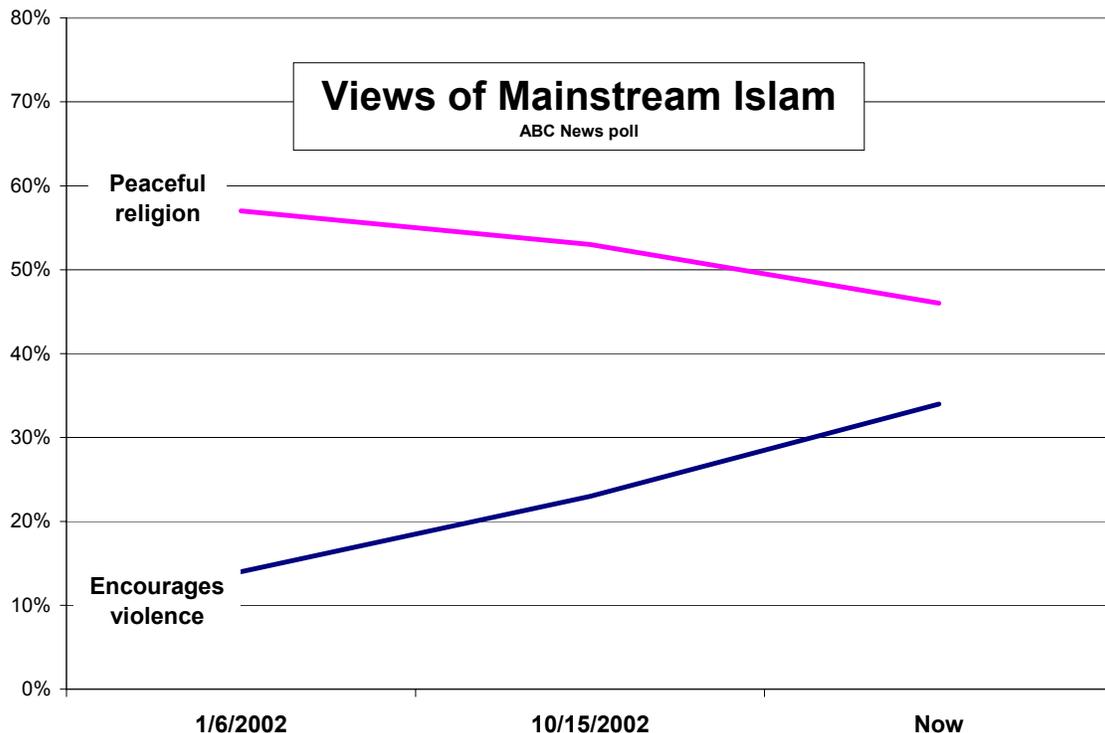


Critical Views of Islam Grow Amid Continued Unfamiliarity

Suspicion of Islam has grown sharply: In the face of broad unfamiliarity with the religion, fewer than half of Americans now call it peaceful, and one in three believes it encourages violence against non-Muslims – double what it was 20 months ago.

Four months after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, 14 percent believed mainstream Islam encourages violence; today it's 34 percent. Similarly, 43 percent now think Islam does not teach respect for the beliefs of non-Muslims – up sharply from 22 percent.



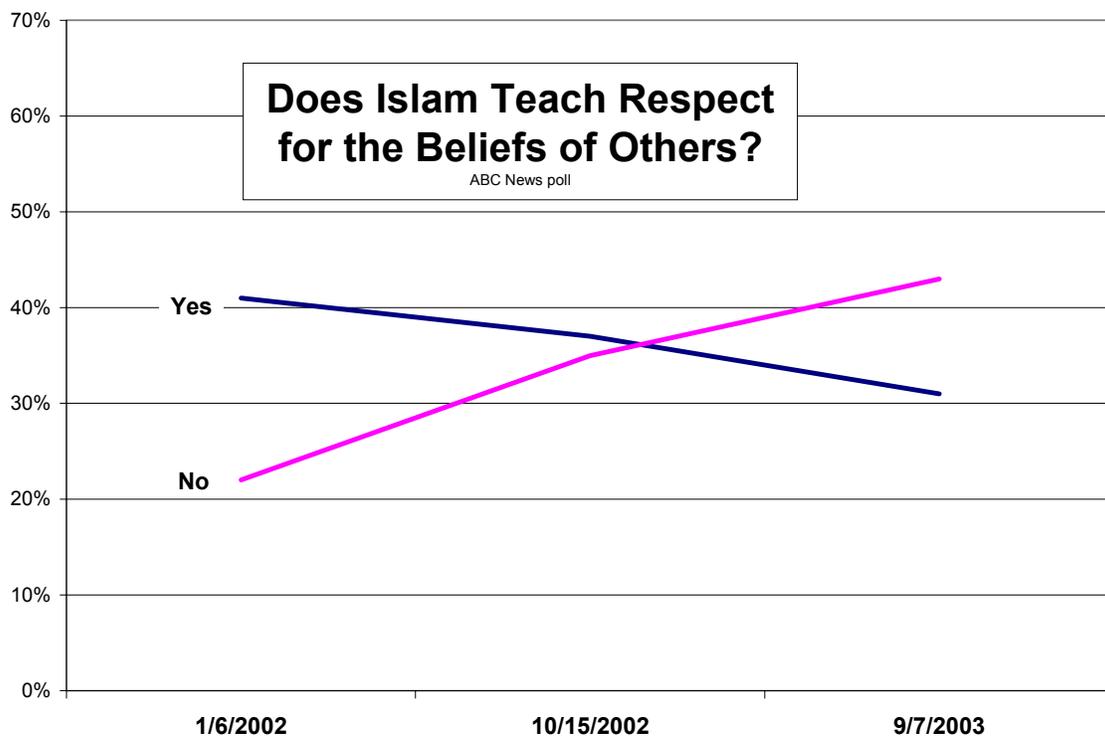
One thing that has not changed is unfamiliarity with Islam. Nearly two-thirds of Americans feel they don't have a "good basic understanding" of the religion, essentially the same as it was in October 2001.

Significantly, people who feel they do understand Islam are much more likely to view it positively. Among Americans who feel they do understand the religion, 59 percent call it peaceful and 46 percent think it teaches respect for the beliefs of others. By contrast, the

two-thirds who express basic unfamiliarity with the religion are 19 points less likely to call it peaceful, and half as apt to say it respects other beliefs.

	Views of Islam:	
	Peaceful religion	Respects other beliefs
All	46%	31%
Basically familiar with Islam	59	46
Basically unfamiliar with it	40	25

Reflecting the public's unfamiliarity with Islam, substantial numbers – between a fifth and a quarter - have no opinion on whether it teaches respect for others, or is peaceful.



FAVORABLE – In another measure, Americans divide evenly in their overall appraisal of Islam: Thirty-nine percent have a generally favorable opinion of the religion, 38 percent generally unfavorable (and again a substantial 23 percent have no opinion.) That's a 14-point rise in unfavorable views from their low point in January 2002.

Again, familiarity makes a difference: People who feel they have a good basic understanding of Islam are 15 points more apt to view it favorably, 50 to 35 percent.

Younger and better-educated people also are more apt to have favorable views of Islam, as are city dwellers and suburbanites (as opposed to small-town and rural residents). And

in the biggest division, 58 percent of people who profess no religion regard Islam favorably, compared with only 18 percent of white evangelical Protestants.

There are differences in other views as well. Republicans and Protestants are more apt to think Islam does not teach respect for other religions; Democrats, Catholics and people of other faiths (or none), less so. Democrats, better-educated Americans, city-dwellers and suburbanites are less apt to accept the notion that Islam endorses violence; evangelicals, more so.

Lastly, this poll included a test: On the questions about violence and respecting the beliefs of others, half the respondents were asked about “mainstream Islam,” the other half just about “Islam.” Slightly fewer people said “Islam,” as opposed to “mainstream Islam,” teaches respect for other beliefs. There was no difference in views on whether it’s a peaceful religion.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone Sept. 4-7, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,004 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by David Morris.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/Poll_Vault/Poll_Vault.html

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934 or Lisa Finkel, (212) 456-6190.

Results follow:

*= less than 0.5 percent

4. On another subject, 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.
9/7/03	33	64	3
10/15/02	25	73	2
1/6/02	31	61	8
10/9/01	34	65	1

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

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opin.
9/7/03	39	38	23
10/15/02	42	33	26
1/6/02	41	24	35
10/9/01	47	39	13

6a. (HALF) 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.
9/7/03	31	43	26
10/15/02	37	35	28
1/6/02	41	22	38

6b. (OTHER HALF) Do you think Islam teaches respect for the beliefs of non-Muslims, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
9/7/03	25	44	30

7a. (HALF) Do you think mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, or is it a peaceful religion?

	Encourages violence	Peaceful religion	No opin.
9/7/03	34	46	20
10/15/02	23	53	25
1/6/02	14	57	29

7b. (OTHER HALF) Do you think Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, or is it a peaceful religion?

	Encourages violence	Peaceful religion	No opin.
9/7/03	36	45	19

Other questions previously released.

END