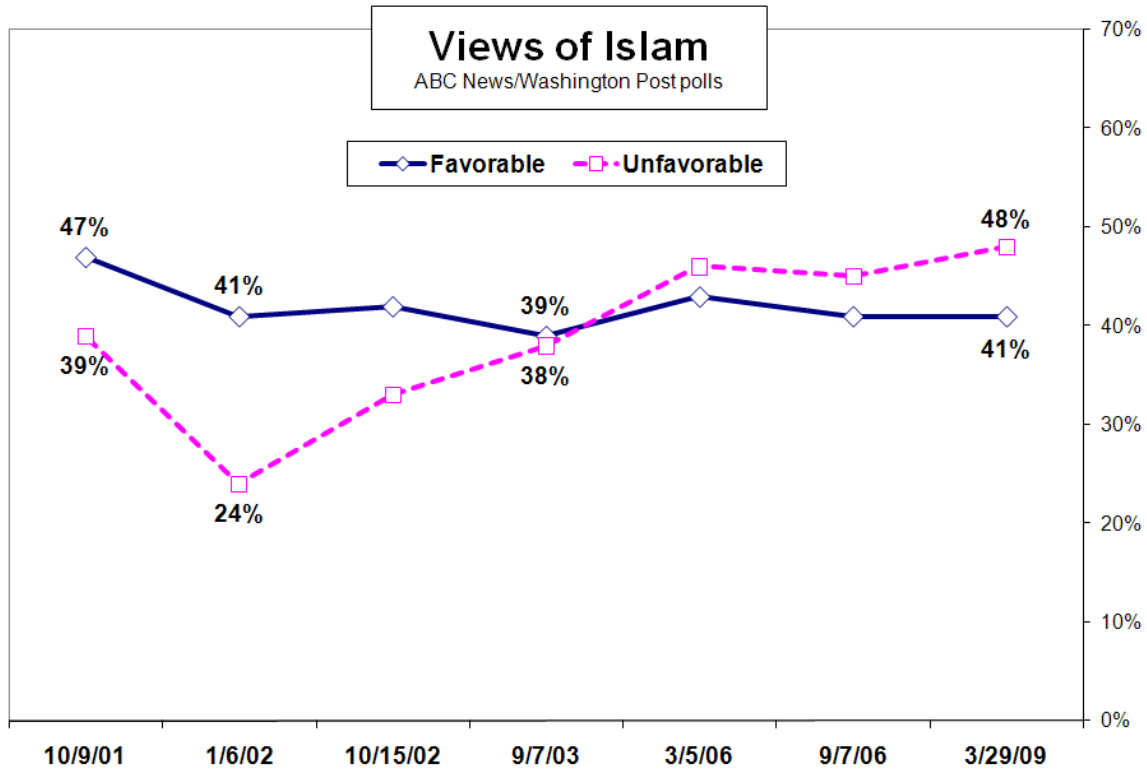


Most Back Outreach to Muslim Nations, But Suspicion & Unfamiliarity Persist

With President Obama in Turkey for a two-day visit, an ABC News/Washington Post poll finds that Americans overwhelmingly support U.S. outreach to Muslim nations – but many also express continued suspicion of the world’s second-largest religion.

Americans by 48-41 percent hold an unfavorable opinion of Islam – its highest unfavorable rating in ABC/Post polls since 2001. And 29 percent express the belief that mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims – down slightly from its peak, but double what it was early in 2002.



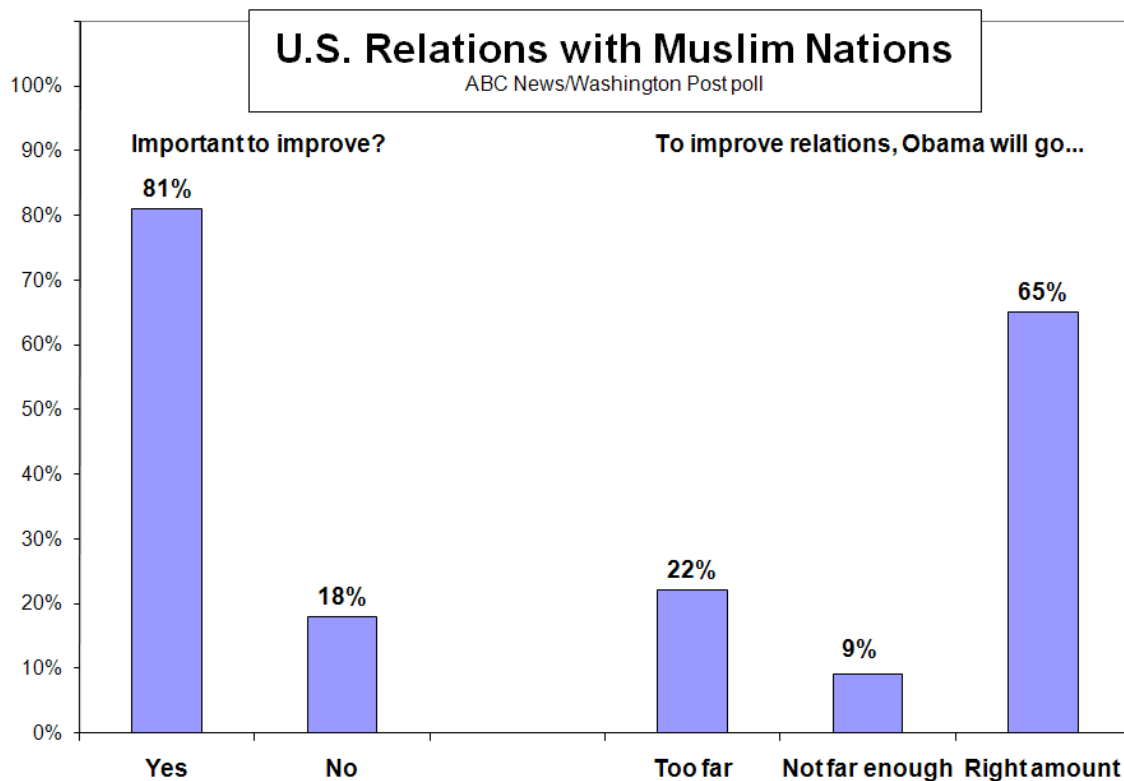
Unfamiliarity is a central factor in these views. Fifty-five percent of Americans concede that they lack a good basic understanding of Islam; about as many, 53 percent, don't personally know a Muslim. People who profess an understanding of Islam, or know a Muslim, have much more positive views of the religion.

But other factors also are at play, and favorable views of Islam have not improved even though familiarity has advanced slightly. Forty-five percent now feel they basically understand the religion, 5 points above its previous high and 20 points above its low in 2002. And the 47 percent who know a Muslim is up from 41 percent in October 2001.

Islam is practiced by an estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide, a fifth of humanity.

OBAMA/WORLD – Obama, in a Chicago Tribune interview in December, described “a unique opportunity to reboot America's image around the world and also in the Muslim world in particular,” and he’s promised a major speech in a Muslim capital. That’s not the purpose of the trip to Turkey, but it is among the first foreign countries he’s visited as president, after Canada in February and his European stops this past week.

An overwhelming 81 percent of Americans in this poll call it important for Obama to try to improve U.S. relations with Muslim nations; 46 percent say it’s “very important.” While slightly more than one in five express concern that he’ll “go too far” in that effort, most by far, 65 percent, expect him to handle it about right.



Another measure suggests Obama’s less combative stance on the world stage has produced some change in U.S. public opinion: Forty-three percent think the United States’ image in the world is improving, up from 10 percent under George W. Bush in late 2003. Just 14 percent think it’s getting worse, down from 61 percent under Bush.

There are sharp ideological and partisan differences specifically on improving relations with Muslim nations, especially in the numbers calling this “very important.” It peaks at 69 percent of liberals, 61 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of Americans who profess no religion, compared with 32 percent of conservatives, 29 percent of Republicans and 33 percent of evangelical white Protestants.

ISLAM – People in the latter three groups also are much more apt to think Obama will “go too far” in trying to improve those relations, and in expressing antipathy toward Islam. Among white evangelicals, 65 percent express an unfavorable opinion of Islam; that drops to 43 percent of other Americans. And 40 percent of white evangelicals think mainstream Islam encourages violence; 26 percent of other Americans hold that view.

This is the case even though white evangelicals are about as likely as other Americans to know a Muslim, and 10 points more apt to claim a basic understanding of the religion.

The broad relationship between knowledge and sentiment, however, is positive. Overall, people who feel they understand Islam, or who have a Muslim friend, are 22 points more apt to view the religion favorably and 17 points more apt to see it as peaceful, compared with those who lack a basic understanding or a friend who’s Muslim.

There are political and ideological differences here as well. About two-thirds of liberals and moderates see Islam as peaceful, as do 62 percent of Democrats and independents; fewer conservatives or Republicans agree, 49 percent and 51 percent respectively. And just 26 percent of conservatives and 33 percent of Republicans see the religion favorably.

	View of Islam		Think Islam is	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Peaceful	Violent
All	41%	48	58%	29
Understand Islam:				
Yes	53	43	67	30
No	31	52	50	28
Know a Muslim:				
Yes	52	41	67	28
No	41	53	50	30
Democrats	47	41	64	20
Independents	42	44	60	31
Republicans	33	60	51	38
Liberals	60	28	69	20
Moderates	48	41	64	24
Conservatives	26	63	49	40
Evangelical				
white Protestants	25	65	48	40
All others	45	43	60	26
Age <65	44	46	61	28
Age 65+	26	57	39	36

Islam also is more apt to be seen unfavorably by less-educated adults, Southerners and senior citizens than by their counterparts.

CHANGES – There have been notable changes in some of these groups. Compared with the first ABC poll to ask the question in October 2001, unfavorable views of Islam have increased by 23 points among senior citizens, 19 points among conservatives, 18 points among Republicans and 12 points among Southerners.

There’s one group – liberals – among whom unfavorable views of Islam have declined, by 11 points.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 26-29, 2009, among a random national sample of 1,000 adults including both landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results for the full sample have a 3-point error margin; click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-22 previously released.

23. How important do you think it is for Obama to try to improve U.S. relations with Muslim nations – very important, somewhat important, not so important or not important at all?

	----- Important -----			----- Not important -----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not so	Not at all	opinion
3/29/09	81	46	36	18	9	10	1

24. In trying to improve U.S. relations with Muslim nations, do you think Obama will (go too far), (not go far enough) or handle it about right?

	Too far	Not far enough	About right	No opinion
3/29/09	22	9	65	4

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

	Do	Do not	No opinion
3/29/09	45	55	*
9/7/06	40	58	2
3/5/06	40	59	1
9/7/03	33	64	3
10/15/02	25	73	2
1/6/02	31	61	8
10/9/01	34	65	1

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

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
3/29/09	41	48	11
9/7/06	41	45	14
3/5/06	43	46	11
9/7/03	39	38	23
10/15/02	42	33	26
1/6/02	41	24	35
10/9/01	47	39	13

27. Every religion has mainstream beliefs, and also fringe elements or extremists. Thinking of mainstream Islam, do you think mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, or is it a peaceful religion?

	Encourages violence	Peaceful religion	No opinion
3/29/09	29	58	13
9/7/06	33	54	13
3/5/06	33	54	13
9/7/03	34	46	20
10/15/02	23	53	25
1/6/02	14	57	29

28. Do you personally know anyone who is a Muslim, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/29/09	47	53	1
10/9/01	41	58	1

END