Approaching P/CVE through building trust and meaningful relationships with Muslim communities

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Abstract

This paper examines the level of trust among Muslims in Australia towards the Government and its institutions. It places particular emphasis on the government's approach to countering violent extremism programs and examines whether a lack of trust negatively impacts cooperation and engagement with the government and P/CVE programs. There is limited research exploring the issue of trust from the perspective of Muslims and how this impacts cooperation and engagement with the government. A survey of Australian Muslims (N= 505) that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative components was used. Inferential statistics (correlations) and thematic analysis were utilised to assess the data. Research suggests that trust is crucial to assisting in the success of P/CVE programs and counter-terrorism efforts. The findings show high levels of distrust towards the government and its institutions, which has flow-on effects, particularly in countering violent extremism. This strongly suggests that P/CVE programs should be approached from a trust-based and relationship-building perspective. Recommendations are made at the end of this paper on how to engage the Muslim community on the basis of building trust and meaningful relationships.

Introduction

After September 11, the government's engagement with the Muslim community in the context of preventing and countering violent extremism has been assessed as ineffectual (Jones, 2019; Roude, 2017, p. 220). Structural factors, such as foreign policy, negative political rhetoric (e.g. stereotyping and marginalising discourse), negative and inflammatory media framing of Muslims (Charkawi, Dunn & Bliuc, 2020), perceived procedural unfairness (e.g. targeted legislation), and perceived discrimination against Muslim minorities living in the West (Hafez & Mullins, 2015) have led to mistrust between the Muslim community and the government (Charkawi et al., 2021). There is a sense of feeling misjudged and stereotyped based on

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prejudice and false media portrayals correlating Islam with terrorism (Ewart et al., 2017; Rane et al., 2020). Politically, Muslims report feeling targeted through aggressive counter-terrorism legislation and boosted police powers (Cherney & Murphy, 2016), and some researchers have viewed Australia's response to counter-terrorism as "hyper-legislation" (Ananian-Welsh & Hardy, 2021). They also report feeling like they are "suspects" and "under siege" through harsh laws and greater scrutiny and the belief that P/CVE programs are "specifically targeting Islamic groups designed to isolate and label the Muslim community" (Roude, 2017). Internal dynamics (i.e. non-structural), such as personal, socio-economical and cultural facets, have also contributed to shaping the current low level of cooperation and disengagement with P/CVE programs (Awan, 2012; Briggs, 2010). Taken together, these dynamics can lead to distrust between the Muslim community and the government and its institutions (Al-hammadin, et al., 2023; Charkawi, et al., 2020). Awan (2012) also noted that these facets can impact the willingness to cooperate or disengage with P/CVE programs. Appeals for more cooperation from the Muslim communities have not been successful (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). This has caused a significant obstacle to the success of P/CVE programs and counter-terrorism efforts, more broadly (Cherney & Murphy, 2016), eroding the legitimacy of the police as an institution and the legal system (Cherney, 2018). If citizens trust institutions and perceive them to be genuine, then they are more likely to accept and support the actions of authorities than those who do not (Beetham, 2013).

The issue of violent extremism and radicalisation is complex. However, research conducted in the UK suggests that establishing political trust and fostering police engagement with Muslim communities can play a crucial role in mitigating the risks associated with radicalisation (Hassan et al., 2021). Similar findings have also been observed in Australia. Specifically, when the police adopt a procedurally just approach to engaging with Muslim communities, it tends to increase the willingness of Muslim individuals to collaborate with the police in counter-terrorism efforts (McGarrity & Blackbourn, 2019). Some studies suggest that cooperation is enhanced when community-based policing approaches are adopted as part of the efforts to counter violent extremism (Spalek, 2010).

While there is a functional difference between the police and the government, there is evidence that trust in government and trust in police agencies are interconnected. Further, the

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actions of agencies will have an impact on the government, and the literature on trust in government has insights into government programs. This article, however, also looks at trust in police agencies and how this impacts P/CVE. Further, police and law enforcement agencies at a state level are tasked primarily with P/CVE responsibilities. The New South Wales Police and Victorian Police, for example, have been actively involved in running P/CVE initiatives (e.g. the NSW Police Counter-Radicalisation Community Engagement Initiative and the Network for Intervention and Tailored Engagement). In contrast, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) has established Community Liaison Teams (CLTs) designed to engage with disengaged Muslims and build trust within the community (Murphy et al., 2015; Cherney, 2017; Al-Hammadin et al., 2023). While the AFP's role involves community engagement rather than directly running P/CVE programs per se, fostering trust and building relationships is crucial because successful P/CVE programs at the state level will depend on community cooperation and engagement from all agencies. Hence, given the likely potential for police agencies to erode community trust, they too feature as a subject of this study, and whether there is an impact on the willingness to cooperate with P/CVE programs.

It is also important to note that some of the key reasons that cause distrust in the government (e.g., the perceived discrimination of Muslims) may lead to catastrophic outcomes. Discrimination, for example, has been identified as a key finding in multiple studies incorporating 172 countries between 1970 and 2006, linking discrimination with higher rates of domestic terrorism (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Two sets of Pew survey data found that perceived discrimination towards Muslims living in the West is significantly associated with the attitude that suicide bombing is justified (Victoroff et al.,2012). While this study is not specifically about discrimination, it is important to note it as a point of distrust. Further, the media's role in negative portrayals of particular groups can enhance and solidify existing biases and attitudes that are linked to the formation of such stereotypes (Gilens, 1996; Maher, 2009). Negative media portrayals can increase the levels of anxiety, distrust, fear, and alarm (Cherney et al., 2018). Scholars in the P/CVE space have long argued that negative portrayals of Muslims enhance the view that Muslims are violent and pose a threat to national security (Cherney et al., 2018). Further, negative political rhetoric is negatively associated with social harmony (Charkawi et al., 2020), a point recently echoed by the boss of the

Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), who said, "As I have said previously, words matter. ASIO has seen direct connections between inflamed language and inflamed community tensions" (Coorey, 2023).

Certainly, the impact of distrust on cooperation and engagement with government-driven approaches to countering violent extremism and their programs remains a gap. Likewise, there is little known and little awareness regarding the specific factors that lead to a small take-up in P/CVE programs. While some studies have researched the link between the Muslim community and law enforcement in counterterrorism settings, research on the viewpoints of Muslims is limited (Brouillette-Alarie et al., 2022; Al-hammadin et al., 2023). In a systematic review conducted in 2022 (Brouillette-Alarie et al.,2022) on primary and secondary prevention programs, those programs based on community policing reported positive insights from facilitators but not those of participants who held trust issues with the police and feelings of discrimination. Another gap that persists is the specific reasons for distrust in government that lead to a lack of cooperation and engagement in P/CVE approaches and programs. Further, few studies, for example, have assessed the impact and erosion of trust as a consequence of negative political rhetoric and adverse media framing (Charkawi, Dunn & Bliuc, 2020; Al-hammadin et al., 2023. The study by Taylor (2018) implied that a lack of community trust that is aggravated by labelling people as risky or trusted leads to decreased engagement and cooperation with PREVENT as well as other P/CVE programs. Vertigans (2010) holds that P/CVE policies have weakened the potentiality of Muslim cooperation and willingness with police agencies. While Shanaah (2022) confirmed features of reduced willingness to take action against Islamist extremism in the face of alienation, it was not conclusive whether this led to a lack of cooperation in P/CVE. Innes el. al (2007) argue that the loss of trust between Muslims and government agencies decreases the willingness of the community to share intelligence with the police.

The paper is structured into five main areas. It begins with a review of the relevant literature (Background section) and then provides a detailed explanation of the methodology. This is followed by reporting the study's results. In the Discussion and Conclusion section, the implications of the findings are discussed, with a particular focus on applications to policy.

Background

In the world of modern governance, the relationship between trust and the efficacy of government initiatives that require community participation, particularly the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE), is important for effective government and policy implementation (OECD, 2017; Evans et al., 2019); thus, it also represents an important area of study. Trust should not be thought of as a philosophical concept but rather as a key aspect of security strategies, public policy, and social harmony. An erosion of trust between communities and their government and institutions can have detrimental consequences (Miranti & Evans, 2017). In explaining what trust in practice looks like, Grueber and Mello (2022) suggest that trust in government goes beyond government legitimacy (e.g. a leader has a right to lead) and instead "signifies a community's belief that the government is working in good faith to do 'right' by residents and that it is capable of delivering on that intent". (p.4). Political trust was also conceptualised as whether citizens trust those in power to do the right thing and keep their promises in a just and honest way (Kettle, 2017).

Further, trust is crucial to any functioning society and is considered especially crucial for cooperation (Luhmann, 1979; Nissenbaum, 2001). If there is trust, there is an increase in participation (Tainter, 1988). A central hypothesis resulting from the theoretical literature is that individuals are more likely to be trustful if they perceive institutions to be reasonable and just. This view is anchored in the theories of procedural fairness that contend that trust and cooperation are enhanced with institutions perceived to be fair and equitable (Tyler, 1990). Empirical studies have revealed this is critical for government policy and law enforcement (Lind & Tyler, 1998). Another hypothesis extracted from the literature is that honesty and transparency enhance trust. Rawlins (2008) held that when institutions give clear, honest and timely communication, trust is more likely to develop. Empirical research supports this proposition, revealing that open communication decreases hesitation and suspicion, thus promoting greater trust with those involved (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). In the context of government and authorities, open communication concerning measures and policies around P/CVE will likely lessen distrust and enhance cooperation. Further, trust can be swayed by the broader socio-political context. Political trust theory posits that trust in

authority or institutions is considerably fashioned by the political context and actions of political leaders (Citrin & Muste, 1999). Political leaders also play a role in social identity that may, in turn, impact trust and cooperation (Charkawi et al., 2020). Researchers have long studied identity and how it connects one to society at large (Burke & Stets, 2009). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987; see also Hornsey, 2008), the greater a group is marginalised, the more likely they are to utilise social categorisation (i.e. in-group, out-group), which can further harden distinctions between in-groups and out-groups (Sageman, 2017). There is evidence that structural alienation in the shape of negative political discourse and negative media framing can aggravate this and create a sense of non-belonging and alienation from others and key institutions (Aly, 2007; Charkawi et al., 2020).

Cherney (2018) holds that if the government executes engagement with the community correctly, even within the context of counterterrorism, it can help generate greater levels of trust, leading to advanced police capabilities for gathering intelligence. The ramifications of a lack of trust are severe, and trust is an essential facet of intelligence gathering to prevent a terrorist attack (Hartley, 2019). A study aimed at assessing the efforts of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and their connection to the community through the police Community Liaison Team (CLT) revealed that engaging the community by adhering to commendable principles (e.g. goodwill, moral character and ethical behaviour) can help develop trust from the Muslim community (Al-hammadin et al., 2023). The study involved young Muslims, community leaders and representatives but was limited to the relationship with the police. This study, however, differs in that it has a broader focus seeking the Australian community's views towards the government, institutions, policies and the reasons for their trust/distrust.

Similarly, research by Bull and Rane (2019) focuses on the views of young Muslims in Queensland and their engagement with the counter-radicalisation narratives and prevalent discussion points surrounding radicalisation. The study revealed that public discourse that is concentrated on defeating extremism could further ostracise young Muslims and limit their opportunities for engagement with P/CVE programs. A notable point was the negative portrayal of Muslims in segments of the media depicting Muslims as a threat to community cohesion and underscoring the religion as a determinant or trigger to radicalisation (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). Bull and Rane's study was restricted to Southwest Queensland. In the

current study, the sample was Muslims from across Australia.

Until 2021, there had not been any ethnographic research undertaken in Australia with Muslim groups not willing to cooperate and assess the reasons why they are disinclined to participate and cooperate (Jones, 2022). One notable point among the findings was the prevailing distrust and its ramifications on developing rapport between what Jones (2022) called "hard-to-reach" Muslim communities like Ahl as-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ) – the peak Salafi organisation in Australia and other outsiders to the mainstream traditions (Jones, 2022). He held that once respectful and meaningful relationships were built after a short period of time, cooperation and engagement ensued. Another point was that ASWJ actioned a willingness to widen their support networks and call for youth participation. While this group is not part of this study, the notable link between an erosion of trust and a lack of cooperation and engagement is noted. Fisk and Cherney (2017) held that engagement between the government and the community is connected to *trust in government*. Cherney and Murphy (2016) also highlighted that a lack of cooperation and engagement between the community and the government can be related to the absence of genuine engagement (e.g. community input) concerning the objectives and benefits of P/CVE to the community.

Finally, Ali, Murphy, and Cherney (2021) explored the perspectives of Muslims in Australia concerning counter-terrorism measures and what impact they have on their assessments of police legitimacy. Specifically, they looked at how perceptions are shaped by representations (e.g. Muslim police officers), bounded-authority violations (e.g. using controversial powers like that in CVE) and procedural injustice. There are a few points to note about their study. The focus was specifically on those three main areas that influence attitudes. This study, however, will extend the focus on police and community connections in relation to P/CVE. While police and community connections are essential to the discussion, this study will focus on how a lack of trust in the Australian government and its institutions more broadly impacts cooperation and engagement with approaches to CVE and P/CVE programs.

The main hypothesis to be tested in the current research is that lower levels of trust are expected to lead to lower levels of willingness to engage. In the context of P/CVE, distrust of government and its institutions diminishes cooperation and

engagement in P/CVE programs. Numerous dynamics affect trust in this space. We expect that both specific structural dynamics (e.g., government measures, foreign policy, negative political rhetoric, police law enforcement) and non-structural (e.g., personal, social) factors are associated with trust in this area.

Current study

The main aims of the study are to a) determine the levels of trust towards the Australian government and its institutions (e.g. Australian Federal Police) in a general sample of Muslims living in Australia, b) if low levels of trust are detected, identify possible reasons for this, and c) assess how (low) trust is connected to cooperation and engagement with the Australian government's approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and P/CVE programs.

This study is designed to include both quantitative and qualitative aspects by using closed and open questions. In other words, the study seeks to determine the levels of trust among Muslims towards the government and its institutions in the study's sample, identify the bases of trust (or mistrust) and assess if a lack of trust may impact the willingness to cooperate and engage in P/CVE programs.

Methods

Participants. An online survey with 505 participants was conducted in June 2023 using the Qualtrics platform. The design of the survey utilised the concurrent nested research design (Creswell, 2009) using 45 closed-ended quantitative questions and supplemented with 1 open-ended qualitative question to obtain a greater description from respondents. An introduction to the survey introducing the authors preceded an opening statement about the survey. The opening statement of the survey also provided a thorough explanation defining the terms P/CVE as well as programs designed to prevent and counter violent extremism. Participants were informed that the survey would not ask about their private information (i.e. name or date of birth). All respondents needed to be over the age of eighteen, affirm consent, select if they

were Muslim/non-Muslim and whether they reside in Australia. Participants not meeting these criteria were excluded from the study. The sample group was recruited from the Australian Muslim community. Muslim organisations across Australia shared the survey with their members. The sample size of 505 participants provides more than sufficient power to draw valid conclusions about the hypothesised relationship between variables. The G*Power tool (Faul et al., 2007) was used to determine that a minimum of 60 participants were needed for the intended assessment. The calculator's input parameters included the variables for the intended tests, such as bivariate testing, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and descriptive statistics.

Data collection. The survey consisted of separate sections, each with a specific focus. After the introduction (Section 1), Section 2 was positioned on the theme of 'trust' and comprised closed-ended questions on the Australian Government, Australian Parliament, politicians, handling of terrorism, and related questions concerning the actions of the Australian Government surrounding violent extremism and the community. Participants then had the option to provide text-based answers to an open-ended question on the aspects that influenced their trust/distrust in the Australian Government. This text-based (open-ended) question is important to this study's qualitative section, as outlined below, given that it would provide further clarification and the reasons for one's trust/distrust. This was followed by questions to indicate one's degree of trust in government institutions, such as the Federal Police, ASIO, State Police Force, Corrective Services, Border Force and the Department of Immigration. Section 3 examined cooperation and participation, including the perceived need for P/CVE programs. Section 4 included closed-ended questions about Australia's foreign policy and the Middle East, followed by Section 5 on perceptions of injustice. Section 6 asked about identity and belonging, while Section 7 focused on religiosity. The survey concluded by collecting information on the participants' demographic background, such as age, education, level of English, and employment.

Measures

Most of the scales used in the survey have been adapted from scales used in previous research (e.g., Charkawi et al., 2020).

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Trust. Questions included trust in the Australian government, authorities and government institutions. (e.g. 1-The Australian government can be trusted, 2-The Australian government's handling of terrorism has marginalised the Australian Muslim community), all of which were measured by five items based on more extended measures of political trust (e.g., Abrams and Travaglino, 2018; Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2016). A 5-point response scale from 1 – Strongly agree to 5 – Strongly disagree was provided for participants. It is important to note that questions on the Australian government and institutions were asked separately to avoid confusion among participants.

Perceptions of injustice. This scale also includes a 5-point response scale from 1 – Strongly agree to 5 – Strongly disagree and includes questions like 1-Australians from an Anglo background (i.e., of British descent) enjoy an advantaged position in our society and 2-Counter-terrorism laws are fair for everyone. These are based on questions from Blair, Dunn, Kamp and Alam (2017).

Foreign Policy. Questions included a level of agreement set to a 5-point response scale from 1 – Strongly agree to 5 – Strongly disagree. Examples include: 1- I think Australia would be better off if it adopted a different foreign policy towards the Middle East).

There is strong justification for the inclusion of foreign policy and perception of injustice in the survey when it concerns trust. There are studies in the literature that justify the inclusion of Western foreign policy towards the Middle East and perceptions of injustice in the survey (see Kull, 2011; Jamal et al., 2015; Roude, 2017; Bar, 2004; Githen-Mazer, 2012; Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Godefroidt (2022) held that Western foreign policy in the Arab regions affects the attitudes of Muslims across the world who self-identify as one 'religious' community (Charkawi, et al., 2024). Certainly, Muslims are not a monolithic group, but they share a religious identity in terms of their faith and a social identity concerning particular experiences and perceptions. Further, this research does not suggest homogeneity of Muslims but instead seeks to analyse commonalities in perceptions and experiences that come about from common social identities. Although there are internal differences, this shared identity has implications concerning aspects of trust, perceptions and experiences that concern this research. Hafez and Mullins (2015) noted the concerning belief among many Muslims in Europe who blame Western foreign policies as the root cause of violent extremism.

Concerning perceptions of injustice, Cherney (2018) noted the erosion of trust in the legal system and police agencies on the back of Muslims' perception of being targeted by P/CVE laws and disproportionate police powers. Githens-Mazer (2012) held that addressing perceptions of injustice can promote a sense of trust between communities and police law-enforcement agencies. Certainly, how individuals view aggression can be determined by government policies and community links. Research by Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) indicated the negative impacts of perceptions of injustice and social exclusion in enhancing support for extremist groups.

Cooperation indicators and engagement. Questions included a level of agreement set to a 5-point response scale from 1 – Strongly agree to 5 – Strongly disagree. Example questions are 1- I agree with the need for P/CVE programs within my community if needed, 2- I would advocate for P/CVE programs within my community if needed), and 3- Organisations who accept money for P/CVE programs are sell-outs. The nature of the questions about warning others about P/CVE programs and the perceptions of organisations accepting money for programs as sell-outs serve as proxies for measuring cooperation with P/CVE programs. While the questions on cooperation provide useful indicators of attitudes towards cooperation, they do not measure cooperative behaviours. Future research could benefit from more direct measures of cooperation, such as participation rates in P/CVE programs or other forms of active engagement.

Identity. Items capturing identity have been mostly based on work by Blair et al., (2017). We assessed them as being suitable for this study as they , have been previously used in this field of research (see Cherney, 2018).

Data coding for thematic analysis for the qualitative data

In the open-ended question of the survey asking what led to trust/distrust in the Australian government, there were 414 responses. The text data were exported directly from Qualtrics and uploaded to the qualitative analysis software NVivo. The participant comments were coded into key themes. Themes and sub-themes relating to the responses were identified using an approach based on reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and in particular, an inductive approach to categorise the data into key themes. The inductive

approach allows the coding and theme development to be directed by the content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, the data generates the key themes and sub-themes. Although the deductive approach allows the code and theme development to be directed by existing concepts drawn from the objectives of the study, and there is evidence in the literature around the key themes that lead to distrust, using an inductive approach allows for further and unanticipated themes to arise. It is important to note that most of the issues (e.g. negative media portrayal) are well established by previous research, so we did not report on them. Instead, we focus on the themes and sub-themes relating to the question of what led to trust/distrust in the Australian government.

There were six phases of thematic analysis adopted as part of the coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This sequencing has been described in previous studies (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) and they include familiarisation with the data, coding the data, generating initial themes, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining and naming themes and producing the report. These steps were carefully followed to allow for a precise and repeatable categorisation of the coding.

Analysis of quantitative data

The survey collected 505 responses for the closed-ended questions. Responses in the quantitative section were transferred into an SPSS database, and the data was used to test the hypothesis – i.e., determine the potential impact on cooperation and engagement with the government approaches to countering violent extremism and P/CVE programs.

Results

The results section first presents the findings based on the quantitative data, followed by the findings of the thematic analysis of the qualitative data. This approach is derived from previous reports of mixed-method research (McWey et al., 2009).

Findings of the Quantitative Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses: descriptive statistics The sample comprised mostly male respondents (53% Table 1), 45% female, and English-speaking (67%). The ages of participants varied, with a combined 64% from the ages 26-45 and 20% for those between the ages of 18-25. A significant majority (86%) answered extremely important to the question of religious importance.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Gender	Age	Main language spoken at home	Employment status	Importance of religion
Male: 53%	18-25: 20%	English: 67%	Employed: 67%	Extremely important: 86%
Female: 45%	26-35: 32%	Arabic: 19%	Unemployed: 1.7%	Very important: 9.8%
Prefer not to say: 2%	36-45: 32%	Hindi 1.1%	Self-employed: 17.4%	Moderately important: 3.0%
	46:55: 11%	Punjabi .2%	Retired: 1.3%	Slightly important: .6%
		Urdu 5.4%	Not in labour force: 0.4%	Not important: .4%
		Other: 6.9%	Home duties: 4.9%	
		Turkish: .6%	Student: 7.3%	
		Pashto: .4%		

General distrust of government. As shown in Table 2, more than half (60%) of respondents reported that they do not trust the Australian government, and even more (70%) reported that they believe that the government does not care about them. Also, 63% of the respondents believe that most members of the Parliament are dishonest, with nearly 90% of Australian Muslims surveyed reporting beliefs that the Australian government's handling of terrorism has led to a sense of distrust between the Muslim community and the Australian government. Most respondents (85%) in the sample agree that the Australian government's handling of terrorism has marginalised the Australian Muslim community. Also, 70% of the respondents reported they did not believe that the Australian government was working hard enough to establish trust.

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Table 2: Trust in the Australian Government							
	1.1 The Australian government can be trusted.	1.2 Most members of the Australian parliament can be trusted to defend the interests of their constituents.	1.3 Politicians are mainly in politics for their own benefit and not for the benefit of the community.	1.4 Most members of the Australian parliament are honest.	1.5 The Australian Government's handling of terrorism has marginalised the Australian Muslim Community.	1.6 The Australian Government's handling of terrorism has led to a sense of distrust between the Muslim community and the Australian Government.	1.7 The Australian Government has worked hard to build trust with the Australian Muslim community.
Agree	13%	15%	69%	7.5%	**85%**	**89%**	8.6%
Neither	27%	22%	20%	30%	9%	7%	22%
Disagree	60%	63%	11%	63%	6%	3.6	70%

Foreign Policy. Descriptive statistics indicate that concerns with foreign policy were very high in the sample, with the majority of respondents reporting strong concerns in this area. As Table 3 shows, many respondents (81%) believe Australia should adopt a different foreign policy towards the Middle East. Likewise, where it concerns P/CVE, a substantial number (71%) agreed that the Australian approach to foreign policy complicates the task of addressing P/CVE. Many respondents (74%) also report that Australia's foreign policy angers them. Australian Muslims in this survey were overwhelmingly of the view that Australia's foreign policy was problematic, alienating and injurious to Australian Muslims, and jeopardised the success of P/CVE programs. The qualitative commentary seems to further confirm these survey findings.

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Table 3: Foreign Policy					
	6-1 I think Australia would be better off if it adopted a different foreign policy concerning its alliances (e.g. with the United States and Great Britain).	6-2 I think Australia would be better off if it adopted a different foreign policy towards the Middle East.	6-3 Australia's foreign policy has made Australia unsafe.	6-4 Australia's foreign policy towards countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, makes the task of countering violent extremism more challenging.	6-5 Western foreign policy regarding the Middle East and Muslim countries results in feelings of anger within myself.
Agree	64%	**81%**	**51%**	71%	74%
Neither	27%	14%	34%	22%	20%
Disagree	9%	4%	14%	7%	6%

Concerning perceptions of injustice, which include double standards, perceived targeted application of the law, the view of giving an advantage to one group over another and the perception of being targeted based on faith, the percentages were significant across the board (see Table 4). For example, 94% of respondents said that counter-terrorism laws unfairly target Muslims.

Table 4: Perceptions of injustice								
	8-1 People from racial, ethnic or religious minority groups in Australia are portrayed in a negative light when terrorist acts occur	8-2 Australians from an Anglo background (i.e., of British descent) enjoy an advantaged position in our society	8-2 The faith of Islam suffers more scrutiny by politicians and the media than any other faith	8-3 Community or faith groups have been singled out for programs that counter violent extremism (CVE)	8-4 Counter terrorism laws unfairly target Muslims	8-5 People from racial, ethnic or religious minority groups experience discrimination in Australia	8-6 Counter terrorism laws are fair for everyone	8-8 The Australian Government treats right-wing extremist groups in a similar way to Muslim extremists
Agree	93%	92%	**97%**	**83%**	94%	95%	7%	15%
Neither	4%	5%	2%	15%	5%	4%	12%	11%
Disagree	3%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%	81%	74%

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Cooperation P/CVE programs. The quantitative data revealed that most respondents (43%, Table 5) oppose P/CVE programs and advocate against cooperating with them. Many respondents (33%, Table 5) viewed the organisations that had accepted grants to run P/CVE programs as lacking credibility.

	5-1 I agree with the need for CVE programs within my community if needed.	5-2 I would advocate for CVE programs within my community if needed	5-3 I would warn others against cooperating with countering violent extremism programs	5-4 Muslim community leaders who support or engage with Countering Violent Extremism programs are sell-outs	5-5 Community organisations who accept money from the Australian Government (state or federal) to engage with CVE programs have no credibility
Table 5: Cooperation P/CVE programs					
Agree	41%	40%	43%	28%	33%
Neither	26%	28%	31%	32%	36%
Disagree	33%	32%	26%	40%	30%

Main analyses

In addition to descriptive statistics, bivariate analysis using the Chi-Square test (X^2 = 217.173, p < 0.002) revealed a significant association between the belief that the Australian government cannot be trusted (with 60% disagreeing) and the perceived need for P/CVE programs. In other words, the majority of those who do not trust Australia do not see a need for P/CVE programs, so it is reasonable to infer that there is an association between distrust and non-cooperation.

Further, to test whether trust in the Australian government predicts the variable on warning others against cooperation in P/CVE programs, a regression analysis was undertaken (see Table 6). The regression analysis revealed that trust in the government is a significant predictor of intentions to warn against cooperating with CVE programs. Specifically, the coefficient for trust was -0.179, with a standard error of 0.051, and this relationship was statistically significant (p < .001). This negative coefficient indicates that as trust in the government increases, the likelihood of individuals warning others against cooperating with CVE programs decreases. Furthermore, the standardised coefficient (Beta) of -0.157 suggests

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that for each standard deviation increase in trust, there is a corresponding decrease of 0.157 standard deviations in the tendency to issue such warnings. Additionally, the analysis found a statistically significant relationship between labelling organisations engaged in P/CVE as "sell-out'" and trust in the Australian government, as detailed in Table 6. Higher government trust correlates with lower perceptions of leaders as "sell-outs" in the P/CVE context.

Table 6: Regression Analysis						
Outcome Variable	Constant	B (Unstandardised Coefficient)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardised Coefficient)	t	Significant (p-value)
1.0 Warn others about P/CVE	Trust Australian Gov	-0.179	0.051	-0.157	-3.537	<.001
1.1 Warn others about P/CVE	Trust Federal Police	-0.172	0.043	-0.179	-4.030	<.001
1.2 Warn others about P/CVE	Trust in local Police (NSW)	-0.130	0.050	-0.116	-2.604	.009
1.3 Organisations are "sell-outs"	Trust Australian Gov	-.149	0.051	-0.131	-2.932	.004
1.4 Gov handling of terrorism has created distrust	Political and media scrutiny media concerning Islam	0.89	0.27	0.150	3.313	<.001
1.5 Warn others about P/CVE	Trust in ASIO	0.275	0.055 P <.001	0.219	4.984	<.001
1.6 Warn others about P/CVE	Trust in AFP	0.212	0.044 P<.001	0.213	4.839	<.001

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Concerning discrimination, as shown in Table 7, l found a statistically significant positive association (X^2 67.480 | p = <.001) between those who answered positively to discrimination (based on ethnic or religious background) and those believing that the war on terrorism is also a war on Islam. In other words, most respondents who answered positively to discrimination believed that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam. Nearly 25% of respondents (113 out of 453) who answered positively to discrimination (based on ethnic or religious background) also had sympathy for ISIS while not agreeing with their methods. Nearly 55% of respondents who answered positively to discrimination (249 out of 453) disagreed with sympathy for ISIS. Nearly 20% (83 out of 453) said that ISIS had legitimate grievances, and 15% (68 out of 453) said that ISIS's violent acts were justified against the West and its allies. Also, nearly 25% of participants (107 out of 438) who said those with Angelo backgrounds who enjoy an advantaged position in society also agreed that they felt sympathy for ISIS. Nearly 20% of participants (78 out of 438) said that ISIS had legitimate grievances. These findings are important as they confirm the suggestion within the literature of an association between discrimination and the increased risk of violence and terrorism (Piazza, 2012). There is limited research relating to discrimination and its impact on P/CVE, rendering this finding important.

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Table 7: Discrimination | Cross Tabulation (See note 3)				
Response category	**Q 2.0: Terrorist grievances**	**Q 2.1 Sympathy with Extremists**	**Q 2.2 War on Islam**	**Q 2.3 Justification of Extremism**
1.1 Agree Experienced racism	83 Agree (18%) 30 Neither (30%) 233 Disagree (52%) Total: 453	113 Agree (25%) 91 Neither (20%) 249 Disagree (55%) Total: 453	370 Agree (82%) 47 Neither (10%) 36 Disagree (8%) Total: 453	68 Agree (15%) 75 Neither (17%) 310 Disagree (69%) Total: 453
1.2 Agree Double Standards	78 Agree (19%) 128 Neither (29%) 232 Disagree (53%) Total: 438	107 Agree (25%) 84 Neither (19%) 247 Disagree (56%) Total: 438	353 Agree (81%) 49 Neither (11%) 36 Disagree (8%) Total: 438 **Note 1**	70 Agree (16%) 69 Neither (16%) 299 Disagree (68%) Total: 438
1.3 Disagree that CVE are fair	70 Agree (18%) 124 Neither (32%) 194 Disagree (50%) Total: 478	100 Agree (26%) 80 Neither (21%) 208 Disagree (54%) Total: 478	320 Agree (83%) 35 Neither (9%) 33 Disagree (8%) Total: 478 **Note 2**	54 Agree (14%) 66 Neither (17%) 268 Disagree (69%) Total: 478
Note 1: 1.2 Chi-Square = 31.218, p < .001 **Note 2**: 1.3 Chi-Square = 24.193, p < .001 **Note 3**: This table is a cross-tabulation. The responses shown for 1.1 and 1.2 are only those who agreed with the premise of 1.1 and 1.2. In other words, if people in 1.1 agreed there is discrimination, how many agreed with 2.0. For 1.3, however, only respondents who disagreed have been cited. This is also the reason why the total numbers do not add up to 505.				

Law enforcement agencies

The quantitative section of the survey revealed that all law enforcement agencies registered significant negative responses, particularly ASIO (71% Table 8) and the Australian Federal Police (61%), who have been the main agencies at the forefront of prosecuting government intervention against violent extremism. The Departments of Immigration and Border Protection (59%) and NSW police (54%) also registered significant negative views, but less so. The numbers reduced to just below 50% for the Department of Education, Corrective Services and NSW Courts. Further, a regression analysis we conducted shows that a decrease in trust towards police authorities is linked to a reduced willingness to cooperate with P/CVE programs and measures. A statistically significant value of <.001 demonstrates a strong association between these variables. Specifically, the standardised coefficients indicate

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that increased distrust in the Australian Federal Police (AFP), for example, correlates with an increased tendency to advise against cooperation with P/CVE initiatives. Furthermore, a high t-value of 4.839 underscores the significance and robustness of this relationship, highlighting the direct impact of police distrust on the willingness to engage with P/CVE efforts.

Table 8: Trust in government institutions

	1.1 Department of Immigration and Border Protection	1.2 Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)	1.3 Australian Federal Police	1.4 NSW Police / your state police force	1.5 Corrective Services NSW	1.6 NSW Courts and Judges	1.7 Department of Education
Trust	18%	11%	24%	33%	20%	33%	37%
N/A	23%	18%	15%	13%	32%	21%	21%
Distrust	59%	71%	61%	54%	48%	46%	46%

Findings of the Qualitative Data Analysis

In this section, we describe the themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis using Nvivo. The five key themes are:

a) Distrust of the government towards Muslims and its approach to countering violent extremism and associated factors (e.g. negative rhetoric, political stereotyping, the perception of targeted laws on Muslims),

b) Australia's foreign policy concerning in the Middle East,

c) Police and law enforcement agencies (e.g. AFP, ASIO and state police),

d) The media (e.g. negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims),

e) Lack of communication, lack of consultation, and not understanding of the community.

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Qualitative diagram 1: themes and sub-themes of trust of government

Theme 01: Distrust of the government towards Muslims and its approach to terrorism, P/CVE and associated factors

Subtheme 01.1: Negative rhetoric

Negative political rhetoric was one of the aspects identified that was reported as leading to distrust in the Australian government. There was a significant quantum of open response commentary on the negative rhetoric of the government towards Muslims. The quote below illustrates well this sentiment from the respondents.

> The use of anti-Islamic rhetoric by politicians within the Australian government can impact the Muslim community's trust in the government as it may lead Muslim communities to feel demonised/ marginalised. Community engagement: depending on the government's involvement with Muslim communities, this can impact the trust Muslims have in the government; if they're seen ignoring the needs of Muslim communities, it can lead to distrust and vice versa.

Subtheme 01.2: Politicians Stereotyping Muslims

Conflating the Islamic faith with terrorism and extremism was perceived as an intentional stereotyping of Muslims. As the quote below suggests:

> Stereotyping and pigeonholing Muslims by saying that terrorism is motivated by religion and Islam is unjust and a major reason for not trusting the government.

An important shared aspect in the respondent's open comments was the assertion that the Australian government conflated the normal practices of Islam with the actions of extremists. In other words, many participants believe that politicians attribute the everyday actions of Muslims to those of extremists. The next comment was also directed at the Australian government.

> The Australian government has not been able to distinguish, in my opinion, the difference between extremist views and those of traditional Muslim followers. This has led many Muslims to be put in a marginalised section of society, pressuring Muslims to conform to the white Australian standard of culture, morality, family values and ethics.

Subtheme 01.3: Terrorism used for political purposes

Participants stressed that the reference to terrorism in the political domain was often used for political gain, as was the justifications of specific laws, for example, in the comment below:

> When it comes to terrorism, consecutive governments took a cynical approach for their own advantage. By that, I mean that while they had plenty of information to know Muslims and Islam are not a threat, they behaved as if these were contestable and capitalised on the doubt it sowed through the broader community regarding the trustworthiness of Muslims.

Subtheme 01.4: Double standards

Respondents also emphasised what they described as the double standards of government when it came to Muslims for not prosecuting people of other faiths for the same offences:

The obvious double standards that the government allows the Muslim communities to endure racism, bigotry, and abuse with threats not taken seriously. On the other hand, other communities are so well protected that any comment directly or indirectly made towards them without so much of a threat provokes an iron-first type reaction. The double standards portrayed during events that have occurred and their response to them, e.g.- their handling of covid restrictions.

Subtheme 01.5: Negative characteristics associated with government (corruption, lies, dishonest, anti-Muslim, does not care, allowed it to happen)

Broadly, there were many responses showing that the government was perceived as corrupt, dishonest, anti-Muslim and consisting of "liars". One notable and recurrent aspect was that the sentiment that the government did not care about Muslim Australians and had allowed all of what they were subjected to (e.g., Islamophobia) to unfold without interference:

The Australian government failed to defend and protect the Australian Muslim community during the time of the terrorism accusations. The abuse and slander that the Australian Muslim community had to face has led to mistrust. Their inability to make fair and equitable decisions (especially during COVID) highlighted an "us" and "them" version of Australia.

One of the participants encapsulates well the feeling that the government does not genuinely care about addressing Islamophobia or, more generally, about the Muslim community, suggesting they are passively allowing such things to unfold.

They know about high Islamophobia and don't do anything about it. They don't care and simply allow it to happen. If they wanted, they could do something against Islamophobia but choose to allow it.

Throughout the responses, a common theme emerged regarding the media: respondents felt that the government was indifferent to the inaccurate and negative portrayal of Muslims, allowing such portrayals to persist:

Allowing free reign of major media outlets to portray an incorrect perception of Muslims.

Subtheme 01.6: Questioning government intentions and actions when it concerns Muslims and the religion Islam

Respondents also express a profound dissatisfaction with the government's failure to adequately safeguard their rights amid prevalent discrimination and Islamophobia. They accuse the government of not only neglecting their protection but also of perpetuating harmful stereotypes about their religion. Specifically, they contend that the government has propagated the unfounded claim that Islam inherently motivates terrorism. This allegation, some participants argue, is made with full awareness of its detrimental impact, thereby exacerbating the challenges they face. Such government actions or inactions contribute to a societal environment where misinformation flourishes, and the true essence of the Islamic religion is obscured, leading to increased prejudice and isolation of the Muslim community. As one of the participants says:

> The apparent inability of the government to sufficiently protect our rights in the face of discrimination and Islamophobia. They have spread the lie that our religion motivates terrorism, knowing about the effects.

In summary, the analysis suggests that the extent of distrust of the government towards Muslims and its approach to terrorism and P/CVE is significant. Both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses show that the study participants are highly distrustful of the government, its policies, and its behaviour (e.g., the perception that it does not care). The views expressed are not limited to one facet of government (e.g., police law enforcement) as in other studies. They are wide-ranging and directed at the deliberate action/inaction of the government, seen as working hand in hand with media outlets to achieve a negative framing of Muslims, therefore actively undermining one of the communities they are meant to represent and support.

Subtheme 01.7: The perception of targeted terrorism laws on Muslims (procedural unfairness)

Laws and policies that were perceived as not only targeting Muslims but also as being specifically designed for people of the Muslim faith contributed to a sense of procedural unfairness. This perception was among the most frequently cited reasons for the lack of trust in the government:

> Structured laws and policies aimed at Muslims. Measures such as counterterrorism laws designed for Muslims, surveillance programs, and immigration policies that disproportionately affect Muslim communities. How can we forget the so-called "war on terrorism", the raids, the sentencing? How can we forget? (…) The last 20 years of the "war on terror" caused us so much pain, and nothing was done about it. Terrorism laws are so harsh but only apply to Muslims. Muslim teens face long-term jail for terrorism while other teens don't.

> Counter-terrorism laws were perceived as procedurally unfair, with a significant number of responses indicating that they specifically targeted Muslims. This perception aligns with research suggesting that such laws and policing practices provoke a backlash among Muslims who feel unjustly targeted (Cherney & Murphy, 2016).

Subtheme 01.8: Racism and discrimination

Racism was often cited as a reason for distrust in the Australian government. Racism appeared to be a motivating factor that influenced the introduction of laws, police law enforcement agencies, the media and the reason why communication was lacking between the government and the community. As one respondent puts it:

> Distrust is caused by racist policies and racism within the government. The moral panic to garner votes, policing and unlawful and arbitrary investigations and detention of people, and breaching privacy rights.

Theme 02: Australia's foreign policy

Subtheme 02.1: Palestine and Israel; Iraq and "weapons of mass destruction"; China's persecution of the Uyghurs

One of the most cited factors leading to distrust in the Australian Government is the international situation affecting Muslims in the Middle East (Charkawi et al., , 2020). The Palestine and Israel situation, for example, was frequently cited, including Iraq and weapons of mass destruction and the persecution of Muslims in China:

> The Australian government's foreign policy hypocrisy towards Arab or Middle Eastern people around the world will always make us feel separate. The criticism that politicians have towards some countries while defending the more atrocious crimes that Israel commits draws a clear line between different groups of people.

> Double standards in foreign policy. Claiming to be pro-human rights and strongly backing Israel. Failure to prosecute Australian war criminals.

Subtheme 02.1: Australia's foreign policy against Muslims

Australia's foreign policy concerning the Middle East and Arab and Muslim nations was one of the most significant features throughout the responses that were thought to lead to distrust between the Muslim community and the government. The following statement resonates and captures the sentiment of most of the responses:

> Failure to identify the crisis that Muslims go through around the world & not speaking out against injustice towards Muslims within their own lands, rather siding with the oppressors & further demonising Muslims & Islam as a whole.

> Choosing which oppression to fight and disagree with. Russia's oppression of Ukraine has seen the government be very vocal yet very silent on the treatment of Muslims in China and the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data reveal that respondents are critical of Australia's foreign policy towards Middle Eastern or majority Muslim countries. The qualitative responses revealed that foreign policy is a strong reason for distrust in the Australian government. What is noteworthy here is the real-world impact of geopolitics on the Muslim community concerning the level of trust towards the Australian government and potentially social harmony. Foreign policy concerning the Middle East and Arab and Muslim nations has also been noted in the literature to increase the risk of violent extremism (Savun & Phillips, 2009). Robert Pape's (2006) research on suicide terrorism found that it is mainly a response to foreign occupation. Examples include the involvement of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq (Nesser, 2004; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Pape, 2006) and Israel's actions in Palestine (Jensen, 2006; Pape, 2006).

Theme 03: Distrust of police and law enforcement agencies

Subtheme 03.1: heavy-handed police

Police law enforcement agencies were viewed negatively and perceived to be part of a broader strategy targeting Muslims. They are seen as counter-productive to the aims of cohesion, safety and even P/CVE. This is illustrated by the following comment:

> Ongoing history of police racial profiling, harassment, and mistreatment during security checks and investigations. Young Muslims with mental illness are harassed by the police. They are targeted and harassed by police. Police constantly harass youth I know about being terrorists. The dealings and disproportionate policing of Southwest Sydney and, in particular, the Muslim community were shown more evidently during the time of the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Subtheme 03.2: ASIO and state police (NSW and VIC)

Muslim participants appear to lack trust in the systems of government. All of the reasons that respondents gave for their distrust of the government mimic those they gave for police agencies like the Australian Federal Police, ASIO and the state police force:

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Agencies like the Australian Federal Police (AFP), ASIO and police organised crime units seem to caricature Muslims as terrorists in their investigation. Police specifically target Muslims and areas with increased Muslim demographics after pressure from politicians and the media.

Police have double standards. Only Muslims are terrorists, and only Muslims seem to get filmed when police are doing raids. ASIO does not do press releases about people of other faiths, only Muslims.

Both the quantitative and qualitative responses reveal that law enforcement agencies are perceived to be part of a broader strategy working with the government and media aimed at Muslims. The qualitative responses show a long history of distrust beginning after September 11 and manifesting during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Theme 04: Media

Subtheme 04.1: Islam portrayed as the enemy

The quantitative responses of the survey revealed that the majority of participants (97% Table 4) deem the media to target Muslims based on their faith. Consistent with these findings, the media was a significant theme in the qualitative data throughout all participant statements. The media was often painted by the respondents as having an agenda aimed against Muslims and was identified as one of the main reasons for the distrust between the Australian government and Muslims. For example, in the comments below, the respondents state that:

Biased and sensationalist media coverage that perpetuates stereotypes, misconceptions, and fear.

Allowing free reign of major media outlets to portray an incorrect perception of Muslims. Muslims have no major media outlet of their own, which allowed for an equal countering of the narrative that formed against Muslims. The ideas of "them" and "us" are repeated regularly and showcased via a multitude of media platforms.

Double standards and mainly the media a lot of the times putting Islam and Muslims in a bad light or propagating the wrong actions of a few no-good Muslims, which causes more hate towards Muslims.

The qualitative data about the media displayed a strong sense of opposition to the media's negative portrayal of Muslims, causing hatred and fear among Australians. These findings confirm previous research about the negative effects of the media on society, solidifying existing biases and increasing discrimination (Gilens, 1996; Maher, 2009; Charkawi, Dunn & Bliuc, 2020; Cherney et al., 2018).

Theme 05: Lack of communication, consultation and understanding of the Muslim community

Subtheme 05.1: No meaningful relationships

This theme, termed *no meaningful relationships*, emerged from the qualitative responses due to the numerous statements made about the absence of genuine and real engagement between the Australian government and the community. The extent of distrust based on the lack of a genuine, meaningful relationship was a common sentiment echoed in many of the responses:

Since 2011, there hasn't been any real authentic consultation with the community on the ground. There have been ad hoc policies that have only disenfranchised Muslims, especially young Muslims. Their [the government had a] genuine lack of care and compassion for areas and groups that truly need assistance.

Subtheme 05.2: Lack of communication and not understanding Islam

The qualitative responses revealed a strong sense of being misunderstood based on faith and the stereotyping that has occurred over many years. The statements below capture a sentiment that the community feels defeated, unable to shift the negative narrative around their faith.

At times, we need the most support; we are either completely forgotten or our identity is politicised to further the preferred agenda. When footage circulates of policemen misusing physical force toward citizens who are all the things we are told we should be (read: educated, employed and serving the wider community), it leads one to

believe despite whatever accolades or contributions we may come with; we will always be the other.

People don't understand or welcome us just because of our faith. We feel marginalised and looked at differently just because of our religion. The lack of parity has given rise to a negative environment for Muslims and massive misunderstandings among non-Muslims about Muslims.

I think that there is a poor understanding of the communities within the Muslim communities. I also think the Muslim community have a poor understanding of the parliamentary process, law enforcement, their own civil liberties and, importantly, the academic language and research behind radicalisation.

This sentiment was common, indicating mutual misunderstanding and the need for more from both the government and the community. It highlights the lack of engagement and consultation on issues affecting the community.

Discussion

This article sought to assess the level of trust/distrust among a sample of Muslims living in Australia regarding the Australian government and its institutions, the potential reasons underpinning this sentiment, and whether a lack of trust might reduce the willingness to cooperate and engage with P/CVE programs. Both the quantitative and qualitative data are utilised to conduct this assessment.

The analysis of the quantitative data revealed that the degree of distrust for the Australian government is high, with the majority of respondents saying they have a high distrust of P/CVE initiatives and many of them saying they would warn others against cooperation and engagement. Many respondents were also critical of the integrity of funded community organisations, questioning their integrity and agreeing with the "sell-out" label. This analysis indicates that a lack of trust correlates with a reduced willingness to engage in

P/CVE programs. This analysis also shows that the greater the distrust, the greater the lack of cooperation and engagement with the government on matters concerning P/CVE. It is reasonable to infer that when community trust towards the government is low or lacking, there will likely be less cooperation and participation in P/CVE programs and initiatives. In line with these findings, the regression analysis undertaken shows the same pattern in the relationship between trust in the Australian government and warning others against cooperation in P/CVE programs. This analysis further demonstrates the association between the dynamics of trust and support for P/CVE programs, supporting the hypothesis that distrust in government impacts the willingness to cooperate and engage with P/CVE programs. This data indicates that distrust is associated with a diminished willingness to engage in P/CVE programs. It is reasonable to say that when trust is reduced, there will likely be less cooperation and participation in P/CVE initiatives. Further, labelling leaders and organisations as sell-outs reflect a wider cynicism that can distance influential figures and potentially reduce the effectiveness of P/CVE measures. These findings suggest that approaches to P/CVE must be multifaceted, comprising efforts to maintain community trust and not only focused on security measures. In line with the qualitative responses, this would involve addressing fundamental causes of distrust, such as experiences of discrimination and stereotyping. Clearly, such a position hinders the government's approach to P/CVE. The lack of cooperation affects communication and intelligence, which law enforcement agencies (e.g., AFP and ASIO) hold as crucial to P/CVE.

The qualitative analysis also shows that respondents have high levels of distrust for the Australian government, with no single positive comment present in the responses. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that, within the community, there is strong fear and suspicion of the Australian government, its policies and measures, as well as police law enforcement agencies. This section provided some insights into some of the reasons for distrusting the Australian government. The key themes involved:

- Distrust of the government towards Muslims and its approach to terrorism, P/CVE and associated factors (e.g. negative rhetoric, political stereotyping, the perception of targeted terrorism laws on Muslims
- Australia's foreign policy concerning the Middle East

- Police and law enforcement agencies (e.g. AFP, ASIO and state police)

- The media (e.g. negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims)

- Lack of communication, lack of consultation, and not understanding of the community

In terms of political trust, we found that all questions that asked about trust unearthed negative dispositions towards the Australian government. Not only did the majority of respondents not trust the government and most members of parliament, but they also believe that the government has marginalised the Muslim community through its handling of terrorism, mishandled terrorism causing a widening of the gap of trust between the government and the Muslim community, and they disagree with the notion that the government has worked hard to build trust. In addition to this, most respondents disagree with the notion that ministers can be trusted to serve the interests of their constituents. The qualitative data confirms these findings and provides detail on the reasons for this distrust, citing marginalising the community through negative rhetoric, structural and procedural unfairness (i.e. targeted terrorism laws and policies aimed at Muslims and perceived double standards of government), and the perception that the government does not care about Muslim and allowed Muslims to be subject to significant humiliation. The qualitative responses clearly displayed consistency around the reasons why the majority of respondents distrust the Australian government. For example, the government's approach to P/CVE through perceived targeted laws on Muslims formed a significant part of the responses.

The findings reveal that the level of distrust toward the Australian government is significantly high and that this distrust correlates with a reduced willingness to cooperate in P/CVE measures and programs. The reasons for this distrust were extensive and focused on the perception of targeted terrorism laws.

We found that enhanced communication and genuine relationships with the government would be important mechanisms to build trust with the community, especially if politicians expressed positive public statements about Muslims and Islam. It takes years to foster meaningful relationships. The statements reveal that it is important not only for the government to be seen to care about the community but also to adopt key attributes like honesty, taking responsibility where it has power and dispelling stereotypes. These are

important findings because they mean that any approach to P/CVE could be enhanced if a government took an active role that includes shielding the community from stereotypes and rhetoric. These lead to marginalisation. The strong inference from the quoted material is that the Government could treat the community as a genuine partner by fostering and building genuine relationships.

The quantitative responses revealed that the extent of distrust extended to government institutions, especially Federal law enforcement agencies (ASIO and the Australian Federal Police). The majority of respondents said that they distrust police law enforcement agencies and government institutions. Most other institutions still registered majority distrust, indicating general distrust for government institutions. Nonetheless, the variations in distrust across institutions indicate that the distrust towards government is not monolithic but variable. The qualitative information also disclosed a significant level of anger directed at police law enforcement, citing that they feel targeted by police on account of faith and that police are heavy-handed in their approach. Combined, this shows that there is a clear perception that police are heavy-handed and that the community feels targeted. The proposition is that this affects the work done by Community Liaison Officers (CLTs) with community engagement (Al-hammadin et al., 2023). While some agencies like the Australian Federal Police (AFP) incorporate values of ability, benevolence, and integrity in their engagement with communities to enhance trust, it appears not enough is being done or not well enough and that current engagement does not necessarily translate into organisational or institutional trust (Al-hammadin, et al., 2023). It is important to note the different responses to law enforcement, with ASIO being the most distrusted, followed by the Department of Immigration of Border Protection, AFP and NSW/local police. This strong sense of distrust between the community and law enforcement agencies indicates how law enforcement agencies operate matters. It also raises the concerns of consequences for community cooperation and engagement in the field of P/CVE where it concerns law enforcement. Research shows that the excessive use of police law enforcement has been shown to generate greater hostility against legal authorities (Lafree et al., 2009) and lead people to withdraw their cooperation (Sherman, 1993). Further, this analysis revealed a significant positive association between distrust in police law enforcement agencies and warning others from cooperating in P/CVE programs. This

indicates that greater levels of distrust are connected to a reduced willingness to participate in P/CVE programs. There appear to be clear implications concerning Muslim community interactions with agencies like the AFP, ASIO, and local police in the context of P/CVE programs. Distrust or confrontational experiences with law enforcement agencies can pose a challenge to participation in P/CVE programs and initiatives regardless of whether these agencies are directly responsible for specific P/CVE programs. In sum, the study showed: i) there are significant levels of distrust for police law enforcement agencies, ii) the reasons cited in the qualitative responses include heavy-handedness concerning P/CVE, specific targeting, and the perception that police are part of a broader strategy aimed at Muslims, and iii) there is a connection between greater levels of distrust and the willingness to cooperate in P/CVE programs.

The sense of discrimination

Although discrimination was not the focus of this study per se, it is cited in the responses as a reason for the distrust in the government and its institutions. The quantitative and qualitative data both revealed a strong sense of discrimination. Most of the questions (faith-based discrimination and targeting) had an agreement of over 90 per cent. The quantitative data of the survey also revealed that the sense of discrimination has an impact on attitudes relating to violent extremism. The analysis established an association between the sense of discrimination and a positive attitude towards violent extremist groups (e.g. ISIS). While the numbers are not remarkably significant, they are sufficient to warrant attention and posit a mild association. However, there was a statistically significant association in two instances where the sense of discrimination was high. The two instances were: 1) Australians from Anglo backgrounds enjoy an advantaged position in society, and 2) counter-terrorism laws are fair for everyone, presented against the belief that the war on terror is a war on Islam. The findings show that the perception of discrimination is clearly associated with distrust in the Australian government; this was also established in the quoted material. Indeed, the sense of discrimination and marginalisation were strong themes in the qualitative data gathered by this survey. Respondents felt this sense ensuing directly through negative political discourse, the adverse media portrayal of Muslims, police law-enforcement agencies and specific laws

and policies targeting Muslims. Given the significant findings in previous studies (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Victoroff et al., 2012) identifying perceived discrimination with higher rates of domestic terrorism, as well as the findings of this paper, this paper recommends a rethink of these dynamics and especially how they are implemented in their approach to preventing and countering violent extremism.

A community approach

The qualitative responses revealed that the community perception is that they are over-surveilled, over-policed, disproportionally subject to terrorist-related offences and laws, not communicated with by the government and misunderstood. The quantitative analysis showed that most respondents (92%) believe there is an atmosphere of "them and us" despite 96% of people also believing that it is a good thing for society to be made up of many cultures. In conjunction with the qualitative analysis, these responses alone underscore the need for a different government approach. Changing the focus and approach of countering violent extremism from one purely of security, surveillance and law enforcement to genuine engagement and building relationships. For example, promoting local ownership and community-led projects will build community capacity and is not viewed through the same security lens when it is government-led (Al-hammadin et al., 2023).

Intentional neglect

A prominent theme in the qualitative analysis was "faith misunderstood". Both the government and media were accused of portraying a picture of Muslims and Islam that did not accurately present who they were. As one participant said, "Our voices are not heard even when they are expressed". This reinforces the finding that a perception of a lack of genuine connection with the Muslim community in addition to feeling marginalised and stereotyped and appears to confirm findings in the study of Jones (2020), who found that overlooking the views of the Muslim community concerning P/CVE (i.e., inadequate consultation) could likely lessen engagement in the trust-building process. The strong sentiment expressed in the qualitative responses reveals that community grievances are not being heard even when they express their concerns. Certainly, building trust through meaningful relationships between the

government and the community requires long-term strategies, extending beyond listening to grievances but also taking steps to address them. It is recognised now that building trust requires significant time and holistic effort; moreover, healing the relationship between the government and the community takes time, and it must be an important consideration across the government (Grueber & Mello, 2022).

Political rhetoric

The qualitative data strongly indicates that negative political rhetoric is critical to the formation of distrust of government. Negative political rhetoric impacted the number of participants who spoke of stereotyping and marginalisation and also blamed for why the media negatively portrays Muslims. Negative political rhetoric aimed at Muslim communities has real-world consequences impacting social harmony (Charkawi et al.2020) and inflaming community tensions towards the government (Coorey, 2023) and their institutions (e.g., police law enforcement agencies). This paper recommends that the government should have policies in place that incorporate community sentiment and community consultation prior to the publicly released statements by politicians. This recommendation follows from the data that a lack of community communication and consultation can be a source of distrust.

The regression analysis also revealed a positive relationship between the effects of negative political rhetoric on the Muslim community and the government's handling of terrorism, eroding trust. In other words, negative political rhetoric is not only a reason for distrust but also a likely contributing factor in reducing the willingness to cooperate with P/CVE programs.

Media

The majority of respondents (97%) in the closed-ended questions part of the survey highlighted the media's targeted campaigns of Muslims based on faith are important when they concern trust. The qualitative analysis revealed that the role of the media registered the greatest number of statements from participants. The words "media coverage" and "bias reporting" frequently occurred. However, the media was not seen to be acting independently of the government. There was a perception that the government was complicit in the negative media reporting through politicians who were willing to make negative statements. [and the

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'media events' orchestrated between agencies and media] There was also a perception that the government did not care about what the media was doing to Muslims. Effectively, the data reveals that the media and the government were seen as two sides of the same coin. In the Australian context, the media portrayal of the Islamic faith has been mostly adverse (Dunn et al.,2007; Aly, 2007), and there has also been a comprehensive discussion amongst Australian politicians that Islam is incompatible with Western values (Berenger et al., 2004).

Co-operating on P/CVE

Another relevant point revealed in the quantitative data is that Muslims generally agree that addressing violent extremism is important, although the data implies the idea from respondents that P/CVE programs are not needed. This was reflected in the majority of respondents agreeing with the need for P/CVE programs if needed. However, when it concerned cooperation, most respondents said they would warn others against cooperating with P/CVE programs. In other words, while the sense of injustice and feeling specifically targeted based on faith (Table 4) had negatively impacted the view of P/CVE programs, respondents appreciate the need to address P/CVE more generally. Effectively, the Muslim community is not willing to engage in P/CVE programs or assist the government in its current approach to P/CVE for the reasons they have cited, although they understand the need to address P/CVE.

Limitations

The sensitive nature of the research topic and questions could involve responses driven by the fear of being identified (despite implementing strict ethics protocol to protect participants' anonymity and that participants were made aware of it). Feeling uneasy about providing specific information through an online survey is not unreasonable. An attempt to alleviate the fears of respondents was made in the opening statement of the survey that personal information would not be sought (e.g., date of birth, name or address). Social desirability or the tendency to always try to respond in what is seen as socially appropriate ways may also produce response bias. The survey was shared when relatively less attention was being given to countering violent extremism, as it was nearly two years after the COVID-

19 lockdowns had ended across Australia. Perceptions and attitudes toward violent extremism can change with time. The survey captured peoples' responses at a point in time (i.e., the cross-sectional nature of the survey).

Further, it is important to highlight in the discussion of associations between variables, such as distrust of the Australian government and law enforcement agencies and one's position on P/CVE programs, that these are correlational findings, and further research is required to establish causal connections. Causative links may require longitudinal studies or experimental research. Equally, the study's findings are specific to the sample studied and the Australian context. It is acknowledged that the results may not be generalisable to other populations or contexts.

Conclusion

This research indicates high distrust in the Australian government and its negative impact on cooperation and engagement with P/CVE programs, as well as the government's approach to preventing and countering violent extremism. Further, the perception of the government as unjust and the reasons given for this view (e.g. discrimination and targeted laws and policies in Muslim communities) have revealed a minor association with increased sympathy and changed attitudes towards violent extremist groups. The perception of government as unjust is intensified when compounded by a lack of genuine relationships and good communication and consultation. Genuine relationships and consultation could theoretically reduce the aspects cited by respondents leading to perceptions of injustice, such as negative political rhetoric (e.g. stereotyping) aimed at Muslim communities and could possibly influence laws and policies. Further, this research revealed a strong use and approach of law enforcement in P/CVE, underscoring the need for shifting the focus from one of law, surveillance and over-policing to a community approach, promoting local ownership and community-led projects. The (dis)trust in law enforcement agencies (some more than others) indicates how they operate matters. Enabling and empowering community voices is essential to mitigating the perception of discrimination and bias. Taking such approaches could enhance greater cooperation and engagement on approaches to countering violent extremism and P/CVE

programs. Building trust requires significant time and a holistic approach, and there is community agreement that government action is needed to address the serious issues at hand and not just the way it is being done to date.

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