

## Arbitration and the Emergence of Sectarianism: A Historical Examination of the Transition of Conflict from Politics to Theology

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### Abstract

The schism within the Islamic community reached its zenith following the Battle of Siffin, when the process of Taḥkīm, intended to alleviate the conflict between Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, instead incited theological divisions. This research focuses on how Taḥkīm transformed the dispute from practical politics into doctrinal debate, giving rise to various sectarian movements. This study aims to critically and historically examine the role of Taḥkīm in the emergence of sects such as the Khawārij, Shī'ah, Murji'ah, and other theological factions. The methodology employed is a literature review, analysing classical documents and contemporary academic literature that discuss the socio-political context, the arbitration process, and the responses of various groups following Taḥkīm. The findings indicate that this arbitration not only resolved military disputes but also served as a catalyst for the formation of a fragmented Islamic intellectual structure. The implications of this study underscore the importance of re-reading the history of internal Islamic conflict in an objective and inclusive manner, enabling the community to learn from past experiences, maintain unity, and avoid the politicisation of religion that could undermine brotherhood.

### Abstrak

Perpecahan dalam umat Islam memuncak pasca Perang Siffin, ketika proses Taḥkīm yang dimaksudkan untuk meredakan konflik antara Ali bin Abi Thalib dan Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan justru memicu perpecahan teologis. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana Taḥkīm mengalihkan perselisihan dari politik praktis menjadi perdebatan doktrinal yang melahirkan berbagai aliran sektarian. Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk mengkaji secara historis dan kritis peran Taḥkīm dalam lahirnya aliran-aliran seperti Khawārij, Syiah, Murji'ah, dan aliran teologis lainnya. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka dengan analisis dokumen klasik dan literatur akademik kontemporer yang membahas konteks sosial-politik, proses arbitrase, serta respons kelompok-kelompok setelah Taḥkīm. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa arbitrase ini tidak hanya menyelesaikan sengketa militer, tetapi juga menjadi pemicu terbentuknya struktur pemikiran Islam yang terfragmentasi. Implikasi dari studi ini menekankan pentingnya membaca ulang sejarah konflik internal Islam dengan cara yang objektif dan inklusif, agar umat dapat belajar dari pengalaman masa lalu, menjaga persatuan, dan menghindari politisasi agama yang dapat merusak ukhuwwah.

### Keywords

theological conflict; battle of jamal; battle of siffin; sectarianism; taḥkīm



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## Introduction

The assassination of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan in the year 35 AH/656 CE marks a significant turning point in Islamic history, concluding the golden era of the *Rashidun* Caliphs. This event engendered a legitimacy crisis in leadership and incited political and social divisions among the Muslim community.<sup>1</sup> The situation became further complicated when Ali ibn Abi Talib was appointed as the fourth caliph amidst rising tensions, with the demand for justice against Uthman's murderers emerging as a central issue that ultimately fractured the community. This tension precipitated armed conflict, beginning with the Battle of *Jamal*, which involved Aisha, Talha, and Zubair, who sought justice for Uthman's death.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the Battle of *Siffin*, where Ali confronted Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, who also demanded justice for Uthman's death and delayed his allegiance until justice was served.<sup>3</sup> Both events marked the culmination of internal tensions within the Muslim community and paved the way for prolonged ideological divisions.

The Battle of *Siffin* in 37 AH/657 CE concluded with an agreement between the forces of Ali and Muawiyah to resolve the conflict through arbitration.<sup>4</sup> Abu Musa al-Ash'ari represented Ali, while Amr ibn al-Aas represented Muawiyah. Although this decision was intended to achieve a peaceful resolution, it instead sparked controversy among the Kharijites, who had initially aligned with Ali.<sup>5</sup> They rejected the arbitration, arguing that leadership decisions should be based on the law of Allah, rather than human considerations. Their slogan, "*lā hukma illā li-llāh*" (there is no judgment except that of Allah), encapsulated their stance. What was meant to be a solution through arbitration instead became a catalyst for profound ideological rifts within Islam, giving rise to the Kharijite and *Saba'iyyah* (followers of Abdullah ibn Saba') movements, which later contributed to the emergence of *Shī'ah* (partisans of Ali) Islam.<sup>6</sup>

The *Saba'iyyah* refers to a faction attributed to Abdullah ibn Saba', a figure believed to have introduced theological narratives linking political legitimacy with divine right.<sup>7</sup> Historical sources such as *Tarikh al-Tabari* and *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* describe Abdullah ibn Saba' as a controversial agitator who propagated the idea that Ali ibn Abi Talib possessed divine authority and was the rightful successor

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<sup>1</sup> Febri Rahmadhani, 'Al-Fitnah Al-Kubra Roots Sectarianism in Islam', *El-Ghiroh: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 22, no. 1 (30 March 2024): 77–85, <https://doi.org/10.37092/el-ghiroh.v22i1.720>.

<sup>2</sup> *How Did the Assassination of Uthman Trigger the Fitna?* 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7YFg167FTA>.

<sup>3</sup> Shibeeb, 'The Battle of Siffin'.

<sup>4</sup> Önkal, 'Tahkim Olayı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme'.

<sup>5</sup> Umi Septina Anggraheni et al., 'Flashback of The Khawarij Stream in History: From Its Inception to the Distortion of Its Teachings', *Matan: Journal of Islam and Muslim Society* 6, no. 2 (31 July 2024): 79–91, <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.matan.2024.6.2.12051>; Önkal, 'Tahkim Olayı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme'.

<sup>6</sup> Resti Novita Dewi, Deni Maulana, and Oznur Tasdoken, 'Shia Is One of the Sects in Islam', *Al-Mubin: Islamic Scientific Journal* 7, no. 2 (30 September 2024): 100–112, <https://doi.org/10.51192/almubin.v7i2.756>.

<sup>7</sup> Nasution, *Identifikasi Tokoh Abdullah Bin Saba' Dalam Literatur Sunni Dan Syi'ah*; Peerzada, *Similarity between the Life of St. Paul and Abdullah Ibn Saba: Their Contribution and Influence on Christianity and Islam*.

to the Prophet.<sup>8</sup> This group asserted that Ali and his descendants held spiritual supremacy, establishing the earliest ideological foundation for *wilāyah* (spiritual guardianship) within proto-Shi'ism.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the Kharijites, whose extreme theological approach and practice of *takfir* (excommunication) are widely documented in both classical and modern scholarship,<sup>10</sup> the *Saba'iyyah* require clarification, as the term specifically denotes a sectarian movement that evolved from political activism into an early prototype of Shī'ah theology.<sup>11</sup> The *Saba'iyyah* thus represent a transitional phase in Islamic intellectual history—bridging the shift from political dissent against the caliphate to a doctrinal assertion of divine leadership and spiritual inheritance (*imāmah*) within the family of the Prophet.<sup>12</sup>

The arbitration event signified a substantial transformation, like internal conflicts among Muslims, shifting from political disputes to theological differences.<sup>13</sup> The debates that initially revolved around the legitimacy of leadership and political justice evolved into deeper issues concerning *takfir*, faith, major sins, and the criteria for an individual to be considered a Muslim.<sup>14</sup> The Kharijites developed an extreme theology that readily deemed others as infidels, including Ali and Muawiyah.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the *Saba'iyyah* began to establish a theological foundation regarding the rights of *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet) and the concept of *imāmah*.<sup>16</sup> This dynamic spurred the emergence of other theological sects, such as *Murji'ah* (the postponers), *Qadariyyah* (free-will advocates), and *Jabariyyah* (predestinationists), which held differing views on fate and human will.<sup>17</sup> These theological disputes extended beyond leadership issues to encompass doctrinal truth and the authority to interpret Islamic teachings. Such theological divisions have persisted and remain characteristic of sectarianism within Islam to this day.

The study of the schism within the Muslim community during the early period is a significant topic in both classical and contemporary Islamic history. Classical works such as *Tārīkh al-Tabārī* by Abu Ja'far at-Thabari serve as primary references for understanding the internal conflicts among Muslims following the death of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan. Additionally, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* by Ibn Kathir

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<sup>8</sup> al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, Vol. 15; Ibn Katsir, 'كتاب البداية والنهاية - ط السعادة - المكتبة الشاملة'.

<sup>9</sup> Rahman and Hamat, 'Sorotan Sejarah Kemunculan Syiah Dan Aliran Utamanya'; Dewi et al., 'Shia Is One Of the Sects in Islam'.

<sup>10</sup> Fawait et al., 'Sejarah Kemunculan Khawarij dan Pemahamannya tentang Hadis'; Anggraheni et al., 'Flashback of The Khawarij Stream in History'.

<sup>11</sup> Zaheer, *Shias and Shiism*; 'Sectarianism in Islam'; Shamsy et al., 'Exploring Early Sectarian Identity in Islam'.

<sup>12</sup> Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*; Rahmadhani, 'Al-Fitnah Al-Kubra Roots Sectarianism In Islam'.

<sup>13</sup> 'Sectarianism in Islam'; Sansarkan, *İslam düşününce geleneginde takim meselesi ve mezhebi ekoller üzerindeki etkisi*.

<sup>14</sup> Putrawan and Eunike, 'Islamic Radicalism'; Anggraheni et al., 'Flashback of The Khawarij Stream in History'.

<sup>15</sup> Nurkhalis, 'Islamic Theological Controversy on Theodicy and Destiny'; Anggraheni et al., 'Flashback of The Khawarij Stream in History'.

<sup>16</sup> Dewi, Maulana, and Tasdoken, 'Shia Is One of the Sects in Islam'.

<sup>17</sup> Prayogi, 'The Theologicalism and Fiqhism in Islam A Descriptive Study'; Supriadin, Abubakar, and Arsyad, 'Diskursus Teologi Qadariyah dan Jabariah'.

provides a comprehensive overview of the political and social dynamics that instigated the divisions among early Muslims.<sup>18</sup> While these works present events chronologically, they have yet to analyse how political shifts could lead to theological schisms.

Contemporary studies, such as Gaiser's in *Sectarianism in Islam: The Umma Divided*, have begun to utilise a narrative-identity approach to understand the formation of sectarian identities within Islam. This approach highlights how sectarian actors create narratives to imbue meaning within the context of the conflicts they face, thus providing a more comprehensive perspective compared to methodologies that focus solely on the chronology of events.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the considerable research conducted on early Islamic conflicts and sectarianism, there remains a significant gap in the existing literature. Most studies tend to concentrate on chronological accounts without analysing the causal relationships between arbitration and the emergence of sectarianism.<sup>20</sup> The lack of analysis placing arbitration as a pivotal moment in the transition from politics to theology constitutes a shortcoming in previous literature. Numerous studies have separated political analysis from theological discourse, despite the close interrelation between the two in the context of arbitration.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the limited application of hermeneutical or sociological approaches in interpreting the long-term implications of arbitration on Islamic thought also warrants attention.<sup>22</sup> Orientalism and sectarian bias continue to influence some of the literature, thereby compromising the objectivity of analyses and resulting in a non-holistic understanding of the roots of sectarianism within Islam.<sup>23</sup>

This article aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining the arbitration event through a historical-critical lens and viewing it as a starting point for a fundamental transformation of ideology. By combining historical, Islamic thought, and conflict sociology approaches, this research offers a new interpretation that is more comprehensive regarding how political mechanisms can transform into the formation of theological sects.<sup>24</sup> The methodology employed integrates analyses of classical sources such as *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, and other classical texts with modern academic perspectives to provide a balanced and objective understanding.<sup>25</sup> Through the analysis of classical sources and

<sup>18</sup> Basor et al., 'An Text Study and Appreciation of Imam Ibn Katsir's Work'; Muna et al., 'From Aisha to Fatima Al-Fihri'.

<sup>19</sup> 'Sectarianism in Islam'.

<sup>20</sup> Helli, 'Religious and Sectarian Diversity in the Early Islamic Period. A Study of Ḍirār b. 'Amr al-Ghaṭafānī's (d. ca. 200/815) "Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh"'; Shamsy et al., 'Exploring Early Sectarian Identity in Islam'.

<sup>21</sup> al-Jamil, 'Sectarianism, Pre-Modern Islamic History, and the Bequest of Orientalism'; Mohseni and Sagha, 'Five Myths of Sectarianism within Islam in the Contemporary Middle East | Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs'.

<sup>22</sup> Aldoughli, 'Missing Gender'; Thaver, *Beyond Sectarianism*.

<sup>23</sup> al-Jamil, 'Sectarianism, Pre-Modern Islamic History, and the Bequest of Orientalism'; Helli, 'Religious and Sectarian Diversity in the Early Islamic Period. A Study of Ḍirār b. 'Amr al-Ghaṭafānī's (d. ca. 200/815) "Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh"'.

<sup>24</sup> Alioua, 'Social Conflict in Ibn Khaldun's Thought'; Sentürk and Naeem, 'Islamic Thought and Its Implications for Current Sociological Inquiry'.

<sup>25</sup> al Tabari, 'كتاب تاريخ الطبرى - ط السعادة - المكتبة الشاملة', Ibn Katsir, 'كتاب تاريخ الطبرى - المكتبة الشاملة'.

contemporary academic literature, this research aspires to make a significant contribution to Islamic thought, particularly in the studies of conflict, religious authority, and the formation of sectarian identities. This study also endeavours to provide a balanced perspective in accordance with the methodology of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* (the Sunni orthodoxy) in understanding this sensitive historical event while maintaining scientific objectivity and avoiding sectarian bias.

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using a literature study to analyse the event of *taḥkīm* (*arbitration*) and its implications for the emergence of sectarianism in Islam. This method was chosen due to the historical nature of the topic, which requires a detailed examination of written sources and relevant literature.<sup>26</sup> The primary analytical framework is historical-critical, allowing the researcher to trace the background of events, analyse socio-political contexts, and identify causal links between arbitration and theological divisions.<sup>27</sup> In addition, an Islamic thought approach is used to evaluate the evolution of theological schools after arbitration, considering epistemological principles and the objective criteria of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*. The combination of these methods provides a balanced and comprehensive analysis that aligns with both historical facts and Islamic intellectual traditions.

The primary data sources comprise scholarly journal articles that discuss political and theological conflicts in early Islam, particularly those related to arbitration, the Khawārij, and Shī‘ah.<sup>28</sup> These works were selected for their academic credibility and peer-reviewed status.<sup>29</sup> The secondary data sources include classical texts such as *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* and *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, which provide chronological and contextual insights into early Islamic history.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, modern scholarly works such as Wilferd Madelung’s *The Succession to Muhammad*, M.A. Shaban’s *Islamic History: A New Interpretation*, and Marshall Hodgson’s *The Venture of Islam* contribute to a broader understanding of the civilisational context of sectarian formation.<sup>31</sup>

Data were collected through document analysis following the READ approach (Ready–Extract–Analyze–Distil) developed by Dalglish, Khalid, and McMahon (2020).<sup>32</sup> This method ensures a structured and transparent process for analysing historical texts. The READ approach consists of four

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<sup>26</sup> Dalglish et al., ‘Document Analysis in Health Policy Research’; Werner, ‘Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse und historische Forschung’.

<sup>27</sup> Moh Arvil Abdillah, ‘Historical Approaches in Islamic Studies’, *ISTORIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sejarah* 19, no. 2 (1 September 2023), <https://doi.org/10.21831/istoria.v19i2.69751>; Nur Ilani Mat Nawi and Shahir Akram Hassan, ‘Domain of Objectivity in Islamic Research Methodology According to the Quran’, *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 10, no. 3 (28 September 2021), <https://ijarped.com/index.php/journal/article/view/2099>.

<sup>28</sup> Abidi, *Sectarian Division in Islam*; Wehrey, *Beyond Sunni and Shia*.

<sup>29</sup> Dalglish et al., ‘Document Analysis in Health Policy Research’.

<sup>30</sup> Sya‘bani, ‘Interpretation of Hermeneutics and Religious Normativity’; Wasman et al., ‘A Critical Approach to Prophetic Traditions’.

<sup>31</sup> Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*; Shaban, *Islamic History*; Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Dalglish et al., ‘Document Analysis in Health Policy Research’.

stages: 1). Ready: Selecting relevant primary and secondary sources that align with the research objectives; 2). Extract: Identifying and recording essential information, such as key quotations, thematic issues, and chronological patterns; 3). Analyze: Conducting comparative and thematic analysis to interpret patterns and relationships between arbitration and theological emergence; 4). Distil: Synthesising findings into a coherent narrative that connects political dynamics with theological developments. This approach enhances analytical precision and reduces researcher bias, ensuring that the historical interpretation remains evidence-based and methodologically rigorous.

The collected data were then examined using content and hermeneutic analysis to establish causal relationships between arbitration and the evolution of sectarian ideologies.<sup>33</sup> A contextual-historical reading of texts was applied to interpret the significance of events within their socio-political milieu.<sup>34</sup> The analysis proceeded in three stages: thematic identification, comparative evaluation, and critical synthesis.<sup>35</sup> This combination of methods yields a holistic interpretation that adheres to historical accuracy and upholds the epistemological principles of Islamic scholarship.

### **Social-Political Conditions Following the Death of Caliph Umar bin Khattab**

The reign of Caliph Uthman bin Affan lasted for twelve years and comprised two distinct phases. The first six years were characterized by political stability and significant economic prosperity. During this period, the caliphate expanded to 4.8 million square miles, encompassing North Africa, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Mediterranean islands such as Cyprus.<sup>36</sup> Uthman successfully implemented effective economic policies, resulting in a near eradication of poverty, to the extent that tax collectors could not find anyone eligible to receive *zakāt*. Uthman was also known as a pious, gentle, generous, and religious figure, frequently engaging in worship and fasting.<sup>37</sup> However, in the latter half of his leadership, political tensions arose due to dissatisfaction with his policies, particularly concerning allegations of nepotism in appointing members of the Umayyad family to strategic positions.<sup>38</sup> This peaceful situation transformed into turmoil, culminating in Uthman's assassination in the year 35 AH/656 CE, marking the

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<sup>33</sup> Neimark, 'How to Use Content Analysis in Historical Research'; Werner, 'Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse und historische Forschung'.

<sup>34</sup> Saeed and Akbar, 'Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān'; Wasman et al., 'A Critical Approach to Prophetic Traditions'.

<sup>35</sup> Nurkhalis and Fauzan, 'Hermeneutics Controversies in Contemporary Islamic Studies'; Sya'bani, 'Interpretation of Hermeneutics and Religious Normativity'.

<sup>36</sup> Salman Bashar, 'Hazrat Uthman Ghani (RA): The Most Successful Ruler in Islamic and World History', 24 May 2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hazrat-uthman-ghani-ra-most-successful-ruler-islamic-world-bashar-au4fc/>; Abu Ruqayyah, 'The Achievements Of 'Uthmān Ibn Affan, And the Events Leading to His Martyrdom', March 2023.

<sup>37</sup> al-Suyuti, *The History of the Khalifahs Who Took the Right Way*; Al-'arabi, *Defence Against Disaster*; al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari*, Vol. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Murtiningsih, 'Tuduhan Nepotisme terhadap Utsman Bin Affan dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Kekhalifahan Ali Bin Abi Thalib'; Sefrianti et al., 'UTSMAN BIN AFFAN'.

end of the golden era of the caliphate and the onset of a major *fitnah* (civil strife) in Islamic history.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Assassination of Uthman bin Affan and the Beginning of Division**

The assassination of Caliph Uthman bin Affan in the year 35 AH/656 CE was the culmination of a systematic campaign led by Abdullah ibn Saba', a Jew from Yemen who disguised himself as a Muslim to spread propaganda.<sup>40</sup> Abdullah disseminated propaganda to incite the populace in Egypt, Kufa, and Basra against Uthman, accusing him of nepotism and misappropriation of state funds. He claimed that Ali bin Abi Talib should have succeeded the Prophet Muhammad as caliph.<sup>41</sup> Even though many governors appointed by Uthman were competent and had previously been trusted by Abu Bakr and Umar,<sup>42</sup> the escalating political situation was exploited by Uthman's enemies to transform political criticism into a rebellion. The tragic climax occurred when the rebels besieged Uthman's house and ultimately killed him while he was reading the Qur'an.<sup>43</sup> This event shattered the unity of the Muslim community and opened a new chapter of prolonged political division.

### **The Battle of *Jamal* as the First Sign of the Fragmentation of Unity**

The conflict following Uthman's assassination led to the first armed confrontation known as the Battle of *Jamal*. Initially, this event was intended as a peace initiative, but it resulted in a tragic war due to provocation and misunderstandings.<sup>44</sup> After Ali bin Abi Talib became the fourth caliph, Talhah bin Ubaidillah and Zubair bin Awwam, who had previously pledged allegiance to Ali, requested permission to perform *Umrah* in Mecca. There, they met Aisha, who was also in Mecca after the *Hajj*. This meeting resulted in an agreement to urge Ali to promptly investigate Uthman's assassination and to enforce *qisas* (retributive justice) against the perpetrators. They viewed this as a religious obligation and a matter of justice that must be established before political stability could be achieved. Consequently, Aisha did not intend to go to war; she merely wished to foster peace among the Muslims, believing that her departure would benefit them.<sup>45</sup> This underscores that their initial goal was reconciliation and the enforcement of justice, rather than a destructive military confrontation.

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<sup>39</sup> Arif, 'Tragedi Terbunuhnya Khalifah 'Utsman Ibn 'Affan'.

<sup>40</sup> Peerzada, *Similarity between the Life of St. Paul and Abdullah Ibn Saba: Their Contribution and Influence on Christianity and Islam*.

<sup>41</sup> Nasution, *Identifikasi Tokoh Abdullah Bin Saba' Dalam Literatur Sunni Dan Syi'ah*.

<sup>42</sup> Sefrianti et al., 'UTSMAN BIN AFFAN'.

<sup>43</sup> Arif, 'Tragedi Terbunuhnya Khalifah 'Utsman Ibn 'Affan'.

<sup>44</sup> M.D.Kamruzzaman and Obeid, 'Battle of Camel and Hermeneutics Reading of Orientalists & Muslim Commentators Views'.

<sup>45</sup> Selviana, Syukur, and Rahmawati, 'Latar Belakang Terjadinya Perang Jamal dan Perang Shiffin pada Masa Ali Bin Abi Thalib'; Satiadharmano, Safira, and Rahmiati, 'Kepemimpinan Ali Bin Abi Thalib dan Penerapan Tahkim dalam Penyelesaian Konflik'.

### Chronology and Context of the Battle of *Siffin*

The Battle of *Siffin* occurred in the year 36 AH/657 CE and represented the climax of the prolonged political conflict between Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan. Muawiyah pressed Ali to punish Uthman's murderers, while Ali argued that peace and stability should take precedence before legal proceedings commenced.<sup>46</sup> Both Ali and Muawiyah were reluctant to engage in this war; however, they were compelled to do so due to pressure from their followers, who insisted on resolving the matter through violence. According to Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah in his work *Minhaajus Sunnah* (II/224),<sup>47</sup> many involved in this war were not loyal followers of either leader but rather individuals motivated by personal ambition and group interests who exploited the *fitnah* to achieve their goals. After sustaining numerous casualties on both sides, both parties agreed to raise the Qur'an on spears as a symbol of their legal dispute, leading to an arbitration process known as *tahkīm*.<sup>48</sup>

### The *Tahkīm* Event

The *tahkīm* event took place in the year 37 AH/658 CE and marked the peak of the *Siffin* war crisis. Both sides agreed to end the conflict through arbitration by raising the Qur'an as a symbol of peace<sup>49</sup>. The *tahkīm* agreement was implemented by appointing Abu Musa al-Ash'ari as the arbiter for Ali's side and 'Amr bin al-'Ash for Muawiyah's side.<sup>50</sup> According to reputable sources such as *al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* by Imam Ibn Kathir,<sup>51</sup> the two arbiters met and concluded to defer the best decision to the Muslim community while respecting one another. Their primary focus was to resolve the conflict peacefully and address the differences between Ali's demand for Muawiyah to pledge allegiance and Muawiyah's demand for Ali to exact retribution against Uthman's killers.

### Reactions to the *Tahkīm* and the Emergence of the *Khawārij*

The rejection of *tahkīm* led to the emergence of the *Khawārij* as an early form of sectarianism in Islam. This group arose from the extreme reaction of some of Ali's followers who viewed the arbitration as a violation of Allah's law.<sup>52</sup> Initially, they supported Ali but later separated themselves with the principle

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<sup>46</sup> Selviana et al., 'Latar Belakang Terjadinya Perang Jamal dan Perang Shiffin pada Masa Ali Bin Abi Thalib'; Shibeeb, 'The Battle of Siffin'.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, 'كتاب منهاج السنة النبوية - المكتبة الشاملة'.

<sup>48</sup> Nurazmallail Marni, 'Peristiwa Tahkim antara Ali dan Muawiyah (Tahun 36 H): Suatu Kajian dan Pengajaran', *Jurnal Teknologi (Sciences & Engineering)*, 2003, 75â€"92-75â€"92, <https://doi.org/10.11113/jt.v38.516>; Satiadharmano, Safira, and Rahmiati, 'Kepemimpinan Ali Bin Abi Thalib dan Penerapan Tahkim dalam Penyelesaian Konflik'.

<sup>49</sup> Önkal, 'Tahkim Olayı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme'; Satiadharmano, Safira, and Rahmiati, 'Kepemimpinan Ali Bin Abi Thalib dan Penerapan Tahkim dalam Penyelesaian Konflik'.

<sup>50</sup> Alamsyah, 'Menilik historical peristiwa Tahkim pada masa Ali Bin Abi Thalib'; Sansarkan, *İslam düşününce geleneğinde tahkim meselesi ve mezhebi ekoller üzerindeki etkisi*.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Katsir, 'كتاب البداية والنهاية - ط السعادة - المكتبة الشاملة'.

<sup>52</sup> Fawait et al., 'Sejarah Kemunculan Khawarij dan Pemahamannya tentang Hadis'; Nugraha et al., 'Eksplorasi Sekte Khawarij Dan Impresinya Terhadap Ajaran Islam'.

of "lā ḥukma illā li-llāh" (there is no rule except that of Allah), claiming that Ali had ruled by other than Allah's law. They rejected political compromise and considered anyone involved in the *taḥkīm* including Ali and Muawiyah as major sinners who must be fought.<sup>53</sup> The main characteristics of the *Khawārij* include a literal interpretation of religious texts without compromise, a rejection of authority that does not align with their understanding, and a tendency to use violence to enforce their religious views.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Emergence of *Shī‘ah* from Supporters of Ali**

Some of the groups loyal to Ali bin Abi Talib after *taḥkīm* subsequently evolved into *Shī‘ah* (*Shī‘ah al-Ali*). Initially, this movement was political in nature, but over time, that political loyalty transformed into a theological conviction regarding the privileges of *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet).<sup>55</sup> *Shī‘ah* emerged from the belief that Ali was the legitimate caliph after Prophet Muhammad SAW based on explicit texts and testament, and that leadership of the Muslim community should be inherited through the descendants of *Ahl al-Bayt*.<sup>56</sup> The early development of *Shī‘ah* was marked by the concept of *imamah*, which stated that an imam must be a descendant of Ali and Fatimah, possessing spiritual superiority, and entitled to lead the Muslim community based on divine appointment (revelation).<sup>57</sup> Excessive loyalty (*ghulūw*) towards Ali and *Ahl al-Bayt* later became the theological foundation of *Shī‘ah*, emphasising that only the descendants of Ali possess the legitimate spiritual and political authority to lead the Muslim community.<sup>58</sup> This concept was subsequently codified during the era of Ja'far as-Sadiq through the doctrine of *imamah* that was inherited through generations.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Influence of *Taḥkīm* on Theological Discourse**

The *taḥkīm* event catalyzed fundamental changes in Islamic theological discourse. Debates shifted from practical political issues to deeper doctrinal beliefs, such as matters of faith, the status of major sinners, and *takfir*.<sup>60</sup> The polemics initiated by the *Khawārij* regarding the status of those who commit major sins spurred theological responses from other groups, including the early *Murji‘ah*, who adopted a moderate position by deferring judgment on an individual's faith until the Day of Resurrection.<sup>61</sup> This dynamic

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<sup>53</sup> Anggraheni et al., 'Flashback of The Khawarij Stream in History'.

<sup>54</sup> Putrawan and Eunike, 'Islamic Radicalism'.

<sup>55</sup> Dewi et al., 'Shia Is One Of the Sects in Islam'; Zaheer, *Shias and Shiaism*.

<sup>56</sup> Badaruddin et al., 'Ahlul Bait Nabi Noble's Characters as Inspiration in Educational Management'.

<sup>57</sup> Dewi, Maulana, and Tasdoken, 'Shia Is One of the Sects in Islam'.

<sup>58</sup> Rahman and Hamat, 'Sorotan Sejarah Kemunculan Syiah Dan Aliran Utamanya'.

<sup>59</sup> Zaheer, *Shias and Shiaism*.

<sup>60</sup> Dewi, Maulana, and Tasdoken, 'Shia Is One of the Sects in Islam'; Nurseri Hasnah Nasution, 'Islamic Theological Thought in Indonesia and Its Implications for Education: Pre-Independence and Post-Independence Comparative Study', *Conciencia* 21, no. 1 (30 June 2021): 69–85, <https://doi.org/10.19109/conciencia.v21i1.16904>.

<sup>61</sup> Prayogi, 'The Theologicalism and Fiqhism in Islam a Descriptive Study'.

subsequently led to the emergence of new theological schools such as *Qadariyyah*, which emphasised human free will in determining their actions, while *Jabariyyah* asserted that everything is determined by God, hence humans do not possess power over their own fate.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the *Mutazilah* emerged, developing the concept of "*manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn*" (a position between two positions) for individuals who commit major sins.<sup>63</sup> By the end of the 3rd century AH, theological schools such as *Ashariyah* and *Maturidiyah* emerged, representing a synthesis between rational and traditional approaches.<sup>64</sup> This transformation illustrates a shift from a purely political focus to systematic theological debates, laying the groundwork for the development of *kalam* science as a structured discipline of Islamic theology.

### **The Map of Ideological Fragmentation of the Muslim Community Post-*Taḥkīm***

Following *taḥkīm*, the ideologies of the Muslim community experienced complex and diverse fragmentation, shaping a map of sectarianism that persists to this day with various changes.<sup>65</sup> This fragmentation resulted in three main groups: *Khawārij*, *Shī‘ah*, and *Murjīah*.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, various other theological schools emerged, such as *Mutazilah*, *Qadariyyah*, *Jabariyyah*, as well as *Ashariyah* and *Maturidiyah*. The long-term impact of *taḥkīm* is evident in the formation of sectarian identities encompassing theological, political, social, and cultural aspects. Each group developed distinct religious thought, systems of authority, and interpretations of Islamic sources.<sup>67</sup> This fragmentation created competition in claims of legitimacy and religious authority, with each group striving to present itself as the bearer of true Islamic truth.<sup>68</sup> The consequences of ideological fragmentation following *taḥkīm* have not only resulted in a diversity of thought within Islam but have also become a source of tension and conflict that continues to influence the political and social dynamics in the Muslim world to this day. This is evident in various contemporary conflicts that exploit sectarian identities for political and social mobilization.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ronny Mahmuddin and Syandri Syandri, 'Qadariyah, Jabariyah Dan Ahlus Sunnah (Studi Komparatif Merespon Kebijakan Pemerintah Dan Ulama Mencegah Merebaknya Covid-19)', *BUSTANUL FUQAHA: Jurnal Bidang Hukum Islam* 1, no. 2 (7 May 2020): 209–22, <https://doi.org/10.36701/bustanul.v1i2.147>; Supriadin, Abubakar, and Arsyad, 'Diskursus Teologi Qadariyah dan Jabariah'.

<sup>63</sup> Nasution, 'Islamic Theological Thought in Indonesia and its Implications for Education'.

<sup>64</sup> Adnin Adnin and Muhammad Zein, 'Epistemologi Kalam Asy'ariyah Dan Al-Maturidiyah', *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Theosofi Dan Peradaban Islam* 2, no. 1 (22 March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.51900/alhikmah.v2i1.7603>; Ahmad Shofi Muhyiddin, 'Pemikiran Teologi Maturidiyyah (Pendekatan Sejarah)', *JASNA: Journal for Aswaja Studies* 2, no. 2 (1 July 2022): 13–30, <https://doi.org/10.34001/jasna.v2i2.3604>.

<sup>65</sup> Abdulmajid, 'Islam and Sectarianism'; Rahmadhani, 'Al-Fitnah Al-Kubra Roots Sectarianism In Islam'.

<sup>66</sup> Miftahur Ridho, 'Peristiwa Tahkim (Polemik Perselisihan Politik Dan Implikasinya)', *HUMANISTIKA: Jurnal Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (23 March 2020): 57–71, <https://doi.org/10.36835/humanistika.v5i1.147>.

<sup>67</sup> Abdulmajid, 'Islam and Sectarianism'.

<sup>68</sup> Geaves, *Chapter 1 Sectarianism in Sunnī Islam*.

<sup>69</sup> Abdulmajid, 'Islam and Sectarianism'; Wehrey, *Beyond Sunni and Shia*.

### Transformation of Post-Arbitration Conflict

Stage	Characteristics of Conflict	Main Actors	Central Issues	Impact
Stage 1: Pure Political Conflict (644-656 AD)	Succession of leadership and administrative policies	Uthman vs. the Rebels of Egypt/Kufa/Basra	Nepotism, corruption, and administration	Assassination of Uthman, legitimacy crisis
Stage 2: Leadership Conflict (656-657 CE)	Legitimacy of the Caliphate and the Demand for Justice	Ali vs Aisha/Thalhah/ Zubair vs Muawiyah	Retribution for the Murder of Uthman, Legitimacy of Allegiance	The Battles of Jamal and Siffin, Fragmentation of the Community
Stage 3: Arbitration and Division (657 CE)	Legal interpretation and arbitration authority	Ali & Abu Musa vs Muawiyah & Amr bin Ash	The authority of God's law vs that of man	The emergence of the Khawārij, rejection of arbitration
Stage 4: Ideological Fragmentation (657-661 CE)	Formation of Group Identity and Doctrine	Khawārij vs Shī'ah vs Murji'ah	Takfir, Imāmah, Status of Major Sinners	Emergence of Political-Theological Sects
Stage 5: Theologisation (661-750 AD)	Systematisation of theology and the formation of schools of thought	Qadariyyah vs Jabariyyah vs Mutazilah vs Ash'ariyah	Free will vs predestination, attributes of God	Diversification of schools and intellectual traditions

### Arbitration as a Turning Point in the Transition from Political Conflict to Theological Conflict

The event of arbitration is not merely a method for resolving political disputes, but also transforms leadership conflicts into profound and enduring theological divisions within Islam. Through arbitration, the legitimacy of leadership is determined not only by political consensus (*ijma'*) or military strength but also by diverse interpretations of religious texts and claims of divine authority.<sup>70</sup> The arbitration process, which elevates the Qur'an as a symbol, has shifted the debate from practical politics to religious hermeneutics. Each group begins to construct legitimacy through exclusive doctrinal interpretations.<sup>71</sup> This dynamic results in sectarian ideologies that far exceed the initial objectives of arbitration. Consequently, the groups that emerge post-arbitration compete not only for political power but also claim theological truth and religious authority.<sup>72</sup> Thus, arbitration becomes a significant moment that transforms conflicts among elites into divisions involving beliefs, identities, and spiritual authority, which persist to this day.

<sup>70</sup> Nasution, 'Islamic Theological Thought in Indonesia and its Implications for Education'.

<sup>71</sup> Geaves, *Chapter 1 Sectarianism in Sunnī Islam*.

<sup>72</sup> Ridho, 'Peristiwa Tahkim (Polemik Perselisihan Politik Dan Implikasinya)'; Satiadharma, Safira, and Rahmiati, 'Kepemimpinan Ali Bin Abi Thalib dan Penerapan Tahkim dalam Penyelesaian Konflik'.

### **The Role of Provocation and the Politicisation of Religion in Aggravating Situations**

Following the arbitration, the politicisation of religion demonstrates how political actors utilise religious symbols and narratives to support their political interests. Religion, which should serve as a spiritual guide, transforms into a tool for mass mobilisation and justification of power. An example of the politicisation of revelation is evident when various parties select verses from the Qur'an and Hadith to endorse their political positions. For instance, the *Khawārij* employ the principle "*lā hukma illā li-llāh*" to reject arbitration, while the *Shī'ah* claim the privileges of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.<sup>73</sup> This strategy creates "instrumentalisation of religion," where Islam is used as a means to achieve specific political ends, rather than as a value system governing spiritual and social life comprehensively. When political elites exploit religious sentiments to enhance their legitimacy, it can undermine genuine religious authority. Society begins to question the motives behind the religious interpretations presented.<sup>74</sup> In the context of arbitration, the politicisation of religion illustrates that the use of religious symbols in political conflicts can prolong and exacerbate divisions. Conflicts that were initially transient evolve into existential conflicts concerning identity and fundamental beliefs.

### **The Contribution of Arbitration to the Emergence of Fragmented Religious Epistemology**

Post-arbitration, various groups begin to establish separate and competing religious epistemic authorities. This leads to the emergence of a plurality of standards of truth and different methodologies of interpretation in understanding Islam.<sup>75</sup> The *Khawārij* develop a literal and exclusive epistemology, rejecting compromise and claiming the sovereignty of God's law. Meanwhile, the *Shī'ah* develop a *nash* epistemology that emphasises the authority of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in religious interpretation.<sup>76</sup> Subsequently, the *Murji'ah*, *Qadariyyah*, and *Jabariyyah* groups emerge with differing epistemological approaches, each claiming that their methodology is the most valid in understanding divine will.<sup>77</sup> This epistemological fragmentation creates a "competition for religious authority," where each group strives to be the holder of the most authentic interpretation of Islam through the development of texts, traditions, and exclusive hermeneutical methodologies.<sup>78</sup> As a result, Muslims no longer possess a single, central source of religious authority but instead face various competing interpretations. This creates a fragmented theological landscape that is often contradictory.

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<sup>73</sup> Echele, 'Weaponization of Religion'.

<sup>74</sup> Williamson et al., 'Preaching Politics'.

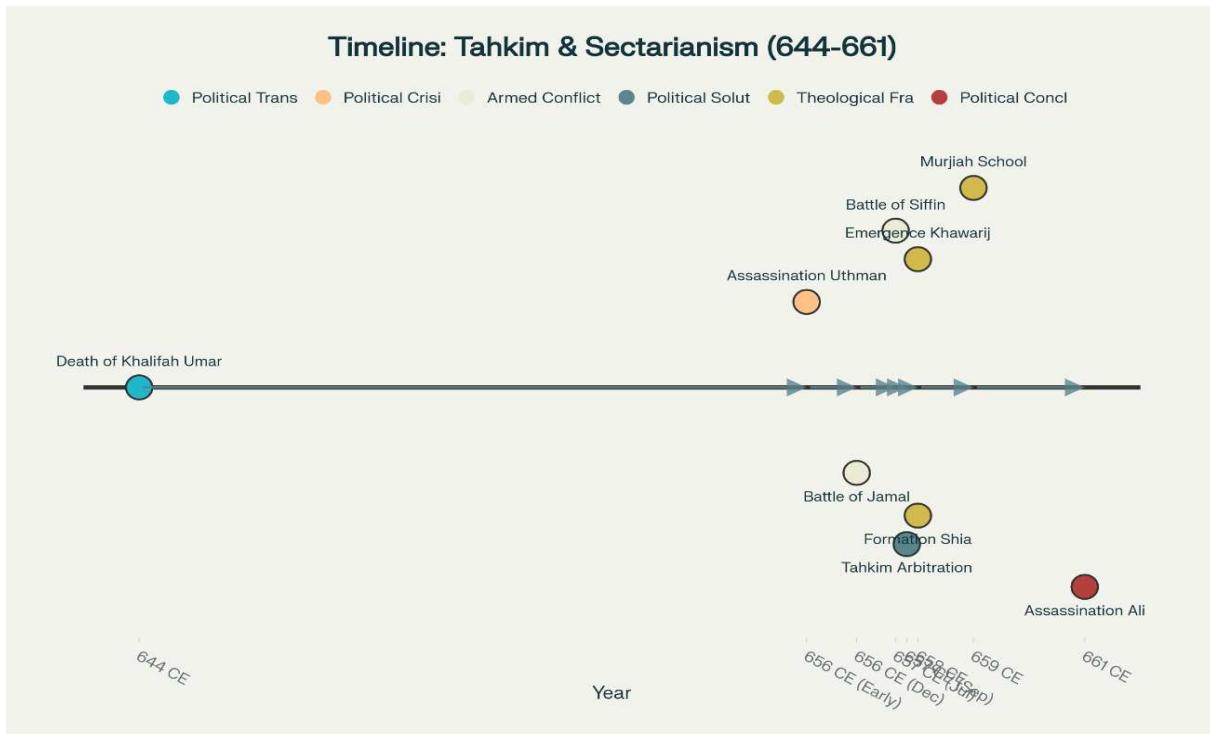
<sup>75</sup> Bhojani and Clarke, 'Religious Authority beyond Domination and Discipline: Epistemic Authority and Its Vernacular Uses in the Shi'i Diaspora'.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Cheong et al., 'Religious Communication and Epistemic Authority of Leaders in Wired Faith Organizations'.

### Chronological Timeline



### Reflection and Lessons for Contemporary Muslims

The event of arbitration offers important lessons for Muslims regarding the significance of objectivity in history, the avoidance of detrimental politicisation of religion, and the enforcement of reconciliation principles based on justice (*al-'adl*) and objectivity (*al-insāf*) in understanding the legacy of the companions. Previous research indicates that Muslim communities capable of resisting sectarianism are those that build social capital among groups, create adaptive conflict resolution methods, and reject the exploitation of religious sentiments for political ends. Muslims need to apply principles of peace such as *ṣulh* (reconciliation), *tahkīm* (arbitration), and *'afw* (forgiveness) in resolving differences, while avoiding the traps of *takfir* (excommunication from Islam) and exclusionism that have divided the community throughout history.<sup>79</sup> It is essential to instill the belief that all companions are exemplary figures (*al-ṣaḥābah kulluhum 'udul*), including Ali, Muawiyah, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, and 'Amr bin al-'Ash, who sought the best solutions even though the outcomes were not always satisfactory. By studying the history of arbitration objectively and avoiding sectarian bias, Muslims can build a unifying narrative, thereby addressing the challenges of division today through constructive dialogue, mutual understanding, and a commitment to authentic Islamic values.

<sup>79</sup> Sabban, 'Contemporary Conflict Resolution and Islamic Conflict Resolution'.

## Conclusion

The event of arbitration in the year 37 AH/657 CE represents a significant moment in Islamic history that transformed a political conflict into a profound theological schism. The attempt at arbitration to resolve the dispute between Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan inadvertently catalysed the emergence of various sects, such as the *Khawārij*, who espoused extreme *takfir* doctrines, the *Shī‘ah*, with their concept of *imāmah*, as well as the *Murji‘ah* and other theological movements. Arbitration was not merely a means of conflict resolution; it also marked the beginning of the fragmentation of Islamic thought, wherein each group began to establish separate and competing religious authorities. Therefore, Muslims need to approach this history with objectivity, applying the principles of *al-‘adl* (justice) and *al-insāf* (equity) in understanding the disputes among the companions, while maintaining the belief that the companions serve as exemplars who endeavoured to find the best solutions in complex situations. This understanding is crucial to avoiding sectarianism and fostering a narrative that unites the community against division.

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