

Poll Finds Muslim Women Admire Western Values, But Don't Want to Imitate Them

By Stephanie Ho
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The Gallup Organization has found many Muslim women admire western values, but do not necessarily want them applied in their culture. These findings come from analysis of data Gallup collected in its 2005 poll of the Muslim World, with a focus on the attitudes of women in eight predominantly Muslim countries.

The data came from face-to-face interviews with women in eight countries, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Gallup Muslim Studies executive director Dalia Mogahed calls this the first wave of polling the organization is doing in Muslim countries. "By the end of 2006, we will have interviewed Muslims in up to 40 Muslim countries, covering 90 percent of the global Muslim population," she said.

Of the poll's findings, Mogahed said strong majorities of Muslim women in nearly all of the countries surveyed believe they deserve the right to vote, the right to drive, the right to work outside the home and the right to serve in government. She said many respondents also expressed admiration for political freedoms and legal gender equality they see in the west.

But Mogahed added that, while the respondents expressed admiration for some western values, they did not consider these values necessary for the development of their society. "Muslim women did not choose 'adopting western values will help Muslim progress.' In fact, this statement was least often associated with the Muslim world. The statement most often associated with the Muslim world was "attachment to spiritual and moral values is crucial to their progress," she said.

She said Muslim women have a perception of women in the western societies as free, but surrounded by and degraded by things like promiscuity and pornography. "While American and western women enjoy legal gender equality, there is a certain cultural degradation of women that they don't favor. So, there are certain things that are admired in the west, but other aspects that are not, that they don't want. This perception is likely taken from Hollywood films, which are, of course, consumed readily in the Muslim world," she said.

Mogahed also cautioned that Muslim women need to be careful because those who are considered too pro-western could also face a backlash. "Associating gender equality with the west or with western values will actually alienate the very women, we're trying, or one might be trying, to reach, and, at the same time, actually energize those who oppose women's rights in the Muslim world, in the name of cultural guardianship," she said.

A 2005 Gallup Poll found that many American women named gender inequality as the thing they admire least about the Muslim world. Mogahed said for Muslim women, gender issues are not a top priority, compared with what she described as other issues of economic and political freedom.