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Poll: Saudis Oppose Qaida, Split on US

WASHINGTON (AP) -- People in Saudi Arabia deeply dislike countryman [Osama bin Laden](#) and al-Qaida, yet have only lukewarm views about the United States, one of the kingdom's allies, a poll showed Monday.

Bin Laden is seen favorably by just 15 percent of Saudis, and the al-Qaida terror organization he founded gets approval from only 10 percent, the survey found. The Saudi government has been battling al-Qaida for years and recently launched an anti-terrorism crackdown aimed at preventing violence during the annual Muslim hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, which just began.

President Bush is viewed positively by 12 percent of Saudis, less than half the number with a good impression of Iranian President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#).

Forty percent have favorable opinions of the U.S. -- a lower rating than they gave China, Iran and all four other countries tested. By 44 percent to 36 percent, most favored limiting Saudi oil exports to the U.S. because of Washington's policies.

The poll also found 15 percent agreed with a Saudi court's sentencing of a young woman to 200 lashes and six months in prison after she was gang raped. In the survey, taken before King Abdullah pardoned her, 38 percent opposed the sentence while the rest gave no opinion. She had been convicted of violating strict Islamic prohibitions against socializing between genders because she was with a male acquaintance before the attack.

The poll was conducted for Terror Free Tomorrow, a bipartisan group whose goal is undermining worldwide support for terrorism. Its advisory board includes Sen. [John McCain](#), a Republican presidential candidate, and former Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind.

"People around the Muslim world look up to Saudi Arabia," said Ken Ballen, the group's president. "The fact that al-Qaida and bin Laden are so overwhelmingly rejected in Saudi Arabia is a significant thing."

The poll also highlighted the depth of anti-Israel feelings in the kingdom. By 51 percent to 30 percent, most said they favor Arabs fighting Israel until the Jewish state no longer exists, rather than a peace treaty recognizing Israel and an independent [Palestine](#). Just 6 percent said they have a favorable view of Jews.

Saudi Arabia has pursued al-Qaida militants since a 2003 series of attacks against foreigners in the kingdom. The poll showed that about nine in 10 Saudis support the effort against al-Qaida in the country.

Underscoring discomfort with the United States, only 45 percent support U.S. military help in hunting for al Qaida inside the kingdom.

While only 40 percent have favorable opinions of the U.S., that is better than many Muslim countries' views in other recent surveys. Only 19 percent of Pakistanis see the U.S. positively, an August poll by Terror Free Tomorrow showed, while surveys last spring in eight Muslim nations by the [Pew Research Center](#) found stronger pro-U.S. sentiment in only Kuwait and Bangladesh.

A strong majority favor Saudi Arabia working with the U.S. to end the war in Iraq. But 36 percent said they favor Saudi citizens fighting U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq. U.S. and Iraqi officials have said many foreign fighters there are from Saudi Arabia.

Given several choices for actions that would improve their views of the U.S., the most -- 85 percent -- chose the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Least popular, at 36 percent, was one of Bush's foreign policy objectives: the U.S. spreading democracy through the Mideast.

The survey also found:

--By 49 percent to 33 percent, Saudis would rather see the U.S. reduce its involvement in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

--Thirteen percent said suicide bombings are justified at least sometimes.

--About four in 10 have a favorable view of Christians.

--Only 27 percent favor Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. By 38 percent to 27 percent, more favor the U.S. taking military action to block Tehran from gaining nuclear weapons.

The poll was conducted for Terror Free Tomorrow by D3 Systems of Vienna, Va., and KA Europe SPRL. Telephone interviews of 1,004 randomly chosen Saudi adults were conducted in Arabic from a country near Saudi Arabia from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5. The poll has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

On the Net:

Terror Free Tomorrow: <http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org>