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Diaspora Engagement Seminar

Voice After Exit: Diaspora Advocacy

Presentation Transcript

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Male: Welcome, for those of you who are both here in attendance as well those that are joining us by webinar. This is the last seminar of our diaspora engagement seminar series at QED, and for those of you that are not familiar or this is your first time attending one of these seminars, USAID in partnership with QED has been doing these seminars since past June.

And all of the other seminars – there's six of them – that reflect six different themes in the NPI publication which is titled Diaspora's New Partners in Global Development Policy, and I think, Kathleen, do you happen to have a copy? Great. She's always carrying one, I think. Exactly.

So what we've done, in each of these seminars, is cover a chapter, each of those themes. And so all of those seminars in the past, as well as this one, are screen casts that you can go to MicroLink's website and take a look at for any of the other topics that you may have missed as I see some new faces in the audience.

But I also want to let you know that this isn't the end of our diaspora seminars because we recognize it's very important to foster a discourse on issues that are important to diaspora communities. And so we'll be continuing to do these seminars in the future either at NPI or at USAID, and those seminars will be for those of you that have – that are attending today or are on the mailing list for QED – we'll make sure that you're made aware of those.

The other effort that I wanted to bring to your attention is what we're doing. USAID in partnership with the Department of State and the Migration Policy Institute with regards to building up the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance which - or IDEA. For those of you who are not familiar, it's a platform – a private public partnership platform that was launched by the Secretary of State at last year's ___ ____ Reform back in May of 2011 and will be under IDEA during these future seminars.

But IDEA is really a platform to do a lot more. It's to forge private public partnerships that brings together USG agencies, the private sector and the diaspora organizations that are members of IDEA. So diasporaalliance.org, for those of you who would like to get more information, is this website.

So I guess we'll get to the topic at hand. I won't talk for too long as we have a moderator for this session. So diaspora advocacy – quick show of hands – anyone read that chapter in the book? Well, someone's read the

book front and back several times is my colleague Yvon Resplandy at USAID, the other senior advisor on diaspora remittances.

For those of you who had the opportunity to read the chapter, you'll see that it's not necessarily focused on the diaspora work or – excuse me – the advocacy work or lobbying efforts of one particular group. What we're trying to look at and what the chapter focuses on is how diaspora is utilized a variety of means to influence both their governments in the country of origin as well as in the country of settlement.

In addition to that, it also looks at the way diaspora organizations utilize mass media and engage with other stakeholders to pursue their interest, and so that's kind of – that's going to be the focus of today is really understand the means and not necessarily focus on any particular diaspora organization or group.

And so, for that, we've assembled a panel here of – a very diverse panel, I would say, of experts to give you different perspectives on that, and we'll begin, of course, with Kathleen Newland who I think all of you know by now. Kathleen is nursing an injury, but she's been able to make it both here and continue on with a lot of the work that we're doing with MPI and the State Department.

Kathleen is a cofounder of MPI and the lead author for this publication that I mentioned, and she'll give you some overarching remarks on the topic and then also moderate our session, and then following her will be Jennifer Brinkerhoff, who is a professor of public administration and international affairs at the George Washington University. Jennifer is also the director of the GW Research Program and has done extensive research on the topic as well as trained and also advised policymakers on diaspora related issues, and Jennifer is going to, I think, talk a little bit more about the different instruments, diasporas used and provide some tangible examples.

And then to her right is Nadia Roumani who is the cofounder and director of the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute, and Nadia – and we wanted to have Nadia here because she is going to provide, hopefully, a very important perspective on the domestic diaspora advocacy efforts of the Muslim American community in the U.S.A.

So we're not just talking about the country of origin. We wanted to look at it both sides, and so Nadia will hopefully give you a lot of those insights, and then last, of course not least, is Aram Hamparium who is the executive director of the Armenian National Committee of America, ANCA. And from Aram's perspective, I think we'll get a lot of insight

into how diasporas can organize, coordinate and put forward their advocacy efforts to some of the experiences of the ANCA.

So I won't take up any more time. I'm going to hand it over to Kathleen who will take over for the rest of the session.

Female: Thank you so much, Rumi, and I'm both disappointed and relieved that not all of you have read the chapter that in reference of the book because, if you all had, you might be bored with these remarks. But what I'm going to try to do is, in just introducing this topic, is give you a very sort of outline of really some of the things we need to think about when we're thinking about diaspora advocacy and then my colleagues here will give you much more sort of detail and texture on this topic because they really are the experts.

Let me just say one word about the title that I chose for this chapter, Voice after Exit. It may resonate with some of you. It's taken from the title of a book by the very great economist, Albert Hirschman, with whom I had the pleasure to study when I was an undergraduate many, many years ago.

And the title of his book was Exit, Voice and Loyalty, and it talked about what both consumers and sort of citizens have by way of choices when they see deterioration in the institution that they're relating to either in terms of the product or the quality of governance. They can leave. They can exit that is. They can express themselves to the company, to the government. They can exercise voice, or they can just kind of put up and shut up. They can demonstrate loyalty.

Well, diaspora populations have combined two of those choices. They have left their country of origin or, in some cases, or their ancestors have. But at the same time, they continue to exercise voice toward the government of the country of origin. In some cases, also toward the government of the country in which they have settled, and these are some of the issues we need to think about when looking at diaspora advocacy.

Very important is the issue of representation or who speaks for whom. There's a question of who the targets, if I can use that metaphor, are for the advocacy of diaspora groups. Who are they hoping to be heard by? What are they trying to achieve? What are their goals? What are the issues that they're addressing? By what means do they do this and how effective are they?

So that's sort of a framework, I think, for thinking about diaspora advocacy, and I'll just go very quickly through those five. As I said, we'll hear much more in depth.

So the first question about representativeness, I think, is the one that is most vexing to policymakers who interact with diaspora advocates. You'll always hear this question. Who are these guys? Where are they coming from? Who do they speak for? Do they represent anyone but themselves?

And it's often very difficult to tell people represent themselves in one way that may not be the perception, may not be stood up by the facts or may not be the perception of others. And that is – you know, it's particularly true of newer diasporas or diasporas after a sort of point of crisis whether it's a – the outbreak of a conflict, the aftermath of a natural disaster, some event or sequence of events that sort of brings diaspora members together but also often results in a great proliferation of groups, and you wonder which of these 50 groups from Haiti or from Georgia or from Turkey should I go to. Who can be trusted? Who is really representing the interests of people back home – back in the country of heritage?

And that, of course, is particularly vexing with groups that have multiple agendas, and they have a political agenda then they have a humanitarian agenda and lots of different – that's normal, natural, what you would expect from groups, but trying to interact with just one dimension can be problematical.

And, of course, in a context of civil war, the question of – or the civil conflict even short of war – the question of means becomes really critical in this questions of legitimacy from the point of view of policymakers who are interacting with this group because some means can never been accepted as justified including the ones that I've left there. And we certainly see many diaspora groups that, unfortunately, do engage in hate speech or do promote violence, do buy weapons and so on.

And trying to figure out when this is a legitimate activity, for example, I'm sure many people would now say that the – that violence deployed by the Syrian opposition against the Ashad regime is a step of last resort, and yet, there are limits in – that have to be respected and if a group is to be regarded as legitimate attacking civilians, engaging in terrorism, promoting dissention between ethnic or religious groups.

Another question that's often raised about having to do with legitimacy is this question of divided loyalties. You know, are these – okay, are these groups, are they American or are they Greek. Again, who are these guys? And I think one of the – what we've seen in the long history of diaspora activism in the United States at least that is that our system of interest group pluralism is accommodated of diaspora groups, that they don't have to make the choice that people – whether they are of a particular ethnic origin or not, have particular interest in a country and its issues, and that

the question of divided loyalties, which is sometimes raised, really is not an issue unless you get into the question of the second – the questions of the second bullet point here.

Who – at whom is advocacy being directed? And I think just three things to think about there is that, sometimes, it's directed at the authorities in the country of origin trying to promote democracy, for example, or make the economic system more sort of friendly to the market. You know, those are some of the goals that we hear often from democracy promotion groups.

Then there's the question of inward advocacy toward the government of the country of settlement, in this case, the U.S. government, and that's probably where advocacy groups are most visible to the American public is that we hear about the Israeli lobby. We hear about the very effective lobbies like the Armenian lobby. We hear about the Greek lobby or the Cuban lobby and know that some of them are extremely sort of powerful within the U.S. political system and are role models for many others who would like to be that powerful within the U.S. political system.

And, finally, many groups – none of these points are mutually exclusive – many groups direct their advocacy toward international institutions, UN institutions, the criminal courts, the international media. And now, with the tremendous upsurge of social media, you have sort of denationalized area of diaspora advocacy which is a very interesting and an increasingly influential one.

With goals and issues, I've listed some of the ones that we've seen in the recent past and continue to see as issues that are of particular interest to diaspora. There, you can sort of separate them into two groups. One being those that relate to the status of the population within the country of settlement and then those that relate more to the relations between U.S. government and society with the country of origin. . And I won't go into detail about these. I'm sure we'll hear much more about some of them, and I'll certainly be happy to give examples or talk in more detail during our discussion period.

The means of advocacy are tremendously varied. I mean I think the one that's most sort of prominent in people's mind is just political lobbying. You have an almost – dozens and dozens of caucuses up on the Hill. That I went to something the other day that was introduced by the chairman of the Norwegian caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives. I was thinking, "Hmm. Who knew there was a Norwegian caucus?" But maybe – do you remember, Jennifer? No. Belgium. Sorry. There's probably a Belgium caucus as well.

But so politicians, who either have that ethnic origin in their background somewhere or just have an interest in the country, are often encouraged to make common cause with diaspora advocates in looking at issues of – issues that are before the U.S. Congress. For example, the Indian diaspora was very active in promoting the U.S. India nuclear agreement which was very controversial and – but which was ultimately passed.

So, as you can see from this list, which I won't go through, there are lots and lots of different means of making one's voice heard. They range all the way from the completely within the existing system, political lobbying to those that are pretty much out on the edge such as support for an armed revolt and almost everything in between.

I think we'll hear more in the discussion to come about the effectiveness of what makes for an effective diaspora advocate. These are certainly some of the metrics that you would look at, not only the size of the diaspora but, in the lobbying gamer certainly, it's concentration in electoral districts is an important factor when you have one member of Congress who knows that there are a number of voters within his or her district that are interested in that country and follow its affairs closely,

Several diaspora groups issue scorecards on an annual basis of which members of Congress have been with them on the issues that are of greatest importance to them and which have not and will use that in campaigns. Of course, that goes along with fundraising. and perhaps, even more important, that is the degree of commitment that members of a diaspora have to working on behalf of the issues that are important to them.
And that is really what sort of separates the sheep from the goats in terms of effectiveness along with unity of purpose. That doesn't mean unity within a particular organization. There can be 50 different organizations as long as they are sort of working toward the same goals. 50 may be a bit of an exaggeration. Six. If you get beyond that then you're probably going to run into some issues of unity and, of course, how organized the groups are whether they really have their means working effectively for them which is often a question of resources and, very often, a question of the political context is the public in general. Are there representatives interested in what's going on in that country?

It was very difficult, and I'm sure this is something that Rahm deals with in his daily life. When you have a new diaspora or one that has been relatively quiescent but suddenly has an issue that's of great importance to the U.S. government – of course, I'm thinking about oil and not _____. And so diaspora that found it very difficult to get the ear of U.S. policymakers now has a card that U.S. policymakers are indeed interested in. So the political context also counts.

So there's my ten minutes' worth, and I am very happy to turn it over to my treasured colleague, Jennifer Brinkerhoff who knows more about this topic than most people and has helped lots and lots of people understand it better. So, Jennifer, we'll try to – if you'll keep an eye on the clock there and try to finish up about 20 to the hour, we'll be grateful. Thank you. I know you have a lot more than that to say.

Female: So thank you, all, very much for coming today, and this is a, obviously, very exciting topic. And when I was invited to come, I was trying to think, "Well, what am I going to say that could be different from this great summary that Kathleen has put together on the tactics and all the details," some of which we got an outline of just now – and these wonderful examples on the ground.

So I am a professor in a school of public policy and public administration as well as in our school of international affairs. So some of my concerns move a little bit beyond the, "Who are these people and what are they doing?" Right? To, 'Why should we care? What are we going to do about it?"

So to try to be a little bit qualitatively different from my colleagues sitting up here with me, I thought I would focus a little bit more on those latter questions. What does this mean for the U.S. Government? So, first of all, I see that my animation didn't get translated here because you were supposed to get this big boom with the Newsweek cover.

Why should we care? Well, we know, on the one hand, that diasporas and politics exercise this amazing ingenuity in pursuing their political and socioeconomic objectives. So it's quite impressive what they can do. We know, though, that they can be potential agents of their own agendas but can also be instruments of the U.S. government or other governments and countries of settlement.

And, of course, the risk, which is supposed to come out at you like a big vroom, is the example that, whenever we talk about diaspora advocacy, people always go, "Oh but to lobby. Oh, to lobby." There are great risks to engaging with particular diaspora groups, and as Kathleen was underscoring, there are questions of legitimacy. Can you trust them? Do we really know what their agenda is?

So it's a mixed bag, but we want to try to consider both sides, both potentialities here. So who are diasporas and why should we care? First and foremost, they are U.S. residents. They're also U.S. citizens, and they are stakeholders with their own interests and agendas and potential assets and partners for U.S. government work.

Diasporas are also ethnic groups – or interest groups, excuse me, and some of the research shows that, in many cases, diasporas can be more ethnic than the ethnic. In other words, sometimes, in diaspora, people hold on much more fiercely to their ethnic identities than people in the homeland.

One of my favorite anecdotes about this was a story that was actually on the cover of the Washington Post. This was a few years ago. It must have been a slow news day, and it was about some returned Indians. They went back to India, and they were interviewed. And they said, "You know, when we lived in the U.S., we used to drive an hour and a half, two hours every week to go to temple. Now we live across the street from a temple, and we never go." So I love that story.

So we know, also, that, in diaspora, there is also represented these nationalists movements. So, staying with the example of India, there's the Hindufa movement which is a Hindu nationalist movement. So there, too, that movement doesn't necessarily represent the poll population in the country of origin. So we need to take care there.

But a more positive side of this is that diasporas can be instrumental in reconstituting legitimacy for governments and constitutional processes, and we have two very important examples, among many others, in more recent years, with post-conflict countries. For example, in Liberia, where a lot of the presidential campaigning occurred here in the United States and a lot of the candidates came from the diaspora that was settled in the United States, and also, in Afghanistan where the Afghan diaspora was asked to comment on the draft constitution and to become a part of that process.

So we also have this issue – and Kathleen spoke a little bit to this – about hybridity. And what do I mean by that? What I mean by that is a hybridity of a identity. Living in diaspora, one is no longer just the ethnicity. One is not just the country of residence identity, but it's a mixture of both. So we combine these different features, and it's to different degrees.

Some very important research by Yossi Shain out of Hebrew University, he wrote this great book that I highly recommend called Marketing the American Creed Abroad. So, for those of you who are from diaspora groups who want to learn more, it's a very – it's a great study, and what he concludes from this is that diasporas can humanize and Americanize U.S. foreign policy.

What does he mean by that? What he's talking about is that diasporas, in lobbying for their cause, tend to hold the U.S. government to account for

its stated ideals about democracy, freedom and human rights. It humanizes us. It helps the U.S. government to be less isolationist. Furthermore, when diasporas utilize this kind of language that is core to American values, they're more effective in their lobbying efforts. That is no surprise. Okay?

And, finally, I want to say, on this topic of hybridity, that it is not a zero sum game. If anything, engaging with the country of origin often makes people feel more American, and I recognize that that seems really counterintuitive. But when I have interviewed people not just here in the United States but also in the Netherlands and in Sweden where I've done some work, they always come back with the idea of that, "You know, when I started doing more in my home country, it made me realize how Dutch I'd become, how Swedish I'd become, how American I'd become, and I'm proud of that."

I was recently in Ethiopia, and the pride in being American is overwhelming among these return diasporas. So they go back and they want to help because of that ethnic connection, but at the same time, they're bringing this American identity. And I'm sure we have all heard this said many, many, many times, but I have yet to encounter a diaspora who does not invoke the John F. Kennedy famous line. "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." And, of course, in this case, they're speaking of the country of origin not the United States.

So, in terms of political influence, as Kathleen noted, the downside is that they can also contribute to insurgencies and to violence, and in fact, studies show that this is probably the most important influence that diasporas have in countries that are experiencing conflict is through diplomatic pressures to engage, to get involved. Chalabi is an example of that.

Partisan interests may also be at play under the guise of inclusive and democratic platforms, and so despite what I just said, which sounds a little bit Pollyannaish – oh, use American values. Humanize American politics, et cetera – well, that can also become a little bit of a shade for other motives.

They also – the positive contributions is these lobby efforts, as Kathleen was pointing out, may contribute to enhanced quality of life in the homeland through U.S foreign assistance, through human rights accountability pressure for improved governance, et cetera. And we know that diasporas haven't been involved, also, in peace building, and that's another form of lobbying and political engagement that is not always

directly on the radar screen because it often happens kind of behind the scenes, but I think it's really important to recognize.

So what's in it for U.S. policymakers? Well, by working with diaspora groups and particular diaspora groups, the U.S. government has an opportunity to reach into areas that may be remote in the country of origin to influence actors that, otherwise, they don't have other means to reach. They – the diasporas can be potential interlocutors or intermediaries between U.S. policymakers and homeland populations. They may even act as intermediaries between U.S. policymakers and country of origin policymakers through their own contacts.

They can bring, in addition to those networks and contacts, they can bring information and expertise, and by engaging with diasporas, we can work towards a coordination of efforts when we have shared objectives. So these are very important rationales for thinking about engaging with diasporas that, at first, may approach policymakers for lobbying, and we say, "Oh, they have an agenda. We don't want to work with them." But wait a minute, there are some opportunities here, and I think it's important for us to consider those.

So possible engagement from the U.S. government's side, in addition to listening and exploring, involving some of these groups and needs assessments in setting priorities, but I think that it's really important to underscore that it isn't just about providing information one way. But it's more about an exchange of information. It's possible to recruit expertise from these groups to share information, as I mentioned before, and coordinate and to use the diaspora organizations and individuals as intermediaries as I already mentioned.

So how do we do this? Well, it's a process, and I liken it to game theory which is that, in a game, you only know who you can trust through experience. Right? So we have to be very carefully in avoiding early winner take all commitments. In other words, if somebody comes to you like a Chalabi, and you say, "Oh, great. This is a great opportunity. He shares our objectives. Let's run with that one," without considering that he may have his own agenda. There may be other actors out there, and by choosing one group, you potentially exclude and ruffle the feathers of many others who could be important allies. So it's extremely important to avoid winner take all especially at the very beginning.

And then I'm going to end with an example about this quotation, "Walk with me." This comes from a guy that I've been studying for awhile. His name is Djime Adoum, and he's from the Chadian diaspora. He started out as a blogger and a mobilizer of the diaspora. He cofounded the Mid Atlantic Chadian Association, but most importantly, he started this blog

that made him absolutely famous in the diaspora internationally. So his blog was followed in Europe, especially in France where there's a large diaspora, the United States and Canada and, also, with Chad because he would try to provide some analysis of current events. So he was very well known.

Well, he also started to mobilize and mobilize others in the diaspora to try to promote good governance in Chad, and among other things, he partnered with a nonprofit organization called Caring for Kaela, and together they organized and initiated this multi stakeholder meeting at the United Nations where Djime Adoum came and spoke on behalf of the diaspora along with some of his colleagues.

And he says to them – and this gets to the, "Walk with us," quotation. He said that, but here's how he got there. He said, "Look. We are the Chadians. We know the country and its intrigues better than anybody else. We're going to be in the driver's seat. So you guys, you can come along, but we're going to be in the driver's seat."

And then he realized, looking around the room, that he had ruffled feathers. So he says, "Look, look, look. I didn't mean to throw you out. I mean to say this is the 21st century. All of this that we've been doing is no good. We've got to do something different. So come along. We would appreciate if you came along with us helping us to navigate, and when we come to you, be receptive to what we have to say."

So he wasn't asking for this winner takes all kind of commitment He was saying, "Look, work with us, and through our experience together, you will see whether our intentions are good, whether our objectives are shared and whether, together, we can make a difference for the future of Chad."

So thank you very much.

Female: Thank you, Jennifer. That was really fascinating and gives us a great platform from which to move to Nadia's discussion of the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute. And thank you very much for joining us. The floor is yours.

Female: Great. That's helpful. So I'm going to start a bit about with my own personal story and how it connects to launching this institute. So I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania. I grew up in Los Angeles to parents who immigrated from Damascus, Syria which we can talk about later about the challenges of advocacy in Syria at the moment, but I won't talk about that.

But they immigrated to Los Angeles, and that's where I grew up. And when I graduated from undergrad, I was really interested into go into

international development and public policy. So I told my parents, "I'm going to DC, and I'm going to do two unpaid internships. The first with USAID and then the second one with was Brookings."

And I'll share why I'm talking about this at the end, but, you know, for them, they just didn't understand. They just thought I was going to work for free. That was their interpretation. First, I was working in development which they were like, "We immigrated to this country so you could like develop a future. Why are you going into development? We just left a developing country, and two, you're going to work for free. We don't understand what you're doing."

But, thankfully, they were very supportive, and they let me do my thing. And they still don't quite understand what I do. It's not that that has changed, but at least, now, they see some structure around it, I think. So they kind of get it a little bit.

So what – but what was interesting, when I first came to DC, was that, at the time – and this was a little over ten years ago – I didn't see a lot of other people like me meaning I didn't see many Arab Americans. I did not see many Muslim Americans or Muslims. And so it was really interesting to me that this – the ethics of Islam and all that was that this was really important to issues of public policy and engagement and all these things, but I didn't see those l involved in these organizations.

And so that was just something that was always question to me but something that I kind of had to put aside while I just did the work that I wanted to do. And then, in 2004, I was approached by a couple of foundations that I was working with on my development work, and knowing my background, they said – they were asking me, domestically, they said, "So we understand that these communities, the Arab, Middle Eastern, South Asian and Muslim communities are really being affected by immigration reform policies, by surveillance and deportation issues, but why are they not at the table in the immigration reform issues? Why are they not – why aren't we seeing them in coalitions? Why are we not seeing them in these discussions? We don't understand why. So can you help us understand the reason?"

So I spent a year, and that's the study that I did – a couple of studies looking at this issue and interviewing a lot of leaders across the country, trying to understand why they weren't more involved, and I think that helped, one, it helped me identify that there were other leaders out there working on these issues. But they simply were not getting the visibility that they needed, and they also weren't getting the support they needed. And I can talk about that more.

They were under resourced, under – there's a lot talent, but it was not being cultivated well. So these were a lot of individuals that were really isolated in the work that they were trying to do. And so that led to launch of this institute which is housed at the University of California which we launched in 2006.

And our first program was in 2008, and we have graduated – or in April, we will be graduating our 86 fellows from the program from across the country, and I'll talk about what we do with that. But just to give you an idea of the complexity of the landscape that we're looking at, there's – it's – there's no census numbers, obviously, on religion and religious groups, but there are approximately five to seven million Muslims in America. Lots of debate around that. I won't open that discussion, but there's generally within that range.

They come from over 80 countries. So, if you're talking about a diverse diaspora community, it's an extremely diverse community, but you also have indigenous Muslims such as African American Muslims who account for about 30 percent who often get left out of the conversation.

And of the immigrant Muslims, nine out of ten Muslim immigrants in America came after 1965. So it's a very young community as well. They are largely – they're kind of clustered in many cities but around – they're all over the country. But some of the largest communities are in L.A., Chicago, New York, Detroit, Houston, Minneapolis and different communities in different ones. Arabs in Detroit. Somalis in Minneapolis, et cetera So you just kind of get an idea.

What came out of the study was interesting was the priorities that a lot of these communities have. They're split. Right? Domestic, as you guys were saying, domestic and international. On the domestic side, post 9/11, the biggest issues were dealing with surveillance and deportation, the idea that this community was seen as a threat and was part of the national security concern regardless of the fact that, you know, there's seven ___ to seven million and only like a couple of individuals are seen as a threat. The whole community was seen as targeted.

And so that was really one of the biggest issues, and I don't know if people have seen the recent New York Times articles about NYPD surveillance in mosques and all of that. It's a very – it's still a very big issue.

You also had issues within other communities such as the African American communities and other in diaspora communities because you have a big – not discussed a lot – but a class difference in a lot of communities, professionals, doctors, lawyers, et cetera, and you have a lot

of people who are working as taxi drivers in New York, et cetera and – so you have also issues about economic issues, concerns.

You have school – high school dropout rates. That is also – so the range of issues is really broad. You're never able to put all of these issues under one umbrella and then you have foreign policy issues. Again, 80 countries. So you have – Iraq was a big issue. Israel, Palestine's always an issue. Syria, right now, is a big issue. Somalia.

Especially issues about the ability to send remittances and the idea of bank closures right now and what's happening with that, Pakistan, India. So but what happened, post 9/11, was there was actually shift to prioritize more domestic issues by a lot of groups because I think there was a recognition that, while foreign policy is still extremely important, unless diaspora communities feel safe in this country, then there's no point of arguing for foreign policy when many people, like my parents who immigrated from Syria, never thought surveillance would be an issue in this country, but they thought, obviously, surveillance was one of the reasons they left Syria. So I mean that becomes – that got prioritized.

So what we – as part of the research – can you just hit that? As part of the research, one of the things that we did was also talk to – oh. We talked to several organizations that had been really effective with immigrant communities and religious and ethnic groups, advocacy groups, and we tried to learn from what they had been doing.

And so we talked to people like the Sikh American Legal and Education Fund, the Jewish American Citizen League, the – sorry, the Japanese American Citizens League, the American Jewish Committee, the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center. Some of these are really small shop. Some are big, but they've been really, really effective.

And I don't think I'll have time to go into all the detail, but what we found is some of the things that were discussed earlier. What was really effective was how you frame the issue. So responding quickly, when there's an issue, but responding with one's own frame, not always using other people's frame when you respond.

Also, framing issues around a moral obligation, that's a really important American value that I think it's important to bring people back to the why and then not framing it so narrowly that it applies only to the community that you're working in. How does this affect others as well as the community you're working with?

Assessing a community's needs. So you need sound research about your community so they know who you're talking about, and you also need to

prioritize – you also need those needs that you're talking about, to reflect what your community is talking about because, otherwise, you have organizations that are just led by individuals that aren't actually reflecting the communities. And so that's really important, and people look for that when they're advocating.

Developing professional organizations in general, defining a clear mission, having a clear public role, building human capital, training staff. So just how do you set up a great organization? Outlining a deliberate strategy in a campaign. Oftentimes, many of our organizations are just responding to put out fires left and right. But how – what's actually the campaign and the issue people are trying to move and what's the strategy in which to move it?

And I think getting people to shift from a reactive place to an actually proactive place was really important and then connecting the national to local. How do you connect national conversations with local communities because, oftentimes, there's a huge rift between the two? How do you actually build those connections?

And the building partnerships and strategic alliances both within organizations and communities and then with strategic allies that, often, people might not expect but can also – again, if you're going with a frame of a moral obligation and an issue that's framed more broadly, it will be – it's always interesting to find which allies come to the table and then how to sustain an organization.

So we built this institute to basically try and address these very needs, and then what we did was we also – well, let me take a step back. We prioritized the three to five areas for the Muslim communities and what they should do to increase their public voice and to be better advocates.

And what we focused on were these issues, strengthening existing organizations and supporting the development of new ones, developing universal and moral messages that resonate with American values, educating communities on civic and political engagement, developing American Muslim policy expertise so they're not – what's important for us was that Muslims are not invited to the table just because you're not playing an identity politics game. You're not invited to the table because you're a token Muslim. You're invited because you have an expertise on an issue or on your community.

And that's really important because I think, oftentimes, people just want to have a spokesperson at the table, and people – some people are happy to fill that role. It was important to us that this is – that you actually have an expertise in what you're there to talk about.

Improving internal Muslim conversations because, oftentimes, because it's such a diverse community, these communities don't interact, and then building strategic alliances and participating in targeted coalitions and then developing – and so we developed the initiative in direct response to this.

And what our goal was to do was to build capacity, the whole infrastructure of the nonprofit sector, to build relationships with trust, and it was really important to us to help organizations understand how to work – how their work is complementary to each other.

Oftentimes, diaspora communities will try to fight each other for a seat at the table, and that's a really destructive place. When we were doing the research, one of the questions we'd often hear is what we call the Just and Only Syndrome.

They would say, "Well, we're the only group that does this, and they just do that." And it's a really destructive tendency because, oftentimes, it discounting the work of others in order to promote one's own work to get that seat. And what we're trying to help these communities understand is that, without everybody understanding how their work is complementary and being all at the same table then it's not effective advocacy period.

And so we're trying to help the fellows in the work that they're doing, help their storytelling and their framing of their issues, help focus their vision and their purpose and then I'm almost done on this one. Educate about how to develop their theory of social change so that that they are more proactive and then we train them on community organizing so they actually know how to mobilize their base and then on policy development.

So I say – and then, finally, the last thing we do is we try and celebrate civic leaders, and for us, that's really important because, again, going back to the beginning, oftentimes, I think people just don't put a value, a lot of diaspora communities don't put a value on civic leadership because people are coming from countries where there may not be a tradition of people being civically engaged or what that means.

And so our hope and my hope is that, while I hope that people don't just tolerate being going – becoming civic leaders like my parents did, but they actually are encouraging people to do that just as much as they're encouraging people to become doctors and lawyers and engineers and whatever, that civic leadership is actually a part of people's kind of desire for their kids' future.

Female: Thank you so much, Nadia. That's a really fascinating portrait of the sort of the early stages of this kind of effort, and I congratulate Rumi on the design of this panel because now we're going to move to a very well established diaspora group and perhaps you'll see your future in it but thank you very much for agreeing to join us this morning.

I'm going to try to prop this up where you can see it.

Male: Kathleen, thank you very much. I learned a great deal from all of your presentations, and I very much appreciate the invitation Rumi extended, and I want to thank everyone involved in this program. It's really very, very helpful.

I started out here with my first slide. I thought the best place to start would be the American Constitution which is obviously guarantees all of our right to assemble peacefully and petition our government for the redress of our grievances.

I think it's very important to sort of go back to that as a touchstone because we were citizens. We're not subjects, and that's not – that doesn't necessarily reflect our past, but it's certainly our future. We're Americans. We're full stakeholders in the American enterprise. As citizens, our values are informed by many things. One of those things is our ethnicity, but everyone at this table, whether they became citizens – and everyone in this room, everyone who might be listening, everyone in America, they may have become citizens in ____. Their family may have come on the Mayflower, but they're equal stakeholders.

And I don't necessarily like to put labels on people I think we're – we all bring something different whether it's how we were educated, how we were raised, the faith we were taught, other things that have influenced us, it's a mix, right? And we all bring that mix to the American civic arena, and we weigh in.

There are no distinctions. There's no test for citizenship. So, again, I would just point out that we're full stakeholders. The Constitution obviously guarantees that. That's one of our core American values.

The second slide I chose was my favorite quote. It's by a fellow named A. Philip Randolph, and every time I go through Union Station, I make a point of visiting his statue which is – it has underneath it a quote. He was an organizer of porters and, ultimately, a very important labor leader in America and really a brave guy and a very thoughtful man. And he – I'm going to read the quote because it means so much to me.

He said, "At the banquet table of nature, there are no reserved seats. You get want you can take, and you keep what you can hold. And if you can't take anything, you won't get anything, and if you can't hold anything, you won't keep anything, and you can't take anything without organization."

In my mind, the thing that he was talking about is policy, the direction of our government, the government that we are all stakeholders in. In our particular world, that means foreign policy. The Armenian Americans had to focus a lot on foreign policy. So we had the revolution, initially, back in the 18th Century precisely because we didn't want a king to tell us what our national interest was. We felt that there should be a democratic competition of ideas that everybody, regardless of where they're from, regardless of where they're from, regardless of what values important, comes together, sits at the American tables and hashes out, works through our democratic process, our federal system, works out what America should do on the international stage.

We're – that's why certainly diasporian groups, people who have – who identify ethnically are certainly, I can understand at one level, they're an opportunity for foreign policymakers. I think, at a far more fundamental level, they're stakeholders in the very development of our national interests and our foreign policy.
Sometime – from time to time, we'll hear phrases like, "disproportionate influence." I'm always uncomfortable. I don't know if any of you guys follow the Knicks. Anyone follow the Knicks? You watch Jeremy Lin in the last couple of weeks? Jeremy Lin does not have disproportional influence. He does not have a disproportionate number of assists or rebounds or points. He worked hard. He brings his best game every day, and he gets the points and the success that he deserves, and he plays by the rules.

The next slide, here, says the three ingredients – and I'll try to move rather quickly through these. Our experience is that, at the very outset, you need – if you want to be effective in foreign policy and if you want to be effective in shaping our nation's policies, you need a constituency that cares, a constituency that feels deeply about a particular set of issues. That's not something advocacy groups typically develop.

I don't think that advocacy groups really instill that in people. That usually happens during childhood. It happens through churches and community groups and through schools and a whole range of other factors. But that – people, who bring that devotion, are I think at the core. They're the wellspring, literally, of a group like ours, for example.

Also, I believe that you can't really outsource that. You have to speak with an authentic voice and an idea that, you know, just gather some

money and pay somebody to represent you, I think, is a flawed model. I think that, again, the best model is that we're citizens. We pay our taxes like everyone else. You know, we go to war and sacrifice our young men and women like everybody else. We're equal stakeholders.

Second and you – Kathleen, you touched – you reviewed this in encyclopedic fashion in a very short time, but sort of the second ingredient is a community that understands what to do. And I won't repeat that, but it has to do with campaigns and lobbying and media and coalitions and all the rest. But if an ethnic community doesn't know those things, they can be taught very quickly. Give them, you know, any decent training outfit can sort of bring people up to speed in a weekend on what needs to be done, how American policy has influenced. It's the Civics 101.

And, finally, and the toughest ingredient I've found is that the – you need a community that believes, right? Very often, we have a community that cares. We have a community that has the intellectual understanding of what needs to be done, but because the cultural DNA that they bring to the equation is not one of cooperation and teamwork toward public policy objectives, right, they lack the faith.

They might say, "Yes. I do believe in your goal, and I intellectually do grasp what needs to be done to realize that aim. But, in my heart, I just don't believe it makes a difference because, back home in this country or that country or that country, the survival strategy was, if you do stick your neck out, it will get cut off, or if you do take a risk in the civic arena, it will not be rewarded better to work under a system or around a system but not through a system because those systems are not legitimate and they're not fair."

But thank God, in America, they are legitimate, and they are fair. And there's a fair – you get a fair shake, and if you can make your case effectively and persuasively, you can win others to your point of view. And that's, unfortunately, a lesson that not everyone brings to the table, but the more folks are involved in America, the more they're going to realize that that is, in fact, the case. So, faith, I think, is the number one ingredient, faith in the civic opportunities that America affords us.

So next slide. I just reviewed civil culture, essential. Second, you need to organize effectively, and that's understand that America's a federal system, understanding how Congress works, how elections work. You simply need to study that and become a student of that, and over time, you develop all the right mechanisms to seek to influence that process.

I won't repeat – I won't sort of delve too deeply into that except to say, in foreign policy, foreign policy, in my view, tends to be one of the more

insulated areas of policymaking. If you have a view on education or health or taxes, believe me, this is a robust debate in America on those issues. When it comes to foreign policy, it's a little bit narrower, and I think there's a concept, at the very higher reaches of this sort of elite notion that there are people who know best.

If you study diplomacy, you can actually – you'll see that diplomats, early on, were friends or relatives of the king or the sovereign who were sent abroad to make deals and to sometimes even be held hostage in the event of difficulties.

It was very much the sovereign or the nobility's or the king's enterprise, and the echoes of that continue to this day. And there's still the notion that there are folks who know best and the citizens who are kind of interlopers or sort of the visitors in the world of foreign policy but certainly not stakeholders. And I obviously reject that. We're all stakeholders. Every last one of us.

I totally agree with the idea of unity and consensus. This is a political town. It can be very tough. It's, in a sense, its dog eat dog. If you show weakness and a lack of unity, those weaknesses will be exploited very aggressively. So the trick is to recognize that you may disagree on nine issues, but if there's one issue you agree upon as a community, foster – build a coalition around that issue. Don't look at the one issue you disagree upon and let that poison the nine other issues unless you might have common cause.

So that's unity and consensus is very important, and of course, you want to target your asks. Figure out what your asks are, your requests are of the system. You know, who – you know, what you want from the system, and you should align those with, obviously, our national interests as a country, with the values we hold in common as Americans, and also, when you're talking to elected officials, their political ambitions. It's important. That's part of our democracy.

People get elected when they have won the confidence and faith of their voters, and politicians are mindful of that as they should be. So that's just the whole process then, of course, there's working out – you know, defining a message that's very carefully crafted, very carefully selecting the target of that message whether it's an elected official or appointed official or third party. It could be the government back home – and then determining what the best vehicle is. You know, is the best vehicle a grassroots campaign, a coalition campaign, an internet campaign, a protest perhaps? These are the various sort of steps that you go through.

And then I'll wrap up with my last two minutes. I'll try to finish early with some of the stages that we've gone through, that Armenian Americans have passed through as a community, and I think other ethnic groups may go through these steps. They may not. They may skip some. They may – this is just the formula that we've kind of experienced.

Early on, you have an ethnic group that is new to America and has a low capacity but a high sense of urgency. Right? And typically, there's something going on, and they feel aggrieved. And they feel there's been some wrong committed or some injustice that needs to be rectified.

So the – lacking sort of the political leverage, the group will seek the sympathy of a target audience and say, "Look at this. Look at that and please come and sympathize with me." And that's actually a decent way to get people's attention. The American people are a generous and sympathetic people, but that has its limits because, ultimately, pity will not change policy.

It will get you – I can speak for the Armenians, many tents and orphanages and much medicine and other relief supplies have been providing to the Armenians over the years, and that's wonderful. And we've been blessed with that, but it hasn't changed policy necessarily.

So one stage is pity or sympathy. Then, as the group gets involved in political life realizes that you can't change things just by through sympathy. You then get involved in the political process, but typically, it tends to be a partisan participation which is you don't show up as a full stakeholder. Instead, you show up as an ally of one side or the other of some larger international or domestic political divide, and that, again, is good. It's a good way to get in.

The political parties, typically, are great ladders for ethnic groups to rise in America, but ultimately, the group tends to feel that, "Well, that's not enough. We need to actually have our own voice." And that usually takes the form or some protests or demonstrations which are wonderful. It wakes people up. It gets the blood moving, but ultimately, when you protest against somebody, they know that you'll be gone, typically, for 350 – 355 day – the next 355 days. So it's good, but it has very ___ limits.

Finally, people turn to force. They turn to pressure and how can we like influence the process. So I think what we'd do? Like all the things that Kathleen talked about and pressure, media, elections, all the stuff like that. And, finally, the last step in all my seconds is that which kind of evolves into participation that you do all the other things.

You seek sympathy, partisanship, protest, pressure, and ultimately, your community participates inside the system as members of Congress, State Department officials as – you know, fully integrated into the fabric of American society and also American foreign policy decision making. So those are some of the steps that we've gone through. I think there's others perhaps have experienced something akin to that. Thank you.