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A large, realistic-looking elephant is standing in a modern living room. The elephant is the central focus, standing on a light-colored rug. To its left is a grey sofa with green and brown cushions. In the background, there is a large window with a view of greenery. To the right, there is a white TV stand with a television and some books. The overall scene is a metaphor for the 'elephant in the room' concept, representing a significant issue that is being ignored or avoided in a social setting.

# The elephant in the room: Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim learners

# Definition



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## A New Definition and Analysis

‘Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’.

(UK parliament’s All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims 2018 cited in Poynting 2020)

- Islamophobia is a form of racism.
- Islamophobia is more than just anti-Muslim hatred or bigotry; and
- Islamophobia does not incorporate criticism of Islam as a faith but some people may hide behind 'criticism of Islam' when engaging in Islamophobia.

(Poynting 2020)

# Contributing factors



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**“After every heavily reported incident of terrorism overseas perpetrated by Muslims (those with white, ‘Western’ victims) – be it the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, the 7/7 London transport bombings in 2005 – there was a marked spike in Islamophobic incidents in Australia.”**

Ref: Iner (2017), *Islamophobia in Australia 2014-2016*, Charles Sturt University

## Media and Political rhetoric about Islam and Muslims

**Since 9/11 September 11, 2001 and other national & international events, media and political rhetoric have contributed to the negative framing of stories about Islam and Muslims.**



“A study of **290 newspaper articles over a ten-year period** found that Australian media coverage of Muslim... tended to be **framed mostly in terms of radicalisation and terrorism**”

(Manning 2004 in Iner 2016).

In 5 newspapers, namely **the Australian, the Daily Telegraph, the Herald Sun, the Courier Mail and the Advertiser**, almost **3000 articles** that referred to Islam or Muslims alongside words like violence, extremism, terrorism or radical.

(ONEPATH network 2017)

**“That’s over 8 articles a day in the Murdoch press slamming Muslims. If all of those were put together, that would be a full double-page spread. Every single day”**

(ONEPATH network 2017)

**“152 front pages over the year that featured Islam in some negative capacity. A lot of the time, these articles and exclusives were the featured item, the most important story for selling the newspaper.”**

(ONEPATH network 2017)



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FORMER ARMY CHIEF SOUNDS WARNING

## We'll fight Islam 100 years

### EXCLUSIVE

BY DAVID M. HAYES  
SPECIAL REPORT

... [Text continues]

### Obama flags strikes on Islamic State extremists

... [Text continues]




### Political fix was in for Hird, Bombers

... [Text continues]

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# ASIO boss says government is fighting terrorism, not Islam

By David Wroe

August 21, 2014 – 7:30pm



- [Protests at Abbott speech in Adelaide turn ugly](#)

Australia's top spy has launched an impassioned appeal to the nation's half a million Muslims not to mistake the Abbott government's counterterrorism push as "fighting Islam".

## TODAY'S TOP STORIES

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Young NSW man found with 'highest infection levels we've ever seen'



Amid simmering fears in the Islamic community about proposed new terrorism laws, ASIO boss David Irvine has given a rare one-on-one interview with a Muslim radio program in which he said he was "utterly outraged" by a recent newspaper headline that talked about "fight[ing] Islam for 100 years".



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#VICTORIA (AUSTRALIA)

## Melbourne Muslim community says the rising number of coronavirus cases has nothing to do with their religion

⚡ abc.net.au

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) has warned against scapegoating the Muslim community for the rising number of coronavirus cases in Melbourne ...

## More recently

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## Melbourne Muslims feel 'unfairly tarnished' by reports linking them to rising COVID-19 cases

By Erwin Renaldi

Posted Yesterday at 5:39am

Until the Christchurch  
massacre, language used by  
far-right politicians linking  
Islam/Muslims with terrorism  
was a prevalent tactic

(Iner in John Esposito and Derya Iner (2019), *Islamophobia and Radicalisation*, p.75)



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This was published 3 years ago

# Pauline Hanson says Islam is a disease Australia needs to 'vaccinate'

By [Amy Remeikis](#)

**Updated** March 24, 2017 –  
4.09pm, first published at  
3.32pm



Pauline Hanson has compared Islam to a disease Australians need to vaccinate themselves against, a comment described by the Deputy Prime Minister as "bat poo crazy".

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EXCLUSIVE POLITICS FEDERAL CHRISTCHURCH SHOOTING

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# Tony Abbott backs away from infamous 'Islamophobia hasn't killed anyone' remark

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By [Michael Koziol](#)  
March 18, 2019 – 5:08pm



Former prime minister Tony Abbott says he no longer stands by his controversial 2017 claim that "Islamophobia hasn't killed anyone".

[Christchurch shooting](#)

● This article is more than 1 year old

## Fury as Australian senator blames Christchurch attack on Muslim immigration

Politicians rebuke Fraser Anning over comments after New Zealand mosque attack

● [New Zealand shooting - latest updates](#)*Press Association*

Sat 16 Mar 2019 12.32 AEDT



7,196



▲ Fraser Anning tweeted: 'Does anyone still dispute the link between Muslim immigration and violence?'  
Photograph: David Clark/AAP

An Australian senator has been strongly criticised after he blamed the [New Zealand](#) shooting on Muslim immigration.

“I want to underline here that  
this racism that is  
Islamophobia, like most modern  
racisms, arises from  
colonialism, from imperialism:  
it is rooted in empire” (Poynting 2020)

# Consequences



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Australians are largely supportive of cultural diversity. However, recent national surveys show some groups attract a substantial and growing degree of negativity. The group that attracts the most negative attitudes is Muslim Australians (Kamp et al. 2017; Markus 2018)

## Opinion

### Christchurch shooting

This article is more than 1 year old

# The Islamophobia that led to the Christchurch shooting must be confronted

*HA Hellyer*

Sat 16 Mar 2019 02:16 AEDT



1,275

Anti-Muslim bigotry is a threat to all of us - we must recognise that before the New Zealand attack is repeated

[New Zealand shooting - latest updates](#)



▲ The Baitul Muqet mosque in Auckland, New Zealand. People have been urged to not attend evening prayers today. Photograph: Phil Walter/Getty Images

“it would be outrageous to fail to recognise that the unbridled, nativistic, anti-Muslim bigotry that has become so widespread in our societies has nothing to do with this attack in New Zealand.”

(former deputy convenor of a UK government-working group on radicalisation - *the Guardian* 2019)



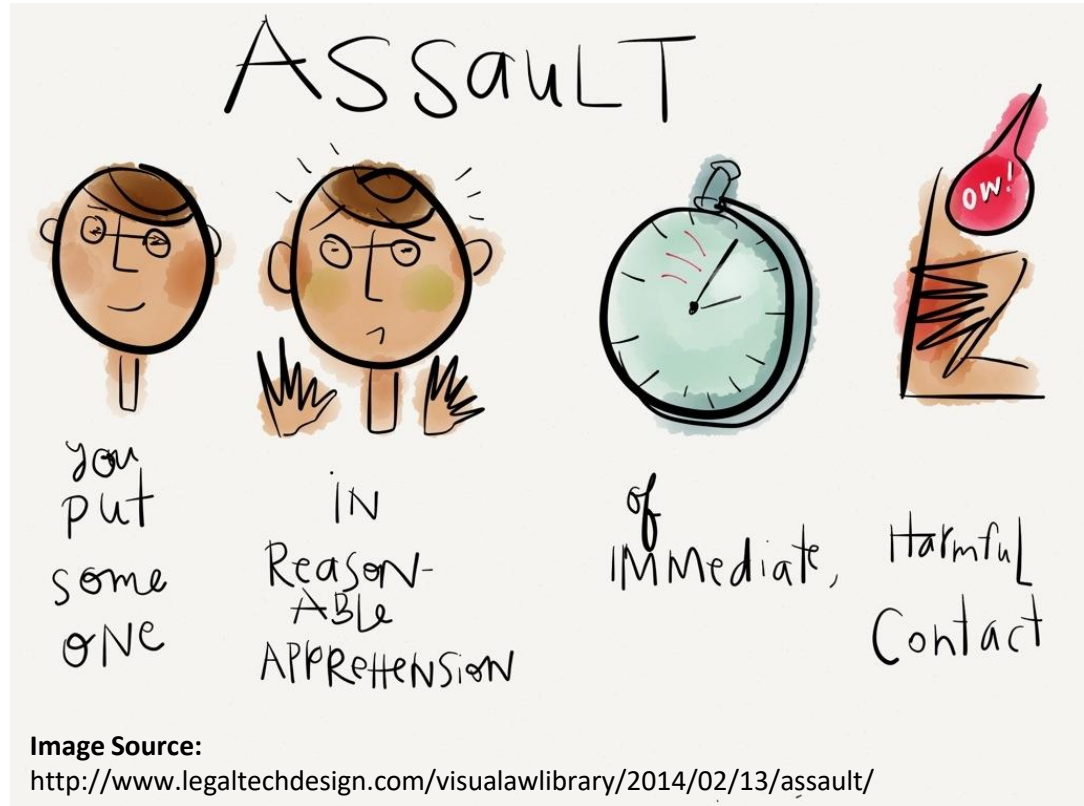
## Key findings

“Women, especially those with Islamic head covering (79.6% of the female victims), have been the main targets of Islamophobia. One-in-three female victims had their children with them at the time of the reported incident.”



**Image source:** <https://www.mobilityideas.sg/blog/key-findings-in-the-research-conducted-by-the-active-mobility-advisory-panel/>

“After verbal threats and assaults, physical harassment was the second highest category of incidents (29.6%).”



**“Of the in-person Islamophobic attacks, 48% occurred in crowded spaces that were frequented daily – shopping centres and train stations were the most common.”**

*Ref: Iner (2017), Islamophobia in Australia 2014-2016, Charles Sturt University*

Insults targeting Muslims' religious appearance and religion was the highest in both reports, with a slight increase from 61% to 67% in the present report.

(Iner 2017)

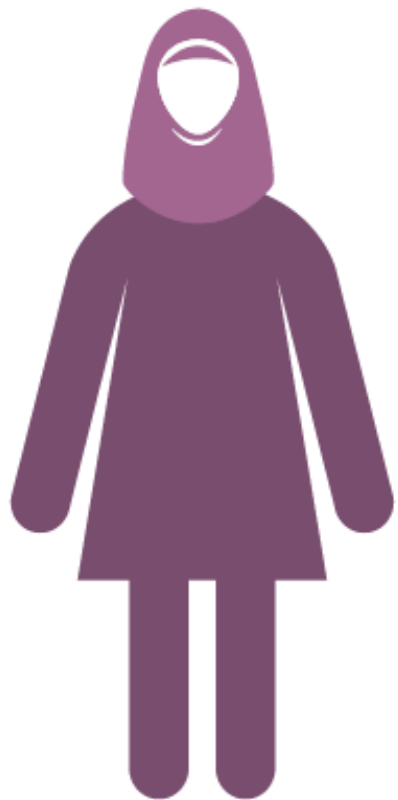
Following the previous report's trend, the most severe level of hate, i.e. wanting to kill/harm Muslims, was the most dominant rhetoric, consisting of the one-quarter of the entire online cases.

(Iner 2017)

Vulnerable people, mostly women and children, were easy targets for perpetrators. Of the 113 female victims:

- 96% were wearing a headscarf (hijab),
- 57% were unaccompanied (in contrast to 6% unaccompanied males) and
- 11% were with their children at the time of the incident.

(Iner 2017)



# 72%



72% of the victims are women in both the online and offline cases, while perpetrators are largely men (71%)

(Iner 2017)



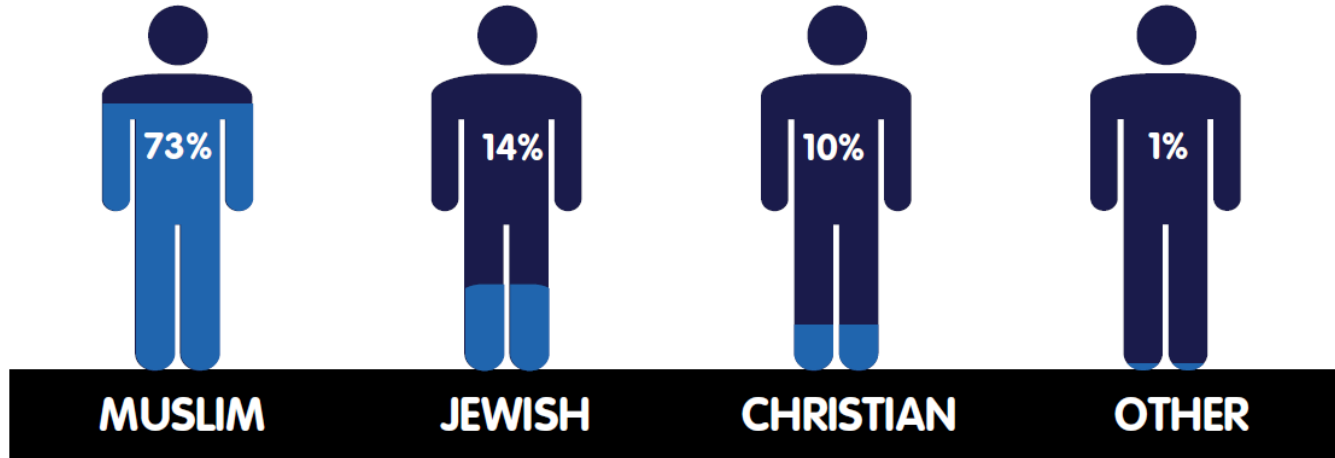
60%

60% of Islamophobic incidents reported  
occurred in guarded or patrolled areas

(Iner 2017)



# NSW POLICE FORCE: Cases of Bias Motivation by Percentage JULY 2013 - JUNE 2016



(Iner 2017)



# Islamophobia and children

Islamophobia occurs on a continuum (Noble 2009). As Chapter 1 of this report outlines, incidents documented by the Islamophobia Register include:

- > Acts of discrimination or bullying, such as at school or work
- > Verbal insults, posters, graffiti or targeting a Muslim woman wearing a hijab
- > Physical attacks involving brutal violence

(Iner 2017)

## Australian children are heavily exposed to Islamophobia

Research commissioned by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and the Department of Education and Training, November to December 2016. Respondents included 2,448 young people aged 12–17 years in Australia.

### TARGETS OF HARMFUL CONTENT ONLINE\*

Muslims

53%

LGBTI

26%

Asylum seekers

37%

Africans

20%

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders

37%

Jews

17%

Refugees

35%

Christians

15%

Asians

33%

Other minority groups

2%

(Iner, Briskman & Yasmin 2020)

“Experiences of Islamophobia start for children in pre-school years, when they were accompanied by their identifiably Muslim parents...”

(Iner, Briskman & Yasmin 2020)

“No difference between the hate type and hate level directed at adults and the ones directed at children.”

Sometimes, children become the source of hatred:

“Shooting gestures towards a school bus carrying Muslim students, pregnant women and women with prams were assaulted by being called ISIS bombers.”

(Iner, Briskman & Yasmin 2020)

“Sometimes not only individual students, but an entire school community was threatened through vandalism.”

## Perth mosque attack: Car firebombed, anti-Islam graffiti sprayed in 'act of hate'

By David Weber, Nikki Roberts

Posted Wed 29 Jun 2016 at 7:25am, updated Wed 29 Jun 2016 at 5:34pm





Islamophobia is  
one of the  
reasons for the  
rapid growth of  
Islamic schools

(Serena & Read 2015)



**Islamophobia has a specific traumatic impact on the young Muslim learner.**

- 55% of Muslim students had been bullied;
- 29% of hijab-wearing students experienced offensive touching or pulling of their hijab;
- 19% of students report experiencing cyberbullying because of their religion”

(CAIR-CA, 2015 in Elkassem *et al* 2018).

55.5% of Muslim had experienced racism in education, in comparison to the national average of 17%.

*(The Resilience and Ordinariness of Australian Muslims: Attitudes and experiences of Muslims Report 2015)*

**Many Australian Muslim learners also experience forms of verbal and physical abuse** (Mansouri & Trembath, 2005)

**Face complex overlapping challenges in the form of bullying, bigotry, assaults on identity and self-worth** (Preger & Kostogriz, 2014)

Lack a sense of belonging & exclusion (Mansouri & Trembath, 2005; Pe-Pua, Gendera, Katz, & O'Connor, 2010).

Muslim teenagers are “mostly vilified in Australian schools” (Iner et al 2017).

# Way forward



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If you  
experience  
Islamophobia  
– speak up!



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<https://www.islamophobia.com.au/>

**There is little to no research in Australia on prevalence in schools & impact on learners (Muslims and non-Muslims)**

**The impact of Islamophobia on children is under-researched**

**Little is known about the knowledge of educators in relation to Muslim learners and the preparedness they feel as a result of their initial teacher education.**

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the Muslim Learner: Meaningful Sources for Optimal Learning

To address the strengths and needs (AITSL, 2011) of Muslim learners in state schools, we argue for *a dialogical critical approach to CRP* that challenges cultural competency or cultural awareness models with one that acknowledges global influences, national priorities, with a “deep connectedness to the local” (Lingard, 2007, 247).



Negative and inaccurate perceptions and assumptions about Muslims in Australia not only give rise to stereotypes, they can also present **as a barrier for educators** to engaging with Muslim learners in the classroom and more broadly within educational settings.

This is less about knowledge gaps in relation to Islam and Muslims and more about educator's orientations in light of othering discourse, political tensions, and the dominant dehumanising narrative.

How exempt are educators from  
the power of the dominant  
discourse and narrative on Islam  
and Muslims?

We need to understand the impact of these on the orientation of educators, and their preparedness to engage with Muslim learners.

We need to examine the preparation and preparedness of pre-service educators to develop and avail from deeper knowledge of pedagogical strategies responsive to the 'learning strengths and needs' of Muslim learners?

Finally, understanding and responding to Islamophobia must be emphasised as a matter of justice and a just education that every learner, including Muslim learners, have a right to.

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Thank  
you

