

# Perceptions of Muslims in Scotland

## Summary Report

08 April 2010

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## Background

The British Council Scotland commissioned research into the attitudes of Scots towards Muslims in Scotland and into Muslim Scots' experiences of integration. The research was conducted by Ipsos MORI Scotland under the auspices of the British Council's "Our Shared Europe" programme, which was established to acknowledge the contribution of Islamic communities and cultures – both past and present – to the shaping of contemporary European civilisation and society.

## Methods

The research consisted of a telephone survey and a series of focus groups.

Questions were included in the February 2010 wave of the Ipsos MORI Scottish Public Opinion Monitor, a telephone survey designed to be representative of the Scottish adult population aged 18+. Random digit dialling then quotas and weights based on population characteristics (sex, age, working status, area and housing tenure) are used to ensure representativeness.

1,006 respondents were interviewed on 18-21 February 2010.

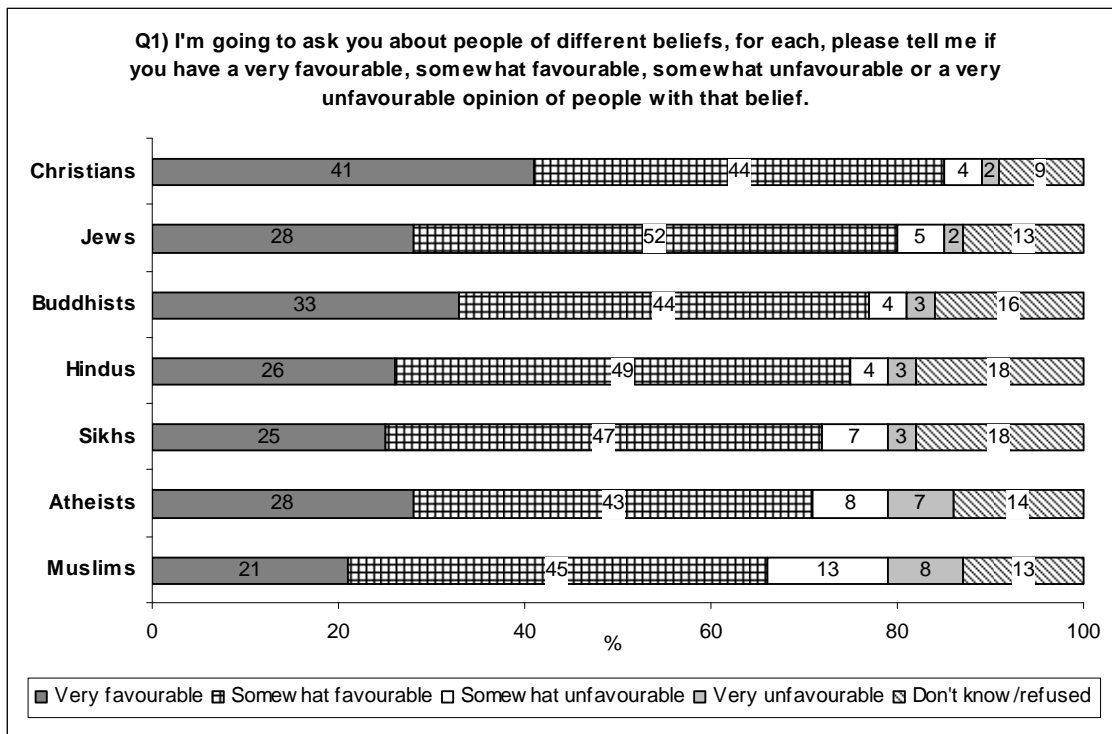
Seven focus groups were conducted in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2010. Three of the groups were with Muslims and four were with non-Muslims. Participants included men and women from a range of ages and socio-economic groups.

## Main findings from the telephone survey

### Favourability towards Muslims

Two-thirds (65%) of respondents have a favourable opinion towards Muslims – three times as many as have an unfavourable opinion (21%). However, Muslims are viewed less favourably than any of the other religious groups asked about.

The results are very similar to those of a previous survey of the GB population conducted two years ago<sup>1</sup>, suggesting that the views of Scots are similar to the rest of the GB population on this issue.



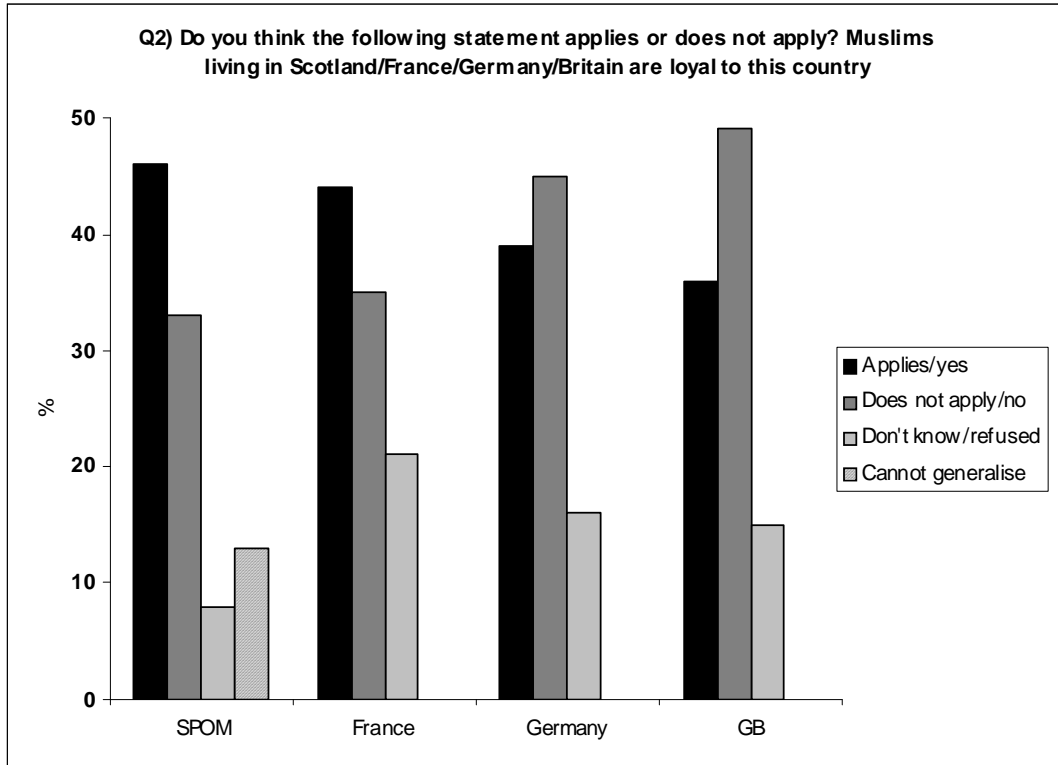
Base n=1,006

<sup>1</sup> The Pew Survey (conducted in Spring 2008) which was a telephone survey of 753 respondents, representative of the population of Great Britain.

## Perceived loyalty of Muslims to Scotland

However, while overall opinion of Muslims as a religious group may be similar, Scots have more positive views of Muslims' loyalty to Scotland.

When asked whether they thought the statement *"Muslims living in Scotland are loyal to this country"* applied or did not apply, 46% agreed that it did, compared with 33% who did not. These results are similar to results in France, and more positive than results in Germany or the UK as a whole. In a 2008 survey<sup>2</sup> of the UK population, 36% thought that the statement *"Muslims living in Britain are loyal to this country"* applied, while 49% thought it did *not* apply.



Base: Scottish Public Opinion Monitor (February 2010) n=1,006; Gallup (2008), GB, n=1,001, France, n=1,006, Germany, (four waves) n=4,024

## Whether Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live in Scotland

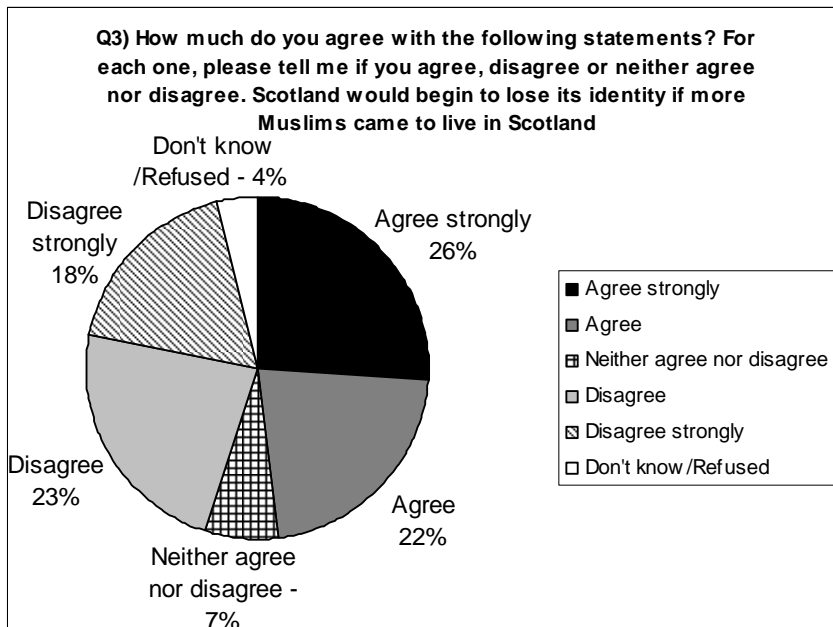
Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that *"Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live in Scotland"*. Just under half (48%) agreed while 41% disagreed.

This question was previously asked in the 2006 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey<sup>3</sup>. We must be cautious in making direct comparisons due to the different methodologies used in the two surveys, but the results do not suggest a large shift in attitudes since 2006. Similar proportions of respondents in both surveys agreed that Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live in Scotland (48% in the current survey compared to

<sup>2</sup> Gallup Co-Exist Study (2008). A telephone survey representative of populations in each country.

<sup>3</sup> A face-to-face survey of 1,504 respondents conducted by ScotCen in 2006. The survey used a show card with the response options: agree strongly/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/disagree strongly.

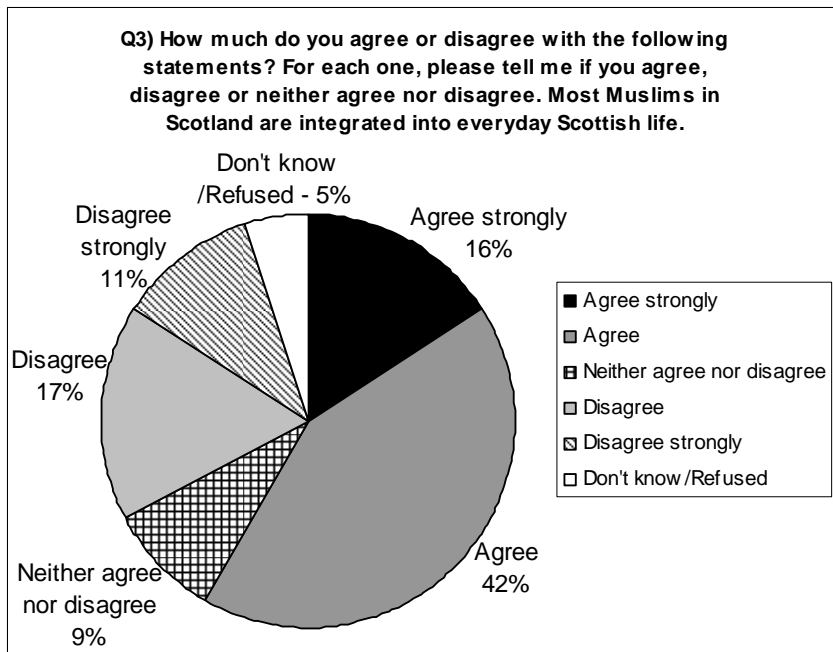
50% in the 2006 survey). A higher proportion of respondents in the current survey disagreed with the statement (41% compared to 31% of respondents in the 2006 survey).



Base= 1,006

### Whether Muslims are integrated into everyday Scottish life

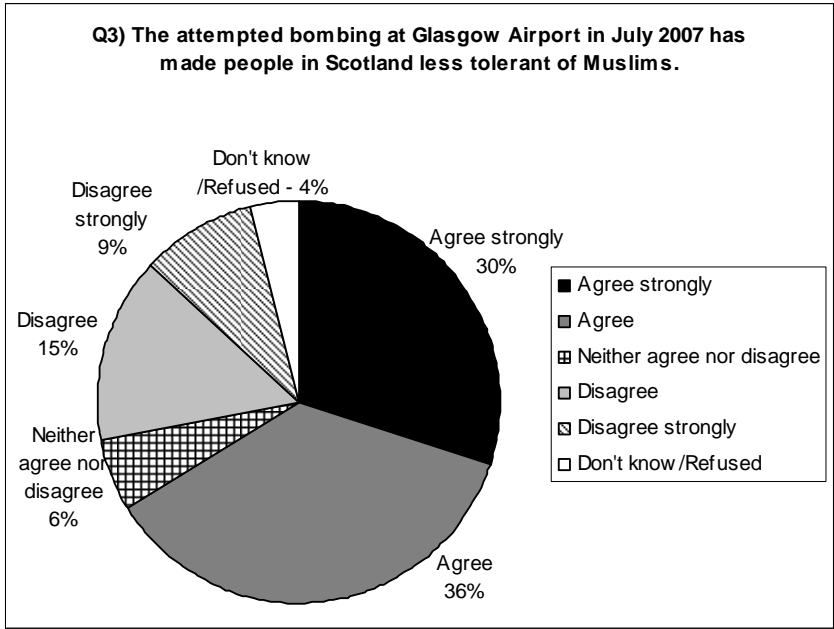
Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “Most Muslims in Scotland are integrated into everyday Scottish life”. More than half (58%) agreed while just over a quarter (27%) disagreed.



Base= 1,006

### Effect of the attempted bombing of Glasgow Airport

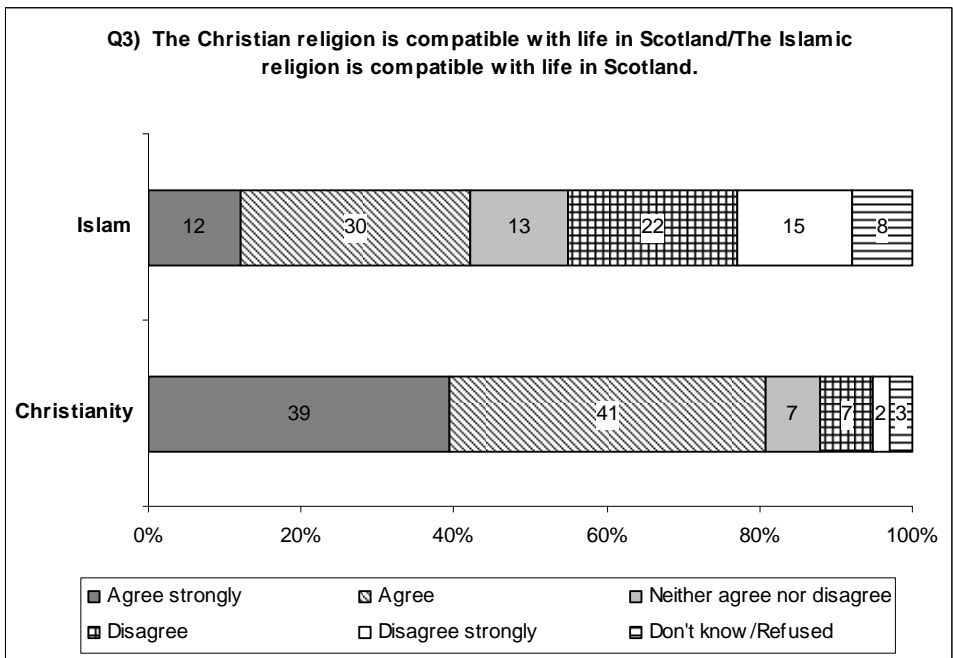
Two thirds (66%) of respondents agree that the attempted bombing of Glasgow Airport in July 2007 has made people in Scotland less tolerant of Muslims. A quarter (24%) disagree.



Base= 1,006

### Compatibility of Islam with life in Scotland

Almost twice as many respondents agree that the Christian religion is compatible with life in Scotland as agree that the Islamic religion is compatible (80% compared with 42%).



Base= 1,006

## Who has the most positive views of Muslims in Scotland?

On almost all questions, those living in the least deprived areas, younger people (those aged under 55), those who read broadsheet newspapers rather than tabloids, and those who said they would vote Liberal Democrat in a Westminster election had the most positive views of Muslims and Muslim integration.

## Main findings from the qualitative research

There was a strong feeling among Muslims that integration in Scotland is largely one-way – with Muslims making the effort to adapt to Scottish life - whereas it should be more of a two-way process.

On the other hand, among non-Muslim Scots, (particularly those who were older and from socio-economic groups D and E<sup>4</sup>) the dominant view was that that Muslims have to make more of an effort to interact and should completely adopt Scottish customs. Factors such as speaking in their own language and wearing traditional dress – particularly the veil - were seen as evidence that Muslims were not integrating.

Some non-Muslims, particularly those from socio-economic groups AB, thought that integration should be a two-way process involving compromise, contribution and respect from both groups. These participants had often experienced more interaction and relatively close relationships with Muslims through work, travel and friendships.

There was a strong view among all groups that younger generations of Muslims and non-Muslims were more integrated than previous generations. This was perceived to be a natural process and mainly attributed to the fact that more and more Muslim and non-Muslim children have grown up together.

Both Muslims and non-Muslims thought the media, particularly tabloid newspapers, were predominantly negative towards Muslims and were the main source of misconceptions about Islam. It was felt that the media focused too much on Islamic fundamentalism and extremism - to the extent that Muslims had become synonymous with terrorism – and fuelled misconceptions about the treatment of women and Sharia law. It was felt that if the media were to report and portray Islam and the Muslim way of life in a more positive way, this would help integration.

However, a recurring theme across all groups was the perception that integration in Scotland was easier than in England. This perception was held by both Muslims and non-Muslims, including participants who had previously lived in England. This was attributed to three main factors; smaller numbers of Muslims, less fear of terrorist attacks and the particular features of Scottishness (Scottish people were seen as typically very friendly, sociable, humorous, honest, open and straightforward).

The most common negative feature of Scotland, mentioned predominantly by Muslims but also by non-Muslims, was the dominance of alcohol in Scottish culture.

Drinking alcohol was seen as a major practical barrier in the integration of Muslims into Scottish life. Both non-Muslims and Muslims recognised that Scottish life involved regular alcohol consumption in social situations. The fact that (most) Muslims do not drink alcohol

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<sup>4</sup> Participants were classified into one of the six social grades commonly used in research. These are based on the current or previous occupation of the chief income earner in the household. Broadly speaking, the groups ABC1 correspond to professional, managerial and clerical occupations whilst groups C2DE refer to skilled-manual and unskilled manual occupations and the economically inactive.

leads to restrictions in social interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims. Aside from simply reducing the opportunities for the groups to socialise together, the fact that Muslims did not consume alcohol also had an affect on the perceptions of Muslims towards non-Muslims and vice versa.

Muslim participants felt that many Scottish people found it very difficult to understand why someone would not drink alcohol. They also explained that, if out socially, Scottish people frequently made comments about the fact they were not drinking alcohol. This in turn made Muslim participants more uncomfortable about socialising in an environment where there was alcohol.

Muslim participants suggested most non-Muslims would feel Muslims were terrorists and that Islamic culture oppressed women. However, these beliefs were not supported by findings from the non-Muslim focus groups we held, suggesting that the views non-Muslims hold towards Muslims may be less negative and more complex than Muslims believe.

The way in which non-Muslims felt they were perceived by Muslims highlighted some interesting aspects of the relationship between the two groups, some of which create challenges for integration. There was a sense in which Muslims were perceived as rather arrogant and morally superior. Non-Muslims suspected that Muslims looked down on their lifestyle and culture (particularly in relation to their consumption of alcohol, lack of religious belief or strict religious observance, and their work ethic). It is interesting, therefore, that the barriers between cultures seem to be re-inforced by insecurities within both traditions.