

Constructions and Contestations of Islamic Religious Authority in Australia

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Boasting one of the world's most culturally diverse Muslim communities, Australia presents an intriguing study into the construction of Islamic religious authority. This research explores Muslim perceptions of how religious authority is cultivated, conveyed and contested among Australian Muslims. The study places emphasis on the lived experiences of Australian Muslims, examining their opinions, attitudes and inter-relationships in formulating new insights about who they turn to for religious knowledge and guidance. This comes at a time when Australian Muslims are merging myriad social and customary practices into their localised understandings of Islam. The study analyses fieldwork data from imams/sheikhs, Muslim academics, educators and survey participants in relation to who Australian Muslims trust and recognise as religious authorities. The presentation outlines new empirical findings indicating the growing diversity of Muslim religious actors and institutions in Australia, as well as the contextual realities shaping the way religious authority is legitimised and contested among ordinary Australian Muslims.

Dr Shaheen Whyte holds a PhD from Deakin University. His doctorate focused on the study of Islamic Religious Authority in Australia. Shaheen is currently an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation, Charles Sturt University. He has published in international journals and national media outlets on the intersection of Islam, politics and society.