



**START**

## **U.S. Muslim Opinion over Time: Final Report**

*Report to the Office of University Programs,  
Science and Technology Directorate,  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security*

Submitted February 2016

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism  
A Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Center of Excellence  
Led by the University of Maryland

8400 Baltimore Ave., Suite 250 • College Park, MD 20742 • 301.405.6600

[www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu)

## About This Report

The authors of this report are Clark McCauley, Professor of Psychology at Bryn Mawr College, and Sophia Moskalenko, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Bryn Mawr College. Questions about this report should be directed to Sophia Moskalenko, [smoskale@gmail.com](mailto:smoskale@gmail.com) or Clark McCauley [cmccaule@brynawr.edu](mailto:cmccaule@brynawr.edu).

This report is part of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) project, “Attitudes within American Subcultures,” led by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko at Bryn Mawr College.

This research was supported by the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate’s Office of University Programs through Award Number 2012-ST-061-CS0001, Center for the Study of Terrorism and Behavior (CSTAB) CSTAB PROJECT 2.12 made to START to investigate the understanding and countering of terrorism within the U.S. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or START.

## About START

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is supported in part by the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through a Center of Excellence program led by the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information, contact START at [infostart@start.umd.edu](mailto:infostart@start.umd.edu) or visit [www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu).

## Citations

To cite this report, please use this format:

McCauley, Clark and Sophia Moskalenko. “U.S. Muslim opinion over time: Final Report,” Final Report to Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. College Park, MD: START, 2016.

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## **Executive Summary**

The research conducted under CSTAB 2.12 consisted of three waves of surveys of U.S. Muslims. The first wave was administered in July 2013; the second took place in July 2014, and the third wave was in September-October 2014. Each survey asked participants' opinions about U.S. Muslims' experience in the United States, and about their attitudes toward international events that concern Muslim countries. Some of the questions were taken from Pew and Gallup polls, and other questions were developed by the investigators. One goal of the research was to test the efficacy of quick turn-around Internet polling in a minority population of interest. A second goal was to measure changes in the opinions and attitudes of U.S. Muslims over time. Both goals were achieved: unexpected political events, including the rise of ISIS, provided an opportunity to assess changing opinions of U.S. Muslims quickly and inexpensively. Key findings detailed in the report are: moderation of opinions in combined sample over waves; increased standard deviation in combined sample over waves; and differences between the panel and off-panel components of the Internet sample. Methodologically the key result was the convergence of Internet results with 2007 and 2011 Pew telephone polling results: the percent of U.S. Muslims justifying suicide bombing in defense of Islam was 8 percent in Pew polling and 7 percent in our Internet polling.

## Introduction

This report is a conclusion to a three-year research project that aimed to explore the efficacy and utility of Internet polling as a tool to access opinions and attitudes of U.S. Muslims. As an alternative to the traditional dial-up polling, Internet polling offers the advantages of providing a cheaper and faster response. These advantages can be especially useful when researchers are interested in assessing reactions to unfolding political events, or when longer-term changes require repeated assessment to observe trends.

The research reported here was essentially a pilot project designed to test the efficacy and accuracy of Internet-based surveys for understanding opinion radicalization among U.S. Muslims. START consortium clients frequently have questions about changing opinions and attitudes that require access to mass opinions. Until recently, such questions were most authoritatively answered through large national polls, such as Pew Poll or Gallup Poll.

The downsides of relying on these giants of the polling industry are considerable. First, although they end up with a large set of participants, usually this set includes only a small proportion of the population of interest to the START community, such as U.S. Muslims. Often the subset is too small for meaningful analyses. What's more, this subset is not necessarily matched to the distribution of the U.S. Muslim population, and therefore is not representative of their distribution of opinions. Second, these large polls include only a small number of questions pertaining to the interests of the START community and those agencies who rely on START for their research needs. Thus, any specific questions not included in the poll cannot be answered. Third, there is a significant time lag, usually of more than a year, between when the surveys are fielded and when the data are made available to researchers. Therefore, there is no possibility to track developments in real time, to include questions in response to the changing political environment, or to observe changes in opinions in response to political events.

The research reported here was conceived to address these shortcomings by creating an Internet panel of participants where quick turnaround survey could be administered. Knowledge Networks (later GfK) offered the well-tested infrastructure for creating such a panel. To explore questions of radicalization within the U.S. Muslim community, the KN panel provided a sample representative of the U.S. Muslim population.

Research in radicalization indicates that radicalization can occur in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). It is the radicalization in behavior that is of gravest concern to agencies entrusted with security and policing. Yet radicalization of behavior is the rarest form, and is often detected when it is too late to protect individuals who suffer from the radicals' actions. Additionally, individuals with radical behaviors are often too entrenched to reveal their true beliefs and opinions to researchers. On the other hand, radicalization in opinion and attitude is much more prevalent (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014). It is possible therefore to sample people with different levels of radicalization of opinion and attitude through a survey. These individuals would be more likely to reveal their feelings and beliefs to researchers than individuals engaged in radical action. Finally, it seems likely that mass

radicalization of opinion feeds into the likelihood of radicalization to terrorist actions by individuals and small groups. Thus, radical opinion and attitude, while being more easily measured, should at the same time reveal some factors contributing to radicalization of action.

Specifically of interest in our research were beliefs and attitudes of U.S. Muslims. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the U.S. Muslim community has experienced discrimination from the general public, including hate crimes ([Rubenstein, 2004](#); Singh, 2002), and an increased scrutiny from security officials. In addition, the “war on terrorism” has been perceived by many Muslims in the United States as a war on Islam. It seems fair to say that many U.S. Muslims feel vulnerability even as they distrust U.S. government and its policies.

Although no major new attack has followed 9/11, there have been smaller-scale terrorist attacks and attempted attacks by U.S. Muslims. Most notorious was the Boston Marathon bombing carried out by two brothers who for years lived in the United States as permanent residents. In this context of mutual distrust and apprehension, there is great value for both researchers and security officials in gauging the attitudes of U.S. Muslims through surveys and polls that ask questions about U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. Muslim experience.

With this in mind, our research tested a new method of repeated Internet polling of representative samples of U.S. Muslims. These polls asked questions about ongoing political events of concern to U.S. Muslims, as well as questions about radical opinions, attitudes and actions. Some of these questions came from Pew polls of U.S. Muslims; some were developed by the investigators.

## Methods

The sample was recruited and data were collected by KnowledgePanel.<sup>®</sup> Data weights were applied by KnowledgePanel<sup>®</sup> to offset deviations in the sample composition from the baseline calculated from U.S. census data. Below we briefly describe sample selection procedures, data collecting procedures, and weight application procedures as performed by KnowledgePanel.<sup>®</sup> Only the weighted sample was used for the analyses reported below.

### Panel Recruitment Methodology

Panel members are recruited through national random samples, originally by telephone and now almost entirely by postal mail. Households are provided with access to the Internet and a netbook computer, if needed.

Unlike Internet convenience panels, also known as “opt-in” panels, that include only individuals with Internet access who volunteer themselves for research, KnowledgePanel recruitment has used dual sample frames to construct the existing panel. As a result, panel members come from listed and unlisted telephone numbers, telephone and non-telephone households, and cell-phone-only households, as well as households with and without Internet access, which creates a representative sample. Only persons sampled through these probability-based techniques are eligible to participate on KnowledgePanel. Unless invited to do so as part of these national samples, no one can volunteer to be on the panel.

The target population consists of the following: non-institutionalized adults age 18 and over residing in the United States who identify as Muslim. To sample the population, KN (now GfK) sampled Muslim households from its KnowledgePanel, a probability based web panel designed to be representative of the United States.

The data collection field periods were as follows:

- Wave 1: 4 July 2013-18 July 2013
- Wave 2: 8 July 2014-23 July 2014
- Wave 3: 23 September 2014-4 November 2014

### **Survey Sampling from Knowledge Panel**

Once panel members are recruited and profiled, they become eligible for selection for client surveys. In most cases, the specific survey sample represents a simple random sample from the panel, for example, a general population survey. Customized stratified random sampling based on profile data can also be conducted as required by the study design.

The general sampling rule is to assign no more than one survey per week to individual members. Allowing for rare exceptions during some weeks, this limits a member's total assignments per month to four or six surveys. In certain cases, a survey sample calls for prescreening, that is, members are drawn from a subsample of the panel (such as females, Republicans, grocery shoppers, etc.). In such cases, care is taken to ensure that all subsequent survey samples drawn that week are selected in such a way as to result in a sample that remains representative of the panel distributions. For this survey, a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults (18 and older) who identify as Muslims was selected.

### **Survey Administration**

Once assigned to a survey, members receive a notification email letting them know there is a new survey available for them to take. This email notification contains a link that sends them to the survey questionnaire. No login name or password is required, providing a degree of anonymity. The field period depends on the client's needs and can range anywhere from a few hours to several weeks. After three days, automatic email reminders are sent to all non-responding panel members in the sample. If email reminders do not generate a sufficient response, an automated telephone reminder call can be initiated. The usual protocol is to wait at least three to four days after the email reminder before calling. To assist panel members with their survey taking, each individual has a personalized "home page" that lists all the surveys that were assigned to that member and have yet to be completed.

The typical survey commitment for panel members is one survey per week or four per month with duration of 10 to 15 minutes per survey. In the case of longer surveys, an additional incentive is typically provided.

### **Sample Weighting**

For the selection of general population samples from KnowledgePanel, a patented methodology has been developed that ensures the resulting samples behave as EPSEM (equal probability selection method).

Briefly, this methodology starts by weighting the entire KnowledgePanel to the benchmarks secured from the latest March supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) along several dimensions. This way, the weighted distribution of KnowledgePanel perfectly matches that of the U.S. adults – even with respect to the above mentioned few dimensions where minor misalignments may result due to differential attrition rates. The geodemographic dimensions used for weighting the entire KnowledgePanel include:

- Gender (Male/Female)
- Age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59, and 60+)
- Race/Hispanic ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Black/Non-Hispanic, Other/Non-Hispanic, 2+ Races/Non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor and beyond)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Household income (under \$10k, \$10K to <\$25k, \$25K to <\$50k, \$50K to <\$75k, \$75K to <\$100k, \$100K+)
- Home ownership status (Own, Rent/Other)
- Metropolitan Area (Yes, No)
- Internet Access (Yes, No)

Using the above weights as the measure of size (MOS) for each panel member, in the next step a PPS (probability proportional to size) procedure is used to select study-specific samples. It is the application of this PPS methodology with the above MOS values that produces fully self-weighting samples from KnowledgePanel, for which each sample member can carry a design weight of unity. Moreover, in instances where the study design has required any form of oversampling of specific subgroups, such departures from an EPSEM design are corrected by adjusting the corresponding design weights accordingly with the CPS benchmarks serving as Study-Specific Final Weights.

Once the study sample has been selected and fielded, and all the survey data are edited and made final, design weights are adjusted for any survey non-response as well as any under- or over-coverage imposed by the study-specific sample design. Depending on the specific target population for a given study, geodemographic distributions for the corresponding population are obtained from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, or in certain instances from the weighted KnowledgePanel profile data. This step controls for demographic changes between the two waves. For this purpose an iterative proportional fitting (raking) procedure is used to produce final weights that will be aligned with respect to all study benchmark distributions simultaneously.

Each sample was weighted to look like the distribution of Muslims, age 18 and older, on KnowledgePanel at the time of each wave of the survey. The following benchmark distributions were used for the raking adjustment of weights for adults:

- Gender (Male, Female)
- Age (18-29, 30-44, 45+)
- Race/Ethnicity (White/Non-Hispanic, Non-White)
- Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)



- Education (Some College or below, Bachelor or Higher)

In the final step, calculated weights were examined to identify and, if necessary, trim outliers at the extreme upper and lower tails of the weight distribution. The resulting weights are then scaled to the sum of the total sample size of all eligible participants.

### **Knowledge Panel Calibration**

Participants from both KnowledgePanel and an off-panel sample completed the survey. An “off-panel” or “convenience” sample refers to sample that is not probability based, i.e. there is no known selection probability. Non-probability samples are comprised of individuals who volunteer to take a survey as opposed to being randomly selected and then asked to complete a survey. GfK purchases off-panel or “convenience” samples from a variety of vendors. This sample supplements the KnowledgePanel sample and is used with small or rare populations and small geographic areas.

To minimize bias from the off-panel sample, the off-panel and KnowledgePanel samples are blended using KnowledgePanel Calibration. KnowledgePanel Calibration is a weighting procedure where a sample composed of both KnowledgePanel cases and off-panel non-probability cases are blended together to approximate a sample that looks like a KnowledgePanel-only sample. The estimates obtained from a successfully blended calibration sample will not be statistically different from those obtained using just the KnowledgePanel cases because the blended sample is “calibrated” to the KnowledgePanel cases.

To develop the “calibrated” weights, the KnowledgePanel sample component is independently weighted to provide benchmark estimates for selected variables. To blend the two sources of the sample, the off-panel cases are added to the weighted KnowledgePanel sample file and then the combined cases are reweighted.

For this reweighting, estimates from the weighted KP sample are used as benchmarks, including dimensions of early adopter (EA) behavior where opt-in panelists are more likely to be early adopters of new technology or other products. In an iterative ranking process, five EA questions were used in addition to standard demographic weighting variables to ameliorate any skew (bias) introduced by the opt-in panel cases and systematic non-response.

Demographic distributions for non-institutionalized, Muslims, age 18+ on KnowledgePanel are used as benchmarks in this adjustment. All KN participants were first weighted to these benchmarks. Weights were trimmed and scaled to all eligible KN participants. KN and off-panel eligible participants were then combined and weighted to the benchmarks of all eligible KN participants.

## Results

We will first present analyses of combined samples, containing both panel and off-panel participants, for all waves. To compare responses across waves, we will use weights calculated by Knowledge Networks for the combined sample in each wave. Following this we will present data only for panel participants, using weights specifically calculated by Knowledge Networks ONLY for panel participants, to compare across the three waves of the survey.

### Combined Sample Findings

The demographic information reported below is for unweighted data. The analyses that follow the demographics summary were performed with weights applied.

*Table 1. Demographic data for participants in survey Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3.*

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
<b>Data collection</b>	July 2013	July 2014	Sept-Nov 2014
<b>Number of participants</b>	206	203	208
<b>Gender</b>	128 (62%)F/ 78(38%)M	105(52%)F/ 98(48%)M	86(41%)F/ 122(59%)M
<b>Mean (SD) Age</b>	36 (13)	37 (14)	36 (11)
<b>Married</b>	111(53%)	118 (58%)	97(47%)
<b>Median Education</b>	Some College	Some College	Some College
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	36% White 35% Other non-Hispanic 17% Black 8% Hispanic	38% White 26% Other non-Hispanic 18% Black 13% Hispanic	34% White 24% Other non-Hispanic 18% Black 18% Hispanic

Each survey had about two hundred participants. Sample composition varied somewhat from one survey wave to another, with gender being most variable (62% female in wave 1, 52% female in wave 2, and 41% female in wave 3). Overall, about half of participants were married. Most participants had gone to college for two years or more. An average participant’s age was 36 years old. About 35 percent of participants were White, with next largest ethnic category being Other, Non-Hispanic; Blacks comprised about 18 percent of each sample.

**Table 2.** Means (SDs) of survey questions in Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3.<sup>a</sup>

Survey Question	Wave 1 N=206	Wave 2 N=203	Wave 3 N=208 <sup>b</sup>
Some people say that Muslims living in predominantly Muslim countries would be better off if all these countries joined together in a 'United States of Islam' stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. Have you ever heard of this idea?	1.91 (.59)	1.83 (.67)	1.81 (.69)
Whether or not you have heard of this idea before now, do you personally agree with this idea?	1.62 (.49)	1.60 (.49)	1.58 (.50)
Do YOU PERSONALLY feel that this kind of violence [suicide bombing] is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?	3.44* (.93)	3.31* (1.01)	3.18* (1.15)
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	3.20* (1.02)	3.17* (1.05)	3.05* (1.11)
Do you feel the United States is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?	2.01* (.86)	2.00* (.89)	1.84* (.89)
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	2.22* (.80)	2.12* (.87)	1.99* (.91)
Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?*	3.57* (.80)	3.47* (.90)	3.48* (.91)
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about Al Qaeda?	3.52* (.73)	3.38* (.92)	3.14* (1.11)

<sup>a</sup> The questions, including the Likert response scale and the percent of each sample participants who responded in each category, are in the Appendix.

<sup>b</sup> In wave 3 only, some questions were dropped in order to make possible inclusion of questions about ISIL and Syrian conflict. As a result, only panel participants (but not off-panel participants) in Wave 3 (N=73) answered asterisked questions.

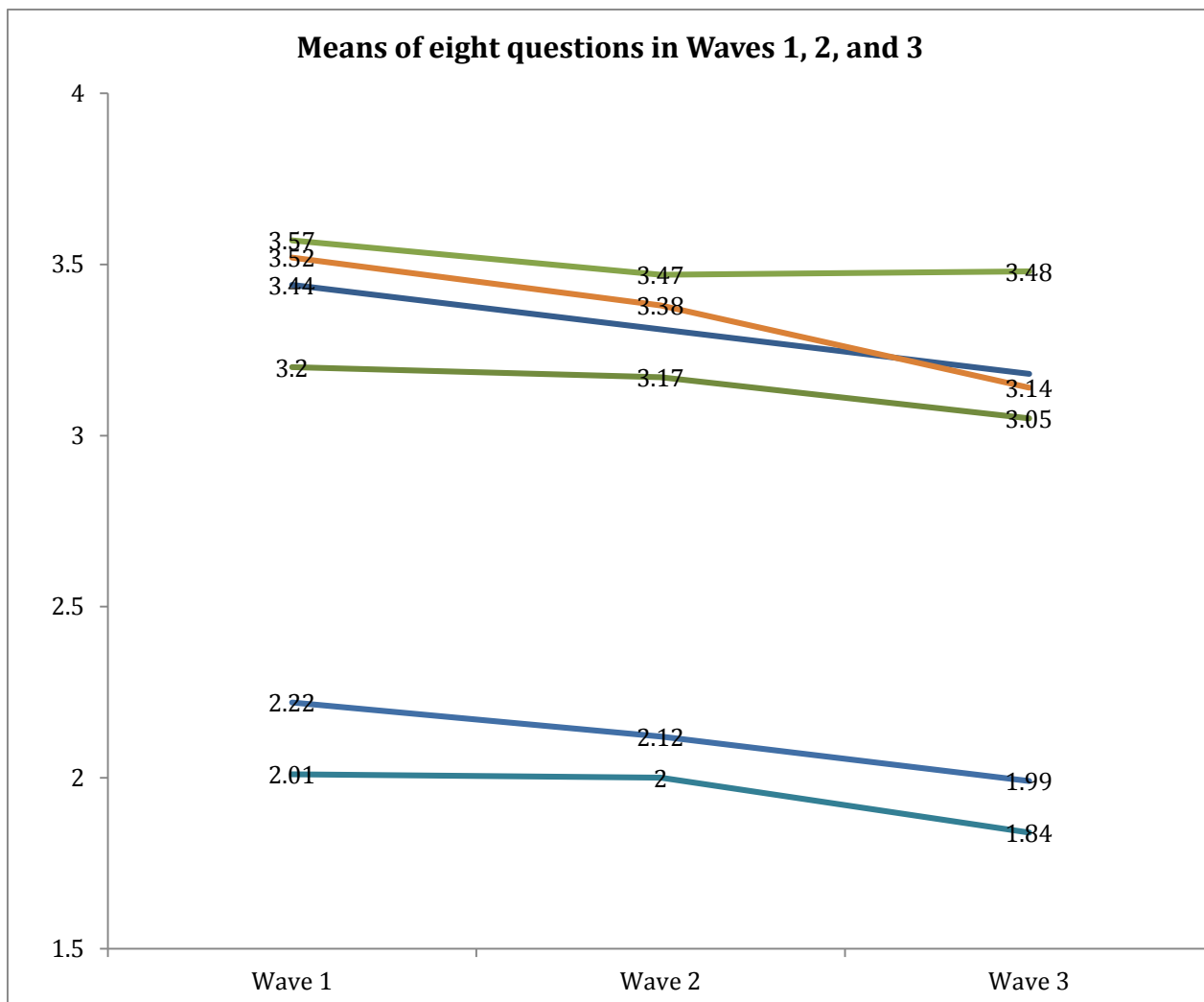
\* Significantly different (p<.05).

Pair-wise comparisons between waves 1, 2, and 3 on each of the questions with significant mean differences are provided in Appendix A.

In Table 2, two trends are of interest. First, of the eight items that were tested across the three surveys for combined samples, six demonstrated statistically significant difference from one survey to another. See Figure 1. The observed differences were in the direction of less radical response. In other words, between July 2013 and November 2014, American Muslims have generally become less radical in their opinions. What’s more, for every one of the eight items asked in each of the three waves, mean responses declined with each successive wave. Using Binomial Probability test (8/8 cases with declining means, with likelihood of decline = .5 for each case, two-tailed test of significance), the likelihood of this result occurring by chance is .01. Thus there is a significant tendency for decline in means across the eight items of Table 2.

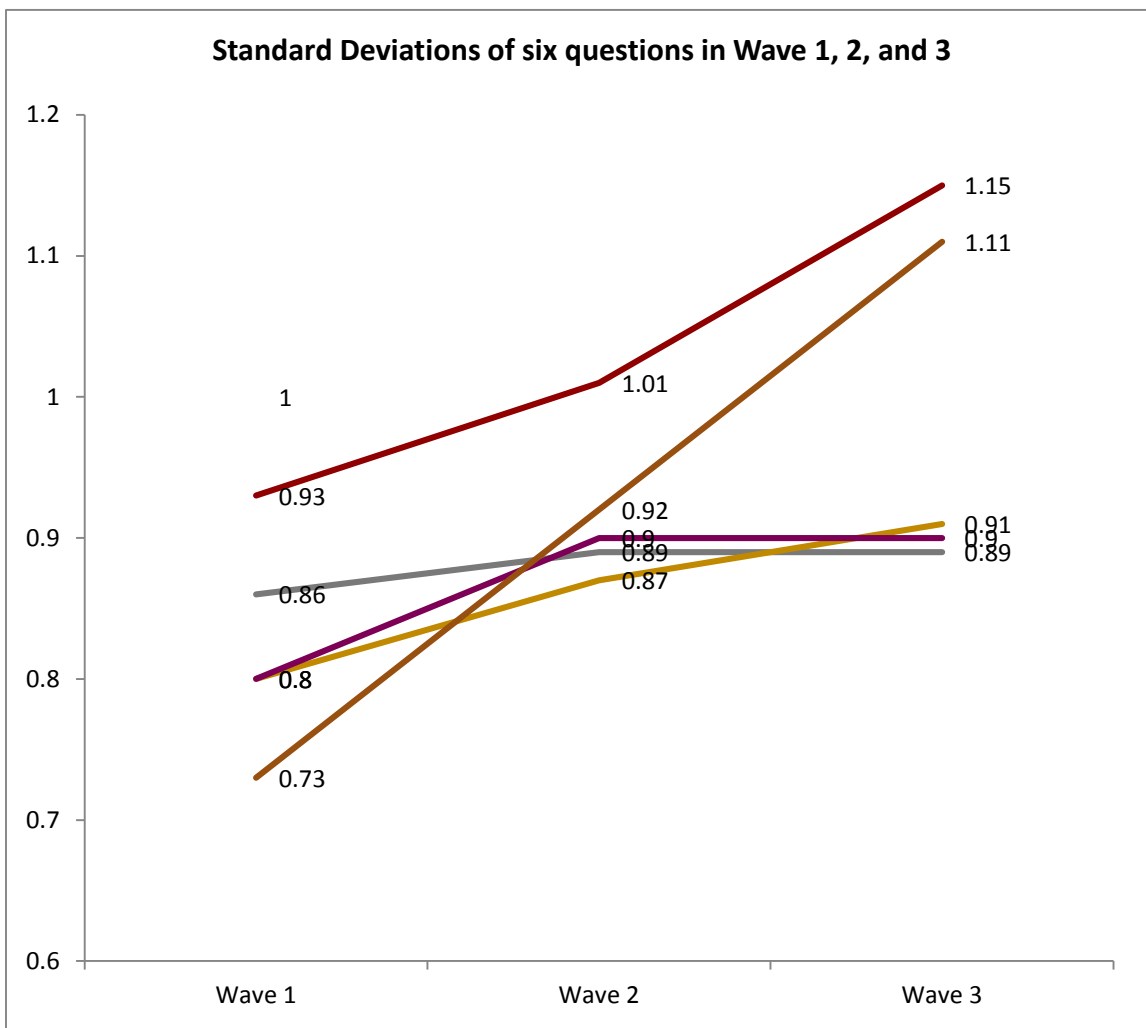
Figure 1 depicts means for items from Table 2 with significantly different means.

Figure 1.



Second, there was a trend for standard deviations to be greater with each successive survey. In other words, between July 2013 and November 2014, the opinions of American Muslims on political issues concerning terrorism and radicalization have become slightly more diverse. Figure 2 depicts standard deviations on those six of the eight questions in Table 2 where significant differences were observed.

Figure 2.



In conjunction, these two trends tell a more complete story. Smaller means, combined with greater standard deviations suggest that, as the later waves of the survey were returned with, on average, less radical responses, a small proportion of participants within each wave continued to respond with high agreement to questions about radicalization. This more radical group fell closer to the average opinion in the first survey, but with the second and third waves of the survey, the responses of this group moved farther away from the survey average on the distribution, thus contributing to higher standard deviations. Possible interpretations for this unexpected result will be offered in the Discussion section below.

In addition to the questions in Table 2, there was a question that we asked in Wave 2 and Wave 3, but not in Wave 1. The question was designed to address the increased attention in the media to the violence in Syria, and an apparent appeal to some U.S. Muslims to go travel to Syria to fight the regime of president Bashar al-Assad. The question, **“How do you feel about U.S. Muslims going to Syria to fight against Bashir Al Assad?”** had a four-point Likert scale, from 1=I don’t approve of U.S. Muslims going to Syria to fight”, to 2, “I would not do it myself, but I would not condemn anyone who did,” to 3, “It’s morally justified to go to fight to Syria,” to 4, “Joining the jihad in Syria is required for any Muslim who can do it.”

The mean response on Wave 2 was 1.56 (SD=.88), and on Wave 3 it was 1.49 (SD=.96). The difference between these means is not significant ( $t(201)=.71, ns.$ ), although the means are again in the direction of decreased radicalization from Wave 2 to Wave 3, and the standard deviations are again increasing from Wave 2 to Wave 3 – concurring with the pattern observed among the questions in Table 2.

**Sub-sample findings: Panel versus off-panel**

The demographic information reported below is for unweighted data of panel participants. The analyses that follow the demographics summary were performed with weights (calculated for panel-participants only) applied.

*Table 3. Demographic data for panel participants in survey Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3.*

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
<b>Data collection</b>	July 2013	July 2014	Sept-Nov 2014
<b>Number of participants</b>	83	88	73
<b>Gender</b>	49 (59%)F/ 34(41%)M	47(53%)F/ 91(47%)M	40(54%)F/ 33(45%)M
<b>Mean Age (SD)</b>	41 (14)	42 (15)	42 (14)
<b>Married</b>	45(54%)	51 (58%)	42(58%)
<b>Median Education</b>	Some College	Some College	B.A.
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	31% White 29% Other non-Hispanic 21% Black 10% Hispanic 7% Other	33% White 28% Other non-Hispanic 18% Black 11% Hispanic 9% Other	36% White 27% Other non-Hispanic 16% Black 12% Hispanic 8% Other

Comparing demographic data panel participants with those on the combined sample presented in Table 1, some small differences can be noted. First, panel participants were on average about four years older than off-panel participants. Second, panel participants were less often married. Finally, on Wave 3, panel participants are on average more educated, with B.A. as median level of education, compared with “some college” for the combined sample in Wave 3, and in panel on Waves 1 and 2.

Table 4 presents means and standard deviations on questions that were asked of panel participants on each of the three waves of the survey (weighted responses).

**Table 4.** Means (SDs) of survey questions for ONLY panel participants in Wave 1, Wave 2, and Wave 3

Survey Question	Wave 1 N=83	Wave 2 N=88	Wave 3 N=73
Some people say that Muslims living in predominantly Muslim countries would be better off if all these countries joined together in a 'United States of Islam' stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. Have you ever heard of this idea?	1.95 (.56)	1.98 (.68)	1.99 (.69)
Whether or not you have heard of this idea before now, do you personally agree with this idea?	1.66 (.47)	1.69 (.47)	1.68 (.47)
Do YOU PERSONALLY feel that this kind of violence (suicide bombing) is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?	3.62 (.70)	3.58 (.74)	3.54 (.77)
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	3.43 (.83)	3.42 (.85)	3.39 (.84)
Do you feel the United States is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?	2.10 (.87)	2.03 (.98)	2.15 (.89)
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	2.29* (.78)	2.13* (.85)	2.24 (.84)
Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?	3.56 (.69)	3.62 (.71)	3.59 (.75)
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about Al Qaeda?	3.49 (.60)	3.49 (.81)	3.39 (.86)
Activism scale (4 items)	2.61 (1.00)	2.57 (.94)	2.63 (.89)
Radicalism scale (4 items)	2.01* (.98)	1.89 (.89)	1.87* (81)

\* Significantly different (p<.05).

There are notable differences between the data from panel participants presented in Table 4 above and those from combined panel and off-panel samples presented in Table 2. In Table 4 describing panel participants, only two mean differences between waves reach statistical significance. One of these significant differences is between Waves 1 and 2 on the question about other Muslims’ opinion about U.S. war on terrorism, with less radical opinion at Wave 2 than at Wave 1. The second difference is between Waves 1 and 3 for the radicalism scale, again with less radical responses at the later survey. Thus, in this subsample of panel-only participants, there was less overall change in their opinion and attitude over the course of the course of the research project than there was for the combined sample. Indeed most of the items in Table 4 show close to zero change over the three waves.

Second, the pattern observed in the combined sample in Table 2, with means going steadily down from Wave 1 to Wave 2 to Wave 3, is observed for only three of the 10 items in the panel-only sample. This trend does not reach significance by binomial probability test. Likewise, the trend for standard deviation to become larger with each wave that was observed in the combined sample is found here in only three of the 10 items, again failing to reach significance. Thus, although the combined sample demonstrated a trend of decreased radicalization, this trend was weaker for panel participants.



At the same time, comparing responses of panel participants with the combined sample within each wave separately, there is a clear and substantial difference in the direction of panel participants giving more radical answers.

Indeed, when compared within waves, a number of questions are significantly different between panel and off-panel participants. Thus, in Wave 1, panel participants (N=83) are significantly more likely to say they personally justify suicide bombing in defence of Islam (M=3.77, SD=.59) than are off-panel participants (N=122, M=3.36, SD=1.04),  $t(204)=3.36, p<.01$ .

In Wave 2, seven out of 10 item means are statistically different, with panel participants (N=85) giving more radical answers than the off-panel participants (N=112). See Table 5.

*Table 5. Means (SDs) and t-tests of panel and off-panel participants in Wave 2 survey.*

Survey Question	Panel N=85	Off-panel N=112	T-test
Some people say that Muslims living in predominantly Muslim countries would be better off if all these countries joined together in a 'United States of Islam' stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. Have you ever heard of this idea?	1.97 (.63)	1.67 (.67)	3.19 p<.01
Whether or not you have heard of this idea before now, do you personally agree with this idea?	1.70 (.46)	1.48 (.60)	2.95 p<.01
Do YOU PERSONALLY feel that this kind of violence (suicide bombing) is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?	3.70 (.66)	3.04 (1.17)	4.81 p<.01
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	3.51 (.79)	2.95 1.17	3.82 p<.01
Do you feel the United States is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?	1.97 (.99)	1.94 (.93)	.20 ns.
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	2.09 (.86)	2.11 (.89)	.11 ns
Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?	3.69 (.63)	3.32 (1.04)	2.91 p=.01
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about Al Qaeda?	3.60 (.69)	3.25 (1.02)	2.81 p=.01
Please indicate if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad	1.40 (.83)	1.60 (.82)	1.67 ns
Activism scale (4 items)	2.53 (.88)	2.75 (1.17)	1.46 ns.
Radicalism scale (4 items)	1.89 (.83)	2.41 (1.09)	3.61 p<.01

Similarly, in Wave 3, all eight questions that were asked of both panel and off-panel participants were significantly different between panel and off-panel samples, with panel respondents more radical on every question, as seen in Table 6.



**Table 6.** Means (SD) and t-tests of panel and off-panel participants in Wave 3 survey.

Survey Question	Panel N=73	Off-panel N=135	T-test
Some people say that Muslims living in predominantly Muslim countries would be better off if all these countries joined together in a 'United States of Islam' stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. Have you ever heard of this idea?	1.96 (.63)	1.71 (.69)	2.54 p=.01
Whether or not you have heard of this idea before now, do you personally agree with this idea?	1.71 (.46)	1.50 (.50)	2.95 p=.01
Do YOU PERSONALLY feel that this kind of violence (suicide bombing) is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?	3.68 (.68)	2.91 (1.24)	4.96 p<.01
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	3.49 (.77)	2.81 1.16	4.41 p<.01
Do you feel the United States is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?	2.08 (.90)	1.72 (.87)	2.86 p=.01
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?	2.19 (.85)	1.85 (.87)	2.72 p=.01
Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about Al Qaeda?	3.53 (.73)	2.99 (1.17)	3.56 p<.01
How do you feel about U.S. Muslims going to Syria to fight Bashir Al-Assad	2.66 (1.00)	2.30 (1.15)	2.27 p=.01

Comparing data from Table 5 to Table 6, it is clear that most of the changes in the direction of less radical responses that were observed in the combined sample (Table 2) occurred in the off-panel subsample. In contrast, as already noted, the panel subsample means remain largely unchanged from Wave 2 to Wave 3.

### Discussion

Our research for CSTAB 2.12 presented an opportunity to compare responses of U.S. Muslims to questions tapping political radicalization over the course of some 20 months.

First, using data blending panel and off-panel respondents, we observed a general trend of decreased radicalization over time on most of the questions. In most cases, this difference was statistically significant, with later survey waves returning less radical mean responses. One possible explanation for this change is the rise of ISIS, or ISIL, that took place over the same period of time as the study. This may seem surprising, as ISIL aims to radicalize Muslims around the world through the use of Internet videos, including public beheadings, and through other recruitment efforts, such as sermons by influential Imams, blogs, and Facebook pages of ISIL members.

Yet our data suggest that perhaps most U.S. Muslims are turned off by the display of violence and barbarism by ISIL, just as most of non-Muslim U.S. citizens are. What’s more, ISIL’s mistreatment of Muslims, including mass killings, kidnappings, enslavement and rape of Muslim women, reported by Western mass media, have been painting a separate picture, one that for many U.S. Muslims clashes with the glowing self-portrait presented by ISIL. Seeing the devastation that has befallen the region where

many U.S. Muslims have family and friends, and knowing it is the result of ISIL offensives, might have led U.S. Muslims to turn more against radical opinions relating to terrorism and political violence. Where before they may have seen the United States and its Western allies as responsible for some of the Middle East’s troubles, with ISIL they got to see a new villain. As a result, their endorsement of political violence has declined, along with negativity about the U.S. war on terrorism.

Second, again using data blending panel and off-panel respondents, we found that variability of responses was increasing with each new wave of the survey. That is, standard deviations on most questions have grown larger with each new wave. Together with decreasing average responses, this suggests that, though the majority of Muslim Americans have become less radical, there remains a small subgroup of those who have continually endorsed more radical beliefs, or may even have grown more radical over time.

This is consistent with numerous reports, both from the United States and from other Western countries, of individuals who have become radicalized to the point that attempt to either travel to the Middle East to join ISIL or to carry out acts of violence in the West inspired by ISIL. Thus, although the majority U.S. Muslims are turned off by ISIL recruitment and radicalization efforts, a small minority are affected by it in the way that makes them a security threat. Finding this needle in a haystack remains a challenge to both researchers and security professionals.

For example, in Wave 3 we included a new question about participants’ opinion of ISIL. The results showed that, although most participants disapproved of ISIL, a small minority (14 people, 8% of the sample) strongly approved. The full breakdown of responses is provided in Table 7.

*Table 7. Opinion of ISIS*

<b>Responses to <i>From what you know, what is your opinion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)?</i></b>	<b>Number of Respondents (Percent)</b>
Very favorable	14 (8%)
Somewhat favorable	13 (7%)
Neither favorable nor unfavorable	23 (13%)
Somewhat unfavorable	16 (9%)
Very unfavorable	115 (64%)

Similarly, in each of the three waves of the survey, a small minority (on average 15 people, or about 7% of each survey sample) said they believed suicide bombing was often or sometimes justified in defense of Islam; and about the same number said they had a favorable opinion of al-Qa’ida. These results are consistent with findings by the Pew Center who used the same question about suicide bombing in their 2007 and 2011 polls of U.S. Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2007; 2011) and found about 8 percent of respondents justifying suicide bombing in defense of Islam. *This convergence of results of the Internet panel with Pew telephone poll results is heartening indication of the value of the cheaper and faster Internet polling technique.*

Similar results emerge from our radicalization scale (see Appendix A for items). About six people, or 3 percent of each survey population, admitted they were very likely to engage in four different radical actions from the radicalization scale (continue supporting an organization that fights for Muslim rights even if the organization breaks the law; join a Muslim rally or protest even if it might turn violent; attack police or security forces if they saw them beating up Muslims; and retaliate against members of another group for infractions against other Muslims, even if they were not sure they were attacking the guilty individuals). However, the absolute numbers of participants with these radical opinions are small, which is good news but the small n prevents statistical comparisons between the few radicals and the rest of the survey sample.

In methodological terms, our research addressed the questions of efficacy and utility of Internet surveys. The easy access to the population of interest that was afforded by the formation of the Internet panel allowed us to collect data at times when political situation was changing and new questions to tap relevant opinions had to be developed quickly. Repeated surveys with the same questions allowed us to compare responses at three different times and to observe trends that would otherwise remain obscured. Access to data in the immediate aftermath of data collection allowed us to provide fast-turnaround findings to the research community and to security professionals.

Had the same research relied on telephone polling by one of the industry giants, instead of reporting on analyses, we would only now be getting access to the data collected for Wave 1. Most of the questions we asked could not have been included in a general national survey as inappropriate for most participants. Wave 2 and Wave 3 surveys could not have been collected at all at the time when we collected them. In brief, the three surveys demonstrates the advantages of using the kind of quick turnaround Internet panel polling tested in this project.

In fact, a recent study by the Pew Center confirmed what we have found here: that Internet polling, as compared with the traditional telephone polling, provides largely the same results at a lower cost (Pew Research Center, 2015). And the difference that the Pew researchers observed between telephone and Internet polls have been in the direction of more socially desirable answers on telephone than on Internet polls. Therefore, for researchers interested in socially-undesirable responses, such as radical opinions, Internet polling is actually more useful, as it seems to increase likelihood of socially undesirable responses. Additionally, for sub-populations who may feel distrustful of researchers and the government (as many U.S. Muslims appear in our survey), Internet polling may offer the additional benefit of reduced apprehension and therefore more honest responses.

In summary, for specific subsets of the general population, and especially for time-sensitive questions, such as political opinions that can change in response to unforeseeable political events, Internet panel surveys appear to have real and important advantages over national telephone polls.

One methodological issue raised by our research concerns blending of panel and off-panel participants. We found an unexpected difference in responses of panel versus off-panel participants, with panel participants giving slightly more radical opinions than off-panel participants, especially on later waves of the survey. While the survey panel was formed by Knowledge Networks, the off-panel subsample was outsourced by Knowledge Networks to an independent vendor. There may be something about the recruitment process that is different between KN and the vendor they used that could help explain the differences in responses. Additionally, there were demographic differences, with panel participants being older, more ethnically diverse, and slightly more educated than the off-panel subsample.

The meaning of the differences between panel and off-panel respondents is yet to be established. As the panel members are recruited to provide a representative national sample, and the off-panel respondents are essentially volunteers, we tend to put more weight on the results from panel members. Indeed it may be that future polling of U.S. Muslims should use only panel members. Further research will be needed to evaluate this possibility.

### **Limitations**

Although our research used the same polling agency (Knowledge Networks, later integrated into GfK) and the same Internet panel, we were unable to conduct time-series testing, where the same individual's responses are compared over time. Longitudinal analyses were not possible because too few people responded to more than one wave of the survey. This limitation may not be a substantive disadvantage. Answering the same question repeatedly may create new problems, such as suspiciousness or efforts to be consistent at the expense of being honest.

Another limitation of this study is that the number of participants (about 200) was too small to reveal enough highly radical participants to allow for comparisons between them and the rest of the participants. Other surveys (Pew Poll 2007, 2011) have indicated that fewer than 10 percent of U.S. Muslims respond with the highest degree of radicalism to survey questions. In our survey, this percentage was about 5 percent, or about 10 people—too few to analyze as a group. As a result, our research is not very helpful in efforts to identify and police those individuals at the highest levels of opinion radicalization. However, to the degree that these radical individuals do not live in a vacuum and are influenced by people around them, specifically their families, friends, and other members of their communities, our research and future panel polling can offer useful insight into the opinions and beliefs of minority groups. For the purposes of community-wide policies and interventions, therefore, panel polling can be a useful tool.

### **Future directions**

With the same goals of improved understanding of U.S. Muslims' attitudes toward the U.S. government and its policies as well as understanding of U.S. Muslims' attitudes toward Muslim radicals in the United States and abroad, we hope to continue using the modality of quick turnaround Internet polls. As new issues emerge relevant to U.S. Muslims—new developments with regard to ISIS, for instance, or reactions to the Safe Spaces program scheduled for roll-out with Los Angeles Muslims—we can develop and employ new survey questions to tap reactions to these emerging issues.

In sum, the Proposed Continuation of CSTAB 2.12 will use PI expertise with repeated and innovative survey items to produce one or more Internet polls to continue tracking opinions of U.S. Muslims.

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## Appendix A

### Survey questions, including response scale

Some people say that Muslims living in predominantly Muslim countries would be better off if all these countries joined together in a kind of “United States of Islam” stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. Have you ever heard of this idea?

- 1) No
- 2) Not sure
- 3) Yes

Whether or not you have heard of this idea before now, do you personally agree with this idea?

- 1) No
- 2) Yes

Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do YOU PERSONALLY feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?

- 1) Never justified
- 2) Rarely justified
- 3) Sometimes justified
- 4) Often justified

Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?

- 1) Most feel this kind of violence is never justified
- 2) Most feel this kind of violence is rarely justified
- 3) Most feel this kind of violence is sometimes justified
- 4) Most feel this kind of violence is often justified

Do you feel the United States is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?

- 1) War against Islam
- 2) Both
- 3) War on terrorism

Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?

- 1) Most feel U.S. is fighting a war against Islam
- 2) Most feel both are true
- 3) Most feel U.S. is fighting a war on terrorism

Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?

- 1) Very unfavorable
- 2) Somewhat unfavorable
- 3) Somewhat favorable
- 4) 4 Very favorable

Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about Al Qaeda?

- 1) Very unfavorable
- 2) Somewhat unfavorable



- 3) Somewhat favorable
- 4) 4 Very favorable

**Activism (Questions a, b, c and d)/Radicalism (questions e, f, g, and h)**

Scales were calculated by averaging across the four item means.

**Think now, not about yourself, but U.S. Muslims as a group. How many U.S. Muslims do you think might:**

**None    A few    Many    Most    All or nearly all**

**(1)    (2)    (3)    (4)    (5)**

- a) **Join an organization that fights for Muslim rights?**
- b) **Donate money to an organization that fights for Muslim rights?**
- c) **Volunteer their time working (write petitions, distribute flyers, recruit people, etc.) for an organization that fights for the legal rights of Muslims?**
- d) **Spend at least an hour traveling to a public rally, demonstration, or protest in support of Muslim victims of U.S. drone attacks?**
- e) **Continue supporting an organization that fights for the rights of Muslims even if the organization sometimes breaks the law?**
- f) **Participate in a public protest against oppression of Muslims even if they thought the protest might turn violent?**
- g) **Attack police or security forces if they saw these forces beating Muslims?**
- h) **Retaliate against members of another group if some of that group attacked Muslims, even if they could not be sure they were retaliating against the guilty parties?**

Below are pair-wise comparisons for questions in Table 2 with significant mean differences between survey waves.

**Do YOU PERSONALLY feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?**

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 3  $t(206)=4.18, p<.01$

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 2  $t(205)=2.48, p=.01$

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 2 and Wave 3  $t(207)=1.44, p=.15$

**Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do you think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?**

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 3  $t(205)=2.12, p=.04$

**Do you feel the United States is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?**

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 3  $t(205)=2.38, p=.02$

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 2 and Wave 3  $t(202)=1.80, p=.07$

**Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about this question?**



One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 3  $t(205)=2.92, p<.01$

**Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?**

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 2  $t(205)=2.60, p=.01$

**Thinking now NOT about yourself but about others, how do think most U.S. Muslims feel about Al Qaeda**

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 3  $t(205)=4.18, p<.01$

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 1 and Wave 2  $t(205)=7.69, p<.01$

One-sample t-test b/w Wave 2 and Wave 3  $t(207)=2.50, p=.01$