

PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ON MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN AUSTRALIA

IMPACT: Public polling data in Australia (2007–2020) reveals that most Australians have little to no reported close contact with Muslims, significant negative feeling towards Muslims, and concerns about immigration from Muslim countries. The polls also show that Muslims report high levels of discrimination. Despite this, there is strong support for immigration and multiculturalism in Australia. Public opinion polls typically receive wide-spread coverage in Australia’s mainstream national media, and have been cited in outlets such as *ABC News*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Guardian*, and the *Australian*.

- Public opinion polls in Australia are often conducted at times of heightened anti-Muslim political and public debate. They are typically covered in Australia’s mainstream national media, including *ABC News*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Guardian*, and the *Australian*. In 2016, *Essential Research* conducted a biweekly poll on social and political issues in Australia. According to [reporting](#) from the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)*, “the poll results come shortly after One Nation leader, Pauline Hanson, called for a ban on Muslims entering Australia during her [first speech to Parliament](#).” **The poll asked whether Australians would “support or oppose a ban on Muslim immigration in Australia.” Among the respondents, 49 percent supported a ban and 40 percent opposed a ban.** Among those who expressed support, 63 percent selected the perceived failures of Muslims to integrate and to “share our values” as the main reasons for their support. The poll was [criticized](#) by Andrew Markus, Pratt Foundation Research Chair of Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, for its binary single-item response options which could not adequately capture the complexity of Islamophobia.
- In response to the findings of the Essential poll, polling organization [Roy Morgan](#) conducted a similar poll in 2016. The CEO [prefaced](#): “Roy Morgan surveys over several years from 2010 to 2015, showed majority support for Muslims, refugees and others immigrating to Australia. We believed it highly unlikely that sentiment would have changed so dramatically.” **The Roy Morgan poll found that 58 percent of the population supported Muslim immigration and 33 percent opposed it. However, this was down from 65 percent support in a 2015 poll. The poll also found greater support for asylum seeker immigration with 66 percent in support and 25 percent in opposition.** 61 percent of the population supported overall immigration levels staying the same or increasing, though this followed a downward trend trajectory, dropping 8 percent from the previous year.
- The question of immigration intake from Muslim countries was asked again in a [2018 Fairfax-Ipsos](#) poll. The [poll was conducted directly after a man who identified as Muslim](#), and was known to counter-terrorism police, stabbed two people and killed one person in Melbourne’s Bourke Street. It came while the [Liberal Morrison government](#) contemplated changes to immigration and population regulations, and experienced internal pressure from conservative members of parliament to cut intake from Muslim countries. **Of those polled, 46 percent stated Australia should reduce immigration intake from Muslim countries a little or a lot. Only 14 percent supported an increase in the number of immigrants from Muslim countries. The poll showed stronger support for immigration overall, with 52 percent either supporting an increase or maintenance of the current level of intake.** The poll also asked what percentage of the population was thought to be Muslim. Respondents significantly over-estimated this percentage: Australians thought 17 percent of the population was Muslim. According to the latest [census data from 2016](#), Australia’s Muslim population is 2.6 percent.
- The [YouGov-Cambridge Globalism Project](#), a global public opinion and research center, conducted a poll in 2019 with wide-ranging questions on sentiment towards Islam and other religions, national identity, populism, gender equality, immigration and acceptance of the

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LGBTIQ community, among others. Australia was one of twenty-three countries surveyed. **The survey found that 51 percent of Australians had an unfavorable view of Islam, while only 10 percent viewed the religion positively. This positioned Australia as more negative towards Islam than seventeen of the other twenty-two countries surveyed.** Nearly half of Australians surveyed said they had “very few” or “no” close friends from a different ethnic background.

- The Fairfax-Ipsos poll and the YouGov poll had direct partnerships with news outlets—Fairfax Media (now owned by Nine Publishing) and the *Guardian* respectively. The 2016 Essential Research poll received considerable attention from key Australian politicians. The Labor party deputy leader at the time, [Tanya Plibersek](#), said the poll showed that “we’re not doing a good enough job as national leaders to bring harmony and cohesion to our community.” Leader of the right-wing One Nation party [Pauline Hanson](#) said she believes the number who support a ban on Muslim immigration would have been higher but during the polling “people would have been in fear to answer the question [truthfully].”
- [The Scanlon Foundation](#), in conjunction with Monash University and the Australian Multicultural Foundation, conducts an annual survey mapping social cohesion in Australia. The foundation collects data from a dozen surveys beginning in 2007 and covering topics such as life satisfaction, democracy, immigration and multiculturalism, as well as attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. **Among the 2019 survey findings was that 22 percent of the population has negative attitudes towards Muslims—this has consistently remained in the 21–25 percent range over the twelve available surveys. This percentage is considerably higher than negative attitudes towards other religious groups, such as Christians (4 percent) and Hindus (6 percent).** The survey methodology included a randomized telephone sample and a self-completed online sample. The online sample reported 41 percent of respondents showed negative attitudes towards Muslims—this disparity could be due to the greater anonymity of the online sample. The survey found greater support for multiculturalism in Australia at 85 percent. Since 2013, support for multiculturalism has consistently remained in the 80–85 percent range. The survey additionally revealed that 29 percent supported discrimination based on religion in immigration policy. Analysis of combined data over the period 2013–2019 showed that 42 percent of Muslims reported experiencing discrimination.
- A 2018 report by the [International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding](#) at the University of South Australia measured, among other things, Islamophobic sentiment in Australia using an ‘Islamophobia scale’ battery of questions. The report asked respondents if they strongly agreed, agreed, were undecided, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the following statements: “Just to be safe, it is important to stay away from places where Muslims could be; I would feel very comfortable speaking with a Muslim; I would support any policy that would stop the building of new mosques; If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims; I would live in a place where there are Muslims; Muslims should be allowed to work in places where many Australians gather, such as airports; [and] If possible, I would avoid going to places where Muslims would be.” **The report found that almost 70 percent of Australians exhibited only a low level of Islamophobia and were not concerned about Islam or Muslims. Almost 10 percent fell into the highly Islamophobic category.** The report also found that those who reported regular contact with Muslims were significantly less Islamophobic.
- While most public opinion polls in Australia focus on questions of Muslim immigration and belonging, a 2016 study focused on Muslim experiences in Australia. A report published by the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy Australia (ISRA) and the Challenging Racism

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Project CRP) at Western Sydney University, “[The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims](#),” found that **the majority of Australian Muslims identified as Australian and felt a sense of belonging to Australia (83.8 percent); the majority of Australian Muslims thought Muslims were well integrated into Australian society (61.8 percent); and higher levels of religiosity were positively associated with stronger national belonging.** However, Muslim experiences of discrimination were three times higher than the Australian average.

- A number of opinion polls in Australia have been conducted in light of proposed legislative changes that would impact Muslim and other minority groups in Australia. In 2017, the [Turnbull Liberal government](#) proposed changes to the [Racial Discrimination Act](#), specifically section 18C which makes it unlawful to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate someone on the basis of race and culture. **Public polling data at the time showed widely varied claims of support to remove the words ‘insult’ and ‘offend’ on the basis of race, culture or religion from Section 18C of the Act—with claims of almost 50 percent in support of this change.** An [Essential Research poll](#), commissioned by Cyber Racism and Community Resilience, found that when asked the question “should people have the freedom to ‘insult’ and ‘offend’ people on the basis of race, culture or religion,” only 10 percent agreed with this, while 75 percent opposed it. In 2019, the Morrison Liberal government proposed introducing stronger legislation to combat religious discrimination. **A [2019 Essential Research poll](#) found that only 38 percent of Australians supported the call for stronger laws to protect those who express their religious views in public, while 64 percent agreed that people should not be allowed to claim religious freedom to abuse others.**

This factsheet is published in collaboration between the Bridge Initiative and researchers at the Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University. More information about this project can be found [here](#).