SANA'A CENTER

Mobilizing from Afar:

The Rise and Influence of Yemen's Digital Diaspora

A sweets seller selling treats during Ramadan festivities in Mukalla, April 20, 2021 // Sana'a Center photo by Abu-Bakr Belfakih

By: Dr. Laura Cretney

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The Sana'a Center is an independent think tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

Executive Summary

Members of the Yemeni diaspora, often regarded primarily as remittance providers and external advocates for the homeland, increasingly employ digital tools in ways that shape conflict dynamics, peacebuilding, the humanitarian response, and the global understanding of Yemen's cultural heritage. This policy paper, drawing on original interviews and building on social anthropologist Alex de Waal's political marketplace framework, argues that policymakers, practitioners, and peacebuilders should reassess their understanding of Yemen's diaspora and engage with its digitally empowered members as influential transnational political actors embedded within Yemen's political economy.

By extending the political marketplace framework beyond territorial boundaries, this paper conceptualizes diaspora actors as capital providers, narrative brokers, and legitimacy entrepreneurs operating through intersecting flows of finance, influence, and digital visibility. It demonstrates how, in the context of Yemen's war-fractured economy and society, platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, X, and Instagram have compressed transaction costs, accelerated mobilization, and enabled hybrid online/offline interventions across advocacy, peacebuilding, justice and accountability, humanitarian response, and cultural heritage.

When policymakers and practitioners regard diaspora actors not merely as symbolic ambassadors, they can engage with them more effectively — as transnational intermediaries whose involvement impacts legitimacy, resource flows, and domestic and international narratives. However, diaspora actors' engagement can be, wittingly or not, deeply entangled in networks of patronage, war economies, and reputational competition. Digital mobilization expands the speed and scope of inclusion, yet simultaneously intensifies asymmetries of power, risks to beneficiaries and local contacts, and exposure to coercive dynamics.

Select Recommendations

For Donors and Policymakers

- Invest in projects guided by conflict-sensitive engagement frameworks that assess how diaspora funding and advocacy intersect with local and international patronage systems, business networks, and territorial power centers.
- Develop flexible funding mechanisms embedded with safeguarding and accountability standards that allow diaspora-led initiatives to access small-scale, rapid-response grants.
- Mitigate digital risk exposure by supporting digital security training for activists, particularly women, who face targeted harassment online.

For Practitioners and NGOs

- Co-design accountability and safeguarding protocols with strategically selected diaspora partners.
- Integrate informal fundraising actors into protection ecosystems, offering advisory support through online platforms on consent, beneficiary protection, and data privacy.

For Diaspora Actors

- Conduct informal conflict-sensitivity assessments before mobilizing funds or advocacy campaigns to avoid reinforcing faction-aligned economic networks.
- Adopt safeguarding standards for beneficiaries and in-country partners who are exposed to greater risk.
- Strengthen transparency practices by publicly disclosing funding sources, beneficiary selection criteria, and delivery mechanisms.

Introduction: The Diaspora and the Political Marketplace

Since Yemen's civil war began in 2014, much of the literature that has emerged to make sense of the conflict has centered on state actors, foreign proxies, and other armed groups, and on mapping political economies of violence through the lenses of territorial control and patronage networks. Although some research into the role of the diaspora has been conducted, studies have tended to focus either on patterns of displacement, the dynamics of specific geographically bounded communities, or the role of remittances, without directly focusing on the increasingly transnational nature of diaspora mobilization in the digital age.[1] Within this framing, members of Yemen's diaspora have been portrayed as peripheral actors — as sources of remittances sustaining household economies, as elite interlocutors participating in high-level negotiations, or as activists organizing locally in their host states. But Yemen's diaspora is not external to the country's political dynamics and war economy; it is embedded within them, an integral part of the patronage networks shaping power on the ground.

Yemen's political marketplace is characterized by fragmented, competitive patronage in which authority derives not from institutional legitimacy but from the capacity to distribute resources and manage rival claimants in the absence of a functioning state. Since 2017, power has been divided among three primary axes: the Houthi group (Ansar Allah), which controls approximately 70 percent of the population;[2] the internationally recognized government, based in Aden; and the recently dissolved Southern Transitional Council (STC). Competing flows of foreign patronage from regional powers, primarily Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, have supported or sustained each of them to varying degrees. Beyond these headline actors, a dense web of sub-state networks, tribal elites, and business figures trade loyalty, access, and resources across and among these axes. Diaspora actors are deeply embedded within these networks: Cairo-based businessman Ahmad al-Essi, once described as "arguably the most powerful Yemeni alive,"[3] exemplifies the role of diaspora-

[1] Noha Aboueldahab, "Reclaiming Yemen: The role of the Yemeni professional diaspora," Brookings, April 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/reclaiming-yemen-the-role-of-the-yemeni-professional-diaspora; Nahla El-Menshawy and Jonathan Hearn, "Echoes of the Past: The Reproduction of Social Imaginaries amongst the Yemeni Diaspora in Cairo," *Arabian Humanities*, 2025, https://journals.openedition.org/arabianhumanities/15121; Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen, "The Long Shadow of War: Mobilization Dynamics of the Yemeni Diaspora since 2011," Arab Reform Initiative, April 2021, https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-long-shadow-of-war-mobilization-dynamics-of-the-yemeni-diaspora-since-2011-2/

[2] "Macro Poverty Outlook: Republic of Yemen," World Bank, April 2026, p. 1, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-yem.pdf

[3] "Businessmen are not prohibited from engaging in politics – A Q&A with Ahmad al-Essi," Sana'a Center, March 16, 2021, https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/13434

based patrons in sustaining political loyalty within the marketplace. Al-Essi at different points, bankrolled both former President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi personally and the internationally recognized government.[4]

In this policy paper, the term "diaspora" is used in a constructivist rather than essentialist sense, and treated not as a fixed, bounded community defined by common ethnic origin or geographical dispersal alone, but as a set of relationships, political, economic, cultural, and emotional, between Yemenis living outside the homeland and the homeland itself.[5] This definition is intentionally broad, encompassing the full demographic range of Yemenis outside Yemen. "Diaspora actors," as used throughout, refers to individuals and organizations within this population who are actively engaged in some form of mobilization in relation to Yemen, whether financial, political, humanitarian, or cultural.

The Yemeni diaspora is estimated at between 6 million and 7 million people globally, about half of whom are migrant laborers based in Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia.[6] For much of this population, engagement with the homeland takes the form of financial transfers, and their embeddedness in Yemen's political marketplace is primarily economic: They are the patrons sustaining household-level patronage networks across the country. The subset of the diaspora on which this article focuses is, however, distinct: those who are politically mobilized — engaged in advocacy, peacebuilding, humanitarian coordination, justice and accountability, and cultural production.

This segment is not defined by a conscious self-selection, but by the opportunity structures that make such mobilization possible. Political engagement of this kind requires access to a specific constellation of resources: language fluency in the dominant idioms of international policy discourse; educational credentials that confer legitimacy in donor and policymaker spaces; digital access and literacy; freedom of expression within a permissive host state; and sufficient economic security to devote time and resources to civic activity that is often unpaid or underfunded. These structures are unequally distributed across the diaspora, and their distribution skews, inevitably, toward the more educated, professionally situated, and internationally networked. This does not render the Gulf labor diaspora peripheral — their remittances are, as noted, a critical pillar of Yemen's political economy — but the forms of mobilization examined here are disproportionately the preserve of those whose positionality affords them the platforms, networks, and freedoms to engage in them.

[4] Ibid.

[5] This definition draws on the framing of diaspora laid out by Sari Hanafi in, "Rethinking the Palestinians abroad as a diaspora," HAGAR International Social Science Review, 4, no.1–2, 2003, p. 174.

[6] Hisham Almahdi, "The Yemeni Diaspora: An analysis of its history, development, and nature," Commonspace.eu, November 26, 2022, https://www.commonspace.eu/young-voices/yemeni-diaspora-analysis-its-history-development-and-nature

Building on social anthropologist Alex de Waal's political marketplace framework,[7] politics in Yemen can be understood as a system of transactional exchange in which loyalty is monetized, and authority is sustained through the distribution of resources rather than institutional legitimacy. In the digital age, diaspora actors operate within this marketplace through intersecting flows of finance, narrative, influence, and access. At the core of De Waal's political marketplace framework is the proposition that, in certain governance systems, politics is conducted as business: Loyalty is bought, brokered, and renegotiated through financial transactions and coercive leverage. Political entrepreneurs manage "political budgets" and trade allegiance in a competitive marketplace in which power is mediated by brokers, security actors, and informal financial networks. Institutions exist, but authority derives less from formal office than from the capacity to distribute resources and manage rival claimants.[8]

This paper extends that framework beyond territorial boundaries. It will demonstrate how diaspora actors function as providers of capital, both symbolic and material. It highlights how symbolic capital accumulates when credentials, international access, and reputational authority turn diaspora actors into narrative brokers, translating local voices and events on the ground into internationally legible formats and influencing external policy discourse. Materially, the Yemeni diaspora also supplies financial capital through remittances, donations, and investments. Formally recorded remittances alone reached an estimated US$3.8 billion for 2023, with total flows likely considerably higher when informal channels are included.[9]

This policy paper will illustrate how diaspora actors are embedded and actively engaged in Yemen's political marketplace: Their financial flows intersect with political and territorial power centers, while digital visibility continuously shapes authority and influence. The digital sphere does not displace the political marketplace; rather, it is leveraged by diaspora actors to amplify their influence, project symbolic and financial capital, and reshape their positionality within transnational networks of patronage and power.[10]

[7] Alex de Waal, "Introduction to the Political Marketplace for Policymakers," The Justice and Security Research Programme, March 2016, https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/Conflict-Research-Programme/policy-reports/JSRP-Brief-1.pdf

[8] Alex de Waal, "The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power," Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015) pp. 3, 16, 21.

[9] Yasmine Osman and Mohammed Al Akkaoui,, "Yemen Economic Monitor, Spring 2024: Navigating Increased Hardship and Growing Economic Fragmentation," World Bank, June 2024, https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-economic-monitor-navigating-increased-hardship-and-growing-fragmentation-enar&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1780582317572090&usg=AOvVaw1uN7Sp9Jt31UciL9w6vuwt; Narayani Sritharan, Istanbool Ba Abbad, Aymen Othman Ghaleb, Oshin Pandey, Amna Mahmood, Bryan Burgess, and Hind Kasim, "From Cash to Capital: Leveraging Remittances for Yemen's Economic Future," International Growth Centre Policy Brief YEM-24338, February 2026, p. 2., https://www.theigc.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/From-Cash-to-Capital-Leveraging-Remittances-for-Yemens-Economic-Future.pdf

[10] Laura Rebecca Cretney, "The Yemeni Diaspora and the Political Marketplace," Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2025, pp.132-141, 149-152, 252-253, 285-287, 360-365, https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/16050/

Methodology

This paper draws on qualitative research conducted for the author's doctoral thesis, which involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 Yemeni diaspora actors from March through October 2023 across Europe, the Middle East, and North America. The research traced how financial flows, narratives, and political influence circulate transnationally within Yemen's fragmented conflict environment. Four additional interviews were conducted in December 2025 to reflect geopolitical shifts since 2023 and evolving digital practices. Of the 25 interviewees, 8 were male and 17 female.

Digital ethnography of online mobilization spaces, including social media platforms, online discussion forums, and virtual events, supported this research, contextualizing and informing the interview sample and question design. This involved systematic observation of online mobilization spaces across platforms, including Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Clubhouse, identified through keyword-based desk research on the Yemeni diaspora and expanded through snowball sampling of accounts, networks, and content shared by key individuals, organizations, and influencers. On Instagram, posts from diaspora platforms were analyzed to assess patterns including geographic location, language use, thematic focus, and purpose; comments were observed to gauge audience demographics and sentiment. On X, posts and reply threads were observed to understand discourse, interaction, and contestation, while on Clubhouse, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, live discussions were followed to observe the emergence and proliferation of Yemen-focused conversations.

A structured dataset of platforms, actors, and content types was collated and categorized to support analysis. Engagement was primarily observational, combining passive monitoring with limited active listening in audio spaces; it was conducted transparently as a researcher, where relevant. This digital ethnography helped to triangulate and strengthen interview data. Ethical considerations were central throughout, with no private or closed groups accessed without permission, no identifiable personal data reproduced, and careful attention paid to source protection and the security risks associated with politically sensitive mobilization in conflict settings.

Diaspora Brokers: Providing Symbolic and Material Capital

One of the clearest manifestations of transnational brokerage can be seen in how diaspora actors position themselves as intermediaries between domestic constituencies and international policy arenas, converting proximity, education, and network access into forms of political leverage. A Yemeni based between the Middle East and Europe and working in the international development space described how, during the lead-up to an international summit on Yemen, his organization designed a survey to capture Yemeni youth perspectives on extremism and its drivers. Distributed on university campuses and online, the initiative gathered more than 1,000 responses, which were compiled into a professional report and actively circulated to foreign ministries, think tanks, and policy forums.[11] Other diaspora actors working in the development, humanitarian, peacebuilding, and justice and accountability spaces shared similar anecdotes about their work, highlighting their use of tools like WhatsApp to gather information from sources on the ground in Yemen, which then informs outputs for international audiences and stakeholders such as research papers, policy reports, and legal cases.[12] Often, the findings are shared via platforms like X, which is frequently used by Yemenis in the diaspora to reach international policymakers, donors, and journalists.[13]

In these ways, Yemenis in the diaspora are able to position themselves as intermediaries between domestic constituencies and international policymakers, constituting a form of brokerage. Access to both local populations and global audiences, increasingly facilitated by digital tools, enables the translation of voices from the ground into policy-legible formats. Seen through the lens of the political marketplace, authority here is derived not from formal mandate but from education, location, and network proximity. Political capital is accumulated and traded, and legitimacy emerges as relational and situational rather than institutional.

[11] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025. Zoom.

[12] Interview with the author, September 21, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, May 21,2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, April 24, 2023, Zoom.

[13] Interview with the author, March 28, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, May 21, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, April 24, 2023, Zoom.

Digital platforms intensify these marketplace dynamics by converting visibility into political currency. Academics and professionals abroad accrue influence through online presence, with credentials and affiliations conferring authority regardless of proximity to events on the ground. As the Yemeni abroad whose organization gathered youths' views on extremism noted, "social media has made everyone a thought leader."[14] At the same time, diaspora audiences consume content about Yemen that is amplified by algorithms, which risks producing skewed perceptions of daily realities.[15] Conversely, local audiences encounter curated displays of diaspora wealth and status. Two interviewees specifically pointed to members of the Yemeni diaspora in the United States taking to social media platforms to share their wealth.[16]

"They're millionaires, literally [...] They have been splurging on a few things and making sure to film it and post it on social media. So you see these crazy weddings, you know, helicopters and all these Mercedes GLs — 10 of them in a convoy [...] competing in extravagance."[17]

In this way, reputation becomes tradable capital: Visibility and wealth project power and influence, and digital spaces operate as reputational marketplaces layered onto Yemen's existing political economy. A senior Yemeni economic expert with extensive ground networks in Yemen observed that the same communities sharing ostentatious displays of wealth on social media are channeling capital back into property in Ibb and other cities, driving up prices for locals. This dynamic, in the expert's assessment, warrants further systematic research to document its scale and implications.[18]

In some contexts, such financial flows from the diaspora could consolidate factional economic networks. The same expert relayed anecdotal evidence of capital flows from Yemenis in the United Kingdom into southern Yemen. This capital, he claimed, was channeled from Yemenis in the UK with roots in the Yafea region to business networks in Aden that were closely connected to the STC's leadership, facilitating investment in airlines, banks, car dealerships, and import sectors. This account, based on the interviewee's direct engagement with business networks in Aden, has not been independently verified; however, it is consistent with documented patterns of politically-aligned patronage and business network formation in southern Yemen, through which UAE-backed actors consolidated

[14] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom.

[15] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom.

[16] Ibid; Interview with the author, December 12, 2025, Zoom.

[17] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom.

[18] Ibid.

control over strategic economic infrastructure.[19] This highlights the potential for diaspora capital to shape economic power dynamics within politically aligned networks. Loyalty and access are then mediated through proximity to these networks, reflecting De Waal's logic of monetized access to security and influence.

In Houthi-controlled areas, meanwhile, authorities have threatened diaspora-owned property assets, with payments allegedly made in exchange for protection or the preservation of status — dynamics mediated through locally connected intermediaries.[20] Such claims are consistent with well-documented patterns of Houthi asset seizure and extortion. The US Treasury Department, for example, imposed sanctions in 2021 on the Houthi-appointed "judicial custodian" who oversaw the seizure of assets valued at over US$100 million, explicitly including companies affiliated with Yemenis residing abroad.[21] Separately, ACLED, which gathers data on global political violence, has documented Houthi appropriation of land and extortion of property owners in Ibb governorate.[22] Such claims allude to a coercive dynamic in which diaspora wealth can become a targetable resource. Here, the marketplace logic can be understood as extractive: Political entrepreneurs monetize territorial control through economies of protection.

Thus, Yemeni diaspora actors cannot be analytically reduced to humanitarian supporters, remittance providers, or external advocates. Through financial flows, narrative production, and networked influence, diaspora actors participate — intentionally or otherwise — in the dynamics of loyalty, protection, and competition that shape Yemen's political marketplace. They are information brokers, investors, and legitimacy entrepreneurs embedded within existing patronage networks. Having situated the diaspora within the political marketplace, the remainder of this policy paper will map how these actors leverage digital tools for mobilization in Yemen.

[19] "Corruption in Yemen's War Economy," Sana'a Center, December 2018, https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/6602

[20] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom; and see, for example, "Systematic Houthi Property Confiscations Threaten Livelihoods and Fuel Conflict," Justice4Yemen Pact, March 2025, https://justice4yemenpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/IR-16-Designed-English.pdf

[21] "Treasury Sanctions Senior Houthi Military Officer Overseeing Group's Seizure of Opposition Property," US Department of the Treasury OFAC, November 18, 2021, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0495

[22] Andrea Carboni and Luca Nevola, "A Barometer of Houthi Repression: Governance and Infighting in Ibb Governorate," ACLED, March 4, 2024, pp. 5-6, https://acleddata.com/report/barometer-houthi-repression-governance-and-infighting-ibb-governorate

Mapping Digital Diaspora Mobilization

Across the fields of conflict, peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and cultural production, diaspora actors are leveraging online platforms to mobilize capital, coordinate action, shape narratives, and influence policy in real time. Digital technologies have lowered barriers to participation and transcended geographic distance and national borders, enabling sustained engagement between actors inside and outside Yemen. WhatsApp groups function as coordination hubs, Zoom facilitates cross-border dialogue and project management, X amplifies advocacy and lobbying efforts, and Instagram creates new opportunities for cultural production and humanitarian fundraising.

Digital mobilization does not render pre-existing power structures and networks of patronage irrelevant. Rather, online platforms redistribute and reshape patterns of visibility, authority, and risk. Digital arenas accelerate mobilization, but they also intensify exposure, polarization, and power asymmetries. The following subsections map how these dynamics unfold across four domains: 1) advocacy; 2) peacebuilding, justice, and accountability; 3) humanitarian and emergency response; and 4) cultural heritage and the arts.

Algorithms of Advocacy

In recent years, digital platforms have become central to how Yemenis in the diaspora engage in political advocacy, functioning both as arenas of mobilization and as channels through which influence is projected beyond Yemen's borders. During the 2011 uprising against then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, early forms of online activism relied heavily on Facebook to coordinate protests, circulate footage, and frame narratives for international audiences.[23] Diaspora activists played a critical role in translating events unfolding from Sana'a and Aden into English-language content accessible to journalists, policymakers, and human rights organizations around the world.[24] Digital spaces enabled geographically dispersed Yemenis to participate in a shared political moment, compressing distance and accelerating flows of information.

[23] Interview with the author, April 10, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, December 12, 2025, Zoom.

[24] Interview with the author, April 10, 2023, Zoom.

Digital advocacy, however, became increasingly polarized during the civil war. Online spaces mirrored territorial and factional divisions inside Yemen, with diaspora actors aligning with competing political narratives that sometimes spilled over into physical altercations and divides within traditionally cohesive communities.[25] On social media platforms, legitimacy claims were advanced, disputed, and undermined in real time.[26]

The political relevance of Yemen's diaspora in international policy and peacebuilding circles has fluctuated over the years. One political researcher and commentator observed that renewed international attention to Yemen following the 2023-2025 Houthi attacks on shipping vessels in the Red Sea had elevated the prominence of diaspora commentators like himself, who were able to explain developments to external audiences: "I woke up that morning to literally 78 emails from media, randoms, insurance companies, maritime [companies], donors, intelligence researchers — 78 emails in one day."[27] In such moments, diaspora actors function as interpretive intermediaries, translating complex local dynamics into legible narratives, often through their online platforms or digital communication. Their influence derives less from a formal mandate than from education, networks, institutional affiliation, language fluency, and digital reach.

The online influence of political advocates and commentators, however, is not necessarily reflective of their level of understanding or their objectivity.[28] Digital platforms can inflate symbolic capital, allowing academics and commentators abroad to shape discourse and even policy, irrespective of physical proximity to events on the ground. Moreover, algorithmic amplification can distort perceptions among diaspora communities of events in the homeland, as algorithms tend to promote particular incidents that may not always reflect the daily realities of life in Yemen or the actual trajectory of the conflict.[29]

At the same time, digital advocacy carries significant risks, particularly for women, with instances of cyberbullying increasing with the proliferation of internet access and social media use.[30] Multiple female activists and peacebuilders who were interviewed shared their experiences of targeted harassment, smear campaigns, and accusations of foreign alignment when they engaged publicly online.[31] Digital visibility can confer reputational capital, but it

[25] Interview with the author, September 26, 2023, Zoom.

[26] Interview with the author, April 27, 2023.

[27] Interview with the author, December 17, 2025.

[28] Interview with the author, April 17, 2023; Interview with the author, May 21, 2023, Zoom.

[29] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom.

[30] Aisha Aljaedy, "Why do they all hate us online? Digital threats and resilience of Yemeni women in the public sphere," SMEX, 2024, pp. 16-17, https://smex.org/meet-the-fellows-mariam-al-shafei-fellowship-on-technology-and-human-rights-2024/

[31] Interview with the author, March 24, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, June 26, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, June 4, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, April 17, 2023; Interview with the author, May 21, 2023, Zoom.

also exposes individuals to the risk of reputational attack and social sanction. In some cases, family names, tribal affiliations, or perceived political loyalties have been weaponized by actors inside Yemen and abroad to delegitimize women's voices.[32] In this way, some online activism reinforces existing patriarchal and factional power structures that govern offline politics.

Algorithms: Invisible Dynamics with Real-World Consequences

Four weeks into a six-week submission window, Al-Yamaniah magazine had barely enough contributions to publish an issue spotlighting Yemeni women. A final plea went out, prompting a deluge of stories and ideas from inside Yemen — an unanticipated outcome that meaningfully shaped the magazine's character and reach.

"It went viral somehow on the algorithm," one team member recalled. "It hit so many people's accounts, and lots of people flooded [our inbox]."[33]

The influence of platform algorithms emerged as a recurring theme across interviews for this research. Algorithmic logic shapes how Yemeni diaspora actors understand events in the homeland, how they are perceived by others, and their ability to advocate. It can be an unexpected ally or a frustrating foe, and its dynamics are largely opaque to those experiencing them, even though consequences can be significant.

The same Al-Yamaniah interviewee who once benefited from platform algorithms described experiencing the opposite dynamic during a Gaza solidarity push. She believed her Instagram posts were being shadow-banned, and accounts she followed from Gaza were disappearing from her feed without explanation. "I could see that the algorithm was working against us," she said, describing a sense of having to "fight the platforms themselves."[34]

The most high-stakes example came from the founder of a network for Yemeni women peacebuilders, who described how politically aligned actors reverse-engineered platform algorithms to spread misinformation about her organization. "They say we promote LGBT rights," she said, explaining that the claim was weaponized because it would resonate with conservative followers and trigger a backlash. "The radicals are becoming smart. They know the policies of Facebook and Twitter, the algorithms." Targeted reputational attacks quickly spread through algorithmically connected networks, she said, posing genuine risks to the group's standing and the safety of its staff and partners.[35]

[32] Interview with the author, June 3, 2023, Zoom.

[33] Interview with the author, December 11, 2025, Zoom.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Interview with the author, June 3, 2023, Zoom; Nadia al-Sakkaf, "Digital Narratives and Houthi Detentions of Humanitarian Workers: X, Propaganda, and the Erosion of Civic Space in Yemen," Sana'a Center, April 21, 2026, https://sanaacenter.org/publications/policy-research/26790

Algorithmically amplified trauma can also take a psychological toll. "It just keeps your mind focused on the conflict, which is not helpful for your own life," a US-based diaspora activist said. "You see people who are hungry, people who are struggling, people who have been shot, children who have been blown up by landmines." Algorithms amplify what is most emotionally resonant, she noted, which in the context of Yemen often means its most devastating content.[36]

Online Peacebuilding, Justice and Accountability

Beyond political advocacy, diaspora mobilization has also taken the form of structured engagement in peacebuilding, protection, and justice and accountability processes. Digital connectivity has enabled sustained collaboration between actors inside and outside Yemen, reshaping how expertise, evidence, and influence circulate across borders. WhatsApp, Zoom, and shared digital workspaces have become central infrastructure for transnational coordination.[37]

Throughout the course of the war, actors in the diaspora have been able to access networks on the ground in Yemen that would otherwise be unavailable to international peacebuilders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While diaspora-mediated access to local communities is not new, digital tools are reshaping how it occurs and lowering logistical barriers to engagement. Accountability and transitional justice practitioners and researchers collect data through their networks inside Yemen using tools such as WhatsApp.[38] Evidence to support legal cases is recorded on the ground and uploaded online for use in international cases and courts.[39] Even in remote areas, Yemenis with internet access can dial in via Zoom to hybridized (online/offline) peacebuilding dialogues, workshops, and training sessions abroad.[40]

The digitization of these practices accelerated after 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic, as remote work became normalized worldwide. One organization led by Yemenis in Yemen, Egypt, and the UK, developed a conflict resolution course that was delivered entirely via WhatsApp using voice notes, posters, and structured discussion prompts.[41] Peace Track

[36] Interview with the author, March 28, 2023, Zoom.

[37] Interview with the author, May 19, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, June 26, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, June 3, 2023, Zoom.

[38] Interview with the author, September 21, 2023, Zoom.

[39] Interview with the author, April 24, 2023, Zoom.

[40] Interview with the author, March 28, 2023, Zoom.

[41] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom; Saferworld, "Texting for Peace: WhatsApp-Based Peacebuilding Course for Yemeni Activists," Saferworld, August 12, 2016, https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/news-and-analysis/post/652-texting-for-peace-whatsapp-based-peacebuilding-course-for-yemeni-activists

Initiative, a peacebuilding NGO led by Yemenis based in multiple countries, including Canada and Egypt, created an online platform mapping the work of Yemeni women peacebuilders around the world and creating opportunities for connection and collaboration.[42] These examples demonstrate how physical constraints combined with digital connectivity have driven adaptation and innovation by diaspora Yemenis working across borders. Where formal institutions are weak and mobility is restricted, digital tools have facilitated participatory engagement at scale.

However, digital peacebuilding does not eliminate asymmetries of power and access: diaspora actors — particularly those located in Western countries — often have greater access to funding streams, policymakers, and media production. In-country partners provide essential knowledge and expertise, yet they assume greater physical risk and have less control over framing and external dissemination.[43] While Yemenis on the ground may have better access to international policy and peacebuilding forums as a result of digital connectivity, that access is often mediated by Yemenis on the outside. Visibility and legitimacy, therefore, become negotiated, relational, and subject to existing hierarchies and power dynamics. As one interviewee reflected, concerns frequently arise over who has the authority to speak on behalf of Yemen, particularly when diaspora professionals with limited recent in-country presence shape international narratives.[44] Another interviewee asked, "Who chooses whose voice to raise and whose to lower?"[45] Digital access may create opportunities to amplify a wider array of voices, but it does not automatically confer representational legitimacy.

Justice and accountability initiatives further illustrate these tensions. Diaspora activists have used online platforms to document violations, circulate this documentation, and connect Yemeni cases to international legal mechanisms. But while digital tools enable rapid transmission of evidence, they also create digital footprints that may expose contributors to retaliation. "It's very important to have people from the country in peace tracks or humanitarianism, or the transitional justice track," a UK-based practitioner said. "But at the same time you need to take care of their wellbeing as well, because it's an extra level of risk."[46]

In some respects, the diaspora's capacity to mobilize digitally within Yemen's political marketplace enhances inclusion and its potential for impact in the areas of peacebuilding, protection, and accountability. However, access to global arenas remains mediated by language, institutional proximity, reputational capital, and digital connectivity. In this respect, it also entrenches particular power dynamics in ways that warrant scrutiny.

[42] Peace Track Initiative, https://peacetrackinitiative.org/

[43] Interview with the author, September 21, 2023, Zoom.

[44] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom.

[45] Interview with the author, April 17, 2023.

[46] Interview with the author, May 19, 2023, Zoom.

Humanitarian Action in the Instagram Age

Humanitarian action and emergency response have been among the most visible arenas of digital diaspora engagement since 2015, and the processes through which they occur have been reshaped significantly by the use of smartphones, social media, and other digital tools. Digital tools have facilitated the rapid and networked mobilization of diaspora actors, influencing the scale, speed, and structure of humanitarian activity. They also raise fundamental questions about power dynamics, networks of patronage, and safeguarding and protection.[47]

Since the early years of the war, Yemeni diaspora communities have mobilized funds through mosques, community associations, and charities to fundraise for specific cases and communities in Yemen affected by the conflict and subsequent humanitarian crisis.[48] Through Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and other online platforms, they have raised awareness of cases and promoted campaigns. GoFundMe and other online payment platforms are increasingly used by diaspora actors to coordinate donations and raise funds.[49] Diaspora actors interviewed for this research, located in UK cities with large Yemeni communities such as Birmingham and Sheffield, have channeled significant sums toward food baskets, medical support, and other emergency assistance. One UK-based individual's GoFundMe fundraiser, with a target of £1,000, grew into a small organization that had raised over £16,000 by 2023. From the comfort and safety of her living room, she mobilized funds and coordinated the delivery of emergency aid through her community networks on the ground in Taiz, including food parcels, medical treatments, and water tanks.[50] Such efforts often were framed as a corrective to what interviewees perceived as slow, bureaucratic, or politically constrained international humanitarian responses.[51]

Digital connectivity has reduced transaction costs and compressed response times. Interviewees described how WhatsApp facilitates real-time coordination for the delivery of aid on the ground: Needs are identified by contacts and familial networks inside Yemen; images and short video clips are circulated to demonstrate urgency; funds are raised within hours; and transfers are made through informal financial channels, including hawala networks and and money exchangers,[52] which have proliferated

[47] Laura Rebecca Cretney, "The Yemeni Diaspora and the Political Marketplace," Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2025, pp.329-335; 352-357, https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/16050/

[48] Interview with the author, March 28, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, May 21, 2023, Zoom.

[49] Interview with the author, September 27, 2023, Zoom.

[50] Interview with the author, October 6, 2023, Zoom.

[51] Interview with the author, October 6, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[52] Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom; Interview with the author, October 6, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

during the war, creating their own broad transnational networks that are accessible, fast, and low-fee.[53] Smartphones and individuals' social networks have become a standardized infrastructure for project management, while social media serves as an accountability mechanism and reputational currency. Photographs of distributions, beneficiary testimonials, and branded graphics circulate rapidly, reinforcing donor trust and strengthening the symbolic capital of organizers.

Once again, the Covid-19 pandemic and its normalization of remote communication accelerated these dynamics. Diaspora professionals began coordinating complex interventions entirely online – from fundraising strategies to procurement and monitoring. In multiple cases, digitally-mobilized diaspora actors have filled critical service gaps in areas neglected or not reached by international agencies, providing emergency relief, medical operations, education initiatives, and livelihood recovery in their communities of origin.[54] Their embeddedness within transnational networks, supported by their ability to document impact on their social media platforms, enables them to mobilize trust and resources quickly, often in contexts where formal institutions are fragmented or absent.[55]

However, these practices do not occur in isolation from existing power structures and patronage networks. At times, they challenge and provide alternatives to the local war economy. One practitioner based between Cairo and Taiz, who founded a humanitarian organization in Taiz city early in the war, described mobilizing local youth as volunteers to deliver food and water to families trapped in the crossfire — work she framed explicitly as providing an alternative to militia recruitment in the absence of salaried work. Her ability to operate in one of Yemen's most contested cities derived in part from a pre-existing institutional connection to the governor of Taiz, through whom she had built relationships with local community networks and security actors before the war intensified. Operating across factional lines, however, exposed her organization to pressure from multiple armed actors simultaneously. As she put it: "We were hit by the Saudis, hit by the Houthis, hit by the international community."[56] This illustrates how even humanitarian actors who deliberately resist alignment with any single faction must nonetheless navigate the marketplace logic of competing armed actors. Access and protection cannot be assumed; they must be negotiated.

[53] "Promoting Economic Resilience in Yemen," OECD, 2026, p. 29, https://doi.org/10.1787/81ed2898-en

[54] Laura Rebecca Cretney, "The Yemeni Diaspora and the Political Marketplace," Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2025, pp. 273-275, 330-334, 363-364, https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/16050; Interview with the author, December 17, 2025; Interview with the author, December 18, 2025, Zoom; Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[55] Interview with the author, October 6, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[56] Interview with the author, June 26, 2023, Zoom.

The ground-level mechanics of delivery for diaspora-led humanitarian initiatives are similarly embedded in local networks of trust and access. The UK-based fundraiser coordinates in-country delivery through her cousin in Taiz, who conducts due diligence on beneficiaries; liaises with local community networks to facilitate the delivery of food parcels, water tanks, and medical supplies; and documents the impact on the ground to share with donors in the UK.[57] This familial relationship functions as a patronage node: The cousin's embeddedness in local community structures is what mediates beneficiary access, confers legitimacy, and makes the operation viable. A third interviewee, who fundraises via Instagram and coordinates surgeries and emergency relief across Yemen and the wider region, works with local partners and fixers on the ground, individuals whose value lies precisely in their ability to navigate local power structures on behalf of those operating from outside.[58] In each case, the success of diaspora-led humanitarian activity depends not only on digital tools and diaspora capital, but also on pre-existing or cultivated relationships with locally embedded actors, whose own positioning within Yemen's political and social landscape affects who is reached, how, and on what terms.

Such activities can make local communities dependent on funding and relationships shaped by the specific networks, logics, and lived experiences of diaspora actors. While aid dependency is a longstanding concern for the formal humanitarian sector, diaspora fundraisers have varying degrees of in-country knowledge and varying expertise in aid delivery and project design, meaning they are not always able to assess the downstream effects of their interventions on existing power dynamics. Additionally, informal fundraising by diaspora actors — whether by individuals or groups — is often not subject to the same scrutiny, accountability, and compliance requirements as that of formal NGOs and multilateral institutions. Yemenis interviewed for this study who are fundraising for communities in Yemen from their homes in the UK perceive the level of interpersonal trust they receive from their donors as higher than that conferred to international NGOs.[59] According to the interviewees, their donors value how they document impact through social media content, preferring to donate to them directly rather than to large organizations with higher overheads and no guarantee that the aid will reach the intended beneficiaries.[60] Yet such informality heightens the risk of misidentification of beneficiaries, diversion of funds, and exposure of vulnerable individuals through online imagery. It also blurs accountability pathways in the event of harm or mismanagement.

[57] Interview with the author, October 6, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[58] Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[59] Interview with the author, October 6, 2023, Zoom; Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[60] Ibid.

A Yemeni-British academic studying legal issues relating to Yemen's war raised concerns about a UK-based organizer who routinely posts pictures of beneficiaries of medical treatments and operations to raise funds, including Yemeni children and women not wearing a veil.[61] When interviewed for this study, the organizer shared openly that he urges beneficiaries to consent to having their picture shared and their faces showing because he would not be able to raise money for their surgeries without such visual documentation.[62] "The ones who have come to me, [it] is [as] a last resort," he explained. "They've been here, they've been there, they've asked, they've done this, the cancer's grown, they've waited — nobody's come. So they think, 'You know what … I can't do it anymore.' […] [In] 98 or 99 percent [of cases], I'm the last resort." But these practices raise red flags regarding safeguarding and beneficiary protection protocols, consent, and power dynamics.

The above examples highlight how digital humanitarian mobilization among the Yemeni diaspora operates at the intersection of solidarity, power, and patronage. While online tools have expanded capacity and accelerated coordination, they have also intensified exposure to marketplace dynamics, where loyalty, reputation, and access remain central currencies.

The Digital Economy of Cultural Heritage

Beyond advocacy, peacebuilding, and humanitarian action, digital platforms have also become central to how Yemenis in the diaspora mobilize around arts, culture, and heritage. While cultural heritage inside Yemen is under threat from conflict, displacement, and economic collapse, diaspora actors increasingly position themselves as custodians, curators, and producers of cultural memory.[63] This mobilization also operates within marketplace dynamics shaped by funding incentives, symbolic capital, and contested claims to authenticity.

Since 2015, digital cultural initiatives launched by diaspora Yemenis have proliferated, including online archives, documentary series, poetry readings, music collaborations, Instagram heritage pages, and virtual exhibitions. These initiatives often seek to counter dominant representations of Yemen as solely a site of war and humanitarian crisis by foregrounding its historical depth, artistic traditions, and social diversity.[64] Digital platforms allow geographically dispersed Yemenis to collaborate creatively across borders, producing and disseminating cultural content to global audiences in real time.

[61] Interview with the author, September 27, 2023, Zoom.

[62] Interview with the author, September 13, 2023, Zoom.

[63] Rafiq Al-Akouri, "The War's Impact on Yemen's Intangible Cultural Heritage," Sana'a Center, The Yemen Review, October-December 2025, https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/oct-dec-2025/26146

[64] Interview with the author, May 29, 2023, Zoom.

Yemen Used To Be, a digital platform archiving Yemeni postage stamps and producing documentary series on historical cultural figures, illustrates this trend.[65] The platform brought together contributors inside Yemen and across Europe and the Middle East, with those on the ground collecting materials and those abroad undertaking editing, translation, and digital dissemination. According to one Yemeni who has worked with the site, the target audience includes non-Yemenis and diaspora youth who "didn't know anything about Yemen, the culture, or the arts."[66] In this sense, cultural production functions not only as memory preservation but also as identity capital, reinforcing belonging and sustaining emotional ties to the homeland across generations and borders.

At the same time, several interviewees raised concerns about how cultural production intersects with donor incentives and funding cycles. The influx of international funding into arts and culture initiatives during the war has reshaped priorities and created new forms of competition among organizations. One arts practitioner with bases in Yemen, Oman, and Egypt described a culture sector in which "a lot of institutes are getting funded," but outputs are uneven, and accountability is opaque. The interviewee characterized the environment as a "game" in which organizations compete for grants, sometimes with limited tangible impact.[67] In this way, artistic expression is molded to fit international aesthetics and then presented as cultural heritage. A recent Sana'a Center article similarly argues that commercialization and external funding have altered the texture of cultural production, particularly when projects are tailored to international audiences or led by diaspora actors. While digital tools can create unprecedented visibility, they also incentivize formats and narratives that travel well globally, potentially privileging certain aesthetics over others.[68]

These dynamics create tension around authenticity and representation. They raise the question of who has the legitimacy to represent Yemeni culture internationally, particularly when diaspora-based actors — with greater access to funding, language skills, and mobility — shape narratives in the absence of in-country representation. Al-Yamaniah, the online platform and print magazine created by Yemeni diaspora women, which seeks to shift global narratives on Yemeni women,[69] offers a telling example of

[65] "Yemen Used To Be," https://yemenusedtobe.org/about/

[66] Interview with the author, May 29, 2023, Zoom.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Rafiq Al-Akouri, "The War's Impact on Yemen's Intangible Cultural Heritage," Sana'a Center, The Yemen Review, October-December 2025, https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/oct-dec-2025/26146

[69] Sahar Esfandiari, "Online platform Al Yamaniah seeks to change the narrative surrounding Yemeni women," The New Arab, May 29, 2020, https://www.newarab.com/features/al-yamaniah-subverting-stereotypes-about-yemeni-women

how transnational cultural production can expand and constrain representation. As one member of their team reflected, much of their project's work is driven by a desire among diaspora Yemenis to reconnect with a homeland they cannot physically access. This has resulted in content shaped by nostalgia and mediated largely in English, which inevitably privileges those with linguistic and digital fluency. She acknowledged anxieties around legitimacy and self-censorship, questioning whether a diaspora team far from everyday realities in Yemen might present an overly aestheticized or partial vision of "home." The team, she said, worked deliberately to include Arabic content and in-country contributors to mitigate that gap.[70]

Cultural production in the diaspora is not necessarily inauthentic. Rather, it reflects diasporic identities and lived experiences shaped by displacement, hybridity, and transnational life as well as experiences of host-state racism and otherness.[71] Diaspora actors may preserve fragments of a heritage threatened by conflict, but those fragments are inevitably refracted through specific social and economic realities. As in the humanitarian and political spheres, diaspora actors' engagement in cultural production is embedded in a marketplace where access, legitimacy, funding, and visibility remain central currencies.

[70] Interview with the author, December 11, 2025, Zoom.

[71] Interview with the author, October 12, 2023, Zoom.

Conclusion: Harnessing the Strength of the Digital Diaspora

This policy paper set out to address a central policy problem: how Yemen's digitally empowered diaspora is shaping conflict dynamics, peacebuilding, recovery, and cultural production processes in the absence of a functioning state and in the context of a fragmented conflict. The evidence presented demonstrates that diaspora mobilization is neither peripheral nor constrained to the provision of remittances — it is structurally embedded within Yemen's political marketplace.

First, digital tools have fundamentally altered the scale, speed, and geography of diaspora engagement. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, X, and Instagram enable real-time coordination between actors inside and outside Yemen, lowering barriers to participation. The use of digital technologies by the diaspora facilitates data collection for policy advocacy, remote peacebuilding, hybrid dialogue processes, justice and accountability initiatives, humanitarian interventions, and transnational cultural production. In fragmented governance environments where mobility is constrained and institutions are weak, digital connectivity functions as critical infrastructure for transnational coordination, representation, and resource mobilization.

Second, the interventions taking place are increasingly diverse and hybridized. They include online advocacy campaigns that translate local events into internationally intelligible narratives with real outcomes for policy and funding; digitally coordinated humanitarian responses routed through familial, tribal, or local networks; remote justice and accountability initiatives that circulate evidence transnationally; and creative projects that document, preserve, and influence Yemeni identity and cultural heritage. These interventions frequently straddle online and offline domains, with digital visibility and connectivity amplifying and reshaping on-the-ground impact.

Third, diaspora-driven flows of funding, influence, and aid are deeply embedded in broader patronage systems and war economies. Financial remittances and donations intersect with local political economies and business networks; access to global policy spaces is mediated by networks, education, language, and institutional proximity; and digital visibility translates into symbolic capital that can be leveraged within political processes. Informal fundraising mechanisms — often operating outside formal regulatory frameworks — provide rapid, trusted alternatives for diaspora donors skeptical of international humanitarian actors. However, they also risk reinforcing dependencies,

bypassing accountability structures, creating bias in beneficiary selection, and exposing beneficiaries to increased risk of harm. Cultural production, likewise, becomes entangled in funding incentives and reputational competition.

The implications are, therefore, double-edged. Digital mobilization expands inclusion, accelerates response, and enables transnational collaboration in contexts where formal institutions are fragmented or absent. Yet it simultaneously intensifies exposure, asymmetries of power, safeguarding risks, and marketplace dynamics, in which loyalty, visibility, and access remain tradable currencies.

For policymakers, donors, and practitioners, the key conclusion is that diaspora engagement cannot be treated as an informal supplement to state-led or multilateral processes. Rather, it is inherently embedded in both local and transnational systems of governance, humanitarian relief, and narrative production — and increasingly so in the age of expanding digital connectivity. Understanding its opportunities and risks requires moving beyond simplistic framings of the diaspora as inherently peacebuilding actors or providers of remittances. When diaspora actors' intrinsicness within the political economies of the conflict is recognized, their ability and desire to mobilize in support of their homeland can be channeled more safely and effectively.

Recommendations

The following recommendations propose ways of engaging diaspora actors that strengthen accountability, protection protocols, and conflict-sensitive practices, while mitigating unintended reinforcement of patronage systems and war economies.

For Donors and Policymakers

- Explicitly map diaspora networks as part of the political marketplace rather than treating them as peripheral civil society actors when designing strategies and interventions.
- Invest in projects guided by conflict-sensitive engagement frameworks that assess how diaspora funding and advocacy intersect with local and international patronage systems, business networks, and territorial power centers.
- Develop flexible funding mechanisms embedded with safeguarding and accountability standards that allow diaspora-led initiatives to access small-scale, rapid-response grants without forcing them to formalize their status as full NGOs.
- Mitigate digital risk exposure by supporting digital security training for activists, particularly women, who face targeted harassment and reputational attacks online.
- To avoid instrumentalizing cultural production symbolically or performatively, ensure that cultural funding does not reinforce externally imposed narratives. . Support projects that reflect the diversity of Yemeni cultural experiences and facilitate collaboration and co-creation between Yemenis at home and abroad.

For Practitioners and NGOs

- Co-design accountability and safeguarding protocols with strategically selected diaspora partners, being mindful of their potential biases and patronage networks.
- In hybrid online/offline processes, challenge and qualify diaspora claims to represent constituencies inside Yemen, and establish clear protocols on attribution and co-authorship with in-country partners to ensure those assuming greater physical risk retain meaningful input into how their knowledge is framed and used externally.
- Integrate informal fundraising actors into protection ecosystems, offering advisory support through online platforms on consent, beneficiary protection, and data privacy.

For Diaspora Actors

- Conduct informal conflict-sensitivity assessments before mobilizing funds or advocacy campaigns to avoid reinforcing faction-aligned economic networks.
- Adopt safeguarding standards for beneficiaries and in-country partners who are exposed to greater risk, particularly around imagery, beneficiary consent, and digital data trails.
- Recognize and acknowledge diaspora and in-country lived experiences as valid, but unique, when conveying narratives about Yemeni culture and heritage, in order to avoid distortion.
- Strengthen transparency practices by publicly disclosing funding sources, beneficiary selection criteria, and delivery mechanisms, both to sustain donor trust and to enable scrutiny of financial flows, to avoid inadvertent reinforcement of faction-aligned networks or patronage dynamics on the ground.

Dr. Laura Cretney is a researcher and international development consultant whose work bridges diaspora politics, peacebuilding, and social entrepreneurship. Her PhD examined digital diaspora mobilization in Yemen's conflict. She has over a decade of experience designing and advising on international development programming for major donors including the United Nations, the European Union, and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. Alongside her academic and consultancy work, Cretney is the Founder of Pink Jinn, a social enterprise connecting artisans and creators across the MENA region and its diaspora with global markets. She is based between Oman and the United Kingdom.

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