Survey finds deep mistrust for Muslims in Canada

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TORONTO (RNS) A new poll shows that more than half of all Canadians distrust Muslims.

The nationwide survey indicates that as many as 52 percent of Canadians feel Muslims can be trusted "a little" or "not trusted at all." The poll showed that 48 percent of respondents said Muslims can be trusted "a lot" or "somewhat."

What's more, 42 percent of Canadians said discrimination against Muslims is "mainly their fault."

Muslims registered the lowest levels of trustworthiness of the religious groups asked about in the survey.

Overall, about 70 percent of respondents expressed high levels of trust in Protestants, Catholics and Jews, while 64 percent trusted aboriginal Canadians and 63 percent trusted immigrants.

Among French Canadians, only 30 percent said they trust Muslims, compared with 57 percent of English speakers who said they felt that way.

The online poll surveyed 1,522 Canadians on attitudes toward religions, multiculturalism and sources of racism. The survey was conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies in Montreal and the Toronto-based Canadian Race Relations Foundation as part of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21.

Nearly half of those surveyed, 49 percent, listed the Internet as the number one source of racism and prejudice.

Sociologist Jack Jedwab, executive director of the Association for Canadian Studies, described the results as a "disturbing" sign that not only do Canadians hold discriminatory views, but they then say, "If we feel this way about you, it's your fault."

A 2007 poll conducted in 23 Western countries showed Canadians had the most tolerant attitudes toward Muslims. Only 6.5 percent of Canadians said they would not like to live next door to a Muslim, compared to 11 percent of Americans.

The online survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.9 percentage points.