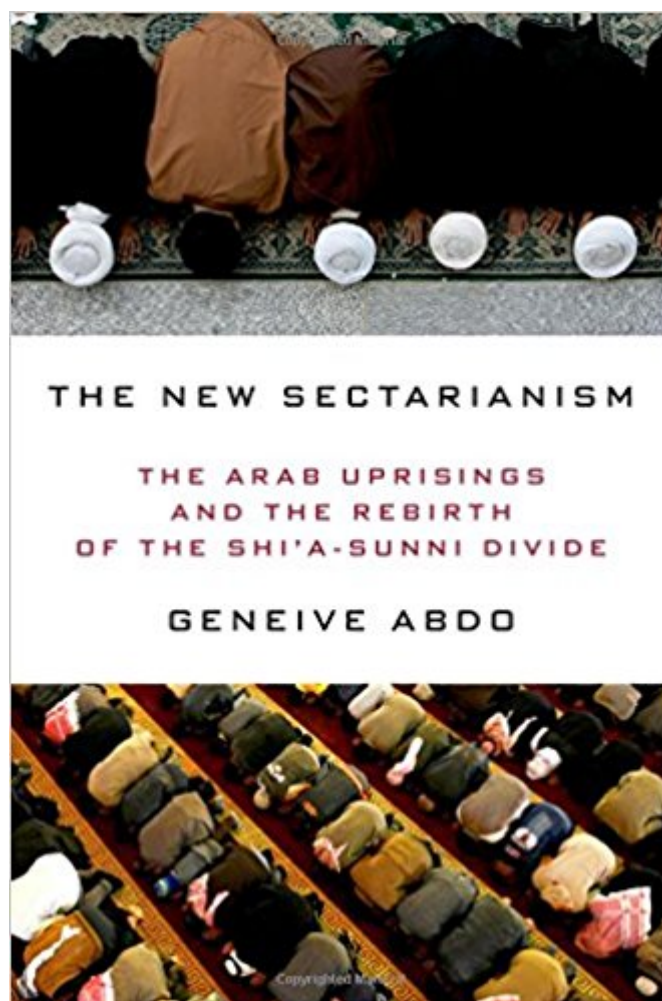


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# The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings And The Rebirth Of The Shi'a-Sunni Divide



## Synopsis

The Shi'a-Sunni conflict is one of the most significant outcomes arising from the Arab rebellions. Yet, there is little understanding of who is driving this tension and the underlying causes. By delving deeply into the historical factors leading up to the present-day conflict, *The New Sectarianism* sheds new light on how Shi'a and Sunni perceive one another after the Arab uprisings, how these perceptions have affected the Arab world, and why the dream of a pan-Islamic awakening was misplaced. Geneive Abdo describes a historical backdrop that serves as a counterpoint to Western media coverage of the so-called Arab Spring. Already by the 1970s, she says, Shi'a and Sunni communities had begun to associate their religious beliefs and practices with personal identity, replacing their fragile loyalty to the nation state. By the time the Arab risings erupted into their full fury in early 2011, there was fertile ground for instability. The ensuing clash-between Islamism and Nationalism, Shi'a and Sunni, and other factions within these communities-has resulted in unprecedented violence. So, Abdo asks, what does religion have to do with it? This sectarian conflict is often presented by the West as rivalry over land use, political power, or access to education. However, Abdo persuasively argues that it must be understood as flowing directly from religious difference and the associated identities that this difference has conferred on both Shi'a and Sunni. *The New Sectarianism* considers the causes for this conflict in key countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Bahrain and the development of regional trends. Abdo argues that in these regions religion matters, not only in how it is utilized by extremists, moderate Islamists, and dictators alike for political purposes, but how it perpetually evolves and is perceived and practiced among the vast majority of Muslims. Shi'a and Sunni today are not battling over territory alone; they are fighting for their claim to a true Islamic identity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Abdo combines a wealth of experience of reporting in the Middle East, fresh interviews, and an expansive survey of social media... Anyone interested in better perceiving current conflicts in the region will benefit from Abdo's analysis and her assertion that how Shi'a and Sunni perceive each other in the wake of Arab uprisings affects Arab life at every level of society."-- Publishers Weekly

"Abdo offers a bold and provocative reassessment of the power and resilience of sectarian identities in a new Middle East. It has become easy to explain Sunni-Shia divides as being primarily about geopolitics. Abdo does us a great service in arguing that ideas and doctrine do, in fact, matter. It is time to bring religion back into our understanding of sectarianism, and Abdo does exactly that."

--Shadi Hamid, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution and author of *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping the World* "This compelling and urgent book dissects and re-appraises the importance of religion to Middle Eastern cultures today. Abdo does not promote a stereotypical or historically deterministic view of these cultures, but urges readers to appreciate and respect the very real challenges confronting native reformers seeking to chart an autonomous, authentic path to the reconstruction of religious identity." --Khaled Abou El Fadl, Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Professor of Law, University of California, Los Angeles "Sectarianism is a complex historical phenomenon that continues to command international attention. Geneive Abdo investigates political rhetoric, collective memory, and social media activism among Sunni and Shi'a from Iraq and Lebanon to Bahrain and elsewhere in the Gulf. Abdo makes the compelling case that policymakers ignore the specifically religious aspects of Sunni-Shi'a relations at great peril." --Max Weiss, Departments of History and Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University "By exploring the social, political, and religious aspects of the new sectarianism in the Middle East and beyond, Abdo convincingly demonstrates that it is reshaping regional alliances and threatening global geopolitics. This volume is a landmark in the study of religion and politics in the Middle East." --Mark Juergensmeyer, author of *Global Rebellions: Religious Challenges to the Secular State* "Abdo's treatment of these topics is balanced... What is original is her analysis of prominent self-appointed Salafi "sheiks" and their output on Twitter."-- John Waterbury, *Foreign Affairs* "This careful analysis of the current state of the Arab world will offer interested readers of the subject a solid perspective of the various movements and how they interact."--Library Journal

Geneive Abdo is a senior fellow at the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East at the Atlantic Council In Washington, DC. She is also an adjunct professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University.

This is a must read book for anyone who wants to understand the Muslim world. I saw this author on VC-span, and it is obvious that she is an expert in the subject. I recommend it to all congress people and the administrative branch members. There is much to be learned about the Middle East.

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