

State Islam in the Battle Against Extremism

Emerging Trends in Morocco and Tunisia

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Dr. Sarah Feuer, an expert on politics and religion in North Africa, was the Rosenbloom Family Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Geduld Program on Arab Politics.



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In the American policy debates over the causes, consequences, and potential cures of Islamist extremism, institutions of state Islam -- i.e., religious institutions that are formally tied to the states governing their respective countries -- have featured only marginally. Whether due to an understandable ambivalence toward overt engagement with religious institutions, or the perception that state Islam lacks credibility in the Arab world, U.S. policymakers have largely overlooked or dismissed these institutions and their affiliated scholars in the search for antidotes to the extremist thought of groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

In this Policy Focus, Sarah Feuer examines the evolving form and tenor of state Islam in Morocco and Tunisia -- home to Sunni Islam's oldest centers of religious learning, and the only two relative success stories of the Arab Spring -- and considers the degree to which state-linked religious institutions constitute potential partners for U.S. policymakers in the broader fight against violent Islamism.

The Author

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