

Study on Muslims in Germany (January 8, 2015)

Abstract

A report sponsored by the Bertelsmann Foundation argues that many of the four million Muslims feel at home in Germany, although they are still confronted by a rising tide of Islamophobia, increasingly triggered by fears of terrorist attacks.

Source

Muslims in Germany Feel Close to Society and State

The attitudes and lifestyles of Muslims living here are strongly oriented towards values in the Federal Republic. The majority population hardly notices this, however, and is increasingly hostile towards Islam. For Muslims living here, this means marginalization and stress.

Most of the four million Muslims in Germany are part of this country. Their attitudes and viewpoints are strongly oriented towards the fundamental values of the Federal Republic such as democracy and pluralism. Conversely, large segments of the non-Muslim population reject Muslims and their religion. This is evident from the “Special Survey on Islam” conducted as part of the Bertelsmann Foundation’s Religion Monitor project.

The study documents the firm ties between Muslims and the German state and society. Of highly religious Muslims, 90 percent consider democracy to be a good form of government. Nine of ten people surveyed have contact to non-Muslims in their leisure time. Every second person has at least as many contacts outside their religious community as with Muslims.

Most Muslims in Germany are both pious and liberal. 63 percent of Muslims who describe themselves as quite or very religious regularly reflect on their religious stance. Some 60 percent approve of same-sex marriage. Even among highly religious Muslims who rarely question their articles of faith, 40 percent approve. In Turkey, in contrast, the main country of origin of Germany’s Muslims, only one in three highly religious Muslims admits to regularly rethinking their faith. Only 12 percent of highly religious people in Turkey approve of same-sex marriage.

The close ties that Muslims feel with Germany and its social values do not, however, translate to mitigating negative preconceptions about Islam. On the contrary: According to a recent representative survey commissioned by the Bertelsmann Foundation, 57 percent of non-Muslim Germans see Islam as a threat. In 2012 the figure was 53 percent. “Germany has become a homeland for Muslims. But they find themselves faced with a negative image apparently shaped by a minority of radical Islamists,” says Yasemin El-Menouar, an Islam expert at the Bertelsmann Foundation.

Thus, 61 percent of German citizens agree to the statement that Islam does not belong to the western world. In 2012, only 52 percent agreed. 40 percent of those surveyed also said that Muslims made them feel like foreigners in their own country. One in four even supports forbidding Muslim immigration to Germany.

These attitudes are by no means found only on the margins of society. Neither political orientation nor educational level nor social status significantly influences Germans’ image of Islam. The more decisive factors are the individual’s age and personal contact with Muslims.

Of those over 54, 61 percent feel threatened by Islam, while of those under 25 only 39 percent do. The fear is also greatest where the fewest Muslims live. In North Rhine-Westphalia, where one third of Germany's Muslims live, 46 percent of citizens feel threatened. In Thuringia and Saxony, where there are scarcely any Muslims, 70 percent of Germans say they feel threatened. Although the great majority of Germans, 85 percent, say that they are very tolerant of other religions, this does not seem to apply to Islam.

Despite the constantly improving coexistence of religions in Germany, there is a danger of widespread Islamophobia in the population, says Yasemin El-Menouar: "There are many things in Germany that Muslims and non-Muslims have in common. This could lead to a growing sense of unity. But in order for this to happen, there needs to be a greater acknowledgment of and appreciation for Muslims and their religion."

Source: Bertelsmann Foundation report: *Muslimen in Deutschland mit Staat und Gesellschaft eng verbunden*, January 8, 2015.

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