For the first time ever, two decades of major polling data on Americans’ views of Islam and Muslims has been analyzed to highlight trends and centralized in one study.

THE RESULT?

THE SUPER SURVEY: Two Decades of Americans’ Views on Islam and Muslims

This report distills a wealth of raw polling data into accessible takeaways, offering a comprehensive portrait of how Americans have come to understand and view Muslims and their religion. A valuable resource for scholars, policy makers, journalists, activists, and the general public, it examines five key themes: perceptions of Muslims; views of Islam; opinions on the relationship between Islam and violence; attitudes towards policies and practices that “single out” Muslims; and feelings about Muslims’ place in American society.

The findings aren’t overly optimistic, but they aren’t entirely pessimistic, either. Let’s take a look at some of them.
KEY FINDINGS

Muslims are mostly unknown, but not entirely disliked. In the 21st century, on average, six in 10 Americans have reported that they don’t know a Muslim personally. And while a plurality of Americans has reported favorable views of Muslims since 2000, at least one in five has expressed unfavorable views of their Muslim compatriots since then.

Islam is unfamiliar to most, and unfavorable to many. A majority of Americans today admit that they’re unfamiliar with the religion of Islam — a trend that’s continued for two decades. After 9/11, many initially had favorable views of Islam, but by the middle of the Iraq War, those views had changed, with more expressing negative views than positive ones. Americans don’t see many similarities between their religion and Islam, and when asked, respondents use more negative terms than positive ones to describe Islam.

Americans tend to see Islam as “more violent” than other religions during national debates about military action in the Middle East. A plurality of Americans said Islam was “more violent” during the lead-up to the Iraq War in 2003, as high numbers of U.S. troop deaths prompted the “surge” in 2007, and more recently as the nation debated about how to deal with the emergence of ISIS. Still, most Americans maintain that only a small minority of Muslims supports terrorism.

When it comes to “singling out” Muslims for increased scrutiny, many Americans think it happens and, in many cases, say that it’s OK. Since 2001, one-quarter or more of the population has expressed support for specific measures like religious profiling, special IDs, surveillance, and internment. At the same time, most do not think that Muslims are treated “unfairly” by law enforcement.

Community mosques are OK, but Muslims in politics are not. Americans say they are generally supportive of mosque construction in their communities. Still, the majority of Americans opposed the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque” in New York. And while most Americans see Muslims as patriotic and loyal, nearly half of the population has reported that they would not support a Muslim presidential candidate.

ABOUT THE BRIDGE INITIATIVE
The Bridge Initiative is a multi-year research project that connects the academic study of Islamophobia with the public. Based in Georgetown University’s Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, it brings together celebrated faculty, subject-matter experts, and seasoned researchers to fill a gap in public knowledge about this phenomenon by wedding rigorous research and analysis with the accessibility and reach of the Internet.

Read more about The Bridge Initiative, and download the full Super Survey at our website: bridge.georgetown.edu

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