

# Middle East Studies Forum Annual Report



## 2023 in review

2023 was a defining year, being host to many milestones for our members. We also held several successful events including two multi-day hybrid workshops on the 'Emerging digital technologies and the future of democracy in the Muslim world'

### Research Recognition

A big congratulations to Arif Saba and Neda Zeyghami for completing their PhDs. We are very proud of their remarkable achievements. 2023 was also a great year of recognition for Dr Abbas Farasoo, who completed his PhD in 2022 on 'The Impacts of Proxy War on Afghanistan' at Deakin University. Dr Farasoo won the 2023 Australian Political Studies Association PhD Thesis Prize which is awarded annually to the best PhD dissertation in political science. The year only got better with announcement of national field leaders:

Prof Ihsan Yilmaz: Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies; as well as Religion  
Prof Fethi Mansouri: Human Migration.

The year ended with the book on the *Middle East Politics and International Relations: Crisis Zone* by Prof Akbarzadeh being listed by BookAuthority in the top 20 books to read in International Relations.

### Academic Achievements

This year our members made outstanding contributions to knowledge by publishing books and articles in esteemed journals. We celebrated the release of six books:

- Akbarzadeh, Shahram, editor. *Handbook of Middle East Politics*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023.
- Ihsan Yilmaz and O.F. Erturk (2023): *Populism, Authoritarianism and Necropolitics: Instrumentalization of Martyrdom Narratives in AKP's Turkey*. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan)
- Ihsan Yilmaz and N. Morieson (2023): *Religions and the Global Rise of Civilizational Populism*. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan)

- Ihsan Yilmaz, E. Shipoli and M. Demir(2023): *Securitization and Authoritarianism: The AKP's Oppression of Dissident Groups in Turkey*. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan)
- Michelle Pace and Jan Claudius Völkel(2023), editors. *Knowledge production in higher education*. Manchester University Press.
- Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Ali Akbar (2023): *Iran's Soft Power in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. (Edinburg University Press)

MESF members published [thirty journal articles](#) this year in top ranking journals. A sample of 2023 publications:

- Benjamin Isakhan (2023): 'Civil society in hybrid regimes: trade union activism in post-2003 Iraq', *Political Studies*. 71(2): 295-313.
- Dara Conduit (2023): 'Digital authoritarianism and the devolution of authoritarian rule: examining Syria's patriotic hackers', *Democratization*, Published online 27 March 2023
- Ibrahim Fraihat, and Basem Ezbidi (2023): 'The Lasting Impact of Trump's "Deal of the Century" on the Question of Palestine', *Middle East Critique*, Published online 19 October 2023.
- Ihsan Yilmaz, E. Shipoli and A. Dogru (2023): 'Transnational Securitization: The Discursive Mechanism Behind the Pro-AKP Diaspora's Repression of the Dissident Diaspora Groups in the West', *Democratization*, Published online 17 January 2023.
- Niamatullah Ibrahim & Abbas Farasoo (2023): 'Understanding Shifts in US Policies towards the Taliban: A Critical Analysis', *Millennium*, Published online 4 January 2023.
- Shahzad Akhtar and Zahid Shahab Ahmed: 'Understanding the resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan', *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, Published online 15 November 2023.
- Zahid Shahab Ahmed: 'Drivers of religious extremism in South Asia', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, Published online 23 August 2023.

## MESF Events

2023 saw seven main events hosted that year. The year started with “Everyday Choices: The Role of Competing Authorities and Social Institutions in Politics and Development” in March with Prof Ellen Lust (University of Gothenburg).

A seminar was held in May by Dr Niamatullah Ibrahim (La Trobe Uni) on “A Violent Nexus: Religious Fundamentalism, Exclusionary Nationalism, and the Taliban.” In May was also the biggest event of the year, a three day workshop as part of our research project ‘Emerging digital technologies and the future of democracy in the Muslim world’, funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation.

In August we held an in-person seminar by Dr Mariam Farida (Macquarie University): “The Weaponization of Religious Myths: An Ethnography Shi’ite Gendered Narratives”.

As part of Social Sciences Week in September, MESF co-hosted a panel discussion on Australia’s Relations with the Middle East. This event was held jointly with the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) and included representation from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Middle East Division. The event explored Australia’s evolving ties with the Middle East post its military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Emphasizing the enduring cultural, economic, and geopolitical importance of the region, the discussion focused on how factors such as increased migration, growing trade, and geopolitical shifts impact Australia’s interests.

At the end of October we held our final seminar of 2023 with Dr. Hadeel Abdelhameed on “Politics of Grief: Mothers and Protesters”.

Our final even of the year was a joint GDP & MESF Hybrid Workshop titled “Strategic Digital Information Operations, Democracy and Social Cohesion.” This workshop emerges from a research endeavour supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation through the Democracy funding scheme. The project, led by a consortium of scholars from Deakin University, sought to investigate the methodologies employed by state and non-state actors in deploying strategic digital information operations.

Thank you to all who attended and contributed to these important conversations. You can view recordings of these events at the MESF website and YouTube channel.



## Selected Projects in 2023

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
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	2020-2023
Prof Shahram Akbarzadeh, Prof Ihsan Yilmaz	Digital technology and the future of democracy in the Muslim world	Gerda Henkel Foundation	2021-2024
Dr Marian Abouzeid	The Global Prioritisation Exercise	Elrha	2022-2024
Prof Ihsan Yilmaz <i>et al</i>	Religious Populism, Emotions and Political Mobilisation	Australian Research Council	2022-2025
Prof Ihsan Yilmaz	Civilisationist Mobilisation, Digital Technologies and Social Cohesion	Australian Research Council	2023-2026

We welcome new members to MESF. Dr. Susan de Groot Heupner, political sociologist and Adjunct Fellow at the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research in Brisbane, Australia. Nicholas Morieson, author of *Religion and the Populist Radical Right: Christian Secularism and Populism in Western Europe* (2021), and an Associate Research Fellow at the Alfred Deakin Insititute for Citizenship and Globalisation.

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MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FORUM CONVENOR