

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# ALI 35 I: The Sectarian Divide amongst Muslims – Session I

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May 4, 2016/ 26 Rajab 1436

# **ALI 356: The Sectarian Divide** **amongst Muslims**

With the current political climate, never before have the ideological and theological differences between Sunnis and Shias been so prominent. Do this have any bearings on the fundamentals that divided the Muslims into various sects?

The two-session course will dwell into some of the historical accounts that divide the Sunni-Shia and its contemporary application.

The objective is to provide a forum for understanding each others perspectives as the two major sects in Islam have coexisted together for centuries much to the envy of non-Muslims.

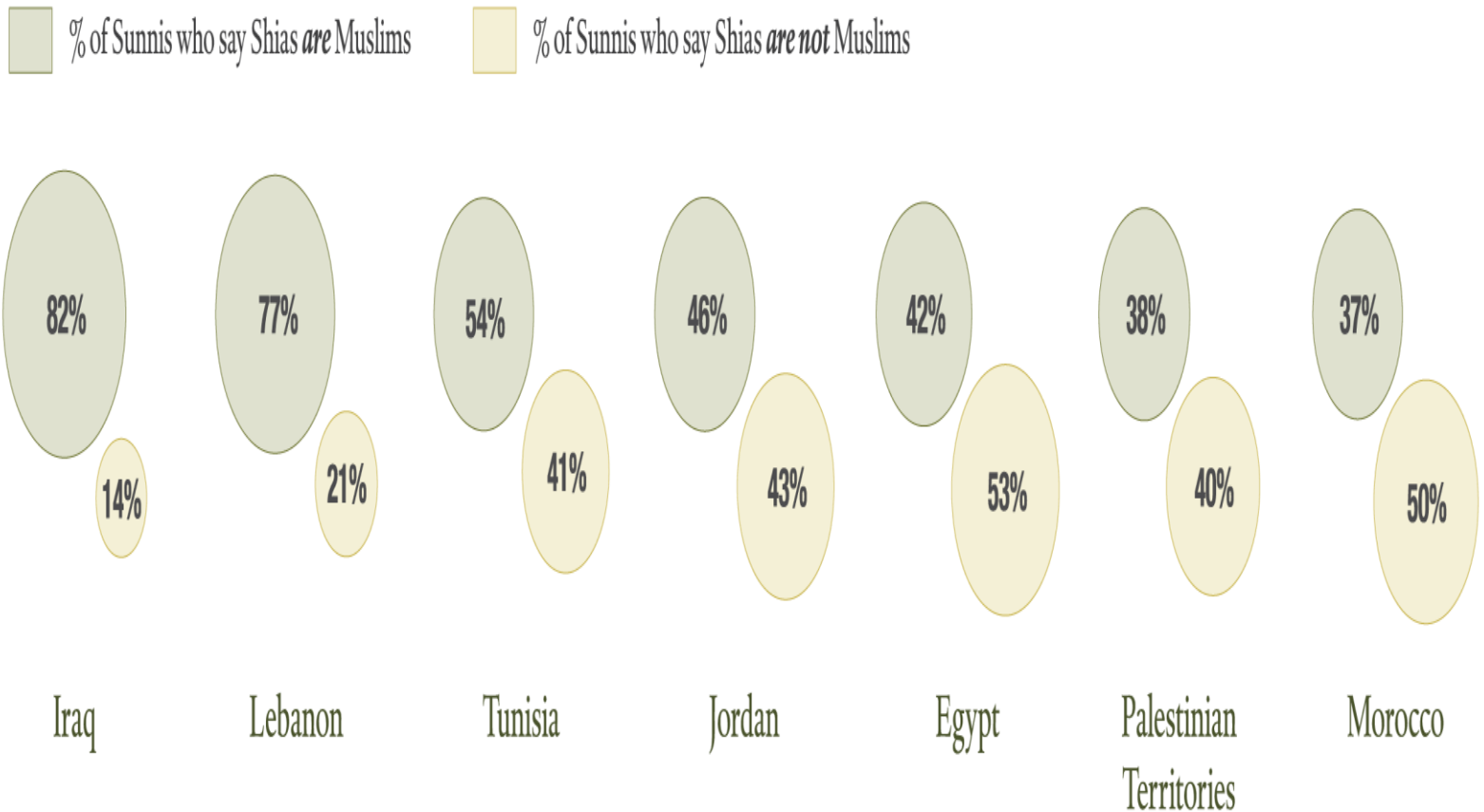
# Agenda

- Background
- Objectives
- Historical References
- The Key divisions in history
- The current political divide
- Areas of collaboration & unity
- The way forward

# Background

- Islam's schism, simmering for fourteen centuries, doesn't explain all the political, economic, and geostrategic factors involved in these conflicts, but it has become one prism through which to understand the underlying tensions.
- Sunni and Shia Muslims have lived peacefully together for centuries. In many countries it has become common for members of the two sects to intermarry and pray at the same mosques. They share faith in the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and perform similar prayers, although they differ in rituals and interpretation of Islamic law.

A CFR InfoGuide Presentation

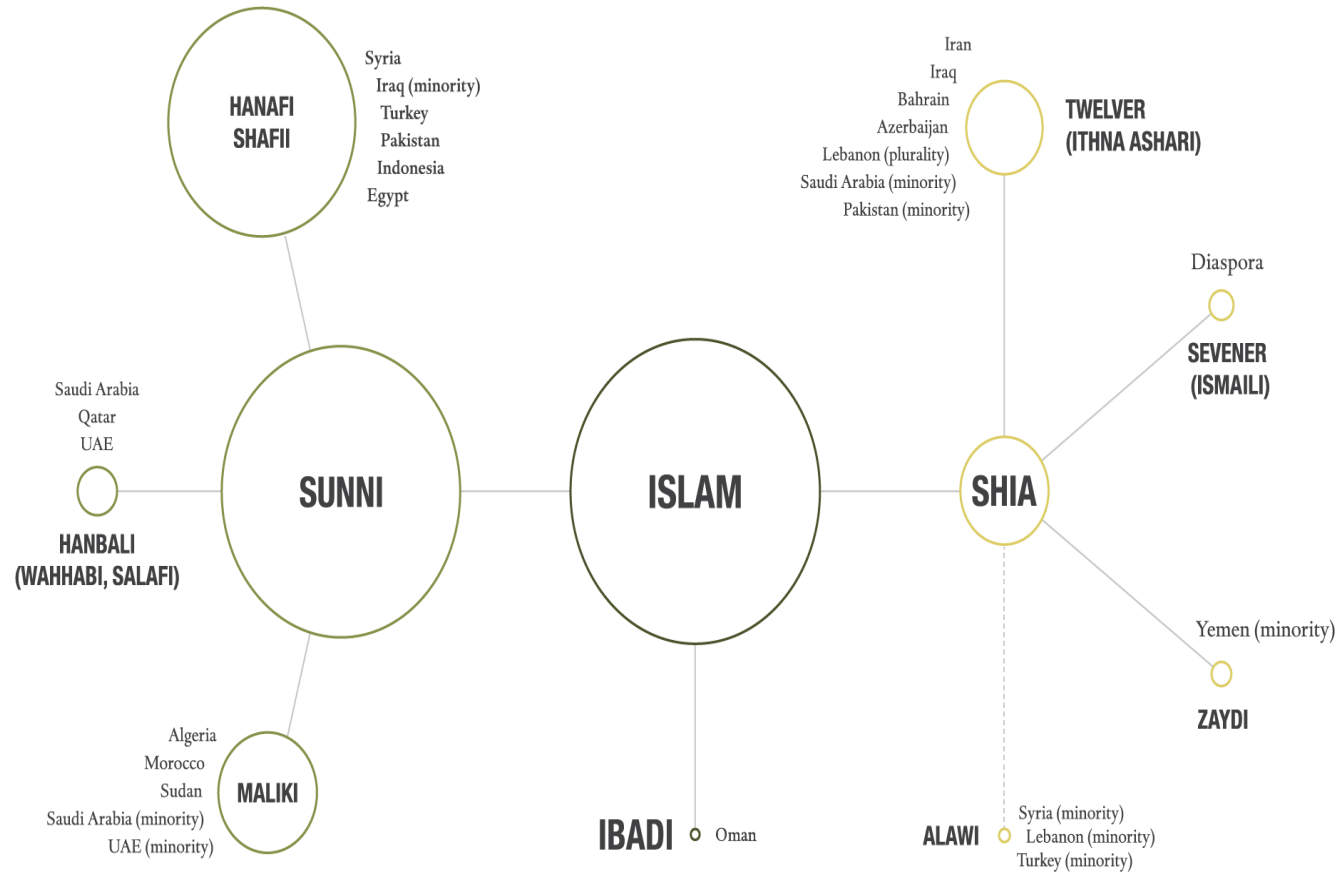


Source: Pew Research, The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity, 2012

# The Branches of Islam

## The Branches of Islam—Relative Size

CLICK ON THE BRANCHES FOR MORE INFORMATION





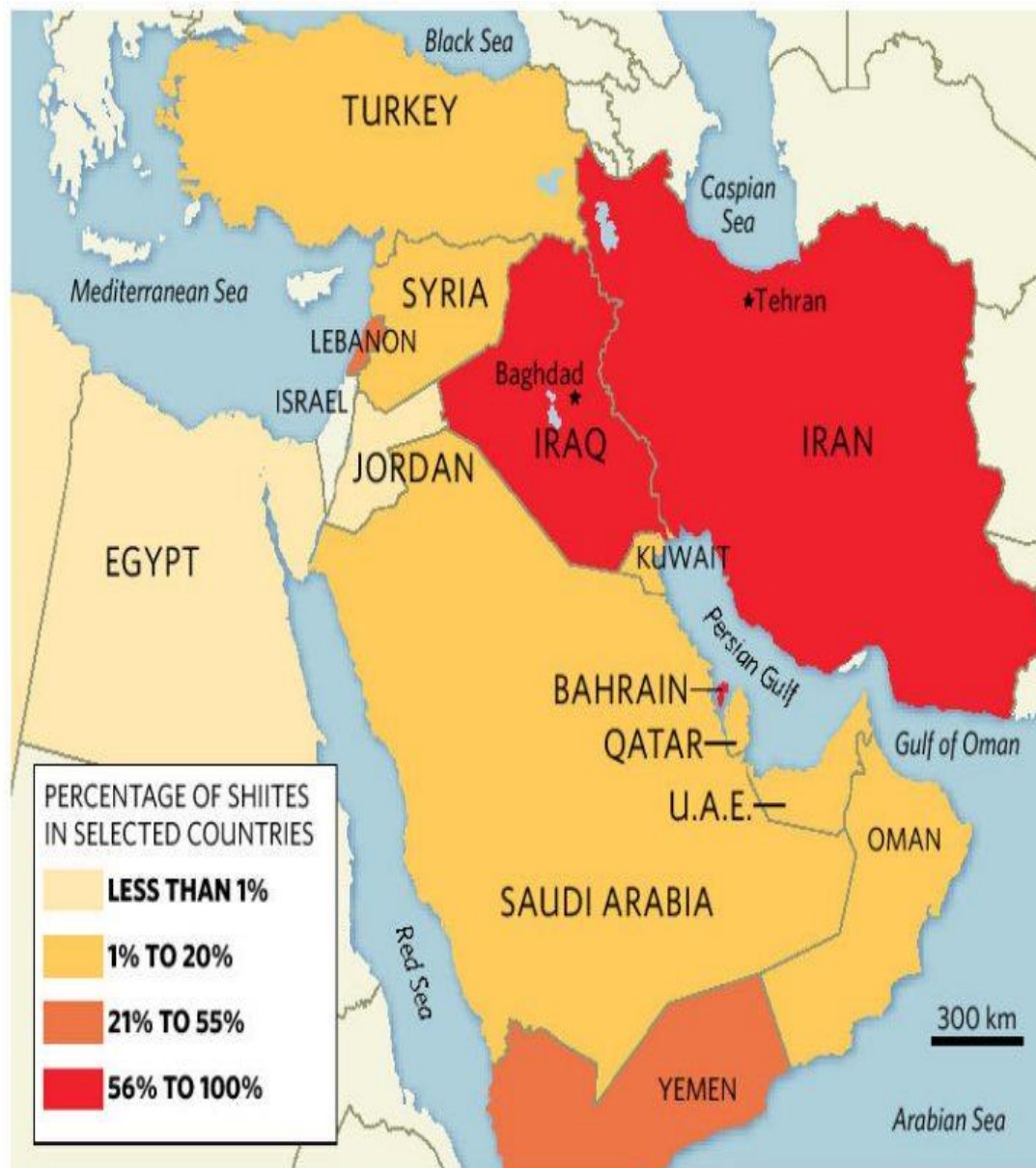
# Muslims in the Mideast

Less than 15 per cent of the world's Muslims are Shiite, or Shia; most Muslims are Sunni.

## PER CENT OF POPULATION

	SHIA MUSLIM	SUNNI MUSLIM
Bahrain	70%	30%
Egypt	-	90%
Iran	90%	9%
Iraq	63%	34%
Jordan	2%	92%
Lebanon	36%	22%
Qatar	14%	86%
Saudi Arabia	5%	95%
Syria	13%	74%
Turkey	15%	85%

SOURCE: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life;  
CIA World Factbook; Adherents.com



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# Objective

- Understanding the truth
- Personality versus Issues
- Qur'an basis for dispute resolution
- Dialogue to achieve unity



# Why is dialogue needed?

- Theological differences between Shia and Sunni go back 1400 years and better left for God to judge, as He knows best. The killing of Shias or Sunnis will not resolve these disputes.
- The principle of "no compulsion in matters of faith" (Quran 2:256) is not just limited to Muslim-non-Muslim relations. It applies to Muslim interpretations of Islam as well. This instruction of God serves as a guideline for the Muslim community to not impose one's interpretation on others.

# Why Dialogue - 2

- When human beings sit down and talk to each other, they learn to respect each other.
- Dialog allows parties to understand each other better by allowing participants to acquire direct knowledge about beliefs instead of relying on propaganda and stereotypical images. (Quran 49:6-12)

# Why Dialogue - 3

- Dialog will isolate the extremist fringe. It is a major sin to kill a human being. Killing a human being is like killing the whole of humanity. By talking to each other, Shias and Sunnis will be able to save lives, which is like saving the whole of humanity. (Quran 5:32)
- If some Shias and Sunnis consider each other enemies, the Quran asks us to be just even toward one's enemy "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do." [Quran 5:8]



# Mutual Respect & Peaceful Co-Existence Among Muslims- a call of time

Do not abuse those whom they call [in their worship] besides Allah, lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge.  
(The Qur'ān 6:108)

# Ayatullah Sistani

- The Muslim *ummah* is going through difficult circumstances, and faces great tribulations and serious challenges that affect its present and endanger its future. Under such situations, all realize an urgent need for closing the ranks, eliminating the disunity, distancing ourselves from sectarian slogans and refraining from inciting religious differences—the differences which have lasted for centuries and there seems to be no way of solving them in a way that would be liked and accepted by all. **Therefore, there is no need to stir up the debate on them outside the respectable scholarly discussion**, especially when it does not involve the matters of the principals of faith and fundamental beliefs.
- **So everyone who wishes for advancement of Islam and progress of the Muslims should put their utmost effort in bringing them together and in reducing levels of tension that rise from some political leanings so that it does not lead to further division and separation since that will give way to fulfillment of the goals of the enemies who intend to control the Muslim lands and capture their resources.**



# Ayatullah Khamanai

- When a person speaking in the name of Shi'as in his private internet television channel (based in London, UK) used abusive and insulting remarks about one of the wives of Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.), a group of Shi'a scholars from Ahsā', Saudi Arabia, sent a question to the Ayatullah Khamena'i and asked for his verdict.
- **“Insulting the personalities of Sunni brethren, including the wives of all the Prophets, in particular those of the Leader of the Prophets and accusing the wife of the Prophet of Islam, is forbidden (*haram*).”**

# Ayatullah Wahid Khurasani

- Once in his lecture, Ayatullah Husayn Wahid Khurasani, the head of Hawza-e 'Ilmiyyah of Qum, read a narration from *tafsir* of Imam Fakhru 'd-Dīn Rāzi in which the name of 'Umar, the second caliph, had come. The narration had the words, “*raziyallahu 'anhu*,” and Ayatullah Wahid Khurasani recited it the way it had occurred in the book. Some from the audience uttered words of insult regarding the caliph

Ayatullah Wahid responded by saying: **“Have I not said that in my lecture do not use such words?!”**

مگر نگفته بودم سر درس من از این گونه کلمات به کار نبرید!

# Fiqi Rulings on Sunnis

**Whosoever bears witness to the unity of Almighty God and the prophethood of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) is a Muslim. His life, honour and property is as sacrosanct as the life, honour and property of a follower of the Ja'fari sect.**

# So Should We Not Discuss Historical Differences?

- **“We cannot close our eyes to history [and historical differences]; *insulting* is one thing while *research* is something else—these two should never be confused with one another. These brothers should realize that historical issues cannot be forgotten; all the books on history of Islam are full of these events.**
- Even the historical books of the Sunnis talk about the issue of Talha, Zubayr and ‘Abdullah bin Zubayr. “If history is researched objectively, then many realities and events will become clear. In the Islamic history, some companions (*sahaba*) were steadfast in the path of the Prophet while some did not remain on that path. If we look the issues and events of history in an unbiased way, then our duty will become clear. This means that explaining the event, and that should not be considered as an insult.” – Ay Makarim

# Key Historical References

- Tareekh Tabari (historical)
- Khilafat –Wa –Mulukiyat (contemporary)
- Political History of Islam



# Key Divisions in History

- The army of Usama
- Tragedy of Thursday
- Saqifa
- Fadaq
- Reign of the Khulafa-e-Rashideen
- From Khilafat to Mulukiyat
- Event of Kerbala