

The Middle East: Myths vs. Reality

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Myth #1

All Middle Eastern
people are Arabs.

Which of these countries are predominantly Arab, and which are NOT?



Arab Countries:

- Iraq
- Syria
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Saudi Arabia
- small Persian Gulf countries (except for Iran)
- North African countries (Egypt-Morocco)

Many of them are not Arab

- Iran is Persian, an Indo-European people.
- “Kurdistan” (the Kurdish parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria) is also Indo-European.
- Afghanistan is a mixture of non-Arab peoples.
- Turkey is Turkish.
- Israel, at least the non-Arab parts, are Israeli.

Myth #2

All Middle Eastern
people are Muslims.

Other religious groups in the Middle East:

- Jews (not just in Israel)
- Zoroastrians
- Baha'is
- Christians
 - Assyrian Christians in Iraq and Iran
 - Palestinian and Lebanese Christians
 - Armenian Christians (in Iran too)
 - Egypt's Coptic Christians



Christian Church, Lebanon

Zoroastrian temple, Iran



Jewish synagogue, Turkey



Myth #3

You can believe the
Western
stereotypes of
Muslims.

NOT! Let's look at:

- who/where they are
- what they believe
- their alleged support for the killing civilians.

True or false?

**Most Muslims are
Arabs who live in
the Middle East.**

False.

Of more than 1 billion Muslims worldwide, only about 1/5 are Arabs.

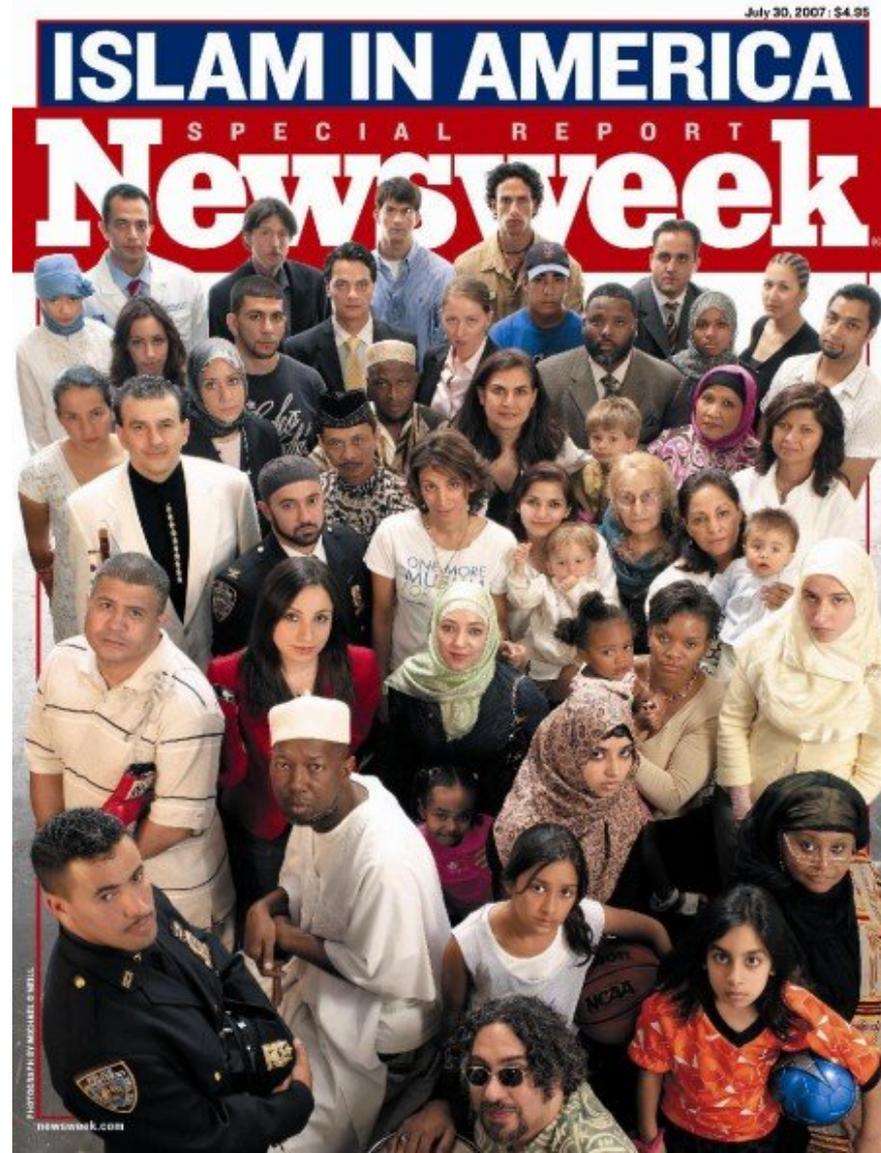
Which country has more
Muslims than any other
country in the world?

?

Indonesia - with over 200 million Muslims.



Note: The U.S. has about 5 million Muslims.



http://www.hahmed.com/pics/newsweekmuslims_large.jpg

True or False?

Muslims have a strange religion and worship a god called Allah.

False.

Muslims are
monotheistic and
worship the same
one God as
Christians and
Jews.



**Note: 'Allah' is the
Arabic word for 'God.'**

True or False?

Most Muslims dislike
Jews and are anti-
Semitic.

False.

- Muslims respect Jews and Christians as “peoples of the book” and worshippers of the same, one God.
- The first declaration of religious tolerance came from Iran, about 2,500 years ago.
- Arabs are a Semitic people too.
- Note, however: While most Muslims respect the Jewish religion, they HATE Israeli politics.

True or False?

Muslims believe it is o.k. to kill civilians in a holy war (“jihad”).

False.

**Only Muslim
extremists believe
this. (Just like most
Christians do NOT
believe in bombing
abortion clinics.)**

Myth #4:

**Most Middle
Eastern Muslim
women wear veils
over their faces and
are treated very
badly.**

Reality:

- Muslim women have many different styles of dress. (Very few cultures require women to cover their faces.)
- The treatment of women varies from country to country and family to family.
- Some Muslim countries, like Pakistan, have had female prime ministers. The U.S. has never had a female president.

Pakistani dress (left); Saudi Arabian (right)



Only Afghani women wear burqas



Iranian woman



Video: “A Land Called Paradise”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbcmPe0z3Sc>

Myth #5

“They hate our way
of life.”

American culture is popular in the Middle East.



Donald Duck in Tehran, Iran.



Coca Cola in Egypt.

Many Middle Eastern people fear
our military/political policies.



Conclusions:

- There are many peoples, languages, and cultures in the Middle East.
- There are several religions in the Middle East.
- Many Muslim beliefs are similar to ours.
- The status of Middle Eastern women is complex.
- Middle Eastern attitudes toward the U.S. are complicated.