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WHO WE ARE
The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) that monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF uses international standards to monitor violations of religious freedom or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and Congressional leaders of both political parties. The Commission’s work is supported by a professional, nonpartisan staff of regional subject matter experts. USCIRF is separate from the State Department, although the Department’s Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom is a non-voting, ex officio Commissioner.

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
Inherent in religious freedom is the right to believe or not believe as one’s conscience leads, and live out one’s beliefs openly, peacefully, and without fear. Freedom of religion or belief is an expansive right that includes the freedoms of thought, conscience, expression, association, and assembly. While religious freedom is America’s first freedom, it also is a core human right international law and treaty recognize; a necessary component of U.S. foreign policy and America’s commitment to defending democracy and freedom globally; and a vital element of national security, critical to ensuring a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable world.
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F or more than 15 years, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has reviewed and analyzed content in Saudi government textbooks that were found to promote hatred and violence toward religious minorities and others. The results of this analysis have appeared in USCIRF’s annual reports and separate stand-alone reports on the topic. Moreover, inflammatory language is not confined to textbooks distributed within Saudi Arabia. Saudi textbooks containing such language continue to surface in numerous countries around the world. For example, in 2008, USCIRF reported on passages inciting intolerance and violence in high school textbooks used at the Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA) in Alexandria, Virginia. At the time, the ISA operated under the auspices of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC and used some textbooks published by the Saudi Ministry of Education.

For years, the Saudi government has stated publicly and privately that it was making progress by reviewing and revising its textbooks. In July 2006, the Saudi government confirmed to the United States that, by 2008, it would revise and update its textbooks to remove all language disparaging non-Muslims or promoting hatred toward other religions and religious groups. Nevertheless, this and other subsequent deadlines were not met. Since then, USCIRF has acknowledged the Saudi government’s incremental progress in revising its textbooks that reflect an overall trend toward greater tolerance, but efforts remain incomplete.

In addition, USCIRF has consistently raised its concern in meetings with Saudi government officials during visits to the Kingdom in 2007, 2011, 2013, 2017, and 2018 and during numerous meetings with Saudi officials in Washington, DC. In March 2018, USCIRF delivered a letter conveying concern over intolerant content in the 2017-2018 textbooks to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during his visit to Washington, DC.

In May 2018, USCIRF released a Special Report on select high school textbooks identifying several areas of concern. This report by an independent contractor examined textbooks from the 2017-2018 academic year. Unlike past revisions to textbooks where progress had been made, these most recent texts contained several intolerant and inflammatory passages that are cited by the report. Overall, these textbooks represented backsliding from earlier versions that were trending toward more tolerance and understanding.
This follow-on contracted study reviews 22 middle and high school textbooks published by the Saudi government for the 2017-2018 academic year, including the 12 high school books previously reviewed by USCIRF in its May 2018 Special Report. The books number more than 3,000 pages and primarily focus on religious subjects. For comparison, the study also includes two middle school texts on social and national studies.

Intolerant content is scattered throughout many of the books. This intolerance is reflected in the commentary and interpretations offered by the textbooks. Whereas the middle school curriculum and books generally dwell on developing “right” belief, the high school books focus on inculcating appropriate responses by society and the individual to those with “wrong” beliefs. They teach that those who worship differently from the Saudi state-sanctioned interpretation of Islam are polytheists who will go to hell regardless of their good deeds. Shi’a and Sufi veneration of the gravesites of prophets is dismissed as “heresy” while criticism of Islam is deemed “apostasy,” for which the textbook endorses the death penalty. The textbooks caution students to avoid friendship with members of other religions. They also encourage both violent and non-violent jihad against non-believers. Finally, the passages espouse the death penalty for women who have an affair, and for gay men.

The textbooks examined in this study are more intolerant than the six religious books from 2012–2014 reviewed in a previous internal analysis by USCIRF. They are even more intolerant than the 2011–2012 textbooks studied by the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD), which identified many troubling passages. The 2017–2018 books are more akin to Saudi textbooks from the early years of the previous decade before the Saudi government promised to reform its curricula.
Twenty-two books are included in this review. All but two have to do with religious studies, which is where most of the worrisome content was found in previous years:

**Middle School Curriculum (2017–2018)**

**Grade 1**
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) – 1st Semester
- Hadith – 1st Semester
- Hadith – 2nd Semester
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) – 1st Semester
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) – 2nd Semester
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) – 1st Semester
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) – 2nd Semester
- Social and National Studies – 1st Semester

**Grade 2**
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) – 1st Semester
- Social and National Studies – 2nd Semester

**Standard High School Curriculum (2017–2018)**

**Shared Program**
- Hadith 1
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) 1
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) 1
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 1

**Specialized Program**
- Hadith 2
- Interpretation (*Tafsir*) 2
- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) 2
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 2

**Optional Program**
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 3

**Quarterly High School Curriculum (2017–2018)**

- Monotheism (*Tawhid*) 1 - Quarterly
- Qur’an Sciences (*Ulum al-Qur’an*) 1 - Quarterly
- Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) 1 - Quarterly

The following discussion contains representative material arranged by theme and concludes by comparing the 2017–2018 textbooks with previous textbooks from the early 2010s.
Polytheism

One of the principle tenets of Wahhabism is the worship of God alone. Failure to do so is condemned as “polytheism” (shirk), worshipping something alongside God. Polytheists, according to Wahhabis, are not merely people who worship multiple gods; they are also people who worship God improperly (i.e., equate a non-Islamic deity with the God of Islam), including Jews, Christians, and even fellow believers like the Shi’a and Sufis.¹

In Wahhabi theology, polytheists of all stripes are destined for hell regardless of their good deeds. These doctrines are reflected in passages found in the middle school textbooks on monotheism:

“Belief in one God is the basis for any act to be accepted, for God does not accept the actions of polytheists even if the act is outwardly righteous, such as charity, and kind acts, etc.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 18)

“Paradise is only entered by those who believe in one God, and it is forbidden by God for the polytheists. The evidence of this is in the verse, ‘God has forbidden paradise for whomever equates any other deity with God. His abode will be hellfire and those oppressors will have no supporters.’” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 32)

“God does not accept any action, even if it looks good on its face, unless it is accompanied by monotheism.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 49)

“A hadith by Abd Allah bin Masud says, ‘I asked the Prophet what is the greatest sin in the sight of God? He said to equate any other being with God because He created you. Then I said, that is truly great. And what is next? He said to kill your son because you cannot feed him (i.e., abortion). Then I said what is next? He said to sleep with your neighbor’s wife.’” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 81)

“Whoever dies while still committing the greatest (kind of) polytheism is in hellfire forever.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 82)

“A righteous act does not benefit [i.e., cancel out] polytheism, and so whoever dies while adhering to the greatest [kind of] polytheism is among the people of hell even if he is the most worshipful of people.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 83)

Heretics

The middle school textbooks on monotheism are especially critical of Shi`a and Sufi Muslims for venerating the graves of their imams and saints and for seeking their intercession with God. Wahhabis consider these practices the greatest form of polytheism, placing one outside of the faith. The textbooks reflect this perspective but do not explicitly say whether someone who engages in these practices is an apostate.

“The Prophet forbade his grave from being the site of any festival lest it become a pretext and a means to worship him aside from God... It is forbidden to use the Prophet’s grave for a festival by doing things associated (with festivals) like using his grave for a festival for prayer and other means of polytheism [shirk].” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 99)

“If there were people who received a portion of the scriptures and believed in idols, as stated in the first verse, and if the Jews were among those who worshipped idols, as in the second verse, and if there were those in previous religious communities who used graves as places of worship, as in the third verse, then that will happen in this religious community as well.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 1st Semester): 105)

“Exaggeration regarding the Prophet by exalting him above his station God gave him is one of the causes of polytheism [shirk]. People excessively venerated him and fell into polytheism. Among the examples are: A) Praying to those other than God and asking them for help during times of hardship. This is polytheism regarding God’s divinity. B) Claiming that they have the power to manipulate reality and command created things. This is polytheism regarding God’s lordship. C) Claiming that they have the ability to know the unseen realm, or that they know what will happen until the Day of Judgment. This is polytheism regarding the names and attributes (of God).” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 18)

“The Islamic Shari`ah has banned all the means that lead to polytheism [shirk], even if they include a way of worshipping God. Among them are using graves as places where people get closer to God through prayer. The Shari`ah has strictly forbidden this, and the Noble Messenger warned against this.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 20)

“Those who use the graves of the prophets and the righteous as mosques are evil people in the eyes of God.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 20)

A SURVEY OF 2017-2018 SAUDI MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS
Why were these people evil in the eyes of God? They were the worst in the sight of God for the following reasons:

1) They treated the graves as mosques, which was one of the greatest reasons they fell into polytheism and made others do so. So they led themselves and others astray when they instead had an obligation to guide themselves and others.

2) They were misguiding people, and they are making them fall into polytheism although on the outside they are worshipping God and praying to Him. They have led themselves and others astray to polytheism. They disguise what they’re doing to the ignorant, and even if they publicly call for polytheism in the beginning and are rejected, they continue their polytheism in a way that is outwardly a reform but is really corruption and error.

3) They took some of the holiest and best places, which are the houses of God, to transgress against Him and practice polytheism. Instead of mentioning His name in these places—worshipping him, humbling themselves and submitting to Him and His oneness, they caused these sites to be places where idols rather than the name of God are mentioned.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 21)

A hadith by Abd Allah Ibn Abbas said, ‘The Messenger of God has cursed women who visit the graves and whoever uses them as mosques and puts lamps on them.’ He cursed those who lit lamps on them because that excess leads one to glorifying them and worshipping such places.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 22)

Punishment of the person who makes images

The Shari’ah prooftexts indicate several punishments on the Day of Judgment for those who make images:

1) They are the people tortured most on the Day of Judgment ...

2) On the Day of Judgment, God creates a torture in hell for every image a soul has made ...

3) The one who makes images will have to breathe life into those pictures on the Day of Judgment, and he will not be able to, but it will be a torture and punishment for him.”” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 37-8)

Polytheistic supplication Supplicating anyone other than God for something that is in God’s hands. This is the most deviant polytheism [shirk] putting one outside of the religion of Islam. Examples include:

1) The polytheists supplicating their fake gods to attract benefits and push away evil.

2) The supplication of those who go to graves of saints to ask for forgiveness and to save them from the pitfalls of life of the afterlife.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 – 2nd Semester): 63)
Apostasy

In classical Islamic law, apostasy from Islam is punishable by death if the apostate does not repent. The 2017—2018 high school texts endorse this penalty, including for those who make fun of God and His Prophet.

“The punishment for apostasy is death. There is no distinction in that between a man and a woman.” (Jurisprudence (1): 277)

“Killing the apostate, since fending off the corruption of his existence—like corrupting others among his people and children, causing dissension among the people, and making them risk religion—is better than the benefit of him remaining....” (Jurisprudence (3), 46)

“Death [for the apostate] if he does not repent.” (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 137)

“Anyone who makes fun of God, His verses, or His Prophet is an apostate. No excuse is acceptable from him regardless of whether he repents or is killed for infidelity.” (Interpretation (1): 109)

Shunning

A pillar of Wahhabi religious practice is the doctrine of *al-wala' wa'l-bara’*, fraternizing only with true Muslims and shunning nonbelievers and misguided Muslims. The concept was elaborated in the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the eponymous founder of Wahhabism, who justified violence against his fellow Muslims by arguing that they behaved like idolaters and so should be fought until they accepted his beliefs. For decades, the kingdom has promoted the doctrine within its borders and overseas. Even today, the government committee that issues fatwas proclaims on its website that “hating infidels is obligatory because they are the enemies of God and His messenger and the enemies of Muslims.” Another fatwa states that any Muslim who calls for the “unity of religions” is an apostate.

The 2017—2018 middle and high school textbooks endorse the doctrine *al-wala’ wa'l-bara’*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tr>
<td>“God does not love unbelievers, and the Muslim does not love them because of that and because they denied the book of God and His Messenger....God forbade loving unbelievers.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 53)</td>
<td>“Being loyal to Muslims and being the enemy of the infidels is the firmest handle of faith.” (Monotheism (1): 163)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “الله تعالى لا يحب الكافرين والمسلم لا يحبهم لاجل ذلك ولكذبهم الكتاب الله تعالى ورسوله (ع)
| “There is no satisfying the Jews and Christians except by disbelieving in Islam and following their faiths.” (Interpretation (2): 78) |

The textbooks urge Muslims to avoid befriending Jews and Christians because they are presumed to be hostile to Islam:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>إن اليهود والنصارى لا يرضيهم الا الكفر بالاسلام واتباع ملتهم.</td>
<td>“Explanation of the plotting of the Jews, and their effort to divide the ranks of Islam, unsettle the dogma of Muslims, and sow doubts and base desires among them.” (Interpretation (2): 116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>بيان كيد اليهود وحرصهم على تفتيت الصف الاسلامي وزعرعة عقيدة المسلمين ونشر الشبهات والشهوات بينهم</td>
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4 http://www.alifta.net/Search/ResultDetails.aspx?language=ar&lang=ar&view=result&fatwaNum=62330&FatwaNumID=11337&searchScope=3&SearchScopeLevels1=1&SearchScopeLevels2=2&highlight=1&SearchType=exact&SearchMoesar=false&bookID=1&LeftVal=0&RightVal=0&simple=&SearchCriteria=allwords&PagePath=&isAdmin=1&searchkeyWord=تجب معاداة الكافرين أو نفسيتهم أو تغليب امتاعهم أو تجفيفهم أو تعديهم أو خلقهم من أمرهم
Nevertheless, one passage in a middle school textbook on monotheism encourages treating unbelievers kindly and with justice:

```
لا يمنع بغضهم من الاحسان اليهم والعدل معهم وحسن التعامل معهم ودعوهم إلى الله تعالى وترك ظلمهم والتعدي
```

“Hating them does not prevent you from being good and just toward them, treating them well, calling them to God, and not oppressing them or transgressing against them.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 54)

The passage is drawn from Qur’an 60:8: “God does not forbid you from dealing with kindness and justice with those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes. Indeed God loves the just.”

Another passage counsels students to judge sinners on a sliding scale, not in absolute terms:

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ليس هذا بغضا مطلقا بل يحب المسلم العاصي بقدر ما فيه من الإيمان والعمل الصالح ويغض بقدر ما فيه من الفجور والعصيان
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“This is not absolute hatred; rather, the Muslim loves the sinner to the extent of what faith and righteous action is in him, and he hates to the extent of immorality and disobedience in him.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 54)

Still, passages that encourage religious tolerance are rare—two were found in the 3,000 pages of text studied. Their infrequency means they likely do little to ameliorate the intolerant passages.
Several passages in the high school textbooks urge violent jihad against nonbelievers for rejecting Islam:

“Among the types of jihad are striving with the infidels by proselytizing them and fighting them.” (Hadith (2): 197)

3 – Being severe against enemy non-believers.
4 – Encouraging jihad in the path of God and warning against neglecting that.
5 – Explaining that the aim of jihad in the path of God is to make the word of God supreme and spread His religion.
6 – Exposing the people of the Book, explaining the falsity of their doctrines, and encouraging fighting them until they give the jiyza [tax].” (Interpretation (1): 94, explaining Sura Tawba, the Qur’an’s ninth sura)

“3 – Being severe against enemy non-believers.
4 – Encouraging jihad in the path of God and warning against neglecting that.
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6 – Exposing the people of the Book, explaining the falsity of their doctrines, and encouraging fighting them until they give the jiyza [tax].” (Interpretation (1): 94, explaining Sura Tawba, the Qur’an’s ninth sura)

The vice of waging jihad on unbelievers and waging jihad of the self, and this is a way to attain guidance and to be supported in finding the truth.” (Interpretation (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 44)

In a middle school textbook on social and national studies, conquest of infidel lands is praised as a pious act of jihad:

“When Muslims were able to distinguish themselves by their strength of belief, their love of jihad in the path of God, and opposing the word of the Visigoths, the battle ended with the Muslims winning and the death of the king of the Visigoths. Then the conquests of the Muslims followed until they controlled most of the Andalusian cities.” (Social and National Studies (Middle School - Grade 2 - 2nd Semester): 23)

“The Ottomans proceeded with their military conquests in accordance with the Islamic method of jihad and missionizing in the path of God. They stood against the Byzantines that had threatened the Muslims since the time of the Prophet....” (Social and National Studies (Middle School - Grade 2 - 2nd Semester): 93)

Some passages in religious studies textbooks glorify jihad without explicitly saying that it excludes fighting:

“Jihad in the path of God is the pinnacle of Islam, and its purpose is calling to God and spreading the religion of Islam, which is why calling to God is preferred over fighting, in contradiction to what the enemies of Islam say is the purpose of jihad, that it is to kill, to destroy, and to take forcefully money and land.” (Hadith (2): 48)

“Blameworthly fear is fear borne by someone for abandoning what God requires of him or for doing what God forbade. For example, someone abandons without excuse what is required of him for jihad or for commanding right and forbidding wrong out of fear of some of the people.” (Monotheism (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 59)
And finally, some passages are quotations from Islamic scripture that are reproduced without context or comment:

لا تقوم الساعة حتى يقاتلون المسلمون اليهود فقاتلوهم المسلمون حتى يختبئ اليهود من وراء الحجر والشجر فقيل الحجر أو الشجر: يا مسلم يا عبد الله هذا يهودي خلفي فأقتلواه إلا الفرد الذي من شجر اليهود.

“The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them until the Jews will hide behind the rocks and the trees. The rocks and the trees will say: O Muslim, O servant of God, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him – except for the gharqad tree which is a tree of the Jews.” (Monotheism (2): 102, quoting a hadith from Bukhari, Muslim, and others)

الجهاد في سبيل الله ذروة سنام الإسلام

“Jihad in the path of God is the pinnacle of Islam.” (Hadith (2): 197; Interpretation (1): 97, paraphrasing a hadith from Nawawi and others: “The head of the matter is Islam, its pillar is prayer, and its pinnacle is jihad.”)
**Women, Gay Men, and Illicit Sex**

In keeping with Wahhabi religious strictures, the books recommend isolating women from strangers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>يحرم على الرجل مصافحة المرأة الاجنبية</td>
<td>“It is forbidden to shake hands with a woman who is not close relative.” (Jurisprudence (1) – Quarterly: 148)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>يحرم اختلاط الرجال بالنساء في الوظائف وفي الحفلات وما إلى ذلك</td>
<td>“It is forbidden to be close to women at work, in schools, in parties, and in similar places.” (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>يحرم على المرأة مغادرة الرجل لمصراعها</td>
<td>“It is forbidden for women to travel alone without a mahram [guardian].” (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 149)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a sick woman can only find a male doctor and treatment requires revealing part of her body, like her ear for example, she can only reveal the ear.” (Jurisprudence (3): 42)

“A woman is inherently shyer than a man; this is why the Shari’ah commands her to do what is in accordance with her nature with regard to covering and separating herself from men. Among the laws connected with this are the command to conceal the face from men who are not relatives and the prohibition against mixing with men in the workplace.” (Hadith (Middle School - Grade 1 - 2nd Semester): 33)

Similarly, gay men are to be stoned to death regardless of whether they are married:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>وقال بعض العلماء، علماً اللواط القليل فيقتل الفاعل بالحجارة</td>
<td>“Some of the ulama say the punishment for sodomy for is death, so the giver and the receiver should be killed regardless of whether they are married.” (Jurisprudence (1): 256)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>وهو ذهب جمهور الفقهاء إلى أن حد اللواط كحد الزنى</td>
<td>“The majority of jurists say the punishment for sodomy is the same as the punishment for adultery [i.e., stoning to death].” (Jurisprudence (1) - Quarterly: 161)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high school textbooks also advocate beating women when they disobey and stoning them to death if they have an affair:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>والما يجوز الضرب عند الضرورة</td>
<td>“Hitting [your wife] is only permitted when necessary.” (Interpretation (2): 174)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>واغد يا أنيس إلى امرأة هذا فإن اعترفت فارجمها</td>
<td>“...go and check on [that man’s] wife, if she admits adultery, then stone her.” (Jurisprudence (3): 83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>وحده إذا زنى الرجم بالحجارة حتى يموت</td>
<td>“The judgment of adultery is stoning to death.”(Jurisprudence (1) – Quarterly: 154)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The USCIRF review of the textbooks for the 2012–2013 and 2013–2014 academic years revealed intolerant passages. None, however, were as intolerant as the passages in textbooks from previous years, like those discovered by the ICRD in textbooks for the 2011–2012 school year. Several passages endorsed interreligious friendship, a sentiment also lacking in previous years. Still, it could not be determined whether the improvements in the 2012–2014 school textbooks were part of a new trend or if these findings were biased by the few books available for study.

This review revealed an apparent reversal in the previous trend toward tolerance in Saudi textbooks. In terms of their content, the 2017–2018 textbooks are more like the 2011–2012 textbooks studied by ICRD than the 2012–2014 textbooks. As in the 2011–2012 Jurisprudence textbooks (ICRD report, 69), the 2017–2018 books say Muslims who convert to another religion should be killed. The two Jurisprudence textbooks for 2013, by contrast, do not call for the execution of apostates or sorcerers. Instead, the textbooks stress that the apostate should be treated like any other nonbeliever. Like the 2011–2012 books (ICRD report, 79–80), the 2017–18 books extol jihad and violence against infidels.

The 2017–2018 textbooks also include topics not found in ICRD’s study. For example, they condemn gay men and support the views of jurists who assess that sexual relations between them is punishable by death. ICRD’s study did not focus on gay men, and the 2012–2014 textbook study only turned up one passage that condemned being gay. ICRD’s study did not focus on gay men, and the 2012–2014 textbook study only turned up one passage that addressed gay men, condemning it. The passage, however, did not call for the death penalty for gay men. The 2017–2018 textbooks are more akin to Saudi textbooks from the early years of the previous decade before the Saudi government promised to reform its curricula. They reflect core Wahhabi doctrines and not other trends of Islamic scholarship that are more accepting.

In line with Saudi Vision 2030, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that he is “determined to build a thriving country in which all citizens can fulfill their dreams, hopes and ambitions.” Critical to the success of this vision will be the advancement of religious freedom in Saudi Arabia, including school textbooks that reflect religious tolerance and eschew hatred and violence. Full implementation of such revisions – which the Saudi government has publicly committed to for more than 15 years – would send a clear signal that the government is fully embracing a more accepting and tolerant religious curriculum in its public education system consistent with international human rights standards.

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