# Conflicted views on Islam

by [John Dart](#) in the [September 21, 2010](#) issue

The political-moral spin from online bloggers and television opinion-makers is enough to make citizens dizzy, if not profoundly unsure of where U.S. public opinion is headed. The controversies relating to religious views have put the nonpartisan Pew polls in the spotlight.

Favorable views of Islam have dropped in the U.S. over the past five years from 41 percent to 30 percent, while unfavorable views increased slightly from 36 to 38 percent. Nearly one-third of Americans (32 percent) now answer "don't know," compared to 23 percent in 2005.

That question was part of a poll conducted August 19-22 among 1,000 adults.

While the emotion-laden proposal to build a Muslim community center and mosque near Ground Zero in Manhattan tallied 51 percent against to 34 percent in favor, another question of a hypothetical nature—the right to construct mosques on the same basis as other houses of worship—found 62 percent agreeing to 25 percent against.

The opinions were collected by a respected source on religious issues and trends—the Pew poll. As is often the case, this survey was the combined work of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. The two entities are among seven projects in the Pew Research Center, a self-labeled fact tank established by Pew Charitable Trusts.

"As in the past, there are substantial partisan, education and age differences in opinions about Islam," notes a summary of the recent Pew poll.

Republicans— 54 percent to 21 percent—expressed an unfavorable opinion of Islam, while independents on balance leaned the same way (40 percent unfavorable to 28 pecent favorable). "Among Democrats, favorable opinions of Islam outnumber favorable ones (by 41 to 27 percent)."

On whether Islam is more likely than other religions to promote violence, the balance of opinion has shifted back and forth since March 2002—six months after

the 9/11 trauma of 2001—when twice as many (51 percent to 25 percent) said they felt Islam encouraged violence no more than other religions.