

Survey

July 2009

public issue

Greek public opinion on Islam & the construction of a mosque in Athens

The survey by Public Issue on the attitudes of Greeks toward Islam investigates, for the first time in Greece, social perceptions concerning the notions and symbols associated with the Islamic faith, the degree of knowledge and familiarity of citizens with Islamic culture, as well as social beliefs regarding relations between Islam & the West and Islam & Greece.

Key findings:

- Almost 1 in 2 Greeks (54%) perceives Islam solely as a 'religion' and not as a 'political system' (18%) or 'civilization' (11%).
- 8 in 10 state that they have no knowledge of the teachings and customs of Islam (77%), while a similar percentage (83%) declare that they have never come into contact with the Qur'an.
- In contrast, 4 in 10 respondents (42%) believe that Islam and Christianity share many common points.
- A negative impression is created among Greek public opinion by the words: 'burqa' (67%), 'Islamic veil' (62%) and 'jihad' (53%).
- 1 in 2 citizens (51%) believe that Islam leads to violence more easily than other religions, against 39% who do not.
- Compared to Christianity, the Islamic faith is considered to be more dogmatic (82%) and more closely connected with politics (42%), against 27% for Christianity and 23% for both.
- In general, bilateral relations between Islam and Europe are viewed as 'poor' (53%), as too – to an even greater extent – are relations between Islam and the USA (61%).
- 2 in 3 Greeks (63%) believe that Greece is 'distant' from the Islamic world.
- The vast majority of Greek citizens, 7 in 10 (70%) believe that Islam does not today pose a threat to Greece.

According to the survey results, more than 5 in 10 Greeks maintain a neutral stance toward traditional notions and symbols of the Islamic world, stating that neither a positive nor a negative impression is created by words associated with it, such as: 'Arabs' (50%), 'Qur'an' (52%), 'Muslims' (53%), 'Prophet Muhammad' (53%), 'Mosque' (54%) and 'Islam' (61%).

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Survey profile

The results presented in this analysis are based on a telephone opinion survey, with a general population sample of 600 adults (18+) from across Greece. The survey was carried out: 20-22/7/2009.

However, words such as 'burqa', 'Islamic veil' and 'jihad' create a negative impression among 67%, 62% and 53% of respondents respectively. This may be due to the fact that traditionally, these concepts have been negatively charged in the West. In this respect, the 'Islamic veil' is considered a remnant of a patriarchal, non-secular society, while the 'burqa' has repeatedly been criticized as a violation of women's rights, and 'jihad' is associated with 'Holy War'.

Between the religious and the political aspects of Islam, Greeks recognize more the religious (54%) rather than the political (18%) dimension. Although Islam is one of the four major religions¹ of the world, with about 1.5 billion followers, 8 in 10 (83%) Greeks state that they have no knowledge of its teachings and customs, while similarly, 8 in 10 (83%) report that they have never come into contact with the Qur'an, the holy book of the Islamic religion. On the other hand, that fact that 42% of Greek public opinion acknowledges that Islam and Christianity share many common points should come as no surprise, given the historical relationship between the two faiths. Nevertheless, despite acknowledging similarities between the two faiths, 1 in 2 (51%) Greeks believe that Islam leads more easily to violence than other religions, including Christianity.

As for relations between Islam and the West, the majority of Greek public opinion describes them in general as 'poor'. More specifically, 1 in 2 Greeks (53%) believe that relations between Islam and European countries are poor, while only 3 in 10 Greeks (29%) consider them to be good. At the same time, the perception of Greek citizens regarding relations between Islam and the USA is more negative, with 6 in 10 Greeks (61%) believing these relations to be 'poor'.

2 in 3 (67%) Greek citizens are of the opinion that there is presently a 'clash of civilizations'² between Christianity and Islam. Indeed, almost 1 in 2 respondents (55%) do not rule out the possibility of a further clash between Islam and the West in the future.

In the opinion of the majority of Greek citizens and specifically for 2 in 3 respondents (63%), the distance between Greece and the Islamic world is 'large', while almost 1 in 4 respondents (27%) believes it is 'small'. However, despite the differences between Greece and the Islamic world, and the clearly ascertained diverseness of these two worlds, the results of the survey show that 7 in 10 (70%) citizens believe that Islam does not today pose a threat to Greece.

1. Along with Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.

2. The term 'clash of civilizations' derives from the theory of Samuel P. Huntington, as set out in his book 'The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order', Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Lastly, the survey participants were asked to compare Christianity and Islam on the basis of five possible characteristics. This comparison yielded the following results: Christianity is considered to 'respect women more' (83%, against 7% for Islam), is 'a more peaceful religion' (73%, against 3%), and that it 'created a greater culture' (64%, against 9%). In contrast, Islam is perceived as being more closely connected with 'politics' (42%, against 27% for Christianity), while it is also considered to be a more 'dogmatic/harsh' religion (82%, against 5%).

The construction of a mosque in Athens

The issue of building a mosque in Athens has returned to the forefront of public debate, not for the first time in recent years. Regarding this issue, its monitoring over time, based on Public Issue's Barometer time series, reveals a negative shift in public opinion during the past five years (2006-2010).

FIGURE 1: IMPRESSION CREATED BY SYMBOLS OF ISLAM

Do the following words/phrases make a somewhat positive impression on you, neither a positive nor negative impression, or a somewhat negative impression...

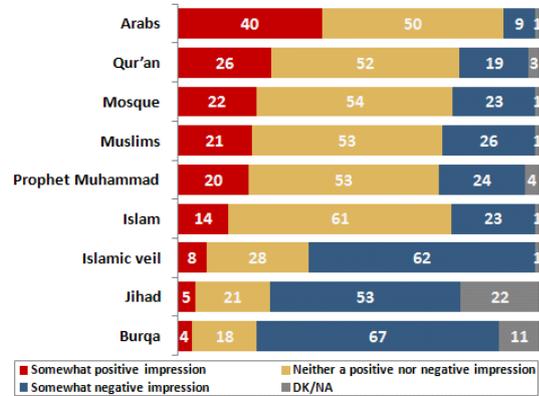


FIGURE 2: MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF ISLAM

Generally speaking, what do you personally, from what you know, or what you have heard, think that Islam is more about? Religion, culture, or politics? Of these, what characterizes it most?

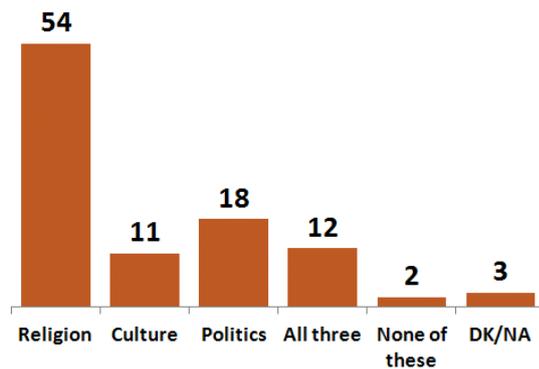


FIGURE 3: KNOWLEDGE OF ISLAMIC TRADITION

In general, how much would you say you know about the Muslim/Islamic religion and its customs? Would you say you know a great deal, a lot, not very much, nothing?

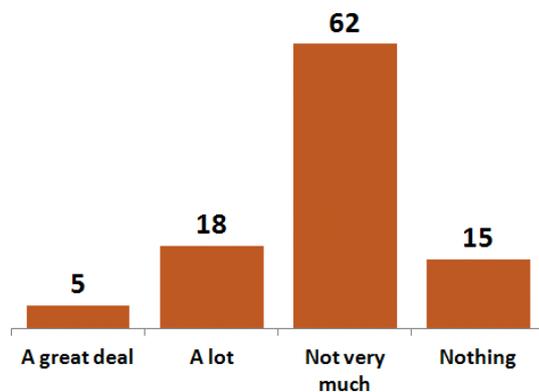


FIGURE 4: KNOWLEDGE OF ISLAMIC TRADITION

In general, do you know about the Muslim/Islamic religion and its customs?

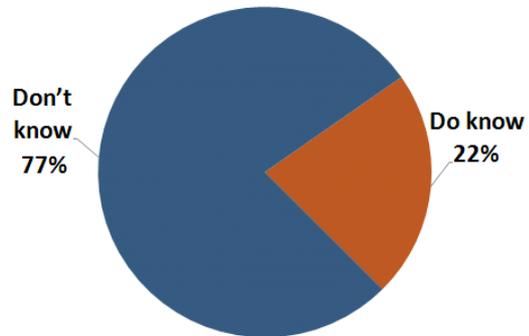


FIGURE 5: PERSONAL READING OF THE QUR'AN

As you may know or have heard, the Qur'an is the sacred book of the Muslim faith. Has a copy of the Qur'an ever come into your possession?

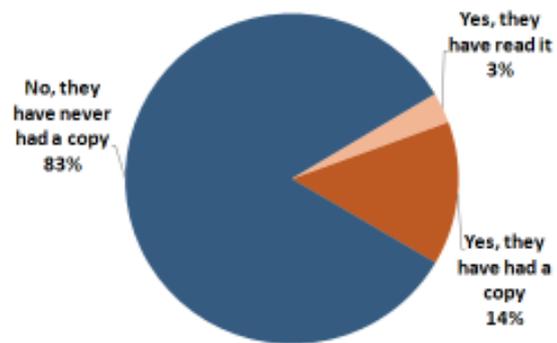


FIGURE 6: COMMON CHARACTERISTICS BETWEEN ISLAM & CHRISTIANITY

In general, do you believe that the Muslim/Islamic religion has much in common with Christianity, or do you believe that the Muslim/Islamic religion and Christianity are very different religions?

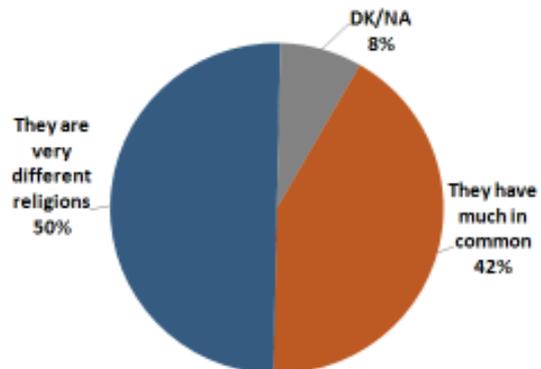


FIGURE 7: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN ISLAM AND VIOLENCE

Of the following views that are heard about the Muslim/Islamic religion, I would like you to tell me with which of the two you agree more.

A: "The Islamic religion leads to violence more easily than other religions"
 B: "The Islamic religion does not cause violence more than other religions"

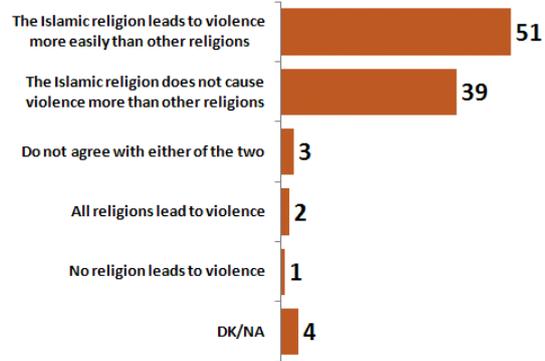


FIGURE 8: RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Do you believe that relations today between Islamic states and the countries of the European Union are good, or bad?

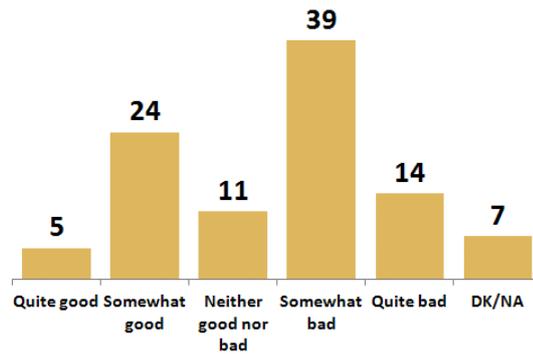


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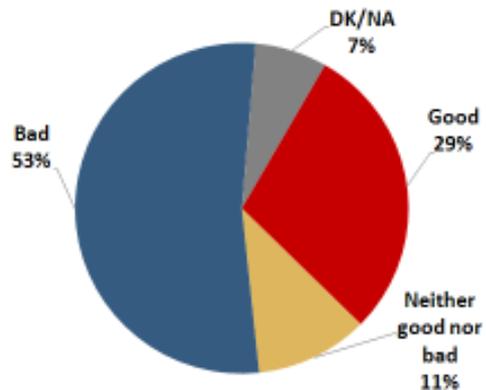


FIGURE 10: RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE USA

Do you believe that relations today between Islamic states and the United States of America are good, or bad?

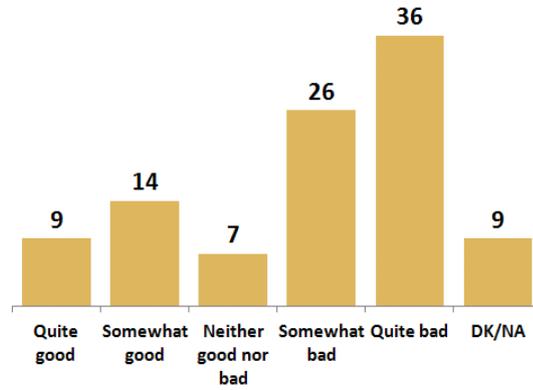


FIGURE 11: RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE USA

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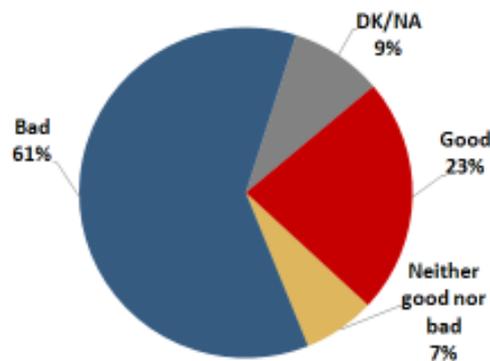


FIGURE 12: OPINION ABOUT A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY TODAY

In your opinion, is there a clash of civilizations in the world today between Christianity and Islam, probably yes or probably no?

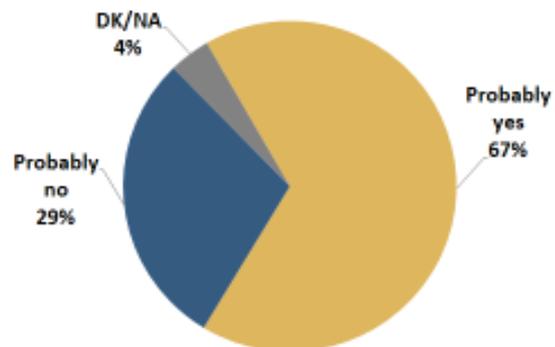


FIGURE 13: OPINION ABOUT A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE FUTURE

Irrespective of what is happening now, in your personal opinion how likely is a clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam in the future? Would you say it is very likely, quite likely, not very likely, not likely at all?

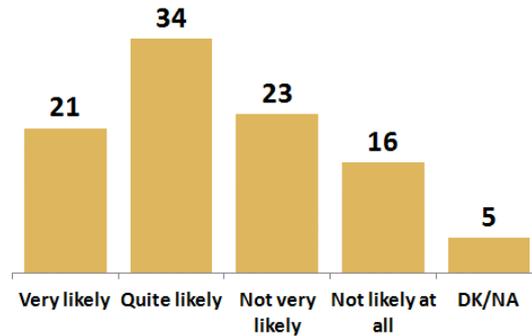


FIGURE 14: OPINION ABOUT A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE FUTURE

Irrespective of what is happening now, in your personal opinion how likely is a clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam in the future?

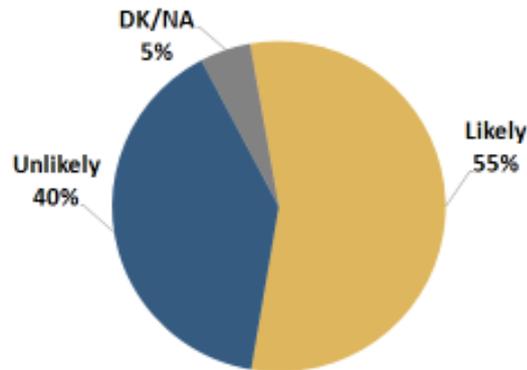


FIGURE 15: COMPARING ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

If we wish to compare the two religions, i.e. Christianity and the Muslim/Islamic faith, in your opinion, which of the two religions...

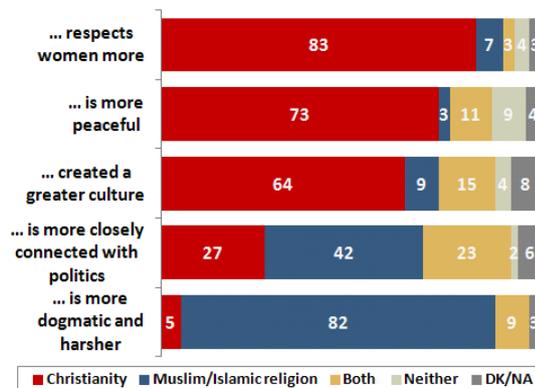


FIGURE 16: 'DISTANCE' BETWEEN GREECE AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Would you personally say that Greece, today, is close to, or distant from Islamic culture? Would you say that Greece is...

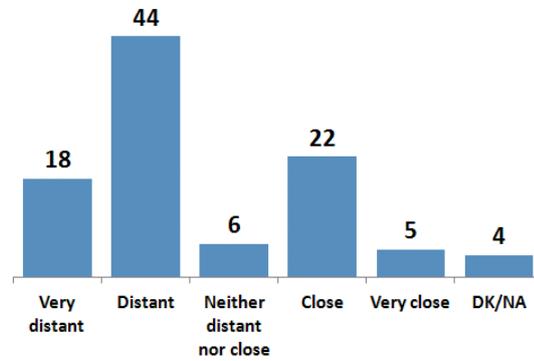


FIGURE 17: 'DISTANCE' BETWEEN GREECE AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

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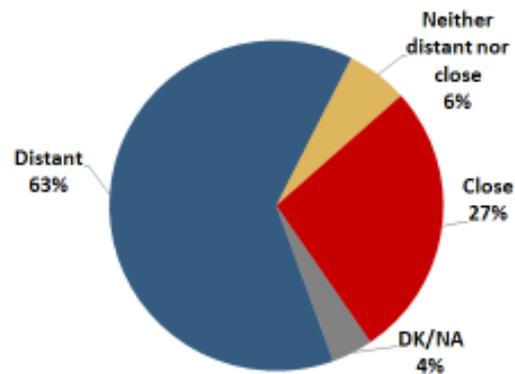


FIGURE 18: OPINION ABOUT THE SO-CALLED 'ISLAMIC THREAT'

In your opinion, how much of a threat is Islam to Greece? Would you say the threat is large, quite large, small, non-existent?

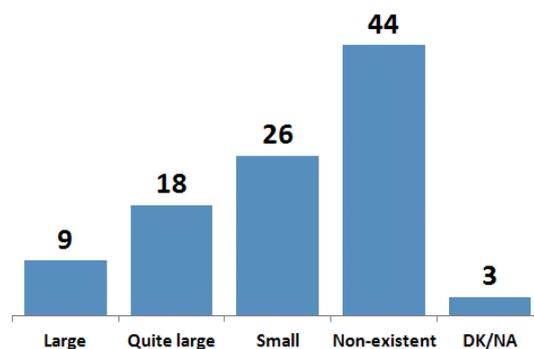


FIGURE 19: OPINION ABOUT THE SO-CALLED 'ISLAMIC THREAT'
 In your opinion, how big is the threat posed by Islam to Greece?

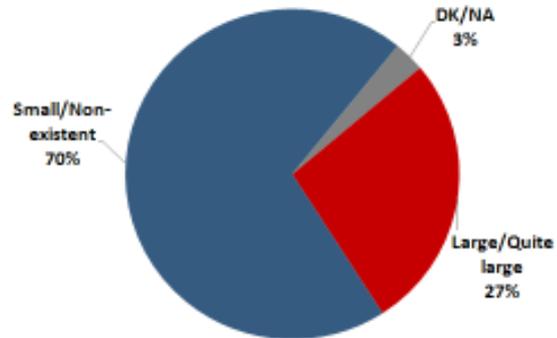


FIGURE 20: OPINION ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MOSQUE IN ATHENS, 1/2010

What is your opinion about the proposal for the construction of a mosque in Athens? Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

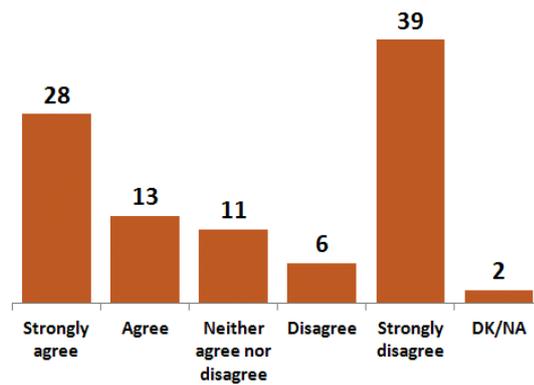


FIGURE 21: OPINION ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MOSQUE IN ATHENS, 6/2009 - 1/2010

What is your opinion about the proposal for the construction of a mosque in Athens? Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

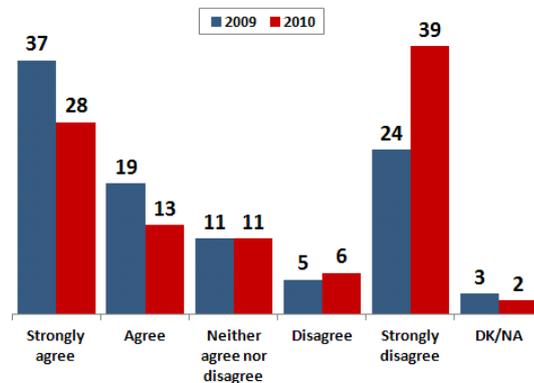


FIGURE 22: OPINION ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MOSQUE IN ATHENS, 1/2010

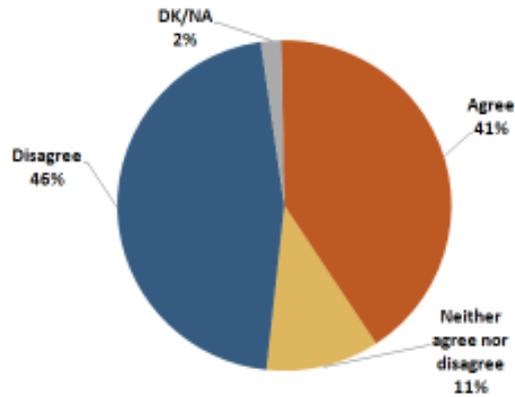


FIGURE 23: OPINION ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MOSQUE IN ATHENS, 6/2009 - 1/2010

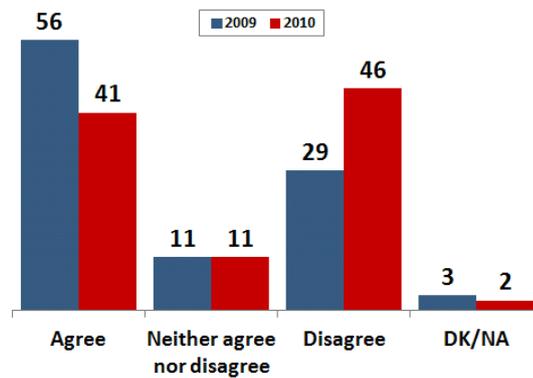
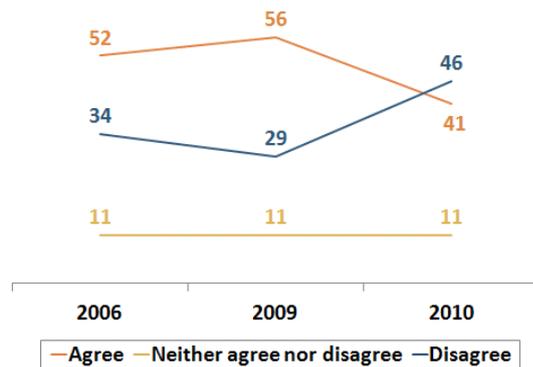


FIGURE 24: OPINION ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MOSQUE IN ATHENS, 2006 - 2010



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