# Reinventing Integration: Muslims in the West

*Speech delivered by Dalia Mogahed, executive director of Gallup's Center for Muslim Studies, at the Cambridge University Conference "Islam and Muslims in the World Today" held June 4-5, 2007, at Lancaster House in London, U.K.*

*In cooperation with the Weidenfeld Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the Coexist Foundation, The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme hosted the conference "Islam and Muslims in the World Today" to which they invited academics and policymakers to listen to Muslim academics, community activists, religious leaders, and scholars from Britain and abroad to discuss issues affecting Muslims in the world today. Topics for debate ranged from the relationship of faith and the state to questions of citizenship, human rights, gender, and education.*

*For more information about the conference, visit: http://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/cip/islam-conference.php*

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As the sixth year of the U.S.-led war on terror rages on, it would appear that few constructs are more self-evident than the one dividing Islam and the West. Muslim minorities in the West are often scrutinized through this paradoxical prism: On which side of the divide do they fall? The signs don't look good — some say.


The results of several recent polls have set off alarm bells in a tense Europe, still shaken by the July 7, 2005, bombings in London. For example, the Pew poll found that given a choice of identifying themselves as first Muslim or Christian or as first a citizen of their country, the majority of British, French, and German Muslims choose their faith, while the majority of British, French, and German Christians choose their country. Some have taken these results as witness to the danger of over-accommodating religious differences, and have advocated that Muslims in Europe be persuaded or forced to forsake their Islamic identity

for a Western one. However, new findings from a Gallup study of Muslims in London, Paris, and Berlin, as well as the general public in each corresponding country challenge the very legitimacy of such a trade-off, and reveal a much more complex relationship between citizenship and creed.

I will first cover three broad themes among the Muslim populations: religiosity, identity, and views of violence, and then point out interesting differences, and close with the key learnings from the study.

**1. Religiosity**

One of the most pervasive underlying assumptions in the discourse on European Muslim integration is that Muslim religiosity is a threat to Europe. Those who believe in the irreconcilability of Western and Muslim identity generally argue that Muslim piety, expressed in religious symbols and moral conservatism, contrasted against the backdrop of secular and sexually liberal Europe, is a recipe for increasingly insular Muslim communities and profound alienation from European national identity. These isolated communities, the argument continues, not only represent an illiberal island challenging Western democratic values, but are a "cesspool" for radicalization.

Integration, defined as conformity with majority culture, is therefore seen as a vital security measure and a defense against dual-loyalty citizens.

However, a new study paints a very different picture. While Muslims in three European capitals are indeed highly religious, this neither leads to a sympathy for terrorist acts, a desire to isolate, or a lack of national loyalty.

Not surprisingly, the study found that Muslims in London, Berlin, and Paris are much more likely than the general public in each of their corresponding countries to say religion is an important part of their daily lives, and to identify strongly with their faith. Predictably, the Muslims surveyed are also much more likely to express traditional moral values than are the general public in their respective countries. Muslim respondents, in comparison to the public at large, overwhelmingly see homosexual acts, sex before marriage, and abortion as "morally wrong."

Muslims' high regard for their own religion extended to a positive regard to other people of faith as well. Muslims in Paris and London were more than 10 times more likely to express positive opinions of "fundamentalist Christians" and Catholics than negative opinions. On the other hand, the public was essentially as likely to express positive opinions as negative opinions of Sunni Muslims, with the exception of the German public, who were almost four times as likely to express negative as positive views of Sunni Muslims.

Muslims in these cities were also at least as likely to support the rights of members of *other* faiths to display their religious symbols as they were to render support for their own symbols, belying the popular assertion that Muslims are demanding preferential treatment for Islam. More accurately, Muslims' expectation of respect for Islam and its symbols extends to an expectation of respect of religion in general.

**2. Identity**

What about Identity? How does Muslim religiosity affect their relationship with their European country of residence and, in many cases, citizenship?

Eroding the foundational assumptions of the Islam vs. the West thesis, the data show that religious and national identities are not mutually exclusive. Not only do these urban Muslims identify strongly with their religion, but they are at least as likely as the general public to identify strongly with their country of residence — and Muslims in London are slightly more likely than other U.K. residents to do so.

Also defying conventional wisdom, a high level of Muslim religiosity and the corresponding conservative moral outlook did not translate into a sense of threat from the "sinful West" and therefore a desire to isolate. Instead, Muslims in each European city were slightly less likely to feel people with different religious practices than their own were a threat to their way of life and slightly more likely than the general public to say they would prefer living in a mixed neighborhood. Not only do religious and national identities coexist, but it is these urban Muslims who are the most eager to forsake isolation for integration.

Muslims in Paris, Berlin, and London wish to hold onto their values, but also choose diversity over conformity. They define integration as mutual respect and cooperation between distinct cultures, not the dilution of minority culture into a dominant mainstream, nor the dilution of majority culture into a politically correct muck.

**3. Radical Rejection**

But should this strong Muslim religiosity scare the West? Is this a sign of sympathy for terrorism? According to the data, the answer is no. Though the world is still far from a definitive answer as to what makes a person turn to terrorism, the results from the Gallup study challenge the common dogma on radicalization and show that Muslim communities are as likely as any other to reject terrorist activity.

Muslims in these three cities were at least as likely as the general public to condemn terrorist attacks on civilians and to find no moral justification for using violence, even for a "noble cause."

While some sympathy for terrorist acts does exist in the Muslim world, after analyzing survey data representing more than 90% of the global Muslim population, Gallup found that despite widespread religiosity, and widespread anger at some Western policies in their region, only a small minority sympathized with the attacks of 9/11.

Even more significant, there was no correlation between one's level of religiosity and sympathy for this horrific act. The real difference between those who condone terrorist acts and the vast majority who condemn them stems from political, rather than religious or cultural, distinctions.

To get a deeper understanding of what drives public sympathy as well as public disgust for terrorism, Gallup asked both those who condoned and those who condemned extremist acts, "Why do you say that?" The responses may be surprising. For example, in Indonesia, the largest Muslim majority country in the world, not a single respondent from the small minority who condoned the attacks of 9/11 cited the West's perceived moral decay or the Quran for justification. Instead, this group's responses were markedly secular and worldly, mostly related to U.S. foreign policy. For example, one Indonesian respondent said, "The U.S. government is too controlling toward other countries, seems like colonizing." Another said, "The U.S. has helped the Zionist country, Israel, to attack Palestine."

Moreover, while residents of predominantly Muslim countries are critical of the West's perceived breakdown of traditional values, this is neither the primary driver of extremist views nor the demanded change Muslims cite for better relations with the West. When asked what the West can do to improve relations with the Muslim world, the most frequent responses were neither for Western societies to be less democratic nor less liberal. Far from it — what Muslims said they admired most about Western societies was their democratic systems of government, including government transparency and freedom of speech. Instead, to improve relations, Muslims called for Western societies to change their economic and political policies toward Muslim nations, but most of all to "stop thinking of Muslims as inferior and to respect Islam." It is not that the majority of Muslims believe there is nothing to respect about the West, but rather that they believe the West finds nothing to respect about them.

Rather than using religious doctrine to condone terrorism, many Muslims refer to their beliefs to condemn it. For example, to explain why she could find no moral justification for the attacks of 9/11, one woman in an Indonesian city said, "It was similar with a murder, an act forbidden in our religion." Another said, "Killing one's life is as sinful as killing the whole world," paraphrasing verse 5:32 in the Quran. Far from reviving terrorism, according to our study, the Quran for many Muslims is the inspiration for rejecting it.

**Differences**

I'll now briefly point out differences among Muslim communities. In the interest of time, I'll focus on comparing between London and Paris Muslims.

This is an interesting comparison because the two nations' approaches to integration are often contrasted. In broad strokes, Britain has dealt with religious diversity in terms of religious pluralism. This is reflected in the U.K. public's relative tolerance for religious symbols, where the majority do not believe removing the hijab is necessary for integration.

In contrast, France's brand of secularism has sought to eliminate visible religious symbols from the public sphere.

The evidence suggests that the U.K.'s religious pluralism approach, accused by some of promoting disloyalty among minorities, may actually promote greater national unity by making room for diversity.

1. We found that while Paris Muslims are culturally more assimilated than London Muslims, London Muslims are more likely to identify strongly with Britain. *Paris Muslims:*
    a. Less likely to say religion is important.
    b. Less likely to express strong identification with their faith.
    c. Less likely to attend religious services.
    d. More likely to look like the general public in moral outlook. For example, close to roughly one out of two of the French public say extramarital affairs are morally acceptable, and 18% of Paris Muslims agree. This compares with only 5% of London Muslims.

2. London Muslims were the most likely to identify strongly with their country of any group surveyed, Muslim or the general public. In addition, they are the most insistent on the need to celebrate their national holidays as a condtion for integration and significantly more likely than Muslims in Paris to see volunteering to serve the public as necessary for full cohesion. Muslims in Britain's capital are also more likely than other populations surveyed to have confidence in the nation's institutions, such as the judicial system and the national government.

To sum up, our study found that Muslims living in Paris, London, and Berlin are distinctly more religious than the general public in each of these nations, and at the same time as likely as the general public to identify strongly with their nation and its democratic institutions, and as likely to reject violence.

These preliminary results suggest that religious and national identities are complementary not competing concepts, and therefore, our study indicates integration must continue to be measured not in terms of cultural conformity, but instead in terms of citizen cooperation.

*The Gallup World Poll is the largest available source of global public opinion data, providing access to the voices of citizens in more than 130 countries and areas. For more information, call 877-242-5587 or visit www.gallupworldpoll.com*