

U.S. Muslims more moderate than Muslims worldwide

by [Omar Sacirbey](#) in the [May 29, 2013](#) issue

Muslims in America are much less inclined to support suicide bombing than Muslims abroad and are more likely to believe that people of other faiths can attain eternal life in heaven, according to a new report released by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The World's Muslims report looks at Muslim views in seven categories: Islamic law; religion and politics; morality; women; relations among Muslims; interfaith relations; and religion, science and pop culture. It has a special section on U.S. Muslims.

Of the countries surveyed, only in the United States did a majority of Muslims—56 percent—believe people of other faiths can go to heaven. Among U.S. Christians that figure is about 64 percent. U.S. Muslims are also more likely than Muslims abroad to believe in evolution, sharing views that are closer to those of American Christians.

On suicide bombing, 81 percent of U.S. Muslims said it was never justified, 7 percent said it was justified to “defend Islam,” and 1 percent said it was “sometimes justified.”

Globally, most Muslims also reject suicide bombing, although significant minorities in several countries say such acts are at least sometimes justified, including 26 percent of Muslims in Bangladesh, 29 percent in Egypt, and 39 percent in Afghanistan.

At least half of Muslims in most countries surveyed say they worry about religious extremists in their own country, including two-thirds or more of Muslims in Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq and Indonesia.

The percentage of Muslims who say they want Shari’a, or Islamic law, to be “the official law of the land” varies widely around the world, from fewer than 8 percent in Azerbaijan to 99 percent in Afghanistan. “Solid majorities” in most predominantly Muslim countries surveyed, however, favor the establishment of Islamic law. (The report did not ask the same question of American Muslims.)

That view did not preclude religious tolerance, the survey found, as most Muslims also favor religious freedom for people of other faiths.

The reason for the variation? “Muslims have different understandings of what Shari’a means in practice,” said James Bell, the Pew Research Center’s director of international survey research, adding that support for Shari’a cut across age, gender and economic groups.

In most countries surveyed, majorities of Muslim women and men agreed that a wife is always obliged to obey her husband, including more than 90 percent in Morocco, Tunisia, Afghanistan and Indonesia.

The 157-page report is based on more than 38,000 face-to-face interviews conducted in more than 80 languages with self-identifying Muslims in 39 countries and territories. The report combines findings from a 2011-2012 survey of 24 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe and a 2008-2009 survey of 15 other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. —RNS

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