

Book Reviews

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

By John L. Espisito and Dalia Mogahed. New York: Gallup Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-1-59562-017-0.

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Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think? is based on results of Gallup polling conducted among Muslims worldwide between 2001 and 2007. Its authors John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed explain, "With the random sampling method valid with a plus or minus 3-point margin of error.... In totality, we surveyed a sample representing more than 90 percent of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims making this the largest, the most comprehensive study of contemporary Muslims ever done" (p. xi). In Espisito's lecture on the Gallup poll at the International Islamic University Malaysia, the author tried to convey the message that the Bush administration's decision-makers in Washington have got it generally wrong while dealing with Muslims as part of the so-called "War on Terror" because of their ignorance of Muslims.

The findings of this book therefore, would go some way to correct their wrong view of Muslims if Washington decision-makers care to read the book. If they are pressed for time, they may read the essential message of the book available in an article entitled "The Battle for Muslims' Hearts and Minds" published in the *Middle East Policy* (vol. 14, no. 1, Spring (2007): 27-41).

John L. Esposito is a professor of religion and international affairs and of Islamic studies at Georgetown University and the founding director of Georgetown's Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for

Muslim-Christian Understanding in the Welsh School of Foreign Service. Dalia Mogahed is a senior analyst and executive director of the Gallup Centre for Muslim Studies. In a short (about 200 pages) book of only five chapters, the Gallup poll results presented in this book negate virtually every assertion about the Muslim world and Muslim views of the West that the Bush administration has incessantly talked about since 9/11 to justify its controversial policies in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world.

The book emphatically disowns the Bush administration's assertion that the main problem with Muslims is their rejection of American values such as respect for democracy, freedom of speech, right of women etc. The Gallup poll instead found that Washington's conflict with Islam is "more about policy than principle" (p. xi). Muslims around the world when asked what they liked about the West the response was its technology and democracy. Ironically, those are the two top responses that the Americans gave when asked the same question. When asked what they liked least about the West, the Muslims world-wide responded by saying it was the West's moral decay and breakdown of traditional values. Interestingly, the American respondents gave the same answer to the same question. The following are other key findings of Gallup data:

1. "Resentment against the West comes from what Muslims perceive as the West's hatred and denigration of Islam; the Western belief that Arabs and Muslims are inferior; and their (Muslims') fear of Western intervention, domination, or occupation" (p. 141).
2. "The primary cause of broad-based anger and anti-Americanism is not a clash of civilisations but the perceived effect of U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world" (p. 156).
3. "[The Gallup data shows that] contrary to what the "They Hate Our Freedom" thesis might predict, Muslims do not recommend or insist upon changes to Western culture or social norms as the path to better [Western-Muslim] relations... Rather they call on the West to show greater respect for Islam, and they emphasise policy-related issues [American interventionism, unqualified support for Israel, and protection for authoritarian Arab regimes]" (p. 159).

This reviewer shares Michael Scheuer's conclusion that Esposito and Mogahed have established a solid empirical basis for refuting the contentions of American political leaders in both Democratic and Republican parties that "Muslims hate us for who we are not for what we do." However, it has to be pointed out that mere publication of this book or other books of similar nature is unlikely to change these views of U.S. political leaders about Muslims. Robert Pape's empirical study *Dying to Win: the Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005) demonstrated that American intervention in the Muslim world is a key contributor to suicide attacks on U.S. interests. But the "they-hate-our-freedom" chorus is still chanted by American leaders, and have been used during the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign.

Neo-conservatives like Norman Podhoretz and George Weigel continue to scourge their countrymen for being too stupid to see that all U.S. interventions abroad are saintly and only medieval Islamofascists could oppose them. Given this context, one would readily agree with an exasperated Scheuer's comment: "On no other foreign policy issue since the Cold War's end has the truth been so easy to establish on the basis of hard facts but so hard for Americans to see – primarily because their leaders eagerly distort or ignore the truth." (<http://www.antimar.com/scheuer/?art...>)

Esposito and Mogahed have also described Muslims as not having a monopoly for terrorist acts. They substantiate their argument with the following facts:

- A recent study shows that only 46 percent of Americans think that "bombing and other attacks intentionally aimed at civilians" are "never justified," while 24 percent believe these attacks are "often or sometimes justified."
- Contrast this with data taken the same year from some of the largest majority Muslim nations, in which 74 percent of respondents in Indonesia agree that terrorist attacks are "never justified,"; in Pakistan, that figure is 86 percent; in Bangladesh, 81 percent; and in Iran, 80 percent.
- Similarly, 6 percent of the American public thinks that attacks in which civilians are targets are "completely justified."

There are people in the United States who have been quick to demonise Islam. Some equate Islam with terrorism. Hate drawings have depicted not Osama bin Laden or al-Qaeda figures but the venerated Prophet Muḥammad (SAW). This appears as “a direct attack on Islam” and is “a denigration of faith.” However, Muslims should take some solace from the fact that of Britons polled, 57 percent believe that free speech protection should not allow newspapers to print pictures of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW). There is no doubt that framing the debate about the hate drawings of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW) in absolute terms played directly into the hands of some autocratic Muslim rulers who charge that Western democracy is anti-religious and incompatible with Islam.

The Gallup poll found that the majority of Muslims around the world do not want their religious leaders to draft constitutions or rule the country. But they do favour *Shari‘ah* as a source of legislation. This is not due to Muslims’ distrust of religious leaders but largely because Muslims do not support a theocratic government ruled by religious leaders. Nevertheless, it is true that most religious leaders are somewhat detached from reality and, therefore, may not understand the complexities involved in drafting a constitution for a desired political system.

This book is a must for those who want to know what the majority of Muslims around the world think. It is highly recommended for those in the United States who still think that Muslims around the world hate America for its freedom and democracy.

Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization. By Akbar Ahmed. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007, pp. 323. ISBN-10: 0815701322.

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Journey into Islam is an account of Akbar Ahmad’s “anthropological excursion” of countries in the Middle East, South Asia and East