

Do Muslim Men Beat Their Wives?

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Associated Press reported that Oklahoma lawmaker Republican State Representative John Bennett asked Muslims whether they beat their wives. I do not know what Mr. Bennett was trying to accomplish by asking this pointed question. Nor am I familiar with his political and cultural values. Nonetheless, I am happy that he raised this issue, since there are actually data to dispute any claim that wife beating is more common in Muslim than non-Muslim countries.

In fact, findings from the latest waves of the World Values Survey display a rather mixed picture. Respondents were asked to rate on the scale of 1 to 10, how justified it is for a man to beat his wife, with 1 being totally unjustified and 10 totally justified for a man to beat his wife. As shown in the table below, a higher percentage of Indonesians than Americans and almost as many Pakistanis as Americans said that wife beating was totally unjustified—89%, 86%, and 87% respectively. While more than 87% of the publics from many democratic countries rejected wife beating as totally unjustified, a higher percentage of Turks and Jordanians (both 80%) and Qataris (77%) than Germans (74%) labeled the horrific act as totally unjustified, the same percentage as Iranians. True, there are several Muslim-majority countries that are located on the extreme end, including Malaysia, Algeria, Egypt, Mali, and Iraq. But these countries constitute only 12% of the total population of the Muslim-majority countries included in the sample.

Based on these figures, Muslim attitudes toward wife beating are not particularly worse than the rest of the world. Moreover, they are better than Chinese and Russians.

That said, one effective way to fight religious fundamentalism and violent extremism is to rigorously defend women's right and the idea of gender equality in Muslim-majority countries. I seriously doubt that a liberated Muslim woman would tolerate the idea of an all-powerful despot under the guise of an Islamic caliphate. A liberated mother would seriously admonish any misguided ambition of her son who might try to seek solace on the side of a black-eyed virgin promised to a male martyr in the Paradise.

Maltreatment of women is a major issue in Muslim-majority countries, and attitudes toward gender equality constitute a major cultural fault line separating citizens of Western liberal democracies and the followers of Islam in many of these countries. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, women are practically treated as second-class citizens. Gender inequality and male supremacy are not only condoned as social norms but sanctioned by the state as well.

However, on such other issues as the rights of women in politics, the job market, and university education, there are vast differences between the publics from Muslim-majority countries and Americans. Findings from a comparative cross-national survey project I carried out in eight countries in the region between 2011 and 2016 showed that 83% Egyptians, 79% Saudis, 76% Iraqis, 72% Jordanians, 71% Pakistanis, 61% Tunisians, 56% Lebanese, and 47% Turkish agreed that men make better political leaders than women do, compared to fewer than 20% of Americans. Likewise, 86% Egyptians, 81% Pakistanis, 79% Iraqis, 78% Saudis, 74% Tunisians, 67% Lebanese, and 54% Turkish agreed that in a tight job market men should have more right to a job than women, compared to 7% of

Americans. Finally, 57% Saudis, 50% Pakistanis, 35% Egyptians, 28% Jordanians and Iraqis, 27% Turkish, 26% Lebanese, and 14% Tunisians agreed that university education is more important for boys than it is for girl, compared to 7% of Americans.

Clearly, from the perspective of democracies, there is a long way to go to advance gender equality in many countries. However on the issue that Mr. Bennett has raised the data do not support the inferred religion and wife-beating association.

| Can it always be justified (10) or never be justified (1) for a man to beat his wife? | | |
|---|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Country/region | Never justifiable | Average: 1= never 10=always justified |
| Australia | 94 | 1.26 |
| New Zealand | 91 | 1.30 |
| Poland | 89 | 1.29 |
| Sweden | 89 | 1.39 |
| Uruguay | 89 | 1.39 |
| Spain | 89 | 1.29 |
| Romania | 89 | 1.33 |
| Indonesia | 89 | 1.35 |
| Chile | 88 | 1.30 |
| Netherlands | 88 | 1.28 |
| United States | 87 | 1.45 |
| Cyprus | 87 | 1.37 |
| Pakistan | 86 | 1.58 |
| Colombia | 86 | 1.39 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 86 | 1.36 |
| Japan | 84 | 1.40 |
| Armenia | 83 | 1.57 |
| Mexico | 82 | 1.82 |
| Slovenia | 81 | 1.57 |
| Turkey | 80 | 1.47 |
| Jordan | 80 | 1.56 |
| Estonia | 78 | 1.44 |
| Qatar | 77 | 1.85 |
| South Korea | 76 | 1.58 |
| Iran | 74 | 1.79 |
| Ecuador | 74 | 1.67 |
| Germany | 74 | 1.68 |
| Ukraine | 72 | 1.74 |

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| Taiwan | 71 | 1.68 |
| Belarus | 71 | 1.77 |
| Libya | 70 | 2.08 |
| Azerbaijan | 70 | 1.85 |
| Russia | 69 | 1.88 |
| Tunisia | 69 | 2.09 |
| Peru | 67 | 1.89 |
| Ghana | 65 | 2.11 |
| Morocco | 65 | 2.43 |
| Kazakhstan | 63 | 2.35 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 63 | 2.13 |
| Lebanon | 63 | 2.36 |
| Yemen | 62 | 2.25 |
| Singapore | 56 | 2.46 |
| Palestine | 56 | 2.40 |
| Kuwait | 55 | 2.46 |
| Uzbekistan | 55 | 2.56 |
| China | 54 | 2.39 |
| Philippines | 52 | 3.44 |
| Malaysia | 50 | 2.66 |
| Zimbabwe | 49 | 2.80 |
| Burkina Faso | 49 | 3.62 |
| Nigeria | 47 | 2.61 |
| Algeria | 41 | 3.24 |
| Egypt | 39 | 3.29 |
| Mali | 38 | 4.82 |
| Iraq | 35 | 2.81 |
| Rwanda | 4 | 4.22 |
| Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org , www.mevs.org | | |