

Silicon Valley's Tainted Cash

By Nicholas Taylor, J.D. Candidate 2020 | November 9, 2018

Saudi Arabian journalist and political dissident Jamal Khashoggi was likely [murdered](#) by his own government. The Saudi government has more or less admitted its involvement in Khashoggi's death. In response, many startups have [declined](#) to attend a major investment summit in Saudi Arabia. However, some startups have continued to [accept](#) money from an investment fund backed by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth.

Is Saudi money tainted cash? Is it wrong for Silicon Valley to receive this money?

Saudi money is not tainted in the way something like conflict diamonds might be. The country's wealth is the product of legitimate oil exports. But, the revenue from the petroleum trade no doubt supports the Saudi regime. A reasonable argument can be made that doing business with the Saudi regime is akin to condoning its evil conduct.

The human rights violations of the Saudis, however, did not start yesterday. If reports are to be believed, the Saudi government routinely targets dissidents and murders LGBT people. Thus, there is little moral distinction between Silicon Valley taking Saudi cash and Americans consuming Saudi oil.

One might argue that Jamal Khashoggi's cold-blooded murder was particularly egregious compared to the garden-variety human rights violations that occur in Saudi Arabia. Even then, it is not clear whether there is a moral difference between a Saudi monarch sanctioning the killing of its dissident journalist and an American president ordering a [drone strike](#) against an American citizen abroad without due process (not to mention the collateral damage).

Whether Silicon Valley should accept tainted cash is not a question of right or wrong. This point is beyond debate. The real question is this: Are we willing to hold ourselves to the same moral standard?

