

INSIDE ISLAM: What a BILLION MUSLIMS Really Think



A Discussion Guide for Using Film to Analyze Muslim Opinion in the Collegiate Classroom

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About the Film

Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think, a new documentary film from Unity Productions Foundation, explores the opinions of Muslims around the globe as revealed in the world's first major opinion poll of its kind, conducted by Gallup, the well-known polling organization.

Gallup researchers began by asking the questions on every American's mind. Why is there so much anti-Americanism in the Muslim world? Who are the extremists and how do Muslims feel about them? What do Muslims like and dislike about the West? What do Muslim women really want?

As part of this groundbreaking six-year project, Gallup conducted tens of thousands of interviews with residents in 35 predominantly Muslim nations, as well as smaller populations in Europe and the USA. Focusing on the issues of gender, terrorism, and democracy, the film presents this remarkable data deftly, showing how it challenges the popular notion that Muslims and the West are on a collision course.

Experts featured (partial listing):

- Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies
- John Esposito, University Professor, Georgetown University
- Rami Khoury, Editor of the Daily Star (Beirut)
- Kenneth Pollack, Director of Research, Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute

Before Viewing the Film

Before having your students view *Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, take a mini poll of the class on some of the issues that are explored in the documentary. Use or adapt the following questions, depending on time available, course level, and the prior exposure of students to the study of Islam and Muslim societies.

You can use the questions to conduct a straw poll of the class to assess students' prior knowledge of and attitudes toward Muslims. This will establish a baseline for comparison with any changes in the class's perceptions after viewing the film. Alternatively, you may have students individually note down their responses to the questions below before viewing the film, and discuss any changed perceptions in a short reaction paper.



Film running time: 55 minutes

Viewing the Film

Questions to guide student viewing:

1. As you watch the film, note down at least five specific polling questions and results that you found surprising, compelling or disturbing.
2. The documentary *Inside Islam* brings together three main components: polling data and analysis, commentary by experts, and still images and video clips. How do you think each of the three informs the others? Is the juxtaposition of the three elements effective? Does the tone of the data presentation, expert commentary and images match? Note any juxtaposition of data, commentary, or images you find particularly engaging or challenging.
3. As you watch *Inside Islam*, notice the wide gap revealed in the polling data between what Americans think Muslims believe and what Muslims actually say about themselves. Why might this be so? Note down any evidence from the film, and be prepared to offer additional explanations from your own experience or analysis.

After Viewing the Film

Questions for class discussion:

1. What are the primary concerns of the majority of Muslims as presented in the film?
2. According to the film, is Muslim animosity toward America an expression of opposition to American values or to American policies?
3. How do Muslim women perceive their status and rights in Muslim society? How different are their views on this issue from those of Muslim men?
4. What social, political, economic and cultural factors do you believe might account for the differences in opinions on gender among Muslims in different countries? Would the same or different factors explain differences of opinion on other issues discussed in the film?
5. What did the film argue about the demography and motivation of “politically radicalized” Muslims?
6. Some of the discussants in *Inside Islam* explicitly compare terrorism committed by Muslims to acts of violence in the U.S. like abortion clinic bombings or lynching’s committed by the KKK. Are these valid analogies? Why or why not? Why did the filmmakers use these comparisons?
7. What commonalities does the film bring out between the opinions held by Americans and by Muslims worldwide?
8. Making a film based on polling data might not seem like a gripping prospect. What cinematographic strategies did the filmmakers use to “juice up” presentation of the topic? Discuss how the filmmakers augmented the data and analysis with “talking head” commentary and with still and video imagery.



Was this juxtaposition done effectively or not? Have students share specific examples to illustrate their argument.

9. Have students revisit their answers to the pre-viewing questionnaire. You may wish to have students do this in small groups (especially if students answered the questions individually), or you may conduct a second straw poll. How much change in attitudes did viewing the film prompt? Have the entire class discuss what perceptions the film changed and why. What kinds of evidence did students find most persuasive if they changed their opinion? If students' opinions on a question did not change, why not?
10. How far *Inside Islam* did this film allow you to see? What follow-up questions would you like to ask Muslim respondents? Why?

Assessment

Have students compose a one-page response paper on one of the following topics:

How did the film challenge your previous assumptions about Muslims and their opinions? Use your responses to the pre-viewing questionnaire and any changes in your responses after seeing the documentary as evidence for the film's effectiveness or lack thereof.

or

You are an official at the State Department tasked with improving U.S. relations with the "Muslim world." How could you use the data from this poll to craft a strategy for accomplishing this goal?

Further Resources:

Albright, Dr. Madeleine K (64th Secretary of State of the United States). Keynote address at World Premiere of *Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. June 3, 2009 at Gaston Hall, Georgetown University, Washington, DC. Text available at: www.insideislam.tv.

Esposito, John L. and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. Gallup Press, 2008.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon and Shuster, 1996. Chapter One is available online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/clashofcivilizations.htm>

