

Muslim Publics Divided on Hamas and Hezbollah

Most Embrace a Role for Islam in Politics

December 2, 2010

Extremist groups Hamas and Hezbollah continue to receive mixed ratings from Muslim publics. However, opinions of al Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, are consistently negative; only in Nigeria do Muslims offer views that are, on balance, positive toward al Qaeda and bin Laden.

Hezbollah receives its most positive ratings in Jordan, where 55% of Muslims have a favorable view; a slim majority (52%) of Lebanese Muslims also support the group, which operates politically and militarily in their country.

But Muslim views of Hezbollah reflect a deep sectarian divide in Lebanon, where the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is threatening violence if a United Nations tribunal indicts Hezbollah members for the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. More than nine-in-ten (94%) Lebanese Shia support the organization, while an overwhelming majority (84%) of Sunnis in that country express unfavorable views.

In neighboring Egypt and Turkey, attitudes toward Hezbollah are generally negative. Just 30% of Muslims in Egypt, and even fewer (5%) in Turkey, offer favorable views of the Lebanon-based organization. Outside of Turkey and the Middle East, many Muslims cannot rate Hezbollah, but views are on balance positive among those who do offer an opinion of the group in Nigeria and Indonesia.

The survey, conducted April 12 to May 7 by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, finds that the Palestinian organization Hamas, which, like Hezbollah, has been classified as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and other Western governments, also receives mixed ratings across the Muslim publics surveyed. Jordanian Muslims express the most support -- 60% have a favorable view of Hamas -- while Muslims in Turkey offer the least positive ratings (9% favorable and 67% unfavorable). Opinions of Hamas are nearly evenly split in Egypt and Lebanon.

In most countries, views of Hamas and Hezbollah have changed little, if at all, since 2009. In Indonesia, however, more Muslims express favorable views of both groups now than did so last year; 39% now have positive views of Hamas, compared with 32% last year, and 43% have favorable opinions of Hezbollah, compared with 29% in 2009. And among Nigerian Muslims, favorable views of both Hamas and Hezbollah are now less common than they were in 2009 (49% vs. 58% and 45% vs. 59%, respectively).

While views of Hamas and Hezbollah are mixed, al Qaeda -- as well as its leader, Osama bin Laden -- receives overwhelmingly negative ratings in nearly all countries where the question was asked. More than nine-in-ten (94%) Muslims in Lebanon express negative opinions of al Qaeda, as do majorities of Muslims in Turkey (74%), Egypt (72%), Jordan (62%) and Indonesia (56%). Only in Nigeria do Muslims express positive views of al Qaeda; 49% have a favorable view and just 34% have an unfavorable view of bin Laden's organization. (Findings regarding opinions of al Qaeda and bin Laden were previously released in "Obama More Popular Abroad Than at Home, Global Image of U.S. Continues to Benefit," June 17, 2010.)

The survey also finds that Muslim publics overwhelmingly welcome Islamic influence over their countries' politics. In Egypt, Pakistan and Jordan, majorities of Muslims who say Islam is playing a large role in politics see this as a good thing, while majorities of those who say Islam is playing only a small role say this is bad for their country. Views of Islamic influence over politics are also positive in Nigeria, Indonesia, and Lebanon.

Turkish Muslims express more mixed views of the role Islam is playing in their country's political life. Of the 69% who say the religion plays a large role, 45% see it as good and 38% see it as bad for their country. Among the minority of Muslims who say Islam plays a small role in politics, 26% consider this to be good for Turkey and 33% say it is bad.

When asked for their views about democracy, majorities in most of the Muslim communities surveyed say that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. This view is especially widespread in Lebanon and in Turkey, where at least three-quarters of Muslims (81% and 76%, respectively) express a preference for democratic governance. Support for democracy is less common in Pakistan, but a plurality (42%) of

Views of Extremist Groups

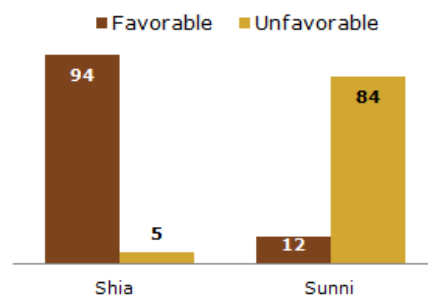
	% Favorable		
	Hezbollah	Hamas	al Qaeda
	%	%	%
Jordan	55	60	34
Lebanon	52	49	3
Nigeria	45	49	49
Indonesia	43	39	23
Egypt	30	49	20
Pakistan	19	18	--
Turkey	5	9	4

Based on Muslims only.

Pakistani views of al Qaeda not shown because the question was asked later in the survey, which may affect the comparability of results. For al Qaeda ratings in Pakistan, see "Concern About Extremist Threat Slips in Pakistan," released July 29, 2010.

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Sectarian Divide in Views of Hezbollah in Lebanon



PEW RESEARCH CENTER 7a.



Is It Good or Bad That Islam Plays a Large/Small Role in Politics?

	Among those who say Islam is playing a...			
	Large role		Small role	
	Good	Bad	Good	Bad
	%	%	%	%
Egypt	95	2	2	80
Indonesia	95	4	--	--
Pakistan	88	6	9	79
Nigeria	88	7	--	--
Lebanon	72	19	49	42
Jordan	53	37	2	91

Muslims in that country prefer democracy to other types of government; 15% of Pakistani Muslims say that, in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable, and 21% say that, for someone like them, the kind of government their country has does not matter.

Turkey	45	38	26	33
Based on Muslims only. The number of Muslims who say Islam is playing a small role in politics in Indonesia (N=83) and Nigeria (N=44) is too small to analyze.				
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Also of Note:

- Many Muslims see a struggle between those who want to modernize their country and Islamic fundamentalists. Only in Jordan and Egypt do majorities say there is no such struggle in their countries (72% and 61%, respectively).
- At least three-quarters of Muslims in Egypt and Pakistan say they would favor making each of the following the law in their countries: stoning people who commit adultery, whippings and cutting off of hands for crimes like theft and robbery and the death penalty for those who leave the Muslim religion. Majorities of Muslims in Jordan and Nigeria also favor these harsh punishments.
- Eight-in-ten Muslims in Pakistan say suicide bombing and other acts of violence against civilian targets in order to defend Islam from its enemies are never justified; majorities in Turkey (77%), Indonesia (69%) and Jordan (54%) share this view. Support for suicide bombing has declined considerably over the years. For example, while 74% of Muslims in Lebanon said these violent acts were at least sometimes justified in 2002, just 39% say that is the case now; double-digit declines have also occurred in Jordan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Indonesia.

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