Slippery Polls

Uses and Abuses of Opinion Surveys from Arab States

David Pollock

Policy Focus #82 | April 2008

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE for Near East Policy

Published in 2008 in the United States of America by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy,
1828 L Street NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036.

Design by Daniel Kohan, Sensical Design and Communication
Front cover: Palestinians line up to vote in parliamentary elections at a polling station in the West Bank village of Dura, January 25, 2006. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Kevin Frayer.

About the Author

David Pollock, a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, was formerly a senior advisor for the Broader Middle East and a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. He has also served as chief of Near East/South Asia/Africa research at the U.S. Information Agency, where he was the top authority on public opinion in those regions. He testified to Congress on the subject in 2007 and has written widely on it as well, including the pioneering 1993 Institute Policy Paper *The "Arab Street"? Public Opinion in the Arab World*.

▪ ▪ ▪

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

THE RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION of this study was funded through a special grant from Washington Institute trustees Jane and Barry Haimes, reflecting their commitment to the importance of sound scholarship in promoting tolerance, understanding, and peace throughout the Middle East.

This Policy Focus is a publication of The Washington Institute's Project Fikra, a multifaceted initiative generating ideas to help Americans identify, nurture, and support mainstream Muslims in the contest against radicalism and extremism. Project Fikra was established through the generous support of the Keston Family Foundation.

In addition, the author would like to thank Institute research assistants Albar Sheikh, Jasmine El-Gamal, and Rana Shabb for their superb and devoted help with various stages of this project.

Executive Summary

A CLOSE EXAMINATION suggests major problems exist with the pervasive overreliance on Arab public opinion polls. Although a few of these polls are fairly credible, most are methodologically suspect, so their numbers are unreliable—even apart from the numerous instances of loaded questions, selective presentations, and biased analyses.

Almost always, these poll numbers sound alarmingly bad—even if their relation to reality is open to serious question. Their primary focus is on how low the American image has sunk. Even to the extent that any of these polls are true, however, this focus is at most only half the truth. The better and much-less-remarked half is a dramatic rise in the level of popular opposition to anti-American terrorism in every Arab society polled on this question over the past four years. Nevertheless, almost no one points out what this clear new trend must mean: attitudes toward the United States and attitudes toward terrorism in the societies where it supposedly incubates are hardly related to each other at all.

At the most down-to-earth methodological level, unusually severe demographic and, especially, social and political constraints restrict polling in Arab countries. In most cases, Arab governments must approve any polling, which raises serious questions about possible censorship (or self-censorship), surveillance, intimidation, or outright falsification, particularly on even mildly controversial questions.

Although polling is somewhat more common in the region today than it was until just a few years ago, that could actually increase rather than decrease the level of official concern and interference with survey activities and results. Experience and expert personal observation suggest that is indeed the case today in several major Arab states. Social controls are also quite onerous in many places, leading an unknown, but probably relatively high, proportion of respondents to offer socially acceptable but disingenuous responses.

Even if these problems could somehow be solved, or at least finessed, the equally serious problem would remain of possible bias in developing and presenting such findings. To be sure, a few pollsters strive to avoid such bias; but given the highly politicized nature of Middle East issues, they rarely succeed. More to the point, consumers of their polling product rarely have the time or the training to pick apart all the more subtle biases that regularly seep into the process of collecting, analyzing, and presenting Arab survey data.

The first step in fixing these problems is to insist on full disclosure of all methodological and other details; without them, any poll is automatically suspect. If that information is provided, the reader can make further judgments about the adequacy or inadequacy of the product. Sampling methods, questionnaire design, integrity of reporting, objectivity of interpretation, and any other relevant factors—especially the sponsorship of every poll and the nature of Arab government supervision or interference, real or perceived—must all be subjected to serious scrutiny.

Second, even if the numbers do not lie, they tell us almost nothing about actual popular behavior, let alone about the interactions (either at home or abroad) among key segments of Arab societies: the business or educational community, the clergy, the military, the media, the village or neighborhood power brokers, or the technical elite—or, for that matter, the violent elements on the margins.

Third, these numbers tell us almost nothing about the policies or the longer-term political prospects of the governments in any of these countries, which are without exception autocratic and only dimly or indirectly attuned to public opinion.

In short, even with the best of intentions, many "Arab world" surveys suffer from severe and mutually reinforcing problems of sample design and execution, social controls, government surveillance, dearth of credibility checks, and most of all, absence of any clear links to events on the ground. At best, these polls are just imperfect snapshots of what people are willing to say to strangers, quite possibly with only a tenuous connection to actual behavior at either the popular or

the policy level. At worst, they are so fatally flawed as to verge on the fraudulent.

In between those two poles lie the "average" Arab polls, which are usually merely misleading as a tool for analyzing, predicting, or influencing interactions with the United States. The only findings worth taking seriously (and even then with a grain of salt) are those confirmed over and over again by different credible pollsters, in response to relatively unbiased questions, with a consistent trend over several years.

The most important such finding, examined in detail in part II of this essay, is precisely the one that is least often acknowledged: Popular sympathy for terrorism, including terrorism against Americans, has declined drastically in every Arab society polled—even though popular attitudes toward the United States have improved only slightly and unevenly in those countries since their sharp decline right after the occupation of Iraq in 2003.

Since 2004, the most striking new trend in regional opinion is the steady surge toward greater popular opposition to terrorism. This trend specifically includes growing opposition to any attacks on American civilians anywhere among all Arab publics polled on such questions by different pollsters, many times over. These findings are all the more remarkable because the same polls show little improvement in popular views of the United States or of American policies during that period.

The validity and significance of this major paradox, which very few if any other analysts have yet explored, are key to any policy recommendations based on Arab public opinion. In particular, this research reveals that views on this top-priority concern depend on local circumstances—especially an enduring backlash against local terrorism—much more than on responses to the U.S. image, policies, or values.

Next, part II examines recent survey findings about those values, beginning with perceptions of democracy among Arab publics and moving on to other broad political, social, and religious concepts. On closer examination, loose talk about "shared values" actually turns out to obscure many ambiguities and even contradictions in these attitudes, along with sharp differences even on matters of fact.

For example, majorities of both Egyptians and Jordanians still deny that Arabs carried out the attacks of September 11, 2001. Most Arabs polled say they want democracy—but also *sharia* (Islamic) law and clerical influence on government. Surprisingly, those who value democracy more seem to be slightly more, not less, inclined to support anti-American terrorism. And most Arabs polled, contrary to common misconception, have negative views both of the United Nations and of the role of religion in the West.

Third, on the basis of criteria previously defined for best polling practices, part II examines country case studies. Again, many surprises, including a few pleasant ones, are in store for those who dissect the data carefully.

Among the Palestinians, conventional wisdom notwithstanding, polls did predict the overall 2006 vote fairly accurately. But they missed the Hamas victory, because they neglected to factor in a hybrid electoral system that greatly magnified the Hamas plurality. Two years later, however, Hamas missteps in power have produced clear erosion in its popular support.

In Iraq, despite the violence, polling is also among the best in the region, in great part because more people now feel free to speak their minds. The latest results suggest some convergence of views among the major feuding communities, although the larger picture remains both mixed and volatile. Sunni and Shiite Arabs now agree, along with Kurds, that both al-Qaeda and attacks on Iraqi forces are wrong. They also tend to agree that both Syrian and Iranian policies toward Iraq are wrong as well.

In Jordan, the only other country for which detailed five-year trends are publicly available, popular satisfaction with overall domestic conditions rose markedly from 2002 to 2007. This trend was accompanied by a sharp turn not only against terrorism but also, although to a lesser extent, against Islamist parties and movements. One uncertainty, however, is the personal popularity of the ruler; as in most Arab states, direct questions about that subject are forbidden.

In Lebanon, attitudes are again sharply polarized along sectarian lines. But new divisions exist within the

major groups—even among the Shiites, who are under greater pressure for conformity. As usual, questions about rankings rather than simple yes/no dichotomies yield more meaningful answers: as time passes since the 2006 war with Israel, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah and his Hizballah movement are losing some ground to others or to "none of the above," even inside their own community.

Last in this series of case studies is a comparison of Egypt and Morocco, where the data is not as reliable but is still suggestive. Egyptians are markedly more anti-American—despite, or perhaps even because of, the many billions of dollars they have received in American aid. Other factors behind this unexpected contrast might be wider overall disgruntlement in Egypt along with sustained government and media criticism of the United States.

The fourth major section of part II of this study moves on to the "so what" question: How much does public opinion matter in Arab societies? Comparing political attitudes with actions reveals little apparent connection between them. Pervasive anti-American attitudes have not been matched over the past five years by sustained anti-American popular behavior. Arab governments have not demonstrably changed their foreign policies in response to public opinion in more than cosmetic ways. And popular pressures have had only a modestly greater effect on internal politics, whether regarding political stability or reform.

Finally, several new policy recommendations emerge from these findings. In public diplomacy, the United States should concentrate its effort primarily on consolidating the consensus against terrorism, only secondarily on other policy issues, and not at all on nebulous shared values.

With respect to policy formulation, the United States should always be alert, but also skeptical, about opinion polls from Arab countries. The tests identified here should be applied to determine which of those polls are simply misguided, which are merely misleading, and which ones are worth taking into account. But even the best of this lot must be used with considerable caution, as just one piece of an intricate and shifting policy puzzle.

PART I
The Limits of Opinion Surveys in Arab States

Introduction: Arab Polls in Perspective

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, yesterday's "Arab street" has merged with today's information superhighway. One can hardly pick up a newspaper, turn on the TV, or go online without coming across the latest poll numbers purporting to show what the Arab man (or woman) in the street is "really" thinking. Pew, Zogby, Gallup, the University of Michigan, the University of Maryland, the State Department, the Defense Department, ABC, BBC, CBC, CNN, and many others have all jumped on this bandwagon.

Even among senior U.S. government officials, the concern with such polls has reached record proportions. One advisor to the secretary of defense confides that the latest public opinion survey results from the region, costing many millions of dollars to obtain, are given pride of place in his boss's briefing book every time he travels out that way. A former secretary of state calls a current Arab king to warn him about his government's low approval rating. And the under secretary of state for public diplomacy cites a modest improvement in other such numbers from that region as among the most noteworthy achievements of her tenure.[1]

This level of preoccupation with Arab polling is equally high on Capitol Hill. For several months in 2007, to cite but one example, the House Foreign Affairs Committee held an extended series of hearings on foreign public opinion polls, with one hearing devoted entirely to Arabs and others liberally sprinkled with dire citations from the same surveys. In the American media, according to two senior pollsters for leading news outlets writing in December 2007:

> Polls too often get a bye on journalism's central tenet: Consider the source. Anything else that flies in over the transom gets checked out before we accept it as real, but numbers are often somehow too compelling. They elevate anecdote; they lend authority and credibility to what's otherwise anybody's guess. . . . And we run with 'em—all too often without stopping to check.[2]

All of this attention raises a key question, one not asked in any Middle Eastern poll: How reliable, how meaningful, and generally how useful are all these numbers? Twenty years ago, when serious Arab political polling was just beginning, the trick was to get anybody to pay attention to some very interesting and surprising results. Some of them even turned out to be true: for example, that many Palestinians under Israeli occupation were prepared, by 1987, to rise up against it after two decades of relative quiescence; or that Saddam Hussein, after his invasion of Kuwait in 1990, was a hero to "the Arab street" in some Arab cities but not in others. Today, however, the United States faces the opposite problem: Arab public opinion polls are so commonplace, and taken at such face value, that they now need to be put in their proper place.

This discussion must begin with the acknowledgment that commercial market and media research in many Arab countries—who uses what shampoo, for example, or watches which news show—is generally sound. Much the same can be said about survey research on social issues, often referred to as knowledge, attitudes, and practices—for example, hygiene and health behavior, or educational preferences.

Real problems arise, however, with any polls about Arab *political* attitudes. For reasons that are examined in great detail below, these are much more difficult to measure with any degree of confidence or precision. As a result, far fewer published polls of this nature exist, which makes their reliability still harder to gauge. Furthermore, although some of these polls are reasonably good, others, as is shown later, clearly cut corners methodologically or stretch the truth to make a political point.

Worst of all, the leading presentations of this data are usually slanted toward their most sensational and

1. Karen P. Hughes, "Sinking in the Polls," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2007.
2. Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "5 Tips for Decoding Those Election Polls," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2007, p. B3.

alarmist interpretation. For example, in 2007, despite evidence from their own polls of a steep decline in Arab publics' support for anti-American terrorism, the Pew poll director introduced himself to Congress as "the first and foremost chronicler of the rise of anti-Americanism in the 21st century," and the University of Maryland's director of its Program on International Policy Attitudes told a reporter that "the picture is going from grim to grimmer."[3]

The sections that follow investigate these problems systematically, starting with the most basic and proceeding to the more complex, and more egregious, cases of political partisanship disguised as analysis. Although some of these problems are generic to all polling, others are specific to the particular conditions encountered by pollsters in Arab countries or to the particular agendas of the pollsters, their sponsors, or their promoters. The discussion begins with general methodological and historical problems and then moves on to problems in the following areas: practical fieldwork, technical fixes, poll design, data analysis and interpretation, and finally—and perhaps most tellingly—bias as a function of presentation.

General Methodological Issues

As with any applied scientific method, polls vary widely in nature, quality, and overall credibility. In all cases, therefore, the consumer of any poll needs full information about how that poll was conducted. As one American analyst recently noted about his own country, "If pollsters disclosed more about how their polls were conducted, we would be in a better position to know which polls are likely to be right, and which ones can be safely ignored."[4] This information should include full details of the sampling frame and methodology, fieldworkers and fieldwork conditions, quality controls, government or other permission or restrictions, sponsorship, full demographics of the sample, full questionnaire and "topline" or "marginal" results, refusal rate, and any other pertinent information. The consumer especially needs to know who sponsored the poll, who supervised the fieldwork, and how exactly these individuals strove to ensure honesty and reliability. Even the fine print of sampling methodology matters greatly. If, for instance, a poll is not a true probability sample, but some kind of quota or hybrid, then the consumer needs to know that. In such a case, the so-called margin of error has no statistical validity—and even more important, any generalizations to the society as a whole, or comparisons to other polls, are inherently suspect. Sadly, such polls may be the best available—but they are worse than nothing unless their severe limitations are very clearly acknowledged and understood.

In this basic respect, the problems of Middle Eastern polls are little different from those of American or other polls. One recent assessment offers some essential words of caution, well worth quoting here, which should be applied in all cases:

> Polls too often get a bye on journalism's central tenet: Consider the source.... [T]here are good polls and bad, reliable methods and unreliable ones....
>
> Surrender to "convenience" or self-selected samples of the sort that so many people click on the Internet, and you're quickly afloat in a sea of voodoo data.
>
> Probability sampling has its own challenges, of course. Many telephone surveys are conducted using techniques that range from the minimally acceptable to the dreadful....
>
> Look for biased questions and cherry-picked or hyped analyses. Watch for big headlines about small differences and reckless analysis of small subgroups.[5]

In short, for reasons both theoretical and practical, some polls are pretty good, but others are pretty bad or downright misleading. These caveats apply just as well to American or any other polls as to Arab ones.

3. Andrew Kohut, president, Pew Research Center, testimony to the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, March 14, 2007 (available online at www.pewresearch.org or http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/koh031407.pdf); Steven Kull, quoted in Ken Herman and Bob Deans, "Longtime Bush Adviser Hughes Returns to Austin," *Austin American-Statesman*, November 1, 2007.
4. Mark Blumenthal, "The Secret Lives of Pollsters," *New York Times*, February 7, 2008.
5. Langer and Cohen, "5 Tips for Decoding Those Election Polls."

The Perils of Arab Political Polling

Beyond these general methodological issues, Arab polls entail certain practical problems of their own, primarily because of demographic, social, and political conditions in the region. Polling Arabs differs from polling many other societies, simply because of the different realities on the ground. It may be the same as other polling in theory but not in practice. Serious political polling in Arab countries is relatively recent, dating only to the 1991 Gulf War. From a research perspective, the field has come a long way since then, but some lessons learned the hard way in the past are still valid today.

Given the broad restrictions on political activity and expression in most Arab countries, getting any political survey data out of them was never an easy task. In the early 1990s, when systematic Arab political polling began, the pioneers in this field commonly had no choice but to conduct "quick and dirty" street-corner surveys, at times of just a few hundred respondents, and then to sneak their data out. So difficult was the research environment that even this technique was once considered sufficient to the task.

Other, more colorful methods were also part of the job. One successful survey field supervisor, asked how he managed to operate in southern Lebanon, candidly revealed his first response to any sign of trouble: he would simply explain which local warlord was his cousin. If that did not do the trick, he would display his Syrian-issued permit to carry weapons; so far, he said, that had never failed to quiet any concerns. Very often, in those early days not so long ago, questions about political issues were tacked on, sometimes surreptitiously, to routine market research surveys. An actual example of this formula from the 1990–1991 era, crude but effective for its time, went like this:

> **Question 1.** When you make a major purchase for your home, what is more important to you, low price or high quality?
>
> **Question 2.** And if the price and quality of different products are about the same, would you rather buy a local brand or a foreign import?
>
> **Question 3.** Now, speaking of foreign countries, what do you think about Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait? Would you say that you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, or strongly disapprove of this action?

Another such example, personally observed by the author during in-home interviews in an Arab village in the mid-1990s, was a long battery of detailed political questions appended to a purely commercial questionnaire about Legos, the popular plastic children's toy. At the end of one session, as a courtesy, the interviewer asked the respondent if he had any questions of his own to pose. The response was revealing: "Well, I think I know why you're here, and what this is really all about. But there is one thing I don't get: What's the connection between politics and Legos?!" In subsequent years, as polling gradually became less of a novelty in some Arab societies, such moments of humor, drama, or derring-do became less frequent. But even today, a pollster most often must request official permission for a specific survey—which is sometimes not granted or granted only conditionally. At other times, the same pollster may rely on a firm's informal connections, friendly reputation, or some vague, open-ended professional authorization to conduct the requisite survey research. As a result, certain countries welcome or at least tolerate some pollsters but not others, with all the question marks about possible favoritism or bias that this circumstance inevitably raises.

Even today, some survey researchers may on occasion have little choice but to resort to certain more or less discreet expedients: exchanging favors with local authorities, slipping some political questions into commercial questionnaires, even hiring some internal security agents as survey interviewers for "protection" and then discarding the completed questionnaires they submit. Sometimes this ploy seems to work fairly well, but not always. More than once, when word got around that some security agents had found this lucrative moonlighting arrangement, they were literally held for ransom—by agents of a rival security agency from the same government!

Without exception, the pollsters interviewed for this study, whether commercial or scholarly, said they depended on their local affiliates or subcontractors to

deal with such matters, without necessarily inquiring into details. (As one Arab contact put it, imitating an Egyptian accent, the general approach is "*ma t'amalsh fi bahth ktir*" [don't do a lot of research into it].) This may be what it takes to get the job done, but such methodology raises difficult questions of quality control and thus of the overall replicability and reliability of any findings.

Many of the problems outlined here, along with some partial solutions for them, are covered in the author's monograph *The "Arab Street*," published in 1992, when such polling was still in its infancy.[6] The major caveats noted there are largely still relevant today, more than fifteen years later, both in spite of and precisely because of the post–September 11 proliferation of such polls. What follows is an illustrative "sample" of these problems, as experienced in actual recent surveys, some of which are so severe as to cast the surveys' validity into grave question.

6. David Pollock, *The "Arab Street": Public Opinion in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), chapter 3.

Problems of Practical Fieldwork in Arab Societies

THE BIGGEST SINGLE CHALLENGE of Arab polling today remains what it always has been: political pressure from the various regimes in the region. As one Arab American academic specialist wrote in mid-2006, there are still

> many Arab countries where independent and politically relevant survey research is not permitted or is at best extremely difficult. Moreover, political restrictions and other impediments remain in at least some of the countries where political attitude surveys can be and are being carried out. Official permission is required in some cases, and sometimes survey instruments must be submitted for review. Thus, although opportunities are indeed emerging, serious and systematic political attitude research in the Arab world is still at an early stage.[1]

Even in some countries that selectively permit polling, certain types of questions are often censored. Every Arab government routinely prohibits pollsters from asking direct questions about the country's top leaders. As a result, pollsters are almost always reduced to asking about approval ratings for leaders "outside your own country" or some other weak substitute. That is far from being the only type of taboo question. For example, in the 2006 "Arab Barometer" survey about democracy, one key question used in Algeria, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories was omitted in Kuwait and Morocco. This item asked respondents to choose the "most important" aspect of democracy from the following list:

- changing the government through elections
- freedom to criticize the government
- providing basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter for everyone
- decreasing the income gap between rich and poor[2]

Similarly, in Egypt, a 2005 Gallup poll apparently omitted a question about "the role of religious leaders" in "drafting new laws to which everyone would be subject."[3] In Egypt again, a 2007 University of Maryland poll had to delete the name of that country from a question about ending U.S. support for regional governments. Some polls in that country have had to drop questions about Muslim as opposed to Egyptian or Arab identity, whereas others have apparently gotten away with it. Generally, questions that could cast doubt about the regime, or inflame sectarian or social tensions, are forbidden or at least heavily discouraged. But other questions that could direct criticism outward are tolerated, in keeping with the overall recipe for political stability followed by most Arab governments. As Zogby International delicately phrased it in mid-2004:

> While many marketing polls have been conducted in the region over the years, this project focused on deeply held values, religious beliefs, political views, and other topics not generally polled in many of these countries. Progress is being made and we ourselves have found a greater willingness on the part of government authorities to allow more inquiry into these topics.[4]

Moreover, on those questions that pass the censors' test, some respondents may exercise self-censorship in

1. Mark Tessler and Amaney Jamal, "Political Attitude Research in the Arab World: Emerging Opportunities," PS*Online,* July 2006, p 4. Available online (http://polisci.lsa.umich.edu/documents/TesslerJamal.pdf).
2. Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler, "The Democracy Barometers: Attitudes in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (January 2008), p. 99. Available online (www.arabbarometer.org/reports/democbarometers.pdf).
3. Magali Rheault and Dalia Mogahed, "Majorities of Muslims and Americans See Religion and Law as Compatible," Gallup New Service, October 3, 2007.
4. "Arab Attitudes towards Political and Social Issues, Foreign Policy and the Media: A Public Opinion Poll Conducted Jointly by the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and Zogby International," May 2004. Available online (http://www.bsos.umd.edu/SADAT/pub/Arab%20Attitudes%20Towards%20Political%20and%20Social%20Issues,%20Foreign%20Policy%20and%20the%20Media.htm).

giving their answers. One thoughtful academic analyst notes that "despite the explosion of survey research … the realities of life in a *mukhabarat* (secret police) state should never be discounted.… Respondents in such societies will have real doubts about the confidentiality of their answers, and will very likely attempt to anticipate the correct (or safe) answers."[5]

Ironically, with the increased prevalence of polling could come increased official interference and corresponding distortion—as governments become more aware of and possibly more concerned about the potential for unwelcome messages and threaten to (or even actually do) shoot the messenger in response. Written reports from most commercial pollsters almost never say more than a few words about such very basic problems.[6] To find out more about them, one must search the specialized literature and interview some of the pollsters themselves, face to face, with a strict promise of confidentiality. In a recent academic political science journal, one can find an account by an Arab American scholar of her 1999 fieldwork in Palestinian society: "When I began my research, I became aware of the difficulties of conducting research in a semi-democratic environment where fear and skepticism prevail."[7] Another Arab American survey research expert, speaking at a seminar in late 2007, provided a rare account of these real-world problems worth citing in detail. In response to the author's query, Dalia Mogahed, director of Muslim world studies for the Gallup organization, talked about

> the practical conditions of polling in countries that have authoritarian governments such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt or Iran. Now we haven't been able to get into Syria.… But we have gone into places like the countries I just listed, as well as Tunisia, Algeria, which actually cut the most questions of any country, which was very interesting, as well as Yemen and some other countries, Pakistan, that would be considered hard to work in.…
>
> All our interviews are in-home and face to face. They're not in coffee shops. They're not outside, which is supposed to, studies show, lessen the possibility of people answering out of fear, answering out of social pressure.…
>
> The other thing we try to do to get at people's perception is to ask questions in a somewhat indirect way, but also we don't start with the really hard questions.…
>
> [W]e actually have to work with the security officials to get the questionnaire approved and so, in some cases, there are questions that are cut.…[I]n Egypt, we were not allowed to ask about whether or not people would favor the right of free assembly.[8]

In the Palestinian environment, other pollsters have suffered harassment and even physical assault for asking the "wrong" questions, or reporting the "wrong" results. Khalil Shikaki, the most prominent Palestinian pollster, was threatened first by Yasser Arafat in the mid-1990s, for reporting data showing Fatah's declining popularity, along with increasingly radical popular views. Then, in 2003, he was besieged in his office by Palestinian radicals upset with other survey data showing that only 10 percent of refugees would actually exercise a "right of return" to Israel, while a majority would accept compensation and resettlement elsewhere.[9] More recently, in one survey taken a few months after the Hamas coup in Gaza in mid-2007, "58 percent of respondents said they are now afraid to express their political views following the Hamas takeover."[10] If that is indeed the case, how much

5. Marc Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," in Joshua Fouts, ed., *Public Diplomacy: Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy; Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006), pp. 43–44. Available online (http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:HPpOuDpklrkJ:uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/USCC).
6. One new and honorable but partial exception to this rule is the brief discussion in appendix B of John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), pp. 176–181.
7. Tessler and Jamal, "Political Attitude Research in the Arab World," p 4.
8. Dalia Mogahed, "What Does God Have to Do with It? The Links between Religion, Radicalism and Violence" (transcript of presentation to Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2007), pp. 54–58. Available online (www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/events/2007/1023_radicalism/1023_radicalism.pdf).
9. James Bennet, "Palestinian Mob Attacks Pollster over Study on 'Right of Return,'" Associated Press, July 14, 2003 (available online at www.amitiesquebec-israel.org/texts/pollster.htm); Eric Umansky, "Why a Mob Attacked the Most Rational Man in the Middle East," *Columbia Journalism Review,* issue 1, January/February 2004 (available online at www.cjr.org/issues/2004/1/science-umansky.asp).
10. "Polls Show Gazans Fear, Distrust Hamas," Associated Press, October 3, 2007, citing a September 25–27 telephone poll of 470 Gazans by Near East Consulting of Bethlehem, West Bank.

can one credit anything else that these respondents tell the pollsters? And the Palestinian case is one of the best, in part because political polls have been a familiar part of the landscape for so long. According to Prof. Marc Lynch, a leading academic analyst of Arab society and politics, "Where public opinion polling does exist, real questions arise as to the reliability and significance of its findings. . . . Many Arab journalists dislike public opinion surveys in the Arab context because they see them as easily manipulated and lacking objectivity, while states fear that they will undermine their legitimacy."[11]

Even when the local government permits some polling, social pressures can make it extremely difficult to pursue. Some pollsters report serious problems obtaining interviews with illiterate respondents, who still constitute a significant proportion of the population in major countries such as Egypt or Morocco. As a result, some polls exhibit a systematic bias, often unacknowledged, toward the better-educated or at least literate segments of society. In some households, especially but not only in the most traditional societies, women respondents may be inaccessible, even to female interviewers. In certain Persian Gulf countries, some pollsters report refusal rates approaching 80 or 90 percent among nationals, who are often a small minority of the total population anyway. Such distortions are practically impossible to correct, even with the most rigorous sampling substitution protocols or statistical weighting techniques.

Faced with all of these pressures, some local subcontractors sometimes yield to the last resort of "referral" or "snowball" samples, in which each respondent suggests additional persons to be polled. No matter how circumscribed by "degrees of separation" or other gimmicks, however, this technique cannot produce a true representative sample. And its use is not always acknowledged, so extra caution is always required.

Special Sampling Problems: The Demographic Challenge

Other sampling issues also pose certain formidable challenges in this region, beginning with the unusual demographics of some Arab countries. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the most polled Arab countries, precisely because of its comparatively easygoing atmosphere. But foreign workers living there outnumber UAE nationals by the extraordinary ratio of about five to one—and by an even higher margin in the workforce, which is where most reported survey samples are taken. So a poll reported from the UAE may not really be a UAE poll at all but a kind of indeterminate mixture of various Arab and even non-Arab opinions from many other countries. Qatar hosts just as high a ratio of foreigners to nationals and would be equally hard to sample and report properly; Kuwait and Saudi Arabia pose similar problems because the labor force is more than half expatriate. In contrast, two of the other most polled Arab countries, thanks to their relatively open political systems, are Jordan and Lebanon. But they are just two small countries, each with highly distinctive demographics (and therefore unrepresentative of "the Arab world"). Jordan has a majority of Palestinian origin, and Lebanon has exceptionally large minority sectarian communities, both Shiite and Christian.

A second aspect of demographics is the urban/village split. Even today, it involves a much higher percentage of the total population in most Arab countries, including some of the most polled ones, than in many other places. Villages are usually much harder to reach and harder to sample properly. So some Arab polls (such as the well-known Zogby series) are usually confined to just two or three cities in each country. But these cities, large as they are, constitute no more than about a quarter of the national population in each case, and they are far from representative. Moreover, because many of the other major polls (such the Pew series) use true national samples, this sampling issue makes results very difficult to compare and validate from one poll to another. Even within the major cities, social structure poses special sampling and interviewing problems. Lower-class neighborhoods may be unsafe or unfriendly, hard to navigate, or just have too

11. Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 66–67.

few people who can be persuaded to invite a stranger inside and answer survey questions.

To be sure, these problems exist everywhere, but elsewhere they are easier to solve (or at least mitigate) by the relatively simple expedient of telephone polling. As discussed below, that is not a good option in the Arab context. Consequently, sample demographics are sometimes badly skewed. For example, in one widely cited University of Maryland survey from 2007, almost half the Egyptians polled reported that they had some college education, including a third who claimed to have a degree.[12] If true, this response is way out of proportion to the population, so much so that it cannot be "corrected" by the standard procedure of statistical weighting. And because numerous studies suggest that better-educated urban Arabs are actually more likely than others to express anti-American sentiments, these demographic distortions are almost guaranteed to produce a significantly distorted picture of public opinion in any given country.

In mid-2006, Prof. Marc Lynch wrote a summary of a 2006 "state of the art" conference on public opinion and public diplomacy that is worth quoting at length:

> The real methodological problems facing any public opinion survey in the Arab world—as well as the particular shortcomings of specific surveys—merit more than the token nod that they usually receive. . . . Even for the most credible, nonpartisan research there are continuing methodology fears. The Gallup and Pew surveys . . . the two most highly regarded in the field . . . have found widely discrepant results. . . . Others are less scrupulous: . . . telephone rather than face to face interviews, short interview protocols that do not allow time to build trust, interviews in public places, convenience sampling, and unacknowledged urban bias. Certain countries tend to be over-represented in survey research . . . while others are consistently absent. Bad data can drive out good, especially when its public release is itself an attempt to influence public opinion.[13]

A third difficult demographic issue is the problem of highly polarized and unevenly responsive publics. In Lebanon or Iraq, for instance, the deep divisions among religious sects or ethnic groups make speaking sensibly about national attitudes nearly impossible. Moreover, the extent of this polarization fluctuates, making even medium-term trends nearly impossible to specify. In Lebanon, the major groups had broadly similar views in 2004, only to diverge radically in 2005; this divergence was followed by another seesaw between partial convergence and renewed polarization in 2006 and 2007. In Iraq, the trends appear to be moving fitfully in the opposite direction, toward greater similarity between Sunni and Shiite Arab collective views, but still with many differences and uncertainties (not to mention complicating factors such as the Kurds).

Even if such distinctive demographic groups are less politically polarized, they may present very significant linguistic or other challenges. In Morocco or Algeria, for example, perhaps 20 to 30 percent of the population speaks not Arabic but some dialect of Berber as a first language, and women in that community are often especially uncomfortable with or even incapable of serious conversation in Arabic; yet polls are routinely conducted only in Arabic (and very occasionally also in French). Kurds in Iraq are similarly situated and similarly underserved in most polls. In the three northern provinces under Kurdish control since 1991, as the author observed on trips there in late 2006 and early 2008, few Kurds under thirty years of age can conduct even a simple conversation in Arabic anymore. Yet polls are usually conducted exclusively in Arabic anyway. From a survey research perspective, the only way to deal with this demographic issue is to try to record and report separately, and fairly frequently, on public opinion *within* each of the major groups in each such country. Some pollsters have been trying to do this, but with an uneven record of success.

12. WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, and National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," questionnaire, December 9, 2006–February 15, 2007, p. 20. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_quaire.pdf).
13. Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," pp. 34, 43.

Problems of Technical Fixes

ONE VERY COMMON and useful reality check on poll data is a comparison of results from different polls. Dramatically different results raise red flags about validity (but unfortunately without necessarily showing which results are right and which are wrong). If results are broadly similar across several different polls, that offers some reassurance about their methodology, integrity, and overall credibility. Credible polls may even be averaged to get a reasonable range.

Of course, the polls involved must have been taken at almost exactly the same time, with the same sample frame (for example, a probability sample of all citizens 18 years of age and older), and with exactly the same (or at least nearly identical) questions, for this test to make any sense. Even so, some systematic error by separate pollsters—or systematically sugar-coated or otherwise distorted responses from their samples—might call all these different surveys into question. That dire situation is relatively unlikely, however, so a test of "inter-pollster reliability" is one of the first and best measures of how seriously to take polling data.

In the Middle East context, however, the paucity of polls today makes conducting even the most cursory test of this nature almost impossible except in a handful of special cases. Although several ongoing series of annual social/political surveys now cover some Arab and (to a lesser extent) other predominantly Muslim societies, these polls almost never coincide closely with respect to any of the requirements for such comparisons: the same fieldwork dates, the sampling frame, the question wording, or even the same countries selected for inclusion in each survey. As two experts on polling in the American context recently put it:

> Don't be seduced by averages.... Averaging polls with different methodologies can easily obscure rather than clarify. If you take a state with few polls—one good-quality survey, say, and three methodological clunkers—averaging may well do more harm than good. Averaging polls done across different time periods, with different sampling methodologies…and different measures of alleged "undecideds" all assumes that these differences make no difference. With this approach, you might as well throw a little Ouija in as well.[1]

Efforts to remedy similar deficiencies in Arab polling through some kind of professional coordination or public exchange are only now in their infancy. One very preliminary discussion held in the past several years, behind closed doors, reportedly showed results from two of the three polls in roughly the same ballpark, but the third "somewhere out in left field." Even that much corroboration is rare. For the time being, then, no solid regional benchmarks of reliability exist as in other parts of the world where polls are considered more normal fare.

When roughly comparable data sets are available from the same country, the comparisons are often not very reassuring. The best cases in this respect are Iraqis and Palestinians, who have been polled by a variety of reputable organizations at frequent intervals since 2003 or since the first Oslo Accord a decade earlier, respectively. But other countries, while calmer, are perhaps for that very reason much less often polled, with much more varied results. Morocco and Egypt are good illustrations of this problem. In Morocco, one finds a large and relatively open society, with a very well-developed commercial survey research capability. Yet inter-pollster reliability seems noticeably low there. For example, on the key question of favorable overall views of the United States, Pew reports a drastic decline from 77 percent in 1999/2000 to just 27 percent in 2003 and 2004,[2] after the American intervention in Iraq. This finding was followed by a large rebound to 49 percent in 2005, according to Pew. But Zogby reports just 34

1. Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "5 Tips for Decoding Those Election Polls," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2007, p. B3.
2. Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Views of a Changing World: June 2003* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2003). Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf).

percent favorable that same year[3]—followed by a huge and unexplained drop to a mere 7 percent in 2006.[4]

The December 2006 University of Maryland poll, in contrast, breaks this question down into favorable views of "the current U.S. government," twice as high at 16 percent—alongside widely (64 percent) favorable views of both "the American people" and "American culture."[5] Again, Zogby records a much less favorable result in responses to a subtly different question, showing that just 28 percent of Moroccans say their view of the American people has a positive "impact on their overall opinion of the United States."[6] At least part of the difference, as usual, probably results from Zogby's narrow focus on just a few urban centers, as opposed to the wider national coverage of most other surveys.

Serious inter-pollster reliability uncertainties have been noted in Egypt as well. For example, the Pew poll conducted in April 2006 shows 69 percent compared with 30 percent of Egyptians with an unfavorable rather than a favorable opinion of the United States.[7] The Zogby poll conducted in November 2006, by contrast, shows a worse result by about fifteen points in both directions: 83 percent unfavorable and just 14 percent favorable.[8] One might guess that this result reflects the difference in timing because this Zogby poll was taken not long after the unpopular Israeli-Lebanese war, but the previous Zogby poll, taken in late 2005, recorded almost exactly the same highly unfavorable view of the United States.

The difference from Pew may actually be caused by the nature of the samples: Pew is truly a national poll, whereas Zogby is confined to metropolitan Cairo and Alexandria (approximately one-quarter of Egypt's total population). Wording of questions is also subtly different, which seems to skew the results: Zogby notes that just 23 percent of Egyptians said their view of the American people positively affects their overall opinion of the United States; while the University of Maryland poll from January 2007 shows nearly twice as many (40 percent) favorable views of the American people per se. (Pew's corresponding figure from April 2006 is closer to the Maryland one, at 36 percent.)

Because inter-pollster reliability in the Arab context is relatively low (or even worse, indeterminate), some of the more conscientious survey research organizations have tried to come up with surrogate sources of confirmation. Here is Dalia Mogahed of Gallup on one aspect of this admirable attempt:

> [W]e can try to get a reality check on whether or not we're really getting something close to an honest response. We have . . . some questions on people's perception of corruption, corruption in government, corruption in business. . . . [W]e compare that to Transparency International's Corruption Index. There is about a correlation of like .7 to .8, which is really very high for public perception versus hard measures. That gives me, at least, some assurance that people are being honest even about something that might be seen as politically sensitive.[9]

Despite this step in the right direction, Transparency International's index is not really a "hard measure"; it, too, is based partly on self-reported perceptions, so it cannot be an independent test of respondents' honesty. Furthermore, where "hard measures" of corruption exist (such as those developed by the World Bank in recent years), they cannot fully test the honesty of self-reported perceptions either—simply because the relationship between reality and perceptions is not known.

3. The Arab American Institute/Zogby International Poll, December 14, 2006. Available online (http://www.zogbyworldwide.com/news/Readnews1.cfm?ID=774).
4. Ibid.
5. WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," April 24, 2007. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf).
6. Arab American Institute/Zogby International Poll. December 14, 2006.
7. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "America's Image Slips, but Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas" (Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., June 13, 2006). Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=824).
8. Zogby International for the Arab American Institute, "Five Nation Survey of the Middle East," December 2006. Available online (http://aai.3cdn.net/96d8eeaec55ef4c217_m9m6b97wo.pdf).
9. Dalia Mogahed, "What Does God Have to Do with It? The Links between Religion, Radicalism and Violence" (transcript of presentation to Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2007), pp. 56–57. Available online (www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/events/2007/1023_radicalism/1023_radicalism.pdf).

The epistemological truth is that no sure way exists of knowing how honest or dishonest survey responses may be, especially to sensitive questions posed in comparatively closed or dangerous societies.

One important exception is the very small set of more or less standard, simple questions about the top international and regional actors, whether political entities such as the United States or al-Qaeda or personalities such as President George W. Bush or Osama bin Laden. Because many regional surveys have included a few questions of this nature on various occasions over a relatively lengthy period, with few if any differences in wording, these results can be compared and contrasted. They are, in fact, broadly similar across a number of different polls, which provides a fair amount of confidence in their validity.

In the few cases where these necessary conditions apply, analysts can establish real trends in these attitudes over time—and also try to relate changes in one set of responses (for example, views of the United States) to changes in another (for example, views of al-Qaeda). For some reason, however—perhaps because the findings, as is shown below, are not only counterintuitive but also arguably politically incorrect—this kind of straightforward comparative analysis is precisely what has been largely missing from most serious public discussion of Middle Eastern and wider Muslim polling data so far.

Another Technical Fix: Trendy, But Not Always True

One way of trying to get around or "factor out" the censorship or self-censorship problems in Middle East polling is to focus not on the absolute numbers from any one poll—the approval ratings, for example, of the United States, or of Hamas, Hizballah, and al-Qaeda—but on how those numbers go up or down from one poll to the next. As one expert quick-and-dirty guide to polling explains: "Change over time is important, especially when it's consistent, with a clear narrative of what's happening and why.... 'Trend is your friend,' pollsters say. Look at repeat polls from the same organization to gauge movement over time."[10]

This approach is especially useful in Middle Eastern and other relatively closed or traditional societies, where a baseline response to certain controversial questions may reflect social convention or pressure rather than personal opinions. One could reasonably, although hardly conclusively, claim that fluctuations in such responses are less likely than individual snapshots to be the product of relatively constant background factors, such as courtesy bias, political correctness, or outright intimidation.

This approach is indeed quite valuable in countering the very common misconception that Arab attitudes are somehow locked in place or implacably hostile to the United States. In fact, several different surveys demonstrate that many vicissitudes occurred in Arab views on this question over the past decade—including periods of substantial improvement—even during the presidency of George W. Bush. For example, from late 2004 to late 2005, the Zogby poll found that favorable views of the United States, while still in the minority, had doubled or even tripled in the UAE and Morocco: from 14 to 28 percent in the former country and from 11 to 34 percent in the latter. This finding probably reflected a year of relative calm in Arab-Israeli tensions, some success in U.S.-supported democratization efforts in the region, and the simple passage of time since the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The next year, however, after sharp increases in violence in Iraq and Lebanon alike, polls by both Zogby and Pew showed a definite drop in U.S. ratings. This finding was followed by a modest rebound in 2007, which again was comparatively calmer.

From a strict methodological perspective, however, the trouble with trends is that they are only as good as the individual polls that appear to produce them. If two or three bad polls indicate a trend, it may well be completely spurious. And if answers in these polls really do reflect social or political pressure, then a change in those answers reflects a change in those pressures—not in people's opinions. Moreover, shifts in Arab

10. Langer and Cohen, "5 Tips for Decoding Those Election Polls."

public opinion, as measured in these polls, are often quite localized and short term, apparently in response to some idiosyncratic circumstance or event. Percentages may go up or down dramatically in one place but not in others, thirty or forty or even seventy points on some questions one year, only to shift right back the next year—and only in one country. As a result, trend analysis is difficult to apply systematically, especially on a cross-country basis, in an effort to control for any underlying methodological problems.

For example, in mid-2005, soon after a series of suicide bombings in Casablanca, the Pew poll showed that 73 percent of Moroccans saw Islamic extremism as a threat to their country.[11] Barely a year and half later, by contrast, the University of Maryland poll showed an astonishingly low 1 percent saying terrorism was a "very big problem" in their country.[12] Yet in the same short time frame, the trend in Jordan was precisely in the opposite direction, and to a similarly extreme extent. In the mid-2005 Pew poll, a mere 10 percent of Jordanians saw Islamic extremism as a threat. But this finding was recorded before a major November 2005 suicide bombing in Amman. By April 2006, according to the next Pew poll, 60 percent of Jordanians were saying they were at least "somewhat" concerned by "the rise of Islamic extremism" in their country—while the percentage saying suicide bombing was never justified had shot up to 43 percent from just 11 percent the year before.[13] The Maryland poll conducted later in 2006 confirms this reading.

In some cases, large swings in opinion seem linked to fresh memories of specific major events that occurred a few weeks or months before a poll was conducted. In other cases, such swings may stem from fading recollections of major events that occurred a year or two earlier. In Jordan, according to both the Pew and the Zogby polls, favorable views of the United States rose about twenty points between 2003 and 2005, even as the proportion who said the United States considered Jordanian interests actually dropped marginally, to a mere 17 percent. The main reason for the positive trend may simply have been that the shock and dismay over American military intervention in Iraq were wearing off, allowing attitudes to rebound at least partially to prewar levels. By mid-2006, a new, negative stimulus intervened: the Israeli-Hizballah war in Lebanon, which appears to have more than reversed the previous year's modest gains for the United States in Arab public opinion. Even here, however, an accident of poll timing may have distorted some of the worst findings. The 2006 Zogby poll was mostly conducted in November, during Ramadan, when Arabs themselves will tell you they are often cranky after fasting every day and also more influenced by Islamic ideas. This accident of timing may conceivably be partly responsible for the apparent dip in perceptions of the United States from 2005 to 2006.

More recently, one of the most significant cases of quick turnaround concerns the public mood among Arabs about Iran in the months after the summer 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war. The variation in question wording from one poll to another leaves few exact trends to go by. The mid-2006 Pew poll includes just Egypt and Jordan and showed Egyptian overall views of Iran to be moderately positive (59 percent favorable compared with 39 percent unfavorable), while Jordanians were evenly divided (49 percent compared with 51 percent).[14] In a like fashion, only a third of Egyptians (34 percent) and somewhat more Jordanians (44 percent) considered "the current government in Iran" to pose even a moderate danger to "stability in the Middle East." But these negative Jordanian voices were up sharply from just 16 percent, recorded three years earlier in May 2003.

Still, the impression created by the November 2006 Zogby polls was that Iran and its bellicose president

11. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics," July 14, 2005, p. 1. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=811).
12. WorldPublicOpinion.org. "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," April 24, 2007.
13. Pew Research Center, "Pew Global Attitudes Project: Spring 2006 Survey (15-Nation Survey Final Topline)." Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/253topline.pdf).
14. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "America's Image Slips, but Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas."

were sweeping the Arab street (in the most heroic sense) because of their Hizballah protégé's strong showing against Israel. Yet three months later, Zogby produced a very different impression. His February/March 2007 polls showed solid majorities in Egypt, Lebanon, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan describing Iran's role in Iraq as "negative." Zogby's interpretation ventures a bit beyond the data but sounds very plausible: Ahmadinezhad "is clearly creating some real concern in the region and eating up whatever goodwill Iran had built up. . . . His boasting, Iran's nuclear program, and its behavior in Iraq have frittered that away."[15] The mid-2007 Pew poll shows that in Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait, the balance of opinion about Iran overall had clearly shifted from predominantly positive to predominantly negative—less than a year after the Israeli-Hizballah war reportedly made Iran a pan-Arab favorite for a short time.[16]

In most discussions of public opinion, the presumption, and rightly so, is that attitudes can change over time and may even shift quite abruptly as circumstances suggest. Yet somehow, with respect to "the Arab street," the prevailing image is one of unchanging attitudes or at least deeply entrenched ones. This image, however, is not supported by the facts. To some extent, this variability is reassuring, suggesting that these polls can measure certain aspects of how Arab publics respond to current events. Thus, the ways Arab opinions change in response to events and over time are at least as important as sweeping generalizations about a "growing gap" between Arab governments and their own people or about a "deepening divide" between Arabs and Americans. Nevertheless, the volatility and extreme variability of these numbers also suggest that these attitudes are ephemeral, neither firm nor intense enough to motivate behavior. And from a methodological standpoint, trend data cannot fully compensate for the uncertain validity of the individual surveys on which the apparent trend lines are based.

The Phone Fix: Wrong Numbers

The third and newest purported "technical fix" for some of the special problems of Arab polling is polls conducted over the telephone rather than in person. This method is supposed to solve some of the practical problems already described of rapid, large-scale national sampling and of access to female respondents—and also, much more broadly, of any access at all to tightly controlled or hostile societies or governments in places such as Syria or Saudi Arabia (or non-Arab Iran). Pollsters claim that the growth in telephone penetration around the region, although uneven, is now sufficient to permit representative sampling by this method. In addition, phone polling is supposed to encourage more-candid responses because of its appearance of greater anonymity and confidentiality.

The reality, however, is that this methodological innovation simply does not perform as promised. A large part of the reason was identified fifteen years ago and is still at work today: "An endearing if seemingly illogical feature of Arab society is that people are often more willing to talk freely to strangers in person than over the phone."[17] Even when they agree to be interviewed on political topics by telephone, Arabs are often likely to be more guarded or "politically correct."

Some evidence for this assertion can be found in the responses to recent telephone polls in Syria and Saudi Arabia, especially on questions not highlighted (or even mentioned) in the pollster's publicity. In Syria, where turnout in rubber-stamp elections tends to run in the very low double digits even by the most generous independent estimates, over 90 percent of respondents told the pollster that they had voted in both the parliamentary and the presidential elections during the past year. Even more remarkably, over 90 percent of Syrian respondents also called those elections free and fair! In Saudi Arabia, according to the same pollster, King Abdullah got a 95 percent approval rating in an "unprecedented" telephone poll

15. Quoted in "Analysis—Arabs See Both U.S. and Iran as Harming Iraq," *Ya Libnan* (Beirut), March 30, 2007. Available online (http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2007/03/analysis_arabs.php).
16. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers: 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," June 27, 2007, pp. 47, 51, 62. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf).
17. David Pollock, *The "Arab Street": Public Opinion in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), pp. 40–41.

in 2007.[18] It simply defies credulity to imagine that these responses could possibly be sincere. Even official Syrian sources do not claim anything remotely like the electoral turnout self-reported in this survey. Rather, most respondents, whether Syrian or Saudi, probably figured these phone calls were monitored, if not conducted, by the *mukhabarat*, the ubiquitous internal security services. Perhaps the respondents lied on some questions and told the truth on others, but one really has no way of knowing. As the director of Muslim studies for Gallup told the author, all her firm's interviews with those respondents "are not over the phones, so they're not worried about phone-tappings and those kinds of things. That should help."[19]

Clearly, the time has come for a serious reckoning about such methodological issues. Nevertheless, the Saudi phone numbers were cited uncritically in mainstream U.S. media coverage of President Bush's visit to Riyadh in January 2008.[20] Most recently, some enterprising pollsters have tried one other technological fix to overcome Arab survey research obstacles: online polling. In the right hands, these polls might have some potential as a step up from the totally unscientific, self-selected call-in or click-on "surveys" sponsored by newspapers and TV shows in the region, which are useless as any kind of statistical sample. To the extent that any online survey can get around the self-selection problem, it may offer a limited window at least on cyberspace, if not on society as a whole. Unfortunately, however, the problem of *mukhabarat* monitoring may be even worse with online than with telephone polls. One example is a multinational online poll from late 2006, claiming to show that over 70 percent of Saudis and Egyptians believed suicide bombings were wrong.[21] Even if this result is representative of internet users in those two countries, it cannot be extrapolated to the general public in most Arab states, where internet penetration is still among the lowest in the world.

18. Details of both polls are available from the sponsor online (www.terrorfreetomorrow.org).
19. Dalia Mogahed, "What Does God Have to Do with It?," p. 55.
20. See, for example, Donna Abu-Nasr, "Saudi Public Leery of Bush: Bush Gets Warm Welcome from King, but Many Saudis Leery," Associated Press, January 15, 2008.
21. Angus Reid Global Monitor, "World Believes Suicide Bombings are Unlawful," online poll for *Maclean's* magazine (Canada), November 15, 2006. Available online (www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/13806/world_believes_suicide_bombings_are_unlawful).

Problems with Poll Design

HAVING EXAMINED the leading technical fixes for some of the practical problems of Arab polling and found them wanting, the discussion moves on to other problems that are even harder—because they have no technical fixes at all. From here on, the answers to all questions depend as much on honesty, relevant background knowledge, and good judgment as on any methodological qualifications or techniques.

Country Selection

The most overlooked yet also hardest problem in designing regional polls—particularly those that claim to represent public opinion in the "Muslim world" or even just the Middle East—is country selection. Three-quarters of the world's Muslims are not Arabs. Why then are Arabs so overrepresented—often comprising a majority of the countries selected—in "Muslim world" surveys? Why do so many polls include just three or four non-Arab countries (usually Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia)? What about Bangladesh and India, which account for about as many Muslims as all the Arab countries put together? Omitting them from country selection is akin to presenting "European" opinion without including either England or France, for example. Why are relatively pro-American publics (such as Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Israel) routinely omitted from "Middle East" surveys? Afghanistan, for example, which is demonstrably pollable, has about as many people as Morocco or Malaysia, which are included far more often in "regional" or "Muslim world" data sets. Kuwait, too, is relatively easy to poll, and it has as many citizens (and as much oil and gas) as the UAE—but Kuwait is almost never included in regional surveys, whereas the UAE almost always is.

The problem exists as well in polls that are explicitly confined to Arabs. The Arab citizens of Israel, for instance, number about as many as those of the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar combined, but they are almost always excluded from regional surveys. Why is Iraq excluded from most "Arab" surveys, when for at least the past five years it is probably the best polled of all Arab states and has five times the population of Jordan?

To their credit, a few of the major polling organizations have begun to remedy some of these deficiencies. Pew, for instance, included both Kuwait and Israel in the Middle East section of its 2007 "global" survey. In addition, Pew includes many more Muslim populations in Africa, Central Asia, and Europe in reporting and analyzing "Muslim world" data. Also to its credit, it explicitly recognizes the great variation in views held by the world's billion-plus Muslims, rather than trying to coerce them all into the same procrustean bed. As Pew's lead report on its 2007 poll noted:

> Examining the views of Muslim respondents from different regions highlights the diversity of opinion regarding the U.S. in the Muslim world. Opinions of the U.S. remain overwhelmingly negative among Middle Eastern and Asian Muslims, although … there are exceptions in Bangladesh and Kuwait, and among Sunni Muslims in Lebanon. However, African Muslims tend to express more positive views.[1]

By contrast, some other leading pollsters continue to claim that a survey limited to Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Indonesia, for instance, can be taken as somehow representative of worldwide Muslim opinion. Other leading pollsters, who actually take the trouble to survey a much wider variety of predominantly Muslim countries, sometimes make the mistake of lumping them all together. Gallup, for example, emphasizes an artificial "average" of just 7 percent of Muslims worldwide who say that the events of September 11 were "completely justified" and have a highly negative view of the United States—but without specifying how individual publics stack up. But Gallup also takes care to note the wide differences

1. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers: 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," June 27, 2007, pp. 8 and 17. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf).

across Muslim societies: while Saudis or Egyptians are almost as critical as Germans or Spaniards of "U.S. leadership," at 70–80 percent, Muslims in Afghanistan, or Senegal, or other less-often-polled places are actually favorably disposed, also by solid majorities. And Iranians are only narrowly negative (59 percent)![2] If ever one of the usually "missing" countries is polled, no matter what the results, that almost never makes news in the U.S. media, where the focus is on "the usual suspects"—often hostile places, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Jordan, or unstable ones, such as Lebanon or Iraq. When Pew finally included Kuwait in its 2007 "global" survey, for example, no mention was ever made in any of the numerous U.S. press reports on the topic. In Kuwait itself, however, it was front-page news in the local Arabic-language press, probably because the findings were so favorable. One headline read, "In a global survey by the American Pew Poll dealing with the views of the world's publics: Kuwaitis are satisfied with their government and their monetary incomes."[3]

"Instrument" Bias: The Answer Depends on the Question

Some polls give the impression that (as any decent lawyer understands) one never asks a question without knowing the answer in advance. This seemingly magical feat can be accomplished because (as any decent pollster understands) the answer will depend on how one puts the question. The phenomenon is well known from American opinion polls, which may use a "split sample" to measure its effect: in the same poll, ask one randomly chosen half of the sample a question worded one way, and ask the other half the same basic question but with a slightly different wording. Here is a classic example:

> In 1996, Gallup ran a survey about the minimum wage. Some respondents were asked if they favored an increase. More than 80 percent said yes. The rest were asked instead if they would favor raising the minimum wage "even if it resulted in fewer jobs available to low-paid workers." Support plummeted to 40 percent.[4]

In other words, by adjusting the wording of one question, a pollster could, wittingly or unwittingly, either double the result or cut it in half. This problem is especially evident in certain polls that purport to quantify Arab or broader Muslim priorities with widely different and sometimes very surprising results. For example, in March/April 2007, Zogby conducted a poll on Darfur, sponsored by the Arab American Institute, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, the UAE, Turkey, and Malaysia.[5] Zogby headlined one finding—truly a startling one at first glance—as follows: "More than three-in-four respondents in each of the six nations agree that other Arabs (or Muslims) should be just as concerned about Darfur as they are about the Arab-Israeli conflict."[6] The supporting figures are indeed superficially impressive: 90 percent or more in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Malaysia, and nearly 80 percent in the UAE and Turkey. On second glance, however, the question that elicited these results turns out to be triply loaded: "Please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: I believe that because Sudan is an Arab ('Muslim' for Turkey and Malaysia) nation, other Arabs (Muslims) should care just as much about Darfur as they would the Arab-Israeli conflict or the conflict in Iraq."[7]

The first way this question is loaded is called "courtesy bias," in this context a tendency for more people to agree than to disagree with most statements presented. The second way is by imbalance and inference,

2. Dalia Mogahed, "Opinions of the U.S. in the Islamic World" (presentation to the Center for National Policy, Washington, D.C., February 13, 2008; as heard).
3. "Fi istitlaa aalami ajra'athu muassasat byu bawl al-amrikiyyah tanaawala ittijaahaat shu'ub al-aalam: al-kuwaitiyun raadun 'an humkumatihim wa dukhulihim al-maaliyah," *al-Watan* (Kuwait), July 27, 2007 (author's transliteration).
4. Bryan Caplan, "Myths about Our Ballot-Box Behavior," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2008, p. B3.
5. Arab American Institute/Zogby International, "Arab and Muslim Public Opinion Takes the Lead on Darfur," March–April, 2007. Available online (http://aai.3cdn.net/c57541b60f206b0297_cmm6brl5d.pdf).
6. Ibid., p. 10.
7. Ibid.

giving the respondent an explicit and plausible reason to agree ("because Sudan is an Arab/Muslim nation") but not to disagree. The third way of loading this question is the most egregious of all, because it is invisible. It is "sequence bias": influencing the results through placement of questions in a series. In this instance, the question came right after respondents were told that "400,000 Muslims have been killed" in Darfur, "2.5 million people have been driven from their homes," and "Muslim nations intervened in Bosnia to aid their Muslim population."[8] If ever there were a case of leading the witness, this is it. Given all of the preceding, it is no wonder that this pollster's website invites prospective clients to pay for polls that will "show" the public is on their side: "The full results and subtotals belong exclusively to the client, who has the sole right to release or withhold the information. This makes our monthly polls particularly effective for advocacy groups who hope to convince elected officials that the public is on their side."[9]

These considerations lead us back to the initial items in this survey, where sequence bias is not at fault. The first two questions ask about levels of concern and of interest in "the ongoing conflict" or just "the situation" in Darfur. The percentages of those reporting "not much concern" or "no concern at all" about Darfur were fairly high in three of the four Arab countries polled: Saudi Arabia, 38 percent; UAE, 44 percent; and Egypt, 51 percent. Taking these answers together with those about a comparison to the Palestinian territories and Iraq, along with the fact that Egypt's population is nearly quadruple that of Saudi Arabia and the UAE combined, one could with about as much (or as little) justice construct this alternative headline for the poll: "Half of Arabs in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE Show 'Not Much' Concern about Palestine and Iraq." This illustration of loaded questions and biased presentation is admittedly a blatant case, but more-subtle instances can be found in key questions even in otherwise reasonably well-crafted questionnaires. For example, two questions from an ongoing, high-profile academic research project are worded as follows: "What concerns you most about the consequences of the war in Iraq?" and "What aspect of the al-Qaeda organization, if any, do you sympathize with the most?" Plainly, both questions are loaded to produce a picture of concern about Iraq and sympathy for al-Qaeda. The insertion of the words "if any" does nothing to fix this deficiency.[10]

Although non-Arab Iran lies just beyond the general scope of this study, two recent polls from that country—with some questions used in Arab polls as well—tell this story so vividly that they must be cited here. One key question is doubly loaded in a negative direction. First, in the item stem, it asks about the goal of "what the United States calls" the war against terror—which, especially given widespread negative views of the United States overall, is manifestly a form of prejudicial attribution, one that practically drips with sarcasm and invites a jaundiced response. (The Pew polls use a better but still-loaded formulation of this issue, asking about "U.S.-led efforts against terrorism.") Then, the question offers two relatively detailed unfavorable options, and only after those, a single barebones favorable option:

> Do you think the primary goal of what the United States calls the war on terrorism is to:
> - Weaken and divide the Islamic world, the Islamic religion and its people?
> - Achieve political and military domination to control Middle East resources?
> - Protect itself from terrorist attacks?[11]

This form of bias, providing more alternatives in one direction than in another, can aptly be termed "option

8. Ibid.
9. Available online (www.zogby.com/zfiles/index.cfm). See also Chris Mooney, "John Zogby's Creative Polls: And a Closer Look at His Methods," *The American Prospect,* February 1, 2003. Available online (www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=john_zogbys_creative_polls).
10. Shibley Telhami, "Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey (with Zogby International): Results from Lebanon Poll Taken November 11–16, 2006." Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, 2006. Available online (www.brookings.edu/comm/events/2006Lebanon.pdf).
11. Gary Langer and Jon Cohen, "5 Tips for Decoding Those Election Polls," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2007, p. B3.

loading," and it practically ensures a distorted response pattern. In this case, not surprisingly, three-quarters of Iranians chose one of the first two options. (And not surprisingly, when the same question was asked in the United States, 40 percent of Americans did as well.) Quite possibly, a solid majority of Iranians really do have a negative view of that American policy, but one cannot rely on this question to provide an unbiased measurement one way or the other, because the wording is tilted in a particular direction. Worse yet, recent high-profile reports from other "Muslim world" (confined in this case to Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia) polls cite a very similar question. For good measure, those polls ask Muslim respondents whether a U.S. goal is to "spread Christianity in the region" as well.[12]

In contrast, a different poll from Iran taken in June 2007 features questions tilted in the opposite, positive direction. At first glance, the findings appear almost too good to be true: a majority of Iranians support "recognizing Israel and Palestine each as separate, independent states" (55 percent yes, 35 percent no). An even larger majority endorses "ending Iranian support for any armed group inside Iraq and only using Iranian influence to actively support a peaceful, democratic government" (64 percent yes, 23 percent no).[13]

A second glance, however, reveals that these findings really are too good to be true. They were elicited by prefacing the statements as follows: "I am going to read you several proposals which some Iranian diplomats were willing to give to the United States in return for normal relations." This formulation seems to give official sanction to these proposals, along with a rationale for accepting them. And that, in turn, wittingly or unwittingly prejudices the results, this time in a favorable way.[14]

Again, majorities of Iranians might really endorse such major policy shifts. But one cannot safely draw such conclusions from such loaded questions. Another survey, from Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan, and Indonesia, offers some additional classic cases of this problem. This well-known series of polls, focused on just a few countries but claiming to speak for Muslims everywhere, uses some questions that are risibly loaded against the United States and in favor of al-Qaeda. For example, the overwhelmingly Muslim respondents in those four countries are asked if they "agree with the al-Qaeda goal" of "standing up to America and affirming the dignity of the Islamic people"—as if those objectives were inseparable.[15] (Imagine the outcry that would follow, and rightly so, if an American poll asked whether respondents agreed with the goal of "standing up to Islamic countries and affirming the dignity of the American people.")

Additional response options prime respondents with negative cues about American policy, asking if they want the United States to "remove its bases and military forces from all Islamic countries" or stop supporting Israel. Small wonder, then, that the "findings" from these questions are so universally bad. And small wonder that two-thirds of respondents in these surveys are led to voice approval for the literally fantastic notion of some plan to "unify all Islamic countries into a single Islamic state or caliphate."[16]

Another example of faulty question wording can be cited from Gallup polls, notwithstanding their attempts at objectivity: a combination of possible sequence bias and prejudicial attribution. These problems are apparent in questions touching directly on the attacks of September 11. One question asks if those events were justified—but after another question asking if it is morally acceptable for people to "sacrifice their lives for a cause they believe in." Two separate questions ask respondents who they think was responsible for September 11—eliciting a plurality of "don't know" responses in samples

12. See, for example, WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, "Muslims Believe US Seeks to Undermine Islam," April 24, 2007. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home_page/346.php?nid=&id=&pnt=346).
13. Terror Free Tomorrow, "Polling Iranian Public Opinion: An Unprecedented Nationwide Survey of Iran" (Washington, D.C., June 2007), p. 38. Available online (www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagestft/TFT%20Iran%20Survey%20Report.pdf).
14. Ibid.
15. WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," April 24, 2007. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf).
16. WorldPublicOpinion.org, "Muslims Believe US Seeks to Undermine Islam."

from nine mostly Muslim societies in late 2001—but then follows up by asking whether respondents agree with "news reports" that Arabs were responsible. This choice of wording was perhaps unfortunate because, as Gallup's own researcher has subsequently noted,

> anyone who has been to the Middle East and has spent some time there knows that people just do not have faith in official stories of any kind about anything, and this was an official story. It was a government story. That's all it was. It was the U.S. Government said this is who did it, and no one has ever been able to independently verify it except for bin Laden admitting it, which could have been fabricated. I mean these videos can be made on computers. People have stories about everything.[17]

But a different September 11 question, not from Gallup, is much more egregious. This question offers three response options regarding the U.S. government's prior knowledge of the September 11 attacks: (1) the United States did not know about them ahead of time; (2) the United States did know ahead of time but did not prevent the attacks; or (3) the United States knew about the attacks and allowed them to happen anyway. Clearly, and almost incredibly, this construction is loaded. Two of three options say that the U.S. government did have prior knowledge of the September 11 tragedy—and either did nothing to stop it or somehow actually aided and abetted the perpetrators, producing an artificially inflated percentage. Worse yet, the "middle position," which standard social science research shows would be the seemingly safe and reasonable choice among any three such answers, is that the U.S. government anticipated, yet failed to prevent, this horrible national tragedy. People may or may not believe that; but they probably should not be led to accept that inference by a poorly designed questionnaire.

Self-Referential Misperceptions

A more subtle, but also quite common, problem of survey design concerns questions that require respondents to gauge changes in their own attitudes: for instance, whether their own views of the United States improved, worsened, or stayed the same over the preceding year. Many people actually have a subjective sense of such change that is very different from the actual trends registered in successive polls. For example, in the 2005 Zogby poll, large majorities in three Arab states said their attitude toward the United States had worsened over the past year: Egypt, 84 percent; Morocco, 72 percent; and Jordan, 62 percent. Yet a comparison of the 2004 and 2005 results on a straight favorable/unfavorable U.S. image question shows that these attitudes had actually improved by fifteen to twenty points in all three countries over the course of that year.[18]

Several plausible (and not mutually exclusive) explanations exist for this anomaly, including the following: (1) the samples are not comparable, in which case the survey methodology is itself fundamentally flawed; (2) the available data, presented as a simple favorable/unfavorable dichotomy, fails to capture changes in intensity of feeling that could help account for the self-reported negative shift; (3) some people just do not remember accurately how their own views might have changed over the course of a year; (4) some people may be reluctant, for whatever reason, to admit that their views of the United States had improved; or (5) some combination of these and possibly other factors. Regardless of the reason, the point is that such self-referential responses, even if honestly expressed, may be substantially inaccurate. Moreover, the problems of interpretation become even murkier when respondents are asked how they explain these attitudinal changes over time—changes that many of them are apparently not reporting or even remembering correctly. For example, the 2006 Zogby poll asked:

17. Dalia Mogahed, "What Does God Have to Do with It? The Links between Religion, Radicalism and Violence" (transcript of presentation to Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2007), pp. 60–61. Available online (www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/events/2007/1023_radicalism/1023_radicalism.pdf).
18. See the Zogby organization's own reports from its 2004 and 2005 Arab surveys, "Attitudes of Arabs 2005: An In-Depth Look at Social and Political Concerns of Arabs"; available online (http://aai.3cdn.net/6e38e45846c8ce7df5_k0m6be9di.pdf). Also see James Zogby, "2005 Arab Attitudes toward U.S.: Good News and Bad News," November 7, 2005: "most of those who now report having a favorable view of the US do not indicate feeling better about the US during the past year." Available online (www.truthout.org/docs_2005/printer_110805H.shtml).

"What two factors [from a list] most contributed to your change in attitude toward the United States?"[19] Iraq and the Palestinian issue, not surprisingly, roughly tied for first place as negative factors in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan. But questions of this sort, which require respondents not just to recall but also to explain their own shifting views correctly, unavoidably raise a double-barreled credibility problem, and answers to them are therefore of dubious value. As one expert put it, "Measures of anti-Americanism do not tell policymakers the causes of these attitudes; even self-reported findings, such as a Zogby question in which overwhelming majorities said that their hostility was driven by policy rather than by culture, should be taken with a grain of salt."[20] This polling problem is general, not somehow particular to Arab audiences. A fellow survey research expert has written with respect to American (or other) respondents in political polls, "we shouldn't take their self-reports at face value. . . . They're offering us plausible reasons, justifications or after-the-fact rationalizations for inaccessible, neurologically and emotionally driven decisions."[21]

19. Zogby International for the Arab American Institute, "Five Nation Survey of the Middle East," December 2006. Available online (http://aai.3cdn.net/96d8eeaec55ef4c217_m9m6b97wo.pdf).
20. Marc Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," in Joshua Fouts, ed., *Public Diplomacy: Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion*, (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy; Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006), pp. 38. Available online (http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:HPpOuDpklrkJ:uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/USCC).
21. George Bishop, "Why We Keep Getting Snowed by the Polls," *Washington Post*, February 3, 2008, p. B3. Bishop, a political science professor at the University of Cincinnati, literally wrote the book in this field: *The Illusion of Public Opinion: Fact and Artifact in American Public Opinion Polls* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

Problems in Analyzing Polls

WHERE THE TWIN PROBLEMS of question wording differences and inter-pollster comparisons intersect, a new problem arises. What does one do when comparable but not identical questions used by different pollsters produce drastically different results, even in polls taken at about the same time? Does this result reflect on the quality of the fieldwork or on the question wording, or is some other explanation more convincing? The problem is very far from being hypothetical, as the following example shows. In April 2007, the Pew poll asked this question in six Arab societies:

> Which statement comes closest to your opinion?
>
> (1) A way can be found for the state of Israel to exist so that the rights and needs of the Palestinian people are taken care of;
>
> OR
>
> (2) The rights and needs of the Palestinian people cannot be taken care of as long as the state of Israel exists.

The results were mixed in Morocco, where fully 30 percent answered "don't know," and also in Lebanon, where opinions divided sharply along sectarian lines (Christians positive, Sunnis split, Shiites negative). In the four other societies—Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and the West Bank/Gaza—three-quarters or even more picked the negative option: Israel and Palestinian rights cannot coexist. This finding is all the more startling because, except for Kuwait, those governments were officially already at peace with Israel. Surely, at least at first glance, this finding points to the near impossibility of ever achieving real peace between Israel and the Arabs.[1] But a similar question asked only a few months earlier, in the November 2006 Zogby poll, yielded much more positive results in both Egypt and Jordan—suggesting that real peace is in fact not only possible but already extant in great measure, at the popular as well as the official level. Solid majorities of Egyptians and Jordanians said they accepted a two-state solution in which Israel and Palestine would live peacefully, side by side, and that the Arabs should not continue to fight Israel in that case.

So, which poll is right: does "the Arab street" accept peace with Israel or not? The answer is that neither one is right or wrong—rather, the answer depends on the question. These two questions are similar, but they are not the same. The first asked about "rights and needs," whereas the second asked about peace as opposed to war. In most Arab societies surveyed, majorities apparently continue to believe that Israel's existence and Palestinian rights are mutually exclusive. At the same time, and in the same Arab societies, where a slightly different question was also posed, majorities accept the idea that peace with Israel is better than endless war. The apparent contradiction is more in the eyes of Western beholders than in the attitudes of the Arab publics involved.

In a like vein, Palestinians typically respond quite differently when asked which solution, of several options offered, they would *prefer* to their conflict with Israel—rather than whether they would *accept* a two-state solution. To the latter question, most surveys have consistently shown at least a narrow majority in favor of a two-state solution: for example, 57 percent in one reputable September 2007 poll. Yet another poll taken at around the same time asked its respondents if the "rights and needs of the Palestinian people could be taken care of as long as Israel exists," and 77 percent of Palestinians disagreed. The most plausible explanation for this apparent discrepancy is simply the natural difference between what people would prefer and what they would be willing to settle for.[2]

1. Richard Wike, "Will Shared Concern about Iran Provide Common Ground for Middle East Negotiators in Annapolis?" Pew Global Attitudes Project, November 27, 2007. Available online (http://pewresearch.org/pubs/641/middle-east-summit-annapolis).
2. Alvin Richman, "Hardened by Conflict: Israeli and Palestinian Views Challenge Peace Negotiators," *Public Opinion Pros*, November 2007, p. 3. Available online (www.publicopinionpros.com/features/2007/nov/richman.asp). This site ceased publication in December 2007, but it may be possible to access the cited article by clicking on "past issues"; hard copy is available from the author on request.

Here, the admonition is vital that no single "Arab street" but different opinions among different Arab publics are the norm. When the differences are found to be considerable, as they often are, the findings are not necessarily contradictory. More likely, a case of real-world diversity of views simply exists, which should be explained rather than ignored.

For example, the question of a two-state solution (*not* of "Palestinian rights and needs") was also posed in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The good news is that in both cases, a majority (however slight) accepted that kind of peaceful settlement with Israel. The other news is that the size of the minority view preferring the other option—continued war against Israel "no matter what"—ranged very widely, from a mere 16 percent in the UAE to a hefty 42 percent in Saudi Arabia, right next door.

On the tactics of Arab-Israeli peacemaking, a comparably conspicuous "contradiction," and one that also disappears upon closer examination, can be found in two Palestinian polls about the Annapolis peace conference. At first glance, these two polls, both conducted in September 2007, reveal drastically different—indeed almost diametrically opposite—percentages of support or opposition. A second glance, however, shows that the question wording varied in a crucial way. Asked about participation in "the peace conference that will be held in the autumn," 72 percent responded in favor, with just 23 percent opposed. When the peace conference was attributed to "U.S. President George Bush," however, the results were almost a reverse mirror image, with support cut in half and opposition more than doubled: just 37 percent in favor, compared with 57 percent opposed.[3] The difference is so dramatic that it raises questions about whether some respondents are really opposed to certain U.S. policies or to their identification with the U.S. "brand" and with its current administration.

Bias as a Function of Presentation

As important as question wording and other aspects of survey design is the interpretation of the resulting data. It is sometimes illuminating but sometimes misleading, and in any case it is inherently selective. For example, one recent presentation of 2006 survey data from six Arab countries (Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) emphasized that in all six, respondents named the Palestinian issue as among the top three priorities for their country.[4] But another survey that same year, which included two of the same countries (Morocco and Jordan) plus Algeria, Kuwait, and the Palestinians, focused more narrowly on the top priority and presented a completely different picture:

> When asked to identify the most important problem facing their country, fully 51 percent of the entire five-country sample described that problem in economic terms, citing such considerations as poverty, unemployment, and inflation. Only 5 percent stated that authoritarianism is the most important problem. Slightly higher percentages mentioned the U.S. occupation of Iraq (8 percent) and the Arab-Israeli conflict (7 percent).[5]

In this accounting, the Palestinian issue comes in a very distant third, way behind economic issues and statistically tied with the absence of democracy at home. A comparable problem of perspective afflicts the numerous references to surveys supposedly showing that Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the chief of Lebanon's Hizballah organization, is the "most popular" or "most admired" leader in "the Arab world." What these references almost never mention is the following: First, although Nasrallah may have outscored any other individual figure, in actual percentage terms, he polled only in single digits or in the low teens in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. Second, these results are from 2006, in the immediate aftermath of the Israeli-Hizballah war that summer, so they represent a highly

3. Ibid., p. 2.
4. Shibley Telhami, "The Widening Perception Gap: U.S. Policy and the Arab World" (presentation at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., March 27, 2007). Transcript available online (www.pai.brook.edu/~/media/Files/events/2007/0327islamic%20world/20070327.pdf).
5. Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler, "The Democracy Barometers: Attitudes in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (January 2008), p. 99. Available online (www.arabbarometer.org/reports/democbarometers.pdf).

unusual and almost certainly very time-bound uptick in his popularity. And third, these results are not from the whole "Arab world" but from limited and purely urban samples in just five Arab countries. Although Nasrallah appeared as a hero on Arab TV screens and websites during the summer 2006 war with Israel, the Zogby poll taken just a few months later shows that Nasrallah's popularity outside Lebanon was spotty, seeming to vary inversely with distance from Lebanon. He was picked as "most admired world leader" by just 13 percent in Egypt, 10 percent in Jordan, and 8 percent in Saudi Arabia—but by 22 percent in Morocco and by an amazing 31 percent in the UAE (perhaps in part because of its significant expatriate Shiite population, or perhaps because of some polling error or aberration).[6] In any case, in the past eighteen months since the end of that war, anecdotal and polling information alike suggest that Nasrallah has lost much of his luster among Arab publics outside Lebanon and among everyone except the Shiites, even inside Lebanon. Strangely, in another Zogby poll in May 2004, Nasrallah actually had more votes (18 percent) in Saudi Arabia and about as many (9 percent) in Jordan and Egypt—suggesting that perhaps his star did not really shine so brightly among Sunni audiences as a result of the 2006 war.[7]

An alternative hypothesis is that problems exist with the poll data. The Zogby polls from May 2004 showed very high numbers for Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian ruler who died in 1970, as "most admired world leader" in certain Arab countries, including a startling 46 percent in Saudi Arabia and a first-place finish (tied with "no one") in Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, and the UAE.[8] But Nasser's name mysteriously vanished from later Zogby survey reports.

Equally misleading are the frequent media allusions to Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad as a hero or even a "rock star" among Arab audiences, particularly in Israel's neighbors such as Egypt or Jordan. In fact, according to the mid-2006 Pew poll, these Arab publics' views of Iran's controversial leader were negative. Two-thirds expressed "not much confidence" or none at all in Iranian president Ahmadinezhad, both in Egypt and in Jordan.[9] Even just after the 2006 Lebanon war, he was named as "most admired world leader" by no more than 5 percent in any of the six Arab countries sampled by Zogby, including Egypt and Jordan plus Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and the UAE.

Similarly, one commentary on President Bush's January 2008 trip to the Middle East claimed that "three-quarters of Jordanians and other Arabs have ranked Palestine as their 'top issue' or 'among the top three' in their priorities for five years in a row."[10] Even given severe limitations of space, this assertion raises more questions than it answers. Which Arabs? How long ago was the latest poll in this series? Which five years in a row? (Especially when the Zogby poll, almost certainly the unnamed sole source for this data, showed that in 2005 the Palestinian issue actually dropped from second to seventh place in this ranking among the six Arab states surveyed.)[11] Was the question asking about personal, political, or just foreign policy priorities? How high (or low) a percentage does "among the top three" really mean? Was this an open-ended question, in which respondents were free to name anything that came to mind, or (much more likely, given

6. Telhami, "The Widening Perception Gap."
7. Ibid.
8. "Arab Attitudes towards Political and Social Issues, Foreign Policy and the Media: A Public Opinion Poll Conducted Jointly by the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and Zogby International," May 2004. Available online (www.bsos.umd.edu/SADAT/pub/Arab%20Attitudes%20Towards%20Political%20and%20Social%20Issues,%20Foreign%20Policy%20and%20the%20Media.htm).
9. Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Conflicting Views in a Divided World, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center), Question 40(g), p. T-45. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/DividedWorld2006.pdf).
10. Shibley Telhami, "It's Not about Iran," *Washington Post*, January 14, 2008.
11. The poll's cosponsor was the Arab American Institute, whose president is Dr. James Zogby, brother of pollster John Zogby. James Zogby's analysis of the findings includes this significant section: "The results demonstrate some real changes taking place in Arab opinion. . . . The most notable change here was with regard to the importance given to 'resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In our 2002 poll, given the brutal repression of Palestinians that was gripping Arab opinion, this issue ranked second in importance. Today, it is number seven." The Arab countries polled in late October 2005 were Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. James Zogby, "Attitudes of Arabs 2005: An In-Depth Look at Social and Political Concerns of Arabs," Arab American Institute, Washington, D.C., December 12, 2005, p. 1. Available online (http://aai.3cdn.net/6e38e45846c8ce7df5_k0m6be9di.pdf).

the nature of this poll) were they given a list that limited their options? If so, how many other choices were there, and what were they?

In this connection, James Zogby's analysis of the trends from the 2002 and 2005 polls conducted in six Arab states by his brother, John Zogby, is illuminating. Asked to rank nine different subjects listed by "how important each…is in your life," respondents produced the following pattern: "As in 2002, issues very close to home dominate the rankings, with 'family,' 'work,' and 'marriage' ranking #1, #2, and #3. 'Political issues facing Arab nations,' 'leisure time,' and 'domestic political issues' remain at the bottom of the list."[12] Even when the agenda is limited to foreign policy, plenty of ambiguity exists regarding such basic issues as the relative concern of Arab publics about Israel and Iran.

This bias is particularly problematic when analysts depend on time-bound data. For example, in February and early March 2007, one respected scholar presented poll findings from November 2006, arguing that they showed how preoccupied Arabs continued to be with Palestinian issues and therefore hostile to the United States and friendly toward Iran. "Most Sunni Arabs take the side of the Shiites on the important issues," he opined about this poll.[13] The major press headlines were sensational: "Polls Show Anti-American Feelings at All-Time High in Muslim Countries";[14] "Iran Fears Aren't Hitting Arab Street";[15] "Going Nowhere Fast."[16] But a mere three weeks later, when a more up-to-date poll showed widespread Arab distrust of Iran's intentions, the same scholar claimed that, "These numbers are not surprising to me, especially in recent months as governments focused a lot on the Iranian threat."[17] Yet in January 2008, apparently harking back to his original thesis, he published an op-ed again arguing with respect to Arab opinion, "It's Not about Iran."[18]

Other distortions can result from focusing too heavily on one or two "headline" questions, instead of considering some of the apparent contradictions or ambivalence evident from the full data set. For instance, the same previously cited 2005 Pew poll from Morocco that shows 49 percent favorable to the United States also shows that most (58 percent) of those with an unfavorable opinion said this was "mostly because of President George W. Bush," not "a more general problem with America." Only 18 percent said Morocco "goes along too much with U.S. policies."[19] In 2007, the vast majority of Palestinians (86 percent) told the Pew pollster they had an unfavorable opinion of the United States, but a plurality (35 percent) also said the United States should take responsibility for dealing with the world's most important problems. Similarly, the 2007 University of Maryland/Program on International Policy Attitudes poll cited previously shows a mere 4 percent of Egyptians with favorable views of the current U.S. government, but it also shows a plurality more than ten times as large (46 percent) *disagreeing* that the United States should "stop supporting the governments of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia." And 83 percent of Egyptians, according to the same survey, agreed strongly that, "When groups in the Muslim world attack American civilians, they make Islam look bad."

Differences among Arab Publics: Beware the "Lumpenpolletariat"

All too often, pollsters lump together findings from different Arab countries—or even from many different Arab and non-Arab Muslim societies. It is a simple but very serious error, because the differences of opinion

12. Ibid., p. 6.
13. Quoted by Peter Kiernan, "Middle East Opinion: Iran Fears Aren't Hitting the Arab Street," *World Politics Watch,* April 26, 2007. Available online (www.zogby.com/Soundbites/ReadClips.dbm?ID=14570).
14. Tom Regan in the Christian *Science Monitor* (Boston), February 22, 2007.
15. Available online (www.zogby.com/SoundBites/ReadClips.dbm?ID=14570).
16. David Ignatius in the *Washington Post*, February 21, 2007.
17. "Analysis—Arabs See Both U.S. and Iran as Harming Iraq," *YaLibnan* (Beirut), March 30, 2007. Available online (http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2007/03/analysis_arabs.php).
18. Telhami, "It's Not about Iran."
19. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Spring 2005 17-Nation Survey," June 23, 2005. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/247topline.pdf).

among different Arab publics are often more important than sweeping generalizations about the "Arab street." Unfortunately, this error can pervade the presentation of even the most ambitious and otherwise promising polling projects, perhaps precisely because such projects attempt to cover too many different societies at once. A prime new example of this problem, an entire book based on polls with no full findings presented from any one country, is John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed's volume *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*.[20]

Among the Arabs, Iraqis and Palestinians are two obvious special cases: they produce the most and the best polls, but because of the particular issues and conditions in each of those two societies, neither the questions pollsters ask nor the results they obtain are readily comparable to those of any other Arab country. Every other Arab society also has its own preoccupations and peculiarities, and lumping them all together makes no more sense than would doing the same with Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela (in fact, spoken Arabic dialects differ as much or more across the region as do Spanish and Portuguese).

Nor does focusing so much more heavily on the attitudes Arab publics have in common than on the ones that distinguish them from each other make much sense, although most regional pollsters do so. Questions about issues inside a particular country may produce more meaningful results, as in the specialized country-by-country polls conducted by the National Democratic Institute or the International Republican Institute, than lowest-common-denominator questions about broad but shallow "pan-Arab" concerns used in "regional" surveys.

Some leading pollsters' continuing tendency to average different country samples together as if they were all somehow on a par—even though Egypt, for example, has about 80 times more nationals than the UAE—makes even less sense. This method is rather like averaging Germans and Estonians to get "European" public opinion or combining Mexico and Belize to produce an average of "Hispanic" views. Even in some individual Arab states, as noted, a national average does more to confuse the issues than to clarify them. Such confusion is only magnified by loose generalizations about "the Arab street" when, in fact, those streets diverge quite widely from one country to another.

The Palestinian issue, to take perhaps the most emotive example, is important to all Arab publics surveyed. Yet the extent of this importance varies considerably—both from one country to another and over time. The Zogby polls of six Arab states from November 2005, as noted, showed a truly stunning drop across the board in the salience of this issue for views of the United States, as compared with other, more urgent concerns at the time: Iraq, terrorism or extremism, and "U.S. treatment of Arabs and Muslims."[21] A year later, after the latest Lebanon war, Arab-Israeli issues were again high on the Arab popular agenda. Still, they displayed major differences of degree. In the same six Arab countries—Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—respondents were asked this (loaded) question: "How important is the Palestine issue in your priorities?"[22] Majorities everywhere said it ranked in the top three, but only in Jordan did a majority (73 percent) rank it as their first priority. Elsewhere, about half (48 percent) of Egyptians and only a quarter of Saudis gave this issue top priority. In another example of this variability, asked by Zogby to rank five political issues in terms of their effect on each country's stability or economy in 2006, Lebanese not surprisingly ranked the Israel-Lebanon conflict number one in both cat-

20. New York: Gallup Press, 2007. Compounding the problem, a couple of footnotes reveal that the book switches back and forth from a much larger group of countries to a collection of just ten—five Arab and five non-Arab—whose data was used "to complete the analysis" in some unspecified ways. But even just those ten countries are far from statistically equal; for example, the five Arab countries together account for approximately 140 million people, while the other five, non-Arab countries have a combined population of approximately 650 million. Yet, there is no explanation of how these country findings were aggregated, or whether the resulting averages were weighted in any fashion. Finally, Lebanon (with just 4 million people), Jordan (with just 6 million), and even Morocco (with 34 million) are erroneously included in this collection as among "the ten most populous" Muslim-majority countries; they are not.
21. "Attitudes of Arabs 2005."
22. Telhami, "The Widening Perception Gap."

egories. In faraway Morocco, however, that issue was in fourth place.

With that distance and relative indifference, the mid-2007 Pew poll suggests, comes a relatively simple view of Arab-Israeli issues. Of six Arab societies polled, only in Morocco did a majority (60 percent) blame Israel alone as "most responsible for the lack of a Palestinian state." The other five Arab publics, including the Palestinians themselves, singled out Israel by pluralities of 30 to 40 percent—but also distributed lots of responsibility to both sides, or even just to the Palestinians, or else volunteered that the U.S. or Arab countries were most to blame (10 to 20 percent for each of those responses).[23]

A closer look at this surprising finding shows additional inter-Arab differences. The percentage who volunteered the United States as primarily responsible for the lack of a Palestinian state varied significantly: from a low of 6 percent in Morocco to a high of 31 percent in Egypt. In contrast, Egyptians scored at the low end (4 percent) in putting primary responsibility on the Palestinians, compared with the relatively high proportion of Kuwaitis (18 percent) who chose that option. Similarly, Kuwaitis were split down the middle rather than favorably inclined toward Hamas, even before its June 2007 "secession" from Fatah in Gaza. On this count, Kuwaitis were unexpectedly very much like Egyptians—but quite different from Jordanians, who approved of Hamas by almost a two-to-one margin. Given their dissimilar history and geography, Egyptians and Kuwaitis also differ greatly, again according to the mid-2007 Pew poll, in their views of another major regional contender: Iran. A surprisingly high 49 percent of Egyptians say that a nuclear-armed Iran would be at least a "somewhat serious" threat to their country, but only 27 percent name Iran as among their top three threats today. Kuwaitis beg to differ: twice as many see Iran as already a serious threat, and even more (71 percent) say that a nuclear-armed Iran would be one. In fact, of the nearly fifty international publics polled by Pew, only Israelis surpass Kuwaitis in seeing Iran as their most serious threat.

Even more striking is this huge difference: a mere one in five Kuwaitis named Israel as one of the top three threats to their country—compared with four in five Egyptians or Jordanians, whose countries (unlike Kuwait) are formally at peace with the Jewish state. In a similar vein, a majority of Kuwaitis, again reflecting their recent history, called the United States a reliable ally; while about as many Egyptians, Jordanians, or even Moroccans identified the United States as a possible military threat.

Among the other Gulf Arab states, very few data points that could be considered even somewhat solid are available from political polls. What is available suggests that the Saudi public may be an outlier on some important issues compared to other Arab societies. For example, in the November 2006 Zogby poll of six Arab states, Saudi Arabia had the largest minority (42 percent) who said that Arabs should "keep fighting Israel no matter what the outcome," even if it offered a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. By way of comparison, in the UAE, right next door to Saudi Arabia, that figure was just 16 percent.

Alone among these Arab societies, Saudis selected "withdrawal from Iraq" as their number-one desideratum for U.S. policy rather than brokering a "land for peace" Palestinian-Israeli settlement. And alone again, the Saudis tended to think that Israelis, rather than Hizballah, came out ahead in the war they fought in Lebanon a few months earlier that year.[24] That last perception might betray some of the anti-Shiite prejudice that anecdotal reports indicate is quite prevalent in much of Saudi Arabia, especially because the minority Shiite areas of the country were as usual not included in this survey. Also interesting is the unusually high extent of apparent popular support for Hamas, or for a Palestinian unity government including Hamas, in Saudi Arabia. The November 2006 Zogby poll showed a third of Saudis supporting Hamas—more than twice

23. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers: 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," June 27, 2007. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf).
24. Telhami, "The Widening Perception Gap."

the percentage in Jordan (14 percent), a majority of whose population is actually of Palestinian origin. Another third of Saudis backed a Palestinian unity government, while barely a fifth picked Fatah and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. This reading of the opinion climate may have been why, a few months later, Saudi king Abdullah secured the (ill-fated) February 2007 Mecca accord on a Hamas-Fatah Palestinian unity government—a crucial initiative that caught U.S. policymakers off guard.

Finally, a brief comment is warranted here about Arab attitudes toward the legendary "Israel lobby." Notwithstanding all the publicity it has received lately, of these six Arab publics, only in Saudi Arabia does even a slim plurality (40 percent) see "U.S. domestic politics" as President Bush's "primary motivation" in Middle Eastern policy, as opposed to "U.S. national interests." The 2005 Zogby poll came up with a result pointing in the same general direction. Similarly, only in Saudi Arabia does a plurality (44 percent) attribute American policy in the region primarily to "Israeli influence." The other five publics surveyed seem to have an even more "realist" view of U.S. Middle Eastern policy.

A Cheat Sheet for Judging Arab Polls

The preceding discussion has pointed the way ahead. First, the United States needs to take some polls from Arab states seriously—which means taking others with a few large grains of salt. The most tendentious polling and analysis, as identified above, should be either corrected or simply discarded. Even the better polls, however, are at best imperfect snapshots of what people are willing to say to strangers, and outsiders may not be so adept at understanding what exactly Arabs are saying or what they may choose not to say at all.

Second, the United States needs to pay as much attention to the differences among and within Arab publics, and to shifts in their attitudes over time, as to sweeping generalizations about Arab public opinion. The analysis of Arab public opinion should be conducted first on a country-by-country basis and, where appropriate, even by different groups within each country. This approach has the added virtue of facilitating a close comparison of several different polls to look at important questions of how closely the results match or how much and why they may differ (what is known in the professional jargon as "inter-pollster reliability"). The analysis should focus more on careful study of trends over time rather than on single snapshots, while exercising vigilance to identify any time-bound results or "one-shot wonders."

A few simple rules of thumb will suffice by way of summary and conclusion. The first step in evaluating any Arab poll is the same as with any other poll: insist on full disclosure. That means full details, not only of sampling design and procedure, but also of sponsorship. Fieldwork conditions and quality controls must be specified in detail as well. It also means providing the full text and results of every question referenced in any reports from the survey. Indeed, the entire questionnaire should be available, not just the pollster's reporting selection, so that potential instances of bias (e.g., wording; sequence; interpretive) can be detected. It also means looking closely at the detailed demographics of the sample to check on how representative (or unrepresentative) that sample may be.

Second, in the particular case of polls from Arab countries, the consumer must have precise information about the extent of government involvement in any aspect of the polling. Although cases may exist where the identity of the local pollsters or other important details must be protected, that should be clearly acknowledged and explained. If any of these details are missing, the poll should be treated as unreliable. And remember that even the most reliable polls may be subject to the severe constraints of polling in a police state.

Third, pick the places and the questions for which polls can be compared and validated, and where polling methods have been both tested and adjusted as necessary. That means, at least for now, forget about telephone polls altogether—at least for any political questions. Take the trouble to compare different polls. Never rely on just one.

Fourth, look for long-term trends rather than static snapshots or even annual ups and downs. Make sure to consider any special events or issues of timing that

could affect these trends. Resist the temptation to use an outdated data set, even if it is only a few months old, just because it is the only one available—and certainly not because of a desire to score political points.

Fifth, analyze one country at a time in some depth, rather than lumping together an arbitrary group of Arabs. Pay more attention to detailed single-country polls, even if they focus more on local issues, than to broader regional surveys, even if they seem to promise easier headlines.

Sixth, if you must treat two or more countries at once, then compare and analyze their differences, rather than sweeping those differences under the carpet or merely mentioning them with no attempt at explanation. Generalize about "Arab public opinion" only when a clear, long-term trend exists on a precisely defined set of questions that is verified by numerous credible polls taken by different pollsters across many countries in the region.

Seventh, consider internal demographic divisions within any one society, but also be alert for signs of convergence or shifts in the pattern of those divisions over time. Understand that some groups may be more intimidated or reticent than others when asked about their views on sensitive subjects, including any political issue.

Eighth, make sure to consider the results as a whole, rather than just the simplest ones. That means, for example, paying just as much attention to new lows in support for al-Qaeda or suicide bombing as to new lows in approval of the United States. Compare the results of related questions to obtain a better understanding of their import.

Ninth, look hard for any evidence of selectivity or bias in interpreting and presenting poll data, even when the poll itself seems sound. This test is the hardest but also the most important, and it is one that even some of the best pollsters do not always meet.

Tenth, and last: do not jump to any conclusions from poll data, even of the more credible and more fairly presented kind, about any other aspect of Arab policies or political behavior. This dimension of the subject at hand is explored at length in the remainder of this study.

PART II
What Polls of Arab Publics Really Show

Introduction: Selecting the Best Surveys

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS highlighted how the greatest care must be taken both in evaluating Arab opinion polls and in making generalizations based on them. Each poll and each country should be examined individually before accepting any numbers as credible, attempting any analysis of their meaning or implications, or generalizing them to any group of Arab societies. The previous discussion identified numerous difficult questions of survey design, execution, and interpretation. It also addressed various efforts to remedy these problems, at least to some extent.

Among the conclusions were the following: The more reliable findings, especially at the cross-country level, reflect the most unbiased questions that have been posed repeatedly, by different pollsters, over a relatively long period. The more credible interpretations take into account nuances of question wording and comparisons of results from related questions. The best individual cases are those for which inter-pollster reliability can be established, along with internal demographic breakouts of results as appropriate. Equally important, the relationship of even the most credible poll data to any other policy issue remains an open question.

In this second part of the paper, the focus will be on answers rather than questions. The conditions discussed in part I are applied in actual cases: recent survey findings that have passed most of the stipulated tests and that can therefore be considered not only interesting but also relatively credible—either in individual societies or even when applied to several different countries in the region.

Two Remarkable Regional Trends

FROM THE BEST AVAILABLE DATA, two major regional trends can be identified that seem to point in opposite directions. First, almost all Arab polls show widespread, continuing disapproval of American policies, both in Iraq and in the Arab-Israeli arena—and negative overall images of the United States, especially since the war in Iraq. Second, on the brighter side, solid evidence from almost every Arab poll (and from almost every other Muslim poll as well) demonstrates a sharp turn against terrorism.[1]

The hard data to support this judgment—including generally decreasing support for terrorist attacks on civilians by al-Qaeda or other groups—comes from many predominantly Muslim countries and several different survey organizations, and in most cases consistently appears from 2005 through 2007.[2] Thus, the evidence is every bit as solid for this conclusion as for the much more widely known sound bite about "dismal" American approval ratings in the same societies. As one generally skeptical authority on Arab attitudes wrote:

> After Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's organization bombed several tourist hotels in Amman in November 2005, surveys found dramatic shifts in opinion against Zarqawi and (to a lesser extent) bin Laden.... Similar studies in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and elsewhere confirm the general trend that local terror attacks tend to undermine—at least temporarily—the universalistic [sic] appeal of radical Islamist ideas.[3]

The most complete data of this nature is from the Pew polls over the past five years. In addition, even before looking at the numbers, the wording of their questions is noteworthy for its balance (even though no wording on this subject could ever be absolutely perfect):[4]

> Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?

Especially noteworthy is the choice of "in order to defend Islam from its enemies" juxtaposed with "no matter what the reason," along with the list of often/sometimes/rarely/never options. This array of choices tends to minimize "politically correct" answers on either side, offering respondents the clear option of saying whether such violence (the politically charged word "terrorism" is not used) might ever be justified.

1. For an earlier presentation of this point, see the summary of remarks by David Pollock in *Autumn of Decisions: A Critical Moment for American Engagement in the Middle East* (conference proceedings) (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2008), pp. 34–35. Available online (www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=287).
2. See, for example, Pew Global Attitudes Project, "2007 Survey Report" (available online at www.pewglobal.org); Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers: 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," June 27, 2007, pp. 14–15, 17–18, 23–24, 55 (available online at http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf); Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Global Trends 2002–2007: A Rising Tide Lifts Mood in the Developing World, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey" *Pew Research Center*. July 24, 2007, pp. 56–58, 61–62 (available online at http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/257.pdf). Also see WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," April 24, 2007. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf). One of the most recent and striking findings from a key non-Arab Muslim society comes from Pakistan, where one series of polls shows a doubling from September 2006 to January 2008 in the percentage of respondents who say that "Pakistan should cooperate with the U.S. on its war against terror." That figure now stands at 89 percent, according to polls taken by competent local researchers and sponsored by the International Republican Institute. The leading U.S. newspaper headline, however, stresses a completely different finding: Griff Witte and Robin Wright, "Musharraf's Approval Rating Plummets," *Washington Post*, February 11, 2008.
3. Marc Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," in Joshua Fouts, ed., *Public Diplomacy: Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy; Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006), pp. 40–41. Available online (http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:HPpOuDpklrkJ:uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/USCC).
4. Pew Polls available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/).

Unfortunately, because of a combination of political and practical constraints, trends over time on this question are available for just a few Arab countries. Following are the most recent Pew results for all Arabs polled:

"Suicide bombing of civilians often/sometimes justified"

	JULY 2002	MAY 2005	MAY 2006	MAY 2007
Lebanon	74%	39%	—	34%
Jordan	43%	57%	29%	23%
Kuwait	—	—	—	21%
Morocco	—	—	—	11%
Egypt	—	—	28%	8%
Palestinians	—	—	—	70%

Other reputable polls show similar results, in response to similar questions, over the same period. For example, in the 2006/2007 University of Maryland poll, Egyptians and Moroccans were asked about "attacks on civilians that are carried out in order to achieve political goals." A mere 8 percent in Morocco and 15 percent in Egypt said such attacks were "strongly justified" or "justified"; an additional 19 percent in Morocco and 6 percent in Egypt called them "weakly justified."[5]

Remarkably, adding Americans explicitly to the mix of these questions only strengthens these findings, perhaps because that implicitly excludes Israeli targets. When another question specified the targets as "civilians in the United States," support actually declined compared with just plain "civilians": only 7 percent in Morocco and 6 percent in Egypt approved (with just another 8 percent and 2 percent, respectively, voicing "mixed feelings"). Even asking about attacks on "U.S. civilians working for U.S. companies in Islamic countries" produced no uptick in Egypt and only a faint one in Morocco (13 percent "mixed feelings"). Large majorities in both countries—66 percent in Morocco and 88 percent in Egypt—agreed with the following proposition: "Groups that use violence against civilians, such as al-Qaeda, are violating the principles of Islam."

A related point deserves emphasis. First, the decline in popular support for attacks on civilians is no longer limited to attacks in the respondents' home country. In 2005, Pew tested two alternative wordings of this question in the same survey, using what pollsters call a "split sample." They found that in Jordan and Lebanon (although not elsewhere), differing wording did produce a substantial difference in responses: people were considerably less likely to say that suicide bombings in their own country could "often" be justified. But in the past two years, Pew has dropped the "in our country" version of this question and finds that support for such attacks has declined still further.

The key to all these relatively reassuring responses seems to be the word "civilians." When that word is absent, the picture darkens somewhat, especially in Egypt. One-quarter of Egyptians said they supported "al-Qaeda's attacks on Americans"; barely one-tenth of Moroccans said the same. When the question referred to an attack against "an enemy," those percentages rose steeply. This alternative wording asked respondents how they felt "when you hear or read about an attack in which a Muslim blows himself up while attacking an enemy." The responses were as follows: Egypt, 60 percent "justified" (41 percent "often" and 19 percent "sometimes"); Morocco, 35 percent "justified" (16 percent "often" and 19 percent "sometimes"). In this instance, the higher numbers for Egyptians may reflect their proximity to the Arab-Israeli conflict and a correspondingly greater propensity to think of suicide bombings against "an enemy" as directed against Israeli soldiers.[6]

The five-year downward trend in Arab popular sympathy for most terrorism against civilians is mirrored by a drop in "confidence" in Osama bin Laden over the same period. Pew again provides the best documentation from its annual surveys:

5. WorldPublicOpinion.org, "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," April 24, 2007.
6. Ibid.

"A lot of or some confidence in Osama bin Laden"

	2003	2007
Jordan	56%	20%
Lebanon	20%	1%
Palestinians	72%	57%
Kuwait	20%	13%

For a dramatic illustration of earlier trends in this direction, Morocco provides one clear case in point. It showed a steep increase, as measured in the annual Pew polls, in opposition to most forms of jihadist terrorism. From 2003 to 2005, the percentage of Moroccans who voiced even "some confidence" in Osama bin Laden was cut almost in half, from 49 percent to 26 percent. The December 2006 University of Maryland poll tends to confirm this figure (although an additional 26 percent voiced "mixed" feelings about bin Laden). And in just one year, from 2004 to 2005, the percentage of Moroccans saying that violence against civilians is at least "sometimes" justified was slashed by a factor of three, from 40 percent to a mere 13 percent.

Even so, some caveats are in order. An additional 20 percent or so of Moroccans continued to feel that violence against civilians was "rarely" (or, in the December 2006 Maryland poll, "weakly") justified. About a third approved of at least "some" of the "groups in the Muslim world that attack Americans." Both the Pew poll in mid-2005 and the University of Maryland poll in late 2006 found solid majorities supporting "attacks on U.S. military troops in Iraq"—although this question was largely hypothetical in distant Morocco, at the opposite end of the Arab world from Iraq.

According to the survey findings, these caveats are broadly applicable to the other Arab publics polled in Egypt and Jordan. The Palestinians, in contrast, can be categorized as an outlier on many of these and similar questions, as measured in the Pew polls and numerous internal surveys. At least until mid-2007, they generally continued to voice support for suicide bombing or rocket attacks and other forms of violence against civilians, often by substantial margins (60 to 70 percent).

Some analysts hasten to point out, especially in private conversations, that even aside from the special Palestinian case, the decline in Arab popular sympathy for terrorism comes with a number of qualifications attached. One scholar, for instance, notes that surveys show lower-class Jordanians are still relatively sympathetic to terrorist acts or groups. Others stress that no survey explicitly shows a drop in Arab popular support for violence against *Israeli* civilians. Still another scholar emphasizes that, although popular support for al-Qaeda has greatly decreased, considerable support still exists in certain Arab societies for other groups that the U.S. labels terrorist, such as Hamas or Hizballah.

In fact, the most recent multinational data available (April/May 2007, just before the Hamas coup in Gaza) shows that of the six Arab societies polled, only among Jordanians and Palestinians was a clear majority favorably disposed toward Hamas.[7] Since the June 2007 Hamas coup, even Palestinian public opinion has hardened against Hamas, according to the Palestinians' own polls. Hizballah, too, got only marginally favorable reviews across the Arab states surveyed in mid-2007—except, curiously enough, in Lebanon, where overwhelming Sunni and Christian opprobrium swung the balance narrowly into the negative column.

None of these caveats alters the fundamental fact that across the board (except perhaps among Palestinians), Arab popular support for al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, suicide bombing, and other forms of violence against civilians has dropped precipitously in the past three years. This trend has not emerged because Arabs like the United States, U.S. policies, or even just "U.S.-led efforts against terrorism" (as the Pew polls put it) much better than they did before—that is simply not the case.

Sinking Support for Terrorism

Not only declining Arab support for anti-American terrorism but also the fact that it occurs with no com-

7. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey," June 27, 2007, p. 58.

parable decline in overall anti-American attitudes is worthy of serious attention. Both points are important, but the second one is especially counterintuitive and much less noted. This disjunction between views of terrorism and views of the United States implies that popular support for the former can be greatly (although probably not entirely) reduced, even if the United States neither changes its policies nor improves its image in these societies.

In fact, a moderate rise occurred in favorable views of the United States in various Arab (and some other predominantly Muslim) societies in 2005 and again in 2007, as documented in the Zogby, Pew, and other polls previously referenced. This change was so modest, however, that at most it could help account for a very small part of the steep decline in sympathy for terrorism. Nevertheless, even taking those improvements into account, these polls also show very low approval ratings for the United States, for American policies, and even for many aspects of American culture throughout this entire period.

If no major change in U.S. policies or great improvement in the U.S. image abroad produced this very welcome decline in Arab sympathy for anti-American and other terrorism, then what did? The circumstantial evidence of timing makes a compelling case that the change occurred soon after terrorism struck home: Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon all suffered major terrorist attacks in 2004–2005. Iraqis also seem to have turned against al-Qaeda and other terrorists when attacks started to concentrate on fellow Iraqis.

When the public turns against terror, the record of the past three years suggests that public disapproval extends to attacks not just against their own but also against American and other civilians—and that this disapproval long outlasts the immediate apparent effect of the violent incidents that produced this turnaround in public opinion. Some pollsters hypothesize that media and official mosque campaigns by Arab governments to anathematize terrorism have had a complementary effect, although the evidence of this result on a mass scale is lacking.[8] Whatever the precise combination of causes, the overall turn in public opinion is so well documented in such a wide range of relatively reliable surveys that it is almost uniquely convincing.

Other, anecdotal evidence supports this conclusion. Take, for example, one recent piece of in-depth reportage from the neighborhood of Jamaa Mezuak in the provincial Moroccan city of Tetouan, which until recently spawned a disproportionate number of jihadists making their way to terrorist assignments, either in Europe or in Iraq. One of their erstwhile friends often still thinks of joining their ranks, but, he explains to an interviewer,

> something always holds him back. He has seen too many images of Muslims dying at the hands of other Muslims. Most suicide operations in Iraq are now targeted at Shiites or Sunnis, he says, not at the American soldiers whom we would gladly face. "You can't know who you're going to kill," he told me. That critique of suicide attacks in Iraq is often heard around Jamaa Mezuak these days.[9]

Another recent observer offers a similarly acute assessment, with the added nuance of the "foreign" factor as part of the explanation for the decreasing popular appeal of al-Qaeda's version of jihad:

> Everyplace where al-Qaeda has gained some measure of control over a civilian population, it has quickly worn out its welcome. This happened in Kabul and in Anbar province in western Iraq.… No one likes to be brutalized and dominated by foreigners.… We may not be loved in Iraq and Afghanistan, but compared with the deliberately brutal methods of bin Laden's associates we become a palatable alternative.... Its members have killed more Muslim civilians than have misdirected coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.[10]

8. Dalia Mogahed, "Opinions of the U.S. in the Islamic World" (presentation to the Center for National Policy, Washington, D.C., February 13, 2008; as heard).
9. Andrea Elliot, "Where Boys Grow up to Be Jihadis," *New York Times Magazine*, November 25, 2007, p. 81.
10. Gary Anderson, "Why al-Qaeda Is Losing," *Washington Post*, January 13, 2008.

Causes of Lingering Support for Terrorism

If that is the case, why do some Arabs still support terrorism? At least one astute analyst of Arab attitudes caught on to an important piece of this puzzle early, although his findings were not immediately published. Based on a mid-2002 survey in Algeria, Prof. Mark Tessler concluded:

> Low socioeconomic status, personal psychological insecurity, greater religiosity and a more conservative religious perspective, opposition to democracy or a belief that democracy and Islam are incompatible, and a belief that Western culture has harmful consequences in Algeria—none of these attributes is more common among those who express approval of the September 11 attacks than among those who express disapproval.... More specifically, those who approve of the 9/11 attacks are more likely than those who disapprove to believe that it would be good for the country if more men of religion held public office and, also, to have little or no confidence in parliament. What these variables have in common is discontent with the political system that prevailed in Algeria at the time of the survey.[11]

Later, in a very detailed study published in 2007 comparing this Algerian data with Jordanian survey data from around the same time, Tessler and a colleague concluded that although dislike of U.S. policy showed some correlation with approval of terrorism, the latter was just as strongly associated in those two Arab publics with negative views of their own governments.[12]

A more recent and larger-scale effort to account for the minority support for terrorism among Muslims is based on the research conducted by the Gallup polling organization. In 2005–2006, Gallup polled samples of approximately 1,000 each in nine mostly Muslim countries, of which the majority are Arab: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia—plus Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, and Turkey. Then, Gallup analyzed the characteristics ("cross-tabs," in polling jargon) of those who said that the attacks of September 11 were justified (rated four or five on a five-point scale from "completely unjustified" to "completely justified"). This group was labeled "radicals." The preliminary results are surprising and important:

> [R]adicals are no more likely to attend religious services regularly than are moderates.... [I]t is the radicals who earn more and who stay in school longer.... More radicals expressed satisfaction with their financial situation and quality of life than their moderate counterparts, and a majority of them expected to be better off in the years to come.... [But] radicals are more likely to feel that the West threatens and attempts to control their way of life. Moderates ... are more eager to build ties with the West through economic development.[13]

"Radicals," by contrast, are more likely to resent Western interference in their countries. Yet Islamic fervor is also a significant distinguishing factor, notwithstanding these analysts' attempt to downplay it. As they note, "in contrast to less than half (45 percent) of the moderate group, roughly two-thirds (65 percent) of the politically radicalized give top priority to holding on to their spiritual and moral values." Radicals are twice as likely as moderates (59 percent compared to 32 percent) to say *sharia* should be the only source of law. And they are three times as likely to say it is "completely justifiable" to "sacrifice one's life for something one believes in."[14]

Moreover, in their new book on this subject, the authors have narrowed the definition of "radical" to just those Muslims who *completely* justify the September 11 attacks (i.e., five on a five-point scale). Everyone else, arbitrarily and unreasonably, is labeled a "moderate." Stranger still, no information at all is provided on what percentages of respondents called September 11 mostly

11. Mark Tessler, "The Extent and Determinants of Approval of 9/11 among Ordinary Citizens in Algeria" (working paper provided to the author).
12. Mark Tessler and Michael D. H. Robbins, "What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts against the United States?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 305–328. Available online (http://jcr.sagepub.com/).
13. John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, "What Makes a Muslim Radical?" *Foreign Policy* blog, November 2006. Available online (www.foreignpolicy.com and http://media.gallup.com/WorldPoll/PDF/MWSRRadical022207.pdf).
14. John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), pp. 86, 90, 93.

or partly justified. And almost no information of any kind is provided on a country-by-country basis, not even regarding precisely when each poll was conducted over a five-year period. These puzzling selections and omissions greatly devalue what might otherwise have been a worthy contribution to this discussion.

What is most unmistakably and unequivocally clear from other polls, in any case, is increasing Arab popular opposition to al-Qaeda and its terrorist tactics. This trend is also most directly related to tangible U.S. interests, because it is most directly linked to popular sympathies and potential behavior rather than to government policies. Yet instead of seizing on this crucial piece of good news and expanding on it, most mainstream commentaries largely continue to lament the old news: the "abysmal" U.S. image "in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia."[15] Almost no one points out that, if popular opposition to al-Qaeda has climbed dramatically even as Arab approval of the United States has languished in the low double digits, then these two sets of issues are not very closely related after all.

15. The quotation is from Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey," p. 3. See also, for example, Richard Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, eds., *A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007).

Beyond Terror: Different Views or Different Values?

HAVING MADE THE CASE for converging views against terrorism among many Arab and Western publics, the discussion turns next to the equally alluring idea of an emerging broad consensus on other "shared values" or core concerns. Here, however, the evidence is much less compelling. In fact, on closer inspection, even on issues that may at first appear to be ripe for understanding, key gray areas or just plain disagreements can be found.

Divergent World Views

In the United States, pollsters have long been able to show that people differ dramatically not only in terms of their attitudes but also in their perceptions of reality. To take one important recent case, a 2004 Harris poll on the Iraq war found that supporters of President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry had radically different beliefs about Saddam Hussein's regime. A striking 58 percent of Bush partisans thought Iraq had weapons of mass destruction when the United States invaded in 2003 compared with just 16 percent of Kerry backers.[1]

Such disjunctions may be magnified in a cross-cultural context. In other words, major differences may exist between American and Arab or other foreign views, not only on matters of opinion but also on what most Americans would consider matters of fact. For example, the December 2006/January 2007 University of Maryland poll asked about the September 11 attacks.[2] In both Egypt and Morocco, only about half of respondents said they were even "somewhat confident" they knew who was responsible. In each country, roughly one-third blamed the U.S. government or Israel, about as many who blamed al-Qaeda. Similarly, the April 2006 Pew poll found a solid majority (59 percent) in Egypt saying they did not believe that "groups of Arabs" carried out the September 11 attacks. In Jordan, the corresponding figure was almost as high at 53 percent.[3] This counterintuitive finding is almost certainly related to another, broader one. In Egypt, fully 57 percent say that "nearly all" of "what happens in the world today . . . is controlled by the United States"; an additional 32 percent say the United States controls "most" of what happens in the world. A majority of Moroccans agree, albeit by a smaller margin (63 percent). These findings are the essential background against which conspiracy theories and other pejorative views of American policy thrive.

In the April 2006 Pew poll, to cite but one instance of such theories, a little over half of Egyptians and Jordanians said that relations between Muslims and Westerners were generally bad. When those respondents were then asked which side was to blame for this state of affairs, a majority in each country singled out the Westerners, and a handful said both sides—while about a quarter of Egyptians and Jordanians volunteered the response that the Jews were actually to blame.

"Shared Values": The Democracy Debate

One must also be careful about loose talk regarding "shared values," including widespread popular support for democracy around the world. In 2004, according to the prestigious University of Michigan World Values Survey, "in the 14 Islamic societies included in our surveys . . . in every one of them a solid majority said that democracy was the best form of government," as the following table indicates:[4]

1. Bryan Caplan, "Myths about Our Ballot-Box Behavior," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2008, p. B3.
2. WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, and National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda," questionnaire, December 9, 2006–February 15, 2007, p. 20. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_quaire.pdf).
3. Pew Research Center, "Pew Global Attitudes Project: Spring 2006 Survey (15-Nation Survey Final Topline)." Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/253topline.pdf).
4. Ronald Inglehart, Mansoor Moaddel, and Mark Tessler, "Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq: A Natural Experiment on the Impact of Insecurity," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 3 (September 2006), p. 501.

"Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government"

	PERCENTAGE AGREEING OR STRONGLY AGREEING
Bangladesh	98
Egypt	98
Azerbaijan	96
Albania	96
Morocco	96
Turkey	90
Jordan	90
Algeria	88
Iraq	85
Kyrgyzstan	78
Saudi Arabia	74
Indonesia	71
Iran	70

Likewise, from 2002 to 2005, even as anti-American sentiment rose in many places, the percentage of Muslims in five of the six such societies polled by Pew who said that "Western-style democracy could work" in their own countries rose significantly. The largest increases were in two Arab countries that held relatively competitive parliamentary elections in late 2002: Jordan (from 63 percent to 80 percent) and Morocco (from 64 percent to 83 percent). The 2006 "Arab Barometer" poll shows even higher support there on the similar question of whether "a democratic system in our own country would be good": Jordan, 93 percent; Morocco, 96 percent.[5]

Nevertheless, these numbers tell us nothing, as usual, about how high (or how low) any of these publics rank democracy in comparison with other values, or what the rather abstract word *democracy* means to them in more concrete terms. As one scholar properly asks regarding the well-polled Jordanian case: "Beyond this general admiration for democracy, how pressing were such concerns for the average Jordanian? Repeated surveys show citizens to be far more concerned with economic issues than with political democracy."[6] Moreover, as the Pew poll director points out:

> This is not to say that Muslims necessarily envision democracy in quite the same way as Americans. In Pew polls, fewer than half of Muslims in Pakistan, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Jordan, for example, rated honest two-party elections and freedom of the press as very important. Moreover, many supported a prominent and in some cases expanding role for Islam and for religious leaders in the political life of their countries.[7]

A separate, more in-depth analysis of 2006 polling data from five Arab societies (Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Algeria, Morocco, and Kuwait) echoes these findings but goes on to caution that "Islam does not foster antidemocratic attitudes. Personal religiosity does not diminish support for democracy. . . . [or] even foster a preference for a political system that is Islamic as well as democratic." At the same time, this study demonstrates that a generalized approval of democracy can mask some crucial qualifications, or even contradictions: in particular, "a desire for stability that parallels the desire for democratic governance." The authors note, "This is reflected in the widespread emphasis on gradualism, as well as the support of some Arabs for a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliaments and elections—a support fostered, in part, by a belief that democracies are poor at maintaining order."[8]

The Islamic angle is relevant as well. Except in Morocco, the belief that democracy is disorderly correlates with support for what the authors call "Islamic

5. Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler, "The Democracy Barometers: Attitudes in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (January 2008), p. 98. Available online (www.arabbarometer.org/reports/democbarometers.pdf).
6. Marc Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," in Joshua Fouts, ed., *Public Diplomacy: Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy; Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006), p. 39. Available online (http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:HPpOuDpklrkJ:uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/USCC).
7. Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes, *America against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), pp. 130–131.
8. Jamal and Tessler, "The Democracy Barometers," p. 108.

democracy," one in which "men of religion should influence government decisions." This option attracts more than half (56 percent) of all respondents across the five societies surveyed. In a similar vein, a separate survey in Iraq in November/December 2004 found that Iraqis—whether Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, or Sunni Kurds—tended to believe that support for democracy "is not incompatible with support for absolute rule by the religious authorities: logically, the two might seem incompatible, but a large part of the Iraqi public has positive feelings toward *both* kinds of government."[9]

What exactly those respondents mean by any of their responses, however, is far from clear. For instance, in each of these societies, a majority of those supporting "Islamic democracy" nevertheless also say that "men and women should have equal job opportunities and wages." But the cross-country differences among these five groups on this question are quite substantial: support for gender equivalence in the workplace ranges all the way from 57 percent in Algeria to 84 percent in Kuwait. Furthermore, another series of surveys from ten predominantly Muslim societies in 2007 shows, surprisingly, that women of all educational levels tend to share the view that Islamic law is at least "somewhat" compatible with women's rights:

> Majorities of Muslim women in the countries…where shariah law is followed believe that their rights…can be very or somewhat well protected by shariah, in some cases overwhelmingly (90 percent or more in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh)…. In most [survey] countries, the level of educational attainment makes no difference in which women believe this.[10]

In Egypt and Jordan, according to separate Gallup polls conducted there in the past few years, majorities of both men and women say *sharia* (Islamic law) should be the only source of legislation. Moreover, only about half (57 percent, including about two-thirds of women) in each country say that women should have the same legal rights as men.[11]

Beyond a handful of hypotheses, the most erudite survey researchers concede they have no clear conception how their subjects reconcile Islamic and democratic politics:

> How do Muslim Arabs who express support for democracy but also want their religion to have a meaningful role in political life understand what might be called "Islamic democracy"?…[V]iews about the particular ways that democratic political life might incorporate an Islamic dimension are beyond the scope of this essay.[12]

On the evidence presented, widespread verbal support for democracy among various Arab publics incorporates wide variations in understanding of what that support really entails and even just what democracy means.

Some of the best examples of such variations come from Egypt—by far the largest Arab country and one from which several recent polls are available, probably for the first time. At first glance, Egypt shows plenty of popular support for democracy. Among the polls previously cited from 2005 through 2007, Pew found 65 percent of respondents saying "democracy is not just for the West, and can work well here." Similarly, the January 2007 University of Maryland poll finds 52 percent saying democracy is a "very good way" of governing Egypt, plus 30 percent saying it is a "fairly good way."

But how do these responses square with other responses in the same poll? Three-quarters of Egyptians also want "to require a strict application of *sharia* law in every Islamic country." And a remarkable 80 percent "strongly" want "to keep Western values out of Islamic countries." No wonder nearly half (45 percent) of Egyptians think a "violent conflict between Muslim and Western cultures" is "inevitable," with the other half (49 percent) saying it is "possible to find common

9. Inglehart, Moaddel, and Tessler, "Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq," p. 500 (emphasis in original).
10. Karl G. Feld, "Giving Voice to Women in Muslim Countries," D3 Systems, p. 6. Available online (www.publicopinionpros.com/features/2007/nov/feld_printable.asp). Besides the countries mentioned above, the others reported in this article were Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo, Pakistan, and Turkey.
11. John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), pp. 48, 50, 118.
12. Jamal and Tessler, "The Democracy Barometers," p. 103.

ground." Similarly, a March 2005 Gallup poll in five Muslim societies (Egypt, Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, Indonesia, and Iran) found that Egypt had the highest proportion, 67 percent, saying *sharia* should be "the only source of legislation" even when offered the option of saying it should be one source among others. The comparable figures for Indonesia or even Iran, quite strikingly, were just 14 percent. Among Palestinians, 44 percent opted for *sharia* as the sole source of legislation, but 46 percent preferred it to be just one source among others—exactly the same percentage of Americans who said that of the Bible.[13]

Some analysts, however, go too far in inferring a contradiction between public opinion and previous U.S. support for democracy in Arab countries. James Zogby, for one, has argued that Arabs do not want American backing for internal reform, but his evidence is based on loaded questions, including one that implies such backing is not really "an important" U.S. objective and then offers respondents the "middle option" of saying the United States is "going about it in the wrong way."[14]

Other analysts argue that Arab regimes' support for unpopular U.S. foreign policies has actually compelled those regimes to become more repressive lately. But this argument ignores the reality that some of the regimes most friendly to the United States remain among the least repressive (for example, Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait), while the one most hostile to the United States is also among the most repressive (Syria). Moreover, in many cases, recent repressive reactions stem in part from local reform initiatives, which the United States actively encouraged from 2002 to 2006.

Empathy or Ethnocentrism?

In the same vein, whereas Zogby shows a majority (59 percent) of Egyptians saying that U.S. policies rather than its values antagonize them, other responses in his poll tell a different story. Half of Egyptians indeed say that U.S. policies toward the Palestinians, Lebanon, and Iraq negatively affect their opinion of the United States, compared with just 20 to 25 percent reporting positive effects. But almost the same proportions report negative (41 to 42 percent) rather than positive (21 to 22 percent) effects from the values of "American freedom and democracy" or from "American promotion of democracy" in other countries.

The series of Gallup "Muslim world" polls conducted from 2002 to 2007 likewise shows that perceived differences over values, at least much as policy differences, lie behind antagonism toward the West. These results are not presented by individual countries, which makes analysis very difficult. Nevertheless, the overall findings draw heavily on five Arab and five non-Arab predominantly Muslim societies: Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Morocco, accounting for about 140 million people; plus Indonesia, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, accounting for about 650 million people. One key overall finding was the following. When Gallup asked the open-ended question—"In your own words, what do you resent most about the West?"—the most frequent response across all countries among moderates and radicals is "sexual and cultural promiscuity," followed by "ethical and moral corruption" and "hatred of Muslims."[15]

Another elusive "values" issue is the role of religion. Arabs, in sharp contrast to Europeans, tend to say that Americans are not religious enough. Yet absolutely no evidence indicates that a heavier dose of religion, or even an emphasis on a common faith in God, would improve reception of the American message among Arab audiences. On the contrary, some research suggests that precisely the opposite would be the case—probably because some Arabs would view that type of outreach as disingenuous or condescending, or simply as coming from bearers of the "wrong" religion.[16]

13. Magali Rheault and Dalia Mogahed, "Majorities of Muslims and Americans See Religion and Law as Compatible," Gallup News Service, October 3, 2007. Available online (www.gallupworldpoll.com/content/?ci=28762).
14. James Zogby, "Why Do They Hate Us? Opinions of the U.S. in the Islamic World" (presentation to the Center for National Policy, Washington, D.C., February 13, 2008; as heard).
15. Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?,* p. 88.
16. I am indebted to the late Dr. Stephen M. Shaffer, former chief of the Office of Research, U.S. Department of State, for clarification of this point in his remarks at the Pew Foundation/USC Conference on Public Opinion and Public Diplomacy (Washington, D.C., April 26, 2006).

One other comment about "shared values" concerns the role of the United Nations. Some have argued that a more multilateral U.S. foreign policy, grounded firmly in UN resolutions and international law, would be more appealing to Arab (and other) publics. But the polling data suggests caution. Egypt's public, for one, is split down the middle on the UN: 49 percent favorable compared with 51 percent unfavorable, according to the mid-2006 Pew Global Attitudes poll previously cited. The same poll shows Jordanians heavily tilted against the UN (30 percent vs. 69 percent), only a marginal improvement over their very negative view in mid-2004. Furthermore, no evidence suggests that the recent UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon have affected Arab public opinion even slightly.

Most important of all, American analysts must beware of their own ethnocentrism, even as they try to better understand others. One should not assume that attitudes toward either U.S. values or U.S. policies are that important, for better or worse, in the overall opinion climate in any given foreign country. This factor holds true both generally and in relation to the particular issues of greatest interest to the United States. For example, in commenting on a late 2005 survey in six Arab countries, Dr. James Zogby of the Arab American Institute made the following important observations:

> What the results show is an Arab world in which citizens are taking a look at what needs to be done to improve their lives. It is important to note that this looking inwards coexists with the sense of satisfaction (most saying they are better off) and a sense of optimism (most saying they believe things will continue to improve).... [T]hese views coexist in an environment where there is a diminishing belief in the "likelihood of peace" and a hardening of negative attitudes toward American policies—especially toward Iraq and "US treatment of Arabs and Muslims."[17]

Similarly, in a very thorough study of Jordanian and Algerian attitudes, Prof. Mark Tessler demonstrates that views of their own government are at least as relevant as views of U.S. policy and more relevant than any broad pro- or anti-Western value orientation in explaining expressions of support for terrorism in both of those significant and quite different Arab societies.[18]

Equally important and counterintuitive is the converse of this proposition: "shared values" do not necessarily correspond with less support for terrorism. This conclusion results from a large-scale analysis of 2005–2006 Gallup poll results from five Arab and four non-Arab Muslim societies that examined the differences between "radicals" who justify the September 11 attacks and "moderates" who do not:

> The war on terror is premised on a key question: why do they hate us? The common answer from Washington is that Muslim radicals hate our way of life, our freedom, and our democracy. Not so. Both moderates and radicals in the Muslim world admire the West, in particular its technology, democratic system and freedom of speech.[19]

Further analysis zeroed in on the "high-conflict group": the small minority, just 7 percent on average, who called September 11 "completely justified" and who also voiced very negative overall views of the United States. Remarkably, these respondents, compared to the others, "were slightly *more* likely to say that democracy will help Muslims' progress."[20] This disjunction between values and views of terrorism echoes the policy disjunction previously discussed: there is little linkage between attitudes toward the United States and toward terrorism. Moreover, Muslims who express support for democracy may actually be a bit more prone than others to support terrorism against Americans as well.

17. James Zogby, "Attitudes of Arabs 2005: An In-Depth Look at Social and Political Concerns of Arabs," Arab American Institute, Washington, D.C., December 12, 2005, pp. 1–2. Available online (http://aai.3cdn.net/6e38e45846c8ce7df5_k0m6be9di.pdf).
18. Mark Tessler and Michael D. H. Robbins, "What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts against the United States?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 305–328. Available online (http://jcr.sagepub.com/).
19. John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, "What Makes a Muslim Radical?" Foreign Policy blog, November 2006. Available online (www.foreignpolicy.com and http://media.gallup.com/WorldPoll/PDF/MWSRRadical022207.pdf).
20. Dalia Mogahed, "What Does God Have to Do with It? The Links between Religion, Radicalism and Violence" (transcript of presentation to Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., October 23, 2007), p. 34 (emphasis added).

Arab Polling: Examples of Best Practices

THE PREVIOUS DISCUSSION has maintained that inter-pollster reliability is generally lacking in political surveys from Arab countries, if only because not enough such surveys exist to compare. Some interesting exceptions exist, however, as the following section demonstrates.

In postwar Iraq, at least as of late 2007, the main problem confronted by pollsters has not been too much government control, but rather too little. The threat of violence against fieldworkers is a major occupational hazard. One extremely entrepreneurial and experienced regional pollster opened for business in Baghdad soon after the United States overthrew Saddam Hussein and quickly snapped up a very lucrative contract to conduct monthly political surveys in Iraq. Before the year was out, however, so was this contractor. One of his field supervisors had been kidnapped, held for ransom, and eventually released; a foreign colleague apparently caught up inadvertently in that same incident was actually beheaded. That experience was more than enough to scare this veteran, battle-hardened pollster permanently out of Iraq. Other pollsters, he later recounted, were nevertheless ready to take his place, for the right price. The Iraqi ones seemed willing to brave the rigors of this extraordinary research environment, but the foreign ones tended to keep their supervisors holed up in Amman or some other safe haven and try somehow to keep tabs on the fieldwork at long distance. The net effect is that Iraq has become by far the most-polled Arab country over the past five years—providing not just a slew of numbers, but also one of the few plausible means of testing their credibility, by comparing the results of different polls asking very nearly the same questions at very nearly the same times.

The Palestinians, too, have a decent and even longer track record of "inter-pollster reliability." So, to a lesser extent, do the Jordanians, as this paper discusses. But these cases are the exceptions that prove the rule, which is that most Arab countries have only a spotty record of any political polling at all and therefore an inadequate basis for sustained comparative analysis and credibility determinations.

Inter-Pollster Reliability: The Palestinian Authority

First prize in this category goes to the Palestinians, among whom a number of different reputable pollsters have been taking the pulse of the public at frequent intervals ever since the original Oslo Accords of 1993 opened up the territories to this kind of research. One unusual advantage enjoyed by early Palestinian pollsters was relatively wide initial acceptance by their own society and leadership, who tended to share the sense that these polls represented a reprieve from Israeli prohibitions against such political activity.

A small anecdote illustrates this point. The author worked on one of the very first true probability samples for a Palestinian political poll in late May 1994. While conducting a random walk to choose interview households in the West Bank village of Anabta, the field supervisor remarked how pleased he was that the very act of conducting a public opinion poll seemed to herald a new era of freedom and even peace. But one interview subject was too overcome by emotion to complete the questionnaire, because she had recently lost a son in the waning days of the first intifada. Coming out of her house, the author asked the field supervisor whether he knew the woman's story; to which came the reply: "Yes, I know. She's my mother." Yet this young man was ready to put the past behind him and participate in more peaceful pursuits, including public opinion polls—and so, too, according to his polls and many others, were a majority of his Palestinian compatriots.

On the methodological level, most Palestinian pollsters moved quickly beyond quota or other unscientific sampling to standard probability techniques. Social pressures or dissimulation, however, present a harder problem. Perhaps as a result, some of these polls appear to have a slight tendency, compared with others, to underrepresent Islamist or extreme views.

Other pollsters actually tested and tried to remedy possible sources of such bias: for instance, in November 1994, they tried coding to see if interviewers who dressed in Islamist fashion recorded more "votes" for Hamas than did their Western-dressed colleagues. When that seemed to be the case, by about ten points, this pollster duly made sure to seek out more-neutral clothing for his fieldworkers. Generally, when substantial discrepancies appear, on closer inspection they usually seem to reflect differences in question wording rather than major sampling or reporting discrepancies. On the whole, the results are usually in the same ballpark, and thus they pass the test of inter-pollster reliability.[1] Sadly, this advantage of Palestinian polls may become another casualty of the Hamas seizure of Gaza and subsequent repression there.

The very professionalism of these polls immediately leads back to this riddle: if these Palestinian polls are so good, why did they miss the most fateful (and eminently pollable) result of recent Palestinian politics, namely, the Hamas victory in the January 2006 election?

The answer in this case is deceptively simple. It was not the polls themselves, but the analysts' failure to take into account the hybrid Palestinian electoral system, that proved to be such an embarrassment. Half the 128 seats in the Palestinian legislature are allotted on the basis of at-large voting results, by party lists; but the other half are decided according to votes for individual candidates in each separate electoral district. Several preelection polls correctly discovered that Hamas and Fatah were locked in an unexpectedly and increasingly close race for votes at the national level, in what looked like a virtual tie as election day approached,[2] but no known poll bothered to investigate the electoral contest at the district level. In every one of those districts, Hamas ran only a single candidate for each available seat, while an undisciplined and divided Fatah party often ran several competing candidates.

The predictable (but unpredicted) outcome was that Fatah votes in various districts were split many different ways and largely wasted—leaving the Hamas candidates in those districts with a plurality, and thus a seat in parliament. As a result, Hamas ended up with a solid overall majority of seventy-four seats.[3] In this respect, Palestinian pollsters could have learned a valuable lesson from their Jordanian counterparts just across the river. The latter have been paying careful attention to the gerrymandering and other vagaries of Jordan's electoral districting—and accurately predicting the results—ever since the first truly competitive parliamentary vote in that country in 1989. After the surprise result of the 2006 Palestinian election, reports surfaced that some U.S. government survey researchers had in fact warned about a Hamas upset electoral victory. The warning, however, apparently came much too close to election time for anyone to do anything about it, even had anyone been so inclined.[4]

Since then, despite the 2006 Hamas triumph in its only election, many Palestinian polls have shown continued popular support for negotiations and eventual coexistence with Israel—and a sharp drop in popular backing for Hamas. As of early January 2008, Fatah was outrunning Hamas by ten, twenty, or (in a few districts) even thirty points, in both the West Bank and Gaza—except for the two largest cities, Gaza City and Jerusalem, where

1. For a valuable and concise summary of various recent Palestinian polling results on key issues, see Alvin Richman, "Hardened by Conflict: Israeli and Palestinian Views Challenge Peace Negotiators," *Public Opinion Pros*, November 2007, p. 3 (available online at www.publicopinionpros.com/features/2007/nov/richman.asp). See also Angus Reid Global Monitor: Issue Watch: Hamas (available online at www.angus-reid.com/). Generally speaking, results published by Near East Consulting sometimes seem modestly more "moderate" than those published by other Palestinian pollsters, such as the Center for Policy and Survey Research, the Center for Public Opinion, or the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center. In addition, these pollsters, none of which is based in Gaza, may be collectively perceived as in some sense "establishment" or "mainstream" rather than Hamas oriented, which may have some influence on their findings despite their best efforts at impartiality.
2. See, for example, the numerous contemporaneous polls cited by Angus Reid in his very useful compilation Angus Reid Global Monitor: Issue Watch: Hamas (available online at www.angus-reid.com/). Also see one Palestinian pollster's own apologia: Nabil Kukali, "The Polling Issue: Is It a Problem of the Poll Centers or the Change of Attitudes?" Palestinian Center for Public Opinion, February 2, 2006 (available online at www.pcpo.ps/articles.htm).
3. For a concise analysis of this effect, see Fair Vote Program for Representative Government, "It's the Election System, Stupid: The Misleading Hamas Majority and the System That Created It." Available online (www.fairvote.org/media/pep/Palestine.pdf).
4. Office of Research, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., "Hamas and Fateh Neck and Neck as Palestinian Elections Near," January 19, 2006. Available online (www.fas.org/irp/agency/inr/hamas.pdf).

the two parties were tied.[5] In addition, Palestinian support for some forms of political violence against Israel seemed to have declined: only about a quarter overall said they backed attacks against Israeli soldiers or settlers in the West Bank.[6] By early February 2008, after Hamas scored a propaganda victory by temporarily breaching the border wall between Egypt and Gaza, a new survey by another credible pollster showed that Hamas had gained three points in popularity, whereas Fatah had lost just as much. Even so, Fatah was still ahead, by a margin of 46 to 34 percent.[7]

Inter-Pollster Reliability: Iraq

As previously noted, the best case of inter-pollster reliability over the past five years in Arab countries is Iraq, which is the most dangerous but also one of the most polled places in the entire region. The U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. military, assorted nongovernmental organizations, and a plethora of international and regional media sponsors all regularly conduct polls in Iraq, despite the obvious hazards and difficulties involved.

From personal observation and conversations with pollsters at work there, the task is daunting, not because of any methodological conundrums but purely for practical reasons. The hardest problem is quality control: how to maintain confidence in the fieldwork when callbacks (to check on the accuracy and honesty of reported results by recontacting a randomly chosen fraction of respondents) are barely feasible, supervisors are afraid to travel around the country or are themselves more safely ensconced in Jordan or Turkey, and some respondents may be fearful about talking openly to strangers.

In one analysis marking the war's fifth anniversary, veteran correspondent John Burns reflected on this problem:

> Opinion polls, including those commissioned by the American command, have long suggested that a majority of Iraqis would like American troops withdrawn, but…any attempt to measure opinion in Iraq is fatally skewed by intimidation. More often than not, people tell pollsters and reporters what they think is safe, not necessarily what they believe. My own experience, invariably, was that Iraqis I met who felt secure enough to speak with candor had an overwhelming desire to see American troops remain long enough to restore stability.[8]

In fact, rather ironically, the most recent comprehensive published Iraqi poll, conducted in late February 2008, suggests that most Iraqis now feel secure enough to tell pollsters precisely that. "Well under half," the findings show (38 percent), "say the United States should leave now, down from a peak 47 percent in August [2007]." Even more striking is the level of support for a long-term American military presence in Iraq: "From two-thirds to 80 percent of Iraqis support future U.S. efforts conducting security operations against al-Qaeda or foreign jihadis in Iraq; providing military training, weapons and reconstruction aid; and assisting in security vis-à-vis Iran and Turkey." Other results from this poll show that majorities also say local security and other conditions are good. This is a very considerable improvement over any such figures from 2007, even if just 36 percent of Iraqis credit the "surge" in U.S. troops for that improvement.[9]

Although it is still too soon, as of this writing, to compare these findings with any other 2008 polls, Iraqis today are clearly much more accustomed to

5. See, for example, the summary of remarks by leading Palestinian pollster Nader Said in "Israeli and Palestinian Views on Peace: What Polls Can and Cannot Tell Us," in *Proceedings of the 2007 Weinberg Founders Conference, October 19–21, 2007: Autumn of Decisions: A Critical Moment for American Engagement in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2008), p. 33.
6. Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), Press Release, "New Revelations on the Opinions of Youth, Women and Educated Palestinians," February 2, 2008, and Press Release, "Public Opinion Index for Governorates," February 6, 2008. Available online (http://awrad.org/etemplate.php?id=28&x=4 and http://awrad.org/etemplate.php?id=30&x=4, respectively).
7. Based on a poll by Khalil Shikaki of the Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research, as reported by Cam Simpson, "In West Bank, Fatah Loses Favor," *Wall Street Journal*, February 8, 2008. As is often the case, the headline, in contrast to the actual poll results, seems overly alarmist.
8. John F. Burns, "Five Years," *New York Times*, March 16, 2008.
9. "Security Gains Reverse Iraq's Spiral Though Serious Problems Remain," ABC/BBC/ARD/NHK Poll, March 17, 2008, pp. 1, 5, 6. Available online (http://www.abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1060a1IraqWhereThingsStand.pdf).

speaking their minds than they were under Saddam, and almost certainly more so than their counterparts in most other neighboring countries. Moreover, the results of different Iraqi polls from the past two or three years are most often comfortably within the range of similarity that might be expected under these challenging circumstances. For example, two polls were taken by two different pollsters, for separate private sponsors, about a week apart in February and early March 2007. In both, Iraqis predominantly (and somewhat surprisingly) said life was better today than under Saddam. The margins were not the same, but at least they were not too terribly far apart: 49 percent compared with 26 percent in one poll, 43 percent compared with 36 percent in the other.[10]

On another key question, responses in the two polls differed somewhat more but could still be considered of the same order of magnitude, or "close enough for government work." In the ORB poll, 27 percent of Iraqis said their country was already in the midst of a civil war, with an additional 22 percent saying it was "close" to that condition. In the BBC/ABC/*USA Today* poll, Iraqis were again noticeably but not wildly more pessimistic: 42 percent said the country was in a civil war, while 25 percent said this was likely to happen. The ability to compare—and on the whole confirm or at least approximately replicate—such findings from nearly identical questions on different surveys taken in temporal proximity suggests greater confidence in polls from Iraq than from Egypt or Saudi Arabia, for example, where things are much calmer but also much more controlled.

A second major point about Iraq is less novel: its three major communities—Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds—evince sharp differences of view. At least through September 2006, Kurds had by far the most positive attitudes, Sunni Arabs had the most negative ones, and Shiite Arabs were somewhere in between. In March 2007, one poll reported widely divergent preferences among these three groups for Iraq's political future. A majority of Kurds (66 percent) desired democracy; a majority of Sunnis preferred a "strongman" with unlimited tenure in power; Shiites were divided down the middle (41 percent vs. 40 percent) between democracy and an Islamic state.

Of the three major Iraqi communities, only the Kurds predominantly (55 percent) gave U.S. troops favorable reviews in 2006–2007. Sunnis (97 percent) and Shiites (91 percent) alike overwhelmingly voiced little or no confidence in those forces. Yet despite all the hardships, 75 to 80 percent of both Shiite Arabs and Kurds—but only one in ten Sunni Arabs—continued to say that getting rid of Saddam was worthwhile. More surprisingly, according to the BBC/ABC News/*USA Today* poll, in response to a slightly different question, a slim plurality overall still said life was better rather than worse (43 percent vs. 36 percent) today, as compared with Saddam's time. The early 2007 ORB poll shows a slightly more positive valence: 49 percent better, compared with just 26 percent worse.

The demographic breakdown was equally telling: Shiite Arabs were heavily positive (66 percent vs. 6 percent); Kurds even more so (75 percent vs. 4 percent); while Sunni Arabs predominantly feel that things were actually better under Saddam (51 percent) than under "the present political system" (29 percent). Late 2004 and mid-2006 polls by an academic team and an early 2007 Gallup poll show, by comparison, similarly divergent percentages in response to similar questions.[11]

A very extensive British poll in late February/early March 2007 showed, surprisingly, a majority of Shiites thinking security would get better (62 percent) rather than worse (14 percent) "in the immediate weeks following a withdrawal of Multinational Forces." Sunnis were split on this question (42 percent vs. 43 percent). The Kurds stood out with a clear majority (64 percent) apprehensive that security would worsen at least "a little" in the wake of such a withdrawal.

10. Opinion Research Business (ORB), "Public Attitudes in Iraq—Four Years On," March 7, 2007 (available online at www.opinion.co.uk/); *USA Today*/ABC News, "Iraq: Where Things Stand" (available online at www.usatoday.com); BBC News, "Iraq Poll March 2007," March 21, 2007 (available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/middleeast).
11. Ronald Inglehart, Mansoor Moaddel, and Mark Tessler, "Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq: A Natural Experiment on the Impact of Insecurity," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 3 (September 2006), pp. 500–501.

In 2007, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had a personal approval rating of 86 percent among Shiite Arabs and 58 percent among Kurds, but merely 14 percent among Sunni Arabs. In the September 2006 University of Maryland poll, however, the pattern for two other leading Shiite figures was completely different. Among the Shiite Arabs, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani got a 95 percent approval rating, and Muqtada al-Sadr was not far behind with 81 percent (although only half viewed him "very" favorably). By contrast, Sunni Arabs and Kurds gave both men roughly 80 to 90 percent negative ratings.

Asked in September 2006 whether Iraq would stay a single country over the next five years, majorities of all three major groups said yes, but by very different margins: Shiites, 80 percent; Kurds, 65 percent; and Sunnis, 56 percent. By March 2007, some shifts appeared in this constellation: somewhat more Kurds (41 percent) predicted independence, but more Sunnis (75 percent) anticipated Iraqi unity, perhaps because of greater government efforts to include and protect that community as internal conflict continues. A plurality of Shiites (48 percent) foresaw a federation of regional governments, which appears to be in line with the position of the largest Shiite political party (the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council).

What is not clear, however, is how much such sharp attitudinal cleavages were a cause and how much they were a consequence of the terrible violence plaguing Iraq in the past five years. One scholarly study based on extensive 2004 and 2006 polls suggests that the violence is itself a causal factor, leading to "the highest levels of xenophobia found in any of 85 societies for which data are available—together with extremely high levels of solidarity with one's own ethnic group."[12] This theory raises the possibility that if violence declined, then Shiite Arab, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish Iraqi attitudes might begin to converge, at least on some important issues. To a certain extent, this process appears to have started in 2007.

That leads to a third major point: Iraqi public opinion, like most others, can change very considerably over just a few months' time. Two of the best published polls, for example, show significant changes in attitudes between January and September 2006—including more criticism of U.S. forces and less optimism about Iraq's situation, along with a surprising increase in support for Iraq's own security forces (except among Sunnis). Data from 2007 again shows a relatively rapid evolution in attitudes, presenting a mixed picture overall—but showing some narrowing of the gap among the three major population groups.

This convergence is not necessarily all good: Kurds have become significantly more likely than before to agree strongly with their Arab compatriots that "life in Iraq is unpredictable and dangerous."[13] Nevertheless, some more hopeful areas of convergence exist. In particular, the significant popular Sunni backlash against al-Qaeda, and also the Shiite public's growing wariness about Iran, can be documented from the available survey data.[14]

Comparing two polls sponsored by the respected World Values Survey based at the University of Michigan, one in November 2004 and the other in April 2006, shows that the percentage of all Iraqis strongly agreeing that their country "would be a better place if religion and politics were separated" rose from 27 to 41 percent. Over the same period, the percentage agreeing that "I am an Iraqi above all" rose just marginally at the national level, from 23 to 28 percent—but it soared in Baghdad, from 30 to 62 percent.[15]

A separate August 2007 survey commissioned by a BBC/ABC/NHK media consortium demonstrated a modest convergence of Shiite and Sunni views on

12. Ibid., p. 495.
13. University of Michigan News Service, "Iraqi Attitudes: Survey Documents Big Changes," June 14, 2006, based on November 2004 and April 2006 World Values Survey polls supervised by Profs. Ronald Inglehart, Mansoor Moaddel, and Mark Tessler. Article available online (www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases/2006/Jun06/r061406a).
14. The most recent, relatively reliable data are from late February 2008, in the previously cited ABC/BBC/ARD/NHK poll report, "Security Gains Reverse Iraq's Spiral Though Serious Problems Remain."
15. University of Michigan News Service, "Iraqi Attitudes."

some key issues, alongside widespread skepticism about the U.S. military "surge" that was approaching full strength at the time. Only about a fifth of either Shiite or Sunni Arabs put primary blame on those forces for Iraq's continuing violence, down from a third in February 2007.

In another positive shift, both Shiite and Sunni Arabs overwhelmingly rejected attacks on Iraqi forces (although, as of August 2007, Sunnis still voiced overwhelming support for attacks on American forces). Shiite and Sunni Arabs were nearly unanimous in rejecting al-Qaeda in Iraq's "attempts to gain control in local areas" or "recruitment of foreign fighters to come to Iraq."[16] Similarly, roughly three-quarters even of Sunni Arabs, and nearly all Shiites and Kurds, voiced a negative opinion of both al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in the University of Maryland survey. Only about one in five (18 percent), however, placed primary blame for Iraq's violence on al-Qaeda or other foreign forces according to the *USA Today* poll.

Iraq's key neighbors garner skeptical attitudes that even cross sectarian lines to some extent. As of September 2006, only a minority (45 percent) of Iraqi Shiites said that predominantly Shiite Iran was exerting a positive influence in their own country, and only a minority (41 percent) of Iraqi Sunnis said the same of Syria, despite its widely reported backing for Sunni insurgents. Iran's influence is viewed negatively by most Iraqi Kurds (71 percent, up from 63 percent in January 2006) and Sunnis (94 percent) alike. Syria's influence likewise elicits largely negative reactions from Iraqi Shiites (68 percent) as well as Kurds (63 percent).[17]

By early 2007, judging from preliminary reports of the *USA Today* poll, views of Iran had hardened a bit with a solid majority (71 percent) overall saying Tehran is actively encouraging sectarian violence in Iraq. Two-thirds, about the same as before, said the same about Syria. A narrower majority (56 percent) accused Saudi Arabia, as well, of supporting Iraqi sectarian conflict—the first time this important question has been reported. All together, from the standpoint of internal public opinion, the picture in Iraq appears mixed, fairly volatile, and certainly divided—but not hopelessly so. From a broader perspective, this picture is a valuable reminder of three crucial guidelines for examining any Arab survey data: look closely at one country at a time; look closely at major demographic divisions even within each country; and look closely at changes in public opinion even over a period of just a few months—including changes in the direction and distribution of attitudes among key demographic segments of the population.

Long-Term Trends: Jordanian Public Opinion

Jordan is one of the very few Arab states for which fairly detailed and credible long-term trend data on political attitudes is available, and from a variety of different local and international pollsters.[18] In the early 1990s, when serious polling started in Jordan, obtaining separate results for the Palestinian-origin majority and the East Bank minority of the country's population—who often had substantially different views on various topical issues, including the possibility of peace with Israel—was usually both desirable and feasible. More recent data is rarely reported with this demographic breakdown, however, perhaps because intermarriage and other socialization factors have blurred some of these differences over time. Perhaps also, somewhat paradoxically, the question of national origin remains a sensitive one for pollsters to ask about. Some analysts therefore try to use neighborhood of residence (for example, West Amman versus East Amman) as a proxy for Jordanian or Palestinian identity.

16. BBC News, "Iraq Poll September 2007: In Graphics," September 10, 2007. Available online (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6983027.stm).
17. WorldPublicOpinion.org, Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, "The Iraqi Public on the US Presence and the Future of Iraq," September 27, 2006, p. 17. Available online (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/sep06/Iraq_Sep06_rpt.pdf).
18. For a concise review and references, including the influential Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan and other local pollsters, see Marc Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," in Joshua Fouts, ed., *Public Diplomacy: Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy; Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006). Available online (http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:HPpOuDpklrkJ:uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/USCC).

In any case, this highly distinctive demographic, along with the country's idiosyncratic history and other characteristics, make Jordan, for all its accessibility and relative openness, ill-suited as some kind of exemplar for the entire "Arab world" or even just for the Levant. Still, the longer-term patterns that one can discern in this relatively small but strategic state are intrinsically interesting and well worth testing whenever solid comparative data emerges from other Arab societies. The discussion that follows focuses on the latest five-year trends—always more informative than any single snapshot—in overall Jordanian public opinion.

Regarding attitudes toward the United States, some evidence appeared of a modest rebound in Jordan since the nadir reached right after the American capture of Baghdad. In mid-2005, favorable views of the United States were almost back at their prewar level in the low 20 percent (Pew polls) or low 30 percent (Zogby polls) range, after having plummeted to single digits in 2003 and 2004. The June 2006 Pew polls, however, showed a slide back to just 15 percent favorable, and the November 2006 Zogby poll (limited to metropolitan Amman and Zarqa) registered just 5 percent in that positive category. Surprisingly, only one in five Jordanians said the Lebanon war that summer had worsened their view of the United States; most blamed U.S. policy in Iraq or the Palestinian territories.

In both of these polls, positive Jordanian views of Americans as people have held steady in the 30 percent range over the past two years, up from barely 20 percent in 2003 and 2004 (although down sharply from 53 percent in 2002). Jordan is thus a counterexample to a purported new global trend toward more negative views on this question.

One very dramatic five-year trend in Jordan is the total reversal, in a positive direction, in popular perceptions of "the way things are going in our country." In 2002, Jordanians started from a low point of 78 percent dissatisfied compared with a mere 21 percent satisfied. After that, year by year, opinions climbed steadily upward to 69 percent satisfied and just 30 percent dissatisfied by 2005, before leveling off at 53 percent satisfied and 44 percent dissatisfied in mid-2006. This major improvement occurred despite the constant turmoil surrounding Jordan on all sides during this period—strongly suggesting that foreign policy, whether in Iraq or the Palestinian territories, does not figure as prominently in public attitudes as is sometimes supposed.[19]

Another sharp change in Jordanian attitudes over the past five years, but one for which not as much polling data is publicly available, concerns the decline in popularity of the Islamist political camp, led by the Muslim Brotherhood–oriented Islamic Action Front. In one reported local poll from April 2007, that support registered just 17 percent—only about half the 32 percent recorded two years earlier. According to the Jordanian research director, "While most of the shift was due to terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda inspired militants here . . . Hamas conduct since coming to power [in the January 2006 Palestinian election] also played a role."[20]

This trend was both mirrored and magnified in Jordan's November 2007 parliamentary election, in which the Islamists fell from 22 to a mere 7 seats of a total 110.[21] As always, the country's complicated and gerrymandered electoral system worked against such opposition candidates. Jordan's government, the polling analyst had correctly noted six months earlier, "was very anxious and worried, but they are in fact in a much stronger position than they were a few years ago."[22] This outcome does not, however, mean that King Abdullah's personal popularity is also on the upswing. Anecdotal evidence suggests the contrary, but hard public opinion data on this is not accessible to the public.

19. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "America's Image Slips, but Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas," June 13, 2006. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=824).
20. Dan Murphy and Jill Carroll, "Egypt and Jordan Quietly Back Abbas, Too," *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), June 20, 2007.
21. Hassan Barari, "Elections in Jordan: Poor Showing for Islamists," *PolicyWatch* no. 1317 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 13, 2007). Available online (www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC10.php?CID=45).
22. As quoted in Murphy and Carroll, "Egypt and Jordan Quietly Back Abbas, Too."

Elusive Internal Divisions: Lebanon

Even within certain individual Arab countries, internal cleavages may be so pronounced that analyzing public opinion at the national level can be misleading. Unfortunately, such is the case today in two of the most polled Arab states: Lebanon and Iraq. To complicate the picture further, these attitudinal cleavages are far from static over time; major sectarian or ethnic groups may diverge or converge radically in the space of just a few years. In Lebanon, surveys suggest that Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shiite Muslim collective views, which were not that far apart as recently as 2004, have polarized dramatically since the anti-Syrian "Cedar Revolution" of 2005 and the Israeli-Hizballah war of 2006. In Iraq, conversely, the most recent surveys suggest some narrowing of the gaps that so sharply divided Sunni Arab and Shiite Muslims in the first three years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

In Lebanon today, the cleavages among the Christian, Sunni, and Shiite segments of society are so pronounced that it makes little sense to speak of Lebanese public opinion as a whole. To cite just a few relevant cases in point, in June 2005, Pew found that a mere 22 percent of Lebanese Muslims had a favorable view of the United States—compared with about 70 percent of Lebanese Christians. After the war with Israel the next year, Zogby found that U.S. policy toward Lebanon was viewed overwhelmingly poorly (90 percent vs. 7 percent) by Lebanon's Shiite population, and predominantly poorly (52 percent vs. 31 percent) by the Sunnis there—but narrowly positively by the country's Christian community (45 percent vs. 40 percent).

The mid-2007 Pew poll showed that the deep sectarian cleavage in overall views of the United States had actually deepened, with an even greater sectarian divide within Lebanon's Muslim population. Christian views of the United States edged up further to 82 percent positive; Shiite approval dropped to a new low of 7 percent; while Sunnis were now split down the middle, at 52 percent positive and 47 percent negative toward the United States.[23]

On many issues closer to home, the deepest divide in Lebanon is between Shiites, on the one hand, and Sunnis and Christians, on the other. Attitudes toward Hizballah and its leader Nasrallah, toward Iran and its President Ahmadinezhad, and even toward Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, are all overwhelmingly favorable among the Shiites, at least according to the Pew and Zogby polls, and overwhelmingly unfavorable among both Sunnis and Christians. On the question of suicide bombings "in defense of Islam," as of mid-2007, a narrow majority (54 percent) of Lebanon's Shiites continued to call them justified at least sometimes—compared with Lebanon's Sunnis, where that figure had dropped to just 19 percent.[24] Christian views, however, now also appear more internally divided between backers of the government and Michel Aoun's opposition.

Good reason exists to believe, however, that the apparent near unanimity of Shiite support for Hizballah and Nasrallah may be an artifact, a product partly of social pressure or outright intimidation, according to some local community leaders,[25] and partly of questions that prevented the respondents from naming other choices. In particular, two more in-depth polls conducted in late 2006 and mid-2007 by a nonsectarian and highly professional Lebanese social science institute show much less uniform Shiite support either

23. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers: 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," June 27, 2007, p. 15. Available online (http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf). The November 2006 Zogby poll, taken about midway between two annual Pew polls and just a few months after the Israeli-Hizballah war that summer, suggests the war had a significant but temporary negative effect on both Sunni and Christian views of the United States. Zogby reported, as did Pew, that Shiites were overwhelmingly unfavorable toward the United States, but he also reported that Sunnis felt largely (69 percent) the same, while Christians were split down the middle. If so, then Sunni attitudes toward the United States appear to have rebounded by twenty points, and Christian attitudes by thirty points, in just the six months leading up to the second of these Pew polls in April 2007. A compelling explanation for such a decisive shift on this question during that period is difficult to find, even supposing that wartime emotions had rather abruptly subsided sometime around early 2007.
24. Richard Wike, "Lebanon's Precarious Politics," Pew Global Attitudes Project, November 15, 2007. Available online (http://pewresearch.org/pubs/636/lebanon-politics). The question about suicide bombing was not asked of Christian respondents.
25. Author's interview with Ahmad al-Assaad, chairman of al-Intimaa al-Lubnani (Lebanese Option Gathering), Washington, D.C., January 29, 2008. Al-Assaad is a prominent Shiite but anti-Hizballah figure who divides his time between the Dahiyah (Shiite districts of south Beirut) and the southern, largely Shiite region of Lebanon.

for that party or for that personality, compared with the Zogby and Pew polls taken at almost exactly the same times.

In these other polls, the question was not a straight up or down (each with "very" and "somewhat" options) vote on just Hizballah or Nasrallah but a choice among different parties and politicians. The results show a considerably lower level of backing for Hizballah and Nasrallah to begin with and a much sharper decline by mid-2007 to a minority position even within Lebanon's Shiite community. The figures from these other two polls are as follows:

Lebanese Shiite Respondents

	NOV.–DEC. 2006	MAY–JUNE 2007
Which political party best represents your point of view?		
Hizballah	64%	33%
None	22%	25%
Which political leader is most appealing to you?		
Amal	6%	27%
Hassan Nasrallah	62%	37%
Nabih Berri	27%	33%
No one	3%	14%
Michel Aoun	3%	4%

If one is forced to choose between these numbers and the ones cited earlier from Zogby or Pew, these numbers should probably get the nod. They reflect not only more precise questions but also much larger samples, complete with much more detailed methodological information. This advantage is understandable, given this institute's exclusive focus on its own home country. In any case, these apparent discrepancies should serve as a cautionary note on even the most plausible survey statistics, such as a "finding" that Lebanese Shiites overwhelmingly support Hizballah and Nasrallah. Maybe the numbers don't lie, but sometimes the people do—because their lives or at least their livelihoods may depend upon it.

Egypt and Morocco: Focus on Differences

The very considerable differences among Arab publics are reason enough not to lump them together and not to make loose generalizations about "the Arab street." But another good reason exists to look carefully at these differences: they may offer some clues about the sources of public opinion, especially when that opinion might seem perplexing or even inexplicable. A good test of this proposition is Egypt, which by most accounts provides the "worst-case scenario" of a close Arab ally with a profoundly anti-American public. A comparison with another major Arab ally with a somewhat different pattern of public opinion, in this case Morocco, is instructive. Because the reliability of polls from either country is uncertain, however, the discussion that follows must be considered more conjectural than the best cases previously discussed.

Regarding views of "the current U.S. government," Egyptian public opinion has no good news to report. The February/March 2007 University of Maryland poll shows a whopping 93 percent unfavorable. This figure is even worse than the 83 to 85 percent measured by Zogby in 2005 and 2006 and among the very worst ever recorded from any Arab public. The corresponding figure for Morocco, as of early 2007, was "only" 76 percent unfavorable toward the U.S. government—and just half feel "very" unfavorable, compared with fully 86 percent of Egyptians. One-fourth of Moroccans, but a mere 7 percent of Egyptians, were convinced that "the creation of an independent and economically viable Palestinian state" was in fact an objective of U.S. policy.

The contrast with Morocco is also instructive with respect to attacks on U.S. targets and related questions. In Egypt, according to the University of Maryland poll, 83 percent said they "strongly" approve of "attacks on U.S. military troops in Iraq"; in Morocco, that number was just 39 percent. Two-thirds of Egyptians approved of at least some "groups in the Muslim world that attack Americans"; just 38 percent of Moroccans said the same. In Egypt, 40 percent voiced at least a "somewhat positive" view of bin Laden; in Morocco, that figure was just 27 percent. (Fully a quarter of Moroccans,

but just 6 percent of Egyptians, however, said they "don't know" or refused to answer.) And one-quarter of Egyptians, compared to a mere 9 percent of Moroccans, said they "support al-Qaeda's attacks on Americans and share its attitudes toward the United States."

What accounts for these awful Egyptian perceptions? Dissatisfaction with U.S. policies is probably part of the explanation. Curiously, only half of Egyptians themselves told the Zogby pollsters that U.S. policy toward the Palestinians, Lebanon, or Iraq had a negative effect on their overall opinion of the United States (rather than the U.S. government). Only a narrow majority of Egyptians (59 percent)—substantially fewer than in most other Zogby sample countries—say that U.S. policies underpin their attitudes. That proportion in Morocco was the highest, at 88 percent. Moreover, Egyptian opinion about the United States was reportedly highly negative even before the latest Iraq war or Lebanon war: 76 percent in the 2002 Zogby poll.

So, in addition to Egyptian popular rejection of U.S. policies on any or all of those issues, one searches for some additional explanatory factors. One possibility is the virulently anti-American media coverage in Egypt, whether official, semi-official, or opposition. Another, more speculative, idea is that the very closeness of the U.S.-Egyptian official embrace, and the billions of dollars in annual aid that have gone with it for the past quarter-century, have made Egyptians especially suspicious of American motives. Slight evidence for this hypothesis is buried in the January 2007 University of Maryland survey. Egyptians and Moroccans were asked their view of this statement: "America pretends to be helpful to Muslim countries, but in fact everything it does is really part of a scheme to take advantage of people in the Middle East and steal their oil." Sad to say, three-quarters of Egyptians agreed strongly—precisely twice the percentage of Moroccans with that attitude.

One other possibility is that Egyptians are simply more disgruntled lately, and that some of this dissatisfaction spills over to their views of the United States. The jot of evidence for this hypothesis comes from the November 2006 Zogby poll. As compared with the previous year, Egyptian attitudes apparently underwent a complete reversal, from positive to negative, on the twin questions of feeling "better or worse off" today than four years earlier and of expectations four years hence. In contrast, Moroccan attitudes on these questions, while showing a slight downturn, stayed predominantly positive. The Egyptian public's relatively pessimistic overall disposition lately just may be contributing to its extraordinarily unfavorable view of the United States.

None of this speculation is meant to imply that the major reasons behind Egyptian popular animosity toward the United States are either irrelevant or irrational—only that the seemingly extraneous factors mentioned may be exacerbating the underlying problem. The perceptual gap between Egyptians and Americans is dishearteningly broad and deep. Perhaps the best that can be said is that some other Arabs have more favorable attitudes toward the United States, if only by comparison.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

ABOVE AND BEYOND any of these polls, analysts often fail to answer, or even consider, any of the crucial "so what" questions. How do people's attitudes affect their actions, if at all? How much does the "Arab street" matter, as opposed to the elite? To what degree do these autocratic governments really care about public opinion? And if they do, have they already adjusted their policies to take popular attitudes into account? The recent record suggests little connection between poll numbers and any other aspect of reality, whether in public behavior, government policy, or more fundamental political change.

Behavioral Consequences: The Missing Link

Although disapproval of American intervention in Iraq is even more pronounced today than during the 1991 Gulf War, nothing like the massive protest demonstrations in major Arab capitals that occurred then is happening now. One empirical study of the entire 2000–2005 period concluded: "Given poll results that show consistently high, often rabid levels of anti-Americanism, the relatively infrequent and generally nonviolent nature of anti-American public protest is surprising."[1] Another expert concurs, writing that "In the case of Iraq before the war, survey research may have been actively misleading. . . . [M]any Arabs would have been happy to see Saddam go, just not through an American invasion."[2]

It is striking that so many Arab analysts tend to agree that attitudes in the region have little to do with action, even as they lament this situation. As one leading pan-Arab newspaper editor put it in December 2004: "One million Americans, a million Britons, and other millions demonstrated against the war on Iraq. The Arab street still slept. How could it move when it is dead?" A prominent al-Jazeera talk-show host added some even more pointed self-criticism: "Why does a loud television clamour suffice as an alternative to effective action, and compensate for weakness?"[3]

Foreign Policy Implications

Concerning Arab foreign policies, many American commentators argue that bilateral relations are suffering as a result of widespread popular disapproval of the United States (or perhaps just of the Bush administration). It is worth asking, however, especially for those who put so much stock in polls, how publics in those countries perceive those ties lately. Here the evidence, ironically, flies in the face of the conventional American wisdom. As Moises Naim writes, citing a wide-ranging recent multinational poll, "despite the overall negative perceptions of the United States, most people surveyed believe that bilateral relations between the United States and their country are improving. In no country surveyed does the population think that the nation's relations with the United States are getting worse."[4]

Another scholar comes to a similar conclusion. Arab "[g]overnments ignore public opinion on important issues," writes Prof. Shibley Telhami, "without obvious penalties"—at least, he argues, in the sense of any immediate threat to their survival. The examples he cites are directly relevant here: "The ability of many Arab states to provide military, intelligence, and logistical support for the Iraq War even as their citi-

1. Robert Satloff, Eunice Youmans, and Mark Nakhla, "Assessing What Arabs Do, Not What They Say: A New Approach to Understanding Arab Anti-Americanism," *Policy Focus* no. 57 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 2006), p. 5. Available online (www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=244).
2. Marc Lynch, "Public Opinion Survey Research and Public Diplomacy," in Joshua Fouts, ed., *Public Diplomacy: Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Public Opinion* (Los Angeles: USC Center on Public Diplomacy; Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2006), p. 42. Available online (http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:HPpOuDpklrkJ:uscpublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/USCC).
3. Jihad al-Khazen in *al-Hayat* (London), December 27, 2004, and Faisal al-Qassem on *The Opposite Direction*, al-Jazeera Television, March 7, 2003, both quoted in Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 73 and 24, respectively.
4. Moises Naim, "A Hunger for America," *Washington Post*, January 2, 2008.

zens strongly opposed it, and the gap between governments and the public during the fighting in Lebanon in 2006."[5] In this respect, the "Arab street" may be less liable to mobilize, and therefore less likely to affect actual events today, than it was nearly two decades ago. One early study of the 1991 Gulf War shows the varied influence of public opinion, once aroused to action by a crisis, even on undemocratic Arab governments:

> [W]here the government opposed Saddam, so too, almost without exception, did the people. Conversely, where the street was mostly sympathetic to Saddam so was the government.... [T]here was not one but many different Arab streets, with different Arab government policies more or less to match.... Arab leaders appeared unable to mold their publics' attitudes at will, or to turn off the flow of independent information and opinion. Rather, public opinion appeared able to substantially modify—or substantially reinforce—the initial policy inclinations of major Arab governments on either side of this very high-stakes issue.[6]

If just how much or how little effect public opinion has on contemporary Arab foreign policies remains unclear, then that is precisely the point. Whatever those effects may be, their existence, direction, and magnitude need to be argued, not merely assumed. And no poll numbers in the world can answer that argument.

Domestic Political Implications: Defining Democracy Down

Finally, on the question of long-term effects of Arab public opinion on domestic political prospects in the region, the evidence is decidedly mixed. In January 2008, one Arab American scholar eloquently described this uncertainty in the following terms:

> Viewers used to calling in live and venting about their rulers' incompetence on one of al-Jazeera's shows are all the more frustrated when they hang up and return to a world where their words make no difference whatsoever. The pan-Arab airwaves are simply more pluralistic and free-wheeling than Arab streets and parliaments, and the connection between screen and street has been weak.[7]

Although some academics see in this picture a rising grassroots threat to the stability of Arab regimes; others emphasize their adaptability and endurance.[8] The record is so ambiguous that it points only to conclusions verging on tautology. Prof. Marc Lynch asks precisely the right questions: "Put bluntly, if Arabs cannot act on their opinions, then do these opinions matter? Will the new public sphere perhaps even reduce the prospects of effective political action, by allowing people a 'safe' outlet for their frustrations and diverting their energies away from concrete political mobilization?"[9]

The uncertainty is only compounded by looking beyond the medium-term issue of political stability to long-term prospects that Arab public opinion might produce democratic transitions in the region. One thoughtful, new, survey-based academic treatment suggests, paradoxically, that the very persistence of "democratic values" among Arab publics could indicate that real democracy may remain unlikely in their countries:

> It is unclear whether popular support for democracy can and will actually become transformed into pressure for political reform and democratic openings in the Arab world. Earlier surveys also found widespread preference for democratic governance, which is a sign that undemocratic regimes and popular desires for democracy can coexist for considerable periods of time.[10]

5. Shibley Telhami, "America in Arab Eyes," *Survival* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2007), p. 115.
6. David Pollock, *The "Arab Street": Public Opinion in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), pp. xii, 31, 39.
7. Marwan Kraidy, "Arab Media and U.S. Policy: A Public Diplomacy Reset." Available online (ljbjbb.@aol.com).
8. For the latter and less common but more cogent view, see, for example, Barry Rubin, "Pushback or Progress: Arab Regimes Respond to Democracy's Challenge," *Policy Focus* no. 75 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2007); Steven Heydemann, "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World," *Analysis Paper* no. 13 (Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., October 2007); Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne, "Incumbent Regimes and the 'King's Dilemma' in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reform," *Carnegie Paper* no. 88 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., December 2007).
9. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public,* p. 54.
10. Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler, "The Democracy Barometers: Attitudes in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 1 (January 2008), p. 108. Available online (www.arabbarometer.org/reports/democbarometers.pdf).

Some years ago, academics were prone to argue that an aroused Arab public opinion could coalesce into institutional forms with lasting political effect—not through official channels, but through popular associations and interest groups. These were called "civil society," and they were expected ultimately to lead the way toward new forms of Arab democracy. That was a weak reed, so to speak. As the author pointed out at the time,

> civil society, while arguably a necessary condition for democracy, is not by itself sufficient. Besides, the associations and activities it comprises may well be more naturally suited to Arab elites than to their "streets." …[T]he state may retain the ultimate sanction of simply (and almost literally) closing down the streets—or perhaps even, if all else fails, reducing some of them to rubble. As a result, the march from civil society toward Arab democracy is anything but inevitable.[11]

Today, some scholars pin their hopes instead on an even weaker path for the influence of Arab public opinion: neither official channels, nor grassroots organizations, but simply some diffuse notion of popular discourse. In the words of one such academic advocate:

> As democratic transitions stalled and civil society struggled …scholars cast about for ways to make sense of a revitalized public opinion disembodied from formal political institutions.… [I]n the mid-1990s, there was only a handful of precedents for conceptualizing the changes in Arab politics in terms of "public spheres." Today dozens of articles and books focus on this theme.[12]

Unfortunately, the number of books and articles on any subject is no proof of its import. Rather, the burden of proof is on those who argue, against the weight of the evidence so far, that Arab opinions can produce politically significant actions or affect the policies of undemocratic regimes—let alone transform them into more democratic ones.

The Policy Debate

Although the persistence of low American approval ratings abroad is certainly no cause for celebration, it has not prevented a sharp drop in support for terrorism among Arab publics—explicitly extending to terrorism against American civilians. This conclusion is all the more noteworthy because it is paralleled by comparably favorable shifts among most non-Arab Muslims surveyed over this period (in Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, and elsewhere). Thus a significant positive shift has occurred in the hearts and minds of various Arab and other Muslim publics on a key American concern. Therefore, perhaps the United States does not need to improve its overall image, or change its policies, to win this crucial battle in the war against terror.

Yet few consider this possibility in public discussion, which is mostly stuck in the immediate post–September 11 mindset. As one analysis published in January 2008 puts it: "The question posed about Osama bin Laden's communication skills six weeks after September 11, 2001, by longtime diplomat Richard Holbrooke still haunts U.S. policymakers: 'How can a man in a cave outcommunicate the world's leading communications society?'"[13] Ambassador Dell Dailey, the State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, presented a more nuanced view in December 2007. He agreed that new findings in opinion polls, showing a sharp drop in popular support for al-Qaeda and for terrorism generally, are a "great indicator" and "one of the things we do pay attention to." At the same time, he asserted that the United States "still has a lot of work to do" in trying to reduce Muslim popular hostility, quoting another senior official's comment that "we do not want to force publics to choose between the United States and al-Qaeda."[14] One leading academic expert on the

11. Pollock, *The "Arab Street,"* p. 63.
12. Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public, p. 31.
13. Kraidy, "Arab Media and U.S. Policy: A Public Diplomacy Reset."
14. Ambassador Dell Dailey, remarks made during a question-and-answer session at a Washington Institute for Near East Policy event, December 12, 2007. For a rapporteur's summary of his presentation, see "An 'All-Elements of Power' Strategy for Combating Terrorism," *PolicyWatch* no. 1321 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 18, 2007); available online (www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2697).

Arab "public sphere" has voiced a broadly comparable position:

> [A] narrowly defined war of ideas—focusing specifically on delegitimizing the use of violence against civilians for political ends—was very winnable. These [survey] results demonstrate this quite graphically. But this "narrow" success doesn't necessarily translate up to a higher political plane.... [T]he al-Qaeda worldview—of a world divided between clashing civilizations and Islam under a comprehensive assault from the West—seems widely spread and increasingly entrenched.[15]

In other words, Muslim popular opposition to terrorism is a good start, but it is only a start. The next steps, in this prevailing view, must seek to make the larger "worldview" of Muslim publics more favorable to the West, in general, and to the United States, in particular.

Current public discussion of this question sees a few notable dissenters. One observer has argued recently that growing Arab and other Muslim rejection of al-Qaeda's tactics should be the sole focus of American public diplomacy—and that all other American efforts to win over Muslim hearts and minds could better be abandoned:

> [W]hy has there not been more of an outcry among Muslims over this slaughter of innocents? A big part of the reason is that we spend too much time wanting to be liked rather than turning Muslim anger on our enemies. We preach some values that are viewed as alien and threatening. ... Our popular culture is seen as decadent at best and downright threatening at worst in traditional cultures.... We can't change what we are, nor would we want to.... The government's official propaganda will be overwhelmed by the deluge... from the popular media. We need to accept this fact and move on, rather than waste more millions on strategic communications "charm campaigns."[16]

This stark minority view contains some important truths about the limits, both ethical and practical, of any attempts in American policy or public diplomacy to enhance its mass appeal among Muslim publics. Yet part of this policy prescription is unnecessarily defeatist. Instead of giving up the field, U.S. policy would be better served by following a few practical suggestions for dealing with this very real challenge.

How to Do a Better Job with Arab Public Opinion

Overall, the challenge is clear: the U.S. image has declined considerably in several key Arab countries over the past few years. In the long run, if this trend continues and impinges more on Arab government policies, it could constrain U.S. policy options in the region. At the same time, however, the more credible polls demonstrate that new opportunities exist on several major policy issues: growing popular opposition to most forms of terrorism against civilians; increasing concern about Iran; and declining support, even among Palestinians, for either Hamas or Hizballah. The top priority is to pay at least as much attention to these opportunities as to the problems revealed by the polls. In addition, the following recommendations emerge from the preceding discussion:

First, the U.S. government can do a much better job of understanding Arab public opinion without either sensationalism or undue apology. Focusing more on country-by-country rather than sweeping regional analyses would help. Sharing and comparing more information from different pollsters, including all the polls sponsored by various U.S. government offices, would also help. In addition, the best experts, especially those with critical language skills, should be encouraged to stay on the job—rather than being excluded on spurious "security" grounds that may reflect improper or illegal discrimination, or even attempts to cover up grave malfeasance by U.S. security bureaucrats.

Second, analysts need to think harder about the "so what" questions: How much does the Arab street matter, compared to the elite? How much do these autocratic governments really care about public opinion? If

15. Abu Aardvark, a blog by Prof. Marc Lynch. Available online (http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2007/04/new_muslim_publ.html).
16. Gary Anderson, "Why al-Qaeda Is Losing," *Washington Post*, January 13, 2008.

they do care, have they already adjusted their policies to take popular attitudes into account, or does the United States possibly know more about what the political traffic will bear than they do? How will people's attitudes affect their actual behavior, if at all? These are all complicated and important questions—and analyzing the numbers is just the beginning.

Third, in estimating the effect of Arab public opinion on policy choices or political stability in different countries of the region, be very wary of jumping to conclusions. Be especially wary about predictions of looming crises of one sort or another. The policy prescription this author proposed fifteen years ago, in the aftermath of the first U.S. war against Saddam, are still valid today:

> Arab public opinion is measurable, and it matters. Pay attention to it—and pay particular attention to the different ways in which different Arab governments respond to it. In other words, do not underrate the Arab street, but do not exaggerate it either. Above all, do not assume that official Arab policies represent only a thin and brittle upper crust.[17]

Fourth, regarding public diplomacy: The U.S. government can do a better job of communicating with Arab publics by focusing more on frank discussion of the issues that divide rather than on vague appeals to supposedly shared values. One good reason to shift in this direction is that Arabs themselves generally tell the pollsters that their problem is U.S. policies, not U.S. values. Another good reason is that Arabs themselves tell the pollsters that what they do admire about Americans is not just their educational achievements or technology, but also their freedom of expression. If that is indeed the case, the United States should stop being shy about freely expressing its views to them, even on the hardest policy problems. Personal experience in the region supports the belief that most Arabs actually respect such open exchanges much more than beating around the bush. One of the highest compliments one hears on the Arab street, or among the Arab elite for that matter, is that someone is speaking *bi-saraahah* or *dughri*—sincerely and straight.

Finally, with respect to the "real" diplomacy of tough policy choices in this region, the United States should keep in mind that Arab public opinion is just part of the picture. Even in the Middle East, other publics are paying some attention to U.S. policies and could affect them: Israelis and Iranians, for example, or Turks and Kurds. And beyond the Middle East, Arabs account for just a quarter or so of the world's Muslims; there are about a billion others. Their views may matter profoundly to the United States as well, even if some of their own governments sometimes seem to neglect them. The difficult task America faces is to find the right balance among those diverse perceptions and players in a way that best serves both U.S. interests and values.

17. David Pollock, *The "Arab Street,"* pp. 10–11, 64–65.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

THE
WASHINGTON INSTITUTE
for Near East Policy

1828 L Street N.W., Suite 1050 ■ Washington, DC 20036 ■ www.washingtoninstitute.org