Global Views on Relations Between Islam and the West

MIDDLE EAST BACKGROUNDER

Lebanon: Among the Middle Eastern publics surveyed, the Lebanese are the most optimistic that Muslim and Western cultures can find common ground. More than two out of three (68%) Lebanese hold this view while only a quarter (26%) believes that violent conflict between Muslim and Western cultures is inevitable. The Lebanese overwhelmingly (78%) attribute current tensions between Islam and the West to conflicts over political power and interests rather than differences in religion or culture. Similarly, most Lebanese (59%) blame the tensions on intolerant minorities, whether such minorities are from both sides (24%), Western (20%), or Muslim (15%). Only about one-third (35%) of Lebanese believes these tensions are rooted in "fundamental differences between these two cultures."

Egypt: A majority (54%) of Egyptians believes that Muslim and Western cultures can find common ground, though a somewhat high percentage (43%) think that violent conflict between Islam and Western cultures is inevitable. Asked about the causes of tension between Islam and the West, 57 percent cite conflicts over political power and interests rather than differences of religion and culture (36%). Most Egyptians (59%) also blame such tensions on "intolerant minorities" from both sides (24%), Muslim (20%), or Western (15%). A significant minority (39%) of Egyptians, however, believes fundamental differences between Islam and Western cultures are the main source of the "current global tensions between Islam and the West." This is higher than any other public polled in the Middle East.

Turkey: Almost half (49%) of Turks believe that it is possible for Muslim and Western cultures to find common ground, while nearly a third (29%) think that violent conflict between Islam and the West is inevitable. Asked about the source of tensions between Islam and the West, a majority (55%) of Turks attributes them to political power and interests rather than religious and cultural differences (23%). A majority of Turks (57%) blame current tensions between Islam and the West on intolerant minorities. Among those who blame intolerance, 35 percent say it is found on "both sides" and 20 percent say "an intolerant Western minority." Only a limited number (2%) of Turks blame "an intolerant Muslim minority." About a quarter (23%) of Turks believes that tensions arise out of fundamental differences between these two cultures.

United Arab Emirates: A significant portion of the public in the United Arab Emirates rejects the notion that conflict between Islam and the West cannot be avoided, believing instead the two cultures can find common ground. A plurality (47%) of Emiratis holds this optimistic view, while slightly more than a quarter (27%) says that violent conflict between Muslim and Western cultures is inevitable. A plurality (48%) of Emiratis also believes that the tensions between Islam and the West are generated by conflicts over

political power and interests rather than differences in religion or culture. Only 27% think that these tensions "arise from differences in religion and culture." However, Emiratis seem divided about whether the tensions between Islam and the West are caused more by fundamental differences between the two (37%) or by the intolerance of minorities (38%). Of those who blame minorities, most fault both sides (20%), while very few hold either a Western minority (11%) or a Muslim minority (7%) responsible.

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