

**MUSLIM POLITICS AND U.S. POLICIES:  
PROSPECTS FOR PLURALISM AND DEMOCRACY  
IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**

**THE PEW FORUM ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE  
AND THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND WORLD  
AFFAIRS**

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MELISSA ROGERS, PEW FORUM ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE  
WELCOME

ROBERT W. HEFNER, INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND WORLD  
AFFAIRS

PROJECT OVERVIEW: “SCALING UP PLURALISM AND  
DEMOCRACY”

**MELISSA ROGERS:** Good morning. My name is Melissa Rogers. I'm executive director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and we're proud to cosponsor this program with the Institute on Religion and World Affairs. I want to welcome you this morning and thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to join us.

I also want to make a brief introduction of Bob Hefner, who's a professor of anthropology and director of the Program on Islam and Civil Democracy at the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University. He has been the leader of this project, and today is really the culmination of that 15-month-long project on this issue. We're very pleased that the scholars from the project can be with us today and bring their very important research to a Washington audience for discussion since this research impacts policy decisions. In just a minute Bob will offer an overview of the conference.

The Pew Forum is a Washington-based organization that serves as a clearinghouse of information and a town hall on religion and public affairs. We're a grant project of The Pew Charitable Trusts, and we're very grateful for their support. The Forum is co-chaired by Jean Bethke Elshtain of the University of Chicago and E.J. Dionne, Jr., of the Brookings Institution and *The Washington Post*. I don't think either one of them are going to be able to join us today – they had some other commitments – but they've been very supportive of Bob's work and are glad that we can present it here today.

The Pew Forum has done quite a bit of polling on American attitudes toward Islam, toward Muslim Americans, and we continue to do so [<http://pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=26>]. That work has become increasingly important in the last two years. Our partner in that project is the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, and I want to mention some work that the Pew Research Center has done independently in the last year. You may have read about their Global Attitudes Project [<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=185>], which was a series of worldwide public opinion surveys. Their surveys turned up information that is pertinent to our subject today, and I'd just like to mention a few of the findings.

Their 44-nation survey shows that people in Muslim countries place a high value on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, multiparty systems and equal treatment under the law. This includes people living in places such as Jordan and Kuwait, as well as those in authoritarian states like Uzbekistan and Pakistan. In fact, the Pew Research Center study found that many of the Muslim publics polled expressed a stronger desire for democratic freedoms than the publics in some nations of Eastern Europe, notably Russia and Bulgaria.

The postwar update to the survey also finds that in Muslim populations, large majorities continue to believe that Western-style democracy can work in their own countries. Interestingly, the survey found that most Muslims support a prominent, and in some cases increasing, role for Islam and religious leaders in the political lives of their countries. But the survey also found that opinion does not diminish Muslim support for

a system of governance that ensures civil liberties and political rights enjoyed in democracies. I want to commend Andy Kohut for his work on this Global Attitudes survey. I think some of these findings are obviously very important to our discussion today.

I want to thank, first of all, Bob Hefner for his leadership on this project, and I want to thank all the scholars and experts who have contributed to it. I think their work has incredible importance for our current discussion and current policymaking. I will turn the conference over to Bob, but we do want to draw your attention to the fact that we have several segments this morning.

**ROBERT HEFNER:** Thank you very much, Melissa. And I want to thank everybody who's had the courage to come today, rather than staying at home preparing for hurricane Isabel as it bears down on this part of the country.

Melissa, I want to thank you genuinely for your wonderful support for this project as well as our seminar here today. I also want to thank Luis Lugo, who can't be here with us today but who was the major contact and supporter of this project at The Pew Charitable Trusts. He had a great personal interest in this project, despite the fact that most of the projects that he supports are in the United States and have to do with American religion. He was a consistent friend and supporter of this project throughout. So I thank him, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Pew Forum here in Washington, D.C.

We're running a little bit late, but I do want to provide a background set-up of the project, so bear with me if we deviate a little bit from the schedule. After that, I think we've had a slight change in format, but each of the three presenters will speak for 10 minutes; we're going to have to keep to that very tightly. And after those presentations there will be a period of open and hopefully extensive discussion from the floor; that's what the mics are there for. The Pew Forum has asked that people go to the mics so that the questions can be later transcribed.

The terrorist attacks on the United States and the subsequent military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan placed the question of Islam and Muslim politics squarely in the American public's mind. In bookshops and classrooms and on radio and on television, Americans have been treated to crash courses on the history of Islam, Muslim attitudes toward democracy, and the question of whether the Western and Muslim worlds are indeed fated to a clash of civilizations. The impact of this media brew has, as we now realize, been decidedly mixed. On one hand, many American Muslim friends report that inquiries about their religion and even conversion to Islam have increased. The imam of a local Washington mosque told me that conversion to Islam has increased dramatically over the past two years, since September 11<sup>th</sup>.

On the other hand, we know from the poll results released by the Pew Forum on July 24<sup>th</sup> of this year and other poll results, growing numbers of Americans are convinced that Islam encourages violence and anti-Americanism. Surveys in the Muslim world – Pew's surveys, Andy Kohut's surveys, not least of all – reveal a near mirror image of a growing concern that America and Americans regard Islam as the new global enemy. So

I would be remiss if we began today without acknowledging the very real seriousness and danger of the moment we now face: we, both Americans and Muslims.

Ten years ago, Samuel Huntington warned of the possibility of a clash of civilizations between, among other regions, the West and the Muslim world. Although I've had the great pleasure of working with Dr. Huntington, in fact, on several occasions and on several projects, I've long found this among his views utterly unconvincing. Nonetheless, two years on, since September 11<sup>th</sup>, it's alarming to recall that one of Osama bin Laden's goals was to polarize relations between America and the Muslim world. By most measures, the past two years has seen significant progress – alarming progress – toward that goal.

It was with an eye toward bringing a measure of level-headedness to the question of Muslim politics in the West that the Institute on Religion and World Affairs at Boston University, with the generous support of The Pew Charitable Trusts, brought together 14 specialists, first in May 2002, as part of a 15-month research project on social supports for and obstacles to pluralism and democratization in the Muslim world.

The project was not a knee-jerk response to the September 11<sup>th</sup> violence. Having directed a small program on Islam and civil society at the Institute at Boston University for the previous nine years, I had submitted the project proposal to Pew four weeks prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>. The aim of our working group was to bridge the gap between academic scholarship on one hand, particularly that which takes a societal or social capital perspective on democratization, and on the other, policymakers and a public understandably concerned about events in the Muslim world.

The panelists today will speak for themselves, and they won't speak with a single voice – although I hope there will be some comments in a common direction. Among the conclusions they share, however, are three, all of which advise against the view that the Muslim world's tumult can be understood as the result of a clash of civilizations.

The three conclusions are: First, the Muslim world and Muslim politics are not monolithic but increasingly diverse, if often agonistically so. Second, a primary feature of this diversity involves the struggle among different Muslim groupings to define the forms and the future of Muslim politics and society. In most countries, the struggle pits a small but very well organized group of militants, who see pluralism and democracy as antithetical to Islam, against a larger but, alas, often less well organized plurality who recognize democracy's compatibility with Islam, a point that was nicely illustrated in Melissa's citation of the Pew Research Center polls. The third point is that a decisive influence on the contest for the heart and soul of Muslim politics will be the ability of the Western powers, and especially the United States, to look beyond the war on terrorism and devise long-term programs that can work with, rather than against, proponents of pluralism and moderation. So a two-track policy is much needed.

The fact is that the great majority of Muslims are, sociologically if not yet fully culturally, already modern. What I mean by this is that Muslims live in societies that depend on the pluralism, education and liberties unique to our modern age. We get

glimpses of that in those poll results. It's this basic fact – the fact that Muslim societies are already sociologically modern – more than any other that shows that Muslim and Western policymakers must have the confidence of history and devise programs that are responsive to the long-term interests of Muslim societies. They must devise programs that recognize that those long-term interests are fundamentally convergent with those of the West.

Let me expand briefly on these points, briefly. Notwithstanding the darkness of recent acts of terrorism, the past few years has seen the first light of a new, if still just partial, dawn for global Muslim politics. Growing numbers of Muslims have embraced the idea that Islam is in some sense compatible with pluralism and democracy. Again, Pew polls illustrate that nicely. But Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris have as well, in their recent World Values Survey [<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>], published in March of this year. Inglehart and Norris compared 11 Muslim majority societies with several Western countries and found that in all but one of the Muslim countries – Pakistan – public support for democracy was equal to, or even greater than, in Western countries. Where Western and Muslim attitudes diverged, and they did, was not on democracy, pluralism and freedom of expression, but on what Norris and Inglehart called “self-expression values,” only recently ascendant in the West, such as, most especially, gender equality – full gender equality – and gay rights.

As papers by today's panelists will indicate, recent developments in Turkey, Iran, Indonesia and Morocco, among others, offer equally striking evidence that many Muslims disagree with conservatives and see their religion as fundamentally compatible with pluralism, moderation and democracy. In Turkey, on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002, voters gave their support to a new and Islam-oriented, but not Islamist, reform party, known as the Justice and Development Party. As Jenny White's paper will explain presently, the leadership of the Justice and Development Party has argued forcefully that rather than providing an alternative to democracy and human rights, Islam should reinforce and deepen the values of justice, equality and human dignity on which the habits of the democratic heart depend.

Events in Iran are more complex, particularly since 1997, but they nonetheless offer a no less pivotal example of a struggle over the forms and meanings of Muslim politics. Iran is, we have to remind ourselves, the only country in the Muslim world to have undergone the full political metamorphosis from Islamic revolution, to Islamic republic, and finally, post-revolutionary society.

During its first quarter century, the republic was viewed by radical Islamists around the world as proof of their religion's ability to provide a full-blown alternative to Western-style democracy. As Bahman Baktiari will explain shortly, however, the post-revolutionary phase of the Islamic republic's evolution shows that the youth, women and professional wings of Iran's new middle class especially are convinced that the creation of a civil society with real pluralism and freedoms is a more appropriate Muslim politics than is rule by clerics. Whether they have the organization and power over the short term to carry through on their aspirations is, of course, another question, one to which Bahman will address some comments.

The Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia offers a third striking example of a sustained but also unfinished effort to reorient Muslim politics in the pluralist direction. In the final years of the Suharto dictatorship, which ruled from 1966 to 1998, a movement for a pluralist and democratic Muslim politics took shape. In May 1998, it succeeded in toppling the long-ruling Suharto. As I'll discuss this afternoon, in the months following the Suharto regime's overthrow, Indonesia was rocked by bitter ethno-religious violence, the effect of which was to slow democratic reform and to put the Muslim community's pluralist experiment on hold. I'll say more about this later.

Despite this setback, however, Indonesia, like Turkey and Iran, shows that there is no single, unchanging shape to Muslim politics, but on the contrary, a bitter contest over its forms and its future. With a fast-growing population of about 1.5 billion people, the outcome of this struggle will be one of the most decisive political events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And that outcome, of course, will depend in no small part on the actions and the policies taken by governments in the West.

Why have we in the West been so slow to recognize this struggle, this complexity to Muslim politics? And what might we now do? One reason for our lagging perception is, of course, that while self-appointed leaders like Osama bin Laden capture our attention by smashing airliners and carrying out mass murder, the struggle to promote pluralist Muslim politics often, indeed typically, begins in a quiet and incremental manner. Where conservatives control mass organizations or the commanding heights of government, pluralist reformers often resort to ostensibly nonpolitical, civil-societal techniques for promoting their ideas.

As Diane Singerman will show shortly in her discussion of legal reforms in Egypt, and as Gwenn Okruhlik will illustrate in her discussion of pluralism in Saudi Arabia and as Dale Eickelman will show in his discussion of the media and politics in Morocco, moderates often focus their efforts not on formal politics and least of all on seizure of the state, but on education, legal reforms and publications that offer ordinary people a greater measure of choice. The result is not quite a public sphere of citizen participation in the modern sense of the phrase, but it is important nonetheless. The limited access nature of these arenas helps to reduce the risk of conflict with state authorities or militants. But the success of these, again, ostensibly nonpolitical initiatives can slowly build public constituencies with which pacts across the state-society divide can be formulated that allow for a broader implementation of pluralist freedoms. So this is a critical moment in the consolidation, the slow consolidation, of a pluralist and democratic Islam.

It's here, too, that Western policies have a role to play. As Richard Norton will show in his discussion of Egypt and Michael Peletz in his discussion of Malaysia, many Western-friendly governments have long combined concessions to conservative Islamists with the repression of moderates and reformers. In Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia, indeed, some among our friends have even sponsored Islamist paramilitaries that, once unleashed against democracy proponents or against the left, prove difficult to control.

The key to an effective, long-term policy, then, is to work with, rather than against, the forces of pluralism and moderation in the Muslim world. Again, we need two tracks for engagement with Muslim societies. To do this requires we put aside stereotypes and again remind ourselves of how Muslim politics came to be the way it is in today's world.

A few basic facts, familiar to many of you perhaps: Between 1950 and 1990, the Muslim world experienced a demographic transition of unprecedented proportions, with a proportion of the population living in cities and towns in most Muslim countries growing by between 200 and 300 percent. Still predominantly rural in 1950, by 1990 most Muslim countries had 35 to 55 percent of their population residing in cities and towns. Meanwhile, rates of annual GDP in Muslim countries, particularly the non-oil producing countries, remained among the lowest in the world, just a little bit above sub-Saharan Africa. The urban populace thus suffered the usual ill effects of pollution, crime, anomie and unemployment. With masses of people from different backgrounds packed into congested slums, the newer urbanites had to devise a new public culture for participation.

Not coincidentally, then, it was during this period that neighborhoods across the Muslim world witnessed an expansion in the numbers of preachers, mosques and *madrassas* (religious schools). For the urban poor and lower middle class, these institutions were islands of moral clarity and civility in a turbulent sea. Americans would do well to remember in reflecting on this history that at the turn of our 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when we were undergoing our own transition to an urban and pluralist society, ethnically based congregations assisted the integration of immigrants into our society as well.

It's equally important to remember that in its first years, the resurgence in most countries was neither particularly political nor least of all militant or extreme. Yes, there were a few extremists, but the mainstream was not that. Most of its promoters were interested in just what they said, in piety and morality, not winning control of the state. Given the enormous problems facing many Muslim societies and the lack of other avenues of participation, and given the scale of the social capital created by the resurgence, however, it was inevitable that at some point political entrepreneurs, some of them opportunists, would attempt to channel its resources into explicitly political ends, particularly where other avenues of public participation were blocked. The same process happened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, as Theda Skocpol has said in a critical article on civil society in the United States.

Even then, however, and contrary again to all stereotypes, the range of political ideals promoted by the resurgence varied widely. Many believers insisted on the compatibility of Islam with pluralism and democracy, as the Pew polls show, while others called for a coercive transformation and totalizing transformation of the whole social order.

What, then, brought undemocratic extremists to the fore in some Muslim societies, and what might diminish the prospects of this happening again? The fact is that for much of the Muslim world, for the past 20 years, mosques and religious schools have been among the only civil society organizations allowed the freedom to operate and grow. Not surprisingly, then, where authoritarian regimes up the ante and tighten controls all the more, as occurred in Algeria in 1991 after the December elections, the political opposition falls easily into radical hands because the militants enjoy the secrecy, organization and ideological dedication needed to weather the repressive storm.

The lessons to learn from this history is not that one should hold out as long as possible on democratization. That's a recipe for explosive disaster, and indeed some of what we're seeing in the Muslim world today has its origins there. The lesson is rather that it is time to move forward with not all or nothing utopianism, but measured programs of democratization and, if I can use the phrase, civil capitalization. The path forward, above all, requires investment in three engines of civil growth: education, particularly that which empowers women and provides flexible and real economic skills; secondly, entrepreneurial activity, particularly that which creates a multi-centric rather than lopsided or monopolistic distribution of wealth; and civic associations, media and legal bodies that jointly sustain a public culture of legality and civility.

There's long been a fear, of course, in policy circles, both Western and Muslim, that if the democratic dam is opened wide, the groups most likely to rush in will be authoritarian Islamists. "One vote, one man, one time" was the phrase that summarized this anxiety in Western and regime circles at the time of the Algerian elections in 1991, and the conviction led Western officials in the United States and France to side with the forces of repression.

There's no easy way to dismiss this anxiety. It's a legitimate anxiety. There *are* radical Islamists willing to exploit democratic institutions for undemocratic ends. But again, here we have to rely on research and develop a keener sense of locally grounded knowledge. It's important to remember that rulers in most Muslim majority societies have not gone so far as the Algerian authorities to liquidate moderates, and in so doing, paint the political process into a corner. Today's presentations provide clear examples of societies in which vigorous grass-root pluralism remains in place and is, so to speak, available for "social capitalization."

There is of course a new wrinkle to the challenge of transitioning from authoritarian rule, and it, too, is worrying. It shouldn't be dismissed. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, made clear that a violent fringe is attempting to overcome their disadvantage in numbers by pressing the one comparative advantage they enjoy, namely a globalizing culture of violence. The al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia have taken advantage of globalization – small irony here – to link their finances and military resources to local conflicts to which Muslims are party.

As Tom Barfield's remarks on Afghanistan will illustrate, the Taliban and al Qaeda made an odd couple indeed. Al Qaeda is an internationalist organization led by well-heeled dissidents from the ranks of the Muslim upper middle class. The Taliban

were a ragtag gang of parochials who emerged from the ruins of one of the most backward states in the Muslim world. The bad news here is that recent attacks in Indonesia and the Philippines show that al Qaeda and its affiliates are determined to seek out and establish such odd-couple collaborations in other parts of the world. In linking transnational networks to parochial conflicts in this way, the internationalists have given local extremists an influence greatly disproportionate to their numbers in society. There's no better illustration of this than Indonesia, where I've done most of my work.

Certainly the actions of international terror pose a very serious threat to Western interests, but that threat is small compared to the catastrophic harm internationalist jihadis may yet inflict on Muslim civilization and Muslim religion. And this is what's central; this is what we have to keep in mind. Policymakers must have – indeed must rediscover – the confidence of history and the confidence of modernity, a modernity which Muslims share, as polls show. This means that policymakers should orient some of their program investments to the long term, and recognize that the attempt to coerce religious totalitarianism is, again, already too late. Muslim societies are already sociologically modern. The growth of the professions, the expansion of the press and publishing, the abundance of goods and services in the market, the popular enthusiasm for universities and modern learning, these processes are well advanced in all but the poorest of Muslim societies. And that's, again, what the poll samples indicate so clearly.

Radical Islamists will deny the modern pluralism of their societies, but where they're able to act on this denial, the price paid by the rest of society will be immediate and traumatic. Moreover, as the Iranian scholar Abdel-Karim Soroush and others have emphasized, the more radicals press for a monopolistic fusion of religion and state, the more they remove the checks and balances vital to maintaining the vitality and integrity of politics, the economy and Islam itself. Here, then, is the key with which long-term Western policy must begin.

An important feature of the cultural capital created by the Islamic resurgence of the last 30 years has been the growing numbers of Muslims who view their religion in a different way. They've come to view their faith as something that can make a difference, not only in their private lives and devotion, but in public society – something, again, which Americans should find not at all unusual. The expectation that being a good Muslim should improve public welfare insures that people, Muslims, are watching, and schemes that ignore what is required to make economy, politics and culture function fairly and efficiently will be judged harshly and immediately. This is what I mean by having the confidence of modernity and history.

After decades of distorted development, it will take time, of course, for Muslims to achieve the synchronies that allow pluralism and democracy to prevail. The comparable process in the West was – the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remind us – also long and difficult. But the conviction held by most Muslims that their religion should be a blessing to all and that its benefit should be apparent in heightened justice and popular, effective well being, is itself a critical resource for pluralist democracy and against

extremism. However painful their experiments, the extremists will fail. It is important that Western and Muslim policymakers have programs in place even before they do.

Thank you.