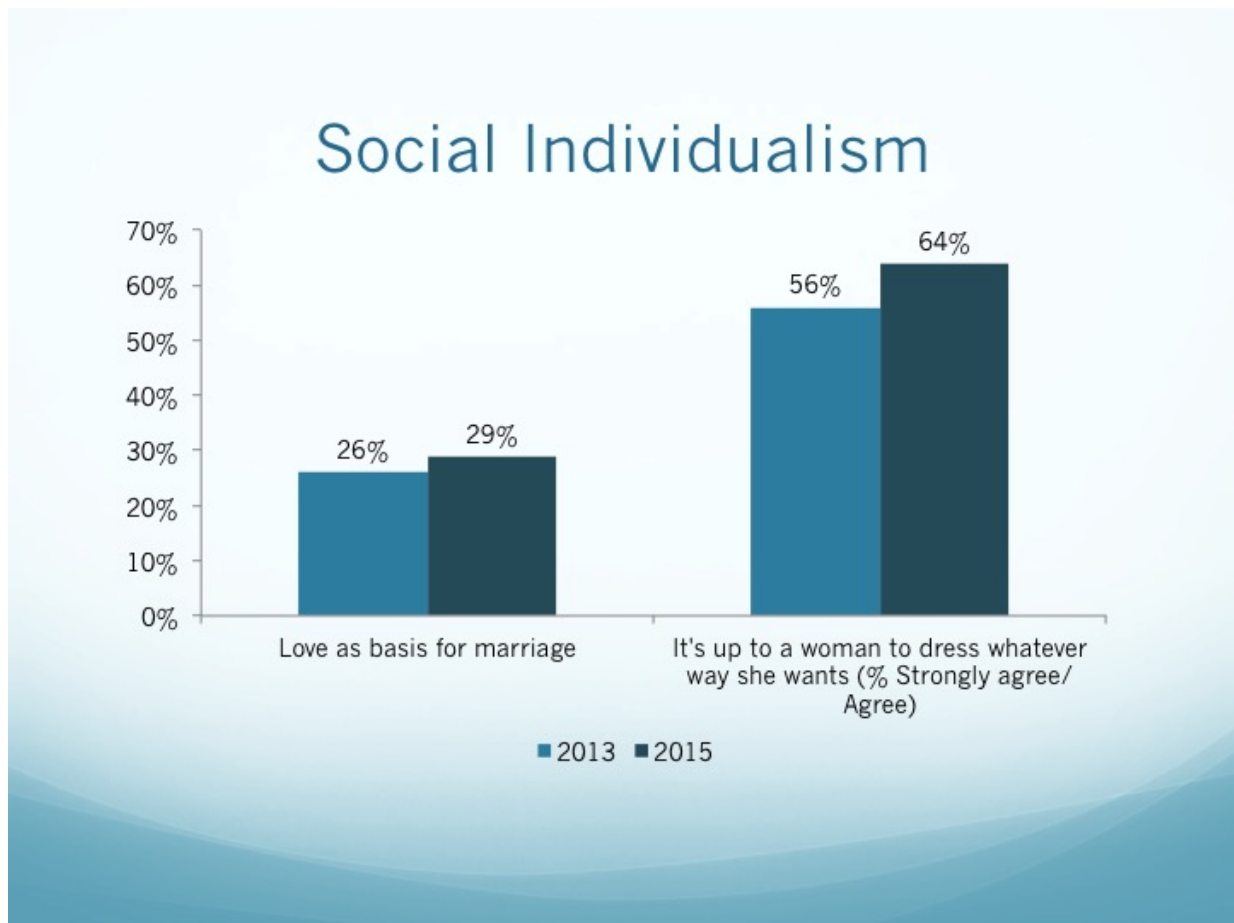


Survey reveals religious tolerance and declining extremism in Tunisia

December 23 2015



A new survey conducted by a team of researchers from the University of

Maryland and collaborating institutions reveals significant shifts in how Tunisians view the role of religion in politics, religious tolerance, political violence, Western political models, and their own national identity.

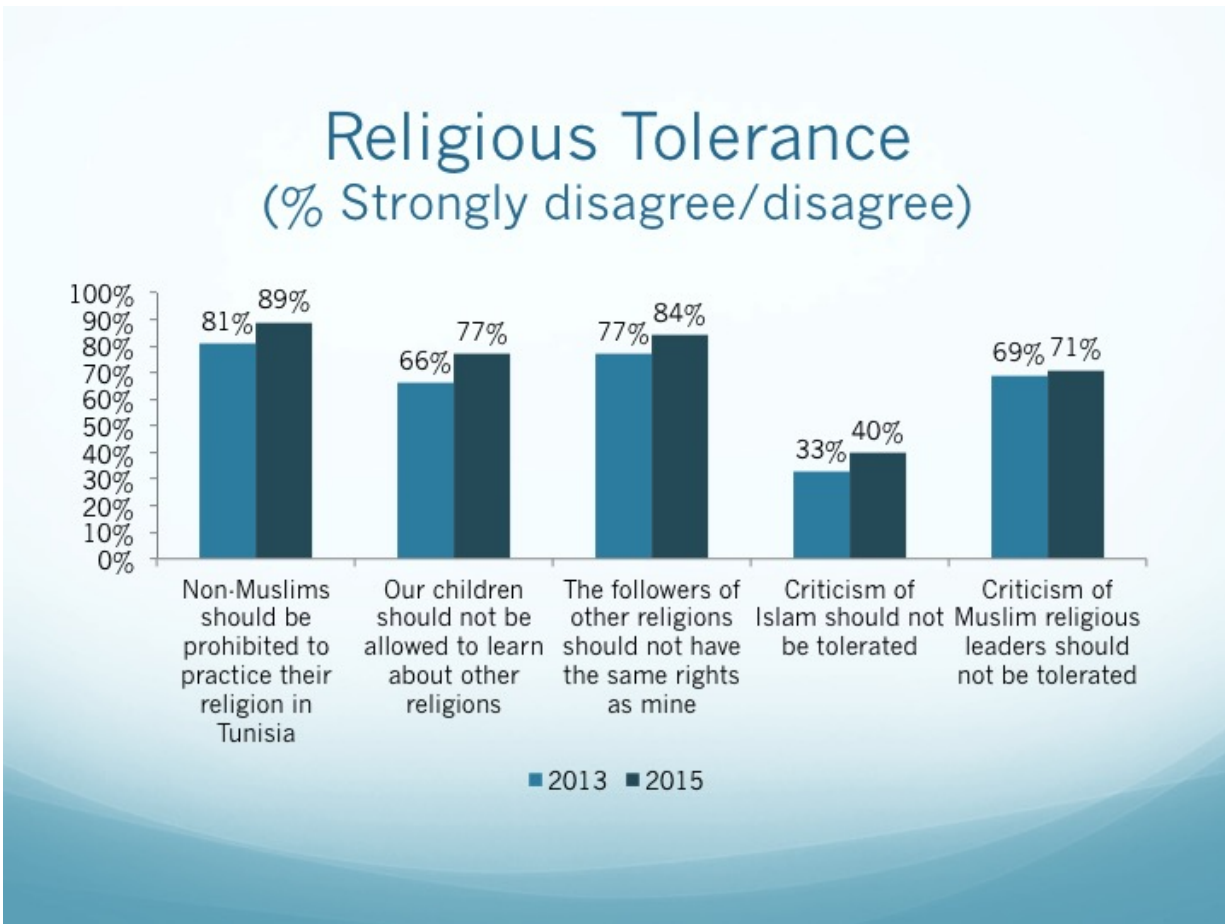
The survey, conducted during the spring and summer of 2015, shows an increase in support for social individualism, a decline in support for political Islam, a significant increase in preference for Western-style democratic government and an increase in religious tolerance. Additionally, respondents demonstrated a rise in national identity as well as national pride, and a considerable decline of trust in Muslim extremists known as Salafis.

The new survey, which re-interviewed 2,400 people from the nationally representative sample of 3,000 Tunisian adults first interviewed in 2013, explored the value orientations and political engagements of Tunisians in such areas of human concerns as family and gender relations, identity, politics, the economy, religion, religious fundamentalism, Islamic government, Western culture, and violence against American troops and citizens.

Dr. Mansoor Moaddel, Professor in the Department of Sociology at UMD and principal investigator on the project, orchestrated both rounds of surveys in collaboration with other researchers from University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, Longwood University, ELKA Consulting, and the Institute National du Travail et des Etudes Sociales in Tunisia.

Compared to other Middle Eastern and North African countries for which data are available, data from the 2013 survey showed that Tunisia was already the most religiously tolerant society. The further increase in the level of religious tolerance shown by the new survey is a welcome development for the institutionalization of liberal democracy in the

country, a finding consistent with the research on the role of religious tolerance in fostering democratic stability.



The survey also explored perceptions of the most significant events that transpired in the country and globally, as well as an experimental component designed to investigate the idea of trust. Among other key findings, Tunisians demonstrated higher trust in their president and prime minister, felt empowered, felt less insecure, and perceived the

presence of less corruption in the government than they did in 2013.

Tunisians polled also showed more favorable attitudes toward American and French citizens, expressed in terms of their satisfaction with having Americans and French neighbors. There were significant corresponding drops in approval of attacks against American military in Iraq and Afghanistan or American citizens.

The trend toward a higher tolerance of outsiders and disapproval of violence against them and a much higher level of mistrust of the Salafis is evidence of a diminishing social basis for extremism in Tunisia. In a country where an increasing number of its people disavow violence and express more tolerant attitudes toward foreigners, including Americans and French, there is a higher likelihood that these people will cooperate with their government in combating terrorism and [political violence](#).

More information: The survey results are available online:
mevs.org/files/tmp/Tunisia_Findings_2015.pdf

Provided by University of Maryland

Citation: Survey reveals religious tolerance and declining extremism in Tunisia (2015, December 23) retrieved 17 July 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2015-12-survey-reveals-religious-tolerance-declining.html>

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