

Canada's Muslims, an international comparison

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[CBC News](#)

Are we talking past each other? A new poll carried out in conjunction with the CBC suggests just that as it seeks to plumb the attitudes of Canadian Muslims and their fellow citizens toward each other.

Take for example the whole issue of fitting in. The survey by Environics Research Group asks respondents if they feel Muslims coming to Canada want to adopt Canadian customs or remain distinct from the larger society.

For non-Muslim Canadians, 57 per cent feel Muslims want to remain distinct from everyone else — but only 23 per cent of Muslim Canadians feel that way: A full 55 per cent say they want to fit in.

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How exact is that finding? It's hard to say. The Environics poll queries 2,045 members of the general public and 500 Muslim Canadians and has an accuracy in the smaller sample of 4.4 percentage points either way, 19 times out of 20.

It should probably also be seen alongside a Pew Global Attitudes poll in early 2005. The respected American research centre found 60 per cent of Muslims here saw themselves as distinct from the general Canadian population. If both surveys are right, that would represent a remarkable sea change in attitudes in the space of a couple of years.

Still, clear that away — along with some other misconceptions Canadians have about their Muslim compatriots — and a remarkably different portrait appears of Canada's Muslim population.

Compared to their counterparts in the U.K., Germany, France and Spain, who were polled on a handful of similar issues by the Pew Research Centre, Canadian Muslims appear to be the most contented, moderate and, well, Canadian in the developed world.

Unfortunately there are not good comparisons to be made with U.S. Muslims. Gathering information in the U.S. on religious grounds is a

highly controversial subject and any comparative survey would probably be skewed anyway by the U.S. role in Iraq.

But looking abroad, Canadian Muslims are clearly out of step with their European counterparts on such important issues as satisfaction with where they are living, perceived hostility from their co-citizens, the struggle between moderates and fundamentalists and, noticeably, the role of women.

By the numbers

The international comparisons in many cases are quite stark. Asked, for example, how many Canadians do they think are hostile toward Muslims, 75 per cent of Canadian Muslims say either just some or very few. Only 17 per cent say most or many.

This is nowhere near the hostility Muslims feel in Europe, where they have been many more flash points of late over integration, fundamentalist teachings and such things as banning headscarves.

Per cent who feel that either some or most of their fellow citizens are hostile to Muslims?					
Muslims in	Canada	Britain	Germany	France	Spain
Just some/very	75	52	43	60	64
Most/many	17	42	51	39	31

Reinforcing that point is the general satisfaction Canadian Muslims feel about life in Canada, a satisfaction rate that is even higher than that (61 per cent) for the general population.

Per cent who are satisfied with the way things are going in their country?					
Muslims in	Canada	Britain	Germany	France	Spain
Satisfied	81	51	44	33	76
Dissatisfied	15	38	52	67	19

Moderates versus hardliners

Concern about Islamic extremism is now widespread across the world, even among Muslim populations. (One exception the Pew research group found was China, where almost 60 per cent showed little or no concern for the prospect.)

The most recent Pew global survey in the summer of 2006 also found Muslims around the world were growing more embittered toward the West, blaming it for their lack of prosperity, and that surprisingly large numbers, majorities even, in Indonesia, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan didn't believe it was a group of Arabs who carried out the 9/11 attacks on the U.S.

That said, Muslim opinion is clearly not monolithic and is mostly aligned with the moderates, particularly, it seems, in Canada. Consider:

Per cent who feel there is a struggle in their country between moderate Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists					
Muslims in	Canada	Britain	Germany	France	Spain
Yes	40	58	49	56	21
No	50	35	40	43	65

Per cent who identify with moderates or extremists in this struggle				
Muslims in	Canada	Britain	Germany	France
Moderates	80	66	75	89
Extremists	14	25	14	10

Islamic identity and women

One thing Canadian Muslims have in common with their counterparts in Europe and perhaps the entire developed world is their growing sense of Islamic identity. About 70 per cent of Canadian Muslims feel their community is undergoing a strong and growing sense of itself as Muslim today, which is about on par with Muslim sentiment in Europe.

Oddly, it is one of the issues where Canadian Muslims and their co-citizens share a common perception. But that is where matters end.

Only 33 per cent of Canadians think this is a good thing compared with 85 per cent of Muslim Canadians who view their Islamic values as positive and in keeping with Canada's vaunted sense of multiculturalism.

Where these perceptions *seem* to clash is over the role of Muslim women in society, a common flashpoint. But even here attitudes are nuanced and Canadian Muslims seem once again at odds with their co-religionists overseas.

According to the Environics survey, 57 per cent of Muslim women in Canada wear no head covering at all; 38 per cent wear a hijab (the scarf that covers the hair and neck); and only a very small percentage wear full coverings.

That said, Canadian Muslims are strongly against banning the headscarf in public places, including schools, as several European countries are contemplating. A full 86 per cent of Canadian Muslims feel banning is a bad idea (compared with 55 per cent of other Canadians who feel that way as well). But at the same time, Canadian Muslims seem much more open than their counterparts elsewhere to the notion of Muslim women taking on more non-traditional roles. Consider:

Per cent who believe the quality of life for Muslim women is better or worse than in other countries					
Muslims in	Canada	Britain	Germany	France	Spain
Better	70	58	50	62	46
Worse	3	13	17	16	16

Per cent who are worried about Muslim women taking on modern roles:					
Muslims in	Canada	Britain	Germany	France	Spain
Very/somewhat	26	44	20	46	32
Not too/not at all	72	54	74	52	65

This Environics survey, in association with CBC, was based on telephone interviews with 500 Canadian Muslims and 2,045 members

of the general public between Nov. 30, 2006, and Jan. 5, 2007. The Muslim sample is accurate to within plus or minus 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The larger sample is accurate to within 2.2 percentage points over the same conditions.