



## The Synergy of Muslim Communities Abroad in Preventing Islamic Radicalism (Evidence from Indonesia Muslim Community in Victoria, Australia)

**Ahmad Dahlan<sup>1\*</sup>; Akhmad Faozan<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>State Institute on Islamic Studies Purwokerto, Indonesia  
[ahmaddahlan@uinsaizu.ac.id](mailto:ahmaddahlan@uinsaizu.ac.id)

### Abstract

IMCV (Indonesian Muslim Community in Victoria) was founded in 1997. Its existence and activities have been widely published in print and online media. However, these publications have yet to present IMCV as an organization that synergizes in counteracting radical Islamic ideology. The existence of IMCV is very strategic because its members are comprehensive and supported by several militant organizations, namely the young Indonesian generation in Australia, such as YIMSA (Young Islamic Muslim Students Association). This article found evidence of the synergy of IMCV as an Islamic organization of Indonesians in the state of Victoria will describe the synergy of IMCV in winning over Islamic radical ideas.

**Keywords:** *IMCV; the Islamic community; radicalism; victoria*

### A. Introduction

Australia is one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse nations. Australians identify with over 100 different faiths or religious traditions. There are over 300 languages spoken in Australian households (Australian Government, 2015: 4). Described around the 1750s is the earliest evidence of Muslim connections in Australia, which started from contact between Indonesian Muslim fishermen from South Sulawesi and indigenous people in Northern Australia (Mansouri, 2012; Fassa, 2015).

After World War II, the number of Muslims in Australia increased significantly, from an estimated 2,704 in 1947, to 22,311 in 1971 and 604,240 in 2016. Multiculturalism and a more expansionist economic program with a migration scheme developed in Australia gave rise to a wave of Arab migration, Lebanon,

Egypt and Syria, and more recently Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan, all of which add to the diversity of the Muslim community in Australia (Mansouri, 2020).

Most Muslims in Australia have multi-stereotyped socio-religious backgrounds. They are very diverse from various Islamic countries worldwide, and naturally, many Islamic streams are developing in Australia. Most Australian Muslims are Sunni, and a significant minority are Shia. Several streams (which are not popular in Indonesia), such as Bektashis, Alawis, and Druze, although only a small number develop (Fassa, 2015).

The data shows that the Muslim population in Australia is overgrowing but is very multicultural, originating from many countries, the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey, and Indonesia, and overgrowing in Sydney, New South Wales, and Melbourne, Victoria.

Melbourne is, apart from being a center for the development of Muslims as well as one of the cultural centers in the Victoria region. However, Melbourne was shocked by the Muslim group Benbrika Group (Melbourne), who carried out a terrorist act with actor Abdul Nacer Benbrika from Dallas (USA). In 2009, Benbrika and 6 of his followers were sentenced to 12 years by the Supreme Court for committing a terror attack on Melbourne's Crown Casino and bombing the MCG. They also terrorized civilians under the pretext of destroying infidels (The Sydney Morning Herald, 2009).

Vergani et al. from Deakin University, Australia explains that in terms of geopolitical concerns around the emergence of militants and transnational groups, Islam in western society has become a source of anxiety, fear, and suspicion. Then Vergani drew on this in Melbourne with the question of whether Islamic religiosity is a predictor for civic engagement and active citizenship among Muslims living in Melbourne, Australia. The findings show that organized religiosity can strongly predict civic engagement, countering discourses that condemn Islam as a source of social radicalization and disengagement (Vergani, 2017). This negative perception encourages Muslims in Indonesia in a community forum called the Indonesian Muslim Community in Victoria (IMCV) to feel challenged and become part of society to provide evidence that Indonesian Muslims are far from radical ideas that often lead to terrorism and destructively carry out terror in various acts especially bombings and suicide bombings.

The existence of IMCV is extensive and strategic in counteracting radical Islamic understanding for Muslims, especially Indonesian pilgrims who are active in IMCV activities in Victoria through various activities, political approaches, and general education in the form of Islamic studies, as well as special studies through deepening Islamic economic literacy it becomes exciting to write about in this article.

## **B. Method**

This research is field research conducted in October 2019. The research theme is the synergy of the Muslim community, who are members of the Indonesian Muslim Community in Victoria, in counteracting radical Islamic ideas through deepening Islamic economic literacy. Methods of data collection are done through observation, interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the IMCV core leaders at that time, the Chairperson, Teguh Iskanto, and other administrators such as Asroni Zubair, Ustad Subarja, Ustad Edward and IMCV congregation, namely Wildan, Naufal and Alfath, who were also YIMSA (Young Indonesian Muslim Student Association) administrators. All research activities are carried out in 3 IMCV secretariats in South Clayton, Melbourne City, and Laverton

## **C. Finding**

### **1. Brief History of IMCV**

IMCV (Indonesian Muslim Community in Victoria), or Indonesian Muslim organization in Victoria is a non-profit socio-religious organization dedicated to introducing Indonesian Muslims who live in the State of Victoria, Australia (Teguh Iskanto, interview, 2017).

IMCV was founded in 1997 by 6 study groups, namely the Brunswick Recitation, SAS Melbourne Recitation, LaTrobe Monash Indonesian Islamic Society (MIIS), Young Indonesian Muslim Students Association (YIMSA), and at-Taqwa which is now known as the Westall Recitation, located in the Clayton area. , South Victoria. The process leading up to the establishment of the IMCV was supported and sponsored by the Indonesian Consulate General in Melbourne (<http://imcv.org.au/about/>).

The existence of IMCV is fundamental in uniting Indonesian Muslims in Australia, especially those in the state of Victoria, in carrying out social-religious activities.

In development, IMCV is spread over three regions; West/North, Central, and South. The southern section is centered on the Westall Mosque (Central) at the Westall Mosque in one of IMCV centers in Melbourne, Australia. Address: 130 Rosebank Ave, Clayton South, VIC 3169. The central part is located at Surau Kita in Coburg, Melbourne City. At the same time, the western and northern areas are centered on Baitul Makmur, located at Laverton, Victoria, Australia (Teguh Iskanto, interview, 2017).

### **2. Social Politics of Religion in Melbourne Australia**

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world, with an area of approximately 7,682,300 square km. The country's capital is Canberra, located

between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with a coastline of 36,735 km. Australia consists of six states and ten territories under a federal government.

The state consists of New South Wales with capital in Sydney, Victoria with a capital in Melbourne, Queensland with a capital in Brisbane, South Australia with capital in Adelaide, Western Australia with capital in Perth and Tasmania with capital in Hobart.

While the territorial divisions consist of the Australian Capital Territory in Canberra, the Northern Australian Territory in Darwin, the Jarvis Bay Territory, Ashmore and Cartier Islands, Norfolk Island, Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, the Coral Sea Islands, Heard Island and the Australian Antarctic Territory ( <https://www.australia.com/en-id/facts/cities-states-territories.html>)

In the 2011 census, there were 476,290 Muslims in Australia, or around 2.2% of the Australian population. Islam is the third largest religion in Australia after Christianity and Buddhism.

Table 1  
List of Religions in Australia Census 2011

Religion	2011	
	Amount	%
Christian	13.150.670	61.1
Buddha	528.977	2.5
Islam	476.290	2.2
Hindu	275.535	1.3
Jewish	97.336	0.5
Other religions	168.196	0.8
No religion	4.796.786	22.3
Not mentioned	1.839.649	8.6
(Supplementary codes)	174.280	0.8
Total	21.507.719	1.652.432

From 2006 to 2011, Hinduism was the fastest-growing religion in Australia (an increase of 86%), but Islam also grew 39.9%. Based on the place or country where Australian Muslims were born, between 2006 and 2011, the number of

Australian Muslims born in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, India, and Saudi Arabia increased by around 81% from 67,826 to 123,089.

This increase was largely due to the arrival of new migrants from these Muslim countries under the Australian Government's various resettlement programs. Most of the migrants are in the economically active age group. Whereas the 35 countries where most Muslims are from have no census influence in those countries from 2006 and 2011.

Of the total Australian Muslim population, most are concentrated (nearly 70 percent) domiciled in Sydney and Melbourne (Kana, 2017). Thus, Melbourne is an exciting city for research on the socioeconomic and religious aspects of Muslims in Australia, especially the Indonesian Muslim community.

Education-one, a site that reports a lot on the lives of Muslim communities in Australia, explains that there are approximately 15,000 Indonesian Muslims in Australia, and 70 percent of them live in Melbourne, or around 12,000 people (Kana, 2017).

In Australia, some of the most prominent Islamic organizations are the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), Lebanese Muslim Association, Australian National Imams Council, and Darulfatwa – Islamic High Council of Australia.

Meanwhile, in Victoria, many socio-religious organizations significantly encourage dedication and public trust in the Islamic community. Several organizations have this role: the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) and the Islamic Coordinating Council for Victoria (ICCV).

## **D. Discussion**

### **1. Islamic Radicalism**

The term radical Islam as a global movement has gained popularity since the September 11 attacks (known as 9/11), namely a series of four coordinated suicide attacks on several targets in New York City and Washington, D.C. in 2001, then succeeded in destroying the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City which caused the WTC building to collapse within two hours, impacting around 3,000 people killed in the attack.

Mozaffari explained that since the September 9/11 2011 tragedy, the use of the word 'Islamism' has increased among politicians and journalists worldwide, but it connotes an opposing movement. On the other hand, radical Islam is considered by some Muslims as a movement against the evils of modernity/modernization by returning to the roots of Islamic politics, namely the ideal Rashidun City State (Khulafah Rosyidin 632-661 AD), which became

known as the Islamic caliphate system. This state based on the Islamic system (Mozaffari, 2007).

Then the study of Islamic radicalism was used as Western political propaganda to be fought, especially against al-Qaeda, the organization behind all radical Islamic movements. An analyst close to al-Qaeda explains;

[...] al-Qaeda has, and always had, a specific aim: to arouse the sleeping body of the Islamic Nation – a billion Muslims worldwide – to fight against Western power and the contaminations of Western culture. In support of this aim, the 9/11 attacks were designed ‘to force the Western snake to bite the sleeping body, and wake it up (Schmid, 2011: 3).

Ömer Taspınar (Professor of National Security Studies at the National War College) explained that the polarized debate about the underlying causes of violent extremism in the Islamic world has occurred among western policymakers, analysts and academics since the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In general, two main views have emerged. On the one hand, the center-left argues that the fight against the root causes of terrorism must prioritize social and economic development. The education and economic empowerment as the best antidote to radicalization and terrorist recruitment. Since poverty and ignorance often breed radicalism, socioeconomic development is an effective antidote.

The second group of analysts strongly rejects this correlation between socioeconomic deprivation and terrorism. The logic is simple: most terrorists are neither poor nor uneducated. The majority seemed to come from middle-class, ordinary backgrounds. Terrorism is therefore considered almost exclusively as a 'security threat' with no clear socioeconomic roots or link to dispossession. Not surprisingly, this second group defines the fight against Islamic terrorism with a singular focus on state actors, jihadist ideology, counter-intelligence, and acts of coercion (Taspınar, 2009).

All radicals do not end up as terrorists, and only some radicals dare to commit terrorism. Radicalism still has a social dimension that is different from terrorism. Terrorism is not a social phenomenon, and there is no 'terrorist' society. A radicalized society is permeated by collective frustration, humiliation, and deprivation relative to hope. This radicalized social habitat is easily exploited by terrorists (Taspınar, 2009).

## **2. Islamic Radicalism in Melbourne**

Most Australian Muslims are Sunni, and a significant minority are Shia. Several streams (which are not popular in Indonesia), such as Bektashis, Alawis,

and Druze, although only a small number develop. The Australian Muslim community can also be seen from the aspects of social organizations and associations, which can be classified into two groups:

First, Islamic organizations and associations that are not affiliated with or indicated by leftist or rightist (radical) Islamic ideology. Groups are divided into major and minor categories.

The major categories are collected in Islamic social organizations, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Lebanese Muslim Association, Australian National Imams Council, and Darul fatwa, Islamic High Council of Australia.

Minor categories such as Crescents of Brisbane, Islamic Community Milli Görüş Australia, Islamic Friendship Association of Australia, Islamic Information and Services Network of Australasia, Islamic Museum of Australia, Islamic Research and Educational Academy, Islamic Women's Welfare Council, Muslim Aid Australia, Muslim Business Network, Muslim Community Reference Group, Muslim Women's Association, Muslim Women's National Network Australia, and National Zakat Foundation.

Second, it is these Islamic groups whose point of view can be said to contain radical and militant elements. Among them are the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah Association, the Global Islamic Youth Centre, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and the Islamic Youth Movement. Meanwhile, the militants consist of "Ahmed Y" group, Cheikho group (Sydney), Lashkar-e-Taiba, Mantiqi 4 (Jemaah Islamiyah), Al-Shabaab, Syrian syndicate, and Benbrika group (Melbourne).

The Benbrika group led by Abdul Nacer Benbrika, born in Al-Jazair but a resident of Dallas (USA) and migrated to Australia in 1989, is a group considered by the Australian Government and society to be radical and terrorist.

In 2019, the Muslim group Benbrika committed a terrorist act with actor Abdul Nacer Benbrika from Dallas (USA). Benbrika and 6 of his followers were sentenced to 12 years by the Supreme Court for committing a terror attack on the Melbourne Crown Casino and bombing the MCG. They also terrorized civilians under the pretext of destroying infidels. 12 Benbrika was also jailed for 15 years, but in 2021, an Australian court will continue to extend Benbrika's detention (News Indonesia, 10 February 2021).

In 2002, the Australian Government, led by John Howard issued the Australian Anti-Terrorism Act 2002, revised in 2005, in which the anticipation of terrorism was calm. Still, the Federal Police could do "Shoot to Kill" if it is endangered.

Thus, in Melbourne, a group of Muslims is considered to spread the ideology of radicalism and terrorism with evidence that they carried out the

bombing, which Nacer Banbrika directly led. Even when Banbrika was imprisoned, this group carried out terror acts in Sydney and Melbourne in 2009 (Caldwell, 2011).

### **3. IMCV in Preventing Islamic Radicalism**

#### **a. Development of Indonesian Nationalism**

Nationalism development is the main program instilled by IMCV for members and congregations who come from new Indonesian citizens or permanent residents (WNI residents who have long lived in Australia), or who have moved citizens to continue to make Indonesia a part of nature, character, character nation.

It can be seen in the establishment of the IMCV, which continues to involve Indonesian institutions in Victoria. Its cooperation with the Indonesian Embassy, represented by the Indonesian Consulate General in Melbourne, was discovered at the establishment of the IMCV. It proves that the establishment of IMCV is part of strengthening Indonesian Islam in Victoria to create open Islamic da'wah through publication in various media so that every public can access and provide an assessment of IMCV. IMCV is an organization that is open to all components or people who want to join and work together in building IMCV in various religious or social activities (Tegus Iskanto, Ahmad Subardja, interview, 2017).

The best moment for IMCV's synergy with the Indonesian Embassy occurred in 2006 during the "The First Indonesian Muslim Conference" held on 23-25 September 2016 at the Bell City Hotel, Melbourne". As described by Tanti Yulianingsih, Neil Siregar held the event at IMCV. The event was also attended by the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Australia, namely Nadjib Riphath Kesoema. The congress shows that minority religions such as Islam are respected in Kangaroo Country. It can be seen from the permission given to hold the first Muslim conference in Australia.

Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Nadjib Riphath Kesoema explained to Liputan6.com. that the activities of the Muslim Conference were an extraordinary initiative, as well as to show the Australian public that these were Indonesian Muslims.

This conference is to answer about Islam which is full of hospitality at a time when Muslims are in the spotlight and are sometimes considered a threat by some people who are against Islam. It is the face of Indonesian Islam, which is full of peace and love, and brotherhood with others regardless of where they come from (Yulianingsih, 2016).



The congress was attended by approximately 200 people and received appreciation from many parties. Everyone was enthusiastic. Even the Head of AIMFACT Canberra named, Marpuddin Aziz traveled 700 km in eight hours by driving a car to attend the congress (*Dakta online*, 26 September 2016).

#### b. Non-Indonesian Community Development

Non Indonesian Community development is an effort to apply to a Muslim community of foreign nationals (WNA) active in IMCV sessions, and most of them are Middle Eastern Muslims. The development carried out is to maintain the integrity of the Muslim community even though they are of different nationalities and always show Islam that is *rahmatan lil alamin*, mercy to all nature (Teguh Iskanto, Ustads Edward, *interview* 2017).

Table 2

The Australian Muslim population is based on Country of Birth Year 2011

Country of Birth	Muslims	%
Australia	179.080	37.6
Lebanese	33.560	7.0
Pakistan	26.466	5.6
Afghanistan	26.043	5.5
Turkey	25.311	5.3
Bangladesh	23.665	5.0
Iraq	15.395	3.2
Iran	12.686	2.7
Indonesia	12.240	2.6
India	10.125	2.1
Saudi Arabia	8.709	1.8
Bosnia & Herzegovina	7.603	1.6
Malaysia	7.225	1.5
Fiji	7.191	1.5
Somalia	5.424	1.1
Egypt	4.716	1.0
Singapore	3.425	0.7
Cyprus	3.148	0.7
Sudan	3.096	0.7
Syrian	2.951	0.6
South Africa	2.827	0.6
New Zealand	2.687	0.6

FYROM	2.512	0.5
Kuwait	2.430	0.5
Jordan	2.260	0.5
Sri Lanka	2.257	0.5
Ethiopia	2.016	0.4
English	1.714	0.4
United Arab Emirates	1.527	0.3
Eritrea	1.520	0.3
Libya	1.323	0.3

Communitive Development is very strategic in conducting collaboration and thinking about the condition of Muslims, who are a minority, and sometimes there are several obstacles in access to Government. Because Muslims often come from countries where common law is not a legal system, they are not familiar with the very different Australian concepts of law and administration of justice (Hassan, 2008; Esmaili, 2015; Neighbor, 2011). Also, many Muslims in Australia are marginalized from an economic perspective (Hassan, 2014).

The importance of Community Development is also to reduce the concern of the majority public towards extremist movements, militancy, and terrorism which are blindly aimed at the entire Muslim community. Due to geopolitical concerns around the rise of militants and transnational groups, the place of Islam in western society has become a source of anxiety, fear, and suspicion (Vergani, et al., 2017).

### c. Openness to non-community

Openness to non-communities or non-Muslim communities aims to reduce Islamophobia which generally occurs in Western society, including Australia (Teguh Iskanto, interview 2017).

Islamophobia exists in some Australian political parties as the growth of Islam continues to grow in Australia, which is still Islamophobic. Reported by Tempo.com (17 May 2019), sourced from ABC Australia, the results of an interview with Adel Salman from ICV (Islamic Council of Victoria). He said and looked at a list of minor political parties in Australia that were overtly Islamophobic; One Nation, Love Australia or Leave, Conservative National Party, together with Australia Party and United Australia, Australian Conservatives, Australia First, Australian Protectionist Party, The Yellow Vest Australia (formerly known as

Australian Liberty Alliance), they call for an end to "Islamization" in Australia.

IMCV conducts various open house activities at 3 secretariats in Westall Coburg, Sura Kita Melbourne City, and Baitul Makmur Laverton or organizes events in public places, especially on Islamic holidays and before the month of Ramadhan (Teguh Iskanto, interview 2017).

Reported by ABC Australia published by detikNews (online), Monday May 20, 2019 proves that IMCV is very strategic in providing examples of Indonesian Islam. The IMCV has received attention and recognition from the Victorian Parliament. A member of the Victorian Parliament, Meng Tak visited the IMCV board and was directly connected by IMCV President Haji Teguh Iskanto. Among the meeting results, the Victorian parliament will support IMCV to bring in ustadz from Indonesia to provide religious knowledge in mosques in Victoria, especially those under the auspices of IMCV.

It is in line with what was explained by the President of IMCV, Teguh Iskanto, that several Indonesian Muslim youth organizations under the auspices of IMCV, such as the Young Indonesian Muslim Students Association (YIMSA) and the Monash Indonesian Islamic Society (MIIS), are part of the effort to produce ustadz-ustadzah for the Indonesian Muslim community in Australia.

## **E. Conclusion**

The existence of IMCV as an Islamic community organization has a strong influence on empowering Muslims from Indonesia and non-Indonesia. Its existence in counteracting radical Islamic ideology can be seen from the activities carried out by IMCV. IMCV activities from the founding process until this research was carried out involved many Indonesian government institutions, such as the Consul General in Victoria, the Indonesian Embassy for Australia, and institutions in Indonesia in coming to the IMCV Secretariat.

Many external parties who respect and are interested in IMCV, especially from the print and online media, including members of the Victorian parliament, have visited IMCV.

From the several activities carried out by IMCV, it concluded that IMCV is very successful and strategic in helping Indonesian people who have a spirit of nationalism, are vital in Islamic teachings, and are free from radical views

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