Majorities In These 8 European Countries Would Back A Muslim Ban Like Trump's

Islamophobia isn't just an American problem.

Antonia Blumberg

February 13, 2017

Refugees wait for a bus heading to the airport in Athens to take a special charter flight bound for France. The group consisted of 168 mainly Syrian families, Iraqis and Eritreans, including 58 small children.

Immigrants are bearing the brunt of rising anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe.

A new survey released by London-based policy think-tank Chatham House found that majorities in eight European countries support the idea of instituting a ban on migration from Muslim-majority countries.

Chatham House, which is unaffiliated with any political body, surveyed nationally representative samples of the adult populations in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK. The institute asked a total of 10,195 respondents across the 10 countries whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "All further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped."

The results revealed that majorities in all but two of the countries agreed with the statement, but the size of the majority varied.

In Poland, 71 percent of respondents were in favor of blocking migration from Muslim-majority countries, compared to 51 percent in Italy. Sixty-five percent of respondents in Austria, 61 percent in France and 53 percent in Germany agreed.

Large minorities in the United Kingdom and Spain — 47 percent and 41 percent, respectively — also agreed with the statement. An average of 55 percent of respondents across the 10 countries supported instituting a ban.

The percentage of respondents that disagreed did not surpass 32 percent in any of the countries.

"Our results are striking and sobering," the researchers wrote in a press release. "They suggest that public opposition to any further migration from predominantly Muslim states is by no means confined to Trump's electorate in the U.S. but is fairly widespread."

The researchers noted that opposition to Muslim immigration tends to be higher among retired and older respondents.

All 10 countries are currently members of the European Union, though the UK recently voted to begin the process of leaving. Several of the countries where majorities were in favor of blocking Muslim migration, including France and Belgium, have experienced terrorist attacks perpetrated by self-described Muslims in recent years. But across the European Union, ethno-nationalist and separatist groups have been responsible for three to four times more terror attacks than Muslims in recent years, according to Europol.

The polls seem to get lost on those who ascribe to Islamophobic attitudes. After President Donald Trump signed an executive order to block visas for people from seven Muslim-majority countries, an analysis by Cato Institute revealed that no fatal terror attacks had been committed by immigrants from the seven countries in over 40 years.

Chatham House's poll was conducted between December 12, 2016 and January 11 of this year — several weeks before Trump signed the order but during a time when the president was floating the idea.

Americans have been wary of Trump's order, and a federal judge recently suspended it. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit upheld the suspension Thursday afternoon.

Leaders in Germany, Italy and the UK spoke out against Trump's order in the days after he signed it. But an influx of refugees has helped give rise to far-right, anti-migrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in many European countries, where citizens also tend to wildly overestimate the size of their country's existing Muslim population.

A poll conducted by IpsosMORI late last year found that many in western European countries, as well as in the U.S. and Canada, overestimate how big their country's Muslim population is. Respondents in France estimated the country's Muslim population was more than four times the actual size. In the U.S., the poll revealed, respondents believed the population of Muslim Americans was 17 times the actual size.

But Engy Abdelkader, a Georgetown University researcher on religion and law, rejects the notion that anti-Muslim sentiment is solely a political issue.

"Threats and acts of anti-Muslim violence in a number of European contexts increasingly demonstrate more than a simple sense of dissatisfaction with political, social, or economic challenges," Abdelkader wrote in an analysis on European Islamophobia. "Rather, they reveal a sense of increasing hatred toward Muslims as a people."