



# Religious Values Held by the United Arab Emirates Nationals

**Opinion Poll Unit  
Emirates Policy Center**

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Emirates Policy Center (EPC) conducted an opinion poll about values in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the period of Feb. 29-Mar. 20, 2016. EPC followed standard scientific bases in conducting the two stages of the poll: During the preparation of the questionnaire, and throughout its distribution. The poll covered a number of dimensions that constitute the basic elements in the UAE’s value system ranging from confidence as a personal, social and institutional value; to happiness as an attribute pursued by individuals and institutions, communication and social connection; tolerance and perception of others; national identity and belonging; and religion. This report presents the preliminary results of the poll.

### I- Survey Methodology

#### Sample

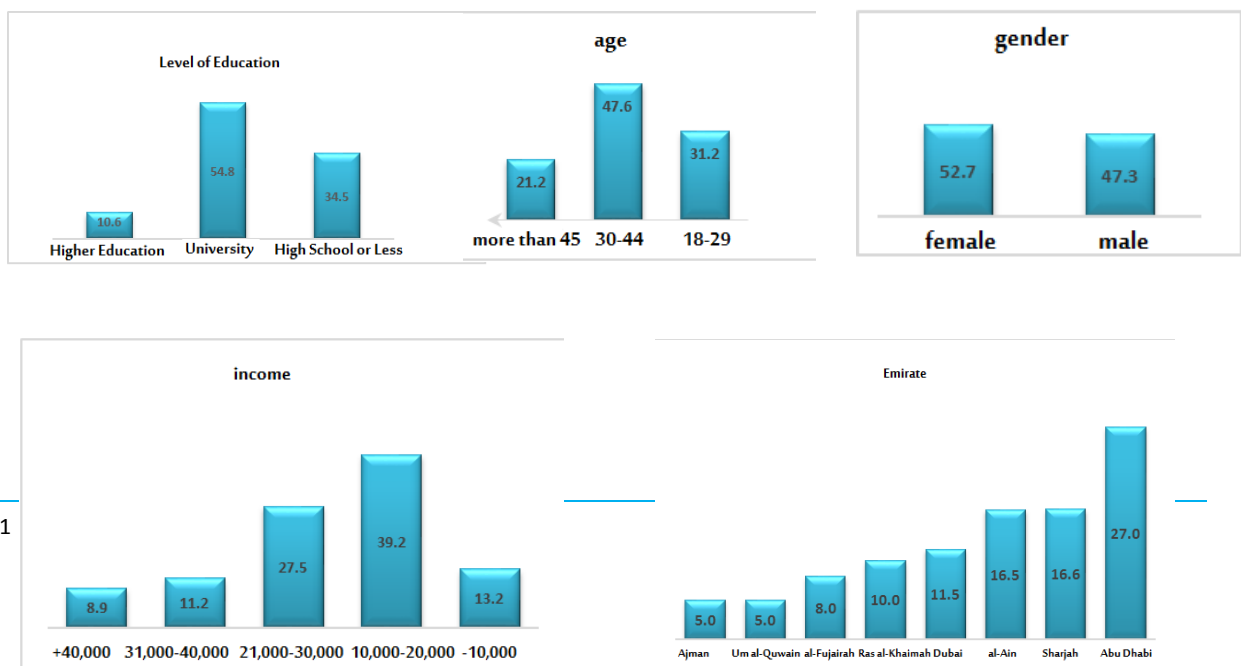
The survey was conducted individually on a sample of 1,232 UAE nationals with a 2.7% margin of error. The sample included people from the seven UAE Emirates; 43.5% from Abu Dhabi, 11.5% from Dubai, 16.6% from Sharjah, 10.6% from Ras al-Khaimah, 5% from Ajman, 5% from Umm al-Quwain, and 8% from Al-Fujairah. The sample was drawn based on the multi-stage probability cluster sampling design. In the first stage, the sample was distributed according to the emirate. In the second stage, the sample of each emirate was distributed according to the place of work. As for the third stage, the distribution was based on the variables of gender, age and level of education.

#### Sampling Distribution

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the survey sample based on the variables of the emirate, gender, age and level of education.

Figure 1

#### Sampling distribution



## II- Descriptive Analysis

### 1. Happiness

A majority of Emiratis (90.6%) said that they feel 'happy'; among which 50.8% said they are 'very happy'. There are, however, some differences based on gender with 54.5% in favor of males, vs. 47.5% for females. As for age groups, it was noted that the intermediate range (30-44) is less happy than youth and seniors.

### 2. UAE Government's Performance

Satisfaction with the UAE government's performance is an important indicator of the relation between the state and its social foundations. It is also one of the measurements for the regime's legitimacy and efficiency in meeting social demands. The overall rate of satisfaction with the government's performance was of 94.1%, among which 53.8% were 'very satisfied'. According to gender, the poll showed 58.6% of male were satisfied with the government performance, vs. 49.5% for females. As for age groups, the survey found that 60.3% of people over the age of 45 were more satisfied with the government performance.

### 3. Social Trust

Trust is a basic value and an essential component in a society because it defines the nature and substance of the social relations. When the surveyed sample was asked about trust between people in general, 43.9% said that they trust most of the public. When compared with other parts of the region, this is a high percentage - even on par with rates of trust in the industrial world. According to the World Values Survey, the rate of trust hovers around 34%-42% in Japan, Germany and the US. This rate is significantly lower in the developing world; for instance, it is of 21% in Qatar. Social trust also varies according to the nature of institution or relationship; we find that trust is extremely high, as expected, within the family (92.2%), acquaintances (89.1%), and neighbors (75.4%).

### 4. Institutional Trust

Institutional trust is an important indicator for the nature of relation between institutions and citizens. It also gauges the legitimacy of the political system and state efficiency. The overall average of trust was 89% in 11 security, media, legal, economic and religious governmental institutions covered by the survey. The security institutions won the confidence of people and came in first place; the army topped the list with 98.5%, followed by police with 95.4%, then the federal government and courts with 94% and 91.9% respectively. Media institutions came last; the press received 82% of trust, followed by TV channels with 79.7%.

### 5. Tolerance and Acceptance of the Other

Politicians, observers and researches have always commended the value of tolerance, which is embedded in the Emirati character. They point out that Emiratis were open to other people and religions even before the establishment of the federation. They respect the culture and traditions of the other as long as they do not infringe on the culture and values of the Emirati society. Furthermore, places of worship of other faiths have existed in the Emirates for decades, which distinguishes the UAE in the Gulf region. Undoubtedly, the spread of tolerance

is one of the important reasons behind the important diversity of expatriate population in the country; there are more than 200 nationalities living in the UAE. Managing this palette of cultures while preserving trust, coexistence and positive communication has prompted the UAE to adopt an unprecedented initiative in the region and the world; the establishment of a ministry dedicated for tolerance.

To gauge tolerance and acceptance of the other in the UAE, the survey asked Emiratis to what degree they accept people from other religions as neighbors. The figures were as follows: 63.8% said they have no objection; Christians were the most accepted among other religions and faiths with 76.1%, followed by other religions with 63.4%. As for accepting other nationalities, Arab nationalities came in first place with 92.6%, followed by Western nationalities with 64.8%, South Asian nationalities with 58.8%, and East Asian nationalities with 54.2%. The high rate of acceptance of the 'other' demonstrate that tolerance, which the Emirati society has been known for historically, is still a prevalent social value.

## **6. Social Communication**

Social cohesion is measured by the intensity and diversity of social communication. Communication in the Emirati society is performed through the primary social institutions represented by the family and kinship, in addition to modern institutions, such as workplaces and social and athletic clubs.

The survey showed that the majority of respondents (or 97.7%) communicate regularly with their parents, labeled as once or twice a week in the survey. Friendship is the second channel for communication; 58.2% said they are in constant contact with their friends, followed by kinship with 55.7%, while 34% bond in places of worship, followed by 23.3% who converse with their neighbors, and 15.9% who connect in social and athletic clubs.

## **7. Religiosity**

To gauge the level of religiosity in the UAE society, members of the sample were asked to provide their self-assessment of their religiosity in general. The figures showed the following: 28.3% of the respondents said they weigh their personal religiosity is high, 61.2% viewed it as average, and 10.3% portrayed it as low.

When comparing the rate of religiosity by UAE nationals with a number of Arab countries included in the Arab Barometer survey, it is noted that the rate of religiosity by Emiratis does not significantly vary from the prevailing rates of religiosity in the Arab region. It is also worth mentioning that Emiratis have recorded the highest rate in medium religiosity.

The poll also affirmed that personal commitment to acts of worship is one of the characteristics of the UAE society. The rate of those committed to performing prayers 5 times a day is 87.8%, of whom 46.6% complete prayers at the mosque.

Another indicator of the personal religious commitment is the fact that 84.4% of respondents have an account in an Islamic bank.

It is noted that the UAE society has not witnessed shifts on the patterns of religiosity compared with other Arab societies. 'Collective' religiosity has remained predominant in the

UAE, and it comes in line with the common religious convictions and attitudes in the society. The results of the poll affirmed that this religiosity is characterized by centrism and moderation.

## **8. Religious TV Channels**

Respondents were given a list of religious channels and required to select the ones they watch most. Noor Dubai came in first place with 65.7%, followed by Alafasy TV for Holy Quran with 31.4%, al-Majd channel for Holy Quran with 25.7%, and Iqraa with 24.8%. It was demonstrated that religious channels with the highest percentage of audience preach a moderate and centrist Islamic discourse.

## **9. Religious Education**

More than half of the surveyed respondents (or 55.6%) viewed the number of the religious education subjects taught at schools was sufficient. Moreover, 44.4% of those surveyed believe that the Islamic education curriculum needs revision. Nearly 40% of surveyed respondents suggested in their response to an open question in this regard to encourage students to memorize the Holy Quran. Also worth noting, 30% of respondents would like the number of Islamic education subjects to be increased.

## **10. Religious Institution**

UAE respondents display high levels of confidence in the religious institution of the country, as 93.3% of the surveyed sample view that the institution offers a better understanding of Islam and seeks to spread a moderate version of faith. 92.9% of respondents say that the religious institution plays a role in explaining the basic issues of religion. 85% agree that the religious institution helps promote religious awareness among people, while 84% of respondents agree that such institutions contribute to protecting community from social problems. It is noted that confidence in religious institutions in the UAE recorded the highest percentage in comparison to other Arab countries as shown in the survey of Values and Perceptions of the Islamic and Middle Eastern Publics from 2010 to 2014. For example, the percentage of confidence in the religious institution recorded 75.9% in Kuwait, 74.2% in Bahrain, 73.9% in both Jordan and Egypt and rose to 80.2% in Morocco and 86.2% in Qatar.

## **11. National identity**

The survey showed a prevalent sentiment of 46.2% for a dual affiliation to the federation and the emirate. More than one third of the sample, or 34.4%, consider the federation as their first affiliation, while the association to the emirate adds up to 9.8%.

Emiratis consider religion as the most important component of their identity. In response to a question about the dimensions of national identity, respondents chose Islam with 65.1%, which is consistent with the results of opinion polls carried out in the Muslim World. It is worth noting that affiliation to the nation was the highest among Emiratis compared with the rest of Arab countries with 30.8%. This feeling has increased by 10 points in the past years due to tense conditions and various threats facing the Middle East since the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring uprisings, subsequently leading to an increase in national cohesion and patriotism.