

## Bad News or Bad Data?

### The Debate over Arab and Muslim Public Opinion

by [David Pollock \(/experts/david-pollock\)](/experts/david-pollock)

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Pollock \(/experts/david-pollock\)](/experts/david-pollock)

David Pollock is the Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on regional political dynamics and related issues.

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#### Brief Analysis

**F**or better or worse, yesterday's "Arab street" has merged with today's information superhighway. With public opinion polls from the Middle East becoming front-page -- and usually alarmist -- news, the results raise as many questions as they claim to answer: How reliable are numbers from undemocratic states? Do the region's different societies truly share the same views? Which polls are better than others, and why? And what does the data really tell us about the challenges, and new opportunities, for U.S. policy in the region?

To help answer these questions, The Washington Institute invited David Pollock and Dalia Mogahed to address the Institute's Special Policy Forum on April 17, 2008. Institute visiting fellow David Pollock will present his new study -- "Slippery Polls: Uses and Abuses of Opinion Surveys from Arab States" -- which reveals some surprising trends in Arab attitudes toward terrorism and U.S. policy. And Dalia Mogahed will be the discussant, presenting some of her own findings on the topic.

David Pollock, a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, previously served as a senior advisor for the Broader Middle East and a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. He is also former 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 this subject in 2007 and has written widely on it, including the pioneering 1993 Institute Policy Paper [The 'Arab Street'? Public Opinion in the Arab World](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=290) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=290>).

Dalia Mogahed, executive director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, is coauthor (with John Esposito) of the new book *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. She also directs (in collaboration with the Coexist Foundation) the Muslim-West Facts Initiative, which disseminates her findings to both Muslim and Western audiences. Her analysis has appeared in many leading journals, including the *Economist*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, and *Foreign Policy*. ❖

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