

## *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*

### **Teaching Guide**

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## About the Book

Are we on the verge of an all-out war between the West and 1.3 billion Muslims? When the media searches for an answer to that question, they usually overlook the actual views of the world's Muslims. *Who Speaks for Islam?* is about this *silenced* majority. This book is the product of the Gallup World Poll's massive, multiyear research study. As part of this groundbreaking project, Gallup conducted tens of thousands of interviews with residents of more than 35 nations that are predominantly Muslim or have significant Muslim populations. Gallup posed questions that are on the minds of millions: Is Islam to blame for terrorism? Why is there so much anti-Americanism in the Muslim world? Who are the extremists? Where are the moderates? What do Muslim women really want? Grounded in Gallup World Poll data, not in contentious rhetoric, *Who Speaks for Islam?* brings data-driven evidence -- the voices of a billion Muslims, not those of individual "experts" or "extremists" -- to one of the most heated and consequential debates of our time.

## About the Authors

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## Chapter 1: Who Are Muslims?

### Summary

Gallup Poll surveys show that Americans say they know virtually nothing about the views and beliefs of people in Muslim countries (xiii). "Who Are Muslims?" explains the vast diversity of the global Muslim population and the core of Muslim beliefs, values, and dreams. The world's 1.3 billion Muslims live in 57 countries with substantial or majority Muslim populations and have a variety of cultural, political, and economic differences that have been overshadowed by a radical minority (3, 5). The majority from countries as diverse as Turkey and Indonesia say that religion is an important part of their daily lives (6). Thus, an understanding of what Muslims say about their faith will shed light on contemporary Muslim-West relations.

The authors explain key concepts in Islam, including *jihad* (literally, "to struggle"). Gallup asked thousands of Muslims to define *jihad* and received a variety of answers, ranging from "a divine duty" and "fighting against the

opponents of Islam,” to “promoting peace” (20-21). Whatever the meaning, *jihad* only has positive connotations for Muslims who see it as a necessarily just and ethical struggle. Many Muslims look back to their “glorious past” for guidance, and like people of other faiths, they constantly face challenges interpreting their texts and confronting extremists within their community (27).

Muslims and Americans also share similar values and hopes. Muslims report that family values are central to their lives. Interestingly, what both Muslim respondents and a significant number of Americans admire least about the West is the breakdown of the traditional family and an excessive libertinism in society (6). When asked about their hopes and dreams of today, many Muslims first cite economic issues as their desire: better economic conditions, employment opportunities, and improved living standards for a better future (26).

### Important Findings

There are 57 countries around the world that are majority Muslim or have significant Muslim minorities (3). Arabs make up roughly 20% of the global Muslim population (28).

When Muslims were asked what they admired most about the Islamic world, the most frequent response was “people’s sincere adherence to Islam” (6). When Americans were asked what they most admire about Muslim societies, a majority -- 57% -- answered “nothing” or “I don’t know” (1).

Respondents were asked to define *jihad*. In four Arab nations, the most frequent answer was “duty towards God,” without reference to warfare (20-21). Significant minorities in three non-Arab countries (Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey) and a majority in Indonesia mentioned “sacrificing one’s life for the sake of Islam” and “fighting against the opponents of Islam” (21).

Most respondents in countries that are predominantly Muslim or have sizable Muslim populations (for example, 95% in Egypt and 92% in Saudi Arabia) say they have “a lot of love in their life” (22).

### Discussion Questions

1. How is it possible to understand Muslims if they are so ethnically diverse and spread out across the world?
2. How does religion inform the lives and practices of Muslims? Does religion play the same role in your country?
3. How is *jihad* commonly understood by Western audiences? How is this different from how *jihad* is understood by Muslims?
4. In what ways does the “memory of a glorious past” affect Muslims’ concerns and ideas of progress (24-26)?

### Thinking Critically

1. A majority of Americans either admire nothing or can think of nothing to admire about Islam. When both Americans and Muslims are asked what they admire most about the West, they both reference freedom and technology. What explains these differences?
2. Muslim respondents and a significant number of Americans say they least admire the excessive libertinism in Western society (6). What explains their views? Do you agree or disagree with these respondents?
3. The authors mention that the word Algebra is derived from an Arabic word, and that Muslims contributed heavily to the development of Western civilization (25). What contributions are these? Why are they important to acknowledge?

## Beyond the Book

Watch a popular Hollywood blockbuster involving Muslims, and compare the entertainment industry's representations of Muslims demographics to the reality of Muslim demographics. Are the representations accurate? Are they stereotypes? What effect do stereotypes of Muslims play in popular culture?

## Chapter 2: Democracy or Theocracy?

### Summary

Due to recent liberation from European colonialism, democracies are rare in contemporary Muslim countries (39). Despite that, the majority of Muslims admire the West's political freedoms and value self-determination (34). However, Muslims do not appear to want secularism or to imitate Western democracies; instead, many Muslims, both male and female, state they want *Sharia* as at least one source of legislation. The authors explain that many Muslims see no contradiction between democratic and Islamic principles (55). Additionally, after many of their governments failed to protect rights and embrace reform in the past century, many Muslims turned to Islam as their source of guidance (43).

However, wanting *Sharia* involved in politics does not translate into Muslims wanting theocracy. Majorities in many countries remarked that they do not want religious leaders to hold direct legislative or political power (50). Additionally, the authors explain that *Sharia* means many different things to Muslims, including the promotion of women's rights and allowing for a free market of religious thought (53 - 55). Thus, many Muslims desire neither a democracy or theocracy, but instead a unique model incorporating both democratic and religious principles (63).

Unfortunately, majorities in many Muslim countries do not think Americans are serious about encouraging democracy in Muslim countries (32), nor do they think Americans are concerned about improving relations (60). The authors explain that many Muslims are affected by what is perceived as America's "double standard" in promoting democracy due to past American support for dictators in the region (58). When asked what the West can do to improve relations with the Muslim world, Muslims most frequently answer "more respect" and "more understanding" of Islam (61).

### Important Findings

Substantial majorities in almost all countries surveyed (including 95% in Burkina Faso, 94% in Egypt) would guarantee freedom of speech if drafting a constitution for a new country (47).

Of the Muslims who believe democracy is important to their progress and future, a majority say a rich spiritual life is something they cannot live without (62).

Majorities in most Muslim countries want *Sharia* to be at least a source of legislation. Significant majorities in many countries, however, say religious leaders should play no direct role in drafting a country's constitution, writing national legislation, drafting new laws, determining foreign policy and international relations, or deciding how women dress in public or what is televised or published in newspapers (50).

Majorities in Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Morocco disagree that the United States is serious about spreading democracy in their region of the world (32).

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do many Americans believe Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy? Why do many Muslims believe the two are compatible?
2. If both Muslims and Americans value democracy, why is there a lack of democracy in the Muslim world (38)?
3. What kind of political model do most Muslims desire? Is it more similar to a democracy or theocracy? How does this model compare to the idea of a separation between church and state?
4. What does *Sharia* mean? Should those in the West fear it?
5. What do Muslims believe the West should do to improve relations with Muslim populations? Do you think these are worthwhile changes?

### Thinking Critically

1. While 85% of respondents in Iran and 94% in Indonesia think women should have the same legal rights as men, only 57% of Egyptians and 57% of Jordanians agree (51). What do you think explains the similarities and differences between these countries?
2. The authors state, “Muslims participate in a ‘free market’ of religious thought” (55). What does this mean? How do you think Muslims are affected by not having a central religious or legal institution? Does it increase or decrease the value of individual Muslim opinions?
3. Many Muslims report that they do not think the United States is serious about encouraging democracy in the Muslim world (32). Do you think this viewpoint is justified or unjustified?

### Beyond the Book

Compare the role of religion in the constitution of Iran and in the constitution of the United States of America.

## Chapter 3: What Makes a Radical?

### Summary

“What Makes a Radical?” finds that most Muslims condemn the acts of 9/11 (69). When Muslims are asked what they admire least about their own societies, extremism and terrorism tops the list (96). Far from being glorified by Muslims, the “terrorist fringe” is rejected by citizens of Muslim majority countries. The authors separate this majority from the 7% who are “politically radicalized.” These Muslims believe the 9/11 attacks are “completely” justified and view the United States unfavorably (69).

Although it is commonly assumed that religious fanaticism, poverty, and hopelessness drive extremism, the politically radicalized tend to come from middle- or working-class backgrounds, hold jobs with greater responsibility, and be more educated than moderates (67, 71). Larger percentages of radicals are satisfied with their standard of living and believe they will be much better off in five years (72). Similar to moderates, radicals admire the West’s technology, value systems, and fair political systems. However, the radicalized are more likely to fear Western control and domination (72).

Additionally, religion does not appear to motivate the politically radicalized. While most radicals -- 90% -- cite Islam as an important part of their daily lives (90%), most moderates -- 94% -- do as well (73). Again, radicals use politics, not piety, to justify 9/11, while moderates argue against 9/11 using religious justifications. Muslims resent what they perceive as a War on Islam in the West that equates their religion with terrorism and extremism. Though Muslims resent the cultural saturation and immorality they perceive in the West, they do not feel the West needs to “stop being immoral and corrupt” (89). To improve relations, they feel the West simply needs to make concrete changes to its policies, not its principles.

### Important Findings

Only 7% of Muslim respondents think that the 9/11 attacks were completely justified and have a negative view of America (69). In America, 6% of the public think that attacks in which civilians are targets are “completely justified” (95).

Of both political radicals and moderates, 20% face unemployment (71).

Sixty-three percent of the politically radicalized and 48% of moderates disagree that the United States will allow people in the region to “fashion their own political future as they see fit without direct U.S. influence” (84).

Large majorities of those with radical views and moderate views (94% and 90%, respectively) say that religion is an important part of their daily lives (73).

### Discussion Questions

1. How do radicals differ from the mainstream Muslim majority in terms of living conditions? How do they differ on their view of the future (72)?
2. What is the primary catalyst of political radicalism? Do the politically radicalized hate the West and its freedom (91)?
3. How do Muslims view terrorism in their own societies? How does it compare to the way the West views terrorism (96)?
4. What is the relationship between *jihad* and terrorism? What are the effects of equating the two concepts?

### Thinking Critically

1. Of the politically radicalized, most are not actively involved in terrorism or militant activity, and only 13% of this group says other attacks on citizens are completely justified (70). What can be done to reach them?
2. More radicals than moderates (59% versus 32%, respectively) want *Sharia* as the only source of law, though majorities of both groups do not want religious leaders to be directly in charge (93). What explains these findings? What kind of political situation do you think they envision?
3. Muslims report that what they resent most about the West is its libertinism and breakdown of the traditional family, yet they do not think it is necessary to change those qualities to improve relations with Muslims (88-89). Instead, they want respect of Islam and Muslims. Do people in the West feel the same way about Muslims' way of life and actions?

### Beyond the Book

Watch a TV news report covering the War on Terror and analyze their description of the politically radicalized in light of Gallup's findings. In what way are they portrayed, and how does the news report frame their views?

## Chapter 4: What Do Women Want?

### Summary

“Muslim women are continually portrayed as victims who seek to be liberated from their faith, yet rarely are given the opportunity to voice their concerns. In “What Do Women Want?”, the authors examine Gallup's findings on Muslim women and what they say about their rights, Islam, and the West. Majorities of women in virtually every country surveyed say that women deserve the same legal rights as men, to vote without influence from family members, to work at any job they are qualified for, and even to serve at the highest levels

of government (102). In many Muslim countries, women equal or outnumber men in attaining post-secondary education. Western students in Muslim countries also report that Muslim women are outspoken, smart, and inquisitive, not submissive, abused, or in need of liberation (101). Muslim women are also gaining prominence in many professional and religious organizations (102-103).

Additionally, the authors present the attitudes of Muslim men towards women, and found that majorities across the Muslim world support gender equality and increased rights for women. Moreover, religiosity is not a factor in how strongly men support women's rights; in Lebanon, Morocco, and Iran, men who are religious are more likely to support women's rights than those who are not (123). Honor killings -- long thought to be a product of religious zeal -- are most often committed by men who do not fulfill their religious commitments such as fasting or prayer (123).

The authors explore Western concerns about Muslim women and suggest that they first understand the concerns voiced by Muslim women themselves, rather than by Western feminists. Majorities of Muslim women believe that their most urgent needs are not gender issues, but greater political and economic development (127). Additionally, Muslim women show a high level of devotion to their religion, want to see *Sharia* more involved in legislation, and feel that Islam guarantees the rights and security of women (118). Western advocates need to understand these sentiments and work within the framework of Islam to empower Muslim women.

### **Important Findings**

The ratio of women to men in secondary education is 100% or higher in Jordan, Algeria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. (104)

Majorities of Muslim women want the same legal rights as men and admire the West for its gender equality; however, when presented with the phrase "adopting Western values will help in their progress," only 12% of Indonesian women, 20% of Iranian women, and 18% of Turkish women associate the statement with Arab and Muslim nations (107).

When asked what they like least about the Muslim world, most Muslim women cite political and economic issues, such as "lack of unity" and "high unemployment." The percentage of women who cite gender inequality is 0% in Jordan, 1% in Egypt, 2% in Morocco, and 5% in Saudi Arabia (120).

Two attributes women associate with their societies are "eager to have better relationship with the Western world" and "attachment to their spiritual and moral values is critical to their progress" (110).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How do Muslim women perceive their status and their rights in Muslim society?
2. What is the relationship between Muslim women and their religion? Is this different than the relationship between what Muslim men say about Islam?
3. The Gallup Poll shows the majority of Muslim men are supportive of women's rights (121). Does level of religiosity determine how Muslim men feel about women's rights?
4. How does the example of Souad Saleh contradict popular assumptions of Muslim women and religious authority (102)?



### Thinking Critically

1. While 95% of Egyptian women believe in the ability to vote for whomever they wish and 88% believe they should work for whatever job they are qualified for, the authors point out that only 69% believe they should have the same legal rights as men (118). Why do respondents feel this way? Do Western societies maintain the same rights for only men or women?
2. Is Westernization a constructive way of ensuring rights for Muslim women? Do most Muslim women think it is? How does Asifa Quraishi's response to rape laws in Pakistan differ from common Western feminist responses to issues involving Muslim women's rights (116)? Are there advantages to either approach?
3. In Yemen, only 28% of women are literate, whereas 70% of men are. In Jordan and Malaysia, however, 85% of women are literate (104-105). What may lead to such disparities?

### Beyond the Book

Make a list of the first words that come to mind when you think of the headscarf worn by many Muslim women. What do you think the most common responses would be in the West? How about in the Muslim world? Explore where these presuppositions come from.

## Chapter 5: Clash or Coexistence?

### Summary

"Clash or Coexistence?" addresses relations between Muslims and the West and explores the "us" and "them" mentality. Neither group is monolithic, and they share similar views on issues such as the importance of religion in public life and eradicating extremism (155). After reviewing responses of both Americans and Muslims regarding what can be done to better the relations, the authors find that conflicts between the West and Muslims are more about politics rather than principles and piety (166).

For instance, the authors explain that despite common perceptions, Muslim reactions to the Danish cartoon controversy were not a result of Muslims' intolerance of free speech. Instead, these reactions were a result of what Muslims perceived as double standards and being singled out and under siege (142-143). The authors provide the context of Muslim reactions and feelings towards the West, which Americans can use to better understand Muslim societies and improve policies. They suggest that blaming Islam is counterproductive; instead, the West should respect Muslims and effectively promote democratic and economic growth in the Muslim world (143).

The Gallup World Poll confirms that the most important issues in improving relations are the beliefs and perceptions of "the other" (163). The most important factor in determining how Muslims react to the West is not what Muslims think about the West, but rather how they perceive the West's thoughts about them. In today's war against global terrorism, this means a public diplomacy that addresses the minds and hearts of Muslims. While religion is not the main motivator for extremism, Islam is a fundamental source of identity, guidance, and spiritual and psychological security for Muslims (162). Respecting and constructively engaging Islam will encourage the moderate majority to use their authentic interpretation to disarm extremists by using Islam's principles against terrorism.

### Important Findings

Only 6.3% of Jordanians, 10% of Saudis, and 1% of Egyptians find nothing to admire about the West (141).

Across all predominantly Muslim nations polled, an average of 75% of respondents associate "ruthless" with the United States (157).

Roughly 86% of the British and French public say that newspapers printing racial slurs should not be allowed under the protection of free speech. When asked about printing an offensive cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad, only 57% of Britons and 45% of the French say it should not be allowed (144).

### Discussion Questions

1. Do polling data reflect the notion that Muslims hate freedom?
2. Why do the authors contend that neither the West nor Muslim societies are monoliths, and why do the authors believe Islam is not the problem?
3. Is Muslim animosity toward America an expression against American principles or policies?
4. Are contemporary global issues a result of a cultural clash between the West and Islam?

### Thinking Critically

1. Many Muslims and Americans -- 38% -- do not know what can be done to improve relations between the two societies (160). The majority of Americans believe Muslims' unfavorable opinion of the West is a result of their misunderstanding. Muslim respondents, however, emphasize the need for a change in behavior on both sides (160). Is improving relations between Muslims and the West a dual responsibility, or does one have more of a duty than the other?
2. Given the overwhelming support for free speech among Muslims, what do the reactions to Pope Benedict's speech and the Danish cartoon controversy point to (142-143)? Do polling data show a homogenous view of free speech in Western societies? What are the limits of free speech?
3. Muslims around the world have primarily asked for respect from Western nations. What role can popular Muslim opinions play in improving Muslim-West relations? How can Western leaders and citizens respond to this request, and can that response truly improve relations?

### Beyond the Book

Read and critique Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* in light of Gallup's findings regarding Muslim-West relations.

## Comprehensive Questions

1. What are the primary concerns of the majority of Muslims?
2. Do you think Muslim-West relations can be improved? If so, how?
3. What role can Muslim opinions play in affecting contemporary policies between Western and Muslim leaders?
4. How do you think the data from *Who Speaks for Islam?* can affect Muslim opinions around the world of themselves as a collective? Who is impacted most by the book's findings?
5. How well do the presented Muslim opinions fit into your conceptions of Islam? Is it necessary to differentiate between Islam and Muslims? Finally, who speaks for Islam?

## Further Reading

### Foundations of Islamic Thought

ARMSTRONG, Karen, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (London, 1991)

CHITTICK, William C. and Sachiko Murata, *The Vision of Islam* (New York, 1994)

CLEARY, Thomas, *The Essential Koran: The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco, 1994)

LINGS, Martin, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London, 1983)  
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