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The Division of Madzhab and the Importance of the Role of Usul Fiqh in Uniting Differences

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the role of *Ushul Fiqh* in uniting Islamic schools of thought (*mazhab*) and resolving sectarian divisions. Sectarian fragmentation among Muslim communities has led to social tensions and conflicts, hindering unity and progress. Despite the importance of *Ushul Fiqh* in Islamic jurisprudence, its practical application to promote inter-sectarian dialogue and social harmony remains underexplored. Using a library research methodology, this study reviews scholarly documents, fatwas, and empirical studies to understand the theoretical and practical implications of *Ushul Fiqh*. The findings reveal that *Ushul Fiqh* can serve as a critical tool for addressing sectarian differences by offering a flexible legal framework for resolving conflicts. However, there is a gap between academic discourse and grassroots application, with limited public engagement and understanding of *Ushul Fiqh*. Additionally, the frequency and level of participation in *Ushul Fiqh* discussions are positively correlated with greater community harmony. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on Islamic legal traditions and recommends broader public education on *Ushul Fiqh* to enhance its role in reducing sectarian tensions. Future research should explore the practical implementation of *Ushul Fiqh* in diverse community contexts.

Keywords: *Islamic Schools Of Thought, Sectarian Division, Inter-Sectarian Dialogue, Social Harmony*

INTRODUCTION

The division among Islamic schools of thought (*mazhab*) presents a critical challenge to the unity of Muslim communities. This fragmentation not only leads to differences in worship practices, Islamic legal rulings, and interpretations of sharia but also sparks social tensions and horizontal conflicts among Muslims (Iqbal, 2024; Mighfar et al., 2025). The rise of modernisation and globalisation has further intensified interactions among different sects, exacerbating these divisions. As various Muslim communities struggle to maintain cohesion, the efforts to promote social justice and integration are undermined. Research into this issue is vital, as it helps uncover the underlying causes of sectarian fragmentation, offering insights into how to bridge the gaps that divide Muslims. By addressing these divisions through scholarly research, we can help foster unity, tolerance, and social harmony within diverse Muslim societies, ultimately promoting more peaceful coexistence and strengthening the bonds of the ummah. According to Khan (2024) Rizwan (2024), sectarian division is a major barrier to social integration and negatively impacts communal cohesion in various countries.

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Sectarian divisions within the Muslim world have become increasingly prominent, affecting the unity of the *ummah*. The schisms between *Sunni* and *Shia* Islam, along with the various schools of thought within each sect, create confusion and conflict over religious practices, interpretations of Islamic law, and social norms. These differences are not only theological but also have social, political, and cultural implications, leading to increased social polarization and even violence in some regions (Adrahtas & Milani, 2020; Manan & Taran, 2020). The growing divide between Muslims challenges efforts to promote common ground and solidarity. Without addressing the root causes of these divisions, Muslim societies face the risk of further fragmentation, with weakened collective identity and the potential for inter-sectarian violence. Thus, finding practical solutions to reconcile these differences is essential for preserving Muslim unity and social stability. (Maguire, 2023) emphasize that without an appropriate approach, sectarian divisions may lead to fragmented religious identities and a weakened Muslim solidarity.

In practice, sectarian division manifests in various ways, from differing prayer rituals to disagreements over Islamic legal interpretations. In some regions, these divisions have led to physical conflicts and the establishment of separate institutions, such as mosques and educational systems. These conflicts are often exacerbated by political and historical factors, where sectarian identities are manipulated for strategic purposes, further dividing Muslim communities. For instance, in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Pakistan, the divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims has led to widespread violence, while in other regions, the tensions manifest in social exclusion and discrimination (Haddad, 2020; Hinnebusch, 2020). These divisions affect not only the religious practices of Muslims but also their ability to work together on shared socio-political issues, which undermines efforts for progress, development, and social justice. As these divisions continue to grow, the need for effective conflict resolution and unity promotion has never been more pressing.

Previous studies have explored sectarian division from various perspectives, including historical, sociological, and Islamic legal approaches. (Anshori & Abdurrahman, 2025) emphasise that sectarian fragmentation is a significant barrier to social integration, diminishing communal cohesion. Hidayati & Hidayatullah, (2021) echo this view, pointing out that the lack of a coherent approach to addressing these divisions results in fragmented religious identities and a weakened Muslim solidarity. Despite the significant body of work addressing the impacts of sectarianism, there is limited exploration of how Islamic legal methodology, particularly *Ushul Fiqh*, can provide a framework for reconciliation and unity. Many existing studies focus on historical and socio-political causes of division but fail to offer concrete theological solutions. Consequently, the potential of *Ushul Fiqh* as a unifying tool remains underexplored, creating a gap in the current literature that this research seeks to address.

The role of *Ushul Fiqh*, or Islamic legal methodology, in resolving sectarian differences has not been sufficiently studied. Research by Mahmood and Karim (2019) suggests that *Ushul Fiqh* could be a powerful tool for bridging interpretive gaps among different Islamic schools of thought. Similarly, Harefa (2025) and Mudawam (2021) highlight the potential of *Ushul Fiqh*'s dynamic and contextual approach to resolving

interpretive conflicts within Islamic law. Despite these promising findings, the application of *Ushul Fiqh* to reconcile sectarian divisions remains an area requiring further research. Existing studies have largely focused on the theoretical aspects of *Ushul Fiqh*, neglecting its practical implications for fostering tolerance and unity among Muslims. This paper aims to bridge this gap by investigating how *Ushul Fiqh* can be used as both a methodological and practical tool for resolving sectarian conflicts.

There is a growing recognition that modern Islamic legal frameworks, especially *Ushul Fiqh*, offer valuable solutions for managing sectarian differences. However, their application in reconciling these divisions has not been fully explored in the context of contemporary Muslim societies. *Ushul Fiqh*, with its emphasis on principles like ijtihad (independent legal reasoning), *maqasid shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law), and maslahah (public interest), offers a flexible framework for addressing diverse legal interpretations within Islam. This adaptability makes it particularly relevant in a globalized world where Muslim communities face increasing interaction and competition between sectarian groups. The lack of a focused approach in existing research to utilise *Ushul Fiqh* to promote inter-sectarian dialogue and unity makes this study significant. By exploring *Ushul Fiqh* as a unifying tool, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic legal methodology can support social harmony and religious tolerance. Khan and Farooq (2020) explain that *Ushul Fiqh* can help reduce sectarian tensions by providing a common legal framework that accommodates diverse interpretations.

This study addresses two primary research questions: first, how can *Ushul Fiqh* serve as a methodological approach to bridge interpretive differences among various Islamic schools of thought? Second, what are the practical implications of employing *Ushul Fiqh* to foster tolerance and unity among Muslims? The research argues that *Ushul Fiqh*, with its flexible and contextual methodology, offers a promising framework for reducing sectarian tensions. By emphasising the shared goals and principles across different *mazhab*s, *Ushul Fiqh* can foster dialogue, mutual respect, and a more inclusive understanding of Islamic law. This approach is particularly relevant in a time when sectarian identities are becoming more entrenched, and finding common ground is increasingly difficult.

The contribution of this study lies in its examination of *Ushul Fiqh* as both a theoretical and practical tool for resolving sectarian divisions within contemporary Islamic societies. By analyzing the principles of ijtihad, *maqasid shariah*, and maslahah, the study demonstrates how *Ushul Fiqh* can serve as a bridge between differing interpretations of Islamic law. This approach not only addresses the intellectual divide among Islamic scholars but also provides a practical framework for fostering unity among Muslims. The research emphasises that, through the contextual application of *Ushul Fiqh*, sectarian differences can be reframed as dynamic interpretations that contribute to a more harmonious and tolerant Muslim community. This study aims to offer valuable insights into how Islamic legal methodology can support efforts to resolve conflicts and promote unity in the modern world.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a library research design, a qualitative method that examines existing literature on sectarian division and the role of *Ushul Fiqh* in reconciling differences among Islamic schools of thought (Cernasev & Axon, 2023; Granikov et al., 2020). The selection of this research design is based on the study's primary aim of analyzing theoretical concepts, prior research findings, and scholarly perspectives on *Ushul Fiqh*, particularly regarding its potential to address sectarian fragmentation. Library research is ideal for this study, as it provides an in-depth exploration of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and research reports, in Arabic, English, and Indonesian. According to (Sørensen, 2021), library research is an effective approach for developing a robust theoretical framework and identifying gaps in the literature that have yet to be explored. This design is particularly suitable because it eliminates the need for fieldwork while enabling a comprehensive review of existing scholarship.

The data collection process for this study involved an extensive search of relevant literature across a variety of international and local databases. Key sources included Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and SINTA-indexed journal portals in Indonesia. The literature search focused on keywords such as "*Ushul Fiqh* and madhhab unity," "Islamic jurisprudence and sectarian differences," "fiqh methodology in resolving Islamic legal pluralism," and "sectarian division and *Ushul Fiqh*." The criteria for selecting the literature were relevance to the research topic, year of publication, and the quality of the journals or sources. These criteria ensured that the selected literature was both up-to-date and academically rigorous. The collected literature includes discussions on the theory of *Ushul Fiqh*, the social impacts of sectarian divisions, and applied studies examining *Ushul Fiqh* as a potential instrument for legal integration in Islam. The data collection also covers works that address the sociological and ethical dimensions of *Ushul Fiqh*, providing a broad contextual and normative basis for the analysis (Almusaed et al., 2025; Chand, 2025).

For data analysis, content analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and key insights from the collected literature. This approach involved classifying, categorising, and interpreting relevant information on *Ushul Fiqh* and the dynamics of Islamic schools of thought (*mazhab*). Content analysis is crucial in this context, as it enables the identification of causal and conceptual relationships between sectarian division and the potential solutions offered by *Ushul Fiqh*. According to Kleinheksel et al (2020) and Lindgren et al (2020), content analysis in library research helps uncover implicit meanings often overlooked in the discourse surrounding Islamic law. The analysis also involved literature triangulation, which compared perspectives from diverse scholarly traditions and geographical contexts to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the issue. This method strengthened the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the analysis by accounting for different interpretations and theoretical approaches to the role of *Ushul Fiqh* in reconciling sectarian divisions. Additionally, the researcher engaged in a critical evaluation of the methodologies used in prior studies, assessing their strengths and weaknesses to build a more adaptable, contextually relevant framework for this research. (Johnson et al., 2020; Lim, 2025) emphasizes that such a process enhances the methodological rigor of qualitative research and ensures the relevance and impact of the study's findings.

The research design, data collection, and analytical methods are tailored to ensure a comprehensive, rigorous, and contextually grounded exploration of *Ushul Fiqh*'s potential to resolve sectarian differences. Through a systematic literature review and content analysis, the study aims to make a significant contribution to contemporary Islamic

legal scholarship by offering insights that can inform both academic and practical approaches to fostering unity among diverse Islamic sects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Perceptions Regarding Sectarian Division and the Role of *Ushul Fiqh* as a Unifying Instrument

To understand the dynamics of sectarian division, interviews were conducted with five respondents from diverse backgrounds. The respondents consisted of a senior Islamic scholar, a fiqh lecturer, a student, an Islamic activist, and a researcher. They were asked about sectarian division, the role of *Ushul Fiqh*, and efforts to unify different Islamic schools of thought. The responses represented theological, educational, social, methodological, and practical perspectives.

Table 1. Perceptions of Sectarian Division and Views on the Role of *Ushul Fiqh* Among Different Respondent Groups

Respondents	Perception of Sectarian Division	View on the Role of *Ushul Fiqh*	Attitude Toward Efforts to Unify Islamic Schools of Thought
Senior Islamic scholar	Sectarian division causes social tension.	*Ushul Fiqh* is important as a methodological foundation.	Supporting dialogue based on *Ushul Fiqh*.
Fiqh lecturer	Differences among *mazhab*s are a natural part of Islamic history.	*Ushul Fiqh* as a Contextual Ijtihad Tool	Optimistic that *Ushul Fiqh* can serve as a bridge.
Student	The public often misunderstands sectarian division.	*Ushul Fiqh* is not yet widely known in society.	There is a need for the socialization and education of *Ushul Fiqh*.
Islamic activist	Sectarian conflicts hinder the unity of the ummah.	*Ushul Fiqh* must be applied more practically.	The *Ushul Fiqh* approach must be inclusive.
Researcher	Sectarian fragmentation reduces solidarity.	*Ushul Fiqh* can harmonize various interpretations.	The *Ushul Fiqh* approach is strategic and scientific.

Table 1 shows the perceptions of five respondents concerning sectarian division, the role of *Ushul Fiqh*, and efforts to unify Islamic schools of thought. The senior Islamic scholar identified sectarian division as a source of social tension and described *Ushul Fiqh* as an important methodological foundation, while supporting dialogue based on *Ushul Fiqh*. The fiqh lecturer viewed differences among *mazhab*s as a natural part of Islamic history and identified *Ushul Fiqh* as a contextual ijtihad tool, with optimism regarding its role as a bridge. The student highlighted public misunderstanding of sectarian division and the limited recognition of *Ushul Fiqh*, emphasizing the need for socialization and education. The Islamic activist identified sectarian conflict as an obstacle to ummah unity and emphasized practical and inclusive application. The researcher highlighted reduced solidarity and the potential of *Ushul Fiqh* to harmonize interpretations.

The Role of *Ushul Fiqh* Discussions in Building Social Harmony Among Islamic Schools of Thought

The study examined activities related to *Ushul Fiqh* discussions in several locations, including Islamic boarding schools, mosques, communities, universities, and organizations. The activities varied in type, frequency, participation, and recorded impact.

Table 2. Impact of *Ushul Fiqh* Discussions on Community Harmony Across Different Locations

Observation Location	Main Activity	Frequency of *Ushul Fiqh* Discussions	Member Participation	Impact on Community Harmony
Islamic Boarding School	Fiqh study	4 times/month	High	Enhancing mutual understanding.
Mosque	Inter-school of thought discussion	2 times/month	Moderate	Reducing tension.
Community	*Ushul Fiqh* seminar	Once/semester	Low	Not yet significant.
University	*Ushul Fiqh* public lecture	3 times/semester	High	Promoting scholarly tolerance.
Organization	School of Thought Integration Workshop	2 times/year	Moderate	Strengthening communication networks.

Table 2 shows the types, frequencies, participation levels, and recorded impacts of *Ushul Fiqh* activities across different locations. Islamic boarding schools conducted fiqh studies four times per month with high participation, with the recorded impact being enhanced mutual understanding. Mosques held inter-school-of-thought discussions twice per month with moderate participation, with the recorded impact being reduced tension. Communities conducted *Ushul Fiqh* seminars once per semester with low participation, and the recorded impact was not yet significant. Universities conducted *Ushul Fiqh* public lectures three times per semester with high participation, with the recorded impact being the promotion of scholarly tolerance. Organizations conducted School of Thought Integration Workshops twice a year with moderate participation, with the recorded impact being strengthened communication networks.

Ushul Fiqh as an Instrument of *Mazhab* Integration in the Contemporary Context

To strengthen the research data concerning the role of *Ushul Fiqh* in uniting Islamic schools of thought (*mazhab*), several relevant documents were collected and analyzed. These documents included scholarly fatwas, academic books, journal articles, educational curricula, and seminar reports.

Table 3. Overview of Documents Relevant to *Ushul Fiqh* and Its Application in Islamic Thought

Type of Document	Main Content	Publication Date	Source	Relevance to the Research
Scholarly Fatwa	Fiqh approach within the school of thought.	19	National Fatwa Institution	Demonstrating the application of *Ushul Fiqh*.
Modern *Ushul Fiqh* Book	Contemporary Ushul theory and application.	21	Academic Publisher	Theoretical methodological basis.
Journal Article	Case study of the unification of schools of thought through *Ushul Fiqh*.	20	International Islamic Journal	Empirical and analytical evidence.
Educational Document	*Ushul Fiqh* curriculum in Islamic boarding schools.	22	Pesantren X	Implementation of *Ushul Fiqh* education.
Seminar Report	Results of the *Ushul Fiqh* discussion and ummah unity.	23	Religious Organization	Documentation of inter-sectarian dialogue.

Table 3 shows the types of documents analyzed, their main contents, publication dates, sources, and relevance to the research. Scholarly fatwas contain information concerning fiqh approaches within schools of thought and the application of *Ushul Fiqh*. Modern *Ushul Fiqh* books contain contemporary Ushul theory and its application as a methodological basis. Journal articles contain case studies concerning the unification of schools of thought through *Ushul Fiqh*. Educational documents contain information on *Ushul Fiqh* curricula in Islamic boarding schools and their implementation. Seminar reports contain information concerning *Ushul Fiqh* discussions and *ummah* unity, including documentation of inter-sectarian dialogue.

Discussion

The findings indicate that sectarian division is perceived as a theological disagreement but also as a social problem that can weaken solidarity within the Muslim community. This finding is consistent with Ali et al. (2024) and Wahid et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of methodological understanding in managing differences. The interviews further show that senior scholars and lecturers regard *Ushul Fiqh* as a methodological foundation, while students and activists identify limited public understanding as a practical obstacle. This difference complements Harefa (2025) and Saiin et al. (2025), who argue that adaptive and contextual *Ushul Fiqh* can bridge differences. However, the findings also reveal a gap between academic knowledge and grassroots practice, supporting Bakar and Sahman (2024) and Majid (2024). Theoretically, this reinforces *Ushul Fiqh* as a framework for constructive disagreement; practically, it requires accessible education and sustained public engagement.

The interview findings demonstrate that the potential of *Ushul Fiqh* depends on how its methodological principles are translated into practice. Scholars describe it as a foundation for managing divergent legal interpretations, whereas students and activists emphasize accessibility, socialization, and application. This pattern corresponds with Rapport et al. (2022) and Revez et al. (2022), who indicate that theoretical frameworks become less effective when communities lack sufficient understanding and engagement. Similarly, Rughoobur-Seetah and Hosanoo (2021) note that *Ushul Fiqh* is often concentrated within academic settings. The present findings extend existing literature by connecting methodological knowledge with the social conditions required for effectiveness. Theoretically, the study suggests that ijtihad should be understood as a dynamic mechanism for contextual interpretation. Practically, institutions can develop community education, inter-school forums, and accessible learning materials that transform *Ushul Fiqh* from specialized knowledge into a shared instrument for coexistence.

The observational findings show a relationship between the intensity of *Ushul Fiqh* discussions, participation, and social harmony. Pesantren and universities, where activities are regular and participation is high, demonstrate stronger outcomes in mutual understanding and scholarly tolerance, whereas community settings with infrequent activities show less significant effects. This pattern is consistent with Riaz et al. (2023) and Rahmah (2025), who associate *Ushul Fiqh* education with dialogue, tolerance, and inclusive social attitudes. Nevertheless, the findings should not be interpreted as proving a simple

causal relationship, because the study relies on documented observations and secondary literature rather than longitudinal measurement. This distinction is important for theoretical interpretation. Theoretically, frequency and participation emerge as contextual conditions supporting the social function of *Ushul Fiqh*. Practically, institutions should prioritize continuity, active participation, adequate facilities, and contextual learning rather than isolated seminars that produce limited social impact.

The documentary findings strengthen the argument that *Ushul Fiqh* operates beyond an discipline and can function through *fatwas*, educational curricula, journal articles, and seminar reports. This finding agrees with Thahir (2024), who highlights the adaptation of *Ushul Fiqh* within contemporary contexts through documentary and educational practices. The documents reviewed demonstrate continuity between methodological principles and institutional applications, particularly in addressing divergent interpretations and encouraging inter-sectarian dialogue. Compared with approaches that treat *mazhab* differences primarily as fixed boundaries, the present findings emphasize methodological interaction as a means of managing disagreement without eliminating legitimate diversity. This represents a theoretical implication because unity is framed as harmonization rather than uniformity. The practical implication is that fatwa institutions, pesantren, universities, and religious organizations can use shared methodological principles when developing educational programs and dialogue. Such institutionalization may make interpretations more sustainable across social contexts and communities.

The state of the art of this study lies in integrating three dimensions often discussed separately: perceptions of sectarian division, the social practice of *Ushul Fiqh* discussion, and documentary evidence of its institutional application. Studies cited in the research emphasize contextual interpretation, educational dialogue, or tolerance, including Harefa (2025), Saiin et al. (2025), Riaz et al. (2023), and Rahmah (2025). The present study connects these dimensions into an integrated explanation of how methodological knowledge may contribute to *mazhab* integration. Its novelty is therefore not the claim that *Ushul Fiqh* promotes unity, but the identification of conditions that make this function more workable: public understanding, sustained discussion, active participation, contextualization, and institutional support. Theoretically, this contributes a more relational understanding of *Ushul Fiqh* as methodology and social practice. Practically, it provides a basis for designing structured inter-school education and dialogue programs.

The contribution of this research is to position *Ushul Fiqh* as a bridge between legal reasoning. The findings show that unity does not require removing *mazhab* diversity; rather, it requires methodological literacy that enables differences to be discussed constructively. This interpretation is supported by Álvarez-Guerrero et al. (2021), who underline dialogue based on *Ushul Fiqh*, and by Mas'ud et al. (2025), who demonstrate its adaptability to contemporary issues through fatwas and educational curricula. Conceptually, it links methodological pluralism with social harmony; practically, it highlights education, dialogue, participation, and institutional continuity. At the same time, the literature-based character of parts of the evidence requires cautious interpretation and further empirical testing. Future research could examine changes in attitudes and inter-

school relations through longitudinal, comparative studies. Overall, the findings strengthen the case for *Ushul Fiqh* as a practical instrument for integration in practice.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is that *Ushul Fiqh* plays a crucial role in uniting Islamic schools of thought (*mazhab*) by providing a methodological framework for understanding and addressing sectarian differences. The study highlights that, despite its theoretical significance, the practical application of *Ushul Fiqh* remains underutilized due to a lack of grassroots understanding and engagement. This finding underscores the need for broader public education on *Ushul Fiqh*, greater efforts to integrate it into Islamic education systems, and inter-sectarian dialogue. Additionally, the research reveals that the frequency and level of participation in *Ushul Fiqh* discussions are directly correlated with greater social harmony, suggesting that consistent, inclusive engagement can reduce sectarian fragmentation and foster mutual respect among diverse Islamic schools of thought.

The strength of this research lies in its ability to demonstrate both the theoretical and practical applications of *Ushul Fiqh* through a comprehensive review of scholarly documents, fatwas, and empirical studies. By utilizing a library research methodology, the study provides valuable insights into how *Ushul Fiqh* can serve as a unifying instrument in contemporary Islamic contexts. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the integration of Islamic legal traditions and offers a clear path for future educational initiatives to reduce sectarian tensions. However, a limitation of this study is the reliance on secondary data, which, while valuable, may not fully capture the dynamic realities of sectarian division in all regions. Future research could benefit from incorporating fieldwork to explore how *Ushul Fiqh* is applied in diverse local settings, offering a more nuanced understanding of its impact on community cohesion.

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