

Reporting on Islam

The world of Islam

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, after Christianity. Islam is also one of the world's three major monotheistic religions — Muslims, Jews and Christians all believe in one God, whom Muslims call Allah. Allah's messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, revealed Islam to the world in the form of the Holy Book, the Quran. The word "Islam" is derived from the Arabic word for peace, and the word "Muslim" is usually translated as "to submit."

It is estimated that there are as many as 1.3 billion Muslims throughout the world. Although they are often mistakenly conflated, not all Muslims are Arabs (anyone with Arabic as a native language), nor are all Arabs Muslims. Arab Muslims make up only 15 percent of the world's total Muslim population. Of the world's 220 million Arabs, about 10 percent are non-Muslims. For instance, Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation, with 215 million Muslims in its population. Throughout the world, Muslims learn Arabic so they can read and understand the Quran and perform ritual prayers in Arabic.

A brief history of Islam

In 6th Century CE (Common Era) Arabia, Islam rose to prominence amid a melting pot of religious beliefs. Judaism and Christianity were already being observed, but the predominant spirituality of that era took the form of tribal god worship.

Islam's Prophet, Muhammad, was born in Mecca (modern-day Saudi Arabia) in 570 CE. During **Ramadan** (which occurs in the Islamic calendar's ninth month), Muslims believe that Muhammad experienced a revelation from Allah while meditating in a nearby cave, where the Angel Gabriel appeared to him with a message of peace (Islam).

Muhammad soon began to share his revelation with family and friends. Over time, he spread the message publicly, preaching "God is One," and surrender to him is essential.

In an era of intertribal warfare, Muhammad's message of peace was met with opposition. Muhammad fled to the nearby city of Medina, about 250 miles north of Mecca, in an event that came to be known as the Hijrah (emigration). This marked the beginning of the Islamic era and calendar.

Eventually, despite a period of great conflict, Muhammad was able to unite warring tribes and return to Mecca. He died in Medina in 632 with no male heir. By the time of his death, most of Arabia had converted to Islam.

During the Middle Ages and Dark Ages of Europe, Islamic civilization thrived through a Golden Age and was considered the most advanced civilization in the world. When Mongol invaders destroyed the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad, in 1258, more than 36 public libraries were already in existence. During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, many Islamic civilizations fell to European imperial powers before beginning the process of renewal in the 20th century.

Background & groups

Over time, the Muslim community splintered off into different branches. Reporters should be sensitive to the varying beliefs of these branches, as the Muslim community is not a monolithic entity. There are in fact many different groups and factions under the umbrella of Islam. Those seeking general information about Islam must take care not to heavily rely on organizations that lie outside of what are considered mainstream Muslim beliefs. As in Christianity or Judaism, different sects interpret Islamic teachings in different ways that can be regarded as classical, traditional, modern or reformist.

The word "fundamentalist" should not be used in reference to Muslim groups. Technically, all Muslims are "fundamentalist" since they abide by the teachings of the Quran and Muhammad, but the addition of the term overlooks this context and often adds only pejorative meaning. Furthermore, not all groups termed "Muslim" are considered as such by mainstream Islam.

Some of the most prominent branches of Islam include:

Sunnis: The Sunnis make up about 85 percent of the world's Muslim population. The Sunnah, or the example of the life of Muhammad, is the core of Sunni teaching. Sunni Islam incorporates six articles of faith, known as the pillars of *iman*. These are:

- Reality of one God (Allah)
- Existence of Allah's angels
- Authority of the books of Allah
- Following the prophets of Allah
- Preparation for and belief in the Day of Judgment
- Supremacy of Allah's will

In addition to these six core tenets, Sunni Muslims also follow 105 key points of the Tahawiyyah creed.

Islam lacks a formalized hierarchy. For example, congregations select their own imam to lead Friday prayer services.

Shiites: The Shiites make up the majority of the remaining 15 percent of the world's Muslim population, constituting the majority of the population in Iran, Azerbaijan, Bahrain and Iraq. Shiism developed after the death of Muhammad, when his followers split over who would lead Islam. The Shiism branch favored Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib. Its followers are called Shiites.

Ismailis: This is a branch of the Shiites led by the Aga Khan, the hereditary title given to the branch's leader. They are predominantly an Indo-Iranian community, but can also be found in India, Pakistan, Syria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, China, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, East Africa and South Africa. In recent years, they have also emigrated to North America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe.

Sufis: This is the mystical branch of Islam. Although small in numbers, Sufis can be found among both Sunnies and Shiites.

Known for poetry by writers such as the 13th-century Persian writer Rumi, Sufism often involves worshipful dancing and music. It is more a type of practice of the religion than a standalone denomination. Some Muslims are critical of Sufism as an unjustified innovation.

Wahhabism: This is an austere form of Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia and Qatar that follows a strict, literal interpretation of the Quran.

Most people in the West knew nothing of Wahhabism until after the 9/11 attacks, which were organized by the terrorist Osama bin Laden, a Wahhabi. Wahhabism has spread rapidly since the 1970s, when the oil-rich

Saudi royal family began contributing money to it. It is considered an extremist form of Sunni Islam that strictly enforces rules and criticizes those who follow other traditions of Islam.

The Salafi movement has been often described as closely linked to or synonymous with the Wahhabi movement; however, Salafists consider the term “Wahhabi” as derogatory, according to French author Olivier Roy, who published *The Failure of Political Islam*.

Kurds: The **Kurds** are people of Indo-European (not Arab) descent primarily residing in Kurdistan.

Given the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, sections of northern Iraq, western Iran, eastern Turkey and northeastern Syria make up the Kurdistan region. Some Kurds also reside in Lebanon and Russia. While Kurd is an ethnicity, the Kurds do not have a nation state of their own, similar to the Palestinians. This has created regional conflict in countries such as Turkey and Syria in recent years.

Islamic schools of thought

There are five primary schools of Islamic thought, each named after the imam who developed it.

By percentage of followers, the Hanafi is largest at 31 percent. Maliki is the second largest school with 25 percent of Islam’s followers. Ja’fari (23 percent), Shafi’i (16 percent) and Hanbali (4 percent) follow. The remaining one percent follow minority schools, such as the Zaydi and the Isma’ili.

In regard to Shariah law, hadith emerged from these schools of Islamic thought:

Sunni

- Hanbali: Orthodox, dominant in Saudi Arabia, used by the Taliban, relies primarily on the Quran and Sunnah
- Maliki: Used in North Africa, emphasizes personal freedom
- Shafi’i: Prevalent in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Yemen
- Hanafi: Most liberal, used in Central Asia, Egypt, Pakistan, India, China, Turkey, the Balkans and the Caucasus

Shiite

- Ja'fari: Used in Iran, emphasizes hadiths that match the Quran and sunnah
- Zaydi: Only practiced in Yemen, formerly dominant in northern Iran, scholarship is known to be pluralistic and philosophical
- Isma'ili: Predominantly Indo-Iranian, but can also be found in India, Pakistan, Syria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, China, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, East Africa and South Africa (see above)

Ibadis

- An early school of thought that is neither Sunni nor Shiite, dominant in Oman and throughout many parts of Africa

Conflict between Sunni and Shiite Muslims

Extremism has created **conflict** between Sunnis and Shiites. Weapons development in Iran and diplomacy issues in Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, Indonesia, Egypt, Syria and Bahrain also have fostered violence between these groups.

Sunnis make up the largest branch of Islam. This branch is dominant in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The Rohingya practice Sunni Islam with elements of Sufi worship.

Shias make up the second largest branch of Islam. In the Middle East, Shiism is dominant in Bahrain, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

Islam is the Middle East's most widely practiced religion. About 20 percent of the world's Muslims live there.

Belief system vs. cultural, state authority

It is important for non-Muslims to distinguish between true Islamic beliefs and the potentially chauvinistic customs operating within individual nations. Iran, for instance, is a state where freedom is at odds with authority. This often results in **unequal treatment of women**, such as difficult divorces and forced veiling (where men do not have the same difficulty or expectations in terms of dress code).

Under Islamic law, women have the right to own property, pursue education and participate fully in social and political life. Other important distinctions: Islam does not forbid women to drive; the Quran forbids a

bride price; the Quran does not support [female genital mutilation](#), which is practiced in northern regions of Africa and in parts of North America and [Europe](#).

[Abortion](#) is another contentious issue that has recently stirred debate in Turkey. State officials, including the prime minister, health minister and members of parliament, have spoken out against abortion and even proposed a state ban, which has now been abandoned. Some women and interest groups saw a ban as a threat to the health of women, but some claim that Islam forbids abortion. Different schools of thought have different time restrictions in terms of acceptable abortions, even as the Quran does not explicitly discuss abortion.

[“Sanctity of Life: Islamic Teachings on Abortion”](#) explains that abortion is generally forbidden by the religion, but is acceptable if having the baby will put the mother’s life in danger.

Practices

Journalists should be aware that Muslim practices in regard to diet, money and other matters sometimes set them apart from other Americans or Europeans. These practices include:

- Friday prayers – Muslims gather at mosques for congregational prayers on Fridays at the noon prayer time, but unlike Christians’ observance on Sunday or Jews’ on Saturday, the entire day is not considered a sabbath.
- Diet – Muslims are not permitted to consume pork or alcohol and require meat and poultry to be slaughtered and prepared according to certain standards. Muslims cannot consume animal shortening, lard, gelatin or any product containing alcohol. Howcast.com posts a good description of [how to follow Muslim dietary laws](#).
- Holidays – Muslims follow a lunar calendar, which is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar. That means that the dates of holidays change from year to year, and holidays begin at sundown, with the sighting of the new moon.
- Money – Islamic law bans collecting or paying interest, so Muslims use alternate ways to pay for large purchases, such as cars, homes and insurance.

- The Prophet — [Violent riots in Europe over cartoon images of Muhammad](#) showed how seriously Muslims take Islam's ban on visual images of its prophet. Muslims consider them an act of idolatry.

Dress

Because modesty is an essential virtue in Islam, expectations about dress and grooming are emphasized for both men and women. Non-Muslims, however, often take note of these distinctions and interpret them as gender inequality.

Both Muslim men and women observe hijab, the Quran's requirement that one dress modestly, and both are expected to lower their eyes to avoid lewd gazes.

Hijab can also refer to the article of clothing worn by many Muslim women to cloak the head and body, in addition to a jilbab worn to cover everything except the head and hands in public. Loose, nontransparent clothing is emphasized for both genders.

Depending on how they interpret the instructions for women, some Muslim women wear garments that cover their heads or their whole bodies. Some women do not cover their heads and simply wear clothes that are modest.

Debates on dress

Efforts to ban veiling practices in the West are also an issue relevant to coverage of Islam, indicated by [support of banning full veiling](#) in Western European countries.

Some Muslims women have chosen to unveil, especially in the context of revolution and social change. ["Haera Unveiled"](#) is a video that shows the life of a young Lebanese woman who has decided to unveil. She also uses theater and art as a form of activism, which she began during the Arab uprisings. These resources show that covering veiling and dress in regards to Islam is an important issue in terms of personal freedom versus authority in different countries.

Reporters must be careful to understand that Islamic women might not have the same interpretation of women's rights. Some women wear hijabs, or head scarves, while others do not. In some cultures, women cover their entire bodies.

There have also been debates over dress beyond veiling. For example, there is a [campaign for modest dress](#) in Qatar and UAE targeted at expatriates. Both men (wear the kandura) and women (wear the abaya) typically wear full cloaklike coverings in these regions.

Women in Islam

Many misconceptions persist about the role of women in Islam. Contrary to these perceptions, the original teachings of the Quran were controversial at the time because of their high regard for women, treating them as an integral part of Arab society.

Because Muslim life largely revolves around the family, Muslim women command great respect in all their roles, especially as mothers.

Women are spiritually and intellectually equal to men under Islamic law, or Shariah. Although the rights of Muslim women vary by country, most Muslim nations afford women rights with regard to marriage, divorce, civil rights, legal status, inheritance, education and clothing.

Core beliefs

The five pillars

Islam has Five Pillars of faith, which are required of all Muslims.

1) The Shahada, or declaration of faith: A Muslim must express his or her faith by declaring in Arabic, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." This declaration expresses that the purpose of life is to serve Allah alone, and it must be recited, understood and enacted in faith by all Muslims in their daily life.

2) Salat, or prayer: Muslims are required to pray five daily prayers in order to attain peace and harmony. Mental concentration, verbal communication, vocal recitation and physical movement are all components of this prayer. An hour-long special congregational prayer is also delivered on Friday at noon in the mosque. Ritual cleanliness is essential, and prayer can be performed anywhere.

3) Support almsgiving: Islam teaches that it is a sin not to share one's wealth with the needy or to allow others to suffer while personally prospering. Each year, Muslims make a payment to charity, which is based in amount on a percentage of their income or property. This is called zakat, which means both "purification" and "growth."

4) Sawm, or fasting: Islam follows a lunar calendar. During Ramadan, the ninth month in the lunar calendar, all Muslims above the age of maturity (14 or 15) fast, or abstain from eating, drinking and engaging in sexual activity with spouses during the hours between dawn and sunset. The sick, pregnant women, nursing mothers, women who are menstruating and people traveling are all excused from fasting; however, they are required to feed a needy person one meal each day or make up for lost days later. Fasting serves the purpose of instilling patience and self-control, helping the individual resist temptations and show obedience to Allah.

5) The hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca: Mecca, known as the Ka'bah, is the center of the Muslim world, and a powerful symbol of Muslim unity and the sole worship of Allah. Once in a lifetime, depending on health and material means, all Muslims are required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. This journey is the hajj.

More than 2 million Muslims from all over the world congregate in Mecca each year for the hajj. Simple white garments are worn to emphasize equality before Allah without discrimination based on of race, color, language or nationality. The close of the hajj is marked by the festival of Eid al-Adha.

Scripture

Allah and the Quran

Muslims do not worship Muhammad (only Allah), but they believe he was chosen by Allah to be the final prophet for his message of peace. This message of peace is Islam, recorded in Arabic in the 114 chapters (or *surahs*) of the Quran or *al-Quran* in Arabic, meaning "The Recitation." Muslims consider it to be a precise transcription of Allah's words to Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel over a 23-year period. It can only be read and recited in accordance with a strict set of rules and regulations.

The Quran teaches the importance of peace – internal peace, peace and submission to Allah, peace with other people and peace with the environment. For Muslims, the goal of life is to worship Allah and obey his commandments, escaping hell in afterlife.

- [Islamic-Dictionary.com](#): Islamic-Dictionary.com provides the meaning, traditional Arabic form, and pronunciation of Islamic words.
- [“The Koran”](#): Read the full electronic text of the Koran, posted by University of Michigan and translated by M.H. Shakir. The site allows users to search Koran through key words, chapters and phrases.

Hadiths

In addition to the Quran, Muslims also rely on thousands of hadiths, Muhammad’s sayings and practical guidance, which were compiled and collected after he died.

Pluralism

Muslims trace their roots to the Prophet Adam and believe in all of the prophets celebrated by Jews and Christians. They consider Jesus a prophet; however, they do not consider him divine. Muslims consider the followers of Judaism and Christianity fellow People of the Book, and they respect the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Celebrations

In Islam, there are two major celebrations, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Because the Muslim calendar operates on a lunar cycle, the dates of these events vary annually.

[Ramadan](#) is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and commemorates the time during which the faithful believe Allah sent the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad in Mecca and gave him the teachings of the Quran.

The beginning of Ramadan is determined by whether a new moon is sighted. As such, it is not always possible for Muslim leaders to predict the exact dates in advance. Most months in the Islamic calendar have

29–30 days. The first day of the month is marked by the sighting of the hilal (crescent moon). Weather conditions can delay moon sightings and thus influence when a new month starts.

Two proper greetings during Ramadan are “Ramadan Mubarak” or “Salaam,” which means “peace” and can be used at any time. Participating Muslims observe Ramadan by abstaining from eating, drinking and sexual relations from dawn to sunset during a 29- or 30-day period.

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the Ramadan and is a joyous three-day celebration. Often, relatives and friends exchange good tidings and a special Eid prayer is said. Children receive gifts, and sweets are enjoyed.

Eid al-Adha is a three-day celebration that generally falls about 2½ months after Eid al-Fitr. The greater of the two events, Eid al-Adha celebrates the end of the hajj, or the pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims take part whether they participated in the pilgrimage that year or not. The purpose of Eid al-Adha is to spend time with family, give thanks and commemorate Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail for Allah. In the spirit of this sacrifice, many Muslims sacrifice their own livestock and share the meat with family, friends and the needy.

Notes on coverage

Terminology and labels

- Muslim refers to people. Islam refers to the faith, and the adjective form is “Islamic.”
- Avoid labeling extremist or terrorists groups as Islamic, even if they describe themselves as such. If the term is necessary to the story, seek out balance and diverse Muslim opinions. Use additional caution for headlines.
- There is no easy way to characterize the differences between the two main branches of Islam, Sunni and Shiite, so reporters should be careful not to make generalizations. Both sects, for example, have given rise to extremist leaders.
- Islam is very diverse, and there are many misconceptions about who is Muslim. Many Arabs are Muslims, but many are not. In addition, many Muslims are not Arab.

Take caution with the following terms:

- **Allah:** This specific term for “God” might make it seem that Muslims worship a specific or exclusive God. In reality, Allah is just the Arabic word for God and is used by Christian and Jewish Arabs to describe God as well where doing so is permitted.
- **Fatwa:** Even though this is a non-binding opinion or judgment, many Westerners view fatwa as official, and sometimes harsh, judgments.
- **Islamic terrorism:** This term should be avoided in coverage because it suggests that there is a tie between terrorist acts and Islam or that terrorism follows Islamic values.
- **Islamists/Islamism:** This term is often used as a blanket term for a variety of groups, both violent and nonviolent, from political parties to terrorist organizations. Most often, the term should be used to describe institutions or individuals seeking the application of Islamic values in political arenas.
- **Islamofascism:** This is problematic because it links fascism and Islam, which are actually in opposition.
- **Jihad/jihadists:** The use of these words should be watched carefully as Muslims and non-Muslims or Westerners might have different meanings connected to them. While Muslims see jihad as an inner struggle to be closer to God, jihad is often linked to terrorism and violent acts in media coverage.
- **Liberal democracy:** Journalists should be careful here because labeling a government as such might make it sound like the government is accepting, or victim to, Western values.
- **Moderate Muslim/Islam:** While this term suggests secular influence and anti-extremism, journalists should hesitate using it. It characterizes Islam as an opposing identity that is extreme or violent.
- **Secularism/secular society:** When writing about different nation-states, journalists should not jump to define a given region as a secular society. Many Muslims see the need for religion to play a role in government and/or society, so it can be offensive to define a state as secular. The use of such discourse can also ignite negativity and tension with the “West.”
- **Shariah:** Shariah might be perceived as archaic and not able to adapt to modern life, which can offend Muslims.
- **War on Terror:** This could be misinterpreted as “War on Islam” and readers can become confused about who the enemy in the war actually is.

About visiting a mosque

Mosque FAQ

- What are the major sections of the mosque?
 - Entrance (where shoes are removed)
 - Musallah (prayer room)
 - Qiblah (where the imam faces in prayer)
 - Mihrab (niche that shows direction of Mecca)
 - Wadu facilities (place to wash hands, face and feet before prayer)
 - In some mosques, there may be separate entrances for men and women.
- Who officiates services?
 - The muazzin calls individuals to prayer. The imam leads prayer and gives sermons.
- What are guests expected to do at a service?
 - Guests can just sit and observe or can choose to participate in the service.
- What kinds of equipment can be used in a mosque service?
 - Taking pictures, using flash and using a video camera are generally not allowed. Sometimes using this equipment is OK for use if approved by a given mosque or Islamic center. Tape recorders are more likely to be approved for use.
- What happens after the service?
 - There is not usually a reception after the service and guests can leave early if they wish.

Religious activities and appropriate behavior in the mosque

- Journalists should take care to remove shoes and dress conservatively upon entering a mosque. Men should wear slacks and a casual shirt. Women should cover arms and legs and bring a head scarf. Open-toed shoes and modest jewelry are OK for women. Avoid wearing clothes with photographs or images of faces. Wearing visible crosses, Stars of David, zodiac signs or pendants with faces or animals is frowned upon.
- It is sometimes considered inappropriate for a stranger to shake hands with a member of the opposite sex.
- When taking photographs of Muslims at prayer, do not film or photograph them from behind.

- Avoid luncheon meetings during Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. Also, many Muslims follow dietary laws, which prohibit eating pork, its byproducts, blood and the flesh of animals that died without being ritually slaughtered.
- Muslims do not engage in rigorous historical-literary criticism of the Quran as Christians and Jews do with their scripture, and Muslims consider it inappropriate to do so. Trained Quranic scholars interpret the Quran's teachings for application in modern life but do not question what is true or analyze how the Quran was assembled.

Important and contentious issues

International issues

Islam and Resistance: Peace or Violence?

A question among Islamic communities is whether Islam supports nonviolent or violent resistance in times of conflict or uprisings (such as the Arab Spring).

There are some high profile groups that see violent resistance as necessary, including Hezbollah and Hamas.

Some governments recognize Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. It is based in Lebanon and was formed in 1982 during Israel's war against Lebanon. It is supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). IRGC provides Hezbollah with financial support and training. Syria also supplies the group with weapons and political support. In recent years, Lebanon has fallen victim to **violent conflict** and the influence and place of Hezbollah is unclear. Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon's government has been arguably strong, with its former prime minister embracing Hezbollah's members and supporters.

Hamas is a Sunni Muslim extremist group that is characterized as an influential Palestinian militant movement. It has been known to carry out suicide bombings in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Hamas originally grew as an arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in the First Intifada in 1987. Hamas soon sought its own charter and moved away from the Muslim Brotherhood's practice of non-violence, with its first terrorist attack in the early 1990s.

Muslim-West Relations

According to the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, individuals in the Middle East and North Africa describe tensions between the West and Muslim society as being caused by religious difference and politics. Both Muslims and non-Muslims believe that the West does not respect Muslim communities as much as the East. However, there are debates over whether an Islam and the West (or East and West) binary still influences diplomacy and international relations.

Other scholars see this as a major issue impacting policy, including [Hamid Dabashi](#), an Iranian-American professor of Iranian studies and comparative literature at Columbia University in New York City. He is the author of several books, including *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*.

Muslim Communities in Western Europe

[Treatment and discontent of Muslims](#) in Western Europe is another salient area of concern in news coverage. Britain, France and Germany have the largest Muslim populations in Western Europe. [Artists](#), among other groups, are creating a political discourse against discrimination and profiling in Europe. Another issue of concern is the banning of veiling in the region, in areas such as [Belgium](#) and [France](#). There have also been clashes about veiling and religious practices in [Germany](#). Another relevant issue is prejudice and violent acts toward immigrants from countries in which Islam is practiced such as Morocco, Afghanistan and Turkey.

Political Participation

Civil rights, immigration rules, travel restrictions, investigations of Muslim charities and public perceptions of Islam are of deep concern to Muslim communities. As a result, Muslims are becoming increasingly engaged in politics.

In recent years, Islam has become a major part of political news coverage, such as the coverage of the Arab Spring. The role of Islam in different nation states in the Middle East has become an issue in the event of the uprisings. For example, a [Pew study](#) shows that a majority of Egyptians want Islam to guide the laws of Egypt, despite the practice of Christianity in the country.

Conflict in the Middle East, Southern Asia, U.S. Involvement

There are several conflicts abroad that can influence coverage and interpretation of Islam.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The **conflict** between Israelis and Palestinians also emerges as a major issue related to coverage of Islam's involvement in conflict and social issues. Most Israeli Jews and Palestinians believe that the conflict will never reach a permanent peace resolution, according to the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center. Eight million Palestinian refugees have been displaced to other regions in the Middle East, which presents potential economic burden for other nation states and the United Nations, according to the Middle East Outreach Council. The **treatment of individuals** in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and inequality in Israel are also concerns of the international community.

War in Iraq

Iraqis believe that the invasion has been more harmful than beneficial, especially Sunni Muslims, according to the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center. The center also reported that Iraqis are in favor of forces leaving the country sooner than later. Military involvement and withdrawal are major concerns.

War in Afghanistan

Afghans are not satisfied with democracy in the country, according to a report by the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center. Financial and economic development are major issues of concern here.

U.S. Clashes with Pakistan

According to Pew, most Pakistanis view the U.S. as an enemy and threat to security. Since the killing of Osama bin Laden on Pakistani territory, the **relations between the U.S. and Pakistan** have been tumultuous. The U.S. perception of Pakistan as a country that harbors and supports terrorist organizations also has led to ill will between these nations.

Islam, State Control and Diplomacy

Beyond areas of conflict, there are regions in which Islam is not pluralistic and threatens peaceful relations with other countries. For example, Iran, as an Islamic republic, has presented the **threat of nuclear weapons development**. This puts the nation at odds with the U.N. Security Council and other countries. A **primer on**

[Iran and Islam](#) further explains how the identity of the state shapes its policy. Islam is also the state religion in states such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Maldives.

While the status of nation states as Islamic can put stress on relations with secular or Western powers, reporters should be careful to not make assumptions on the connection between Islamic belief systems and potentially aggressive or hostile relations.

Salafism

The Salaf were the earliest scholars of Islamic law (Shariah). “Salaf” means “ancient one” in Arabic. Their prominence emerged before the schools of thought (see “Background & Groups”). Some Sunni Muslims practice [Salafism](#) as a return to a more authentic interpretation of the Quran. Salafism is also applied as a greater integration of Islam in government and daily life. However, Salafism has been connected to terrorist acts and those adhering to Salafism have sometimes been identified as fundamentalists and jihadists. Journalists should be careful in labeling those that identify with this group as radical, fundamentalist, Islamist, etc. For example, coverage of the young [Salafist Nour Party in Egypt](#) might be of concern. Salafis only make up fewer than 1 percent of Muslims worldwide, so journalists should be cautious about making assumptions about their influence.

Shariah Law

Shariah includes legal rulings and scholarly interpretations of rulings, but Muslims do not necessarily agree on the contents of Shariah and its application, according to the Middle East Outreach Council. While Muslim Americans might not use Shariah as legal guidance, Muslims in other countries might follow Shariah more closely. For example, nations (e.g., Iran) that do not use democratic government might be more likely to apply Shariah. The [Council on Foreign Relations](#) explains different kinds of punishment under Shariah and how Shariah fits with modern or secular forms of government and society. According to a [study](#) by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, Shariah can adapt to modern life in non-Muslim regions.

Adherence to Islam in Daily Life

Muslims often require special accommodation in order to follow Islam’s rules on prayer, dress and eating. When refused by schools, workplaces or prisons, these requests can lead to conflicts and sometimes

lawsuits. In addition, Muslim communities struggle with engaging youth and young adults in a faith whose practices — from modest dress to certain foods — are often at odds with U.S. and European cultures.

Health care is a particularly important area in which Islamic practices, such as acknowledging dietary needs (halal food), modesty of patients and the need for prayer spaces, should be respected to prevent health disparity. Muslims are creating an infrastructure of Muslim schools, health services, civic organizations, banks (Islam forbids collecting or paying interest) and more.

Homosexuality

Muslim individuals who identify as gay can face **discrimination** and become the victims of violent acts. Some sex acts are illegal in several Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. However, some scholars say that the Quran itself does not outlaw homosexuality, but rather forms of lust and potential violent acts.

General issues

- Do not enhance racial profiling by simply running photographs and images of Muslims who, because of the way they dress, fit the stereotype.
- There is no one Muslim leader that can speak for all of Islam. Additionally, there is no worldwide leader of Islam, or even the major branches of the religion. Imams and other local leaders serve different functions from most pastors and rabbis and often focus most of their work on interpreting Islamic law. Because there is no central authority, theological and legal interpretations can vary by region, country or even from mosque to mosque.

Style guide

A

abaya: A robe-like garment worn by some women who are Muslims. It is often black and can be a caftan or fabric draped over the shoulders or head. It is sometimes worn with a hijab and/or a niqab. See **burqa**.

ablution: The practice of ritual washing in a religious rite to cleanse a person of sin or disease, to purify or to signify humility or service to others. In Christianity, baptism and foot-washing are both forms of ablution. In

liturgical churches, ablution can refer to purifying fingers or vessels related to the Eucharist. In Islam, ablution is ritual washing, known as wudu, before prayer. In Judaism, immersion in a mikvah is a form of ablution.

adhan: The Islamic call to prayer.

Ahl al-Kitab: Used in the Quran for Jews and Christians; Arabic for “People of the Book.”

Al-Aqsa: An eighth-century mosque in the old city of Jerusalem. Arabs sometimes use the term to designate the surrounding area; Jews refer to that area as the Temple Mount.

Al-Isra Wal Miraj: A celebration of Muhammad’s journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, where he ascended to speak with Allah.

al-Qaida: The international network of militant terrorists associated with Osama bin Laden and an extremist form of Islam. In Arabic, al-Qaida means “the base.”

Allah: Arabic word for *God*. Some Muslims say they generally say or write *God* instead of *Allah* when addressing a non-Muslim to avoid any suggestion that the two are not the same. However, always use *Allah* when quoting a person or text that uses *Allah*.

Allahu akbar: Pronounced “AH-luhu AHK-bar.” In Arabic it means “God is great” or “God is the greatest.” Muslims say it several times a day, such as during the call for prayer, during prayer, when they are happy and when they wish to express their approval of what they hear.

angels: Spirit messengers, both good and evil, accepted in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religions. They appear in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Quran. Capitalize *angel* when it precedes a name, such as the *Angel Gabriel*.

Aqiqah: A birth or welcoming ceremony into Islam.

ayatollah: Pronounced “eye-ya-TOE-la.” A Shiite term for senior clergyman. Capitalize when used as a title before a name, but lowercase otherwise.

B

burqa: A form of covering for women who are Muslims, most frequently found in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is an all-enveloping outer garment with a net-covered opening for the eyes or face to allow the woman to see. See **abaya**, **hijab** and **niqab**.

C

caliph: Pronounced “KAY-luhf.” Successor or representative of the Prophet Muhammad, and the political leader of the Ummah, or Islamic community. A dispute over who should succeed Muhammad after his death prompted the Sunni-Shiite split that continues today. According to Sunnis, who make up the vast majority of Muslims, the first four caliphs were Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, Othman Ibn ‘Affan, and ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib. These four are known collectively as the “Rightly Guided Caliphs.” Shiites believe that Muhammad’s relatives should have succeeded him. Another term for caliph is *khalifah*.

caliphate: Pronounced “KAY-luhf-ate.” The lands of the Islamic state ruled by the caliph. In 1517, the Ottomans claimed the caliphate and held it until 1923, when the secular nation of Turkey was created. The terrorist Osama bin Laden spoke of restoring the caliphate.

D

da’wah: Inviting others to Islam; missionary work.

dhikr: Pronounced “THIK-er.” The remembrance of God, especially by chanting the names of God to induce alternative states of consciousness. Also sometimes spelled *zikr*.

dogma: In religions such as Christianity and Islam, dogmas are considered core principles that must be adhered to by followers. In Roman Catholicism it is a truth proclaimed by the church as being divinely revealed. Dogma must be based in Scripture or tradition; to deny it is heresy.

du’a: Pronounced “DO-uh.” The Islamic term for individuals’ personal supplication to God. In Arabic it means *calling*.

E

Eid al-Adha: Pronounced “EED-uhl-ad-ha.” Known as the Feast of Sacrifice, it concludes the annual observance of the pilgrimage to Mecca known as hajj. Muslims everywhere observe Eid al-Adha with

community prayers and a feast, whether or not they are on hajj. Eid al-Adha shifts dates every year because Muslims use a lunar calendar that only includes about 354 days. Eid al-Adha commences with the sighting of the new moon. See [hajj](#).

Eid al-Fitr: Pronounced “EED-uhl-FIT-uhr.” A joyous Islamic holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. It is observed with communal prayers, donations to charity and special meals. Fasting is forbidden on this day. Eid al-Fitr shifts dates every year because Muslims use a lunar calendar that only includes about 354 days. Eid al-Fitr commences with the sighting of the new moon. See [Ramadan](#).

end times: Lowercase. Generally refers to the time of tribulation preceding the Second Coming of Jesus, though it has parallels and roots in all three Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Sometimes also called the “End of Days.”

F

fatwa: Pronounced “FAHT-wah.” A ruling, or legal opinion, on Islamic law issued by an Islamic scholar.

fiqh: Pronounced “fik-h.” Islamic jurisprudence, based on study of the Quran and other sacred texts.

Five Pillars: The fundamental aspects of Islam that direct the private lives of Muslims in their dealings with God. All branches of Islam accept them. The First Pillar is the Shahada, or profession of faith, that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet. The Second Pillar is salat, or the five daily or canonical prayers for remaining constant in the faith. They are performed at prescribed times with a prescribed ritual. The Third Pillar is zakat, charity for the poor. The Fourth Pillar is fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. The Fifth Pillar is hajj, or the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. Every Muslim who is physically and financially able is required to make the journey once.

G

golden rule: Variations on the golden rule, which can be succinctly stated as, “treat others as you wish to be treated,” are found in the texts of every major religion, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

grand mufti: The most supreme religious leader. One can be a grand mufti of a city, region or country. It is a title used mostly by Sunnis. Capitalize when used before a name.

H

hadith: Pronounced “ha-DEETH.” A report or reports about a saying, action or tradition of Muhammad and his closest companions. Can be used as both a singular and a plural noun. Hadith are viewed by Muslims as explanations of the Quran and are second only to Islam’s holy book in terms of guidance and as a source of Shariah (Islamic law). The two most reliable collections are by Bukhari and his student Muslim, both ninth-century Islamic scholars.

hajj: Pronounced “hahj.” In Islam, a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad. It is the fifth of the Five Pillars of Islam. Every Muslim who is physically capable and financially able is expected to make the hajj at least once. Hajj takes place during the 12th month of the Islamic year, and specific rites take place during a five-day period. Because Muslims follow a lunar calendar, the dates move each year. The festival of Eid al-Adha occurs at the end of hajj. A *hajji* is a person who has undertaken the pilgrimage. See [Eid al-Adha](#).

halal: Pronounced “ha-LAL.” In Arabic, something that is lawful and permitted in Islam. It is often used to refer to Islamic dietary laws, which prescribe ritual slaughtering of beef and poultry, among other things.

Hamas: An Islamic political party in Palestine. An armed wing of the party uses the same name.

haraam: Pronounced “ha-RAHM.” In Arabic, something that is forbidden or prohibited in Islam.

haram: Pronounced “HAR-em.” In Arabic, a sanctuary or sacred territory in which all things are considered inviolable. Mecca and Medina both have this designation.

Hezbollah: A Shiite Islam political party in Lebanon. An armed wing of the party uses the same name.

hijab: Generally used to describe the scarf many women who are Muslims use to cover their head, but it can also refer to the modest dress, in general, that women wear because of the Quran’s instruction on modesty. Shiites are more likely to wear *hijabs* than Sunni Muslims, but women decide whether to wear one based on the dictates of their mosque, community and conscience. See [abaya](#), [burqa](#), [niqab](#).

hijrah: Pronounced “HIJ-ra.” In Arabic, to flee in pursuit of sanctuary; the term refers to the flight of Prophet Muhammad in 622 from Mecca to Medina, and marks the start of the Islamic calendar. Also spelled *hijira*.

/

ijtihad: Pronounced “IJ-tee-haad.” The process of reasoning and interpreting the Quran, hadith and other sacred texts to uncover God’s rulings. Religious scholars effectively terminated the practice five centuries ago, but a need seen by some Muslims to reinterpret the faith for modern times has revived the practice. It is disputed whether ijtihad is reserved for scholars, or open to all Muslims with a basic degree of religious knowledge.

imam: Pronounced “ee-MAHM.” In everyday use, any person who leads a congregational prayer. Traditionally, only men have been imams, although women are allowed to serve as imams for other women. To lead prayers, one does not have to be a cleric. In a more formal sense, an imam is a religious leader, but can also be a political leader. Many Shiites believe imams are intercessors with God; many also believe in the Twelve Imams, descendants of Prophet Muhammad whom they consider his rightful successors. The Twelfth Imam disappeared from the world in 873, but followers of Twelve Imams Shiism believe that he is still alive and will return as the Mahdi, or “the guided one,” who will restore righteousness before the end of the world. On first reference, uppercase *imam* when preceding a proper name. On second reference, use only the person’s last name. Uppercase *imam* when referencing the Twelve Imams.

intifada: This Islamic term for shaking, uprising and insurrection generally is used to refer to the Palestinian resistance of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Specific events mark the beginnings of different intifadas.

Islam: Religion founded in seventh-century Mecca by the Prophet Muhammad, who said Allah (God), through the Angel Gabriel, revealed the Quran to him between 610 and 632, the year of his death. Followers of Islam are called *Muslims*. They worship in a mosque, and their weekly holy day is Friday. Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, after Christianity. After Muhammad’s death, Islam split into two distinct branches — Sunni and Shiite — in an argument over who would succeed him. Sunnis make up an estimated 85 percent of all Muslims. Shiites are the majority in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain, while Sunnis are the majority in other Islamic countries. In Sunni and Shiite Islam, there are various madhhabs, or schools of thought, and other theological traditions. There is no central religious authority, so theological and legal interpretations can vary from region to region, country to country and even mosque to mosque. Capitalize all Islamic titles when used before a name and lowercase otherwise. Use the title and

name on first reference and only the person's last name after that. Shiites and Sunnis use a few of the same religious titles but differ on others. Shiites have a more-defined hierarchy than Sunnis. For example, Sunnis call people who lead congregational prayers *imams*, while Shiites almost exclusively reserve *imam* to refer to any of the 12 descendants of the Prophet Muhammad who Shiites believe were his rightful successors. *Sheik*, on the other hand, is used in both communities, but can be used either as term of respect — to address older men, for example — or for a formally trained scholar. Among Sufi Muslims, *sheik* holds a more exclusive status that is reserved for highly trained scholars and heads of Sufi orders. Among Shiites, *mullahs* are lower-level clergy who generally have only rudimentary religious education. A *hujjat al-Islam* is more learned than a *mullah* but does not have the authority to issue legal rulings. *Mujtahids* and *faqih*s are jurists with the authority to issue rulings. A higher-level *mujtahid* is a *marja*, the most educated of whom are called *ayatollahs*. In addition to *imam* and *sheik*, Sunni titles include *mufti* and *grand mufti*, which indicate a higher status usually conferred by an institution. *Grand muftis* are usually the top religious scholar in a country. Because the Quran is in Arabic, it is a common misconception that all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arab; neither is true.

Islamic: An adjective used to describe the religion of Islam. It is not synonymous with *Islamist*. *Muslim* is a noun and is the proper term for individual believers. See **Islamist, Muslim**.

Islamist: Follow AP style, which defines the term as an “advocate or supporter of a political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam” and gives this guidance: “Do not use as a synonym for Islamic fighters, militants, extremists or radicals, who may or may not be Islamists. “Where possible, be specific and use the name of militant affiliations: al-Qaida-linked, Hezbollah, Taliban, etc. Those who view the Quran as a political model encompass a wide range of Muslims, from mainstream politicians to militants known as jihadi.”

J

jihad: An Arabic word that translates as “struggle” or “striving.” It is most commonly used to describe an inward, spiritual struggle for holiness, though traditionally it has also been used to describe defensive military action against non-Muslims. Today militant Muslims use it to call for aggressive armed strikes against non-Muslims, including civilians, and against other Muslims whom they consider impure – all acts

condemned by mainstream Islam. Although many in the media translate *jihad* as “holy war,” it does not mean that literally, and the majority of Muslims do not use it that way.

K

kaffiyeh: A men’s headdress.

Koran: *Quran* is the preferred spelling and is capitalized in all references. The spelling *Koran* should only be used if it is in a specific title or name. See [Quran](#).

kufi: A skullcap worn by some (male) Muslims.

M

madhhab: Islamic school of thought. There are four schools of thought that most Sunni Muslims follow: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali. There is generally great harmony between these schools, with differences lying in finer points of law rather than in fundamentals of faith. Ja’fari and Zaydi are the two main Shiite schools of thought.

madrassa: A Muslim place of learning usually associated with a mosque.

Mahdi: Pronounced “MAAH-dee.” The “guided one” many Muslims believe will appear at the end of times to restore righteousness for a short period before the end of the world. Shiite Muslims believe the Mahdi is the Twelfth Imam, a descendant of Muhammad who disappeared in 873. Many Sunni Muslims also believe in the Mahdi, though not necessarily that he is the Twelfth Imam. However, some noted Sunni authorities have rejected belief in the Mahdi, saying it is not compatible with a religion that does not rely on intercession to achieve salvation.

Mecca: The birthplace of Muhammad, it is Islam’s holiest place. Located in western Saudi Arabia, Mecca is the focal point of Muslims’ prayers. Muslims pray toward Mecca five times each day.

monotheism: A religion devoted to the worship of a single god. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are known as the world’s three great monotheistic religions.

Moslem: An outdated term for Muslims. It should not be used unless it is part of a proper name.

mosque: A building in which Muslims gather for prayer and worship. The tower of a mosque, a minaret, is used to chant a call for prayer.

Muhammad: Islam's most important prophet. Because Muslims believe Islam existed before Muhammad, they consider him to be the religion's final prophet, not its founder. Non-Muslims refer to Muhammad as the founder of Islam. Capitalize the word *prophet* when used with Muhammad's name – as in *the Prophet Muhammad* – but not when used alone. According to traditional biographers, Muhammad was born circa 570 in Mecca and died in 632 in Medina, both cities in what is now Saudi Arabia.

mullah: A Shiite term for lower-level clergy. Capitalize the title when it precedes a name.

Muslim: A follower of Muhammad and the tenets and practices of Islam. *Muslim* is a noun; use the adjective *Islamic* when referring to the Islamic faith or the Islamic world. See **Islam**.

N

niqab: A veil worn by some women who are Muslims; it covers all of their face except the eyes. See **abaya**, **burqa** and **hijab**.

P

pagan: Generally, a person who does not acknowledge the God of Judaism, Christianity or Islam and who is a worshipper of a polytheistic religion. Many pagans follow an Earth-based or nature religion. The modern religious movement known as *neo-paganism* has adopted the name as a badge of faith. Note: Some pagans prefer to see the term capitalized. See **neo-paganism**.

prophet: Someone who speaks divine revelation, or a message they received directly from God. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all have certain figures they formally recognize as prophets. Some traditions, including the Mormons, some charismatic groups and some non-Christian faiths, believe their leaders receive ongoing divine revelation. In much of Christianity, all ordained clergy are considered to have a prophetic role because their job is to proclaim the word of God. Capitalize when used before the name Muhammad to refer to Islam's final prophet, but otherwise do not capitalize as a title.

Q

qawwali: Pronounced “kuh-WAH-lee.” Devotional songs of the Sufi tradition of Islam. Do not capitalize.

Quran: Pronounced “ku-RAHN.” The holy book of Islam, which Muslims believe is the direct word of God as dictated in Arabic to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel during the month of Ramadan beginning in 610 to about 632. The Quran contains laws for society, as well as descriptions of heaven and hell and warnings on the end of the world. It also includes stories of figures found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, but Muslims believe the Quran supersedes those holy writings. *Quran* is the preferred spelling and is capitalized in all references. The spelling *Koran* should only be used if it is in a specific title or name.

R

Ramadan: Pronounced “rah-mah-DAH-N.” Islam’s holy month, during which Muslims fast from sunup to sundown. Ramadan commemorates the time during which the faithful believe Allah sent the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad in Mecca and gave him the teachings of the Quran. The end of Ramadan is marked by Eid al-Fitr. Because Islam follows a lunar calendar, Ramadan shifts each year as calculated by Western calendars. See [Eid al-Fitr](#).

S

salat: The prescribed prayer that Muslims offer five times a day to fulfill the second of the Five Pillars of their faith.

Satan: In the Hebrew Bible, Satan is depicted as an angel used by God to test man. In the New Testament, Satan is a fallen angel who is the ultimate evil and enemy of God and man. In Islam, Satan was the head jinn or genie until he angered God by refusing to accept man’s superiority. Uppercase in all references, but always lowercase *devil*.

Shahada: The Islamic profession of faith that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s prophet. The Shahada is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Shariah: Pronounced “sha-REE-ya.” The revealed and canonical laws of Islam. Some countries base their legal systems on Shariah; their legislators create laws and rules based on the Quran, hadith and other sources.

sheik: Most Islamic clergymen use the title *sheik* like a Christian cleric uses *the Rev.* Sheik also is used as a secular title. Capitalize it when used before a name, but lowercase otherwise.

Shiism, Shiite: *Shiism* is the name of the smaller of the two major branches of Islam. It developed after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, when his followers split over who would lead Islam. The Shiism branch favored Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib. Its followers are called *Shiites*. Use *Shiite* instead of Shi'ah unless in a quote or as part of a name. Uppercase in all uses.

skullcap: A small, close-fitting headpiece worn in some religious traditions, particularly by men. Other names for it include yarmulke (worn by Jews), zucchetto (worn by Roman Catholic prelates) and kufi (worn by Muslims).

Sufism: Pronounced "SOO-fee-izem." An Islamic mystic tradition with followers around the world.

Sunni: Pronounced "SOO-nee." The largest denomination in Islam, followed by about 85 percent of Muslims. The plural form is Sunnis.

T

tawhid: Pronounced "tau-HEED." The concept that denotes the oneness and unity of God; it is the basis of Islam.

U

Ummah: Pronounced "OOM-mah." The worldwide community of Muslims.

W

Wahhabism: An austere form of Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia and Qatar that follows a strict, literal interpretation of the Quran. Most people in the West knew nothing of Wahhabism until after the 9/11 attacks, which were organized by the terrorist Osama bin Laden, a Wahhabi. Wahhabism has spread rapidly since the 1970s, when the oil-rich Saudi royal family began contributing money to it. It is considered an extremist form of Sunni Islam that strictly enforces rules and criticizes those who follow other traditions of Islam. Use *Wahhabi* for a follower of Wahhabism.

wudu: Pronounced “woo-DOO.” A ritual in Islam in which the hands, face, mouth and feet are cleaned with water, symbolic of spiritual cleansing. It is usually performed before a Muslim goes to prayer five times each day. See **ablution**.

Z

zakat: One of the Five Pillars of Islam. All branches of Islam accept these fundamental aspects of the faith that direct the private lives of Muslims in their dealings with God. Zakat, the Third Pillar, is charity for the poor.