

# The Psychology of the Sunni-Shia Divide

July 10, 2014

## *Politico Magazine:*

More than a decade after the Iraq war began, it still boggles our minds: Sunni and Shia—both revering the Quran, following Muhammad and praying to Allah—killing one another. It brings to mind the 3,500-plus dead from the clashes between Northern Ireland’s Protestants and Catholics—all, at least nominally, following the same Prince of Peace.

One wonders: Why such animosity among those so ethnically and religiously similar? Certainly, Sunni-Shia violence has deep historical-political roots. Ditto the Protestant-Catholic clashes. As the late Ed Cairns, leader of the University of Ulster’s Peace and Conflict Research Group, once explained to me, religious labels can sometimes be markers for just those kinds of deep cultural divisions. “If anything, the more [Northern Irelanders] believed or went to church, the less prejudice they showed,” he said.

Read the whole story: [\*Politico Magazine\*](#)