Re-Imagining Wahhabism: Saudi Arabia’s New Islamism
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Under the leadership of Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has been pursuing a dramatic new direction in social policies. This includes the arrest of prominent Islamist leaders, new restrictions on religious police, and cultural openings, especially toward women, unthinkable just five years ago. At the same time, the Crown Prince has been centralizing power under his own authority and championing a vigorous Saudi nationalism that emerged under his predecessor, King Abdullah. These significant changes in both ideational and institutional foundations raise the question of whether the long-held assumptions about the nature of the religious doctrine and alliance between clerics and royals at the center of the Saudi state need to be reassessed, and what such changes might mean for Saudi leadership in the broader Islamic world.