

Publics in Western Countries Disapprove of Muhammad Cartoons

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But Right to Publish Widely Defended

By Angela Stephens

An analysis of polls on the worldwide uproar over the publication of cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammad shows that the prevailing attitude across several Western nations-- Norway, Britain, France, the United States and Australia--is that while the media have the right to publish the cartoons, it was not the right choice to do so. In Denmark, where the cartoons were originally published, the public is divided on whether it was the right choice.

The Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September published 12 cartoons it commissioned from artists who were asked to depict Muhammad as they imagine him, which led to protests worldwide and the deaths of at least 18 people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Somalia. The cartoons include images of Muhammad wearing a turban in the shape of a bomb with a lit fuse attached, and another of Muhammad greeting suicide bombers in heaven saying, "Stop, Stop! We have run out of virgins!"

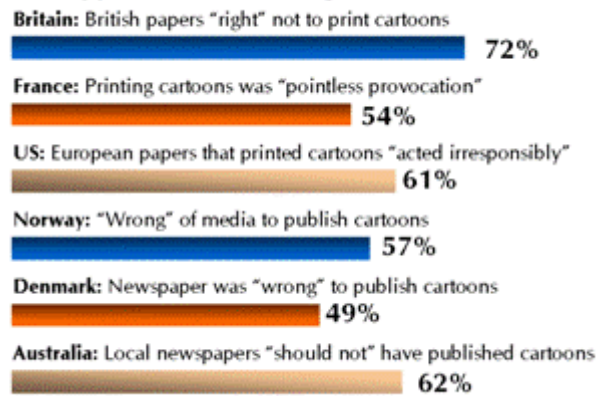
In Norway, where the small Christian publication *Magazinet* was the first to reprint the cartoons, two polls conducted between Feb. 6 and 8 found that a majority of Norwegians felt the cartoons should not have been published. Norsk Respons found 57 percent of Norwegians felt it was wrong to publish the cartoons, while 30 percent said it was right. Similarly, the polling firm Infact asked whether it was right or wrong for *Magazinet* to publish the cartoons "considering what we now know," and 59 percent said it was wrong while 25 percent said it was right.

In France, where at least three newspapers have printed the cartoons and the managing editor of *France Soir* was fired by the publication's French-Egyptian owner for doing so, 54 percent of those polled Feb. 8 by CSA said that publishing the cartoons was a "pointless provocation."

In Britain--where no newspapers published the images--72 percent of those polled by Ipsos MORI Feb. 9-10 agreed with the statement "British papers were right not to publish the cartoons."

In Australia, where one newspaper published one of the cartoons earlier this month, 62 percent of Australians polled by Roy Morgan Research Feb. 8-9 said such cartoons should not have been published.

Disapproval of Publishing Muhammad Cartoons



Sources: Ipsos-MORI, CSA Group, Gallup, Norskrespons, TNS Gallup, Roy Morgan

In the United States, where at least one major newspaper--the *Philadelphia Inquirer*--and one university student-run newspaper published some of the cartoons, 61 percent of those polled by Gallup Feb. 9-12 said the European newspapers that printed the cartoons acted irresponsibly (29 percent said they acted responsibly).

The Danish public is divided over whether the cartoons should have been published in the first place. Forty-nine percent of Danes said in a poll released Feb. 12 by TNS Gallup that *Jyllands-Posten* was wrong to publish the cartoons, while 43 percent said the newspaper was right to publish them. A Feb. 3 poll by Epinion found similar results--47 percent said the newspaper should have abstained from publishing the cartoons, while 46 percent said it should not have.

Norway

Norway has experienced significant repercussions from the publication of the cartoons in a Norwegian newspaper. Norwegian NATO troops in Afghanistan were attacked by protesters this month, leaving several injured, the country's embassy was looted and torched in Syria and boycotts of Norwegian products have been launched in several mostly Muslim countries.

As noted above, two polls found that a majority of Norwegians say the cartoons should not have been published.

The polls also found that Norwegians are concerned that the controversy will damage the relationship between Norwegian Muslims and other Norwegians, and will make things more difficult for Norwegian Muslims. A Feb. 6-8 Norsk Respons poll found that 53 percent of Norwegians polled felt that the conflict over the cartoons will damage the relationship between Norwegian Muslims and other Norwegians in the long term, while 38 percent said it will not. The Norwegian polling firm InFact found in its Feb. 7 poll that 71 percent of Norwegians said they believe the events surrounding the controversy would make things more difficult for Norwegian Muslims in the future.

The fallout from the cartoons' publication has had an overall negative impact on Norwegians' view of Islam. Asked by InFact how the controversy has affected their attitude toward Islam as a religion, 48 percent of those polled said it has made them more skeptical of Islam, 37 percent said it has had no effect and only 7 percent said they have become less skeptical of Islam because of the controversy. However, a majority of those polled--54 percent--said the controversy did not affect their view of Norwegian Muslims, though 31 percent said it has made them more skeptical.

Britain

In Britain, where newspapers did not publish the cartoons but the BBC, Sky and ITN television networks briefly broadcast video showing European newspapers that did publish them, most people believe the press has the right to publish the cartoons, but that it was not the right thing to do, and also that Muslims should accept the principle of free speech. A majority also feels that the Muslim response worldwide was an overreaction.

As noted above, 72 percent of Britons agreed that British newspapers were right in deciding not to publish the cartoons. Also, a Populus poll conducted Feb. 3-5 found that 52 percent of Britons agreed with the statement "The cartoons should be banned from publication because they cause grave offense to Muslims." Two-thirds (67 percent) agreed with the statement "Newspapers have the right in principle to publish the cartoons, but should not do so out of respect for the Muslim community."

At the same time, most Britons take a benign view of the newspapers' intentions. In a Feb. 9-10 Ipsos MORI poll, 55 percent said that publishing the cartoons was not "a deliberate attempt to provoke outrage."

When polls have included questions that present the right of free speech as a value but do not invoke a counter-value, the principle of free speech is endorsed. In a Feb. 9-10 YouGov poll, 56 percent agreed with the statement "It was right that they were published, in the interests of freedom of speech," while 29 percent agreed with the statement "They should never have been published." Similarly, in the Populus poll, two-thirds (65 percent) agreed with the statement "Muslims should accept the principle of freedom of speech, which means that newspapers must be free to publish cartoons if they choose."

Britons encountered incendiary messages at a Feb. 3 protest in London. Signs at the protest included messages such as "Behead those who insult the prophet," "Massacre those who insult Islam," and "Europe your 9/11 will come." Some protesters chanted "bomb bomb Denmark," "nuke nuke Denmark" and "7/7 is on its way," a reference to the suicide bombings on the London transport system last July that killed 52, plus four suicide bombers, and injured 700.

A majority of Britons said these demonstrations made them angry, overwhelmingly rejected the statements and favored taking legal action against those inciting violence. An overwhelming 93 percent of Britons in the Ipsos MORI poll disagreed with the statement "Demonstrators carrying placards calling for beheading and other acts of violence were justified." Eighty percent of those polled by Ipsos MORI said the police should have arrested demonstrators promoting acts of violence, and 87 percent said that demonstrators urging killing should be prosecuted. In the Feb. 9-10 YouGov poll, 58 percent said that the sight of the protestors made them angry and 76 percent agreed that "The protesters should have been arrested at the time by the police for incitement to violence." Just 18 percent agreed with the statement "The police were right to adopt a 'softly-softly' approach."

The Muslim protests around the world were also seen as an overreaction. The YouGov poll found 86 percent saying that in many cases, the worldwide protests "were a gross overreaction." Only 7 percent agreed with the statement "It was understandable that Muslims protested as they did after their religion was insulted."

France

France has the largest Muslim population in Europe--nearly one-tenth of its population of 60 million. As noted above, 54 percent of those polled by France's CSA polling organization on Feb. 8 said that publishing the cartoons was a "pointless provocation."

A majority of French also said they would not approve of making jokes about Islam, as well as Christianity or Judaism. CSA found two-thirds (65 percent) of those polled said it would be a

bad thing to joke about Islam. Sixty-three percent said the same thing for Judaism and 60 percent for Christianity.

At the same time, most French said they do not understand Muslims' feelings about the controversy. Asked by CSA whether they understand the indignation some Muslims feel about the cartoons, a majority--53 percent--said they do not (35 percent not at all, 18 percent not much), while 36 percent said they understand to some degree (22 percent somewhat, 14 percent completely).

A large majority also found the violent reaction of Muslims disturbing. CSA found 78 percent saying that they found the violent responses to the cartoons' publication disturbing (31 percent very, 47 percent somewhat), while only 19 percent were not very disturbed by them (15 percent slightly disturbing, 4 percent hardly at all).

United States

Most Americans (61%) polled by Gallup Feb. 9-12 said European newspapers that printed the cartoons acted irresponsibly.

At the same time, when asked to assign responsibility for the controversy, many more cite Muslims' intolerance of different viewpoints than Western disrespect of Islam. In the same Gallup poll, 61 percent attributed the controversy to "Muslims' intolerance of different viewpoints," while 21 percent say it was mostly due to "Western nations' lack of respect for Islam."

Most also feel that the U.S. media has an obligation to show controversial information even if it risks offending religious sensibilities. Gallup found 57 percent agreeing with the statement "The U.S. news media have an obligation to show controversial items that are newsworthy even if they may offend the religious views of some people." A third of respondents (33%) say the U.S. news media have an obligation to avoid offending people's religious views, even if that prevents them from showing controversial items that are newsworthy.

Denmark

As noted above, Danes are divided about whether the cartoons should have been published. At the same time majorities of Danes do agree on many points. On one hand, clear majorities affirm the principles of the freedom of speech and the press, and on the other hand, majorities show understanding of how Muslims could be offended by the cartoons.

Freedom of speech is seen as a higher priority value than religious sentiment. A majority--56 percent--of Danes in the Feb. 3 Epinion poll agreed with the statement "Respect for freedom of speech should be more important than the consideration of religious sentiment." Only 37 percent agreed with the statement "Out of respect for the Muslim faith, the cartoons should not have been published even though this could be considered a limitation on the freedom of speech."

Asked in the Feb. 5 Epinion poll whether the media should restrain itself in the future with regard to publishing religious cartoons or other material that might be deemed offensive to certain groups, a plurality of 49 percent said the media should not be affected by this incident, while 44 percent said the media should restrain itself.

At the same time, Danes have shown understanding of Muslims' feelings. TNS Gallup asked respondents Feb. 12, "Do you understand how Muslims all over the world got offended by the drawings?" A majority--56 percent--said yes, while 41 percent said no.

Epinion also asked Danes in a Jan. 27 poll whether they understand Muslims' reaction to the cartoons. When asked to choose between three statements regarding whether the newspaper should have published the cartoons and whether the respondent understands the reaction from Muslims, 58 percent agreed most with the statement: "*Jyllands-Posten* is allowed to publish the drawings, but I have some understanding of the Muslim reaction." Twenty-two percent agreed with the statement "*Jyllands-Posten* should not have published the drawings," and 20 percent agreed with the statement "It is OK for *Jyllands-Posten* to publish the drawings of Muhammad in the newspaper, and I have no understanding of the Muslim reaction."

A third Danish polling organization, Megafon, asked Danes in polls on Jan. 31 and Feb. 9 to what extent they find it understandable that Muslims feel offended by the cartoons. Fifty-six percent said on Jan. 31 that they find it understandable. On Feb. 9, 60 percent said they find it understandable.

As protests around the world grew and became violent and *Jyllands-Posten* decided to issue a public apology for publishing the cartoons, Danish opinion changed regarding whether the publication should apologize from opposition to a divided view. In its Jan. 27 poll, Epinion found that Danes by a two-to-one margin said the newspaper should not apologize (62% no, 31% yes). On Jan. 30, *Jyllands-Posten* editor Carsten Juste wrote in a message posted on the newspaper's Web site, "In our opinion, the 12 drawings were not intended to be offensive, nor were they at variance with Danish law, but they have indisputably offended many Muslims, for which we apologize." The following day, Megafon found that half (50%) of Danes agreed that *Jyllands-Posten* "should give an unconditional apology," while 44 percent said it should not.

Danes felt strongly that Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen should not apologize for the incident (79% no, 18% yes in Epinion's Jan. 27 poll) and two polls indicated Danes felt he has handled the situation well (65% well or very well in Megafon's Feb. 9 poll, 53% well in Epinion's Feb. 3 poll).

Yet many disagreed with his decision in October not to meet with ambassadors from predominantly Muslim countries who asked to meet with him about the issue. Asked in Epinion's Feb. 3 poll whether he should have met with the Muslim ambassadors when they proposed that, 78 percent of Danes said yes (18% said no).

A large and growing percentage of Danes see leading Danish Muslims as having the primary responsibility for the conflict. A group of Danish imams traveled to the Middle East in November in an effort to bring international attention to the cartoon issue. Megafon asked Danes Jan. 31 and again Feb. 9 who they felt has primary responsibility for the conflict over the cartoons. A plurality--49 percent--on Jan. 31 said "leading Danish Muslims." That number rose to 58 percent by Feb. 9. On Jan. 31, 28 percent said *Jyllands-Posten* had the primary responsibility, but that number declined to 22 percent on Feb. 9. Only 9 percent said the Danish government on Jan. 31, and even less--5 percent--on Feb. 9. Ten percent on Jan. 31 said "Middle East governments," reaching 11 percent on Feb. 9. (Some observers around the world have accused governments such as Syria and Saudi Arabia of seeking political points with the fundamentalist segment of their population by denouncing the cartoons and Denmark.)

Megafon asked Danes Feb. 9 if the conflict over the cartoons had changed their views of the Muslim world. Sixty-one percent said their view had become more unfavorable (35% more unfavorable, 26% much more unfavorable).

A plurality of Danes have come to feel that their relationship with Muslim countries has been damaged. Danes were asked by Epinion Jan. 27 and again Feb. 3 if they feel the relationship between Denmark and Muslim countries has suffered irreparable damage from the incident. A plurality of those polled on Feb. 3 (46%) said they felt the relationship had been irreparably harmed, up from 25 percent on Jan. 27.

Danes expressed concern in the Feb. 5 Epinion poll that the gap between Danish Muslims and other Danes is widening as a consequence of the cartoon controversy--56 percent said it is widening, only 3 percent said it is narrowing and 31 percent said it is the same.

Large majorities perceive that there is an increase in the risk of terrorist attacks. Epinion found that 80 percent feel there is some level of terror risk as a result of the flap over the cartoons (41% certain risk, 27% serious risk, 12% almost certain Denmark will be struck). Megafon asked respondents in its two polls on the topic whether they think the controversy has increased the risk of a terror attack against Denmark. On Jan. 31, 69 percent said they believe the conflict has increased the risk (13% to a very high degree, 26% to a high degree, 30% to some degree). By Feb. 9, the number reached 78 percent (13% to a very high degree, 26% to a high degree, 39% to some degree).

But when asked if the controversy could develop into a large-scale religious conflict between the West and Muslims, Danes were divided--48 percent said they are worried that the conflict could lead to a war of religions, while 46 percent said the danger of war between Muslims and the West is overrated (Epinion Feb. 5).