

## INDONESIAN MUSLIM WEBSITES PICTURING AUSTRALIA

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The relations between the neighbors Indonesia and have become interesting over the last several decades.

**Methodology:** We have shown the important role of blended learning in the maintenance and development of the subject-subject model of interaction between students and teachers. The implementation of subject-subject interaction was considered on the example of the discipline "General and professional pedagogy", the electronic course of which is presented on the Moodle platform.

**Result:** As the largest religious group in Indonesia, Indonesian Muslims play significant roles in shaping public opinion within society. Since the Bali Bombing 2002, there has been intense attention devoted to Australia and Indonesian Muslim issues. This paper explains how five different Indonesian Muslim websites (Arrahmah.com; hti.com; dakwatuna.com; nu.or.id & republik.co.id) portrayed Australia from 2011 to 2013.

**Applications:** This research can be used for the universities, teachers and education students.

**Novelty/Originality:** The 'up and down' tension between the 'up and down' tension between these countries, is influenced not only by their governments but also their citizen's perceptions, about the other country.

**Keywords:** *Australia frames, Media frames, Indonesian Muslim Websites.*

### INTRODUCTION

Australia-Indonesia relations are always interesting to track in the media. Media portrayals of Australia-Indonesia relations are not about friendly neighbors. Some of the more controversial aspects of the relationship are exposed: the cattle-slaughter issues (2011), asylum seeker issues (2013), Corby's parole issues (2013), and Australian phone-tapping of the Indonesian President (2013), to name a few.

Several influential factors that place other nations in cooperative, oppositional or stratified stances are dependent on news production ([Rivenburgh 1997](#)). This involves the professional roles of journalists, organizational routines, and cultural values.

This paper will explore Australian images as framed by Indonesian Muslim online media. A variety of online Muslim media has been chosen to address this question, ranging from general commercial media targeting specifically Muslim audiences to Muslim group media outlets that have different Islamic ideologies – from militant to moderate. The aim of this paper is to comprehensively show how Australia is portrayed in Indonesian Muslim online media. The article not only elucidates issues to do with Australia but also investigates the particular tones and framing mechanisms that these media outlets have taken toward Australia from 2011 to 2013. This paper also attempts to explain whether there is any variance in the framing of Australia between militant, moderate and general media.

### METHODOLOGY

Understanding how Australia is viewed from other countries' perspectives may help to promote mutual appreciation and understanding between Australia and Indonesia in the future. To achieve this aim, this study applies a qualitative research method, which involves media frame analysis to define distinct frames among selected Indonesian Muslim websites with different ideological backgrounds ([Suleri & Cavagnaro, 2016](#); [Piteira et al, 2018](#); [Ardakani et al, 2015](#)).

[Taufik Abdullah \(2014\)](#) argues the Muslim ideological backgrounds can be classified into continuum ranges, from extreme impatience and intolerance to extreme open-mindedness toward all religious plurality in Indonesia (p. 75). Militant Muslims tend to be watchful of other's behavior that might be considered sinful and act swiftly if their laws appear to be broken. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum are liberal Muslims who agree with the idea of pluralism, and believe that religion should liberate and enlighten all human beings ([Abdullah, T, 2014](#); [Razavi et al, 2015](#)). Moreover, some large Islamic organizations in Indonesia such as *Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)*, *Muhammadiyah*, *Persis* and *Al-Irsyad* are located in the middle of this ideology continuum, which is called moderate Islam.

The news interpretation by Indonesian Muslim websites is mediated by several variables, such as knowledge, values, and beliefs, including the values and beliefs from referenced groups ([Lecheler, Vreese & Slothuust, 2009](#)). According to Hofstede's (1986) cultural variability concept, Indonesia is categorized as a collectivist culture, which considers group values and interests as precious in interpreting an issue. As a collectivist culture, Indonesian Muslims are likely to frame an issue in line with their Muslim group references rather than following the mainstream media frames itself. This study seeks

to identify the media frame from different Muslim group websites with a variety of ideological backgrounds (Afriyani et al., 2018; Kodekova et al., 2018). This step is important because these group references will influence the framing process within the members as well as their official websites about images of Australia.

Media frame data is gathered from Indonesian Muslim media websites. The media websites are chosen based on these considerations: the variety of ideological background, media owner and management, and daily accessibility. Five Muslim media websites are chosen and are expected to provide a diversity of frames of Australia from different ideological backgrounds. They are: two militant Muslim websites (*Arrahmah* and *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)*), two moderate Muslim media (*Dakwatuna* and *Nahdhatul Ulama (NU)*) and one general Muslim outlet (*Republika*).

*Arrahmah (Arrahmah.com)* and *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (hizbut-tahrir.or.id)* are categorized as militant media outlets by Bergin (2009) and Hui (2010). *Arrahmah* is a news portal for Islamic issues; especially news about the Islamic world and *Jihad*. The aim of this media outlet is publishing balanced information about Islam and the Islamic world, which has been marginalized through globalization and modern communication era. *HTI* has similarities to *Arrahmah*, being categorized as militant media, with one ultimate goal – to establish a Caliphate with one Muslim leader for all Muslims in the world. To execute their goal, *HTI* argues that there will be no suitable governing system in the world unless Islamic systems are applied in all respects. *HTI* rejects the idea of democracy, capitalism, and liberalism, as these are not referred to in *Al Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.

The third and fourth media channels are *dakwatuna (dakwatuna.com)* and *NU online (nu.org.id)* – these channels both follow a moderate ideology. *Dakwatuna*, administered by *Lembaga Kajian Dakwatuna (LKD, the Preaching Studies Institute)* was founded 20<sup>th</sup> January 2007 and launched by Hidayat Nur Wahid<sup>1</sup>, the Chairman of *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (MPR, People's Consultative Assembly)* from 2004 to 2009. *Dakwatuna.com* is one of three Muslim online media channels that have been accessed by Indonesian Muslim activists from several high schools in Jakarta who want to learn about Islam (Nur, 2015).

*NU, or Nahdhatul Ulama*, is one of the largest Muslim organizations that are spread throughout Indonesia, especially in rural areas, in the form of *pesantren* or traditional Islamic boarding schools. *NU online* is the official website of *Nahdhatul Ulama* and publicizes the organization's activities as well as illustrates their perspectives on current issues.

The last media outlet is *Republika*. Unlike the four previous media, *Republika* is commercial, with a Muslim target market, and is owned by *PT Mahaka Media Tbk*. *Republika* has had a print version since 1995. Since this media outlet is owned by a private company, *Republika* has no affiliation to any Muslim groups and tries to stay 'neutral,' representing the Muslim population more generally.

The media text gathered in this research is all news mentioning 'Australia' from 2011 to 2013 in the five selected websites. This time frame was chosen because it has been ten years since the first Bali Bombing in 2002; therefore this research has tried to document the recent frames about Australia after a decade of the catastrophic event which saw Australia lose the most victims.

For collecting media frame data of each news item about Australia, this research applied the external and internal characteristics of media salience defined by Kiousis (2004). The external characteristic is visibility, including the number of media issues published in the media. While the internal characteristic includes issue valence that classifies news tones into positive, negative or neutral.

News frames in the article can be found in stereotyped images and sentences that provide facts and judgments (Entman, 1993). The news themes, news tones, and news sources classifications also make significant contributions to analyzing news frames and media salience on Australian matters within selected media outlets. Accordingly, the focus of militant, moderate and general ideologies media can also be determined.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The total number of news items with the 'Australia' keyword in all five media from 2011 to 2013 was 795 (Table 1). Table 1 shows that *Republika*, the general commercial Muslim media channel, had the highest number of news stories about Australia. However, in 2013 *Arrahmah* had almost the same number of news stories about Australia as *Republika*. All online Muslim media outlets show the highest number of news stories about Australia in 2013 because of the Australian spying scandal in early November of that year.

### *Australian News Framing: From US-Allies to a Multicultural Country*

The term 'Australia' can refer to the name of the country, its government or its people. Considering in-group favoritism, media ideology, and national perspectives, this study found that all five media outlets have framed Australia within three

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<sup>1</sup> Hidayat Nur Wahid is known as the former President of the *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Prosperous and Justice Party)*, an Islamic party in Indonesia where Hasan (2012) categorised Muslim groups that accepted democracy as being moderates.

contexts: Australia in relation to Islamic issues, Australia's position toward Indonesia, and Australia's image as a developed country.

**Table 1:** Number of News Items Mentioning 'Australia's five Indonesian Muslim online media channels, year 2011 to 2013

MEDIA	Year			Total news items
	2011	2012	2013	
<i>Arrahmah</i>	33	37	84	154
<i>Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)</i>	11	51	75	182
<i>Dakwatuna</i>	5	8	50	63
<i>Nahdhatul Ulama (NU)</i>	57	51	33	141
<i>Republika</i>	71	67	85	223
Total news items (annual)	221	239	335	795

The first context relates to the stances that Australia has on Islamic issues. This involves the position of Australia and other Western countries including United States (US). Within this context, the position of Australia in the minds of media editors being examined is positively framed while Australia is framed as supporting Islamic values and the Muslim existence in multicultural country as Australia. The example frame of supporting Islamic values such as Australia's government launched sharia funds for pensioners (dakwatuna, 2012) and Canberra's authority (ACT) canceled the same-sex marriage law (NU, 2013). In addition, as multicultural countries, Australian Muslim policewomen are allowed to wear *hijab* (Dakwatuna, 2013).

While Australia is framed negatively for conflicted stands of Australia toward Islamic interest. For example, Australia is framed as a country of infidelity (negara kafir) (Arrahmah, 2013), Islamophobia and Muslim discrimination in Australia (Republika, 2011), as well as Australia's position as US allies in international relations (Republika, 2012).

The second context regards Australia's role as a supporter or opponent of Indonesia. As a supporter, Australia is framed positively as a 'good partner' in several collaborative projects. However, Australia is also framed as 'disrespecting Indonesia' with relation to particular conflicts with Indonesia, such as Corby's parole and the spying scandal. Another negative frame of Australia regarding this context is Australia's interferes into some Indonesia's internal matter such as the form of *Densus 88* that is sponsored by Australia's government and targeting Muslim activists for being framed as terrorists (Arrahmah, 2013).

The last context frames Australia as a developed country and one that is not linked with Islam or Indonesia's issues. Within this context, Australia is positively framed has outstanding education, therefore Australia has become a benchmark in many fields.

### ***Beyond the Frames: The Big Picture of Australia within Indonesian Muslim Online Media***

Media framing can have a powerful impact in influencing audiences on certain issues (Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond & Vig, 2000). Likewise, all the media channels examined in this study also have the ultimate goal of influencing readers about the media's interests in shaping Australia, and this is especially the case for *Arrahmah*, *HTI*, *Dakwatuna*, and *NU online*.

Differentiation of the Australian frame in militant and moderate media can be examined by looking at the chosen issues and the frames that have been formed by each media organization. Militant media tends to publish issues related to terrorism and anti-terrorism, Muslim discrimination and Islamophobia. The moderate media tends to publish items about the co-existence of Islam in Australia and collaborations between Australia and Indonesia.

*Arrahmah* paid great attention to terrorism and anti-terrorism issues as well as the US military base in Darwin. In addition, *Arrahmah* also has an interest in Islam in Australia, especially regarding the Australian Muslims who become *Mujahideen* and joined the war in Syria. *Arrahmah* is the only media outlet that conveyed news about the Australian government's banned passports of 20 of its citizens who planned to join the *jihad* in Syria.

*HTI* has different interests to *Arrahmah*. Except for the spying scandal issue in late 2013, *HTI* has more interest in economic and financial issues. Compared to *Arrahmah*, *HTI* also affords more attention to the West Papua issue and less attention to the US military base at Darwin.

The frame of 'US Ally' is mostly how Australia is presented by *HTI*. *HTI* frequently links Australia and the US within broader subjects, such as spying scandal, terrorism, economic finance and appointment of Tony Abbott as the new Prime Minister. The most important frame of Australia that exists in both *Arrahmah* and *HTI* is that the country 'spreads bad values such as capitalism and liberalism'.

There are some frames in two of the militant media channels – *Arrahmah* and *HTI* – that are similar. Regarding Australia's interest in Indonesia, both militant media argue the weak position of the Indonesian Government vis-à-vis

Australia. This frame also criticizes the Indonesian government, that was not sufficiently assertive in its diplomatic relations with Australia.

The frames from *Arrahmah* and *HTI* show the position of both media as ‘insiders’, with complete involvement and interest as Muslims. Both media outlets acknowledge Islam in a subjective way, and Amin Abdullah classifies militant followers of the religion as projecting Islamic teaching as ‘absolute truth with no dialogue’. Therefore, both media outlets tend to choose and criticize news from Australian media that show the discrepancy between accepting Islam in Australia and the discriminatory attitudes faced by Muslims living there.

Moderate media channels use different frames for Australia. *Dakwatuna* and *NU* focus more on ‘Muslim existence in Multicultural Australia’ and other Australia-Indonesia relations. *Dakwatuna* frames the multicultural environment of Australian society, which enables various Islamic values to thrive. Two distinctive issues that attracted *Dakwatuna* were: the issue of Australia’s abstaining during the vote for Palestinian membership in the United Nations, and the cattle-import issues. Both issues featured prominently in *Dakwatuna* as opposed to the other channels under scrutiny. Overall, *Dakwatuna* framed Australia as a multicultural country that enabled Muslims and Islamic values to exist in the country.

*NU* has a different way of portraying Australia. Compared to the previous three media outlets, *NU* has more positive frames of Australia than negative ones. *NU* positive frames are ‘Australia and Indonesia are good partners’ and ‘Australia respect and support Indonesia’. Both frames were shaped by collaborative endeavors between *NU* and Australia news and the Australian ambassador for Indonesia’s visit to the graveyard of the late Indonesian fifth president as well the prior leader of *NU*, Gur Dur.

On the other hand, *NU* also report negative frames, such as Australia as a US ally, Australia as a threat to Indonesia, Australia interfering in internal matters in Indonesia, Australia disrespecting Indonesia, and the media channel has also labeled Australia as an ‘enemy’ and *kafir*, the number of these negative frames, however, is incomparable to the positive one. Therefore, it can be concluded that *NU* frames Australia as a good partner but not as a friendly neighbor, since there has been some conflict between Australia and Indonesia.

One interesting fact about *NU*’s website is that it never refers to the opinions of other groups’ leaders as news sources. This shows that *NU* strictly limits the interference of other groups’ opinions with its news channels. The limitation of citing other opinion leaders might restrict other Muslim ideologies in its news. Yet *NU* cites numerous opinions from official opinion leaders as news sources to convey *NU*’s frames. This proves that *NU* confines other Muslim groups’ assumptions by controlling the news on its own website. Though *NU* is a moderate Muslim group, its viewpoint is firmly closed off from other Muslim groups’.

*Republika* has the widest range of issues and frames in its news, with more general issues, rather than specific issues, about Australia. *ABC* collaboration has enabled *Republika* to gather information that cannot be found in the other four studied media channels. Some issues are: sport and Australian daily life. Some frames only exist in *Republika*: unclear problem/solution between Australia, and Indonesia and Australia in crisis. The number of positive to negative news items in *Republika* is balanced,<sup>2</sup> meaning *Republika* portrays Australia in a ‘balance’ approach.

Unlike other Muslim group media channels examined in this study, *Republika* has complicated considerations in gatekeeping select issues and shaping the frames. For *Arrahman*, *HTI*, *Dakwatuna*, and *NU*, the group’s ideology is the ultimate factor of publishing news. For *Republika*, however, demonstrating a certain group’s ideology is best avoided. This avoidance is important as *Republika* tries to reach all Muslim groups in Indonesian Muslim society. Once *Republika* is stereotyped as one particular Muslim group’s organ, other Muslim groups would no longer want to access it. Fewer people reading *Republika* means a weaker market since *Republika*’s main income comes from advertisements, and that depends on audience numbers.

Market consideration is not an important matter for other Muslim groups’ media for two reasons: first, each Muslim group’s media already has segmented audiences – they are either members of the group or readers interested in following the group. This does not mean that Muslim group media administrators are not interested in reaching wider audiences. By sharing their opinion about an issue on a public website, they show the attractiveness of their group’s ideology without worrying whether the news framing might affect other Muslim groups or non-Muslim societies.

Another reason is that the owner of the media outlet is a Muslim organization itself, which does not depend on advertisers and other elites. Its operating funds come instead from the organizations that influence its operation. Therefore, the internal organizational elites have significant influence on the news content rather than advertisers and audiences. However, not considering advertisers does not mean that there is no advertising on Muslim groups’ media. There are several advertisements on these media channels, but advertisers are usually members or other advertisers who do not put any ideological pressure on the media’s administrators.

In addition to comparing *Republika* as general commercial Muslim targeted media with Muslim groups’ owned media, this study also tries to compare militant and moderate Muslim media. There are three differences between *Arrahmah* and *HTI* –

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<sup>2</sup> *Republika*’s positive tones are 98 while its negative tones are 101



as militant media channels – and *Dakwatuna*, *NU* and *Republika* – as moderate media channels. The first difference is the frequency of general and specific issues. For the militant media channels, specific issues appear more than general issues, while the inverse is true for moderate media. The second fact is that there is a huge gap between negative tones and positive tones for militant media channels, with negative being the most dominant. This does not occur in moderate media – even *NU* and *Dakwatuna* have more positive than negative news tones. The final difference is that militant media channels seem interested in the role of Australia in world politics, especially Australia's role relating to conflicts in Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Syria. While moderate media channels have more interest in the Muslim existence in Australia, include the application of Islamic teaching in this developed country.

## CONCLUSION

Australia is acknowledged as being a developed country with an outstanding education system and an established society. Therefore, all five Muslim media channels admit that Australia is the benchmark in many fields. However, the frame of Australia as a US ally cannot be forgotten. The US military base in Darwin is strong evidence of this alliance that bolsters negative opinion.

Thus, there is a different focus for militant and moderate media. Militant media perceive Australia as a 'distrustful' neighbor and frames Australia as an 'enemy', a 'threat' and as interrupting Indonesia's internal matters. On the other hand, the frames of Australia in moderate media focus on Australia's support of the existence of Muslims in its multicultural society but also use several negative frames about Australia's disrespect and interference in Indonesia's internal matters. Therefore, *Dakwatuna* and *NU* perceive Australia as 'a multicultural country but not so friendly neighbor'. In addition, *Republika*, as a general Muslim media channel, highlights Australia as its role toward Indonesia. In a nutshell, Australian frames in moderate and general Muslim online media channels tend to balance positive against negative frames, while in militant media the narratives about Australia are far more negative than positive.

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