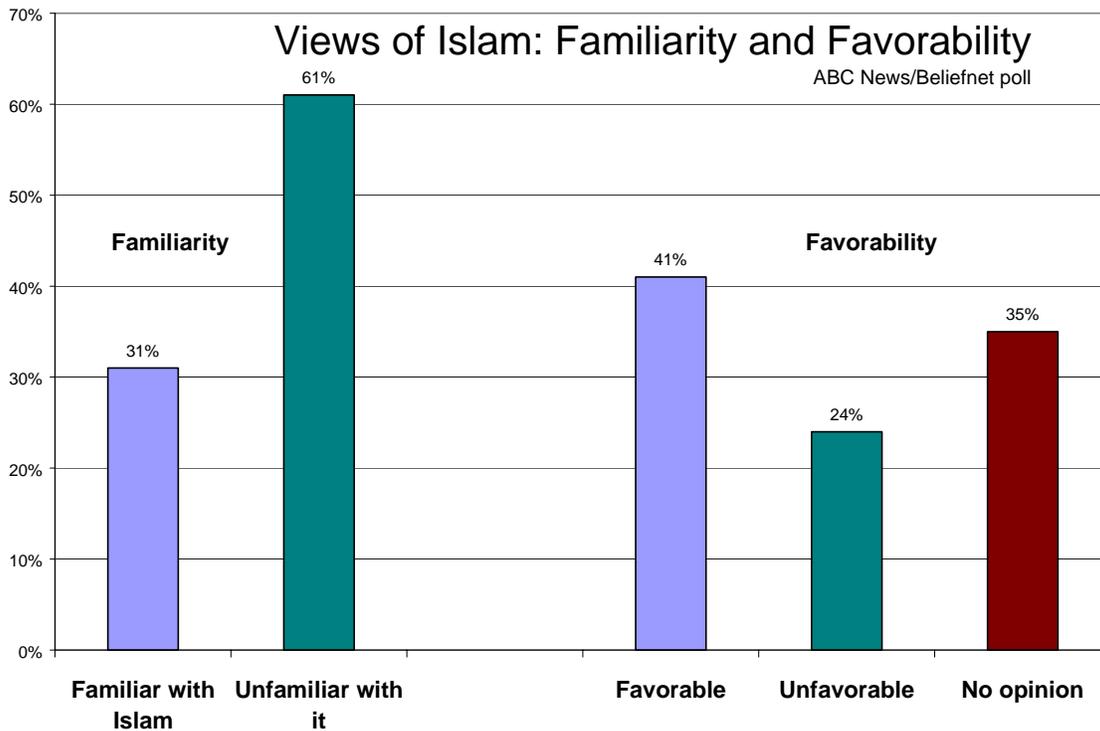


## **Unfamiliarity with Islam Runs High, Giving Rise to Some Skepticism**

Most Americans reject the suggestion that mainstream Islam encourages violence, but unfamiliarity with the religion runs high, and just four in 10 adults express confidence that it teaches respect for other faiths.

Unfamiliarity seems to direct negative views: Americans who feel they're familiar with the basic tenets of Islam are much more likely than others to call it peaceful, to say it teaches respect for non-Muslims and to view it favorably overall.

But that familiarity is in short supply. Only 31 percent in this ABC News/Beliefnet poll say they have a good basic understanding of the teachings and beliefs of Islam, a number that's essentially unchanged from a few months ago.



Given this weak knowledge of the religion, Islam receives a decidedly mixed overall evaluation in U.S. public opinion. Among the survey's findings:

-Just 41 percent of Americans express a favorable opinion of the religion, down a bit since October, with more people undecided.

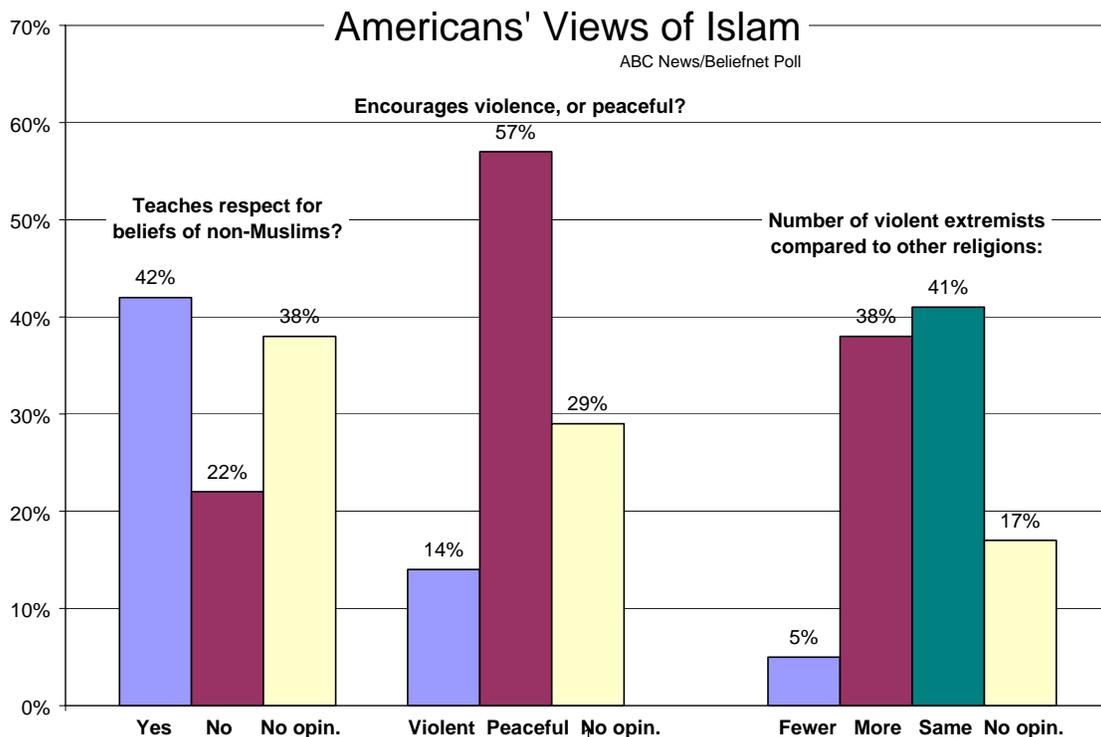
-The same number, 41 percent, think mainstream Islam teaches respect for the beliefs of non-Muslims. Just 22 percent think it does not teach tolerance, but 38 percent are unsure.

-Fifty-seven percent see it as a peaceful religion – a majority, but not an overwhelming one on such a fundamental question. Fairly few, 14 percent, think mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, while 29 percent are unsure.

-Thirty-eight percent think Islam has more violent extremists than other religions, and an additional 17 percent are unsure whether this is the case. (Forty-one percent say it has about the same number, while five percent think it has fewer.)

As noted, knowledge strongly influences many of these views. People who feel familiar with Islam are 18 points more likely to view it favorably, 26 points more likely to say it respects other faiths and 18 points more apt to call it peaceful. (People who are unfamiliar with Islam, on the other hand, are 19 points less likely to express an opinion of it at all.)

	All	Familiar with Islam?		Diff
		Yes	No	
View Islam favorably	41%	54	36	+18 points
Think it respects other faiths	41	60	34	+26
Think it's a peaceful religion	57	71	53	+18



GRAHAM – Discussion of the nature of Islam arose in mid-November when Christian evangelist Franklin Graham described it “a very evil and wicked religion.” He later wrote in The Wall Street Journal, “The persecution or elimination of non-Muslims has been a cornerstone of Islamic conquests and rule for centuries. The Koran provides ample evidence that Islam encourages violence in order to win converts and to reach the ultimate goal of an Islamic world.”

Others have distanced themselves from Graham’s remarks. The White House said George W. Bush “views Islam as a religion that preaches peace.” Nihad Awad, director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, wrote that “negative impressions of Islam are most often based on a lack of accurate and objective information.”

This survey also shows that Graham’s views are not broadly held among the American public; as noted, just 14 percent believe mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims. It’s not much higher among those who might be most attuned to Graham’s thinking – evangelical Protestants, white evangelical Protestants or evangelical Protestants who describe themselves as politically conservative

	Think Islam encourages violence
All adults	14%
Evangelical Protestants	19
White evangelical Protestants	20
Conservative evangelical Protestants	23

GROUPS – There are some differences among population groups. Political conservatives are less apt to express a favorable opinion of Islam or to think it teaches respect for others; in both cases, better-educated people are more apt to think so. And men are somewhat more likely than women, and whites than nonwhites, to think there are disproportionate numbers of violent extremists within Islam.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Beliefnet survey was conducted by telephone Jan. 2-6, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,023 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

1. Do you feel you do or do not have a good basic understanding of the teachings and beliefs of Islam, the Muslim religion?

	Yes	No	No opin.
1/6/02	31	61	8
10/9/01	34	65	1

2. Would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opin.
1/6/02	41	24	35

10/9/01            47                    39                    13

3. Every religion has mainstream beliefs, and also fringe elements or extremists. Thinking of mainstream Islam, do you think mainstream Islam teaches respect for the beliefs of non-Muslims, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
1/6/02	41	22	38

4. Do you think mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, or is it a peaceful religion?

	Encourages violence	Peaceful religion	No opin.
1/6/02	14	57	29

5. Compared to other religions, do you think there are more violent extremists within Islam, fewer, or about the same number as in other religions?

	More	Same	Fewer	No opin.
1/6/02	38	41	5	17

\*\*\*END\*\*\*