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## THESIS

**VIRTUE AND VICE: MORALITY POLICE AND SOCIAL  
CONTROL IN ISLAMIC REGIMES**

by

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December 2017

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**VIRTUE AND VICE: MORALITY POLICE AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN  
ISLAMIC REGIMES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Certain states with religious systems of governance maintain and deploy morality police forces as a mechanism of social control. What role do morality police play in the social control programs of Islamic states? How are those forces employed, and what are the effects of those forces on society? These issues were explored through a comparative study of morality policing programs under three Islamic regimes: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban. This thesis argues that states with religious systems of government employ morality police as a formal method of social control to expand and stabilize their rule. Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, and enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity. The examination of the selected cases further suggests that the tactics and operations of morality police have led to certain levels of domestic unrest. Despite some measures taken toward curbing the forces, regimes perceive them as too valuable for the preservation of society, religion, and political power to abolish completely.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.	Hegemony and Informal Methods of Social Control.....	6
2.	Power and Formal Methods of Social Control.....	10
3.	Conclusion .....	12
<b>D.</b>	<b>POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>F.</b>	<b>THESIS OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>G.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>15</b>
 <b>II.</b>	 <b>MORALITY POLICING IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA.....</b>	 <b>17</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND OF SAUDI ARABIA AND GOVERNMENT- SPONSORED MORALITY POLICING .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF MORALITY POLICE FORCES .....</b>	<b>21</b>
1.	Structure of the CPVPV .....	21
2.	Vigilante Morals Policing: Non-CPVPV Volunteers .....	23
3.	Morality Policing of Drugs and Alcohol .....	24
4.	Morality Policing of Gender, Clothing, and Sexuality .....	25
5.	Maintaining Islamic Culture: Music and Western Influences .....	31
6.	Policing Religion: Prayer, Suppression of the Shia, and Apostasy .....	32
7.	Policing Witchcraft .....	34
<b>C.</b>	<b>REFORMING THE MORALITY POLICE: THE CPVPV, MEDIA, AND CLERICAL POWER.....</b>	<b>35</b>
1.	Abdullah’s Reforms: 2006 to 2007 .....	36
2.	The Arab Spring: Dissent and Oppression Online .....	37
3.	2016: Rise of Muhammad bin Salman, Vision 2030, and the CPVPV’s Survival .....	39
4.	CPVPV Online: Reforming the Morality Brand .....	41
<b>D.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>43</b>
 <b>III.</b>	 <b>MORALITY POLICING IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN .....</b>	 <b>45</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED MORALITY POLICING.....</b>	<b>46</b>

B.	STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF MORALITY POLICE FORCES .....	47
1.	Structure of the Basij Militia .....	48
2.	Guidance Patrols .....	50
3.	Ansar-e Hezbollah and Vigilante Morality Policing.....	52
4.	Morality Policing of Drugs and Alcohol .....	53
5.	Morality Policing of Clothing, Gender Segregation, and Sexuality .....	54
6.	Maintaining Islamic Culture.....	60
7.	Policing Religion: Religious Minorities, Mysticism, and Witchcraft.....	61
C.	REFORMING THE MORALITY POLICE AND CONSERVATIVE POWER .....	62
D.	CONCLUSION .....	64
IV.	MORALITY POLICING IN THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN .....	67
A.	BACKGROUND OF THE TALIBAN AND MORALITY POLICING .....	68
B.	STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF THE TALIBAN'S MPVPV .....	70
1.	Structure of the MPVPV .....	70
2.	Morality Policing of Drugs.....	72
3.	Morality Policing of Gender Segregation, Clothing, and Sexuality .....	73
C.	THE SURVIVAL OF MORALITY POLICING AFTER 2001 .....	79
D.	CONCLUSION .....	81
V.	CONCLUSION .....	83
A.	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH .....	84
B.	FINDINGS .....	86
C.	RE-EXAMINATION OF THE HYPOTHESES.....	88
D.	IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	90
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	93
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	109

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CITC	Communications and Information Technology Commission
CPVPV	Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
DPVPV	Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
LGBT	lesbian gay bisexual transsexual
MPVPV	Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
NGO	non-governmental organization
NTP	national transformation program

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The United States remains interested and involved in the security of the Middle East. As the Arab Spring uprisings showed, regional security can be negatively impacted by domestic unrest in regional states. In part, discontentment with poor governance coupled with a lack of political rights fueled the Arab Spring, and could lead to further unrest in certain states in the future. This thesis examines one controversial aspect of governance: the internal security role of morality police. Many countries in the Middle East—including U.S. allies and adversaries—rely on morality police to control society. Although morality policing may help in the maintenance of security in some states, it has also led to protest at a social level, especially in response to the political oppression and human rights abuses sometimes connected to morality policing. As regional state approaches to morality policing face potential changes in the coming decade, what would change mean for the stability of the states that employ it?

### **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

Social control is the employment of formal and informal methods to correct and prevent deviant, criminal, or otherwise undesirable behavior.<sup>1</sup> Formal social control methods, which include law, policing, and legal punishment, can be a valuable tool for states to maintain control of their population. Certain states with religious systems of governance maintain and deploy morality police forces as a mechanism of social control. This thesis examined morals policing through the theoretical lens of social control, and asked what role do morality police play in the social control programs of Islamic states? How those forces are employed, and the effects of those forces on society, were also examined. These issues were explored through a comparative study of morality policing in three Islamic governments: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the short-lived Taliban state known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (hereafter, the Taliban).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Innes, *Understanding Social Control: Deviance, Crime and Social Order* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>2</sup> For clarity, these states will be referred to as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The United States has abiding interests in the Middle East. Many of these interests revolve around conflict and security, which makes the stability of regional states critical. Therefore, it is important to examine the resiliency of these regimes, both allies and adversaries, and the challenges associated with some of the methods they employ to maintain domestic security. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban—regimes that differ with respect to religious practices, languages, ethnicities, and mode of government—all employ or employed morality police forces to enforce Islamic codes and standards within society as a mechanism of social control. Despite the prominence of morality policing in these states and in the Middle East more broadly, there has been no comparative scholarly analysis on morality policing as a means of social control.

Further, in recent decades, growing opposition has led some states to curtail the authority and operations of their morality police. Will these actions undermine regime stability, or alternatively, could they have an ameliorating effect on social dissent? Either way, with the spread of instability through war and sectarianism throughout the region, the use of morality policing as a means of maintaining state power in the Middle East is an area worth exploring. This thesis will do that through a comparative analysis of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Of the states under consideration, Saudi Arabia is the only one to be an ally of the United States. Saudi Arabia and the United States maintain military and economic ties that date back to Chevron's discovery of Saudi oil in 1938. Despite various setbacks to U.S.–Saudi relations throughout the decades, Saudi Arabia remains the United States' main military and counterterrorism partner in the Persian Gulf region. As the largest and most influential of the Persian Gulf states, the United States relies on Saudi Arabia's influence in the Middle East to maintain its military presence in the Gulf, continue the extraction and sale of oil, and cooperate with U.S. efforts to contain and oppose adversaries such as Iraq under Saddam Hussein and Iran after the Islamic Revolution. In recent decades, the United States has increasingly relied on Saudi Arabia to combat and contain extreme religious and terrorist groups both domestically and within the wider



Middle East region. Saudi Arabia is also the largest foreign customer of American weapons systems, which makes it critical for the U.S. defense industry.<sup>3</sup>

With such close economic and military ties, it is in the interest of the United States that Saudi Arabia remains secure and stable. The forces of the Saudi government's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) may play a role in regime stability. However, several high-profile incidents of abuse in recent years led the state to limit their authority following public outcry.<sup>4</sup> If morality police in Saudi Arabia are truly curtailed, what effects if any will it have on the state's ability to project power and control over society?

Iran is the chief U.S. adversary in the region. Iran and the United States experienced a fraught relationship following the 1979 revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis.<sup>5</sup> The leaders of Iran's regime have been committed to ridding the Middle East of the presence and influence of the United States and Israel, and adopted a foreign policy of sponsoring militant groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah. Despite the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which curbs Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, U.S.—Iranian relations remain strained.<sup>6</sup> With Iranian involvement in the Syrian Civil War in support of the Assad regime and in Yemen in support of the Houthi rebellion, both of which put Tehran on the opposite side of the United States and its allies, and tensions mounting between Iran and U.S.-allied Arab Sunni states, Iran remains one of the United States' top state adversary in the Middle East.

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<sup>3</sup> "U.S.-Saudi Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, May 12, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-saudi-relations>.

<sup>4</sup> "Saudi Arabia: A Move to Curb Religious Police Abuses," Human Rights Watch, 18 April, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/18/saudi-arabia-move-curb-religious-police-abuses-0>.

<sup>5</sup> "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, Since 1776: Iran," United States Department of State Office of the Historian, Accessed 10 May, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/countries/iran>.

<sup>6</sup> "Iran Nuclear Deal: Key Details," *BBC News*, 16 January 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33521655>.

Iran employs forces from the Basij militia to conduct morality policing and other security roles alongside more traditional police forces.<sup>7</sup> The potential for the Basij to engage in physical violence and abuse has contributed to episodes of social unrest, such as the 1999 student protests and the mass demonstrations that followed the 2009 presidential election. Understanding the role that morality policing plays in the security of the Iran's system of clerical rule as well as its potential for fueling anti-regime politics and protest is important, even more so after the nuclear deal, as Iran's tries to re-enter the international economic system and assert its role as an important player in the Middle East.

Afghanistan has been central to American interests in the Middle East since the 1980s, when the United States funded *mujahedeen* militants to fight against the Soviet invasion. In 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, toppling the Taliban regime but launching a conflict that continues through the time of this writing.<sup>8</sup> Despite continued U.S. and allied counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, the Taliban remains an entrenched enemy in Afghanistan. Fighting between Afghan forces and the Taliban continues, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties each year.<sup>9</sup> In May 2017, the Washington Post reported that the Trump administration was considering increasing U.S. troop levels by at least 3,000 and expanding combat roles, demonstrating that the United States has a continued interest in the stability of Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

An effect of the continuing war is that areas of Afghanistan exist in a “dual system” of both government and Taliban control. In these Taliban-controlled territories,

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<sup>7</sup> Saeid Golkar, *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 75–77.

<sup>8</sup> Zachary Laub, “Council on Foreign Relations: The Taliban in Afghanistan,” July 4, 2014, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>.

<sup>9</sup> “World Report 2016 – Afghanistan,” Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/afghanistan#bb079e>.

<sup>10</sup> Missy Ryan and Greg Jaffe, “U.S. Poised to Expand Military Effort Against Taliban in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, 8 May 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-poised-to-expand-military-effort-against-taliban-in-afghanistan/2017/05/08/356c4930-33fa-11e7-b412-62beef8121f7\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1042ef17d6d8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-poised-to-expand-military-effort-against-taliban-in-afghanistan/2017/05/08/356c4930-33fa-11e7-b412-62beef8121f7_story.html?utm_term=.1042ef17d6d8).

many of the morals policing of the pre-2001 era continues.<sup>11</sup> Examining how the Taliban used morality police to strengthen the regime's control in society in the past could prove useful to understanding how the group utilizes coercion at the social level, and to what it might be aiming to achieve as it continues to resist the U.S.-backed Afghan government and vie for territorial control.

Morality policing is not an isolated phenomenon. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2012, one in ten countries had some form of religious or morality police force. In the Middle East and North Africa region, 35 percent of countries have such forces.<sup>12</sup> Pew also listed Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan as states with "very high restrictions on religion" through 2012.<sup>13</sup> In 2016, Freedom House scored all three nations as "not free" and ranked Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia 173, 177, and 204 respectively out of 211 states and territories on their Freedom Index.<sup>14</sup> These three cases are or were highly controlled societies, and all three states employed morality policing as a means to maintain that control. They are also all facing challenges to their stability and security as conflict consumes the region and populations agitate for freedoms and rights. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan continue to have profound importance in U.S. policy, and an examination of the connection between morality police and the state may prove to provide answers to how regimes conduct social control and to what extent religion-based social control methods strengthen (or undermine) a regime's hold on power.

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<sup>11</sup> Auliya Atrafi, Ali Hussein, and Attahullah Safi, "Taliban Territory: Life in Afghanistan Under the Militants," *BBC News*, 8 June, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40171379>.

<sup>12</sup> Angelina Theodorou, "Religious Police found in nearly One-in Ten Countries Worldwide," Pew Research Center, March 19, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/19/religious-police-found-in-nearly-one-in-ten-countries-worldwide/>.

<sup>13</sup> "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High," Pew Research Center, January 14, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Freedom in the World 2016," Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>; "Freedom in the World 2016 Table of Country Scores," Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2016/table-scores>.

## C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts and theories of social control abound in many academic fields in the social sciences.<sup>15</sup> As sociologist Martin Innes contended, there exists little consensus about what exactly social control is; many scholars disagree about basic definitions of social control, as well as the role of state power within in.<sup>16</sup> Sociologists such as Stanley Cohen and Donald Black define social control in a way many social scientists ascribe to, and that is the definition this thesis will employ: exertion of control within society to prevent or punish deviant behavior, to include both formal and informal methods.<sup>17</sup> As Innes described, informal methods of social control are varied and include family ties, cultural norms, and religious beliefs. Formal methods indicate state involvement and include policing and punishment.<sup>18</sup>

The broad literature on social control can be divided into two basic schools of thought: those that emphasize the importance of formal methods of social control and those that stress the importance of informal methods. This literature review will explore the case for informal methods through a discussion of the theoretical frameworks provided by Antonio Gramsci and Travis Hirschi. It will further address the discourse surrounding the intersections of cultural hegemony, religion, and self-control. The case for formal methods of social control, such as policing, punishment, and state power, will then be reviewed through theories introduced by Michel Foucault and engaged by scholars Ervand Abrahamian, Bryan Turner, and Jason Powell.

### 1. Hegemony and Informal Methods of Social Control

One of the most influential Marxist philosophers on social control is Antonio Gramsci, who linked the product of social control to the larger issues of hegemony and power. Hegemony, in Gramsci's conceptualization, is the cultural domination of one social class over another. And as Roger Simon explained, in Gramsci's view, the

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<sup>15</sup> Innes, *Understanding Social Control*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 7.

“maintenance of hegemony” is necessary for the dominant class to retain its status.<sup>19</sup> Gramsci understood power as the relationship between social classes (i.e., between the proletariat and bourgeoisie), and the manifestation of power relations is the state.<sup>20</sup> To maintain hegemony, those in power must constantly tend to the class relationships within civil society that put them there in the first place.<sup>21</sup> As religion plays a role in the maintenance of hegemony, this theory is a significant advancement of informal social control. Gramsci inspired many later scholars, including philosopher Michel Foucault, who is discussed in a later section.

Adam Possamai employed Gramsci’s framework on religion in his case study of popular or “hyperreal” religions that have proliferated in the Internet age.<sup>22</sup> Possamai explained hegemony as the state or class elites maintaining “moral leadership” over other groups through, in part, an official state religion.<sup>23</sup> According to Gramsci, disenfranchised classes and groups could wield popular religions against the hegemony of the ruling class if the state or official religious institutions embraced them.<sup>24</sup> In his study of “Jediism” as a popular religion in the modern world, Possamai argued popular religion could not be a counter-hegemonic force in a world where religion is standardized and consumed as a commodity.<sup>25</sup> This illustrates the power of the state and other institutions in determining the success of religion as a part of the hegemonic order.

While Possamai found the influence of popular religion was blunted by commercialization, sociologist Dwight Billings argued religion could play a large role in the maintenance or disruption of the hegemonic status quo. In his case study of unionizing American laborers in Appalachian coal mining towns, Billings applied

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<sup>19</sup> Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015), 35.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Possamai, “Gramsci, Jediism, the Standardization of Popular Religion and the State,” In *Religion and the State*, edited by Barbalet, Jack, Adam Possamai and Bryan Turner, 245–164 (New York: Anthem Press, 2013), 245.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>24</sup> Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought*, 245.

<sup>25</sup> Possamai, “Gramsci, Jediism, the Standardization of Popular Religion and the State,” 260–261.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony to examine the role Protestant clergy played in encouraging their constituents to either maintain submit to their employers or foment opposition—or “counter-hegemony”—by unionizing.<sup>26</sup> According to Gramsci, there had to be room for “autonomous organizations” to operate within society to allow for the growth of free thought and the organization of a counter-hegemonic movement. Billings argued that the clergy were not inherently apart of the hegemonic system. They were independent entities, and had the resources and influence to either support the hegemonic class or encourage resistance to it, depending on the clergy's own beliefs and interests.<sup>27</sup>

Shifting to the criminological perspective, Travis Hirschi pioneered concepts of informal social control, particularly the examination of the likelihood of adolescents to commit crimes or other acts of deviancy. In their often cited and tested survey of American children, Hirschi and Rodney Stark argued that religion, specifically church attendance, did not determine the likelihood of adolescents to commit crimes or acts of deviancy.<sup>28</sup> They maintained that social bonds fostered within the community and an ingrained respect for the law had more of a bearing on lack of criminal activity than a belief in “supernatural” religious sanctions, such as punishment from God in the afterlife.<sup>29</sup> Later, Hirschi and Michael Gottfredson advanced the theory that crime results from a lack of internal self-control. Self-control is derived from childhood socialization by the family and community, and not from external mechanisms, such as policing.<sup>30</sup> Hirschi and Gottfredson argued the state was not a “solution to crime,” and that there is little the state could do to prevent crime beyond encouraging the socialization of young children toward self-control.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dwight Billings, “Religion as Opposition: A Gramscian Analysis,” *American Journal of Sociology* 96, no. 3 (Jul 1, 1990): 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark, “Hellfire and Delinquency,” *Social Problems* 17, no. 2 (Oct 1969), 212.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 209–211.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 274.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

Since Hirschi's theories were introduced, they have been extremely influential in sociology and criminology. When it comes to case studies testing these theories, specifically Hirschi and Stark on the role of religion in social control, the conclusions within the literature vary widely.<sup>32</sup> Criminologist Michael Cretacci examined the role of social bond and religion in adolescents' propensity to commit violent acts.<sup>33</sup> Cretacci stated that while Hirschi and Stark did not find correlation between religion and deviancy, many other scholars and researchers had. Cretacci concluded from his own survey of adolescents that religion as social control had little to no impact on adolescent violence.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Lee Ross conducted a study of religiosity and self-reported deviance among adolescents and concluded that morals, family, respect for authority, and belief in "supernatural sanctions" were all important factors in social control.<sup>35</sup> Ross argued that his findings were consistent with the body of literature that agreed with Hirschi and Stark that religion alone "could not compete" with other social control methods.<sup>36</sup>

The case studies addressed above, like most that apply Hirschi's theory and methodology, focus on adolescents and the role of religion and self-control play in the likelihood that they will commit acts of deviancy from an individualized perspective. These are valuable theories on informal methods of control. However, the following sections will focus on more formal methods of control that are imposed on society by the state, as opposed to informal methods that are imposed on the individual by personal belief.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Cretacci, "Religion and Social Control," *Criminal Justice Review* 28, no. 2 (Sep 2003), 255.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>35</sup> Lee Ross, "Religion and Deviance: Exploring the Impact of Social Control Elements," *Sociological Spectrum* 14, no. 1 (Jan 1994), 65, 81.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

## 2. Power and Formal Methods of Social Control

The will of the state in maintaining social control and reducing deviant behavior is manifested in police forces and their activities, according to Innes, who outlined three areas of police responsibility: “crime management,” “order management,” and “security management.”<sup>37</sup> Crime management refers to the investigation of crimes after they are committed. Order management is the maintenance of order in public spaces, for example, during demonstrations and protest. Security management is a combination of crime and order management—essentially, it is the range of actions police take to project the power of the state over society to promote a sense of security and to respond to security threats when needed.<sup>38</sup> As this thesis is concerned with the use of morality police forces as formal methods of social control, it will focus on these forms of management as it examines how morality police respond to or prevent deviant behavior.

Michel Foucault explored social control as the state exerting its power on society through mechanisms of torture, punishment, discipline, and the prison. He argued punishment of social deviants was a “complex social function” and a “political tactic” for the state.<sup>39</sup> Foucault argued that society and the state employ various methods such as surveillance and punishment to discourage deviancy in society by controlling individuals both mentally and physically.<sup>40</sup> In his examination of how Western society moved away from public executions and torture to privatized punishment, Foucault also explored “the spectacle of the scaffold,” where the sovereigns of monarchical and authoritarian regimes reclaimed their power from social deviants in public displays of punishment.<sup>41</sup> Foucault originated many theories and concepts throughout his career. This thesis will primarily focus on his thoughts on power and the state, from punishment to “governmentality,” which will be discussed further below.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 65–66.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 15–16.

<sup>40</sup> Innes, *Understanding Social Control*, 24–25.

<sup>41</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 47–54.



Historian Ervand Abrahamian examined the use of torture and incarceration against political dissidents throughout Iran's modern history. In his search for an answer to why the Islamic Republic used torture, Abrahamian used Foucauldian theory to argue that the state did not employ public displays of torture to establish social conformity. Instead, the state tortured prisoners in secret.<sup>42</sup> Torture was used to induce prisoners to recant their political and religious ideologies. These "recantations" were disseminated to the public and served as propaganda for the state, which was made more effective by the fact that the public was unaware of the coercive measures taken to force prisoners to make their statements.<sup>43</sup> This thesis, however, will explore the public aspect of punishment and the effect that publicity has on controlling society.

The concept of governmentality was part of Foucault's theory on power; as there are multiple sources of power in society, religious institutions offer an alternative power source to the government, so the state must subjugate religion to maintain its own power.<sup>44</sup> In an application of this theory, Bryan Turner used Singapore as a case study to examine state control of religion on both liberal and authoritarian states. Turner argued that all states involved themselves in some form of "management of religion."<sup>45</sup> In the case of Singapore, the government attempted to maintain its power over a religious and ethnically diverse society by creating an artificial sense of "social cohesion."<sup>46</sup> Jason Powell applied governmentality theory to his exploration on the Chinese state's influence on their aging population.<sup>47</sup> As the state attempted to limit its influence on lives of Chinese citizens, the aging nature of the population necessitated an increased role instead due to the lack of familial and community support. The state then relied on surveillance

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<sup>42</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Bryan Turner, "Religion in Liberal and Authoritarian States," In *Religion and the State*, edited by Barbalet, Jack, Adam Possamai and Bryan Turner, 25–42 (New York: Anthem Press, 2013), 30.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25–26.

<sup>47</sup> Jason Powell, "A Foucauldian Assessment of China and Aging," *Hallym International Journal of Aging* 8, no. 2 (Jan 1, 2006), 83.

technologies and material support to assert itself as the main source of power in society.<sup>48</sup> These case studies demonstrate the role the state can play in social control by relying on religion as well as formal methods of control.

### **3. Conclusion**

The preceding review explored two schools of thought on social control: informal and formal methods. Gramsci and Hirschi, while operating under different contexts and disciplines, both examined the role religion played in power and social control. While Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban all employed religion within their governing systems, religion as an informal method of control through the lens of such scholars as Gramsci and Hirschi is contingent on social class and the individual. This is not an analysis that would be appropriate to apply to morality policing. While religion will be an important consideration in the selected cases, to examine religion as an informal control at the individual level is outside the scope of this thesis. Alternatively, the Foucauldian theories explored above will be employed as a way to examine formal methods of control. The “morality,” or religious, aspect of “morality police” and how they affect individual belief are not emphasized in this thesis. How morality police forces are employed, the punishment they and the rest of the state inflicts, and how those methods project power into society are questions that necessitate a focus on formal controls.

### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

This thesis seeks to explain how morality policing contributes or contributed to the social control programs of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban. Based on a review of the literature, there are two broad categories of social control methods: informal and formal. While informal methods such as religion and family cannot be discounted as integral components of social control, this thesis contends that policing and punishment has the most important effect in the control of social societies by the state. This thesis explored how states conduct social control programs, and because the selected countries are governed by religion-based state systems, morality policing is a key way for the state

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 92–93.

to extend its authority into society. This thesis argues that states use morality policing in an attempt to expand and stabilize their rule. To test this, the following sections advance three hypotheses.

(1) First Hypothesis

Morality police forces lend religious legitimacy to Islamic regimes by creating public spaces that adhere to Islamic morality and mores. Morality police enforce Islam in practice in the population's public life. By making Islam visible in practice at the social level, these states reaffirm their founding commitment to religion which undergirds their claims of political legitimacy.

(2) Second Hypothesis

Morality police forces reinforce the political conformity within society. By enforcing uniformity in society, morality police inherently repress the expression, organization, and action of dissenting political alternatives to the regime. The regime attempts to retain a monopoly on political control by controlling the public space.

(3) Third Hypothesis

Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, and enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis is comprised of a comparative case study of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban. The purpose of this study was to compare the following factors: the structure and operational patterns of morality police forces, state motivation and justification for deployment of morality police, and overall effectiveness of the forces. To test the hypotheses discussed above, particular attention was paid to whether methods employed by the police forces concentrated on control of public space, the concept of punishment as spectacle or deterrent, or other formal or informal social control methods.

As social control is a broad subject, this thesis borrowed the themes Michael Cook identified in his work on forbidding wrong in Islam—wine, women, and song.<sup>49</sup> These themes will be modified to encompass 1) drugs and alcohol, 2) gender, clothing, and sexuality, and 3) music and social practices and behavior associated with Western secular culture. These themes were analyzed along with Foucauldian concepts of punishment as social control.

Research for this thesis included relevant secondary works and primary source materials. Secondary sources included government reports, non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, books, journal articles, and scholarly discourses about relevant topics. Primary sources included news reports from both Western and Middle Eastern media, foreign government websites, statements, and propaganda, as well as religious and popular sources including social media and other relevant resources.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction. The second through fourth chapters are comprised of the case studies of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban. Each case study chapter contains historical context and discussions of how morality police forces operate and are employed by those governments in those countries. These sections are further divided into analyses of police force structure and operations, methods, and effectiveness. The fifth chapter contains a comparison of each case, and analyzes the role of the morality police as a formal method of state control with tests of the three hypotheses. The fifth chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of thesis findings and recommendations for future study of morality policing and regime stability. Below is a brief summary of the research findings presented in the following chapters.

Chapter II examined the case of morality policing in Saudi Arabia. The program is executed by the CPVPV, a nominally independent law enforcement agency that is administered by clerics and reports to the king. The CPVPV's morality police patrol

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67.

public spaces to uphold religious laws and norms in Saudi society. The CPVPV target those suspected of questioning the political and religious legitimacy of the regime as well as those who violate laws such as gender segregation, the dress code, and public prayer requirements. In recent years, regime instituted a series of reforms to limit the CPVPV's authorities in response to criticisms of the commission's tactics. Despite reform attempts, Saudi morality police remain in power and under the protection of conservative religious authorities.

Chapter III explored the morality policing program in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran's morality program is a whole-of-government effort that relies on broad mobilization of various segments of society to enforce. State authorities rely on morality policing forces drawn from the Basij militia, National Police Force, and other law enforcement and security agencies to complete various missions, including the suppression of political and religious dissent. Despite domestic agitation for reform, the clerical establishment direct and protect morality police forces in order to pursue the maintenance of an Islamic society.

Chapter IV explored the morality policing program of the Taliban during the group's tenure in power as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban rose to power in the midst of civil war, and the group's morality police forces employed violent physical measures to control the populations of the Taliban's seized territories by dictating dress, public behavior, and restricting the movement and employment of women. Despite the Taliban's fall from power after the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the Taliban continues to employ morality policing in territories under its control in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the research question, explored a subset of the broad literature that exists on the subject of social control, and posited three hypotheses to answer the research question. Social control, for the purpose of this thesis, was defined as the use of formal and informal methods of control within society to prevent or punish deviant or otherwise undesirable behavior. With this definition established, the question

of the thesis was posed: what role do morality police play in the social control programs of Islamic states? A review of the literature on informal and formal methods of social control concluded that formal methods of control, as advanced by Foucauldian theories of policing, punishment, and state power, was the most appropriate lens with which to examine morality policing. Three hypotheses were advanced to answer the research question. 1) Morality police forces lend religious legitimacy to Islamic regimes by creating public spaces that adhere to Islamic morality and mores; 2) Morality police forces reinforce the political conformity within society; and 3) Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, and enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity. The findings of the research, as presented in Chapter V, conclude that the first and second hypotheses are not complete enough to answer the question. Therefore, this thesis relies on the third hypothesis to advance the principle argument: states with religious systems of government employ morality police to expand and stabilize their rule. Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, as well as enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity. The examination of the selected cases further suggests that the tactics and operations of morality police have led to certain levels of domestic unrest. Despite some measures taken toward curbing the forces, regimes perceive them as too valuable for the preservation of society, religion, and political power to abolish completely.

## II. MORALITY POLICING IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

The events of the twenty-first century have dealt a series of challenges to the authoritarian rulers of states across the Middle East; the United States' ally Saudi Arabia is no exception. The threat of unrest from the Arab Spring, the rise of social media and political dissent, and the country's desire to normalize relations with the international community have led the Saudi state to implement a series of governmental reforms.<sup>50</sup> Many of these reforms target the kingdom's morality police forces, the formal arm of which is the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), popularly known in the English language media as the "religious police."<sup>51</sup> The CPVPV is an institution that dates back well before the formal establishment of the Saudi state in 1932, and is an important tool for the expression of clerical power in the kingdom's "dual system" of authority and governance.<sup>52</sup> The religious element of the government uses the CPVPV to project its power into society, regulating various aspects of daily life ranging from the enforcement of public prayer to gender segregation in a variety of social and public contexts.<sup>53</sup> But while recent reforms may appear to limit the influence of clerical authority in the daily life of Saudi citizens, the commission remains as an effective formal method of social control. Morality police remain engaged in the government's efforts to stymie political and religious dissent, and the CPVPV's rebranding efforts are aimed at reforming the image that the commission presents to the Saudi public.

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<sup>50</sup> David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, (London: Ib Tauris & Co Ltd, 2015), 155–156; "Saudi Cabinet Decree Prevents 'Religious Police' from Pursuit, Arrest," *Al-Arabiya*, April 13, 2016, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2016/04/13/Saudi-cabinet-decree-preventing-Religious-Police-from-pursual-and-arrest.html>.

<sup>51</sup> "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain: A Human Rights Assessment of Five Years of King Abdullah's Reforms in Saudi Arabia," Human Rights Watch, September 27, 2010. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/09/27/looser-rein-uncertain-gain/human-rights-assessment-five-years-king-abdullahs>, 20.

<sup>52</sup> Muhammad Al-Atawneh, "Authority-Holders (Wulat Al-Umur) in Contemporary Islamic Politics and Governance: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 2 (Apr 3, 2017): 123. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19436149.2017.1313930>, 123, 125–126.

<sup>53</sup> "Precarious Justice: Arbitrary Detention and Unfair Trials in the Deficient Criminal Justice System of Saudi Arabia," Human Rights Watch, March 1, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/saudijustice0308/>, 59.

Ultimately, the physical and digital presence of the commission in Saudi society serves as a projection of the conservative, religious component of the state into the population.

This chapter will examine the moral policing program of Saudi Arabia with a focus on the CPVPV, a formal government agency. The first section of the chapter provides background information and historical context of the morality policing program. The second section examines the structure and operations of the force. The third section addresses the various reform efforts targeting the CPVPV in the twenty-first century, the effectiveness of reforms, and the current CPVPV's rebranding effort and role in suppressing dissent on the Internet.

#### **A. BACKGROUND OF SAUDI ARABIA AND GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED MORALITY POLICING**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is well known for its implementation of a strict form of Sunni Islam, which non-adherents often refer to as Wahhabism, named after Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was an Islamic revivalist and strict monotheist who preached throughout the central Nejd region of the Arabian Peninsula from 1740 to 1792.<sup>54</sup> As recounted by historian David Commins, the kingdom's founding family, the Al Saud tribe, adopted Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine as legitimization for the Al Saud family's efforts to expand their control of the Nejd and, eventually, the peninsula at large.<sup>55</sup> From this early partnership, Saudi political rulers and Wahhabi clerics developed a symbiotic relationship. In exchange for offering the Al Saud tribe religious legitimacy, the clerics received political protection and influence.<sup>56</sup> This partnership ultimately culminated in the 1932 unification of the Arabian Peninsula under the crown of King Abdulaziz ibn Saud. Since then, his descendants have maintained authoritarian rule over Saudi society with the assistance of the social and legal rule of Wahhabi clerics.<sup>57</sup> While Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, the clergy and the state

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<sup>54</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Atawneh, "Authority-Holders (Wulat Al-Umur) in Contemporary Islamic Politics and Governance," 127.

<sup>57</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 3–5.



continue to share in a dual power structure. As argued by religious scholar Muhammad al-Atawneh, the Wahhabi clerical establishment exercises great power in the social and legal spheres of governance. While the royal family dominates political and security concerns, the clergy maintain shape culture and society.<sup>58</sup> This mutual relationship produced a system governed by *sharia*, or Islamic law, with the Quran serving as the country's constitution.<sup>59</sup> Wahhabi clerics hold wide authority in the interpretation and administration of Saudi laws via the court system.

In 1979, the rise of ideologies that challenged the authority of the royal family resulted in the strengthening of the clerical influence in society. The Islamic Revolution in Iran spurred fears amongst the Saudi Sunni establishment of a similar event from the Saudi Shia population, and sparked a series of protests that necessitated reactionary reforms and anti-Shia crackdowns from the government.<sup>60</sup> The same year, a group of religious fundamentalists violently occupied the Grand Mosque of Mecca's holy *Al-Haram al-Sharif*, where the *Ka'ba* is housed. The group's leader claimed to be the *Mahdi*, or messiah, and decried the Wahhabi clerics for legitimizing a government that allowed Western influences to permeate Saudi society.<sup>61</sup> In cooperation with the royal family, the leading clerics issued a *fatwa*, or religious ruling, justifying the use of force to remove the occupiers. After the incident, the government instituted conservative social policies designed to appease their clerical allies and shore up the royal family's credentials as rulers of the birthplace of Islam.<sup>62</sup> These events had ramifications throughout the following decades to the present day, from the systematic suppression of the Shia population to the government's formal morality policing program.

Saudi Arabia's morality police force falls under the auspices of the CPVPV. The first branch of the commission was established in 1926 in Mecca, and several offices

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<sup>58</sup> Al-Atawneh, "Authority-Holders (Wulat Al-Umur) in Contemporary Islamic Politics and Governance," 134.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 125; David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 43–44; "Precarious Justice," 17.

<sup>60</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Atawneh, "Authority-Holders (Wulat Al-Umur) in Contemporary Islamic Politics and Governance," 133.

appeared in other cities and provinces throughout the 1930s.<sup>63</sup> The discovery of oil and the subsequent influx of wealth to the kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s enabled Saudi authorities to organize the CPVPV and other ministries under the authority of a centralized government.<sup>64</sup> With the political transformation, Wahhabi clerical authority was formalized within government ministries.<sup>65</sup> While Western-educated administrators proliferated throughout the 1970s to fill the technical needs of the kingdom, clerics and administrators with religious education maintained their influence over the population through civil state structures such as the courts, education, and religion. This influence extended to public behavior through the actions of the CPVPV.<sup>66</sup>

The authority and responsibilities of the CPVPV were formalized by law in 1980 and alternately clarified, expanded, and retracted throughout the decade. The Human Rights Watch, in a 2008 report, detailed the activities policed and prohibited by the CPVPV as defined by the 1988 Executive Regulations, which expanded upon the 1980 law:

Mixing of the two sexes and women adorning themselves excessively; transgendered behavior; men's advances toward women; saying obscenities; disrupting prayer by playing media near mosques; practicing or displaying non-Muslim faiths or disrespecting Islam; displaying or selling media contrary to Islam, including pornography, the Christian cross, the star of David, pictures of Buddha or the like; producing, distributing, or consuming alcohol; committing or facilitating lewdness, including adultery, homosexuality, and gambling; adhering to heresies by venerating places or celebrating events inconsistent with Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxis; practicing magic for money; and shortchanging customers.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 66; George Holoch and Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 12.

<sup>64</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 46.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>67</sup> "Precarious Justice," 59.

The 1980 law afforded the CPVPV powers of arrest, detention, search and seizure, and interrogation pursuant to the prevention and investigation of the crimes listed above. The agency was also empowered to detain individuals without an arrest warrant.<sup>68</sup> However, in 1981, the authority of the CPVPV to detain and question individuals was revoked by royal decree.<sup>69</sup> This reversal in the power and influence of the CPVPV was the first of many throughout the decades, as authorities continued to expand revoke the commission's authorities in response to clerical influence and societal backlash.

The CPVPV is an independent government agency that reports directly to the kingdom's prime minister—who is also the king.<sup>70</sup> In theory, the CPVPV does not report to any one ministry, but oversight of the commission's activities was delegated to the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>71</sup> Along with the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior maintains law and order within the kingdom through various law enforcement and security agencies.<sup>72</sup> While the level of power and influence the CPVPV exercises within the government fluctuates over time, it is the ministries that have ultimate authority in maintaining security and stability in the country.<sup>73</sup>

## **B. STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF MORALITY POLICE FORCES**

### **1. Structure of the CPVPV**

The forces of the CPVPV are often referred to as the religious police or the *mutawa* or *mutaween*, an Arabic word that roughly translates to “volunteer.” Estimates of the force's size vary from 3,500 to 6,000 paid officers, who are supplemented with as

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” United States Department of State, accessed September 3, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, 4.

<sup>72</sup> “Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report,” United States Department of State, accessed August 10, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220586.pdf>, 7.

<sup>73</sup> “Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain,” 2.

many as 5,000 volunteer members.<sup>74</sup> While branches of the commission are present in every province of the kingdom, there are areas where the CPVPV's influence holds more sway than in others.<sup>75</sup> Port cities such as Dammam and Jeddah are more cosmopolitan and liberal than the interior of the peninsula, due to influx of foreign populations from trade and religious pilgrimage. In the epicenter of political and religious power, the capital Riyadh, the CPVPV are notorious for stricter enforcement of moral law.<sup>76</sup> In the eastern provinces, where there is a sizeable presence of a Shia minority, some towns do not have a local CPVPV presence, and adherence to law that prohibit Shia practices is lax.<sup>77</sup>

Members of the CPVPV are recognized by their conservative clothing. Photographs and video clips published by the commission on social media show the *mutaween* dressed in robes, loose white or red checked head coverings, and long beards with short or shaved mustaches. Their only form of identification is a badge affixed to their chests.<sup>78</sup> As evidenced by their dress and purpose, they are generally men of religious backgrounds. A common critique of the agency was that it recruited members who were poorly educated or had criminal records, the only prerequisite for employment being that members have memorized the Quran. In response, recent reforms were aimed at raising recruitment standards.<sup>79</sup> Accusations of extremism also arose from the commission's own ranks. In February 2014, then-president of the CPVPV Sheikh Abdel Latif al-Sheikh alleged that there were "extremists" and "advocates of sedition" within the force, and that they would be "eliminated."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "Precarious Justice," 58; Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 66; "Head of Saudi Religious Police Denies Corruption." *Al-Arabiya*, March 15, 2014, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1507614566>.

<sup>75</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>78</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 26 June 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BV0DS5fBRbO/?taken-by=pvgovsa>.

<sup>79</sup> "Saudi Cabinet Decree Prevents 'Religious Police' from Pursuit, Arrest."

<sup>80</sup> "Head of Saudi Religious Police Denies Corruption."

## 2. Vigilante Morals Policing: Non-CPVPV Volunteers

The sanctioned officers and volunteers of the CPVPV are not the only forces patrolling public spaces for morality violations. As discussed in Chapter III, this is a similar phenomenon as observed in Iran, wherein conservative civilians police the public behavior of others. Groups and individuals in Saudi Arabia known as *muhtasibeen*, which is another Arabic word for “volunteer,” take it upon themselves to exact vigilante justice on those who they perceive to have violated *sharia* or religious norms. The *muhtasibeen* have been known to violently confront both individuals on the streets and at events that do not conform to their conservative viewpoints.<sup>81</sup> In 2014, Saudi media reported that the leader of the CPVPV considered assigning uniforms to the force’s members in order to combat the trend of *muhtasibeen* posing as official CPVPV.<sup>82</sup> Subsequent reforms imposed the current badges on the force instead of uniforms.<sup>83</sup> In attempting to differentiate official CPVPV members from vigilantes, the commission demonstrated that it did not wholly condone their activities, or at least did not want to be associated with their actions.

Much like their counterparts in Iran, members of the CPVPV have been known to ally themselves with vigilantes and volunteers, and to leverage sympathetic members of the security forces and population at large as a wider source network.<sup>84</sup> In one 2015 incident cited by the U.S. Department of State, the CPVPV responded to a physical confrontation between *muhtasibeen* and academics presenting at the Riyadh International Book Fair. Whether the CPVPV supported or opposed the *muhtasibeen* was unclear. However, the *muhtasibeen* were successful in ending the academic presentation with calls to prayer.<sup>85</sup> Whether or not the CPVPV supported the efforts of the *muhtasibeen*, the incident demonstrates that there are conservative elements within Saudi society that organize and target controversial events and behaviors.

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<sup>81</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 16.

<sup>82</sup> “Haia Men Could Wear Special Uniforms.” *Saudi Gazette*, September 25, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> “Saudi Cabinet Decree Prevents ‘Religious Police’ from Pursuit, Arrest.”

<sup>84</sup> “Vicious About Virtue.” *The Economist*, June 21, 2007. <http://www.economist.com/node/9377236>.

<sup>85</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 16.

### 3. Morality Policing of Drugs and Alcohol

As in all three cases examined in this thesis, morality policing in Saudi Arabia extends to the population's use of drugs and alcohol. Pursuant to the kingdom's *sharia*-based legal system, all liquor and recreational drugs are banned in Saudi Arabia.<sup>86</sup> While the kingdom has law enforcement agencies dedicated directly to drug and alcohol enforcement, the CPVPV has a hand in investigating drug and alcohol violations.<sup>87</sup> Alcohol and drug busts feature prominently in the CPVPV's social media campaign. A Tweet dated 24 May 2017 from the commission's account showed a photograph of what the caption claimed was "14 pieces of cannabis material" seized by *mutaween* and other security service members.<sup>88</sup> On 14 July 2017, the CPVPV posted photographs of the destruction of over 17,000 bottles of confiscated alcohol on Instagram. The caption read that the bust was also conducted in coordination with other security services.<sup>89</sup> In another example, in January 2015, the commission announced its members had conducted the arrest of "a big gang selling liquor" in Jeddah and seized approximately 6,700 bottles of alcohol.<sup>90</sup> The CPVPV routinely touts such successes, perhaps indicating the low risk of controversy in the enforcement of drug and liquor laws. However, the CPVPV reported that only 1 percent of their case work for 2014 involved drugs or alcohol.<sup>91</sup>

Despite the low numbers of drug and alcohol cases the CPVPV investigates, the commission's statements to the media offer a view into how it conducts operations. On 25 September 2015, local media reported that after receiving a tip the *mutaween* "monitored" a suspected drug dealer before conducting an arrest and handing the

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<sup>86</sup> "Precarious Justice," 17.

<sup>87</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 67.

<sup>88</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 24 May 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/867414016284667905>.

<sup>89</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 14 July 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BWhcHSVbBVv/?taken-by=pvgovsa>.

<sup>90</sup> "Haia Arrests Six for Distributing Liquor." *Saudi Gazette*, January 4, 2015. <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/108623/Haia-arrests-six-for-distributing-liquor>.

<sup>91</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 11.

investigation to a “related authority.”<sup>92</sup> The wording of the news article seemed to indicate that the CPVPV operated as a traditional law enforcement agency in that it cultivated an informant, conducted surveillance of the suspect, and executed the arrest. While the above example was only one operation conducted by a field office, it offers insight into what the organizations sees as an acceptable case worthy of public acknowledgement.

#### **4. Morality Policing of Gender, Clothing, and Sexuality**

##### ***a. The Maintenance of Gender Segregation***

The CPVPV’s enforcement of gender segregation and norms commands great attention from the international community.<sup>93</sup> In Saudi Arabia, women are subject to guardianship laws that prohibit them from appearing in public and conducting a myriad of basic tasks without the escort and consent of a male guardian, usually a husband, father, or other family member.<sup>94</sup> Women were famously not allowed to operate their own vehicles—until a September 2017 royal decree promised their eventual right to do so—owing to guardianship laws and prohibitions against gender-mixing.<sup>95</sup> Members of the CPVPV regularly investigate whether men and women in each other’s company are related or not, and reportedly conducted searches of electronic media such as phones to check whether a couple was properly related.<sup>96</sup> The CPVPV also conducted high speed vehicular pursuits of couples they suspected were engaged in a non-marital relationship; the pursuits and searches became public relations issues to the point that by 2008, then-

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<sup>92</sup> “Haia Arrests Liquor Dealer.” *Saudi Gazette*, September 25, 2015, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/136893/Haia-arrests-liquor-dealer>.

<sup>93</sup> Vicky Baker, “International: Rape Victim Sentenced to 200 Lashes and Six Months in Jail,” *The Guardian*, November 17, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/nov/17/saudi-arabia.international>; “No Charges for Saudi Woman in Viral Miniskirt Video,” *Al-Jazeera*, July 19, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/charges-saudi-woman-viral-miniskirt-video-170719124353966.html>; “Saudi ‘Emo’ Girls Busted by Religious Cops: Report,” *Agence France Presse*, May 22, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> “Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia’s Male Guardianship System,” Human Rights Watch, July 16, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system>, 1–2.

<sup>95</sup> Ben Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees to Let Women Drive.” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-women-drive.html>.

<sup>96</sup> “Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain,” 20–21.

president of the commission Sheikh Ibrahim al-Ghaith banned both practices.<sup>97</sup> More recent reporting from the kingdom suggests that the CPVPV is still engaged in upholding gender segregation. An article carried by Bloomberg News in June 2017 claimed the *mutaween* admonished professional drivers for mixing with their female customers. Only instead of engaging in a car chase, the CPVPV let the driver go.<sup>98</sup> The incident was meant to demonstrate the reformed tendencies of the CPVPV. However, it also demonstrated that the CPVPV was still engaged in the management of inter-gender interactions.

Victims of rape are not exempt from the prohibition against gender mixing. As the U.S. Department of State detailed in their annual human rights reports for Saudi Arabia, the kingdom often punishes both male rapists and female victims for violating gender segregation laws.<sup>99</sup> Crime statistics and other government records on the investigation and punishment of sex crimes are not made publically available.<sup>100</sup> However, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International regularly publish articles and reports rebuking Saudi Arabia for gender segregation practices, guardianship laws, and other human right violations.<sup>101</sup> These NGOs, along with the local and international media, regularly highlight examples of sexual assaults and reprisals against victims. For example, in 2007 a case made international headlines when the CPVPV investigated a young woman for riding in an unrelated man's car after he and six others raped her.<sup>102</sup> In 2010, Amnesty International featured the story of another woman who was sentenced to flogging and imprisonment

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Vivian Nereim, "Saudi Religious Police Return, Just With a Little Less Vengeance," *Bloomberg News*, June 25, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-06-26/saudi-religious-police-return-just-with-a-little-less-vengeance>.

<sup>99</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 33.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>101</sup> "Annual Report: Saudi Arabia 2010," Amnesty International, March 19, 2011, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/annual-report-saudi-arabia-2010/>; "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain," 21; "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," United States Department of State, accessed August 10, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265730.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> Baker, "International: Rape Victim Sentenced to 200 Lashes and Six Months in Jail."



for having non-marital sex after she was raped by five men.<sup>103</sup> In late 2016, an appeals court requested the death penalty for a convicted rapist who assaulted a female teacher. The man was initially sentenced to flogging and five years' imprisonment, and the sentencing court imposed the lighter sentence because the woman had been inside the man's residence at the time of the assault, indicating she was also at fault.<sup>104</sup>

Gender segregation affects nearly every facet of public life. Schools, banks, shops, restaurants, and many other public areas are subject to patrol by the CPVPV as it fulfills its mission to prevent unlawful gender mixing. Malls and restaurants are particularly rich targets for the CPVPV forces.<sup>105</sup> Sociologists Ibrahim Alhadar and Michael McCahill studied mall surveillance systems in Saudi Arabia, and found that morality police employed the surveillance systems. The aim was not to catch shoplifters, but to monitor potential segregation violators.<sup>106</sup> The CPVPV were particularly concerned with the young men who followed girls and women in the hopes of courting them. Any young couple sitting alone was subject to monitoring and checks by the CPVPV forces that patrolled the malls.<sup>107</sup> The ubiquity and scope of the CPVPV's public presence and investigations appear to contribute to the maintenance of gender segregation.

***b. Policing the Dress Code***

The long, black robe or *abaya* and the facial veil known as the *niqab* are ubiquitous symbols of Saudi Arabia, and the CPVPV are tasked with ensuring that women conform to the uniform and do not dress in an eye-catching or flamboyant manner.<sup>108</sup> In a deadly 2002 incident that many authors and reporters cite as the

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<sup>103</sup> "Annual Report: Saudi Arabia 2010."

<sup>104</sup> "Driver Gets Death for Raping Teacher," *Saudi Gazette*, December 26, 2016, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/169833/Driver-gets-death-for-raping-teacher>.

<sup>105</sup> "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain," 21; "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," 44.

<sup>106</sup> Ibrahim Alhadar and Michael McCahill, "The Use of Surveillance Cameras in a Riyadh Shopping Mall: Protecting Profits or Protecting Morality?" *Theoretical Criminology* 15, no. 3 (Aug, 2011): 315–330. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1362480610396644>, 327.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 319–320.

<sup>108</sup> "Precarious Justice," 59.

beginning of mass critique of religious policing in Saudi Arabia, members of the CPVPV prevented girls from escaping their school after it caught on fire. Reportedly, the *mutaween* would not allow the girls outside because they were not properly dressed.<sup>109</sup> Since that incident, reports of CPVPV interactions with female violators of the Saudi dress code have proliferated on social media and traditional news outlets.

Prior to the 2000s, the power of the CPVPV went largely unchallenged by the general public. But in 2007, a woman became the first person to challenge the commission in court after members of the CPVPV harassed her and her daughter for not conforming to the dress code, hijacked her vehicle, and crashed it.<sup>110</sup> More recently, the commission was investigated for another incident. In February 2016, Arab News reported that the investigation into an altercation between members of the CPVPV and two girls outside of a mall found fault with both parties. The *mutaween* were faulted for beating and arresting one of the girls after she refused to cover her face; the girl was faulted for disobeying them. The incident was brought to the attention of the authorities after a video of the beating appeared online.<sup>111</sup> As with many of the other incidents explored within this chapter, social media played an integral role in holding the CPVPV accountable for negative interactions with the population. Some videos spark social media campaigns, which then draws more attention to the issue. In 2015, a video showed *mutaween* demand a woman cover her eyes. A U.S. Department of State report quotes the woman telling the officials, “I will send it to the press, and to the king.”<sup>112</sup> Such reports serve to illustrate that the CPVPV is sensitive to public attention and censure.

In recent years, Saudi women have increasingly flouted convention. Cosmetics, nail polish, and colorful accessories and *abayas* are becoming more common, especially in urban areas. Some women even opt to go without the *niqab* or even the *hijab*, or head

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<sup>109</sup> Sewell Chan, “Saudi Arabia Moves to Curb its Feared Religious Police,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/16/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-moves-to-curb-its-feared-religious-police.html>; Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 96–97; “Vicious About Virtue.”

<sup>110</sup> “Vicious About Virtue.”

<sup>111</sup> “Haia Men Exceeded Limits, Girl Too was at Fault: Probe,” *Arab News*, February 11, 2016, <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/878706>.

<sup>112</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 10.

covering.<sup>113</sup> In 2017, one Saudi woman took a walk through a historic town dressed in a cropped top and mini skirt. After a video of the walk was posted online, the woman was arrested. Both the video and the arrest drew widespread condemnation. As the woman claimed the video was posted without her knowledge, she was released without charges.<sup>114</sup> The episode illustrated Saudi authorities' sensitivity to international and domestic opinion, as well as the proliferation of so-called blackmail crimes. The CPVPV has increasingly focused their investigations on a spate of blackmail crimes, where suspects use photos and videos of women to threaten their reputation in return for money or sex.<sup>115</sup> In 2014, the commission asked the government to reinstate and expand their powers to search cell phones in order to facilitate the identification of blackmailers.<sup>116</sup> This relatively novel trend in crime, and the commission's eagerness to investigate, displays the CPVPV's efforts to portray their presence as a service to the population.

*c. The Investigation of Sexuality*

The responsibilities of the morality police forces in all three of the cases examined in this thesis extend to the policing of individuals' sexuality and expression of gender preference. In Saudi Arabia, homosexual acts are illegal and subject to the death penalty.<sup>117</sup> As the U.S. Department of State noted in 2016, there are no rights accorded to homosexuals and no official groups for advocacy and protection for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) people in Saudi Arabia.<sup>118</sup> People arrested for homosexuality are regularly sentenced to harsh penalties, such as a man who received a

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<sup>113</sup> Richard Spencer, "Black is the New Black in Saudi Arabia; Religious Police Crack Down on Colourful Clothes." *Montreal Gazette*, February 21, 2015, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1657161677>; Dina Al-Shibeeb, "Women in Riyadh Feel More at Ease without Niqab." *Saudi Gazette*, November 18, 2016, <http://live.saudigazette.com.sa/article/167494/Women-in-Riyadh-feel-more-at-ease-without-niqab>.

<sup>114</sup> "No Charges for Saudi Woman in Viral Miniskirt Video."

<sup>115</sup> "Driver Gets Death for Raping Teacher"; "Haia Asks for More Powers," *Saudi Gazette*, October 9, 2014, <http://live.saudigazette.com.sa/article/99847/Haia-asks-for-more-powers->.

<sup>116</sup> "Haia Asks for More Powers."

<sup>117</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report," 40.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

sentence of 500 lashes and five years in jail in 2011.<sup>119</sup> A person does not have to engage in any homosexual acts to be targets of the government; solicitation of the acts online is also punishable by death.<sup>120</sup> In 2016, a Jeddah man received jail time and 180 lashes for promoting a gay lifestyle on social media.<sup>121</sup> In Saudi Arabia, public morality extends well into cyber space.

In May 2016, local media reported that members of the CPVPV entered a restaurant to scold and cite women who were not dressed in *abaya*. To their surprise, the suspects were actually men dressed as women. The three cross dressers—and two of their male friends—were placed under arrest.<sup>122</sup> Both genders are barred from behaving or dressing as the opposite sex.<sup>123</sup> Beyond that prohibition, news reports suggest that Saudi officials appear to view transgenderism as a mental illness that is capable of being cured. There are even instances of legal gender reassignment surgeries. The Saudi Gazette quoted Saudi plastic surgeon Yasser Jamal of the following:

I performed gender correction surgeries for both males and females in my career. People who perform transgender surgeries without a valid reason are violating Islamic teachings. But there are patients who undergo what is called gender correction surgeries because they have clear signs showing that they belong to the opposite gender.<sup>124</sup>

While the surgeon's comments reveal a certain latitude with how Saudi Arabia addresses transgenderism, the arrest and prosecution of cross-dressers makes it clear that the CPVPV is tasked with ensuring that society conforms to traditional expressions of gender.

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<sup>119</sup> "Annual Report: Saudi Arabia 2011," Amnesty International, June 20, 2011, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/annual-report-saudi-arabia-2011/>.

<sup>120</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," 49.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> "Jeddah Court Puts 60 Men on Trial for Transvestism." *Saudi Gazette*, May 9, 2016, <http://live.saudigazette.com.sa/article/154584/Jeddah-court-puts-60-men-on-trial-for-transvestism>.

<sup>123</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report," 40.

<sup>124</sup> "Jeddah Court Puts 60 Men on Trial for Transvestism."

## 5. Maintaining Islamic Culture: Music and Western Influences

The Saudi authorities' goal of maintaining an Islamic society is threatened by the proliferation of Western cultural mores. Music and dancing not native to Saudi Arabia are banned in the country—even the Saudi national anthem, when played too loud, will catch the attention of the CPVPV. In 2013, two brothers were killed after their car was forced off a bridge while members of the CPVPV engaged them in a vehicular chase for blaring the national anthem.<sup>125</sup> Not even private parties are safe. In 2015, media outlets reported that *mutaween* conducted arrests of multiple men for “loud music and inappropriate dancing.”<sup>126</sup> Inexorably, like in many other areas previously discussed, social media and Western influence have contributed to changing the Saudi music landscape. The Internet, satellite television, and other influences have gradually sensitized Saudis to incorporate music into their everyday life.<sup>127</sup>

The CPVPV routinely polices other behavior that is deemed to be un-Islamic. From arresting men offering “free hugs” in Riyadh to warning citizens to avoid secular holiday and birthday celebrations, the religious police are charged with safeguarding Saudi society from influences of the West.<sup>128</sup> Pet animals have also come onto their radar. In 2006, Al-Jazeera reported that authorities ordered the CPVPV to police public pet ownership. The fear was that “parading” pet dogs and cats in public mimicked Western, and therefore un-Islamic, societies.<sup>129</sup> This fear extends to many fashion subcultures. In particular, the CPVPV enforces the prohibition on “emo” fashion. Emo fashion refers to a style of dress that is popular in the West and Asia. Media reports

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<sup>125</sup> Manal Al-Sharif, “Opinion: Reign in the Saudi Religious Police.” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/11/opinion/rein-in-the-saudi-religious-police.html?mcubz=0>.

<sup>126</sup> “Saudi Men Detained for Dancing at Birthday Party.” *Saudi Gazette*, February 22, 2015, <http://live.saudigazette.com.sa/article/113799/Saudi-men-detained-for-dancing-at-birthday-party>.

<sup>127</sup> Jonas Otterbeck, “Wahhabi Ideology of Social Control Versus a New Publicness in Saudi Arabia,” *Contemporary Islam* 6, no. 3 (Oct, 2012): 341–353. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1081226065>.

<sup>128</sup> “Saudi Police Arrest Two Over ‘Free Hugs,’” *Al-Jazeera*, November 21, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/11/saudi-police-arrest-two-over-free-hugs-20131121164035187159.html>; “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 10.

<sup>129</sup> “Saudi to Ban Sale of Cats and Dogs.” *Al-Jazeera*, September 9, 2006, <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2006/09/200849133632267770.html>.

indicate the *mutaween* respond to complaints and tips of dress code violations by emo girls; the perpetrators are then often placed under arrest until their parents or guardians can collect them and vouch for their future conduct.<sup>130</sup> Those who follow the emo and other un-Islamic subcultures were banned from public school and universities in 2012, and the government ordered the CPVPV to enforce the ban and crack down on violators.<sup>131</sup>

## **6. Policing Religion: Prayer, Suppression of the Shia, and Apostasy**

In the pursuit of cultivating an Islamic society, the enforcement of religious laws is paramount. The most visible trait of piety is that of prayer. In Saudi Arabia, prayers are conducted five times a day for half an hour each. Businesses are required to close, restaurants are shuttered, and men are required to go to the nearest mosque. This requirement does not extend to women, even when they are in public.<sup>132</sup> The CPVPV spends the vast majority of its time and resources making sure that prayers are observed, with 78 percent of its caseload dedicated to investigating prayer breaches in 2015.<sup>133</sup> Through the years, members of civil society have criticized the CPVPV for violent confrontations with those who do not adhere to Sunni prayer practices, leading to some reforms. An event in 2007 was a contributing factor in later reforms, when the *mutaween* arrested and assaulted eighteen Iraqi-Americans and Iraqi-Britons for conducting Shia prayers during the *Hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>134</sup> As early as 2014, then-president of the CPVPV Sheikh Abdulatif Al al-Sheikh told media outlets that the commission might relax enforcement of prayer time rules, including the closing of businesses.<sup>135</sup> As of 2017, prayer enforcement was reportedly reduced to *mutaween* shouting reminders over

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<sup>130</sup> “Saudi ‘Emo’ Girls Busted by Religious Cops: Report.”

<sup>131</sup> “Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report,” 41.

<sup>132</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 72.

<sup>133</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 11.

<sup>134</sup> Stephan Schwartz and Irfan Al-Alawi, “Saudi Arabia’s ‘Religious Police’ Reforms,” *The Weekly Standard*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/saudi-arabias-religious-police-reforms/article/654065>.

<sup>135</sup> “Saudi Morality Police May Relax Rules on Prayer Times.” *Arabian Business*, January 1, 2014, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-morality-police-may-relax-rules-on-prayer-times-533137.html>.

mobile speakers as they drove through city streets.<sup>136</sup> Enforcement of prayer times and practices for Shia Muslims varies depending on CPVPV presence, as well as the ratio of the Sunni to Shia population.<sup>137</sup>

As in Iran and under the Taliban, the Saudi state displays little tolerance for religious minorities. The Shia minority of Saudi Arabia, who comprise approximately ten to fifteen percent of the population, are subject to systematic suppression and discrimination.<sup>138</sup> The CPVPV, as one of the government's main vehicles to ensure compliance with Wahhabi practices, regularly investigates and detains Shia for practicing their religion and voicing political and religious dissent.<sup>139</sup> Adherents to other religions are also persecuted. U.S. government and NGO reports highlight CPVPV and other Saudi government raids of non-Wahhabi Muslim and non-Muslim worship services.<sup>140</sup> Mosques—which are administered and closely monitored by the government—are the only locations authorized for public religious worship.<sup>141</sup> The CPVPV and their security counterparts are known to arrest attendants of private religious gatherings, despite their legalization in 2006. For example, a gathering of Ethiopian Christians in a “prayer group” was raided in 2013 for “illegal mingling,” and Al-Jazeera reported that dozens of the attendants were detained and deported.<sup>142</sup>

Apostasy is punishable by death.<sup>143</sup> Liberals, human rights activists, bloggers, and others are routinely investigated by the CPVPV for making statements critical of the Saudi regime or of Islam. Several high-profile cases have captured the interest of international rights groups. In an incident which revealed how the Saudi government justifies political repression with accusations of apostasy, in 2014 a Saudi blogger was

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<sup>136</sup> Nereim, “Saudi Religious Police Return, Just With a Little Less Vengeance.”

<sup>137</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 10.

<sup>138</sup> “Annual Report: Saudi Arabia 2010.”

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.; “Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report,” 10.

<sup>140</sup> “Annual Report: Saudi Arabia 2011”; “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 9.

<sup>141</sup> “International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia,” 9.

<sup>142</sup> “Christians ‘Face Deportation’ in Saudi Arabia.” *Al-Jazeera*, January 31, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/01/20121311378554467.html>.

<sup>143</sup> “Precarious Justice,” 17, 25.

sentenced to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines, ten years in prison, and 100 lashes for apostasy and insulting Islam after he established a “liberal network” and declared 7 May 2012 “a day of liberalism” and criticized the role of religion in Saudi Arabia.<sup>144</sup> In 2016, a Palestinian resident was initially sentenced to death for authoring poetry that the courts “deemed offensive to Islam” before his sentence was commuted to eight years in prison and 800 lashes.<sup>145</sup> That same year, a Saudi was sentenced to ten years and 2,000 lashes for “expressing his atheism on Twitter.”<sup>146</sup> As many suspects receive sentences for views expressed over the Internet, the CPVPV has modified its digital operations, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

## **7. Policing Witchcraft**

While witchcraft is banned and investigated to varying degrees in Iran, Saudi Arabia is unique in the scope and urgency to which it pursues this crime. The *mutaween* have formally investigated those who practice magical arts since the 1988 Executive Regulations codified the jurisdiction of the CPVPV.<sup>147</sup> In 2009, the commission garnered much attention in the international media when it established an “Anti-Witchcraft Unit” to more effectively combat the crimes of sorcery and folk religious practices.<sup>148</sup> Those who are accused of witchcraft are male and female, and range from abortionists to television personalities.<sup>149</sup> In 2010, the New York Times reported the plight of a Lebanese “TV mystic” who was detained in Saudi Arabia while on the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. The CPVPV conducted a “sting operation” and arrested the suspect after they recorded him providing a customer with a magic potion.<sup>150</sup> Unofficial medical clinics

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<sup>144</sup> “Saudi Blogger Gets 10 Years and 1,000 Lashes.” *Al-Jazeera*, May 8, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/05/saudi-blogger-gets-10-years-1000-lashes-20145825916565359.html>.

<sup>145</sup> “Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report,” 6.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> “Precarious Justice,” 59.

<sup>148</sup> Ryan Jacobs, “Saudi Arabia’s War on Witchcraft.” *The Atlantic*, August 19, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/08/saudi-arabias-war-on-witchcraft/278701/>.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Michael Slackman, “TV Mystic Lingers in Saudi Jail.” *The New York Times*, April 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/25/world/middleeast/25saudi.html>.



and folk healers are also often raided for sorcery.<sup>151</sup> As the crime is punishable by death, witches are often executed, such as a woman who was beheaded for sorcery in 2011 after members of the CPVPV arrested her for claiming to heal customers for hundreds of dollars each.<sup>152</sup> The CPVPV Anti-Witchcraft Unit also apparently possesses the capacity to nullify curses. In February 2014, the Saudi Gazette reported *mutaween* cured a “hexed man” after they removed a “witchcraft tool” from his home and “cured the man according to Islamic teaching.”<sup>153</sup> Further clarifying information about the CPVPV’s curative powers was not reported.

### C. REFORMING THE MORALITY POLICE: THE CPVPV, MEDIA, AND CLERICAL POWER

The twenty-first century reforms of the CPVPV have had a profound impact on state-sponsored morality policing in Saudi Arabia, and as a result those reforms have been featured throughout this chapter. With the advent of social media and its growing importance in the post-Arab Spring Saudi Arabia, citizens often take to social media sites such as Twitter to air their grievances against the state.<sup>154</sup> Domestic and international backlash to heavy-handed tactics often employed by the *mutaween* have contributed to the series of reforms and rebranding efforts of the commission. The relationship of the kingdom’s rulers with the clerical establishment contributed to the success or failure behind the reforms. The Wahhabi clerics, as discussed previously, have strong influence in the socio-cultural and legal realms of the Saudi government.<sup>155</sup> The clerical structure’s relationship with influential members of the royal family appears to contribute to their influence in these realms. The following section will focus on the three main timeframes

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<sup>151</sup> Abdulrahman Al-Arabi, “Black Magic Inside a Polyclinic?” *Saudi Gazette*, May 7, 2016, <http://live.saudigazette.com.sa/article/154434/Black-magic-inside-a-polyclinic?>; “Saudi Arabia Beheads Woman for ‘Sorcery,’” *Al-Jazeera*, December 12, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/2011121302059182183.html>; Jacobs, “Saudi Arabia’s War on Witchcraft.”

<sup>152</sup> “Saudi Arabia Beheads Woman for ‘Sorcery.’”

<sup>153</sup> “Haia Unit Cures Hexed Man.” *Saudi Gazette*, November 25, 2014, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/104721/Haia-unit-cures-hexed-man>.

<sup>154</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 155–156.

<sup>155</sup> Al-Atawneh, “Authority-Holders (Wulat Al-Umur) in Contemporary Islamic Politics and Governance,” 134.

where critical junctures led to significant changes to the authorities and operations of the commission: 2006 to 2007 and the reforms of King Abdullah, 2011 and the Arab Spring, and 2016 and the rise of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman.

### **1. Abdullah's Reforms: 2006 to 2007**

The foundations for the reformation attempts of 2006 and 2007 were laid throughout the preceding years. The previously discussed school fire of 2002, which resulted in the death of fourteen girls, placed the operations of the CPVPV firmly in the international spotlight.<sup>156</sup> The incident occurred as the kingdom—and the Middle East at large—received more Western attention in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.<sup>157</sup> In 2005, the reform-minded King Abdullah ascended to the throne and began to institute the first round of limitations to the authorities of the CPVPV.<sup>158</sup> The reforms targeted many of the law enforcement capabilities of the CPVPV. The commission's powers of interrogation, detention, and arrest were stripped away.<sup>159</sup> The *mutaween* were no longer authorized to conduct these actions without the presence and assistance of regular police forces.<sup>160</sup> Searches of private residences and electronic records and devices pursuant to morality investigations were also prohibited.<sup>161</sup> Members of the commission were required to wear identifying badges, and their traditional weapons—leather covered sticks used to beat the immoral—were banned.<sup>162</sup>

The success of reforms was questionable. The CPVPV, though answerable directly to the king, is overseen by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>163</sup> At the time of the 2006–2007 reform attempts, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz ibn Saud headed the ministry;

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<sup>156</sup> "Vicious About Virtue."

<sup>157</sup> Nereim, "Saudi Religious Police Return, Just With a Little Less Vengeance."

<sup>158</sup> Schwartz and Al-Alawi, "Saudi Arabia's 'Religious Police' Reforms."

<sup>159</sup> "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain," 20.

<sup>160</sup> "Precarious Justice," 58; "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain," 20–21; Schwartz and Al-Alawi, "Saudi Arabia's 'Religious Police' Reforms."

<sup>161</sup> "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain," 20–21.

<sup>162</sup> "Precarious Justice," 58; Schwartz and Al-Alawi, "Saudi Arabia's 'Religious Police' Reforms."

<sup>163</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 4.

he held the position from 1975 until his death in 2012.<sup>164</sup> The conservative Nayef, who was closely allied to the religious establishment, stymied King Abdullah's efforts to reign in the CPVPV by rolling back many of his reforms.<sup>165</sup> In July 2007, he negated the rule that prohibited CPVPV members from entering private homes.<sup>166</sup> Under his leadership, the *mutaween* were also largely shielded from various other abuses of power and defied limits on their authority. CPVPV members continued to conduct vehicle chases, public beatings, and detentions of suspects.<sup>167</sup> The attempts at reform and their subsequent roll backs demonstrated that while the Saudi government had the will and intention to curb the authority of the CPVPV, the commission and the clerical establishment that it served had a powerful ally in Nayef. While he and the religious element continued to hold sway in the political sphere, the CPVPV was empowered to continue their operations.

## 2. The Arab Spring: Dissent and Oppression Online

The Arab Spring, and the Saudi government's response to the threats it presented, precipitated a series of reform that bolstered the CPVPV's role in policing dissent in the digital realm. In early 2011, the popular overthrows of the presidents of Tunisia and Egypt launched the spread of demonstrations and revolution throughout the Middle East.<sup>168</sup> Fearful that unrest would spread in Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah announced a \$130 billion aid package of grants and subsidies for the public. Leading clerics issued *fatwa* that condemned those who would protest against the government.<sup>169</sup> The restive Shia minority continued demonstrations in the east, and the state continued to respond by

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<sup>164</sup> T. Rees Shapiro, "Nayef Bin Abdul Aziz, Saudi Crown Prince and Interior Minister, Dies," *Washington Post*, June 16, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/nayef-bin-abdul-aziz-saudi-crown-prince-and-interior-minister-dies/2012/06/16/gJQAugR8hV\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1b0e6c95f28a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/nayef-bin-abdul-aziz-saudi-crown-prince-and-interior-minister-dies/2012/06/16/gJQAugR8hV_story.html?utm_term=.1b0e6c95f28a).

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.; Gregg Carlstrom, "Obituary: Crown Prince Nayef." *Al-Jazeera*, June 17, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/06/2012616105329468593.html>.

<sup>166</sup> "Precarious Justice," 58.

<sup>167</sup> Schwartz and Al-Alawi, "Saudi Arabia's 'Religious Police' Reforms"; "Looser Rein, Uncertain Gain," 21.

<sup>168</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 155.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 156.

jailing and prosecuting protestors.<sup>170</sup> However, calls for protests in the rest of the country did not draw large crowds. While most Saudis stayed away from protesting in the streets, activists took to Internet sites such as Twitter and YouTube to express their dissatisfaction with the regime.<sup>171</sup> The government responded by retracting freedoms in the media and imposing harsh punishments on those who criticized political and religious authorities.<sup>172</sup> Clerics, despite prior condemnations of the evils of Twitter, took to social media to spread their own messages and engage with the population.<sup>173</sup>

Amidst the events of the Arab Spring, attempts at moderating the CPVPV continued as the religious establishment lost a powerful ally in the government. The powerful Nayef bin Abdulaziz ibn Saud was named as Crown Prince in 2011, a position that he held until he died the following year.<sup>174</sup> Shortly before Nayef's death, King Abdullah announced the appointment of Abdul Latif Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh as president of the CPVPV. Al-Sheikh demonstrated reformist tendencies, and implemented some moderating measures such as the dismissal of volunteers from the force.<sup>175</sup> In 2014, news outlet Al-Arabiya quoted Al-Sheikh as saying that he sought "a moderate approach" to enforcement of religious law.<sup>176</sup> "We are neither extremists nor too lenient," he said, and claimed the commission did not "seek to be repressive or brutal" because that was not the way of *sharia*.<sup>177</sup> While still a cleric himself and concerned with the integrity of Islamic law, Al-Sheikh made an effort to appear as a moderate in his rhetoric. But the Arab Spring and the government's resulting actions moved much of popular dissent into the social media realm. As dissent moved online, so did the clerics and the morality police.

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<sup>170</sup> "Annual Report: Saudi Arabia 2010."

<sup>171</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 156.

<sup>172</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," 24.

<sup>173</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 156.

<sup>174</sup> Shapiro, "Nayef Bin Abdul Aziz, Saudi Crown Prince and Interior Minister, Dies"; Carlstrom, "Obituary: Crown Prince Nayef."

<sup>175</sup> Schwartz and Al-Alawi, "Saudi Arabia's 'Religious Police' Reforms."

<sup>176</sup> "Head of Saudi Religious Police Denies Corruption."

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

### 3. 2016: Rise of Muhammad bin Salman, Vision 2030, and the CPVPV's Survival

The CPVPV was subjected to its most restrictive round of reforms in 2016.<sup>178</sup> The restrictions arrived after the death of King Abdullah and the accession of his half-brother King Salman bin Abdulaziz ibn Saud in 2015.<sup>179</sup> Initially, the change in power sparked speculation that King Salman would reverse his predecessor's efforts. The elevation of Nayef's conservative son, Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, to the position of Crown Prince along with more aggressive actions by the CPVPV made it appear as if the Wahhabi agenda would translate to a greater physical presence of the morality police on the street of Saudi cities.<sup>180</sup> But in July 2016, Muhammad bin Nayef was sidelined in favor of the young Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, the king's own son.<sup>181</sup> The transfer of power was swiftly followed by the announcement of a large modernization effort. Muhammad bin Salman headed the launch of Vision 2030, a plan designed to revitalize Saudi Arabia and turn the kingdom into a regional economic leader.<sup>182</sup> Vision 2030, as featured on its website, presents reformation goals for nearly every government sector as a part of the National Transformation Program (NTP). The Ministry of the Interior and the CPVPV were not listed as participants in the NTP.<sup>183</sup>

As dissent against the Saudi regime spreads online, the government is increasingly involved in media and Internet censorship. The CPVPV works directly with the Ministry of Culture and Information to censor and prohibit access to Internet

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<sup>178</sup> "Saudi Cabinet Decree Prevents 'Religious Police' from Pursuit, Arrest."

<sup>179</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan and Kareem Fahim, "Saudi King Names Son as New Crown Prince, Upending the Royal Succession." *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/saudi-king-names-son-as-new-crown-prince-upending-the-kingdoms-succession-line/2017/06/21/e66db88d-fecc-40fe-a902-7f9afa487de9\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a050135959d0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/saudi-king-names-son-as-new-crown-prince-upending-the-kingdoms-succession-line/2017/06/21/e66db88d-fecc-40fe-a902-7f9afa487de9_story.html?utm_term=.a050135959d0).

<sup>180</sup> Spencer, "Black is the New Black in Saudi Arabia."

<sup>181</sup> "UPDATE 2-Saudi King Overhauls Security Services Following Royal Shakeup," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/saudi-king-overhauls-security-services-following-succession-shake-up/2017/07/20/0ea027e6-6d97-11e7-b9e2-2056e768a7e5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.93207c17cdad](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/saudi-king-overhauls-security-services-following-succession-shake-up/2017/07/20/0ea027e6-6d97-11e7-b9e2-2056e768a7e5_story.html?utm_term=.93207c17cdad); Raghavan and Fahim, "Saudi King Names Son as New Crown Prince, Upending the Royal Succession."

<sup>182</sup> Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, "Foreword - Saudi Vision 2030," <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en/foreword>.

<sup>183</sup> "NTP Infographics - Saudi Vision 2030," <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en/node/276>.

content.<sup>184</sup> The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) manages all website domains in Saudi Arabia, and is the chief provider of the kingdom's "content filtering service."<sup>185</sup> Through the CITC, the CPVPV is able to target websites and social media posts that challenge the kingdom's official stances on religion.<sup>186</sup> Along with apostasy and blasphemy, Internet content that questions the state's policies and insults the royal family is also outlawed and censored.<sup>187</sup> As previously explored in the chapter, those who express dissenting opinions online are subject to investigation, arrest, and prosecution.<sup>188</sup> The CITC is able to pressure service providers into blocking offensive content by imposing fines that total over \$1 million per violation. In 2013, the organization claimed that Facebook agreed to remove objectionable content while Twitter did not.<sup>189</sup> Despite this claim, in 2015 the CPVPV banned and blocked individual Twitter users for advocating unacceptable religious viewpoints.<sup>190</sup>

The CPVPV was not spared from further reform. In April 2016, Saudi authorities announced sweeping changes to the authorities accorded to the commission.<sup>191</sup> The *mutaween* lost their powers of investigation, and were limited to reporting suspects of crime and immorality to the regular police forces.<sup>192</sup> They were even banned from requesting individuals' identification information.<sup>193</sup> For the remainder of 2016, the *mutaween* were largely absent from city streets.<sup>194</sup> By June of 2017, Bloomberg reported that a CPVPV initiative to "strengthen field work" had returned their officers to patrol

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<sup>184</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 11; "Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report," 20.

<sup>185</sup> "CITC Roles and Responsibilities," Communications and Information Technology Commission, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.citc.gov.sa/en/AboutUs/AreasOfwork/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>186</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 11.

<sup>187</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," 23.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>189</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2013 Human Rights Report," 20.

<sup>190</sup> "International Religious Freedom in the World 2015: Saudi Arabia," 11.

<sup>191</sup> "Saudi Cabinet Decree Prevents 'Religious Police' from Pursuit, Arrest."

<sup>192</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," 10.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>194</sup> "Saudi Arabia 2016 Human Rights Report," 10; Nereim, "Saudi Religious Police Return, Just With a Little Less Vengeance."

operations. However, they were limited to “politely” rebuking wrong-doers for violating gender segregation and the dress code.<sup>195</sup> It remains to be seen if the newest incarnation of the CPVPV will endure, if its previous authorities will be reinstated, or even if it will retain its unique independent status within the government. In September 2017, that independent status was cast into doubt when the legislative Shoura Council considered a proposal to place the CPVPV under the purview of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Call, and Guidance, as the two organizations execute similar missions.<sup>196</sup> Local media reported that after “a heated discussion,” the Shoura Council postponed further consideration of the proposal until late 2017.<sup>197</sup> The proposal signals that further limitations of the CPVPV’s powers could be on the horizon.

#### **4. CPVPV Online: Reforming the Morality Brand**

In the face of reforms and the curbing of its authority, the CPVPV seeks to retain its influence in society through rebranding and social media campaigns. Social media use is prevalent in Saudi society. A report compiled by the CITC claimed that as of 2017, 25 million Saudis had access to the Internet, or almost 75 percent of the population.<sup>198</sup> Twitter is particularly popular, and the kingdom boasted one of the fastest growing populations of Twitter users as of 2013.<sup>199</sup> As discussed in previous sections, wide Internet access and the popularity of social media in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East helped to fuel the spread of the ideas and unrest of the Arab Spring.<sup>200</sup> Much as clerics took to the Internet to combat dangerous ideas, the CPVPV has jumped on the social

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<sup>195</sup> Nereim, “Saudi Religious Police Return, Just With a Little Less Vengeance.”

<sup>196</sup> Abeer Al-Fahd, “Shoura to Vote on Proposal for Merger of Haia, Islamic Affairs,” *Okaz/Saudi Gazette*, September 17, 2017, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/517439/SAUDI-ARABIA/Shoura>.

<sup>197</sup> Faris Al-Qahtani, “Shoura Postpones Discussion on Proposal to Curb Haia Autonomy,” *Okaz/Saudi Gazette*, September 26, 2017, <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/518122/SAUDI-ARABIA/Shoura>.

<sup>198</sup> “KSA ICT Indicators End of Q1 2017,” Market Studies Department, CITC, Accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.citc.gov.sa/en/Reportsandstudies/Indicators/Pages/CITCICTIndicators.aspx>.

<sup>199</sup> Badreya Al-Jenaibi, “The Twitter Revolution in the Gulf Countries,” *Journal of Creative Communications* 11, no. 1 (Mar, 2016): 61–83, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0973258616630217>, 64–65.

<sup>200</sup> Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 155.

media bandwagon.<sup>201</sup> To an outside observer, the Internet is a major vehicle that the commission uses to rebrand itself and cast itself in a more sympathetic light. The CPVPV joined Twitter in February 2015 with the handle @pvgovsa, and as of August 2017 the account boasted over 1,000 Tweets and more than 250,000 followers.<sup>202</sup> The group's Instagram account is less popular, with only around 3,000 followers and over 200 posts. The account, as yet unverified by Instagram, shares the commission's Twitter handle of @pvgovsa.<sup>203</sup> The CPVPV also has accounts with Facebook, YouTube, and SnapChat.<sup>204</sup>

A review of what the CPVPV chooses to post online offers a view into how the commission wishes to present itself to its constituents. The group, religious by its very nature as a morality police force, focuses heavily on the *Hajj* pilgrimage and injunctions to pray.<sup>205</sup> Videos and photographs posted to Twitter and Instagram showcase technologically advanced mobile prayer units. The units are truck and trailer combinations replete with sinks for the ablutions required before prayer, and are plastered with the CPVPV logo and boast large video screens.<sup>206</sup> The commission also showcases its role as an educative body. Many social media posts focus on *mutaween* that man

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>202</sup> "Twitter - @PvGovSa." <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa>.

<sup>203</sup> "Instagram - @pvgovsa." <https://www.instagram.com/pvgovsa/>.

<sup>204</sup> "Facebook - @pvgovsa." <https://www.facebook.com/pvgovsa/>; "Twitter - @PvGovSa." <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 20 May 2016, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/733714648839692288/>

<sup>205</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 28 August 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/902228194719408129>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 13 May 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/863416472659480576>.

<sup>206</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 4 May 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BTrWkLoBR6c/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 8 May 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BT1yHb8hzqn/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 6 August 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXdkZs3hDqC/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 14 August 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXyHtXkBsbc/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 28 August 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/902228194719408129>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 13 May 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/863416472659480576>.



information booths and hand out pamphlets.<sup>207</sup> Contrary to their reputation of brutality, the Twitter and Instagram feeds are peppered with friendly *mutaween* visiting hospital patients and giving gifts and sweets to children.<sup>208</sup> Despite the smiles, the commission also regularly posts statements about joint security operations with various agencies, including provincial police and the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>209</sup> The CPVPV's official website has links to its social media profiles, and even displays its latest Tweet next to a short survey that asks visitors to rate the commission's services.<sup>210</sup> The CPVPV seems to be presenting a new face to the public in the wake of Vision 2030 as a service oriented, compassionate organization that offers society tangible benefits.

#### D. CONCLUSION

It is clear that CPVPV is a tool of clerical power and influence in society. However, as demonstrated throughout the chapter, the commission is also a source of unrest and a liability for the state, necessitating a series of reforming efforts throughout the twenty-first century. The effects of the latest reforms remain to be seen. But the CPVPV's efforts to expand into social media and Internet censorship demonstrates that the commission will remain relevant in the years to come. The CPVPV continues to be an effective tool to project power into society by contributing to suppression of religious and political dissent. Despite its lowered profile when it comes to physical policing on the

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<sup>207</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 6 August 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXdkZs3hDqC/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 14 August 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXyHtXkBsbc/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 28 August 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/902228194719408129>.

<sup>208</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 12 March 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BRjJo4RhRfE/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 11 February 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BQXqvyVgmXO/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 6 June 17, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/87219828556538304>.

<sup>209</sup> CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 30 April 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BThOw2dBcTe/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Instagram photograph (Arabic), 13 December 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BN96N04A4oZ/?taken-by=pvgovsa>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 11 August 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/895946918114807808>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 30 May 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/869728952021123074>; CPVPV (@pvgovsa) Twitter post (Arabic), 6 May 2017, <https://twitter.com/PvGovSa/status/860797447622340609>.

<sup>210</sup> "General Presidency of the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vices (Arabic)." <https://www.pv.gov.sa/Pages/PVHome.aspx>.

streets of Saudi cities, the CPVPV is still a visible presence in the lives of everyday Saudi citizens. The commission can continue to leverage its ties with the clerical establishment and conservative elements of the population to receive government resources and street-level cooperation.

The commission, despite the limits imposed upon its law enforcement authorities, does not appear to be in danger of disbandment. As previously stated, the dual political-religious system of authority in Saudi Arabia that produced the CPVPV also protects it. As the Gulf and the Middle East at large continue to be consumed by sectarian tensions and conflict, the CPVPV will likely remain an attractive way for the government to continue its campaign to suppress rebellious and liberal elements—such as the Shia and other dissenters—and is therefore too valuable to abolish. If its rebranding efforts are successful, perhaps the CPVPV can rehabilitate its image within its constituency and thereby increase its effectiveness. Nonetheless, the commission continues to be an effective means of project state power—on the streets and online.

### III. MORALITY POLICING IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran appears similar to its rival Saudi Arabia in many ways. They are both Muslim majority countries ruled by religiously conservative governments. They both adhere to elements of *sharia*, or Islamic law. And both countries employ prominent morality police forces to enforce ideal Islamic practices and norms upon their populaces. However, the character of religious, political, and morality policing systems of Iran differ greatly from that of Saudi Arabia. Much of this difference stems from regime type and the relationship of religious clergy to the government. In Saudi Arabia, the rulers are closely allied with the religious establishment, whereas in Iran, the rulers are the religious establishment. Unlike Saudi Arabia, as well as the Taliban, Iran does not restrict its morality police force to one agency. Instead, the concept of “promoting virtue and prohibiting vice” is a broad-based effort.<sup>211</sup> The leaders of Iran employ their morality forces for various missions, to include the suppression of political dissent and to defend Islamic ideals, and they draw upon large segments of society in an effort to do so.<sup>212</sup> From traditional law enforcement agencies and state-sponsored militias to vigilante groups, the forces involved in policing the morality of Iranian society are too large and too complex to explore comprehensively within the scope of this chapter. As this thesis is concerned with the use of police forces directed by the government to police morality, this chapter will more narrowly focus on morality policing units, with less attention given to the other varied organizations that are somehow connected to morality promotion efforts.

This chapter will examine the moral policing program of Iran with a focus on the Basij militia and the Guidance Patrols of the National Police Force. The first section of the chapter will provide background information and historical context of the morality policing programs. The second section will examine the structure and operations of the

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<sup>211</sup> Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 149; Golkar, *Captive Society*, 75–76.

<sup>212</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 75–76.

forces. The third section will address some recent reformist rhetoric and examples of conservative entrenchment that were not otherwise addressed throughout the chapter, followed by a conclusion.

#### **A. BACKGROUND OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC AND GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED MORALITY POLICING**

In 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini harnessed the disparate interests and actors of the Islamic Revolution to help establish the Islamic Republic of Iran under his ideology of “guardianship of the jurist,” or *velayat-e faqih*. Under this concept, Iran is ruled directly by the Twelver Shia clerical establishment, with Khomeini himself serving as the ultimate governmental authority in the office of the Supreme Leader.<sup>213</sup> One of the main goals of the revolution was to establish an Islamic society. The constitution of the Islamic Republic specifically compelled the Iranian citizenry to live according to the Islamic principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong.<sup>214</sup>

From the foundation of the republic, the regime established numerous “Islamic revolutionary committees” to enforce moral behavior under the purview of a Morality Bureau.<sup>215</sup> These revolutionary committees proliferated in cities across Iran and were allied or directed by local clergy members; they engaged in activities that ranged from morality policing to violent repression of those that did not adhere to revolutionary principles. The committees were eventually dissolved and replaced with more traditional law enforcement bodies, or combined with the Basij militia, by the end of the 1980s.<sup>216</sup> When Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ascended to the role of Supreme Leader in 1989, he sought to rally conservative support by declaring that the republic was under threat from a “cultural invasion” from the West. In the name of fighting this threat, the new Supreme Leader established the independent Bureau for the Revival of Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong, and charged the Basij with the bulk of the responsibility for

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<sup>213</sup> Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, 11–13.

<sup>214</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 76.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

maintaining an Islamic society.<sup>217</sup> While the militia is not alone in this responsibility, it is a large organization that permeates every other morality police unit, and central to Iran's morality policing approach.

## **B. STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF MORALITY POLICE FORCES**

The Basij militia was established amidst the events of the 1979 Islamic Revolution as the Mobilization of the Oppressed, or *Basij-e Mostaz'afin*, hereafter referred to as the Basij militia.<sup>218</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the establishment of the organization in 1979, and at the time, it was only one of a myriad of armed militia groups operating within Iran. The Basij were closely affiliated with and directed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and the both groups' involvement in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980 to 1988 ensured their continuing influence within the regime in the following decades.<sup>219</sup> The militia was expected to mobilize the Iranian population as a citizen army, with a force numbering 20 million volunteers, to serve in the defense of their country and the new regime.<sup>220</sup> From the outset, the IRGC was charged with the organization and training of volunteers from all walks of life, located at Basij bases that the militia established in nearly every community mosque.<sup>221</sup> For a brief time, in the midst of government reorganization, the militia fell under the purview of the Iranian president and the Ministry of the Interior. However, in the same year of its formal establishment in 1980, the Basij were placed directly under the direction of the Supreme Leader, and it absorbed various other militia groups within it. The next year, the Basij was incorporated formally as a unit within the IRGC.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>218</sup> Afshon Ostovar, "Iran's Basij: Membership in a Militant Islamist Organization," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (2013): 345–361.  
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the\\_middle\\_east\\_journal/v067/67.3.ostovar.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the_middle_east_journal/v067/67.3.ostovar.html), 348.

<sup>219</sup> Ostovar, "Iran's Basij," 348–349; David Thurfjell, *Living Shi'ism: Instances of Ritualisation Among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 38.

<sup>220</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 13–14.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 14; Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, 11–13.

<sup>222</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 14.

When Ayatollah Khamenei became Supreme Leader in 1989, he lacked the religious credentials of his predecessor; therefore, he expanded and consolidated the IRGC and Basij under his control as a way to solidify his power.<sup>223</sup> The Basij were given new national security responsibilities, such as the suppression of societal unrest and public protest.<sup>224</sup> The Basij mission to police societal morals was also formalized during this period with the establishment of the Basij morality headquarters.<sup>225</sup> In 1993, the militia was granted formal powers of arrest in the pursuit of morality policing and other security duties.<sup>226</sup>

### 1. Structure of the Basij Militia

The membership of the Basij militia is estimated to be between 4 million and 5 million, though as various scholars contend, determining the true numbers of the militia is difficult due to the opacity of the organization.<sup>227</sup> A volunteer organization with chapters and missions directed towards all walks of life, from toddlers to college students to career military members, members range from casual attendants of meetings at the local mosque to IRGC-trained security personnel.<sup>228</sup> Membership in the Basij overlaps with other organizations. Members of the IRGC, law enforcement, and religious-based vigilante groups are often also members of the Basij or coordinate closely with them.<sup>229</sup> This overlap is possible due to the various levels of membership available to volunteers, each with varying requirements of time commitment and training.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 18–19.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 19; Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, 150.

<sup>226</sup> Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam*, 149.

<sup>227</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 52–53.

<sup>228</sup> Ostovar, “Iran’s Basij,” 349; Golkar, *Captive Society*, 37–38, 46.

<sup>229</sup> “Vigilante Violence: The Acid Attacks Against Women in Iran and the State’s Assault on Women’s Rights,” International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, March 6, 2015, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/03/vigilante-violence-report/>, 8; Ostovar, “Iran’s Basij,” 345; Golkar, *Captive Society*, 47–52, 97–98.

<sup>230</sup> Ostovar, “Iran’s Basij,” 345.

Basij morality policing operations are coordinated via provincial headquarters. The chain of command then descends to the regional, district, and local levels.<sup>231</sup> An accurate count of the Basij's morality force is not publically available, but in 2005 a leader within the organization claimed that half a million Basij morality enforcers were spread across 300 units around the country.<sup>232</sup> Law enforcement powers afforded to Basij depend on the rank and membership type of the member, and range from low-level members being restricted to offering "oral guidance or verbal warning," to group leaders who "have an open hand in implementing Islamic order" and possess the power to arrest suspects.<sup>233</sup> The majority of Basij volunteers are youths—often as young as 15—and poor.<sup>234</sup> An internal Basij study revealed that approximately two thirds of members did not possess the equivalent to a high school diploma.<sup>235</sup> The militia provides ideological training for its members, but the education offered is often "doctrinal" and not academically rigorous.<sup>236</sup> Regular recruits need only complete two days of training in the promotion of virtue and prohibition of vice in order to join the morality squads, though their chiefs are required to attend a more in-depth course from the militia's Deputy of Training and Education.<sup>237</sup>

The Islamic Republic explicitly charges the Basij to play an active role in the policing of morality law.<sup>238</sup> The militia's responsibilities range from policing the Islamic dress code, monitoring interactions between genders, to stemming the influence of Western culture. In order to accomplish this broad mission, the morality units utilize methods such as vehicle checkpoints, street patrols, and surveillance. Units operate overtly in uniform as well as undercover.<sup>239</sup> The Basij and IRGC provide training in

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<sup>231</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society* 83–84.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>234</sup> Ostovar, "Iran's Basij," 358.

<sup>235</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 83.

<sup>236</sup> Ostovar, "Iran's Basij," 356.

<sup>237</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 82.

<sup>238</sup> "Vigilante Violence," 7; Golkar, *Captive Society*, 84.

<sup>239</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 84.

basic security and law enforcement operations to members, to include physical combat and the use of firearms. The training, procedures, and operations of morality enforcement units is believed to be somewhat decentralized, and is left to the discretion of regional and local leadership.<sup>240</sup>

## **2. Guidance Patrols**

Various uniformed law enforcement units are dedicated to uphold public morality throughout Iran.<sup>241</sup> While the Supreme Leader holds ultimate authority over the security apparatus in Iran, the law enforcement units of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and Ministry of the Interior report to the president and are separate from the IRGC and Basij, and also contribute to morality policing.<sup>242</sup> Law enforcement agencies and the Basij often hold joint meetings and training exercises in order to coordinate their security operations. In 2006, Basij commander General Seyed Mohammad Hejazi told local media that the militia and the National Police Force (*Niruy-e Entezamiy-e Jomhuriy-e Eslami*) “can fully cooperate and work with each other” despite their separate missions.<sup>243</sup> Below are some examples of formal law enforcement units charged with the morality policing mission.

In the early 2000s, various police groups were created or strengthened with the aim of policing moral behavior in society. A 2002 article by Radio Free Europe noted the appearance of an “elite force” of law enforcement called “Special Units” (*Yegen-i Vishe*) on the streets of Tehran that were dedicated to aggressively pursuing violators of the dress code and other Islamic norms.<sup>244</sup> The police department announced the introduction of the force, which was comprised of 60 units dedicated to arresting drug users and those

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<sup>240</sup> Ostovar, “Iran’s Basij,” 356.

<sup>241</sup> “Iran 2016 Human Rights Report,” United States Department of State, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>, 8.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>243</sup> “Iran: Tehran Basij, Law Enforcement Force, to Hold Joint Exercise.” *BBC Selected Newspaper Articles: Iran (Published as Kayhan (Tehran, Iran))*, March 4, 2006, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/110363C48EECA5F0?p=AWNB>.

<sup>244</sup> Charles Recknagel and Azam Gorgin, “Iran: New ‘Morality Police’ Units Generate Controversy.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 25, 2002, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1100367.html>.



“who harass women and exhibit un-Islamic behavior.”<sup>245</sup> The units’ confrontation with citizens were so violent, however, that patrols were reduced a month after their introduction amidst public outcry.<sup>246</sup> A Human Rights Watch report detailed that in 2004, the judiciary formed its own morality police force called the Social Protection Division (*Setad-e Hefazat Ejtema’i*). By 2005, 210 units of 1,970 members—mainly former soldiers—patrolled in the city of Qom alone.<sup>247</sup>

The National Police Force also has a prominent role in morality policing.<sup>248</sup> The *Gasht-e Ershad*, or Guidance Patrol—was established in 2007 on the behest of then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>249</sup> Their primary role is to ensure that female citizens adhere to the Islamic dress code: nail polish, makeup, and revealing clothing are all grounds for arrest.<sup>250</sup> The units target highly trafficked urban areas, such as squares and intersections.<sup>251</sup> Male Guidance Patrol members are clad in green uniforms, while female members wear black and green *chador*. Both genders have badges and insignia affixed to their clothing. Patrol teams drive marked vans, which are used to transport moral offenders to the local police station.<sup>252</sup> Some of the units’ arrests draw international

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> “‘We are a Buried Generation’: Discrimination and Violence Against Sexual Minorities in Iran,” Human Rights Watch, December 15, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/12/15/we-are-buried-generation/discrimination-and-violence-against-sexual-minorities>, 46.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>249</sup> “Who are Islamic ‘Morality Police’?” *BBC News*, April 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36101150>; Zahra Alipour, “Will Iran’s New Undercover Morality Agents have any Impact?” *Al-Monitor*, May 4, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/iran-undercover-morality-agents-tehran-police-chief.html>.

<sup>250</sup> Peter Kenyon, “Springtime in Iran Means the ‘Morality Police’ are Out in Force,” *All Things Considered*, May 3, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/05/03/476511439/springtime-in-iran-means-the-morality-police-are-out-in-force>; Yara Elmjouie, “Iran’s Morality Police: Patrolling the Streets by Stealth,” *The Guardian*, June 19, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2014/jun/19/iran-morality-police-patrol>.

<sup>251</sup> Elmjouie, “Iran’s Morality Police: Patrolling the Streets by Stealth.”

<sup>252</sup> “Iran Deploys Plainclothes Morality Police on Tehran Streets,” *Times of Israel*, April 27, 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-deploys-plainclothes-morality-police-on-tehran-streets/>; Alipour, “Will Iran’s New Undercover Morality Agents have any Impact?”

media attention.<sup>253</sup> Much like with Saudi Arabia's *mutaween*, videos capturing violent altercations between Guidance Patrol members and women they attempt to detain have been posted to the Internet and sparked international condemnation in the media.<sup>254</sup>

### 3. Ansar-e Hezbollah and Vigilante Morality Policing

An organization that has drawn the attention of human rights groups and the media is Ansar-e Hezbollah, or the Nation of Hezbollah.<sup>255</sup> Ansar-e Hezbollah is a non-state organization that champions conservative Islamist policies.<sup>256</sup> The group is affiliated with the Basij, and has participated in repressing political dissent and popular demonstrations against the regime, most notably during student-led protests in 1999 and the Green Movement in 2009.<sup>257</sup> Many in the group hold dual membership with the Ansar-e Hezbollah and the Basij.<sup>258</sup> Dedicated to ensuring the maintenance of female chastity through the proper wear of *hijab*, the Ansar-e Hezbollah conduct their own volunteer morality policing. In 2014, the group held a mass demonstration in downtown Iran to protest women who did not adhere to proper veiling.<sup>259</sup> The demonstration was

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<sup>253</sup> Elmjouie, "Iran's Morality Police: Patrolling the Streets by Stealth"; "Who are Islamic 'Morality Police'?" Kenyon, "Springtime in Iran Means the 'Morality Police' are Out in Force"; Henry Johnson, "Iran's President has had enough of its Morality Police," *Foreign Policy*, April 20, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/20/irans-president-has-had-enough-of-its-morality-police/>.

<sup>254</sup> "Video shows Distressed Woman Resisting Arrest by Iran's Morality Police," *Women in the World (New York Times)*, December 5, 2016, <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2016/12/05/video-shows-distressed-woman-resisting-arrest-by-irans-morality-police/>; "Harrowing Videos Provide a Peek Inside Iran Morality Police Vehicles," *Women in the World (New York Times)*, May 11, 2017, <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2017/05/11/harrowing-videos-provide-a-peek-inside-iran-morality-police-vehicles/>; Lizzie Dearden, "Iranian Morality Police Beat and Detain 14-Year-Old Girl 'for Wearing Ripped Jeans,'" *The Independent*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iran-morality-police-14-year-old-girl-teenage-ripped-jeans-sharia-guidance-patrols-womens-right-a7582206.html>.

<sup>255</sup> Recknagel and Gorgin, "Iran: New 'Morality Police' Units Generate Controversy"; "Vigilante Violence."

<sup>256</sup> "Iran Police Chief Says Party Can't Deploy Morality Police without Permission," *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran (Published as ISNA (Tehran, Iran))*, September 24, 2014, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1508A21EE1160438?p=AWNB>; "Vigilante Violence," 8.

<sup>257</sup> "Vigilante Violence," 21, 95.

<sup>258</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 21.

<sup>259</sup> "Vigilante Violence," 9.

the opening volley of a wide-spread chastity campaign.<sup>260</sup> The group organized twenty teams of 4,000 members in motorcycle bands to police Tehran and enforce the Islamic dress code.<sup>261</sup> The Ministry of the Interior objected to the group conducting vigilante operations without registering for a permit.<sup>262</sup> In September 2014, Iran's head of law enforcement urged the group to register with the Headquarters for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice as an "honorary police force."<sup>263</sup> Ansar-e Hezbollah announced that it did not need to apply for a permit to uphold virtue in society, and continued its operations.<sup>264</sup>

#### **4. Morality Policing of Drugs and Alcohol**

According to Amnesty International, Iran executed approximately 567 people in 2016, ranking second only to China in number of death sentences meted out by nations of the world.<sup>265</sup> That number fell from the 2015 figure, which was somewhere between 966 to 977 executions.<sup>266</sup> A report compiled for the United Nations General Assembly stated that the majority of executions were due to drug crimes. Iran claimed that the sentences were necessary, as millions of dollars and the lives of over 4,000 security personnel had been spent in the republic's war on drugs.<sup>267</sup> In accordance with *sharia*, both drugs and alcohol are banned in Iran. However, their underground trafficking and use remain widespread, in part because Iran is in the center of massive drug trafficking route that

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> "Iran Police Chief Says Party Can't Deploy Morality Police without Permission"; "Vigilante Violence," 9.

<sup>262</sup> "Vigilante Violence," 10.

<sup>263</sup> "Iran Police Chief Says Party Can't Deploy Morality Police without Permission."

<sup>264</sup> "Vigilante Violence," 10.

<sup>265</sup> "The Death Penalty in 2016: Facts and Figures." Amnesty International, April 11, 2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/death-penalty-2016-facts-and-figures/>.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.; "Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report of the Secretary-General," United Nations General Assembly, September 6, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/374](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/374), 2.

<sup>267</sup> "Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 2.

extends from Southwest Asia to Europe.<sup>268</sup> As evidenced by the number of executions carried out for drug crimes, their eradication is a large priority for the state.

The Basij's involvement in combatting drug use and trafficking was highlighted by Iranian media in the early 2000s. The Basij collaborated extensively with other law enforcement agencies to conduct search and arrest sting operations, and seized tons of illegal drugs pursuant to checkpoint searches.<sup>269</sup> Some Basij units volunteered to conduct search-and-kill missions that targeted drug smugglers.<sup>270</sup> In recent years, the Basij continued to contribute to the state effort to combat drug and alcohol use in the course of its security and morality policing missions. In 2011, the commander of the Basij claimed that the militia could "eradicate drug use," equating the ability to the Basij's successful enforcement of *hijab* modesty laws.<sup>271</sup>

## **5. Morality Policing of Clothing, Gender Segregation, and Sexuality**

Similar to their counterparts in the other cases examined in this thesis, the Basij and other morality police forces are primarily concerned with maintenance of societal morality through the enforcement of Islamic norms in dress, gender relations, and sexuality. And much like Saudi Arabia in particular, Iran's morality police face some societal backlash for the use of heavy-handed tactics, which are primarily aimed at women. Despite calls for reform within the elected government, the programs remain.

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<sup>268</sup> "Iran: Police Arrest 3000 Drug Addicts, Dealers in Tehran." *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran* (Published as IRNA News Agency (Tehran, Iran)), June 25, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1043AAC9A13AFD51?p=AWNB>.

<sup>269</sup> "Iran: Police Arrest 3000 Drug Addicts, Dealers in Tehran"; "Iran: Members of Volunteer Force Said to have Seized Heroin in North Tehran," *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran* (Published as IRNA News Agency), April 29, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1043AA3F72609118?p=AWNB>.

<sup>270</sup> "Iran: Official Says Basij Volunteers Involved in Fight Against Narcotics," *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran* (Published as IRNA News Agency), December 17, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/1043AC71CEB8A419?p=AWNB>.

<sup>271</sup> "Iran Commander Says Basij to Solve Hijab and Drugs Problems," *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran* (Published as ISNA (Tehran, Iran)), December 18, 2011, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/13BBCFFD9C880FD8?p=AWNB>.

*a. Enforcing the Islamic Republic's Dress Code*

Iranian women are compelled by law to dress modestly and cover their hair with a *hijab* or *chador*, a long, cloak-like garment.<sup>272</sup> In recent years, women have challenged the prescribed dress code. The young, urban, and wealthy dare to wear their *hijab* pushed far back on their head, and are opting to wear fashionable, more revealing garments than is traditionally accepted since the Islamic Revolution.<sup>273</sup> To combat this trend of so-called “bad *hijab*,” the state adopted a whole-of-government approach by implementing chastity programs to encourage women to cover up, and dispatching a myriad of law enforcement and morality squads to punish those who do not.<sup>274</sup>

Once a year, the state sponsors “*Hijab and Dignity Week*” to celebrate women who veil properly. The Women’s Basij Organization is involved in the planning and execution of the event, which generally falls in the second week in July. The date commemorates July 12, 1935, the day that Reza Shah Pahlavi banned veiling at a mosque.<sup>275</sup> The week features religious programs and various clothing exhibits, as well as workshops aimed to educate female teachers about the ideology of Islamic dress and chastity.<sup>276</sup> In 2012, the Basij launched an “international congress” to celebrate the dress code, and invited “noble women” from other countries to participate.<sup>277</sup> These events

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<sup>272</sup> “You Shall Procreate: Attacks on Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Iran,” Amnesty International, March 10, 2015, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/you-shall-procreate-attacks-on-womens-sexual-and-reproductive-rights-in-iran/>, 36; “Iran 2016 Human Rights Report,” 36; “Vigilante Violence,” 7.

<sup>273</sup> Kenyon, “Springtime in Iran Means the ‘Morality Police’ are Out in Force”; Elmjouie, “Iran’s Morality Police: Patrolling the Streets by Stealth.”

<sup>274</sup> “Officials Warn Strict Punishment for Iranian Women Caught Wearing ‘Bad Hijabs’ as Summer Heat Begins,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/06/officials-warn-strict-punishment-for-iranian-women-caught-wearing-bad-hijabs-as-summer-heat-begins/>; Elmjouie, “Iran’s Morality Police: Patrolling the Streets by Stealth.”

<sup>275</sup> “Iran to Mark Hijab and Modesty Week,” *Tehran Times*, July 11, 2017, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/news/414959/Iran-to-mark-hijab-and-modesty-week>; “Congress on Hijab and Modesty Held in Tehran,” *Tehran Times (Iran)*, July 12, 2016, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/15E12C770053D108?p=AWNB>.

<sup>276</sup> “Iran to Mark Hijab and Modesty Week”; “Iranian Women to Rally in Support of Hijab Observance,” *Tehran Times (Iran)*, June 27, 2011, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/1382294DA326CF50?p=AWNB>.

<sup>277</sup> “Iranian Women to Rally in Support of Hijab Observance.”

highlight the state's efforts to impose its Islamic ideal upon society by employing the Basij in one of the organization's non-security roles.

Despite the pro-modesty rallies and events, it is still necessary for the regime to rely on the security apparatus to punish those who flout convention. As Amnesty International reported, females over the age of seven must veil and cover their limbs in order to participate in public life.<sup>278</sup> Those that do not adhere to the various laws that govern acceptable dress are subject to arrest, imprisonment, and fines.<sup>279</sup> In a one year period from 2013 to 2014, more than 2.9 million women were cited for bad *hijab*, and over 18,000 women were criminally charged.<sup>280</sup> In 2017, a prosecutor in northern Iran announced that women with improper dress would have their vehicles impounded.<sup>281</sup> In another province, a judge proclaimed that violators would be subjected to eight hours of "educational class" in lieu of prosecution.<sup>282</sup> Such examples illustrate the wide discretion the judiciary possesses in assigning punishment to women who violate morality.

The enforcement methods that capture the most attention from the Western media are those employed by predominantly uniformed morality policing squads, such as the Guidance Patrol. The police employ cameras to record violators in the act of breaking moral laws.<sup>283</sup> Marked vans and uniformed officers of both genders monitor highly populated areas and target female violators, whom they coerce into the vans for eventual transport to a police station.<sup>284</sup> Some of these altercations turn violent. As in Saudi Arabia, some Iranians record their run-ins with the morality police and post the videos to social media. In 2016 and 2017, the New York Times featured two of these videos, where the female suspects were physically detained for infractions such as the donning a too-

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<sup>278</sup> "You Shall Procreate," 36.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>281</sup> "Officials Warn Strict Punishment for Iranian Women Caught Wearing "Bad Hijabs" as Summer Heat Begins."

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> "Vice Squad Active." *Iran News*, May 27, 2010, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/13003A29713A1CA0?p=AWNB>.

<sup>284</sup> Elmjouie, "Iran's Morality Police: Patrolling the Streets by Stealth."

short coat and resisting arrest.<sup>285</sup> Female police officers were integral to the interactions, and were involved in restraining a woman who attempted to run away.<sup>286</sup> In February 2017, the Independent reported on the experience of a 14-year-old girl, who was detained and beaten for wearing purposefully ripped jeans and resisting arrest. She, like many other violators of moral law, was required to sign a pledge that she would dress more modestly before she was released to her family.<sup>287</sup> These videos and stories are often shared on social media sites, such as the Facebook page entitled “My Stealthy Freedom,” which advocates for women’s rights in Iran.<sup>288</sup>

Several social media campaigns criticizing the Islamic dress code have stemmed from the “My Stealthy Freedom” Facebook group. Notably, the social media page featured women who shaved their hair to avoid requirements to wear *hijab*, and men who snapped photographs of themselves in traditionally female veils in order to show solidarity with the women in their lives.<sup>289</sup> Another development, which has garnered some excitement from Iranian smartphone users, was the release of an Android application called Gershad.<sup>290</sup> The application and affiliated website allows users to mark the locations of known Guidance Patrol locations on a map in order to help others avoid them.<sup>291</sup> While these social media campaigns do not appear to garner the international attention that viral Saudi posts do, as discussed in the previous chapter, they demonstrate that some segments of Iranian society are actively advocating against the restrictive

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<sup>285</sup> “Harrowing Videos Provide a Peek Inside Iran Morality Police Vehicles”; “Video shows Distressed Woman Resisting Arrest by Iran’s Morality Police.”

<sup>286</sup> “Video shows Distressed Woman Resisting Arrest by Iran’s Morality Police.”

<sup>287</sup> Dearden, “Iranian Morality Police Beat and Detain 14-Year-Old Girl ‘for Wearing Ripped Jeans.’”

<sup>288</sup> “Facebook - My Stealthy Freedom.” <https://www.facebook.com/StealthyFreedom/>.

<sup>289</sup> Heather Saul, “Iranian Women Cut their Hair Off and Dress as Men to Avoid Morality Police.” *The Independent*, May 21, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/iranian-women-cut-hair-off-and-dress-as-men-to-avoid-morality-police-a7041236.html>; Heather Saul, “Men in Iran are Wearing Hijabs in Solidarity with their Wives Who are Forced to Cover their Hair,” *The Independent*, July 28, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/men-in-iran-are-wearing-hijabs-in-solidarity-with-their-wives-a7160146.html>.

<sup>290</sup> “New App that Detects Morality Police is Instant Hit in Iran,” *Center for Human Rights in Iran*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/02/gershad-app/>.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.; Gershad, “داش رگ (Gershad),” accessed October 1, 2017, <https://gershad.com>.

morals policing of dress code. This has led to calls for reforms of morality police, which is examined later in the chapter.

***b. The Maintenance of Gender Segregation***

While gender segregation is not as rigidly enforced in Iran as it is in Saudi Arabia and under the Taliban, morality police forces are charged with enforcing laws against gender-mixing.<sup>292</sup> All sexual activity outside of marriage is illegal in Iran.<sup>293</sup> Relationships between unmarried men and women are subject to punishment via flogging, and many young Iranians are also subject to corporal punishment for attending mixed-gendered parties and private events.<sup>294</sup> Amnesty International cited one example where 35 Iranians were subjected to flogging after they were arrested for dancing and drinking at a mixed-gender party.<sup>295</sup> The United Nations condemned a report of the same instance, as well as the revised 2013 Islamic Penal Code. The code expanded the application of corporal punishment for a wide range of offenses, to include that of unrelated men and women shaking hands.<sup>296</sup>

In Iran, adultery is an offense punishable by flogging or death by stoning.<sup>297</sup> The United Nations report singled out the case of one woman, who was exonerated for the murder of her husband, but subsequently sentenced to death by stoning for carrying out a relationship with her husband's murderer. Her ultimate fate was unclear.<sup>298</sup> The opacity surrounding the fates of those sentenced to death by stoning is due to the implementation of a "moratorium" on the practice in 2002.<sup>299</sup> Despite this, the relative independence with

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<sup>292</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 75.

<sup>293</sup> "'We are a Buried Generation,'" 19.

<sup>294</sup> "Iran: Wave of Floggings, Amputations and Other Vicious Punishments," Amnesty International, January 18, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/iran-wave-of-floggings-amputations-and-other-vicious-punishments/>.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> "Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 7.

<sup>297</sup> "Iran: Wave of Floggings, Amputations and Other Vicious Punishments."

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>299</sup> Mike Woolridge, "Iran's Grim History of Death by Stoning," *BBC News*, July 9, 2010, <http://www.bbc.com/news/10579121>.



which individual judges operate means that the practice continues, particularly in rural and conservative areas.<sup>300</sup> This illustrates that even if the regime is responsive to some calls for reform or moderation in the criminal justice system, conservative elements of local government and society are able to operate according to their personal brands of morality.

*c. Policing Sexuality and Transgenderism*

Homosexuality is heavily persecuted in Iran. Human Rights Watch published a comprehensive report detailing the situation faced by homosexual and non-gender conforming individuals in the republic.<sup>301</sup> Intercourse between males is punishable by the death penalty, and intercourse between females is punishable by flogging.<sup>302</sup> However, lesbians who repeat the offenses multiple times may ultimately be sentenced to a capital offense.<sup>303</sup> Morality police forces within law enforcement entities and the Basij target homosexuals through surveillance in public spaces and online, raids on private dwellings, and entrapment operations with the use of undercover agents and informants within the homosexual community.<sup>304</sup> Human Rights Watch accused the Basij and other forces of mistreating homosexual detainees through sexual assault and torture.<sup>305</sup>

Iran is unique to the region in that it recognizes transgenderism and subsidizes gender reassignment surgeries and treatment.<sup>306</sup> Immediately after the Islamic Revolution, transgenderism was, like homosexuality, illegal. But in 1986, a transgendered individual petitioned for a *fatwa* from then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah

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<sup>300</sup> Laura Secor, “War of Words: A Woman’s Battle to End Stoning and Juvenile Execution in Iran,” *The New Yorker*, January 4, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/04/war-of-words-annals-of-activism-laura-secor>.

<sup>301</sup> “‘We are a Buried Generation.’”

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>306</sup> Neha Thirani Bagri, “‘Everyone Treated Me Like a Saint’—In Iran, There’s Only One Way to Survive as a Transgender Person,” *Quartz*, April 19, 2017, <https://qz.com/889548/everyone-treated-me-like-a-saint-in-iran-theres-only-one-way-to-survive-as-a-transgender-person/>; “‘We are a Buried Generation,’” 3.

Khomeini, who ruled that gender reassignment surgery and hormone therapy were in accordance with Islamic law.<sup>307</sup> In 2013, gender reassignment was legislatively codified and placed under the jurisdiction of family courts.<sup>308</sup> As homosexuality remains illegal, many homosexual yet non-transgendered citizens are pressured to complete gender reassignment surgery.<sup>309</sup> Homosexual and transgendered individuals who do not elect to complete gender reassignment are not subject to legal recognition, and remain subject to morality policing.<sup>310</sup>

## 6. Maintaining Islamic Culture

The entire aim of the Islamic Republic's social mobilization and morality enforcement program is to maintain Islamic culture in the face of the war against Westernization. The clerical establishment often blames society's ills, from homosexuality to bad *hijab*, on the encroachment of liberal and Western values. As Human Rights Watch asserted, many in the Iranian government see gay and lesbian individuals as "diseased...corrupt agents of Western culture."<sup>311</sup> The United Nations condemned the 2016 arrest of Iranian fashion models accused of "promoting Western promiscuity" on Instagram.<sup>312</sup> In recent years government ministries banned vaguely-defined "homosexual and devil worshipping hairstyles," to include the Mullet, as they were seen as too Western.<sup>313</sup> These bans extended to tattoos, fake suntans, and full-body waxing for both genders.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Bagri, "Everyone Treated Me Like a Saint."

<sup>308</sup> "Human Rights Report: Being Transgender in Iran," OutRight Action International, 2016, <https://www.outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/OutRightTransReport.pdf>, 8.

<sup>309</sup> "We are a Buried Generation," 3.

<sup>310</sup> "Human Rights Report: Being Transgender in Iran," 9.

<sup>311</sup> "We are a Buried Generation," 3.

<sup>312</sup> "Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 9–10.

<sup>313</sup> Phil Daoust, "Iran Bans the Mullet," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/06/iran-bans-the-mullet>; Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran Bans 'Homosexual' and 'Devil Worshipping' Hairstyles," *The Guardian*, May 5, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/05/iran-bans-devil-worshipping-homosexual-hairstyles>.

<sup>314</sup> Dehghan, "Iran Bans 'Homosexual' and 'Devil Worshipping' Hairstyles."

## 7. Policing Religion: Religious Minorities, Mysticism, and Witchcraft

While Saudi Arabia dedicated an entire unit within its morality police force to the eradication of witchcraft, few reports mention the role that Iran's morality forces play in combatting sorcery, if any. However, in 2011, allegations of witchcraft emerged amidst the rivalry between then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the clerical establishment.<sup>315</sup> Dozens of Ahmadinejad's aids were arrested as "magicians," and some were accused of summoning *jinn*, or genies.<sup>316</sup> In 2017, a "religious mystic" and many of his followers who had previously been tolerated by the regime were arrested for founding and participating in a cult.<sup>317</sup> While the arrests were more than likely to be politically motivated, they shed some light on the Islamic Republic's treatment of religious practice and rhetoric outside the mainstream of Twelver Shiite Islam.

As the United States Department of State reported in 2011, the government of Iran also participates in the widespread, systematic oppression of the Baha'i religious minority.<sup>318</sup> Baha'is are required to register with the government, and their activities and those of other religious minority groups are "closely monitored" by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security.<sup>319</sup> Members of the Basij undergo ideological training that is designed to make them hostile towards religious ideologies, such as Wahhabism and Baha'ism that do not conform to the state's version of Islam. In view of the examples presented above, young Basij are also indoctrinated against Islamic mysticism.<sup>320</sup> The Basij itself has expressed interest in expanding to incorporate acceptable religious minorities—namely Christians and

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<sup>315</sup> Russell Goldman, "Iranian President Linked to Black Magic, Summoning Genies," *ABC News*, May 9, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/iranian-president-ahmadinejad-allies-charged-black-magic-summoning/story?id=13561870>.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.; Benjamin Radford, "Black Magic and Genies Stir Trouble in Iranian Politics," *Live Science*, May 10, 2011, <https://www.livescience.com/14100-magic-genies-iran-politics.html>.

<sup>317</sup> Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran Sentences Faith Healing Shiite Mystic to Death," *The New York Times*, Aug 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/world/middleeast/mohammad-ali-taheri-iran-death-sentence-mystic-healer-shiite-mystic.html>.

<sup>318</sup> "International Religious Freedom Report for 2011: Iran," United States Department of State, accessed September 21, 2017, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dliid=192883>, 1.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>320</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 64.

Zoroastrians—into the ranks of the Basij itself.<sup>321</sup> While the government is engaged in widespread campaigns against non-Shia—in which Basij members as members of the security structure are very likely apart—the organization itself has expressed some interest in recruiting minority groups.

### **C. REFORMING THE MORALITY POLICE AND CONSERVATIVE POWER**

In 2009, allegations of electoral fraud launched demonstrations and social unrest throughout Iran. The Basij militia, acting in its capacity as security personnel and regime protection, participated in the violent subjugations of the protests.<sup>322</sup> Since the so-called Green Movement, the Basij have been regarded with suspicion by many Iranians.<sup>323</sup> However, the successful quelling of the demonstrations showed the militia's value to the maintenance of the regime, as well as the group's loyalty to clerical jurisprudence.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who campaigned for both of his presidential terms on reformist policies, has a history of questioning the necessity and efficacy of morality police forces.<sup>324</sup> In 2013, he attempted to reign in their operations by shifting the state's "modesty project" to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, where he would have more direct control over operations.<sup>325</sup> Despite backlash directed toward morality patrols, conservative elements are well-entrenched in the Iranian government and society. In 2014, the proposed adoption of a law entitled "the Plan to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice," one of many pieces of legislations introduced to the Iranian parliament to control social morality, sparked condemnation from human rights

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 1, 100.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>324</sup> "President Says Iranian Culture Cannot be Advanced by Morality Police," *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran* (Published as IRNA News Agency (Tehran, Iran)), September 7, 2014, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/150328C308CB2CC8?p=AWNB>; Johnson, "Iran's President has had enough of its Morality Police."

<sup>325</sup> Ahmed Vahdat, "Iran to Ban Morality Police from Targeting Women," *The Telegraph*, November 13, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/10446613/Iran-to-ban-morality-police-from-targeting-women.html>.

groups.<sup>326</sup> The law would have called for “all citizens” to apply the ideology of promoting virtue and prohibiting vice in their daily lives, and included provisions to strengthen the law enforcement powers of the Basij and other morality policing bodies.<sup>327</sup> As of 2015, the bill was under review for ambiguous language, but would be open for a vote in parliament upon its revision.<sup>328</sup> Groups such as Human Rights Watch claimed that the bill would expand “the powers of the police, the Basij and even the general public,” and would place “women at further risk of harassment, intimidation and violence.”<sup>329</sup>

In 2016, the Tehran branch of the National Police Force announced the introduction of 7,000 undercover officers who would conduct covert morality policing activities. The announcement met with critical reception both domestically and internationally.<sup>330</sup> In response to the 2016 announcement, Rouhani offered comments about “dignity” and criticized the decision, which earned him a rebuke from one of Supreme Leader’s provincial representatives.<sup>331</sup> Despite Rouhani’s efforts to appeal to his electoral base as a moderate reformer, the true power over security services and moral policy appears to remain in the hands of the Supreme Leader and his conservative clerical allies.

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<sup>326</sup> “Vigilante Violence,” 38.

<sup>327</sup> “You Shall Procreate,” 38.

<sup>328</sup> “Vigilante Violence,” 7.

<sup>329</sup> “You Shall Procreate,” 38.

<sup>330</sup> Alipour, “Will Iran’s New Undercover Morality Agents have any Impact?”; Kenyon, “Springtime in Iran Means the ‘Morality Police’ are Out in Force”; Johnson, “Iran’s President has had enough of its Morality Police.”

<sup>331</sup> Johnson, “Iran’s President has had enough of its Morality Police”; “Iran Hardline Cleric Indirectly Chides President Over Morality Police,” *BBC Selected Wire Articles: Iran (Published as ISNA (Tehran, Iran))*, April 22, 2016, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/15C69B237411D198?p=AWNB>.

Rouhani's reformist ambitions have also been ignored in cyberspace, as the Iranian state dedicates vast resources to the censorship of media and the Internet.<sup>332</sup> Among the many groups and tools that the regime employs to block access to immoral content and social media accounts, the Basij stands out as heavily involved in the effort. Separate from the morality units, Cyber Units utilize young Basij members to counter "cyber warfare" against the republic, which regards citizens' widespread access to the Internet "as an existential threat."<sup>333</sup> In response to the opposition's use of social media during the Green Movement, the Basij expanded its online footprint, and urged millions of members to establish blogs and other social media accounts to promote state ideology and collect intelligence on enemies of the republic.<sup>334</sup>

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The morality police forces of the Basij militia and various other official and vigilante groups are only a part of the Islamic Republic's efforts to ensure that Iranian society adheres to the values of the regime's brand of Islam. Unlike Saudi Arabia's dual system of authority, where senior clerics and the royal family rely on one another for religious legitimacy and protection, Iran's clerical establishment is the government system. The regime, as discussed above, is primarily concerned with maintaining the ideals of the Islamic revolution in the face of cultural conflict with Western ideals. In pursuit of this mission, the state has mobilized millions of conservative volunteers. The missions of these volunteers extend well beyond the realm of morality policing. In 1999 and again in 2009, the Basij militia proved its ability to quell domestic unrest in order to protect the solvency of the regime.

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<sup>332</sup> Ahmed Majidiyar, "Iran Tasks Basij to Expand the War on Information and Smother Social Media," *Middle East Institute*, February 8, 2017, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/iran-tasks-basij-expand-war-information-and-smother-social-media>; "Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 10.

<sup>333</sup> Majidiyar, "Iran Tasks Basij to Expand the War on Information and Smother Social Media"; "Iran 2016 Human Rights Report," 20.

<sup>334</sup> Golkar, *Captive Society*, 73–74.

Has the morality policing program contributed to the stability of the republic? As demonstrated in this chapter, the tactics employed by morality police in Iran have led to social unrest in the form of social media campaigns, as well as to the condemnation of the regime by international governmental and human rights groups. Despite calls for and attempts towards reform by the Rouhani administration, direction of the security services responsible for morality policing rests with the Supreme Leader and other conservative elements of the regime. In pursuit of maintaining an Islamic society, as well as the political primacy of the regime, Iran's morality police have proven too valuable a tool for the projection of clerical power into society to reform away entirely.

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#### **IV. MORALITY POLICING IN THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN**

As with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Taliban employed morality police forces to exert their vision of an Islamic society upon the population of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The case of morality policing in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the state established by the Taliban, differs from those of Saudi Arabia and Iran for three main reasons. First, the Taliban's state was short-lived. Its morality police forces—organized under the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV)—did not have the institutional longevity of the institutions employed by Saudi Arabia and Iran. Operating before the widespread use of social media and in a country whose infrastructure was ravaged by war, the MPVPV was not faced with the same level of domestic demands for reform that is apparent in the other cases. Second, the reign of the MPVPV was extremely violent. Whereas the morality police forces of Saudi Arabia and Iran generally restrained from outright and widespread physical violence against their citizenry, the MPVPV regularly partook in brutal street-level beatings, amputations, and executions that far exceeded the violent threats and punishments in the other two cases. This experience was a result of the third factor, which is that the Taliban case operated exclusively within the context of civil war. The Taliban was mired in state-consolidation conflict with other ethnic, religious, and militant groups since its emergence in 1994. Because of this, the forces of the MPVPV were employed to exert control over the behavior of populations immediately upon the Taliban's assumption of command over conquered territories in order to exert and solidify Taliban rule. Unlike Saudi Arabia and Iran, whose morality police sought to exert power in order to discourage political and religious dissent and appease conservative elements, the Taliban was primarily concerned with the physical domination of the populations it was still in the process of conquering. The MPVPV was the primary vehicle to ensure the Taliban's power was established and maintained over conquered populations.

## A. BACKGROUND OF THE TALIBAN AND MORALITY POLICING

The Taliban rose to power as Afghanistan was consumed by the chaos of civil war. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up a fledgling communist government, and entered into a bitter conflict with U.S., Saudi, and Pakistani-funded Islamist rebel groups known as the *mujahedeen*.<sup>335</sup> After the Soviet-backed government fell in 1992, the country was engulfed by even more conflict as tribal groups, political parties, and war lords vied for control.<sup>336</sup> Rule of law was nonexistent, and millions of Afghans were displaced.

In the refugee camps of Pakistan, where *mujahedeen* received aid and shelter during the war with the Soviets, conservative Islamist ideologies emerged.<sup>337</sup> In 1994, the Pakistan-backed Taliban arose in the Pashtun-dominated Kandahar Valley.<sup>338</sup> A man named Mullah Muhammad Omar initially established the group in reaction to the local rule of warlords and former *mujahedeen*, who operated like bandits and abused women and young boys.<sup>339</sup> An experienced *mujahedeen* commander himself, Mullah Muhammad Omar and his partners were able to leverage existing connections with the Pakistani government to receive the logistical and materiel support it needed to become a formidable force.<sup>340</sup> After the group solidified its rule in its native Kandahar, a quick succession of military victories established the Taliban's power over the majority of Afghan urban centers by 1996.<sup>341</sup> By 1998, violent battles had extended the Taliban's

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<sup>335</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 18-19; Robert D Crews and Amin Tarzi, eds, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4-5.

<sup>336</sup> Larry P Goodson, "Perverting Islam: Taliban Social Policy Toward Women," *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (Dec 1, 2001): 415-426.  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02634930120104618>, 417.

<sup>337</sup> Goodson, "Perverting Islam," 417.

<sup>338</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 1.

<sup>339</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 101; Rashid, *Taliban*, 115.

<sup>340</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 101.

<sup>341</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 1; "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan," Human Rights Watch, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/worldreport99/asia/afghanistan.html>; Goodson, "Perverting Islam," 416-417.

control to the contested north.<sup>342</sup> The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from Kabul and Kandahar until the United States and its allies ousted it from power in December 2001, in response to its harboring of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda following the September 11 terrorist attacks.<sup>343</sup>

The Taliban espoused a strict version of Deobandi Islam that was strongly influenced by the traditional ideology of Pashtunwali, or the code of conduct observed by the Pashtun ethnic groups of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>344</sup> Saudi Arabia and Pakistan served as the Taliban's ideological and financial benefactors, and the countries wielded religious influence with the Taliban *mullahs*, or clerics, as they provided them with millions of dollars in arms and aid as the group battled to conquer the north.<sup>345</sup> Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates were the only countries to formally recognize Taliban rule.<sup>346</sup>

While the Taliban proclaimed its intent to purify Islam in Afghanistan, it was not the first to employ morality policing in the country. The 1992–1994 government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani possessed a Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (DPVPV), which would become a partial model for the Taliban's MPVPV.<sup>347</sup> Under Rabbani, the DPVPV restricted women's rights, to include their right to drive.<sup>348</sup> The model of Arab Persian Gulf states' morality police forces, particularly Saudi Arabia's CPVPV, also heavily influenced the structure and operations of the MPVPV.<sup>349</sup>

As the Taliban rose to power and governed in the midst of civil war, it employed the MPVPV to consolidate control over its newly-conquered territories. The rural

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<sup>342</sup> "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan."

<sup>343</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 2.

<sup>344</sup> Goodson, "Perverting Islam," 416; Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 42–44.

<sup>345</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 72.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>347</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 141.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 46–47.

countryside—the Pashtun-dominated south in particular—was largely very conservative and mirrored the Taliban’s moral ideology.<sup>350</sup> But as the Taliban conquered urban power centers, the MPVPV was invaluable for consolidating the new rulers’ power over the more diverse populations of cities such as Kabul and Herat.<sup>351</sup> This projection of power manifested in various moral controls, to include the enforcement of gender segregation. As Ahmed Rashid asserted, the imposition of strict gender laws followed military losses and victories alike, in order to “sustain morale amongst their defeated soldiers” and to show “Taliban power” to every “newly conquered population.”<sup>352</sup>

## **B. STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS OF THE TALIBAN’S MPVPV**

### **1. Structure of the MPVPV**

The MPVPV was reportedly a large organization, boasting as many as 32,000 morality police.<sup>353</sup> Much like the Taliban forces at large, the MPVPV was manned by many young men who had grown up as orphans in the refugee camps of Pakistan. Many received minimal educations from *madrassas*, where Islamist seminarians imparted their religious ideology.<sup>354</sup> Juan Cole believed that a background of displacement and violence meant that many Taliban recruits were divorced from traditional “male sources of self-esteem,” which translated to a lack of respect and even an attitude of “sadism” towards women.<sup>355</sup> This milieu is significant, as many of the edicts enforced by the MPVPV affected the movement and appearance of women, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 140–141.

<sup>351</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 112.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Steven Gutkin, “Enforcing Religious Purity in Afghanistan,” *Rutland Herald*, June 15, 2001, [http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/10D83B52D4A0EDF8?p=A\\_WNB](http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/10D83B52D4A0EDF8?p=A_WNB).

<sup>354</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 106.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 144.

During the Taliban's time in power, the MPVPV was headed by Maulvi Qalamuddin, who was of Pakistani tribal origin.<sup>356</sup> Qalamuddin, in an interview with Rashid in 1997, explained that the MPVPV was an independent organization that reported directly to Mullah Muhammad Omar. Much like Saudi Arabia's CPVPV, the Taliban MPVPV was not beholden to the judiciary or Ministry of Justice.<sup>357</sup> Qalamuddin also claimed that "Wahhabi sources in the Gulf" provided the MPVPV with independent lines of funding, thereby entrenching Wahhabi influence in the organization.<sup>358</sup> In another similarity to the CPVPV as well as to Iranian morality police forces, the effectiveness of the MPVPV was enhanced by its ability to command a wide source network. Qalamuddin stated that the MPVPV maintained "thousands of informers in the army, government ministries, hospitals and Western aid agencies."<sup>359</sup> Like their counterparts in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the forces of the MPVPV were able to leverage individuals sympathetic to the regime's ideology to expand their reach into society.

The members of the MPVPV employed habitual violence in the pursuit of their duties. Armed with whips and rifles, the MPVPV members regularly arrested and assaulted those they suspected of violating behavioral edicts.<sup>360</sup> Violent enforcement of morality laws was concentrated in urban areas such as Kabul, where ethnically and religiously diverse communities were less amenable to the Taliban's ideological mix of Pashtunwali and fundamentalist Islam than its rural constituency.<sup>361</sup> While Qalamuddin maintained that the role of the MPVPV forces was to "advise" and not to "beat people on the street," reports abounded of morality policemen's systematic use of violence.<sup>362</sup> In

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<sup>356</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 105.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>358</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 134.

<sup>359</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 106.

<sup>360</sup> "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan"; Rashid, *Taliban*, 105–106.

<sup>361</sup> "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan."

<sup>362</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 106; "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan"; Goodson, "Perverting Islam," 420; Kathy Gannon, "Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul," *Charleston Gazette*, March 29, 1997. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/10137F78ACD51406?p=AWN>; Gutkin, "Enforcing Religious Purity in Afghanistan."

addition to beatings, morality police reportedly conducted amputations in the streets.<sup>363</sup> The Taliban also resembled Saudi Arabia and Iran in that formal executions and corporal punishments were administered publically.<sup>364</sup> On Fridays, males were required to gather at stadiums and other public places to witness deaths by stoning and shooting, amputations, floggings, and other acts.<sup>365</sup>

Once the MPVPV was established in Kabul in 1996, the ministry issued a series of edict over a radio station dubbed “Radio Shariat.”<sup>366</sup> Kabul residents listened to the nightly broadcasts, in case the morality police issued a new rule they had to follow.<sup>367</sup> The edicts ranged from the imposition of gender segregation to the banning of music and bird training.<sup>368</sup> Cole argued that the edicts banned activities that the Taliban deemed to be “frivolous or impudent,” such as dancing, astrology, and flying kites, or were intended to impose a separation between what was meant to be public or private. A man’s face, for instance, was public and men had to adhere to Islamic society by growing beards. Women, on the other hand, belonged to the private sphere. Women therefore had to cover their faces before venturing out into society.<sup>369</sup>

## 2. Morality Policing of Drugs

Taliban edicts banned the use and trafficking of drugs.<sup>370</sup> Sally Armstrong cited one translation of an MPVPV edict, which proclaimed “addicts should be imprisoned and investigation made to find the supplier and the shop....both criminals...should be

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<sup>363</sup> Marcus Warren, “Shame of the Mullah Caught Red-Handed with a Beardless Boy; the Taliban’s Zealous Secret Police Displayed a Strange Sense of Priorities as they Carried Out their Masters’ Orders, Reports Marcus Warren in Kabul,” *Daily Telegraph*, December 5, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/0F2B771632E98695?p=AWNB>; Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 149; Sally Armstrong, *Veiled Threat: The Hidden Power of the Women of Afghanistan* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 4.

<sup>364</sup> “HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan.”

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.; Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 7.

<sup>366</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 107; Gannon, “Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul.”

<sup>367</sup> Gannon, “Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul.”

<sup>368</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 135–136; Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 11–17.

<sup>369</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 137.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 136.

imprisoned and punished.”<sup>371</sup> While the Taliban relied extensively on poppy cultivation and the trafficking and sale of opium to fund itself, the group banned Afghan use of drugs such as hashish.<sup>372</sup> Drug users were subject to arrest, and were “cured” in prison through a regimen of repeated submersion in cold water for hours on end.<sup>373</sup> The double standard was explained to Rashid when the head of the Taliban’s anti-drug force stated: “Opium is permissible because it is consumed by *kafirs* [unbelievers] in the West and not by Muslims or Afghans.”<sup>374</sup> Taliban heroin policies placed it in direct contention with Iran, whose own struggles with the drug trade occupied much of its security and morality apparatus.<sup>375</sup>

### **3. Morality Policing of Gender Segregation, Clothing, and Sexuality**

#### ***a. Gender Segregation***

Before the rise of the Taliban, the position of women in Afghanistan was degraded by decades of violence. Upon the group’s seizure of power in Kabul in 1996, women were initially restricted from stepping outside of their homes.<sup>376</sup> The MPVPV’s later edicts prohibited women from leaving their homes without the escort of a male relative, from hiring a taxi on their own, and from staying in hotels.<sup>377</sup> Morality police suggested that people paint the windows of their homes black to prevent outsiders from catching glimpses of the women in the family.<sup>378</sup> Bath houses, which were the only sources of hot water for many urban Afghan women, were closed.<sup>379</sup> In 1996, a group of women gathered outside the governor’s home in the city of Herat to protest the closing of

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<sup>371</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 16.

<sup>372</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 118.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>376</sup> Goodson, “Perverting Islam,” 419–420.

<sup>377</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 12–13; “HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan.”

<sup>378</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 134.

<sup>379</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 113–114.

the bath houses; the MPVPV beat and arrested the women.<sup>380</sup> Armstrong related another anecdote where the Taliban punished the leader of a group of protesting women, also in Herat, by burning her alive.<sup>381</sup>

With the exception of some health workers, gender segregation meant that women were no longer allowed to work.<sup>382</sup> The removal of women from the workforce had a drastic impact on education and healthcare. Before the arrival of the Taliban, women held approximately seventy percent of teaching jobs, and comprised around forty percent of medical doctors.<sup>383</sup> But directly after the fall of Kabul, the Taliban asserted their power by confining female doctors and teachers at home, resulting in the closure of 63 schools and severely depriving women, girls, and boys from educational and healthcare opportunities.<sup>384</sup> Taliban enforcement of these edicts varied, depending on location and circumstances. Some girls were allowed to be educated privately or in co-educational settings.<sup>385</sup> In 1996, the MPVPV released an edict that outlined the requirements of female employment and segregation in hospitals. Women were allowed to be seen by a male physician if a female was unavailable, as long as she was accompanied by a male relative and veiled. Interactions of male and female health workers were to be limited, and the MPVPV was to be allowed unfettered access to hospitals to ensure compliance.<sup>386</sup>

#### ***b. The Taliban's Dress Code***

As the black *abaya* and *niqab* epitomize Saudi women to Western audiences, so does the *burqa* characterize women under Taliban rule. While many in the Pashtun-dominated rural areas of southern Afghanistan adhered to the *burqa*, the concept of completing veiling the entire female body was a new introduction to urban and northern

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>381</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 7

<sup>382</sup> "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan."

<sup>383</sup> Goodson, "Perverting Islam," 421.

<sup>384</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 145; Rashid, *Taliban*, 108.

<sup>385</sup> Goodson, "Perverting Islam," 422.

<sup>386</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 13–14.



Afghans.<sup>387</sup> Once the Taliban gained control of a territory, the MPVPV mandated wear of the *burqa* for when women ventured outside their home.<sup>388</sup> Exposing any part of the body or clothing from under the *burqa* was grounds for assault or arrest at the hands of the morality police.<sup>389</sup> Any man who interacted with an unveiled woman was subject to imprisonment and punishment by flogging.<sup>390</sup> MPVPV edicts banned the use of cosmetics. In some cases, morality police reportedly amputated the tips of some women's fingers in the street if they caught them wearing nail polish.<sup>391</sup> Any item of clothing that could draw a man's attention—high heeled shoes, tight or fashionable clothes, even white socks—were explicitly banned.<sup>392</sup> Removal of the *burqa* was forbidden even in some life-or-death situations. Armstrong recounted a 1997 incident, wherein a member of the morality police forbade a doctor from removing the *burqa* of a severely burned woman so that he could treat her. The woman died of her wounds.<sup>393</sup>

Men were also subject to a strict dress and appearance code. Once the Taliban seized control of Kabul, the group mandated that every man was to grow a beard within six weeks.<sup>394</sup> Men whose beards did not reach the prescribed length—as long as the width of a man's hand or fist—were subject to arrest and beatings.<sup>395</sup> The MPVPV were specifically authorized to imprison offenders until their facial hair reached an acceptable length.<sup>396</sup> Men employed by the government were not allowed to trim their beards. A 1997 news report, for example, stated that 84 government employees were fired for

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<sup>387</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 110.

<sup>388</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 12–13; “HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan”; Rashid, *Taliban*, 105.

<sup>389</sup> “HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan”; Gannon, “Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul”; Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 149; Letta Tayler, “Afghans Tell of Law, Order Brought in by Taliban,” *The Repository*, December 13, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/1247C13B38A386E8?p=AWNB>.

<sup>390</sup> Gannon, “Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul.”

<sup>391</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 149; Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 4.

<sup>392</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 113; Rashid, *Taliban*, 105; Goodson, “Perverting Islam,” 423.

<sup>393</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 10.

<sup>394</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 114; Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 132.

<sup>395</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 114; Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 15; Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 132.

<sup>396</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 15.

inappropriate beards or for not wearing a turban after “a Taliban raid of government offices.”<sup>397</sup> Long or Western-inspired haircuts were likewise banned.<sup>398</sup> The MPVPV cut the long hair of offenders in the streets or in jail, and the ministry arrested scores of barbers for giving their clients haircuts inspired by Leonardo DiCaprio from the film “Titanic.”<sup>399</sup> The hairstyle covered the forehead, and the Taliban insisted it interfered with prayers.<sup>400</sup>

*c. Pedophilia and Sexuality*

As mentioned previously in the chapter, one of the founding narratives of the Taliban is that Mullah Muhammad Omar formed the group in response to the Pashtun warlord practice of habitually sodomizing young boys.<sup>401</sup> A main mission of the MPVPV, particularly in the south, was to eradicate the practice of abusing “beardless boys” in addition to consensual adult homosexual activities.<sup>402</sup> The Taliban’s own forces were often the target of the MPVPV’s investigations. In 2001, a media report detailed an instance where morality police discovered an army *mullah* in the company of a young boy. The *mullah*’s punishment was not reported, while the boy was sent to a religious school.<sup>403</sup> Meanwhile, Taliban clerics debated the appropriate punishment for other adult offenders. Sodomizers were often sentenced to be crushed beneath stone walls, while some *mullahs* believed throwing offenders from the roof of a building was more appropriate.<sup>404</sup>

There was less debate surrounding the punishment for women who committed adultery—they were routinely sentenced to death by stoning, or to punishment by

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<sup>397</sup> Gannon, “Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul.”

<sup>398</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 114; Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 16.

<sup>399</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 132–133; Amir Shah, “Religious Police Arrest Hairdressers Giving Western-Style Cuts,” *Associated Press Archive*, January 25, 2001.

<sup>400</sup> Amir Shah, “Religious Police Arrest Hairdressers Giving Western-Style Cuts,” *Associated Press Archive*, January 25, 2001.

<sup>401</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 115.

<sup>402</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 115; Warren, “Shame of the Mullah Caught Red-Handed with a Beardless Boy.”

<sup>403</sup> Warren, “Shame of the Mullah Caught Red-Handed with a Beardless Boy.”

<sup>404</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 115

flogging if they were unmarried. Both forms of punishment were performed in public.<sup>405</sup> The Taliban does not differ from the other two cases in the implementation of public punishment and executions of women accused of sexual crimes. However, the Taliban differed in that punishments for these and other crimes were delivered in front of audiences who were forced to attend weekly executions, as mentioned earlier in the chapter.<sup>406</sup>

*d. Maintaining Islamic Culture in Conquered Territory*

Like their counterparts in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Taliban were primarily concerned with imposing and preserving Islamic society upon the populations of the territories the conquered and administered. Rashid stated that, after the Taliban took power, they “banned every conceivable form of entertainment.”<sup>407</sup> To free the population to focus on prayer and attending mosque, MPVPV edicts banned movies, televisions, music, satellite dishes, foreign books, and more.<sup>408</sup> Traditional dancing at weddings, even between members of the same gender or family, was likewise prohibited.<sup>409</sup> The Taliban also initially deemed soccer and other sports to be un-Islamic.<sup>410</sup> Eventually sports were allowed to resume, but the now male-only audiences were forbidden from applauding, and instead had to chant *Allahu akbar* to cheer their favorite players.<sup>411</sup>

To prevent idolatry, all paintings and photographs were also banned.<sup>412</sup> In 1998, the morality police arrested the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs and 19 other media and aid workers for taking photographs in a hospital.<sup>413</sup> Art and human

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<sup>405</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 128–129, 151; Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 7.

<sup>406</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 129.

<sup>407</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 115.

<sup>408</sup> Zaheeruddin Abdullah, “Taliban Bans TV,” *The Peoria Journal Star*, July 13, 1998.  
<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/0EB6F151F3400968?p=AWNB>.

<sup>409</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 137–138.

<sup>410</sup> Abdullah, “Taliban Bans TV”; Gannon, “Blanket of Edicts Settles on Kabul.”

<sup>411</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 107.

<sup>412</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 16.

<sup>413</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 65.

likenesses were also not allowed in decorating private homes.<sup>414</sup> Along with art, books, and other media, the MPVPV also banned paper bags lest they were made with recycled paper from the Quran.<sup>415</sup>

The MPVPV was charged with enforcing the five mandatory daily prayers in urban centers.<sup>416</sup> The ministry's edicts proclaimed that the morality police would broadcast calls to prayer, and "all people" were charged to go to the mosque.<sup>417</sup> MPVPV members roamed the markets with whips to encourage shopkeepers to close their stores and chase young men to prayer.<sup>418</sup> The 1996 edicts asserted that "If young people are seen in the shops they will be immediately imprisoned" for up to 10 days.<sup>419</sup> Cole has argued that two years later, however, "universal male mosque worship" was not enforced in Kabul as zealously as it was when the Taliban first seized power.<sup>420</sup>

*e. Policing Religious Minorities and Proselytization*

The Taliban clashed with many religious and ethnic groups in their bid to conquer Afghanistan. The primary group that the Taliban targeted for persecution were the Hazaras, a predominantly Shiite minority who resided in territory north of Kabul.<sup>421</sup> The Taliban accused the Hazaras of religious hypocrisy and systematically killed, arrested, and displaced millions in the midst of the war.<sup>422</sup> However, this persecution was largely conducted as the Taliban attempted to consolidate power in the face of war against a resistant ethnic group (the Hazaras), and was dissimilar from the cases of Saudi Arabia

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>415</sup> Zaheeruddin Abdullah, "Afghan Religious Police Prohibit use of Paper Bag," *The Associated Press*, May 8, 1997, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/0EB5161EEE05BF30?p=AWNB>.

<sup>416</sup> Gutkin, "Enforcing Religious Purity in Afghanistan."

<sup>417</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 15.

<sup>418</sup> Gutkin, "Enforcing Religious Purity in Afghanistan."

<sup>419</sup> Armstrong, *Veiled Threat*, 15.

<sup>420</sup> Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 132.

<sup>421</sup> "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan."

<sup>422</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, 68–69; "HRW World Report 1999: Afghanistan."

and Iran whose governments targeted religious minorities to maintain the security of established states.

The Taliban drew international attention in May 2001 when Taliban clerics decreed that the small Afghan Hindu and Sikh minority would wear small, yellow badges on their clothing in order to identify them as non-Muslims.<sup>423</sup> The MPVPV insisted that the badges were intended to alert morality police that the wearers were not Muslim, and therefore not required to adhere to laws that mandated prayer and beards for Muslims. Hindu women, however, would still be required to wear the *burqa*.<sup>424</sup> It is unknown whether the badge decree was widely enforced; by the end of the year, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan had routed the Taliban and the MPVPV from Kabul.

The MPVPV was concerned with policing those who they suspected of attempting to convert Afghans away from Islam, and proselytization was punishable by the death penalty.<sup>425</sup> In the midst of an ongoing dispute with the United Nations in 2001 over the Taliban's treatment of international aid groups, the MPVPV arrested foreign Christian aid workers and accused them of converting Afghans to Christianity.<sup>426</sup> Morality police took custody of 59 Afghan children and placed them in a "correction house" for religious re-education.<sup>427</sup>

### C. THE SURVIVAL OF MORALITY POLICING AFTER 2001

The Taliban may have been ousted from Kabul in 2001, but ongoing conflict ensured the survival of morality policing in regions where the group was able to re-establish itself and operate with relative autonomy. However, the Taliban was not alone

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<sup>423</sup> "Taliban Seeks Dress-Code Decree," *United Press International*, May 23, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/156559C7149787B8?p=AWNB>; Amir Shah, "Hindus to Wear Identity Label in Islamic Afghanistan," *Associated Press Archive*, May 23, 2001; Ahmed Rashid, "Aid Women Face Execution by Taliban," *Daily Telegraph*, August 7, 2001, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/317515794>.

<sup>424</sup> "Taliban Seeks Dress-Code Decree."

<sup>425</sup> Amir Shah, "Taliban Close Office of a Foreign Relief Group for Propagating Christianity; Arrest 24," *Associated Press Archive*, August 6, 2001, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/0F89240FF7872EF4?p=AWNB>.

<sup>426</sup> Shah, "Taliban Close Office of a Foreign Relief Group for Propagating Christianity; Arrest 24"; Rashid, "Aid Women Face Execution by Taliban."

<sup>427</sup> Rashid, "Aid Women Face Execution by Taliban."

in morality policing. In 2006, the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan drew international attention when the cabinet of then-President Hamid Karzai approved the creation of a Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and sent the final decision to parliament for a vote.<sup>428</sup> The department was intended to advise Afghans on proper religious observance and enforce morality laws, such as a ban on alcohol consumption.<sup>429</sup> While the department was not implemented, according to Afghan government websites, the post-Taliban state still remained concerned with the issue of policing morality.<sup>430</sup> For example, in 2011 the Justice Ministry attempted to pass a law that would punish shops that sold revealing wedding gowns.<sup>431</sup> Thus, despite the ouster of the Taliban government, the legacy of policing morality remained.

As of late 2017, in areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan where the Taliban have regained the ability to exercise territorial control, morality police implement punishments for crimes the MPVPV enforced under the Taliban state.<sup>432</sup> The Taliban operate shadow governments, and punish those who commit moral violations such as tobacco use and beard shaving through public beatings.<sup>433</sup> In the Swat Valley of Pakistan, for example, a

<sup>428</sup> Christina Lamb, “‘Ministry of Vice’ Fills Afghan Women with Fear” *Sunday Times*, July 23, 2006, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/1130E14073EA38E0?p=AWNB>; Waheedullah Massoud, “Concern as Afghanistan Mulls New Version of Taliban-Era ‘Vice Squad,’” *Agence France-Presse*, July 18, 2006, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/112F7D7787430240?p=AWNB>; Golnaz Esfandiari, “Afghanistan: Proposed Morality Department Recalls Taliban Times,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 18, 2006, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-proposed-morality-department-recalls-taliban-times>.

<sup>429</sup> Esfandiari, “Afghanistan: Proposed Morality Department Recalls Taliban Times.”

430 “Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs,” accessed October 20, 2017, <http://mohia.gov.af/en>;  
 “Office of the President – Cabinet,” accessed October 20, 2017, <https://president.gov.af/en/cabinet-members/?q=council&t=cabinet>.

<sup>431</sup> Jon Boone, “Taliban-Style Dress Code for Afghanistan’s Brides: Government Intends to Police Weddings to Ensure Modesty and Segregation,” *The Guardian*, April 4, 2011, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/859872520>.

<sup>432</sup> Miles Amooore, “Beards, Music, Tobacco: The Taliban’s Morality Police are Back to Smash ‘Vice,’” *The Australian (National, Australia)*, June 25, 2012, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/13F9CA6AB011ADE8?p=AWNB>; Daud Khattak, “Taliban’s Deadly ‘Justice’ Cows Pakistan; Sharia Judges are Ordering Beatings and Executions, Writes Daud Khattak in Peshawar,” *Sunday Times*, January 18, 2009, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.nps.edu/resources/doc/nb/news/125CD8C682A041A8?p=AWNB>.

<sup>433</sup> Amoores, “Beards, Music, Tobacco: The Taliban’s Morality Police are Back to Smash ‘Vice.’”

network of *sharia* judges has ruled on moral laws.<sup>434</sup> These judges belong to the shadow governments of the Taliban and other radical Islamist groups, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and the Movement for Implementation of Sharia of Muhammad (*Tehri-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi*).<sup>435</sup> Under their rule, unveiled women, “faith healers,” and other moral criminals were sentenced to a public death by beheading.<sup>436</sup>

Individual morality policemen have also survived the fall of the Taliban in Kabul. In 2010 the Karzai government asked Qalamuddin, the former head of the MPVPV from 1996 to 2001, to serve on the “High Peace Council.”<sup>437</sup> The council was formed to enable negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and was comprised of other former militants.<sup>438</sup> Qalamuddin still held influence with the Taliban, and media reports claimed that he moderated his views since 2001.<sup>439</sup> As this episode illustrates, the Taliban and their former and present members remained active in Afghan society well past their brief tenure in power.

#### D. CONCLUSION

Even though the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was a short-lived state from its seat of power in Kabul, the Taliban and its morality policing operations continue to reverberate in the group’s strongholds in rural areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Despite this, the MPVPV was not able to establish the level of sophistication and societal influence that its counterparts exhibited in Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Taliban were

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<sup>434</sup> Khattak, “Taliban’s Deadly ‘Justice’ Cows Pakistan.”

<sup>435</sup> Khattak, “Taliban’s Deadly ‘Justice’ Cows Pakistan”; Daud Khattak, “Who is the Swat Taliban’s Commander?” *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/04/21/who-is-the-swat-talibans-commander/>.

<sup>436</sup> Khattak, “Taliban’s Deadly ‘Justice’ Cows Pakistan.”

<sup>437</sup> Rob Taylor and Obaid Ormur, “Ex-Head of Taliban Police shows More Moderate Face,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-qalamuddin/ex-head-of-taliban-police-shows-more-moderate-face-idUSTRE81K0IE20120221>; Pamela Constable, “Former Feared Taliban Enforcer Maulvi Qalamuddin Now Promoting Peace in Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/former-feared-taliban-enforcer-maulvi-qalamuddin-now-promoting-peace-in-afghanistan/2011/06/16/AGPwR3eH\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.74991d424390](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/former-feared-taliban-enforcer-maulvi-qalamuddin-now-promoting-peace-in-afghanistan/2011/06/16/AGPwR3eH_story.html?utm_term=.74991d424390).

<sup>438</sup> Constable, “Former Feared Taliban Enforcer Maulvi Qalamuddin Now Promoting Peace in Afghanistan.”

<sup>439</sup> Taylor and Ormur, “Ex-Head of Taliban Police Shows More Moderate Face.”

violent rulers in a violent time period, and punishments imparted to moral criminals under their power were extreme in comparison to the other cases. This is due to the context in which the group rose to power: violent methods were used to subjugate conquered territories and confine half of the Afghan population indoors in a bid to stabilize the Taliban's contested rule. The Taliban case demonstrates the role morality policing can play in an aggressive campaign to establish control over hostile populations. In the United States' ongoing conflict with militant groups such as the Taliban, analysis of morality policing programs may shed some light on to the effectiveness of its enemies' abilities to administer populations. Despite social upheaval and conflict, morality policing remains a valuable tool for power projection as ruling groups struggle to impose religious, social, and political conformity over populations.



## V. CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to answer the following question: under the theoretical lens of formal social control methods, what role do morality police play in the social control programs of Islamic states? How are the morality police employed, and what are the effects of these forces on society? Three hypotheses were advanced to answer these questions. 1) Morality police forces lend religious legitimacy to Islamic regimes by creating public spaces that adhere to Islamic morality and mores. Morality police enforce Islam in practice in the population's public life. By making Islam visible in practice at the social level, these states reaffirm their founding commitment to religion which undergirds their claims of political legitimacy; 2) Morality police forces reinforce the political conformity within society. By enforcing uniformity in society, morality police inherently repress the expression, organization, and action of dissenting political alternatives to the regime. The regime attempts to retain a monopoly on political control by controlling the public space; and 3) Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, and enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity.

This chapter summarizes the research presented in this thesis, compares and contrasts the examined cases, and tests them against the three hypotheses, and presents the final argument. This thesis argues that states use morality policing in an attempt to expand and stabilize their rule. Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, and enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity. Despite public discontent and campaigns for reform, and even political rhetoric and government steps towards reform, the morality policing programs in the countries examined persist. This demonstrates the value the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Taliban place on morality policing programs, and presents interesting questions for future research on the topic of regime and state stability.

## A. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

Chapter I presented the research question of this thesis and explored a subset of the broad literature that exists on the subject of social control. The definition of social control selected for the purpose of this thesis was borrowed from sociologists such as Stanley Cohen and Donald Black, who defined social control as the use of formal and informal methods of control within society to prevent or punish deviant or otherwise undesirable behavior. With this definition established, the question of the thesis was posed: what role do morality police play in the social control programs of Islamic states? The cases selected for study—Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban—are or were (in the case of Taliban rule in Afghanistan) Islamic states in the sense that they relied on their respective forms of Islam as the basis for governance. A review of the literature on informal and formal methods of social control concluded that formal methods of control, as advanced by Foucauldian theories of policing, punishment, and state power, was the most appropriate lens with which to examine morality policing.

Chapter II examined the case of morality policing in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is governed by a royal family, whose political authority is legitimized by the support of the Wahhabi Sunni clerical establishment. The morality policing program is executed by the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), a nominally independent law enforcement agency that is administered by clerics and reports to the king. The CPVPV's morality police, known as *mutaween* (literally “volunteers”), patrol public spaces to uphold religious laws and norms in Saudi society. The *mutaween* employ various methods, including arrest, surveillance, interrogation, physical coercion, verbal admonishment, and public outreach and education. The CPVPV target those suspected of questioning the political and religious legitimacy of the regime as well as those who violate laws such as gender segregation, the dress code, and public prayer requirements.

With the advent of social media and greater information sharing in the twenty-first century, the Saudi regime instituted a series of reforms to limit the CPVPV's authorities in response to domestic and international criticisms of the commission's

violent or repressive tactics. The group's close ties to the clerical establishment, however, has shielded it from complete divestment of its role and authorities. Rebranding efforts have thus far ensured that the CPVPV remains a valuable tool for the state to stymie political and religious dissent in society. Despite reform attempts, Saudi morality police serve to project the power of conservative and religious elements into the population.

Chapter III explored the morality policing program in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran's political system is ultimately governed by the concept of clerical jurisprudence, and the political power of the Twelver Shia religious establishment is manifested throughout the government and headed by the rule of the Supreme Leader. The maintenance of social morality is a whole-of-government effort that relies on broad mobilization of various segments of society to enforce. State authorities rely on multiple morality policing forces for various missions, including the suppression of political and religious dissent. For the specific mission of enforcing public morality, the state relies on undercover and uniformed patrol units from the Basij militia, National Police Force, and other law enforcement and security agencies. Morality police forces rely on a myriad of tactics to uphold laws governing the dress code and protection of Islamic culture, such as the detention, surveillance, interrogation, physical coercion, and verbal admonishment of violators. Morality police are also heavily involved in the state's public education efforts.

Despite domestic agitation for reform and elected political leaders' attempts to curtail morality policing actions, the clerical establishment direct and protect the groups that conduct them. Morality police, as the Basij militia in particular demonstrated during the Green Movement of 2009, have exhibited their efficacy at suppressing public unrest. Along with the continued regime focus on the maintenance of the Islamic character of Iranian society, morality police continue to serve as a valuable tool to preserve both the political and religious power of the regime within society.

Chapter IV explored the morality policing program of the Taliban during the group's tenure in power as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban rose to power in the midst of civil war, and engaged in armed struggle against other armed groups throughout its time in power. Once the Taliban gained control of new territories, urban areas such as Kabul in particular, the morality police forces of the

Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) enforced religious laws derived from Deobandi Sunni and Pashtun values. The MPVPV employed violent physical measures such as beatings, amputations, public executions, and other methods to control the populations of the Taliban's seized territories by dictating dress, public behavior, and restricting the movement and employment of women. In 2001, the United States and coalition partners routed the Taliban from power in Kabul. However, the group continues to employ violent morality policing tactics to cement its control in areas where it remains in power in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## **B. FINDINGS**

This thesis explored the different methods of organization, size, and structure of morality police forces in the three selected cases. In Saudi Arabia, distinctively garbed *mutaween* were organized under the auspices of a single government agency. The Taliban's MPVPV was similarly organized, likely owing to Wahhabi and Saudi influence within the Taliban. In Iran, however, the morality police were drawn from multiple organizations and were not centrally organized under a single government body. Instead, numerous security agencies are involved in maintaining the government's ideal of an Islamic society. The state relies primarily on the Basij militia to police morality, demonstrating the regime's efforts to mobilize the population. Despite these differences in organization, all three cases revealed that each regime employed uniformed or otherwise recognizable units to maintain a presence in public spaces. By maintaining visible patrols, each state maintains a daily influence on the public behavior of its population.

In all three cases, the states' regimes were comprised of or heavily influenced by the religious establishment. Conservative, religious authority holders held great political influence. To protect that influence and to translate it into control of society, clerics directed or sanctioned the operations of morality police. In the face of public opposition to the police forces or their tactics, the support of clerics and conservative segments of society and government ensure the groups' survival and, in the cases of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the expansion of their operations into cyberspace. Politicians in Saudi Arabia and

Iran have advanced or advocated for reform of morality police, but in both cases, the groups retained a great deal of their authorities and mission set. The short timeframe and conflict that characterized the Taliban's time in power, in contrast, did not allow for the same expression of popular discontent. Protest of Taliban morality policing tactics were met with violent repression and the forces, like the other cases, remained in operation.

In Saudi Arabia, Iran, and under the Taliban, government authorities were concerned with the maintenance of Islamic identity of their society. All three states relied on morality police to enforce dress codes and laws governing gender segregation and sexuality. Women were often the main focus of morality police, who sought to ensure modest dress through detention, fines, beatings, and public admonishment. In all the cases, morality police were concerned with maintaining "Islamic" dress and appearance, and actively patrolled against cultural and fashion elements that were considered Western or otherwise un-Islamic, such as cosmetics, haircuts, sub-culture styles of clothing, and other personal grooming and dress habits that did not comport with the states' ideal.

Gender segregation was present in all three cases, and was most zealously enforced in the Saudi and Taliban cases. To varying degrees, morality police were employed to enforce laws regarding the public movement and employment of women. The freedom of movement outside the home for half the populations of these states are or were curtailed by patrols of government-sponsored units. Gender-mixing and sexuality laws were enforced in all three cases, reflecting religious or culturally conservative values regarding relations between men and women outside of marriage, and between homosexual individuals. Punishments for violations of these laws varied in all three of the cases, ranging from fines and imprisonment to public beatings and executions.

Public expressions of faith, apostasy, and other faith-related laws such as the ban on the consumption of alcohol and drugs, were also in the purview of morality police in all three cases. In Saudi Arabia and under the Taliban, the five daily prayers mandated under Sunni Islam was required for males and enforced by morality police. The Saudi CPVPV and Taliban MPVPV were also charged with investigating apostates; in more recent times, the CPVPV in particular has targeted those accused of apostasy on the Internet. The morality forces in all three cases were involved in some way with the

persecution of their countries' religious minorities, either for their practices or for their opposition to the rule of the regime. As for the ban on alcohol and drugs, each case is unique. In Saudi Arabia, the capture and destruction of alcohol and drugs is a popular pursuit of the CPVPV and is prominently featured in its social media campaigns. In Iran, the Basij militia is involved in drug interdiction with other security agencies as the republic struggles to stem the flow of drug and violence across its borders. The Taliban banned the consumption of drugs and alcohol for Afghans, yet relied heavily on the opium trade to fund its operations.

Beyond upholding religious law and maintaining an Islamic society, morality policing programs in all three cases contributed to upholding the political control of the regimes. In Saudi Arabia, morality police actively target those who question the political and religious establishment. As the CPVPV rebrands itself in response to calls for reform, its operations continue to expand in cyberspace and target the speech and expression of Saudis. In Iran, the Basij militia and other security forces allied with the clerical establishment are actively employed to subvert public demonstrations and unrest targeting the regime. The Basij, like the CPVPV, are also active online. Militia members monitor citizens' online activities, and run their own blogs and social media accounts espousing support for the political and religious primacy of the Islamic Republic and the Supreme Leader. The Taliban employed their morality police forces to physically control and coerce populations of conquered cities and territories, in their attempt to consolidate power in the middle of civil war. This tactic continues as the Taliban maintains and regains territorial control in the face of ongoing conflict with the United States and its partners.

### **C. RE-EXAMINATION OF THE HYPOTHESES**

This thesis argues that states employ morality police to expand and stabilize their rule. The first hypothesis contended that morality police forces lend religious legitimacy to Islamic regimes by creating public spaces that adhere to Islamic morality and mores. As demonstrated above, the morality police forces in all three of the examined cases are or were employed to enforce Islam in practice in the population's public life. By making

Islam visible in practice at the social level, these states reaffirm their founding commitment to religion which undergirds their claims of political legitimacy. This thesis contends that this argument is correct, but does not completely answer the original research question, as it does not address how the missions of the examined morality police forces included extensive operations targeting individuals and groups that challenge the political primacy of their respective regimes.

The second hypothesis argued that morality police forces reinforce the political conformity within society. This is also true in the three cases. By enforcing uniformity in society, morality police inherently repress the expression, organization, and action of dissenting political alternatives to the regime. This phenomenon is observed both in public life and online, from the suppression of religious minorities to the policing of free speech and expression online. The regime attempts to retain a monopoly on political control by controlling the public space, as observed with the enforcement of laws that limit public movement—as with the unhindered travel of unescorted women, and the free mixing of the genders—as well as discouraging dissent through the enforcement of laws through public punishment and execution. But as with the first hypothesis, this does not fully answer the question. It ignores how religious establishments rely on morality police to enforce certain public religious behavior to bolster the legitimacy of the regime.

Therefore, this thesis relies on the third hypothesis to advance the principle argument. States with religious systems of government employ morality police to expand and stabilize their rule. Morality police forces enable the regime to project power into society and retain dominance by affirming religious legitimacy, suppressing dissent, and enforcing socio-religious and political uniformity. This argument highlights the wide and varied employment of morality police forces. As discussed above, these forces are employed to reinforce the religious legitimacy of the regimes and the political conformity of society. The regimes also seek to enforce socio-religious and political uniformity. The maintenance of “Islamic culture” and defense against foreign, un-Islamic influences highlight the states’ efforts to create an ideal society that accepts the religious or religiously-sanctioned political rule of the regime.

#### **D. IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Does morality policing stabilize the rule of these regimes? The research for this thesis suggests that the tactics and operations of morality police have in fact led to certain levels of domestic unrest. In Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular, the advent of social media provided an outlet for the population to express discontent by spreading videos of confrontational interactions with the morality police and to voice criticisms against the regimes. As examined in Chapter IV, the Taliban were not met with a similar organized resistance campaign, though the group did encounter some protests in urban centers such as Herat. How did the regimes react to the popular discontent that their morality policing programs contributed to, and did this instability put the future of morality policing in jeopardy?

In Saudi Arabia, the rise of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman precipitates an ongoing series of reforms, and the CPVPV saw many of its law enforcement authorities curtailed in response to popular criticism of its tactics. As of the end of 2017, the Shoura Council debated divesting the CPVPV of its independence. The research into this case revealed that despite popular discontent with morality police tactics, and curtailment of the CPVPV's law enforcement authorities and independence, the commission's missions remain important to the regime. The CPVPV's re-branding efforts show that the group is repositioning itself to become more palatable to Saudi society, but also that its monitoring of religious and political dissent remains and is even expanding into the cyber realm.

In Iran, the Rouhani administration has criticized morality patrols and called for some reforms. However, the ultimate direction of security services and the morality program in Iran rests not entirely with the elected government, but instead is under the direction of the Supreme Leader. This is highlighted by the expansion of uniformed and undercover patrols of morality police in public spaces in recent years. The use of forces drawn from the Basij militia to suppress public unrest, while contributing to the group's unpopularity, demonstrated its usefulness in protecting the regime from political dissent. The maintenance of Islamic society and the political primacy of the regime remain vital missions to the authority holders in Iran. Therefore, despite public debate and political rhetoric surrounding the reformation of morality patrols, the program remains.



The Taliban continues its morality policing program, as reports from areas it continues to control suggest. This case is unique among the three in that its time in power was short, and riven by conflict due to civil war. The group continues to exist in the context of conflict, as it is targeted by the forces of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the coalition led by the United States. Despite this, the morality policing program appears to remain a prominent characteristic of Taliban territorial control. The legitimacy of the group's rule is linked to its ability to uphold religious law and project its power into the behavior and practices of the population it rules. To maintain political power, the Taliban employs morality policing to uphold its own version of law and order.

Despite conflict and social unrest, the morality policing programs in these cases remain intact. The regimes in all three cases continue to see value in their morality policing programs, as they continue to seek to affirm the religious legitimacy of their rule, suppress growing dissent and social unrest, and enforce socio-religious and political uniformity in the face of greater cultural and information exchange in the twenty-first century. In short, while morality police contribute to varying degrees of social unrest, the services they provide to the regime remain too valuable to abolish or reform away entirely.

This thesis recommends further examination of the relationship between regime stability and morality programs, as well as further research into the ever-changing prospects of individual programs as conflict, dynastic change, and popular political and religious mobilization continue to shift the dynamic in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, and other countries in the region. Study of other states and state-like actors who employ morality police forces could also shed further light on the relationship between regime stability and the imposition of socio-religious and political conformity. For example, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant reportedly employed bands of female morality police to enforce newly-imposed religious and moral laws that governed female

comportment in areas under the group's control.<sup>440</sup> Continued study of this topic could reveal how adversaries and allies of the United States maintain control of their populations in the face of war and unrest.

This thesis also recommends that observers of morality policing view reforms of the tactics and authorities of the programs with a critical eye. Despite some measures taken toward curbing the forces, conservative elements within regimes perceive them as too valuable for the preservation of society, religion, and political power to abolish completely. As Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, and the wider Middle East confront continued conflict and threats to the stability of states and religious establishments, morality police programs will remain an entrenched and important tool for those who seek power.

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<sup>440</sup> "Iraq: Women Suffer Under ISIS," Human Rights Watch, April 5, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/05/iraq-women-suffer-under-isis>; Souad Mekhennet and Joby Warrick. "The Jihadist Plan to use Women to Launch the Next Incarnation of ISIS," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-jihadist-plan-to-use-women-to-launch-the-next-incarnation-of-isis/2017/11/26/e81435b4-ca29-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_isiswomen-9pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.54e533edcc4c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-jihadist-plan-to-use-women-to-launch-the-next-incarnation-of-isis/2017/11/26/e81435b4-ca29-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_isiswomen-9pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.54e533edcc4c).

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