

Global Views on Relations Between Islam and the West

ASIA BACKGROUNDER

Indonesia: Indonesians are unique in that a slight majority (51%) say that violent conflict between Islam and the West is inevitable, while 40 percent believes that it is possible for the two sides to find common ground. However only 35 percent say global tensions between Islam and the West are due to “fundamental differences between the two cultures,” while 55 percent attribute it to the intolerance of minorities: 28 percent hold intolerant Muslims responsible, 23 percent blame both sides, and 4 percent blame Western minorities. Further, when asked about the source of tensions between Islam and the West, only 35 percent blame them on “differences in religion and culture” while a majority (56%) blames them on conflicts over political power and interests.

China: The Chinese public tends to agree that Muslim and Western cultures can find common ground. Half of Chinese respondents believe this while only one-third (34%) feels that violent conflict between the two is inevitable. More than three in five (62%) say that “conflicts about political power and interests” are responsible for the tensions between Islam and the West; very few (14%) blame cultural or religious differences. Similarly, a majority (53%) of Chinese respondents select the intolerance of minorities as the chief cause of current tensions between Islam and the West, while just 19 percent attribute them to fundamental differences between the two cultures. One-third (33%) blames intolerant minorities “on both sides;” 11 percent an intolerant Western minority, and 9 percent an intolerant Muslim minority.

India: The most common view among Indians is that Muslim and Western cultures can find common ground (35%) but a significant number feel that conflict between the two is inevitable (24%). Indian views about the source of tensions between Islam and the West are also somewhat mixed, with many not taking a position. About a third (32%) say that tensions arise from conflicts over political power and interests, while a quarter (25%) blame differences in religion and culture. Similarly, while 43 percent of Indians believe that intolerant minorities are the cause of current tensions between Islam and the West, 27 percent cite fundamental differences between the two cultures. Among those who blame intolerant minorities, nineteen percent specify a Muslim minority, while smaller numbers say an intolerant Western minority (12%) or intolerance on both sides (12%).

Australia: Most Australians believe that it is possible for Muslim and Western cultures to find common ground. Sixty-eight percent hold this view, while just 26 percent think “violent conflict is inevitable.” Half of Australians (50%) believe tensions between Islam and the West arise primarily from conflicts about political power and interests, while considerably fewer (35%) feel “differences of religion and culture” are the source. Asked to identify the main cause of current global tensions between Islam and the West, a very large majority (80%) selects intolerant minorities, including 68 percent who blame

minorities “on both sides.” Very few Australians (14%) attribute these tensions to fundamental differences between the two cultures.

South Korea: South Koreans generally feel that Muslim and Western cultures are capable of finding common ground. A significant majority (57%) believes that such agreement is possible and just 29 percent say that violent conflict is inevitable. More than three in five Koreans (61%) attribute tensions between Islam and the West to “conflicts about political power and interests.” Only 32 percent say that these tensions have arisen from religious and cultural differences. A large majority (72%) sees intolerance by minorities as the main cause of current global tensions between Islam and the West, including 46 percent who blame “both sides.” Very few Koreans blame only an intolerant Western (16%) or Muslim (10%) minority for the tensions. Less than one-quarter (24%) of Koreans think fundamental cultural differences are responsible.

Philippines: The public in the Philippines stand out in that it is divided over whether Muslim and Western cultures can find common ground. While 42 percent of Filipinos believe that it is possible for the two cultures to find areas of agreement, 39 percent think that violent conflict is inevitable. A slight majority (51%) believes that tensions between Islam and the West arise from conflicts over political power and interests but more than a third (36%) blames religious and cultural differences. Asked to identify the main reason for current global tensions between Islam and the West, a majority of Filipinos (50%) blames intolerant minorities, while just 36 percent cite fundamental cultural differences. Filipinos generally say intolerant minorities on both sides (42%), are responsible, rather than an intolerant Muslim (6%) or Western (2%) minority.

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