



# DEMOCRACY WORKSHOPS

An AMARAH, Crescents of Brisbane  
& Islamic Council of Queensland Initiative

# PREFACE

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To create a greater awareness of the Australian electoral and parliamentary processes amongst the different Muslim groups in Queensland the three community-based organizations - Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity (AMARAH), Crescents of Brisbane and the Islamic Council of Queensland (ICQ) initiated a series of democracy workshops at various centres in Queensland.

The aim of this education campaign was to serve as a catalyst for greater participation and engagement in the democratic institutions at all levels of government in the country - council, state and federal, as well as highlight the importance and benefits that could accrue from increased interaction with politicians and the political processes.

It was also an opportunity to provide an alternative narrative to the voices in the community that have contested the compatibility of Islam with democracy and the Australian democratic system.

The organizers of the workshop are grateful to the Australian Electoral Commission and Multicultural Affairs Queensland for helping us facilitate this programme.

Thanks must also be recorded to Ms Riffat Gurdezi in her role as project coordinator and to Ms Nora Amath, Mr Mohammed Yusuf and Dr Mustafa Ally of AMARAH, ICQ and Crescents of Brisbane respectively who facilitated the sessions.

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# INTRODUCTION

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In February of 2011, AMARAH, Crescents of Brisbane and the Islamic Council of Queensland received a grant to hold a series of democracy workshops for the Muslim community in Queensland in affiliation with the Australian Electoral Commission. The purpose of the 'democracy workshop' initiative was to better enhance the understanding of the Australian parliamentary and electoral processes amongst Muslims in Queensland.

A series of democracy workshops were held around Queensland in the form of workshop presentations and the 'Voter's Challenge' Trivia.

The workshops were held for Muslims on the south of Brisbane, the senior students at the two Islamic Colleges in Brisbane, Rockhampton, the affiliates of the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland, the Muslims north of Brisbane, Gold Coast, Darra and the surrounding area, and at the Brisbane Eidfest. The Democracy workshops were conducted between May and September 2011.

*The aim of the project was to conduct a series of workshops across Queensland with the various Muslim communities on the:*

- *The importance of political participation to the communities, and*
- *To instil an interest and an understanding of the Australian electoral and parliamentary processes*



# ORGANISATIONS

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## **AMARAH Inc.**

AMARAH is non-profit organisation based in Brisbane that advocates for the rights of all humanity.

*Ms Nora Amath (President)*



## **Islamic Council of Queensland (ICQ) Inc.**

The Islamic Council of Queensland is the umbrella body that represents the interests of Muslims in Queensland.

*Mr Mohammed Yusuf (President)*



## **Crescents of Brisbane Inc.**

Crescents of Brisbane is a community-based, not-for-profit organization fostering a healthy lifestyle through sport, entertainment, education and culture, particularly amongst Muslims in Queensland.

*Dr Mustafa Ally OAM (President)*

**Project Coordinator**  
Miss Riffat Gurdezi



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# BASIC OBJECTIVES

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In 2010 a report on political participation of Muslims in Australia was conducted by Monash University. This report highlighted that electorates with the highest proportions of recent migrants had the highest levels of informal and donkey voting. A need was, therefore, felt to increase political literacy amongst Muslim migrants and long-standing Australian residents. Accordingly, the two main objectives of this project included 1) creating awareness about the importance of participation in politics and 2) advising participants of ways in which they could influence the political scene.



# PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

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- Creates a sense of ownership of the nation's political institutions
- Develops and maintains a sense of belonging
- Overcomes alienation and powerlessness which minority communities often experience
- Builds bridges
- Provides a channel of communication for concerns and ideas
- Creates greater awareness and understanding amongst wider community
- Provides role models





# INFLUENCING THE POLITICAL SCENE

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- Voting
- Standing for office
- Joining a local or issue-specific action group
- Volunteering to support a political campaign
- Writing to a Member of Parliament
- Raising funds for a political campaign
- Writing to a newspaper
- Phoning talk back radio



# OUR MODEL

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An innovative framework badged as *The Voters Challenge* - “An evening of Entertainment, Education & Enlightenment in your very own Electorate” was developed.

It comprised of a trivia-styled event in which participants formed teams of five members, named after local electoral divisions

The teams challenged each other by answering around 6 rounds and 10 visual and written questions on the elections and the workings of the parliaments. See Appendix 2 for a sample of the questions asked.

Liberal clues were offered throughout the session from the quizmaster and discussion was encouraged during and between rounds.

Prizes were given to the winners of each of the rounds and to the overall winning team.

The review of the questions sparked enthusiastic discussions and debates and served to enhance the learning and understanding of the issues, and cleared any lingering misconceptions and misunderstandings.

The AEC was on standby at most of the events.



# THE ROADSHOWS

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- Nine workshops/trivia events were conducted in various towns in the State
  - ❖ Mosques
  - ❖ Schools
  - ❖ Organizations
  - ❖ Community Groups
  - ❖ Culminated at the Brisbane Eidfest
- An AEC representative was present at most of the events
- To address the debate prevalent in the community on the extent to which Islam and democracy are compatible, an Imam was invited to be present to put forward the Islamic perspective on the subject
- There was ample food and drinks provided at each event
- Feedback was very positive and encouraging



# GETTING THE MESSAGES ACROSS

- How to engage in the democratic process
- The potential benefits of voting to individuals and to the community
- The mechanics of the electoral process
- Parliamentary processes and the role of the three tiers of government
- Political terms and terminologies
- That voting is not only a right but also a responsibility to ensure that the leadership and management of our country are vested in people who subscribe to principles of honesty, justice, and compassion
- That through political participation we can contribute as citizens of Australia towards preserving and strengthening democracy and help define the future of our country
- That by lobbying or seeking help from our elected representatives we are able to get approvals and redress on issues that may not have been otherwise possible, for example
  - Building a mosque/school in a certain area
  - Speed limits on certain streets/bus shelters
  - Funding for certain community projects



- That constituents have a right to see their elected representatives to seek help or advice on matters that may affect/concern themselves or their families personally, their neighbourhoods and their communities
- That the elected representatives are in the most part accessible and approachable and there is no need to feel intimidated or the threat of victimization
- That it is in the interest of their communities and organizations to engage with their representatives, inviting them to events, mosques, iftaars (breaking fast during the month of Ramadan) etc.
- That politicians do respond to the demographics of the electorate





# An overview of the workshops and trivia challenges conducted throughout Queensland



## 'LINKING LEADERS IN QUEENSLAND' LUNCH



Attendee introducing her organisation

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2011 ICQ, AMARAH and Crescents of Brisbane held the 'Linking Leaders in Queensland' lunch at the D'Lahori Restaurant, in Underwood. The main intent of the lunch was to bring the leaders of various Muslim ethnic, regional and sects of Queensland together to enhance networking and to launch the democracy workshops. Approximately 30 leaders from all over Queensland, including as far north as Rockhampton to as south as the Gold Coast

attended.

Mr. Mohammed Yusuf introduced the various leaders to ICQ and its key functions. The various leaders were then given an opportunity to introduce themselves and the community groups that they represented. This enhanced awareness of the various group and allowed for further networking between the different organisations. Nora Amath then deliberated on the history and impact the various community organisations have made in Queensland. Sgt. Jim Bellos, as a representative of the Queensland Police Service /Muslim Community Consultative Group, then spoke about the work he does within in the group.



Attendees from all over Queensland

Demographic data was also collected from each of the leaders, which was later used to analyse the format of events that would be used in their respective communities.

Many links were formed and used to plan the later democracy workshops.



# AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY TRIVIA SOIREE

## *Voter's Challenge Trivia Night 14/5/11*

The pilot run of the *Voter's Challenge* trivia event was overall a fun, vibrant and well-received evening. The trivia night was held at the new multi-purpose hall at the Islamic College of Brisbane on the ground floor. With a few initial organisational hurdles, the evening flourished into a highly enjoyable and informative event. The

crowd was very enthused and engaged in the content and seemed to really get into the fun, competitive nature of the trivia format. Attendance was within what had been anticipated, as we had 64 participants of 14 teams, and had hoped for between 50-75 people.



**Team Rankin revelling over their win!**



**Team Dickson enjoying an evening of Voter's Challenge Trivia**

Representatives of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), Derek O'Beirne and Lorraine were in attendance and provided further insight into the voting process and played a great adjudicatory role. The last four rounds of the trivia of the evening were well received; however it seemed to be too long for most, so a note was made not to hold as many rounds at future trivia nights. Snacks, refreshments and tea and coffee facilities were also available throughout the evening and thoroughly enjoyed by most.

Representatives of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), Derek O'Beirne and Lorraine were in attendance and provided further insight into the voting process and played a great adjudicatory role. The last four rounds of the trivia of the evening were well

received;

however it



**Participants undergoing the 'who, what, where and when?' session of the trivia**





# AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC COLLEGE (AIIC)

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## *Democracy Workshop and Voter's Challenge Trivia 26/5/11*

The democracy workshop was well received by the students of the College. They were overall quite attentive and engaged in the content. The session was modeled in most part on the AEC's 'Democracy Rules' education resource.

One of the activities required the students to think of the characteristics in a leader that they felt would most suit their individual needs as well as the needs of their community. The students then made posters of what characteristics and policy/law reforms they would like implemented. The students came up with a wide range of characteristics and policies and were able to apply them to current issues and problems. A discussion then ensued on the importance of responsible voting and the ability and space the law has to make change and curb policy to meet our individual interests.

The feedback suggested that this activity was very well received by the students.

The session concluded with two rounds of the Voter's Challenge trivia session. The students were quite excited and engaged in the content of the trivia. The students were put into groups of 2-3 persons, and the winning teams were awarded prizes.

The students and teachers were quite happy with the overall content and nature of the workshop. Many students asked when these sessions were likely to be held again.



# DEMOCRACY WORKSHOP ROCKHAMPTON

## *Islamic Society of Central Queensland Open Day 11/6/11*



**Voter's Challenge Trivia at the  
Rockhampton Mosque Open Day**

The democracy workshop in Rockhampton was incorporated into the Islamic Society of Central Queensland's open day, as the president of the society had suggested it was the best forum to ensure as many people would attend as possible.

The workshop began with a definition of democracy, followed by a discussion on democracy in Australia, Islam's compatibility with notions of democracy and the system of the Australian democratic government. AEC representative, Jo Mitten, then elaborated on the Australian electoral process and distributed enrolment forms.



**Quiz master enthralling the crowd**

This discussion was then followed by a group voter's challenge trivia session, which facilitated discussions on the topic questions and further enhanced understanding of the parliamentary and electoral process. There were approximately 70 participants from Rockhampton and the surrounding regional areas, predominantly young to middle aged professionals, including some children and teenagers. Most participants found the workshop quite enjoyable and informative.



# ISLAMIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (IWAQ)

## *The Voter's Challenge Australian Democracy Trivia Soiree* *Voter's Challenge Trivia 25/6/11*



IWAQ participants eagerly awaiting the next trivia question

The *Voter's Challenge Trivia* was held at the IWAQ centre in Springwood.

Participants consisted of fairly new immigrants affiliated with IWAQ. There were approximately 70 participants of varying age groups.

The trivia was generally well received however, due to the limited English proficiency level some found it quite challenging. Most participants seemed to be quite engaged in the content and several said they had acquired new knowledge.



On site babysitting facilities were also provided to parents, which was of great assistance to many.

AEC representative, Andrew Reid provided great assistance and further insight into the electoral system. Some participants also took advantage of the AEC's presence to complete and submit enrolment forms.



# HOW YOUR VOTE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

## *Democracy Workshop and Voter's Challenge Trivia 26/6/11*



The Democracy workshop was held at the Bald Hills Mosque.

The committee of the mosque requested that the event take place with male and female segregation.

This at first seemed a challenge, as we had not done an event in this format; however it worked out to be a highly enjoyable and successful event.

There were approximately 50 participants of varying ages from the local area.

Mohammed Yusuf and Mustafa Ally were MCs for the workshop and facilitated it in such a way that encouraged productive discussion and learning.

Participants particularly enjoyed the discussion on getting to know your local Member of Parliament on a personal basis and utilising that relationship to lobby for policy change and funding for community initiatives, as several were unaware of the accessibility of politicians.



Participants enjoying lunch

Kerri Dowsett and Karen Hall from the AEC played a great adjudicatory role throughout the workshop and were there to assist in further understanding key concepts and assist those who wished to enrol on the electoral roll.



# POLITICS AND PIZZA VOTER'S CHALLENGE TRIVIA NIGHT

## *Voter's Challenge Trivia Night 8/7/11*

The Gold Coast Trivia Night was held at the Gold Coast Mosque in lieu of the Mosque's weekly Friday night Islamic lectures.

Attendance was overwhelming, the biggest event throughout the series, as there were close to 100 participants.

It was a night of politicians and pizzas as hastily made up teams took on the names of electoral divisions and pitted themselves against each other to test their knowledge of electoral and parliamentary terms for the many prizes on offer.

The Bowman electoral division made up of Hussin Goss, Imam Imraan Husain, Habib Jamal, Abdul Latief Gundru, Ahmed Gundru and Yunie Omar walked off with the main prize of the night.

With the assistance of AEC representatives Derek O'Beirne and Caroline D'Allura, attendees felt they had substantially benefited from the workshop and had learnt something new.



# DARRA VOTER'S CHALLENGE TRIVIA NIGHT

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## *Voter's Challenge Trivia Night 22/7/11*

The Voter's Challenge Trivia was held at the Darra Mosque for the community in Darra and the surrounding areas.

Despite the less than expected turnout the 40 participants of varying ages appeared to enjoy and engaged in the session.

Several of the participants of that locale had heritages that dated back five generations of being Australian-born and therefore had a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the Australian electoral and parliamentary processes.

Cameron Stokes from the AEC was in attendance and provided further insight to many issues pertaining to the electoral process.





# ISLAMIC COLLEGE OF BRISBANE (ICB)

## *Democracy Workshop and Voter's Challenge Trivia 10/8/11*



*The 'future Presidents and Prime Ministers' strategising policies*

The democracy workshop held at the ICB consisted of approximately 50 students from grades 11 and 12. Learning from the last experience at the AIIC, it was decided to focus on defining democracy as a process, how it worked in the Australian system and its

compatibility with Islam.

The facilitators were most impressed by the students as they had a highly comprehensive knowledge of the Australian parliamentary and electoral processes and performed very well in the Voter's Challenge Trivia.



*A student emphatically asserting his team's, A Good Moustache, qualities they would look for in a good leader and policies they felt were necessary to advocate for*

The students were highly engaged in the content and enthusiastically discussed and analysed concepts. They also displayed a high level of creativity in the way they presented their ideas in the responsible voting activity and had great knowledge of world affairs.

Graham Smith and Pam Preston from the AEC provided a great presentation on the Australian parliamentary and electoral processes.



# VOTER'S CHALLENGE AT EIDFEST 3/9/11



**Ms Nora Amath of AMARAH and Dr Mustafa Ally of Crescents of Brisbane with Mr Farouk Adam of the Muslim Business Network**

Sandie and Jodie.

The Voters Challenge stall at Eidfest was abuzz with activity throughout the day as visitors to the festival took on the challenge to test their knowledge of Australian electoral and parliamentary processes.

The challenges were ably administered by Ms Fathima Adat, Ms Naadi Omarjee, Ms Mariam Essof and young Zahira Casoojee along with AEC representatives



**The Voter's challenge stall with the AEC**



**The Voter's Challenge stall abuzz with eager participants**





# FUTURE DIRECTIONS TO ADDRESS

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- Access to the “hard-to-reach” communities
- Cater for varying levels of political savviness – rather than the one-size-fits-all approach
- Design the roadshows to be more adaptable and flexible
- Take into consideration cultural sensitivities and requirements
- Address the political and historical baggage that migrants tend to come to the country with



# APPENDIX

## 1. The Voter's Challenge Publicity Material

**The Voter's Challenge!™**  
 AUSTRALIAN  
 DEMOCRACY TRIVIA  
 SOIREE

AN EVENING OF GOURMET FOOD,  
 TRIVIA AND INFORMATION ON  
 THE PARLIAMENTARY AND  
 ELECTORAL PROCESSES

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AN AMARAH, CRESCENTS OF BRISBANE  
 AND ICQ INITIATIVE



The New Multi-Purpose Hall, Islamic  
 College of Brisbane, KARAWATHA | Saturday, May 14  
 6.00 pm

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Please register your team of 5 (maximum) by May 10

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Participation is free! | CALL 0424 829 126 or EMAIL [info@amarah.org](mailto:info@amarah.org)  
 Free gourmet pizza & coffee | for more information  
 Great prizes up for grabs! | Please note that Team places are limited (First-Come-First-Served)



## 2. Sample Questions

### *The Voter's Challenge!* ©

#### ROUND 1

No.	Question
1	The person who seeks to be elected as a representative of a political party or as an independent, is called a/an _____.
2	What is a geographical area which is divided for electoral purposes called?
3	A party or candidate who gets more than 50% of the votes cast has won by a/an _____ majority.
4	What does AEC stand for?
5	The sealed container where electors place their completed ballot papers is called a _____ (2 words).
6	A combination of two or more parties in parliament, usually to form the government or opposition is called a/an _____?
7	All Australian citizens are required by law to vote. TRUE or FALSE
8	A ballot paper marked 1, 2, 3, 4 etc straight up (or down) a ballot paper is known as a/an _____ vote.
9	What kind of a vote is it called when a ballot paper is left blank or wrongly marked and which is therefore excluded from the count?
10	When a Member of Parliament holds a seat with a small majority of votes this is known as a/an _____ seat.

