



The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy

2020

TIMEP ANNUAL REPORT



The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) centers localized perspectives in the policy discourse to foster transparent, accountable, and just societies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

TIMEP was founded in 2013 and is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a network of expert fellows and partners located on the ground in the Middle East and North Africa and throughout the world. TIMEP is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit in the District of Columbia.

For more information about TIMEP's mission, programming, or upcoming events, please visit timep.org. This report is the product of the collaborative efforts of TIMEP's staff and fellows.

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01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than seven years, the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) has worked to ensure that policy at the U.S., Canadian, European, and UN levels are being informed and shaped by the experiences and voices of experts and advocates on the ground in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Doing so has brought about policy that is not only more ethical, but also more effective—contextualizing priorities like security, stability, and economic development in MENA alongside key objectives like transparency, accountability, and justice.

With the ten-year anniversary of the region’s 2010-2011 uprisings, TIMEP entered 2020 with a clear commitment to ensuring that the voices of those presenting alternate visions to decades of status quo would be heard, strengthened, and protected. In 2020, TIMEP leveraged the unique tools and network at its disposal to expand programmatically on both regional and thematic levels. The institute exponentially grew its work on countries like Syria and Tunisia, while addressing new country contexts, including Lebanon, Yemen, and Algeria—all while unpacking new thematic challenges, from content moderation to business

accountability. These developments positioned TIMEP to serve as a platform for changemakers in and from the MENA region and as an agenda-setting resource for decision makers around the globe



Tunisian protesters gather inside the oil and gas plant in el-Kamour, in Tunisia’s southern state of Tataouine, on July 16, 2020. (Photo by FATHI NASRI/AFP via Getty Images)

Top photo: Algerian protesters wave the national flag during a weekly anti-government demonstration in the capital Algiers, on February 21, 2020. (Photo by Billal Bensalem/NurPhoto via Getty Images)



“**TIMEP entered 2020 with a clear commitment to ensuring that the voices of those presenting alternate visions to decades of status quo would be heard.**”

Through its 2020 programming, TIMEP invested in the future of the MENA region, amplified solutions-oriented and locally-informed expertise, and centered the rule of law—all toward the crafting of strong, responsive, and principled policy. TIMEP welcomed its first-ever cohort of nonresident fellows through a dynamic program that reflects the institute’s regional priorities and caters to each fellow’s personal and professional objectives. TIMEP published a wide array of unique analytical pieces, sparking dozens of solutions-oriented policy conversations; and invested heavily in Arabic editing and translation to tackle the language and access barriers plaguing the policy community. TIMEP worked to protect lawyers-at-risk and strengthen the resources, capacity, and access of the community, all as a long-term investment to protect those best-positioned to provide protection for everyone else. In advocacy meetings, coordinated campaigns with like-minded partners, and briefings with members of the media, TIMEP worked to ensure that those informing and making decisions would have the most clear, comprehensive, and actionable information possible at their disposal.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, TIMEP adapted its programming model to reflect the realities of remote

work, leveraging technology and other tools to convene partners safely, spotlight and center unheard expertise, and host virtual convenings, all the while remaining steadfast in its mission and targeted in its approach. TIMEP balanced pre-existing thematic priorities, while also introducing a new and essential focus on the pandemic. The institute hosted analysis that unpacked the specific challenges brought on by COVID-19, as well as perspectives that highlighted pre-existing vulnerabilities. Intent on integrating human rights in the pandemic response, TIMEP convened partners in the policy space to articulate and push for the application of international standards relevant to the pandemic and due process, surveillance, and other key rights issues; also endorsing legislation toward this end in the United States.

Ending the year on momentum for the future, TIMEP launched a [new website](#) that best reflects its mission and programming, while giving users a window into how and why TIMEP does the work that it does. Our new website is meant to serve as a platform to generate new ideas, convene creative thinkers, and inform the policy discourse on persistent and emerging issues across and in the MENA region.



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FELLOWSHIPS

TIMEP's fellowships are an investment in the future of the MENA region. They provide early and mid-career voices with the space to develop solutions-oriented, forward-thinking content; integration into a network of like-minded entities; connectivity to policymakers; and targeted skill-building opportunities.

Nonresident Fellowships

Each year, TIMEP welcomes a group of nonresident fellows for a one-year period, whose mandates reflect key topical and thematic priorities for the institute as a whole. The work of fellows is integrated across all of TIMEP's programs.

In 2020, TIMEP supported a dynamic and diverse group of nonresident fellows based in or with significant ties to the MENA region. Through the nonresident fellowship program, TIMEP empowered a cadre of young and mid-career advocates, scholars, and analysts to shape the global policy discourse in a lasting and impactful way, while leveraging its network, partnerships, and programming to realize each fellow's personal and professional objectives.

2020-2021 Nonresident Fellowship Cohort

Though the institute had previously hosted nonresident fellows, 2020 represented the first year that TIMEP brought in a group of them in a single cohort at the same time, allowing for cross-regional collaboration and dynamic partnerships that will continue well beyond the one-year fellowship contracts.

This year, TIMEP welcomed seven new fellows to its 2020-21 cohort. One is not spotlighted here for security reasons.

Top photo: A man wears protective gear as he sprays disinfectant inside a health isolation center established on the Syrian-Turkish border for people coming from Turkey to Idlib as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19. (Photo by Anas Alkharboutli/picture alliance via Getty Images)



“TIMEP empowered a cadre of young and mid-career advocates, scholars, and analysts to shape the global policy discourse in a lasting and impactful way.”



Kareem Chehayeb is an investigative journalist at The Public Source, an independent media organization in Lebanon. He has published work with several outlets, including *The Washington Post and Foreign Policy*.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Freedom of information, whistleblowing, and transparency, as they intersect with deeper issues of corruption, both in Lebanon and across the MENA region
- Over the course of his fellowship, Chehayeb has led the institute’s work on freedom of information legislation in Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia, bringing stakeholders together and conducting key research on corruption and transparency. Chehayeb has also provided important context, unpacking and explaining how the lack of an independent judiciary and ineffective transparency mechanisms are at the heart of crises that were further exacerbated by the explosion in Beirut in August.



Noor Hamadeh is a Syrian-American lawyer and co-host of the Branch 251 podcast. She is currently consulting on a number of Syrian legal projects.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Accountability for human rights violations committed by businesses, both in Syria and across the MENA region
- Engaging on a new and emerging topic of global importance, Hamadeh has played a key role in comprehensively mapping the top business and human rights issues in the MENA region, guided TIMEP’s long-term strategy and priorities in this issue area, and provided legal and political insight on timely topics, from the U.S. Caesar sanctions to reconstruction in conflict areas.



Diana Rayes is a PhD student in International Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, specializing in the impact of conflict and displacement on refugee and migrant health.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Public health trends across the MENA region; the state of refugees from and across the MENA region
- Having joined TIMEP shortly after the onset and spread of COVID-19, Rayes’ fellowship has allowed her to provide insight and timely analysis on not only the public health elements of the pandemic, but also the institutional vulnerabilities highlighted by it across the region. She has weighed in on critical debates from equitable vaccine distribution to the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on vulnerable populations. In the refugee space, Rayes has produced unique research on topical issues like refugee return to Syria.

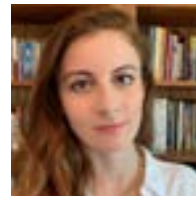


Ruba Ali Al-Hassani is a legal sociologist and PhD student at Osgoode Hall Law School, whose research explores sociological and behavioral approaches to Iraqi studies, law, transitional justice, crime, social control, and social movements.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Transitional justice and broader justice-related issues in Iraq
- Over the course of her fellowship, Al-Hassani has worked with TIMEP to establish the framework for its new programming on Iraq; conducted policy-relevant research on justice in the country; mapped misunderstood elements of the legal and judicial system; connected with a network of lawyers in the country to document the top challenges they face; and advocated on behalf of detained protestors and activists to policymakers.

Suhail al-Ghazi is a researcher and OSINT analyst with extensive experience conducting research on a wide range of Syrian topics, from military developments to socioeconomic issues.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Developments in Syria, the Syrian regime’s narrative, and social media
- During this fellowship period, al-Ghazi has unpacked the Syrian state’s strategy and narrative through research, analysis, and speaking engagements. He has also leveraged social media to add nuance and unpack key conversations on refugee return and regime politics.



Joey Shea is a researcher, focusing on online freedom of expression and human rights issues, as well as policy solutions that protect the right to privacy and access to information.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Digital rights, information controls, and the impact of technology across the MENA region
- As contestations between citizens, the state, and non-state actors unfold across the digital space, and as surveillance and legislation implicating cyberspace continue to be weaponized, Shea’s fellowship has applied a unique technical and rights-based understanding of the issue and significantly grown the institute’s engagement on the digital issues across its programs.

“ I have built skills in advocacy and public speaking through the Nonresident Fellowship Program and become well-versed in legal and policy frameworks that complement my research portfolio. ”

*Diana Rayes
(2020 Nonresident Fellow)*

Outside of the 2020-21 cohort, TIMEP supported the work of two nonresident fellows:

Timothy Kaldas is a PhD candidate at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. He researches transitional politics in Egypt, regime survival strategies, and Egyptian political economy and foreign policy.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Political economy of Egypt and the regional dynamics at play
- Looking toward prospects for development, Kaldas informed TIMEP’s work on Egypt’s political economy and influenced policy discourse in the Egypt space on transparency concerns and political stability moving forward following the

onset of COVID-19 and other regional challenges, including the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Mohamed El Dahshan is Managing Director of OXCON, a consulting firm focusing on fragile and post-conflict countries.

- **Fellowship Mandate:** Development and economy in Egypt and across the MENA region
- El Dahshan worked with TIMEP to assess the Egyptian government’s response to COVID-19 across a number of sectors and explored how the pandemic has impacted vulnerable populations in the MENA region.

Bassem Sabry Democracy Fellowship

Every year, TIMEP hosts one to two Bassem Sabry Democracy Fellows at its Washington, D.C. offices for a six-month period, providing young analysts from the region with the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of policymaking in the U.S. capital and to produce policy-relevant analysis that is informed by their first-hand knowledge. The fellowship welcomes applications from young professionals residing in the region, with plans to return to the region following the fellowship.

In 2020, researcher and journalist **Nourhan Fahmy** completed her Bassem Sabry Democracy Fellowship with TIMEP. Prior to joining TIMEP, Nourhan had

amassed unique experience as a journalist, as well as worked as a researcher and archivist at the Law & Society Research Unit at the American University in Cairo, where she conducted socio-legal research and archived material for the digital legal archive Manshurat Qanuneya.

Her work at TIMEP culminated in a collection of research and analysis that unpacked how Egypt’s prosecution, a key player in the legal and judicial space, affects fair trial guarantees. In May, TIMEP hosted a virtual launch event where Fahmy engaged with a diverse audience to explain how changes surrounding the prosecution have implicated access to justice and the rule of law in a lasting way and to reflect on the policy implications of this development.



The Bassem Sabry Democracy Fellowship was established in memory of Egyptian political writer and commentator Bassem Sabry.

03

EDITORIAL

TIMEP's Editorial Department exists as an integral part of the institute's strategy to amplify localized perspectives and carve out a space for their voices to be heard toward the objective of influencing and informing policy. Through the publishing of a wide range of commentary by a diverse array of advocates and experts, TIMEP provides independent and unique voices with a platform to share research findings, policy analysis, and solutions-oriented writing. In a commitment to support contributors and readers who face language barriers and to ensure that voices otherwise left without a policy platform are heard, TIMEP has invested in translation and Arabic editing and has been exponentially growing its Arabic output.

Analysis

Throughout 2020, TIMEP centered the expertise of its expansive network of fellows and contributors on a range of regional policy issues, producing a total of 70 commentaries in English and Arabic, marking a year in which it made dramatic progress toward informing the policy discourse on new countries and topics.

Top photo: Anti-government activists chant slogans during a protest in Beirut. (Photo by Marwan Naamani/picture alliance via Getty Images)



Aerial view of Tunis, Tunisia (Photo by VW Pics/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)



“ TIMEP provides independent and unique voices with a platform to share research findings, policy analysis, and solutions-oriented writing. ”

TIMEP’s Editorial Department produced solutions-oriented analysis on pivotal regional themes of long-standing importance, while expanding to unpack new issues and country contexts:

- In recent years, digital rights, privacy, and freedom of information have been at the heart of understanding control and dissent in MENA. TIMEP published a number of pieces with this focus, including an [article](#) on the forms that targeted digital threats take in MENA and another piece involving an [online smear campaign](#) targeting victims and witnesses to a prominent rape case in Egypt.
- The Beirut explosion in August complicated the multiple crises that Lebanon continues to face, as protests calling for reform in the face of deep-seated corruption continue. TIMEP’s Analysis page followed the situation closely, examining issues that include the effects of the explosion on Lebanon’s [food crisis](#), the [obstacles to accountability](#), and the passage of [legislation](#) ostensibly used to fight corruption.
- TIMEP was committed to centering the voices of marginalized communities in the larger policy

discourse, while giving due attention to their specific lived experiences. A [three-part series](#) written by Nonresident Fellows Diana Rayes and Suhail al-Ghazi was published in this vein, along with articles by contributors on challenges facing [religious minorities](#) and [gender equality](#).

- As part of its efforts to expand its regional scope, TIMEP published a number of articles on personal rights and freedoms across North Africa, from press freedom in [Algeria](#) and [Morocco](#) to corruption and accountability in [Libya](#).
- Looking ahead to the ten-year anniversary of the region’s 2010-2011 protests, in December, TIMEP launched its [Ten Years On: Organizing in the MENA Region](#) project with four commentaries looking at various aspects of organizing [on the ground](#), in [cyberspace](#), and in [exile](#).

For the first time in TIMEP’s history, TIMEP outputs and analysis are being made available in a third language thanks to a cooperation with [The Digital Interpreter](#), a Latin America-based organization that translates and publishes a significant portion of the institute’s content into Spanish.

Arabic

Language barriers have long prevented Arabic-speaking audiences from informing the largely English-speaking policy world. In 2020, TIMEP took a number of institutional steps to break down this barrier, ensuring that its content could be accessed in Arabic and that originally-written Arabic content could be accessed by an English-speaking audience.

More specifically, TIMEP expanded its Arabic editorial coverage by investing in translation and editing support, marking significant progress in the publication of [Arabic content](#) on its website and the translation of pieces originally written in Arabic into English—both of which TIMEP regards as essential in centering localized perspectives.



Egypt allowed Friday prayers to resume in major mosques under strict preventive measures against COVID-19. (Photo by Islam Safwat/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

COVID-19

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight: COVID-19

Throughout the year, the spread of [COVID-19](#) brought to light a number of global, regional, and country-specific challenges affecting MENA, not only in the health space, but on issues involving the economy, rule of law, security, access to information, and beyond. In centering localized perspectives, expertise, and voices, TIMEP's editorial response to the pandemic has included producing nuanced and solutions-oriented analysis that unpacks the context in which COVID-19 spreads, assesses the response of governments and

other actors, and looks to expected impact.

This has included legal analysis examining how COVID-19 measures across the region have presented serious issues to [due process](#) and other [legal rights](#). TIMEP's fellows and contributors have also worked to provide insight on how the pandemic has affected [vulnerable refugee](#) populations. In addition to its regional coverage, the institute's outputs have also taken country-specific looks at responses to the pandemic, whether it be challenges facing health workers in [Egypt](#) or how COVID-19 presents distinct risks to populations amid conflict in [Yemen](#) and [Syria](#).

While the pandemic presented entirely new challenges to governments across the region and beyond, TIMEP also published analyses discussing how COVID-19 has [exacerbated](#) existing [issues](#).

04

LEGAL UNIT

Recognizing its central role in protecting localized perspectives and in reforming the societies in which these perspectives can thrive, TIMEP invests in the region's legal community through the work of its Legal Unit. Through research and documentation, the Legal Unit makes key legal and judicial developments understandable for policy audiences. Its support work lends assistance to lawyers at risk individually and for their work; and its investment in Arabic legal education helps guarantee that this otherwise marginalized community has access to the tools necessary to advance its contributions.

Legal Research and Documentation

Legal and judicial developments are central to a comprehensive understanding of the MENA region. Yet they are often dismissed as too technical and left out of policy discussions. In an effort to simplify and contextualize these developments in the broader political, economic, and social contexts in which they take place, the Legal Unit produced and hosted analysis throughout the year on a number of key topics in collaboration with the Editorial Department.

These include outputs on:

- How the pandemic has affected [states of emergency](#), [detention](#), and [due process](#) across the entire MENA region;
- [Prospects for accountability in Syria](#), including on the [first-ever Syrian state torture trial](#) and [sexual and gender-based violence](#);
- How [legislation has affected the ability of Tunisians to organize](#) on the ground and online in the decade since the Jasmine Revolution; and
- The systematic discrimination of [women in the judiciary in Egypt](#).

At the heart of the rule of law crisis in MENA is the systematic attack on lawyers for their exercise of fundamental freedoms and legal defense work.

Top photo: Outside view of Egypt's High Court in downtown Cairo. (Photo by Gianluigi Guerica/AFP via Getty Images)



“ Through research and documentation, the Legal Unit makes key legal and judicial developments understandable for policy audiences. ”

To kick off what will become a region-wide program on Lawyers-at-Risk, TIMEP worked to document violations against and raise attention to the legal community in Egypt, the region’s top jailer of lawyers.

- TIMEP documented, compiled, and released an annotated list of 35 lawyers arrested since 2018 for their legal defense work and exercise of fundamental freedoms.
- Together, TIMEP and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) launched [Targeting the last line of defense: Egypt’s attacks against lawyers](#), a joint briefing paper documenting authorities’ attempts to weaken and curtail the legal

profession, and thereby dismantle the last line of defense against the government’s crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- Following the release of the report, ICJ presented a joint statement on behalf of itself and TIMEP before the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council.
- TIMEP and ICJ also hosted a joint launch event around the release of the report and on the sidelines of the 45th Session, featuring the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, among other speakers.



Legal Support and Advocacy



Legal support and advocacy work relies on international legal tools and mechanisms to protect lawyers-at-risk and bolster their work.

Ahead of the review of Lebanon's human rights record before the United Nations in January 2021, referred to as its Universal Periodic Review (UPR), TIMEP connected with partners and identified press freedom as a key topic that continues to be left out of international discussions around Lebanon.

- The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and TIMEP produced a [joint UPR submission](#) in July, documenting the practices and trends that have significantly compromised press freedom in recent years, including the relevant and intricate legislative framework. The submission also underscored worrying trends and practices regarding press freedom in Lebanon, including a rise in violence against journalists, an increase in defamation and false news lawsuits against the press, and unlawful surveillance.
- In November, the partner organizations jointly produced a [fact sheet](#) that summarizes key takeaway points from the submission, along with a series of recommendations for states to raise to Lebanon during the UPR.
- TIMEP and CPJ have conducted advocacy meetings with country missions based in Beirut and the region, as well as in Geneva, to discuss the topic and the opportunity that the UPR presents.

In addition to engaging around the UPR, the Legal Unit worked throughout the year to assist the region's lawyers to make submissions to the UN special procedures to complement domestic priorities, including on academic freedom, content moderation by social media companies, and deteriorating detention conditions.

The Legal Unit raised the cases of a number of detained lawyers-at-risk to international legal organizations to bring about global action on their behalf, inform reporting on lawyers-at-risk, and nominate lawyers for high-profile human rights awards in order to lend protection to the at-risk community.

Legal Education



With an eye toward investing in the skills and capacity of the legal community by providing greater access to Arabic-language training materials, the Legal Unit launched a practical Arabic guide entitled [Effective Communication Between the Lawyer and Defendant in](#)

[Egypt](#) by former nonresident fellow Adel Ramadan. Responding to a crackdown on the practice of law, declining judicial and prosecutorial independence, and the deteriorating state of legal education, the guide focuses on the relationship between the lawyer and the client and the right to a fair trial. TIMEP will continue to host private convenings around the guide and ensure that it is accessible and adaptable for lawyers practicing in different spaces and contexts.

Leveraging its experience with the UN special procedures, the Legal Unit also provided expert review on a set of practical guides produced by the [Syrian Legal Development Program](#) that will support members of the Syrian legal community and Syrian civil society at-large to better access these mechanisms and make submissions on key rights violations at a time when documentation is more important than ever.



05

CONVENINGS

To strengthen the work of localized advocates and experts, TIMEP brings them together. The institute hosts and participates in convenings of various forms to support partnerships and momentum for change. From virtual collaborations that emphasize the value-add of different parties, to technical training sessions addressing the needs of participants, to public events which center unheard perspectives, TIMEP’s convenings are responsive and dynamic.

Human Rights During the Pandemic

At the onset of the pandemic, governments in MENA exploited safety measures as a means to further restrict human rights. TIMEP joined like-minded organizations to underscore the issues around COVID-19 and to identify policy responses:

- Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany spoke on the [human rights violations faced by detainees, women, and marginalized communities](#) and the intersection of [politics, rights, and global dynamics](#) in Egypt and across

the MENA region at events and discussions hosted by the Middle East Institute, [In Lieu of Fun](#), and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

- Nonresident Fellow Mohamed El Dahshan spoke at an event hosted by MIT Arab Alumni Association that explored [“Inequality and Social Justice in the Time of COVID-19.”](#)
- In an event series hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Nonresident Fellow Timothy Kaldas discussed the [health and economic effects](#) of the pandemic.
- Egypt Legal Associate Yasmin Omar joined the Law Society’s International Human Rights Day Seminar [“The Risks of Defending Rights in a Global Pandemic,”](#) reflecting on how the legal community and legal practice has been impacted.

Top photo: Lebanese volunteers help areas hardest hit by the explosion, distributing food, clean water, and COVID-19 protection supplies to the most vulnerable in Beirut on August 12, 2020, after the explosion of a warehouse in the Lebanese capital on August 4. (Photo by Enes Canli/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)



“ The institute hosts and participates in convenings of different forms to support partnerships and momentum for change. ”

Lebanon: Pandemic, Blast, and Racism against Migrant Workers

In Lebanon, the pandemic has underscored long-standing issues of corruption, exacerbating its worsening economy by pushing citizens into debt to purchase food, and exposing a racist Kafala system for migrant workers. Now without the destruction of the Beirut port following the blast on August 4, the failure to form a new government, and recovery efforts falling on grassroots groups and international organizations, Lebanon has reached a critical point.

- In response to these events, TIMEP hosted its first-ever event on Lebanon on “[Food Security, Economy, and Accountability in the Wake of the Beirut Blast](#)” featuring TIMEP’s Kareem Chehayeb, Economist Dima Krayem, and the World Food Programme’s Malak Jaafar, and moderated by AFP’s Maya Gebeily. Participants reflected on the state of the country’s food security, discussed the root causes of Lebanon’s economic breaking point, and addressed how the current crisis can be alleviated, while still bringing about necessary structural reforms.

- Nonresident Fellow Kareem Chehayeb additionally participated in an AJStream [event](#) to discuss the country’s economic hardships and subsequent inflation, food insecurity, and protests; joined a discussion on [press freedom in the pandemic](#) hosted by International Democracy Community; explored state violence and racism against migrant workers and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon with Makan Rights; and joined Young Professionals in Foreign Policy New York to [discuss](#) the current status of Lebanon immediately following the Beirut port explosion and the government resigning.



TIMEP hosted its first virtual event, “Food Security, Economy, and Accountability in the Wake of the Beirut Blast.”

Digital Rights and Cyberspace

2020 Bread and Net Unconference

Joining as a community partner of the largest digital rights conference in the Arabic-speaking region, TIMEP participated in Bread and Net to provide a space for the digital rights community to connect and discuss ways to navigate and overcome critical regional challenges and to promote a secure and open virtual space. In addition to this institutional collaboration, several members of the TIMEP team organized and participated in sessions during Bread and Net:

- Nonresident Fellow Joey Shea hosted two sessions—“State-backed information operations in MENA: Using Twitter to Understand Coordinated Inauthentic Activity” and “Privacy and Data Protection Law in MENA: Lessons from COVID-19 Contact Tracing Apps.” In the first, she explored how foreign intervention online has broadly undermined confidence in the authenticity of political discourse across the region and beyond. In the second, she assessed the privacy implications of the legal frameworks affecting data protection in the context of the pandemic.
- Egypt Legal Associate Yasmin Omar’s session “Criminalizing virtual spaces in Egypt: the Tiktok cases,” contextualized the recent crackdown on TikTok female video bloggers in Egypt in the

broader social, political, and legal space in which it takes place.

- In “Holding Social Media Accountable in the MENA Region,” Nonresident Fellow Suhail al-Ghazi told stories underscoring the vital, but at-times detrimental role that social media companies can play in the work of activists, advocates, and documentarians in the MENA region, and sparked food-for-thought with innovative solutions for how these companies can better engage with these communities and be held accountable to them.

RightsCon 2020

For the third year in a row, TIMEP joined RightsCon, a global conference hosted by AccessNow that unpacks the top rights issues in the digital space. This year, TIMEP co-sponsored a panel with Eshhad on “[Data Collection and Open Source Investigations: Advancing Accountability and Justice in the Middle East](#).” Through a cross-disciplinary and regional conversation, participants explored how civil society organizations, journalists, and lawyers play vital roles by collecting, analyzing, and engaging with different types of data and collection methods to advance accountability and justice across MENA. This panel reached over 600 participants. TIMEP’s Mai El-Sadany moderated the event and was joined by TIMEP’s Joey Shea, Eshhad’s Amira Mikhail, investigative journalist Emma Beals, and Bonyan Gamal of Mwatana for Human Rights.



TIMEP and Eshhad hosted a virtual panel at RightsCon2020 to discuss, “Data Collection and Open Source Investigations: Advancing Accountability and Justice in the Middle East.”



An aerial view shows an informal tent settlement housing for Syrian refugees flooded by rain water in the central Bekaa Valley. (Photo by Joseph Eid/AFP via Getty Images)

Accountability and the Reality of Refugees

As Syria heads into its eleventh year of war following peaceful protests in 2011, there are a number of issues that will remain of key importance, including prospects for accountability, and the challenges facing returning refugees, IDPs, and refugees and migrants abroad.

- Legal and Judicial Director Mai El-Sadany spoke at a panel discussion hosted by the Arab Center Washington DC on the obstacles and opportunities in accessing justice in Syria. The event was based on the publication of the book [Accountability in Syria: Achieving Transitional Justice in a Postconflict Society](#) to which El-Sadany contributed a chapter.
- Leveraging her on-the-ground research and expertise on refugee communities, Nonresident Fellow Diana Rayes participated in webinars on the [challenges facing Syrian refugees in Jordan](#), the [reality of return and the future of the displaced](#), and [the importance of psychosocial support for refugees and migrants in Europe](#), hosted by the World Refugee Council, the Syrian Association for Citizen's Dignity, and the KAICIID Dialogue Center. Rayes also hosted "[Displacement, Faith, and Mental Health: Integration and Support for Arabic-speaking Refugees in Germany](#)" as part of Johns Hopkins Spotlight Series.

Economies of North Africa

Reflecting on the economic agenda in the months following the 2020 Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, TIMEP hosted a timely session on "[Autocratic Governance and Market Reform in North Africa](#)" with Tin Hinane El Kadi, Associate Fellow at Chatham House, and TIMEP Nonresident Fellows Timothy Kaldas and Mohamed El Dahshan. Participants sought to broaden the conversation around autocratic governance and control by exploring the political economies and development of North Africa, with a specific focus on Algeria and Egypt

In addition to the above, TIMEP fellows and staff convened, participated, and engaged in a number of key convenings on a diverse range of policy-relevant topics, including Nonresident Fellow Ruba Al-Hassani's participation in a discussion titled "[The only constant is change](#)" on the ten year anniversary of popular protests in the MENA region. Throughout the year, TIMEP also hosted private convenings on topics including: the state of justice for Syria; the root causes of radicalization in Tunisia; and the experiences of artists at risk in the region.

06

POLICY OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY

Its commitment to informing and influencing policy in a way that centers localized perspectives and approaches is what brings all of TIMEP’s work together. The institute engages with the policymaking community at-large from both top-down and bottom-up approaches, through advocacy with government officials and representatives of the U.S., EU, and UN; collaboration with media outlets and journalists; and coordination with like-minded partners. TIMEP’s policy work is agenda-setting—in that it raises essential issues that may not already be on the top of policymakers’ agendas. It is responsive in that it meets requests for information from policymakers who have come to regard TIMEP as a reputable and reliable knowledge source.



Policy Priorities

TIMEP informed the work of policymakers on a wide range of topics of region-wide importance including the necessity of equitable and transparent content moderation policies for the MENA region, the state of minorities in Egypt amid continued and unaddressed sectarian violence, and the rise in forced disappearances and assassinations of protesters and organizers in Iraq.

- TIMEP staff and fellows attended and participated in at least 60 advocacy meetings with a diverse array of stakeholders from the U.S. Congress to the Canadian foreign ministry and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- In efforts to add nuance to the regional developments, TIMEP staff and fellows shared their expertise and were quoted on at least 125 occasions by media outlets including *The Washington Post*, PRI’s *The World*, and AFP.

Top photo: Tunisian President Kais Saied and UN Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs in Libya Stephanie Williams attend an opening session of LPDF in Tunis on November 9. (Photo by Yassine Gaidi/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)



“What brings together all of TIMEP’s work is a commitment to informing and influencing policy in a way that centers localized perspectives and approaches.”

- Across all of its work, TIMEP prioritized collaboration with like-minded organizations, both in the policy space and on-the-ground, to ensure accurate messaging that reflected the priorities of localized perspectives and to bring about effective coordination, and ultimately, maximum impact. Collaboration on advocacy priorities included but was not limited to work on press freedom in Lebanon with the Committee to Protect Journalists; collaboration with Human Rights First as a member of the Global Magnitsky NGO Coalition; and information-sharing to inform government letters on detained lawyers in Egypt with the Law Society of England and Wales.

Responding to COVID-19

As COVID-19 continued to spread, TIMEP prioritized advocacy around the pandemic, both as a lens through which to understand existing opportunities and vulnerabilities within the region, and also as a global development in and of itself that would have reverberating implications for years to come.

- TIMEP endorsed legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress called the Protecting Human Rights During Pandemic Act, a key bipartisan law that would require reporting on the human rights impact of the pandemic and designate resources for government programming to respond to this impact.
- TIMEP joined partners to co-sponsor a [Pandemics and Power Grab Congressional Briefing](#), featuring the voices of a number of prominent human rights defenders and congressional representatives on the topic.
- Recognizing the absence of clear human rights language and standards around the pandemic and issues such as [detention](#) and [surveillance](#), TIMEP took lead on and joined collaborative efforts to articulate and demand adherence to these standards.
- TIMEP hosted a private convening of organizations based in MENA to collaborate on effective engagement to ensure that incarcerated persons would be protected from the pandemic.

07

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Established in 2013, TIMEP’s internship program is dedicated to training the next generation of nonprofit leaders, policy influencers, and policymakers. In 2020, TIMEP refined and revamped its goals for the internship program to focus on instilling in future policy practitioners the importance of incorporating localized perspectives into the policymaking process and investing in nonprofit leaders who will influence change in this space.

TIMEP additionally made changes to the structure of its internship program by:

- Offering a new Legal & Policy Internship track that provides interns with the opportunity to conduct comprehensive legal and policy research on a diverse range of key issues in the MENA region.
- Fostering substantive, cross-collaborative projects and outputs between interns and TIMEP staff and fellows.
- Tailoring the internship program in a way that allows staff mentors to provide more individualized and hands-on training.
- For the first time, offering completely virtual internships in order to continue providing training opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Increasing the monthly stipend offered to each intern in a commitment to making the program more accessible to students of all socioeconomic backgrounds and to compensate interns for their valuable work.

Spotlight: Fall 2020 Legal and Policy Internship

Through the Fall 2020 program, TIMEP’s Legal and Policy Interns had the unique opportunity to delve into key legal and judicial issues in MENA, gaining first-hand experience with key international human rights principles and standards; conducting legal and policy research on a diverse range of topics from forced disappearances in Iraq to pretrial detention in Egypt; interacting with UN human rights mechanisms from the Universal Periodic Review to the UN special procedures; and collaborating alongside a wide

range of stakeholders, from TIMEP’s nonresident fellows to its partners on the ground.

Additionally, both interns conducted and published original research in their names on [prospects for accountability in Syria](#) and the [first-ever sexual and gender-based violence criminal complaint in the Syria context](#). They additionally provided legal research support toward other published TIMEP work products including a dynamic series on [the return of refugees](#), a fact sheet on [organizing in Tunisia](#), and an explainer on indefinite detention renewals in Egypt.

**One Legal and Policy Intern had
this to say about the program:**

“

At TIMEP I had the opportunity to work with a welcoming, passionate, and extremely talented team of people where I was able to both develop my understanding of international human rights law in the MENA region and learn about effective policy strategies for creating change. This internship has been invaluable not only for the skills and knowledge that I have gained, but also because of the amazing colleagues that I worked with who made me realize the type of advocate that I want to be in the future and further fueled my passion for human rights work.

”



*Sarah Morsheimer (Legal and
Policy Intern Fall 2020)*



The Tahrir Institute
for Middle East Policy