



# Muslim Millennial Attitudes on Religion & Religious Leadership

*Arab World*

## KEY FINDINGS

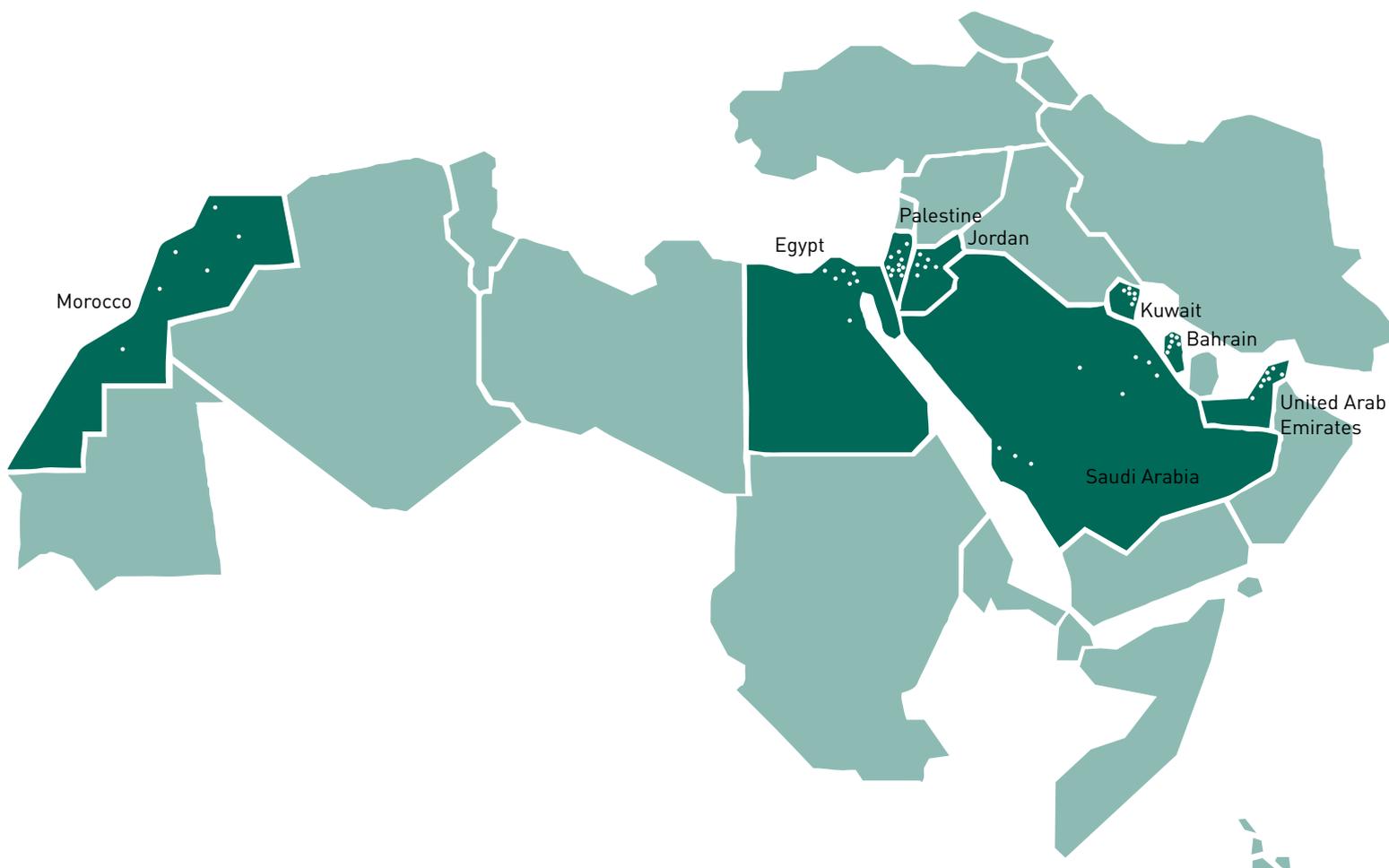
This edition of *Muslim Millennial Attitudes on Religion and Religious Leadership, Arab World*, was prepared and published by the Futures Initiative at Tabah Foundation.

To arrange a detailed presentation of further analysis of the results, please contact our staff at the address or email below.

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Countries and cities in which interviews took place.

## **Foreword**

Muslim millennials comprise the largest demographic in the Arab world today. Future projections affirm this status. At the Futures Initiative at Tabah Foundation we believe that it is only by knowing this generation that we can address the seismic religious, cultural, social and political shifts taking place in the Arab world today and in the future.

Muslim Millennial Attitudes on Religion and Religious Leadership is a statement of intent. We explore a diverse range of issues and topics related to religious identity, thought and practice that will provide the region's religious and policy leadership with much-needed evidence-based insight on the religious life of Arab Muslim youth.

The unique advantage of this survey is its engagement of questions related to the Muslim religious experience. The Futures Initiative's expertise on Muslim faith-based affairs in the modern world allowed us to formulate a set of questions that not only addressed intricate aspects of religious life but ensured that the questions were relevant to Muslims and how they particularly experience and understand their faith. This allowed us to avoid the problem of imposing foreign conceptions of faith on its local experience. By doing so, the results have credibility since they speak to the audience on its own terms.

The Futures Initiative was delighted to partner with Zogby Research Services on this project and would like to thank everyone who participated in and supported it.

The full report can be downloaded from Tabah Foundation's website  
<http://mmgsurvey.tabahfoundation.org>

Abaas Yunas  
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## Key Findings

During October and November of 2015, Zogby Research Services (ZRS) conducted face-to-face polls, surveying 5,374 Arab Muslims, both citizens and expatriates, between the ages of 15 and 34 in eight Arab countries: Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, and Palestine. The Futures Initiative at Tabah Foundation commissioned ZRS to explore attitudes of the Muslim millennial generation, specifically with respect to their attitudes toward religious identity, faith-based leadership, scholarship, religion and politics, personal religious devotion, reform, and religious extremism. A summary of the results is presented as follows.

### Identity as a Muslim

Majorities of millennials in all eight countries say it is important that they be known by their Muslim identity.

In Morocco, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Jordan, and Palestine, almost 7 in 10 respondents say that their principal identity is either their “country” or “being Arab.”

The four countries (UAE, Egypt, Morocco, and Kuwait) where more than nine in 10 millennials say that it is important that they be known as Muslim are also the only four countries where a majority of respondents say that in their circle of acquaintances they know persons of another faith.

### Personal Devotion & Conceptions of Faith

In six of the eight countries the percentage of millennials who believe that religion is a private spiritual affair is greater than the percentage who believe that religion is “just about beliefs and laws that define right and wrong.”

Only in Saudi Arabia do a substantial majority of millennial Muslims say that it is easy to be an observant Muslim and to resist temptations currently found in their society.

More than seven in 10 in UAE and about six in 10 in Kuwait, Egypt, and Palestine acknowledge that they feel tension between the temptations of today’s society and preserving their religious identity and practice.

In almost every country, millennials say that the aspect of Islam that is most important to them is “living by Islamic ethics and standards,” followed by “the political issues facing Muslims.”

There is near unanimous agreement among millennials in all surveyed countries that their belief in Islam is based on their conviction that it is the truth. At the same time, strong majorities in Bahrain, Palestine, Egypt and UAE acknowledge that their belief in Islam is due to their being brought up in the faith.

## Religion in the Public Sphere

Strong majorities in all countries agree that people have the right to dispense religious advice in public, with the caveat that it is best if done with courtesy. In the UAE, Kuwait, and Palestine around one in five express some resistance to such public interventions.

## Role of Governments

Overall, majorities of Egyptians, Kuwaitis, and Palestinians see a role for government involvement in almost every area of religious life, while majorities of Bahrainis are opposed to almost all government involvement except in the area of stopping incitement to violence and hatred. Strong majorities of millennials in all eight countries agree that the government should be involved in insuring that religious discourse does not incite violence and hatred and that if movies and TV programs breach the moral and ethical standards of society, they should be banned.

## Religion and Contemporary Relevance

In five of eight countries, majorities disagree that Islam as it is currently taught and practiced conflicts with the modern world and needs to be reformed. This disagreement is strongest in UAE, followed by Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Only in Palestine and Morocco do more than six in 10 feel that “reform” is needed.

Substantial majorities of millennials in all eight countries feel that the language used by religious leaders to express Islam, and the topics and issues they address, need to be brought up to date and made more relevant for the present .

Substantial majorities in all eight countries agree that religion as it is currently taught and practiced respects and empowers women and that there is a need for more women religious scholars and preachers. Given the diverse nature of the countries covered and the millennials who were surveyed, it appears that respondents may have varying interpretations of “respect and empower.”

## Role of Religion

Overwhelming majorities of millennials in seven of the eight countries reject the notion that religion is a major cause of decline in the social, political, and economic realms in the Arab world. Only Palestinians believe that religion is a cause of decline.

In all eight countries, substantial majorities of millennials believe that religion has a key role to play in their countries’ futures.

## Sources of Religious Learning and Views on Religious Services

When asked “who has the right to interpret religion?” the most frequently given responses provided by millennials are their country’s Grand Mufti and qualified scholars (Shaykhs).

When asked “what is their most important source of guidance and direction?” majorities in four of the eight countries say religious TV shows. In three other countries, millennials say they derive guidance from religious lectures in their towns.

In five of the eight countries, majorities say that the religious discourse they hear through religious addresses, lectures and lessons are relevant to the issues facing Muslims today.

Opinions on the Friday sermon are split. Majorities in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Palestine view the sermon as either “a loud, angry tirade,” “bland and boring,” or “the government’s voice,” with 44% of millennials in Kuwait & 42% in Jordan agreeing with this view. Large majorities in Egypt (69%) and the UAE (79%) feel that the sermon is “inspiring & uplifts your faith.”

As expected, there is a correlation in most countries between those who feel that there is a need for renewal in religious discourse and those who find sermons less inspiring.

## **Religious Extremism**

A vast majority of all respondents say that movements like ISIS and Al-Qaeda are a complete perversion of Islam.

Between 75% and 93% of all respondents say that movements like ISIS and al Qaeda are either a complete perversion of Islam and/or that these groups are “mostly wrong but sometimes raise ideas I agree with.”

When asked to select the reasons leading young people to join extremist groups, the most frequently cited reason is “corrupt, repressive, and unrepresentative governments,” followed by extremist religious discourse and teachings.

Among Palestinians, “foreign occupation” is the number one choice as to why people join extremist groups.

Respondents who say that these groups are either “mostly right” or “not a perversion of Islam” are more inclined to point to the “conviction that these groups represent the truth” or “seeking adventure” as the reasons that young people join them.

# **Demographics and Methodology**

## Demographics

Table 28	Demographics							
	Morocco	Egypt	KSA	UAE	Bahrain	Kuwait	Jordan	Palestine
15–24	51%	52%	50%	32%	44%	42%	57%	59%
25–34	50%	48%	51%	68%	56%	58%	43%	41%
Sunni	99%	98%	85%	91%	36%	75%	96%	100%
Shia	1%	2%	15%	10%	64%	25%	4%	0%
Male	50%	52%	53%	67%	53%	57%	51%	48%
Female	50%	48%	47%	33%	47%	43%	49%	52%
No Univ	87%	88%	84%	89%	73%	82%	78%	79%
Univ+	13%	12%	16%	11%	27%	18%	22%	21%
Live in city	59%	60%	81%	84%	73%	97%	80%	72%
Live outside city	41%	40%	19%	16%	27%	3%	20%	16%
Refugee camp	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12%

*Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding*

## Geographic Coverage

Country	Geographic Coverage
Morocco	Casablanca, Marrakech, Fes, Meknes, Rabat, Tanger
Egypt	Cairo, Giza, Shoubra Al Khima, Alexandria, Mansura (urban and rural), Asyut (urban and rural), Tanta (urban and rural)
Jordan	Amman City, Balqa, Madaba, Irbid, Jarash, Zarqa
KSA	Riyadh, Buraydah, Jeddah, Makkah, Taif, Dammam, Al Khobar, Dhahran
UAE	Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Northern Emirates
Bahrain	Manama, Muharraq, Al Riffa, Madinat Isa, Hammad, Sitra
Kuwait	Farwaniya, Andalus, Fardous, Kuwait City, Jabriya, Hawalli, Mubarak Al Kabir
Palestine	Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Hebron, Jericho, Tulkarem, Tubas, Qalqilya, Salfit, Gaza City, North Gaza, Dier Al-Balah, Khan Yunis, Rafah

## Sample Sizes, Dates of Survey, Margins of Error

Country	Sample size	Dates of Survey	MOE
Morocco	738	Oct. 29 – Nov. 15, 2015	±3.7
Egypt	826	Oct. 28 – Nov. 15, 2015	±3.5
Jordan	527	Oct. 29 – Nov. 15, 2015	±4.4
KSA	831	Oct. 28 – Nov. 16, 2015	±3.5
UAE	527	Oct. 29 – Nov. 16, 2015	±4.4
Bahrain	522	Oct. 29 – Nov. 16, 2015	±4.4
Kuwait	523	Oct. 28 – Nov. 15, 2015	±4.4
Palestine	880	Oct. 29 – Nov. 18, 2015	±3.4

## Sampling Methodology

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The approach used for conducting the poll involved face-to-face, personal interviews. Urban as well as rural centres were covered in each country to cover a widespread geography. The sample obtained is nationally representative and is comprised of adult Muslim males and females, who are 15–34 years of age.

Sampling for the polls varied by country. In Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait, where door-to-door sampling is not possible, a referral sampling approach was used. In the remaining countries where random, door-to-door sampling is possible a multi-stage sampling methodology was employed for selection of respondents.

In each country, the selected study centers were stratified depending on the predominant social class/ income levels of the people residing in various areas. This is because in most cities/towns, people of a specific social class/ income segment/religious grouping tend to stay in clusters. These strata were further sub-divided into blocks of roughly equal size, based on available data about population. Thereafter, blocks were selected at random depending on the sample size for that center and keeping in mind the social class/ religious cluster distribution. A pre-assigned number of starting points were used for each selected block and sampling within the blocks was undertaken using right hand rule method. Within each selected household that agreed to participate, we took an inventory of all family members between 15 and 34 years of age and randomly selected one adult to be interviewed in a way that ensured that both genders had an equal chance of inclusion, with no one allowed to self-select into the sample.

