

Liberal democracy is possible in Muslim-majority countries

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A new study by University of Toronto and University of Tübingen researchers suggests that Islam is not as much of an impediment to liberal democracy as is often thought.

"One of the key markers for a successful liberal democracy is a high degree of social tolerance," says U of T sociologist Robert Andersen. "We wanted to see the extent to which this existed in [countries](#) with a majority of Muslims compared to Western countries."

Andersen, U of T sociologist Robert Brym and Scott Milligan of the University of Tübingen used data from the World Values Survey – a global research project that explores people's values and beliefs, how they change over time and what social and political impact they have. They compared levels of racial, immigrant and religious tolerance by age, gender, education level, religiosity, economic development, economic inequality and other factors in Muslim-majority and Western countries.

"We found that people living in Muslim-majority countries are on average less tolerant than people living in the West," said Brym. "However, a significant part of the reason for this difference is that Muslim-majority countries tend to be less economically developed and more economically unequal than Western countries."

Their study also found that:

- the most socially tolerant category of people are non-practising Muslims living in Western countries.
- in Muslim-majority countries, there is no difference between Christians and Muslims in terms of their level of social tolerance.
- in at least one Western country – France – Christians are less tolerant than Muslims are.

"Our findings suggest that, in Muslim-majority countries, the nature of socio-economic conditions and political regimes supports a relatively high level of social intolerance. Taking these factors into account, Islam still has a significant effect on intolerance in Muslim-majority countries, but that is largely because state and religion are so tightly intertwined," said Brym.

The study, "Assessing Variation in Tolerance in 23 Muslim-Majority and Western Countries," is published in this month's *Canadian Review of Sociology*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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