

FACTSHEET

Think Tanks in West Asia - North Africa

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Think Tanks can be defined as policy research institutes that conduct and disseminate research, and advise policy-makers to design effective public policy. There is surprisingly little knowledge on what the role of think tanks is, why academic research is not widely used to inform policy-making, as well as poor general information on think tanks in the WANA region. This fact sheet aims to fill these gaps.

What is the role of think tanks in the policy world?

Think tanks are autonomous organizations that synthesize original research, and provide advice to the public and policy-makers on formulating public policy.¹ Think tanks usually act as brokers between researchers, the general public, and decision-makers to enable the formulation of an evidence-base for policy programming. Research produced by think tanks tends to be easier to communicate to the general public than jargonized academic research, and think tank researchers tend to be more ‘media savvy’ and skilled in areas of communication. Moreover, think tanks do not operate in a set mandate period like elected decision-makers. Thus, think tanks enjoy a position where they can consider long-term impacts and deliver sustainable policy recommendations instead of simply short-term responses. Policy-areas that think tanks are active in usually include, but are not limited to, politics, economics, social policy, health, security, technology, environment, and culture.

Why doesn't academic research inform policy-making?

The core issue with academic research is that its findings are difficult to understand for non-academics, and not communicated in ways that makes them both meaningful and accessible to policy-makers or government officials.³ Most of the times, lengthy technical research papers are not acted upon by governments, simply due to the lack of technical understanding and time constraints. Policy-makers need short, non-jargonized briefings that can inform policy design. More importantly, policy-makers need such briefings just in time when policies are being developed or changed,

something which academic research falls short in providing in a timely manner.⁴

Think tanks in the WANA region

The WANA region is home to 398 think tanks; that is 5.8% of the world's total.⁵ Out of the 398 think tanks, only 6 rank in the global top 150, two of which are American subsidiaries (Carnegie Middle East based in Lebanon and Brookings Centre based in Qatar), and an additional two are based in states whose views are not widely accepted in the region (Institute for National Security Studies in Israel and the Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies in Qatar). When it comes to Jordan, the country is home to a meagre 5.27% of the region's think tanks, and scores poorly with respect to their quality.

Table 1: Concentration of think tanks in the WANA Region

Country	Concentration of think tanks
Iran	59
Israel	58
Egypt	35
Turkey	32
Iraq	31
Jordan	21

According to the 2015 Global Go to Think Tank Index Report⁶, below are the top think tanks in the WANA region⁷

Table 2: Top Ranked think tanks in WANA

WANA's Top 5 Ranked Think Tanks
1. Carnegie Middle East – Lebanon
2. Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies – Egypt
3. Brookings Doha Centre – Qatar
4. Institute for National Security Studies – Israel
5. Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies – Qatar

1 Judy Sebba, “Getting research into policy: the role of think tanks and other mediators,” LSE Impact Blog, March 7, 2011, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/03/07/getting-research-into-policy-the-role-of-think-tanks-and-other-mediators/>

2 ibid

3 Sindhu Nair, “Through the Policy Lens,” Qatar Today, January 9, 2016, <http://www.qatartodayonline.com/through-the-policy-lens/>

4 Judy Sebba, “Getting research into policy: the role of think tanks and other mediators,” LSE Impact Blog, March 7, 2011

5 James McGann, “2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report,” TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports, February 9, 2016, http://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/10

6 ibid

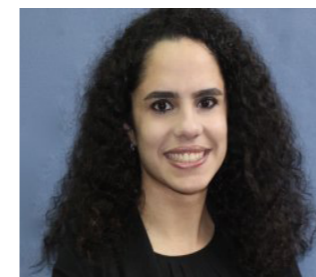
7 The reason for discrepancies in global and regional tables is unclear as this is how they were ranked by the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report 2015

Table 3: WANA think tanks within the global top 150

WANA think tanks ranking within the global top 150
(34) Carnegie Middle East Centre – Lebanon
(49) Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies - Egypt
(74) Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation – Turkey
(88) Association for Liberal Thinking – Turkey
(108) Institute for National Security Studies - Israel
(130) Gulf Research Centre - Saudi Arabia

What can think tanks in WANA do to influence better policy?

Think Tanks in the WANA region need to work on maximizing their impact. A large number of the think tanks in WANA do not disseminate their research online, which both limits the scope of their reach and makes their impact questionable. First, think tanks in WANA need to recognize the importance of social media in making their research findings noticeable. More importantly, think tanks need to invest time in building partnerships with government officials and policy-makers. These are the key benefactors of the produced research, and the importance of involving them in refining research questions and commenting on preliminary findings cannot be stressed enough. This in turn will place the produced research at the heart of policy-making, and immensely enhance research impact in the region. Last, but not least, think tanks need to be more policy-oriented than academic in their research findings, and stress how it can impact policy. By including policy implications of their research, think tanks are in a better position to influence policy-makers in shaping and designing policy to benefit the wider public.



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During her studies, Leen was a recipient of two full scholarships for academic excellence; the Middle East Partnership Initiative Tomorrow's Leaders scholarship supporting her undergraduate degree, and the Said Foundation scholarship supporting her Master's Degree. Leen joins the WANA Institute as a Research Fellow in the Human Security team, after having completed internships at the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the European Union, The Royal Institute of International Affairs – Chatham House, the United Nations Development Program, the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Arab Institute of Security Studies. Her work experience includes Amman, Beirut, London, and Brussels. Leen's research interests include International Relations of the Middle East, Islamist groups, Political transitions, and Foreign Policy. In her spare time, Leen enjoys travel, horseback riding, photography, theatre, and reading.