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## Widespread Muslim Skepticism of US as Democracy Advocate

By Jim Lobe

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Despite continuous assurances that the United States favors democratic rule during the 18-month-old “Arab Spring,” majorities or pluralities in six predominantly Muslim countries see Washington as an obstacle to their democratic aspirations, [according to a new survey released Tuesday](#).

Indeed, Saudi Arabia is generally seen as a stronger advocate of democracy than the U.S. in all six nations, although not as strong as Turkey, according to the poll by the Pew Global Attitudes Project.

The survey, which covered Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Turkey, also found a strong desire in all six countries not only for democratic government, but also for specific concepts associated with democratic governance, including free elections, freedom of religion, free speech, and equal rights for women.

At the same time, majorities of respondents in Pakistan (82%), Jordan (72%), and Egypt (60%) said they believed their nation’s laws “should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran.”

In Tunisia and Turkey, on the other hand, majorities and pluralities said the law “should follow the values and principles of Islam,” while in Lebanon, the country with the largest percentage of Christians, a 42% plurality, said laws “should not be influenced by the Quran.”

The survey, which was conducted from mid-March to mid-April, was part of Pew's annual series on global attitudes that has run over the last 12 years. A total of 26,000 respondents in 21 countries were interviewed in the poll whose findings on specific issues, such as attitudes toward Iran's nuclear program and the popularity of various international leaders, have been and will continue to be released over a period of months.

Because the polling was done in the spring, the latest release, which is focused on attitudes in the six countries as the "Arab Spring" has evolved, does not take account of various recent events, such as the presidential elections and ongoing power struggle in Egypt; the past week's elections in Libya; the drift toward civil war in Syria and its government's increased tensions with Turkey and Lebanon; renewed sectarian tensions in Bahrain; and the latest accord between Pakistan and the U.S. re-opening NATO supply routes to Afghanistan — some or all of which could have an impact on respondents' answers to some questions.

In terms of respondents' desire for democratic government, the survey found few changes from similar questions posed in last year's poll, with the greatest enthusiasm found in Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt.

And while democratic governance remained popular, most respondents in Jordan, Tunisia, and Pakistan said they would rather have a "strong economy" than a "good democracy." Egyptians were roughly split on the issue, while Turks and Lebanese favored democracy over a strong economy.

Asked whether respondents would have more confidence in democracy as opposed to a "strong leader," strong majorities in Lebanon (80%), Turkey (68%), and Egypt and Tunisia (61%) opted for democracy, as did a 49% plurality in Jordan. By contrast, 61% of Pakistanis opted for a "strong leader."

More respondents in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood won parliamentary and presidential elections in the past year; Pakistan; and Lebanon said that Islam was playing a "major role" in public life compared to a year ago. Two-thirds of Egyptians said it was playing a major role — up from 47% last year; similarly, 62% of Pakistanis agreed with the proposition — up 16 percentage points from last year.

In Tunisia, where the Islamist Ennahda Party swept elections late last year, 84% of respondents said Islam was playing a major role. Tunisia, which had not been polled by Pew before, was a major focus of the latest release.

Led by Egypt (76%) and Tunisia (69%), solid majorities in the four Arab states expressed optimism that the past year's uprisings would lead to more democracy in the region. Respondents in the non-Arab states were significantly more doubtful: only 34% of Turkish respondents and 21% of Pakistanis said they would lead to more democracy.

Asked about specific elements that were important in democracy, Lebanese and Turkish respondents showed the greatest appreciation for such attributes as free elections, freedom of religion, free speech, free press, equal rights for women, and a narrow gap between rich and

poor, while Pakistanis and Jordanians were somewhat less supportive in most of those categories.

And, while majorities ranging from 58% in Egypt to 93% in Lebanon agreed with the proposition that women should have the same rights as men, the survey found substantial gender gaps in all of the countries except Turkey.

The gap was most pronounced in Jordan, where 82% of women said they believed in gender equality, while only 44% of men agreed.

Moreover, the belief in gender equality broke down when more-specific questions were asked.

Majorities ranging as high as 86% (Tunisia) in all six countries except Lebanon (50%) said men should have more of a right to jobs when unemployment is high; majorities in Tunisia (75%), Pakistan (62%), and Turkey (52%) said men make better political leaders than women; and majorities in Pakistan (87%), Jordan (73%), Lebanon (51%) said families should have a say over whom their daughters marry.

Perhaps the most remarkable finding was the perception that Saudi Arabia, which has been accused by dissidents throughout the Middle East of leading a counter-revolution against the Arab Spring, supported the spread of democracy in the region more than the U.S.

Two-thirds of Egyptians said Riyadh favored democracy and nearly two-thirds of Jordanians (64%) agreed, as did 52% of Pakistanis. Lebanese respondents were split on the question, while pluralities in Turkey and Tunisia said Saudi Arabia opposed democracy.

In five of the six countries, on the other hand, pluralities or strong majorities (over 70% in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia), Turkey was rated a stronger supporter of democracy.

The U.S., on the other hand, was regarded as an opponent of democracy by pluralities or majorities in all six countries, most notably in Jordan (67%).

Israel, however, was rated as the most opposed to democracy in the region: a median of 78% of respondents characterized it in that way. Significantly, opinion on that question was strongest in Egypt, where nearly nine out of 10 respondents (88%) said Israel was an “opponent” of democracy.