

# Communicating Biological Evolution in the Muslim World

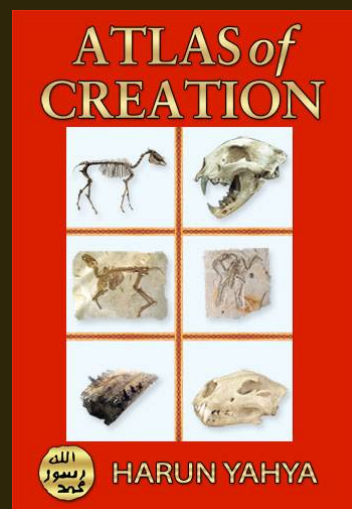
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Hampshire College  
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WCSJ 2011  
**Evolution in the Evolving World of Journalism**  
June 27, 2011

# Islam and Evolution in the News



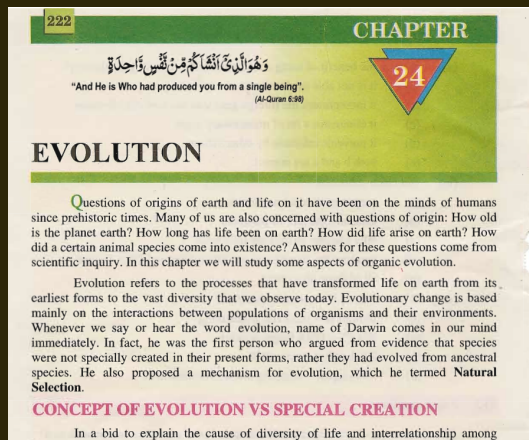
# Al Jazeera versus “Ardi”



“Ardi Refutes Darwin’s theory”

Actual situation is much more complex...

In most cases, it is not about science...



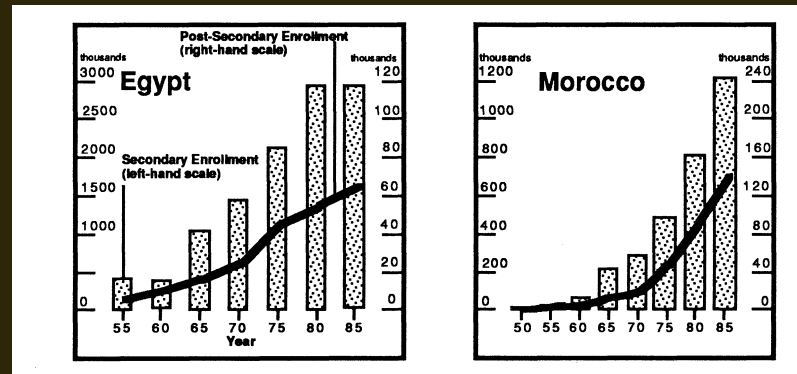
Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, etc



Biotechnology, biomedicine, stem cells research, etc.

# Factors to consider while Communicating Evolution in the Muslim World

# “New People”



New educated, globally connected,  
and trans-national middle class.

Science journalists have the opportunity to  
shape the narrative of evolution and  
modern science

# How do educated Muslims think about evolution?

- NSF-funded survey of Muslim physicians and medical students
- **5 Muslim countries:** *Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey*
- **3 Muslim diasporas:** *Germany (with Turkish doctors), England (with Pakistani doctors), US (with Pakistani, Arab, and Turkish doctors)*
- Oral interviews with 30-40 physicians and medical students in each country
- Current status: *Completed US, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey. [UK in October, Egypt in December, Indonesia and Germany in 2012]*

Salman Hameed (PI), Science & Religion, Hampshire College, Massachusetts

Anila Asghar, Education, McGill University, Canada

Berna Turam, Sociologist, Northeastern University, Massachusetts

Laura Wenk, Education, Hampshire College

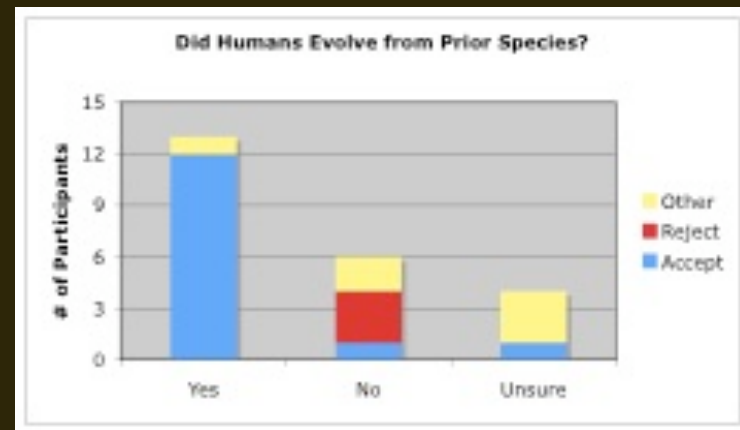
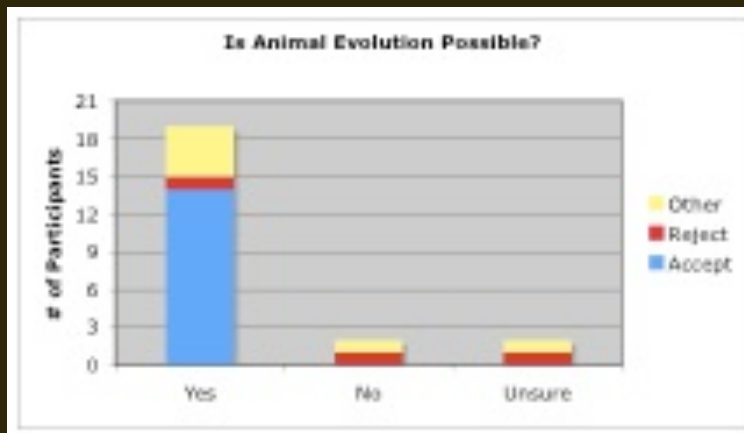
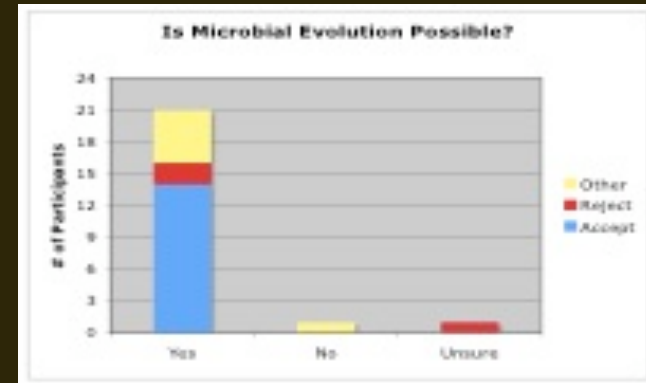
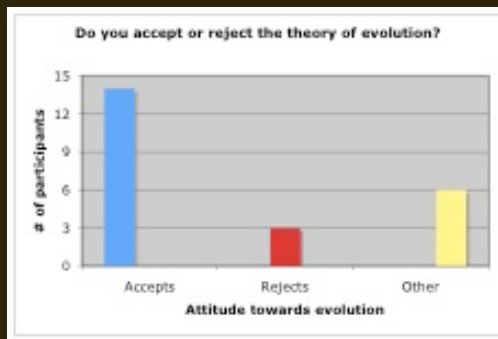
Laura Sizer, Philosopher, Hampshire College

Don Everhart, Graduate Student, University of Chicago, Illinois



# Pakistani Physicians in the US

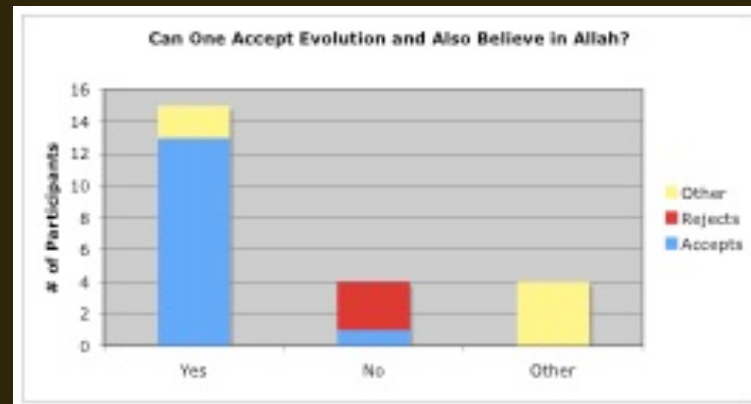
## Broad range of opinions



P.S. Young Earth Creationism is completely absent

*Everhart & Hameed 2011*

## Pakistani Physicians in the US Evolution and Islam?

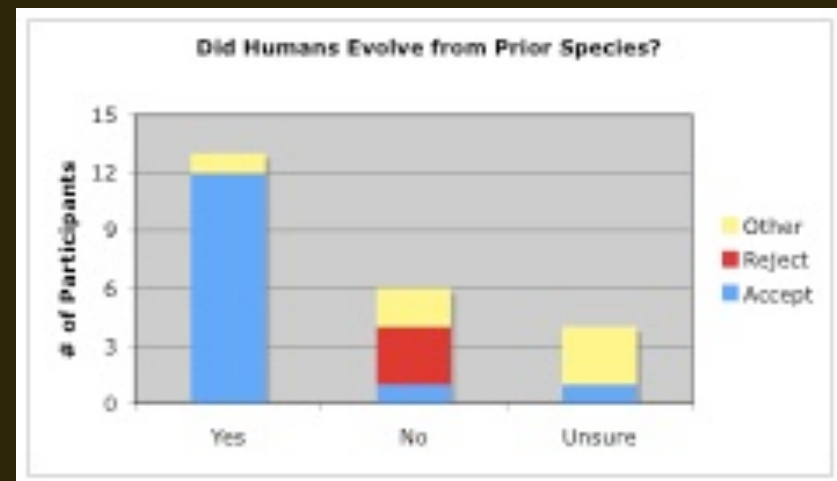
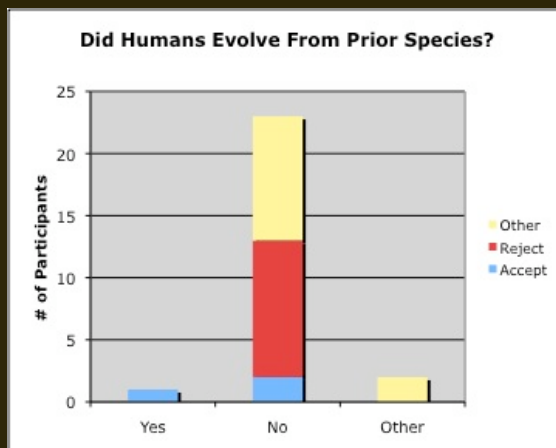
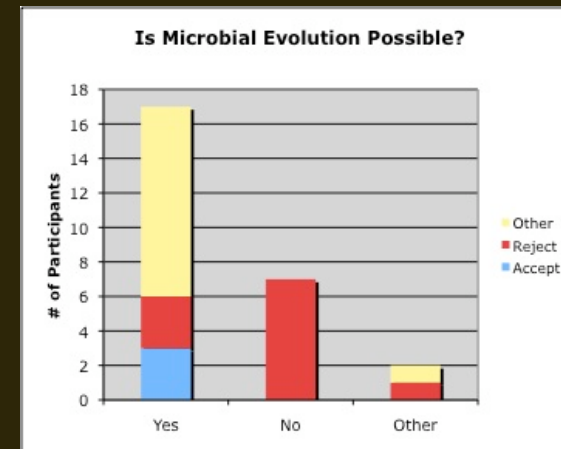
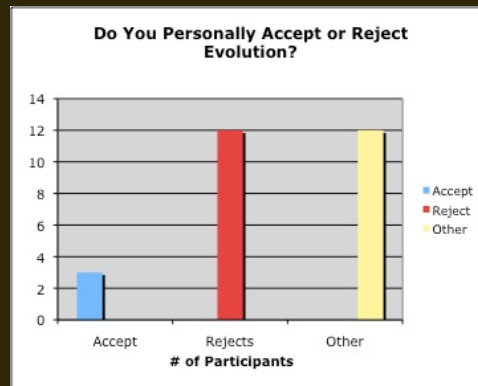


No need for self-censorship

# Malaysian Physicians & Medical Students

## Different contexts, different results

An opposite of  
Pakistani-US  
sample



*Hameed et al. 2011*

# Negotiating Modernity

## Separate and yet Overlapping Magisteria?

- (below all three accept microbial, animal and human evolution, but are deeply conflicted):
- *“It is complicated...I accept evolution scientifically, but reject it religiously” (Turkish doctor)*
- \* *“I don't accept or reject it [evolution], oh well, I guess as stated I would reject it, because I don't believe it's comprehensive...Meaning that it doesn't factor into, it doesn't uh, factor any creative design into the process.” (Pakistani doctor in US)*
- *“I accept it when I'm in the hospital, and reject it when I go home” (Pakistani medical student)*

Local cultural, political, and social factors may be shaping the response to evolutionary biology (and modern science)...



## Conflict sells, but it is also defines the narrative

- Muslim contexts are different than the battles in the US
- The dominant narrative is yet to emerge in the Muslim world

# Two Recommendations

## Recommendation 1:

Emphasis on local evolution examples



**Pakicetus**

50 Million year old ancestor of modern whales

## Recommendation 2:

Address religious concerns directly

- Appreciate the central role of religion in Muslim societies
- NOMA + address Darwin/atheism conflation
- Early Muslim scholars that speculated on change of species (e.g. al-Tusi)
- Catholic Church connection

# Factors to consider while covering Islamic Creationism





- Predictable cycle of coverage
- Different contexts



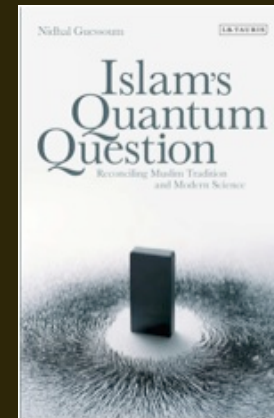
# Diverse reactions from a diverse population (but no young earth creationism)



# Glass Half-full



Ehab Abouheif  
McGill University



Nidhal Guessoum  
American University of Sharjah

**natureMIDDLE EAST**  
Emerging science in the Arab world



Thanks!

Please also visit:

Irtiqat: A Science & Religion Blog:

**<http://sciencereigionnews.blogspot.com/>**

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