

The Western Perceptions of Islam and Muslim Perceptions of the West: Encounter and Dialogue

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Abstract

There is very important and exaggerated Perceptions on Islam among the Western people and Intellectuals in the West. This view has effected on Muslim's view on themselves and "Others". To understand the nature of these percestions, we have launched a survey in Indonesia, Pakestan, Egypt, and Kazakhstan. The methodology of the survey in face to face interview. The object of the survey is to show the nature of these perceptions.

In terms of our analysis of the survey, the Muslims in general were very optimistic and positive about the influence of Islam in the furure. A large majority of them saw Islam gaining influence in the world affairs. The evidence also showed that religious piety was generally positively associated with the view that Islam will gain influence in future. This perception, together with the widespread view that the governments of the major western countries were anti-Islamic, raises important questions about the nature of Muslim political consciousness and public opinion in the Muslim countries. This perception contrasts sharply with the Western perception, which sees Islam as characterized by ideas of aggression, brutality, irrationality, fanaticism and medieval backwardness. These stereotypes of Muslim countries sharpen the polarization between the West and Muslim world.

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Introduction

After reviewing some of the key features of the perceptions of Islam in western debate, this paper will focus on the Muslim perceptions of the 'other'. The comparison of two competing discourses reveals an increasing moral polarization. Such a polarization has significant implications for global stability and peace. These conditions clearly demonstrate a need for civilizational dialogue and not a clash of civilizations as suggested by some commentators.

The Western Perceptions of Islam

In much of the Western debate, Islam is seen as a monolithic religion often equated with fundamentalism and characterised by ideas of aggression, brutality, fanaticism, irrationality, medieval backwardness and misogyny [1]. The Western media is replete with terms such as 'the Islamic threat', 'the sword of Islam', the roots of Muslim rage', the 'green peril' and 'Islam's new battlecry'. The Islamic world in the Western discourse is also seen as the polar opposite to the West. The Western discourse that highlights the Islamic threat perceives Muslims as crazed Islamic zealots, warlike, conquest-hungry and anti-Christianity.

In his book *'De l'Islam en general et du monde moderne en particulier'* the French author Barreau writes 'What could be described as the "great humiliation" and what is indeed present in the basic disposition of the Muslims, can be explained by the origin of their religion: it is warlike, conquest-hungry and full of contempt for the unbeliever' [2]. Islam is seen as the aggressor against the West, and embodying a theology of conquest and victory and no theology of defeat. According to the American newsmagazine *Time* 'this is the dark side of Islam which shows its face in

violence and terrorism, intended to overthrow modernizing, more secular regimes and harm the Western nations which support them'.

The concept of holy war (jihad) often crops up in these accounts. By linking concepts such as aggression, jihad and so on with Islam, the Western experts extend the scope of Islamic threat from the religious to the cultural and psychological domains as well, and at the same time rule out any possibility of communication and dialogue from the very outset. Instead they stress the irreconcilable differences between the West and Islamic countries [3].

Islam and Religious Fundamentalism

Many Westerners see Christianity not as a religion but as a cultural influence, but when it comes to Islam it is hardly seen as a cultural category, but as a medieval religion that rejects modernity and produces fanatics and fundamentalists. The pronouncements of Islamic fundamentalists are seen as the only possibility and are transformed into Islamic injunctions without any critical examination of Islamic norms and injunctions [4].

These negative stereotypes have become a part of collective western consciousness. For example, 75 percent of French people questioned in a recent survey, thought that the word fanatical best applied to Islam. The former US ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick is reported to have questioned the ability of Arabs to make rational decisions: 'the Arab world is the only part of the world where I have been shaken in my conviction that if you let the people decide they will make fundamentally rational decisions.' These types of stereotype sharpen the polarization between East and West. As a result, the modern West is seen as progressive, rational, enlightened and secular, and the

backward Muslim world more or less crazy, unpredictable and dangerous, fanatical and fundamentalist [5].

In the Persian Gulf war, Western dominance was demonstrated in its ability to kill more efficiently. To justify the military action and many innocent victims of this war, stereotypes which portrayed Arabs as inferior and therefore of less value were evoked. 'We caught them with their pants down. They were still in their sleeping bags. It was just like shooting turkeys' was how the American company commander Jess Farington expressed himself after a helicopter gunship attack on Iraqi positions during the Gulf war. War was seen as turkey shooting, people as turkeys. Does this illustrate the civilizing superiority of the West? It only does so if we measure civilizing superiority in terms of standards of modern technology.

Some commentators have suggested that the need to demonise the Islamic world is related to the demise of the Cold War enemy of the West – communism and the USSR. According to political scientist Franz Nuscheler, the loss of the cold war enemy has led to a search for a replacement. Islam has presented itself as one, particularly since the Persian Gulf War. Other commentators have suggested that the anti-Islamic image of the enemy is part of a more extensive feat of the third world. Dangers and threats that are more often of a political or cultural nature rather than a military one also seem to come from the poor 'south'.

The Third world as a whole, and not just the Muslim world, is seen as a place of instability and insecurity of tribal and civil wars, incomprehensible violence, disease and many other evils. These regions of poverty, misery and unrest stand in contrast to the apparently well and clearly-ordered West [6]. The fear of the Third world is in a certain sense a fear of poverty, a fear of being

infected, again by its evils. This is another reason why migration from Islamic countries is perceived to be so threatening to the prosperous, peaceful and culturally different West.

The treatment of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran in Australia, Western Europe and the United States, and policies now being formulated towards these unfortunate people are an eloquent testimony to the negative perception of Muslims in the Western countries. The policy towards and treatment of refugees is part of the Western image of the 'South' as 'the enemy', which is not only strengthening prejudice, but is also breeding racism and creating a fortress mentality in Western countries. As Nuscheler says, 'it is not the West's military security, not its affluence that are threatened, it is its humanitarianism'.

Muslim Perceptions of the 'Other'

This section of the paper will focus on two questions that broadly relate to the Muslim attitudes towards the 'Other'. Firstly, it will explore Muslim perceptions of how influential Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Atheism will be in the future. Secondly, it will examine Muslim perceptions of the attitudes of the governments of some of the major non-Muslim countries in the world towards Islam. The focus on Christianity, Judaism and Atheism was prompted by their historical as well as contemporary relevance to the debates about the present and future civilizational conflicts in the world [7].

The Muslim perceptions of the attitudes of some of the major non-Muslim countries indirectly expand the discussion by including other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism that are practiced in some of the countries included in this investigation. A secondary

reason for undertaking this analysis was to explore the phenomenon that can be described as 'moral polarization'. By moral polarization I refer to the widespread view held by many Muslims that in the modern world only Islam offers and promotes a real moral and ethical alternative to permissiveness, consumerism, hedonism, moral relativism and individualism associated with and promoted by the modern Western cultures. Indirectly, therefore, this paper will seek to ascertain the extent of this moral polarization from the empirical evidence. As I have indicated earlier the existence of moral polarization has important consequences for the relationship between the West and the Islamic world.

The data about the perception of the 'Other' was collected from the respondents surveyed in a multi-country study of Muslim religiosity. The respondents were asked how they felt about the future of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and atheistic beliefs. They were asked to indicate which one of the following responses came closest to expressing their opinion: (1) It will probably gain more and more influence; (2) It will continue about the way it is; (3) It will probably lose some influence; (4) It will probably grow rather weak; (5) Do not know. In the analysis response categories three and four were collapsed into one category 'lose influence'. There were very few 'Do not know' responses. Only those who had chosen the reconstituted response categories one to three were included in the analysis.

For ascertaining whether respondents perceived some of the non-Muslim countries as pro-Islamic or anti-Islamic the respondents were asked the following question: What kind of attitudes do you think the governments of the following countries have towards

Islam? The list of countries included the following: the United States, The United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia, China, Australia, Singapore, Japan and India. They were asked to indicate which one of the following responses came closest to expressing their views: pro-Islamic, anti-Islamic, Do not know. The following discussion will first focus on the finds pertaining to the respondents' perceptions of the future of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Atheism followed by the findings pertaining to the perception of the attitudes of the governments of different countries towards Islam.

Methodology

The data for the study were gathered through an international study of Muslim religiosity in four countries namely, Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Kazakhstan. The initial intention was to interview a sample of the elite and the general public. The elite were to consist of religious elite and the elite from other spheres of the society. However, due to technical, political, logistical, ethical and financial reasons, such a sample could not be achieved in any country. The survey fieldwork in each country was carried out with the collaboration of local social science research institutes.

Because of the highly sensitive nature of the issues being explored in the study, the investigators had to rely upon "snowball" and purposive methods of sample selection. This situation required a redefinition of the elite. After considerable consultation with local colleagues, it was concluded that the only way to capture the elite dimension was to focus on highly educated groups occupying professional, economic, social, religious, cultural and bureaucratic positions in

the mainstream social structures of their respective societies. The sample in each country was therefore stratified by those who were active in major religious organizations and highly educated respondents who were actively involved in professional, business, bureaucratic and cultural organizations. About 30 percent of each sample was chosen from the general public. In each group, between 20 and 45 percent of the respondents were women.

The fieldwork in Indonesia was carried out by the Population studies Centre of Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. In Pakistan, it was carried out by the Social Science Research Centre, University of the Punjab, Lahore. In Egypt, it was carried out by the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Social Development, Cairo. Finally, in Kazakhstan, it was carried out by the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, Almaty. General socio-demographic profiles of the four samples are given in Table 1. The fieldwork for the study was carried out from November 1996 to October 1998. The data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which took on average about 90 minutes to complete.

The survey questionnaire was translated into Indonesian, Urdu, Arabic, Russian and Kazakh by experts in these languages, and key parts of the questionnaire were then back-translated into English to minimize translation bias. In most cases the questionnaire was given to the selected respondents for completion but the interviewers were available for clarifications or questions. Whenever and wherever it was or became necessary, the questionnaire was administered through a face-to-face interview. Almost all of the interviewers were graduates in social sciences. A field supervisor checked each questionnaire for completion. The completed questionnaires were coded

in the country where the data were entered and initial frequency tables were run. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Sample Profiles

| Countries | Pakistan | Indonesia | Egypt | Kazakhstan |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 79.1 | 74.3 | 75.8 | 53.8 |
| Female | 20.9 | 25.7 | 24.2 | 46.2 |
| Age | | | | |
| <25 | 17.2 | 20.3 | 16.0 | 20.1 |
| 26-40 | 47.9 | 39.5 | 54.6 | 39.9 |
| 41-55 | 22.5 | 28.9 | 19.1 | 25.0 |
| >56 | 12.4 | 11.3 | 10.3 | 15.3 |
| Level of Education | | | | |
| Less than High school | 5.6 | 10.8 | 14.0 | 14.0 |
| HS/Some College | 8.9 | 21.6 | 20.1 | 39.6 |
| University/Professional | 82.5 | 66.4 | 65.9 | 45.1 |
| Other | 3.0 | 1.2 | — | 1.3 |

As in any study of this type, problems arose. They were resolved in appropriate ways by the country coordinators in consultation with me. The most serious problem encountered was in Egypt, where, due to media and other pressures, the study was stopped before all the interviews could be completed. Instead of the expected 1,000 interviews only 788 were completed. In each country some minor changes were made to some questions in the questionnaire in accordance with the advice of the local coordinators. These changes were made to accommodate local sensitivities and they did not compromise the overall objectives of the study.

Findings

The findings about the perception of the future of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Atheism are reported in Table 2. In Indonesia and Pakistan an overwhelming majority of the respondents saw the influence of Islam increasing in the future. In Kazakhstan and Egypt comparatively smaller proportions expressed the same view. The reason was that a much higher proportion of respondents in these countries compared to Indonesia and Pakistan thought that the influence of Islam would remain the same. If we combine the response categories, 'stay the same' and 'gain influence' then the evidence clearly indicates that a majority of the respondents perceived the influence of Islam in future increasing or remaining the same. Only in Egypt about one out of every ten respondents said that Islam would lose influence. A detailed analysis of the Egyptian data revealed that most of the respondents who saw a decline in the influence of Islam in future were men (only 4 percent of Egyptian women compared with 17 percent of men saw a decline in the influence of Islam in the future). In this respect the Egyptian respondents differed from the other three countries in which there were no significant differences between men and women.

Table 2. Respondents' Perceptions of the Future of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Atheism in Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt and Kazakhstan (%)

| Indonesia | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Islam | Christianity | Judaism | Atheism |
| Lose influence | 2 | 37 | 68 | 83 |
| Stay the same | 5 | 51 | 29 | 12 |
| Gain influence | 93 | 12 | 4 | 5 |

Table 2. Continue

| Pakistan | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Islam | Christianity | Judaism | Atheism |
| Lose influence | 2 | 57 | 68 | 50 |
| Stay the same | 4 | 22 | 12 | 6 |
| Gain influence | 94 | 21 | 20 | 44 |

| Kazakhstan | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Islam | Christianity | Judaism | Atheism |
| Lose influence | 4 | 15 | 53 | 72 |
| Stay the same | 18 | 68 | 41 | 25 |
| Gain influence | 78 | 17 | 6 | 4 |

| Egypt | | | | |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Islam | Christianity | Judaism | Atheism |
| Lose influence | 12 | 15 | 3 | 11 |
| Stay the same | 29 | 27 | 11 | 32 |
| Gain influence | 59 | 58 | 86 | 57 |

There was a significant variation in the responses about the future of Christianity. In Indonesia the majority of the respondents (51%) said that the influence of Christianity will remain the same and 37 percent said that it would lose influence. Twelve percent were of the view that Christianity will gain influence. In Pakistan the majority of the respondents (57%) saw Christianity as losing influence and 22 percent thought that it will remain the same and about the same proportion thought that its influence will increase in the

future. Among the Kazak respondents 68 percent said that its influence would remain unchanged and 17 percent thought that it would gain influence followed by about the same proportion who said that it would lose influence. The Egyptian pattern was very different from the general pattern of responses described above. Unlike the Indonesian, Pakistani and Kazak respondents, the majority of the Egyptian respondents (58%) said that Christianity would gain influence with another 27 percent expressing the view that it will remain unchanged.

The perception of Judaism was similar to that of Christianity. In Indonesia and Pakistan 68 percent of respondents expected Judaism to lose influence and a slightly lower proportion in Kazakhstan expressed the same view. But compared with Indonesia and Kazakhstan significantly more Pakistanis said that it would gain influence. The Egyptian responses were once again strikingly different from the other three countries. An overwhelming majority of Egyptians (86%) were of the opinion that Judaism will gain influence in the future. Only a small minority (3%) said that it would lose influence.

The future of Atheism was viewed differently. In Indonesia and Kazakhstan a large majority saw its influence declining and only a small proportion said that the influence of Atheism would increase. In Pakistan while 50 percent of respondents said the influence of Atheism would decline, a very significant proportion (44%) also saw Atheism gaining influence. The Egyptian perception of Atheism was similar to that of Christianity with majority viewing its influence to increase and a small percentage saying that it will decline. About one third of the Egyptian respondents said that its influence would remain unchanged.

Further analysis of the data showed no significant effect of gender, age, education and sample types on the attitudes of Indonesia respondents towards Islam, Christianity and Atheism. The only exception to this was that the more educated were less likely to say that Judaism will lose influence but still the majority (64%) with university education said that Judaism will lose influence in the future. In Pakistan the above mentioned independent variables did not influence the opinion about the future of Islam but were found to have some effect on the attitudes towards other religions. Pakistani women were significantly less likely to say that Christianity, Judaism and Atheism will lose influence than Pakistani men and more likely to say that they will gain influence. In Pakistan, additionally, more educated respondents were more likely to say that Atheism will lose influence and less likely to say that it will gain influence compared with the less educated.

In Kazakhstan significantly more educated respondents saw Islam gaining influence in the future compared with their compatriots with lower educational attainments. Majority of the Kazak saw the influence of Christianity to remain unchanged but women and younger respondents were more inclined to say that its influence would increase in the future. The Kazak Muslims were equally divided about the future of Judaism. About half thought that its influence will decline but another half did not see much change in its future role. However, majority of the Kazaks saw the influence of Atheism declining. This view was especially pronounced among older respondents and university graduates.

The majority of Egyptian Muslims, like the Muslims from Indonesia, Pakistan and Kazakhstan, also saw Islam gaining influence in the future. This view was

much more widely held by Egyptian women than men. For example, 79 percent of women expressed this view whereas the corresponding percentage for men was only 53. Another feature of the Egyptian data was that compared with Muslim professionals and public a significantly larger proportion of the religious activists saw the influence of Islam to decline. Egypt was the only country displaying this pattern and this suggests that among Egyptian social groups there was considerable polarization of views about the future direction of the role of Islam in Egypt as well as in the world. Another unique feature of the Egyptian data was that a majority of the respondents (60%) saw the influence of Christianity and Atheism increasing and even a larger majority (86%) saw Judaism gaining more influence. These views were generally much more widely expressed by the more educated respondents as well as those who were religious activists.

These perceptions showed that compared with their fellow Muslims from the other three countries the Egyptian Muslims held very different views about the future of Christianity, Judaism and Atheism. Not only that, but also these views were more widely subscribed to by religious activists. If this pattern represents a general pattern then it would suggest that comparatively speaking the Egyptians take a much more pluralistic view of the future religious and ideological develop-

ments and that the internal evolution of the Egyptian society may follow a different pattern than the other three countries. One feature of this may be greater polarization among Egyptian Muslims leading to a different pattern of religious activism compared with the other countries.

Perceptions of the 'Other' and Muslim Religious Piety

An investigation of the relationship between the perception of the 'Other' and Muslim religious piety showed that the ideological dimension of Muslim Piety and the response that Islam will gain influence in the future were statistically positively and significantly correlated in Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Egypt and positively, although not significantly correlated in Pakistan. The Ritualistic dimension of piety was, in statistical terms, correlated positively in Indonesia, Pakistan and Kazakhstan but negatively – although in statistical terms not significantly – in Egypt (See Table 3). This negative relationship, as mentioned above, though not significant was unexpected but it does confirm the observation made earlier that in Egypt the perception of the future roles of different religions was markedly different compared with the other three countries.

Table 3. Correlations between the Ideological and Ritualistic Dimensions of Piety and the Future Role of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Atheism

| | Indonesia | Pakistan | Kazakhstan | Egypt |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----------|------------|--------|
| Islam | | | | |
| Ideological dimension of piety | .084* | .047 | .128** | .075* |
| Ritualistic dimension of piety | .062* | .133** | .114** | -.057 |
| Christianity | | | | |
| Ideological dimension of piety | -.036 | -.063* | -.084* | .205** |
| Ritualistic dimension of piety | -.039 | .042 | -.113** | .278** |
| Judaism | | | | |
| Ideological dimension of piety | .017 | -.069* | -.007 | .162** |
| Ritualistic dimension of piety | .031 | .069* | -.105* | .182** |
| Atheism | | | | |
| Ideological dimension of piety | -.101** | -.095** | -.122** | .067 |
| Ritualistic dimension of piety | .00 | .009 | -.149** | .064 |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The relationship between the ideological dimension of piety and the response that Christianity will gain influence in future was negatively correlated in all countries except Egypt where the relationship was positive and statistically significant. The same pattern of relationship was observed between ritualistic piety and Christianity gaining greater influence except that in Pakistan the relationship was also positive but not statistically significant. The correlation between Judaism gaining more influence and the two dimensions was more complex. In Egypt it was positive and statistically significant. In Pakistan and Kazakhstan it was negative but statistically significant only in Pakistan. In Indonesia the correlation between the ideological dimension and Judaism gaining greater influence was positive but not significant. The correlation between such perceptions of Judaism and the ritualistic piety was positive and statistically significant

in Pakistan and Egypt but not in Indonesia. It was negatively correlated in Kazakhstan. The correlation between the two dimensions of piety and Atheism gaining more influence in the future was, in general, negative in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan and positive but not statistically significant in Egypt.

The above evidence lends itself to the following broad conclusion. In general Muslims' perception of the 'self' is very positive. That is to say that they see Islam gaining greater influence nationally and internationally in the future. Their perception of the 'Other', on the other hand, is markedly different. In Indonesia, Pakistan and Kazakhstan the respondents generally saw the influence of Christianity, Judaism and Atheism declining or at best remaining the same. The exception to this pattern was Egypt where the respondents thought that Christianity, Judaism and Atheism would also gain influence in the future.

These national differences in the perceptions of the 'Other' would suggest that the dynamics of relationship between Islam and Christianity, Judaism and Atheism are going to follow a complex pattern, which would be shaped in part by nationally grounded social factors. The interesting question, which unfortunately cannot be answered by the available data but needs further investigation, is what social factors are instrumental in producing the observed different patterns in the perception of the 'Other'? This evidence, however, would suggest that future relationships between Islam and the West are likely to experience periodic political and social tensions and conflicts. This should provide a challenging opportunity for those individuals and organizations interested in promoting harmonious relationships between the two major world civilizations.

Muslim Perceptions of the Major Countries

The Muslim perceptions of the 'Other' were further explored through a question that inquired about the respondent's opinion about the attitudes of some of the

major non-Muslim countries towards Islam. The respondents were asked: "What kind of attitudes do you think the governments of the following countries have towards Islam?" They were asked to indicate which one of the following responses came closest to their opinion: 'pro-Islamic', 'anti-Islamic', or 'Do Not Know' (if they had no opinion). As mentioned earlier, the countries included in the list were: The United States, The United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia, China, Australia, Singapore, Japan and India.

The categories 'pro-Islamic' and 'anti-Islamic' are broad and open to wide interpretations. But the pre-test of the question before the fieldwork showed that most respondents were able to make a choice and if they did not have an opinion and were not sure they chose the 'Do not know' response. The decision to include the countries mentioned above was guided by the intention to include all those countries which were generally regarded as the 'West' and because of their influence in the international and or regional affairs most of the respondents would have been aware of them. The findings are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. The Respondents' Perception of the Attitudes of Governments of Selected Countries towards Islam

| | Indonesia | | Pakistan | | Kazakhstan | | Egypt | |
|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Pro-Islamic | Anti-Islamic | Pro-Islamic | Anti-Islamic | Pro-Islamic | Anti-Islamic | Pro-Islamic | Anti-Islamic |
| United States | 4% | 52 | 4 | 84 | 12 | 15 | 3 | 80 |
| United Kingdom | 6 | 34 | 5 | 79 | 10 | 16 | 11 | 65 |
| Germany | 6 | 26 | 4 | 63 | 11 | 16 | 12 | 56 |
| France | 6 | 26 | 5 | 65 | 10 | 15 | 18 | 52 |
| Russia | 2 | 56 | 3 | 80 | 12 | 16 | 2 | 75 |
| China | 4 | 44 | 27 | 38 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 56 |
| Australia | 9 | 18 | 7 | 46 | 2 | 11 | 9 | 44 |
| Singapore | 23 | 10 | 8 | 42 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 40 |
| Japan | 9 | 13 | 10 | 44 | 4 | 12 | 13 | 41 |
| India | 17 | 19 | 3 | 86 | 9 | 12 | 2 | 21 |

Note: The figures are percentages of respondents. The percentage for 'Do not Know' responses are not indicated above but can be calculated by adding the percentages of the two responses given above and subtracting it from 100.

About half of the Indonesians said that the attitudes of the governments of the United States and Russia were anti-Islamic and 44 percent expressed a similar view about the Chinese government. As for the other countries, a majority of the Indonesians were not sure or did not know what their government's attitudes towards Islam were. On the whole, only a small minority of Indonesians thought that the governments of major western countries were pro-Islamic. The major exceptions were Singapore and India, which were seen by 23 and 17 percent of respondents respectively as pro-Islamic.

About one out of every ten Indonesian respondents thought that the Japanese and Australian governments were pro-Islamic and about the same proportion saw them as anti-Islamic. The governments of Singapore and Japan were seen as least anti-Islamic followed by the Indian and Australian governments. These data were collected before the 1999 East Timor conflict in which Australia was seen by many Indonesians as taking an anti-Indonesia position and it would be interesting to assess whether events surrounding the East Timor conflict have resulted in a shift in the attitudes of Indonesians towards Australia.

About one third of the Indonesian respondents regarded the attitudes of the other major Western powers, the United Kingdom, France and Germany as anti-Islamic but interestingly a majority of them expressed no opinion about their attitudes. The anti-Islamic perceptions of the United States were attributed to the American policies towards the Palestinians and Bosnian Muslims. The anti-Islamic attitudes were largely attributed to the Russian treatments of Chechnyan Muslims and to its past Atheistic policies.

The attitudes towards China were largely shaped by China's past support of Indonesian communists as well to China's Atheistic communist ideology that was seen to be against the teachings of Islam.

The Pakistani responses clearly demonstrate how the national political dynamics and concerns shape individual perceptions of the 'Other'. Expectedly, given Pakistan's deep concern with India and the history of military and political conflicts between the two countries, an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis saw the Indian government as anti-Islamic. It was closely followed by similar perceptions of the American, Russian and British governments. These perceptions again appear to be influenced by the conflicts involving Muslim populations in former Yugoslavia, Palestine and Chechnya. At the time of the data collection for this study the Bosnian conflict was raging and many respondents blamed the above-mentioned countries for not doing enough to stop the massive human tragedy inflicted on the Bosnian Muslims. In addition, Pakistanis also viewed these countries supporting India in its conflict with Pakistan. The United States was often seen as blatantly pro-Israel in its conflict with Palestinians and the Arabs and in general hostile to Islamic countries such as Iran, Iraq and Libya.

The anti-Islamic perception of the German and French governments was also due to the same type of causes but about one third of the respondents had no opinion about these two countries. China has been long seen as a close ally of Pakistan in its conflict with India. Consequently, notwithstanding that China is a communist country, about one third of Pakistanis saw its government as pro-Islamic and only 38 percent as anti-Islamic. While about half of the respondents were

neutral about the governments of Australia, Singapore and Japan but slightly less than half of the respondents felt they were also anti-Islamic.

The majority of the Kazaks were surprisingly uncertain or neutral about what their perceptions were of various countries. About one in ten Kazaks felt that the major Western countries were pro-Islamic and slightly larger proportion felt that most of the countries were anti-Islamic. The governments of major Western countries and Russia were seen as slightly more anti-Islamic than Japan, Australia, Singapore and India.

The Egyptian perceptions were somewhat similar to the perceptions of the Pakistanis and the Indonesians. A large majority of the Egyptians regarded the United States government as anti-Islamic and this view was largely shaped by their perceptions of the pro-Israel policies of the Americans in the conflict of Israel with the Arabs. A large majority also saw the Russian government as anti-Islamic primarily due to its policies towards Muslim minorities in Chechnya and former Yugoslavia. The French government was seen as the most pro-Islamic although a majority of Egyptians saw the British, French, German and Chinese governments as anti-Islamic in their policies. Unlike the Pakistanis, the Egyptians did not see India as anti-Islamic. In fact, most of them said that they did not know its policies. Slightly less than half of the respondents thought that Singapore, Australian and Japanese governments were anti-Islamic largely because they were perceived as allies of the Western countries which, in turn, were seen as hostile towards Islam.

Concluding Remarks

The Muslims in general were very optimistic and positive about the influence of Islam in the future. A

large majority of them saw Islam gaining influence in the world affairs. This view was almost universally held by Indonesians and Pakistanis. The Kazaks and Egyptians were comparatively somewhat restrained in expressing such a view but still a large majority felt that Islam would gain influence. One main difference between the Indonesians and Pakistanis and the Kazaks and the Egyptians was that a greater proportion of the latter held the view that Islam's influence in the future will remain unchanged.

The opinions about the 'Other' were more complex and appeared to be influenced by national factors such as the demographic composition of the populations and the perceptions of the influence held by the 'Other' in the national affairs. For example, in Pakistan the population is religiously largely homogeneous with Muslims constituting over 95 percent of the population. This fact obviously had an impact on the Pakistani perceptions of the 'Other', with the majority of the respondents expressing the opinion that Christianity, Judaism and Atheism will lose influence. The demographic homogeneity in Pakistan precludes other religions influencing the national affairs.

The populations of the other three countries are less homogeneous. Sizeable proportions of Indonesian, Kazak and Egyptian populations are Christians and consequently their opinions about the future role of Christianity are less skewed. In Egypt where Coptic Christians historically have been not only a sizeable proportion of the population but have also occupied a very prominent role in the national affairs especially in politics and economy, a majority of the Egyptian respondents held the view that the role of Christianity will increase.

Surprisingly, an overwhelming proportion also

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The Muslims in general were very optimistic and positive about the influence of Islam in the future. A

large majority of them saw Islam gaining influence in the world affairs. This view was almost universally held by Indonesians and Pakistanis. The Kazaks and Egyptians were comparatively somewhat restrained in expressing such a view but still a large majority said that Islam would gain influence. One main difference between the Indonesians and Pakistanis and the Kazaks and the Egyptians was that a greater proportion of the latter held the view that Islam's influence in the future will remain unchanged.

The opinions about the 'Other' were more complex and appeared to be influenced by national factors such as the demographic composition of the populations and the perceptions of the influence held by the 'Other' in the national affairs. For example, in Pakistan the population is religiously largely homogeneous with Muslims constituting over 95 percent of the population. This fact obviously had an impact on the Pakistani perceptions of the 'Other', with the majority of the respondents expressing the opinion that Christianity, Judaism and Atheism will lose influence. The demographic homogeneity in Pakistan precludes other religions influencing the national affairs.

The populations of the other three countries are less homogeneous. Sizeable proportions of Indonesian, Kazak and Egyptian populations are Christians; consequently their opinions about the future role of Christianity are less skewed. In Egypt where Coptic Christians historically have been not only a sizeable proportion of the population but have also occupied a very prominent role in the national affairs especially in politics and economy, a majority of the Egyptian respondents held the view that the role of Christianity will increase.

Surprisingly, an overwhelming proportion also

expressed a similar view about Judaism. This can be possibly attributed to the impact of Egyptians and Israeli political and military conflicts on the national perceptions of Egyptians. Israel is not only militarily and economically more powerful than Egypt but it also enjoys the support of much of the West as well as much of Western Jewish populations. All these factors obviously influence Egyptian Muslims respondents' perception of Judaism thus producing the pattern revealed by the data.

Atheism still appeared to be viewed by many Pakistani and Egyptian respondents to be gaining influence in the future but not by the Indonesians and Kazaks. Once again this perception is influenced by specific national factors. For example, the Kazaks having been part of the former communist Soviet Union probably did not see the restoration of communism to power and Indonesians also probably made their assessment based on the decline of communism in Indonesian society over the past thirty years under the New Order government of former President Mohammad Suharto. They may have also been influenced by the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union and Indochina where only Vietnam remains a communist country and is now part of the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).

But none of these factors appeared to forge the same type of change in the perceptions of Pakistanis and Egyptians. What factors influenced their attitudes is difficult to say. One possible reason may be that both of these countries have very robust and influential Islamic organizations seeking to establish an Islamic state. Their influence may be a factor in shaping their attitudes towards Atheism. The respondents in these countries may also be influenced by the increasing economic,

military and political influence of the West in their countries, which is largely viewed as secular and non-religious.

The evidence also showed that religious piety was generally positively associated with the view that Islam will gain influence in future. This perception, together with the widespread view that the governments of the major western countries were anti-Islamic, raises important questions about the nature of Muslim political consciousness and public opinion in the Muslim countries. This perception contrasts sharply with the Western perception, which sees Islam as characterized by ideas of aggression, brutality, irrationality, fanaticism and medieval backwardness. These stereotypes of Muslim countries sharpen the polarization between the West and Muslim world.

These perceptions tend to support our observation about how Muslims see an increasing moral polarization between them and the "Other" globally. For many Muslims this belief is based on the evidence they see around them. In Muslim societies there is a visible increase in religious piety. Additionally, they also see the evidence as portrayed in the popular cultures of the Western countries of declining religious piety and increasing secularisation. What the popular cultures, however, fail to show is that in Western countries the decline in religious piety has been accompanied by an increase in social morality which emphasizes public responsibility of collective social well being and good citizenship.

However, irrespective of the fact whether Muslim perceptions of their own and that of the Western countries moral and religious life are valid or not, the perception of the increasing moral polarization, in our opinion, does not augur well for promoting better

political relationship between the Western countries and the Muslim world. Just as Muslims' perceptions of the future role of Islam in the world may be exaggerated for considerations of self-esteem, the perceptions of many Muslims that most of the Western countries are Anti-Islam may also be exaggerated. Whether the Muslims' views about Islam and the West are exaggerated or not, the findings provide a glimpse of the social reality which requires attention of all those who are interested in promoting better understanding between the Muslim world and the other religions and cultures in order to foster a harmonious future for humanity in the 21st century.

The empirical evidence about the Muslim and Western perceptions of each other after the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington suggest a growing chasm between the two. A Gallup Poll of respondents from the United States and nine Islamic countries about the involvement of Arabs in the September 11 attacks carried out in March 2002, showed deep misunderstanding and hostility. The findings of this survey (see appendix A for details) revealed that nine in ten Americans say groups of Arabs carried out these attacks. The solid majority in Muslim countries did not believe that. More than six in ten Americans say the U.S. military action in Afghanistan is totally justified, compared with fewer than one in 10 in most Muslim countries. Only one in four Americans has a favourable opinion of Muslim countries, and roughly the same percentage of Islamic countries' respondents look favourably on the United States. Two in three Americans say Muslim countries would be better off if

they adopted U.S. and Western values. Fewer than one in three residents of most Muslim countries agree. Ironically the only area of agreement was the broad pessimism about the chances for better understanding between the Muslim and Western civilizations. These findings give urgency to the need for a dialogue between civilizations.

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