

# EXCLUSIVE POLL: HOW DO AMERICANS VIEW THE WAR WITH THE ISLAMIC STATE?

Joel C. Rosenberg<sup>1</sup>  
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President Trump has made the defeat of the Islamic State and “radical Islamic terrorism” one of his administration’s top priorities.

To accomplish this mission, he has assembled an impressive team of experienced professionals to run the Pentagon, National Security Council, CIA, and Office of National Intelligence. He has proposed significantly increasing defense spending, and asked the Secretary of Defense to develop a comprehensive new war plan.

However, the challenge facing the new administration is not simply one of military strategies, tactics and resources. It is also important that the administration and Congress develop a new strategic communications plan for the war.

Washington has both the need and the opportunity to explain to the American people the magnitude of the threat we face, the true nature of the enemy, and the urgency of taking decisive action to win the war and protect the homeland and our allies. Policy-makers would be wise to begin their strategic communications planning by taking a fresh look at just how the American people *currently* see the war with ISIS and identifying critical information gaps where more education would be helpful.

In this context, we commissioned McLaughlin & Associates, a leading U.S. polling firm that has worked for a range of clients including the Trump campaign, to conduct a national survey of Americans’ attitudes towards the war.<sup>2</sup> This memo contains a summary of the survey’s findings and key takeaways.

## **Key Takeaways**

- A plurality of Americans (41.2%) believe we are losing the war against the Islamic State, though almost one-in-four say they aren’t sure we are winning or not.
- Almost seven-in-ten Americans fear catastrophic terrorist attacks by ISIS are coming to the U.S. homeland, possibly involving chemical or biological weapons.
- Most Americans overestimate the percentage of Muslims who support terrorism.
- A plurality of Americans say their leaders should define the enemy as “Radical Islam” but also be careful to explain that *most* Muslims are not our enemy.
- Fortunately, very few Americans (less than 10%) believe we are engaged in a war against the religion of Islam.
- Fully 63% of liberal Americans believe that the threat of climate change is greater than that the threat of Iran and ISIS obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

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<sup>1</sup> [Joel C. Rosenberg](#) is a former aide to U.S. and Israeli leaders and the author of more than a dozen *New York Times* best-selling books about the Middle East.

<sup>2</sup> The survey of 1,000 likely U.S. voters was commissioned by Joel C. Rosenberg and conducted by [McLaughlin & Associates](#) on February 20, 2017 (3.5% +/- margin of error). The survey was paid for by Tyndale House Publishers.

## SURVEY RESULTS: AT-A-GLANCE

**Question #1:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. The U.S. and our allies are <u>winning</u> the war against the Islamic State and getting safer every day.            | 33.1% |
| 2. The U.S. and our allies are <u>losing</u> the war against the Islamic State and the threat to our safety is growing. | 41.2% |
| 3. Don't know/refuse to answer.   | 25.7% |

**Question #2:** Do you agree or disagree: "If the forces of the Islamic State are not defeated soon, I fear they will launch catastrophic terrorist attacks inside the American homeland, perhaps even using chemical or biological weapons"?

- |                               |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| • Agree                       | 68.1% |
| • Disagree                    | 22.6% |
| • Don't know/refuse to answer | 9.3%  |

**Question #3:** Extensive polling has been done over the years throughout the Islamic world asking Muslims if they support violent jihad, suicide bombings, the Islamic State, and other forms of terrorism. What do you believe is the percentage of Muslims living overseas who openly support acts of terrorism against innocent civilians?

- |                               |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| • More than 30%               | 24.7% |
| • 21-30%                      | 14.7% |
| • 11-20%                      | 17.1% |
| • 10% or less                 | 30%   |
| • Don't know/refuse to answer | 13.5% |

**Question #4:** When it comes to the war against the Islamic State, which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1. Our leaders should say we are waging a war against the religion of Islam.  |       |
| 2. Our leaders should say we are waging war against the forces of "Radical Islam," but be careful to explain that most Muslims are not our enemy. |       |
| 3. Our leaders should not mention Islam at all, but simply say we are waging war against the forces of "violent extremism."                       |       |
| 4. Don't know/refuse to answer.   |       |
| • Radical Islam/explain   | 45.1% |
| • Violent extremism   | 36.3% |
| • Against religion of Islam   | 9.6%  |
| • Don't know/refuse   | 9.0%  |

**Question #5:** In his 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama declared that "no challenge poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change." Do you agree, or do you believe that letting the leaders of Iran and the Islamic State obtain chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in pursuit of building their caliphate (or Islamic kingdom) is the greater threat?"

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| • Iran & ISIS with WMD is the greater threat | 60.0% |
| • Climate change is the greater threat       | 31.4% |
| • Don't know/refuse to answer                | 8.6%  |

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DATA

### ARE WE WINNING OR LOSING THE WAR AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE?

Question #1: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

1. The U.S. and our allies are winning the war against the Islamic State and getting safer every day.
2. The U.S. and our allies are losing the war against the Islamic State and the threat to our safety is growing.
3. Don't know/refuse to answer.

#### Overall Results

- We are winning 33.1%
- We are losing 41.2%
- Don't know/refuse 25.7%

#### Men

- Republican men believe we are losing (49.4%); only 34.7% believe we're winning.
- Democrat men believe we are winning (47.4%); only 34.1% believe we are losing.
- Independent men are nearly split evenly on the issue, though they lean slightly towards the view that we are winning.
  - 37.9% believe we are winning
  - 33.7% believe we are losing
  - The rest say they don't know (28.4%)

#### Women

- Significantly more Republican women believe we are losing (49.3%) than believe we are winning (30.9%).
- Significantly more Democrat women believe we losing (41.6%) than believe we are winning (25.6%).
- Twice as many Independent women believe we are losing (38.5%) as believe we are winning (19.1%), though a plurality say they don't know (42.4%).

#### Ideology

- Nearly half of liberals believe we are winning (45.7%). Only 30.7% believe we are losing.
- More than half of conservatives say we are losing (51.8%), and nearly twice as many as say we are winning (26.2%).
- A plurality of moderates say we are losing (38.8%), while 30.8% say we are winning. The rest say they don't know (30.4%).

#### Age

- Most people under 40 say we're winning (44.7%), while 34.0% say we're losing.
- Most people over 40 say we're losing (45.6%), while 26.0% say we're winning.

## **DO YOU FEAR ISIS LAUNCHING CATASTROPHIC ATTACKS INSIDE U.S.?**

Question: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If the forces of the Islamic State are not defeated soon, I fear they will launch catastrophic terrorist attacks inside the American homeland, perhaps even using chemical or biological weapons”?*

- Agree 68.1%
- Disagree 22.6%
- Don't know/refuse to answer 9.3%

### **Party**

- Nearly all Republicans fear attacks inside U.S. (85.4%), while only 9.3% say they do not.
- Nearly six-in-ten Democrats fear attacks inside U.S. (59.3%), while only 31.1% say they do not.
- Likewise, nearly six-in-ten Independents fear attacks inside U.S. (59.3%), while only 26.9% say they do not.

### **Ideology**

- More than eight-in-ten conservatives fear attacks inside U.S. (82.5%), while only 10.2% say they do not.
- More than half of all liberals fear attacks inside U.S. (53.4%), while some 38.5% say they do not.
- More than six-in-ten moderates fear attacks inside U.S. (64.9%), while only 23.1% say they do not.

### **Age**

- While six-in-ten people under 40 fear attacks in U.S. (60.4%), such concerns are significantly higher among people over 40 (72.7%).

**WHAT PERCENTAGE OF MUSLIMS LIVING OVERSEAS  
DO YOU BELIEVE OPENLY SUPPORT TERRORISM?**

Question: *Extensive polling has been done over the years throughout the Islamic world asking Muslims if they support violent jihad, suicide bombings, the Islamic State, and other forms of terrorism. What do you believe is the percentage of Muslims living overseas who openly support acts of terrorism against innocent civilians?*<sup>3</sup>

- Percentage of Americans who believe that more than 30% of Muslims worldwide support terrorism 24.7%
- Americans who believe 21-30% of Muslims support terrorism 14.7%
- Americans who believe 11-20% of Muslims support terrorism 17.1%
- Americans who believe 10% or less of Muslims worldwide support terrorism 30%
- Don't know/refuse to answer 13.5%

**Who believe that more than 30% of Muslims worldwide support terrorism?**

- 46.9% of those who say they are “very conservative”
- 39.1% of Republicans
- 38.3% of conservatives overall
- 18.7% of Independents
- 16.7% of Democrats
- 14.7% of liberals

**Who believe that between 21% and 30% of Muslims support terrorism?**

- 15.9% of Republicans
- 15.1% of Democrats
- 12.8% of Independents

**Who believe that between 11% and 20% of Muslims support terrorism?**

- 18.2% of Republicans
- 17.5% of Democrats
- 15.5% of Independents

**Who believe that between 10% or less of Muslims support terrorism?**

- 45.8% of those who say they are “very liberal”
- 44.4% of liberals overall
- 37.1% of Democrats
- 34.9% of Independents
- 20.0% of conservatives
- 17.7% of Republicans

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<sup>3</sup> Since 9/11, the Pew Research Center, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Gallup and other organizations have conducted extensive polling in the Middle East, North Africa and East Asia on Muslim attitudes regarding a wide range of political and religious subjects. An analysis of the data suggests that the vast majority of Muslims – upwards of 90 percent – generally do not support violence against civilians to advance their beliefs. However, the data indicate that between 7 and 10 percent of Muslims worldwide can be characterized as having radical views in that they openly state that they support the extreme violence of the Islamic State or support the use of suicide bombings against innocent civilian targets to advance their political and/or religious objectives.

**WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR LEADERS TO DEFINE THE ENEMY  
IN THE WAR AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE & OTHER JIHADI GROUPS?**

Question #4: *When it comes to the war against the Islamic State, which of the following statements is closest to your view?*

1. *Our leaders should say we are waging a war against the religion of Islam.*
  2. *Our leaders should say we are waging war against the forces of “Radical Islam,” but be careful to explain that most Muslims are not our enemy.*
  3. *Our leaders should not mention Islam at all, but simply say we are waging war against the forces of “violent extremism.”*
  4. *Don’t know/refuse to answer.*
- Say Radical Islam/but explain 45.1%
  - Say violent extremism 36.3%
  - Say war is against Islamic religion 9.6%
  - Don’t know/refuse 9.0%

**A closer look at those who believe our leaders should speak about “Radical Islam,” but also to be clear we are not at war with all Muslims.**

- Most Republicans and conservatives prefer this approach.
  - 64.3% of Republican men
  - 57.6% of those who call themselves “very conservative” (regardless of party)
  - 56.8% of conservatives (regardless of party)
  - 54.8% of Republicans overall
  - 50.1% of military households
  - 46.8% of Republican women
- That said, significant numbers of Democrats, liberals, moderates and Independents prefer this approach, as well.
  - 52.8% of Independent men
  - 45.5% of Independents
  - 42.2% of Democrat men
  - 41% of moderates
  - 38.7% of Independent women
  - 35.9% of Democrats
  - 35.5% of liberals
  - 30.2% of Democrat women
  - 31.6% of those who described themselves as “very liberal”
- Christians also prefer this approach.
  - 50.1% of Catholics
  - 46.8% of Protestants
  - 45.0% of self-described “born again” Protestants

**A closer look at those who believe our leaders should speak about “violent extremism,” and not about “Radical Islam.”**

- 47.4% of those who call themselves “very liberal”
- 46.9% of liberals overall
- 45.1% of Democrats
- 39.8% of self-described “born again” Protestants
- 39.3% of moderates
- 38.3% of Independents
- 35.6% of military households
- 25.2% of conservatives
- 24.9% of Republicans

**A closer look at those who want our leaders to say we are at war with Islam.**

- 20.3% of those who describe themselves as “very liberal”
- 15.8% of Republicans
- 15.8% of those who describe themselves a “very conservative”
- 14.2% of liberals overall
- 12.2% of Catholics
- 11.1% of conservatives overall
- 8.9% of those who describe themselves as “somewhat liberal”
- 8.3% of Democrats
- 7.9% of Protestants
- 5.1% of moderates
- 4.6% of Independents

**WHICH IS THE GREATER THREAT: CLIMATE CHANGE OR WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN THE HANDS OF RADICAL ISLAMIC REGIMES?**

Question #5: *In his 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama declared that “no challenge poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change.” Do you agree, or do you believe that letting the leaders of Iran and the Islamic State obtain chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in pursuit of building their caliphate (or Islamic kingdom) is the greater threat?”*

- Iran and ISIS with WMD                      60%
- Climate change                                      31.4%
- Don't know/refuse to answer              8.6%

**A closer look at those who see Iran & ISIS obtaining WMD as the greater threat**

- 84.5% of conservatives
- 81.6% of Republicans
- 69.1% of Protestants
- 66.8% of self-described “born again” Protestants
- 62.1% of military households
- 61.9% of Catholics
- 57.3% of moderates
- 55.2% of Independents
- 44.3% of Democrats
- 31.2% of liberals

**A closer look at those who see climate change as the greater threat**

- 68.8% of those who describe themselves as “very liberal”
- 62.9% of liberals overall
- 45.7% of Democrats
- 31.9% of Catholics
- 31.8% of Independents
- 28.9% of moderates
- 23.9% of self-described “born again” Protestants
- 21.0% of Protestants
- 16.1% of Republicans
- 10.6% of conservatives

**Note:** It is interesting to see the generational gap on this question in particular.

- Only 46.3% of those under 40 see Iran and ISIS obtaining weapons of mass destruction as the greater threat, while 68.3% of those over 40 believe this.
- Conversely, 42.4% of those under 40 see climate change as the greater threat, while only 24.7% of those over 40 believe this.