

Britons oppose Muslim

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Home Affairs Editor

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 "gen-

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

THE EVENING STANDARD INFLUENTIALS DEBATE

erally 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 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 YouGovStone.

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 20 per cent when other faiths are included.

By contrast, 30 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, 20 per cent say that Muslims contribute a "great deal" to the capital's economy, with another 51 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

BLAME FOR THE LONDON BOMBINGS

ALMOST three-quarters of those surveyed blame Islam for the 7 July London bombings.

The survey shows that 72 per cent say Islam was to blame for the atrocities, 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 expresses similar sentiments, saying: "It upsets me that some people view all Muslims with suspicion because of the actions of a few."

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

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64%
FEEL THERE IS SOME DEGREE OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS

No niqab: 58 per cent thought wearing a full-face covering in public was totally or somewhat unacceptable

1 Which if any of the following religions do you belong to?

Buddhist 1%, Christian 47%, Hindu 1%, Jewish 6%, Muslim 1%, Sikh 0%, Other 1%, None 38%, Don't know 1%, Prefer not to say 4%

2 Thinking about people you consider to be friends, how many are Muslim?

None of them 25, A small number of my friends are Muslim 67, A large number of my friends are Muslim 5, Most or all of my friends are Muslim 0, Don't know 4

3 Do you consider Islam to be a generally tolerant faith or a generally intolerant faith?

A generally tolerant faith 44, A generally intolerant faith 49, Don't know 8

4 Thinking about the position of the Muslim community within the London community as a whole, which of the following statements do you most agree with?

The Muslim community is mostly integrated into the rest of the London community 4, The Muslim community is somewhat integrated into the community 37, The Muslim community is somewhat isolated from the rest of the London community 36, The Muslim community is mostly isolated from the rest of the London community 15, Don't know 7

5 How would you feel if there were proposals to build a mosque on your street?

I would welcome it 5, I wouldn't mind either way 36, I would be concerned about it but would not actively oppose it 31, I would be concerned and would actively seek to prevent it 23, Don't know 5

6 Eid-ul-Fitr (often shortened to Eid), is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, which is the Muslim month of fasting. In your opinion, should Eid be

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

7 Now, thinking about art, literature and the media and where we should draw the line at publication of things that would offend Muslim sensibilities, please look at the following statements and say which one you most agree with:

There should be no restrictions at all; freedom of speech should be paramount no matter what damage it causes to people's feelings or community relations 36, There should be no formal censorship but media outlets should avoid gratuitously publishing things that would offend Muslim sensibilities 52, Given the importance of maintaining good community relations, we should have some limits on the publication of things that would upset the Muslim community 4, It is paramount that we respect other people's religious feelings and there should be a ban on the publication of things that would offend the Muslim community 1, None of these 6, Don't know 2

8 In your opinion, how much of a contribution do you think Muslims have made to... Business and the economy in London?

A great deal 20, A fair amount 51, Not very much 16, Nothing at all 1, Don't know 13

9 In your opinion, what degree of discrimination, if any, do you think Muslim people living in London face?

A great deal 14, Some degree 64, Not very much 13, None at all 1, No negative discrimination; if anything, there is positive discrimination 4, Don't know 5

10 Would you support or oppose recruitment quotas for Muslim applicants to the Metropolitan Police?

Strongly support 10, Somewhat support 24, Neither support nor oppose 22, Somewhat oppose 18, Strongly oppose 23, Don't know 3

11 Would you vote for a suitably qualified Muslim candidate to be Mayor of London?

Yes, I would 71, No, I wouldn't 16, Don't know 13

12 Turning to Muslim traditions of dress, do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable for Muslim women in the UK to wear the niqab (a veil that covers their whole face apart from the eyes) or other full-face covering?

Entirely acceptable 21, Somewhat acceptable 19, Somewhat unacceptable 29, Entirely unacceptable 29, Don't know 3

13 Do you think Muslim girls should be allowed or not allowed to wear a full veil over their face at school?

Yes, they should be allowed 10, No, they should not be allowed 84, Don't know 6

14 Do you think female Muslim school teachers should be allowed or not allowed to wear a full veil over their face when teaching in schools?

Yes, they should be allowed 7, No, they should not be allowed 88, Don't know 5

15 Thinking about immigration to the UK in general, to what extent, if at all, would you like to see the amount, reduced increased or kept at its present level?

Greatly reduced 28, Slightly reduced 33, Kept at its present level 27, Slightly increased 3, Greatly increased 2, Don't know 7

16 Thinking specifically about immigration from Muslim countries to the UK, to what extent, if at all, would you like to see the amount reduced, increased or maintained at its present level?

Greatly reduced 33, Slightly reduced 22, Kept at its present level 30, Slightly increased 2, Greatly increased 1, Don't know 11

17 Thinking about faith schools in general (whether Christian, Muslim or otherwise), which, if any, of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Faith schools should be encouraged and expanded 20, Existing faith schools should be allowed to continue but no new ones should be

18 Thinking specifically about Muslim faith schools, which, if any, of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Faith schools should be encouraged and expanded 12, Existing faith schools should be allowed to continue but no new ones should be opened 31, The number of faith schools should be reduced 10, Faith schools should be abolished 30, Don't know 9

19 Thinking about political groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas, which, if any, of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Political groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas should be banned regardless of whether they have any direct links with terrorism 29, Political groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas should be banned only if a direct link to terrorism can be proven 58, Political groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas should not be banned 9, Don't know 4

20 To what extent, if at all, do you think Islam is to blame for the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005?

A great extent 35, Some extent 37, Hardly at all 13, Not at all 9, Don't know 5

71%
WOULD VOTE FOR A SUITABLY QUALIFIED MUSLIM CANDIDATE TO BE MAYOR

Source: YouGovStone survey - Figures are % of people responding in a sample size of 701