

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

## New-style Islamic movements in Indonesia: Implications for Australian-Indonesian relations

Professor Julia Howell from the UWS School of Social Sciences and Psychology, and Associate Professor Mark Woodward from Arizona State University have been granted funding through the Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects initiative to study a new "counter-radical" Islamic movement in Indonesia. They will aim to document its practices, appeal and public impact. Their work will inform Australian policy making concerning Indonesia, as well as public perceptions of Islam and the Islamic world.

'A recent souring of Australian-Indonesian relations is traceable to various factors – one of which is a fear of Islamic extremism following the Bali bombings in 2002', Professor Howell explains. 'In Indonesia, however, there are numerous moderate Muslim thinkers and organisations, and even new counter-radical Islamic movements. One of these takes the form of mass prayer rallies notable for their rejection of narrow, sharia-focused interpretations of Islam. Encouragingly, these rallies are attended by hundreds of thousands of people.' To better understand this religious phenomenon and its potential impact on Australian-Indonesian ties, a wide ranging study of the rallies is being undertaken.

A survey of various Islamic mass rally ministries will be conducted and filmed. Detailed case studies of six of these ministries will gather information about the worship patterns, modes of communication and demographics of these movements, while interviews with attendees will measure the emotional draw of the rally rituals and their charismatic Arab-descent preachers (affectionately called *habaib*). The *habaib* and their followers will be studied to identify their political orientations linked to their faith, and researchers will map varieties of individual



engagement with this new style of Islamic expression. The findings will be used to create a documentary film, and book and journal publications.

The documentary film and other educational resources will address misconceptions Australians may hold about Indonesian society and the role of Islam in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The findings of this study could help improve Australian-Indonesian relations by contributing to government assessments of Australians' safety in the region.

**Project Title:** Counter-radical revival: Indonesia's new-style Islamic prayer rallies

**Funding has been set at:** \$185,200

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