



Global Views on Relations Between Islam and the West

EUROPE BACKGROUNDER

Great Britain: A very large majority (77%) of Britons say that it is possible to find common ground between Muslim and Western cultures; only 15 percent see violent conflict as inevitable. A modest 52 percent majority thinks conflicts over political power and interests are primarily responsible for tensions between Islam and the West; 29 percent believe differences of religion and culture are primarily responsible, and 9 percent say both. Seven in ten (70%) say “intolerant minorities on both sides” are the primary cause of current tensions—the highest response recorded among the study’s 27 countries. Another 8 percent blame an intolerant Muslim minority, and 1 percent an intolerant Western minority. Only 9 percent think fundamental cultural differences are responsible.

Germany: A large plurality of Germans (49%) think that it is possible to find common ground between Muslim and Western cultures, but a sizable 39 percent thinks violent conflict is inevitable—the highest percentage among the European countries polled. A clear majority (55%) says that the tensions between Islam and the West arise primarily from conflicts about political power and interests, not about religion. Sixty-eight percent see the conflicts arising from intolerant minorities, with 44 percent saying “intolerant minorities on both sides;” another 20 percent choosing an intolerant Muslim minority; and 4 percent saying an intolerant Western minority. Only 25 percent blame fundamental differences between the cultures.

France: The French—like the English and Italians—emphatically reject the idea that conflict between Islam and the West is inevitable. Sixty-nine percent say it is possible to find common ground between Western and Islamic cultures; only 23 percent say conflict is inevitable. Asked about the causes of tensions, just 29 percent see them as primarily arising from differences of religion and culture, while a 56 percent majority see them as based on power conflicts (with 11% saying “both”). Offered four options, an exceptionally high 68 percent say that global tensions between Islam and the West are caused primarily by “intolerant minorities on both sides.” Another 17 percent say “an intolerant Muslim minority” is primarily responsible. Only 7 percent blame fundamental cultural differences.

Russia: Russians tend to agree with the rest of the world that Muslim and Western cultures are capable of finding common ground. Forty-nine percent of Russians hold this view, while just 23 percent consider violent conflict to be inevitable. A slight majority also rejects the idea that tensions between Islam and the West are the result of religious and cultural differences. Fifty-three percent of Russians believe that these tensions arise from conflicts over political power and interests; only 19 percent blame culture. Given the option of naming fundamental cultural differences or intolerant minorities as the

cause of tensions between Islam and the West, just 18 percent prefer the cultural explanation. Nearly six in ten (59%) blame intolerant minorities, with the largest number citing minorities on both sides (40%) rather than just Muslim (13%) or Western (6%) minorities.

Italy: More than three out of four Italians—78 percent—say it is possible to find common ground between Muslim and Western cultures, the greatest number of all the European publics polled. A very small minority—14 percent—sees conflict as inevitable. Fifty-eight percent see conflicts over political power and interests as the primary causes of tensions between Islam and the West; 22 percent cite religious and cultural differences. Offered four options, a 45 percent plurality blames “intolerant minorities on both sides” for current tensions; another 18 percent blame an intolerant Muslim minority, and 1 percent an intolerant Western minority. Twenty-three percent blame fundamental cultural differences.

Portugal: Two in three Portuguese (66%) think common ground can be found between Muslim and Western cultures, with only 26 percent saying that violent conflict is inevitable. A modest majority of 52 percent think the tensions between Islam and the West arise more from conflicts about political power and interests, but a third (34%) see them as arising more from differences of religion and culture (both, 11%). In answer to a question with four options, a bare majority of 52 percent see the current tensions as caused more by intolerant minorities (on both sides, 40%; on the Muslim side, 10%; on the Western side, 2%). Thirty-nine percent attribute the tensions more to fundamental cultural differences.

Poland: Forty-six percent of Poles think it possible to find common ground between Muslim and Western cultures, while 19 percent think violent conflict is inevitable (34 percent decline to answer). Poles are unique in that they are divided on whether tensions between Islam and the West arise more from differences of religion and culture (34%) or from conflicts about political power and interests (37%). But, given four options only 18 percent think these tensions are caused more by fundamental differences between the two cultures, while 46 percent blame intolerant minorities, with 33 percent citing “intolerant minorities on both sides” as the biggest cause of current tensions; another 11 percent blame an intolerant Muslim minority, and 2 percent an intolerant Western minority.

Hungary: While Hungarians’ positions are consistent with the global trends, they are unique in that these positions are held by relatively modest pluralities. A 42 percent plurality thinks it is possible to find common ground in the relationship between Muslim and Western cultures, while 27 percent thinks violent conflict is inevitable (31 percent declined to choose either response). Similarly, 42 percent thinks the tensions between Islam and the West arise more from conflicts over political power than from differences of religion and culture (25%). Thirty-nine percent see intolerance (of minorities) as the primary cause of global tensions, whether on both sides (20%), on the Muslim side (12%), or on the Western side (7%). Twenty-nine percent blame fundamental differences between the two cultures.

Greece: Sixty-two percent of Greeks think it is possible to find common ground between Muslim and Western cultures; only 26 percent see violent conflict as inevitable. Fifty-nine percent see the tensions as primarily arising from conflicts about political power and interests; only 23 percent say that differences of religion and culture are primarily at fault. A 49 percent plurality views “intolerant minorities on both sides” as responsible for tensions; another 11 percent blame an intolerant Muslim minority, and 4 percent an intolerant Western minority. Eleven percent say instead that tensions are based on fundamental cultural differences.

For more information on this poll, please see the Questionnaire/Methodology:
http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan07/BBC_USRole_Jan07_quaire.pdf