Britons oppose Muslim

Survey on impact of Islam on London culture reveals a divided community

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STRONG opposition to the use of the Muslim veil in schools and face covering in public is revealed today in a new opinion poll for the Evening Standard. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents say that Muslim teachers should not be allowed to wear a veil when teaching. Eighty-four per cent say that Muslim pupils should not be allowed to wear a veil at school.

The survey shows the sharply divided views of Britons on Islam and the contribution of Muslims to life in the capital.

Among the most striking findings are that half believe that Islam is a “generally intolerant” faith and that Muslims are “isolated” from the rest of the community. At the same time, about 40 per cent hold the opposite opinion, while seven out of 10 believe that Muslims make a positive contribution to the economy.

More than 70 per cent also say that they would be happy to vote for a Muslim as London Mayor.

There is strong opposition, however, to the censorship of images or words that might offend Islamic sensibilities and to the idea of making Eid a public holiday. The findings are contained in a survey of more than 700 “influentials” — a category including business leaders, innovators, politicians and other prominent individuals — carried out for the Standard by opinion pollsters YouGov/Stone.

It shows that while a quarter of those questioned have no Muslim friends, the remaining three-quarters do.

Despite this, concern about the extent of Muslim integration into British life is felt by a significant proportion of respondents. On Islamic attitudes towards others, for example, 49 per cent say they regard the religion as a generally intolerant faith.

Although 44 per cent have the opposite opinion, the survey also reveals that 51 per cent think that the Muslim community is “somewhat isolated” or “mostly isolated” from the rest of society in the capital. Only four per cent of respondents believe that Muslims are “mostly integrated”.

Only a small minority of those surveyed favour the creation of more Muslim schools — but almost as many are opposed to new faith schools of other religions. Just 12 per cent of respondents back the expansion of Muslim schools, with the figure rising only slightly to 30 per cent when other faiths are included.

By contrast, 10 per cent want all existing faith schools to be scrapped — the figure wanting an end to Muslim schools is 31 per cent — and 10 per cent want a reduction in the current total.

The most popular option, both for faith schools in general and only Muslim schools, is for a freeze, allowing existing institutions to remain but an end to further building. Around a third of those surveyed give this as their favoured option.

Views on the wearing of the niqab or any other full-face covering in public are still firmly against, with 58 per cent describing it as either entirely or somewhat unacceptable.

For example, one respondent states: “I would find it difficult to do business with anyone I could not see.” Four out of 10 of those questioned, however, do not oppose the niqab.

Considerable opposition to high-profile symbols of Islam also emerges in the poll findings.

More than 80 per cent say they oppose the notion of making Eid a public holiday and 54 per cent say they would be concerned if there were plans to build a mosque in their street.

Of these, about half say that they would actively oppose any such proposals.

On the Muslim contribution to society, 30 per cent say that Muslims contribute a “great deal” to the capital’s economy with another 31 per cent saying that they make a “fair amount” of impact on business.

Opinion on the Islamic impact on arts and culture is more divided, with 45 per cent saying that Muslims make “not very much” or no contribution, compared with 42 per cent who take the opposite view. A more favourable verdict is reached on the Muslim role in academic and intellectual life, with 52 per cent of respondents taking a positive view, far more than the 33 per cent who suggest the impact is small or non-existent.

Half of those questioned think the media should avoid publishing material that would gratuitously offend Muslims but only five per cent favour any formal curbs and 82 per cent are opposed to censorship.

More than a third say there should be total freedom of speech regardless of the damage that this might cause to other people’s feelings or to community relations.

Opinion on the introduction of quotas to boost Muslim recruitment to the Metropolitan Police is split, with 41 per cent opposed, 34 per cent in favour and 25 per cent having no view.

More than 70 per cent, however, say that they would back a suitably qualified Muslim candidate who stood for Mayor, compared with 16 per cent who say that they would not.

The majority of respondents also want immigration to be either greatly or slightly reduced, although the 55 per cent taking this view in respect of Muslim migrants is slightly lower than the overall figure of 61 per cent who want cuts to the numbers arriving from elsewhere in the world, regardless of religion or ethnicity.

The discussion continues in tomorrow’s Standard. The Influentials debate takes place at the Royal Society of Arts tonight. Tickets are sold out but it will feature on www.standard.co.uk

BLAME FOR THE LONDON BOMBINGS

ALMOST three-quarters of those surveyed blame Islam for the July London bombings. The survey shows that 72 per cent say Islam was to blame for the attacks, although nine per cent say it played no role and a further 13 per cent say its influence was minimal.

A total of 29 per cent also want political groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas to be banned, although a far greater number — 58 per cent — say this should only be the case if a direct link to terrorism can be proved.

Several respondents caution about the danger of viewing Muslims as a single group with uniform attitudes. One stated that: “On the question of whether Islam is responsible for the 2005 attacks, it does not refer to fundamentalism. There is a very big difference.” Another expressed similar sentiments, saying: “It upsets me that some people view all Muslims with suspicion because of the actions of a few.”
On the day of the Evening Standard’s Influentials debate on Islam, these are the 20 questions that our pollsters asked more than 700 Londoners and their answers by percentage.