

Egyptians want advice, not rule, of clerics

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Four months after the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a new Gallup survey says a majority of Egyptians want religious leaders to advise the nation's officials but they do not want a theocracy.

About seven in 10 Egyptians said clerics should advise national leaders on legislation. In comparison, 14 percent said religious leaders should have full authority in creating laws and 9 percent said they should have no authority.

The findings, announced Tuesday (June 7), come from the United Arab Emirates-based Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, which monitors attitudes of Muslims worldwide.

Even as they seek a limited advisory role for clergy, most Egyptians (67 percent) want religious freedom as a provision in a new constitution. A much higher percentage (92 percent) say freedom of speech should be included, and slightly more than half want a new constitution to include freedom of assembly.

The report, titled "Egypt From Tahrir to Transition," notes that despite sectarian violence in the country following Mubarak's resignation, Egyptians are among the most religiously tolerant in Gallup's ranking of populations in the Middle East and North Africa.

"Two-thirds of Egyptians say they would have no objections if someone of another faith moved in next door to them, second only to Lebanon in the region," the report states.

The findings are based on in-person interviews with about 1,000 people ages 15 and older in late March and early April, and have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 to 3.5 percentage points.