



5 Starter Facts About Sunni Islam

1. Approximately 85-90% of Muslims identify as Sunni. They believe the first four caliphs to be Prophet Muhammad's rightful successors.
2. Four prevailing schools of thought have varying interpretations of Sharia. Named by their respective founders, they are called Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi.
3. Sunnis generally regard Islamic leaders (*imam*) as determined by political realities and merits, not divine order. They do not bestow exalted status for humans that is given only to prophets in the Quran, in contrast to the Shiite veneration of *imam*.
4. The Sunni puritanical movement *Wahhabism* is arguably the most pervasive revivalist movement in the Islamic world. It is considered an offshoot of the Hanbali school. Abd al-Wahhab encouraged a return to orthodox practice of the "fundamentals" of Islam. Since the 18th century, there has been a close relationship between the Saudi ruling family and the Wahhabi establishment. The most conservative interpretations view Shiites and other non-Wahhabi Muslims as dissident heretics. Following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Shiite revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia's ruling Sunni royal family began more actively promoting Wahhabi religious doctrine abroad.
5. In an effort to counter the growth and influence of extremist interpretations of Islam, Morocco opened the *Mohammed VI Institute – International Imam Academy* in the capital Rabat in March 2015. It aims to pass on the values of Morocco's open, moderate form of Sunni Islam to the next generation of Muslim *imams* and preachers from across the region and the world.

Learn more at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/04/world/middleeast/q-and-a-how-do-sunni-and-shia-islam-differ.html>

These five points are not meant to be comprehensive or authoritative. We hope they encourage you to explore this spirituality more deeply and seek out members of this community to learn about their beliefs in action. In understanding our differences we will better understand our common humanity.

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