

CAIR

Council on American-Islamic Relations

RESEARCH CENTER

AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIMS 2006

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Background and Objectives

In 2004, CAIR commissioned a public opinion survey to gauge anti-Muslim sentiment and found nearly one-fourth of the American public believing anti-Muslim canards and stereotypes.

A replication of the initial 2004 survey was administered in 2005. This report will provide a comparison of both polls in an effort to identify major trends.

This survey project of CAIR Research Center aims to:

- Understand what Americans think about Muslims;
- Identify variables associated with anti-Muslim prejudice; and
- Identify conditions conducive to combating prejudice.

Methodology

CAIR commissioned Genesis Research Associates, a California-based polling company, to conduct the survey. Samples for the 2004 and 2005 polls are random digit samples of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the United States. Interviews were conducted by telephone. The recent round of interviewing took place during November 2005 and consisted of a total of 1001 interviews. In the previous the survey, 1000 respondents were interviewed between June 23 and July 2, 2004.

The response rate was 23.2 percent and the cooperation rate 41.5 percent. The margin of error for this survey, with 95 percent confidence, is +/-3.1 percent.

The 2005 poll was designed to replicate the earlier survey. Most of the questions were repeated, with several new ones added in order to allow a more in-depth understanding of public attitudes. Results have been further stratified by several demographic factors.

Summary Findings

The latest survey of American public opinion about Islam and Muslims tested and confirmed the following findings:

- Approximately one-in-four Americans believes that Islam is a religion of hatred and violence.
 - This proportion is virtually unchanged since 2004.
- As in 2004, those with the most prejudiced attitudes tend to be:
 - Older
 - Less educated
 - Politically conservative
 - Republican

- The level of knowledge of Islam is virtually unchanged from 2004. Only two percent of survey respondents indicated that they are “very knowledgeable” about the religion.
 - Almost 60 percent said they “are not very knowledgeable” or “not at all knowledgeable” about Islam.
 - Nearly 10 percent said Muslims believe in a moon god.
 - Just a little over one-third of survey respondents reported awareness of Muslim leaders condemning terrorism.
- A segmentation analysis of the respondents’ attitudes identified four main blocs of Americans:
 - A plurality of Americans— a little over a third of the total— are indifferent, confused or simply neutral in their perceptions of Islam and its adherents.
 - More than one-fourth maintains a tolerant view of Islam and Muslims;
 - More than one-fifth is somewhat tolerant;
 - Nearly one-fifth admits to intolerant feelings towards Muslims.
- A vast majority of Americans said they would change their views about Muslims if Muslims condemn terrorism more strongly, show more concern for Americans or work to improve the status of Muslim women or American image in the Muslim world.

Demographic Characteristics

- The age of the 2004 and 2005 poll respondents averaged 49 and 48, respectively.
- The average income in 2004 and 2005 was \$64,000 and \$58,000, respectively.
- The 2005 sample consisted of 53 percent females and 47 percent males. The gender split in the previous year was even.
- Most, or 61 percent in the 2004 sample and 68 percent in the 2005 sample, were employed; the rest were either retired, homemakers or in school.
- In both samples, white Christians represented more than 80 percent of the respondents.
- A plurality of the respondents (38 percent in 2004 and 48 percent in 2005) said they attend a place of worship at least once a week. Less than 30 percent in both years said they rarely or never go to worship places.

The Reality of Islamophobia

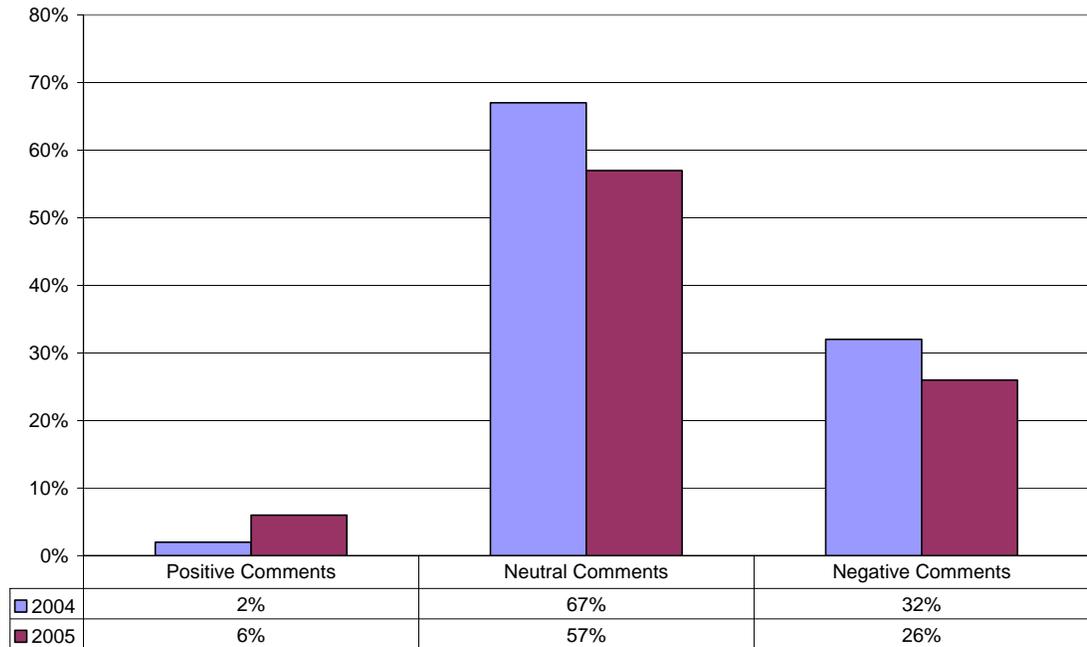
First impression

Responding to the open-ended question “When you hear the word ‘Muslim,’ what is the first thought that comes to your mind?” 6 percent had positive comments like, “good religion,” “good people,” “faithful,” “devout,” “misunderstood.” In contrast, 68 percent had neutral comments like, “mosque,” “religion,” and “desert.” Twenty-six percent had negative comments like, “violence,” “hatred,” “terrorists,” “war,” “guns,” “towel-heads”,

and “rag-heads.” Although still low, the number of positive comments has grown since 2004, and the number of negative comments has declined.

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First Thoughts About Muslims

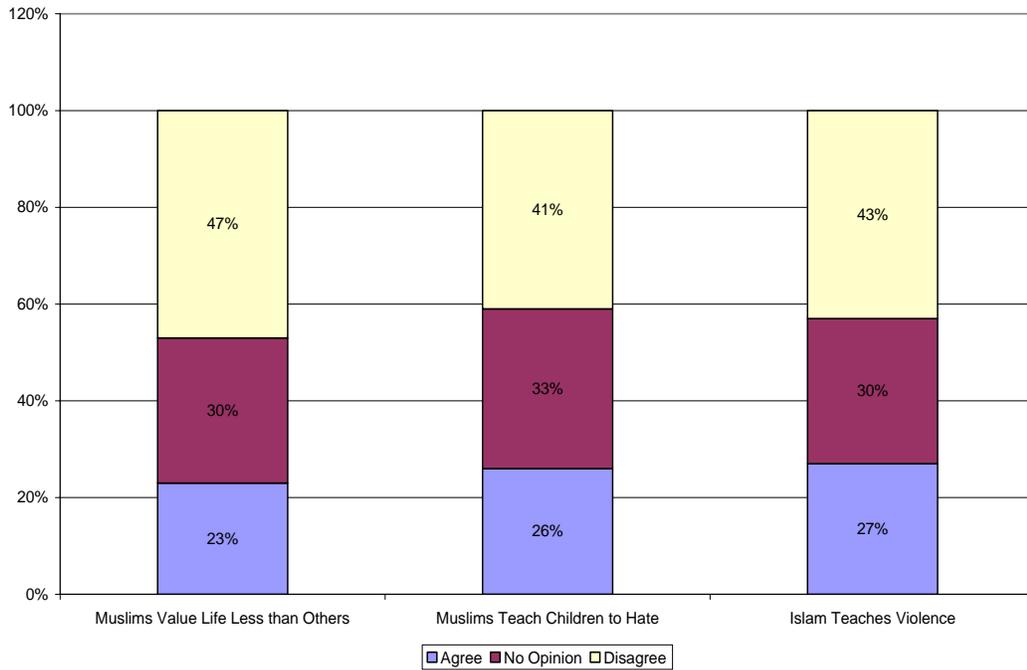


Negative and Positive Statement Tests

Respondents were asked to state their agreement or disagreement with twenty statements reflecting favorable and unfavorable perceptions of Islam and Muslims. The 2005 survey affirmed last year’s finding that one-fourth of Americans agree with one or more of the following extremely negative statements:

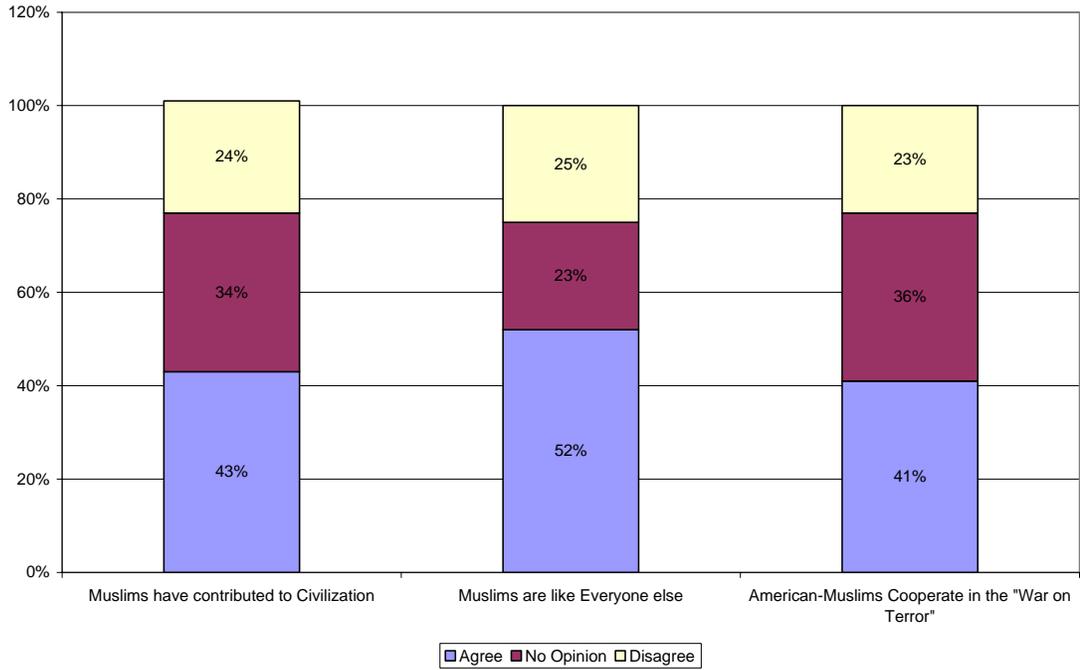
- “Muslims teach their children to hate unbelievers.”
- “Muslims value life less than other people.”
- “The Muslim religion teaches violence and hatred.”

This percentage has not changed since 2004.



The same level of prejudice is also evident in responses to positive statements, worded to reflect a favorable views of Muslims. When asked to respond to the statement “Muslims made significant contributions to civilization,” a significant portion of 43 percent agreed in 2005—down from 47 percent in 2004. More than a third reported no opinion and a significantly growing segment, or 23 percent—up from 17 percent in the previous year—disagreed. Nearly the same attitudinal pattern, with 41 percent agreeing, 23 percent disagreeing and 34 percent having no opinion, is reflected in the responses to the statement: “The American-Muslims community is cooperating in the fight against terrorism.” Even a statement that is worded to be passively positive, i.e., suggesting that “Muslims are just like everyone else,” one-fourth disagreed—although more than 50 percent agreed.

Tolerant Attitudes About Muslims

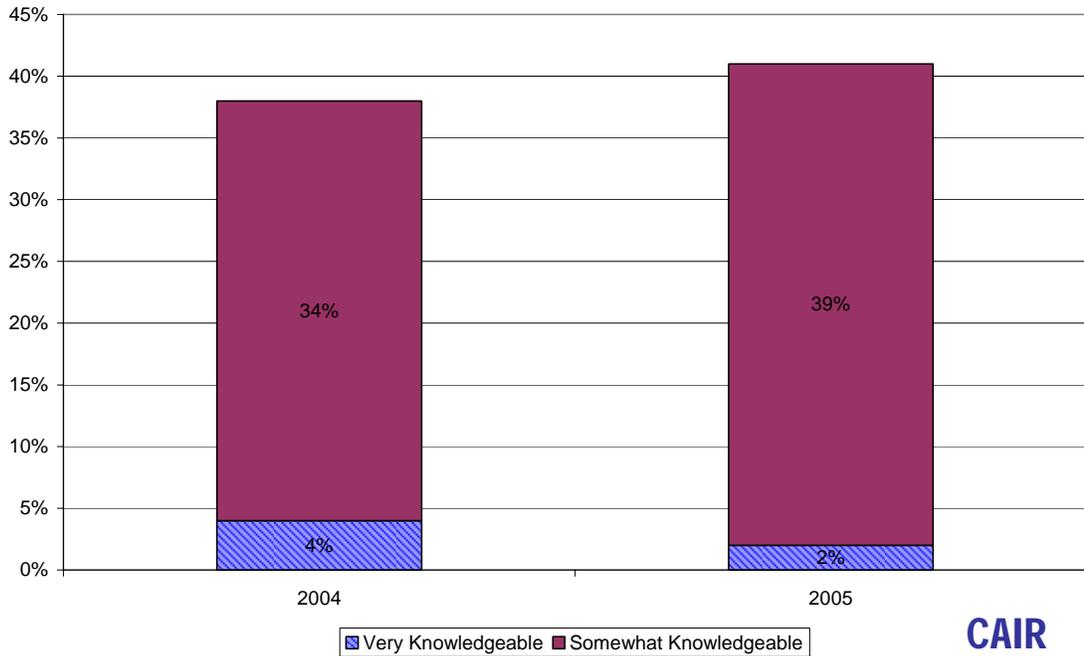


Restricting Muslims

About one-fifth of the respondents agreed that the civil liberties of Muslims should be restricted because of security reasons. Indeed, 19 percent agreed that, “Because of security needs, the civil liberties of American Muslims should be restricted.” However, 51 percent disagreed (strongly or somewhat) with this proposition. Also, 17 percent agreed that “It’s okay to lock up Muslims, just in case they are planning terrorist acts.” Compared to 2004, this figure declined by 4 percent, a meager change of 1 percent above the margin of error.

The Knowledge Gap

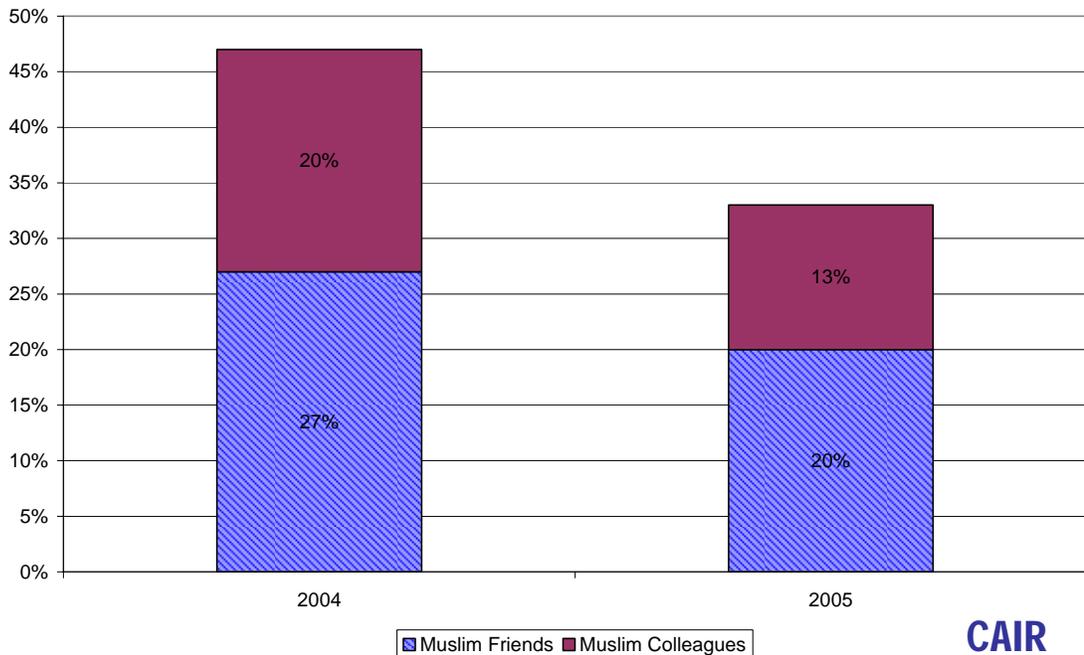
Self Reported Knowledge of Islam



In 2005, only two percent of respondents said they are “very knowledgeable” about Islam; 39 percent felt they were “somewhat knowledgeable.” Nearly 60 percent said they were “not very knowledgeable” or “not at all knowledgeable” about the faith.

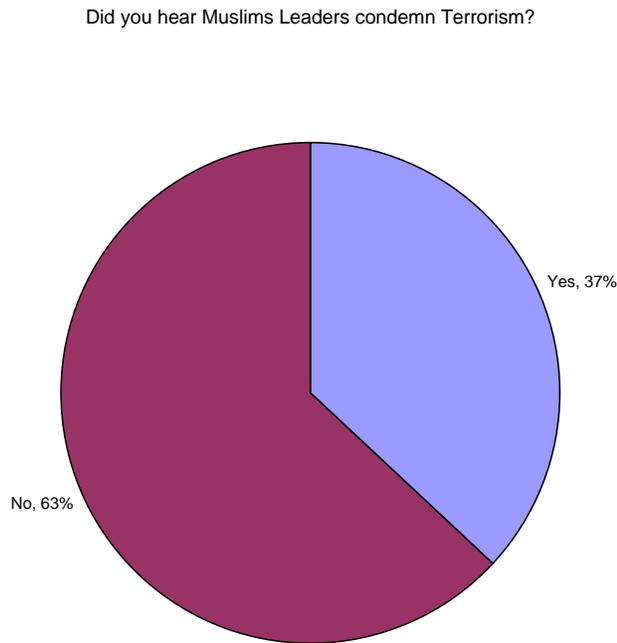
A more telling factor is the low number of Americans who reported having Muslim friends. On average, only one-fifth of respondents in 2004 and 2005 reported having

Personal Contacts with Muslims



Muslim colleagues or friends. In other words, most Americans lack personal experience with Muslims.

Americans tend to have only scanty knowledge of specific Islamic topics. Although nearly 60 percent said they know the name of the Muslim holy book, only one-third of respondents are aware that Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews do. Nearly 10 percent said Muslims worship a “moon god,” a notion that most Muslims would find not only false but also offensive.



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Most Americans are poorly informed about their Muslim neighbors and their role in society. Nearly two-thirds said they did not hear, see or read about “any Muslim leaders who have condemned terrorism.” And among those who answered affirmatively, the overwhelming majority learned about such Muslim positions only casually. Nearly 80 percent said the source of this knowledge was television.

These findings point to a vast difference in perception between American Muslims and their neighbors. Most American Muslims will point to the numerous condemnations of terrorism that their representative organizations have issued. However, it is clear that such condemnations are not being heard by other citizens. This may be the result of decisions by media outlets that acts of terror are more newsworthy than statements condemning senseless violence.

Only one-third of the 2005 sample claimed awareness of the fact that Muslims participated in relief efforts aiding victims of Hurricane Katrina. One-fifth disagreed with the statement that Muslims played part in the relief effort, while 46 percent had no opinion.

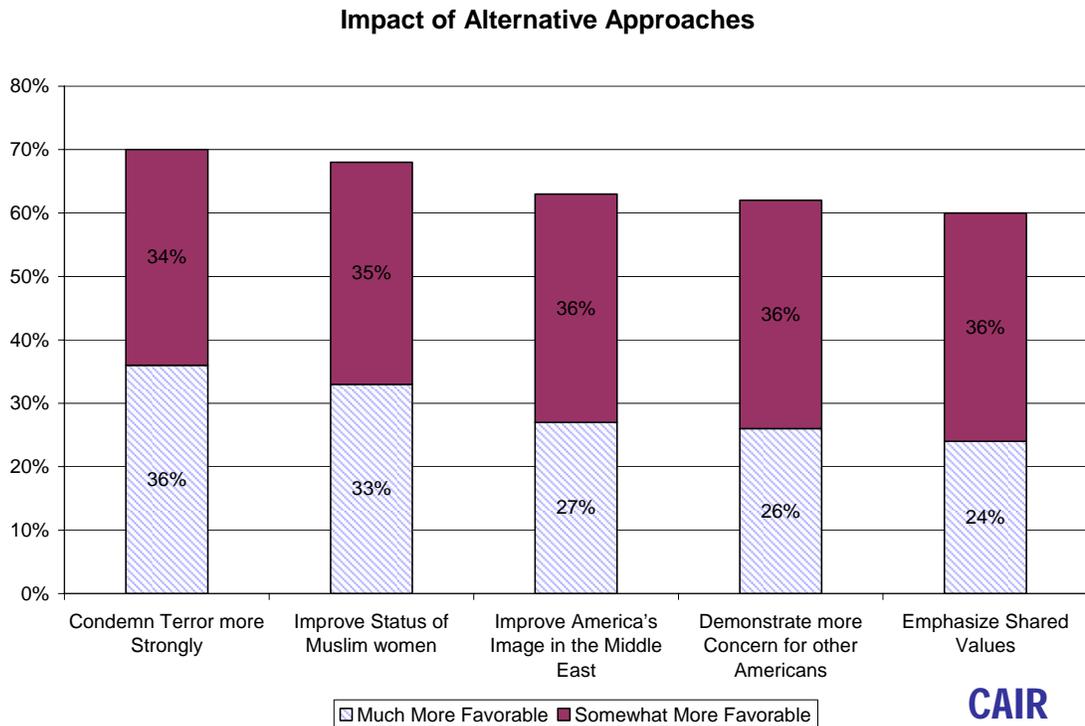
Segmentation Analysis

So far, we have established the fact that anti-Muslim prejudice molds the views of many Americans. This finding has been confirmed over two rounds of polling. To position the prejudiced segment in the broader American public opinion, a segmentation analysis was administered. This is a statistical procedure that looked at responses to all twenty negative and positive statements as scattered plot data. Responses to similar questions have been clustered, revealing the following four major blocs of American public attitudes about Islam and Muslims:

- **Ambivalent.** Over one-third (34 percent) either express “no opinion” on the attitude questions have mixed opinions—not leaning toward the accepting or the rejecting side—or simply state that they “do not know.”
- **Tolerant.** About one-fourth (27 percent) of the population rates themselves as accepting of Muslims. This segment of the population consistently rejects anti-Muslim stereotypes and strongly agrees that Muslims are just like everyone else and that their civil rights have been violated after 9/11. They strongly disagree that it is okay to lock up Muslims just in case; that Muslims value life less than others; that Muslims teach children to hate that Islam teach violence and hatred; that the war on terror is a war against Islam, that Muslims worship a moon god or want impose their faith on others. However, members of this segment are not pro-Muslim. In fact many moderately agree that Islam encourages the oppression of women.
- **Somewhat intolerant.** A smaller portion (22 percent) is somewhat intolerant. Members of this segment may passively accept Muslims but they also believe in long-held stereotypes. For example, members of this segment strongly agree that Islam oppresses women. Also, they only moderately disagree that it is acceptable to lock up Muslims just in case they are planning terrorist attacks. They do not know if Muslim American civil rights have been limited since 9/11, and they do not know if Muslims worship the same god as Christians and Jews do. And they only moderately agree that Muslims are just like everyone else.
- **Intolerant.** A little less than one-fifth (17 percent) admits to intolerant feelings toward Muslims. (Although one-fourth agreed with three major anti-Muslim statements, a significantly less percentage remained negative about the remaining attitude statements). That is more than one out of

every six people who would strongly agree with the statement that Muslims value life less than other people do; that they worship a moon god; that Islam oppresses women; that it is acceptable to lock up Muslims; that they teach children to hate; that their faith teaches violence and hatred; that the war on terror is war on Islam; and that Muslims seek to impose their faith on others.

Conditions that May Change Attitudes



Despite negativity and indifference, most respondents said they would change their view if American Muslims took measures to condemn terrorism more strongly (69 percent), to improve the status of Muslim women (68 percent), to work harder for improving America's image in the Middle East (63 percent), to demonstrate concern for other Americans (60 percent) and to emphasize shared values with Christians and Jews (59 percent).

Conclusion

This survey provides us with replicated statistical evidence suggesting that nearly one-in-five Americans maintain a strong anti-Muslim attitude. Although 27 percent are tolerant towards Muslims, only six percent have a positive first impression of Muslims.

People with negative or intolerant views toward Islam consistently agree with Islamophobic canards suggesting Islam teaches violence and Muslims inculcate hate in their children. Both the 2004 and 2005 surveys indicate that Islamophobia defines the attitude of nearly one-fifth of Americans and has widespread influence on public discourse regarding Islam and Muslims.

The prevalence of anti-Islamic prejudice may be associated with a lack of accurate information about Islam and Muslims, coupled with widespread apprehensions about personal safety. This explains the finding that the vast majority of Americans said they would change their view if they perceive Muslims to demonstrate more concern for Americans or if they perceive Muslims work towards improving America's image in the Muslim world.