Arab Reform Initiative

Press Release, 26 July 2021

Mobilizing for the Homeland: New Iraq, Libya, and Yemen Diasporas



(Paris, 26 July) – The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) today released a collection of studies that examine the transformations within Arab diasporas post-2011 and shed light onto what is "new" about them, examining both their profiles and geographies as well as new forms of mobilization.

The collection is part of our work on "New Arab Diaspora" which has also included a series of webinars and convenings. Titled "Organizing in Exile: Dynamics of Mobilization and Engagement of New Arab Diasporas," it looks at the Iraqi, Libyan, and Yemeni diasporas and exposes the various factors that affect the mobilization of new diasporic groups. It sheds light on how political identity is formed/transformed through the experience of exile and the impact of multiple and overlaying political opportunity structures on the types of actions by the diaspora – from pursuing accountability, to protecting cultural heritage, to providing humanitarian assistance – taking place.

"The studies in this collection are an important contribution to our broader understanding of the complex factors affecting diaspora political mobilization and the types of non-economic remittances that occur," said Sarah Anne Rennick, editor of the collection and deputy director at the Arab Reform Initiative. "One of the interesting findings we see across the three case studies is the increasing diversification of the political leanings ranging from those who are pro-revolution to pro-status quo to those who avoid positioning themselves in the current political spectrum."

The studies written by Oula Kadhem (Iraq), Houda Mzioudet (Libya), and Maysaa Shuja Al Deen (Yemen), have the following key findings:

- New political remittances and forms of diasporic organization and mobilization are, in many cases, actively seeking to change homeland politics and respond to the cascading crises at home. Yet, many of these diaspora members who were displaced by conflict are also trying instead to navigate the liminal and uncertain status of being caught in the spectrum of "here" and/or "there."
- The relationship to the homeland informs greatly if and how diaspora mobilize; a complicated set of factors mediate when and where diaspora members mobilize and the types of mobilization they choose to

undertake.

- The political contexts in which MENA diasporas are located, including receiving-country and origin-country, shape their forms of engagement.
- Given conflict dynamics, the prospects for increased diaspora mobilization for reconstruction and political renewal at home face important obstacles, including political polarization, increased mistrust among those in diaspora, the closures of civic space, decreased operational capacity of organizations, and the waxing and waning of feelings of belonging.
- Nonetheless, new opportunities for leveraging diasporic resources exist in various areas, including transitional justice, community-level reconstruction via trans-local activist lines and cultural heritage protection.

“For amplification of diaspora initiatives to occur, there is a need for increased operational capacities. Given that the process of diasporization of MENA populations is only likely to continue in the coming years, understanding how political remittances are affecting not only diasporic communities themselves but also home and host sites opens new avenues for a future research agenda – and new opportunities to leverage activism for political change,” said Sarah Anne Rennick.

As part of this effort, the Arab Reform Initiative is undertaking broader work on diasporas in order to promote diasporic mobilization for political change. In addition to previous projects on the Syrian diaspora, we are also currently working on the Lebanese diaspora and examining political leanings and methods for mobilization abroad.

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About Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

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