

# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT



The Tahrir Institute  
for Middle East Policy

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The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) is dedicated to centering localized perspectives in the policy discourse to foster transparent, accountable, and just societies.

TIMEP was founded in 2013 and currently has an office in D.C., with a network of expert fellows located throughout the world. TIMEP is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit in the District of Columbia.

For more information about TIMEP's mission, programming, and upcoming events, please visit [timep.org](http://timep.org).

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# Executive Summary

For more than six years, the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) has leveraged its access to decision makers in the United States, Europe, and within the United Nations to guarantee that the expertise and perspectives of local advocates are central components of the policymaking process. With an eye toward crafting policies that help foster transparent, just, and accountable societies across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), TIMEP has used its platform to disrupt the status quo and to introduce localized and nuanced understandings to policy making.

In 2019, TIMEP elevated local perspectives from the MENA region by fostering a platform for them to be heard. It supported a network of seven nonresident fellows and two Bassem Sabry Democracy Fellows in its Washington, D.C. office, showcasing their analysis in policy-relevant outputs, connecting them to influencers and like-minded organizations to expand their reach, and inviting them to join media and convening opportunities. It published 27 analytical commentaries on the top issues affecting civilians, states, and actors in the region, from negotiations around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam to protests in Sudan and calls for transitional justice.

Recognizing the power of bringing local players together in solutions-oriented conversations that build momentum for change, in 2019, TIMEP convened critical voices in conferences, events, and private meetings to unpack, analyze, and craft strategic and coordinated responses to pressing policy issues. From Bonn, Germany to Tunis, Tunisia, these convenings tackled topics such as the criminalization of the online space to the role of civil society organizations in exile and abroad.

Singling itself out as the only D.C.-based organization of its type to maintain a Legal and Judicial Department, TIMEP grew its work in support of the region's legal community: those best-positioned to use their technical skills to foster an environment that respects the rule of law and provides protection for local advocates as they pursue their critical work. TIMEP led a series of interventions around Egypt's Universal Periodic Review, supported the creation of practical Arabic legal guides and tools to remedy a deteriorating legal education system, and expanded the access of its local partners to international legal mechanisms.

Showcasing its specialized and contextualized knowledge of the region's legal, political, economic, and social issues, in 2019 TIMEP published 30 policy-facing briefs on topics from Egypt's constitutional amendments to the forced return of Syrian refugees. These tools paved the way for TIMEP, in collaboration with its fellows, partners, and contributors, to serve as a driver of policy influence. In 2019, TIMEP shaped the agenda in briefings with members of Congress, the U.S. executive branch, European missions in Washington, D.C. and New York, and the United Nations. The institute also shared its expertise with top media outlets around the world, from *The New York Times* to the BBC, and it participated in fora, closed-door consultations, and high-profile global conferences in cities from New York to Johannesburg. 🌍

# Section I: Elevating Localized Perspectives

Over the past six years, TIMEP has become a home for critical voices and the work of local experts and advocates from across the MENA region. Our collaborators find our approach that centers their expertise by creating a space for them to be heard, connecting them with like-minded actors across the region, and providing protection for them, a unique one—particularly at a time when they face increasingly limited resources, a lack of access to decision makers, and increasingly restrictive environments.

## FOSTERING A NETWORK OF FELLOWS

A critical component of TIMEP’s approach to elevating localized perspectives is the institute’s fellowship program. The program amplifies the voices of local experts by providing them with a space to develop solutions-oriented, forward-thinking content; integrating them into a network of like-minded entities and connecting them to policymakers; and providing them with targeted skills-building opportunities.

In 2019, TIMEP supported a total of seven nonresident fellows whose contributions bolstered TIMEP’s growth toward a more regional and thematically-oriented focus across the MENA region. Some of the topics addressed by fellows during their fellowships included economic development in Egypt, transitional justice mechanisms in Tunisia, and political and legal issues in Iraqi Kurdistan.

- In 2019, TIMEP renewed its collaboration with six nonresident fellows and welcomed Ghuna Bdiwi, who is producing research and analysis on transitional justice and accountability in Syria, as a new nonresident fellow.



*TIMEP Nonresident Fellow Ghuna Bdiwi joins Allison McManus, Research Director, TIMEP, Mai El-Sadany, Legal and Judicial Director, TIMEP, Mona Oraby, Assistant Professor, Amherst College, and Nathan Brown, Professor, George Washington University at a TIMEP-sponsored panel at the 2019 Middle East Studies Association conference.*

- In addition to its Nonresident Fellowship Program, TIMEP also offers a six month-long resident fellowship in its Washington, D.C. office: the Bassem Sabry Democracy Fellowship. The fellowship is aimed at empowering young analysts from the region to produce policy-relevant analysis that is grounded in localized perspectives. The fellowship welcomes applications from young professionals residing in the region with a background in journalism, international relations, political science, law, and other relevant fields.
- In 2019, TIMEP hosted Deema Abu Alkhair and Nourhan Fahmy as Bassem Sabry Fellows. During their fellowships, they produced vital scholarship on child recruitment in the Syrian war and fair trial guarantees in Egypt vis-à-vis the role and mandate of the public prosecution, respectively.

In 2019, the expertise and scholarship produced by TIMEP’s fellows was widely cited and featured by domestic and international media outlets. Examples include:

- Timothy Kaldas penned a number of external op-eds, including a piece for [Bloomberg](#) on the role of the Egyptian military in the country’s economy. In addition to giving quotes to outlets including [Reuters](#), [The National](#), and [France24](#), Kaldas also participated in extended television interviews, including an [interview](#) on DW News on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, [France24](#) and [Al Jazeera English](#) on Egypt’s constitutional referendum, and [ARD](#) concerning the Egyptian military economy.
- As tensions between Kurdish and Iraqi government entities rose over oil disputes, Kamal Chomani wrote on the political ramifications for [Al-Monitor](#). He was also quoted in [Al-Monitor’s coverage](#) of possible Turkey-Iran mobilization against the PKK.



*TIMEP Nonresident Fellow Kamal Chomani speaks at the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum (photo via flickr account Deutsche Welle Unternehmen)*

## CREATING A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE

TIMEP's Editorial Department exists as an integral part of the institute's overall strategy to amplify localized perspectives and carve out a space for their voices to be heard, ultimately adding nuance to the policy discourse. Through the publishing of a wide range of commentaries, the editorial department stands as an important means by which independent and unique voices are provided a platform to share research findings, policy analysis, and writing relevant to TIMEP's themes of focus.

In 2019, TIMEP published a total of 27 articles on a wide range of important regional issues by both fellows and external contributors.

Throughout the year, TIMEP's fellows penned commentaries touching on a number of topics including transitional justice, the rights of marginalized communities, legal and constitutional developments in the region, and much more. Some examples of the editorial outputs produced by TIMEP's fellows include:

- Nada Ahmed contributed a commentary entitled, “[An Uphill Battle: The Truth and Dignity Report and Transitional Justice in Tunisia.](#)” In it, she outlines the ongoing struggle for transitional justice in Tunisia, with a look at how the government has thwarted such efforts in the past and the possible effects upcoming elections could bear.
- Ghuna Bdiwi explains the ways in which the Syrian conflict has led to an evolved paradigm of transitional justice and opened the door to important discussions surrounding universal jurisdiction in her piece “[Attempting Justice within Conflict: How Has Syria Influence the Contemporary Conceptions of Transitional Justice?](#)”
- In “[Egyptian Authorities are Denigrating the Revolution,](#)” Yasmin Omar discusses efforts by Egyptian officials to disparage and rewrite the history of the January 25 Revolution in a piece co-written with Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany.
- Yasmin Omar and Timothy Kaldas both penned commentaries on the constitutional amendments that were passed in Egypt in April 2019. In his piece “[Doubling Down on Dictatorship,](#)” Kaldas analyzes the political context in which these amendments were being deliberated and its effect on the impending referendum. In “[Egypt's Constitutional Amendments: A Nail in the Coffin of Political Pluralism,](#)” Omar looks at the amendment's specific effects on political parties in the country.
- Ishak Ibrahim assesses the Egyptian state's self-assigned call to “renew religious discourse” and the roles that different branches of the state have undertaken in that campaign in his commentary “[Obstacles to Renewing Religious Discourse in Egypt: Reasons and Results.](#)”

In 2019, TIMEP also continued engaging a diverse group of external contributors. These authors provided insights that complemented the research and policy analysis produced by TIMEP staff and fellows. Analysis by external contributors include:

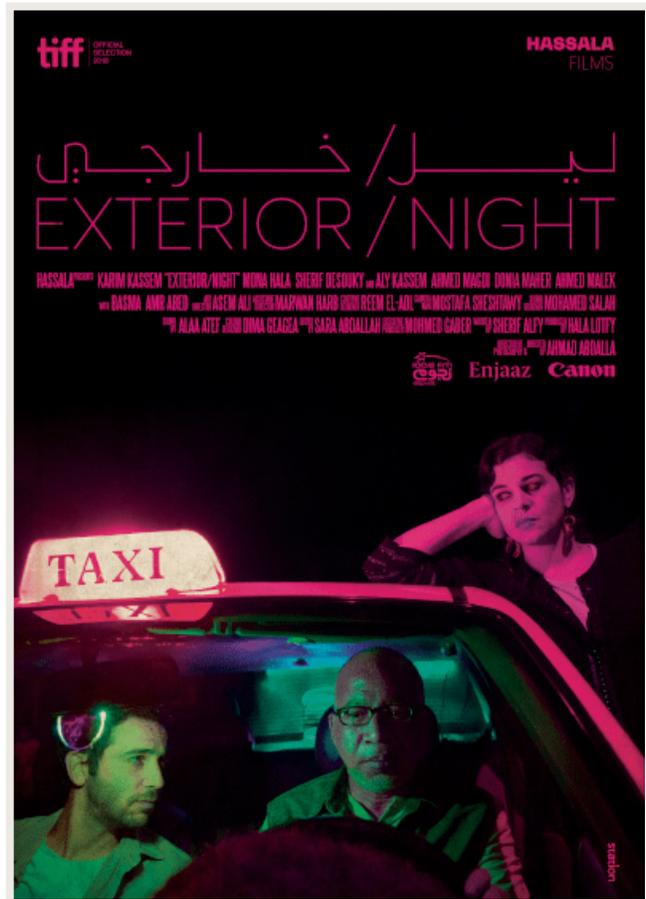
- In “[The Checkered Past of Sudan's Hemedti](#)” Mohamed Elagami examines the role of the key figure on Sudan's Transitional Military Council, who has a background in Darfur and Yemen, and has vacillated in his support for protesters in Khartoum.

- Joey Shea explains and analyzes the methods by which the Egyptian state carries web censorship, looking specifically at the ways in which Batel, a campaign opposing the constitutional amendments, was repeatedly blocked, in her commentary “Egypt’s Online Repression Thwarts Both Growth and Democracy.”
- Diana Rayes analyzes the needs and obstacles Syrian refugees in Egypt face as it relates to their mental health in “‘Stuck’ in Transit: Systematic limitations on the integration of Syrian refugees in Egypt and its impact on mental health and well-being.”

## ENGAGING WITH LOCAL EXPERTISE IN EVENTS

To further center localized perspectives within the Washington, D.C. and international policy communities, TIMEP hosted and participated in events that spotlighted artists, journalists, experts, and advocates based in the region.

- TIMEP hosted the premiere D.C. and NYC screenings of Egyptian director Ahmad Abdalla’s film “Ext. Night” (“Leil Khargi”). In this film, over one extraordinary night, the characters struggle with breaking away from accepted social norms—patriarchy, societal hypocrisy, and economic and political power—as they traverse Cairo’s complex landscape. Executive Director Nancy Okail explored these themes in a post-screening moderated discussion with Abdalla and actors Karim Kassem and Ahmed Malik.
- Mediating a discussion on how the media can facilitate or undermine populist trends in the Middle East, Research Director Allison McManus chaired a panel at the Columbia University’s Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life’s “Untangling Popular Power” event in Amman, Jordan.
- At Georgetown University Lab PerForum’s “Art of the Revolution in Egypt,” Executive Director Nancy Okail participated in a discussion with playwright Ahmed El-Attar, actor and director Khaled Abol Naga, graffiti artist and author Ganzeer, and author Ahmed Naje, addressing their unique experiences using art and expression to advocate for change.



# Section II: Convening to Build Networks

In 2019, TIMEP convened a number of critical conversations implicating top issues across the region. Doing so brought individuals and organizations across areas of expertise and backgrounds together to stimulate forward-thinking and solutions-oriented conversation, ultimately resulting in a more nuanced discourse and stronger networks. Through its convenings, the institute seeks to create new platforms and opportunities to support partnerships and momentum for change.

TIMEP returned to two previously-attended international platforms at the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum and RightsCon, and also brought analysts, researchers, and policymakers together in its Washington, D.C. office to provide a space to advance local voices and further collaborative efforts by like-minded organizations.

- At the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum in Bonn, Germany, TIMEP hosted a panel on “Silencing digital expression in the name of security: The role of regulation in combating freedom of expression” with Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany; Amr Gharbeia, an independent researcher; Nonresident Fellows Timothy Kaldas and Kamal Chomani; and Mosaab Baba, Managing Director of Ayin Network. Participants unpacked the range of mechanisms through which governments are using to crack down and institutionalize digital regulation and restrictions on free expression and speech online.



*TIMEP's panel at the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum (photo via flickr account Deutsche Welle Unternehmen).*

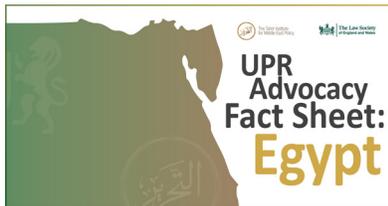
- Exploring opportunities and challenges for rights-centric governance of technology and cyberspace at a time of increased threats, TIMEP hosted a panel at this year's RightsCon in Tunis on "Cyber warfare and defense in a tumultuous Middle East" with Dlshad Othman, Senior Cyber Security Engineer for Verizon Media; Stan Byers, Cybersecurity Policy Fellow at New America; Marietje Schaake, former member of the European Parliament and TIMEP Board of Advisors member. The panel was moderated by Research Director Allison McManus.
  - While in Tunis, TIMEP co-hosted a reception with Al Bawsala, a Tunisian organization that has been fundamental to advancing citizen empowerment and good governance through monitoring, advocacy and capacity-building efforts. The reception brought together international, regional, and local civil society organizations and networks working to advance the rule of law regionally.
- On the heels of the Sudanese protests that began in December 2018 that ultimately resulted in the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir, TIMEP hosted a timely half-day Sudanese-led workshop aimed at facilitating policy dialogues from a Sudanese-centric perspective. The workshop unpacked three pressing themes: public, political, and legal landscapes; militia, state, and security; and economic, social services, and inclusion. The discussions were led by 12 Sudanese analysts, researchers, and activists.
- Seeking to carve out a space for legal scholarship in academic understandings of the Middle East, TIMEP hosted a roundtable at the Middle East Studies Association's annual meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana on "Advancing and Integrating Legal Scholarship in and on the Middle East" with Research Director Allison McManus; Legal Director Mai El-Sadany; Nathan Brown, professor at the George Washington University; Mona Oraby, assistant professor at Amherst College; and Ghuna Bdiwi, lawyer, PhD candidate at York University and TIMEP nonresident fellow.
- Additionally, in 2019, TIMEP convened seven private discussions on Egypt covering topics that included the state of civil society and human rights, the economy, the constitutional amendments, the NGO law, and internal security. TIMEP also held a closed consultative meeting with D.C.-based Sudanese experts about the top challenges facing the country and the space for U.S.-based responses.

# Section III: Strengthening a Rule of Law Culture

In recognizing the centrality of the legal community's role in the protection of local voices and the creation of an environment that respects the rule of law that allows those voices to flourish, TIMEP continued to grow its Legal and Judicial Department through the following steps:

- Building a network of human rights lawyers and legal advocates across the region in order to assess opportunities and obstacles facing the legal community and to craft programming that addresses needs on the ground.
- Documenting rule of law and accountability-related trends in policy-relevant and action-oriented outputs.
- Providing technical support to and collaborating with lawyers on the ground by advising them on international legal standards and the underutilized legal tools available to them, from human rights sanctions to international U.N. mechanisms.
- Remedying deteriorating legal education opportunities and curricula in the region by supporting a nonresident fellow whose mandate was to create a practical Arabic legal guide for young Egyptian lawyers on the right of a defendant to retain counsel at every stage of the legal process.

## SPOTLIGHT: EGYPT'S UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)



In November 2019, Egypt underwent its third UPR, the U.N. mechanism created to examine the human rights record of every member state. As part of this process, Egypt submitted a national report and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights put together one report compiling U.N. information on the country, as well as a second report compiling information received from stakeholders, including civil society.

TIMEP's Legal and Judicial Department led the organization's work on a stakeholder report on the consolidation of authoritarian rule in Egypt through legislation and the crackdown on members of the legal profession and civil society; the report was jointly produced with the Law Society of England and Wales.

In addition to the report, TIMEP also co-produced an advocacy fact sheet, highlighting key takeaways from its submission; wrote and submitted an oral statement that was read during the UPR Pre-Session; conducted advocacy through its partner with the Geneva-based U.N. missions of various countries invested in the UPR process; and convened a group of like-minded organizations to unify messaging and strengthen collaboration around the UPR.

Ultimately, TIMEP's leadership and participation in the UPR constituted a unique opportunity to document a poorly-understood legal trend, as well as build a strong advocacy and civil society network to leverage U.N. tools like the UPR to bring about greater adherence to the rule of law in Egypt.

# Section IV: Exercising Policy Influence

In 2019, TIMEP was able to engage with policymakers in the U.S., E.U., and U.N. to share its in-house expertise, the scholarship and analysis produced by its fellows, and the initiatives of its partners, to bring about policy that addresses root causes and responds to needs on the ground.

## IN-HOUSE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

In 2019, TIMEP's team leveraged its specialized knowledge of issues across thematic and regional matters to produce 30 policy-facing briefs on a variety of legal, political, and security-related issues. These briefs are meant to provide policymakers with a nuanced, yet concise exploration of some of the key topics they are engaging with on the region.

Many of TIMEP's briefs address thematic issues on a regional level and unpack the role and influence of regional and global powers in the Middle East. These include:

- A **brief** that examines China's role in Egypt's economy and the implications of such for relations between the two countries, Egypt's domestic security and rights landscape, and larger economic reforms being undertaken by the Egyptian state.
- The dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam continued unresolved in 2019, and TIMEP's **brief** on the megaproject provides background on the negotiations and diplomatic efforts that have been spent on finding a settlement between the two countries.
- As surveillance technology continues to emerge as a global issue, TIMEP published two briefs on the issue as it pertains to the MENA region. A brief on the **export** of these technologies examines the countries and businesses that cooperate with regional governments in this arena, while a second brief on the **use of surveillance technology** looks at the tools and methods through which these governments have targeted dissidents.
- A **brief** on U.S. arms transfers analyzes the accountability mechanisms in place to enforce human rights conditions related to American security assistance and explains the ways in which such mechanisms have been circumvented.

Launched in August 2019, TIMEP's **Syria Unpacked** project seeks to bring into conversation multifaceted and multilayered themes relating to the country's security and governance dynamics, its geopolitical situation, accountability for past and ongoing rights violations, and mass internal and global displacement. Through this project, TIMEP pairs in-depth coverage of developments with law, policy, and issue briefs, including:



- TIMEP’s brief on Syria’s **Counter-terrorism Law** explains the new parameters set forth by the piece of legislation, its adherence to legal norms, and implications for its implementation.
- A brief on **Syria’s Idlib Province** analyzes ongoing violence in the contested area, breaking down the effect of the security dynamics of the province on forced displacement and other disastrous humanitarian fallout.
- As countries hosting Syrian refugees reconsider their asylum, refugee, and immigration policies, TIMEP’s brief on the **return of these refugees** to Syria describes the increasingly difficult conditions they face in their host countries and also provides reasons why their premature return to Syria raises serious concerns.

In 2019, TIMEP also continued to develop its deep knowledge of Egypt across a number of thematic issues:

- TIMEP’s **brief** on Case 173, popularly known as Egypt’s Foreign Funding Case, analyzes how the acquittal of the defendants, a group of Egyptian and non-Egyptian civil society workers, has broader implications for the country’s civil society and international relations.
- TIMEP’s **brief** on **LGBTQ human rights in Egypt** provides background on the systematic violations of the rights of LGBTQ persons through successive regimes and examines the long term trends and political contexts during which such violations have been carried out.
- TIMEP published the fourth full session **report** the ongoing Egypt Parliament Watch project providing analysis on the parliament with sections on parliamentary performance and legislation.

In response to a significant legal and constitutional development that took place in Egypt in 2019, TIMEP published a package of products to provide greater clarity on the process and implications of amending the constitution for the country’s long-term trajectory. This package included:

- An **infographic** details the process and steps taken to amend the constitution, which necessitated a popular referendum.
- A comprehensive **brief** covers the developments leading up to, and the implications of, the amendment that extends presidential term limits.
- Two law briefs on Egypt’s constitutional amendments, in **draft form** and as **ultimately adopted**, highlight the ways in which the package of amendments—including those which extend presidential term limits, establish the military as the protector of the constitution, and expand the authority of the president over the judicial branch—alter Egypt’s legal landscape and dis-mantle the rule of law; and documents the context in which the referendum took place.



## POLICY IN ACTION

In working to expand the reach of research, scholarship, and analysis produced by the TIMEP team in Washington, D.C., its fellows, and its partners, in 2019, TIMEP engaged in a number of policy meetings, hosted and participated in a variety of events, shared expertise with the media, and continued to host its internship program.

In 2019, TIMEP engaged policymakers on a wide range of key issues spanning from the implications of the September 2019 protests in Egypt to the forced return of refugees in Syria.

- In 2019, TIMEP made a conscious effort to engage with both Republican and Democratic members of Congress to gain bipartisan support for TIMEP's work. TIMEP also built relationships with a number of E.U. country missions. Internationally, TIMEP has also begun to engage with several United Nations Permanent Missions and U.N. Special Rapporteurs on issues relating to Egypt and Syria.
- TIMEP continued to foster its relationships with pre-existing contacts in the National Security Council, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Departments of State and Defense, those in the European Union, and others.

TIMEP hosted and participated in a number of events that tackled a diverse range of policy issues, including:

- In a discussion among leading analysts and policymakers on foreign policy at Florida International University's event "State of the World: Global Relations & U.S. Foreign Policy," Executive Director Nancy Okail addressed the issue of the shortfalls of U.S. Middle East policy and its new and complex configuration.
- At a Johannesburg-based consultation with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in May 2019, Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany joined more than 60 representatives of civil society from 25 countries to discuss, explore, and document the impact of restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly and association on sustainable development.
- In discussing the "justice gap" in countries impacted by conflict and the necessary role which transitional justice plays in reconstruction, Executive Director Nancy Okail spoke on a panel titled, "Challenges and Opportunities in Contexts of Ongoing Conflict," for the ICTJ Transitional Justice and Sustainable Development Goals Dialogue Sessions. Okail was joined by Fatima Ayub, Policy Advisor at the International Crisis Group; Ilaria Martorelli, an Independent Consultant; Riam El-Gantri, Head of Libya Program at ICTJ; and moderator Kelli Muddell, Director of the Gender Justice Program at ICTJ.
- Sharing her expertise on advocating for greater academic freedom on behalf of imprisoned academics and scholars, Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany was a panelist on "Making the case: How to advocate on the Hill" at New York University's "Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Day" event.



*TIMEP Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany speaks on a panel for Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Day (photo via Scholars at Risk Network).*

- In 2019, TIMEP presented at six other events hosted by the Middle East Institute, Stanford University, the Project on Middle East Democracy, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Scholars at Risk.

TIMEP experts were also featured in *The Washington Post*, the BBC, *The New York Times*, a U.S. Department of State report, NPR radio's All Things Considered program discussing issues of religious freedom in Egypt, Syrian refugees seeking asylum, and the counterterrorism law in Syria, among other issues.

Finally, and looking to the future class of policy influencers and policymakers, TIMEP continued to host a dynamic internship program. Through this program, TIMEP trains students and young professionals who have an interest in going into the policy field, pairing each intern with a staff mentor to help them work on projects or initiatives that align with their own career or academic goals.

- In 2019, TIMEP brought on sixteen interns who provided support for our work on transitional justice in Syria, Egypt's economy, religious minorities in the Middle East, and U.S. advocacy toward the Middle East.



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1140 Connecticut Ave NW Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036 - 202 969 3343 - [info@timep.org](mailto:info@timep.org) - [timep.org](http://timep.org)