

Is Religion A Force For Good In The World?

Combined Population of 23 Major Nations Evenly Divided in Advance of Blair, Hitchens Debate.

48% Believe Religion Provides Common Values, Ethical Foundations That Diverse Societies Need To Thrive In 21st Century...52% Believe Religious Beliefs Promote Intolerance, Exacerbate Ethnic Divisions, Impede Social Progress

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November 25, 2010 Toronto, ON—A new Ipsos poll commissioned for the November 26th **Munk Debates on Religion** in Toronto Canada featuring **Tony Blair** and **Christopher Hitchens** has found that the world is evenly divided on one of history's most vexing questions: *is religion a force for good in the world?*

When the debate framing question was put to 18,192 citizens of 23 nations worldwide, half (48%) agreed that “religion provides the common values and ethical foundations that diverse societies need to thrive in the 21st Century” whereas the other half (52%) agreed that “deeply held religious beliefs promote intolerance, exacerbate ethnic divisions, and impede social progress in developing and developed nations alike.”

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The Event...

On November 26th in Toronto, Canada the Munk Debates is convening an international debate on the role of religion in the world. The debate will feature former **British Prime Minister Tony Blair** a recent Catholic convert debating author and atheist **Christopher Hitchens** on the resolution: *Be it resolved, religion is a force for good in the world.*

Speaking about the debate Mr. Blair said: "Understanding religion and people of faith is an essential part of understanding our increasingly globalized world." Mr. Blair continued: "The good that people of faith all over the world do every day, motivated by their religion, cannot be underestimated and should never be ignored." Commenting on what it will be like to debate Mr. Blair, Christopher Hitchens remarked: "...he went 'over to Rome' as soon as he could. Very bizarrely he did this at one of the most conservative times for the Catholic Church, under one of the most conservative Popes."

The sold out debate will be broadcast on the internet live as a pay per view video feed at www.munkdebates.com starting a 7:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. Edited versions of the debate will be broadcast on BBC World News (January, 1, 2011) and BBC World Service (date TBD). CBC radio in Canada and CPAC television in Canada will also broadcast the debate.

The Key Findings...

The question put to respondents:

In a world of globalization and rapid social change some say religion provides the common values and ethical foundations that diverse societies need to thrive in the 21st century while others say that deeply held religious beliefs promote intolerance, exacerbate ethnic divisions, and impede social progress in developing and developed nations alike... Which is closer to your own point of view?

Those who believe *religion provides the common values and ethical foundations that diverse societies need to thrive in the 21st century* (48%) by country and region:

Saudi Arabia 92%, Indonesia 91%, India 69%, Brazil 67%, South Africa 67%, United States 65%, South Korea 62%, Russia 59%, Mexico 51%, Italy 50%, Hungary 45%, Argentina 44%, Turkey 43%, Poland 42%, Canada 36%, Germany 36%, Australia 32%, Great Britain 29%, Japan 29%, Spain 25%, France 24%, Belgium 21% and Sweden 19%; Middle East/Africa 67%, BRIC 65%, APAC 57%, LATAM 54%, North America 51%, G-8 Countries 41% and Europe 32%.

Those who believe *religious beliefs promote intolerance, exacerbate ethnic divisions, and impede social progress in developing and developed nations alike* (52%) by country and region: Sweden 81%, Belgium 79%, France 76%, Spain 75%, Great Britain 71%, Japan 71%, Australia 68%, Canada 64%, Germany 64%, Poland 58%, Turkey 57%, Argentina 56%, Hungary 55%, Italy 50%, Mexico 49%, Russia 41%,

South Korea 38%, United States 35%, Brazil 33%, South Africa 33%, India 31%, Indonesia 9% and Saudi Arabia 8%; Europe 68%, G-8 Countries 59%, North America 49%, LATAM 46%, APAC 43%, BRIC 35% and Middle East/ Africa 33%.

Some Observations...

- Two countries with large Muslim populations had by far the highest percentage of respondents who agreed with the positive influence of religion: 92% in Saudi Arabia and 91% in Indonesia.
- Countries with the lowest percentages in agreement with religion's positive impact were found in continental European countries such as Sweden (19%), Belgium (21%), France (24%) and Spain (25%).
- Overall, developing economies had higher support for the positive impact of religion, with the Middle Eastern (67%) and BRIC (65%) countries averaging and advanced economies of the G8 (41%) and Europe (32%) on the other end of the spectrum at 41% and 32%.
- Of those who believe that religion *has a negative impact*, Western Europe stood out with large majorities in Sweden (81%), Belgium (79%), France (76%), Spain (75%), and Great Britain (71%) agreeing with the sharp statement that religious beliefs promote intolerance, exacerbate ethnic divisions, and impede social progress. On the opposite end of the

spectrum were Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, with 9% and 8% support respectively.

- Citizens of Europe (68%) and the G8 (59%) were more likely to take this negative view, than those from APAC (43%) BRIC (35%) or Middle Eastern and African countries (33%).
- In North America there was a pronounced divide: Canada only 36% agreed with the positive view of religion whereas 64% indicated it is a negative force in the world; in the United States it was the opposite: 65% in favour of religion's social role, and only 35% against.
- In Turkey, a country divided between the European and Islamic worlds, the population was split, but leaned to a more negative than positive view of religion (57%-43%).

The Munk Debates...

The semi-annual Munk Debates are initiative of the Aurea Foundation, a Canadian charitable organization established in 2006 by **Peter and Melanie Munk** to support Canadian institutions involved in the study and development of public policy. The sold out Munk Debate on Religion will take place in Toronto, Canada on November 26th, 2010 and will tackle the resolution be it resolved **religion is a force for good in the world**. Arguing for the resolution will be former **British Prime Minister Tony Blair** who was prime minister of

the United Kingdom from May 1997 to June 2007. Since leaving office, Mr. Blair has served as the Quartet Representative to the Middle East, and in May 2008 he launched the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, which promotes respect and understanding among the major religions. This fall he released his memoir *A Journey: My Political Life*. Speaking against the resolution will be author, journalist and literary critic **Christopher Hitchens**. Mr. Hitchens, one of the world's most prominent atheists, has been a columnist at Vanity Fair, The Atlantic Monthly, The Nation, Slate, Free Inquiry, and a variety of other media outlets. His most recent best selling books include *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* and *Hitch-22: A Memoir*.

The Methodology...

These are some of the key findings of the Global @dvisor Wave 14 (G@14), an Ipsos survey conducted between September 7, 2010 and September 23, 2010. The survey was conducted in 23 countries around the world via the Ipsos Online Panel system. The countries surveyed were Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United States of America. For the results of the survey an international sample of 18,192 (unweighted) adults aged 18-64 in the US and Canada, and age 16-64 in all other countries, was interviewed. Approximately 1000+ individuals participated on a country by country basis via the Ipsos Online Panel with the exception of Argentina, Belgium, Indonesia, Mexico, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey, where each have a sample approximately 500+. Ipsos' Global @dvisor Wave 13 (G@13) is weighted to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to the most recent country Census



data, and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points for a sample of 1,000 and an estimated margin of error of +/- 4.5 percentage points for a sample of 500 19 times out of 20 per country of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in that country had been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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***For more information on the Munk Debate on Religion visit:
www.munkdebates.com***