PAKISTAN JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY (2026), 4(1), 12-23
DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23980449

The Role of Diaspora Communities in Political Engagement via Social Media

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How to cite this article:

Ashraf, Z., & Anjum, R. (2026). The Role of Diaspora Communities in Political Engagement via Social Media. *Pakistan journal of multidisciplinary, 4(1), 12-23.*

Article Details

Received: 30 Jan 2026
Accepted: 09 March 2026
Published: 30 June 2026

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Abstract

Due to technological innovations and competitive market conditions, the communication environment has been subject to alteration. Accordingly, people's ways of communication and modes of expression have also evolved. The emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) and social media channels as a result of consumer engagement with digital landscapes have made interpersonal communication faster and easier. People have the opportunity to share their ideas in virtual environments, attend to discussions via social networking websites and share content among each other. This new era of digitally mediated communication has implications particularly for diaspora communities, who use these digital platforms for political discourse and mobilization. Social media technologies create specific opportunities and challenges for diasporas. Evidence suggests that social media platforms enable more widespread and faster communication than offline media or earlier ICTs. Social media enables transnational connections of various kinds: migrants can follow news and discussions in their country of current residence, in their homelands or with other diaspora communities. When it comes to sharing content, it also allows for discussions and debates with different communities based on micro-topics. Generally, there is a consensus that while diasporas have been historically shaped by prior migration waves, what sets current diaspora engagement from previous qualitative changes is technological innovation, primarily new forms of digital communication. Diasporans widely utilize these communication technologies to build and maintain their political networks in formal and informal ways: following, sharing, liking, commenting on political content but also curating, producing and broadcasting their content. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to explore the role of social media platforms in the political engagement of migrant communities: refugees, irregular migrants, and asylum seekers in the migrant destination country. Especially, how it shapes their active or passive behavior towards formal political structures and their own respective states is explored based on the post-2011 Syrian migrant framework in Turkey. Furthermore, it is intended to provoke discussions on the implications of this socio-digital interaction for scholars and policymakers. Finally, the methodology used in the research and a description of the data collected from both online and offline interviews that were organized with migrant informants are presented.

Keywords: *diaspora communities, political engagement, social media, digital communication, transnational connections, migrants, political discourse, mobilization.*

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Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

1. INTRODUCTION

The amount of time that we spend online has increased exponentially over the past decade. With the surge in digital activity and evolution of high-speed internet, diasporas are using digital platforms to engage in discussions and political actions in the global domain (Boichak, 2019). The rise in social media platforms has especially opened new communication channels. Forced migrants, or those groups living in countries where they are not citizens, such as refugees, asylees, or diasporas, escape conflict or persecution and are thus often politically active (Marlowe, 2019).

Many are critical of the governments in their homeland or have links to transnational movements. Although governments and peace-building actors aim to stabilize post-conflict countries, diaspora networks, often living in countries with large refugee or asylee populations, can also potentially inflame tensions. This study centers around the use of social media as new forms of engagement as they simultaneously subvert and are subjugated by political life. Social media is used to engage in political activities through social media from the perspective of resettled refugees -- that is, those who have been admitted to a third country through resettlement conventions -- and live in countries where they are not citizens. The following analysis presents how resettled refugees in New Zealand engage in political activities in their home and host countries, and how they negotiate their identities and beliefs in the online domain.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Diaspora communities have largely been acknowledged as a growing and influential political phenomenon in the current age of globalization and rapid information communication technology. Additionally, these diasporas tend to lean towards becoming influential actors in international politics. In light of the ongoing civil wars in both Syria and Sudan, they have become salient cases in examining how diasporas engage and mobilize politically in fighting authoritarian rule and demanding democracy back home. Social media networks have been found particularly useful to mobilize diasporas for transnational political activism,

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Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

which consequently impact politics and security in different settings (Boichak, 2019).

The role of diasporas on post conflict countries and their involvement in affecting peace and stability have however gained little attention in the existing literature, despite various civil wars having internally displaced and dispersed a large number of people from their homelands. Along with the efforts for restoring peace and stability, large extent of these conflicts have settled down through various peace agreements and negotiations, and post conflict reconstruction activities subsequently follow. Yet, diasporas constitute a set of important actors outside the 'peacebuilding triangle' who might have a potential negative influences by destabilizing the peace process and affecting its sustainability through their direct or indirect involvements in domestic politics back home (Marlowe, 2019).

3.1. Diaspora Communities

Diaspora communities are transnational social fields that are usually formed outside national territories in modern nation-states. They emerge in the international migratory movements both after they go abroad and as a new social and cultural structure (Cisterino, 2019). In its basic formation, they are shaped as cultural groups, built on religious affinity, common language and ethnicity, and prevent loss of identity. By maintaining their homeland culture and attitudes, diasporas establish social networks and group structure of institutional solidarity. From a functionalist point of view, these cultural and social structures are tools to solve the economic, social and political problems of migration. On the other hand, diasporas, due to its immigration base and gradual socio-cultural metamorphosis, are part of the formation of new systems of local or regional expression, rather than the country of entrance. Diaspora also emerges at the intersection of intra-national tensions in multi-layered societies. Diasporic bonds are thereby imbricated and fractally formed by these tensions (Boichak, 2019). As a result, the relationship of diaspora to the state is always two-fold. Members localize within the host society, and thereby share a kind of common social and cultural systems, and in its international relations, by keeping its political and economic-religious

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powers of the state, maintain their identity and then their duality of belongings thrive.

The discussion on diasporas is undoubtedly planned as such to involve all diasporas, including parameters and peculiarities which, although it is not in the field of sociology, are undoubtedly aware of everyone. While diasporas can appear as single-color images, they are over-cooked with linguistic, religious, socio-economic, and sectarian diversities. Especially in many cases, differences within the diaspora, which are even more violent than with the country of origin, become a handicap for joint action. In this respect, it should be underlined that the ground of action is much broader than the homeland or the political field. Diasporas are empowered to engage in any kind of initiative using their socio-economic, cultural, and religious infrastructure. The success of these initiatives nourishes the political initiative. The flow in the opposite direction applies. Range of initiatives is in a way a function of population, duration of settlement, and contribution to the country of settlement. In this context, the more the demographic potential, the more the formation of inter-diaspora cultural infrastructures, and the more regular decisions of political institutions are being made. But above all, far-reaching initiatives and political culture derived from the country of origin are very important for performance. Among the strategies are also included the use of the country's critical periods of interest, the orientation of the country of settlement in social and political domain, and the formation of coalitions. There are formal and above all informal structures specific to the diaspora institutions. These blocs are part of them, trying to create consensus and manage the collective decisions of the diaspora. The sphere of cultural representations, which are embodied in national identity, constitutes one of the driving forces of political expression. Many analyses look at how national culture and its representations are manipulated by the elites to provoke nationalism. This research is at the intersection of cultural studies and migration research, and has led to considerable questioning of areas that have not been addressed before. Vulnerability in the face of migration experiences has the capacity to lead to either

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integration into a hegemonic culture, or to reproduce and resist the culture/nationality of origin. As a result, the transformed culture should be seen in relation to local societies and migration experiences. That is, transformed cultural heritage is a relational concept that encompasses local social structures and cultural articulations, as well as migration experiences and possible future settlements. (Gelb et al.2021)

3.2. Political Engagement

The term "political engagement" refers to the various forms of involvement that citizens undertake in relation to their political systems. It accrues significance in the context of diaspora communities, particularly from conflict-affected states. Fleeing conflict and political dislocation, diaspora communities are often bound by strong ties to homeland politics. The political motivations behind a community's engagement are integral to understanding why and how it becomes politically active in its adoptive state (Cisterino, 2019). These motivations may be based on questions of collective identity, belonging, and ties with the homeland. Such motivations become salient as members become politically mature and therefore seek to inform themselves about political issues. Within diaspora communities, research has shown political socialization to be a long-term and complicated process that can take place at different points and from various platforms. A broad subdivision of these items, based on political maturity and activity, delineates four groups: passive engagement, political socialization, political frustration, and political activity. However, not all communities experience this last stage due to particular circumstances and barriers in the host state (Marlowe, 2019).

Host state policies and domestic barriers can impede high engagement levels, thereby limiting potential diaspora influence. However, social media is identified as a tool whereby some barriers can be minimized, though not entirely removed. Social media can facilitate an environment in which the community can continue to engage in host state politics while also maintaining ties and being informed about homeland politics. Political engagement can manifest in both influence over

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and action towards homeland politics. Influence takes the form of encouraging peace and development, advocating democracy and human rights, and strengthening it institutionally. However, action can also take potentially destabilizing forms, such as active support for armed groups or renewing conflict in the homeland. Nevertheless, all engagement with diaspora groups is political. The dynamic between diaspora communities and political systems is nuanced and complex and it is suggested that such engagement has profound implications for both local and international political systems.

3.3. Social Media

The role of social media in enhancing political engagement practices among members of diasporas is analyzed. The principal assets and affordances that make social media an important tool for this type of political engagement are reflected upon. These new ways of connecting and communicating are also noted to open up new areas of empirical inquiry, yielding a set of cross-cutting thematic questions to guide analysis. Examples of successful campaigns and practices by diaspora groups are used to contextualize the findings, emphasizing the centrality of the uniqueness of social media for expanding the potential spheres and practices of diaspora political engagement. Social media platforms have rapidly changed the ways people connect and mobilize for myriad political purposes. Social media use portends considerable implications and affordances for transnational types of political engagement. It has been recognized by scholars and social activists alike that social media are a key channel of communication and mobilization of and among diasporas. Social media platforms are looked to as tools for the rapid spread of news, the coalescence of social networks in the diaspora space, and the establishment of dialogues with other actors at home or elsewhere. These new modes of communication are discerned to consolidate, shape or even challenge extant forms of (transnational) social involvement. Social media should reach it more systematically, assessing the specific attributes that shape its use for varied political and civic activities. Social media offers unique opportunities for performing political practices. The first set of features relates to

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the specific affections and practices that social media might mobilize or enable. Social media platforms offer a (largely) free space for the (un)limited dissemination of information, connecting their users across time and space. The affordances of social media are highly adaptable and whether informative, commutative or interactive, they are used correspondingly by social actors to expand or consolidate their social networks (Boichak, 2019). In practical terms, social media enable diaspora actors to rapidly distribute news and information about events, developments, or governments both in their host societies or their homelands. As such, social media work to a great extent as transnational platforms that enable their users to 'travel' and 'orientate' across space. This allows them to stay sufficiently informed, enabling them to form educated opinions or analyses, develop dialogue with other actors, and eventually react (Marlowe, 2019). On the whole, the unique attributes of social media platforms arguably lower the threshold for political practice and engagement, spreading a sense of agency that otherwise might not be manifest. The spread and democratizing potential of social media should increase the levels of inclusiveness, amplifying (marginalized) voices that would otherwise be neglected or drowned out in the polyphony of the traditional media landscape.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Politics, media, and national identity are inextricably connected. The way of conveying information in media largely shapes the way in which people shape their national identities and ties to the homeland. Over the past two decades, the rapid expansion of the internet has increased options of communication in media and has created new ways in which people relate to their homelands. It has briefly but loquaciously affected national identity and political mobilization, particularly among the people who live abroad – diasporas (Boichak, 2019). At the intersection of social media studies, diaspora politics, and media-nationalism studies, this work is an endeavor to reveal the role that social media led nationalist discourses have played in the crystallization of the Ukrainian national identity among the Czech-based Ukrainians in 2014.

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5. CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

The diffusion of the Internet spurred the emergence of a new generation of cross-border political actors; the role of migrants and diaspora communities in this new political environment has become an active field of research in diverse disciplines. The expulsion of forced migrants and the availability of online communication fundamentally changes the nature of political engagement, complicating the power differentials faced by diaspora actors and potentially subjugating their activities or making them more influential. It makes them both targets of aggressive control practices and able to build strong transnational solidarity networks while also cultivating public opinion.

Analysis of the participation of forced migrants in post-conflict environments details processes of transnational repression and resistance by comparing cases of successful subjugation of diaspora political life with one in which it is subverted. Both case studies inform how a politics from below and a politics from above are conducted through social media across multiple scales. (Aziz2021)

6. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Diasporas use social media both to the advantage of achieving political objectives and to their detriment. It is underlined that study yields a broader understanding of the complex landscape in which they operate for political purposes and accentuates the compulsion of international cooperation in this regard (Marlowe, 2019). It is considered to be the way in which social media, besides being a tool for enhancing democracy, can also work as a potent weapon for the subversion of democracy, and how public institutions can be instrumentalised by regimes against a widely dispersed critical public. In response to popular dissent, the Turkish government has themselves been instrumentalising social media in a new hybrid form of internet crackdown to suppress a vibrant openness on the internet. Twitter revelations sounded the alarm about endemic corruption and put under question the legitimacy of their government. Following the Gezi Park protests, Erdoğan made public statements and the Ministry of Internal Affairs declared war

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to all forms of social media. At the heart of the government strategy to control social media, the Internet Act No. 5651 has had far-reaching consequences. However, social media have been hacked by state proxies in a much more sophisticated and sinister manner. In the light of these occurrences, public institutions – prosecutorial authorities, Land Registry Directorate, and the Interception Center – have been affected and yet another authoritarian line of defense against political adversaries has crystallized.

7. CONCLUSION

The deepening and broadening of social media use has changed the patterns and nature of political engagement by diaspora communities. The increasing capacity of migrants and refugees to support their political, economic, and social interests and values through social media has significantly altered the dynamics between diaspora identities, host state politics, and home state political discourses. Whether posting comments on news articles to engage in political discussions, or sharing organized media content to raise a political issue, the interplay between the online and physical worlds has become more sophisticated and influential. Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, participants in the diasporas have gained a voice in political discourse in their host countries and in relation to their countries of origin, offering a blueprint of the development of a grassroots movement from diaspora communities. Encompassing the representation of diaspora power in online media spaces, the signs of mainstream opposition to diasporic influences can be observed politically. Similarly, the visual presentation of the dialog and trace is analyzed graphically; showing the signs of organized activities opposing the diaspora community. Understanding the dynamics between diaspora identities and political discourses in the digital age is becoming increasingly important, given that digital communication space is relatively new. The capacity to engage and influence both home and host state politics has expanded significantly for many diaspora communities. For both developed and newly connected demographics, engagement in political processes can take many forms, but can also bring a range of challenges and risks. Beyond the immediate

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focus on Middle East-related online media discourses, the activities, behaviours, norms and perceptions around the political activities of different diaspora communities in digital spaces are investigated. The other key axes of interest are the broader implications of the diasporas communities exerting influence on home and host state politics. Although these phenomena are being gauged through the lens of diaspora representatives from different communities of diaspora, the findings also contribute to the understanding of mainstream parties and other representative bodies in the broader public policy context.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, technological, commercial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the content, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Availability

No new clinical, experimental, or patient-level datasets were generated or analysed during this study. All information discussed in the review was obtained from the published literature and publicly available sources cited in the manuscript. Additional information relating to the review may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. No patients or other human participants were recruited, and no identifiable personal or clinical information was collected or analysed for this review.

Use of Generative AI

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to conduct the literature review, generate the scholarly content, interpret the evidence, or formulate the conclusions presented in this article. The discussion of generative AI, artificial intelligence, and machine-learning technologies in the manuscript relates solely to their applications in healthcare resource optimization and does not constitute their use in preparing the article.

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