

Religion more divisive than race, say Brits: A government-sponsored opinion poll

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A government-sponsored opinion poll in Britain has found that religion has displaced race as the most divisive issue facing the nation.

The survey, conducted by the Ipsos MORI research organization for the government's Equality and Human Rights Commission, says 60 percent of respondents believe that religious intolerance has become a bigger problem than racial tensions among Britons.

That figure climbs to 66 percent among Muslims who took part in the poll.

Ten years ago, government policymakers had ticketed improving race relations as the No. 1 demand on their social agenda. But then came the war in Iraq and the July 2005 suicide bombings by Islamic radicals, which killed 52 commuters on London's rail and bus network. Those events served to shift priorities in the eyes of the public.

The poll, whose release coincided with the inauguration of President Barack Obama in Washington, prompted Trevor Phillips, the black chair of the UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission, to remark that "at this historic moment, when America has chosen its first black leader . . . here in Britain we have a sophisticated sense of our own identity."

Phillips conceded, however, that the telephone survey, which involved 1,498 interviews conducted January 12 to 14, "points to emerging religious divisions" that have begun to supplant racial conflict as the major social worry in the UK. -*Religion News Service*