

The Role of Cultural, Political, and Social Structures in Reducing Religious Conflicts in the Islamic World (Presenting Solutions)

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Abstract

This research aims to identify and analyze effective strategies for reducing religious conflicts in the Islamic world, particularly between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The main objective is to examine the serious challenges arising from these conflicts and propose comprehensive solutions for fostering unity among diverse Islamic communities. The research employs qualitative content analysis, utilizing a combination of documentary and library research methods, along with in-depth interviews conducted with specialists and religious scholars. This multifaceted approach enables researchers to explore the complexities and various dimensions of the subject matter, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying issues contributing to religious discord. The findings indicate that reducing religious conflicts necessitates a multifaceted strategy that encompasses several key components. These components include: 1) Strengthening interfaith dialogue to promote understanding and respect; 2) Encouraging cultural and social exchanges to build bridges between communities; 3) Leveraging the constructive role of media and education to disseminate positive narratives; 4) Organizing joint scientific conferences to foster collaboration; 5) Emphasizing common religious principles that unite rather than divide; 6) Actively countering extremism through community engagement; and 7) Promoting scientific and cultural cooperation to enhance mutual respect and understanding. The research underscores the necessity of collective and continuous efforts by governments, religious leaders, intellectual elites, and the general public to establish unity and convergence within the Islamic world. By implementing these strategies, it is possible to significantly reduce tensions and promote peaceful coexistence among Islamic communities, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious society.

Keywords: : Islamic world, Islamic unity, constructivist theory, religious conflicts.

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Introduction

Unity and convergence among various Islamic groups and sects are today recognized as one of the most essential needs of the Islamic world—a need emphasized repeatedly in numerous verses of the Holy Qur'an (Q 3:103 and 21:92). The Islamic Ummah, with its extensive commonalities in religious, cultural, and civilizational principles and values, possesses immense and dynamic capacities for progress and excellence. This solidarity not only enhances the power and authority of the Islamic world in the international arena but also paves the way for the development and flourishing of Muslim societies. Unity, understood as respect for diversity of viewpoints and sectarian differences while preserving distinct identities, facilitates peaceful coexistence and constructive cooperation. In the light of unity, the Islamic Ummah can more effectively confront the challenges ahead and advance toward its shared aspirations.

Nevertheless, ethnic, racial, historical, and diverse political structures in the Islamic world, along with mistrust, extremism, prejudices, and deviations, have posed serious challenges to the shared identity and cohesion of Islamic countries. Disunity and discord among Islamic sects—particularly the Shia-Sunni duality—represent one of the most significant obstacles to the progress and flourishing of the Islamic world. These divisions, rooted in political, historical factors and the divisive policies of external actors manifested as Shia-phobia, Iran-phobia, and fear of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (Fischer 2006:157), have weakened the unity and solidarity of the Islamic Ummah and paved the way for foreign intervention and the exploitation of these rifts (Hafeznia and Mirzaei Tabar, 2020: 116). The consequences of this situation include the outbreak of religious wars and conflicts, intensified violence and extremism, destruction of infrastructure, and the displacement of millions of people. Such conditions not only deprive Muslim societies of development opportunities but also tarnish the image of Islam and lead to global misconceptions about its teachings.

This is while Islam, with its transnational perspective, emphasizes the brotherhood of Muslims and the unity of Islamic societies based on the common nature and disposition (*fitrah*) of human beings (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2010: 58). On the other hand, through divisions such as *Dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam) versus *Dār al-Kufr* (abode of unbelief), Islam presents a form of social order and a distinct approach in the global arena (Sarkheil, 2019: 24) which, grounded in Qur'anic and religious logic, underscores adherence to the divine rope and the unity of Islamic societies. Given the significance of unity and convergence in the Islamic world and the grievous harms and consequences of disunity, the central problem of this research concerns how to transition from sectarian differences toward integration and cooperation among Muslims, so that while preserving the identity and independence of each sect, the

Islamic Ummah may achieve its common goals. Accordingly, the main objective is to investigate practical solutions for overcoming the Shia-Sunni duality and to identify and present effective strategies for reducing sectarian tensions, strengthening Islamic solidarity, and fostering an environment of peace and peaceful coexistence.

The significance of this research can be assessed from two aspects. First, this study is undertaken at a time when the Islamic world confronts numerous challenges, including sectarian divisions. Offering practical solutions to overcome these challenges can contribute to ameliorating the current situation and creating a better future for Muslims, such that, as Karl Deutsch asserted, through close communication, independent units transform into interdependent components of a system (Deutsch, 1971: 158). Second, the findings of this research can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, religious leaders, intellectuals, and other stakeholders concerned with the Islamic world. This study can provide a foundation for designing unity-oriented programs and policies, promoting interreligious dialogue, and fostering an atmosphere of mutual understanding and empathy among Muslims

The Islamic World

As the second largest religion globally, Islam unites a significant portion of the world's population as Muslims, who are dispersed across various continents. This geographical expanse stretches from the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the western borders of China in the east, with an approximately southwestern to northeastern geographical orientation (Hafeznia and Mirzaei Tabar, 2020: 116). Specifically, Guyana in northern South America is recognized as the westernmost member state of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, while Indonesia in Southeast Asia constitutes the easternmost Muslim country within this organization. Kazakhstan stands as the northernmost Muslim country in Central Asia, and Mozambique is situated at the southernmost point of the African continent (Kazempour and Ma'dani, 2019: 81).

The Islamic world as a whole encompasses approximately 20 percent of the global population and 25 percent of the countries established on earth, with around 19 to 20 percent of the planet's land surface inhabited by Muslims. This population constitutes a formidable cultural, economic, and ideological force (Mostofi al-Mamaleki, 2002: 162). The demographic composition in countries considered part of the Islamic world is such that Muslims constitute between 65 and 75 percent of the population in many of these nations, with Islamic beliefs serving as the most significant identity marker in these regions. An absolute majority of Muslims reside in the continent of Asia (53 percent), 24 percent in Africa, and the remainder are scattered across other continents (Nazari, 1993: 20-25).

Possessing the largest subterranean and productive resources, Islamic countries form a substantial economic bloc extending from the zero-

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degree meridian to the temperate zones of the world, spanning from East Asia to West Africa and Europe. Within this geographical domain lie several critical straits—Gibraltar, Bab el-Mandeb, Hormuz, and Malacca—each considered strategic and geopolitical zones. These straits, together with the Suez Canal, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East, enjoy considerably more favorable conditions than other world regions due to their mineral and fossil fuel resources, fertile lands, and climatic diversity (Hafeznia and Mirzaei Tabar, 2020: 116).

This research broadly conceives of the Islamic world as comprising those territories where the majority of the population adheres to the religion of Islam. This includes Muslims residing in Islamic countries as well as those dwelling in non-Islamic states. Moreover, this concept encompasses Islamic countries that have not yet joined the Organization of Islamic Cooperation but may nonetheless be regarded as Islamic. In the current context, approximately sixty independent states have Muslim majorities exceeding 50 percent of their populations. Furthermore, Muslim minorities in various countries augment the concept of the Islamic world, such that this population has expanded geographically on a global scale (Raja, 2011: 40). In summary, the Islamic world—as a cultural and social entity, with its immense interests and riches—plays a significant role in global transformations and necessitates broader attention and cooperation both within and beyond its confines to achieve convergence and unity.

Islamic Unity

Islamic unity signifies the establishment of cohesion and solidarity among the Islamic Ummah and within the Islamic world—such that this unity portends the formation of a single Islamic community. The Holy Qur'an states: *"Indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so fear Me"* (Q 23:52). The concept of Islamic unity never implies the abandonment of other schools of thought. Moreover, Islamic unity must be regarded as an instrument for realizing a unified Ummah at the level of Islamic societies and the broader Islamic world. Accordingly, from the perspective of theorists, Islamic unity refers to a set of policies, decision-making processes, and methods that lead to the exploitation of shared capabilities and the adoption of uniform models, ultimately resulting in the actualization of Islamic unity. For this reason, God Almighty declares in the Qur'an: *"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided"* (Q 3:103). In light of Qur'anic verses, the unity of word (*wahdat al-kalimah*) of the Islamic Ummah signifies religious and Islamic unity, and is conceived as a method and instrument for the achievement of religious and divine objectives (Azin, 2014: 191).

From a religious perspective, unity is a desirable and ideal condition, emphasized and strongly enjoined, such that the establishment of religion is realized through the unity of the Islamic Ummah. This unity, within the domain of Islamic governments and societies and among Muslim nations, is termed political unity (Fouladi, 2008: 77-78). Given that the peoples of Islamic societies are bound together through the bond of faith, a single Islamic Ummah is formed—an Ummah that serves as the connecting link for all Muslims worldwide, irrespective of ethnic, sectarian, racial, linguistic, and cultural differences (Inayatollah, 2007). Unity, from yet another perspective, is considered a strategic approach to the question. In light of the Prophetic practice (*sīrah*) and Qur'anic verses prohibiting discord and contention, the call to "unity," "rapprochement," "solidarity," and "cohesion" is not merely a practical measure for preserving shared interests; rather, the effort to maintain unity and avoid division constitutes an obligation rooted in the belief in divine unity (*tawhīd*). Although a tactical approach to this issue is undeniable—meaning that while the unity and solidarity of Muslims is among the strategic goals of the Islamic system and the Islamic world, particularly following the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and given the threats and challenges posed by global arrogance to the Islamic system—the necessity of tactical and practical measures must not be overlooked (Kord, 2022: 12). Consequently, the establishment and preservation of Islamic unity is not merely an idea or ideal, but a vital necessity for confronting external threats and safeguarding the cultural, social, and political interests of Muslims.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory, as one of the theories of international relations, is a term that was employed in political and international studies by Nicholas Onuf in the 1980s and was subsequently rendered more applicable by Wendt (Chekel, 2012: 146). This theory maintains that the nature of social phenomena differs from material objects and entities, and that important aspects of international relations are not consequences of human nature or the essential characteristics of global politics; rather, they are historically and socially constructed. The most significant assumption of this theory is that value systems and intellectual frameworks are as important as structures, institutions, and material capabilities in politics. This theory further seeks to affirm that subjective systems, beliefs, patterns, and norms exert a fundamental influence on behaviors, perspectives, and the formation of new identities (Hopf, 1998: 158). The first wave of constructivists, identified as post-positivist or interpretivist, place particular emphasis on linguistic and discursive themes, grounding their theoretical foundations upon these, and stress the contextual conditions and linguistic structures (social discourses) that render such change possible (Chekel, 2012: 149).

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In the second phase, constructivists—unlike traditional positivists—emphasize the intersubjective structure and the role of norms in the formation of identity and, consequently, the interests of states (Palosaari, 2004). Within this theory, patterns, actors, and human subjectivities play a significant role in determining behaviors, structures, and decision-making; humans are not independent of their social context, and through their conduct and thought, they reconstruct the environment to define who they are and how they think. Accordingly, states likewise act based on their subjective meanings, language, and perceptions—themselves derived from their identities—and their identities are constructed through actors. These patterns and subjectivities arising from state identity, largely products of their social system and domestic identity, become determinants in foreign policy.

By introducing structures, actors, identities, interests, and ideas into the realm of international relations, constructivists ultimately seek to elucidate changes in the behavioral patterns of actors (Abdollah Khani, 2004: 186-187). From a constructivist perspective, regional integration and the formation of convergent identities, conceptions, and structures are rendered possible through shared language and discourses. In a convergent structure and region, people experience a sense of togetherness, shared belonging, and participation in common interests and values, with geography, territory, and material elements assuming a diminished role (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 31).

Furthermore, rather than concentrating on material motivations and factors, constructivists emphasize the importance of shared knowledge, learning, identity-related forces, and institutional and normative structures. They contend that through understanding intersubjective structures, we can identify the ways in which interests and identities transform over time and elucidate new forms of cooperation and integration among societies and states (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2002: 45). From the perspective of constructivist theory, a region is neither preordained, inherent, nor essential; rather, it is a constructed concept, the product of state interaction and their political will within a defined spatial boundary—one capable of generating regional identity (Katzenstein, 1996: 45-48).

Literature Review

The question of Islamic world unity constitutes one of the fundamental and challenging issues in the contemporary era. Numerous scholars and researchers have authored studies and articles endeavoring to examine the various dimensions of this subject, its obstacles and solutions, and to propose practical models for Islamic convergence. The collection of articles and research reviewed herein examines diverse facets of this question and seeks, through the presentation of appropriate solutions, to pave the way toward the realization of unity and convergence.

Veysi (2023), in a study entitled "Futures Study of Convergence among Islamic Countries through Scenario Planning," investigates the challenges and opportunities confronting convergence on the basis of the Qur'anic teaching of a single Ummah and with attention to the distinctiveness of the Islamic world from other regions. Having experienced integration in the past, the Islamic world has in recent centuries suffered colonization and decline. This research aims to identify various scenarios for convergence—including complete integration, an Islamic confederation, a union of Islamic countries, and continuation of the present state—each presenting a different vision of Islamic cooperation. The findings indicate that multiple scenarios exist for the future of Islamic countries; among these, scenarios such as complete integration and the formation of a unified state represent the most desirable outcomes, while other scenarios, such as confederation or union, are considered preferable, probable, and worthy of examination.

Sarkheil (2019), in the article "Religious Identity and the Future of Convergence in the Islamic World," attends to the role of Islam as an identity-forming factor. This article examines why, despite the significance of religious identity, this factor has failed to function as the primary driver of foreign policy in Islamic countries. Employing a descriptive-analytical method, the author investigates the obstacles to convergence and proposes solutions such as consensus-building based on religious commonalities, education, and scientific synergy at various levels to consolidate shared religious identity and foster greater convergence among Islamic societies.

Abd al-Karim, Arasto (2009), in the research "The Idea of Unity in the Islamic World," examines this concept and presents a practical model for Islamic convergence grounded in ideological foundations. The principal concern of this research is to emerge from a state of divergence by attending to opportunities and vulnerabilities. Utilizing four approaches—experiential-communicational, cultural-functional, economic-functional, and political-institutional—this study seeks a model of convergence and demonstrates that the experiential-communicational approach, through its employment of shared opportunities, is the most suitable. It proposes solutions for strengthening communications and exchanges within the Islamic world. The research concludes that Islamic convergence can be achieved by exploiting common ideological, normative, and historical capacities and by elevating the level of exchanges.

Qa'edi and Golshani (2015), in the study "Futures Study of the Trend of Convergence and Unity in the Islamic World," examine the internal and external challenges to Islamic world unity. Employing futures study methodology, this research demonstrates that, owing to conflicting interests among Islamic states, unity is improbable in the short term. It further recommends that consensus among intellectual and governmental elites and practical measures toward unity be prioritized, and that by

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promoting dialogue and cooperation in place of hostility, the path to convergence be opened. With a realistic perspective on the political issues of the Islamic world, this research emphasizes the necessity of elite consensus and collaboration for the realization of unity.

Eyvazi and Khaki (2017), in the research "The Intellectual Trajectory of Islamic World Unity in the Thought of Muslim Thinkers," examine intellectual developments concerning this subject. Through library resource analysis, this article identifies five intellectual waves on this topic from the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate to the present. These waves—caliphate-oriented, state-oriented, institution-oriented, people-oriented, and civilization-oriented—each present distinct perspectives on how to achieve Islamic unity. Employing a descriptive approach, this research traces the evolution of the idea of unity in the Islamic world and demonstrates that the question of unity has persistently occupied the attention of Muslim thinkers.

Hafeznia and Mirzaei Tabar (2019), in an article entitled "Capabilities and Capacities for Convergence in the Islamic World," examine the problems and dissensions existing in the Islamic world, which, despite abundant capacities, confront developmental challenges and internal tensions. Through descriptive-analytical methodology, this article investigates the capacities for convergence in the Islamic world and demonstrates that, notwithstanding divergence, considerable capabilities for convergence exist; however, realization of this objective requires optimal utilization of these capacities. Presenting a comprehensive analysis of the Islamic world's capabilities, this research emphasizes the importance of planning and exploiting these capacities for the achievement of convergence.

In sum, the reviewed studies indicate that the question of Islamic world unity confronts numerous challenges and opportunities. Multiple obstacles—including political disagreements, conflicting interests, and internal tensions—have rendered the path to complete convergence difficult. Nevertheless, considerable capacities exist—such as shared religious identity, common history and culture, and mutual economic and political interests—that can serve as a foundation for convergence. According to the research conducted, realizing unity necessitates that the intellectual and governmental elites of the Islamic world arrive at a consensus and, through promoting dialogue, cooperation, and the avoidance of division, advance toward a convergent and unified future. These studies further demonstrate that no research has been conducted on the subject of the present study—namely, the role of various structures in the unity of the Islamic world—notwithstanding that structures and approaches pertaining to communication, education, culture, and economy play a pivotal role in achieving convergence within the Islamic world.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative method aimed at identifying the role of cultural, political, and social structures in reducing sectarian conflicts. The qualitative method is the most suitable approach for this study due to its capacity for in-depth exploration of data and attainment of a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Data collection was conducted through two means: documentary and library research, and in-depth interviews. Prior documentary studies in related fields were utilized to become acquainted with the literature and conceptual framework of the subject and to lay the groundwork for conducting interviews.

In the in-depth interview component, purposive sampling was employed to select professors and elites in the field of international relations with expertise in Islamic world affairs. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that only individuals possessing specific characteristics relevant to the research subject participated in the study (Weimer and Dominick, 2010: 126). Throughout the interview process, questions and responses were formulated in accordance with conventional and recommended practices (Blake, 2008: 173) to reconstruct personal theories concerning the research topic.

This research, unlike hypothesis-testing methodologies, follows an inductive and exploratory approach. In this method, rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, theories are extracted and formulated through data analysis, allowing researchers themselves to define theory and propose solutions (Mansourian, 2006: 4). Following the conduct of interviews, the raw data were transcribed and coded; through data categorization and the extraction of concepts and categories, the principal analytical themes were identified.

Research Findings

Sectarian conflicts, as enduring and complex challenges within the Islamic world, have exerted profound negative effects upon societies and interstate relations. Numerous research articles have addressed this subject from various perspectives, some of which were referenced in the literature review. The objective of the present study is to examine the role of cultural, political, and social structures in mitigating sectarian conflicts and to propose practical solutions in this regard. Accordingly, the findings of this research are organized in the form of a table that comprehensively presents the concepts, categories, and principal themes related to the reduction of sectarian conflicts. This table seeks to identify and elucidate the key elements capable of improving relations between Islamic sects and fostering an environment of peace and peaceful coexistence.

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Table of Strategies for Overcoming the Shia-Sunni Duality in the Islamic World

Initial Concepts	Categories	Main Themes
Interfaith dialogues meaning the establishment of communication and exchange of views between representatives and scholars of different sects. These dialogues are conducted with the aim of better understanding perspectives, removing misunderstandings, and finding common ground. Example: Formation of dialogue groups at local, national, and international levels.	Interfaith Dialogues	Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue and Interaction
Creating opportunities for greater interaction and familiarity among followers of different sects with each other's culture, customs, and way of life. Example: Holding joint celebrations and ceremonies, sports competitions, and visits to religious sites.	Cultural and Social Exchange	
Utilizing media and educational systems to promote a culture of dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect. Example: Production of television and radio programs, inclusion of interfaith dialogue topics in textbooks.	Media and Education	
Holding joint conferences with the participation of scholars from both sects to examine common issues and differences. Example: Conferences titled "The Qur'an and Islamic Unity" or examining human rights issues from the perspective of Islam.	Scientific Meetings and Conferences	
Revision of history and religious textbooks to emphasize Islamic commonalities and eliminate provocative content. Example: Introduction of prominent Islamic figures and shared achievements of Islamic civilization.	Textbooks	Education and Training Emphasis on Islamic Commonalities and Values
Concept: Holding educational workshops for teachers, students, and parents to promote a culture of respect for others' beliefs. Example: Workshops on the topic "Familiarity with Islamic Sects" or "The Role of the Family in Promoting Unity."	Educational Workshops	
Focus on common religious principles such as the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) to create unity. Example: Interpretation of verses such as " <i>And hold</i>	Qur'an and Prophetic Sunnah	

<i>firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided" (Q 3:103).</i>		
Promotion of values such as justice, mercy, brotherhood, and mutual respect. Example: Shia-Sunni cooperation in charitable projects such as constructing schools and hospitals.	Ethical and Humanistic Values	
Confronting extremism and sectarian prejudices that cause division. Example: Holding scientific meetings between Shia and Sunni scholars to provide logical solutions. Documentaries depicting positive experiences of coexistence among Muslims from different sects, production of television programs centered on unity.	Combating Extremism	
Emphasis on principles such as monotheism (Tawhid), prophethood, and eschatology that are agreed upon by both sects. Example: Holding classes and workshops on common religious principles.	Identification of Common Principles	
Holding joint religious ceremonies to commemorate common Islamic principles. Example: Joint ceremonies on the Nights of Qadr or the celebration of the Prophet's (PBUH) birthday. Joint cultural festivals. Awarding and honoring unity-oriented scholars.	Holding Joint Ceremonies	
Striving to establish social and economic justice and reduce inequalities. Example: Educational and employment generation programs for deprived communities.	Social and Economic Justice	
Participation of all religious groups in political processes and decision-making. Example: Formation of joint committees of Shia and Sunni representatives for discussion and exchange of views on political issues.	Political Participation	
Confronting any foreign intervention that exacerbates religious conflicts. Example: Holding joint conferences to examine the negative effects of foreign interventions.	Combating Foreign Interventions	
Creation of joint charitable and cultural projects. Example: Holding joint cultural festivals or joint projects in the fields of health and education.	Social Projects	
		Political and Social Participation and Issues

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Religious scholars should play an effective role in reducing religious tensions through moderate and enlightening interpretation of religious texts. Example: Holding educational classes and webinars to explain the true meanings of Qur'anic verses and hadiths. Promotion of unity-oriented views.	Role of Religious Scholars and Elites	Combating Extremism and Supporting Unity-Oriented Scholars
Support for Shia and Sunni scholars who seek to establish unity. Example: Holding joint conferences between scholars of the two sects for discussion and exchange of views.	Support for Shia and Sunni Scholars	
Identification and confrontation of groups that foment division. Example: Formation of research teams to monitor the activities of extremist groups.	Identification of Extremist Groups	
Dissemination of messages of peace and peaceful coexistence through media and social networks. Example: Launching media campaigns centered on peace and coexistence.	Promotion of Peace Messages	
Establishment of joint research centers and holding scientific conferences. Example: Research centers working on Islamic history, culture, and philosophy.	Scientific and Cultural Collaborations	Creation of Common Structures
Implementation of joint social and economic projects. Example: Joint projects in the fields of health, education, and sustainable development.	Joint Social Projects	
International Islamic organizations can play an effective role in promoting dialogue and resolving disputes. Example: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as a platform for dialogue and cooperation.	International Islamic Organizations	
Religious scholars can assume intellectual leadership by elucidating common Islamic principles. Example: Building consensus and consultation on fundamental issues and calling for unity.	Intellectual and Spiritual Leadership	Role of Leaders, Elites, and Scholars of the Islamic World
Holding interfaith meetings and conferences to exchange views and reduce misunderstandings. Example: Elites acting as mediators in Shia-Sunni dialogues.	Interfaith Dialogue	

Muslim leaders and scholars can issue statements in support of unity and solidarity. Example: These statements can serve as a powerful message to the Muslim community.	Issuance of Joint Statements	
Elites and religious scholars can acquaint the new generation with the values of unity by creating joint educational programs. Example: Training youth as ambassadors of unity and solidarity.	Education and Training of the New Generation	
Muslim leaders and scholars must confront extremist and radical thoughts. Example: Explaining the dangers of extremism and providing practical solutions to prevent it.	Confronting Extremism	
Cooperation in charitable and social projects can help strengthen relations among Muslims. Example: Creating a sense of solidarity through joint activities.	Cooperation in Social Projects	

Explanation and Analysis of Findings

The results of the present study regarding the role of cultural, political, and social structures in reducing sectarian conflicts in the Islamic world indicate that effective measures to mitigate tensions and disputes between Islamic sects require a comprehensive approach grounded in cooperation. In this regard, the findings are divided into seven key themes, which will be explained and analyzed.

Interfaith Dialogues: The nature of Islam is cosmopolitan (Shahramnia and Nazifi Naeini, 2013: 198) and does not recognize geographical, national, racial, ethnic, tribal, or linguistic differences (Amid Zanjani, 1998: 214). In this context, unity, a single Ummah, Ummah-orientedness, and the concept of Dār al-Islām are foundational Qur'anic concepts in Islam that encourage and recommend cooperation, convergence, and solidarity among Muslims, necessitate demarcation from unbelievers, and negate the domination of unbelievers over Muslims. One of the fundamental strategies for reducing conflicts is the strengthening of interfaith dialogues. Dialogue between sects—or more precisely, dialogue between followers of multiple sects—is the process of communication and interaction among individual Muslims with diverse doctrinal and practical beliefs, during which various words and discourses are exchanged among them (Marvian Hosseini et al., 2020: 384). Such dialogues create an atmosphere of interaction and mutual understanding and are recognized as effective tools for reducing tensions in multi-sectarian societies. These dialogues may include scholarly, cultural, and social discussions in which representatives of different sects exchange views. For instance, in 2017, the Islamic Unity Conference was held in Tehran with

the participation of Shia and Sunni scholars, aiming to strengthen interfaith relations and exchange views on common challenges. This conference demonstrated how dialogue can help clarify positions and reduce misunderstandings. The establishment of independent, non-political institutions to facilitate these dialogues and the holding of educational workshops for religious scholars can help reinforce this process. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Veysi (2021) and Sarkheil (2019), who maintained that establishing communication and exchange of views among scholars of different sects can lead to the removal of misunderstandings and better mutual acquaintance. Such dialogues can be implemented in various forms, such as dialogue groups at local, national, and international levels.

Cultural and Social Exchange: Creating opportunities for interaction among followers of different sects is another effective strategy. Holding joint celebrations and ceremonies, alongside enhancing awareness and knowledge of each other's cultures, can strengthen the sense of solidarity and unity. Cultural exchange fosters the dynamism of cultures, enables societies to know one another, facilitates relations among nations and states, and creates a suitable foundation for peace and security (Shahmohammadi and Qara'ati, 2012: 99), thus becoming a factor for the unity and empathy of nations. The findings indicate that cultural exchange can highlight commonalities and reduce tensions. Moreover, holding joint ceremonies can help reinforce the sense of solidarity and unity among followers of different sects. For example, religious celebrations such as Eid al-Adha, which are observed in many Islamic countries with the participation of followers of various sects, can lead to the creation of a shared culture. Utilizing media to promote such activities and encouraging public participation in these ceremonies can contribute to strengthening interfaith relations.

The Role of Media and Education: Media and educational systems are important tools for promoting a culture of dialogue, mutual respect, and public diplomacy. Public and media diplomacy refers to the use of media by leaders to articulate their interests in negotiations, build trust, and garner public support for agreements. This type of diplomacy is pursued through various activities in public and specialized media, including press conferences, interviews, meetings of heads of state and mediators in rival countries, and influential media events. These events are organized to herald a new era in mutual relations and convergence. Media diplomacy, as a modern skill in international relations, can neutralize many of the rumors and falsehoods propagated by political rivals and smooth the path for statesmen to achieve their foreign policy objectives (Khalilzadeh, 2010: 2). The importance of the media's role in promoting mutual understanding and the necessity of producing television programs containing content related to interfaith dialogue are crucial in this regard. This can be effective in reducing prejudices and increasing

public awareness. Furthermore, incorporating topics related to inter-faith dialogue into textbooks and holding educational workshops for students can acquaint the younger generation with the values of coexistence. In addition, creating online educational platforms and organizing webinars can help disseminate this culture.

Scientific Meetings and Conferences: Holding conferences with the participation of scholars from different sects to examine common issues and differences is another finding of this research. Such meetings will create a scholarly space for the exchange of views and the achievement of agreements. These conferences can address common issues and differences and assist in devising practical solutions. For example, the Human Rights from the Perspective of Islam conference held in Malaysia in 2019 examined human rights challenges in Islamic countries and proposed solutions for improving conditions. Universities and religious institutions, and cooperation between them, can serve as research and scientific centers for organizing such meetings and contribute to knowledge production in this field.

Relying on Common Religious Principles: Affection for and respect toward common religious principles, such as the concepts of monotheism (*tawhīd*) and prophethood, can serve as a foundation for practical unity among Muslims. Abd al-Karim Arasto (2009) emphasizes that exploiting shared religious and normative opportunities can help reduce conflicts. Principles such as monotheism and prophethood can be utilized as a basis for joint cooperation in social and cultural projects. For instance, charitable projects carried out by various religious groups to assist the needy can strengthen interfaith relations. Muslims, both Shia and Sunni, share common pillars and values in their religious beliefs and doctrines. One of the most important of these values is belief in the religion of Islam and its principles, which influence all aspects of life and unite Muslims as a spiritual community (*Ummah*). Other common values among Muslims include: the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*), the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH), belief in eschatology, the single Book (the Holy Qur'an), the single direction of prayer (*qiblah*) (the Kaaba), the performance of prayer (*ṣalāh*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), enjoining good and forbidding wrong, fasting during Ramadan, and jihad. These principles contribute to fostering solidarity and unity among Muslims.

Confronting Extremism: One of the challenges facing Islamic convergence is the existence of extremist and radical groups that foment division; their interpretation of Islam is entirely political and ideological, inflicting the greatest damage upon the unity and convergence of the Islamic world (Seifi et al., 2016: 110). In fact, Western Islamophobia and Islamic fundamentalism are two sides of the same coin, sowing discord and conflict in the Islamic world. Sectarian prejudice leads its adherents to regard absolute value and truth as exclusive to their own creed and to consider other creeds as absolute error and deviation. Should such

prejudice result in a group's ascendance to power, other creeds and groups become subject to attack and annihilation, thereby exacerbating sectarian violence (Qa'edi and Golshani, 2015: 25). Identifying these groups, which are inherently violent and divisive through their practice of excommunicating (takfir) others, and undertaking preventive measures against them, is of paramount importance according to the findings of this study. Educational and explanatory programs concerning the dangers of extremism, as well as the introduction of unity-oriented scholars, can contribute to raising awareness in this regard. For example, educational programs in schools aimed at informing students about the perils of extremism and introducing unity-oriented scholars can be effective. Forming research teams to monitor the activities of extremist groups and organizing educational workshops for young people can help prevent the spread of extremism.

Scientific and Cultural Collaborations: Establishing research centers and holding joint conferences focused on Islamic history, culture, and political philosophy can play an effective role in strengthening convergence. Eyvazi and Khaki (2017) also emphasize the necessity of scientific and cultural collaborations on the path to unity. Creating networks for scientific and cultural cooperation among Islamic countries can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences in this area.

Overall, the findings demonstrate the necessity of adopting a comprehensive and participatory approach in confronting sectarian conflicts. This approach requires not only initiating dialogue among sects but also the involvement of elites, religious scholars, and policymakers in the decision-making and implementation processes. It must encompass dialogue, cultural exchange, scientific collaborations, and confrontation with extremism. Moreover, reliance on common cultural, social, and political points of reference, through the utilization of Muslim capacities, can contribute to the realization of unity and convergence in the Islamic world. In this regard, the commitment of religious leaders and officials can significantly aid in strengthening and consolidating communications and interactions among various Islamic communities. The analysis of these findings suggests that, considering the existing challenges and problems, serious resolve in adopting scientific and practical approaches toward Islamic convergence and the reduction of sectarian conflicts can lead to the creation of an atmosphere of peace and cooperation in the Islamic world. It is essential to note that achieving a united and empathetic society requires exploiting all available capacities and seeking to establish positive and constructive relations among different sects. Some key future-oriented considerations for strengthening unity and convergence in the Islamic world include:

Strengthening Civil Institutions: Civil institutions can act as bridges between sects and help promote a culture of coexistence.

Educating the Young Generation: The younger generation must be acquainted with the values of unity and coexistence to prevent the spread of prejudices and extremism.

Developing International and Regional Cooperation: International cooperation can facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices in reducing sectarian conflicts.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that, consistent with previous studies, sectarian conflicts, common threats, ethnicism, and extremism—particularly the dispute between Shiism and Sunnism as the two main Islamic sects—constitute one of the most significant serious obstacles to progress, development, unity, and convergence in the Islamic world. These conflicts are rooted in political and historical factors that have led to the weakening of the unity and solidarity of the Islamic Ummah and necessitate a multifaceted approach for their reduction and resolution. Employing constructivist theory, this research examines the role of norms, identities, and social structures in the formation and perpetuation of these conflicts. The research findings indicate that reducing sectarian conflicts requires attention to the strengthening of cultural, political, and social structures. Furthermore, reinforcing shared identity and focusing on cultural and religious commonalities—not only in doctrinal principles but also in ethical values and shared cultural heritage—can foster a greater sense of solidarity and belonging among Muslims. Proposed strategies include interfaith dialogues, cultural and social exchange, utilization of media and education to promote a culture of dialogue and tolerance, revision of textbooks, holding conferences and educational workshops, and combating extremism. Additionally, establishing social and economic justice, political participation of all groups, and confronting foreign interventions are also key factors in reducing sectarian conflicts. The research further emphasizes the pivotal role of religious scholars and intellectual elites in promoting dialogue and unity, and maintains that reducing sectarian conflicts in the Islamic world requires a collective and sustained effort on the part of governments, religious leaders, elites, and the public. This research demonstrates that through the adoption of comprehensive and coordinated strategies in the three spheres of cultural, political, and social action, it is possible to take steps toward the creation of a united, peaceful, and developed Islamic world. In this path, attention to the vast common cultural and religious capacities of the Islamic Ummah and the employment of modern methods in education and communication are of particular importance. Without this collective effort, a fundamental resolution of sectarian conflicts and the attainment of peace and stability in the Islamic world will remain elusive.

Recommendations for Future Research in Light of the Findings of This Study:

Evaluation of the Impact of Proposed Strategies: Quantitative and qualitative studies to assess the effectiveness of the proposed strategies in reducing sectarian conflicts in various Islamic societies.

Comparative Studies: Comparison of successful strategies in different Islamic societies to identify best practices and successful models.

The Role of Technology: Examination of the role of social media and new technologies in exacerbating or reducing sectarian conflicts, and proposing strategies for the effective use of technology in the service of unity.

The Influence of Economic and Social Factors: Investigation of the relationship between economic and social inequalities and sectarian conflicts, and proposing strategies for establishing social justice.

Case Studies: In-depth studies of societies or countries that have succeeded in reducing sectarian conflicts, in order to identify the factors contributing to their success.

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