

## Muslim-Western Tensions Persist: Pew Survey

Muslim and Western publics continue to see relations between them as generally bad, with both sides holding negative stereotypes of the other. Many in the West see Muslims as fanatical and violent, while few say Muslims are tolerant or respectful of women. Meanwhile, Muslims in the Middle East and Asia generally see Westerners as selfish, immoral and greedy – as well as violent and fanatical.

However, the latest Pew Global Attitudes survey finds somewhat of a thaw in the U.S. and Europe compared with five years ago. A greater percentage of Western publics now see relations between themselves and Muslims as generally good compared with 2006.

In contrast, Muslims in predominantly Muslim nations are as inclined to say relations are generally bad as they were five years ago.

For the most part, Muslims and Westerners finger point about the causes of problems in their relations, and about which side holds the high ground on key issues. Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere who say relations with the West are bad overwhelmingly blame the West. However, while Americans and Europeans tend to blame Muslims for bad relations, significant numbers believe Westerners are responsible.

One note of agreement between Westerners and Muslims is that both believe Muslim nations should be more economically prosperous than they are today. But they gauge the problem quite differently. Muslim publics have an aggrieved view of the West – they blame Western policies for their own lack of prosperity. Across the Muslim publics surveyed, a median of 53% say U.S. and Western policies are one of the top two reasons why Muslim nations are not wealthier.

In contrast, few Americans or Western Europeans think the economic challenges facing Muslim countries are a result of Western policies.

However, both Muslims and Westerners believe corrupt governments and inadequate education in Muslim nations are at least partly responsible for the lack of prosperity. And perhaps reflecting the Arab Spring, in several Muslim and Western nations, people are more likely than they were five years ago to say the dearth of prosperity stems from a lack of democracy.

These are among the key findings from a survey by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, conducted March 21 to May 15. The survey updates a number of old questions from a 2006 Pew Global Attitudes poll that explored how Muslim and Western publics view one another. The current survey finds that five years later – and nearly 10 years after the attacks of September 11, 2001 – tensions remain high, although there are also some shared concerns.

For instance, both Muslims and Westerners are concerned about Islamic extremism. More than two-thirds in Russia, Germany, Britain, the U.S. and France are worried about Islamic extremists in their country.

But extremism is considered a threat in predominantly

Muslim nations as well. More than seven-in-ten Palestinian and Lebanese Muslims are worried about Islamic extremists in their countries, as are most Muslims in Egypt, Pakistan, and Turkey. For Muslims, the most common concern about extremism is that it is violent, although in both Egypt and the Palestinian territories the top fear is that extremism could divide the country.

In four of the six largely Christian nations included in the study, most say they have a positive opinion of Muslims. The exceptions are Germany (45% favorable) and Spain (37%), although views toward Muslims have improved in both countries since 2006.

Muslim views toward Christians vary considerably across countries. In Lebanon, which has a large Christian population, nearly all Muslims (96%) express a positive view of Christians. Narrow majorities of Jordanian (57%) and Indonesian (52%) Muslims also give Christians a favorable rating, while in Egypt – which has recently experienced violence between elements of its Muslim and Christian communities – views are divided (48% favorable; 47% unfavorable).

Meanwhile, very few Muslims in Pakistan (16%) or Turkey (6%) have a positive opinion of Christians.

Ratings for Jews are uniformly low in the predominantly Muslim nations surveyed.

Among Israel's minority Muslim community, however, views are divided: 48% express a positive opinion of Jews, while 49% offer a negative opinion. In contrast, only 9% of Israeli Jews have a positive view of Muslims. Christians receive somewhat higher ratings among Israeli Muslims (67% favorable) than among Israeli Jews (51%).

### Also of Note:

- There is a widespread perception that Muslims living in the West do not want to assimilate. Majorities in Europe and the U.S. think Muslims wish to remain distinct from the rest of society, instead of embracing the way of life in Western nations. More than two-thirds in Germany and Spain believe Muslims do not want to adopt national customs.

- Among Muslim publics, many believe that Americans and Europeans are hostile toward Muslims. In fact, in Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, and Jordan, the belief that Americans and Europeans are hostile has become more common since 2006.

- In Western nations, those who believe some religions are more prone to violence than others tend to say Islam is the most violent faith (when asked to choose among Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism). Muslim publics who think some religions are especially prone to violence tend to name Judaism.

- There is an education gap on views about Muslim assimilation – in Western Europe and the U.S., those who do not have a college degree are more likely than those who do to believe that Muslims want to remain distinct from the broader society.

## DIALOGUE

# A need for constructive dialogue for tolerance

**Jeddah, Saudi Arabia** – Dr. Lansine (Al-Hassan) Kaba, distinguished visiting professor of history at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, urges for a constructive dialogue on civilization for tolerance to prevail in order to make the world more humane.

During a recent visit to the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah, he sat with the OIC Journal for a brief history of Islam in the West.

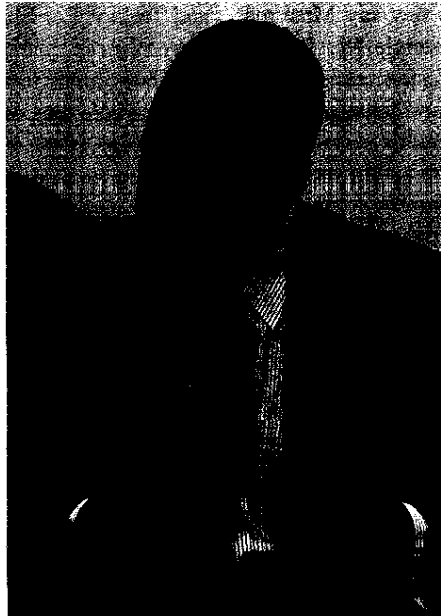
Islam is a religion that is based on diversity, globalism and interdependence; therefore, it has no problem with these concepts as some claim. He said that Muslims willing to defend their fundamental values as Muslims does not mean that they are denying the values of Christianity and Judaism and other people, but to ensure that they are following a tradition that since its conception until now always called for the dignity of men and their brotherhood.

He believes that the recent debates held at the official government level in France and the US about the presence of Islam are politically motivated because Islam has been present in France, in the US and other western countries for a very long time.

In the case of France, Muslims defended France in World War I and fought under the leadership of General Charles de Gaulle in World War II; why was there no debate then, he asked, or when France colonized Muslim countries and exploited their resources. Dr. Kaba believes that the reason for the recent debates is because President Nicolas Sarkozy wanted to win some potential electoral votes in the next elections away from the right wing party.

“The problem does not exist. But Sarkozy created it to antagonize, to create a sense of antagonism among French electoral and attract right wing elements who are anti-foreigners, xenophobes, anti-Arab, anti-black, and any element not “pure French”.”

He does not see Islam as a cultural threat to France as some has argued. “There has always been a co-habitation,” asserts Dr. Kaba. Muslims only want to ensure their right to



practice their religion. “The right wing has to manufacture threat” to win over people without knowledge.

In the US it is the same. Muslims have been there for centuries. Although they came in large numbers after the repeal of the Immigration Act in 1965 by President Johnson, said Dr. Kaba, in fact they were in the US long before that, during slavery and even came with Columbus when he discovered America.

“Islam is not new in the US. What is new is the willingness of Muslims to develop their presence, not to make Islam a transient religion but a reality of American consciousness, which was not possible before the war of cessation or after the war of 1864 because of the slavery system. But then Muslims became full fledged citizens.”

Now there are mosques all across the US and Muslims are found in every aspect of life.

The hearings launched by Congressman Peter King persuaded Muslims to develop a better consciousness of their rights and to defend their rights, according to Dr. Kaba.

“The new phenomenon of Islamophobia literally, in my judgment, is threatening the foundation of America. Luckily the US has a constitution that defends freedom of religion,” he said.

As ominous as those hearing were, Dr. Kaba sees a bright future for Islam in the US.

Every religion can lead at times to misconception in the mind of people, to commit terrible things, said Dr. Kaba. “We need to resist the feelings of hatred.”

Diversity is part of humanity. Differences are no reason to hate each other.

“A constructive dialogue on civilization is a necessity for tolerance and to make the world a humane world. I think within this context, Islam is here to stay in France, in the US, and other places, and to blossom.”