



Comparative Review of Violence and Social Hostility in the Curriculum of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: High School Religious Studies Textbooks (2017 to 2020)

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Henry Burbridge
James Patton
Majd al-Waheidi
International Center for Religion & Diplomacy
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Contents

Introduction.....	iii
Glossary	1
Overview.....	3
Findings of the 2020 Review	8
<i>Violent Content</i>	8
Violent content removed from retired textbooks	10
Removed Lesson 1: “Ridda” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)	11
Removed Lesson 2: “Ridiculing Islam and Trivializing its Divinity” Tawhid 3(5) (2019) .	12
Removed Lesson 3: “Al-Wala’a Wal-Bara’a” Tawhid 3(5) (2019).....	12
Removed Lesson 4: “Jihad” Hadith 3(5) (2019).....	13
Removed Lesson 5: “Hadith 12” Hadith 3(5) (2019)	13
Removed Lesson 6: “Respect for the Companions” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)	13
Removed Lesson 7: “Shirk” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)	14
Removed Lesson 8: “Ethics of Travel” Hadith 3(5) (2019)	14
Removed Lesson 9: “Sura al-Tawba (23-28)” Tafsir 4(5) (2017).....	14
Removed Lesson 10: “Sura al-Tawba (34-36)” Tafsir 4(5) (2017).....	14
Violent content removed from active textbooks	15
Removed Lesson 11: “Sura al-Tawba” Tafsir 1 (2019).....	15
Removed Lesson 12: “Signs of the End of Times” Tawhid 2 (2019)	16
Remaining violent content	16
Lesson 1: “Danger of Takfir” Tawhid 2 (2020).....	17
Lesson 2: “Magic” Tawhid 1 (2020)	18
Lesson 3: “Jihad” Hadith 2 (2020).....	19
Lesson 4: “Support Kafirs over Muslims” Tawhid 1 (2020).....	19
Lesson 5: “Sura ali ‘Imran (137-141)” Tafsir 2 (2020)	19
Lesson 6: “Sura ali ‘Imran (146-151)” Tafsir 2 (2020)	20
Lesson 7: “Hadith 15” Hadith 1 (2020)	20
Lesson 8: “Sura al-An'am (151)” Tafsir 2 (2020).....	21
Lesson 9: “Ethics of Humor” Hadith 1 (2020)	21
Lesson 10: “Types of Kufr” Tawhid 1 (2020)	22
Lesson 11: “Dua” Tawhid 1 (2020).....	22

Lesson 12: “Mocking the Religion” Tawhid 1 (2020).....	22
Lesson 13: “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims” Tawhid 1 (2020).....	22
Lesson 14: “Sura ali ‘Imran (104-107)” Tafsir 2 (2020)	22
<i>Social Hostility</i>	22
Social hostility content removed in retired textbooks:	24
Removed Lesson 1: “Al-Wala’a Wal-Bara’a” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)	24
Removed Lesson 2: “Ruling on Wala’a to Kafirs” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)	25
Removed Lesson 3: “Correct Understanding of Bara’a” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)	26
Removed Lesson 4: “Ethical Guidelines in Dealing with Servants” Hadith 3(5) (2019).....	27
Removed Lesson 5: “Sura al-Ma’eda (51-66)” Tafsir 5(6) (2017).....	27
Removed Lesson 6: “Sura al-Tawba” Tafsir 4(5) (2017).....	28
Removed Lesson 7: “Sura al-An’am (159-165) Tafsir 4(5) (2017)	28
Social hostility lessons revised in active textbooks	28
Removed Content 8: “Muwala of Kafirs”, Tawhid 1 (2019).....	28
Remaining social hostility content.....	29
Lesson 1: “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims” Tawhid 1 (2020).....	29
Lesson 2: “Sura Hud (110-115)” Tafsir 1 (2020)	31
Lesson 3: “Sura Ali ‘Imran (28-32)” Tafsir 2 (2020).....	31
Lesson 4: “Preface to Sura Al- Nisa” Tafsir 2 (2020)).....	32
Lesson 5: “Preface of Sura Al-Ma’ida” Tafsir 2 (2020).....	32
Conclusion	33
Addendum – A Note from the Saudi Ministry of Education regarding Additional Revisions Undertaken from 2021-2022.....	35
Endnotes.....	37

Introduction

In 2011-2012, ICRD conducted its first study of Saudi public-school textbooks on behalf of the US State Department's (DOS) Office for International Religious Freedom. This study reviewed nearly 100 Saudi textbooks from the entire K-12 curriculum to document the prevalence of intolerant and extremist content, which had been reported on in previous years by groups like Freedom House¹, Impact-SE², and the Hudson Center³.

This report, which was also translated and presented to the Saudi government, found that religious intolerance and violent extremism were being taught as core concepts in the religious and social studies textbooks, particularly at the high school level. Following the format set by previous studies, ICRD presented emblematic examples of objectionable content, which formed a baseline for future review. While the content presented was sufficient to establish the need for a drastic revision of the curriculum, the examples were only able to capture a fraction of the objectionable content that students were being exposed to during their studies.

Over the subsequent ten years, ICRD took an approach to the curriculum review process that focused on exhaustive studies of the Saudi curriculum based in an effort to build a relationship with the Saudi Ministry of Education, which would allow for an honest exchange of views and an effort to embed recommendations into the growing desire within the Kingdom to remove intolerance from their education. Not only did ICRD provide a deep analysis to the State Department, adding nuance and context to complement more general overviews published by the Hudson Center⁴, IMPACT-SE⁵, the Anti-Defamation League⁶, Human Rights Watch⁷, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)⁸, and others, but the Center provided real time analysis to the Kingdom as they engaged in curricular review themselves.

While the studies by other organizations are of very high quality, they primarily serve an advocacy role to raise public awareness about the extremist content that has been part of the Saudi textbooks, using selected, emblematic examples in their reports. By contrast, ICRD endeavored to create functional reports that provide a comprehensive documenting of intolerant or violent extremist content, and contextualize it. ICRD's reports have aimed to be technical documents, not intended for public release, rather than more journalistic efforts.

ICRD's review of the 2017 editions of the textbooks looked at 22 textbooks, of which 16 were found to have unique content, with the remainder comprised of duplicate lessons. ICRD conducted an exhaustive review of these 16 textbooks, and identified 120 lesson units containing content that

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/TextbooksArabicExcerpts.pdf>

² [Saudi Arabia – IMPACT-se \(impact-se.org\)](https://www.impact-se.org/)

³ <https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/931/sauditextbooks2011final.pdf>,
https://www.theoakinitiative.org/pdfs/saudi_textbooks_final.pdf

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ <https://www.impact-se.org/saudi-arabia/>

⁶ <https://www.adl.org/media/12180/download>

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/13/saudi-arabia-religion-textbooks-promote-intolerance>

⁸ <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/SaudiTextbook.pdf>

was violent or expressed “social hostility”, which was catalogued in a report of more than 60 pages.⁹ At the request of the Saudi Ministry of Education (KSA MOE) and with the encouragement of DOS and the US Embassy in Riyadh, ICRD shared the ongoing findings directly with the MOE in bi-monthly briefs over the course of the review, which then were presented in full to DOS and MOE at the end of 2018.

In 2020, ICRD conducted a review of the 2019 editions of the high school level (grades 10-12) religious textbooks, focusing specifically on the Tawhid, Hadith, and Tafsir textbooks, which were previously found to contain the most intolerant content and the most graphic depictions of religious violence. This review was delivered in August 2020 and designed to be the first of a two-step review to evaluate the promised progress being made by the MOE in removing the intolerant and extremist content from the curriculum between 2019 and 2020. This review found that progress had been considerable, compared to the previous decade, but limited when compared to the full breadth of the objectionable content found in the previous reviews. While the level of progress was less than hoped for, ICRD believed that, given the schedule of textbook reform and development in the Kingdom, the majority of the edits would likely come in the 2020 textbooks.

In February, 2021, ICRD completed a review of the Tawhid, Hadith, and Tafsir textbooks from the 2020 edition of the Saudi curriculum. This review found that, through a combination of (a) the removal of several textbooks that contained the most objectionable content in the curriculum and (b) several important edits to the remaining textbooks, the 2020 curriculum had successfully incorporated the overwhelming majority of the changes ICRD recommended in the review of the 2017 curriculum.

As described in the resulting report, some important work remained for the MOE to fully realize the textbook reform process, but an astonishing amount of intolerant and extremist content was removed from the curriculum between 2019 and 2020. ICRD has always provided an objective analysis of the textbook content, and has been direct and specific in indicating when progress failed to meet promises and where and how material might continue to encourage students to prejudice and even violence, particularly against the religious other. The 2021 report was clear that the KSA MOE made unquestionable and significant progress towards the removal of intolerant and extremist content from their curriculum.

Finally, much of the content that was still recommended for removal in the 2021 report directly contradicted the purported objectives of Vision 2030: to **prepare students to be effective global citizens**. If that goal is to be realized, students must be prepared to encounter and have relationships with people of very diverse cultures, backgrounds, and beliefs. ICRD suggested that completing certain revisions and supporting the training of teachers in tolerance and religious literacy would help to ensure that no student is taught to hate or mistreat another person based on their religious identity, and particularly to repudiate any suggestion that they should engage in violence, would be essential to advancing those broader goals that the Kingdom set for itself.

⁹ The report has not been translated from English to Arabic.

In the summer of 2022, an ICRD delegation visited the KSA MOE, including H.E. Minister al-Sheikh and the centers tasked with curriculum design, teacher training, and textbook revisions. The shift in attention to modernizing STEM education was significant, as was the discussion around global citizenship and tolerance. H.E. Minister al-Sheikh argued that many more reforms had been implemented since ICRD’s 2021 report, inviting the Center to review the texts again. At the invitation of ICRD, the KSA MOE provided a synopsis of the reforms that they wish to highlight, which have been undertaken since the Center’s 2021 report. While these changes have not been independently verified by ICRD, as the Center is not equipped to carry out a thorough evaluation with existing resources, the Minister’s articulation of reform efforts was compelling and the delegation has little reason to believe that the trajectory towards tolerant reforms has not continued.

The following is ICRD’s original 2021 report – as submitted to the donor – entitled, “Comparative Review of Violence and Social Hostility in the Curriculum of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: High School Religious Studies Textbooks (2017 to 2020)”, with an annex at the end summarizing the reforms that the KSA MOE indicates that they have taken since that report was completed.

Glossary

Al-Wala’a Wal-Bara’a: A concept that delineates one’s community based on not committing shirk and adherence to Tawhid. Whoever falls outside of this community is to be dealt with bara’a, or disavowal, including hating them in one’s heart and declaring that hatred to them openly. Whoever is within this community is to be treated with respect, love, and complete wala’a, or loyalty.

AQAP: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Bid’a: Innovation (heresy) in any form of worship to Allah that is not similar to what Muhammad, his companions, and early Muslims did. While in some contexts there are bid’as that are deemed “good,” in the context of Saudi textbooks, bid’a has a negative connotation.

Da’wah: Call, summons, invitation; in this context, religious mission and the promotion of a specific creed.

Dhimmi (People of Dhimma): Non-Muslims, such as Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans, who live in a majority-Muslim country or under the protection of Muslim law. Muslims offer them security, freedom to practice their religion, and protection against enemies, while their adult males are required to pay Jizya (tax) based on their wealth.

Dua: Prayer. Asking Allah’s help.

Fiqh: Jurisprudence. The science of extracting religious rulings (fatwas) from religious texts, namely the Quran, the books of Hadith, and other religious texts.

Jai’z: A term used to indicate that something is not forbidden in Islam.

Jinn: Creatures with supernatural powers that can appear in many forms. They are associated with magical works and very popular in the Arabian and Islamic contexts.

Jizya: A tax levied on non-Muslims who live in Muslim countries. In return for jizya, the Muslim state vows to provide freedom of religious practice and protection for those who pay it.

Hadith: Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Hadith are considered an authoritative source of revelation and one of the Islamic Law sources.

Halal: A term used to indicate what is lawful or permitted in Islam.

Haram: A term used to indicate what is forbidden in Islam.

ISIS: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Isma: Living a moral life or being free of sin in Islam, which grants protection of “blood and money” (not being a legitimate target for punitive violence or for having your material wealth seized).

Murtad: Apostate (one who leaves Islam after being a believer).

Mushrik: A person who commits shirk.

Ridda: Apostasy (leaving Islam after being a believer).

Shari'a: Islamic law that comes from the Quran, Hadith, the Prophet's Sunnah, and the rulings of Islamic scholars. Shari'a guides Muslims in their moral and ethical behavior in daily life.

Shirk: Directing any form of worship toward someone or something besides Allah.

Sura: A chapter of the Quran.

Sunnah: The Prophet Muhammed's traditions (acts and sayings) and a major source of Islamic law.

Takfir: The accusation by any Muslim that another Muslim is an apostate and unbeliever (kafir). This can be understood as a kind of excommunication from the faith, and is not necessarily equivalent to the one being accused of apostasy having voluntarily chosen to leave Islam.

Tawhid: The basis of Islamic monotheism. Directing all forms of worship to Allah alone and attributing the creation and the control of every aspect of the universe to Allah alone.

Umma: Refers to the Islamic community in which all Muslims, despite diverse locations, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds, are meant to be equal.

Umra: Pilgrimage to Mecca at a time other than that designated for the obligatory Hajj. Umrah is not obligatory but highly recommended for Muslims.

Wahhabism:¹⁰ The Hanbali Sunni reformist tradition of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), which advocated for violent means of enforcing what Wahhab considered to be the singular acceptable interpretation of Islamic scripture.

Wajib: A term used in Islamic jurisprudence to describe an obligatory act for Muslims.

Wali: Supporter, ally, helper.

Wali al-Amr: Refers to the head of the community, such as the father in the family or the country's ruler, who is responsible for taking care of his family members or citizens.

¹⁰ This term is often used incorrectly to describe the modern practice of Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia, or Salafism more generally.

Overview

Over the last decade, ICRD has conducted several significant reviews of intolerant and extremist content in Saudi Arabia’s public-school textbooks. Those which are pertinent to this report, and more thoroughly elucidated below, include:

- 2012 review – ICRD’s initial study, which was a broad study of the curriculum that identified significant concerns within the content and set a baseline for future studies, while also highlighting areas of positive reforms that had already taken place.
- 2017 review – a review of 16 religious studies textbooks from 11th and 12th grade, where previous studies had identified the most egregious content.
- 2019 review – the first of a two-part, slightly expanded review (including 10th grade) that sought to verify the removal or revision of content that the MOE had indicated would be edited (based on ICRD’s 2017 recommendations, among other things).
- 2020 review – the subsequent part of the previous review, looking at the newly released texts, based on MOE assertions that some content that was not able to be revised in 2019 was meant to be changed or removed in 2020.

ICRD’s initial 2012 study, and many other reviews before and after, documented the content in the Saudi textbooks that was seen as violating international human rights standards in education. It was a very broad review of the entire National Curriculum. One finding was that the most egregious content, in terms of religious intolerance and calls to violence, was contained in the high school religious studies texts. Subsequent reviews, therefore, focused primarily on those texts. During the 2017 review of the 11th and 12th grade religious studies curriculum, the Saudi MOE was open to receiving preliminary findings from ICRD as the study progressed, to support their internal process of revisions, which was done in the form of bi-monthly updates. During that process, the Saudis indicated that there would be significant recommendations for content edits based on those findings.

ICRD’s 2019 review, which focused on the 2017-2018 high school religious textbooks (expanding on the 2017 study to include 10th grade), was meant to be exhaustive. This was in contrast to many previous (or subsequent) studies of the National Curriculum that were publicly available. This approach allowed for properly understanding the entirety of the narratives that were being delivered to Saudi students through the curriculum, as opposed to simply identifying objectionable lessons out of context. The latter approach often left out content that, on the surface, seemed benign, but when taken in light of a broader narrative took on a more problematic character.

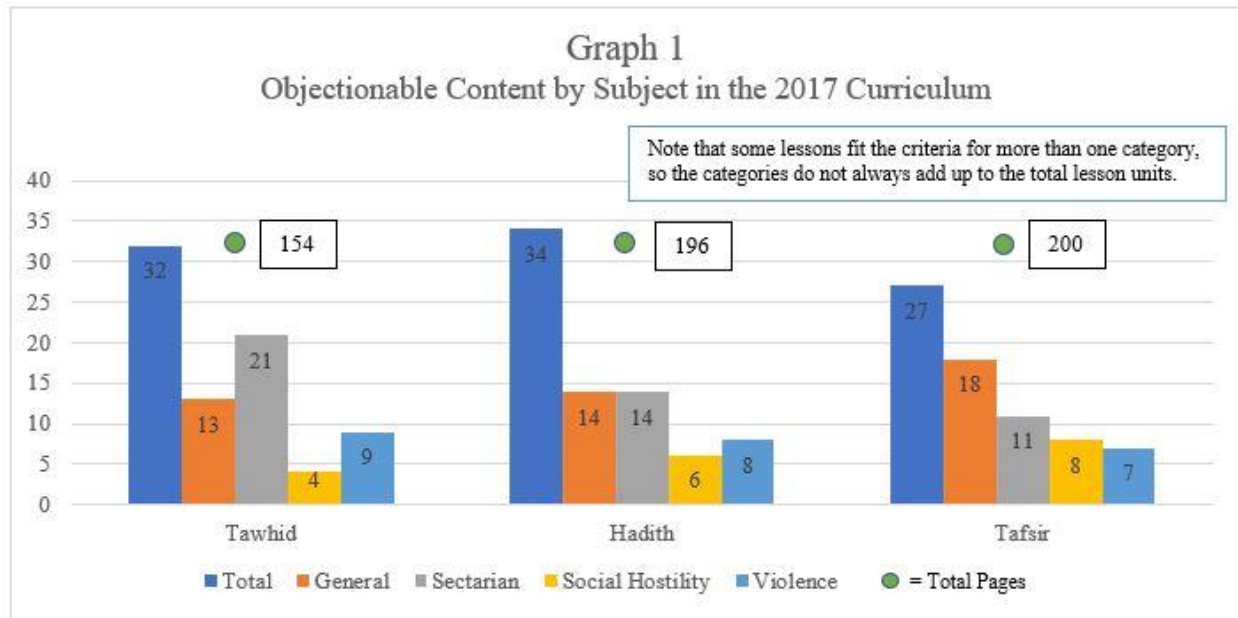
While ICRD has not received official confirmation that these recommendations were specifically used as a reference in the MOE reform effort, it is notable that, with only minor exceptions, the current curriculum, reviewed in 2020 and included in this report, reflects the very edits that were suggested. Part of ICRD’s review in 2019 examined how the emblematic excerpts identified in previous studies might align more with narratives that were being used by groups like ISIS, to recruit and radicalize young Muslims in Saudi Arabia, than they do with the laws and practices

within the Kingdom itself. The presence of these narratives suggested a need for not only “surface” edits, but rather a fundamental overhaul of some of the core themes in the curriculum.

In the 2019 report, ICRD concluded that **between 2017 and 2019, the Saudi curriculum reform process made more progress towards removing religious intolerance and violent extremism from the high school textbooks than had been accomplished over the prior decade.**

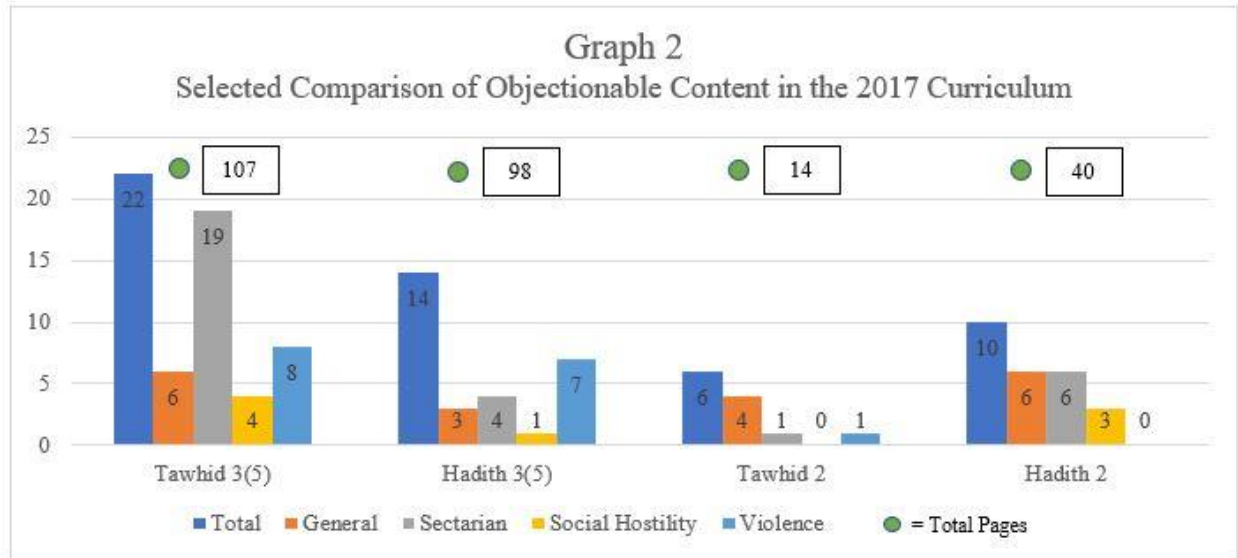
However, this present report asserts that **in 2020, the Kingdom made additional advances in curriculum reform that dwarfed all previous years’ progress.** The 2020 editions of the high school religious textbooks represent an unprecedented year-on-year improvement over the previous curriculum. Most of the progress came from the consolidation of the curriculum. Courses and textbooks that had been separated into “terms” were shifted into a standard combined curriculum, which allowed for the removal or “retirement” of the terms textbooks, which had a huge impact on intolerant content. In ICRD’s 2017 review, both terms textbooks and combined curriculum textbooks were available (as the new curriculum was being introduced). ICRD’s report identified that the term texts contained, by far, the most intolerant material.

Overall, ICRD’s 2017 review of the 11th and 12th grade religious studies textbooks found 93 lesson units with intolerant content in eight high school level textbooks from the Tawhid, Hadith, and Tafsir subjects. These intolerant units accounted for a total of 550 pages of text and were distributed as shown in Graph 1, below.



As Graph 2 indicates, when comparing the terms textbooks with the combined curriculum (in this case, two books from each, covering Tawhid and Hadith subjects), the terms texts were significantly more objectionable. While there were more than 200 pages of intolerant material in

the two terms textbooks, and 15 violent lesson units, there were only 54 pages of intolerant material in the two combined curriculum texts, with only one violent lesson unit.



During ICRD’s 2017 review (as reflected in Graph 1, above) 24 violent lessons were identified (Table 1) in six textbooks (two books had zero findings), which were recommended for removal. **ICRD’s 2020 study confirmed that all 24 of the highlighted lessons had been removed from the curriculum.** 23 lessons were removed from the curriculum with the simple retirement of the terms textbooks, and one lesson was removed from the Tawhid 2 textbook (which is still in use).

Table 1 - Lesson Units Containing Violent Material (2017)		
Textbook	Lesson	
<u>Combined Curriculum</u>		
Tawhid 2	<i>Minor Signs of the Hour</i>	
<u>Terms Curriculum (texts removed in 2020)</u>		
Tawhid 3(5)	<i>Shirk</i>	<i>Types of Shirk</i>
	<i>Apostasy</i>	<i>Magic/Sorcery</i>
	<i>Ridiculing Islam</i>	<i>The Companions</i>
	<i>Al-Wala’a wal-Bara’a</i>	<i>Heretical Sects</i>
Hadith 3(5)	<i>Hadith 6</i>	<i>Hadith 8</i>
	<i>Hadith 10</i>	<i>Hadith 12</i>
	<i>Jihad for the Sake of Allah</i>	<i>Hijab for Muslim Women</i>
	<i>Ethics for Travel</i>	
Hadith 4(4)	<i>Hadith 4</i>	

Tafsir 4(3)	<i>Sura al-Hijr (85-95)</i>	<i>Sura al-Tawba (23-26)</i>
	<i>Sura al-Tawba (34-36)</i>	
Tafsir 5(6)	<i>Sura al-Ma'eda (27-32)</i>	<i>Sura al-Ma'eda (51-56)</i>
	<i>Sura ali 'Imran (10-14)</i>	<i>Sura al-Baqara (153-157)</i>

It should be emphasized that, due to the fact that the mandate for ICRD's 2017 curriculum review was limited to the final two years of secondary education, the study did not include the 10th grade Tawhid 1, Hadith 1, or Tafsir 1 textbooks. However, ICRD's review of the 2019 textbooks included all three secondary levels of the Saudi high school system, expanding on the number of books reviewed and including a retroactive review of the 2017 textbooks to establish a baseline. An important implication was that the recommendations from the 2017 review, which were submitted directly to the MOE to support ongoing revisions, did not include some of the texts that appear in the second half of this report, which identifies the removal, reform, or continuing inclusion of intolerant content in the 2020 review.

Due to those limitations, for example, the lesson on "Magic" from the Tawhid 1 textbook was not identified until the 2019 review. While this lesson was removed from the 11th and 12th grade texts with the retirement of the terms textbooks, it can still be found in the 2020 edition of Tawhid 1.¹¹

Additionally, in the review of the 2017 curriculum, the Hadith 2 textbook was not found to contain any violent content, which was an error in ICRD's reporting. During the baseline review of the 2017 textbooks for ICRD's 2019 study, a lesson on jihad was identified in the Hadith 2 textbook (pp.182-185) that was nearly identical to the "Jihad for the Sake of Allah" lesson in the Hadith 3(5) textbook. The jihad lesson in the Hadith 2 textbook was significantly improved in 2019, however, in concert with the changes that ICRD had suggested for the Hadith 3(5) textbook (which, ironically, was not itself changed until 2020, when the textbook was retired).

In ICRD's 2017 report, 17 lesson units (Table 2) were identified to have content that constituted social hostility, primarily religious intolerance. In similar fashion to the violent material, the vast majority of this content (15 lessons) was removed when the terms textbooks were retired.

Table 2 - Lesson Units Containing Social Hostility (2017)		
Textbook	Lesson	
<u>Combined Curriculum</u>		
Hadith 2	<i>Hadith 8</i>	<i>Hadith 15</i>
<u>Terms Curriculum (texts removed in 2020)</u>		
Tawhid 3(5)	<i>Shirk</i>	<i>Al-Wala'a Wal Bara'a</i>
	<i>Wala'a to Kafirs</i>	<i>Correct and Incorrect Bara'a</i>

¹¹ As noted in the section below, there are special considerations regarding this lesson.

Tawhid 4(4)	<i>Belief in the Messengers</i>	
Hadith 3(5)	<i>Ethics for dealing with servants</i>	
Hadith 4(4)	<i>Hadith 7</i>	<i>Greetings</i>
Tafsir 4(3)	<i>Sura al-Hijr (85-98)</i>	<i>Sura al-An'am (13-20)</i>
Tafsir 5(6)	<i>Sura al-Ma'eda (51-56)</i>	<i>Sura al-Nisa'a (116-122)</i>
	<i>Sura ali 'Imran</i>	<i>Sura al-Baqara (8-16)</i>
	<i>Sura al-Baqara (119-123)</i>	

Irrespective of the role that ICRD's recommendations played, if any, in the tremendous success that has occurred in the past year of the Saudi curriculum reform process, credit for making these changes must be given to the Ministry of Education and the Saudi government in general. In no small part, these advances reflect the policies aimed at advancing other important reforms in the Kingdom, as articulated in Vision 2030, which have been advocated for by King Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. While there have been other notable steps to modernize the Kingdom recently, removing large swathes of intolerant and extremist content from the public-school curriculum should be considered a groundbreaking development. It is ICRD's contention that the scale of progress realized by this effort reflects a clear determination on the part of the Kingdom to play a constructive role in the global fight against violent extremism.

ICRD has spent a decade conducting reviews of the Saudi curriculum for intolerance and incitement to violence, and has attempted to be rigorously objective, acknowledging both contextual and religious challenges, while simultaneously being unflinching in legitimate criticism of the reform effort. To some degree, while seeking to build a constructive partnership in reform, ICRD has historically been a strong, but constructive, critic of the MOE. On the basis of the progress demonstrated in the 2020 textbooks, ICRD is profoundly pleased to be able to conclude that the Kingdom's commitment to meaningful reforms in education is beyond doubt.

Findings of the 2020 Review

The following content summarizes ICRD’s most recent, comparative review of the Saudi high school religious education curriculum. As previously described, ICRD has taken the approach of contextualizing specific content within broader narratives, which allows the reader to understand not only violence and social hostility within the lessons, but how different lessons gain a character of intolerance and extremism when placed within the broader narrative. This is crucial, as the simple removal of content that is blatantly violent or hostile, for example, may not resolve the broader issue of a curriculum that creates an atmosphere for students to understand their religious obligations through a lens of threats of violence, encouragement to commit violence, admonitions to hate and discriminate against others, and basic religious prejudice.

The following emblematic excerpts demonstrate the significant changes that ICRD has observed between the 2017 study and the 2020 study, with some references to incremental progress in 2019. They also illustrate the remaining objectionable content that the recent review has identified, which ICRD recommends be considered for revision or removal, keeping in mind the argument that general intolerance can still be taught even if direct calls to violence are removed. As expressed previously, ICRD recognizes enormous positive strides taken by the MOE in the 2020 curriculum, and suggests that a few minor additional changes, plus the training of teachers on certain themes such as globalization, tolerance, human rights, and critical thinking, will complete the transition away from an educational environment that previously risked radicalizing students.

Violent Content

The nature of the violent content in the Saudi curriculum changed dramatically with the removal of the most intolerant textbooks from the curriculum and the two revisions to the remaining textbooks. It should be recognized that the new curriculum represents the success of reforms pushed by the Saudi leadership and the Ministry of Education where all previous efforts have been insufficient. This is a major accomplishment that represents an enormous step toward ending the exposure of Saudi students to extremist narratives that have been employed by terrorist groups for recruiting fighters, including from among those very same Saudi students.¹²

The textbooks that were removed from the curriculum presented a vision of Islamic society that so-called “jihadi-Salafi” insurgent groups, like the Taliban and ISIS and, to a lesser extent, AQAP, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and others are trying to create. In that vision, a very specific and rigid interpretation of religion was presented as the only legitimate measure to determine whether a person, idea, belief, or behavior is either good or evil, with no grey area in between. If an individual failed this test, they were deemed enemies of Allah, Islam, and every Muslim. Jews and Christians automatically fell into that category and they, together with all non-Muslims, were therefore marked as worthy only of hostile treatment until Muslims could gather the strength to kill or convert them through aggressive jihad. According to the retired textbooks, the state was also

¹² See ICRD (2019)

obligated to kill as apostates, and as an urgent matter of national security, any Muslims who were associated with the “evil” ideas, beliefs, or behaviors outlined at great length in the curriculum. According to the reformist Wahhabi tradition, these include the beliefs and practices of most of the world’s Muslim population.

The 2020 curriculum does not present the same religious vision found in the retired textbooks. While the textbooks that were previously used celebrated violent religious narratives, the remaining textbooks, in fact, largely caution students against them. There are some limited instances where the lesson units still contain relics and fragments of the violent religious narratives found in the retired books, and ICRD strongly recommends further revisions to complete the reform, as outlined in this report.

For instance, the remaining textbooks in the Tawhid curriculum still teach students that their government kills Muslims for apostasy, in a lesson that is actually seemingly designed to warn students against the practice of *takfir*. While the intention of this lesson may be positive, and designed to prevent students from embracing the *takfirism* associated with groups like ISIS, the broader message is the legitimacy of state-sanctioned murder in cases of excommunication and apostasy.

In the retired Tawhid 3(5) textbook this lesson was accompanied by a lesson called “*Ridda*” (apostasy), which outlined a more comprehensive framework for identifying apostates as well as religious and political justifications for the brutal violence being prescribed. The Tawhid textbooks that are still in use do not include the *Ridda* unit, but do still outline a violent and inhumane punishment for apostasy that is *not practiced* anywhere in Saudi Arabia. Under these circumstances, the inclusion of the death threat for unrepentant apostates invalidates the positive intent of the lesson. The lesson actually *delegitimizes* the Saudi government for *not* killing apostates, and also *legitimizes* so-called “jihadi-Salafi” insurgencies who do.

There are direct consequences to the individual student within these lessons. If it is taught that a Muslim should be killed by their government for apostasy, then every lesson that mentions apostasy represents the threat of death. Students will understand that anyone – themselves, their friends, their family members – who may be guilty of the infractions that are outlined, which include very specific offenses such as mocking the laws of Islam or religious scholars, as well as more intangible crimes like “kufr of pride” or “doubt”, are legitimate targets for state-sanctioned murder. The current Tawhid textbooks make absolutely clear that these offenses meet the criteria of apostasy and should therefore result in the death penalty. It is the highest priority that this content be removed from the curriculum.

As long as there is any lesson that teaches students that apostasy (leaving Islam) is a capital offense, every lesson that describes behaviors as apostasy should be considered a violent threat. This includes lessons that reference “disbelief after belief”; “ex-communication”; “becoming one of them” (if “them” means a kafir); or in the context of the Tafsir lesson on Sura ali ‘Imran, for

example, that kafirs will “drag you back into disbelief”. Even if the textbooks separate the accusation from the threat by a few chapters, the connect still exists.

The content that remains in the 2020 curriculum, while greatly improved, speaks to the need for a dedicated teacher training programs to ensure that the material still found in the textbooks is put in the appropriate context where it will not be misinterpreted as encouragement for violent extremism.

Violent content removed from retired textbooks

The following are a sample of the key lessons promoting violence that were removed from the 2020 curriculum by simply retiring the terms textbooks. These 10 examples cover the content in all 23 of the lessons that ICRD had earlier identified as promoting violence, which are now no longer being taught.

Perhaps the most significant lesson unit that has been removed in 2020, due to the retirement of the terms textbooks, was the “*Ridda*” or “Apostasy” chapter of the Tawhid 3(5) textbook. According to this unit, if a Muslim commits a sin as benign as mocking the beard of another Muslim and refusing to repent, they are a murtad (apostate). The lesson taught that a critical function of a legitimate Islamic government is to kill murtads, who must have their family ties severed and their families made destitute. According to the now-retired Tawhid 3(5) textbook, this is vital to national security. Throughout the curriculum, there were more than 20 specific offenses listed that meet the criteria of apostasy, but the “*Ridda*” chapter itself included broad categories describing the kinds of speech, behaviors, beliefs, and doubts that must be punished with death.

The lesson unit was the most objectionable for three reasons:

1. The unit condemned most of the world’s Muslims to death. Many of the beliefs and behaviors described as apostasy were normative religious expressions of Shi’a Muslims, for example, who comprise a meaningful portion of the Saudi population, as well as many populations of Sunni Muslims outside of Saudi Arabia. This lesson, therefore, violently threatened every Islamic group that is considered a sectarian rival of Wahhabism.
2. The unit represented a death threat to all students. It was intended to teach students that if they (or their loved ones) so much as doubt the religious narratives in the textbooks, they would be killed by their own government.
3. This unit reflected the governance system of ISIS, not the Saudi Kingdom. The violent threats in the lesson do not apply in Saudi Arabia, where the “crimes” that were listed in the Tawhid 3(5) textbook are generally treated as socially unacceptable, but are not punished with death. However, the violent enforcement of these crimes is the stated reason for the existence of groups like ISIS, which often establish formal court systems to prosecute these offenses. Ultimately, any student seeking to live this version of Islam must join a terrorist insurgency to fulfill the instructions in this lesson.

Removed Lesson 1: “Ridda” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Introduction: Islam’s message has spread in many places around the world, and people have accepted Allah’s religion in high numbers. This disappointed Islam’s enemies who started scheming against it deceptively. An example of that deception is when they called upon people to become Muslims at the beginning of the day and switch to being kafir at the end of the day[...] Therefore, Allah revealed specific [Islamic] rulings regarding those who do this either by word or deed and called them apostates (murtad).

Types of Apostasy:

1. Verbal Apostasy: examples of this include insulting Allah, His Messenger, His angels, or any of His messengers, claiming to attain the Knowledge of the Unseen, claiming to be a new prophet, or believing claims of new prophethood, praying to any other than Allah.¹³
2. In action: examples of this include prostrating and sacrificing to idols, trees, stones, and graves, placing the Quran in dirty spaces, and practicing, learning, or teaching witchcraft and sorcery.
3. In belief: examples of this include believing in a deity besides Allah, that adultery, [consuming] alcohol, or usury are *halal* (permissible), that bread is *haram* (forbidden), that the [five] prayers are not *wajib* (required), that governing a state not according to what Allah has revealed is *jai’z* (allowed), or altering the [Islamic ruling] of what the Muslim scholars have reached absolute consensus on, whether it is *haram*, *halal* or *wajib*.
4. By doubts: examples of this include casting doubts that *shirk*, adultery, and alcohol is *haram* and that what Muslim scholars have reached consensus on as permissible, such as water or bread, is not *jai’z*. [Other examples] include casting doubts on the Prophet’s message, his honesty, Islam, or Islam’s suitability to our times.

Apostasy rules:

1. The rulings on apostasy are the prerogative of the distinguished scholars and are adjudicated by a Shari’a court [added in 2019: “so that the judge can make sure one has committed apostasy before that verdict is issued”].
2. Carrying out the sentence on apostates is the responsibility of Wali al-Amr.
3. The ruler asks the apostate to recant his apostasy. If the apostate repents and returns to Islam, he is to be acquitted and left alone. If he refuses, **he is to be killed by the ruler** as [Muhammad] has said: “whoever changes his religion, kill him.”
4. The apostate is prohibited from using his money and property during the repentance period. If he returns to Islam, his money remains his. If he does not, and he either dies **or is executed for his apostasy**, his money and property are seized by the state.
5. The apostate is separated from his wife as he is no longer permissible for her.
6. The apostate’s relatives are not allowed to inherit.

¹³ In the 2019 curriculum, the following text from earlier editions had been removed from this paragraph: “seeking refuge from any other than Allah in what only Allah has the power to do.”

7. If he dies without recanting his apostasy, he is not allowed to have an Islamic funeral and be buried in Muslim cemetery. He is to be buried in a kafir cemetery.

Supplemental information:

Islam has encountered many people who converted to it misleadingly then left it with malicious intentions. Do they expect from a religion – which it is at its essence a faith by the heart and a Shari’a that regulates social life – to face these ill-intentions in an unintelligent and foolish manner? No indeed!¹⁴

Indeed, apostasy is rarely undertaken due to only change of heart. If it was that way, no one would have noticed it. Apostasy, in most cases, is a self-imposed veil for rebellion against religious deeds, traditions, Shari’a, and against the foundations of the state itself, and its stance vis-a-vis its foreign adversaries. Because of this, it is obligatory to combat it. No state should be blamed if it has a strict position on apostates when the mere existence of such apostates is an attack on the state’s survival.¹⁵

Activity: Since the early days of Islam to our times, Islam’s enemies have been keen on making Muslims leave Islam. Why in your opinion? What do you suggest to combat their attempts?ⁱ

Many of the additional lessons that dealt with apostasy may not, in and of themselves, have contained direct calls to violence. However, when taken together with the above example, they reemphasized reasons for considering someone an apostate, which Lesson 1 made clear to students is punishable by death. For example, Lessons 2 and 3, prior to their removal, were effectively death threats when seen through that framing.

Removed Lesson 2: “Ridiculing Islam and Trivializing its Divinity” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Ridiculing Islam is every act or saying that disparages and ridicules anything in Islam, whether it is done seriously or jokingly ... Whoever does that is an apostate, as he has fully left Islam. [...] ⁱⁱ

Removed Lesson 3: “Al-Wala’a Wal-Bara’a” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Kafirs are the enemies of Islam and Muslims. Allah has said [in the Quran]: “O believers, take not Jews and Christians as allies; they are allies of each other. Whoso of you makes them his ally is one of them. Allah guides not the people of the evildoers.” ⁱⁱⁱ

The Hadith 3(5) textbook outlined the concept of violent jihad as a means of spreading Islam “around the world” by achieving “dominance over other nations” and applying the Shari’a

¹⁴ In the 2019 curriculum, the following text from earlier editions had been removed from this paragraph: “Islam has permitted Jews and Christians to live with Muslims in the same community with the same rights and duties. So then, why do [Jews and Christians] abandon their religion, convert to Islam then leave it? To give these individuals the right to apostate can be construed in one way only which is to give others the right to attack Islam, insult its creed, and deceive the Shari’a. Is this acceptable by anyone with reasonable logic?”

¹⁵ In the 2019 curriculum, the following text from earlier editions had been removed from this paragraph: “apostasy is often viewed as a crime of utmost treason”. Even without that text, however, this lesson raises the issue of apostasy to the level of a threat to national security.

described in the Tawhid textbooks. While there was mention of jihad as including “righteous deeds”, there was a much greater emphasis on “fighting enemies”.

Removed Lesson 4: “Jihad” Hadith 3(5) (2019)

Introduction: Allah made this Umma special by legislating jihad for it and using the Umma to spread his religion around the world. Allah also provided the Umma with dominance over other nations. When our ancestors performed jihad as Allah wants it, applied Shari’a and build the earth in a way that he approves of, all the countries in the world became theirs and **their enemies were terrified and fearful of them.**

Jihad definition: [...] Generic definition: struggling to do what Allah loves such as faith and righteous deeds and rejecting what Allah dislikes such as kufr, depravity, and sins.

Specific definition: Striving to **fight the enemies** and defending the religion [Islam], the homeland and the people.¹⁶

Lessons 5 through 10, below, represented the different contexts where this concept of violent jihad is applicable, with a special emphasis on spreading the faith. The overall takeaway was extremely religiously intolerant, in addition to being violent. Taken with Lesson 3 above, for example, Lesson 6 admonished believers to actively attack Jews and Christians on behalf of Allah. Lesson 8 drew an equivalence between travel for the Hajj, which is a religious requirement, to travel aimed at recruiting others to violent extremist groups. Lesson 10 even specified using violence in an effort to force conversion, which is a concept that is often refuted by Islamic scholars themselves.

Removed Lesson 5: “Hadith 12” Hadith 3(5) (2019)

Rules and Recommendations from the Hadith: [...]

- The Hadith points to the status of the Umma which will become extremely weak after its strength, which is achieved by holding onto Allah’s religion and jihad in his sake. Other nations consider the Umma weak and conspire with each other to harm them. [...]
- The Hadith shows that all the nations, with their diverse faiths and beliefs, are going to dominate Muslims when they are weak and inattentive to the reasons of their strength. [...]
- Muhammad’s statement that “Allah will take the fear of you from the breasts of your enemy and instill weakness into your hearts” shows that the enemies of the Umma fear Muslims as long as they are holding onto Islam and strengthening themselves [...]
- What is meant [in the Hadith] by hating death is: the reluctance to perform jihad in the sake of Allah and holding onto life [as opposed to the hereafter]^{iv}

Removed Lesson 6: “Respect for the Companions” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

¹⁶ In the 2019 curriculum, the final sentence of this paragraph reads: “Striving to fight the kafirs and sinners (or oppressors).”

All those have great respect for Allah. They get angry for Allah and are meticulously keen on maintaining Tawhid. They demonized shirk and those who practice it. They fight Allah's enemies for Allah's sake.^v

Removed Lesson 7: "Shirk" Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Shirk justifies fighting those who practice it. As is in the Hadith, "I have been ordered to fight against people till they testify that there is no God but Allah. And whoever say there is no God but Allah, their blood and property are guaranteed protection on my behalf except when justified by law, and their affairs rest with Allah."

Major Shirk:

- Excommunicates whoever practices it;
- Will subject whoever practices it to dwelling in the Hell-fire eternally;
- Annuls all good deeds;
- Justifies fighting whoever practices it, given that certain conditions are met.^{vi}

Removed Lesson 8: "Ethics of Travel" Hadith 3(5) (2019)

Types of Travels:

Commended travel. This includes any travel done in order to obey Allah, such as traveling to perform Hajj or Umra, perform jihad for the sake of Allah or to recruit people to do it, seek knowledge or visit relatives [...]^{vii}

Removed Lesson 9: "Sura al-Tawba (23-28)" Tafsir 4(5) (2017)

The verse indicates that it is required that [Muslims] disavow mushriks ... because they choose not to believe. The feeling of disavowal should cease once they convert to Islam. [...] It is required to love Allah, His Messenger, and jihad over anything else. Ibn Taymiyyah said:

"Believers have to love Allah, His Messenger, and jihad more than their relatives, their possessions, dwellings and businesses, friends and siblings. If the believer did not do so, he is not a real believer." [...]

The verse points out the value of jihad for Allah's sake. When jihad is required, it is more important than one's family and possessions. Jihad for Allah's sake is the jihad that aims to give Allah's word hegemony over anything else.

[...] Allah informs us he punished the mushriks by their grave defeat [in battle]. The defeat left many of the mushriks dead or taken as prisoners. It also allowed Muslims to seize their possessions. This is a punishment they deserve because they did not believe in Allah and His Messenger.^{viii}

Removed Lesson 10: "Sura al-Tawba (34-36)" Tafsir 4(5) (2017)

[...] Allah instructs to fight the mushriks totally. This means fighting them after calling them to join Allah [and Islam]. If they do not convert to Islam and refuse to pay the Jizya (levy tax), it is required to fight them as long as the Muslims are able to do so. The fight should start with the mushriks who are in the proximity of Muslim land. Allah said [in the Quran]: "O you who believe!

Fight those of the kafirs who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty unto him.” This is how Muhammad and the Muslims after him waged their wars.^{ix}

Violent content removed from active textbooks

Two lessons have been removed from textbooks that remain in the 2020 curriculum. The first comes from the Tafsir 1 textbook.¹⁷ This is centered around the Sura al-Tawba, which is often cited by terrorist groups as providing legitimacy for aggressive violence. This lesson advocates for aggressive jihad, furthers the narrative of apostasy, and, fortunately, has been entirely removed.

The last example was the only instance of violent extremism highlighted in the Tawhid 2 textbook in ICRD’s 2017 curriculum review. This lesson reinforced the violent concepts of jihad and the treatment of apostates introduced earlier. Even though there was some small reference to jihad being regulated by leaders, a much stronger emphasis was put on jihad as a religious duty. The now-removed, violently anti-Semitic lesson also taught students to be prepared for the slaughter of all Jewish people at the End of Days, when even stones and trees would turn on them.

Removed Lesson 11: “Sura al-Tawba” Tafsir 1 (2019)

Themes of Sura al-Tawba

- 1) An acquittal from the treaties with mushriks.
 - 2) ...
 - 3) ...¹⁸
 - 4) Urging jihad in Allah’s way and warning against belittling it.
 - 5) ...
 - 6) ...¹⁹
- [...] ²⁰

Jihad, in the way of Allah, is the head of the matter in Islam, and Allah required it to protect Muslims against those who are scheming against them. This requires full preparation and being ready to respond to the call of jihad any moment, if Wali al-Amr calls for it.

[Quranic quote from verse 41- 45]

What can we learn from those verses:

¹⁷ This lesson did not appear in the Graphs at the beginning of this report, as it comes from the 10th grade curriculum, which was not part of ICRD’s 2017 review, as mentioned in the description of the studies.

¹⁸ This bullet was removed in 2019, and read: *Showing harshness to obstinate kafirs.*

¹⁹ This bullet was also removed in 2019: *Exposing the people of the book, showing their false beliefs and urging to fight them until they pay jizya.*

²⁰ In 2019, the following Activity was removed: *Determine which verse cautions against loyalty (wala’a’) to kafirs, even if they were relatives.*

- 1) Jihad is contingent upon the permission of the imam (leader).
- 2) Not participating in required (wajib) jihad or using unfounded excuses to not participate is a sign of hypocrisy.

[...]

- 5) A sign of being a [good] Muslim is to take the initiative to perform good deeds, including jihad, which is one the greatest deeds.

[...] [Quranic quote]

What we can learn from these verses:

- 1) One prominent feature of hypocrites is mocking Islam, slandering Shari'a, and belittling the importance of Islamic scholars.
- 2) [The verses] warn against mocking Islam. It is feared that whoever does so might become a kafir and become excommunicated.
- 3) Mocking scholars and the people of righteousness is considered a mockery of Islam.
- 4) Whoever mocks Allah, His verses, and His Prophet is a murtad (apostate). No excuse will be accepted from him unless he repents. The imam has to rule on his case according to Allah's laws.
- 5) It is haram (prohibited) to mock anything in Islam. There is a consensus among scholars that it is kufr and ridda.^x

Removed Lesson 12: "Signs of the End of Times" Tawhid 2 (2019)

Muhammad said: "The last hour would not come until the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; except the Gharqad tree would not say, because it is the tree of the Jews."^{xi}

Remaining violent content

The following lessons are recommended for revision or removal. Some lessons that are included here might not seem to be evident calls to violence. However, when seen in the context of the other remaining violent material, they take on a violent nature.

The first lesson presented below warns students of the danger of Takfir, which is taken almost verbatim from a similar lesson unit in the now-retired Tawhid 3 textbook. The direct admonition to students against this practice and the specific reference to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques as the only figure with the authority to administer this punishment are both positive developments. However, this lesson still reinforces the acceptability of violent punishment and human rights abuses found in the lesson that was removed.

It should be noted that this lesson was not identified in ICRD’s review of the 2017 curriculum. In the context of the now-removed lesson on apostasy²¹, this lesson placed important conditions on punishments and only repeated content from the much more objectionable lesson in the Tawhid 3 textbook. However, now that the apostasy lesson has been removed, this lesson stands out as promoting violence (both physical and social). ICRD recommends that this lesson be revised to remove any reference to violent or inhumane punishment of any student or their families for violations of religious rules.

Lesson 1: “Danger of Takfir” Tawhid 2 (2020)

Consequences of Takfir: it is dangerous to rule with takfir against others. If one is ruled against takfir, he will face the following:

1. **Killing him would be lawful ...**
2. Separating him from his Muslim wife ...
3. He cannot inherit and no one can inherit from him ...
4. He will not be washed or prayed on or buried in Muslims' burial sites [He is not entitled to Islamic funeral rites]. He should be buried in the cemetery of the kafirs ...

Who can rule with takfir?

From what was described above we can see that takfir has dangerous consequences ... What the Quran and the Sunna say is kufr, is kufr. What the Quran and Sunna say is not kufr, is not kufr.

No one is allowed to rule with takfir against any Muslim unless there is text-proof from the Quran and Sunna. This is a measure to protect the religion of Muslims, their blood, wealth, and family. The reference here is the trusted scholars.

The ruling of takfir is the authority of the Wali al-Amr or his appointed judges. Implementing the rules is the authority of the Wali al-Amr, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, or anyone he appoints. No one else is given this authority.^{xiii}

Lesson 2 has been identified in each of ICRD’s previous curriculum reviews, as well as reviews performed by USCIRF, ADL, IMPACT-SE, and others who recommended it for removal. Up to the present moment, however, the MOE has only chosen to make minor edits to the unit. There are a few important notes with respect to reforming this unit, which prescribes death for “sorcerers”:

1. Unlike the other apostasy “crimes” described in the textbooks, sorcery is something that is still a criminal matter in the Kingdom. As such, *removal of this lesson while sorcery is still illegal could put students at risk of committing a crime* and receiving the related punishment.

²¹ See: *Removed Lesson 1: “Ridda” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)* in the section entitled “Violent content removed from retired textbooks”.

2. This lesson is sufficiently vague that it could be interpreted to mean that even Muslims who read a daily horoscope should be put to death. While this behavior may not be common in Saudi Arabia, there are many Muslims outside of the Kingdom who would not see this behavior as apostasy or grounds for murder.
3. The MOE may not have prioritized revision of this lesson due to the fact that prohibitions and legal actions against “sorcery” in the Kingdom most often target ethnic minorities who are traveling to the Kingdom to perform domestic work.

Lesson 2: “Magic” Tawhid 1 (2020)

Magic is a known phenomenon in all nations. [...] Magic acts including pretending to know the unseen and what might happen in the future by consulting demons and astronomers. [...] Magic is kufr since magicians get closer to Satan and commit shirk so Satan can help in the magic act. It is also kufr because magicians get closer to the planets (and stars) because they claim they influence what happens on earth. All of this is shirk that excommunicates from Islam.

Magic is divided into two types:

1. Magic that leads to kufr. This is the type of magic that Satan employs. As such, it is why whoever practices it is sentenced to death, as he is an apostate. The execution is only performed under the authority of Wali al-Amr or his representatives.
2. Magic that does not reach the level of kufr and does not excommunicate. This is the Magic of deception and sorcery. This is done through potions and mixes.²²

Magic is kufr and excommunicates from Islam [...] because it includes: (1) dua and seeking refuge of demons, (2) kufr speech, such as defaming Allah, in order to please demons, (3) sacrificing something to demons, (4) believing that demons can benefit or harm, (5) believing that planets (and stars) influence the universe, (6) belittling what Allah asked to glorify such as the Quran and (7) pretending to know the unseen.^{xiii}

Lessons 3 through 6 involve the topic of violent jihad, which, as noted, has been the focus of considerable improvement in the curriculum over the past few years. In the 2019 edition of the Tawhid 2 textbook, “*jihad against non-believers through da’wa and fighting*” was removed from the definitions of jihad, and the 2020 version includes a new warning about ensuring that donated funds are not used by terrorist groups (at least not those who will attack the faith or the Kingdom):

“Whoever wants to donate has to be cautious about who the recipients are. One needs to ensure his donation did not go to those who do not deserve it or those who are from dubious entities that will use the donation to fight [Islam] and harm the homeland.”^{xiv}

These lessons still express a notion of jihad that strongly emphasizes a call to religious violence over righteous deeds, and which better describes the terrorism of ISIS than it does the military

²² The following was removed from the end of this statement in 2020: *Whoever practices it is punished however the judge sees fit, even if he sentences him to death, in a way that guarantees blocking the evil of the magician and his harm away from Muslims. The one who carries out the sentence is Wali al-Amr or his representatives.*

action of the government of the Kingdom. In Lesson 3, jihad is described as “*a way to spread Tawhid*” against a religious enemy who fights Muslims “*to make them abandon their religion.*” Lesson 4 suggests protections for kafirs under certain circumstances. Not only does one of the points made reverse many of those protections, but the implication is that any non-Muslim that does not fall into these categories is a legitimate target of violence. Lesson 5 idealizes martyrdom and warns against apostasy. Lesson 6 encourages students to follow “*righteous people’s faith and jihad*”, while also warning students that obeying kafirs will lead to apostasy (which carries a penalty of death).

Lesson 3: “Jihad” Hadith 2 (2020)

[...] When does fighting constitute jihad? When it is a response to Allah's order, a sacrifice in Allah's way, a way to spread tawhid, a protection of the land of Muslims [...]

The fight between good and evil will take place until the Day of Judgement, in accordance with the wisdom of Allah. And as long as this fight is ongoing, jihad will be valid ... and its merits are eternally present in all times and places. Allah said: “And they will keep fighting you until they turn you away from your faith—if they can.” [...] and Muhammad said: “A group of my Ummah will keep fighting for the sake of good until the day of judgment.”^{xv}

Lesson 4: “Support Kafirs over Muslims” Tawhid 1 (2020)

Islam's instruction in dealing with kafirs:

First: People of Dhimma, or those who agreed to a treaty where they remain on their faith and reside in the lands of Muslims under the protection of the Islamic state. It is required to uphold the rules of the agreement with them as long as they stay in accordance with it. It is not permitted to harm them, or take away their souls, wealth, or rights. Allah protected it. [...]

Second: Those with protection status, such as ambassadors, delegates that come to Islamic lands for business, education, etc. Their lives, wealth, and rights should be respected. Allah said: “And if any mushrik seeks your protection, grant him protection until he hears the words of Allah; then convey him to his place of security.”

Third: Those with treaties with the Muslims not to fight. One must keep this promise, and it is forbidden to attack them if they are under a treaty. [...]

Fourth: Fighters. Allah instructs to fight them to push away their evil and harm and preserve Islam and its people. Allah said: “Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. Allah does not like transgressors” ... And Allah said: “Fight those who do not believe in Allah and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, and who do not follow the Religion of Truth among those who were given the holy book, until they pay the jizya with a willing hand, being compliant.”

Muslims must be proud of their religion, defend their homeland, and preserve its identity. Allah said: “The glory belongs to Allah, and His Messenger and the believers. The Muslims must not be [on the side of] the enemy fighters or support them in any form.”^{xvi}

Lesson 5: “Sura ali ‘Imran (137-141)” Tafsir 2 (2020)

Intro: Allah has rules and ways of managing things. Muslims have to be aware of the rules of victory and defeat [in a battle]. They should be conceited when they are facing [in the battle] their enemies because they are merely kafirs. Muslims might be defeated as happened in the Battle of Uhud when there was an infighting and they disobeyed Muhammad (PBUH) to collect the booty.

[Quranic Verse]

What can be learned from the verses:

[...]

- 4) Allah deals out days [of victory and defeat] in turn among Muslims and their enemies to test them.
- 5) Allah provides good news to the Muslims: he will make them victorious over their enemy, even if the enemy has more troops and better tools.
- 6) [...]
- 7) **Martyrdom in Allah's way is a gift from him, and a divine honor. Allah only gifts it to the elite among his worshippers.**
- 8) Evildoing and abandoning faith are reasons for destruction and ruin.^{xvii}

Lesson 6: “Sura ali ‘Imran (146-151)” Tafsir 2 (2020)

Allah has prepared the Muslims to lead humanity and civilize it. This does not mean Allah granted them victory in all battles. [...]

What can be learned from the verses:

[...] Allah will make Muslims achieve victory by spreading fear. [...] It is encouraged to follow righteous people's faith and jihad, and their patience, and well-spoken speech, and virtuous deeds.

[...] Activity 3: Ponder the meaning of this verse: “O you believers, if you yield to the disbelievers, they will drag you back into disbelief—and you will become losers”, and explain the consequences of obeying the kafirs.^{xviii}

Lessons 7 and 8 both focus on the prohibition against killing those who are considered “protected” under various religious restrictions against certain kinds of violence, but still reaffirms the fact that there are categories of people who are legitimate targets of violence. Each lesson either explicitly or implicitly reaffirms the threat of violence against students who are guilty of anything that lies outside of accepted Wahhabist practices. There is also a vague and contradictory instruction on who is to murder those who are guilty, as well as who might be legitimate targets of violence. For instance, Lesson 8 states that “Islam declares it is haram to kill the protected soul,” but then ends the lesson with a question about when a protected soul can be killed.

Lesson 7: “Hadith 15” Hadith 1 (2020)

A person with *isma* (protection) should not be killed until *isma* conditions are not met, which only happens if the person committed an act that permits his or her killing. The Prophet clarified that very well by saying:

“It is not permissible to spill the blood of a Muslim except in three [instances]: the married person who commits adultery, a life for a life, and the one who reverts from Islam and leaves the Muslims.”

The killing of such people is the duty of [he to] whom Allah gave the governing power over Muslims, not the duty of individuals. Taking the matter into one’s hands is a rejection of imam’s rule. It also spreads chaos among communities ... whoever does it deserves a severe punishment.^{xix}

Lesson 8: “Sura al-An'am (151)” Tafsir 2 (2020)

Islam declares it is haram to kill the protected soul or assault it. Examples of the protected soul are (1) a Muslim **who did not do anything that warrants his killing**, as the Quran said: "and whoso kills a believer willfully, his reward is the hellfire, therein dwelling forever, and Allah's wrath will be upon him and will curse him and prepare for him a mighty punishment" and (2) a kafir who is living in the land of Islam that has a treaty, is protected or in dhimma of Muslims. [...]

Under which conditions is it **permitted to kill a protected soul**?^{xx}

The following lessons describe apostasy in a way the specifically includes the normative practices and beliefs of non-Salafi Muslims, such as the mention in Lesson 11 of practices that might be understood as common within the Shi’a community, as well as other behaviors that mainstream Muslims may not consider forbidden.

Without the earlier references to violent punishments for apostasy, these lessons would still represent serious religious intolerance, as they seek to invalidate the legitimate religious identities of sectarian rivals. However, when taken in light of the remaining calls to violence, these lessons represent a direct threat to students and a vision of Islam that is only practiced in territory controlled by terrorist insurgencies like ISIS, not in Saudi Arabia. Highlighted content demonstrates where the selections reference earlier content that justifies violence, such as references to kufr, which is specified in the remaining lesson on Takfir (Lesson 1 above) as a crime calling for a violent punishment. Some of the vague and broad definitions in the lessons, such as “doubt” and “pride” as constituting Major Kufr in Lesson 10, open up significant room for interpretation as to what might justify a violent punishment. Many references exist to “kufr after belief”, which is equivalent to apostasy and subject to the harshest of punishments.

Lesson 9: “Ethics of Humor” Hadith 1 (2020)

Types of jokes (satire) to avoid: [...] Joking about [religious] matters because it is mockery and defamation of something that should be revered. Allah said: “And if you ask them, they will surely say, ‘We were only talking idly and playing.’ Say, ‘Is it Allah and His verses and His Messenger that you were mocking? Make no excuse; **you have disbelieved (committed kufr) after your belief**. If we forgive one party of you, we will punish another party for that they were sinners’.”^{xxi}

Lesson 10: “Types of Kufr” Tawhid 1 (2020)

Anybody that commits an act of kufr or shirk cannot be ruled as kafir until he or she meets certain conditions. [...] Major Kufr is defined as disbelief and is divided into five types, the kufr that rejects the truth, kufr of doubt, kufr of pride [that leads to rejection of the truth], kufr of rejection, and kufr of hypocrisy.

Minor kufr: Some sins that do not excommunicate those who commit them are categorized under minor kufr. Examples include disrespecting [Allah's] blessing and fighting the Muslim.^{xxii}

Lesson 11: “Dua” Tawhid 1 (2020)

Know that dua is a type of worship that should be directed only to Allah. When dua is directed at other than Allah, even if it is a prophet, wali, King, or jinn, in a matter that only Allah can address, it is an act of kufr. **Whoever commits it is excommunicated from Islam.**

Dedicating dua to Allah only is a sign of faith and tawhid, and dua to other than Allah is kufr and shirk. Whoever sought refuge from other than Allah, such as dead people, has declared an associate to Allah.^{xxiii}

Lesson 12: “Mocking the Religion” Tawhid 1 (2020)

Mocking the religion includes mocking Allah's attributes or acts, laws of Islam, Quranic verses, the Sunna of Muhammad, religious scholars, or the people of righteousness (since they are holding into the faith and followers of Sunna, since mocking them is really directed at Islam and Sunna). [...] Those acts are against the instruction to glorify Allah [...] “Make no excuses. **You have disbelieved (committed kufr) after your belief.**”^{xxiv}

Lesson 13: “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims” Tawhid 1 (2020)

What does it mean to support Kafirs over Muslims? It means to support them through loving their religion against one’s Islamic state/homeland and Wali al-Amr. This is a major kufr and **whoever does it is excommunicated.**^{xxv}

Lesson 14: “Sura ali ‘Imran (104-107)” Tafsir 2 (2020)

Islamic society is like a ship in the sea of life. The waves of desires and uncertainty strike it. The evildoers and kafirs are scheming against it. [...] What can be learned from the verses: [...] Reporting that disagreement and conflict and abandoning the group [of Muslims] leads to the desertion of religion and **kufr after being a believer.** [...] On the day of judgment, everyone will receive his reward justly. Those holding onto Allah's rope and care about Muslims, their face will brighten. The faces of the people of Bid'a, desires, and disagreement will darken.^{xxvi}

Social Hostility

In previous editions of the Saudi high school religious textbooks, narratives of religious-based social hostility were found in each of the major subjects reviewed (Tawhid, Hadith, Tafsir). These narratives follow a theme called *al-wala’a wal-bara’a* (loyalty and disavowal, hereafter “AWWB”), which holds that Muslims must only be loyal to other Muslims and must treat all non-Muslims as enemies. As ICRD noted in previous curriculum reviews, the AWWB narrative, along

International Center for Religion & Diplomacy – “*Comparative Review of Violence and Social Hostility in the Curriculum of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: High School Religious Studies Textbooks (2017 to 2020)*”

with the narratives promoting aggressive religious violence, have been presented in the Saudi curriculum in ways that are alarmingly compatible with the ideological premise of violent extremist groups like ISIS.

According to ICRD’s 2019 findings, a clear distinction emerged between how this narrative was covered in the textbooks that are now retired (the “terms” textbooks) and those that are still in use. In the textbooks that were retired in 2020, AWWB was described repeatedly and at considerable length. As shown in the next section of the present report, AWWB was primarily described in several dedicated chapters of the Tawhid 3(5) textbooks and appeared repeatedly as “key takeaways” from the Quranic suras examined in the Tafsir books. While this narrative epitomizes religious intolerance, it should be noted that the Saudi textbooks warn students against overt expressions of hostility or violence (despite seemingly contradictory messaging about violence elsewhere) and encouraged surface-level politeness and honesty towards non-Muslims. Simultaneously, however, the 2019 editions of the now-retired textbooks presented students with lessons that created a foundation of religious hatred and then built a system of pejorative, discriminatory, and hostile beliefs and behaviors that logically followed. These included the encouragement of fear and personal animus toward all non-Muslims, practical instructions for religious-based discrimination, and threats of ex-communication and violence for students who transgressed these admonitions.

In the textbooks that remain in circulation, the lessons on AWWB were less hostile and less frequent. ICRD’s review of the 2017 editions uncovered only two objectionable lessons in the Hadith 2 textbook and none in the Tawhid 2. ICRD’s subsequent review in 2019, found that the objectionable lessons related to AWWB that were identified in the 2017 Hadith 2 textbooks had been removed. However, the review of the 2019 textbooks was the first ICRD review to cover the Tawhid 1 high school textbook, which, due to the retirement of the other Tawhid textbooks, now contains what should be considered the “core lessons” on AWWB in the Saudi curriculum. In this textbook, the lessons from the 2019 edition on AWWB are similar in structure to the Tawhid 3(5) lesson units and still deeply intolerant, but with a significant difference in the amount of conditional language and without the most objectionable content. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a considerable change in the remaining lessons on AWWB (which will be examined in a subsequent section of the present report).

The progress made by the MOE on how the concept is presented in the textbooks has been as drastic as progress made in removing the violent material, as elucidated above. However, this narrative has the same issue as the apostasy lessons. Students learn that other people’s non-conformity to the specific religious views in the textbooks is a crime and a threat that must be avoided when possible – and punished when necessary.

Despite the prodigious and laudable progress represented by the retirement of the textbooks with the most objectionable AWWB lessons, ICRD reaffirms its guidance from the review of the 2019 textbooks, in which ICRD strongly recommended:

International Center for Religion & Diplomacy – *“Comparative Review of Violence and Social Hostility in the Curriculum of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: High School Religious Studies Textbooks (2017 to 2020)”*

“...entirely removing any content from the textbooks that references AWWB as well as any other content that instructs students to discriminate against, hate, or regard anyone as an enemy based on their religious beliefs.”²³

Social hostility content removed in retired textbooks:

As seen in the content below, the lessons on AWWB were previously designed to prepare Saudi students for interaction with non-Muslims, who are explicitly described as enemies. The comprehensive lesson units, which were removed from the curriculum when the Tawhid 3(5) textbook was retired, provided a detailed guide for how students must regard and treat all non-Muslims. Students are warned that they will no longer be Muslims if they ever come to perceive or treat a non-Muslim as an ally. If understood in concert with the lesson on Takfir from the Tawhid text²⁴, the lesson implies that students would be killed if they do not accept the intended message.

The first three examples are from the 2019 edition of the Tawhid 3(5), which contained the core lessons on AWWB. In the first lesson, students learned that AWWB is critically important for every Muslim because all non-Muslims are “Allah’s enemies” and “enemies of Islam and Muslims.” The implications of AWWB on students’ behaviors and perceptions were explored further in Lessons 2 and 3, which provided guidelines to apply the principles of AWWB without demonstrating overt signs of hostility or committing acts of violence. Yet the AWWB narrative remained fundamentally religiously intolerant. For example, the third lesson outlined the “incorrect understandings of Bara’a”, describing how Bara’a should not be applied the same way to Muslims (even if they were sinners) and non-Muslims, emphasizing religious hatred by stating that one should not:

“[Be] extreme in hate towards Muslims who do bid’a and sin, [...] hating them like one hates the disbelievers [...] Because whatever a Muslim does of sins [...] the love and sense of loyalty one should have for him remains.”^{xxvii}

Removed Lesson 1: “Al-Wala’a Wal-Bara’a” Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Wala’a and Bara’a (loyalty and disavowal) are two pillars of the Islamic creed. They are tenets of faith, if not the strongest tents of faith. Many people neglected them [...]

Wala’a (loyalty) is loving the believers [i.e., the Muslims], supporting them military or otherwise and being affectionate with them. [...] Bara’a is detesting Allah’s enemies and showing animosity toward them.

Wala’a and Bara’a in Islam: Wala’a and Bara’a are at the essence of Tawhid. They occupy an eminent position within Islam [...] Both have a discernable effect on guiding Muslims’ actions and relationship with others, Muslims and kafirs. [...] The basis of Wala’a and Bara’a are built on the

²³ See page 17 of Burbridge, Henry; Annas Shaker and James Patton (2020) “Analysis of Revisions to High School Textbooks from the Tawhid, Hadith, and Tafsir Subjects in the Saudi Arabian National Curriculum (2017-18 to 2019-20)” International Center for Religion & Diplomacy

²⁴ See: Lesson 1: “Danger of Takfir” Tawhid 2 (2020) in the section entitled “Remaining violent content”.

idea that Islam is the true religion and that Allah will not accept any other religion from his servants, and that any other religion is void.

Required Wala'a: Wala'a is Wajib (required) to Allah, His Messenger, and the believers [i.e., the Muslims] [...] Prohibited Wala'a: [...] Wala'a toward kafirs by loving them and supporting them militarily or otherwise is forbidden.

The reasons behind the prohibition of Wala'a to kafirs:

1. Kafirs are Allah's enemies. Allah has relayed [in the Quran] his animosity toward them...²⁵
2. Wala'a to kafirs is a sign of being satisfied with their kufr, and this goes against the unquestioned acceptance with Allah as the Lord, and with Islam as a faith, and Muhammad as a messenger.
3. Kafirs are the enemies of Islam and Muslims. Allah has said [in the Quran]: "O believers, take not Jews and Christians as allies; they are allies of each other. Whoso of you makes them his ally is one of them. Allah guides not the people of the evildoers." ...
4. Wala'a to kafirs is a reason to rely on them and to support them. If one does this, they must receive Allah's punishment and discontent.^{xxviii}

Removed Lesson 2: "Ruling on Wala'a to Kafirs" Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Introduction:

Many people confuse the prohibited Wala'a towards kafirs and being kind and charitable towards them or trading with them. What is the ruling regarding trading with them and being charitable to them? Some prohibit all of this. Others allow being nice to them and trading with them. Which group is right? What is the Islamic ruling on living in their lands? What is the Islamic ruling on benefiting from their industries?

Wala'a to kafirs comes in different forms that can be summarized as follows:

1. Having Wala'a to kafirs in your heart, which necessitates loving the kafirs, being affectionate to them, being pleased with, and accepting of the veracity of their religion. This is kufr and apostasy, whether the person shows this Wala'a outwardly or not. An example of this Wala'a – which excommunicates whoever does it – is spreading the kafir's religion, praising it, and equating it to Islam, and supporting kafirs militarily or otherwise against Muslims, with the desire for their triumph over Islam.
2. Having Wala'a to kafirs outwardly without believing it in your heart due to a legitimate excuse such as being forced to do so ... This is allowed ... as long as the faith remains in the heart.
3. Having Wala'a to kafirs outwardly without believing it in your heart with no legitimate excuse. This is haram – but it is not kufr.

An example of that is appointing kafirs in a position of power, such as ministry positions. Another example is cheerfully spending time with them in a frequent manner, whether this is done for

²⁵ In the 2017-18 edition this paragraph contained the following sentence: "He (Allah) cursed them, declared He detests them, showed His anger toward them and showed that He does not love them..."

recreational or business purposes. A third example is imitating them in what they have innovated (the Bida'a they came up with) in terms of celebrations, outward appearance, clothing, mannerisms, and bad ways, and also taking on their names, and praising them.

[...] Mistakes regarding Wala'a and Bara'a: [...] Mixing between the forbidden Wala'a and being kind and charitable and fair. Some people perform Wala'a to kafirs thinking that it is part of being kind and charitable toward them. Others think that treating the kafir with respect and human decency falls under Wala'a to them. Being kind and charitable to someone does not require loving them and Wala'a. Bara'a toward someone does not require one to avoid being kind, fair, and charitable to them.

Allah said about non-combatant kafirs: "All does not forbid you, as regards those who have not fought you in religion's cause, nor expelled you from your homes, that you should be kind to them, and act justly towards them: surely Allah loves the just." And Allah said: "But if [your parents] strive to make you commit shirk and associate someone that you do not know about with me, then do not obey them. But stay virtuous with them." Muhammad visited a young Jewish boy when he was sick and asked him to become a Muslim, and he did. He permitted Asma to visit her mushrik mother [in order to eventually make her convert to Islam]. Omar gifted his non-Muslim brother a gift. Being kind and charitable, along with good treatment, toward non-combatant kafirs, to parents and other relatives is not a part of the forbidden Wala'a since this does not lead to love and taking those who commit it as allies.^{xxix}

Removed Lesson 3: "Correct Understanding of Bara'a" Tawhid 3(5) (2019)

Required Bara'a: Islam requires Bara'a of, and detesting, everything that Allah detests whether it is corruption, kufr and sins ...

Fields of required Bara'a

1. Detesting the kafirs, Bara'a (disavowing) from them and taking them as enemies because of their kufr or shirk. This is similar to what Abraham did as stated by Allah [in the Quran]: "You have had a good example in Abraham, and those with him, when they said to their people, 'we are disavowing you and that you worship apart from Allah. We disbelieve in you, and between us and you, enmity has shown itself, and hatred forever, until you believe in Allah alone'." ... Detesting a kafir is undertaken by the heart. It should not lead to oppressing a kafir or harming him.
2. Bara'a (disavowal), detesting and avoiding everything that Allah and His Messenger detest. Detesting people of Fisq (evildoing), evil, and corruption among Muslims. It is partial hatred done in combination with love. Those Muslims are detested for their bid'as, sins, corruption, and evil acts and are loved according to how much faith and goodness they possess. [...]

Incorrect understandings of disavowal:

1. Thinking that disassociating (Bara'a) one's self from non-Muslims and being hostile means that it is permissible to oppress them, attack them, and take their rights away from them. This is incorrect, because Allah commands justice and forbids oppression absolutely.
2. Thinking that since oppression is forbidden against non-believers and that justice and kindness are required when interacting with them, that these positive behaviors would forbid

disavowal...Even though a disbeliever should not be oppressed or attacked, they should also not be taken as allies or loved.

3. Being extreme in hate towards Muslims who do bid'a and sin, and hating them like one hates the disbelievers and showing them no love or loyalty. Because whatever a Muslim does of sins (as long as the sins do not take him out of the folds of the religion), the love and sense of loyalty one should have for him remains. His faith and beliefs are loved, and his sins/evil are hated.^{xxx}

Lesson 4, which was removed from the curriculum with the retirement of the Hadith 3(5) textbook, was an example of how AWWB was referenced outside of the core lesson units. This lesson explicitly instructed students to discriminate against non-Muslims in employment opportunities.

Lessons 5, 6, and 7 were removed from the curriculum with the retirement of the Tafsir 4(5) and 5(6) textbooks. These lessons reinforce themes presented in the AWWB narrative, including: (Lesson 5) the belief in a Christian-Jewish conspiracy to destroy Islam; and (Lesson 7) the notion that “taking mushriks as enemies” is one of two foundations for Islam.

Removed Lesson 4: “Ethical Guidelines in Dealing with Servants” Hadith 3(5) (2019)

Hiring non-Muslims:

Whoever wanted to hire a worker should hire a Muslim. This is because of the following reasons:

1. Supporting Muslims. They are more worthy of that than others. When in need, there are no issues with hiring non-Muslims.
2. When hiring kafirs, we provide them with help and allow them to become stronger.
3. Hiring kafirs can damage the religion [Islam] and good manners. For example, mixing with the kafirs weakens Wala'a and Bara'a towards mushriks, it might influence young people's religious manners and decorum or some of the kafirs might utilize their presence [in the country] to spread their falsehoods [their religions].
4. This Peninsula is the Peninsula of Islam. Muslim housemaids and workers yearn to visit it. Giving the Muslims the priority is better.^{xxxi}

Removed Lesson 5: “Sura al-Ma'eda (51-66)” Tafsir 5(6) (2017)

“Allah warns his believing servants against taking the Jews and Christians as allies, and this means loving them and supporting them. This is because of the disparities in the fundamentals of these religions upon which a true alliance should be built. Allah said: “And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion.” [...] Allah states that the Jews and Christians are allies of one another, and they love and support each other. The Jews make allies of the Christians, and the Christians make allies of the Jews. And regardless of whether they have different beliefs, Jews befriend other Jews, and Christians befriend other Christians. In mentioning the Jews and Christians being allies and friends, there is a warning for believers: To not choose them (Jews and Christians) as allies over Muslims because they cannot be trusted, since they are allies with one another, and are not allies with Muslims. [...] Warning about the Jews and Christians

conspiring against the Muslims, and agreeing on animosity towards Muslims – because they are allies.”^{xxxii}

Removed Lesson 6: “Sura al-Tawba” Tafsir 4(5) (2017)

[...] Allah asks the believers to not take mushriks as allies even if they were their fathers and brothers ... Allah denied the possibility of alliance with mushriks to show that relationships between Muslims are more essential than blood relationships. Allah prohibits taking mushriks as allies whether it is through loving them or supporting them militarily or otherwise ... Those who take mushriks as allies are described as wrong-doers by Allah. This because they are being audacious in committing sins and taking Allah’s enemies as allies ... instead, they should hate those that Allah hates based on the fact that they refused to believe in Allah and His Messenger... The verse indicates that it is required that [Muslims] disavow mushriks ... because they choose not to believe. The feeling of disavowal should cease once they convert to Islam. ^{xxxiii}

Removed Lesson 7: “Sura al-An’am (159-165) Tafsir 4(5) (2017)

[...] One of the great fundamentals of Islam is disavowing shirk and mushriks. Islam is built on two fundamentals. The first is Tawhid and allying with those who adhere to Tawhid. The second is to reject shirk and to take mushriks as enemies. ^{xxxiv}

Social hostility lessons revised in active textbooks

The lesson on AWWB in the remaining Tawhid 1 high school textbook changed dramatically between the 2019 and 2020 editions. The following content was removed from the 2019 edition of the Tawhid 1 textbook (issues still remain, however, see: Remaining social hostility content Lesson I).

Removed Content 8: “Muwala of Kafirs”, Tawhid 1 (2019)

Introduction: Muwala to the believers and animosity towards kafirs are the strongest points of faith. Muhammad (PBUH) said: “The best of deeds is love for Allah's [sake] and hate for Allah's [sake].”

Muhammad's companions used to pay allegiance to him on that basis. Jarir said: "I came to the Prophet when he was accepting the people's allegiance, and said: "O Messenger of Allah, extend your hand so that I may give you my allegiance, and state your terms, for you know best." He said: "I accept your allegiance that you will worship Allah, perform prayer, pay the zakat, give your advice to Muslims, and forsake the mushriks.” The basis of Muwala is love. The basis of animosity is hatred. Muwala and animosity are products of love and hate.

Muwala is only to be performed toward Allah, his Messenger (PBUH), and believers. Allah said: “Your wali is Allah, and His Messenger, and the believers who perform the prayer and pay the zakat.” Allah praised the companion of the Prophet because they performed Muwala to other believers and expressed their animosity toward the kafirs. Allah said: "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are hard against the kafirs, merciful one to another." The believer loves other believers because they are following the way of truth. The believer hates the kafirs because they disbelieve (committed kufr) in Allah, his Messenger and his religion. They committed a mistake against Allah and His Messenger, the most loved person to Allah's heart. They do not believe in Allah's oneness or his Messenger's Message.

Activity: List five methods of Muwala toward the believers. Show the connection of those with loving them.

Activity: Determine the reasons why some perform Muwala toward kafirs and a weak Muwala to believers.

Remaining social hostility content

With the Tawhid 3(5) and other textbooks retired, the core lesson in the high school curriculum on AWWB is to be found in the Tawhid 1 textbook, which, as noted in the previous section, has been revised from the 2019 edition. The revision is a commendable attempt to reframe the lessons in a manner that is consistent with religious tolerance. However, even with the emphasis shifted towards the limitations that should be placed on religious-based hostility, this is still a pejorative lesson, which contains violent content²⁶ and teaches students to regard non-Muslims as potential threats.

As long as this lesson offers instruction on “appropriate” social interaction based on a binary, “us vs. them” religious framework, it will continue to promote religious-based hostility towards non-Muslims. Even the restrictions that are placed on hostility towards the religious other are problematic. In the case of interpersonal or social interaction, this lesson encourages students to engage with non-Muslims only on a transactional basis. The most literal interpretation of the lesson forbids students from ever engaging non-Muslim unless that interaction is required for commercial gain or to encourage conversion to Islam. The restrictions against violence are even more alarming, because they set conditions that are no longer possible to meet. The Saudi Kingdom no longer collects the *jizya* from defeated *kafirs*, and Muslims are no longer parties to formal treaties as a single collective entity. Despite the fact that the Saudi Kingdom asserts the same monopoly on violence as any other modern nation, this lesson suggests that violence against non-Muslims is a matter for students to decide, based on their understanding of the individual status of the target.

ICRD continues to recommend that this lesson be removed from the textbook entirely. Even if the conditions for engagement are expanded, and the conditions for violence are modernized, the lesson will still be inconsistent with international standards of religious tolerance in education, simply because these rules apply a *religious measure* to social engagement and permissible violence. The lesson will continue to create a vulnerability to violent extremism as long as it suggests that Saudi students, or other adherents who follow these instructions, are allowed – if not required – to commit violence against non-Muslims who fail to meet certain conditions.

While most of the ancillary references to AWWB were removed from the Tafsir subject with the retirement of the terms textbooks, several examples remain in the curriculum. These reinforce the intolerance found in the following Tawhid 1 lesson unit.

Lesson 1: “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims” Tawhid 1 (2020)

²⁶ See previous section.

Discuss in small groups the following examples from the life of Muhammad and his dealings with kafirs:

- A companion from Daws tribe visited Muhammad and said: Daws disobeyed and rejected Islam. Can you call on Allah to punish them? ... Muhammad said instead: "O Allah, guide Daws and bring them to us."
- Aisha said when Muhammad died and his armor was mortgaged with a Jewish man.
- The treaty of Hudaibeya where Muhammad agreed to 10-year armistice with the mushriks.

Introduction:

Islam instituted values ... grounded in justice and fairness. Allah said: "Allah does not forbid you, as regards those who have not fought you in religion's cause, nor expelled you from your houses, that you should be kind to them, and act justly towards them; surely Allah loves the just."

Being kind and just does not require being supportive or expressive of wala'a. **Hatred of kufr and the people of kufr does not require abandoning being kind and just to them.** Allah encouraged us to be kind to those who do not fight as the previous verse says ... Muhammad visited a Jewish boy and asked him to convert to Islam and he did. He permitted Asma to be kind to her mother although she is mushrik. Umar ibn al-Khattab sent a gift to his brother before converting to Islam. It is not considered prohibited wala'a if someone expresses kindness, maintains a friendly relation with the parents and the rest of the relatives as long as they are not fighters. It is also not prohibited wala'a to engage in commercial deals, establish treaties and political relations and collaborate on international matters.

Islam's instruction in dealing with kafirs:

First: People of Dhimma, or those who agreed to a treaty where they remain on their faith and reside in the lands of Muslims under the protection of the Islamic state. It is required to uphold the rules of the agreement with them as long as they stay in accordance with it. It is not permitted to harm them, or take away their souls, wealth, or rights. Allah protected it. [...]

Second: Those with protection status, such as ambassadors, delegates that come to Islamic lands for business, education, etc. Their lives, wealth, and rights should be respected. Allah said: "And if any mushrik seeks your protection, grant him protection until he hears the words of Allah; then convey him to his place of security."

Third: Those with treaties with the Muslims not to fight. One must keep this promise, and it is forbidden to attack them if they are under a treaty. [...]

Fourth: Fighters. Allah instructs to fight them to push away their evil and harm and preserve Islam and its people. Allah said: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. Allah does not like transgressors" ... And Allah said: "**Fight those who do not believe in Allah and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, and who do not follow the Religion of Truth among those who were given the holy book, until they pay the jizya with a willing hand, being compliant.**" [...]

What does it mean to support Kafirs over Muslims?

It means to support them through loving their religion against one's Islamic state/homeland and Wali al-Amr. **This is a major kufr, and whoever does it excommunicated.** Allah said: "Whoso of you makes them his allies is one of them. Allah does guide the evildoers." It is not a [true] Muslim who supported them as an expression of love toward their religion against his own Muslim homeland.

[...] Muwala is not permitted except toward Allah, His Prophet, and the believers. Allah said: "Your friend is only Allah, and His Messenger, and the believers who perform the prayer and pay the zakat, and bow them down."

Allah praised the companions who expressed Muwala to believers and antipathy toward those who oppose Allah and his messengers. Allah said: "You shall not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day who are loving to anyone who opposes Allah and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their clan. Those -- Allah has written faith upon their hearts, and has confirmed them with a spirit from himself; and Allah shall admit them into gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to dwell forever, Allah being well-pleased with them, and they well-pleased with Him. Those are Allah's party; why, surely Allah's party -- they are the winners." Based on this verse, the believer is anyone who obeys Allah and Muhammad and hates anyone who opposes them.

Examples of love and Muwala:

- The Prophet Muhammad said: "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever."
- [...] And said in another Hadith: "A Muslim has six duties towards other Muslims: When you meet him, you should salute him; when he invites you, accept his invitation; when he asks for your advice, give it to him; when he sneezes and praises Allah, say may Allah have mercy on you; when he is ill, visit him; and when he dies, follow his funeral."

[...] Reminder:

Muslims must be proud of their religion, defend their homeland, and preserve its identity. Allah said: "The glory belongs to Allah, and His Messenger and the believers." The Muslims must not be [on the side of] the enemy fighters or support them in any form of support."^{xxxv}

Lesson 2: "Sura Hud (110-115)" Tafsir 1 (2020)

It is haram to be inclined toward the mushriks and express praise for them."^{xxxvi}

Lesson 3: "Sura Ali 'Imran (28-32)" Tafsir 2 (2020)

Introduction: The heart of the believer cannot contain a belief in Allah and wala'a to his enemies. Allah warns from taking that route and discourages it by declaring his wrath on it on this earth and punishment in the hereafter.

[verses Ali 'Imran 28-32]

Meanings of the verses:

"Awliya" - Supporters, pleased with providing them love, advice, kindness and support.

Benefits and Rulings:

[...] It is haram to perform Muwala (i.e., wala'a) to the kafirs and not the Muslims. This does not mean oppress them or assault them.^{xxxvii}

Lesson 4: "Preface to Sura Al-Nisa" Tafsir 2 (2020)

Major themes:

[...] Renouncing of hypocrites, reporting their animosity to Muslims and their Muwala (performing wala'a) to kafirs.

Condemning/denouncing the actions of some People of the Book and their misdeeds.^{xxxviii}

Lesson 5: "Preface of Sura Al-Ma'ida" Tafsir 2 (2020)

Major themes:

It is not allowed to perform Muwala to the people of desire and deviant nations.²⁷

Mentioning the rulings on theft, and the necessity of cutting off the thief's hand, as a punishment for him, and as a deterrent to others.

Calling Jews and Christians to believe in Muhammad (PBUH).^{xxxix}

²⁷ In 2017, this lesson was "It is not allowed to perform Muwala to Jews and Christians."

Conclusion

The content in the 2020 Saudi curriculum reflects a major improvement over previous editions of the textbooks. While the previous curriculum was primarily intolerant, with a handful of disjointed positive lessons, the current curriculum is primarily tolerant, with a handful of problematic lessons remaining in the textbooks. While the focus on the Saudi MOE should naturally emphasize the progress made, the focus on the textbooks must always remain on any material that could have a negative impact on the healthy development of the students. If not addressed through teacher training that also impacts upon the pedagogy in the classroom, this unfinished progress creates potential opportunities for violent extremist organizations to use the textbook material to encourage the radicalization of students.

Examples of priority milestones for additional improvement include the following:

1. The textbooks no longer dedicate a lesson unit to promoting and describing the process by which Muslims who refuse to conform to the doctrine outlined in the curriculum should be killed.

The requirement for killing an apostate is currently still described in a lesson designed to warn students about the danger of accusing someone of apostasy.

2. The textbooks no longer describe violent jihad in inflammatory terms as an aggressive war against all non-Muslims who are actively plotting to destroy Islam.

Violent jihad is currently still presented as a religious-based form of violent conflict in which students must always be prepared to engage.

3. The textbooks no longer describe non-Muslims as enemies of Allah, Islam, and all Muslims, and as legitimate targets for social hostility who must be fought until they all convert to Islam.

The current lessons on AWWB still portray non-Muslims as socially undesirable, with the only permissible interaction being transactional in nature. While the textbooks emphasize the limitations of violence against non-Muslims, the examples they provide, such as a treaty between “Muslims and Kafirs” or the collection of the jizya tax, are antiquated.

4. The textbooks no longer include a lesson that teaches students how to kill Jews at the End of Days.

Despite a decade of reform progress, these lessons remain and one lesson still describes Jews as apes.

The major changes to the curriculum in 2020 suggest that there is momentum in the reform process that will ideally continue until the textbooks are completely purged of intolerant and extremist content.

As long as content remains in the curriculum that is either explicitly intolerant, extremist, or vague in areas where students could easily interpret an extremist message, a considerable burden will be placed on Saudi teachers to mitigate the potential negative impact. For example, teachers must ensure that students understand how the conditions for not attacking a non-Muslim fit into the modern realities of war and peace. Saudi students live in a world where treaties are made between nations rather than collective religious entities, the *jiyza* is no longer collected, and the Saudi Kingdom is more likely to be allied with non-Muslims fighting against self-identified Muslims in efforts to resist extremism than it is to be in conflict with non-Muslim nations. These realities can be confusing for young students, particularly amidst active radicalization and recruitment efforts by violent extremist organizations, and certainly if they are being encouraged to prepare for entry into a globalized, and therefore diverse, marketplace.

With training, teachers can present remaining lessons, like those highlighted above, in a manner that reduces the potential for negative outcomes. They can learn to recognize when students may be forming views that are anti-social, extreme, or violent. Specialized training in these areas will be essential while objectionable lessons remain in the curriculum. Ultimately, however, both training of teachers and a final purge of remaining intolerant content should be the course of action.

Addendum – A Note from the Saudi Ministry of Education regarding Additional Revisions Undertaken from 2021-2022

The following is a summary²⁸ of the document “*Status Report on Saudi Textbooks: An update listing the changes and improvements introduced to Saudi Textbooks reported in ICRD’s Feb. 2021 report on Saudi Textbooks*”, which was provided to ICRD by the Saudi Ministry of Education in July of 2022.

Over the last several years, as indicated in ICRD’s Feb. 2021 review of Saudi textbooks, the Kingdom has made significant strides in removing material deemed to be offensive and intolerant from its religion textbooks. While progress in the previous decade had been slow, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has asserted that Saudi textbook authors have, since the 2021 ICRD report, taken even greater initiative to eliminate content regarded as antisemitic or prejudiced against other groups and religions. The MOE specifies that these changes are also per Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's Vision 2030, which aims to “enhance the quality and sustainability of the Kingdom's education as one of its pillars.” ICRD has been assured, and has no reason to doubt, that further edits will not only include redactions of harmful material, but additions and alterations of material aimed to show a positive image of other nations, groups, and religions. More of these changes are expected to follow as the MOE prepares for the 2022 school year. The reform commitment of the Saudi MOE seems more authentic than ever, as evidenced by H.E. Minister of Education Hamad al-Sheikh’s clear articulation of the Ministry’s and the Kingdom’s desire to prepare students for a diverse and pluralist global marketplace.

The Ministry of Education flagged thirty-seven passages in ten 10-12 grade religion textbooks, which had been referenced in ICRD’s 2021 report. In their summary report, the MOE indicated that four of the books: *At-Tawheed 3 - 5th Level*, *Hadith 3 - 5th Level*, *Tafseer 4 - 5th Level*, and *Tafseer 5 - 6th Level*, were removed entirely from the Kingdom's education system. New texts on these subjects will be authored to fit the Kingdom's new trimester education system, which will come into effect this coming school year. The removal of these texts was, itself, a large step toward removing intolerant content, but it is important to note that the development of replacement curriculums is ongoing.

The Ministry’s report also included images that demonstrate the removal of problematic material from a few of the textbooks that remain in the curriculum. For example, in *Tafseer 1*, content on Surah At-Tawbah was removed. This Surah details the consequences of unrepentance - specifically, the unrepentance of those from other faiths. Additionally, *Hadith 2*’s controversial material on violent Jihad against non-believers was redacted. In *Tafseer 2*, content was removed on Surah An-Nisa, which historically has been used to support several controversial ideas about women. In the same text, content glorifying violence and loss of life to spread of Islam was also

²⁸ ICRD staff compiled this summary based on information and evidence provided by the KSA MOE. The details within the report have yet to be verified by ICRD independently, however, images of edited texts were provided where relevant.

shown to be removed in the images that were sent. The MOE stated that there is no plan to re-introduce these concepts in future textbook editions.

Finally, some material is undergoing review and restructuring to satisfy religious educators and critics, rather than being entirely removed. Examples include: content in *At-Tawheed 1* on Sihr (black magic) and the morality of socializing, aiding, or having compassion for nonbelievers; *At-Tawheed 2* material on the apocalypse, and; *Tafseer 2*'s interpretation of Surah ali 'Imran celebrating martyrdom and insulting 'kafirs' (broadly understood to mean non-Muslims). The MOE has stated that these items and others are expected to be rewritten before the beginning of the next school semester.

Overall, in the ten textbooks included in the Ministry's summary to ICRD, which references items highlighted in ICRD's 2021 report, there were thirty-seven instances of intolerant, violent, or otherwise harmful material that was said to be removed or revised. The MOE stated that they have completely removed four of those books from Saudi Arabia's educational system, redacted chapters from three other books, and are reviewing nine chapters from the three remaining books. The head of the curriculum development center has indicated that the trimester system, which has been in effect since 2021, has had a significant impact due to the "introduction of the new high school "pathways" track system and the specialized secondary schools, which led to the replacement of some of the existing textbooks and introduction of new textbooks for the pathways schools." The MOE is, by all measures, making significant strides in revising Saudi textbooks in recent years, per the Vision 2030 reform priorities in the Kingdom, and with the support of recommendations from ICRD. As of the drafting of this Addendum, the next school year in the Kingdom is quickly approaching, and the baseline reviews produced by ICRD, spanning the decade from 2011 to 2021, may provide a thorough reference for assessing the MOE's continued reform success.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Ridda (Apostasy)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.56-62
- ⁱⁱ Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Ridiculing Islam and Trivializing its Divinity”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.134-135
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Al-Wala’a wal-Bara’a”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.220-226
- ^{iv} Hadith 3(5) (2019). “Hadith 12”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.146
- ^v Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Respect for the Companions”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.200-203
- ^{vi} Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Shirk”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.14
- ^{vii} Hadith 3(5) (2019). “Ethics of Travel”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.182
- ^{viii} Tafsir 4(5) (2017). “Sura al-Tawba”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.94
- ^{ix} Tafsir 4(5) (2017). “Sura al-Tawba”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.153-162
- ^x Tafsir 1 (2019). “Sura al-Tawba”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.94-113
- ^{xi} Tawhid 2 (2019). “Signs of the End of Times”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.86
- ^{xii} Tawhid 2 (2020). “Dangers of Takfir”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.156-157
- ^{xiii} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Magic”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.150-151
- ^{xiv} Hadith 2 (2020). “Jihad”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.178
- ^{xv} Hadith 2 (2020). “Jihad”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.173
- ^{xvi} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.168-172
- ^{xvii} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Sura ali ‘Imran (137-141)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.132-135
- ^{xviii} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Sura ali ‘Imran (146-151)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.140-143
- ^{xix} Hadith 1 (2020). “Hadith 15”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.98
- ^{xx} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Sura al-An'am (151)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.215-217
- ^{xxi} Hadith 1 (2020). “Ethics of Humor”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.164
- ^{xxii} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Types of Kufir”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.134-136
- ^{xxiii} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Dua”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.147
- ^{xxiv} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Mocking the Religion”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.154-156
- ^{xxv} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.169
- ^{xxvi} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Sura ali ‘Imran (104-107)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.119-121
- ^{xxvii} Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Correct Understandings of Bara’a”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.240
- ^{xxviii} Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Al-Wala’a wal-Bara’a”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.220-226
- ^{xxix} Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Al-Wala’a wal-Bara’a”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.220-226
- ^{xxx} Tawhid 3(5) (2019). “Correct Understanding of Bara’a”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.239-240
- ^{xxxi} Hadith 3(5) (2019). “Ethical Guidelines in Dealing with Servants”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.266
- ^{xxxii} Tafsir 5(6) (2017). “Sura al-Ma’eda (51-66)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.14
- ^{xxxiii} Tafsir 4(5) (2017). “Sura al-Tawba”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.31-39
- ^{xxxiv} Tafsir 4(5) (2017). “Sura al-An’am (159-165)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.193-199
- ^{xxxv} Tawhid 1 (2020). “Supporting Kafirs over Muslims”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.168-172
- ^{xxxvi} Tafsir 1 (2020). “Sura Hud (110-115)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.122
- ^{xxxvii} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Sura ali ‘Imran (28-32)”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. pp.112-114
- ^{xxxviii} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Preface to Sura Al-Nisa”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.155
- ^{xxxix} Tafsir 2 (2020). “Sura al-Ma’ida”. Secondary Level Textbook. Saudi Ministry of Education. p.192