

Nearly a third of French Muslims prefer sharia to secular law, research finds

Posted: Tue, 20 Sep 2016

Polling by a French think tank has found that more than one in four French Muslims, most of whom are young, support an "ultra-conservative" form of Islam and around one in three reject secular rule, favouring sharia.

The Institut Montaigne, a think tank which conducts research on social cohesion, found that 29% of French Muslims reject secular law and consider sharia to be more important.

The group's research divided Muslims into three categories including those who were "completely secular" – about 46%; then those who were defined by what the think tank called their "Islamic pride", Muslim believers who rejected practices like polygamy (25%); and finally those the think tank said were in "revolt". It found 28% in the latter category and said they had an "authoritarian profile".

The think tank's report warned that the "ultras" were "mostly young, low-skilled people with low levels of participation in the labour market" who considered Islam to be a "way of asserting themselves on the margins of French society".

Concerns were particularly focused on the younger generation who, in an inversion of what demographers usually find in other faiths in the west, were showing signs of an increasing religiosity. More extreme views were "overrepresented among the young" and the think tank said this was a particularly worrying sign.

Half of Muslims under the age of 25 fell into the "revolt" category, and were likely to support the burqa and polygamy. But just 20% of Muslims over the age of 40 were in the "revolt" category, according to the study, showing the significant generational divide among French Muslims.

French Muslims also have a very young age profile: The study concluded that 84% of French Muslims were under the age of 50. But the author did find that French Muslims made up a smaller proportion of the French population than had previously been thought.

The report tried to highlight successful "integration" and said a "French Islam" was possible, but among young Muslims a stark divide emerged.

24% of the total French Muslim population, according to the poll, supported the wearing of the burqa. An overwhelming number agreed with wearing the hijab, including in schools.

The poll also found that a quarter of French Muslims thought religion should have a greater role in the workplace and 80% said that public schools should serve a halal option.

French Muslim women were generally more conservative than French Muslim men.

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