

Sample essay on sunni and shia: the history of two beliefs

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Mohammed introduced Islam, or submission to God, to the people of Mecca in 610 (Ro). The religion combined some Jewish and Christian traditions and later on included set of laws influencing most aspects of life. The religion proved to be influential and an empire that included Central Asia and Spain was established. However, his death 1400 years ago caused a divide amongst the Muslims. Debates about who will succeed Mohammed ensued, with some saying that a qualified member should be the next successor, while the others insisting that the next ruler should come from Mohammed's bloodline. In the end, members who wanted to choose his successor by following the traditional Arab custom or the Sunna, formed a group called the Sunnis (Ahmed). The other group who believed that Mohammed has chosen his successor, his cousin and son-in-law Ali, became the group Shia Ali or the ' Party of Ali' (Ahmed).

When Ali became the caliph in 656, he was assassinated after just five years of leadership (Ro). His two sons, the legitimate successors, were also killed. Hassan, the eldest son, was rumoured to have been poisoned by the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty. His younger brother Husayn, on the other hand, was killed by the soldiers of the second Umayyad caliph in a battle in Karbala. He was with his family at that time and all of them ended up dead (Ro). The Sunnis, thinking that the Shias might use the massacre as a way to catch the attention of the public and later on overturn the monarchs, Shias were further persecuted and isolated. These events led to the Shia's concept of martyrdom and rituals of grieving (BBC News Middle East).

Iran's Shia clergy has been supporting the Shia Muslims of Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria since 1979, and this has caused great concerns to the Sunni

leaders of Arab countries like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which are also home to some Shia minorities. The Sunni leader Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980, which was then led by its new Shia ruler Ayatollah Khomeini (Ahmed). Hussein wanted to take Iran's position as the dominant state in the Persian Gulf despite his fear that the Iranian revolution in 1979 might cause a chain of reaction among the majority of Shias in Iraq. The war took place, killing an estimate of one million Iranians and half-a-million Iraqis (Ahmed).

In other countries governed by Sunnis, Shias compose the poorest sections due to discrimination and oppression. Tehran supported Shia militias and parties outside its borders, but the Gulf states matched these efforts, thereby giving them stronger relationships with the Sunni governments abroad. The military activities of Hezbollah during the civil war in Lebanon gave the Shias stronger political power. However, this put the Shia governments in conflict with the Sunni Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar (The Economist). These two countries have been supporting their coreligionists with cash, and in the process, strengthened Sunni assertiveness which made the Shia feel more threatened. Hard-line Sunni militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan like the Taliban have reportedly been attacking Shia's places of worship. However, both hard-line and mainstream militants don't just focus on the oppression of Shias as they have been fighting against coreligionists in the course of history, including the series of crackdowns in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the battles of Saudi Arabia against al-Qaeda (Ro).

Sectarian violence increased in 2013, wherein sectarian motivations were said to be fueling extremists in Syria, Lebanon, and Pakistan. Sunni

extremists recruitment showed considerable increase as a result of losses in al-Qaeda groups. Private funding networks in the Gulf encouraged this recruitment, with most violence aimed towards other Muslims instead of the Western targets. Shia militants, on the other hand, are also said to be gaining more power as they prepare to confront the threat posed by Sunni extremists, leading to a cycle of sectarian violence.

Conflict between the two Muslim sects continue to this day, and with the participation of other players supporting each group, possibilities of it coming to an end prove to be far. With Shias and Sunnis well spread out, both have to coexist with their respective countries, with one group ending up the majority and the other the minority. The way this rivalry will be settled is said to have a big influence in shaping the political balance in Muslim regions such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain (Ro).

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