

Muslim world residents see no conflict between religious principles and democratic values.

Gallup data from 10 predominantly Muslim countries provide insights about how these societies combine Islamic precepts with freedoms and social values that would be considered “secular” in the West.

## Islam and Democracy

*by Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director, The Gallup Center for Muslim Studies*

Islam in politics has been asserted in many countries in the Muslim world through democratic elections. Islamist parties have gained varying degrees of political power in Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, and the occupied Palestinian territories, and have widespread influence in Morocco and Jordan. Now, more than ever, Western governments, alarmed by this outcome, have raised the perennial question: Is Islam compatible with democracy?

A recent in-depth Gallup survey in 10 predominantly Muslim countries, representing more than 80% of the global Muslim population, shows that when asked what they admire most about the West, Muslims frequently mention political freedom, liberty, fair judicial systems, and freedom of speech. When asked to critique their own societies, extremism and inadequate adherence to Islamic teachings were their top grievances.

However, while Muslims say they admire freedom and an open political system, Gallup surveys suggest that they do not believe they must choose between Islam and democracy, but rather, that the two can co-exist inside one functional government.

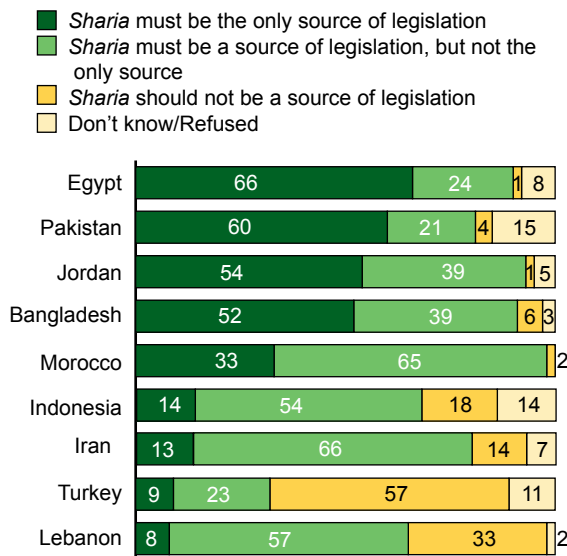
In surveying Muslim populations, Gallup solicited answers that shed light on the following crucial question: Can you have democracy where religion and politics are intertwined? The electoral victories of the Shia in Iraq and members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian parliament seem antithetical to Western democratic principles, particularly the separation of church and state. Is it possible to have democracy and *Sharia* simultaneously?

### Creating an Islamic Democracy

Although many Muslims have favorable attitudes toward an inclusive political system, according to Gallup polling, their ideas of self-determination do not require a separation of religion and the state. Poll data show that significant percentages of Muslims cite the importance of the role of Islam in governance. Muslims surveyed indicated widespread support for *Sharia*, Islamic principles that are widely seen as governing all aspects of life from the mundane to the most complex.

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Question: In general, which of these statements comes closest to your own point of view?



Question not asked in Saudi Arabia

Often assumed in the West to be an oppressive corpus of law associated with stoning of adulterers, chopping off limbs for theft, and imprisonment or death in apostasy cases, the incorporation of *Sharia* as at least a source of legislation enjoys the support of an average of 79% in the 10 countries surveyed.

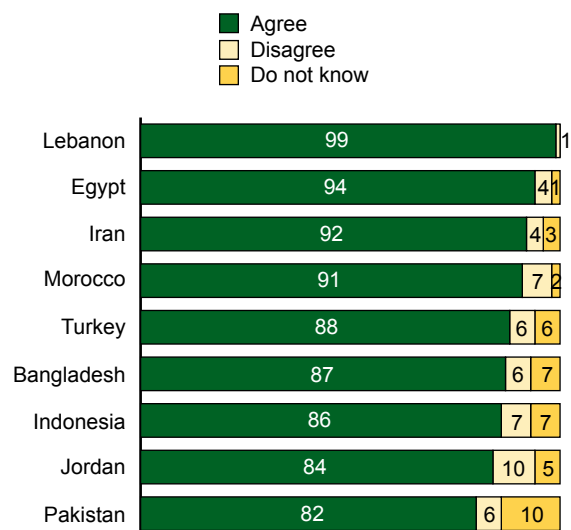
In five countries, only a minority wanted *Sharia* as “the only source” of law. However, in Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, and Bangladesh, majorities wanted *Sharia* as the “only source” of legislation.

The only outlier is Turkey, where 57% say *Sharia* should not be a source of legislation, not surprising for a country whose constitution explicitly limits the role of religion in the governmental sphere.

Surprisingly, there are no large differences between men and women regarding support for the incorporation of *Sharia* into governance.

For Muslims, the presence of the *Sharia* as a source of legislation does not conflict with drafting a constitution that would allow freedom of speech. Substantial majorities in all nations surveyed — the highest being 99% in Lebanon, 94% in Egypt, 92% in Iran, and 91% in Morocco — said that if they were drafting a constitution for a new country, they would guarantee freedom of speech, defined as “allowing all citizens to express their opinions on political, social, and economic issues of the day.” Support is also strong in most nations for freedom of religion and freedom of assembly.

Question: Suppose that someday you were asked to help draft a new constitution for a new country. As I read you a list of possible provisions that might be included in a new constitution, would you tell me whether you would probably agree or not agree with the inclusion of each of these provisions? Freedom of speech.



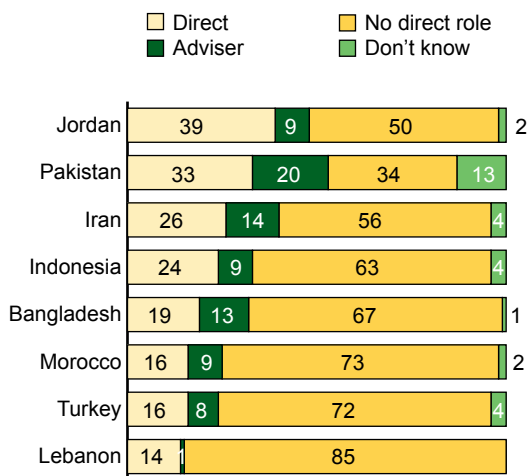
Question not asked in Saudi Arabia

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Yet, the poll also indicated that support for *Sharia* does not mean that Muslims want a theocracy to be established in their countries. Only minorities in each country say they want religious leaders to be directly in charge of drafting their country's constitution, writing national legislation, drafting new laws, determining foreign policy and international affairs, and deciding how women dress in public or what is televised or published in newspapers.

*Question: In cases like this, there might also be discussion about what role, if any, religious leaders should play under a new country's government. I'm going to read a list of possible areas that the country's religious leaders should play a direct role in that particular area or not. Drafting the country's constitution.*

*Question: In the area of drafting the country's constitution, do you think you would probably recommend that the role of religious leaders should be. . .*



Question not asked in Egypt and Saudi Arabia

The high support for *Sharia* as at least a source of legislation stems from Muslim views that religion should play a large role in their lives. Majorities of those surveyed say religion is highly valued. As many as 98% in Egypt, 99% in Indonesia, and 86% in Turkey say religion is an important part of their daily lives. Asked to describe in their own words what they admired most about the Arab/Muslim world, by far the most frequent reply from Muslim respondents was “adherence to Islamic values.”

At the same time, Muslims cite “liberty and freedom of speech” among the aspects they most admire about the West. However, while admiring many aspects of the West, those surveyed did not favor complete adoption. For example, Muslims surveyed say they do not approve of promiscuity and moral decay that they perceive exists in some Western societies. Many appear to envision an indigenously rooted model that incorporates *Sharia* and democratic values.

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