

Assessing What Arabs Do, Not What They Say:

A New Approach to Understanding Arab Anti-Americanism

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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In-Depth Reports

Instead of focusing on what Arab publics say, this study argues, U.S. policy would be better informed by paying close attention to what Arab publics do.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, President Bush's widely aired query "Why do they hate us?" became a touchstone for America's response to the disaster. To answer that question, many pundits quickly settled on polling data as the tool of choice -- a trend that has continued in the years since. Indeed, the explosion of public opinion surveys in Arab countries has pushed aside virtually all other measures of anti-Americanism, leaving policymakers, media outlets, and ordinary citizens with few other options for gauging Arab attitudes.

This special Policy Focus -- a product of The Washington Institute's Keston Project on the Battle of Ideas in the Middle East -- offers an alternative to this narrow reliance on polls. Instead of focusing on what Arabs say, it argues, we should focus on what Arabs do. Drawing from the Institute's extensive [Arab Anti-American Protest Database \(https://legacy.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PF104-Appendices/ProtestDatabase2009.mdb\)](https://legacy.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PF104-Appendices/ProtestDatabase2009.mdb) -- which inventories media-reported anti-American demonstrations held in Arab countries between 2000 and 2005 (updated now through 2009) -- the authors show how regional animosity toward the United States and its policies is episodic and event-driven, with little evidence of a continually rising tide of popular hatred. Supported by detailed graphs, tables, and timelines, the paper urges policymakers to pay at least as much attention to Arab behavior as they do to potentially distorted and easily manipulated perceptions of Arab public opinion.

- 28 pages



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