

Sectarian Division In Islam: A Comparative Analysis Of The Historical And
Contemporary Shia-Sunni Schism

by

Dua Zehra Abidi

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Chair of Committee: Irene Guenther, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Cyrus Ali Contractor, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Ben Rayder, Ph.D.

University of Houston

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Dua Zehra Abidi

APPROVED:

Irene Guenther, Ph.D., Instr. Associate Professor
The Honors College
Thesis Director

Cyrus Ali Contractor, Ph.D., Instr. Associate Professor
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Second Reader

Ben Rayder, Ph.D., Instr. Assistant Professor
The Honors College
Honors Reader

William Monroe, Ph.D.
Dean, The Honors College

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For my *Abbu*. I often wonder what conversations we would have if you were still here.

Though I will unfortunately never be able to know your exact response to this accomplishment, I can almost guarantee that you would end whatever you would have said with: “*Shabaash, mera pooch!*”

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Abstract

Through the use of primary and secondary sources, as well as several hundred responses to a survey sent to Muslim communities, this thesis examines sectarianism in Islam, its roots, historical narratives, and recent political events. More specifically, this thesis attempts to address whether certain divisions are irrevocably in place, whether they have been fostered for generations by familial transference, and whether there can ever be reconciliation between Muslims of different sects.

In this thesis, I specifically seek to comparatively analyze the historically documented rifts between Shia and Sunni Muslims with the contemporary existence of sectarianism. Moreover, the aspect of politicization is included due to its significant role in the rift. Not only does this thesis provide insight into a millennium-long feud between members of the two largest Islamic sects, but it also gives modern-day Shia and Sunni Muslims a platform to express their own feelings about the internal schism.

The disunity that exists within a faith which emphatically promotes brotherhood and unity is, in every sense of the word, paradoxical. Therefore, by examining key secondary sources, as well as amassing data and personal statements from a wide range of individuals who identify with one or the other sect, I provide a clearer view of the contemporary conflict. In the end, I hope that the understanding of these differences – from the point of view of historical and contemporary Muslims – illuminates the inherent desire for undisturbed unification.

Table of Contents

Dedication	3
Acknowledgments	4
Abstract.....	6
List of Figures.....	9
I. Part 1: An Analysis of the Historical Shia-Sunni Schism	10
Introduction	10
Chapter 1: Successorship	13
Background	13
Who were Ali and Abu Bakr?	14
Who was Umar?	18
Relationships to Prophet Muhammad	19
The Death of Prophet Muhammad and the Election of Abu Bakr	20
What was Ghadeer?.....	23
Denouement	26
What was the Calamity of Thursday?	26
Conclusion.....	29
Chapter 2: Commemoration.....	29
Background	29
Introduction	30
Fatima and The Companions	31
Altercation or Conversation?	31
The Land of Fadak	34
The Death and Burial of The Prophet's Daughter	36
Karbala, Muharram, and Ashura.....	38
Controversy	40
Conclusion.....	41

Chapter 3: Politicization.....	42
Background	42
Introduction	43
Extremism and Contemporary Islamic Politicization	44
The Aftermath of Karbala and the Safavid Empire	45
World War I, Sykes-Picot, and Saddam Hussein.....	46
The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War.....	48
Conclusion.....	51
 II. Part 2: An Analysis of the Contemporary Shia-Sunni Schism	53
Preface.....	53
Disclaimers and Notes.....	53
Study Methods	55
Data and Results.....	56
Analysis.....	70
Conclusion.....	71
 References	94
 Appendices	
1. Appendix 1: Survey.....	75
2. Appendix 2: Figures	84

List of Figures

Figure P1.1	Age Bracket (Shia).....	84
Figure P1.2	Age Bracket (Sunni).....	84
Figure P1.3	Successorship (Shia)	85
Figure P1.4	Successorship (Sunni)	85
Figure P1.5	Generational Transference (Shia)	86
Figure P1.6	Generational Transference (Sunni)	86
Figure P1.7	“Othering” (Shia)	87
Figure P1.8	“Othering” (Sunni).....	87
Figure P1.9	Sectarian Division Trend (Shia).....	88
Figure P1.10	Sectarian Division Trend (Sunni).....	88
Figure P1.11	Possible Solutions (Shia).....	89
Figure P1.12	Possible Solutions (Sunni)	89
Figure P2.1	Branch Specificity (Shia)	90
Figure P2.2	Branch Specificity (Sunni).....	90
Figure P2.3	Fasting on Ashura (Sunni)	91
Figure P2.4	Self-Flagellation Defense (Shia)	91
Figure P2.5	Opinion on Fadak (Sunni).....	92
Figure P2.6	Shia Genocide (Shia).....	92
Figure P2.7	Shia Genocide (Sunni)	93

Part 1: An Analysis of the Historical Shia-Sunni Schism

Introduction

The existence of sectarianism is not unique to Islam. The two other Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Judaism, as well as several other religious traditions, also contain varying sects within them. What is unique to Islam, however, is the extent to which sectarianism causes rancor within the religion. While sectarian violence does indeed exist in other religions, the historical context for sectarianism in Islam is significantly tied to its contemporary existence. Many of the explanations for the current Shia-Sunni conflict stem from historical events that certain members from both sects are unable or unwilling to reconcile.¹ Moreover, most of the sectarian division within Islam is based upon differing interpretations of both documented events and doctrinal texts. As a result, a great deal of numerous historical “debates,” which now serve as a sort of “justification” for rifts between Shia and Sunni Muslims, stem from divergent understandings of God, the Quran, and divine leadership. While Christianity and Judaism also present sectarianism in similar ways, the crux is that Islam is unique from other religions in regard to its degree of contemporary sectarianism – and just how detrimental that is within and to Islam.

Shia and Sunni Muslims abide by the teachings of the Quran, hadiths, and other traditions that emerged after particular historical events.² In fact, all Muslims are known to

¹ It is important for the reader to be made aware that there are several branches within the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam. Sectarianism is quite prevalent within the entire religion but is mostly overt between the Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) branch of Shia Muslims and majority of Sunni Muslims. Distinct branch divisions within the Sunni denomination will not be as broadly discussed, for there are not as many significant differences across Sunni branches as there are in Shia branches.

² “Ahadith” and/or “hadiths” is the plural form of “hadith,” which are accounts of sayings by and behaviors of notable Islamic figures (such as Prophet Muhammad) – often reported by witnesses and/or historians. In this thesis, “hadiths” will be used as the plural for “hadith.”

keep the Quran as their main point of reference, and books that contain hadiths as the most authentic after the Quran.³ Interestingly, and while the methodology by which Shia and Sunni Muslims interpret hadiths are similar, there are significant discrepancies regarding which historical narrators of these hadiths are considered reliable, good, and/or trustworthy. Although these differences may not seem to be too great from an outside perspective, they are responsible for a considerable amount of the disunity between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

As a faith, Islam promotes unity, love, and community. It is therefore alarming to realize that, currently, these ideals are largely absent. For centuries, Shia and Sunni Muslims have feuded over the same issues; issues that are likely to have been transferred generationally and, for the most part, are unbeknownst to many Muslims today. As with many faiths, generational transference is expected, but to what extent do these passed-down narratives fuel the conflict? Are Muslims, followers of a religion that advocates for the attainment of education, blindly adhering to customs and embracing stories that have been passed down generationally? If so, why? Exploring the aforementioned differences in hadiths and historical events may shed some light into these divisions.

While the history of Islam is vast, the main purpose of this thesis is to understand how the Shia-Sunni conflict began and how it presents itself today. In order to do so in a concise manner, I have chosen three major turning points that arguably cemented the Shia-Sunni conflict. These turning points highlight the dissonance that began during the life of the Prophet Muhammad and after his death: successorship, commemoration, and

³ Muḥammad Al-Tījānī Samāwī, *Then I Was Guided* (Bloomfield, NJ: Message of Peace (Pyam-e-Aman), 1991), 91-92.

politicization. Moreover, these events illuminate the extent to which Shia and Sunni Muslims have remained steadfast in their divergent beliefs regarding the direction Islam should have taken. Alongside an analysis of these three historical turning points, I will also discuss relevant facets within these events in order to further an understanding of sectarianism in Islam.

Before delving into the historical turning points I have chosen to examine, I would like to make the reader aware of the manner in which the events are going to be discussed. While they will be analyzed holistically, mostly from varying sources, the specific events within these turning points will be viewed from the following three frames of reference: the Shia stance, the Sunni stance, and – when applicable – the Western/academic stance. As a result, the different viewpoints will be discussed briefly and without fear of subjectivity, irreverence, or bias.

Furthermore, I want to explain why this project is important and relevant today. Specifically, why there is an urgency for this project, and why I have chosen this topic for my thesis. In this particular moment, I am concerned that the rift between Shia and Sunni Muslims is deepening. As a result, it is imperative to know if this is because political leaders are weaponizing religion or if, in fact, generational transference is so deeply rooted in Muslim families that both of these factors work in tandem to deepen the schism. Moreover, analyzing how modern-day Shia and Sunni Muslims feel about sectarianism can help to identify if both of these factors will continue to further sectarian conflict or if there is room for any sort of reconciliation.

Chapter 1: Successorship

Background

Arguably, the most cited conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims pertains to the issue of successorship. Who would be the leader of the Muslim people after the Prophet's demise? Sunni Muslims believe that Abu Bakr, one of Prophet Muhammad's closest companions, was the rightful successor as he was chosen by Muslims in what could be considered a modern-day election after the Prophet's death.⁴ Sunni Muslims also argue that, due to this close relationship between Abu Bakr and Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr was more entitled to the caliphate. Conversely, Shia Muslims believe that Ali ibn Abu Talib, hereafter referred to as Ali, was the rightful successor but wrongfully denied his position; Shia Muslims insist that Ali was much closer to the Prophet, as his cousin and son-in-law, and was more worthy than Abu Bakr for the position of caliph.⁵ These beliefs are held not only today, but also were prevalent following the Prophet's death. While both sects have justifications for their differing positions, it is imperative to analyze the issue of successorship through a broad lens. To do so, historical evidence is necessary, as are accounts of events that took place during the Prophet's life, as well as the time period immediately preceding and following his death.

Historically, Shia Muslims reject the validity of the first three successors to Prophet Muhammad: Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman.⁶ While Ali went on to become the fourth caliph of Islam, Shia Muslims deny the legitimacy of the first three caliphs completely because they believe that the familial line of the Prophet should have

⁴ Sayyid S. Husayn, *The Early History of Islam* (Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1996), 282-283.

⁵ Lesley Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2010), 24-25, 70-71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

designated who would lead the religion.⁷ The rejection understandably angers many Sunnis, as the first three caliphs were greatly respected and revered by the population who followed them. However, understanding the historical context is crucial before judging why some Shia Muslims hold these beliefs. For the purposes of this thesis, only Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ali will be examined because the initial divergence between Shia and Sunni Muslims can be pinpointed in large part to the disagreement about who should have led the Muslim community after the Prophet's death.⁸

The brief biographies that follow are put in order of the caliphate during the early history of Islam. Therefore, Abu Bakr (who was 38 years old at the time of his conversion to Islam and in his late 50s at the time of his appointment) is discussed first, and then Ali (who was around 13 years of age when he accepted Islam and about 55 years old at the time of his appointment); Uthman is omitted for purposes of concision, and Umar is only briefly discussed to provide further historical context of the division.⁹ By examining the qualities of these men, one can likely gain a deeper understanding of the Muslims' mindsets at the time. Why was Abu Bakr chosen over Ali to begin with, and why was Umar the second caliph instead of Ali?

Who were Ali and Abu Bakr?

In Islamic history, the first caliph after the death of the Prophet was Abu Bakr. However, the validity of his appointment remains in question. Given the divisiveness of his appointment, specifically, and of the issue of successorship, generally, it is important

⁷ Ibid., 70-71.

⁸ On "Monday, June 8 in the year 632 [Prophet Muhammad] was dead." See Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 55.

⁹ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 36-37; Syed Muhammad Khan, "Ali Ibn Abi Talib," Ancient History Encyclopedia (online), https://www.ancient.eu/Ali_ibn_Abi_Talib, May 25, 2020, accessed December 11, 2020; Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 32.

to first discuss both Abu Bakr and Ali, as they were the two men in question vying for succession following after the Prophet's death.¹⁰ Who were they in relation to Prophet Muhammad, what were their respective attributes, and what were their objections to the other being the successor? Answers to these questions offer a window into the dichotomy that exists within Islamic sectarianism, as well as the historical context for the division. Arguably, this is one of the cornerstones to understanding the disunity between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

At around the age of thirty-eight, Abu Bakr converted to Islam and became an adherent to the Prophet.¹¹ The following short story presents the details of a Shia viewpoint on Abu Bakr's conversion and subsequent confidence in the validity of Prophet Muhammad's assertion of prophethood. During a trip to Yemen, Abu Bakr "met an old [man] and learned sage of the Azd tribe, who predicted to him that a prophet was to appear in the near future at Mecca, with a young man and another of advanced age to help him."¹² When Abu Bakr returned to Mecca, he met with Prophet Muhammad and bore witness to his testimony on claiming prophethood. When Abu Bakr asked for proof, Prophet Muhammad simply repeated the prediction of the older man whom Abu Bakr had met in Yemen – even though he was in Mecca the whole time – solidifying Abu Bakr's belief in Islam and in Prophet Muhammad.¹³

¹⁰ Muhammad As-Sallaabee, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*, trans. Faisal Muhammad Muhammad Shafeeq (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 51; Abu Bakr was about 58 years old at the time of the Prophet's death, whereas Ali was around 31 years of age, see Syed Muhammad Khan, "Ali Ibn Abi Talib," *Ancient History Encyclopedia* (online), https://www.ancient.eu/Ali_ibn_Abi_Talib.

¹¹ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 36-37; Rasul Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, trans. Ali Ebrahimi, 1st ed. (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2003), 21-22.

¹² Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 36-37.

¹³ Ibid.

A Sunni viewpoint on Abu Bakr's conversion is as follows: Abu Bakr was a "successful businessman...[who] travelled far and wide throughout the Arabian Peninsula. He met with the adherents of various religions, and he was particularly interested in...people who spoke about monotheism, about the belief in the one true God."¹⁴ It was not until a specific incident, one in which Abu Bakr overheard two men discussing that a Prophet would soon be sent to guide mankind, that Abu Bakr decided to have this discovery somehow corroborated by someone else.¹⁵ Abu Bakr would see a man named "Waraqah ibn Naufal," who confirmed this revelation and gave Abu Bakr some traits of what this soon-to-be Prophet would hold.¹⁶ Afterwards, when Prophet Muhammad claimed his prophethood, Abu Bakr recalled all that Waraqah ibn Naufal told him and, thus, believed in Prophet Muhammad's claim and became an adherent.¹⁷

Though an early believer of Prophet Muhammad's position in Islam, Shia Muslims believe Abu Bakr was not the first male to bear witness to his prophethood. Several Shia accounts document that Ali was the first male to attest to the fact.¹⁸ As aforementioned, Abu Bakr was about thirty-eight years old when he converted to Islam. Conversely, some accounts assert that Ali was just ten or thirteen when he became the first man to accept Islam.¹⁹ As a result, Sunni Muslims consider Ali to have been the first child to accept Islam and Abu Bakr as the "first free man" to accept Islam.²⁰ According to some

¹⁴ As-Sallaabee, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*, 50.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 37-39; Muḥammad Sulṭānu'l-Wā'izīn Shīrāzī, *Shiah Islam in Sunni Traditions: A Translation of Peshawar Nights*, trans. Charles A. Campbell and Hamid Quinlan (Dallas, TX: Texas Islamic Press, 1997), 128-130.

¹⁹ Dar Rah Haqq's Board of Writers, *A Glance at the Life of the Holy Prophet of Islam*, trans. N. Tawheedi, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Alavi Foundation, 2000), 57; Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 32.

²⁰ As-Sallaabee, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*, 53.

historians, Ali's young age is relevant to the long delay of his caliphate appointment.²¹

Moreover, many followers and supporters of Abu Bakr's claim to the caliphate took his older age into account when compared to Ali's youth, asserting that his adulthood was indicative of maturity and knowledge.²²

Ali is revered by the Shia as a valiant and heroic figure, a soldier who had won many battles, but was disliked by the majority of the Quraysh due to the fact that "he was young and because he smashed their arrogance and had killed their heroes."²³ Moreover, without Ali, there would be no Shia. Ali was "the man whose name the Shia were to take as their own. They were, and are, the followers of Ali, or in Arabic, *Shiat Ali* – Shia, for short."²⁴ Ali was "mentored and groomed by Muhammad himself, inducted by the Prophet into the inner, gnostic meaning of Islam so that his understanding of the faith would far surpass that of all others."²⁵ Clearly, Ali was dear to the Prophet and had a very deep understanding of the tenets of early Islam.

Notably, Shia Muslims justify their claim that Ali should have been the first caliph after Prophet Muhammad's death due to the fact that Ali was Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law.²⁶ Similarly, one could assert that Abu Bakr (and Umar) could be considered family since Prophet Muhammad was the son-in-law of both men. Regarding blood relations, Prophet Muhammad was orphaned at a very young age and raised by

²¹ Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 15-16.

²² Shīrāzī, *Shiah Islam in Sunni Traditions: A Translation of Peshawar Nights*, 128-130.

²³ Samāwī, *Then I Was Guided*, 104. Quraysh is the name of a tribe in early Islamic history but due to the depth of the subject, I will not be going into further detail regarding it.

²⁴ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 32.

²⁵ Ibid., 34.

²⁶ Ibid., 24-25.

Ali's father, Abu Talib, who also happened to be his uncle.²⁷ During a difficult time for Abu Talib, Prophet Muhammad took care of Ali in order to relieve his uncle of stress.²⁸ Not only did Prophet Muhammad care greatly for Ali, but he raised him as his own son.²⁹ Thus, both blood relationship and the close affinity that Prophet Muhammad had with Ali are key to the Shia's assertion that Ali should have succeeded Prophet Muhammad.

Clearly, both Abu Bakr and Ali had significantly important relationships with Prophet Muhammad. However, the ways in which Shia and Sunni Muslims view Abu Bakr and Ali are vastly different. From debates on which of the two individuals was the first to accept Islam to disagreements on who should have succeeded the Prophet, the rift between Shia and Sunni Muslims only continued to grow. Understanding these differences is imperative to gaining insight into contemporary sectarianism within Islam.

Who was Umar?

Relevant to both Abu Bakr and Ali's biographies is the key role that Umar played in ensuring Abu Bakr's appointment as caliph. Therefore, it is important to note the relationship that existed between Abu Bakr and Umar, and subsequently Umar's own attributes and qualifications. Umar was Abu Bakr's successor. Notably, Abu Bakr becoming the first caliph aided Umar in becoming the second caliph due to their close relationship.³⁰ In fact, some of the Muslims under Umar's rule felt as though "Umar's caliphate was the continuation of Abū [sic] Bakr's and that their caliphate was a single administration."³¹ In Shia sources, Umar has been described as "quick-tempered and an

²⁷ Dar Rah Haqq's Board of Writers, *A Glance at the Life of the Holy Prophet of Islam*, 25-27.

²⁸ Ibid., 57.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 52-53.

³¹ Ibid., 52.

extremist,” both of which “seriously affected his political and administrative career.”³² In Sunni sources, Umar is noted to have been “a beacon of guidance, a criterion between truth and falsehood,” whose presence had a profound effect on all those he led.³³ One thing that must be emphasized, however, is the fact that Umar was an extremely influential caliph. In fact, Umar “bent history to his will” and is revered as “the architect of Islamic civilization.”³⁴ The relationship between Abu Bakr and Umar, as well as Umar’s strong and prominent personality, are relevant to the issue of successorship following the death of Prophet Muhammad.

Relationships to Prophet Muhammad

Though both Abu Bakr and Umar were companions of the Prophet, there were no blood ties between the three men. However, after the death of the Prophet’s first wife, Khadija, Prophet Muhammad was married nine more times.³⁵ His first wife after Khadija’s death was Aisha, who, notably, was the daughter of Abu Bakr.³⁶ Later on, Prophet Muhammad also married Hafsa, who was the daughter of Umar.³⁷ It is important to note that historians consider these specific marriages, as well as a few others during the course of the Prophet’s life, as political tactics and “diplomatic alliances” in order to merge tribes and further the spread of Islam.³⁸ For example, Prophet Muhammad once “arranged to seal an alliance with a major Christian tribe newly converted to Islam by

³² Ibid., 55.

³³ As cited in <http://www.margatemasjid.org/pdfs/Umar-Ibn-Al-khattab-Volume-2.pdf>, 400.

³⁴ Nazeer Ahmed, *Islam in Global History: From the Death of Prophet Muhammed to the First World War* (Concord, CA: American Institute of Islamic History and Culture, 2000), 34.

³⁵ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 10. The reader should be aware that polygamy is quite common in Islam and was very prevalent during the early history of the religion.

³⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁷ David S. Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 307.

³⁸ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 10.

marrying its leader's daughter."³⁹ Other narratives circulated, such as Abu Bakr offering Aisha's hand in marriage to Prophet Muhammad shortly after the death of Khadija, "as a means of distracting the Prophet in the depth of his mourning [over Khadija]."⁴⁰ In regards to Hafsa, Umar first asked Abu Bakr and Uthman if they wanted to marry his daughter, both of whom refused and "preferred leaving her to the Prophet."⁴¹ As a result, both Abu Bakr and Umar held the title of father-in-law to Prophet Muhammad.

The Death of Prophet Muhammad and the Election of Abu Bakr

Abu Bakr was elected by Muslims following the death of the Prophet. However, it is important to consider the events that took place in the house of the Prophet during the time of the election at Saqifa.⁴² Let us first examine the Shia point of view regarding the death of Prophet Muhammad. As the historian Sayyid S. Husayn notes, "[a]s soon as the Prophet's eyes were closed, without even waiting to commit him to the grave...a meeting [was convened] at Saqifa Bani Sá'da [sic] to deliberate on the election of one to assume the authority in place of the Prophet."⁴³ Shia Muslims believe that before the Prophet was even buried, an election on who was to succeed him was at the forefront of the minds of some Muslims at the time.

The election at Saqifa was quite fraught, and there are significant political distinctions that were made during the event. There were notable tribal feuds and disagreements about which tribe the caliphate belonged to.⁴⁴ The crux, however, is that

³⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁴¹ Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, 307.

⁴² Saqifa, also referred to as Saqifah, was the location at which the election took place.

⁴³ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 280.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 16.

Abu Bakr was elected as the caliph and allegiance was pledged to him.⁴⁵ A Shia source notes that, after the fact, “[Abu Bakr and Umar] walked in the alleys and rubbed the hands of whoever they met to Abū Bakr’s [sic] hands, not paying attention to the person’s willingness or unwillingness.”⁴⁶ This claim reinforces the Shia viewpoint that Abu Bakr secured the caliphate without regard for what the Muslim community wanted, which is a significant distinction from the Sunni viewpoint on the situation.

As aforementioned, this election took place immediately after the Prophet’s death – before he was even buried.⁴⁷ As a result, Abu Bakr and Umar were absent from the funeral processions of the Prophet. In fact, a Shia source claims that “[Abu Bakr and Umar] avoided to fall in with Ali before achieving complete and sure success in securing the Caliphate. After their success beyond the possibility of a reversion they came, but the funeral ceremonies were all finished.”⁴⁸ Another Shia source states that “[Abu Bakr and Umar’s] interest in allegiance was so immense that...they did not attend the funeral ceremony of the Prophet (s) and returned to the city after the ceremony.”⁴⁹ Shia Muslims often raise the question of why Abu Bakr and Umar did not wait until after the Prophet’s burial to discuss the outcome of successorship; was the appointment to caliph deemed more important than the burial ceremony of Prophet Muhammad?

Though Shia Muslims consider the election at Saqifa to be illegitimate following the event of Ghadeer, which will be discussed shortly, Sunni Muslims consider this

⁴⁵ Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 280.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 286.

⁴⁹ Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 17. The “(s)” is often seen in writings regarding the Prophet and is a shorter version of “Sal-Allahu Alayhi Wa Ahli,” which translates to “May God bless him and his family.”

election as proof of the validity of Abu Bakr's successorship. After all, in their eyes, Abu Bakr was elected by the people and it was the ummah who chose him to be the caliph.⁵⁰ Sunni Muslims assert that it is unfair to jump to the conclusion that Abu Bakr and Umar purposefully missed the funeral of the Prophet. We can assess the distraught nature of both Abu Bakr and Umar when they found out about the Prophet's death. In fact, Umar refused to believe that the Prophet had died and forbade anyone from even stating that the Prophet was no longer alive.⁵¹ The Sunni viewpoint is that several community leaders urged Abu Bakr, as well as Umar, to have a congregation to decide who was to succeed the Prophet so as to not create a rift within the ummah.⁵² Thus, the election at Saqifa ensued and Abu Bakr was elected as the Prophet's successor.⁵³ Notably, Ali did not immediately pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr – an assertion that is found throughout Islamic literature.

On the one hand, we see groups of Shia Muslims condemning Abu Bakr and Umar for being absent from Prophet Muhammad's funeral. On the other hand, we have groups of Sunni Muslims praising Abu Bakr and Umar for taking the initiative to choose the leader of the Muslim community in a time of grief and confusion. Irrespective of these differing accounts, one thing that generally can be agreed upon is the following: "The death of the Prophet brought forth the towering personalities of Abu Bakr as Siddiq, Umar ibn al Khattab, Uthman bin Affan and Ali ibn Abu Talib into the historical process. What

⁵⁰ "Ummah" means Muslim community.

⁵¹ Ahmed, *Islam in Global History: From the Death of Prophet Muhammed to the First World War*, 22.

⁵² Ibid., 25.

⁵³ Ibid.

these Companions did and did not do has influenced the course of Islamic history in the subsequent 1,400 years.”⁵⁴

What was Ghadeer?

Now that the events of Saqifa, which Sunni Muslims cite when justifying the legitimacy of Abu Bakr’s caliphate, have been discussed, it is equally important to analyze the event of Ghadeer, which Shia Muslims cite when defending Ali’s right to successorship after the death of Prophet Muhammad.

Many Sunni Muslims claim that the event of Ghadeer was simply one in which Prophet Muhammad praised Ali greatly and showcased his merits. Shia Muslims, however, assert that Ghadeer was none other than a clear conferring of power from Prophet Muhammad to Ali. It was in the year 632 when Prophet Muhammad set out to perform his last Hajj, known famously as the Farewell Hajj.⁵⁵ On the return journey back from this Hajj, the Prophet stopped at a place known as Ghadeer Khumm – also known as the Pool of Khumm.⁵⁶ At this location, underneath a blistering hot sun with over 100,000 pilgrims in attendance, Prophet Muhammad summoned Ali up to a pulpit, and proceeded to give a speech that Shia Muslims celebrate to this day.⁵⁷ In fact, before specifically bringing Ali up to this pulpit, the Prophet made sure that anyone who had left earlier was

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21-22. Spellings per author’s quotation.

⁵⁵ Anita Rai, *Ghadeer: Government of the People, for the People, by God* (London: Starsighter, 2006), 88; Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 51.

⁵⁶ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 51. Ghadeer and Ghadir are interchangeable.

⁵⁷ Rai, *Ghadeer: Government of the People, for the People, by God*, 90-92; Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 51-52.

brought back, even if some of these pilgrims had left hours before.⁵⁸ Clearly, he was determined to ensure that everyone would hear what he was to say.⁵⁹

The Prophet then gave a detailed, lengthy, and historic sermon at Ghadeer. One of the most quoted and celebrated statements made by the Prophet Muhammad regarding Ali is as follows: “Ali is the master of those whom I am a master.” While several variations of this same proclamation exist, the premise is the same. For anyone who considered the Prophet their master, they were also to consider Ali their master. However, “not one of these...declarations has the absolute clarity of the word ‘successor,’” leading to “what seemed [as] incontrovertible proof to some, remained highly ambiguous to others.”⁶⁰ With this in mind, the reader should note that the Prophet used the word *mawla*, which can have several different meanings in Arabic.⁶¹

Before moving forward, I would like to make the reader aware of the Shia belief that Ghadeer was an act of divine intervention to choose the successor of Prophet Muhammad. In other words, Prophet Muhammad did not choose Ali; rather, God did. Most notably, and what Shia Muslims use to justify their position of divine intervention, is the revelation of the following verse: “O Apostle! Proclaim the Message which hath been Sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, Thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend thee from Men (who mean mischief) for

⁵⁸ Rana Safvi, "How Interpretation of the Word Maula Caused the Shia-Sunni Schism," DailyO (online), <https://www.dailyo.in/lifestyle/prophet-mohammad-muslim-world-shia-sunni/story/1/19373.html>, September 07, 2017.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 35.

⁶¹ Ibid., 53. The reader should be made aware that there exists a certain level of difficulty and confusion when translating from original languages as, often, meanings and connotations can be altered during the course of doing so.

Allah guideth not Those who reject truth. (Chapter 5; verse 67)” [sic].⁶² Shia Muslims understand this verse to mean that “the Message which hath been sent” to Prophet Muhammad at Ghadeer was what he proclaimed when he called Ali the master of all those who consider Prophet Muhammad their master.⁶³

Another Quranic revelation, which Shia Muslims often cite to uphold the validity of Ali’s claim to successorship is as follows: “This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islām [sic] as religion.”⁶⁴ In other words, Shia Muslims understand this verse to mean that the event of Ghadeer, and specifically the naming of Ali as *mawla*, was an event that “perfected” and “completed” the religion of Islam.⁶⁵ As a result, Ghadeer “is one of the most important religious holidays for the Shia...[but] Sunnis, however, do not accept this interpretation.”⁶⁶

Irrespective of what some Muslims may consider the word *mawla* to mean, or even the belief of some Muslims that the event of Ghadeer was clearly an act of divine selection, it was indisputable to some people in attendance the intentions of the Prophet at the time of his speech. In fact, historian Lesley Hazleton contends that Umar himself is said to have congratulated Ali after the speech by stating, “[n]ow morning and evening you are the master of every believing man and woman.”⁶⁷ Did Umar interpret the

⁶² Sayyid A. Razwy, *A Restatement of the History of Islam & Muslims: C.E. 570 to 661* (United Kingdom: World Federation of K. S. I. Muslim Communities, 2017), 200.

⁶³ Safvi, "How Interpretation of the Word Maula Caused the Shia-Sunni Schism," (online), <https://www.dailyo.in/lifestyle/prophet-mohammad-muslim-world-shia-sunni/story/1/19373.html>

⁶⁴ "Surah Al-Ma'idah - 5:3," The Noble Quran (online), <https://quran.com/5/3?translations=20>.

⁶⁵ Safvi, "How Interpretation of the Word Maula Caused the Shia-Sunni Schism," (online), <https://www.dailyo.in/lifestyle/prophet-mohammad-muslim-world-shia-sunni/story/1/19373.html>

⁶⁶ Juan E. Campo and J. Gordon. Melton, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York, NY: Fast on File, 2009), 257.

⁶⁷ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 52.

Prophet's words to mean that Ali was to be his successor, and admitted that after the famous speech at Ghadeer? If so, why the need for the election at Saqifa, which took place after Ghadeer?

Denouement

Now that the roles of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ali have been examined, alongside relevant information about Ghadeer and the following election that took place at Saqifa, the reader may be better able to formulate an understanding of the political motivations at the time. A feud over successorship that has been fueled for generations is unlikely to be put to rest with this brief summary. In fact, even with the many volumes written by the finest historians on this very subject, I still have difficulty understanding why there is no written documentation that substantively reveals who the Prophet wanted as his successor, or why the Prophet was not clearer in his wishes. This confusion might be slightly clarified with a brief summary of the Calamity of Thursday.

What was the Calamity of Thursday?

Three days before the Prophet's death, some of his companions were gathered in his home. The Prophet humbly requested for "a bone and an ink pot so that he could write a statement for them which would prevent them from straying from the right path."⁶⁸ An argument ensued and, in fact, it was Umar who refused to fulfill the Prophet's request.⁶⁹ Umar claimed that the Prophet was suffering from pain and that he might write something unintelligible due to his rapidly declining condition.⁷⁰ The companions in the home began to argue, with some supporting Prophet Muhammad's request and others upholding

⁶⁸ Samāwī, *Then I Was Guided*, 100.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Umar's assertion. This quarrel upset the Prophet and he eventually asked everyone to leave.⁷¹ This account is well-documented in Shia sources, and is even reported in a very prominent Sunni source, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, as follows:

Narrated 'Ubaidullah bin 'Abdullah:

Ibn 'Abbas said, "When the ailment of the Prophet (ﷺ) became worse, he said, 'Bring for me (writing) paper and I will write for you a statement after which you will not go astray.' But 'Umar said, 'The Prophet is seriously ill, and we have got Allah's Book with us and that is sufficient for us.' But the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) differed about this and there was a hue and cry. On that the Prophet (ﷺ) said to them, 'Go away (and leave me alone). It is not right that you should quarrel in front of me.'" Ibn 'Abbas came out saying, "It was most unfortunate (a great disaster) that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) was prevented from writing that statement for them because of their disagreement and noise."⁷²

Some Shia Muslims believe that the Prophet requested a pen so that he could write that the successorship belonged to Ali, an irrefutable written record of his wish as opposed to a verbal directive that could potentially be lost or changed in translation, or simply forgotten. According to the Shia, Umar would not allow this to happen. According to the Sunni, Umar was justified in his view that the Prophet was too ill to write, and that the Quran was more than sufficient for the Muslim community. Without the pen, the words that the Prophet might have written have been left to the imagination – imagination that, in turn, became a driving force in the wedge between the soon-to-be Shia and Sunni Muslims.⁷³

The Calamity of Thursday event begs the question: Why was Umar adamant in his refusal to give the Prophet the pen he requested? If the Shia viewpoint is correct, and the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Muhammad Ibn Ismā'il Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, English reference: Vol. 1, Book 3, Hadith 114. “(ﷺ)” is another commonly seen symbol in Islamic literature and translates to “Peace be upon Him.” Spellings per author's quotation.

⁷³ “Soon-to-be” is included because, before the death of Prophet Muhammad, there was no Shia or Sunni. The followers of Islam were simply Muslim.

Prophet truly was going to write down Ali as his successor, then one can surely see why Umar would not want this to happen. After all, if Ali were to be the first caliph after the Prophet's demise, then Umar may not have gotten a chance to be caliph at any point. If the Sunni viewpoint is correct, and Umar was right in his attempt to restrict the Prophet from writing something unintelligible, then why did the ensuing argument anger the Prophet to the point where he dismissed everyone who was in his home? This event, as well as the two opposing interpretations that emerged, was likely the first clear indication of a division within the Muslim ummah.

I wanted to understand what prompted the Prophet to dismiss the companions rather than insist that he be provided a pen. After all, if he had been insistent enough, I cannot imagine that he would not have been granted his wish. It seemed to be that “the wisdom of the Messenger ruled that he was not to write the document because it had been attacked during his lifetime, let alone after his death.”⁷⁴ In other words, perhaps the Prophet had enough foresight to understand that the attack on his request during the last moments of his life would likely turn into an attack on his written order shortly after his death. After the lengthy event of Ghadeer, Shia Muslims claimed that there was no question as to who deserved the successorship in the eyes of the Prophet. After the event of Saqifa, Sunni Muslims claimed that there was no question as to who was meant to lead the ummah after the death of the Prophet. As the renown historian Lesley Hazleton succinctly puts it, “[t]he more things seemed to be clear, the less clear they had become.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Samāwī, *Then I Was Guided*, 103.

⁷⁵ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 53.

Conclusion

The events I have discussed thus far present a few of the most prominent and controversial examples that led to the division of Muslims into Shia and Sunni. Additionally, these events, as well as the ways in which they have been interpreted, illuminate the deeply held, yet diametrically opposed beliefs of Shia and Sunni Muslims about successorship. Yet, the turning point of successorship proved to be merely the first domino in a lengthy and tragic chain reaction. What began as the Shia viewpoint on the outright refusal of Prophet Muhammad's pen request, to the multiple documented hardships that befell his family after his death, further consolidated the strife between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The deep grievances that one part of the Muslim community felt about successorship requires an analysis of commemoration which is now a cornerstone of sectarianism within Islam.

Chapter 2: Commemoration

Background

The contentious issue of successorship exemplifies the ways in which some Muslims felt wronged and marginalized following the death of Prophet Muhammad and the immediate successorship of Abu Bakr. Those Muslims who believed Ali was the Prophet's rightful successor held onto their grief following what they believed were two very tragic events. Their pain due to the Prophet's death was compounded by their feelings of loss and resentment over what they considered to be Ali's rightful successorship. This grief began as a thread that quickly multiplied and was eventually

stitched into a thick cloth with which a significant number of Shia Muslims still shroud themselves today. Grief and resentment have the power to completely transform communities on a very intrinsic level. While the issue of successorship was foundational in initiating the rift within Islam, several events that took place thereafter caused the Shia to cling to their belief that they had been wronged. It makes sense, then, that commemoration is one of the acts of devotion in which Shia Muslims participate.

Introduction

In their commemoration of tragedies, the Shia convey their desire to hold tightly onto their perception of past events from which their sect originated. In other words, commemoration is not only the most meaningful catharsis aside from retribution, but it also ensures that their interpretation of past adversities is not forgotten. Nonetheless, some acts in which a number of Shia Muslims still participate when commemorating certain events are regarded as controversial by many other Muslims and even non-Muslims. Examining commemoration, therefore, illuminates how deeply embedded the powerful emotions of grief and aggrievement are in certain communities, as well as how those emotions fuel sectarianism within Islam.

Similar to the analysis of successorship through a discussion of key events interpreted differently by Muslims, an examination of key events relevant to commemoration highlights its prevalence in the Islamic faith. Thus, discussing multiple historical events that reinforced the rift between Shia and Sunni Muslims in early Islamic history is imperative to furthering our understanding.⁷⁶ However, to present as balanced

⁷⁶ Due to the vastness of Islamic history, only a few notable historical events are discussed in this chapter on commemoration. There are additional historical events that are of equal importance, but have been omitted due to the thesis' time and length constraints. Moreover, given the limitations of an undergraduate thesis, discussion of Shia and Sunni Muslims in this section on commemoration is general, rather than nuanced and

an account as possible, I have included multiple perspectives on these historical events, the first of which occurs soon after the Prophet's death.

Fatima and The Companions

Certain Shia accounts assert that the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, who was also the wife of Ali, was upset with the election results at Saqifa and deemed Abu Bakr unfit to rule. A notable Shia source reports that "[t]here is no doubt that Fātima (a) [sic] was angry with Abū Bakr [sic]...and she passed away sore in the heart."⁷⁷ From a personal standpoint, it is understandable that Fatima was upset with the results since her husband was not included in the election. However, the Sunni emphasis on consensus as a form of, and integral to, jurisprudence countered attempts to change the election. In fact, Shia sources state that Ali and Fatima went personally to the homes of Muslims to ask for their support of Ali after the election at Saqifa, but to no avail.⁷⁸ It is clear from Fatima's actions that she, like other Shia then as well as now, felt that Ali had been wrongfully denied the successorship following her father's death.

Altercation or Conversation?

The Shia assert that Abu Bakr and Umar became very frustrated with Fatima and Ali's refusal to recognize Abu Bakr's caliphate. Even renown historian Lesley Hazleton asserts that, at a certain point, Abu Bakr and Umar decided that "Ali had to be pulled into line."⁷⁹ This divided the ummah even more, arguably past any willingness to reconcile. Notably, Shia and Sunni Muslims hold starkly contrasting views about what occurred

branch specific. In other words, some accounts may differ from denomination to denomination within both sects.

⁷⁷ Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 19.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 71.

next, as the following narratives and accounts illustrate. It is those differences that formed the building blocks to sectarianism within Islam.

The Shia narrative is that Abu Bakr had sent Umar, generally regarded as the most forceful caliph of the *Rashidun*, to Ali's house in order to demand his allegiance to Abu Bakr.⁸⁰ Hazleton reports the following nuanced version of the event: Umar stationed himself with some of his guards outside of Ali and Fatima's home, and shouted for Ali to come out and give his oath to Abu Bakr.⁸¹ With fire-lit torches in his hands, as well as in the hands of the guards, Umar threatened to burn down the couple's house if Ali did not comply.⁸² Ali, however, resisted Umar's order due to his belief that he was the rightful successor to the Prophet.⁸³

What follows are Shia narratives of what occurred next. Some accounts assert that Umar hurled his body weight against the door in an attempt to force Ali's compliance, and that standing on the other side was Fatima, heavily pregnant, who was crushed against the wall.⁸⁴ Other sources report more violence, in that Umar purposefully set on fire the door of Fatima and Ali's home and, undeterred by "the screaming Fatima calling upon her father," Umar hit her on her side with his sword.⁸⁵ Despite this confrontation, Shia sources maintain that Ali did not pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr until much later.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 289. The general assertion of Umar being regarded as the most forceful caliph is further indicated by the ways in which he dealt with spreading the message of Islam during his rule. Also, *Rashidun* refers to the first four caliphs that ruled after the Prophet's death.

⁸¹ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 71-72.

⁸² Ibid.; Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 18, Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 289.

⁸³ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 71-72.

⁸⁴ Mahboob Illahi, *Doctrine of Terror: Saudi Salafi Religion*. 1st ed. (Victoria, BC, Canada: Friesen Press, 2018), 150.

⁸⁵ Vinay Khetia, "Fatima as a Motif of Contention and Suffering in Islamic Sources," (M.A. Thesis, Concordia University, 2013), 68.

⁸⁶ Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 19.

Hazleton writes that, after the alleged altercation, Fatima suffered a miscarriage. However, historical narratives remain unclear and historians remain divided over whether or not this miscarriage was a result of Umar's actions.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, Shia Muslims viewed at the time, and continue to remember today, the violent confrontation and the death of Fatima's unborn child as yet another calamity that emerged from the earliest known division between the Muslim ummah – successorship. Specifically, "[t]his violent intrusion into Fatima's sacred private space would have been deemed by Shiites [sic] to be an unforgivable transgression. The tragedy for Shiites [sic] is of cosmic proportions."⁸⁸ In fact, this event is commemorated by Shia Muslim in a very significant manner to highlight the threads of misfortune, grief, and injury that began to shroud their community as the Prophet took his last breath.

Sunni Muslims reject the veracity of these events, sometimes outright and sometimes due to the manner in which Shia Muslims retell them. In fact, some sources claim that an altercation did not take place, but instead a conversation between Umar and Ali ensued, which ended when Ali eventually pledged his allegiance to Abu Bakr.⁸⁹ Additionally, some Sunni Muslims believe that Fatima did not suffer a miscarriage, but that her child was born and died at a young age.⁹⁰

The Western academic view of these events takes into consideration the political motivations of successorship, and the various interpretations thereof, and, therefore,

⁸⁷ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 72.

⁸⁸ Khetia, "Fatima as a Motif of Contention and Suffering in Islamic Sources," 69.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁰ "The veracity of this account is disputed, with beliefs being primarily split on sectarian lines between Sunni and Shia denominations." Susan de-Gaia, *Encyclopedia of Women in World Religions: Faith and Culture across History* (New York, NY: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 56.

cautions against taking the starkly contrasting Sunni and Shia narratives as facts.⁹¹ Of note, one common theme emerges in all of these accounts: for a period of time, Ali and Fatima both refuted the validity of Abu Bakr's successorship and actively sought to reverse it.⁹² However, the primary reason Shia Muslims believe Fatima was angry with Abu Bakr would emerge not after the alleged altercation between Ali and Umar, but later.

The Land of Fadak

As has been previously noted, the threads of grief and injury sewn into Shia narratives of key historical events, albeit narratives which Sunnis largely reject, serve to consolidate not only the current Shia-Sunni division, but, more specifically, the marginalization that many Shia Muslims feel to date. Fadak is yet another historical event that causes significant rancor within the Shia-Sunni reconciliation discourse. The following account attempts to offer a holistic view of the issue. Sectarian nuances, however, are interspersed and noted as such.

Shortly after the heavily disputed event at Fatima and Ali's home, Fatima asked Abu Bakr for her right to the Prophet's estate after his death.⁹³ Specifically, she requested the land to the north of Medina, known as Fadak, which generated profit due to an abundance of date palm orchards.⁹⁴ In Islam, daughters are entitled to a portion of their fathers' assets after their deaths, so her request was not prohibited or extraordinary.⁹⁵ In fact, several accounts have documented the theological understanding of the Quranic

⁹¹ Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker, *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 186.

⁹² Jafarian, *History of the Caliphs: From the Death of the Messenger(s) to the Decline of the Umayyad Dynasty 11-132 AH*, 19.

⁹³ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 290; Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 72.

⁹⁴ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 72.

⁹⁵ "Surah An-Nisa - 4:7," The Noble Quran (online), <https://quran.com/4/7?translations=131>.

verse, “[g]ive to close relatives their due...,” to explain Prophet Muhammad’s likely behest of Fadak to Fatima.⁹⁶ It is important to note that her request, in and of itself, is recognized historically. However, at the time that she requested Fadak from the caliph, she encountered resistance.

Hazleton writes that Abu Bakr claimed the estate belonged to the community and was not the possession of any one individual. She goes on to note that Abu Bakr told Fatima that the Prophet did not intend for any of his assets to be given to heirs, and that any remaining assets following his death represented “alms” belonging to the Muslim community.⁹⁷ A Sunni source also corroborates this by reporting that Abu Bakr told Fatima that he heard the Prophet say that anything left after his death was for charity and was not to be inherited by anyone.⁹⁸ Notably, however, Abu Bakr provided extensively for the widows of the Prophet, including his own daughter, Aisha.⁹⁹ For example, after the Prophet’s death, “Aisha received valuable property in Medina as well as...in Bahrain.”¹⁰⁰ Seemingly, the message was that “the House of Muhammad was the House of Islam, and all were equal within it,” but that “some were more equal than others.”¹⁰¹

Many Shia sources report that, after this incident, Fatima refused to speak to Abu Bakr and Umar until her death.¹⁰² Sunni sources, however, offer a starkly different narrative. What follows, then, is a brief analysis of the end of Fatima’s life, which serves to exemplify how sectarian differences in historical narratives and in the communities’

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 72.

⁹⁸ As-Sallaabee, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*, 304-305.

⁹⁹ Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51.

¹⁰⁰ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 72.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 290.

divergent takeaways of historical events have contributed to the controversy that surrounds commemoration.

The Death and Burial of The Prophet's Daughter

Many Shia Muslims hold close to their hearts their version of key events, such as Fatima's altercation with Umar and the miscarriage of her son, as well as her denied request of a portion of her father's estate. These are crucial to the Shia justification of Fatima's anger with the first two caliphs. Further supporting their justification is a notable quote from the Prophet, "Fatima is a part of me, and he who makes her angry, makes me angry."¹⁰³ If the Shia explanation of Fatima's anger is correct, then it is naïve to assume that Fatima was not upset with Abu Bakr. Her anger, then, might lead one to assume that Abu Bakr had inadvertently also angered the Prophet. While this claim may be shocking, considering that Abu Bakr was a close companion of the Prophet, it is important to understand the ways in which the Shia consider it to be true.

Before Fatima's death, she requested that her body be buried in the middle of the night, with no witnesses other than her family.¹⁰⁴ Specifically, as the Shia retell it, Fatima wanted to ensure that Abu Bakr would not be present at her funeral.¹⁰⁵ In fact, she wanted only the members of her house to be in attendance.¹⁰⁶ An interesting parallel exists here: both Prophet Muhammad and Fatima were buried without the presence of the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar. A "clandestine burial like that of her father," Fatima's remains were buried in a grave that is still unmarked and, therefore, unknown to Muslims

¹⁰³ Muhammad Ibn Ismā'il Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, English reference: Vol. 5, Book 57, Hadith 61.

¹⁰⁴ Husayn, *The Early History of Islam*, 290-291; Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 73-74; Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 74.

even today.¹⁰⁷ Although conjecture, perhaps Fatima wanted to replicate the vacancy surrounding her father's burial. Or, perhaps, she hoped that Muslims would wonder why her grave was unmarked, and would investigate the reason behind her request to Ali, her husband, to be buried furtively.

Sunni sources do not consider the Shia retelling of Fatima's refusal to speak to Abu Bakr to be accurate. Nor do they agree with the Shia narrative regarding Fatima's funeral procession. In fact, one Sunni source claims that it was Abu Bakr who led the obligatory death prayer before Fatima was buried, and that the two were on very good terms before her death.¹⁰⁸ However, this same source does include a report which noted that it was Ali who led the death prayer.¹⁰⁹ Irrespective of this nuance, numbers of sources indicate that Abu Bakr was not aware of Fatima's funeral procession. Moreover, Fatima's unmarked grave aligns with the viewpoint that only her immediate family was present and aware of her burial place. Overall, these counter narratives greatly contribute to sectarianism and are indicative of how deeply rooted some of the historical differences and divisions are between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

Shia Muslims commemorate the death of Fatima on a yearly basis, following the lunar calendar. They participate in and listen to mournful poetry, recount historical events in a similar fashion as they have been portrayed herein, and memorialize the tribulations that the Prophet's daughter endured so shortly after his death. The commemoration does not end here, nor does the history of calamities that the Shia assert were experienced by the Prophet and his family. In fact, these descriptions seem to become more harrowing as

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁸ As-Sallaabee, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*, 308-309.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 309.

Shia narratives recount subsequent events. For example, if the treatment of the daughter of the Prophet is remembered as traumatic, the ways in which the son of the Prophet's daughter – Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussain – was dealt with are significantly more distressing.

Karbala, Muharram, and Ashura

The Battle of Karbala is arguably, at its core, the historical event that defines Shia Islam. While the historical and political implications of the Battle of Karbala will not be discussed, for the sake of conciseness, the crux is to note just how ruthlessly the grandson of the Prophet was treated. Ask any Shia Muslim about Ashura, and they will likely immediately begin to recount the oppression that Hussain and his family faced. As Lesley Hazleton states, “[w]hat happened at Karbala in the seventh century is the foundation story of the Sunni-Shia split...known to Sunnis...and all but engraved on the heart of every Shia.”¹¹⁰

Along with his companions and family, Hussain was left hungry and thirsty preceding the tragic event of Ashura – the Arabic term used for the 10th of Muharram.¹¹¹ Hussain himself, as well as his children, brothers, nephews, and companions were killed in brutal ways – all before being beheaded.¹¹² After the death of Hussain, the women who were with him were paraded around town after their veils had been forcibly removed.¹¹³ The son of Ali and Fatima, both of whom are commemorated in ways that reflect their

¹¹⁰ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 2. The reader should note that Muharram is the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 184, 187.

¹¹² Ibid., 185-188.

¹¹³ "Chapter 25: Persecution after Karbala," Al-Islam (online), <https://www.al-islam.org/the-hidden-truth-about-karbala-ak-ahmed/chapter-25-persecution-after-karbala>, October 04, 2015, accessed March 14, 2021.

own separate tragedies, had been dealt with in a manner that wove ever more tightly together the threads of misfortune, grief, and aggrievement felt by Shia Muslims.

For centuries, these narratives have been retold night after night during the month of Muharram for Shia Muslims.¹¹⁴ Sunni Muslims, for the most part, do not commemorate the events of Muharram or the Battle of Karbala in the same way or to the same extent. In fact, some Sunni Muslims celebrate the month of Muharram because it is the first month of the Islamic calendar and, therefore, is similar to the Western equivalent of New Year.¹¹⁵ However, vilifying the group of Sunni Muslims that participates in celebration during Muharram, as some Shia do, is not conducive to reconciliation.

As discussed, generational reiteration of these tragedies plays an important role in how Shia Muslims hold on to their beliefs. Most Sunni Muslims who do not celebrate the month of Muharram are usually indifferent or uninformed about the significance of the month. This drastic contrast in commemoration, or complete lack thereof, causes further division – increasingly so with each passing year. While groups of one major sect of Islam send out congratulatory and jubilant well-wishes, groups of the other major sect prepare for weeks of continuous mourning.

Sunni Muslims' views on mourning may also play a large part in their reluctance to commemorate Muharram, the Battle of Karbala, and Ashura in the same way that Shia Muslims do. One point that is often cited by Sunni Muslims, as well as by scholars, is that Aisha had reported a saying of Prophet Muhammad's, which forbade "[women] to mourn for anyone who dies for more than three days, except for her husband."¹¹⁶ Thus, mourning

¹¹⁴ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 188.

¹¹⁵ "The Islamic New Year: What Is Muharram?" Culture Trip (online), <https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/articles/the-islamic-new-year-what-is-muharram/>, September 12, 2018, accessed March 14, 2021.

¹¹⁶ Muhammad Ibn Ismā'il Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, English reference: Vol. 4, Book 27, Hadith 3555.

the events of Muharram centuries after they occurred would be viewed as wrong if Aisha's statement is true. Additionally, most Sunni Muslims fast on Ashura. This has caused severe dissent between the Shia and Sunni sects. In Islam, fasting is usually an of happiness or something that one does to express gratitude to God. Sunni Muslims justify their decision to fast based on a celebration of Prophet Moses being saved from the Pharaoh of Egypt, or, sometimes, other events that express happiness, which occurred before the Battle of Karbala.¹¹⁷

It may not be conducive to argue about traditions. After all, the rift between Shia and Sunni Muslims is less about traditions than it is about education and respect of differences. Rather than being seen as a day full of blessings and happiness, or a day without any meaning, it is important for Sunni Muslims to recognize the ways in which Ashura is a day of tragedy and pain for their Shia counterparts. Equally important is the willingness of Shia Muslims to understand how Ashura means something different, or nothing at all, to Sunni Muslims. Finding a middle ground and nurturing respect for one another is absolutely imperative for both sects to actively engage in. By doing so, the willingness and ability to have restorative conversations greatly increases. After all, meaningful conversations that lead to understanding can only occur when two parties are willing to set aside their animosities and intolerances to truly listen to one another.

Controversy

The controversial acts of commemoration that cause additional dissent between Shia and Sunni Muslims are heavily attributed to the aforementioned historical events;

¹¹⁷ "The Islamic New Year: What Is Muharram?" Culture Trip (online), <https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/articles/the-islamic-new-year-what-is-muharram/>

specifically, the ways in which a number of Shia Muslims commemorate Muharram. One of the more controversial acts of commemoration is self-flagellation, which many Sunni Muslims, and non-Muslims, frown upon. While numerous Shia Muslims are more moderate in their commemorative acts, there are, most assuredly, some Shia who participate in extreme forms of commemoration. Self-flagellation in most mournful gatherings of Shia Muslims is limited to beating one's chest in rhythmic unison to mournful poetry and prose, but acts of self-flagellation have included throwing blade-tipped daggers across one's back repeatedly.¹¹⁸ While such acts are commemorative in nature, they often put all Shia Muslims – as a group – in a less than desirable light.

Many notable Shia clerics and scholars have denounced acts of excessive self-flagellation, citing that they not only are harmful to the individual, but also detract from what Muharram and Hussain's story truly aims to portray.¹¹⁹ The trend of generational transference of certain traditions and beliefs is just as prevalent in the Shia sect regarding this matter as it is in the Sunni sect regarding fasting on Ashura. As a result, the controversy seldom abates and, instead, seems to intensify with time.

Conclusion

A consistent theme in Shia historical narratives and, therefore, in Shia identity is the denied rights of Prophet Muhammad and his family. Prophet Muhammad was denied a pen on his death bed, Ali was denied his supposed right at immediate successorship, Fatima was denied her right to the land of Fadak, and Hussain and his family were denied water preceding his brutal death in Karbala. This motif, along with a few others that have

¹¹⁸ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 189-190.

¹¹⁹ Teymoori, Ali. "Shia Scholars' Fatwas on Tatbir." Ijtihad Network (online), <http://ijtihadnet.com/shia-scholars-fatwas-on-tatbir/>, August 24, 2020, accessed March 14, 2021.

not been mentioned for purposes of concision, consolidates the Shia view of abandonment by and grievance towards a majority of the Muslim community, which manifested in a division between those who denied and those who were denied. The aforementioned historical occurrences were not necessarily “Shia versus Sunni” events. Nonetheless, the ways in which those events have been, and still are, retold and commemorated illuminate which sect has held onto grief and grievance and which sect has not, thereby fueling the fires of sectarianism.

While the politicization of faith and, specifically, sectarian politicization will be discussed in the next chapter, historian Lesley Hazleton offers a profound summation of the ways in which grief and aggrievement have shaped the Shia community and have aided in the politicization of Islam: “[A] sense of disinheritance...[was] sear[ed] deep into Shia hearts and minds, a wound that would fester through to the twentieth century, there to feed off opposition to Western colonialism and erupt first in the Iranian revolution...and then, as the twenty-first century began, in the war in Iraq.”¹²⁰

Chapter 3: Politicization

Background

From a purely historical standpoint, religion and politics have routinely been interconnected and, frequently, with negative connotations. There have been numerous debates on the intermingling of political issues and religious mandates. Issues that are at the center of these two factors evoke a great deal of controversy. Clearly, religion and

¹²⁰ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 70-71.

politics have an intriguing relationship, but what happens when religion becomes politicized? More specifically, what happens when a religious faith is turned into a political weapon? In Islam, politicization has led to extremism, arguably in every sect and branch. The Shia-Sunni schism is not limited to internal conflict or disagreement. The rift between Shia and Sunni Muslims, especially in a more contemporary context, has widened due to the politicization that began after the Battle of Karbala. That rift truly erupted at the turn of the 20th century. Moreover, and in the words of the renowned Iranian-American political scientist Vali Nasr, “[i]t is not possible to write on these issues without also writing about a topic of great interest to the West in recent decades: Islam’s complex and seemingly unbreakable ties to politics.”¹²¹

Introduction

The greatest benefit to analyzing politicization and, subsequently, extremism within Islam is understanding that a majority of the contemporary issues may simply be fueled by particular political motivations. It is necessary to discern these implications – for example, if there are forces that are actively working against Shia-Sunni unity – before trying to initiate reconciliation. Therefore, examining politicization is imperative to understanding the contemporary existence of sectarianism in the faith of Islam.

Due to the vast nature of Islamic history and politics, I will examine only a few events that exemplify the links between politicization and extremism, and will attempt to explain how these events have contributed to the current Shia-Sunni conflict.

Additionally, I hope to uncover whether or not Islam has been weaponized by persons or

¹²¹ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 28-29.

entities within the faith as well as by entities outside the faith. I also seek to determine if there are certain individuals or groups that are benefitting from the division and, if so, in what ways are they reinforcing this strife.

Although the early history of sectarian politics in Islam is important, I will focus on the more contemporary examples of politicization. With this in mind, it is necessary to briefly discuss evidence of early politicization and to examine how events at the time contributed to the current manifestation of sectarianism in Islam. Looking back at the contentious debate regarding successorship, which has been thoroughly examined in this thesis, it is not farfetched to conclude that political power, or lack thereof, was at the heart of the issue. Commemoration by each sect solidified – and still does – that core difference in belief, and politicization continues to fuel the division further. As stated repeatedly throughout the first two chapters of this thesis, the three turning points of successorship, commemoration, and politicization are crucial to unraveling the contemporary existence of sectarianism in Islam. Picking up from the end of Chapter 2, I will begin my examination with the politicization that began after the Battle of Karbala.

Extremism and Contemporary Islamic Politicization

Before analyzing what extremism and contemporary Islamic politicization are, it is first vital to define what I mean by extremism. Religious extremism is different from political extremism, which is different from violent extremism, and, frankly, all three forms of extremism are arguably subjective. In this thesis, religious extremism refers to what inhabits the fringes of religious practices in a specific religious community. Similarly, political extremism can be considered the political beliefs and actions that inhabit the margins of what is deemed acceptable in a particular group. For example, Shia

Muslims may not consider self-flagellation to be a form of religious extremism, but most Sunni Muslims would contend that it is.

Specifically, I will be examining historical forms of political Islamic extremism with a couple of questions in mind: To what extent has Islam been utilized by political leaders or figures to advance certain agendas or ambitions? And, more specifically, to what extent has political extremism developed on both sides of the schism – Shia and Sunni? For a period of time, Shia and Sunni Muslims peacefully coexisted. What changed? Analyzing historical evidence of political extremism is the best way to gauge the depth of this discord.

The Aftermath of Karbala and the Safavid Empire's Conversion of Iran

Notably, “[f]or a few centuries after the Battle of Karbala, the Shia were in the minority and basically had very little political power...[leaving] the main political authority in the Islamic world...in the hands of the Sunnis.”¹²² Despite this, however, the two sects lived in peace for centuries until the “Mongol invasion destroyed the Abbasid caliphate that had ruled from Baghdad.”¹²³ What occurred thereafter is known as the Golden Age of Islam, during which power was passed through several empires in the Middle East.¹²⁴ However, the events that followed altered the course of Islamic history and politics quite drastically.

Simply put, “[i]n the 16th century, three major empires controlled the region - the Mughals from India, the Ottoman Turks and the Safavids,” with the Mughals and

¹²² Ramtin Arablouei and Rund Abedelfatah, “War of the Worlds,” *Throughline* podcast (18 April 2019 episode), NPR; retrieved 18 September 2020.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Ottomans being Sunni and the Safavids being Shia.¹²⁵ In fact, and although Iran is currently widely known as a majority Shia country, it used to be “the seat of Sunni philosophy, theology, [and] high learning.”¹²⁶ That is, until the Safavids came along.¹²⁷

The Safavid empire seized control of Iran and declared the country to be Shia because the ruling dynasty itself was Shia.¹²⁸ “[M]uch like medieval European princes, once you took over a territory, the identity of the prince becomes the identity of the territory. And partly, also they wanted to create a differentiation with the two other rival empires on their borders,” the Mughals and Ottomans.¹²⁹ Afterwards, through patronage, persecution, and punishment, the Shia Safavid empire was successful in its conversion of Iran from a majority Sunni country to a majority Shia country – a historic event that would set the stage for contemporary divisions and political motivations.¹³⁰

The political scientist Nasr argues that these events had enormous consequences for the faith, for Iran, and for the region. He writes that after conversion “was achieved by the Safavid kings of Iran, the [Shia] faith has become closely enmeshed with Iranian identity, and the two have influenced each other...[with] the identification of Iran and Shiism...[having] highly provocative consequences for the Middle East in the twentieth century.”¹³¹

World War I, Sykes-Picot, and Saddam Hussein

The 20th century was quite eventful in regard to Islamic history; specifically, the

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 79-80.

era of the First World War. This was when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, “and all of the land it controlled in the Middle East [went] to the allies,” the victorious Americans, French, and British.¹³² This is also when the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, named after the two men who led the effort to divide and redraw the Middle East, came into effect. The agreement, essentially, set out to “carve...[the Middle East] into new nation-states” without any respect for the various “tribes, ethnic groups, [and] religious factions” that were a part of the vast region.¹³³ Considering all of these factors in retrospect, the agreement marked the onset of a serious issue. Several of the countries that Sykes-Picot set out to carve or reshape were very diverse and their populations were greatly disturbed. This caused tension that “began to build between different communities, including Sunni and Shia, that used to get along pretty well.”¹³⁴

The mid-20th century was when tensions really began to boil over, and “revolutionary wave[s] swept through the region...[with] secular dictators gaining control, including in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein eventually came to power.”¹³⁵ Saddam Hussein, a Sunni who ruled over a majority Shia population, was a key figure who both fueled and affected political Islamic extremism.¹³⁶ He used his “flair for drama and [his] keen sense of history” to embed sectarianism under his rule for his own political motivations.¹³⁷

Political extremism in Islam is, essentially, a product of modernity and the Cold War/post-Cold War world. Western intervention added to the underlying tension that Shia and Sunni Muslims began to experience after World War One. Irrespective of their

¹³² Arablouei and Abedelfatah, “War of the Worlds,” *Throughline* podcast.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 166.

¹³⁷ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 81-82.

centuries of peaceful accord, “[a]s Rwandans and residents of the Balkans can sadly testify, mixed marriages and a history of communal coexistence are no guarantee against fratricide.”¹³⁸ In the post-World War Two era, the United States, “[m]otivated by Cold War ideology” and strategic concerns, inserted itself heavily into Iranian and Iraqi affairs.¹³⁹ It was this intervention which “helped create the intense anti-Westernism that today underlies both Sunni and Shia radicalism.”¹⁴⁰ Although this thesis’ purpose is not to delve into the political motivations of the West, awareness that the West – an external player – has contributed to Islamic political extremism – the internal Shia-Sunni schism – is crucial to understanding that Western intervention had caused the “Sunni-Shia split...[to] become as politicized as when it began.”¹⁴¹ But, back to the 20th century.

The Iranian Revolution and The Iran-Iraq War

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, which occurred thirty-four years after the end of World War Two and twenty-six years after the CIA-assisted overthrow of the Iranian government of Premier Mohammad Mosaddeq, has often being associated with the “turn to political Islam.”¹⁴² It is important to understand the implications for how “millions of supporters” stood for the eruption of the Iranian Revolution, led by Ruhollah Khomeini, known in the West as Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁴³ Khomeini had

relied on Shia messianism to confirm his own leadership of [the] revolt...[his] followers used messianic symbols and language to give him an aura of power...[and] this was designed to compel support for the revolutionary movement by suggesting that the choice before Iranians was between absolute good and absolute evil...[spreading a message that

¹³⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁹ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 208.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 208-209.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 209.

¹⁴² Arablouei and Abedelfatah, “War of the Worlds,” *Throughline* podcast.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

whoever] failed to fight on behalf of the Twelfth Imam were condemned to damnation.¹⁴⁴

In a majority Shia country, using such symbolic and emotional rhetoric to further political ambitions exemplifies the benefit that some held – and still hold – in regard to the internal schism. Eventually, Khomeini came to power and became the first Supreme Leader of Iran. Nasr highlights an interesting comparison regarding this event and the Battle of Karbala in Shia Islamic history with the following: "Shia history was none other than the famous dialectic of class war, culminating in a revolution. It had all begun in Karbala and would end with an Iranian revolution."¹⁴⁵ Notably, how this revolution relates to political Islam is the strain it applied on a global scale. It introduced a tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as several other Sunni countries in the region, and that tension continues to shape global conflicts to date.¹⁴⁶

A few months after the Iranian Revolution, Iraq's secular dictator, Saddam Hussein, commanded the invasion of Iran primarily for oil, but also for other reasons. As a result, "Iran mount[ed] an epic defense and repel[led] the Iraqi army after a few years. The Iraqis offer[ed] a peace deal, but Khomeini reject[ed] it and, in retaliation, call[ed] on the

¹⁴⁴ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 28. The Twelfth Imam is a direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad – a descendant of Hussain – who is believed by the Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Shia Muslims to be in occultation. Notably, this is significant because there was a theological and eschatological importance of the Twelfth Imam and its basis for Khomeini's theory of government. Wilayat al-faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist), and more specifically, the general, all-encompassing guardianship espoused by Khomeini (what is known as Wilayat al-motlaqah), is based upon the idea that the jurists are the only qualified persons to rule/govern in the absence and occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Moreover, that guardianship is the same guardianship that the Twelfth would have. It is "motlaq," meaning general or all-encompassing. In other words, Khomeini intentionally used the importance of the Twelfth Imam's standing in Shia Islam to fuel people in fulfilling his own political motivations. Thanks to Dr. Cyrus Contractor for this insight. For further reading, see Nasr's *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 131-134.

¹⁴⁵ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 128.

¹⁴⁶ Arablouei and Abedelfatah, "War of the Worlds," *Throughline* podcast.

Iranian military to invade Iraq under the guise of a religious war.”¹⁴⁷ Thus began the Iran-Iraq War in 1980.¹⁴⁸ The same tactics Khomeini used during the Iranian Revolution, he used again to “garner support for the battle against Iraq.”¹⁴⁹ In fact, Iran used such powerful rhetoric and symbolism that “thousands of volunteers...[were so] [c]onvinced of the religious significance of their sacrifice...[that they] confounded the Iraqi army’s conventional tactics by using their bodies to set off mines and even to swarm Iraqi tanks or overrun Iraqi gun positions.”¹⁵⁰

The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War greatly inflamed sectarianism and “soaked it in blood.”¹⁵¹ Behind-the-scenes political motivations on a global scale, though, were carefully planned throughout the late 20th and well into the 21st centuries. While these historical developments are crucial to world history, sectarian divisions were largely framed by the rhetoric spewed by leaders who wanted to remain in power. Saddam Hussein fueled these divisions, too. After the United States’ invasion of Iraq, Saddam compared “Baghdad’s fall to the Americans in 2003 to its fall to the Mongols in 1258...[h]is implication was clear: just as the Shia had betrayed Islam in 1258, he was saying, so they were betraying it again in 2003.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 131.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 131-132. “Many of those who willingly ran into the mine fields were young male orphans. They were given necklaces with keys hanging on the end, and were told that the keys were the keys to heaven. The young boys and men who, on their own volition, ran into the minefields did so to clear the way for conventional troops.” Thanks to Dr. Cyrus Contractor for this additional detail.

¹⁵¹ Arablouei and Abedelfatah, “War of the Worlds,” *Throughline* podcast.

¹⁵² Ibid.; see also Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 81-82. Saddam Hussein made a deliberate calculation to present himself as more religiously-minded at this point. He hoped to stir love of country from both a nationalist and religious perspective. Thanks to Dr. Cyrus Contractor for this insight.

As Hitler had done during World War II and Milosevic had done in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, as Khomeini had done in Iran during the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein did the same in Iraq in 2003. In their efforts to maintain their power block, all of these leaders had intentionally sown divisions in communities. Purposeful fearmongering, anxiety due to war or the threat of war, and an overwhelming desire for a semblance of security and control leads people down the dangerous path of scapegoating. While “[h]istory and theology may establish the identities of rival groups...the actual bones of contention are far less likely to be religious ideas than matters of concrete power...doled out along communal lines.”¹⁵³

Conclusion

Clearly, several historical events over significant amounts of time have solidified the presence of politics in Islam. Nonetheless, the basic premise still remains: Islam and politics have been interconnected since the Prophet’s death, and, arguably, even preceding that event. From the conflict of successorship to the ramifications of Western intervention in the Middle East, politicization is a key factor that characterizes present-day Islam. Evidently, “[a]s with any matter of faith, in modern America as much as in the Middle East of centuries ago, the Sunni-Shia split could always be manipulated for political advantage.”¹⁵⁴

Though Vali Nasr is discussing sectarian identities specifically in the Middle East in the following passages, he touches on an important reality for Islamic sectarianism on a global scale:

¹⁵³ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 28.

¹⁵⁴ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 208.

[Sectarian identities] matter to society and politics, but the conflicts that they animate are due to the lopsided distribution of resources and power that have benefited one sect at the cost of the other. Over time the Shia-Sunni conflict can be brought under control only if the distribution of power and resources reflects...demographic realities.¹⁵⁵

Nasr asserts that while there is a clear power struggle, there is room for reconciliation. He goes on to write, “[a]s is the case with all disputes involving religion or ethnicity, loyalties die hard, but they are less likely to command bloodshed if they are divorced from social, economic, and political injustices.”¹⁵⁶

After analyzing all of the aforementioned events, it becomes clear that, in more ways than one, politicization has changed the climate in which Islam exists. While sectarianism does transcend internal conflict, even the external issues feed back into the internalized animosity that exists between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The main question, however, still remains: How have all of these various factors manifested into the contemporary existence of Islamic sectarianism? Successorship, commemoration, and politicization can surely factor as historical justifications for Islamic sectarianism, but what are the contemporary justifications? To understand this question, I have dedicated the next part of this thesis to analyzing survey responses from more than three hundred individuals who might be able to shed light on that question – present-day Shia and Sunni Muslims.

¹⁵⁵ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 253.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

Part 2: An Analysis of the Contemporary Shia-Sunni Schism

Preface

I would like to preface the second part of this thesis by making the reader aware of some of the constraints I confronted upon initiating this study. Due to IRB deadlines, I was required to send my survey to the committee preceding the actual conduction of my research. In other words, the survey questions had to be composed before I began the bulk of my research. Thus, several of the questions I had initially asked became somewhat irrelevant throughout the course of my research for the first part of this thesis.

Retrospectively, I wish that I had asked questions that would have furthered some of the ideas about which I would have liked to elaborate on in Part 1. Namely, I would have liked to ask respondents what their ethnic background was, what their opinions were on the politicization of Islam, and other such questions. However, given the way the process of thesis research works, when I began this project, those questions did not seem as pertinent as they were by the time I ended my thesis. Even so, I find the following analysis to be significant to understanding much of the reasoning behind contemporary sectarianism.

Disclaimers and Notes

In order to understand current opinions among Muslims about the contemporary Shia-Sunni divide and the possibility of a generational transference of this schism, I composed a survey of questions per IRB standards that I sent out to multiple Muslim communities. Although I obtained more than 350 responses without filters, I only included in my data those surveys that were fully (and, if not, then mostly) completed. Moreover, I attempted to ensure a relatively equal number of Shia and Sunni respondents.

After applying these filters, the number of Shia (Ithnaa' Ashari/Twelve) respondents was 149 (54.78%) and Sunni (various branch specifications) respondents was 123 (45.22%); the total number of respondents included in my data set was 272. Although the survey responses are not meant to represent the entirety of both sects, I hope to indicate a trend within both groups in regard to the questions I posed. For the sake of concision, I particularly focused on the questions and responses thereto that were most applicable to my thesis. As the reader will notice, many of the questions run parallel to the historical events that were discussed in Part 1 of this thesis.

Branch specifications for both sects were inputted into the surveys I sent out, but there were only two Ismaili Shia Muslims who participated in the survey. As a result, their responses are not included since it would not be feasible to depict any kind of trend from only two completed surveys. Therefore, the Shia sect is limited to responses by Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelve) Shia Muslims, whereas multiple responses were obtained from each of the Sunni branches included in the survey.

The survey will henceforth be referred to as Appendix 1, and any relevant figures will be noted as P1.1 (Part 1, Figure 1), P2.1 (Part 2, Figure 1), etc. The entire *Figures* section will be labelled as Appendix 2.¹⁵⁷ Appendix 1 will be included in the back of the thesis, before Appendix 2 (*Figures*) and References, so the reader can easily reference these items when they are mentioned in the following analysis. Since there are two parts to Appendix 1, I will be referring to the questions and figures from Part 1 as "P1Q#1._" and "Figure P1.1" and from Part 2 as "P2Q#2._" and "Figure P2.1," respectively, in order to keep the following analysis as simple as possible. Moreover, any specific open-ended

¹⁵⁷ All figures were created by *SurveyMonkey*; the survey itself was distributed via *SurveyMonkey* as well.

answers to questions are paired with a numerical identifier. If a respondent inputted an informative answer that I choose to include in my analysis, then their response will be referred to as “Respondent P1Q#1.1” rather than a name or email address (i.e., if I choose to input an answer from P1Q#1, then the identifier will appear as Respondent P1Q#1.1, etc.) – as per IRB protocol.

As the reader will note in the *Study Methods* portion, the number of respondents in the study do not always match the number of respondents that answered each question. Due to IRB protocols, many of the questions posed could not be “required” to answer – or they had an open answer/skip option. As a result, some of the data may show differing responses than the noted respondent number. Please keep this in mind when analyzing the data presented.

I feel it is important to provide some context on what the age of the respondent pool looks like for both sects. As seen in Figure P1.1, most of the Shia respondent pool falls between the ages of 18 and 40, but there are thirty-six respondents of or over the age of 41, so I believe that this is an appropriate pool from which to gather information about generational transference. In Figure P1.2, most of the Sunni respondent pool is between the ages of 18 and 40. Similar to the Shia respondent pool, however, there are thirty-seven Sunni respondents of or over the age of 41, so this also serves as an appropriate pool from which to gather generational transference information. Aside from these factors (sect/branch/age), there are no other respondent identifiers that I find relevant to include.

Study Methods

The purpose of this study has been to identify whether or not there is a generational transference that has contributed to contemporary Islamic sectarianism,

specifically, the Shia-Sunni schism. And, if so, does this generational transference have much to do with the historical events from which these rifts have originated? In other words, are the current divisions between Shia and Sunni Muslims related to the historical divisions or are they a byproduct of narratives that have been passed down generationally?

To understand this contentious and complex issue, I decided to conduct a mixed-methods survey that touched on these themes. Throughout the survey, questions were posed on historical events and contemporary issues, as well as some personal opinions on the divide, in order to gauge just how deeply embedded these issues are. Appendix 1 was sent out across various platforms and through snowballing measures to ensure an adequate respondent pool.

Appendix 1 presented different questions based on what was answered. For example, if a respondent chose choice A on P1Q#3, then they were directed to P1Q#4; if another respondent chose choice B on P1Q#3, then they were directed to P1Q#5. I decided to do this in order to better understand why some respondents chose specific answers. Notably, the analysis of these choices proved to be significant.

Throughout my analysis of the data, I decided it was best to do a comparison of the first part of Appendix 1, as it was relatively similar for all respondents. For the second part of Appendix 1, which included sect/branch specific questions, I decided to include direct answers and observations with some comparisons. Doing so made it easier to view trends, while also providing insight into how some of the respondents chose to justify their answers.

Data and Results

As aforementioned, I decided to conduct a comparative analysis between the two

sects: Shia and Sunni Muslims. Parallel to the way I presented information in the first part of my thesis, it seemed most conducive to first exemplify how each sect feels about successorship. As seen in Figure P1.3, of the 121 Shia Muslims who answered P1Q#5 from Appendix 1, 118 (97.52%) believe Ali was the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad whereas only two (1.65%) Shia Muslims believe that Abu Bakr was the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad. One (0.83%) Shia Muslim inputted an open-ended response to this question, which stated their uncertainty on the topic. Figure P1.4 depicts a different trend; of the ninety-one Sunni Muslims who answered the same P1Q#5 from Appendix 1, sixty-six (72.53%) believe Abu Bakr was the rightful successor whereas twelve (13.19%) believe Ali to have been the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad. Interestingly, there were thirteen (14.29%) Sunni Muslims who chose to input open-ended answers, with most of the responses stating their lack of knowledge or indifference about the issue. An analysis of the number of respondents from each sect who were aware/unaware of the issue (0.83% of Shia respondents versus 14.29% of Sunni respondents) supports the argument that majority groups do not have to hold on to certain beliefs or traditions. By this, I mean that Sunni Muslims' unawareness of occurrences that are significant to Shia Muslims furthers the sense of marginalization affecting Shia communities.

P1Q#6 from Appendix 1 asks the respondent their justification for their answer to P1Q#5. I found this section to be quite interesting when examining the responses of both sects. Rather than include the responses in Appendix 2 (*Figures*), I have inserted some answers below with numerical identifiers, as aforementioned, and have noted which responses came from which sect.

Respondent P1Q#6.1 (Shia): “Due to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) announcing him as his rightful successor at the event of Ghadir. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated "Man kunto Maula fahaaza Ali-un Maula" meaning "For whoever I am his master, Ali his is master" thus clarifying that Ali-ibn Abi-Talib would lead over his people.”¹⁵⁸

Respondent P1Q#6.2 (Shia): “Eid-e-Ghadeer when Rasoolullah’s stopped everyone in the blazing sun for hours to announce the succession of Imam Ali (as) after him. Rasoolullah had not done anything similar to or for anybody else.”

Respondent P1Q#6.3 (Sunni): “From my understanding, Abu Bakr was chosen by the community to be the first successor. I believe this to be correct as I think the community should decide the next “leader.” In addition, he was the Prophet’s greatest companion.”

Respondent P1Q#6.4 (Sunni): “While Ali (R) is extremely dear to me, Abu Bakr (R) (also extremely dear to me) was selected by Rasoolullah PBUH to lead following him. Two things I can think of as further justification are that Abu Bakr was considered the best of the Companions and was senior in age to Ali. Ali was almost like Mohammad’s son (and son in law and cousin) and was a younger version of him, if you will, who was well placed as a later caliph, due to his juniority and thus ability to lead later in life.”

As the reader will recall from Chapter 1 of the first part of this thesis, many modern-day Muslims hold the same beliefs regarding successorship as the Muslims who were present immediately following Prophet Muhammad’s death. Of the four responses I have chosen to include, all of them indicate generational transference.

P1Q#7 from Appendix 1 asks if the respondents’ personal beliefs and sect-identification had been passed down from their parents and/or older family members. Figure P1.5 depicts that, of the 115 Shia Muslims who answered P1Q#7 from Appendix 1, ninety-nine (86.09%) answered ‘yes’ whereas sixteen (13.91%) answered ‘no.’ Figure P1.6 shows that, of the eighty-three Sunni Muslims who answered P1Q#7, seventy-five (90.36%) chose ‘yes’ while eight (9.64%) chose ‘no.’ Like P1Q#5/P1Q#6, respondents who answered P1Q#7 were directed to justify their choice in P1Q#8. Some of these

¹⁵⁸ For this response and all of the responses that follow, I have not corrected for grammar, punctuation, or spelling, nor have I altered the answers in any other way. In other words, I have left them all exactly as they were written by the respondents. As a result, there will be differences in the spelling of the same words between the respondents’ answers and the rest of my thesis.

responses were quite enlightening, and I have inputted them below in a similar fashion as previously.

Respondent P1Q#8.1 (Shia): “Being part of a religious family that identifies with the Shia sect, the beliefs and sect identification were passed down to me via going to various events and learning about the history of the religion through lectures and speeches. The teachings helped me form my own opinions and conclusions which are my own today.”

Respondent P1Q#8.2 (Shia): “My family is of shias. In that sense, I was born into shiasm. However, as for my education and knowledge of the sect, was done from my own research. My parents made the internet available for me and I used it to research on my own about my religion and the many sects of islam. In this respect, I can proudly say I am not Shia by ignorance.”

Respondent P1Q#8.3 (Sunni): “My family has been Sunni for many generations, and so I grew up in a Sunni household. Ultimately, this influenced everything from the way I pray to the beliefs in my religion, as well as what I believe my religion allows for and forbids. As I grow older, I am actively trying to unlearn and relearn my sect and religion to truly understand why I believe what I do, but it’s a work in progress.”

Respondent P1Q#8.4 (Sunni): “They taught me what i know, and through them I know sunni islam to be true. Their tradition is more than simple blind following but rather generations of reassured belief.”

The reason I have chosen to input these answers specifically is because, while these respondents all admit to generational transference strongly affecting their current beliefs, they also state that, in some form, they have attempted to educate themselves about their faith. It is unclear, however, what forms their self-education and self-reflection have taken. They could have been “researching” in echo chambers that simply reemphasized what they had been taught. They could have been attending lectures and speeches relevant only to their sect’s beliefs. “Informing” themselves, then, does not necessarily translate into modified views of the other sect, nor does it mean that they are actively working to bridge the divide. Generational transference – the ways in which the respondents were raised and steeped in the beliefs and practices of their faith – is a key component to sectarianism.

Something that I was personally quite interested in was whether or not there was a difference between sects in regard to “othering,” or being specifically discriminated against due to sect-identification. P1Q#13 posed this question in a simple yes/no format, with respondents who answered ‘yes’ being redirected to P1Q#14. As seen in figure P1.7, of the 101 Shia Muslims who answered P1Q#13 from Appendix 1, seventy-two (71.29%) answered ‘yes’ while twenty-nine (28.71%) answered ‘no.’ Interestingly, figure P1.8 shows that, of the seventy-two Sunni Muslims who answered P1Q#13, sixty-six (91.67%) answered ‘no’ while only six (8.33%) answered ‘yes.’ Those who chose to answer P1Q#14 had the following to say:

Respondent P1Q#14.1 (Shia): “I have been cursed at and wished death upon. After being asked questions by sunnis and giving proper and respectful responses, I’ve been told that they refuse to listen to my brain washing and then continued to slander me and call me vile names. Even much after an incident with one girl who encouraged people to send me threats and curses, when I had gotten engaged, encouraged people to stop congratulating me because of my beliefs. Apparently, to her, I didn’t deserve happiness because I’m shia. What’s shocking is she admitted to saying I was extremely respectful and kind towards her when we had met prior. However, still had the audacity to threaten ruining my engagement and telling me to curse me.”

Respondent P1Q#14.2 (Shia): “- Mostly seen on social media where multiple people would question and sometimes outright verbally attack Shias. - Some people telling me that Shias are "emo because they like to hit themselves"”

Respondent P1Q#14.3 (Shia – converted from Sunnism to Shiism): “To be honest, in my personal experience, as a Sunni, I had never been treated poorly by Shias. But when I converted to Shiism, even just bringing up the topic of Shiism (without even disclosing that I was one) would elicit anywhere from smirks to open heated arguments. One person even referenced a joke to all present that someone had told him, "If I had two bullets and there was a Shia and a Jew in front of me, I'd shoot the Shia twice." (So many things wrong with this one statement.) The laughter died down to nervous awkwardness after I responded with, "Guys, how is that funny?"”

Respondent P1Q#14.4 (Sunni): “I was turned down for marriage (to a shia girl) her mother blatantly called on my sect i.e. Sunni. Her actual words which I remember were ‘The only way you can marry her or any one in our (shia) community own is if they loose their husband and become widows) i would like to add that i was ready to convert and take a vow not to change her sect after marriage but they thought of it as a family thing

and that one has to be a born shia and to shia parents. I'm talking about very educated people holding good positions in society. even though that took a lot to move on from but I remember it to this day.”¹⁵⁹

Just the figures from this question depict a trend that has unfolded throughout this thesis:

Shia Muslims feel alienated and disparaged. The open-ended responses, notably from

Respondent P1Q#14.3, indicate that sectarianism is ever-present and, often, unapologetic.

It is also important to note that some Sunnis have experienced “othering” by Shia

Muslims, and have been rejected by the seemingly “closed” Shia community because they

were Sunni – as Respondent P1Q#14.4 noted. Does this mean, then, that because Shia

Muslims feel largely alienated and disparaged, they adopt a defensive stance and,

therefore, actively seek to keep their community as “tight-knit” and “exclusive” as

possible?

P1Q#20 from Appendix 1 asked respondents what they felt were some of the biggest religious conflicts between the Shia and Sunni sects. This was an optional free-response question, and the following responses were quite pertinent to this analysis:

Respondent P1Q#20.1 (Shia): “Sunni don't want to give credit where it's due. The Sunni sect didn't give the prophet's family their right and instead gave it to the Sahaba that's the major conflict.”

Respondent P1Q#20.2 (Shia): “The Prophet's successions, The land of Fadak being granted to BIBI Fatima, Bibi Fatima's house being burned by Umar, whether Muawiya should be respected or not, whether Hazrat Abu Talib was Muslim, and cursing of Sunni figures.”

Respondent P1Q#20.3 (Shia): “Mainly the situation about the Caliphate, as well as how the family of the Prophet (SAW) had been treated after his death for generations.

Respondent P1Q#20.4 (Sunni): “They are different in celebrating month of Muharram. Some of them pray Namaz differently.”

¹⁵⁹ The reader should note that more Shia open-ended responses are included in this section due to the greater number/percentage of Shia respondents who answered ‘yes’ to P1Q#13. Only three Sunni respondents answered P1Q#14, and so I chose to input the most relevant response.

Respondent P1Q#20.5 (Sunni): “Status of the companions. Religiously Sunni and Shia are similar for the most part. It’s all political events that have caused most of the tension.”

Respondent P1Q#20.6 (Sunni): “I think its in the time of muharram when they do the matam, shed so much blood. As sunni we respect the muharram and imam Ali but we Don't go to extreme like them.”

These responses, as the reader will notice, are quite parallel to the events and factors I discussed in the first part of this thesis. While theological differences are nuanced in the respondents’ answers, a significant number of issues stem from political disputes.

Evidently, modern Muslims are still holding onto rifts that were present over a millennium ago.

P1Q#22 from Appendix 1 asked respondents if they believed that the sectarian division has gotten worse, better, or remained about the same over time. The responses from this section were noticeably different when the sects were compared with one another. Specifically, of the ninety-one Shia respondents who answered P1Q#22, forty-eight (52.75%) of them reported that they felt it has worsened; twenty-nine (31.87%) felt it was about the same; fourteen (15.38%) felt it has gotten better – see Figure P1.9. Of the sixty-five Sunni respondents who answered P1Q#22, thirty-three (50.77%) reported that they felt it was about the same; eighteen (27.69%) felt it had gotten better; fourteen (21.54%) felt that it had worsened – see Figure P1.10. Though the number of respondents for both sects who had answered this question are not equal, there does seem to be an overwhelming majority of Shia respondents who felt that the divisions have worsened whereas most of the Sunni respondents did not note a significant change. This is illustrious. Do Shia Muslims feel that the divisions have worsened because they feel more marginalized or have always felt marginalized? In contrast, do Sunni Muslims not feel a

significant worsening of the divide because they are in the majority or because the experience of marginalization – as an individual or as a group – is not common to members of majority groups?

Before moving on to the sect/branch specific questions (P2) portion of Appendix 1, I did want to insert responses from P1Q#25, which asked respondents for possible solutions to help heal the current sectarian division. Most of the Shia and Sunni respondents who answered this question felt as though there are possible solutions. Of the eighty-four Shia respondents who answered P1Q#25, sixty-five (77.38%) included a possible solution and nineteen (22.62%) stated that they did not feel any solutions existed – see Figure P1.11. Of the fifty-seven Sunni respondents who answered P1Q#25, forty-two (73.68%) proposed a possible solution and fifteen (26.32%) stated that they did not feel any solutions existed – see Figure P1.12. Below, I have included some of the thoughtful and insightful solutions that respondents from both sects suggested:

Respondent P1Q#25.1 (Shia): “Be tolerant. If you can tolerate Christians, Hindus, budhist and not condemn them for not believing in 1 God why condemn your brother and sister in Islam. Let them follow Islam their way. You won’t have to answer about their beliefs at the day of Judgment.”

Respondent P1Q#25.2 (Shia): “Interacting with each other on a personal level. Praying at each other’s masajid. Holding Quran studies together. Sharing and exposing them to the gems of the ahl al bayt’s treasures we have. Very importantly stop insulting leaders that they reaver etc.”

Respondent P1Q#25.3 (Sunni): “There are things which could not be changed and we learn from it. Mostly today's conflicts between sects are due to blame game. There are lot of people who directly benefit from this environment. If those people are identified and sidelined then things could improve.”

Respondent P1Q#25.4 (Sunni): “Visiting each other in religious places, in homes. Respecting one another. Intrafaith work”

Now that several of the more pertinent questions from the first part of Appendix 1 have been covered, I will analyze the sect/branch specific questions. As I stated earlier, there will not be as much comparison since the questions are different, but I believe that including the various answers will help to reveal some explanations for the current schism. This second part was optional, and many of the respondents chose to end their participation with the conclusion of Part 1. However, the respondents who completed the survey in its entirety assisted greatly in my ability to develop the following data analysis. As seen in Appendix 1, there is a “Part 2,” with P2Q#1 asking respondents for their sect identification and then redirecting them to different questions based on their answer choice.

Per Figure P2.1, there were sixty Shia respondents who moved on to P2, fifty-eight of whom (97.67%) answered Ithnaa Ashari (Twelver) and two (3.33%) of whom answered Ismaili. As stated in the *Disclaimers and Notes* section, I will not be analyzing the Ismaili Shia Muslims’ answers as it would be virtually impossible to analyze any sort of trend with only two responses. Figure P2.2 depicts that there were twenty-six Sunni respondents who moved on to P2; twenty-three (88.46%) answered ‘Hanafi,’ two (7.69%) answered ‘Hanbali,’ and one (3.85%) answered ‘Shafi’.’ Though branch specifications have not been overtly noted throughout the thesis, these statistics are included for informational purposes.

There are multiple questions from P2, drawn from both the Shia and Sunni respondent pools, that I want to highlight. The first is P2Q#2 from the Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions, which asked the respondents how they would defend acts of self-flagellation during mourning. As depicted in Figure P2.4, fifty-one Shia Muslims

responded, and the answers were quite divided amongst the possible choices. Of the fifty-one respondents, sixteen (31.37%) stated that they support self-flagellation; fourteen (27.45%) stated that they do not support the more extreme versions of self-flagellation; eleven (21.57%) stated that they do not support self-flagellation of any kind; ten (19.61%) chose to utilize the free-response section and elaborate on their answer. One answer that I felt relevant to input is as follows:

Respondent P2Q#2.1 (Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions): "Many religions self-flagellate when mourning, including Catholics. This is not a new tradition"

Clearly, Shia Muslims or, at least the respondents to my survey, are very divided on this issue. As mentioned in Part 1 of the thesis, self-flagellation is a significantly controversial topic in sectarian discourse. The inputted free-response answer downplays the issue by suggesting that because self-flagellation during mourning is not limited to Shia practices, it should not evoke the level of controversy that it does. The point is, however, that it does evoke controversy not just in sectarian discourse, but clearly also within the Shia community.

P2Q#3 from the Sunni Specific Questions asked respondents how they felt about the ways in which Shia Muslims commemorate Muharram. As the reader might recall from Chapter 2 on Commemoration from Part 1 of this thesis, there are significant debates amongst Muslims and non-Muslims on the mourning rituals held in Muharram. Here are some of the more notable responses from the Sunni respondents who answered this question:

Respondent P2Q#3.1 (Sunni Specific Questions): "I don't understand how they will explain it on the day of judgement since they claim to be Muslims. Muslims by definition follow Rasulullah (saw) Ann's He never said or did anything like this. If we needed to follow this, it was His duty from Allah swt to teach us, so my understanding is it wasn't central from a religious perspective."

Respondent P2Q#3.2 (Sunni Specific Questions): “We all should mourn, but should not cause physical violence on our selves. But we should also celebrate the life of Imam Hussain. When someone is martyred they are given immediate Jannah and return to Allah. We should celebrate that.”

Respondent P2Q#3.3 (Sunni Specific Questions): “I respect it entirely. It is very difficult to mourn at the level they mourn at, but I am inspired by their care”

Chapter 2 on Commemoration from Part 1 of this thesis highlights the rift that exists between Shia and Sunni Muslims regarding the tradition of fasting on Ashura. I felt it was important to understand how prevalent this rift is in a more contemporary context. First, Figure P2.3 depicts the number of Sunni respondents who answered P2Q#5 from the Sunni Specific Questions; of the twenty-seven respondents, twenty-three (85.19%) stated that they do fast on Ashura while four (14.81%) stated that they do not fast on Ashura. Respondents who answered ‘yes’ to this question were redirected to P2Q#6 of the Sunni Specific Questions from Appendix 1, which asks why they fast. Here are some of the responses:

Respondent P2Q#6.1 (Sunni Specific Questions): “Something that has been done at home, I don't always observe but I do when I can”

Respondent P2Q#6.2 (Sunni Specific Questions): “Hadith of prophet Mohammad to fast in that day because of Musa's deliverance from the Pharaoh. I try to do things Rasoolullah did/encouraged because there is no path to paradise that does not have his blessed footsteps on it. My family is the same.”

Respondent P2Q#6.3 (Sunni Specific Questions): “According to hadith and what my parents and family have told, fasting in Muharram was preferred by Holy Prophet as well to show the Jews that Muslims believe in all the Prophets including Hazrat Musa' and they are much more closer to him than Jews.”

The Sunni respondents whose answers I inputted all acknowledge familial influence on their practice of fasting on Ashura. However, of the twenty-nine free-responses inputted in

this section, nineteen stated that they fast due to other reasons. Some of their justifications for fasting are as follows:

Respondent P2Q#6.4 (Sunni Specific Questions): “Because it’s a day when musa (as) crossed sea and prophet Mohammed ﷺ told us to fast”

Respondent P2Q#6.5 (Sunni Specific Questions): “There is a Hadith from Prophet (PBUH) around the time when He was to part ways from world where he said that Jewish people fast on 10th. We should fast on either 9th and 10th or 10th and 11th of Muharram.”

Respondent P2Q#6.6 (Sunni Specific Questions): “It’s Sunnah and has a great reward”

Comparatively, P2Q#6 from the Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions asked the Shia respondents why they do not fast on Ashura. Here are some of their responses:

Respondent P2Q#6.1 (Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions): “As far as I know, fasting is something which takes place to rejoice something. Furthermore, fasting on Ashura or that 10th day was an act practiced by Jews which was later inherited by Muslims. Many Ahadith in the following year were altered to cover the story of Karbala hence, fasting was deemed to be greatly rewarding on that day. I have steadfastly observed not to fast and it is because of my own research.”

Respondent P2Q#6.2 (Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions): “Did the research on this but vaguely remember the answer. The reason is 2. 1) prophet family did not fast (and we match our actions with theirs) 2) the reason that the story of prophet fasting on ashoor is a weak sunni hadith that has many problems, why would the prophet compete / match a jew cuz the jew was fasting? Our prophet follows Allah, not the jew.”

Respondent P2Q#6.3 (Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions): “Fasting is a happy or more day celebratory action, The reason it is not practiced by Shias on the day of mourning.”

Interestingly, none of the Shia respondents whose answers I inputted admit to familial influence on their choice to not fast. However, of the forty-three free-responses inputted by Shia respondents in this section, three stated that they fast due to familial influence.

Two of these answers have been inputted as follows:

Respondent P2Q#6.4 (Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions): "I've been taught that it's makruh to fast on Ashura but I don't know much about why and I haven't looked enough into this to give a more detailed answer"

Respondent P2Q#6.5 (Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions): "honestly just something we always did"

The critical point to be made here is that, irrespective of the reasons both respondent groups have given, familial influence clearly plays a role in the decision to fast or to not fast on Ashura. There is no way to know if any of the respondents – Sunni or Shia – are intentionally noting that they have chosen to fast/not fast because of their own "knowledge/research" when, in fact, both groups of respondents have shown a significant trend of generational transference. Because of the numerous responses that do not acknowledge familial influence, I assert that there is likely a level of pride influencing their responses. In the responses to this question as well as numerous other survey questions posed, both the Shia and Sunni respondents make clear that many of the practices and historical narratives of their faith are learned or transferred from their parents, families, and religious leaders because they have been steeped in that community since birth, whether or not they want to admit that familial influence.

I came across an intriguing analysis to P2Q#7 of the Sunni Specific Questions from Appendix 1. When asked about the Land of Fadak, as depicted by Figure P2.5, sixteen of the twenty-five Sunni respondents (64%) inputted free-response answers – ten of these answers were different variations of statements that established the respondents' unawareness of this historical event. Of the other nine respondents, six (24%) chose to agree with Abu Bakr's decision, and three (12%) chose to disagree with Abu Bakr's decision – see Figure P2.5. As stated in my own analysis on the question regarding successorship (P1Q#5; Figures P1.3 and P1.4), the respondents' answers indicate that the

majority group is unaware of – or does not grant importance to – this historical event. Generational transference – whether that means transferring practices and tenets of the faith or transferring the perceived importance or unimportance of historical events – is a key factor in furthering the enmity between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

Last, I wanted to gauge how each sect felt about the assertion of a “Shia Genocide.” While I know that is a loaded question, and it is likely that most people, including the survey respondents, would not be able to offer an accurate definition of the term “genocide” per the U.N. Convention on Genocide, many people infer from the term that it is “bad,” that it entails “suffering,” or that it is “evil” or “violent.” With those caveats in mind, I asked both sects what their opinion was on this specific issue. Figure P2.6 shows that, of the forty-nine Shia respondents who answered P2Q#7 from the Ithnaa’ Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions, thirty-four (69.39%) chose ‘yes,’ eight (16.33%) chose ‘no,’ and seven (14.29%) inputted answers in the free-response section. Interestingly, Figure P2.7 depicts that, of the twenty-five Sunni respondents who answered the same question (P2Q#11 from the Sunni Specific Questions), ten (40%) inputted answers in the free-response section, nine (36%) chose ‘no,’ and six (24%) chose ‘yes.’ Due to such a high percentage of Sunni respondents utilizing the free-response section for this question, I have inputted some of the most relevant answers below:

Respondent P2Q#11.1 (Sunni Specific Questions): “No I don’t, but I do feel awful when anyone of any sect hurts a member minority sect. This is absolutely abhorrent and too many Muslims live out their lives ignorant of how gravely this sin will be punished.”

Respondent P2Q#11.2 (Sunni Specific Questions): “It would be unfair to answer yes or no without proper research and knowledge. I realize this unawareness comes from a place of privilege”

Respondent P2Q#11.3 (Sunni Specific Questions): “I think sects have done wrong to each other. Does not amount to genocide.”

While all three responses are notable, Respondent P2Q#11.2's response, that their "unawareness comes from a place of privilege," points to the inclination of majority groups to be unaware of or indifferent to the grievances of minority groups. Even so, the fact that six out of twenty-five Sunni Muslim respondents chose "yes," which is almost one-quarter of the respondents, while ten wrote free responses in which they answered the question in more detail, pushes back on the notion that Sunni Muslims are indifferent to or unaware of Shia grievances. Clearly, many Sunnis are aware. Whether or not their awareness will lead to the Shia community eventually feeling less aggrieved is difficult to infer. Nonetheless, the belief in historical marginalization, which has embedded itself into the Shia vitality, is present even in a contemporary context.

Analysis

A very distinct parallel to Part 1 of this thesis is visible in the survey responses. A significant majority of the respondents from both the Shia and Sunni sect appear to remain in line with what generations before them believed. Clearly, there is generational transference of narratives; historical events, personal beliefs, and stories that have been passed down have kept Islamic sectarianism alive for over a millennium. Though I have included an analysis of the more pertinent questions and answers from Appendix 1, all of the gathered data is quite telling in regard to the contemporary schism between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The majority of the contemporary analysis is in line with the historical analysis, but there is an overwhelming majority of responses that points to generational transference.

As I alluded to in the first part of this thesis, as well as in my own analysis of survey responses in this second part, there is not as much pressure on majority

communities to steadfastly hold onto their beliefs or traditions. When a people group is aware of their power or majority status, they often become comfortable in letting go of or loosening certain practices. On the other hand, when a community feels marginalized, the members of that community are much more likely to firmly grasp onto their traditions. Both of these trends are visible in the obtained responses. The Sunni respondents' answers are more in line with their majority standing in Islam, just as the Shia respondents' answers fall in line with their minority standing in Islam.

Clearly, generational transference and historical events, as well as the ways in which those events have been remembered and narrated, play significant roles in contemporary sectarianism. While both sects are affected, albeit in different ways, generational transference and historical events have caused a continuation of the schism.

Conclusion

[C]ontending with the reality of sectarian rivalries and understanding what motivates them and how they play out socially and politically [is imperative to understanding how to move forward as a whole]. As in all wars of religion and conflicts over identity, in the end, peace, like war, is a function first and foremost of recognizing the fact of differences, and only then going beyond them in the pursuit of common goals.¹⁶⁰

Based on the contemporary analysis portion of this thesis, it is obvious that Islamic sectarianism is alive and well. While both sects may not view it in the same manner, both agree that it exists and presents itself as a detriment to the Muslim community as a whole. Even so, I am left to wonder if politics and Islam can ever become disconnected from each other enough to completely eradicate sectarian divisions.

¹⁶⁰ Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 253.

Specifically, was the schism between Shia and Sunni Muslims really ever about dogma? Or has it always been about political power? I argue that while differences in theological understanding of Islamic scripture and traditions exist, the division stemmed from a feud over succession and, therefore, political power. While speculative, the question is worth posing: Would the rift have occurred if there had been written documentation, or even a very straightforward Quranic verse, that stated exactly who would succeed Prophet Muhammad? After all, was it not a disagreement about leadership and its attendant power that resulted in a plethora of the debates Shia and Sunni Muslims grappled with then and still struggle with today? In the words of Lesley Hazleton, "...if there are any number of ways to interpret a written document, there are an infinite number of ways to interpret one that was never written at all."¹⁶¹

There is such a deeply-rooted historical relationship between Islam and politics that the divisions wrought by generations of feuds may never be resolved. Each of the chapters in the first part of this thesis have both examined and illuminated this idea. Successorship, commemoration, and politicization are all factors that have contributed to the schism, but the second part of the thesis – based on the current responses of more than 250 Muslims – concludes that generational transference is what perpetuates the divide. The answer to generational transference of animosity is ‘yes,’ but the answer to eradication of sectarianism – at least for the time being – is a resounding ‘no.’

While I did not necessarily come to the answer that I had anticipated – that there is a generational transference of animosity, but that it is improving and there is a chance to eradicate sectarianism – I felt compelled to highlight an interesting point raised by a

¹⁶¹ Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 53.

majority of the respondents. Particularly, I am referring to P1Q#25 from Appendix 1, which asked respondents if they felt that there are possible solutions to the division (see Figures P1.11 and P1.12). Whether or not they were aware of doing so, many respondents' suggestions pointed to the idea of restorative justice. While it is currently being tried in a few courts and schools, and therefore is focused on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims, it has occasionally been attempted at a community-wide level. Its aim is to bring parties together to take responsibility, to acknowledge fault or wrongdoing, to ask for forgiveness, and to come to an equitable resolution to resolve the problem. It is not punitive, but rather restorative – repairing the harm and restoring individuals and their communities.

The respondents to my survey were clearly aware that the division in Islam exists and that it is deeply embedded, but it is also clear that they want it to heal. Their responses, a few of which I highlighted in my analysis of the data, are insightful, thoughtful, and doable. However, as noted in Chapter 3 of Part 1, the division is not nearly as much about theology as it is about political power; in other words, the division is fueled and sustained by leaders who are more concerned with attaining and retaining power than with peace.

In conclusion, I would like to borrow from the work of the historian Lesley Hazleton. While she discusses the following in relation to how external forces (specifically, the West) should view and understand sectarianism in Islam, her comments also relate to how current Muslims feel about the division, and how, often times, internal desire for unity is often forgotten or minimized in a “divide and conquer” political climate.

Whether sacredness inheres in the Prophet's blood family, as the Shia believe, or in the community as a whole, as Sunnis believe, nobody...should forget that what unites the two main branches of Islam is far greater than what divides them, and that the vast majority of all Muslims still cherish the idea of unity preached by Muhammad himself – an ideal the more deeply held for being so deeply broken.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Hazleton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, 211.

Appendix 1 (Survey)

WELCOME TO MY SURVEY: Hello! My name is Dua Z. Abidi, and I am an undergraduate student working on an academic research project. This survey will help me obtain necessary data for my project. You will be asked to input your email address shortly, but if you prefer to remain anonymous, you do not need to include your email address. Please fill out each question with as much detail as possible. Thank you very much for your participation!

CONSENT FORM: Please click on the following hyperlink and carefully read through the consent form. Once you have read it, please choose one of the options regarding your participation below. Thank you!

[Consent Form \(HRP-502e\)](#)

- 1) I accept
- 2) I do not accept **if chosen, the survey will end for them at this point.**

EMAIL ADDRESS: Please enter an email address that you regularly monitor; by entering your email address, you are agreeing to a possible follow-up email for any further clarification/inquiry regarding your answers. If you prefer to remain anonymous, feel free to skip this page and move on to the rest of the survey.

Part 1:

- 1) Which Islamic sect are you a part of?
 - a. Shia
 - b. Sunni
 - c. Other **if chosen, the survey will end for them at this point.**
- 2) Which age bracket do you fall in?
 - a. < 18 **if chosen, the survey will end for them at this point.**
 - b. 18-23
 - c. 24-29
 - d. 30-35
 - e. 36-40
 - f. 41-45
 - g. 46-50
 - h. 51-55
 - i. 55+

- 3) Do you believe your specific sect aligns with the overall values of Islam? (In other words, do you feel as though your sect is the "correct" or "best" sect?)
 - a. Yes *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 4.*
 - b. No *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 5.*
 - c. Unsure *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 4.*

- 4) How do you believe your specific sect aligns with the overall values of Islam? (In other words, why do you feel that your sect is the "correct" or "best" sect?)
 respondent will be directed to question 5 after answering this question.

- 5) Who do you believe was the rightful successor after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)?
 - a. Ali ibn' Abu Talib
 - b. Abu Bakar ibn' Uthman
 - c. Other (please specify)

- 6) Why do you believe your previous choice was the rightful successor after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)? (Feel free to provide any historical justifications for your belief, if applicable.)

- 7) Have your beliefs and sect-identification been passed down from your parents or other older family members?
 - a. Yes *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 8.*
 - b. No *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 9.*

- 8) Since you answered yes to the previous question, please explain how your beliefs and sect identification have been passed down from your parents and/or other older family members? In what ways did their teachings affect your religious beliefs? *respondent will be directed to question 9 after answering this question.*

- 9) Have you ever been told to not try to understand the beliefs of the other sect? (Remember, you are comparing your sect with only one other sect. For example, if you belong to the 'Sunni' sect, you would state whether or not you have been told to not try to understand the beliefs of the 'Shia' sect.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 10) Were you ever told to not question the beliefs of your own sect? In other words, have you been expected to follow without question what your parents/older family members have taught you in regards to your sect?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11) Do you agree with any of the values/beliefs of the opposite sect? (Remember, you are comparing your sect with only one other sect. For example, if you belong to the 'Sunni' sect, you would state whether or not you agree with the values/beliefs of the 'Shia' sect.)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (explain)

12) Do you have any personal opinions about the other sect? (Remember, you are comparing your sect with only one other sect. For example, if you belong to the 'Sunni' sect, you would state your personal opinion of the 'Shia' sect.)

13) Have you ever been subjected to any kind of "othering" because of your sect? (Have you ever been discriminated against because you are Shia/Sunni?)

- a. Yes *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 14.*
- b. No *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 15.*

14) Please give as much detail as possible/multiple examples of being "othered" since your answer was yes. *respondent will be directed to question 15 after answering this question.*

15) Have you ever heard any family members/friends make fun of, stereotype, or state negative remarks against members of the other sect? (Remember, you are comparing your sect with only one other sect. For example, if you belong to the 'Sunni' sect, you would state if you have ever heard jokes/stereotypes/negative remarks made by family members/friends about the 'Shia' sect.)

- a. Yes *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 16.*
- b. No *if chosen, respondent will be redirected to question 17.*

16) Since you answered yes, what did some of these jokes/stereotypes include? (Remember, you are comparing your sect with only one other sect. For example, if you belong to the 'Sunni' sect, you would state if you have ever heard jokes/stereotypes/negative remarks made by family members/friends about the 'Shia' sect.) *respondent will be directed to question 17 after answering this question.*

- 17) How do you perceive the other sect to be different from yours? (Remember, you are comparing your sect with only one other sect. For example, if you belong to the 'Sunni' sect, you would state how you perceive the 'Shia' sect to be different from yours.)
- 18) In your opinion, is “different” the same as “negative/bad”?
- 19) How do you feel that the differences in cultural/social norms between the Shia and Sunni sects further contribute to the division?
- 20) What do you believe are some of the major religious conflicts that exist between Shia and Sunni Muslims? In other words, what are some religious differences that set apart the two sects?
- 21) How do you think the division impacts Muslim Americans of both sects? Do you believe the impact of the division is worse/better than in other countries?
- 22) Do you think the sectarian division has gotten worse, better, or remained about the same over time?
- a. Worse
 - b. Better
 - c. About the same
- 23) How do you personally feel about the sectarian division between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Islam?
- a. I do not have an opinion about this.
 - b. I wish our sects could be more unified.
 - c. I am comfortable with the way things have been and currently are.
- 24) Do you believe the division can be healed? Do you think it should be healed? Please explain.
- 25) Please list some solutions that you think may help solve the sectarian division, if any.
- a. I do not think there are any possible solutions to help the sectarian division.
 - b. Possible solutions: (open answer comment)

The next section will be asking branch-specific questions. Multiple branches from each sect will be included. If you feel comfortable with proceeding, please click "Proceed." If you would like to end your participation here, please click "Finish."

- a. Proceed
- b. Finish **if chosen, the survey will end for them at this point.**

Part 2:

- 1) Are you Shia or Sunni?
 - a. Shia **if chosen, respondent will be redirected to Shia Branch Specific Questions.**
 - b. Sunni **if chosen, respondent will be redirected to Sunni Branch Specific Questions.**

Shia Branch Specific Questions:

- 1. Which branch of Shia Islam do you belong to?
 - a. Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) **if chosen, respondent will be redirected to Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions.**
 - b. Ismaili **if chosen, respondent will be redirected to Ismaili Specific Questions.**
 - c. Unknown/Other **if chosen, the survey will end for them at this point.**

Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Specific Questions:

- 1. How do you defend sending Lanat (removal of blessings) on the companions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)?
 - a. I do not support sending Lanat on the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him).
 - b. Other (please specify)
- 2. How do you defend self-flagellation? For example: Matam, Zanjeer, Qamaa, etc.?
 - a. I do not support self-flagellation of any form.
 - b. I support self-flagellation.
 - c. I do not support more extreme versions of self-flagellation (ex: Zanjeer Matam, Qamaa).
 - d. Other (please specify)
- 3. How would you defend saying "Ya Ali Madad" to someone who calls this act a form of shirk?

4. Why do you think Sunni Muslims perform Taraweeh? Please explain.
5. Why do Twelver Shia Muslims mourn in Muharram for over two months when Sunnat is to not grieve for more than three days?
6. Please provide a brief explanation as to why Ithnaa' Ashari (Twelver) Shia Muslims do not fast on Ashura (the 10th of Muharram). Also, has declining to fast been a practice you have steadfastly observed? If so, is it because it was always just "done at home" or is it something that was explained as important in the family or deeply important in the religious devotion of the family or community?
7. Do you think assertions of a "Shia Genocide" are correct? (Please click the following link to understand what genocide truly is: [What is Genocide?](#))
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other (please specify)

Ismaili Specific Questions:

- ~~1. As a minority within a minority, how would you explain the foundations of your beliefs to someone who has never heard of Ismaili'ism?~~
- ~~2. Please briefly explain the difference between Ismaili Shia'ism and Ithnaa Ashari (Twelver) Shia'ism.~~
- ~~3. Is there a specific way in which Ismaili Shia Muslims commemorate Muharram?~~
 - ~~_____ a. Yes (please explain)~~
 - ~~_____ b. No~~
- ~~4. Is there a significance of the Battle of Karbala to Ismaili Muslims?~~
 - ~~_____ a. Yes (please explain)~~
 - ~~_____ b. No~~
 - ~~_____ c. I do not know what the Battle of Karbala is~~
- ~~5. Please briefly explain who the Aga Khan is, and what their position is in the Ismaili branch.~~

~~6. Please briefly explain why some Muslims believe that Ismaili Shia Muslims do not pray five times a day or fast for the entire month of Ramadan. If this belief is true, please briefly explain why.~~

~~7. Do you think assertions of a “Shia Genocide” are correct? (Please click the following link to understand what genocide truly is: [What is Genocide?](#))~~

- ~~_____ a. Yes~~
- ~~_____ b. No~~
- ~~_____ c. Other (please specify)~~

Sunni Branch Specific Questions:

1. Which branch of Sunni Islam do you belong to?

- a. Hanafi
- b. Maliki
- c. Shafi’i
- d. Hanbali
- e. Unknown/Other

2. Does Muharram, the first month of the Islamic year, hold any significance for you?

- a. It is a celebratory month; I send family members/friends “Happy New Year” posts.
- b. It is a month of mourning; I refrain from celebrating to the best of my ability.
- c. The month of Muharram does not hold any particular significance for me.
- d. Other (please specify)

3. How do you feel about the way Shia Muslims commemorate Muharram?

4. What do you think the significance of the Battle of Karbala is, if any? Recall that this was the day where the grandson of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was brutally killed after being starved and water-deprived for three days.

- a. I do not think the Battle of Karbala is significant.
- b. The Battle of Karbala is not something that I was taught/was not discussed in my household, therefore I do not have an opinion.
- c. I believe the significance of the Battle of Karbala is...(open comment)

5. Do you fast on Ashura (the 10th of Muharram)?

- a. Yes (if chosen, respondent will be directed to question 6)
- b. No (if chosen, respondent will be directed to question 7)

6. Please provide a brief explanation as to why you do fast on Ashura (the 10th of Muharram). Also, has not fasting on Ashura always been something that you personally do? If so, is it because it was always just “done at home” or is it something that was explained as important in the family or deeply important in the religious devotion of the family or community? (Respondent will be directed to question 7 after answering)

7. What is your opinion on the land of Fadak? Recall that Abu Bakar did not give Lady Fatima (sa), Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)'s daughter, the right to the property of Fadak after Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) passed away even though she asked for it.

- a. I am not aware of this event.
- b. I think Abu Bakar had a good reason to deny Lady Fatima (sa) her right to the land of Fadak.
- c. I do not think Abu Bakar had a good reason to deny Lady Fatima (sa) her right to the land of Fadak.
- d. Other (please specify)

8. Does the event of Ghadeer hold any significance for you? In other words, was this ever discussed or celebrated in your home? Please recall that this was the event where Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated “Whoever I am master to, Ali is his master too.”

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (please explain)

9. Do you know about the event of Mubahila? In other words, was this ever discussed or celebrated in your home? Please recall that this was the event where Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) took the closest members of his family (Lady Fatima, Ali ibn Abu Talib, Hasan, and Hussain) to debate with the Christians of Najran.

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (please explain)

10. Why do you perform Taraweeh? What is the religious significance behind this act?

11. Do you think assertions of a “Shia Genocide” are correct? (Please click the following link to understand what genocide truly is: [What is Genocide?](#))

- a. Yes
- b. No

Appendix 2 (Figures)

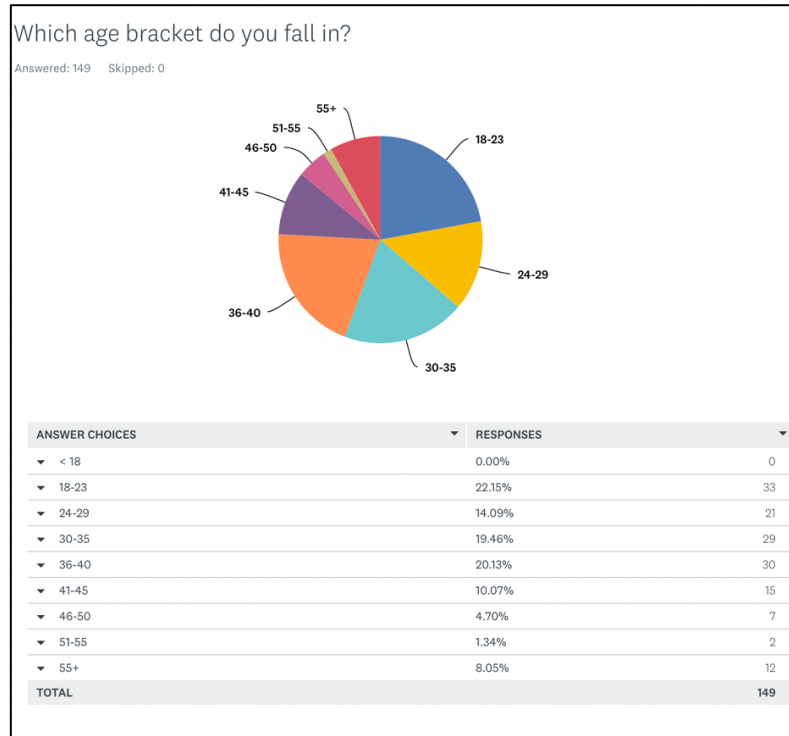


Figure P1. 1 (Shia)

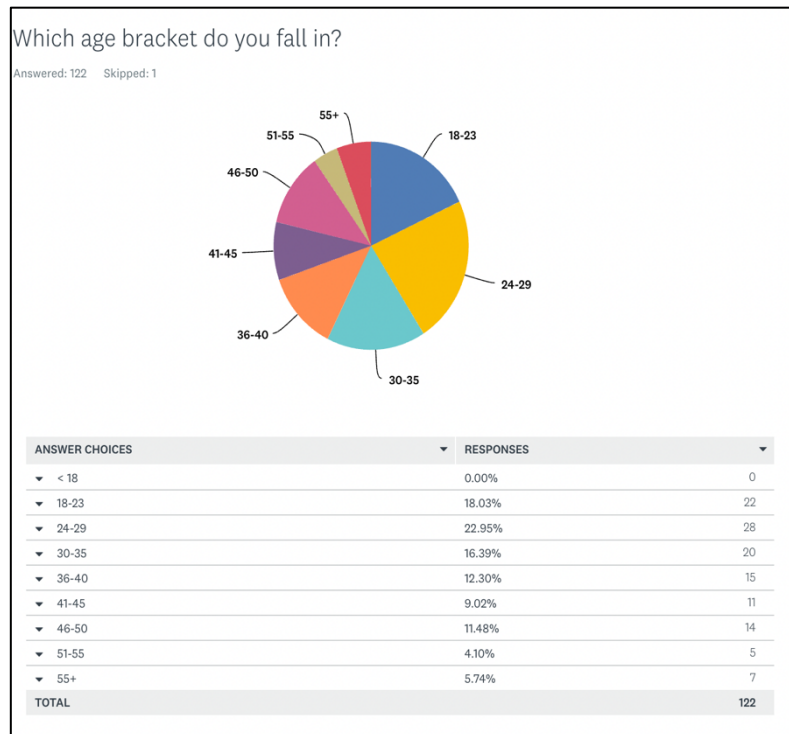


Figure P1.2 (Sunni)

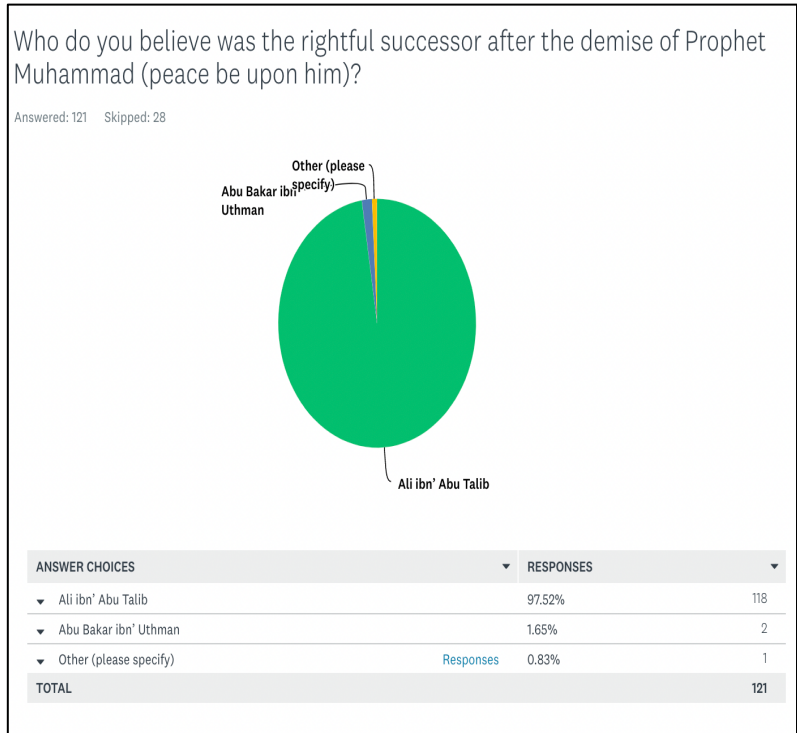


Figure P1.3 (Shia)

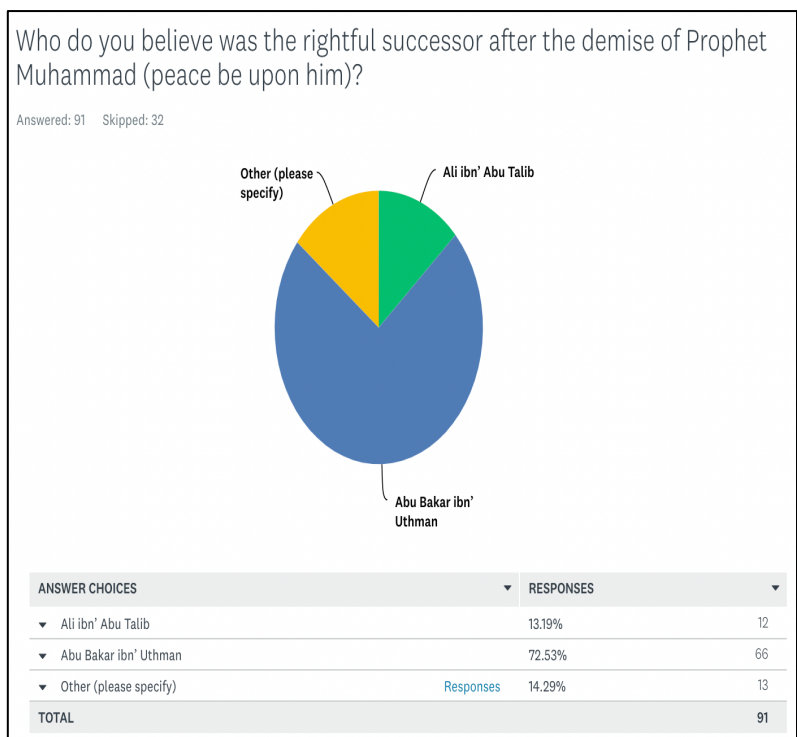


Figure P1.4 (Sunni)

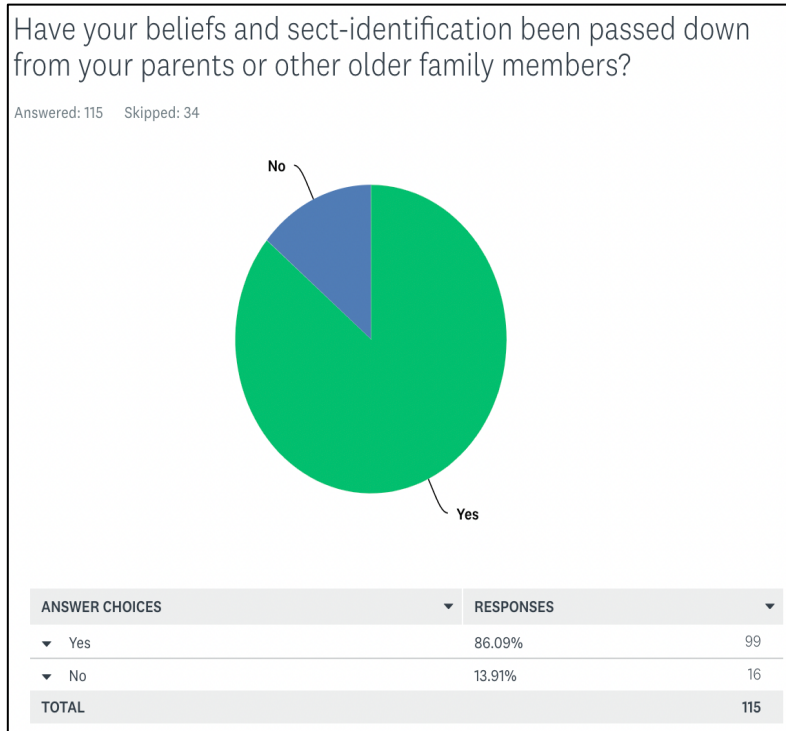


Figure P1.5 (Shia)

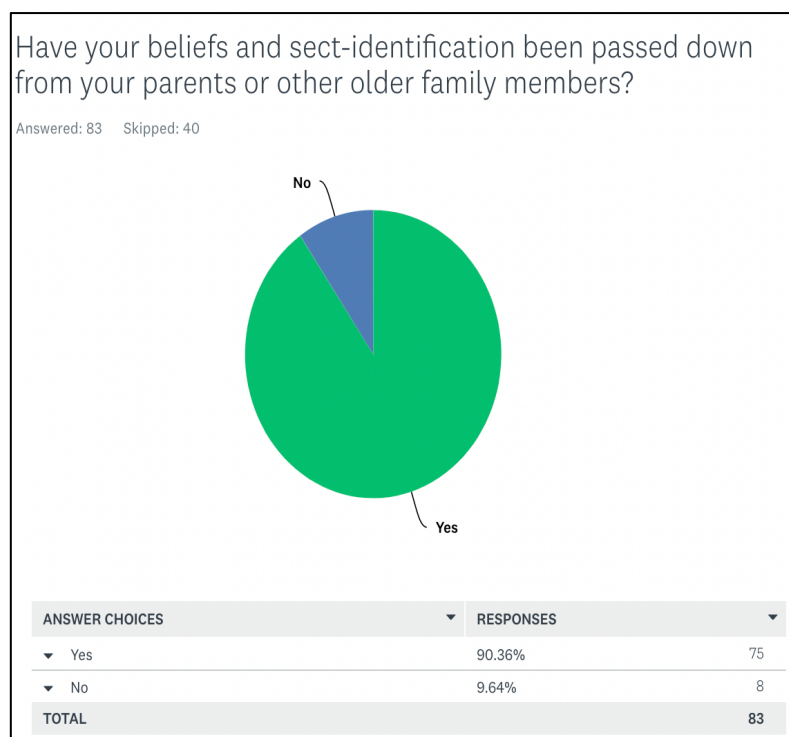


Figure P1.6 (Sunni)

Have you ever been subjected to any kind of "othering" because of your sect? (Have you ever been specifically discriminated against because you are Shia/Sunni?)

Answered: 101 Skipped: 48

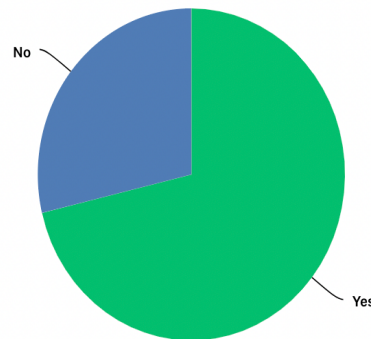


Figure P1.7 (Shia)

Have you ever been subjected to any kind of "othering" because of your sect? (Have you ever been specifically discriminated against because you are Shia/Sunni?)

Answered: 72 Skipped: 51

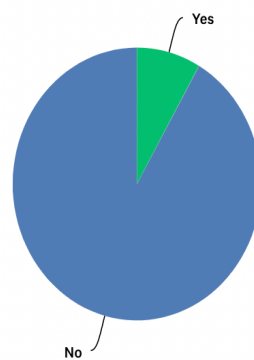


Figure P1.8 (Sunni)

Do you think the sectarian division has gotten better, worse, or remained about the same over time?

Answered: 91 Skipped: 58

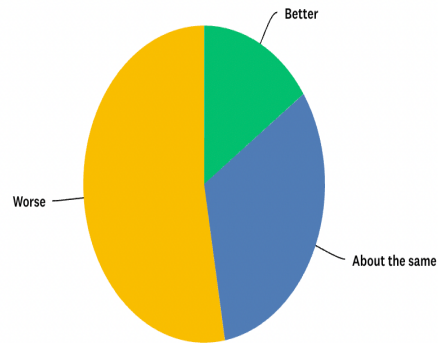


Figure P1.9 (Shia)

Do you think the sectarian division has gotten better, worse, or remained about the same over time?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 58

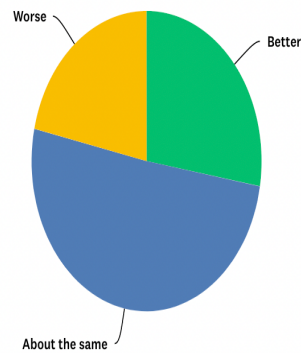


Figure P1.10 (Sunni)

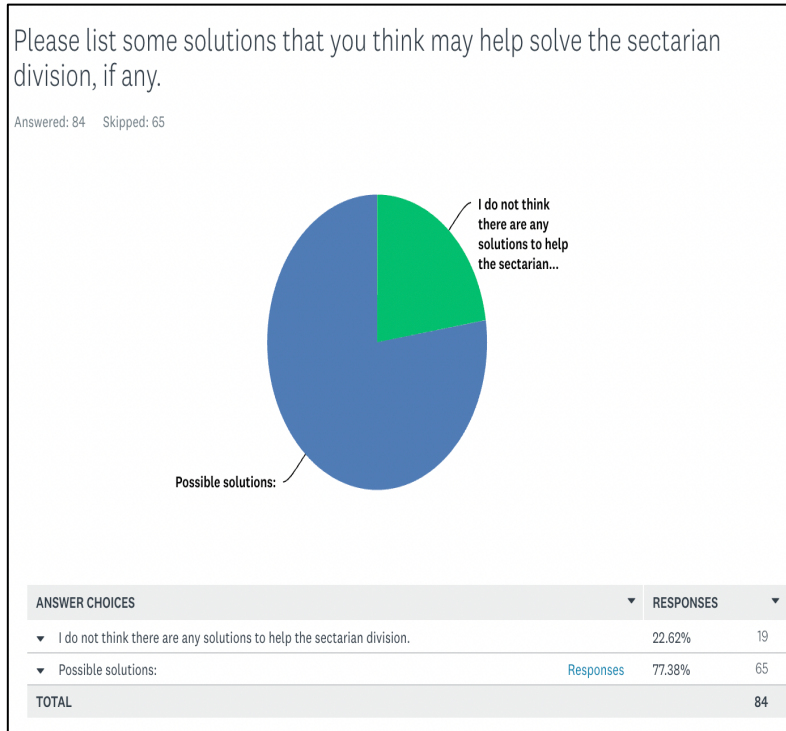


Figure P1.11 (Shia)

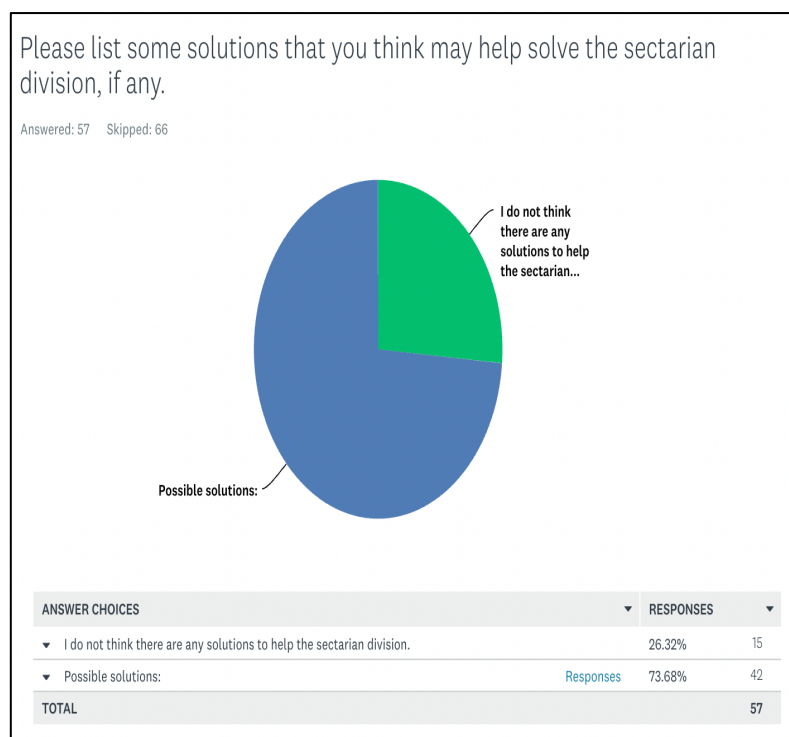


Figure P1.12 (Sunni)

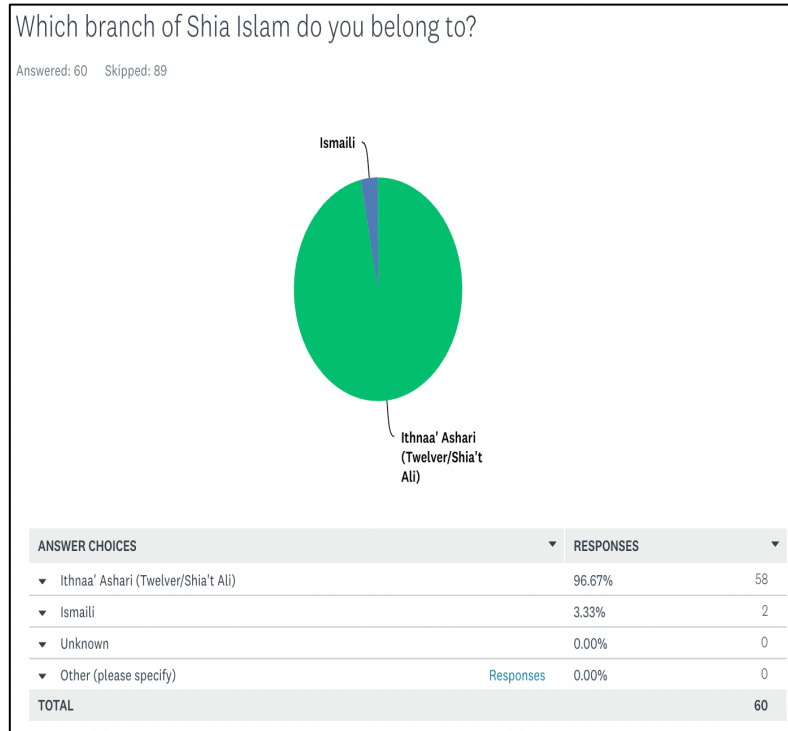


Figure P2.1 (Shia)

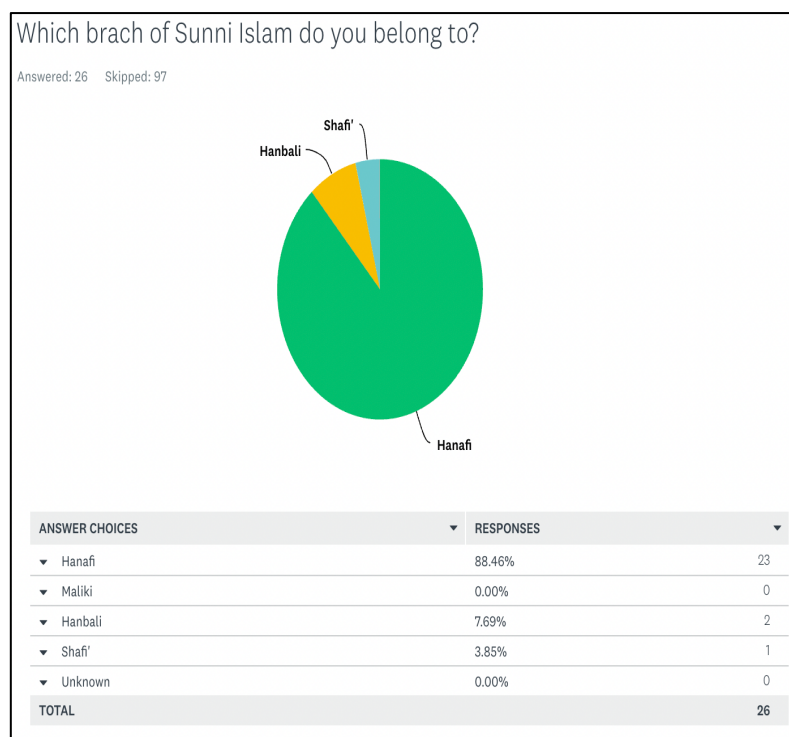


Figure P2.2 (Sunni)

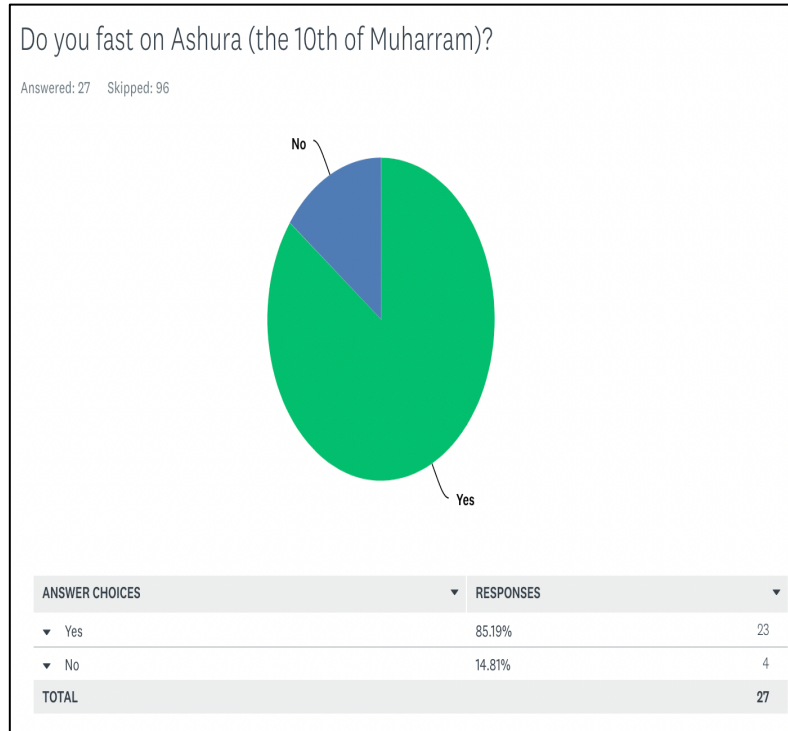


Figure P2.3 (Sunni)

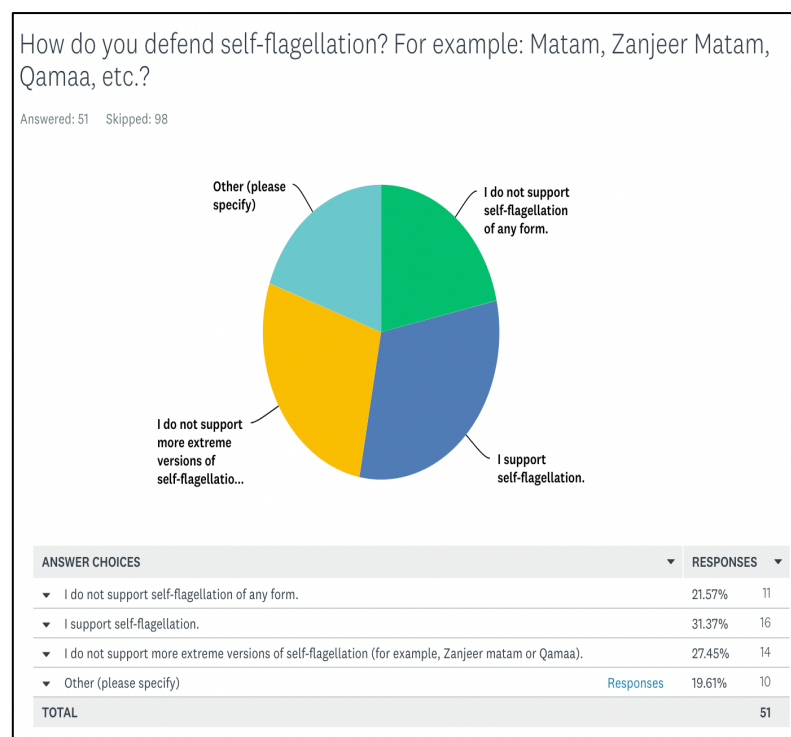


Figure P2.4 (Shia)

What is your opinion on the land of Fadak? Recall that Abu Bakar refused to give Lady Fatima (peace be upon her), Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)'s daughter, the right to the property of Fadak after her father's passing even though she was entitled to it.

Answered: 25 Skipped: 98

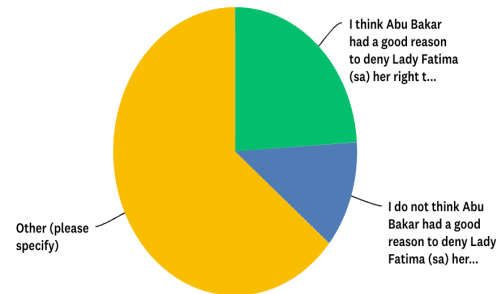


Figure P2.5 (Sunni)

Do you think assertions of a "Shia Genocide" are accurate? Please view the following link to understand what genocide really is: [What is Genocide?](#)

Answered: 49 Skipped: 100

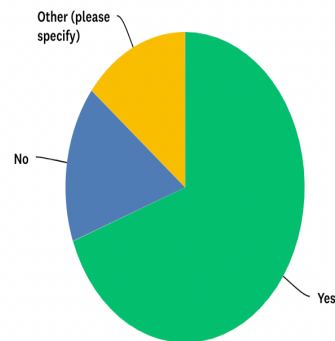
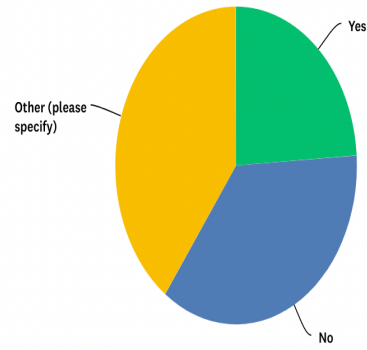


Figure P2.6 (Shia)

Do you think assertions of a "Shia Genocide" are accurate? Please view the following link to understand what genocide really is: What is Genocide?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 98



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	24.00% 6
No	36.00% 9
Other (please specify)	40.00% 10
TOTAL	25

Figure P2.7 (Sunni)

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