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INTERN POLICY REPORT

Identifying the strategic constraints on integration of the Australian Muslim community

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Acknowledgements

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I Introduction

The purpose of this report is to establish the current position and perception of Muslim communities in Australia towards the various factors – societal, economic, governmental, internal – that have an influential role in determining whether a group can 'integrate' or not.

Pertinent to this investigation is first to establish what an 'integrated' community looks like in Australia. Relevant is the contextual use of the term in light of the history of immigration policy. This is to establish the interpretations of the term 'integration' from different stakeholders.

Following discussion of the history of immigration policy and the interpretations of integration, this report will then discuss the identification of strategic constraints to community integration.

This discussion is drawn from academic literature and primary research consisting of interviews conducted with key community leaders. These views will be contextualised with academic research in order to assess an objective perspective on identified strategic constraints.

The manner in which these identified strategic constraints can be overcome will then be discussed, in order to develop policy recommendations.

II Methodology

The research conducted can be broken down into four predominant sections.

The first major area was investigating academic journalism from the past five years on immigration policy, integration, and the Australian Muslim community to establish a context. This provided insight into the position of Australian Muslims within the context of Australia as an immigration-based nation that also has a prevailing national identity of white and Christian.

The next major area was news articles from the past few years to establish the position and views of political leaders on immigration policy, migrant and diverse communities and Muslim Australian communities. This is particularly useful as later discussed in the absence of current government policy on multiculturalism and limited academic research into recent events. Government policy and Commonwealth legislation also provided insight into the legal and administrative factors affecting integration.

The major part of the research was focused on personally conducted interviews with prominent people from the Australian Muslim community. It was important to reach a range of backgrounds, including religious leaders, community activists, and academics, in order to ascertain differences in perspectives. The respondents were as follows

- Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed, Grand Mufti of Australia

- Sheikh Shady Alsuleiman, President of the Australian National Imams Council

- Mr Keysar Trad, founder of the Islamic Friendship Association of Australia and President of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils

- Darulfatwa, the Islamic High Council of Australia, response from Media Liaison Ms Mona Hwalla

- Dr Minerva Nasser-Eddine, research fellow in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Adelaide

- Ms Diana Abdul Rahman, OAM, a prominent advocate and activist.

This research consisted of personally conducted face-to-face and phone interviews as well as one response in writing to a series of questions developed from extensive research, as above, into government policy and academic analysis of the major constraints on integration.

III Context of immigration policy and public discourse

Immigration policy has always been a highly topical issue receiving significant political and public focus (Boulos et al. 2013, p. 301).

Among the first pieces of legislation passed after federation in 1901 was the *Immigration Restriction Act*, empowering the state to place restrictions on and 'remove' immigrants. The infamous dictation test was blatantly designed and utilised to keep out those considered 'undesirable', i.e. non-European people. The policy of assimilation became more explicit following World War Two. Although little assistance was given, new migrants were expected to adopt the white Anglo-Australian identity and way of life (Koleth 2010).

The end of the White Australia Policy in 1973 and the adoption of international law combating race-based discrimination into domestic legislation with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* signified the end of the policy of assimilation. Leaders were aware it was no longer an appropriate or effective policy to manage immigration, and multiculturalism had bipartisan support (Moran 2010, p. 2159). This was reflected with the use of the term multiculturalism in political discourse (Koleth 2010).

The policy of multiculturalism was refined in the 1980s under the Hawke government, with inclusion and support for multiple identities being balanced against the need for obligations of 'commitment to Australia'. Although government initiatives including recognising overseas education and training and teaching English as a second language were developed, this was 'placed within a nationalist narrative where cultural diversity and tolerance were part of the Australian identity'. (Koleth 2010).

Criticism over the policy of multiculturalism grew towards the start of the 21st century, with Pauline Hanson taking public office and Howard as prime minister. Howard was a critic of multiculturalism, having published his 'One Australia Policy' when in opposition in 1988, and when in power reformed visa policy to favour 'skilled' migrants over humanitarian.

Concern over vulnerability to terrorist attacks in Australia following 9/11 and 7/7 were the motivating factors in the introduction of an 'Australian values' based citizenship test and the

'National Action Plan to Build Social Cohesion' according to Fozdar (2011). The latter explicitly attempted to address 'extremism and the promotion of violence and intolerance in Australia'. Fozdahr (2011, p. 168) contextualises multiculturalism within a 'worldwide socio-political phenomenon that has seen Muslims targeted as 'the enemy' both transnationally and within the nation state'.

Other incidents are frequently listed as creating a 'big picture' of anti-Western violence from the Muslim world, including bombings in Bali in 2001 and 2005, Istanbul and Riyadh in 2003, Madrid, Jakarta and Jeddah in 2004, increasing criticism of multiculturalism in Australia (Kabir 2007, p. 1284). For instance, Howard responded to the 2005 Cronulla riots by emphasizing a greater need for integration and 'avoidance of tribalism' (Moran 2010, p. 2164). In the past decade, the bipartisan nature of multiculturalism policy has been polarised due to concern over asylum seekers and labour immigration (Boulos et al. 2013, p. 307). Although the Gillard government reversed this 'retreat from multiculturalism' in 2011 (Moran 2010, p. 2167), there have been successive Liberal governments since. Abbott, particularly when introducing new counter-terrorism legislation, was far more in line with Howard in terms of prioritizing Australian identity and values over an inclusive recognition of diversity (Cox 2014). Although Turnbull praised Australia as a multicultural society, he also spoke of the need for 'strong borders', limiting refugee intake and emphasizing integration (Gordon & Hasham 2016). The Gillard policy on multiculturalism is still the most recent publication, and this leaves considerable uncertainty on the current position of the government.

Muslim Australian history dates back to the start of white settlement in the 19th century (Kabir 2007, p. 1280). Significant numbers of Muslims did not immigrate to Australia until after the end of the White Australia Policy, with Turkish and Lebanese immigration really starting at the end of the 1960s and rapidly increasing toward the 1980s (Kabir 2007, p. 1282). Whether intentional or not, the number of Muslim migrants to Australia currently is in the decline (Overington 2016). The 2011 census reported that 2.2% of Australians identified as Muslims, and were predominantly born in

Australia, followed by Turkey and Lebanon. Despite positive policies of multiculturalism and individual success, we are seeing the position of Muslims in Australian society increasing questioned (Akbarzadeh 2016, p. 323). In public discourse, the mounting fear of Islam has given rise to an apparent increase in anti-Muslim statements (Akbarzadeh 2016, p. 324).

IV Definition 'Integration'

'Integration is being a valued member of society, respectful of cultural heritage and multiple identities.'

'[Multiculturalism] was a very positive and excellent approach in that we are all proud Australians, but we are also happy and proud of our heritage. […] it was a good balance.'

- Dr Minerva Nasser-Eddine

'The term 'integration' has been hijacked. It varies wildly among politicians, and it is a loaded term.'

'The term may rejected because it is loaded with Islamophobia.'

'It is fundamentally a question of contribution to society, which is a question of access what is being offered and what can people offer in return.'

- Mr Keysar Trad

'Integration happens when a community assumes aspects of its environment without losing its own identity and is allowed the option to participate in all and every aspect and institution of its nation.'

- Darulfatwa

'Integration should never mean losing your identity.'

'Multiculturalism is a positive policy […] because culture is not mutually exclusive.'

- Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed

'Integration is […] respecting one another, tolerating one another, excusing one another.'

'[Integration] is misunderstood and misrepresented in many ways. It is portrayed as 'you must think like me and my way of life' – it should mean a mutual respect.'

- Sheikh Shady Alsuleiman

It is evident that the historical context of the term has contributed to a significant degree of ambiguity in meaning. To some respondents, the use of the term appeared to carry connotations of anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Muslim sentiments.

Most, if not all respondents defined the term in a positive manner that allowed for multiple identities and civic participation across different demographics. Emphasis was placed on tolerance for difference and diversity, and in supporting different cultural values.

A survey conducted at the 2009 Eid festival in Brisbane found that 83% of respondents 'support integration at some level', with 71% agreeing that 'Muslims should integrate by learning English and by other social, economic and political means but should retain their religious identity' (Rane et al. 2016, p. 131). This finding appears to be strongly supported by the responses. On multiple occasions the language of 1970s multiculturalism was specifically used. This reflects the regard and preference for this policy.

The People of Australia - Multicultural Policy published under the Gillard government in 2011 similarly prioritised 'embracing shared values and cultural traditions' while allowing for 'the right to practise […] cultural traditions and languages within the law and free from discrimination'. This was placed within a desire for 'national unity' and the responsibility to 'pledge loyalty' to Australia. Despite the changes in political power and party leaders since then, this is still the policy under Turnbull today (Sharaz 2016). Turnbull does not appear to have published a press release as prime minister referring explicitly to the policy, although did publish one affirming commitment to combating 'violent extremism' (2015) and another on 'increasing the participation of Muslims in all aspects of Australia life' (2016).

The perspective of key community leaders of the term of integration is one that includes successful socio-economic achievement on par with Anglo-Australians, while allowing for the preservation of multiple identities, religious heritage and traditional values. Although some respondents expressed discomfort with the language of integration, others were comfortable and felt the term to have been

appropriately re-contextualised since the end of the White Australia Policy. The current People of Australia policy does express a meaning of integration and multiculturalism similar to the ones offered by community leaders. At face value, this appears to indicate significant understanding and cooperation between the government and the Muslim community in Australia; however, this policy is five years old and four prime ministers ago. The apparent failure to establish policy while the debate around immigration, diversity and multiculturalism remains a salient part of public discourse is not conducive to a more 'integrated' society. The fact that different political leaders may interpret the term differently was specifically raised by multiple respondents as a source of concern.

V Ascertaining status quo

As established, integration is a term of subjective meaning. It is relevant to then consider whether community leaders believe the Muslim community to be integrating as they consider. The question put to the respondents was whether they perceived integration to be on a positive or negative trajectory.

Two of the most senior positions in religious leadership perceived the integration of the Muslim community to be increasingly positive. Particularly Dr Ibrahim cited representation in parliament and respect for law as indicators for success.

Darulfatwa sees the position of the Muslim community as having integrated on the same level as any other group in Australian society. They do note that it is the disadvantaged groups, who have less education, skills, wealth, power and other resources that are likely to be perceived as having 'less integrated'. This is attributed to being less able to contribute and less protected from stereotyping and discrimination. This is notably in line with Trad's definition of 'integration'.

Keysar Trad, the respondent who described integration as an inherently loaded term, argued that despite the best efforts of the Muslim community they are becoming increasingly less integrated. He said this was a response to increasing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia. Diana Abdel Rahman agreed, stating that the current situation is 'far worse' than it was in the 2000s. Her perspective was that today is markedly different from her childhood in Australia, where no one really questioned her identity or religion, whereas now she feels 'a stranger in her own country' as the Muslim community comes under scrutiny at every opportunity.

The last two respondents described mixed results. Dr Nasser-Eddine said that Australia was witnessing both success stories and 'paranoia', and attributed to some extent the difference in results to geographic and socio-economic class. Sheikh Alsuleiman indicated that the mixed picture was being obscure by a significant degree of fearmongering which worked to foster a negative perception of the relationship, but that there was still notable 'successful' examples of integration.

Esmaeli (2015, p.71) asserts that there are two perspectives on the position of Muslim communities in Australia: that there is either an 'inherent incompatibility' between the broad 'Western' and 'Islamic' ways of life, or that racism and prejudice, not fundamental differences, account for the tension between the two. This second line of logic would assert that the contributing causes are reactionary to the presence of Muslim communities and external of them. Esmaeli takes the approach that both external and internal factors affect the position of Muslim communities in Australia, with particular reference to the relationship with the legal system (2015, p. 72). Fozdahr (2011, p. 169) asserts that despite the statistically significant presence of Muslim Australians, this group has never been considered to be part of the cultural landscape of values and identities comprising Australian society. Further the author asserts that there is a fundamental assumption of national identity as white and Christian is the primary factor in targeting Muslim Australians as the 'other'.

The perception from the respondents in this research indicated that overwhelming Muslim communities in Australia are seeking to achieve, and to a certain degree have already achieved, a level of 'integration'. However it is clear that this is not a uniform result amongst all differing demographics within the Australian Muslim community, and that in some aspects the situation is becoming worse in light of public scrutiny and discourse surrounding Muslim Australians. The recent academic research provides a useful background to the sociological climate that may be less conducive to 'integration'.

VI Identifying constraints

Following on from analysis of the definition of integration and the status quo, respondents were asked a series of general questions into what they perceived to be the major barriers to integration.

A *The media*

All respondents unilaterally identified the media as being one of the major factors that contributed to anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in Australia. Academic literature and studies support this finding: Kabir (2007, p. 1285) found that the media has linked veiled Muslim women to an image of terrorism, while Sohrabi (2015, p. 6) agrees that there has been a shift from identifying migrants with their national identities to their religious, and particularly identifying Muslims as such. Rane et al. (2015, p. 504) asserts that the media portrays Muslim Australians as a homogenous group, failing to recognise the diversity in culture, language, ethnicity and ideology. Kabir (2008, p. 276) references the media portrayal of the former mufti, Sheikh Taj el Din al-Hilali. His comments on women's clothing and sexual assault received significant media attention and condemnation by political leaders, whereas similar comments by Catholic leaders around that time went virtually unnoticed. His research indicated that incidents like this resulted in sentiment amongst Muslim youth that the media misrepresents the community. Rane et al. (2010, p. 133) found that among the Muslim respondents, nearly 60% had 'no' or 'very little' trust in the media as a public institution, compared with 60-80% having some, most, or complete trust in the education, judicial and other public institutions.

The respondents to this research agreed with these findings, offering further insight.

The respondents also noted positives which the academic literature did not. Darulfatwa recognises and commends the government policies that allow for an alternative voice in mainstream commercial media, particularly referring to ABC and SBS community radio and the Muslim Community Radio in Sydney. Ms Abdul-Rahman noted that while media go and interview obscure, fringe people and 'give them oxygen', she perceives a change in that 'moderate Muslims' are 'stepping up to the mark', particularly women, and the picture in media today is more balanced than it has been in some time. Sheikh Shady Alsuleiman noted that while there is a significant amount of

bias and unfair reporting in the media, there is a 'responsibility on both sides' and that the Muslim community could engage more with the media.

B *Political and public discourse*

The identification of rhetoric utilised by politicians was identified as one the major factors in contributing to anti-Muslim sentiment. Akbarzadeh (2016, p. 325-326) outlines the rise of far-right and anti-Muslim sentiment in politics, referencing the new and explicitly anti-Islam Australian Liberty Alliance party under Geert Wilders, Abbott's words even after leaving office that 'all cultures are not equal', and South Australian senator Cory Bernardi that 'Islam itself is the problem'. This discourse is likely in response to the support it generates among far-right votes, with Kabir (2007, p. 1284) asserting that politicians have used the fear of Islam for political ends. Kabir (2007, p. 1286) also notes that politicians linked Muslims with terrorism and violence. To repeat just a few of his examples, he particular references Howard's response to the *Tampa* refugees in 2001, the words of Peter Slipper during his time as Parliamentary Secretary that there was an 'undeniable link' between asylum seekers and terrorists, Fred Nile calling for a ban on the chador in 2002, and the suggestion of banning hijabs in schools in 2005 by Bronwyn Bishop.

The respondents to this research were also highly conscious of the role of political leaders. Mr Trad offered that 'Howard sent a message to society that it is acceptable to lash out against Muslims', and Ms Abdul-Rahman that 'Abbott pursued a discourse of 'othering' Muslims that started with Howard ... [it has been] a slow escalation'. Dr Nasser-Eddine noted that the language of the Menzies period came back into use under Howard, with the result that 'many members of the community felt it was targeting them in particular'. Darulfatwa responded that it is 'common knowledge that some political discourse is damaging and severs the relationship between Australian Muslims and the wider Australian community'.

The primary research conducted in conjunction with academic articles establishes conclusively that politicians in Australia frequently refer to Muslim Australians in a highly negative manner than

serves to establish them as an 'other' in society and contribute to tension. Although it appears that with the most recent change in political leadership the situation has been somewhat ameliorated it is still a readily apparent strategic constraint, and one that community leadership is well aware of.

C *Community factors*

Respondents were asked several questions on whether there were any internal factors that were not conducive to integration. While there was some limited research to suggest that factors such as the creation of 'ethnic enclaves', and conflicting perspectives of the law (Esmaeli 2015, p. 76), the supposed inherent incompatibility of Islam with an Australian way of life is one of the flagship policies of the One Nation Party (Hanson 2016).

One academic source (Kabir 2007, p. 1282) pointed out that Muslims are portrayed monolithically and by the media, comparing this to the identification of Vietnamese during the war who were identified primarily with their nationality, as opposed to broader ethnicity or religion.

Responses on this topic varied considerably.

Sohrabi (2015, p. 12) identified a difference in community participation between Muslim youth and leadership. This research indicated that there was a significant gap between the views of the older, conservative leadership which is predominantly male and moved to Australia later in life. Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed described the older generation as 'more static', and less open to change which could be seen as attacking their values. The younger generation of Muslim Australians, particularly those born in Australia or having moved here at a younger age, are more likely to be 'integrated'. He pointed to the example of children achieving top HSC marks and asserted that their parents are proud of them and admire this meaning of integration, but are concerned with still preserving their values.

Dr Nasser-Eddine similarly agreed that the older generation are generally less 'integrated' than the younger, but also noted that youth may struggle to identity as Australian *and* Muslim given the hostility around Islam today.

The response from Darulfatwa noted that some radical ideological groups have been influenced by overseas movements, but that these organisations 'sway with a strong breeze' because they are not

founded on proper Islamic knowledge. Darulfatwa highlighted the role that in response, structured and formal Muslim advocacy groups as well as individuals worked to represent, serve and educate the community. Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed offered the comment that 'a hostile society will naturally result in a community withdrawing or lashing out'.

D *Legal system*

Many of the respondents indicated that they did feel that the current legal system offered protection to Muslim Australian communities.

Mr Trad, in particular, raised that 'laws protecting minorities are weak'. Darulfatwa also that there is a perceived 'void in in civil rights' where anti-discrimination laws do not adequately protect Muslims from defamation. Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed also raised this weakness in laws protecting Muslim leadership from being misrepresented in media. In the view of Darulfatwa, this causes doubt as to whether Muslims are accepted in society and may lead to 'regression that leads them to resort to radicalisation'.

Ms Abdul-Rahman drew on particular incidents where law enforcement had responded in irresponsible ways. One instance was where parents had sought help from the police in response to their son becoming apparently 'radicalised'; the police conducted a sting operation in him. Another issue discussed with Ms Abdul-Rahman was the gunman behind the 2014 Sydney Lindt Café incident, Man Haron Monis. The members of the Muslim had actually reported him to the police who had failed to act in response to threatening behaviour to other members of the community. These two incidents in her perspective undermine trust and cooperation in the law enforcement system.

VII Policy recommendations

1. New policy on multiculturalism, integration and immigration should be written in order to provide clarity on the government perspective.

It is necessary for the government to continuously update or reaffirm policy on issues of multiculturalism, diversity and immigration. A clear stance on the matter would be conducive to helping all parties define and understand the relationship between government and community groups. If a definition similar to that provided by community consultation in this report, this would reaffirm government commitment to an inclusive and tolerant society of diverse ethno-religious backgrounds. It would also mark a commitment to Australia's long history of multiculturalism as the preeminent policy, notwithstanding the retreat from it under Howard. When developing new integration policy, a consultation process of community groups including migrant and ethno-religiously diverse communities and particularly Muslim ones, would have a significant effect on establishing a positive relationship between marginalised groups and political leaders. Publicizing such a process would demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion across Australia.

2. Media

The role of the media in exacerbating anti-Muslim sentiment is well recognised by academic literature and perceived as one of the most significant constraint on integration by community leaders as indicated in this research.

Bouolos et al. (2013, pg. 305) note that the influence of media is generally limited to reinforcing political views rather than changing them, and typically have the effect of increasing the salience of issues. This indicates that a shift in political and public discourse is a necessary step to achieving the more responsible journalism, which is perceived by the respondents to the research: Mr Trad raised the issue of 'dog whistling'; that is, politicans effectively directing the media on issues of public 'concern'. Therefore, the recommendation to overcome this constraint is primarily changing the dialogue of political leaders.

3. Responsible political discourse

There needs to be a significant change in language used by political leaders when talking about issues relating to immigration, religious and ethnic diversity, and particularly when referring to Muslim Australians and the Islamic world. This is a fundamental step to a more harmonious relationship. The need for more responsible dialogue has been recognised by multiple groups across society, reflecting the phenomenon of anti-Muslim sentiment across the Western world (see Cinalli and Guigni 2013 for a comprehensive overview of European countries). Clearly, more effective lobbying is needed. Diana Abdul-Rahman was pivotal in organising a submission from the Canberra Muslim community when new counter-terrorism laws were being implemented. She took the opportunity to directly address the senators involved to say that 'if the Prime Minister [Abbott] continues to use the language that he uses, it defeats anything you are trying to do.' This is indicative of the fact that fundamentally, those in power with access to influence need to advocate for more responsible, balanced and nuanced dialogue.

This research indicates that the perspective of the Muslim community is that they are limited: many members have spoken out, directly called for or lobbied for less inflammatory language. Dr Nasser-Eddine asserts that the government is simply not listening to the Muslim community or its spokespeople. Near unilaterally every respondent without prompting spoke of their respect and preference for the more balanced language employed by Turnbull, but a change in leadership does not solve a problem of entrenched attitude. Further, the recent re-election of Pauline Hanson shows that this language is still acceptable to many Australians. The responses and research indicate that this is a highly significant factor and that Muslim communities are keenly aware of the effect that inflammatory language of politicians has. It is noted that it is important not to overstate the degree of political alienation of Muslim Australians (Akbarzadeh 2016, p. 330), but it appears that this state of affairs will escalate unless directly addressed. One respondent, Darulfatwa, did note that on a personal and local level many politicians 'are upfront in their support to the Muslim community'. Engagement with political leaders at both a local and national level to advocate for more responsible dialogue and for members of parliament to do the same within their political parties and

portfolios will likely be the most effective method of achieving this.

4. Law reform

While an investigation of current anti-discrimination laws and their effectiveness in offering protection to the Australian Muslim community is outside the scope of this research, there is a clear need for such research. The perception that there is insufficient legal protection for minorities and Muslim Australians in particular is a clear inhibitor to 'integration'; the fundamental principle being equal participation in society. A government response, potentially in terms of a parliamentary inquiry with consultation from community leaders, would be effective in addressing this concern even if ultimately reform was not made.

VIII Conclusion

Current public anxiety and discourse have put the question of the position of Muslim Australians in society to the forefront of public discourse. The question of what it means to integrate is therefore highly salient. The perception of the Muslim community is that there are significant constraints in terms of media, political discourse, and the legal system that are contributing to an increasingly negative state of affairs. It is highly important that steps are taken to address these perceptions in order to work towards a desirable outcome of inclusive multiculturalism.

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