

Shi'ism

Principles of Islam

GARY R. BUNT



Reading (in conjunction with lecture materials)

- Arjomand, Said, *Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, Oxford University Press, 1989
- [Beeman, William O., "Iranian Revolution of 1979," In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online.](#)
- Kadivar, Mohsen, 'Routinizing the Iranian Revolution', in Kenny/Moosa, 'Islam in the Modern World'
- Keddie, Nikki, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Yale University Press, 2006
- [Madelung, W., "Shi'a," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2015.](#)
- Saud, Laith, 'Islamic Political Theology', in *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*, eds. Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, Laith Saud (Wiley-Blackwell)



Mashad Mosque of Gawhar Shad



Isfahan - Ali Mosque



Calligraphic rendering of a prayer in praise to Ali (Lion)



Shi'ism: Calligraphy symbolising Ali as Tiger of God

"... Whoever sets himself up as an Imam over the people must begin by teaching himself before teaching the people."

Imam Ali



Ashura Karbala 2015

- [Press TV, Millions mark martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein in Karbala, 23 Oct 2015](#)
- [Daily Pakistan, Karbala 2015](#)



Where are Shi'a Muslims found TODAY?

-Throughout the Muslim world: at least 10-13% of Muslims are Shi'a.

-In minority situations, where there is a Sunni majority, there can be oppression of Shi'a communities.

-Shi'a are found in:

Iraq (55%?) Pakistan (20%) Iran (95%+) India

Lebanon

Bahrain Yemen Morocco Kurdistan Kashmir Turkey Gambia Nigeria

Indonesia Albania Malaysia Saudi Arabia Afghanistan Syria Egypt Tajikistan

Uzbekistan Zanzibar Kenya USA Canada Germany Australia UK Azerbaijan

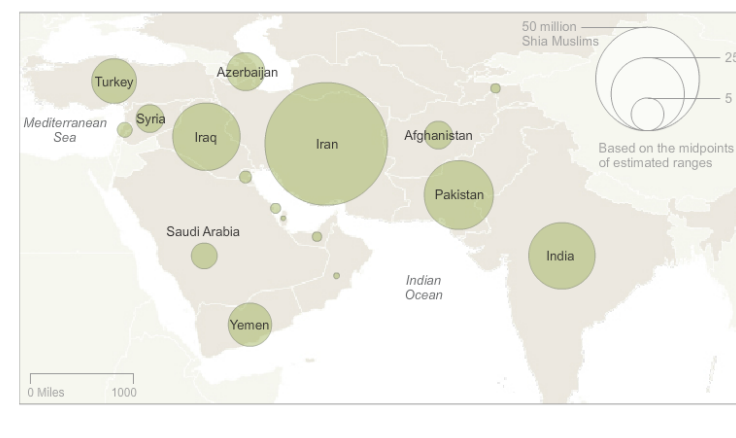


Between 116 million and 147 million Shias live in Asia, representing about three-quarters of the world's Shia population (note that Iran is included in the Asia-Pacific region). Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of the world's Shias (36 million to 44 million) live in the Middle East-North Africa.

Looked at in a different way, 12-15% of the Muslim population in the Asia-Pacific region is Shia, as is 11-14% of the Muslim population in the Middle East-North Africa region.

Most Shias (between 68% and 80%) live in four countries: Iran, Pakistan, India and Iraq. Iran has 66 million to 70 million Shias, or 37-40% of the world's total Shia population. Iraq, India and Pakistan each are home to at least 16 million Shias.

Source: <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>



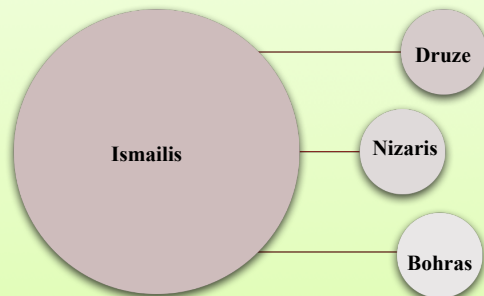
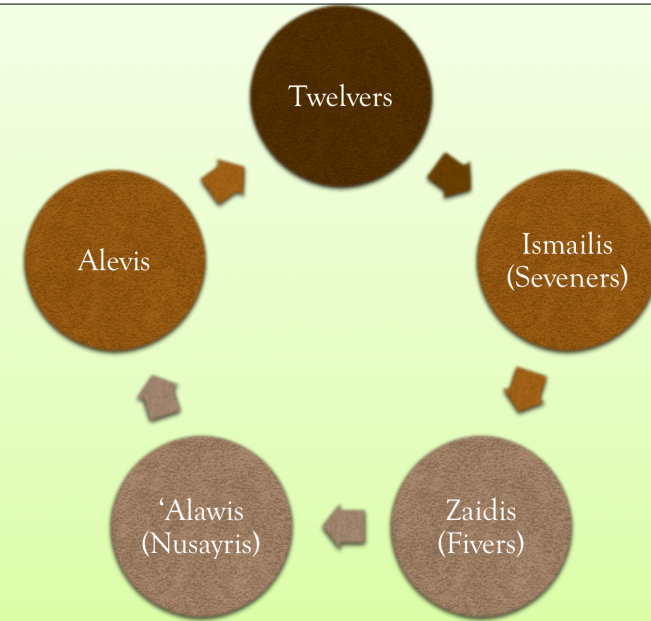
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Mapping the Global Muslim Population, October 2009

Countries with More Than 100,000 Shia Muslims

	Estimated 2009 Shia Population	Approximate Percentage of Muslim Population that is Shia	Approximate Percentage of World Shia Population
Iran	66 – 70 million	90 – 95%	37 – 40%
Pakistan	17 – 26 million	10 – 15	10 – 15
India	16 – 24 million	10 – 15	9 – 14
Iraq	19-22 million	65 – 70	11 – 12
Turkey	7 – 11 million	10 – 15	4 – 6
Yemen	8 – 10 million	35 – 40	~5
Azerbaijan	5 – 7 million	65 – 75	3 – 4
Afghanistan	3 – 4 million	10 – 15	~2
Syria	3 – 4 million	15 – 20	~2
Saudi Arabia	2 – 4 million	10 – 15	1 – 2
Nigeria	<4 million	<5	<2
Lebanon	1 – 2 million	45 – 55	<1
Tanzania	<2 million	<10	<1
Kuwait	500,000 – 700,000	20 – 25	<1
Germany	400,000 – 600,000	10 – 15	<1
Bahrain	400,000 – 500,000	65 – 75	<1
Tajikistan	~400,000	~7	<1
United Arab Emirates	300,000 – 400,000	~10	<1
United States	200,000 – 400,000	10 – 15	<1
Oman	100,000 – 300,000	5 – 10	<1
United Kingdom	100,000 – 300,000	10 – 15	<1
Bulgaria	~100,000	10 – 15	<1
Qatar	~100,000	~10	<1
World Total	154 – 200 million	10 – 13	100

Note: Countries with an estimated Shia population of less than 1% of the country's Muslim population are not listed. The figures for Shias are generally given in a range because of the limitations of the secondary-source data (see Methodology for Sunni-Shia Estimates). Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Source: Pew



There is a rich religious, political and cultural diversity throughout the Islamic world.

Naturally, historical and cultural influences have interacted with the core values of Islam.

One of the most interesting examples of this can be found within the varied interpretations of Shi'a Islam.

The popular image of Shi'a Islam in western contexts has been informed primarily by developments in Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 – where the symbols of Ayatollahs, veiled women, Holy War, and Holy Law proliferated in the media.



The images of soldiers marching with Ayatollah Khomeini's picture pinned to their chests, and crowds of men flagellating themselves in religious processions were frequently encountered media images of Shi'i Islam - further stimulated by news coverage of events including the Iran-Iraq War and the civil war in Lebanon.



Iran-Iraq War



Lebanon



This presented an image of Shi'a Islam as inherently warlike and hostile, with legal scholars and Ayatollahs 'dictating' holy law to the masses.

This stereotyped Shi'a Islam as authoritarian and restrictive, without acknowledging – as with other forms of Islamic expression - there is considerable diversity under the general banner of 'Shi'a Islam'.



In minority situations, where there is a Sunni majority, there can be oppression of Shi'a communities (and vice versa).

The position of Shi'a Muslims as victims of oppression has been highlighted in locations such as Iraq (during the era of Saddam Hussein in particular, despite being numerically in the majority) and in Saudi Arabia.



The term Shi'a is derived from "Shi'at 'Ali" – "the party of 'Ali (bin 'Abi Talib)", the group who (according to tradition) championed 'Ali as Caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 (Abu Bakr was appointed).

The reality of this paradigm is far more complex and open to interpretation.



Salman, Abu Dharr, Miqdad = championed 'Ali as Caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 (Abu Bakr was appointed)



Problems arose after Muhammad's death in 632 AD in deciding whom "those charged with authority" were to be. The first three caliphs were Abu Bakr (d. 634), 'Umar (d. 644) and 'Uthman (d. 656).

These Companions of the Prophet were selected by a committee from Muhammad's Meccan kinfolk, and – according to tradition - were judged eligible according to criteria based on acceptance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and membership of Muhammad's Quraysh tribe.

The first three caliphs began to have practices and precedents attributed to them.

Whilst the process of Islam's expansion continued, certain flaws, administrative problems, and defeats led to suggestions that the caliphs' status was unfounded.

"O ye who believe!
Obey God, and obey the Apostle,
And those charged
With authority among you.
If ye differ in anything
Among yourselves, refer it
To God and His Apostle
If ye do believe in God
And the Last Day:
That is best, and most suitable
For final determination."
Qur'an s.4:59)



In Shi'a hagiography, 'Ali bin 'Abi Talib - the fourth caliph - is seen as redeeming the failings of the first three caliphs.

Such literature suggests that 'Ali - who was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law (married to daughter Fatimah) - was intended by Muhammad as being his chosen successor

Through the scheming of the appointment committee he was unable to become caliph until 656 CE.

During his brief Caliphate, 'Ali was in conflict with the governor of Syria and the Kharajite 'outsiders', who believed that any pious worthy Muslim could become Caliph - not necessarily from the correct 'pedigree.



After 'Ali's death, his first son Hasan bin 'Ali bin 'Abi Talib resigned the right to succession.

There is considerable disagreement as to why this occurred.

There may have been a military treaty with Mu'awiya, financial compensation, or a promise of Hasan succeeding Mu'awiya.

Hasan's brother Husayn bin 'Ali bin Abi Talib put forth his own claim for the caliphate after the death of Mu'awiyah.

In 680, Husayn and his supporters were forced to flee from Makkah, and the Caliph Yazid. Stopping in Karbala' en route to Kufa (in modern-day Iraq), Husayn's small force was starved and denied water before a momentous battle in which - according to Shi'a tradition - Husayn's supporters showed great piety and courage.

Outnumbered, they were defeated and there was a slaughter - Husayn was decapitated, and tradition states there were seventy-two martyrs.

Only Husayn's son 'Ali survived.

The stories of what occurred play a significant part in Shi'a Islamic expression.

The Battle of Karbala' took place on Ashura Muharram - 10th day of the first month in the Islamic calendar.

This became a day of mourning for Shi'a Muslims.

Mu'awiya sought revenge for his cousin Caliph 'Uthman's murder.

This led to a battle between two massive armies in 37/657 at Siffin - some sources say 70,000 died - before Mu'awiya suggested that the "combatants resolve the question by consultation of the Qur'an".

Soldiers hoisted copies of the Qur'an upon their lances.

Ultimately, the situation between Mu'awiya and 'Ali did not resolve itself - and 'Ali was struck by a poisoned sword at Kufa mosque, dying two days later in the year 19th Ramadan 661 AD by Abd al-Rahman bin Muljam. It is thought by some commentators that he was buried in Najaf.



Husayn's head may be buried:

- at Najaf (beside his father)
- outside Kufa
- at Karbala with the rest of his body
- at Medina
- at Damascus
- at Cairo.



Many legends and supernatural attributes are given to Husayn: verses in the Qur'an are interpreted by Shi'a as referring to him.

The high regard for martyrdom within Shi'ism is linked to Husayn's death, annually 'recreated' in Ta'aziyah passion plays.

Sunnis may also respect Husayn as Muhammad's grandson, and because of his martyrdom for a high religious ideal.



Husayn's son 'Ali survived, to carry on the Shi'a leadership of Imams.

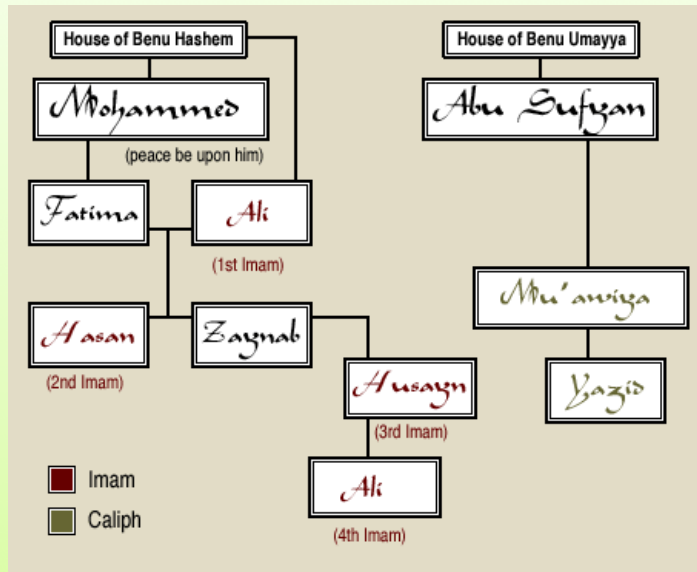
The Shi'a regard Muhammad, Imam 'Ali, Husayn and his descendants as being infallible leaders - whilst the Ahl al-Sunnah ('People of Tradition') saw the caliphs as fallible, only following Muhammad and the first four caliphs.



Ali's second son, Yahya ibn al-Hosain d.680AD

a Mahdi - 'rightly guided one'





SIGNIFICANT DIVISIONS IN EARLY SHI'ISM

(1) Zaidis, founded in 900 AD by the descendants of the fourth Caliph Husain, in Yemen. They rever the fifth Caliph, Imam Zayd ibn Ali. They invest authority and sanctity in descendants of Imam Ali and Muhammad's daughter Fatima.



(2) ISMAILIS: Following a dispute over the successor to the sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadeq, one faction opted for his son Isma'il to continue the line of living Imams. The Isma'ilis subsequently fragmented at frequent subsequent intervals, forming such diverse groups as the Druze (the Assassins), the Fatimids, and the followers of Aga Khan.



(3) TWELFTH IMAM SHI'ISM (ITHNA 'ASHARIYYA)

Ja'far as-Sadeq's younger son Musa al-Kasim became seventh Imam, and maintained a branch of Shi'i Islam known as Jafarism.



Alawis (Nusayris, negative term)
Syncretic, 12-er Shi'a branch based in Syria, 12% of Syrian population; ruling group



Alevis

Mystical branch of Shi'a, influenced by Sufism

Strong link to Kurdish identity

Turkish Alevi-Bektash

Persecution of Shi'a led to 'underground activities, in which funding was established covertly, and secret practice of Shi'a rituals undertaken.

The tradition of al-Ghayba - a concealed Imam or Mahdi - became prevalent. This Imam would rise to defeat the oppressive Caliphate, lined to the hadith of *al-Qaim bi-l sayf* "the one who will rise with the sword".

A further hadith suggested that Muhammad has said there would be twelve Imams after him.



Occultation of the Twelfth Imam.

The Twelfth Imam, Muhammad bin al-Hasan al-Askari (869-940) was four or five when his father died (possibly through poisoning), and remained hidden - in what's known as the lesser occultation.

To keep the decision making process going, during his lifetime Muhammad al-Askari was represented by four safirs. It was believed that Muhammad al-Askari did not die, but remained hidden to rise again as al-Qaim bi-l sayf.

This remains the belief of the Jafaris, who were now known as Twelfth Imam Shi'ites - al-Ithna Ashariyya. It had been prophecised that "...the Mahdi of my nation is Muhammad" i.e. Muhammad al-Askari, not Muhammad ibn Abdullah of the Quraish in Makkah.





[karbala slideshow](#)



Mashad, Khorasan,
Iran





Karbala, the site of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussain ibn Ali's martyrdom in 680 C.E. and one of the most important religious sites for Shi'a Muslims, has been rendered in 3-D.

[Battle of Karbala 3D](#)

[Battle of Karbala](#)

[Karbala Google Earth](#)



Religious figures interacting with sacred spaces have been depicted in 3-D animation: a representation of Imam Hussain is shown in Mecca, as part of an animation of his journey to Karbala (hasanabbas.com).



Individual clips filmed by pilgrims can be found alongside more professionally produced movies, as part of propagation efforts relating to visiting shrines.

These in themselves can be informative and illustrate *others* undertaking religious experiences: an example of this can be found in film of the Shrine of Syeda Masooma in Qum, a site for *ziyarat* (shrine or tomb visitation) in Iran; this long clip shows pilgrims in prayer, film of the shrine and mosque, and is accompanied by an audio recording of the *musibat* (lament) of Fatima (Prophet Muhammad's daughter)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxoBtvHrGyU>



Mashad is an important shrine in Iran, being the home of the shrine of Imam Reza (the eighth imam), and has been presented as a 3-D Game ([Mashhad Imam Reza Mosque 3D Game, 2012](#)).

Also in this [Press TV documentary Kingdom of Hearts](#)



There are numerous clips showing ritual practices, notably the representation of Muharram in Mashad, and the recitation of *noha* poetry and prose [praising the imams and their families](#) (3D Noha).

The practices within *Ashura* (the tenth day of Muharram), including the self-flagellation by pilgrims, can be located online.

[Ashura - Euronews](#)



Many videos showing the *Ta'ziyeh* passion plays - ritualistic performances depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussain - can be viewed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aKAPL9Fkz4> (Tehran)



[A visit at The Shrine of Imam Reza by an animal](#)



Saff matam nauha , http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_d-E0wxRww

28 safar Babul ilm 2011.mp4, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7YZLPtZ6wY>



Many Shi'a communities draw on the Internet to network to their members worldwide: the Dawoodi Bohra have utilised the Internet extensively to network to their communities internationally.

[Mumineen.org](#)

[Progressive Dawoodi Bohras](#)

Blank, J. (2001). [Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras](#). Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press.



The communities have origins in Yemen, a base in India, and members worldwide.

Their websites integrate news of religious leaders on their pages with targeted advertisements for community related products. News items are fully documented with photographs, which are archived online. Social activities are recorded through a blog.

Video and photographs of ritual activities are uploaded regularly, with substantial minutiae of detail - whether it be from Texas, Kuwait or Mumbai - blended together to form a single online community.

Malumaat.com, <http://www.malumaat.com>

Mumineen.org, <http://www.mumineen.org>

