

Poll: Palestinians Highest Favoring Suicide Bombings

Out of all the Muslim respondents in a global survey, Palestinian Muslims polled highest in favor of suicide bombings as a justifiable means “to defend Islam.”

A new Pew Research Center survey of Muslims around the globe finds that most adherents of the world’s second-largest religion are deeply committed to their faith and want its teachings to shape not only their personal lives but also their societies and politics.

In all but a handful of the 39 countries surveyed, a majority of Muslims say that Islam is the one true faith leading to eternal life in heaven and that belief in God is necessary to be a moral person. Many also think that their religious leaders should have at least some influence over political matters. And many express a desire for Shariah—traditional Islamic law—to be recognized as the official law of their country.

In most of the 21 countries where the question was asked, few Muslims endorse suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets as a means of defending Islam against its enemies. But in a few countries, substantial minorities believe suicide bombing can be often justified or sometimes justified.

Muslims in some countries surveyed in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa are more likely than Muslims elsewhere to consider suicide bombing justified.

Four-in-ten Palestinian Muslims see suicide bombing as often or sometimes justified, while roughly half (49 percent) take the opposite view.

In Egypt, about three-in-ten (29 percent) consider suicide bombing justified at least sometimes. Elsewhere in the region, fewer Muslims believe such violence is often or sometimes justified, including fewer than one-in-six in Jordan (15%) and about one-in-ten in Tunisia (12 percent), Morocco (9 percent) and Iraq (7 percent).

In Afghanistan, a substantial minority of Muslims (39 percent) say that this form of violence against civilian targets is often or sometimes justifiable in defense of Islam. In Bangladesh, more than a quarter of Muslims (26 percent) take this view. Support for suicide bombing is lower in Pakistan (13 percent).

At least half of Muslims in most countries surveyed say they are concerned about religious extremist groups in their country, including two-thirds or more of Muslims in Egypt (67 percent), Tunisia (67 percent), Iraq (68 percent) Guinea Bissau (72 percent) and Indonesia (78 percent). On balance, more are worried about Islamic extremists than about Christian extremists.

The percentage of Muslims who say they want Shariah to be “the official law of the land” varies widely around the world, from fewer than one-in-ten in Azerbaijan (8 percent) to near unanimity in Afghanistan (99 percent). But solid majorities in most of the countries surveyed across the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia favor the establishment of Shariah, including 71 percent of Muslims in Nigeria, 72 percent in Indonesia, 74 percent in Egypt and 89 percent in the Palestinian territories.

At the same time, the survey finds that even in many countries where there is strong backing for Shariah, most Muslims favor religious freedom for people of other faiths. In Pakistan, for example, three-quarters of Muslims say that non-Muslims are very free to practice their religion, and fully 96 percent of those who share this assessment say it is “a good thing.” Yet

84 percent of Pakistani Muslims favor enshrining Shariah as official law. These seemingly divergent views are possible partly because most supporters of Shariah in Pakistan—as in many other countries—think Islamic law should apply only to Muslims. Moreover, Muslims around the globe have differing understandings of what Shariah means in practice.

The survey—which involved more than 38,000 face-to-face interviews in 80-plus languages with Muslims across Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa—shows that Muslims tend to be most comfortable with using Shariah in the domestic sphere, to settle family or property disputes. In most countries surveyed, there is considerably less support for severe punishments, such as cutting off the hands of thieves or executing people who convert from Islam to another faith. And even in the domestic sphere, Muslims differ widely on such questions as whether polygamy, divorce and family planning are morally acceptable and whether daughters should be able to receive the same inheritance as sons.

In most countries surveyed, majorities of Muslim women as well as men agree that a wife is always obliged to obey her husband.

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