

Middle East Studies Forum Annual Report



2021 in review

2021 was a very busy year for the Middle East Studies Forum. We were Australia's go-to information hub for the presidential election in Iran and we saw exponential growth in our public engagement. We welcomed two new members, our members published extensively and we celebrated grants and awards.

Research Recognition

This year our members saw great success. Dr Dara Conduit won a Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) from the Australian Research Council for her project on digital authoritarianism in Syria and Iran. MESF Convenor Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Professor Ihsan Yilmaz, Dr Zahid Ahmed & Dr Mahmoud Pargoo won a Gerda Henkel Foundation grant for their project on Smart Digital Technologies and the Future of Democracy in the Muslim World. Professor Akbarzadeh also won this year's Elie and Sylvia Kedourie Prize for an outstanding co-authored article in *Middle Eastern Studies* titled 'Religionisation of politics in Iran: Shi'i seminaries as the bastion of resistance.' We are proud of all our members' achievements.

Academic Achievements

This year our members made outstanding contributions to knowledge by publishing books and articles in esteemed journals. We celebrated four book releases:

Amanuel Elias, Fethi Mansouri and Yin Paradies (2021): *Racism in Australia Today* (Palgrave Macmillan)

Mahmoud Pargoo and Shahram Akbarzadeh (2021): *Presidential Elections in Iran: Islamic Idealism since the Revolution* (Cambridge University Press)

Mahmoud Pargoo (2021): *Secularization of Islam in Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Routledge)

Ihsan Yilmaz (2021): *Creating the Desired Citizen: Ideology, State and Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge University Press)

MESF members published [thirty-four journal articles](#) this year in top ranking journals. Our top-cited articles for 2021 are:

Ihsan Yilmaz, Erdoan Shipoli & Mustafa Demir (2020): 'Authoritarian resilience through securitization: an Islamist populist party's co-optation of a secularist far-right party', *Democratization*

Ihsan Yilmaz & Omar F. Erturk (2021): 'Populism, violence and authoritarian stability: necropolitics in Turkey', *Third World Quarterly*

Ihsan Yilmaz, Nicholas Morieson & Mustafa Demir (2021): 'Exploring Religions in Relation to Populism: A Tour Around the World', *Religions*

Ihsan Yilmaz & Erdoan Shipoli (2021): 'Use of past collective traumas, fear and conspiracy theories for securitization of the opposition and authoritarianisation: the Turkish case', *Democratization*

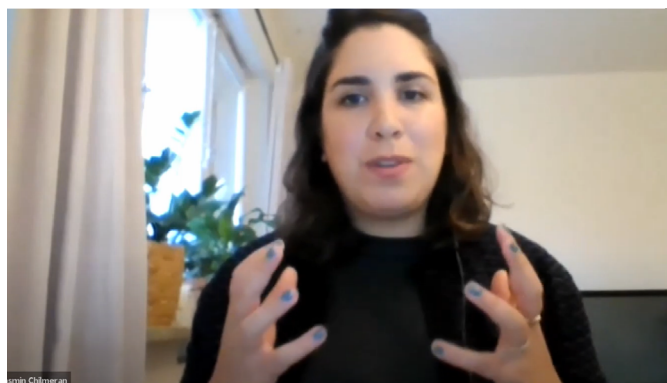
Zahid Shahab Ahmed & Ihsan Yilmaz (2021): 'Islamists and the incremental Islamisation of Pakistan: the case of women's rights', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*

MESF Events

We hosted eleven [webinars](#), featuring local and international guest speakers. While all of our events attracted high participation a webinar presented by Dr Yasmin Chilmeran of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs particularly attracted interest. Building upon her post-doctoral research, Dr Chilmeran discussed [‘Iraqi Women’s Participation in Peacebuilding Across Local, National and Global Contexts’](#). The webinar, moderated by MESF’s Dr Hadeel Abdelhameed, garnered much discussion. Recordings of each webinar are made available on our [website](#).

A number of events were in collaboration with international partners. We partnered with Qatar University Gulf Studies to discuss [Iran’s presidential election](#). We partnered with Durham University in co-hosting an online panel discussion titled [‘JCPoA revival: implications for regional dynamics in the Persian Gulf’](#). This panel, moderated by MESF’s Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh and Professor Anoush Ehteshami, featured speakers from King’s College London, Cranfield University and Qatar University.

Many notable and important partnerships were formed in 2021. We partnered with DFAT Council for Australian-Arab Relations and WoMENA in hosting a panel of female experts who discussed the role of women in the [Middle East uprisings](#).



Dr Yasmin Chilmeran passionately discussing ‘Iraqi Women’s Participation in Peacebuilding Across Local, National and Global Contexts.’

We partnered with the Australian National University Crawford, the University of New South Wales and La Trobe University to discuss the [Afghanistan crisis](#). Dr Hadeel Abdelhameed presented at a conference on gender studies held by The Academic Research Institute in Iraq and Professor Michelle Pace took part in the ‘Gaza: Arts of Resilience and Hope in the Midst of Despair’ virtual festival held by University College London.

MESF is proud to provide a platform to share research and initiate important conversations.

Funding Success

MESF enjoyed great success in funding this year - another indicator of the calibre of our members and their dedication to providing cutting-edge research.

Dr Marian Abouzeid	Global Mapping of Humanitarian Research and Innovation Investment Initiatives	Elrha
Prof Shahram Akbarzadeh, Prof Ihsan Yilmaz, Dr Zahid Ahmed & Dr Mahmoud Pargoo	Smart Digital Technologies and the Future of Democracy in the Muslim World	Gerda Henkel Foundation Grant
Dr Dara Conduit	Digital Authoritarianism in Syria and Iran	ARC DECRA
Prof Ihsan Yilmaz, Prof Greg Barton, Dr Zahid Ahmed & Dr Ana-Maria Bliuc	Religious Populism, Emotions and Political Mobilisation	ARC Discovery

Selected Projects in 2021

MESF members engaged in pioneering research. A selection of these projects are listed below, demonstrating the breadth and depth of our expertise and competitiveness.

Lead	Project Name	Funding Body	Duration
A/Prof Benjamin Isakhan	After Islamic State: Local-State-Global Heritage Dynamics in Syria and Iraq	Australian Research Council	2020-2024
Prof Fethi Mansouri	Mapping Social Services Provisions for Diverse Communities	Australian Research Council	2020-2023
Prof Fethi Mansouri	A Transcultural Approach to Belonging and Engagement among Migrant Youth	Australian Research Council	2018-2022

Research Engagement

This year we launched '[Iran Election 2021](#)' on our website. This was Australia's go-to information hub on the 13th Presidential Election of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We hosted webinars about the election and MESF's Dr James Barry moderated a [podcast](#) about the election that was published on our website and Twitter account. Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh discussed the election at a webinar hosted by the [Australian Institute of International Affairs](#) and Dr Mahmoud Pargoo discussed the election at events held by the Middle East Institute Singapore and Rudaw in Iraq.

The US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul to the Taliban was a major event in 2021. MESF members brought their expertise to public debate on this topic. Professor Akbarzadeh and Dr Ibrahim offered expert accounts to TRT World (Turkey), CNA (Singapore), Channel News Asia, SBS and ABC news about the political ramifications of the Taliban takeover. MESF public commentary were published on leading media outlets, such as Al Jazeera and [The Conversation](#).

Our website gained a 45% increase in traffic this year and our [Twitter profile](#) saw an average of 2,551 views per month; a 145% increase compared to 2020. We gained 600 new followers since this time last year and [our top Tweet](#) was seen 37,000 times.

A Growing MESF Network

This year we welcomed two new members; [Dr Hadeel Abdelhameed](#) and [Associate Professor Ahmed S. Hashim](#).

Dr Abdelhameed's research interests include Iraqi gender politics and feminism, Iraqi social movements, and Iraqi theatre and drama about war. She co-authored the forthcoming 'Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Communications' which will be available in 2022.

Associate Professor Ahmed S. Hashim is an expert on Iranian ways of war and global counter-terrorism measures. We will celebrate the launch of his forthcoming book 'Iranian Ways of War: From Cyrus the Great to Qasem Soleimani and Beyond' in 2022.

To view all our members and to see the full list of work and achievements for 2021, please visit our [website](#).



PROFESSOR SHAHRAM AKBARZADEH,
MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM CONVENOR