

POLICY REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2025

Diaspora Mobilization

The Social Media and Internet Transformation

BY LAURA CRETNEY



THE NEW LINES INSTITUTE
FOR STRATEGY AND POLICY

Our mission is to provoke principled and transformative leadership based on peace and security, global communities, character, stewardship, and development.

Our purpose is to shape U.S. foreign policy based on a deep understanding of regional geopolitics and the value systems of those regions. remove it over time.

CONTENTS

Introduction _____ 3

The Rise of Digital Diasporas _____ 4

Shifting Power Dynamics in International Peacebuilding _____ 6

The Power and Potential of Digital Diasporas _____ 7

Risks and Challenges for Diaspora Activists _____ 9

Recommendations _____ 11

 For Policymakers and Peacebuilders _____ 11

 For Humanitarian and Development Practitioners _____ 11

 For Diaspora Activists _____ 12

The content and views expressed in this intelligence briefing are those of the author and should not be taken to reflect an official policy or position of New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy.

Cover Image: Photo Illustration (DEV IMAGES via Getty Images)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The digital age has transformed the role of diasporas in homeland conflicts, reshaping how communities mobilize, influence narratives, and engage in political, humanitarian, and peacebuilding efforts. Once seen primarily as external actors providing remittances or lobbying from afar, diaspora communities now leverage social media, crowdfunding platforms, and encrypted networks to exert direct influence on conflict dynamics and international peacebuilding.

From the Ukrainian “IT Army” conducting coordinated cyberattacks, to Palestinian activists reshaping global discourse and raising millions online for humanitarian relief, to Syrian networks preserving digital evidence for transitional justice efforts – diasporas use technology to transcend borders and redefine transnational engagement. Yet these opportunities are coupled with significant risks, including misinformation, online harassment, transnational repression, and the ethical challenges of unregulated fundraising.

Policymakers, practitioners, and peacebuilders must recognize digital diasporas as powerful actors while ensuring safer, more inclusive frameworks for their engagement. Harnessing their influence responsibly offers new avenues for diplomacy, justice, and recovery – but requires navigating unprecedented challenges in this evolving digital landscape.

Introduction

The growing influence of diaspora communities in homeland conflict is an increasingly important dynamic for international policymakers grappling with the complex intersections of foreign policy, national security, and global stability and development. The role of diaspora communities in shaping political outcomes and influencing conflict dynamics has long been acknowledged, but the digital age has sparked a paradigm shift in how these communities engage politically.¹ From Ukrainian hackers shaping the trajectory of the conflict in their homeland to Palestinian digital activists mobilizing protests internationally and reshaping public opinion, diasporas are entering a new phase of international relevance and influence. The implications of this for countries such as the United States, which is home to large, influential diaspora communities, cannot be overstated – either at the domestic political or foreign policy levels.

Academics and policymakers have traditionally understood diasporas as external actors, providing financial remittances and lobbying politically from afar.^{2,3,4} However, the internet and social media have given diaspora communities unprecedented access to global networks, real-time communication, and direct channels for transnational political engagement. These tools have enabled diaspora actors to engage more actively in homeland conflict, shaping global public opinion, navigating and challenging entrenched political structures, and contributing in real time to both war efforts and peacebuilding initiatives.^{5,6,7,8,9,10} This creates significant opportunities for governments, policymakers, peacebuilders, and practitioners to leverage the influence of diasporas in support of mediation, recovery, development, and diplomacy.

As digitally mobilized diasporas increasingly become a force in global politics, challenges lie not only in effectively harnessing their potential for positive

1 Fiona Adamson, “Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security,” *International Security*, 31, no. 1 (2006), 183 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137542>.

2 Fiona Adamson, “Globalisation, transnational political mobilisation, and networks of violence,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18 (2005), 35. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249017025_Globalisation_Transnational_Political_Mobilisation_and_Networks_of_Violence.

3 Aharon Barth and Yossi Shain, “Diasporas and International Relations Theory,” *International Organization*, 57, no. 3 (2003), 449, 452. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3594834>.

4 Amanda Roth, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict,” *Journal of International Affairs*, 68 no. 2 (2015): 294. <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/news/role-diasporas-conflict>.

5 Brinkerhoff, “Digital diasporas and conflict prevention: the case of Somalinet.com,” *Review of International Studies*, 32 no. 1 (2006), 32 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40072125>.

6 BG7, interview with the author, 28 March 2023, via Zoom.

7 GH6, interview with the author, 6 October 2023, via Zoom.

8 ID5, interview with the author, 19 May 2023, via Zoom.

9 LE0, interview with the author, 21 May 2023, via Zoom.

10 ZO2, interview with the author, 13 September 2023, via Zoom.

The Digital Diaspora

In the past, diasporas affected change to the homeland by sending money and lobbying from their expatriate communities; however, in the digital revolution, they have found greater influence by utilizing social media and other modern technologies.



Source: Laura Cretney

change but also in mitigating the risks associated with their online mobilization. The spread of misinformation is one of the most prominent dangers, as unverified or biased narratives can quickly gain traction online and shape public opinion, sometimes with unintended consequences. Additionally, algorithms and anonymity on digital platforms can lead to the amplification of polarizing views, deepening political divisions within diaspora communities, in their homelands, and internationally. These dynamics can complicate international peace efforts by hindering reconciliation and exacerbating communal tensions — both in the homeland and in host countries.

Furthermore, the rise of digital engagement has exposed members of diaspora communities, particularly women and politically vulnerable groups, to online harassment and bullying, creating a hostile environment for some individuals engaging in political activism or advocating for peace. This echoes a broader trend, whereby diaspora activists have been subjected to transnational repression by authoritarian regimes and nonstate actors targeting dissent abroad. As academics including Dana Moss have noted in their research, states often use digital surveillance, coordinated harassment campaigns, and even physical threats or attempted assassinations to silence critical voices across diasporas.¹¹ This intensifies the risks for those engaging in online activism, particularly for those who are already vulnerable, and underscores the urgent need for protection mechanisms and international accountability frameworks.

The Rise of Digital Diasporas

For much of the 20th century, the strategic importance of diaspora communities in homeland conflict from the perspective of policymakers and peacebuilders was limited. Diasporas have traditionally been viewed primarily as external actors, largely through the lens of their potential as providers of financial remittances or as local constituencies in the politics of their host countries. This understanding was reinforced by traditional models of diaspora engagement in homeland politics and peacebuilding efforts, where diasporas have largely

11 Dana Moss, *Transnational Repression in the Age of Globalisation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024 <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-transnational-repression-in-the-age-of-globalisation.html>.

VULNERABILITIES OF THE DIGITAL DIASPORA

Misinformation and polarization:

Online echo chambers deepen divisions within diaspora communities and between diasporas and homelands.

Digital harassment and cyberbullying:

Women and politically active individuals face coordinated abuse campaigns, often weaponizing cultural norms.

Transnational repression:

States and nonstate actors target diaspora activists with surveillance, hacking, harassment, and intimidation across borders.

Unregulated fundraising and privacy risks:

Informal crowdfunding campaigns can lack accountability, raise safeguarding issues, and expose vulnerable individuals.

been reliant on political gatekeepers to access influential political and diplomatic channels. Meanwhile in their homelands, diasporas have often faced a lack of legitimacy, often perceived locally to be detached or out of touch with the realities of daily life.¹²

Over the past two decades, digital platforms, particularly social media, have drastically and exponentially reshaped the dynamics and behaviors of diaspora communities. Firstly, this digital transformation has redefined the ways in which diasporas understand and negotiate their identity. Historically, the formation of diaspora communities was geographically constrained. Communities were often tightly knit within host countries and primarily defined by shared cultural and social experiences of their countries of origin. Today, however, diaspora communities transcend geographical boundaries, forming dynamic, “deterritorialized” global networks that are transnational in nature and constantly evolving.¹³ The internet has enabled the formation of cross-border digital communities driven by intersectional identities and worldviews, political ideologies, multilayered cultural affinities, and humanitarian concerns rather than just physical proximity. Online platforms have given diasporas the freedom to negotiate their identity in real-time, collaborating and engaging with both local and online communities, and reshape the relationship between diasporas and their homelands.

The internet has also given diaspora communities access to the global political marketplace, enabling real-time communication and engagement in political discourse. Platforms like X, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have provided new spaces for political expression and collective action, allowing diasporas to engage in their homelands’ political dynamics in ways that were previously impossible by bypassing traditional gatekeepers like journalists, international policymakers, and multilateral institutions.¹⁴ This shift has transformed diasporas from “external actors” in homeland politics and conflict into active, digital-first participants in shaping global narratives, influencing policy, and mobilizing for change.

During the ongoing conflict in Sudan, for example, the Sudanese diaspora¹⁵ has been instrumental in lobbying for ceasefires and supporting grassroots initiatives like community kitchens and emergency response rooms, fundraising online and providing telemedicine services to those in need. The Armenian diaspora¹⁶ has been active in lobbying for international recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, using platforms like X to raise awareness and acting as a bridge between the homeland and the international community. The Rohingya diaspora,¹⁷ meanwhile, has used social media to document atrocities and advocate for justice, while the Yemeni diaspora¹⁸ has used platforms like X to lobby policymakers, Clubhouse to facilitate dialogue, and Instagram to challenge narratives of Yemen and the conflict through arts and culture.

- 12 Adamson, Fiona, ‘Mobilizing for the transformation of home: Politicized identities and transnational practices’. In *New approaches to migration: Transnational communities and the transformation of home*, eds. Khalid Koser and Nadje Sadig Al-Ali, 155-168. London: Routledge, 2002, 165 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280022243_Mobilizing_for_the_Transformation_of_Home_Politicized_Identities_and_Transnational_Practices; Lyons, Terrence, ‘Diasporas and homeland conflict’. In *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, eds. M Kahler and B Walter, 111-130. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 128 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292453172_Diasporas_and_homeland_conflict; Roth, ‘The Role of Diasporas in Conflict’, 293 <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/news/role-diasporas-conflict>.
- 13 Adamson Fiona, ‘Constructing the diaspora: Diaspora identity politics and transnational social movements’. In *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks*, eds. T Lyons and P Mandeville, 25-43. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, 27 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279717744_Constructing_the_Diaspora; Maria Koinova, ‘Diaspora Mobilisation for Conflict and Post-Conflict Reconstruction’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44 no. 8 (2018), 1258 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1354152>.
- 14 BG7, interview with the author, 28 March 2023, via Zoom; ID5, interview with the author, 19 May 2023, via Zoom; LE0, interview with the author, 21 May 2023, via Zoom.
- 15 Ahmed, Kaamil. 2024. “Deeply inspiring and humbling”: how neighbourhoods in Sudan are coming together to fill gaps left by foreign aid.” *The Guardian*. December 31. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/dec/31/neighbourhoods-sudan-gaps-foreign-aid-community-kitchen-emergency-response-rooms>
- 16 The Guardian. “Defend Our Nation: Armenian Diaspora Feels Pull of Another War.” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/03/armenian-diaspora-feels-pull-of-another-war-kardashian-azerbaijan>
- 17 Quinley, John III. “The Rohingya Diaspora Is Crucial to Achieving Justice in Myanmar.” *TIME*, February 14, 2019. <https://time.com/5529321/rohingya-myanmar-genocide-fortify-rights-diaspora/>
- 18 Cretney, Laura. “Art as Activism: How Yemenis in the Diaspora Are Connecting with Their Culture to Drive Political Change Back Home.” *The New Arab*, April 3, 2025. <https://www.newarab.com/features/yemeni-diaspora-creatives-challenging-politics-through-art>

Diaspora Innovators

Resourceful communities creatively utilizing technology to affect positive change in their homelands.



Source: Laura Cretney

Shifting Power Dynamics in International Peacebuilding

Despite the clear potential of diasporas to influence political outcomes and contribute to peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery, past attempts by policy-makers and peacebuilders to engage diasporas in meaningful ways have often been limited and, at times, tokenistic. Historically, policymakers, multilateral institutions, and humanitarian and development organizations have sought to utilize diasporas primarily for their financial resources, local expertise, and access to networks in their homeland. However, such efforts were often aimed at fulfilling top-down agendas and ticking boxes of “inclusive peace” with little recognition of or support for the capacity of diasporas for meaningful and independent political action.

For example, diaspora Yemenis working in the peacebuilding space have criticized multilateral institutions for their engagement of Yemeni women in peacebuilding and dialogue projects aligned with the United Nations’ Women, Peace and Security agenda.¹⁹ Female activists and peacebuilders have complained that their inclusion in formal peace processes is often tokenistic, arguing that their voices often go unheard and that they are not adequately acknowledged or compensated for their contributions.²⁰ The lack of financial compensation creates an immediate barrier for those diaspora activists without the financial means to support themselves. In an interview with the author, a Yemeni peace activist whose name is being kept confidential said tensions and divisions within the community of women peacebuilders were in fact exacerbated by the interventions of multilateral institutions, in contrast to their stated objective of contributing to inclusive peace.²¹

Peacebuilders and multilateral institutions frequently give diaspora actors a seat at the table by virtue of their local knowledge and networks, as well as their accessibility outside of the zone of conflict. Diasporas are often more familiar with international normative frameworks and the language of conflict resolution than are local communities. However, inclusion of diaspora actors on this basis risks being more symbolic than substantive: Diaspora actors may unintentionally reinforce political divisions, lack legitimacy among local populations, or pursue agendas misaligned with evolving dynamics in the homeland, particularly when they are perceived as disconnected, elite, or politically partial.²² These risks can undermine the credibility of broader peacebuilding efforts and further entrench divisions if diaspora involvement is not accompanied

19 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. “20 Years of Women, Peace and Security.” [Peacekeeping UN Org](https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/20-years-of-women-peace-and-security), 2020. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/20-years-of-women-peace-and-security>

20 KR3, interview with the author, 26 June 2023, via Zoom; MS2, interview with the author, 3 May 2023, via Zoom.

21 KR3, interview with the author, 26 June 2023, via Zoom.

22 European Union Global Diaspora Facility. “Diaspora Engagement in Peacebuilding.” *Diaspora for Development*, accessed July 23, 2025. <https://diasporaforddevelopment.eu/diaspora-engagement-in-peacebuilding/>

by inclusive, context-sensitive frameworks that center local ownership and accountability.

Thus, the power dynamics of traditional diaspora engagement were heavily skewed. Diasporas have often needed access to political and diplomatic gatekeepers to have their voices heard, and their participation in political decision-making was contingent on the willingness of community elites or international actors to include them. This has limited the potential for meaningful influence and genuinely representative inclusion, often leading to the marginalization of diaspora voices in critical peacebuilding discussions, as well as their delegitimization in the eyes of communities “back home.”²³

Digital platforms have shifted these power dynamics, however. Today, diasporas no longer must rely on gatekeepers to gain access to political conversations; they have direct access to national and international platforms where they can shape discourse and advocate for change. The democratizing nature of digital platforms has allowed for the decentralization of political power, enabling diasporas to bypass traditional community elites and political powerbrokers and engage more directly with both global policymakers and local influencers. This shift challenges conventional approaches to diaspora engagement in conflict management and peacebuilding, highlighting the need for more genuinely inclusive, dynamic frameworks that harness digital tools and are co-created with diaspora activists, to more effectively leverage their potential for lasting peace and sustainable development.

The Power and Potential of Digital Diasporas

Digital tools have significantly transformed the engagement of diaspora communities in homeland conflicts, enabling real-time participation and direct influence over their trajectories and outcomes. The Ukrainian diaspora exemplifies this shift through various digital initiatives. Platforms like Telegram have been pivotal in facilitating communication and coordination among diaspora members. These platforms allow for the rapid dissemination of information, mobilization of support, and real-time updates on the conflict, thereby amplifying the diaspora’s role in influencing both public opinion and international policy. One notable example is the “IT Army of Ukraine,”²⁴ a volunteer cyberwarfare group established in February 2022. This group, coordinated via Telegram and X, comprises 300,000 volunteers, including IT professionals and hackers both inside Ukraine and in the diaspora, who conduct cyberattacks on targets such as power grids and railways to disrupt Russian military operations.

Such initiatives underscore the evolving role of diaspora communities as well as the blurring of the line between diaspora and homeland in the digital age. Moreover, digital platforms have significantly enhanced the capacity of diaspora communities to mobilize resources for humanitarian and development initiatives, enabling them to reach broader audiences, including transnational diaspora networks, and to conduct fundraising campaigns independently of established charities and NGOs.

For instance, amid the ongoing siege of Gaza, the Palestinian diaspora has turned to crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe to support urgent needs such as evacuations, medical treatments, and food aid. According to a Time magazine report in March 2024, over 12,000 active fundraisers had been launched since the onset of hostilities in October 2023, collectively raising approximately \$77 million in less than six months.²⁵ These campaigns are often initiated by individuals or activists abroad on behalf of family members or

23 Brinkerhoff, “Digital diasporas and conflict prevention,” 132 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40072125>.

24 Associated Press. “Ukraine Digital Army Brews Cyberattacks, Intel and Infowar.” VOA News, March 5, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/ukraine-digital-army-brews-cyberattacks-intel-and-infowar/6471320.htm>

25 Rajvanshi, Astha. “Palestinians Have Turned to Crowdfunding Platforms for Survival.” Time, March 25, 2024. <https://time.com/6960367/gaza-gofundme-justgiving-crowdfunding-israel-war/>.

“Digital tools have significantly enhanced the ability of diaspora communities to collaborate in real time with individuals in their homelands on justice and accountability initiatives.”

communities in Gaza, bypassing traditional aid channels and directly addressing immediate needs. One notable example was a campaign that raised \$1.2 million for humanitarian relief, including food, water, and shelter, with funds distributed to charities in Gaza such as the Palestinian Ethar Society for Community Development.

Similarly, the Yemeni diaspora has leveraged social media platforms like Instagram to facilitate rapid, informal fundraising efforts for communities affected by the ongoing conflict. Individuals and community groups post appeals for specific needs, such as medical expenses and food aid, often accompanied by personal stories or images, creating a sense of urgency and connection. Diaspora members typically manage these campaigns in coordination with contacts in Yemen, allowing for swift deployment of funds without the bureaucratic delays that can beset larger humanitarian organizations. For example, one Yemeni-British activist based in Birmingham has utilized Instagram²⁶ to raise thousands of pounds for emergency relief for communities in the south of Yemen affected by the war, coordinating with family members in the country to oversee delivery of the aid.

These examples illustrate how digital tools have empowered diaspora communities to take direct action in response to crises, facilitating immediate and targeted support that complements, and at times supplants, traditional aid mechanisms.

Moreover, digital tools have significantly enhanced the ability of diaspora communities to collaborate in real time with individuals in their homelands on justice and accountability initiatives. The Syrian diaspora exemplifies this dynamic through coordinated initiatives that bridge geographical divides. In Syria, activists and local organizations collect evidence of atrocities and human rights violations, often using smartphones and other digital devices to document incidents as they occur. This grassroots data is then transmitted to organizations and NGOs across the diaspora that process and analyze the information, verify its authenticity, and compile it into structured formats suitable for legal proceedings. Organizations like the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre²⁷ play a pivotal role in this process, utilizing online databases to organize and preserve digital evidence.

This model of collaboration between Syrian civil society organizations and international justice institutions has proved effective in supporting legal actions and advocacy efforts. For instance, the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, in partnership with the U.N.’s International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, has utilized digital evidence to build cases against perpetrators²⁸ of war crimes, facilitating trials in countries like Germany under universal jurisdiction laws. Additionally, initiatives such as the Syrian Archive²⁹ have been instrumental in preserving and verifying digital content, ensuring evidence remains accessible for future accountability efforts.

These examples underscore the transformative impact of digital tools in enabling diaspora communities to actively participate in justice and accountability processes, fostering collaborative practices that both transcend physical borders and enhance the efficacy of transitional justice mechanisms.

Finally, digital platforms have significantly enhanced the ability of diaspora communities to influence international narratives and public opinion concerning conflict in their homelands. The Palestinian diaspora, in particular, has adeptly utilized social media to reshape global perceptions and mobilize

26 HELPING YEMEN^{YEGB} (@4redm4n). *Instagram*. <https://www.instagram.com/4redm4n/>

27 Syria Justice and Accountability Centre. “About.” *Syria Accountability*. Accessed July 23, 2025. <https://syriaaccountability.org/about/>

28 Burgis-Kasthala, M. “Assembling Atrocity Archives for Syria: Assessing the Work of the CIJA and the IIIM.” *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 19, no. 5 (November 2021): 1193-1220. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqab065>

29 Syrian Archive. *SyrianArchive.org*. Accessed July 23, 2025. <https://syrianarchive.org/>

support for the Palestinian cause. In the aftermath of the October 2023 escalation in Gaza, Palestinians across the diaspora have harnessed platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X to document and disseminate real-time accounts of the conflict, often in collaboration with citizen journalists on the ground in Gaza using their smartphones to collect and share real-time footage and evidence.

Content creators such as Plestia Alaqad³⁰ and Motaz Azaiza,³¹ for example, garnered millions of followers by sharing firsthand footage and narratives from the ground in Gaza before leaving the territory in 2024. Now, as members of the diaspora, Azaiza and Alaqad continue to use their platforms to highlight Israel's atrocities in Gaza and advocate for Palestinian liberation. Meanwhile, diaspora actors like lawyer and human rights professor Noura Erakat³² and MSNBC journalist Ayman Mohyeldin,³³ both Americans of Palestinian origin, have used their online platforms – both professional and personal – since October 2023 to call out Western media biases and U.S. complicity in Israeli atrocities and war crimes. At the same time, international celebrities and social media influencers of Palestinian origin like Bella and Gigi Hadid have used their online platforms to reach millions of followers with pro-Palestinian messages.

The widespread dissemination of such content has contributed to a noticeable shift in international public opinion on the Palestinian issue. A study analyzing social media discourse³⁴ during the Israel-Gaza conflict from Oct. 1 to Dec. 20, 2023, indicated a significant increase in pro-Palestinian sentiment online. This shift is further evidenced by unprecedented pro-Palestinian protests in Western capitals. In London for example, tens of thousands have rallied demanding a ceasefire and an end to the siege of Gaza, marking some of the largest demonstrations in the city's history. Governments in the West are now finding themselves struggling to justify and sustain their traditionally sympathetic and supportive policies toward Israel in the face of shifting public opinion.

Such activity underscores the growing influence of digital diasporas in building empathy, shaping public discourse, and pressuring policymakers. Despite challenges such as content suppression and algorithmic biases³⁵ from social media companies like Meta and TikTok, the Palestinian diaspora's strategic use of digital tools has undeniably amplified its voice on the global stage.

Risks and Challenges for Diaspora Activists

While digital tools have created new avenues for diaspora communities to take direct action in response to homeland conflict and crisis, they also present significant risks and challenges that can undermine their potential impact. One major concern is the proliferation of misinformation and online polarization, which can lead to divisions within communities that spill over into real-life interactions. For example, online debates about the ongoing conflict in Yemen have created divisions among physical communities of Yemenis in different cities in the U.K., undermining unity and collective action. In an interview with the author, a political activist based in Sheffield reported witnessing a physical fight between two young Yemeni men that had originated from a political argument online.³⁶ Similarly, the highly polarized debates surrounding Israel/Palestine

30 Middle East Eye. "Plestia Alaqad on Finding Her Voice, Leaving Gaza, and Humanising Palestine." *Middle East Eye*, March 30, 2024. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/live-blog/live-blog-update/plestia-alaqad-finding-her-voice-leaving-gaza-and-humanising-palestine>

31 Zerrouky, Majid. "Palestinian Photographer Motaz Azaiza on the Front Lines of Gaza's Destruction." *Le Monde*, June 15, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/m-le-mag/article/2024/06/15/palestinian-photographer-motaz-azaiza-on-the-front-lines-of-gaza-s-destruction_6674865_117.html

32 Noura Erakat 🇵🇸 (@nouraerakat). *Instagram*. Accessed July 23, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/nouraerakat/>

33 A Y M A N (@aymanm). *Instagram*. Accessed July 23, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/aymanm/>

34 Nasereddin, Sara. "Impact of Social Media Platforms on International Public Opinion during the Israel War on Gaza." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 35, no. 2 (December 2024): 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2024.2415908>

35 Human Rights Watch. "Meta's Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook." *Human Rights Watch*, December 21, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/21/metass-broken-promises/systemic-censorship-palestine-content-instagram-and-facebook>

36 VZ7, interview with the author, 26 September 2023, via Zoom.

often create echo chambers that can hinder opportunities for dialogue, making it difficult to foster meaningful reconciliation or mutual understanding across opposing views.

Additionally, informal and community-based digital fundraising campaigns can raise ethical concerns, particularly when images and personal information of vulnerable individuals in conflict zones are shared without evidence of their consent. While the rapid spread of such content, often in the form of personal stories or distressing images, can attract donations, it also raises important questions about transparency, accountability, and privacy. Informal fundraising efforts, which bypass traditional charity infrastructures, often lack the oversight required to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place and that funds are used appropriately, leaving vulnerable people at risk of exploitation and abuse. This unregulated environment creates risks for both donors and recipients, as money raised may not always reach those in need.

Another significant challenge lies in online harassment and safety concerns, particularly for women³⁷ and marginalized groups engaging in political activism. Yemeni women in the diaspora have experienced online bullying and shaming campaigns, which often weaponize conservative cultural norms within diaspora communities. These attacks can silence advocates and create a hostile environment, deterring individuals from speaking out on critical issues. The intersection of digital engagement and cultural backlash poses serious risks for activists, particularly women, who are often targeted with threats of violence or social ostracization for their public advocacy.

This echoes the risk of transnational repression, whereby states and nonstate actors, including authoritarian governments, engage in activities to suppress dissent and activism across their diasporas. One striking example of transnational repression is the Chinese government's reported targeting of activists among the Uighur diaspora with cyberattacks and online harassment campaigns³⁸ in efforts to disrupt their digital presence and silence dissent beyond China's borders.

This kind of repression is not conducted solely by actors in the homeland. One Yemeni activist based in North America described to the author how she had been targeted by trolling and threats originating from an online account that appeared to have belonged to a Houthi supporter in Yemen. However, a forensic expert she hired to investigate the activity found that the attacks were in fact the result of a coordinated effort conducted by a group of individuals scattered across multiple locations worldwide, including not only Sanaa but also New York, and Sheffield, both home to significant Yemeni diaspora communities.³⁹ This highlights the fact that diaspora actors can be not only victims of transnational repression but also perpetrators.

These risks underscore the complex realities of digital mobilization – where the very tools that empower can also divide, exploit and endanger. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring that diaspora engagement remains both impactful and safe.

37 UN Women. "FAQs: Digital Abuse, Trolling, Stalking, and Other Forms of Technology-Facilitated Violence against Women." *UN Women*, February 10, 2025. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/digital-abuse-trolling-stalking-and-other-forms-of-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women>

38 Meaker, Morgan. "China Is Trolling and Hacking Uighur Exiles across the World." *WIRED*, December 6, 2019. <https://www.wired.com/story/china-uighur-hacking/>

39 MS2, interview with the author, 3 May 2023, via Zoom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopting these strategies will enable the potential of diasporas to be realized in a way that is responsible, sustainable, and impactful, empowering those groups to contribute to peacebuilding, recovery and development efforts globally.

1 ENHANCE DIGITAL LITERACY AND RESPONSIBILITY

For Policymakers and Peacebuilders

Invest in targeted digital literacy campaigns designed specifically for diaspora communities engaged in activism and transnational mobilization. These initiatives should go beyond generic training to include context-specific programming that addresses challenges such as misinformation in multiple languages, digital security threats, and platform-specific risks. Effective approaches should incorporate peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, collaboration across diaspora networks, and capacity-building that draws on the lived experience of digital organizers. Tailoring the scope in this way enhances relevance, sustainability, and impact – especially where funding is limited.

2 ESTABLISH INCLUSIVE AND CONTEXT-SENSITIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR DIGITAL DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

Create inclusive, context-sensitive frameworks that move beyond tokenistic engagement and enable diaspora communities to participate meaningfully in political and peacebuilding processes through digital platforms. As illustrated by critiques from Yemeni women peacebuilders, inclusion often remains extractive or symbolic. To address this, initiatives should prioritize co-designed processes, early and sustained involvement in agenda setting, and recognition – including compensation – for diaspora contributions. Digital tools should be used to broaden access, decentralize participation, and center marginalized voices. Framing diaspora engagement as both a strategic and ethical imperative can help unlock the full potential of its members as connectors, mediators, and mobilizers.

3 FOSTER SAFER DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS THROUGH COMMUNITY-LED SAFEGUARDS AND PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY

Foster safer digital environments through community-led safeguards and platform accountability: Rather than relying solely on top-down regulation, support diaspora communities to develop community-led moderation practices, reporting mechanisms, and peer support networks that mitigate online harassment and abuse – especially targeting women and marginalized groups. Policymakers and civil society should also advocate for greater transparency and accountability from tech platforms on how harmful content is addressed and how victims of abuse are supported, as well as partnering with trusted diaspora organizations to create culturally relevant digital safety resources and response systems.

1 IMPLEMENT SAFEGUARDS FOR DIGITAL FUNDRAISING

For Humanitarian and Development Practitioners

Humanitarian practitioners should develop guidelines for diaspora-led digital fundraising and project management aimed at increasing transparency and accountability.

2 STRENGTHEN COORDINATION BETWEEN DIASPORAS AND LOCAL ACTORS

Support frameworks that enable diaspora communities to collaborate with local organizations in the homeland to ensure digital mobilization efforts are effectively channeled toward sustainable and ethically sound humanitarian projects.

3 PROMOTE ETHICAL CONTENT SHARING

1 FOSTER UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN DIGITAL SPACES

2 CHAMPION ONLINE SAFETY AND MENTAL HEALTH

3 BUILD DIGITAL SOLIDARITY NETWORKS



Encourage the use of ethical guidelines for digital content sharing, particularly in relation to vulnerable individuals in conflict zones, ensuring that their dignity and consent are upheld at all stages of the fundraising and advocacy process.

For Diaspora Activists

Diaspora activists should actively work toward creating inclusive digital platforms that counter online polarization, fostering cross-ideological dialogue and reconciliation rather than reinforcing divisions within communities.

Activists, particularly women and marginalized groups, should be empowered to speak out about the risks of online harassment and be provided with tools and resources to safeguard their digital presence. This includes advocating for policies that ensure a safer online environment for political activism.

Strengthen connections between diaspora communities through digital networks that facilitate solidarity campaigns, joint initiatives, and collective action, ensuring that diasporas can effectively influence global conversations around peace, justice, and development.

AUTHOR

Dr. Laura Cretney is a social entrepreneur and international development practitioner who completed her doctorate at Durham University's School of Government and International Affairs, focusing on diaspora mobilization in conflict zones. Cretney is a fluent Arabic speaker with over 10 years of experience in capacity-building, conflict transformation, and entrepreneurial ecosystems in the Middle East. Her work explores how digital tools have transformed the role of diasporas in conflict, peacebuilding, and development. She is the director of startup Grind Muscat and the founder and CEO of Pink Jinn, an online marketplace focused on supporting communities across the Middle East through business and entrepreneurship.



Contact

For media inquiries, email
media@newlinesinstitute.org

To learn more about New Lines'
publication process, email
submissions@newlinesinstitute.org

For other inquiries, send an email to
info@newlinesinstitute.org

A: 1660 L St. NW, Ste. 450
Washington, D.C., 20036

P: (202) 800-7302