



## How Muslims Think

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Colaboraciones n° 1097

July 18, 2006

How do Muslims worldwide think?

To find out, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press carried out a large-scale attitudinal survey this spring. Titled "[The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other](#)," it interviewed Muslims in two batches of countries: six of them with long-standing, majority-Muslim populations (Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey) and four of them in Western Europe with new, minority Muslim populations (France, Germany, Britain, and Spain).

The survey, which also looks at Western views of Muslims, yielded some dismaying but not altogether surprising results. Its themes can be grouped under three rubrics.

*A proclivity to conspiracy theories:* In not one Muslim population polled

does a majority believe that Arabs carried out the attacks of September 11, 2001, on America. The proportions range from a mere 15% in Pakistan holding Arabs responsible, to 48% among French Muslims. Confirming recent negative trends in Turkey, the number of Turks who point the finger at Arabs has declined to 16% today from 46% in 2002. In other words, in every one of these 10 Muslim communities, a majority views September 11 as a hoax perpetrated by the American government, Israel, or some other agency.

Likewise, Muslims are widely prejudiced against Jews, ranging from 28% unfavorable ratings among French Muslims to 98% in Jordan (which, despite the monarchy's moderation, has a majority Palestinian Arab population). Further, Muslims in certain countries (especially

Egypt and Jordan) see Jews conspiratorially, as being responsible for bad relations between Muslims and Westerners.

Conspiracy theories also pertain to larger topics. Asked, "What is most responsible for Muslim nations' lack of prosperity?" between 14% (in Pakistan) and 43% (in Jordan) blame the policies of America and other Western states, as opposed to indigenous problems, such as a lack of democracy or education, or the presence of corruption or radical Islam.

This conspiracism points to a [widespread unwillingness](#) in the *umma* to deal with realities, preferring the safer bromides of plots, schemes, and intrigues. It also exposes major problems adjusting to modernity.

*Support for terrorism:* All the Muslim populations polled display a solid majority of support for Osama bin Laden. Asked whether they have confidence in him, Muslims replied positively, ranging between 8% (in Turkey) and 72% (in Nigeria). Likewise, suicide bombing is popular. Muslims who call it justified range from 13% (in Germany) to 69% (in Nigeria). These appalling numbers suggest that terrorism by Muslims has deep roots and will remain a danger for years to come.

*British and Nigerian Muslims are most alienated:* [Britain](#) stands out as a paradoxical country. Non-Muslims there have strikingly more favorable views of Islam and Muslims than elsewhere in the West; for example, only 32% of the British sample view

Muslims as violent, significantly less than their counterparts in France (41%), Germany (52%), or Spain (60%). In the Muhammad cartoon dispute, Britons showed more sympathy for the Muslim outlook than did other Europeans. More broadly, Britons blame Muslims less for the poor state of Western-Muslim relations.

But British Muslims return the favor with the most malign anti-Western attitudes found in Europe. Many more of them regard Westerners as violent, greedy, immoral, and arrogant than do their counterparts in France, Germany, and Spain. In addition, whether asked about their attitudes toward Jews, responsibility for September 11, or the place of women in Western societies, their views are notably more extreme.

The situation in Britain reflects the "[Londonistan](#)" phenomenon, whereby Britons preemptively cringe and Muslims respond to this weakness with aggression.

Nigerian Muslims generally have the most belligerent views on such issues as the state of Western-Muslim relations, the supposed immorality and arrogance of Westerners, and support for Mr. bin Laden and suicide terrorism. This extremism results, no doubt, from the violent state of Christian-Muslim relations in Nigeria.

Ironically, most Muslim alienation is found in those countries where Muslims are either the most or the least accommodated, suggesting that a middle path is best - where

Muslims do not win special privileges, as in Britain, nor are they in an advanced state of hostility, as in Nigeria.

Overall, the Pew survey sends an undeniable message of crisis from one end to the other of the Muslim world..