

Appendix One: Rachel Woodlock, Victorian Muslims: a profile

The data for this profile of Victorian Muslims comes from the 2006 Census of Australian Population and Housing. Answering the question on religion is voluntary and the non-response rate among the general population was 11%. By definition, the non-response rate among Muslims is unknown, but for those who nominated birthplaces with large Muslim majorities the non-response rate was much lower than the general population. For example, for those born in Saudi Arabia, the non-response rate to the religion question was 3%; for those born in Iraq, the non-response rate was 2%; for those born in Pakistan, the non-response rate was 3%. This low non-response rate thus enhances our knowledge of Muslims' demographic characteristics and contradicts the presumption that Muslims as a vulnerable population are less likely to volunteer information about their religious affinity.

Population

At the 2006 census collection, there were 109,369 Victorian Muslims (2% of the wider Victorian population) with 108 males for every 100 females. Victorian Muslims composed 32% of the total Muslim population in Australia. By comparison, there were 168,787 Muslims in New South Wales who formed 50% of Australia's 340,392 Muslims.

Age

Figure 1 shows age-group pyramids comparing Muslim Victorians with all Victorians, by sex. It shows a noteworthy difference in the proportions of younger and older groups. That is, Muslim Victorians

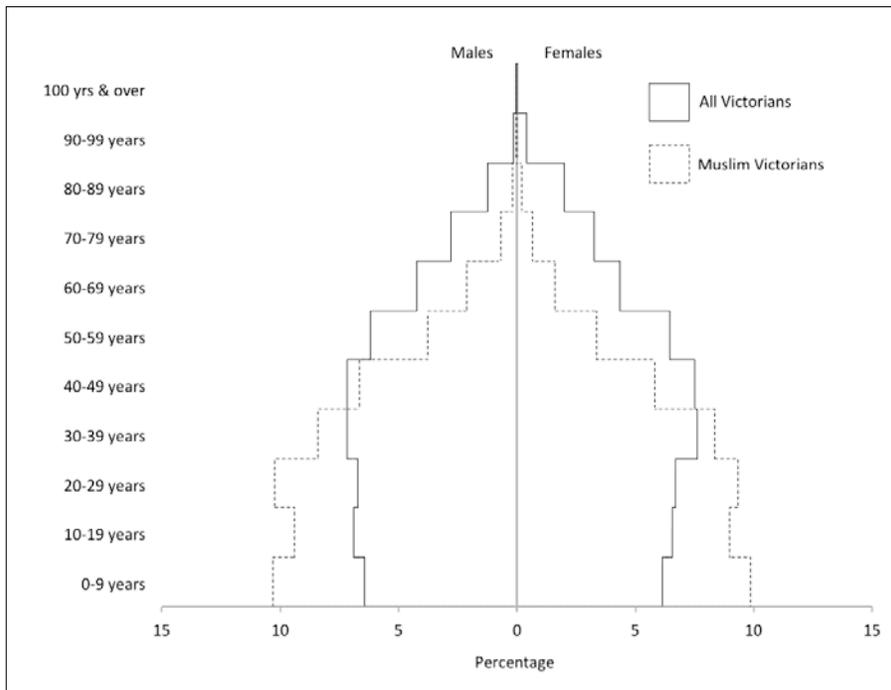


Figure 1. Age-group pyramids comparing Muslim Victorians with all Victorians, by sex.

had a higher proportion of younger people than Victorians generally, and a smaller proportion of older people. The median age for Victorian Muslims was 25, substantially younger than for all Victorians at 37. The median age of Australian-born Victorian Muslims was 12, whilst the median age for overseas-born Victorian Muslims was 35. By comparison, all Australian-born Victorians reflect a median age of 32 and all overseas-born Victorians, a median age of 46.

The youthful profile of the Victorian Muslim community is unsurprising given most are migrants or children of migrants, with a relatively high birthrate. This is reflected in dependency ratios (the proportion of dependents per 100 members of the working-age population). For Muslims the youth dependency ratio was 44 whilst the aged dependency ratio was only 5. This is dramatically different from the general Victorian population, which had a youth dependency ratio of 29 and an aged dependency ratio of 20.

Birthplace

In regard to birthplace, the largest group of Victorian Muslims (38%) was Australian-born as figure 2 demonstrates. Following this, were those born in Turkey, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Indonesia. Those remaining came from 131 different countries demonstrating the diverse and multicultural nature of the Victorian Muslim community. Although Australian-born Muslims are the largest group, 71% of them had parents born overseas and a further 17% had one parent born overseas. Only 7% of Australian-born Muslims had Australian-born mothers and fathers. A very small number of Muslims (194 people) belonged to Indigenous – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander – communities.

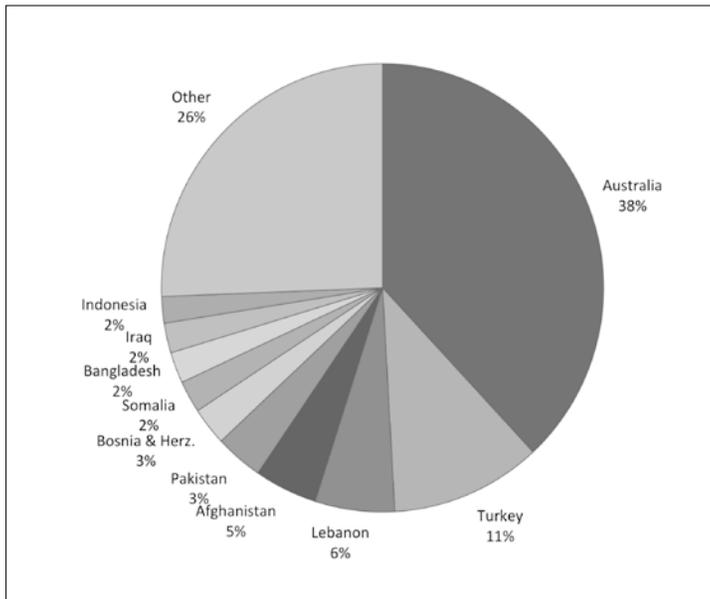


Figure 2. Victorian Muslims' birthplaces.

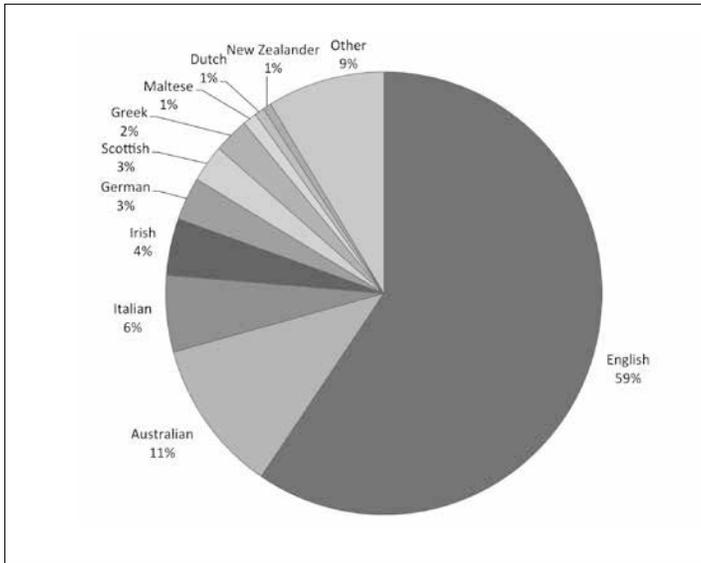


Figure 3. First ancestry responses from probable converts to Islam.

Conversion

Although it is impossible to know precisely how many people have converted to Islam because the question is not asked on the census and there is no Islamic body that officially records conversions, a crude estimate is possible through assessing ancestry responses. That is, those nominating ancestries without historical connection to Islam (such as Irish, Dutch, Jewish etc.) are probably converts or at most children of converts. Removing those with first-response ancestries commonly connected with Muslim populations (eg. Albanian, Lebanese, Indonesian etc.) as well as those who nominated 'Australian' as an ancestry but who did not have Australian-born parents, left 6,541 people, or 6% of all Victorian Muslims.

So we can make an estimate from the 2006 Census that around six and half thousand people have converted to Islam. Of these, 52% are males and 48% are females, meaning that in all likelihood gender plays no substantive role in influencing conversion. If anything the numbers are slightly skewed towards males, contradicting popular mythology that more females are converting to Islam than males. See figure 3 for the top ten ancestries of probable converts.

Citizenship

Seventy-nine percent of all Victorian Muslims have taken out Australian citizenship. For those 17% (4% not stated) who have yet to become Australian citizens, the median year of arrival in Australia was 2004. Taking into account there is a two-year waiting period between being granted permanent residency and being eligible for citizenship, Muslims appear to be adopting citizenship at the first available opportunity.

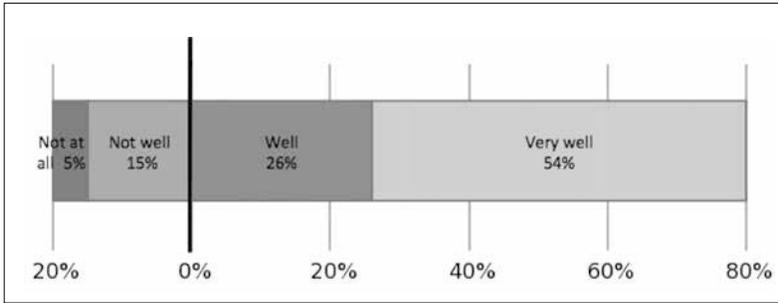


Figure 4. Levels of English proficiency among those who speak non-English languages at home, by percent.

Language

There were 134 different languages spoken by Victorian Muslims at home, again reflective of Muslims’ diversity. English was spoken at home by 11%, but the two biggest non-English languages were Arabic (25% of Muslims) and Turkish (24%). Other languages included Urdu, Albanian, Dari, Somali and Bosnian with 4% each, Bengali with 3%, and Farsi, Indonesian and Malay with 2% each.

The census also provides information on English language proficiency of those who speak other languages at home. There were 93,974 people who provided such information and the greater majority (80%) had English proficiency at either ‘well’ or ‘very well’ levels, as figure 4 shows.

Place of Residence

Muslims were dispersed over the greater Melbourne metropolitan area, however the greatest number lived in Hume (18% of Victorian Muslims) followed by Moreland, Greater Dandenong, Brimbank, Casey, Whittlesea, Darebin, Wyndham, Hobsons Bay and Moonee Valley. The remaining 29% were spread out over 69 cities and shires of Victoria. Figure 5 gives the top ten Victorian Local Government Areas where Muslims resided and Figure 6 shows percent of residents in metropolitan Melbourne that were Muslim, by Local Government Area. The highest concentration was predictably Hume, where 13% of all residents were Muslim.

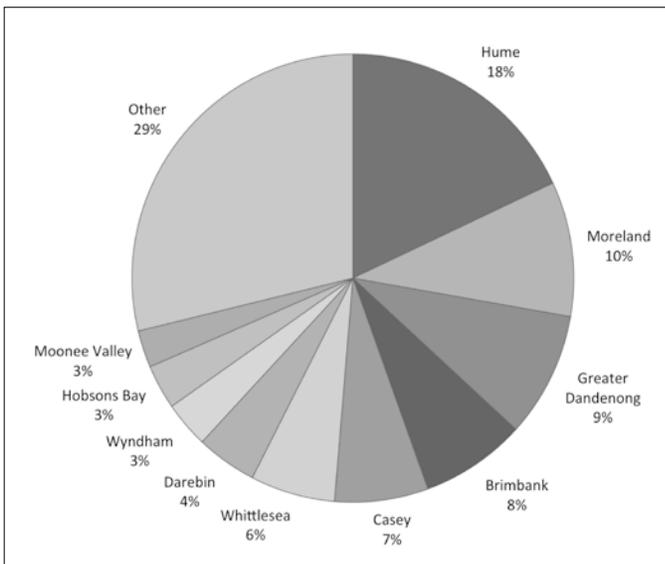


Figure 5. Victorian Local Government Areas where Muslims reside.

The greatest numbers of Muslims were found in the most disadvantaged socio-economic areas in the northern, south-eastern and western suburbs of Melbourne.³ There are a variety of reasons for Muslims predominantly residing in lower socio-economic areas, including the high proportion of migrants, particularly those who entered Australia through humanitarian programmes, who lack the financial resources to settle in more affluent areas. Because newer settling communities are building ‘from scratch’ without the benefit of the established resources and networks of older groups (such as the churches that North-West European communities brought with them after 1788), Muslims have tended to settle in more affordable areas. Then, there is the common preference of new migrants to settle in areas where relatives and other members of the same cultural and/or religious groups already reside facilitating their access to appropriate food and facilities, such as places of worship.⁴

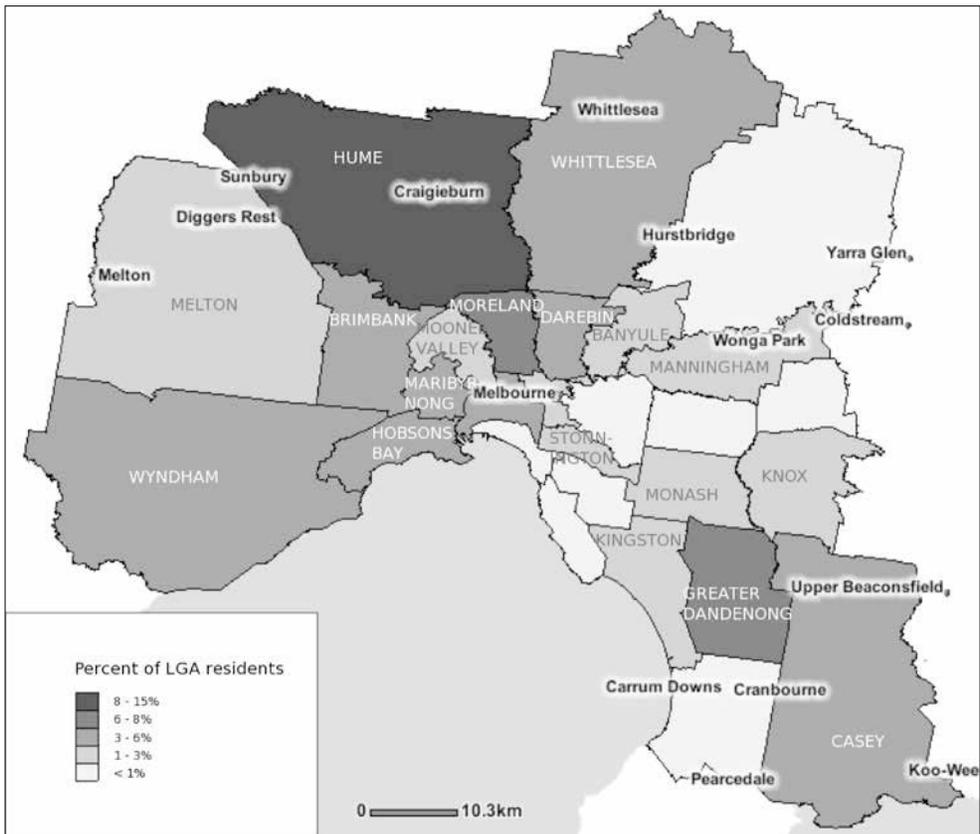


Figure 6. Percent of residents in metropolitan Melbourne that are Muslim, by Local Government Area. Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing, CData Online.