Muslim Publics Oppose Al Qaeda's Terrorism, But Agree With Its Goal of Driving US Forces Out

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Support for Including Islamist Groups in Elections

[Full Report (PDF)](#)
[Questionnaire/Methodology (PDF)](#)

A study of public opinion in predominantly Muslim countries reveals that very large majorities continue to renounce the use of attacks on civilians as a means of pursuing political goals. At the same time large majorities agree with al Qaeda's goal of pushing the United States to remove its military forces from all Muslim countries and substantial numbers, in some cases majorities, approve of attacks on US troops in Muslim countries.

(Photo: [Ed Yourdon](#))

People in majority-Muslim countries express mixed feelings about al Qaeda and other Islamist groups that use violence, perhaps due to this combination of support for al Qaeda's goals and disapproval of its terrorist methods.

However large majorities support allowing Islamist groups to organize parties and participate in democratic elections. In some majority-Muslim countries, Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are forbidden from participating in elections.
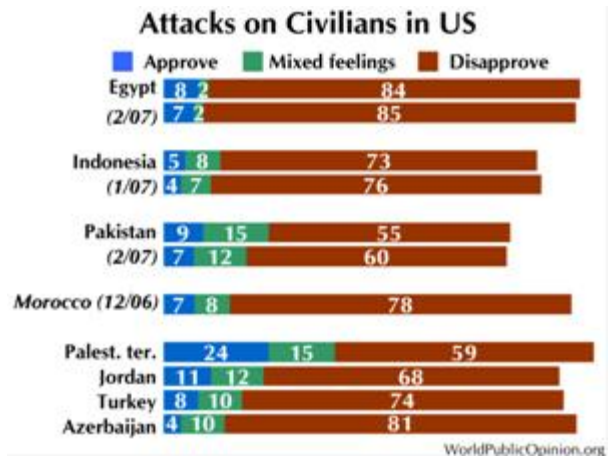
Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, comments, "The US faces a conundrum. US efforts to fight terrorism with an expanded military presence in Muslim countries appear to have elicited a backlash and to have bred some sympathy for al Qaeda, even as most reject its terrorist methods."

The survey is part of an ongoing study of Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia, with additional polling in Turkey, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Azerbaijan and Nigeria. It was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org with support from the START Consortium at the University of Maryland.

In nearly all nations polled more than seven in 10 say they disapprove of attacks on American civilians. "Bombings and assassinations that are carried out to achieve political or religious goals" are rejected as "not justified at all" by large majorities ranging from 67

to 89 percent. There is a growing belief that attacks on civilians are ineffective, with approximately half now saying that such attacks are hardly ever effective.
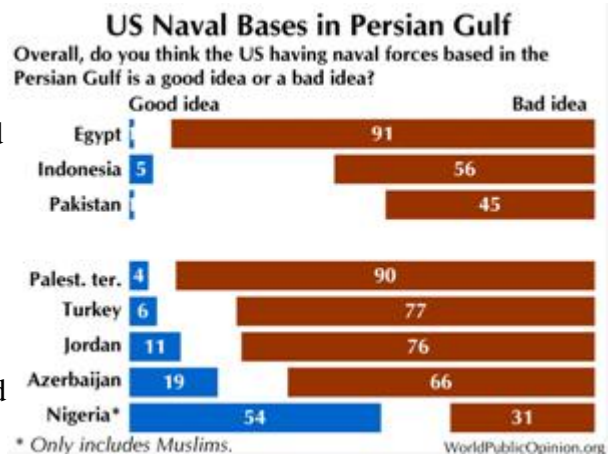
At the same time large majorities endorse the goal of al Qaeda to "push the US to remove its bases and its military forces from all Islamic countries," including 87 percent of Egyptians, 64 percent of Indonesians, and 60 percent of Pakistanis.

Attacks on Civilians in US

	Approve	Mixed feelings	Disapprove
Egypt	8	2	84
(2/07)	7	2	85
Indonesia	5	8	73
(1/07)	4	7	76
Pakistan	9	15	55
(2/07)	7	12	60
Morocco (12/06)	7	8	78
Palest. ter.	24	15	59
Jordan	11	12	68
Turkey	8	10	74
Azerbaijan	4	10	81

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Asked specifically about the US naval forces based in the Persian Gulf, there is widespread opposition across the Muslim world. Across eight Muslim publics on average, 66 percent said it was a bad idea; only 13 percent called it a good idea. Opposition is largest in Egypt (91%) and among the Palestinians (90%), but opposition is also large in America's NATO ally Turkey (77%).

Significant numbers approve of attacks on US troops based in Muslim countries, presumably as a means to apply pressure for their removal. Respondents were asked about US troops based in Iraq, the Persian Gulf, and Afghanistan. Large majorities approve of attacks in Egypt (78-83%), the Palestinian territories (87-90%), and Jordan (66-72%). In Turkey and Pakistan views are more divided. However, only minorities support attacks in Indonesia and Azerbaijan.

US Naval Bases in Persian Gulf

Overall, do you think the US having naval forces based in the Persian Gulf is a good idea or a bad idea?

	Good idea	Bad idea
Egypt		91
Indonesia	5	56
Pakistan		45
Palest. ter.	4	90
Turkey	6	77
Jordan	11	76
Azerbaijan	19	66
Nigeria*	54	31

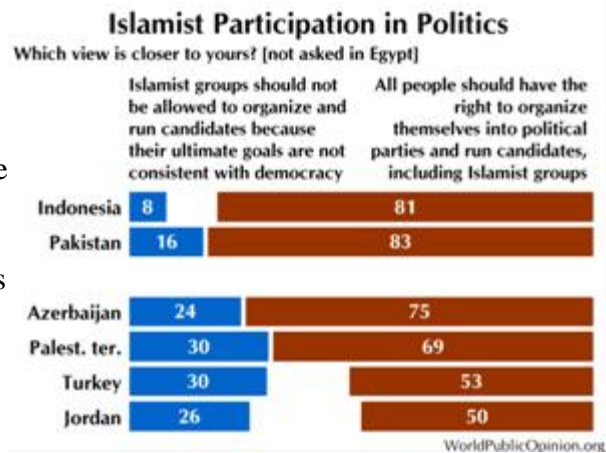* Only includes Muslims.   WorldPublicOpinion.org

Opposition to US military presence appears to be related to largely negative views of US goals in relation to the Muslim world. A key belief is that the US has goals hostile to Islam itself. Large majorities ranging from 62 percent in Indonesia to 87 percent in Egypt say they believe that the United States seeks "to weaken and divide the Islamic world."

Many also perceive the US having goals of economic domination. Large majorities say that it is a US goal to "maintain control over the oil resources of the Middle East" ranging from 62 percent in Pakistan to nine in 10 in Egypt, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Jordan, and the Palestinian territories.

Views of al Qaeda are complex. Majorities agree with nearly all of al Qaeda's goals to change US behavior in the Muslim world, to promote Islamist governance, and to preserve and affirm Islamic identity. However, as mentioned, only minorities say they

approve of al Qaeda's attacks on Americans. Consistent with this apparent ambivalence, views of groups that attack Americans and Bin Laden are mixed or lukewarm.

Support for Islamist groups participating in the political process, though, is quite strong. Respondents were reminded that "in some countries there is a debate about whether Islamist political groups should be allowed to organize parties and run candidates in elections," and then asked to choose between two statements. Majorities or pluralities in every country chose the statement "All people should have the right to organize themselves into political parties and run candidates, including Islamist groups," including Pakistan

Islamist Participation in Politics
Which view is closer to yours? [not asked in Egypt]

	Islamist groups should not be allowed to organize and run candidates because their ultimate goals are not consistent with democracy	All people should have the right to organize themselves into political parties and run candidates, including Islamist groups
Indonesia	8	81
Pakistan	16	83
Azerbaijan	24	75
Palest. ter.	30	69
Turkey	30	53
Jordan	26	50

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(83%), Indonesia (81%), Azerbaijan (75%), Palestinian territories (69%), Turkey (53%), and Jordan (50%). Few chose the statement "Islamist groups should not be allowed to organize and run candidates because their ultimate goals are not consistent with democracy."

In all Muslim publics polled, majorities see US support for democracy in Muslim countries as conditional at best. Only very small minorities say "the US favors democracy in Muslim countries whether or not the government is cooperative with the US." The most common response is that the US favors democracy only if the government is cooperative, while nearly as many say that the US simply opposes democracy in the Muslim countries.

The surveys were conducted July through September 2008. As part of an ongoing study, in-depth surveys were conducted in Egypt (1,101 interviews), Indonesia (1,120 interviews), and Pakistan (1,200 interviews). This research was supported by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland. Additional polling, as part of a WorldPublicOpinion.org network survey, included Azerbaijan (sample size 600), Jordan (583), the Palestinian territories (638), and Turkey (1,023). All of these samples were national probability samples conducted through face-to-face interviewing. Margins of error range from +/- 3 to 4 percentage points. Muslims in Nigeria were also polled.

For more information, see the full report (PDF) or the questionnaire (PDF).