
American Attitudes Toward Arabs and Muslims

December 21, 2015



Executive Summary

Our polling reveals that Americans continue to hold persistent, negative attitudes toward the Arab American and American Muslim communities. Favorable attitudes toward Arab Americans and American Muslims have declined since we last polled on these communities in 2010 - from 49% to 40% for Arab Americans; and 48% to 33% for American Muslims.

A deep partisan divide is apparent in attitudes towards these two communities, not only in favorable ratings, but also in assessing policies that directly affect these groups. When asked about the use of profiling of Arab Americans and American Muslims by law enforcement, 51% of Democrats said they oppose its use, while 60% of Republicans find its use justifiable. This divide is also a demographic one, with younger, educated, and non-White Americans far more likely to have positive attitudes toward and favor policies that do not discriminate against Arabs and Muslims than older, less educated, and White Americans.

At the same time, Americans continue to lack confidence in the ability of an Arab American or American Muslim to perform in an important position of influence in the government. 35% of respondents felt that Arab Americans would be influenced by their ethnicity and 46% of respondents felt that American Muslims would be influenced by their religion.

This year, in anticipation of the 2016 election, we also polled supporters of the two leading candidates. We found that a majority (60%) of Trump supporters believe that President Obama is a Muslim, and three-quarters of Trump supporters are not confident in the ability of an American Muslim to perform in an important position of influence in the government.

When looking at Americans' primary sources of news, our polling found that respondents that listed CNN as their primary news source had the highest net unfavorable rating of Arab Americans, while those that listed Fox News as their primary news source had the highest unfavorable rating of American Muslims. Those that get their news from other sources, such as print and Internet outlets, are more likely to have favorable views of both communities. This was the only group of which a plurality had confidence in the ability of an American Muslim to perform the job without being influenced by their religion.

Overall, our polling found that those who knew an Arab or Muslim were more likely to have more favorable opinions toward both Arab Americans and American Muslims, indicating that exposure to and education about these communities is key to shifting sustained negative attitudes.

Methodology:

Zogby Analytics was commissioned by AAI to conduct an online survey of 1001 adults in the U.S. on 12/7/2015. Based on a confidence interval of 95%, the margin of error for 1001 is +/- 3.2 percentage points.

Part 1: American Attitudes

I. Attitudes toward Arab Americans and American Muslims

Please tell me your opinion on each of the following is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or are you not familiar enough to make a judgment - Arab Americans.

Arab Americans	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Favorable	40	51	34	34	43	40	39	44
Unfavorable	30	23	44	25	31	34	32	27
Not Familiar	15	17	13	15	15	16	15	16
Not Sure	14	10	9	25	11	10	14	13

Please tell me your opinion on each of the following is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or are you not familiar enough to make a judgment - Muslim Americans.

American Muslims	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Favorable	33	44	25	29	37	31	30	41
Unfavorable	37	28	53	30	34	49	41	28
Not Familiar	14	17	10	15	15	11	14	16
Not Sure	16	11	11	26	15	8	15	15

Group	Response	2010	2015
Arab Americans	Favorable	49	40
	Unfavorable	31	30
American Muslims	Favorable	48	33
	Unfavorable	33	37

Opinions toward Arab Americans and American Muslims by those who know and those who do not know anyone who is Arab or Muslim.

Group		Know an Arab or Muslim	Don't Know an Arab or Muslim
Arab Americans	Favorable	56	29
	Unfavorable	29	33
American Muslims	Favorable	47	22
	Unfavorable	37	41

1. Overall, Americans are split in their attitudes toward Arab Americans and American Muslims.
2. A deep partisan divide is apparent in the net ratings of both groups. Democrats give a net 51%/23% favorable rating to Arab Americans and a net 44%/28% favorable rating to American Muslims, while Republicans gave a net 34%/44% unfavorable rating to Arab Americans and a net 25%/53% unfavorable rating to American Muslims.
3. Over half of respondents that know both an Arab and a Muslim gave favorable ratings to both groups.
4. While older Americans (65+) give a net favorable rating to Arab Americans, 49% gave an unfavorable rating toward American Muslims.
5. Those respondents that know either an Arab or a Muslim gave the highest net favorable ratings of any group.

II. Knowledge of Arabs and Muslims

Do you personally know anyone who is Arab or Muslim?

Response	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Yes, I know	41	52	43	39	55	40	41	56
No, I don't know	42	40	48	39	34	52	46	36
Not Sure	12	8	9	22	11	8	13	8

Do you know enough about Arab countries and Arab people or do you feel you need to know more?

Response	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Know enough	30	29	36	25	33	37	29	31
Need to know more	54	60	51	49	52	53	54	55
Not Sure	16	11	14	26	16	10	16	14

Do you feel you know enough about Islam and Muslims or do you feel you need to know more?

Response	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Know enough	37	33	46	32	40	39	39	34
Need to know more	47	56	41	43	44	49	46	53
Not Sure	15	11	12	25	16	11	15	13

1. Democrats, younger Americans (19-29) and non-White Americans are most likely to know an Arab or Muslim.
2. Over half of both Democrats (60%) and Republicans (51%) feel they need to know more about Arab countries and Arab people.
3. Republicans are the only group in which a plurality (46%) feel they know enough about Islam and Muslims.

III. Arab Americans and American Muslims Working in Government

If an Arab American were to attain an important position of influence in the government, would you feel confident that person would be able to do the job, or would you feel that any ethnic loyalty would influence their decision-making?

Arab American	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Confident they could do the job.	37	54	22	31	50	34	34	43
Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making.	35	26	48	31	29	48	36	33
Not Sure	29	20	31	18	21	18	30	24

If a Muslim American were to attain an important position of influence in the government, would you feel confident that person would be able to do the job, or would you feel that their religion would influence their decision-making?

American Muslim	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Confident they could do the job.	31	47	17	27	43	23	27	41
Their religion would influence their decision-making.	46	34	63	41	39	60	50	38
Not Sure	23	19	20	32	18	17	24	21

Group	Response	2010	2014	2015
Arab Americans	Confident they could do the job.	42	36	37
	Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making.	32	36	35
American Muslims	Confident they could do the job.	38	34	31
	Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making.	38	42	46

Confidence in Arab Americans and American Muslims by those who know and those who do not know anyone who is Arab or Muslim.

Group		Know an Arab or Muslim	Don't Know an Arab or Muslim
Arab Americans	Confident they could do the job.	48	27
	Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making.	34	39
American Muslims	Confident they could do the job.	44	19
	Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making.	43	54

1. Americans are overall divided as to whether Arab Americans, if appointed to a government position, could do the job without their ethnicity influencing their work. When asked the same about American Muslims, respondents had less confidence in the ability of American Muslims to perform their job without being influenced by their religion.
2. Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided in their assessments of an Arab American's or American Muslim's ability to do the job. In both cases, a majority of Republicans believe that the ethnicity or religion of members of these communities would influence their decision-making.
3. That divide is also generational, with younger Americans (18-29) more likely to have confidence that individuals in both communities could perform the job.
4. Those who know an Arab or a Muslim are more likely to have confidence in the ability of both groups to perform the job without their religion or ethnicity influencing their decision-making.

IV. Profiling

Do you think it is justifiable for law enforcement to use profiling toward Arab Americans or American Muslims?

Response	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White	Know an Arab or Muslim	Don't Know an Arab or Muslim
Yes	41	30	60	33	28	54	45	32	41	44
No	37	51	22	36	51	27	34	46	42	34
Not Sure	22	20	18	31	21	19	22	22	17	22

1. There is a partisan divide on attitudes toward profiling Arab Americans and American Muslims. 51% of Democrats oppose its use by law enforcement while 60% of Republicans find its use justifiable.
2. The divide continues among generations. 51% of younger Americans (between 18-29) oppose the use of profiling while 54% of older Americans (65+) agree with the use of profiling.

VI. Syrian Refugee Resettlement

Which of the following do you think is the best approach for the U.S. to take with refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria?

Response	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	18-29	65+	White	Non-White
Do not accept any Syrian refugees into the U.S.	40	27	59	37	36	46	47	29
Proceed with the plan to resettle 10,000 properly vetted Syrians	30	44	16	27	35	25	28	35
Resettle only Christian refugees from Syria	7	5	12	5	7	12	8	6
Not Sure	22	25	12	31	22	17	18	30

Opinion on refugee resettlement by those who know and those who do not know anyone who is Arab or Muslim.

Response	Know an Arab or Muslim	Don't Know an Arab or Muslim
Do not accept any Syrian refugees into the U.S.	37	48
Proceed with the plan to resettle 10,000 properly vetted Syrians	39	21
Resettle only Christian refugees from Syria	9	7
Not Sure	15	24

1. A plurality of Americans believe that the U.S. should halt the acceptance of refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria.
2. Democrats, non-White Americans, and those that know an Arab or Muslim are the only groups in which a plurality believe we should proceed with the plan to resettle 10,000 properly vetted refugees.
3. Republicans are the group most opposed (59%) to accepting refugees.
4. Respondents that do not know an Arab or Muslim are more likely to support halting the acceptance of refugees from Syria.

PART 2: Supporters of 2016 Presidential Frontrunners

I. Attitudes toward Arab Americans and American Muslims

Please tell me your opinion on each of the following is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or are you not familiar enough to make a judgment - Arab Americans.

Arab Americans	Clinton	Trump
Favorable	54	26
Unfavorable	27	53
Not Familiar	11	7
Not Sure	8	14

Please tell me your opinion on each of the following is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or are you not familiar enough to make a judgment - Muslim Americans.

American Muslims	Clinton	Trump
Favorable	50	18
Unfavorable	31	68
Not Familiar	10	4
Not Sure	9	10

1. Clinton supporters have a net favorable rating of both Arab Americans (54%) and American Muslims (50%).
2. Trump supporters had the highest net unfavorable ratings of both Arab Americans (26%/53%) and American Muslims (18%/68%).

II. Arab Americans and American Muslims Working in Government

If an Arab American were to attain an important position of influence in the government, would you feel confident that person would be able to do the job, or would you feel that any ethnic loyalty would influence their decision-making?

Arab Americans	Clinton	Trump
Confident they could do the job	58	14
Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making	27	62
Not Sure	15	25

If a Muslim American were to attain an important position of influence in the government, would you feel confident that person would be able to do the job, or would you feel that their religion would influence their decision-making?

American Muslims	Clinton	Trump
Confident they could do the job	52	10
Their religion would influence their decision-making	34	75
Not Sure	15	16

1. Three-quarters of Trump's supporters are not confident in the ability of an American Muslim to perform in an important position of influence in the government.
2. A majority of Clinton supporters indicate they are confident in the ability of Arab Americans and American Muslims to perform the job without being influenced by their ethnicity or religion.

III. The President's Faith

In your opinion, is President Obama a Christian, a Muslim, or a person or no faith at all.

Response	Clinton	Trump
A Christian	74	6
A Muslim	5	60
A person of no faith at all	4	15
Not Sure	17	20

1. Nearly three-quarters of Clinton supporters correctly identify President Obama as a Christian.
2. A strong majority (60%) of Trump supporters believe that President Obama is a Muslim.

PART 3: Primary News Source

I. Attitudes toward Arab Americans and American Muslims

Please tell me your opinion on each of the following is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or are you not familiar enough to make a judgment - Arab Americans.

Arab Americans	CNN	Fox	ABC/NBC/CBS	Other*
Favorable	37	40	42	40
Unfavorable	43	40	31	18
Not Familiar	11	14	16	17
Not Sure	9	6	12	24

Please tell me your opinion on each of the following is it very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or are you not familiar enough to make a judgment - Muslim Americans.

American Muslims	CNN	Fox	ABC/NBC/CBS	Other*
Favorable	37	28	34	34
Unfavorable	41	54	38	24
Not Familiar	12	11	14	17
Not Sure	9	7	15	25

1. Respondents that listed CNN as their primary news source had the highest net unfavorable rating of Arab Americans, while those that listed Fox News as their primary news source had the highest net unfavorable rating of American Muslims.
2. Those that use sources other than cable or network television news as their primary source of news have the lowest unfavorable ratings of both Arab Americans and American Muslims.

**"Other" consists of respondents that mainly depend on print and internet platforms as their main source of news.*

II. Arab Americans and American Muslims Working in Government

If an Arab American were to attain an important position of influence in the government, would you feel confident that person would be able to do the job, or would you feel that any ethnic loyalty would influence their decision-making?

Arab American	CNN	Fox	ABC/NBC/CBS	Other*
Confident they could do the job.	44	28	35	41
Their ethnicity would influence their decision-making.	34	48	37	23
Not Sure	23	24	28	36

If a Muslim American were to attain an important position of influence in the government, would you feel confident that person would be able to do the job, or would you feel that their religion would influence their decision-making?

American Muslim	CNN	Fox	ABC/NBC/CBS	Other*
Confident they could do the job.	39	21	29	37
Their religion would influence their decision-making.	43	64	48	32
Not Sure	18	16	23	31

1. Respondents that listed CNN as their primary news source had the highest confidence in the ability of both Arab Americans and Americans Muslims to perform the job, although a plurality of CNN viewers were concerned that religion would influence the decision-making of American Muslims.
2. CNN and Fox News viewers were split in their assessment of an Arab American's ability to perform the job without being influenced by their ethnicity.
3. Nearly two-thirds of respondents that listed Fox News as their primary news source were concerned that religion would influence the decision-making of American Muslims.
4. Those that use sources other than cable or network television news as their primary source of news were the only group of which a plurality had confidence in the ability of an American Muslim to perform the job without being influenced by their religion.

III. The President's Faith

In your opinion, is President Obama a Christian, a Muslim, or a person of no faith at all.

Response	CNN	Fox	ABC/NBC/CBS	Other*
A Christian	46	19	39	38
A Muslim	18	45	30	20
A person of no faith at all	14	22	11	10
Not Sure	23	15	20	33

1. CNN had the highest percentage of viewers to correctly identify President Obama's religion.
2. A plurality (45%) of respondents that watch Fox News as their primary news source believe that President Obama is a Muslim.

