

# Diasporas as agents of democracy: Pitfalls and prospects

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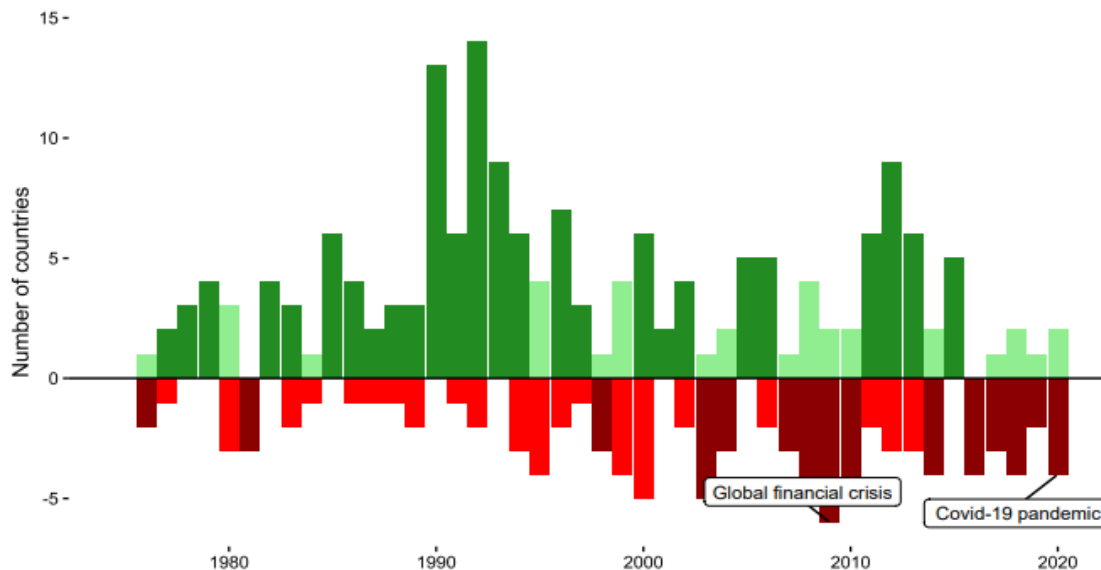
# Global state of democracy

- Democratic erosion
- Democratic backsliding
- Traditional geopolitics
  - *Great power competition*
  - *Imperial ambitions*
  - *Ripple effects from Ukraine*



# Global state of democracy

Number of countries moving in an authoritarian direction or a democratic direction



Notes: This bar graph shows the number of countries moving towards authoritarianism (from democracy to either a hybrid or authoritarian regime, or from a hybrid to an authoritarian regime) in red or towards democracy (from either a hybrid or authoritarian regime to a democracy or from an authoritarian to a hybrid regime), by year since 1975. Years shown in dark green rather than pale green are those where the number of countries moving in a democratic direction outnumber those moving in an authoritarian direction. Years shown in dark red rather than pale red are those where the changes towards authoritarianism outnumber the changes towards democracy.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices 1975–2020, v. 5.1, 2021, <<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/dataset-resources>>, accessed 3 September 2021.

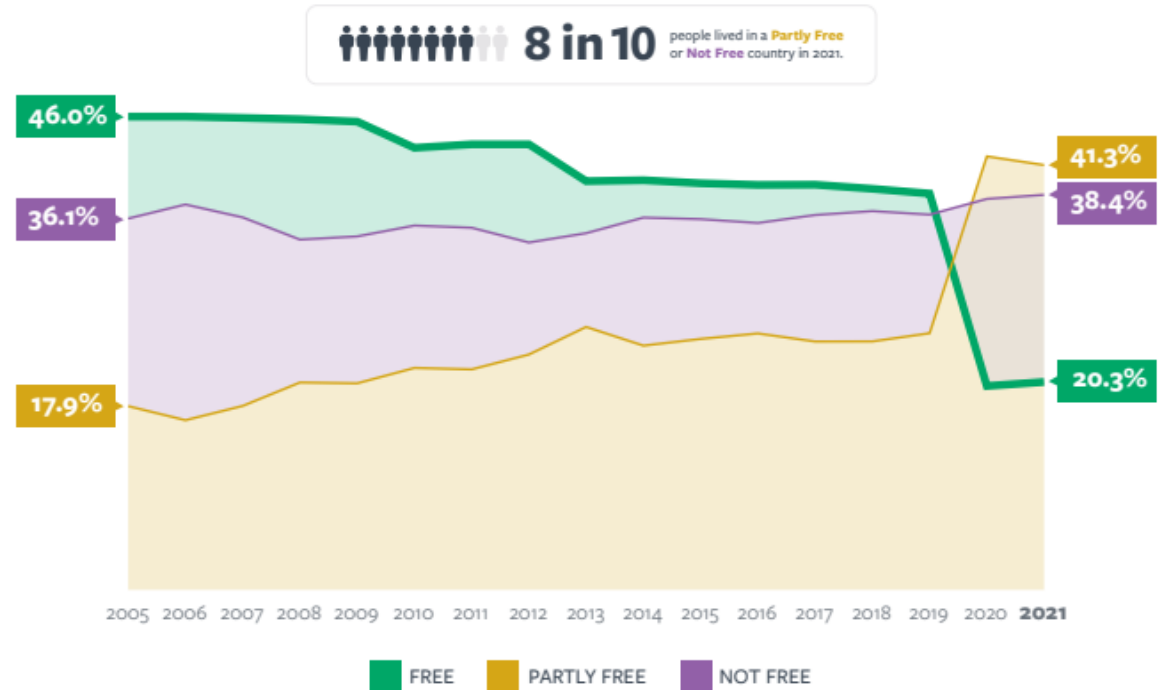
# Global state of democracy

- 16 consecutive years of decline in global freedom.
- 60 countries got less free last year.
- 25 got more free.

(Freedom House 2022)

## LIVING IN A LESS FREE WORLD

The share of the world's population living in Free environments has fallen as authoritarian practices proliferate.



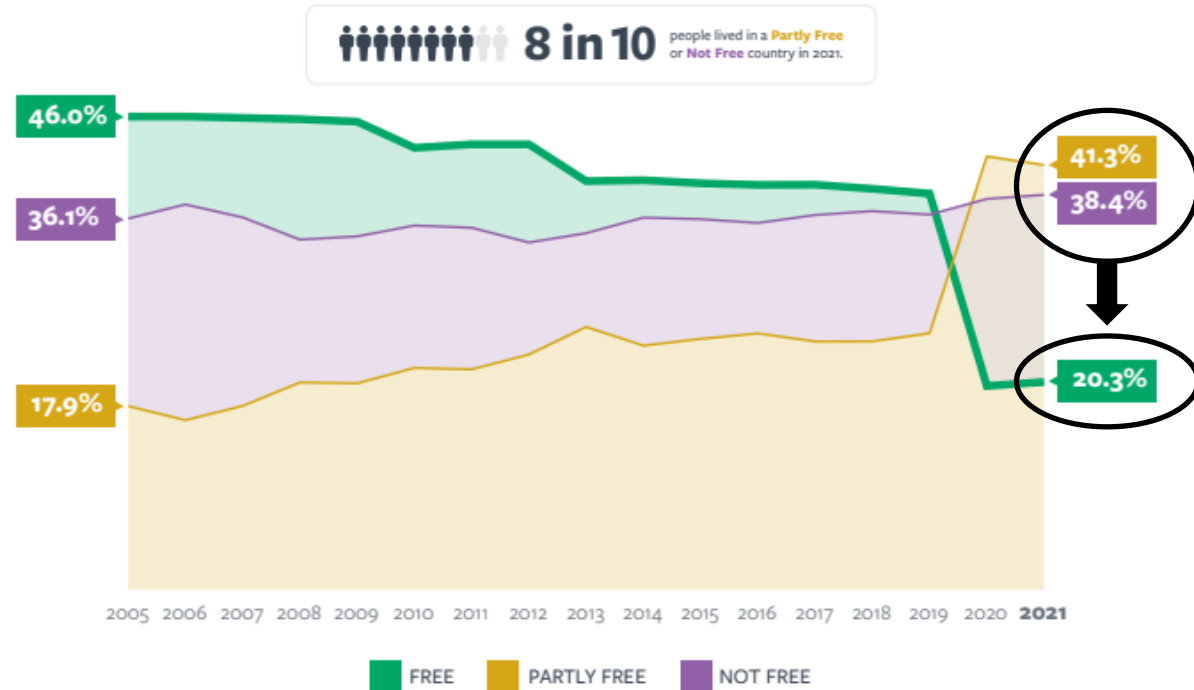
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# Diaspora: A conceptualization

(Adamson and Demetriou 2007)

- A social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to
  1. Sustain a collective national, cultural or religious **identity** through a sense of **internal cohesion** and **sustained ties** with a **real or imagined 'homeland'**.
  2. Display an **organizational ability** to address the **collective interests** of members, **through transnational links**.

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Knowledge

Skills

Networks



# Factors enabling political engagement

- State policies that are conducive to diasporic engagement
  - (e.g. long-distance voting, open communication channels to policy makers)
- Inter-generational transmission of identities and perspectives
  - (e.g. a self-definition as oppressed ethnic groups)
- Organizational infrastructure
  - (e.g. pre-existing social movements, ethnic organizations, allies)
- Triggering (non-)events in host state
  - (e.g. foreign policies, or lack thereof)
- Triggering events in 'homeland'
  - (e.g. mediatized human rights transgressions, revolutions, regime change, etc)



# Some pro-democracy practices

- *Sending remittances to support civil society and human rights activists (e.g. Somalia).*
- *Initiating small scale community projects to revise school curricula (e.g. Bosnia)*
- *Transmitting political remittances that support liberal values (e.g. Hungary)*
- *Contesting domestic and foreign policies (e.g. Russia)*
- *Demonstrating, protesting, framing events alternatively (e.g. Iran)*
- *Electoral campaigning and long-distance voting (e.g. Lebanon).*
- *Returning to engage directly in homeland politics at various levels of governance (e.g. Iraq)*

## I. Cooptation by host states and 'homeland' states

- *Divide and rule through patronage.*
- *Instrumentalising the diaspora as a useful proxy instead of engaging in an equitable partnership.*

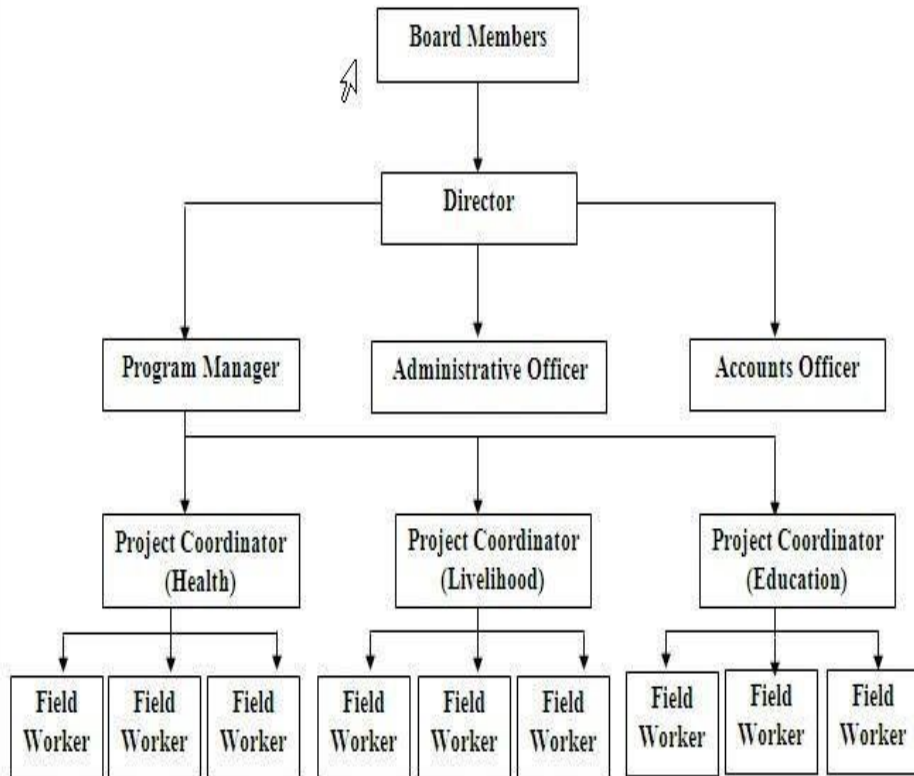
# Pitfalls

## II. Organizational issues

- *How to get it right?*
- *How to partner with informal networks?*
- *How to ensure accountability and results?*

# Formal NGO

# vs Diasporic network



## III. Transnational repression

- *Digital spyware, bots, hacking, trolling*
- *Surveillance by co-nationals in regime-friendly diaspora*
- *Smear campaigns, labelling (e.g. as ‘terrorists’)*
- *Detention in host states*
- *Direct or indirect physical threats*
- *Extradition from host states (e.g. via Interpol)*
- *Kidnapping from host states*
- *Assassinations*
- *Targeting by proxy (e.g. family and friends in ‘homeland’)*

# Key take-aways for policy makers

- **Engage with diasporas to foster democracy.**
  - ‘The government should to a greater extent take part in society [and diasporas] should to a greater extent take part in development in origin states’ (Norway’s Governmental Integration Strategy 2018-2022).

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- **Protect diasporas against transnational repression.**
  - ‘In all, the stronger the transnational ties to the home country, the greater the probability that diaspora members will self-censor’ (Moss, 2018).



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- **Have clear policy objectives but implement them flexibly.**
  - Think of diasporas as partners, not service providers.