



Shia & Sunni Islam

*What is the **difference** between Sunni and Shia muslims
and why is **understanding** this important?*



DISCLAIMER

I am not a religious scholar.

The basics behind the Shia & Sunni split:

A long, long time ago...

The Prophet Muhammad dies in 632 AD.

Then a debate started over who should be the next spiritual leader of Islam
(*Caliph translates as "successor"*)

The choices being debated were:

1. A person who was **as spiritual** as Muhammad (Sunni)
2. Someone who was **related to** Muhammad by blood (Shia)

Keep In Mind: *At this time in history, the actual labels or names "Sunni" and "Shia" were not assigned to the quickly separating groups of believers.*

The Caliphs that followed Muhammad

Ali was Muhammad's son-in-law/cousin and was supported by **Shia**

Abu Bakr was a close friend of Muhammad, followed the prophet's customs and was supported by **Sunni**

Sunnis chose **Abu Bakr** and also the next Caliph.

Shia assassinated Abu Bakr & then made **Ali** the new Caliph.

Ali was then assassinated in 661 AD.

Shia Basics

- ◆ One who is a member of the Shia branch is called a **Shiite**
- ◆ Imams: spiritual & political leaders of the Islamic community.
- ◆ Shia believed that imams related to Ali gained the right to teach religious and political practices to the Islamic community.
- ◆ The wisest of the Shia imams are “ayatollahs” (literally the sign of God).
- ◆ Most Shias (between 68% -80%) live in four countries: Iran, Pakistan, India and Iraq.
- ◆ **Iran has 66 to 70 million Shias, 37-40% of the world’s total Shia population.**
- ◆ Iraq, India and Pakistan each are home to at least 16 million Shias.

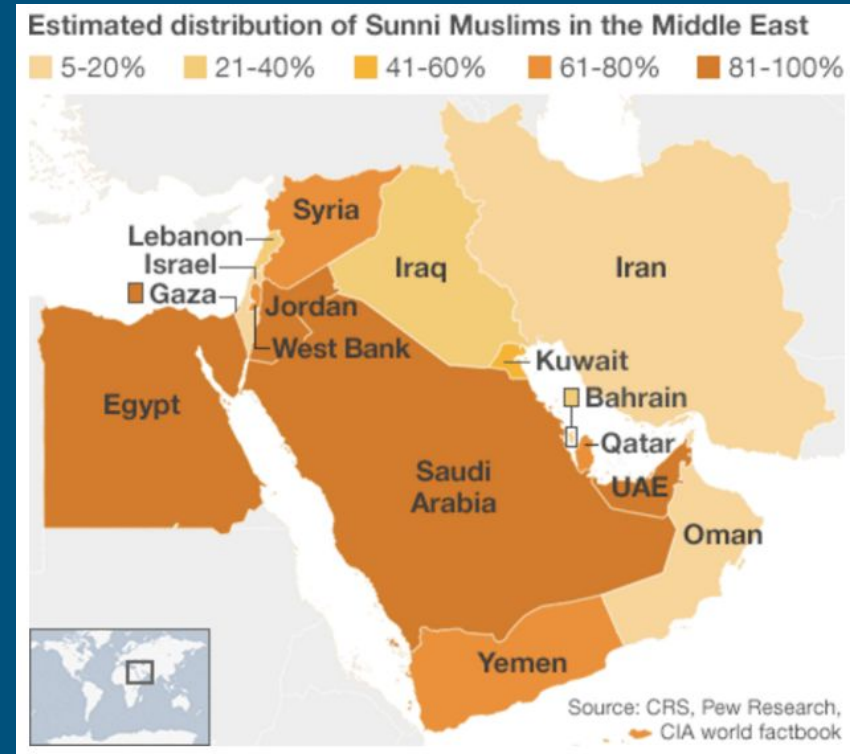
Estimated distribution of Shia Muslims in the Middle East

0-1% 2-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81-100%



Sunni Basics

- ◆ The great majority of the world's more than 1.5 billion Muslims are **Sunnis** - somewhere between **85% and 90%**.
- ◆ In the Middle East, Sunnis make up 90% or more of the populations of **Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia**.
- ◆ Sunni **reject** the belief that **Shia** imams are divinely chosen and should be given such deep respect.
- ◆ Sunni Islam isn't as strict as Shia regarding who can be religious leaders in most Mosques.



Lets try this one more time...

1. The two groups first started to disagree after the Prophet Muhammad died in 632, and his followers could not agree on whether to choose bloodline successors or leaders most likely to follow the tenets of the faith.

- The group now known as Sunnis chose Abu Bakr, the prophet's adviser, to become the first successor, or caliph, to lead the Muslim state.
- Shiites favored Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Ali and his successors are called imams, who not only lead the Shiites but are considered to be descendants of Muhammad.

2. Fighting continued, but Sunnis emerged victorious over the Shiites and came to revere the caliphate for its strength and piety.

3. Shiites focused on developing their religious beliefs, through their imams.

Shared beliefs & practices

Shia and **Sunni** both share a great deal of Islamic **core beliefs and practices**:

- The Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of Allah.
- All must follow the teaching of Muhammad.
- All must abide by the five pillars of Islam.

Differences in Beliefs and Practices

The Sunni are typically seen as putting more emphasis on **the power of God and his determination of human fate**, and are often understood to be more inclusive in their definition of what it means to be a Muslim.

The Sunni tradition has placed **great emphasis on the role of religion in public and political life, with great weight placed on the Shariah** (Islamic law) as the standard for a broad range of social issues—marriage, divorce, inheritance, commerce, and so on.

Differences in Beliefs and Practices

Because of the different paths the two sects took, Sunnis emphasize God's power in the material world, sometimes including the public and political realm, while Shiites value in martyrdom and sacrifice.

Saudi Arabia and **Iran**, the dominant Sunni and Shiite powers in the Middle East, often take opposing sides in regional conflicts.



What role has sectarianism played in recent crises?

In general, countries which have been governed by Sunnis, Shia tend to make up the poorest sections of society. They often see themselves as victims of discrimination and oppression. Sunni **extremists** frequently denounce Shia as heretics who should be killed.

Today, many conflicts in the region have strong sectarian overtones.

- In Syria, Iranian troops, **Hezbollah fighters** (Shia political party and militant group that the United States and European Union consider a terrorist organization) and Iranian-backed Shia militiamen have been helping the Shia-led government battle the Sunni-dominated opposition. Sunni jihadist groups, including ISIS, have meanwhile been targeting Shia and their places of worship in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.
- In January 2016, the execution by Saudi Arabia of a prominent Shia cleric (Sheikh Nimr Nimr), who supported mass anti-government protests, triggered a diplomatic crisis with Iran and angry demonstrations across the Middle East.

The Global view of Islam

- ◆ **Sunni** 85-90%
- ◆ **Shia** 10-15%
- ◆ Shia make up a majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, and Yemen.



[image source](#)

What's the
Difference
Between Sunni
and Shia
Muslims?



**SUNNI
VS.
SHIA**



Sunni-Shia Divide





Cartoonists International: www.nyph.com/cartoons

KAL
CAL/19/78

HIG-GIH

SYRIA FIGHT CLUB

IS v Assad v Hizbullah v
rebels v IS v Kurds v Turkey
v Russia v IS v Allies...



TURKEY
AND
RUSSIA
ARE NOW
SQUARING
OFF!!

HOW
CAN
YOU
TELL?