



Gallup polls take stock of the Muslim world

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“This is really remarkable considering that there is very high level of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, with lots of events happening around people who are suspicious of Muslims,” says Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies and Director of the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center.

In many cases, the suspicion is grounded on the idea that Muslims and Arabs are different and that they don’t share the same values as Americans, says Mogahed. These sea changes show the world that there is much common ground between them and Muslims. “Whoever someone is, they desire greater access to their government’s decisions. Most Muslims and Arabs have the same aspirations as everyone else. I believe that the way that people in the West view this region is improving. The impact of that change on this region is going to be profound.”

Gallup found that the vast majority of people surveyed reject both extremes: they reject

dictatorship as well as radical interpretations of their faith. They want healthy governance that is free of corruption that allows people opportunities.

“So when this majority is finally given a voice and represented, you are going to find a different model. What we don’t know is how successful they’ll be in creating a system that reflects their aspirations. But if that system were to come to be that truly reflects the aspirations of most people, we would expect it neither to be a dictatorship nor one built on radical ideas,” says Mogahed.

Different self views

According to Mogahed, the Arab people now have a different view of themselves. They are much more empowered. In Egypt, especially, they feel that they have accomplished something very difficult that no one thought they could do. And that gives them the confidence to then go on and progress in other ways.

“One thing that I found very inspiring is how many new initiatives have been borne out of ‘Tahrir Square’ (the scene of Cairo’s demonstrations) and the events of the last several weeks. There are so many projects that are being fostered - from entrepreneurship to new media - and that energy is

going to have wide-ranging effects,” Mogahed told INSEAD Knowledge.

A new U.S. paradigm

In 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama appointed Mogahed to the White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, making her the first Muslim-American woman to hold a position of this seniority. So how is the Obama administration dealing with issues of Arabs and Muslims? Is it different compared to previous administrations?

“I believe the Obama administration is doing things differently from the previous administration. Some policies, of course, are not changing fast enough. Nor are they changing in a way that people would want. But there are also a lot of things that are changing that people see as positive,” Mogahed says.

One thing that is evident is that the words and the paradigm that the Obama administration uses in talking about Muslims are very different. They are approaching the Middle East with a prism that is very wide and inclusive.

“They are not just looking at the region through the prism of security. They are looking at the region through the prism of partnership, entrepreneurship, development and are recognising that this is a human community with the full range of human needs and aspirations, not just a liability to be mitigated,” says Mogahed, adding that she sees the U.S. administration’s work with entrepreneurship in the region as growing. There are other policies and actions that they have initiated as a reflection of that new approach.

But she says that’s not enough; there is a great deal more to do in general, and that sometimes words can make as deep an impression as actions. She cites the harm that the Danish cartoon controversy created in September 2005 when the Jutland Post published caricatures of Prophet Muhammad which Muslims considered offensive.

“Those were just words and words have impact. Words matter because they create thoughts that promote behaviour, especially from influential people,” she argues. “The words they use are actions, and they do count. So just as offensive disrespectful words created crises, in the same way respectful words should be given some weight in creating at least a different environment for dialogue.”

The future

Mogahed is optimistic about the region and feels that the region has so much potential to not only

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compete but in some ways lead in solving global problems.

“The region has a wealth of resources both financial as well as human. It’s the region with the largest percentage of young people,” she says. “Some people see it as a liability but it is also a huge opportunity. If there could be a way to tap into that talent, to transfer all that energy into something positive, then this region has so much to contribute to the rest of the world.”

Dalia Mogahed addressed a seminar marking International Women’s Day at INSEAD’s campus in Abu Dhabi.

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