

Uneasy support seen for sharia

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The majority of Muslims in Indonesia support the introduction of sharia in the country, but are wary about its implementation, a survey has revealed.

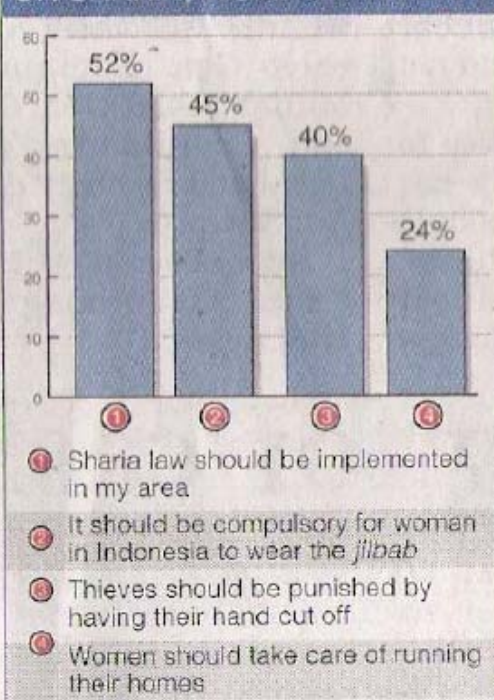
A nine-month survey by Roy Morgan Research, involving 8,000 respondent from across the country, found that 52 percent of Indonesians say sharia law should be introduced in their area.

Assuming that members of other faiths are not interested in sharia, that would mean two out of every three Muslims support sharia.

The Roy Morgan survey confirms the results of a recent survey by the Setara Institute on Democracy and Peace, which found 56 percent of youth in Greater Jakarta supported the introduction of sharia law.

Debnath Guharoy of Roy

VOICES OF THE PEOPLE: ON SHARIA, WOMEN & THIEVES



Source: Roy Morgan

JP/Budi

Morgan, however, warned the public about the way the survey's questions were presented to respondents.

"Common sense tells us that if you ask a Christian if the Virgin Mary was Jesus Christ's

mother, if you ask a Hindu if Lord Ganesha had an elephant's head, the answer is going to be yes."

"Ask a practicing Muslim if he supports the introduction of sharia law and he is likely to say yes also. Considering that reality, it is surprising that only 56 percent responded positively," Guharoy said in a statement.

This situation, he said, needs to be handled carefully because the questions are more sensitive than the answers. Asked in innocence perhaps, the results can be distorted for political gain.

Wary of this very possibility, Roy Morgan Research introduced a battery of three questions on the issue in July 2007.

In sequence, respondents were asked if "sharia law should be introduced in my area", if "it should be compulsory for women in Indonesia to wear the jilbab (veil)" and should "thieves have their

hands cut off".

The first question evokes an answer influenced by faith, and 52 percent of residents said sharia should be introduced.

Only 45 percent said women should be compelled to wear the jilbab, while 40 percent said thieves should have their hands cut off.

The majority have spoken, time and again, and are continuing to do so with remarkable consistency, Guharoy said.

Any question of a referendum on sharia therefore does not arise, not only in keeping with the Constitution today but also the views of the significant majority, 85 percent of whom are Muslims, he said.

Because of the sensitivity of the issue, the survey results had not been released until now, awaiting a reliable number of respondents to validate the findings over time, he said.