

U.S. Muslims after 9/11: Poll Trends 2001-2007

by Clark McCauley and Jennifer Stellar

Abstract

The terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 brought increased attention to Muslims living in the United States. Results from four national polls of Muslim Americans conducted between 2001 and 2007 indicate that Muslim Americans feel increasingly negative about the direction in which America is heading and increasingly see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam.

Introduction

Since the events of September 11th, 2001, substantial research has been devoted to the thoughts and feelings of Americans towards Muslims living in the United States. A recent analysis of polls conducted in the U.S. from 2000 to 2006 showed that a relatively tolerant atmosphere of American sentiment towards Muslim Americans immediately after September 11th gave way to increasing feelings of concern and distrust as time passed [1]. In this report we analyze polls of Muslims living in the United States in order to determine what changes have occurred since 9/11 in U.S. Muslims' views of America and Americans [For the methodology utilized, see Appendix].

Results

We searched the four polls described in the Appendix to find where the same or substantively similar questions were used in more than one survey. The Tables note where items or responses were not identically worded. We considered ten repeated items and divided them into four content areas.

Political participation and satisfaction

With the Global War on Terrorism coming to the forefront in domestic politics as well as foreign policy, Muslim voters are bringing their voices into the public arena. The Pew Center estimates the population of U.S. Muslims of voting age at 1.4 million. In areas of high concentration, Muslims have the potential to have significant impact on elections. Polls in 2001, 2004, and 2007 indicate that the majority of Muslims are registered to vote (79%, 82%, 67%).

Table 1. *Are you registered to vote?* (percentages)

	Zogby 2001 N=1781	Zogby 2004 N=1846	Pew 2007 N=1050
Yes	79	82	67
No	21	17	30
NS, DK, Refused	1	1	3

It appears that Republican registrations may have fallen (17%, 18%, 9%, 7%) as more Muslim Americans identified themselves as independents or in alignment with minor parties such as the Libertarians (21%, no data, 24%, 35%).

Table 2. *What is your political party?* (percentages)

	Zogby 2001 N=1781	Zogby 2002 N=531	Zogby 2004 N=1846	Pew 2007 N=1050
Democrat	40	36	40	37
Republican	17	18	9	7
Independent/Minor Party	21	--	24	35
NS, DK, Refused	33	46 ^a	28	21

^a Zogby reports Independent, Other, and Refused as 35%, No Response as 11%.

A disturbing trend is the growing Muslim dissatisfaction with “the way things are going in American society”. Polls in 2001, 2004 and 2007 show that dissatisfaction grew sharply (38%, 61%, 55%).

Table 3. *How satisfied are you overall with the way things are going in American society today?* (percentages)

	Zogby2001 N=1781	Zogby2004 N=1846	Pew2007 ^a N=1050
Satisfied	52	35	37
Unsatisfied	38	61	55
NS, DK, Refused	10	4	8

^a Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country today?

Importance of Islam

Polls in 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2007 show that the importance of Islam in the lives of Muslim Americans has remained consistently high for the great majority of Muslims (79%, 81%, 82%, and 72% say “very important”).

Table 4. *Would you say the role of Islam in your life is very important, somewhat important or not very important?* (percentages)

	Zogby2001 N=1781	Zogby2002 ^a N=531	Zogby2004 N=1846	Pew2007 ^b N=1050
Very important	79	81	82	72
Somewhat important	16	13	14	18
Not important	5	5	4	9
NS, DK, Refused	1	1	1	1

^a Original scale from 1= not important to 10 = very important. Responses converted: 1-3 = Not important; 4-6 = Somewhat important; 7-10 = Very important.

^b How important is religion in your life? Responses converted: not too important and not at all important = Not important.

The same polls show that about half of Muslims (54%, 51%, 54%, 40%) attend mosque at least once a week. Note the stability of Zogby results (54-54%) in contrast to the lower report of weekly mosque attendance from **Pew2007** (40%); the lower percentage in the Pew poll is consistent with our suggestion in the Methods section that the Pew poll may have better represented Muslims who are less religious.

Table 5. *On average, how often do you attend the mosque for 'Salah' and 'Jum'ah' Prayer?* (percentages)

	Zogby2001 N=1781	Zogby 2002 ^a N=531	Zogby2004 N=1846	Pew 2007 ^b N=1050
More than once a week	31	22	29	17
Once a week for <i>Jum'ah</i> prayer	24	29	25	23
Once or twice a month	10	11	10	8
A few times a year, especially for <i>Salah</i>	14	16	16	18
Seldom	9	11	9	16
Never	11	11	10	18
NS, DK, Refused	1	1	1	0

^a *Approximately how often do you attend a mosque for prayer?*

^b *On average, how often do you attend the mosque or Islamic center for Salah and Jum'ah prayer?*

It is also worth noting that the religiosity of Muslim Americans is only slightly higher than that reported in national surveys of all Americans. Polls taken between 1996 and 2004 show 59% - 64% of Americans saying that religion is very important in their lives, and 38% - 43% saying they attend religious services at least once a week. [2].

Perception of Bias and Discrimination

The belief that Islam and Muslims are unfairly portrayed in the media shows some indication of decline: 77% believed this in 2001, 76% in 2004, and 57% in 2007. Explanation of change toward a more positive view of the media between 2004 and 2007 is not obvious – perhaps due to growing media criticism of the war in Iraq as the presidential election approached -- but the important result is that consistently over the years more than half of U.S. Muslims feel the media are biased against them.

Table 6. *Do you think the media is fair in its portrayal of Muslims and Islam?* (percentages)

	Zogby2001 N=1781	Zogby2004 N=1846	Pew2007 ^a N=1050
Yes fair	13	17	26
No biased against	77	76	57
Biased in favour/Depends	--	--	6
NS, DK, Refused	10	7	11

^a*Do you think that coverage of Islam and Muslims by American news organizations is generally fair or unfair?*
 Response converted: Unfair = Biased against.

In contrast, report of personal experience of discrimination shows some indication of a peak in 2004: 26% reported discrimination in 2002, 40% in 2004 and 27% in 2007. Again, explanation of this variation is not obvious. Increase from 2002 to 2004 may be a function of the phrasing of the Zogby items, which asked about discrimination experienced since 9/11.

Table 7. *Aside from restrictions on religious expression at work, have you yourself suffered anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment, verbal abuse, or physical attack since Sept. 11?*

	Zogby 2002 N=531	Zogby 2004 ^a N=1846	Pew 2007 ^b N=1050
Yes	26	40	27
No	74	59	71
NS, DK, Refused	0	1	1

^a*Have you personally experienced discrimination since September 11th?*

^b*And thinking more generally - NOT just about the past 12 months - have you ever been the victim of discrimination as a Muslim living in the United States?*

Any experiences of discrimination between 2002 and 2004 would contribute to an increased reporting of discrimination. However, this interpretation contributes nothing to understanding the drop from 40 to 27 percent reporting discrimination in 2007; indeed the **Pew 2007** item asks about “ever” being a victim of discrimination in the U.S., suggesting that, if anything, the **Pew2007** percentage should be higher than the **Zogby2004** percentage.

Despite this uncertainty about variation over time, there is an important consistency in finding that at least a quarter of U.S. Muslims report personal experience of anti-Muslim discrimination.

It is worth noting that the percentages of Muslims reporting experience of discrimination (26%-40%) are below the 46% of African-Americans who reported in 2007 that they were victims of discrimination [3]. Nevertheless, Muslims in the U.S. report significant levels of discrimination.

War on Terrorism

Polls in 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2007 show that Muslim American support for U.S. military action in Afghanistan decreased (52%, 53%, 35%, 35%).

Table 8. *Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the U.S. military action against Afghanistan?* (percentages)

	Zogby 2001 ^a N=1781	Zogby 2002 ^b N=531	Zogby 2004 ^a N=1846	Pew 2007 ^c N=1050
Support	52	53	35	35
Oppose	43	42	53	48
NS, DK, Refused	6	6	11	17

^a Responses converted: support and somewhat support = Support; somewhat oppose and oppose = Oppose.

^b U.S. military action in Afghanistan after Sept 11 was justified under the circumstances. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree? Responses converted: strongly agree and somewhat agree = Support; somewhat disagree and strongly disagree = Oppose.

^c Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force in Afghanistan? Responses converted: right decision = Support; wrong decision = Oppose.

Events between 2002 and 2004 may explain the shift in sentiment. The entrance of the opposition forces into Kandahar and the end of the Taliban authority in that region in December of 2001 appeared to open an opportunity for democracy and stability in Afghanistan. However, Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan and stagnation in the war in Iraq may have contributed to increasing doubts about U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.

In Gallup polls conducted in 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2007, national samples of Americans were asked whether the “U.S. had made a mistake in sending military forces to Afghanistan.” The percentage saying it was a mistake increased (9%, 6%, 25%, 25%) [4]. Thus opposition to the war in Afghanistan is consistently at least 25 percentage points higher for Muslim Americans than for other Americans.

Table 9. *Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the war in Iraq?* (percentages)

	Zogby 2004 ^a N=1846	Pew 2007 ^b N=1050
Support	13	12
Oppose	88	75
NS, DK, Refused	6	13

^a Responses converted: strongly support and somewhat support = Support; somewhat oppose and strongly oppose = Oppose.

^b Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq? Responses converted: right decision = Support; wrong decision = Oppose.

Only **Zogby2004** and **Pew2007** inquired about Muslim opinions toward the war in Iraq, but the great majority of respondents (88% and 75%) opposed this war and few supported it (13%, 12%). In contrast, *USA Today*/Gallup polls (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/106783/opposition-iraq-war-reaches-new-high.aspx>) show that the percentage of Americans saying that the U.S. “made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq” ranged between 40% and 50% in 2004, rising to about 60% in 2007 [5]. As for the war in Afghanistan, Muslim opposition to the war in Iraq is consistently higher than for other Americans, at least 15 percentage points higher.

A central question for U.S. Muslims is whether the US is fighting a war against terrorism, or whether the Global War on Terrorism is a war on Islam. Muslim Americans show a striking decrease in belief that the US war is against terrorism (from 67% in 2001 to 26% in 2007), and a parallel increase in the belief that the war is actually about Islam (from 18% in 2001 to 55% in 2007).

Table 10. *In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, do you feel the U.S. is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?* (percentages)

	Zogby 2001 N=1781	Zogby 2002 ^a N=531	Zogby 2004 ^b N=1846	Pew 2007 ^c N=1050
Terrorism	67	41	33	26
Islam	18	31	38	55
Neither/Both	--	20	--	2
NS, DK, Refused	16	7	29	17

^a Some describe the U.S. worldwide response to the Sept. 11 attacks as a war on terrorism. Others say it is a war on Islam. Which do you think is more accurate?

^b Do you feel the U.S. is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?

^c Do you think the U.S.-led war on terrorism is a sincere effort to reduce international terrorism or don't you believe that?

Responses converted: sincere effort = Terrorism; don't believe that = Islam.

Conclusion

Polls of minority groups are made difficult and expensive by the need to screen out majority members from random sampling of respondents. Muslims make up about one half of one percent of the U.S. population, a very small minority for which ordinary sampling methods are prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless we found four national polls of U.S. Muslims conducted between 2001 and 2007, and looked for trends over time for items that were repeated or substantially the same across polls.

The four polls show both stability and change in U.S. Muslims. Results stable over time include large majorities registered to vote, large majorities saying that Islam is very important in their lives, large majorities opposing the war in Iraq, and a simple majority reporting attendance at mosque at least once a week. Indications of small changes included switching from Republican to Independent parties, a possible peak in personal experience of discrimination around 2004, and a possible decrease in perceived media bias against Muslims between 2004 and 2007.

Large and consistent changes over time – too large in our judgment to be attributed to any kind of sample variations – were found for three issues. Satisfaction with the way things are going in the U.S. declined from 52% in 2001 to 35% in 2004 to 12% in 2006. Support for U.S. military action in Afghanistan declined from 52% - 53% in 2001 and 2002 to 35% in 2004 and 2007. Perception of the war on terrorism as a war on Islam increased from 18% in 2001, to 31% in 2002, to 38% in 2004, and to 55% in 2007.

Interpretation of these changes cannot be made with confidence, but tentatively we suggest that all three of the large changes can be linked with the Global War on Terrorism. GWOT was the most salient U.S. government policy between the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Pew poll in 2007. Increasing dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the U.S. was likely linked with increasing opposition to the war on terrorism. In turn, a major element of GWOT in these years was the continuing U.S. military action in Afghanistan; Muslim Americans moved toward increasing opposition to this intervention. In the context of very high and stable Muslim opposition to the war in Iraq, the major shifts in the opinions of Muslim Americans reported here may signal reduced willingness of Muslim Americans to cooperate in the war against terrorism.

We began by noting that polls assessing American opinions about Muslims since 9/11 indicate a lack of understanding coupled with growing distrust of Muslim Americans (*1*). The polls we have reviewed indicate that at least half of Muslim Americans feel the media are biased against Islam and at least a quarter feel victimized by anti-Muslim discrimination. Those seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam have increased and included about half of U.S. Muslims by 2007. Taken together, the polls of American opinions about Muslims and the polls of Muslim Americans suggest that there may be difficult times ahead for Muslims in America. Perhaps President Obama, himself the son of an African Muslim, can halt or reverse these unhappy trends.

Interpretation of these changes cannot be made with confidence, but tentatively we suggest that all three of the large changes documented here can be linked with the Global War on Terrorism. GWOT was the most salient U.S. government policy between the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Pew poll in 2007, and increasing dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the U.S. was likely linked with increasing opposition to the war on terrorism. Specifically, the most salient elements of GWOT in these years were the continuing U.S. military action in Afghanistan that began in 2001, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In addition to high and stable opposition to U.S. military forces in Iraq, U.S. Muslims show increasing opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan and increasing perception of the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. Thus it seems likely that increasing dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country and increasing doubts about the war on terrorism are both reflecting opposition to U.S. forces in Muslim countries. Consistent with this interpretation, analyses not reported here show significant correlations between opposition to the Iraq war and seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. In other words, individuals opposed to U.S. forces in Iraq are more likely than other U.S. Muslims to see a war on Islam.

Finally, we note that increasing doubts about the war on terrorism cannot easily be attributed to the actions of Al Qaeda. In our results, it is increasing disagreement with U.S. actions in Afghanistan that most obviously parallels increasing percentages seeing the war on terrorism as a

war on Islam. But there is little doubt that framing the war on terrorism as war on Islam is useful for AQ, as this framing represents sympathy for AQ's professed goals of defending Islam even if sympathizers do not agree with AQ's attacks on civilians and martyrdom missions. A war on Islam is the "simple populist message" identified by Brynjar Lia as an AQ 'selling point' for Muslims in many countries [6]. From this perspective, the appeal of AQ is in part a function of Muslim perceptions of U.S. actions. This is a dynamic perspective in which AQ's brand or image depends as much on U.S. actions as on AQ's actions.

APPENDIX on Methodology Utilized

We reviewed four national polls of U.S. Muslims conducted between 2001 and 2007, including brief description of their sampling methods, then discussed some of the issues raised in comparing results across these polls. Three narrower polls of U.S. Muslims were not included in our analyses: Zogby International's 2003 Detroit Arab American Survey (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cocoon/ICPSR/STUDY/04413.xml>), Zogby's 2006 Four-State Arab-American Survey (<http://www.truthout.org/article/how-arab-americans-will-vote-2006>), and Zogby's 2007 Arab-American Identity Survey (<http://www.aaiusa.org/page/-/Polls/AAIIdentity2007Final%20Report.pdf>). These three polls did not aim for national surveys of U.S. Muslims.

Four Polls of U.S. Muslims 2001-2007

Zogby2001: The American Muslim Poll (n=1781) was conducted in November and December 2001 by the Muslims in American Public Square (MAPS), supported by the Pew Research Center (<http://pewresearch.org/about/>) in collaboration with Zogby International (<http://www.zogby.com/>). In this and other polls considered here, all respondents were 18 years of age or older. A telephone list was created by matching the zip codes for 300 Islamic centers nationwide against their respective local telephone exchanges; listings of common Muslim surnames were then identified from the local telephone exchanges and a random sample of names were called using Random Digit Dialing (RDD). This approach under-represents African-American Muslims, many of whom do not have Muslim names. Thus, an additional sample of African American Muslims was obtained in face-to-face interviews conducted 7 - 9 December 2001 at locations in New York, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, GA, and Detroit, MI. The percentage of African-American respondents was weighted to reflect 20% of the American Muslim population.

Zogby2002: The Hamilton College Muslim American Poll (n=521) was designed by Sociology Professor Dennis Gilbert and a team of Hamilton students and supported by the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center. It was conducted in April 2002 in collaboration with Zogby International. A national call list was created by software that identifies common Muslim names in telephone

listings, an approach that, as already noted, probably underweights African-American Muslims (<http://www.hamilton.edu/news/MuslimAmerica/MuslimAmerica.pdf>). Published results were gender-weighted to correct for 60/40 representation of men and women, but results presented in this paper are unweighted.

Zogby2004: The American Muslim Poll (n=1846) was conducted in August and September 2004 by Muslims in the American Public Square (MAPS) supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts in conjunction with Zogby International. Telephone interviews were carried out with a nationwide sample of American Muslims using the same methods as for Zogby2001 - except that no additional face-to-face sample was included.

Pew2007: The Muslim Americans Survey (n=1050) was conducted by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas Incorporated (SRBI) between January and April of 2007, according to the specifications of the Pew Research Center. Telephone interviews were conducted in English (83%), Arabic (11%), Urdu (3%), and Farsi (3%). The sampling frame had three parts: two RDD samples and one re-contact sample. The first sample came from a sample frame that ranked U.S. counties by percentage Muslims (using data from government surveys, commercial lists of Muslim names, and self-identified Muslims in previous Pew RDD national polls). RDD within the top three quartiles of counties produced 354 completed interviews. The second sample began with a list of 450,000 households thought to contain at least one Muslim, purchased from Experian, a commercial credit and market research firm. Analysis of names by Ethnic Technologies, another commercial firm, produced a sampling frame from which RDD produced 533 completed interviews. The third sample re-contacted all Muslims identified in previous Pew national surveys 2000-2006, producing 163 completed interviews. The complexities and advantages of this multiple-strata polling are detailed in pages 57-71 of the Pew Research Center report, *Muslim Americans: Middle class and mostly mainstream*. (2)

Comparability of Surveys

Although there have been other polls of U.S. Muslims since 9/11 (see for instance Council of American-Islamic Relations poll, http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/American_Muslim_Voter_Survey_2006.pdf), we believe that the four polls reviewed here provide the best available foundation for comparisons over time. The ideal of comparison over time would be repeated random samples from the same sampling frame, with the same poll items used by the same polling organization for the same sponsor. Frame and organization are linked because the polling organization produces the sampling frame, and two organizations will seldom produce the same frame, even for the same target population of interest. Similarly, sponsorship is important because the preferences of those supporting a survey can make a difference in the sampling frame and the items used. Thus it is important to note that the four surveys examined here all involved either Zogby International or the Pew Research Center, who

together produced the first survey of interest, *Zogby2001*.

The two polls that come closest to an ideal comparison over time are **Zogby2001** and **Zogby2004**. Both were conducted by telephone by Zogby International in association with Muslims in the American Public Square (MAPS) and the Pew Foundation. Both aimed at a national sample and used a sample frame based on Muslim names. The only difference was the addition of face-to-face African-American interviews to **Zogby2001** but not **Zogby2004**. Similarly, **Zogby2002** was a national Muslim survey using name identification to create the sample frame, although it was sponsored by Hamilton College rather than the Pew Center.

Finally, **Pew2007** was a national poll that differed from all the Zogby polls in joining three different sample frames, interviewing in four languages, and developing a painstaking approach to estimating the population and distribution of U.S. Muslims (1.4 million Muslims 18 years old or older). This 'gold standard' of Muslim surveys cost over one million dollars. It may have reached less religious Muslims than the Zogby surveys, which began in 2001, as already noted, with the zip codes of 300 Islamic Centers.

Statistical and Substantive Significance of Differences over Time

Statistically, the standard error for a percentage in a sample of 1000 is about two percentage points, and responses to the same item in two independent random samples of $n=1000$ are significantly different ($p<.05$) if the percentages differ by more than about five percentage points. The complex sampling frames used in Muslim polls suggest larger standard errors for percentages; for instance the Pew Research Center (2007, p. 57) estimates a standard error of 2.5 percentage points for **Pew2007** percentages. Using this estimate, percentages from two samples of 1000 differ significantly if the difference exceeds about 7 percentage points. Using a more conservative criterion of substantive significance, we ignored in this article differences between surveys of less than ten percentage points, and focus especially on consistent trends over time that amount to change of 15 percentage points or more.

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About the Authors: **Clark McCauley** is Rachael C. Hale Professor of Mathematics and the Sciences at the Psychology Department, Bryn Mawr College; he is also Editor of 'Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict'; **Jennifer Stellar** is at the University of California at Berkeley where she is specializing in pro-social emotions and cross-cultural foundations of morality.

Notes

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