

The Divide Over Islam and National Laws in the Muslim World

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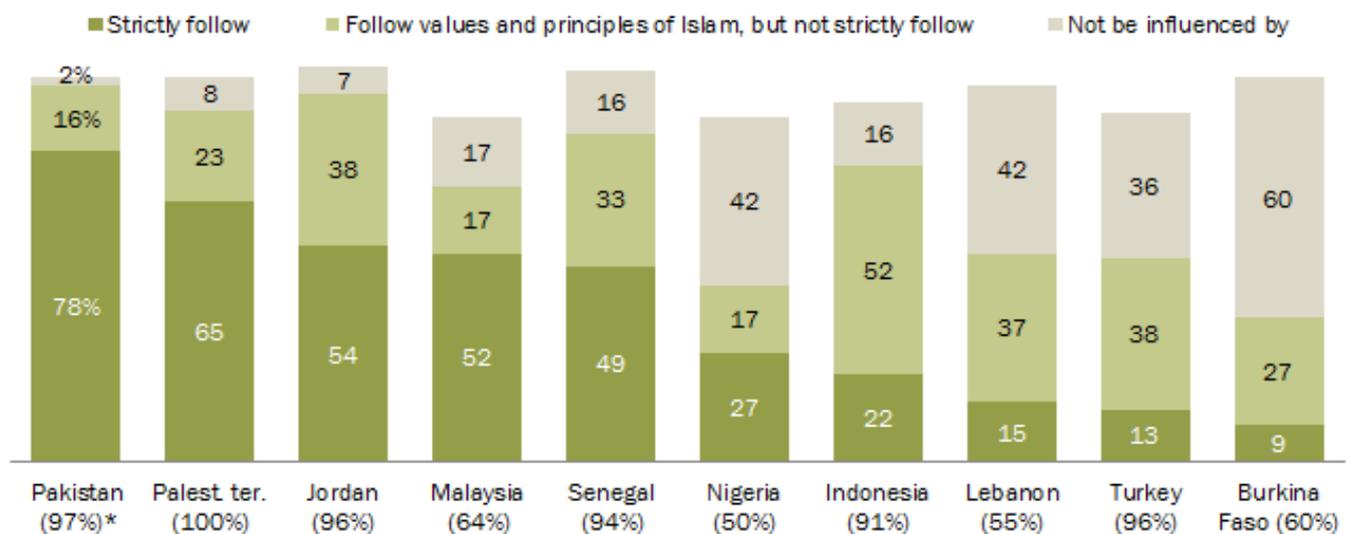
Varied views on whether Quran should influence laws in countries

By [Jacob Poushter](#)

As strife in the Middle East continues to make headlines, from the militant group ISIS to Syrian refugees, the Muslim world is sharply divided on what the relationship should be between the tenets of Islam and the laws of governments. Across 10 countries with significant Muslim populations surveyed by Pew Research Center in 2015, there is a striking difference in the extent to which people think the Quran should influence their nation's laws.

How much should the Quran influence our country's laws?

Which of the following comes closer to your view? Laws in our country should ___ the teachings of the Quran



*Percentages in parentheses represent the share of the sample in each country who identify as Muslim.

Note: Results include full country sample, including Muslims and non-Muslims.

Question wording: "Which of the following three statements comes closer to your view - laws in our country should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran, laws in our country should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the teachings of the Quran OR laws in our country should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran?"

Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes Survey. Q24.

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In Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Malaysia and Senegal, roughly half or more of the full population says that laws in their country should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran. By contrast, in Burkina Faso, Turkey, Lebanon and Indonesia, less than a quarter agree. And in many of these countries where non-Muslims make up a significant portion of the population, there are strong disagreements between major religious groups on this issue.

For example, a 42% plurality of Nigerians think laws should not be influenced by the Quran, while 27% think laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran. [However, among Nigerian Muslims, 52% say national laws should conform to Islamic law, compared with only 2% among Nigerian Christians.](#)

These are the main findings of a recent Pew Research Center survey of 10,194 respondents conducted in 10 countries with significant Muslim populations from April 5 to May 21, 2015. Unless otherwise noted, results are for national populations, including non-Muslims. The percentage of the population that is Muslim in each of these countries ranges from almost all in the Palestinian territories and Pakistan to about half in Nigeria. The survey includes four of the 10 countries with the largest Muslim populations in the world (Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria and Turkey).

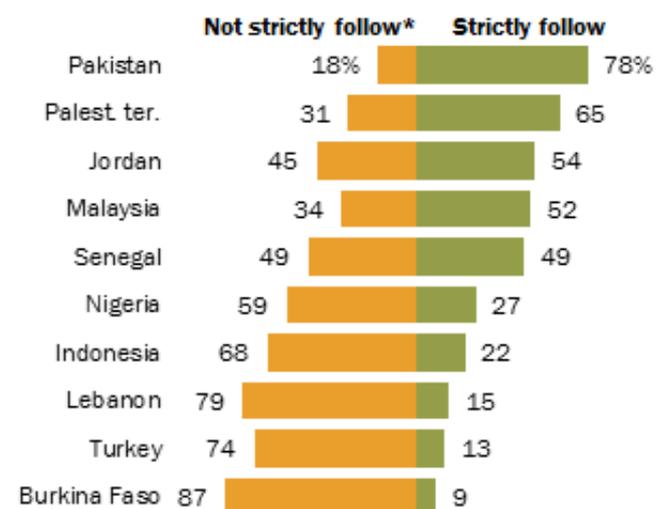
Where people say their national laws should strictly follow the Quran

[Half or more in four of the 10 countries surveyed say that laws in their countries should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran.](#) This opinion is especially prevalent in Pakistan (78%), one of only five declared Islamic Republics in the world, and the Palestinian territories (65%). Support for strict adherence has grown in the Palestinian territories. In 2011, only 36% of Palestinians said their laws should strictly follow the Quran.

In Jordan, which is a constitutional monarchy, 54% say their laws should strictly follow the Quran. Another 38% say Jordan's laws should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the Quran. Just 7% believe that laws should not be influenced by the Islamic holy book. Since 2012, there has been an 18-percentage-point decline in the number of Jordanians saying the Quran should be strictly followed in making national laws.

Views on strictly following the Quran for laws differ widely between countries

Laws in our country should ___ the teachings of the Quran



*Combines those who say "laws in our country should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the teachings of the Quran" and "laws in our country should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran."

Note: Results include full country sample, including Muslims and non-Muslims.

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Roughly half of Malaysians (52%) favor strict adherence when it comes to national laws; fully 78% of Muslim Malays hold this view, but only 5% of Buddhist Malays agree. Instead, 38% of the Buddhist minority in Malaysia prefers that laws not follow the Quran, though a similar percentage (37%) does not offer an opinion.

Senegalese are split on the issue: 49% say that laws should closely abide by the Quran, while an equal percentage says that laws should either not strictly follow (33%) or not be influenced by the Quran (16%).

In Nigeria, only 27% among the general population believe that laws should closely follow the Quran, with 17% saying laws should be guided by Islamic principles and 42% saying the Quran should not influence laws at all. Not

surprisingly, there is a sharp divide on this question between Nigerian Muslims and Christians. Around half of Nigerian Muslims (52%) prefer the strict interpretation of the Quran for the country's laws, while 64% of Nigerian Christians prefer the Quran have no influence.

Since 2013, the percentage of Nigerians who say that national laws should be shaped strictly by the Quran is up 8 percentage points. The increase in this sentiment comes entirely from the Muslim population. Views among Christians in Nigeria have not changed since 2013.

Where people say national laws should adhere less strictly to the Quran

People in Indonesia, Lebanon, Turkey and Burkina Faso are more secular in their orientation. [Roughly two-thirds or more in each of these countries prefer that laws either be only influenced by the Quran \(and not strictly follow its teachings\) or that the Quran be left out of lawmaking altogether.](#) In the case of Lebanon and Burkina Faso, this is due, at least in part, to the religious divides within those countries.

A majority of Lebanese Christians (59%) say the Quran should not influence their

Religious divides over whether country's laws should follow Quran teachings

Laws in our country should ___ the teachings of the Quran

	Strictly follow	Follow values and principles of Islam, but not strictly follow	Not be influenced by	Don't know
Malaysia	%	%	%	%
Muslim (64%)	78	16	4	2
Buddhist (20%)	5	19	38	37
Nigeria				
Muslim (50%)	52	24	20	4
Christian (50%)	2	10	64	24
Lebanon				
Sunni (27%)	27	34	37	2
Shia (29%)	24	56	19	1
Christian (37%)	3	25	59	13
Burkina Faso				
Muslim (60%)	15	33	50	3
Christian (32%)	2	18	77	3

Note: Percentages in parentheses represent the share of the sample in each country who identify as a member of the specified religious group.

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nation's laws. Lebanese Sunni are divided between saying that the Quran should not influence political laws (37%) and that laws should simply reflect Islamic values (34%). Among Lebanese Shia, 56% say that laws should follow Islamic principles, but not strictly.

Only a quarter of Lebanese Muslims say that laws should strictly follow the Quran, perhaps a reflection of the country's diverse ethnic and religious makeup and its laws that give each religious [group a say in national politics](#). Half of young Lebanese (18- to 29-year-olds) say that laws should not be influenced by the Quran, compared with 36% who say this among Lebanese 50 and older.

In Turkey, which was founded as a secular democracy in 1923, 36% say that laws should not be influenced by the Quran, compared with 27% who said this in 2012. Opinions on this issue in Turkey are driven, in part, by devoutness to Islam and age. Muslims in Turkey who pray five times per day or more are far more likely to say laws should strictly follow the Quran (32%) than are those who pray fewer than five times per day (9%). And generally, younger people in Turkey are less likely to say that laws should strictly follow the Quran.

An overwhelming majority in Burkina Faso says that the country's laws should not be influenced by the Quran (60%) or should only follow the values and principles of Islam (27%). Christians in Burkina Faso are far more likely to say laws should not be influenced by the tenets of Islam (77%) than are Muslims (50%).

Generally, more-educated people say laws should not follow Quran

[In six of the 10 countries surveyed, people with a secondary education or more are more likely to say that national laws should not be influenced by the Quran, compared with those who have less than a secondary education.](#) For example, 48% of Nigerians with a secondary education or more say that the Quran should not influence laws, versus 29% among those with less than a secondary education. In this respect, more educated people in these countries have more secular views on this issue.

Educational differences on whether laws should not be influenced by Quran

Laws in our country should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran

	Less than secondary education	Secondary education or more	Diff
	%	%	
Nigeria	29	48	+19
Turkey	28	45	+17
Burkina Faso	58	72	+14
Indonesia	12	23	+11
Lebanon	37	46	+9
Senegal	15	22	+7

Note: Results include full country sample, including Muslims and non-Muslims.

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