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Study: Iran Indoctrinating Children in Islamic Supremacism

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WASHINGTON — A new Freedom House study of Iranian textbooks finds that the Islamic Republic is teaching its children to embrace Islamic supremacism, preparing them to enter a political system that discriminates against women and non-Muslims.

The study, "Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks," is the most comprehensive to date of Iran's textbooks, analyzing 95 compulsory textbooks for grades one to 11. The main author of the study, Saeed Paivandi, is a sociologist at Paris-8 University and one of the few Western scholars to specialize in Iran's post-revolutionary education system.

"The discourse of the textbooks has not been written with the concept of equality of all human beings, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," the study concludes. "In the

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textbooks' reasoning, human beings cannot be equal with one another on this earth, in the same way that, on the day of reckoning, they will be subject to divine judgment for their identity and actions. The trend,

based on the clear and official negation of the equality of human beings, created different positions for the various people in society. Some individuals are born first-class citizens, due to their identity, gender, and way of thinking, while others become second- and third-class citizens. Those who are excluded from the inside are victims of this discriminatory system."

That system inside Iran has led to a raft of laws that prohibit non-Muslims from holding high government and military posts, enforce a quota of non-Muslims allowed to matriculate at universities, and require non-Muslim shopkeepers to designate their stores as such. But the lessons of Islamic supremacism also applies to Iran's foreign policy, which the American government says is to support terrorist groups throughout the Middle East. For example, the Islamic culture religious studies textbook for eighth-grade instructs, "Defensive jihad is incumbent upon every one, the young and the old, men and women, everyone, absolutely everyone, must take part in this sacred battle, fight to the best of his or her abilities or assist our fighters."

A seventh-grade textbook on the same subject says: "By taking note of the guidance and instructions provided by Islam, every Muslim youth must strike fear in the hearts of the enemies of God and their people through combat-readiness and skillful target shooting. He must always be ready to defend his country, honor, and faith and use all his capabilities and power in this endeavor. After the victory of the revolution, His Holiness Imam Khomeini, the deceased leader of the Islamic revolution, issued an order for the establishment of the basij (paramilitary group) for the oppressed."

The report places the present school curriculum in Iran in the context of the country's ancient tradition of religious Muslim schools but finds major differences between the two. Iran's modern school curriculum, for example, teaches secular topics such as science and political history, while the Khomeinist doctrine of the state runs through these subjects, as well. On lessons on world history, the textbooks emphasize a unity with fellow Islamic republics.

The textbooks also enforce a strict view that women should be at home raising children. A 10th-grade textbook for religion and life says, "A mother whose husband earns sufficient income cannot say, 'My job demands that I leave my child at the day care center every day,' and, in this way deprive her child from her constant love and attention."

While the textbooks recognize other religious groups in Iran, including Jews, they refer to followers of the Bahai faith as members of a cult.

The Freedom House study is not the first review of Iranian textbooks. Last year a Jerusalem-based think tank, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, did its own review, which concluded that Iran was preparing children to become radical martyrs. The Freedom House study takes a broader approach to the textbooks, but it also finds that martyrdom is encouraged in grades one through 11.

"In the Farsi textbooks of Grades 1 through 11, 31 lessons discuss martyrdom and death for the sake of religious or political beliefs. These lessons are mostly biographies or autobiographies of important religious figures of the past, including soldiers and officers of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution and the basij (paramilitary group)," the Freedom House study says.

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