

Survey: U.S. Muslims Assimilated, Opposed to Extremism

By Alan Cooperman
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Unlike Muslim minorities in many European countries, U.S. Muslims are highly assimilated, close to parity with other Americans in income and overwhelmingly opposed to Islamic extremism, according to the first major, nationwide random survey of Muslims.

The survey by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that 78 percent of U.S. Muslims said the use of suicide bombings against civilian targets to defend Islam is never justified. But 5 percent said it is justified "rarely," 7 percent said "sometimes," and 1 percent said "often"; the remaining 9 percent said they did not know or declined to answer.

By comparison, Muslims in [France](#), [Spain](#) and [Britain](#) were almost twice as likely to say suicide bombing is sometimes or often justified, and public acceptance of the tactic is even higher in some countries with large Muslim populations, such as [Nigeria](#), Jordan and [Egypt](#).

Titled "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," the Pew report draws a picture of a diverse population of about 2.35 million U.S. Muslims, of which two-thirds of the adults were born abroad, and which has a generally positive view of the larger society.

Most call their communities good or excellent places to live, and most report that a large portion of their closest friends are non-Muslims. They are slightly more satisfied than the general public is with the state of the nation.

On balance, they believe that Muslims coming to the [United States](#) should adopt American customs, rather than trying to remain distinct. And they are even more inclined than other Americans to say that people who want to get ahead can make it if they work hard; 71 percent of U.S. Muslims agreed with that statement, compared with 64 percent of the general public.

"What emerges is the great success of the Muslim American population in its socioeconomic assimilation," said Amaney Jamal, an assistant professor of politics at [Princeton University](#) who was a senior adviser on the poll. "Given that for the past few years they've been dealing with the backlash from 9/11, these numbers are extremely impressive."

A majority say their lives have become more difficult since Sept. 11, 2001, and most think the government has singled out Muslims for monitoring. About one in four said they do not think that "groups of Arabs" were responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Though socially conservative, Muslims lean toward the [Democratic Party](#), six to one.

Farid Senzai, another Muslim adviser on the poll, said the findings are in sharp contrast to the "ghettoization" of Muslim minorities in parts of [Western Europe](#), where Muslim immigrants are markedly less well off than the general population, frustrated with economic opportunities and socially isolated.

Just less than half of Muslim Americans have attended or graduated from college, close to the national figure of 54 percent, and the income distribution among Muslim families closely matches the national norm.

Still, the poll found "pockets of sympathy for extremism" particularly among African Americans and young Muslims, said Andrew Kohut, head of the Pew Research Center.

Native-born African American Muslims, who represent about 20 percent of the total Muslim population, are its most disillusioned segment, the report shows. They are more skeptical than foreign-born Muslims of the idea that hard work pays off. About 13 percent are satisfied with the way things are going, compared with 29 percent of other native-born Muslims and 45 percent of Muslim immigrants.

One of the poll's most striking findings, Kohut said, is that African American Muslims are considerably more likely than immigrant Muslims to express support for [al-Qaeda](#).

Nine percent of African American Muslims expressed a favorable attitude toward [Osama bin Laden's](#) terrorist organization, while 36 percent held a very unfavorable view. Among foreign-born Muslims, 3 percent had a favorable view of al-Qaeda while 63 percent chose "very unfavorable."

Jamal, the [Princeton](#) professor, said the data seem to indicate that African American Muslims are sympathetic to the goals but not the

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means of al-Qaeda, because 85 percent said suicide bombing is rarely or never justified. She speculated that they may see al-Qaeda "not just as the force behind terrorist attacks . . . but as resistance to a status quo that is seen to treat them unfairly."

The poll found that U.S. Muslims overwhelmingly oppose the war in [Iraq](#), while the general population is closely split on that question. Muslims also oppose the war in [Afghanistan](#), 48 percent to 35 percent. The reverse view prevails in the general populace, which supports the Afghan war by nearly two to one.

Muslims under age 30 are more religious than their elders, as well as more inclined to support suicide bombing and more likely to identify themselves as Muslims first, then Americans, the poll found.

Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, said the Washington-based nonprofit organization spent \$1 million on the poll. It surveyed 1,050 Muslim adults in four languages -- English, Arabic, Urdu and Farsi -- and paid them \$50 each for their time.

To generate the sample, Pew used randomly dialed telephone numbers to reach more than 57,000 households. In addition, it gleaned likely Muslim names from a commercial database and re-contacted some English-speaking Muslim households that had been identified in other surveys since 2000. The overall margin of sampling error was plus or minus five percentage points.

One finding likely to generate controversy is Pew's estimate of 2.35 million Muslims in the United States, including 1.5 million adults. Because the U.S. Census does not ask about religious identity, there has been no previous, widely accepted estimate of the Muslim population. Smaller, less random surveys have come up with lower numbers, while some Muslim groups have contended, based on loose methodology, that there are 7 million Muslims or more.

Polling director Jon Cohen and polling analyst Jennifer Agiesta contributed to this report.

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