

Editorial: The influence of diasporas on democracy-building processes: Behavioural diversity

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1 Introduction

Diaspora and democracy: These two phenomena have always aroused the interest of scholars. Indeed, in academic literature various significant research contributions and discussions are focused separately on either diaspora issues or on democracy. This special focus is an attempt to combine these two categories by exploring democratisation through the prism of diasporas' activities and the other way round – to reveal the influence of democratic changes on diaspora issues. Something that has been less explored in literature is the role of the diaspora in democracy-building processes. In this context, articles presented in this issue of the *Global Campus Human Rights Journal* are unique and in various ways fill this gap in the academic literature.

The aim of the research in this special thematic focus is to explore the role and influences that diasporas can have on democracy-building processes by identifying diverse behavioural approaches applied in various regions. In this framework, the main research questions highlighted in the articles are the following: What are the factors and spheres of diasporas' influence on the democracy-building processes in the states and regions under study? Which frameworks are the main driving forces for diaspora policies? What challenges are there in state-diaspora cooperation on both ends? Are there any geopolitical and socio-economic constraints in terms of cooperation? To address these questions, case studies, comparative analyses, desktop research, interviews, fieldwork, observation, policy analyses, discourse analyses and regression analyses are the research methods revealing and explaining the complex configurations of state-diaspora cooperation for fostering democracy in the states and regions under study.

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2 Diaspora: Definition and concept

The rapid growth in migration streams and the institutionalisation of immigrant communities have changed our perception of the role and potential of diasporas. These processes are increasingly deepening, taking on new forms and intensifying the influence of diasporas in various spheres of social life which, in turn, have led to the discussions about 'diaspora' as a scientific category.

A significant contribution to the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of diaspora was made by Armstrong, Brubaker, Clifford, Cohen, Connor, Dabag, Esmen, Safran, Sheffer and others.

According to Brubaker (2005), the term 'diaspora' has recently become a definition that is not simply related to the concept of homeland and the model of Jewish dispersal, which has traditionally been associated with banishment and oppression. In his book *Diasporas*, Dufoix (2008) also states that at present this term carries a positive meaning and mainly refers to the population abroad, that has a symbolic link to the homeland. Thus, in contrast to most early studies of the twentieth century, when the term 'diaspora' mainly concerned the description of the Jewish case and other 'classical' diasporas such as the Greek and Armenian, this definition has increasingly undergone a series of transformations in meaning. One of the broadest definitions is suggested by Connor (1986: 16), who presents diasporas as 'a segment of a people living outside the homeland'. Sheffer (1986: 3; 2003: 9) defines diasporas as 'ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands'.

These discussions that have developed in the academic community indicate the polysemy of this phenomenon and the great differences in its understanding. Indeed, much research and many studies are devoted to the concept of diaspora, but there still is no unified and comprehensive definition and it is interpreted in different ways by scholars. This inevitability of various approaches to the understanding of this complex phenomenon is due to the fact that 'diaspora' is the subject of study in various disciplines. For this reason, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted for all articles in this special thematic issue, which implies a holistic and multidimensional framework of analysis which is not limited to explaining the phenomenon from the premise of a single discipline. In this context, the authors were free in the formulation of a diaspora definition when studying their cases.

3 Diaspora, democracy and behavioural diversity: Regional approaches

The formation processes of diasporas have become so widespread that it is impossible to find a country in the world that does not have an agenda on diaspora issues in its state policy. Indeed, much has been said and written about the significant role and influence of diasporas. However, is this influence positive or negative? Does it foster democratic processes or does it have a reverse impact on it? Remiddi and others discuss these approaches in their article by examining various cases in the region of

South East Europe. In particular, the article explores the dichotomies of diasporas' activities in three main spheres, namely, the political, economic and cultural. It further explores the discourse over its potential controversiality.

Another interesting approach can be found in the European article. Amorim and others study the issues of diasporas in European Union (EU) member states both as sending and receiving sides and also consider these issues at institutional and local levels. From this point of view, the case of EU is unique, since EU member states for a long time have faced the challenge arising from both emigration and immigration movements. By studying the cases of France and Bulgaria, the article reveals the relationship between EU member states and diasporas at local levels. In addition to studying diaspora issues at the institutional level, the article analyses the connections between the EU and diasporas within its policy framework. What should be emphasised is the authors' analysis of diasporas' link to democracy through the parameters of citizenship, voting, education and culture.

Through an expert interview and regression analysis, Aleksanyan and others reveal the factors and fields of diasporas' influence on democratisation in the six Eastern Partnership countries. The article explores the second research question based on the theoretical framework provided by Ragazzi (2014). In particular, three explanatory frameworks are applied to understand and explain diaspora policy and diaspora-homeland relations in the given cases. The authors conclude that diasporas from these countries impact differently on democracy. The further analysis shows that the democracy level, in turn, largely determines diaspora policies.

Sarsar and others explore the role of the Arab diasporas on democratisation processes in home countries before and after the 2011 uprisings. An important approach in this article is the fact that the authors not only discuss the opportunities of diasporas' participation in political life, but also reveal the limitations of and obstacles encountered in such participation. Direct and indirect forms of political participation, such as lobbying, campaigning online from abroad, voting in parliamentary elections, national dialogue initiatives, and so forth, are the tools for revealing the diasporas' role in democratisation processes and the main changes in the field, initiated since the Arab Spring.

Gumedze's article is devoted to the role of the African diaspora in democracy-building processes. The majority of academic literature on diaspora concentrates on diasporas' issues in their homelands, while the approach of this article is to discuss the influence of the diasporas on democracy in their countries of residence – in the African diaspora. The author concludes:

Racism, racial discrimination, Afrophobia, xenophobia and related intolerance remain antitheses for the full participation of people of African descent in democracy-building processes ... People of African descent remain invisible 'visible' minority groups whose destiny is always determined without their involvement.

Studying the diasporas' engagement issues in the cases of The Gambia, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, Tutlam and others come to the conclusion that governments are more open to interaction with diasporas in spheres of

development and investment, and are less interested in allowing political participation. The article reveals circumstances affecting relations between diasporas and African governments and provides recommendations for effective cooperation in the development of democracy.

In her article, Iskandaryan presents the situation of the Armenian community in Iran both before the Islamic Revolution and after the Revolution and subsequent waves of emigration. The author categorises the range of problems that Armenians encountered in Iran after the Revolution by applying the approach of holding interviews with and circulating questionnaires among approximately 100 respondents in order to understand the main reasons for emigration. Today, the size of the Armenian community in Iran is shrinking, but they retain all the rights and privileges granted them by the state.

4 Conclusion

The diasporas across the world are different and unique. They affect democratisation differently and in this process demonstrate behavioural diversity. This uniqueness of the diasporas determines the diversity of the authors' approaches when studying the diasporas.

Some of the points and findings can be highlighted in this special focus. Citizenship, voting, human rights, civil society, democratic governance, policy making, and so forth, are the spheres in which diasporas engaged as part of democracy-building processes. In turn, the level of democracy determines diasporas' activities both in their homeland and in their country of residence: The higher this level, the more intensive the activities of diasporas in various spheres of social life. Another finding that should be highlighted is the dichotomy between the positive and negative influence of diasporas. We used to perceive diasporas only as positive actors, but for a better understanding of the diaspora phenomenon, the antagonistic approaches should also be taken into account. It should also be noted that diasporas may affect not only democratisation in the homeland but also that in their countries of residence.

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