

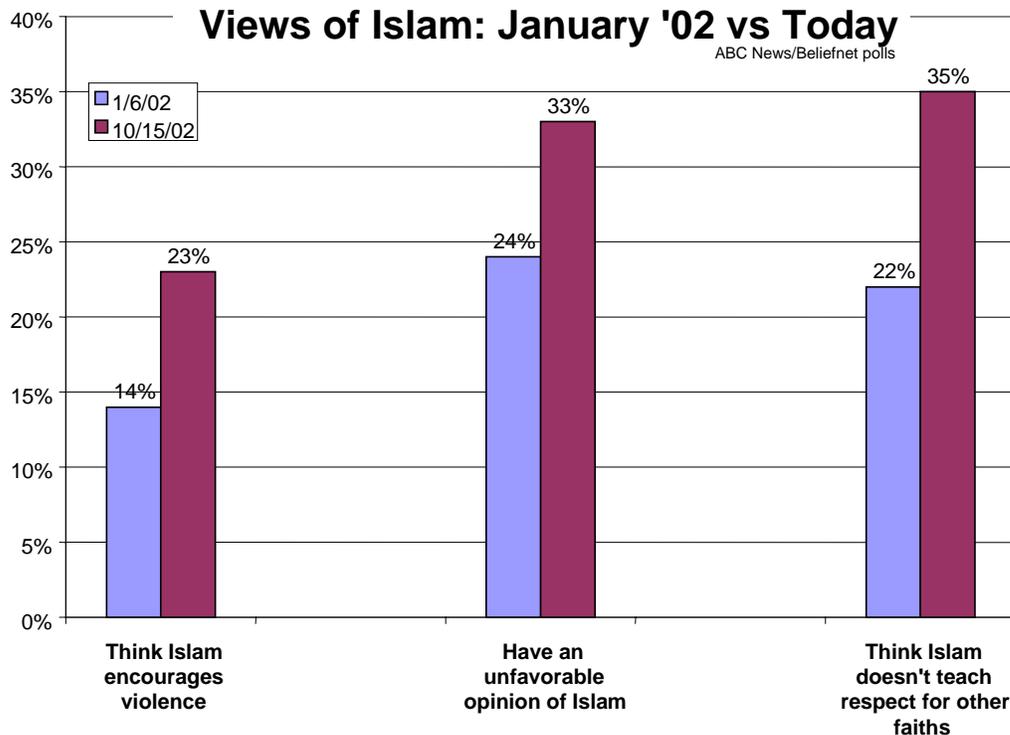
Doubts About Islam Rise Amid Broad Unfamiliarity

Amid broad public unfamiliarity with Islam, doubts about the religion's tenets have grown. More than a third of Americans now don't think it teaches respect for other beliefs, and nearly a quarter believe Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims.

While these numbers remain far from majorities, they are up. Last January 22 percent said Islam doesn't teach respect for other beliefs; today it's 35 percent. And the view that Islam encourages violence is up by nine points, to 23 percent. Many more – 53 percent – reject this suggestion, but a substantial number, 25 percent, are unsure.

Similarly, while 42 percent of Americans express an overall favorable opinion of Islam, this is unchanged in the last 10 months, while unfavorable views are up by nine points, to 33 percent. (Still it was higher, 39 percent unfavorable, shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks.)

This poll was conducted earlier this month, before the arrest of Washington-area sniper suspect John Allen Muhammed, who's been identified as a convert to Islam. Authorities have not specified a motive for the shootings.



Unfavorable opinion of Islam	33%	24	+9
Think Islam doesn't teach respect for other faiths	35	22	+13
Think Islam encourages violence	23	14	+9

These views in part reflect very widespread unfamiliarity with Islam. Seventy-three percent of Americans do not feel they have a good basic understanding of its beliefs and tenets, and that, too, has risen, from 61 percent last winter. This suggests that any additional information people have gleaned about Islam has confused more than clarified.

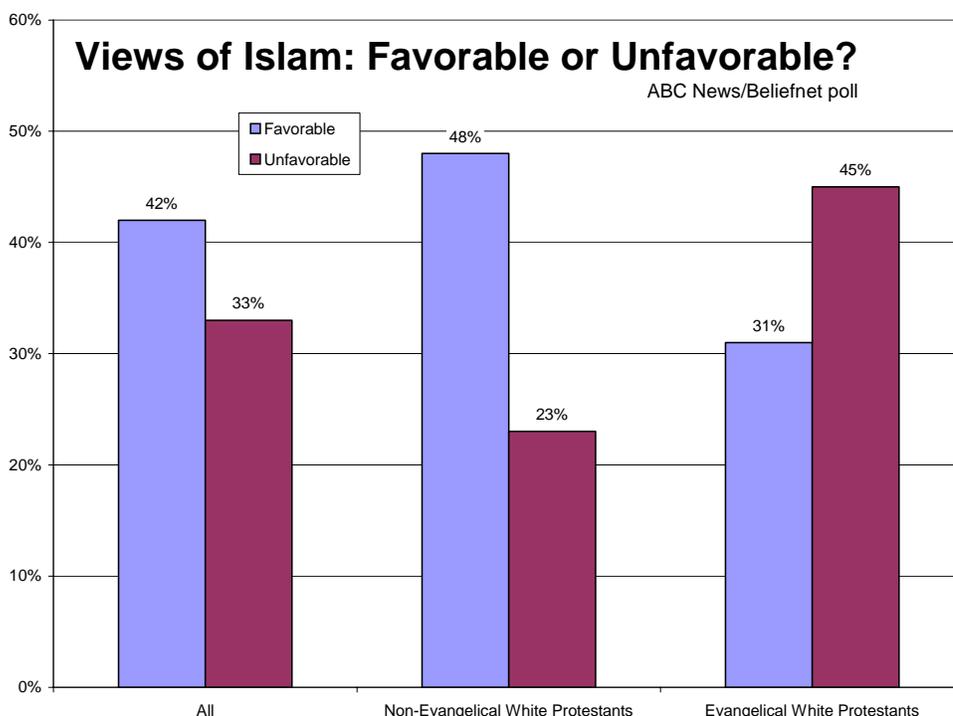
	Yes	No
Feel you have a good basic understanding of Islam	25%	73

Familiarity does matter: People who feel they have a good basic understanding of Islam are 16 points more likely to express a favorable opinion of it, 15 points more likely to think it respects other faiths and 15 points more likely to call it a peaceful religion.

EVANGELICALS – Last fall, Christian evangelist Franklin Graham called Islam “evil” and “wicked” and wrote that it “encourages violence in order to win converts.” More recently, early this month, the Rev. Jerry Falwell described Muhammad as “a terrorist” and “a violent man.” A week later Falwell apologized.

Such views are more prevalent among evangelical white Protestants than among their non-evangelical counterparts or the public more broadly. Evangelical white Protestants are 22 points more likely than mainstream white Protestants to express an unfavorable opinion of Islam. They’re also more likely, but by much smaller margins, to think Islam encourages violence and doesn’t teach respect for other beliefs.

White Protestants

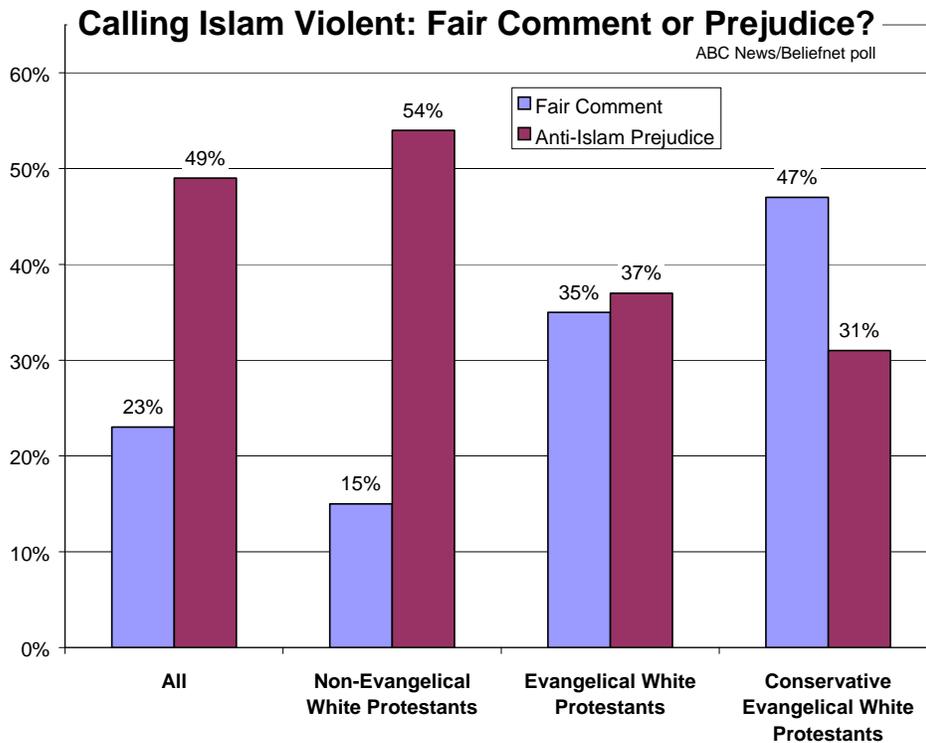


	Evangelical	Non-evangelical
View of Islam		
Favorable	31%	48
Unfavorable	45	23
Think Islam		
Respects other beliefs	30	43
Doesn't respect others	41	31
Think Islam		
Encourages violence	31	22
Is a peaceful religion	49	55

However, negative views of Islam haven't grown more quickly among evangelical white Protestants than among others – suggesting that comments such as Falwell's are more an expression than a cause of such views.

	Think Islam encourages violence		
	Now	January	Change
All	23%	14	+9
Evangelical white Protestants	31	20	+11
Non-evangelical white Protestants	22	13	+9

PREJUDICE? – While just under a quarter of Americans, 23 percent, say it's “a fair comment” to describe Islam as a violent religion, more than twice as many – 49 percent – say such comments are an expression of anti-Islam prejudice.



Evangelical white Protestants are much more accepting of this kind of remark. They divide, 35 percent to 37 percent, on whether it's a fair comment or prejudicial. By contrast non-evangelical white Protestants call it prejudice by a 39-point margin.

Calling Islam violent is:	All	White Protestants	
		Evangelical	Non-evangelical
Fair comment	23%	35	15
Anti-Islam prejudice	49	37	54

Most accepting of this kind of comment are those evangelical white Protestants who describe themselves as political conservatives. In this group, 47 percent say it's a "fair comment" for religious leaders to call Islam a violent religion; 31 percent say it's prejudice.

OWN CHURCH – Most Americans say the religious leaders in their own churches or houses of worship have been silent on Islam: Eighty-four percent say they haven't heard their own pastor or religious leader say anything about it recently.

Just nine percent have heard about Islam from the pulpit. Of them, 63 percent say the comment was a favorable one; 30 percent say it was unfavorable.

OTHER GROUPS – There are ideological components to some of these views, with conservatives more apt than moderates or liberals to express an unfavorable opinion of Islam. Overall views of Islam are similar between blacks and whites, and more favorable among better-educated than among less-educated Americans.

	Views of Islam	
	Favorable	Unfavorable
All	42%	33
Conservative	35	40
Moderate	46	31
Liberal	50	25
Whites	41	33
Blacks	46	35
High school	38	35
Some college	42	32
College grad	48	31

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Beliefnet poll was conducted by telephone Oct. 11-15, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,018 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Full results follow.

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.
10/15/02	25	73	2
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.
10/15/02	42	33	26
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.
10/15/02	37	35	28
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.
10/15/02	23	53	25
1/6/02	14	57	29

5. Some religious leaders recently have described Islam as a violent religion. Do you think that's (a fair comment), or do you think it's (an example of anti-Muslim prejudice)?

	Fair comment	Prejudice	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
10/15/02	23	49	2	7	18

6. Have you personally heard a religious leader in your own church or house of worship say anything about Islam recently, or not?

	Yes	No	No church (vol.)	No opin.
10/15/02	9	84	5	1

7. (IF YES) Would you say it was a favorable or unfavorable comment about Islam?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neither, mixed (vol.)	No opin.
10/15/02	63	30	6	2

END*