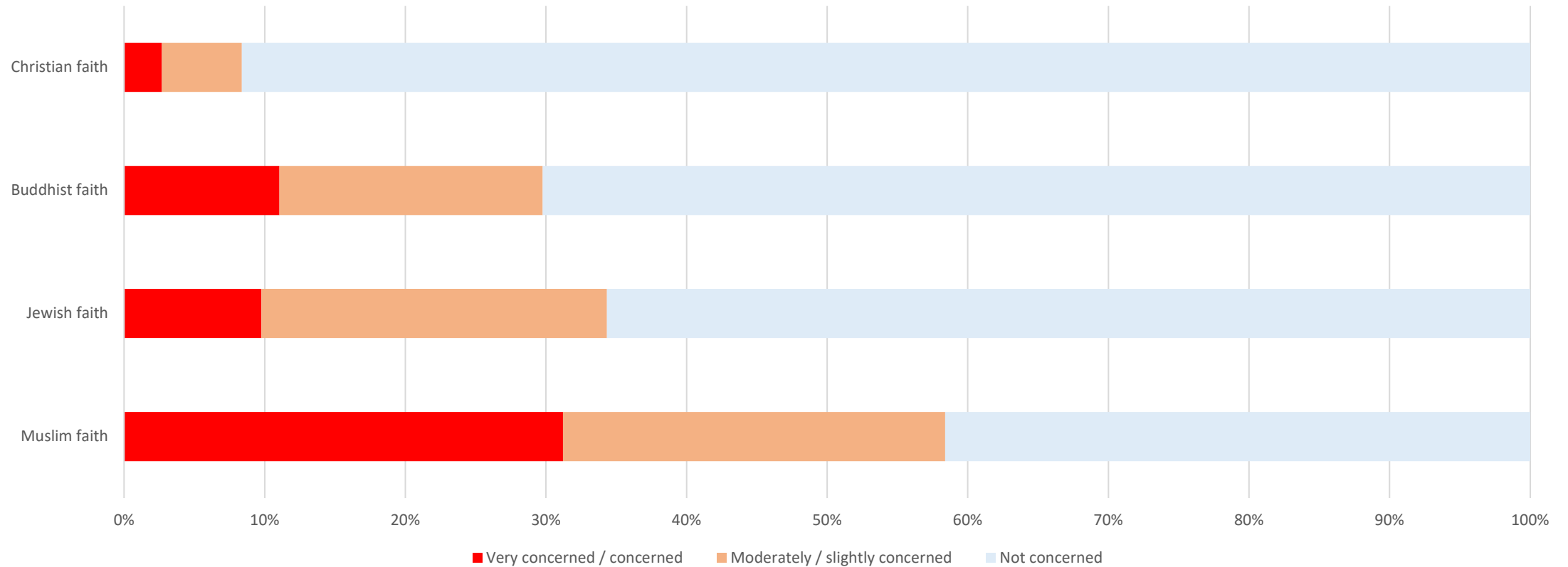
1. Measuring prejudice, threat and knowledge
2. Are those measures associated with Islamophobia above and beyond other predictors?
3. Is there an interaction between threat, knowledge and prejudice?

# PREJUDICE AGAINST PRACTICING MUSLIMS

<i>How much do you agree with the following statements about practicing Muslims (like for example Muslim women wearing the veil and Muslim men growing a beard)?</i>	Strongly disagree / disagree	Undecided	Agree / strongly agree	Missing
Practicing Muslims are pious people and therefore they are more trustworthy (reverse scored)	53.6%%	33.6%	7.9%	4.9%
Practicing Muslims are the same as other citizens (reverse scored)	23.3%	17.4%	55%	4.3%
Practicing Muslims do not fit Australian society	54.6%	22.7%	18.7%	3.9%
Practicing Muslims pose a threat to Australian society	55.6%	23.7%	16.7%	3.9%
Practicing Muslims should be searched more thoroughly than others in airports and stations	59.5%	17.8%	18.7%	3.9%
Counter-terrorism policies in Australia should focus exclusively on practicing Muslims	70.4%	14.8%	10.8%	3.9%

# AUS-Wave Data: (1) Inter-religious marriage

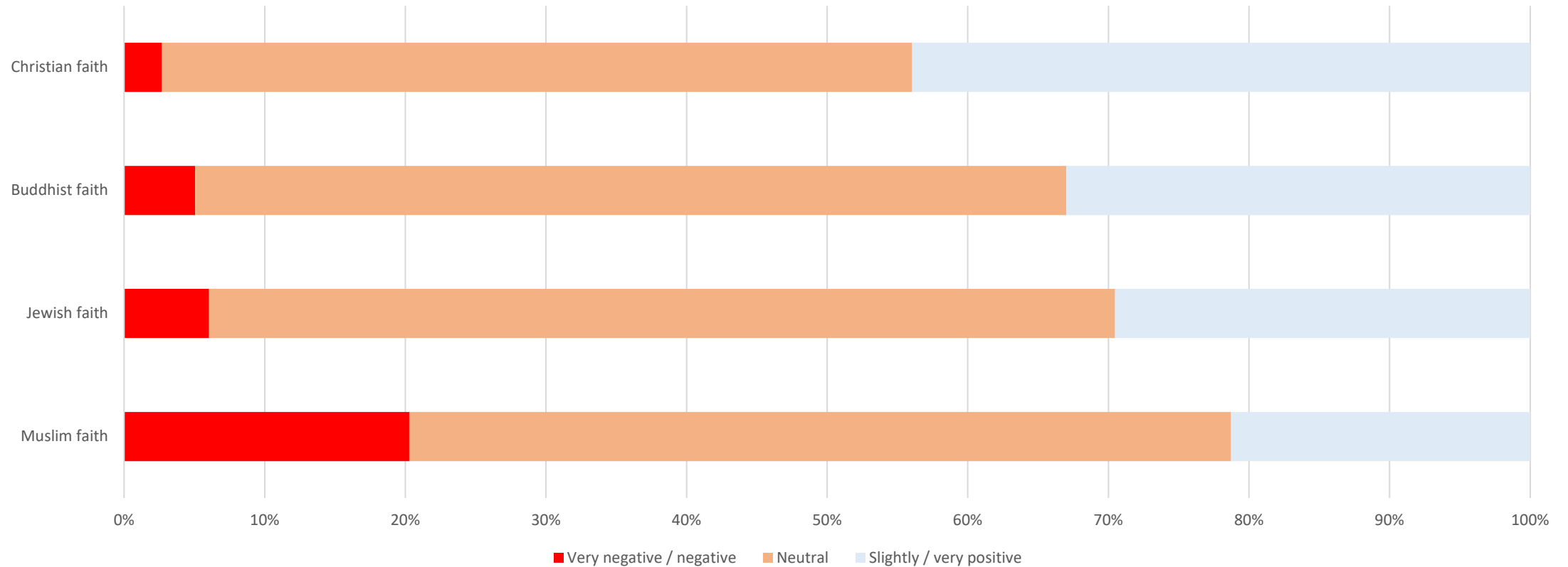
how concerned would you feel if one of your close relatives were to marry a person of:



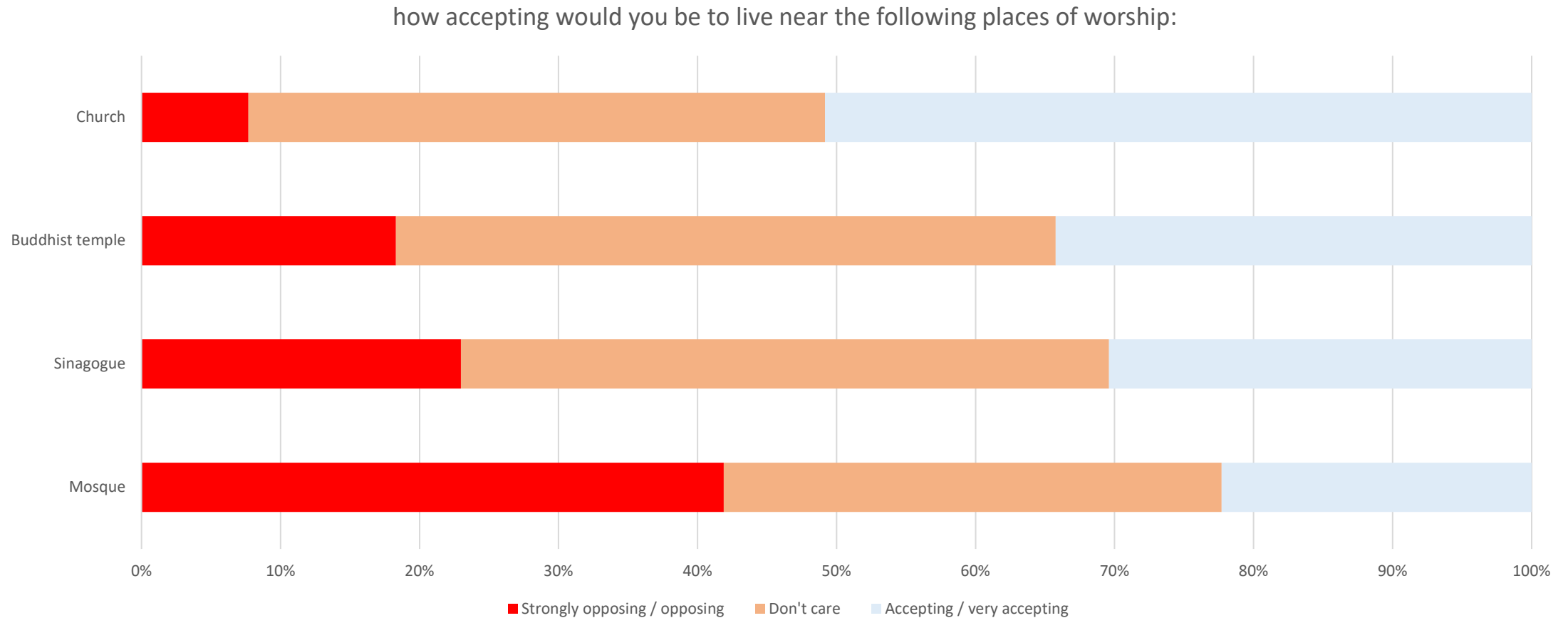


# AUS-Wave Data: (2) local co-existence

how would you feel if one of your neighbours was a person of:



# AUS-Wave Data: (3) acceptance of # religious institutions



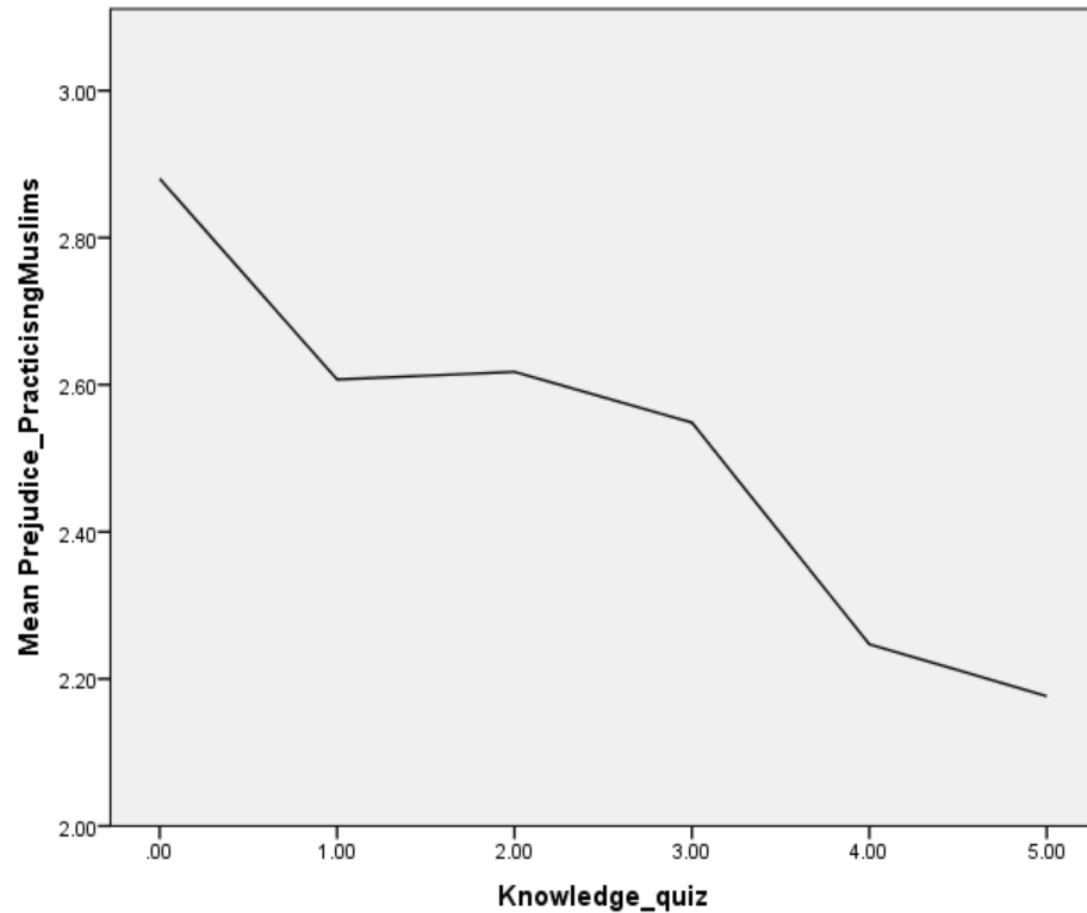
# KNOWLEDGE OF ISLAM

<i>Now a few questions about your interest and knowledge of religion. If you don't know the answer, just indicate that and move on to the next one. Don't ask others and don't look up the correct answers on the Internet: we are interested in your general knowledge of religion.</i>	Correct answer	Wrong answers	Don't know	Missing
What is the main religious text for Muslims, like the Bible is for Christians?	72.4%	7.8%	16.8%	3%
What does the word Ramadan indicate?	80.9%	5.6%	11.2%	2.3%
Is Jesus a revered Prophet in Islam?	20.1%	41.4%	36.5%	2%
Is Islam an Abrahamic religion as are Judaism and Christianity?	24%	15.1%	58.2%	2.6%
Are the majority of Muslims Shia, Sufi or Sunni?	13.5%	16.4%	67.4%	2.6%

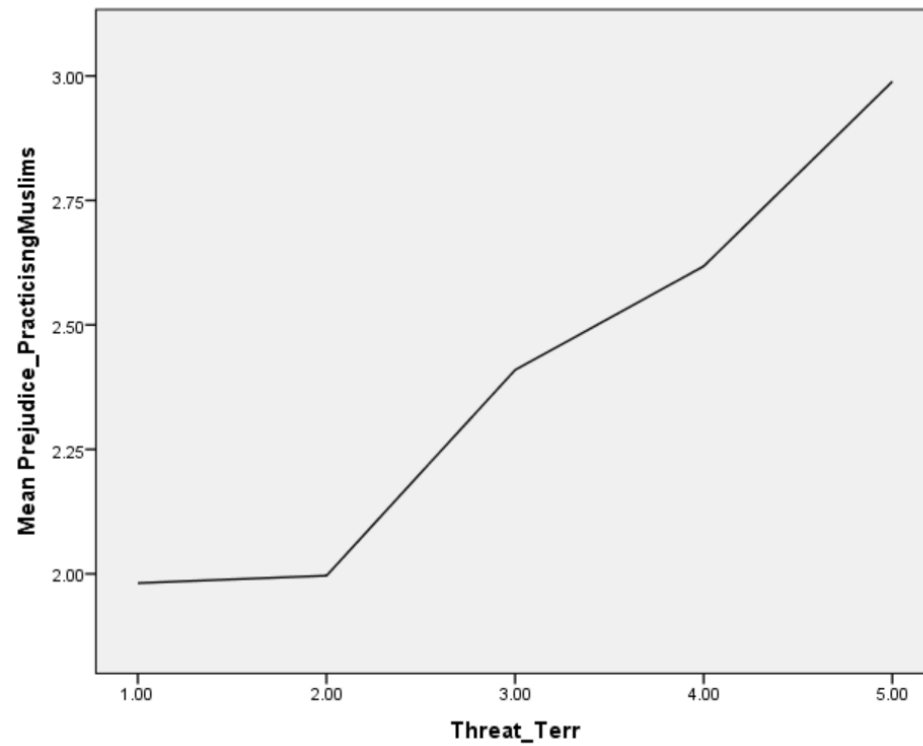
## KNOWLEDGE / SELF-REPORTED KNOWLEDGE OF ISLAM

- How much would you say you know about the Muslim religion and its practices? A great deal (7.2%), Somewhat (35.9%), not very much (40.1%), Nothing at all (14.5%), missing (2.3%)
- The two measures of knowledge of Islam (quiz and self-reported) are positively associated ( $r = .61^{**}$ ) with levels of islamophobia.

## FINDING 1: MORE KNOWLEDGE, LESS PREJUDICE



## FINDING 2: MORE THREAT (OF TERRORISM AND IMMIGRANTS), MORE PREJUDICE



# THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE

- Bivariate correlations show that **knowledge of Islam is positively associated with less prejudice** against practicing Muslims ( $r = -.19^{**}$ ).
- Interestingly, the **self-reported measure of knowledge of Islam does not present any significant relationship** with the measures of prejudice against practicing Muslims (.04).
- This means that saying to know about Islam is not associated with less Islamophobia, but rather **actually knowing more about Islam** is associated with less Islamophobia.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

- Importance of Islamic rituals and practices but their **DIFFERENCE from mediatised images and association with violent extremists** (the 'excess' hypothesis): Practising Muslims are often more engaged locally, i.e. active citizens even if this differentiated at the civic/political level;
- There is no theological/spiritual 'clash' between Islamic ethos and notions of active citizenship;
- **knowledge (via education, leadership and media)** is of critical importance in addressing both **Islamophobia** and **extremism in all of their manifestations**.



# Thank You.

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