

# From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: Tunisia's Ennahda Changes Course

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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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**To get a truer picture of the party's longer-term plans and the implications for political Islam writ large, observers will need to see how Ennahda changes its internal structures, how it votes on divisive legislation, and how it campaigns in upcoming elections.**

**T**o read the newspapers is to believe that Tunisia, the small country that sparked the Arab Spring, is the only one still on a recognizable path to democracy, in large part thanks to the conciliatory nature of the country's leading Islamist party, Ennahda ("Renaissance"). There is truth in this narrative. At key moments of the democratic transition, Ennahda, which has roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, distinguished itself from other Brotherhood derivatives by granting concessions to its secular opponents in the interest of preserving stability, even going so far as to cede to a technocratic government the political power it earned through free and fair elections, an unprecedented move for an Islamist party. And now, Ennahda may again be making history.

In late May, over one thousand members of Ennahda convened in the resort town of Hammamet for the movement's 10th party congress. Delegates discussed and voted on seven measures -- from the party's internal procedures to Ennahda's political and economic platforms. Arguably the most significant outcome of the congress, and the one subsequently grabbing international headlines, was the adoption of a motion to separate Ennahda's political and religious activities. In the run-up to the decisive vote, 74-year-old Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi (who the party reelected as president) issued a series of statements indicating that Ennahda was poised to leave behind "political Islam" and embrace "Muslim democracy"...

**[Read the full article on the Foreign Affairs website. \(https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/tunisia/2016-06-](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/tunisia/2016-06-)**

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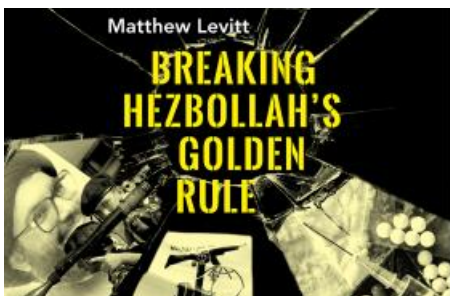
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